

The Royal College of Physicians and Oxford Brookes University

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**Lord Porritt of Wanganui Bt GCMG GCVO
in interview with Lord Walton of Detchant
London, 21 November 1991**

JW Lord Porritt, Arthur, thank you very much for agreeing to talk to me and telling me something about your life and work. As you know, this series of recordings is being made for the historical archives of this Royal College. What I would like to do is to begin by learning a little about your early life in New Zealand. You were the son of a surgeon, I believe, who was an Edinburgh graduate.

AP Yes, that's right.

JW Yes, what sort of surgery did he do?

AP Oh, general surgery, it was the end of the last century, in the late nineties.

JW He himself was a New Zealander, who came to Edinburgh to study medicine.

AP Yes, he was just, a New Zealander.

JW Yes, I see. You yourself went to the Wanganui Collegiate School and then went on to Otago University.

AP Yes, that's right.

JW With the intention of studying medicine?

AP I studied medicine. I started there. My whole time at Otago was studying medicine.

JW But then you left Otago because you were one of the first ever Rhodes Scholars, I think, from New Zealand.

AP No, not the first ever, I was the first medical.

JW The first medical.

AP The first New Zealand Rhodes Scholar dated back about 1906, but I was the first medical, oddly enough.

JW And you came to Magdalen College, Oxford.

AP I came to Magdalen, because really one knew nothing about it. I had never had the experience before, nobody advised me, and so I didn't realise that when I got to Oxford my three and half years at Otago wouldn't count for anything.

JW Didn't it?

AP I had to start all over again, I went back to physics and chemistry.

JW No, really, that surprises me.

AP So I had a very good double grounding in the basics sciences.

JW Right And then you went on to St Mary's Hospital as a clinical student. What made you choose St Mary's, out of interest?

AP Oh, the famous scholarships I suppose. There were one or two places that were rather tempting. I nearly went to George's, but Mary's seemed a better offer. I got a scholarship, of course - one of the famous Moran scholarships, which I never justified. I didn't play rugger for Mary's at all.

JW No I see, yes, but you had actually played rugby, played rugger in New Zealand, hadn't you?

AP New Zealand and at Oxford.

JW Well, we will come back to your sporting career a little later. But you graduated with an Oxford degree in medicine, then MA and then, ultimately, later you became an MCh of Oxford.

AP Yes. I graduated with a conjoint as soon as I possibly could because from what I have told you, you will see that my three years at Oxford were magnificent, but medically they took me nowhere at all. By the time I came down from Oxford I was in exactly the same position medically, as when I went up.

JW Quite, quite.

AP So I got moving after that. I took the conjoint as the quickest thing in the Oxford final.

JW Yes.

AP And then the primary and final fellowship, and then the mastership of surgery at Oxford.

JW So where did you do most of your postgraduate training, was that at St Mary's?

AP Yes.

JW Would you say that there was any particular teacher or surgeon that influenced your career more than any other?

AP That is rather a hard one. I was with Zachary Cope, of course, who was a great character. My actual chief was Vincent Warren-Low, Vice-President of the College of Surgeons, a dear old boy, but very much the old generation. Cope, of course, as you know was very much up to date at that time.

JW Indeed.

AP I suppose those were the two that influenced me, first of all in the early days.

JW Yes. Now you got on to the consultant staff of St Mary's, but also on to the staff of a good many other hospitals. You were essentially a general surgeon, did you have a particular speciality in which you were deeply interested?

AP Yes, I had two but they didn't develop until later. I was on Pannett. I should think Charles Pannett, Aubrey Pannett¹...

JW Indeed.

AP ...was really the greatest surgical influence in my life. When I ceased being surgical registrar he took me on as a new post, as assistant to the surgical unit. And you probably will remember Pannett was the first ever professor of surgery in the University of London, and he was an extraordinary, interesting fellow. He was aesthetic; he painted, artistically painted, and his surgery was artistic. He was meticulous and a beautiful technician and I learnt all my technique from him, really. So my first hobby was, what he was keen to start on, was gastrectomy - duodenal and gastric ulcers, and that was my life. I went on doing those for the whole of my surgical life. The other great interest that I developed came after the war when I got so fed up with the sort of gross, traumatic surgery of the war, of the army that I was looking for something more human and I turned to carcinoma of the breast. And, in that I was one of the pioneers of simple surgery, lumpectomy.

JW Lumpectomy, right.

AP Although like so many people in their own country I got little credit for it. But I had a very good series of people, patients, both hospital and private, which produced a very interesting result that there was practically no difference between the two.

JW Between that and the more radical, mutilating mastectomy, of course, yes.

AP If any thing the simple method was just faintly, the better.

¹ Charles Aubrey Pannett, Professor of Surgery, University of London and Director of Surgical Unit, St Mary's Hospital, London 1922-50.

WP It is interesting that you should mention Pannett because when I was a medical student we were recommended to read 'Bailey and Love's Surgery', I remember, but I read a book by Pannett, which I thought was excellent, on surgery, very good. But then, of course, you yourself produced your 'Essentials of Modern Surgery'², didn't you, which was a very...Wasn't that with Handfield-Jones?

AP Yes, with Handfield-Jones.

JW Which was a very successful book. How many editions?

AP Well, it was. It went into five editions and it would have gone on if there had been anybody to edit it.

JW Yes quite.

AP We were growing old and got out of date, but it was a very successful book. It was written for students, undergraduates, but became very popular with postgraduates.

JW Now, you went into the army. When in 1939 was it, or was it shortly after?

AP Yes, just at the end of '39.

JW End of '39, and eventually rose to...

AP I joined the EMS [Emergency Medical Service] at first.

JW Did you?

AP Because at that time we all thought the bombing was going to be in London and all the surgery would be in London, and so I remained in London. In fact, I was left with another couple of colleagues at St Mary's as a sort of casualty clearing station, for three months, because we did practically nothing.

JW Quite. Eventually you rose to become a Brigadier with the 21 Army Group.

AP Oh yes, I had a very interesting career in the army.

JW Well tell me about it.

AP Well, I went over to France at the beginning, in charge of a surgical division, and there again hardly got moving before we were shunted out and ultimately we finished at La Baule with probably the last of the heavy casualties in France. And, in fact, I got out of France the day after the *Lancastria* was sunk. I got out of France after the armistice had been signed. So, virtually and officially, I suppose I was a prisoner of war. But very luckily a small naval boat came along and took me. I was in charge of the last people in the casino at La Baule.

² R M Handfield-Jones and A E Porritt, *The Essentials of Modern Surgery* 5th edition (London, 1957)

JW I see.

AP They consisted of about a dozen mortally wounded. In fact, we left two behind and about twenty VDs. And with those we set off in a tiddy train from La Baule to St Nazaire. We hung about all day trying to get aboard the *Lancastria*, which was sunk that night when she did sail. But I couldn't get my wounded on board and ultimately the transport officer pushed a little engine on to the front of our two carriages and sent us up to the coast to Quiberon. We spent the night on the Quiberon beach, and that night was the night the armistice was signed. And so, as I say, the French didn't take a very good view of us, and there we were just kept on the beach. The next morning this young midshipman came round with his motor-board on the back of his little boat and said did I want any help and I said my God I did, and in due course his ship came in and took us off.

JW I see, that's interesting because this morning I was talking to John Richardson, who was also in St Nazaire with a hospital ship, the *Dorsetshire*, during exactly the same period, which is interesting. Maybe you didn't know that.

AP No, I did not.

JW Then where did you go after that in the army?

AP Well, then of course we went up to Leeds where we re-grouped and I became acting CO to No. 2 British General Hospital, underneath the cricket pavilion, and there we stayed doing virtually nothing for months, training courses and so on. And ultimately, on almost New Year's Eve in 1940, we started on our voyage to the Middle East. Nine weeks in the troopship, a week to get out of Glasgow because of fog, seven weeks voyage round the Cape and a week in the Red Sea, with the last of the German bombers trying to get at us without success. And then I had nearly two years in the Middle East, again as an officer in charge of Surgical Division No. 2 General. A wonderful experience because it was a really genuine desert hospital. When they dumped us down the engineers had put in a couple of pipes and nothing else, absolutely nothing except sand and a few little bushes. We were a completely tented hospital. The engineers finally built us an operating theatre which was wood and tin, but all our wards were tents and all our living quarters were tents and our messes were all tents, so it was a genuine desert hospital. Incredibly good life, spurts of activity. Greece and Crete, of course were twelve hundred bedded hospitals: we had over two thousand patients in under canvas. And long periods of doing nothing or virtually nothing. It was an interesting life, very healthy life, very hot when it was hot, and very cold at night.

JW Where were you actually in the Middle East? Do you remember?

AP We were in the Canal Zone.

JW In the Canal Zone, yes.

AP Near Tell el Kebir.

JW TEK, yes.

AP Between the Canal and Tell el Kebir.

JW Yes, I know it.

AP A place called Qassâsîn.

JW I see. I was there after the war and later commanded, interestingly, the No.1 Northern General Hospital, TA.

AP Northern General.

JW Northern General, yes, from Newcastle.

AP Ours was the British General Hospital.

JW British General Hospital, yes indeed. Now then... and then of course when you became Brigadier to 21 Army Group, that was where?

AP That was here.

JW That was in the UK.

AP You see I was posted home from the Middle East in the usual way that happens in the army, you haven't the faintest idea why, just at the Alamein time. I had a wonderful trip home by flying boat the whole way, up the Nile and across Uganda and down the Congo, out half way across the Atlantic, back to Lisbon, Shannon, Southampton - a wonderful trip. And then again the usual criss-cross of postings. I was in charge of surgery at the Cambridge Hospital and the Woolwich (?) hospital, and then I did quite...twice I did consulting surgery for Eastern Command for Max Payne (?) when he was ill. I hadn't realised why I had been brought home but they were really trying to find out...get a consultant for 21 Army Group.

JW I see.

AP The Normandy picnic.

JW Yes.

AP And I hadn't appreciated at all that I was a potential candidate but in the end, I did. I was appointed, because that was quite superb job. And I had about...I was appointed about eight months before D-day, and then I travelled all over the country seeing my units, getting to know my surgeons and their anaesthetists. I had a large family of surgeons, anaesthetists, pathologists, blood people and so on, and it really was a most fantastic job. And of course we had penicillin for the first time in quantity.

JW Did you stay in that post until the end of the war?

AP Until after.

JW Until after the war, yes.

AP I was furious because being the age I was - I was a bit older than most. And a certain number of marked jobs were kept in the army after their genuine demob date. And I am afraid I got into that category, so I didn't get out actually until the October.

JW Oh didn't you. I see.

AP '45.

JW Then you went on, of course, afterwards as Consultant Surgeon to the army and you later became Surgeon to the Royal Household. Did that involve you in much work?

AP Oh, I had been Surgeon to the Royal Household long before that.

JW You had. I see, yes.

AP This was one of the lucky breaks.

JW From 1946 I believe, that's right.

AP No, 1930.

JW Oh, really I didn't realise that.

AP I was appointed surgeon to the Duke of York when King Edward VIII came to the throne and the Duke of York became heir apparent. The medical powers that be, namely Lord Dawson and Lord Horder and company, decided that they ought to have a special household for the heir apparent, the Duke of York. He already had a surgeon and physician so they appointed a young physician and a young surgeon who I expect they thought about twenty years hence might be a respectable member of the Royal Household. And as you know very well, within a year our boss, the heir to the throne, had come to the throne. And so we really were a bit young to be surgeon and physician to the king and so we became surgeon and physician to the household.

JW Who was the physician? Never mind.

AP I should remember... old age.

JW I appreciate that. Yes indeed. Well let's leave that anyhow. And then later you became Sergeant Surgeon to the Queen.

AP Well, it went in steps. My senior, in the Royal Household in the thirties, took over my job as surgeon of the household when I joined the army. When I got out of the army, I became Surgeon to the King, genuine.

JW Quite.

AP When he died I became Sergeant Surgeon to the Queen.

JW And did that involve you in, apart from obviously going to the Palace from time to time, did you actually have much in the way of surgical activity?

AP That depends which job you are talking of. You see, the Sergeant Surgeon is really the consulting surgeon. If there is any surgical problem at the Palace, he is called in by the apothecary or the physician and is really there to give the best... to say who is the best person to do this particular job.

JW To do that particular job, yes.

AP So very seldom does the Sergeant Surgeon operate, but as Surgeon I operated once or twice on members of the Royal Family.

JW You did, right. Now you became President of the Royal College of Surgeons of England in 1960 for three years. An enjoyable time?

AP Magnificent. Quite an experience of a lifetime really.

JW Of course. What are the things that stand out most in your memory from that period?

AP That is a hard question to answer in one. I suppose essentially the people I met. It was an enormous widening of one's surgical viewpoint, both at home and abroad. I got to know a vast number of very delightful and very interesting and very well-informed people on the surgical side, and I think that was the thing that struck me more than anything. Of course, you know from your own experience that what a president does depends very much on the atmosphere that exists in the place he does it.

JW Indeed.

AP And therefore a wife is all important.

JW Quite.

AP And the College of Surgeons didn't have much atmosphere, but my wife gave it one. And in that atmosphere I was able to work and I thoroughly enjoyed working for three hectic years, in which I travelled a great deal as well.

JW Kay was a tremendous support, of course, and we will come back to her a little later. And I am interested to hear that you said that because in so many of these situations the whole ethos is decided or in fact governed by the wife's activities.

AP Well, I think so, the happiness of the place. She made a point of knowing all the staff and all the people in it. They liked her and she liked them and the whole thing went like clockwork.

JW President of the BMA, '60 - '61, and gold medallist in '64.

AP They overlapped, you see.

JW Of course.

AP I had been appointed to the BMA presidency before I knew anything about the College. The College rather came out of the blue like so many things in my life, and so I had the two of them together for the first year. So it was a bit of a sweat.

JW It was yes.

AP Because I had promised to do a tour, a world tour for the BMA at the beginning of 1961. Of course, that was my first year, '60 - '61, first year in the College.

JW At the College, yes.

AP So Stanford Cade was extremely good at the College, he was my vice-president and he took over for about nearly six weeks.

JW Did he, did he. An enjoyable world tour?

AP Oh, yes. It was wonderful.

JW And then of course later the Royal Society of Medicine, of course, with which we have both been associated.

AP That was after, some time later '66, '67.

JW Are there any particular incidents or events of your presidency there that stand out?

AP Well yes, because we were just starting on the ideas of considerable enlargement of the Royal Society of Medicine, and the beginnings of it, without much detail, were being planned, and there was great excitement, of course, taking over the old Post Office building, which you yourself know very well.

JW Very well.

AP You had the final stages, I had the very beginning of it. And during that time too we purchased Chandos House, which was the sort of social centre for the RSM, and that again was quite an event, and a most beautiful house, as you know, which we used and loved, where I had my farewell party before I went to New Zealand.

JW I see, right. Now, of course among your other presidencies you became President of the Association of Surgeons, Great Britain and Ireland, and then you were Master of the Society of Apothecaries. Had you been an apothecary for a long time?

AP Oh yes, way back in the thirties.

JW Did you, I see.

AP Middle thirties.

JW Yes. And that again would be very enjoyable because of the magnificence of the premises and...

AP Oh, I was fascinated. I'm a very keen apothecary and, in fact, I have the very odd honour of doing two consecutive years as master. I had finished my official year and a successor had been appointed, an extraordinary nice gynaecologist called Brass - I don't know whether you remember him. And we just sort of packed up for the summer, and the election had been made, and he died, very suddenly and quite unexpectedly. And so the court decided that rather than go through everything again they'd just carry on, so I carried on. And I think this only happened about three times in the four hundred years history of the apothecaries.

JW Quite, quite. Well now let's change the subject for the moment because that's a little to do with your surgical career. Let's go back a long, long time because you were a great athlete in your youth, and I think it is important to come to that and I hadn't realised until I got to know you about some of your outstanding pedigree. Tell me about your original training and before you went to the Paris Olympics in 1924. You started in New Zealand no doubt.

AP I started in New Zealand. I was really a rugger player. I used to run, but my real game was rugger.

JW Where did you play, what position did you play in rugger?

AP I started off at school as a front-row hooker, translated to what is now called a number eight, and then I went, because of being able to run fairly fast, out on to a wing, and stayed on the wing. I was a wing three quarter really. When I played for Oxford I played in the wing.

JW So you got an Oxford blue, did you?

AP No, I didn't get an Oxford blue, because sadly at that time athletics, Oxford athletics, were held in the winter and the two just wouldn't mix and I tried very hard and every time I played rugger I wricked an ankle or knee and couldn't run. My first year at Oxford I only got a half blue for a hundred yards because of an injury from rugger, so I gave up the rugger.

JW Now what year was that? That was after the Olympics?

AP I went up in 1923, October 1923.

JW So you were running then before you went to the Olympics.

AP Oh yes. The year before I got my Rhodes scholarship, 1922, I ran in the New Zealand championships, and although I was beaten by an Australian and an American, I was the first New Zealander home in a fairly fast start. And so when they came to pick the team, the New Zealand team for Paris in 1924, I was a good cheap proposition because I was already at Oxford, they didn't have to send me from New Zealand, they only had to pay my fare from Oxford. So that is how I got to Paris for the Olympic Games.

JW And in the famous hundred yards won by Harold Abrahams, with Jackson Scholz second, I recall, as we do from 'Chariots of Fire', you were third.

AP Yes. Well, 'Chariots of Fire' that was my race, of course.

JW That was your race, of course it was, indeed.

AP Yes Harold Abrahams, Scholz and myself.

JW And then yourself and you got the bronze medal. It must be a treasured possession.

AP It certainly is. I gather now, I am the oldest holder of an Olympic medal in this country. Not surprising, of course.

JW Now, tell me...I think you told me something about what Sam Peckinpah (?) the coach said to you after that race.

AP It wasn't very polite.

JW No. Why? We would love to hear it. Let's have it recorded.

AP Yes, (?) quite rightly spent a long time congratulating Harold Abrahams, who very kindly shared his special quarters with me on that day. We were the two Englishmen against four Americans. So when we got back after the race he spoke to Harold for a long while and then he turned to me and said, 'Well, young fella, I suppose I have got to congratulate you too, but I think you're the worst bloody runner I have ever seen in my life.'

JW I see.

AP And I thought having just got a bronze in the Olympic Games, that was a very good statement.

JW I see.

AP But he went on to say, 'If you let me take a hand with you next year, I will make you into a runner.' So I thought it was a good opportunity, and by next year at

Oxford, every Sunday I went down to Queen's Club and Mussabini coached me. And he did what he said. At the time of the Olympic Games I was a good, even time runner, say ten seconds for a hundred yards. In the year he coached me, on anything like a good day I could break ten anytime, and my varsity record was under ten because of him.

JW And I understand in 1925 in the Oxford Cambridge match you did 9.9 [secs]. Is that right?

AP That's right. That was a record that stood for thirty seven years.

JW Did it really. I see, and interesting.

AP I got tired of going down to watch it being broken, and of course the one year I didn't go, it was broken.

JW I see, by somebody who became notable or...

AP No hasn't been very notable, a chap called Metcalfe. His name is fairly well known.

JW But were you not only a member of the New Zealand team but you were the captain of the New Zealand team in 1924. Is that right?

AP That's right.

JW Yes indeed. And then you became captain of athletics in Oxford, and since then you've been...well, when did you become a member of the International Olympic Committee?

AP Very early on in 1935.

JW And you are still a member?

AP Yes, an honorary member now.

JW Right, but still that's even so long serving. And what does the Olympic Order First Class mean, out of interest?

AP Well it is given to people who've spent a long while with the Olympic movement and done a fair amount of work for it.

JW I see.

AP It's a nice chain that you wear round your neck on occasions.

JW And apart from your publications in surgery you wrote a book on athletics with somebody called Lowe.

AP Douglas Lowe. He was before your time. He was a magnificent half-miler, middle-distance runner and a charming chap. He was the captain of the Cambridge team when I was captain of the Oxford team when we went over to America to run. And he was a lawyer and I was a doctor and we wrote this book on athletics and it was really a philosophical book. It dealt more with the background, Greek background of athletics, than it did with modern athletics, I think.

JW So you were not only a hundred yards runner but you also were a hurdler.

AP Yes, that was at the time Oxford had no hurdlers, and I used to jump the damn things and run in between. I wasn't really a hurdler. That accounts for some of the best races of my life against David Lord Burghley who was an early straight-legged hurdler. As I said, he hurdled, I sprinted between the hurdles and the net result, we used to finish up within inches of each other, time and time again.

JW Well, so that's been one of your abiding interests throughout your career. Did you have actually any representative honours, apart from athletics, in rugby. Did you play in New Zealand for... You weren't an All Black for instance?

AP No.

JW No, but you played for Oxford on more than one occasion. Right, well let's leave the sport for a moment and then come back to your surgical career. You have had a lot of honours conferred upon you, the American Surgical Association and the French Academy of Surgery, and I think you probably are an honorary fellow of more colleges throughout the world than anybody that I have ever met.

AP All of them.

JW All of them. So how did this, I mean, what was your feeling about these things? Did every one of them involve a journey to the particular college in question to have it conferred?

AP Yes every one of them. They were all rather special.

JW Yes, of course they were.

AP I greatly appreciated them. The two Scottish ones, of course, Edinburgh and Glasgow. Edinburgh very early on, Glasgow much later. Ireland just after the end of my presidency. Ireland, an odd one, of course, - Royal College in Ireland.

JW Of course.

AP The American College, I valued greatly. Not only am I a member of the...what did you say - the Clinical Association?

JW Yes, the American...

AP But I am also the American Clinical Association as well.

JW Clinical Association, I see, as well as the American Surgical. Yes, indeed. And of course you are an honorary...

AP Honorary Australia, which is obviously one near my heart. And the other – Canada, Canada was splendid. I got my Canadian one in Quebec and then, to try and pay due deference, I made half my speech in French after I got my fellowship there, with help from this end before I left. And that leaves South Africa.

JW South Africa, yes indeed.

AP I was one of the very first people to get the South African one, together with John Bruce, who was then President of the Edinburgh College. And we did a fantastic trip together. Really from instead Cape to Cairo, we did Cairo to the Cape, and we visited almost every medical centre, surgical centre that had an Edinburgh or an English fellow in Africa, quite fantastic. We ended up in Johannesburg in this new college, very much modelled on the Edinburgh pattern. They decided to give us both fellowships. Now, there is a story about that because John Bruce and I on this long trip had decided to take literally, desperately, in turn to give the official speeches at dinners and so forth, irrespective of where we were, just took one after another. When it came to the last time at Johannesburg, we were given these scrolls, after due processions, as they'd done, copying the Edinburgh College. It was John's turn to speak. Whoever spoke the other simply made due acknowledgement, and as John had turned to do the speaking, which he did of course as usual very well, and I simply had to end by saying thank you, really. In the meantime I'd had a chance to look at my scroll and when I got up I was able to say, 'You have really put the seal on this trip with two reigning presidents travelling together all this distance, because while Professor Bruce was talking to you I have had a chance to look at my certificate and I see that you have very kindly given me his.'

JW I see, yes, right. Well that is the sort of...but you managed to get them exchanged afterwards. That's right good. Now, apart from this of course you are honorary Fellow of this College, the Royal College of Physicians of London, and of several others: the Obstetricians and the Radiologists and the Australian College of Physicians as well.

AP And Radiologists.

JW And Radiologists. So again these are all important. Now, I suppose that of your honorary doctorates of law, probably, apart from the ones at St Andrew's and Birmingham, Otago must have given you particular pleasure, your old university.

AP It certainly did, because from what I have told you, you see, I left Otago after three and half years without a degree. And although it was my mother university I had no degree from Otago at all until I got this honorary LLD.

JW I see.

AP So I told them that I was very pleased when I got it to receive it, to be made legitimate, after about fifty years.

JW Yes quite, quite. And of course Doctorates of Medicine – Bristol, and you are a Doctor of Science of Oxford, as well.

AP That was a lovely one, of course.

JW That was a lovely one. Encaenia is an extraordinary event, isn't it?

AP Yes, it really was a terrific occasion, as you know very well. Marvellous.

JW What is the Legion of Merit then of the USA, tell me about that?

AP Well, that is an army degree, an army honour, I mean. What happened of course in the north-west Europe campaign – as you know the American and British armies worked closely together, and so did the surgical side. They evacuated through our lines their wounded and *vice versa*. So I got to see a great deal of the American surgical side and the American consulting surgeon. Well, as I say, I had so much to do with the Americans that they decided they would like to give me a little credit.

JW That is lovely, delightful. Now, of course, as far as honours conferred by the Crown are concerned, you really have had an extraordinary lists of these: the OBE in 1943, that must have been ...

AP That was the Middle East.

JW That was the Middle East career, yes. And then you became a CBE in 1945?

AP That was Normandy.

JW That was Normandy, so that again was another one and then...

AP I did in fact go over illegally on D plus one. I sailed on D.

JW Ah, did you, I see.

AP And Monty himself, of whom I saw a great deal - I was his consulting surgeon – said, 'Normally, of course, you did a very good job and this would be a DSO job, but brigadiers do not go across with the assault forces, officially, so we can't realise your presence officially, so I can only get you a CBE.'

JW I see, so that is the way that came about. And then the KCMG in 1950.

AP The KCMG, as the Michael and George is, was really an Empire, Commonwealth decoration. I got it for really reviving the Empire Games after the war and for being chairman for the first ever games in Auckland in 1950. It was after that that I got my KCMG, nothing to do with surgery, it was really an Empire degree.

JW For the athletics side, and presumably, I remember watching it well on television, you would be in Vancouver in 1954 to see the mile of the century between Bannister and Landy, were you? Yes. I hadn't realised that you had been so prominent. So you are now obviously delighted that the Commonwealth Games have been so good.

AP With luck they've gone on because we had a bit of a tussle for a while keeping them floating. And just as the London Olympic Games after the war, I think saved the Olympic movement, so I believe the 1950 Empire Games in Auckland saved what is now the Commonwealth Games. They were two very good efforts in very difficult circumstances.

JW You didn't have the problem then of the political South African issue at that stage? No, it hadn't arisen at that stage.

AP No.

JW And then the GCMG, the Knight Grand Cross, 1967, was when you became Governor General.

AP Yes that's right. That's always an automatic award to a Governor General.

JW Yes, we will come to that in a little while. But then I wondered about the GCVO, the Victorian Order in 1978.

AP The KCVO I got for being surgeon to the...

JW To the Royal Family, yes.

AP And then the GCVO is a promotion given as a courtesy after we had entertained the Queen and the Royal Family as our guests in New Zealand when she came out to pay an official visit. So, in other words, I got them both by bits and pieces...

JW I see, it's a remarkable record. But let's go to then being Governor General, which you held that post in New Zealand from 1967 to '72. Did it come as a surprise to be invited?

AP Oh, completely, out of the blue.

JW Did it?

AP I don't think any surgeon has ever been a Governor General before. But I loved it and I did find something in common, funnily enough, because when you boil

it down, just as a doctor is there to serve his patients on a basic level, so a Governor General is really there to serve his people on a basic level. And it was just doing the same thing, mixing with all sorts of people on a considerably higher level this time. But, of course, I found it fascinating; I had had nothing to do with politics before and hadn't very much liked politics, in fact, but in New Zealand the Governor General chairs the executive committee, which is really the cabinet every week, once a week. So you can't keep out of politics, so that became incredibly interesting. I had my tussle with the prime minister, when I insisted on seeing the leader of the opposition always, at intervals, because I was a firm believer that the Governor General must be an impartial character.

JW Quite.

AP And so that side of it was quite fascinating and then, of course, the visiting. I travelled to every corner of New Zealand I think. I made a special point of going to small villages miles from anywhere to really show the flag. And it was very important when I got to these tiny little townships and so on, it was the Rolls Royce flying the Royal Standard and my Governor and my ADC's uniform that really affected the people, that's what they loved. In other words, the show. I felt there that I was a halfway house. New Zealand had decided that it was time, like Canada and Australia, that they had their own New Zealand Governors General, and so I was a very useful hermaphrodite, having been born in New Zealand and lived all my life in the old country, I was a good mixture. But I sensed it early on, and for that reason I rather, I think, overdid the pomp and ceremony and ceremonial, although it was vastly appreciated, I can tell you; most people in New Zealand loved it. But the powers that be in New Zealand thought it was time to cut a lot of it, but they didn't in my time.

JW No, no right. Well going back to honours, you became a Baronet in 1963, which was presumably because of your presidency of the Royal College of Surgeons, related to that.

AP Again, you see, lucky. There are only about six baronets after my appointment, right at the end of the chain.

JW But it will...that's something which will go on of course to your son, be passed on to your son. And then a Life Peer in 1973, which was shortly after returning from New Zealand.

AP Very shortly, much quicker than usual.

JW Had you ever while you were in New Zealand for those five exciting years, had you ever considered the prospect of staying there permanently, or were you always drawn back to the UK?

AP No. I was always coming back. I have been here too long. I loved New Zealand, I was born there, it is my mother country, and it is, as you know, a beautiful little country, so many things that other places haven't got, but it's too far away. Now

because it is too far away, it cannot help being parochial, and if you have live long enough in this country then you notice that parochial atmosphere.

JW Yes, I understand that.

AP And despite all the pleasures of living there, I think I still would rather have a London winter.

JW Yes quite, quite. Coming back then, here, what would you say have been your most outstanding memories of your time in the Lords, and have you been involved in any really major debates and activities, committees over the years?

AP Yes I was at first, quite a lot. I used to speak on quite a lot of things, mostly on medical things of course, but I think my maiden speech was made on immigration, which was rather an odd speech when you are supposed to be, as you know, not very argumentative.

JW No, quite.

AP I've spoken on sport matters. And of course another funny thing that happened to me after I got back, I became the director of a company, of two, in fact, pharmaceutical companies, which was quite a new life, big business. And that led me to speak in the Lords once or twice on patents and on pharmaceuticals in general.

JW You have enjoyed working for those companies I know. Are you still involved?

AP I retire this December 30th.

JW I see, right, good. Well, I don't say good.

AP About time too, I mean I just wondered when they were going to kick me off, so I felt at the age of ninety one it was time I got off.

JW I see, well, I think that's a pretty fair stint, a pretty fair stint that you have done for these companies.

AP But it was a wonderful experience because one learnt an awful lot about how these companies are run, and it led to a lot of extremely interesting travel. I had several trips to America and all over the Continent, over and over and over again. It was very stimulating.

JW Good. Now returning to your family life, did you keep in touch... did you have brothers and sisters in New Zealand?

AP I had one brother.

JW One brother, was he medical?

AP No, he was a farmer.

JW He was a farmer, I see, yes. And have you still got relatives in New Zealand whom you contacted when you were out there?

AP Yes, I have got a lot of cousins, I don't know who they are. I have got one or two, very few, very few really. Not in close touch.

JW Not in close touch. Your parents, no doubt, they probably died while you were still in the UK, did they?

AP My mother died before I went to school. She died when I was fourteen.

JW I see, and your father?

AP My father lived till he was eighty.

JW And you would go back and see him from time to time?

AP Oh yes, I went back three or four times after the war. And I have been back of course three or four times since my Governor Generalship.

JW Now Kay, your wife, has been immensely supportive throughout, and, of course, you have got two sons and one daughter and of those sons one has found a particularly prominent role in public life, Jonathon.

AP Yes, he has.

JW What do you think is his future now, then?

AP Oh, I think it is quite interesting. He has become recognised in this country as one of the..., almost the conservationist.

JW Yes.

AP Ecological guru. He is speaking everywhere. He enjoys writing. He did six years as the chairman of Friends of the Earth, but he retired from that, really to do writing, lecturing and talking and the media, he is always on the box. I think he has got quite a future in that. He has written a magnificent book. I don't know whether you have seen it.

JW Yes I have, yes I have. And he has become now, I think, really quite heavily identified with the Green Party.

AP Well, no, I would like to contradict that.

JW You would, right, good.

AP He was one of the founders of the Green Party, originally. But he is really not politically minded, he is only politically minded in that he feels that it is going to be very difficult to get conservation anywhere without politics. So to that extent he keeps next to them. I don't think he likes the present Green Party much at all, quite honestly, and I don't think he favours any particular party in fact.

JW So the Green Party he doesn't see it as really achieving any kind of significant power or influence in this country.

AP No, I don't think he does. Originally, he thought it might; you see, he was taken with what the Green Party in Germany did. And then they went astray, as you know, and so did this party here, and he gave up the chairmanship, gave his chairmanship up because he didn't approve of what it was doing. He is still a member of the Green Party and he still essentially believes in their...

JW In their principles.

AP Yes.

JW Yes, quite, and their ideas.

AP But he doesn't like the politics of it.

JW Is he living nearby, or is he..?

AP Yes, he lives in London.

JW He lives in London. And you other son?

AP He wants to move out.

JW Does he, yes, well I think that there is a lot to be said against the quality of life in London nowadays, isn't there? Yes. But you really are so much a Londoner that this is now your home.

AP Yes, I have lived in London all my life.

JW Yes, quite, quite. You have another son and a daughter, and what are they doing?

AP My daughter, who is our eldest child, we took her out to New Zealand with us as a youngster thinking it would be a wonderful opportunity for her, and within six months she was engaged to my senior ADC and within a year they were married, and that's that. They have been a very good partnership ever since, he gave up the army, he was in the Blues, and took on banking and then stockbroking, which he is doing now.

JW In New Zealand.

AP No, no in London.

JW Back in London, I see.

AP They live in Barnes.

JW Oh, they live in Barnes, so very close by.

AP They have two boys, both at Eton.

JW Both at Eton, I see, right. And do any of them, your grandchildren, have your kind of athletic prowess?

AP I haven't seen it yet.

JW You haven't, no, I see.

AP They are fairly young, I mean my eldest grandson is only sixteen. There is time yet to come.

JW So how many grandchildren? And your other son?

AP My younger son, he's got two sons too. He married a very nice Canadian girl, an artist, a rather modernistic type of artist, and they took up what we you could only only call real estate business, first of all in London and then in France, in the good days. Of course, they have suffered a bit in the last year or so, like everybody else has. Their eldest son is now at the Dragon School at Oxford, and the younger son is only five.

JW I see, right. Do you find...do you get pleasure and enjoyment from being with your grandchildren, have you over the years?

AP Oh yes, very much, but limited.

JW But limited, I agree, yes.

AP I find that a grandparent's (?) are exhausted within an hour. I thoroughly enjoy seeing my grandchildren but not too much of them.

JW Yes. What things have you and Kay enjoyed doing most together, quite apart from all the excitement and the travel and so on that you've had over the years?

AP Well, I think again it boils down to people. We both love people. We both seem to get on fairly well with people and that has really made our lives. We have got so many friends all over the world. I think that has been the essence of our lives.

JW Indeed, indeed. Going back over your career, if you were starting again, would you wish it to go exactly as it has done or is there anything that you would have liked to have changed?

AP From what we have spoken about, you will realise that I have had an incredibly lucky life.

JW You have. You have had, not lucky, you've had an incredibly productive life and a wonderful life.

AP And an incredibly varied life. I have had about five different lives so it would be very, very difficult to say that I would want them anything different to what they've been. I have enjoyed every one of them and I've enjoyed them all when they have been put together.

JW When did you actually give up surgery, was this...?

AP When I went to New Zealand.

JW When you went to New Zealand. Before that you were still doing surgery.

AP 1967

JW 1967. So that you were...

AP I retired from the Health Service in 1965 and I didn't have long after that.

JW No. So you just had another couple of years in sort of private practice, etcetera. Without betraying any confidences, did you find in the course of your career that you had any really interesting and unusual patients?

AP Oh yes, quite a few.

JW Well, any particular experiences that you would like to share with us without, as I say, betraying any medical confidences.

AP I suppose one of my most interesting patients was Monty.

JW I see, yes, quite.

AP Montgomery, I operated on him twice. He was a fascinating character. But you know from your life that interesting people turn up from all over the place. And, of course, being on the Royal Household - you see the Royal Household involved treating anybody from private secretaries, king's private secretary, down to the ostlers in the stables, and they were a wonderful variety of people, all with their particular interests. So I found that intensely interesting in that job because of the people. All the time people have attracted me.

JW There is an interesting apocryphal tale, which I think would be possibly largely apocryphal, that when King George VI had incipient gangrene in one foot, that Learmonth came and apparently refused to operate on him at Buckingham Palace, and he would have to go into hospital. Is that true or not?

AP It's a good story.

JW But not entirely true.

AP I doubt it very much.

JW He eventually did I think do the operation at Buckingham Palace.

AP Yes, he did.

JW But brought all his equipment...

AP Brought all his accoutrements with him.

JW With him from Edinburgh, not trusting all these Londoners, etc. You must have been involved, were you, in all the discussions at that time?

AP Oh yes, that's where the Sergeant Surgeon comes in, you see. He doesn't actually do the job.

JW No no, but you gave advice. It was also said at the time that he was being treated by his private physician with tiny, tiny doses of, homeopathic, doses of ergot.

AP This was dear old Weir (?). Oh, he was a great difficulty to us in many ways. Yes a wonderful old Scotsman, and of course he believed thoroughly in homeopathy and he kept on with homeopathic treatments irrespective of what we were doing. And of course the Royal Family rather approved of homeopathy and so we just had to accept it for what it was worth. He really was one of the things we had to treat.

JW Looking back you had this incredible interest in athletics over all the years and rugby football and rugger, but you also include in Who's Who, riding, golf and swimming.

AP I love riding. I could ride almost before I could walk, and I did a lot of hunting over the years. In fact, I didn't give up hunting until I left for New Zealand and I wanted to go on hunting out there, but they wouldn't let me.

JW This was because you were Governor General was it?

AP Yes

JW I see that was one of the rules.

AP Yes.

JW And what about the golf?

AP You got that out of Who's Who.

JW Yes I did. Yes.

AP I used to get a lot of exercise out of golf. I never really played golf. I used to use golf clubs and got a great deal of enjoyment out of it, but I never did much about my handicap. I would have thought fifteen, sixteen, the best I ever got to. But I got a great deal of pleasure out of it. And while I was Governor General it was one of the few methods I could find of getting away.

JW And getting some relaxation. Yes, indeed.

AP Getting a little exercise and fresh air and peace.

JW Yes, indeed. So for how long did you go on with these athletic and sporting pursuits? I mean, when did you really begin to hang up your boots?

AP Oh, in the middle seventies.

JW Squash, for instance, did you play?

AP No, I never played much squash, I did play some, but not much. Tennis too I used to.

JW And a little bit of tennis. Yes, yes indeed. The one thing that doesn't appear in your sporting interest, is cricket. Were you ever a cricketer?

AP No, I wasn't. I played for the Rudolph Ramblers when I was at Magdalen. You know Oxford colleges have their college sides.

JW Indeed, indeed. Ours was called the Rudolph Ramblers.

JW Was Hugh Sinclair involved in that?

AP Yes.

JW Because he was a great...

AP He was a bit after me.

JW He was a bit after you, yes of course he was. Yes, yes indeed.

AP Yes, I knew him well.

JW Going back to Magdalen, you're an Honorary Fellow of Magdalen. How did that come about? Was it something that came completely out of the blue?

AP Yes, as far as I know. I wouldn't be surprised...Hugh Sinclair, you were referring about, I wouldn't be surprised if he hadn't had an effect on it, but it came from the College. A delightful thing to be.

JW Of course, and have you been back on a number of occasions?

AP Oh yes, until recently I used to go fairly regularly to gaudies and this sort of thing. I haven't been much in the last year or two.

JW Well, it is always difficult to terminate a fascinating discussion like this with someone who has had such a varied life. Throughout the whole of this varied life and exciting and interesting life, any regrets, anything that you would like to have done that you didn't do?

AP No, I don't think so. I have enjoyed life thoroughly. I hope there is not much that I regret, I can't think of any at the moment.

JW No, no, well of course it's been a career of continuing success and achievement. And nothing then you that would like to have changed, as you said, from what you have been doing over all these years?

AP No.

JW No. Thank you. Well, I can only say that it has been a great pleasure to have had the opportunity of talking to you and I hope that you too have enjoyed sharing some of these reminiscences with us.

AP I have talked an awful lot, much too much, probably.

JW Not at all, not at all. It's been splendid. Thank you.

AP Thank you very much. Thank you.