

BDOHP Biographical Details and Interview Index

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SIR PATRICK (STANISLAUS) FAIRWEATHER KCMG

interviewed by Malcolm McBain on Thursday, 27 January 2011 in Tisbury

Early life and education, decision to join the Diplomatic Service

MM: Would you say a little about your early life and your education, and how you eventually came to join the Diplomatic Service?

PF: I went to school at first in Yorkshire and then at a state boarding school in Surrey called Ottershaw. The headmaster of the school had a friend who was a don at Trinity College, Cambridge, and he arranged for me to have an interview there. I got a place and then I did what we all did in those days – two years' National Service. So I went up to Cambridge at the age of twenty-one, did my three years there, and then joined an advertising agency. That was a tremendously fashionable thing to do in those days. It was a mistake. In due course, I gravitated towards the Diplomatic Service joining under the overage scheme.

National Service in the Royal Marines and Parachute Regiment, 1955-57

MM: Please tell me about your National Service?

PF: In those days, when you were at the medical, they would ask you whether you wanted to join the Royal Navy or the Air Force or the Army. The Army was the kind of default mode! The Navy took one in five applicants and the RAF one in two, and the Army took everybody else. I said I wanted to be in the Navy so they offered me a choice: seaman, stoker or marine and I joined the Royal Marines. In due course I went to the War Office Selection Board down the road here at Nether Wallop near Winchester, and I passed that and went to Eaton Hall, the Army Infantry Officer Cadets School - Marines are of course infantry. Because of this one-in-five business I was telling you about, there was rather a large number of Royal Marine cadets. Of the eight of us, only three went back to the Royal Marines. I was then looking for an Army infantry regiment to join, and a friend, an 'oppo', as the marines say, and I

decided we didn't want to join a normal County regiment so we put in for the Parachute Regiment.

It gets complicated, this. The Parachute Regiment had no cadre of officers of its own. It took people from ordinary infantry regiments, much as SAS does to-day. So I was commissioned in something called The Loyal North Lancashire Regiment, which I knew nothing about. I went to Aldershot and, in due course, passed through the P Company and did my parachute training, and was wearing a red beret and so on. I shudder to this day at the thought of what would have happened if I hadn't passed P Company and I'd gone up to Preston as a failed young officer joining a regiment he'd never heard of and the Colonel had never heard of him! It would have been awful, but anyway that didn't happen, thank God.

I spent the rest of my time in the Parachute Regiment depot at Aldershot. When the Suez Campaign began in 1956, I stayed behind to look after a large group of soldiers who were too young to be allowed to go on active service with one of the Battalions in the Suez Campaign. I had about fifty young soldiers here at Bulford doing the parachute jumping trials for an aircraft that was entering the service of the Royal Air Force, called the Beverley. Every day we would go over to Boscombe Down and parachute on to the Plain; it was quite fun. We did a lot of jumping, but no fighting.

MM: So that was quite an exciting interlude. You eventually joined the Diplomatic Service in 1965, and what was your first post in that?

Appointment as Second Secretary, British Embassy, Rome, 1966-69

PF: In Rome, as a Second Secretary because I was a little bit older than the usual starting point. For me it was special because I had spent some months in Italy in 1948 when my parents got divorced. With two postings in Rome, I always thought that it was a fortunate thing to have this perspective on Italian life and where Italy had come from. The country was so poor in 1948. We were living in the richest part of Italy in the Lombard Plain, and my mother had I

remember about the equivalent of £15 a month, but we were certainly among the richest people in the village. So in my career it was very useful. When, later, the Italians got miserable about Berlusconi, I would say that they had come quite a long way.

MM: What was your job in the Embassy?

PF: I was in the Political Section of the Embassy, and I got dog's body jobs and one rather more than dog's body job. But the dog's body jobs were quite extraordinary. This is one of the things about the Diplomatic Service that has changed, I think for the better. We spent hours every month at meetings of a body called the Danube Commission which sat for years and years discussing how a relatively modest quantity of gold, which had been deposited in the Bank of England by the Danube Commission before World War II, would be distributed between the various countries which were members of the Commission in 1939. There was also, I remember, an organisation called Unidroit which was about unification of international law or some such thing. Again it took up a lot of chancery time. Those were ridiculous jobs and they wouldn't be done to-day; we'd simply say that this was not worth the effort.

A more interesting job came my way when we received a telegram saying that Princess Margaret would be arriving in Rome as usual in the second half of August, and could we please facilitate her visit and help arrange her programme. Douglas Hurd, who was acting head of chancery, called me in and said, "You are going to look after Princess Margaret!" He added, "You're the only person in the Embassy who has not had that experience!"

MM: That was a warning!

PF: So I became Princess Margaret's Attaché and did it every year until my departure in 1969. And when I came back to Rome in 1992, she was still coming to Rome every year. Looking after her was quite taxing

MM: I'm sure!

PF: It gave rise to lots of anecdotes.

MM: What was she coming there for?

PF: Holidays. She loved Italy, and she would come every year and spend a fortnight or three weeks based in Rome where her friend Judy Montague, who was one of what used to be called Princess Margaret's set, lived with her art historian husband, Milton Gendel, in a beautiful house on the Tiber Island. I used to be involved in arranging her programme and trying to find solutions to the problems which arose such as hiring sports cars. Princess Margaret liked to be entertained, to be amused – dinner parties, nice places to visit, people to go and stay with. It was quite fun for a young man.

MM: Did you go with her on these trips?

PF: Heavens, no! She went with Judy and Milton Gendel, and with Tony Armstrong-Jones. She would not have wanted someone from outside her circle.

MM: That was Italy. What about the political situation in Italy in those years, 1966-69? Was anything going on of any great interest then?

PF: A great deal, yes. Of course the Italian political spectrum was pretty solidified. The Christian Democrats were the biggest party in Parliament and the heart of every government, usually in coalition with the Socialists, the Social Democrats, the Liberals and the Republicans. And there was this great frozen block on the left of Italian politics, the Communist Party and sometimes even harder left parties. There was an ever-so slow process whereby the Christian Democrats tried to lure the Communists into becoming part of the normal political set-up. This did happen eventually and it was under way in the late 1960s when the phenomenon of Euro-Communism manifested itself. This was a reaction to what had happened in Hungary in 1956 and then in the Prague Spring in 1968. The glacial movement of the

Communists towards being a normal party began, really, in that time. That was interesting.

From our British point of view there was the question of whether we could exploit a residual Italian affection for the United Kingdom because of our role in the unification of Italy – which by the way we are remembering this year because it's the 150th anniversary. I was at an event at the Italian embassy last week.

The word I used-“exploit”- sounds harsh. It would be better to say that we sought to gain Italian support so that we could counter the French block on our joining the EU – the Common Market as it was in those days ... So that was a vital British interest. I remember a visit by Harold Wilson and George Brown, for example, when we tried to do precisely that. So it was not without its importance.

And then there were other interesting questions like the Mafia association of various senior Italian politicians - the same old story. Italy and the Italians are so extraordinarily fascinating and sympathetic that it's a wonderful thing to be paid to study them.

MM: What about industrially? The thing that always used to puzzle me about Italy was how they managed to succeed and finance their various activities.

PF: It's a very good question, and one that we used to ask ourselves a lot. There's one wrong answer and one right answer. The wrong answer was the one the Embassy espoused which was that, if only Whitehall had the wit to do what the Italians had done and set up an organisation like IRI, a state holding company which held stakes in all the quasi-nationalised industries in Italy, and ran them, as it were, with a top-down industrial policy, we might emulate their industrial success. I think that was nonsense. IRI still existed when I came back to Rome in 1992, with Prodi, later Prime Minister, as boss. It was rapidly wound up when privatisation became government policy. IRI was a system whereby funds from, let's say, the electricity generating company were

channelled to the political party of the man who was appointed by the State to run electricity generation. And so on. You would have a Christian Democrat boss in a number of para-statal companies, a Socialist boss in others and so on. There was an unhealthy relationship between political power and economic power.

I think the real reason why Italy did so well was that Italian business was typically in the hands of engineers and they are very good at engineering. British companies were more often run by accountants. I remember Sir John Russell, who was at that time retired and a director of Rolls Royce and, I believe, Westland, telling me that, so far as manufacturing helicopters in this joint venture between Westland and Agusta was concerned, if you wanted a man to keep a tight grip on costs to make sure that the company made money, you put in a British CEO. But if you wanted a brilliant engineering solution to a particularly difficult engineering problem, you got the Italians to do it. They are first class.

The strength of Italy for all these years since World War II has been the small and medium enterprises, the family-owned companies. For all sorts of reasons to do with the Italian psychology, and also taxation, they are reluctant to go public. That's not entirely positive because medium sized Italian companies, which ought to be making a step into world-scale companies, don't do it because the family want to keep control. Meanwhile however, they are very good at niche businesses. If you go into your dental surgery, you will probably find that the machine which is drilling your teeth has been made in Bologna or somewhere similar. That, I think, is one of the great secrets of Italian success.

The question, of course, now in the second decade of the 21st century is whether that can continue. There are a great number of pessimists around in Italy because the research budget isn't high enough either in the state or in the private sector and, like everybody else, they are competing with increasing Chinese inventiveness and skills. So what was true for the last fifty years won't necessarily be true for the next fifty. But the Italians are people of

immense creativity; very nimble on their feet. They're not bureaucratic at all in the business area. So that's really the great question for the next fifty years.

MM: Thank you for that. That is very illuminating. It's always puzzled me how Italy managed to drag itself up by its bootstraps and to become a success when their starting point at the end of the Second World War was so dire.

MM: Anyway, after Italy, you then went to Paris.

First Secretary (Economic) Paris, 1969-70

PF: Yes. I did not spend long at home after Italy. Then I went to Paris. This was a very important time to be in Paris because, by this time, the effort to get into Europe was beginning to make progress. Général de Gaulle had just retired and Pompidou was President. Ted Heath made a big effort to get onside of Pompidou. And we had a remarkable figure as Ambassador in Paris, who of course was Christopher Soames. He was appointed, interestingly, by George Brown and not by the Conservatives, although he was a Conservative. I guess he was the last Ambassador of that kind.

I've never quite understood where Christopher's money came from, but he spent an awful lot of it in Paris. I remember when the Queen came on a State Visit, after the negotiations for our accession were wrapped up. I have never ever seen anything like the extravagant display that was put on. He had a grand Ball in the Residence, had the space between the two wings which went backwards into the garden tented over – you know how it is – and all his family came to Paris. Up in the pinnacle of the tent there was a huge hand-painted coat of arms, probably about half the size of this room! It was absolutely extraordinary. There was a cut-off point for the invitations to this event and I made the grade, I'm not quite sure how but, because we were included, I was given a list of all the people coming. I noted that there were eighteen Rothschilds! It was definitely an event not to miss.

MM: Was it not covered by his *frais*?

PF: I'm not sure. People used to sneer about his poor successor, Eddie Tomkins, because 'poor', I think, was the right word. Somebody once told me very snobbishly, that the Residence wasn't what it had been and half the furniture was covered in dustsheets! So I assume that Eddie was living on his *frais* and Christopher was not.

MM: Did you speak French?

PF: Yes.

MM: Where had you learned that?

PF: I learned it at school. But then I married a woman who was half Greek and half Russian whose Greek father and I had only French in common so I spoke French with my wife's family. So I'd had a good deal of practice before I went to Paris. I married in 1962 and I arrived in Paris in 1970.

MM: You're talking about Maria. Was she a considerable asset to you?

PF: Enormous, yes. First she was a brilliant linguist and, later in life, when we were in Brussels, she passed the exam to be a conference interpreter, doing simultaneous translations for the EU. She spoke Russian as her mother tongue, English because she was educated here, French because her parents again spoke French together. One of her parents didn't have Greek and the other didn't have Russian. So that was Russian, Greek, French and English. She spoke Farsi because she was brought up in Iran, Italian after we'd been in Rome. She picked up languages with great facility! So she interpreted in five languages, and she was very vivacious, I think attractive, witty. Yes, she was a big help.

MM: It was a good time of life, wasn't it. What about the business of the relationship with the French and the President?

PF: A great deal of effort in the Embassy went into keeping the Foreign Office and Whitehall informed about French attitudes to all the various issues which were part of the negotiations. There was a big and very clever team in the Embassy; really first class; led by Derek Thomas. We were pretty well targeted. We knew the French negotiating team and we knew exactly who our targets were. You went and talked to the individuals making up this committee of young French civil servants, who had all been to ENA and who were good at their jobs and, if you got alongside them, you would begin to get a good feel for what the French position would be.

But above that layer there was the political level: the level of Soames and Pompidou, Soames and Schumann, the Foreign Minister; and still more important, Heath and Pompidou. It certainly wasn't the sort of exercise which relied only on the basis of the Embassy operating at the working level. It required both official and political inputs, and got both.

MM: How did France compare economically with Italy? Is the system there different? It's so obviously different from that which exists in this country.

PF: I have to admit I was much less involved in that. I was much more focussed on the financial and economic aspects of the enlargement negotiations than I was on the economy proper as it were. I think that the French economy is slightly more difficult to analyse than the Italian. They have nurtured high-class industries – the best example would be the nuclear industry – and they simply avoided the mistakes we've made. We were first, but every nuclear power station we built was on the basis of a different design of reactor; very strange. We weren't very clever. The French majored on a Westinghouse design, basically an American design, and then made them *en masse* so that the unit costs of their power stations are much less. I think that's quite a good illustration of how the French worked. They did have an industrial policy but it was an educated and clever one compared with ours.

The other big difference, I think, between Britain, say, and France is that they were prepared to invest large amounts of money in infrastructure like the high-

speed rail connections; large amounts of money, regardless of the fact that the national railway company, SNCF, would make a loss every year. These losses are still paid for by higher taxes in France, which the French seem to think are an acceptable price for good services.

I think there we come close to the original differences. Etatism in France going back to Colbert, and our traditional economic liberalism.

MM: What about on the financial side? Are there fundamental differences between them and us in financial policy terms?

PF: At that time we were trying to make the French believe that sterling – remember there was that famous sterling area – was going to be a huge advantage to Europe. Here you come directly to the question of statism or private enterprise. Let's take the City as an example. The French could never agree that the loose supervision and control exercised by HMG or the Treasury over, say, Lloyds was the right approach. We, of course, firmly believe that it was. We came a frightful cropper because there took place what the media called the "looting of Lloyds" and the French were able to say, "There you are! We told you ...". I'm afraid that the French stance on stricter and tighter control has in many cases been demonstrated to be right. I think we could look again at the latest banking crisis; they haven't suffered much from that.

I'm always astonished when I listen to Euro-sceptics in Britain talk as though we have lessons to teach the French about finance and the economy. They take it as axiomatic that the French economy is badly run. So, by the way, is the German economy!

This is something that applies to all my later postings. I found the tone of superiority in which Foreign Office telegrams of instruction were steeped, vis à vis economic policy towards our European partners, was hard to stomach. We could certainly say that, yes, after all those decades of low growth, we had begun to pick up and to do rather better, but we paid a price in social terms. Take the number of single-parent families for example; much higher in Britain

than France. I think we should have been more modest, and we weren't. For years from the mid-eighties through to the end of my career in 1996, and I know beyond (after I retired I had dealings with former colleagues) we adopted an unjustified tone of superiority.

MM: After Paris you came back to the FCO.

Posting to European Integration Department (EID(E)), 1970-73

PF: Yes, and I think it was one of the most important career moves that I had. I became a Desk Officer in what was called the European Integration Department (External). This was important because this was where – to use a dreadful expression – ‘fliers’ used to go. I was left to deal almost on my own with what became known as the Lomé Convention. The agreement between the six original Common Market countries and seventeen (I may have the number slightly wrong) countries mainly in Africa which had a preferential trade agreement with the Common Market - the Yaoundé Convention - was up for renewal. Britain was going to become part of it because we were now a member of the European Common Market, and the former British Colonies in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific were going to become part of it. I worked directly to the Under Secretary, a remarkable man called John Robinson. He was a slightly controversial figure in the Foreign Office who had been a member of the team negotiating our entry into the Common Market. He was very clever, very good and – how shall I say, very tough. John Robinson did the most extraordinary things. The Yaoundé Convention had included reciprocal trade concessions so that the Yaoundé countries had had to admit exports from the European Common Market at a preferential tariff rate. John Robinson said that this was quite unacceptable in British terms. The Labour Party which was bound to win the elections, would simply throw out the successor to the Yaoundé Agreement if the EEC insisted that the former British Colonies in Africa should provide reciprocal trade concessions. By very hard negotiation he got this through. It was important because this success off-set the fact that the EEC did little for India, which was a Labour

party obsession or the White Commonwealth (though we managed to negotiate something for New Zealand butter and lamb).

This was an important lesson in negotiating toughly over a long period, and successfully. Again sometimes our negotiating successes are overlooked in terms of subsequent problems. This was a great negotiation success.

MM: What were its implications for the British territories?

PF: The implications were that they continued to get access to the British market for their tropical produce and their temperate-zone produce normally early season, as it were. They continued to get that, which was the most essential thing, and they didn't have to give the EU anything in return. Thirdly they became eligible for grants from the European Development Fund. So they continued to get British bi-lateral aid and also EU aid. One of the big issues in the negotiation of what became the Lomé Convention was the size of the aid packet. It was agreed that, if X was the amount for the seventeen countries, 3X would be the amount for 47, or something like that; no problem about that. The question was should there be a real increase as well as a pro rata increase? I think we negotiated that too, if I remember rightly. It's a long time ago.

MM: What happened to John Robinson?

PF: He died some time ago. If I remember rightly he had two later postings. He had an unhappy time as Minister in Washington -- Foreign Office minder to Peter Jay, when Jay was appointed Ambassador in Washington. Then a job which I think he hated as Ambassador in Algiers.

MM: That was very sad; he died young. After the FCO, you then had the privilege of serving in Vientiane. What had you done wrong?

Posting to Vientiane as First Secretary Head of Chancery, 1975-76

PF: I don't know! I don't think I'd done anything wrong, but I guess they thought that, after Rome and Paris, it was about time I got my knees brown. There was, you remember, a kind of 'us and them' flavour about the Foreign Office at one time when there were people who were regarded as being on some magic inner circle, who never went anywhere nasty, and the others who did!

MM: The outer circle! So you had Vientiane. That's perhaps where we met. I was in Chiang Mai.

PF: Ah yes. I remember saying to the Head of Chancery in Bangkok that I was thinking of taking some local leave and would he recommend Chiang Mai. He said, "It's all right, but I think that you should go to Luang Phrabang; it's much better!"

The main reason why we had a mission in Laos was that Britain was co-Chairman with the Soviet Union of the Geneva Peace Agreement on Indo-China. We therefore had a rather large mission and an aeroplane, would you believe it. That aeroplane, by the way, is in the Museum of Army Flying at Middle Wallop with the Lao writing on it still, saying "British Embassy, Vientiane".

Anyway, that was the reason for such a large mission. The reason ended within a very short time of my arriving in Vientiane because three weeks after the fall of Saigon to the Vietnamese, Laos went Communist as well. The Pathet Lao simply took over. The Vientiane side, the centrists and the rightists, fled across the river to Thailand and, if they didn't flee fast enough, they were sent away to be 're-educated' and suddenly we were in a communist country. That was much less satisfying. The Embassy lost its aircraft and we couldn't travel around the country, and it became pretty boring.

MM: Was Alan Davidson still the Ambassador?

PF: Alan Davidson was Ambassador for only a few weeks after the coup. After he left I took over as Chargé. There was a long inter-regnum. I thought the Foreign Office had decided to be subtle and quietly down-grade the post ... just not nominate an Ambassador. Weeks and weeks passed and nothing happened. And then I had a panic telegram one morning saying, "Owing to an oversight, the file has been put away and we have neglected to ask you to seek Agrément for Mr Davidson's successor. Please now do so and do it quickly!" Every Monday afterwards, we would have a nag telegram saying, "Why has the Agrément not yet been given?" The Communists couldn't have cared less!

So weeks and weeks passed and the Office got very twitchy about things because the Americans were being given a hard time in Vientiane. If things had got out of hand, it could have been a hunting down of the "Falang"- the whites - because of course the Pathet Lao couldn't tell an American from an Englishman.

PF: So the Foreign Office got very nervous and sent me another weekly nag saying in effect, "Should you decide to evacuate the Embassy staff, you will have our full support and we won't think you're a wimp!" The Australians then sent all their people out to Butterworth in Malaysia, but after three or four days they slunk back rather sheepishly saying they had gone on a shopping trip because there was nothing to buy in Vientiane – which was true. I didn't evacuate the wives and children; we kept an eye on things, and we had a boat in case we needed to evacuate. We could take it across the Mekong. So we were geared up and we knew where the boat and fuel were. We could just about start the outboard.

Looking back on this afterwards - the Embassy in Vientiane closed a couple of years after I left - I thought the Foreign Office was pretty slow-footed about this. They should have saved money straight away by down-sizing the Embassy or even shutting it. Laos is a lovely country and everybody who has been to Laos adores it but we had nothing to do there.

MM: It is. Luang Phrabang is nicer than Chiang Mai! It's like Chiang Mai used to be before tourists.

PF: About four years ago my wife and I went up to Northern Thailand and we took a boat from Baan Huey Sai almost on the point where the Burma, Thailand and Laos borders meet. We got on a boat there and went down the Mekong by boat to Luang Phrabang. Two days.

I was rescued from Vientiane because the British were by now in the European Community. The first British Presidency was coming up and it was decided, very late in the day, that UKREP needed a co-ordinator for COREPER Deputies. Since I'd been in the European Department, and since I'd served in Rome and Paris, I was whistled out of Vientiane where I really didn't have enough to do, and posted to UKREP Brussels in late 1976, ending my flirtation with South East Asia.

MM: That must have been jolly interesting all the same. I'd forgotten you'd got the Beaver in Vientiane. In Bangkok we had a Dove for six months of the year which we shared with Indonesia, Jakarta. It kept an Air Attaché happy; his main raison d'être.

PF: This is a digression but I found the Embassy in Bangkok unfriendly. I realise that the support which Hanoi, Phnom Penh, Saigon, Vientiane and, I suppose, Rangoon needed was considerable and probably a burden on the Embassy in Bangkok but they were less friendly than I had expected. Maybe there were just too many people coming through, but we weren't exactly made to feel welcome in Chancery.

First Secretary UKREP Brussels, 1976-78

MM: So you were then posted to Brussels from Vientiane in 1976. How did you find that posting?

PF: I think that post one of the most interesting I ever had. For somebody who has spent their time in Europe and then working on European questions in London to go to the place where it all happens, was exciting. This was the first British presidency, as I said, and it was interesting to see the way that Europe worked. Since I continued to be involved in Europe for quite a large part of the rest of my career – I was in Athens and in Rome later – it was an enormous advantage to have had that experience. I think that Europe is the most important question in British foreign policy since the end of World War II. I have strong reservations about the obsession that so many of our colleagues and, worse, politicians have about the so-called ‘special relationship’. I think Europe is *the* issue and I think that as many people as possible should experience it and see how it happens; that would be an advantage to us all.

Whitehall in general is rather good at the Brussels game. The way in which Home Civil Servants are brought into the picture is very well done, and the calibre of people sent to UKREP has always been very high. I don’t think there’s any permanent representative whom I haven’t known, and they’re all very good. People like Stephen Wall are exceptionally talented, but they need to be; it’s an exceptionally demanding job. I don’t think there’s anything more difficult in our Service than being the Permanent Representative in Brussels. It’s a very tough job; intellectually incredibly stretching. The average COREPER agenda has I think about eighteen or twenty items on it; some of them are nodded through, but the Permanent Representative probably needs to master ten briefs before a COREPER meeting. It’s an astonishing achievement. And they are well briefed, and our Ministers are well briefed as well.

So it’s a great thing to have had that experience.

MM: We seem to have been excessively negligent in seconding people to the Commission.

PF: It’s a complicated story, isn’t it, because you should really have good people to do important jobs but it is made difficult by the need to balance the

composition of Commission officials at a high level when somebody's going to have to leave because you have to make way for eg. a Latvian. It's not altogether straight-forward. For quite a lot of British people in the Commission Services, life's been very good. I used to feel that about one of our colleagues, Adrian Fortescue, when he was in the Commission. People from our Service who have done jobs as chefs de cabinets for UK Commissioners have been extremely good. I was talking to Anthony Cary on Sunday here in Tisbury at a lunch party. He was chef de cabinet for Chris Patten. I'm thinking also of the Home Civil Service; Hayden Phillips (Lord Phillips) did the job of deputy chef de cabinet to Roy Jenkins. Perhaps you should interview Hayden and get his views.

MM: I know he came and addressed the ESU some time ago. He gave the annual lecture a few years ago, and he was very good. Thank you for that suggestion.

Reverting to the main story, anything else to say about this?

The Common Fisheries Policy

PF: Brussels was rather a short posting because, as soon as the British presidency was over, the reason for my being there rather disappeared, but I did hang on for another year or so and was part of the external trade team, a large team in UKREP. I did the Common Fisheries Policy, which has given me an abiding interest in that frustrating policy. The CFP was foisted on us at the last minute in the negotiations in order to extract something that wouldn't be extractable once we were members. It really was a disgrace. It doesn't work. Fearnley-Whittingstall talking about why catches are thrown back in – all of that dates back to the ridiculous Common Fisheries Policy.

Counsellor (Economic) Athens, 1978-83

Anyway, then I was posted to Athens directly again, without passing 'go', on the basis, I think, that I had assimilated Greek on the pillow. I had not learned Greek, at that time. My wife's Greek was much less good than it later became

because she hadn't lived in Greece. The normal procedure in the Foreign Office was that, if you learned a semi-hard language like Greek, you would do three or four months language training in London and then you go off and live with a family in Greece for a month or two. I never had any of that. I was posted from Brussels to Athens and thrown in at the deep end as Economic and Financial Counsellor with an Ambassador who was extremely hard-working and tenacious, and detailed-minded – his name was Ian Sutherland, a very good man, but he worked you hard. In summer we worked the long forenoon as we used to call it in the navy - from 7.30 or 8.00 through to 2pm. Then in the evening Commercial Counsellors always had one or two receptions and perhaps a dinner so I had Greek lessons in siesta time. It was hard work.

MM: Another interesting country.

PF: Greece was negotiating to get into the EU – I'll call it the 'EU' from now on, although it was not yet the EU at that time. This was a lesson in *realpolitik* if ever there was one. The negotiations were conducted by the Commissioner in Brussels responsible for enlargement, Christopher Soames. He and his team came up with a number of reasons why the Greeks weren't actually ready for membership. Nothing was right. They weren't anywhere near aligned in terms of regulations and rules, law and so on. We, in Athens agreed and were producing reports on the basis of our own experience of dealing with the Greek bureaucracy. Christopher Soames then produced a Commission 'Avis' for the Council which basically said, "Fine, but the Greeks need a lot more time to adapt to Community rules and we shouldn't be in a hurry to let them in." He was told to grow up by Giscard d'Estaing, who was President of France. Giscard had been telephoned by Karamanlis who had spent his exile, you will remember, in Paris. Karamanlis had rung Giscard and said, "Look, the only guarantee that we won't get the Colonels back is if Greece joins the EU as soon as possible." So basically Christopher Soames was told to revise his Commission 'Avis' and Greece was let in straight away. There have been quite serious consequences down the years. Greece is still not really adapting

to membership. The awful problems of the Greek bureaucracy and evasion of normal regulations are flagrant.

One nice little anecdote: my successor Jenkin Thomas, was a lovely man with a very strong Welsh accent. One morning the Greek government, trying to get their balance of payments into shape, announced with no notice at all new non-tariff barriers on the import of Scotch whisky, which was one of their biggest imports from Britain. The Ambassador rang Jenkin Thomas, who happened to be about to set out that very morning for Mount Athos to do a pilgrimage to the holy mountain. He whistled Jenkin Thomas up to his office and said to Jenkin, "What about the whisky?" "Oh don't you worry about that, Sir. I've got two bottles with me!"(Laughter).

But this was a real lesson about power and what really counts. The Commission was being licked into shape by the great men on the European Council led by Giscard.

MM: Actually, the argument about not getting the Colonels back was quite a good one.

PF: Yes and no. Of course in the longer term absolutely; Greece had to be admitted into the European Union, just as I would argue Albania and Macedonia and Montenegro should be admitted to-day. I don't mean right now; I mean we should be working on it. We are working on it, but we must keep working on it. If they aren't admitted, then there will be bad things happening again in the Balkans.

MM: What about Turkey?

PF: Well, Turkey's another issue; I'm in two minds about Turkey. I think it needs to have very special relations with the EU but whether this should be membership is open to debate.

Greece is a wonderful country and I adored being there because, by that time, my wife's family had moved from Iran so we had lots of family in Athens. Greeks are agreeable people and we were trying very hard to ... Perhaps this is the time for an anecdote about Mrs Thatcher. Would you like that?

We - the UK - were trying to get into the big projects. Greece was trying to modernise, after the period of the Colonels. There were a lot of big infrastructure projects around and one project, which was dreamed up in London, was to negotiate the sale to the Greek Public Power Corporation of a coal-fired power station. This was a consortium effort with our National Coal Board providing the coal, Parsons providing the generating kit, Babcock or somebody producing switchgear and Lazards providing the finance. Mrs Thatcher came out to Athens, amongst other things to give this a final heave with the Greek Government.

For once she had not read her brief. We were all in the Residence after dinner on the night that she arrived in Athens and Michael Alexander, who was the Private Secretary, tried to get her to focus on the next morning's meeting with the Greek Prime Minister. He said to the Prime Minister, "Patrick will tell you about this project which is the number one commercial issue you have to think about for your meeting with Rallis," (the Greek Prime Minister). I started to tell her about the project and said that the British consortium included the National Coal Board for the coal supply. "COAL?", she said, and it was hard to say whether she was more anti Derek Ezra or Arthur Scargill. She just wouldn't come down from the ceiling! She wouldn't focus on the project; all she did was rant about the National Coal Board and the National Union of Miners. It was the most extraordinary performance. So the next morning when she went to see Rallis, she still wasn't briefed and she said, "Prime Minister, I think we'd better leave our subordinates to discuss the coal-fired power station which is such an important part of our interests in Greece." And I was swept off to go and do this with the appropriate Greek Minister. This was not a success. He threw me and the representatives of the consortium out of his office pretty summarily perhaps because he had just arrived in the job and there was a smell on the Greek side of a brown envelope - and in those

days there was quite a lot of enveloping in Greece. Either he was strongly opposed to brown envelopes or possibly it was because the envelope had gone in the wrong direction. Anyway it was a terrible day.

MM: Who got the power station then?

PF: Nobody got the power station because it was a negotiated contract. The Greeks have paid the price ever since because what they use for the bulk of their power generation is lignite, which is highly polluting, much worse than coal because you have to burn five times as much to get the same thermal value. So there are a lot of problems.

MM: Enormously bad for the climate.

PF: Terribly bad for the climate. Hideous. And they're now of course burning gas and oil. What I would like to say at this point, if it's not stretching your patience too much, is that I found running a commercial department a big challenge and I found it a challenge again later when I wasn't running it but had some responsibility when I was in Italy. In those days I think – I don't know if it's different now – we had the locally-engaged staff thing completely wrong. In Athens there were three LE1s, two Greeks, one British and they were all old and past it. The basis for operating the commercial section was all wrong. What you should have done was to offer young men or women the opportunity to become an LE1 on a strict five-year contract after which he or she would know a great deal about Greek industry and the people working in the Greek industry and would have made him or herself a rather useful asset. To employ somebody for twenty-five years as a locally-engaged commercial officer made little sense. They had seen commercial counsellors come and go, all new-brooming away; they had seen it all before and they were not going to get off their backsides and do anything much. Gradually I got rid of them, but it wasn't a good situation. Later, fast forwarding, the Consul General in Milan who had responsibility for commercial promotion in Italy, had exactly the same problem when I was Ambassador in Rome, but he couldn't get rid of them because of labour laws. It was crazy! The Foreign Office either wilfully

ignored the nature of the problem of employing ancient LE1s or, having got themselves into the problem, ignored the nature of the labour regulation issue. So poor old Philip Wetton, who was the Consul General in Milan, had the hideousness of having to deal with the particularly recalcitrant and difficult Italian locally-engaged commercial officers who knew perfectly well that they could give us a two finger salute at any time they wanted.

MM: And anyway, he would soon go off on another posting!

PF: Absolutely. It's all very much come-and-go, not once but half a dozen times.

The other thing which I feel we've rather got wrong with the commercial side was that it was a bit like Blair and target-setting. In order to try and get round the inertia in the system, somebody, I suppose in the DTI, came up with the idea that you had a kind of norm of what were called 'export opportunities': 150 export opportunities per LE1 per year is a figure that sticks in my mind. What a daft proposition! A huge mechanism in the embassies, in the consulates, producing these export opportunities and shooting them off to the DTI to send to clients in the UK – do you ever remember anything really seriously emerging from an export opportunity?

MM: No! A complete waste of time.

PF: Think of the time wasted monitoring where the guys were and "Why haven't you got your 150 export opportunities this year?"

MM: The trouble was that we weren't making the stuff that people in foreign markets wanted to buy. If we hadn't got the stuff to sell, how on earth could commercial departments of embassies sell it?

PF: My LE1s in Athens would go off to see their chums. One of them specialised in the marine sector, very important in Greece. What you want to know is whether Mr Onassis is going to buy another tanker and, if possible, persuade him that he should have it made on Tyneside. But that wasn't the way the

commercial department worked. My LE1 would go and see the purchasing manager of a shipping company, and they'd be mates because he'd been visiting him every year or twice or four times a year, and they'd have a nice coffee or several, and at the end of it they would come up with some fictitious export opportunity. That was the way we did it. It was amateur.

On the other hand, when I read that the Foreign Office to-day is solemnly devoting itself to export promotion, I think, "What a fraud. Do the coalition or the present management of the FCO really think this is the first government to make that a priority?"

MM: It's been going on for decades!

PF: So what's different! It's ridiculous.

MM: You've got Mr Cameron saying that we must approach the Indians with humility as we go forward. What on earth is he thinking about?

PF: How about this one for lack of logic? Somebody said that we had to increase the number of tourists from China. The Chinese can get a visa for a Schengen country and then visit twelve countries or whatever in the heart of the EU. They can't visit Britain on the Schengen visa; they have to buy a British visa. Naturally they stay in the Schengen countries. It would be nice if someone could please explain why the British don't join the Schengen agreement?

Sorry. I digress.

Anyway, we were in Athens weren't we? Do you want to continue with Athens?

MM: Your time in Athens was four and a half years. Was that mainly commercial work?

PF: Yes, economic and commercial when I first arrived when there was also a political counsellor who was senior to me but when he was posted I became the senior and Chargé therefore when the Ambassador was away. It was my first experience of, as it were, running a mission apart from Vientiane. It was quite fun. So one also got involved in the politics of Greece.

We were in Athens for the great change; the first time that a left-wing administration had ever been in power in Greece. Andreas Papandreou, founder and leader of PASOK, the socialist party, won the elections in 1981 so we had to deal with a completely new government. The patronage system operates as in America. The bosses of all the state and parastatal companies left the day after PASOK won and new people came in who of course didn't know anything about the job. So we had to start all over again. It was interesting to see socialism Greek style working.

In fact quite a lot of important things did happen. The rift between the left and the right which had been created by the Greek civil war and the treatment of the people on the losing side afterwards was very great. That rift was really cured by Andreas Papandreou, who was not completely gaga at that time: untrustworthy perhaps but not gaga. The children of the civil war guerrillas, who had fled into Yugoslavia and Bulgaria and the Soviet Union after the end of the civil war, were invited back into Greece. That bitter exile of the losing left-wingers. I am not starry-eyed about the communist side in the civil war; they were at least as bad as the right – it was a particularly filthy civil war - but that rift was healed under Papandreou and PASOK.

The other thing which I'd like to say about Greece, I suppose, is that this is a country with which Britain has been very closely associated ever since independence. Our role in the Second World War is important in terms of the perception of Britain in Greece. We were fortunate in having such a high calibre of SOE officers in Greece. There was Paddy Leigh Fermor in Crete; George Jellicoe in the Special Boat Service operating in the Aegean who may have been the first British officer into Athens in October 1944 but was certainly the first into the bar of the Grande Bretagne Hotel; Monty

Woodhouse, who was a Conservative Member of Parliament and many others. These men were both military heroes and people of literary and political calibre. The Greeks have a word for the hero figure - the 'palikari', the chivalrous young warrior. The image of the palikari appeals strongly to them. George Jellicoe had it my goodness, and Monty Woodhouse as well. I watched with amazement the way in which the Greeks reacted to things like George Jellicoe's death, for example. The interesting question is who are the figures in British life today who the Greeks might regard as worthy representatives of the Britain that they knew and looked up to and admired? George Jellicoe has gone; Monty Woodhouse has gone; Paddy Leigh Fermor is alive, thank God, but he's ninety-four or so and he's not immortal. Who are the characters in our life that are going to make Greece say, "Yes, Britain's really a very interesting and important world country?"

Educational ties are also very important. When I was in the Embassy in Athens, the London School of Economics sent their director for ex-alumni out to Athens and there was an event in the British Council. Half the Greek cabinet was there. They'd all been at LSE. Now you would be lucky if you got a couple of members of the government to the Queen's Birthday Party. Large numbers of Greeks are being educated and doing degree courses in Britain.

MM: Are they having to pay very high fees?

PF: No, because EU students pay the same fees as British students. So if you're running the LSE, you make the money on the Chinese and the Malays.

The other person I must mention is Stephen Runciman. He's dead now of course but he played a prominent role in British-Greek relations because he was the foremost Byzantinist in British academic life. The Greeks, rightly I think, believe that, until very recently, for most British academics Greek history ended when the Ptolomies took over from Alexander the Great. Runciman represents the rediscovery of Byzantine history by the British academic world. He was enormously influential and much admired in Greece.

It is interesting to mention him perhaps at the moment because one of the things that George Jellicoe did when he was Chairman of the Anglo-Hellenic League was to set up the Runciman Prize run by the League to give a prize for the best work of literature on a Greek theme published in Britain. For a time Maria ran the administrative side of the Runciman Prize, which enjoys sponsorship from the National Bank of Greece. The Anglo-Hellenic League tends to be better off and to do more exciting things than the British-Italian Society with which I was connected. But I digress.

MM: An interesting digression though. It does help to illustrate the importance of the Greek connections.

PF: It is easy to criticise the Greeks. I think that there are two critical things that happened within my lifetime. First Churchill sending the British Army to Greece in October 1944, despite Congress and the Parliament in London. It was because of this that Greece didn't go communist. Greece would have been like Albania or Yugoslavia had it not been for that because in some respects it is just another Balkan country though it happens to have a rather longer coastline and is rather more outgoing. Greece is lucky not to have been a communist country.

Tracking forward, with the collapse of communism in Yugoslavia, Greece had a huge opportunity to expand its influence in the Balkans and above all to be a model of good government for societies which were rather short of models. In some respects Greece took advantage of that; there are for example Greek banks all over Albania. But from another point of view they completely failed because they decided to put all their money on the Serbs and never mind the human rights of the Albanians in Kosovo. That was deeply distressing and disturbing. Everybody knows that the former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia (FYROM as the Greeks insist it should be called), has not played its cards particularly cleverly in its relations with Greece. It's pretty silly for a Slav country to call the airport in Skopje the Alexander the Great Airport. We can discuss whether Alexander the Great was ethnic Greek or somebody who was brought up in a Greek-influenced culture; it doesn't really matter that

much. The one certainty is that Alexander the Great was not a Slav! And the Greeks get unreasonably, or perhaps a better word would be disproportionately, upset about this. The point I'm making is about the need to handle Greece rather carefully because it can and should play a role in the Balkans. But the record has not been a wonderful one.

So I try not to talk to Greeks anymore about Balkan politics. When I was Ambassador in Albania, which I was (non-resident) I had a dear Greek friend who invited me to dinner in Athens with the Foreign Minister, in order that she should hear from me, a non-Greek and non-Albanian, a view of Albania and its future and what was happening there, which she might not get from the Greek diplomatic service. This woman didn't want to know what I thought about it, and simply said "The Albanians are children and we deal with them as though they were children." From a Greek Foreign Minister about a neighbouring country, this was worrying. Mitsitakis, while Prime Minister, arranged for Milosevic to have banking facilities and for his villas in Greece to be guarded by Greek security: shameful when Milosevic was busy beating up on the Kosovars. I'm not saying of course that the Kosovars are marvellously moral people. What I'm saying is that, if you're Greece and you're purporting to be democratic and part of the European Union, you can't ignore Milosevic's treatment of the Kosovars. It is a characteristic, I'm afraid, of the Balkans that each Balkan country points to its neighbours and says, "You're maltreating our minority," and never gives a damn about how much they maltreat the other.

MM: They are a bit mixed up.

PF: I once read an article produced for an organisation called the Minority Rights Group about the Chams in northern Greece. The Chams, who are an ethnic Albanian minority living in a corner of north-west Greece, were chucked out of Greece after the war. This article, thirty pages of learned exposition on the Chams, managed to avoid mentioning that there had been a civil war in Greece and that the communist side had been supported from Albania as well as Yugoslavia and that the Chams were regarded, not unreasonably, as a potential

fifth column. Whether that was right or wrong, at least you can understand the circumstances under which this expulsion took place.

MM: Ethnic cleansing it was.

PF: Yes, but for this woman who wrote the piece on minority rights report not even to mention the Greek Civil War is astonishing. Everybody gets poisoned by the Balkans. People cannot see things straight.

MM: It is weird.

PF: She was an Englishwoman, not a Greek, by the way. I wrote a book review for *The Economist* about the history of SOE in Albania and what was riveting was the way in which British officers fighting in the differently politically affiliated groups all took on the colouration of their group, so you had Reg Hibbert, our dear colleague, who was a liaison officer with the communists being very left wing, while Julian Amery and David Smiley who were with the centrists, were right wing and very anti-Reg. Strange.

MM: How did Reg Hibbert come to be involved in this?

PF: He was a young officer in World War II parachuted in to be a liaison officer to the Hoxhas communist guerrillas. The enmities remained. When the Albanian government gathered together the remains of British who had died in Albania during the war in a corner of the Tirana cemetery we had a brief memorial service. Smiley told me that Reg had brought down an airstrike on him in late 1944 and for his part Reg wouldn't speak to him.

MM: I can't help remembering the occasion when the Albanians fired on the British frigate.

PF: The Corfu Straits you mean? It was actually mines. Two Royal Navy destroyers were blown up on mines in the Corfu Straits. We said the mines had been sown by Hoxha. I'm not absolutely sure that that's right but the

result was that diplomatic relations were broken off. My predecessor in Rome, Stephen Egerton, was very pleased to be made Ambassador non-resident in Albania and I think he paid one visit but, other than that, I was the first real Ambassador to Albania after the Corfu Straits incident in 1946.

MM: And you were there in ...

PF: 1992 to 1996. I was Ambassador for three and a half years.

MM: Did you generally enjoy it? Athens?

PF: Oh God yes! Absolutely enjoyed it. It was a tremendous place.

MM: Socially?

PF: I enjoyed it workwise as well. Ian Sutherland worked me very hard but he was a man – now this is also perhaps relevant – he was the model of an Ambassador who understood the way in which the work of different sections of the Embassy supported each other. That's not something which is given to everybody and he may have overdone it from time to time, but he could see the potential of cross-fertilisation so that he found plenty of things for people to do. He was very good that way.

MM: Well I think that probably covers Athens from your point of view.

Head of European Union Department, FCO, 1983-85

PF: Then I came back to London as Head of the European Union Department, so you see the EU thing continues. I was head of EUD (Internal) at the time of Mrs Thatcher's renegotiation of our budgetary contribution to the EU. Before coming on to policy, I would like to say that the heads of the two European Departments were very fortunate. Their efforts were made to look good because they had such wonderful, high-calibre desk officers. You really have to be a dummy not to look good. It's not particularly fair but it is hard to

avoid it. If you're the Head of the East African Department it is hard to get a first class annual report because you've probably got only one bloke in the Department who can actually write English. I on the other hand had the cleverest young people in the Office working for me. They made it look easy. Stephen Wall was my Assistant. Not only was he brilliant but he was the most hard-working man I've ever met in my life. I'm not lazy, but Stephen would always be there before me and always there after I left. He's a complete workaholic. You got good reports from your Under Secretary, and the PUS would counter-sign them, because the Department was producing first class work.

It was a wonderful thing to be Head of EUD. It was taxing intellectually because of the series of things that came across your desk. Geoffrey Howe was the Foreign Secretary. He had an inexhaustible appetite for paper so if a book came out on, what shall we say, the future of European agriculture, he would ask for an analysis in his weekend box – and he'd read the thing! But it was nowhere near as taxing as being Ambassador to UKREP. And then you had very high-powered Under Secretaries. My Under Secretaries were David Hannay and then Robin Renwick.

MM: He's a very impressive chap. And David Hannay for that matter.

PF: So it's a great place to be in the Office. It is a stepping-stone to higher things. You can't go wrong unless you screw up big time.

MM: Were there specific problems arising in your time in the EUD?

PF: There were constant budget problems.

MM: It's difficult, really, to talk about that, isn't it, because it's water under a bridge now.

PF: Except possibly that the Foreign Office would have settled for less than Mrs Thatcher?

MM: We're talking about our budget contribution?

PF: Yes. She was right. The deal in the end was extraordinarily beneficial because it can't be undone without our say-so. But nearly 30 years on I begin to feel uneasy. When the agreement for a British budgetary rebate was negotiated, Britain was towards the bottom of the twelve-member states in GDP per capita terms. If you look at the figures now, you will see that we are up towards the top. So on the basis of the same argumentation we used, it is hard to justify less rich countries contributing to our rebate. The European argument in Britain is so strained, so difficult. You ask what the particular problems are of that job; I guess the real answer is that it's the problem of the general growing antipathy in Britain to the EU.

MM: And it is growing, I think.

PF: And it will go on growing, I think. I don't understand why we are so anti-European. It seems to me to be an open and shut case. I am one of the Foreign Office Europeans, I'm afraid. That doesn't mean when talking about the Common Fisheries Policy, that I think that Europe is invariably good, but I am profoundly convinced that our place is in Europe.

MM: I agree.

PF: Since you are looking back, though, my first Head of Chancery in Rome had been in the CRO and he thought that the future of Britain lay in India. It's amazing to think of such an argument being taken even half-seriously.

MM: They're all talking about these new rising countries, aren't they.

PF: Yes, but he didn't just mean it in terms of trade.

MM: That's looking a long way back into history, I think. Digressing for a moment, when you were in Brussels, did you find that it was possible to argue our case effectively against the continental Europeans?

PF: Oh yes. I think I've mentioned ...

MM: I think that one of the things that motivate these people who are Euro-sceptics is the belief that somehow or other they are pulling the wool over our eyes all the time.

PF: The French are good, there's no doubt about it. They argue their corner very well and convincingly, but so do we. It would be hard to show, I think, that the French had run rings round us in the more than thirty-five years since we've been in the EU. If two people were talking to-day in the Loire somewhere, one might say to the other, "We haven't done terribly well, have we. When Britain joined the Community, French was by the far the commonest language spoken in the EU. What is the commonest language to-day? So they've done pretty well, haven't they, the British!" Those things don't get noticed. You know that under our influence Europe has become much more interested in free trade than it was. It was a deeply Mercantilist place when we joined.

MM: It's all overlooked.

PF: The single market is the most astonishing achievement.

MM: I heard George Soros talking about the Euro economy this morning on Radio 4, saying that he thought the Euro had emerged already from the crisis. And of course it still faces ...

PF: I think he might be a bit optimistic on that. I think they've a lot of problems ahead.

MM: And there are a lot of problems ahead for us too.

PF: Absolutely. I don't mean that ours are less.

HMA Luanda, Angola, 1985-87

PF: From my personal point of view, this is the second time I was taken away from the inner circle and sent away to get my knees brown. The point about the post in Luanda was that there was a very complicated diplomatic negotiation taking place of great importance for southern Africa. The Americans, under Reagan, came up with a proposal which was rather radical, whereby the Cubans, who were defending Angola (30,000 Cuban troops in Angola), would be withdrawn to Cuba, and the South Africans would withdraw from Namibia back to South Africa and Namibia would become independent. So you have a balanced outcome.

This was put forward by a clever American academic called Chet Crocker. There was only one problem: the Americans didn't have representation in Luanda to do the message passing. Neither would they be able to get one because Congress wouldn't agree to the setting up of an American Embassy in Luanda -- in a communist country as Congress thought. So the British Ambassador in Luanda, my predecessors before me, especially Mig Goulding who later became the Deputy Under Secretary in the UN (dead now, alas), passed messages for the Americans.

This was the first and most important justification for a British Ambassador in Luanda. We had, however, had a long-standing connection with the place because, when Livingstone completed his first journey across Africa, it was in Luanda, something that hardly anyone knows. He found there a British official called the Anti-Slavery Commissioner, who had the command of two Royal Navy frigates which patrolled up and down the coast between Luanda and the mouth of the Congo River preventing slave trading out of Central Africa to Brazil. So it's quite an interesting historical note.

Anyway, I then inherited this job and I passed messages to and from the Americans. It was often difficult, almost hilariously difficult, because the Angolans were so inefficient and disorganised that, when I got a message I'd ring the Minister of the Interior, whose nom de guerre was Kito Rodrigues to tell him that I had a message from Chet Crocker, and nobody would ever answer the telephone. So I would then go down to the Ministry with the message in my pocket and walk around the Ministry trying to find someone. It was not as though it was the Ministry of Social Security! It was the Interior Ministry. But there'd be nobody there, nobody in the Minister's outer offices, nobody in the Minister's office – absolutely nobody. So by this time twenty-four hours have passed and Chet was pressing for a meeting with Kito in Brazzaville in a few days time.

I then remembered that there was going to be a commemorative meeting of the revolutionary MPLA, a sort of Marxist organisation then running Angola, the following Sunday, and probably Kito Rodrigues would be there. So I would go to this meeting with the message in my pocket and slide up to him and give him the message clandestinely. Of course it wasn't clandestine at all – everybody could see what I was up to!

It was a very strange process, the Angolan side of it. Sometimes the Americans would come to Luanda and they would have a meeting in a government guesthouse, and all the resources for this meeting were kept in my office: loo paper, torches, torch batteries, bottled water, everything which somebody needs to function more or less was kept in my office for the visit of the American officials!

The civil war was going on still and the Americans were covertly supplying equipment to the civil war. It was quite difficult for the Americans to be the objective mediator in this complicated negotiation while supplying UNITA with kit. The British Ambassador had a particularly delicate role because the people who were helping the Angolans mine the diamonds in north-east Angola were British. So I used to have to pay parochial visits to north-east Angola to talk to them. Several times people working in the mines had been

captured by Unita and marched away to Jamba, Savimbi's headquarters down in south-east Angola. This is a thousand kilometre walk. A predecessor of mine as Deputy Under Secretary, John Leahy, had once actually to go to Jamba to negotiate the release of some captured British diamond miners.

I would go up to Dundo in Lunda Nord province where the diamond mining took place to meet the miners. I would notice that the accents of the British diamond miners were ever so slightly clipped, and I would say to them in my best Duke of Edinburgh mode, "What do you do in your spare time?" The reply would be "Listen to Radio Ipswich!". "And where do you go when you have leave?" "Ipswich!" Then I realised they were British passport-holding South Africans and their lightly disguised name for S Africa was Ipswich!

Dundo was a high-risk place. You could die in an attack because the UNITA guerrillas were on drug highs when they came in. When Maria and I went up there – she accompanied me on two occasions – we could take what we called our Jamba bags. This was a small bag of kit which you put under your bed at night which contained malaria pills, a spare pair of underpants, a spare pair of socks and whatever else you thought was necessary. You had it under your bed so that, if UNITA attacked, you dived under your bed and, whatever happened to you, you hung onto your bag in case you were marched off. The thought of a British Ambassador being marched down to Jamba was disagreeable for the British Ambassador. The thought of my wife on the march was doubly disagreeable.

Anyway, that was our life there, and it was not without incident. It was incidents with lots of boring bits in between. The problem about life in Angola was that there was no power, no water, no shops; it was absolutely nil of everything. The inspectors came to visit while we were there and, at the end of the inspection, the team head said to me, "Well, I've heard of hardship posts and I've even visited some, but this is really *the* hardship post. Tell me what you want, and I will get it for you." I remembered one of our British Council English teachers in Angola telling me that with one tumbler of water she could wash her teeth, give herself an all-over bath and have something left

over to drink so I said what I wanted was a water-bowser – a lorry with a tank on the back and a pump -- so that, when we had water as we occasionally did in the Embassy, I could send the bowser out to the staff flats and pump the water up to fill their cisterns. (These were never otherwise filled because the water pressure was never enough to get to the third floor of an apartment block.) Life was full of that kind of thing, and you become obsessive so that the noise of a generator going non-stop for twenty-four hours could drive you almost demented.

We normally had water from about 8.00 am to 12.00 noon in the embassy -- just enough to fill our storage tanks. One Christmas Eve I returned from the beach at about 4.00 in the afternoon and I heard this sssssshh noise. I wondered what was going on. It was water! It was water flowing into my tanks. It ran all the way through to Boxing Day. It was the best Christmas present I'd ever had in my life!

MM: Did you have many staff there?

PF: There were nine UK-based staff and they were fantastic. Armed robbery was commonplace and we all went without. The admin officer played a role so important I can't begin to tell you. We would buy – and maybe you did the same in Chiang Mai – our perishables from some firm near Gatwick and they'd be air-freighted out in polystyrene boxes. We'd get a telegram from the firm saying "On flight no. such-and-such arriving Luanda ..." and the admin officer would race off to the airport, to make sure first that they didn't get left in 45 degrees heat and rot, or secondly looted by the green-uniformed little soldiers. He was absolutely amazing this boy; he was a boy. I tried to send him an e-mail the other day and I didn't get an answer so I suppose he's long gone from the Service, but he was a really good colleague to whom we were all indebted. To get the stuff out he'd have to parley his way past the very stupid, very ill-trained soldiers.

Mig, my predecessor, was extremely punctilious and would never do anything that was against the rules. He was quite right of course not to countenance

changing money on the black market. The problem was, however, that any food available on the local market was priced at the unofficial rate of exchange which was a hundred times the official rate. So I could not afford fish on my frays and Angola is a very fishy place. So I asked the admin officer to get the fish market lady to come up to the compound. She appeared smoking a cigarette with the hot end in her mouth -- more buzz that way -- and she mentioned a figure in kwanzas, the Angolan currency, which was the equivalent of £600 for a fair sized fish. I said this was out of the question and asked how much was it in cans of beer? We did a deal and I started getting fish regularly on the basis of direct barter. When I met Geoffrey Howe a few weeks later at a conference in Lusaka, I told him that I was not prepared to live in Luanda and never eat sea food because of a strict interpretation of Foreign Office rules. "Quite right! Quite right!" he said, so at least we had wonderful fish.

The wine of course came from Peter Justersen in Copenhagen. When Ewen Fergusson, the Deputy Under Secretary, came down to see us, we had a dinner for him. This began with prawns, continued with crayfish and a large dorade fish for the main course. Ewen, a great wine connoisseur, ate his fish and drank his Meursault and remarked from the other end of the table that he could see Luanda was a real hardship posting!

In places like Luanda, which operates - if it operates at all - on the basis of what the Portuguese call "schemas", you have to be flexible. I don't mean you should be exchanging currency on the black market but you do need to come up with solutions to the problems of feeding and water supply. You need people who are enterprising and go-getting like my admin officer. In places like that a disproportionate amount of time is spent on administration but it is essential if staff morale is to be maintained.

Security was another issue. Later when I became Under Secretary for Africa, I would go round the continent and I'd talk to some young girl who'd be eighteen and a half or something on her first foreign posting, and I would say to her ever so delicately, because we were delicate about this, "Are you happy

about the security in your flat?” This was after the Foreign Office had started to give us what they called ‘safe areas’ – iron grills round a bedroom and bathroom in the hope that if the house was broken into, the thieves would take away the stuff but spare the occupant her life or ‘a fate worse than death’. And the answer came from one of these young girls, “Oh, you mean the rape gates!” And I was full of admiration for them.

Anyway, that’s probably enough about Angola. It was really the pits.

MM: So you went on to be Under Secretary for Africa. What stands out from that period?

Assistant Under Secretary of State in the FCO, 1987-90

PF: First South Africa. The UK had a torrid time resisting the almost universal call for full sanctions but our stand was justified by the role Renwick and his team played in getting the Afrikaners to let Mandela out and to negotiate with him. These were stirring times.

Twenty, twenty five years ago, conditions in many, perhaps most, African posts were difficult. I would not be surprised if, despite all the hype, they remained difficult today. At that time, before the real economic bite on the FCO budget, we had small missions in places like Monrovia, Brazzaville and Libreville. It takes somebody with real inner resources to cope in these places. Most of our colleagues did so and did so very well. They weren’t for the most part people with field marshal’s batons in their knapsacks, but they were dedicated to Africa and their work and I admired them.

Years later, when Robin Cook was Foreign Secretary in the Blair government, the FCO or perhaps the government as a whole got into a tangle about a company in Sierra Leone called Sandline, which, if I remember rightly, was using mercenaries. I was telephoned by a contact of mine who asked me what was going on. I said that by and large our African posts and the African Departments in the Office were not manned by the brightest officers so

warning signs might have been missed. But the critical point was that Robin Cook had said that he wouldn't accept any submissions on Africa unless World War III was about to break out. So there was bound to be a cock-up; sooner or later. Some of this appeared in the press. The Foreign Office spokesman then said that the very highest calibre officers were posted to Africa; and the Foreign Secretary was deeply interested in Africa. Truth apart, I thought this line was mistaken. By the late 1980s only about 3% of British exports went to Africa. The end of the cold war had reduced the political and strategic importance of Africa. Inevitably the FCO has to prioritise. It was not difficult to justify a low priority for Africa.

One of my responsibilities was to deal with the BBC World Service African services because, as you know, funding for the BBC External and vernacular services came through the FCO. The BBC in those days, and I suspect still, was obsessive about vernacular services.

MM: It's virtually the Foreign Office that pays for them.

PF: Bush House told me that they wanted to spend another £8m a year on a service in Xhosa, the South African language spoken by Thabo Mbeki. I asked why they wanted to do that when the influential Xhosas we wanted to reach spoke English. I suggested that what they should be doing was to improve the audibility of the World Service in English to Southern Africa - in my experience almost inaudible. All over the continent you had this problem. In all my travels in Africa I never met anybody, except expatriates like me, who were prepared to surf the different wavelengths and walk around the room like a water-diviner to try and find the World Service in English, especially the famous half hour World Service for Africa. Audibility is in my experience poor. Coming up to date I see the BBC has suspended the World Service in Portuguese for Africa. This must be right. It is not clear to me why the BBC feels it has a mission to broadcast in Portuguese to Angola and Mozambique.

MM: There should be some way of cross-fertilising the cost of other services of the BBC, like paying presenters goodness knows how much.

PF: The other thing that must be said is that Africa gets under the skin; it is addictive. People feel passionately about the continent, however disastrous its situation. As AUS I saw my role as trying to get our colleagues in African posts to be realistic about their posts and to see them against posts elsewhere. For example, at that time the total value of our exports to the Netherlands was in the region of £9-12 bn a year; I won't put my hand in the fire but that's the order of figures. Many billions of pounds of exports. The value of our exports to the average African post might be £300-400 million. In the annual management exercise - just beginning in the late 1980s - the head of post might bid for another Commercial officer on the grounds that our exports might then be increased by, say, 50% over the next two years. I would have to point out that a 50% increase in our exports to the Hague would mean perhaps £5 billion rather than £150million. It was clear where the effort should be made. But it's hard to discourage a group of enthusiastic people living in a difficult place and to get them to accept the reality and the relativities.

When I arrived at the AUS desk, I was surprised to find we gave so little emphasis to what I shall call good government. I found some quotations by Julius Nyerere and - would you believe it - Mugabe and other African leaders criticising the continent's performance and tried to persuade Ministers and our colleagues to be braver when talking about human rights etc to their governments. It was not easy. But without better human rights and without better governments, there is no future for Africa.

I think one of the interesting things about being an Under Secretary is that, for the first time really in your career, you're exposed to the foreign policy problems of other parts of the world. It doesn't happen before that. The Permanent Under Secretary's morning meetings give you this insight into what the rest of the world is having to struggle with, and you can put your own problems in your own area into perspective, give them their proper weight and dimensions.

I have already mentioned that in the late 1980s and early 1990s there was increasing emphasis on the management of the Foreign Office. I didn't think the Foreign Office had a brilliant record for being nimble footed but on the other hand the Office have now given ourselves an increasingly heavy management structure and 'management think' seems sometimes to mean that policy takes a back seat because everybody is monitoring whether we have the right percentage of gays or women or whatever.

This process was just beginning when I was Under Secretary and I found it painful, difficult and tedious. As I was suggesting in terms of talking to my African Heads of Mission, it was rather discouraging for them. If instead of the formal post management review conducted by all twenty three posts in Africa, all submitted to the AUS who laboriously put them together for a "command" bid, I could simply have written a letter saying, "Africa represents 2.8% of our foreign trade. Don't even think of asking for anyone extra on your staff; you're not going to get anyone!" It would have been quicker and less frustrating!

Some of the things that happened in London at that time were really bizarre. The IRA were active in the city. Now the Metropolitan Police, in my experience, will close London down, or a large chunk of it, as completely as possible after some incident. Always! It's their immediate reaction.

MM: It's like a road accident on the M3.

PF: Exactly. I remember on one occasion I was out of the Office and something had happened and the tapes went out across Bird Cage Walk, and I'm outside facing a constable. I showed him my Foreign Office pass and said, "I'm working in the Foreign Office over the road. Can I please cross the tapes and go in through the Ambassadors' entrance?" "No Sir", he said. "But my colleagues are actually working in there," I replied. "You can see them. They have not been evacuated." Still no success. Next morning at the prefects' meeting I said this was ridiculous. The Met was helping the IRA to disrupt London. I suggested that the PUS should raise the matter at the Head of the

Civil Service's weekly meeting. Nothing happened. I suspect no one was prepared to take on the Met. They still aren't. And they are inefficient. I know a former Metropolitan policeman who has retired to Greece on a full pension at forty-seven years of age. He was stressed out from working for several years on the river patrol. They fetch a body out of the water once every month or so: deeply stressful of course.

This job brought me into contact with other layers of British life. I remember on one occasion when I was Deputy Under Secretary – I'd moved up to the Middle East job so I was working on the Gulf War. The President of Nigeria paid a State Visit. The Lord Mayor had a banquet for him and I received an invitation. I was working from 6.00am to 8.00 or 9.00 at night on the Gulf War but, because the President of Nigeria was an important figure, I made an effort and went to the Lord Mayor's dinner. I found myself at a table with no Nigerians and sitting next to a woman who was a Freeman of the City of London which, she explained, meant she could drive her sheep across London Bridge. Fascinating! Next day, the Marshal of the Diplomatic Service or whatever he's called said at the prefects' meeting that the Lord Mayor had expressed his displeasure at the fact that so few of the Foreign Office people went to Lord Mayor's banquets anymore. So I told them about my evening. I didn't expect to be sitting next to the President, but I would have found it interesting to sit next to someone in his suite and I flattered myself that a senior Nigerian official accompanying the President might find it vaguely useful to be sitting next to the Under Secretary for Africa. My evening had been a complete waste of time and I would never go again to a Lord Mayor's banquet.

I also got a bit anti about the Court. One of my Heads of Mission sent me a telegram saying that he noticed that on her way to the Commonwealth Conference in Harare Her Majesty would probably pass over his country; his Head of State had been trying for many years to get himself invited to London on a State Visit and, quite rightly, Her Majesty and the Foreign Office had never agreed. Equally he'd been trying to get Her Majesty on a State Visit to his country – this is Zaire – and very properly she'd not gone. But why, as she

flew over Zaire in the Royal Flight, did she not do what everybody else did and send a message down saying, “Mr President, as I fly over your lovely country, I send you my greetings as well as those of British people.” I got this telegram and I scribbled on it, “Good cost-free gesture” and put it in the box to Buckingham Palace. Two days later, I had the thing back with a scribble saying that Her Majesty did not do this. I thought this irritating. Who says that she doesn’t do it? Why doesn’t she do it? Doesn’t she have advisers like me to tell her that she ought to do it? Instead of which some superannuated Major General in Buckingham Palace is going by the book of precedents ...

MM: They can be extremely pompous like that.

PF: They *are* extremely pompous like that. I just think that that business needs a really good shake-up and I hope – though I don’t believe – that this has happened since I left the Service. Everything that I have said should be prefaced by the obvious remark that it’s fifteen years since I left the Office. For all I know, things might be vastly different and hugely improved, but I doubt it.

[Note: The policy of not sending a royal message from an overflying aircraft was agreed between the FCO and the Royal Household. PF's comment is therefore based on a misunderstanding.]

MM: That brings us to your final ...

HMA Rome (and non-resident Albania), 1992-96

PF: Final glory! Back in Rome.

MM: Had much changed?

PR: Not a lot!

MM: You have Mr Berlusconi of course.

PF: I arrived just as the fat was in the fire. It was *mani polite* which means clean hands. This clean hands investigation blackened the reputation of the political parties which had traditionally governed Italy for all those years since the end of World War II. People started to think that Italy was going to enter a period of rapid reform; economic and political reform. So it was a very exciting time to return to Italy. Also the Mafia had murdered a couple of magistrates in Sicily so there was the idea that the state might actually get a grip on the Mafia. So there were big hopes of radical change.

Since you mention Berlusconi, his formation of his political party seemed to suggest that there was real change in the air. It was disappointing that in practise the change was more apparent than real. At this point of any discussion on Italy everybody quotes Lampedusa's book '*The Leopard*' in which one of the key characters says that things have to change in order that things can stay the same. It's a very Italian concept.

That's really what we're talking about. Things had changed in order to stay the same. The fundamentals of Italian life in my first time in Italy had changed only a bit when I returned in the 1990s.

The Italians are very remarkable. Nowhere else in the world, I think, could you imagine this great obelisk put up by Mussolini for the Rome Exhibition of 1940 (which didn't actually take place because war broke out) still standing there with the inscription 'Mussolini Dux'. There is a sort of worldliness and acceptance of the weakness of human nature about Italy which is deeply touching and warming. It also gives rise, though, to cynicism!

MM: They probably all have a good smile about that.

PF: Yes. Everywhere else, all names change don't they. But not so much in Italy! So you have traces of Mussolini around the place and, whilst changes appear to take place, it goes very slowly. To take another example, I mentioned earlier the problem of Mafia connections in the Christian Democratic Party.

When I was in Rome the first time, it was a given in the British Embassy that Giulio Andreotti, this great figure of Italian political life, had Mafia connections. When I returned to Italy in 1992, he was about to be tried for his Mafia connections. For reasons technical or real, I forget which, he was not actually nailed with this accusation, though there was a lot of stuff in the Italian press about what a wicked man he really was. Now, a few years later, Giulio Andreotti, no longer particularly active in politics, is treated as a God. They have this extraordinary ability to forgive, to overlook, to forget crimes. It's a great achievement! It's very Italian.

Anyway, that's the Italy to which I came back and it was, for obvious reasons, an extremely thrilling time to be there.

MM: 1992 – 96.

PF: Yes. One of the things that I'd just like to record for you, is that I had a couple of bones to pick in my time with the British Council. This is an important organisation because cultural diplomacy is important. But they have to do it right.

The British Council, in my experience, is aggressively avant garde. Now you can be this, perhaps, if you're in Chicago or New York – I don't know, I've never been there. But you can't be aggressively avant garde if you're funding an opera in Palermo or Rome. The British Council insists on thinking that they can teach Italians about opera, and it's quite a brave thing to want to do! To put on, at notable expense, the Covent Garden production of *Peter Grimes* in the opera house in Palermo is to be aggressively unthinking about Italy and Italian culture. You just don't do that. *Peter Grimes* is a wonderful opera and in Covent Garden they fill every seat. But in Palermo it was a flop. They filled about 20% of the seats and I'm sure most of them were given away. It was a shame.

The other thing which I feel about the British Council which I took up with them as well was the question that, if you go to any cultural manifestation by

any French organisation – an orchestra, a choir, a gallery, a museum, anything – it's all channelled through the cultural section of the French Embassy, and the French Ambassador will do his stuff. He'll go up to Turin and give a reception for the Lyons Symphony Orchestra. In Britain's case, and subject again to the qualification I make of my not being up to date, the British Council will inform the Ambassador of Italian-connected events which they are funding or participating in, but there is no clearing-house for organisations arranging a cultural event dealing with Italy which is not being funded or organised by the British Council. It's an absurdity. So you have the nonsense of symphony orchestras coming to Turin to play, and the British Ambassador not being informed until two days before their coming. This is a waste of a cultural opportunity; a big mistake. I wrote a letter to the president of the British Council, whom I happened to know personally, and suggested the Council should circulate the orchestras, galleries and museums which were big enough to mount such an event and ask them please to tell the embassy. Then you have a monthly update of events. I was told that it was all too difficult because there were so many organisations. Disappointing. We really ought to be more professional about cultural events. The French do it far better than we do.

MM: They maximise their opportunities, and quite rightly. Are there other points?

PF: Only one other point, I think. I was non-resident Ambassador in Tirana for most of my period in Rome. The deal was that there was a young man, normally a young man, a Grade 5 officer in his late twenties, early thirties, in Tirana in my time. I would come out to Tirana every three months or so when there was some particular reason to go or some particularly heavy instructions to carry out. I came to the conclusion that for a young man (or woman) the job of being the Resident Chargé and therefore actually ambassador most of the time, was an amusing, interesting and responsible one, and better than he or she would get for another twenty years probably. They did it so amazingly well. I understand that giving someone young real responsibility happens rather more these days. So much the better. I wrote a letter to Malcolm Rifkind when he finally gave the Albanians a resident Ambassador, to say that

we'd been extraordinarily well served by the series of young officers. The experience suggested that, if you get the person in the right place, you can operate on the basis of a very mean or lean organisation. A bright man or woman who can do a terrific job without having a great heavy structure.

MM: So they were well chosen to be there. Or perhaps even trained by the experience to achieve better.

PF: Amazingly well chosen to be on their own. I hope they enjoyed it because they were certainly very good.

MM: As you've already made clear, the Italians do have their own way of dealing with Ambassadors.

PF: The only other thing I'd like to say is about the infrastructure of the Rome embassy. When Mrs Thatcher went out to Rome for the first time in about 1981 or 1982, when she'd been Prime Minister for only a couple of years, she found that the Villa Wolkonsky, the Residence, was undergoing a sort of planning blight. The Treasury was fighting with the Foreign Office about whether the Porta Pia site, which is where the Chancery is, or the Villa Wolkonsky site, where the Residence is, should be sold. They wanted to sell one or the other. Mrs Thatcher apparently said that Villa Wolkonsky was an inestimable asset to the presentation of the British in Rome, and that we should keep it. That was that. Then work was put in hand to build staff flats in the gardens and convert buildings for staff flats, so that we could justify having both sites: one the Chancery and the other being the Residence with staff accommodation, not in the big house but around the very large gardens. I hear that this question has been reopened. Personally I am very much on Lady Thatcher's side here, I think that in a country with people as interested in *figura* as the Italians, it would be mad to give up the Residence and go and live in a three-bedroomed villa in the suburbs. You won't get the Italians to come.

MM: It would be taken as an indication that we no longer care about them and that we no longer matter.

PF: That's exactly what it would be. And the amount you would get from selling the Villa Wolkonsky – I assume you would not be allowed to develop the site so you could only sell it to another country as an embassy - would not make a great difference to FCO finances. How much would you get? Who's in the market? There's not going to be huge competition; if you got £10m quid for it, it would be surprising. How far does £10m go?

Unless you have any questions, I think that's just about it.

MM: No, I think that covers the ground very nicely. Thank you very much indeed.

Transcribed by Joanna Buckley