

BDOHP Biographical Details and Interview Index

Sir John Walton David GRAY

KBE 1995; CMG 1986.

Born 1 October 1936.

Married 1957, Anthoula Yerasimou.

Educated at Blundell's School and Christ's College, Cambridge.

National Service, 1954-56.

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Interview with **Sir John Gray** by Malcolm McBain on 29th October, 2001.

McB I see that you were educated at Blundell's School, went on to Christ's College, Cambridge, and then went to do National Service from 1954 - 56. Some time later, in 1962, you joined the Foreign Service, so would you tell me first of all about your National Service and then, secondly, how you came to join the Foreign Service.

JG I actually did National Service immediately after school, 1954 - 56. And then I went to University and stayed there for six years, doing research until 1962, when I joined the Diplomatic Service. My National Service was in the Army, in the Royal Army Service Corps as it then was. I took a National Service Commission, and was posted first to Egypt with a company of The East African Pioneer Corps, transport drivers, and then I went to Cyprus. This was before Suez of course. I went to Cyprus and was a platoon officer in an independent transport company. Again a rather unusual assignment because my platoon consisted entirely of Cypriot civilian drivers, of all possible religious affiliations. I then went up to Cambridge from there.

McB That was a good introduction, in fact, to Diplomatic Service life?

JG Yes, it certainly gave somebody from a reasonably poor background the chance to see the world a bit. And certainly introduced me to a lifelong relationship with the Middle East. At University I did what most people did at universities, with the one exception that I got married as an undergraduate, which is rather unusual. Then I took my degree and I wasn't very sure what to do with my life so I decided to stay on and do some research. And that turned out to be about the Middle East as well: "Arab unity as a factor in Egyptian politics 1936 - 1945".

McB So may I ask you by what method you joined the Diplomatic Service?

JG Well, like so many of the crucial decisions in one's life, it was a bit of an accident. I was coming to the end of the three years of research. I didn't want to go on as an academic and had decided that much. I had a big idea at one time that I wanted to go into the Church, and I still had this idea of the moral crusade of some

kind. The United Nations Secretariat appealed and I got some rather unhelpful advice from the Cambridge University Careers Office saying that the only way for a Brit to get into the UN Secretariat at that time, 1961, was to join the Foreign Office and then seek a transfer later on, which of course was a complete load of twaddle, because very few people took that course and they were usually rather superior beings like Mig Goulding. But, anyway, I rather liked the idea of the Foreign Office, although there were other options in commerce, but I chose the Foreign Office, and the Foreign Office chose me. And rather more by luck than judgement I finished up back in the Middle East, because it was one of those decisions that at the time was considered rather strange. The Foreign Office decided that since I had already made some attempt at Arabic and knew something about the Middle East, perhaps they should make me an Arabist. So off I went to MECAS.

McB So back to Beirut?

JG Well, really back to Shemlan, because the Middle East Centre of Arabic Studies was certainly in the Lebanon, but it was up in the hills; and the Embassy kept a very discreet distance, largely because they felt that a lot of recent undergraduates couldn't be controlled too well. For instance, at the Queen's Birthday Party, the male students at MECAS were invited 'for the garden only'; they weren't allowed into the house. Maybe they thought we'd pinch the silver. Anyway, up in Shemlan, which was about 2,000 feet up, it got quite cold in winter, very primitive living conditions, particularly if you were married as I then was with a child. The school itself, the Centre, was in a what nowadays would be considered a 2-star hotel. And the bachelors who lived there had quite reasonable accommodation, but some of the married villas were a bit outlandish.

McB Who was the Director?

JG John Wilton, with whom I served again later. I think he was a good Director.

McB Did you make any useful contacts amongst the other students?

JG Not many that have actually lasted, I don't think. I'm trying to rack my

brains. There were a few whom I kept in touch with for quite a long time afterwards. There were one or two I still know. Yes, there was Hugh Tunnell, who finished up, if I remember correctly, as Ambassador in Bahrain, who I still occasionally meet, who was in my year. And Hugh Norton (BP) and Brian Constant (now with the Middle East Association). But most of the others, I think, have lapsed.

McB You went into MECAS after having had National Service experience of Egypt and the Canal Zone and so on, and Cyprus too. Did you find that MECAS contributed to your understanding of the Middle East?

JG I think living in the Lebanon contributed to my understanding of the Middle East. I have a bone, have always had a bone, to pick with the way in which Arabic was taught at MECAS. It is very difficult to teach Arabic for practical use, because Arabic is spoken in so many different ways and in so many different countries, and even when they use literary upper-class Arabic, the dialect, the accent can be different and the way in which words are pronounced can be different, so there is a problem which no teacher can get over. It has to be up to the pupil to adapt later on. I always felt, myself, that we didn't pay enough attention to reading and speaking Arabic. Far too much attention was given to learning to write it and unless you were in a very peculiar position most of us didn't need to write Arabic when we left MECAS. We did need to read it because you needed it for the newspapers. And we certainly needed to be able to speak it. And I found I just wasn't equipped for speaking it. I wasn't really equipped for reading it other than with a dictionary. Funnily enough I could write letters and was used to write letters when I was in Bahrain. But God knows what the recipient made of them.

McB Dictionaries. That must be a bit of a problem too. Did they have an alphabet?

JG Yes, they have an alphabet. It's perfectly .. you know, it goes from 'alef' to 'zein', 'waw' 'waw' ... my arabic is a bit rusty, but I was looking up a word the other day in the dictionary and I found the problem was that I had forgotten the order of the alphabet. Yes, there is one. Arabic is, in many ways, a very logical language. It doesn't appear so to a Westerner because it's written in a different script and from right to left, but it is very logical with very few exceptions, except in the formation of

the plural. One of the problems in Arabic is that you just have to learn each plural separately.

McB Anyway, that was a good start for a posting to Bahrain. What were you doing there?

JG I was the Political Officer. That was my official title, which in effect meant a bit of a dog's body, Third Secretary in Chancery type job. I mainly helped the Political Agent and the Deputy Political Agent in contacts with the local population, in running our relationship with the Government of Bahrain, looking out to see what it was doing on foreign affairs, keeping an eye on social and economic developments inside the state. There were other officers who did information and commercial work.

McB Did you come in contact with the Sheikh?

JG Yes, yes. It was a very easygoing relationship between the Agency and the Ruler. He died last year or the year before, Sheikh Isa. He had only just come to the throne when I arrived. He'd only been there a couple of years, so he was quite young. He got on remarkably well with certainly the second Political Agent I served with, Tony Parsons. He was very open and welcoming fellow, whom I knew as well, probably better than any other Third Secretary could be expected to know the ruler of any other country in the world. I wouldn't say I was an intimate but he knew who I was and occasionally signalled me out for particular favours - on his beach - so it was rather an unusual start.

McB After that, in 1967, you went back to the Foreign Office?

JG I I went back to the Foreign Office at a time of change, owing to the fact that the Foreign Office and Commonwealth Relations Office were about to amalgamate, and did so while I was there. I first had a job in Defence Department of the old Foreign Office, which meant our defence relations with about a third of the world, roughly speaking everything east of Suez. And it was quite a dramatic time because we were actually withdrawing from East of Suez; it was the time when we decided to close down various bases. It was the time when we were withdrawing from the Gulf

and there were continual arguments about how many troops to leave behind, etc. So it was quite an exciting year, but then the two Defence departments joined, CRO and Foreign Office, and there was also a Defence Supply Department I think at that time, which also joined. Obviously there weren't enough spaces for everybody, so I went off to Near Eastern and North African Department, as it then was, and got the Egypt desk, which was fascinating, for a couple of years. This was in the aftermath of the '67 war and there was quite a lot of active diplomacy going on over our famous Resolution 242, the one in which we managed to find a form of words that satisfied everybody and imposed a truce on the warring parties between Egypt and Israel. So there was quite a lot of work to be done on that. There were also ships blocked in the Canal, quite a lot of work to be done on that. And there were defence sales with quite a lot of work to be done on that

McB That was a second lot of ships wasn't it, in addition to the ones that the Egyptians put in the Canal in 1956?

JG No, no, this was the second lot. The Canal had been cleared after '56 and in '67 the Egyptians sank some more at both ends, thereby blocking the Canal. But there was a convoy marooned in the Bitter Lake for quite a long time and there were arrangements for changing the crews over and what were we going to do about all the animals and the gunge and that sort of thing, so there was quite a bit of work to be done on that, that was rather low level stuff. But there was also some high level stuff trying to get the Egyptians and the Israelis to talk to each other, difficult. And our own relationship.

McB What sort of relationship did we then have with the Egyptians?

JG Correct. It was, if I remember correctly, the time of Harold Beeley's second coming in Cairo, and he got on remarkably well with Gamal Abdul Nasser so our relations were actually reasonably warm, certainly not cold, and things were going along on a fairly even keel. But it was a period obviously when one took a great deal of interest in what was going on inside Egypt, so there was a great deal of analysis. It was a very interesting job.

McB So it was Sir Harold Beeley for the second time?

JG And Patrick Wright was then the Counsellor and Head of Chancery. So it was a star-studded team.

McB So that was your time in the Foreign Office? And then in 1970 you went to Geneva. What were you doing there?

JG It was put to me by Personnel Department that I required a second string to my bow. At least that's what they said. I'm sure this was *ex post facto* ratiocination. They said they wanted me to acquire an interest in international economic relations. So I was posted to UKMIS Geneva, UK Mission to the UN Geneva, with special responsibility at desk level for UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) but with a little bit of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, not to be confused with the Brussels bit, and of GATT, and anything else that anybody chose to throw at me as time went by. And that was an entirely new departure for me. But I took to it like a duck takes to water. It was very much a matter of backstage, smoke-filled room diplomacy at midnight, trying to get texts that were sufficiently vague for everyone to accept them. From darkest Africa to deepest South America through South Asia into Europe. And it was actually diplomacy as it used to be. You were actually negotiating things and texts came out at the end to which you were more or less bound. I occasionally headed the Western negotiating teams on this and did some work on the bigger stuff as a rapporteur, or the friend of the rapporteur, the person who actually writes the report and has to get it agreed, with all the various groups involved. It was fascinating stuff and we were right in the middle of the Cold War at that time, so there was a great deal of Cold War competition.

McB On a constitutional point, could you say something about how international negotiations are conducted? For example, we negotiate some sort of agreement on economics and everyone agrees to it at the official level. How then does it get translated into accepted policy? Is it debated in Parliament, does it have to go to the Government? How do we do it?

JG I am not a political scientist, but from my experience of various institutions, including UNCTAD and GATT in Geneva, the OECD in Paris and obviously marginal involvement in what was going on in the European Union in Brussels, it depends very much on the constitution of the institution itself. In the terms of the European Union you are agreeing to prospective legislation which you are going to have to put into law in your own country. That was not really the case with the OECD or with UNCTAD. With UNCTAD you were usually trying to negotiate either resolutions which were more or less binding upon the Government but did not entail any legislation, or codes of conduct which, again, were not binding. But the comeback, of course, was that every now and again there would be a review of what Governments had done in relation to the commitments they had readily undertaken in these resolutions and codes of conduct and all the rest of it, and then you could look rather bad. If you worried about looking bad, and if you didn't want to look bad, then you tried to follow the codes of conduct. One of the ones that I was very much involved in was shipping, where we had in those days very considerable interests. Somehow the British merchant fleet seems to have disappeared at some point in the eighties and the ships are all now registered in the Bahamas or Bermuda or wherever. But in those days there were interests to be fought for and it was thought sufficiently practical, the application of these codes of conduct were thought sufficiently real, for us to fight very hard to make sure our corner was defended.

McB Are there any other aspects of your time in Geneva that you want to record?

JG Well, I had two very good immediate superiors, very different in style, one of whom was Michael Butler, and the other of whom was Anne Warburton, later Dame Anne Warburton. Yes, she came after Michael Butler. Michael Butler was always pre-eminently interested in the European Union and had actually gone out to Geneva in the hope that EFTA might turn out to be the back door into the European Union. He got himself out after a couple of years and went somewhere else. Anne Warburton was very much a United Nations person, and she was a very strict disciplinarian, but she did me a lot of good. She straightened me out a bit. I'm very grateful to Anne in many ways.

McB Was she there as early as 1970?

JG No, she was there about 1972.

McB Wasn't she gazetted as a Consul-General?

JG Don't think so, because the Consulate-General in Geneva was a separate institution. It occupied a floor of the same building as did the Disarmament Delegation, but they were all separate entities, but with joint administration. One thing I should mention about my time in Geneva is that after three years I was due for a posting, and I was due to be posted to Sofia, which I didn't particularly relish. I tried to get out of it by getting myself on to the delegation of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, which had started in Helsinki, and did most of the detailed work in Geneva. It finished up in Helsinki later on when great men signed the papers. But that went on for a couple of years in Geneva. I managed to stay for a year. Fascinating, because, there again, you were renegotiating something which was going to have an effect and every word was fought over, and some words were fought over more than others. But unfortunately the person who had the job in Sofia just stayed on, so at the end of twelve months I went to Sofia anyway. I remember I had a fellow delegate on the delegation to the Conference on Security and Co-operation who was a Russian speaker (Roy Reeve), and we used to sit alongside each other in delegations and he used to correct my Bulgarian homework, because the Foreign Office insisted that I did Bulgarian homework while I was in Geneva, to get me ready for this great move. The other thing I suppose I ought to say was that UNCTAD had one of its big conferences during the time I was there, was it 1972, or 1971, and we all tootled off, a whole charabanc, down to Santiago in Chile, for a conference that was supposed to last two months and eventually went on for three. So that was quite a fiesta. Again lots of negotiation and a chance to see yet another bit of the world. I've never been to South America again since then.

McB I think the CSCE was probably one of the most successful international negotiations there has ever been?

JG Well, certainly, in two ways. First of all, it opened up what had been a very rigid wall between East and West. It was helped by other circumstances, the growth

of the telephone, satellites, television stations, radio. It made it very difficult for the Soviet Union to actually maintain that rigid isolation on which so much of the discipline in the system depended. So we were to some extent pushing against a wall which wasn't exactly crumbling but where the fissures were already there. I was particularly dealing with the economic bit and we got some very good concessions out of the Russians, at least on paper, about contacts between economists, scientists, businessmen, this sort of thing. I'm not saying it was what we did in that context which actually resulted in the opening up of the East but it certainly added to the pressure. The other thing it did was establish the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) which is still around and still doing useful if largely unseen work. For instance, in the Balkans. It was great fun, because we had a gang of young first secretaries, well youngish, thirties, who were, we liked to think, running rings round these rather ponderous people who came out from the Soviet Union with KGB leads round their necks, briefs scrupulously written in advance, and of course they weren't very light on their feet. Most of the negotiations were not held in Russian. Once you got behind the scenes, English tended to be the language you negotiated in so we had a built-in advantage. And we had great fun.

McB Interesting. Anyhow they packed you off to Sofia.

JG They packed me off to Sofia as number two, Head of Chancery. It was, again, the rationale of Personnel Department, at least in the old days, that they liked to give people postings that they were virtually bound to take, and that it was time I did a little bit of management. So I was sent off to manage the Embassy in Sofia. And it was a new dimension. I'd never done anything like that before apart from occasionally checking the accounts as a dogsbody in Geneva. This was the first time that I'd ever done any administration, and discipline in an Embassy in those days was very important. We had one or two lapses. I won't go into it, but there were one or two lapses where people were silly.

McB Could you be a bit more specific about that without naming names?

JG Well married men got mixed up with local girls. Then there were things that did not affect our relations with the Bulgarians, internal problems like an accountant

who couldn't actually keep accounts, so he tried to square it away without actually going back to see what was the problem and, as a result, the accounts went haywire. He managed to conceal this from everybody for a long time.

McB Was he making money out of it?

JG No, no, he wasn't. He was perfectly honest, it was just that he was incompetent. I don't know whether he's still in the Service. He was taken off that, sent back home and given something else to do. I've always been afraid of accounts.

McB It's desperately important to get them right.

JG I would probably have been in exactly the same position had I been doing it.

McB How about life generally?

JG Well life was actually a mixture. Basically it was pretty grim, because the Bulgarians, unlike the Soviets, had not really, and all credit to them, except for the very few members at the top of the Politburo, enjoyed very few privileges in Bulgarian society. So, for instance, I would be queuing for my bread on a Saturday morning alongside the Head of Protocol. That sort of thing. There were a few special shops you could go to, but on the whole they only served things you didn't want, or not want very often, like wine and cigars. If you actually wanted bread or meat or eggs or poultry, you had to go and join the queue. And you learnt, for instance, always to carry a plastic bag in your pocket because you might just come across the only supply of oranges that were going to be available in Bulgaria that year. As you were going down the street, you joined the queue. It was rather like wartime in England. If it was going you bought it, because God knows when you were going to see it again. The Embassy had very little exemption from that way of life. There were two or three exemptions: we could, of course, bring in duty free goods, drink and that sort of thing. We worked out a rather risky but usually successful way of getting fresh meat from a butcher near Heathrow, who used to pack it in ice and deliver it just in time (we invented 'just in time') to the local weekly flight out to Bulgaria, and we would virtually meet it on the aircraft steps and take it away before

the ice melted. The other advantage, of course, of Sofia was that, particularly since I have a Greek wife, Sofia was only about 100 miles from the Greek border, so what we often did, particularly for fresh fruit and vegetables, was to go down and spend the weekend in Thessalonika, or if necessary, one of the nearer towns, and go to the Sunday market and buy all the vegetables that God gave you and bring them back over the border without any fight over sanitary problems from the Bulgarians. So it was possible to do it. If you lived in Bucharest God knows what you did.

McB Why didn't the Bulgarians grow their own?

JG They did, but they had contracts to sell it all to the Russians. And they had a very cavalier attitude to all sorts of things. The Bulgarians were not very clever in their commercial operations. They would, for instance, produce the required amount of carrots or whatever it was, load them on to a wagon in the marshalling yards in Sofia. I've seen them there. And then just leave them there until the Russians chose to send down a train to take them away, by which time they were a stinking heap. So as a result the Russians didn't get them, nor did the Bulgarians, except at the very height of the season. For instance there was one month of the year when they produced so many melons that they had overdone their quota to COMECON, so they actually sold melons to the Bulgarian people. But they would disappear as fast as they'd arrived, because as soon as the quota had popped up again, they'd gone.

McB What did they get back from Russia?

JG Engineering goods.

McB Migs?

JG Military stuff, yes, but in terms of what you could actually do things with, engineering goods...um, I think mainly engineering. Oil, that was the big thing, sold at a price below world prices. No oil in Bulgaria. Well, there may have been one or two donkey pumps somewhere or other. And they had a very leaky nuclear plant which they still have. It's still leaking, called Kosladui.

McB Were the security people obtrusive?

JG Yes. It was assumed that everything was bugged. After a time, I must say, you schooled yourself not to mention certain subjects and then just got on with life. I worked on the basis that if they really listened to all my pillow talk with my wife, you know, how many hours do they have in a day? Listening to all this stuff. Maybe it was more sophisticated. Maybe they had word activated things that were tripped on if you mentioned a particular word. I don't know. But anyway you got accustomed to that. You got accustomed to the fact that there was always a policeman hanging around outside whatever building you were in. We lived in three buildings in three years, of our own choice. There was always a militia man posted at the bottom of the stairs to see who went in and who went out. You didn't have free access to the Bulgarians. I remember once having a fascinating conversation with a drunken miner to whom we gave a lift in some area of Northern Bulgaria. He obviously didn't know what on earth a CD car was - he just wanted to get home. We had a rather interesting conversation with him. Particularly the Defence Attaché. The Defence Attaché had an awful lot of problems as a result of being followed wherever he went, and there were one or two occasions when I went with him when it did actually become rather intrusive and at times rather dangerous because they were so keen to keep us in their sights. If necessary, if you were going too fast, they would drive in front and force us to slow down. That sort of thing. It was all rather childish. I was only once, myself, followed that I know of, ostentatiously. We went down to Plovdiv and we needed some bread, some rather nice bread, which you could get there, so I went into the bread shop, bought two loaves, and took one back and offered it to the secret policeman, who pretended I wasn't there. But you were aware of it all of the time, and it was a bit of a bore so that is why it was rather nice to be able to go over to Greece and to a lesser extent, also to Yugoslavia, which was only forty miles away. That was a bit, in those days, freer and economically more advanced. All things available in the shops, better restaurants.

McB How long were you there?

JG In the end I was there for about three years. I stayed on a bit because, great event, we had the first Royal Naval visit to a Bulgarian port for about twenty years,

and they made an awful lot of difficulties about it, so it was thought that on the whole I'd better hang around as a focal point back at the Embassy. So I waited until that was over, and then I went off to my next post.

McB Which was...?

JG Jeddah

McB As Counsellor?

JG Well, I had two posts in Jeddah, which again meant I stayed rather longer than was usual. I had two years as Commercial Counsellor and then two years as Head of Chancery and No. 2.

McB So that was a good long spell?

JG I was there for four years.

McB Then came back into using your Arabic again?

JG A little bit. Not as much as you might think. First of all there weren't an awful lot of local newspapers to read. If any writing needed to be done then there was someone willing to do it rather than me, thank God. Even if it was confidential. Most of our correspondence with the Saudis was not confidential. And all the Saudis we dealt with spoke English. Very few businessmen of the quality and calibre that we would want to speak to didn't speak English. And almost all the Ministers spoke English. One or two senior Princes either didn't or wouldn't but they all had interpreters anyway. And I very rarely got to see them. That was the Ambassador's job. Except when I was Chargé. It was a country where you use an awful lot of what you might call kitchen Arabic. In the souks and shops and at petrol stations, this sort of thing, or out in the deep countryside, but the sophisticated political discussion tended to take place in English.

McB Anyhow, the knowledge of the language would have given you a certain feel

for what was going on in the country?

JG Yes, and also obviously because of the fact that I had spent quite a lot of time as a student, as a young diplomat, either in, or dealing with, the Arab world. I had been in Bahrain and so had some, not total, but some preparation for the social aspects of Jeddah. But Jeddah was the most rigorous Islamic country that I and my wife had ever lived in up until that point, well ever. And it did take a bit of getting used to. I remember I gave away to my wife where we were going. I wasn't supposed to tell her, but I told her that she wouldn't be able to drive a car, and of course she knew immediately that this meant Saudi Arabia.

McB Were there any other curious restrictions? Drink, of course.

JG Not ferociously. They may have got worse now but certainly when we were there they were tolerant provided you were discreet. And certainly for diplomats there was no particular problem. There was more of a problem for the non-diplomats who had to be careful not to be picked up drunk or have anybody picked up drunk who had been at their house. And they had to keep an eye on disaffected servants who might shop you. But providing you obeyed those rules, there was no problem. Everybody knew that the foreign community was brewing booze like mad and buying the occasional bottle of bootleg liquor. Only the occasional one because it was so expensive. Only the richer merchants and Princes could afford it anyway, and of course they did. That was the hypocrisy of the system. If you went to a rich Arab's house, he didn't offer you whisky, he asked you which brand you wanted. So, you know, there was quite a display. There was the drink. That, as I say, was an irritant rather than anything else. There was no entertainment; public entertainment was almost unknown. There were no cinemas, no theatres, that sort of thing. If you brought a video into the country they took it into a private room to view it to see if there was any lechery involved. Pork products were unobtainable. Occasionally there were ways in which you could find access to it, but on the whole you did without pork. Which meant that a menu at a hotel was somewhat tricky as you couldn't have any booze and you couldn't have any pork. The dress restrictions for women in public could be a bit of a bore. Certainly not very flattering. It was just a sort of general dead hand, in public. In private it was much more relaxed, even with

the Arabs, much more relaxed, when you could get to them. It wasn't as bad as Bulgaria where everyone was vetted before they could come to your house. But on the whole most Saudis didn't see the need to be seen with Europeans in Saudi Arabia. There were exceptions. But they lived their lives, we lived ours.

McB So how about finding out what they really thought about things?

JG Very difficult. I mean you could find out what the Government really thought about things or wanted you to think what they thought about things. You might have one or two Saudis who were sufficiently westernised that they would then speak to you about what was going on. But, on the whole, you couldn't generalise about public opinion. Newspapers were very strictly controlled, so it was rather difficult to get to know what was going on. You could use inspired guesswork, but I think many of us would have expected some sort of uprising, revolution, or coup d'état in Saudi Arabia years ago, and it hasn't happened. So presumably public opinion is reasonably happy with what is going on or is not disposed to do anything about it. There was one significant outbreak when we were there. A sort of proto-Osama bin Laden, took over the Holy Mosque in Mecca. I don't know if you remember that, but it went on for several weeks. They were fanatics, Moslem fundamentalists, who were critical, very critical of the regime, and they took guns into the Holy Mosque and barricaded themselves in and were eventually flushed down into the cellars where they hung out for several weeks, as a protest about the way in which the Al Saud were running the country, the way in which the ruling family were ruling. Very little appeared in the local press but we knew what was going on and the foreign press knew what was going on.

McB Did you get any sort of understanding of the Islamic philosophy of life?

JG I dabbled with the philosophical or politico-philosophical side of Islam when I was doing my research on Egypt, particularly to try to understand the views of the various reforming elements in Egyptian Islam in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. And they went different ways. There was a general feeling that something was wrong with Islam amongst the more advanced thinkers, not I think the mass of the population, and they split roughly into two groups, one of which believed in a sort of

relativism. You can still see it in Islam with Islamic speakers today. There was someone in the papers yesterday, in The Sunday Times, who believed that the Koran and the Hadith and the Sharia had to be interpreted in relation to the world we now live in, rather than in the world in which the Koran etc had been revealed. A dangerous thing to say as the Koran was said to be the word of God. But the Koran contains what, to a non-believer, look like contradictory statements, and so they need to be reconciled. And there were those like Mohamed Abduh, the great sage of that particular train of thought, who felt that some degree of relativism needed to be brought in to relate these original revelations to modern times. The other stream of modernism is the one that finishes up with Osama bin Laden at its extreme, which believes that what was wrong was that the Moslem people had departed from the clarity and position of cleanliness of the original revelation and had allowed themselves to be corrupted along the route. What was needed was to go back to fundamentals. Therefore they were fundamentalists. And you got a certain feel, you certainly got a feel for it in Egypt, but you got a certain feel for it in Saudi Arabia, in that the official school of Moslem philosophy followed by the Saudi Royal Family is Wahhabism, and Wahhabism is a form of fundamentalism. It believes in going back to the strict tenets of Islam, not messing about, and they still theoretically hold to that. That's why life in Jeddah so difficult for someone of a Western frame of mind. And Osama bin Laden is to some extent the extreme example of that.

McB Well extraordinarily there now appear to be some of these British Moslems willing to go and fight for ...

JG The same dichotomy is present in British Islam. There are those who, as I say, in the Sunday Times yesterday, were arguing for the relativist view of Islam, that it needed to be brought up to date, if you like. They are very careful about these words, because they wouldn't say 'brought up to date', they'd say it was 'eternal' but we are not eternal, we change, and therefore the way in which the sacred documents apply changes. But then there are others who say no, and you know it's revelation....

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JG ...As I was saying, many of these so-called fundamental elements of Islam

have nothing to do with the Koran at all - such as wearing the burka in Afghanistan. There's absolutely nothing in the Koran which substantiates that requirement, or makes an Afghani woman who wears the burka more pure than an Egyptian woman who puts a slight scarf around her head. All that is required is modest dress. So the interpretation is there again. How do you interpret the requirement for modest dress. But that's the way they feel it. They have incorporated some of these post-Mohamed ideas or even free market ideas. Some people would say that the strict differentiation between men and women is actually an ancient Persian custom. It goes back a long way in Persian history, at least as far back as the Greeks and the Persians fighting each other; or the idea of haram where women can be excluded is a Persian rather than an Arab idea. But anyway, there we are, to go back to your original question, yes, one was aware of the practical effects of Wahhabism in one's daily life but there wasn't much discussion of religious topics between Brits and Arabs in Jeddah at the time. It was, on the whole, considered to be a subject best avoided by both sides because the likelihood of agreement was small. You just accepted that's the way they were, and they accepted that's the way we were.

McB Yes that certainly seemed to be the case in British India, didn't it, among British officers and Hindu troops?

JG You didn't discuss religion. The difference, I suppose, between India and Saudi Arabia when I was there was that in India we were the boss class and in Saudi Arabia we weren't. There was nothing to stop you setting up churches in British India but you couldn't set up a church in Saudi Arabia. You couldn't even have a Christian religious meeting. And if you were found to be having one then you were likely to be expelled.

McB Just like that.

JG Just like that. There was a group in Riyadh when I was there who were very keen Christians and they thought that if they went out into the desert on Sunday and held their services there they would be left alone, but ultimately they weren't. They were holding their services one day and suddenly they found themselves ringed by Saudi police. And within days they'd all been thrown out. So much for the

Declaration of Human Rights or whatever it is. We, in fact, had the ... I don't know whether it still goes on.... we used to make our Embassy in Jeddah available for church services on Friday, and they were known by some euphemism as 'Community Meetings P', for Protestants, and 'Community Meetings C', for Catholics, and the Saudis must have known what was going on because hundreds, literally hundreds, of Filipinos would turn up for the C service, and what were they doing at the British Embassy on a Friday?

McB Did no other Embassy do this?

JG The Americans did, I think. And one or two of the big American firms. Contractors like Raytheon, people like that, and Aramco at one time, but it had changed by the time that I got there, were almost autonomous states. In fact, one of the few places you could get pork in Jeddah when I was there was in Raytheon, and one of the few places in Riyadh where you could get pork was in the American Officers' Club, where they actually advertised it as you went in: "Today's special - Pork Chops", with that sensitivity the Americans always have to Moslem feelings.

McB They probably find it difficult to believe that there are people with such strict views.

JG They're not very sensitive. I don't think it's because they want to be insensitive, but it just doesn't register; they don't understand. Maybe this conflict will help. Well, there we were, enjoying the delights of sunny Jeddah. There were upsides to it. It was a very crucial relationship for us. We were obviously not as high in the esteem of the Saudis as the Americans were but the Saudis were very important to us in terms of oil, in terms of security, in terms of defence sales, in terms of straight commerce, so we were very keen to cultivate them, and I think the Saudis saw us, and the French, as a sort of counterweight to the Americans. Another way of getting their message across on Israel. And on the whole they got on. They found the Brits more sensitive, easier to deal with than the Americans. There were an awful lot of Brits working as commercial advisers or even managers to Saudi businessmen. It was a very, to use that terrible word again, interesting appointment because it was a country where we mattered, not at the top rank, but we mattered. Very definitely at

either the top of the second division or at the bottom of the first. The Americans were in a league of their own, virtually. We were in the next league. And it was important to us to cultivate them and, to some extent, important for them to cultivate us.

McB It is astonishing, isn't it, how many Saudis own property in London?

JG Yes. Thinking of my generation, as it were, or the generation just before, I think the younger generation of people I didn't know when I was there, who were still at college or at school, tended to go more for the States, or did. Whether they will now I don't know. But they did tend to go for the States, to be educated there. They loved the gadgetry and all that and that it was an open society which they don't get at home. So if you are going to go open, let's go as far open as you can. And they like America. But the older generation, people who are older than me and my age and possibly just before, finds London and Paris very attractive.

McB How far down the social scale did the wealth percolate among the Saudis?

JG Far enough. There's always been, there was then, always the feeling of responsibility to pass some of the wealth on down the scale, both for moral reasons and also to some extent for self-preservation, to spread it about a bit. But the contrasts in wealth between the very rich and the poor were immense. There were still Bedouin wandering around, owning little more than just what they stood up in, or were able to carry in the back of a pickup. There were Bedouin encampments around Riyadh where the standard of life was absolutely appalling and the Saudi Government did try to do something about it. Because these people didn't want to settle down, they were rather like gypsies, they wanted to be able to get out into the desert. And so they don't want to settle down, don't want houses. What they wanted, and got, was education, if they wanted it, free, health service free, this sort of thing and they appeared to be happy. The people who were probably in their quiet way most disaffected, I think, because they'd lost status, were the merchants, particularly the merchant princes, not princes in that sense, but the old family, the old money. I won't name names. Many of them in Jeddah, which was the old outlook or post for the Peninsula who, until the oil started coming in in billions, had been the rich of Saudi Arabia. Princes used to hang around their offices in the hope of a little largesse, and

the situation had been reversed in a lifetime, less than a lifetime, in a generation, and now they were hanging around Princes in the hope that the Princes would give them crumbs from their table, certain contracts and a wink and a nod, and the entrée to the Prince Ministers, and things like this. They did sometimes, I think, feel that life had dealt them a hard hand of cards.

McB At the time you were there, of course, Britain itself was undergoing great turmoil, great financial turmoil because of the collapse in confidence of the pound, and excessive spending by the Labour Government at that time. So we were in a sort of financial and economic crisis. Did that impinge at all on your work?

JG Well, by the time I got there, Mrs Thatcher was in power. I arrived at the beginning of 1978 and it was shortly after that that we had a State Visit by the Queen, at which a rather tetchy David Owen represented the Foreign Office. He clearly thought it all a waste of his time. And then, very shortly after that, there was a General Election and Mrs Thatcher came to power.

McB David Owen thought the State Visit was a waste of time...?

JG No, not the State Visit was a waste of his time but his presence on it was a waste of his time. He was grumpy. He can be a very grumpy man and he let it show. But most of the time I was there it was Mrs. T. That doesn't mean to say we didn't have problems, we did, but I think the Saudis felt more at ease with a Conservative Government than they did with a Labour Government. They certainly felt more at ease with the sort of policies that Geoffrey Howe was pursuing, and they got on reasonably well, but obviously there were problems. I can remember when I was in the Commercial Counsellor's job bitter complaints coming in from Saudis about the way in which businessmen, manufacturers in the U.K., would not increase staff to fulfil a contract earlier, because once they had taken men on they couldn't get rid of them. So they would prefer to get a small contract which they could handle within their existing capacity rather than get a bigger one for which they would have to increase capacity, and the Saudis just couldn't understand that sort of thing. And of course the problems of exchange rates too. On the whole we were respected, but, as I say, not in the same league as the Americans. Of course the Russians weren't there at

all. The French were very intrusive. They were starting to work from nothing, so they had everything to gain and nothing to lose.

McB And of course they had a pretty impressive defence industry.

JG Yes, indeed. A very flexible approach too.

McB Were you there during the time of 'Death of a Princess' and all that?

JG Yes, I was.

McB And the Helen Smith case. Would you like to elaborate on that.

JG They were actually separate, though they overlapped in time. But there was very little influence across from one to the other. I have my own theory about the Helen Smith case. Others have their theories, but nothing was definitively proved in the end. My theory is that she died (I hope this interview will not be published while her father is alive) in the throes of sexual passion on a truckle bed on a balcony with a very low wall, and over they went. They were both probably very drunk. She and the man, who also died, a deep sea diver, were impaled on the railings below, a nasty way to go. I felt very sorry for the girl, but that in my mind is what happened. The other diver, there were two of them, was almost certainly in bed with the mistress of the house, Peggy Arnott, and her husband, Dr. Arnott, who had had a hard day's work at the hospital as a consultant surgeon, was probably sleeping it off in another room, totally unaware of what was going on backstage. Now in order to evade the charge of murder, the charge was that she was jealous of Helen Smith and pushed her over, Mrs Arnott said she couldn't have done it because she was sleeping with this other man at the time, committing adultery. Adultery is a very difficult thing to prove in Sharia Law - I mean to go into the sordid details, you either have to have three male witnesses to the actual penetration, which must be a bit of an orgy, or, because they are female and so less reliable, six female witnesses to the actual penetration, making it more of an orgy. Or you can confess on three separate occasions to having committed adultery. And Mrs Arnott had confessed twice when we got in on the act, got a good Moslem lawyer, Oxford educated, to give her advice. He said 'keep your

mouth shut'. Because for the third time you say this you are in for a stoning, because that's the other way of proof. So she didn't say anymore. She was a stubborn, pig-headed woman, but she realised she was in some mortal peril, so she shut her mouth. We then had to go in to a long rigmarole with the Saudis to try and get an appropriate punishment, all the time being sniped at by Helen Smith's father, who actually came out to Jeddah for some considerable time, who was trying to prove that it was all a con. We were a set-up. We were all whitewash. And he was in touch with the British press, but eventually we got and the King was rather loath to get involved, because this was Sharia Law. Wahhabism separates the two to some extent, and it was being tried by Islamic judges. But eventually I think somebody leaned on somebody and it was decided that she would be sentenced to a certain number of strokes of the cane for indecent behaviour, or something, dancing with a man not her husband, that sort of thing, which in the eyes of the Western world is not particularly and that her husband should also be sanctioned in some sort of way and that they should both be expelled. But then, of course, the British press, not satisfied with the fact that we'd actually got the woman off the hook, as far as life was concerned, began to protest about the strokes, which were always interpreted in English as 'lashes'. You had ideas of men strapped to the gunwales, and being given the cat-of-nine-tails. It wasn't like that. It was fairly humiliating but not particularly painful, the use of the cane. You couldn't do the old public school twist, it had to be a straight arm. I've seen it done. It wouldn't have passed muster at Blundell's I can tell you. But eventually we even got them to drop that and she was just kicked out. So that more or less got rid of the Helen Smith thing. Meanwhile we had the 'Death of a Princess' which you know was a TV film which cast some aspersions on the way in which Saudi Princesses lived their lives. And was also regarded by the Saudis to intrude into the domestic affairs of one of the senior members of the family and they wanted it withdrawn. We pointed out that we couldn't exercise that right over an item in the newspapers or on TV. They never understood this idea that we couldn't influence the press. And when the film was shown, they duly objected and, when we wouldn't apologise, because we didn't see there was anything to apologise for, it wasn't our decision, asked the Ambassador to leave. They gave him a month to go, pretty generous as these things go, which probably revealed a split in the Royal Family between the younger generation led by Saud bin Faisal, and the older members of the family. Saud bin Faisal realised that there wasn't very much we

could have done about this and that it would be better if they kept their mouths shut. No-one was particularly interested. It's a very boring film. I've seen it three times. You see the Grandfather, who is maligned in the film as the Grandfather of the Princess, who gets shot and her husband get beheaded, was actually the King's elder brother. He was the oldest surviving son of the direct line from Abdul-Aziz bin Saud, Ibn Saud. He was passed over as King because they have a very judicious way of choosing their rulers. He was passed over as King because of what was known, he was known as Abu Sha'rain, father of two devils, one devil was that he drank too much, and the other devil was that he had a terrible temper. And when the two were out at the same time, you were in deep trouble. If he was drunk and in a bad temper then anything might happen. And he was putting pressure on his brother, as he put pressure originally on the Princess herself; he pressed for family justice, because she hadn't actually done anything wrong in Sharia Law. She had married the man before he took her virginity, as far as everybody knew they had been married, but the point was he'd gone against family law because she had married without the consent of her parents. But when we came down to the film he was the one who was pressing the King and through him various Ministers to do something about it. This was an insult to him. There was also an insult to the family generally, because there was an aspersion, if you remember, that Saudi Princesses were in the habit of going to a particular stretch of desert road in their large limousines and drive slowly down one side of the road while gentlemen who appeared to offer their favours drove slowly down the other. And when the Princesses saw someone whose features they thought they rather liked, they'd say 'him' and he would be brought over and away they'd go, and you know, life would resume its course. And the Saudis didn't like that, needless to say. And there were other things there too, but those were the two basic points. Now we couldn't apologise, we refused to apologise, because we said these things were outside our control in the UK, so the Ambassador was asked to leave.

McB Who was that?

JG James Craig. And I was left in charge and we then spent three and a half months trying to get him back again. Trying to get him back on an even keel. Actually there was very little direct downside to this incident. Commerce was not affected, most relations were not affected, it was just that the Embassy was

functioning without the Ambassador, and he was an Ambassador who had very good contacts, top level, so we wanted him back and wanted everything properly sorted. It was eventually sorted out by some weasel words that I can't now remember, which we said didn't amount to an apology and they said did. And so everyone was happy in the end. First Hurd came out, and, number two, meetings and documents were agreed and then Carrington came out and everybody fell into each other's arms lovey-dovey and away we went. And I had use of the Rolls Royce for three and a half months.

McB So, anyway, after that exciting period you came back to be Head of Maritime, Aviation & Environment Department (MAED)

JG Everything else department. It was actually a direct lineal descendent of General Department, do you remember the old General Department, which was the place where you sent everything that you hadn't given to any other department? And we were the direct lineal descendent of that. There were one or two others but we reckoned they were Johnny-come-lately. We dealt with the three subjects which you see in the title, plus, when I first headed the Department, counter terrorism. And the spread was so large that I was one of the few Heads of Department at that time who had two Assistants, one of whom dealt almost exclusively with counter-terrorism.

McB Of course, there had been high-jackings hadn't there?

JG It came about because terrorism on an international scale first showed its face in aircraft high-jackings, so aviation. The Department grew rather like Topsy. About halfway through my tenure, after the Yvonne Fletcher case, it was decided that a separate Department should be set up for counter-terrorism, so they set up Security Co-ordination Department and that hived off. So that was great fun. You know, exercises and the occasional real thing down in Cobra. Cobra is not a new invention, it's been going for at least twenty years.

McB The occasional real..?

JG Real hi-jack. No, not a Scottish reel. Though one of our manoeuvres did

take place in a Scottish castle. No this was very serious stuff actually. For instance I remember one of the first exercises I went on which was the one in the Scottish castle. We had to break it off half-way through because someone had hi-jacked an aeroplane in Uganda and it had finished up in Stansted. So we all had to come skeltering back, including an SAS team, from Inverness, by any means possible, down back to Stansted in London and Hereford and God knows where to set up for this operation. So it was a significant part of my life and we also dealt with planning for evacuations, for some reason. That was landed on my Department, and that I liked to, I don't know whether they still do it, I like to credit myself with a little bit of a revolution there, because when I arrived we had these cumbersome plans which all assumed that things would go according to a pre-ordained plan: you do A, then you do B, then you do C and D. They all assumed that you had the co-operation of local authorities, which was by no means assured in many cases, so I got them to re-write it on the basis of a series of check lists, a series of questions you asked yourself as the crisis developed - 'do I need to do this?' - 'can I do that?' - etc. rather than 'I'm going to do this, I'm going to do that', many of which would not have been applicable or wouldn't have been possible. And after a good deal of persuasion it was agreed that we would go over to the Gray System, phases and checklists in each case, rather than pre-ordained plans, but that also was then taken away from us. And we concentrated in the last two years I was there on Maritime, Aviation and Environment, which had some vague and difficult subjects to get your head round, like the Law of the Sea where I came in very late on negotiations that had been going on for about ten or fifteen years and where every word had a sort of commentary about ten pages long that couldn't possibly be changed. But it also included the Channel Tunnel, or as it was then known 'The Channel Fixed Link', as it could have been a bridge. And I was the Foreign Office, Ministry of Defence and MI5 and MI6 representative on the official committee. Quite a strange constituency. That was again very stimulating. It involved at its height bi-monthly visits to Paris, which showed up very starkly the difference, because there were also bi-monthly visits the other way to London. The style and content of official entertaining in Paris was at a slightly different level to the thick sandwiches you got from the Department of Transport in London. So I got to know Paris quite well apart from that because, I must admit, rather selfishly, I insisted that all meetings in Paris should take place either on a Friday, thereby allowing me to stay for the weekend with my wife, or on Monday whereby I was also able to stay the

weekend with my wife. And we used to get those special 72-hour tickets, whatever they were called, a two and a half day ticket or three day ticket from Sealink which were cheap, so the Foreign Office quite liked that.

McB How about Lockerbie?

JG No that was after my time. We had no particularly nasty terrorist incidents abroad that I can recall during my time. We had a couple of hi-jackings, but none of them were abroad, because the way in which things worked in those days was that if terrorist incidents were in the UK, then the Home Office led. If it was abroad and affected British interests, particularly if it might require mobilisation of the SAS, then the Foreign Office led. As far as I can recall, there was no incident of that sort, so we were always just providing the diplomatic advice.

McB To your profound relief.

JG No I rather enjoyed it, it was rather.....

McB No, I mean relief that there were no actual ...

JG Oh I see, yes, well, obviously one doesn't want these sorts of incident to arise but it did rather mean we practising in a vacuum, we never actually carried it out. One of the incidents that I remember during the Stansted incident took place at a very cold time of the year and was very revealing of the more humane aspects of Mrs. Thatcher's personality. First of all, she was very worried about the women and children on board, for everybody but particularly the children, because they'd taken off in the middle of summer in Tanzania and arrived in Stansted in February or March, and it was pretty grim and she wondered how on earth they could get some warm clothes. Clothes were got. The other thing she realised was there were at that time in the Cabinet Office Briefing Room, in COBRA, down in the depths of Downing Street, no facilities for providing food for the people who were there, in twelve hour shifts virtually, and every now and then somebody would be sent out to a Pizza Hut to collect pizzas. That sort of thing. It was all very gimcrack and at one point she said 'what about food, what about feeding?' because she was capable, as

you know, of moving from the sublime to the less sublime fairly directly. She suddenly asked 'what are the feeding arrangements?' Go on, I want to know what the feeding arrangements are', wouldn't brook no for an answer, and I think it was pointed out that there weren't any. 'Ah', she said, 'Then you must be getting rather hungry'. This was about 11 o'clock at night. 'I've got a lot of Christmas cakes in No 10 that I've been given over Christmas. We'll never eat them. I'll send for them. We'll all have Christmas cake.' So there we were discussing this wretched hi-jack, which might still have gone wrong, we didn't know what in fact had been done, we were all eating Christmas cake in the Cabinet Office Briefing Room, courtesy of the Prime Minister. Strange world. The result of it was that we were then given Metropolitan Police food, which consisted mainly of greasy breakfasts, very bad for the health. I think the pizzas were probably better.

I should mention one of the more serious incidents that we dealt with in my time at MAED, and it was after this that the new Department was set up. The Yvonne Fletcher case. You will remember that she was shot dead by someone within the Libyan Embassy while stewarding a demonstration against Qaddafi. Since the incident took place in the UK the Home Office was the lead Department. But the involvement of the Libyan Embassy, or People's Bureau as they liked to be called, meant that there was a strong FCO interest as well, not least because of the position of our Embassy staff in Tripoli where there were lots of demonstrations. There was also the question of how far diplomatic immunity stretched. The Met were very unhappy that the eventual settlement allowed everyone inside the People's Bureau to leave the UK unquestioned although one of them must have been the killer of Yvonne Fletcher.

That went on for four years and there were lots of other bits and pieces including Air Service Agreements. We had some very tight negotiations with the Americans, particularly over Laker. Do you remember the Laker case where Laker sued in a class suit/action British Airways and Pan Am for undercutting him, the equivalent of dumping, bringing in uneconomic rates on the North Atlantic in order to chase him off. And the Justice Department in the States got on to this and we had a very hard time over it. I can't actually remember how it ended because it went on for so long that I had left by that time.

McB They some how or another got rid of Laker, didn't they?

JG Yes, I think they saw him off in some way or another, but it was not easy and a Judge Green, I remember, that's a name from the past, who was very strict on all this sort of stuff, wouldn't stand any nonsense at all. But it took me over to Washington three or four times, which was nice.

McB Yes the Americans have always been extremely tough on transport negotiations.

JG I can assure you on shipping they were as difficult as anyone from a very protectionist point of view, much more protectionist than we were. There was some Act, which looked after their shipping interests and meant that almost nobody else could get in, rather like the airlines. They could not get in on coastal traffic. What's it called ?

McB Cabotage.

So have we dealt with MAED?

JG We got involved in some very crucial subjects from the Foreign Office point of view. These weren't usually things which the Foreign Office led. But they were subjects on which the Foreign Office required MAED to make sure that the interests of the nation abroad were taken into account. Because the Department of Transport were very tough on aviation agreements, we had to make sure that they knew there were other things in our relationship with Lower Slobovia other than the Air Services Agreement. And they didn't take kindly to being told about this, and that was our job to create a liaison between the two Departments. It was not easy. And we also got involved in the selling of aeroplanes. For instance, I remember a case where a particular Ambassador got in very deep water with the Department of Trade and Industry because he hadn't realised that an aircraft which was 50% British in the airframe, but with an American engine, was not necessarily a better deal for UK Inc than an aircraft that was 50% British in the engines with an American airframe. Because engines have a much shorter afterlife than the airframes. The airframes on

the whole go on for ever. Engines wear out, they have to be maintained, repaired, spare parts, all this sort of thing, so if you put a Rolls Royce engine into the aircraft, even if it's an American frame, in this case it was a Dutch frame, it was a Fokker, then you are much better off than the other way round, and the poor Ambassador didn't realise this. He thought having BAE up front was much more important than having Rolls Royce stuck on the wings. He got into the most terrible problems. We were always having to give detailed advice on how to handle this question.

McB Which was very specialised, there's no doubt about that.

JG And it needed very careful handling because the obvious is not always right.

McB So after that you went back to the Lebanon as H M Ambassador.

JG Yes, with my bank manager on my tail and children at school. As we all know, the Foreign Office never quite covered the school fees. We were happy to accept the first foreign posting that came along. They didn't always find it easy to get an Ambassador to go to the Lebanon. My predecessor, David Miers, had gone there after a two or three month gap, after his predecessor, David Roberts, who was very well liked and respected, left before the end of his term to become Director of the Middle East Association; he subsequently died after that. And left this gap and David Miers came under very great pressure as Head of Middle East Department to get out there and take the job on. Which he did very well. So out I went to the Lebanon, which was a very different kettle of fish. One really didn't think in the Lebanon. I'd come from a Department where, in a quiet way, there was involvement with decisions, which were of some importance, even if they were taken largely by other Departments, and I went out to a country in which, frankly, I don't think the Foreign Office was awfully interested, except in hostages. And possibly drugs. Our commerce had gone, everybody's commerce had gone down the tubes. There wasn't really a government to have relations with, there was a sort of 'gouvernement fainéant,' which you could deal with, but whether they actually had any control over anything was doubtful. You were never quite sure where they were going to vote in the UN or anything like that. Security was awful. All one's traditional reasons for wanting to be represented in that country didn't really apply, except for hostages, I

suppose the possible export of terrorism, and drugs.

McB Was the green line still in operation?

JG Oh yes. You went through an area of devastation. If you went from one side of Beirut to the other you had to go through various crossings, which were rather chaotic. The whole area in the middle of the town which has now been cleared, when we were there, that was just devastated buildings, the old centre of the town. And you had to go to various points where you could get across. And some of them were actually rather hairy because you were exposed for quite a long time to any ill-intentioned drugged-up sniper who felt like loosing off a blast. You always had a slight prickle in the back of the neck when you went across any of these positions. But, I went across about once a week. I stopped sleeping over there quite early on. We had a magnificent old residence which went back to the days of Spears, the Pro-Consul who went out there in 1941/2. He moved in with the British troops and saw the Vichy French out. He was shown the old British Consulate-General in Beirut, and he said 'do you expect me to live in that?' Terrible mess. 'Show me what else is available. What about the Germans or Japanese?' So eventually they showed him the old Japanese Consulate, 'That'll do', he said, 'that'll do.' It had actually been a home for two members of the Japanese Consulate staff, one lived on the first floor, and one lived on the ground floor. But it was readily converted back into one house, so he took that on a lease, and the British Government being what it is it remained on a lease for the next fifty years until I got rid of it. But it was a grand place. I think that during the two and half years that my wife and I were there we probably slept in it in the first year about ten nights at the most. And it was really becoming a bit of a burden because although the rent had gone straight through the floor, being fixed in Lebanese pounds. However, every time anyone didn't like what we'd done they'd loose off a blast of rocket grenade and blast the windows out and this sort of thing and you'd quite often pick up a machine gun shell, cartridges in the yard. So we handed it back to the landlord, who gave it to an Islamic charity, I'm glad to say, for blind children, which was nice. But, no, I used to go quite often to West Beirut. There were people I needed to see if you were going to pretend to be an Ambassador. I could just have sat in my bunker and done nothing, but I wouldn't have been any use then on the two subjects the FCO was particularly interested in, first of all in

hostages. Because you had to know the local bigwigs and people who counted. And I think I met most of them with the exception of the real hard line Islamic Shi-ite extremists. I had fingers out to most of these people, and with some of them I actually became quite friendly, people like Walid Jumblatt, Nebbi Berri, who is now the Speaker, Elic Hrawi, who became the President. All these people I knew, people in the north, the Karame family, they were all, or some of them were, I think I would call friends. Some were bad friends but friends. Others were people who you could talk very easily to. Whether the answers actually meant anything was another matter. And we did, as a result of that, manage to spring one or two people who never really moved into the realms of being hostages, because we got them out so quickly that they hardly featured in the British press before they were out again. To some extent that was the secret with hostages. If you get to them quickly, before they'd gone too far down the tube, then you might have a chance, but after four or five days, much more difficult. They were either dead or chained to a radiator, and we did lose one or two people, people who were killed. But it was also fascinating. I love politics, dirty politics. And there was an awful lot of dirty politics going on, and trying to work out exactly who was telling you the truth or half of it, and who was just telling you a whole lot of lies, I liked very much. And they are very hospitable people. On the whole they don't stab you in the back while you are their guest. So, yes, a great zest for life, they lived very high off the hog at almost all levels of society. You had this depressing sight of the middle classes going down the monetary scale and not being able to live as they had, and that was very depressing because they had a very lively and, for the Arab world, an independent middle class, which suffered very badly during the civil war. But you know, you go anywhere, terrorism even in the darkest south Lebanon, a lunch would be laid on.

McB Did you come across the Druze?

JG Well, Walid Jumblatt was a leader of the Druze. He had rivals of course, which is true of every village, every community, every family in Lebanon, within the community, village, camp, family clan, wherever they are, rivals and within the Druze there were rivals. He was the acknowledged leader.

McB There's something very peculiar about the Druze. I can't remember what it

is?

JG Well, they have a strange religion. And they are also, unusually for alleged Moslems, monogamous. Can't have more than one wife.

McB And dress, what about that?

JG Well, yes and no. The ordinary Druze now, and I can confirm this from a trip to the Lebanon last month while going up through the Druze area, it was perfectly obvious that most Druze men now wear western clothes. [END OF SIDE 2 OF FIRST TAPE]

JG ..As I understand it, the Druze are not actually as mysterious as they would like to think, because there is a copy of the sacred tomes in the British Museum, which is readily available. Basically they believe in circles within circles within circles. And your knowledge of the religion increases as you progress through the circles. The vast mass of the Druze are outside the circles and don't really know anything, or are expected to know anything or want to know anything. They just do as they are told. As you progress through you get to know more. The impression I get is that when you move into one of the circles you start wearing these baggy trousers which is what you are probably thinking of, with the big bag at the back, sort of britches with a big bag at the back. There are various myths about what that might be, but basically I think it's just that it's easier to move around the mountains if you haven't got tight trousers on. And they also tend to wear little white hats and as you go further in they tend to get more priestly, as it were, in the way in which they dress. You can differentiate the initiated but not so much the young initiated who look exactly the same. Unlike the Alouites in Syria who are all supposed to have flat heads because they get put on boards when they are born. Certainly if you look at the Assad family they have a straight plane down the backs of their heads. They're another very strange religion. But those are those Druse. They shut their golden book in the 14th century or something, so you can't become a Druse anymore, other than for a woman by marriage. But the male members are all fixed, that's it, by inheritance, so they are very small in number. Very security conscious, very strong ties. And, you know, pretty dangerous indeed as fighters when it comes to the push.

So I knew them quite well. Walid Jumblatt lived in a fairytale palace in the Shouf Mountains, very attractive, which is the Lebanon mountain range, or the foothills of it, south of Beirut. Not Beit el-din, which is further in. Jumblatt lives at a place called Mukhtara, which means “chosen”.

McB We haven't spoken about some of your most celebrated kidnap victims.

JG T. Waite and J. McCarthy I suppose and possibly B. Keenan. Though with B. Keenan, Brian Keenan, we came to an understanding with the Irish that we would say he was Irish. He's actually from Northern Ireland but has an Irish passport, as all Northern Irish are allowed to have an Irish passport. Although born Protestant, he was actually very Republican in his views, so we were quite happy to go along with the idea that he was an Irishman and therefore, you know, 'why are you locking him up?' It didn't work. While I was there I think, in fact, the IRA sent a delegation twice to Beirut to try and get him out. The local papers said they did. It didn't work. But him I never met. I met John McCarthy about two days before he was kidnapped. He was based in West Beirut, which was the hairier part. I'd gone over for various bits of business and I gave him an interview. Frankly, he got hold of my wife and begged her to get me to give him an interview. So I did. He was standing in for the representative for something I think called World Vision, some international television news system, and he was just about to go, his term had finished. So I gave him his interview and as he was packing up his equipment, I said, 'You know you journalists have all got it wrong, you shouldn't really be here, your journalistic status confers no immunity from nonsense of one kind or another and you should all really go, you included.' And he said, 'Well actually I am going. I'm going on Saturday night.' 'And' I said, 'How are you going?' He said, 'I'm going by the airport.' And I said, 'That's a pretty silly thing for a start, because to get to the airport you've got to go through the southern suburbs where kidnaps and murders go on all the time. The airport itself is full of dangerous people from various militia including Shi-ite extremists and the Syrians; you know you're taking your life in your hands.' 'Well, what shall I do?' he said. 'Well, do the sensible thing. We don't use the airport, come over to East Beirut, through the crossing which at that time was a fairly easy one to the Museum, no problem, you can get over without difficulty, and then take the ferry over to Cyprus, which is what we do, and fly from Cyprus. You'll lose twelve

hours or something.’ He thought of that, rejected it and went to the airport and the car never got there. So that was somebody who didn’t take my advice. The other person who didn’t take my advice was Terry Waite. Waite had been to Beirut, I think he came three times while I was there, before the final time. The first two times the understanding we had with Lambeth was that I would not go to see him unless he asked to see me. He wasn’t on the whole interested in the English hostages, the British hostages, he was working for American hostages on a sort of understanding that I think the American Methodist Church or something, one of the American hostages of long-standing, was a minister. So we agreed in London not to compromise his position by appearing to be in touch with him unless he asked to be in touch. On the first two occasions he did, and I went to see him and it was all very primitive cloak and dagger stuff. We might come to one of the more hilarious aspects of it. The third time he came he didn’t tell me he was there but I learnt he was, he was staying in the American Embassy, which I could see from my house, and the fourth time he came was the time he didn’t go back. Now I got wind, the Foreign Office got wind, of the fact that he was going to come out again, and they asked me for my advice and they said that he was going to be protected by Walid Jumblatt, a Druse, so I went to see Walid, well actually I went to see Walid’s military man, who again was a good friend, and asked him what we should do. Were they really able to give this protection? And he said no. He said that he has approached us but that no, I don’t think at that time they admitted that he had approached them, we subsequently learned that he had he said we couldn’t do it because we can protect him while he’s with us, because there were areas of Beirut that they had as their fiefdom, and they can stay in a hotel there and they can provide bodyguards and cars and the rest of it, fine, but as soon as he makes contact with the Shi-ite group that he wants to talk to, they won’t agree to us being there. They will want us to leave and they’ll want him to be entirely in their hands, and then we can’t protect him. So there’s a risk. I was going back to the U.K. for Christmas on leave and I went to Lambeth, with the Foreign Office’s approval, and talked to Terry Waite, put all these points to him. He accepted that that was the common sense interpretation, but he was working on instructions from a higher authority, he didn’t mean the Archbishop, and he was going. So off he went. And I think the day I came back he disappeared, though we didn’t know that for two or three days. That was another problem. Lambeth had no idea what he was up to so Lambeth didn’t know he’d disappeared

then. We didn't know he'd disappeared because he wasn't in contact with us and this was one of the periods when he declined to be in contact because we learned about it from a journalist, a very good brave journalist, who was actually the girl friend of one of the Druse lieutenants, and he blurted it out to her, pillow talk, that Waite had disappeared. And she alerted us. But it was two or three days and by then the trail was going cold. The Druse were already trying to find him. So he didn't take our advice either. The hilarious occasion was that he once asked to see me, but it must be very hush hush, no word should get out about the fact that I'd been to see him to the extent that I could, because I travel around in a convoy of two with four armed men, five armed men. This does make a certain stir, but I won't tell anyone I'm coming, I'll just come. He was in a UP or UPI or one of these big American international news agencies, who were still there at that time, and I was guided in to see him and we had a talk on whatever it was we had to talk about and at the end he said, do remember, please Ambassador, not a word about this to anyone. I do not want the world's press to know that you have been to see me. He opened the door, flash lights everywhere. He'd forgotten that he'd invited the world's press to meet him. It wasn't that he didn't want them to know that he was there, he didn't want them to know he was in contact with me. He led me out of the wrong bloody door. So it finished up with one of them pursuing me down the street, trying to get me to say something, to my car, with my bodyguards all round me, and there is actually a picture of me on the front cover of a book about terrorism, with me and the guard, but I'm not mentioned in the book at all. It's just my photograph on the outside with the bodyguard, who was a British soldier in mufti. And some pompous General in the Ministry of Defence instigated an enquiry as to why British soldiers were wandering around Beirut in mufti and not in uniform. So we gave him fairly short shrift. Going around in regimentals in the middle of Beirut! Waite was not an easy man to handle.

McB Did you at any stage come in touch with the notorious Colonel North?

JG No, I once met one of his deputies at a Ditchley Park Conference but I never met Ollie himself. The man I did once get in touch with was the head of the Syrian Mukhabarat, Intelligence, in Beirut who I sat next to at lunch one day, and had a conversation with, but on the whole I don't take to intelligence men, particularly when they're prone to take your toenails out.

McB So does that deal with the Lebanon?

JG Well, I suppose. There were lots and lots of things about Lebanon. I could go on. I hope one day to sit down and write a book about it. The Syrians and the Americans made several attempts to solve the problem while I was there, which didn't work for the whole five years. The Iraqis had a rather sinister influence on what was going on. They were the only Arab Embassy in Beirut at the time who had their Embassy in Christian East Beirut, rather than West Beirut, because they were so worried about what the Syrians might do to them.

McB The thing that struck me when I went to Beirut in 1999, was that it was all being rebuilt in a most splendid style. And where on earth was all the money coming from?

JG Well the centre of the Lebanon. Quite a lot of building in Beirut is the result of investment by Lebanese or other Arabs in real estate, because they do believe, in spite of the destruction of the civil war, that real estate is a money maker, whereas other things like manufacturing are not, or agriculture. There were a lot of Shi-ites, in particular, who did invest in agriculture while I was there, people who had made a lot of money in West Africa or South America, were buying land in the south of Lebanon and applying more modern methods of agriculture and production to it. Or Israeli type methods, and they were making money. But the Lebanese have a love of building, so there was a certain amount of private development going on in Beirut, banks and those sorts of things. If you've got money you can put a bank anywhere, you can cover the interest you have got to pay, or rent it out. But the central area, the area that had been cleared, where the old souks were, the old classical centre, all the rest of it, running down to the docks, that's financed by a company called Solidaire, solidarity, whose chairman is Rafiq Hariri, currently Prime Minister, and Prime Minister in the early 90's as well. And this company, of which he has about 15% of the shareholding, is funded partly by bonds which were issued to the owners of the original properties in that area. They hadn't got much option. The property was valued and they were paid half in money and half in bonds. So that's how they got the land. The building, as far as there has been any, because there's an awful lot that

hasn't yet been evened out, I was there last month, and it's still not been built on. Lot of work to do. It was funded by other shares in the company which were available, I think they are actually still, available now for foreigners, but originally they were available for Lebanese who wanted to invest in this area. A lot of the contracts for renovating buildings went to banks or the Government and, of course, being Prime Minister that helped, and there may or may not be a few grey practices going on as well, in terms of financing and cross holdings with Government etc. But basically it's this company Solidaire and the fortunes of Solidaire have gone up and down with the fortunes of Mr Rafiq Hariri. It was supposed to be moribund when he lost the Prime Ministership, and now it's up and running again.

McB Well that seems quite a good point to leave the Lebanon and switch on your time as Ambassador and U.K. Ambassador to OECD.

JG Well this was something that I had always had in mind as an agreeable and instructive posting. I think the Foreign Office reckoned they owed me something after Beirut. They first offered me Tunis, actually, and I politely declined, because that would be a bit too quiet after Beirut. But I hung out, and they said well I would have to spend another six months in Beirut, and I said no problem. And I put in for this OECD post. I'd known of OECD when I was in UNCTAD in Geneva because the OECD provided the Secretariat for the Western Group in big UNCTAD conferences. And I'd been over there a few times and I rather liked the lifestyle, the office style as well as the lifestyle. And I had had a number of economic postings, after all, with the Geneva one, so they were then able to agree. I'm not an economist and I still don't think, although there's all the pressure from the Treasury on this, that you actually need an economist as Head of the OECD representation. You need someone who basically manages. The economics is done by economists either in Paris or coming out from the Treasury and all the rest of it. And the health work is done by the Health Ministry, agricultural work is done by the Agricultural Ministry. What you were there for was to manage the budget and the ambitions of the Secretariat. And also occasionally the ambitions of your own civil servants from London who kick over the traces on occasions and actively promote work programmes which cannot possibly be financed within the budget as the UK Government sees it. So it was largely managerial and again negotiating. Not

perhaps, well certainly not at the level of the European Union with legislation, but certainly with codes of conduct and a certain moral pressure through resolutions and communiqués at the end of ministerial meetings and this sort of stuff. And also a good deal of very detailed groundwork exploring pressing economic and social problems as they emerged and trying to see what was best practice in other developed countries because there was a very small membership in OECD, mostly countries that have a very similar economic status and financial burden - how were they tackling the hospitals, health insurance, rural development, this sort of stuff. And then seeing whether that best practice could be amalgamated into a sort of universal best practice, which would not be imposed upon the member states but which the member states could draw upon in their own legislation or own administration. So it was, I always thought, a very worthwhile job. We had difficulty in persuading Mrs Thatcher of this because she had had a particularly unhappy relationship with the previous Secretary-General, a Dutchman called Van Lennep, who got a bit big for his boots, and rather assumed he was on the same level as the President of the European Union. She rather disliked him and his works, and she had a long memory, but anyway we managed to survive and I think we had useful function to perform in the OECD, though it wasn't always one which was appreciated by our fellow members. There was a sort of dogged resistance by the UK Treasury, which we had to follow in these matters, on things like budget and work programmes. Whereas some of our members would have preferred to be very expansive, give the Secretariat its head, we were under very strict instructions as to how much the budget should be, what programmes should be undertaken, how much work should be taken up by the committees etc. etc. So it was very much a managerial and negotiating job. I was speaking every Friday, Thursday actually, in conclave, so there was a great deal of amateur dramatics going on, which I rather like, and as you say, we were living in Paris. And we were also very much in touch with a certain strata of officialdom and ministerial office in Whitehall, not always the very top man, except once a year when we usually got the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Foreign Secretary, if you were lucky the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry coming out. But all the time my house was paying host to people like Portillo, who was No. 2 in the Ministry of Transport, and others who would pass through. Because there was a conference Heseltine, on his return to power after Mrs T went, spent several nights in my house, because he stayed on after a conference to write the new version of the Poll Tax. And he said there should be a plaque on the

outside of the house which said 'The 1992 (whatever it was) General Election was won in this house' because that's where he tore up the poll tax, and started again. Chris Patten came out on several occasions so it really felt, more than in any other post I have ever been in, that you were aware of the way the decisions were being made in London, and the people who were making them, if not at the top level, at least just below. Which was a very pleasant experience.

McB A fascinating internal political ...

JG Yes, as well as the external.

McB The Budget. How was that achieved?

JG With difficulty is the answer. Well two parallel, well they weren't parallel, because they were actually words, two lines would be pursued at one of the same time, and eventually would converge. One line was that the Secretariat would come out with its proposals for the budget and work programme, the work programme obviously being the basis on which the budget was going to be worked on. So what you did if you wanted to lower the budget was to tackle the work programme. Because if you could get things out of the work programme that helped. At the same time in Whitehall, and no doubt in the Wilhemstrasse and God knows where, all over the OECD capitals, individual countries were working out what they could accept. Which in many cases was that we want more of this. But in our case it was usually we want less of that. And meetings were held in the Foreign Office with representatives from all the Ministries who had interests in the OECD, and particularly the Treasury, in which we would go through the draft programme and work out what we thought was jettisonable. And it was sometimes very difficult to get people like the DTI or the Department of the Environment or the Ministry of Transport to jettison things, because they were relying on work done in the OECD to inspire their own work. It was a sort of soft option, it was an easy way. Someone else was doing it and they were only paying 4% of the cost. If they had had to do it themselves they would have had to cover 100% of the cost.

McB How does the OECD get its funds?

JG From the States members.

McB What proportion?

JG Ah that. I'm sorry I missed your point. It was all done on a complicated scale which basically was GDP.

McB A percentage?

JG Yes. So you couldn't pay more than, was it 25%? Anyway the Americans would have paid more than they did if it had just been unscaled, but it was scaled back so that nobody paid more than, whatever it was, 25% of the total. And two countries achieved that happy position. The Americans and the Japanese. The Japanese have probably now gone down again. But they were both thriving at the time and their cut of the budget would actually have been higher than they paid if it had been straight proportionality, so they were scaled down, which meant the rest of us were scaled up. Most of the time I was there we were lying fifth in the pecking order, behind the US, Japanese, the Germans, the French and the Italians. The Italians had done what I think they called the 'surpassò,' they'd overtaken us. They've now slipped back again, so may have the French. There wasn't an awful lot in it but we, the French and the Italians, were a second echelon behind the Germans, the Japanese and the Americans. And we paid around 4% I think. And what we wanted, the intention of most UK Governments during the time I was there, was to have a zero real growth. If they could have got away with zero absolute growth they would have done that as well. In other words, we wanted no growth after allowing for inflation. And what we really would have liked would have been no growth even including inflation. So in fact the real value would have gone down. We never got that. Most of the years I was there we managed to get within about 1% of real zero growth.

McB Are you talking about sharing the budget?

JG No the budget as a whole. Our share was fixed. It would be whatever it was,

4% of whatever sum was taken, let us say it was usually £100 million.

McB Oh as much as that.

JG Oh yes, quite a lot of money. Ours wasn't £100 million - we were paying 4%, 1000 million francs. The idea as far as we were concerned was to keep the overall budget down so that our 4% would not go up. And there were various projects. I think at one time we got to the point where we were forced to allow certain countries who wanted a project very badly, which would have meant going over the top, to fund it themselves over and above their proportional cut. The Treasury weren't very happy about that, but in the end they realised they couldn't really hold it back. But it was a long struggle that went on for a couple of months into the early hours, in which we were usually cast as the awkward squad. We'd start out with four or five allies, the Australians, the Americans, the Japanese sometimes, and then gradually it would all fall by the wayside when the pressure got too great. And then poor old Gray would be standing there still sticking out for more cuts. I used to get a certain amount of credit for the fact that we were drafting in English and I was able to offer, on subjects that were not of particular interest to the UK, wording which overcame a particular problem in some sort of rather devious way, and that was considered to be a great advantage. To some extent, that was offset against my sins. And also it was obviously recognised that I was just acting as a lawyer. I had no personal brief in this. If I could find a way around it I would. But I had hard instructions from my capital.

McB You could just imagine the mean-minded ...

JG And the other thing we spent an awful lot of time on at the other end of the year, was the Ministerial Communiqué, because once a year in the Summer all these bigwigs, the Ministers of Finance, Foreign Affairs, Trade etc. would come, they still do, to Paris and have a long confab, where they read boring speeches to each other and issue a communiqué. Now 95% of the Communiqué was agreed before they arrived, in again long, difficult, long drawn out nightly sessions over several weeks with continual references back to capitals by the Permanent Representatives. We sat in this room doing this and again, because there were implications for the work

programme in most of this, so you had to think ahead six months to the next phase. We were usually amongst the more difficult members, who knew precisely what they wanted, the implications involved. But, again, there were areas where we were able to offer wording spontaneously, which helped. We were usually among the more open members of the European Union. The European Union negotiated in a strange sort of way. The European Union was not actually a member of OECD, it was an observer, so that although we had to maintain a certain amount of internal discipline, like the Common Agricultural Policy, there was the ability to play games on two levels at once, to defend your interests in the European Union by trying to find words in the OECD which would hamper the more ambitious or retrograde of our new fellow members when it came to Brussels. The Americans, the New Zealanders and the Australians always wanted a much more liberal wording over agriculture than the EU was prepared to give. So you could fiddle around and fish about and try and get useful texts from elsewhere.

McB That sounds pretty fascinating.

JG It was indeed, and as I say the living was easy.

McB This brings us on to your period in Brussels.

JG In more ways than one, it was the summit. It was the last post, it was a normal post, more or less, because of the posts I had served in Beirut wasn't a normal Embassy and the OECD wasn't a normal Embassy, because it only had one interest in life and that was the economic and social negotiations. Nothing about politics or that sort of thing. Brussels, itself, wasn't entirely normal, partly because you were watching Belgian activity and development of Belgian policy on two institutions which were down the road, and where you had very powerful members of the British Foreign Service in charge. Most of the time I was there, John Kerr was in UKRep and John Weston was at UKDel NATO, two pretty important satraps. But also you had to defend your territory to make sure they weren't carrying out incursions into what was my responsibility and where I ought to be and hope that I was better informed than they were. We also had one of these Joint Administration Offices, which meant that you weren't really responsible for your own administration, which

is a good thing and a bad thing at the same time. It relieves you of an awful lot of balls-aching responsibility. On the other hand it means that you can't actually at the end say I want this. But it was much more normal than usual. I covered the whole gambit of policy from politics, economics, commerce, consular, information, the lot. It entailed watching the development of Belgian policy in the European Union and trying to get them to understand ours. Equally on NATO and defence matters. And there were considerable consular problems, particularly when we had an international football match or a champions league match or whatever, the clans would come over and there'd be problems there. We had BSE during my time where the line seemed to change every month and I had go in again and say "we didn't quite get it right last time and what we really meant to say was", and it all became more and more incredible or unbelievable. So it was a very rich series of things to take in. There was also the fascination, often malignant, of the British press and some politicians in the way in which Belgium was ruled and devolution in Belgium. There were areas where we co-operated very well with them because they were better informed than we were, in Africa, for instance. But in other areas we felt they let us down, like over the Gulf War and the shells, etc. etc. I was also rather disappointed that there wasn't more contact between the Royal Families. When there was, it usually went rather well. The Queen got to know Baudouin in his last twelve months or so reasonably well, and I think was genuinely impressed by the man. He was genuinely impressive. She came to his funeral. She very rarely does that sort of thing. Moreover, she came to it from her then annual cruise in HMS Britannia round the coast of Scotland. So she put herself out considerably to come. But there's still something between the two Royal Families that doesn't quite click. And the new King still hasn't been invited and it's for her to invite him first because he's the new boy. There's still not been a State Visit and he's now been King since 1993, that's nine years. They are, after all, a member of NATO and the European Union, just over the Channel, huge commercial interests, Eurostar link. It may not be the Royal Family that is the problem, it may be others, maybe the Foreign Office, I don't know what the point is, but it never quite clicked. Never quite clicked. Though she went there while I was there on an official visit, for the Battle of Waterloo, and that's when she had a long lunch with Baudouin, and he died a couple of months later. She was there for the funeral. The Prince of Wales was always popping in and out for one reason or another. He had an interest in an architectural project in Brussels which

was a renovation, not a renovation, a total rebuilding in a sympathetic style of a block in the old part of Brussels. Princess Anne came, York came, Gloucester, they all trooped in and out and put up in my house, apart from the Queen. Princess Margaret. There was quite a lot of that sort of thing going on. In fact I saw rather more Royals in Brussels than I saw Ministers.

McB Oh really. I suppose the Ministers would be going to the Commission.

JG Ministers would be going to the Commission all the time, but they wouldn't be staying with me. Occasionally they would come over and do business but it had to be pretty .They came, obviously, during our Presidency, they came over to try and chivvy up their Belgian colleagues, but otherwise much less than I had experienced at the OECD. And very much less senior civil servants.

McB Well I suppose it was little Belgium.

JG Little Belgium. It had ten votes on the Council. The trade was huge of course. When I was there, I think they may have slipped to fifth, while I was there they were ranked after America, Germany, France and the Netherlands, and they were fifth. And if you put the Netherlands, if you put the Benelux countries together, because Luxembourg is always chucked in with Belgium, because they have an old Economic union, you put the Benelux countries together, they were second after the United States. Very big. Belgian/UK trade was about 7 billion in each direction, so we were even bigger partners to them, than they were to us.

McB In dealing with the Belgians, which language did you use?

JG I regret to say that usually either English or French. I made an effort to learn Dutch, and actually even passed the Dutch exams, which at my ripe old age gave considerable problems. I think I even got the intermediate in the end. But I'm one of these cynics who reckon if you are faced with a foreign language in the Foreign Service, you can do one of two things, you can either pass the exams or you can learn the language. Because if you are trying to pass the exams, you learn the language in order to pass the exams. Also there was the usual problem which went all the way

back to Bahrain with Arabic, the locals speak English better than you do. And certainly speak their own language better than you do, and it just becomes a bore for all parties, as you stumble along in this rather stilted, halting way, when they could do it all in English. So quite a lot of it, particularly with the Flemings, was done in English. And if necessary there were some non-English speaking Flemish who would stretch a point and reveal that they in fact spoke French pretty well, and do it in French. But language was not really a problem.

McB Where did you get your KBE?

JG I suppose there must be something somewhere that gives a citation as to why I got it, but I got it in Brussels.

McB In Brussels, because it was your last post?

JG Well, I don't think it's as easy as that. I got my CMG, actually it was awarded to me while I was in Beirut, but it had been posted before I went there. So it was actually not for Beirut. I got the impression from Stephen Egerton that it was for stuff I'd done in MAED on the tunnel and counter-terrorism, and the time in Jeddah when I stood in for the Ambassador, so the CMG had nothing to do with my Ambassadorial career. I got it before I became Ambassador. So the KBE must have been something to do with the Ambassadorial role. There was, I know, a discussion, because there's one KBE per honours List. There were then two KBEs a year for the Foreign Office, apart from the KCMGs, who were the lords of this world. There was one KBE for some deserving case or another, it's rather like releasing Barrabas into the crowd, you can have one. When I finished in Beirut I believe there was a discussion as to whether I should get a K because both my predecessors had got K's, David Miers and David Roberts, and they had both had a hard time there. I think probably in the case of David Miers and David Roberts, they possibly had a harder time than I did, but still it wasn't comfortable. But they gave it instead to a man who was retiring from Uganda, who also had had a rather hard time, and it was his last post. And the argument, as I understood it from certain well-placed members of the Committee of Direction, they now call themselves the College, was that in the end they thought Gray will have another chance. Well Gray soldiered on for a long time

and wondered whether he was ever going to get another chance, but I imagine it was an accumulation of a good job done in Beirut in difficult circumstances, a good job done in the OECD and then some rather spectacular events in Belgium, one of which was the organisation of what can only be called a Festival to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of Belgium, of Brussels in particular, by British troops. We collected about a quarter million pounds, obviously there was very little from the UK Government, a quarter million pounds in one kind or another, either in cash or kind, and brought out, I think we had in the end about ten military bands over a fortnight who paraded up and down various towns in Belgium. We brought out a hundred Grenadier Guards in full uniform, with their band, and they marched up and down. I think it was the Grenadier Guards. In the Grande Place. There was some other people there as well but we certainly stood out. It was a big show. Had York out for the four days, actually five days and four nights, and he went down very well. A big handsome jolly fellow. It went very well. Most of the work was done by other people but I chaired the committee. But we also worked in co-operation with, and we gave a certain amount of seed money to, the local Belgo-British Union who caused to be erected at their expense, a large monument on one of the main streets of Brussels, a very spectacular sculpture. So quite a lot went on during that fortnight. I think that may have had something to do with it. It may have been possible that all the Royals that I'd entertained may have played a part and then my wife organised a spectacular event which was a vague recreation of the Waterloo Ball, the Duchess of Richmond's Ball. Unfortunately she couldn't come, but we got ..

McB The Duchess of Richmond?

JG The original ball was given by the Duchess of Richmond. The present one couldn't come.

McB There is one is there?

JG Yes I met her husband, he's a very charming fellow. He's the one who, well his son, runs Goodwood. We got the present Duke of Wellington's son, we got the current Prince Blucher, we got a member of the Belgian Royal Family, we got the Duchess of Kent and we got 800 guests, paying I don't know how much for a seat,

but they did and we got a band from the British Army and we had prizes, tombolas, and this and that and the other, and my wife raised £100,000. A lot of money.

McB Well that's the way to do it.

JG And we laid on a fantastic [end of tape]

So that may have contributed to it, those two events. And again perhaps there was not much competition, but I was exceedingly gratified, not least for my wife.

McB Sounds as if it was jolly well earned.

JG The great thing is that any decoration short of a K doesn't recognise your wife, which is a great shame, because people getting a CMG or whatever doesn't help the wife, she's still Mrs. X. My wife is now Lady Gray and I think she deserves it. Without her all these things in Beirut, Jeddah, Brussels, would not have been possible, and she was running a hotel.

McB All unrecognised.

JG Well, it's getting a bit more recognised. They're giving them some allowance in terms of money. But the number of K's is going down inexorably all the time. So we were rather.. but that's my assumption, I've never seen the citation so I don't know...It just said "For services to Diplomacy". Oh we also ran a very good campaign called 'Begin it in Benelux' which was a commercial campaign which I think impressed the DTI particularly, and of the three Ambassadors I was the one who took the most active interest and turned up for some of the events in the UK and did things in Brussels.

McB Well it sounds like a thoroughly wonderful career. Of course you didn't stop work when you retired, did you, by any means.

JG No.