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**LYALL GRANT, Sheila (b. 16 December 1960)**

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## **BRITISH DIPLOMATIC ORAL HISTORY PROGRAMME**

### **RECOLLECTIONS OF SHEILA LYALL GRANT RECORDED AND TRANSCRIBED BY IAN HAY-CAMPBELL**

**IH-C:** This is Ian Hay-Campbell recording Sheila Lyall Grant on Tuesday, 11<sup>th</sup> October 2022 for the British Diplomatic Oral History Programme.

Sheila, to begin with, how did you get into the Office in the first place?

**SLG:** I had finished my 'A' Levels and I was going to university and I'd had a bit of time in between. I was travelling – inter-railing around Europe - and I was always enjoyed travelling away from home and my mother saw an advertisement in the *Telegraph* saying: Do you want to get off the plane in Nairobi? Or New York? Or somewhere else – I can't remember. She cut it out as she thought that this was something that Sheila would be interested in and should be applying for. I sent off an application and applied without thinking too much about it and went up for the interview in London and that was how I joined. No history of any diplomats in the family or much travel within the family, really. So, it was my mother I have to thank for my joining the FCO.

**IH-C:** You arrive in London. You had accommodation there?

**SLG:** Yes, this was August 1980 when there were various hostels around London for young, single civil servants. They were all in nice areas, there was a popular one in Queensgate. I was in one in Belsize Park. They had huge rooms in a dormitory style, how much you paid depended on how many you shared with.

**IH-C:** So, you were in a dormitory with several other people?

**SLG:** Two other girls, yes, from other civil service departments. You could have a single room but that was too expensive for me on my monthly salary of £238.00. Meals were provided so there was a breakfast and then a hot meal in the evening. The food was pretty dreadful but it was affordable accommodation and if you were late, all the FCO girls

(because it was an all-girls hostel) were never back in time when the meals were served so they'd keep the food on a hot plate and so it was even worse! I stayed for as short a time as possible and then found a flat share in Fulham.

**IH-C:** How strictly was your life controlled? Was there a kind of warden who kept an eye on you?

**SLG:** There was a warden. You couldn't have any visitors in or have parties.

**IH-C:** Could you stay out as long as you wanted to at night?

**SLG:** No – you couldn't come and go as you wanted throughout the night. But it didn't feel too restricted for me as I did not know many people then and it was affordable. But now they've all closed. They've been sold or they've been converted into flats and they don't exist anymore. I think it's quite difficult now for people to take on these jobs on low pay without some kind of help with accommodation.

**IH-C:** What was your first job in the Office?

**ALG:** My first job in the office was in Western European Department, as it was called then, as Registry Officer for France, Belgium and Luxembourg. There were four of us in a room.

**IH-C:** And your job was to provide files and do the filing for that section of the Department?

**SLG:** Yes, there were binders with the registry. Everything then obviously was on paper and you had to give every document a number and then it would go in a file. It was registry procedures, really which was completely new, lots of cross referencing and flagging up documents. I'd never done anything like that before but I joined with a group of young people in the same position as me and we were all spread out around the Office doing this filing job which wasn't actually desperately interesting. But it was interesting in that the papers you were filing covered a wide range of interesting topics and you were answering the phone. I was at first worried that I would mis-file something and never find it again. On my first day I was handed a jar of Nescafé and told it was my job to make the coffee, can you imagine doing that today!

**IH-C:** Were you given reasonable training for this?

**SLG:** I went on a registry course to show me how to register a document provided and an elderly gentleman would come around every now and then to see that you were doing it correctly, his title was Head of Registry. There was a lot of memory involved. You had to remember a lot about different subjects and how they might be broken down and also cross referencing and that was what you put in the binder. It wasn't very easy but it wasn't particularly intellectual.

### **Immigration Registry, then Consulate, Islamabad, 1982-85**

**IH-C:** What happened after that?

**SLG:** After that I went to Far Eastern Department for a very, very brief stint, working with the China Desk Officer and then I got my first posting very quickly. I was only in London for 18 months. You usually expected to be in London for two to two and a half years. I had just turned 21 and was called into my Deputy Head of Department's office and told where I was going. There was no application or bidding process then or: "Do you want go?" The posting was Islamabad and luckily, I knew where Islamabad was because I had been to a party in London recently attended by the current Defence Attaché's daughter. Otherwise I'd have had no idea where Islamabad was.

**IH-C:** How did you feel about Pakistan as a posting?

**SLG:** I was very excited, I only had a short time to prepare and as I had few belongings to take it was very stress free. I hurriedly bought some kitchen equipment and a new Ford Fiesta.

**IH-C:** And the job you were going there to do?

**SLG:** I was sent out to do work in the Immigration Registry which was a large pool of Grade 10s, in Islamabad, about 12 of us in total all dealing with the visa applications. And then

there was a Head of Registry stationed in the Embassy/High Commission whose job it was to lead us.

**IH-C:** And what were working conditions like?

**SLG:** The working conditions were pretty bad really because the air conditioning wasn't very good; there was lots of overcrowding of applicants coming in for their interview; there were rats and always issues with the water. It really wasn't a very good clean working environment, despite being a relatively new building.

**IH-C:** Did you see much of others in the Embassy beyond your particular section?

**SLG:** Yes, there were two sections to the Embassy really and you had to walk over an interconnecting bridge. It was an ugly modern concrete building and you had to cross over this internal walkway through a security code to go into Chancery. So, you would see a certain amount of your other colleagues, but you had to make that happen, some people rarely went to Chancery but I was always looking for opportunities. You had to think: "Oh, I'm going to go over to Chancery Registry for research." And I did a bit of swopping of jobs with Chancery registry and Consular to get a bit more experience. On the whole, if you wanted to you didn't need to cross the bridge and you could just stay in the Immigration side of Registry if you wanted to.

**IH-C:** One thinks of Pakistan these days as being a pretty insecure sort of place. Not so when you were there, I gather?

**SLG:** When I first went there first in 1982 there were no walls around the diplomatic compound or the houses. It was all very open. There were no formal security guards as such. There were chowkidars, who were employed as night watchmen, but they would just be lying on a sort of bed outside the house usually asleep. No wider security as such and no terrorism threat. There was a civil war in Afghanistan and the issue was really mainly the Afghan refugees flooding into Pakistan across the Peshawar border and there was a rising drug problem but not a terrorism problem. I didn't feel that my security was at risk but being a single female did cause problems because you would be followed everywhere you went. There were groups of young men. They never did anything, they were just watching. I

would be very careful over the clothes I wore, I was always very covered up, long sleeves and my legs covered. When I drove my car I got run off the road more than once because they hadn't expected to see a woman driving a car and certainly not a young woman. Sometimes I would put a cap on to hide my hair and try to look like a man behind the wheel.

**IH-C:** But this didn't stop you from seeing a good part of Pakistan?

**SLG:** No, I drove all over Pakistan. I drove up the Khyber Pass.

**IH-C:** With a companion, presumably?

**SLG:** No, I was in the car on my own. We were trying to leave one car up at the border because we wanted to come back and get the train up to Torkham very early in the morning. I was trying to drive up on my own, following Mark actually, and I was driven off the road. It was a strange position to be in and I did feel a bit intimidated at times.

**IH-C:** You would feel a certain fear!

**SLG:** I was quite worried at that point and there were all these faces through the windscreen of the car and I could not see out. I panicked and reversed the car into Mark's car. Anyway, I got back up to Landi Kotal, left the car there and we went back and got the train up. I later sold the car on my return to Fulham as one lady owner.

**IH-C:** And although you talk about these two sections within the Mission itself, there was a social life presumably that linked the two whether it was amateur productions or things like that.

**SLG:** Yes, it was a very sociable place because there was no television, no videos then either. All the entertainment was home grown. It was either sports or amateur dramatics. There was lots of mixing among all the sections of the Embassy and the wider diplomatic community. You could do any type of sport, really. If you didn't play sport and you weren't interested in amateur dramatics – well, there was a film night once a week in the club with a big Betamax video which would come over in the diplomatic bag and a film would be shown. There were quite a lot of social club events and parties. It was a very active club in the

middle of the compound, with tennis courts and a swimming pool. There was a large contingent of Home Office staff because of the immigration work and they were very active.

**IH-C:** And am I right in thinking you met a Second Secretary (Chancery) there, didn't you?

**SLG:** I did. That's where I met Mark, now my husband, quite soon after my arrival. He'd been in Lahore on language training and came a few months after me. He'd been very sick down in Lahore. He'd been learning the language with a local family. He arrived and we got together quite soon after that.

**IH-C:** So, you were there for what - a total of three years?

**SLG:** I was there for three years. My posting was initially for two years and then I applied to extend for a third year.

**IH-C:** You had a certain motive for that?!

**SLG:** I had a motive for that, yes! It seemed a good idea to stay on a third year and then come back to London. I was there for a full two years and before I got a paid journey home. You didn't get a paid journey home every year then. I only got a paid journey home after I agreed to extend for a further year. Because I was staying for a third year I then moved over to consular work within the Mission, at that time in 1984 it was the very end of the hippy trail coming through. And so we had quite a lot of people, not always young people – probably now in their '30s but who had been left behind from the hippie trail and into drugs. In Peshawar there was a lot of easy cheap heroin on sale. Flashmans, one of the hotels in Peshawar would ring up from time to time to say that there was a bad smell coming from a room and it was someone who had sadly overdosed and they thought they were British. Often, actually, they weren't British but they just knew they could ring up the British Embassy and we would look into it.

**IH-C:** That has a familiar ring about it because I can remember from my own experience of consular work – you never knew what was going to come up. There was a huge variety in it and you found yourself doing some very strange things.

**SLG:** Yes. Then after a year I left and came back to London for a home posting but on the way back I was diverted to Jeddah for three months because there was a shortage of staff there and they just wanted somebody for three months to help clear a backlog. I thought: well why not? Because the allowances were really, really good.

**IH-C:** But a very different sort of atmosphere.

**SLG:** Very, Jeddah was much more restrictive than Pakistan. I couldn't drive a car, I had to be driven by an Embassy driver just to go to the supermarket and get food. I'd go out in the evening with colleagues from the Embassy, sometimes five men and me all sitting round the table. There weren't many female staff at all in fact I don't remember any other female. I was glad to leave after my three months stint.

### **Protocol Directorate, FCO, 1985-90**

**IH-C:** So, back in London – where were you sent?

**SLG:** Back in London I was sent to Soviet Department where it was the time of the Chernobyl incident.

**IH-C:** But you were only there for a short time?

**SLG:** Yes, a short time because I was then promoted to DS9, as it was then, to the role of Assistant Lady Ceremonial Officer in Protocol Department working for the Hon. Diana Makgill who was appointed by Douglas Hurd's wife into a role to help diplomatic wives and families settle into London as well as to deal with ceremonial aspects. This sort of role doesn't really exist anymore. She was called the Lady Ceremonial Officer and I was her Assistant. I would fill in for her when she couldn't do things and a lot of the things that I would do, for example, were to go and visit new Ambassadors' wives before their husbands, and it was always husbands then, had presented their credentials and explain to them what would happen and to show them how to curtsy.

**IH-C:** Right foot behind the left sort of thing! Would all of them have agreed to curtsy?

**SLG:** They did in those days. Nobody seemed to question it. Of course, they didn't have to curtsy but if that was what they wanted to do then they knew how to do it. Then I would accompany them to the Palace in a car behind and wait while the credentials ceremony was going on.

**IH-C:** Would you be in the same room?

**SLG:** No, I'd be outside waiting in the corridor. That was my first work going to Buckingham Palace and throughout my career, actually, I did a number of jobs that took me to Buckingham Palace and it was very interesting to see how we worked with the Royal palaces.

**IH-C:** What was Diana Makgill like to work with? What kind of person was she?

**SLG:** She was an amazing woman really. She was quite a formidable lady, she had a very direct style and was very clear about how things were done. She had a lot of information available and she really did help a lot of Ambassadors' wives who might come seeking advice on various matters concerning settling into London life. I think she was there for quite a number of years.

**IH-C:** And as part of your job you were escorting some people, weren't you?

**SLG:** There was one particular programme where I was escorting somebody and I was deemed to be the right person because I'd recently got married and so wasn't a single person and so was considered suitable. I was asked to escort Crown Prince Dipendra of Nepal on a tour round the establishments in the UK – in London, really. This was at the request of his father, the King of Nepal. He was then a rather tubby 15 year old schoolboy at Eton and my role was to put the programme together, which involved going to the Houses of Parliament, the Old Bailey and Buckingham Palace to show him how the UK great institutions were run. This was in 1986/7. I would pick him up from school in the morning and we would have very grand lunches at these places with pre-lunch drinks and then wine served with the meal. One of my jobs was to make sure that he didn't drink too much and to escort him back to school so that he didn't ask the driver to take him somewhere else afterwards. It was a fascinating week for me to be invited to these establishments.

**IH-C:** This went on for a whole week?

**SLG:** It was a whole week. It was five days. I have to say that his behaviour was very polite. He showed great interest in the programme. He then later, as we all know, went on to shoot his family and then himself which was quite shocking and surprising. I still have a very nice handwritten thank you letter from him about his week and this time. A very sad end to his story, really. A very interesting week for me, anyway.

### **Vice-Consul, Paris, 1990-93**

**IH-C:** And in the midst of this you also had your marriage to Mark, of course.

**SLG:** Yes, I was newly married. Towards the end of my time in Protocol Directorate I was offered a posting in Paris as Vice Consul which was my first choice. Mark was also applying for a job in Paris as Pol Mil First Secretary but my job as Vice Consul was finalised first. That was the first time I got a job before Mark. So I readily accepted the job.

**IH-C:** Would you have accepted it even if Mark hadn't got his job?

**SLG:** No, I wouldn't but I think it was very likely that he was going to get that job he wanted in Paris too. I accepted that job and when I was sitting with my Personnel Officer, I said: "Oh that's great. Paris – lovely. Pakistan was a difficult place. I was pleased to be going somewhere different. But I have to tell you that I'm three months pregnant." So, my arrival date was delayed by six months but I had to go back to work immediately after my maternity leave which then was only three months. That worked very well in that we both had jobs in the same place that we wanted.

**IH-C:** How did that work out from a family point of view in Paris. You had a nanny?

**SLG:** We did. We had a nanny who we took out with us from London and she would work Monday to Friday for the hours that we were working so that when I came home she would then be off. We negotiated in the contract that she would give us three nights babysitting a week so that enabled us to go out to official functions that we were required to do - in Mark's

role, not so much in mine. But my role wasn't at all nine to five really: there was quite a lot of evening work or weekend work because on the consular side it doesn't stop at 5 o'clock. Quite a lot of people get into difficulty outside of office hours and need consular assistance at different times. But it was a really interesting job because every day there would be something different. Someone would come in with a problem and often a good story, not good stories, of course, because they'd either been robbed or they had arrived at their hotel and had gone for a walk and couldn't remember where their hotel was - it was always surprising to me how often that happened. Or, for whatever reason, they'd run out of money and didn't have any credit card on them and so had absolutely nothing. In those days people didn't have mobile phones. We would ask if someone in the UK could transfer funds via Western Union, but more often than not, they had no one to call or help them. In those cases what we used to do was give them a metro ticket to the end of the line and then 21 francs for a ticket on for the Eurolines Bus home. We would give them that and they could at least get back to the UK and sort themselves out. If they reappeared after that we knew we had been scammed for the 21 francs! We had no way of providing government funds money to them so what we gave them wasn't government money, we called it a slush fund. It was money that was raised in the Consulate by auctioning off the lost property that was never claimed or through quiz nights etc.

**IH-C:** It was a form of charity?

**SLG:** Yes, it was a charity. It was the only way we could help them, but also get rid of them. If they couldn't come up with somebody in the UK that we could ring up, and help them then they were really on their own. Often family refused to bail them out as they were often getting into trouble. So this was the only help that was available to them. Often very young men would turn up with shaven heads wearing baseball caps who had escaped from the foreign legion. They would be given the metro ticket and bus ticket to get home.

**IH-C:** What was your French like at that point?

**SLG:** I had been doing some French language training when I was on maternity leave and I'd had a French 'O' Level before that. Most of my staff were French locally engaged. A very nice group of people, very sociable. I needed working French in my role as Vice Consul for a variety of roles, for example to be able to deliver writs around Paris. I was not keen on

this role as I'd have to go to an address in Paris and knock on the door and somebody would open the door and I would say: "Are you so and so?" and they'd say, yes and I'd say: "In that case I am serving you with this writ..." And I used to hand those over as soon as they said yes, otherwise they would slam the door in my face. I would occasionally have to attend court when somebody was having a hearing or there would be a prison visit. There was a more dedicated team for prison visits because there were quite a lot of Brits in prison then. There was a very sad, horrible murder of a young British language student when I was on weekend duty and I remember being hounded by journalists for the details. I remember feeling physically ill when talking to them out of fear that I would unknowingly relay some detail. So, some of the duties were very testing and not pleasant but you got stronger and as I said there was always something different.

**IH-C:** Obviously it was not easy for you both with a child under those circumstances. Would you say that there was understanding in the Embassy for you?

**SLG:** No, there was no understanding and no special measures at all. If anything, I felt I had to work harder. I had an older single male who was my immediate boss and he told me on arrival that he was not keen on my appointment because of my circumstances. I just kept my head down and got on with the job and as I said I had a great team. There was a very nice Ambassador while we were there – Ewen and Sarah Fergusson. Four weeks after our second child, our daughter, had been born they invited us for dinner at the Residence. Mark said to them: "Oh, we can't go because Sheila is still breastfeeding." "Oh well, just leave the baby upstairs. Bring the baby." The Residence is like a palace on many floors so this would not have worked.

**IH-C:** And after your daughter was born you had a period off then?

**SLG:** Yes, Lucy was born in Paris in 1991. Then I took some maternity leave followed by special unpaid leave because we had less than a year in Paris left of Mark's posting and were coming back to London. When I was on maternity leave there was an advertisement for someone to do the official flowers at the Residence. I thought this sounded a rather nice job. It was only a few hours a week so I applied for that. I had had no real experience of doing flowers at all before then but it seemed like a very nice thing to do. I had to go off to the big

flower market, buy the flowers, find out how many functions there were and put them together. Sarah Fergusson was very helpful and nice to work with.

**IH-C:** She wasn't too critical of your flower arranging skills!?

**SLG:** No, no. She was very good sometimes saying: "Perhaps you could do a bit more on this side" or something but no, I was left very much to my own devices and she had a very nice way about her. It was quite a pleasure to do this job, it was my time away from two small children.

### **MPs' Letters Section, 1993-96**

**IH-C:** So, at the end of your flower arranging, you and Mark went back to London?

**SLG:** Yes, we were posted back to London and now we had two small children. I was returning to work but I had a few months to sort out the house. We moved house as well during that time before I went back to work so there was lots to do. It was quite clear that I couldn't work full time because we couldn't afford full time child care so I took on what's called a job share then. It was my responsibility to find a job share partner. It wouldn't necessarily be someone I knew but by exploring through Personnel about who might be interested and at my grade. Then it was up to us to find the job. It was really very difficult to find jobs as managers were not convinced of the benefits. In fact most managers would find reasons why jobs could not be a job share.

**IH-C:** So in that sense, the task of it fell to you rather than to the Office to look out for?

**SLG:** Yes. There was no internet then. Today it would be rather easier now to do that sort of thing. Personnel might say: "Oh well, so and so might be looking." Obviously, they would have to be the same grade as well and then you'd have to negotiate between you as to how you were going to split it and the time. Invariably, the only jobs that could go to job sharers were the jobs that nobody else wanted to fill. So, it became a resource valued in filling jobs that were unpopular. I shared with a very nice person who was in the same situation as myself and we agreed to do two and a half days and had a bit of a changeover in the middle. We took on a job in a place called MPs' Letters Section. There were about 12

people sitting in this room and you would be responding to MPs' inquiries on all subjects. You would take the letter and see: "Oh, they're talking about something in France." You'd have to find the information and then draft the letter in conjunction with the department in London. It would take a bit of time because you'd have to go back and forth with these drafts. There were a lot of MPs' letters on immigration matters from their constituents. Often there was a chain of letters, it wasn't just one letter and there was a deadline when you needed to answer these letters by. It was all a bit like a typing pool except that you were drafting the letter not someone else.

**IHC:** Were you at that stage passing them electronically to others?

**SLG:** No, the drafts were all on blue paper attached by papers clips to background papers and would often get lost.

**IHC:** So these letters were being delivered to places and brought back again – these drafts?

**SLG:** Yes, they'd be delivered and then come back again and you were waiting for the information so it took a while but there was always a deadline by when they had to be answered. There was a man who ran this section who was very difficult to work for because he clearly didn't like the idea of a job share. What people realise now, of course is that you are getting two people, two brains for the price of one. There is always cover as we are never sick at the same time, in fact as a job share I always made sure I was sick when I was not working! All dentist, doctors' appointments are taken when you are off so in fact you get better attendance. But we weren't being treated equally at all. He made it difficult for both of us and I think I stuck it out for about 18 months there before I moved on from that section. It was the worst job I've ever had.

**IHC:** Presumably as part of that, you didn't feel you could complain to anybody?

**SLG:** No, because we felt or were made to feel that we were lucky to have a job share and it was quite difficult to find a suitable job share so we worked hard to make this work. And it was only half a week which allowed me to be at home and doing everything else that I needed to run a home. And the pay didn't really cover going to work and paying for the child care I had, which was then an au pair. But it kept me in the Office and because I lived in

central London I could still get in to work and get home relatively easily. Despite the job I considered myself lucky in a way. Anyway, we both stuck it out this job share for as long as we could and I knew that we had a posting on the horizon which was to South Africa, to Pretoria.

### **Consul, Pretoria, 1996-98**

Mark was being posted as Deputy Head of Mission to Maeve Fort who was one of the very few female ambassadors, the Head of Post at that time. She was single – all the female ambassadors that I know of at that time were single, I think. She was a beautiful, elegant lady who became a great friend over the years and she sadly died very young in her 60s. She was a great ambassador to have at post. She was mainly based in Cape Town and we were based in Pretoria. That was the way the South African Government worked then with Parliament moving between the two cities. When we went out I didn't have a job at that point. Years earlier Personnel had already asked whose job was going to take precedence. Being a lower grade and with two young children it was quite clear that Mark's job was going to take precedence over mine. But, I knew that I wanted to continue to work for the Office, I felt that it was my responsibility to slot in and look for opportunities as they came up and one opportunity that came up was as cover for the Consul in Pretoria role. This came up after we'd been there about eight months, so the children were settled in their schools by then.

**IH-C:** You were on special unpaid leave at that stage?

**SLG:** I was on special unpaid leave. Then, in the Office, you were allowed a period of ten years for special unpaid leave. I didn't actually use the full ten years. Because some people would go on special unpaid leave and it would turn into fifteen years and twenty years and the Office still had a responsibility to them if they were still on their books. So there was a sort of cut off point. So – I was dipping in and out of my special unpaid leave and the position of Consul in Pretoria came up because there was a gap again as the previous incumbent had to leave for medical reasons. This period of cover was after a recent move from premises in Johannesburg to a new site in Pretoria. This was because it was so dangerous in Johannesburg for not just the staff coming to work but for the applicants coming in for services. It was too dangerous for them as well. By this stage our children were old

enough to be in the start of the South African local school system. They were at school every day. We had initially intended to put them into the French lycée in Johannesburg because they had both been in a maternelle in Paris and then at the lycée in South Kensington which was a very affordable form of education because it is the French state system. So, we enrolled them at the lycée school in Johannesburg but as it turned out, the minibus which was to take the children from Pretoria to Johannesburg, a journey taking about 30 or 40 minutes, was hijacked three times in one month, with the children left at the side of the motorway that runs between the two cities. So, we went for the Afrikaans school option.

**IH-C:** So they were having to learn Afrikaans?

**SLG:** It was Afrikaans and English and Sotho, but they were very young and adaptable and it was a very happy time.

With them both at school I was able to take on the consular role. Again, it was an interesting job because for the Brits there were a lot of casualties with gun crime, murders or muggings. I remember visiting men (it was always men, not women) in prison for drug related offences and these were horrendous, very violent prisons. I was escorted by a guard. I remember thinking this feels a bit dangerous but it was interesting to see the conditions, which were pretty bad, really.

It was a huge Consular team. Pretoria was the passport hub for Africa at the time back when there used to be hubs for passport applications. There would be applications coming from all over Africa but my consular district for assistance to distressed British nationals was just the northern part of South Africa because there was also a consulate in Cape Town.

**IH-C:** And your boss would be the Consul General in Johannesburg?

**SLG:** The relevant Consul General was in Cape Town, not in Pretoria so miles away and I never saw him. The crime situation in Pretoria was bad but not as bad as Johannesburg. The office move was to an industrial estate on the outskirts of Pretoria; not a great site but it meant that you were closer to the Embassy and could come into the Embassy for the weekly meeting. We were there in South Africa for only two and a half years because we then came back early on promotion for Mark on a posting to London. We were unusual in that we had

an overseas posting and then always coming back to London instead of going on two consecutive overseas ones.

I should say something about the responsibilities of a spouse of a Deputy Head of Mission in a post where the Ambassador was mainly not on site but down in Cape Town. There was a lot that was expected of me. We had a nice house and we had a cook and a housekeeper. Despite having the staff, who were very good at doing their jobs, they couldn't go and do the shopping for all the dinners. We had to do an awful lot of entertaining for visitors from London. South Africa was a very popular place to visit especially and we had a continuous stream of guests that needed entertaining.

**IH-C:** Why couldn't the staff do the shopping?

**SLG:** The staff didn't have the transport to get to the shops. It was a kind of historical legacy I think from apartheid days that the house staff were not given money to go to the supermarket. It was always the spouse who did the big shop. Pretoria was a very Afrikaans city and to me there was still a very visible divide between the races and many restrictions. I would rush off to buy great quantities of food once a week that the cook would need.

**IH-C:** Would the cook go with you?

**SLG:** No, you never saw the house staff in the supermarket which seemed odd to me.

**IH-C:** And you were loading up the car on your own?

**SLG:** Yes. This was all while I was working and had a young family and time was quite precious. There was one incident when I was in a 'Pick n Pay', a sort of South African Sainsburys equivalent, and there was a commotion at the till where there had been a hold up at the cashier. The cashier was shot in the hand and the thieves took the money from the till. I had my trolley full of food for a dinner the next day and I thought: "I'm not leaving this trolley because I'll have to come back and do it all again and I don't have time!" I decided to wait at the back of the supermarket until all the commotion had died down and then I went to the till and paid for my groceries, put them in the car and later was thinking: perhaps that wasn't a normal reaction!

**IH-C:** I'm sure Mark couldn't have been very happy when he heard about that!?

**SLG:** There was a lot of random gun violence like that, actually. The area we lived in was considered pretty safe, but there would be gun shots at the local bakery. Mark was robbed once on the golf course in Durban and he was playing with the chief of police at the time!

**IH-C:** At the same time Mandela had been released?

**SLG:** Mandela was President by then so it was a time of great hope and possibility. High level visitors wanted to come and see the new South Africa. One of these was Prince Charles, along with a very young Prince Harry, who came with a school friend. This was soon after his mother's tragic death and I remember it was during a half term. There was a Spice Girls concert in Johannesburg – a visit to this concert was part of the official programme with Prince Charles and Prince Harry and it was a sort of surreal cultural experience to see this. The Spice Girls were very popular - a sort of soft power at that time. A meeting was set up with the Spice Girls, President Mandela and Prince Charles. There's a lovely happy photo of Prince Charles and Mandela and the Spice Girls with their arms around each other.

**IH-C:** And other visitors as well?

**SLG:** We had many other visitors, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester came on a St John's Ambulance representation. Lots of MPs and Select Committees. South Africa's quite a nice place to come to especially in the English winter. There's always a lot of issues going on. The visitors would often come to Pretoria and then go down to Cape Town where Maeve Fort, the Ambassador was mainly based.

We also had a house in Cape Town because Mark was required to be in Cape Town a certain amount of the time. Because the children were at school in Pretoria and I was working in Pretoria, we as a family were based in Pretoria. But I would go down at Christmas for family holidays or for official visitors as required

**IH-C:** So there'd be occasions when Mark would be needed in Cape Town and you would be having to stay in Pretoria. Not easy, either.

**SLG:** No, but our house was well protected. There were lots of grids up around the house. There was a panic button in most rooms and what was called a rape gate across the top of the stairs.

**IH-C:** I was thinking of just in terms of family life. If he was having to spend spells in Cape Town.

**SLG:** He would not be there for extended spells, usually just a week at most. It wasn't easy but that was how it was.

After my temporary cover slot as Consul ended, I took a voluntary part time job with the Citizens Advice Bureau in downtown Pretoria. I did this for about 18 months. It was set up exactly the same as Citizens Advice Bureaux in this country which gives advice to people who don't have access to legal help. The office was run mainly by Afrikaans ladies who were doing great work solving all manner of issues and legal disputes. The main area that I was dealing with was old retired miners; these old miners were coming in who had worked in various mines but, because of a lack of a paper trail or incorrect papers, hadn't been able to get their pensions. It was a matter of trying to put all the pieces together, finding when they worked in a certain mine and the dates and securing some pension for them, by calling the personnel office at the mines and saying that I was X's legal representative etc and demand that they look into his case. It was actually a very rewarding job to do for a time.

**IH-C:** Was there a language problem with that, or not?

**SLG:** There was at times because they only spoke Afrikaans and that wasn't going to work. But in the office we had Afrikaans speakers as well as English speakers and a lot of the tracing you could do in English. English was spoken in the HR departments. Cases often took a long time to follow up and solve but our success rates were high. As I said it was very rewarding.

**IH-C:** This was unpaid work, of course?

**SLG:** Yes, unpaid work.

**IH-C:** But very satisfying.

**SLG:** Yes. But when I went back to London and said that I had been working for the Citizen's Advice office in Pretoria for 18 months, I was told that it didn't count as experience as it could not be appraised. This was galling because I had actually had more responsibility in that job than in lots of other jobs, but it didn't count.

**Equal Opportunities Officer, Personnel Policy Dept, FCO, 1998-2001**

**IH-C:** You go back to London with Mark. Mark's on promotion at that point? What happens as far as your work is concerned?

**SLG:** Yes, Mark goes back on promotion. I take on a role in Personnel Policy which was a good department to work in because this is 1998 and we're starting to look at more flexible working patterns and how to retain staff as well as improve our female representation. I was appointed Equal Opportunities Officer. There were two of us in these new roles and our responsibilities were divided.

**IH-C:** You say new roles. These were newly established jobs?

**SLG:** Yes, because equal opportunities officers as roles came in about that time. Now we don't have equal opportunities officers as such but there was a need for this role to represent under-represented groups then. My role was for gender and same sex partners; the other was for disability and ethnic diversity.

**IH-C:** What form did the work take?

**SLG:** People would come to you with information about discrimination that they had faced or how they had been treated unfairly. LGBT staff would come to see me because they wanted to take their partner to post and they were being blocked from that job – not by the rules of the country but by the person who they would be working for. You could see how

this discrimination really affected people's lives. LGBT staff were very eloquent in explaining their issues and the problems they faced and some were still very worried about being open. I was really shocked as I had had no idea as I had never come across any problems like that myself.

**IH-C:** You had to put yourself into the minds of those people in a sense to appreciate what they were going through?

**SLG:** Yes. Not to be able to go to your post with your partner must have been very hard. There was still a lot of discrimination in the Office at this time and people would still say things that were unacceptable. Even the FCO Board only had a Gender Champion for LGBT later, after equal opportunities officers. There was FLAGG (Foreign Office Lesbian & Gays Association) which had regular well attended meetings to form the policy and make change. One big area of change was for same sex partners to have access to the same allowances as married officers. I am pleased to say that the Foreign Office was really ahead of the pack looking at these issues compared to other government departments. It meant that partners could accompany the staff member and get a similar allowance to the married couples allowance. This was a huge step forward for people meaning that they could stay together in relationships and follow their career. The issue was so clear and LGBT staff were so eloquent in their argument that it was relatively easy to get across. Working in this role really opened my eyes up to discrimination.

**IH-C:** To work effectively, your boss in that section would need to be really on the ball as well. Was there good leadership?

**SLG:** Yes, my line manager was an expert on employment law and was recruited from outside of the FCO. The gender side of my role was interesting too. There was discrimination against women and their mobility in the Office. Some of the ways that women were treated was very poor and the fact that there was an equal opportunities officer role meant that there was somewhere for women to go to voice their concerns. It was very interesting hearing from people and trying to find a solution and a way through. On gender, it was also about looking outside of the Office and seeing where there were women in senior roles and how they had got there, and how their organisations had supported them. I organised one event, for example, where we invited women in senior roles across Whitehall

and the private sector to an event to openly discuss the issues faced. There were round table discussions to talk about barriers faced etc and at each table was a member of the FCO Board, who were all male at the time. This was in the early 2000s and some of the Board were in support. It was a start and it was clear that something had to be done to support gender more in the Office. It was an interesting experience to see how much was done outside the Office and what practices could be applied in the FCO. Of course, now there are a lot of female heads of mission and there are a lot of great female role models. It was about looking at role models, really, where were the role models and how to encourage women to stay in the Office.

The other interesting thing was that, up until 1975, as a female officer you had to resign if you married. When I joined, a lot of my female contemporaries left when they got married and had children. Some married other officers in the Diplomatic Service and some outside. They had had to resign because their SUPL had come to an end. One of my roles was looking at retention and reaching out to these people who had been trained and see if they wished to come back to the office. That was quite successful in some cases.

**IH-C:** Because that's a tremendous potential resource that's being wasted otherwise.

**SLG:** There were huge numbers of staff on extended SUPL and Personnel realised that there were quite a large number of people still on the books so to speak who had no desire to come back; and some not realising that they could come back. These were just some of the different initiatives we pursued to try to see how to achieve a better gender balance in the Office.

**IH-C:** Do you think in overall terms – because you were obviously looking at what was happening elsewhere in the Civil Service and in the private sector – where did the FCO tend to sit in terms of progress being made?

**SLG:** Well, the FCO had other specific issues because we had this mobile career which makes it very difficult for those with partners to stop and start. We had extra challenges compared to other government departments around Whitehall. It was difficult to compare like with like. Certainly, the numbers were not good and the statistics for senior women were poor. Certainly, when I joined the Office there were very few visible senior women in the

Office at all. It takes time for change and the statistics were not going to change overnight but now you only have to look around to see that gender balance has been achieved.

**IH-C:** So this was something of a groundbreaking job that you had that must have given you a lot of satisfaction.

**SLG:** There was a lot of satisfaction but frustration too at the time. As I said progress was going to be slow and was not popular with everyone. Also, some senior staff at the time were ticking the box but not really buying in. They were quite slow steps because although you can easily recruit more women graduates, it's going to take 20 years before you see any change at senior levels. Then, with the best will in the world, some might have left for reasons of marriage or other reasons and it's proven that there is a higher percentage of women leaving on those grounds than men. It was quite a slog, really, to get results. But now 20 years later, that's all completely changed.

While I was in this job in Personnel Policy my children were then attending boarding school and I drew up a plan for 'term time working'. This was a new format and would allow me to continue working but also be there for my children during the holidays. I worked 100% of the time during term but not at all during the school holidays. This was all carefully calculated in relation to how many school weeks and holidays there were and it was worked out that I would get 60% of my pay the whole time, even if I was on holiday. I would get 60% because I would have worked 100% during school term. I mention this because, as I've now got my pension, the hardest part for the pension team to work out was how to understand this two year slot of term time working. I had to go back and forth to explain how it worked. I'm glad to say that it finally got sorted out in the end. Of course, it's much easier to explain a job share or part time than 'term time'. Interesting that this new format caused me problems twenty years later!

**IH-C:** But you got there in the end!

**SLG:** Yes, you always get there in the end!

**IH-C:** You have got a pension now, haven't you?!

### **Visits Officer, Protocol Directorate, FCO, 2001-03**

**SLG:** I certainly do! Then a position came up back in Protocol – my second time in that department – as a Visits Officer. This involved planning programmes for Guest of Government Visits by Presidents, Prime Ministers etc and then accompanying them throughout their visit. The Head of Visit Planning would assign you a visit that was coming up. You usually had about eight weeks – sometimes less - to meet with the embassy in London and the desk officer and agree on what the essential components of the programme would be. Depending on how senior they were, they would have a meeting at the Palace, they were always hopeful that they would get a meeting at Number Ten and these were always the hardest appointments to secure. Depending on the specific issues or their importance they would go to speak somewhere at a university or at the House of Lords or something like that. There was a basic guideline and around that you would fit in what other elements came up in meetings with the embassy and the desk officer. You'd be in charge from when the plane touched down and for the police escorts, the car and the hotel and accompany them throughout. I did a number of these. They were all different and there were lots of last minute changes and different issues that would come up.

**IH-C:** I always think of visits like that, whether they're State Visits or Guest of Government Visits with somebody like yourself being like a duck in a stream – looking serene but paddling away furiously underneath because of things that could derail it and need to be put right quickly.

**SLG:** When something went wrong, that was usually what made the job interesting, because if it had all gone to plan, it wouldn't really be very interesting! One morning we woke up and the inner courtyard of the Foreign Office was unexpectedly completely covered with snow. There was meant to be a guard of honour for a senior Chinese visitor and Gordon Brown was going to come out of Number Ten and walk through the arch at a specific time to greet the visitor and review the guard of honour. No one had been able to clear the snow; the Guard of Honour did the best they could when they arrived, but it all looked very shambolic. This was relayed by the Chinese back to the principal who wouldn't leave the hotel until Gordon Brown had come out and was standing in place. The head of the Foreign Office at the time was standing there, but he didn't know that the Chinese visitor hadn't left and was talking to the PM. He didn't want to tell the PM to go back inside No.10 again because of

the delay as the press were stationed in place. I explained to the PM the delay with the visitor and the snow etc and asked him to wait inside the FCO. He was not happy about waiting but given the truth he couldn't really do anything else. There were difficult things that would come up that you wouldn't dream of! It always kept you on your toes and I enjoyed it. It got me out of the office and often all over the UK.

### **Special Unpaid Leave , Pakistan, 2003-06**

**IH-C:** You then went back to Pakistan?

**SLG:** Yes, we went back to Pakistan in 2003 when Mark was posted as High Commissioner. We were happy to go back but we hadn't really expected to go back. We went back because of the heightened security post-9/11 and the role as High Commissioner had changed somewhat in reaction to the enhanced terrorist threat. I found myself in the position of accompanying Mark and having no job. There was no job coming up for me at post and our two children were now at boarding school. It was a strange position for me to be in but I did look to see what job opportunities were available. One opportunity was temporary cover for Head of Media.

**IH-C:** Temporary cover?

**SLG:** I can't really remember exactly what happened. I think the person who was doing the job was evacuated sick and there was a gap of four to six months before somebody else could get out to Pakistan. This was shortly after we arrived so I thought: "Well, that's an opportunity" and obviously I was there. It was quite a steep learning curve but very interesting and a very good section to be working in to quickly understand the country with very good colleagues and obviously it helped me to get to grips with understanding more about the changes in the country through that job. But I would say that expectations of staff, particularly locally engaged staff was that "The High Commissioner's wife didn't work". I was quite surprised that in 2003, only 20 years ago, that things hadn't changed more, but there was an underlying attitude of: "Well, why is she working? She doesn't need to work."

**IH-C:** And you could even argue that your husband got you a nice job. Thank you very much! Which perhaps, even on a temporary basis, could be seen as a favour to you?

**SLG:** Well yes, possibly. I don't remember that coming across, however. But it wasn't easy, I would say. It was temporary and I knew it was temporary and I knew why I'd got it. I was the right person there at the time and it was the right grade.

**IH-C:** Did you enjoy it?

**SLG:** Yes, I did enjoy it. There was a nice team there and they were very happy with me working there. They were all locally engaged. I think it was just that expectations were very different then and of course recently, you had a High Commissioner in Islamabad whose wife was of ambassadorial rank herself. So, it's all completely changed around.

Anyway, I was always looking for employment of some sort and there I was – unemployed on Special Unpaid Leave. So I quickly found a job with an NGO which was called the White Ribbon Campaign.

**IH-C:** How did that come about?

**SLG:** I think talking to somebody and they said: "Maybe you'd be interested?" It was a Pakistani-run organisation; I was the only foreigner in this NGO. It was based in Lahore. I was interested in supporting the cause.

**IH-C:** What was the cause?

**SLG:** It was breast cancer in Pakistan. I should mention that this was a particularly difficult personal time for me because my mother was dying of breast cancer in the UK and so I was going back and forth quite a bit so that I could spend time with her during treatments, so this cause was obviously close to my heart. Pakistan has one of the highest rates of breast cancer among women, especially young women, and it's considered a shameful disease. Things may have moved on in the last 20 years, but women didn't feel that they could talk about it and it was considered shameful to have it in your family. This NGO was about raising awareness and, as a foreigner, I had no embarrassment or shame in talking about it. There were a lot of subtle, complex problems. There's no nice word for 'breast' in the Urdu language which didn't help. I was helping to set up the campaign and then launch the NGO

in Lahore. Cherie Blair – Tony Blair was Prime Minister then – agreed to come out and support it because she is closely associated with breast cancer through her own family. This was just after we had had the terrible earthquake in 2005, so she was also going to visit some of the earthquake areas.

It was a great support that she came out because she was obviously able to raise it to a high level and great publicity. This was purely a private visit that I was organising as it wasn't actually through the High Commission although obviously there was a lot of support from the High Commission on the security side. When she arrived, she arrived with a BBC World Service crew of three, which was headed up by a very young Fiona Bruce and Ginny Dougary who was writing a special supplement for *The Sunday Times*. Nobody had told us this. This was quite interesting suddenly dealing with Cherie Blair plus a BBC crew and Ginny Dougary. They were all great fun in lots of ways.

**IH-C:** Did there have to be some sort of last minute adjustments as a result?

**SLG:** Well – it was great for the campaign because it was good publicity but they didn't all stay with us. We couldn't put all them up, Ginny and the BBC crew went to a hotel and Cherie Blair and her Private Secretary stayed with us. It was half term so the children were visiting and so we were short of two bedrooms.

**IH-C:** It was extraordinary that you didn't know in advance that they were coming! A bit of a break down in communications?

**SLG:** We were just not informed. Nobody in the Mission knew. But it worked to the charity's advantage, obviously, because there was better publicity. She was able to travel up to the earthquake area and see for herself the devastation. Her visit was a great boost for the charity but it was an awful, awful lot of work.

**IH-C:** It was also launched on local television, wasn't it?

**SLG:** That was more the Breast cancer awareness campaign. Imran Khan who was then not a politician but a cricketer – his mother had died of breast cancer and he'd set up a cancer hospital in Lahore. So, he also felt a family obligation to be involved. He came with me on a

series of advertisements on the Pakistan TV channel– I would say my piece in English and he would say his piece in Urdu. To have high profile people involved was a great achievement, really and this advert reached a very wide audience.

**IH-C:** How did you find him?

**SLG:** I found him charming.

**IH-C:** And obviously committed to the cancer risk cause.

**SLG:** Yes, he wasn't involved in politics at that stage.

**IH-C:** But it was a very different Pakistan that you returned to, obviously, if only from the security point of view. How did that impact on your daily life either in the High Commission or outside it?

**SLG:** It had changed hugely. It was like another posting, really because we were living in the Residence and we both had personal bodyguards, we had an armoured vehicle to travel everywhere. There were a lot of restrictions on where we could go. I found that I could actually travel more widely than Mark because when I wasn't travelling with him I was able to go off with friends to the hill areas because I would be more inconspicuous. So I was actually able to get out and about more than Mark was.

There were huge personal constraints about going back to Pakistan. When we were posted there the children were not allowed to visit. They were at boarding school and they were suddenly not allowed to come out and visit because of the security alerts. We were constantly assessing the levels of security because actually things had calmed down to a certain extent. It was a 'no child' post when we arrived and the office wanted to widen the employment pool and open up the Embassy to staff with young children. In order to do that, we needed to see if it was possible to set up a small school where they could safely go. That was one area of work I took on which was a feasibility study looking at how this might work, how it might pay for itself, with other children from the international community coming in as well. It was very popular with the international community to have a small kindergarten in the diplomatic enclave. And also it meant that we could widen our search for employing a

wider range of staff in the Embassy. It was a huge, huge embassy by then with hundreds and hundreds of staff and it got bigger and bigger.

This study was carried out and the school was actually built. The classrooms were on one level with provision for a second level if demand grew. It was built, it was opened and it was successful. We left post and then there was a terrible bomb in a hotel in Islamabad and staff were evacuated and the school was closed down again. I went back about five years ago because I was working on another project through London and they'd actually turned the school into temporary staff accommodation for visitors so the classrooms were now bedroom suites.

**IH-C:** What a shame.

**SLG:** Yes, it was a shame.

**IH-C:** As a matter of interest, when the security was particularly bad and at a stage where children were not allowed to come out – it was a single post in that sense – what was the compensation for people? Did they get extra leave back to the UK in compensation?

**SLG:** I can't remember whether there was extra leave for us. Mark certainly didn't get extra leave to go back, but he was back and forth to the UK officially anyway. I did come back to the UK more because of my mother and paid for my flights. We were able to agree initially that children could visit for school holidays, so it wasn't really a huge problem for us family wise.

**IH-C:** And in addition to Cherie Blair, you had a number of other high level visitors?

**SLG:** There was a continual stream of high level visitors. It was probably one of the most visited posts because of the security issues. We were due to leave post in 2006, but we extended for a couple of months because Their Royal Highnesses Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall came on a five day visit. It covered all three faiths. That was a fascinating visit and we had a wonderful time. We went down to Lahore to the mosques, to Rawalpindi for the Christian faith, then flew up the Indus valley – we took a helicopter up to it – to an Ismaili village high up in the mountains with the Aga Khan who also came out for

that part of the visit, celebrating the Ismaili faith. It was Pakistan at its best, really, and they had a fantastic time and, fortunately there were no major security incidents, though a security scare prevented us going to Peshawar at the last moment. That was quite a trip.

**IH-C:** It sounds great! Obviously, you and Mark had stayed on site to accommodate that, and then back to London?

**Head of Visits Section, Protocol Directorate, FCO, 2007-09**

**SLG:** Then we were posted back to London. We were in London for five years. I was then promoted to Head of Visits Section in Protocol Directorate. This was my third job in Protocol Directorate and this job was for five years. The visit that stands out is President Obama's first visit to the UK. I ran that visit, and accompanied him throughout.

**IH-C:** That must have been tough because the Americans come in with this huge team, don't they, when the President is visiting abroad. So, it must have been an awful lot to sort out for a visit like that.

**SLG:** The Americans come in with, as you say, a huge team, which was also a very new team. So, they didn't really know what they were doing and their requests far exceeded what was possible. I was leading on this visit with only two staff supporting me, so only three staff on this visit. The Americans couldn't understand how there weren't more staff assigned. There were so many requests that I found that the only way I could deal with it was to say: "Yes, what a good idea. I'll see what I can do" and move on. Of course, the plane landed and everything went well. No one then said: "Oh, where was the brass band we wanted?" Anyway, that was my way of dealing with the enormous number of requests, to simply say: "What a good idea."

**IH-C:** This was your third time in Protocol Department and you had this good long spell there. Had its function changed very much over time? Either when you were there now or from previous times? Was it focused in a different way or anything like that?

**SLG:** That's a very good question because in a lot of ways, protocol and a lot of the ceremonial relationship between the Foreign Office and Buckingham Palace hadn't changed

at all. The nature of some of the visits followed a set structure depending on the VIP's status or how long they had been in power. There was a set format: visit the Queen, hopefully have an appointment with the Prime Minister – that didn't always happen but they'd be angling for that. The format is very much the same but visits – had they changed? Not an awful lot, not really.

**IH-C:** These were still people going about their duties pretty much as they had done previously?

**SLG:** There's a pretty set formula and I wouldn't say there were a huge amount of changes. No.

**IH-C:** Presumably the differences, in a sense, would be the way communications had improved with people being able to stay in touch with emails and voicemail and all the rest of it and you could communicate during a visit with others rather more easily than you did before. I was thinking of a State Visit I was involved in with the Queen overseas where we had large, bulky phones we could try phoning each other on. It wasn't always very easy to stay in touch with other members of the team.

**SLG:** Yes, I'm trying to remember the year emails became a really, really common format. We certainly had mobile phones but we didn't necessarily have access to our emails on our phones. That's a lot, lot later. It's true that when you are on a visit a mobile phone is important because you can ring ahead and check in. Yes, communications have changed and improved. You didn't have to print everything so early, you could delay so that the programme could be printed nearer the time which was better. But, it also meant that there were more possibilities for making lots of changes.

### **New York, 2009-15**

**IH-C:** So you had five years of that and then you were abroad again?

**SLG:** Yes, Mark was posted to New York as the Ambassador and Perm. Rep. With that appointment, we were expecting a stay of something like four or five years and that's what happened. I applied to do a UK-based job remotely in New York in the international

organisations area but that didn't materialise, so I ended up taking a locally engaged job in the Mission which was appointed by the Multilateral and Policy Department in London. I was working for London in the UK Mission and it was part-time. It was only a half job which suited me perfectly because there were lots of other exciting things to do in New York. I was looking out for other opportunities but remote working wasn't – this was 2005 – as common as it later became. I was looking in particular at securing better UK representation in the UN system.

**IH-C:** How familiar were you with New York as a place?

**SLG:** . I'd never been to New York before this posting and I didn't really know how the UN worked, so it was a completely new area. I knew nothing about international organisations at the UN, so it was starting from zero. The role I took was looking at British representation in the UN and how we could have more influence, how many roles we have and which roles we can target and how we can get people placed in that area. I was part of the London team. So, I would come back to London once or twice a year for meetings but I was locally engaged, so this period of employment didn't count for my full time working and pension.

**IH-C:** What work were you doing to focus on this particular issue? Did it involve talking to masses of people and getting opinions or – what was the way of working?

**SLG:** It involved talking to people, finding out what might work and influence – how we might acquire more senior representation. One successful area was having a pipeline funded by the UK which looked at targeting how we could attract senior women – this wasn't just British women but all women – into certain areas which were under-represented like the peacekeeping side or conflicts. It was funding a project that was for the greater good of all. But obviously we were extending our influence by funding it and leading on the meetings around the table in the UN at my working level. This was a two-year pipeline. The jobs would be advertised. There would be a new team set up in the UN who would be targeting certain jobs. It would be about how to attract under-represented groups into these roles. It was interesting. I ended up coming back to international appointments later when I went back to London and I found it an interesting area.

**IH-C:** And in addition to that, you were involved in other things in New York as well?

**SLG:** Yes, in a non-Foreign Office role I was appointed to the board of the American Associates of the National Theatre which was promoting British culture and also influencing Americans to donate large sums of money.

**IH-C:** Donate large sums of money for what?

**SLG:** To the National Theatre in London and it's surprising and very rewarding to see how Americans were happy to support this theatre, which is some of the best theatre in the world, undoubtedly and they recognised that by donating huge sums of money. There was a fundraising function, for example *War Horse* came to New York which was a great success; I think it's only just stopped running now. It was a pleasure and a privilege to be appointed to that because it was a whole new area for me being involved in and promoting something outside the Office. I love the National Theatre and I'm still very much involved with the National Theatre now.

**IH-C:** Were you talent spotted for this, or what? How did you come to this role in the first place?

**SLG:** Again, that was through talking to somebody I met and then I was able to use my position which helped – I can't really remember how it came about. I was also on the Board of the Foreign Policy Association which was an all-female board which set up monthly lectures in New York with speakers on a variety of international foreign policy areas. There were huge audiences and the membership was huge. There'd be about 400-plus women in the audience and it was over a lunchtime and it was fascinating for to me work with an all-American female board.

**IH-C:** Did it operate in a different way from committees you'd been on before in the UK? Would the Americans approach things in a rather different way?

**SLG:** It's difficult to answer because I'd never been on an all-female committee before. And actually an all-female committee is very different to a mixed committee. The all-female committee was very much about getting everybody involved to make sure everyone was on board. So, it was much more inclusive but meant that it could take more time to reach a

decision. So, I can't really say if an American board operated differently to a British board. There was a Swiss lady on the board and me and all the rest were American. There was a limit to how long you could sit on this board. I just did the five years I was in New York.

**IH-C:** You were looking to bring in speakers ...

**SLG:** Yes, I was looking to bring in speakers and David Miliband was one that came and I remember him saying: "Oh gosh, it's so rare that I get to speak to an all-female huge gathering like this." You could invite male guests to attend but it was generally a female audience. There were always lots of questions, there was never any shortage of questions. It was a very active, vocal group.

**IH-C:** You obviously had a very fulfilling time in New York. You must have been very sad to leave.

**SLG:** Very sad to leave. In fact, we stayed five and a half years. We had the Queen come out and visit. She came to the UN fifty years after her first visit.

**IH-C:** Were you involved in the organisation of that?

**SLG:** I wasn't involved in the organisation except in my role as the wife of the Ambassador. The recce visit came out and the Queen was going to move from one floor to the other and the Duke of Edinburgh was accompanying as well. A lot of their waiting staff were quite elderly so I was asked "Would I mind, although the wife of the Ambassador, to use the stairs and make room in the lift?" And I said: "I don't mind at all." And I'd be running up and down the stairs and not using the lift but I was more than happy doing that. It was all a bit of a crush and I did lose them at one point.

**IH-C:** I hope, Sheila, that your curtsy when you met the Queen was absolutely flawless given that you had coached other people!

**SLG:** Absolutely!!

**IH-C:** So, you then went back to London?

## **Project Task Force, FCO, 2015-18**

**SLG:** We came back to London and I took on a full time role working in the newly formed Project Task Force which is a department made up of a few core people in London but then remote staff all over the world. I was part of the core team that went into the office in London. Although it was a remote working team, I was part of the London-based office desk. So, I would be sitting behind a desk and my colleagues would be all over the world in different time zones. We would be assigned different projects to work on. Some of these projects would be in London departments, some of them would be overseas. You would take on a project, finish it, and then get assigned to another one. There was some choice in it because you could see what projects might be coming up. But it was a bit of a lottery which project you got . I did a number of very interesting projects during my time there.

**IH-C:** Such as?

**SLG:** One was the stakeholder review of the 2016 Rio Olympics in preparation for Tokyo 2020. It was requested by the post, not by the ambassador, by the deputy ambassador, to go out and look at the value of the input of British Government involvement, like for example the British House, where we had invested time and money, and what the objectives were and whether they had worked.

**IH-C:** British House?

**SLG:** There's always a British House in every capital when there's an Olympics, which is used to promote the UK. Other countries did the same. You would have a French House, in Rio, for example. You wanted your House to be the House everybody came to visit. You would be working with stakeholders like the Olympic Association who have very different objectives to those of the British Government's objectives around the Olympics. They were a very successful Olympics, you may remember. We had a huge medal tally so from that point of view it was very successful. So why have an evaluation of this? I went out on a two week visit to Rio and Brasilia with another colleague and we set up a series of interviews with staff. What worked well and how did this decision come about, how was this decided and were the core objectives around this achieved. It was really putting together a report for the

Post to take forward to Tokyo 2020. Of course, as it happened, Tokyo 2020 didn't happen until 2021.

**IH-C:** A victim of Covid.

**SLG:** Yes. Really, you're going in as a sort of consultant. I didn't know Rio and I didn't know anything about the British House before. So, you really are going in and evaluating what you find by talking to people and then you write the review with your findings. It's a really interesting, rewarding position to be in where you can go in and put together a paper and offer recommendations.

**IH-C:** And hopefully have a positive influence in the future as a result of the recommendations or rather the findings you make in your report.

**SLG:** Or better aligned British objectives, given the amount of financial resources that are put into it.

**IH-C:** And other projects?

**SLG:** I volunteered for one project which was delivering the communications strategy campaign to celebrate Pakistan's 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence. That involved going back to Post, that was 2017, some 10 years after I'd left to look at the activities in the media section – again the job I had done previously and see how that was aligned to what was being done in London. Bearing in mind that this was Pakistan's 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary and it was also for them to be involved here. It involved the High Commission here in London and also visiting Birmingham, which has a huge Pakistani diaspora, and to link in what was happening and how they were celebrating, also to make sure they were aligned. That involved two visits going back - I went in January and February the same year. They're not the best times to visit when the weather's a bit cold. Tom Drew was the ambassador. He very kindly offered to give me dinner in the Residence and see our old house staff which was lovely. A lot of changes had taken place in ten years. A much higher wall had been built around the compound and there were even more restrictions. I was only out there for a week, I couldn't travel around. I was in the compound and actually staying in the school in one of the classrooms that was now a kind of bedroom suite.

**IH-C:** ... of the school which you'd promoted and helped set up!

**SLG:** Yes, and which Mark and I had formally opened – the plaque is still there. It was all a bit sad, really. I was fascinated to go back. From a work point of view, I was very pleased to have this opportunity to go back and look at the place. One of the campaign initiatives was a big photographic exhibition and that was shown in the House of Commons here. Very different from the Rio project, but fascinating to be able to work on something like that. I think I was on that for about three months. There was a whole range of different projects but I just mention those two.

### **Multilateral Policy Directorate, FCO, 2018-21**

**IH-C:** And then we come to your last appointment before leaving the Foreign Office.

**SLG:** I went back into international organisations work in what was then called MPD - Multilateral Policy Directorate - in the London side in charge of the locally-engaged staff in New York who were in the role I had filled previously, the locally-engaged staff in Geneva and Paris. The team led on international appointments and elections. I worked in this role from August 2018 until August 2021, three years.

**IH-C:** And you were well into Covid by the end of that, of course.

**SLG:** Well into Covid by the end of it. The last year was working fully remotely at home although I was very happy to go into the Office and on occasions I did go in because somebody needed to go in occasionally for some special reason. In the last year there'd been nobody there in our office at all, which had its different challenges which everybody, I'm sure, faced in different ways.

But what was quite interesting was that we ran a campaign in this last year for a British Judge at the International Criminal Court. We had a candidate, Judge Joanna Korner. She was sitting at Southwark Court. We set up a campaign to promote her around the world. Normally, she would have travelled overseas to our embassies/missions where she would have been promoted, where she would have given a talk, where we would have called in the

representatives of various countries to secure votes that way. But because there was no travel and so many restrictions, this was purely a digital campaign. Everything about this campaign was digital. This was difficult because we hadn't done a digital campaign before. Having said that, it was low cost, there were no airfares, no diplomatic receptions. It was all about promoting her on screen to the wider world and setting up telephone calls and lobbying calls because she needed to be on those calls. It was very difficult for her. She was a full-time working judge and the courts were still sitting, you will remember, and some of them were online as well, but judges were never online, they always had to appear. Anyway, she got elected and got a huge number of votes. It proved in the end that you could do a campaign in a completely different way and be successful. Lord Ahmad was the Minister responsible and we set up regular calls with him to keep him up to date. We had a lot of face to face time with people although it was on the screen and I would link in Joanna from where she was. We weren't allowed to meet up. She actually lives around the corner from me at home so I did sometimes go and meet up with her because it was easy to go and talk to her about it, but I wasn't supposed to.

**IH-C:** Did this work arise possibly because there was a feeling in the Office that we were no longer promoting and fighting for our corner, as it were, as far as representatives on these organisations are concerned?

**SLG:** There was a huge input from Number Ten and financial backing to spend more resources in this area to help the UK have more influence in these international organisations. There's a long term programme seeing which roles are coming up and then we would look to see which British candidates might have the right skills or be in the right frame for it and then work up a campaign around that.

It was a very difficult time, as I've said, working from home and I decided to retire because I just didn't want to do another year working from home all online and in fact a lot of the team are still not back in the Office. Working from home works as long as everyone's communicating, then it works. It was a role I enjoyed, working with a wider, interesting team.

**IH-C:** It must have been an absorbing final job and you had – what – a digital farewell?

**SLG:** Yes, because it wasn't possible to meet up in person. I did actually go into the Office for a lunch as the London team had arranged to go out for a small lunch because you were just about allowed to do that by then. But they also set up a Zoom call with a lot of my friends and colleagues around the world at 11 o'clock in the morning. So, it was everybody on Asian time. It couldn't include the US colleagues – you can't cover everybody in that way, obviously. But it was really very moving to see all these faces on the screen. They were all there. In some ways it was better than a face to face at a drinks party because I really got to see everybody there and people got to speak.

**IH-C:** And of course it preserved the international flavour of what you'd been doing.

**SLG:** Yes, and it was very touching. When you've been in the Office a long time and people say nice things: "Oh, I remember when you ..." and some of them in quite senior positions in the Office. So, it was a nice ending to a career that I found very enjoyable. I haven't mentioned all the roles I did in the Office. You can't fit all the bits and pieces in. I had to work hard at remaining in employment and being flexible because I was married to Mark who as you know was also in the Office. What I would like to say is that by the time I left I had done job share, part-time, term time, remote working, and I had been locally engaged. I worked in five different ways in addition to the normal full-time format that we all do. In all, I worked in six different ways in the organisation and the Office was, for the most part, very flexible with that too. At the end of 40 years, I'd worked out it was 25 years total solid employment (because it needed to be calculated *pro rata* as I've explained earlier). So, 15 years of that 40 years were SUPPL or doing these other roles. I think, as an organisation, the FCO didn't really get the credit that it deserves for being able to make that possible.

**IH-C:** And to have evolved more forward-looking policies over that time?

**SLG:** Certainly, today it's a completely different picture and more is possible and also a lot more attention is given to what jobs you might have done outside of the Office because there was no procedure in place for that before. It's a completely different landscape now.

**IH-C:** One that you no doubt feel proud to have been part of.

**SLG:** Very much so. It was a very rewarding, exciting, interesting career.

**IH-C:** Sheila Lyall Grant, thank you very much indeed.