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Dr. Peter Williams, CBE, in interview with Dr. Max Blythe
Interview One Part One
Oxford, 21 November 1995

MB Dr. Peter Williams, you were born in Trinidad, in this rather wonderful house, Port of Spain.

PW Yes.

MB In 1925, September 1925.

PW That's right.

MB To fascinating parents. I've been reading about your father's life, anyway, in particular. Tell me about these parents and that home.

PW Well, it starts off in Dorsetshire. My father came from the village of Lulworth Cove, you know, the fishing village on the coast of Dorset there, and he and his brother had a business. They owned boats in Lulworth, and they looked after the gentry's houses when they were up in London during the winter months. And so they were people of some slight substance in that type of community. They fished as well, they fished for lobsters and that type of thing. So that was on my father's side. And my father was born into that home in the middle of Lulworth. My mother was from a village not that far away, called Little Briddy, quite near to Dorchester. And this was a real village built around the country house. And my grandfather on that side, was the head gardener to that household. So my mother was born into a gardening community, went to the village school. My father went to the village school. And these were the people from which they came. Now, from that stage, my father, having left school at about the age of 12, and at the age of about 16, he went over to Little Briddy to become an apprentice in the garden, to learn about gardening. So that was where he met my mother. The background to these gardens is very fascinating, because the great houses all over England, had these superb gardens, very professionally run. The people in them were trying to create great gardens, were introducing plants from all over the world, and fascinatingly, I found out subsequently, they all used to meet at the Chelsea Flower Show to exchange plants, and also, in fact, to exchange apprentices, so that ... if you exchanged an apprentice, of course, and that apprentice moved to the other garden, he might well meet the daughter of that gardener. And so there was enormous intermarriage between the heads of these gardens. It was the horticultural community of those days. And I think this underlines quite a lot, that that horticultural community was the one that my father moved into, and that my mother came from, because it really caused the rest of the life to develop from that. So, from that, my father, having worked there for several years, decided that he'd like to go into this in a more elaborate way than from the local garden, and he followed, in that respect, in the footsteps of a brother of my mother's. Frank Burkenshawe had gone to Kew Gardens, because that was where you got the higher education in gardening, you might say, and from Kew Gardens he'd been appointed to the Colonial Service in Malaysia. My father must have

seen that as an opportunity to really move. And he followed in the footsteps, via a nursery garden, Beeches, near Kew, and then he went into Kew. Kew Gardens was the place you trained in really proper gardening. And that was done by training on the job, but also attending night school, and he did that type of thing. And you can still see the notebooks from that time. Now, there he was, after a few years, in 1916, trained to be a gardener, as high status as you could get in that, from the point of view of training. Now you were going to go and do a job. And it was 1916. And two things happened, virtually by the same post. One was his call up papers to go to the Western front, and the other was the offer of an appointment as the Curator of the Botanic Gardens in Port of Spain, Trinidad. He, I think, was fool enough to ask which he should do. Fortunately, from my point of view, he was told to go to Trinidad, not to the Western Front. So maybe all of the subsequent story stems from that choice being made for him.

MB Peter, I'd like to come in here, because the marriage to Agnes Burkenshawe, when did that take place?

PW Well, that took place at just about this time, because now he had a job. And so they got married in 1916, and he almost immediately went off to Trinidad, and she followed a few months later, on a later boat.

MB A terrific story of a young gardener falling in love with a head gardener's daughter, and moving away into a fantastic new world – Trinidad.

PW Yes. Trinidad. And Trinidad, obviously, became the centre of our life. When you worked in the Colonial Service, you were three years in Trinidad before you went home on leave, so you had to make it your life. And so he became a tropical agricultural expert. He had this background of botany from Kew. He was intensely interested in botany, and he subsequently wrote a considerable part of *The Flora of Trinidad and Tobago*, and other books about the plants.

MB He was a great systematist, in due course, I think.

PW Yes, he was a systemist, and a popularist as well, because he ... other books that he wrote on *The Useful and Ornamental Plants* were illustrated and that type of thing. These were, became basic books, and things about school gardening, that type of thing. And his career then went on. From Trinidad he went to Grenada for three years as Superintendent of Agriculture, returned to Trinidad until 1935, when he went to Palestine as Chief Horticultural Officer, looking after the citrus industry on behalf of the government. And in '39, returned once more to Trinidad. There until '45, when he went to Zanzibar, became Director of Agriculture there, then the General Manager of the Clove Growers Association, and retired to South Africa. So that's my father's background in this.

MB Peter, I have a delightful photograph of him in this book, that obviously he was in middle years, or young to middle years, and is a delightful person, with some resemblance of you. And this is a career that is obviously fascinating, from a horticultural, botanical, agricultural point of view. And I'd just like to stay with your father for a moment, because he really was a very special botanist, and from him you

got a very great love of plants, I suspect. And he was basically the Botanical Gardens in, in Port of Spain when you were a boy.

PW Yes. Yes.

MB That must have been quite an impact.

PW Well, it was a considerable impact, because we lived beside the Botanic Gardens, just up the hill. It was ... part of the view from the House on the Hill. And we used to go in there, to walk around, to play, the bay avenue of the sort of trees that the leaves were turned into bay rum, there was the palm avenue that he planted, there were all the plants, and the plant names were total familiars to my father. And so they became familiars to me and my brother and sister, so that you knew these plants as your friend.

MB Fascinating tropical flora, with quite a lot of South American material there, I suppose?

PW Yes. Very South American, it's very near to Venezuela. But, of course, being a botanic gardens, the plants were from all over the world, because the object of these Botanic Gardens was to act as a sort of clearing house for tropical plants, discovered and made economic in other parts of the world. So that the Botanic Gardens that you found all through the colonies, were interchange places for new varieties of cocoa, or limes or grapefruit, or what have you, and they were all brought through these gardens. And this is where the propagating experience from Kew was absolutely essential.

MB Peter, I just wanted to bring Mother in at this stage. Mother is a delightful figure.

PW Mmm.

MB Not quite as powerful, in terms of career ambitions, or force of impact, but a lady of some mystery and intriguing personality?

PW Well, I think maybe you don't do her quite justice. I think she was, in many ways, the strength behind him. I think he was keen, but probably hadn't got the faith in himself as much as she would have made him have. And I think that she saw that he learnt how to write well, and to really develop from his village background into what became later, a sort of fairly big political situation, in that type of world. After all, you have to say, here was this young man out of a village, married to the gardener's daughter, you might say, but he used to go and play chess with the Governor, and the Governor was a terribly important chap, as thought of in those terms, Sir Somebody Somebody. And here was this young man who had managed to develop the sort of qualities to be a good enough chess player to do that. Self-taught, no doubt. But just little examples of the way, in a colonial situation, you could mature and develop very satisfactorily.

MB So the entrepreneurial genius that your father displayed, was kind of in the matrix of common sense, developed by your mother?

PW That's right. And she, she created a background for all this, of a house and home. You see, in that sort of situation, we were counting up the other day, that there were

actually five servants in the house. There was a housemaid, there was a cook, there was a washer-woman, there was a yard boy, and there was somebody who looked after the grounds. All of these for somebody in that situation, quite remarkable. And so we were in a pretty privileged community very early.

MB Was she a good mum?

PW Oh yes, yes, yes. Firm, but I remember it perfectly happily.

MB And she ran the House on the Hill.

PW She ran the house.

MB Which you've got terrific memories of.

PW Yes.

MB Peter, just tell me a bit about the House on the Hill, Nag's Hill, is it?

PW Mmm, Nag's Hill. Also called Cashew Hill, because all over it were trees, cashew trees, from which the cashew nut comes. And so I remember, as a boy, collecting these nuts, and roasting them over an open fire, and then eating the fruit. So all the things were on that hill. And it was a hill of, oh, some ten acres or so, with the house perched on the top, and a wonderful place to be brought up. You had the freedom of that land, you could build a tree house, you could play ... along the grounds we had a pitch and putt golf course that my father built on the lawns, and very tricky it was, if you didn't get on the green, you went down to the bottom of the hill and had to start again! And it was a very very fascinating place to be.

MB And you could see the harbour from there?

PW Yes.

MB It was high enough to really see the boats from there.

PW Well, I don't know ... anyone who knows Trinidad, if you go up into the hills just behind, there are panoramic places. The house is no longer there, it burnt down. But higher up, there are a lot of houses. We lived in one higher up the hill later. You looked out over this large green park, which is the beauty of Port of Spain. And then there's the town, and then there's the gulf, with all the ships that come in, now with the Longside Harbour, they used to anchor out in the harbour. And from there, you could see all that went on. And just across that green, was Queen's Royal College, where I went to school, and you could hear its clock chiming every hour. And you were right in, and yet ... in a slightly privileged position on that community, because you were up the hill, where it was a little cooler. My father's office was at the bottom of the hill, the Department of Agriculture, and so he used to go down there and get to work in the morning.

MB Peter, I believe, on one occasion when we were talking, that you said that you could see probably as many fifty cricket matches on an occasion, looking out from the house.

PW Ah yes. Yes. Well, all over the Savannah were the training grounds for the West Indian cricketers.

MB Look how well they did on it!

PW Indeed! Indeed! And so there was that, there was also a race track for horses, and there was a sort of pavilion in front of which the main football matches took place, so it was a real sports ground, but ... but more like an open lawn than ... than something ... there were no tennis nets, nothing to obstruct it.

MB Peter, you had a sister and a brother.

PW Yes.

MB Your sister was seven years older, I think?

PW Yes, she's seven years older.

MB And so you didn't have long enough to get to know her, because I think she went away to school?

PW Well, that's right. When I was about three, she went to school in England. And, of course, those days, she wouldn't have seen her parents until she was ... 13, and then 16. So really long and great separation in those days.

MB And she was called?

PW She was called Rene – Irene.

MB And you had a brother?

PW And I had a brother, who was Robert, same name as my father, always referred to as "Rob". Now, she, I hardly knew then, but have known a great deal subsequently, because she is now back in England, and we see her quite frequently. But my brother, who was five years older than me, stayed there until he was 13 or so, so I remember him very well, because I was ...

MB His junior. A bit of a role model to you?

PW Yeah. Well, that's right. In many ways he was. He got up to the adventures I wasn't brave enough to get up to, and led me into them, as elder brothers do!

MB Peter, you've talked about going to the Queen's Royal School. I think there were two famous schools on Trinidad at that time, but one was the Roman Catholic one. You went, eventually, to Queen's. Before that, you must have gone to a more junior school, or had some training somewhere else?

PW That's right. That's right. Well, I started off at Miss Potter's, where the thing that we all remember most, was that she used to draw circles with a compass, and we used to colour them in. And I think, from the age of five to seven, I did little else except colour in the circles! But I suppose I must have learned to read and write, and add two and two. I think, after a couple of years or so, my parents thought that I'd better do something other than colouring, and my father took what, I think, in that situation, was quite a brave ... he ... he ... brave ... venture. He talked to the Director of Education, who we knew in a friendly way, and said, "Where would you send your boy?" And he said, "Tranquillity School for Boys", believe it or not, that's what it was called. And this was a secondary school, very competitive, down in the town. And there weren't more than three white boys in it. And that, at that time, meant something, to say that. And I was sent there, and had no trouble fitting in, because there was no colour problem in Trinidad that one felt at all in that way. And I was there for several years. And that was a very strict training in learning the first educational things. And so I was there until, I suppose, I was about eight or so, and I'd gone as far as it seemed it might take me, because I was then old enough to move over to Queen's Royal College, as the other school was concerned, the junior part of that. And so I spent a year or so there, beginning my education. After that, he moved abroad, and so did I.

MB So he went to Palestine, I think, and you came to England?

PW Yes, well, that's right. In 1935, he was asked to go to Palestine as Chief Horticultural Officer, and we had a wonderful trip, as you can imagine, going to this, as far as I was concerned, non-existent place called Jerusalem, which I thought was only in the Bible. And at the age of nine, we had this boat trip to England, boat trip out to Palestine, through Gibraltar, and via Vesuvius, and Stromboli, between Italy and Sicily, to Port Said, up by train to Jerusalem, and there we were, '35, in Jerusalem, and all of us went together, in fact, because my brother and sister were there.

MB And as youngsters, they would have ... in Trinidad, I suppose they would have said you were motoring. I mean, that was pretty good, seeing the world.

PW Wasn't bad, was it! And so we went there, and that was in sort of July or so, and they looked around to see if there was somewhere I could be educated there. It was fairly clear that I was going to have to speak Arabic if I was going to be educated there. They didn't think there was much hope of me doing that, and so I went, in fact, to school in England, to Caterham School in Surrey, where my brother had been for the previous three years or so.

MB Why did they choose Caterham? Was there a particular family reason why Robert had gone there?

PW No, not at all, because, in fact, it's a school for Congregational Ministers' sons, and we weren't that!

MB Yeah, I know.

PW But ... no, Cheeseman, the Professor of Botany at the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture in Trinidad, had written part of *The Flora* with my father. He was

from Caterham, had been to school there, and my father said, “Well, where shall I send this son of mine?” And he said, “Why don’t you send him to that school?” And that’s why he went, and that’s why I went too. And it was a very satisfactory school.

MB Peter, I want to draw a line at that particular point, and go back on one or two issues that still relate to Trinidad. We’ll come to England in a moment, and how Caterham was part of that story. What I would like to ask is about your links. You talked about going to a school where you were one of only three white boys. You did rub very closely with a range of families, a range of people, a range of poverty as well, I guess.

PW Yes.

MB But that was a significant part of your background?

PW Well, I suppose that ... if you think of me on the Hill, with these servants, these servants had children, and Frankie, who I played cricket with in the back yard, was, you know, a very black boy, if you can put it in that way. And I never thought that he wasn’t the same as me. And I used to go and lie down with the cook and the housekeeper when they rested in the afternoon. Colour didn’t exist. And Trinidad was a marvellous place that way because, I think I’ll put it this way, there really wasn’t a colour bar, because nobody knew what colour they were, because it was a very very mixed place, and there were Portuguese, and Chinese and Spanish and French, and English, and Negroes, and East Indian, and they were ... not all intermixed, but there was an enormous intermixture. So it was really an ideal place for not ...

MB You were voyaging on a very international education.

PW Well, so many things that one learnt from just that juxtaposition with people of all sorts.

MB And you enjoyed it, and you became good at conversing with people, very early on, because of this mixture, I suppose.

PW Well, I don’t know whether it was the conversing, but you just ... they were all just people. I mentioned the white/black thing, because, in a sense, one might think I would. But it really wasn’t greatly material in that situation.

MB Did you develop a West Indian twang, too?

PW Oh yes, man! I can talk ... talk that, I can tell you! You see ... because you have to fit in with everybody when you’re in a place like that, mm? (SPEAKS WITH TRINIDADIAN ACCENT) And I can always keep it. And if I was listening to my voice, talking to you now, in what I believe is terribly proper English, I’m fully aware that I can recognise the West Indian twang, and other people would.

MB In fitting in with that community, did you become a sportsman? Did you join in quite a lot of sport at that time? I’ve got a feeling you weren’t quite a sportsman early on, but became a sportsman later.

PW Well, I ... it was a bit difficult, living up on the hill, it was quite a distance. But I did play, and I played cricket. But they were rather good, the boys at school, they were the sort of boys who played for the West Indies. I wasn't quite in that class, but, you know, cricket was very much in the thing. And I remember that one of the favourite things was when we went to a beach on a Sunday, we would have the base of a ... the leaf of a coconut tree, which is a little bit bat-shaped, and played with coconuts and hit them for six out to the water. So we were always there from an early stage, and getting your eye in, hitting a ball. And so this was always there at the back.

MB And you played pitch and putt on Father's manicured lawns!

PW And we played pitch and putt around the lawn, so that, you know, I could learn to hit a ball with a golf club.

MB I've formed a picture from all that you've said of an idyllic childhood.

PW Well, I thought it was, yes. Mmm. And, you know, you could sort of carve up a bit of land. You could, if you wanted to dig a hole, you would dig a hole, and you had insects to chase, and plants to plant, and you could dig, you could do anything you wanted to, because there was space and land.

MB Peter, now your venue to Caterham, to dig in England!

PW Yes.

MB What was Caterham School like? You've already said that it wasn't a bad experience. Was it good teaching you got there?

PW Yes, I think it was pretty good. I ... I thought it was very good. I think, if I look back on it, some subjects I might have had better teaching on, I might have been more attracted to Latin if ... and French, if the teachers had been different. But I think everybody has that. But it had good science laboratories.

MB And from very early on, there was this commitment to science.

PW Yes. Somehow it was unavoidable. It was there. You see, the biology was part of me and my upbringing, and so ... and everything was towards agriculture and plants. You know, we didn't look at ... we hardly noticed animals. When I think that I lived in Trinidad and the ... those red ibis that come in every night to (INAUDIBLE – 259) Swamp, I didn't know were there, until I went back long after I'd got into my forties. They must have flown in every night, no more than ten miles away from us, and I didn't even know they were there, we were so plant orientated.

MB Wrapped in plants and plant forms.

PW Yes. Yes.

MB And so botany took over a part of your life at Caterham, and ... you pursued (INAUDIBLE – 263)

PW Well, not at Caterham. That was when I went back to Trinidad that it really developed. No, I started in chemistry. I particularly liked geography. I am very very fond of maps. I had a schoolmaster there who encouraged the drawing of maps. So, all my life, I've known where places were on maps, I could always find routes on maps. I can have a wonderful time, just opening an atlas and going along the roads I'm familiar with. And he wrote a book about the Alps, and he allowed me, as a mere callow schoolboy of no more than 12, to help him to draw the maps that became part of the illustration of that book. So maps, and, of course, the maps were natural, because I'd been to all these places at this young age.

MB But there was no great corresponding level of the languages that fitted those places?

PW No, not really.

MB No, that didn't happen, did it?

PW No.

MB Never happened?

PW We didn't need to speak anything except English, and I tended to avoid any subjects like that. I could have learnt Spanish in Trinidad, it was taught in the school, I decided to do geography instead.

MB In this period at Caterham, from nine to fourteen years old, that was obviously a formative, away from home period. There's no mum and no House on the Hill at that time. You learnt to rub up with other chaps, at that time, in a new way. Was that a satisfactory experience?

PW Oh, that was, that was great!

MB Did you organise them? I've got a feeling you might have pushed them into some kind of order.

PW Well, sadly, I suppose I did, because ... I ... I suppose I've always been that sort of person. I noticed, in the preparatory part of the school, that there was no sort of prefect system that there was in the senior school, and I knew about that because my brother was a prefect. And so I really said to the Headmaster, "Don't you think we should have a prefect system?" But what a stupid, big-headed thing to say, you see! But then I went on strike about something or the other and, and they set up everybody else as prefects, until he made me toe the line. He said, "I won't make you a prefect". And I think, "Why was I doing that sort of thing?" I suppose it's always been this feeling of the need for (INAUDIBLE – 291)

MB Change things.

PW Yes. And subsequently, that stupid thing I started in Queen's Royal College when I went back there. But, you know, it was a superb place to be, because we lived at the School, and I got to know other boys well. There were games that I played, not

very well, but I played them. And we had a great time just mucking about there, and working. And I did reasonably well at school, so it wasn't a great pressure on me. And, of course, the wonderful thing was that every second year, I went to Palestine, because my father was on two-year tours by then. He and my mother came to England one year, and we went out there the other. And so during that time, I visited Egypt, Cairo, the Pyramids, went to Lebanon, saw Damascus, and Balbec, because we couldn't stay in Palestine because the pre-war riots, Arab/Jew, were so significant, that it was unsafe there. And so although I'd had a good look at Palestine when we first went there, been all over, really, subsequently I saw more of the Middle East than I might have otherwise.

MB Peter, about 1939, you actually go home to Trinidad for a summer vacation. That was because Father went back there, is that right?

PW That's right. You see, this was one of those extraordinary things. You think of '39, in Palestine, and somebody offers him to go back to Trinidad, the Colonial Office, as Deputy Director of Agriculture. It was an attractive thing to do. By gum, he was lucky to do it, wasn't he! Because he went there in about June or July '39 ...

MB There's a certain charm and magic about all the good fortune.

PW Yes. Charm was his life ... chance has dominated my life. So he went back there, and my brother and I went out to spend our summer holidays in Trinidad, and the War broke out. The boat that was supposed to take me back to England didn't go. So neither my brother nor I went back. He would have been at King's College in the Strand, went to the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture, and became trained as a tropical agriculturist in that way, and I went back to Queen's Royal College.

MB Much senior, with a public school education in Britain behind you.

PW A bit of that behind me, and I spent, then, four years there, doing the sort of ... up to School Certificate and Higher Certificate, in Trinidad, before I came back to England again.

MB I want to take you through that School Certificate period. I've got a feeling, when we talked before, that you said that you never really tried very hard at school, and there were no great achievements, in terms of academic life, until it came to School Certificate, and you were first in the Islands, in your results.

PW Yes, well ...

MB Like you performed well on the day, when you went public!

PW Well, it seems so, yes! No, I mean, I performed quite well at Caterham. I was sort of a pretty regular second. The first was a bit bright for me (?? – INAUDIBLE – 334). And I went back to Trinidad, I was a bit out of gear there, I was ... the subjects had changed, they'd come to a different stage. And there were some pretty bright lads there, I can tell you! And so I used to be about middle of the form, and ... really ... they were a bright lot, so I didn't feel too bad there. But somehow, when it actually came to taking the public exam, I fooled them mightily!

And I suppose it was because I really worked pretty hard at one or two things. For instance, a subject like English Literature, I found that if you actually read *Julius Caesar* several times, it was so easy, because you knew what the questions were going to be. And so a subject like that, which, which you could learn ... you could do in geography, was a subject I loved doing, and fortunately, this was a subject that was in my blood. And so I really had a number of things going for me for that, and much to everybody's surprise, and not only mine, I came out top. And so it was a great shock.

MB And (INAUDIBLE – 351) your mother and father as well.

PW Well, I suppose they must have been pleased!

MB They were very progressive parents, looking to your future.

PW Mmm.

MB You go into a sixth form set of studies. Botany, zoology, chemistry?

PW Yes.

MB Did that become the combination you chose?

PW Yes. Yes.

MB And took those on to a kind of Higher School Certificate level?

PW Yes.

MB Was there a view to going to England, to university, at that time, when you made that decision?

PW Oh, I suppose ... I suppose I had realised that I couldn't stop at the end of school. But there was only one way to go to university, from Trinidad, if you were a Trinidadian, and I was not. You had to win an Island Scholarship, which meant that you had to come first in the Island in either mathematics or the arts, or in science. And I reverted to my old role of coming second. But I was very fortunate in that my father could afford to pay for me to go to university. So I was able to go to Cambridge from there. And the ... the training that I got in botany and zoology, particularly, were very very important.

MB Were they good teachers there? Was it an exciting time of learning?

PW The botany and zoology were great. The chemistry was pretty appalling. And I, I never really got happy with chemistry.

MB Any significant teachers who we should put on the record?

PW Oh yes. There was ... in terms of botany, there was a remarkable man there, named Biddell. And Biddell really was interested in science, and he knew his botany and physics well. And, but he was not very popular, because he was rather strict and

somewhat bizarre in his behaviour. But because I was interested in botany, and I was acceptable and ... he was a tremendous help to me. And I think that he, he was important.

MB You got into plant physiology?

PW Yes, yes.

MB Into taxonomic questions, and ...

PW Well, that's right. I think I became interested a bit in the sort of evolution of plants a bit, as well. And that was fun. But the real thing was that I had such a tremendous advantage. I mean, if you imagine a bunch of boys doing botany, it's not a subject people are very fond of, and this wretched fellow knew the names of all the plants. And he knew how to pollinate it and things like that. So all the things that you needed to learn, were almost there before I started. The physiology I had to know, and other things.

MB And the zoology, you began to get into dissections?

PW Ah yes, well, that's right. I mean ...

MB Was that exciting also?

PW That was extremely exciting. That transferred to the animal side of it, and, and we did a lot of dissecting. We'd catch our own toads from by the ponds, and dissected as many toads as you liked. Also dogfish, imported from England, believe it or not, to be dissected in Trinidad, and things like that. But ... but there it was. And the man who looked after zoology was also, his name was Jones, he was very good indeed. And those two people stroked my biological interest a great deal.

MB Peter, what I'm trying to tease out is the kind of young man that was in gestation then, because you were obviously working quite hard at school.

PW Mmm.

MB I get a feeling there's a good deal of play and leisure interest in you as well. I mean, it wasn't all work, and Jack a dull boy.

PW Well, there were very attractive girls in Trinidad, I can tell you, you know! And you started pretty young. And so we had a lot of parties, and a lot of ... a lot of fun going on.

MB So that was a heady time?

PW Oh yes.

MB Moving through adolescence into a kind of ...

PW And calypsos and all that heady type of music and warmth, and stars and everything else. Very romantic too.

MB Certainly a time of (INAUDIBLE – 406)

PW Yes.

MB At the end of Higher School Certificate, you had to go to England.

PW Well, that was a bit of a shock.

MB How was this decision ... you had to go to England, because you wanted to do agricultural botany?

PW Yes, well ...

MB And the best Department in the country was probably going to be in Cambridge.

PW Well, I suppose I thought I was going to do Colonial Agricultural. My father had, my brother had, and I had a head start in that sort of thing. But I suppose two things influenced me then. One was that my brother and father had done it, and I thought I ought to do something different, and the second was that I was not doing medicine, because everybody did medicine. And I thought, “Well, that’s not a very sound reason! I must do medicine”. And then I thought, “Why?” And the reason why I did medicine, I’m bound to say, was because I couldn’t have stood not to have known about the biology of man. I think I had come to that from zoology, that somehow, there had been a stop. That here was this whole thing that was medicine, and that if I did botany, I’d never meet it. And so those were the days ... I got a place in Cambridge to do agriculture, because that was the place you might go on to colonial agriculture from, those days, changeover from Kew. And I ... on the way over in the boat, decided I’d do medicine. So when I arrived, I went to my tutor at St. John’s, and said, “I think I want to do medicine”. “Oh”, he said, “All right. I’ll register you for that instead”. Now, that, I think, was a wonderful way to allow a young man to change his mind, rather than say, “Well, that’s what you applied for, and that’s what the place is, and I’m afraid you’ll have to go in the queue”. It was more flexible than that.

MB So what we have now, Peter, is a decision that was made on the boat, but which had been ... been in embryo for some time.

PW Yes.

MB In that early zoology, but hadn’t actually exposed itself at that point of changing university courses.

PW Well, I ... I was deeply embowered (?? – 434), more plants than animals, and I ... there was another factor. I was very conscious of the need to earn a living, and I thought doctors, really, would get a job, because I knew doctors had jobs. And I wasn’t sure whether there was a job in biology, or geography I might have liked to have done. But I couldn’t think how you could have got a living in that. But there was one other factor. Chance really does peculiar things. But around that time, a man named Sir

Raymond Priestley visited Trinidad, from the British Council. Sir Raymond Priestley had been in the Antarctic with Scott, and he was, at this point, Vice-Chancellor of Birmingham University. And I met Raymond Priestley because he was out there, setting up the University of the West Indies, on the Commission to set it up, the Irvine Commission, and he came to my house, because he was wondering about an Agricultural College, and my father was the person to consult. And I met him, and he was helpful. I was wondering about going to university, and he said, "Go to Cambridge. Go to St. John's. I'll ring, get hold of Worthy, and he'll let you in, you know". And so I was encouraged in that way, by somebody who knew. And to show you how friendly these people were, I was up in Barbados on holiday, after I took my Higher Certificate, and the Commission was there writing its Report. They were going along the street in a motor car, they saw me, stopped, said, "Come around with us". Can you believe the Commission and a schoolboy, taking around with them? And I got an insight into university then, that was terribly important. And to go one more about Raymond Priestley, because he was the Vice-Chancellor of Birmingham, for God's sake! I was now an undergraduate back in Cambridge, he used to invite me to go and stay in his home. He used to write me a letter every month, and I wrote back. What Vice-Chancellor could do that today? It was great!

MB Peter, I want to just start the Cambridge career off. You arrive in Cambridge. The War was still on.

PW Mmm.

MB So Cambridge was a bit unusual, Wartime Cambridge.

PW Yes.

MB Tell me a bit about the Wartime Cambridge you encountered.

PW Mmm. Well, I arrived there, and I had not got a Certificate in Latin. You still had to take a Certificate in Latin to get into Cambridge. There was a thing called "Little Goal" (?? – 474). It turned out to be not all that tricky, because you could take a dictionary into it, and if you had the right tutor, he said, "There are ten problems in Latin, such as 'ad takes the advotive (?? –476)', and one of these will be in each sentence. And as long as you recognise it's in the sentence, and you put the 'ad', if you don't know the word afterwards, put 'in the advotive', and you'll get your mark". Anyway, I had to do that. So I arrived in the long vacation. I went under the tutorship of one W.H.S. Jones, from St. Catherine's, called "Malaria Jones" because he'd written about Hippocrates and malaria. And he taught me the ropes for getting that Latin out of the way. But Cambridge. Yes, well, I got to stay in College during the vacation because I helped with the fire-watching. And Cambridge was a sort of military town, or Air Force/Military, because the American bases were all around there, and they came in in their numbers in the evenings. The students were ... quite a lot of medicals, because they were reserved, and there were quite a lot of engineers, particularly ones who were doing short courses in engineering before they went in the Army, and other people who weren't eligible for the Forces, one way or another. During the second year, people began to come back from the War, because that was '45. And as they came back from the War, Cambridge grew, but it was still a superb place to be, even in the War. We lived in the rooms in College, or in digs. Sure, there was rationed food,

and the rest of it, but there were superb playing fields. I was able to play games there, and work away in doing the medical training, and it was (INAUDIBLE – 505)

MB And to think that a more marvellous background one could have had than coming from Trinidad, and all the beauty that you'd had there, and arriving in the tranquillity of Cambridge and its backs and its wonderful ...

PW Well, I mean, you know, it is such a superb place, St. John's College, with those wonderful buildings right on the backs, the Bridge of Sighs and the river. I couldn't believe it!

MB It was rather a comfortable College, because there were nice normal chaps there, in a way.

PW Yes.

MB Manchester Grammar School people, Leeds Grammar.

PW That's right.

MB It was that kind of a College, I believe.

PW Yes. Yes, it was. It was. It didn't have the ... the sort of snobbism, you're bound to say, of some of the other Colleges. And at that time, it was across the board. It was a big College. There were a range of people to know, and you were mixed with every discipline of interest, really.

MB And you took a (INAUDIBLE – 517) on yourself, with the Natural Science Tripos.

PW Mmm.

MB Plus a degree of sport.

PW Yes.

MB Quite early on you got involved in hockey.

PW Well, yes.

MB A goal-keeper, or something?

PW Mmm, well, another one of those chance things, you see. I'd never played hockey in my life. But the first day I turned up there, I met the Captain of Hockey for John's, who, who came from Caterham! And I hadn't seen him for four or five years, and so we recognised one another, and spoke to one another, and he said, "We need a goal keeper. Nobody wants to play goal". And I said, "Why not?" And so I became a goal keeper. Now, a goal keeper isn't required to hit the ball with a stick, his job is to get in the way, and furthermore, he wore a lot of warm clothes, so that was rather better

for me in the climate! And so I got a place in the John's team. Nobody else wanted the job. And because I was sucker enough, I even got to play for Cambridge once, and became the Captain of the Wanderers, that's the Second XI, Cambridge hockey. Well, those were the days, of course, when there weren't all the players that there might have been, but, nevertheless, it gave me an insight into what it might be to be a blue and things like that. And so the hockey and the village cricket, and this type of thing, gave me a lot of pleasure there.

MB Peter, you start this Natural Science Tripos. Tell me a little bit about the teaching, the quality of that work, whether it made impact on you, or whether it was fairly stale in Wartime, or whatever.

PW Well, essentially, one was doing anatomy and physiology, and I had to do some organic chemistry, to pick up. The organic chemistry, I think, was very well taught by Kitting (?? -544). He made, to me, what had previously been a muddle, make some order. When he went into the physical chemistry, I was completely lost and gave it up. But the anatomy and physiology were very fascinating, because in the anatomy was a man named H.A. Harris, who was an absolute bull of a man, and enlisted enormous fear in, particularly the women students, who he was very unkind to. And, but he had a sort of feeling about anatomy. And with him was one D.B. Davies, who was Tutor of John's, in anatomy, and D.B. Davies was extremely strict, and you knew, from the beginning, you had to know what every lump on every bone was going to be for, and doing. And the fear of God was in you, because this was Wartime, and if you didn't pass, you were thrown out. And we were having two years instead of three for the Tripos, and so you had to really get down to it. And I came to like anatomy. I came to like anatomy particularly when I found there was something called *An Atlas of Anatomy*, and so my geography could come in, and I didn't have to read *Gray's Anatomy*, which was much too heavy for me. And so I could actually become good at anatomy, because I (INAUDIBLE - 568)

MB A strong disciplined, forceful approach you were subjected to.

PW Yes. Yes.

MB So it went well.

PW Yes.

MB But you also met a young lady on the anatomy course. You both were (INAUDIBLE - 570) one day.

PW Mmm. You remember that, yes. Well, these girls used to come up from Girton in the morning, and Newnham as well, and ... I don't know how it was ... I think it might have been by design, I sat next to them. And one of them I sat next to, could see that I was not well equipped for this business of taking notes. And she was, and she lent me her crayons, and it sort of led on from there.

MB She was called?

PW Her name was Billie Brown, actually. It was sort of unfortunate for her, since she came from London, because there was “Billy Brown of London Town”. However, she was Billie – B I L L I E – as a distinction, and ... and ... well, there you are.

MB So that started to go well from that time. I mean, it’s a partnership that’s gone on over the years. But it started and just steadily progressed.

PW Yes, yes. I suppose ... if you ... meet with somebody who is doing the same subject as you, in parallel, you have much more to talk about than if you are simply talking about the social things of life. And so such a deep understanding ... you can see I’m quite emotional.

MB Yes. I can understand, knowing both of you now. It’s been an important partnership. But keeping back there with the anatomy ... let’s go to physiology. Was that as good?

PW No. Now, this was really because it was Cambridge, I think. Both Billie and I had thought that physiology was a great subject, before we went there. Zoology physiology. I think the famous Cambridge School of Physiology, headed by Adrian, and with the other people, was a tremendous disappointment. They were so keen on their own research and the things going from it, that they taught us, I think, extremely badly, and put us both off physiology.

MB You got the fag end of it, really, then?

PW I think so. I mean, Leonie Thank (?? –615) said, “Well, by the laws of the General Medical Council, we have to give you five lectures to cover elementary physiology. That’s all we’ll give. After that, we’ll talk about the things we’re interested in”. So we went, and had to go to all these lectures, which were really ... made no impact at all, when there were so many fascinating things to learn.

MB And physiology could have been made so
(INAUDIBLE – 621) of a great period in its history.

PW Yes. I mean, this is a very important thing. And I was, looking back, greatly disappointed in physiology. A large part of the rest of my life was involved with physiology, and, and I think Cambridge was a great disappointment about physiology.

MB Subsequently, though, Peter, you pass in your two years.

PW Yes.

MB You get through. But you hadn’t reckoned on having to go to London, when you went to Cambridge, to do clinical work.

PW Well, you see, it had never ...

MB Never crossed your mind.

PW Well, it never ... I thought I'd transfer to medicine when I went there. And I did. I didn't know much about doing medicine, other than it was a subject I wanted to know about. And then I discovered, after about a year or so, that you had to go somewhere else to do your clinical, because in those days, Cambridge didn't have clinical training. And so you had to choose somewhere. And I had no idea on what basis I was supposed to choose somewhere to go. Most people went to London, and I thought I'd probably go to London. I had no reason to go anywhere else. And I then had to get a place at a Medical School. A lot of people were going to the Middlesex, and they were quite good friends of mine, and so I got a place at the Middlesex. You virtually went along and had an interview. But I thought it would be nice if somebody paid for me to go. And I saw that there were some Scholarships advertised from St. Mary's, which were by interview only. Now, being a West Indian, I sort of felt that was my forte, rather than doing a paper. And I applied for St. Mary's. Now, this is a fascinating sort of story, because I had no idea that these were Rugger Scholarships, Moran's Rugger Scholarships. And everybody else did, and so they didn't apply unless they played rugger! Anyway, they, they offered me an interview, and Moran wasn't there any more, he'd just left. The others, I don't think, had picked this up. I hadn't either. I didn't know who he was! And I was not interviewed by Moran, I was not asked if I played rugger. I was asked if I played anything else, and I did play some hockey.

MB You were interviewed by Brinton?

PW Brinton, yes. And, and so they actually gave me a Rugger Scholarship because I didn't play rugger. And I thought that was, you know, another of those elements of chance. So I went to St. Mary's with my fees paid, because I didn't play rugger, and because there were only a certain number of people who played, and they weren't going to appoint all rugger Scholarships. They appointed one rugger man, Summerskill, who played for England.

MB And you hit a changing tide.

PW I just happened to hit the change, and ...

MB And did you go on a Colonial Quota?

PW Well, there was a certain amusement to that too, because if you're getting towards the end of an interview, and somebody says, "Where do you come from?" you sort of realise that you have got off the ... being a little bit ... maybe hadn't stimulated them with your great interest in anatomy or something, and so I said, "Trinidad". And they sort of opened their eyes, and one of them said, "Could we include you in the Colonial Quota?" Well, I'd no idea there was a Colonial Quota! And so I said, "Why not? I come from the Colonies". I sort of felt at the back of it that I heard them say, "Mmm, won't have one of those chaps again, will we. We could have him". And ... I don't know whether that was the reason, but I certainly maybe was included in the Colonial Quota.

MB Peter, you've both, Billie and yourself, both came to London at that time. I think she went to the Royal Free?

PW Yes. Yes. Well, there were very few places women could go to in those days. If you think that, at that time, women were not awarded degrees in Cambridge, they were awarded the equivalent of a degree, they took the same exam, but this is pre the recognition that women ...

MB So they could go to Royal Free?

PW They could go to the Royal Free. There were a couple of places at The West London, two places at University College, I think. And she went to the Royal Free.

MB Was that a good experience for her?

PW Don't think so, no. Essentially a women's college, and I don't think it really was a very imaginative place, and it didn't have that great flavour that St. Mary's, for instance, had with its rugger and other things. So I think, Billie, in many ways, was a Mary's student who did her clinical at the Free.

MB But you were together in London, and the ... so your relationship was able to go on on a regular and caring basis.

PW Yes. Yes.

MB Peter, I'm leaving now to take you to Mary's with some detail about the kind of teaching you got. Was it good clinical teaching? Did you enjoy it from the start? I mean, people like George Pickering were around, I suspect?

PW It was very variable. There was the surgical type teaching, which ... particularly one remembers a man by the name of Hanfield-Jones, who ... really drummed absolute rules into you, in surgery. There was no room for thought. An appendicitis had five symptoms and signs, and those were what they were. The fact that most appendicitis weren't like that, was not material. That's what you learned.

MB Everything was stereotyped?

PW Yes. And he had written the *Textbook of Surgery*.

End of Tape 1 – Side A

Tape 1 – Side B

PW ... Hanfield-Jones and Porritt, and that was the ... Now, fortunately, Porritt just came back from the Western desert to there, and he really did know about surgery in the field in the War, and so the balance between those two was fine. On the medical side ...

MB Did you see distinguished surgery, though? You did actually watch distinguished surgery taking place?

PW Oh, sure.

MB Did that make an impact? You didn't have any wish to become a surgeon?

PW Oh, I enjoyed doing that, but ... but no, I was really much more interested in why things happened rather than ... than patching up. On the medical side, there was George Pickering. And he was, essentially, an intellectual, who had been trained with Lewis, and the Research Professor. He was one of the earliest professors in London. Most of the Medical Schools didn't even have Professors of Medicine. And he was not really very popular with the students, because he always asked the reason why. He did not want the lists that the surgeons wanted. And so when you'd come out with some statement, he would say, "Why is the rash like that?" Or "Why is something ...". And that was not what students particularly wanted, who wanted to get through exams. But I found that was fascinating. And I suppose that Pickering was really quite an influence in ... in making you feel that everything wasn't known about medicine, that there were lots of questions still to be answered.

MB He had the research field to that Unit that he ... that group that he had.

PW Yes, he did.

MB It was a bit unique at the time, wasn't it.

PW It was. It was very unusual. And since Mary's was particularly known for its rugby, rather than academe, it was an extraordinary thing that Pickering, one of the leading professors, research professors, probably the leading research professor in the country, was there, as well as Dickson-Wright, the surgeon, promoting the Rugby Club, and Moran promoting the Rugby Club, and all that type of thing. That difference was there.

MB Peter, knowing a little bit about your future, and the fact that you were eventually going to become associated with the Wellcome Trust, and have a long relationship with Stan Peart, did you, in those years, encounter Stan Peart? Was that a time when you first met?

PW Well, I first him, actually, when I did my first house job, because he had come back from the RAF and was on the Medical Unit at that time. He was very active and busy with his research, and ... but I got to know him a bit, but not, not, I suppose, greatly, at that time. I mean, subsequently, he's become a very close friend. But that ... that ...

MB But not in the clinical years, in the house job years, really?

PW No. He became a friend, really, after the Wellcome Trust days, almost.

MB Just staying with St. Mary's, I'm sure we've talked of exciting people like Dickson-Wright and Pickering. Any other people we should pick out who influenced your thinking at that time?

PW Well, there was Porritt. Porritt had come back from the War as a surgeon, and there was Hanfield-Jones and Porritt's textbook, and Porritt really was an open man, who really made you feel that surgery could be normal. But I think that's the main parts of it. Of course, there was Fleming there, you see, and ...

MB Was he seen about the place?

PW Not much. Subsequently, I did a job where he appeared on the labels by the beds. So, strictly speaking, you could say I worked for Fleming, but I didn't see much of him. But, no, I think it was a fairly average group of people. They were particularly strong in obstetrics and gynaecology, people who'd written textbooks and were famous for one reason or another – Alec Bourne and others. And but I think it was pretty much, in other respects, a run of the mill Medical School, scientifically or medically, good medicine, I think, in all branches. But there was a tremendous spirit of the place, because of the rugger, to quite an extent, and the other games. I played hockey.

MB Did you play hockey? You did.

PW I played hockey there, I was Captain of hockey at Mary's, and had a lot of fun playing hockey out of that.

MB Peter, we've talked of the academic side, the training side, we've not talked about the patients, and how you responded to the ... to the humans who came under your care, increasingly, in that time. Was that a satisfying experience, caring for humans, in your first career role?

PW Yes. Yes. But, fundamentally, I don't think I like sick people. I really, I think, enjoy good health. I enjoy good health personally, or have done. And I don't think I really felt enormous sympathy with sick people. I was interested in why they were sick, and the science of why they were sick, and I think I was quite a good doctor, in terms of diagnosis and what I did. But I don't think I was a natural doctor.

MB But you related to them well, I'm sure, because you enjoyed talking with them. You're a good communicator.

PW Oh, sure. I don't think that was a problem. But I never felt enormous deep sympathy with sickness, which people have made me believe was the centre of being a doctor.

MB Yeah.

PW And I think that sounds as if I'm very callous. It's not true. I was much more interested in other ways.

MB You were focused in other areas.

PW Yes.

MB But you played the role game well. I've got a feeling, when we talked before, I asked you about the roles of being a doctor. You said you adapted to individuals well, because of your communication skills. There was some performing skill that was there. That may be selling it too cheaply, but there was an ability to perform a part, and to get patients to really respond well to you.

PW Yes, I think they probably did. I think ... I certainly didn't run into the troubles that many young newly-qualified doctors run into. I think I had a bit of maturity because of Trinidad, a bit more than ...

MB Lots of nous.

PW ... than others. And I didn't like getting into messes very much, and so I was pretty wary not to upset the system, I think. No, I think I was probably quite a good doctor, but I didn't feel the desire to, to get too deeply into this.

MB But when you qualified in 1950, when you got your medical degree, you hadn't seen any other light. You were probably concentrating on becoming a physician?

PW Yes. Well, I don't know what I was concentrating on being, but I was thinking what I didn't want to do. I wasn't terribly keen on getting up in the middle of the night, to be honest! And so the subjects that might do that, like obstetrics and gynaecology, were out, I wasn't very keen on that anyway, and it didn't attract me. And I think I preferred, somehow, the intellectual things that went with medicine. The questioning of what was the cause of this or that. Medicine, at that time, didn't have many tools. Penicillin had just come in at Mary's, and things like that. There was very little treatment available in most spheres, and a lot of it very empirical. And I didn't like that sort of feeling that it wasn't scientific. And so I really did recognise that science and medicine had to get closer together. And so that really was quite a driving force. And I did begin to do a bit of sort of fairly elementary research, to try and answer some questions.

MB Peter, your first house jobs, though, your house job, let's just take the house jobs together. They were interesting jobs, because you did get a chance to use streptomycin, I think, in one of the house jobs.

PW Yes. Well ...

MB Was that an interesting time? But it wasn't being used very much.

PW Yes. After all, penicillin had only been with us a little while. Fleming was at St. Mary's, St. Mary's had the first penicillin. We used penicillin in Casualty, and we had more than other hospitals, because we were ... had a good line on it. And so penicillin and antibiotics were there, at that time, very (INAUDIBLE – 091). So my second job at Mary's was looking after patients with a tuberculous meningitis, because streptomycin had just arrived, and this was called the Wright-Fleming Ward, because it was those two names, Almouth-Wright, and Fleming, of penicillin, was treating tuberculous meningitis with streptomycin. And that meant putting streptomycin into

the spinal cord, well, not in the spinal cord, in the spinal fluid, every day, by a lumbar puncture, and my principal job was to, was to do the lumbar punctures and put the streptomycin in. Now, that was really on the forefront of things, and there were the cases being studied and what happened to them. And so I got a feeling that research existed.

MB And you were doing several lumbar punctures a day?

PW Oh, many, yes. Up to a dozen a day.

MB Was there anybody else in the field? I mean, that was an important trial going on. Was anybody else working on that?

PW Oh yes. In Oxford, there was a very important group.

MB Honour Smith's group?

PW Honour Smith's group, yes. And I think Honour Smith's group was probably rather more scientifically with it than we were at Mary's. But we were treating people ...

MB (INAUDIBLE – 105)

PW (INAUDIBLE – 105)

MB But it was... you felt there was a collaboration?

PW No, independent groups, but there were just ... and we got the streptomycin that came into the country, because we were doing that. I mean, there was very little around, you see. And, and so that experience of, of really looking after relatively few people, made an impact, and ... and the research going on around it, influenced me.

MB Peter, we've jumped a bit, because that was the exciting bit, the streptomycin, and the link with the Wright-Fleming Ward. You said a first house job. We ought to put that on the record.

PW The first house job was a general medical one. Really three physicians, and one was Dr. Thomas Hunt, who was the general physician with an interest in gastroenterology, a tremendous bedside manner. The next one was Jack Litchfield, who was a very careful doctor, but not greatly imaginative, but took tremendous trouble with his patients. And the third one was Denis Brinton, who was also the Dean, and he was a neurologist. And with him was Harold Edwards, who subsequently became the neurologist. So I had that range of patients to look after. And the neurological aspect led on to the job in what was called the Wright-Fleming Ward, looking after the tuberculous meningitis, because I had some experience in neurology. But that was the first job, that was general medicine. That was like all these jobs, very hard work, and a wide range of things to see, and a very interesting time. I think it, it made me feel I wanted to do medicine.

MB In the medical research field? And you went into medical research in the next few years, but I think there was an Army detour that came up? You had to do National Service?

PW No. I think that's in slightly the other order, because, having done the work, the job on tuberculous meningitis in the Wright-Fleming Ward, with all those lumbar punctures, I then got the job at the Royal Free Hospital, as a Registrar in Rheumatology. Now, I got that job, you could say, in part, because the Registrar at St. Mary's was the son of the consultant at the Royal Free, in charge of this ... the Rheumatic ward. The great thing about that job was, they had a little lab attached to it.

MB This was Fletcher's Department?

PW This was Fletcher's Department, yes. I was able to go there, and I did the clinical ward duties with other people, and I had the opportunity, because there was a little lab, to look at the serum from patients with rheumatoid arthritis. A friend of mine from Mary's days, had developed paper electrophoresis of plasma proteins, and we built some equipment for the electrophoresis of these, and we were very early in the business of getting the proteins out.

MB So if you're looking at patients with chronic rheumatism?

PW Yeah, rheumatoid arthritis.

MB Looking at gamma globulins in their serum?

PW Mmm, that's right.

MB And was that an exciting story?

PW It was an exciting story, because the technique was interesting, because you had strips of filter paper, which you put over a glass rod, dipping into your, the agent. You transmitted a high voltage current, with the serum through them, these proteins separated out into the gamma, alpha, beta and gamma globulins, and in rheumatoid arthritis, there is a large amount of gamma globulin, and nobody knew what was the cause of it, what it came from.

MB Did it correlate well, the kind of readings you got? Gamma globulin, with the kind of damage to joints?

PW I think with the damage, yes, but not with the acuteness. And I'm not sure what the reason was. But you would pick up things like multiple myeloma, because that was another type of disease with large ... large quantities of globulins. And you ... but you had a system there. You were ... rheumatoid arthritis was there, and cortisone had just arrived.

MB Ah, yes. So it was there?

PW We had a ward, with cortisone arriving, and we were treating patients with it, and I could look at what happened to their gamma globulin, as they got better. And so I

was able, after a year of doing the house job, to get a Registrar job there, with a little lab, in which I studied these type of proteins, and saw how they changed. I don't think I actually got very far with this, and I ...

MB But you used beta-zoadine (?? – 160), I think, as well, at one time?

PW Well, that was the other thing that was more interesting, in a way, because this new drug, butazoladine (?? –161) had come along, and undoubtedly, people got better with it. And, why did they get better? And I was able to do some work with a chap named John Green, who was in the Biochemistry Department there, and we showed that if you took butazoladine, the patient's excretion of water and electrolytes was grossly changed. And, in fact, some of them turned up with renal stones, because their urine became so concentrated. So here was this drug that actually did help people, but could ... was doing it in a very peculiar way. And so I had the chance to develop that type of thing. I had available the plasma protein type of thing, and there was ...

MB So that must have been the most satisfying two years for a person with a research interest of the kind you had.

PW Well, it introduced me into it. But it was, really, fundamentally, a mistake, because it was amateur research. I ...

MB You published? You did publish?

PW Oh, I published. I published various things in *The Biochemical Journal*, and things ... *The Lancet* and the rest of it. But, essentially, I think it was a bad thing, because I didn't have people sufficiently able leading me, and criticising me. I was rather left to get on with it.

MB But it could have taken off.

PW It could have taken off, and some of it subsequently did. But it ... I did feel, to some extent that, that it was not the quality that it might have been if I'd been in a more critical atmosphere.

MB That was one of the fateful turning points in your career, of which there have been so many, but this wasn't a ...

PW Well, it was in a way, because it was the introduction to research which, after all, became my later life. And ... and, you know, if you've published a few papers, it's a little help. And I had published some papers in this, during that time.

MB Peter, we've got you started in medicine, we've got you through the house jobs, but we haven't actually got you married.

PW Mmm.

MB And we must not overrun the story.

PW No, well ... Billie and I, as I said, met in Cambridge, and she went to the Royal Free and did her medicine. And when we qualified, we ... we decided to get married. Well, we'd been decided to get married all along, exchanged string rings and ... And ... but that was not too easy, because I had failed my Finals, and Billie had passed hers, and I think her father wasn't too sure that I wasn't, wasn't likely to be ... not quite the person for her, she might be marrying a failure.

PW He was quite a tough ...

PW Well, he was a fairly tough Aberdonian, yes! And, anyway, we ... we survived that, and got married, and did our various house jobs, and that type of thing. But, you know, that was a long time since anatomy days.

MB Which year did you get married in?

PW '39, end of '39, we ...I was just thinking ... yes, we went to Ventnor, in the Isle of Wight for our honeymoon, because Billie said she wanted to go abroad, and I couldn't afford anything else, so we went abroad! (LAUGHS)

MB But it was nice, you were married in time for the house jobs. And it must have been rather interesting the home you set up, because you were doing different things, and bringing different information into it.

PW Yes. Well, not a great deal of home, in fact. But we lived over a gents' hosiers shop in Clapham, just outside the Clapham Common tube station. The gents' hosiers belonged to a cousin of mine, so he was able to let us have the rooms at a fairly reasonable rent. We weren't there that often, really, because she was doing various jobs at the Royal Free, and St. James's, Balham, I was doing jobs at Mary's and the Royal Free after that.

MB A pretty busy lot!

PW Yes. You don't get much time for marriage in that sense.

MB Peter, perhaps now we could take in that National Service?

PW Yes. Well, you see, I was a Colonial, because I'd come from the colonies. But what was I? A Trinidadian or an Englishman? I mean, I had to decide, because my passport would actually have to be a British passport from England, or from Trinidad when Trinidad became Independent. Well, I thought it would be better to become an Englishman, as I really was. Now, until I became an Englishman, I wasn't liable for National Service. But as soon as I said I was, I was immediately liable. And so, because of that peculiar situation of not being classified correctly, I did not do my National Service as early as I might have. And I think this was a great influence in my life. So, in fact, instead of doing it at, say, 25, I didn't do it until I was 28. I had these jobs we've talked about, behind me, and I had my Membership of the College of Physicians, so as far as the Army was concerned, I was a specialist. And I wasn't very specialised, I can tell you! But I got the exam.

MB That was the MRCP in '52, I think, Peter?

PW Yes. Yes.

MB We'll just put that on record, yes.

PW And so I went into the Army and within three months, because that's the way of the Army, I was a Junior Specialist in Medicine. My first job was at Millbank, and then I went to Germany, in charge of a hospital. The poor patients, you know! I knew about rheumatoid arthritis, they ... none of them had rheumatoid arthritis! But, you know, I'd got the Membership, and one learnt fairly quickly. And I was in ... for six months at Millbank, the Royal Army Medical College Hospital there, and then ... and then went to Germany. The first hospital by München Gladbach where the Headquarters was, subsequently. And then up at Isolone (?? – 232) in the Saarland, over two years these jobs. And I learnt a great deal, because I was the physician at that age, and most of the people I saw were fairly young, who didn't have ... greatly ... dangerous illnesses. But there were quite a lot of young people. But in addition, there was the Control Commission in Germany, who used the Army Hospitals. And so I saw, really, quite a lot of things, rather different from the practice I would have met otherwise. And this was important. I was, in effect, a consultant, before my time. And I, really, concluded that that wasn't the life I wanted to live. I didn't really want to go on seeing patients in Outpatients and these wards for the rest of my life.

MB So it was a time of strong decision-making.

PW Yes. Well, you know, there it was, I had to leave the Army and decide what to do. So there I was, I was very well qualified, I'd got all the exams I needed to have, and I was coming back, I might well have got a reasonable senior registrar job, and in due time got a consultant job ... a little wary of whether consultant jobs were available at that time, because of all the people who'd come back from the Army and filled them up. But, somehow, the research bug had got me. Not to do research, particularly, but I really wanted to know more of what was happening. And so that, what I was going to do at the point of leaving the Army, was a little different from that of other people leaving the Army. I was ...

MB You were a bit older, but it had resolved itself in a fascinating way.

PW Well, yes, it did. It resolved itself because there was a job advertised to work with the Medical Research Council as a Medical Officer on the Medical Research Council Staff. Now, I might not even have noticed it, except that a chap who had worked at the Royal Free, just before I went there, and who I knew, worked at the Medical Research Council, and he told me about his job, and it sounded rather exciting. He was very very pleased with the job he was in. His name was Brandon Lush (?? – 264). A strange name, but ... nevertheless ... And so I was able to know a bit more about it than anyone else who'd seen it advertised. So there was a chance. And so I applied for that job, and got the appointment. I think a great factor in my favour of getting that job, because I wasn't just an Army physician, I'd done a bit of research, but I had compiled, at my last year as a medical student, a book called *Careers in Medicine*, which I got fifty people to contribute to, because I didn't know what to do in medicine. I may say what I've subsequently done in medicine, didn't appear in the book! But I did actually know what were the various things you might do if you

qualified as a doctor. And I had, of course, that in my CV, a published book, albeit a compilation. And I think this helped in getting the job.

MB Peter, in your last year at Medical School, that was done. That was quite innovative, a kind of part of your entrepreneurial nature coming out again, in the kind of thing that you'd shown before when deciding a school should have prefects, rather than the Headmaster making the decisions.

PW Yes. Yes.

MB That was another of these stepping stones of administrative entrepreneurialism.

PW Mmm. I think I like organising other people to do something, you know!

MB I think you probably do! (LAUGHS) Tell me a little bit more about that book, because I think it brought in some rather fascinating characters to write about different disciplines in medicine. I think it really was quite an impressive book.

PW Well, I think it ... it was certainly new. If you were a medical student, and you have no background in medicine, as I didn't, you ... and you meet surgery and gynaecology and public health and pathology, and all these things, and you think, "What the devil am I going to do?" Or general practitioner, or something. And you say, "Well, let me find out what they are". But you don't, actually. What happens is, you take a job, somebody offers you another job, which you apply for, which happens to be advertised at the right time, and you finish up doing this or that. It isn't really a solidly thought out process. And I suppose I began to think about it, and began to realise I couldn't even find out. And so then, I suppose chance happened, and two people helped me a great deal. One was Denis Brinton, the then Dean, who I went to speak about it, and he said, "Yes, I think that's a very good idea. I'll write a preface for you. These are the sort of people I think I should get to help you write it". And the other was Arthur Porritt, who'd come back from the Western Desert, surgery, later became Lord Porritt, who said, "Yes, fine. I'll write a chapter on surgery for you". And so I could start off with the Dean and Arthur Porritt. And I could write round to all the other people who, various people helped me with the names, and finished up with a fifty subject book, which I was lucky enough to get published. And so I had a set thought, I think, for the first time, the conspectus of what it meant to have a career in this or that. And this or that was ...

MB Somebody who we interviewed in this studio quite recently, George (INAUDIBLE – 306), I think, made a contribution to that.

PW Yes. Yes, he did. Yes.

MB Peter, that was a massive development, and, as you say, it stood you in good stead when you went for interview at the Medical Research Council.

PW Yes.

MB And you got the job.

PW Yes.

MB Interviewed by?

PW Well, really ... R.H.L. Cohen (?? – 311) and Lansbury-Thompson. R.H.L. Cohen became the first Head of Research in the National Health Service when it started, Dick Cohen, Lord Dick Cohen. And the other was Sir Lansbury-Thompson, who was an absolutely fascinating man, who was the Second Secretary of the Medical Research Council. Lansbury-Thompson was a zoologist. He'd been there for many years. He really epitomised the strength of the place. He was the one who made it possible for Harold Hemsworth, as the Secretary, to get on with the job, because he made it work. And Lansbury-Thompson was a very important

(INAUDIBLE – 320)

MB Made an impact in that, a big impact.

PW Mmm. Mmm.

MB Peter, at that stage, with a job in prospect at the MRC, we're running into the last minute of this reel, and we'll close down and come back to the MRC in our second interview.

End of Tape 1 – Side B