NOTE: The respondent stipulates that he should be informed when researchers publish and disseminate work drawing on this interview.

VOICE FILE NAME: COHP_(ROGER_CARRICK)

Key:

SO = Sue Onslow (interviewer)
RC = Roger Carrick (respondent)
s.l. = sounds like

SO: This is Sue Onslow talking to Sir Roger Carrick at the Royal Overseas League in Park Street, St James's on 6 February 2013. Sir Roger, thank you very much indeed for talking to me. I wonder if you could begin by commenting, please, on Foreign Office views on the Commonwealth in the 1960s. You joined the Foreign Office in 1956, but this is an organisation which evolved considerably between 1956 and 1965. What are your recollections of how Britain saw the Commonwealth in this particular decade?

RC: Well, I joined the Foreign Office, not the Commonwealth Relations Office. The two merged in the '60s. I went off to my first posting abroad behind the Iron Curtain and didn't give a single thought to the Commonwealth! Except, perhaps, that an 'Old Commonwealth' member's diplomatic mission would look after the interests in a third country of other members not represented there. In Bulgaria, exceptionally, my wife Hilary worked in the British Legation as Pro-Consul and among other things operated Australia's then 'White Australia' immigration policy for Canberra. (In those days, and until the early '70s, lady members of the British Diplomatic Service, as Hilary had been, had to resign on marriage; but we had a 'visa war' with Bulgaria and Hilary replaced a UK-based officer whose intended successor was refused a visa.) At that time, in the very early '60s, before the merger, apart from the Planning Staff and far-sighted thinkers, nobody much in the Foreign Office gave a lot of thought to the Commonwealth because that was the business of the Commonwealth Relations Office. After the merger, there were cultural resentments, but they really were very few. The Commonwealth Relations Office and Commonwealth Service and the Diplomatic Service and Foreign Office came together culturally much more smoothly than, for example, BOAC and BEA combined as two different and previously competing airlines. Perhaps the clue is in the competing, because the two (the FO and CRO) were complementary, so they didn't compete very much at all. That said,

there was some limited resentment within each service of the other, and of the merger. The Commonwealth Relations Office, in the view of the Foreign Office, was overstaffed, over resourced and rich; and was able to have a comfortable existence: no doubt that view was exaggerated, but it was around. The Foreign Office also thought the CRO were over-promoted and promoted most of their members before the merger, conveniently enough. Perhaps there were reciprocal views in the CRO. But it was remarkable how quickly all that died away. Indeed in 1971 when I was posted to a Commonwealth country it was not a particular surprise. Had I been posted to Singapore in the early '60s, I would've felt very uncomfortable – as if I were leaving my regiment and going to another. But by the time 1970 came, one really didn't think that way. There was still some deliberate policy going on in the merged Foreign and Commonwealth Office to promote cross-fertilization of the two cultures which were very different cultures; so it was thought a good thing that my boss in Singapore was from the Foreign Office, the number two was originally from the Commonwealth Office and I was the number three, if you like, as Head of Chancery. We had another counsellor as well and to mix them was thought a good thing. But all that stuff died very quickly. So the view of the FCO was fairly well homogeneous by the end of the period we're discussing.

SO: So there was no sense that the Commonwealth had actually lost a Cabinet voice with the merger of the Foreign Office with the Commonwealth Relations Office?

RC: Well, not that I discerned. The first Permanent Under-Secretary of the merged Foreign and Commonwealth Office was a Commonwealth Relations Office man. There was a great negotiation that led to that. Now some Foreign Secretaries have been more interested in the Commonwealth since then than others and I'm told - I don't know how true it is - that one said he wanted to be known as the Foreign Secretary, not the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary because it's too much of a mouthful. That disappointed, I suppose, Commonwealth people a bit; but only a bit: what's in a name? The Foreign Secretary, if you will, or the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary or the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs more formally, does all the Commonwealth work including arguing its case in the Cabinet and I think as in some other external matters the view of the Prime Minister is important in that as well. But I was then in a lowly position: I'm not sure I was in a position to discern, in those days, anything much in the way of high politics. It seemed to me that the merger was carefully crafted, well negotiated and despite some cultural differences, the merged FCO got on with the job pretty quickly and rather well, and therefore the Commonwealth input to any policy discussion became as much part of the input to any policy discussion as any other influence, be it the EEC/EU, or relations with France or whatever.

SO: You arrived in Singapore in January 1972?

RC: Yes.

SO: This was within a year of the first non-emergency Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting being held outside the UK, which of course was chaired by Lee Kuan Yew, the Prime Minister of Singapore. Did you pick

up on any reverberations on British\Commonwealth relations following on from that Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting?

RC: It was actually in February that I arrived and there were some reverberations going around town. Much gratitude that the British Prime Minister had decided to have his suits made in Singapore while he was there and some feeling in the High Commission that we were jolly lucky, we members of the High Commission, to be able to buy the left over desk lamps from the British delegation! I still have one, since we bought them personally. But as far as I gathered when I got there - and I was busy with the new job of looking at the withdrawal of the troops of Singapore and so on - as far as I recall there was a sense that Lee Kuan Yew had much enjoyed chairing the first Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting outside the UK; that Ted Heath and Alec Douglas Home, who was the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary of the day, had done a good job. It had been regarded as immensely hard work in the view of some High Commission staff, I seem to remember – but perhaps that's part of the attitude, the ethos and the difference between CRO and FCO methods of work, I'm not sure. But I don't remember anything else except a feeling of 'That went rather well didn't it?' so I suppose a feeling of relief. But had I been there at the time I would've been able to answer your question much more intelligently and in a much more informed fashion.

SO: I'm just wondering because the way that it was presented in the press beforehand was that this CHOGM was going to be enormously contentious because of British sales of aircraft carrier parts to South Africa. I know that there was an enormous amount of tension within the Commonwealth on this issue. But, of course, it was also the venue at which the Singapore Declaration was put together and agreed.

RC: That was done at the time, yes.

SO: Indeed, so most of your work while you were in Singapore was focused on the East of Suez withdrawal negotiations?

RC: A great deal of it, yes, and it was bilateral which is probably another reason why the Commonwealth Heads of Government problems had been done, dusted, put away as far as the work that the High Commission was doing. It was bilateral work and really very practical. Really the wider Commonwealth event was all over by the time I got there and I don't remember discerning any tensions that could be ascribed to that, left on the ground in terms of UK/Singapore bilateral relations.

SO: Was there an element of a Commonwealth dimension to the solution of Lee Kuan Yew's concerns about the implications of British withdrawal from Singapore - the potential for a political and military vacuum with the perceived Communist threat from further north, as this was at the time of the Cold War?

RC: Definitionally yes, but the solution was an Australian/New Zealand/UK operation, rather than Commonwealth. The ANZUK Force, as I recall it, was not called a Commonwealth force; it was not a Commonwealth force. It was a force constructed for political reasons to fill the perception of a political

vacuum. It was designed not to last long, which it didn't. It lasted just as long as it was needed and it didn't really impinge on the broader Commonwealth, because the only people directly were those who contributed troops to it and those who were affected on the ground, hence Singapore and Australia, New Zealand, UK.

SO: You said that there was a subsidiary intelligence group.

RC: Well, as part of the ANZUK force which we wrote down on a piece of paper with two stars at the top which became, I think it was, an Australian two-star officer - I think a Rear Admiral – the first one in charge. As part of that force structure there was an intelligence group which is fairly normal in force structures. It amused me that we were full of acronyms even in those days; not only was there ANZUK, there was actually ANZUKIG(S) which few people are given to pronounce. So it was just a part of the force, but because it was an intelligence group, civilian diplomats sat on it. I didn't (except perhaps once), but others did.

SO: Within the Commonwealth at that particular time, was there any element of a Malaysian/Singapore angle? Obviously the Federation of Malaysia and Singapore had dissolved in the 1960s and I just wondered, again, was there any residue of bilateral tension between the two countries that you observed, or really was this a non-story by the 1970s?

RC: I think that early tension was mostly over, but that doesn't mean to say there were no tensions at all: they were bilateral tensions between two neighbouring countries. They covered questions such as water supply from Johor to Singapore; what exactly should happen to the Causeway railway issues: the Malaysians still owned the strip of Singapore on which the railway line sat. That wasn't so much a dispute as a matter of negotiation that went on for years and years and was eventually resolved perfectly happily long, long after I'd left Singapore. But those were examples of the sort of bilateral Singapore and Malaysian issues that were still around and in some sense could be related back to the Federation, but had nothing directly to do with the UK, still less the Commonwealth.

SO: You said also that there had been an element of tension between Kuala Lumpur and Singapore on aspects such as terrorism in Songkhla.

RC: Well there were differences of assessments as to what was really going on on the Malaysia/Thai border up in Songkhla province that I dimly recall, because we had our own views and assessments of that. We would discuss them as friendly countries do, to try to understand better what was going on; there were occasional disagreements, but they were the disagreements of debate not of serious policy. There's an awful lot of history, of course, in the Malaysian/Singapore relationship, but while I was serving there, early '72 to late '74, there were no major issues that I recall: the occasional flare-up with Malaysian internal problems that worried the Singaporeans but didn't cause great tension between them.

SO: When you became Counsellor at the British Embassy in Washington in 1978, you were the JIC representative at the Embassy.

RC: I was, and I had another job as well, yes.

SO: In the run up to the outbreak of the Falklands War and during the Falklands campaign, was there any Commonwealth dimension to your work?

RC: Very, very little. There was, what the Americans called, a Commonwealth Liaison Group of 'old' Commonwealth members and the CIA; but when I say CIA, I mean always the analytical side (I had nothing to do with the operational side), i.e. the assessment of the intelligence and not its gathering. The group met regularly. Once we got into serious pre-Falklands invasion time I think I was not working with anybody but the Brits and the Americans, because we had a major task to do to overcome opposition within the American administration – perhaps half of it and some of it highly placed – to the idea of America supporting Britain in the Falklands campaign. Without that support, we couldn't have done it because we needed petrol, oil and lubricants, for example, ferried from Virginia across to Ascension Island. Certainly my Commonwealth colleagues - the 'old' Commonwealth in particular because of the intelligence arrangements among us - would ring me to ask, 'How's it going?' and I would give them a quick burst. But there was no serious Commonwealth involvement in my JIC work in Washington on the Falklands conflict.

SO: So then any label of a 'Commonwealth Liaison Group' in fact was a misnomer?

RC: My JIC work had become overwhelmingly bilateral because of the Falklands. But it is something of a misnomer. Looked at from the academic or historical assessment point of view, what it really reflects is the understanding among Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the UK with the US as the senior partner, if you wish, although we felt it was fairly important at the time to share intelligence assessments, to debate them and to try to arrive at a common view, because that was in the interests of getting to the right, or best view.

SO: That then suggests to the American administration the Commonwealth remained the 'old' Commonwealth.

RC: Well to the CIA analytical side, yes. That wasn't true of the State Department who knew far better of course, but it was a convenient name; that's all.

SO: I understand also that New Zealand membership, or contribution to this Liaison Group, was suspended for a while.

RC: Yes: it was as a result of the New Zealand government of the day refusing permission for principally the American, but also other NATO navies to enter New Zealand harbours, mainly Auckland, of course. It stemmed from the then New Zealand policy against any nuclear involvement and the NATO policy of not declaring whether or not any given ship had nuclear weapons aboard or, I think, even whether or not it was nuclear-propelled. That New Zealand policy irritated the Americans, not too surprisingly, possibly because of their responsibilities for security in the Pacific.

SO: So this was a separate issue to New Zealand's protests against French nuclear testing at Mururoa?

RC: Yes. You could say that they're linked because they both have to do with things nuclear and Mururoa was about nuclear testing and looking after nuclear weapons, but I saw Mururoa as a separate issue. The Australians became very cross over Mururoa and that could have become quite a Commonwealth issue. The CHOGM that immediately followed Mururoa, if I remember, was in New Zealand.

SO: In Auckland in 1995.

RC: Yes and the Retreat was in Queenstown in the South Island of New Zealand, if I recall right. I was in Australia at the time. The principal problem before CHOGM in 1995 was Nigeria, and that rather dominated everything.

SO: So you went as British High Commissioner to Canberra in 1994, the year before Auckland as you say: were there tensions between Britain and Australia over Mururoa?

RC: Yes, there were indeed.

SO: Was this a bilateral point of friction which has Commonwealth implications?

RC: I'm not sure... well, we're both members of the Commonwealth, and CHOGM happened that year, as you say. But I think that's about all because it wasn't a matter that gave rise to any wider discussion or problem at the CHOGM that followed it; it was a bilateral dispute between originally New Zealand and then Australia and non-Commonwealth member France. Australia's first pronouncement by the then Foreign Minister Gareth Evans on the subject of Muroroa was fairly reasonable, but then the Prime Minister, Paul Keating, elevated the issue and took a stronger view - one much closer to the New Zealanders and very anti-French. So there was an Australian/French dispute which I think was handled on the Australian side as well as it could have been by the Foreign Minister, but not by anybody else in the whole country, because they were passionately anti-French and did some pretty disgraceful things, a few of which I have described briefly in my book [R Carrick, *Diplomatic Anecdotage – around the world in 40 years* (2012)]. We took the side of the French. They were a nuclear power; we were a nuclear power. We took the firm view that the French were one of the nuclear powers who had kept the Cold War from becoming a hot war; and we supported them in their statement that their actions in Muroroa were designed to ensure the safety of their nuclear weapons; and it wasn't right for any ally to complain about that because it was in Australia's and indeed New Zealand's interests that the weapons be kept safe. So we were very much with the French on that issue and personally I was pretty appalled at what went on in Australia and its body politic.

SO: How much did this become a personal issue between two Prime Ministers, the British Prime Minister and the Australian Prime Minister?

RC: Well, they met at CHOGM, but it wasn't a great issue there partly because I think it was managed which, if you like, was my job; and partly because of the Commonwealth crisis of the time. There's very often a crisis or near-crisis at CHOGM: that time it was over Nigeria, so Mururoa was rather put into the shade and didn't get much of a mention, if at all. Whether the two Prime Ministers had a bilateral chat about it I honestly don't remember.

SO: Did you use your own initiative to manage this crisis in the run up to CHOGM or had you been asked by Downing Street or by Paul Keating's office?

RC: It's called diplomacy, isn't it?

SO: Yes, it is!

RC: Yes. I did what I could in the circumstances and I think I would have acted on my own because I could see a row coming; indeed I was in the middle of a row and I didn't want that row to transfer itself to CHOGM where it could've gone silly. It was pretty silly anyway but it could've gone sillier.

SO: So Paul Keating didn't phone you up and say, 'Roj, could you sort it out?'

RC: He thought it would be a good idea if I were to fix it so he didn't have a row with John Major**.** I expect John Major had a similar view although I don't remember my own Prime Minister ringing me.

SO: But you were in Australia during the CHOGM meeting?

RC: Yes, I didn't go to New Zealand then.

SO: After Paul Keating was replaced by John Howard, did the personal tensions between the two Prime Ministers ease?

RC: Yes, instantly. They are both very keen cricketers and experts on cricket. They're both high Tories, which sometimes matters, although after a sticky start John Howard got on very well with Tony Blair later; but tensions did ease, yes. The two Johns knew each other and liked each other. Mind you, I think Paul Keating didn't dislike John Major; I think he just took very different political views.

SO: Also during your time as High Commissioner in Canberra, was there an element of Commonwealth intelligence liaison?

RC: I suppose there was a little. My staff and I dealt mostly with the bilateral arrangements between Australia and the UK. I was keen on that because we and the Australians had done some good work together in Indonesia and I thought we could do more if we stirred it a little more. I did see something of the intelligence community in Australia; indeed there were exchange officers between the two sets of agencies, so I used to go and see them occasionally. I think there was the odd occasion when the Canadian and New Zealanders and we had a chat about something or other, but it was pretty informal and the New Zealanders, especially, probably had their own separate bilateral

arrangements. Again that's bilateral or trilateral or at most quadrilateral, not Commonwealth-wide.

SO: Again a misnomer then?

RC: I think it's just an easy, convenient name for what used to be called the 'old' Commonwealth.

SO: Yes, so for instance there might not have been any intelligence sharing in analysis of the acceleration of the Pakistani nuclear programme in the 1990s, and a growing stand-off in terms of dangers to hemispheric defence and stability?

RC: I don't recall any more than bilateral discussions in Australia of those issues.

SO: How far did you observe, as High Commissioner, that there was a particular regional dimension to the Commonwealth with Australia's engagement with the Pacific Commonwealth?

RC: Well, that was quite a subject. We had a sort of bilateral interest in the Pacific. There had been some British colonies, of course, in the Pacific. There were some residual responsibilities. There was an aid programme. There was the South Pacific Forum, which may still exist, I don't know, which was a forum under which some aid budget supported projects were managed. At the time we, the UK (as opposed to nowadays, when I worry about our ability wisely and accountably to spend such a high aid budget) we were rather trying to focus and even retrench our aid: the South Pacific was not the highest aid priority for Britain. So that had to be managed, and there is, of course, a good number of Commonwealth countries across the Pacific. But again, the issue wasn't Commonwealth wide; I don't remember papers from the Secretary General on the subject. It was dealt with as far as my High Commission was concerned as a UK/Pacific matter with, also, some discussions with Australia: we were probably trying to persuade the Australians to pick up some of the projects we were thinking we ought to withdraw from because we couldn't do everything with limited resources.

SO: I was just wondering whether within the broader Commonwealth you could identify broader power centres - say Nigeria, as a leading West African nation within the Commonwealth in West Africa; South Africa in the southern hemisphere; Australia in the South East Asia/Pacific region.

RC: Yes, I think one can. I think it's worth saying at this point that the consciousness of the Commonwealth in the body politic and society in general in Australia, at least in the sophisticated end of Australia, is rather higher than I feel it to be in the UK. Commonwealth Day is celebrated, commemorated, not only by the Federal Government in Australia every year, but also by state governments, so New South Wales would have its Commonwealth Day and there were Commonwealth societies here and there around Australia, including in the states as far away as Western Australia, far away from Canberra I mean. There was quite a lot of Australian consciousness of the Commonwealth, so that when things went nasty in Africa, Nigeria or whatever it was, and the 'wise men' groupings were formed

within the Commonwealth, it was no surprise even when Africa was concerned, to find that the Australian Foreign Minister was a member of a small group and working away jolly hard to try to help. When Commonwealth Day was celebrated, the Commonwealth High Commissioners in Australia would all turn up and have a sort of Commonwealth gathering. But I do remember admiring how much notice Australia took of the fact that the Commonwealth existed. (Though I also wondered whether Australian school children understood the difference between the Commonwealth of Australia and the Commonwealth.) In the bad old days when it was called the British Commonwealth they probably did. In the days when Prime Minister Billy Hughes of Australia was waxing very eloquent at the Versailles Peace Conference they knew what a dominion was and they knew what later became, I suppose, the Commonwealth: what influence it could wield; how important it was; and how important the Australian armed forces were to the conduct of World War I and later World War II. But that history stems from empire and Churchill's phrase about overlapping circles. The residual, the legacy of all that in a history as condensed as modern Australia's is, into, now, 225 years, makes a bigger impression on the Australian political psyche than it does in the UK; and I found that interesting. It may help to explain that when the Australians (and no doubt the New Zealanders too but certainly the Australians to my knowledge) get involved in the Commonwealth, they mean it, and they work jolly hard at it and they're a good Commonwealth member.

SO: So it's become part of their DNA? It's part of their cultural identity?

RC: Yes, certainly while I was there it was discernibly so.

SO: Yes. Have you been back to Australia and observed any shift in that since?

RC: I've been back pretty well every year and if there is any shift it's a very slight dilution, but I haven't tapped into that issue closely.

SO: I'm going to suggest a provocative question: did you discern any element in Australia being an active Commonwealth member, of a certain constructive history on race relations in Australia? I wonder whether Australia's good Commonwealth credentials stem at all from the domestic political implications, as Australia's domestic history is more fraught with racial tension and genocide than an established acceptable narrative would have it.

RC: No, I wouldn't link those two. I think the Australia/Aboriginal problem has received more attention since I left Australia than it did in the 200 years or so before. My problem at the time was dealing with a myth running around some Australian circles that that great, great unsung British hero, Arthur Phillip, First Governor of Australia, and his men were cruel to the Aborigines. Untrue. The enlightened Phillip laid great stress on treating the Aborigines well [see R Carrick, *London Papers in Australian Studies No.17 – Admiral Arthur Phillip RN, Founder & First Governor of Australia: A British view* (n.d.)] But it then was becoming fashionable to believe that white men had been cruel. Later, much, much later than Arthur Phillip, there was the difficult history of the 'stolen children' as they were called: in my time I shall never forget Lois O'Donoghue, a splendid lady, Chairman of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander Commission, declaring that had she not been 'stolen' as a child and given a decent education she would not have been in the position she rose to – and, in her view and rightly, much more importantly – nor would she have been able to help her Aboriginal people. So there's been a history of myth and unfairness in judging the issues and, since the British colonial time, there have been ups and downs with Aborigines. Government policies have not always worked well. I think they're probably getting better now and I saw quite a lot of that on the ground. But I don't think the connection you made strikes me as clear.

SO: I'm very struck by the fact that Australia has been such a good contributor to the Commonwealth – the presence on the first Eminent Persons Group, its stance within CMAG - and yet Australia has got a complicated past itself.

RC: A very complicated past, but whether that makes Australians more inclined to be good Commonwealth members or less, I don't know. I don't think it makes much difference. I think they just believe that the Commonwealth is a good thing they ought to support and can support, including intellectually. Hence my point about Alexander Downer and the Eminent Persons Group. As both (the longest ever serving) Australian Foreign Minister and a senior Commonwealth figure, he deployed great intelligence, in my view, supported and defended the work of EPG's, and was a valuable influence in the Commonwealth (as well as more widely: currently he is Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General on Cyprus, helping the parties towards a comprehensive settlement – a long and difficult task).

SO: Yes. Have your attitudes to the Commonwealth, then, altered since you joined the Foreign Office in the 1960s to your retirement, aged 60, in 1997?

RC: I suppose one answer is they must have. They had to because I knew next to nothing at all about the Commonwealth when I joined and now I know a little. So they have changed a bit and I have learned to be impressed by the achievements and survivability of a 54-nation strong organisation with such disparities and such different forms of government and such different views as to what they gain from the Commonwealth. I remember being particularly struck when non-English speaking Mozambique applied to join and now we have a Portuguese speaking member of the Commonwealth. It's commonplace to say so, but I do think that is a particular tribute to the reputation in Africa of the Commonwealth and the good it does there. Clearly Mozambique didn't join because it would like to be part of a good organisation, but because it was in Mozambique's interests to join. Disraeli said 'interests never lie', and I think he was mostly right at that. The perception of interest sometimes lies, but the Mozambique story is impressive. The work the Commonwealth does in development, quietly mostly, and in quiet development, is usually the best sort because the noisier it gets the more it wastes money and tends to be corrupt. The work it does in the academic world in bringing people together to stimulate work on international problems within the Commonwealth, I suppose, going all the way up to the Eminent Persons Group, is impressive. Although I can't say I'm deeply impressed yet by the last great men's Report on the form of the Commonwealth and the reception it got at the Commonwealth Heads of

Government Meeting in Perth. The document is frankly far too long, with far too many recommendations. I'm a great admirer of Malcolm Rifkind who sat on that group. I'm a great admirer of his intellect and judgment. When he was a Minister of State in the Foreign Office he and I worked together on one particular issue and he was magnificent. I think he was also a very good Secretary of State for Defence and a very good Foreign Secretary. He is a great brain to have around London. But evidently even he couldn't ensure that that Report was terse and pithy. It was too easy for heads of government to look at that document, to say: "oh this is far too complicated: we can't deal with it now" and to kick it into the long grass. That was a pity. But that's a tangential point.

SO: Would you identify Malcolm Rifkind then as one of those unusual British Foreign Secretaries who really did value the Commonwealth?

RC: I think you're a little harsh to say it's unusual for a Foreign Secretary to value the Commonwealth! But I know what you mean and, as I said earlier, one of them did say once that he wanted to be known as 'the Foreign Secretary.' Yes, certainly when he was Minister of State and he was dealing with parts of the world that included a lot of Commonwealth countries, I think he did value the Commonwealth. I was in Australia for most of the time he was Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary so I'm not sure I can judge him 'close to'. But I think it wasn't that he favoured the Commonwealth, or paid special attention to it. He gave it the attention it deserved, just as he gave foreign matters, non-Commonwealth foreign matters the attention they deserved. That he does now work on the Commonwealth is also a positive answer to your question.

SO: Do you think Britain at that particular point benefited from the enormous sense of relief that permeated King Charles Street that the South African issue was finally off the agenda as far as the Commonwealth was concerned. That Britain had contributed to the anti-apartheid struggle and the successful, political transition in South Africa?

RC: I think probably so. I was a long way away from South Africa geographically at the time, but I shan't forget (and I think I put this in my book) when Mandela visited Indonesia on his first sort of state visit abroad. The Foreign Minister of Indonesia formally presented the heads of mission to Mandela. I didn't know Mandela at all then and the Foreign Minister presented me as the British Ambassador, and gave my name: Nelson Mandela stepped forward and gave me the longest and biggest bear hug I've ever experienced. I shan't forget looking over his shoulder into the eyes of President Soeharto, whose Javanese mask had slipped a million miles! So Mandela was pleased with us. I knew why, from seeing some of the telegram traffic helpfully copied to UK heads of missions to Commonwealth countries. So I knew a little of what we'd done. I certainly was pleased and I felt some pride and relief, yes.

SO: You've emphasised the unsung contribution that the Commonwealth makes to development, to education, to youth, etc.

RC: Yes.

SO: But looking at it also as an elite network, how important do you think are the personalities at heads of government level, or is there an

excessive personification of politics by the media, by the general public as far as Commonwealth get-togethers are concerned?

RC: I think both of those two strands are correct. When there's a big row about a country in Africa the media go ape about the Head of State or Government of that particular country. On the other hand, they can be very important. I was in Lancaster House earlier today, in the room where all those, I think it's 40, de-colonisations were arranged between 1947 and the late '60s I suppose.

SO: Well right up to 1979.

RC: I suppose, yes. When was Zimbabwe?

SO: '79.

RC: That was the last one, yes, I to Z, India to Zimbabwe. That gave me to think about things like the Zimbabwe Conference and Peter Carrington's handling of Mugabe, a very different Mugabe from the one we know today. Absolutely brilliant work by Lord Carrington, our politician most concerned, who of course, had been well trained because he was a British High Commissioner to Australia, so he's bound to be good, isn't he! He was aged 37 when appointed High Commissioner. Anyway, the press made a big, big fuss about all of that. Also, when Alec Douglas Home was struggling away in Lancaster House over Kenya and having tomatoes thrown at him, the press had several field days over that (and the British Legation in Sofia Bulgaria, where I was serving, was physically attacked over that issue). So the press do exaggerate it. Then matters become very complicated because how much are the 'personalities' playing to the press, playing to the Brits, playing to the gallery, playing to their own domestic party at home and their opposition and so on. People in those positions make speeches which are designed to be understood in different ways, in different places, around the world.

SO: Absolutely, to different audiences.

RC: Yes and there was quite a lot of that in some of those de-colonialisation stories. But the Commonwealth somehow has a rôle in all that implicitly – in holding it all together. We haven't mentioned the Queen and we should. We should because it is a quite extraordinary phenomenon the way she can bring the Commonwealth to its senses without appearing, including to the press, to do anything much at all, but actually she's working very hard and has done some really fine work. The Heads of Commonwealth Governments all, rightly, respect her as far as I can see.

SO: Did you see that yourself in any of your diplomatic postings, her extraordinary ability to provide the glue for the Commonwealth and to soothe ruffled souls?

RC: No, I've only seen it at second hand. The Queen did not visit Australia while I was there. Prince Charles came just before I served there, and HM the Queen went soon afterwards, but that would have been a visit to her Realm, rather than a specifically Commonwealth event. I haven't seen HM at CHOGM, but I've read about her leadership at CHOGMs.

SO: How much do you feel that the Queen is one of the key explanations for how the Commonwealth has survived since 1965?

RC: Well, I certainly think she's one of them: a major explanation, if you will. The way the Queen has conducted herself as Head of the Commonwealth, and the way she has commanded and earned the respect she has, are quite extraordinary. You must ask Don McKinnon about that.

SO: Yes, I intend to.

RC: I think I know what Sonny Ramphal would say and indeed what Don would say. He's so sound, Don; he would be very, very interesting on the subject. I think the Queen has been quite extraordinary and everybody says there's going to be a crisis when she goes. Well we'll see. There might not be; things are changing.

SO: What other explanations would you give for the survival of the Commonwealth?

RC: The self-interest of the members is probably the stickiest glue of the lot really. Think of Fiji who've been in and out, like a 'fiddler's elbow', of the Commonwealth. I was visiting Fiji once with my wife, when Fiji had just been suspended, I was going to say 'thrown out' – 'suspended' was the word – from the Commonwealth. They'd just had another of their coups. Fiji worries Australia a bit because it's her backyard and Australia can't control everything that goes on in Fiji, even though the constitution of Fiji was drafted in the Australian National University - says he with a little bit of trivia. We deliberately sought out Fijians we could talk to in a very, very short visit: the head of the local library, that sort of thing. We found those Fijians desperate to come back in – and the sooner the better. They were also very keen to make it clear that the Fijian actions were in no way a reflection upon the Queen as Head of the Commonwealth.

SO: So as explanations of the survival of the Commonwealth: the Queen; self-interest.

RC: Yes, the self-interest and every nation likes to feel it belongs to a worthwhile club. Groucho Marx once said 'I wouldn't join a club that would have me as a member'; not quite relevant. But there is an instinct to want to have a voice at a large and important table and I should think that applies to nearly all, perhaps all of the Commonwealth members: they do see it as a national self-interest to be a member of an important international organisation. They're also members of the UN, of course, and I imagine that from time to time there is some attempt at Commonwealth coordination within the UN on issues of common concern.

SO: So that would identify the particular strengths of the Commonwealth, as you say, its unique cohesion. What would you identify as its weaknesses?

RC: Well, another strength, perhaps, would be its size; and that can also be a weakness, I think. The Commonwealth generally has quite a lot of respect outside the Commonwealth: that too may be a strength if I'm not exaggerating

it. Its weaknesses probably do include size, in that it's too big to attain the highest level of agreement – the highest common factor of agreement of aspiration; rather than the lowest common denominator of what can be written down and agreed to. So big that it tends to the lower common denominator rather than the highest common factor, I'd say. I think that point I made earlier about some reports to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting being so unwieldy as to be a weakness where there had been an opportunity for strength, that seems a pity and then if you look at the history wherever there is corruption that becomes, at some time, a Commonwealth matter and a weakness for the Commonwealth as an organisation if there is perceptually corruption within it.

SO: Have you identified corruption within the Commonwealth?

RC: I haven't because I have not worked on that, but there's enough corruption around the world I have found to know that some of the crises over the history of the Commonwealth might, at least, have the perception of corruption in some governments; and that's a weakness. If the French or the Americans or the Germans or people whose support we needed at a UN vote, or the Russians or the Chinese (despite corruption in those countries), were to perceive corruption in a Commonwealth country about which there were a matter of interest to the UN, then those countries might not be so helpful to the Commonwealth – or even the British – interest.

SO: So it's a debilitating factor in questions of political influence.

RC: It can be. And the perception debilitates, I think, as much as the reality.

SO: Yes. So just in conclusion then, do you feel the Commonwealth has mattered in international politics, in the international community, since 1965?

RC: When was South Africa sorted?

SO: '94.

RC: Yes well there you are: there's just one example. You may say that was a South African solution to a South African problem; you may say it had bilateral influences from the UK and others, but I think there are some who would call that something of a Commonwealth success. I know less about Nigeria, but it was a great problem and the Commonwealth deliberations surely helped. It still can be an important problem, including because it's the largest country in that part of Africa. But I think there are some successes and yes, surely the Commonwealth has changed, but it has changed to the extent that people want to join it – including some of the most unlikely countries.

SO: Algeria?

RC: Algeria, there you go! Prime Minister Cameron was there only the other day, I don't know what he said to the President.

SO: I can understand why South Sudan, Burma or Yemen would want to join, or indeed Palestine.

RC: But would you have expected Mozambique? Didn't somebody tell me that Israel was considered at one stage? Very unlikely I would've thought, as members. So people do have respect for the Commonwealth, or at least see some national self-interest in wishing to be aligned, if not a member or it. I think when it was going through its changes from the 'old' British Commonwealth to the Commonwealth of Nations to the Commonwealth there was quite a rollercoaster really: I don't think the rollercoaster has, in recent years, moved a lot. It hasn't sunk deep down, I think. Nor has it stopped. You should ask the Queen, she'll give you a really informed view.

SO: Oh, I'm sure she's about to give me an interview!

RC: Of course the Queen does not give interviews; and the Freedom of Information Act might actually be inhibiting.

SO: Sir Roger, thank you very much indeed.

RC: A real pleasure, Sue: thank you.

[END OF AUDIOFILE]