

BDOHP Interview Index and Biographical Details

Sir Thomas Legh Richardson, born 6 Feb 1941

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BRITISH DIPLOMATIC ORAL HISTORY PROGRAMME

RECOLLECTIONS OF SIR THOMAS RICHARDSON KCMG, RECORDED AND TRANSCRIBED BY SUZANNE RICKETTS

SR: This is Suzanne Ricketts recording Tom Richardson on 22 March 2019. Tom, tell me, why did you join the Foreign Office?

TR: Well, this was in 1962. Career planning was in its infancy. In fact, it hardly existed. I seem to remember that one of my tutors said there was the Civil Service, BT or ICI and that was about the extent of it. It was rudimentary. I suppose I started panicking a bit in my final year. I took the Foreign Office exam in I think almost the last year in which it was a largely written exam. It was like taking Finals again, a month later!

SR: What subjects had you been reading?

TR: Modern History, but actually my main interest was Byzantium. I loved travelling. I travelled a lot as a student, mostly to the Middle East and Turkey. I was always interested in politics. So I thought that I would give the Foreign Office a try. It seemed like a nice thing to do and, if it failed, I could always revert to staying on at university. I'm glad I joined. I was full of excitement. I was told I was probably going to go to France for language training. I think they used to send you to Tours, which is supposed to have the best French accent. So I dashed down to our local shops and selected - I'm ashamed to mention it now - a really hideous suit, with brown and black stripes: I looked like someone out of Guys and Dolls! It never got worn very much.

1962 - 1963: Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana

Within a week, I was told that I was being sent instead to the University of Ghana, to its Institute of African Studies. So I was a bit nonplussed and went round to Airey and Wheeler to get my tropical kit instead.

There I was, on a plane going to Ghana. The first thing I remember about the country was that all around the airport were enormous termite mounds, almost as high as a human being - a very strange landscape. On another occasion, I was at the airport and wandered into a room where Ghanaian censors were busy cutting articles out of the British newspapers that had just arrived.

I think I only realised later why the Foreign Office had decided to send me back to university, which in practice is what they did. There were probably two reasons. One is that they looked at me and thought I was an utterly callow youth who needed another year of growing up! The other reason was more to the point: a lot of Africa had suddenly become independent, particularly in 1960, because of the march to independence of something like 15 new states in what had been French Western and Equatorial Africa, not to mention the Belgian territories. The Foreign Office's own responsibility in Africa before that was minimal: it was Liberia and Ethiopia. The rest was either other countries' colonial territory or if it was, or had been, ours, there was still a Colonial Office and a Commonwealth Relations Office in those days before the mergers. So the Foreign Office suddenly woke up and thought they had better understand something about Africa as they were going to have to open a lot of posts. It might have been better if they had sent me to a French-speaking university. In fact, Robin Renwick, the year afterwards, went to the University of Dakar ... a lesser-known part of his career. For some reason, they stopped the scheme after two years both in Dakar and in Ghana. Ghana, I imagine, because the politics was getting rather nasty. Dakar, I don't know. Michael Shea followed me in Ghana and that was that.

So there I was as a graduate doing a postgraduate course in African Studies. It was a two-year course. I only did one year. The Vice-Chancellor of the University was an interesting man, Conor Cruise O'Brien. He wrote 'To Katanga and Back', a very entertaining book. He made a reputation as an Irish diplomat, working for the UN, standing up for the Congolese, against the sinister forces all around. Nkrumah thought that was a good career recommendation. So Conor Cruise became Vice-Chancellor but later turned on Nkrumah, much to the President's disappointment. The Head of the Institute was a fairly gentle Marxist called Thomas Hodgkin, who had written quite a lot about African politics at a time when no-one else was doing so and, if I remember rightly, had been in our Palestine Civil Service in World War II. His wife was a brilliant scientist and Nobel prize winner, but she seldom came to Ghana. It sounds unkind, but some of the people who were teaching for example social

anthropology probably would have been far happier teaching in Britain if they could have got a post there. I was asked to teach the Ghanaian undergraduates a history course in my final term. It wasn't quite 'Our Ancestors, the Gauls', but I did think that Ghanaian students didn't really need to know about the Thirty Years' War.

I should mention, since we are doing oral history, that African history - leaving aside colonial which we didn't really study at all - is very largely a matter of oral history, handed down by professional *raconteurs* throughout the generations. That's how you understand something of these ancient empires of Ghana, Mali and Songhai, of which very little - apart from fragments in Arabic - is written down. We even studied African music. I was never any good at that. We did a course in Arabic as we had a Sudanese refugee teacher who was in Ghana, a Mecca for revolutionaries from all over Africa in those days. We were taught about French African politics, which was extremely interesting, by a man called Joseph Ki-Zerbo, a refugee from what was then Upper Volta. I loved his accounts of recent electoral manipulation.

There were three or four Ghanaians doing this course, three or four Americans, one German girl who'd been at an American university and I was the only Brit. It was a very interesting year. I knew nothing about African history and it was good to look at it from the African point of view. I learned various lessons from that, which stood me in good stead later. The political situation was not easy. Nkrumah, after five or six years in power, was edging towards dictatorship. There was still an opposition, led by Dr Danquah. The students were mostly anti Nkrumah, so a curfew was imposed on the University which, in those days, was about three miles out of town beyond the airport. That was when I - briefly - started to play bridge.

One of the signs of the times, even back in the 1980s when I last visited Ghana, was how the city has grown - three, four million people and counting - and the University was completely surrounded by shanty towns. Astonishing. In my day, it was a very beautiful colonial creation, one of the pride and joys of late Empire.

So things were a bit tense. I saw the High Commission from time to time. Not a great deal. They wisely left me on my own. They occasionally gave me a decent meal for which I was very grateful. I could have had African food, fufu and kenkey for a year but I weakened and wrote to the Foreign Office to ask them to pay a bit extra to let me go onto European food. I

travelled a lot in the vacations. I spent a whole month going round Nigeria on a scooter which I had bought with a loan from the Foreign Office, as I had no money of my own. I didn't get any allowances: I was paid the minimum wage which I think was about £800 a year in those days, but of course I got free board and lodging at the University. So I went all round Nigeria. Crashed the scooter. I was with an American friend in pillion. A lorry was racing along an un-asphalted road, hurrying to get home for Christmas and we crashed into a ditch. I was looked after by some very nice Irish nuns for a day or two. I spent Christmas in Benin City eating what was called African chicken. We speculated afterwards whether it was vulture or perhaps some obnoxious form of wild turkey. It certainly wasn't chicken. There was a wonderful festival and somewhere I have a slide of the Oba's wives in all their finery.

In the spring vacation, I went with another American, who was not at the University but doing aid work in Accra. He had a *deux chevaux*. We went through the Ivory Coast to Liberia and then through Guinea to Mali. I had to get back because the term was starting again, so I never got to Timbuktu. But I did get to Bamako. And I got through Guinea which was an absolutely miserable country under Sékou Touré. Nobody looked at us or greeted us because we were white colonialists: it was that sort of place. In the Ivory Coast, in contrast, the French were everywhere, including the bakeries. In Liberia, we were detained by a Firestone company cop for taking photos of a worker illegally cutting into a rubber tree for the sap. But the cop was a Ghanaian and when he heard that we'd come from there, we were promptly released.

Finally, when my time came to go back to England, I discovered that we were all invited to go to the Sudan by our Sudanese teacher, who had somehow managed to reconcile himself with the government. So, at the expense of the government of Ghana, we were taken around those parts of the Sudan which were safe to go around - which excluded the whole of what is now South Sudan. But it did include the Gezira cotton project to the south of Khartoum and a lovely train which took us to the Red Sea and the old slave port of Suakin. That was fascinating. From there, I finally got back to England after a year, having not really thought about the Foreign Office at all. I suddenly realised I was still employed by them!

SR: But it was a two-year course. Why didn't they let you finish it?

TR: It was only one year - that was always the deal. I didn't actually ask for a second year. Even if I had stayed on in university life, I frankly had no plans to specialise in African history. I did think, when I got back, of trying to take the African degree in absentia and I signed up at SOAS with a man called Dennis Austin, who was one of our first experts on African politics and history. He was rather against it, saying that you needed to be on the spot. In the end, with the demands of daytime work and trying to do a paper job from records, it seemed to me that it wasn't what a research project should be all about.

SR: Before we move on to your posting in London, you mentioned in your notes a first gaffe. What was that all about?

TR: I had enormous trouble. All of the countries I wanted to visit when I was in Ghana required a visa. I was queueing up at the Ivory Coast Embassy and the Mali Embassy and what have you and ran out of pages in my passport. It seemed impossible in those days to get more pages. So I wrote to my Member of Parliament and complained, quite forgetting that I was a member of the Foreign Office! The Member of Parliament went diligently into bat on my behalf and I got my extra pages in no time at all. And there was a two-page letter, which I still have, reminding me firmly that I was a member of the Foreign Office. They were rather cross with me. So I had to eat humble pie.

1963 - 1965: Near East and North Africa Department, Foreign Office

SR: So then you went back to London. You were a junior desk officer. What was the Foreign Office like in 1963?

TR: Well, there were still coal fires. A nice lady came round with tea and biscuits and we all broke off work for ten or fifteen minutes. There were Saturday morning rosters and, of course, duty officers over the weekend. Near East and North Africa Department (NENAD) covered Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, Egypt under Nasser, Libya still under the monarchy (this was before Gaddafi) and Sudan which had had a military coup under General Abboud. We treated him to a state visit and I was roped into some of the meeting and greeting, I remember. Well, I knew something about the Sudan on the strength of two or three weeks barrelling around the country! I knew nothing about Libya and I was the junior desk officer for Libya and the Sudan. Essentially, you were learning about how the Office worked, how

to draft. It could have been anywhere in the Foreign Office, but at least it gave me an African - although not a West African - job and I was grateful for that. I spent about a year and a half there.

SR: Who was your Head of Department?

TR: Ronald Scrivener, who I think ended up in Prague in the days of the Iron Curtain. And there was a delightful Assistant called Peter Laurence. He ended up in Turkey. He'd been a naval officer during the war. John Shakespeare was the Morocco desk officer and in time became Ambassador to Morocco. Ronald Higgins had the most important Third Room job, Egypt. He married a journalist and resigned to work for the Daily Telegraph. They were a nice bunch of people.

One of the things I remember ... I should say I have read some of the contributions to this project. Inevitably, particularly when you're interviewing women officers, the whole topic of women in the Foreign Office comes up. So I did want to say something about that. I don't think I was conscious of discrimination when I first joined. There was a smart lady in NENAD called Lucy Deas, later Lucy Ismail, who had to resign on marriage - the usual problem in those days. But there were also senior women in the Foreign Office. There was a lady called Barbara Salt whom we were all asked to go and see. It was a very sad business. She would have been our Ambassador in Israel, the first woman Ambassador, but became too ill to take up her post. All new entrants were encouraged to go and see her which I thought was a very civilised idea. It kept her in touch too with the Office. To anticipate a bit, I always thought that the Civil Service in those days was better at employing women. And certainly, as I will tell you later, when I went round the country meeting businesses on think tank work or when I was seconded to Rothschilds, the male environment in the private sector was complete and utter. The Civil Service shone by comparison. So I will make a mild defence, I think, in employment terms, subject of course to the fact that in those days you had to resign on marriage! That's all changed, thank God!

SR: Did you get much in the way of training? Did your line managers take time to mentor you?

TR: It's funny you should mention that. There was an inaugural course, of which I can remember absolutely nothing. Of course I took it a year late because I'd been in Ghana, so I was with a load of even newer entrants. I think we still learned drafting on the job. These were the days of intensive training in other areas. There'd been the Plowden Report on the Foreign Office which I'll come back to later in the context of my time in Milan. There was a Treasury course which lasted 18 weeks, at a place which the Civil Service owned in Regent's Park, one of those lovely houses up there along the eastern flank.

SR: Was that the Treasury Centre for Administrative Studies?

TR: Yes.

SR: So that was mainly economics?

TR: It was all economics. We had Wynne Godley who was regarded as a rather dissident economist. We did a basic university course in record time. It was a good course and, towards the end, because I spoke some rudimentary French from schooldays, I particularly appreciated the fact that I was selected to lead an expedition of us to the South of France to investigate regional policy. We wined and dined our way very happily through three or four days while some rather over serious *Directeurs du Plan* explained to us how they were going to build and fill so many *unités touristiques* along the coast. I think they were building the new town of Sète, towards the Spanish border. We were taken to Northern Ireland and told about the situation there and the economy. And I suppose I must have done a Going Away course before my next posting, but I don't remember very much about it.

SR: You mentioned in your notes a second gaffe. Tell me about it!

TR: Well the first post they came up with after I left NENAD was Private Secretary to our Resident in Bahrain. This was before we moved out of the Gulf. I went to my atlas and saw this small country about 20 miles long and 10 miles wide. I spoke only about a hundred words of kitchen Arabic from my time in Ghana. They weren't proposing to teach me Arabic so I thought they were mad to want to send me to Bahrain. I thought I really ought to go back to Africa. They hummed and hah-ed and said, in effect, "If you insist." They gave me the job in Tanzania. I did worry afterwards that it might have blotted my copybook. In those days,

you were told where to go. But the Bahrain idea did seem rather pointless and I couldn't understand the logic of it. So that was my second gaffe. I don't think they held it against me and I was careful not to query any of my future postings!

SR: Wise course, I think!

TR: I never wanted to be an Arabist. Partly because I travelled a lot in the area when I was still a student at Oxford. It seemed so black and white, depressing. I just thought it was not for me.

SR: Difficult for spouses and family, too.

TR: Well I was a bachelor until the age of thirty-eight.

1965 - 1966: British High Commission, Tanzania; later British Interests Section in the Canadian High Commission, Tanzania

So there I was, going off to Tanzania in 1965. It had become independent in 1961 and a lot of things had happened since then.

First, it had had an army mutiny, as there was in Kenya, and I think in Uganda too, although it's forgotten about these days. My predecessor, Christopher MacRae, had had quite a lot to do with helping the Marines to land ... it sounded rather exciting! The Brits restored the legal governments in all three of these newly independent East African countries. For which, I may say, Nyerere was rather ungrateful. I think he was extremely embarrassed by the whole thing. He had gone into hiding for a few days and no one knew where he was. His Foreign Minister had also disappeared, a man called Kambona.

And secondly, there had been a shotgun union with Zanzibar which had had a coup d'état only a month or so after it became independent from Britain, when the African majority took over and the last Arab Sultan fled back to Oman where his family came from. There was a real worry about East Europe penetration in Zanzibar. Nyerere somehow cajoled the thug who ruled Zanzibar, an ex-docker called Karume, to go into a union which later became known as Tanzania. The deal was that Zanzibar had complete internal self-governance.

Karume ran the place and it was a one-party state. So was Tanganyika, but a much more moderate form of one-party state, with internal party elections.

We had a large High Commission. It was too big. A lot of our Commonwealth posts were overstaffed in the early years. The High Commissioner was a lovely man called Bob Fowler. He had no dedicated Private Secretary of his own but he took me on some of his travels out of Dar es Salaam through coffee farms and tea estates. I was very grateful for that and I wrote everything up afterwards. I learnt a lot about the country from these travels. I discovered a few job niches like subbing for the Labour Attaché, a nice man called Harry Hurst who covered Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. He was an old Tanzania hand, but he was based in Nairobi. So I more or less volunteered to be his local assistant. There wasn't much to report: a one-party state has a one-party union. The Minister of Labour, Kamaliza, was pretty well the head of the trade union as well. But it gave me a few contacts which otherwise I wouldn't have had. When Harry Hurst came to Dar es Salaam, I could throw a small party for him. This was the first time, of course, that I'd ever entertained anyone. I had a nice flat overlooking Dar es Salaam harbour with a spectacular view, in one of Dar's few buildings then of more than five storeys. Times have changed.

Other than that, I could deputise for the First Secretary (Internal) or the First Secretary (External). I trod water, but it was a fascinating time. It was my first real post. I made some good friends amongst the other African diplomats and the embryo Tanzanian Foreign Service. There was a nice man called Tony Nyakyi, who later became Permanent Under Secretary and a journalist called Ben Mkapa who became President: we were all terribly young. When I was PNG-ed, Nyakyi and Mkapa had a farewell party for me. I was very touched.

And then came UDI in Rhodesia. There was a last-ditch meeting between Nyerere and our Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, Arthur Bottomley. The meeting went disastrously. Bottomley was on his way back from Rhodesia and it was clear that Smith was going to go ahead with UDI. Then came the OAU meeting where four countries decided to break relations with Britain. The others didn't like UDI, but they decided pragmatically that their bilateral relations with Britain counted for more. And Nyerere, who was always something of a visionary and an idealist, was somewhat surprised that so few countries followed him.

So two thirds of the entire mission were out within a week: the High Commissioner, the Deputy High Commissioner, the lot. I helped to burn some papers and was left behind as a dogsbody Third Secretary. There were still consular staff and we had an aid programme which we kept going. We were the British Interests Section of the Canadian High Commission. The Canadians had done a very good job in Tanzania. They smelt sweet. The Tanzanians did not want us to train their army: I think partly because they were embarrassed at the military intervention I told you about. The army had been run on British lines. But it had mutinied. It needed professional training. The Canadians gulped and very nobly agreed to take it on. And they nobly agreed to represent our interests in Tanzania. I must say, they did it very well. I still have an abiding friend from those days. We went around together and did everything together. I was still a diplomat: I was on the Canadian list. So I was still invited to diplomatic parties.

I remember a famous party at State House with the President of Zambia, Kaunda, who paid a state visit to Tanzania. What most of us hadn't realised was the very famous tune called 'God Bless Africa' had become the national anthem of both Tanzania and Zambia, with slightly different orchestration. So we had the national anthem - we assumed it was of Tanzania - and we all sat down. But the band started up again, with different orchestration. We were still sitting down, thinking this must be a mistake. The aide de camp was desperately trying to get us to stand up again!

The Canadian High Commission let us survivors get on with our job. I had a few trips around the country. Although there was no longer a British High Commission, there were still lots of British aid advisers, teachers, businessmen and even a few settlers. We had wardens in various parts of the country who had fairly standard instructions about what to do and various numbers to ring if there was trouble. So I was sent on one or two of these trips. One was to Lake Victoria which was wonderful. One down to the Mozambique border, which the Tanzanians were very suspicious about because, in those days, if you wanted to go more than 20 or 30 miles from the capital you had to seek permission in a *Note Verbale*. So when they saw that a British diplomat was going within about 10 miles of Portuguese Mozambique, the Tanzanians sent someone to 'look after' me. Not actually physically in the car. But it was fairly easy to spot him. I went near the border because that was where Bishop Trevor Huddleston had his diocese.

Basically, I had a fine old time. I was doing some internal reporting and drafted for my boss, the Head of the British Interests Section. And then they decided there were still too many of us and we had to cut down further. Perhaps my trips were the final straw - I don't know - but we did have a job, and a perfectly genuine one. We had to talk to our nationals in case anything happened and I was the obvious person to do it as I had done one or two similar tours with the High Commissioner in the days when we had had a High Commission.

So I had to go. My Canadian friend gallantly drove me to the Kenyan border. I sat in Nairobi awaiting instructions as to where I was going next. Well, actually, I didn't await instructions. I took the opportunity to go all round Uganda and Kenya. I had to get back every week to see if anything had come in from London.

SR: Ah yes, in the days before mobile phones!

TR: Zanzibar was difficult to get to. I went back there about a year ago, for the first time since the 1960s. In those days, I only got there twice: we used to have a Deputy High Commission until the break in relations. The East Germans were very powerful there. The East German Consul General was a man called Gottfried Lessing, better known as the husband of Doris Lessing, whom she had married in her early Communist days. They had since split. He was a very smooth piece of work. Unlike the West German mission which, in those days, had large maps in its Embassy of Germany before World War II, including the Polish Corridor and East Prussia. It was quite astonishing! I had to be educated in the Hallstein Doctrine.

Anyway, I only had 18 months and, as it transpired, that was my last posting in a developing country. I never expected that. I thought my career was going to take a different route. There was a time when I thought I might go back to Africa. But, as it happened, that was that. I did a lot of work on Africa thereafter, particularly in New York, including lots of visits to the continent. But I was never stationed in Africa again.

1966: Zambia Department, Foreign Office

I went back, earlier than expected, and I was put into Zambia Department.

One thing I haven't mentioned is that Zambia suffered from serious problems of oil, because UDI had cut it off from the pipeline which went from Portuguese Mozambique, through Rhodesia to Zambia. The country needed an airlift to get basic supplies in and the airlift came from Dar es Salaam. The RAF ran it. You could take a lift with them, sitting among the oil drums and other supplies and go down to see our people in Zambia, which I did once or twice.

SR: So there was a whole Department devoted to Zambia?

TR: Yes, we were very generously staffed. There were also two Rhodesia departments, External and Internal, from UDI right up to independence. Zambia Department was there simply because there were so many practical problems of supplying Zambia but also I imagine because Kaunda felt isolated and vulnerable. They'd not yet built the railway. The Chinese, who paid a state visit in my time in Dar es Salaam, agreed later to build the Tanzam Railway. So they earned kudos in the whole of the region.

So I was in Zambia Department while they brooded about where to send me.

1967-70: Vice-Consul (Commercial), Milan

This is where the Plowden Report comes in, written some years earlier, I think in 1964. Basically, it was the report on the Foreign Service which said, accurately enough, that commercial work had been neglected by diplomats for too long and that we needed to improve our performance. Everyone should do it at some stage in their career. It was perfectly sensible. What I think they hadn't thought through was what sort of commercial work they wanted and at what level. I was sent to Milan which had just had a quite successful trade fair. A British week - we had a much wider range of British industry in those days, I'm sorry to confess, and you could put on a rather decent event. Milan was chosen as the commercial and industrial capital of Italy. It had had a full-time Vice-Consul from the fast stream, David Tatham, who had just left at the end of his posting. John Ford, who was my boss in Rome, decided we needed the same arrangement and I was sent out to replace David. I should explain in parentheses that John Ford had been Head of Personnel when I was sent to Ghana and had seen me there on the occasion of a wider call on High Commission staff.

SR: So there you were in Milan. Did you have any Italian?

TR: I did an Italian course before I went out. And a commercial course at the City of London College.

Going back to John Ford, he did a lot of good things. He decided to stay in Rome himself, partly because that's where the Embassy was. But he upgraded Milan. He got in a very good Consul General with commercial experience behind him. He travelled to Milan quite often. He had people like me and Willie Marsden down in Rome, who he hoped would give commercial work a bit of a punch! He weeded out some of our local commercial staff. There were some rather sad relics who'd been booted out of Egypt by Nasser and, as it were, drifted into Italy. John had a policy of bringing in young, bright Italians who spoke English and giving them a job for three or four years, but not for life. It was a good idea on paper. But a few things went wrong. As was true in Britain in those days, Italians preferred a permanent job to changing jobs throughout their career. No gig economy. So we mobilised these bright young Italians. Two of them were still there when I became Ambassador in the 1990s! And of course they were heavily protected by Italian labour legislation.

I mention this because it left me wondering what I was there for. Like my predecessor, I was responsible for trade fairs and British participation in them: that was fascinating, partly because it got me around the country. So if there was a trade fair in Bari, I could also learn something about the southern economy. There was a lovely children's book fair in Bologna, with huge participation from the United Kingdom as we're good at children's books. Our people were looking for translation and publishing rights and things like that. Milan had lots of fairs for chemistry and heavy industry. There was a big agricultural fair in Verona, Turin of course for cars. We had an Agricultural Attaché in Rome but he didn't do commercial work so I more or less volunteered my services to do that work in North Italy. I had to learn an entirely new vocabulary in English, let alone in Italian. Especially when I discovered that the British Agricultural Export Council were taking a group of Italian farmers around Britain - there were about fifteen or twenty of them, including some wives. They took them all round Wales, the Borders and up into Scotland. They decided they didn't want a full-time professional interpreter, so they had me. My Italian was not perfect, I am the first to admit, but I really got down to learning all the technical words. The wives wanted to go off and do

shopping, and there we were, stuck overnight in unpromising places like Blackpool. I remember Blackpool very well. After an awful dinner, we were walking down the promenade and past us came an amazing bearded lady! She really was bearded. We all looked at her and you could see the Italians thinking, "Is it all like this?" The next day, we passed by Morecambe Bay. The Italians were very excited, because it is tidal and the Med doesn't have tides. A mile in and a mile out. They'd never seen such a big tide ... Things like that kept the party going.

There is a real role for commercial lobbying at a senior diplomatic level. Ambassadors and Consuls do it very happily these days, as I did in Rome. When you're twenty-five years old, you don't have any credibility. You're not meeting senior people. We had local staff who were very good at what was, after all, the bread and butter work: finding agents and looking for export prospects. I did a number of special reports - I remember one on the retail trade in Italy. But overall, I don't think my bosses quite knew what to do with me. I did have a successor, but I don't think he had a successor. As time went on, of course, with localisation, more and more of these kinds of jobs were done by our Italian staff.

SR: So is that why you said in your notes that it wasn't an easy posting?

TR: No, it wasn't an easy posting in terms of work, because I always had this feeling that the local staff knew far more than I did and that there was no real point in my second guessing them.

SR: But in terms of being paid to live in Italy...

TR: Oh, that was wonderful. I got all round the country. I enjoyed myself and had good Italian friends. I met my future wife! I don't think that I expected to go back to Italy at that point. I was quite surprised when I did. I was very grateful to see Italy. I hadn't expected to see it. I think John was a bit disappointed that the job hadn't worked out as he had anticipated. But there wasn't something like another British week to prepare for: that would probably have been a full-time job.

Towards the end, the first bomb exploded in Milan, not far from the Consulate. We heard it. Little did we know that it was the prelude to Italy's 'years of lead' - and the Red Brigades. The great boom years were over.

1970: Secondment to Rothschild's

SR: So you came back to London and went on secondment to Rothschild's. That was an unusual move then, wasn't it?

TR: I was absolutely amazed. I had had a secondment already in Ghana. I was twenty-nineish and fairly gullible, but not altogether stupid. I wondered why they wanted to make me go on secondment again. I was beginning to worry that I didn't really understand how the Office worked. I hadn't spent much time there. A year and a half in Dar and three years in Milan and a year in Ghana ... and only about a year in NENAD, a lot of which was taken up by special courses. Also I felt I hadn't really been in what you might call a heartland Department or indeed a large Embassy. I was a bit upset about that. We were starting to talk again about the European Community. Heath was about to come to power. So I was a bit surprised with this posting to Rothschild's. I tend to think it was because someone senior in the Foreign Office at, say, Under Secretary level, met someone senior in Rothschild's, maybe a partner, and they all got to talking over a nice glass of wine and agreed that Rothschild's would send someone to the Foreign Office and the Foreign Office would second someone to Rothschild's. I'm not sure if Rothschild's itself ever did, but there were merchant bankers in my time doing jobs like Financial Attaché in Tokyo - a highly intelligent appointment.

All that said, I learned a lot about finance. I went round all the bank's departments. Export credits had a young chap called Norman Lamont. The family were good to me. But, for the record, women were virtually invisible, other than the PAs and one or two librarians. It was a male dominated world.

The big thing in my few months was the Eurodollar or Eurobond market. These were all the dollars slurring around Europe that couldn't, usually for tax reasons, be repatriated back to America and the companies didn't particularly want them. So what the banks did very cleverly was to collect and bundle them all up, and then on-lend the dollars to countries who wanted dollar-denominated loans. It was a new business, started in London by what were

still called the merchant banks. We were a few years away from the Big Bang. Rothschild's was one of the senior merchant banks, still owned by the family, with connections everywhere. My time there was notable - not that I was involved particularly - because the bank negotiated and then sold the first bond offering by a Communist country, Hungary. This was goulash Communism under Kadar. It actually wasn't a very good idea. It's rather like taking out a loan from the Chinese these days. A lot of the East European countries, who desperately needed money and weren't going to get it from the Soviet Union, started borrowing heavily from the West. Of course, at a certain point, the problem arose of how to repay these loans. By that time, I was well away from Rothschild's.

1971-73: Financial Policy and Aid Department (FPAD), Foreign Office

Then I learnt that I was going to transfer to Financial Policy and Aid Department. So I said to myself, "Ah! They have a plan. How exciting." Peter Marshall was the Head of FPAD and Catherine Pestell was one of the Deputy Heads. She later became President of an Oxford college.

FPAD was one of what I call the tracker departments. Essentially, the Foreign Office had a whole network of functional departments, whose main job was to see what the foreign policy aspects of home departments' work were, influence where necessary and, in turn, understand the domestic constraints. Now, in the case of the Treasury, it was pretty hopeless. You were banging your head against the most powerful Department in Whitehall. They reckoned - and still reckon - that they knew exactly what has to be done.

But it was an interesting time to be in Whitehall. 1971 saw the 'Nixon shock' when the dollar went off the gold standard and floated. We followed suit the next year. In 1972 - not yet in the EEC - we also joined a short-lived first attempt at European economic and monetary union. It was called the Snake in the Tunnel, the ERM. The Snake was 2.25% either side of parity. Basically, the Europeans were trying to hold relatively fixed rates between their currencies in a world that otherwise was floating. It lasted in our case for two or three years and then we crashed along with Ireland and Italy. The weaker brethren, I suppose you might say. The sterling area more or less came to an end at that point, leaving the whole problem of how to run down the sterling balances, much of which were held in London. Finally, in 1973, there came Yom Kippur and the first OPEC price hike in, I think,

October followed by another price hike in December, and further hikes right through to 1979 when the Shah fell. I think I read somewhere that, on average, oil prices at the end of the decade were, in real terms, ten times what they had been at the beginning. So there was a cocktail of floating currencies, oil and other commodity price rises and huge inflation. A lot of power seemed to pass to the primary producers, be they of oil, rubber, cocoa or anything else. Developing countries foresaw the great days of the start of a new international economic order. All this came into sharp focus when I went to New York later, although I wasn't dealing with it there.

So it was an interesting time to be in London. But what did the Foreign Office want me to do? I'm not trying to sound immodest, but thanks to training in Rothschild's and a little bit of work in Milan, I think I could say that I knew more about financial affairs and money than most people in the Foreign Office, other than our excellent Economists, with whom I worked very closely. The problem was how to convert this raw material into something of use. I got involved in one or two scrapes with the Treasury. Exchange control was still in force in those days. That was hurting a lot of residents of Britain. For example, West Indians who traditionally wanted to send some money back and over time build their retirement home back in the Caribbean. We tried this on with the Treasury, but they were not going to relax exchange controls, even by a little. And they didn't like me phoning the Bank of England directly to find out how the currency markets were moving.

SR: And you were a Resident Clerk at this time. Did you ask to do this?

TR: It wasn't compulsory. I had come back in 1970, having desperately saved 10% of the price of a flat to get a mortgage. I wanted to be fairly close to the Office, so I bought in Pimlico, just round the corner from where I live now. This was, unusually for the area, a new build. Anyway, I finally moved in in 1971. On the one hand, I wanted to stay in my own little flat, but on the other I could do with the money from renting it out and staying in the Foreign Office as a Resident Clerk. Do we still have them, by the way?

SR: No, they've been replaced by a professional out of hours team.

TR: That's good, because your work rate when you have been up all night is not great.

SR: What were the Resident Clerks' flats like?

TR: There was a study, a bathroom, a bedroom and a stripped-down kitchen. There were four of them on the Horseguards Parade side. I was on the other side, overlooking the Treasury, at the far end of St James's Park. It didn't make much difference where you were.

Being a Resident Clerk did mean you could speak directly to the Foreign Secretary from time to time. I had to get hold of Alec Douglas-Home a few times. There were some terrible moments when the Libyans told a British Airways flight on the way to Africa to land at Benghazi Airport. In other words they wanted to hijack it. I was on duty at the time. The plane was still within international airspace. It could have turned round. This was in the days before instant communications, you were holding a fixed line to the emergency desk in British Airways - or was it BOAC in those days? - to ask if they couldn't turn the plane back. That's what I had been told to do by the Department. British Airways said they couldn't because they were being threatened. That may have been bluster. Fair enough, though, as they had a responsibility towards their passengers. They landed and a Sudanese dissident was taken off and later handed on to the tender mercies of whichever Sudanese government was in charge at the time. That was a pretty harrowing night. Another time, the Crown Prince of Ethiopia was badly ill. We got a message. I had no instructions. Maybe it was my African past. I thought we should try to get him to hospital here. I had no authority for this. I suggested the RAF send a flight out and, bless them, they did. I don't know who paid the bill.

So those were my three years. I had applied earlier for another post in London and I was about to go to the Tokyo desk. I had started priming up on Japan. At the last moment, there was yet another financial crisis. Peter Marshall asked me to stay on. It probably did me no harm in the end.

1974-78: UK Mission to United Nations (UKMIS), New York

SR: So now we move to 1974 and your posting to UKMIS New York.

TR: I really wanted to go there. My future wife, Alex, was still in Milan, but as a good American she gave me lots of introductions to family and friends, so I didn't spend all my

days with the diplomatic mafia. I'd never been to the States, but I managed to find time to drive across the country and back. Wonderful. And then the main thrust of my new job was to represent Britain on the UN's Fourth, or Decolonisation Committee, along with responsibility for any African issues that came before the UN - except for Rhodesia as it then was, which a colleague of mine dealt with full-time. That tied in a bit with my earlier African background, there were clear responsibilities, and what's not to like about multilateral diplomacy? I stayed in New York nearly four and a half years, so this was one of the longest postings I ever had. And a great one.

The Fourth Committee, like all the other General Assembly committees, only met in the autumn. The rest of the year the Committee of 24 met. Its name sounds like something from the days of Robespierre. Its official title was much longer, but essentially it had been set up by the non-aligned to monitor the colonial powers and press them to grant their dependent territories independence. We had an obligation under the original UN Charter to provide annual reports on our activities as an administering power - purely factual stuff - and the Fourth Committee debated each territory every autumn. We had no such obligation to accept the Committee of 24's remit and indeed Ted Heath's Conservative government had given up its seat on the Committee and refused to cooperate with it. But Labour returned to power in the 1974 election, shortly after I arrived, and for the rest of my time we resumed cooperation, though not resuming our membership.

Decolonisation (and disarmament) were big Labour policy planks, so in a sense I was swimming with the tide. Under a Conservative government I would have had a harder time, though still an exciting one. By 1974 our big ex-colonies were all independent, and what were left were for the most part small island states in the Caribbean, Indian Ocean and Pacific. I visited three of them as representative of the administering power and general bag carrier when I accompanied missions from the Committee of 24. These had been invited by HMG to show we had nothing to hide. Can you imagine the joys of visiting the Gilbert and Ellice Islands (now Kiribati and Tuvalu) to witness a referendum in the Ellice on separation from the Gilberts? Arriving at each coral island on a leaky old steamer and being transported to land on a dugout canoe? A pity the missionaries had imposed prohibition, but you can't have everything. I went with two other missions to the British Virgin Islands and to Montserrat, the latter before the terrible volcanic eruption which still blots out half the island. Labour was in a hurry to decolonise - too quickly for people like the Seychelles' first Prime

Minister, James Mancham, who wanted integration with Britain, or for some of the West Indian Associated States.

Other colonial powers were less cooperative. The French got away with it. The Portuguese didn't cooperate either, but then their empire collapsed not that long after I got to New York. The Americans had an uneasy relationship with the Committee and there were annual skirmishes over Puerto Rico's status, not surprisingly since Cuba was on the Committee. In a politer way, Malaysia raised questions about the status of Brunei and each time, for reasons I won't go into here, I ritually walked out of the committee room. But on the whole we had good working relations. That helped us later as I'll tell you when we come to Belize. And it may have helped that the Committee chairman was a Tanzanian.

These were the sort of issues that I could deal with by myself. The others needed heavier lifting from time to time, and that meant bringing in my Permanent Representative, Ivor Richard, or his deputy, James Murray.

SR: You mentioned Ivor Richard. Can I just interject and ask what he was like?

TR: I liked him a lot. He had a difficult start. He'd lost his Commons seat in the first 1974 election, and when it became clear that Wilson, with his tiny majority, was going to seek a new election later that same year, he decided to run again. As he was in New York by then, his wife managed the constituency for him. He lost and then he really got down to the UKMIS job. He had a very quick and agile mind, and of course was a good speaker - we mere diplomats envied his loquacity, his lovely British habit of addressing his Security Council colleagues 'with respect' before he disagreed with them. He learned from Harold Wilson the great art of sucking your pipe when on TV and pretending to relight, while you worked out what the hell to say. I was reminded of that years later, on returning to New York, when the US Perm Rep, Tom Pickering, took possession of one of the first mobile phones. It came from the Defense Department and it weighed a ton. Pickering pretended to be speaking into it when he left the Security Council consultation room and didn't want to talk to waiting journalists. (David Hannay ordered one up. But these gizmos were very heavy and the number three of our mission was awarded the important but onerous task of phone carrier.)

Ivor had no side. I often had to ask if he'd mind lobbying some Perm Rep - say on South Africa or Belize - and he was game, if sometimes nonplussed. When he wanted to be rough,

he could be very rough indeed. He tore into the Swedish mission when (without consulting us) they decided to introduce a Chapter VII resolution in the Security Council on sanctions against Rhodesia, that's to say a mandatory one. He went incandescent and accused them of trying to be goody boys with the Africans. Eventually the Swedes withdrew their draft, but said they only did so because the UK had a fellow socialist government (not their purer sort of socialism - those were the days of Olof Palme). Some of my colleagues said he was a bit lazy; what I admired was his great openness and lack of pomposity. We saw each other over the years.

I want to mention James Murray briefly. I worked to him for a couple of years on Namibia, ex-South West Africa, on which more later. I've read a fierce criticism of him in one of the BDOHP oral memoirs. From my lowly angle, he did a first-rate job in New York. When the Council eventually adopted a resolution on the steps to Namibian independence, David Owen was in New York with his fellow Foreign Ministers of Canada, France, the FRG and the United States. He organised a testimonial for James, who was kind enough later to give me a copy with his own testimonial. Late in my posting, I spent many weeks flying around Africa with Ivor and James, on Rhodesian and Namibian business respectively.

SR: What were the trickiest issues you faced?

TR: Mostly Belize, Namibia and, at the very end, Rhodesia. You might be surprised that I don't add South Africa, which was also part of my portfolio, but in truth the annual General Assembly confrontation had a sort of ritualism about it - a dozen or more hostile resolutions, little changed from year to year, most of which we voted against or abstained on, the (EC) Europeans, then nine in number, torn every which way. The real drama came in the Security Council, and in 1977, I think it was, we, the French and Americans (Carter had shortly before become President) accepted an arms embargo against South Africa. From a New York perspective, our direct dealings with the South Africans in those days were much more to do with Rhodesia and Namibia.

SR: Did you not have European coordination?

TR: Yes, but it was in its infancy. And Britain and Ireland were unlikely to agree on these sorts of texts, for obvious reasons. The same problem arose in the case of the ex-Spanish Sahara later on, where the EC divided their votes four ways on two very different (Moroccan

and Algerian) resolutions about it before coming together in an unheroic (and illogical) common abstention.

I'll spare you the history of Guatemala's dispute with us over Belize, which goes back to the 1850s, but they claimed Belize and that was blocking its move to independence. They'd probably have settled for less, but the Belize government under George Price was against making any concessions, and it was their country. So we decided to launch a G.A. resolution calling for Belizean independence. A bit cheeky since we were one of the dreaded colonial powers, but we had great support from the independent Commonwealth West Indians and from the Committee of 24 itself. There must have been about 130 UN members in those days, and only a half dozen or so took Guatemala's side, mainly those countries with territorial claims of their own. We paid special attention to the Americans because of their huge interests in Central America. A delegation from Washington came to grill me, and I swear that some were wearing dark glasses! In the end the Americans abstained. We had to persuade the Belizean lobbyists not to be too chummy with the Cubans - a red rag to a bull. I worked very hard on that resolution. It strengthened our hand. We continued to negotiate with the Guatemalans. The government asked Ivor Richard to lead for our side, and I and a FCO Director accompanied him on various Central American visits. It all worked out happily in the end.

SR: Tell me about your work on Namibia.

TR: In my last eighteen months or so in New York, the Namibian question dominated my time. This was another legacy of history. South Africa occupied German South West Africa in 1918 and was given a League of Nations mandate to administer it. By the time I got to New York the UN had revoked the trusteeship, the ICJ had ruled that South Africa's occupation was illegal, and the UN had appointed a Council of Namibia - all of them New York-based diplomats - as a sort of trusteeship authority in exile. This was a strange arrangement and of course the South Africans disregarded it. But in 1974-5 the Portuguese empire fell apart and in 1976 Carter became US President and appointed Andy Young, Martin Luther King's close associate, as his Perm Rep at the UN, and a highly respected black professor, Don McHenry, as Young's No.2. McHenry was a brilliant man. He advocated engagement with South Africa, rather than always being on the defensive, as we were at the time, and he argued quite rightly that with the independence of Angola and Mozambique South Africa's northern frontier was now exposed. The proposal was that the

five Western countries then on the Security Council should seize this opportunity to negotiate independence for Namibia (as I'll call it from now on) following a democratic election supervised by United Nations monitors, both civilian and military. The five in question were the Americans and ourselves, the French and the newly elected Canadians and Germans. The idea was launched at a convivial meal at an East side restaurant called The Leopard. The New York deputy Perm Reps were chosen to conduct the initiative, and were generally known as the Gang of Five.

It's hard to explain today how difficult it was to conduct multilateral diplomacy outside a settled venue like New York or Geneva. Over the next eighteen months or so, the five Western powers talked to South Africa; to SWAPO, the liberation movement recognised as such by an overwhelming UN majority; to the 'Front Line States', Zambia, Botswana, Angola, Mozambique and Tanzania ('front line' no longer, but Nyerere was a respected statesman); to Nigeria (as the biggest African state); and to the Nordic countries, as having influence in the region. Communications were primitive: mobile phones didn't exist. Scheduled air services, especially on an East-West axis across the continent, were few and far between. It was PanAm or Ethiopian Airlines, as and when they were available. Messages and other written texts had to be agreed between the Five in New York, approved by their five capitals, and then sent to the Five's ambassadors in the country concerned for transmission to the South Africans, Zambians or whoever. I did a lot of the drafting - the Brits in New York had a good reputation for this, and most of the recipients had English as at least their second language. People liked my stuff. I have a nice line of appreciation from my German colleague, who wrote a book on the negotiations.

Then, in November and December 1977, the Five embarked on a mammoth tour of Africa and I was lucky enough to be taken along. I have a problem here since only two months later I embarked on a similar tour with Ivor Richard - on Rhodesian business - and I've forgotten which heads of state or government I met on which visit. I'll take them together. I never got to Angola - the small jet that the Americans chartered wasn't big enough for us all - but otherwise got to see all the then heads of government and Foreign Ministers in the area. Well, the most impressive were Vorster and Machel of Mozambique. Each conveyed an aura of power. Vorster was kind enough to invite Ivor Richard's team to his home somewhere west of Port Elizabeth. Our venison came from a deer he had shot himself on the Karoo. There were few servants, and they were all white. He was politeness itself. A helicopter buzzed overhead, and he told us that South Africa would never have majority rule in his

lifetime. He was right, because he died in 1983. Machel of Mozambique received our delegation in the old Portuguese Governor's building, revamped as the Presidential palace - a rococo construction with, in the reception room, a rather jarring gift from the Peoples' Republic of China, a large black fist raised menacingly towards the ceiling. Kaunda, always an emotional man, wept at some stage. Seretse Khama was courteous and wise, but his country was small and vulnerable. Sam Nujoma of SWAPO - whom we chased all around the region - was obdurate, but then he had to be since militarily he was weak and his support was essentially the United Nations majority. On my later - Rhodesian - visit, I also met Ian Smith, Muzorewa, Sithole, Nkomo and Mugabe. We stayed in what I was sure was a heavily bugged hotel and we were taken deliberately to a sanctions-busting tobacco factory. This was a time of transition in Rhodesia, but for different reasons both Smith and the Labour government were running out of steam - it took an election and Mrs Thatcher's willingness to accept an interim return to British sovereignty to unblock the agreement that led to Zimbabwe's independence, and even then it needed Machel's pressure upon Mugabe to achieve this goal. It's so wrong to judge people by a chance meeting. All I can say is that, when we met them in Mozambique, Nkomo smiled and Mugabe never did.

This Rhodesian tour happened by accident. Ivor had chaired fruitless talks in Geneva in late 1977. They'd broken down and London decided in classic diplomatic style that, rather than have a damaging vacuum, Ivor should embark on a tour of the region even if he (and London) had nothing very new to offer. It seemed odd to me at the time, but I came to realise that sometimes you have to put the car into neutral, pending new decisions. For various reasons, our UKMIS Rhodesia desk officer wasn't available and I stood in for him at short notice, the only time I dealt directly with Rhodesia. I wasn't wild about this since I knew I was in my last few months and I'd already been out of New York for quite a time. But when you're a bachelor ..! I have never regretted these lengthy tours, and they taught me a lot. Neither Namibia nor Rhodesia was resolved by the time I left in the spring of 1978. By that time the Five had tabled their proposal for a Namibian settlement as a Security Council document. At the time, we all thought that Namibia would be an easier nut to crack than Rhodesia, and indeed that a peaceful settlement in the former might help produce a settlement in the latter. How wrong we were. There were various loopholes in the Five's proposal - and as Don McHenry himself admitted at the time, deliberate obfuscations - that came back to haunt it. In particular, the draft agreement stipulated that during the election period SWAPO troops should be restricted 'to base', without specifying where the base or bases were, inside or

outside Namibian territory. Anyway, it took another ten years before Namibia became independent, because the whole issue got mixed up with the presence of Cuban troops in Angola. When I returned to New York in the summer of 1989, Namibia was still on the UN's books - but only for a few more months - and the issue of SWAPO's bases, wherever they might be, and their cantonment under UN military supervision was still very live. The overall agreement was, in its essentials, the one the Five had negotiated all those years before.

SR: Did you make any other overseas trips?

TR: Yes, but in lower key, one to Mozambique and the other to Nigeria, both to conferences organised by the Special Committee against Apartheid. They were intended as political pressure on South Africa, but nothing much came of them and the South Africans were kind enough to supply food and wine for the delegations in Maputo. In Lagos, where the meeting was held in a conference centre recently built by the Bulgarians - loose wires everywhere - the food was also a topic for discussion, but only because a lot of it had been flown in pre-cooked from London and the francophones turned up their noses.

It was good to have had some responsibilities that were fairly clearly defined. There was a flip side, I came to realise later. I doubt I thought much about the wider picture - the Security Council's inaction in the Cold War years, the Assembly's dominance (at least if words meant anything), the tussles over the New International Economic Order, and on the positive side the important Law of the Sea negotiations. In a sense I was doing a winding up job, but it had to be done, and done peacefully if possible. It was always busy and seldom dull. I learnt how important the mantra 'non-intervention in the internal affairs of a member state' - roughly the language of the founding Charter - was to so many delegations, and still is today, even if the old anti-colonialism has in a sense been overtaken by wider concerns about western interventionism, the Right to Protect, and so on.

You mustn't think I spent all my time at the UN. I got around the Eastern seaboard a lot, walked in the Catskills, took lightning visits to Santa Fe and New Orleans. But it was time to get back to London.

1978-79: Energy, Science and Space Department, FCO

SR: Good morning. It's the first of April today. Tom, after your time in New York, you went back to the Foreign Office to be the Deputy Head of Energy, Science and Space Department (ESSD). Was that a surprise?

TR: A little bit. Another new area although I suppose the Foreign Office thought my experience of financial departments might come in handy. I had a very nice letter while I was still in New York from the Head of ESSD, David Hannay. He talked cheerfully about climbing the face of the Eiger. The Department of Energy was different from the Treasury which has always been the most powerful department in Whitehall. It was different because, first, it was a very new department, at the Cabinet level, a child of the various OPEC crises of the 1970s, culminating in the further crisis in 1979 when the Shah fell. I arrived just about at that time. That was one factor. The other factor was that North Sea oil and gas were now coming through quite fast, so we had become an energy-producing power. This raised political questions. Certainly, the Foreign Office had a lot to offer, because we had posts in all the OPEC countries with a particularly strong profile, I suppose, in the Middle East. We could therefore collaborate on reasonably equal terms with the newly formed Department of Energy. David Hannay, as you might expect, knew very much what he wanted. It is worth adding that one of the by-products of the creation of this new Department was that we had seconded some people to form its nascent international affairs side. One of them was Gillian Brown, who later ended up as Ambassador in Norway - a very appropriate posting for her. On her return to the FCO, she was my Under Secretary. By common consent between her and David, she continued to focus on the work she'd been doing in the Department of Energy which, apart from setting up their international affairs side, was to negotiate and keep an eye on the newly formed International Energy Agency. You never hear much about it now. It was basically the OECD countries, minus the French who, for whatever reason, declined to be members of it, but its headquarters remained in Paris. It was essentially a Western club of oil and gas consumers: how to tackle the producers, how to manage austerity and commit to holding national reserves, how to manage transfers of fossil fuels if OPEC countries ratcheted even more tightly. So that was interesting.

The head of the Department of Energy, of course, was Tony Benn. I don't think it's any great secret that Jim Callaghan and Tony Benn were not on the best of terms. By that time,

Callaghan was Prime Minister. He tended to keep Benn away from matters nuclear. I will leave it at that. But when I started thinking back, Benn had a number of quite good ideas. I shall never know whether it made sense to create the British National Oil Corporation. Part of the deal, when new slices of our sector of the North Sea were offered to oil producers like Shell, BP and the American giants, was that once they'd got their allotment, part of it should be handed over to a state oil company which was BNOC. It was disbanded a few years later, one of Margaret Thatcher's early privatisations. Still, since we've never set up a state oil reserve fund for future generations like the Norwegians and others, there was a germ of an idea in BNOC and I don't think it should be laughed out of court. Benn also spent a lot of time trying to create an installation and refinery industry centred around Aberdeen. It actually succeeded rather well for a number of years and we exported expertise to other countries. So it wasn't all one-way.

During those difficult years, we evolved a policy that we would only sell our North Sea oil and gas to existing customers. We were getting pestered by a number of countries around the world, some of which we didn't really want to sell oil to for political reasons. So it seemed safest to say that we would carry on trading in these difficult times with the people we already traded with. I'd like to think - I still delude myself - that I had a germ of this idea fairly early. In the end, it was a joint effort - though more Foreign Office than Department of Energy. It served us quite well when we were under pressure.

Somewhat to my surprise, I was called back to matters African in the shape of the now forgotten Bingham Report. This taught me a lot about how the Cabinet Office works and about how ministers work. In Britain, we applied sanctions against Ian Smith's Rhodesia, in particular on Rhodesian imports of oil, because the country was very vulnerable. And for that purpose we created something called the Beira Patrol, which was one or two ships hovering outside Beira port, because the main oil pipeline went from Beira into Southern Rhodesia. We could do nothing about oil exports by land from South Africa to Rhodesia. So the pipeline did assume a certain importance. There were accusations of past collaboration in sanctions violation by some of the oil majors - the names of Lonrho and Tiny Rowland were also mentioned. Callaghan was rather stung by accusations that we had been conniving with Ian Smith. So he asked Lord Bingham, a distinguished High Court judge, involved I think in other government enquiries before, to investigate this. I was delegated, along with someone from Research Department, to look at all the Cabinet and Cabinet Committee papers that

contained discussions of UK sanctions policy against Southern Rhodesia. Callaghan was very confident that those would show that we were absolutely guiltless. We pored over them. Robert Armstrong, the Cabinet Secretary, very kindly gave us, as it were, the keys to the safe. There were quite a lot of them. Obscure Cabinet Committees that I'd never heard of as well as the main, weekly Cabinet. We produced our findings which, as you might guess, were rather inconclusive. There was certainly a lot of discussion but, as I remember, there weren't an awful lot of hard policy decisions one way or the other. You certainly couldn't say we had colluded, but whoever wrote the records of these various meetings had never recorded a killer sentence which said 'We will pursue these smugglers to the ends of the earth.' So Callaghan was pretty fed up with that and our findings died a natural death. One Cabinet minister (I think it was Harold Lever, Minister without Portfolio in the Callaghan government) told David Hannay who, with great presence of mind, was hanging around outside Number 10 in the days when you could walk across Downing Street, that we had got it just about right - this is what had happened. I was consoled by that.

I did spend a lot of time on space policy which was somewhat esoteric. That mainly concerned the Department of Trade and Industry. During those years there was great pressure to set up an organisation - which still exists - called INMARSAT. It's now split into two creatures, both based in London. I'll come back to that. At the beginning, it was all about satellites for use in maritime navigation: the plan was for a dedicated satellite in space, which would help ships in trouble and show them where they were and provide far more accurate readings than you could get from ground level. This is a layman's explanation. So, on the one hand, it was a commercial organisation: it had to procure or build a satellite, send it into orbit and then charge shipping companies for the use they made of it when they put the necessary receiving equipment into their ships. On the other hand, it had a regulatory function within the UN framework for maritime safety and security which was very important. One reason, I seem to remember, for that was the huge amount of piracy in those years, not the piracy we have become more accustomed to outside Somalia, but around the Philippines and Malaysia then, along the big shipping lanes. We negotiated to get the headquarters set up in London. There was a meeting in the rather unattractive bowels of the Department of Trade and Industry. The reason I remember it is because it was the first glimmering that we were moving out of an area of state control, state companies, state monopolies into a more privatised world. This was a year or two before Margaret Thatcher came to power. Or, come to that, Ronald Reagan. I say that because every representative at

that international meeting was from a state - nationalised - telecommunications authority, except the Americans, where the government had decided that a private company would be authorised to speak for the United States. I think that created misunderstandings. There were certainly altercations ... I'll put it that way ... over a rather indifferent lunch at the Department of Trade and Industry. But when I think back - because I got more involved later on in space matters when I joined the think tank - this was the first whiff I had that the tectonic plates were shifting a bit. INMARSAT has now become two creatures. One is purely private and commercial. It buys or makes the satellites, sells the product and puts the software on (which is what makes the money these days). The regulatory function is still a UN organisation, called something different: the IMO.

So that's my year and a half. Except for the most important event - I married Alex. She and I had first met in Milan all those years ago.

1980-81: Counsellor attached to Central Policy Review Staff

Towards the end of my time, the end of 1979, I was told I was going to be promoted and seconded to the Central Policy Review Staff, otherwise known as the Think Tank. I thought, "Oh my God, another secondment!" There was a guaranteed Foreign Office place amongst the fifteen or so mid-career officials who comprised the CPRS. Some were civil servants, others were secondees from the private sector.

It was a Ted Heath creation and Heath used it heavily. You know what I sometimes feel when I listen to the Today programme and there's some luckless Minister being grilled by John Humphrys or whoever and then he turns to Laura Kuenssberg and asks her, "What do you think of that?" I mean, if I were a Minister, I wouldn't want to have my remarks corrected and marked by Laura Kuenssberg. Why go on the programme? Well, the CPRS was rather like that in Ted Heath's day. There was one notorious meeting at Chequers when the CPRS produced a paper, in effect, on 'How is Britain Inc. Doing?', analysing and criticising various ministries and Heath sat there happily, but the departmental Ministers were furious of course. So I think the lesson is that if a think tank, a policy unit at the centre of government is not personally and consistently backed by the Prime Minister, the rats are going to get at it.

My first boss, for approximately one week or it might have been two, was Ken Berrill. He'd already been read the riot act by Margaret Thatcher, who had just come to power. After Berrill came Robin Ibbs. I think of him as the British Rex Tillerson.

SR: He was a businessman, wasn't he?

TR: Yes, ICI. He was what I call a company man. He wanted clear instructions, clear lines of organisation. The CPRS under Ken Berrill had been a bit more free-thinking and the staff were all encouraged to go their own way. They sometimes produced some outlandish ideas and these might be voted down or suppressed. But they were supposed to ask the questions that nobody else would ask.

SR: What they call blue sky thinking these days?

TR: Yes. Margaret Thatcher later called it the Ministry of Bright Thinking and she wasn't being polite. It was clear that she wanted a more disciplined CPRS. And the things which really interested Ibbs were the things which were beginning to emerge in the light of day: what to do about nationalised industries. The changes began slowly. The big privatisations of the state behemoths like British Gas and British Telecom - they all came later in her second term, which only began in 1983, by which time I had moved to Rome. But the sands started to shift in my time there.

There were two particular problems. One concerned the fact that the nationalised industries never got enough money from the Treasury for new, modernising investment, and that has always been the main argument in favour of privatisation. It applied with particular force to the water industry with all the leaks, but it applied in other sectors too. So we were asked, from time to time, to look at British Steel or British Telecom, sometimes, as I recall, with the active connivance of the Departments responsible. They thought perhaps the CPRS could achieve a rethink which they couldn't do alone. The other side of it were awkward companies like British Leyland, working in a competitive private sector but entirely dependent by then on huge injections of state aid which, naturally, the Treasury hated. It was run by a man called Michael Edwardes who, by all accounts, was a very good Chief Executive. But he'd been sold a pup. He'd been handed a merger of the old Morris and Austin with Leyland which, until that time, had been a relatively profitable company. So Robin Ibbs seized very much on British Leyland. My recollection is that he persuaded the government that there should be no more state investment in it. That was a harsh decision but

one which, as a businessman, he felt well qualified to argue. In that, at least, his views coincided with those of Margaret Thatcher.

I had no part in the Leyland business, but I did do some work on British Steel and on British Telecom. Lots of factory visits, visits to the North of England which, I freely confess, I did not know as well as I should. Sheffield, Rotherham, places like that, seeing some of these huge factories, listening to all the concerns. Competition, obviously: every country wanted a steel mill by then. And the government was giving export credit to British companies to supply steel mills to our future foreign competitors! British Telecom was an egregious example of what you shouldn't use a think tank for. They desperately wanted a new headquarters building. They had a very shabby place, rather like the Department of Trade and Industry, just behind St Paul's. The Treasury said they hadn't got the money for a new place. British Telecom said they needed something more efficient. Communications were entering a new stage - more wiring under floors and ceilings - this was why so much of business moved to Canary Wharf. New buildings with stronger payloads. So we were asked to investigate that: even at the time, it did seem to me absurd that we should get involved in what was basically micro policy.

The other thing I got involved in was space. I took my interest over from Energy, Science and Space Department as I thought I could make a contribution. I seem to remember that, at DTI urging, the CPRS was tasked - and I suppose Mrs Thatcher must have approved - to do a review of UK space policy in the round. Now that was something the CPRS was well designed to do, as you had your little enclaves throughout Whitehall: there was the DTI which had an interest in civilian satellites, both domestic and European; there was the military who had their own military satellites; there were the research people; the weather satellites for the Meteorological Office; and - something which I didn't understand although I had a colleague at the CPRS who did - all the software which went into them. (In those days, novices like me were primed to think in terms of heavy, clunky Soyuz 2 satellites and not so much of the software they actually carried, which is what does the research and other tasks and makes the money.) So there was a wide range of interested departments and I and two colleagues brought them together and produced a report, not a bad one. What it really needed was some Minister who could crack heads together and try to work out priorities.

Government only had a limited amount of money, so the question was what to invest in and whether to specialise. Should we put all our eggs into Europe? We were a member by then of the European Space Agency. Did we want to work with the Americans? We ended up

with a committee chaired by a junior minister: that was very much a plan B. The more ambitious ideas were excised on the way. Nevertheless, it was an interesting report of a snapshot in time. By the way, in all our visits to steel or telecoms or space industries, we did not meet a single woman in any position of responsibility, either in the private sector or in the state nationalised sector.

Would the CPRS have survived? I left at the end of 1981 on a posting to Rome. I hadn't quite finished two years. Shortly after the election of 1983, it was abolished. Ibbs had left by then. I think the last straw was that Mrs Thatcher wanted to reduce state spending and the CPRS - with the encouragement of the Treasury - were encouraged to do some radical thinking. The CPRS came up with some suggestions which would not raise so many eyebrows today. For example, student loans - completely unthinkable back in 1982. Paying something for your visits to hospitals or your GP. More private health insurance. Well, you can imagine: all the spending departments pitched in and that was the end. Mrs Thatcher's biographer, Hugo Young, has told the story more fully. The report leaked and the CPRS was blamed.

So there we are. It was fascinating while it lasted. I learnt a lot about how the Cabinet Office and central government work. And I valued the chance to focus on what were largely domestic policy issues.

1982 - 6: Head of Chancery, Rome

SR: That brings us to Rome. Did you ask to go there?

TR: A good friend of mine from New York days was Head of Personnel. He told me there was this vacancy coming up, because the Counsellor and Head of Chancery in Rome was about to be appointed as Ambassador to a Middle Eastern country. As I had been in Milan, I was an obvious candidate for the post. He asked me if I was interested, but warned me that there were some problems in Rome. Part of the problem, I was given to understand, was an Ambassador who was very nervous about threats from the Red Brigade and Irish security problems. He went round everywhere in an armour plated car. These cars were just beginning to find their way into the Foreign Office system in certain countries. I was given the impression that he was not easy to work for. The Ambassador in question, Ronald Arculus, is now dead. He could be difficult, but he had many good qualities. He had fought

in Italy during the war, spoke excellent Italian. He understood the Italian mentality backwards and forwards and he knew how to operate an often opaque system. I think he was probably as effective an Ambassador in dealing with the Italians as we had had for quite a long time.

The other problem was staff accommodation. There was one basic difficulty: everyone naturally wanted to live in historical old Rome, but historical old Rome was rather expensive. A lot of our younger First Secretaries really didn't want to live in what they regarded as the boondocks of Rome.

I think I was very naive when I went out because I thought, "Hey, you're in Rome, one of the loveliest cities in the world. Just enjoy it and be happy." I freely admit I made a mistake there: it took me some time to realise that there were a lot of little resentments under the surface. I who had been in Italy before was more inured. This is a diversion, but I should say that I was very glad I had been in Milan before Rome. Not many diplomats do Italy that way round. Rome was not - and still is not - Paris or London. It's more like Washington to Milan's New York. You had, of course, the government, the parliament, the Church and the state industries who needed to be near the Ministers who took decisions and dispensed favours. And tourists. But Rome wasn't a real capital city. Indeed, most of the parliamentarians from the North of Italy spent, if they could, only three days a week there and pushed back home as quickly as they could. I'll come back to that in the context of my final tour as Ambassador, when I made a lot of contacts simply by going to the North at weekends and attending various events there and meeting people whom I would never have met in Rome.

I had two jobs, really. One was Political and Economic Counsellor, which I enjoyed. I made a lot of contacts. I was lucky because I had worked in Italy before and particularly lucky because of Alex, who had been a practising journalist in Italy before she married me and introduced me to a lot of her Italian chums. Very helpful people who, in turn, introduced me to other people. One of these journalists wrote a very pro-British piece in Italy's top weekly magazine when the Falklands war started. But the politicians ... neither of us had had any experience of them. This was virgin territory. I also called on the people at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from time to time. So I enjoyed that part of my work.

The managerial side ... well I've referred to that already. We had - and still have - two buildings in Rome. We have the modern Embassy Chancery offices near Porta Pia, the Basil

Spence creation. There were very few modern buildings inside the Aurelian Walls of Rome, the outer walls. I rather liked the building, although it was often criticised. It was on the site of our old Embassy cum Residence which had been blown up by the Stern Gang in 1946, just before the independence of Israel.

This is a slight detour but I might as well tell you the story. We had to find a new Residence and new offices. We went to the Italians. This was just after the war. We asked them if they could find us a new building. They replied that the Germans weren't doing anything at that time and offered us their Embassy. And that is what we have. Villa Wolkonsky was the German Embassy of the interwar years.

SR: That's the one with the viaduct in the garden?

TR: Yes, the Roman viaduct and crematorium. So the British Ambassador moved to Villa Wolkonsky with all his staff and that's where he had his Residence, and a lovely one it was, with a swimming pool which was built for the state visit of Hitler to Italy in 1938, I think. There is a dispute as to whether it was actually used or not. Anyway, it was a smart piece of work to get the money necessary to build it. Our own Embassy staff moved back to Porta Pia when the new building was opened in 1971. So we had large, vacant offices and they had remained empty for many years. When Tom Bridges became Ambassador, I advised him to go ahead and convert it into staff accommodation. This was the only way to stop all the fuss over privately rented accommodation. I don't think anyone who dealt with it was entirely happy with the idea of having a staff compound in the middle of a friendly Western capital. It's the sort of thing you expect where there are screaming protesters outside your front door, as it were. But, nevertheless, it made a lot of financial sense and indeed is the main reason why we are still in Villa Wolkonsky. A very large proportion of our home-based staff now live alongside the Ambassador. It works all right. The grounds are big enough for everyone.

Italy at the time. I think it's safe to say that, just as no one really - whatever they say now - predicted the collapse of the Soviet Empire, no one that I can remember predicted the collapse of the post-war Italian political system. We're talking about what Italians know as *Tangentopoli* which roughly translates as 'Bribesville'. In 1991 - 1992 it brought down the entire political system. I had left by then. I left Rome in 1986, so I was there in the last days of Christian Democrat supremacy. They'd been around since the war, or at least since the Communists were ousted from coalition governments in 1947. And, as you might imagine, they got a bit lazy in power and quite corrupt, too. There isn't a Christian Democrat party

now. It's disappeared. So has the Communist Party, their chief adversary. It was the 'Little World of Don Camillo': the Communists eternally in opposition and the Christian Democrats eternally in government. Andreotti, seven times Prime Minister, much disliked by Margaret Thatcher, seemed to me the only Italian Minister I knew with a sense of humour. He was responsible for at least two *bons mots*. One was, "I love Germany so much that I want there to stay two of them." The other was "Il potere logora chi non ce l'ha" (power wears out those who don't have it). A good aphorism, directed as you might imagine at the Communist Party.

Still, the system was crumbling a bit. The President was a Socialist Resistance hero, a hero from the time he was imprisoned by Mussolini - a man in his 80s, called Pertini. In choosing a new Prime Minister, he started casting his net wider. The Christian Democrats were slowly losing a few percent: they didn't have an absolute majority, it was a relative majority. So Pertini introduced, as Prime Minister, first a man called Spadolini, an amiable, rotund figure from a tiny party called the Republicans. And then, more importantly, a year later, the man who was Prime Minister for most of my time in Rome, Bettino Craxi. The name Bettino bore an unfortunate resemblance to Benito (Mussolini). One of the famous Italian cartoonists always had Bettino Craxi dressed up in a black shirt and appropriate jackboots. He was a tough egg. He ran the Socialist Party, which was not terribly Socialist. The only way they could force their way into a government system hitherto dominated by the Christian Democrats and the Communists was patronage. They managed to get hold of Milan which, then as now, was the most important city in Italy and certainly the leading financial and industrial centre. It was the source of much of the Socialist Party's wealth, which came - there and elsewhere - from kickbacks. This was well documented: I'm saying nothing new.

Our relations with Craxi were correct but not easy. The first time that differences emerged was shortly after my arrival in 1982. The Falklands war. I'd been responsible for decolonisation when working at our mission to the UN in New York and I knew something about the Falklands. Out of solidarity with Britain, the European Community decided upon sanctions against Argentina and particularly upon an arms embargo. That caused great problems for the Italians. Understandably, I think, because half the population of Argentina is of Italian descent, not necessarily second-generation, but even further back. The Italians have always felt - far more than the British - a firm attachment to their emigrés and children of emigrés abroad. We do not have the same level of attachment. (I could bang on about that for some time - witness our voting regulations.) In Italy now there are 15 or 20 MPs in the

Chamber of Deputies who represent Italians in Argentina, Australia, Western Europe or wherever. Anyway, it was a sensitive matter. The Ambassador and I lobbied hard. Most parties in the coalition in Rome were disposed, with some reluctance, to go along with sanctions. Craxi was not: he saw some political gain and took it. Eventually, in the usual way these things happen, the EC rules were relaxed for the Italians (and, I think, for the Irish too). That was the first time I had come across Craxi and he wasn't even Prime Minister then.

When he became Prime Minister, the Milan European Council of 1985 took place on his watch as rotating President of the European Council. Consensus still governed all the actions of heads of state and government. But Craxi put the question of whether there should be a new intergovernmental conference to a vote and Margaret Thatcher was absolutely furious. She lost the vote. Eventually, there was an intergovernmental conference and in 1987 it led to the Single Act.

The third time, which I participated in in a minor way, was pretty dire. It was the fashion in those days to have big meetings of ministers. The Prime Ministers of different European countries would hold bilaterals with their opposite numbers and bring along four or five of their key ministers to do likewise. So you had five or six coming from Britain. Or vice versa. The system was still working in the 1990s when I was Ambassador: I've no idea if it does now. It is quite a big use of resources.

SR: We still have summits with countries like France.

TR: As and when we leave the European Union, I think it should be a high priority of ours to revert, at least with the major European countries. Anyway, it was the Brits' turn to come to Italy in 1986.

SR: In Florence?

TR: Yes it was. I was asked to interpret between Mrs Thatcher and Craxi. In those days, for some reason (possibly on cost grounds?) we didn't employ trained interpreters: it was very silly. No matter how good as a diplomat linguist you think you are, you're never good enough for all the nuances. The meeting between Mrs T and Craxi and the subsequent lunch where they sat next to each other were stony, to say the least. Really stony. In the end, in desperation, Mrs Thatcher asked what Craxi thought about Albania. So there was ten minutes of desultory conversation about whether Albania was changing, in which neither had

the slightest interest. Afterwards, the Italians ... I knew the chap who organised the summit very well ... opened up the famous Vasari Corridor between the Pitti Palace and the Uffizi Gallery. It had been a private walkway for the Grand Dukes of Tuscany in the old Medici golden days. It was part of the Uffizi, but in those days it was not open to visitors. They opened it up and I regret to say that Mrs Thatcher was not terribly interested in artistic delights. She walked straight through the Corridor, took one look at Botticelli and a few others and then left early for the airport. As an exercise in bilateral cooperation, the meeting did not go very well.

I should say a few words about the Communists. I've mentioned Andreotti's *bon mot* about them already. They were not a particularly revolutionary party and they hadn't been ever since Palmiro Togliatti decided that elections were the way forward and not an armed coup in Western Europe. On the whole, the Communists did pretty well in opposition. They and the government had a common enemy in the Red Brigades. The Communists were disposed to help when it came to action against the terrorists, whether far right or far left. I knew some of them quite well and there were very few real workers amongst their leaders. There was a man called Violante, a very smart lawyer who later became President of the Chamber of Deputies. I met him at his very nice, bourgeois home in Turin. We had a cup of tea served on a silver salver by a maid. In swept his wife a bit later, wearing a fur coat. There was a wonderful cartoon, by the same man who depicted Craxi in a black shirt and jackboots, of Berlinguer the Communist party leader in his home, in a dressing gown, drinking a cup of coffee and wincing at the noise of a street demonstration outside: it was very telling. Cartoons do tell you a lot about a country. I was an avid follower of them.

For the American Embassy in the 1980s they were still the enemy and there was no direct contact with them at all. We, and I think most other European countries, were more flexible. We met them from time to time. The Ambassador attended Berlinguer's wake. After all, the Communists ran many of the big cities and, on the whole, administered them very well. Places like Bologna, Ferrara, Modena, Reggio. We felt it was perfectly in order to meet the elected Mayor of a town, irrespective of his party affiliations.

SR: You put in your notes, Tom, spouses and local jobs. Was this a problem?

TR: I'm afraid it was. The employment of spouses was beginning to become an issue. I had two Ambassadors who had grown up in the old school. It was reasonable for them to think 'I went through all this' ... they did an enormous amount of work, particularly as a Head of

Chancery's wife ... 'I don't see why Tom Richardson's wife should not do the same', because there clearly were a number of problems in Rome to be sorted out. Alex was quite assiduous, I thought and she thought, in dealing with illnesses, talking to the wives and asking if she could help in any way, but the fact was that she had worked as a journalist in Milan for 13 years and she wanted to do at least a part-time job of work and go on writing. I had to say quite firmly that, actually, this was part of Foreign Office ethos at that time. Alex spoke perfect Italian: it was easy for her. Organised help for spouses abroad didn't exist in the 1980s and, even now, there are practical problems depending on which country you're sent to.

Locally engaged. The problem in Italy, and I suspect in many other countries, were the post-war employment rules, extracted at a time when governments were weak and the unions strong. In Italy's case this was in the 1970s, the time of the Red Brigades. Work was a job for life. It was almost impossible to sack anyone. Although we could claim diplomatic immunity up to a point, litigation was untested and would have been expensive: cases in Italy can drag on for years. It doesn't look good in terms of your relations with the local staff. As I mentioned in relation to my time as a lowly Vice Consul in Milan, the policy of hiring bright young things for a few years didn't really work and some of them stayed on for a long time.

The only way you could get rid of someone was by abolishing the job. We did that in one or two cases. We did it without great enthusiasm but, given the restrictions, it was all you could do. A job for life was very much a part of the equation and still is in the Italian public sector. So much so that, sadly, now almost no young person can be employed for more than a year or two without a break clause when they start their career for fear that the company is going to be entangled in an unbreakable long-term relationship.

There is one more thing I wanted to say about Rome. It's very much a footnote. But it tells you something about the spirit of the times. When I was in Rome in the 1980s - and still more of course in the 1960s - what they called the spirit of the Resistance was very much alive and its values were trumpeted. The vast majority of the population, who had had to live with or, in many cases, actually work for the Fascists, were quiet about their background on the whole. As in most other European countries, it was good statesmanship to forgive and forget. There was a legal neo-Fascist party: tolerated, but not part of what was called the 'constitutional arc' and excluded from government. It was certainly true that, from time to

time, the Christian Democrats found their vote in Parliament useful on certain matters. Nevertheless, the resistance ethos still prevailed in public life. The only reason I mention this is that the first flickers of the changing mood came during my time in Rome, about halfway through, I'm guessing about 1984 or 1985. They put on a coyly named exhibition inside the Coliseum called 'The Italian Economy Between The Wars'. This also included large chunks about places like Ethiopia and Eritrea (which, incidentally, have some of the finest Fascist architecture going). It was quite controversial, but a reminder that many post-war institutions dated from the Fascist regime, including the Institute for Industrial Reconstruction (IRI - *Istituto per la Ricostruzione Industriale*). So that was the first chink. I'm jumping forward now but, by the time I came back in 1996, book after book was about the Fascist period, book after book about Mussolini: it was quite extraordinary.

1986-89: Head of Economic Relations Department, FCO

SR: So now we are back in London, in Economic Relations Department (ERD), another 'tracker' Department.

TR: It may surprise you that, of all my jobs, it was one of the ones I most enjoyed. Why was that? This sort of work can be quite ungrateful: you're often in interdepartmental meetings, not my favourite form of life. Actually, I enjoyed the intellectual challenge. And Geoffrey Howe was Secretary of State. If you don't have a Foreign Secretary who is interested in economic matters - and he's the only one I came across who was - you can have problems, because you put an issue up to Private Office, but then he or she mightn't want to pursue it. Howe was interested. He'd loved his time as Chancellor. He was a bit nostalgic about it. He devoured paper. He enjoyed going to meetings of the OECD, which very few other Foreign Secretaries did; he liked G7 and Commonwealth meetings, he was very much a summit man. I would give him the interdepartmentally agreed brief for these events, especially the G7, and sometimes I'd add a sheet of paper to say that these are the four or five big things you need to focus on. He would use a handy camera to miniaturise this and tuck it into a pocket for use in meetings.

I also had excellent bosses and colleagues. My three seniors were Rodric Braithwaite and then Nicholas Bayne, whom I'd known before, and dear Humphrey Maud as Assistant Under Secretary (or Director). I got on well with the Economists who, in those days, were still one single department, led by an old friend of mine from FPAD days, Simon Broadbent. That

was before the economists got parcelled out around departments, foolishly, in one of those endless navel-gazing (and often cost-cutting) exercises that the FCO suffered in the nineties. I ought to add that the Treasury had mellowed over the years - or perhaps I was just a tad more senior? I had particular respect for Huw Evans, an economist turned administrator, who sadly died quite young. He was a breath of fresh air.

SR: Did you enjoy having your own Department to run for the first time?

TR: Yes, I did. I had some good people. I should perhaps explain that ERD was a joint Department between the FCO and ODA (Overseas Development Administration). What I've not mentioned is that, quite apart from Howe, Nigel Lawson was Chancellor and Chris Patten, for much of my time in London, Minister for Overseas Development. That was a pretty strong Ministerial team. I actually had a departmental budget of IMF-related money and I got to the IMF and World Bank meetings, mostly in Washington, twice a year.

John White was my deputy from the ODA, an excellent man, a trained economist, and there was another ODA slot for the developing country debt job. Very important in my time - there were huge debt problems stemming largely from the crises of the seventies, the breakdown of Bretton Woods, inflation and so on. It was fun running a joint department. But I did something which I'd not done before, or indeed since. There was so much paperwork, so many technical issues, that I thought I couldn't keep an eye on everything. In these economic and financial fields you can't be a dilettante, and the salient points are often buried in a mountain of bumf that takes time to read. So I decided not to deal on a day by day basis with some of the department's subject matter, and I put my ODA deputy in charge of commodity policy - quite a hot issue then because price maintenance was breaking down - as well as drug related money laundering. ERD's staples were these and debt, extraterritoriality and, later on, export credit policy. But of course other problems came up, often unexpectedly, like the Kuwait Investment Office's purchase of large blocks of BP shares following HMG's sale of its stake in the company, many said far too hastily.

Over and above these were the constant demands for briefs for international meetings. ERD coordinated the briefing for G7 and OECD meetings, and contributed as necessary to those for Commonwealth Heads of Government meetings (CHOGM), Commonwealth Finance Ministers and Commonwealth Senior Officials, to which the PUS led our small delegation. I attended most of these meetings as a middle ranking adviser, and in some cases a participant in communiqué drafting. That took me all over the world, and then I also went to African

Heads of Mission meetings to talk about debt. There was a Lawson scheme that was going to help some of the poorest indebted countries by putting some funny money their way - Special Drawing Rights from the IMF - and we wanted to advertise that Britain was doing something to help. Braithwaite and then Bayne took Simon Broadbent and me on two trips to Asia to talk to their opposite numbers in foreign offices dealing with international economic affairs. I'd hardly been to Asia before then and these visits were incredibly useful for someone like me starting in lowish gear.

What else? Well, I remember the great row at the CHOGM meeting in Vancouver in 1987. We came under heavy criticism - nothing new - for our policy towards South Africa and alleged bypassing of UN sanctions. Mrs Thatcher characteristically went on the offensive and instructed Bernard Ingham to read out the figures for Canadian trade with South Africa at a press conference. You can imagine the furore.

As for Commonwealth communiqués, I bumped into Vince Cable some years ago. He'd spent time as Special Economic Adviser in the Commonwealth Secretariat. I asked him if he remembered those Commonwealth Finance Ministers' meetings, which is where I'd last seen him. He gave me a haunted look as he said, "Those communiqués!" Sixty or more paragraphs with something for just about every country. You do sometimes wonder whether communiqués are necessary.

I remember the G7 meeting in Venice not so much for what it said publicly - because that's largely settled in advance - but for the terrorist warnings. The summit was held on that lovely island, San Giorgio, just opposite San Marco, and the Italian Navy put divers all round the lagoon, I assume to make sure that there was no underwater attack on the delegates.

The IMF and World Bank meetings of summer 1988 were held in West Berlin, and remain in my mind because they took place right at the end of the Cold War. Some of us took time off before the meetings started for the obligatory tour of East Berlin. I'd never been to a Communist country and, as both a serving officer and for many years a bachelor, had never been allowed to: the rules were strict and I was told I could only go on holiday to Eastern Europe if I was accompanied by another male. I can still remember the goose-stepping in the Alexanderplatz. Honecker was taking the salute on the occasion of the 35th anniversary of the People's Militia, in other words the crushing of the East Berlin uprising of 1953. Who would have thought that a year later the Wall would come down? Quite astonishing.

Back in London, there was a tussle over a loan to Nigeria. It was an oil producing country and shouldn't really have needed loans at all. But the country had run up large debts. We and West Africa Department got together and produced a case which was as much political as economic, although a lot of people had confidence in the man who was then Nigerian Finance Minister. The Treasury was not disposed to spend. The rival submissions went up to the Prime Minister as arbiter. Normally civil servants try to reach agreement way before getting to that level. To our surprise and mild pleasure, Mrs Thatcher ruled in favour of the loan. We had taken a risk but, as I remember, Nigeria set out its economic reform stall and got both an IMF programme and a rescheduling of public sector debt.

But at times ERD disagreed with its Foreign Office colleagues, especially when it came to ECGD export credits. Some, particularly the Arabists, seemed to think export credits were a milch cow. You just went on seeking more of them to help British business get export contracts ... Saddam Hussein's Iraq (at war with Iran in those years) was a case in point. I had to point out that Iraq had never repaid previous ECGD credits dating many years back. A waste of taxpayers' money. I knew I sounded like the Treasury - but I also thought it was bad politics.

On one occasion I was asked to go to Scotland. Britain was going to host a G7, and Ministers (quite rightly) wanted to hold it outside London for a change. Scotland was suggested, the Scottish Office was more than eager and it had some money to chip in. We thought of Turnberry. There were some lovely rooms around the golf course for the great men to get together, and there were hotels nearby as well as in Glasgow, which wasn't impossibly far away. But in those days, maybe more than now, the G7s - far from being the fireside chats first envisaged by Giscard and Schmidt - had turned into caravanserais of up to 3,000 people, if you include the international press as well as the delegations and assembled hangers on. I returned thinking that, short of putting in tents and portakabins, there just weren't enough rooms available, and we advised against Turnberry. A pity, because it's a lovely place. The next time it was our turn to host, the choice fell on Birmingham, which by then had state of the art conference facilities and lots of hotels.

On drugs, we had a very simple idea. We were ready to do bilateral deals with friendly countries - many in the Commonwealth. We would help them confiscate the assets of drug traffickers and offer to split the proceeds if they helped us seize the criminals. It was a sensible idea which proved quite popular. We had a chap in ERD who was seconded from

private industry and he took on this job with great gusto and a results-oriented focus. I don't know what happened to the scheme further down the line.

They were good years with a nice mix of subjects to handle, and the nature of economic work brought me in touch with a lot of departments, both within and beyond the FCO, that I probably would never have contacted otherwise. Almost my last engagement in the job was to attend the 1989 G7 in Paris, but whatever the summiteers achieved is now obscured in my mind by the magnificence of the celebrations of the Revolution's bicentenary. Shortly after, Geoffrey Howe left the FCO.

1989-94: Deputy Permanent Representative, UK Mission to UN

SR: Good morning. It's the 12th of April. Last time, Tom, we came to the end of your time in ERD. Now you went back off to the UN in New York.

TR: I did indeed. There were actually two jobs on the cards in North America at the time. My name and that of Christopher Meyer were put forward for the posts of Economic Minister in Washington and Deputy Permanent Representative (with the personal rank of Ambassador) in UKMIS New York. Antony Acland, the Ambassador in Washington, was keen to have Christopher. Crispin Tickell said he'd like to have me in New York and I was delighted to go back. Alex got plenty of work and we had a great apartment for friends and entertainment. I'd come across Crispin when he was Permanent Secretary in what was still then the Overseas Development Administration. He was a wonderful boss. He had a great sense of style. Well before I arrived in New York, Crispin had achieved something quite important, which was to bring together the Ambassadors of the five permanent members of the Security Council (Britain, the US, France, the Soviet Union as it was then and China) to discuss what, if anything, could be done to stop the Iran-Iraq war which had dragged on at that stage for years. That was the beginning of some sort of unacknowledged collaboration. Of course, it became well known around the houses that the Permanent Five did meet from time to time.

SR: Crispin was passionate about environmental issues, wasn't he?

TR: Yes, he was instrumental, amongst many others, in getting the environment on the map: he was a great believer in the dangers to the planet from environmental pollution and global warming. It was he who persuaded Mrs Thatcher to come to the United Nations and to dedicate her speech to the General Assembly to global warming, citing British research in the Antarctic and really putting the environment on the map. Those were two very signal achievements.

SR: And after him, was it David Hannay?

TR: Yes. I'd already worked with him in London years earlier. A very distinguished public servant. His character was rather different. But he got results, my word! I was very happy to work with him. I should also mention before I go on that in the number 3 job, which really held all the various sections of UKMIS together, we had two absolutely star turns, first Christopher Hum and then Derek Plumbly.

When I arrived in late August, the East Germans were already beginning to trickle - and then move in torrents - through Czechoslovakia to Hungary, hoping for a way to the West. I needn't rehearse all the history. The Berlin Wall came down in November and, one by one, all the countries of Eastern Europe shook off Soviet occupation. The last, of course, was Romania which, as it so happened, had just been elected to the East European slot as a non-permanent member in the Security Council for two years. While Ceausescu was a thoroughly nasty piece of work, so was his Ambassador in New York. We spent some fruitless time in informal meetings wondering just how one could remove a person, or indeed a country come to that, from a job to which they had been perfectly legally elected in rather different circumstances. The problem resolved itself rather quickly. We had a nice university professor as the Romanian delegate to the UN for the next two years.

It was a very heady four years at the United Nations. Incredibly busy. Before I describe my own role, such as it was, I should sketch some of the background. For most of my time there, Western interests dominated the agenda of the United Nations. The Security Council, which had hardly ever met in the 1970s, was meeting just about every day, including a few evenings and often at weekends too. It was an exhausting, but worthwhile, period. The Permanent Five continued to meet and the Russians (first the Soviets and then, from December 1991 the Russian Federation) were fairly quiescent as were the Chinese, who played a long game. So there really was something of a Western agenda which could be got through in those years. The General Assembly, for its part, felt left out. Big issues still came its way like the

environment. But many members resented the dominance of the Security Council. And they had some reason to do so. I don't mean merely the huge countries like the Indias and Brazils of this world, but quite a few European countries too. From those germs came the later pressure for Security Council reform. I'll come back to that in due course. But when I think that in the 1970s, the Security Council only met about twice a month, and then usually for routine matters like welcoming new members or renewing the mandates of such few peacekeeping operations as then existed, you could see what an enormous difference there was.

A lot of our time, particularly in the first two years that I was there - the tail end of 89 until 91 - we were trying to unpick the rather unpleasant legacies of the Cold War, the civil wars - and they were, in many cases, civil war or rather struggles for power, which had been backed by one or other of the super powers during the Cold War. I'm thinking of countries like Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, Cambodia, Nicaragua, El Salvador. There probably were others. It seemed to us right, both politically and also morally, to try and bring peace to those countries, now that the Russians and the Americans - to simplify greatly - no longer had the same interest in keeping their clients, governments or opposition as the case might be, in business. So the UN went through a lot of excruciatingly complicated negotiations. It made mistakes in some places which weren't always the UN's fault. Angola comes to mind. The UN was underfunded and failed to corral all the various troops wandering around the country into cantonments where an eye could be kept on them by UN monitors. We learnt our lessons later when we came to Mozambique.

These operations had many ingredients: human rights monitors, election monitors, peacekeepers to observe the cantonments into which, at least in theory, the troops of the respective sides were corralled. Also demining experts. In the case of El Salvador, because the opposition insisted on it, the United Nations recruited some land reform experts at short notice. I mention this because peacekeeping was an infinitely more complex and difficult business than it had been in the 1970s where, on the whole, you had two sides, normally states but not always, who had fought each other and then, for whatever reason, they'd agreed to a truce. The United Nations interposed some peacekeepers into the contested land between them: there's still the Green Line in Cyprus and a Line of Control between India and Pakistan. But that wasn't the case in the 90s. We had huge countries rocked by civil wars which the UN couldn't conceivably patrol in their entirety. It was not possible, for example, for election monitors to observe every poll in every small hamlet or village of a vast African

country, or even in a relatively small country like Cambodia. But something had to be done to try and bring about a peace, the final stage of which was always an election, reasonably fair, not 100% perfect - it couldn't be, given the size of these territories - that would pave the way for a government which other countries could recognise. And the hope was that the opposition would then give up its fight and adapt itself to peace.

All this was very expensive. Peacekeeping costs ballooned. The Treasury got worried. On one occasion, I had to hold up an otherwise uncontroversial Council resolution authorising a peacekeeping operation in Liberia because in London they were arguing as to who should pay for our share of it. Not that I had to explain myself, but the Brits didn't usually hold up Council business. And peacekeeping forces ballooned too. The UN, which hitherto had relied on traditional peacekeeping countries like Canada, Austria, Ireland and Sweden, started looking way outside to countries like Bulgaria, Nepal, Bangladesh ... I name them at random. South American countries. That created a few problems and I mean no disrespect because a lot of these countries' armies had never had overseas experience, nor necessarily the experience of being shot at! So there were some teething problems, but I think the UN was quite right to widen the basis of peacekeeping. In addition to which, I doubt whether the original peacekeepers could have shouldered the growing burden by themselves.

So that was a large part of what we were doing and I haven't yet even mentioned the first Gulf War. The result was desperate overstretch. And in my last year or two, 92 to 94, we saw the result. We saw the collapse of UN operations in Somalia, we saw the genocide in Rwanda which the United Nations was powerless to stop and, above all, we saw the chaos and war and massacres in what had been Yugoslavia. All these cast a shadow over the achievements of the first year or two. Towards the end, and because of the frustration in the General Assembly to which I referred earlier, there were the first stirrings and informal meetings about Security Council reform which had two separate tracks. One was to question the composition and size of the Security Council, enlargement in other words. The second was the Council's mandate. Wasn't it getting a bit too big for its boots?

At the time, of course, it all looked a bit different. I thought - and I wasn't the only one - that we were living through a silver age at the United Nations. I don't think there's ever been a golden age. And certainly, during the Cold War, I doubt we could have awarded ourselves a bronze medal. But I came to realise later that it was not so much a silver age for the United Nations, but a silver age for what the West thought the United Nations should be doing.

Without always admitting it even to ourselves, we were trying to create a rule-based society in which the UN family would have pride of place. An activist agenda that ran up against the attachment of many members, not only in what used to be called developing countries, to the doctrine of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states: Article 2(7) of the Charter, a fundamental principle of the United Nations from its infancy onwards. I think that explains, to some extent, the reaction over the next ten or twenty years to what we were trying to do, or appeared to be doing, in the early 1990s.

I'll give you a small personal example. I had a very rude awakening after my arrival in New York. There was interest in London following some particularly well-publicised episodes of cross-frontier drug smuggling emanating from Colombia. The Foreign Office pondered and asked us to investigate whether there wasn't a role here for the Security Council. Crispin asked if I would go and talk to the Colombian mission which I did. They seemed initially receptive, although probably the penny hadn't dropped. Within days, we'd been summoned by the Brazilian current President of the Security Council - that job rotates every calendar month - and he said to me, in no uncertain terms, "The Security Council has no authority in this matter. This is an internal matter. It is not for the Security Council. It is not a threat to international peace and security. If anyone should deal with this, it should be the General Assembly, if it chose to do so." In fact, we ended up with a special session of the General Assembly, much to the irritation of some of our closest allies. There were two perfectly sensible days spent in the Assembly discussing what to do about drugs although, from memory, I'm not sure a great deal came out of it. It was a reminder of the sensitivities involved in dealing with the General Assembly and in appearing to want to enlarge the Security Council's competence.

So this was the context into which I had to fit. About halfway through in New York we had the usual Foreign Office inspection. The Inspectors came out and asked me for a job description. I said it was very hard for me to give one. To a large extent, it was to do things which needed to be done at a senior level in UKMIS which David Hannay didn't have time or the wish to do. And that required the utmost flexibility. I said that, on any given day, you could perm one or two of these out of five or six: there could be a Security Council meeting or Security Council consultations, a meeting of EU Ambassadors, something important - a speech, a vote - happening in the General Assembly, a meeting of the Iraq Sanctions Committee, a visitor or there could even be a meeting of something called the Western European and Others Group (whose purpose I'll pass over here). At any one of these, you

might require someone with an ambassadorial moniker which London had always given the number two in New York for the reasons I mentioned. There were drawbacks in not having precise tasks, but life was never dull.

For some months in 1991 and, to an extent, in 1992, I did have one fairly constant feature in my job: to represent us on the newly created Iraq Sanctions Committee while David was tied up in the Security Council. The Sanctions Committee was important. The 'mother of all resolutions', Security Council Resolution 687, was thirty or forty paragraphs long, setting out all the things that Saddam Hussein shouldn't do. Many of them had to be translated into practicalities by the Sanctions Committee. The Russians, on the whole, were no great trouble. The Cubans, who were members of the Security Council, did cause some problems for us. From time to time, so did the Malaysians. But, on the whole, we had a tough but, I think, defensible regime. The difficult arguments centred around the supply of food and medicine to Iraq on humanitarian grounds. Were the goods going to be collected by the regime and its armed forces? Who was going to get them? What conditions therefore applied, because the UN had to authorise transactions. That produced a lot of arguments, for months on end and that was a reasonably fixed bit of my schedule. I never had any trouble with the validity of the Security Council's military action under Chapter VII to remove Saddam Hussein from Kuwait. It was, I think, the first time since the United Nations was founded that one member state had not only attacked but annexed another member state. So Council was entirely within its rights to take action. Incidentally, I've always believed, although there was subsequent criticism, that George Bush Senior was quite right not to advance to Baghdad, but to stop; the United Nations resolutions were about the liberation of Kuwait, not about regime change in Iraq, a distinction which faded somewhat over the years, as we all know. When I went into retirement, I had no hesitation in opposing, along with many other former colleagues, the second Gulf War which had never had any meaningful United Nations imprimatur.

I also kept an eye on all the smouldering problems which hadn't reached actual take-off level yet in the Security Council, but were clearly going to one of these days. So I paid attention to El Salvador partly because, from the 1970s, on I had had the experience of Belize and I knew a little about Central America. Ditto Mozambique. We also needed to talk to people who probably would have been frowned on if I had been in any other mission, or indeed in London. The FCO essentially expected UKMIS to freewheel a bit and use its discretion. A classic example - and here I'm not talking personally but about the whole mission - is that we

could and did have relations with the Iranian delegation, although we had no diplomatic representation in Tehran. From time to time, I met their very articulate, American-educated Deputy Perm Rep, Zarif, who is the Iranian Foreign Minister as I speak. Thabo Mbeki, later President of South Africa, came to town quite often in those days ... I'm talking now about the period transition between Mandela's release and his election as first President of post-apartheid South Africa which more or less spanned my years in New York. In the early days, Mbeki was still head of the ANC's foreign affairs body. He came to New York from time to time and I met him. Likewise, we could freely meet members of the Rwandan opposition or both sides in the Salvador dispute, as long as our contacts were linked to some piece of actual or potential business in New York.

Libya kept us busy. After Lockerbie and the enquiry into the disaster, we mounted a campaign for sanctions against the Libyans. David Hannay and I between us spoke individually to all the other fourteen members of the Security Council, one on one, to explain our position - which in a first-round of sanctions, quite appropriately, was to stop Libyan aircraft from landing or overflying anywhere in the world. Embargoes on arms sales and oil equipment followed. The Council wasn't unanimous, but no member voted against and our hard work paid off.

Along with Iraq, Yugoslavia and its successor states took out more of my - and the mission's - time in the Security Council than any other issue. I find it hard to talk about, in part because I never kept a full diary; and when I've been interviewed since retirement I have always struggled to remember the exact sequence of events, such as the arms embargo or the disastrous safe areas resolution. At the start, I think, the slow disintegration of the country took second place in our minds to the Gulf War and its aftermath, and to the disintegration of the Soviet Union. There's only so much you can cope with at the same time. Again, at the start, those of us with any knowledge of interwar and World War II Yugoslavia thought of the situation in civil war terms, and that pattern of thinking was hard to shift even when the constituent republics, and especially Bosnia, proclaimed (or had to proclaim) independence and joined the UN. Finally, we never agreed, particularly within the European Union, where blame lay; we could all condemn Milosevic's actions but Tudjman was hardly a blushing violet and memories of the Ustase ran deep.

This isn't to excuse our floundering. Should we have accepted the inevitability of NATO intervention much earlier, rather than rely on peacekeeping when there was no peace to keep

and UNPROFOR convoys of food and medicine were regularly robbed before they reached their destination? At the risk of passing the buck, this was essentially a decision for London, Paris and the other capitals. In New York, we may have suffered from a degree of localitis. Peacekeeping was our basic trademark, and for quite some time, no one outside the Muslim states' camp at the UN argued for the proactive use of armed force, peace enforcement in UN-speak. I think it was widely assumed that that meant heavy ground forces, that unlike in the Gulf geography was against us, and that we'd have had to extricate our fairly lightly armed peacekeepers first. Certainly - as I learned later - our own generals were reluctant. So we and the French, in particular, persevered with a thankless half-in half-out task. It took the repeated shelling of Sarajevo and a hardening of American attitudes to bring us all to the point of calling NATO in and using airstrikes to force Milosevic to the table.

I have two particular memories of those times. The first was a meeting of EU Ambassadors. David Hannay was somewhere else that day and the German announced that he'd received instructions from his Foreign Minister, Genscher, that Germany was going to recognise Croatia (and Slovenia) as independent states. There was fighting going on in Croatia and Carrington was still trying to keep something called Yugoslavia together. I was angry. Now, Croatia would have become independent anyway and, in that sense, the Germans were right, albeit there had been no prior consultation, the timing was arbitrary and German motives dubious. What upset many of us was that the Germans made no effort afterwards to contribute to the peacekeeping efforts in Bosnia and elsewhere. We understood their concerns about rekindling wartime memories. But they could have done more.

My other memory is of Yugoslavia's last Ambassador (a Croat married to a Serb and a friend of ours) sitting silently in the seat traditionally reserved for the representatives of countries under debate in the Council. As a NAM founder nation, Yugoslavia had many friends and delegations were urging him to speak. There was nothing he could say; whom did he really represent at that late stage? Diplomats aren't faceless and we often pass over their human emotions.

A few thoughts about the Russians in those years. I had a lot of admiration for their Permanent Representative, Vorontsov, who presided with great grace and dignity over the dissolution of his country. He had had trouble even before December 1991. He told us that he had a real job keeping the Ukrainians and the Kazakhs in his team within bounds. Of course, the Ukrainians technically had a separate permanent mission in New York even then,

because of the arrangements of 1945 to give the Soviet Union two extra seats. In August of 1991, there came the aborted coup d'état against Gorbachev while he was on holiday in his dacha in the Crimea. A group of KGB and hardliners took over for two or three days in Moscow. It so happened that I had invited my opposite number, a delightful man and a reformist at heart, called Lozhinsky to lunch. He was very keen to grill me in a polite way. What did we think about these meetings of the five permanent members of the Security Council? Would they continue? When was the next meeting? I think he might have wanted to report to the Soviet Foreign Ministry in Moscow, possibly not quite sure who was in charge of it, that there were going to be problems in New York which might affect Russia's standing. David was on leave and I had absolutely no instructions from London. Things were moving too quickly. So all I could do was to contrive to look mysterious, as if some terribly important things were happening that I couldn't tell him about! In December 1991, when the Soviet Union broke up, there was a rather sad little scene in the Council. Their Number 3 leant over, as the meeting ended and took away the nameplate with The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on it, saying, "I'm not sure anyone is going to need this any more." I hope that never happens to us.

On a lighter note, I was President, from time to time, of the United Nations Trusteeship Council. By the 90s it had little to do. There was one territory in the United States Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands which had not yet achieved independence. Palau is a scattered group of islands covering a vast amount of the world's sea surface and much less of its land surface. It had been, in turns, Spanish, German before World War I, Japanese between the two World Wars and American ever thereafter. It had been a responsibility - oddly enough, not of the General Assembly - but of the Security Council, to whom the Trusteeship Council reported in a slightly bizarre arrangement. This was because the Americans wanted to ensure they had a veto over whatever happened to these small but strategically valuable bits of real estate in the South Pacific. Every so often, the Trusteeship Council sent a mission to Palau to see what the locals wanted. They had already had six or seven referendums. The Americans were disposed to give them independence, as the Marshall Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia already had, but the Palauans were very canny. They didn't think they wanted independence quite yet, but wanted to talk about money and what I think is now termed 'frictionless access' to the United States for employment or whatever. That was quite smart of them but it was very frustrating for everyone else.

It was a wonderful mission to Palau, which is quite difficult to get at. There was only one regular flight a week from Guam. We did our duty. We supervised the elections. The lady who called herself the Queen of Palau gave us all splendid cowrie necklaces. We departed. Palau voted yet again against independence. It's independent now and very beautiful. That was my only overseas mission in four intensive years

Finally, I should record the first stirrings of the move for Security Council enlargement. There were meetings towards the end of 1993, only a month or so before I left. I think the mission held the first one and I attended the second, a breakfast session chaired by the very bright Singaporean Permanent Representative. We and other permanent members weren't quite sure whether we were welcome there: the point, after all, was how to clip our wings. But, since it was advertised as an open-ended breakfast, we and the French went along. We were looked at slightly askance by other countries. All I can say is that it became obvious, even within the first month or two, (and still is after 25 years of inaction or aborted action) that, for every country which aspires to have a permanent seat on the Security Council - or at least a longer lasting non-permanent one - there are at least one or two countries which will do anything they can to stop them.

You will have gathered that, whatever the storm clouds towards the end, it was a wonderful time professionally to be in New York; and some of the aura lasted through the decade. Diplomats are no different from any other professional body. They speak the same language and there's a camaraderie when they get together, even if it's sometimes only superficial. I made many friends, including some able Italian diplomats whom I met again later in my career. It's funny to think that almost my last engagement in New York - at least according to my appointments diary - was a farewell lunch for me given by the Russian Ambassador.

A quarter of a century on, we're not back in the days of the Cold War, but we can't deny that the UN of the early 90s was a product of particular circumstances which may not recur. I'm not sure that the rule-based world that many of us would like to see is a foregone conclusion. I worry in particular that the International Criminal Court, set up in Rome towards the end of my ambassadorship there, rests on a rather narrow base of support. We have learned the hard way - maybe still learning in the DRC - that peacekeeping doesn't work when there's no peace to keep and when the parties to a dispute are negotiating in bad faith. And we've learned that it's relatively easy to go into another country with armed forces but much, much harder to get out again. Maybe it's too much to say that the Security Council's legitimacy is

in question, but its relevance to the changing world certainly is and I think we do need a reformed and expanded Council.

The UN is over seventy years old and creaking, like any other organisation of that age. But it's better to reform it from within - hard though that will be - than to risk its stability or even its demise, since we're not in 1945 and agreement on a new body to help maintain world peace and promote prosperity will be near impossible in this age of growing nationalism and diffusion of power.

1994-96: Assistant Under Secretary for Western and Southern Europe, FCO

SR: So now we come to 1994. You are back in the FCO as an Assistant Under Secretary (AUS) dealing with Western and Southern Europe. Who was the Permanent Secretary then?

TR: It was John Coles. The job was a strange mishmash. Western European Department - that's easy, most of Western Europe and Northern Europe including Iceland. Southern Europe stretched from Portugal to Turkey with a big gap called ex-Yugoslavia and Albania which I'll come back to. I had supervisory responsibility for bilateral matters with these countries. Then I had Research Department, a relatively minor part of my job, but a very enjoyable one. They'd just gone through an inspection of their own, the sole purpose of which, as far as I could see, was to cut their numbers. I disapproved. But the researchers actually managed to get by with the minimum of problems, many of them later switched to the mainstream and went on to have quite distinguished careers as Ambassadors. They were often underappreciated. I had nominal responsibility for the Republic of Ireland but, as you can imagine, that Department answered in several directions. In addition, I was Deputy Political Director. That was an entirely different job. I'll come back to that in a moment.

I'd have liked the Director Generalship for Economic Affairs, which was up at the same time, but I didn't have a Brussels background and Michael Jay had both that and the economics. He was a very distinguished candidate. I've no complaint whatsoever.

My predecessor, Jeremy Greenstock, had had Yugoslavia as well, but it gradually got to engross the whole of his time, so it went to someone else, but was given back to me after a year, from the beginning of 1995 onwards. Of course, it tended to become all consuming, just as it had been for Jeremy!

It's never been easy to work out how best to direct European policy from the London end. Of course, every geographical FCO Department has basic responsibilities for performance, staffing, morale and so on of the posts for which it's responsible. Over my two and a bit years, I visited all my European posts except for Iceland and Portugal. These were visits of a couple of days at most, but you hoped to get some feel for how the post was performing, whether they had good local contacts, how they worked with the British Council, business and so on, were they happy? I was pretty impressed.

But with few exceptions - the Greece/Turkey/Cyprus triangle, Spain over Gibraltar and of course ex-Yugoslavia - by the year of grace 1994 we had almost no strictly bilateral problems with Western and Southern European states. Many of our dealings were multilateral and took place in Brussels in either the EU or NATO format. There had always been separate Directorates in London for these purposes. Some Ambassadors - I remember Nigel Broomfield in Bonn on the subject - weren't happy with, as he saw it, a division of responsibility, at the expense of a more closely organised focus on German-British relations in the round. Of course there were conferences for that purpose, like Königswinter. But the London structure - and the sheer pressure of business - told against Nigel's ideas. Not too long after my departure, my responsibilities for Western and Southern Europe were merged with those of EU Directorate and the Deputy Political Director part of the job made a freestanding post. I expect it's all changed again. There is no simple solution. But, if and when Brexit happens and we're out of the EU, we'll anyway need a complete think of our European strategy, what we expect of our posts, especially lobbying, and the money we're prepared to put behind them.

SR: Who was the Political Director?

TR: The redoubtable Pauline Neville-Jones until near the very end of my time, just before I left for Rome, when Jeremy Greenstock came back from a very brief incarnation in Washington as the number two there. As Political Director, Pauline attended all the meetings she had time to attend, but she didn't get to all of them. I went to a fair number of Foreign Affairs Councils with Douglas Hurd who was my first Secretary of State (Malcolm Rifkind was the second). And I went to Political Directors' meetings (PoCo) which were mostly held in Brussels at the ghastly Justus Lipsius building which had just opened. A monument to neo-Stalinist or neo-Nazi architecture! I had some good PoCo friends from New York days.

I think I need to explain that the Common Foreign and Security Policy was really in its infancy. In my time, it was still intergovernmental: it had not been folded into the European Union/Commission structure. It was the Second Pillar, home affairs and justice being the Third Pillar. Political Directors reported directly to the European Council of Ministers without going through the institutions in Brussels. In the end, it got swallowed up: it probably had to be. And it has to be said that, for all the Political Directors' hard work, they never had the clout, or indeed the money or the civil servants behind them, that the Brussels institutions had. We were ably guided by the Council of Ministers DG for External Affairs, whose Chef, Brian Crowe, was a British diplomat. Quite a sensitive job. I remember him saying to me, "Be very careful. You could be swallowed up by the European mandarins before Christmas if you're not careful!"

And of course a lot of the work lay elsewhere. From early on, there was a Contact Group on Yugoslavia comprised of America, France, Britain, Russia and Germany. I don't recall Yugoslavia ever being discussed in great detail by Political Directors. But a lot of other issues were. Ukraine was big in my time. You acted in the usual way. You requested briefs. As Deputy Political Director you were naturally handling a lot of briefing on countries for which you were not otherwise responsible. But that's what any lawyer does with a brief and that's what we did. Looking back, what surprises me is the relative brevity of these high-level meetings but, as I said, those were early days.

I'd had a brief acquaintance with Gibraltar issues when I was in New York in the 70s. There was an annual ritual in the General Assembly of a carefully worded joint statement with the Spaniards, after which the subject was shelved for another year. Back in London now, it took up an awful lot of my time. I arrived at a tricky moment in our dealings with both Spain and the Gibraltar government. The Spaniards had hoped for movement on London's part towards a co-sovereignty arrangement - two flags on the Rock - something like the deal that the Labour government negotiated years later, but that was then rejected in a Gibraltar referendum. Back in 1994, John Major's government decided not to pursue the co-sovereignty idea and, on my first visit to Madrid, I had to break the news. My Spanish opposite number had so arranged the seating that I was facing a large map of 17th century Spanish Gibraltar. She was not amused by what I had to say.

In Gibraltar I needed to put pressure on the government to clamp down on smuggling. It was a huge problem and an embarrassment in our relations with Madrid. We are talking about

drugs and cigarettes coming by very fast Zephyr -type boats from Morocco to Gibraltar or directly to the Spanish coastline. The crews, and for all I know the owners too, were often smart young Gibraltarians who were making a lot of money and flaunting it openly. We wanted the Gibraltar government to take action and spoke pretty toughly. I can't say that the Chief Minister, Joe Bossano, showed much concern. Luckily, ordinary Gibraltarians disliked the trade too. There was a big public demonstration against the smugglers. The British government gave the Gibraltar police some boats which were as fast or even faster than the Zephyrs. I was given a ride. It wasn't quite Malcolm Campbell on Ullswater, but I've never been so scared!

The Rock had pretty full internal self-government. Through our Governor, we were responsible for foreign affairs and defence and we kept a finger on finance, quite rightly I think. Day to day affairs were run by elected Ministers and a tiny, overworked civil service serving thirty thousand inhabitants and two square miles. Nearly every aspect of life in Gibraltar became a foreign affairs problem because of its tiny size. For example, customs checks at the border on both people and goods because Gibraltar was outside the EU customs union, though not the single market and so, if the Spanish authorities wanted - which from time to time they did - they could create really long border delays. Or the airfield astride the frontier, or the flight paths to land and take off, which were quite hairy, or overflying rights, or territorial waters, minute in Gibraltar's case but regularly violated by the Spanish Navy or fishing vessels. We were constantly complaining to Madrid.

Another source of tension was Gibraltarian compliance with EU law. As I said, their civil service was tiny and EU directives were thick on the ground, sometimes only distantly related to their situation. We couldn't legislate for Gibraltar. Domestic water pollution, for example. I remember the top civil servant complaining to me that Gibraltar's problem was that it didn't have any water of its own, so why draft big new laws to comply with EU rules? We financed some much-needed legal drafting posts. I got involved in talks on the projected financial centre, where we needed to appoint suitable trustees or governors with regulatory oversight. It was important that Spain shouldn't be given any pretext for complaining that Britain - which it held ultimately responsible as the administering power - was not fulfilling its obligations. But responsibility when you have limited powers isn't an easy circle to square.

I have a lot of time for Gibraltar. It's the only remaining place in the Mediterranean that harks back to the multinational, tolerant merchant towns of old. What happened to

Alexandria, Beirut or Salonica? Gibraltar is still a Levantine town and I mean that as a compliment. Its first Chief Minister was a Sephardic Jew, from North Africa I think, and the two I knew personally were respectively of Genoese and Maltese ancestry. Gibraltarians live on their wits. They have to. I wish them luck.

Douglas Hurd gave Joe Bossano, the Chief Minister, a dinner at Carlton House Terrace and there was some straight talking. His last overseas visit as Foreign Secretary was to Spain and I went with him. After his resignation, he told John Coles that he regretted leaving two bits of unfinished business behind him - ex-Yugoslavia and Gibraltar. Both of them, I noticed, lay in my parish.

I visited Cyprus on several occasions. It had been a divided island since Makarios's ousting and the subsequent Turkish invasion of 1974. It still is. The only good thing is that the restrictions on travel across the lines have been relaxed somewhat in recent years. Tourists can now go backwards and forwards between the two parts of the island more easily, whereas in the 90s that was impossible. I saw the Green Line in Nicosia for myself and walked up and down it. It is very eerie: you look into little tea rooms and cafés right on the border with yellowing newspapers and dirty teacups dating back to 1974. No local person can get at them. It's a very strange experience.

I met Rauf Denktaş, the flamboyant and talkative leader for many years of the Turkish Cypriots, as well as a number of senior Greek Cypriot politicians. My feeling about Cyprus is that efforts for a settlement tend to oscillate between three approaches. There's the all-out effort for a comprehensive settlement, when the island gets enormous outside attention from the United Nations, the EU, Britain in its own right and as a treaty guarantor, and often the United States. Shortly before I was posted to Rome, in early 1996, Malcolm Rifkind appointed David Hannay, by then in retirement, as British Special Representative for Cyprus. David worked tirelessly for a settlement, but the negotiations collapsed in 2003. There were many reasons, but one was that Cypriots tend to resent too much visible foreign pressure being applied to them. Another was that by then, they were assured of admittance to the EU, whatever the outcome of the settlement talks.

The ideal approach would be that the two sides agreed to forget about the world outside and do a deal between themselves. And that has been tried from time to time, especially after Denktaş's departure from the scene - but so far without success. I came along at the tail end of the third, more modest, approach known as Confidence Building Measures (CBMs).

These were talks initiated by the UN and aimed at a partial settlement, low hanging fruit if you like, not the sort of deal that would involve big and controversial territorial adjustments. The main focus of the CBMs was the ghost town of Varosha, near Famagusta, which had been a huge holiday resort but was right astride the dividing line. Getting it back to life could have been of benefit to both communities. But by 1994, this initiative was petering out and thereafter Cyprus relapsed into neutral gear. I confess I wasn't too upset. I had a lot else on my plate, especially when Yugoslavia came back my way, but I also felt instinctively that it wasn't the right moment to make another big effort. Malcolm Rifkind did. Cyprus's application for EU membership was certainly a factor, but there were also good domestic political reasons for trying. The large Cypriot communities in Britain, both Greek and Turkish, were making their voice heard.

When I inherited line responsibility for the Yugoslav successor states in January 1995, we had a Department called the Eastern Adriatic Unit, to which had been sent some of the finest up and coming Foreign Service officers you could imagine: Alan Charlton, Kim Darroch, Matthew Rycroft and David Manning as Britain's Contact Group Representative. Pauline essentially left day-to-day supervising work to me. That largely had to do with our peacekeeping deployment in Bosnia, its military and humanitarian tasks and the obstacles these faced, especially in and around Sarajevo. We had a military briefing every morning and, in Pauline's absence, I was often over at the Ministry of Defence to sit in on the Joint Chiefs or to take part in videoconferences with the French. John Major wanted the Cabinet Office to monitor developments closely, so I attended Paul Lever's early morning meetings as well. I was familiar with UN peacekeeping, so the job made sense, at least until NATO took the lead. I got involved in the contingency plans for extricating our troops from the 'safe area' of Gorazde. They weren't needed in the end, because we threatened the Bosnian Serbs with air attacks and Gorazde escaped the terrible fate of Srebrenica. But I won't run through everything that happened that year. Richard Holbrooke came through London that summer, the Americans took a more active stance, the Croats - heavily armed by the US - went on the offensive and, in December, Dayton produced the agreement that we are all still stuck with.

Milošević lived to fight another day in Kosovo. I only met him once. He looked and talked like the banker he once was. After Dayton, I accompanied Malcolm Rifkind on a brief visit to a shell shattered Sarajevo. President Izetbegović was remarkably courteous, considering all he'd been through. I also visited Macedonia, where we had recently opened a small

Embassy and saw President Gligorov, who had just survived a car bomb. The UN's preventive deployment of troops in that country was probably one of the most intelligent things it did those terrible years, because it saved Macedonia from Serbia's embrace and also avoided a deterioration in relations between the Macedonians and the large Albanian minority there.

A few other small points. As I've said, part of my mission was to visit our posts. Come early 1995, I suddenly found I had lots of new ones. There was Albania. Now I did pay a visit there. I had an undeclared reason for that: I knew that I could possibly be in line to succeed Patrick Fairweather in Rome. He was non-resident Ambassador to Albania as well. I wanted to see for myself how it worked out. But I also knew from the Department that our staff in Albania were having a terrible time. I've never seen such inadequate housing or offices in all my life. That started off, as you may know, in the famous French mission, in the broom cupboard. By the time I arrived, things had got slightly better than that. My main task, however, was to try and do a deal with the Albanian Government, whereby we would give them back the Albanian gold reserves which we had seized and held in the Bank of England ever since the Corfu Channel incident in 1946, in which two of our warships struck mines and sunk. We blamed the Albanians under Enver Hoxha. They confiscated our Embassy, one of the few nice Italian built dachas of the 1930s. We now wanted it back and were prepared to give them back their gold. I met a senior Albanian in one of the very few hotels open in Tirana in early 1995, only three or four years since Communism. He said it was a bit awkward as it was their official guest house, but they did offer us other places. This all went on beyond my time, but those were the terms of the debate. Afterwards, I arranged to go on by car to Macedonia, from Tirana to Skopje which was absolutely fascinating. The Italians, during their brief rule had built a road which was death-defying. They love building roads, but this was one of the more frightening ones I have driven along.

I went a second time to Albania with Malcolm Rifkind who was visiting Sarajevo after Dayton and suggested stopping in Albania for a few hours. We landed at their windswept airport ... it's grander now, but in those days it was pretty run down. There were still all these wonderful little anti-aircraft bunkers. Hoxha built them all over the country. Tens of thousands of them to deter aerial landings from all his imagined enemies. Little pillar boxes, basically. Some enterprising Italian businessman got into the scene very early on and the only tourist object that the Albanians could offer in those early years, after Hoxha's fall, were little marble replicas of these boxes. I have one. They sold like wildfire! We went to see

President Sali Berisha. I don't think Malcolm Rifkind had very much to say to him, but he confirmed that we did want to get our old office back. It was such a classic, Soviet-era meeting. I'd had no experience of Eastern Europe before. Here was Berisha - not a Communist himself - sitting on a platform, a dais, on a stiff, gold-backed chair, with his ministers on one side and us on the other, at a slightly lower level. Very, very stiff indeed. I'm glad to say that the Embassy's living conditions improved over the next few years.

And finally, the new Berlin Embassy. Our old one lay in what became East Berlin. It backed onto the Adlon Hotel and had been heavily bombed by us during the war, or was it perhaps the Russians? Anyway, it was a shell. We had happily had a mission in Bonn for umpteen years. When the Germans moved their unified capital back to Berlin, we decided that we would build on our old site to which we still had title. It had the merit of being a couple of hundred yards away from the Brandenburg Gate. Not an ideal site, otherwise, it has to be said. One side of it is in deep shadow and dominated by the quite tall Adlon Hotel. Anyway, the time had come to select a design prior to going out to tender for a new Embassy building. I was told by my masters in the Foreign Office that the contract had to be PFI-ed. Private Finance Initiative. I have lots of doubts about the PFI because, in return for a private developer taking on the capital cost of construction for some public sector project, the developer charges the government rent for what can be decades ahead. Some savings up front, heavy costs thereafter and, in Berlin's case, no conceivable 'risk element'.

However, that's by the bye. It was PFI-ed. Then we had to invite the architects to submit designs. It became clear, even to rather dumb people like me, that there was a sort of honour amongst thieves. The Fosters and the Rogers of this world had had a reasonable slice of public sector work recently. There were five shortlisted designs. The architects on our selection panel favoured the one that was all built of glass. The Ambassador sat atop, in a glass box, rather like Turandot or Nebuchadnezzar or someone, looking down on his slaves below. It was all see-through, in what was in the 90s one of the most sooty, dirty capitals in Europe. Now it's changed but, only a few years after the demise of East Germany, Berlin was still absolutely filthy. The idea of a see-through Embassy made no sense at all to me or any other person in the Foreign Office, including the estates experts. We had had the good sense to include in our panel a PA and a junior diplomat, the people who would ask the important questions like the location of the bathrooms and the canteen. We all threw up our hands in horror. So the assembled architects reluctantly turned to the other designs, not quite so 'innovative and exciting', maybe, but if you really don't want it ... So the FCO team

eagerly fastened on their second recommendation, the Michael Wilford design, which I'm sure is fine. But I've always wondered if the architects didn't run rings around us!

So that was my signal contribution to our man in Germany.

1996 - 2000: Ambassador to Italy

SR: Good morning. It's 25 April. We come now to your final posting, Tom. You got your own show to run in Rome, lucky man!

TR: Yes, I was lucky. Third time round in Italy. I was happy to go back because I knew the country well and also most of my overseas career had been spent in either New York or Italy. Anywhere else I would have been a complete novice!

It had already been agreed that Albania would get a resident Ambassador. I was glad about that. Albania had a lot of problems and it deserved a boss on the spot. I think the events of the next few years bore me out.

SR: You said in your notes, Tom, 'mad cow disease for openers'. Tell me about that.

TR: Yes. That was BSE in Britain. Not the ideal start to my job. I got a briefing before leaving. When I called on President Scalfaro to present my credentials, he'd obviously been primed to wag his finger and say, "BSE - very serious!" And I replied, "Very serious indeed. We're working to eliminate it." It took us a long time to resume exports of meat and pedigree livestock, although to be honest our market in Italy had never been that great. So that was my reintroduction to Italy.

SR: And a challenge to your Italian vocabulary as well!

TR: Yes indeed!

SR: I think you wanted to say something about Italy, before coming on to your own time as Ambassador?

TR: I'd been ten years away from Italy, and it had changed in many ways. I'd been told that a second republic had emerged from the ashes of the first. Most of the old ruling parties had disappeared. I've already mentioned the Bribesville scandals. Italian political parties needed

money, a lot of it came from business kickbacks, the parties got too greedy, businessmen started to complain, and the magistrates bestirred themselves. In times gone by they might well not have done, but by the early nineties the Cold War was over, and by the time I arrived the once powerful communists were disbanding themselves and the Christian Democrats had splintered and almost disappeared. Some magistrates launched indictments, and a previously rather cautious press plucked up courage too. Craxi, who was once so powerful, fled to Tunisia and died there. Andreotti, seven times Prime Minister, survived two court cases but never became President of the Republic.

I think there were deeper reasons for this half-revolution, most obviously the country's social transformation, the secularisation of society, the legalisation of divorce, the greater freedom of women, the growth of higher education and in general a more restless, less deferential society. But the spark came from outside Italy.

All that said, many things hadn't changed, and I told London that it was Republic 1½, not 2. Certainly the old parties had largely gone. Politics had become less controllable and more populist. The state had reluctantly started to privatise; gone were the days when Craxi could seriously argue that state control of a food chain was somehow essential to the economy. And there had been a determined assault by some brave magistrates on the Mafia and other criminal organisations. I met the chief Palermo prosecutor, Caselli, in his Palace of Justice, which was guarded like a fortress. He was a brave man. Two of his senior colleagues had already been murdered.

But I noted that there were still far too many parties in Parliament, that the system still favoured coalition-making and weak short-lived governments, that an Italian Prime Minister still had no real control over his colleagues, that the bureaucracy remained overstuffed, and perhaps most important, that the North/South divide was getting worse, not better. In the South there was 50% youth unemployment, in the North a shortage of labour. This was before entry into the euro and the migration of factories to Asia.

Still, there seemed some chance of a fresh start when I arrived. For the first time ever, the centre left had come to power. Prodi's government was a bit of a mishmash, and I'll say more about it later. But at least it was a real change of government and not simply a rearrangement of the tableware.

SR: Let's move on to domestic concerns. Can you talk a bit about the Embassy and your role as Ambassador?

TR: Staff cuts were beginning to bite. But it was a viable Embassy, and there was still some fat, partly in staffing of the consulates but also among support staff. Housing, on the other hand, which had been a real problem back in the eighties, was much less of an issue. Most of our senior home-based staff were now living on the Villa Wolkonsky estate. I mentioned that decision a while back. I don't regret it, and it is indeed one of the main arguments for remaining in that remarkably lovely, but remarkably large piece of real estate within the old walls of Rome.

A newer problem we faced was how better to integrate the non-Foreign Office staff on our books. There were more of them than there had been in the eighties. We had customs, drugs and police liaison attachés. In a sense, they were the by-product of greater globalisation - better and cheaper communications, more migration, more transnational crime. Some of the new people who joined us were reporting straight back to their parent departments without letting me know what they were doing or where they were going, and I had to field some polite Italian complaints. We had to sort that out. I'm not talking of the defence staff, by the way, because they were well established and used to working within the Embassy framework.

An older generation would have recognised the way that Embassies still functioned in the nineties. Telegrams to the FCO carried the Ambassador's name at their end, whether he or she had read them or not. But the top down system was creaking, and the internet did the rest. Towards the end of my time, some of our local staff were emailing their colleagues in other European posts to compare notes on pay and conditions, which of course like most other things were centrally determined in London in those days. The internet was a great leveller.

I'll come on to government to government relations, but at our Embassy level we tried to thicken up the relationship with Italy, as the saying goes. A big asset were the annual British-Italian conferences at Pontignano in Tuscany, which my predecessor, Patrick Fairweather, had started. We always had a good turnout, and Ralf Dahrendorf was a marvellous chairman. We also ran a smaller defence and foreign affairs seminar. In both cases, the British Council did a first class organising job. The centre left had come to power in Italy with big ideas about administrative reform, something which had eluded most of their predecessors.

Administration is top-heavy in Italy, very Napoleonic without perhaps - how can I put it? -

the cutting edge of Paris. The Italian Minister responsible wanted some experts from Britain to come and say what they did. Now the two structures are quite different, but still it was a useful demonstration of cooperation, and when *sportelli unici*, one-stop shops, were introduced in Italy I think they owed something to our influence.

In terms of what everyone now calls soft power - I don't recall we did then - we were so lucky to have the British Council, the British School at Rome, the British Institute of Florence and the Keats-Shelley House, all flourishing in my time and since. War veterans were another link - at least after 1943! - and I spent some time with them and with the Monte San Martino Trust, which every summer brings over Italian schoolchildren to the UK to improve their English, in gratitude for the help and refuge that many ordinary Italians gave our servicemen when they escaped from POW camps after the Armistice. These are all marvellous British-Italian links but of course music and football provide the real mass audiences.

The only cloud in our relations I can remember was the Great Pizza Affair. The EU Presidency was coming our way, and in those days each new Presidency chose a logo which appeared on banners at EU meetings, stationery and so on. New Labour's theme was young Europe, and each Embassy in a fellow member country was tasked to find a couple of kids who'd sit down and draw or paint something they felt represented Europe, or at least their own country. Our kids painted a pizza. The head of the Italian Foreign Ministry rang me in fury. This was an insult. We'd never have allowed a painting of a beer mug to appear on the German entry. Why was Italy singled out? The "these are just young kids" argument got nowhere. Eventually London ruled that we needn't display the logo in Italy, and elsewhere it was often tucked out of sight. A reminder of Italian sensitivities.

A word about making contacts. Every Ambassador does this, every Ambassador entertains, and it wouldn't be worth mentioning if it weren't for the Italian angle. First, as I've said before, Rome isn't Italy, and you need to get out. Then Italian local authorities - regions, cities - have a lot of power and prestige. It's quite common for a Minister to become mayor of a big city after leaving national office, or for the Governor of a region to move to Rome. The powerful Mayor of Naples became Minister of Labour halfway through my stay. I think we Brits may see more of that in future. Add to that that most Italian governments don't last all that long, and there are good reasons to cultivate the outs as well as the ins. Moreover, many politicians, especially northern ones, hate spending too much time in Rome, and it's

often easier to meet them on their home turf. My first acquaintance with the man who later became Berlusconi's powerful Finance Minister was at a goose-eating extravaganza in a tiny Lombard town called Mortara, whose mayor I happened to know. My wife's charitable work - Alzheimer's, especially - and her journalistic contacts also brought me in touch with a whole range of interesting people. There was the head of a consumer organisation who was invaluable in helping us to organise, at very short notice, a conference on CD and video piracy, the big scams of the time, and identify the right participants. This was way outside our normal business.

I said that Prodi's government was a mishmash, and in my four years in Rome we went through three Prime Ministers. Prodi himself was a delightful man, a mix of politician and technocrat which is perhaps more common on the continent. He cobbled together a coalition called the Olive. He liked Tony Blair, and I think Blair liked him. They met every summer when Blair was on holiday in Tuscany. Prodi used to meet him and the family at Bologna airport, Bologna being Prodi's home town. We were there waiting for the plane to arrive, and out jumped Blair in dress down Friday gear. Prodi was caught out but better prepared the summer after. He visited London a couple of times, I think, the first time when John Major was still in office. I was with him. The plane arrived at Northolt and we went into central London together by car. It went through Hyde Park and then turned and went round the park all over again. I later learned that Number 10 had been told to keep Prodi off the door before noon because Major was in a meeting. Prodi asked me calmly whether we hadn't already been round the park, and I murmured something about heavy traffic. Quite different from British Ministers' visits to Rome, where the traffic cops delight in racing you through the streets!

Relations were pretty good throughout my time, especially when the left came to power in Britain as well as France. It seemed as if Europe was going the moderate socialist way. There were meetings of the centre left, including one in Florence, and lots of talk about the Third Way, the new left, triangulation - various words for the same phenomenon. Italian Ministers were pretty accessible. The summits in London and Rome went off okay, though I don't recall that they got down to a great deal of detail. I always thought that relations at the top, while warm, were a little superficial. Maybe that was inevitable with the changes of government.

Prodi himself was eased out after he'd assured Italy of its place in the euro. D'Alema, who came after him, was a very different man, a politician's politician. He'd come up through the young communists - I'd briefly met him back in the eighties - but was now anxious to be seen as a mainstream western politician. The ex-Communists knew they perhaps lacked street cred, and when it came to the Kosovo war D'Alema proved more open to intervention against Milosevic than some of the Foreign Ministry people. I once called on him when he was still party secretary. He started scribbling and making diagrams. He was Chairman of the latest commission charged with reporting on constitutional reform. How could they get Berlusconi, the opposition leader, on board? (They didn't). Paper was piling up and it was fascinating to see a politician's mind at work. But his government was as fragile as Prodi's. Too many chiefs, not enough Indians.

As I mentioned, Prodi's achievement - quite hotly contested within Italy, let alone by the Germans - was for Italy to join the euro project as a full member. Politically, this became inevitable as soon as Aznar of Spain told Prodi that he was determined to join. So the government introduced a special "tax for Europe". Quite a big one. Can you imagine that happening in Britain? It did reduce the annual deficit, but not gross Italian debt which is still one of the EU's major headaches. The Embassy had a ringside seat. It was perfectly clear that we were not going to join the euro, whatever Tony Blair might have wished. So while we followed the euro saga closely, and reported to London, we didn't have to use the same fine scalpel that I'm sure our German Embassy colleagues devoted to it.

People are often surprised when I tell them that Italy has the second largest manufacturing base in Europe, after Germany. We think of food, fashion and tourism, But Italy has marvellous engineers and first class communications, a strong car industry, a shipbuilding sector that has survived, and some good defence companies too. I mention this because quite a lot of my time in Rome was taken up with trade matters. The big nationalised industries in Britain had already been privatised, and many of them seemed to have surplus funds which they wanted to invest abroad, whether in acquisitions or tie-ups. I'm not sure that they always chose the right targets. The British Airports Authority (as was) bought Naples airport and was fishing around for Turin before I left. British Telecom was looking for partners in Italy for what was in those days only 3G. British Gas was hoping to market Egyptian liquefied natural gas and ship it by container to a port in Italy. GKN, Enterprise Oil, British Aerospace, the luckless Marconi ... there were an enormous number of UK companies sniffing around. In a country like Italy, which still had a big state sector and can be quite

protectionist, the arrival of these invaders was sometimes greeted with resentment. Enterprise, for example, had licences to drill in southern Italy. But it couldn't get the stuff out unless its partner, ENI, was prepared to invest money in a pipeline to the coast. And ENI dragged its heels and I suspect would quite have liked to see Enterprise disappear. A lot of local politicians in Bari, which would have been the port in question, objected to the Egyptian LNG scheme and, after some fruitless years, British Gas eventually pulled out. But the other companies did better. It was an area where a Rome-based ambassador felt he could be of use. The overall direction of trade work lay quite rightly in Milan, where we had good people. But these big privatised British companies were dealing with counterparts that often gravitated around Rome for political reasons. You couldn't get very far on telecommunications, for example, without calling on the relevant Italian Minister.

I used to estimate that foreign policy, properly speaking, took up no more than 10 to 15% of my time. An Embassy, after all, deals with all Whitehall departments, not just the FCO. But for a few months Kosovo kept me and our defence section busy. Most of the aircraft and ships that the NATO operation required, including our own, were based in Italy, and we needed Italian cooperation. I've already said that D'Alema was supportive. There were strains of Third Worldism and Catholic pacifism in the country that had to be managed, and he did it well. What was downright perverse, given Italy's geographical and political importance, was its initial exclusion from the Contact Group. The Italians had to gatecrash a meeting before they were finally let in.

One general feature of my time in Italy, which I've touched on already, was the growth of our workload on home affairs - immigration, judicial cooperation, drugs and the like. A lot of Albanians were caught out by Ponzi schemes and lost their money. There was a big exodus to Italy, only 50 miles or so across the Adriatic, and we had those scenes, fairly new at the time, but now we're sadly so used to them, of rickety ships crossing the Adriatic and often dumping their helpless cargo offshore. No one was prepared for this. My deputy, Mariot Leslie, paid a useful visit to the Italian coast, and the Kent police sent some people out too. Kosovars had refugee status, so all the Albanians claimed they were from Kosovo. We learnt that there were two ways of telling the difference. The interpreters for the Italians said there were small differences in dialect but a bigger one was that Kosovars dressed more snappily!

I left Rome with regret when my time was up. We used to have a small place in Tuscany. It's our second home. Britons tend to talk about Italy's political instability, but maybe they'll

be less vocal now. Despite the frequent changes of government the country has held together. I think its semi-federal structure helps. People identify very much with their regions or towns, and local pride is strong. There's some elastic in the system. People also say that Italy punches below its weight. Now I've no problem with Britain or any other country punching above its weight, which was one of Douglas Hurd's favourite remarks. But I'm sure he'd agree that you do need to work out what your true weight is before you get too ambitious. Witness all the inflated expectations of our future trade deals.

I do worry about resources. That'll sound like the usual special pleading, but if we leave the EU and don't have a seat at the Brussels table, we're going to need to step up our bilateral diplomacy in European capitals, and indeed elsewhere. For all the siren songs of social media and electronic diplomacy, the job is still largely about meeting and influencing people face to face, and that takes resources, whether home based or local. We used to be fat and now I think we're too lean, at least for a country of our size and ambitions.

For all its current challenges, the FCO remains a great career. I always felt I was part of a team. The structure of these oral histories tends to be about you as an individual, but it's teamwork that makes an effective diplomatic service. Since I retired and began to do a bit of lecturing, I've noted that many academics seem to regard diplomats as mere "practitioners". Not a glowing testimonial, perhaps - but I was proud to practice a skill for nearly forty years and I thank everyone who made that possible.