

[REDACTED]

SUBJECT: KEYDOC: GORE-BOOTH: VALEDICTORY

1. I leave India tomorrow and the Diplomatic Service on New Year's Eve. It is no secret that I had hoped to leave the DS from New York on 14 May 2003. But the dice fell another way. So I shall see in the Millenium as Special Adviser to the Chairman of a major financial institution instead.

2. As the son of a diplomat, I promised myself not to be one (my wife, a diplomatic daughter, swore she would never be so stupid as to marry into the career!). Yet abroad was in my veins, as was a sense - old fashioned though it seems now to say it - of duty: Shell offered me a job but I asked for a stay in case I passed the Civil Service exam. Typically of the time, if bizarrely in retrospect, I was adjudged well suited for the Foreign Office but not fitted for the Commonwealth Office. I joined the FO on 3 September 1964 and was despatched two weeks later to learn Arabic at the Middle East Centre for Arabic Studies (MECAS) in Lebanon.

3. The choice of Arabic (made for, not by, me) turned out to be pivotal. In Baghdad for the June 1967 war, in Tripoli for Colonel Qaddafi's overthrow of King Idris, in London for the October 1973 war, in Jedda in the early 1980s for the height of the oil boom and the depth of "Death of a Princess", in London again for for the crisis with Iran over Salman Rushdie, Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent Gulf War; and in Saudi Arabia a second time for its aftermath. A posting to Zambia, two multilateral assignments in UKREP Brussels and UKMis New York and spells in Financial Relations Department and as Head of Planners were testing, if welcome, deviations from what had become the norm. As, when I had mined the seam of Arabism to its richest point in Riyadh, was India, controversy over State Visits and nuclear tests notwithstanding.

4. Arabists were trained for colonial tours of duty in the Gulf and Aden: they were described - even if they did not see themselves - as latter day Lawrences. But before most of my generation could ply their trade, withdrawal from East of Suez had changed the nature of the task: the rise of oil price and power meant that the Gulf remained as important to the UK as ever and Saudi Arabia began to eclipse Egypt as Britain's most substantial interest in the region. Above all, the two Arab/Israel wars of 1967 and 1973 meant that Arabists had more than enough to do, not as apologists for the Arabs but to persuade London (and indirectly Washington) that Palestine was a running sore that needed to be treated if the entire Western position in the Middle East was not to be undermined. That danger remains.

5. To follow one's father's passage to India, three decades on, was as tricky as it was (I think, though I have not checked) unprecedented. At first, social Delhi - a formidable force - queued up to congratulate London on having finally accepted the dynastic principle. Later, as things soured after the 1997 election and the ensuing State Visit, socialites wrote off

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

socialists and began taking pot shots at Her Majesty's messenger. The Indian press is commendably free, but it abuses that freedom to make mincemeat of personalities. I have never held a rein, a gun or a rod in my life - yet I am regularly described here as a hunting, shooting, fishing aristocrat of a type inconsonant with Labour, old or New.

6. As I learned during the Scott Report saga the British press is no less proficient than its Indian counterpart at creating stereotypes only to demolish them. One of the great failures of the Diplomatic Service has been its inability to cast off its image as bowler hatted, pin-striped and chinless with a fondness for champagne. It does not help when Ministers earn themselves a cheap thrill by colluding in the notion that the FCO is elitist and fuddy duddy. Or that Eton is a dirty word. A Foreign Office career is one of the best levellers - upwards or down - that has been devised. It is also testing. Bubbly is far from the mind when burning confidential documents on the roof of the Embassy in Baghdad, battering down the hatches against stone throwing mobs outside the High Commission in Lusaka or the Embassy in Tripoli, grinding out texts at all-night sessions in Brussels or New York, paying incognito visits to Syria or doing bumps and jumps in an RAF Tornado over Kuwait. Indeed cocktail parties are death as I am sure 99 per cent of DS colleagues would agree. Whoever it was who suggested an international treaty banning National Day receptions should be canonised.

7. I know that you filleted the Conservative Government on the issue, but in truth Sir Richard Scott's Inquiry was a travesty in its origin, procedure and output. I am not surprised that you decided that Sir Thomas Legg should conduct his in private. No civil servant should be put in a position where he or she is pilloried in public - and mimicked on the radio, TV and stage - without the chance to defend him or herself. The gradual erosion of trust between officials and Ministers is one of the saddest consequences of the dumbing down of the media and the focus on personalities as opposed to policies. If the doctrine of Ministerial responsibility is to be so blatantly prostituted then civil servants will have to man their own ramparts for rightful remedy. I believe that, as a first step, the Diplomatic Service Association (which I hope will soon be open to all who accept the mobility obligation) should retain the services of a lawyer. He, or she, should advise Foreign Servants on how to protect their fronts - and their rears. Such advice would have been handy not only during the Scott episode but, more recently, the Surtees case; in which ill-judged but widely publicised comments by the present FCO Legal Adviser helped to fuel a report which was as inflammatory as it was prejudicial to my personal and professional reputation.

8. My span in the DS has witnessed innumerable Reports on and Reviews of its size and shape. Duncan, Berrill and others have examined the entrails and produced their prescriptions. But no one has seriously queried the need for Britain to maintain an

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

extensive spread of overseas representation. And no Government has yet found a way of reducing the tasks placed on the DS. An early contraction seems unlikely for both positive and negative reasons. On the plus side, the proliferation of independent countries following the end of Empires (including the Soviet one), the expansion of world trade, the multiplication of visa regimes and the growth of tourism. On the flip side, the emergence of global dangers such as poverty, pollution, terrorism and drugs. More sharing of responsibility may become the norm as the Common Foreign and Security Policy becomes less embryonic: but I do not expect to see much furling of the Union Jack as we enter the next century. It is not a question of punching above one's weight (as one of your predecessors may or may not have said) but with it.

9. Having spent the last six years in Duncan's Outer Area, I have to say that I think he got it totally wrong. Saudi Arabia and India are both countries where the UK has extensive interests that can only be promoted by British diplomats. And these must be possessed of abundant reserves of talent, resilience and humour. Saudi Arabia is a cheerless confine, India a cacophonous cauldron. Serving in the Third World is quite different from serving in the First and, increasingly, the Second; as well, in most cases, as being further from home. Such service needs to be rewarded on a totally different scale, with a much larger quality of life element. I am glad to hear that Hornby marks a step in this direction - though, from the projections I have seen, not a large enough one. Distance, dirt and danger are the key variables.

10. So how does the "blustering buffoon" of Francis Wheen's imagination sign off for the last time? Not without thanking my wives: the first for giving up under the strain after only a few years; the second for making the last 21 years a joy above and below deck. And scores of colleagues, whether UK based or locally engaged, who have helped keep this particular show on the road. I have hugely enjoyed a career that has always been colourful and at times controversial. But now it is time to go home.

GORE-BOOTH

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]