

BDOHP Biographical Details and Interview Index

PRINGLE, Dame Anne Fyfe (born 13 January 1955)

DCMG 2010 (CMG 2004)

Career (with, on right, relevant pages in interview)

Joined FCO, 1977	p 2
3 rd Secretary, Moscow, 1980-83	pp 3-10
Vice-Consul, San Francisco, 1983-85	pp 10-11
2 nd Secretary, UK Rep, Brussels, 1986-87	pp 11-12
Head of Polish Section, FCO 1988-91	pp 12-13
1 st Secretary, European Political Co-operation Secretariat, Brussels, 1991-93	pp 13-16
Deputy Head, Security Co-ordination Department, then African Department (Equatorial), FCO, 1994-96	pp 16-17
Head, Common Foreign and Security Policy Department, FCO, and European Correspondent, 1996-98	pp 17-18
Head, Eastern Department, FCO, 1998-2001	pp 18-22
Ambassador to the Czech Republic, 2001-04	pp 22-29
Director Strategy and Information, FCO, 2004-07	pp 29-31
Ambassador to Russia, 2008-11	pp 31-41

BRITISH DIPLOMATIC ORAL HISTORY PROGRAMME

RECOLLECTIONS OF DAME ANNE PRINGLE DCMG RECORDED AND TRANSCRIBED BY ABBEY WRIGHT

AW: It is 23 January 2018 and this is Abbey Wright recording the recollections of Dame Anne Pringle. Our first question always starts – Why the Foreign Office?

AP: It's a very good question! Why the Foreign Office? I studied languages at St Andrews University, I always saw myself as doing a job that involved international travel and living in countries, not just spending a couple of weeks in countries. I applied for various jobs when I left St Andrews, mostly in industry, oil companies, but the Foreign Office gave me an offer and I thought "I'll take it".

FCO London, 1977

AW: You, came straight to London? What did they do with you first?

AP: Yes. I spent two years first of all in London. My first year was spent in what was then called Migration and Visa Department dealing with mainly people from Central and Eastern Europe who wanted to come to the UK, and also there were a lot of Spanish cases in those days. I then spent a year in what was called Soviet Department under Rod Lyne at the time. My job as Third Sec was to deal with human rights cases. At that time, 1978, there was an awful lot of interest in human rights cases and in some big names like Sharansky etc. There was a post bag that was huge and my job was to find out what was going on, in so far as we could, and make sure all the letters were answered.

Russian Language Training, 1979

AW: And then going on to do language training in Russian was an obvious next step?

AP: Yes. I didn't study Russian at University, I took French and German, but I was really interested to go to Russia and in those days the language training was at the Royal Army Education Corps at Beaconsfield. It was mainly training military intelligence people and five diplomats went that year, there were nineteen of us altogether. I was the only female and I have to say I got spoilt rotten! It was a combination of Officers and NCOs who were there so it was my first introduction to the Army and the setup which was very useful for the future

when I had military attachés on my staff. It was highly disciplined as only the Army can do. We were given twenty or thirty words a day and grammar every day and you absolutely had to know it by the next day and it was solid. Some of the military guys struggled.

We rounded it off after ten months with a month in Paris in Meudon. There was a school there that was set up in the twenties to teach the children of Tsarist officers who had left during the Revolution, so it was full of emigrés, full of priests, and we had a month's immersion there as well to bring our language up to scratch. It was good and a lot of fun.

AW: And then off to Moscow for the first time?

Third Secretary Chancery, Moscow, 1980-83

AP: I arrived in late November. I vividly remember it because Curtis Keeble, the Ambassador, was actually on the same flight. He was terribly sweet. He was obviously in business class, or first class if there was one in those days, and he came back to see me to make sure I was alright. However, in those days we landed at Sheremetyevo Airport, that was the main gateway then, which is to the north of Moscow where the Germans actually came in the same road. There was nobody there to meet me and by then Curtis Keeble was long gone. I remember I got off the plane and I was waiting, waiting, waiting for my suitcase, probably waiting for about an hour, because clearly they were rifling through it to see what was of interest. Then I got out into the vast hall in Sheremetyevo, which is still pretty similar nowadays, and there was nobody there. So I waited thinking "What do I do now?" Eventually the person I was taking over from turned up, there'd been traffic problems. It was snowing in Moscow in November 1980, and it was deeply grey in those days, the only thing that leavened the atmosphere were all the red Communist banners with the very butch men and women striding out to a grand future. They were a lovely deep red colour but otherwise the main impression was just grey.

Everybody used to ship in cars in those days and I shipped mine in. I remember my first time driving round the inner ring road, I parked my car and someone stole my windscreen wipers. This was in driving snow. I was so naïve. You pick up what you need to do gradually and I hadn't appreciated that if you leave your windscreen wipers on your car they are going to get stolen, you had to take them off every time. The other thing that really struck me on my first weekend – I was keen to get out. A family were putting me up but they effectively just left me and went out. I thought I would not stay in their apartment all

day and I thought I would walk to Red Square. The diplomatic compound in those days was, still is, in Kutuzovski where Brezhnev used to live. It was a massive compound that housed a lot of the diplomats. It was about a thirty minute walk from Red Square. I was on my own but I thought “I’m pretty sure of my directions, I’ll get my coat and my boots on and I’ll go”. I had brand new boots, of course, because one did. I remember walking along from Kutuzovski, along Kalinin Prospekt, the main thoroughfare that cuts down towards the Kremlin, and everybody was staring at me. I remember thinking “What’s wrong? Why are people staring at me?” After about twenty minutes I realised it was my boots, they were brand new, probably good leather. Everybody was staring at me but nobody approached me. I went to Red Square and discovered much later afterwards that quite a number of people in the Embassy had never been to Red Square! I probably shouldn’t have gone on my own but, hey, I wasn’t going to sit around and do nothing. So that was my introduction to Moscow.

AW: How was personal safety generally during that period? Did you feel you needed to be with somebody when you were out?

AP: No, not really. Of course we were shadowed and followed quite overtly, especially if you were travelling outside – there were constraints about where you could travel. If you wanted to do a trip outside the 40 kilometre permitted area you had to notify the Russian MFA in advance. Then they would probably put on some fairly heavy duty chaika, a black car, to follow you. But in Moscow itself it felt to me pretty safe. I remember in my first year going to Red Square at New Year with friends to bring in the New Year – deserted! In those days all you saw were a few militia guards. We took a bottle of champagne for midnight and we were the only people in the square. You would never get that nowadays but these were quite treasured memories in a way ...

AW: A different world ...

AP: Yes it was.

AW: Did you stay living with the family for long?

AP: Oh no, that was only for a weekend until my predecessor vacated the apartment in Kutuzovski. I didn’t like staying there because it was a massive compound, hundreds of apartments in the posh area of Moscow, at the time. I moved to a much smaller block that had a couple of British families, an American correspondent, and that was pretty well it, over by the river and closer to the Embassy. It was in Peoples Street, number 13, and it was very

close to the famous Taganka Theatre where, for its time, they tried to put on fairly interesting plays. That was much better for me; I didn't have that same sense of living on a massive compound full of cars, by a main road. For me it really worked, it was more human, more liveable. But we still had a little box with a militia guard outside and the guys in the basement with their earphones listening to everything. You would see them coming out, especially in the small block where there were only a dozen apartments. You'd start saying "Good Morning" to them and they would try desperately to ignore you! That was life.

AW: And what was your work like?

AP: I was what I used to call Third Secretary (Chancery Dogsboddy) at the time. It was a really odd role. I had a mix of things that I did. I was Private Secretary to the Ambassador. Curtis Keeble was a lovely man and his wife Margaret delightful. She was just brilliant for the Embassy because she was very motherly and kind and looked after people perfectly. He was very focussed, as he needed to be, but a very shy man. Because I was his Private Secretary I got to know him quite well and after I'd left Moscow we were in touch right up to his death and Margaret too, I saw just a couple of years ago before she passed away. We always stayed in touch. So my work was partly being his Private Secretary, and that could be anything, that's the role, partly looking after the Residence and helping his wife because that was very difficult and Margaret's Russian was fairly basic, she tried hard but it's a difficult language and she needed help just running things especially if they had big functions on. They would often do film shows and I would help out with stuff like that. I was the Embassy book buyer which is a really weird role, but in those days Research Department and the economists couldn't get hold of Russian books and they needed to have a source buying them in Moscow. They would give me lists and I would go off all around bookshops in Moscow, obviously heavily followed because they must have wondered what I was up to but I was genuinely buying books! It was a great role because I really got to know Moscow, I got out and about and to know which book shops were pretty good.

Another weird bit of the job was to help the First Sec (Economy), I think his title was in those days. He would be sending reports back to London about the state of the grain harvest, the state of this, the state of that. Part of the role was to go into stores in Moscow to see what food supplies there were and how much they cost. There was a Gastronom reasonably close to the Embassy on the ring road, it still exists. It was just right at the end of the Arbat, where the Arbat hit the ringroad. Even though it was quite famous it would have virtually no food

in it. And queues of course. Everybody had to queue twice. Once to get whatever you got and once to pay. These were long, long queues and in winter you'd see people queuing all over the place in the freezing cold. I remember having to check how much sausage cost. If you were lucky there would be sausage. There would be tins of fish, usually pilchards. You could always get bread. Bread shops were always full because the authorities would realise that if people can't have bread, it is really not good. People on the whole used their place of employment to get foodstuffs. They would be fed in canteens and would have access to food stuff from their place of employment so what I was seeing in regular stores, and this was in central prime Moscow, nevertheless was pretty shocking, stuff just wasn't getting through.

We'd go to markets, especially in the summer when they'd ship in fruit and vegetables from Georgia, etc. Even though you would say that the quality was terrible now, all bashed around, and not uniform, that was what they had. And for diplomats, for the whole diplomatic community, there was one shop which would equate to the size of a smallish Tesco. The Gastronom it was called. There was one store. All the diplomats and all the Ambassadors went there to shop and it was filled with reasonably good produce, mainly from Helsinki, Germany as well. There was not much fresh stuff. If for instance the Gastronom had bananas the word would go round the Embassy like wildfire "They've got bananas"! There would be an exodus to go get. My first Christmas in Moscow I was invited to have Christmas lunch with Curtis Keeble and Margaret and I shipped in a pineapple from Helsinki as the gift I took to them - that gives you an idea. After about two or three months people went grey. It was like the whole atmosphere was grey. We used to talk about it. People would come in bright eyed and bushy tailed, great complexions, and we would say that in three months they would look grey, and they always did. Because of the pollution, because there wasn't enough fresh fruit in the diet. It's all changed now, but that was how it was.

There were no videos and video recorders - I'm really dating myself - so there were loads of film nights, lots of socialising, everybody would entertain everybody else all the time, dinner parties, welcoming dinner parties, farewell dinner parties, absolutely loads of socialising and far too much booze. I remember when I first arrived thinking "Gosh, people drink a lot here", diplomats I mean, and that did shock me.

AW: Were the authorities providing very cheap vodka to keep the people happy, to keep them numb?

AP: No but there was probably quite a bit of moonshine going on. I remember one instance when I had been out book buying and I came back to the Embassy and all hell had broken loose! Margaret Keeble had been to the Gastronom and she had taken the Embassy driver to help her. The Embassy driver had been trying on the sly to buy three or four bottles of vodka, as if she wouldn't see it and put it into his own personal account. Of course Margaret couldn't condone that, we weren't there to buy vodka for people, so it was really very difficult. We wouldn't buy them vodka, they would have their own sources. I don't know how much it cost a bottle but it would have been hard for them to afford it.

It wasn't unusual in those days to go to a breakfast meeting and vodka would be served. I always felt sorry for the blokes because they had to drink it. Andrew Wood who was Ambassador in Moscow told me before I went that he used to have to down vodka, and the way he did it was by sucking on a lemon after each shot and that soaked up the vodka. All I said was "I'm a girl, folks, and I'm not doing this". I just couldn't and I think it's inelegant for a woman to be downing vodka so I said very early on to the Russians that I would wet my lips but was not drinking it and that was perfectly acceptable. They were much more health conscious when I was there as Ambassador, and they certainly were not having it for breakfast by then. It was rare even at lunches. You'd have a tiny toast at the end but not five toasts ...

AW: ... and throwing the glass into the fireplace!

AP: Yes! All of that used to happen.

AW: You've mentioned that you had to get passes to travel outside Moscow, and in your notes you mention travel, so did you go to some interesting places?

AP: In those days it was very cheap to travel. You could take overnight trains to the Baltic States, which I did several times, overnight train to Kiev, which I did. There were loads of really run down but interesting estates just round Moscow where Tchaikovsky lived, where Tolstoy lived, so there was a lot to see, as well as old religious centres, Zavidovo is a key one, so there was masses to see. You could also fly internally in the Soviet Union very cheaply. I went to Yerevan, I went to Georgia and it was good because there were such contrasts. You always felt a lightening of atmosphere. I was in Georgia in a May and it felt very light, the Georgians were full of wine, women and song as you'd expect. It was a completely different atmosphere in those days. Tbilisi then, this was 1981, was really quite

pretty, I remember that. Centrally it felt very pretty. I did try to get to Samarkand once but spent 17 hours at Domodedovo Airport, which was a tiny airport then although it's now the major international one. They kept promising there would be a plane but the plane didn't arrive. In those days if you travelled by air it was really bizarre. You automatically were shunted into a VIP lounge, even as a junior diplomat and they wouldn't let you go into the main lounge in case you mingled with Russians. And they would load you on the plane first, say at the back of the plane, by separate bus. They would lay on a whole bus for what might only be two or three of you and get you on the plane. Then they would load the plane with ordinary Russians who would come on literally with live chickens in cages, it was extraordinary. And they would walk across runways. For them it wasn't bussing, you would see this huge stream of people walking across to the plane. Travel was great. Leningrad was easy to get to by overnight train. A lot of people weren't very adventurous because they didn't have the language but, having the language meant it was great.

AW: You said they segregated you when travelling, so you didn't meet many Russians. Did you make any Russian friends? Did you break through that barrier?

AP: You never made friends. I mixed a lot with Americans and there was a core of Russians who tended to be artists, mathematicians whom the Americans saw, and I did then go around to apartments in Central Moscow where a few Russians lived with American colleagues. That was an eye opener too because it was communal apartments. I remember seeing a quite successful mathematician and his wife, they lived in a room that was about 6 ft x 12 ft long, literally, with their son, and then there would be the communal kitchen and communal toilet and that was it. We sat on what was their bed and was like a sofa, and they opened a tin of pilchards that were extremely poor quality. But we were very conscious that for them this was a huge deal. I did that a few times so I did have a sense of how they were living, and it wasn't good. The blocks were very badly cared for, the entrance hall walls were falling apart, it was really poor living. This was in the dying days of the Brezhnev era when things were not great. Gorbachev called it the Period of Stagnation. Brezhnev called it the Period of Developed Socialism! So take your pick! Gorbachev also called it the Zombie Apocalypse Period. That is very damning and it was! The famous phrase the Russians used was "fse u nac yest" which means "we have everything" and then they would ask if you had cassette tapes, cigarettes, chewing gum, you name it. Their lives were very challenging, no question, it was obvious.

AW: So it was ready for ...

AP: Ready for Brezhnev's death quite frankly, in '82 and for some sort of change, but it took a long time.

AW: In your notes you mention a poisoned return journey by train from Prague?

AP: Oh that was terrible. That was another trip I did. I knew someone in the Embassy in Prague. I'd never been, but heard that Prague was a great city and it was fabulous, even then it was crumbly, but beautiful. I went with a friend in the Embassy on a long train journey to Prague. It took, from memory, certainly a full day and a bit more. We were fine going there, we had a nice time, it was a big international train, but on the journey back we got to the border with the Soviet Union and Passport Control came through. They saw my passport and they started making a fuss saying "You don't have a transit visa". I said that I didn't have one going to Prague and was fine and was told I didn't need anything coming back. They took me off the train and took me to a hut by the border. There were three or four guys and they started to question me. They didn't take my friend, just me. This went on for about an hour and a half and I was thinking "this is great – the train will have gone and what am I going to do then". After about an hour and a half and lots of grumps they said that I could go. I got out of the hut and the train was still there. They had held this whole train up just to question me. So I thought that was fine and got back to Moscow, and was as ill as I've ever been in my life. I have no idea what it was. I can't remember but I think they must have given me a glass of water, I really don't remember now, but I suddenly couldn't move and everything was just spinning for 48 hours, a bit like if you have food poisoning but really really bad and I couldn't move. I sat on a sofa in my apartment for 48 hours with a spinning room. It was really dumb when I think about it. I had a dinner party that night with friends but I had to call it off and all I said was "I'm really unwell" instead of "Get me a doctor". I just assumed I'd eaten or drunk something but I hadn't and to this day I've no idea what it was except that it was really bad, and of course I should have got a doctor. I just thought that it would pass, as one does, and eventually after hour after hour it did. But it was really bizarre and with the benefit of hindsight, a really frightening episode. But when you're young, you're cocky, and also because you're a diplomat with diplomatic immunity I always felt quite confident that there was a limit to what anyone would do because they couldn't risk it. That was not pleasant. So the moral is never take a drink from strangers, even a glass of water.

AW: Before we leave Moscow, Curtis Keeble wasn't your Ambassador for the whole period you were there?

AP: No, that's right. He left in September '82 so Ian Sutherland was there for my last six months. He was a different kettle of fish, but I didn't have long with him and didn't get to know him in the same way. He died not long after he left Moscow.

Vice Consul, San Francisco, 1983-85

AW: Three years in Moscow and then a leap into a very different world?

AP: There's not much to say here. I must say it was like two, nearly three years, of a holiday. I came out of grey Moscow in February '83 and went to San Francisco in June. In the first week the Consul General took me to the San Francisco Yacht Club for lunch and I thought this is sublime ... San Francisco, I don't know if you know it but it is, and it was then, the most gorgeous place. It was absolutely beautiful, it was much less crowded then than it is now and it was just so buzzy and exciting. The reason I was there was to do a trade job. There was a big push then both for inward investment into the UK because there was a lot of wealth in California, it was the seventh largest, if it had been a country, wealthiest area at that stage, and there were a lot of opportunities for UK business so my job was to go to endless trade fairs and look at various sectors to see what opportunities there were for UK companies, and to connect both sides. It wasn't an intellectually stretching job but it was very good for networking and I have to say I had an absolute ball. I had a lovely time there. We had a lot of friends who, even at that point, spent two or three days playing tennis and living off their investment, young things, it was that sort of place. It was quite a joy to live there.

AW: And it was the beginning of Silicon Valley?

AP: Yes it was. Nothing like now obviously. Google, Amazon weren't there. All these companies that are household names now were not there. Where they were basing themselves, south of San Francisco, in those days, there was a gorgeous freeway, the 280, that was really scenic going south towards LA and it was pretty empty, and it's not like that now, so it was just beginning to take off, but only just. And AIDS, which became a real plague, was not then.

We had obviously quite a few gay friends - it was San Francisco – but it was only about five to seven years later they were beginning to die so it was only just becoming an identified issue when we were there. So it really seemed like paradise on earth. It's as close as it's come for me! The contrast with Moscow was huge. However, in Moscow we were a real community, everybody looked out for everybody. There was no need for that in California.

Second Secretary UKREP Brussels, 1986-87

AW: So, after your fun in the sun, your next move was to Brussels. Was there starting to be choice for posts in the late '80s or was it still “Pringle, you're going to UKREP?”

AP: Well, here's a funny one. They were trying to get me to go to Mongolia after San Francisco, believe it or not. I had a letter, out of the blue, saying “We know you enjoyed Moscow, how about Mongolia?” I said “No, I think mostly the job is about fixing the Embassy car and I'm not a good mechanic!”. Was there choice? No, not really. They were reinforcing UKREP for the Presidency and they were bringing people in from all over, and for me it sounded interesting. I really enjoyed it. I was mainly doing regional policy and social affairs and it was a very good introduction to the EU. I liked Brussels. It was obviously more intellectually challenging, and I felt that I really needed that having had a holiday in San Francisco.

AW: Who was your Perm Rep at that point?

AP: David Hannay for most of it. I was too junior so I didn't really cross his screen. One of the dossiers was going a bit pear shaped and I got hauled up into the meeting with David Hannay and his cohorts at zero notice. Everybody was terrified of David frankly. I remember going into the meeting and he asked a few questions and I was not terrified at all. If someone asked me a question I would just answer it. I didn't really know his reputation. He asked a few questions around the dossier, I answered and said “Is that it then?” and then walked out. Afterwards people were coming up to me saying “How did you do that?” I said that I didn't really know the man but he asked me a question so I answered him! But it was a very pressured job, no question. If you're under a lot of pressure you don't want your time wasted, but I didn't really know him.

AW: It wasn't a very long stint?

AP: No, because it was reinforcement for the Presidency. I think from memory I did about eighteen months, but I went back to Brussels later on.

AW: So back to London and it looks like you were promoted during that stint?

FCO London, Eastern Department, Head of Polish Section, 1988-91

AP: Yes I was. I was First Secretary when I was Head of Polish Section and that was a great job. A lot of this is about the timing when you hit things. The Berlin Wall had collapsed and because of The Solidarity Trade Union, Poland at that stage was at the forefront of the change that was afoot in Central and Eastern Europe. Solidarity, the trade union, was established in 1980 and they went through Martial Law for a couple of years when Jaruzelski thought he'd be able to curb their power. That didn't work, and gradually they moved towards round table negotiations and pretty free elections in June 1989, which Solidarity of course won hands down. Very soon thereafter Lech Walesa, who'd been in the Gdansk Shipyard leading Solidarity, became President. I joined Eastern Department, as it was called then, over that period. He took over as President and very quickly we were trying to engage. He was very quickly invited on a State Visit to the UK and he came in April '91. It was fascinating because of the transition and because of the knock on impact of what had happened in Poland was having on everywhere else. Hungary then dismantled its Iron Curtain; East Germans were fleeing through Hungary. All of this was like a roller coaster, it was absolutely historic and a lot of it was done without major violence. Of course, hanging over everybody was the thought "Will Russia invade as they had done before, will our lives be on the line for this".

We were trying to forge a close relationship with Walesa and with the new team. So his Prime Minister, Mazowiecki, came to the UK just a bit before Walesa to see the lie of the land and then Walesa came on a State Visit. You can imagine from his background suddenly for anyone – and the Palace do this so well – the pomp and circumstance! He was welcomed at Windsor Great Park, it was April, and it was an outdoor ceremony. I was invited and it was great. It was a bit like a fish out of water. I remember he was said to have said that in Windsor Castle they should have issued maps for the bedroom they put him in because it was so big. Gorgeous little touches. The Palace did it very well. He was a huge figure of course, seen as one of the pivotal people to change what was happening at that point. He made a great speech in the Guildhall where he said he really hoped that the Iron Curtain would not be replaced with a silver curtain of indifference – a really good way of putting it,

because what they wanted was investment and trade, what they had was crumbling infrastructure which was all over the block at that stage. I'd been on a familiarisation visit to Poland and I'd been to Nowa Huta, the big steel mill, and everything, the machinery, was twenty or thirty years out of date, business practices and productivity the same, nobody cared and everything was crumbling. That was ultimately the problem with Communism, if everybody owns everything who cares about it? Where are your incentives for doing things well and with pride? Certainly after forty odd years of Communism that sense of real pride, unless you were a fanatic, had just gone. So they'd been given a mandate, they had no money and there was still that sense of "this could go wrong". The people are trusting us but how long do we have that trust for? It was an absolutely fascinating time to be Head of Polish Section. I couldn't have wished for a better job.

European Political Cooperation Secretariat, Brussels, 1991-93

AW: And back to Brussels. Tell me about this department.

AP: The European Political Cooperation Secretariat was an odd beast. It was set up in 1987 and had diplomats seconded from five capitals according to rotating Presidency. The idea was that Presidencies needed administrative English language support to get through the raft of General Affairs Councils, European Councils, Political Committee meetings and all the business that was growing between Member States.

When I was there, there were twelve Member States and there were five diplomats seconded. I was seconded with a view to our upcoming Presidency in the second half of 1992. It was the precursor of what is now Common Foreign and Security Policy which was brought in and approved under the Treaty of European Union at Maastricht. I loved it because I was working alongside people of my age but diplomats from other countries. I learnt a huge amount, not least how they perceived the world. Our view tended to be quite US-centric but theirs absolutely wasn't. I did learn a lot from them. I had quite a heavy dossier which was the Middle East Peace Process dossier. I had no background in the Middle East but that didn't trouble people. It was right after the 1991 Madrid Conference at which Jim Baker, the US Secretary of State, had been trying to break the impasse whereby the parties to the conflicts in the Middle East didn't have direct talks with the Israelis and Palestinians. The Madrid Conference aimed to kick start direct dialogue between the Israelis and Palestinians and bilateral talks between the Palestinians, Israelis and the parties in the regions, Syrians, the Jordanians, Egyptians, etc. Also trying to tackle some of the deep rooted issues in the area

like economic development, the environment, water was a huge issue, refugees and regional security - that was the multilateral element. There was a whole structure for these negotiations to try and move them forwards. It was the critical moment for the Middle East Peace Process. I don't think since then it has gone anywhere, so it was a real moment in time. The European role was to be co-convenor of some of these multilateral working groups. We also would go to Washington to meet the parties when they were having their bilateral negotiations. It was interesting on all sorts of levels. Partly evolving European Union practice, the Troika, which was the past, current and future Presidency, acted on behalf of the European Union plus a Commission rep. That in itself was really difficult because the Troika at that stage was the Portuguese (they were the current Presidency), we were coming after them as UK and then the Dutch were coming after us. The Portuguese would say "Hang on, why aren't the French involved in this, or whatever". We had a special Steering Group that would coordinate our lines with all the Member States and then the Troika would have its mandate and would go and talk to the parties on that basis. It was interesting both from the perspective of EU practice and also from the perspective of – this was the big opportunity in the Middle East and it wasn't going to get better.

We went to the region a number of times. We would meet all the players in the region too. I spent time in Gaza, which was pretty shocking. We were under the auspices of the UN Relief and Works Agency and we'd be in their cars, badged, but we still got stoned. It was quite dangerous. We went through Hebron and there were young Israelis literally in the streets with Kalashnikovs to protect themselves. I had no Middle East experience but my impressions were that you'd see young Israelis with Kalashnikovs and Palestinians with stones. The Gaza Strip was full of rubbish and dirt poor so you could see immediately that there were issues here, and how on earth were you going to try and get both sides to talk to each other and engage on serious issues about economic development and the degraded environment in Gaza? It was an absolutely fascinating time and there was a will to move things forward, and it culminated in September '93 when I was still in the Secretariat, in the signing of what's called now the Oslo I Accord in the White House in Washington under Bill Clinton. That was the famous time when Yasser Arafat shook hands. I think it was a moment when people really thought it might move forward. The European Union role was – if it moves forward, the Palestinians will need massive funding to get this right, and they were brought in for that reason. I was really privileged. I sat there being a privileged interlocutor for all these meetings. It was amazing. Most of it was official level although we

had one Ministerial visit with the Belgian Foreign Minister when we hired a private jet to go to Tunis to see Arafat. He was based there then in a heavily guarded compound. It was a very brief visit, we had lunch with him in his house. We had a buffet lunch on our laps, just sitting like you and I are sitting now, I remember he was that close, two feet away from me, this very small man, but this was Yasser Arafat with all that that entailed, chatting and eating. It was a very critical time, to try and get momentum especially into the multilateral side of the peace process. The year after he moved back to Gaza, to Rafa. It was a very fraught time. You had that sense of 'it's great to have a structure, great to try and build momentum'. Jim Baker was very clever about the way he pursued it but there was so much deep ingrained mistrust and hostility through generation after generation that it was going to be a huge deal to try to get beyond that.

We went to Beirut. We went across the border from Syria to Beirut. We were picked up by troops on the border and were in armoured cars. There was just a very small group of us at that stage. Beirut, you will have seen the pictures, it was just a building site, buildings gutted, rubble everywhere. We were shown round the centre and we were guarded by a guy, I've still got the pictures, who had a rocket propelled grenade over his shoulder. That was his protection for us and it was a big one! We were in bullet proof jackets, not that that would have helped, but the key in those days was that it was so dangerous that you had to keep moving. So rather than stop, if the traffic stopped at a light, you would cut over to the other side and go screaming up the wrong side of the road with sirens blaring. The guys who were protecting us had machine guns; they were hanging on to our jeeps, but outside the jeeps. If anything came near they would shoot first, for me it was quite extraordinary! Thinking "eee-er"!

AW: So you got around a lot of the region?

AP: Yes we went to Syria, to Jordan, to Lebanon, to Egypt, seeing all the key players and trying to encourage people not to boycott meetings but to go and to engage seriously. The baggage was huge. The first multilateral meeting took place in Moscow and the Syrians and the Lebanese boycotted (of course if Syria did, Lebanon did in those days). The PLO turned up but boycotted because the Israelis had issues with some members of their delegation. It was always on tenterhooks, would it move forward? Wouldn't it? Who would be playing games, who wouldn't. But gradually, especially on some of the hard issues, there was a sense that there was a bit of momentum. And then it all fell apart again. A shame.

AW: And were there good relations with your European counterparts?

AP: I always felt in European Political Cooperation that the Brits had the upper hand because frankly, and it sounds a bit conceited, we are quite good at what we do. We are well prepared, we have great sources of information, we know how to construct compromises and we know how to negotiate, all of these key skills, and we do that with the benefit of really knowing the English language inside out. There aren't many people to match that, so I found in the Secretariat that we were all given various dossiers and there were about fifty working groups altogether at that time in a gamut of areas and I had twenty of them in my portfolio and my four colleagues between them had the rest. And I sympathise, they were trying to produce reports in French or in English, and that was their choice, but they might be Dutch or Portuguese, or whatever, and that's a really tall order. They did remarkably well. I really take my hat off to European diplomats, they usually have pretty impeccable French or English and other languages too and they did very well, but inevitably it was easier for me.

FCO, London, 1994-96

AW: And then they bring you home again? Your notes have two years in the Office but nothing else...?

AP: Yes, I've put bits in that were politically interesting and this wasn't. I moved very briefly to a job dealing with hostage cases in the Security Coordination Department. They couldn't move me soon enough frankly. It was a very necessary role and it was becoming a growth area, people would be in dangerous parts of the world and they would be taken captive for a ransom, not as it is now in the really difficult cases we have had since then. I used to deal with the Metropolitan Police a lot and we also did some test exercises with American Special Forces which was quite fun, but the job wasn't for me.

Then I became Deputy Head in Africa Equatorial Dept, I was dealing mainly with Nigeria and countries around it. It was good to get experience as a Deputy Head of Department and Nigeria was broadly interesting. The interesting bit at that time was Sierra Leone that was being driven apart by some fairly brutal fighting but in terms of political interest, it just wasn't there.

They moved me quite quickly through two jobs to give me the job I really wanted. These things happen, you don't necessarily hit a time when the job you really want is available and

you wait and wait and try and position yourself and obviously do a good job where you are, but that was how it worked.

Head of Common Foreign and Security Policy Department, FCO, 1996-98

Then I got my dream job. That was the successor to what I had been doing in the European Political Cooperation Secretariat, CFSP was the successor to that. It still involved a familiar role for me of going to Political Committees, monthly General Affairs Councils, European Councils and working on the whole gamut of foreign policy dossiers where the EU was engaged - which meant, then, a lot on Yugoslavia, a lot still on the Middle East and anything else that cropped up. The British and French were quite ambivalent about CFSP's worth. It's very true that if you want to have a credible foreign policy you need some might and power behind it. Ultimately, there was the sense that serious stuff in foreign policy was done bilaterally and certainly not in the EU, and France and the UK have their Permanent Seat on the Security Council. And never will the EU get that seat even though I think that was what a lot of people aspired to. So there was quite a lot of smoke and mirrors in what we did. It's probably a much bigger growth area now but there was still quite a game to keep the EU out rather than have the EU meddle in serious stuff. But it was a great job.

AW: Did you have a nice team?

AP: It was a very small team who worked incredibly hard because these meetings would go on very late in the night. My immediate boss was Emyr Jones Parry and then Jeremy Greenstock was the Political Director so I tended to work to Jeremy and my whole team did and that worked very well. There were a lot of good people.

AW: And how was the mood in the Office? Who was Foreign Secretary?

AP: Robin Cook was Foreign Secretary for some of the time for me. I got on very well with Robin. I went on a couple of trips with him to Russia when I did my next job. How was the mood? Difficult. He wasn't everybody's cup of tea as became quite evident, but to me he was one of the most brilliant brains I've ever seen. You would give him a brief and it was just like a sponge, I watched him. In those days briefs would be a couple of inches thick; he just absorbed it like nobody else and then regurgitated it at the right moment.

What I did like about him – I remember saying to him that I was very uncomfortable at General Affairs Councils. By then there were a couple of female Foreign Ministers, the

rooms were vast and there were probably about a couple of hundred people there with all the civil servants and the people at the table. As soon as the women spoke, the guys started talking so even though the women would be on microphones the men would just talk over them. I did say to Robin at one stage that this was really discourteous and said “if you notice, when the women speak, the guys start talking”. He wasn’t in the Chair at that point but then when he took the Chair he dealt with it and I really admired him for that. He absolutely cut it and said quite bluntly to people “so and so is speaking you will give them the courtesy of listening to them”. And it did stop it happening, but it was so overdue, it should never have been like that. But there you go.

Head, Eastern Department, FCO 1998-2001

AW: We must be entering the era when you can actually apply for jobs?

AP: Yes. I did make a real pitch for CFSP, but after CFSP I really wanted Eastern Department and I remember Emyr Jones Parry and Nigel Sheinwald putting notes in to Personnel saying I’d done a really good job at CFSP and bust a gut and to get me a good job and I got Eastern Department. It wasn’t a given. The Foreign Office was still – “you’re a blue eyed boy”, you fit a mould, you get certain key roles in those days, like Eastern Department, like Head of News Department, like the Private Secretary to the Foreign Secretary, or indeed to the Prime Minister, there was still a culture of – you could get to a certain level but it was very male and very pale. Everybody would tell you that they are open and believe in equal treatment, etc., but it was always still quite a struggle. In fairness, there was a lot of competition but I think that people over-estimated the abilities of a certain profile in the Office, and found that out to their cost when they got to a certain level and couldn’t actually do the job. Anyway, I got Eastern Department which was an absolutely brilliant job. I had this wonderful office, just above the Foreign Secretary’s, so looking out onto Horseguards. Now it’s all open plan and it’s got about a dozen people in it. But it was a lovely office, which was a relief because I spent a lot of time there; it was a very heavy job. Because we were now dealing not just with Russia but with the Commonwealth of Independent States, we were dealing with the Baltic States. We had set up mini Embassies in all of these places, quite often working out of hotels but they all needed attention, they all needed line management, they all needed visits and we needed to find a way through on how we could help them both through the Know How Fund and through trade, investment, etc. It was quite a huge job by then and I loved it.

Ministers have always been a bit reluctant to spend a lot of time in that part of the world in truth. You'll always get a Minister going to Europe, or get a Minister going to Washington, but Russia, CIS, Kiev, it was always considered quite hard. I, as Head of Department, went to Georgia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, I went to all of these places and I would be going in to see the Foreign Minister because of course they would want to see me because they weren't going to see Ministers very often, so they wanted the contact. It was a great training ground for me. It was a fabulous job and it was very heavily weighted on Russia. Russia was in the economic doldrums then and we were deeply worried that Russia was going to sink. We had lots of meetings at the Treasury saying if they go under, what happens. The approach was very much that was the last thing anyone wants because it could produce chaos throughout the region, but it was touch and go for a while as to whether they would manage to turn the corner. There had been a succession of leaders and Gorbachev in his time had tried to pump money into the economy and industry because industry had been heavily weighted to arms. But it was all too late; it comes back to that culture. Productivity had slumped, they'd done well in the sixties but they were doing really badly by the eighties, there was no imagination or creativity. There was brain power, but it was how do you turn this colossal thing around and make it vibrant and geared towards what people want? And of course Communism couldn't do that, it was still on five year plan cycles. There had been a huge struggle to try to get things moving and the economy was in a very bad way by '98 and it took quite a while to turn things around. The high oil price was eventually, for Putin, his saving grace because it enabled them to put money into turning things around. The other problem was that they had massive one-industry towns, monogorods they call them, where you might have a car industry in one place and that's it. But if you're not competitive when you eventually try to compete in the world market under capitalist terms, not under Communist terms, what do you do with all these people and how do you create jobs and wealth in regions that have only known one industry and been protected from cradle to grave by five year plans. It would be a huge thing for anyone to deal with.

AW: And the red mafia aspects?

AP: Well the KGB by then had also suffered hugely. Putin, whose background was St Petersburg administration, was brought down to Moscow to work in Yeltsin's administration and he was a functionary of course. He wasn't a politician, as we understand the word, he was a functionary, but a good one and he was for a short time Head of the KGB's successor the FSB and then took over very briefly as Prime Minister. Very quickly this chap whom

nobody really knew (I know businessmen who knew him in St Petersburg who said he was just a low level functionary) suddenly out of the blue he was being groomed to take over from Yeltsin. Nobody had really heard of him at all.

I went on a visit with Robin Cook to Moscow in February 2000 and at that stage Putin was acting President because he'd been nominated by Yeltsin and the election was in March. Everybody was scrabbling around saying "Putin Who?" At that stage he didn't have poll ratings because nobody knew him. We went to see him in the Kremlin. The Kremlin is vast, a palace, full of drooping gilt chandeliers, beautiful. Putin is quite small. This chap came towards us through massive double doors, like ten feet tall, which inevitably made him look even smaller. We had a meeting with him and after the meeting Robin Cook said that he found him competent and efficient and stuff like that. I did a note when I came back to London to John Kerr, who was Perm Sec at the time, saying the things that I'd picked out was that he fixes people with an unblinking stare and he's clinical, cold and ruthless. This was my impression of sitting across from the guy for an hour and what's interesting is that when Cameron went to Moscow in 2011, what does he do? He sits opposite Putin and Putin fixes him with the cold stare. He hadn't changed! He still treated people in the same way to put them on edge and make them feel uncomfortable. In those days, when he was relatively unknown, he looked a bit like a fish out of water in the Kremlin but of course his image, his posture and his clothing - everything is so top notch now. He is very much a man in control of himself but that wasn't the case when we saw him then. No.

Blair was on a mission to cultivate Putin, and it was controversial at the time because some of our European partners said "well if Russia's in a bad way ... well ... and who is this guy? he's KGB (which he was), and we can't trust him". But Tony Blair's view was that they were in a mess, we had an opportunity to try and engage Russia at this point, to diminish the lack of trust, to engage through NATO conversations, so the Russia NATO Council was formed, to engage them in G7 talks, so it became the G8, and to see if they want to be responsible players on the big global issues which were coming up. So that was the positioning. You can argue it was naïve, but nobody else was trying to put a hand of friendship out for a guy who, in our judgement, had very little experience. He'd been in East Germany when he was KGB but that was it. Otherwise his focus had been Russia internal and he was now being projected into the role of President of Russia and he needed a bit of support, not just brickbats. That was where Tony Blair was coming from, and for a while it felt like it might work but inevitably there were disagreements over policy, particularly on

Kosovo at the time, and suspicions. Ultimately, I've always thought that given the deep history of Russia and the traumatic times it's gone through, from way back, Tsarist times, there is this inherent mistrust of anything Western and a real deep sense of everyone wanted to take us over, surround us with enemies – it's deeply felt and you can try to put a hand of friendship forward but it usually breaks down. Eventually that's exactly what happened.

AW: And you visited Georgia? You've met them all!

AP: Well, Shevardnadze was still President at that time and was considered quite a star. He was a dyed in the wool Communist in his time, or a convenient Communist. But again I went with Robin Cook to Georgia in February 2000. The things that really struck me were that Georgia too was struggling, the poverty struck you. They had gone from the certainty of a managed economy where your rent was paid, your transport was cheap or free and you got food supplies through your work so all the basics were paid for. You got two weeks holiday a year and were given a pass that got you to, say, Bulgaria. That's how it worked. You were looked after from cradle to grave, but pretty basically looked after. And then it all fell apart and Georgia at that point was really poor. We went to see Shevardnadze and the thing that struck me most was to get into his office (and this is Robin Cook the Foreign Secretary and there were two or three of us with him) he had to go through a metal detector. They put him through a metal detector. What that told me at the time was that Shevardnadze was deeply worried about what was going to happen to himself personally, let alone to his country. We saw the Prime Minister, we saw the Patriarch who took us to a soup kitchen. This was February and we had reasonably warm gear on. We were looking at people queuing for a bowl of soup, older people who were pretty well in rags, shivering to the skin. That struck me too and I thought it was really serious.

I would travel to Kazakhstan which at least had oil and gas and a pretty reasonable prospect of a future. You would speak to people there who would say that the changes hadn't suited them. This was no longer the Communist Party speak, this was for real, they were saying that their parents used to have a reasonable pension and everything was taken care of. Now they still have a pension but with the hiked prices can't afford anything anymore and were really suffering. People who were teachers and musicians would have had status and respect in society in Communist times but that had all gone. The transition was traumatic for a lot of people. It was quick and it was brutal. Yeltsin's move to "right we'll just turn ourselves into a capitalist economy and democracy" ain't that easy. You can't do it because the structures

and processes weren't there to be able to just snap your fingers and make it all great. A lot of people suffered acutely and couldn't really put food on their table. Local staff would turn up at Embassies and some of them would be fainting with hunger. I think people underestimate how traumatic the transition was. The skills and competence in governance to deal with it had to be learned. Russians are quick learners, they are extremely bright people and extremely generous people, I love that about them. But it had to be learned and structures had to be put in place and inevitably you got what's called crony capitalism where some people saw the opportunities, milked them and did very well, but most people struggled a lot. Then the oil price went up and it got a bit easier.

AW: Right across the region...?

AP: Absolutely, right across. Kazakhstan probably of all the countries picked itself up quite well and quite quickly. Georgia went a different path, it was still very poor but had oil. And of the others, Armenia stayed very close to Russia because it needed money, you've seen what's happened in Ukraine, the ambivalence of 'who do you want to be?' and 'who with?' It's been a massive transition for people which is why you now see a lot of Russians going back towards the Orthodox Church which of course was banned under Communism. You need that sense of spiritual self as well as just getting by in life. It's been traumatic for them.

HM Ambassador, Czech Republic, 2001-2004

AW: It is 8 February 2018 and Dame Anne Pringle is resuming the recollections of her diplomatic career.

When we finished last week Anne, your post as Head of Eastern Department at the FCO was coming to an end and then you were off to the Czech Republic as Ambassador. Your first Head of Mission role. It must have been a thrill? Again, how did that come about?

AP: This was my absolute dream posting. People say your first Head of Mission role is always your favourite, I don't know, but it certainly for me was way up there. I was applying for various roles after Eastern Department. I knew I wanted a Head of Mission role. I really wanted Prague but then I wasn't the only one who really wanted Prague. At the time John Kerr was PUS and I'd dealt with him quite a bit as Head of Eastern Department. We'd travelled famously to Azerbaijan together and so I'd got to know him a bit and he was very supportive as were Stephen Wright and Emyr Jones Parry. They were my backers as well as David Manning and I got the job. It's a point I've made before. It's not just whether you get

the job but what's going on politically at the time that either makes it a really fascinating posting or not.

The Czech Republic had joined NATO in March '99. Vaclav Havel was President, a huge figure globally. There was a real combination of trying to prepare them for membership of the EU, that was a real chunk of the job and this back drop of how they had got through Communist times, who had behaved with courage, who hadn't. It was absolutely the most fascinating moment. Havel was President of the Czech Republic from '93 to 2003. I got there in November 2001. There was a big NATO Summit in 2002 in Prague which was the marker for asking the Baltic States and a few other countries to join NATO, so it was a huge moment in time, both for Havel to host the Summit putting the Czech Republic on the map and for a real sense of hope and freedom.

When I got there in 2001 it was still a bit run down, it reminded me a bit of crumbling Communism, as I call it, but in the course of three years there they were beginning to transform Prague and renovate the buildings in a proper way. They'd been renovated under Communism but the skills then had not been so great and buildings were crumbling and there was a lot of work to do. There was a sense of buoyancy and hope, it was wonderful. The other thing about Prague is that it's like a sort of village almost. The Residence is in Little Quarter, Mala Strana it's called, which is just down from the President's Palace, just up from the Parliament – and I mean they are both three minutes' walk away.

AW: You don't need a car!

AP: No, you really didn't. Tony Blair, at the time as PM, was one of the key advocates of Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland having a fast entry into the EU. Quite a number of people in the EU were saying that they were not ready and would never make the standards we needed them to reach to join. Tony Blair was at that time much more visionary and was saying "We'll help them to reach the standards" and that it was really important psychologically and for peace in Europe that we got these people in quickly. He was a real fan and of course they were fans in turn. We had quite a few EU secondees in Government Ministries helping the Ministries get their processes and rules and regulations in place to meet the EU acquis and there were quite a few Brits. We were helping a lot. I used to spend a lot of time with the Social Affairs Minister in particular on how you get your rules and regulations up to scratch. We had calling cards, if you will. We had huge support at Prime Ministerial level, Tony Blair came twice in my time there, and so everybody wanted to see

us. It was bliss! I remember once some Czech complaining to me that I saw his Defence Minister more often than he did, (we were trying to sell them fighter aircraft at the time). In many respects that was actually true. There was great access, they were superbly welcoming. I liked them a lot. I liked their professionalism. Then you had the Havel backdrop. He was obviously a huge figure and he was one of the brave ones. He was a very unlikely hero, he was really shy, quite self-effacing and yet this huge figure on the world stage. It was a complete joy from beginning to end. My only regret is that I only stayed three years, I could have stayed four. But Michael Jay was then PUS and he wanted women on the FCO Board, there were no women on the Board, another issue, and he asked me if I would come back to the Foreign Office to join the Board, so I did. Four years wouldn't have made much difference. I left after they joined the EU in May 2004.

AW: And there were celebrations?

AP: Yes, the Czechs do fireworks as well as the Chinese, put it that way! I was there for the celebrations. I was there crucially for the transfer at President level from Vaclav Havel to Vaclav Klaus. At the time the Americans thought that someone else would get the role, another sort of person in the mould of Havel but not well known. Klaus, at the time I arrived in Prague, was Leader of the main Opposition Party and of the Lower House. He was an economist by background and had a different Communist experience from Havel. Havel really did spend quite a bit of time in gaol for his beliefs; Vaclav Klaus was in Italy and at Cornell University in the sixties. Everyone knows how it worked in those days. You didn't get permission to go to these places unless you were considered good, reliable and were going to come back. He did that and he also worked in various parts of what was then the Soviet bloc as well. Let's just say his background raised more anxiety among Czechs than Vaclav Havel's background did. He was also strongly Eurosceptic and they were joining the EU and he was not shy about coming forward with his views! So it was a completely different ballgame but an interesting transition nevertheless.

There were lots of tos and fros. When Blair came on his first visit when I was there it was in April 2002. Because everything was accessible, we just walked to the Parliament, I'll never forget it. We just walked out of the Residence and Embassy (it was the same building) for a two minute walk down the hill to the Parliament. Blair had security around him but not much and it wasn't needed. I said to him "Let's walk, it's just round the corner". People in the street were doing a bit of a double-take thinking "that's Tony Blair", saying hello, and

Tony Blair was saying “Hi, how are you doing”. That was quite special because you just don’t get that on Prime Ministerial visits going in cars from A to B. I think he enjoyed that too.

I lived in a palace. It’s quite a famous old palace in Prague with a garden that used to connect up to the Presidential Palace. Supposedly there were secret passages that Tomas Masaryk, when he was President, apparently used to come through, so I’m told. You could see how it might be feasible because the back garden in the Residence looks right up to the Palace but on the front side you look out towards the new town which is over Charles Bridge, still a very historic part of Prague. Like all palaces it was not frightfully functional as an Embassy and Residence. The rooms in the Residence were grand enough; you could entertain really well, which I did a lot. But the Embassy itself was a bit of a rabbit warren because it was built into the hill, it was a really old palace and there were gothic elements in it. It had been owned for several hundred years by the Thun family which goes back to the Archbishop of Salzburg, he was Count Thun, and it was handed down and handed down. So it was grand but a bit awkward as a place. Interestingly, the Foreign Office did think about “could we sell it?” – as always if you’ve got a palace they’re wanting to sell it! The issue really was who on earth would buy it. The access was very narrow, up a very narrow street and then a narrow passageway into a huge wrought iron gate, which was famous and very old and then into a courtyard behind that. A very restricted access. You could have turned it into a hotel or something, but it would have needed vast work, and it would have been a very small hotel. So we had this conversation during my time. You probably wouldn’t get a great price for it. So in the end, with Parliamentary opposition as well, they decided that they were going to hang onto it and it was a lovely place to live.

AW: Did it take a lot of people to run it?

AP: Not really, I had a chef. A chef? Well, I had a Czech cook. It was the bane of our lives in Prague at the time – and I remember the American Ambassador and I talking about how to get a really good cook. If I were doing it now I would probably advertise the role for somebody like a trainee chef who wants the experience on the CV. But at that time I inherited staff, as one does. I had a worthy cook who did worthy, quite stodgy Czech food, stews, dumplings, but couldn’t do anything really special. But I stuck with it. The salary was not so good that you would be able to attract anyone very good. If I needed anything really splendid I would buy it in from a hotel, and they would come in. Otherwise I had three

maids and a social secretary who worked very hard because it was a big place to keep and there were quite a lot of functions, but it worked very well. The only point I found – and it sounds churlish – is that if you live in a palace behind a gate guarded effectively 24/7, after about six or seven weeks I'd feel “Oh I'm going a bit bonkers” and that I needed to be out of it for a while! Because you feel cooped up after a while. But that was the only drawback.

AW: A bit of a prison?

AP: Yes it was, and if you looked at it you'd think it was a bit, yes.

AW: You've talked about President Havel. In your notes you mention presenting credentials to him. Was that a very special occasion?

AP: It was. People do this differently wherever you are in the world, as you know. This was my first occasion. They picked me up in a lovely limousine to take me one minute up the road.

AW: Not one you were going to walk!

AP: No! They told me how the ceremony would run. I got into the courtyard, it was December, so my main concern was I thought I was going to freeze. But they had a band laid on in the courtyard to play the British National Anthem and the Czech National Anthem. There was something about that moment, and I suddenly felt the weight of responsibility on my shoulders, they were ‘playing my tune’ and I realised ‘this is quite serious’. Then you go up a very long staircase. Buildings in that part of the world often have very long grand staircases, much more than say Buckingham Palace, this was much longer, much grander. President Havel came into a very formal room. He had virtually the whole of the Cabinet there. The Foreign Minister was there but there were loads of other Ministers, lined up on one side. I had my Deputy with me, my Defence Attaché and a couple of others. I had learned Czech to go there and I was determined to say the formal words about presenting my credentials and letters of recall for my predecessor in Czech. It wasn't a long spiel but I just wanted to make the point that I am learning Czech and I knew I could do it. You could have heard a pin drop! I thought at the time “Did I make a mistake? Have I inadvertently caused a huge diplomatic faux pas?” But afterwards people talked about that a lot and the fact I did it in Czech, so it was smart. Then I had half an hour one-on-one with Havel. Again, my other experience of presenting credentials in Moscow was very different. There were about ten of us, there was live TV coverage, we didn't get one-on-one with the President. But this was

one-on-one and he spoke very fondly of the importance of the BBC World Service and the British Council when he was a human rights campaigner and Charter 77. It was so relaxed and lovely and here was this guy who was a hero to lots of people. They did the ceremony beautifully. There was that sense of this is responsibility now, I have got to get this right.

When I left there were two really touching things. Jack Straw, who was then Foreign Secretary, came on a visit in 2004 just before I left Prague. It coincided with the Czechs' Heads of Mission Conference with all their Ambassadors worldwide, and Jack had agreed to speak at it. I took him to the Conference and before he started Cyril Svoboda, who was then Foreign Minister, said "We just want to acknowledge how much you, Anne, have contributed to our relations" and the whole room stood up to applaud. I was really moved, that was very Czech. I laid on farewell drinks, as one does, for a whole load of people and Vaclav Klaus, who was then President, turned up. Nobody was expecting him and he turned up! My driver said "Vaclav Klaus is coming; you need to go down to meet him". So I went down. I knew him, I'd had one-on-one lunches with him and knew him quite well but I said "This is really good of you to turn up". He said "I don't normally do this, but I'm doing it for you".

I felt it was a great job to do, I felt we were at the forefront of trying to get them into the EU so it was a moment in time that was phenomenal, it was really great.

And the Rolling Stones came! I should tell you that too. This was really odd. It wouldn't happen nowadays but we had an email from a guy in the Foreign Office who knew the Rolling Stones from way back. He said that they were coming to Prague and would the Embassy like some free tickets to their concert. That was how it started. We said that was very nice thank you and we would raffle them amongst the staff, it would be a big deal. But then it developed into - It's Mick Jagger's 60th birthday and they were asking my PA for advice about where would be a good venue in Prague to hold it. To cut a long story short we suggested some but nothing was going to be private enough for them. It was going to be a very low key private birthday dinner and how could Mick Jagger do it without paparazzi being around? Eventually we suggested that they use the Residence, it was completely guarded and private with great views over to the Charles Bridge etc and so they did that. It was a private dinner and we went to the after dinner party that was held off site and of course they were very grateful and it was a lot of fun. We got to go to the concert and so did people in the Embassy and I also got a few tickets for some people in the Government, not that they couldn't get tickets themselves, but it was the gesture they really welcomed. A lot of the

Czech Government at the time were people who were about my age who had the same sort of outlook in life, they were all young technocrats trying to make their country great again and maybe that too was why I got on really well with them. I really related to them. Most of them were quite young and quite technical.

AW: So it was a generation on from the Communists, a fresh start?

AP: Yes mainly. There were some old soldiers and there was always that underlying friction about what your neighbours were really doing in Communist times. But overall they were moving forward and they were ambitious for the country so it was lovely from start to finish.

AW: On the consular side, had Prague become party central for the British stag night industry by then or was it still not too bad?

AP: It got progressively worse while I was there. It was really, really not nice. It was cheap. You could get flights very cheaply to Prague, it was only an hour away, Czech beer, famous the world over, was very cheap. You'd find quite a number of sensible men would lose their common sense when they came to Prague. I had very good consular officers who would deal with it. There was one really sad case where a chap was on a stag night, lost his friends, and at 5am in the morning was still under the influence and fell under a tram. My consular staff had to ring his family to tell them he'd been out all night and had died, hit by a tram. The family were saying that they'd got the wrong family because that was not how he was, he was a very professional chap etc. There were a number of really bad stories. And at the airport they would often be outrageous. Guys would be mooning; they would be doing all sorts of things. The Czechs are very educated, very civilised, they bring up their children extremely properly and by any standard it was outrageous behaviour. That went on for a while but gradually the groups moved to Latvia where it was cheaper and we had less problems.

Tourism generally, as opposed to stag nights, was booming. It's one of the most beautiful cities architecturally; the opera and concerts are fabulous. I used to be able to walk across Charles Bridge early in the morning and it would be quiet. But by lunch time, especially in the summer and because that's where you get the views, it would be wall to wall tourists. So they began to have quite an issue about how they handled that volume of tourism. Great for the economy.

AW: But pressure on everything and the bad behaviour not good for our reputation?

AP: Yes. On the whole the people the Czechs dealt with were civilised, well behaved and they admired them. But you got this loutish behaviour, it was desperate, but what can you do?

Director, Strategy and Information, FCO, Member of FCO Board, 2004-2007

AW: So as you have mentioned you left after three years because an FCO Board place had come up, they wanted female representation on the Board, so home you came. How did you find the FCO after three years out? Was there a lot of change?

AP: It was a really difficult time. At my first Board Meeting my predecessor in the role Simon Fraser delivered a monologue to the Board saying it's hopeless and what we need to do. There was a litany of dysfunctionality. I was sitting there a bit sort of 'rabbit caught in the headlight' thinking 'Wow, what on earth have I let myself in for?' Michael Jay was trying to connect the centre more with overseas and there was a real disconnect there, particularly at senior level where Ambassadors in the top jobs didn't have any real way of feeding in to the centre. There wasn't a group that met periodically to feed in views. Increasingly there was a lot of pressure on resources that was much more of a theme than had been earlier in my career in the Foreign Office. There was much more of a theme about how to concentrate resources optimally and where if necessary to cut. How do we bring the Foreign Office into the twenty-first century and make it look and feel like British society? So those were the big themes and Simon Fraser's message at the time had been "none of you are very bold, you need to be bolder and grasp these nettles if you're to make this place relevant and function properly". That was the back drop. We did set up a group where senior Ambassadors came back to the UK for a meeting once, twice a year it was. I remember the first meeting. You had all these guys who came in and read from prepared scripts that their staff had prepared for them. I said to Michael Jay "that's not the issue Michael, we don't want that. We want something that's a proper interactive dialogue where they are engaging on the problems we are facing as an organisation". But change and change management is such a difficult issue. If people are used to their way of working and begin to have a sense of self that might be a bit overblown after a while, it's quite hard to move that forward.

We tried to tackle resource issues. I did a presentation to Ministers including the Foreign Secretary about where we had some posts and why we had them. I vividly remember it. I was quite cheeky. I said "What's the capital of Madagascar?" thinking they're not going to know this, and of course they didn't. I said "Well, it's Antananarivo and what do you think

we do there as a post? Why do we need that post?" They had no idea. I went through about a dozen posts asking if we needed those posts or could we do it smarter. We don't necessarily always need boots on the ground unless say, they are going to be a member of the UN Security Council for two years, that sort of thing. If there is no real reason, could you be doing things smarter and more cost effectively? We had all those painful discussions at the time. Parliament and Foreign Secretaries don't like the idea of shutting something, you know, we are Britain, we are global etc.

AW: And was the Foreign Secretary still Jack Straw?

AP: Yes Jack Straw at the beginning when I did that resource thing, then Beckett and Miliband, but the presentation was to Jack Straw. We had to bring Heads of Mission worldwide into this – here is the Office, here are the challenges. How do we all get on message to engage local staff, our own staff on whatever the hard choices are? That's when we started Heads of Mission Conferences too. There had been one before I came back and it was very difficult. I remember we had an almost complete train wreck on the first one that I did because we were trying to talk about resources and change, and all that these senior guys wanted to talk about, and they wanted to hog the field, was policy, great and good policy, what was the UK thinking etc. What we needed was a conversation that was broader than that. It was really difficult. By the second one we got them onto the right sort of platform, where we had a bit of policy but lots on resources and we told the senior guys to stay on message and not to hog the floor because otherwise all the Heads of Mission from all over the world were going to wonder where their role, their voice was in all of this. So we pulled that together. The long and short is that annual Heads of Mission Conferences are a feature in the calendar now. We used to try and get the Prime Minister, the Chancellor, some good people in to talk about the view from No. 10 or whatever, and they became much more valuable and much more a way of pooling together an organisation that is globally spread. It was very painful and was my least favourite job ever.

I enjoyed the FCO Board but it too was dysfunctional when I joined. It didn't even have a proper risk register. There were loads of issues that needed to be properly, professionally addressed and it improved. I'm sure now it's a lot better.

AW: And it has more non-FCO people introduced to bring in the wider perspective?

AP: Yes, that's right and it did need to feel more representative of the world we live in. The Heads of Mission Conferences were very male, it still is, but it was incredibly male. I remember Tony Blair came to speak at that first one and there were questions at the end. Everybody around me was trying desperately to get me to ask a question because there were no females. And I said no, that it was much more telling if I don't speak up because it's full of blokes here desperate to have their moment in the sun. It was very male and very top down rather than accepting that other people have voices and might conceivably have some really good ideas about how we can do things better in this organisation. It was a very scratchy job, shall we say, so I was very glad to leave it.

HM Ambassador, Russian Federation, 2008-2011

AW: And then the prize!

AP: The prize!

AW: Did you feel that this was where you had been heading, to be Ambassador to Russia?

AP: I didn't think in mid-career that I was going to end up doing this, indeed I didn't think I would end up going to Prague. But my career had a very logical sort of progression of a lot of EU, about a quarter maybe a third of my career was on the EU and a third on Central and Eastern Europe, so there was a certain logic to it. Again, it's not a given because you're not the only person who wants the job and the nature of it is, as you know, you can be disappointed and then do you wait three or four years until it comes round again? Of course you don't. I knew I'd love to do it and I knew I'd be the first female to do it, just as I was in Prague actually. I'd be the first female for Russia in four hundred or so years. But I knew the Russians, I had interacted with them when I was Head of Eastern Department and Putin had been over to the UK as had a lot of his cronies from St Petersburg, so I knew the faces and I knew what I was getting into. I really wanted the job. Actually I wanted the job from Prague and I could have bid from Prague, but they had other ideas.

It was my dream ticket because it was again this moment in time. It was hugely challenging. It was just after the Russian invasion in Georgia that happened in August and I got there in October. It was a couple of years after the poisoning of Litvinenko in the UK, a huge case. Relations had plummeted, they had not been very good for a while but they certainly were not good and there were attacks against my predecessor, sometimes physically going for the

flag car, people throwing themselves at it, there were demonstrations in the streets saying “Tony Brenton go home”, so the climate was not auspicious.

When I got there it was after the French had brokered a sort of “let’s move on after Georgia” agreement, because nobody at that stage wanted a big bust up with Russia. The Americans then got on to their US/Russia Reset Policy where they thought let’s give this a try to get on to a better footing with the Russians. Let’s engage across the board on health, social, educational, scientific, space issues. They set up a huge structure of working groups with the Russians to try and engage them practically on issues that mattered to both sides. The Americans were really pushing that at the time because they felt that the then President Medvedev was young, talks the democratic talk, outward looking, a President who could take Russia to a different place. My view was “worthy but no cigar” because I felt that they completely under-estimated the Russian psyche and Russian history over hundreds of years. Russians, on the whole, don’t see things in ‘win win’ terms which really underpinned the American approach, they see things more in ‘if you win, I lose, therefore we’ve got to think about how I win all the time at your expense’. Even though there were real worthy attempts, and we were doing that too as Brits, I was trying to engage them obviously on the Olympics, at the time they had the Winter Olympics coming up in Sochi and we had the 2012 Summer Olympics, so we engaged them on that. We engaged them on education, on space which was a big issue. I had Helen Sharman over at one stage, our woman in space. And we did cultural things obviously. So we made a push to try to have a different sort of relationship. I was lucky in that Peter Mandelson was my first visitor. He was very well known to the Russians from when he’d been Commissioner in Brussels. He came over and we had a first meeting of a joint committee on trade and investment that we’d been trying to get off the ground for a while. It hadn’t happened but we got them all together. A lot of oligarchs, a lot of key people running the banks came in. So there was a feeling of let’s see how far we can take this. That was the agenda I really pursued while I was there. I was there for three years and that agenda was ongoing until the end of 2011. And then Putin and Medvedev effectively agreed a very cynical job swap – you can vote for us but we are agreeing a job swap. After I’d left there were demonstrations in Moscow and St Petersburg saying we’ve had enough of this cynical politics and the domestic atmosphere began to sour a bit. And Putin did come in as President and began to clamp down on internal opposition. That all happened after I’d left but inevitably it meant that people were no longer saying that the US

Reset Policy was going to work, engagement's going to work. It became colder, harder and a bit more confrontational, and we've been on that path since then.

I remember saying to Lavrov when Miliband was in Moscow on a visit when he was Foreign Secretary, we had a dinner with Lavrov and we were toasting. He said he'd just been to Primakov's birthday party and how jolly it had been. I said to him that I thought the real issue was that we don't trust each other and that underpins everything, "You don't trust us, you don't trust the West. We fundamentally try, but we don't trust you and therefore everything flows from that". He said "Yes, that's it". And that is it. And it's such a shame because it's an absolutely wonderful country, they are really generous people, they're funny, they're educated, they have got huge skills but there is this overlay of corrupt government and corruption filters down. If the top are doing it, everybody else is doing it. It could be so much better, but people have said that for a long time.

AW: It's hard to see where the change could come from.

AP: Yes. When I was there quite a lot of young people were going to the West to get experience of either studying or working with companies in the West, which was great. And everybody thought they would come back with those skills and lift everything. But when they came back they would join Russian companies and they'd be told this is how it works here. We do backhanders, we do this, we do that and either you do it and you'll thrive or you don't and you won't. Ultimately their systems are opaque and their businesses run on keeping people sweet in the Kremlin. I don't know if you've seen it in the papers but there have been these Unexplained Wealth Orders that are being introduced, a very interesting development. Because a lot of people in Russia made a lot of money during Yeltsin's time by buying up industries that had failed under Communism but were inherently valuable, steel, oil, timber, whatever. And that's where all the money is. They'd made a lot of money and a lot of it had been salted away overseas. They have their second passports etc and it's pretty opaque. It's very interesting that now they are saying if you're a government civil servant how can you own a £30 million mansion in Belgravia, UK, and we're going to ask questions now. It's not to say it's going to be easy to track where wealth has come from, people are very clever at laundering etc, but at least it's saying – hang on, we're not going to be your safe haven for ill-gotten gains and we're going to look at this more carefully. That for me was always the iniquity of the system. There's a lot of what I would say is obscene wealth in Russia. But I would see people who weren't in that league, but people who were just trying

to lead ordinary lives. And that's quite hard to do and to get by, particularly for professional people, teachers, lecturers at universities, who had been used to a certain status under Communism or pensioners who had been broadly looked after. There wasn't any rent, utilities were free, transport was pretty well free, so all the basics were taken care of and then suddenly they are thrown into a free for all, and that works for some people but not necessarily for others.

Putin was very lucky in that in his first eight years as President, because then they were four year terms, he had eight years of economic growth because the oil price was buoyant. He was able to make people feel better about themselves economically and also that Russia was back, it mattered and had credible, clean – I don't mean clean, but clean in that he was healthy – leadership and that put a bit of pride back in peoples' sense of self. But again that's being eroded because the economy is not doing so well now and it's just tough.

AW: And how did you find being the first female Ambassador to Moscow? Did you feel it? or did you know enough of the faces that they accepted it?

AP: The latter definitely. A lot of people said to me "Ooh, how do they treat you?" because Russians have this reputation for being misogynistic, but actually I didn't find it at all. I think there was a tendency with a lot of senior Russian leaders to bully but they would bully men as well as women and for me that would just make me laugh. If I could see they were trying to put on the "I'm going to intimidate or bully you" face it always had the opposite effect for me, I don't know why. It would just make me think "don't giggle, he's trying to put on an act here" so it never fazed me. I think all they were interested in was "Are you professional? Do you know Russia? Do you speak Russian?" – which I did and a lot of my colleagues didn't – and "Can you defend your policies and your own interests?" Because if you wobble and say "I'm going to do x" and then you don't follow up, Russians are very good at perceiving weakness and going for the gap. So you have to be very clear sighted, not contradict yourself, know your stuff, know them and speak Russian, those are the keys to really understand the psyche and the history and why they behave the way they behave.

AW: You said earlier when you were talking about your Czech credentials ceremony how different it was in Moscow - that was a group baptism was it?

AP: There were about ten of us and of course it falls as it falls, depending on who has arrived. It was in the Kremlin, so it was very grand in one of the State rooms there. There

was live TV coverage which was quite something. The Foreign Minister Lavrov was there and President Medvedev at that stage. We had to walk across a very long red carpet to present our credentials formally. I could see from the TV coverage, I was wearing a blue suit thing, and when I turned having presented my credentials, there was no conversation at that point and three or four people had already done that and we were watching them all. I turned to come back and as I came back all you could see was Medvedev clearly eyeing me up! You can clearly see it! People hooted when they saw it on the coverage, it was very, very funny. He was probably bored and he didn't realise what he was doing!

AW: And did you do it in Russian or in English?

AP: There was no conversation, you just formally handed the papers, every country does it differently. At the end we all gathered round for a Vin d'Honneur. It was a bit of a scrum. We had a snatched moment of conversation with them, but with everybody listening in. I said a few words to him in Russian and he responded in English even though he didn't have much English then, we knew that, he was clearly having lessons. And he said "Best regards to your Prime Minister" which was very good and I thought "Right, clock that, you've got some English at least". But it was a very different ceremony from Prague, there was no chance to engage. He did quite a long speech which was addressed to everyone. He was going through the relationships with each country. You can imagine! I was standing there – and this is December and our relations were really not good – and I was standing thinking "What's he going to say?" It was all in Russian, which was fine because I could understand it all, and I was thinking "Please don't say anything that is so outrageous to the TV camera that makes this a bit of a difficult moment", but he didn't. It was more forward looking, hoping that things might improve in future. There was no opportunity to engage as you would if it was one-on-one and get the measure of the man, so deliberately done really.

AW: So Medvedev was there until ...

AP: Putin came back in 2012. So he, Medvedev, was President for all my time but Putin was Prime Minister. The Presidency, it depends who is in it, but it can be quite a ceremonial role and Putin was Prime Minister and it was very clear to everybody that the power was with Putin. I think the Americans' policy was a bit wishful thinking - that Medvedev was a bit younger and that he was the face of the future. But I kept saying "No, no, no, the face of the future is the guy who is Prime Minister, that's where the power lies." You always need to look at where the power lies and Putin had all the levers of power and still does to this day. It

was a very interesting time in that respect to see them engage. They would have their National Day celebration, which was in May. Putin and Medvedev would come in but they would sit in a sort of tent-like structure away from all the Heads of Mission and there was a little rope barrier. They would sit and talk to each other, so again, there was never really an opportunity to engage. The French got to Putin a bit better because he had a few visits to Paris and the French are very good at schmoozing and pressing the right buttons as you've seen recently with Trump. I think they got to know him a bit better; it was a bit less formal. But it was quite hard to get through that cordon of protocol.

AW: And the lack of engagement doesn't help the mistrust issue.

AP: That's absolutely right. Cameron came to Moscow in September - that was a major moment because we hadn't really had any contact with Putin for five years. Five years, how do you know what the man's thinking? Again we had talks but Putin was in his "I'm going to intimidate you" mode, it was so obvious across the table that that's what he'd determined was going to be his behaviour. He spent a lot of time asking Cameron which way we would route pipelines and stuff, which was very technical and not something that Cameron was really on top of. It was very formal. That was when Putin was still Prime Minister and it wasn't a phenomenal engagement, no.

AW: While you were in Moscow you moved back into the remodelled Kharitonenko mansion, was that early on?

AP: No. When I arrived there was a temporary Residence that used to be the old Naval Attaché's residence, just off the Arbat, a very famous street in Moscow in quite a noisy area but it was a nice house, not huge by any stretch. My first reception there my butler was absolutely, not horrified - he was delighted, but so many people turned up that the house was literally bursting at the seams and he said to me "I've never seen so many people, I don't know where to put them". They were queuing to get in and it was bursting. So it wasn't very practical for entertaining but it was quite a comfortable house to live in. There was a little private area upstairs, which felt private.

The Residence that used to be the Embassy and Residence until we opened a new Embassy in 2000 was being gutted. It was an old sugar merchant's residence; they'd bought it in the 1800s. It was a grand palace right opposite the Kremlin, so an absolutely great location in Moscow. When it was the Embassy and Residence, the Residence was on the top two floors

and the Embassy, when I was there in the seventies, was all on the ground floor. They had the pictures of how the mansion had looked originally and because there were heritage issues, and the Moscow heritage people are very particular, we were stripping it back and returning it to how it had looked. So it was fascinating. Where I had been in the seventies was the old library and it stayed pretty well as I remembered it with spiral staircases and a gallery around – except that it wasn't dusty anymore. When I was there in the seventies/early eighties it was covered in dust. The next door room had been for the Head of Chancery and Chancery people. It was stripped out to be a dining room again and all the old woodwork was brought back with a stunning fireplace, and then what used to be on the other side of the corridor, registry and safe speech rooms, was stripped out to form another grand function room. I must say they did do it beautifully. The Residence is a real mix of styles, Gothic, Renaissance, a real hotchpotch, which was what the rich merchants had in the late 1870s Moscow, it's what they loved. They were art collectors etc and were borrowing styles from all over the world and so it was very grand if quite gothic especially on the ground floor and on the staircase. It was quite a long process to get it stripped out and get it refurbished. Eventually I just said "I'm moving back" because the builders were dragging their heels, it was so obvious to me. A number of people were coming over from Estates in London and having a jolly old time but it wasn't in their interests to push this project forward. So I said finally "I'm moving in in March 2010" because by then I'd been in the temporary Residence for nearly eighteen months, which was fine but constrained in space terms, and so that's what we did. We moved in, and there were inevitable teething problems, the basement was flooded at one stage. I remember my husband and I at midnight watched as water was dripping down walls in our private apartment thinking "Where do we get a bucket, how do we get this fixed, where is the stopcock". We had no idea. But broadly it was a glorious refurbishment and it worked as a big entertainment space because I could then do both rooms downstairs. Upstairs is what's called the White and Gold Room, which is like a ballroom and is very good and very useable, fabulous view out to the Kremlin but if you had bigger groups of people coming - and I had a huge party for Gorbachev for his 80th birthday with television cameras and all the great and the good in Moscow, you needed to use downstairs too. I say the great and the good, but actually you had people who were still happy to support Gorbachev and others who had very mixed views because the government were not marking his 80th birthday at all because in the end the Soviet Union broke up on his watch and a lot of people never forgave him for that and thought it could have been different. I think that's wrong. I think that inevitably the economic situation was such that it was going to happen at

some point, it happened and he was not necessarily the most popular of figures. We did a huge party for him which he loved because he hadn't been back in the Residence since Thatcher had visited and they were great pals. During Rodric Braithwaite's time Thatcher had visited several times but also they'd had lunches at the Residence and so I was able to show him the guest books with his signature and Thatcher's in it. Then he signed the guest book again. He's very good with women, Gorbachev, he just likes women, absolutely charming, loved his party and it was just a very special moment for him to have that. I had seen him before. He has a foundation in memory of his wife, and in his offices you see big blown up black and white pictures of his wife Raisa. They were clearly a very happy couple and it shows. He had a few health issues but it was quite a moment, and in the end yes, some decisions could have been done differently but you don't ignore the people who contributed a lot in their time to this country.

AW: Was there any problem about organising this party ...?

AP: I didn't get permission, I just did it. How did it come about? I think somebody had mentioned it to my Press Secretary – would I consider it? I said of course and it took off from there. You seize your moments!

AW: And then there are all the regions – did you travel during your time as Ambassador?

AP: Not then. That's a very interesting question. Predecessors, when they covered what was then the Soviet Union, covered everything which was quite an ask really. I was only accredited to Russia and by then we had a network of Ambassadors in all of the former Soviet bloc so I didn't. I would see my counterpart in Warsaw occasionally and saw my counterpart in Kiev occasionally; just because they are really key and you want to know what's going on there. I travelled within Russia but mainly to European Russia because in the end it comes back to the "do you have a calling card?" Unless we had trade missions or British Council activity apart from St Petersburg, there wasn't a huge need to go to any other places. I did travel to Sakhalin on the east coast of Russia because Shell were opening another big facility there and the Duke of York flew out from London for that. That was a huge trip, travelling for ten hours in a jet across Russia to get to the East. Even though Japan was 35 kilometres away and you could wave at it, this was still very Russia. I went to Ekaterinburg where we had a Consulate. We had some modest trade interests there but there wasn't really any big reason to go to these places. I think probably my successors did less

because there was even less reason and they had to concentrate on the relationship going pear shaped after 2012.

AW: So there was much less consular work?

AP: Oh yes, mainly it was visas. We had a huge visa section in Moscow, about a hundred people doing visas. The demand was vast because by then Russians were travelling. Even my Residence staff would go on bucket holidays to Thailand and places, which they'd never done. Visas was where I would come under a lot of pressure. A lot of bigwigs would be ringing me saying "Could I have a visa tomorrow? I can't wait in the queue." There was always a lot of pressure on visas.

AW: You mentioned closed regions?

AP: Yes. When I was there in the early eighties we couldn't travel outside a 40 km perimeter of Moscow without notifying the Russian authorities so anywhere we went, including places in European Russia, they often said were closed because, well they wouldn't tell you, but it would be closed because there was a nuclear facility or something in that region or they just didn't want foreigners to see it. So a lot of it was shut off. None of that happened when I was there as Ambassador, you could travel around Moscow and anywhere you wanted. In that sense it was an opening up but it didn't mean they weren't still following you.

AW: Did you still have that sense of people watching you?

AP: I wasn't really looking for it or you'd be neurotic all the time. It was much more overt in the eighties for me because they would come into your apartment; they would leave shoes in the corridor that were never left there. They would do things just to make you aware that they'd be in. They would ring you in the middle of the night, that was a favourite thing or I've had water put into my petrol tank so I couldn't move my car. If I travelled then, I remember going on a weekend trip away to Tchaikovsky's house, from memory, they put, not heavies on us, but a black Volga was following us everywhere and they often had very good looking young men followers. I was a single girl, so they'd try their luck at anything, so that was always a bit amusing. It was much more overt in the eighties. By the time I was Ambassador they had more sophisticated methods of tracking you. If I had a mobile they could easily track you. They knew my movements and habits pretty well by then, they would clearly have copies of my forward programme that would have been leaked. It wouldn't

have been very hard for them to track every movement if they wanted to but there was no “in your face” hostility or following you. When I travelled in the regions they were great, the protocol was exceptionally good, they looked after you very well, they always gave you flowers. Russians have touches that are wonderful. Again, I think the atmosphere has closed down a bit now. Some of my staff would have radios left on that hadn’t been left on. They were still doing the tricks of the trade to quite a lot of people but I think they didn’t feel they needed to with me so much.

AW: And did you feel you made any real friendships with some of the people, academics?

AP: I saw a lot of them, a lot of academics, politicians, Ministers, cultural people. You see a huge number of people and a lot of them came to the Residence but not officials. MFA officials on the whole didn’t tend to. Ministers would come for a function so if I was doing something on the Olympics and I needed the Minister of Sport, they would come but on the whole they stayed away. They wouldn’t come in vast numbers to the QBP, you wouldn’t even get the Foreign Minister. Lavrov would go probably to the Polish National Day, he didn’t even go to the Americans, they just didn’t. And if the atmosphere was souring more, they would go to even less. It was like “we’re not socialising with you”. My deputy told me that when he left Moscow a year or so after I did they wouldn’t even give him a farewell call in the MFA. If they want to send you a message, they will.

AW: What were your feelings on leaving?

AP: I loved my time there and also it’s the stuff of living there. I loved cross country skiing through silver birch tree forests in the snow. They had a dump of snow recently, the best in 100 years, and oh, I’d love to be there, the cross country skiing will be phenomenal. I loved the challenge of being there. I have a huge warmth for Russians, I really do. I think they have so many really good features that it’s just a shame that they’ve had the tortuous history they had and a lot of the wounds if you will are self-inflicted. It could be different. I felt it was a great period to be there, I hit an interesting time. They treated me well, I was always very well treated and I do have a sense of sadness for what could have been and could still be, but doesn’t seem to be. They have a different world and pursue their interests rightly in a very hardnosed way, and that can often seem very antagonistic and aggressive, whereas we try to engage more.

AW: Maybe another Gorbachev will come along...

AP: Well that's a very interesting point because Putin, with Presidential elections coming up, is going to have another six year term. He was born in '52, so obviously by then he will be getting on a bit and after two Presidential terms in theory he can't do more. So does he then step aside? And if he does, what next? They've got to work it out. But I doubt you'll get some modernising reformer. You might, but who knows.

AW: So now we reach the close of a wonderful career ...

AP: Yes, I left early in truth, I left when I was just 56, but I ran out of opportunities. There were only three or four jobs I could bid for and in the nature of the Foreign Office they were either already promised to someone - in two cases they were - and there wasn't much left, or you're waiting for two or three years until the job becomes vacant. I thought "I've had an absolutely great innings". I've done all sorts of stuff, mainly board level stuff, since I left and that was the right call for me. But sad. I miss it

AW: And over the span of your career in the Foreign Office do you think the attitudes to and the opportunities for women have radically changed?

AP: Yes. When I joined the Foreign Office in '77 it felt very male and quite exclusive. I hadn't really lived in England even and it was my first real engagement with English people, so there was a cultural issue there, let alone joining the Foreign Office. It was very male, very hierarchical, very structured, everybody was "Call me Fred, call me whatever" except - do go away and don't bother me, that was the culture. There weren't really any role models as such when I was there because until 1972 women resigned on marriage. There were quota limits to how many women could join the fast stream, certainly in the forties, that was only lifted in the fifties or sixties I think. A lot of people resigned on marriage and others felt that the job entailed a lot of hard choices, which it did. Even in Prague a lot of my colleagues, if they were women and married, were unaccompanied, it was quite normal whereas that just didn't happen with blokes. Inevitably you were making choices. It's changed a lot now, there are more visible role models now than there were in my day, which is great, and the Board is pretty well 50:50. But there is still at real senior level, the top two senior grades, not enough women. I've always argued that until you have a female Head of News Department, a female Private Secretary to the Foreign Secretary, a female Private Secretary to the Prime Minister - all these key feeder jobs - it's still not really balanced. So it's got a way to go.

AW: And any other thoughts?

AP: Well, I think I've had the most wonderful life, the most wonderful opportunities that I wouldn't have conceived of having when I was a schoolgirl in Glasgow, it never really occurred to me. It's a fabulous career. If anyone asks me now I still say "If you are interested in policy and how the world ticks, go to it". To me it's still the great choice in life to make. I loved it. The Office looked after me well, I have absolutely no complaints. I met a lot of very distinguished, extremely bright people and I was lucky to have a lot of supportive mentors and I absolutely loved it.

AW: The mentoring in the Office, it's quite an element, isn't it?

AP: It is now; it wasn't when I was there. I remember when I got Prague, a very senior diplomat said to me "You will never ever be discriminated against ever Anne". I thought "Wow! That tells me a lot". It wasn't true, I have to say. However, it was very well meant and that spoke volumes for 'there really is an issue here and we all recognise it's an issue'. Because, however much you try and say we have got equal opportunity policies, this that and the other, ultimately it's the subliminal messages people send. So if you walk into a room that's full of suits and they are all talking football, do you feel comfortable with that? You might if you're a football fanatic, but chances are you won't. But then they are saying 'everything's open and equal and ...' People need to think about subliminal messages and judgements they make that are based on gender and assumptions, rather than abilities and skills. So that's still work in progress, everywhere I find. But I have no complaints, it was brilliant.

AW: Well that's wonderful, thank you so much Anne.

AP: Thank you very much.