

## **BDOHP Interview Index and Biographical Details**

### **Sir (Albert) James Craig GCMG**

Biographical Details with (on right) relevant pages in the interview:

Born 13 July 1924

Educated at Liverpool Institute High School and Queen's College, Oxford

Married 1st, 1952, Margaret Hutchinson (*d* 2001); three *s* one *d*; 2nd, 2002, Bernadette Hartley Lane

Student, Cairo University, 1950–51	pp 4-5
Lecturer in Arabic, Durham University, 1948–55	pp 3-5
Seconded to FO, 1955 as Principal Instructor at Middle East Centre for Arab Studies, Lebanon	pp 5-6
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**RECOLLECTIONS OF SIR JAMES CRAIG GCMG RECORDED AND  
TRANSCRIBED BY ABBEY WRIGHT, NOVEMBER & DECEMBER 2013**

AW: This is Abbey Wright speaking with Sir James Craig on the 12<sup>th</sup> November 2013. James, we're going to start a little bit before you joined the Foreign Office because you want to talk about the part of your life before you joined which marks you out from some of your colleagues. Where would you like to begin?

JC: Well, with my birth. I was born in Liverpool. My father, who was also James Craig, had been born in the Royal Village of Scone near Perth. He joined the army on his seventeenth birthday in 1914 and because he had faked his age he was not sent to the trenches with the Black Watch which was the normal procedure for people joining in Perth, so he was never in any danger and he finished the war at Aldershot and there he met my mother who, although her mother was Scottish, had been brought up in Liverpool. So these Scottish connections have always been very important to me. I used to spend every summer with my grandparents and later on, after they died, with my aunt and uncle in Scone or in Perth and all my life I've been attracted to the idea of Scotland. I have a Scottish name and I enjoyed being in Scotland a great deal.

I went to school at the normal age of four and a half to a little Church of England school, stayed for a year or two and then moved to a more senior school and won a special scholarship to the Liverpool Institute for Boys which was founded in 1825. That was when the idea of a university first occurred to me. I was ten at the time and the Headmaster was an Oxonian and he encouraged me. There was a tradition in the school that half a dozen people would go to Oxford or Cambridge and several more would go to Liverpool University.

We were very poor. My father was often out of work in the thirties but both my parents encouraged me and made it easy for me to do my homework and I did pretty well at school. I was younger than all the people in my class and eventually I won an exhibition to The Queen's College Oxford. It was a lucky thing that I went to Queens because Queens, from its foundation in 1341, had always been connected with Cumberland, Westmoreland and north Yorkshire and so there weren't any Old Etonians there. There were one or two from minor public schools. I enjoyed Oxford very much. I didn't do anything much except work. I didn't join the Union Debating Society. I did well. At the end of my first year I had taken

the normal classical course, much reduced because of the War. Then I was for the army and I spent a year in the army and then had some mysterious illness which was traced back, possibly, no one was ever certain, to TB when I had been a child.

So I went back to Oxford just before the War ended. The atmosphere at the time was that everyone wanted to do something new, fresh. I didn't want to go on to the second half of the classical course which was philosophy and ancient history. I thought at first of law and my moral tutor, who was a Scotsman said "Do you want to be a barrister or solicitor?" I said: "a barrister". He said "Well, do you have any money?" and I said "not a bean", "You can't be a barrister then" he said! In that case I said I wanted to learn a language as I'd always been interested in language, grammar, phonetics and so on. So I said "I can't do any of the orthodox languages, French, German. What do you have that I can start at the beginning?" He said "There is a choice of three, Arabic, Chinese or Russian". He didn't mention, as he should have done, Celtic Languages which almost certainly I would have chosen and then I'd have spent my life collecting folk songs in the Outer Hebrides!

So I said "Chinese", and he said "No, you can't do Chinese because the professor of Chinese has not yet returned from his war time duties. So it's either Russian or Arabic." I thought Arabic sounded more exotic, more original, so I chose Arabic and found that there was only one man otherwise doing Arabic in my first year and he gave up after six months. I was interested, didn't work fiercely hard but I got a First at the end.

My parents were very supportive. I was told that at Oxford I would need £225 a year. I had an exhibition from Queens of £50 a year, a scholarship from Liverpool City Council of £100, £50 exhibition from the school, so I had £200. I went to the headmaster and said "I need £225 and I've only got £200 and by the way that is approximately 6 times what my father earns in his weekly wage". He said "Leave it with me" and a week later he sent for me and said "I've discovered a charitable foundation which offers scholarships to the families of people who served in the First World War". So I got £25 from them and that was enough to live on. There was an unexpected supplement in that the Army decided to award me a pension on the grounds that my condition had been damaged by the places where I was stationed. So £2 a week meant £325 and I had no further money troubles. The pension stopped after 10 years or so but it had got me through.

Then when I had graduated I went to the Professor of Arabic and asked "What should I do now?" He said "I've got you a job, or the prospects of a job, at Durham University as a

lecturer in Arabic". There had been a government committee worried about the absence of people who knew unorthodox languages. It was called the Scarbrough Committee after the Earl of Scarbrough, and Durham had benefited by this. It had started Arabic and Persian and later on was to take up Chinese and Japanese. I said to the Professor "That's fine but I have never been to the Middle East and so I can't speak Arabic". He said "Well, you go up to Durham for an interview and I suggest you say to them that after two or three years they should give you a year off, with finance, to go to the Middle East". I said "This is very difficult, am I supposed to say to the Vice Chancellor, Sir James Duff, that I would graciously deign to accept their offer of a post if they would give me a year off after two or three years?" He said "They've no one else because the post which has been set up has not yet produced a crop". So I went up and it was a typical Oxford ploy. It had all been arranged. So I went up to Durham and after two years I went to Cairo University and spent a year there. I was lucky that on the way out to Cairo I met a young Arab student who was also going to study engineering at Cairo University. He said to me "I am hoping with a few friends to rent a flat, would you like to join us?" and I said "Like a shot". I spent the academic year in a rather squalid flat with four Arab students. For the first month, because I'd never heard a word of spoken Arabic, (AW: *your studies had all been on paper?* JC: *yes, literature and history*), it was difficult, but after the first month I knew enough to stagger along and by the end of the year I was fluent in a mixture of dialects. I was surrounded by shops and buses and so on where I heard the Egyptian dialect, three of the students were Palestinians and one was Syrian. So I learnt a mixture of dialects and travelled widely in the Arab world so I got some idea of the variety of tongues which the Arabs spoke.

I remember that the first place that I landed after my first flight was in Damascus. The next morning I went to the money changer and presented him with my traveller's cheques and addressed him in French. This was 1950. He replied in fluent Arabic and I didn't understand a single word. So I spoke again in French and he spoke again in Arabic and this time I recognised, or thought I did, one word: *mulazim*, a lieutenant. But I realised that I was getting nowhere so I went along to the British Council and in the reading room there were 30 or 40 Arab students, mostly Palestinians, they were refugees, after the establishment of Israel in 1948. I went to the supervisor and explained my predicament and he called over two young people, I was then 22, and they were two or three years younger than me, and they explained what the money changer had said was not *mulazim* but *mu lazim* (not necessary). And I said "But it doesn't make sense to me he uses a word which you say means "not" and I

know three words in Arabic that means “not” but that’s not one of them”. And they roared with laughter and they said how curious that a man with a First in Arabic from one of the most famous universities in the world doesn’t know the word for “not” which children in Damascus use a hundred times a day! We went and had a cup of coffee and I discovered that one of the students was going to Cairo and that’s how I managed to get my foundation of colloquial Arabic.

Then I went back to Durham after a year and a quarter. Meanwhile I had visited the School of Arabic which the Foreign Office was running in a little village in the Lebanon called Shemlan. I had met an American who lived in the village and he wrote to me in 1955 and said: “I learn that the School”, which was called Middle East Centre for Arab Studies (MECAS), “requires a principal instructor and it seems to me that you have the necessary qualifications”. So I went to the authorities in Durham and asked if they would give me leave and they said yes. So I went out on the understanding that I would come back to Durham after two, or at the most, three years in Shemlan. Meanwhile when I got to Shemlan there were several Foreign Office students there who said “Why don’t you join the Foreign Service?” and I thought “Why not!”

I put my name down and got a letter from the Head of Personnel Department, Henniker-Major. He became Lord Henniker, but he’s now dead. He wrote me a letter saying “You are just the man we want but I’m afraid you are a fortnight too old for the age limit”. I showed this to the Foreign Office students who’d urged me to apply and one of them said “I used to work for Henniker-Major and I drafted this letter for people who were outside the age limit”. However the next day I got a telegram from Henniker-Major saying “Ignore my letter, second letter follows”. The letter came in two or three days and it said he had been talking to a member of the committee of people which admitted people to the competition and they had decided to ignore the age limit. So I went home and took the normal over-age entry competition and got in much to my surprise. So I stayed three years at Shemlan.

AW: How many years of that were Foreign Office?

### **1955 Principal Instructor MECAS**

JC: I went out in July 1955 and I joined the Foreign Office substantively in September 1956 and a new director was appointed, Donald Maitland. Immediately, he was called away. We

had the Suez incident and he was transferred temporarily to run the Arabic Radio in Cyprus. So I was left in charge of the place. The place had been neglected and I suggested various reforms and when Donald came back I found he was a man of great energy and hard work and he had had similar ideas and so we implemented them together. So we had almost two years working as a team. And then I went back and got my first job in the actual Foreign Office on the Sudan Desk in the old Africa Department.

AW: How did you find the Foreign Office students when you were at MECAS, were they a good bunch? Did they work hard?

JC: Yes, there were three or four of them. We worked in syndicates, old word for classes. Almost always one of them was at the top of the course, sometimes jointly with one of the oil company pupils or a banker. They were very good. Patrick Wright was one, Hookey Walker was another, who were easily the top of the course and had distinguished careers afterwards.

### **1958-62 Foreign Office**

I was pleased with my work at MECAS and when I got back I found the Foreign Office very odd. There was no training at all. You were sat down and told you were in charge of the Sudan. I sat there reading the book of Foreign Office regulations until someone said to me: "Do you realise that you have a tray on the central table?" And I said "What's a tray?" In it I found a number of documents which were enfolded in covering sheets of paper and one of them I remember was a telegram from our Ambassador in Khartoum called Sir Edwin Chapman-Andrews suggesting that we should give £5 million to help the budget in the Sudan. And I thought "What shall I do? Write I agree, signed J Craig"? And I then had to ask the people around about me who said "Well, first of all you must copy it to the Treasury and the Board of Trade". "How do I do that?" I said. And they told me.

AW: No training at all?

JC: None at all. But I picked it up despite everything. At the time I was 32 and everyone assumed I'd been in the Foreign Office since 22. On the telephone I learnt to say "Thank you, I'll call you back". It was difficult and after a few weeks I brought my wife to London, we had two children by then. We'd decided to buy a house and I said to her "I don't think I'm going to last very long in the Foreign Office, we'd better not buy a house which would

use up all our savings”. So we cancelled the house buying and continued to rent. It all worked out, I settled down and learned the ropes and I had one or two interesting passages.

The Crown Prince of Libya was invited and I was attached to him as interpreter. I had to go to Number 10 Downing Street and interpret between the Crown Prince and the Prime Minister who was Harold Macmillan. I remember Macmillan saying to me in his rather affectedly pompous way, “Look here interpreter, you don’t seem to be eating anything”. And I said “Well no Sir, it’s very difficult to eat when you are interpreting all the time”. He said, “That seems to me most unjust. Call over that waiter who looks so much like the Leader of the Opposition and order a glass of champagne”. And I can remember going up the stairs to dinner and Macmillan saying “These are all photographs of my predecessors as Prime Ministers” and I translated. Macmillan had added “a rather scruffy lot don’t you think” but I didn’t translate that. The final witticism was when we went out to get into the various cars in our procession and Macmillan put his hand on my shoulder and said “Thank you very much interpreter, you were splendid, as usual”. He had never set eyes on me before and I realised that politicians have to lead a very discreet life.

And so I finished my three years. I had a very interesting conversation with Henniker-Major who said “I’m looking for someone to go to Outer Mongolia”, and I said “Well I’ll volunteer for that, I can learn another language”. “Oh good” he said, “I’ll look after that straight away”. I never heard another word and eventually I was sent to Dubai and that’s another story.

AW: So we are resuming the tape, and you are about to arrive in Dubai?

### **1961-64 Political Agent, Dubai**

JC: Yes, which is pronounced locally as “*Dubay*”. I can remember when I was leaving I was invited to the RAF Base in Sharjah and I happened to say to the Commanding Officer who was saying “Dubai” and I said “it’s really *Dubay*”. He announced to the assembled company “James Craig has come to say goodbye, or should I say *goodbay*”.

Dubai was a very special place in those days. We still had complete authority. The rulers addressed me in glorious terms and when I visited them they always saw me to my car. I had some authority there. I had the sum of £200,000, which is just about what one of the rulers

spends in Harrods on a Saturday morning. We ran a travelling doctor system, we had a series of clinics and I would go round and inspect them from time to time. I remember one of the doctors had registered his diagnosis in some remote place in the mountains as “tennis elbow”. I said “this man has never heard of tennis”. “No” he said “I know, but the symptoms are exactly the same as tennis elbow”.

The rulers were delightful. Always quarrelling among themselves and calling on me to intervene. How could I intervene without favouring one or the other? I remember I was at a dinner party when the host came up to me: “There’s a man at the door with a message for you” and this message was a wireless message from a man up on the borders between Ras al-Khaimah and Fujaira. It was reported that they had started firing at each other. So this was about midnight and I went along and got a valise and a driver and we drove out and slept in the sand for a couple of hours and arrived just after dawn at the scene of the fighting. I said to the people of Fujaira “You are not to fire, I am walking over to the Ras al-Khaimah forces”. We shouted across to them to stop firing and I walked across the two or three hundred yards wondering if any of them would defy my instructions. No one did. The people from Ras al-Khaimah had sent for their ruler. I met him and he agreed I should arbitrate between them and set up an enquiry. I went back and took advice from the ruler of Dubai who was the most intelligent man among them. He nominated an arbiter and he came back to me and said “I’ve got them to stop fighting and you will have to go and tell them”. So I went and told them and that was the end of that incident. It was fairly typical.

I remember another occasion when I went to call on the ruler of Fujaira who was the least educated of all the rulers and he said to me “you must stay for lunch”. I said: “thank you very much, I’m honoured” but I knew what it meant. He would have to kill a sheep and roast it. So I said I would go off and make some calls and come back at lunchtime. He saw me out to my Landrover and I, making conversation, said to him “What’s the name of that mountain behind you?” He said “I don’t know”. I said “You don’t know? You’re the owner of this land, and you don’t know the name of that mountain?” “No”, he said, “I don’t”. So I got into my Landrover and drove along and the first man I saw, I stopped the car and said “What’s the name of the mountain?” and he told me. So I went back to the ruler for lunch and I said “I found out the name of the mountain. The first man I met told me, the name was *Zibb-al-a’zab*, “Bachelor’s Penis”! I said “You must know that, why didn’t you tell me”. He said “Yes, but I know what you’re up to. You’re making a map and you fill in all the names and when the map is ready you will send it to the Foreign Office and they will send it to the

Queen and it isn't appropriate that the Queen should see such words"! He was a lovely man and I had lots of trouble with him.

All the rulers were nice though they were troublesome. We spent the £200,000 on the travelling doctor's surgeries and we built little clinics. We had agricultural trial stations that grew the first strawberries in the Trucial States which are now the UAE, very tiny little strawberries. We made tracks, there were no roads in those days, and we founded two or three schools in collaboration with some of the oil rich states. There was no oil in the Trucial States then. It was enormous fun! I would have my hair cut at my desk, the barber would come in; while I read the telegrams, he would be trimming my hair.

AW: And your staff?

JC: We had servants, I had a cook and a number one bearer and a number two bearer. The substructure of society in Dubai in those days was essentially Indian. The Arabs were not looking to the main Arab centres of Cairo and Damascus and so the rich men sent their sons to India to be educated and there were lots of temporary immigrants, no one got the right to nationality. The Indians were extremely well behaved; the Pakistanis were always fighting among themselves. I enjoyed every moment of it.

AW: So by this stage you weren't regretting your move to the Foreign Office from academia and your Arabic by now must have been ...

JC: Yes, it was good. I had to learn the different dialects and get used to people calling me "*Gune-sool*", *Consul*, but also "Your Formidability"! And I stayed there three years with my wife and by now, three sons. We had two sons in Beirut, while I was at Shemlan. They all enjoyed it. I remember going across the border into Oman with my wife and the youngest son who was expecting his fourth birthday. We stopped at a camp where a squadron of the British Army was stationed under the command of a guards officer. My son had his fourth birthday there and was given a ride on a white donkey. There are so many memories.

When I went back to London to await my next posting I had to go to the Foreign Office doctor. I went to a nurse first who took my height and weight. The doctor asked my normal weight and I said: "I never vary between 9 stone 3 and 9 stone 6. He said: "So it will be a surprise to you to know that you are 8 stone 7 now?" And I was 5ft 10. Very skinny. He picked up the telephone and said "Get me the x-ray department of St Thomas's Hospital" and I was sent over there to see if I had TB or anything.

AW: Were you OK?

JC: Yes, I'd spent the previous couple of months going everywhere to say goodbye ...

AW: And it was quite a healthy diet?

JC: The luxuries were omitted. We had mostly Arab food and we used to have an arrangement. The ships used to call on their way from Karachi and Bombay to Kuwait and wouldn't land but they would anchor in the sea outside Dubai and send any passengers who wanted to get off in a short launch. The agent of the shipping company, which was P&O, made an arrangement with the political agency that we would get some bacon which wasn't on sale in Dubai. So that was a great treat, except that during Ramadan when the Muslims fast, the Pakistani cook came to me and said "Would you mind forgoing bacon for the duration of Ramadan?" and I said "No, not at all".

When the inspectors visited they looked round everything including into the fridge and they found a lot of fat bacon and said to the cook "What's this?" and he said "Oh the boss doesn't like fat bacon so we keep it for the wife and children!"

And then they told me I would be going to Beirut.

### **1964-67 First Secretary Beirut**

AW: That must have been exciting? Returning to the Lebanon?

JC: Oh yes and this time I was going to be living in Beirut (as First Secretary) and I got a nice flat on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor in a new building only a couple of hundred yards from the Embassy. The Ambassador was Sir Derek Riches who was a very nice man and we had two and half years there and we saw the start of the 1967 war between Israel and the Arabs. The Lebanon wasn't involved but they decided they'd better not deviate too far from the other Arab States and so that was the occasion of the "Big Lie". The Arabs, Jordan and Egypt, announced that the American and British forces had been collaborating with the Israelis and that accounted for the Israeli victory.

I can remember the first morning when the Egyptian Air Force was destroyed on the ground the Ambassador, Sir Derek, called the heads of departments together and he said "If we want to deny this story we must do it quickly, we have no time to ask the Foreign Office if there is

any truth in it, what do you all think?” and he went round, one by one. Two or three people said “Well normally I would say it’s not true but we have Suez only eleven years before”. The Ambassador picked up his phone and said to his secretary “Get me the Prime Minister” and when he got the Prime Minister he strenuously denied the story, “It is a ridiculous story”, which was the truth but he didn’t know it was the truth and I realised some of the burden that lies upon ambassadors. Shortly afterwards the Prime Minister told him he would have to return, they were not breaking off relations with us but the least they could do was to eject the Ambassador. The Embassy was being besieged by an unruly mob and we gathered at the front door and saw the Ambassador drive away. He had previously said to the Prime Minister “How long have I got?” and the Prime Minister had said “You should go today”. The Ambassador had said “I’ve been here three years, I can’t go today” and he took two days to go and the Counsellor became the Chargé. We all missed the Ambassador, he was a very good man indeed and he had no further job in the Foreign Office.

AW: You were mentioning that the crowds were outside the Embassy, surrounding his car?

JC: Yes and the Ambassador had said to us “You should all arm yourselves”. We had some guns kept in the basement, but he said “No guns, we’ve got some cricket bats and cricket stumps, you should dish those out”. The Military Attaché was in charge of our defences but he was a nervous kind of chap so I found myself having to tell the locally engaged people that they could go home. The crowds were throwing Molotov cocktails through the windows. The locally engaged who I thought were necessary stayed on and were very good indeed. The only damage done was to my car which was a couple of hundred yards away. We managed to get in touch with the Head of the Special Forces, who we were on good terms with, because we’d invited him to pay a visit to the United Kingdom. I rang him and he sent his men down and they dispersed the crowd and we were saved but my car was only 200 yards away, so they smashed it up and eventually I got half the damage costs from the Treasury.

AW: Did you get another Ambassador while you were there?

JC: Yes, after three or four months and he was a man who, unlike Riches, had never been in the Middle East before and didn’t know any Arabic, so he wasn’t as efficient as Riches was, but we managed and then six months after all of this I was posted to Jeddah.

AW: Did you have a spell at home first?

## **1967-70 Counsellor and Head of Chancery, Jeddah**

JC: No, I went straight away to Jeddah to take the place (Head of Chancery) of a man who had fallen ill, called Cranston. He eventually died and so I was left there and promoted to Counsellor. I can remember when I arrived in Jeddah the Embassy was still guarded by the National Guard, a kind of military force, which wasn't the army. They were camped on the tennis court. The first morning the Military Attaché said to me "I have to brief you on our plan if we are attacked. It has been decided that if the mob arrives at the door of the Embassy you, as being an Arabist, will go out and address the crowd in as high and clear classical Arabic as possible and tell them to go away. If they don't agree to go away then you will see that we have set about the place some barbed wire and you will go through the last hole in the barbed wire that I have left at the bottom of the staircase and you will dodge through that and go upstairs to join the rest of the Embassy who will all be upstairs". I said "What happens if the crowd breaks in?" and he said "The plan envisages that you will then be expendable".

AW: Not a very good plan!

JC: It never happened.

AW: And was this mob still angry following on from the war?

JC: There had been no real mob. The Saudis were very good at maintaining a peaceful street but it was conceivable that they would be listening to Radio Cairo, The Voice of the Arabs, and there was no doubting where their sympathies were. They believed the "Big Lie" but they didn't take any measures so I wasn't requested to leave or anything like that.

AW: And who was your Ambassador in Jeddah?

JC: He was a man called Morgan Man. His Arabic was superb because he had belonged originally to the Levant Consular Corps and in 1943 that Consular Corps had been amalgamated with the normal diplomatic corps. He wasn't a very sympathetic Ambassador. He knew that he was going in six or seven weeks, but he didn't do anything about introducing me to the people who counted and he was rather mean.

I arrived in November and I said to him "Are you going to give a Christmas party for the staff?" He said "No, no, no, there will be several farewell parties for me and I'll make sure that some of them are invited to one of those". So I went back to my wife, we were still living on the reserves, some tea pots, tea cups and glasses and I said "Could we get enough

together to give a party?” and she said yes, so I went back to the Ambassador and said “Since you’re not able to give a party, my wife and I will give one for the staff” and he said “My wife and I will be delighted to attend”! I remember that the only person he introduced me to was as I was standing at the door of the Embassy, waiting to go off at lunchtime. He had been to the Saudi Foreign Office and so I couldn’t go until he came back. He drove up in what would be the equivalent of the Permanent Under-Secretary’s car, and they both got out. The Ambassador beckoned me over and said “You’d better meet the Permanent Under-Secretary, this is my Counsellor who will be the Chargé”. That’s all he did and I had to wait six months or so for a new Ambassador with one introduction, funny things.

AW: Was the next Ambassador better?

JC: Oh the next Ambassador was terrific. He had been to MECAS and on his own confession said he hadn’t done very well there because he wasn’t a linguist by bent but he was a good man. He was Willie Morris. Willie was not an abbreviation of William, he was christened Willie. His Arabic was makeshift but he was a terrific Ambassador and got on well with the Saudis. But I had six months as Chargé d’Affaires, enjoyed it and learned a lot and got a great deal of support from the remaining staff.

AW: How big was the Embassy, was it a large delegation?

JC: Not really but we had a boat. And the Master of the boat was the solitary Saudi we had in our employ because they didn’t like to work for Embassies. He would take us out on Fridays, because that was the beginning of our weekend, Fridays and Saturday. He would take us out to an island and have a picnic. There wasn’t much to do, there were no cafes, no cinemas and the only television was the local Arab television which would get programmes from Egypt. Women weren’t allowed to drive so if my wife wanted to go somewhere she would have to ask the admin officer who would say “Yes, but Mrs so and so wants a car and driver half an hour after you so would you come back straight away?” It irritated my wife considerably. If she went by bus, she would have to wait and go to the back of the bus, the men sat in the front. So there were irritations of that sort, particularly for the women. There was one supermarket in Jeddah in those days. There were incidents, none ever happened to my wife, but the Tunisian Ambassador’s wife, who was a Muslim for heaven’s sake, and who wore a head-dress. She was stopped by one of the religious police going in to the supermarket who said “You’re not wearing a veil”. She said “No I am the wife to the Tunisian Ambassador” and he said “That’s not an excuse; I am taking you to the Police

Station". She managed to telephone from the Police Station to her husband who came along and made a big fuss and she was released. But thereafter many of the European wives began to wear headdresses, a scarf, bound under their neck and stopped showing their lower legs. It was uncomfortable for them.

I was invited to dinner but almost never my wife. Social life was a bit difficult. I would try to invite some Saudis and first of all my secretary would ring their secretary and they would say: "Who else is coming from the Saudis?" And she would say who, and they would say "That won't do because he's a free thinker and he doesn't mind if alcohol will be served. Will alcohol be served?" "Oh yes it will." "He won't be able to come" or they would say they would ring back and we would go for a week without any reply. In any case on the morning of the dinner party my secretary would have to ring the secretary to remind that her boss would be coming. Very often they would bring other guests with them because in the Arab fashion, if you are invited, you turn up with two friends and say "These friends were with me so I invited them along". So you never were sure of the numbers, it was very difficult indeed. There were one or two families who had lived abroad in the west and they conformed to our system but most of them, no.

The wives couldn't go, except in a licenced group, to anywhere else in Saudi Arabia. People often used to go up to a ruin of an old town in the north, and they could go there, but they couldn't go by themselves on the plane to Riyadh, the embassies were all in Jeddah in those days, so my wife never saw Riyadh.

AW: But you travelled?

JC: I travelled and as I recall I didn't need to get permission. The Ministers of the Saudi cabinet were all in Riyadh except for Ramadan when they came to Taif which was a mountain town much nearer to Jeddah than Riyadh. I will break off to say that when they were in Taif they weren't so formal and so I would get a couple of appointments with Ministers and then I would go to some other Ministers who I knew very well and drop in on them. Once I went to drop in on the Minister of Petroleum Resources, Zaki Yamani, a very famous figure in oil circles, he wasn't in his office and his two secretaries said "No, no, it's Ramadan, so he's sleeping". Now he was a man who made a good deal out of his Islamic faith and Ramadan is meant to show the rich how it is to be hungry and so you are really supposed to work in Ramadan. All the labourers, who were mostly Pakistanis, work, and the bus drivers and taxi drivers, were Saudis then, later on they weren't, worked and got hungry.

AW: So Zaki Yamani shouldn't have been sleeping!

JC: No, and I said "Oh that's alright, I know where his temporary house is and I go past it on my way to Jeddah so I'll stop in and see him when he gets up for the noon prayer". They said "That won't do, he gets up to pray the noon prayer of course, but then he goes straight back to bed". So I didn't see him! But you went every evening after sunset on a round of visits to congratulate people on the month of Ramadan and Eid, the festival which followed it. It was a convenient opportunity but they didn't want to talk about politics very much because they were hungry and tired.

I stayed in Jeddah that time for nearly three years and then went home, back to the UK, as people now say.

AW: I understand you had a Sabbatical Year after Jeddah?

### **1970-71 Sabbatical year at St Antony's Oxford**

JC: Yes, it arose in the following way. On Friday, which was our weekly holiday, I went in and let myself in to the keep and sat down reading some confidential papers. There was one other man there, St John Armitage, who was a particular friend of mine. Then apparently I fainted and came to and noticed my doctor who was an Arab, a Syrian or a Lebanese. He wasn't a Saudi. In my anxiety over security I said to him: "What are you doing here in the keep where no non-British were allowed" and he said: "You've had some kind of fit". I was lying on the floor and he was bending over me and he decided I had something wrong with my brain and I was sent up to Beirut where our Ambassador was spending the last two or three weeks of his leave trying to get up his Arabic. He said to me "When are you going back?" and I said to him "Oh in two or three days, why?" and he said "Well, we have left Armitage in charge and I'm not happy about that!" This was a joke between us. Armitage was very competent but not about rules of the Foreign Office. Anyway I saw a doctor and he gave me some pills and then I set off to go up with Armitage to the north, to the little pre Arab town, and we stopped the first night outside the town of Medina, which is a holy city and non-Muslims are not allowed in. His wife and my wife were taken on a little circular tour, not into the city itself, and St John and I were in the kitchen when I had another of these attacks and as a result we went back to Jeddah. Then I was called home to have my sabbatical and I stopped in Beirut and was talking to one of my former colleagues there and

suddenly I felt a funny feeling in my head but it didn't increase and I went home and was sent by the Foreign Office doctor to one of the London hospitals and they recommended that I should proceed straight away to my sabbatical year. So I went to Antony's College Oxford, which had been founded only in 1950 and I had a year's laziness there taking pills.

AW: Did they sort out the medical problem?

JC: Oh, they diagnosed it as the kind of thing which happened occasionally but I seem to have got over it and at the end of the year I got a message from my great hero Tony Parsons saying I was to return to the Foreign Office and take charge of the Middle East Department.

### **1972-75 Head of Near East and North Africa Department (NENAD)**

When I went back there he said he'd changed his mind and that I should take charge of NENAD. I said: "What's that mean?" He said "Near East and North Africa Department, which we are amalgamating". I said "That's not a very attractive name, why don't we call it Levant and Barbary Department; people will form a queue to join it?" There had previously been a Levant Department. I never knew why I was put into NENAD, because Saudi Arabia was in Middle East Department and the Lebanon was in NENAD, so I went to it and Acland became head of Middle East Department and was soon after moved to be Private Secretary.

We had a lovely time! This was the first time I'd really been in the Foreign Office apart from the three years in Africa Department. This time, as head of a department, I was meeting Ministers and taking part in the decisions and so on. So it was much more serious and I was half the time with Tony and we had the 73 war when I didn't get home for three weeks. We had bought a house in Oxfordshire and I was coming up on a Monday morning and going back on a Friday evening but for three weeks I didn't go home. I was sharing a little flat with a friend in Redcliffe Square. That was my real introduction to the Foreign Office and I enjoyed it.

AW: Did you have a good team?

JC: Yes, they varied. I had Gore-Booth on the Arab Israel desk and I had, at first, two assistants, one wasn't satisfactory so we got rid of him, and got a very good man called Nigel Williams who later became Ambassador to Denmark and was brilliant. He was really very good indeed. The first man in charge of the Arab Israel desk was the man who died last year.

He went on to become the Queen's Press Secretary. He was out of my swim until I went to say goodbye to the Queen after retirement and there he was again.

AW: And what about Ministers at that time?

JC: I was there from 1971-76. It was nearly all Labour Government so we had first of all Callaghan until the end of my posting in the Office and then when I went to Syria we had the young man who later on went to make the SDP.

AW: David Owen?

JC: Yes, David Owen but that comes later.

I will skip a bit and tell you about my Under-Secretary for a time who was Geoffrey Arthur who, by coincidence, had joined me for reading Arabic at Oxford. After my first year, the War was over, and a whole pile of army and navy people came back and he was one. I met him on my first trip to the Middle East, I had just started to learn Turkish and was going to spend three months in Turkey to bring it up, so I went from Aleppo by local bus across Turkey, including Ankara, and in Ankara I stayed in a hotel and went to see Geoffrey Arthur who invited me to stay with him. The first day he and the Ambassador were going to the Ankara races and he was all dressed up in his frock coat and top hat and so was the Ambassador. I thought would I like that? He was very keen that I should join the Foreign Office, so I put my name in for the over age competition and at one of the interviews I was told by a Foreign Office man, who later was Ambassador to Pakistan, that because I spoke Arabic I could not expect to spend more than one-third of my career in the Arab world. So I withdrew my name, there were rumours going about that if you spoke Arabic you'd be sent to Buenos Aires or Hong Kong, and I didn't want to do that! The only result was that I didn't join the Foreign Office but was approached by MI6 but I wasn't interested in them. Yes, I remember that I had said to Geoffrey Arthur when I was quite advanced in my career as Head of NENAD, that for my next posting I would like to be Ambassador to Oman and he said "Oh, there will be no difficulty about that, you're eminently qualified" but then he was taken away and became Master of Pembroke College, Oxford and late in my third year I was sent for by Tebbitt who was the Chief Clerk who said "I have a note saying that you would like to go to Oman, I'm afraid you can't because Mr Callaghan has vetoed it on the grounds that you have no experience outside the Arab world and he wants you to build up your experience". I said "I'm fifty years old! This is the time to deploy my experience, not to urge me to get

new". He said "Where else would you like to go to, you can't go to Oman" and I reviewed the list and I suggested Kabul but he said "I'm sure that Mr Callaghan won't think that's far enough away from the Middle East", so I said: "What about Norway?" He said "We already have a man there", "What about Consul General in Chicago?" "That's already catered for". So I said "What do you have in mind?" and he said "Malaysia". At the time everyone was keen to go to Malaysia, it was a very pleasant place, so I was promoted a rank and went as Deputy High Commissioner and I didn't like it at all. But that's for later.

In my Foreign Office time, yes I saw Ministers more often. We had the '73 War in which I was kept very busy. I used to sleep in a spare room at the top of the main staircase and I would put a bar of chocolate on the window sill outside, so as to have it if I didn't get out for dinner.

Additionally, we were candidate members for the EEC and I began to take part in the political talks and found a welcome from some of the members because in the political talks I was the only one who was specialised in the Middle East. The Belgian, who was particularly nice and handsome, introduced me by a word of welcome and said how glad they were to have a specialist on the Middle East and the Frenchman was a man I got on very well with and later I met him again, because we were both Ambassadors to Syria at the same time. I enjoyed the talks; they improved my French a good deal. I had done school boy French up to school certificate so speaking as we were encouraged to do by a word from the Foreign Secretary, who couldn't speak French himself. I enjoyed going over to the foreign capitals, whoever was the President we met, to Brussels, to Rome and to Bonn and to The Hague and to Amsterdam. It was jolly interesting and I conceived a great liking for my colleagues in foreign Foreign Offices. I met some people, like Dick Faber, who was in Holland and liked him enormously. One of the younger men, I saw his photo in the paper the other day, he was in Bonn in those days and later became Ambassador to Russia.

I went once to Russia, it was in 1973. Sir Alec Douglas Home went there trying to recover from the period of coldness after we had expelled some Russians in '72 and they had expelled a whole pile of our people. I went to Russia and it was very lucky, I stayed in a hotel and saw some of the Russian method of dealing with foreigners and I went to the big stores where only privileged Russians could go, it was eye opening. You had to queue three times, first to buy something and you were given a little form which said the following person has bought such and such, then you queued again to pay and then back to collect your stuff and you

queued again! But I did that on my second day when they'd finished with the Middle East and I was free. We all bought whisky from the Embassy stores and at night after two days in Moscow we took the train to Leningrad and I can remember somebody coming along to my sleeping compartment and saying "Did you get some whisky and would you sell it to us because we're entertaining some Russians who are coming with us to Leningrad and we want to feed them whisky and we've used up all our own!"

I was trying to buy things for my wife and children in these stores and I bought some Russian dolls and records of Russian choirs. We went to Leningrad and were taken round the Hermitage and it was a beastly December day, very cold and when we got on board the RAF plane they hadn't been able to switch the heating on until the plane took off and so it was freezing cold and it wasn't until we were over Denmark that we got warmed up.

We had all been through a process by Security Department about how we would be overheard any place, so when we discussed politics we went into a special room at the Embassy and they switched on the various safeguards.

AW: So to clarify, these European trips were ...

JC: Yes, as Head of NENAD, I was going out as the Middle East expert because when I took over the Middle East Department was in the charge of Acland. He'd been to MECAS but he had one post in the Arab world in Kuwait and he never went back. Middle East Department was taken over by Richard Evans, who died recently, and he wasn't an expert on the Middle East, so I was sent always and I enjoyed being the only expert!

I can remember a story, although I wasn't there myself. After the '73 War the Arabs had a meeting of the Arab League in Algiers. They decided they had to talk to the seniors of Europe, in Denmark, who was then the President. On that occasion, rather exceptionally, Tony Parsons went and five Arabs arrived including the Foreign Minister of Algeria who we knew. I wasn't there. Tony told me this story. The Arabs were welcomed but told they couldn't meet the heads of government; they could only meet the foreign secretaries. They accepted that but they said there must be no officials present. The only time they could get the meeting was about 11 o'clock at night. They all filed in and the officials all waited outside. Two and a half hours later they all filed out and Sir Alec Douglas-Home said: "Tony, Tony, where is the nearest synagogue, I wish to become a Jew!" Every one of the

five had demanded the right to speak and the Algerian Foreign Minister had spoken for nearly two hours.

Sir Alec was a very nice man indeed. I can remember when I took over the job at NENAD, it was a Monday and they said “On Friday you’re going out with the Foreign Secretary and various seniors to Cairo and then Morocco and then Gibraltar”.

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AW: This is 4 December 2013 and Sir James Craig and Abbey Wright are resuming his recollections.

James, when we left off last time you were at NENAD and you were starting to recall a trip you made with Sir Alec Douglas-Home, but we ran out of time, would you like to start there?

JC: Yes, by all means. I took over NENAD on a Monday and then I was told that on Friday I would go off on a tour of Egypt, Morocco and Gibraltar with the Secretary of State. This was a bit of a shock because I couldn’t expect in 4 hours to have mastered the whole of my parish. However, Tony Parsons, who was my Assistant Under Secretary above me, said “The most important thing to remember is the speeches which the Secretary of State will have to make and we have agreed them all, we have prepared them for him and cleared them with him and the Private Secretary and your job is not to let a word be changed”. I took him literally and we had just broken through the clouds over Heathrow when the Private Secretary who was Jonny Graham, Sir John Graham, came along with some papers in his hand saying “We want to make some changes to these speeches”. And I said “No, no, there are to be no changes”. And he said “Why not?” And I said “Because I have instructions from Parsons”. And he said: “Well, come on ...” And they got some changes and I was very nervous about this.

We flew out to Egypt and we had some talks with the Egyptians and then there was a press conference. Sir Alec announced in his remarks that we were going to give the Egyptians £5 million. I knew that was quite wrong but I didn’t have the confidence to intervene in his speech. So I went off to see him immediately the conference was over and said “Sir, you said we were going to give the Egyptians £5 million, it should have been £1 million”. And he said “Oh really, well I’ve done it now” and I thought to myself, there is a man who doesn’t care whether he’s sacked or not, he can return to his estate in Scotland and fish and shoot. He had enormous confidence and there was no trouble about it.

AW: And did we give them the £5 million?

JC: I can't remember!

We had a nice time in Egypt. The Ambassador was a friend of mine, Richard Beaumont, he was a thoroughly nice man who had been there for two or three years. I liked him enormously. Nothing else arose of great sensitivity. The time came for us to depart. We had a special plane and we boarded the plane and there were some members of the press along with us. We hadn't gone a few miles out of Egyptian air space when a report came back that one member of the press was very ill and the staff of the plane had wrapped him up warmly and the pilot was considering what to do. Finally it was announced that he would have to land at Malta and drop the man off and send him to hospital. That posed another problem because at the time the Maltese in a fit of anti-Britishness had decided to charge a very high rate for petrol and so he was under instructions not to load petrol in Malta. He would need more petrol as we were on our way to Morocco so we suggested that he might take off from Malta and land at Tunis and that involved sending telegrams to the Embassy in Tunis. Off the telegrams went and we landed and the man was taken off in an ambulance and emerged unharmed by his experience and we took off. It's the only time I've been to Malta and my visit lasted about half an hour! We landed at Tunis where the Ambassador was waiting and we didn't stay long there, it was just for refuelling. Then we landed safely at Rabat and were taken off to our hotel where we were very comfortable and the first days of talks began and went quite well.

On the second day the rest of the party were to be given a sightseeing tour of Fes and Meknes but I was to be left behind in the capital and work on the final communiqué. So they all went off and I went to see the man who was responsible for Western Europe and he began by addressing me in French. I said I wasn't completely fluent in French and I would rather we had our discussions in Arabic. He said: "No, no, no it's to be French". The oddity about this exchange was that his name was *Sharqawy* which means in Arabic eastern or oriental. So he went on speaking in French and I went on speaking in Arabic and we finally got a text agreed which was to be issued in French.

Then we set off for Gibraltar where I had no responsibility. I was rather distressed by the appearance of Gibraltar which looked like an English town, a rather scruffy one, fish and chips and English breakfasts advertised in every café. However, we stayed only one day and

then we flew back home and that was my first trip with Ministers and I settled down to get to know the Department and all its affairs.

AW: In the papers which you kindly lent me at our last session, I read about the hi-jack experience you were involved with ...

JC: Yes, I was living in lodgings quite close to the Foreign Office, slightly north of Victoria. I was asleep there when the telephone rang and it was the Resident Clerk (out of hours duty officer) saying would I come in as soon as possible as there had been a hijacking. I assumed that the hijacking was by Arabs. So I went in and it appeared that a British passenger plane had been attacked on the ground at Sharjah in the Gulf. The pilot had been told to aim towards Libya and its capital Tripoli. In Tripoli he had not been given a warm welcome and he had been told to refuel and take off as quickly as possible and they had flown to Tunis. The Tunisian Government was then very moderate and they were willing to cooperate with us and it was proposed that British Airways would send a plane out to Tunis and on it would be the Chief Executive Officer of BA, one or two other technical people and me. So I rang my wife and said I was going off. It so happened that there was no Ambassador in Tunis because he was in London to have an operation. However I found that the Chargé d'Affaires didn't speak Arabic, no one in the Embassy spoke Arabic, they were all getting by with French. I landed and found that the Chargé was a very reasonable warm hearted man and then I went off to the airport and met the two Tunisian ministers who had been put in charge of the whole affair. The President of Tunisia was not well at all, he was the famous Habib Bourguiba. The two ministers were the equivalent of our Foreign Secretary and our Home Secretary. We had a talk with them and they told me that the hijackers were demanding the release of some of their PLO prisoners who were mostly in Egypt or in Holland, in jail. The Egyptians said immediately that they would release them and the Dutch were considering the matter. The Dutch Ambassador was there and confirmed this story. He was a good man and spoke excellent English, but no Arabic. I continued to have friendly relations with the two Tunisian ministers.

Then came the news that the Dutch were going to release the prisoners on condition that the hijackers would leave the plane and allow it to take off to wherever it wanted. So we watched the passengers being off loaded and the Dutchman counted them all and then when the hijackers said they were all off, he said "No, no, there's one short". "No there isn't one short" said the hijackers. When we argued about it they admitted that one of the passengers,

who spoke good English though he was an Arab, had volunteered to stay aboard with the hijackers. The Dutch Ambassador said “That’s no good, my instructions are rigid and we have to get off all the passengers”. Eventually after a long wait, this man was released. I spoke to him once and he had not volunteered! So the Tunisians then said that the plane could take off and go where it wanted but it was the weekend and there was a delay. I had been working in the VIP lounge but I went aboard the control tower. My instructions from the Foreign Office were not to engage in the negotiations but to listen and to object to any things which were obviously unacceptable to us and to report back to the Foreign Office where they were operating the emergency room under the charge of Michael Weir, who was an old friend of mine. So I asked the Tunisians what was going to happen to the hijackers and they said they would accept them for the time being and it was obvious that they were going to release them to go back to wherever they’d come from, Palestine or Egypt. I didn’t see anything objectionable in that in the circumstances. Meanwhile I talked to the passengers and a man from MI5, who had come out with me, also talked among them and he had some very curious conversations. I should say that the only casualty of the affair was a man who we saw come to the door of the plane, obviously compelled, and then he was shot and his body dropped onto the ground. The conversation which the MI5 man had with one of the passengers who was a middle aged lady, obviously not used to this sort of thing, and said “The hijackers were extremely nice people”. He said “They have just shot a man”. She said “Oh, I’m sure they didn’t mean to do it”. That was something we left to the Tunisians. Eventually the plane had to be disinfected and then we were to be flown back in that plane to London and we didn’t know whether there would be any concealed bombs or not. It had been searched but we couldn’t guarantee. However we took off and then we were told that all the goods for sale in the plane would be confiscated and distributed among us so we all got some bottles of wine and whisky and things like that and when we got to London the Customs were very efficient and we were allowed to bring these from the plane into the car which British Airways had supplied and we were driven into London and the whole thing was over. It was a curious thing, but it had some repercussions.

The authorities decided that they should have preparations for future hijacks and they said since the guilty parties in most of the hijacks were Arabs it would be desirable that the man chosen should speak Arabic. I was the man they chose. We had some rehearsals. There was a special operations room set up in Number 10 or near about and we rehearsed what should be done. It involved my being flown out to Stansted Airport where I immediately rang the

operations room but what I got was an operator at Number 10 and I said I wanted room B or operations room or whatever it was. She said "I think it will take a couple of minutes". I remonstrated afterwards and said that we should have a regular phone set up. We dithered and eventually the operations room decided to call in the SAS troops who were based near the border of Wales and they flew in and attacked the plane with blank rounds and so on. While this was going on the operations room rang me and said "We're closing down now". I said "You can't close down now, we're attacking the plane". They said "No, no, no, no, we've all got to go home it's after six o'clock"!

So afterwards in my report I pointed out these deficiencies and the next rehearsal was at Prestwick Airport near Glasgow and they had mostly corrected them.

AW: Were there any more real events to deal with?

JC: Yes, there was a genuine hijack on a BEA aeroplane. This was hijacked in the month of January and was halted at Heathrow. I was told to go out there and take a part in the negotiations. When I got there I found there was a caravan crammed with policemen who didn't expect anyone from the Foreign Office to come with any authority. I had an assistant with me who was later Ambassador to Egypt, David Blatherwick, who lived in Cambridge. The hijackers were asking for a sum of money, I think it was £50,000 and the way to be cleared for them to fly to France. The Foreign Office told me that they had approached the French who had refused to receive the plane and we shouldn't pass that on necessarily to the hijackers. We continued talking and the police had sent to various banks to get £50,000 and one policeman was sent out, not of strong character. He stood at the bottom of the steps leading to the aircraft and called out. A man appeared at the door of the aircraft and when he heard the policeman had the money he said "Right, come up". And the silly ass went up and handed over the money and didn't get a look inside the plane. Things were ridiculous. There was only one hijacker and we didn't know his nationality, he was speaking English to the pilot and the crew of the plane was quite short. He had gone with the co-pilot and the stewardess to the back of the plane so we could talk to the pilot confidentially.

The police were obviously hostile to me. I was honing in on their responsibilities and I spoke to the Minister (I've forgotten the name of the Minister) and said that the police were hostile, the hijacker was not an Arab and couldn't speak Arabic, so could I go home. He said I'd have to wait for a time while he discussed it with his colleagues but he came back in five or ten minutes and said "No, we'd like you to stay there". So I stayed and a plan was concocted

in which we would tell them that they were going to take off to land in France where they would be able to refuel the plane and go where they wanted to but in fact instructions had been given to the pilot to fly to Stansted and we would follow in another plane and the pilot of the hijacked plane would take his time so as to simulate the time that would be needed to get to France. So we boarded another plane with 100 policemen and four trained dogs and Blatherwick and me.

When we reached Stansted we found that the Essex Police had been called out and had surrounded the landing strip. The hijacked plane landed and they lowered their steps and the crew of the plane, the pilot, the steward and the stewardess on board. The hijacker came down with a weapon of some kind with the steward and the silly man who had handed over the money. When they reached the ground at the bottom of the ladder, the hijacker hit the steward and ran away. He was caught immediately by the police and was brought into the airport buildings where we were waiting. I can remember I said to him “Why did you hijack the plane?” And he said “My visa had run out”. He turned out to be an Iranian and his explanation was right, his visa had run out and he couldn’t get another one, so he’d hijacked a plane. He was taken away and sentenced. I was installed as the official Hijacker in Chief which was useful because in not quite my next post when I was in Syria a British Midland Airways plane was hijacked and I had to deal with that and earlier in Kuala Lumpur the American Airways Office was invaded by people who were the equivalent of hijackers. Immediately below the American office there was an office of Swedish Airlines and they could not communicate with their office because some arrangement with the phones meant that they could be listened into so they passed their messages to their Embassy in Stockholm who passed it to the Foreign Office who sent it out to us and we delivered it. So I got a letter of thanks, when it was all over, it didn’t last very long, from the Swedish Government.

So back to London and I can’t remember any more serious incidents. Afterwards British Airways decided to give us, who were involved in the hijacking to Tunisia, a memento. They gave us a model aeroplane, you can see it over there on the bookshelf, and in accordance with Foreign Office rules I asked permission to receive it. They asked “How much is it worth?” It cost something over £100 to make but you can’t sell it for £100, so I was given permission. They proposed to give one to the two ministers who had been involved and to Habib Bourguiba the President. He was to get a gold one. They asked if they could fly me out with the Chief Executive of BA. I asked the Foreign Office but they said no, I knew the rules about gifts and that included free passages! British Airways persuaded the Foreign Office to

allow me to fly out and back again and I got that memento. It's the same type of plane as the one that was hijacked. So for the rest of my career at NENAD I became the main hijacker but there weren't any more big deals.

AW: So, we have covered the hijacking, your role in the European trips being the Arabic expert on the negotiations, are there any other big items at NENAD or is it time for us to move to Kuala Lumpur?

JC: I had done three years at NENAD and my Under Secretary who was Geoffrey Arthur was well known to me and a very able man. His Arabic was very good but his accent was terrible. You could tell where he came from, which was Ashby de la Zouch! Speaking Arabic with an Ashby de la Zouch accent was a very weird thing. He travelled, he came out to see me once or twice. He travelled with scores of famous piano concertos in his pocket and used to play on the Residence piano. I had spoken to him about my next post and said I would like to go to Oman as Ambassador and he'd said there would be no problem and he would tell the required authorities. Then soon afterwards he was taken away and accepted voluntary retirement from the Diplomatic Service and became Master of Pembroke College Oxford.

AW: Yes, you mentioned that last time, and we covered Mr Callaghan wanting you to have non-Arab experience, so we had got to the point where there'd been various choices that didn't work and Kuala Lumpur was the one that emerged ...

JC: Yes, they sent me to Kuala Lumpur.

### **1975-76 Deputy High Commissioner Kuala Lumpur**

AW: And you weren't there very long?

JC: Yes, a year and a month

AW: And so, how was that?

JC: Well, I soon realised that unlike everybody else in Kuala Lumpur I didn't want to be there. They all thought that it was a lovely place with a lovely climate and there wasn't too much work to be done. I found that my work with my High Commissioner, who was Sir Eric Norris, who was an extremely nice man, I was lucky with my bosses, the only one I didn't

like was Morgan Man. I discovered that my two predecessors had both said that the post of Deputy High Commissioner was over-graded. It was of the same rank and pay as the Ambassador in Saudi Arabia which was very odd. The Ambassador's grade in Saudi Arabia was raised either before or soon after I got there. I discovered that several Arab Ambassadors in London had petitioned the Foreign Office that I shouldn't be sent away but that I should be high graded and they couldn't imagine that I was being promoted to go to being Deputy High Commissioner. However, I was being promoted in grade.

I liked Malaysia as everyone did but my job was uninviting. We lived in style, the best house I ever had in the Foreign Service was this house as Deputy High Commissioner and which I believe is now the house of the High Commissioner. It had seven acres of land, mostly jungle with monkeys which came into the house and sat on the stool of my wife's dressing table and powdered their faces and used the lipstick! But my only real job was to tour the many British firms and estates which were in Malaysia and tell them that their time was coming and that there was nothing that the British Government could do about it. It was a very unwelcome job, although it was necessary. They all waxed very angry and I could only shrug my shoulders and tell them that was the case. So I made an excuse to go home for a week. The excuse was the Elm Disease. We had a row of elms in our garden in England and I went back and we had let the house to some Americans and they had to be persuaded to vacate. Then I went to see the Chief Clerk, Donald Tebbitt, the man who had told me Callaghan had vetoed my appointment, so I went to him and said "I'm not happy in Kuala Lumpur and I shall want to be transferred after 18 months", which was half a normal stay. He said he didn't think Mr Callaghan would think 18 months a long enough period to accomplish (and I remember the word) "desanitisation"!

I went back and soon afterwards there came a telegram from the office marked especially for me saying would I accept the Embassy to Syria. I couldn't send an answer quick enough, "Yes Please".

AW: So somebody had listened?

JC: Well I then had a letter from the Assistant Private Secretary to the PUS, I've forgotten her name, she resigned on her marriage. But she wrote to tell me I owed her something because when the papers came over from the Chief Clerk to the PUS saying they needed a new Ambassador to Syria and giving two possible names, she, rather boldly, wrote on "Why not Craig who is wasted in Kuala Lumpur?" and sent the paper to Palliser. Now Palliser had

not been the PUS when I was posted to Kuala Lumpur and he came rushing out asking “What’s this about Craig?” She told him the story and he said “Get me Tebbitt” on the line and then they went together to Callaghan and persuaded him that I should be offered Damascus. So I went back and I took her out to lunch. She married someone from the City of London, but her assistant or colleague I knew better because she’d been in Jeddah and she later married Mark Allen, Maggie. So I was brought back fairly quickly and sent out to Syria.

### **1976-79 HM Ambassador Damascus, Syria**

Syria I knew fairly well because it was the first place in the Middle East I’d ever been to when I was a lecturer at Durham in 1950. It had been my base for three months before I went to Cairo. I knew something of its history and of its language. Our relations with Syria were pretty cool. I wasn’t expecting to have any privileged position but I enjoyed being an Ambassador and I enjoyed Syria which is a fascinating country. Now [in 2012] everyone in this village, two or three months ago, was coming up to me and saying “You’re an expert in Syria, what’s happening?” And I said: “Everything has changed. The Foreign Office in London has changed and the whole scene in Syria has changed”. So I can say that while I was there I hated the Ba’ath Party and the government which it had created. I find that I am now in favour of them and that the whole of the western media is against them. I have got together with one or two people in my position, notably Oliver Miles, who was Ambassador in Libya and speaks Arabic well and then Ambassador in Greece and Ivor Lucas who later was Ambassador. The man who succeeded me was Patrick Wright, and Ivor Lucas succeeded him. And Patrick Wright is in this little group of half a dozen people or so. Oliver Miles and Patrick Wright have tried to intervene with the Foreign Office and say we are not in favour of any solution but we think you should keep out of the quarrel in Syria.

So, I lived in Syria for three years and I enjoyed it. I found a new house for the Ambassador. The one I had was on the ground floor of a block. The only time it was useful was when the German Ambassador, who lived two floors above me, was threatened, he got letters saying they were going to bomb him and I said “You’d better move into my flat where the sitting room and the guest bedroom were all underground”. It has been taken on by my predecessor because it was the only flat in Damascus which had a garden and he had a dog which he needed to exercise.

AW: So you found a new house?

JC: Yes, a new house which is still there. We haven't got an Ambassador to Syria now but I presume we still own the property.

One thing I remember in my dealings with the Syrian Government was that we had bought, during the War, a piece of land which was, at the time, well outside the city boundaries, intending to build a new Embassy there. But our relations with the Syrians were of mixed warmth and we never built anything there and we were occupying then the basement, the ground floor and the third floor of another block of flats. It wasn't very satisfactory.

Meanwhile the piece of land which we had bought had somehow come into the possession of a market gardener who was running a flourishing business there. So I went to the Syrians and asked how much they were asking for me. The quarrel had broken out in 1956 over the Suez incident when the Syrians had ordered two fighter planes from us. We had agreed and the planes had been built and the Syrians had been informed they were ready for export but then came Suez and the British Government put a veto on the export of the planes to Syria. The Syrians claimed their money back, they had already paid for them. The firm which produced them said it was nothing to do with them. They were prepared to export them but the British Government wouldn't let them. So the Syrians asked the British Government to pay and the British Government said "Nothing to do with us". So I said "They allege that we owe them £145,000 and I have had the land which we can't build on valued by an estate agent and its valued at £2 million so I recommend that we pay them the £145,000 in return for a document which will say that once we've paid the money, we can occupy the land and do what we like with it". So we paid the money. And I was boasting about how I'd settled this difficulty and one of my Syrian friends said "You will never get the land which is too close to the President's Residence and his guard won't allow you to occupy it". So that fell through and we'd paid the £145,000 and we didn't get the land.

I looked around for another Embassy. I relished the idea of moving into the old city and spoke to the Department of Old Buildings. They welcomed the idea because the whole trend had been out of the old city. Somebody was designated to show me two or three possible sites. The date was given and the time was given. He turned up an hour late and I waited in the street outside the chosen building. Then he didn't have the key to this unoccupied house so I had to go home and I dropped the idea. That was typical Arab inefficiency.

AW: After paying the £145,000 did relations with the Syrians improve?

JC: No, they were Arab nationalists and we were considered to be against. They were like Egypt, like Libya, like almost every Arab country, hostile to the Imperialist Neo Colonialist West. They were perfectly polite. I didn't see very much of the President, I think I only had two or three meetings with him. It was very funny. The European Common Market was only seven countries and each of the Foreign Ministers of the seven countries came out on a visit and met the President and the Foreign Minister. They had then the very useful and friendly gesture of calling together the Ambassadors of the ECM and briefing them on their visit. And they all said they loved the President, Hafez al-Assad. What a mannerly, welcoming and decent man he was, quite different from his Foreign Minister! And we Ambassadors would look at each other and smile and wink because we knew they were playing hard cop and soft cop and the President was responsible for more suicides, exiles, arrests and so on than his Foreign Minister. But the Foreign Minister, after I had left, got into trouble over corruption and now lives in Paris.

Most of the ministers were members of the Ba'ath party. One or two who were not had been put under great pressure to join the party, including the Minister of Economy who was a highly intelligent man who had studied at New York City University and had married an American and I liked him very much. But in the end when I was later in Saudi Arabia I went to visit Kuwait and he had been allowed to resign from his Ministry in Syria and had taken on the Chairmanship of one of the Kuwait International funds and he told me that he'd only been there a year or so and he would have to go back to Syria. He'd just had the President on the telephone urging him to go back and he would have to. He didn't explain why, possibly it was patriotism, I don't know. But he went back and has now retired if he's still alive. It was typical. The President recognised that in this man he had a very efficient minister and despite the fact that he knew he wasn't enthusiastic for the Party, he appointed him and brought him back from Kuwait.

They were full of contradictions. I'd been working late in my house and it came to quarter to midnight and I thought I would stop but before I went to bed I would take a little walk round the suburb I was living in. I had the habit in those days of whistling when I walked and as I went past a block of flats where the Secretary of the Party's Executive Committee lived there was a guard on the gate, which was not a soldier guard but Alawites from the north in civilian clothes. As I walked past them, one of them shouted out to me "*Balash tusaffir*". I stopped and turned and said "What did you say?" in Arabic and he repeated "*Balash tusaffir*", "Stop whistling". I said "Do you know who I am?" and he said "No" so I said "Well I am the

British Ambassador and if I want to whistle I will whistle” and continued on my way whistling, terrified that I would get a burst of sub machine fire. The next morning I went in to see the Head of the Department which dealt with us who was a very civilised and educated man and not a member of the party and I told him what had happened. He said “Why do you tell me this?” I said “I hoped you could do something”. “I can do nothing” he said “They are all peasants”. They were scattered about the town in little groups telling the people to walk in the gutters and so on. I had a couple of incidents with them but I was in a privileged position.

The people of Syria are splendid and what’s happening now is very distressing. I hear that a great deal of damage has been done to Aleppo. Aleppo is (or was) the most remarkable city in the world. It’s wonderful and now I don’t know the details but I image the markets are all in ruins.

I used to go over to Beirut, which was in the middle of a civil war, but the funny thing was that I felt freer to talk in Beirut than I did in Damascus. You could talk in Damascus in the Embassy and you could talk to people you knew with safety. I remember that the Russians had built a new Embassy with the money that the Syrians paid them for arms. They gave a big cocktail party and I went along. The Russian Ambassador said to me “What do you think of our new Embassy?” and I said, ambassadorially polite, “It’s very nice” and he said “It reminds me of the departure lounge in a south Russian airport”. I didn’t repeat that.

AW: And your other diplomatic colleagues?

JC: My colleagues were very nice. We used to meet regularly, the ECM Ambassadors, and only the Frenchman knew anything about Syria because of France’s history. But he couldn’t speak Arabic. I once gave him a lift back from a party. I had a very old Bentley. He had, as his house, the old High Commissariat of the French Mandate and he said “Oh what a fancy car you’ve got” and I said “What a fancy house you’ve got. I’m thinking of giving the next Queen’s Birthday Party in the back of this car!” Eventually we sold it to some Japanese businessman.

Syria was a lovely place and they had done remarkably well. They had no financial area like the City of London, their banking system was absurd and yet they had had a great deal of success in promoting their exports. They have now suffered ten years of drought in the

nineties and early two thousands. They are in a bad economic situation now and the civil war is raging.

AW: When you were talking about Jeddah, you said it had been very difficult life for your wife and family and the many restrictions on the female spouses, was it much easier in Syria for women?

JC: Oh yes. Although I didn't have my wife in Syria but women could drive and so on. I suppose there were 45,000 British subjects living in Saudi Arabia, not all of them in Jeddah. When I was there, even the second time as Ambassador, the Embassies were all in Jeddah, they are now all in Riyadh but it would have been difficult when they were in Jeddah for a British Ambassador who was a woman to fly to Riyadh because it would have been difficult to get her a ticket.

AW: And were there any big issues during your time in Syria?

JC: No, I had one visit by Mr Owen, who was the Foreign Secretary, whom I didn't take to. The policies in my mind are more inclined to the left than to the right but if I look back on the Foreign Secretaries we've had the ones I liked best were Hurd, Home and Carrington.

Our house was a flat on the ground floor partially but the guest bedroom and the sitting room and the guest sitting room were all underground, my bedroom and a tiny little room which I used to use for receiving visitors were all on the ground level. The man above me, though he didn't do it deliberately, he was a nice man, when I was giving a party in the garden he would hang out the washing, the underclothes! So I got my own back, once a year we had an Armistice Day and I got by special concession a Canadian bagpiper from Germany who came out and played at the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery. And I said would he come back and play in the garden at 6 o'clock in the evening and he did!

The great difficulty, for the first time in my life, was meeting people. You could meet ministers who didn't count but you never could get to meet the President except at the first time when you presented your credentials and the last time when you were saying goodbye, unless you had some distinguished visitors. So I would have Members of Parliament who would have an appointment with the President, and I would not be allowed to accompany them. It was irritating. With the Foreign Minister who all my colleagues thought was very rude, I discovered that like with so many rude people, you could be rude back to him. So I used to be rude back to him. The conversations were always in Arabic and so I could be rude

in Arabic. I liked him. He was brave. I visited him once in hospital. He'd been riding in the back seat of his car with a chauffeur and a little moped came up alongside with a driver and a man sitting on the pillion who produced a gun and shot into the car. It hit him in one shoulder and passed over his backbone and out over the other shoulder. I visited him in hospital and he was being very brave indeed. He used rudeness as a diplomatic tool. He knew that ministers and diplomats don't like a row. He rather liked a row so he would say something offensive and see the chap he was talking to trying to control his temper. Then he would say something more offensive until there was an open row from which he would win. But he's finished now.

AW: Are you ready now to move on to Saudi Arabia? How did the news come to you that you would be returning to Jeddah? Did you apply for it?

JC: No, I didn't apply for it but I suspect who was responsible. My former boss, he was the Assistant Under Secretary when I was Head of NENAD, was Tony Parsons and Tony Parsons had just come back from Tehran and was waiting to be sent to the UN in New York where he did extremely well. Meanwhile he was employed in the Foreign Office. He let me know through a third party that he had had some part in suggesting me for Saudi Arabia. I was the fairly obvious character. I was the best Arabist in the Foreign Office at that time and I'd been speaking Arabic in Syria a good deal and even in the Lebanon. Did I tell you in the Lebanon, when I first arrived I began to speak Arabic to my colleagues the civil servants and they replied in French. I said "I won't speak French to you, first of all because I'm not so fluent as I am in English or in Arabic, but my Arabic is quite good and I propose to go on speaking in Arabic". And they replied, again in French. It took six months before they accepted what they never believed, that a foreigner could speak Arabic comfortably and understand what they were saying.

So it was a big of a change going to Jeddah because there are some words which are in common use in Lebanon but were rude words in Saudi Arabic and I had to avoid those.

### **1979-84 HM Ambassador Jeddah, Saudi Arabia**

AW: How did you find things when you arrived? Had it changed much from your previous time there?

JC: Oh there were several irritations but the quarters were a good deal better. They were fairly new. I had previously been negotiating for this piece of land with one of the Princes who owned the land and he was to build in accordance with our wishes but by the time I came to leave it hadn't been finished so I knew what I was going back to. The house was quite pleasant, but it wasn't as good as the palace in Egypt for example. I got permission to have my study redecorated and re-equipped and I had some book shelves put up in the sitting room and in general paint everywhere. The garden was tidied up because they knew we were staying there for at least a further five years. So it was quite comfortable both in terms of where you sat and in terms of the atmosphere. I was offered a Pakistani chef from Tehran and I took him on and he was a very nice man. They used old fashioned words. I had the cook and the number one bearer and the number two bearer who lived in the servants' quarters. The number one bearer was a Pakistani and the number two bearer was an Arab from the Yemen and they didn't get along, they couldn't talk to each other. So I had the number two bearer moved to be the outdoor caretaker and the gateman. He was a nice man but not very bright. I was offered a new bearer who was a Bangladeshi and he was very good, with excellent English and very much on the ball. So I was quite comfortable and I was promised an exceptional secretary and just before I went to Jeddah I was told that she had to have a heart operation so I was sent a deputy who wasn't very nice and the original girl came out in three or four months and was terrific since she had to be my social secretary since I was not accompanied by my wife.

AW: And how were relations with Saudi Arabia when you arrived?

JC: I inherited some problems. Do you remember the case of the English woman who fell from the balcony? Well that happened before I arrived but it didn't end for about three years. The Deputy Consul had been the one who had gone round at about 5am in the morning in response to a telephone call and found there had been drinking. They admitted everything to him. She was persuaded to withdraw her confession and the doctor and his wife had been arrested for allowing drink in their house and allowing people to drink. He was arrested for allowing his wife to dance with another man and she was arrested for dancing with another man. They'd been remanded and they'd lost their job and their income so they'd been put up free in the house of the Military Attaché who was a toff from the Scots Guards. They didn't get on. He brought them to see me with their lawyer and the vital thing was what they should do when they came up for trial. First of all she had to withdraw her confession and say she didn't know why she had confessed to it. She was shocked and slightly drunk I expect. The

lawyer said that would do for him and he thought that the best result they could expect was to be found guilty and convicted but I could intervene diplomatically and get them repatriated. I said "Fine" and then the doctor spoke up and said "Well, just a moment. I am the money raiser in this marriage and it's far more important that I be released than my wife be released, so would you say to the Foreign Minister, when you are intervening, that you want me to be released". I said "That will be very difficult to say in this country but I will think about it". Then we broke off and we scattered for lunch. I was sitting down to lunch when the servant came in and said I was wanted on the telephone, and this was the doctor again who said there was one thing he hadn't said because the lawyer was present "It has been put to me that there are ways of smuggling me out of the country and what do you think about that?" he said. I said "It's a funny thing to ask me because the reason you came to see me was that my predecessor had promised the Saudi court that if they would bail you, he would make sure you appeared for court when the trial came up. And I have inherited that condition. Secondly, the chances of you leaving the country are pretty unlikely, so I advise you not to try it". And I think he took that advice. They were unpleasant people. They were sentenced to terms of imprisonment and she got twice as much as him because she was a woman, she shouldn't have been drinking.

There were all kinds of complications. The first post mortem exam had been done by an Egyptian doctor and we had the tenth copy of it. We had translated it and two sheets of the paper had stuck together and the awful thing was that it made sense. It began a tabulation on the end of page 2 and carried on with the tabulation not only on the beginning of page 3 but also on the beginning of page 4. So we sent a translation home, done before my time, and a copy was given to the father. He was agitating back home. He said that he had been given no help by the Embassy but in fact he had been out soon after the incident had happened. He'd been put up by the Embassy in a house vacated by someone, an official on leave, and all his appointments had been made for him since he couldn't use the telephone. He didn't mention any of that. He had a lot of support from "Private Eye". The editor of "Private Eye" had a brother who was working in Riyadh, he was a banker. He said "My brother is coming on a visit to Saudi Arabia, would you like to see him?" I had just heard the story from David Gore-Booth that he'd been invited to the country to a lunch party by an old friend of his and by chance he'd been sitting next to this brother. He had said "You'd better know that I am the Counsellor at the Embassy" and the next week in "Private Eye" it said "We can now reveal the latest ploy of the Foreign Office to get people to shut up about this case" and they

said that he had said there was nothing in their preferred case, they'd been guilty of breaking the law in Saudi Arabia and we could do our best of ameliorate the sentence. That was the first time that David had come across the press I think.

AW: And your relations with the Saudis at this time?

JC: I could see ministers when I wanted to. I saw the King quite often and often alone and could talk to him frankly and he could talk to me frankly. It was better conditions than in Syria. I enjoyed it enormously. First of all I enjoyed being the Ambassador, which I'd enjoyed in Syria, but I enjoyed the better conditions. I had a better house and the working conditions were much better.

Most of the difficulties came from British subjects. There were two men who had been sentenced to a term of imprisonment for manufacturing booze and they escaped. They made their way from Riyadh to the Gulf coast where they found a boat lying on the beach. They took it and paddled it as best they could. Finally they hit another beach and they thought hooray they were in Bahrain, but they weren't, they were back in Saudi Arabia. But they escaped again! And they found another boat and this time they reached Bahrain! There were telegrams to the Foreign Office copied to us "They have no passports". Of course they had no passports. Could they issue them with new passports? To which I intervened to say "No the Saudis will be on to this and be very angry if we issue them with new passports". The Foreign Office took legal advice which said they had no grounds on which to refuse them the issue of passports and so they issued them the passports on condition that they didn't make a fuss or consult the press when they got home. But they were approached by the press and within a week it was full of their versions of inhuman conditions, torture and things like that.

I went up to Riyadh and saw the prison where they were and apologised for this behaviour and told them that they had promised not to do it. The governor wouldn't be reconciled, he said that he had given them special conditions which they had exploited to escape, that kind of stuff.

Every foreigner who came had to be sponsored by a Saudi. There was a man who came to work for a Saudi firm so they had sponsored him but he had begun to borrow money from his employer and from one of the Princes. He also appealed to the British community in Riyadh and they had lent him money. But it was no good, he didn't go home, he continued to rampage around and he was finally arrested. One of his friends came out from England and

we knew that the man arrested was an Old Etonian. The man who came out from England came to see me to enlist my help. I refused him but I went on to do all I could privately. When he'd left David Gore-Booth, who was an Old Etonian himself, came in and said "Did you see his tie?" I said "No, I didn't notice". "Well it was an Old Etonian tie; he was hoping to impress you!" We finally got the man out and deported against a promise that he wouldn't do anything in the press and, once again, he spoke to the Daily Mirror. When copies of all the newspapers arrived they were sent straight to the censors so we got ours through the diplomatic bag. The prison governor had seen some of these appeals which shone an unpleasant light upon him and I couldn't persuade him to come round.

JC: We got a visit from Mrs Thatcher which caused great trouble. Whatever department it was sent out the requirements and would I explore how she was to be treated, because they'd never had a woman visitor of that rank before. So I had talks but they said I didn't need to worry, they recognised she was the Prime Minister, a woman of steel, and they would treat her as if she was a man. So I sent a telegram straight to Number 10 reporting what I'd been told and saying that I thought they were genuine. I recommended she wore modest dress with a high neck and cover her arms, long skirt, and gloves as appropriate. I got a telegram back from Number 10 saying "Do you really mean that, at dinner for example, she will have to wear gloves?" I drafted a telegram saying "Of course, except that she can take off the left hand glove because she never touches the food with the left hand". My Counsellor dissuaded me from sending the telegram he said "You can't trust the sense of humour in Number 10", so I didn't send it.

But they sent another telegram saying that she would like to have a hairdresser visit her every day. She was staying in Riyadh in the newly built and equipped guest palace. The Saudis had banned all women's hairdressers because they suspected, rightly, that they were a means for arranging for women to meet men. They would be shown into the shop and then shown out of the back door. But there had sprung up a helpful system by which hairdressers would come to your house. I had a hairdresser who would come to my office. So a woman arrived on the first morning after Mrs Thatcher's arrival and had her own equipment in a box and plugged it in and fused the lights in the whole palace, six storeys high. Explaining that to the guards was difficult but it was got over and her hair was nicely done. It all went well, there were no major problems. I took her in to see the Minister of Defence with whom we had several contracts for supply of arms. The Saudis were providing an interpreter for every interview but something had gone wrong this time so I was interpreting and when he said

something I would translate it and then she would give her reply. I turned to him and found that he was speaking on the telephone and he was speaking to his wife. He was saying “I’m going to be a bit late home for lunch because I’ve got a very awkward visitor here”; I didn’t translate that.

She was a great success. She got everything wrong that she was supposed to say but she didn’t cause any offence which was the important thing.

AW: And did you have any Royal visits?

JC: Yes we had the Duke and Duchess of Kent. The Duke was provided with a special Saudi interpreter and I was interpreting for the Duchess and I can remember we were attracted to a shop which sold spices, great sacks of green powder, purple powder, some of which I recognised and could give the English name for but often I asked the shopkeeper its name in Arabic, he would say it and I had never come across it – and often not the English equivalent either!

There was a moment when the King went on an official visit to London and he was accompanied by his younger brother, the Minister of Defence. He went to Newmarket and afterwards we were driving away and in a field, alone, was a mare. Prince Sultan asked me why the horse was alone so I asked the official from Newmarket who was there. He said “That’s a teaser”. I said “What’s a teaser, I can just about translate it, but what does it do?” and he said “When the stallions come along they have five or ten minutes with the mares and so they can’t waste time, so we have to get them excited first. We put them in the field with this mare, they get excited and then can be taken along to the mare for the purpose of the visit”. I’d no idea about this, knew nothing about horses. So I explained it to the Prince and he said “It’s a bit unfair on this mare”.

The Princes were treated with the greatest ceremony but their ministries were not efficient. We used to send notes verbales to the Foreign Ministry. Now this is not just my experience, it’s every Embassy. There would be no reply. So after a couple of weeks we would go down and ask to see the Head of the West European Department, who was a very nice man indeed and you would speak to him. He could speak good English but he always spoke Arabic to me but he could deal with other Ambassadors who couldn’t speak Arabic. I would say “My note about imports”, he would say “What note? I haven’t got any note”. I said “Well I’ve got a

copy of it here". After about a fortnight you would perhaps get a reply. And every Ambassador said the same thing.

And then there was entertaining. You would make your lists and then you would face the problem of wives. Some men had no objection to bringing their wives and so you would put them down on the list. You'd give the list to your secretary and she would ring their secretary and the first question he would ask would be "Is he to bring his wife?" We would say "That's desired, yes". They would ask if any other Saudi women were coming and "Will there be alcohol at this party?" "Who else will be there?"

AW: And did you serve alcohol at dinners?

JC: Yes, but if we had somebody who was entirely opposed to alcohol then, no, we wouldn't. We'd serve water or Cola or something like that. But most people like that wouldn't accept an invitation.

Similarly when you were invited to a dinner at somebody's house, they would have it in some official place in the house. There were one or two families which were semi-westernised and they would have their wives there and their daughters. I remember once that Kissinger arrived on a boat with his wife and was invited by a man who had been Saudi Ambassador to America twenty years before. All their family were coming. He was a man who had arrived in Saudi Arabia with his wife and his wife had to be invited. So the Ambassadors invited included their wives. But that was unusual.

So your secretary had the job of not only issuing the invitations but ringing on the morning of the dinner party the secretary of the man invited to remind him that this was the night your boss is going to come to the Embassy. Then the Arab habit if you were invited and you have guests, you take them along. So there were lots of extras and problems with the placement. You would say to your secretary or your third secretary "You better scarper". Once an English family arrived at the very last minute and there was a very close friend of mine and he had an extra lady in his group so I invited my secretary to make up the numbers and at the last moment this lady said she wouldn't come and this was a 12 or a 13 or 14 dinner, I had to tell my secretary to stay away. She was nice.

AW: So there wasn't a major problem, a big conflagration during your period in Saudi?

JC: No, the problems were mostly social in Saudi Arabia. We'd had the Queen six months before I arrived so that brought us a lot of plaudits and we had these problems with the British drinking and improper behaviour.

The Embassy was in Jeddah but I had a house and an office in Riyadh the capital, so that I had somewhere to stay when I went up there and some staff who knew Riyadh. Sometimes they would give a party of their own. There was a Counsellor in charge. They would serve wine. On one occasion a man went out after a dinner party and hailed a taxi. The taxi suspecting, rightly, that the man had been drinking drove him straight to a police station. They said "Where did you get his wine?" and he said "At the British Embassy". We were not supposed to have a house in Riyadh though we and the Americans did, the Saudis knew about it and that could be swept aside, but serving alcohol was not known to the police. It was known to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

So these were the little problems we had but over the film, do you remember the film? (AW: the Saudi Princess film?) I was going backwards and forwards to Riyadh to report back. Normally what I would say was that the British Government does not have the power to ban the film and they would say "Well the Dutch Government has banned it". "Well that may be, the Dutch Government has the power but we don't have the power". So I went back to Jeddah three or four times and settled down to wait, decisions take a long time in Saudi Arabia. One day I was rung by the Head of Protocol Department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, round about 7 o'clock in the evening, saying "The Foreign Minister Prince so and so wants to see you. He wants to see you at 8 o'clock tomorrow morning". I said "I'm in Jeddah, I can't get to Riyadh by 8 o'clock, the first plane doesn't go till 7.30 and it takes two hours, what am I to do?" "That's your problem" he said. So I rang my secretary who was very well connected and she said "I've got you a place on the 8.30 plane so you will be there soon after 10 and ask if you can change the summoning time". It worked very well and I got there. I went in and was received by the Foreign Minister who said "This is a very sad day. As you know we have no Ambassador in London but we have named a man. But he will not now go to London and we don't see what purpose you can serve by staying here. We are very upset." And I went into my explanations again but he said "Yes, but we are offended". I asked "How soon do you want me to leave?" "Why do you ask?" he said, and I said "Well in Beirut when the Ambassador was asked to leave he was asked to leave the same day or at the latest the next day". He said "We don't behave like that, take as long as you like". So I took a couple of weeks. He was very nice the Foreign Minister. He came to give a lecture in

Oxford and he began the lecture, in English, he'd been educated at Yale or Harvard and then at the LSE, by saying "I'm speaking to you in English because I have just seen my old friend Sir James Craig and I don't want him to be leaping to his feet with corrections to my Arabic", which was nonsensical but very charming! Then he gave a lecture. "You people in the West are always urging us to make liberal reforms, well we are doing though they may seem very small but we know our country better than you do. Allow us to go at our own pace". When it came to question time somebody stood up, I don't know who he was, I never was introduced to him. He said "What you've said is very understandable but answer me this – when will women get the vote in Saudi Arabia?" And the Prince, who was the Foreign Minister, said I don't know, but I hope it won't take as long as it took in this country". At which there was a great outburst of clapping and laughing. Because he was quite right, they are only about a hundred years behind us. Now a woman can't book a ticket to go from Jeddah to Riyadh unless she has a father or son or uncle with her. Well it was more or less the same here not so long ago.

AW: And so you returned home?

JC: Yes, that was my retirement. They were very generous because it was two or three years before I was due to retire. I had a letter from whichever office it was saying "You may not believe this but it will be advantageous to you to retire now voluntarily. We will engage you on contract and you will stay until the date of your sixtieth birthday. You will be paid the same salary as you are getting now and you will receive early your retirement gratuity." And so that was done and I thought it was very generous.

My secretary, who was an enterprising one, had just noticed that the Ambassador to Germany, he later became Ambassador to the USA, Oliver Wright, had been collected by a British destroyer from Hamburg or somewhere like that, and she discovered that they weren't going to send out a destroyer to Jeddah for me! So she spoke to the agent of one of the big container firms who had ships sailing out and he said "Yes, by all means, where does he want to go to?" She said "I'll have to ask him, where is your boat going to?" He said "It's going from Jeddah to Singapore and then on to Hong Kong". She said she thought I wanted to go to Australia and he said "He can get off at Singapore and take a plane". So I did that. I flew from Singapore to Sydney and was met by my brother-in-law who was living with my sister in New South Wales. He has now died and my sister has got a tumour on her lung, so I speak

to her, she's eight yours younger than me. Heaven knows why I haven't got anything, well I have, but it's not serious like her.

AW: Well what wonderful stories and recollections you have given us James, thank you so much.

### **Supplementary Visit on Wednesday 19 February 2014**

AW: Since we last met, I sent off the draft of our work together so far to the Historians and I did mention that there had been all the issues over your valedictory and the problems that it had caused you. They are quite interested at the moment in the whole issue of valedictories, now they are not being done, but people are wanting to do them ... I wondered if you'd just like to say something about what you felt at the time about what happened to your valedictory?

JC: I don't think that my valedictory was one of the causes ...

AW: No, no, but it caused you some difficulties at the time?

JC: Yes, but it was difficulties arising from the Saudis. I said I think that the Saudis were famous for ignorance and arrogance and I didn't agree with that but that there were various faults. The characteristics of Saudi Arabia were Islam and ignorance of the modern world.

I can remember that at the time I was Director General of the Middle East Association and a man had been ringing for some time, a journalist whose name was Forbes. He wanted to interview me for an article he was writing and I finally gave him an appointment and when he arrived he had a man with him. I'd never heard of Forbes but the other man I knew, I think it was Campbell. They began with some routine questions and then they said "Do you think that the Saudis are arrogant?" Recognising that this was a word that I had mentioned in my valedictory, I said to them "It seems to me that you have some knowledge of what's in my valedictory" and they said "Yes". I said "In that case you have had access to a privileged document which you shouldn't have had access to and the interview is now ended". I rang the Foreign Office immediately afterwards and said that the valedictory was compromised and they put it in the hands of the Treasury Solicitor.

It turned out, after investigation by Scotland Yard, that although I had enclosed with the despatch a little note to the Department saying that although I had given the despatch the classification "Confidential", it did contain some sensitive points. And they got an injunction

against the New Statesman for whom they, the journalists, were working. A great breath of relief. And then I was rung by the Resident Clerk, at 2 in the morning to say that I'd better know that the New Statesman had passed on their copy of the despatch to the Glasgow Herald, as Scottish newspapers were not subject to the English courts. They were working at it but it seemed unlikely that they would succeed. The Glasgow Herald would publish the despatch, and so they did.

Some of the quotations which were critical were published. I was just about, the next week, to go out with a delegation headed by the Deputy Governor of the Bank of England, to have some talks with the Saudis and I cried off that. I got two letters, one from the Governor of the Bank of England, Richardson, and the other was from the Deputy Governor, Blunt was his name, I can't be sure, apologising for having caused me this embarrassment because it seems that this journalist Forbes had been working for the Bank of England on probation and it was fairly clear to Forbes that he was not going to pass the probation. And so he approached various newspapers, which I got from my friends in the press, and I discovered that the Times and the Financial Times had been approached by him and had rejected his suggestion.

And so there was a great fuss. Carrington was the Foreign Secretary and he issued an apology in very cautious terms. I didn't go out to Saudi Arabia until it was all over. The Saudis calmed down. I went out again three or four weeks later because I was on the Board of the Saudi British Bank and when I was there I called on the Minister of Finance, who'd been a particular friend of mine. He invited me to dinner and there he had no women of course but lots of my old friends of ministerial status. And the conversation obviously turned and I said "You've all obviously seen the despatch". They said "Oh yes, it's going round in Riyadh and we have had some discussion". And one of them said "We thought that your criticisms were for the most part right though a little severe". It was all very friendly indeed and I was given a message from the King that I would be very welcome in Saudi Arabia whenever I wanted to go. The Foreign Minister at the time was the same man as at the Oxford debate.

AW: That's lovely James, thank you, that rounds that story off. Now if there is anything else that you can recall, since reading the draft ...

JC: I said that I had been given a prize a few weeks ago. The prize is £5000 and is awarded by the Saudi British Society and this is relevant to the valedictory. I had noted that there was

a British Lebanese Society, a British Egyptian Society, and thought “Why don’t we have a Saudi British one?” So I made all the arrangements for starting and for the first meeting which was to be in the Shell Headquarters on the South Bank. And then there burst on the public the sensation of the despatch. I had imagined that as the founder I would be the Chairman, so I retired quietly and my place was taken by Lord Denman. It crossed my mind that he would say, once the excitement had died down, that I had better resume my chairmanship, but he didn’t! He stayed on, this was 1986 and he remained Chairman of the Saudi British Society until his death in 2013 at the age of 96.

Fellow members of the governing body of the bank had said to me that they thought at first that it would be a resigning matter but everything died down very peacefully and it never arose.

The Society carried on operating in London, I went to one or two meetings but then I moved out here and it became a dreary and expensive task to go up to London. So I stopped going and the Chairmanship was taken over by Sherard Cowper-Coles. They instituted a prize for people who had done something to encouraging British Saudi relations and it was financed by a man called Sheikh Abdul Aziz Turki. Towards the end of last year I got a message from Sherard saying that the Society had decided that I should be given the prize this year but it would be shared by a man I knew, Michael Field who was a financial journalist and he had begun by writing a few books about the families who had been commercially successful in Saudi Arabia. From that he had discovered that there was an interesting and profitable offshoot. In the course of his research he had had to produce family trees of these families and had shown them to the members of these families. They had said “May I have a copy of that” and so now he was concentrating on sending copies of these genealogies to the families and he was awarded the joint prize. I wasn’t sure until I had the news what the prize was, but then I thought it would be divided. I don’t know whether it was divided but I got the £5000, maybe he got another £5000. The money had been given every year by this Sheikh.

So I went up and had to give a speech and said to the secretary of the Society “Shall I speak in Arabic or in English?” She said “Oh that’s an interesting question because as far as I can remember no one has ever spoken in Arabic at these functions which we have every year”.

So I thought about it and I thought I would say a few lines in Arabic and then go on in English and make a joke about me moving into English out of courtesy to the British who had not had the opportunity to learn Arabic and who were living, we thought, in the period of

ignorance. The word for that which would have been recognised by all the Arabs present was *Jahiliyya*. *Jahiliyya* was the period before the birth of Islam and so it got a mild chuckle and I got £5000!