

BDOHP Biographical details and index

Sir Robert (Lucian) Wade-Gery (22.04.29-16.2.15)

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Sir Robert Wade-Gery

This is Malcolm McBain interviewing Sir Robert Wade-Gery at his home in Cold Aston, Gloucestershire, on Sunday, 13 February, 2000

MMcB: “Sir Robert, I see from ‘Who’s Who’ that you had a distinguished education at Winchester and New College, Oxford and that you have a continuing association with All Souls. You’re a Fellow. You joined the Diplomatic Service in 1951 however, which is quite a long time ago now, and went to begin with, to the Economic Relations Department in 1951. Can you tell us something about your time in that department?”

Sir R W-G: “I was fortunate in that my first chief, the head of that department, was that great man Denis Wright, whom you will have encountered in your researches into the Diplomatic Service, who later became a very famous, long-running, successful ambassador in Iran. I remember on my first morning going in to see Denis who arrived the same morning from Chicago where he’d been working, and I said I found it all very confusing. He said, ‘Well, it’s much better for you, you’ve got to share an office with someone, you can learn from them. I’m the head of department, I’m stuck in an office by myself with nobody to ask.’ But of course those were very primitive days in terms of Foreign Office training. One was given no kind of induction course, no training, one was hauled off to an occasional lecture on this and that. But basically, you were sat down at a desk and told these were your responsibilities, and there was, in my case, somebody on the other side of the desk who was doing his job who said, ‘Do ask me if you find anything difficult,’ and I found myself making it up as I went along. And that was the rather amateurish way in which the system worked. I spent two and a half years in that department. I was fortunate, I think, in that it was a very, by Foreign Office standards, rather outward-looking department. Its job was to work with a lot of other departments in Whitehall, so it taught me very early on that the Foreign Office is only a little bit of the government machine. And the relations between the external bit of the government

machine and the various internal bits, is critically important. It also taught me a bit about how a bureaucracy works. I can remember the Deputy Under-Secretary in charge of that area in my time was that great man Roger Makins, as he then was, Lord Sherfield as he later became. He was indeed an All Souls colleague and I was elected at All Souls about a month after I started working in Economic Relations Department, and I got to know Roger at the weekends as well as during the week. I remember on one occasion, we were going to what I thought, in my awe-struck early days, to be a crucially important meeting at which he, as the Foreign Office representative, had a crucially important role, and I, and others, had written him the most elaborate briefs. We got into the motor car to drive the five minutes from the Foreign Office to the Treasury, or wherever it was the meeting was taking place, and he said 'Right Robert. Now what's this meeting about and what do you want me to say?' I realised that he hadn't read any of the briefing papers, that it entirely depended on what I said in the course of the next five minutes as to whether he was going to get through that meeting and do what was required. Of course, being a very able guy, he did get through, extremely well. But it taught me something which I became very conscious of later in my career when I was, as it were, in his position, that you are crucially dependent on your subordinates for telling you what you need to know at the right time, and the right time can be two and a half minute slots, and if you miss it, you miss it. And that's the kind of thing which is very useful to anybody, I think, to learn early in their time. Other lessons I think from then probably went out of date as time went on. One of my memories of that period was that a great deal of time was spent in Whitehall in bodies which were called things like the Anglo-Italian Economic Committee, deciding how much of the scarce resources which we in Britain controlled, we were prepared, by grace and favour, to make available to our friends in Italy, or Belgium or Norway or wherever. Europe was being reconstructed. Britain was less devastated than Europe, even in the early fifties. The relative economic power of Britain, compared to her neighbours, was very striking, and I think it was one of the things which led us to get our relations with Europe so wrong at that period and later. I had nothing to do with the Messina decisions and so on, but I can understand, remembering the atmosphere of those times, I can remember how likely it was that people in authority, which I wasn't, should make the mistake of thinking that Britain was a kind of America, and not a kind of France or Germany.

MMcB: “You didn’t have anything to do whatever with the initial application by the Europeans to Britain to join with them in the coal and steel industry?”

Sir R W-G: “No, I didn’t. That was the next door department, also supervised by Roger Makins. It was called, rather misleadingly, the Mutual Aid Department. It was round the corner, and I knew them as people I talked to over a cup of tea from time to time, but I had nothing to do with their work. I talked a lot to Roger Makins, later in life, about how we got it so wrong at that particular time, but the only thing that was a useful lesson for me from that period, I think, was how, in comparative terms, though devastated by the war, we were still very much more of a power in world terms than any of our neighbours were.”

MMcB: “Were you conscious at that time of the fact that we were enormously indebted to practically everyone on the face of the earth?”

Sir R W-G: “No, I probably wasn’t as conscious as I should have been. I think I was probably a child of my generation and thought of Britain as ruling half the world which, in terms of the independence of India, it had only stopped doing, if you remember, four years before then. So I assumed that indebtedness after the war was a temporary state of affairs and that the debts would be paid off as they had been after other wars. I don’t think I thought very profoundly about it. One was much more conscious of the weakness of the European economies, how devastated they were, how grateful they were for another couple of thousand tons of British steel because they were producing awfully little of their own. One of the reasons, I think, though I wasn’t involved in it, why putting together the coal and steel community on the continent was comparatively easy, was we were putting together very small fragments with other very small fragments, and the trouble was, for that brief period, what we had in coal and steel was very much greater, and therefore it somehow seemed demeaning for our leaders at the time to put our huge lump into this otherwise cauldron of tiny little bits of this and that. What we didn’t realise was how quickly all that was going to change. I think my chief professional memory is how much it taught me about Whitehall and how Whitehall works and how

the Cabinet committee system, which was invented I suppose by Lloyd George and hasn't altered very much since then, I mean I've had a lot of experience of it in later jobs since my early fifties days, but the structure, the way it operated was not dissimilar in the eighties from what it was in the early fifties."

MMcB: "Thank you. You went from there, of course, to Bonn, a direct posting to the relatively new Embassy there."

Sir R W-G: "I was nearly sent to China. Denis Wright said that he thought I would probably be rather lost somewhere as far away as China, so he sent my colleague, also in the third room of the department, who was a contemporary of mine, called Douglas Hurd, to do the job in China which I would otherwise have done, and I went to do the job in Germany which I suspect he would have done otherwise, though I can't vouch for that. That was in the spring of 1954. I went off to a Germany which was still ruled by the allied High Commissioners, rather nominally ruled, there was a German government which was effectively governing Germany under Conrad Adenauer, but nonetheless one of the things that we in the British High Commission, as it was called in those days, it only became an Embassy when German sovereignty was restored a couple of years later. One of the things we did was service the regular meetings of the three allied High Commissioners whose job it was, among other things, to ratify the laws and decrees which were coming up to them for approval from the German government and the German parliament. Germany, not being a sovereign country at that time, couldn't make laws for itself, it had to propose them and ask the three High Commissioners to ratify them which it practically always did."

MMcB: "Can you remind me who the High Commissioners were?"

Sir R W-G: "Well, the British High Commissioner when I got there was Derek Hoyer Millar. It had been Ivone Kirkpatrick until just before I got there. Derek had taken over a few months before I got there. The Frenchman was a very remarkable man called Andre Francois-Poncet who did a great deal, I think, in restoring the prestige of France in international affairs and in Europe and Germany in particular, and was a very long-

running French High Commissioner in Germany. The American, I think, was Professor J B Conant, I can't really remember. I must have been in a room with him, but I didn't of course interact very closely. One interacted really with one's own High Commissioner."

MMcB: "And Derek Hoyer Millar was, in effect, the British Ambassador?"

Sir R W-G: "He was the British Ambassador. He was called the British High Commissioner. He became the first British Ambassador to independent Germany when the independence of Germany was restored in, I think, 1955. I was involved in the negotiations that led to the, I think they were called the Bonn and Paris treaties which restored German sovereignty."

MMcB: "That would be in the allied zones, of course."

Sir R W-G: "Yes. What had happened was that Germany had been divided into four zones and, long before I got there, we had put the British, French and American zones together to form what became the Federal Republic, and was already governed by a government whose responsibilities covered those three zones and whose Chancellor was already Conrad Adenauer. The Russian zone was run by the Russians and still very much run by the Russians. They had refused to come into this amalgam of the other three. Berlin, of course, as it remained until the other day, was divided into four sectors and part of my job was to go up to Berlin at regular intervals. My High Commissioner had a residence in Berlin which he used to go to about once every two months, and I quite often went with him. Again, we were much more actually governing Berlin in substance as well as in name. West Germany we were governing it name and not really in substance in my time. My job in West Germany was a genuine diplomatic job. One was paid to get to know Germans and what was happening in Germany and what they were thinking and what they were going to do next. The usual stuff of diplomatic reporting. Then there were specific negotiations like the negotiations on the restoration of sovereignty. And I had also, in my particular bailiwick, a lot to do with the British armed forces in West Germany who were headquartered in Moenchengladbach, as indeed they still are, which is about an hour's drive from Bonn. I used to go over there about once a week and take

part in things like the Joint Intelligence Committee and other bodies which were basically co-ordinating the British presence in Germany, both military presence and the diplomatic/administrative presence.

In Berlin, again, we had a military presence which was very much more conscious of being the front line because Berlin was a potentially threatened outpost. In Berlin, the Kommandatura, as it was called, the governments of the British, French and American sectors, was effectively the government of West Berlin. There was a mayor and there was the beginnings of a civil administration, but that was some way behind what was happening in West Germany. One was very much more conscious of being in the post-war world with the thing still under genuine allied military government.”

MMcB: “The time when you were in Bonn, was the presence of the British army in North Rhine Westphalia and all that, very noticeable?”

Sir R W-G: “Not on the roads, no. I mean, if you went to Moenchengladbach it was a huge headquarters and there were a lot of people around. The bulk of the British forces was some way away from the Rhineland. They tended to be up in places like Krefeld. I used to go up there to attend meetings called by the corps commanders and so on. You saw rather more British military vehicles around on the roads in those days. But, no, you didn’t get the impression of British troops everywhere if you moved around in the British zone or for that matter French troops or American troops. You saw notices up by the roadside indicating that there were British, French or American as it might be, units, quartered nearby. You saw little arrows pointing to Headquarters of US Army Fifth Corps and so on, but it was much more noticeable in what became East Germany, in the Russian zone, where again, it was part of one’s job to travel.”

MMcB: “Oh, you went to Eastern Germany?”

Sir R W-G: “Yes, we had no representation in East Germany, so the High Commission in Bonn was, as it were, responsible for the whole of Germany. Our people, we had an outstation of the High Commission permanently in Berlin and it was the Berlin people

who did the bulk of the travelling round East Germany. They, on the civilian side and on the military side, a strange organisation called Brixmis, which was the British military mission accredited to the Soviet Commander-in-Chief in the Soviet zone. That was essentially an espionage organisation which went around taking photographs of Russian military installations. Its counterpart was a group called Soxmis who were the Soviet military mission accredited to our Commander-in-Chief in Moenchengladbach, and keeping them reasonably well-behaved was a preoccupation.

I used to go once or twice a year to travel in East Germany and very interesting it was. It was my first experience of communism. It was very much more visibly under the heel of the Russian Army which was everywhere. Indeed, our instructions, as British officials in East Germany, if we were stopped by an East German policeman, was to refuse to be processed by him and to demand to see a Soviet officer. One sat there, if necessary in one's car, saying, 'I'm not answerable to you. I'm one of the four occupying powers and if you want someone to come and talk to me you must find the nearest Soviet officer.' And one did occasionally have to do this, and a Soviet officer could always be produced within in half an hour. The problems that arose were always very minor, in my experience anyway.

I remember going to the Leipzig Fair which had just be restarted, and being struck by the bleakness and poverty of East Germany, and indeed of East Berlin. The greyness, which was one of the characteristics of communism, even in its later time and of which I was very conscious when many years later I went to Moscow, to Soviet Moscow. This was a striking contrast with West Germany in the early 1950's which was very unbleak, and indeed was less bleak than early 1950s Britain. I left London to go to Germany in the spring of 1954, and I left a London where food was rationed, and I went to a West Germany where food was not rationed. It was a very interesting change. There was no question of restrictions on how much restaurants could charge for a meal and that sort of thing which you still had in Britain. By the time I came back for the first time on leave, I think in 1955 or 56, all that had changed. Food rationing had been abolished in Britain, and again the same sudden transition had occurred. I think it had occurred not very long before in West Germany. I was struck by the fact that a number of my long-running

colleagues in what was still called the British Control Commission for Germany, which was the sort of service provided by the High Commission and our out-stations in places like Hamburg. They all were used to doing their housekeeping from the NAAFI because they assumed that that was the only place you could buy anything, and I who had arrived after German shops had reopened, it seemed to me perfectly normal. It never occurred to me to go to the NAAFI except to get duty-free drinks. For ordinary groceries and so on, one just went to a German grocer. British officials, who had been in Germany for the previous six or seven years, were rather startled by this. They hadn't quite registered the fact. They used to use the phrase 'Oh, you bought it on the German economy'. That was the phrase meaning 'You bought it in a German shop', rather than on the allied economy, on the economy run by the occupying powers for their own benefit. And, as I say, it was completely unnecessary to go to anything other than a German shop in the West Germany that I knew. But I don't think it had been like that for very long. It had only been like that a year or so."

MMcB: "Can you tell me, please, what the CCG did when you first arrived. How did they fit in with the concept of the High Commission?"

Sir R W-G: "Well, I was seconded to the CCG in order to serve in the High Commission in Germany. I had formally to be seconded to the CCG, as I could have been seconded, I suppose, to the government of Kenya. I remember being given a whole manual about all the regulations of the CCG which were quite different from the regulations of the Foreign Service, as it was then called. What particularly sticks in my memory is a clause which read 'Unmarried female members of the Control Commission for Germany would not normally be granted maternity leave on more than one occasion.' It was the word 'normally' that I liked."

MMcB: "What did they all do?"

Sir R W-G: "Well, their numbers were being run down all the time, but they'd been governing Germany, and what those of them who survived were doing was basically shadowing the German government. It was a little bit like something I saw in Cyprus

years later. The end of the British colonial period in Cyprus, where the British had been developing Cypriot ministries of this or that who ran the place, but until those had been developed there had been British officials, or Cypriot officials in British pay, who were running those departments. During the transition, you had a rather curious situation in which more and more of the day to day work was being done by the embryo, independent Cypriot ministry and there was still the expatriate official there who was technically the boss and was technically in charge but was busy trying to work himself out of a job. It was a strange situation.

The employees of the Control Commission, three-quarters of them must have been Germans rather than British, just as three-quarters of the staff of any normal British embassy are locals rather than expatriates. But they were paid by the Control Commission, and the Control Commission for Germany, of course, was paid for by the German taxpayer, not the British taxpayer. There were things called 'occupation costs' which the German taxpayer was required to bear, which were the expenses of the British forces and the British civilian administration, and me, in Germany. All that changed with the restoration of German sovereignty. The houses we lived in all belonged to the Control Commission and therefore, ultimately, to the German taxpayer, and when Germany became sovereign again, we had to buy those houses, with British money, off the German government because the German government said they were the legal heirs of the Control Commission, which is quite correct. We either bought them or rented them from the German state, though we'd sort of thought of ourselves as owning them until the occupation came to an end. It was a strange world.

The civilian end of the Control Commission was very much the civilian tail of an enormous military dog. When I wanted a new bit of furniture for my flat, I would go to some enormous military warehouse in Cologne and try to persuade the quartermaster to allocate me a new sofa or a new bookcase, or whatever it was. He was always rather puzzled when I didn't have a military rank. I mean, they did know there were one or two strange civilians who didn't have military rank. But as a third secretary, later second secretary, I think I equated to a captain or a major or something and therefore that told them what I was entitled to in the way of sofas and bookcases. It was a strange sort of

intermediate world. But the work one did was actually, with a few exceptions, like servicing the weekly meeting of the allied High Commissions, was really beginning to be perfectly straightforward embassy work. In the course of my time, as I say, the Bonn and Paris treaties or conventions, or whatever they were called, were ratified, and Germany did become sovereign, and there was a day on which we hauled down the Control Commission flag which was the Union Jack with something funny in the middle of it, I can't remember now, and ran up the ordinary Union Jack over what became at that moment, the British Embassy rather than the British High Commission. Of course, the control and governmental apparatus went on in Berlin, as indeed it did until 1992 or something."

MMcB: "So during your time there you would have seen German society beginning to prosper."

Sir R W-G: "Oh yes. German society had got to be quite normal, though they were still all very poor in West Germany. What was interesting is that my German friends, if they were a few years older than me, or even if they weren't, had the most extraordinary accounts of what they'd been doing in 1945, 46, 47, 48. There had been a period, they'd all been demobilised, or at school or whatever, until 1945, then with the ending of the war and the over-running of Germany by the allied armies, everything changed, civilian life really came to an end. I can remember one, nice assistant professor of philosophy in Cologne University whom I knew well, who had spent those three years as a janitor in a sailor's brothel in Hamburg. He had a series of wonderful stories to tell about the habits of British sailors when they got on shore in Hamburg. But you had to do something. You had to keep yourself alive. Then Cologne University reopened and he got a job as an assistant professor of philosophy, and by the time I got there he was behaving very much as if he'd been a lecturer at the London School of Economics. Life was normal in that respect, but it was normal having changed back to normal very recently.

Not many Germans had motorcars. I remember that every summer, a very nice man who later became German Ambassador in London, and died the other day, called Johnnie von Herwarth, who was a very popular Chief of Protocol, and the fact that there was a

German Foreign Office with a Chief of Protocol was all again rather new. Johnnie and his wife, Pussy, were very keen on music in general, and opera in particular, and I used to drive them down every summer to the Wiesbaden Festival because they longed to go and I had a very small Ford motorcar and they didn't have a motorcar at all. It was the best thing I ever did because a few years later he turned up as the German Ambassador in London and used to take me as an impecunious young man in the Foreign Office to Glyndebourne every summer, so I gained substantially from that! It illustrates how a quite senior German official at that point in time, 1951-52 did not have enough money to own a motorcar."

MMcB: "Did you ever come across Conrad Adenauer in the course of your service?"

Sir R W-G: "Well, I was in the same room as him, I probably shook his hand at some point, but I wouldn't claim to know him."

MMcB: "I understand that his attitude to the British was coloured by coming across some military officer on our side who had snubbed him at an early stage."

Sir R W-G: "I'm sure there were a lot of stories like that, and I'm sure we were very insensitive. I was very conscious of it because of course I hadn't lived through the conquest of Germany and the re-civilianisation of Germany, and I'd never been in the army, I never did military service, I came straight from a British university and then Whitehall environment straight into what had become an apparently quite normal Germany. There were a lot of British people still treating the Germans as if they were colonial subjects and behaving with a degree of arrogance which I remember thinking very shocking, but looking back, I can see why. You know, habits change more slowly than the rules change."

MMcB: "After that you went back to the Foreign Office and became private secretary to the Permanent Under-Secretary."

Sir R W-G: “Yes, it was Derek Hoyer Millar. He was transferred back from being High Commissioner in Bonn to being Permanent Under-Secretary in succession to his own predecessor in Germany, Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick. I was due to go back to London anyway, and he asked me if I would like to come back to London and be his private secretary. I think I owed that to the fact that I had a group of friends, British, German, French, American, all young, unmarried people in Bonn, and we used to spend our weekends exploring Germany, particularly south and central Germany, which we thought was very beautiful and very interesting. We were very interested in the architecture. We also like the trout restaurants. One rule of the club was that you would never discuss how you were going to get back to Bonn for opening time on Monday until you’d finished dinner on Sunday night. Then you sent for a map and said ‘Where are we?’ and then you drank a lot of black coffee and drove through the night. As a result of this, I got to know south Germany in particular rather well, and the cultural monuments there, and Derek somehow discovered this and whenever he was going off on travels he used to send for me and say ‘What ought I to look at in the way of pretty rococo churches’ or whatever in this or that area. I usually was in a position to tell him. Why he thought this was make me a good private secretary I don’t know. I think he liked people he knew really, and I was a familiar face. I got to know him quite well over the years and liked him very much. He was a very characteristic kind of Englishman. He liked making out that he was an idiot, and was very, very shrewd, but he had this sort of manner of ‘I don’t know much about this, and I’m just a simple fellow’, which was designed, I think, to confuse the opposition. He was a nice man to work for, very considerate chief, both when he was Ambassador and when he was a Permanent Under-secretary. My first meeting with him I found rather awe-inspiring, I’d never met a British Ambassador before and I was told I had to go and touch my hat to him on my first morning. I walked across what seemed to me about a mile and a half of deep-pile carpet to get to his desk at the end of the office. He was writing and I stood there politely behind the desk. After a bit he looked up and cleared his throat and said, ‘Another bloody Wykehamist on my staff’. He did have a number of Wykehamists there, so I said, ‘I’m sorry it worries you, Sir. What have you got against them?’ He said, ‘Oh, nothing much, they just sulk if you change their drafts.’ It always seemed to me rather a good characteristic. It was full of interesting and amusing people, the High Commission. Charles Johnston was Head of

Chancery, Roger Jackling was the Economic Minister, Jack Ward and then later Roger Allen was the No.2, the Deputy High Commissioner.”

MMcB: “We’re back in Bonn now.”

Sir R W-G: “ We’re back in Bonn. I’m so sorry, you’d tried to move on to London. Anyway, I went back to London and took over in the spring of 1957, a rather shattered Foreign Office which was trying to recover from the effects of the Suez debacle. Suez had actually occurred while I was still in Germany. Perhaps this is interesting, I can remember, though we didn’t talk in terms of ethical dimensions to foreign policy in those distant days, I do remember how shocked my contemporaries and I in the Service were by Suez and how seriously we worried about whether we wanted to go on working for a British government if it was going to behave in this sort of way.”

MMcB: “It had been so deceitful, hadn’t it?”

Sir R W-G: “It wasn’t clear at the time quite how deceitful. We didn’t, of course, know anything about the collusion with the Israelis and so on. We just felt that this was an outrageous example of what I, at any rate, had been spending a lot of time talking to my German friends about what Hitler had done, and where he had gone so wrong. He had used military force as a way of imposing his will on his neighbours and in the interests of some German interest in the Sudetenland or Danzig or whatever it was, and that we were busy telling everybody in post-war Germany had been a thoroughly disreputable way to behave, and here we were doing exactly the same thing to the Egyptians, a fact that some of one’s less agreeable German acquaintances reminded us. They would say, ‘Well, we’re glad to notice when the chips are down you do it too.’ That was rather galling. I can remember staying with a contemporary of mine in Paris and going for an enormous walk in the forest at Fontainebleau in November 1956, at the end of which, we concluded that provided they didn’t do it again on a regular basis we weren’t actually going to resign, but it had rather shaken our faith in the British government as an employer. I’m glad, looking back, that I didn’t resign. We all thought

quite seriously about it, it did shock us very much as a high-handed and, if you like, an immoral way to behave.”

MMcB: “And unsuccessful.”

Sir R W-G: “That too, but interestingly, it wasn’t the unsuccess that we minded so much as the inappropriateness of it. It seemed to us to be bad behaviour. I suppose it was worse that it had failed, though perhaps it would have been worse still if it had succeeded. I think I felt worse about Kosovo because it succeeded than I would have done if it had failed, because it seemed to me that Kosovo was another similar example.”

MMcB: “But the line taken by Anthony Eden in 1956 was that Gamal Abdul Nasser was a serious threat and had to be stopped.”

Sir R W-G: “Was a Hitler and this was the occupation of the Rhineland. He was reliving the history of the 1930s, and if Hitler had been stopped when he marched into the Rhineland we wouldn’t have had a war, and if Nasser was stopped when he seized the Suez Canal we wouldn’t have had whatever. It was a false analogy as we know. Eden, of course, crucially, wasn’t able to carry his American allies with him in the policy he chose to follow. In the Foreign Office in London, when I got back, everybody was feeling very flattened by Suez. It was clear that it had been a disaster. It was clear that the loss in terms of prestige, on which Britain relied much more in those days than it did since, was enormous, that we had fallen flat on our faces, and we had behaved very badly. That combination people had found very bad for their morale.”

MMcB: “Disaster on every possible count. So you were in the Foreign Office recovering”

Sir R W-G: “Yes. Derek Hoyer-Millar was very good. He was very robust, very cheerful, very sort of bluff and straightforward and we’ve got to get on with it and we’ve got to get on with our lives and we’ve got to do the best we can, and we mustn’t sit around moping and moaning and analysing and so on. I did it for just over a year, but it

was a wonderful training in how the Foreign Office worked, because, from the Permanent Under-Secretary's office, one saw the whole thing."

MMcB: "Who was the new Foreign Secretary?"

Sir R W-G: "At that time, Harold Macmillan. Eden had become Prime Minister before Suez, and Macmillan was his first Foreign Secretary. I remember Macmillan coming to Bonn when he was still Minister of Housing, and taking a great interest in Germany and German affairs. I remember saying to one of my better informed colleagues, 'Why is the Minister to Housing taking all this interest?' and he said 'Oh, didn't you know he's going to be the next Foreign Secretary.' And everybody who was better informed than me did know this. I suppose that must have been just when Churchill was retiring, Eden was becoming Prime Minister and Macmillan became his Foreign Secretary, and then when Macmillan succeeded Eden after Suez, he needed a Foreign Secretary and Lloyd was his appointment. Lloyd, whom I got to know a little bit better in my subsequent job in the Cyprus negotiations, was regarded by everybody as very much Macmillan's poodle. I mean, Macmillan was regarded as being his own Foreign Secretary, and Lloyd was the office boy who did the work. I can remember attending, as an official, a debate in Parliament, jumping a year or two ahead in the Cyprus negotiations period, Lloyd was on his feet making a speech as Foreign Secretary, about the Cyprus negotiations I suppose, and, as he was speaking, Macmillan, as Prime Minister, came into the Chamber and sat down on the front bench. Aneurin Bevan who was leading for foreign affairs on the Opposition, got to his feet and said to the House, 'Why do we bother to listen to the monkey if the organ grinder has now joined us?' It was a very funny moment, and everybody fell about laughing. And Lloyd did look like a monkey.

I'm jumping ahead. Curiously I don't remember much about foreign policy in my private secretary days. I think I was too busily involved in keeping the paper moving. I remember a certain amount about the running of the Diplomatic Service and the care that was taken over appointments and future appointments and sketches of who might be going to go where in five years time. This was the senior people, of course, not people at

my sort of level. I was very impressed with how carefully all that was done. I remember a lot that came the Permanent Under-Secretary's way about housekeeping of the Service, the cost of the Service, battles with the Treasury about the Foreign Office vote, all that kind of thing. I don't remember very much about actual foreign policy, which I think may have been, as I say, that I simply had my nose to the grindstone and was making it possible for other people to think about foreign policy."

MMcB: "On the other hand, it probably wasn't a very active time after Suez in many ways, going hard to get ourselves back on terms with the Americans."

Sir R W-G: "Well, I think that was probably it, but I was less conscious of it than perhaps I should have been."

MMcB: "You went from there to join Southern Department."

Sir R W-G: "I went from there to join the Southern Department and to become the desk officer for Greece and Turkey and, therefore, for the Cyprus problem at a time when what was going to happen to Cyprus was very much one of the major concerns of British policy. It was partly a colonial problem and partly a diplomatic problem. In principle we were already at the stage of wanting to de-colonise, we weren't resisting the idea of Cyprus becoming independent. It was obvious to everybody that if the Ghanaians could become independent, there was no reason why people who were Greek or, twenty percent of them Turkish, should not be independent. They couldn't be regarded as not sufficiently advanced, and indeed, one of the things that had irritated the Greek Cypriots in particular, was that they felt they ought to become independent or part of Greece or at any rate moved away from colonial rule long before the Ghanaians and Indians and so on. The complication was that it wasn't a straightforward exercise in de-colonisation, gradually introducing representative institutions and handing over more and more power to elected local representatives as was classically done in British colonies. McLeod was by this time Colonial Secretary. When I first began on Cyprus it was still Lennox-Boyd, but McLeod took over while I was doing that job. It was the time of the wind of change speech and so on, in perhaps the late '50s, possibly '60, '61. The fact that we were going

to allow the Cypriots to cease to be ruled by Britain, subject to one point about military bases, was not controversial. We did say that we need Cyprus as a base, we'd lost the Suez Canal base, we thought we needed a major base in that part of the world, we'd spent a lot of money on building up Cyprus when we'd moved out of Suez and we were damned if we were going to give that up. The experience of Egypt had taught the Chiefs of Staff that you didn't build your base on somebody else's sovereign territory, and hence the doctrine that our bases had to remain British sovereign territory, as they are to this day. There are still things called the British Sovereign Territories in Cyprus which are the ground on which the military installations are built, and I think, quite wrongly, we thought that the security of our tenure of that base would be quite different if we retained sovereignty than if we made Cyprus independent without any strings, then say, 'By the way, can we have a base?' as the Americans did in Panama and the Philippines and so on.

The Cyprus problem was partly a classic de-colonisation exercise, developing Cyprus to the point where either they could govern themselves or be governed by somebody else like Greece or Turkey, because that's what they wanted, but any rate not by the British Colonial Office. It was partly a military base problem in terms that we wanted, while allowing Cyprus to cease to be a colony, we wanted to retain our bases in Cyprus and therefore, as we thought at the time, it was necessary to retain sovereignty over those little bits of territory on which the bases were built. But above all, the problem was getting the Greek government and the Turkish government and their respective clients in Cyprus, the Greek-Cypriot community and the Turkish-Cypriot community, to agree about anything. What was happening was that we were producing various formulae under which Cyprus could either join Greece or be partitioned or become independent (these were, roughly speaking, the three alternatives), and we kept producing new and more ingenious formulae, including things like condominium and tridominium and goodness knows what. Any formula that you produced, if you got the Turks to agree to it, you could bet your boots the Greeks wouldn't, and vice versa. There were a series of journeys which I was normally involved in, which involved people like Macmillan, going round from Nicosia to Ankara to Athens and back to London, and getting back to London feeling that one had got absolutely nowhere. One had moments thinking one had got the Turks to agree to something, but then it was quite clear that that was impossible for the

Greeks, and vice versa. It seemed to be permanent deadlock and we appeared to be locked in to a situation which, a little bit like Ireland today, it had been a shooting war. By the time I arrived, the shooting had stopped because there was enough negotiating going on for EOKA, who were the IRA of that situation, to have called a cease-fire, but EOKA were quite clear they were prepared to start the shooting war again if the negotiations didn't go the way they wanted. So one lived with the constant threat of that happening.

As I say, we kept producing new, and more ingenious, formulae based on elaborate studies of the only tridominium in the world, which was somewhere in the South Pacific, and the one or two condominiums that existed. The breakthrough came in New York in the autumn of 1958, I think. One of my jobs was to go, as the desk officer from London, and be a temporary member of the British delegation to the United Nations for a couple of months, to help get them through the annual Cyprus debate which was traditionally an occasion when, led by the Greeks, the members of the United Nations, tore strips off the British for being brutal colonialists in Cyprus at a time when the UN was already getting to be pretty anti-colonial in its general atmosphere. That particular autumn, it went rather better, from our selfish point of view, than it had done previously, because, first of all, we persuaded the Turkish government to come along and shout as loudly as the Greeks did, not in a particularly pro-British, but at any rate in an anti-Greek sense, and every time the Greek Foreign Minister got up and made a speech denouncing us, the Turkish Foreign Minister got up and made a speech denouncing him, saying that the British might be frightful but the Greeks were even worse, producing a lot of chapter and verse. It has to be said that the Greeks, who had a great deal of right on their side and were, on the whole, rather nice people, the Greeks diplomats one dealt with, they were a very small diplomatic service and they didn't always get their act together. I remember, they produced a black book about British atrocities in Cyprus which they circulated to the General Assembly and it fell absolutely flat because they got the wording wrong. They said that the worst thing that the British had done in addition to all the horrors of the previous five pages of the report, had been that they had been caught the previous month in Nicosia sticking pins into the chests of clergymen. Now, if they had said priests, it would have been all right, it would have seemed dreadful, but clergymen somehow

injected a note of farce. If you knew the English language, clergymen was a hopeless word, it just reduced everybody to giggles. Partly because of the intervention of the Turks rather neutralising the Greeks, but even more because we managed to get one or two what would be now called Third World countries to sponsor resolutions which were broadly acceptable from the point of view of British policy. The Iranians, I remember in particular, this of course was still the Shah's Iran, had a very good Iranian ambassador whom we knew well, and we got him to sponsor the crucial resolution which said, more or less, the British have got a very difficult row to hoe in Cyprus, they're doing their best, they're trying to get out, they aren't being beastly colonialists, and it is a much more complicated problem than you in the General Assembly realise. All of which was true. He produced this resolution, and it passed after about two months of argument, on and off stage. I remember the enormous sense of relief when we got it through. We went back to the mission in Fifth Avenue and sent off our reporting telegrams, and then we looked at each other and said let's go out and get drunk. It was three o'clock in the morning. It taught me what New York is like. We walked up, I think it was Third Avenue, and there were endless bars open, crowded full of jolly Americans drinking, and we drank ourselves silly, feeling we'd actually achieved something.

But we'd achieved more than we realised because the next day, a very remarkable thing happened. The Greek Foreign Minister said he'd like to have a private meeting with the Turkish Foreign Minister. He didn't say that to the Turks direct, he said it to us. He said could we arrange it? He didn't want us to be there, but he knew we knew the Turks well, and could we fix it? So we fixed it. We found a quiet room at the end of the corridor where no journalists would see what was happening. We got the Turk in position and then we went and found the Greek, steered him in and closed the door and left them to it and wondered slightly what was happening. They got on like a house on fire. Basically what had happened was that the Greek government had come to the conclusion that if they couldn't get a good resolution through the General Assembly, they were probably on a loser. They'd got trouble with their other neighbours and they came to the conclusion that really they couldn't go on feuding with Turkey forever and they needed to mend their fences with Turkey.

That led on, in fairly rapid order, to the Zurich agreement between Greece and Turkey, which in turn led to the London agreement between Greece, Turkey, Britain and the two Cypriot communities, in I think January, February 1959. The Zurich agreement, at which we weren't present, though the British Consul in Zurich kept in touch with us during negotiations, and at which the Cypriots weren't present, was just the Greeks and Turks. They roughed out a very remarkable deal. A very remarkable Turkish official, a man called George Vincios on the Greek side and a man called Zeki Kuneralp, who was later Turkish Ambassador in London and was then Turkish Ambassador in Madrid when I was there. His wife was assassinated by terrorists. He's dead now, but I saw him only about five or six years ago living in old age in Istanbul when I was there as a banker. He was a very great man, and he and Vincios were the people who drew up the independence for Cyprus constitution, agreed that the inevitable compromise was that the thing had to become independent, and it had to become independent on a very carefully interlocking arrangement which gave both the Greek and Turkish governments the right to intervene and preserve the British bases which made Britain a guarantor of the settlement. It was really a masterly settlement. It didn't last unfortunately, but it did last long enough to bring Cyprus to independence. This was all agreed between the Greeks and Turks at Zurich.

They then came on, at Harold Macmillan's invitation, being by then Prime Minister, to Lancaster House in London, and there was a five-powered conference in Lancaster House involving the two of them and us and delegations from the Greek community and Turkish community in Cyprus. This five-power negotiation led to what's called the London agreement, which said that Cyprus would become independent one year from that day, and by then certain things would have happened, would have been negotiated, which, looking back, was probably a rash way of doing it. At any rate, I was then very much involved in the negotiations to try to ensure that the things that had to happen by the time of independence, did happen. I was the Secretary-General of a sort of continuing negotiation in London between the five parties involved. A rather nice old man called Knox Helm, who was a retired British ambassador from the Middle East, was brought in to be the head of the British delegation. It was very much a Whitehall type of operation because one had the Ministry of Defence, the Air Ministry which was then not part of the

Ministry of Defence but who were going to be responsible for governing the sovereign base area, one had the Colonial Office as the withdrawing power, one had the Foreign Office, one had the Treasury who were concerned with the financial implications. We had a sort of Whitehall steering group, which was ultimately chaired by the Secretary of the Cabinet, but of course it normally met at a rather lower level. Norman Brook was Secretary of the Cabinet and extremely good. That was to work out what our minimum requirements were and whether what we were being offered in the negotiations were adequate to meet our minimum requirements. I got to know Cyprus quite well at that period because Hugh Foot as he then was, Hugh Caradon as he later became, was the Governor and he very kindly invited me to go out to Cyprus in the spring of 1959, about two or three months after the agreement had been signed, because he said, 'Look, you're sitting in London, you're heavily involved in negotiating the future of this island and you've never been there and you don't know what it looks like. Why don't you come out as my guest and spend a couple of weeks and we'll take you around and show you everything.' It was absolutely fascinating, I must say. He was extraordinarily kind, a nice man. I got to know him in the course of these peregrinations because every time we went to Athens and Ankara trying to negotiate the settlement he was part of the party. He was very kind. He put me up in Government House, I'd never stayed in a government house before, and, as I say, I got to know a bit about the island. And then, as you'll hear in a moment, I spent a certain amount of time there in the next and following year and got to know it even better.

The negotiations in London dragged on and dragged on and didn't reach a settlement because the main problem between us and the Greek Cypriots was that we wanted too large an area for bases, and they said it was too large and we said we couldn't manage with less, and the argument went on. At the same time, there were quite a lot of difficult issues between them and the Turks which we were involved in helping to arbitrate. Eventually, Selwyn Lloyd, who'd been in charge of the negotiations, said he thought it would be sensible to move them from London to Cyprus where we would be on the ground and would be able to, as it were, walk out and look at the disputed areas. He certainly wanted to get it off his own patch too, because he was having to give up a lot of his time. So the negotiations were moved to Cyprus, and Julian Amery, who was the

junior minister in the Colonial Office, was sent out as the minister responsible, and he had one guy from the Foreign Office, who was me, and one guy from the Ministry of Defence and one guy from the Colonial Office and one guy from the Air Ministry and a Foreign Office legal adviser as his team and support from government circles. We went out there in, I think, January 1960, and finally left having initialled the independence treaties, in July. Cyprus independence took place at the end of July, having been assured it would take place in February, and we had to postpone it because we weren't ready. We first of all postponed it for a month, and then we postponed it indefinitely. This had both comic implications and some more worrying ones. The comic ones, we ran out of stamps for example. All the stamps had been printed saying Republic of Cyprus which didn't yet exist, so we had to overprint them with things saying British Colonial Government of Cyprus. But more seriously, the negotiations deadlocked until about March of that year, and remained deadlocked until June. During that time, the Greek Cypriots were saying that they would go back to the shooting war if we didn't give way, and we were saying, well we're not going to give way and we think you should give way. It was an unnerving time because we thought that they would crack if we held on, but one can be wrong about these things. However, given that we were stuck with this, we did dig in our heels, and I used to be sent back to London from time to time by Julian Amery to stiffen the British government which was inclined to wobble. McLeod was rather given to saying, well you know this is a silly little problem, why don't we just give way on this or that. Eventually they did give way, and we persuaded them that if they didn't give way by some date at the very beginning of July, there wouldn't be time to get the independence bill through parliament before the summer recess so nothing could then happen until October, and eventually they said okay, and we settled, and we compromised on a number of the outstanding issues. The final moment of the negotiations, the one thing we hadn't settled was the dowry, what would now be called the economic aid, that was going to be given to independent Cyprus to sort of start it off by the British government. I forget the figures now, but they were all very small by today's standards, but we had, as it were, permission to go to £3 million. We had what we hoped was a final meeting of the negotiating body, and Archbishop Makarios, who throughout was leading on the Greek Cypriot side, said, 'Well now, I'm not going to accept any less than £2 million as the dowry.' And we said, 'That's far too much, a million is the most we can do.' So we argued for two or three

hours, and then finally we said, 'Well look, it's Saturday morning and we've settled everything else, this is getting very urgent. We'll do what we can, it's not easy at the weekend, but we'll send a telegram to London setting out all your arguments about getting two million rather than one million and we'll beseech them to agree and to let us have a reply by five o'clock this evening so that we can have a meeting, and we'll tell you what the answer is.' We then went swimming because we didn't have to send a telegram to London. We'd got permission to go to three million which we didn't mention of course. So we didn't consult London at all. We just went off and had a picnic. We came back at five o'clock and said, well it's been a tough struggle, but we've persuaded them and you can have your two million.

One of the things I rather honour Makarios for was that he was a very, very, good negotiator. The next night after we had signed everything, initialled everything, he gave a dinner for the delegations in Kykos monastery up in the Troodos Mountains in Cyprus, which had been a great headquarters of the EOKA freedom fighters, or terrorists, whichever you like to call them, the Greek Cypriot church, being very much on their side, had tended to allow them to use the monasteries as headquarters. I remember I drove up there with a very nice Greek colleague who was the leader of the Greek delegation, whom I got to know extremely well. He was also a very good novelist and poet as well as being a Greek diplomat. He was called Rodis Roufos. He'd been Greek Consul in Cyprus all during the troubles, during which time there'd been constant battles between the Greek Consulate and the colonial government who said that he was smuggling arms in his diplomatic bag. He said how can you suggest that a civilised country like Greece would do anything so wicked as that? I drove Rodis up to Kykos monastery in a car that I borrowed from Government House, and we got out and strolled in, a lovely summer evening, the mountain pines smelling rather wonderful. Rodis sniffed the air and said, 'Yes, Kykos monastery, a wonderful place, haven't been here since my gun-running days.' That was the first time he'd ever mentioned he'd been doing any gun-running. After dinner, Makarios came across the room and said to me, 'That negotiation about money, am I wrong or could you have gone further if I'd been clever enough to press you?' So I said, 'No, you weren't wrong, we could have gone further if you'd pressed us.' And he said, 'I'm glad you told me. I won't of course re-open it. I just wanted to

know. I'm interested in negotiation as an art. I thought there was something slightly fishy about it.' He never mentioned it. He never re-opened it. He genuinely wanted to know if he'd got it wrong, which he had, for once. He was normally very shrewd.

I left Cyprus and came back to London and was fairly soon thereafter posted to Tel Aviv as commercial secretary. One thing I might mention, I don't know if this is at all relevant to your purposes, but during all this time, I was a Resident Clerk in the Foreign Office, which, if one was a bachelor, which I still was in those days, was a wonderfully convenient way of life because you lived over the shop. You were comparatively well off because you didn't have to afford central London rents, and your commuting journey to work was about a minute and a half walking downstairs. You were on duty one night a week and one weekend a year, which was no great hardship, but you saw, and were involved in some quite interesting negotiations.

So I went to Tel Aviv as commercial secretary. I was lucky really, I think, looking back, because in those days the commercial section in Tel Aviv was run by a first secretary, which is what I, by then, was, so I was commanding my own very small ship. It's now run by a counsellor, but it was a first secretary job in those days. I had a very small staff, one expatriate, three locals and a couple of secretaries. It was quite an interesting and challenging atmosphere in which to be a commercial secretary because the Israelis are nothing if not good at business, and also very good at negotiating, and we had a lot of inter-governmental negotiating of things like air service agreements as well as the sort of day to day stuff of trade promotion. Getting to know the Israeli banking system and the main Israeli industrialists, as well as the Israeli government on the economic side, I found very interesting. They were immensely articulate people, Israelis. Though in groups they tended to be rude and impolite, as individuals they were exquisitely polite and nice, extremely pleasant to interact with. I found it altogether a fascinating experience.

It's a most beautiful country and one was able to travel around it, and, being a diplomat, one could also travel around neighbouring countries. It was complicated to do. You had to go either through a thing called the Mandelbaum Gate between the two halves of Jerusalem, or sometimes you had to go to Cyprus and from Cyprus to the Lebanon or

Syria as a way of getting round the various difficulties. You could get into Jordan from Israel but if you then tried to get into Syria from Jordan, they didn't like it because they could tell, even though you had two passports, from the stamps in your passport, that you'd come from Israel. On the other hand, if you came the other way, coming out of Syria, they might guess that you were going to Israel, but there wasn't much they could do about it. You were trying to leave their country rather than enter it. I did a lot of travelling round the Middle East as well as round Israel.

I got married half way through my time in Israel. I went back to England to get married, and my wife and I spent our honeymoon driving rather slowly out from Gloucestershire to Jerusalem through Italy, Greece, Turkey, Syria, and Jordan. Fascinating. I'd been in Israel for about a year and a half when I got married, and had just got to know my way around a bit and had the fun of going round it all again with my wife. We had no children so we were free to travel.

I don't think there were any major lessons of foreign policy from that period. My ambassador, for most of my time there, was a very nice and remarkable man called Patrick Hancock, who later was ambassador in Rome. Of course it was a slightly odd sensation, because the Foreign Office, as you know, is traditionally pro-Arab and therefore anti-Israeli, certainly that's what the Israelis thought."

MMcB: "Did you share that thought?"

Sir R W-G: "No, but even if you didn't assume any bias on the part of any official, and that was a bold assumption, the fact of the matter was, there were about eight Arab embassies sending telegrams about what their government thought, and only one British embassy in Israel sending telegrams about what the Israeli government thought, so you tended to get much more noise on the Arab side than on the Israeli side. I'm bound to say I came to the conclusion it was almost impossible to be impartial in the Arab-Israeli dispute. It was too emotional, and people tended to get drawn into the emotional side of whichever party they were in contact with. If they were in some neutral position, something triggered them to be on one side or the other. On the whole, most people who

served in Arab countries were sympathetic to the Arab point of view, and most of us serving in Israel liked to think we weren't as fanatically pro-Israeli as our colleagues in Amman and Damascus were pro-Arab, but we tended to see the Israeli side of the story. I mean, it was Israelis we were talking to all the time, and we also saw, of course, the achievements of Israel, how well it was run, how efficiently it was run, compared to the rather shambolic Arab countries. One learnt about the Palestine dispute. One travelled a lot in the area. One learned a lot about the process of negotiating, and I learned quite a lot about the economic side of my job, which turned out to be very useful later on.

I then went back to London to the Planning Staff. That was a fascinating job. I was a founder member of that, well more or less. There was a sort of co-ordinating speech-writing department which was also supposed to have a planning function. When Michael Palliser was invited to be head of it, he said he'd only take the job if they split it in two and took all the speech writing and co-ordinating away, and made it into a planning staff. He said that otherwise, what his predecessor, Peter Ramsbotham, had told him was that you never got time to do any planning. The speech writing wouldn't wait, because it had to be done by Thursday at five o'clock, and the planning always would wait because it was all about what was going to happen in five years' time, and it was silly to pretend you were ever going to get round to it. So we were set up as a little planning staff of three people on our own, Michael Palliser, initially John Thomson and myself, and later it was Michael and me and Crispin Tickell. It was fascinating. It was the time of the great debates about East of Suez and should we maintain a base in Singapore. The Foreign Secretary was Rab Butler when I first started, and then the government changed, and then it was very briefly Patrick Gordon Walker, then George Brown who was wonderful but totally erratic. He had brilliant insights but could never follow through. You got half-way through the meeting and agreed to meet again at eleven o'clock the next morning, and by eleven o'clock the next morning he was drunk and there was no way in which you could carry on."

MMcB: "He was drunk at eleven o'clock in the morning?"

Sir R W-G: “Oh yes, there was no way to telling whether he was going to be drunk or sober.”

MMcB: “Was he an alcoholic?”

Sir R W-G: “He drank very heavily. I don’t know what the medical verdict was, but he drank very heavily and very unpredictably, so you could never tell. It was very odd. I remember thinking that he had more imagination and insight into the business of British foreign policy than any politician I’d come across, but this was Dr Jekyll and there was Mr Hyde as well.”

MMcB: “How had he acquired these insights?”

Sir R W-G: “He was a very intelligent man. He was very interested in Europe. He’d spent a lot of time travelling in Europe, and I think he was one of those brilliant amateur students of foreign policy.”

MMcB: “What was our status with regard to Europe at that stage?”

Sir R W-G: “Well, he was stage-managing the second application. Macmillan had made the first application, which had been vetoed, and he was trying to stage-manage the second. I forget whether Harold Wilson applied and was turned down a second time, or whether Harold Wilson was persuaded to apply and then was persuaded not to on the grounds it was going to be vetoed. I can’t remember. But at any rate the Wilson application didn’t work. Whether it was made or not, I can’t remember. But Brown was a passionate European and was one of the main people who converted Wilson to the idea of applying which hitherto had been . . . I mean the Labour Party was the reverse of today. Macmillan had come round to Europe, and then the Labour Party came in and the trade unions didn’t like the idea of European union, and so the Labour Party was seen to be hostile, and Brown had to turn them round. I think Michael Palliser, as head of the Planning Staff, it had nothing to do with me, but Michael, I think at the official level, was extremely influential in influencing not just the Foreign Secretary who he worked for, but

the government as well. He then went on to be Wilson's private secretary at No.10, and John Thomson took over as head of the Planning Staff.

It was the most intellectually exciting period of my life. I enjoyed it enormously. Everything one did was interesting. One was right in the middle of everything, operating well above one's natural level, because, as a first secretary, one was dealing all the time with under-secretaries and people like that, because there always had to be one guy from Planning Staff. There was a lot of interaction with ministers. Again, it was highly educative. There was no part of the world that we weren't, in principle, paid to think about."

MMcB: "Did you choose your own topics, so to speak?"

Sir R W-G: "Well, yes and no. We spent a lot of time asking senior officials and ministers and so on what they wanted studied, and we also had our own idea about what needed studying, and we got remits handed down to us from the Cabinet or Cabinet committees and so on."

MMcB: "You would find somebody like George Brown saying, 'Well Planning Staff, what do you think about this particular thing'?"

Sir R W-G: "Yes, he was good at saying 'I want a paper on this. I want it written by the Planning Staff in consultation with South-East Asia Department', or whoever it was. The other thing that it opened up for me (this was very much a Palliser doctrine) was that what the Planning Staff was there to do was to develop links between the Foreign Office and the foreign affairs community who weren't the Foreign Office. That is to say, academics, businessmen, Chatham House, journalists and the military, all of whom had ideas to contribute, and most of whom had been kept at arms length by the old fashioned Foreign Office who thought that Chatham House was a nest of communists, and journalists were people you should never speak to, soldiers were too stupid to bother with and academics were wholly irrelevant. All this was reversed under Palliser, who was very much supported in this by Harold Caccia who was the Permanent Under-Secretary

at the time. One of the things we were supposed to do was to spend our time going to meetings at Chatham House. It's when I first got involved in the Institute of Strategic Studies, of which I'm now on the board. Indeed I'm their Treasurer. Michael, I remember, made me go and join that. It was fairly newly founded in those days. We ran weekend seminars to garner ideas on 'What was going to happen in the Soviet Union' or 'What should be done about the remaining British colonial territories' or 'What was the future of the Anglo-American special relationship'. One would persuade Edinburgh University, or somebody, to act as the host at the seminar to which you would bring officials, politicians, businessmen, journalists, academics, all of whom were knowledgeable about that particular area, to interact for a couple of days in a fairly informal way. I found it all very educative and interesting."

MMcB: "It must have been pretty educative for the universities as well, of course."

Sir R W-G: "I hope it was. It was certainly very good for Whitehall. It was a process of letting light into Whitehall. Whitehall had been pretty resistant to that sort of thing. The old tradition was that you were the inner sanctum. You were government and you didn't want to waste your time talking to people who were outside the charmed circle. Ministers were there to persuade the public to support your policies, but we knew about foreign policy, and the idea that there might be professors of international affairs who knew more than we did was a rather new one. I think it was very timely and extremely interesting. A lot of friends and connections I made at that time still remain with me. Indeed, it was the first moment when I felt my All Souls connection extremely useful professionally. I found it fascinating as a sort of place to go at the weekends and be refreshed mentally."

MMcB: "I'm surprised you had time."

Sir R W-G: "Well, as a bachelor I used to reckon that I lived in Oxford at the weekend and in London during the week. It got more difficult once one was married. I enormously enjoyed All Souls and found interaction with people who were thinking about international issues in longer time-scales from the sort of next three days, which

was typically what the Foreign Office was thinking, at any rate at my level. The Planning Staff was paid to try to make people think in five years rather than three days. I found that going down and talking to people in All Souls was immensely useful and relevant. One came back with hosts of new ideas which one could actually put to work the following Tuesday.”

MMcB: “From there you went on to Saigon, where presumably there wasn’t too much intellectual stimulus.”

Sir R W-G: “No. It was a very brief period. I used to try to give the impression of having served long and hard in a tropical war, but actually I was in Saigon for, I think, something like eight or nine months. But one got a lot of bang for one’s buck, because I was there either side of the Tet offensive, which was the turning point of the war. Indeed, that’s why I left, because during the Tet offensive there was a great deal of fighting inside Saigon itself. It was the time when the American Embassy was captured by the Viet Cong. The Americans were immediately across the road from us. What we did was to run the embassy down to a minimum size because of the Tet offensive and said that the embassy would be, so far as possible, staffed by people who weren’t married and didn’t have children, or if they were married, didn’t have children. We’d had our two tiny children, aged 2 and 0, with us which was just about all right before the Tet offensive broke out, but once it broke out, clearly Saigon wasn’t a sensible place to have small children. Sally and the children were evacuated as soon as the Americans recaptured the airport and we were able to get people out, but that took about a month. We were cut off from the world for a month. It was a very odd sensation.

One of the interesting things it taught me, I was Head of Chancery so I was a bit involved with the personnel side of things, was that physical courage is something that’s very difficult to predict before you see people in circumstances of danger. There were great big tough macho characters in the embassy who went completely to pieces under fire, and other little wimps, whom you’d have thought would have been hopeless, who were entirely fearless, and could be relied on to walk across the street in the middle of a hail of machine-gun bullets without taking the slightest notice. To me it was amazing which

people turned out to be brave and which people turned out not to be. Quite unpredictable and often the opposite of what you would have supposed. The only time in my life where I've ever been seriously under shot and shell. It wasn't exactly agreeable. They eventually did recapture the airport, and we found the British Embassy aeroplane sitting there where it had been the whole time. The Viet Cong hadn't, so far as we could see, even got into the cockpit let alone tried to fly it away, so we got it working again and we flew out the dependants gradually. Sally, rather characteristically, insisted on being on the last flight. I eventually did get her and the children out. Driving back into town I suddenly felt light-hearted, and I thought 'This is very odd, why am I feeling so elated having said goodbye to my nearest and dearest?' And then I realised that actually for a month every time one heard a crump, one said, 'I wonder if that's it, then' subconsciously. You knew it hadn't hit you because you'd be flat on your back if it had, but you just said, 'I wonder if that landed on our house'. You knew it couldn't have and felt, well, if it hasn't hit me there's nobody else in this town I really mind about.

I then went home on leave, and they said, 'Don't go back. There's no point sending you back. We're running down the embassy. It's going to be half its size and you've got a wife and two small children, and you're not the sort of guy we're looking for.' So I never went back. But it was a fascinating, brief experience of a war-torn country. With the help of the embassy out there one could get around. The Americans would also lend one aeroplanes. The most interesting part was really travelling round the country. One had to go by air because all the roads were unsafe. Basically, I thought of myself as accredited to the Americans rather than to the Vietnamese. I was no kind of South-East Asian expert. I didn't speak Vietnamese. I'd never been in that part of the world before, and basically, what we wanted to know was what the Americans were up to. Though the Americans were trying quite desperately not to run the place, they were in fact doing so. I remember one American friend of mine, he was the sort of American czar for the northern part of South Vietnam, and he said, 'Every day when I get up, I swear to God I will not take over more of the administration of these two provinces in the course of today, and by the time I go to bed I find I've done it.' The Vietnamese machine was so hopeless, if you wanted to get anything done you had to do it yourself. In the end, that's

why it didn't work. The Americans hated being in the situation of being a colonial power, which was contrary to all their ideology and objectives.”

MMcB: “I'm quite convinced, from my experience of the Thais, that the Vietnamese would have been desperate to get the Americans to take over these responsibilities, to abdicate completely.”

Sir R W-G: “With the encouragement of my ambassador, who was Murray Maclehorse, I devoted most of my energies to, as it were, regarding the Americans as the people to whom I was accredited. It was my job to find out what they were thinking and what they were doing. It was very good for my knowledge of Americans and the way they think, making friendships with them. I also remember concealing an enormous admiration for the American political officers in the field. Being in Saigon, where there were thousands of Americans, wasn't particularly dangerous. It was rather dangerous during the Tet offensive, but otherwise, from time to time somebody threw a hand-grenade into a restaurant and people got killed, that was a little like an air crash or a train crash. You knew it happened, but you just assumed it wouldn't happen the evening you were there. So life went on perfectly normally. Statistically, going about your business in Saigon, whether you were American or anything else, you weren't particularly at risk. I don't think the average run of American soldiers in fighting units ran very many risks. They were very careful about casualties. The enemy's tactic was always to melt away when confronted with force, with strong American units. They did get killed sometimes, but as wars went, for the fighting soldiery in what was notionally the front line, it wasn't particularly dangerous. But for the political officers out in the districts, it was very dangerous indeed. In every district headquarters there was a little American headquarters which, I suppose, was there to liaise with the Vietnamese government agency in that district or whatever. I used to go and visit them. A lot of them were personal friends, and you could either borrow their aeroplane or use our own, and you were met at the airfield with a jeep and you wondered why it had got an awful lot of sandbags on the floor. You realised this was for safety and you hoped it didn't do too much damage to your underparts if it went over a mine. They drove you into the compound. This was all in daylight of course. As it got dark, they shut the gates of the compound, and you could

hear the Viet Cong walking round outside during the evening. Occasionally they loosed off a bazooka and took a chunk off the window-ledge, but nobody took much notice. The walls of the buildings were quite nice and thick. One talked far into the night, and having spent the night in this little fortified American outpost, you then would have breakfast and be flown back to Saigon the next morning.

Now, the people who staffed these little political outposts were all volunteers and they came from all over. They were secondees. I suppose they were a bit like the Control Commission for Germany, in rather different context, but they were partly secondees from the State Department, they were partly secondees from the Armed Services, they were partly secondees from the CIA, and they were partly guys from ordinary civilian, non-governmental life, who'd volunteered. There was a guy I knew who'd been running a sweet shop in Utah. He'd got rather bored with running a sweet shop and he knew there was a war going on in Vietnam and he went along to the local Governor's office and said he'd like to help, and he ended up as one of three Americans out in some remote district in the central mountains. The life expectancy of these guys was very low. It was a little like being a British Army officer in the Battle of the Somme. You didn't expect to last the year that you had volunteered to do, and the astonishing thing was that those who did survive the year, volunteered for another year. They tended to go on until they were killed. I remember being absolutely dumbfounded at the courage of these guys. They knew they were doing a job where statistics proved they were almost certain to be killed. I wouldn't have dreamt of volunteering for such a job in the first place. If I had been foolish enough to do so, I certainly wouldn't have volunteered to do a second year if I'd got through the first with my whole skin. I must say I was very, very impressed."

MMcB: "When you came back on mid-tour leave, you were appointed to become Secretary to the Duncan Committee, on loan to the Cabinet Office."

Sir R W-G: "The combination of cutting down the Embassy, I was sort of spare, and they needed somebody to be secretary of the Duncan Committee that had just been set up, and in the usual sort of way, they put two and two together, and I was it. And that was fascinating, I must say. I wouldn't have missed that for words. Val Duncan himself was

a most remarkable man. He was an industrialist. The other two were Andrew Shonfield, who was a journalist and commentator, and our Frank Roberts whom I hadn't known previously at all well. We lived very close to each other: the three of them and my co-secretary, who was a guy from what was called in those days the Board of Trade. For the best part of a year we lived in each other's pockets. Val was a wonderful chief. He died very young, not very long afterwards, but he gave an immense amount of his time. He just got interested. He hadn't meant to. He was very busy being Chairman of RTZ, which was very much a frontline job. But he was a bachelor and he was a tireless worker. He just made the time. He just cleared other things away, or did them in the middle of the night, or whatever. Again, it was an interesting experience of the interface between the Foreign Office and the rest of the world, because one was collecting a lot of people who came to give evidence to the commission, people from the outside world. I found myself using my non-official contacts from my Planning Staff days and my Oxford contacts and my personal friends, my wife's friends, and my merchant banker father-in-law's friends, that sort of thing."

MMcB: "Were you still a Fellow?"

Sir R W-G: "Where are we, '68? Yes I was, I went on till '73 in that incarnation, and then came back onto the governing body of All Souls only in '87-'89, for two years, and then back in '97 on a permanent basis, which is what I'm doing now. They're now stuck with me, I'm afraid!"

MMcB: "Going back to the Duncan Committee: it produced its report. Did it make any serious change in the way the Service operated, do you think?"

Sir R W-G: "I never find that kind of question terribly easy to answer because you never know quite what would have happened if there hadn't been the Duncan Report. I think if you take the question excessively literally, and say how many of the specific recommendations were acted on because they were recommendations in the Duncan Report, the answer is that about 30% of them were acted on and the other 70% were quietly shelved. The government changed while we were at work, which had a certain

effect. But I think, if you take the question rather more broadly, did it change the climate of opinion, which in my view is what Royal commissions and their lesser brethren are basically designed to do, the answer is, yes, it did. I think that under the impact of the Duncan Committee, and what it said and what people said because it was at work, and what people said about its findings when they came out, all this led to a change in the climate of opinion.

The two changes I would identify were a tendency to treat economic work, including trade promotion, a good deal more seriously than it had been treated up to that point, and secondly, a greater modesty about Britain's position in the world, the beginnings of a realisation that we weren't the super power that we thought we were. The fascinating thing there, and again I think this had its impact, though we, in the short run, lost the argument, we used a phrase, which I was responsible for drafting, about Britain's position in the world, and said Britain should these days be regarded as a major power of the second rank. Now, looking back, I think I would regard that as an over-statement. We were a medium power of the second rank. At any rate, that was the phrase we used, and we were torn to shreds by public opinion, particularly in the Conservative party, but also more generally. The newspapers fastened on this. They said, 'What the hell do you mean? Second rank? Britain?' But again, within 5 years, nobody seriously doubted that we were a second rank power. Now, did we lose that argument, end of story, or were we part of the process of getting people used to the idea that we were second rank not first rank? I would say the latter, but it's very hard to know.

It was extremely interesting. I've always enjoyed drafting, as one of the aspects of official life. I don't draft very easily, but I enjoy the process. I wrote the bulk of the report, in first draft. Every sentence was argued over. So, one was doing a lot of the first drafts, and then one was doing an awful lot of, you know at the end of a rather turbulent meeting, three hours, one was sent away to produce a new version which would reflect that conversation, which was good training when one came to be a Cabinet secretary later on. My co-secretary drafted the trade promotion side of it, but he wasn't a great draftsman. He didn't do credit to it, and Andrew Shonfield, who was a very good draftsman, he was a journalist, a wordsmith of some skill, wrote the introductory chapter,

which is extremely good. But I wrote most of the rest, at any rate in the first version. I always enjoyed being in charge of the drafting. There were three Cyprus Independence treaties, I remember, and I reckoned, when they were all over, I had drafted them all. They had been argued over, but there wasn't a paragraph of which I hadn't written the first version, or indeed put into shape the final version. I always found that very satisfactory. The nearest one got to authorship, I suppose.

When the Duncan Committee was over, they said what would I like to do, which was nice of them, and I said, well, I'd like to do something on the economic side of international affairs, in which I was getting more and more interested. They said, right, well we'd like you, either to go and be Financial Attaché in Paris or to run the Financial Policy Department of the Foreign Office, and we're not quite sure which at this stage. Neither is going to be free for nine months, and would you like some training in international economic matters in the interval? I said, yes, indeed I would. They said, right, we'll arrange a secondment to the Treasury, and I said I don't want to go to the Treasury. I knew about the Treasury. I'd had quite a lot to do with them. It was Whitehall, and I was good on Whitehall. I wanted to know something about the world outside Whitehall. The Foreign Office wouldn't be thrown by that at all these days, but in those distant days they were slightly puzzled and said, what do you mean? I said, well I think I'd like to go and work in the Bank of England.

I suppose what I really meant was I'd like to have gone and worked in the City, but I don't think I had the courage to say that, which would have been too outlandish. But the Bank of England was, after all, a government department in a sense, but it was in the City and it was a bank and it was rather different from a government department, and it seemed to me that it offered an opportunity of learning about the world from a completely different perspective. By great good luck, a very nice school contemporary of mine called Jeremy Morse, who later became Chairman of Lloyds Bank, was at that time External Affairs Director of the Bank of England, he was the permanent official on the court of the Bank who did the overseas job, the job that Anthony Loehnis did in more recent times. Anyway, I went to Jeremy Morse, whom I'd know all my life, he was at school, he's an All Souls colleague, and said if I can persuade the Foreign Office to

second me to the Bank of England, could you fix for me to have an interesting time there which wouldn't be too much nuisance to you and your colleagues? Jeremy said, yes I think that would be an extremely good idea, and by great good luck at the same moment, they'd been asked the same question by Robin Butler in the Treasury, so Robin Butler and I arrived at the Bank of England more or less on the same morning. They were rather more used to the idea of the Treasury. They dealt with them quite a lot, but they were rather puzzled about what they should do with a rather unpromising looking young man from the Foreign Office. Partly because of Jeremy's help and partly because they had to look after Robin Butler anyway, the add-on trouble of me wasn't that great. They were extremely good. I was only there between six and nine months, so one didn't have time to settle down and do a serious job. It was essentially a training secondment, a learning secondment, one was looking over people's shoulders seeing what they did and trying to understand why they did it and how they did it. But it was fascinating, and they rightly saw that what I wanted was an introduction not just to the Bank of England but to the City of London. Of course, they were well placed to arrange for me to go and talk to money brokers and bond dealers."

MMcB: "An absolutely perfect introduction to being head of Financial Policy Department."

Sir R W-G: "Absolutely. Which is what it turned out to be. I can't remember why I didn't get Paris. I was never promised Paris, but they were creating a job, which still exists I think, called Financial Counsellor, Paris."

MMcB: "Yes, but it was probably a Treasury man."

Sir R W-G: "I forget. But I don't remember any sense of indignation or loss. I was equally happy to do either. I think slightly that I was rather happier to stay in London, nice as Paris would have been. I've always liked headquarters' work more than line work. I think, by nature, I'm more of a staff officer than a battalion commander. At any rate, that's what I did. It wasn't actually the most satisfying job. I only did it for a very short time, for a reason I'll come to. I did it for about a year. But whereas I'd greatly

enjoyed ERD, which was its lineal ancestor, it was what ERD had by then been re-christened. But partly, I suppose, my perspective had changed, partly perhaps the world had changed, but I remember finding it extremely unsatisfactory that the Foreign Office, instead of doing what I thought they ought to do, which was get on with the process of being experts in foreign countries and how foreign countries impacted on the process of governing this country, were more and more tending to set up departments to shadow other departments in Whitehall. Essentially, my job was to shadow the Treasury and to find out what the Treasury were doing and why they were doing it. And it seemed to me, from a taxpayers point of view, this was wholly unsatisfactory.”

MMcB: “Of course they wouldn’t tell you.”

Sir R W-G: “A great deal they wouldn’t tell. Part of the trick, as with diplomacy in the field, was to get to know them well enough so that they would tell you. In principle, the Spaniards and the Indians wouldn’t tell you what they were going to do, but if they became a personal friend you might find out. And working with the Treasury was rather like that. They were very nice and very intelligent and interesting people, but it seemed to me, from a taxpayers point of view, it was thoroughly unsatisfactory that the taxpayer should be paying one lot of blokes to do it at the Treasury, and another lot of blokes, within the same government working for the same cabinet, to do it at the Foreign Office. It seemed to me the Foreign Office was getting much too big and much too drawn into setting up miniature treasuries and miniature boards of trade, and so on. So I was slightly restive in the job.

I was rescued from boredom and frustration by the fact that the first stirrings of, I suppose the euro, the question of were we going to have monetary union in Europe. I think of the Werner Report. It all, at that stage, came to nothing. Roy Jenkins was Chancellor of the Exchequer, and was very supportive, much more supportive than his officials who were greatly shocked by his progressive attitude. The Foreign Office was split, but the sort of pro-European bit of the Foreign Office was rather in favour of this. So working out, if the Werner Report did lead on to some kind of monetary union (it was called economic and monetary union in those days, EMU) in Europe, were we going to

be part of it, and if so what would it involve. Roy Jenkins' view was quite simple, that if it was going to be there we were going to be in on it, and we were going to go, in a phrase he kept repeating, as far and as fast as any of our partners. Whether he would have been able to carry his colleagues with him if it had come to a punch up, I don't know. There were plenty of people, including a lot of his own officials, who were deeply shocked by this. I can remember one very eminent Treasury official, Sir Frank Figgures, who was the No.2 official in the Treasury. He was what Nigel Wicks is now, the head of the whole external side of the Treasury, international side of the Treasury. He was a rather pompous man, Frank Figgures, and at some meeting at which I was present in Whitehall, he said (it was a moment of high farce as far as I was concerned), 'Do you realise what this means? If this goes through we may have to change the date of the budget.'
Breathhtaking really. I don't think any of the Treasury officials thought it particularly funny.

Knowing the Bank of England was helpful, because they came into this sort of thing, and were much more sensible than the Treasury on many of these issues. They were much less provincial, much less insular than the Treasury. The Treasury were paid to think of things from an English point of view and the Bank of England, I suppose, instinctively thought about things from a more international point of view.

At any rate, I was rescued from that after a year. I think if I'd done a full two or three years I would have got pretty frustrated, because, as I say, I think it was a non-job basically. I was rescued by being recruited by Victor Rothschild to work in the Central Policy Review Staff which had just been set up by Ted Heath. The government changed. I started doing the FPAD job in the beginning of 1970, the government changed in the middle of 1970, and Ted Heath (though I wasn't involved in this) and various people in Conservative Central Office who'd been planning this, said they were going to have what was called a 'strengthening of the centre'. It is all rather familiar in these Blairite days. There was going to be a unit based in the Cabinet Office, which would work for the whole Cabinet in general, but obviously for the Prime Minister in particular, not least because it was Ted's personal creation.

There was a question of who was going to head it. I was not at all involved in these negotiations, but it has since become clear that there were a number of people who were approached and all of whom felt it was a poisoned chalice and wouldn't touch it. Kit MacMahon was one of them. I don't know who the others were. Eventually, they settled on Victor Rothschild who had just retired as the research main board director of Shell. He was a scientist by background, and of course he was enormously rich, which was no great handicap. He was also very well connected socially. He knew everybody and was on easy social terms with everybody. He was also, instinctively, a very irreverent figure. He liked getting hold of conventional wisdom and showing how silly it was. He also believed that, which I'm not sure is right but it's a nice belief, almost any problem could be solved if you got enough intelligent people together and made them think about it. He was recruited by Ted and given, by Ted, a fairly free hand as to how he did the job and whom he recruited to it. I think he'd insisted that he had a completely free hand. I was one of his early recruits, and at the time I was very puzzled by this because I didn't know him. I got to know him very well later, but I'd never met him. Victor had an enormous range of friends and acquaintances, and he'd always been very good at keeping friendships in good repair. He used to spend hours on the telephone every Sunday morning ringing round his friends. I discovered this as I used to spend weekends there quite often when I was working for him. He would disappear into his study at half past nine on Sunday morning and reappear at lunchtime, and you knew that what he'd been doing was talking to friends in London, Oxford, New York, Tokyo.

I discovered afterwards that his technique when either looking for someone for his own unit or, as he did quite a lot for the Prime Minister who might say, can you think of somebody to run the National Coal Board or whatever, his technique was to ask about fifty people who they thought would be the best, and listen to see which name came up more than once. I never got a full list, but I discovered about twenty or thirty people who said to me afterwards, 'Oh, you're working for Victor Rothschild are you, how interesting. Yes, he asked me about you.' Obviously, he'd rung round, about fifty people, saying have you heard of a man called Wade-Gery and what do you think of him. Obviously, enough of them must have said the right thing. I was summoned to the Cabinet Office, where I found him sitting in a very large office by himself, and wasn't at

all sure what form the interview was going to take. I was told that this was because he was recruiting for this unit and if I satisfied him I might conceivably get offered a job. It was a very short meeting. He said, 'Sit down, relax. Tell me, you got a double first from Oxford?' So I said, 'Yes, in Mods and Greats.' And he said, 'Was it a congratulatory first? Were you congratulated by the examiners at your viva?' So I said, 'Yes, as a matter of fact I was.' He said, 'Thank you, that's all.' I discovered I was in about a week later. I think he simply wanted to see what I looked like. He was rather an intellectual snob. He liked the fact that I was a fellow of All Souls, he liked the fact that William Waldegrave, whom he had recruited about two months previously fresh out of university, became a fellow of All Souls that autumn, and he liked the fact that he had other people who had starred firsts and what were recognised to be brilliant minds.

He ran the thing as a kind of extended seminar. It all centred round the Monday morning meeting, and the doctrine was that the unit couldn't get bigger than fifteen people, because fifteen people was the most you could get round the table. If you couldn't get to the Monday morning meeting you weren't any use. It was a free for all. One talked about anything and everything, and argued furiously. Somehow, some kind of order came out of it. If you're going to ask me the same question, 'What did the CPRS actually achieve?' It's an equally difficult question to answer, but it certainly, at the time, was thought to have an impact."

MMcB: "It was certainly throwing out ideas, a bit like Planning Department, I suppose."

Sir R W-G: "Yes, one of the reasons I liked it. I suspect one of the things that interested Victor was my Planning Staff background. It was very much doing, at a national level, what the Planning Staff had been doing at the Foreign Office level. It didn't have a great deal to do with foreign policy. Foreign policy issues came up, and defence issues came up, and since I was the only person from the Foreign Office in the unit, they tended to get pushed in my direction when they did. But it wasn't our forte. We did things like the sort of first stirrings of privatisation. I remember getting into frightful trouble with Burke Trend, who was then the Secretary of the Cabinet, because I

wrote a paper suggesting that the government might sell its shares in BP, which Burke thought was a) wrong, and b) wildly indiscreet.

It was an interesting time, and again, it taught one a great deal about government and Whitehall, and how it worked, a great deal about the economic side of things, a great deal about business and the interface between government and business, which has always interested me very much, and fascinating people to work with, not least, Victor.

Remarkable. Robin Butler, who had been my co-seconded to the Bank of England, was the Treasury man in the first wave, Peter Carey, who ended up as head of the DTI, was the deputy secretary, and Dick Ross, the economist, who ended up as Deputy Chairman of the European Investment Bank. He was basically a don, an economics don, but a very good practical one. They were a remarkable bunch of people.

That took three years. I left before the fall of the Heath government, and though the organisation went on, even Victor Rothschild himself went on a bit into the Wilson era, it was never, I think, quite the same, because it had been Ted's project and Wilson always viewed it with a certain suspicion. So I think I was lucky to do it in its heyday.

From that I went to Madrid. I had rather an odd career situation in which the Cabinet Office had very kindly made me an under-secretary, because basically Victor and Burke Trend thought that I would do the job more effectively if I had the rank in Whitehall terms. And in Whitehall terms, I was about the right age to be an under-secretary, but you got to be an under-secretary in the Foreign Office much older than you did in a home department. The FO staunchly refused to make me a grade, whatever it was, officer, so I was a Foreign Office counsellor with the acting rank of under-secretary in the home civil service, and when I came back to the Foreign Office, I went smartly back to the rank of counsellor. I'd become a counsellor about a month before going to the Cabinet Office, so being promoted to under-secretary within a month of being promoted to counsellor was rather outrageous.

I was lucky in a way, because my next job was minister in Madrid which carries a title which implies being under-secretary, but you are, actually, a grade 4 officer, or were at

that time. So it was a kind of courtesy title being called minister. It didn't look like demotion in the eyes of the world which had its useful side. It was fascinating. I was extremely lucky. We were there for nearly four years, and it turned out to be either side of the death of Franco, which, in a sense, everybody had been waiting for twenty years. I remember one of my friends saying, 'Don't kid yourself Franco will die when you're there. Everybody's thought that. He's clearly immortal and there's no question of it happening!' It was fascinating because the people who took over and ran Spain, and took it through to democracy after Franco, were all, of course, out of government, out of public life, when I first got there because Franco wouldn't tolerate people with those sort of ideas in government. They were in universities and in business and so on. They were sitting around, and they were nice, interesting people, and were perfectly happy to come to dinner. They used to sit there in our drawing-room, far into the night talking about what they were going to do when the old boy died. Although it was theoretically a dictatorship, it never crossed anybody's mind that anybody would report what you said. Freedom of speech was complete. What you couldn't do was write an article in the newspaper or get up and make a speech on a public platform, but you could say what you liked at a dinner party, and everybody did."

MMcB: "Did they speak in English?"

Sir R W-G: "I had to learn Spanish when I went there. But interestingly, Spaniards, in that period, Spaniards under 40 spoke quite good English. Spaniards over 40 tended to speak French, but basically, Spaniards preferred talking Spanish. They don't like talking foreign languages, and why should they? They were in their own country, so one damn well had to know enough Spanish to be able to talk to them. It's not the world's most difficult language, it has to be said. I'm a very bad linguist and my wife learned it much better than I did. I find now, if I go back to Spain, I sit on Spanish boards, I can follow what they are saying, but I have great difficulty in saying what I want to say in Spanish. I tend to say, 'Well, you talk Spanish and I'll talk English.' That's simply because I'm out of practice. If we go to Spain on holiday, I find that after about a week, it comes back. I'm naturally very bad at languages. I always feel I've been very lucky to get away with a diplomatic career in spite of that."

It was an extremely interesting time. It wasn't oppressive. Although it was a dictatorship, and though it was supposed to be very stultifying, actually, I found it quite lively in the sense that the place was full of lively, well-educated Spaniards with a lot of ideas and a lot of interest, and a feeling that this regime was clearly on its last legs. The old boy was going to die. One of the things that had clearly got to happen, under whatever regime, was that the place had got to be modernised. It had been living in a sort of artificial isolation from the modern world, mainly, not its fault, but because people were sort of ostracising Franco.

One had a peaceful time, vis-à-vis one's own government, because no minister would come to Franco's Spain, so one could get on with the job of getting to know Spaniards and with travelling around Spain. I had two very nice Ambassadors, John Russell was the first one who was at the end of his career. He was naturally rather a lazy man, and had more or less stopped doing any work at all in his last couple of years. He saw that I quite liked working hard and he basically left me to run the embassy. He used to go riding every morning, then have a long lunch then pop into his office for about an hour in the afternoon, see how we were getting on, then go off to his first cocktail party, which suited me, as I liked running the place. He had a reputation of being extremely difficult to work for and very jealous and so on, quarrelling with a lot of people whom I thought it impossible to quarrel with like Ewen Fergusson. I think I was very lucky because it was right at the end of his time and obviously the fight had gone out of him. He was no longer worried that I might be, as it were, succeeding where he'd failed. He was just, I think, wanting to hand on to me his tricks of the trade. He reckoned he'd learned a lot about how to be a diplomat, and I was clearly a responsive pupil and he was going to pass it all on. He'd known my wife when she was a schoolgirl in Washington during the war, and her family, and that was a great help. He sort of felt he knew where he was with us."

MMcB: "He had a very exotic wife, hadn't he?"

Sir R W-G: "Very exotic wife. She'd been Miss Greece in her early years. She's still alive. She was nearly blind, even in those days, Aliko. She was an awful old woman in

many ways, but Sally and I did rather love her. You simply had to say, ‘Aliko, darling, how wonderful.’ You also had to say who you were, because she was too blind to see you, then fold her in your arms and give her a smacking kiss, and it would all be well. She was a great trial to John, who was dead loyal to her. She couldn’t make up her mind about anything, and when she did make up her mind, she changed it again the next day. Was he going to go to San Sebastian in July, well he was, no he wasn’t. You knew this wasn’t him changing, you knew it was simply that he’d been receiving different orders from headquarters.

He was there for my first year, then I had Charles Wiggin, who was half Spanish and very, very good at the job, but unfortunately spent the last year and a half of his time there, which was roughly my last year and a half too, dying of cancer, so he wasn’t there a good deal of the time. Again, from my selfish point of view, it was great fun and gave me experience of running a medium size embassy with two chiefs who, for quite different reasons, didn’t actually interfere a great deal. Charles, before he got ill, did all the work himself, and I think if he hadn’t got ill, I might easily have got bored because there wasn’t much left when he’d finished. He did it so much better than I ever could have done. He did spend long periods away in nursing homes in England.

We loved it. We still go to Spain a great deal, and I’ve kept up my business links with Spain.”

MMcB: “And you’re Chairman of the Anglo-Spanish Committee.”

Sir R W-G: “Well, I’ve actually just given up, but I was Chairman of the Anglo-Spanish Society for about 10 years.”

MMcB: “Then you went from there to Moscow, with the same rank.”

Sir R W-G: “Same rank, but actually by this time in Moscow I actually became a pukka Foreign Office under-secretary, though the title was minister. It sounded the same, but the money was different. That was an odd experience. I mean, Spain is a wonderful

country. It was particularly good in the Franco and immediate post-Franco period, because you couldn't find things out by reading the newspapers, because they were tightly controlled and said nothing. On the other hand, Spaniards are immensely talkative and loved gossip, if you got to know them as personal friends, which took a bit of doing. For the first six months, Sally and I used to worry we were getting nowhere, and then quite suddenly you found that you'd passed the exam; they'd decided that you weren't a bore. They were no respecter of persons. They didn't like you because you were the Ambassador or because you were the minister, they liked you because you were uninteresting. They assumed that all the English were prone to be bores, and if they found one who appeared not to be, they were rather suspicious about that, so it took them six months to make up their mind that one was worth knowing, but once you became a friend, you became a friend. There was no question of being a different nationality. You were just part of the gang. Once you got to that stage, you could ring up anybody and say, 'Look, what's happening, why was the minister of so-and-so sacked the other day?' 'Oh, don't you know?' they'd say. 'It's a fascinating story. He was screwing the ambassador's secretary's brother.' And all the gossip would come pouring out, and you couldn't stop them telling you. But if you were a journalist trying to go round interviewing people, you got nowhere, or a diplomat for that matter, if you didn't happen to be on chummy terms with the people who were actually involved. So the combination of this, and listening to the planning of what they would do in the post-Franco era, I did find absolutely fascinating. And, of course, travelling round Spain was fascinating. It was an important part of the job because there was a huge British community in Spain and, God knows, 4 million British tourists a year, even in those days. The consular side of the job, was something I'd never given particular attention to before, but it was a major part of the job there. One damn well had to know it. I found getting to know the leaders of the expatriate community quite interesting. In places like Marbella and Alicante and so on, we had a very good bunch of consuls, some of them career and some of them non-career, and keeping in touch with them was part of the job. It's a most beautiful and interesting country, and it's a wonderful climate. We had a wonderful house, beautiful garden and swimming pool. It couldn't be nicer. From Madrid you could go skiing by the day in the winter, and our children were just six and eight, the right age to learn to ski.

We used to ski every weekend, and go climbing in the central sierras in the summer. It had everything, in the way of douceurs de vie.

Going to Moscow after that, was really like going into a dark tunnel after brilliant sunshine. It was extremely interesting, highly educative. I wouldn't, looking back, have missed it for worlds, but I remember the sense of the light having gone out. I don't know if you've had any experience of it, but the Soviet Union was run by intensely boring people, in an intensely boring way, and doing business with them was a process of repeating yourself over and over and over again. You simply went along and said, 'My instructions are to say the following.' And then when they said they didn't agree, you said 'I don't think you could have been listening. Let me repeat.' So you then repeated, verbatim, for the fourteenth time. After you'd done this for about an hour, exhaustion set in, and that was the end of the interview. They were frightfully dull people, with no imagination, no ideas, and no sense of humour. After the Spaniards, who were lively and thoughtful and made every interview, even if it was a difficult one, funny and exhilarating because they could see the ironic side of almost anything. In Spanish society, the one crime you must never commit, is to be boring. If you tried to be a diplomat in the Soviet Union, and if you weren't boring, you weren't doing the job right. It was really quite a contrast.

It was also very uncomfortable. Housing was appalling. If you wanted the window cord mended, you couldn't get a man to mend it. You had to ring up the Foreign Ministry, who rang up the Ministry of Works."

MMcB: "Couldn't you just speak into the lampshade?"

Sir R W-G: "You could try doing that a bit, but it didn't always work. That worked better in hotels. If you said 'This is a bloody hotel. I can't get any ice.' You would suddenly find a tap on the door 'Were you wanting ice?' But it was fearfully bureaucratised. When eventually you did get through, they always got it wrong. We had a garden. We were very lucky to have a garden attached to our house, which was in a terrible state, and Sally, who is a good gardener, said that she must have some manure.

This had to go to the Foreign Ministry who thought about it for a long time. We filled in endless forms, there were a lot of arguments and why did we need manure? What was manure anyway. Eventually she said that what she wanted was three tons of manure and that would put the garden back into shape. There was a terrific grinding of bureaucratic gears, and eventually they said it would arrive on Tuesday, and on Tuesday, there was this enormous traffic jam because forty lorries appeared loaded with manure. We said what on earth is going on and they said, 'Well, here we have your 30 tons of manure.' A nought had simply crept in at some point. Thirty tons of manure is an awful lot of manure. They had absolutely no sense of it being sensible. They didn't mind whether it was a sensible thing to do. The thing about the Soviet Union was you didn't ever think whether what you were doing was good or useful. You had merely to think, had you got a chit to entitle you to do it. What are the orders.

We used to have frightful problems with British travellers who missed their aeroplane home, because they would go to a hotel, as one might in another country and say, 'Have you got a room?' and the man would say, 'Yes, I've got a room. Have you got permission to stay in my hotel?' The Englishman would say 'No,' and the Russian would say, 'In that case, you can't stay here. Go away.' The Englishman couldn't understand. The man's got empty rooms, and why is he turning me into the streets. The Russian attitude was that you would get him into trouble with the authorities if you insisted on staying in a hotel which you aren't authorised to stay in. There was no sense of the profit motive and that the hotel would be better if they had a higher occupancy rate. It was entirely a question of keeping the room, which is why, of course, the economy didn't work.

It was highly educative. To have seen what communism was meant to be like was very interesting. In Eastern Europe, where one of the nice things about the job, was that one did a lot of travelling round Eastern Europe, because the Moscow embassy had a kind of droit de regard for the satellite countries of Eastern Europe. It seemed to me, by contrast, that places like Poland, and even Czechoslovakia, and certainly Hungary, were sort of half-way to being non-communist."

MMcB: “But we did have embassies there.”

Sir R W-G: “Oh, we had embassies there, but they were small embassies, and the Moscow embassy was meant to get round and visit them regularly.”

MMcB: “In a semi-supervisory role?”

Sir R W-G: “It wasn’t quite put like that, but part of your job was to know. . . Co-ordinatory rather than supervisory would be a tactful way to put it. The Moscow embassy was very large, and in those days the small missions tended to be very small. There wasn’t very much you could do in Budapest or Warsaw. In Moscow they were trying, in their not very competent way, to make communism work. They were trying to play the rules. The Poles and Hungarians were simply trying to cheat on the communist rules just as hard as they could, because they were simply imposed on them by the Russians, and the Russians weren’t as clever as they were. It was sort of grandmother’s footsteps: you waited until the Russian wasn’t looking, and then you took two paces forward. But the Russians were imposing it on themselves, though a lot of them were naturally anarchic and drunken and didn’t keep the rules. The people who were running the country, basically did believe in the rules, and in some cases were doing well out of them.

It was extremely interesting, and travelling around the Soviet Union was very interesting too. In Moscow there were far too many foreigners, and the Russians wanted to have as little to do with them as possible because it might get them, the Russians, into trouble talking, without authorisation, to a dangerous foreigner, particularly to a class enemy, which is what the NATO countries were called. People like the Finns and the Indians, got on much better with the Russians. We were regarded as dangerous. But the minute you got outside Moscow, people were quite nice to you because they were bored. You were interesting and you were a change. Life in the Soviet Union for them, as well as for us, was very dull. You turned up in Novosoberska, you were a couple of interesting foreigners and they were all over you, so that was really quite fun. For security reasons, one was never allowed to travel alone, so everywhere I went, Sally came too. Our

children, by this time, were at boarding school, so for the bulk of the year we had no problems about leaving Moscow whenever we wanted to.

It turned out to have a number of consolations which I wouldn't have missed, not least getting to know places like St.Petersburg, one of the most beautiful cities in the world, and places like the Caucasus, which again are fascinating, and Central Asia. They were all comparatively easy to get to. You had to have permission, but then you had to have permission to have breakfast, more or less, in the Soviet Union, and so did they. It wasn't discrimination against us. If you were a Soviet citizen and you wanted to go to Samarkand, you had to get a piece of paper authorising you to do so. We simply did the same, unless you were a military attaché and particularly wanted to go and take photographs of things in sensitive frontier areas. They had a hell of a time, but I wouldn't have known a military installation of interest from a hole in the road. I wasn't much good at doing that, and tended only to go to the interesting places. So it turned out to have a lot of consolations and it was highly educative, but it wasn't the most exhilarating professionally. As I say, the people one dealt with were very dull, and the way that you dealt with them was a very boring way and a very slow-moving way. Dialogue between the two government was excruciatingly slow and normally got nowhere."

MMcB: "Did you get any social contact at all in Moscow?"

Sir R W-G: "Yes, you had two things. A propos visitors, the appropriate analogues would be produced, so, if you had the Deputy Mayor of Leeds, the deputy mayor of somewhere equivalent would be produced, and would turn out to be quite interesting. I didn't speak very good Russian, so normally used interpreters, but they preferred that because they knew where they were. The other thing was that there were one or two people, particularly in the sort of artistic world, who were licensed to talk to foreigners. The poet, Genya Yevtushenko, the painter Elan Glasimov, people like that, one or two academics, who were thought to be respectable Soviet citizens, in many cases good foreign exchange earners because people bought their books or their paintings, or what have you. They were, therefore, treated with indulgence and allowed to amuse

themselves by talking to the likes of Sally and me. Yevtushenko was quite a well-known poet in the seventies and eighties. I think he's still alive, but he's rather faded out. He wasn't exactly an opponent of the regime. He was much too interested in having a comfortable life for that, but he had what passed for radical views in the very stultified world of Brezhnev's Russia. Glasimov, was quite a good international painter, he painted Mrs Gandhi and things like that.

The danger in Moscow was that one spent too much time talking to one's diplomatic colleagues, which is not a good way of getting on with the job, though they tended to be an interesting bunch. People sent able members of their diplomatic service to Moscow, and if you did find yourself at a diplomatic dinner party, where they were all foreigners, they tended to be quite interesting foreigners. It just never seemed to me to be a sensible way of getting to know a country to talk to other diplomats. Again, after Spain, where it was such fun getting to know the locals, the constant difficulty of getting to know locals was an important drawback. However, there it was, we only did it for two years. One got nice long holidays and was rather well paid. There were compensations.

Then I was lucky to be promoted again because I had only had one spell as an under-secretary. I went up to deputy under-secretary, and went to do what is traditionally the Foreign Office deputy-secretary job in the Cabinet Office, which means being basically responsible for foreign and defence affairs, though not European Community. You do foreign and defence and contingency planning, what you do about strikes, you know, use the Armed Services to drive ambulances. But by extension of that, the whole subject of what you did about national emergencies, was part of my bailiwick. I was responsible for what happened if London flooded. Before the barrage, it was quite serious. One of the most interesting things I did actually, was the planning for the miners' strike. I was in India by the time the strike took place, but a fascinating thing about the job was that Margaret Thatcher came in as Prime Minister, after I was appointed but before I got there.

I was appointed by Callaghan, and rather to my surprise ratified by Thatcher. She was new, dynamic, didn't know a great deal about foreign policy, hadn't got dug into her

ideas about Europe, which is just as well from my point of view, because I don't think we'd have got on too well on that subject. I wasn't, as I say, paid to advise her on that. I was paid to advise her on everything else. She was a tremendous breath of fresh air, great fun to work for, very stimulating and very quick on the uptake, extraordinary contrast with Ted Heath, who's the only other Prime Minister I've known. He was extremely polite professionally, and not deliberately rude, but never noticed if you were standing up or sitting down, or whether you might need a drink or anything like that. He was totally indifferent to one's personal welfare.

Margaret Thatcher was extremely good at looking after all that kind of stuff, but then when it came to talking shop she could be blisteringly rude. I remember early in our time, she sent for me and said, 'I think only somebody as stupid as you could have written this paper.' Slightly flattening remark! Mercifully, I was very lucky because one of the things I discovered later was that she would only listen to people who would talk back in the face of that kind of assault. It was a technique to see what you would do. She happened to do it on something I knew a lot about and I knew she knew nothing about at all. I just lost my temper and said, 'Prime Minister, it isn't nonsense. If you listen for a moment, I'll tell you why it isn't nonsense.' And rather by surprise, she said, 'Okay, go ahead.' And I did, and after that I had no trouble, but it was pure luck. I wasn't aware that this was the way to survive. She could be very tough. Even when she knew you and liked you, she could say 'This is absolute rubbish. You're just trying to con me.' Good rough stuff. But very stimulating. One of the fascinating things, as I say, occurred very early, in her first weeks as Prime Minister. She had a meeting which Willie Whitelaw was at and I was at, and the Energy Secretary of State, I think David Howell, and she said, 'Look, the last Conservative government was destroyed by the miners' strike, and there's going to be another before this Conservative government gets itself properly established, and this time I'm going to win it.' 'And you,' she said, fixing Willie with a beady eye 'are going to do the planning now for this punch-up when it comes, which may not be for several years, but we've got to be ready. It may mean me changing the law. It'll certainly mean changing the contingency plans.' As we went out of the room, Willie got me by the ear and said, 'You heard what she said about me being in charge? Well, that wasn't altogether true. You're going to do all the work.' I said, 'Okay.' He was a

wonderful person to work for. He was a brilliant delegater. He would leave you to do everything you wanted, and when you got into difficulty, or needed support against some other minister, and you went to Willie and said, 'Look, I've got to this point and I can't get further' he would say, 'Okay.' He would just pick up the telephone, ring up whoever it was and say, 'Look Charlie, could you get your guys to be a little more helpful.' They all liked Willie and didn't want to quarrel with him. He was very, very shrewd politically. He couldn't draft, so he never tried to do one's drafting for one. He had a wonderful sense of what the traffic would bear. I found him a joy to work for. It took about two years, the planning for the strike. When it actually happened, I was sitting in India, simply listening to the radio, and fascinated to see that they followed the plans almost to the letter. In a way, I suppose, I had the best of it. I didn't have the anxieties of actually going through the strike itself. I had all the stimulus of making the plans.

That was one aspect of the job. Then defence policy, foreign policy other than European policy. It was a fine mixed bag, but also rather interesting being a poacher turned gamekeeper. I mean, having been an irregular at the Cabinet Office, I was now the sort of policeman rather than the irregular. It was a fascinating job, and one's stock in trade was one knew ministers well and how their minds worked. That's what one basically had to offer, and you spent your time chairing committees of officials, and what they could tell you was what the Treasury wanted, what the ministry of whatever it was, wanted. What you could tell them, was what ministers collectively would and wouldn't stand for, because you were sat there day after day as the secretariat of ministerial committees and you knew what they would tolerate and wouldn't tolerate and why. Even if the thing hadn't come up, you could judge the temperature. It was an extremely interesting job and they were a very interesting bunch of ministers to work with.

Peter Carrington was the Foreign Secretary all the time I was there. I did that for three years. It ended with a bang with the Falklands War when I was Secretary of the War Cabinet. Robert Armstrong was co-Secretary. The War Cabinet met every morning. The only difference between Sunday and the rest of the week, was that it met at Chequers on Sunday. It met at 9.30 am every morning, and there was an official committee chaired

by Robert Armstrong which met every afternoon to set the agenda, and one was basically the central direction of the war on the civilian side.”

MMcB: “What did that entail? What were the civilian aspects of it?”

Sir R W-G: “Well, it was a highly political war, as you know. Basically, it was whatever John Fieldhouse, who was the Commander-in-Chief, and the Chiefs of Staff wanted authority from the Prime Minister to do. Right at the beginning she said, ‘Look, you run this war because you know how to. I don’t, but when you need a political decision of any kind, come to me, if necessary at 3 o’clock in the morning, and I will give it to you.’ And she was as good as her word. I mean, if one rang her up at 3 o’clock in the morning and said a decision was needed, she would say, ‘Can’t it wait till breakfast time? Have I got time to consult my colleagues?’ If one said ‘No. For the following reasons you have to decide now,’ she would say ‘Okay, what are the alternatives?’ You’d tell her and say what was your recommendation, and she’d say ‘Okay, this is what we do.’ She was a frightfully good war leader in that respect, which I didn’t think she’d be. I thought she’d be more like Churchill and would keep saying why didn’t you do it the other way.”

MMcB: “You weren’t around at the time of the sinking of the Belgrano?”

Sir R W-G: “Yes, I was.”

MMcB: “So how about your decision on that?”

Sir R W-G: “Well, it was Chequers one Sunday morning. It was a lunch party at Chequers and we were having drinks before it. We’d had a meeting and it had broken up, but all the members of the War Cabinet were there, and the news came in that one of our submarines had got the Belgrano in their periscope and wanted instructions whether to sink her or not. So she said, ‘I think we’d better reconvene,’ and said to the other guests, ‘Excuse us.’ We all trooped into the little white drawing room and sat round on chairs. And then, very uncharacteristically in a way, she went around everyone in the room and

said, 'What do you think we should do?' including the officials. And we all said 'Sink it,' and she said, 'Okay, sink it.' I remember going out of the room and ringing up Northwood and saying 'Sink it. Do you want that confirmed in writing?' They said 'No. There won't be time. They'll have sunk it by the time it arrives.' And they sank it about twenty minutes later. I've no doubt it was the right decision. It was veering about, it kept going in different directions, so the fact that it was actually pointing homewards at the time when it was sunk is not evidence of anything. If it remained at sea, it was a desperate menace to our fleet because it meant that aeroplanes could take off from the mainland, or take off from the Belgrano, go and bomb the fleet, and get back to the mainland before they ran out of fuel, so it gave them a range they didn't otherwise have."

MMcB: "It was being used for that purpose, was it?"

Sir R W-G: "It had gone to sea with the intention of being used for that purpose. I don't think it had actually been used at that point. I can't remember the details. But it was quite clear that it was a military menace and that a decision to let it go when one was in a position to sink it would have been unforgivable. What we, of course, didn't realise was that the three escort ships would not, as we assumed, stay around and pick up the survivors, but simply scoot off over the horizon, leaving the survivors in the water. So a great many people were killed, simply drowned, because nobody was there to pick them up. The Navy did not behave well. The Argentine Air Force was extremely brave, and our experts said they'd never known an air force in their history take a casualty rate of about 30% for a month, and keep coming. They were very impressed with their courage. The actual critical thing was keeping the fleet far enough away from the mainland so that the Argentine Air Force only had a very few minutes over the fleet, and if they didn't get a hit within the first minute and a half, they had to go home or run out of fuel. And that's why it was so vital to cut the airfield at Stanley, because if they could go back and land at Stanley, they had 20 minutes over the fleet. If they had to get back to Buenos Aires, they didn't. We normally managed to keep the runway at Stanley out of action.

The sort of things that the War Cabinet got involved in were the rules of engagement. I mean, who could you sink, who couldn't you sink, and with things like the declaration of

the exclusion zone, and terrible problems about nuclear submarines. The trouble with the nuclear submarine is that, if you challenge it, by the time you've established who it is, it's had every opportunity of killing you. So you have to make up your mind, when you see a nuclear submarine, whether you're going to sink it or not. The only thing we could do about that was to get hold of every government in the world who owned a nuclear submarine and say, 'We would strongly advise you not to let your nuclear submarines go within 200 miles of the Falklands, because we are going to have to kill any nuclear submarine we find in the area.' The Argentineans had two, and would have been a considerable menace. They never actually put to sea because one of them, although we didn't know it, was unserviceable, and the other didn't like the idea of coming out. But it didn't stop us being very frightened of them.

There were a whole series of things - the whole question of what they were and weren't allowed to do, relations with the Chileans which is a fascinating and still very little known aspect of the war, though bits of it have surfaced a propos of how much we owe to General Pinochet. It was most extraordinary. We kept saying to each other, they can't have gone on like this for six years, between 1939 and 1945, because the pace was absolutely killing. Nobody did anything at the top of Whitehall. They virtually did nothing else for three months except run the war. We never had time to go and look up precedents to see how they did run it in 1939. It was a very odd war too, because everybody realised that if we hadn't won it by mid-summer, our time, we would have lost it. We couldn't keep the fleet on station. The nearest base we had, until we occupied the islands, was Dakar in West Africa, and if one of the aircraft carriers' hangar doors had jammed, they would have had to go back to Dakar to be repaired because there was no way you could repair it at sea. We said to the Chiefs of Staff, what happens if one has to go back for repair, and they said you have to abort the expedition. We can't go on with one. We said, well how long do these doors normally last, and they said well you're already about a fortnight longer than they normally last. Mercifully, they didn't jam.

Bombing Stanley airfield involved using Vulcan bombers from Ascension Island, which had to be refuelled four times in flight in order to get there and back, three times on the way down, and once on the way back because they were much lighter on the way back

because they weren't carrying any cargo. If the probe broke on any of the ones on the way down, you simply turned round and went back to Ascension Island. You had enough fuel to get back. Then you started again. If the probe broke on the fourth one, when you were on your way north, you had to go to Brazil because you hadn't got enough fuel to go anywhere else. It only happened once. Everybody behaved beautifully. The guy landed at ? Hernambucco military airbase, got out of his cockpit and said, 'This is Ascension Island, isn't it?' and the Brazilians said, 'No, as a matter of fact, it isn't,' and he said, 'Oh dear, my controls must be terribly wrong.' 'Oh well,' they said 'it could happen to anybody. I'm afraid we have to intern you because we're neutral in this war, but we do have a very comfortable VIP suite on this airbase which is at your disposal, and anybody you'd like to have to dinner you're more than welcome. We've stocked the cellar, and we hope you don't have too boring a time until the war ends.'

That was the last thing I did before going abroad. It took up the time that I was supposed to be being briefed on India, so I never got briefed on India. Tony Parsons had been due to leave the UN but couldn't because he was in the middle of handling the Falklands negotiations. John Thompson had been due to succeed Tony in New York and couldn't, so he was left in Delhi, and I couldn't leave London, so the whole thing sort of marked time for three or four months. I eventually got there in August.

I then started what was roughly five years in India, which couldn't have been more fun. Difficult in its way. I mean, we had a bad patch in British-Indian relations in the second half of my time which was caused by the fact that they were, first of all, talking about assassinating Mrs Gandhi, then did assassinate her, and then, of course, went on talking about assassinating Rajiv. The people who were doing this were the people who did murder her, which were the Sikh separatists, Sikh terrorists. There were, among the Sikh community in London, a number of people who were strongly on the separatists/terrorists side. There was a man called Dr Chauhan, probably still is for all I know, who was a leader of the pro-independence and therefore implicitly pro-terrorism Sikhs in London, who made speeches on the radio which we, and our lawyers, used to look at very closely. On the BBC and ITV. They were very carefully phrased, and anybody listening to it, or reading it, would reckon that what he was saying was 'Why don't you go and assassinate

Indira Gandhi, or Rajiv Gandhi,' whichever it was at the time. But if you looked at the exact words, the lawyers always said you couldn't make a case for incitement to murder stand up on the basis of these words. It just wouldn't quite fit. It was very cleverly done. But, of course, the Indian Government were furious about this, and said 'We've lost one Prime Minister, we're going to lose another any minute, and why the hell do you allow this person, who isn't a British subject, to stay in Britain? Why don't you put him in jail when he makes these outrageous statements?' And, you know, why, why, why? If you didn't know the way Britain worked, it was quite difficult to explain. I think they thought a lot of our explanations were just prevarication and that we didn't particularly mind destabilising India. There's always been a suspicion in India that, whereas the Labour Party is on your side, the Conservative Party is against you. Memories of Churchill and the Conservative Party that never wanted Indian independence and if it hadn't been for the Labour government they'd never have got it. It's not true, but this is the sort of mythology. So when you get a Conservative government which won't do, what you, the Indian government, want when you think that they're being unreasonable, all the old atavistic fears come up.

One of the characteristics of the relationship is that it's very like a family relationship. I always reckoned that we, the British, always did better in India when things were going well than any other country, and worse when things were going badly. They treated us better than anybody else when they were feeling pleased with us, and worse than anybody else when they were feeling cross with us. Mercifully, they were feeling pleased with us for the bulk of the time, but it did get rather difficult when they were cross because they got very cross."

MMcB: "When you first arrived, though, you were fresh from the Falklands scene. Did you find that the Indian military were very keen to find out the inside story?"

Sir R W-G: "Yes. The Indian political establishment, of course, was strictly neutral, if anything slightly on the Argentine side because it was seen as a colonial situation, and they couldn't be on the colonial side. Equally, of course, the Argentineans had lost, and nobody in India likes being on the losing side, so they weren't shouting about being pro-

Argentine. But they certainly weren't prepared to be pro us, from a political point of view. The military were absolutely fascinated. I got to know the Indian military rather well, because I was constantly being asked to go along and talk to seminars about how it had all worked and how we'd done this and how we'd done that. And they were fascinated in the sort of thing that I actually knew about, which was the command and control. I didn't know a great deal about the weapons that we used, but the command and control system was something which I'd been absolutely in the middle of. It was a great advantage that, and of course whatever they, in terms of Indian political correctness, had to say about colonialism, the fact was that we had won. Our prestige was very high.

By and large, even allowing for the difficult periods, it seemed to me one of the few places in the world where it was clearly more fun being the British Ambassador, or High Commissioner or representative, than any other representative. You had more fun. You got more out of India. You got further into India than anybody. You were more on the same wavelength. One of the nice things was that when the Indians got cross, all the old anti-colonial prejudices would come out, and they would start saying, 'Well, you don't run this bloody country any more. Get off our backs.' But normally, the memories, which were either personal or from their parents of the British period, were very generous. You know, 'How well I remember when . . .' That sort of thing. You went to call on the Chief of Staff, or Secretary of the Cabinet, or whatever, and there would always be a board up in the office with a list of all the names of people who had held that office for years, and there was no break in 1947. They just went on, the names stopped being called Smith and started being called Gupta, but they didn't take the board down and start again. If you went to call on the Governor of a Province, he would have, as we have in an embassy, a row of photographs of his predecessors up in the corridor. They would go back to somewhere in the 19th Century, and as you got three-quarters of the way along the line, the faces turned brown from having been white. There again, he didn't take the photographs down of the guys who had been Governor of that Province in 1919. There was a great sense of continuity.

They had the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Indian Air Force when I was there, and invited a dear old boy who'd served in the Indian Air Force in the 1940s, and he was going around

saying to his Indian hosts, 'It's awfully nice of you to invite me to this.' They said, 'What do you mean? We couldn't not invite you. You're an ex Air Marshal of the Indian Air Force. We couldn't discriminate against you just because you're British.'"

MMcB: "What about the clubs? Are they still functioning?"

Sir R W-G: "Clubs are still there. They don't play the central role that they did. But the Willingdon Club in Bombay is still there, the Turf Club in Calcutta is still called the Royal Calcutta Turf Club and is run on a parody of British lines. There's still the Royal Bombay Yacht Club."

MMcB: "It's amazing the way the traditions persevere in a country like India."

Sir R W-G: "It was an odd country in a way because the only part of the Indian government that was ever at all hostile, was the Foreign Ministry. You think in any normal country, the Foreign Ministry is the one that is most likely to be friendly to you as a foreigner. It's its job to be friendly to you as a foreigner. Indeed, one of the reasons why the Foreign Office is always unpopular in its own capital, is that it's thought to be on the side of all these bloody foreigners. In India, all the economic ministries, the Ministry of Defence, the Home Ministry, madly friendly, would do anything for you. The Foreign Ministry believed themselves in those days, it's all changed now, to be the keepers of the flame of non-alignment; India had to be strictly neutral between the power blocs. And the trouble about that was, culturally and commercially, all the bias was towards the West because all the business was with the West. Nobody wanted to buy Russian goods except when they had to. Nobody wanted to send their children to Russian universities. They all wanted to send their children to American or British universities. They didn't particularly want Russian theatre. They did want British theatre, American theatre. So from the Foreign Ministry's point of view, they were constantly trying to redress this balance, otherwise you wouldn't be in the middle. You'd be tilted towards the West which is what you couldn't be. Political rhetoric was what you used as a way of redressing the balance, so you were always ruder about the West, to the West, than you were about the Soviet Union, which, from their point of view, always seemed to be

perfectly reasonable. Maddening from our point of view, and particularly maddening to British ministers who could never understand why they were doing it.”

MMcB: “It makes a curious contrast with Pakistan, doesn’t it, because the situation is quite different there.”

Sir R W-G: “Yes, I think partly because the Pakistanis are not a self-confident country and feel the need for friends. The Indians, on the whole, are a self-confident country, and feel that they are a major power in their own right. Part of the point of non-alignment was that shouldn’t become a satellite of America or the West, which they reckoned that Pakistan had become and Thailand had become and, to some extent, even Japan had become, and they were damned if they were going to. One can see why, although I think they pressed it to ridiculous extremes.”

MMcB: “How did you find the Russian Ambassador fitted in?”

Sir R W-G: “Well, of course, Russia changed, or began to change while I was there. I left in 1987, and the real change in Russia didn’t come till 1991, but Vorontsov, who was my Russian colleague for the bulk of my time there, was the guy who played a very major part in the transition when it came. He did a lot of the crucial negotiation on Europe from Moscow in the early 90s. He was quite clearly a liberated man. He wasn’t the kind of Soviet official whom I’d been used to dealing with in Moscow ten years before. I can remember, when he was leaving, he came round to see me to pay a farewell call, and I said, as one does, ‘Tell me about your successor.’ You know how correct and formal Soviet officials were on these occasions, and Vorontsov looked at me and he said, ‘He’s very old and very boring.’ I thought, gosh, the Soviet Union is changing. If a Soviet Ambassador is prepared, on a minuted occasion (with a secretary there taking notes) to say something like that to the class enemy, it really is changing. That must have been ’86, I suppose. Gorbachev had been there for a year; it was beginning to shift. He knew much more than we did.

The Russian Ambassador wasn't as influential by then as he had been at various points. They didn't feel they needed him as much as they had done at times in the past. They didn't feel as threatened by Pakistan or China, and that was when they felt they needed the Soviets' alliance and protection. But they did like cultivating him because, as I say, they had this constant problem that India's natural tendency was to drift westwards, and, at any rate in the Foreign Ministry, they felt it was their duty to keep pulling her back to the middle. You got some very tiresome Foreign Ministry officials who carried this process to extremes, who were great thorns in our flesh. It was in that sense a difficult period. The interesting thing was how little it mattered. One worried terribly because one felt that one was responsible for relations between the two governments, and they were going wrong, and it must be because I wasn't doing the job right. The astonishing thing was that I could be pulled in by the Permanent Under-Secretary at their Foreign Ministry and get my head washed for a very disagreeable hour, being told all the things that we had failed to do and had done wrong, in very crisp terms. I remember on one occasion when this happened. Douglas Hurd, at that time Minister of State at the Foreign Office, was staying with us, and I had arranged a lunch party to which I'd asked this guy who was head of the Indian Foreign Office, and his wife. Meetings broke up about half past eleven and he, having been quite astonishingly rude over a long period, I said, 'Incidentally, I don't imagine in these circumstances you'll want to come to the lunch for Douglas Hurd.' 'What do you mean, not come to lunch. Of course I'm coming to lunch. I look forward to it very much.' And so he came along to lunch. Again, it was sort of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. He behaved beautifully, amusing, friendly, 'First time in India, Mr Hurd? How nice to see, what can we show you? Had any relatives who ever worked here?' He couldn't have been nicer and friendlier. And one was sort of blinking and saying is this the same guy who was telling us that he thought the British government were a bunch of subversive fascists. It was unbelievable."

MMcB: "Did you find, when you were dealing with the Indians, that they were so sophisticated in a westernised way, that you didn't really need to get to understand their basic culture?"

Sir R W-G: “No, I felt the opposite. I felt that the fact that they were so westernised was a great trap, and if you made the mistake of assuming that because they talked like you, they thought like you, you were lost. You had all the time to remember that they were the product of a different government and different culture and different way of looking at things. Also, if they were very westernised, they were the westernised fringe of a fundamentally not very western country. It made it much easier, in social terms, to talk to people who had been at Oxford or the Harvard Business School, or whatever it was, but it didn’t alter the fact that they weren’t Bostonians and they weren’t from Lincolnshire.”

MMcB: “But they were the products of a Hindu society.”

Sir R W-G: “Not always Hindu. Muslim, Christian, what have you. Though the Hindus are the majority, I should think there are probably more Parsees in the higher reaches of the Indian Administration than there are Hindu, simply because the Parsees are so extraordinarily able that they gravitate to the top of anything. They are only 100,000 of them in India, whereas there are 800 million Hindus.”

MMcB: “You had to distinguish between Parsees and Sikhs and ordinary Hindus and so on. Did you feel that you needed to understand their culture? If so, how did you set about it?”

Sir R W-G: “Well, you needed to understand a bit about the culture. It’s such a vast place and there were so many bits of it that you couldn’t possibly, in five years, know it all. One had to rely on one’s friends. One of the great virtues of Indians, from a diplomat’s point of view, was they have a very strong didactic streak. If you say ‘I’m very ignorant about this. Will you teach me?’ their eyes gleam. They say, ‘Yes. How long have you got?’ I would consciously get Indians to give me tutorials in the Hindu way of looking at things.

I was very fortunate in a way, I think, to be there at such a particularly interesting time, even though there were bumpy patches politically. I had two and a half years of Indira

Gandhi and two and a half years of Rajiv Gandhi, and the contrast in styles was very remarkable. I also had the good fortune that, when I arrived, it was quite clear that Rajiv was the heir apparent, but he was actually a private citizen. He was a Member of Parliament but he held no other office when I first arrived, and he didn't have a huge amount to do. He and his nice Italian wife were perfectly happy to come round and have lunch and just chat. So I got to know him in those days reasonably well. Once he became Prime Minister, of course, he was surrounded by miles of protocol and so on, and he couldn't spend more time with the British Ambassador than with other ambassadors. I would get in to see him from time to time, but it was very much more formal. But one knew him very well by then. I remember giving a very amusing lunch party for Norman Tebbit and Rajiv Gandhi and their respective wives. They were the only people there. I deliberately kept it at that because they were the only two politicians I knew who had started their life as airline pilots. I also thought that they were both going to end up as Prime Minister of their respective countries. Rajiv did, and Tebbit, as you know, didn't, but he easily might have done as seen at that stage. The interesting thing was that they talked about airlines all through lunch with the interesting difference that Rajiv talked about his time as an airline pilot with real regret. He had obviously enjoyed it much more than his life as a politician. Tebbit was the other way round. Tebbit had absolutely no doubt that politics would be infinitely more fun.

It was a fascinating job. It's a very rich relationship, there's every kind of strand to the relationship between Britain and India. One had a mass of visitors of all kinds, extremely interesting visitors, ministers, royals, captains of industry, vice-chancellors of universities, chiefs of staff. Everybody wanted to come to India, and did come to India. We liked having them to stay. The only trouble was, one had to do an awful lot of travelling as well, and finding enough days in the month to be able to travel and be there for the next visitor. We didn't always manage it. We would occasionally come back and find that the next VIP had been there for 24 hours. One or two of the more pompous VIPs got cross about that and said, 'Why do we have a High Commissioner if he's not here when I turn up.'

It's a lovely house, 2KG, as you probably know, lovely garden. It's a wonderful country to travel around, enormously varied. Sally and I used to reckon that if we weren't out of Delhi for ten days in the month, we weren't doing the job properly, because the country is so huge and Delhi is so unrepresentative. Delhi is much more unrepresentative of India than London or Paris is of Britain or France. If I sat in my office in the British Embassy compound, in the diplomatic enclave of New Delhi, which is itself an enclave, there were so many layers between you and the real Indians that you might as well be on the moon. One of the reasons we used to go trekking in the mountains twice a year was because we reckoned it was the only time of the year when we actually moved at the pace of the country. Travelling by aeroplane and car, which is what we normally did, is actually not characteristic of Indian life, whereas walking is.'

MMcB: "Where did you do your trekking?"

Sir R W-G: "Normally in the Himalayas, in the country north of Simla, in Uttar Pradesh. We went to Bhutan a couple of times. And occasionally we went to the south, to the Nilgiri hills, in Kerala. There is almost nowhere you can't walk. I remember we once did a lovely walk on the flat from the Bhalapore bird sanctuary to Vasikram. I remember talking to an Indian friend of mine who was then Minister of State in the Foreign Ministry, and he said 'What were you doing last weekend?' I told him and he said 'You must be the first Englishman since General Lake to have done that particular walk.'

MMcB: "Did you find that our Deputy High Commissions, our outposts, were helpful?"

Sir R W-G: "Yes. It was pretty important to have them because, I mean, Bengal is such a different place from northern India, and Bombay is different again. We just managed to hang onto the Deputy High Commission in Madras which the Office kept trying to close. The usual thing, a search for economies. We cut it down very much and built a tiny office in the grounds of the Deputy High Commissioner's house, which was rather more efficient than having a larger office in the town. But it was very much a

minimalist presence. We had no Deputy High Commission in Bangalore which I think now would be seen as a mistake given that it has become a great boom town in India.

On the other hand, the British Council was very thick on the ground. The British Council spends more money in India than it does in any other country in the world, and rightly. A very very good operation, and for the bulk of my time there I had a wonderful British Council representative, a man called John Hanson, who went on to be Director-General of the British Council. He is now Warden of Green College, Oxford. They had a lot of staff, most of it Indian, but you could hire people of the highest academic quality in India for what, by the pay standards of the British Council worldwide, was nothing. So they were very good, very high-powered, very well liked. They weren't felt to be threatening in the way that sometimes people felt that the political representation might be. The British Council's libraries are the biggest in the world and the most used. The library in Bombay was worth going to, simply to see how big it is and to see how many Indians you have pouring in and out borrowing a book.

In terms of the professional job, the core of the professional job, the general point one needs to make is that I was, looking back, there just before the two biggest changes in Indian policy; the huge change of abandoning the non-alignment policy because there were no longer two Super Powers to be non-aligned between; and the big change of abandoning the attempt to be only partly involved with the market economy and the international economy and the decision, for good or evil, that you had to join the international economy. Both those decisions were taken in the early 90s, so I therefore left three or four years before they actually occurred. You could see the stirrings in both cases. But equally, there were a lot of people who were either wilfully, or inadvertently, blind to the direction in which, though they didn't know it, the country was going. I can remember, actually, it was after I left, being asked to go to give a lecture at Wilton Park about India to a Wilton Park course which had got some Indians on it. I forget what the subject was, but Indian foreign policy came into it, and I said (this was about 1990) that the world is changing, the Soviet Union is changing, the balance between the Super Powers is changing, and one of the really odd things to me is that India is one of the few places in the world where I go regularly and people still don't seem to realise it.

Anywhere else in the world, you've noticed this change, and in India, they're still behaving as they were when I left three years ago. I very amused by the fact that there were three or four Indians in my audience who, in the question period, said 'What do you mean, world changing? Of course it's not changing. It hasn't changed in any respect.' It seemed to me to prove my point rather neatly.

The fact that the Foreign Ministry, throughout the whole of my time were, as I say, deeply preoccupied with all the time trying to stop the westward drift of Indian policy, the Western bias of Indian policy, meant that one couldn't do a lot of things one would like to have done, or at any rate couldn't do them properly. There ought to have been much more consultation between our Foreign Office experts and theirs on whither China, whither Indonesia, whither East Africa, whither the Soviet Union. Either they wouldn't do this or, if they did, they did it perfunctorily, or they did it patchily. You would get one guy who'd be the sort of under-secretary in the Foreign Ministry who was broad minded and interested, and be prepared to do it, and he would go and his successor would be an apparachnik who was against all that sort of thing so it just died. So that whole dimension, which, though I haven't served there, I know from experience, goes on all the time in places like Paris and Berlin and Washington, and should have gone on in India, didn't in my time, although I think at other times, including now, it does.

The fact that one had such easy, good relations with, and access to, all the economic ministries and the Defence Ministry, meant that there was almost no visitor coming to India for whom one couldn't find the right people to meet, both in terms of calls and in terms of entertainment.

Entertaining was great fun, because Indians loved going to parties and they liked the house(the High Commissioner's residence). It was maddening trying to find out who was coming and who wasn't coming, and they always changed their mind at the last minute, so you were always amending the table plan. Nonetheless, dinner parties were fun. People came and real conversations took place. They didn't talk about the weather, and there was no language problem with the Indian governing classes and everybody was very relaxed. If you had business visitors or visitors or ministers or senior officials from

the ministry of this or that in London, you could always find their opposite numbers and other people who were relevant to their sphere whom they would be interested to meet and who would be interested to meet them. All that was marvellous.

You would think that the political sensitivity would extend to the Defence Ministry, but it didn't. First of all, we sold them quite a lot of military equipment. In my day (but I think they do now) you could never quite have had a joint military exercise, that would have been a little bit too much, losing your non-aligned position, but relations were frightfully good. I mean, if you had the Chief of the Naval Staff coming, the Indian Chief of the Naval Staff would go out of his way to be nice to him, give him a wonderful time, do far more for him than he would for any other visiting Chief of Staff. I remember John Nott coming, when he was Defence Secretary, having a very successful visit, everybody going out of his way to be nice and open and show him round. One of the sad things was that Michael Heseltine, when he was Defence Secretary, was coming and would have loved it because a) he was a very good Defence Secretary and would have been very good with the Indians, and b) because he's one of the most ardent bird-watchers of the world, and he'd never been bird-watching in India. I had a wonderful programme which had bird-watching as well as Ministry of Defence stuff laid on. He resigned about a week before he was due to come out – you know, the row over Westlands.

The visitors were thick on the ground and always fun, always interesting to their opposite numbers and vice-versa. That aspect of the relationship was very good, and great fun to be involved with and a great privilege."

MMcB: "How much, in actual cash terms, was our relationship worth?"

Sir R W-G: "In my day, we gave them about £100 million a year in economic aid, which was much more than we gave anybody else, but, as they never tired of pointing out, very much less in terms of aid per head. If you drew up a table of recipients of British aid, in terms of aid per head of population, they were way at the bottom because they would have got 85% of the budget if they'd had, what they regarded, as a fair whack. Equally, £100 million was quite a lot of money and it was, on the whole,

reasonably well laid out. It wasn't too difficult reaching agreement with them what it should be spent on.

But the two-way trade relationship was a very flourishing one. I forget the figures now, but they were large, and got much larger in my time, not because of me, but because of the nature of the thing. Britain is a place where Indians seem to go to buy things, whether it's military equipment or power stations. And there are a lot of things that India exports that we quite like. A particular thing that became steadily true in my day, and which, if you like, the software thing that's occurred since is a contemporary example. British Aerospace, for example, discovered that they could get parts for their aeroplanes manufactured in Bangalore at about a quarter of the price it cost them to have them manufactured in Derby and to the same standard of excellence, if they insisted. One of the troubles about India was that because of the hang over of the fact that they weren't yet a full market economy, the quality standards were low, not because Indians are not capable of producing world class workmanship, but because they didn't bother to do so if they didn't have to do so in order to get the thing sold. The way the Indian economy was run under Indira Gandhi, everything was controlled. You couldn't extend your factory, increase your productive capacity, without a government permit. These permits were given very carefully, and basically the game was to keep production at about 90% of demand, so that everything sold, and no manufacturer had any incentive to try to improve his quality, or reduce his prices. That would simply reduce his profit margin. He wasn't competing, because everything he produced could be sold, and everything his competitor produced could be sold.

Of course, the other side of the bargain was that in return for rigging the market in this way, which is what the politicians did for businessmen, what the businessmen did for the politicians was to employ their nephews and other clients in unnecessary jobs, packing the payrolls. Industrialists could afford to do that, because they remained able to sell their products, but not internationally. That's why Indian prices haven't stormed the world. India ought to make everything cheaper, given the wage rates. Everybody in the world ought to be driving an Indian motorcar, and they aren't because of the way that Indian factory have traditionally run (though they're changing fast now, but they were

still being run in my day). They were all grotesquely over-staffed and had no motive for not being. That was a deficiency from India's point of view. Making little breakthroughs in this, discovering that you could find a company that was interested in doing business with British Aerospace, and which could hire people who, in quality terms, could make parts for aeroplanes which were indistinguishable from what was made in Derby, was very gratifying. They could do it. They just didn't always bother.

In my day, of course, they had this huge bilateral trade with the Soviet Union, which was not monetary. It was all done on a barter basis. They totted up values, but it had to balance. No money passed over the exchanges. The Indians liked the Soviet market because the Soviet market was so short of consumer goods that any crappy Indian goods, however crappy, would sell because the Russians were so glad to get anything. The Russian inferior goods would sell in India because, again, Indian manufacturers didn't have to bother to reach international quality standards. So Indian consumers were just as willing to use a Russian biro which didn't write properly as use the local one which also didn't write properly. All that has changed out of all recognition in the last ten years in India."

MMcB: "Do you think that they are going to manage the population problem?"

Sir R W-G: "Well, they aren't doing too badly. It's well under 2% now. When I was there, it was the tail end of the period when they believed that there was a Hindu rate of growth, which was 3% a year, and, rain or shine, that's what India did. The only thing they were pleased about was that it never went below 3%. They said 'The rest of you go up and down like yo-yos, but we just go jogging on at 3%.' They've broken out of that now, and they've never done less than 6%, and there's no real reason why they shouldn't move ahead to 8% or 9%."

MMcB: "I'm sorry. We're talking about rates of growth. I was talking about population."

Sir R W-G: “No, the economy, the GDP. Why this is relevant to the population is that, if you’re doing 6% growth, and you’re losing 2% of that on population, you’re actually 4% up, which is wonderful. Think how pleased we are if we can do 2% of real growth. But you see, if you had 3% of real growth, and a 2% population increase, meant you only have 1% left. That’s where the population problem, though dreadful, is not as serious now as it was because it’s taking away from a much bigger annual gain. It doesn’t, of course, alter the social and overcrowding problem. Indian cities are grotesquely overcrowded already, and getting worse. Even 2% a year is awful. And, as everybody points out, adding the population of Australia to the population of India every year, is a frightening thing to be doing.”

MMcB: “Well, thank you. I think that’s an absolutely fascinating account.”

MMcB: “This is Malcolm McBain resuming the interview with Sir Robert Wade-Gery on Saturday, 1 April 2000.

Now, Sir Robert, we have just listened to the end of the last tape from our first interview and you had a point that you wanted to add to that before we go on to some additional points. We replayed the end of an interview which covered Indian development.”

Sir R W-G: “Yes. Thank you very much. The point I wanted to add illustrates a quite interesting general point which was, though in my time, as I said in our earlier interview, one was dealing with a hostile Foreign Ministry, which was hostile because it was always trying to preserve the non-aligned position of India in the face of a natural tendency of India, for cultural and commercial reasons, to lean westwards, and the Foreign Ministry was inclined to lean eastwards (in Cold War terms, Soviet-wards) in order to redress that balance. Now, there were shining exceptions to that, and I talked to you about some of them in our earlier interview, how good, for example, some of the defence sector visits could be, and so on. Another interesting example, from towards the end of my time, was when the British government became extremely worried about the level of drug traffic that was passing from Afghanistan, through India and into Europe, including Britain. The

British government suggested that they might station, in Delhi, a liaison officer, or two, to work with the Indian police on the suppression, or at any rate partial suppression, of this trade. The initial Indian reaction to this was intensely suspicious. The idea of British policemen being allowed back onto Indian soil, ‘Oh well, we got rid of all of them in 1947’ was the first reaction. This was an erosion of Indian sovereignty, and the Indians could cope with the problem perfectly well without help from the British police, and if British young men chose to take hard drugs in Liverpool, that was our fault and therefore nothing to do with the Indians. We got through all that stage, thanks very largely to a very nice and enlightened senior official in the Indian Foreign Ministry called Natwar Singh, who later became a politician. He was a great personal protégé of Indira Gandhi’s. He was also a great personal friend of mine, which was my good fortune. He was an interesting example of the mixed feelings which the Indians had about the British, as I’ll mention in a moment. But he saw the point of that at once, and beat the necessary people in the Indian administration over the head, and within a very short time, we had our police liaison officers in place, and they did a tremendous job. I mean, they and the Indians jointly did a tremendous job, and the Indians were immensely proud of their achievement and the fact that it had been done as a joint effort. It was an interesting side light; when you got through the rhetoric, you found there were real pleasures in practical co-operation, but you did need one sensible man occasionally to help you get through the rhetoric.

That’s what I’ll come back to, because I want to talk about it in the next context. But he was a very remarkable example of a man who was both deeply anglophile and deeply anglophobe. Many people had thought of him, over his career, as an anglophobe, and he could be a very sharp critic both of Britain, in particular, and the West in general. He had been at Cambridge as a young man and had got very involved there, and had written a rather good book about E M Forster, which in its day was regarded as a standard treatise on the works of that great novelist. I remember him once, in a moment of relaxation late in the evening, making one of his characteristic speeches at me about how badly my ancestors had treated his, and indeed how my generation had treated his, and he said, ‘The really terrible thing you did to us, Robert, was you took us from our Indian cultural heritage and you took us to places like Cambridge and you re-educated us in a completely

alien culture.’ Then he paused, and he looked at me and said, ‘And the really unforgivable thing is that we enjoyed it so much.’ He was a very nice, fair-minded man, under the sharp exterior. There’s a good illustration of that in the next subject I wanted to come to, which was the Queen’s visit to India in 1983.

This is worth talking about because first of all it was the first visit by a reigning monarch to India since just after independence. The Queen had been there in the early 1950s, a very different India, and it was an enormously successful visit; everybody enjoyed it, the Indians liked it, the British public liked it, the Queen enjoyed it, everyone she met enjoyed it. A very sharp contrast to what happened with the Royal Visit recently in the 1990s, which had a series of misfortunes which we were lucky to avoid. I can remember how the planning for that visit, the British/Indian planning for that visit, began, because it centred on the man I mentioned just now, Natwar Singh. He was the No.2 man in the Indian Foreign Ministry and had been identified as the man who was going to lead on the Indian side for the Queen’s visit. This was about a year before the visit took place. He was also the lead man in the Indian government for a thing called the Non-aligned Conference, which was the conference of the non-aligned countries which met in different parts of the world at intervals and was due to meet in India in, I think, February or March of the year in which the Queen was coming to India in October/November. I got hold of Natwar during the winter and said, ‘Look, you’re going to be much too busy with the Non-aligned Conference till it’s over to think about the Queen’s visit, so shall I not pester you until then, but maybe I could come and have a talk with you about what we should do about the Queen’s visit and how it should be organised and so on, as soon as you’ve got the Non-aligned Conference out of your hair.’ He said, ‘Yes. That’s a good idea. Come round and have a drink after dinner on 23 March, which is the first day I’ll be free, and we can have a proper talk.’ So, I waited patiently, went round about 9.00pm on the appointed evening, and found that I’d come in on the tail end of a long, and clearly fractious, conversation between Natwar and my American colleague, the American Ambassador, who, I suppose, had come round to talk to Natwar about some of the excesses in which the Non-aligned Conference people had been indulging in rhetorical terms. Natwar was bawling out my nice American colleague in no uncertain terms, and saying, ‘You complacent westerners, you British, you Americans, you have no

idea how deeply you are hated and loathed in the non-aligned world, and if you catch a faint echo of it by listening to our rhetoric and our communications, it is extremely good for you. It should happen more often.’ He went on like that, in very strident terms, for the first half hour that I was in the room (I sat quietly in the corner). Eventually he ran out of steam, and the American got up and said, ‘Well, I think I’d better be going,’ and he went off. By this time it was half past ten, and I said to Natwar, ‘Look, you obviously don’t feel like starting to talk about the Queen’s visit now, but it’s jolly nice to see you and I’m glad you’ve emerged alive from your struggles with the Non-aligned Conference. Let’s have a meeting next week and we can start on the Queen.’ ‘Oh no,’ said Natwar ‘the night is young. Sit down, have a drink, let’s talk about the Queen’s visit. We want to make it a success. We’d like her really to enjoy herself and we’d really like it to be an occasion, you know, to show what India is like and how Indians think and feel and so on. And we really want to make it good, and be hospitable and we’d like to co-operate in every way.’ And it was sort of a complete switch from Mr Hyde to Dr Jekyll in a matter of five minutes. We then talked very happily for an hour and a half and laid the foundations for what, as I say, turned out to be an extremely successful visit. There were moments of sensitivity. One always had to remember the thinness of the Indian skin. There was some question, I remember, of whether the Queen should, in the course of her travels, go to Pune, which she did, indeed, very successfully, and if she was going to go to Pune, might she stay overnight, which in the end she didn’t, and if she was going to stay overnight, she would probably stay in the summer residence of the Governor of Maharashtra, which was conveniently situated in Pune. I was persuaded by the Indian Foreign Ministry to go down to Pune, where I happened to be passing that way anyway, and have a look at this residence. I said, ‘Before I do that, I ought to have a word, at least on the telephone, with the Governor of Maharashtra because it’s his house and I don’t want to go tip-toeing round it without his permission.’ The Indian Foreign Ministry said, ‘I don’t think that would be a good idea, because we haven’t talked to him yet about the whole question of whether the Queen should go. It could get very complicated. So why don’t you just go quietly and just say you want to look at the building, then we’ll talk to the Governor later.’ So, like a fool, I fell for this and did just that, went round the building, and later it emerged that I had been to look at the building because of the possibility of the Queen staying there, and the Governor of Maharashtra

was immensely affronted that I, as it were, a British hygiene inspector should come and look at his plumbing to make sure it was up to royal standards. He gave an interview to the press in which he said this was no way to behave. And indeed, he was absolutely right. I had to go down and apologise to him and explain that I had been persuaded to do this rather against my will, and it was a complete mistake on my part and he couldn't be more justified in his indignation. But it was an interesting example. You had never to forget how thin the skin was. But with that sole exception, not only the preparations for, but the actuality of the royal visit went wonderfully well. The Indians went out of their way to be helpful and nice.

The visit to Pune, for example, was to a very splendid institution, the Joint Services University in Pune, something we have not managed to achieve in this country yet. But all Indian officers, when they become officers, before they finally pass out, go and spend three years at a university, at a military university, at the end of which they get a degree, exactly the same as if they'd been to an ordinary university. It's done on a tri-Service basis in the most lovely physical setting in the rolling hills near Pune. The Queen went there and enormously enjoyed the inside of the day which she spent there.

She also went to Hyderabad, and she did a lot of things in the Delhi area. Altogether, it was an enormous pleasure. It ran end to end, as these things tend to, with the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. She came and spent, I think, ten days in India as the British Head of State, as the guest of the Indian Head of State. She followed that with about another ten days in India as the Head of the Commonwealth where she wasn't in the second incarnation of course specifically my responsibility. The British Prime Minister, who came of course for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, which she naturally would, stayed in our house. The Queen stayed at the President's palace, Rashtrapathi Bhavan, where they made her extremely comfortable. Though I remember, again, an amusing discussion with the Indians when we were talking about how her staff were going to be accommodated. There was an enormous sort of ante room to the guest apartments in the President's palace, and they said, 'You'll presumably want to put the Queen's bodyguard in there.' And I said, 'The Queen doesn't travel with a bodyguard.' They said, 'Good heavens! She's the only Head of State we've

encountered who doesn't have about four enormous thugs who never let her out of their sight.' Again, the Indians were surprised and pleased to discover that the Queen, when she drove around Delhi, as they kindly enabled her to do in an open carriage, wanted to do so as slowly as possible. Most of their visitors wanted to do it as rapidly as possible in case they were assassinated. The Indians thought that was an extremely elegant way to behave. In general it was a very happy period and everyone enjoyed it very much.

The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting was more complicated because it was at the height, as far as I can remember, of the South African sanctions. This was 1983. There was some issue in which Britain was in a minority of one. Mrs Thatcher was, not unnaturally, apprehensive about spending ten days in a milieu where she was going to be pitched into by everybody and have very few allies. But she got through it, and got through it very well, not least because she got on so extremely well, personally, with Mrs Gandhi who was, at that stage, the Indian Prime Minister. They disagreed violently about most political issues, but liked each other personally, liked each other stylistically. They enjoyed each other's company, and I think that made a big difference to the tolerability of the event from Mrs Thatcher's point of view.

Mrs Thatcher also liked India and Indians in principle. She liked our house very much and used to enjoy using it as a staging post when going somewhere else, like China where she was going a lot in those days because of the Hong Kong negotiations, or going to Australia, or going to South-East Asia. She would normally try to arrange to spend a night or two which was fun from our point of view, and I hope from hers.

Those were two events in the time I was in India, the Heads of Government Meeting and the Royal Visit, which I think are worth mentioning because the Royal Visit, in particular, illustrated a much happier and less difficult side of British-India relations than I talked about in our previous interview."

MMcB: "When was Mrs Gandhi assassinated?"

Sir R W-G: “Mrs Gandhi was assassinated in November 1984, that is just about a year after the Royal Visit. It was very moving because she was assassinated less than a month, I think, after Mrs Thatcher was very nearly assassinated in the bombing of the Brighton hotel. The last communication between the two of them was a note from Mrs Gandhi to Mrs Thatcher saying, ‘I’m so pleased to hear you’ve escaped assassination.’ That arrived, more or less with the news that Mrs Gandhi herself had been assassinated. Margaret Thatcher was really very upset indeed because she had great personal affection for her. It was a very tragic event.”

MMcB: “Can you tell us something about the background of that?”

Sir R W-G: “Yes, indeed. I think we talked a little bit about this last time, because the issue of the separatist movement in Punjab, the Sikh separatist movement, was one of the issues in British-Indian relations because a number of Sikh separatists were headquartered in London. It has now completely disappeared, but there was this very violent struggle in the Punjab between militant Sikhs seeking an independent state, and being prepared to murder everybody in sight, including lots of their own co-religionists, in order to get their way, and moderate Sikhs, who didn’t believe in behaving in this way, and the other half of the population of Punjab who were non-Sikh Hindus of course not wanting it at all. It was a very uncomfortable period. During it, the Sikh fundamentalist leader, a man called Bhindrawale, set up his headquarters in the Golden Temple at Amritsar, which was the sort of holy of holies of the Sikh religion, and fortified it and made it a no-go area for the police. There was a lot of indignation about this; should the police storm it? Mrs Gandhi insisted on holding back and not using violence against a holy place, until finally, they shot a police inspector, a rather generally admired and respected police inspector, who was patrolling round the outside, and from inside the building they shot and killed him. That was too much, even for Indira Gandhi’s patience, and so she ordered the army to capture the Golden Temple, which they did although it had very elaborately been fortified, and a great many people were killed on both sides. A great deal of damage was done to it, and it was regarded by the Sikhs as deeply sacrilegious, even by Sikhs who didn’t particularly sympathise with the extremists. It was, I think, one of the things that led on to the assassination because a lot of Sikhs held

her responsible and did feel that she had committed sacrilege. When their leaders said you have a religious duty to go and murder this dreadful woman, they were more inclined to listen.

A very credible story about Indira Gandhi, which I know to be true, because I heard about it even before the assassination took place, was that at this time, her security advisers approached her and said that they thought they ought to weed out all the Sikhs from her personal bodyguard, because, given this tension, no Sikh could be regarded as completely reliable. Mrs Gandhi, I think to her great credit, said ‘No, India is a secular state. We don’t believe in religious discrimination and I’m not going to have it said that I discriminated against anybody in my bodyguards on the grounds of their religion.’ So she insisted that everybody who was in the bodyguard should stay, including the two people who later assassinated her, who were both Sikhs. It was a very fine principle, and she died for it. But it was much to her credit because I think she knew the risks she was running. It was a very dreadful business.”

MMcB: “The Sikhs separatists also blew up an airline, I think in Canada. What was the connection with that?”

Sir R W-G: “Canada is the other country in the world apart from Britain which has a large Sikh diaspora. This was an Air India Boeing which was flying from Toronto, or Montreal, via London to Delhi, and it blew up over the North Atlantic. I remember I was taking a distinguished Indian visitor to England, I happened to be on leave at the time, to catch it in the middle of the night and it never turned up. We couldn’t think why it hadn’t turned up, and nobody would say why it hadn’t turned up. Then the next day we discovered. It was a very unhappy and tense period.”

MMcB: “Was that about the same time?”

Sir R W-G: “The blowing up of the airliner? I can’t now remember. I would have said it was before the assassination, but don’t bank on that. One can mis-remember the sequence of events.”

MMcB: “What was their objective in blowing up the airliner?”

Sir R W-G: “I think they were hoping to weaken the determination of the Indian state to repress the separatist movement, like the IRA in Ireland. All acts of terrorism, anything that damaged the Indian government, Indian property, Indian prestige, was all seen as grist to the mill. Of course, there was a terrible backlash when Mrs Gandhi was assassinated. The mobs in Delhi and other Indian cities went for the Sikh community, on the grounds that the Sikhs had murdered their Prime Minister and they were damn well going to exact revenge. A lot of wholly innocent Sikhs were massacred.”

MMcB: “They were, were they? In large numbers?”

Sir R W-G: “Some hundreds, not hundreds of thousands, but some hundreds. There were also some very good stories about neighbours who concealed Sikhs and refused to give them up to the mob, and some rather bad stories about populist politicians who whipped up the mobs. It was a very tense period in Delhi at that time.

The funeral I remember not enjoying at all. Princess Anne was there on an official visit anyway, and stayed on to be the Queen’s representative, and Mrs Thatcher came out, as Prime Minister, to the funeral. I remember escorting them both to the funeral where we were sat in the front row to watch the fire being lit, and in front of us, between us and the fire, were a couple of security guards in black uniform who were the people from whose ranks the assassins of Indira Gandhi had emerged. These two heavily armed men were parading up and down in front of us, and one of them, I noticed, was flicking the safety catch of his automatic rifle on and off as he did so. I had some terrible moments thinking that if he’d taken one sweep with that rifle he could have got a very substantial number of heads of government and head of state in one sweep, to say nothing of Princess Anne and me. Mercifully, he didn’t, but I was quite glad when we got back safely at the end of that afternoon.

I think those are the main things I wanted to add on the Indian front, unless there's anything else you wanted to ask."

MMcB: "No, thank you. I think that's given it very good coverage. I'm particularly grateful for what you had to say about the potential of the Indian economy. I think that's well worth noting."

Sir R W-G: "Yes. Well, I've been very lucky of course in that since leaving the public service, and becoming a banker I've been going back to India several times every year, and have been privileged to watch the changes that have happened since. It is interesting to compare what has happened, almost all of it to the good, in the intervening years with some of the foundations which one saw being slowly laid, even in those days, not least by Rajiv Gandhi. Rajiv Gandhi's tragedy was that he was just a little bit ahead of his time. He was the same kind of reformer that they've had in the 90s, but public opinion was just that much less prepared for modernisation, globalisation. He was also, it has to be said, a less skilful politician than the people who have managed the transition in the 90s. He had not been a politician by choice or by background. He didn't particularly like politics or like politicians, had gone off and left all that to his mother and his younger brother, who was very good. And when his younger brother killed himself in an air crash, Rajiv, as the only remaining son, was persuaded by his mother to come and take his place and become her heir apparent, but he was very reluctant to do it. The game plan was that she was going to have retired to her house in the Dehra Dun in about 1986/87, and he was going to have taken over. I remember him saying to me once, in that period when she was still alive, he wasn't at all sure how he was going to manage when that happened because he said he couldn't bring himself to run the country the way she runs it, 'but if I run it differently, they'll all go streaking off to the house in the hills and say the young man's gone off his head.' It was not going to be easy. In the most tragic circumstances, I think, in many ways he had an easier time because she was dead, though that was not a solution one would have wished for him. They were very fond of each other, very unlike each other politically; she was a brilliantly successful political manoeuvrer, successful in knowing how to lead a disparate party, hold it together, knowing everybody's strength and weakness, no interest in policy at all, in my day. He was the opposite. He was very

interested in policy, he loved being Prime Minister, hated being party leader. He thought all Indian politicians were pretty squalid, which is a point of view, but they didn't particularly like their own Prime Minister making quite clear that this was his attitude."

MMcB: "I suppose his mother learned her skills from her father."

Sir R W-G: "Yes. She'd also learned, like Charles II, from having been turned out and got back. She was very determined, like Charles II, never to go on her travels again."

MMcB: "Who was responsible for the vasectomy idea?"

Sir R W-G: "That was the younger brother. That wasn't Rajiv at all. Rajiv was interested in public works. He organised a road-building programme in Delhi for the Asian Games that took place there, and Delhi traffic has been that much more manageable ever since then. If you go to Delhi today and see the flyovers, they were all built by Rajiv at the time of the Asian Games."

MMcB: "I must ask you to say something about vasectomy."

Sir R W-G: "Well it was before my time."

MMcB: "Oh was it! Sorry. Well in that case . . ."

Sir R W-G: "It was the background to a lot of quieter work which was being done on population control, but all the time the politicians had to say 'Well, we're not going to have a compulsory sterilisation programme, that's all finished, that's gone.' But it was why everybody was rather tiptoeing round the subject in the '80s, because it had been in the early '80s that Rajiv's younger brother had been Mrs Gandhi's strong right-hand in pushing this policy, a policy for which, from a brutal point of view, there was a lot to be said; it was just a bit too brutal for a democracy and public opinion wouldn't take it."

MMcB: “Well let’s leave India. You wanted to revert to some of the topics you recounted during your time earlier.”

Sir R W-G: “Yes. I realised there were two subjects I ought to have mentioned about my time in the Cabinet Secretariat, which you remember was the period before I went to India. I was actually appointed to the Secretariat by Callaghan just before he lost office as Prime Minister in 1979, and I took up my position there in May/June ’79, just after the General Election, when Mrs Thatcher had just become Prime Minister. I stayed until I went to India in the summer of 1982. That was three years, the first three years of Mrs Thatcher’s Prime Ministership.

There were two things that I was particularly involved in which I think are worth mentioning. One was the beginnings of serious negotiations between the British and Irish governments, the beginnings of the negotiations which, long after my time, but under the skilful guidance of my successor in the Cabinet Office, David Goodall, led on to the Anglo-Irish Treaty, which in turn played such a crucial role in producing what we all still hope is a settlement in Northern Ireland. It was very interesting to be in on the beginning of that because there had been no thought of this kind of contact before. But when Mr Garrett was the Irish Prime Minister and Mrs Thatcher was Prime Minister in England, they began a tentative dialogue, very reluctant on Margaret Thatcher’s part, because her instincts were very anti-Irish for the simple reason that one of her closest political friends and allies, a man I never knew, Airey Neave, was assassinated by the IRA, just about the time she took office in the spring of 1979. He was blown up, more or less in the forecourt of the House of Commons. She very much missed him. He was a great personal friend, a great collaborator, somebody she would have relied on very much while in office, and she never had him, and she blamed the Irish, quite understandably, for it, and she was a little inclined to regard all Irishmen to some extent guilty of Airey’s death. So the first problem I had was trying to persuade Margaret Thatcher to let me go and respond to these tentative overtures we had from the Taoisaech’s office in Dublin. It had to be done by the Cabinet Office and by No.10, rather than by the Foreign Office, because Peter Carrington, who was then the Foreign Secretary, was very anxious that the Foreign Office should not become involved at all, for a very understandable tactical

reason. He said this is not going to be popular with British public opinion, us going and, as it were, truckling to the Dublin government who, in those far off days, was still regarded as a supporter, aider and abetter and armer of the IRA. The Foreign Office, in Peter's view, was far too liable to be labelled by British public opinion as truckling to foreigners and on the wrong side of all arguments, and this was one that he didn't want to touch. He said, 'Well, if this is going to happen, it's going to be done by No.10 and the Cabinet Office, not by the Foreign Office.'

The second reason why it had to be done in a rather peculiar way, was that it had to be kept extremely secret, both for political and security reasons. If it leaked out too early there would have been great political difficulty on both sides. The Irish government were being very brave in being prepared to talk secretly to us about the possibilities of a settlement, which their nationalist supporters would not have liked. And we had the same political inhibitions. There were also security grounds for secrecy. Anybody who became known to the IRA to be indulging in this way, whether me and my colleagues on our side or my Irish opposite numbers, would have become assassination targets. So the thing was done very much under the counter. I remember talking to the main negotiator on the Irish side, who was a very remarkable man called Dermot Nally, who was then Secretary to the Irish Cabinet. I was going to do a lot of shuttling backwards and forwards between London and Dublin to see if we could reach a basis of some kind of agreement, and I talked to Dermot about how I should do this, what was the best way of doing this without getting myself assassinated. He said, 'Well, there are two things you can do. If you want to do it openly, we'll arrange for a large squad of policemen and an armoured car to meet you at Dublin airport each time and drive you around and never let you out of their sight. We'll do everything in our power, but it won't necessarily save you. The alternative is to get a false passport, in a false name, and simply be one of a thousand people getting on the shuttle aeroplane between London and Dublin. When you get to Dublin airport, take a taxi to your hotel, and at a quarter to nine the next morning you walk along a particular street in Dublin, which is past the wall of the Taoiseach's garden, and, if it's exactly quarter to nine, the door will open as you walk past it, you step in, it'll close behind you, and we can negotiate all day. Then we'll let you out in the evening. You can walk back to your hotel, have dinner by yourself in your hotel, take a taxi back to the airport next

morning, and nobody will ever know that a representative of the British government has been here. Don't go near your Embassy. Don't talk to anybody other than us in the Taoiseach's office.' And I did that for a period of several weeks. It worked perfectly. It never leaked out, and we were able to do it, despite intense suspicion on Mrs Thatcher's part.

Huge credit to Garrett Fitzgerald and Dermot Nally who realised what the problems were from our point of view, and were very imaginative about making it easier for Margaret Thatcher to reach some sort of agreement. It was all very tentative, at the stage that I was involved. Nothing was ever, as it were, formally signed, but a degree of mutual understanding was achieved, and the possibility of this as a negotiating route, the possibility that one might be able to set up a united front of the two governments against extremism of all kinds, was started. It was a great privilege to be involved in it."

MMcB: "Ironic really that nobody recognises that civil servants run these risks as part of the daily work."

Sir R W-G: "Well, it's become rather more obvious, I think, in our generation. And diplomats in particular. Poor Christopher Ewart Biggs, of course, was blown up in the driveway of his own house in Ireland. It was that kind of thing I rather had in mind.

That was one negotiation, and it was, for me, a great privilege to be involved in it. I must say I was extremely impressed with Dermot Nally, in particular, and with the quality of his very small staff in the Irish Cabinet Office who were very thoughtful, interesting, nice people to deal with, in extremely difficult circumstances.

The other thing I think I ought to have talked about were the nuclear weapon negotiations, the negotiations which led to the successive acquisitions of Trident I and Trident II as a successor to Polaris as the British nuclear deterrent. I came in on the beginning of that. It all started before my time in the Cabinet Office when Callaghan was still Prime Minister and went to a summit in Guadeloupe. I think that was during the winter of discontent, his last winter in office, and I seem to remember he made himself

rather unpopular by going off and lying in the sun in Guadeloupe when everybody else was suffering from countless strikes and so on.”

MMcB: “Was that the occasion when he returned and was alleged by the press to have said, ‘Crisis, what crisis?’”

Sir R W-G: “I think it may have been. At any rate, during this summit they were all living in little log cabins in some kind of encampment.”

MMcB: “Who were?”

Sir R W-G: “The Heads of Government. I can’t remember which governments they were. I think they were the G8, or G7 as they were in those days. President Carter was there, and Callaghan was there, and, no doubt since the French were hosting it, the French President could have been there. But there were opportunities for bilateral talks. Callaghan took the opportunity to walk across, very early one morning, and knock on Carter’s veranda door and have a private bilateral talk with Carter about the question of whether Britain should acquire another generation of nuclear weapons, and, if so, when and how and what. This was the despair of officials on both sides because this was a rare example of a meeting which only Callaghan, in his pyjamas, and Carter, presumably also in his pyjamas, were present at. So none of us actually knew what had happened. Callaghan wrote down a few notes on a half sheet of paper when he got back to his cabin, and Carter similarly made some rough notes. These two sets of notes, which of course we compared, didn’t really square with each other, so there was a good deal of uncertainty as to what had or hadn’t been agreed. But, at any rate, it was the first indication, by the Callaghan government to the Americans that we were interested in making a move, which was, in Labour Party terms, highly controversial. There were a lot of people in the British Labour government who would have been horrified at the idea.”

MMcB: “Were you there at Guadeloupe?”

Sir R W-G: “No, I wasn’t. This was before my time, and I don’t think my predecessor was there either. But, I got back to London to find that the sort of foundation document for everything were these two rather inarticulate notes by the great men who weren’t used to writing their own records. Studies had begun then, in a very secret way within Whitehall, as to what we wanted and what the alternatives were. The government then changed and Margaret Thatcher came in, and the internal political difficulty within the ruling Party of course disappeared, because the Conservative government had no doubt that they did want another generation of nuclear weapons. It wasn’t a sensitive subject in Party terms. It was, of course, a sensitive subject in national terms. She was aware that there was a good deal of opposition to it in the country, but there was no problem internally.

One of the very first things I got pitch-forked into was helping to organise a very secret Whitehall study between the Cabinet Office, the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence about what we wanted and what our chances were of getting it and what the alternatives were. I started the job in June, and by July we were in touch with the White House about saying please could we arrange to talk about this. It coincided, rather happily, with the American wish to deploy Cruise missiles around Europe, and the problem which that caused some European governments. I remember at least one European government, from memory I think it was the Belgian government, which had said it would take some Cruise missiles then reneged on the undertaking. The Thatcher government was asked, in its very early days, whether they would be prepared to make up the deficiency and take rather more than our share. These were the famous Cruise missiles that later got stationed at Greenham Common and gave rise to all the shenanigans there. Again, Mrs Thatcher was extremely good about that and said yes if that’s what President Carter wants to do, that’s what we’re going to do and never mind if there are internal objections to it.

One of the first international negotiations I was involved in was fielding the Deputy National Security Adviser from the White House, who was a man called David Aaron, who is now, I think, Commerce Secretary in the present government, extremely nice, very able man whom I got to know very well in this context. He was coming to London

with a small team to talk about the deployment of Cruise missiles, so we arranged to entertain him suitably and talk to him in, again, suitably secret circumstances, and to say well, 'That's what you want us to do. We'll try and do it. What we want you to do is help us to get another generation of nuclear weapons because Polaris is wearing out and we need something better.' That led on to a series of negotiations, mainly in Washington which I led. It was an intriguing kind of negotiation because it was also secret. Nothing could ever be put down in writing. I used to have to write my own brief and clear it with the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary and the Defence Secretary, and then go off to Washington and talk. I did keep in touch with Nicko Henderson, who was the Ambassador, but only very distantly; I couldn't use the Embassy as a sort of formal base.

It was a very interesting negotiation. The real problem with the Carter White House was the moral issue; was it really right for Carter, who was a man who believed in peace (what would now be called the moral dimension of foreign policy) to help even a close ally like Britain to acquire another generation of these terrible weapons, and was it compatible with the goal of non-proliferation and so on? Carter agonised over this a great deal. My task was to get his advisers to make up their minds that they ought to help us, and then to help them to persuade him.

I never actually met Carter. I shook his hand but never had a serious talk with him. All the talking was done with David Aaron and his colleagues. Zig Brezinski was Aaron's boss. He was a mercurial figure who wasn't particularly good at detailed negotiations. Aaron was extremely good at detailed negotiations. I found him a nice, easy man to negotiate with. He had considerable charm. We kept saying, 'Well, this is all very well, but is it really what we ought to do in the larger interests of mankind?' Eventually, after interminable delays, which sorely tried everybody's temper in London, they agreed. I remember one of my tasks was to try to keep everybody in London patient, because I knew that Aaron was doing his best, and I knew that further pressure on Aaron or Brezinski or Carter, would be counter-productive. Yet I had pressure from Margaret Thatcher and Robert Armstrong in London, saying there is a real political necessity to get on with these negotiations. The Conservative Party was anxious about the future British nuclear deterrent. The whole subject was highly controversial in inter-Party terms in

Britain, and the more wretched ministers had to say, the more they had to fence and flannel, and the harder their job became. On the other hand, it was quite clear to me that we'd got Aaron, and to the extent that he mattered in this, Brezinski, on our side, and it was merely a problem of them persuading Carter, and they had to be given time to do that. I was fairly clear that they would do it if they were given time, but the more they were pestered, and Carter was pestered, the less likely they would be able to do it. It took several months, I remember, and tempers got quite frayed in the process."

MMcB: "In London?"

Sir R W-G: "We met all over the place. The first meeting, as I say, was in London. Most of the later meetings were in Washington. The crucial one, where we finally got it settled, I remember, was actually in Paris. I can't remember why it was in Paris except that both David and I happened to be there. I think there was some kind of quadrilateral summit; Aaron, and his equivalents in Britain, France and Germany were got together as a kind of inner circle of the G8/G7."

MMcB: "Who was his British counterpart?"

Sir R W-G: "Me. I think this was the political side of what used to be called the Sherpas, the people who would prepare for the summit, and Robert Armstrong was the British sherpa. On the political side of that, I was his deputy and tended to do the rather secret quadrilateral meetings that we had, which had to be kept very secret because the Italians and Canadians and Japanese would have been very offended to know that there was a caucus of four of the seven powers getting together to pre-cook things. David and I both happened to be in Paris for one of these. In the margin of that, we needed to talk about this, and I remember we had to go and borrow the safe-room in the American Embassy in Paris, so that we couldn't be eavesdropped by the French or anybody else, without telling the Ambassador what it was we wanted to talk about. The American Ambassador in Paris was rather irritated, but he said, 'All right, if that's what you want.' I remember we then ran out of time, we had an hour left if David was going to get any food at all before his flight home that night, so we went and sat in a restaurant in the

Champs Elysées, on the very noisy edge of the pavement, and reckoned we could just hear each other, but that nobody who put a microphone under the table would have been able to make anything out of it at all because of the roar of the traffic within about five yards of where we were sitting. We concluded the negotiations. As I remember it now, that was the final stage where we actually got it all straight. It was agreed that we would buy Trident I. The crucial thing was the missile; we were of course providing the warhead. That was why it wasn't proliferation. The Americans were not giving us a warhead, we were making our own warhead, what they were selling us was the delivery mechanism, which was a missile. The Polaris missile was no longer viable, or was going to cease to be viable within a few years, and the Trident I, as it was later called, appeared at that stage to be the answer.

The interesting thing about the Carter White House is that having made enormously heavy weather about the moral issue, whether they should provide us with this missile at all, because it was helping us stay a nuclear power, once they'd got over that and agreed to do so, they were very little interested in the terms, what we were going to pay for it, how many we wanted, whether there was anything we were going to do in return. All that sort of detail they rather brushed aside. They said, 'No, no, let's just get on with it.' So the negotiations concluded quite satisfactorily, and, in the course of the next two years, two things happened. One, Carter lost office and was succeeded by Reagan, and the other is that the scientists, in particular, and the military experts, in general, it became clear that Trident I, like Polaris, wouldn't actually do what we needed. What was then being developed was Trident II, which is what, indeed, we've now got. Trident II was larger and more expensive, but more effective, so we had a complicated and, again, very secret, internal argument, as to whether we should . . . Having got the right to acquire Trident I, but not yet acquired it, whether we should seek to alter that to a right to acquire Trident II. It was finally agreed, largely at Mrs Thatcher's insistence, that we should do so.

I remember it was very striking that the Treasury were never involved in these arguments at all. I never had to consult with the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I did go and talk to Douglas Wass, who was his Permanent Secretary, from time to time, simply to keep him

in the picture, but he was never a member of the inner group of ministers who controlled these negotiations, which was a committee called Misc 7, I remember, which consisted of the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Defence Secretary. It was an amusing example of how things go in Whitehall. One of the problems, to my mind, in Whitehall, is that ministers are grotesquely overburdened with the combination of their departmental life, their parliamentary life, their constituency life. They are almost always over-tired when they get to meetings, and they quite often haven't read their briefs. I think it's a serious flaw in our system. We're the only government that actually requires ministers to spend as much time as they do on all three of these separate activities,

We developed a superstition in the Cabinet secretariat that meetings of Misc 7 were like fat popes and thin popes, which you know have alternated for the last two or three hundred years. The meetings of Misc 7 were alternatively very productive and wholly frivolous. We used to say, 'Oh well, next one's due to be a frivolous meeting. Don't let's put that on the agenda.' But there were some very good meetings.

At any rate, they took the decision that they would try for Trident II, so I was then sent off, again with a tiny team and no written briefs, but with one guy from the Ministry of Defence and one guy from the Foreign Office. In both cases, in both the previous negotiation and this negotiation, I was very fortunate in my opposite numbers. They were a remarkable pair in both cases. That was Michael Quinlan, who later became Head of the Ministry of Defence, and Patrick Moberly, in the first instance, and in the second instance it was Richard Hastie-Smith from the Ministry of Defence, who'd been my deputy in the Cabinet Office, which helped, and David Gillmore who later became Permanent Secretary at the Foreign Office. The three of us went out to Washington on more than one occasion, although there's one occasion I remember particularly, to negotiate with Bud McFarlane, who by then had become my opposite number. A very nice, prompt man, who later committed suicide in rather mysterious circumstances. Again, he had one guy from State and one guy from the political wing. What struck us at the time, and me in particular as I was the one person who'd been common to both negotiations, was how totally different it was from negotiating with the Carter White House. We went out, remembering in my case the previous negotiation, fully prepared

with a whole raft of arguments about the moral issue and how it was perfectly all right to let Britain have this missile. We found the Reagan White House wholly uninterested in the moral argument. They brushed all that aside and said, 'Don't give us all that crap. Don't worry about that. What are you going to pay for these, and what are you going to do in return? How's your policy going to be different, because, you know, if we're doing this for you, we want to be paid in cash and in kind.' It was a good old-fashioned haggle about how much we would pay and what we would do in return. I remember one of the things we were bullied into undertaking in return, was to keep in commission a couple of landing craft which the Americans thought would enhance Nato's capability and which the Ministry of Defence thought we ought to decommission because they were expensive. They were kept in commission and turned out to be extremely useful in the Falkland's War which came along later. So it was an ill wind, as they say. But we were very reluctant to keep these in commission."

MMcB: "Landing craft? That must be something more substantial than springs to my mind."

Sir R W-G: "Well, there were a whole series of things we were asked to do, but that's the one that I remember because it was precisely those landing craft that turned out to be a vital element in our capability to land a force on the Falkland Islands. If we hadn't had that, we'd have been sunk."

MMcB: "Before we leave nuclear weapons and so on, were you aware of a secret undertaking between President Roosevelt and Winston Churchill during the Second World War, arising from the transfer of British nuclear expertise from Britain to North America enabling the Americans to develop nuclear weapons?"

Sir R W-G: "The Manhattan Project, yes."

MMcB: "And the corresponding undertaking by the Americans to share nuclear power with us?"

Sir R W-G: “Yes. I forget the details now, but there was quite an argument about this, the British view being that that was an absolute undertaking that ran in perpetuity. The American view was ‘Now come on, be sensible. We can’t be expected, in return for something that happened in 1940, to go on doing something for the next two or three hundred years. We helped you to get Skybolt, and we helped you to get Polaris, we are willing to get you Trident I, but we can’t go on doing it indefinitely.’ Actually, there was no trouble on that score with Trident II. It was Trident I which was the difficulty. Carter was inclined, at least so Aaron said though I never talked directly to Carter, to argue that the moral commitment of Roosevelt to Churchill was to some extent balanced by the moral obligation on an American president not to help the world to destroy itself prematurely. The greater good ought, arguably, to prevail. At any rate, that was Carter’s initial view. He came off it in the end, but it took a long time to persuade him. I think, by temperament, Carter was an agoniser; he didn’t take decisions easily. He would just sort of say, ‘Well, I’ll think about that,’ and a week later you’d try again and he still said he’d think about it.

The McFarlane negotiations were much more straightforward, though very tough in the sense that we were constantly being hassled by the Americans to give more in return, and that in turn involved carrying people in Whitehall with us, which again had to be done on a very secret basis. Frank Cooper was then the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Defence and was my main real link in London. He was extremely good at arranging to get the Prime Minister, the Defence Secretary and the Foreign Secretary to take quick decisions in response to frantic telegrams from me in Washington, saying ‘We’ve got to decide this by three o’clock this afternoon.’ It was a very interesting negotiation

I remember in particular, on the light comedy side, the three of us, Richard Hastie-Smith, David Gillmore and I were doing our negotiation with three of us and three of them in what they called the Situations Room in the basement of the White House, which was, so far as we could make out, where they intended to fight the next war from. We were simply using this room as a convenient and secret place to talk. We got to a particular point one day in the negotiations when they met and said they wanted to retire and talk among themselves, and would we forgive them? They wouldn’t be more than half and

hour and why didn't we stay where we were? So we were left alone in this room, with this fearsome battery of communications equipment around the wall, and I remember David Gillmore getting up and prowling round and saying, 'I wonder which is the one you press to start the next war.' There was a row of buttons, of red and blue and green. However, we managed to restrain ourselves from pressing buttons on an experimental basis. It was trusting of them to leave us alone.

We concluded that negotiation, as I remember, only very shortly before the Falklands War broke out, which was right at the end of my time in the Secretariat. I think we talked about the Falklands War last time, didn't we?"

MMcB: "Would you like to say anything more about the Falklands?"

Sir R W-G: "Yes. It was a most extraordinary experience. I remember it took place just after Mrs Gandhi had come on a major official visit to Britain, and I was known to be going to work in India and therefore a) because I would have been anyway with the Prime Ministerial visit, and b) because I was going to India, had been very much involved in that and all the fall-out of that. It had been a very hectic period, and I then arranged to go off skiing for a week in Val d'Isère. In the margin of the last Indira Gandhi meeting, I remember meeting Peter Carrington in the corridor of No.10 and saying to Peter I was thinking of going skiing next week, and there was nothing terrible that was going to happen was there that I ought to know about? Peter said, 'No, I don't think so. We've got a bit of bother with a scrap merchant in the South Atlantic, but I don't think it will come to anything.' So I duly went off. The invasion took place, I think, on a Thursday, and everybody started jumping around in reaction to it on the Friday. In Val d'Isère there aren't any newspapers. There's a radio which tells you about the local press; it doesn't tell you about world news, so I was completely unaware of what had happened. On the Saturday, we skied in the morning and, as arranged, drove across France in the afternoon to stay with friends in Burgundy on the Saturday night. We were due to cross the Channel from Le Havre to Portsmouth on Sunday night/Monday morning. When we got to our friends' house in Burgundy, they came out to the courtyard and said, 'We're frightfully glad you're here. We've had No.10

Downing Street on the telephone for you all day.’ I said, ‘Good Heavens. I can’t think why,’ so I went in and rang up my deputy, Roger Facer, in the Cabinet Office. He had succeeded Richard Hastie-Smith as my No.2 in the Cabinet Office. On the defence foreign policy side, the convention was that the senior secretary, at deputy-secretary level, was always from the Foreign Office, and the No.2, at under-secretary level, was always from the Ministry of Defence. I rang up Roger and said, ‘I gather you’ve been trying to get me all day. What’s all this about.’ We then had a conversation which lasted about five or ten minutes during which I hadn’t the faintest idea what he was talking about. I didn’t like to ask him at first. I thought it might be rather secret, and it never occurred to him to mention what he was talking about because he assumed everybody already knew. Eventually, I said, ‘Roger, I think you’d better tell me what you’re talking about.’ There was a stunned silence. Then he said, ‘Well, Robert, you must be the only person in Europe who doesn’t know. The Falklands were invaded the day before yesterday.’ And indeed, I didn’t. At that point, there was no quicker way of getting back from the wilds of Burgundy than to go on to Le Havre on Sunday night, which was very good fortune from my personal point of view because it meant that we sailed in through Portsmouth Heads in the ferry from Le Havre as the grand fleet was sailing out. It was a most amazing sight. Of course it will never happen again, but there they were, steaming out. They got underway that quickly. Very impressive. The invasion was on Thursday and the fleet sailed on Monday morning, leaving half of its kit behind. An awful lot had to be flown out to Ascension Island and linked up. There was quite a lot. The reason why we hadn’t got any photographs of what was happening for so long was because they left the equipment for transmitting photographs over long distance behind.

I was whirled off to Downing Street the moment I set foot on British soil, and didn’t really re-emerge for several months. It was a most extraordinary existence. The war cabinet met every morning at, I think, nine o’clock, and the only difference between weekends and weekdays was that sometimes it was at Chequers rather than Downing Street. Then there was sort of an officials group of Robert Armstrong, Secretary of the Cabinet, Antony Acland, Head of the Foreign Office (Michael Palliser had just retired and was supernumerary of that group because he’d been hired by a combination of Thatcher and Carrington to be an adviser on the public relations side). The formation of

the war cabinet was the first thing I got involved in on the Monday when I got back. The decision was taken, nobody quite said why, but it was quite clear that what Margaret Thatcher wanted was a very small group. It had to have Francis Pym, who had just become Foreign Secretary, it had to have John Nott, who was the Defence Secretary, and she decided she was going to have two others. Although she never said so, one was going to be known to be close to Pym and one was known to be close to Nott, so that there would be some sort of balance. Willie Whitelaw was an obvious choice for one of those (I can't remember whether he was formally Deputy Prime Minister, but he was, if not formally then at any rate, in substance), and Cecil Parkinson, who in those days was very much on the way up. He was a very effective, though quite junior member of the Cabinet Office, who was brought in as the surprise member. His main job was liaison with the parliamentary party, which he did extremely well, unable to tell them anything because it was all so secret, but frightfully good at appearing to be friendly and helpful and keeping them all on side. He was, I think, Chancellor of the Duchy at that particular point. He was in charge of government publicity. He had an office in the Cabinet Office. I must say I was very impressed with him. He was a very remarkable and good performer in those days. It was before his marital troubles, which I'm afraid rather broke his career in two. He would have become Foreign Secretary, and been a very good one.

The famous story of Margaret Thatcher, which she tells. I wasn't aware of it at the time. She got hold of Harold Macmillan when the invasion took place and said what advice had he got to give her, and he said, 'Get yourself a pug.' She was slightly puzzled by that, then she realised what he meant was 'Get yourself the equivalent of Pug Ismay' who had been the crucial guy in making sure the 1939-45 War Cabinet functioned effectively. That led on to the famous story of what should be done by any Prime Minister finding himself in a war situation (I think came up in the Gulf War), and Thatcher is alleged to have said, 'The crucial thing is to get yourself a willie,' meaning a Willie Whitelaw! It was a phrase that lent itself to misinterpretation, not so intended by her.

The ministers of the War Cabinet were those five, and then present at all its meetings were Terry Lewin, who was the Chief of the Defence Staff, and very fortunate it was that it happened to be the Navy's turn to have the top job (it was done in rotation in those

days). It was primarily a naval war, and the fact that the Chief of the Defence Staff was a naval man, made it very much easier to do what Thatcher wanted, which was to keep the other two Chiefs of Staff out of most meetings of the War Cabinet. They came to selected meetings to give their advice, but the only person in uniform who attended the daily meetings was Terry Lewin. He was a brilliant Thatcher handler. He was extremely good at briefing her and giving sensible advice. He was always present, and Michael Palliser was normally present, in his capacity as adviser on PR, and Robert Armstrong and myself from the Secretariat. It was quite an effective decision-taking body, and Thatcher herself was brilliantly good at taking decisions. If one had to ring her up at two o'clock in the morning, and say we need a decision between course A and course B, she would be perfectly willing to be disturbed in the middle of the night, and say, 'Could it wait until tomorrow morning so that I can consult the War Cabinet?' 'No,' 'All right, tell me what the issues are, tell me what the alternatives are.' And having listened to them, she would say, 'Okay, as between A and B, we'll do B,' put the receiver down and go back to sleep. From the point of view of the Secretariat involved in running a war, it was absolutely wonderful; you knew you could get a decision immediately. To me, she was remarkably conscientious in consulting down the line when she could, which is the opposite in many ways of what people might have expected. She always liked the decisions to be taken by the War Cabinet, rather than individually by her, though, I have to say, under her strong lead. She was also very punctilious in making sure that once a week the War Cabinet, well she on behalf of the War Cabinet, reported to the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee, of which the War Cabinet, as it was colloquially called, was technically a sub-committee. We were the South Atlantic Sub-Committee of the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee. That used to meet about once a week, once a fortnight, and she would conscientiously report to it. And, then again, she used to report, fairly regularly, to the full Cabinet about what was happening. Beyond that again, she arranged fairly regular debates in parliament about the war to make sure that parliament was kept on side, to the extreme extent that she, very wisely I think in political terms, decided to have a debate in the House of Commons on a particular evening, and the essential point was that the government thought that it was right to make a landing on the Falkland Islands, and what we wanted was a vote of the House backing that. And we got it. We got back just after ten, having got the vote, and said to ourselves, 'Well, it's just as

well we did because we'd had to give the orders for the landing at 4 o'clock that afternoon.' The ships were already moving, because they had to move in during darkness, and it would have been impossible to countermand that, so it's just as well we got the vote when we did. She was also, I thought, very very good at not doing what Churchill is always supposed to have done during The War, of constantly sending little notes to his Chiefs of Staff saying why don't you do it the other way, etc. And, given that that was Margaret Thatcher's style (she always knew better than her own advisers what ought to be done) I thought she would be like that with the War Cabinet. Not a bit of it; particularly with Lewin. She was very much given to saying, 'No come on, you're the soldiers and sailors here, you know how to do this. What is the situation? What should be done? You tell me.' I think it was partly that she was a woman and had never been in the Armed Services and had no experience of military affairs and wasn't tempted to be an amateur as Churchill, who had been a soldier, obviously was. But I think it was partly again because she reckoned it was the Chiefs of Staffs' job to give military advice. It wasn't the Prime Minister's job to have military ideas."

MMcB: "It's very difficult for a politician to tell a soldier what to do. It might result in deaths."

Sir R W-G: "Relations between her and Lewin were extremely close, very much to Lewin's credit, and her credit, and it was one of the reasons why everything went so smoothly. I remember what later became the very famous decision to sink the Belgrano. I remember that decision had to be taken before lunch at Chequers one day because the War Cabinet had been meeting at Chequers. There was a lunch party, which had nothing to do with us, it just happened to be a Chequers' lunch party, and the Prime Minister said, 'Why don't you all stay and have lunch.' We were having drinks before lunch and I was tapped on the shoulder and taken aside. There was a signal in from the captain of the submarine which said in effect 'I've got the Belgrano in my sights in my periscope. Do I sink her or don't I, because I've got to take a decision one way or the other pretty quick?' So I came back and said that this had happened, and the Prime Minister said, 'Well, I think we'd better take the War Cabinet into the little white room and have a few minutes discussion.' So she apologised to the other guests and took us into the little white

drawing room, and then she went round the whole room, not only ministers but all the officials, and said, 'What do you think we should do?' And everybody said, 'Sink it.' She hadn't at this point expressed a view, rather uncharacteristically, and she said, 'Well, I agree with that too, so you'd better go and tell them to sink it.' And I remember going out of the room while they went back to their Sunday drinks, and ringing up the Ministry of Defence and saying, 'Sink it.' And about an hour later, they did.

The other person who was frightfully good throughout the whole time, who died fairly soon afterwards, was John Fieldhouse, who was the Commander-in-Chief. He had his headquarters at Northwood. Admiral Sir John Fieldhouse. He later became Chief of the Defence Staff. He died rather young. He was the C-in-C, Fleet and he was effectively the Commander-in-Chief of the military operations. It was his job to brief the War Cabinet on the next step – what sort of task force you sent, what it should do in what time scale, and whether it should land and, if so, where. He was brilliantly good at that. His only problem was that Thatcher, though she never interfered in the running of the war in the sense of suggesting any course of action, she did love being briefed. Fieldhouse was constantly being dragged over to Downing Street to give another briefing. The other problem, from his point of view, was that Northwood lay in almost a direct line if you're motoring between Downing Street and Chequers. So, every time the Prime Minister went from Chequers to Downing Street, she said, 'Do let's go via Northwood and listen to the briefing that's going on.' She had the illusion that she could sort of tiptoe into the back at one of Northwood's briefings and just listen to it and then tiptoe out again. What she didn't realise was that the entire work of the headquarters came to a grinding halt two hours before she arrived in order to get rid of her. I used to have Fieldhouse on the telephone saying, 'She's a wonderful woman but can you please keep her away from my headquarters for a bit because I have got a war to fight.' But she was remarkably good, and he was remarkably good.

The really extraordinary thing was how virtually, it seemed to me, the whole of the rest of the machine of government just came to a standstill while she concentrated full-time on the war. I remember we used to say to each other, 'They can't have gone on like this for six years between 1939-45. It wouldn't have worked.' But we never had time to look up

the precedent, and everybody knew it was going to be brief. If we hadn't won by mid-summer, which was mid-winter in the Southern Atlantic, we would have lost, so everybody knew it was going to be over by July, one way or the other.

It was very brave of her. Again, I remember one of Fieldhouse's briefings, and everything turned on the air cover we had when we got down there, and that in turn depended on having the two aircraft carriers. Fieldhouse explained that one of the troubles with these aircraft carriers was that they had very very large hangar doors, which were worked by machinery, and these doors were, historically, liable to jam. If they jammed, they couldn't be repaired at sea, so the ship in question would have to go into a friendly port to effect that repair. The Prime Minister said, 'Well, where is the nearest friendly port in these circumstances in the South Atlantic?' to which the answer was Dakar in West Africa. The Prime Minister said, 'Well, if that happens, what happens?' and Fieldhouse said, 'We'll have to abort the whole operation.' We couldn't do it with one carrier and there wouldn't be time to wait while the ship went back to Dakar and was repaired. And the Prime Minister said, 'Well, what are the chances of the doors jamming?' He said, 'I can't give it to you in numerical terms, but with luck it won't.' And it didn't. Afterwards, I think the Navy did tell us that the operating manual said that you shouldn't use aircraft carriers at that intensity for more than a fortnight at a time because something was bound to go wrong. We did it for about five weeks, and nothing did go wrong, but we were on borrowed time for the last three weeks of the war.

Of course, there were bits of bad luck the other way, like the sinking of the freighter that was hit by an Exocet missile. It was an enormous cargo ship that was loaded with virtually everything. It went down fairly soon after the fleet arrived off the Falklands. It was a complicated business. At the time that the fleet was sailing and the question of whether the fleet was liable to be attacked was being considered, diplomatic negotiations were going on being conducted by Al Haig, who was shuttling between Washington and London, trying to set up a peace deal. When he eventually failed, there was later a Peruvian initiative and various others, each of which had to be carefully considered. I remember, right at the end of that process, a very very long Sunday at Chequers, when Tony Parsons, who was our man at the UN and a great favourite of Margaret Thatcher's,

had been summoned back for the occasion. I think Nico Henderson was there too, but Tony was the hero of the day, who managed, very much against her wish, to persuade Margaret Thatcher to go along with the latest initiative, to be prepared to discuss it. He said, 'I don't think it'll work, but I don't think you can just say 'No'. I think you've got to spend two days going into it.' She was very reluctant, and we were holding up the landing because of her, and the lady was jumping up and down. Tony persuaded her that it was vital for our international posture to get the Security Council to vote on our side at this junction. And, very reluctantly, she agreed. He was absolutely right. It was very skilfully done, and took him a long, hard day of argument."

MMcB: "That's actually a very good example of the government system working well."

Sir R W-G: "Absolutely. He had very close personal relations with Perez de Cuellar, who was the Secretary General at the time. Without that link, and without Tony's close link with Margaret Thatcher, I think the diplomatic side would have gone badly wrong, because Thatcher, rather sadly, had no confidence at all in Francis Pym. She liked him, but she didn't think he was a good Foreign Secretary. His tragedy was that he was very good as a manager of the House, and after an unsuccessful period as Defence Secretary, when she'd given him hell, he was then made Leader of the House. He was brilliantly good at that. He was pulled off that to be Foreign Secretary when Peter Carrington resigned. He ought, I think, to have refused. But it was a great mistake on both her part and his because, because of her unhappy experience of him as Defence Secretary, she had no confidence in him, and it made the whole process of getting her to focus her mind on the diplomatic side of the negotiations quite difficult.

There were also moments of high comedy. One I particularly remember, was on one of Haig's visits to London. Again it was a Sunday, as these things so often are. We were all locked up in 10 Downing Street, negotiating all day, and Haig said could he have a room in which he could retire and talk to his team privately before concluding the session. So he was taken upstairs and shown into the room which, on a weekday, is used by the adviser to the Prime Minister on regis professors, and above all bishops and church

leaders. Round the walls of this room was a chart showing the organisation of the See of Canterbury and the See of York, which bishop descended from which archbishop, and which bishop was going to retire and which year. After Haig had been upstairs for a bit, the Prime Minister said to me, 'Robert, go upstairs and see if he's ready to come down because I think we've done enough talking amongst ourselves and I should think he has by now. We need to get on.' So I went up, and I found Haig and his advisers in this room, and they were gazing intently at this plan of the bishops and church leaders, and he said, 'Tell me about this Church of England. How does it work?' I gave him a sort of brief five minute burst on how the Church of England worked. He said, 'How fascinating, and how do they make the appointments?' and a series of rather intelligent, penetrating questions. It took about ten minutes altogether, and I could almost hear the Prime Minister tapping her foot. Eventually, I got Haig down, and afterwards she said to me over drinks before lunch, 'Why the hell were you so long getting Haig down?' I said, 'You won't believe me if I tell you why.' But it's interesting what people get interested in at these tense moments in negotiations. Haig was rather a successful politician. I thought he was quite impressive in those negotiations. They weren't successful, but he presented his case well, he talked to Thatcher in what she regarded as a sensible way, and all this was quite difficult to do because Thatcher was pretty impatient with the diplomatic side. Intellectually, she could understand that in order to have a successful landing and reconquer you had to have your diplomatic flank covered. It had to be clear that you were fighting because it hadn't been possible to settle it by jaw-jaw. But her instincts were all against that, and she was more interested to get on with the action and reconquer."

MMcB: "Haig was actually aiming to settle without a fight."

Sir R W-G: "Yes. Because the Americans were desperate not to take sides which, for the first month or so, they didn't, because Argentina was their great protégé, great ally."

MMcB: "And the United States is full of Latinos."

Sir R W-G: “Well, it was more than that. Argentina was their sort of prize exhibit in Latin America. They were very close to the regime. So they really did sit on the fence. A lot of the military and intelligence help which the Americans gave us in the second half of the campaign, they did deliberately refuse to give us in the first half. They said, ‘We’re neutral, we’re not taking sides between you and Argentina.’ After Haig’s, whatever it was, third effort, to make a settlement failed, Haig warned the Argentineans. He said, ‘Look, if this doesn’t work, we’re going to come down on the British side, and you’d better know that.’ That failed to budge the Argentineans. The Americans were then as good as their word. They then came right over, and without making any public announcements, from then on, all the logistical help, all the intelligence help, we needed came flooding in. And it was vital. It is extraordinary how well it turned out.

Well, thank you very much. I don’t think there’s anything more I need to say, but if you have any questions?”

MMcB: “No, I think this is a good point to break off. Thank you.”