

## **BDOHP Biographical details and index**

### **Sir Colin (Henry) IMRAY (b. 21.9.33)**

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I joined the Commonwealth Relations Office in 1957 - almost by accident, but also because of my family background. My father died when I was two years old, and I do not remember him. I grew up wanting to be like him - or at least like what I heard about him. I wanted to do the things he did. He had been in the Seaforth Highlanders in the First World War; I joined them for my National Service. He had been in the Colonial Service in Sierra Leone; I volunteered to serve out my army commission there to meet people who had known him, and to try to experience his way of life. I acted as ADC to the Governor and travelled up country. My Headmaster had commented that a generation earlier I would have been ideally suited to the ICS; I knew nothing about India, but having been given the top leadership roles at school and in the army, I was convinced that I could contribute significantly "*pro utilitate hominum*" - for the welfare of mankind, by joining the Colonial Service and persuading and helping others to improve their standards of living and of government. For my father's generation, colonial management was to be one of great crusades of the 20th century - to free Africa from the ignorance and poverty of the past, and to lead her people towards the dignity of political independence. Their guide was Sir Thomas Munro - Governor of Madras in 1827. "Work through, and not in spite of native systems and ways, with a prejudice in their favour rather than against them; and when in the fullness of time your subjects can frame and maintain a worthy Government for themselves, get out and take the glory of the achievement and the sense of having done your duty as the chief reward for your exertions."

But already in 1957 it was clear that, just as the days of the ICS were over, so were the days of the Colonial Service coming to an end. However, at Oxford my friends were mainly from the Commonwealth and the US, and I studied the Political Structure of the British Commonwealth - the only subject in which I earned an alpha marking. Many of my contemporaries at Balliol took the Civil Service Exam, and although neither I nor my peers thought I had a chance, I put my name down for it as a matter of routine. I was interested in overseas rather than Whitehall service. I could not bear the thought of a lifetime of commuting to the corridors of bureaucracy; and coming from a poor family, I was unfairly prejudiced against the Foreign Service, which I regarded - quite wrongly - as privileged and effete snobs. To everyone's surprise, I was accepted for the Commonwealth Relations Office.

We were blessed by good fortune very early on. During our first year Shirley became pregnant. We had no private money and could not manage on my £54 per month. Lord Carrington, then our High Commissioner in Australia, had turned down the CRO's candidate for the post of his Private Secretary (George Cunningham who later became a Labour MP). I was appointed; and we enjoyed the great privilege and pleasure of working for Lord and Lady Carrington. He was only 39 - but already a brilliant diplomat, and showing signs of becoming an outstanding statesman. They were particularly nice to work for - as were their successors, Sir William and Lady Oliver - for whom I had already worked in London. So we got off to a good start in the CRO. The PUS of those days, Sir Gilbert Laithwaite, was also particularly kind to his "children" (new APs and their wives). He had us to his flat to meet senior colleagues - and even visited me in hospital when I had my appendix out. So it was a small service - friendly and sharing a naive idealism about the development of the Commonwealth, and Britain's role in it.

My own idealism was tested by an unexpected posting to Kenya. We were en route by sea to Uganda when I received a cable from the CRO saying that I was required to get off the train in Nairobi, instead of Kampala. Kenya's independence had been advanced, and I was needed to help prepare for it. I objected strongly - (the first of many times) - because my only experience of Kenya had been with very reactionary settlers. The first few months were indeed difficult - but the Europeans who could not face African rule left, and I found myself working under the guidance of Malcolm MacDonald - another great diplomat and statesman - who showed throughout his careers a most unusual rapport with the leaders of emerging countries. My job was not only to help set up the British High Commission, but also to help the Kenya Ministry of External Affairs to develop - and Shirley and I became close friends with the new Permanent Secretaries, senior bureaucrats and professionals - and would go dancing at the Starlight Club with their politicians. I would help the MFA draft a protest against British colonialism in the morning, and then in the afternoon, with their knowledge, advise London and New York what was coming. I learned that one of the duties of a First Secretary was to confront demonstrators (and that it was sensible to leave one's spectacles behind - and park one's car out of sight). We had a revolution in Zanzibar and mutinies in Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika - when African Governments (for the last time) asked colonial power to intervene - and we did, except in Zanzibar.

I was horrified to learn in 1965 that the FO and the CRO were to be merged. My first reaction was to write to the Australian Public Service Board to ask if I could transfer to the Australian Government Service. They were happy to accept me, but at the bottom of the salary scale - and since we then had four children, we decided to stick it out a bit longer and see what happened. I returned to London in 1966, when my youthful idealism suffered a grievous blow by a three month stint in the CRO's intelligence department. This shattered my illusions of the cosy commonwealth relationship - and I had already written my letter of resignation when I was summoned to become the Area Officer for Africa and the Middle East in Personnel Department of the Joint Diplomatic Service Administration Office. I later became its Assistant Head. I found that Foreign Office people might be bright, but they were also human; that they worked extremely hard, to high standards; and that the quality of one's ideas, and ability to communicate them, took priority over status and seniority. Speed and accuracy were absolutely essential.

The DSAO was concerned to merge the two services as effectively and as quickly as possible. The most obvious means of doing so was a crash programme of cross postings - and I was at the centre of that particular spider's web. Usually these worked fairly well - although some old fashioned Ambassadors did make life difficult for new transfers from the CRO. On the whole most of the more capable CRO officers adapted quickly to Foreign Office realism, which reflected more accurately than the CRO, and the Government itself, the changed status of Britain in the world, and the continuing reduction in resources available. There was some feeling among CRO staff that they were held back in the free competition between members of the Services for promotion; but in practice this rarely happened - if anything there was a slight bias in the other direction. The Foreign Service naturally had a near monopoly of hard languages. They had always been more hard-headed and Anglo-Centric than the CRO. The CRO had given priority to British Council and British Information Services types of work, preserving professional, military and educational links, with generous aid donations. The relatively generous staffing of the High Commissions reflected this. Britain could not afford what seemed to be an indulgent favouritism towards its ex colonies - and particularly after our entry to Europe; and in Mrs Thatcher's time as Prime Minister, the pendulum swung the other way. The cuts have since been reinforced by stringent economy measures, a new management

philosophy throughout Government Service, and by new techniques of motivation by remuneration.

My own view is that the Thatcherite materialistic philosophy of national self interest was pursued with too narrow a vision - and back fired. A more generous spirit, and a broader vision could have resulted in Britain retaining a more influential role in the developing world (not least in Asia). Thatcher went far beyond the Foreign Office interpretation of national self-interest - and for the most part, her successors in the Conservative Government seem to have little understanding of the ideals of public service or international morality that attracted me and many of my colleagues to serve our country. Nor have they been capable of assessing the enormous, but unquantifiable, benefits of the British Council, BBC World Service, or a generous programme of educational scholarships. France would dearly love to acquire the assets we are discarding.

My point of view may be biased - since I served in eight Commonwealth countries and Israel. But I have always considered that the role of a High Commissioner in a Commonwealth country to be particularly satisfying - from the point of view of influence - even if sometimes both difficult and exposed. The historical, educational and professional links gave the British a great potential advantage in these countries - particularly in the 50s and 60s. Even now, a reasonably sized aid programme (and our influence with international financial institutions and other donors) provides political leverage beyond what Douglas Hurd described as our punching weight. Our European colleagues, and often the Americans, recognise this - particularly when we and our other Commonwealth colleagues co-operate in overlapping councils. Incidentally I found that in most posts it was useful also to have close relations with the Japanese, Egyptians, Turks and Hungarians.

If a High Commissioner could demonstrate that he and his staff had a good local understanding, and if the host country was not at the top of the political agenda in the UK, the recommendations of the post could receive carry great influence in London. Personal relationships with the political and other leaders were most important - to be liked and respected made it much easier to get them to listen to friendly and often less friendly criticism, both by the High Commission and by British statesmen and

other visiting firemen. Although I believe Thatcher went over the top on materialistic motivation, both for the country and its servants - she did a great deal to restore our position in the world in the short term; and thus to reinforce the credibility of her representatives.

During my career I developed three main skills - which inevitably intertwined a lot. These were political, management and aid - and three times I did a major commercial job. Like most of my peers, I was assumed to have political understanding. This was encouraged by working closely with Lord Carrington in Australia, Malcolm MacDonald in Kenya, by being in charge for fifteen months in Montreal after the kidnapping of my boss, Jasper Cross, in a strongly Quebecois province. I was Political Counsellor in Islamabad, and Chargé for nine months during the elder Bhutto's rule. In Israel I persuaded HMG to open up commercial work in the West Bank and Gaza and developed relations with the Palestinians which have stood me in good stead while I have been working for the Order of St John in Jerusalem. In both Tanzania and Bangladesh I had major roles in persuading the governments to adopt IMF policies on the economy (and in persuading the IMF and World Bank to moderate their demands). I was closely involved in the events leading up to the downfall of Bangladesh's Present Ershad, and in helping to introduce concepts of "good government" to both countries. In 1993 the FCO invited me to be the British nominee for the post of Deputy Secretary General (Economic) at the Commonwealth Secretariat. The nomination carried with it almost automatic appointment - but I decided that despite the interest of the job, and its excellent conditions of service, I would accept another offer that had been made to me of Secretary General of the Order of St John. Sir Humphrey Maud went to the Secretariat instead.

The second skill - too often assumed as one became more senior, was management. By this I do not mean management techniques theory, and philosophy - although these are important tools. But I believe that the basic requirement for exposed management positions is a combination of a flair for leadership, and a deep, even passionate, interest in the welfare of one's colleagues and their families (and it helps enormously to have a wife who also puts that as a top priority). I was never prepared to regard current regulations or practices as immutable, if there was a sound argument in common sense, equity, and the evolving, values of society for change.

My first real exposure to management was to participate in the Personnel Department's campaign to merge the Foreign Office and the CRO. I took over the Middle East and Africa during the turbulence of the late 60s when evacuation, terrorism, war was common, and families had a most disruptive time. I first learned then that personnel work involved very uncomfortable personal interviews, in which sincerity and detachment were paramount - also that the interviewee would be very selective in what he or she remembered - and that it was important to follow up with a written record. This was the precursor of open reporting - which is sometimes difficult to use objectively in a small diplomatic mission.

I was sent to Islamabad just after there had been a meeting among junior staff over non payment of utilities on the compound. There were 78 staff, many from the Home Office on first overseas postings, in a somewhat hostile Muslim Pakistan, recently defeated by India in a war to liberate a British-backed Bangladesh from East Pakistan. The Embassy had a house in Peshawar available for leisure visits. When I arrived, diplomatic staff stayed in the house, non diplomatic in the (converted) stables. Diplomatic staff could import liquor and cigarettes duty free; for non dips the Pakistanis forbade imports. I persuaded a reluctant FCO to grant diplomatic status for deserving Grade 9s throughout the Service. We set up a Welfare Committee for complaints; organised a car hire service for new arrivals who faced nine months without a vehicle; then an overland delivery of freight and cars via Iran and Afghanistan (Shirley and I tested the route). My wife was affectionately mocked in the panto as 'Dear Auntie Shirley, What shall I do?'. I disarmed a member of staff who was threatening to kill another for sleeping with his wife. And so on.

My next major management job was a Rayner exercise in 1980 on the provision and maintenance of transports for diplomatic service posts overseas. I encountered the most amazing obstruction from the Treasury, the Ministry of Defence and Department of Trade and Industry. Ministers of all those Departments warned me off their patch. Their reactions were summed up by the comment that 'we are not in the second hand car business' when I suggested that the FCO took advantage of the high prices that could be obtained in many countries after one year of use. Our HQ records on vehicles were computerised from data sent in unchecked by often semi-literate mechanics. I found much of it to be garbage. Jaguars or Daimlers were *de rigueur*

even for jungly posts - it was the grade of the Head of Mission that counted rather than the conditions of the roads, or the availability of servicing, and air conditioning was only authorised for Heads of Mission. But I must record that Mr Hurd to whom I reported, was totally supportive. It took up to ten years for many of my recommendations to be put into practice.

In 1984 I became Chief Inspector and Deputy Chief Clerk. I had the job for a year and a quarter, helping to introduce the Financial Management Initiative, Management Information Services, and management by objectives. I converted the Home Inspectorate into a Management Review Service, and developed the concept of inspecting being a consultancy concept, with open inspections asking Posts for their own recommendations on contingency cuts. The Treasury participated in our Inspections for the first time; and we introduced Local Budgets - which were initially a great strain on Administration Officers. We also tried out output measurements. At that time the overseas inspectors were briefed to cut ten to fifteen home based jobs three times a year from their visits.

As Head of Mission in two difficult posts, Shirley and I still kept out interests in Management. Tanzania was a relatively straightforward "difficult post" - but Dhaka was not. I had 350 British staff and families in diplomatic and aid communities which tended to be mutually suspicious. I was responsible for the High Commission administering both - with 200 home units, 200 official vehicles, two social clubs, a mini hospital and a workshop. We built and moved into a new ten million pound chancery over the wall from our brand new Residence. Both were built on an artificial mound to prevent flooding.

Before leaving management, I must pay tribute to all that my wife did - unpaid, but rewarded in satisfaction, in the Diplomatic Service. We married three weeks before I joined. In my kind of diplomacy the wife is enormously important. She has to give up any idea of a structured career of her own - but, from the first, Shirley and I made a joint career. I did the office work - she ran the government hotel we used as home - and, in many places, she helped the morale of the families among both the staff and the British community as well as getting to know the wives of influential nationals. In our last year, she organised the entertainment of 6,000 guests in our



house. When we evacuated mothers and children during the Gulf War, she wrote to them all to tell them their husbands were OK. In Pakistan she turned our spare bedrooms into cholera wards for some British visitors from India whom the local hospitals wouldn't touch. In Kenya she ran a hospice for poor people dying of cancer - now a Cheshire home.

But as well as being a capable administrator, a diplomat's wife is expected always to appear smart and well dressed - and still be a loving wife, and a mother to children who can feel insecure in strange environments, or who have to be packed off to boarding school and be separated from their parents by thousands of miles. Now our children are grown up and parents themselves, they tell us that there were lots of compensations - holidays in Dulwich seemed tame compared to flying off to join us in exotic postings. Our son learned some of his surgeon's skills in a government hospital in Nepal, where he developed a continuing interest in high altitude medicine; our doctor daughter worked in a gyne hospital in Kashmir; our theologian daughter worked six months in a kibbutz learning Hebrew and played hockey for Israel. Our youngest daughter, who has a more relaxed approach to life, brought her fiancé to enjoy the game parks in Tanzania and beaches in Zanzibar. And the happiest holiday we ever had was two weeks exploring Afghanistan.

The third skill acquired was that of aid administration. My appetite for that derived, of course, from my thwarted desire to join the Colonial Service - and my determination to do all that I could to influence the use of the funds and skills available from British and international institutions to benefit the people of Tanzania and Bangladesh in ways which would be "owned" by both donor and recipient. This was not as easy as it might sound, since one had to deal with political priorities and prejudices on the part of the donor, that were often coupled with unrealistic and impractical demands for rapid restructuring of the economy. On the part of the recipient there was a horror of being patronised, and frustration at the donors' apparent political naiveté, coupled inevitably with the endemic corruption that pervaded all levels of politics and bureaucracy in such poor countries. The extent of the presentational difficulty hit me hard when, in the first few months of my time in Bangladesh, the Prime Minister and two senior Ministers told me that the poor are "politically irrelevant", the Chief of Protocol referred to them as 'garbage', and a leading

businessman as 'aid generators'.

Aid was administered by London and the Development Division in Bangladesh; and the High Commissioner was frequently left out - even though at over £100 million, it was Britain's second largest programme. I persuaded the FCO and ODA to move its management to Dhaka; so that I could report on the Aid Programme to Under Secretaries in both Ministries, and thus influence its direction, and negotiate more credibly with the Government and International Financial Institutions. Baroness Chalker was a great support.

By the time I left Bangladesh it had been accepted that we had a moral obligation to help the large number of deserving poor and disadvantaged women there who fight hard against recurrent natural disasters, and have to accept a remarkable subservience to their menfolk. With other donors, we pressed the Government to press on with structural adjustment, more efficient and accountable government and the creation of new jobs. The British were well equipped to help with the machinery of bureaucracy, and revenue collection. We swung the emphasis of our aid programme away from large projects (which provided easy rakeoffs for politicians), to focus more on alleviating poverty, helping women, encouraging good, effective and accountable government, educating the military to participate in a democracy, providing a wide variety of training - and focusing on infrastructural projects such as feeder roads and bridges that encouraged development of backward areas. All this in partnership with the Government so there could be clear joint "ownership". Our more poverty focused agenda entailed a greater use of NGOs - often a politically sensitive area.

Those were my three skills. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to acquire them, and to put them into practice. For both Shirley and me, diplomacy provided a good life - and in retrospect, we would not have exchanged it for another. We had the privilege of living in different countries, among different cultures. We have made many friends and met many national leaders. I have often been in the position to exercise influence to the benefit of both my own government, and of the people where I was serving. For me, there was the great bonus that so much of my work was based on personal relationships. But I am glad that my service was at the

time it was. Britain may have continued too long after the war with an unrealistic understanding of its changed status in the world; but at least it accepted a service of obligation and responsibility which we now seem to shirk to the detriment, ironically, of our wider self interest. I believe this Government's present attitude towards its civil servants to be crass and damaging. But old men are notorious for regretting the passing of the past.

I thought I would finish with a few stories about each of my postings. My first was in Australia, where I was Private Secretary to Lord Carrington. I learned a great deal working for him. When I joined him, he warned me that he would occasionally lose his temper with me. Sometimes I would deserve it; other times he would just be letting off steam. He had to be nice to people all the time - and just occasionally he needed to work off his frustration. Part of my job was to absorb it. I was cultivated by the Russians there, and had to learn to find flower vases for the third vodka martini. We loved Australia so much that I almost transferred to their Public Service.

We were in Nairobi for Kenya's Independence. Nobody knew what the UHURU celebrations would be like. It was after Mau Mau, and the Forest Fighters with their dreadlocks were parading in the arena. Many Europeans were afraid that the Africans would riot. Shirley, who was heavily pregnant, had rejected well-meant advice to stay away. Prince Philip and Prime Minister Kenyatta stood on the dais at one minute to midnight, floodlights on the Union Jack, which the Duke was to pull down. The Duke turned to Kenyatta and said: "Last chance to change your mind". Kenyatta made an expressive gesture with his fly whisk - and the rest is history. After the parade our car was stuck in the mud; eight delirious Africans came over and we feared for the worst. But they said: "Now we are independent, we have a motto. It is 'Harambee' - or 'Let's pull together'. We'll show you what that means". And they pulled us out of the mud, laughing and joking. Less welcome was a telephone call at 4.00 am a few weeks later from a colleague in Zanzibar asking me to arrange for British nationals to be evacuated from a very bloody revolution.

In Montreal my boss was kidnapped six weeks after my arrival. The kidnappers had watched both his house and mine. They took him, because he was more important; but

also because since we had four children, our movements were unpredictable. They knew that at 7.15 am he would be under the shower with no clothes on and his wife would be in bed. They took him and bundled him into the boot of a car. The Cubans, who were personal friends, negotiated his release eight weeks later - but a Cabinet Minister who had also been kidnapped was strangled by his crucifix when he tried to escape. For the rest of our time in Montreal we enjoyed the status symbol of a 24 hour guard on our house.

In Pakistan I had my most exciting title: HM Consul General for the North West Frontier Province. My family have vivid memories of travelling down the Khyber Pass on the luggage rack of a rickety old bus. To put that in context, we had travelled up the Pass in a train with an armed soldier in each compartment to protect us against the bandits that used to raid the train. At that time our telephones were bugged, and we were followed everywhere. They thought I was in MI6. But when I left, the Head of their counter espionage service presented me with a tea service to mark the end of a close relationship!

I went to Israel from Pakistan - the only two countries created as religious states. The Israelis were always stimulating. Two Israelis - three opinions, into the early hours on orange juice. The old lady one dreaded sitting next to at coffee and cakes would turn out to be a most stimulating academic or musician, with an Auschwitz branding under her sleeve. The Jewish settlers had made the desert bloom with their hard work and high technology; but their bureaucracy was Levantine and after the Camp David return of Sinai to Egypt the Israeli character became coarsened by increasingly colonialist and settler attitudes to the West Bank. We used to listen to the news every hour on the hour. Shirley would never go to the markets on a Friday morning because of the danger of bombs. Our next door neighbour was killed by terrorists when she was out photographing birds. A fascinating country - and with so much packed into it; religion, history, archaeology, scenery, agriculture. But I suffered from claustrophobia in the tense Israeli society - and I used to relax walking in the hills of the West Bank; and going on archaeological expeditions every Sunday with the great Biblical scholar, Father Jerry Murphy O'Connor.

In Bombay I started off a British Chamber of Commerce. We had consular problems with the disciples of Rajneesh, whose ashram was in Pune and who was notorious at that time for encouraging free love among his disciples. This resulted in the occasional alleged murder of British subjects. Most tragically just before I left I had to deliver the body of the assassinated Indian vice Consul in Birmingham to his family - and my successor was himself assassinated after only six weeks in post. There may have been a connection. My wife maintains our connection with India, working in the Victoria and Albert Museum and the India Office Library.

In Tanzania our most vivid memory is 1.5 million wildebeest migrating to the Kenyan Masai Mara; and in the Ruaha River hippos surfacing and barking like old men laughing at jokes. The end of the long dry season; the dark clouds; the rush of wind; the misty rain fingers; the tangible smell of the dusty earth soaking up the downpour, and the zebras getting soaked. And the worst roads in the world. We had a house in Zanzibar, which we lent to the Aga Khan. When the Ismailis returned it to us, they had to replace the sheets. They had cut up the ones he had slept in as relics for his followers.

My last post was Bangladesh, the most densely populated country in the world. If a year went by without a natural disaster, they seemed to produce a man-made one. Many people there believed that I helped to overthrow their military President. I am not sure that I did; but I do know that it was exciting travelling with him in his helicopter in the last few days of his rule - to attend a large public meeting at which London had instructed me to disassociate the British Government from his undemocratic policies. I was most surprised that as we were flying back to the capital he invited me to join him in his study, where he told me (as a friend) that he believed that much of what I had said was right. Ironically a few days later he was arrested and locked up in the attic of my old house; and despite the return of democratic government to Bangladesh he is still in jail - although he has won three Parliamentary seats in each of the last three elections. I was very lucky in the timing of my speech. My colleague in Sri Lanka, David Gladstone, was instructed to make a similar declaration there; but his Head of government did not fall - and he was declared *persona non grata*.