ONE OF A THOUSAND

Peter Thompson



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To Valerie
with enormous gratitude for sharing nearly all of this journey

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Foreword

I have spent a lifetime writing technical reports, usually under considerable pressure on overseas assignments and therefore procrastinated when it came to writing this memoir. Various projects took precedence, including writing a family history, editing the historical novel "Tradewinds and Treachery" and the history of Hunting Technical Services. The incentive for actually putting pen to paper come from reading Rory Stewart's book "The Places in Between". He has the following to say in relation to the multinational officials involved in returning Afghanistan to "normality":

> *Critics have accused this new breed of administrators of neo-colonialism. But in fact their approach is not that of a nineteenth-century colonial officer. Colonial administrators may have been racist and exploitative but they did at least work seriously at the business of understanding the people they were governing. They recruited people prepared to spend their entire careers in dangerous provinces of a single alien nation. They invested in teaching administrators and military*

officers and mastered the local language. They established effective departments of state, trained a local elite and continued the countless academic studies of their subjects through institutes and museums, royal geographical societies and royal botanical gardens. They balanced the local budget and generated fiscal revenue because if they did not their home government would rarely bail them out. If they failed to govern fairly, the population would mutiny.

Post-conflict experts have got the prestige without the effort or stigma of imperialism. Their implicit denial of the difference between cultures is the new mass brand of international intervention. Their policy fails but no one notices. There are no credible monitoring bodies and there is no one to take formal responsibility. Individual officers are never in one place and rarely in one organization long to be adequately assessed. The colonial enterprise could be judged by the security or revenue it delivered, but neo-colonialists have no such performance criteria. In fact their very uselessness benefits them. By voiding any serious action or judgement, they unlike their colonial predecessors, are able to escape accusations of racism, exploitation and oppression.

Perhaps it is because no one requires more than a charming illusion of action in the developing world.

I must be one of the rapidly dwindling number of people whose career covered both the colonial and post-colonial situations described. The first half of my life placed me firmly in the "Colonial Camp" and my commitment to Fiji and its people was total. In the second half of my career as an international consultant I was not one of the neo-colonialists referred to by Stewart, but I was in effect their servant so some of the criticisms set out above I both recognise and accept. The neo-colonialists I worked for, usually in the form of the bilateral and multilateral aid agencies, set the agenda. My role was not to ask too many questions but to win the work, carry it out as effectively as possible and above all ensure that the firm got paid. My Fiji experience was never repeated and I had neither the time nor inclination to become as deeply involved in the thirty or so countries where I have worked.

Finally, an explanation of how I arrived at the title "One of a Thousand". In "How Green was our Empire", edited by Terry Barringer (2005) there is the following statement:

> *It has been estimated that, from the start to finish, no more than 1,000 graduate agricultural scientists were ever appointed to the Colonial Agricultural Service (CAgS). Three quarters of all CAgS officers served in African territories and, although few in the field, the staff with strong support from their network of distinguished Centres of Excellence provided a most impressive range and quality of work.*

I am proud to be one of the last of The Thousand.

Part I
Starting Out

India

The Thompsons are said to have good memories and my father Eric claimed (tongue-in-cheek) that his brother Reg could remember pricking himself putting his nappy on when a year old. My claims are much more modest and my earliest memory was of my mother bringing my brother Christopher back from hospital wrapped in a red blanket when he was a week old. It was September 1938, I was nearly four years old and home was our bungalow at Binnyston Gardens, the housing complex belonging to the Bangalore Woollen Cotton and Silk Mills in South India where Father was the head of the Dyeing Department.

Father was born in June 1898, brought up in Leeds, leaving school at fourteen and a half to start work. Aged sixteen he was employed as a laboratory assistant at Leeds University, which entitled him to join the University's Officer Cadet Training Unit. World War I was raging and he was commissioned in the West Yorkshire Regiment (Leeds Rifles) in 1916 and subsequently transferred to the Royal Tank Corps. His tank was blown up and he was severely injured just before Armistice was declared. After a year in hospital he entered Leeds University and graduated

with a diploma in Colour Chemistry in 1923.

Jobs were hard to come by in the immediate post-war Depression and at first Father could only find work as a foreman on the construction of a water tower at Moortown (Leeds). Then thanks to his life-long friend (and my godfather), Tom Harding, he was recruited by Binny and Co (Madras) Ltd as an Assistant Chemist in February 1926, transferring to Bangalore Woollen Cotton & Silk Mills as Chemist in February 1937 and then appointed Chief Chemist at the end of 1939.

My mother Phyllis Monk was born in Blackburn in December 1907, the younger daughter of Edward Monk, the director of a firm of mill factors and Mary Jane Monk (née Whittaker). Educated at Blackburn Girls High School, she was a talented artist and went on to art college. Opportunities to use her skills were scarce at the time and she worked for a company painting dressing table sets, a job she found repetitive and uninteresting.

Phyllis and her older sister Hilda were on holiday in Abersoch (Wales) in the summer of 1929 where she met Father who was on leave from India. They corresponded for 3 years whilst father was back at work. On his next leave in the winter of 1932, Father made the mistake of suggesting that they wait a further 3 years before getting married. Mother put her foot down and said,

"Marry me now or forget it!"

They were married at Salesbury Parish Church near Blackburn in February 1933.

There might have been a reason for Father's "indecision",

as he had an attractive Parsee girlfriend in Madras. Mother may not have known about her at the time of the wedding, but it was no secret when we were children and mother always referred to her as "Oh My", certainly not the lady's real name.

Trying to book a double cabin back to India at very short notice proved to be impossible and the best that father could do was to share a cabin with three other men, whilst Mother was likewise required to share with three other women. Father felt obliged to warn Mother against any inappropriate approaches from her cabin mates as at the time she was unaware that lesbians existed. Mother's parents came to Southampton to bid the newly-weds farewell and her father Edward gave her £200 saying "*Use this to come home with if he isn't nice to you.*" No sooner had they arrived in Madras than some of the money was spent on a fridge.

I was born in Madras in November 1934 and the family came to England on leave in 1936. I have no recollection of this visit, but apparently I caused mayhem when the ship called at Marseilles, by pulling down a large display of hats in a shop. From 1927-39 my father was in the Army of India Reserve of Officers and served as a Captain in both the Royal Tank Corps (Armoured Cars) and in the Royal Indian Army Service Corps (MT). He was called up at the outbreak of WWII but this was blocked by the Company.

A letter dated August 1939 states *"as this Mill is required to produce woollen blankets for the Military, you as a key man cannot be released for military service"*.

He was required to resign his commission, which he greatly regretted.

Many of the families living at Binnyston Gardens in Bangalore were originally from Yorkshire on the woollen side of the business or from Lancashire on the cotton side. In addition to my brother Christopher there were six other children of about our age living at the Gardens. This number increased during school holidays as a couple of other children were away at boarding school in Ooty. We constituted quite a gang and were dominated by Maureen the mill manager's daughter who in addition to being older than everyone else was very conscious of her father's position.

We lived a very comfortable and privileged life with half a dozen servants – Anthony (the bearer), Diana (the ayah), a cook, chokra (kitchen boy), mali (gardener) and syce (groom). Diana was our favourite, a good looking young woman who was never short of boyfriends. These Anglo-Indian chaps only appeared when our parents were out for the evening. Mother had her suspicions, but we were not about to rat on Diana.

There was plenty of room to keep ponies and to roam at will as far as the railway line which divided the compound from the mill. One of my less-than-clever ideas was to have a one anna coin flattened under the wheels of a train – I can still see the driver's face as he narrowly missed this foolish white child, not to mention the scolding I got from Diana. There was also a playground, swimming pool and club house for parties complete with Santa dispensing presents

at Christmas time. The best fun however was to be had in the under drawing of Maureen's house (many tropical houses are built with the floor a couple of feet off the ground) where we established various dens and indulged in the odd *bidi* (local cigarette). Years later I re-visited this house and was horrified at the thought of the snakes we might have encountered.

School

All of us went to Bishop Cotton's Boys or Girls School which is in the Cantonment (military and civil service) area of Bangalore, whilst Binnyston Gardens was in the "City" some miles away. Getting to and from school was quite a performance. Every morning a flatbed truck from the mill was loaded with a tin-roofed, wire-sided cage with benches along each side on which we sat on the way to and from school. On a visit back to Bangalore 40 years later I was pleased to see that "our cage" had taken on a second lease of life as a hen house for the occupants of Maureen's old house.

We boys started in the junior school which was part of Bishop Cotton's Girls School and went on to the "real world" in the senior school. There were and still are, three Bishop Cotton Boys High Schools, the other two being in Shimla and Nagpur. The school was modelled on a traditional British public school and every morning we lined up class by class on the games field before going into chapel for assembly. Our uniform of shirt and shorts was completed by a topee sporting a military style flash on the side to identify our house. I was in Pope House and to this

day I remember our house song:

Tally-ho Pope House/ Tally-ho Pope House/ Pope House on forever/ Yellow and white our colours so bright etc etc

Like everyone else we spoke Anglo-Indian English at school, although I was careful to fall back on standard English when Mother was around. My best friend Peter was in "Packnawash" House and it was many years before I discovered that it was really Packenham-Walsh House. I think that the composition of the school at that time was about 50% Anglo-Indian, 25% Indian and 25% European. Some staff members were English including the Headmaster, Canon Elphic.

Discipline was strict and in my first year in senior school I was caned for kicking another boy's topee around the playground. This sadly occurred right outside the Headmaster's office window and taught me an early lesson – try to be out of sight when committing a crime! The other corporal punishment incident that I remember very vividly was being present at the public caning of a sixth former who had been caught smoking – he was beaten on the dais in front of the entire school and humiliated. He left the next day to join the Indian Air Force.

As day boys we were not involved in much sport but our free time was dominated by a different game for each term, marbles, tops and kites. These games were highly competitive and involved driving your opponent's "ally" out of a circle drawn in the dirt, or putting his top out of action or by splitting it in two with the lethal chisel tops we

used, or fighting his kite and bringing it down.

Kite fighting was a particularly popular sport amongst the older boys and involved treating the first 15 feet or so of string with a concoction of rice paste, ground glass and colouring. The objective was to cut down your opponent's kite by sawing through his string. We younger boys were quick to salvage pieces of the vanquished kite's string as souvenirs, a process that caused many cut hands.

We all took sandwiches to school and ate them sitting on benches around the games field. Numerous kites, of the feathered kind, were adept at swooping down to steal our food and in an unwary moment many a sandwich was whipped out of our hands. However we did not need to go hungry, as hawkers were always camped at the school gates ready to sell us curry and roti, sticky sweets and roasted peanuts.

This being wartime, Father's former involvement with the military and the fact that he was prevented from joining up impacted on our lives in a number of ways.

With permission from management, Father was allowed to use his laboratory to produce "Slique Toilet Preparations and Perfumes". These were packaged and marketed by Mother through "Ye Olde Victory Shoppe" in Bangalore, with the entire profit going to the War Fund (Rs.6,000 or £4,800 by September 1943). Because neither cosmetics nor their containers were readily available in India during the war, Mother spent much time collecting suitable jars and bottles, many of which she hand painted.

In order to "do their bit" our parents also entertained a lot

of soldiers (both commissioned and non-commissioned) through the army's welfare (R&R) service. This enabled me, by dint of much scrounging, to build up an impressive collection of military memorabilia including a captured Nazi flag and a Japanese sniper's rifle.

We were allowed to join the British United Services (BUS) Club, now the Bangalore Club, something which would never have been permitted had Father not been an army officer. As the only family from "the Gardens" allowed to join, we made full use of the Club's facilities.

The family car was a "Hillman Wizard" that consumed rather a lot of petrol which was rationed during the war. Father's solution to the travel restrictions was to buy a pony and a light two wheeled trap and to hire a *syce* (groom). This served us well as mother travelled into Bangalore most days either to work at Ye Olde Victory Shoppe or as a volunteer (Captain) in the St John Ambulance Brigade.

Some part of the cloth dyeing process required the use of alcohol which the laboratory at the mill was allowed to distil from molasses. After some experimentation Father found that he could run the car on a mixture of petrol and alcohol and could also produce good vodka and passable gin but "Binnyston Gardens whiskey" was never a success.

The political upheavals and the Quit India campaign waged towards the end of the war made little impact on us as children, although I am sure that the adults followed Gandhi's frequent spells in jail with interest. My only political experience was going down to the stables one morning to see our pony "*Subsy*" and being accosted by

two men wearing the ubiquitous Congress Party caps. They harangued me at length about the inequities of British rule. If their intention was to scare the pants off me they certainly succeeded

The highlight of the year was our annual holiday to Ooty, a hill station now in Tamil Nadu state, where we stayed with the Whapshire family in their guest house "Rosemount". In 1944, just as we set off on holiday, Christopher and I developed whooping cough and were no longer welcome at the guest house. Fortunately Father knew the District Forest Officer who suggested that we stay at the Forestry Rest House at Nadrivatum Station, in the Nilgiry Hills some miles from Ooty. In addition to eucalyptus, the cinchona tree was grown and the bark harvested to produce quinine. This was of great importance to the war effort, as the cinchona plantations in Malaya were occupied by the Japanese and production from the Station was badly needed to counteract malaria. For us kids Nadrivatum was magic, we had the whole plantation to roam in and the blacksmith at the station made us each a small axe. Thus armed we felt very important and sure that we could defend ourselves from all comers.

One branch of the Whapshire family owned a tea and coffee plantation in the Ochterlony Valley near the Station. General Ochterlony was a colourful early 19th century general in the East India Company who was in the habit of parading through Delhi in the early evening along with his ten wives each seated on their own elephant. He made sure that all of his wives were well connected and the Ochterlony

Valley may have been a part of one wife's dowry.

One afternoon we were invited to tea by the Whapshires who had arranged for a travelling entertainer to put on a show for our benefit. Two of his acts stayed in my memory. He cut the spongy mid-rib out of a banana leaf and then pierced it three inches from each end with a sharp kitchen knife. Christopher and I were told to hold the handles and the back of the knives with both hands, then after rubbing our forearms and a suitable incantation told to pull the knives with all our might. Nothing happened - until he lifted the spell and the knives cut through the mid-rib with ease. I suppose that it was some form of hypnosis but, if so, we were unaware of feeling any different.

For his final performance the magician asked our hosts for a length of sewing cotton and a glass of water. The cotton was folded into a ball and swallowed along with the whole glass of water. After a moment or two for digestion he next asked for a razor blade and lifting his shirt cut a slit in the skin of his stomach. Blood trickled out and after feeling around for some time he produced a length of bloody sewing cotton from the incision. Father said that he must have planted the cotton a month earlier and allowed the cut to heal so that he could produce it again with a flourish at the appropriate moment. He was probably right but we were still very impressed.

Another Whapshire relative managed a mica mine (a mineral much in demand during the war for its insulating properties) but his hobby was taxidermy and he had an amazing array of frogs playing tennis and chipmunks

playing golf. I was fascinated and decided that when I grew up I wanted to be a taxidermist – fortunately this ambition had waned by the time I reached my teens.

We were actually on holiday at Nadrivatum when we heard about VJ Day on the radio (August 15th 1945 the day on which the Japanese surrendered, ending WWII). We therefore knew that it would not be long before we went to England on leave. Father's last overseas leave had been in 1936 and so he was the first person from the "Gardens" entitled to travel.

In September 1945 we were all packed up and ready to catch the train to Bombay when I was bitten by a snake. I was running through long grass in plimsolls and must have stood on a snake with my right foot and it promptly bit me just above the instep on my left foot. I knew what had happened and could see the two fang marks clearly. I rushed home, where father promptly cut between the puncture marks with a razor blade packed the wound with potassium permanganate, added a tourniquet and rushed me to hospital. I had no idea what sort of snake had bitten me so I was given a broad spectrum anti-venom injection and sent home. The next day we caught the train to Bombay and apart from running a temperature and being a bit delirious I was really none the worse for wear. It was certainly a drama the family could have done without.

Going "home"

Home for us was something of a misnomer as England was entirely new territory for Christopher and me and even our parents found post-war Britain fairly difficult, but not nearly as difficult as families who had lived through the war years in Europe.

We sailed from Bombay on a P&O vessel, one of the first troop ships to accept civilian passengers. The ship was packed with troops going home from the Far East and amongst the civilians Father recognised a man he had last seen at Leeds University 25 years previously. A professor of chemistry in Singapore, Charles and his family had been imprisoned in the notorious Changi jail and whilst they were painfully thin, at least they emerged with all of the family intact. Not much of the journey remains in my memory except for going ashore at Aden to refuel and being fascinated by a soldier with a large tiger tattooed on his back, the tiger's tail disappearing down his shorts!

We landed at Southampton on 23rd October 1945 and as we came into harbour we could see the large coils of PLUTO (pipe line under the ocean) which was used to supply fuel during the D Day landings. Then through Customs with my Japanese sniper's rifle hidden amongst

the golf clubs and numerous trunks, cases and bags, then we made our way to our paternal grandparents' house in West London. There we encountered hoar frost for the first time and, thinking that it must be snow, collected it into tiny little balls. If these were really snowballs we were unimpressed!

The Thompson grandparents were leaving shortly for America to stay with Father's sister Marjorie, so we soon moved on to Blackpool to stay with Granny Monk. Grandpa Monk had died in 1943 and one of Mother's great regrets was that she had last seen him in 1936. I attended a local school for a few weeks before Christmas and was surprised to see children wearing clogs playing football and white men sweeping the streets. Only later did I discover that this was called "culture shock".

At about this time Father decided that he would not return to India but he had not ruled out going overseas again, so there was some pressure to get me into a boarding school.

Lancaster Royal Grammar School (LRGS)

I started at LRGS in the Lent term of 1946 and fortunately was spared the 11plus exam. My reports from Bishop Cottons were good and I had been top of the form for four out of the last five terms in India. Nevertheless I was full of fear and trembling when "Tim" Timberlake the Headmaster sat me down in his study and finally, after asking me a lot of searching questions regarding my academic ability, declared, *"You will do".* Storey House at LRGS and life in Form II contributed to my culture shock. Everything was rationed (except the cold weather) and initially our family did not have sufficient clothing coupons to kit us out properly. When I came to leave school in 1953, "Tim" said,

"I remember your first term, Thompson, you looked like a starved and drowned rat!"

Our first taste of really cold weather was the record-breaking winter of 1947 when everything froze and I developed spectacular chilblains, as did my friend Clarke, also a new arrival from India. Nurse had the answer to our predicament. First we had to sit on the edge of a bath that contained a basin of hot water and a basin of cold and we

were strictly instructed to soak our feet in the hot water for two minutes and then for another two minutes in the cold water "to improve the circulation". This was sheer agony but there was no point in trying to avoid the time spent in cold water, as Nurse was watching.

Starting a term later than the other new boys, as well as coming from India, was a considerable disadvantage. My first lesson with "Tigger" Tyson came as a shock. The class was already half way through Hereward the Wake ("Hereward who sir?") and Greek mythology ("Beg pardon sir") was no easier. Some of the skills I had acquired at Bishops were of little consequence. For example I knew my 16 times tables, because in India at that time there were 12 pice in an anna and 16 annas in a rupee. Similarly no one was impressed by my skill at marbles, tops or kites, although I did gain a little kudos from the python skin secreted in my tuckbox. Similarly it was a long time before I could contribute to group discussions of the prowess of Blackburn Rovers or the latest set of toy soldiers or model aeroplanes. Fortunately I was a good swimmer and every new boy at a boarding school, needs to be really good at something.

After a couple of years, I was fairly well integrated at LRGS and overall I enjoyed my time at school. Basically I am a conformist and accepted the discipline, including the odd beating from prefects, of a fairly traditional boarding school without too much complaint. A small gang of boarders came from the West Riding of Yorkshire and we travelled to and from school by train at the beginning and

end of term, then trudged up the hill to school with our trunks and tuck boxes being delivered by British Rail the next day. When we entered the sixth form we were allowed to take our bikes to school and in the summer term I used to cycle from Rawdon to school and back, a journey of some 65 miles.

I sat the last ever School Certificate in 1950 and the results were due to come out when I was on a school field trip at the Marine Research Station on the Isle of Man. I was balanced on a rock looking for sea anemones when someone called out:

"Thompson, there is a telegram here with your exam results!"

I slipped off the rock in my excitement and fell into the sea. I had passed fairly comfortably but failed in both French and Spanish and needed a foreign language to get into university. I then took French O level another four times before finally securing a borderline pass.

Sport was strongly encouraged at school so in addition to swimming I played rugby for the school Under 16 team. Alas I was too light or too slow, or both, to make the First or Second XV, so somewhat reluctantly turned to cross country running in the winter terms. My other interest was amateur dramatics and I appeared in - and on one occasion produced - a number of house and school plays. In later years LRGS joined forces with Lancaster Girls Grammar School to put on plays but in my day we played the female parts and almost invariably I was "a girl".

At about this time an Old Lancastrian came to talk to

the school about his work in the Agricultural Department in Kenya. As I had already decided that I did not want to work in UK, this sounded interesting. Also, we enjoyed our summer holidays at Brickyard Farm at Easingwold so I thought that I could see the way ahead fairly clearly. I got reasonable A levels in Biology and Physics in 1952 and could probably have entered university with these results. However, I was still 17 and Father said that I could stay on to do a third year in the sixth form. This final year at school was great as I was a school prefect, a sergeant in the Combined Cadet Force, captain of swimming and collected three more A levels in Botany, Zoology and Chemistry.

I am not sure if "Tim" thought that the school had any responsibility for telling the boarders about sex but, if so, his attempts at instruction were sadly inadequate. At the end of our last term he called the leavers together and, after urging us to uphold the best traditions of the school, felt obliged to say something about sex in general and prostitutes in particular – his words are remembered to this day at LRGS*:*

"Frankly chaps you would not want to use someone else's handkerchief would you?"

When I started at school the boarding fees were £32 per term, which seems a paltry sum these days, but it was significant enough for father to worry if he could afford to send Christopher to LRGS. The problem was eventually resolved when Christopher passed the 11-plus at his primary school in Roundhay and started at LRGS in 1950. By this time I was in the sixth form and starting to breathe

down his neck as a prefect. This he did not appreciate and I had to put up with a lot of insubordination.

In 1951, a century after the Great Exhibition of 1851, The Festival of Britain was held to demonstrate that Britain was back on its feet after the dark days of the war. Four of us, David Morphet, David Smith, Audrey Lancaster and I went to London for a few days and "did" the Festival and the Battersea Fun Fair. Audrey, aged 15, was David Smith's girlfriend and I think only allowed to join us on the basis of "safety in numbers".

As my school days were coming to an end, National Service was very much on the horizon and I had heard that the RAF ran pre-selection courses for potential aircrew. This seemed a good way of avoiding weeks of "square-bashing" in the Army so I applied and went down to Hornchurch for the two day course. The RAF decided that I was "navigator rather than pilot material" and I was happy to accept this decision. In the end my National Service was deferred while I was at university and then exempt when I was accepted for the Colonial Agricultural Service. At some stage during this process I was called to the RAF recruiting office in Leeds and reprimanded for going on the pre-selection course if I never intended to join up. I did try to explain that I was simply hedging my bets, but they were not impressed.

Family

Father was on leave until the end of March 1946 but had already decided not to return to India and would rather not have to go back into the textile industry. We were still living in Blackpool and for six months he had obtained a temporary post as a "Technical Cosmetic Consultant" at North Western Laboratories in Middleton. This textile manufacturer made an unsuccessful attempt to diversify into the manufacture of cosmetics using the brand name "Gay Venture" but was unable to compete once the established cosmetic companies geared up again after the war. The company was about 40 years before its time and might have made a fortune in "pink pounds" if only it had survived!

From the middle of 1946 until he retired in 1963 Father returned, somewhat reluctantly, to dyeing as a chemist at Green Lane Dye Works in Yeadon, subsequently a part of Bradford Dyers Association (BDA). By the winter of 1946 we had moved into a three bedroomed house at Roundhay, Leeds which I apparently said was so small "that there was no room to breathe". Thereafter number 8 Roman Crescent was called "NRTB Villa".

Mother survived the move from Blackpool and the awful winter of 1946- 47 and soon afterwards Granny and Grandpa Thompson returned from America and moved in with us. Father had tried without success to re-possess his tenanted house at Chapeltown for use by his parents, but in the immediate post-war period tenant rights were stringently enforced. His answer to the problem was to buy an old chicken shed, erect it in the back garden and, after giving it a lick of paint, move Christopher and me into it (during the school holidays). A housing inspector was duly impressed by the Thompsons' reduced circumstances and at the next court hearing Father obtained possession of "Greystones" at Chapeltown which Granny and Grandpa duly occupied.

Mother spent a considerable part of the next three years travelling by tram from Roundhay to Chapeltown to look after the old folk, until Granny died in June 1951, whereupon Grandpa returned to live with us at Roundhay. He had Parkinson's disease, fell down stairs and died about three months after Granny. An accidental death automatically involves the police and a post-mortem and Mother was convinced that the police thought she had pushed Grandpa down the stairs. In the meantime Father was in the process of having a substantial detached four-bedroom house built on a greenfield site at Rawdon. We moved in 1952 and "Newstead" remained the family home for the next 25 years.

My mother continued to be busy as Father purchased a company called Locking and Sons from a firm in Otley

in 1953. Two "over the counter pharmaceuticals" were produced – Glickons Celebrated Salve (a cure for boils and other infections) and Lockings American Sugar Coated Pills (herbal based laxative). Father produced the salve in "our shed", whilst a manufacturing chemist made the pills in bulk. Mother was responsible for the administration, finance, packaging and marketing. The company made modest but useful profits until it was gradually wound down from 1972 onwards. Forty years later I was able to place all of the records, equipment and samples of production in the archives of the Thackray Medical Museum in Leeds.

Following retirement from BDA, Father went back to work as the manager of Pennine Polyfibres near Bradford. The company had been started by Reg Booth and Tony Hall to process man-made fibres into pillow and duvet fillings and similar products. Reg was an old friend of the family, formerly the Woollen Master at the Mill in Bangalore and accurately described by Mother as "a card". His wife had died in India before the war and his two daughters were at boarding school in England. This left Reg as the only bachelor living in the "Gardens" and the stories of his leisure activities were legion.

On one occasion building work was in progress at the Mill and, as is common in India, a procession of women carried head loads of bricks and mortar up the scaffolding. Reg noticed one particularly attractive girl amongst the workers and said to his clerk Ram Sami:

"See that girl over there? Ask her if she would like to come and look after my dogs."

The arrangement was a success but about nine months later the clerk came back and said:

"Sahib, I must talk to you about the girl looking after your dogs."

"Yes Ram Sami."

"Well Sahib, her husband is in jail for murder and he will be released next week."

To return to the more mundane textile trade in West Yorkshire in the late 1960s, Father became a director of Pennine Polyfibres which eventually owned six or seven mills in and around Bradford. The company was expanding as traditional woollen mills went out of business at the rate of one a week in West Yorkshire. Father finally retired aged 74 and the Pennine Fibre Group, as it became known, was sold to the Courtauld Group and made Tony Hall a millionaire.

Father died in 1978 just five days before his 80th birthday, Mother stayed on at Newstead until 1982 when she bought Appletree Cottage in Aldborough and moved to be near us. She had six happy years in the village before succumbing to bowel cancer two months before her 81st birthday.

Priory Farms

I had been accepted to read agriculture at Leeds University and at the time students without a farming background were required to spend a year working on a farm to gain practical experience. Finding a good farm for my practical year proved straightforward as our neighbour Tom Rhodes knew someone who audited the books for Priory Farms at Nun Monkton near York. We went over to have a look and the farm manager, Mr McGregor, was happy to accept my long standing friend Bryan Lupton and myself as farm workers. At the time Nun Monkton, which is now a much sought after village, was quite feudal. Colonel Ackroyd owned the Priory and much of the land around the village including two dairy herds, a pig and poultry unit along with grain stores and on-farm feed mixing plant, so it was a good place for a beginner. Also Mr McGregor's brother was professor of agriculture at Leeds University and he took a stern but professional interest in my progress.

There was a hostel in the village run by Priory Farms for single workers which held eight men and two women and we were looked after by a couple of spinsters who cooked substantial meals and took care of the laundry and

housekeeping. Food rationing was still in force so when reporting for work I had to produce my ration book. The village dead ends on the river and is two and a half miles from the A59 York to Harrogate road, so a bicycle was essential both for getting to and from work as well as for getting out of the village. Then (as now) there was a garage at Nun Monkton lane end and we would leave our bikes behind the garage before catching the bus to town. No one ever had a bike stolen.

I was assigned to Sweethills Farm and the 100-strong Ayrshire herd and followers. The herdsman Fred Smith lived in the tied house on the farm and was assisted by myself and a lad called Richard. Not a natural farm worker, he had served his apprenticeship as a brush maker in Rochdale and was saving up to go sheep farming in the Falkland Islands with his older brother. Work started at 5.30am and I soon took on the role of second herdsman, largely because Richard was not a particularly good milker and therefore was assigned to look after the calves and other livestock.

We were paid a shilling and nine pence an hour (about 9p in new money) but even on this lowly wage it was possible to save thanks to our subsidised cost of living at the hostel. We had our own Young Farmers Club as well as a branch of the National Farm Workers Union. I was thus well aware of both the social and political aspects of farming in the early 1950s.

The Alice Hawthorn pub in the village took a small proportion of everyone's pay packet. At the time pubs were required to stop serving drinks at 10.30pm. However, the

landlord had a deal with the garage on the main road and if a police car turned into the lane after witching hour a phone call to the pub ensured that the lights were out and the front door locked by the time the local bobby arrived.

Soon after starting work I heard about day release classes in agriculture being held at the secondary school in Knaresborough. These I attended on a Wednesday afternoon before catching the late bus to Rawdon for my day off on Thursday. Working every weekend was a bit of a chore, especially after a late night on Friday or Saturday which made getting up for work the next day in mid-winter a real pain. On one memorable occasion I actually fell asleep on my bike and rode into the back of a stationary Morris Minor car whose owner, a farmer from neighbouring Moor Monkton, was visiting his girlfriend for the night.

Bryan and I were given very little exposure to anything other than dairying and certainly never got to drive a tractor. As Priory Farms had its own grain drying storage and feed mixing facilities, we were involved in preparing the dairy rations each week. On one occasion I was working with John Williams, a 26 year old former grammar school boy who was recognised as our hostel spokesman and leader. We had fed six bags of ingredients into the hopper of the mixing machine, but only five bags appeared to come out at the other end. In a moment of madness John put his right hand up the delivery chute and promptly had two fingers and the top of his thumb removed by the propeller keeping the machine free from blockage. We rushed John to hospital and I put his fingers in the fridge at the hostel.

Sadly this was before the days of micro-surgery and in due course John returned to work minus two fingers.

The day release course was interesting in itself but was largely undertaken because successful completion led to a certificate, which in turn led to the opportunity to apply for one of a small number of Agricultural Bursaries awarded by the West Riding County Council. Everything went well and I was offered a bursary which I turned down because I had already qualified for a County Major scholarship and unfortunately the rules were that one could not have both.

The other advantage of the course was meeting Pam, an attractive blonde whose father was a wealthy gentleman farmer on the edge of Harrogate. The poor girl suffered from severe asthma which meant that every social event we planned had to be cancelled because the stress brought on an asthma attack. Nevertheless we saw each other every week and I often spent the night at her house rather than going home on a Wednesday. This sounds pretty racy but it was the 1950s and Pam was a closely guarded only daughter.

The hostel did not have TV but fortunately Bryan and I were often invited around to Elaine's house on a Sunday evening for supper and to watch television. Elaine's husband Roger was herdsman on a neighbouring farm, owned by Colonel Jackson whose family made their money from two "over the counter" pharmaceuticals, Zam-Buk (an ointment) and Zubees (a throat lozenge). It was not uncommon to see newspaper adverts of a cartoon horse and the caption "Hoarse? Go suck a Zubee". Mother was convinced that Elaine's hospitality was not entirely

innocent, but if she did have an ulterior motive, I was too inexperienced to recognise the signals.

Working for a veterinary practice

Once we had completed our enjoyable year at Priory Farms, Bryan and I left with a few pounds in our pockets. As there was still about two months before the start of the university year, I arranged to attach myself for six weeks to Frank Lofthouse and Partners who were the leading vets in Otley. This was still a traditional large animal practice serving farms as far south as Huddersfield and Halifax and with only a little domestic animal work. I was kindly received and whilst I was not paid, I like to think I made myself useful. At the end of the six weeks I rather wished that I had decided to read veterinary medicine rather than agriculture.

The Scottish assistant in the practice was saving for his wedding, so we were both on a tight budget. When duties allowed we always ate lunch at the same café in the centre of Otley. Without exception we paid two shillings and six pence (less than 13p in new money) for soup and apple pie. The waitress got used to us and always supplied unlimited quantities of bread and butter to go with the soup.

I took my duties seriously and travelling home on the bus one day was reading a text book on Artificial Insemination

(AI). The girl sitting beside me had what must be a classic in chat up lines.

"What are you reading?"

*"Well, er, this is a book about, er***."*

"Oh really, that sounds interesting what is AI?"

*"Well, er, it is, er***"*

Having covered me in confusion, she admitted that she had seen me at her father's farm the previous week and knew all about AI. I was sure that girl would go a long way.

Leeds University

In the first year at Leeds we were required to do the same subjects as those reading General Science and related subjects and we only moved down the road to the School of Agriculture for the second and final years. Because I already had an A level in Physics, I was excused the subject and consequently had a fairly easy year. Zoology practical involved dissecting a dogfish with two students sharing each specimen. Another agricultural student and friend, John Page, was teamed with Christine (General Science), romance blossomed over the dissecting dish and they married soon after graduation. I shared a dogfish with a super 26 year old nun who was training to be a teacher!

I lived at home rather than in a hall of residence and travelled to and from lectures by bus from Rawdon. After nine years at boarding school and the farm it was nice to be looked after at home and as Christopher was still at LRGS my parents were happy to have me around. Living at home did reduce my exposure to the "university experience", but I already had plenty of experience of institutional living.

I got into the university swimming team pretty well straight away and this dominated my sporting activities

except for the occasional game of fives with John Page who, like me, had played the game at school.

By the second year I had saved enough money to buy a new motor cycle (BSA Bantam) which made getting to and from the university easy. There were changing facilities in the basement at the School of Agriculture which meant that I could stow away all the motor cycling clobber before changing to look presentable for lectures.

I already knew a number of girls, including Liz, who were doing secretarial courses in Leeds. One evening I took Liz home on the back of my motorbike and over coffee with her parents it transpired that three years earlier my father, when returning from work on a foggy Friday evening, had run into a subaltern on his motorbike coming home from Catterick for the weekend. Sod's law, the subaltern was Liz's older brother and, although his injuries were minor, I made sure never to let her ride pillion again.

Lucy started as a medical student in my second year and as she was also a swimmer we got to know each other well. We were a fairly serious "item" until after I left Leeds, she got as far as her third year before dropping out and I don't think she had ever been really serious about becoming a doctor. Lucy ended up working for her father who was an estate agent and also owned a chain of dry cleaning shops.

In the final year we made weekly visits to agricultural enterprises of one sort or another. On one occasion we visited the Reed Brothers poultry enterprise on the old RAF station at Dalton This was interesting as Guy Reed and his brother Eric became hugely successful at the end of

the war by introducing intensive poultry techniques from America. Of less interest was being told by Guy that we were wasting our time at university and ought to "*Get out there and do what we have done.*"

Social life at the university during the winter months was dominated by the formal balls held in the Union Building and organised by the various faculty societies. Thus the engineers, miners, agrics, medics, etc vied with each other to hire the best bands and provide the best stage sets and catering. Tickets were £5 for a couple, equivalent to what a girl working in the weaving sheds might earn in a week, so not an insignificant sum for us students. The cinema was the mainstay of evening entertainment and at the end of the show there were only one or two coffee shops open and espresso coffee was still something of a novelty in Leeds.

I graduated in the summer of 1957 with a pass degree and had already been offered a Colonial Probationership.

Vacations

The university vacations were a great opportunity to gain experience and earn money. I must confess to doing little or no academic work in the holidays. Every Christmas for four years I worked for the Guiseley Post Office and because I had a driving licence I got to drive the postmaster's personal van. Jim, my mate from Nottingham University, and I had the job of delivering parcels to outlying farms and villages including a veritable stream of presents addressed to "Sooty" the well-known TV puppet.

I hoped to spend the vacation at the end of the first year in Canada but did not have either enough money to pay for the voyage or the necessary work permit. A short article in the Yorkshire Post seeking assistance brought a variety of responses which varied from someone who thought it a coded homosexual invitation to a couple of letters to the editor accusing me of wasting taxpayers' money by obtaining qualifications and then migrating. In the knowledge that I had to do more homework and earn more money before I could get to Canada, I decided that I would take myself off to Fort William in Scotland to work on the Great Glen Ranch.

The Great Glen Ranch

The Ranch was featured in the farming press because it had introduced from Canada the concept of keeping beef cattle in open "loafing yards" rather than indoors during the winter. I subsequently learned a bit more at the Ranch about Mr Hobbs, the Scottish born entrepreneur who was said to have made all of his money running booze from Canada to the States during the days of prohibition. Whatever the real story, Hobbs was a wealthy man, lived in Inverlochy Castle and owned the Dew of Ben Nevis distillery in addition to the Ranch.

I took the train from Leeds to Fort William and checked into a B&B in the town. The next morning I turned up at the distillery and told Mr Hobbs that I wanted to work for him. He said *"Sure"* and sent me off in an ex-Army left-hand drive truck to pick up my bags. This accomplished, I was billeted in a tied cottage with Irish Mike, his wife Bridget and their 15 year old daughter. It was Mike's job to look after the bulls on the 10,000-acre ranch and on the domestic front two things stick in my memory.

On land around the cottage there were more mushrooms than I had ever seen in my life, which Bridget ignored as

she thought they were not safe to eat. I could remember enough of Mother's recipes for us to eat mushrooms any style for days to come.

The other was one of Mike's bits of Irish wisdom:

Where do you come from?
Donegal.
How are yer taters?
Very small
How do yer eat them?
Skin and all
Don't they choke yer?
Not at all.

When it came to work, I was told to drive a Fordson tractor which, along with a couple of D4 Caterpillar tractors, was bulldozing and wind-rowing silver birch trees on marginal land. At the time there were healthy subsidies for liming and grassing such land and I have no doubt that today there are grants for putting the land back to trees. I had only worked for a couple of days when I came back from lunch to find that the tractor would not start. My knowledge of tractors was minimal and it transpired that the previous driver had removed the distributor head at lunch time. The culprit was duly exposed and said,

"Mr Hobbs is godfather to my daughter, why did he give you my tractor?"

There wasn't really an answer to that but thereafter I was happy to work with a couple of Irish lads and became quite adept at fencing.

The ranch foreman was happier speaking Gaelic rather

than English but was remarkably tolerant of the student who had been foisted on him and it was at his invitation that I got to attend the Saturday evening parties. A long-standing tradition in the distillery ensured that every worker was entitled to one pint a week of the spirit as it came off the stills. Whisky it certainly was not. It had been cured for about five minutes and was almost pure ethyl alcohol. Even watered down to half strength it was pretty lethal and the Saturday evening ritual was to drink a shot of spirits followed by a chaser of beer followed by another shot of spirits and so on. Fortunately Sunday was a day of rest, although Mike and family still made it to mass. I was quite sorry to head south for the start of the Michaelmas term.

Canada

In the summer of 1956 I finally made it to Canada, having obtained the first ever "working holiday permit" (this type of permit became commonplace later on). The other hurdle was getting a part of my boat fare paid, thanks to a travel scholarship from LRGS. Currency restrictions were still very strict and the Bank of England allowed me to take only $US50 out of the country provided that I gave back a similar sum on my return to UK. We sailed from Liverpool on the Cunard vessel S.S. Ivernia and arrived in Montreal 10 days later.

I shared a cabin with three new migrants, Tom (a shot-firer from a Doncaster pit), Dick (a builder's labourer from north London) and Harry (occupation unknown). Much more interesting was meeting Margery Jones and her friend Denny who were migrating to Toronto. We got on well, it certainly made the journey interesting and we have kept in touch ever since.

I was met off the boat in Montreal by David Morris, a former Leeds University graduate who was studying for an MSc degree at McDonald College, the agricultural faculty of McGill University. For a brief time I was able to earn a

few dollars at the college before moving on. First stop was to see Margery who was sharing a flat in Toronto and we visited Niagara Falls. Then I went on to Ottawa where I had secured a job through the Canadian Pacific Railway which ran a recruiting office to assist new migrants.

Carp, Ontario

The Johnstone family ran a small dairy farm near Carp, a town about 20 miles from Ottawa, and needed an extra pair of hands to cope with the summer work. I was assigned to the bunkhouse in the farmyard which I shared with Felix the middle-aged farm hand. The family consisted of Mr and Mrs Johnstone and their younger son but it was the formidable Granny Johnstone who ruled the roost. No drink was allowed in the house and so father and son used to buy bottled beer, tie a piece of string to the neck and lower it into the tank of iced water used to cool the milk churns. Then when the thought of the teetotal household got too much to bear, it was easy to pull up a couple of nicely chilled beers in the dairy before having to face Granny.

It was hay time and the work was unrelenting - bringing in the cows for milking at 5.30am all the way through to 10pm at night. As the work piled up Felix, who had a large old Chevrolet, used to go off into town at the end of the day for a drink or three. On his return somewhat worse for wear, I had to listen to a rambling tale of how he had been sexually assaulted whilst working on the Toronto docks.

Things got so bad that one morning he refused to get up, so I started work on my own and after milking came back for breakfast to find that he had locked himself into the bunkhouse, was refusing to come out and threatening to burn the place down. This caused great excitement and having recently spent more money than I could afford on an 8mm Kodak cine camera I had visions of my precious purchase going up in smoke. Mr Johnstone called the local authorities and two men in white coats turned up and took poor Felix away. I suspect that the Johnstones knew that Felix was mentally unstable but were not about to warn me in advance.

Felix's departure meant the workload increased and my only let up was to accompany the family to services at the United Church of Canada on Sunday. After church it was customary to drive by the neighbour's farms so that Granny could see who was working and should anyone be unwise enough to be caught with a pitchfork in hand Granny would say,

"The Browns are working on the Sabbath - they will never prosper."

University of Manitoba

Then I went on to Winnipeg by rail which involved an interesting overnight journey. My friend at McDonald College, David Morris, had arranged for me to work for six weeks with the Plant Science Department at the University of Manitoba. A team of three of us were engaged in harvesting trial plots of a potential new malting barley from sites scattered across the province. We had the use of a big Ford station wagon and often drove for 350 miles a day to harvest, weigh and sample the plots. Outside the towns only the Trans-Canada Highway was tar sealed and 350 miles a day on dirt roads was quite a chore. Bill the team leader had a vested interest in doing the work properly as it constituted part of his post-grad studies, whilst Jim Bean the second team member's only concern was to be fed as near to midday as possible. As the critical time got closer, the secret was to search the horizon for the nearest grain silo and head in that direction in the hope that a supply of food could be found.

Having visited London, Bill was of the opinion that *"British beer is like love in a canoe* (f***ing near water). This was a bit of a nerve as at the time Manitoba beer could not

exceed 3.5% alcohol by volume and the law even required that when travelling beer and spirits had to be secured in the boot.

Long distances, flat land and isolated farms usually without any livestock were interesting but not particularly appealing. It was late summer (the first frosts came on 1st September) and the thought of a hard six month winter ahead did not add to the attraction. One community we visited in the Inter-lake area was settled almost exclusively by Icelandic people and the long winter months were spent in keeping alive the language, culture and traditions from back home.

The Head of the Plant Science Department, Professor Shebeski, advised me against a career in the Colonial Service and instead offered me a scholarship to do a Master's degree at the University of Manitoba when I finished at Leeds (it paid $5,000 a year which sounds very little but must have been enough to live on). I told him I would think about it.

While at the university, I was able to live in one of the halls of residence and eat meals in the cafeteria. The food and setting was very different to the refectory in the Student's Union at Leeds and I came across homogenised milk for the first time. I also met a nice Dutch girl working as a waitress at the university and one evening we went into town to hear Bill Haley and the Comets perform at a nightclub. The band was later credited with introducing rock and roll to UK and this, along with actually seeing Elvis Presley on American TV, improved my "street cred" no end back in Leeds.

U.S.A.

When it came time to leave Winnipeg, Uncle Mickey Donovan (husband of my father's sister Marjorie) came up trumps and provided a ticket to fly from Winnipeg to St Louis on Eastern Airlines. This was my first ever flight and I was impressed by the two air hostesses who remembered my name and took the time to chat. If they had taken a close look at my shoes they would have had second thoughts as the sole and uppers on both feet had almost parted company. The Donovans met me in St Louis and, thankfully, stopped to buy me a new pair of shoes on the way home.

For the first time since leaving home, I was able to observe American suburban living first hand and the contrast to Britain, still recovering from the war, was dramatic. Domestic appliances I had never heard of, along with swimming pools in the back garden and 16 year old girls driving new cars certainly impressed me.

Cousin Wendy had recently left high school and was going to a junior college in Vermont. The plan was to deliver her to school by car, taking a few days on the journey in order to show me some of the sights. The first stop was to

check out historic Boston where we met Wendy's brother Ian, at that time a junior officer in the US Navy, and his new fiancée, Anne. We then went on to Up State New York and Vermont to see the trees at their autumn best and deliver Wendy to college.

We got back to New York in time for me to catch the *Queen Elizabeth* back to England. The journey took five days from New York to Southampton and was great for a short term romance, on this occasion with Bunny, a 17-going-on-25-year-old, travelling to Europe with her parents.

Uncle Mickey's final act of kindness as I boarded the ship was to hand me $50 in new notes so that I could meet my obligation to the Bank of England. I am not sure what the Bank would have done in the case of default but I was not keen to test the water. I arrived back at Leeds only a couple of days after the start of term having had a very interesting trip.

Summer 1957

The summer following graduation I worked for a builder in Guiseley, most of the time on a new stone built detached house at Baildon. I remember it as a beautiful summer and the team took a very leisurely approach to the work. I was the mason's labourer and it was made clear that I could clean his tools but not use his trowel. Years later I remember being told that in apartheid South Africa, blacks were also not allowed to use a trowel. Builders got round this regulation by supplying black "brickies" with garden trowels which had been flattened out.

Colonial Office, London

In my last term at Leeds I applied to the Colonial Office for a post in the Agricultural Service. I was called for interview at Great Smith Street in London, stating a preference for a post in the Pacific. This was partly influenced by reading Sir Arthur Grimble's book *Pattern of Islands* and partly because I knew that the Pacific territories would take longer to become independent than many of the larger colonies in Africa. I also let it be known that if unsuccessful I intended to take up the MSc offer in Manitoba.

In due course I was offered a Colonial Probationership, provided that I graduated satisfactorily from Leeds. This would require two years of post-graduate study, a year at Cambridge University and a second year at the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture (ICTA) in Trinidad. Once these hurdles had been cleared satisfactorily, I would be appointed an Agricultural Officer in Fiji.

Cambridge University

Although we did not know it at the time, ours was the last significant intake into the Colonial Agricultural Service (CAgS). Thereafter numbers recruited dwindled as more and more territories became independent and by 1961 recruitment into the permanent service had ended. Of the 34 people appointed that year I was the only graduate from Leeds University, with the largest contingent coming from Reading University, two were from East Africa, a couple from South Africa and there was one Australian.

We were on a salary equivalent to or perhaps slightly better than the sort of scholarships available for UK postgraduate study and were required to do the three normal Cambridge terms plus the long vacation term studying for the postgraduate Diploma in Agriculture. The course was designed partly so that agrics could follow a similar postgraduate route to cadets in the Colonial Administrative Service and partly to ensure that everyone reached something like the same academic level. What the Cambridge authorities did not say until the start of the course was that everyone would be expected to take the

same lectures and examinations but only those with a 2.1 degree from a British or Irish University could be awarded the diploma. This restrictive practice did not encourage people like me with a pass degree to try very hard.

I was lucky enough to be assigned to St John's College and I think that this was more a question of random selection than anything else. I was even more fortunate to find "digs" at Harston just outside Cambridge with the Kendon family. Dr Kendon was a Fellow of St. John's and had a daughter married to an Agricultural Officer in Nyasaland (Malawi), so I met the profile of their preferred lodger. Postgraduate students were allowed to have cars and by this time I had recently acquired a new Austin A30 van for about £350 (a commercial vehicle attracted a lower rate of taxation than a domestic vehicle). The van enabled me to travel to and from Harston without difficulty and I even managed to obtain a pass allowing me to park on university property.

Many of the traditions we were required to observe at the university have disappeared now, such as the wearing of gowns (short gowns for postgrads and long ones for undergraduates) and eating at least one dinner in Hall every week. The college gates closed at 10pm with all visitors out on the street and Proctors and bulldogs patrolled the streets at night to ensure that students behaved,

When it came to the long vacation term I was able to live in college which really rounded off the Cambridge experience, along with all of the other "must do" things like climbing into college after hours and punting on the Cam. An additional advantage for us was the Overseas

Services Club run by a retired Administrative Officer (ex Tanganyika), which provided a useful social venue as well as the opportunity to meet administrative cadets, only one of whom, Alan Scott (subsequently Governor of the Cayman Islands) was destined for Fiji.

Two or three of my contemporaries from school, having completed two years of National Service, were in their final year as undergraduates including Brian Whittle who was reading law and had an athletics "blue". The May Balls were another "must do" and in addition to the St John's Ball, which was spectacular, I managed to afford a couple of others. At one of these Brian borrowed my van to take his girlfriend back to London in the early hours of the morning. The next day the girl sent me a large bunch of flowers care of the college porter. No one had ever sent me flowers before and I was somewhat surprised but suggested to the Head Porter that he should take them home for his wife - this bit of quick thinking earned me a lot of brownie points.

My only sporting effort was again swimming and I represented the university in four or five matches. Elected to the University Swimming Club (the Tadpoles) I was allowed to wear the distinctive green tie with its tadpole motif. An outfitter in the High Street traditionally held a stock of the appropriate blazers and ties but needed permission, for example from the Swimming Club, to supply Mr Thompson with a tie. Unfortunately I was not selected for the team to swim against Oxford University and so was not awarded a "half blue".

Seed Pea Inspector

A notice appeared in the School of Agriculture seeking temporary inspectors for the Pea Growers Research Organisation (PGRO) based near Peterborough and there was enough time between the end of the long vacation term and sailing for Trinidad to get in a few weeks work. It was made clear that preference would be given to those with vehicles and the mileage rate was set at nine pence per mile (about four pence in today's money), but enough to make a modest profit. The task was to inspect fields of peas destined to produce seed and ensure that there was no admixture of "rogues". We had a day's briefing at PGRO and then a mate and I were let loose with a schedule of farms to visit, mostly in Kent. The work was pretty straightforward and the only visit of note was to farms on Foulness Island, at that time a secure Ministry of Defence property. The island was used to store mothballed military aircraft and the guards on the gates ensured that we did not spend too much time plane spotting.

Getting to Trinidad

Our entire group survived Cambridge and the number boarding the ship for Trinidad actually increased with the addition of half a dozen wives. We caught the boat train from London to Southampton and a friend, Flick Rowntree, came to see me off, amidst much cheering from the assembled rabble. We embarked on the *MV Antilles* which had an interesting itinerary

First stop was Vigo where I had to part company from a nurse I had got to know who was travelling to Portugal on holiday with her aunt - pity she was not staying on board until the Caribbean!

Then we sailed across the Atlantic to Puerto Rico and the impressive fortifications at El Moro. Next stop was the Dominican Republic where the dictator Trujillo was still in power and not only had he named the capital Cuidad Trujillo in honour of himself but also there were more troops on the street than I had ever seen before.

On again to Guadalupe where all the policemen appeared to be white and where there was a noticeable lack of coins. Notes were used for even small denominations which became dirty and tattered. Someone said that this

was government policy as the Treasury made a small profit every year from the notes which simply fell to pieces. Then it was on to Martinique where the ship discharged stainless steel vats of wine and reloaded the same filled with rum.

Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture (ICTA)

ICTA was established in 1923, largely to provide postgraduate training in tropical agriculture for officers entering the Colonial Agricultural Service. At the time consideration was given to locating the college in Ceylon, in view of the excellent Botanical Gardens in Colombo. However the priority was to establish a centre for training and research in the Caribbean and Trinidad won the day.

Three courses were available, the undergraduate DICTA and the post-diploma AICTA and special courses in sugar technology for West Indian and some other students. The Diploma in Tropical Agriculture (DTA) had been designed for Colonial Probationers and some serving offices. Our group were not the last to graduate from ICTA but the writing was on the wall. The number of Probationers recruited declined rapidly post-1959 as more and more colonies gained independence. Trinidad gained independence in August 1962 and ICTA became the Agriculture Faculty of the University of the West Indies. Qualifications were upgraded to full degree and MSc status and many of the lecturer posts were localised.

Trinidad

As we came down the gangway at Port of Spain we were met by the College Bursar, Mr Gianetti, who made a point of greeting each one of us by name. He must have spent time studying the photographs from our student records and was said to have made only one or two mistakes in the previous ten years.

ICTA was set in spacious grounds with an impressive collection of tropical trees and shrubs and situated at Tunapuna a few miles out of Port of Spain. We colonial probationers formed the majority of the DTA students but were joined by a few others from Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria and Hong Kong. These men had actually done the job in the field and added a touch of reality to the courses (Ken Newton's description in Pigeon English of the steps involved in establishing a coconut nursery in PNG was both hilarious and instructive).

We single students were housed in a fairly new accommodation block which was particularly well designed to allow a through breeze and there were very few nights when it was too hot to sleep. The main sports field was in the centre of the campus fronted on two sides by the

college library and the dining/club building. The food was adequate and the catering staff did their best to cater for both West Indian and European tastes.

Qualifying for the DTA required success in the final examinations and the satisfactory completion of a research project. One project on offer was a study of the grazing behaviour of European cattle in a tropical environment and essentially followed on from work first undertaken at Louisiana State University. The mechanics involved a team of eight people observing the behaviour of a random selection of Friesian cows from the college dairy herd for a continuous 72 hours, a process to be repeated three times on the occasion of the full moon. The team was made up of Prof. Peter Wilson, Lecturer Ross Houghton, Budu the Farm Manager and five students including Tony Tucker and myself. Turning out at 3am to do a three hour stint of cow watching was not always easy and even worse was not being relieved on schedule, which produced a special form of "observer rage". Nevertheless this was one project where failure was impossible and in fact our work was subsequently written up in one of the scientific journals under Peter Wilson's name and as far as I can recall there was no mention of his faithful band of observers.

With only one exception (he wanted an excuse to leave) I think that all of our group passed the DTA successfully. Most of us acquired a part share in a car and the mechanic on the college farm ran a successful business in buying cars from a departing batch of students for onward sale to the next lot. Most of the cars had seen better days and so the

provision of repair services was yet another string to his bow. Tony Tucker and I had both owned vehicles at Cambridge and could afford to share ownership of an Austin A70 car which Art King, the only black American on the course, dubbed (without any justification) *"The Passion Wagon"*.

As far as I remember, the only sports at college were rugby and hockey and there were enough other teams on the island to provide adequate competition. I played rugby for the college and on one occasion played for a Trinidad team against a team from British Guiana. I suspect that this was not sufficient reason for me to claim to be a rugby international. These were 'racial times' and being white conferred many privileges including being invited to join the Country Club in Port of Spain. This provided some of us with a social venue away from the campus and in addition had a much better pool than the rather dank affair at ICTA. The night clubs on Wrightson Road proved to be a short term attraction, but with one or two exceptions most of us found alternative forms of entertainment after the first couple of weeks.

The "must do" for everyone in Trinidad is Carnival, which technically occurs on the Monday and Tuesday before Ash Wednesday. However, in practice many Trinidadians, even if they are not taking part in carnival, are planning the next one or talking about the last one. It has to be experienced to be believed, the atmosphere is electric and everyone leaves their inhibitions and most of their clothes at home. For women, of any age, the guideline is to imagine mother saying, *"You are not going out looking like that"* and then

remove a couple of items of clothing.

Billed as the "biggest street party on earth", the steel bands practise for weeks before Carnival and compete in the calypso tents where budding contenders strive to rival the unforgettable Mighty Sparrow. The elaborate marching bands spend a fortune on their costumes and lead the parade down Frederick Street, which soon ends up with everyone "jump-up" and "limbo" dancing. I remember returning to college exhausted, but fortunately lectures were cancelled for the duration.

Tobago

In the Christmas holidays six of us decided that it would be a good idea to spend ten days in Tobago as long as it did not cost too much money. We six comprised the two South Africans, Quin Mann and Tony Heberden, Quin's brother Bob and his fiancée Ann (visiting from Canada), Tony Tucker and myself. We had two cars between us but needed a couple of largish tents and somewhere to erect the same. I am not sure where the idea came from but I ended up phoning the Colonial Secretary's office to explain the problem and within a couple of hours was told to report to Police HQ to collect two tents. In 16 years in Fiji, the thought of phoning the Colonial Secretary out of the blue would never have entered my mind!

Then where to stay? Again we were lucky as Charles Merry, a DICTA student, had been at public school in England with Bryan Lupton and came to our rescue. His father was a Director of Geddis Grant, Trinidad's leading trading company with plantation interests and he furnished us with a letter to the manager at the company's Pigeon Point coconut estate asking him to "afford us every courtesy" (Princess Margaret spent her honeymoon at a

Pigeon Point hotel and we could not have picked a more idyllic spot).

Having borrowed pots and pans from the college, we loaded both cars onto a converted military landing craft which served as the ferry between Port of Spain and Tobago and after a rough crossing (LCs are not designed for comfort) found our way to Pigeon Point. We rocked up at the estate and presented our letter to the manager who was not too pleased at receiving instructions from on high. We pitched our tents under the coconuts with Bob and fiancée Ann in one tent and the rest of us in the other.

The weather was perfect, Ann proved to be an excellent camp cook and we had a super holiday with time enough to explore Tobago fairly thoroughly. When we got back to college we returned the tents to the Police Inspector who said, *"OK this time chaps, but don't ask again."*

British Guiana

Every year the DTA students spent a couple of weeks of the Easter holidays on a field trip either to Barbados for those interested in crops or to British Guiana (BG) for those interested in livestock. I opted for the BG trip and just a couple of days before we set off met Valerie Barker, an air hostess with British West Indian Airways (BWIA) at a party in Port of Spain. She mentioned that her father was Director of Civil Aviation in Georgetown. This sounded too good to be true as I had heard about cattle ranching in the Rupununi on the BG/ Brazil border but could not see a way of getting there. At the time there was no road from the coast to the Rupununi and the economy of this part of the country was entirely dependent on BG Airways bringing beef carcasses out and everything else in.

Soon after we arrived in Georgetown and had settled into the Woodbine Hotel, I took myself off to find the Department of Civil Aviation. Having got into Harold Barker's office, I said that I had met Valerie in Trinidad and please could he help me to get to the Rupununi. He was so surprised at the cheek of the request that he provided me with a note to the General Manager of the airline

requesting the provision of a free return flight to Lethem, the small community at the heart of the Rupununi. When I turned up at the airline offices, Jim Farquerson the GM was none too pleased at having rank pulled on him but told me to report at the airport the next day (Friday) to catch the Lethem flight.

BG Airways used DC3s on the Lethem run and when I turned up at the airport the Captain instructed that a bag of flour be taken off the already loaded plane to make room for me on one of the metal folding seats along the fuselage. The flight was uneventful, we landed on the dirt runway and discharged the load of flour along with the hitchhiker and started to load a consignment of beef from the local slaughter house. Meanwhile I made my way to the Agricultural Station where Ed Cundiff, the officer-in-charge, had been two years ahead of me at Leeds University. I did not know him but he was kind enough to provide accommodation for a couple of nights, showed me around the station and pointed out a bungalow nearing completion which would be home to Roy Hewson, one of our group who would be destined to work on pasture research at the station. Roy had recently married a girl he had met at the regular tea dances held at the Dorothy Café in Cambridge, universally known as "The Dot," and at the time I though that "*From the Dot to the Rupununi*" would make a good book title).

On the Saturday afternoon Ed and I, complete with half a dozen large bottles of beer, set out to meet a couple of new settlers clearing land at the edge of the station. These

two, Eric and George, had grown up together in Sale (Greater Manchester), joined the RAF together during the war and then came out to BG together to work as overseers for Bookers. After a few years on the sugar estates they went AWOL, met up with a couple of Amerindian girls and started to carve out a living in the bush. We sat on the earth floor of a hut drinking beer and listened to the following story which, although not hugely funny in itself, the contrast between the events in industrial Lancashire and the telling in a grass hut in the interior of BG would be hard to beat.

As boys Eric and George were playing lacrosse using the door of the semi-detached latrine at the bottom of the garden as a goal. One shot went through the partly open door and down the hole. Not about to lose the ball and knowing that the night soil man had visited recently, Eric descended the hole to retrieve the ball. At that moment the lady next door came to use her half of the loo. Eric, seeing a large white bottom descending could not resist the temptation and used his lacrosse stick to deliver a well-aimed poke. The lady sprang from the seat but the knickers round her ankles measured her length on the path. Suppressing their giggles, Eric and George beat a strategic retreat and duly expressed surprise at what could have caused this mishap.

Back in Georgetown our tour of places of interest continued, including a tour of the Carib Brewery where other than sampling the brew, I remember only two things. We were shown round by a stunning PR lady and later learned that her husband, an English police inspector, was

the first to be killed in the pre-independence rioting in Georgetown. The other was that broken rice was used in the brewing process - surplus enzymes in the imported malting barley work on the rice carbohydrates to produce sugars. Years later I came across a similar situation in Nigeria where maize was used to produce Guinness.

On our return to Trinidad I phoned Valerie to thank her for her help with the trip to the Rupununi and asked if she would like to join us in a small expedition. The two Tonys, Quin and myself decided that we should check out the famous Aripo Caves and their equally famous inhabitants, the "mutton birds". These birds nest in the caves and the fledglings grow to be bigger and fatter than the parents. In the past the Carib Indians knocked the fledglings from the nests and boiled them down for the fat, hence the name. Valerie joined us and we found our way through the rainforest to the caves without any difficulty but it was a different matter coming back. Just as we thought we were thoroughly lost, Valerie came to the rescue and led us back down to the cars. I thought, this girl is not only well connected but she also has a great sense of direction.

At about this time I was told by the college that a letter had been received from the Director of Agriculture in Fiji regretting that there was no longer a vacancy in the Department. Before the Colonial Office could be advised, Peter Wilson offered to find me a post at the college. This would have suited me admirably but did not eventuate as in almost the next mail I was told that an unexpected resignation had occurred and Fiji wanted me after all.

Valerie and I saw as much of each other as her flight schedules and my final exams allowed. She shared a nice flat with Christine Holloway, another BWIA hostess, who was going out with one of our lecturers, Ross Houghton, and these domestic arrangements suited both parties. I proposed just before the end of the course and we agreed to announce our engagement in England where we intended to meet in a month's time.

Some 60 years after leaving Trinidad, I heard from a former classmate that our group was regarded as the best ever to graduate from ICTA. Apparently the Secretary of State was so impressed that he instructed the Principal to *"Send these chaps home first class"*. No one told us this at the time but I suppose the windfall meant that Tony Tucker and I were able to take an unusual journey home without costing us any money.

Tony and I had already made arrangements to fly to the USA via Bermuda and then after a couple of days in New York, take the passenger liner *Queen Mary* back home. Valerie arranged it so that she was the senior hostess on our flight, where we got the very best of VIP treatment. Tony and I had a short stay in Hamilton where we did the traditional thing of renting scooters and driving round the island, fortunately without falling off. Valerie was still in New York when we arrived and staying with the crew at the legendary Algonquin Hotel, whilst we were booked into the YMCA. Valerie had secured tickets for us to see the stage version of My Fair Lady before heading back to Trinidad.

I am not sure why Tony and I almost missed the boat but after a nail biting taxi ride we got to the wharf just before they pulled up the gangway.



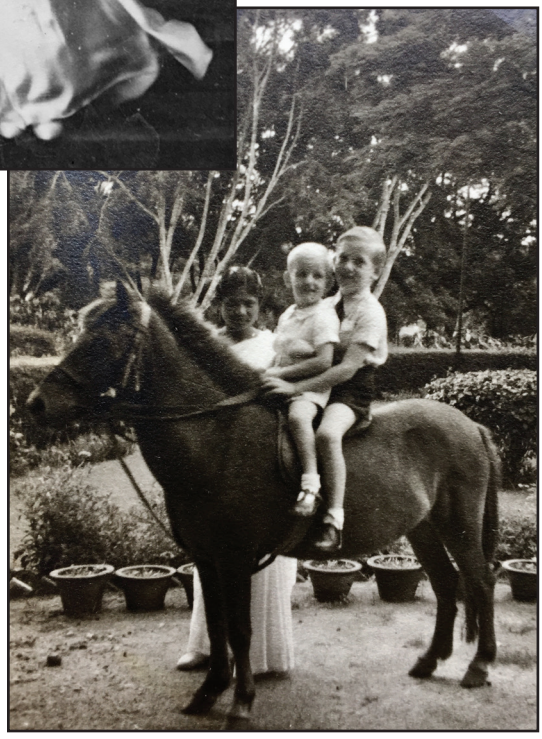
Left: Phyllis Monk as Robin Hood



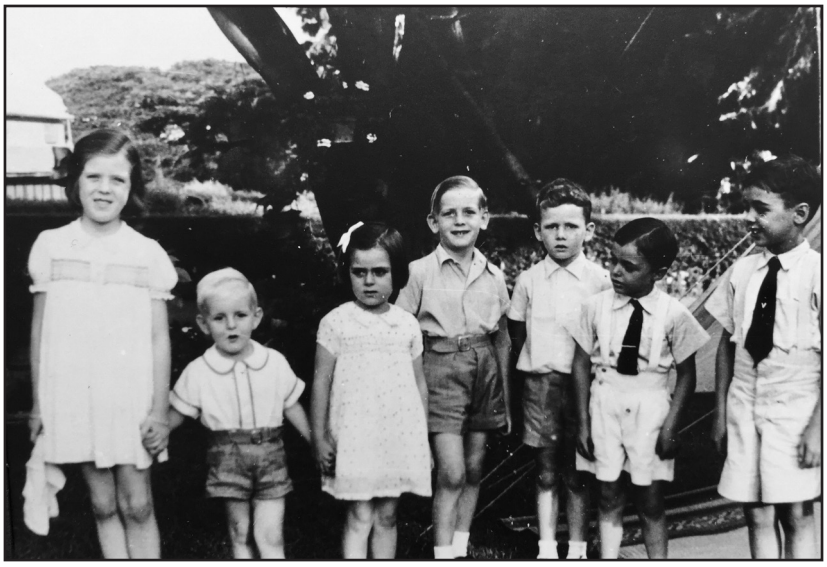
Right: Captain Eric Thompson, Army of India, Reserve of Officers



Left: my parents' wedding in February 1933



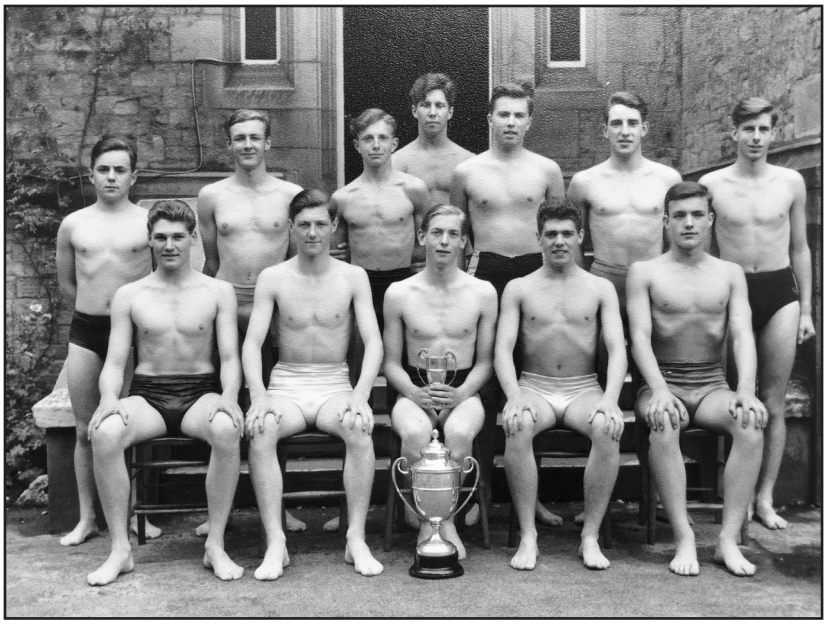
Right: Christopher and me on our pony with our ayah Diana in India





Above: "Our Gang" - Maureen, Christopher, Brenda, me, Billy, Keith and Clive

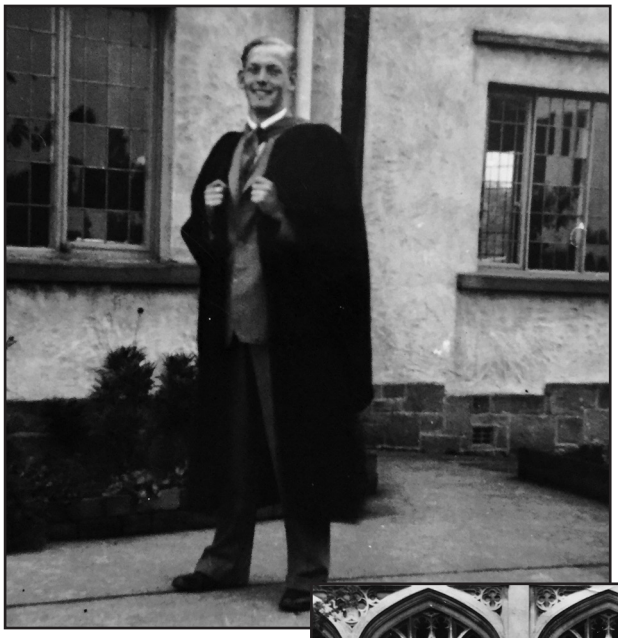
Right: Christopher and me with our parents the year we left India

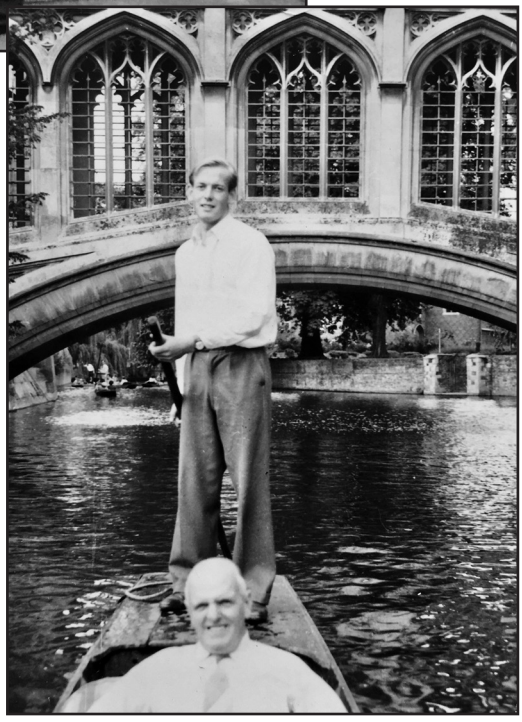




Above: the LRGS swimming team, I am holding the trophies

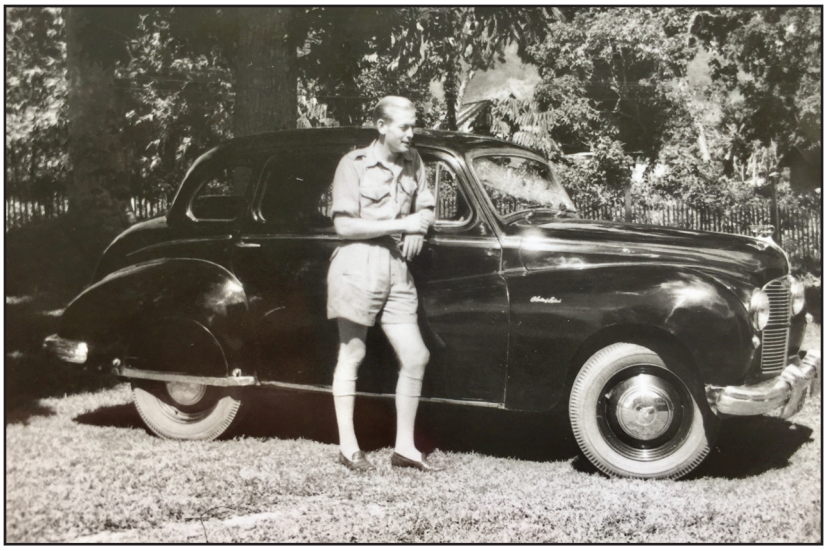
Left: Lucy with my motorbike





Above: graduating with a BSc (Agriculture) in 1957

Right: punting in Cambridge in 1958



Above: the Thompson/Tucker car in Trinidad

Below: BG Airways DC3 at Lethem in 1959



Part II
Colonial Service in Fiji

Getting to Fiji

I was due some leave at home before setting sail again, this time for Fiji. I broke the news of our engagement and showed Mother and Father some movie footage I had taken of Valerie in Trinidad. The film may have been under-exposed and Mother asked as tactfully as possible, *"Is she coloured?"* and I was able to say, *"Not that I know of."*

Valerie came on leave in time for her twenty-fourth birthday on 18th July 1959 and I went down to her Granny Vinters in Boston to bring her back to Rawdon. We made the engagement official on her birthday, I produced an acceptable engagement ring and we also arranged a small party so that Valerie could meet some of my friends.

The short leave was soon over and I took Valerie down to Heathrow to fly back to Trinidad, whilst I got ready to sail on the *RMS Rangitoto* to Auckland with all my worldly possessions (two cabin trunks, Father's old golf clubs and my trusty leather suitcase). Funds provided as a Colonial Probationer ceased as soon as the ship sailed and from then until arrival in Suva I was on half pay but as food and accommodation was provided this arrangement was quite

generous. When appointed I had been told that my initial salary would be £700 per year and that a four-year tour of duty was normal. The conditions of service assumed six weeks of sea travel each way between Fiji and UK so in addition to the actual leave I would have been entitled to something like 9 months away from Fiji. In fact I never experienced this because, either just before sailing or soon after arriving in Fiji, the conditions of service changed. Air travel became the norm (4 days each way), tours were reduced to three years and my starting salary increased to £1,000 per year.

We sailed from Southampton to Curaçao in the Dutch West Indies and Valerie had arranged to fly up from Trinidad in order to meet the boat. She knew a KLM air hostess with a flat in Willemstad who was kind enough to let us use her flat for the brief period the ship was in port. Then Valerie flew back to Trinidad, we did not see each other for eight months and letters were the only means of communication.

The next port of call was Panama City and the only thing I remember was a night club with a calypso singer and his song:

I am LORD - Lord; DELI – deli; CIOUS; I am Lord Delicious.

I had heard much better calypso singers and songs in Trinidad and am not sure why this particular ditty should stay in my memory.

Passengers on the boat included a couple of Fiji civil servants returning from leave in UK who made little or no

attempt to be pleasant. At the time there was no television in New Zealand and I got to know a young engineer who had spent a year with the BBC in London prior to the launch of the new service. I thought that I should spend some of the journey learning to type as Valerie had given me a typewriter in Curaçao.

The long haul across the Pacific was broken only by a short stop at Pitcairn Island. *The Rangitoto* stood off the island and a couple of long boats arrived, loaded with men and women who came on board to sell stamps and handicrafts. After a couple of hours the long boats pulled away and in no time Pitcairn disappeared over the horizon.

We arrived in Auckland to a crowded wharf and I was met by a man from Wright Stephensons, the Fiji government agents, who saw me through Customs and Immigration and arranged to collect me later in the day to take me to the airport at Whenuapai (in the days before Mangere was built, civilian aircraft flew out of the RNZAF base). It was a Saturday and I had time to look around and find a barber as I needed a haircut. Fortunately I managed this before noon because the barber made it clear that he shut up shop promptly at midday and had no intention of staying any later to oblige a customer. My impression was that the country made a point of "being as good as the next man", very egalitarian and almost one hundred percent white or Maori with very few Asians or Southern Europeans. There was no question of accepting a tip for services rendered - very different to Auckland at the turn of the 20th century.

The Wright Stephenson man took me to the airport and

I caught a Tasman Empire Airways Ltd (TEAL) DC 6 to Nadi. I have no idea how my two trunks got to Fiji but I arrived complete with suitcase, typewriter and golf clubs.

Fiji in 1959

Jumping ahead a little, it took a while to understand the socio-political scene in Fiji and to contrast this with Trinidad, where independence was already fairly imminent (1963). However, many aspects of life were similar to my childhood in India and indeed Fiji was sometimes called 'little India'.

In 1959 there was no talk of independence and it is hard to believe that only 11 years later (October 1970) Fiji became an Independent Dominion within the Commonwealth. This is not the place to describe the changes which took place prior to independence, nor the political turmoil which started with the first coup in 1986.

At the time, sugar and the Colonial Sugar Refining Company (CSR) was "the king", tourism was in its infancy and gold plus some agricultural produce accounted for most of the exports.

Arriving

It was dark when the DC 6 came in to land at Nadi and the only thing to be seen from the plane were the fires burning off the sugar cane trash. When I got through immigration I was met by Ram Nath Badlu, the Acting Agricultural Officer (Western), and checked into the old Mocambo Hotel which had started life as an officers' mess for the US military. The next morning I travelled by air to Nausori to be met by Greg Gregory, the Chief Extension Officer, and John Dearing, one of the Agricultural Officers (AOs).

The Civil List for 1959 showed that all of the senior posts in the Department were occupied by Europeans and there were only ten agricultural officer posts (I only remember three or four local Europeans or part-Europeans in the AO ranks) and there were even a number of (mostly local) European sub-professional Field or Livestock Officers. I was the last CAgS officer appointed to a permanent and pensionable post in the Department and thereafter all overseas appointments were on contract.

I spent my first night in Suva at the old Metropole Hotel but after a couple of days arrangements were made for me

to share a house at the Koronivia Research Station with Alan Donald, the Veterinary Pathologist. Government regulations required bachelors to share accommodation but I believe that Alan was none too pleased at having this newcomer imposed on him. No sooner had I settled in than I was laid low by a bout of dengue fever, which was most unpleasant and whilst I knew what had hit me I do not think that anyone suggested a cure other than time.

A period of familiarisation followed and I spent time as:

A banana inspector on the Suva wharf. The Union Steamship Company vessels operating between Fiji and New Zealand were general cargo carriers and did not have the specialised low bulkheads found in the banana boats operating between the Caribbean and Europe. Hands of bananas were packed into special wooden boxes and some skill was required to keep bruising to a minimum. The ships called into Suva every two weeks and the growers' co-operatives delivered cases to the wharf to be loaded overnight. My temporary job, along with the Manager of the Co-operative Association, was to make sure that the cases were properly packed with good quality fruit prior to loading

An observer for a week or so in Labasa with Ken York (AO Northern) who had been a year ahead of me in Trinidad and had written to me at ICTA advising that I bring at least one wife.

An assistant to John Hall (AO Central) whose main task was to encourage farmers to grow rice and crops other than sugar cane. The CSR Company had decided to close the

sugar mill at Nausori and to concentrate cane production on the dry side of the main islands because the better hours of sunlight resulted in cane with a higher sugar content. This was a very controversial decision and was only accepted by Government after a Commission of Inquiry. Cane had been grown in the Central Division for over 100 years and all the infrastructure was in place with cut cane being brought to the mill by barges on the Rewa River. The farmers only knew about cane growing and could not believe that the mill would really close. To drive the message home the Company dropped the chimney stack and blew the mill whistle continuously to mark the end of the 1959 season and the permanent end of the Nausori mill. A very sad day.

As the passenger on a road trip round Viti Levu with Trevor Mune, the Fiji born Weed Control Officer who knew every twist and turn of the 360 mile, mainly dirt road round the island. We travelled from Nausori to Suva and then all the way to Raki Raki visiting a couple of places on the way. After a night at the Raki Raki Hotel we travelled on to Nausori and I confess that the journey seemed unending and uncomfortable. This was the first and last time I ever drove round the island in one go.

By this stage I had acquired a Morris Oxford car from the retiring Deputy Commissioner of Police and was able to borrow the money from the Government to effect the purchase. Later, when installed at Sigatoka, I needed £100 to buy a kerosene refrigerator which I could not afford. An SOS went off to Valerie and she used the money she had been saving for a trip to Machu Picchu in Peru to come to

my rescue. I was greatly impressed by this investment in our future and Valerie has had plenty of mileage from repeating this story over the years.

Sigatoka

Even before I arrived in Fiji, it had been tentatively decided that I would take over the Agricultural Station at Sigatoka which would allow the incumbent, Neville Miles, to be transferred to Lautoka as AO (Western). I suppose that Merrion Watson, the Director, wanted to have a look at me before appointing me as Officer-in-Charge of the Agricultural Station Sigatoka, thankfully shortened to O/C ASS. During the first tour of duty I also needed the Director's permission to marry and being allocated a house was an essential step in obtaining his approval. Having cleared these hurdles, the next problem was a shortage of housing for Neville in Lautoka. I was finally transferred to Sigatoka just before my 25th birthday and because there was no house for me at the Station I was obliged to take up residence in the Sigatoka Hotel for six weeks. The Government subsidised 50% of the hotel bill but even so my stay was comparatively expensive and I was glad to move into the house on the Station.

By a strange coincidence Neville Miles (his father had been in the Indian Army) had been Head of Pope House at Bishop Cotton's Boys School in Bangalore at a time when I

was in the same house in Standard III. Some years later on a visit back to our old school I was interested to see his name in gold letters on one of the honours boards.

Our first home

The Fijian name for ASS was and is, Nacocolevu (pronounced Na-tho-tho-levu roughly translated as the big echo). The house I inherited from Neville Miles dated from 1935 and was built into the hillside up a steep drive and overlooking the farm. It was a standard Grade III bungalow of the period, of sturdy timber construction on concrete piles with a corrugated iron roof. Wooden shutters, opening outwards, covered the mosquito netted windows and provided protection from hurricane damage. There were three good sized bedrooms and a large open plan living / dining area. We were provided with hard furniture to the standard laid down by the PWD for a Grade III house. Valerie's pride and joy was the huge round dining table - French polished to perfection every three years. The kitchen, bathroom and pantry were off the back verandah and could only be described as basic.

Outside there was a single garage close to the laundry and a loo/ shower, which along with a separate small *"bure"* (traditional thatched house) provided a home for the house-girl. There was a front lawn but most of the garden was the sloping land leading down to the office which I could

easily reach from home in two minutes flat. Whilst not technically a garden, this area was planted with interesting trees including 'flame of the forest", coffee bushes and a handsome royal palm. At the time we worked on Saturday mornings which was a good opportunity for a couple of labourers to keep the lawn mowed and the hill side under control.

There was quite a housing colony at Nacocolevu including two Grade IV houses (one assigned to the Extension Field Officer), a wooden Grade V quarter and a number of staff houses, some of which we had built and maintained, along with a good network of Station roads.

"Mains water" was supplied from a dam in the hills which fed a large concrete holding tank in the back garden and was reticulated throughout the Station. The system worked well and required little maintenance. Drinking water came from a large rainwater tank near the back verandah and we never needed to boil the water.

Electricity came from two large diesel generators which the mechanic, Ram Bali, nursed along with considerable success. The down side was that power was only available for 6 hours a day (two hours in the morning and four in the evening with lights out strictly enforced at 10pm), however we soon got used to the system.

The Station kept two Friesian cows on loan from Koronivia Research Station and every morning Mitieli came up to the house with a couple of pints of milk, quite a bonus as most people had to manage with powdered milk. In addition I inherited half a dozen hens from Neville but

this enterprise did not last long as there was never a shortage of eggs in the market.

The houses and offices were connected by telephone through a switchboard in my office and then in theory to the rest of the world via a manual switchboard in Sigatoka town. Out of office hours, our house phone was connected to the Sigatoka exchange and we could contact other houses on the Station by "Morse code" - turn the handle on the box three times to talk to so-and-so. The whole system was fairly temperamental which suited me, particularly when Head Office could not get through but I could phone out.

Basic essentials came from Sigatoka where we Europeans were expected to have accounts with Morris Hedstrom and Burns Philp (the leading trading/ retail companies in Fiji). In Sigatoka as elsewhere, both of the store managers were Europeans.

The only bank in town was the Bank of New South Wales, which opened for business one day a week when the Australian bank tellers came down from Nadi to open up shop.

The Anglican Church held services in the Court House where Mrs Potts, the wife of a former CSR General Manager, played the harmonium and the vicar travelled down from Nadi every fortnight to preach to (I think) an entirely white congregation.

Medical services were provided by Dr Hands from her surgery in the town whilst Dr Keeting-Clay looked after the community down the coast at Korotoga.

There were two cinemas in town showing mainly Hindi

films whilst the Sigatoka Hotel could be relied on for the occasional meal and a drink at the bar.

Sporting activities were limited to tennis at the CSR compound at Cuvu and to a short-lived nine hole golf course near the sand dunes just out of town. I got to play once before retiring Father's old golf clubs for good.

Bachelor days

When the time came to move from the Sigatoka Hotel to Nacocolevu, I was faced with looking after myself for the first time ever. I had nothing in the way of household possessions but fortunately the Manager of the Sigatoka Hotel, John Adams, and his wife were leaving Fiji to run a pub in County Durham. John had been a Sub-Inspector of Police but was fired, because he was too lazy to write up the charge sheets properly and had been taken on by Sir Hugh Ragg as a hotel manager.

Fortunately the Adams sold me the basic pots, pans, crockery and cutlery for £5. I cannot remember what I did about bed linen etc but must have managed somehow.

Soon after taking up residence, a Fijian arrived at the house and asked if I would take on his daughter as he wanted her to get experience of working for Europeans. Sadly, Alesi was almost useless. She could not cook but I suppose managed the washing and ironing and basic cleaning. She lasted for about 18 months but was never happy and one day came to say that she was leaving as she had woken the previous night to find a disembodied head sitting on her chest. There was a story on the Station that a linesman had

been electrocuted working on the power pole just outside her *"bure"* and this must have been the ghost which came to haunt her.

In contrast our next experience with a house girl was entirely satisfactory. Anareta (her father, Isoa was the Station carpenter) came to work for us just before Caroline was born (October 1961) and stayed with us until we left Fiji in 1974. Fortunately she lived at home with her parents so no fear of headless ghosts in the night.

I made an effort to join the Nadi Airport Club as a Country Member but the journey to Nadi on dirt roads defeated me very quickly and it was much easier to go to the beach at weekends. Fortunately my "bachelor period" only lasted for about five months before Valerie arrived to take charge.

Valerie arrives

Back in Trinidad Valerie had passed her driving test, given in her notice to BWIA and booked a passage to Fiji on the *"Southern Cross"*. This all sounds straightforward but it was in fact a huge leap into the unknown and she subsequently said that if our friends Christine and Ross Houghton had not pushed her up the gangplank she would not have caught the boat.

Apparently the trip went well, stopping at Panama and Tahiti on the way and arriving at Suva early in April 1960 BUT there was no Peter to meet the boat. Convinced that she had been deserted, Valerie was on the point of talking to the Purser about going on to Australia when Peter arrived to join half of the Agricultural Department who were already assembled on the wharf to welcome her to Fiji. My excuse, repeated many times over the years but never really believed, is that I had driven over from Sigatoka the previous day, stayed the night at Koronivia with Alan Donald and expected the Southern Cross to dock at say 9.30am. However having heard on the radio that it had already arrived I dashed into Suva and saved the day!

Colonial Fiji never caught up with the "swinging sixties",

so the proprieties had to be observed and Valerie stayed at the Metropole Hotel for her first night in Fiji. Then in Sigatoka she stayed at the hotel there, coming up to Nacocolevu during the day to get settled into her new home. Then for a few days immediately before the wedding she went to stay with Nancy and David Langdale at Nausori.

We were married on 16th April 1960 at the Anglican Cathedral in Suva by special licence. The service was conducted by the Reverend Figass who had previously served in an inner-city parish in Leeds. The reception has held at the Club Hotel, largely paid for by a cheque for £100 from Valerie's father. Neither of our families was present but friends and colleagues rallied round. Valerie was given away by John Smith, the Director of Civil Aviation and a colleague of her father's, whilst his daughter was the flower girl. Nancy Langdale was the matron of honour, Alan Donald the best man with John Parham and Ken York the ushers.

We drove straight from the reception to spend our honeymoon at Korolevu Beach Hotel and I remember the drive as seeming to be almost interminable. We had one of the *bures* on the beach for five days before starting married life at Nacocolevu. Sadly "*our bure*" did not survive an arson attack some years later. It took Valerie a while to get used to Fiji after the Caribbean but she soon had the house running smoothly and became involved in the social life of both the Station and Sigatoka town.

Agricultural Station Sigatoka (ASS)

The posting of O/C ASS was, in my opinion, the best in Fiji as it was situated in a beautiful valley with a comparatively good climate and with very little supervision from Head Office in Suva.

About 45 people were employed in the Station, a mixture of civil servants and 'unestablished' (hourly paid) workers. I was the only graduate and only European, although a couple of Field Officers had overseas diplomas in agriculture. The school of Agriculture at Koronivia had only been established in 1953 and consequently none of its diplomats were employed on the Station when I first arrived.

In 1963 National Service came to an end in UK and the British Army needed soldiers, so they looked to Fiji and possibly other colonies for recruits. Two of the best young men from the Station were 'signed up' and I remember going down to the Sigatoka Hotel to complain bitterly to the Gurkha Captain for pinching "my men". He said, "*Sorry old man only doing my job.*"

A visitor from the University of Hawaii once remarked that I was very lucky to have a 700 acre laboratory of my

own to work in. By 1963 it was possible, by the acquisition of a further 300 acres of hilly grassland, to increase the size of the Station to 1,000 acres. Originally established in 1927 as a cotton experimental station, the emphasis changed following the war and under the influence of a previous incumbent, Dr Willie Payne, tended to concentrate on livestock production and horticultural crops.

Livestock

We maintained pedigree herds of Santa Gertrudis and American Brahmin cattle, Tamworth and Berkshire pigs and a breeding programme to upgrade local meat goats. Long before the establishment of the Fisheries Division, we distributed *tilapia* fingerlings (juvenile fish) locally and to neighbouring Pacific Island and *tilapia* became an important fresh water fish throughout Fiji. Breeding stock was made available at subsidised prices to farmers both big and small throughout Fiji and for export to other Pacific islands including the French territories. We made sure that our blood lines were improved from time to time by the introduction of bulls and boars from Australia and USA.

With the Santa Gertrudis (SG) cattle we were upgrading Red Poll cows to purebred, a policy which was encouraged by the SG Association. The breed had been developed in Texas by crossing Brahmin and Shorthorn cattle to arrive at a stabilised breed. The herd society rules required the use of three quarter or better bred females and at least seven eighth bred bulls for the progeny to qualify as purebred. Then, to ensure uniformity of type, a classifier from Australia made

an annual visual inspection of the herd. We preferred to sell off only seven eighth or purebred bulls but demand exceeded supply and on one occasion I was under pressure to sell a fine looking three quarter bred animal which was blind in one eye to the Bull Brothers for their coconut plantation at Dreketi in Vanua Levu (this story is not all bull). Some years later I met Jock Bull who said,

"You know that SG bull you sold us? Well, we call it Thompson and although he only has one eye his aim is 100 percent".

Crops

The station's flat alluvial land was ideal for a wide range of crops and consequently there was 'a bit of everything' on the Station. A pre-war Director of Agriculture described Fiji as *"a Colony exporting plenty of samples but not much else".*

Thus there was a need to concentrate on crops which had potential in the Intermediate rainfall zone and to discontinue trials for example on coca, coconut and banana which were better suited to the Central and Northern Division.

My ten years as O/C ASS exposed me to a large range of crop and livestock production, experience which would have been impossible to acquire elsewhere in Fiji. A brief mention of some of the crop industries which ASS helped to kick start includes:

Introduction and multiplication of a wide range of crops including Solo pawpaw, passionfruit, Macadamia, sorghum, broom corn etc. Also the introduction and multiplication of 'no mow grass' for the new tourist hotels and golf courses.

For a number of years the Station provided nursery

facilities for the tobacco company until they established their own nurseries further up the valley.

Variety and production trials for a wide range of salad vegetables. This work had in time a big impact on the range of crops available in the markets, particularly during the wet season.

For many years the Station operated a Commercial Undertaking Scheme, whereby funds were provided to purchase, dry, store and re-sell maize with the intention of breaking even or making a small profit. At a later stage the same scheme was used to produce treated passionfruit poles.

In 1932 mahogany seed was introduced from British Honduras (now Belize) and used to establish two handsome avenues each of about 50 mother trees. The Forest Department harvested the first seed from these trees soon after I arrived in 1959 and the annual harvest continued for many years. Eventually the seed was used to plant up 10,000 hectares of land and became a major industry. The full mahogany story needs to be recorded, including its role in the "Speight coup" of 2000, which should perhaps have been called the "Mahogany coup".

Not all the work was a success, notably the attempts to develop potato growing in the Sigatoka Valley and in upland areas. The culprit was and is *bacterial wilt* and only when this disease can be overcome by breeding resistant varieties will the crop be a commercial success. This taught me the lesson that determination does not always guarantee good results!

A Field Day was held every year when we provided a curry lunch for the visitors. On one occasion Valerie took our Austin Westminster car (a lemon of a car if ever there was one) up to the house to replenish the supply of curry. Attempting to stop in front of the house, the brakes failed and the car headed over the hill and finished on the drive below. Fortunately Valerie bailed out just in time but the crash caused quite a stir amongst the assembled crowd. That car was never the same again and we were quite pleased to get rid of it.

Implementing the Burns Commission Report (1963) led to a colony-wide increase in development activity and in the Sigatoka Valley an opportunity to spread the Station's work, notably assisted by two new appointments - Winston Thompson, as AO (Sigatoka), had been three years behind me at ICTA and Bob Campbell as the District Development Officer (DDO), working in parallel with the District Officer, Murray Mackenzie.

Considerable progress was made in the District largely because Bob, Winston and I made a good team but there was general resistance to the whole 'Development Approach'. The line departments like Agriculture saw it as 'treading as their toes' whilst the District Administration resented the additional allowances paid to DDOs and the fact that capable staff were being diverted from normal duties. Sadly the whole effort petered out after about four years and much momentum was lost.

Work off the Station

With the exception of a few upland potato trials, official work was confined to the Station with four notable exceptions in the mid to late 1960s.

Vanua Levu. Soon after my marriage, Ken York arranged for me to be one of the Returning Officers for some early national elections. This involved the Yorks and Thompsons visiting all of the polling stations along the north coast of Vanua Levu. We took the "*Ra Marama*" (Lady of Ra and officially the Governor's yacht) from Labasa, stopping frequently and hiking inland to visiting villages all the way to Nabowalu. It was a very memorable trip and I cannot remember if this was regarded as work or local leave.

Koronivia Research Station. In 1966 Peter Rhodes went on leave and I was asked to keep an eye on Koronivia near Nausori, so we camped in their house for about four months, going back to ASS every so often. There was a large dairy herd in the station with milk being sold to the Rewa Dairy Factory, as well as providing a daily supply of fresh milk to the Koronivia staff. Caroline and Chris used to watch out for the milkman every morning and as he drove

away it became traditional for them to sing out "*Bye bye milkman, bye bye milkman.*" We owned a state of the art reel-to-reel tape recorder and sent regular news tapes home to our parents, which often featured the children's dairy chorus.

A significant area of peat, said to be 18 feet deep, formed a part of the station land and when showing visitors around, my party trick was to easily push a thin bamboo pole into the peat. On one occasion a group of newly elected Parliamentarians from Papua New Guinea (PNG) visited the Station accompanied by an Australia Patrol Officer (PNG's equivalent of a District Officer). My party trick was translated into Pigeon English by the Patrol Officer as,

"This im dirt, one fella atop one fella atop one fella."

Seaqaqa. A new Station had been established down the coast from Labasa in Vanua Levu called Seaqaqa to investigate cropping on the red laterite soils of the dry zone (called *talesiga* or sun burnt in Fijian). I was asked to take responsibility for this Station which involved flying up to Labasa every six weeks or so to spend a couple of nights at the Grand Eastern Hotel. I then used the Station's Mini Moke (a little Australian work horse derived from the Morris Minor) to drive down the coast. I enjoyed these periodic excursions, which lasted until we left Sigatoka in 1969.

Raymond Burr. The freehold island of Naitoba was owned by Raymond Burr, the film and TV actor of Ironside and Perry Mason fame, who put a lot of time and effort into developing his island. He became quite a regular visitor to

Nacocolevu and we supplied him with both livestock and planting material. On one occasion Doug Brown, at that time the Minister for Agriculture, and I were invited to the visit Naitoba and advise on progress. We sailed from Suva on Captain Stan Browne's boat, at one time the Tongan Royal yacht/ copra carrier, and arrived at Naitoba after a rough crossing.

The copra estate had been developed by the Henning family and most of the workers were the descendants of Solomon Island indentured labourers, thus dating the origins of the estate to pre-Cession (1874). On the first evening we sat down to a grand dinner in the old plantation house, waited on by young Solomon Island men dressed only in red *sulus* (a kilt-like garment) a bit Somerset Maughan but also a little creepy. I noticed that the Minister had a silver napkin ring inscribed 'Doug' at his place setting, whilst my ring was a short section of bamboo, which tells you everything about the relative importance of Raymond's guests.

Years later Naitoba was acquired by a religious cult whose disciples tended to be attractive women dressed all in white. Caroline was a flight attendant when they flew into Nadi from Los Angeles on Air Pacific. They sat together at the back of the plane where the cabin crew were instructed not to talk to them. On arrival in Nadi they were flown up to Taveuni in a Sunflower Islander aircraft and then took the short sea trip across to Naitoba.

The first time our son Chris did the trip, many years later, the 'Teacher' said, *"He is too young to fly my ladies"* but

he was told that there was really no alternative, other than swimming.

Study tours

I was fortunate to undertake five short study tours whilst at Nacocolevu and the Department was very supportive in making the funds available.

Northern Ireland 1962. Awarded a FAO fellowship to study the seed potato certification standards used in Northern Ireland. This was before the "Troubles" and I accompanied two Department of Agriculture men on their routine inspections. Having finished work, the farmer's wife would ask us in for a cup of tea. After a couple of minutes of polite conversation, I would be asked, *"Are you a Catholic or a Protestant?"* Surprised, I said something about being an Anglican and later queried this with my colleagues. They explained that the farmer's wife would have known if I were local but as a foreigner she was confused and had to ask.

Hawaii 1962. Study of passionfruit/ guava production and processing techniques in Hawaii. This work led to the introduction of a number of clonal varieties and the establishment of the passionfruit industry in Fiji.

Hawaii 1965. Attached to the University of Hawaii to study the production and processing of Macadamia nuts. Subsequently a number of clonal Macadamia nut varieties

were introduced for trial in Fiji. Macadamia never became established in Fiji, partly because of the risk of hurricane damage but mainly because there were no large well financed estates prepared to invest in a long term tree crop. However, the introduction of the Solo variety of pawpaw at this time became a commercial success.

India 1968. Assigned to work with the world collection of sorghum varieties in Hyderabad prior to the introduction of a number of white grained varieties into Fiji. The possibility of substituting sorghum for wheat to make *roti* was investigated with the help of the Bread Research Institute in Sydney but even low levels of substitution proved unacceptable.

Jamaica 1969. Attached to the Co-operative Department in Jamaica to study the purchase, storage and marketing of locally grown potatoes and vegetables. The concierge at my hotel in Kingston advised against being out of the hotel after dark and my host from the Co-op Department kept a loaded revolver in the glove compartment of his car., both of which were a surprise to me coming from peaceful Fiji.

The Nacocolevu Years

Our ten years at Nacocolevu were happy and we stayed as long as possible before finally being moved first to Koronivia and then Suva. Culturally the "sixties" had almost no impact on our lives, as there was no television and only indifferent radio. In fact we only heard about *The Beatles* and *The Twist* from a vet visiting from Kenya, instructions for the latter being,

"Imagine that you are drying your bottom whilst stubbing out a cigarette with your feet."

For the first three or four years we felt poor and for example shared a single can of beer in the evening. Valerie and Eileen Campbell claimed to know every conceivable way of cooking mince. Having said that, we had no mortgage to pay and, whilst we had no savings, we had no real money worries.

Financially things improved from about 1963 when the Colonial Office (soon to become the Foreign and Commonwealth Office) introduced the Overseas Services Aid Scheme (OSAS) which paid a supplement to UK/ Commonwealth recruited staff. This caused resentment amongst locals but was essential in order to attract contract

officers and retain pensionable staff whose careers were being curtailed with the onset of independence across most colonies and dependencies.

Security on the Station was never an issue but elsewhere in the Western Division the sugar industry was in trouble. Growers were demanding better prices for cane and were refusing to cut unless their demands were met. Civil unrest was common, particularly between Fijian growers who were prepared to harvest and Indians who would not. The start of the crushing season was repeatedly delayed and when the District Commissioner (Western) was shot in the rear, military reservists were called up to help the police. Three incidents from this time stick in my memory:

The Bren Gun Site. Carl Hughes, the DO, visited and presumably on the basis of his National Service experience advised on the location of a potential Bren gun site with a commanding view over the Station. Soon after the "troubles" were over, I bulldozed the area and built a *bure* as a tourist attraction which became known as "Thompson's Point".

In 1966 Arthur Bottomley MP (later Baron Bottomley of Middlesbrough) the last Secretary of State for the Colonies, visited Nacocolevu as part of his farewell tour. A picnic lunch was laid on at Thompson's Point but a severe bout of Fiji diarrhoea meant that Valerie had to take him to our house to use the facilities.

Drau-ni-kau 1. Field Officer Isimeli Veranakadavu, a sergeant in the reserves, was called away for six months duty guarding Korolevu Beach Hotel. When he returned

to the Station he brought with him one of the maids from the hotel. Understandably his wife objected strongly and, following a huge row, she moved out, having first slashed all of the pillows and scattered the feathers in the yard.

That was not the end of the story and in the cool months of the year Isimeli used to wear his Army greatcoat to work and I noticed him getting grayer and grayer and more emaciated-looking every day. Finally a phone call came one evening asking for the use of the Station Land Rover to take him first to Sigatoka and then to the Lautoka Hospital, where he died. Everyone knew that this was the result of witchcraft (*drau-ni-kau* in Fijian) and the next day after work the staff had a long meeting. Having made a purchase, on credit, of the traditional funeral presents of kerosene and biscuits from the Co-op store, they set off to walk home. It was getting dark and there, standing in the middle of the road, was a ghost, instantly recognised as Isimeli wearing his greatcoat with the collar turned up. Everyone fled back to the Station and only left after I had arranged for the Land Rover to take everyone home.

The postmortem was carried out in Lautoka by a doctor we knew, who stated that the cause of death was the result of hemorrhaging in the lower intestine. When I queried this he implied that it was poisoning and advised that I let the matter drop as *"nothing would bring him back"*. Everyone on the Station knew that Isimeli's wife was related to powerful *drau-ni-kau* practitioners in Rewa and that his demise had been "arranged".

The final postscript was the return of the wife laying

claim to all of the household effects (including the unstuffed pillows) which the resident girlfriend was reluctant to release. I was asked to adjudicate and consulted the DO who advised me not to get involved and that "possession was probably nine tenths of the law".

Drau-ni-kau 2. My only other direct experience of the power of *drau-ni-kau* concerned Field Assistant Ketedromo who was responsible for the livestock. A valuable purebred American Brahman bull was missing and I held Kete responsible. After fruitless searches nothing was found and he asked to borrow money from the Co-op in order to engage the services of a "practitioner" who duly led Kete to a grave outside the Station boundary where the unmistakable head of the bull was buried. In this instance the mystery was only partly solved - we had the body but not the culprit.

The children

From the mid-1960s onwards political activity increased steadily but at first it was all very polite and low key, in fact for a time Valerie served as Secretary for the local branch of the Alliance Party which came to power after Independence. However, for us the big events were the births of our children.

Caroline Mary was born 4th October 1961 at the Colonial War Memorial Hospital (CWM) in Suva and christened at Fishtoft Church in Lincolnshire whilst we were on leave. Prior to the birth, Valerie was staying with the Langdales in Nausori and was due to go into hospital for an induction on 4th October. The plan was to drop the Langdale children at school and then deliver Valerie to the CWM. However, on the way into town the front nearside wheel fell off the car which then came to rest against a cutting at the side of the road. A somewhat surprised Indian stopped to offer help and took Valerie to hospital where an induction was no longer needed!

Christopher Gordon was born 2nd November 1963 at the CWM Hospital and on this occasion Valerie stayed with Jack and Joyce Yelf prior to the birth. The christening

was in the Cathedral in Suva when Chris was eighteen months old.

The children had a very happy, safe and carefree childhood, roaming at will on the Station. Caroline in particular would disappear at first light to visit Anareta's house for an early breakfast of "*purini*" (a sort of pancake) and came back smelling of wood smoke to a scolding from Valerie. As a family we were remarkably healthy at Nacocolevu and only three incidents remain in my memory.

Aged about three and a half, Caroline developed amoebic dysentery and it was a while before we realised that she was a very sick little girl. Dr Hands advised that we take her to the CWM hospital in Suva without delay so we packed up the family, negotiated the ferries across the Sigatoka and Navua rivers (both bridges having been destroyed by the 1964 floods) and made it to Suva by late afternoon. Caroline was admitted immediately whilst we had booked into the Grand Pacific Hotel (GPH) for the night where an overtired Chris refused to go to sleep. The hotel had a very large entrance hall with guest bedrooms leading onto a balcony that ran around all four sides. Chris would not stop crying so I carried him round and round the balcony late into the night and remember an almost irresistible urge to throw him over into reception.

Valerie stayed on in Suva and was only allowed to visit Caroline four days a week, a cruel regime indeed. In spite of repeated requests, the English doctor in charge either would not or could not tell Valerie what was wrong and Caroline was discharged after a week or so.

Back in Sigatoka, Dr Keeting-Clay said,

"OK, now I will treat her for amoebic dysentery."

The treatment involved, I believe, arsenic and antimony and was very unpleasant but effective and Caroline made a full recovery.

On another occasion Caroline had to visit the Government dentist at the Sigatoka hospital for a filling. She had the injection and was told to sit outside whilst the anaesthetic took effect. Thinking that was painful enough and that the problem had been fixed, Caroline asked Tawake, the driver, to take her back to the Station, only to be told to return the next day to repeat the process, plus of course the filling.

The children had a number of fast breeding guinea pigs and I built a large cage to house them on the back lawn. Andrew Campbell had come to stay and decided to join the guinea pigs in the cage. On crawling out of the cage, our Alsatian "Flint" pounced on Andrew, thinking that he was a large guinea pig, and bit his ear. I was away at the time so Valerie stemmed the flow of blood and set off to take Andrew to the hospital. The PWD were digging up the road but eventually let the car through and a young Fijian doctor made a very neat job of stitching up Andrew's ear. We asked Eileen Campbell if we should have Flint put down and were very relieved when she said NO!

The dogs

In addition to our own dogs, we acted as an unpaid mini boarding kennels for a succession of visiting dogs whose owners were on holiday or about to leave the colony. Valerie has written about these characters and only one (a Doberman) was impossible to discipline. The Station was an ideal environment for dogs and they were cheap to keep because the Station's Veterinary Assistant did the meat inspections at the local slaughter house and kept us supplied with offal which, when boiled up with broken rice, provided a good balanced diet.

Tragedy at Natadola

We became good friends with District Officer Bob Campbell and his wife Eileen and their four children and spent many weekends with them either at the beach or visiting for tea on Sunday and listening to the "*Clitheroe Kid*" on the radio. One Sunday we went to the beach at Natadola, leaving Chris and Andrew Campbell at the DO's house in Sigatoka. Natadola is the biggest and best beach on Viti Levu and on this occasion, in addition to ourselves, there was a party of "bank boys" and further along the beach an extended family of Indians from Nadi town.

We had finished our picnic lunch and left Karen Campbell sitting under a tree in charge of the other three children whilst we adults walked along the beach. We learned afterwards that the Indians on the beach were all members of a well-known Nadi family on an outing with one of their relations from India who was returning home after studies in Germany.

Suddenly we heard cries from the Indians and rushed back to find an emerging tragedy. Some of the women had waded into the sea, holding onto their saris to have their

photos taken, when they were dumped by a big wave. They could not swim, panicked and in no time were floating face down in the water and being pulled along by a strong current. The men went to try to save them and were soon in trouble themselves. We pulled the bodies onto the beach and Valerie and Eileen, having learned about mouth to mouth resuscitation from the Red Cross the previous week, set to work. Bob rushed off to get help from Sigatoka whilst I borrowed a set of flippers from one of the bank boys (BBs) and swam in search of the one missing person, a young man whose pregnant wife was having hysterics on the beach. Eventually the BBs, who were watching the drama without offering to help, asked for the return of their flippers and, very sunburnt, I gave up the search. Three women and two men died in the tragedy and one body was never found and must have been taken by sharks. Valerie and Eileen managed to save three women but it was at least a year before they could face another curry - the Red Cross failed to mention that resuscitation usually involves vomiting!

This was a major tragedy for the family concerned and we heard later that the episode was re-lived at the Annual Quawali Competitions (Quawali is a stylised Indian form of musical storytelling and attracts a large following). Sadly we never discovered how the events were portrayed in song and in particular whether we got an honourable mention.

About a year later Ian Thomson (later Sir Ian but at that time Commissioner Western) organised a reception and on behalf of the Royal Humane Society presented Valerie

and Eileen with the Society's "Testimonial on Parchment" whilst I received their "Resuscitation Certificate".

Tragedy and a near miss

Whilst not in the same league as the events at Natadola, there were two incidents, one bad and one which could have been much worse, which are worthy of note.

The main road out of the Station was steep, with at various places nasty drops on either side. One day Valerie was going into Sigatoka and met a bus going the other way. Instead of stopping or going very slowly, the driver misjudged badly and the bus rolled over and down the hill. Valerie rushed back to the Station for help. The teenage son of Ram Nath Badlu, our friend and the senior Field Officer on the Station, was killed in the accident and there were a number of injuries.

The second incident, like Natadola, involved the Campbell family. After the 1965 flood, the Land Rover was partly inundated and for a while needed to be push started. One afternoon Valerie, Eileen and I took the children in the Land Rover up to see the new crop of kid goats. Forgetting the ignition problem, I stopped the engine to open a gate and we were then stuck at a point where there was a slight rise in the road, followed by a steep downward

slope. The plan was for Eileen to jump into the cab and put the brakes on as soon as Valerie and I had the Land Rover rolling. Everything went to plan, but Eileen could not get into the cab to put on the brakes. Fortunately she pulled the steering wheel so that the vehicle hit the bank and not the drop. The Land Rover tipped on its side and spilt the children into the road like so many peas, but no one was hurt. However, in an attempt to hold back the Land Rover, Valerie acquired a nasty graze on her thigh which was still raw when she had to dress up to be Matron of Honour at the Parham wedding. In addition it was quite a while before Caroline was prepared to ride in the back of a Land Rover again!

Overseas leave

We were entitled to four months of overseas leave every three years, plus the travelling time involved in getting "home". By 1962 all travel was by air and the standard six weeks of sea travel each way was a thing of the past. With hindsight, much shorter and more frequent leaves would have been preferable and became routine in later years. We were on leave on three occasions during the Nacocolevu years.

Leave in 1962. Konda Reddy, the senior Field Officer, looked after the Station whilst I was away and we went home via the States. Valerie and Caroline, nine months old and very active, went to visit the Donovans (my uncle and aunt) in St Louis whilst I travelled via Omaha, Nebraska. A group of American farmers had visited the Station a year earlier and had extended a pressing invitation to visit. As the result of a brief TV appearance in Omaha, I was contacted by a University of Nebraska fraternity *Phi Delta Gamma* (FiDG), which sounds much the same as Fiji. The old Fiji penny with a hole in the middle was prized by the "frat brothers" to wear on a chain and I made some friends by supplying them with a dozen or so coins.

On arrival in England we bought a powder blue Morris Minor car from my godfather Arnold Wilson and lost £100 when we sold it back to him at the end of our leave. I was rather miffed at this but when he died a year later he did leave me £100 in his will. Mother said:

"It would have been embarrassing if he had left you more" - logic which failed to impress me at the time.

Valerie's parents had recently returned from British Guiana (now Guyana) and Harold was back with the Ministry of Civil Aviation and posted to Liverpool. They had rented a large flat at the edge of Sefton Park and we divided our time between Liverpool and Rawdon. In truth this was not a very satisfactory arrangement, particularly having to keep a very active Caroline under control.

In a fit of enthusiasm I registered for an MSc at Leeds University, planning to use the Santa Gertrudis breeding programme at Nacocolevu for my dissertation. The project fizzled out mainly because I was too busy to do the necessary study.

The Department had nominated me for a three week (FAO sponsored) study tour in Northern Ireland, working with the Potato Inspectorate Service, and I got to visit quite a bit of the six counties. Fortunately "The Troubles" had not started but it was quite easy to understand the underlying tensions.

We did get down to Boston to see Granny Vinters and to celebrate Caroline's christening at Fishtoft church, attended by godparents and family. We also made a short visit to Edinburgh to see Jane Isaac and to show Valerie the

Great Glen Ranch and a bit of northern Scotland.

Then it was back to work and I routed myself back via Australia, touching down in Dubai and Rangoon. Little did I know that in future years I would become very familiar with both places. The main reason for visiting Sydney was to carry an engagement ring for the fiancée of Peter Slicer, a large yellow diamond and something of a family heirloom. I also met Peter's fiancée for the first time and saw our old Rawdon neighbour Anthony "Tubby" Rhodes and his Australian wife Iris. They were married in England and left for Sydney the day after Tubby was called up for National Service.

Leave in 1966. There was every indication that we would return to Nacocolevu at the end of this leave and Peter Bradley, seconded to Fiji from the UK Ministry of Agriculture, looked after the Station in our absence. By this time Valerie's father had been transferred from Liverpool to oversee the transformation of RAF Station Middleton-St.-George into the new Teesside Airport and had bought a house in nearby Norton-on-Tees. Our parents were looking forward to us staying either at Rawdon or at Norton and we spent a not entirely satisfactory time shuttling between the respective houses. In addition it was winter, the children were small (Caroline five and Chris three years old) and we felt fairly poor, all of which conspired to make it the least satisfactory of our four UK leaves.

Leave in 1969. It had already been decided that I would be transferred to Koronivia Research Station on return from leave in order to take over the Station from Peter Rhodes

and a newly appointed contract officer, Ian Partridge, would take over as O/C ASS. We left Fiji on Easter Sunday so the children had their Easter eggs and because we had crossed the International Date Line, we got to Hawaii in time for another Easter Sunday and to the children's delight another lot of Easter eggs. Anareta came with us as we had arranged for her to stay and help David and Judy Zundel with their son Aaron whilst we were in UK.

We had impressed on Anareta the importance of keeping her travellers cheques safe but when we got to Honolulu discovered that we had left our own travellers cheques on the dressing table at Nacocolevu. A hasty phone call to Ian Partridge ensured that the cheques were hand carried by the next flight north, whilst in the meantime we had to borrow money from Anareta.

The next stop was Oakland near San Francisco to stay with Mr and Mrs Harris, old friends of Valerie, who showed us around the wine growing areas of the Napa Valley. Valerie and the children flew home direct whilst I routed myself through Miami en route to Jamaica for the aforementioned potato storage project. With a day to spare in Miami, I looked in the Yellow Pages for a fishing tackle shop, intent on selling them some Sulua Lures (made by Valerie as part of her business). In the belief that the store was just down the road I hired a taxi and over an hour and many dollars later I was deposited at the store, only to find that they were not interested in Valerie's lures.

Valerie's parents were still at Norton, which was quite convenient as we had arranged to rent Raintree Cottage in

the village of Romaldkirk from Bill and Rena Allen. (Bill was my immediate boss in Fiji.) This arrangement was very satisfactory and it was good to have our own temporary home rather than having to stay with our parents.

We were able to book both children into the primary school at Middleton-in-Teesdale for the whole summer term. When they came home after the first day we asked how they had got on and Caroline said,

"It was good, two of the other children spoke English."

On further investigation we discovered that the vet's children from the village spoke English whilst the rest of the kids spoke "Geordie".

We were in the village for the first ever landing on the moon and got the children up at midnight to watch the event in real time on the Allen's black and white TV set and then went outside to see a clear sky and a full moon - magic!

The school outing to Whitby generated much more excitement than coming from Fiji to England. Valerie had chosen the occasion to visit Amsterdam with her parents and I was left as the only man on a coach load of mums and children. To add insult to injury, it rained all day.

We attended a Summer Garden Party at Buckingham Palace, possibly because we happened to be on leave at the time and thus on the Colonial Service invitation list. Certainly it caused a stir in Romaldkirk as we were the first villagers in living memory to be so invited.

We found a Fijian war club hanging on the wall of the village pub, the *Rose and Crown*, and arranged to purchase it for £15. In December 2012 it featured in the Antiques

Road Show and was valued at a "conservative" £8,000.

The downside of this leave was a car crash where Valerie's mother was badly injured and spent quite a long time in hospital. Valerie and the children stayed on for a while to help her whilst I returned to Fiji ahead of time to organise the physical moving of the Korotoga house (more about this later) before reporting for duty at Koronivia.

Koronivia Research Station

Situated near Nausori, Koronivia was and is Fiji's main agricultural research station and home to quite a number of professional staff and disciplines including agronomy, livestock husbandry, veterinary and plant pathology, entomology and pasture research as well as the Fiji School of Agriculture. I was transferred to take over from Peter Rhodes in September 1969, which marked the beginning of many staff changes and much political manoeuvring in the Department. Independence was still a year away but localisation moves were already afoot.

Ken Garnett (local European), the in-effective Director of Agriculture, "retired". Charlie Walker (part European and therefore more local than Garnett) became Director thus superseding Jack Yelf, the Deputy Director. Under the Civil Service rules Yelf was able to claim loss of career prospects and took early retirement. Peter Rhodes, the next most senior officer in the Department, might have aspired to replace Jack Yelf but the Deputy's post had been abolished so he also planned to leave, which was where I came in.

History from ten years earlier was about to repeat itself

and for a short while there was no house available on the Station and we were allocated an ordinary and temporary house at Nausori Hill, previously the old CSR Mill Compound. Fortunately a house soon became available at Koronivia, although neither of us liked living on the edge of Nausori. The school runs were a headache but at least the Station was big enough to run itself at the weekend and we were able to escape to our Korotoga house (a property we had acquired earlier) at every opportunity.

From a career point of view I was in limbo. Bill Allen, the Chief Research Officer (CRO), only did one tour and his post was left vacant. I found myself answering to the Director of Agriculture for Koronivia and the other six Stations (Nacocolevu, Legalega, Dobuilevu and Nadroloulou on Viti Levu and Seaqaqa and Wainigata on Vanua Levu). I was never appointed to the post of Acting Chief Research Officer and everything was in such a state of flux that the title would have been meaningless anyway.

Fiji became independent on 10th October 1970 and because we were amongst the last in a long line of colonies to gain independence, the rules of disengagement were already well established. Colonial Service officers like myself could take early retirement and equally could be required to leave in the interests of localisation by our "new masters". Having said that, compensation for loss of career and pension arrangements was designed to keep people in post for as long as possible. In Fiji, unlike some other colonies, there was no great rush to the airport but it was still difficult to "keep the ship afloat" for the transition

period before locals could be promoted and/ or contract officers recruited to fill vacancies.

We pulled down the Union Jack from the flagpole at Koronivia and raised the new Fiji flag. I acquired and still have this rather tattered Union flag. About this time Brian Robinson was appointed CRO on secondment from the UK Corps of Specialists and I again began to reconsider my options as no way was I prepared to work under Brian.

Drainage and irrigation development

Fortunately, before I could hand in my resignation Doug Brown, the Minister for Agriculture, asked if I would take on the job of Co-Manager of the FAO Rewa Project. I had no previous knowledge of the work but irrigation was being promoted heavily in many developing countries as a way of increasing food production and building on rice research at Koronivia, two projects were in hand.

Development plans for the Navua flats with a focus on double cropped irrigated rice had recently been prepared by UK consultants Sir M Macdonald & Partners (MMP) and Hunting Technical Services (HTS), funded by British Aid.

A three year project similar to the above was underway involving the former cane lands around Nausori and staffed by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations (UN).

The FAO project had about a year to run and was funded largely by a UN grant with Fiji's contribution being in the form of staff, land and equipment. As with all projects of this nature there was a danger that the reports would be

finalised, FAO specialists would depart, local staff would revert to their old jobs and nothing would happen. Minister Brown was determined not to let the work fizzle out, whilst the Department probably hoped that the Extension Division would carry the work forward.

For a couple of days I was posted to work alongside the Agricultural Officer (Central) and allocated an office in Nausori, whilst also being required to 'shadow' the FAO Project Manager. This was never going to work and, unilaterally, I let it be known that either we moved to live in Suva and I worked out of the FAO offices or we caught the next boat home. In short order we moved into a temporary house in the Domain area of Suva, and then for the next four years into neighbouring Grade III houses in Mahaffy Drive.

This was to be my first experience of working with international consultants and the FAO team comprised the Team Leader (an Irrigation Engineer), Agronomist, Agricultural Engineer and various visiting specialists. The work was concentrated on the former cane estates of Lakena and Manoca just outside Nausori and by the time I became involved the methodology for double cropped rice was fairly well established. I do not think that a final project report was ever produced and in this instance was probably unnecessary as my job was to continue and expand the work as seamlessly as possible.

There was some debate as to the government organisation needed to implement the expansion programme and the options were a Drainage and Irrigation Authority

answering to the Ministry of Agriculture, but not a part of the Department, or a new Division within the Department.

In order to help resolve this issue and learn more from Australia's experience, Ratu Epeli Kanamawi (Chief Extension Officer) and I went to New South Wales in 1971. The trip was funded by Australian Aid (we travelled First Class on Qantas) and gave us a very good overview of the NSW approach to irrigation development and the work of the Water Conservation and Irrigation Commission (WC&IC) as well as the State organisations responsible for production, milling and marketing of rice.

The Drainage and Irrigation Authority approach had a number of attractions but would have met with much political opposition from the Department of Agriculture. In the end the alternative of a new Drainage and Irrigation (D&I) Division was created and once everything was fully established I was promoted to Assistant Director of Agriculture (D&I). The four year period 1971 - 1974 was an interesting and rewarding time for a number of reasons.

The D&I Division continued to occupy the old FAO project offices at the Mothibai Building in Walu Bay, Suva and thus well away from the politics and personalities of the Department in Rodwell Road.

As a newly independent country, Fiji attracted a lot of international help and a number of aid agencies were keen to provide both staff and equipment to D&I. In fact, for a while, the number of seconded professionals exceeded us Fiji civil servants and I headed a mixed team of Brits, Australians, New Zealanders, an Israeli and an Italian.

Local staff saw a transfer to D&I as being both interesting and challenging as well as an opportunity to advance their careers and I had no difficulty in attracting an excellent team.

The work at Nausori expanded with help from FAO staff and considerable progress was made on the mechanisation front including the 'Frim Roller Chopper', capable of turning wet fields round quickly, and the importation of three specially commissioned combines made by Massey Ferguson and financed by Australian Aid, capable of coping with the wet soil conditions at harvest time. In addition Government acquired the Rewa Rice Company, housed in a part of the old CSR sugar mill in Nausori, and expanded operations to cope with the increase in rice production. For a time I was appointed the Vice Chairman.

An Irrigation Ordinance was in existence but needed re-drafting, whilst we had to create a new Drainage Act and have everything approved by Parliament. A vital element of the latter, which met with some political opposition, was the provision to recover drainage rates from cane farmers as a third charge on their payments from the mill.

Australian Aid adopted the Navua project, building on the earlier work by consultants MMP/ HTS. Unfortunately the first Australian Project Manager was not the Irrigation Engineer he claimed to be but he did spend a lot of time building a concrete boat. Eventually he sailed the boat away when his contract was terminated and things got back on track with the appointment of a replacement Resident Engineer. Sadly my plans for farming the area by a

commercial company rather than by small farmers did not eventuate and progress was disappointing.

The Dreketi/ Bua area of Vanua Levu provided the best prospects for rice production, partly because there were no urban work opportunities. The first Resident Engineer (Antonio Longhi) seconded from FAO was in fact a Roads rather than Irrigation Engineer but this was no bad thing as the necessary infrastructure was soon established, including a new rice mill owned by Rewa Rice Ltd.

After my time, Fiji became 60% self-sufficient in rice before the industry declined largely due to Government neglect. Conversely improvements in land drainage, particularly in the cane growing areas, proved to be very successful from the beginning. In the days when the CSR Company had a firm grip on production, farmers were required to form themselves into drainage gangs as soon as the cane harvest ended. This work kept the internal drains in order whilst the company undertook some reclamation and tidal control work particularly on their own estates. However, as the miller's influence over the production of sugar cane declined, so did drainage maintenance and in many low lying farms this resulted in a steady loss of yield.

In a relatively short period of time the D&I Division addressed the above by taking on the construction or repair of sea walls, tidal control structures and some main drains. They also designated drainage areas and established Internal Drainage Boards, funded largely by the beneficiaries.

Leave in 1972

We were due leave in the middle of the D&I years and on the way home I visited the Muda Irrigation Project in Malaysia with special reference to farmer organisations and the difficulties experienced in mechanised rice production under wet soil conditions. It was a relief to find that the Malaysians had experienced our problems of tractors getting bogged down, a situation which only improved over time as the soil stabilised with better drainage.

By this time Valerie's parents were living on the Costa Blanca in Spain and we took the ferry from Southampton to Santander and drove across the country to visit for a week or so. The leave seemed short and quite a lot of time was spent settling an unhappy Caroline into school at Overstone near Northampton.

Last tour in Fiji

Back in Fiji the D&I Division was expanding and Valerie's business Belinda Products was also doing well. However, we again started to wonder 'what next?' We flirted with the prospect of migrating to Australia and even enquired about boarding schools for the children in New South Wales.

As noted earlier, there was no great pressure for technical officers to leave Government service but, realistically, my career in Fiji was at an end. I was never going to make it to Director of Agriculture, added to which Caroline and soon Chris were at school on the other side of the world and our parents were not getting any younger. So after much thought and debate we made plans to leave Government service before my fortieth birthday on 25th November.

During our last two years Valerie took a very reluctant Chris back to Cundall Manor Prep School in September 1973 and charged the air fare to Belinda Products as a business expense. Valerie's mother visited for about six months and we paid for the air fare from my 'golden handshake'. Father finally retired from Pennine Polyfibres and my parents embarked on a world trip which took in

USA, Fiji and Australia. During the time Mother and Father were with us we invited Bill Calder and his wife round to dinner to meet them. Bill was D&I's Drainage Engineer and formerly with the Public Works Department of the Indian Civil Service in pre-Independence India. On first introduction, Bill said to Dad:

"So you were a Boxwallah'!"

The back of Father's neck went bright red, as it did when he was angry, and the rest of the evening was distinctly cool.

I did a final mission for Government in 1974 which involved a review of the techniques and the environmental safeguards employed in disposing of effluent from a CSR industrial alcohol plant in northern Queensland, prior to the establishment of a distillery in Fiji.

Unlike most of our contemporaries in Government service, we had a lot of assets in Fiji which we needed to dispose of before we could leave, in particular the house at Korotoga and Valerie's business Belinda Products. Two unlikely 'estate agents' Graham Watson and Hector MacDonald came up with various possibilities including a funeral director from New Jersey (USA) and his ailing wife who were hoping to start a new life in the South Pacific. Eventually, very reluctantly, we sold the house and business to Arthur Jennings. Not content with disposing of our assets, we were busy establishing Sovi Farm Ltd, a long running saga which is covered in Part III.

My six month notice period to Government ended on 20th November and the final weeks involved handing over D&I responsibilities and saying goodbye. As a final

gesture the staff on the Nausori project pulled down the Fiji flag and presented it to me. We arranged for our Basset hounds Hansel and Gretel to be looked after by a newly arrived British couple which worked out very well. Our household effects were packed up for sea freighting to UK. I had the packing cases made from timber salvaged from a mahogany tree destroyed during a hurricane at Nacocolevu. Subsequently the cases were converted into the dining table and other furniture at Bramley Cottage and without doubt the first examples of Fiji mahogany furniture in UK.

We loaded everything else from Suva into the Ford Falcon and drove down to the Korotoga house for the last few nights and disposed of various bits and pieces. The 'vultures' had been hovering for weeks saying things like:

"We hear that you are leaving, do you want to sell us your fridge etc?

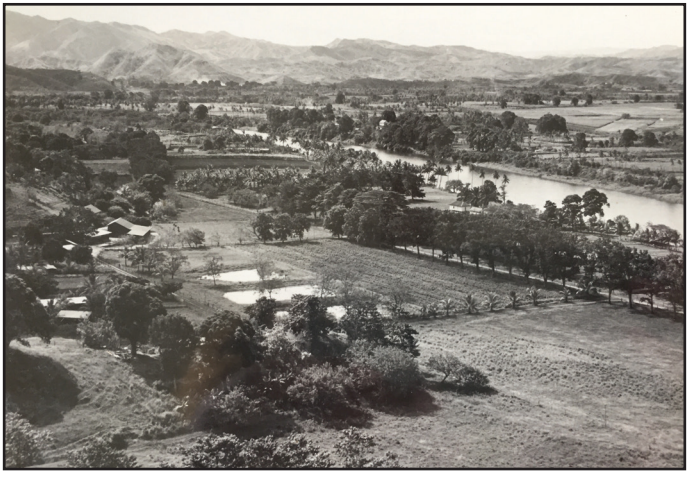
We left two cabin trunks of household effects with Dr Cecily Hands, pending our hoped for return, and finally gave our Ford Falcon car to Hector MacDonald *in lieu* of an estate agent's fee for the dubious distinction of introducing us to Arthur Jennings.

We celebrated my actual 40th birthday with Cecily Hands at the Naviti Resort and then the next day had Hector drop us at Nadi Airport to catch the flight to UK. We left with considerable reluctance and this time, 'what next?' was not just a rhetorical question.



Above: The Sigatoka Valley from Thompson's Point
Left to right: Caroline, me, Granny Barker, Chris

Below: the Agricultural Station







Rawdon man weds in Fiji

20/4/60 Yorkshire Post

The bride and groom

IN the far-away South Sea Island of Fiji, a Rawdon man has married a girl from Boston (Lincs)—and a clergyman from Leeds performed the ceremony.

Bridegroom at the wedding, in Holy Trinity Cathedral, Suva, last Saturday was Mr. Peter Gordon Thompson, elder son of Mr. and Mrs. Eric J. Thompson, of Billing Drive, Rawdon. He is a graduate of Leeds University, and after further studies in tropical agriculture, joined the Colonial Service. He is at an agricultural station in Fiji.

The bride was Miss Valerie Mary Barker, formerly of Boston, whose parents, Squadron-Leader and Mrs. Harold G Barker, now live in Georgetown (British Guiana). She has been an air hostess with British West Indian Airways, stationed in Port of Spain, Trinidad.

Officiating minister was the Rev. H. W. Figges, who went to Fiji from the living of St. Margaret's, Cardigan Road, Leeds, in 1948.

He had also served at All Souls, Leeds, and St. Wilfrid's, Harrogate.

Above: our wedding in April 1960

Left: the wedding notice in the Yorkshire Post







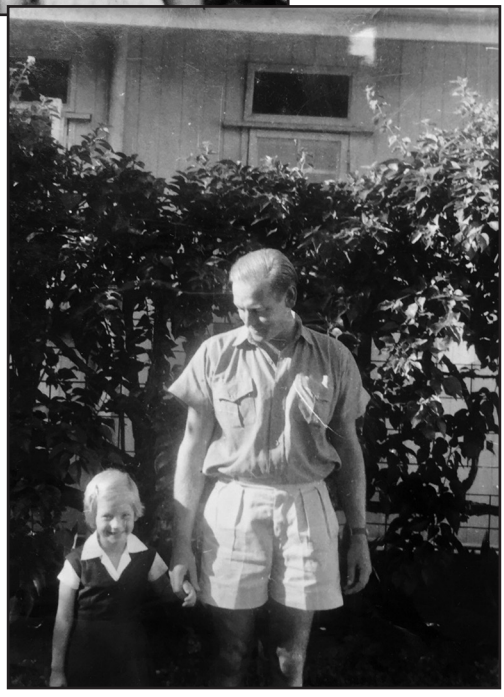
Above: the Nacocolevu house

Below and left: Valerie and me with our dogs



Above: party time, Valerie with the children

Right: Caroline goes to school







Above: the Governor General at the Rewa Project

Right: more VIPs at the project



Above: digging the main drain

Below: Australian Aid



Part III
Extracurricular Activities

Belinda Products

This part of the story runs parallel to both previous and later sections and covers some 45 years. It is as much about Valerie's endeavours as my own and is more easily recounted in a separate section. For about one third of the time we were resident in Fiji and for the remaining two thirds we were frequent visitors to Fiji from our home in UK.

The Colonial Government discouraged its officers from most activities outside their direct areas of responsibility. There was an absolute ban on any kind of commercial enterprise and indeed the policy of moving (particularly Administrative) officers every two or three years made it difficult or impossible to get too entrenched in any one District. These rules did not apply quite so rigorously to officers' wives but any suggestion that a DO's wife might find work behind the counter in the local Burns Philp store would certainly be frowned upon.

We were an exception as we spent ten very happy and productive years at Nacocolevu and had the time and energy to become involved in a number of extracurricular activities, some of which caused friction at the Agriculture

Department's Head Office in Suva.

At about the time Chris was born in 1963 we had imported trial quantities of casting resin from Australia and experimented with embedding sea shells and coins etc to make a variety of souvenir items for the tourist trade which was in its infancy at the time. Slowly the business grew and at first Lachmi Govind, a young teaching assistant from Lawai, came to work with Valerie and became adept at the manufacturing process. Then 17 year old Setareki Taminaivalu joined the team to do the dusty work of grinding, polishing and finishing the items.

Seta, who had a Chinese father and Fijian mother, came from Naitasiri and somehow turned up at Nacocolevu to live with Ram Bali, the Station's mechanic and his family. At the time the Station was producing poles for the expanding passionfruit industry and I employed a number of workers, including Seta, to cut and creosote treat the poles. Valerie took him on just as the pole business was winding down, the beginning of a long association with Seta and ultimately his own family.

The business needed a name and for want of any better idea we called it after our cat. We were given a pure white cat as a sort of wedding present, the only cat we have ever owned, and for a reason which eludes us decided to call it Belinda. The business became Belinda Products and for years afterwards people on meeting Valerie for the first time would say,

"Oh you must be Belinda".

Workshop space for the business was easily provided.

Lachmi used the house girl's *bure* at the house and for Seta we modified a *bure* in the garden which the Miles family had used for drying clothes. Belinda Products was still in its infancy when Graham Wallace, who operated a game fishing boat out of Korolevu Beach Hotel, showed us the *Kona-head* fishing lures he used in trolling for marlin, tuna and the like and said *"Can you copy these?"*

More experimentation followed and over time Valerie produced four standard lures and would custom-make lures of varying size for special customers. One frequent and demanding purchaser was the owner of Axminster carpets in UK who was most particular about the colour of the inserts. Valerie also needed a name for this new business and offered a small reward to the Station employee who came up with the best suggestion. *"Sulua Lures"* was the result (*sulua* in the Nadroga dialect means octopus, which seemed appropriate). The lures became quite well known amongst the game fishing fraternity in Fiji and her lures held at least two world records. In addition lures were exported to Australia, Kenya and New Zealand.

The house and business at Korotoga

In 1966 our good friend Dr Cecily Hands said that the lease on her land at Korotoga was coming up for renewal and that she was thinking of surrendering half of the area, which had not been developed and which she did not need. This seemed like a good opportunity and so we approached the owner of the freehold and took a 20 year lease of the one acre block across the Queen's Road from Cecily's house.

Over time we employed a Fijian lad to clear the land of undergrowth and reached the stage where the site consisted of mown grass between the established mature trees. The opportunity to put a house on the land occurred in 1969 when a retired civil servant and his wife who lived in a small cottage a bit further down the coast decided to retire to live near their daughter in Canada. The new owners, a retired forester from Ceylon, planned to build a new house on the land and had no use for the old wooden cottage which we bought for £300.

At the time a New Zealander living in Lautoka had a business moving wooden buildings, something which is still a common practice in NZ, so I returned from our 1969

leave early to organise physically moving the house the half mile or so up the road to our land. This was an interesting and very professional operation involving:

Jacking up the house using heavy lifting jacks and placing it on old oil drums, then cutting off and removing the concrete piles and lowering the building onto a low loader

Driving the low loader along the Queen's road, trying to avoid most of the telephone lines. Once in position on our land, placing the house back on the oil drums and removing the low loader

Suspending new concrete piles by wire ties from the joists and digging holes in the coral sand beneath each of the piles. Then lowering the house and piles into the holes, leaving a 2 foot 'crawl space'

Back filling the holes and setting the sand with a couple of buckets of water. (In the 1972 hurricane the house never moved an inch.)

The whole process was over in a day and cost £100 but was only the start of months of work by Barjen Lal, an Indian carpenter said to have served time for murdering his wife. He converted the original cottage into a comfortable three bedroom bungalow. Stage 2 was to build a workshop for Belinda Products behind and at right angles to the house. This consisted of a room and bathroom for Seta and his new wife Ilita and two workshops, one 'clean' for Lachmi to do the setting up and pouring and one 'dusty' where Seta did the grinding and polishing.

In addition to the Korotoga operation, Valerie converted

one of the bedrooms in our Suva house into a storeroom/ workshop and was responsible for all aspects of running an increasingly successful business. By the time we left Fiji at the end of 1974, Belinda Products, and Sulua Lures, were turning over as much as I was earning as a Government servant.

We sold the house and Belinda Products to Arthur Jennings with considerable reluctance as perhaps the market of last resort but retained ownership of Sulua Lures, leaving the stock with Rob Wright and his Hook Line and Sinker shop in Suva. Sadly history was not kind to either of the two businesses. Rob died of a heart attack at a comparatively early age shortly after we left Fiji whilst Arthur Jennings made little attempt to continue Belinda Products and some years later burnt down the house in an unsuccessful attempt to claim the insurance money.

The house at Korotoga was a life saver for the five years we spent in Koronivia and Suva. Every Friday, almost without exception, Valerie would collect me from the office promptly at 4.30pm and have the car fully loaded with the children, dogs etc. Then we set off down the long dusty road to Korotoga, a journey which in bad weather could take four hours.

On arrival Valerie would have a large pot of Irish stew on the table in no time and in spite of grumbles - not stew again! - the children would be fed and soon in bed. Saturday morning was often spent on Belinda Products and VICA business and then Saturday afternoon and sometimes part of Sunday on the beach at Sovi Bay. We would return to

Suva on Sunday afternoon collect a fish and chip supper in Suva and be ready to do battle again on Monday.

Churches

I became involved in building (or converting) three churches during the Fiji years.

Methodist Chapel at Nacocolevu. Staff at the Station were keen to have their own church and I persuaded Colin Philp, a marine architect, to design a suitable A-frame building. This was located amongst the houses on the Station and whilst some of the material came from Government all of the work was done by the staff in their own time and under the able supervision of Isoa the Station carpenter.

Anglican Church in Sigatoka. Prior to building the church, the congregation used the old Sigatoka courthouse. A half-acre block of Native land had been acquired at Lawaqa and I think that Dr Hands, whose father had been an Anglican Archdeacon, must have persuaded me to take on the building project. The church funds were miniscule but Charles Vockler, the Anglican Bishop in Polynesia, was keen to see a church in Sigatoka and was of the opinion that "the Lord would provide". More practically, he arranged for an interest-free loan of £1,000 from Diocesan funds. So we started work and I remember grading the land to

form the "*yavu*" one weekend in early November 1963 when Valerie was in Suva having Christopher. An excellent carpenter from Naitasiri constructed the building largely from traditional material, which was consecrated as the Church of the Good Shepherd by the Bishop in June 1966. And yes, the Lord did provide in the unlikely form of Mrs Brierley, a wealthy widow from California.

Staying at the Fijian Hotel, she turned up at one of the services and asked *"Is there anything you need?"* With some hesitation we asked for a motor mower to keep the grass under control and she said "*No problem*." She turned up again a year later and asked the same question. When we mentioned the £1,000 loan she paid this off without hesitation.

On visits back to Fiji, particularly when staying at Sovi Farm, we attended services at the Church of the Good Shepherd conducted by a number of resident vicars. By and large the fabric of the church has stood the test of time and celebrations were held in June 2016 to mark its 50th Anniversary.

Methodist Chapel at Koronivia. Staff at Koronivia rather envied the church at Nacocolevu and when I was in charge I encouraged the conversion of an unused building into a chapel. The work involved was fairly modest and carried out by staff in their own time. However, there was some suggestion that I should have sought Departmental approval, so we avoided a formal dedication ceremony and I rather enjoyed the sight of the congregation quietly going into church on Sunday mornings.

Fiji Crippled Children Society (FCCS) and Valley Industrial Co-operative Association (VICA)

In UK the term "crippled" is definitely out of favour but is still in use in Fiji where it does not carry the same negative image. I was recruited by Dr Hands and served for a number of years as the Secretary of the Sigatoka Branch of FCCS. Little did I know at the time of my future involvement with disabled people through the charity PhysioNet.

I inherited from Neville Miles the Chairmanship of the Nacocolevu Co-operative Society which operated a grocery store on the Station. Everyday food items were purchased in bulk at wholesale prices from merchants in Sigatoka and sold on to Station staff at a minimum mark up. There were no overheads and, because the staff settled their bills on pay day every week, losing money was virtually impossible. An early project was the purchase of a deep freezer and ice cream became a special treat for the children but even so the operation was left with a small surplus of cash.

Trials on the Station showed that broom corn - a variety of sorghum used to make millet brooms - could be grown satisfactorily in the Sigatoka valley under very similar conditions to maize. Early records showed that the Prison Service made brooms during WWII but at the time it looked as if broom corn would be yet another crop looking for a market. I came across a US Aid pamphlet describing the manufacture of brooms as a cottage industry and listing the suppliers of second-hand equipment in USA, so why not invest the Nacocolevu Co-op Society profits in a broom making co-op?

This came to pass and members of the Nacocolevu Co-op became the first shareholders in the Valley Industrial Co-operative Society (VICS). In a comparatively short time the new society:

Leased an acre of land next to the Station.

Ordered a complete set of hand-operated broom making equipment from the States.

Built the first factory, an open sided "*bure*" 40 ft x 20 ft. The Co-op supplied the materials with the labour being provided by the Lawai rugby team at a cost of £45, which was enough to provide new kit for the whole team. Fortunately the team played barefoot and did not need boots.

Having installed the broom making machinery there was a need to make broom handles but there was no mains electricity at the factory. So we bought a second-hand but almost indestructible single cylinder Lister engine.

Then we ordered a handle making machine from a UK company which had to be specially modified to be belt

rather than electrically driven. The Lister engine was linked to overhead shafting and bearings, scrounged from the CSR's old pineapple factory in Lautoka, to drive the handle making machine.

Similarly the Lister drove a second-hand saw bench used to cut timber into 1inch x 1inch billets and a contraption we called "The Rumbler" which turned slowly and rolled the handles against each other until they were smooth enough to dip paint.

All of the above gave the Factory Inspector nightmares but he was kind enough to allow us time to install the necessary safety measures.

In the meantime there was a campaign to encourage farmers to grow broom corn with the Society providing the seed and with a guarantee to buy the crop. Farmers were paid in cash and also required to buy shares in the Co-op, a procedure which quickly built up the assets. In the early years more raw material was produced than the factory could handle, so seed was stripped from the long fibrous panicles using a 'hackling' machine.

The clean corn was then bailed using a bailer imported from Italy and exported to Bunting & Co who made brooms in Auckland whilst the seed was sold to Crest Feeds in Fiji for use in poultry feed.

To reflect the spread of farmer members throughout the valley, VICS became the Valley Industrial Co-operative Association (VICA) with an ever increasing number of members eventually organised into 32 branches.

As soon as the factory was completed and the hand-

operated machinery installed, we had to learn how to make brooms (no *Google* in those days). I had visited a broom factory in Melbourne but the rest was a matter of trial and error. Mosese, one of the labourers on the Station, pretty well taught himself to be the first broom maker, using imported handles prior to making our own. This is not the place to describe the way the fibres were built up on the handles and stitched to make brooms but in order to maximise the use of the different lengths of fibre it is customary to make a range of brooms graded by the number of lines of stitching known as 'ties'. Thus 5 or 6 tie woolshed brooms at the top of the range were followed by cheaper 4 and 3 tie brooms and finally 'whisks', as used by barbers years ago to brush hairs off the customer's shoulder before offering "*something for the weekend sir?*". We marketed brooms under the "Vicky" label with the logo of a Fijian girl holding a broom.

At an early stage when broom making was still a one man band, disaster struck! The Co-op was badly over-stretched and I learned an early lesson in the need for cash flow. In order to pay Mosese's wages I was borrowing money from the Nacocolevu Co-op in return for IOUs. A lightning inspection by the Registrar of Co-operatives discovered my crime and immediate steps were taken to de-register both Co-ops. Prompt action was needed and I borrowed £300 from our friend Dr Hands, which easily balanced the books and the threat of de-registration was lifted. Valerie again came to the rescue and moved £300 from UK to repay the debt and accepted Co-op shares in lieu. Fortunately some years later she was able to trade in her shares for cash.

Bunting (Fiji) Limited

Increasingly the broom manufacturing business took on a life of its own. Bunting & Co. in Auckland had purchased broom corn from VICA for some years and suggested that it would make sense to transfer their operation to Fiji. This would reduce labour costs and allow Bunting to sell their valuable factory site in Auckland for re-development.

By this time mains power was available at the factory and a joint venture company, Bunting (Fiji) Ltd, was created with VICA holding 45% of the shares. At this stage VICA closed the factory temporarily and sent the five employees to Auckland to be trained in the use of powered broom making machines.

After six months training, the men returned to Fiji along with all of the machinery from Auckland. Sadly Mosese had a mental breakdown in NZ, had to be repatriated to Fiji, was admitted to the psychiatric hospital in Suva and subsequently died.

VICA borrowed money from the Fiji Development Bank and built a large new factory on the existing site and repaid the loan from the rent paid by Bunting.

Having installed the broom making machinery, Bunting appointed Jack Deveraux, recently retired from the NZ factory to manage the Fiji operation and production increased enormously. In addition to local sales, brooms were exported to NZ and at its height the factory was producing up to 1,800 brooms per month.

One disadvantage of the Bunting deal was that the NZ Government, presumably the Department of Trade and Industry, insisted that in return for 'losing an industry' NZ-made handles should be used in the manufacturing process. As a result Fiji lost the handle making business.

The Peace Corps years

Alongside the broom manufacturing business, the rest of VICA was expanding rapidly and taking on many of the aspects of a multi–purpose farmers' Co-op but was badly in need of managerial support. At the time the US Peace Corps was becoming increasingly active in the Pacific and was attracting good quality volunteers anxious to avoid the Vietnam war. Accordingly in 1966 the first two volunteers, Ron Moore and Reg Berry, were assigned by the Co-operatives Department to work for VICA. This had a huge impact on the business and when Ron and Reg's two year assignment finished they were replaced by Tsoli Richardson and Tom (& Lolly) Tatum, the latter spending much of his time with the passionfruit enterprise.

The final Peace Corps volunteer to work for VICA was Bill Coburn, a middle aged former US Marine Corps Sergeant with a background as a labour contractor (gang master) in California. He was a hard nut and did not fit in particularly well with the laid back Fiji style of doing business.

VICA could never afford to pay the sort of salary which

would attract a good local manager but fortunately Reg and Kathy Berry (Valerie and I organised their wedding) were persuaded to return from the States as a poorly paid replacement for Bill Coburn.

The Bank of New South Wales operated from a small wooden office on an excellent corner site in Sigatoka town which was manned by staff who came down from Nadi only on Thursday to open up shop. The Bank decided to build a proper bank on the site and the wooden building became redundant. VICA bought the building and moved it physically up the valley to the broom factory site to become 'The office'. For many years VICA boasted of,

"Buying the bank in Sigatoka."

An Australian company, Cottee & Co, set up South Pacific Foods Ltd (SPF) to process passionfruit and other tropical fruit in Sigatoka. VICA had a 45% stake in this business and, rather like broom making, SPF took on a life of its own.

The policy of paying for produce in a mixture of cash and shares meant that eventually VICA comprised some 1,200 members organised into 32 branches spread throughout the settlements in the Sigatoka valley. These settlements were either predominantly Indian or predominantly Fijian and this was reflected in the composition of individual branches. At the time, racial politics did not really affect running the business because essentially Europeans held the balance of power. With hindsight we should have done more to strengthen individual branches but this required resources which VICA did not have.

The District Administration's programme aimed at kick starting rural development had been successful in the Sigatoka valley. However it was short lived for various political reasons and instead of terminating abruptly, it would have been preferable for a progressive withdrawal of the Development programme in favour of VICA. The Association did acquire, without cost, the Development schemes facilities in the middle and upper valley but sadly nothing in the way of staff or resources.

A farmer organisation as large as VICA inevitably becomes a pressure group and at one stage I became embroiled in a 'tobacco war'. British American Tobacco (BAT) had sponsored tobacco growing in the valley since 1960 and paid for graded leaf only when it came out of the company's curing barns. Then five years later a rival company, Carreras, entered the market and paid for green leaf at the roadside. Farmers vastly preferred the latter and through the Association, BAT farmers threatened to stop growing unless there was a change in policy. The BAT manager and the Ministry of Agriculture were not best pleased with my involvement but I could hold my hands up and say,

"*Sorry sir only representing our members.*"

Eventually BAT backed down, I made a couple of enemies, but thereafter both companies bought green leaf.

Once electricity from the grid became more readily available, Government bought out the privately owned power supplier in Sigatoka and VICA was able to acquire both the site and the old wooden powerhouse for a nominal

sum. This became the new Head Office. the old bank building having been incorporated into the new broom factory in the Valley.

VICA did make mistakes, one of which was devoting too much time and effort trying to promote potato growing in the Valley. As mentioned elsewhere, the endemic potato disease *bacterial wilt* was always going to win the day.

Fiji became independent in October 1970 and ushered in a period of considerable change, including quite strong anti-establishment and anti-European elements. A new Registrar of Co-operatives in the shape of a rabid nationalist named Butadroka made it clear that Thompson should resign as the Chairman of VICA. I was happy to go as I did not relish the nasty atmosphere being generated. In spite of this unpleasantness, I was pleased to note that my award of The Fiji Independence Medal was for services to the Co-operative movement.

I lost track of what happened to VICA once we left Fiji at the end of 1974 and indeed the Association's future is hardly part of this story.

Sovi Farm Ltd

For the first time in over ten years we had a little money to spare because at Independence permanent and pensionable officers like myself were compensated by the UK Government for loss of career in two ways.

A golden handshake, known as 'lumpers', of £5,000 was paid out over a five year period. In addition, on leaving Government service a pension based on salary and years of service became payable. In order to encourage officers to stay in service, if required, an increasing proportion of the pension could be commuted. I stayed on for over four years after Independence and was allowed to commute 50% of my pension, a capital sum which we invested in Bramley Cottage.

Only the Thompsons would consider investing in a small farm within six months of leaving Fiji but it came about as follows:

I was visiting the Native Land Trust Board (NLTB) offices in Suva in connection with rice developments in Navua when I met Ratu Solomoni, Seta's father-in-law and asked,

"What are you doing here Ratu?"

He replied,

"*I am thinking of transferring my lease at Sovi to my Indian neighbours.*"

At which point I uttered the fatal words,

"*No don't do that, transfer it to us instead.*"

Sovi Farm Ltd (number 2421) was duly registered with the Registrar of Companies on 16th July 1974 with a share capital of $10,000 and acquired the remaining 12 years of a 30 year lease on nearly 38 acres of native land (out of reserve) at Sovi Bay in Nadroga.

Valerie became the Chairman with the shareholders (each holding $2,500) eventually being Valerie, Caroline, Chris and Seta (no Peter because of the ban on officers becoming involved in private enterprise).

The farm was idyllically located in the lower Sovi valley running down to Sovi Bay with the Queen's Road passing through the property. We inherited six acres of ageing coconuts and the remnants of an old village site, along with 12 acres of good alluvial land, including a small area of cocoa, which was uncultivated and 20 acres of hill land mainly 'bush'.

The background is worth recording as an example of the complexities of land tenure in Fiji. Ratu Baka from Vatukarasa village had taken out a 30 year lease on the land and used it as security to borrow money from the Fiji Development Bank (FDB).

He fell behind with repayments and, to avoid foreclosure, agreed to sell the lease to John Matson, a hotel manager from NZ. John had made Seta's sister-in-law Alena Ratuniyarawa

pregnant and, partly to make amends, had passed the land to her and hence to her father Ratu Solomoni.

Whilst John had acquired the lease document, lodged with Cromptons the solicitors in Suva, he had not paid the full price and money was still owed to both Ratu Baka and Alena.

To keep everything legal and above board, Sovi Farm Ltd paid off the outstanding debts (about $800) and the lease was ours.

The original lease ran out in 1986 and thanks to the Agricultural Landlord and Tenants legislation was rolled over for a further 20 years until 2006.

The first task was to build a house on the land for Farm Manager Seta and Ilita. This was quickly done using a standard plan for a house 24 ft x 16 ft which in time was extended to include a separate kitchen. A farm shed was also built with an enclosed area using the timber rescued from Seta's old workshop at Nacocolevu.

In November 1974 we left Fiji and hoped that Seta would make a good job of farming the land. The rest of the 32 year Sovi Farm saga occurred whilst we were living in England and visiting almost every year from 1978 onwards. The records for this period, in annual reports, company returns and accounts, is very comprehensive. They provide details of what happened over this period when the farm survived four coups, three serious hurricanes, loss of land, property and crops through flooding and the loss of crops and livestock through theft. Full disclosure would occupy too much of this story but it would provide a good case

study of the vicissitudes of working a small mixed farm in Fiji.

An overall assessment of the pros and cons of the investment shows:

Pros: The farm provided Seta and family with a satisfactory living for 30 years and, with help from the Thompsons, provided his four children with a good education. The three girls got jobs as a teacher, a nurse and on the staff of a resort hotel.

It provided Seta with a pension and sufficient capital to build a comfortable retirement home in Korotoga village. It also paid the rent and we tried to be responsible custodians of the land.

Importantly, it provided us with a comfortable second home with many enjoyable holidays and finally it provided Caroline and Chris with an initial base from which to launch their own jobs, careers and families.

Cons: Except for one year (1988) the farming operation consistently made losses which eventually totalled $F32,213. This was partly offset by resurrecting Belinda Products & Sulua Lures which made a profit of $F8,014. The total loss spread over 32 years equated to about £160 a year and Valerie always said that it would have cost more to belong to the Harrogate Golf Club.

From 2003 onwards, security on the farm became an increasing concern, so we stopped using the Sovi house and thereafter based ourselves with Chris and family at Nasoso. Then from 2004, we faced the probability that Sovi Farm Ltd would lose the land and transferred the lease and all

assets to Seta in the hope that he might have a chance of extending the lease. This suited Chris who was happy to be relieved of responsibility for the farm.

By 2007 losing the lease became inevitable and as there was no possibility of being compensated for the assets, anything that could be moved, including the buildings, was dismantled and removed by Seta.

Other extracurricular activities

Once we left Fiji there was a limit to the extracurricular activities I could undertake, although as mentioned earlier our involvement with Sovi Farm Ltd continued for many years. We had visions of Valerie continuing a Belinda Products type business in UK but this proved impossible. Valerie had more than a full time job setting up and running a house and garden mostly single handed, however all was not lost and some extracurriculars were still possible.

The Swimming Pool in Iraq. The Baquba 'colony' of eight houses assigned to the consultants in Iraq and where I was the oldest resident included a club house and squash court but no swimming pool. I was instrumental in correcting this deficiency and with a lot of hard work by the residents and some help from the Khalis Administration and HTS/ MMP, who provided the pump and filtration system, we constructed a nice pool 10 metres x 5 metres, being 1 metre at the shallow end and 2 metres at the deep end. It took us 20 months to complete and I did manage 20 swims before it was time to leave Baquba.

The Railway Station in Romaldkirk. This extracurricu-

lar never happened but is nevertheless worth recording. We were on home leave in 1969 and staying in the village of Romaldkirk. The Teesdale branch railway line fell victim to the Beeching closures and the local station was no longer in use. I got in touch with British Rail's estate office in York to ask if I could buy the station. After many phone calls I was told that I should contact an estate agent and ask if they were interested in handling the sale. I rushed round to an estate agent in Barnard Castle and suggested that they could have the business provided they gave me the opportunity to beat the highest bidder.

Things moved swiftly and we were soon in a 'ping pong match' with another party. The price got to £1,200 at which stage we pulled out. In fact the whole operation was a pipe dream as we were already over committed on the Korotoga house in Fiji and my parents were not interested in helping to finance the project anyway.

8 Clifton Street, St Albans. The move to a job at Hunting's Head Office in Hertfordshire in June 1997 whilst living in North Yorkshire presented many logistical problems but we never seriously considered selling up and moving south. At first I lodged with a Mrs Very who ran a boarding house catering for young Hunting land surveyors and on one occasion I was assigned a bed in the cellar with zero headroom and awoke determined that things had to change.

Fortunately I was introduced to Penny Forster who was moving to live in Portugal and I agreed to house-sit her terraced house at 8 Alma Cut, St Albans whilst she was

away. When Penny was back home I simply moved out for a week or two and stayed with Alice Harbour in Harrow. Then I had a similar arrangement with Marilyn Green at her house in Flavian Close, a newish estate in St Albans where all of the roads had pretentious Roman names. Marilyn had come home one day to find that her husband had tragically committed suicide by putting a plastic bag over his head and was happy to let me house-sit whilst she decided what to do with the property.

None of the above was very satisfactory but it was all I could afford and anyway I was overseas and/ or back home for a lot of the time. Then things improved and another extracurricular cropped up:

Sometime after Father's death, Mother sold the family home in Rawdon and moved to a smaller house near us in Aldborough. This resulted in some surplus cash which she was prepared to invest in a property to be jointly owned by my brother Christopher and myself.

Valerie got busy and found that an end of terrace house, 8 Clifton Street, St Albans, was on the market which we promptly bought for £26,000. It was a centrally located, Victorian working man's house built in 1880 and had been lived in by the same old lady for 50 years. Although badly run down, it was basically sound and consisted of a living room, dining and kitchen downstairs and two bedrooms and a bathroom upstairs, along with a good sized cellar, outside toilet and a modest back garden.

I took up residence on 11th May 1982 and started to convert the house into two flats following the advice of a

helpful building inspector. When finished, each flat would comprise a bedsitting room, kitchen/ dining room and bathroom and have a separate front door. I did most of the work myself except for a modest amount of brickwork and plastering. On one occasion Billy the builder got our son Chris to hold up the remnants of a chimney breast with a shovel *"While I go for a crap"* In fact this was quite unnecessary, but Chris terrified that the rest of the chimney would collapse was relieved when Billy returned to finish the job.

I used the downstairs flat myself, paying Mother a modest rent, whilst renting out the upstairs flat to a strange young man who never disposed of any rubbish. This worked well for about four years but then brother Christopher needed to cash in his share. I thought that we might have to sell the whole property in order to find the money. However, Valerie talked to the estate agent and discovered that it would be possible to sell off the upstairs flat whilst retaining downstairs. Accordingly I borrowed the money to pay off Christopher and then set about some necessary improvements, including a new roof, in order to make the upstairs flat presentable.

I sold the top flat quite quickly to Audrey Renton for £52,000 and after I left Hunting I rented the lower flat to an American woman for some years, finally selling it in the summer of 1996, again for about £52,000.

The Old Chapel at Cattal. This project hardly qualifies as an extracurricular as I did very little of the physical work myself but simply rolled over the profits from St Albans to

convert the old Chapel at Cattal into a comfortable two bedroom house which has been rented to a series of tenants since 1998.



Above: outside the Church of the Good Shepherd are Isoa the builder and me as Clerk of Works

Below: the consecration of the church in June 1966





Above: Lachmi in the Belinda Products workshop



Right: Sulua Lures and Belinda Products



Above: the Korotoga House

Below: Chris and Caroline at Korotoga





Valley Industrial Co-operative Association projects

Above: the broom factory

Right: the fruit processing plant





Left: Sovi Farm and Sovi Bay



Right: VICA Peace Corps Volunteers with Ratu Mara



Above: the house at Sovi Farm

Right: Chris and Seta putting up trellising for passionfruit







Above: Chris and David with newly acquired goats

Right: the Solo pawpaw plantation

Below: the farm family goes to church



Part IV
An International Consultant
Hunting Technical Services Ltd

Re-entering UK

We landed at Heathrow one evening in December 1974, memorable only as the day John Stonehouse, Postmaster General in the Labour Government, faked his suicide in an attempt to avoid a financial scandal. The next day one of Brian Lupton's drivers turned up with our new car, a second-hand, custard coloured Austin Countryman, which we never liked.

So we set off north, visiting Caroline's school at Overstone on the way. Then came the ignominy of having to have the car push-started by half a dozen of Caroline's friends because we had left the choke out all the way from Heathrow. Parents' cars are a topic of much interest at boarding schools and a custard coloured Austin Countryman was never going to 'cut the mustard'.

We spent a couple of nights with my parents at Rawdon and in the Yorkshire Post saw an advert for a Basset puppy at an address in Bradford. The kennels were a bit unusual, mainly a stripped out double-decker bus and an old Morris Traveller. We had no house, no job and few prospects but we did have Gretel II, which the breeder agreed to hold until we could collect her just before Christmas.

Having agreed to rent Bob and Eileen Campbell's house, Walton Cottage in Staveley, we moved from Rawdon in time for Caroline and Chris to join us for the Christmas holidays. Two incidents stick in my memory, Chris's delight at receiving a new bike and our dismay when Gretel tried to eat one of the baubles from the Christmas tree.

1974 was not a good year to return to UK as oil prices had increased enormously and jobs were scarce. Financially things were OK for the time being as I was on leave and therefore had a salary until early May and the education allowance would cover some of the summer school fees. However, finding a job was definitely the top priority.

Job and house hunting

If I had a game plan at all, it was to try to find a job in agri-business in UK and having enjoyed the challenges of building up VICA in Fiji I thought that something in the Co-operative sector might be the way forward. Little did I realise at the time that Co-ops in general and Farmer Co-ops in particular are prone to a host of business problems.

January and February, depressing months at the best of times, saw me searching the job adverts in the Thursday edition of the "Telegraph". I applied for and was invited for interview for three potential jobs in the Co-operative sector:

Manager, Yorkshire Rhubarb Growers Association. The organisation was seeking their first paid manager and a dozen candidates turned up at a hotel near Wakefield to be interviewed by the whole committee. I was the first to occupy the 'hot seat' and clearly this was the first time the members had ever conducted a job interview. It was a disaster and I heard nothing more.

Manager, Bacon Producers Co-operative in Suffolk. A much more rewarding interview with the Chairman

but clearly they were looking for someone with relevant experience in the industry.

Manager of an Industrial Co-operative Association in Cumbria. The Labour Government of the day had designated a number of Development Areas across the country and hoped to kick start various enterprises under the co-op banner. I was invited to attend a two day interview for the Cumbria position and a week before this happened Valerie and I thought we ought to have a look at the small town of Cleator Moor, population 7,000, where the manager would be based. We had never experienced anything so depressing and for the first time saw grown men sitting on their doorsteps smoking in the middle of the day. We departed in haste, I made excuses and did not attend the interview.

Then things took a turn for the better as the Government had established the Overseas Resettlement Bureau to help people like me to find jobs. Unbeknown to me, two overseas consulting firms, Bookers and Hunting Technical Services (HTS), had received copies of my CV and they invited me for interview.

The Booker interview came first and they were looking for a Team Leader for the Iran National Agricultural Master Plan Project.

Then I visited the Hunting offices in Borehamwood where I was offered the job of Chief Agriculturalist on the Lower Khalis Project in Iraq. I mentioned the Booker interview which raised some hackles as the Iran job was supposed to be a joint Booker/ HTS project for which

HTS had already nominated the Team Leader. I agreed to join HTS, intending to arrive in Iraq on or about 1st June.

Rose Lea Farm. Back in North Yorkshire the Campbells were due on leave from the Gilbert and Ellis Islands and their children were also due to come home for the Easter holidays, so there was no room for the Thompsons at Walton Cottage. As a temporary measure we moved into Len Palmer's small flat at Waterside in Knaresborough. Len had been with me in Cambridge and Trinidad and the flat was empty as he was overseas on an HTS job. Meanwhile Valerie, aided and abetted by Eileen Campbell, knew of every house on the market within a ten mile radius of Knaresborough.

Fortunately we could move quickly as we had money in the bank and Valerie had found that Rose Lea Farm in Lower Dunsforth was on the market at a price we could afford. The vendor, Mrs Cran, a widow, planned to move to London but did not want to vacate until May. We were allowed to leave our packing cases, which had arrived from Fiji, in the outbuildings and we got possession of the re-named Bramley Cottage (in honour of Valerie's grandparents' Bramley House in Boston) and there was a mad rush to leave the house habitable before I was due to start work in Iraq.

International Natural Resource Consultants

To put my next 30 years of work into context requires a word or two of explanation. Prior to World War II, British colonies and territories were expected to be self-supporting and it was not until the 1940s, when Britain was very conscious of the contribution being made to the war effort by her overseas dependencies, that the first Colonial Development and Welfare Act was passed. Modest assistance became available for specific projects and it was felt that there was a moral obligation to ensure a better start for former colonies, especially given the catastrophe in the Belgian Congo which had gained independence in 1960 with a mere eleven graduates serving a country roughly the size of western Europe.

Senior staff in Ministries of Agriculture, and Departments such as Agriculture, Forestry and Water Development at the time of Independence tended to be staffed with expatriates from UK and the Dominions. A new generation of nationals as replacements for the retiring expatriates had or were being trained. In the meantime, gaps in technical expertise could only be filled by expatriate officers on contract or by packaging the work into projects

for a new breed of private sector consultants of which HTS was first in UK if not in the world. Thus the market was born.

Given that the aid programme emerged from its colonial antecedents by way of the administrative and technical support provided by the colonial power, it was not surprising that early technical provision lay in such disciplines as agriculture, forestry, natural resource evaluation and map making.

Therefore the early 1950s became years of opportunity for those concerned with development and planning as the pressure for independence grew. In addition, after more than six years of widespread world war, many other activities had been curtailed or foregone while military priorities reigned supreme. Governments throughout the world were bringing forward delayed development projects or developing new ones, often assisted either directly via skilled staff or indirectly via funding by aid from the richer countries and from the newly established United Nations agencies. The demand for planning capability and for basic data, including accurate maps and natural resource inventories of all kinds was increasing rapidly and has continued to grow.

By the end of the twentieth century overseas development had become big business with many of the developed and oil-rich countries operating bilateral aid programmes. In addition the multi-lateral agencies like the World Bank and the European Union dispersed many billions of dollars a year in grants or loans.

The Hunting Group of Companies, initially established in 1874 as ship owners, diversified into a wide range of interests and in the inter-war years moved into oil and various aviation activities including aerial photography. The extensive use of aerial photography in WWII for the identification of bombing targets had many civilian uses including natural resource planning and development. Starting in 1953, Hunting Technical Services Ltd (HTS) - a part of Hunting Surveys and Consultants Ltd which in turn was a part of Hunting Associated Industries PLC - specialised in this field and when I joined in 1975, the company was already well established.

Iraq

HTS staff already in Baghdad advised driving a car out and wrote with detailed instructions for the journey. Accordingly, we traded in the Austin Countryman for a new left hand drive Volvo 245 and a second hand Morris Traveller for Valerie to use in UK.

HTS agreed to advance the cost of the air fare plus some extra baggage allowance, which covered the cost of driving to Baghdad. The company organised our visas, whilst we obtained a letter from our local vicar stating that we were Christians (ie not Jews). Most HTS staff however dispensed with the vicar's letter and as Dan Godley was the company secretary, took the view that a note signed by the Rev Godley would do nicely. Anti-Israeli sentiments were particularly strong at the time and having a passport with an Israeli stamp was a sure way of being refused entry and it was even advisable to remove the St Michael's label from underwear as Marks &Spencer was regarded as a Jewish company.

Getting there

Valerie and I loaded the Volvo with everything we thought we would need in Iraq and drove out of Lower Dunsforth early on the morning of 28th May, which was three or four days later than we had intended but there was so much we needed to do at Bramley Cottage. We spent the first night with the Luptons in Hertfordshire, then crossed the Channel, spending the night at a small B&B in Zolda, Holland. Then we coped with the scary autobahns of Germany in driving rain to Salzburg. After another early start, it was a relief to get to a hot bath and a comfy bed at the best hotel in Belgrade (then Jugoslavia). We came down to breakfast just as a wedding party from the previous day were wending their way home. Then we went across Bulgaria where we had been warned that fuel might not be available, so we stopped in a lay-by to top up from our jerry can. With perhaps half a gallon to spare we offered it to a local family out for a picnic. With great reluctance, presumably in fear of the communist authorities, they put the fuel into their car, making sure that no one was watching.

On 1st June we crossed into Turkey and spent the night at Edirne in a former caravansary turned hotel. The next day

we went across the Golden Gate Bridge, through Istanbul with only a brief stop and on to Ankara for the night. East of Ankara the roads steadily deteriorated until by the time we reached Gaziantep we were travelling on dirt roads. The hike in oil prices meant a huge increase in demand in the Middle East for all sorts of consumer goods from Europe, some of which was being trucked along our route. Old hands advised new truck drivers to scatter packets of cigarettes, particularly on steep inclines, to distract urchins who were liable to clamber aboard and steal the cargo.

On 4th June we crossed the border into Iraq at 5pm and stayed at the awful Rafidain Hotel in Mosul, then finally we were on the last leg on a good road to Baghdad, ready to start work. I had been assigned a house at Baquba, some 60 km north of Baghdad, and Valerie kindly spent a week helping to get the house cleaned and organised before flying back to UK on 10th June in time for the children's summer holiday.

The project

Some basic knowledge of the project is necessary in order to understand my first two years with HTS. Coming virtually straight from 16 years in the South Pacific, I was confronted for the first time with the following simple truth:

In all arid countries it is possible to irrigate without drainage for about 50 years, but then the salinity in the soil steadily increases until conventional cropping becomes impossible. Land can only be brought back into cultivation by drainage and reclamation.

The consultants Sir M Macdonald and Partners (MMP) in association with HTS had often addressed this salinity problem, particularly in Pakistan, and their track record was no doubt an important factor in being awarded the job.

The project area of 93,000 hectares stretched from Baghdad in the south to Baquba in the north and the Tigris to the west. It was originally the subject of a World Bank (IBRD) loan but by 1975 Iraq was making so much money from the increase in oil prices that they did not need to borrow money from anyone. Consequently the consultant staff members became, in effect, government

employees directly responsible to the Khalis Agricultural Administration (KAA). An IBRD team did make a short visit to the project in mid-July and thereafter had no further involvement. This 'change of master' occurred at the same time as the first two year planning phase was coming to an end and coincided with my arrival in Iraq.

Land and soil surveys had been completed and the design work for the irrigation and drainage network was well advanced. Abdul Wahab, the Director General (DG) of the KAA, was a capable engineer and subsequently Minister for Irrigation and then Ambassador to Saudi Arabia. He lost no time in deciding which of the consultant inputs he could do without, the major HTS casualty, quite rightly, being the Training Centre.

In my first six weeks on project I was kept busy overseeing the departure of most of the HTS team. Technically I took over as Chief Agriculturalist from John Cowburn and also inherited numerous administrative and financial duties. In addition to myself, soils, horticulture and mechanisation staff remained, plus from time to time various visiting specialists.

Greek contractors won the bid to build the first and smallest of the three irrigation areas and because money was no object the early plans were up-graded to meet the highest standards, as the project was intended to showcase irrigated agriculture in Iraq:

The main canal, all secondary canals and water courses were concrete lined and state of the art laser controlled machines graded the land to best fit.

Buried field drains 2 metres deep were constructed to carry the saline groundwater into a network of open drains eventually out-falling into the Tigris. Most of the area was designed to supply 45 litres / second to 45 hectare watercourse (WC) units using border strip irrigation.

I was in effect working for the Agricultural Department of KAA which was headed by S'd Nama, a pleasant man but very much required to play 'second fiddle' to the KAA engineers. Fortunately we had access to a trial area at Mash just outside the project but with a good supply of water and with very similar soils to most of the proposed irrigation area.

Land on the banks of the Tigris was good, easy to work and largely under citrus and horticultural crops, which KAA was committed to expanding. Once off the levee however, thousands of years of flooding meant that the soils had become progressively fine silts and were very difficult to manage. The soil surveys confirmed this and showed large tracts of land as only suitable for rice production. Having seen very successful rice/ grass rotations in Australia this seemed a possible way forward and by 27th June we had planted and eventually harvested a good rice crop. In contrast, attempts to grow other crops using border strip irrigation proved very difficult. The soil was highly erodible and even the slightest over-application of water would see a large chunk of the field filling the open drains. In addition, unless the soil could be kept moist it was liable to set like concrete above the emerging seedlings.

In order to see how farmers handled these soils I took

the DG into the field early one morning for an excellent demonstration of micro managing water in basins no bigger than the average bedroom. On this occasion we were near the main road north and saw dozens of tanks and their transporters heading for the Syrian border. I said *"I wonder how many?"* and the DG replied *"Best not to count, Peter"*

The basic problem, if rice was not a long term proposition, was how to handle 45 l/sec of water on a 45 hectare block of land. I was increasingly convinced that following a two year reclamation period, possibly with rice as the reclamation crop, the answer lay in sprinkler irrigation - possibly lateral move irrigators drawing water from the watercourse - and that border strip irrigation was, in practice, a non-starter. But saying this too loudly was presenting the consultants with an enormous problem. Eventually it was decided that one of the first watercourses to come on stream (WC 29) would be used to work out and then demonstrate the most cost effective irrigation and cropping systems. I made seven supervisory visits to the project between July 1977 and October 1979 and on the final visit I was dismayed to find an oil rig at work on WC 29, instead of the flourishing crops I had hoped to see.

Life in Iraq

Considering what was to come, our time in Iraq was calm, although it was wise not to be openly critical of the ruling Baath Party. The squabbles with Iran were over for the time being and the Kurds had either been gassed into submission or transported from the mountains to the marshes to languish and die. The military were very much in evidence but compared to most other countries in the region life was fairly normal. Women could drive, churches were tolerated and alcohol was readily available, nightclubs did good business and there were restaurants and cinemas. In addition, MMP maintained a Baghdad office independent of the project, which took care of many of the staff and administrative problems.

We were regarded as Iraqi civil servants and enjoyed all of the local holidays as well as being eligible for discounted fares on Iraqi Airways. In addition we were issued with 'a passport' in Arabic, which allowed us to explore most of the country without difficulty, a privilege not available to the Diplomatic Corps.

Our house was in the Baquba Colony, originally constructed for earlier consultants and set within a perimeter

wall. The compound consisted of two rows of four identical houses with flat roofs and individual driveways and modest gardens. A walkway between the back gardens led to the Club, whose main attraction was a squash court.

The house was well equipped and relied on desert coolers to keep us cool in summer and gas heaters to cope with the surprisingly cold winters. Valerie spent as much time as she could in Iraq and was very good at leaving the deep freeze full of ready cooked meals for consumption whilst she was away. I became fairly adapt at looking after myself, helped enormously by Majid, a delightful former batman to a British Army officer. He did the washing, ironing and housekeeping and was worth every penny (dinar) he was paid.

During the brutal Iraqi summer, swimming was a great attraction and the British Club in Baghdad, 60 km away, had an excellent pool but getting there was not really a possibility during the week. On one memorable occasion I tried the pool at the Army Officers' Club in Baquba but it was horrible and green. The answer was to build our own pool in the Club grounds and this successful project is described elsewhere.

As described later, I visited Iraq on five occasions between 1980 and 1982 and on a visit in 1981 the expat wives complained bitterly that they could not get their hair done as all the ladies hairdressers in Baghdad had been closed down. It transpired that one of the ways that boys could get to meet girls was for the would-be swain to slip a note to the hairdresser suggesting that the lady concerned

might consider a date. One poor boy made the mistake of trying to proposition Saddam Hussein's niece and she complained to her uncle. The answer to the problem was simple "*Shut down all the hairdressers*". I often wondered how Mrs Thatcher would have responded to a bad hairdo and bet that she rather envied Saddam Hussein's powers of persuasion.

Exploring

Having spent six months in Iraq on my own, a period neither Valerie nor I appreciated and were determined not to repeat if at all possible, I went home for a couple of weeks over Christmas 1975 and again in the summer of 1976. The children came out for the Easter holidays in 1976 and again for the Christmas holidays that year and we took every opportunity to travel and explore the region which is about as far from the South Pacific, both geographically and culturally, as it is possible to get.

In addition to travels with the children, Valerie and I did our fair share of exploring Iraq and the neighbouring countries on our own.

Close to Baghdad and therefore easy to visit was the classic arch at Ctesiphon, still standing which says a lot for the original design as well as the Ishtar Gate and the remains of ancient Babylon which the Iraqis had rather insensitively 'restored'.

On a business trip with my young Iraqi counterpart/agronomist S'd Adnan, we visited Karbala, the Shiite holy city in the south of the country. Sunni Muslims would not

consider entering the main mosque and unbeknown to us entry by non-Muslims was forbidden, This did not deter Adnan, who encouraged and escorted Valerie, suitably clad in a black *abaya* to visit the mosque, I wisely stayed outside as I would never pass for anything but a Westerner.

On the same day we visited the local souk and bought a couple of what we thought were single woollen bedspreads in a sort of tartan pattern. With a good wash they did in fact make good bedspreads for the children. Sometime later we discovered the truth. They were shrouds! Shiite Muslims from across the country sought to be buried at Karbala and rough wooden coffins on the roof rack of taxis were a common sight. The shroud would cover the coffin for the internment ceremony but was often not buried and found its way to the souk ready to be used by the next 'customer'. Adnan must have known this but did not enlighten us!

One long weekend we headed south again to spend the night with an MMP engineer and his wife working on an irrigation project near Kut. In WWI, this was the site of a disastrous battle where British and Indian troops were soundly beaten by the Turks. It was also a good starting point to visit the ancient sites of Eridu and we were shown the actual site of Abraham's house (really?!). We did get a glimpse of the marshes and the unique reed houses constructed by the Marsh Arabs and written about by Wilfred Thesiger.

On another Eid holiday we set off to drive to Iran, crossing the border at Kermanshah and heading through Hamadan to Esfahan. The town was expecting a visit from

the Shah, so no room for us at any of the hotels. Fortunately we found a hotel car park where we could sleep in the Volvo for the night. The next day we discovered the souk and spent most of our money on silverware 'treasures'. Nearly broke, there was no question of finding a hotel room, so we spent another night in the Volvo before heading back to Baquba.

First impressions of Iran v Iraq could be summed up as: Cornflakes and bananas readily available in Iran but almost unobtainable in Iraq; infrastructure, schools and health clinics in rural areas better in Iraq than Iran.

All of the above was before the Shah was overthrown, before Saddam Hussein came to power and of course, before the madness of the Iraq/ Iran war.

Finally in 1976 we made a five day trip to Jordan. This involved an 800 km drive across the basalt rock covered desert to the Jordan border at H4. The original Iraqi Petroleum Company pipeline ran from Kirkuk to Haifa and the relay pumping stations along the route were numbered H1, H2 etc). Valerie was taken off to be searched by a female customs officer and, with hardly a word in common, Valerie heard the tragic story that the Palestinian woman's husband and children had been killed in the Tel al-Zaatar refugee camp and that the Jordanian government had given her a job as a customs officer. We stayed at the Inter Continental in Amman and visited most of the mandatory tourist attractions including Jerrash and Karak then down to Wadi Rum and Petra etc. We enjoyed Jordan and resolved to return.

Travels with the children

The children came for their first visit in the Easter holidays of 1976, a date fixed in our minds because Caroline (the little monkey) rushed into the house and said to Valerie "*Come quickly Mum, Chris has fallen in the squash court and is unconscious."* Valerie dashed to the scene of the supposed accident to find the children laughing and saying *"April Fool!"*

A favourite weekend destination was Wadi Tharthar, a large artificial lake formed by diverting water from the Tigris into a natural depression. The weather was beautiful and we were well equipped with tents and a canvas covered canoe which I had inherited and restored.

On one occasion Caroline and the British Ambassador's daughter were sharing a tent and we awoke to much excitement as they had found a small scorpion under the groundsheet. The downside of Wadi Tharthar was that Valerie developed asthma for the first time on one of our trips.

On a visit to the trial area at Mash one afternoon we found a farmer grazing his goats on the rice stubble and made the mistake of admiring one of the kid goats. The

farmer insisted on giving it to us and whipped out his knife to see if we would like him to kill it first. We were horrified, tried to pay him, but he would not hear of it, which is how we came to own Gordon Goat II. Gordon happily took up residence in an old packing case in our garden which he shared with a semi-domesticated cat.

The long trip that holiday was going into the Kurdish mountains, where we were able to stay in a Government rest house which was grotty but there was no alternative! The weather was delightful and the hills were covered in wild flowers, including wild tulips which are native to the region. On a visit to the large and heavily guarded Debendikhan dam, Caroline was adopted by a dog which wrapped his front legs round her ankles and would not let go. Very sadly we had to walk away but felt guilty for a long time afterwards.

The next day we made the mistake of driving through the Kurdish village of Rawanduz, the site of an infamous gas attack by the Iraqi Army. Not surprisingly, the villagers were sullen and very suspicious and we hastened away feeling like ghouls. However Chris did not come away empty handed, scrambling down a bank outside the village and salvaging an ammunition box and a number of empty cartridge cases.

We had the time to visit the ancient Abyssinian sites of Nineveh and Nimrud and admired the mythical winged beasts which ISIS were busy destroying in 2016. Finally a quick visit to Kirkuk and as we came close to Arbil, said to be the oldest continuously inhabited city on Earth, we

noticed a pair of cranes building a nest on top of a telegraph post. Chris said,

"The top one must be the consultant and the other one the contractor." Obviously far too much exposure to the project engineers ...

The children came out again for the Christmas holidays and as soon as the festivities, such as they were at Baquba, were over we set off for Jordan. The weather was bitterly cold and the highlight of the trip, a visit to Petra, nearly ended in tragedy. It was afternoon by the time we dropped our bags at the Government Rest House where we had been allocated two adjoining rooms, with our room having an en suite bathroom.

We set off to explore *"The rose-red city half as old as time"* and got back to our rooms at dusk and very cold. I ran a deep bath to get warm and the children went first, followed by me, whilst Valerie opting to finish the unpacking. I had trouble getting out of the bath and was hyperventilating which I put down to being so cold. Meanwhile back in the bedroom the children were nearly asleep and I remember feeling drunk and unable to tie my shoelaces. Finally it dawned, the gas heater in the bathroom was faulty and we were suffering from carbon monoxide poisoning. So outside we all went, onto the open verandah and soon felt a lot better. After a while we went down to dinner and complained bitterly to the manager whose only comment was: "*Our God has been kind to you."*

The next day we were snowed in and the Volvo was unable to manage the steep road out of Petra, which meant

that we had to wait for a snow plough to clear the way. So on to Aqaba where the sun shone and we were able to swim in the sea.

We left Amman later than intended and, with night approaching, decided to spend the night at H4, where the guide book said there was a rest house. Wrong, no rest house, so we spent the night in the Volvo. Caroline had the front seat and the rest of us were like sardines on a lilo in the back. It was a bitterly cold night and our breath froze on the windshield, so that in the morning we had to have the car heater on full blast before we could see out. The Jordanian customs officers, wrapped in long sheepskin cloaks and looking like biblical shepherds, came on duty and seemed happy to wave us on our way to Iraq.

As soon as we got back from Jordan we heard that Valerie's father Harold had suffered a cerebral haemorrhage and was in a coma. Communications were difficult but we got the message through to my parents that the children were returning to school early and that Valerie was making every effort to get to Spain as soon as possible. Exit and re-entry visas had to be obtained and flights booked. Fortunately the Iraqi officials and airline staff went out of their way to be helpful. Valerie arrived in Alicante just after her father had died but she was at the funeral and stayed on for some time to help her mother.

Back to UK

My stint in Iraq came to an end early in May 1977 and I was pleased to hand over my technical work and the HTS administration and financial responsibilities to my replacement David Needham. We decided to make the trip home a bit of a holiday by spending five or six days in Turkey, a country we had rushed through in 1975. We again loaded up the Volvo including the "Kuwaiti chest" which we had acquired and carefully restored and got ready to set off.

We left Baghdad early on 4th May and reached Gazientep that evening, then set off again the next day and arrived in Alanya at 6.30pm (640 km). We drove from Alanya to Pamukkale on 6th May (450 km) and enjoyed swimming in the hotel pool fed by a thermal spring. The next day we drove to Ephesus and regretted that we could not spend more time amongst the very interesting ruins because we had booked into a hotel in Kusadasi that evening. The next day we drove from Kusadasi to Edirne and then started to retrace our 1975 journey.

At the Bulgarian border the customs officer made us unload everything including the Kuwaiti chest and only

allowed us to proceed once it became obvious that we were not prepared give him any money. We reached Belgrade that evening and Saltzburg the next day, where we took the day off and really enjoyed the culture shock of being back in Europe again. We left Salzburg on 12th May for one of the longest days of driving we had ever made, through Ostend, crossing the Channel and arriving at Tolgate in Kent, absolutely shattered, to find that the motel was full except for one room with only a single bed. We took the room, collapsed on the bed and slept like logs. The next day we headed north and at one point on the A1 I had difficulty slowing down sufficiently and ended up gently pushing a yellow sports car a few yards round a roundabout. Fortunately no harm was done and we made it to Harrogate in time to see Caroline act the part of a policeman in the school play.

Elstree based

After a month at home I reported for duty at the HTS head office in Elstree (Borehamwood) on 13th June, not quite sure what was in store but I had told my boss Don Chambers that I was not interested in another long term assignment overseas. It turned out that 1977 was an ideal time for me to seek a UK based job. Vernon Roberson who established the company in 1953 retired at the end of July and was replaced by Don Chambers. At the same time the huge Umm er Radhuma job in Saudi Arabia had just started, with John Goss as Deputy PM and thus not available to replace Don as Area Manager, Middle East & South Asia. (ME&SA).

The Directors were probably reluctant to see "new boy Thompson" appointed to replace Don, so I sort of drifted into the Area Manager's job which I held for the next ten years.

The company structure made provision for two strands of supervision, geographical control with managers responsible for projects in Africa, ME&SA, Far East and Latin America and Technical control with HO based specialists providing support for staff in the field eg Chief

Agriculturalist, Chief Economist etc.

Just before I joined the company, HTS and Sir M MacDonald & Partners (MMP) had formed Groundwater Development Consultants (GDC). For a time this JV company successfully provided a vehicle for carrying out a number of groundwater development projects including the huge Umm er Radhuma project. Virtually all HTS work was overseas and only from the late 1980s onwards was the company able to secure work in UK and Western Europe thanks to a special capability in the interpretation of satellite imagery.

The company's clients were almost invariably the aid agencies and to a lesser extent Governments, particularly in the oil rich states, whilst private sector work was miniscule. The clients' demands dictated the work schedules, the major players being:

Bilateral Agencies. In effect grants from donor countries (UK, Western Europe, Kuwait etc) to recipient (developing) countries. In the case of UK funded work, invitations to bid were restricted to British consultants, work was awarded in London and payment was never a problem.

Multilateral Agencies. Funded by a number of countries (eg World Bank, EU, Asian Development Bank etc) making grants or loans to recipient countries. Grant aided jobs were straightforward as project control and payment rested with Washington, Brussels or Manila. Loan projects were a different matter, as the recipient countries were, in theory, borrowing the money and as such insisted on

approving the consultants and controlling payment. Low level corruption, difficulties in running the project and getting paid were common-place problems.

Governments. A fairly short lived phenomenon and applied to oil rich countries which wanted to 'fast track' natural resource development. Iraq and Saudi were good examples of this type of client and many of the working and payment difficulties described above applied.

Area Manager (ME&SA)

My job as an Area Manager covered countries from Iraq in the west to Burma in the east, excluding Sri Lanka which was regarded as the Far East Manager's domain. The demise of communism in the Eastern Bloc countries resulted initially in a trickle of work which I tended to pick up.

I kept a very rough work diary from 1977 to 1992 which recorded all overseas trips and in my ten years as Area Manager I was responsible for 43 projects in nine Middle East countries and for 38 projects in six South Asian countries. The first priority was to keep tabs on potential projects as they worked their way through the aid agencies and gestation periods were often long. Then, a need to express interest in carrying out the work and if shortlisted prepare a costed proposal in response to the terms of reference. HTS won slightly more than one in every three proposals submitted. If successful the contract had to be negotiated and signed and finally the team mobilised.

Projects could vary in length from a few weeks to many years and profitability depended largely on the number of staff months involved. During the currency of the project I

needed to visit from time to time to ensure that the job was on schedule. The final task was to present the draft report or reports and try to ensure that the aid agency or client paid up in full.

Carrying out my duties involved a considerable amount of travel and a fairly typical month 'on the road' (April/ May 1980) follows:

22nd April 1980. Travel to Baghdad, 23rd to 27th in Iraq. 28th Saw Minister of Drainage and Irrigation in Baghdad (Abdul Wahab formerly DG Khalis Agricultural Administration now promoted). Travel to Abu Dhabi that evening, 29th in Abu Dhabi, 30th Travel Abu Dhabi to Dubai by taxi, saw the Minister of Agriculture, 1st May travel Dubai to London, 8th meeting at Shell Head Office in London regarding a project in Qatar, 9th travel to Riyadh, 10th in Riyadh, 11th travel to Harad, 12th and 13th in Harad, 14th travel to Riyadh, 15th in Riyadh office, 16th travel to Al Hasa, 17th to 20th in Al Hasa, 21st return to Riyadh, 22nd travel Riyadh to UK

To try to give some structure to all of this travelling, I prepared a table which shows that I made 148 visits to 35 countries over the 10 year period 1977 to 1987. In addition, I carried out a number of contract negotiations as well as eighteen technical assignments in thirteen countries. These were always a welcome change to my usual frantic travelling regime *(If it's Wednesday it must be Riyadh!)*.

After spending 100 days overseas, the company's conditions of service allowed wives to accompany their husbands on a trip. Valerie took full advantage of this

concession and, by avoiding the less attractive countries, came with me on visits to Burma, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Pakistan.

Negotiations

The following is a selection of some of the more interesting visits I made in order to negotiate and sign contracts.

Aden (1979). Negotiations for the Wadi Tuban project on behalf of GDC got off to a bad start as my MEA flight 'went tech' in Athens and, after a night in an indifferent hotel, I finally arrived in Aden well after midnight and without my suitcase. Fortunately John Greenwood, the 1st Secretary (Commercial) in the British Embassy, met the flight, took me to his house for the night and even lent me a pair of pyjamas. Five days of hard negotiations followed with a Hungarian engineer leading the Government team. He was a keen swimmer, so we swam across the bay a couple of times after work and I encountered sea lice for the first time, which made swimming uncomfortable.

I was required to draft the contract for Government approval and in this task I was assisted by Sue Greenwood who had been a secretary before she married and in the days before Tipp-Ex had been invented. I always travelled with a fairly comprehensive set of writing equipment and material and as the draft contract required numerous alterations and

corrections, my supply of Tipp-Ex proved an invaluable revelation to Sue. After the first night I stayed at the Rock Hotel and one evening went along to, I think, the only Chinese restaurant in town. South Yemen at the time was strongly communist, the restaurant was State owned and the chewing of *qat* by employees was supposedly restricted to one day a week. Of course I chose that day for my meal and found myself as the only customer being served by a waiter spaced out on *qat*.

In making enquiries as to where the team might stay, I was shown a block of flats set out on three sides of a rectangle and was told, *"The first side is occupied by Stazi advisers from East Germany, the middle is occupied by Cuba agriculturalists, but you can have the third wing"*.

In the end the Team Leader and family took up long term residence in 'the Rock' as did the other team members.

Ankara (1987). I was called to negotiate and sign a contact with the Turkish Ministry of Agriculture for a World Bank loan to privatise the supply of all agricultural inputs. Much of this work was concentrated in the south of the country (we were not allowed to visit for security reasons) where the State farms producing seed were said to be the same size as the State of Israel. Our Turkish associate, Dr Unal, had a German degree in farm mechanisation and German rather than English was his second language.

The negotiations were prolonged, but eventually we withdrew to allow the Ministry to make a decision. Unbeknown to me, Dr Unal had a 'mole' in the Government team and at a break in the proceedings we heard that we

had won. As we departed, Dr Unal kissed the mole on both cheeks, handed over the brown envelope and said ,*"I told him we would pay - the schweinehund."*

Bhutan (April 1986). Not strictly contract negotiations, but an invitation to visit Bhutan for a series of pre-bid briefings prior to submitting proposals for a large ADB funded project to support the Department of Agriculture. Four firms had been invited, HTS, an Australian firm, American consultants and a German/ Austrian consortium. We were all staying at the Druk Hotel and, after the day's briefings, congregated in the bar to exchange lies designed to convince the opposition that they had no chance of winning the contract.

Also at the bar was an American working for the ADB but not involved in the project. The Australian and I got talking to him and he turned out to be a wine snob who only drank red wine from a small area on the right bank of the Rhine. The Australian had an allergy to gluten and was therefore a wine rather than a beer drinker, so the American said, *"What wine do you drink?"* and the reply was, *"I drink it from the cardboard."* Then turning to me he asked the same question and I said, *"I also drink it from the cardboard."* That killed the conversation but HTS won the contract and worked in Bhutan for many years to come.

Jakarta (September 1987). The South Sulawesi Nucleus Estate and Smallholder Cotton project required my signature and fortunately this only took a day as most of the negotiations had already been completed. So back I went to the hotel and I had only been in my room for

five minutes when there was a knock on the door and a big well-spoken Indonesian apologised for disturbing me and explained that he was in the room opposite me. He went on to present his card and said that he was a timber merchant from Surabaya, had been robbed in the street and needed money to get home. He asked if I could lend him the rupiah equivalent of about $US15. I was dubious but it was not a huge sum and he assured me that the money would be returned when he got home.

As soon as he left I went down to reception and asked if the man had been staying in the hotel, predictably the answer was NO. The next morning I was having breakfast with Rupert Hughes, a Binnie and Partners Director, and I said, *"You won't believe what happened to me yesterday."* Rupert replied, *"Don't tell me, he was a timber merchant from Surabaya."*

In my own defence this was the first and only time I have ever been conned in this way.

London (September 1980). HTS had been selected to carry out the Banaba Island Resources Survey with me as Team Leader and I had already been vetted for the post by ODA. This was not sufficient and the long running legal battle which preceded the contract involved a firm of lobbyists and a senior MP. I thought that lobbying was an American phenomenon but not so. I was summoned to smart offices in Bond Street to meet the two lobbyists and Sir Bernard Braine, at that time 'The Father of the House', who had been 'hired' to represent the Banaban cause.

After sixteen years in Fiji I knew a lot about the

Banabans but listened dutifully whilst I was lectured about my responsibilities and the supposed injustices suffered by these 'poor people'. At one point Sir Bernard said, *"This case broke poor Julian Toganivalu's heart."* I said nothing but thought, *"This can't be the Julian I knew, he did not die of a broken heart and even if he had it would certainly not have been over the Banabans."*

Manila (June 1986). I visited the ADB's Head Office in Manila to negotiate and sign a contract for the Agricultural Inputs Corporation project in Nepal. The Task Manager was a New Zealander and I was allocated a desk in his office to work on the contract. A number of Filipina secretaries occupied the outer office and I had forgotten that they spoke American English, for example a rubber = a condom. At one stage I said to the Task Manager, *"Could I ask the girls for a rubber?"* He replied, *"Better make that an eraser, unless you want them falling off their seats giggling."*

Kuwait (August 1990). Ian Baillie, the Team Leader on the abortive Kuwait Soil Survey project, was in the country getting ready for the team's arrival when on 2nd August Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi forces marched into Kuwait. His story is a good example of the resourcefulness needed to survive on a HTS project.

On the day of the invasion, I was fortunate enough to meet three other Brits at a filling station, who suggested that I move into their villa in Kuwait City - there being safety in numbers. We were hiding indoors but expecting a visit from the military at any time and had worked out a strategy for coping

with the situation when it occurred. In due course an officer and a couple of soldiers appeared at the gate and demanded to see "The Englishman". The servant who came to the gate assured them that they were wrong but the soldiers persisted in their demands. Eventually I came to the gate, protesting that I was not English and as proof produced my Swaziland driving licence, obtained on an earlier HTS project. The soldiers heard "Switzerland" and, knowing of that country's neutrality, apologized and marched away.

Projects

I carried out eighteen technical assignments in thirteen countries and usually tried to combine these with sales or supervisory visits.

Jordan. Two projects in Jordan at the end of 1977 and early in 1978. I was Team Leader for both of these studies funded by British Aid (ODA).

Desert and Southern Highlands Irrigation Project. To review an earlier project to provide groundwater irrigation to *bedu*, in an attempt to encourage them to settle and become farmers. In practice they sublet the land to Palestinians and continued as they had done in the past, except that they lived for a part of the year in rather ordinary concrete houses provided by the Government. At a meeting I suggested that it might have been better to provide a walled block of land served by water and electricity so that families could continue to live in their traditional tents. I calculated that the difference in cost between these two options was about dinars 1,000 so I asked, *"What would you do with the money if the Government gave you a thousand dinars?"* Quick as a flash they answered, *"Buy another wife"*

Jordan Valley Dairy Project. To investigate the feasibility

of increasing milk production in the valley to supply the dairy factory in Amman. Intensive horticulture dominated the valley and there was really only enough land to support the odd house cow, thus the volume of milk available would make the long journey to the factory uneconomic.

Oman. In 1978 I was the agriculturalist on the World Bank (IBRD) funded **Urban Power and Water Supply Study.** This investigated the possibility of supplying the capital and other urban areas from either a large well field or by damming a wadi. The latter option was preferred and a dam was ultimately built.

On the last day of my input I planned to get into the office by 5am in order to complete a report. Driving in the slow lane was the tractor unit from a large rig, whilst I was in the fast lane. I noticed the unit moving rapidly into my lane and I just had time to accelerate away before it collided with the crash barrier. The driver had obviously fallen asleep at the wheel and it took me some time to get my heartbeat back to normal.

On a subsequent visit, 12th June 1978, I travelled from Bahrain to Muscat and was met in the hotel by our agent and told that my father had died, just six days before his 80th birthday. The following day I presented the Oman Livestock Report to the Director of Agriculture who was very sympathetic. He immediately cancelled the proposed workshop and I returned to UK in time for the funeral on 16th June.

Nepal. Three related inputs in 1979, 1985 and 1986 on the **Sunsari Morang Irrigation Project.** This large (60,000

acre) irrigation project in the Eastern Terai had originally been built by the Indians and was being remodelled as part of a World Bank (IDA) loan. My job was to contribute to the agricultural and/ or institutional aspects of (a) The Phase I report, (b) The Feasibility study for Phase II and (c) The Phase I Completion report.

Valerie was with me for part of the first input and we were lodged in an Irrigation Department rest house in Biratnagar. This was fairly basic and had two en suite bedrooms - we chose the one with the western loo - on either side of a living/ dining area, with the kitchens out at the back. Three staff looked after the place and all appeared to sleep either on or underneath the dining table. The dawn chorus of coughing and other ablution noises was impressive and woke us before Raju, the bearer, appeared with 'bed tea'. We had noticed a luxurious crop of marijuana growing in the kitchen garden and, pretending ignorance, asked Raju what it was. He was highly embarrassed but eventually mimed puffing a joint.

My fourth job in **Nepal** in 1982 was commissioned by ARC, an American charity which had established the **Agricultural Projects Resource and Service Centre** (**APROSC**) in Kathmandu and financed their new office building. My task was to carry out a review of the organisation and prepare plans for future development as a national and ultimately international consulting company. At the end of the assignment I went over my report with the CEO and listed a number of recommendations and in passing suggested cleaning the loos and taking the splashes

of whitewash off the windows. On a subsequent visit, the CEO said, *"Mr Thompson, I hope you have noticed that we have cleaned the windows."*

China. An unusual project at the end of 1979 was fronted by the British Agricultural Export Council (BAEC) but with the Consulting firms carrying all the staff costs and the Chinese carrying all of the in-country costs. A delegation from the Nigxia Hui Autonomous Region had visited UK and asked for help in developing the 10,000 hectare **Ho Lan Shan State Farm.** I opted to review the agriculture, which was easy as it would be difficult to improve on present practice, and also some of the livestock where there was indeed room for improvement. In practice this was a big 'brain picking exercise' which resulted in no paid work but no one minded too much as it was all so interesting.

At the end of the assignment, we eight British Consultants plus our personal translators plus the six technicians assigned to each consultant (a total of 64 people) gathered at the military airfield at Yinchuan waiting for a civilian aircraft to take us back to Beijing. The Scottish forester on the team suggested that we should sing, *"Auld Lang Syne"* whilst we waited, so we all linked hands in a big circle on the tarmac. When the song ended my translator, a twenty-three year old girl said, *"That was very clever of you to sing a song about our State Farm."* Without a moment's hesitation I took full credit for the song, realising that she and presumably many of the other Chinese had heard, *"If old acquaintance be forgot for the sake of Ho Lan Shan".*

Kiribati. One of the best assignments I ever had was as

Project Manager/ Administration Adviser on the ODA funded **Resources Survey of Banaba Island** in 1980. Banaba, called 'Ocean Island' by the British, is (or was) rich in rock phosphate originating from guano built up over thousands of years. Only 625 hectares in area, the island is in the central Pacific Ocean, just south of the equator, 400 km south-west of Tarawa, the capital of the Republic of Kiribati, whilst the nearest island to Banaba is Nauru, 258 km to the west.

When mining of phosphate began in 1905, the island was populated by about 1,000 Micronesians, the Banabans. As the phosphate mining began to turn large parts of their island into impenetrable areas of limestone pinnacles, all that remained after the phosphate was extracted, the Banabans became concerned about their future. This concern was shared by the Colonial Government and in 1942 Rabi Island in Fiji was purchased for the islanders. The Japanese, however, invaded Banaba before any action could be taken and it was only in 1945 that the Banabans finally moved to Fiji.

With the Banabans settled on Rabi, mining resumed on Banaba. More than 20 million tonnes of phosphate were mined from the island overall, the major beneficiaries being the Australian and New Zealand farmers who were able to buy fertilizer relatively cheaply. The British Government received enough royalty income to pay for all the administrative costs of running the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony. In addition, many foreigners and Gilbert and Ellice islanders benefited by working in the mine and

the Banabans themselves were paid royalties for the use of their island. During the 1960s and early 1970s, however, the Banabans claimed that this compensation was inadequate and sued the British Phosphate Commission (BPC) and Her Majesty's Attorney General. The legal battle was one of the longest in English judicial history and in 1976 the courts found that the BPC had failed to meet some of its contractual obligations to certain Banaban landowners and ordered them to negotiate additional compensatory payments. It was recommended that an additional ex-gratia sum be paid to the Banabans and that a full resource survey be carried out to determine what, if anything, could be done with the island after the end of the mining

In September 1980, ODA contracted HTS to undertake the full survey. The survey was unusual in many ways as every aspect of the resources and development potential of this tiny island had to be examined and a number of specialists were involved. Eleven team members were recruited from eight different companies. I led the team along with the economist and an agriculturalist from HTS plus a civil engineer, a water engineer, a mechanical and electrical engineer and specialists in mining, fisheries, shipping, aviation and tourism. We arrived on the island having heard grim stories of a desolated, pinnacle-strewn wasteland, vandalised buildings and facilities, starvation, drought and depopulation. However, the physical infrastructure established by BPC remained generally in sound condition. The harbour, the roads, the power station, the phosphate processing plant and most of the

140 buildings on the island were in good condition. The water supply, which is based on roof collection of rainwater, with storage in a system of tanks at different levels, was still fully operational. It could provide enough water for a population of 250, even in severe drought periods, without any need for pumping. If pumps and tankers were available, the system could provide for 1,250 people.

The Banabans had started to migrate back to the island to 'stake their claim' before the end of mining in November 1979 and 400 people were living on the island when we arrived. They had started to cultivate a variety of food crops and could support a greater volume of agriculture, as some 19 hectares were suitable for annual crops and a further 75 hectares could be planted to perennial tree crops. In addition the fish resource in the ocean around Banaba was found to be substantial and it was recognised that Banaba was in a favourable position for the year-round pursuit of skipjack tuna. It was estimated that 850,000 tonnes of wet phosphate could still be mined.

We were required not only to identify and describe the resources found on Banaba, but also to outline ways in which these resources might be exploited and the island developed in the future. Everything went well, we reported on schedule and were congratulated by the Kiribati Government and by ODA on a job well done.

We organised a reception before leaving Tarawa to thank everyone who had helped us and Mrs Rose, the wife of the British High Commissioner, was one of the guests. I had

heard that the Roses employed the two house girls who had previously worked for our good friend Eileen Campbell and when I mentioned this Mrs Rose exploded, *"I am sick of hearing about Mrs Campbell! The girls keep saying Mrs Campbell says this or Mrs Campbell does that."*

Having routed myself across America to Fiji in order to meet with some of the Banaban leaders prior to flying up to Tarawa, I made my way home via Nauru to talk to the President, Hammer de Robert, hoping to persuade him to commission the sort of study we had just carried out in Banaba. Then an evening flight took me via Guam and Manila to Hong Kong where I spent a day. Then I took another evening flight to Karachi to meet with government officials and finally to Islamabad to meet with UN officials, before returning home.

Burma. In 1980 I had an input as Agronomist/ Institutions Specialist on the long running **Groundwater Exploration and Pilot Development Project** funded by UNDP and carried out under the GDC banner. The project identified the groundwater resources in an area of inadequate rainfall and established a number of pilot irrigation schemes.

Valerie was with me for a part of my input and because we had UN passports we were not subject to the requirement that limited tourist visits to seven days. Whilst the team were in the project area, Valerie went off to explore the world famous temples at Pegan. The problem was that the hotel had over-charged her and only admitted their mistake when Valerie thought that she would have to

join the monks begging in the street. After this she joined Andrew Lilly and myself on a visit to Maymew, Burma's old hill station. The homes previously owned by the British were now owned by drug barons and the area was normally out of bounds to foreigners.

When Kipling wrote "*The road to Mandalay"* he meant the Irrawaddy, *"where the flying fishes play".* The three of us went from Mandalay to Rangoon in a beat-up jeep on a very bad road. It was so uncomfortable in the back that we changed places every 20 minutes with the person in the passenger seat and Valerie was given no quarter. Halfway there we spent the night at the Yanzin Agricultural Station before finally reaching Rangoon, a journey we swore never to repeat.

Bangladesh. Also in 1980, I had an input as the Agriculturist/ Institutions Specialist on the Asian Development Bank (ADB) **financed South Western Rural Development Project.** The task was to prepare a feasibility study for the development of 40,000 hectares of additional irrigated agriculture in south western Bangladesh. In addition to determining the agricultural inputs, the project involved a detailed review of the rural institutions and proposed a development programme.

Qatar. HTS was commissioned by Shell International to carry out **the Resources Study of the State of Qatar.** The ruler was known to want to "Green Qatar" and Shell hoped to curry favour and in return be allowed to exploit a huge offshore gas field. I was the horticulturalist on the team and we determined that desalinated water could be

used for intensive horticulture and amenity plantings, provided that the cost of water was heavily subsidised.

Iraq. In 1981 HTS, in partnership with Binnie & Partners, carried out the **Greater Mussayib Irrigation Project** for the Iraqi Government. The scheme, situated south of Baghdad, was built by the Americans in the 1950s on land which had previously been the bread basket for ancient Babylon and required extensive reconstruction of the irrigation and drainage networks. I had a minor role on the project and presented the final report to the Minister in 1982. This proved to be my last visit to Baghdad as by that time the Iraq/ Iran war was consuming all available resources.

Our team stayed at a small hotel located beside the Hindiya Barrage on the banks of the Euphrates. One day in June the scream of low flying jets was heard, followed by the thump, thump, thump of anti-aircraft fire, then a machine-gun opened up and the hotel lounge suffered 'collateral damage', whilst soil surveyor Austin Hutcheon took shelter under a table. This proved to be the raid on Osirak by the Israeli Air Force to destroy the nuclear plants being built by the French. The jets flew up the Euphrates as it was an obvious route with no low buildings close by, so virtually radar-free. Being at war, there were troops and gun emplacements all over the place, one of which was at the barrage. When the planes were spotted the machine-gunner swung his gun round in an effort to take down the low-flying invaders and, being low flying, so were the bullets.

Pakistan. Two somewhat related projects in 1982 and 1983. Firstly I had a supervisory role on the huge **Left Bank Outfall Drain Project,** designed to take saline drainage water from irrigation schemes on the left bank of the Indus out to the Ran of Kutch.

Secondly Jim Dempster of MMP and I had been hired by Kf W (German Aid) to write the terms of reference for the **North Dadu Surface Drainage Project.** Valerie was with us on this assignment and we were staying in a WAPDA (Water and Power Development Authority) rest house in Larkana, Benazir Bhutto's home town. The Pakistani Supervising Engineer who was with us was so embarrassed at Valerie's presence that she had to eat her meals in a corner away from us males.

Nigeria. This was an unusual job in 1985, because it was my only assignment in Africa during my time with HTS and also because it was for a private client. The Nigerian *haji* concerned collected me from a Tube station in his golden Rolls-Royce and took me to his opulent home in north London. The project was to carry out a **Prefeasibility Study, for Mechanised Maize and Corn Starch Production** in Kaduna**.** A staff member from NRI and I were responsible for planning the production, management and staffing needs, costs and returns from a 2,100 hectare maize farm. The study also reviewed the site, equipment and costs of a factory to produce corn starch.

Bahrain. I was the horticulturist and institutions specialist on the Government funded **Sewage Effluent Reuse Project** in 1985. The team planned three farms to be

irrigated using waste water from a large sewage treatment plant. Priority was given to the development of fruit and intensive vegetable crops, with the intention that the farms would be operated by the Department of Agriculture.

Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. I had a minor input in 1980 planning an experimental farm on the very large **Umm er Radhuma Project (UeR).** The input would usually only merit a few lines but because the project tended to dominate my work for a number of years, a longer explanation is justified.

This major work undertaken by GDC was one of the most challenging HTS projects of all time and established the company as a major force in development work. The three and a half year study was carried out in an area of 350,000 square kilometres (an area 11% larger than the British Isles) mainly desert stretching from the sand seas of the Empty Quarter to the salt-encrusted depressions or *sabkhas* along the Arabian Gulf. The study was undertaken for the Ministry of Agriculture and Water to evaluate the water resources of a large aquifer and the potential for the development of irrigated agriculture in the eastern region using water pumped from this underground resource. Overall the development potential of the area was well below the client's expectations but the results of the study were a factor in the agricultural revolution which eventually made the Kingdom self-sufficient in cereals and some fruit and vegetables.

The title of the project comes from the limestone formation which is one of the most important aquifers

in the eastern part of Saudi Arabia. Another important aquifer, the Wasia formation which underlies the UeR – had earlier been the subject of a study by MMP assisted by HTS, a study which led to the construction of a major new water supply for Riyadh. It was probably on the merits of this earlier work that GDC was awarded the contract in the face of fierce competition from American, French, and German consultants.

In terms of area and value, UeR was the largest contract in which HTS had ever participated. The work undertaken directly by GDC as consultants was budgeted at nearly £6.8 million and sub-contracts, mainly for well-drilling and testing and for topographic survey, amounted to another £13 million of which £3.25 million was allocated to Hunting Surveys (HSL) as a sub-contractor. The final contract was signed in February 1977, work started in April 1977 and was completed, in Saudi Arabia, at the end of March 1980, the final report being presented that September.

In March 1978 the contract was extended at a value of £3.2 million to include Bahrain which, although a separate state, is geographically close to the Saudi Arabian eastern seaboard and is underlain by the same aquifers. The extension was a logical one and was funded by Saudi Arabia as aid to Bahrain.

GDC coped with a tough and testing programme and in recognition of a job well done by HTS and HSL, Hunting Surveys and Consultants Ltd (HS&CL) received the Queen's Award for Export Achievement.

However there was a down side, doing a good technical job under very difficult conditions did not guarantee payment. Relations with the client's representative had deteriorated from day one, largely because GDC had steadfastly refused various requests for 'assistance' ("*My cousin needs a filling station designing – can you help?*"

Thus it was no surprise that when it was time to release the retention money serious difficulties arose. The first tactic was to claim that the terms of reference had not been met which involved Stan Western and myself spending a painful week in the back of a 4WD vehicle. We were required to accompany a couple of US technicians, seconded to the Ministry, visiting sample areas to see if the reports and maps matched the situation on the ground. When this difficulty was overcome, GDC faced months when government simply refused to discuss payment. I made seven visits between 1981 and 1986 attempting to release the logjam of £1 million. The money was finally released but only after GDC's Palestinian agent had negotiated the withholding of a substantial sum, which no doubt lined a few pockets. It was a souring experience which put me off Saudi Arabia for life.

On a lighter note, the HTS team on a related Rangeland Study became friendly with the nomadic *bedu* camping nearby, to the extent that as a mark of mutual respect our team leader was given a *saluki* dog. One long weekend the whole team departed for Riyadh asking their neighbours to keep an eye on the camp. On returning from town the whole camp had vanished, down to the last tent peg, as had

the neighbours. I was blissfully unaware of this incident until overhearing a casual remark in the Elstree canteen some three years later.

Company evolution and beyond

Initially I had no responsibility for the huge UeR project described previously and Vernon Robertson, who retired as MD in 1977, had assumed this task. On one occasion in a meeting with the Ministry, Vernon had lost his temper rather publicly, something which Arabs deplore. His credibility was destroyed and in mid-1978 project staff asked that I should assume responsibility for all work in Saudi. I believe this came as a great relief to Vernon who had nothing further to do with the project.

My reward for taking on this 'poisoned chalice' was to be appointed an Associate Director at the end of 1978. This made little difference to my workload but I did become entitled to a company car. Sadly our reliable Volvo went to auction and although I got the proceeds, the replacement was a Ford Cortina.

It was pretty well business as usual for the next four years until I was appointed a Director at the end of 1982, essentially to replace John Joyce, the Chief Economist who had left to join the World Bank. Again there was no change in my work but I was invited to attend HTS Board Meetings which were held every quarter. These meetings

were chaired by David Sinker, the MD of HS&CL, and fortunately HTS continued to be profitable, although at this level of management I had no knowledge of how well our sister companies HSL and HG&G were performing. But changes were just around the corner. .

In August 1986 2.5 acres of the Head Office front lawn was sold for more than £2 million to accommodate 60,000 sq ft of new offices, perhaps the first indication that the property was more valuable than the business. Then in September David Sinker resigned unexpectedly (was he pushed, did he jump or had he seen the writing on the wall?) and Richard Hunting took on the role of both Chairman and MD of the Elstree based companies. At Christmas I was appointed Deputy MD of HTS but still no one told me what was going to happen next and we went off to Fiji on holiday for the whole of January 1987.

Whilst we were away, Richard Hunting visited Arabian Aerosurveys (an HSL subsidiary) in Riyadh and was horrified at the level of debts which had built up. This was exacerbated by continuing and accelerating financial losses at home, occasioned in part by the collapse of the oil exploration market. On 17th February 1987 the extent of the problem became clear and Richard Hunting announced that HSL, HG&G and the parent company HS&CL were to close. HTS, the Leach Photographic Group, Aerofilms and HG&G (Australia) would continue as operating companies of the newly created parent Hunting Survey and Photographic Ltd (HSPL).

The closing down was painful and protracted but was well

funded and handled better than most exercises of a similar nature. Hunting Engineering had made windfall profits of £6 million from the sale of its JP 233 cluster bomb system to the Saudi Air Force and the parent company, Hunting Associated Industries (HAIL), used some of this money to meet the closing down costs. Two important features of this crisis were that no attempt was made to sell any of the companies as the Hunting name was not for sale and a number of mini-management buyouts were encouraged with staff allowed to buy equipment at reduced prices to begin their own businesses.

HTS would retain its previous functions and take over all remote sensing services inherited from its erstwhile colleagues, along with responsibility for geology, survey and mapping consultancy, but would have to find a new home.

Fortunately during this difficult time, HTS was busy and it was a relief for UK staff to take up assignments overseas as former colleagues in HSL and HG&G were leaving and the Elstree offices started to look more and more like the "*Marie Celeste*". HTS was given until the end of the year to find new offices but in the meantime continued to be supported by a slimmed down HS&CL and it was accepted that the major Company changes would only occur once the office move had been effected.

Once the early retirement conditions became known, Harry Piper opted to leave and was replaced by Tom Boyd as Area Manager (Africa). Then in the middle of 1987 Richard Hunting told me that Don Chambers, MD since

1977, also planned to take early retirement at the end of the year and offered me the job of Managing Director at a salary I considered acceptable. The mandate from the Chairman was to try to increase profits to a million pounds per year and it was agreed that this could only be done by trying to increase the areas of business whilst at the same time hoping to reduce exposure should there be a downturn.

In the second half of 1987 I started to become familiar with some of the African projects and made short visits to Malawi and Zimbabwe and then spent more time in Zambia where the team was based in Kabwe. This was a large and interesting ODA project covering the whole of the Central Province which almost re-created the colonial era, with HTS staff shadowing local counterparts in administration, agriculture, economics, town planning etc.

Most of October was spent handing over the ME and SA region to Fred Collier which involved a marathon trip:

3rd October LHR to Ankara, 4th and 5th in Ankara, 6th to Muscat, 7th Muscat to Karachi, 8th Karachi to Islamabad, 9th in Islamabad, 10th Islamabad to Lahore, 11th in Lahore and travel Lahore to Karachi, 12th Karachi to Hyderabad, 13th Hyderabad to Karachi and on to Kathmandu, 14th to 16th in Kathmandu, 17th Kathmandu to Bangkok, 18th in Bangkok, 19th Bangkok to LHR, 20th Arrive LHR.

At the end of the trip I was tired, but managed to be back in the office on 23rd October, whilst Fred called in sick.

The Managing Director

Don Chambers took two months pre-retirement leave so I effectively became the MD on 1st November, although for appearance sake I did not move into Don's old office until 11th January 1988. The pressure to move and restructure HTS was becoming urgent and I felt obliged to forgo our Fiji holiday and Valerie went off on her own until the end of March.

Much time was spent searching for suitable new offices and it was made clear that the search should be restricted to Hertfordshire and that any suggestion of moving to Yorkshire, for example, would be vetoed. Ultimately a long lease was taken on a newly built office at Boundary Way, Hemel Hempstead which was fitted out to meet the firm's needs. The new office was named Thamesfield House, echoing the name given to three ships of the Hunting flee, and remains the firm's head office to this day. Finally the move came about on 4th July 1988 just a day or so ahead of the sale of the old Elstree offices to a firm of developers. At the time the property market was buoyant and Hunting was able to strike a good deal.

The developers lost no time and within a week the

bulldozers moved in, demolished the old Elstree offices to make way for two new multi-story office blocks. Aerofilms which had also survived the closure of HS&CL moved into new offices at Gate Studios in Borehamwood where they remained until they were sold not once, but twice.

I was invited to join the HSPL Board when it met at the new HTS offices for the first time on 12th October 1988. I asked to be excused as I had just heard that Mother was dying and rushed home to be met by Valerie and my brother Christopher as I got to Lower Dunsforth with the sad news that Mother had died just an hour earlier in Harrogate Hospital.

Being the MD was really no fun, particularly as the pressure to keep the Company afloat mounted. There was no escape from the office and for four years my only overseas travel was an annual visit to the United Nations in New York and to the World Bank in Washington in search of work.

The business

The need for HTS to carry its own finance, administration and other support services was helped by being able to absorb a number of staff from HS&CL. Ultimately HTS lost all of its old support staff but the redundancy package encourage staff to stay in post until suitable replacements, prepared to work at Hemel Hempstead, could be recruited. None of the professional staff opted to leave and when the move to new offices came the disruption was minimal.

As a stand-alone company HTS had inherited some profitable work, particularly from HG&G, but had also joined Eurimage, a JV with four European partners charged with the marketing of Landsat imagery. In practice, the hoped-for markets failed to materialise and it was a relief when at the end of 1990 HTS was able to withdraw from the JV. It was doomed from the start as the birth of Eurimage was announced just one day before the news that HLS and HG&G were to close.

As a part of HS&CL, it was difficult to quantify the performance of the company but in the first operating year (1987) a profit of £375,000 was recorded which could be

regarded as an acceptable return on sales of about £6 million. By the end of 1989, the first full year at Hemel Hempstead, it was possible to take stock. Staff months sold are a good indication of profitability and have the advantage of being inflation-proof and so 644 months in 1987 was pleasing, rising to 822 months in 1988 (the best year since 1979) whilst the 870 months of sales in 1989 was the highest ever achieved. However, the difficulties of translating this activity into a growing profit was also clear and the cost of running HTS as a stand-alone company was known. Although actual man month sales had increased, gross profit decreased by 6% whilst overheads increased by almost 16% as a result of the higher cost of communications, office space and delayed mobilisations. The facts were simple: HTS needed its 1988 level of business to make acceptable profits and a reversion, even to the 1987 levels, would be bad news. To maintain its market share in the face of strong competition, the Company needed to be vigilant in the control of costs yet always seeking new markets. During 1989 considerable time was spent on new business research and the investigation of possible joint ventures, both in UK and abroad, to enhance the scope of HTS expertise and to improve market penetration.

Adversity. The best laid plans are always going to be influenced by external forces and this certainly happened to HTS in the form of changes to the Hunting Group and Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait.

Hunting plc. Partly in response to pressure from the financial markets, the three Hunting listed companies were

merged to form Hunting plc in August 1989 and over the next ten years the Company expanded its petroleum interests and slowly but steadily divested itself of most of its other businesses, including HTS.

The Kuwait Soil Survey and the Aftermath. The contract for this £5 million project was signed with the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) and scheduled to start in mid-July 1990. The advance payment had been received and involved the entire State of Kuwait and would take three and a half years to complete. Technically the project was straightforward and in addition to land and soil suitable for irrigated agriculture, the project was scheduled to evaluate the potential for a wide range of other applications such as recreation, sewage disposal and road construction. The project started on schedule and Ian Baillie, the project manager, arrived in Kuwait on 15th July and started to prepare for the team's arrival by setting up the office, purchasing vehicles and arranging accommodation. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on 2nd August put an immediate halt to the project and Ian became one of several thousand British Nationals trapped in occupied Kuwait. Saddam Hussein, hoping to avert a war, allowed British and other nationals to leave the country by Christmas - an experience every project manager would wish to avoid.

The impact of the Gulf war in January 1991 had an enormous and immediate impact on the Company's fortunes. Throughout the Arab and Islamic world there was a sneaking admiration for Saddam Hussein who had been prepared to stand up to the hated USA and its western

allies. This led to HTS having to temporarily withdraw the team from Jordan and working conditions in other Muslim counties such as Pakistan and Bangladesh became difficult with a distinct increase in anti-western feeling. To add insult to injury, the British Government declared the Sudan to be an uncooperative regime and HTS was required to withdraw from Dafur within a month with no prospects of receiving compensation. The rest of the year was a disaster with the World Bank and other aid agencies putting a ban on staff travel so that no new projects came into the pipeline.

Acquisition of Land Capability Consultants (LCC). The third problem was self-inflicted, the acquisition of LCC to create Hunting Land and Environment (HLE) was probably a mistake. However, buying the company on the very day that Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait was a very bad mistake.

With little new work there was an urgent need to reduce overheads at Thamesfield House, a situation made worse by having to pay rent on the HLE offices at Willingham near Cambridge. The steps included closing the library, disposing of most of the books and making the librarian redundant, also vacating and trying to sublet one third of Thamesfield House but a recession was gaining pace and there were no takers. Sadly I had to make a number of recently recruited staff redundant and the contracts of the few remaining retained consultants were terminated. There were no salary increases for a time, no new vehicles and all extraneous expenses were trimmed such as withdrawing from the

Royal Agricultural Show. In addition HTS abandoned, for the first time in 35 years, the concept of resident specialists at Head Office responsible for the different disciplines and where possible all staff were put onto paid work.

All of the above measures were taken reluctantly as HTS was very conscious of the loyalty of staff and the traditions which had built a strong company. Despite these painful adjustments the financial situation did not improve quickly and further cuts were necessary, In January 1992 Richard Hunting, by this time Chairman of Hunting plc, called me into his office in Trafalgar Square and offered me early retirement. This was a shock at the time but in fact the right decision. I had been appointed to expand the company whilst the new need was to make the firm profitable at any cost in order to sell it. I duly handed over control of the Company to David Potten in April 1992 and retired to North Yorkshire.



Above: at Hatra in Iraq

Below: Valerie digging into the past





The Baquba pool - before and after





Above: some of the tough terrain we encountered while exploring Iraq

Below: Valerie at Aldborough Roman Town (English Heritage)



Part V
A Freelance Consultant

A new career

My departure from HTS in April 1992, just over two years before normal retirement age, came as quite a shock. It was, however, a blessing in disguise because if I had stayed on until my 60th birthday, I would never have embarked on a career as a freelance consultant and would have missed out on twelve years of interesting and profitable work. After thinking things over for a few months I decided that if I wanted to work as a specialist in Organisational Change and Development (Institutional Change and Development) it would be necessary to strengthen my CV by the addition of a business degree and some sort of professional qualification.

A few enquiries led to my enrolment for the part-time Executive MBA at Leeds University in April 1993 and I duly graduated in June 1995, having passed comfortably but with no great distinction. Valerie and Caroline came to the graduation ceremony and, having checked out all of the new graduates, reported that I was not (quite) the oldest person there. At about the same time I was appointed a Fellow of the British Institute of Management (FIMgt) and neither of these objectives proved as difficult as I had

anticipated. The time back at Leeds was interesting as in my immediate group (known as a cohort) I met a number of people from different backgrounds and experience to my usual associates in the world of overseas development.

During the currency of the course I carried out short assignments in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Romania and Ethiopia and there was sufficient flexibility in the course work to accommodate my absences overseas. The Bangladesh project provided me with material for one of the study modules whilst the Romania work provided the basis for the important final dissertation which carried 40% of the total marks.

A senior civil servant

Just before graduation, I was approached by the Natural Resources Institute (NRI) at Chatham in Kent to ask if I was interested in a one year contract as the Director of Development Services. I went off for an interview with the CEO and was offered the job at the top of Grade V in the Scientific Civil Service and because the organisation had a degree of autonomy, was also appointed one of the Institute's five directors.

The NRI was formed by the amalgamation of a number of government scientific institutions including the Land Resources Development Centre and the Tropical Products Institute and on merging moved to Chatham to occupy what had been the shore based ship HMS Pembroke. The 'ship' had originally been built in the early 1900s to house the officers and ratings whilst their ships were being refitted in the Royal Dockyards. Once the dockyards closed the buildings became redundant and in due course were refitted to house NRI. Built at a time when the Royal Navy was indeed the senior service, the complex included a Grade I listed building for the officers complete with panelled wardroom, six large buildings for the ratings, a covered

drill hall and gymnasium. The office assigned to me was enormous and easily the grandest I have ever occupied and must originally have been the quarters for a senior officer.

As a part of a general move by Mrs Thatcher's government to privatise everything in sight, NRI had already adopted many of the features of a limited company and within a year was scheduled to be fully privatised. In appointing me, the CEO hoped to find a replacement for the outgoing Director of Development (ie Consultancy) Services, who was leaving for a job with the EU and at the same time bring on board expertise from the private sector. A final consideration was not having to promote someone from in-house who might have to be compensated on privatisation.

For my part I was happy to be dispensed with at the end of a year and interestingly was not required to sign the Official Secrets Act, as the undertaking I had made in Fiji many years before was apparently still valid.

NRI was, in effect, the in-house pool of expertise for British Aid overseas, however it would not occupy this privileged position once privatised. If it was to survive, it would have to market itself to the wider aid community in competition with HTS and everyone else out there in the jungle. So my main task was to make the best of the Institute's considerable track record, get onto shortlists and then start to submit winning proposals, all areas where NRI with its captive market had little previous experience. In addition a considerable effort had to be devoted to two other aspects of the job.

It had been decided that the best fit would be for an

academic institution to acquire NRI and a shortlist of five universities or consortia had been drawn up and much time was devoted to meetings and due diligence searches by the prospective purchasers. The second objective was to downsize, at its height NRI had about 700 staff and by the time I arrived this number had been reduced to about 500. Target staff numbers at privatisation had been set at 350 and even at this level the chances of commercial viability were slim. The Treasury had agreed generous voluntary redundancy packages but most of the staff were long term civil servants and discussing the pros and cons of leaving with my team was an agonising process.

Ultimately the bulk of NRI was acquired by the University of Greenwich who had already moved into some of the old HMS Pembroke buildings, whilst my Consultancy Division became NR International and was owned by a consortium of Edinburgh and Greenwich Universities and Imperial and Wye Colleges (London University).

On privatisation, the CEO and Administration Director reverted to the Civil Service, whilst the other two Directors became instant professors in the University of Greenwich. With hindsight I should have insisted that my contract run until a month after the takeover date, so that I too could be academically elevated to "Professor Thompson".

Domestic arrangements were straightforward. I rented a one bed flat in Gillingham and commuted to and from home at weekends by train. Valerie got quite used to dropping me at York Station on Monday morning and

collecting me again on Friday evening, whilst I left my car in the secure NRI car park over the weekend. I was still getting the rent from the St Albans flat so hardly noticed the cost of renting in Gillingham.

Bangladesh

The first overseas assignment after leaving HTS came early in 1993 and involved the review for British Aid of a long running rural development project in Bangladesh previously carried out by another consulting firm. Our HTS team of three were housed in the BAGHA Club in Dhaka, which I would come to know quite well in the years ahead, whilst office space was provided in the library at the British High Commission. Much of our time was spent reading past reports and interviewing government officials in order to determine the success or otherwise of the project.

Ex-post evaluations of this nature are usually carried out by staff from the aid agency and it is unusual to assign the work to a rival firm of consultants. When our report was submitted in London a long series of meetings and correspondence followed, all of which asked for various parts of the report to be watered down or deleted as civil servants were terrified of critical reports coming to the notice of MPs.

Pakistan

During the period of the MBA I was assigned as the Institutions Specialist on a Mott Macdonald & Partners (MMP) study for the Asian Development Bank in Pakistan. This project involved the re-modelling of the north-west canal which supplies water from the Sukkur Barrage to rice growing areas on the right bank of the Indus. The team leader was Jim Perry from MMP who had been our neighbour in Iraq and it is always a comfort to join a team with familiar faces.

We were billeted in a barely acceptable hotel on Workshop Road in Sukkur and crossed the barrage every day to go to the Irrigation Department offices on the left bank of the river. Soon after arriving Jim asked me to read through reports written by local consultants on agriculture, input supply and mechanisation as he was concerned that these were sub-standard and that the Bank would hold MMP responsible for any shortcomings. He was right and I had to set down and re-write these reports in addition to my own work - definitely a case of fitting a quart into a pint pot.

The sociologist on the team was Bibi, a forty-something

female Associate Professor from Hyderabad University, and we travelled extensively on field trips in the project area. After a couple of days jolting about in an old Land Cruiser my shoulder sized up completely. I got a driver to take me on a tour of the town to try to find a physiotherapist but without success. That evening Bibi said,

"Don't worry, I am very good at massage and I will come to your room." Then in the same breath, *"You know what will happen if I am found in your room."*

My shoulder cured itself instantly.

Bangladesh again

My second Bangladesh job as a freelance was the World Bank financed Water Master Plan project contracted to Halcrow/ MMP and a number of associates. This three year project had the ambitious objective of preparing a blue print for managing the country's water resources through to 2025. Bearing in mind that much of Bangladesh is only a few metres above high tide and is prone to devastating floods our best efforts were likely to be as nothing compared to the whims of nature.

My input as Institutions Specialist was for nine months spread over the project period and the effects of the 1998 flooding were evident even as we flew into Dhaka - water as far as the eye could see.

Within a couple of weeks it became impossible to get to our office where the ground floor was already under a meter of water and Rick Langdon the Environmentalist and I set out to retrieve our files. Where the dry land ended a couple of smartly dressed girls were getting out of a punt and, thinking that it was a water taxi, we were just about to step on board when the girls said,

"Hey this is our boat! But you look like nice boys - please borrow it."

We moved to temporary offices in Gulshan which was mostly above water level and the flood became just another fact of life. Poor families moved from flooded ground to camp along the road sides and appeared resigned to their lot. There was no sign of protest or crime and once the water finally receded the families moved back to try to re-build their homes. In theory Dhaka should be safe from all but the worst floods as it is protected by an embankment and by powerful pumps charged with getting rid of the surplus water. Sadly the latter had not been maintained and were not operating until it was too late.

We were working for the Water Resources Planning Organisation (WARPO) and as part of the project the client had an advisory team of local experts to ride herd on the consultants. In addition the Ministry of Water Resources had a second team of international advisers, paid for by various donor countries including USA, Canada and India, to do essentially the same job. The combined staff months of these advisors actually exceeded the time allocated to our team and made the job a nightmare. In no time at all, the two sets of advisors fell out and would not even talk to each other.

A joint Review Mission was due at the end of 1998 and I was excused the anticipated grilling because Valerie's mother was near the end of her life. Fortunately I was able to get home and be with Valerie when the end came.

My job was to review the role of the 34 government

agencies with an interest in water, determine their strengths and weaknesses and, critically, to try to establish procedures to ensure that they co-operated with each other. Getting any two Bengalis to agree about anything is notoriously difficult, so my task was almost impossible. However, I managed to complete my report and with some over-run Malcolm the team leader completed this headache of a project to the client's satisfaction.

At the end of my first input, Valerie and Penny Denny decided to raise money to provide low cost houses for flood victims and in due course raised £2,500. I carried the money back in a brown paper bag and handed it over to the UK-Bangladesh Association, who along with the local Lions Club organised the building programme. It was quite satisfying to accompany the British High Commissioner and his wife to a village 30 km from Dhaka to ceremonially hand over the keys for one of the houses.

Expatriate living in Dhaka is quite comfortable with servants, good restaurants and two or three clubs providing sporting and social facilities. Rick and I managed a swim after work almost every day of the week until the weather got too cold in January. Under normal circumstances I would have been required to stay in the Halcrow guest house but at the start of the project Paul Kaplan, the American sociologist on our team, suggested that I share his flat. We had worked together in Nepal some years earlier, so knew each other and got on well. In addition to being my landlord he took care of all the housekeeping, so when Valerie came to visit everything was well organised.

We were looked after by Swapan the cook and Munir the bearer. Towards the end of the project Swapan started to have severe heart problems. One evening after serving us shepherd's pie for dinner he went off home. Early the next morning there was a knock on the door and one of Swapan's relatives was there to say that he had died in the night and would we please come. So we dressed hastily and were taken to a poor part of town to join the grieving relatives. He and his family belonged to one of the hill tribes, who were Buddhists and remarkably philosophical about everything. MMP and we personally did what we could to collect enough money together to get his wife and children back to their village and provide at least something for the immediate future.

During Valerie's visit I managed to organise a memorable trip into the Sundarbans. We took a plane to Jessore and then joined ten other passengers for four days on a small boat under the watchful eye of 'Mowgli' our pony-tailed guide. The cabins were tiny, the food acceptable and, whilst we heard tigers and saw pug marks, there was no sign of the real thing. Nevertheless it was a once in a lifetime experience which Valerie has recorded in detail in her diaries.

The Pacific

Whilst I was still with HTS, I made a point of calling to see contacts in Suva during our annual visits to Fiji. I had heard about an EU funded agricultural development project for the eight ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific) countries, an aid programme for the former territories of EU member states. HTS expressed interest in providing the Project Coordinator, a job which eventually went to German consultants who fielded Brian Smith, a classmate from Cambridge and Trinidad.

The Pacific Regional Agricultural Programme (PRAP) got underway and HTS was invited to carry out the Inception Review, a task undertaken by an agriculturalist and an economist. For a number of reasons the agriculturalist fell down on the job and the EU withheld the retention payment. David Potten asked me to edit the report in order to salvage the job but by this time the client had lost patience and the retention was never paid.

Then towards the end of my time at NRI, I was asked if I was interested in doing the PRAP Mid-term Review. My CV was accepted but, in view of past problems, the EU

would only hire me as an individual and not through HTS. So in mid-1996 I found myself in Suva negotiating the details of my contract with Aleki, the Tongan Project Co-ordinator (having taken over from Brian Smith) the EU's bureaucratic Italian project manager and the EU Delegate, a former Luftwaffe pilot. The job involved checking out the various project sub-components in Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Tonga and Samoa. In addition I was supposed to visit Kiribati, where I had worked in 1980, and Tuvalu but the flights were unreliable and Aleki decided that in view of time constraints I could give these two tiny Island States a miss.

On the Royal Tongan flight from Nuku'alofa to Suva the ageing HS 748 developed mechanical trouble in Vavau and we were offloaded to spend 24 hours at the Princess Hotel whilst a replacement plane was found. My supply of whisky had run out, it was Sunday and nothing, but nothing moves in Tonga on a Sunday. So what to do? The local Agricultural Officer came to my rescue and we took a government vehicle to check out every shop on the island. Eventually we found a Chinese store-keeper who was prepared to open up and sell me a bottle of:

MacWaters Whiskey. Distilled in San Francisco, including 10% genuine Scotch whisky.

I drank it and it was definitely better than nothing.

The project was a great opportunity to visit countries I had never been to before and although it took seven weeks to complete the job, which I was supposed to do in five, the pay was good and I had no cause to grumble. Valerie

accompanied me for the first couple of weeks and she was a great help to Chris and Pitila as they were moving into their newly built house at Nasoso, Nadi.

Fiji

Whilst in Suva on holiday in 1999, HTS asked me to check on a possible project which looked interesting. All of the mahogany plantations in Fiji were managed by Hardwoods of Fiji, a quango, which the Government had decided to privatise. In order to arrive at an equitable value it had been decided to invite international consultants to confirm the area planted, assess the age of the trees and value the Corporation's other assets. The first part of the project would have been ideal for HTS and I arranged for a Suva firm of valuers to join us for the second part of the work. A good proposal was submitted but a year later there was no sign of progress and I called to see our associate in Suva and was told that,

"A chap called George Speight has been appointed as CEO of Hardwoods by Rabuka (at that time the Prime Minister) *and is in the process of having the work carried out by some American friends. So we can forget it."*

As soon as Mahendra Chaudhery came to power (replacing Rambuka), he fired Speight as everyone was well aware of the underhand deal being hatched. Speight was down but not out and the next thing we knew was that he

had led a coup to overthrow the Government. The rest of the tangled tale has no part in this story but I often wonder what would have happened if HTS had been awarded the job.

St Lucia

Following close on the heels of the work in the Pacific was another HTS job, this time in St. Lucia. A severe hurricane a couple of years earlier had caused considerable damage and resulted in re-construction aid from both the World Bank and Britain. An important part of the UK's programme was a watershed management project to try to reduce the amount of soil washing down the hillsides and into the sea.

The island is mountainous and made up of over 30 watersheds of varying sizes. Most of the flat land and even slopes marginal for production grew bananas for export, which exacerbated the problem because the plant has a very poorly developed root system and does little to hold the soil. We came up with a management plan for each of the watersheds, being careful to avoid an easy but impractical solution - replace bananas with for example citrus, which has a good rooting system. Apart from the practical difficulties of replacing a well-established crop, St Lucia was faced with another problem. Bananas are cut green and gas ripened at destination, which means that there is no local market for green banana so there is no point in stealing bananas

and farmers stated categorically that every other crop they attempted to grow was always stolen at maturity.

The team leader Peter Humphreys had worked in St Lucia before and was aware of the difficulties inherent in small islands - everyone is either related to or knows everyone else. This means that the junior government official the consultants cross swords with is probably related to the Minister and in no time a diplomatic incident has blown up. Fortunately we avoided trouble of this sort, received adequate support from the client and were provided with good offices by the Forestry Department.

Watershed management projects are notoriously difficult to implement and require determined effort over a long period of time. At the request of British Aid, Peter and I returned to St Lucia at the end of the project to present our findings and recommendations to a high level meeting which included the Prime Minister, but it is doubtful if St Lucia had either the resources or the will to effect change.

We were comfortably housed in the Benedictine monastery on the outskirts of Castries and were well looked after by the small community of nuns. If anything we were too well fed but fortunately our offices were at the other end of town and so we had a good excuse for missing the sister's enormous lunches.

Valerie was able to join me for a couple of weeks and took the opportunity to go down to Trinidad to see some of her old friends from BWIA.

Guyana

The second project in the Caribbean was in Guyana where I had two six week inputs on a British Aid study to reorganise the Lands and Surveys Commission. This was again carried out by HTS and once the findings had been accepted the project moved into long term implementation and eventually received a British award for excellence.

The land area of Guyana (214,970 sq km) is slightly bigger than England and Scotland and ninety percent of the land is owned by the State, whilst the remaining ten percent (invariably the best land) is in private hands. The Commission therefore had responsibility for the proper administration of some 193,000 sq km. Land rents had remained static for many years, although inflation over the same period had increased thirteen fold. The Commission's expenditure exceeded income, rents were not paid and the offices were besieged on a daily basis by people trying to sort out leases, pay rent or just talk to someone about their problems.

Commission offices were established in the districts but invariably power devolved to head office where knowing (or

paying) the right person was the only way to get to the front of the queue. Thanks to long term British involvement, great progress was made. The 1960s head office designed by UK architects, with a flat roof (they should have been shot) was replaced by a pitch roof, the bats were finally removed from the map store, air conditioning saved historic documents from decay, maps were digitised and, thanks to GPS, leases were approved without cadastral surveys. All in all, very good news.

In 1959 I had visited Valerie's parents in The Domain, a small housing complex in Georgetown for senior government officers in the Colony. After some effort, Commission staff produced the plans for the area and it was depressing to re-visit what had become a rundown estate. The constitution says that State land can only be expropriated by order of the President and it was interesting to note that stamped across plans for The Domain were the words *Hypothecated to Verna Burnham*. Forbes Burnham, for many years the corrupt President of Guyana, obviously had no compunction in 'hypothecating' this valuable bit of real estate to his wife.

Rodney Tucker, the team leader, had secured accommodation for us in the Georgetown Club, in its day the club for anyone who was anyone in the Colony. Board and lodging was adequate to good and the staff produced excellent curries on demand. An additional plus for me was the use of the Guysuco swimming pool next door where, occasionally, I trained with the national squad (under 14s).

The decline of the sugar industry in what was BG

(British Guiana) is peripheral to the story but following independence the sugar industry, dominated by Bookers (wags said BG stood for Bookers Guiana) was nationalised and became 'Guysuco'. The mills ran down and production fell to a fraction of the annual half million tons of raw sugar made pre-Independence. When we were there, the industry was undergoing extensive reconstruction aided by, guess who, a team from Bookers UK.

The local and visiting characters propping up the bar at the Georgetown Club were a great source of entertainment including Nigel Chen-a-Soo, a local Chinese pilot married to an ex-BA stewardess and running tourist flights into the interior including the Kaieteur Falls. I was interested in booking a couple of seats for a trip when Valerie came to visit and mentioned that her father had been Director of Civil Aviation which brought a prompt response.

"Not Squadron Leader Barker? He gave me a scholarship to the flying school in Oxford and set me up for life".

We did not get the sightseeing trip free of charge but we did get VIP treatment.

Monty, a freelance TV producer working mostly for ITN, had been born in Guyana where his father was an overseer for Bookers. Now living in UK, Monty had many relatives and contacts in Georgetown and was a mine of information and gossip. His reason for this particular trip was to work up a programme to mark the 20th anniversary of the Jonestown massacre in November 1978. Forbes Burnham had allowed a US evangelist called the Revered Bob Jones and his 900 plus followers to settle in an isolated

part of the country. The plans for Utopia went badly wrong and when US authorities started to investigate the horror stories seeping out of the jungle, everyone was induced to drink Kool-Aid laced with cyanide. There were only enough survivors to tell the world of the tragedy and Kool-Aid never recovered market share.

I played snooker on occasion with Mike, an Irish woodworking technician engaged by a UN agency to improve the quality of local furniture production. In an earlier life he had been foreman in a furniture factory near Dublin. A worker was in the process of changing the head on a spindle moulding machine when he was called away to the phone. On his return he started up the machine, forgetting that he had not tightened the head properly. The head flew across the workshop at great speed and hit Mike in the groin. Prompt action saved his life but not his *'goolies'* which explained how he came to have two adopted daughters.

When Valerie was in Trinidad (circa 1958) she had a boyfriend who subsequently moved to Guyana and became a successful businessman. Both he and his wife were of Portuguese descent and had three sons. Ralph the youngest was ranching with a partner on the Courantyne River which divides Guyana from Surinam. They heard about our project and cornered me at the Club one evening, determined that I was about to bankrupt them by increasing the rent on their land. They went away having consumed all the beer I provided but still convinced that I, personally, was determined to do them down. At one time I thought

that '*Ralph of the Courantyne*' would make a good title for a Rider Haggard type book but perhaps not!

Tales of lawlessness abounded and whilst we took care when we went out at night we had no first hand evidence of crime. One story going the rounds told of a British Airways (BA) crew travelling into town from the airport. A steward made the mistake of having his arm complete with Rolex watch hanging out of the window to catch a passing breeze. Instead, a passing villain used his cane knife to remove the arm at the elbow in order to secure the Rolex. Very soon after that BA stopped flying into Georgetown.

Romania

On a visit to the World Bank in 1991 I heard that a project was being considered for the restructuring of the irrigation sector in Romania. On my return to the office I alerted Binnie and Partners and suggested that we might work together in bidding for the job. In the early 1970s Binnie had been the consultants building a large scheme on the Danube flood plain using funds generated through some sort of barter deal. This was most unusual in the communist era and Binnie was perhaps the only western firm with appropriate Romanian experience.

At its height over 3 million hectares of land (an area 50% bigger than Wales) was under irrigation and a huge workforce was involved in the design, construction and administration of schemes. With the downfall of Ceausescu in December 1989, the whole agricultural industry based on Collective and State Farms came crashing down and because of the technology and management involved, the irrigation sector probably suffered more than most.

In due course HTS won the bid and started the project soon after I left the company in 1992. Then in 1994 when the project was coming to an end, some additional funds

were made available and the project was extended to look in detail at a pilot area of 700 hectares served by a single pumping station at Braila in eastern Romania. This sub-project was carried out by a young Binnie engineer and myself and was heaven-sent from my point of view, as with only a few modifications and a bribe or two to elicit information, the study provided the basis for my MBA dissertation.

The Romanian irrigation industry was highly developed and technically excellent, the only problem was that schemes had been built with huge command areas serving typically 10,000 hectare collective farms. Post-Ceausescu, land was returned to the original owners or their descendants with holdings of perhaps 5 or 10 hectares each and the original irrigation designs and operating systems became obsolete. In the past, three universities turned out land reclamation engineers, those with the best degrees went into study and design, the second echelon staffed the construction companies building the schemes, whilst those with pass degrees, usually built like armoured cars, ran the schemes.

In doing the field work for the pilot project, I fell in with the latter group and on one memorable occasion we finished work at 3pm and went to the house of one of the water bailiffs, stationed at 2 km intervals along the banks of the Danube, whose forte was a lethal local brandy. I sprained an ankle going out for a pee but felt no pain, somehow got back to town and, without eliciting any sympathy, suffered for at least a month.

Our local associate was ISPIF, the organisation

previously responsible for the design of all irrigation schemes and only recently privatised. Consequently we had excellent counterparts and Binnie had rented a very grand apartment for us on the top floor of a block of flats close to the Presidential Palace. Previous tenants must have been VIPs (Very Important in the Party) because status could be judged easily - a top floor flat in close proximity to the palace equals very important.

The country was suffering from the change from Communism to Capitalism and we saw the dying days of the big state stores where all the shelves were depressingly empty and at the same time the first neon signs were going up in Unirri Square. Significantly the guys driving the luxury cars were former members of the hated Securitate who had quickly emerged as the new Mafia. Valerie came to visit and I asked one of our secretaries if she knew of anyone who could show her around for a couple of days. Thus we came to meet Diana, at that time a university student, and it was the beginning of a long friendship culminating in Diana marrying, living and working in Harrogate but that is another story.

Dino Daconescu, the young Romanian economist on the team, was working towards an external MA at London University and on one of his visits to UK he came to spend the weekend with us at Bramley Cottage. It happened to be 5th November and we were able to take him to a big bonfire and earlier the same day we had followed the hunt through the village. Trying to explain why men in red jackets chased foxes across the countryside and also why nearly everyone

in the country (except the boys of Guy's old school, St Peter's in York), burns an effigy of Guy Faulkes, on Bonfire Night, left poor Dino quite bemused.

Moldova

Building on the work in Romania, Binnie and Partners was invited by the World Bank to do a rough and ready review of the irrigation sector in Moldova (300,000 hectares under command and therefore only one tenth the size of the Romanian sector). The funds available were very limited and the only way to tackle the job was for our ISPIF team, now re-structured as Binnie (Romania) Ltd to do most of the work with short inputs from Mike Clark (engineer), an economist and myself to make the reports presentable.

The infrastructure we saw was even more rundown and dilapidated than in Romania and we were unable to visit schemes drawing water from the Dniester River because the area to the east had broken away from Moldova and unilaterally declared independence. Supported by Russia and Ukraine, Transnistria is not internationally recognised and the tanks and troops we saw on the riverbank persuaded us that the area was definitely out of bounds to foreign consultants.

We were working for the Ministry of Agriculture and it was early spring, still cold but nice bright weather and

time to uncover the rose bushes in the parks in the capital, Chisinau from winter hibernation under overcoats of straw and soil. Our offices were round the corner from the Mercedes showroom and on the way to work one morning we noticed that people were giving a black Mercedes parked on the pavement a wide berth. This was because a dead body was slumped over the wheel and the theory in the office was that someone had fallen behind with their repayments! Whatever the real reason, when we investigated at lunchtime the car and the body had been moved.

At the start of the project we were not happy with the first Russian-type hotel we were booked into and decided to move to a new hotel. When we checked in there was a great crowd around the front desk and a fair degree of confusion. The next morning, panic stations, Mike could not find his laptop and was up at 3am searching high and low. We thought it could have been stolen during the confusion the previous evening but then checked with the taxi rank where we had picked up a cab. Mike had left the computer by mistake and fortunately the driver did not know that the market value in Chisinau of a new Toshiba was equivalent to what he could earn driving a cab for a year. He was delighted with the $50 tip from Mike for being honest.

Although Romanian is the official language in Moldova, many years in USSR meant that the *lingua franca* was Russian. In order to make progress we needed translators with English, Russian and Romanian and were fortunate

to have an excellent team of young university students including Natasha who had spent a year at high school in California and had particularly good English. One afternoon we were approaching one of our reporting deadlines and Mogor, the Romanian team leader, was furious that Natasha had disappeared at lunchtime and only reappear at 6pm. *"Where have you been?"*

"Sorry, I was having sex with Gregor, he goes off to university in Istanbul tomorrow and I couldn't say no." Mogor was speechless.

Travelling out for the second input involved a BA flight to Budapest and then a Moldovan Air Yak 40 flight to Chisinau where I was seated next to a stunning blonde, sadly without a word of English. Communication was strictly limited but she was kind enough to share her (unchewed) chewing gum with me and Mike seated in front of me could not resist turning round and saying,

"Amazing what you have to do for Mr Hunting!"

And then it was, *"Serves you right"* after we discovered that my bags had been left behind in Budapest.

When we finished the project we had a big Russian-style party hosted by the Minister with plenty of vodka and Moldovan red wine. I suspect that the hospitality was because the project made provision for a conducted tour of irrigation schemes in the USA, a trip which was eagerly anticipated. Moldova produces good red wine and we heard about a huge underground wine store a mile long and serviced by vehicles. The facility was open to the public but only on weekdays so we never got to visit.

Before leaving Chisinau we made sure to buy our full allocation of Pinot Noir from a newly opened store. The wine cost the equivalent of 50p a bottle and at the checkout my purchases were packed into a Sainsbury plastic bag. When I got home I soaked the label off one of the bottles and, tongue-in-cheek, sent it off along with the plastic bag to Sainsbury's Customer Services Department in London. I wrote pointing out that I had purchased the wine at their store in Chisinau and please could they make the same wine available at the same price in Harrogate. The lady at customer services wrote back to assure me that they did not have a store in Moldova but said that she had forwarded my suggestion to the Manager in Harrogate.

Romania again

My next visit to Romania in 1997 was to accompany an Asian businessman, resident in UK, to look at the possibility of investing in a large agricultural development at Braila. I already knew the area fairly well so it was straight to work and I mean straight to work. Alexandru, the Romanian entrepreneur, met us off the plane and drove through the night to Braila - not a journey I am keen to repeat. He had previously been the head of the machinery unit in Braila County and had been able to lease 5,000 hectares of land from a number of individuals and although the holdings were not contiguous they were reasonably compact. Alexandru's problem was a lack of capital and in particular the need for large tractors and equipment to replace the old medium-sized Russian machines he was using.

My job was fairly easy as the Farm Manager was excellent and all of the information I needed was readily available. The potential returns on investment were attractive but the problem lay in the fact that Alexandru and my client had nothing in common and there was very little chance of building the mutual trust and respect needed to bring

the project to fruition. The work was completed in UK and sometime later I had a call from a different group who had secured a copy of the report and wanted to re-open negotiations.

The third job in Romania was really the culmination of work which had started more than ten years earlier in 1992. Irrigation reform had been a slow and painful process with many thousands of hectares of land no longer receiving water. A World Bank project was underway to rebuild two large schemes on the Danube flood plain with a tentative budget of $100 million. However, the loan was conditional on restructuring SNIF, the organisation responsible for the administration of all schemes. Halcrow had been awarded the consultancy for both the design and restructuring elements and I had been taken on as Team Leader of the Institutions component.

The last thing that SNIF wanted was reform because not only were jobs at stake but also 15 years of decay and under-funding had resulted in widespread corruption. In many cases water was only available to those prepared to pay bribes. Our reception in SNIF was rather like expecting *"a turkey to enjoy Christmas"* a situation exacerbated by the fact that consultants financed under a Canadian Aid programme had spent over a year making no progress and had been removed by the Bank.

Our job had to be completed within nine months or, failing that, the loan offer would be withdrawn early in 2005. The World Bank's Task Manager (Japanese) was under great pressure to complete the project and on his

frequent visits to Bucharest he resembled Hiroshima rather than Mount Fuji. There was however a lot of good news, the design component was winding down and we inherited or hired excellent staff from Romproject, our local associates. In addition we had good office facilities and an expat team prepared to work ridiculously long hours. Bucharest is an attractive city and we had an outstanding apartment overlooking Cismigiu Park, with a number of good restaurants and shops close by.

Our client was a unit within the Ministry of Agriculture and all reporting had to be in English and Romanian and available both electronically and in hard copy. Unfortunately the unit was staffed by reclamation engineers with close links to SNIF and there was no reason to assume that the client was on our side. The loan and our report had to be approved by Parliament and just before the papers went forward we heard from our 'mole' at SNIF that the summary report had been doctored to say the reverse of what we intended. We were able to get a copy of this version of the white paper and Cristina, our excellent secretary who had done most of the translating, pointed out the many changes which had been made. At this point our Task Manager went into Hiroshima mode and his boss in Washington threatened to cancel the loan unless our original proposals were adopted. Ultimately the loan was approved and implementation started.

Valerie was able to visit on two occasions and we made fascinating trips into Transylvania and to the painted churches in Moldavia. Her travelogues are excellent and

might one day be written up as a complementary volume to this story.

Volunteering

I had heard of British Executive Service Overseas (BESO), an organization fielding older volunteers for assignments of up to six months in developing countries and, post-1989, in former Eastern Bloc countries. In due course I learned a bit more about the organization, which the unkind called the 'Paunch Corps', and sent off a copy of my CV. My motives were not entirely philanthropic, rather I thought that a couple of suitable assignments as an Institutions Specialist might improve my CV and hence the prospects of paid work.

Ethiopia

A few months later I was asked to consider an assignment in Ethiopia to work for a local consulting firm and was invited to BESO's head office in London to discuss the details. The organisation appeared pretty laid-back with many former overseas hands working as volunteers. In addition to air fares, insurance and the reimbursement of various expenses, there was an allowance of £5 per day, so it was definitely a matter of doing the job for love not money.

On the plus side BESO would meet a spouse's air fares provided the assignment was for a month or more. This was a considerable attraction and Valerie was issued with a ticket and really looking forward to the trip but had to cancel in the end because her mother's health had taken a turn for the worse.

I set off just after Easter on Ethiopian Airways direct to Addis Ababa and landed at the old and shabby airport late in the evening. Fortunately I was met, amongst all the crowd and confusion, by Wajedi and Omar, the principals of ARDCo, my new employers. They were US trained geologists and formerly senior members of the Ministry

of Mineral Resources. At the time the long running war with Eritrea was over, the former president Mengistu had been forced into exile and many senior officials had been pushed aside by the new regime. Nevertheless there was an air of optimism in the country and I suspect that ARDCo was a by-product of the purges and that the principals had been forced into the private sector. The company, which included Bogey the faithful Company Secretary, had just completed a three year job and was feeling quite buoyant.

From the airport I was taken to a new high-rise hotel, complete with ladies of the night in the foyer, and allocated a room on the fifth floor. The next day Wajedi collected me and asked if the accommodation was OK. No, I said and requested a ground floor room with a bath if I was going to be around for a month. *"OK,"* he said, "*Let us go and talk to the Ambassador.*"

The latter turned out to have been Ambassador to London in Haile Selassie's day and was now part owner of the *'Buffet de la Gare'* next to the railway station. In its day this was *the* place to stay in town but its fortunes had declined along with the railway. In a previous incarnation it had been the best whorehouse in the country but that was all in the past and I settled for a large en-suite room with a comfortable bed and plenty of hot water, also an acceptable evening meal with a half bottle of very drinkable local white wine.

Then it was down to work. Ethiopia's basic land resource and development programme involved a series of Basin Master Plans (MP) of which the Baro-Akobo MP was

the next on the list. ARDCo was tasked with the survey and collecting the basic information which international consultants would use to prepare the MP. The company had completed the survey but not to the Government's satisfaction and consequently the 15% retention had been withheld. As with many contracts the retention equates to the profit on the job and ARDCo was desperate to claw it back. Wisely no one had explained this before I left UK.

The task had to be completed in a month and I was faced with 17 technical reports compiled by 34 local consultants and no Main Report or Executive Summary. I had a room in a nice stone-built villa from the Italian era which served as the office for the Baro-Akobo Development Authority and was greatly assisted by a pleasant and competent Muslim secretary called Halima. An ancient Russian Zil car and driver was available to take me to the office and then back to the hotel.

Fortunately all of the reports were available electronically but varied in quality from awful to quite acceptable. All of the original authors were available in Addis so could be called upon for clarification and I simply tried to make the reports readable and worked on the assumption that if I could not understand the text then the client had no hope! We battled away for 12 hours a day, six days a week and in addition I usually went into the office to work on my own on Sunday. We finished the job by the skin of our teeth and later on I heard from Wajedi that the retention had been paid.

Alongside the ARDCo project was a sub-plot. A

German consulting firm and HTS were bidding for the Master Plan and were head to head with an American firm of consultants. Lobbying was intense as the Americans were coming to the end of their work on the new Addis Airport and were anxious to roll over staff and resources to a new job.

Meanwhile Mike Chegwin from the German/ HTS consortium was in town supposedly at the client's invitation to talk about a contract! I had a vested interest in the outcome as I had a couple of months input on the HTS team. Things were not going well and Mike and I would meet for a drink after work in the hope that I knew more than he did about the behind the scene negotiations. Things dragged on interminably but in the end the Americans had more 'oil to devote to the machinery' and we lost out.

All of this work left almost no time for anything else but there were a couple of highlights. My first weekend coincided with the Orthodox Easter at the end of a six week long Lent. The Ethiopians take Lent and the associated fasting very seriously and I was fortunate enough to be invited by Wajedi to join his family on Easter Sunday. The fast breaks at exactly 3am and the rest of the night and the next day is spent eating and visiting family and friends - so much so that school on Monday is a write-off as nearly everyone is at home with stomach ache.

The second bit of luck was Scott Jones, a fellow guest at the Buffet, who knew his way around town and provided some light relief. His story was almost unbelievable, a male nurse from the Isle of Wight with a stint towing gliders off

Sutton Bank in North Yorkshire, then ten years fighting and nursing with the Eritrean army under conditions of extreme privation. Somewhere along the way he had acquired a degree in afro-forestry from the University of Southern California and when we met he was married to an Associate Professor, had a daughter and was, very reluctantly, trying to teach undergraduates. Job satisfaction was non-existent as his students were both ignorant and uninterested in learning. To maintain his sanity he had taken a short assignment with an American NGO working in the Rift Valley. He understood Amharic but was not prepared to speak it as his Eritrean accent would give the game way. One of our memorable excursions was to a nightclub with local cuisine and the most erotic floor show I have ever seen - yet the boys and girls kept all of their clothes on.

ARDCo was good to work for and provided comfortable accommodation and allowances, unlike the next time BESO approached me for yet another job in Ethiopia this time with a local NGO.

On this occasion I did not go up to London for a BESO briefing but heard on the grapevine that the organization had undergone some drastic changes, the old CEO had been pushed out, there were bad vibes all round, the office locks had been changed and many of my old contacts had left. A new CEO (female and formerly an Army Brigadier) was "on seat" (to use the quaint Pakistani expression), clothing allowances were out, no more spouse air fares for short assignments and travel costs were being cut to the bone. I found myself on a no leg-room Kenya Airline flight

to Nairobi and then on to Ethiopia with such a long and uncomfortable stopover that I told BESO that in future volunteers should be sent out direct from London to Addis.

On the flight I sat next to Karen, a Dutch girl who had just finished a two-year stint for VSO in Kenya and was visiting Ethiopia on her way home to check out a possible job in an orphanage. On arrival, it was still the old airport, still with all the crowds outside and no sign of my new boss, Kassaye. Not to worry, I know my way around (said I), so Karen and I took a taxi to The Buffet where the staff were pleased to see me again. Meanwhile Karen took off in the taxi to find a cheaper hotel elsewhere.

I eventually contacted Kassaye on his mobile phone and he arranged to collect me the next day. I rather hoped that I could stay on at the Buffet but Kassaye said that he wanted me to stay with his family, something which I was unhappy about but felt that I must accept. At the time I did not know that NACID was broke and throughout this input I covered all of my own expenses except for the aforementioned board and lodgings.

At the time of the awful famine of 1972 -74, Kassaye had established an orphanage for 50 children on a large site just outside the town of Nazareth. This was the start of "Nazareth Children's Home and Integrated Development" (NACID) but by the time of my input most of the children had grown up and moved on and only a handful were left in the home. To support the children and earn some money a dairy, poultry and horticulture units had been established and I thought that I was there to help upgrade these

enterprises. In fact the children's home was a very small part of what NACID had become and the "integrated development" bit was much more important. Kassaye and NACID had prospered by providing local staff and facilities for overseas donors in a host of enterprises too numerous to mention. Unfortunately this time around, Ethiopia was back squabbling with Eritrea and foreign donors were losing patience. Aid programmes were being severely pruned and projects which NACID hoped to promote were dropping like flies. Forget the dairy at Nazareth, Kassaye hoped that my input could revive some of the projects he had on the back burner.

Ethiopia had adopted a constitution giving individual States (usually ethnic based) a high degree of autonomy and Kassaye had persuaded the Oromia State Government to hand over control of two enterprises. Persuaded is the wrong word, they probably could not get rid of them quickly enough.

An earlier aid programme had established a garment factory in Nazareth for handicapped people and NACID had assumed control of the factory hoping to turn it around, something which local consultants thought was possible. After reading the reports and visiting the extremely depressing factory and workforce, it was clear that this project would take very deep pockets and would never be anything but a burden. Interestingly, NACID had previously made good money from the importation distribution and sale of second-hand clothing from charities like Oxfam. However, the government had banned such

imports, in theory to protect the local garment industry. In practice the importation continued but in the hands of a few influential government officials. A possible solution would have been to license the Nazareth factory to import used clothes, providing an income flow to revive the enterprise - but no chance.

In the late 1960s Norwegian Aid had established two big irrigated farms in the Awash Valley to provide a living for former lepers and their families. With the downfall of the Emperor, the Norwegians had withdrawn and the government had assumed control until NACID offered to manage the enterprises, without any visible means of meeting its obligations. Meanwhile local consultants were doing a good job of preparing a study to revive the schemes and upgrade the two associated villages.

To succeed, a massive injection of capital and expertise was needed but NACID had neither. The Dutch potential investor I talked to rightly demanded more control over the development and future management of the schemes than Kassaye would allow and in due course everything simply reverted to the State Government.

NACID's third project was much more promising and involved a National Park covering a large tract of land in the Rift Valley. The area fell between the Oromia and Southern Regions and NACID had obtained permission to carry out a feasibility study for the development of the area. There was the potential to protect the flora and fauna in the park and in time build up a useful tourist trade in an area famous for migrating birds including flamingos. This would only

be possible by involving the people living in and around the park and giving them some reason not to slaughter the wildlife and cut down all the trees. A first reading of the local consultant's report was extremely depressing but I visited the area, re-wrote the report and thought that something could be done. In spite of trying to interest the World Bank, Worldwide Fund for Nature etc in putting a small amount of money into upgrading the study to an acceptable standard, my best efforts fell on stony ground.

As before I worked my socks off, the weather was awful and living with the family was no joke, particularly as mine host spent much of the night wandering around the house draped in a blanket trying to cope with his money worries.

Swaziland

The third BESO job was a big improvement on the previous two in Ethiopia and involved a review and recommendations for the development of the National Agricultural Marketing Board (NAMBORD) in Swaziland. On this occasion I was required to visit London for a day-long briefing on HIV/ AIDS, the thinking being that all VSO and BESO volunteers should be fully briefed prior to leaving UK. The speakers were professional and the message quite terrifying!

Travel involved an overnight stop in Johannesburg (this was my first visit to South Africa and I was given a warning from the front desk not to step outside the hotel after dark), then a small plane to Swaziland. I was booked into the hotel in Manzini which was an easy walk from NAMBORD's offices above a shopping mall in the centre of town. The main establishment, however, was close to the airport and had been constructed by FAO as a wholesale market with good facilities.

All produce coming into the country from South Africa had to transit the market and was subject to import duty with inspectors assigned to ensure compliance. Money from

this cess was supposed to be used to help local production compete with imports but in practice the money was building up in the bank, no development schemes had been instituted and most local growers were too small scale to use the market anyway.

I recommended a management buyout on the basis that the wholesale market was intrinsically a viable proposition and also doing away with the cess, which only had the effect of increasing the costs to local consumers and use the accumulated funds for a well thought out project. What happened? I will probably never know.

I did manage to pick up a little local colour and was generally impressed by how comfortable people seemed to be in their own skins. To escape the evening meal in the hotel, I sometimes ate at a Chinese restaurant and was surprised on a couple of occasions when young men approached me to moan about the government in general and the king in particular. In addition to a brief visit to the capital at Mbane, I borrowed a NAMBORD utility one weekend to travel to the sugar cane area in the low veldt. Harry Rostron, the head of extension services for the Swaziland Sugar Producers Association, had been a year ahead of me at Leeds University and, having found his house in the well maintained housing complex on one of the estates, we took ourselves off for an excellent Sunday lunch at the club.

On the way home I stopped off in Durban to see Tony and June Tucker, enjoyed a trip into the Drakensbergs and promised faithfully to return with Valerie for a proper

visit in the near future. Soon after I got home there was a message from NAMBORD asking if I could arrange a visit to Covent Garden Market for the their Chairman, one Colonel D'lamini. I offered a tour of Leeds Wholesale Market instead and this was accepted. The Colonel was attending a short course in Dublin so I sent off a fax with a detailed schedule - train to York, collected from the station, taken to Bramley Cottage for the night, then an early start to be at the Leeds Market by 5am.

In due course I waited at York Station for the London train but no D'lamini. I could not believe that I had missed him but went along to the information office to ask if he could be paged. The announcer said, *"No way am I going to pronounce that name! You had better do it yourself."*

So for the first and only time I became a temporary announcer at York Station. Still no D'lamini and by nightfall we were really worried - what had he been up to in Dublin? Was this the start of a diplomatic incident? We phoned the Swazi High Commission to be told that he had been dropped off at Kings Cross on schedule. The next afternoon a phone call explained everything, D'lamini had lost my instructions, taken a train to Leeds, was surprised not to be met so booked himself into the Queen's Hotel until he could take the train back to London.

Ethiopia again

The Swazi assignment was the exception that proves the rule and my fourth and last BESO job was definitely the pits. Kofi Annan and the UN had dreamed up something called the Global Compact Initiative based on the premise that the big multi-national companies could, if they were so inclined, make more of an impact on development than either national governments or the aid agencies. A high powered conference in New York looked for pledges of support and Shell (International) signed up for water resource development projects in Ethiopia. They then engaged BESO to identify an agriculture and associated domestic water project with implementation costing $10 million plus. BESO prepared the terms of reference for the study and asked me to be the Team Leader

I should have turned the job down right at the start, if only because BESO had no track record of mounting multi-disciplinary teams, did not have access to the range of skills required and were not in a position to provide backup if things went wrong. In the end it was only possible to field half the team and the economist assigned to the job and I were at loggerheads from the beginning. Things got so bad

that we could not even agree on the time of day and were barely speaking by the end of the month.

None of the above was the fault of Shell (Ethiopia) who put us up at the Hilton Hotel where my daily swim in the hotel pool with water drawn from the hot springs was a lifesaver. They provided good counterpart staff and office facilities. However, it was very clear that this project had been imposed from above and local management's worst fear was that they would be required to implement the project. Against my better judgement we came up with the sort of small scale irrigation project which any aid agency could have commissioned and Shell's potential comparative advantages in the country were ignored.

On one trip into Rift Valley we stayed at a local hotel where management provided each guest with five sheets of toilet paper, a small bar of soap and a condom. This was once again the wet season and shallow Lake Langano was very full, so I hired a flat-bottomed boat because the boatman said that he would give me my money back if we did not see hippos. No hippo - but the trip was interesting so I paid up. The next morning at first light I went back to the lake to see fishermen bringing in their catch and gutting the fish on sheets of corrugated iron on the shore. A lot were catfish and the bait of choice was small squares of washing soap. I did not believe this until I tasted the bait myself.

In the end nothing happened, mainly because of a scandal within Shell (International) - the company had been overestimating their oil reserves and the CEO, who had personally made the original commitments in Ethiopia, was

forced to resign. All the steam promptly disappeared and Shell (Ethiopia) handed the study over to the Government with a sigh of relief and that was the end of that.

Swansong Ethiopia

I had not been looking for any overseas assignments for a couple of years and it was depressing to think that the job for Shell and BESO in Ethiopia might be the end of what had otherwise been a long and interesting career. Then in September 2004 I got a call from Halcrow to ask if, at short notice, I could do a six week input on an existing job in Ethiopia. The team leader was Nick Portch whom I knew from Romania and so I was happy to accept, provided that the job could be split into two inputs as Chris and family were coming on leave from Fiji and I wanted to be around for their visit. The split input was agreed and I was on a plane as soon as my multiple entry visa came through.

Nick met the plane and over lunch explained that Halcrow was engaged on an African Development Bank study to identify a number of water conservation projects in the Awash Valley for future implementation using World Bank funds. At the Inception Report stage, the consultants and the client (Ministry of Water Resources) realised that there was no provision for a review and, if necessary, reform of the organisation responsible for the administration of the dams, irrigation schemes and other conservation works.

So sufficient funds were found for my input and, because Halcrow's share of the project was already overcommitted, I found myself working for the French JV partner Sogreah of Grenoble.

On the third day in Addis I lost not one but two fillings so asked Nick where I could find a dentist. He had recently had quite a serious problem and recommended a Russian dentist with a surgery close to the office. On arrival I was required to pay a small registration fee and was then ushered in to meet a middle-aged lady with bright red hair and almost no English. Fortunately the Ethiopian dental nurse understood both English and Russian and I asked for a couple of temporary fillings to tide me over until I got home. Through our interpreter I was assured that she could do a really good permanent job for not much more money. We finally settled on the temporary fillings, at which point I got out of the chair and accompanied the nurse to the front desk to pay over the requisite money before returning to have the job done. My dentist at home was amused to hear about payment in advance but did not think that he needed to institute the same system in Knaresborough.

It was great to be working for Consultants again. I was provided with good accommodation, satisfactory office facilities and a team of professionals with whom to discuss the work. I also spent a long weekend in the field with Nick looking at the existing and possible future projects. Because Ethiopia no longer has a sea port, most imports come in by road along the Awash Valley from Djibouti or alternatively from Kenya in the south. A series of small motels along the

road provide truckers with accommodation on the six-day trip from Addis to Djibouti and return. We stayed at one of these motels which cost £1.20 for an en suite room. The en suite was in fact a tiny cubicle with a shower mounted over the Asian loo. Run the shower to flush the loo, then straddle the loo to have a shower, making sure not to drop the soap.

No sooner had I started work than the client began to have cold feet. Any in-depth review of the water resources administration would soon identify the inefficiencies and over-manning inherent in the system. This might lead to a need for reform and wholesale staff redundancies as a pre-condition for the loan (exactly the situation which had occurred in Romania). With the spectre of problems on the horizon the Minister decided that it would be better to cancel my input before any embarrassing decisions had to be made.

Valerie always intended to return with me for the second input and Nick had kindly invited us to stay at his house. So cutting my time short did not matter greatly and we went back as originally scheduled but this time as tourists. We explored the historic north of the country and again Valerie's account of this fascinating trip ought to be written.

Right: with Valerie after receiving my MBA at Leeds University in June 1995



Below: Rose Lea Farm, renamed Bramley Cottage



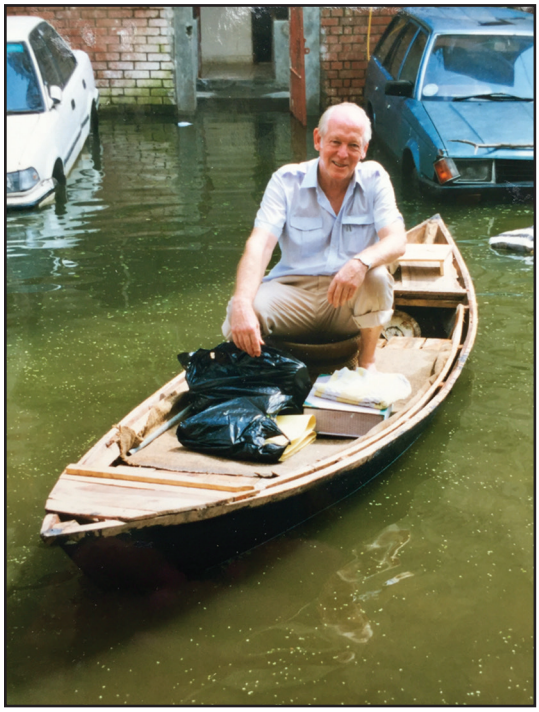


Left: 8 Clifton Street, St Albans

Below: the Old Chapel, Cattal







Above: Director and staff, Natural Resources Institute, Chatham

Right: me rescuing the files from the Project Office during the Dhaka floods of 1998

Part VI
The Last Lap

Starting the last lap

Overseas assignments kept me fairly busy until my last paid job in Ethiopia in 2005, which is as good an official retirement date as any. In fact I knew that it was time to give up overseas assignments once the pressure of work started to affect my sleep pattern. Typically I would fade out at 8pm then wake at 2am and only get to sleep again after taking a sleeping pill. Combine this with only a trickle of job offers in places like North Yemen, Afghanistan and Southern Sudan and it was definitely time to call it quits.

Did we really have a retirement plan? Take up golf? Sell Bramley Cottage and buy a retirement apartment in Spain? Or just spend the winter months on cruises to the Caribbean?

Valerie said, "*Don't be ridiculous!*" She had no plans to retire and was adamant that her responsibilities would remain unchanged. She already had a full time job, keeping the house and garden in order, serving for nineteen years as churchwarden and for even longer as the secretary of St. Mary's Parochial Church Council. She was also Treasurer of the Lower Uredale Branch of Hope and Homes for

Children, raising money by a sky dive from 14,000ft in 2010 and again from 10,000ft in 2015, and was in charge of the second-hand books at the Oxfam shop in Boroughbridge

A similar situation applied to myself as a number of activities I had taken on before retirement continued to demand time and effort, including being Chairman of the Dunsforths Village Meeting from 1992 to 1997 and again from 2003 to 2012 and Chairman of the West Yorkshire Support Group of Hope and Homes for Children (HHC) from 1999 to 2007.

We continued to visit Fiji and/or New Zealand or Australia every year, initially travelling via Los Angeles and when that became a chore via Tokyo, Hong Kong or Singapore. These trips were only possible thanks to the concessionary air fares on Air Pacific/ Fiji Airways. Our annual visits provided a welcome period of relaxation, or at least a chance to do something different, away from the demands at home. Initially we stayed at Sovi Farm until a couple of burglaries, whilst we were in residence, made us think that continuing to stay at the farm was not a good idea. Thereafter we stayed with Chris and Pitila at Nasoso, Nadi, where the 'Sovi Room' provided an increasingly comfortable substitute for the farmhouse.

The activity which came to dominate retirement was PhysioNet and the rest of this section describes how from small beginnings the charity grew and grew. I wish that I could claim a blinding flash of light when PhysioNet sprang instantly to life but its development was much more prosaic.

"Twinkle"

My inputs on the Bangladesh project were coming to an end in 1999 when one Friday I visited a charity fair at the Dhaka International School and got talking to a Bengali woman with excellent English who said,

"Why not come over and visit us?"

So the next Friday my driver Ali and I made our way to the address in Old Dhaka and, after losing our way a few times, we found the 'orphanage' and the nice Bengali lady.

Orphanage probably gives the wrong impression. The building was small, very clean and tidy with the same room acting firstly as the bedroom, then the mats were rolled up and the space became the dining room. Then they cleared away the pots and pans to make room for the kindergarten. Perhaps some of the children were orphans but many were the children of single mums working in the Middle East as domestics in order to keep body and soul together.

I was told that the children went up the road to a primary school at age six but on this Friday there was no school or kindergarten and in honour of their visitor the children all sat in well behaved rows and sang *Twinkle, twinkle little*

star/ How I wonder what you are? etc

At first I did not catch the words and thought they were singing in Bengali but then I recognised the tune of the nursery rhyme. I thanked everyone for the impromptu concert, left a few hundred taka (following partition from Pakistan in 1972, the country dropped the rupee in favour of the taka) and asked if it would be possible to transfer money from UK, but as a strictly local charity this was not going to be easy.

Hope and Homes for Children (HHC)

Soon after getting home from Bangladesh in 1999 Valerie and I were invited to nearby Queen Mary's School for supper and to hear Col. Mark Cook talk about HHC, the charity he had established to help children affected by wars and disasters in Eastern/Central Europe and Africa. Mark was a charismatic speaker and at the end of the evening, encouraged by Claire Wright, the persuasive and glamorous Northern Support Group (SG) organiser, we 'signed up'. I suppose that the *'Twinkle experience'* had conditioned us to supporting an overseas children's charity and HHC fitted the bill. It became a registered charity in 1994 and expanded rapidly following the downfall of Ceausescu when the British public heard about the awful conditions in the Romanian orphanages and in similar institutions throughout the Eastern Bloc countries

We opted to join the West Yorkshire SG and soon after this, the Chairman of our SG retired, moved away from the area and I found myself appointed in his place. In September 2004 I was invited to join a small party of HHC supporters visiting the Bjeleve Children's Home in Sarajevo. This orphanage had been shelled into oblivion

during the Bosnian war and HHC had been instrumental in re-building the institution. The six-day visit was organised by HHC staff working in Bosnia, the weather was good and we even had the opportunity for some sightseeing outside Sarajevo. I met Sharon Campbell, an Australian volunteer physiotherapist working in the home and responsible for about 25 disabled children. I asked if there was anything we could do to help when we got back to UK and the next day Sharon produced a list of therapy equipment her children needed. It also transpired that her funds would run out by Easter but if she could find another £800 she could stay until Christmas 2005.

Back in UK, a whip round amongst our party raised the required money and, at the same time, a short article in *'Frontline',* the physios' professional journal, asked if anyone could provide us with surplus equipment. The response to the article was very encouraging and an indication that securing everything on Sharon's list would be fairly easy. Money to collect the equipment came from our Support Group and whilst HHC's head office in Salisbury might not have been keen on us taking this sort of initiative, they did not say, "*Don't do it".*

In June 2005, four months after my "retirement", Scott Green, a recently retired GP, and I hired a white van from a firm in Harrogate. This was no easy task as a number of hire firms said that their insurers would not cover vehicles in a 'war zone'. We loaded the van with the equipment and set off early in the morning on a fairly straightforward journey. Ferry from Dover, then an overnight at a service area in

Germany, memorable only for the strong smell of cigarette smoke on the pillow. Then we incurred a heavy fine, having somehow missed the toll booth on a motorway in Austria, and spent a second night at a hotel in Zagreb, Croatia.

After a long delay at the customs post on the Bosnia border, the officers took a quick look in the van and sealed it, subject to final clearance in Sarajevo. Once in Sarajevo we made contact with Sharon who met us in the car park at the Hilton Hotel and took us to the HHC offices. During the war the Hilton, situated in 'Sniper's Alley', was the unsatisfactory home for many of the war correspondents including the BBC's Martin Bell. Accommodation for the night was a problem as a jazz festival in town meant that all of the hotels were full. We spent the night on two very uncomfortable couches in the house occupied by the six HHC female volunteers.

The next day Sonja, a Bosnian staff member with good English, and I set off to clear customs, a process which took the best part of the day. I was driving a right-hand drive van on the right side of the road whilst Sonja was sitting in what would be the driver's seat in a left-hand drive vehicle. No sooner had we left the customs yard than we were stopped by a young policeman who approached what he thought was the driver's side and said to Sonja,

"Driving licence please."

Sonja replied, "*Sorry I do not drive*."

Then he said, "*Where is the steering wheel?"*

At this point he was thoroughly confused and let us go.

Scott and I finally got rooms in the American Hotel,

where I had stayed in 2004, and we set about unloading the van at the home, with a part of the load going to a State Institution for the Disabled situated some way out of Sarajevo. The Director of the institution explained that they were desperately short of money. When Bosnia was part of Jugoslavia, the institution received patients from all over the country but following the war it was difficult or sometimes impossible to get funds for patients who originated for example from Croatia or Montenegro. Consequently the institution was desperate for further assistance and we promised to help.

Thanks to Sharon, we meet the Bosnian Red Cross and a couple of other organisations who might be interested in receiving equipment in the future. In particular we met the Director of the Sarajevo Paraplegics Association who asked for 150 wheelchairs.

The journey home was uneventful and in due course we sent equipment to both the Red Cross and the Sarajevo Paraplegics, using the excellent services of the British military. At the time British troops were stationed in Banja Luka (Banjo Luke to the soldiers) and two articulated trucks left Bicester near Oxford every week. If there was room on the trucks the Army was happy to help and of course there was no difficulty with Customs. The helpful NCOs in the Royal Logistical Corps arranged for the internal delivery of the equipment.

By the end of this exercise, Sharon had left Sarajevo for home and no further assistance was forthcoming from the HHC staff in Bosnia, very much on the basis that their

hands were full doing what they were doing and there was no time or mandate to do any more.

Back in UK we still had equipment in stock and asked HHC if they had any further need for the services which the West Yorkshire SG could provide. At a meeting attended by the newly appointed CEO and Delia Pop, the Romania Country Director, we were told that HHC planned to close down two large orphanages in Central Romania and move the children into small family homes. Fifty or so of these children were handicapped and might need the sort of equipment we could provide. Accordingly, HHC approved the establishment of a separate account into which funds could be deposited and subsequently withdrawn to meet project expenses. The first step was to assess the needs and Mike Harding, at that time the Export Manager for Jenx Ltd, a Sheffield based manufacturer of equipment, visited Romania and carried out this task at his company's expense.

Returning to UK, Mike selected the equipment from the stock in hand and we arranged for a commercial carrier to back load the equipment to Romania. We had also arranged for two physios from NHS Dunfermline to arrive at about the same as the truck to help fit the equipment and train local staff.

Back in UK we were again asking HHC, *"What Next?"* and in the hope of progressing matters invited HHC's newly appointed Operations Director to visit so that we could show her the operation. The results were unexpected and her report to the CEO basically recommended that

this sort of activity was not a part of HHC's core business and should cease. In the short term, we spent the remaining project funds and closed down the operation at least as far as HHC was concerned.

But we still had stock in hand, people were still offering us equipment and wheelchairs and I remained convinced that many countries overseas needed the sort of services we could provide.

Voluntas and 500 Miles

The next stage was fairly straightforward and a charity called Voluntas paid for a mixed load of equipment and wheelchairs to be sent to Belarus. We duly loaded about 35 cu metres of stock onto a truck in Dunsforth which, after various difficulties with Customs exacerbated by Voluntas' refusal to pay "backhanders", finally made it to Minsk. Then history repeated itself and when we asked Voluntas, *"What Next?"* we were told that the government obstacles to importing used equipment made future consignments virtually impossible. At the time there was interest in supplying a consignment to South Africa but Voluntas made it clear that their interests lay in Belarus, Latvia and Ukraine and that they had no interests elsewhere.

So it was back to the drawing board and the continuation of a frustrating period trying to find an existing charity prepared to take on our sort of work. I tried anyone and everyone I could think of including Cheshire Disability, the Red Cross and Oxfam without success but came across one possibility, an existing charity called "500 Miles" set up by Olivia Giles who had lost both her hands and feet to a

nasty form of septicaemia. She came down from Edinburgh to check out our operation and whilst we were impressed at how well she managed simple tasks like eating and drinking, nothing eventuated in the way of a business deal.

A lucky break

One bit of good news during this fairly bleak period when we were operating in a vacuum was the unexpected appearance of Lindie Dalton and a white van one January morning just before we were due to leave for Fiji. Lindie, a South African physio working in South London had heard about us from Jenx Ltd and at her own expense was in the process of sending a 20 ft container of equipment to help the institution where she had trained in Pretoria. We were happy to fill her van and subsequently received press cuttings and photos showing the happy recipients.

By 2008 we realised that a separate charity would be needed if the work was to continue and thereafter things moved quite quickly. An inaugural meeting in Harrogate in January approved the name PhysioNet and by the middle of the year we were able to base operations at Greenfield Farm in Lower Dunsforth. Then in October I joined the Knaresborough Rotary Club, which provided a pool of potential supporters as well as access to Rotary organisations worldwide.

PhysioNet was recognised by HM Revenue and Customs

for the recovery of gift aid in May 2009 and subsequently by the Charities Commission (Registered charity no. 1135684). By this time we had in place publicity material, a website, officers and an all volunteer workforce.

The first 40 ft container went to Johannesburg in April 2009 thanks to funding and physical help from a group of Lindie's young South African friends and was followed in December by another 40 ft container, this time to Fiji, and this pattern of an increasingly professional operation was established.

We soon learned that the only economic way of moving large volumes of equipment is in 40 ft shipping containers or the HGV truck equivalent and in eight years 60 container loads have gone to:

Europe: Bulgaria, Romania and Ukraine**.**

Africa: Benin, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, South Africa (including onward consignments to Botswana and Mozambique), Sierra Leone, Swaziland, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Middle East and Asia: Bhutan, India, Sri Lanka, Syria and Thailand.

Pacific: Fiji (including onward consignments to other Pacific Islands) and Samoa.

Over the period there were only two disasters (Kenya and India). In both cases the recipient failed to clear the container at destination and the contents were auctioned by the port authorities to recover their charges and so that the shipping companies could retrieve their container. By dealing only with reliable recipients, having all

documentation in place before loading and by employing good shipping agents, we ensured that this problem was never repeated.

Supplying Third Parties: PhysioNet is happy to supply equipment to other charities who usually collect a van load at a time from our stores. In this way 40 van loads, equivalent to four full containers, have gone to Belarus, Bulgaria, Nigeria, Mexico, Romania, South Africa and Sierra Leone.

Logistics: In addition to the main store in North Yorkshire, PhysioNet has stores in East Anglia and the South West. Equipment from across the country is collected by volunteers using hired vans, then sorted and prepared for shipment. Equipment needing attention, particularly wheelchairs and bikes, is sent via the Margaret Carey Foundation to HM Prison Service for repair.

What we have sent: In both 2016 and 2017 we sent a container (or truck load) per month somewhere in the world. In practice, it is difficult to load much more than this from North Yorkshire and only by loading from other depots will increased shipments be possible. The shipping manifests detail the contents of each container and three lines of business have emerged.

Therapy equipment for disabled children and adults. A small group of physiotherapists ensures that everything we send is fit for purpose and these volunteers are prepared to travel and train recipients in the proper use of the equipment.

Wheelchairs and mobility/ amenity aids: In volume

terms this accounts for at least half of the consignments and many thousands of items have been supplied. This category also includes some hospital hardware and medical consumables.

Care-in-the-Community equipment: This is frequently supplied in UK to the elderly and infirm for use in the home and includes perching stools, shower and bath equipment, commodes etc. An under supplied market may exist in Eastern/Central Europe for this sort of equipment and successful shipments have been sent to Bulgaria and Romania.

What is everything worth? Because therapy equipment is particularly expensive, we believe that the new value of a typical container load is about £100,000.

At the PhysioNet Summer Garden Party in June 2015, the tenth anniversary of the first delivery to Bosnia, I handed over as Chairman to David Kaye, whilst remaining as the charity's "Founder and Trustee". Then the real icing on the cake for PhysioNet occurred in June 2017 with The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. Eleven charities received the award in Yorkshire but PhysioNet was the only one with an overseas agenda.

End of the last lap

The previous section describes why 2017 is a suitable point at which to call time on my involvement with PhysioNet, although there is every hope that the charity will go from strength to strength in the years ahead.

Importantly, 2017 also marked the very end of the British Colonial Service and therefore the end of the career I had embarked upon in 1959. The rush to independence in the 1960s saw some former colonies - Aden, British Somaliland and Zanzibar - refusing to honour the obligations to their former officials. The Overseas Services Pensioners Association (OSPA) was established in 1962 to protect the interests of former officers and ensure that the British Government underwrote and honoured all obligations. In addition the Association did a good job of documenting the work of the Service and went some way to counteracting the public's negative image of "Empire".

A memorial service had already been held some years earlier at Westminster Abbey and it was evident that the dwindling number of pensioners no longer justified a dedicated association. Rather than quietly closing up shop, it was decided to go out with a bang on the 55th anniversary

of establishing the Association. The closing event was held at the Royal Connaught Rooms in London on 16th June when 450 former officers and their families sat down to a meal. There were members from nearly all of the former colonies and territories, although Bob and Talei Strick (a former District Commissioner) and Valerie and I were the only people there representing the Fiji Service.

The guest of honour was Prince Charles, who said all the right things about former officers who had served the Crown with honour and dedication and he passed on Her Majesty's personal thanks to those present.



Above: the loading crew with the first container in 2009

Below: the 82nd container in 2019







Above: presentation of the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service in 2017

Left: me with the award



Above: with the family celebrating our golden wedding anniversary in 2010