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British Diplomatic Oral History Programme

SIR RICHARD BEST

Interview by John Hutson. Tuesday 5th March 1996.

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JH: Can I ask you first, Dick, just for the record, your full name and date and place of birth?

RB: My name is Richard Radford Best. I was born in Worthing, West Sussex, on the 28th of July 1933. I was educated locally at Worthing High School and subsequently at University College London where I took a B.A. in History.

JH: Thank you. And now, can you tell us how you landed in this career or how you chose it or how it chose you?

RB: Well, I landed in this career almost by accident. When I joined the Home Civil Service after my National Service I applied to join the Commonwealth Relations Office. In fact, I was assigned to the Home Office where I stayed for nearly 10 years. Towards the end of that period I was in the Nationality Department and one of my duties was to lecture to courses of aspiring Consuls on British Nationality Law. I was much interested by what they were doing and when the opportunity came through a trawl following the Plowden Report to apply to join the newly formed Diplomatic Service I decided to take the plunge and I must say I have not regretted for a day doing so.

JH: Well, that is a little unusual -maybe you will be able to give us some thoughts on the two Civil Services - home and abroad - later on. However could you at this point tell us about your KCVO.

RB: Well, yes, I must say that this came as a great surprise to me. I was Her Majesty's Ambassador in Reykjavik at the time of the 1990 State Visit which went fairly well and at the close of proceedings, to my astonishment, one of

the Equerries muttered to me that there would be "sword play". I wasn't quite sure of what the code was, so I didn't even dare to tell my wife. Much to our astonishment I was given the accolade by Her Majesty. So that is the story of my KCVO. Nothing to do with seniority; I just happened to be the man in charge at the time a State Visit to Iceland took place.

JH: I see. Well, that is a frank story and perhaps we can come back to your time in Iceland later. However, let's now begin a bit nearer the beginning and you may wish to say something about your time in the Home Office, but, if not, let us keep to the main subject by talking about your time, I think, first of all in the Colonial Office and subsequently in the Diplomatic Service. What about your first time as a rather older new entrant to the Colonial Office in 1966-68.

RB: Well, thank you, John. - It was actually the Commonwealth Relations Office for a fortnight followed by the Commonwealth Office; I was posted to Asia Economic Department which itself was soon to be rolled up to become part of South Asia Department. My job was as assistant desk officer for India, which was quite a task in itself. I found this extremely satisfying to have a block of work for which I was responsible, to which I was called in to talk to the Head of Department or even Under Secretaries, whereas by contrast in the Home Office, with its intense hierarchical system, at least in those days, at my second secretary level I should hardly ever have seen such august persons, so I did enjoy my introduction to the CRO and the Diplomatic Service life - it gave me chance, for example, to meet Lord Louis Mountbatten who was then the chairman of a Committee which was considering how the U.K. might commemorate the centenary of the birth of Mahatma Gandhi. I was the most junior member of the group which met, I think, once a month in Lord Mountbatten's house in the Mews behind the Albert Hall and I did actually have the rashness to suggest that a postage stamp might be issued as the U.K.'s contribution, or one of them, to the centenary; to my surprise and delight this was accepted and I always felt that this would have a particular place in my memories. The work of Asia Economic Department was very interesting to me; there was a great deal of work to do on remittances from India by people who had come to settle in the U.K.; there were some very long ongoing problems such as the

investment in the Calcutta tramways which I was to come back to later in my life. I had the privilege also of meeting a Major Ahuwahlia who was the first Indian to scale Mount Everest and, in fact, the reception for him in London was my first Diplomatic Party and so it does rather tend to stick in my memory. I was there for about two years before I was posted overseas as Second Secretary Information in the High Commission in Lusaka, Zambia.

JH: I see; and then your first posting abroad then came and it was to Lusaka in 1969.

RB: Yes, that was Second Secretary Information which was effectively Press Officer as I succeeded a First Secretary and the terms of my job were somewhat changed from his; at least, at first I was supposed to be mainly concerned with the Commercial side, but in fact I found myself almost fully engaged on Chancery type work and indeed, following an inspection half way through my posting to Zambia, I actually became Second Secretary Information/Chancery - just to legitimise my life style.

JH: Do you want to explain the term Chancery?

RB: Well this essentially referred to the political activities of the High Commission and as such tied in very closely with the press contacts which I made as Second Secretary Information. I had my first experience of being slightly in charge of an operation then in that our Information Secretary was 'out housed' down in the centre of Lusaka a busy shopping area; this in itself and I must tell you one amusing tale, supposedly amusing tale, we had evacuation instructions in case of riots or fire or other civil disorder; the main instruction was to wait until one heard the sound of the mob breaking in and then to disappear quietly through the side door into the abattoir next door, following which one was to mingle unobtrusively with the crowds in the street.

JH: I see, and was it easy to be unobtrusive? Were there a lot of other white people around?

RB: It wasn't too difficult although I imagine in those circumstances white faces would be few and far between; however, I was never forced to put this to the test. Although there were in our time in Zambia one or two occasions when physical violence was offered to the High Commission, usually in the form of demonstrations by students. I have to say, though, that the Zambian authorities were very quick to crush such demonstrations and were extremely brutal in their treatment of the students who demonstrated outside the High Commission; so, by and large, although there was in those days something of a security problem in Lusaka it was nothing like as bad as I understand it became in later years; this, of course, was in the days before the war in Rhodesia reached anything like its later proportions and my wife and I were quite amused when our houseboy disappeared for a fortnight, reappeared and said that he had been kidnapped by freedom fighters; well in 1972 we found this fairly hard to believe; however, we did reinstate him.

JH: Was Rhodesia or the Rhodesian problem a big factor in your work in Lusaka?

RB: Oh yes, it was the major political factor affecting Anglo Zambian relations during our time; there were various feelers to make peace with the Smith regime and indeed the Pearce Commission which was investigating the move towards independence in Rhodesia was then based in Zambia and this involved a great deal of contact for me, not only with the Zambian media, but also with many politicians.

JH: Well, this was also very useful experience and valuable work. Any other highlights from that posting?

RB: Well, they tend to be of rather a personal nature; for example, Hawker Siddeley were selling a HS 748, I think it was, aircraft to the Zambians. I arranged a press flight to go and circle Lake Kariba; to fly from Lusaka and then come back again I had the Zambian Minister of Information Mr. Sikota Wina who was a very powerful member of the ruling United Independence Party on board; the idea was that the pilot would fly down under strict instructions to Victoria Falls, stick to the north bank of Lake Kariba and come back; unfortunately, when he got in the air it was quite obvious that he was taking instructions from controls at Salisbury

airport and following that we actually flew around Lake Kariba along the Rhodesian bank before returning to Lusaka. I had visions of Rhodesian Hunter jets appearing in the sky and forcing us down for violating their air space and the end of my career at a very early stage! However, luckily nothing like that happened and we returned safely to Lusaka without any ill effects, personal or in general. Just one or two other points about our time in Lusaka: the Zambian Copper Mines, belonging to the Roan Selection Trust and Anglo American, were nationalised by the Zambians rather suddenly, I think it was in 1970, I did actually through my press contacts get a forewarning of this which I was able to pass on to the High Commissioner; it was all rather cloak and dagger; I actually received the Zambian government's instructions for the nationalisation of the mines from a press contact of mine, meeting him at midnight at a darkened crossroads; when I discovered later that he was actually an undercover agent for the Rhodesians and was expelled from Zambia I felt that I'd been sailing rather nearer to the wind than I'd realized; however, again I emerged unscathed; I think that is probably enough about Lusaka; I could go on for a long time; it is of course a most interesting area in which to travel.

JH: Perhaps we can come back to Sub-Saharan Africa subsequently as your career did, but your next move was a contrast, to the far north; you were posted to Stockholm in 1972, I believe .

RB: A characteristic change in my career from hot to cold; I was appointed First Secretary Economic and must say I felt rather daunted by the prospect as I was told by my High Commissioner in Lusaka that I would be expected to advise my new Ambassador from the start and to be an expert on this rather complex subject in this advanced economy. I knew very little about economics and I was lucky enough to be sent by the Office on an International Economics Course at Queen Elizabeth House in Oxford before we went to Stockholm, but I went pretty unprepared and ,as with many of us in our job, it took me a few months to get the main aspects of my job under my belt, so to speak, but it was a most interesting period. I must say I have been very fortunate in all my postings in that respect.

JH: Yes, it is a feature of our job; I think you are only really good in our job if you are able to pick up the details and the inward nature of a new job in a new

place fairly fast. I think that is quite important and you certainly had plenty of practice. Please go on about Stockholm.

RB: I couldn't agree more with what you say; adaptability is the key to our kind of job. As First Secretary Economic I had a lot of dealings with Swedish Bankers as well as the Government Departments concerned with the economy. British politicians were particularly interested in how the social democratic miracle was working out in Sweden during the period of the Heath government and you will remember that I was in Stockholm from 1972-76 so during the first part the Labour Party was in opposition in Britain and leaders of the Labour Party such as Mr. Gerald Kauffman, Mr. Michael Meacher and Mr. Peter Shore were frequent visitors to Sweden; so were Conservative politicians such as Chris Chataway and I had the opportunity of escorting many of these to meetings with their Swedish opposite numbers. I also had the opportunity of a lot of contact with Swedish Trade Unionists and I should perhaps say in parentheses here and I should perhaps say here that I owe much of this to my predecessor the late Jonathan Longbottom who joined the Foreign Service in 1945 after the Second World War as a locally engaged member of staff and was actually recruited to the Diplomatic Service shortly before he retired in 1972 and he was able to hand on to me some extremely interesting and valuable contacts. One of the tasks which I inherited was lecturing to Swedish Trade Unionists on the British Economy and this as you can imagine in the days of the early 70's was no easy thing; I put all our troubles down to the slow start made during the Industrial Revolution and the expenditure of our blood and treasure during the Second World War; however, that is in parenthesis. In fact, these were the days when British exports to Sweden were booming and as Economic Secretary I was a member of the Commercial Department; stepping slightly outside my backroom role, I was in charge of a British shopping week at the Täby Centrum development in the north of Stockholm; this proved to be quite a success, great fun, and we all enjoyed this very much as well as helping to boost British exports to Sweden at the time. My job involved a great deal of travelling from Lulea in the far north, where the Swedish steel industry was based, right down Gothenburg and Malmö in the south of Sweden. The job had a great deal of varied interest not least when one had the opportunity of attending the Nobel prize-giving which was quite something. Seeing the commemoration and mourning for the death of old King Gustav VI and the amazing revival of the enthusiasm for the monarchy in the person of his grandson and

successor, King Carl XVI Gustav who is of course, the present King of Sweden. One particular event, again nothing to do with economics, which I should mention was the attack on the West German Embassy by the Baader Meinhof terrorists 1975; it so happened that my office in the British Embassy overlooked the West German Embassy and I did actually see the Baader Meinhof people go in. That was a day of extreme tension, ending up with the setting fire to the West German Embassy and the murder of a number of German colleagues including the Commercial Counsellor and the Defence Attaché, both of whom as it happened had been at a party at our house a night or two before. I think that this is another example of the way in which people in our Service can see at very close hand some of the less palatable aspects of life in Europe in the 20th Century. After 4 years we felt ourselves really at home in Sweden as one sometimes does in these postings; we made many valuable and genuine Swedish friends and were quite sorry to leave. Somewhat to my astonishment I was awarded the MBE after leaving Stockholm, supposedly in connection with the British Trade week at Täby but I wondered in fact if it was due to the combination of my being the chairman of the Embassy Bar Committee and a member of the Church Council of the English Church in Stockholm!

JH: Well, yes; as in fact they never tell you exactly what these awards are for, it may be that your self deprecating interpretation is quite wrong.

Well, however that may be, I think you were rounding off your time in Stockholm and you moved back to London this time and you worked in the F.C.O. for about three years from 76-79, is that right?

RB: Yes that's right John. In fact I was in Personnel Operations Department for the whole of this period. I had two jobs, one following the other; first of all I was assistant to the Area Officer for Home Postings and then on promotion to DS 5 I became Head of Grade 9/10 Management Unit responsible for the career development and the postings of all the junior officers in the FCO. I found this very interesting and rewarding and later in my career I saw some of the officers I had dealings with go on to quite considerably better things. I found that the work was hard and the hours were long as one does working in the FCO and I wasn't sorry when the time came in 1979 for my next overseas posting.



JH: Again rather a contrast; your next stop was New Delhi, was it not?

RB: That's right. I was First Secretary Commercial in New Delhi from 1979-83. The Commercial Department in New Delhi was a pretty large operation, as you can imagine; it was headed by a Counsellor Economic and Commercial and I was in a sense the manager of the Department and very interesting and satisfying I found this. Of course I had direct commercial responsibilities in terms of trade promotion but in general I was more involved with the visits of Trade Missions or leading British industrialists than with the day to day activities of the Trade Promotion work of the High Commission. Again, this was all very interesting and involved a lot of travelling in the area. I suppose the highlights must be my visits to Madras, Bombay and Calcutta. At times I was able to see a good deal of what was happening on the political scene as well. At the time of our arrival in September 1979 Mrs. Gandhi was fighting her way back onto the political stage and by the beginning of 1980 she had become Prime Minister once again, taking her place in the Republic Day procession alongside the principal foreign visitor who that year was President Mitterand, a very interesting time indeed in India as the Congress Party reestablished itself. Very soon we started making preparations for a visit by the Prince of Wales who I think was accompanied by a team of a dozen kings of British Industry, the chairmen of the major nationalised industries as they were then, and other principal British Companies. A rather interesting feature was the way in which senior members of the High Commission staff were told off to accompany the Prince to different parts of India and my slice was to go to the South to Madras and Bangalore where some of the major Indian industries are situated particularly on the electronics side, but there were other aspects as well and I shall never forget an occasion in Madras when Indian forces beat the Retreat along the sea front by Fort St. George - it was a cloudy overcast sort of day but just as Gandhi's favourite hymn 'Abide with me ' was being sung the sun came out and the clouds parted over the Bay of Bengal and I don't think that there could have been anybody there who didn't feel very moved by this occasion. During my time in India we had other prominent visitors on the Commercial side and it was interesting when the then Mr Denis Thatcher accompanied the Prime Minister and came immediately from the aircraft after a 12 hour flight to hold a reception for prominent Indian businessmen and impressed them all with his knowledge and stamina; I think that this was back in 1981. We were in India during the time of the Falklands War and it was quite

interesting to see the way in which the reaction of Indians, particularly in the business and military circles, and the two often intermingle, with which we had dealings in Delhi moved rapidly to the British side and whenever there was a victory or indeed a loss by the United Kingdom forces in the Falklands the Indians would refer to "we" and "us" and associated themselves completely with Britain. It was interesting too to have the opportunity to see the making of the film of the life of Mahatma Gandhi and my wife and I were both lucky enough to play the part of extras in that film and we actually gained, or I did, a little notoriety by having my name and face on the front page of the Indian newspaper The Statesman and it so happened that a couple of days earlier the Head of Chancery had issued an instruction that under no circumstance were members of the staff to take part in the film as extras; however, my session had already been shot and when the High Commissioner himself congratulated me on my appearance and believed it had done nothing but good for the British - Indian relationship I was much relieved. India is and always will be a fascinating country and the opportunities to travel were devoured in a way that one would expect. My wife and I were invited to visit the Indian oil fields in Assam; we were the first foreigners, in fact, to be permitted to enter that State of India for at least a year, because of the state of rebellion which existed there and it took a long time to get permits which were in fact issued half an hour before we were due to depart. We went via Calcutta and went on up to Digboi in the far North of Assam; this was an extremely interesting experience indeed and we were privileged to see not only the oil fields but also to be flown by helicopter back to Gauhati, the capital of Assam, across a Game Reserve where some rare white rhino were to be observed. We were taken up to Shillong in the Hills which looks down on the one side on Assam and on the other towards Bangladesh; we thoroughly enjoyed that journey and I think it helped to maintain the influence of British industry with the Indian oil industry. My next connection with Calcutta was of a rather deeper nature; I was asked by the High Commissioner to take over as the acting Deputy High Commissioner in the absences on sickness of the incumbent and on leave of his deputy. I was in Calcutta for some three months in 1971 and I found that the experience was extremely enriching.

May I just break in there; when we say Deputy High Commissioner, we in fact mean the equivalent of a very senior kind of Consul General.

RB: Yes, that's right yes. In fact the man in charge; he is a deputy to the High Commissioner in Delhi but he is the man in charge in Calcutta. Returning to Delhi I continued in the Commercial Department for some 6 months during which time the negotiations were completed between Northern Engineering Industries Ltd. and the Indian Government for the building of a power station at Rihand in Bihar State. Again we were sorry to leave a country of immense interest but our time came in 1983 and we returned once more to London and I returned once more to Personnel Operations Department, this time as Assistant Head of Department. I enjoyed this posting very much, seeing things from a slightly different angle from my earlier posting in the Department. One of the attractions was the system of pastoral visits to some of the more distant or difficult posts which had been inaugurated; I took part in one such visit to the posts in Southern Africa or South Africa and the neighbouring High Commission territories of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland; they all felt somewhat beleaguered at the time and it was very interesting to see at first hand the relationships between the races in South Africa. However, my term in POD was a fairly brief one. It so happened that my next posting came about as the result of an accident. It so happened that John Massingham, at that time the only Hausa speaking officer, had been selected to succeed Brian Austen as Deputy High Commissioner and Head of Post at Kaduna in Northern Nigeria. You will recall perhaps that Umaro Dikko the Nigerian politician was discovered in a crate at Stansted Airport at that time in 1984 and it so happened that earlier in his career John Massingham had been a close friend of Dikko and it was thought that a posting at that time would be inappropriate and cause some offence to the Nigerians. I was therefore selected in his place for posting on promotion to Kaduna. Supposedly Dikko was being kidnapped on a contract job by the Israeli Secret Service working for the Nigerians; be that as it may, it was my reason for becoming Head of Post at Kaduna; this turned out to be a spell of four years which I count myself very lucky to have spent in such an interesting Country south of the Sahara. My area of responsibility in Nigeria was something like 60% of the land area and 40% of the population so it was a fairly massive job.

JH: That's of the whole of Nigeria?

RB: That's of the whole of Nigeria.

JH: I see.

RB: Of course the Northern part is populated largely by Hausa-speaking Fulani but also by some the more mixed tribes, scattered remnants of tribes in the centre of the country, and then of course down in the South in the rest of Nigeria you have the Yoruba and Ibo who are never on the best of terms with their Hausa brothers in the North. We had a beautiful house and I think that it is worth mentioning it because it was something of a gem of Colonial architecture in Kaduna with 5 acres of garden; of course the house came into the possession of the Nigerian Government or rather the Northern Nigerian Provincial Government at Independence but they were very very pro British and the story goes that when the Nigerians were considering a Residence for the British Deputy High Commissioner the Northern Region premier, the Sardauna of Sokoto, turned to one of the leading local pundits, Alhaji Isa Kaita, who said we must have the best house there is and turned to the Minister of Labour and said 'your house will do' and this how it came into the possession of HMG, at least on a long lease until 2000.

The job in Northern Nigeria involved a lot of travelling and indeed this was part of my remit. I was told by Johnny Johnson the Under Secretary before going to Kaduna that I should show the flag which seemed a little anachronistic to me, but nevertheless I spent a lot of my time visiting the Military Governors of the States in the North and also the local traditional rulers, the Emirs and particularly the Sultan of Sokoto, Sir Abubakar III, who was at that time the longest reigning ruler in the British Commonwealth and I was in fact the last foreign diplomat to see him before he died in 1988 shortly before we left Nigeria.

We were in Nigeria during a period of some economic depression and during a period of strict military rule punctuated by coups d'état as one General after another succeeded in taking over power from his predecessor; nevertheless, the structure of life for the Nigerians as a whole in the North probably changed very little and, as I say, the Emirs retained great power and influence. The greatest of these was the Emir of Kano in his huge Palace where he was said to maintain a staff of some 400 people and of course had responsibility for the Old City of Kano and probably fed thousands of people from his own pocket every day. We had a number of important visitors to Northern Nigeria during our time there - a whole

succession of Ministers including Baroness Chalker, Lord Belstead, Mr. Kenneth Clarke who was then a Minister of State at the Department of Trade and Industry. We had a promotion of British agricultural machinery and equipment in Kano for which he was the principal guest. Lord Belstead, Lady Trumpington, Mr. Tim Eggar and Mr. John Stanley were other Ministers who visited and the prize was when Mrs. Thatcher herself visited in the early days of 1988 and was the guest of honour at a tremendous celebration parade or durbah given by the Emir of Kano; this was the celebrated occasion seen on British television when Mr. Bernard Ingham struggled with a Nigerian security guard who was trying to bar his entrance to the viewing platform. We also had occasion to see at first hand the clash between Christian and Moslem elements in Nigeria - Kaduna being very much on the border line between the countries dominated by the two faiths and numerous episodes of Church or Mosque burning, indiscriminate shootings by the military, who tended to be Christians, took place in Kaduna and more particularly in the town of Zaria - the Emirate of Zaria some 50 miles to the north of Kaduna. Life was very much as it would probably have been 30 or 40 or 50 years earlier; when travelling, always accompanied by representatives of the local Nigerian State Government, one would frequently be asked to stop in a village to inspect progress made in some form of agricultural or well digging and sometimes to respond to speeches by the village headman; of course one had to be somewhat circumspect in what one said. One of the more satisfying aspects was to be able to administer part of the Heads of Mission gifts scheme and my wife and I were delighted when this gave us the opportunity to take medical equipment, particularly sterilizers, to hospitals in remote parts of the country; these were used in leprosy hospitals and in hospitals where they carried out repairs on unfortunate women who had been subjected to female circumcision practices at a very early age. British industry still had quite a part to play in that part of Nigeria; the influence still existed over some of the electrical supply undertakings, in cement factories and in the production of bicycles, which are still very frequently used in the North of Nigeria. We also played a part in the effort to stem the flow of locusts from the north from the Sahara area and also the spread of the desert; this gave a particular insight into the work of the aid agencies and the work of the VSOs who were particularly prominent and in the hospitals. Our last prominent visitor was Baroness Trumpington, then an Agricultural Minister, who came to a promotion of British agricultural machinery and equipment which we sponsored at the Hilton Hotel

in the new capital Abuja. We escorted Lady Trumpington to the far north of Nigeria, to the Emirate of Katsina, where she was able to inspect forestry and wind break projects before returning to the United Kingdom. My own posting ended soon afterwards and I returned to the U.K., knowing that my next posting would be another transition from the hot to the cold to become Her Majesty's Ambassador in Reykjavik. To my surprise and delight I was awarded a CBE on leaving Nigeria and felt that I had perhaps been unduly rewarded for what had been a rewarding experience in itself . I knew during the course of my briefing for Reykjavik that Her Majesty the Queen was planning a State Visit to that country in the following year - we went in 1989 - and the State Visit was in 1990; however, this did give us enough time to settle down in this most fascinating to my mind of all countries in Northern Europe. A tiny population and a land size about the size of England or Ireland plus Wales. A land of ice and fire with volcanos, huge waterfalls, enormous deserts and areas of lava fields, famous for its fishing industry; we just didn't know what to expect; in fact the hospitality of the Icelanders was tremendous and there was no undercurrent of ill feeling as a result of the earlier cod wars. The Icelanders had of course emerged victorious from the cod wars which no doubt lent a certain amount of emollience to their attitude; we found them, as I said, to be extremely hospitable and friendly and they couldn't have been more helpful over the preparations for the State Visit. In fact, Her Majesty's visit was preceded shortly after our arrival by one by the Pope, the first time he had been to Iceland which is a predominately Lutheran country. The weather was extremely cold although the Pope arrived in early summer; all the foreign Ambassadors together with the Icelandic Cabinet were drawn up on parade at the Airport to greet him; I noticed that only the Icelandic Prime Minister and I were wearing suits and no overcoats; I was frozen - I asked the Prime Minister the secret; he said 'Oh well, make sure you wear plenty of underwear ' - this was a lesson which I very quickly learned as a newcomer to Iceland. The usual rounds of credentials and calls on Ministers and so on took place and we were very soon involved after that with preparations for the Queen's State Visit, preceded by a reconnaissance from Buckingham Palace led by Sir Robert Fellows who was then the Queen's Assistant Private Secretary. The whole operation was one of extreme detail - not least preparations for the docking of the Royal Yacht 'Britannia' in Reykjavik harbour. A survey ship was sent out for

this purpose, although ostensibly it was simply remapping part of the northern seas and in fact it was discovered that there would just be room for 'Britannia' in Reykjavik harbour with a few inches to spare; the escorting destroyer which was supposed to keep 'Britannia' under surveillance the whole time was moored in a newer harbour a couple of miles down the coast. Part of the ground work was to gain the confidence and friendship of President Vigdis Finnbogdottir, a lady of considerable character and who was extremely well disposed as it happened towards Her Majesty and the whole concept of the visit, we were able to win her particular affection through making a donation of some thousands of pounds through the Heads of Missions gift scheme to buy saplings for planting in her favourite project which was known as the Forest of Friendship - a replanting scheme near to the site of the ancient Icelandic Parliament. All the preparations were eventually made and the necessary arrangements were made for receptions, including one at the Residence itself . The Queen stayed on 'Britannia', of course, and fall back preparations to accommodate her in the main Icelandic Hotel had 'Britannia' for some reason or other not been available were stood down. The Queen held a number of such Receptions - one of the more interesting locations being at Höfði, the house where the Gorbachev/Regan summit took place in 1986; this wooden house, situated on Reykjavik bay was interestingly enough the residence of the British Consul General to Iceland, then part of the Danish Kingdom before the Second World War. From 1940 when a Resident Minister was appointed it was the Residence of the Minister and was finally sold by HMG in 1952 at the instance of the then Minister John Greenaway who genuinely believed the house was haunted. The house was purchased by Reykjavik City Council who now use it as a Reception centre and the Queen's host on this occasion was Mr. David Oddsson who subsequently became Prime Minister of Iceland. The State Visit passed off well and concluded with a Banquet on 'Britannia'. The backdrop was the sight across Reykjavik Bay of the twin peaked volcano of Snaefell and, of course, the Royal Marines beat the retreat on the quayside to the delight of a modest crowd of Icelanders and of Americans from the NATO base at Keflavik.

One or two other memoirs which I should perhaps commit to tape. One was the return to Keflavik Airport for the Queen's departure when the motorcade passing through a volcanic region stopped at the water spout at Krisuvik. Out on foot, the

party found themselves enveloped in a cloud of steam and sulphurous odours; however, this was all taken in good part and the Queen and the President of Iceland shared an umbrella, some memories, and I think a few laughs on that occasion. There can be no doubt that the State Visit to this small country was greatly appreciated; the Icelanders revelled in the opportunity to display their friendship to what is after all one of their NATO allies and a former fellow member of EFTA. The occasion was taken to generously decorate the visitors with their own Order of the Icelandic Falcon and they in return were liberally sprinkled with equivalent British honours. Relations with Iceland at this time were fairly good; there was some feeling about the hostility in the United Kingdom to whaling and a final sailing of the Icelandic whaling fleet in 1989 for quote scientific purposes unquote brought in a fixed catch; however, this did not impair the warmth of the relationship for the State Visit and the Icelanders subsequently maintained their independence of view, although they haven't actually followed the Norwegians in sending their whaling fleet to sea again. Commercial relations between the two countries were good, although clearly Iceland was an importer on a fairly small scale; nevertheless, British companies had a fair share of the market and Britain was the largest purchaser of Icelandic fish during this period. The House of Commons Select Committee on Trade and Industry visited Iceland during my time there and again were given all possible help by the Icelanders in a very warm spirit of friendship - they enjoyed the opportunity to visit Gullfoss to see the waterfall and enjoyed the warm hospitality that was readily offered wherever they went.

JH: And then on your return to Britain in 1991 that I believe was the moment of your retirement, although certainly not to be inactive. I wonder if there are any more general matters that you would like to record your views on about your career in general and perhaps, in particular, your experience of what we in Britain call the Sub Continent - India, Pakistan and Bangladesh now and of course the continent of Africa where you have served twice - once on either side of the Equator. Britain's relations with these areas since the dissolution of the Empire into the Commonwealth have had their ups and downs, have they not?

RB: Well, I should like to say that perhaps my career gives an example very much in the middle grades of the Service can have a satisfying, interesting and constructive



time as a member of the Service. You ask particularly about the relationship with the Sub Continent; here I believe that the British experience, if you like to put it that way, has been very much absorbed into the consciousness and the history of India. The term "the Raj" enjoyed a certain renaissance during my time in India; people amongst the governing classes in India looked back with some affection even to the time when they were more closely related with Britain and at all times appeared to strive not to lose this connection - I mentioned incidents during the Falklands War when the Indians appeared to be very much on our side and certainly the Indian forces and Civil Service, the Government Institutions and the Parliament are all modelled on what they perceive to be the British example - in fact an example stemming back now fifty or even more years, but the connection is a very strong one and will probably not fade from Indian consciousness for many many years. I feel too that Britain has had a great advantage in its dealings with Africa north and south of the Equator because of the contribution, now much more rationally observed, which our forebears were able to make to the development of countries such as Zambia and Nigeria. I was delighted as a young officer when posted to Zambia to be able to see examples of work which a great-uncle of mine had done as Provincial Commissioner in Barotseland; I saw the registers of the school which he established down there and I think that this link with Britain as part of the Commonwealth is something which is still enduring. It is perhaps a pity that the FCO didn't decide that they should establish a cadre of people specialising in African affairs; I think that this might well have been useful during the transitional time between Independence and the realignment of British interest on the European scene rather than on the Commonwealth scene. It has been a privilege, as I think I have said, to be able to observe the world on such a wide stage as a member of the Diplomatic Service; I feel that it was inevitable that the Foreign Service and the Commonwealth Relations Service should amalgamate sooner rather than later and I can only look back upon my time with considerable happiness and remarkably few regrets.

JH: Thank you very much. Your time in Nigeria obviously made a deep impression on you and I wonder if you would like to say something about how you see developments in the near future in that country in the light of what seems to an ignorant outsider like myself to be a pretty powerless and troubled state, even for an oil-rich Country, perhaps particularly for an oil-rich Country.

RB: Well anything that I say is likely to be proved completely wrong and probably in the near future; the essence of Nigeria as such is the unity of the very different ethnic groups, with very different economic reserves and indeed different religions, different outlooks and the question is whether Nigeria is likely to remain together even. Myself, I believe, that it will; I think that there is a genuine desire on the part of Nigerians in all parts of the country to sustain this unity; this was evident, not only amongst the ruling factions in the Army but also amongst academics and curiously amongst the traditional Rulers as well - I found, visiting the courts of the Emirs in the North, that they were frequently the recipients of visits and certainly of gifts from their counterparts down in Yorubaland and from amongst the Ibos - and indeed it was rather embarrassing as they would occasionally try to transfer these gifts to my wife and myself as visitors and indeed to other people, as well, of course; but my feeling is that, in spite of the differences which are outlined, Nigeria is likely to remain an entity; I think there is a will for some kind of central Government and the building of a new capital in Abuja is a symbol of this and it is interesting that successive regimes since the 1970's have revived the concept although it appears to have fallen down from time to time and to be neglected; successive military Governments have turned to the Abuja concept as a means of reinforcing the unity of the country and I, myself, see a much greater likelihood of Nigeria coming together - I think, in fact, through this period of extremely harsh military rule there will remain a thread of desire for something which is more democratic and more acceptable to the mass of the people. There is a tremendous spirit of unity and movement towards an increase in the standard of living amongst Nigerians in all parts of the Country and I believe that Nigeria will get through its present difficult period and may well work out its own form of civilian Government; whether it would be a democracy in the sense that we regard a democracy, I really don't know; I think I would doubt it, but I think that the concept of either an iron military dictatorship or an inefficient military dictatorship will pass and something better will eventually emerge.

JH: Thank you.

End of recording.