

DOHP Interview Index and Biographical Details

Peter HALL (Born 26 July 1938)

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This is an interview by Jimmy Jamieson of Sir Peter Hall, formerly HM Ambassador to Yugoslavia and to Argentina on 8 November 2002

Russian language training as part of National Service 1956-58

JJ After schooling at Portsmouth Grammar, you attended the Joint Services School for Linguists. Was this part of your National Service?

PH Yes, it was, and a very welcome part. I had done basic training, which I didn't enjoy one bit, and the word got around that there was a Russian course as part of National Service. I applied for that. It was a remarkable course. Quite a lot of people applied for it, keen to get away from the drill square.

JJ How long did the course last?

PH Well, that depended. Applicants came in and the first 8 weeks was devoted to sorting the sheep from the goats, 8 weeks of intensive Russian instruction. After that 8 weeks, there was an exam and either you were out and back to the drill square or you were trained as a translator which meant in due course you went to West Germany and listened in to Soviet broadcasts and indeed intercepts.

JJ So interpreter?

PH No, translator. It was basically an oral skill; or, if you were lucky, which I was and were in the top echelon you were trained as an interpreter which meant a year at either London or Cambridge university, still in the Services but with the grand rank of officer cadet and wearing civvies. So it was much prized and very enjoyable indeed, if you liked languages. One or two people got in and then found that they weren't actually natural linguists and were faced with an exam every week, instruction in Russian, essays in Russian as well, so you had to like the language, but fortunately I did.

JJ So you then went on to Cambridge and continued in the language field, modern and

medieval languages. Which?

PH Well, I got in before National Service, from school. I got in with French and German but after nearly two years of this extremely intensive Russian I thought I had better stick with Russian, not least because it would give me an easier ride because I was frankly up to degree level by then, thanks to the course. I thought, 'I know enough French and German. Why don't I continue with the Russian and simply read more literature?' which is just what I did. I had to have a second language so, perhaps rather bizarrely, I chose Serbo-Croat, of which we shall see, in the course of the interview, the consequences.

Joining the Diplomatic Service in 1961

JJ What impelled you to join the Diplomatic Service? Was it because you thought you could use your language skills particularly or was it something else?

PH To be quite frank, it was a degree of desperation. I really didn't know what I wanted to do and by the third year this was becoming a rather nagging thought because those were the days, we are talking about 1961, when there were actually a lot of nice jobs for graduates. Everyone seemed to be going up to London for interviews with Shell, or the BBC or something, and coming back looking very pleased with themselves. I really didn't know what I was going to do. So, with two friends who came up with the idea for the Diplomatic Service, I took the exam without, I must say, a great deal of enthusiasm. And to my alarm when the smoke had cleared I was in and they were not. My hardest question in the final interview was why I wanted to join. It wasn't for the money.

JJ So you spent two years in the Office before you went abroad. How did you pass those two years?

PH I was put into the Northern Department as it was called, in the rather grand Foreign Office approach of those days. I believe originally in the Foreign Service there had been four Departments dividing the globe. Northern Department looked after the Soviet Union, Russian satellite countries and, rather incorrectly politically, the Scandinavian countries. But

I was on the most junior Russian desk.

JJ Still, at least the Office was building on a certain amount of knowledge already of Russia through literature and the language course.

Posting to Warsaw and a requirement to learn to speak Polish, 1963

PH Yes I suppose it was, but it showed an either callous or slightly ignorant bias, choosing after Northern Department to send me to Warsaw, which of course involved learning Polish. It was bad enough separating Russian and Serbo-Croatian, it is a bit like doing Spanish and Portuguese at the same time, but then to have Polish thrown into the mix effectively meant that for many years I had to bury Russian and Serbo-Croatian because I was learning Polish, which I did in London and...

JJ What, at SOAS?

PH No, they found an old lady who tutored me. In grammatical terms it was easy because the structure is very similar, but in oral terms it was a bit of a nightmare and indeed when I first got to Poland, having had only three or four months of Polish, a Pole said to me, actually you speak quite good Polish but you have got this dreadful Russian accent. It made me suspect immediately.

Soviet influence in Poland

JJ Quite. So 1963 must have been an interesting time in Warsaw. What were your impressions when you got there of Warsaw, and Poland if you were able to get around a bit? Was there a strong Soviet influence?

PH Yes and no is the answer on Soviet influence. In realpolitik it was immensely strong. Effectively the Soviet Union ran Poland, certainly directed Poland. The Soviet ambassador in Warsaw wasn't an ambassador, he was a viceroy. Among the people of whatever kind or level, absolutely not. The loathing for anything to do with Russia was so marked and so

strong. They used to have a joke about the coming war when Poland, as so often, finds itself facing both Germany and Russia and the embattled Polish soldier slides his last bullet into the breech and draws a bead on the Russian, and his comrades say why the Russian instead of the German? He replies, 'business before pleasure.' This sums up the attitude.

JJ What was your particular responsibility there?

PH It was a fascinating one. Of course, it wasn't an enormous Embassy so there was a degree of everyone doing a bit of everything but essentially my task was to monitor internal developments. There was no point in monitoring Polish foreign policy because there wasn't such a thing. It was Soviet foreign policy. My job was to monitor internal developments, economic and above all political, to the extent that there was any normal political life. I greatly enjoyed that.

JJ Did the Embassy have contacts with the Party, which presumably ran the country with Soviet influence or Soviet alongside...

PH Well, not really at my modest third secretary level. The Ambassador and Counsellors and so on of course had to deal with senior officials and ministers who were all Party men. Many of them I think with hindsight, or even one could see at the time, were not in fact committed communists but that was the way the system worked. Fortunately I had an Ambassador who, although extremely eccentric was tolerant of what his junior officers did, the direction in which they worked. He said to me, your predecessor knew a great many Polish journalists. I don't know if you will want to continue that or whatever, I would just like to know the sort of people you are seeing. I in fact found myself spending a lot of time with writers and musicians, theatre people, which I found tremendously interesting. They regarded my professional interest in Polish politics with slightly contemptuous amusement, because they decided that there was no such thing, that life was a question of pursuing your intellectual and cultural interests, and so they would occasionally say to me, 'I've got a tremendous piece of gossip for you, Peter, which you'll find very useful: the current mistress of the Polish prime minister is called so and so...'

Anglo-Polish relations

JJ This is what life is really about. But perhaps the Anglo-Polish relationship in the second World War when the government in exile did help to a certain extent, or was it too late for that?

PH I don't think it was too late. I think there was a degree of Anglophilia among some of the people. I'm talking as I say about writers and that kind, but on cultural terms. But there was nonetheless a bitterness arising from the Second World War, a feeling that we had sold Poland down the river at Yalta, which, to be blunt, I can understand.

JJ Gomulka was back in the politburo having been dumped at one point and was trying to pursue the Polish path to socialism rather than the Stalinist one? To what extent was he successful in that?

PH I don't think he was really. I think it was one of many sad episodes in Polish history. I remember a friend of mine saying that there was tremendous tension in Warsaw, in Poland, when, as you say Gomulka returned. It was by no means certain that he would. He was regarded as relatively revisionist. He told me that he had been in the theatre the night it was announced and Szymanowski's symphony was being played, an immensely emotional piece of music, an intensely Polish piece of music, and it was at that point that someone threw open the doors in the theatre and said Gomulka has been elected! He said the euphoria then was so great; that is why we hate him now. Because he let us down. And he started with the nearest you are ever going to get to a degree of enthusiasm for a communist leader, but it just didn't work.

JJ Yes, the trend worked against him steadily during the period you were there and there was this famous fourth party congress in 1964 which looked as if it was actually trying to undermine him and get rid of him. The party accused him of undermining socialism from within.

PH I think there wasn't a genuine ideological conflict there because Gomulka was a deep

dyed communist. It was a power struggle. You might argue that Gomulka was slightly more enlightened than some of his more brutish opponents but effectively it was a struggle about power.

JJ And did this impact on our own relations with the government?

PH No, I don't think so. Whoever came out on top, you were going to end up dealing with a communist government under effective Soviet control.

Polish disaffection with Communist leadership

JJ What about this letter, the 34, which was sent to Gomulka by people that you were mingling with, writers, intellectuals, theatre people and so on. Can you say a bit about that?

PH I found it extremely exciting and also, although it's rather a cheap way of looking at it, I thought this gives me a tremendous basis for reporting to London, because I knew a lot of these guys. I don't think it had any real effect. It was part of the general disaffection with Gomulka. The people like Gomulka, the Party apparatchiks, as one should call them, really had no idea what literature was about. Their view was that either you wrote something that was useful to the cause of socialism, which was good, or you didn't, which was bad. So the desire for intellectual freedom was to them almost meaningless. It was a dialogue of the deaf, but it was an interesting manifestation of the degree of disaffection in Poland among the more intellectual circles.

JJ So they wanted more freedom of expression?

PH Yes.

JJ But freedom of the individual rather than of the state and I suppose less censorship, which there must have been?

PH Yes.

JJ Like of newsprint, put out publications, that sort of thing?

PH There were sad manifestations of the censorship. The saddest thing in a way was that after a while the censors were barely needed because the writers knew what was going to happen to their product.

JJ Self censorship.

PH So in some cases they would not write at all and in others write, as they put it, 'do shu flady' for the bottom drawer, and just store the stuff away hoping that one day it might be possible to publish. And indeed the brighter and more honest writers had a great contempt for what they called 'graphomania' a sort of churning out of stuff acceptable to the regime.

JJ So, still talking a bit about culture, was the BBC World Service available and could you pick it up?

PH Yes, you could pick it up, and many did. Though, as I said before, I think, and this is one of the saddest things about what was a sad country at that time, a lot of people had given up. They are not the sort of people who give up very easily, but they had decided there wasn't much future in politics at that time so I think there was more interest in western culture than in western politics. But I think the BBC World Service did a very good job.

Anglo-Polish trade

JJ Looking on the commercial economic side, Anglo-Polish trade was flourishing, in the early 1960's anyway, and we were their biggest trading partner outside the communist world. Was this a major part of the embassy's activities?

PH It was. It wasn't a major part of my own but there was a commercial section as I recall, two officers; a counsellor and a second secretary with secretarial support who were very active and, as you said, trade did flourish to a considerable degree.

JJ How did the Poles pay for their imports?

PH That's a good question. They did have things they could sell, furs and timber and vodka of course. I don't think it was barter. I think they did manage perhaps an element of barter. It was two-way trade and they had stuff which they could and did sell to us. It was a time when the British ship building industry was declining and the Poles are actually very good ship builders and managed to sell us a few ships.

The place of the church in Poland

JJ Going back to another aspect of Polish life; the church. In 1965 the Polish bishops sent a letter to their German counterparts who had earlier made overtures towards, I suppose, reconciliation towards them. Would you like to say something about that?

PH Yes, I think it was a very noble act on the part of the Polish church. I think one needs to understand that the power of the Catholic church in Poland under communism was colossal. I think it was greater than the power of the Catholic church in the relatively free Poland of today because it was effectively the only opposition. Of course, it wasn't a totally declared opposition but it was a highly nationalist traditional Catholicism which appealed to the feeling of Poles that they had been trodden down by their neighbours on both sides so often but yet the church had survived, so it was a very important part of national life.

JJ And this letter leaked out?

PH Oh yes, it was published. Poland was, God knows, not free but was free enough for there to be one Catholic newspaper which was produced in Krakow and the letter was published there. The letter, very bravely, said, 'we forgive you, and we ask your forgiveness.' This produced a furore which the regime, normally pretty stupid in questions of PR, saw the opportunity to say, 'why on earth should we ask the Germans of all people to forgive us?' Of course, in Christian terms it was good, but it did produce a great furore. I don't think in practice it changed anything. It was I think a noble gesture which didn't in fact have any

particular effect.

JJ Except I think the leading cardinal's passport was taken away.

PH Yes, Wyszynski. Wyszynski was a very powerful figure. Of course it was a time when the Roman Catholic church outside the Soviet bloc was moving in a more liberal direction. Wyszynski would have none of that. Wyszynski had trouble, not merely with the communist regime, but with Rome because Wyszynski's view was, 'I am in a battle and I am not going to give anything away when I am fighting.'

The position of the Jews in Poland

JJ Right. Can we just mention the position of Jews in Poland at that time. Did they have synagogues? Were they allowed to worship freely? Did they have their own publications? How did it all work out, or didn't it?

PH I am a great lover of Poland and the Poles and that has stayed with me. But I think one needs to recognise that there is a very strong strain of anti-Semitism in Polish history and to a degree in Polish culture. Some of my friends who were as enlightened as one normally would expect anyone to be, nonetheless had a kind of odd knee-jerk anti-Semitism. I used to tell them it's an extraordinary Polish feat to have anti-Semitism when you don't have any Jews. A terrifyingly high percentage of Polish Jews had either got out or, in the majority of cases, had been imprisoned and killed. I can't remember any synagogues. There was a Yiddish theatre which I think the regime ran as a kind of window dressing but there weren't many Jews. It would be a very awkward situation to try to defend or even explain anti-Semitism but one of the strands of Polish anti-Semitism was that in pre-Second World War Poland there was a very high proportion of Jews in the Party leadership so this gave them a kind of image of being Russia's useful agents acting against Polish interests, for example in border disputes. Before the war, some of these Polish Jews, as leading communists, supported the Soviet position on border questions. This was not the recipe for popularity.

Posting to British High Commission New Delhi, India in 1966

JJ So after Warsaw you moved to Delhi in 1966 and stayed there until 1969: the world's biggest democracy, it must have been quite a contrast.

PH Yes it was. It was a colossal contrast. A large mission of course covering a vast country. A democracy, though some Indians would have argued about the adequacy of their democracy as most people do in democracies, but obviously a completely different system, different climate, culture, fascinating.

JJ What did you do there?

PH At the heady height of second secretary, my task was to monitor and report on Indian foreign policy, other than Indo-Pakistan, which was regarded rightly as an arcane and complicated subject of its own. My task was, as I say, Indian foreign policy other than that. Actually, to be blunt, it wasn't that interesting a topic in itself under Mrs Gandhi, who was for most of my time in control. Mrs Gandhi's attitude to foreign policy was really to be as disobliging as you can be towards the West without forfeiting aid and be as obliging as you can towards the broad aims of Soviet foreign policy. So it wasn't intellectually that interesting a subject. What was interesting was simply being in India.

Travel within India

JJ Were you able to get out and about quite a lot outside Delhi?

PH Quite a bit. You have to bear in mind, as I know you know, that there were as it were subordinate regional offices, subordinate to the High Commission, Deputy High Commissions in Madras, Bombay and Calcutta, so a) those were not places where foreign policy was made or discussed and b) they would not necessarily welcome the second secretary charging into their bailiwick. Delhi was an all-powerful capital. The travel, of which I did a great deal, was more social and personal than work-wise. For example, I very well remember driving with friends through the North-West, through Rajasthan, through

Pakistan, through the Khyber Pass and on to Kabul in Afghanistan, which is not a trip one would lightly undertake these days.

JJ Certainly not, very risky. And of course English was still the lingua franca wasn't it, amongst people of a certain caste or class so language wasn't a problem.

Relations with the Government of India

PH That wasn't a problem at all. One of the Diplomatic Service officers was trained in Hindi, but generally speaking, and certainly as regards the Indian Foreign Ministry, English was simply the norm. If one had tried to operate in Hindi, or indeed any other Indian language, you would have been regarded as foolish and patronising.

JJ With Mrs Gandhi as prime minister and her attitude to foreign policy was life made particularly difficult for us as a former colonial power?

PH There was an element of that. I think there were two aspects of that. One was that there was among many Indian officials, some with a chip on the shoulder, something of a feeling of, 'look mate, you can't push us around.' And bizarrely enough I used to find that the more Anglicised the Indian official appeared to be, suits made in London, children educated in Britain, the heavier the chip was, as if to counter-balance it. In addition there was, as you say, the Mrs Gandhi factor. I think England paid a very heavy price in bilateral relations for Oxford University having, I believe, chucked Mrs Gandhi out, or certainly made life difficult for her as a result of some academic failure which was not forgotten. In contrast with her father who was rather proud of having been to Harrow and Cambridge, Mrs Gandhi was not. And this made life, of course that was too stratospheric for me, it made life difficult for John Freeman who was the High Commissioner and I think a very remarkable High Commissioner...

Rt Hon John Freeman as British High Commissioner

JJ He was a political appointment...

PH He was a political appointment. He told me how the job came up. He was at the time the editor of the New Statesman so that when he got a call to go and see Harold Wilson at No 10, he wasn't in fact surprised or suspicious because he said all editors, major editors have a sort of request in to Number 10 and when sooner or later your turn comes up you go along. So he had his questions and went along to see Harold Wilson who simply said 'I want you to go to New Delhi.' John Freeman said, 'what do you mean, go to New Delhi.' And he said 'I want you to be our High Commissioner there.' Freeman was completely taken aback and had no preparation of any kind for this and he said, 'can I think about it', and Wilson said, '48 hours.' So he took it. I think he did a very significant job. It wasn't an easy one because there were sensitivities and pricklinesses in the bilateral relationship, not least with Mrs Gandhi. But I think the remarkable thing about John Freeman was that he recognised a basic truth and I think got London, HMG, to understand the truth, which was that although we had colossal ties with India in legal, linguistic, structural and organisational terms, anything you like, it was literally a foreign country. It may seem blindingly obvious now. In fact then, and after all 1966, not very long after independence...

JJ Nineteen years, a very short time...

PH And moreover, when looked at, as often London did, in respect of Indo-Pakistan relations, it was possible for Britain to influence to some degree Pakistani foreign policies. That was not the case in India and whenever London, with a sort of hankering in a way for the great role Britain could play in the sub-continent, would unwisely put itself in the middle between India and Pakistan, it would find that not only was it an extremely uncomfortable place to be but it wasn't very effective because you couldn't, when push came to shove, influence Indian policies. And I think Freeman made London understand, reluctantly, that we weren't ... it was no good viewing India even in post-colonial terms. One had to view India with completely fresh eyes which he did.

JJ What do you think was Harold Wilson's point in posting a broadcast journalist, and John Freeman in particular...

PH I really don't know. I'm not what one would call a passionate Wilsonian. But I think one has to hand it to him for his great perspicacity. John Freeman, who was not I think particularly popular with Mrs Gandhi, did a great job. I'll give an example, and I'm sure it is something you will recognise yourself. There is a particular kind of art form in Foreign Office telegrams employed by the ambassador, or head of mission, when reporting back on a decidedly unsuccessful meeting. This art form has certain characteristics; for one thing the telegram is rather long; for another it dwells rather heavily on what the ambassador said, quotes liberally from his instructions and emphasises the doughty way in which he argued and defended British interests; it rather downplays the degree to which the meeting was unsatisfactory. I'm sure you will recognise the sort of...

JJ Sounds familiar...

PH Right. I remember Freeman having to go in to do an important but desperately difficult task. This was to call on Mrs Gandhi and argue against nuclear development in India on the grounds of non-proliferation. I can well imagine how many ambassadors or High Commissioners would have recorded that discussion. I remember Freeman's telegram quite well. He gave the telegram references and said, 'I saw Mrs Gandhi this afternoon and spoke in accordance with instructions. Her manner was frosty and unhelpful throughout and I am convinced my representations will have no influence on Indian policy. Freeman.' Perfect, but how many people do it?

JJ I can think of one or two. If India didn't take the UK too seriously what about the Commonwealth?

India's membership of the Commonwealth

PH They took the UK seriously. They were just very reluctant to be guided or influenced in a political sense by the UK. As highly intelligent, sophisticated people, they could see that there was considerable material benefit to be had from the Commonwealth. I think they also saw some merit in it from their point of view as a sort of means of keeping Pakistan in check within the confines of a large organisation such as the Commonwealth. I don't frankly

believe they had, and I am talking of course of the governing ruling classes, much affection for the Commonwealth as such. That's not to say that, we were talking about attitudes towards Britain, leaving aside officials and politicians, there was not a great deal of affection for Britain and indeed among, how shall I put it without sounding condescending, some of the supporting staff, waiters and what have you working in the High Commission, a great regard and a nostalgia even for the Raj. So it was a very complicated relationship.

JJ Of course the Commonwealth did work at various levels which were not political where relations were good and Commonwealth representatives did get along with each other and develop their views together and so on.

PH That's true, this was of course before a comparable EEC membership which could perform the same sort of role and that's quite true. There was a bond in New Delhi between representatives of the various Commonwealth countries certainly.

British Aid to India managed by John Rimington

JJ You mentioned earlier generous financial development aid. How was that handled and was it productive?

PH It was an extraordinary country in which to administer foreign aid because of the diversity, of the sheer size of it. I think I said earlier that Delhi was the fount of foreign policy, and it certainly was, but in other respects the great states of Bengal or Andhra Pradesh were really fiefdoms. They ran themselves, so it was difficult from central New Delhi to administer the implementation of technical and financial aid. A great effort went into it. I remember the chap in the High Commission who was in charge of developmental policy was a certain John Rimington, and if the name rings a bell the fact was that his wife was Stella, who, deciding that she would like to be doing something with her time, became locally engaged as secretary to the MI5, declared MI5 representative and, as you know, went on to do rather well in that organisation.

JJ Yes, she ran it.

Beginning of Stella Rimington's career

PH It amused me actually when Stella got the job that newspapers in Britain were making much of this secret woman, and there are no publicly available photographs of Stella Rimington. I in fact had a drawer full of photographs of Stella Rimington because she, like me, featured in many of the High Commission amateur dramatic productions, which were highly developed and used to absolutely sell out in New Delhi. Nehru, Mrs Gandhi's father, never missed them apparently. I don't recall her ever coming but Stella was an extremely good actress which must have come in very handy.

JJ They produced Shakespeare whilst I was there.

PH Absolutely.

British Information Services in India

JJ Right, just one other question on India, you say everything flowed from the centre. What about journalism? Were there many papers in local languages? How did you deal with all that because there was a large British information effort, wasn't there, in the High Commission?

PH Yes there was quite a large effort. In Delhi itself the influential papers, Indian Express, The Statesman. The Statesman in fact was published from Calcutta. The influential papers in New Delhi were in English. It's a kind of inexhaustible job to try to follow the entire Indian press and I don't think a real effort was made but of course there was reporting to HMG from Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, so it was their job to track local media and ours to track the Delhi based English language media.

Posting to European Integration Department in the FCO 1969-72

JJ After Delhi, Peter, you came back to London and into the European Integration

Department, whose boss was the formidable John Robinson. Even the title suggests there was strong determination at that time to make up for the failed earlier negotiations and to really get us into the Common Market. What was your particular job at that stage?

Part played by John Robinson in negotiations to join the EEC

PH Well, just to pick up on John Robinson, he was indeed formidable. I think he was the single ablest officer I have ever met. He was a really remarkable man. The determination was there in spades. Indeed the story, and I believe it to be true, was that after the failed attempt Mr Heath called in John Robinson and another official who had been prominent work horses in the first attempt and said, 'That's it, I'm afraid we have failed. I think you have both been remarkable, I want to help you, what would you like to do now?' And Robinson said, 'I want to stay on EC issues. We will get in.' My role under this rather daunting, but actually very nice, and certainly immensely able man, my role in the third room was on the agricultural side where Common Agricultural Policy, Common Fisheries and also Britain's contribution to the EC budget were dealt with in the negotiations because, of course, the negotiations by 1969 were actually happening. It took a long time but we were already moving into a bargaining, debating situation.

JJ In non-official negotiations amongst officials.

PH Yes, but it was quite clear we were girding our loins for another go, and above all, this is perhaps not always totally understood, in joining something as far reaching as the EC there were really two completely separate negotiating issues. The obvious one is your negotiation with it is to be hoped your future EC partners; but in some ways the most difficult one of all is your Whitehall negotiation, putting together the British, HMG's, position. Because of course some Whitehall departments, shall we say Overseas Aid, are very much less enthusiastic than the Foreign Office or perhaps the Treasury are, and one had to reconcile a lot of very widely differing attitudes and preferences. De Gaulle, when we failed the first hurdle, was not entirely wrong, I think, in seeing that British history was not entirely or easily compatible with a European continental association. Here John Robinson's formidable, aggressive intellectual capabilities were tested to the full. And we eventually got a British

negotiating position which, with an overall understanding between Ted Heath and Pompidou, was negotiable. It could be argued that in our first attempt we were trying to hang on to too much of our post-Empire baggage to make it, certainly to make it past the French.

JJ There was also the EFTA angle, the European Free Trade Association, that was very worried about their future if we were to join.

The old Commonwealth dimension to the EEC negotiations

PH Well, they were very worried and of course there was particularly, if one dare use the phrase, the white Commonwealth aspect. Canada by that stage had really harnessed its commercial identity to North America, but in the case of Australia and New Zealand this was very different and actually part of my job dealing with the agricultural aspects of the negotiations was focussed on Australia and New Zealand. There was a very marked difference between those two countries. The moment, and I mean almost literally the moment, that Britain declared its intention to try to negotiate entry to the EC the New Zealand Deputy Prime Minister, Jack Marshall, came to London. He beefed up the, what had probably been a slightly somnolent, New Zealand High Commission with some really good guys. They put in a really marvellous political and intellectual performance. They harried us, but understandably. They saw the future of their country being dramatically changed as it was by Britain joining the European Economic Community and New Zealand fought very hard for good terms. And they got them.

JJ This was dairy products?

PH Yes, above all dairy products, lamb to a certain extent but above all butter and cheese. They got them, to put it brutally, at our expense. It cost us in terms of our contribution to the budget. It was seen as a bargaining chip in that particular argument. Australia was quite different. The Australians appeared not to wake up to the implications for Australia until a hopelessly late stage and then started to complain loudly and publicly with many references to Gallipoli, whereas the New Zealanders had worked in an extremely, not only energetic, but sophisticated way, and I think did a great job for their country.

JJ Their particular interest was sheep meat or wool?

PH Not so much wool. Meat and dairy products.

JJ The Common Agricultural Policy which you mentioned just now, the agricultural aspects of the negotiations was really about how much it was going to cost us, wasn't it, to switch away from our system of deficiency payments to these heavy subsidies.

PH Yes we had to adjust to a totally different system of managing our agriculture. I'd give a tribute here, jumping ahead slightly, to what was then MAFF, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. They rightly recognised the crucial importance of that aspect of the negotiations. They put their best people onto it and they were very good indeed. When it came to actual membership in many ways the task of the Foreign Office in the negotiations was to keep the other Departments on track without excessive distortion on the grounds of particular Departmental interests. Once we were in, the Foreign Office was still in the chair but the actual day to day interests were not particularly Foreign Office ones because there wasn't a foreign policy aspect to the economic community as it then was, but there was a great importance for the, if you like, if I dare say, the bread and butter Departments in Whitehall, the Department of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Agriculture who would be sending people out on an almost daily basis for the endless process of negotiations. One of the things that struck me, and I know you knew this from your own time in Brussels, was the fact that the negotiations in a sense never stop. The EEC, whatever you like to call it, is not a static body. Many people think of it as a kind of behemoth located in Brussels, which issues its own directives in a sort of magisterial way. In fact there is a constant process of negotiation both within the Community and with other countries and governments and MAFF was very prominent in that and very expert in it. I would give them the highest marks of any of the Whitehall Departments for knowledge of, and engagement in, this process of continual debate. We have mentioned the EFTA countries for example, if you don't mind jumping forward slightly to my own time, I think you know that...

JJ When you went to Brussels...

Posting to UKREP Brussels 1972 and continuing EEC negotiations

PH I went to Brussels at the end of 1972 when effectively we were in but we weren't formally in until the first of January 1973. The EFTA countries were of course very alarmed, as New Zealand had been, by our membership of this new radically different body and in Brussels when I joined the UK representation, UKREP, to use the acronym, my responsibilities were on the external trade side but specifically the community's relationship with the EFTA countries, which of course we had been one of, but no longer were, and what were euphemistically termed the State Trading Countries, i.e. the Communist Bloc. One of the things that I found particularly attractive about working in Brussels was this endless process of negotiations, so much going on in such a large and sort of multifarious body that actually there weren't enough chiefs, there weren't enough ambassadorial level people to go round, so that you did find yourself, and I did find myself as a mere first secretary, in a process of negotiation. The way the Community worked, and works as far as I know, is that it's a layered structure in that issues come up, usually on the basis of a proposal from the European Commission. Let us say, for the sake of argument, something to do with Norwegian fisheries comes up. This is the kind of thing I found myself dealing with. The initial process of negotiation is at working group level, i.e. my level as it was then. And it is perfectly possible for an issue to be effectively resolved at that level. Everyone is working of course on the basis of instructions from home base. The result might then be merely rubber stamped at the level of Permanent Representatives and Ministers. Of course, quite often it's not that way at all and the argument carries on upwards. The point I am making is that there is such a constant process of detailed negotiation going on that you are actually negotiating for your country at first secretary level, which almost never happens at any other capital one can think of. Let me give you another rather bizarre example of this. At one stage in my working group there was a great argument about access to the EEC market for EFTA exporters of dairy products and here you could see the taking up of positions of the various countries. France and Italy as the prime defenders of the Common Agricultural Policy predictably took the line that, 'I'm sorry, Britain has now joined the EEC and these EFTA countries no longer have any privileged access to the market.' Britain, of course, in my case me, in the particular working group, would argue that well, that may be so but we ought to be

nice to the EFTA countries because we have a constitutional requirement in the Community to meet with them every six months. We ought to listen to what they say and where we can, without of course breaching the sacred CAP, we ought to be as helpful as possible. We would get a certain amount of muted support from the Danes and the Irish on this and, as I say, opposition from France and Italy whose view was pretty brutal on this. On one occasion this came up in very specific form. My French colleague, with whom actually I got on very well, but, of course, he was operating to his own instructions, said, 'There is a difference in attitude around this table. Let me give you a specific example; there is a country represented here, a member of the Community whose Delegation and office in Brussels regularly, and of course quite illegally, takes Austrian butter off the back of a lorry essentially for the use of its Delegation, because it's a great deal cheaper than community butter. And this, I think, though anecdotal, demonstrates a difference in attitude', looking at me the entire time. This struck home because we did indeed have a sort of little fixer man in the office, who used to get the Austrian butter and provide it to us. But I thought I am not going to rise to this rather low blow, I shall say nothing at all, and just doodled on my pad. At the end of the discussion, of course this was only a part of it, the Italian came up to the Frenchman and said, 'How did you know about our butter?' The Frenchman, this is the cream of the jest, said, 'I did not know about your butter. We take the Austrian butter.' This is an example of French diplomacy at its finest because he had merely said there is a country represented at this working group which takes the Austrian butter. He used it against me. In fact, he was talking about what they did themselves. It's an illustration of many things, the sometimes brutal excellence of French diplomacy and the way that alliances are formed but are not always what they seem to be.

JJ And the alliances change...

PH Absolutely, the Irish for example were in a relatively comfortable position in these arguments because in broad economic terms their interests were very close to ours, and they could leave us bigger guys to make the argument for them.

JJ But what you say demonstrates the fact that we were working with the Community at its different levels quite some time before formal accession in January 1973 so that could

prevent any major initiatives which could work against us such as the Common Fisheries Policy which came to light just months before the formal negotiations...

PH Indeed, and operated against our interests and gave us a great deal of trouble. Reeling back now to my time in EID in the Foreign Office before going to Brussels I found myself having to produce endless draft letters from ministers to explain to anguished British bodies and the representative MPs that the Common Fisheries Policy wasn't quite as bad as it appeared to be. I'm afraid the fact is that it was bad.

JJ We have never got over it.

PH We have never got over it.

Sir Michael Palliser as UKREP Brussels

JJ Sir Michael Palliser was Ambassador in Brussels in your time, and in mine too. It seemed to me that he kept hold of the different activities of his staff pretty well. Would you like to say something about that?

PH I would. I had, and have, the greatest admiration for Michael Palliser. He was a brilliant choice for the job because quite apart from formidable intellectual capacity, for one thing he was married to Spaak's daughter, which is as about as European as you can get, not least in Brussels itself, but for another he had great projection. What I mean by that is that when you come to arguments and debates at his level, what's known, as you know, as the Committee of Permanent Representatives, i.e. the ambassadors to the community, you have to project. I mean there is an element of theatre about these debates. It is not entirely part of the British political culture but it is certainly part of the continental European part that you have to ... it's part of their educational system after all, which is not the case with ours, of public argument, public debate, and you have to be able to play your part, your role, to inject a degree of, when necessary, drama and passion into the argument rather than simply repeating the fact that we want eleven and a half percent of whatever it is. And Palliser was extremely good at that. He ran a very friendly but a very effective Mission. It was a remarkable Mission as you

know because the change in orientation of Britain's position on so many, almost every aspect, was so great that almost all Departments in Whitehall found themselves affected and sent really very good guys to Brussels to represent their Department. It was a very high level of ability which made it not only enjoyable but impressive to work with, say, the Ministry of Agriculture or the Treasury or whatever representatives. It was, I can say so immodestly, a very high level team.

UK performance limitations in relation to the European Commission

Looking back on it, I think that although UKREP was a very hard working and an effective Mission, I think an area where Britain did not operate as effectively as it should have done was in the European Commission. I think there was a tendency because of our continuing insistence that this should not be an entirely federal body, that in the last resort matters had to be decided by the Council of Ministers i.e. by national representatives. I think there was a tendency to underrate the importance of having your good guys, not only in UKREP but in the Commission as well. One can easily think of exceptions to that, extremely able British officials who were seconded to the Commission. Nonetheless I think if I compare the UK with, say, the French and the Italians, we were not adroit enough at getting our guys into key positions in the Commission. But one needs to remember, as I and you know, that although the Commission does not itself decide major issues, it does have the colossal power of being the only body which is licensed to make a proposal, put forward draft regulations whatever it may be. I found several times that the Commission would produce proposals which did not take proper account of British interests, and when one complained about this they would say, 'well, you should have told us when we were working on the drafts.' The difficulty there I found was that it was difficult to get hard pressed, hard working, London-based officials to come out and wine and dine the Commission and find out what ideas they were working on, what was gestating behind the Commission doors. Because by the time the proposal emerges it is a bit late. You really need to make your input inside the Commission before this or that proposal sees the light of day and I don't think we were particularly good at that.

JJ I recall UKREP did make a determined effort in co-ordination with London before we joined to secure adequately senior places in the structure of the Commission to ensure that we

were properly represented. But perhaps we didn't have enough people at the right levels...

PH You are perfectly right but that was at a relatively senior, chef de cabinet, level. What you actually need are the guys whose job it is to produce the first draft. I do remember in particular with the DTI, trying to get people to come out to talk to this or that Commission official who I knew to be working on an area of interest to them and all too often the reaction I got was I am far too busy just to come out and swan around Brussels for a couple of days. And I would say you'll be a damn sight more busy when the Commission produces something which gives you serious difficulties. Now is the time to be talking to the Commission. You are quite right in saying that in relatively senior positions we did have some extremely good people but you really can't cover all the necessary aspects at chef de cabinet level. There isn't time. You need a constant process of interchange with the capital and although London was good at sending people to UKREP and in some cases to senior Commission posts I don't think it was good enough, in my time at least, at day to day working contact with the Commission.

JJ Do you think it was the case that in Whitehall generally they didn't really appreciate what was going on in Brussels and how important it was for their own Departments.

PH I think there is some truth in that. I think there was a tendency to react, often with irritation, to this or that Commission proposal rather than get in on the ground floor before it actually became a Commission proposal.

Relations with the EEC after Britain became a member

JJ So once we had actually joined and we were fully paid up members, so to speak, how did it work in the initial year or two? There was still a lot of stuff that perhaps we hadn't dealt with very fully in the negotiations that had to be sorted out after membership.

PH Yes, there was. I have given the example of EFTA. There was a continuing process of trying to manage our relationships with the EFTA countries, and I'm sure many other examples in which I wasn't involved in the fine print, but above all, as I said, and I can't over

emphasise, the Community whatever its manifest failings is not a static body. It's a body in a constant process of negotiation of what might appear extremely minor points. Actually the degree of access for Norwegian prawns, one of my finest hours, was settled at working group level, and it affects what the British housewife pays in the supermarket. It matters. That was one of the appeals of working in Brussels, and there were many. It was real life stuff. It affects what you eat and what you pay, in the cases of the stuff I was dealing with.

JJ I seem to remember we were vigorously defending the British sausage and the pint of ale at the same time.

PH Yes. There are of course, as you know, myths about the degree of interference of the EEC and the great British breakfast or whatever. For example, as far as I know, although it is a very long lasting myth, there is no truth in the allegation that the Commission wanted straight rather than curved bananas. And cucumbers.

Comments on Sir Geoffrey Rippon as leader of the negotiations to join the EEC

JJ Would you like to say briefly how you viewed Sir Geoffrey Rippon who led the negotiations at ministerial level?

PH Yes, I had a lot of time for Geoffrey Rippon. I found him very engaging and a very effective character. There is yet another example of the importance of a degree of acting. This may sound over cynical but it is necessary on occasion to present, to deploy, the British position in a way that requires a certain amount of histrionic talent. I do remember on one occasion a particularly nitty-gritty approach from the New Zealand government, who sent a senior representative to talk to Geoffrey Rippon and to explain the precise importance of some very arcane point about, I think it was butter, and Geoffrey Rippon gave a marvellous performance to this chap which led to him going out shaking hands warmly and saying thank you very much, that's extremely reassuring. I had to keep a note of this meeting and I realised that actually Rippon hadn't really said anything of substance, but he had nonetheless managed to give an impression of concern and interest. As I say, I often kept a note of these exchanges and quite often Geoffrey Rippon would return after a pretty good lunch with a

very large cigar and I would present my draft record of these exchanges. I remember Rippon saying, 'I'm not sure that is precisely what I said, but it is certainly what I ought to have said.'

JJ He used the contribution of ANZAC forces in the Second World War to help save the world for democracy in defending the position on dairy products didn't he? And he was very good with the late night brandy and cigars which was strong but effective.

PH Yes, it is necessary. Being dull is not a recipe for winning arguments.

Postings to Venezuela and British Information Services New York in 1977-78

JJ So after EEC matters, and you had a spell in Caracas, Venezuela. You then moved on, Peter, to a very important post I think in British diplomacy, and that was running British Information Services in New York from 1978 to 1983 and for a period also you were in the Embassy in Washington as well. Please tell us about that.

PH It was a great job. I was pulled out of Venezuela, not very reluctantly I must say, to this job. British Information Services, I call it BIS, was required from a New York base to cover the United States. It was a very sophisticated, quite large operation which provided government propaganda, if you wish, but necessary. It provided both factual information and opinion in both print and radio and indeed TV from wherever we could place it in the United States. So that required a great deal of travel which I very much enjoyed, a great deal of contact with editorial boards. I found in general a great friendliness, a great interest at the editorial level. The difficulty I found was not in New York or in Washington where there was a real interest in foreign policy issues, but in what New Yorkers describe rather dismissively as flyover country. The fact was that provincial Americans, if I may be allowed to use the term, are not interested in foreign policy. One editor said to me, 'look, I like your stuff, we all read it with great interest but every time we run a reader survey of what do you want more of, what do you want less of, they want more of 'man bites dog' and less of foreign policy. So that was a problem.

Move to the Embassy in Washington in 1981

There were issues from time to time which transcended the ordinary business of BIS, and the Falklands was a really substantial example of that. You mentioned New York and Washington rightly. What happened was that having been based, initially, in New York, with responsibility for the New York operation, Nico Henderson, the then Ambassador in Washington, said, 'Why on earth is my Counsellor (Information) living in New York when I want him here in Washington?' Which was difficult in personal terms. I loved New York, our children were at school in New York, I had a nice house in New York and we were uprooted.

The Falklands campaign in 1982

In hindsight we were very grateful because having the chance of two and a half years in New York and two and a half in Washington was great good fortune but in the case of the Falklands it was particularly fortunate because by the time the Falklands issue blew up in the spring of 1982 I'd already been for some time based in Washington so I knew the Washington media, and knew them reasonably well which was a tremendous advantage. In terms of the Falklands issue as seen from the US, the first skirmish was in New York where Tony Parsons at the UN brilliantly secured a Council resolution extremely helpful to HMG. But from then on it was a Washington issue because it became a US political issue and Washington obviously is the political capital. So, as I say, I was fortunate in that by this time, being reasonably conversant with the Washington media scene, we put together a strategy, if that is not too grandiose a word for it, for how we were going to play the Falklands issue in the very hectic ten weeks or so that the campaign lasted. And our strategy was this; that our first requirement was to influence American public opinion at the ordinary individual level because this would then play into the Senate and the House of Representatives, which would then affect the position of the Reagan Administration. As you will recall, the Administration was initially very reluctant to get involved in this dispute. There was the hemispheric school of thought which was that well, the Brits may have a relationship with us and so on, but this is our hemisphere and we can't afford to go against one of the largest and most important countries, Argentina, in our hemisphere. So we had a task. And I am bound to say

that I think, I don't know if it would play precisely the same now, but we found a tremendous degree of emotional support for Britain in that conflict. We were lucky because, putting it in very broad terms, the left leaning wing of US opinion, to the extent that there is such a thing in relative terms, regarded the Galtieri regime as dreadful, jackbooted dictators whereas the right wing of American opinion regarded the conflict as a monstrous insult to our kith and kin in the UK.

JJ That was very important, rather than consider this as another colonial...

PH That was the danger. My fear was that this would be regarded as a faintly ludicrous Gilbert and Sullivan cocked-hat thing. But the points that we stressed in our campaign were, above all, that it is wrong in a dispute to invade the territory concerned. There were at that time at least nine seething territorial disputes in Latin America and our argument was this is important to all of us, but, above all, it is important to have negotiation rather than the high-handed military intervention that Argentina had taken. The various strands of US opinion were very receptive to this and I do believe Nico Henderson was a quite brilliant operator on morning television. I do believe that this had a serious effect. It over-rode existing divides. For example, I remember getting a phone call from a Boston radio station which asked if I was prepared to go on live in 30 minutes' time to talk about it and I said, 'yes', and about 10 minutes later the British Consulate-General in Boston rang me and said, 'Peter, say it isn't true that you have agreed to do an interview with such and such a station.' I said, 'I'm afraid it is true. I don't turn down any request.' They said, 'well, this is going to be very difficult,' they warned me, 'because they are rabidly Irish-American and very anti-Northern Ireland.' So I said, 'So be it, thanks for the warning but I've got to do it.' So I read up my papers and remembered all the details of what happened in 1833 and Heaven knows what and the chap came on the phone and said, 'Is that Pete Hall?' I said, 'Yep.' He said, 'Can we go?' and I said, 'Yes', he said, 'OK, we are live', then, 'Pete, I wonder if could tell us how Britain sees the present situation?' Absolutely marvellous, so I talked, between us I suppose, it was meant to be about 10 minutes, it turned out to be about 20. Entirely friendly; 'what is the British position?' When we were coming to an end he said, 'Are you prepared to do this every day?' I said, 'Yes, I am.' I said, 'Have you been in touch with the Argentines?' He said, 'We have, but they weren't prepared to talk.' So, perfect.

Performance of Sir Nicholas Henderson as ambassador in Washington

Nico Henderson, as I say, was brilliant. The only trouble from my point of view was that American breakfast television starts at a dauntingly early hour and what this meant in effect was that, since I had to accompany Nico to the television studio, I would have to get up at about five, get into the Embassy and read the overnight telegrams then pick up Nico who understandably at this very early hour was rather grumpy. Having performed brilliantly, as he did without exception, it was then an atmosphere of sweetness and light and back we would go in the ambassadorial Rolls-Royce with Nico phoning the residence and saying I want a large English breakfast for myself and Mr Hall. He did perform exceptionally well. He was ideal for the task. Indeed, I remember somebody from NBC saying to me, 'Your ambassador is straight from central casting,' which was the highest praise he could give.

JJ Very good for the special relationship, then?

PH It was indeed.

JJ Particularly between the White House and Number 10.

PH Absolutely. There were some really moving telegrams from the ordinary American viewer or listener. We worked very long hours during those ten weeks and I would normally find myself at about 10pm pouring a fairly generous scotch and looking at telegrams that had come in to us, or letters, from members of the public and they really were quite moving in their tone and in what they said. I remember one which read, 'I was alongside HMS Illustrious in WWII and if your guys now are as good as your guys then, your problem is going to be looking after the prisoners.'

JJ At the grass roots level I think the special relationship is special. We saw this with the 9 - 11 aftermath, didn't we.

PH The lump in the throat when the Brigade of Guards played the Star-Spangled Banner in

front of Buck House...

JJ The St Paul's service...

PH Absolutely. That was beautifully done.

Appointment of Mr Peter Jay as ambassador in Washington

JJ Can I ask you about Peter Jay? He was Prime Minister Callaghan's son-in-law, an economics journalist posted, for some reason or other, as Ambassador to Washington. This must have been a bit of a shock to the traditional diplomatic system. How did you view it, and how did the Embassy react?

PH Well, I have to say that I wouldn't have got the job without Peter Jay, in the sense that Peter Jay and Callaghan and David Owen chucked out my predecessor in BIS, which is why I was hauled out of Caracas to do the job. Peter Jay as Ambassador from my narrow point of view was both good and bad; bad in the sense that Jay, whatever else one may say of him, is not a man in doubt about his own abilities and as you say a journalist. In fact Jay had never been a journalist. He had been a very high level economic commentator so Jay's view of BIS was in a sense rather dismissive because he thought we don't really need all these people beetling around in New York when I can have Walter Cronkite to dinner. Well, that's true, and he was pretty good at having Walter Cronkite to dinner but in fact the business of supplying something as enormous as the US media with the necessary information is completely another matter. Fortunately for me Jay regarded BIS as slightly boring and beneath him so I was able to get on with it as I wished. I think for others in the Embassy it may have been difficult. I'm not in principle opposed to political appointments. As I have said, I had the highest regard for John Freeman's performance in New Delhi. What I would say, perhaps rather rudely, is that I'm very glad that when it came to the Falklands and the battle for television, and for US public opinion, I'm very glad we had Nico Henderson rather than Peter Jay.

Relationship between Peter Jay as Ambassador and John Robinson as Minister Political

JJ And at some point, you've mentioned already the formidable John Robinson, he went out there coincidentally at the time as Peter Jay. How did they work together, or didn't they?

PH They didn't. It was a very, very difficult relationship.

JJ What was John Robinson's formal title?

PH He was Political Minister, so he was number two to Jay in that respect. Jay was not used to, naturally I suppose, not used to the way an Embassy is structured and having, as I say, a very high regard for his own abilities, thought that anything interesting or important he could do. So that the sort of interplay, essential interplay, between staff was very imperfect. And in particular there wasn't enough left of interest for formidable John Robinson to do. It was a bad relationship.

JJ John Robinson himself was not known for his warm personal relationships...

PH He could be warm. He was very warm to me. He could be warm but in a sense the men were similar though they came from completely different professional backgrounds and disciplines, strong personalities and who had strong likes and dislikes and they didn't mesh well together, I'm afraid.

Return to work in London in 1986

Head of Research Department in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office

JJ Right. Shall we move on now. You came back to London, after that long spell, as Head of Research in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and then to the Cabinet Office in 1986 and 1988. Would you like to say something about those two posts?

PH Yes, briefly. The Research Department is one of the largest Departments in the Foreign

Office. When I was running it, it had about 50 people. It's a very unusual Department in Foreign Office terms because whereas the Foreign Office personnel are normally in a constant state of rotation; being posted here there and everywhere, coming back to the Foreign Office and then off again, the Research Department was composed of area and country experts who spent the vast bulk of their professional time in the Foreign Office. They were there to be a permanent source of information, expertise and as a source of support for the mainstream operative Departments in the Foreign Office who were often made up of people who might have been in the job for only six months, and might have only two years to do in that slot. So Research Department provided a really impressive degree of expertise culled both from overt and covert intelligence material. This made them in a sense a rather difficult Department to manage. I found it intellectually fascinating because of the calibre of the people. The difficulty was that the static nature of their postings in Research Department made it difficult to have an adequate system of promotion. They were not likely to be posted somewhere with a step up. They did occasionally have appointments abroad. But that was the difficulty, as I say, balanced by the intellectual excellence of the people one was dealing with. It was in a way a natural step to go from there to the Cabinet Office where I was Chief of the Assessments staff. My job was to provide the Joint Intelligence Committee, and through them the ministers with analysis of this or that crisis or situation, whether a longstanding one like the war in Afghanistan or yesterday's bombing in Belfast. And there I was running a small but extremely high calibre staff made up of people seconded from the Foreign Office, Ministry of Defence, all three services, and some of the intelligence agencies. So it was highly classified work, but immensely interesting, both in itself and because we had a very close relationship with the intelligence allies, above all the United States, but also Australia, and for a while New Zealand, which involved a certain amount of travel to the capitals concerned. It was a fascinating job. It was a tough one because you could be required to produce what was called an immediate assessment which if necessary would be done overnight. But it was very rewarding.

Chief of Assessments staff in the Cabinet Office

JJ So it's quite normal for Foreign Office staff, like yourself, to have a posting to the Cabinet Office, from time to time?

PH Yes. Not a great many but Chief of the Assessments staff is one of them and there are one or two posts of that kind. For example, my boss and the chairman of the JIC was Percy Cradock, a most impressive man, who had been Ambassador, first to East Germany then to China. One of the most intellectually distinguished men I have ever worked with or for. If one produced a draft paper for the weekly meeting of the JIC on Thursdays, you had to get it past Percy on Wednesday. My own feeling was whatever happens on Thursday in the JIC, if I can get it past Percy I've done my job.

JJ So you weren't expected to represent Foreign Office views, more to draw perhaps on your own experiences in different posts and different situations as background?

PH Yes. That's true.

Sabbatical year at Stanford University 1988-89

JJ I see, right. After the Cabinet Office you were given a break, a sabbatical year, out of diplomacy to Stanford University in America so back on your old stamping grounds to a certain extent with your American friends.

PH Yes, except that of course it's in California so I moved from the East coast to the West coast which is pretty well a different country. Stanford was marvellous. The way it happened is this: we talked about Research Department then the Cabinet Office; I had been in London for about 5 years, and I phoned up Personnel Department and said I joined the Foreign Office rather than the home civil service, isn't it about time that I went abroad? They said, in the way of Personnel Department, who keep their cards very close to their chest, 'we don't have a job for you at the moment, but we think we will next year.' They weren't prepared to say what the job was, 'so how about a sabbatical?' 'How about a sabbatical at London University?' I said, 'hang on, I have a very good job in London as it happens, what I am talking about is going abroad. I would like to go to the States. You have, I know, a tradition of sending relatively senior diplomats to US Universities, Harvard, Yale, what about it?' Well, they were initially not very helpful. It was one of the few occasions on which I

tried to pull strings and I went to Percy and said, 'they are not being very helpful about this.' He made a phone call and Stanford came through. The only problem, I adored Stanford, it's an enormous university, it's very rich with some fascinating people there, not least Condy Rice, who was in the same bit of Stanford University as I was.

JJ This is Bush's Foreign Affairs adviser now, Condoleeza Rice?

PH Yes. The only difficulty was the Foreign Office not having told me what the twinkle in their eye was for next year, it was impossible for me therefore to use this sabbatical to prepare myself for this forthcoming job. Since I had spent 5 years of my life, first in National Service and then Cambridge, doing Russian, I thought I will revise the Russian, I will bring it right back and I will produce a thesis on the prospects for Gorbachev, which is what I did, apart from watching a great deal of college baseball. And travelling a bit. That was all very well, the Russian had been sown so deep that I was able to revive it without too much difficulty. The problem about that was that reviving Russian is very poor preparation for working in Serbocroatian, which was what the next job turned out to be. But still, I enjoyed Stanford very much. It is of course quite different, certainly from being in a university like Cambridge. It is one enormous campus. There is no college system. Undergraduates seemed to be worked a great deal harder than they were in my time, but it was great fun.

Posting to Belgrade as Ambassador in 1989

JJ So after that you had to get back into serious diplomacy in Belgrade. You went as Ambassador in 1989, shortly before the fall of the Berlin Wall and everything that happened as a result of that very fascinating period for you. Tell us about Belgrade.

PH I arrived in Belgrade, as you say in late 1989. I had done some work, as it happened, on Yugoslavia in my time in the Cabinet Office because rightly or wrongly I regarded myself as having some feeling for Yugoslavia having as an undergraduate visited several times, indeed having done a short university stint at Zagreb University, so I had kept in touch with things Yugoslav, really out of personal interest. It was already evident there were serious cracks in the federal Yugoslav structure. Having arrived in November, 1989, by January the cracks

had become a fissure. What happened was the league of communists effectively ran Yugoslavia; and things like the presidency and parliament and so on were polite fictions really, Yugoslavia was held together by the Yugoslav league of communists. The league of communists in January, to cut a long story short, had a disastrous 14th congress in which the Slovenes walked out and the Croats followed suit. I remember very vividly the next morning my driver coming to me at the residence and I showed him the newspaper, Borba, the headline of which was, 'the league of communists no longer exists.' My driver actually dropped to his knees and kissed the pavement and said, 'I knew this would come but I did not think it would come in my lifetime.' But I, although I was rather moved and impressed by this, I in fact felt a sort of frisson of foreboding bordering on fear, because if the league of communists couldn't run Yugoslavia, who could? The sort of fissiparous nationalist tendencies that were already so evident that one could see trouble coming, as of course it did.

JJ This was trouble in the period of Mr Milosevic, it turned out, particularly him.

PH Well, I suppose so, yes of course Milosevic bears a very heavy responsibility but the Slovene and Croat leadership were not slow in seizing their advantages. One of the fundamental things I believe about what happened in Yugoslavia is that blame has to be apportioned pretty widely. Atrocities were committed on all sides. I would exempt the Slovenes from that because they had the kind of 'mouse that roared', little war. I believe 32 people were killed. And they were, as it were, allowed to go because Slovenia is an ethnically homogenous little country without a sizeable Serbian or Croatian minority so it didn't cause much trouble. When it came to Bosnia above all, of course, you were dealing with the three camps of Croatian, Muslim and Serbian, all minorities, all with a well justified loathing, would probably be the right word, of the others and with historical justification for that loathing. So it was an absolute bonfire waiting to be lit.

JJ The German government came out in support of President Tujman's efforts to break away from the federation, for Croatian independence. Why did the Germans do that?

PH Genscher, then the German Foreign Minister, was almost fanatical in his support for an independent Croatia. Why did they do it? Well, they had of course the rather unappealing

connection from the Second World War when Croatia was effectively a sort of 'satrap' of Nazi Germany and appalling atrocities were committed by the Ustasha Croatian forces, which of course sowed a dreadful seed when the break-up of Yugoslavia started to happen. The German Ambassador in Belgrade was a very able man, and he was very strongly opposed to Genscher's support for Croatian independence, which did him no good at all vis à vis Genscher and his own subsequent career. But I do believe he was right in the sense that although some form of Croatian independence was just about inevitable, pressure should have been applied on Croatia to assuage the fears of the quite substantial Serbian minority in Croatia. Instead there was a sort of triumphalist new Croatia using the sort of chequer board symbols that had been so popular there in the Second World War. Indeed everything was done to make the Serbs in Croatia alarmed. They were a tough, gun-happy, mob anyway, so the mixture was an extremely dangerous one. Milosevic of course seized his opportunity. He came to power essentially by using the Kosovo issue, bizarrely as it turned out, since it led to his downfall eventually. I saw a lot of Milosevic. I don't believe Milosevic was driven by communist ideology or even, surprising as it may seem, by a particularly virulent Serbian nationalism. He was a man addicted to power and that was the route he took. In fact Milosevic's family is Montenegrin in origin rather than Serbian. He was an evil man. He caused many appalling things to be done, beyond question. But he was an able wheeler and dealer and when I came, as you know, subsequent to being Ambassador in Belgrade when Bosnia really started to fall apart, the European Union countries withdrew ambassadors in May 1992 from Belgrade thinking fondly that this gesture would have a tremendous impact on Milosevic. It did nothing of the kind of course. Milosevic couldn't have cared less, but I then found myself, as I think you know, working first for Carrington and then for Owen. In fact Milosevic, it's a very unfashionable thing to say so, tried to make the Owen-Vance Plan accepted. The Croats and the Moslems had already accepted it as the best of a bad job. The Bosnian Serbs under the dreadful Karadjic were proving reluctant and I know for a fact, don't ask me how, Milosevic made tremendous efforts to get Karadjic to accept the Plan and indeed if Karadjic had accepted it the Bosnian Serbs would have got a better deal than they eventually got under the Dayton Plan. So Milosevic was of course a pretty bad man but a point did come in the Owen-Vance negotiations when Milosevic tried to be helpful, for his own selfish reasons. He realised this was the best deal the Bosnian Serbs were going to get.

JJ And what do you think of the outcome now, looking back, as it is?

PH I think it is sad because one of the things that, we are really talking of Bosnia now, shows that you cannot force people, unless you are prepared to actually take a country over fully, you can't force the component parts of that country, in this case Bosnia, to work together. And what we have now is, OK a lack of hot war, but effectively there are three entities in Bosnia, not a single Bosnia, the Moslems, the Croats and the Serbs, and never the three shall meet. So the aim of restoring a unified Bosnia never worked. To look at it another way, the mistake the West made over Yugoslavia in general was to think that it was feasible and possible to maintain a federal unitary Yugoslavia. It wasn't. The divisions were much too great. I argued, completely ineffectually, that if that was the objective then it needed to be a great deal looser. I argued that there was no chance of re-establishing a federal Yugoslavia. Instead one should try to establish a very loose confederation where there was, if you like, a single economy but the component parts effectively ran themselves. I doubted whether that was feasible but it was certainly worth a try, whereas simply banging on as the West did, 'no, no we would like to have one single Yugoslavia,' was a waste of time.

JJ In other words we couldn't turn back history. It was amazing that Tito held it together for so long.

PH Amazing. Tito was very tough and very smart. Yugoslavia was a much tougher, if you like more brutal, country internally under Tito than many of the in the West were prepared to recognise. Many in the West thought Tito was actually rather a good thing because he gave the Russians trouble rather in the same way as Ceaucescu did, and indeed I think to our shame, there was a degree of support for Ceaucescu.

JJ Hard to think of that now...

PH Hard to think of that now, with Ceaucescu staying at Buckingham palace.

JJ Do you think the eventual move, of at least some of the component parts of the Balkans,

to join the European Union will eventually help them out, help them find a way where they can live with each other?

PH I suppose it will be a strong barrier, if you like, against resumption of hot war but effectively they will ... Slovenia will, I think, have no difficulty within the EU. Slovenia will be, in economic terms, a sort of colony of Austria. Croatia will be largely dependent on Germany. In neither case will that give them difficulty. It's very difficult to see Bosnia, Montenegro or Serbia ever functioning inside the European Union.

Posting to Argentina as Ambassador 1993-97

JJ So, your last posting abroad as Ambassador to Argentina, 1993 to 1997, ten years after the Falklands war. What was it like when you arrived then?

PH Enormously welcoming actually. The Falklands issue, or, to put in Argentine terms, the Malvinas issue remains. But Argentina was a very different country by 1993. The Foreign Minister, Di Tella, was a tremendous Anglophile, who indeed had been imprisoned briefly by the military regime in Argentina. He managed to get himself and his family out to Oxford so he had a great deal to thank Britain for. He was an extremely intelligent and agreeable man whose Malvinas ambitions were undoubted but who was wholly convinced that it could only be advanced by peaceful means. Within Argentine public opinion generally, although it would be universally felt that the Malvinas should be Argentine, there were very, very few who thought this could be achieved by military means. As I used to point out to Argentine friends, they had quite enough trouble running their own enormous disparate country without trying to get more territory. And really my difficulties over the issue were with the Foreign Ministry, but in an entirely amicable way. And with the Argentine press and certain MPs. Most of my Argentine friends, of whom there were many, were really not that bothered. As you know, there is a very long history to Anglo-Argentine relations. Effectively Britain built much of Argentina. Britain provided the Aberdeen Angus and the Hereford cattle. It then built the railways to the ports which, again, it built. It provided the ships to take the meat to Europe leading to Argentina, shortly before the first world war, being the seventh richest country in the world, which is a sobering thought when one looks at Argentina now.

JJ One of the poorest.

PH One of the poorest.

JJ As you say, trade and the commercial connections were very strong but they deteriorated, or just faded away.

PH They faded away effectively under Peron who greatly disapproved of the West generally, and in particular US and British influence in Argentina. He believed Argentina could go it alone and proved to be sorely mistaken. When I was there of course President Menem was in the chair, an extraordinary character.

JJ This is the Argentine peasant turned politician, isn't it?

PH Yes, he was an extraordinary man. He was Syrian in ethnic terms. He had run one of the poorest republics within Argentina. He was a man whose private life could not bear a great deal of examination. But putting it brutally Argentines are used to fairly tough politicians. The great thing about him was that he was a pragmatist and he believed above all in Argentina inserting itself into the world economy, effectively the Western economy and in the dollar-peso peg. I believe that Argentina under Menem, whatever criticisms might be made in moralist terms of the man himself, prospered greatly. It worked. I think history should recognise that.

JJ It worked at that time but...

PH It worked. It's not easy frankly, even for me with a certain amount of knowledge of Argentina, to explain just how it went so badly wrong. But I'm afraid the answer is a vast degree of corruption and that money that should have gone into structural development went into personal pockets.

JJ The Americans had a very strong relationship with Argentina.

PH Yes. Well, Menem was fairly happy with that, unlike Peron. The Americans were strong, so were the French and the Spanish. As you know, the Menem era was the era of privatisation when whole chunks of the Argentine economy were effectively bought out by the French, the Spanish and the Americans, often now to their cost.

JJ We kept a low commercial profile?

PH Oh no. We kept a high commercial profile. In fact probably at the time we would have liked to be more involved in these great privatisations perhaps than we were. Happily for us, as it turned out. Nonetheless, actually bilateral trade flourished a great deal and we were heading for a mutual commercial exchange in both directions of a billion dollars. Trade did, not as a result of my efforts, but trade did develop very strongly during that time.

Final comments on career

JJ So, that was the end of your diplomatic career. A very rich and fruitful one for you personally, I think. It must have been perhaps a bit of a shock to suddenly find yourself without a job at all. Would you have wanted to continue after 60?

PH No, I don't think I would. I felt that I had been very lucky. I felt that I had in the main very good postings. Particularly to be in Yugoslavia when I was, uncomfortable in some ways though it was but nonetheless an historic period, and then to be in a country as attractive, and in most respects as friendly and fascinating, as Argentina was, very good fortune. I am not actually a believer in staying overlong in a given post. I can see, of course, the obvious arguments for staying for 5, 6 or 7 years in this or that post because you are good in the post and know the place etc. but actually I am a great believer in energy. And I think there is a danger in staying too long in a post. My own experience is, this sounds I know rather arrogant, but my own experience is if you can't do the job after about 6 months you are not up to that particular job. And you will be at your best after one or two, perhaps three years. But that in temperamental terms, certainly in terms of my own temperament, you are unlikely to retain the keenness stage after three or four years. It's a personal view but my

own view.

JJ It's said, not least in the media and sometimes by politicians, that now that ministers travel so frequently abroad and it is not difficult to do so there is not such a great need for having embassies and diplomats lying abroad for their country. What do you think about that?

PH I don't think it's true. One might say that I am 'parti pris' but my own experience is that Britain's relations with the rest of the world are so complicated, Britain belongs to so many organisations, almost more than any other country one can think of, the Commonwealth, the EU, NATO and obviously many more that actually the maintenance of the necessary degree of information about what is going on and the presentation of British viewpoints is an enormous job which does require a properly resourced and reasonably sized diplomatic service. I do think, moreover, having been in a position to compare and contrast, that Britain still has one of the best diplomatic services in the world. I certainly know that good judges, not least the French, think the same of us.

JJ And, of course, having somebody in the post who knows the politicians and the senior civil servants in person is something that ministers can't possibly achieve in these flying visits of 24 hours or...

PH It is quite true. When a minister flies in for 24 hours, who is he going to talk to? He doesn't know. Who is coming to come to dinner? Who is going to have a drink with him? What are the immediate issues? What is the personality of this or that interlocutor? What are the particular strains? What are the particular opportunities? A ministerial contact of course can achieve a lot but I believe he can only achieve a lot if it is based on information.

JJ He would be properly prepared on the ground. We used to be called, perhaps we still are, professional generalists, but there is a tendency, I think, to talk about having contract diplomats, or others, posted abroad for a period of time. Does this sound feasible to you?

PH I don't think it should be overdone. Again, perhaps, talking as a former member of the Diplomatic Service, it can be useful. One particular aspect of that that often struck me is that

it is very important to the Diplomatic Service, and the Foreign Office, to have a reasonably sympathetic Treasury in the sense that that is where your resources are going to come from. The problem about the Treasury attitude is that Treasury officials are indeed seconded and working in Embassies, UKREP and Brussels, but they only go to nice places. You don't get many Treasury secondments to Ulan Bator or Afghanistan so that they tend to persist with the view that life is pretty comfortable for British diplomats whereas in fact, as you know, there can be some very tough postings, dangerous postings and postings moreover very damaging to home life and personal relations. I have been extremely lucky in that respect but foreign service produces a great many divorces.

JJ The DTI also likes to pick its foreign posts, doesn't it?

PH Yes, they certainly did. I don't think that the undoubted expertise of a particular desk in the DTI or Treasury necessarily makes you particularly good in country X or Y, where you are dealing with a completely different culture, quite possibly a different language, though, as you suggest, members of the DTI and Treasury seldom go to places where great linguistic competence is required.

JJ Yes, quite. In my experience ambassadors are asked once a year to fill in forms which ask them to give their views about the British Council and BBC World Service. Should they expand, should they have more money, whatever. What do you think about that?

PH I am a great admirer of both. At the back of your question, of course, is if they could be properly resourced would that be done at the expense, as the Treasury would like, of the Foreign Office budget, and it would be difficult really for me to advocate that. But the BBC World Service does have a completely unrivalled influence and I think the British Council does an extremely good job. It did a very good job in Yugoslavia, it still does and ditto in Argentina. I think we are extremely fortunate to have, a) this extraordinary weapon of the English language and, b) two, I think, really very good organisations who deploy that language, and in the case of the Council, that culture. I suppose it's a failing of mine to regret quite how nitty gritty the Council has to be in terms in pushing science and technology rather at the expense of culture, but that's probably because I am temperamentally more inclined to

culture than to science and technology. I know some in the Council feel the same.

JJ Nevertheless they do play a part in developing relations at a quite different level, where culture is concerned. And winning hearts...

PH They do indeed, sure. And they are pretty good at picking people. There are a great many influential politicians around the world today who have benefited personally from the British Council.

JJ Finally, we talked earlier about the Commonwealth, not least in relation to India. Do you think it serves any useful purpose at the political level anymore? I'm thinking of Mugabe and Zimbabwe in particular, for example.

PH I know that Her Majesty The Queen is devoted to the Commonwealth. I think there are great links within the Commonwealth. I think it helps to preserve many relationships and ties. It is difficult not to be greatly disappointed by essentially the failure of the Commonwealth to impact upon Mugabe and his regime in Zimbabwe and I think what is particularly disappointing is the failure of neighbouring or nearby African countries to use Commonwealth muscle, which does exist. In fact the EU, though not immensely effective in this context, has been more active than the Commonwealth.

JJ I suppose one could argue that the African neighbouring countries do have a certain amount of selfish interest in not interfering, but could you say that equally of Her Majesty's Government? We have intervened elsewhere, but where kith and kin are concerned, or have been in the past, we haven't.

PH Emotionally, I'm entirely with you, but how? I've visited Zimbabwe a couple of times, not in any official capacity, but before this reign of terror began it was, I am afraid, evident that the status quo was not going to last. We are not going to maintain a position where a tiny proportion of the population, which happens to be white, are running such a vast proportion of the good agricultural land. Of course, they knew this themselves. Plans were in existence to share the load a bit. Of course Mugabe's regime has been utterly hateful and

brutal and deceitful in its actions. But short of invasion it's not clear to me, whether, in the absence of a broad Commonwealth determination, there's a lot one can do, sadly.

JJ Right, well, Peter Hall, thank you very much for that.

Transcribed by: Ann Drew, February 2003