

**Lord Walton of Detchant in interview with Max Blythe
Oxford, 23 January 1991
Interview II**

MB Lord Walton, a good deal has happened in your life since you talked in this studio five years ago with Sir Gordon Wolstenholme.

JW Yes, Max, it's good to be back. Thank you.

MB It's nice to talk with you today. It would be good to start with your election as Warden of Green College which had just come about - you'd just moved to Oxford - and to talk about that transition from Newcastle to Oxford and that wardenship.

JW Yes. Well, of course, I didn't have, really, I think sufficient time to put that story into perspective last time. I had never had the slightest intention of leaving Newcastle. As you know, I'm a Geordie, born and bred, and I felt a strong sense of loyalty to the North East. But, it's interesting that while I was attending a neurological congress in 1981, in Kyoto in Japan, I met Trevor Hughes who was, of course, a distinguished neuropathologist here in Oxford, an old friend, and he said, 'Could we have a cup of coffee together?' So, I said, 'Yes, Trevor, fine.' And he said 'Well, I'll come straight to the point. Had you ever considered moving to Oxford?' And I said 'Well, Trevor, to be perfectly frank, I hadn't.' But, then I said 'I'll qualify that.' Because the year before, our daughter, Judy, and her husband, they'd been working in general practice in Australia in a fairly remote country area and he'd been telephoned by an old friend of his from medical school asking whether he was interested in coming back to take up a partnership in a general practice in Burford. And Betty said - well, one day she said to me, perhaps a year after they'd arrived, she said, 'Do you think anything will ever take us away from Newcastle?' I said, 'No, not really.' And she said, 'Have you ever thought about Oxford?' And I said, 'Well, I hadn't really considered it.' But, she said, 'It might be a nice prospect with Judy,' our daughter 'being in Burford.' Anyhow, Trevor said to me then that the Warden of Green College, the founding Warden, Sir Richard Doll, who had been appointed actually by special concession of council when he was sixty seven and, therefore, only had an absolute maximum of three years to serve - the normal retiring age is sixty seven, of course - he was going to be giving up in 1983, and they had wondered whether I would be interested in being considered as his successor. So, to be approached in Japan was a little odd and so, I said, 'Yes, I would be very interested.' And I talked to Betty about it and I think there were three reasons which led us to feel interested in the appointment. The first, and perhaps the most important, was the intrinsic attractiveness of the post itself, the beautiful college, the fact that I would be continuing my close association with students, and many of them medical, which I've enjoyed as Dean in Newcastle. Secondly, the fact that because I had become President of the BMA [British Medical Association] and then, later, President of the GMC [General Medical Council], I was living on the train from Newcastle and

I was spending a great deal of time away. And as Betty pointed out to me, she said that in one year I had left her alone in the house in Newcastle on one hundred and eighty-five nights, purely by having to do these other things, nationally and internationally. And then, of course, having our daughter in Burford was an attraction. So, I told them yes, I'd be very interested. Then, of course, they took it up and the first thing that happened was that they invited me down to meet a few of the fellows and members of the governing body and we had an informal chat. Then, nothing happened for a month or two and then they invited Betty to come down with me and I met again with some of them in the Fellows Room at Green College. This time, of course, they had the statutory lady present who was one of the fellows and so, in a sense, she knew that she was being interviewed in much the same way as I was. And then they gave... they invited me down yet again to a dinner to dine with the governing body. And I remember very well that I had been chairing a meeting all day at the GMC and I finally managed to get away from this very tough meeting by about 6 o'clock in the evening, I caught the train to Oxford. Brian Bower who was the Vice-Warden and very, very kind, met me at the station, brought me to dinner; we had a glass of sherry and we chatted in a desultory way. They sat me at one table for the soup and the fish, they moved me to another table for the main course and they moved me to a third table for the sweet. So, I felt I was really getting the third degree. And then after dinner, they said, 'Well, now we'd like you to have a kind of informal chat with the governing body.' So, we went downstairs into the common room - which you know well - by which time there was a forbidding circle of chairs set out all round the room, and I was sat down in the middle with a cup of coffee and a glass of port by my side and questions were fired at me from all angles. And this went on for about forty minutes and I enjoyed it and I told them my views about a whole lot of things relating to medical education and the future of the health service and my relationship with students and whether I would be able to spare the time to run the college properly when I was President of the GMC etc. And by the time this had been going on for about forty-five minutes, I confess I began to feel slightly aggressive, you know, just a sort of feeling of well, I've done a fair bit in my life and I've done a number of... I think, held a number of prestigious appointments, why am I being put through this third degree? So, I started to respond slightly more aggressively than I'd intended and, in fact, the whole thing went on for nearly an hour and a half. Brian Bower took me back to the station to catch the 11 o'clock train to London to connect with the 1 am sleeper to Newcastle and off I went.

MB That was some day!

JW That was quite a day! And I remember it very well, I shall, indeed, never forget it. But, the following morning I left Newcastle because were going on our Easter break up at our cottage in Northumberland. Brian Bower had promised to telephone me. As luck would have it, when I got to our cottage in Northumberland, the telephone was out of order, so I telephoned him from a call box and he said, 'Yes, we want you to come.' So, that was how it all came about.

MB That was the start?

JW Yes.

MB Can I just break at this moment from Green College, we'll look at Green

College in a moment, the years at Green College, but we've mentioned Betty, your wife, and we've mentioned Judy, your daughter and your son-in-law, essentially above being a professional man and a public figure, you are essentially a family man and perhaps we could talk about your family for a moment because they have been mentioned at various points, but not in detail?

JW No. Well, I hope I'm a family man. I'm certainly very much attached to my family, though I know that I have been criticised by them - both by my two daughters and my son, by our son - for the fact that perhaps they never knew me as well as they would have wished because my professional life was so demanding and so extremely busy. And they've often said that in some respects I've become rather closer to my grandchildren in a kind of friendly way than I ever was with my children. That's not to say that I did that deliberately but, you know, 'Daddy's away again,' or 'Daddy's not here,' etc.

MB Well, perhaps through the grandchildren the cycle will actually turn full circle?

JW I hope so. Well, my elder daughter, Ann, she was at the Central High School in Newcastle, as indeed our second daughter, Judy, was. Ann was quite bright, but not particularly, I have to say, hard-working. She did the minimum necessary to achieve whatever she set her heart on. She, at one stage, thought she might go in for medicine, but then she decided no, that was too long a course and so on. She said, however, that because of our relationship with the medical world and what she had learnt in it, that she hoped she could work in hospitals. She said, quite deliberately, that she thought nursing was too much like hard work, that physiotherapy was too much jolly hockey sticks, she thought. So, she said, 'Why don't I become an occupational therapist?' So, she came to Dorset House, in Oxford, where she had three absolutely wonderful years and within three months of qualifying as an occupational therapist, she married. The interesting story about how she met her husband is quite an amusing one, because I had flown to the States in November - the year I can't remember - to speak at a conference and, quite exceptionally in November, Newcastle had a heavy snowstorm and Anne had just passed her driving test; she was seventeen, and she said to Betty could she borrow her car to go and see a friend of hers across in Fenham. And on the way back from Fenham to Gosforth, crossing the Town Moor and Grandstand Road in the heavy snow, she turned the car round twice and ran through a fence onto the Town Moor where in this snowstorm a young man was practising golf. I've always thought that was rather peculiar. But, anyhow, he came to her aid, got her back to the house with the somewhat crippled motor car, which meant that she didn't get as much of a rocket as she had intended, as she had expected, and eventually she married him. So, that was how they met.

MB Remarkable story.

JW Judy, our second daughter, the one who is in Burford, always wanted to be a nurse and never wanted to do anything else and she eventually, after being in school... after one year in the sixth form, having been accepted for nursing in three hospitals in London, she went to Geneva where, for six months, she worked as a nurse's aid in a private hospital and then eventually went and nursed at Thomas' where she met her husband who was a medical student. They had a fascinating life

afterwards because they travelled the world. They spent eighteen months in South Africa where Andrew worked, her husband, in a hospital in Durban and she worked as a nurse. Anyhow, they came back from South Africa, he did some SHO jobs, picked up some qualifications, they spent six months in Saskatchewan and then they went out to Australia, where they spent eighteen months doing practice in a small village called Omeo in Northern Victoria, before coming back to general practice in Burford. Now, Ann and Ian eventually moved to London and then eventually Ian was sent to Geneva and they've lived for the past fourteen years in Geneva where he's worked in a number of banks. And they've had an extremely happy life there and our two grandchildren, their children, Drew aged nineteen now and Victoria, aged eighteen, are both now at Durham University, so they've gone back to the north-east from whenst they came.

MB That must be quite pleasing to you?

JW It's very pleasing. Now, our son is the youngest, Christopher, and he decided after being at school in Sedbergh, that he wanted to do, I think, zoology and science. He did a joint honours degree in Newcastle in zoology and psychology. Then he became greatly attracted by farming work and worked in his vacations on a farm. So, then he went to Cirencester to the Royal Agricultural College for a year, then worked briefly as a kind of trainee management consultant, then went to Wye College and did an MSc in agricultural economics where he met his wife, Denise, and they married soon afterwards. And then he worked on a farm in Northumberland for about three and a half years, but decided that to be a proper agricultural consultant he needed to be an accountant, so he's just completed his final year in accountancy working for Grant Thornton in Edinburgh and running a smallholding and farm in Northumberland, which they own, in his spare time. Denise works as a kind of landscape architect and designer and they have one son, Angus. Judy and Andrew in Burford have a boy and a girl. So, we've got five grandchildren.

MB Right. And we must, finally, come to Betty who is a wife, who's given you strong support over the years and has, also, managed to keep in touch with her own musical career?

JW Well, of course, it was a grave disappointment to her that she was not able to pursue her musical career as fully as she had wished, because she was going to the Royal Academy in September 1939, having been interviewed and played there, and obviously had a considerable career in front of her, both as a pianist and a singer, but not unnaturally her family from Durham County wouldn't allow her to go to London in 1939 because everybody anticipated the blitz. And, so, she in fact, soon afterwards, started to have to work in the family business because her brother was in the Territorial Army and was called up at the outbreak of war, her father died early in the war and eventually Betty was in the business for a while. But then she, herself, volunteered to join the WAAF and spent, I think, about eighteen months plotting aircraft in underground bunkers in the WAAF, first, in the south and then, later, in Newcastle, so that, whilst I was a medical student at the time, we saw a great deal of each other. But then, because the business, which was a bakery business in Spennymoor in Durham County, couldn't function properly without her, she got a compassionate release and ran the business for the rest of the war. So, when we married in 1946, she decided that that was the time to take up again her career,

particularly since I was a houseman and shortly knew that I was going to be joining the Army. But she only spent a few months at the Academy because Ann, our daughter, is in her forties and so, through pregnancy, she had to give up. Now, after that, of course, she continued to pursue some musical interests, though I think it's fair to say that because of the very varied and busy life that we've had over the years, professionally and socially, she was never able to enjoy the kind of continuity of musical life that she had wished until we came to Green College. And at Green College, of course, she had a very happy and exciting time as President of the Music Society, accompanying the choir, doing a certain amount of performing and particularly playing duets with her friend, Christine Bower, and accompanying some of the vocalists etc. and, in general, thoroughly enjoyed it.

MB She made a rich contribution to the music of Green College, which I remember.

JW Yes, I think so and she enjoyed the work, of course. Not only that, she enjoyed enormously the contacts with the students and the entertaining and socialising with the fellows and their wives and the students.

MB I was going to look for a bridge back to Green College, but we have one now.

JW Yes.

MB You can tell me now, perhaps, Sir John, about the college you found when you arrived there?

JW Well, of course, at the time of my arrival in 1983, the college was in an exciting growth phase. It had only been open a few years. Its fellowship had expanded. Many of the fellows were medical, either holding university posts or National Health Service posts, and the student body consisted roughly then of about forty per cent clinical medical students, all of whom, of course, had a first degree. It's a graduate college, but they had got a first degree in the natural sciences and were then doing their clinical training, and the remainder were reading for higher degrees in a wide range of subjects, including the social, behavioural, physical and biological sciences. Now, I had to set about, in collaboration with the governing body, trying to raise funds to further the College's objectives. We knew, of course, that it would be many years before the College would have achieved a sufficient endowment to be able to stand on its own feet and get a royal charter. It was still when I arrived a department of the university, but as I've said to many people, one of my first and principle objectives was to raise additional finance by going around with my hand in other people's pockets. The things that, I think, I enjoyed particularly about Green College... I enjoyed the fellowship, first with the fellows who were, I have to say, a thoroughly delightful group of people, very varied in their background and in their academic and professional activities. And we, I think, developed a very pleasant and happy relationship with the students, and we've been served... we were served in Green College throughout by an extraordinarily effective group of college officers. I would single out, particularly, the two Vice-Wardens, Brian Bower and Trevor Hughes; the bursar of the college, Peter Garnham, who was exceptionally efficient, particularly in handling the financial affairs of the college with the help, of course, of David Mosley, who was our investments supervisor and also looked after the

University's investments, and, of course, the completely indispensable Gerald Chambers, who was the domestic bursar and who was just a marvellous person to have around. We enjoyed the academic activities; we built up a series of seminars and continued the tradition of having every January, Green College lectures given by an outstanding series of national and international figures. We managed to raise funds to endow two additional lectures, one in memory of Jan Brod, a Czechoslovakian physician who served in the British Army during the war and had a very distinguished career, and we've had some very fine Jan Brod lectures, and a Radcliffe lecture to open the academic year. We introduced a good many social innovations, an annual dinner for the fellows and an annual dinner, also, for the fellows' wives. I used to say - or fellows' spouses, rather, husbands and wives - I used to say that there was no event in Green College to which you couldn't bring your wife, except for the fellows' dinner, but then the fellows weren't entitled to go to the fellows' spouses' dinner which Betty hosted, etc. And, of course, we enjoyed the sporting activities as well. We played the students at cricket annually and I thought my cricketing days were over, but I turned out every year and managed to get a few runs. The last year that I was Warden when I dropped three slipped catches before picking up the toughest one of all, made me realise that, perhaps, my cricketing days were over, but I got a few runs and retired 'not out' because our daughter, Judy, was singing in a concert in Burford and we had to leave the field to go to that. And, of course, we also managed to prevail, the fellows every year, over the students at the indoor sports of snooker, table tennis, darts and bar football. We always lost the bar football, but I think it was the misspent youth on the table tennis and snooker tables that probably helped us. And, of course, we also became really quite closely interested in the affairs of Osler House and I strove to do what I could to maintain and develop a happy relationship between Green College and Osler House, which is the clinical students club at the John Radcliffe Hospital. The relationships were a little strained in the early days because Osler House used to occupy premises which are now part of Green College and I think that there were clinical students who were not Green College members who felt in some respects deprived, but by the time I left the College, I think relationships with Osler House were very good.

MB That was an important time in terms of the family life of the College which you thoroughly enjoyed?

JW It was, it was.

MB That must have been quite difficult to leave when you left, and we'll come to your departure from Green College in due course, but I can imagine how centrally important that family life was?

JW Well, it was. You see, it was the first time in my life that I had effectively, that Betty and I had effectively lived on top of the job. We had a very attractive home at 1A Observatory Street, the Warden's house; a marvellous L-shaped drawing room, splendid for entertaining and, so, we often had sherry parties and other parties there. I remember one particular occasion when we, the music society, had a number of notable people coming along to perform, vocalists and others, and we had a very happy buffet supper in the house, and other occasions when we entertained some of the members of the Osler Boat Club, because Osler ladies were 'Head of the River' in several successive years and regularly in rain and shine Betty and I used to go down

to the river, often in the time of the Torpids, digging our way through the mud along the towpath to watch them perform. Indeed Pete, who was the coach of the two crews, men and women, used to regard Betty as the mascot because he said every time she appeared they got a bump or something, although they didn't do quite so well last year. I don't think it was anything to do with our departure...

MB You'd gone by then.

JW I don't think it was anything to do with our departure. So, the family life was great and we did enjoy it and, as I say, it became very much a part of our life.

MB Here was the primary aspect of your life in Green College, but beneath it all there were very serious, that was for people, that was the linking with people and giving in that direction, but there were also interests in the fabric as well and producing more College. I could...

JW Yes. Well, of course, the College gradually, in fact, steadily expanded during the time that I was there. I think when I arrived we had about a hundred students. At that time, the College had a target of trying to get up to a hundred and fifty, but gradually its popularity increased, not only with students migrating from other Oxford colleges after their pre-clinical course, but more particularly in the medical field with many students coming over from Cambridge, who did their pre-clinical studies in Cambridge and then came to Oxford for their clinical, and quite a lot of those came and enlivened the life of the College. It would be invidious to pick out individuals, but quite a number of the presidents of the NCR, very attractive, intelligent, able and dedicated young people played a major part in College life, so that we had a policy in the College that students could be resident in College accommodation for two years out of three. It became necessary, therefore, to obtain additional accommodation. We bought when we could, additional houses for married students in Observatory Street until they became too horrendously expensive, but I was determined to do what I could to raise the funds necessary to build an additional residential block and so, in 1986, we launched a major appeal to raise the funds necessary to build an additional residential block and a hundred seat lecture theatre and a book stack to accommodate the books from our expanding library. We, also, clearly needed more visitor accommodation for academic visitors who were beginning to come, well, in fact, not beginning, but who throughout were coming to Green College in increasing numbers, not only as visiting fellows, but also as visiting scholars, many of them from the States and from many other parts of the world. So, we launched an appeal and that involved a great deal of work. The university surveyor, Douglas Bending, and Michael Harrison, a member of his staff, produced some outstanding plans for us. At first, the appeal was very, very slow to get off the ground, but eventually, through the very good offices of Cecil Green after whom, of course, the College is named who gave us another major donation, we achieved the funding necessary to build this building. We had a problem in that to construct the new block required us to demolish a small and rather unattractive lodge in the vehicle entrance to the College and close to the Radcliffe Infirmary. This lodge had been designed by Sir Hubert Worthington in the 1930s and built in about 1934. None of us thought that it was a particularly attractive building, but I'm afraid that when we applied for planning permission, we were turned down by the Planning Committee of the Council and the Victorian Society had apparently lobbied them saying that this was part of Oxford's

architectural heritage. How a 1932 building could be regarded as such, I really don't know, and in the end it cost us a lot of money; we had to have a major appeal and this eventually was heard twelve months later by an inspector. I collected together reports from a number of major figures in the architectural world, including one that was very influential from an old Newcastle friend of mine who had become head of the Graduate School of Architecture in York and who produced a very fine report, and a number of others; the President of the Royal Institute of Architects produced a very good report, and the appeal was successful. But, that delayed us for about a year and, of course, involved us in additional costs, which was depressing. But, eventually, all went well, there was a huge hole in the ground, our extension to the office block with additional office accommodation and more visitors' rooms, a flat for visitors, a double bedroom and kitchen for visitors and more bathroom accommodation, the residential block with fourteen additional student rooms, basement lecture theatre, which we'd named after Sir Edward Abraham who'd helped us. And many other people helped us, the Rhodes Trustees, the Radcliffe Trust and a large number of commercial companies and firms. My old friend, Mr [Alexander] Patrick, from Birmingham, Mr Edwin Stevens whom I'd known through the Royal Society, a lot of people gave us money, so eventually the building was built in the same kind of attractive architectural style which some called pseudo-Georgian, but I think improperly, because it's a classical style and it integrates, I believe superbly with the old buildings of the Observatory and the Observer's house nearby and it's been widely commended. We were deeply touched when Cecil Green came over in 1988 to lay the foundation stone. In fact, you are probably aware that the University decided, after I had asked a member of council to put his name forward, eventually conferred upon him an honorary DSc.

MB Much deserved.

JW Much deserved. Now, of course, it's important to recognise that although they may have been swayed by his financial support for and contribution to Green College, essentially his Doctor of Science was conferred to acknowledge the outstanding original contributions that he made to geophysics in his professional life because he was one of the world leaders in developing methods for aerial exploration for oil and, so, he got a DSc, and that, again, was a most memorable period. Unfortunately, when he came over, his dear wife, Ida, who had been, of course, his help mate throughout the years was very sick and was unable to come and she died a year or two later. In fact, I, in 1988, no, 1987, and I went over for her funeral, actually flew over to La Jolla in California and was privileged to be one of the pall-bearers.

MB But, by that time, you were a family friend?

JW I was a family friend and, of course, Cecil is a most marvellous man. He and Ida together have given away well over \$500 million to many worthy causes in the United States, but Green College was the first major foundation which he had created by giving money to the country of his birth. He was born, you see, in Lancashire, on the outskirts of Manchester, a place called Besses o' the Barn; his father was a maintenance electrician. They emigrated to Canada when he was small, then moved to the States. They lost virtually everything in the San Francisco earthquake of 1905 when Cecil was only five years of age; he was born in the year of the century, 1900. They eventually moved back to Canada and Cecil went to the University of British

Columbia, then to MIT in Cambridge, Massachusetts and then went on in geophysics. Now, as I said, he came over and we were able to entertain him when he laid the foundation stone and then, of course, the great day when the building was opened in 1989 in June, that glorious flaming June, a wonderful period of extraordinarily hot weather, it was magnificent. And he came over and, of course, the Chancellor of the university, Lord Jenkins, came, the Vice-Chancellor and many other dignitaries and Sir Richard and Lady Doll, of course, were there as the founding Warden and Warden's lady, and Sir Crispin and Lady Tickell who had already been appointed to succeed me, Betty and myself, in the College, they were there, and it was a most memorable week. We had a series of events, which will always, I think, live in my memory.

MB But, with a memorable week of that kind, it must have been quite difficult to face up to the departure that was about to go ahead?

JW Well, it was, Max, but there were a number of other things which were important and which had arisen at that time. I've often said that in that particular year, I had an offer I couldn't refuse, first of all. I didn't miss a single governing body in my six years at Green College, apart from one in May 1989 shortly before the events of that memorable week because I was invited to lecture on a Swan Hellenic cruise in the steps of Hippocrates, a cruise devoted to medical history where we went to places like Split, Dubrovnik, Corfu, Delphi, Athens, Crete, Alexandria...

MB An opportunity not to be missed?

JW Absolutely, and then went up to Rhodes and then on to Kos, of course, the island of Hippocrates and then on to Dikili and Pergamon in Turkey before coming back home. It was a wonderful trip. The only problem was that poor Betty picked up what only later we discovered was a *Giardia lamblia* problem, which I think came from Cairo, almost certainly, and when she came back from the trip, facing up to this period of enormous activity for the opening with social events and dinner dances and the opening ceremony, she got through that week, but was really very poorly and I don't think anybody really know how poorly she was, but she coped superbly. Immediately after that was over, we got the thing investigated fully and we found the nature of the infection and it was effectively treated and, of course, she recovered completely. But, in the meantime, I should just mention how deeply touched we were that Cecil Green suggested and the governing body warmly agreed that the new building that was opened with the lecture theatre and the student rooms and so on should be called the Walton Building. So, that is something for which we shall always be tremendously grateful. Well, we went on after that to plan our move into 13 Norham Gardens, of which more in a moment, but the thing, of course, which had, of course, added to a new dimension to my life was that when we got back from the Hellenic cruise, my secretary, Rosemary, said that she'd had a call from the Prime Minister's office in 10 Downing Street saying that the Prime Minister wished to write to me a personal and extremely confidential letter and asking where he could send it. And so, in the event, the only thing they could work out, the secretary from Downing Street and my secretary, Rosemary Allan, was that she should send the letter to Green College in a sealed envelope with an outer envelope addressed to Rosemary who would hold the letter until I came back. So, the first thing I saw on my desk was this sealed letter saying 'Prime Minister - Urgent - Special Delivery' and, of course, I

opened it up to find that in the usual phraseology, the letter was signed by the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, personally, of course, she said 'Dear Sir John, I am writing to let you know that I have it in mind on the occasion of the forthcoming Birthday Honours List to recommend to Her Majesty that the honour of a Life Peerage may be conferred upon you, but before making this decision final, I would be grateful if you could let me know if this is agreeable to you.' So, not unnaturally, I wrote back and said that I would be deeply honoured and so, in the Birthday Honours which took place just the week before the opening of the new Walton Building at Green College, I knew that I was to receive a life peerage.

MB That must have been a great time altogether?

JW Well, it was and, indeed, we knew, of course, a few weeks in advance and so we arranged a garden party with champagne etc. for all of the fellows and college officers in the grounds of Green College just as it were, ten days or so, before the major event, the major opening ceremony for the Walton Building. And, of course, it was, we actually arranged it on the Saturday morning when the Birthday Honours were announced and, interestingly enough, quite a lot of the fellows who got the invitation, their wives, of course, were also invited, said, 'Why is the Warden doing this?' and so on. 'What's it all about?' And, of course, they kept on ringing us and we said, 'Well, it's just a thank you to the fellows for their support during the time that I've been warden,' and so on, you know, and even when they arrived, some of them hadn't read the newspaper and didn't know what it was all about, so it all came as...

MB But, it was all happening around Green College?

JW It was all happening, it was all happening.

MB You leave Green College, you are now a member of the House of Lords, an elder statesman not only of medicine but now nationally, in a new way. How did that turn out? Did the life in this senior English club turn out to be especially satisfying after Green College?

JW It's been immensely exciting, Max. There's no doubt that it's added a totally new dimension to my life. Frankly, it was unexpected because although two of my predecessors who served as long as I did as President of the General Medical Council, Lord Cohen of Birkenhead and Lord Richardson, both received life peerages, and I knew, therefore, that it might at least be a possibility, I felt it was unlikely because in the previous years there was usually a new medical peer created every two or three years, but then during Margaret Thatcher's primeministership, during the era that she was prime minister, there was a period of eight years where no medical peerages at all were created. And among others, I had tried very hard to propose certain names, not least that of Sir Douglas Black for a peerage and these proposals, which I knew didn't come just from me but from many other parts of the profession, had clearly fallen on stony ground. And I believe that the medical profession had become rather unpopular, not just with the Prime Minister, but with senior members of the Tory Party because they believed that the doctors were always complaining about cuts on the Health Service, cuts on the universities and so on and hadn't appreciated fully their need, as they saw it, to cut Government expenditure. Now, I had been among

the critics in that, on a number of occasions, I had criticised quite openly Government policy in relation to education and health and I thought, therefore, that it was unlikely that it would happen, but in the event I was grateful that it did; not only grateful but, of course, deeply honoured to have been singled out in this way, not least because I felt that many of my medical colleagues in the Lords were very senior and that perhaps somebody, I don't regard myself as young but I am younger than many of them, with more recent experience of the Health Service and of medical education might be able to make a useful contribution. So that, for this reason, I was very, very pleased indeed about it. Of course, as you will be aware, I had given up my presidency of the General Medical Council at the end of the statutory seven years, also in February 1989, so that in that year, the GMC went and Green College went and, of course, it couldn't have been more timely to go into the Lords because this, with other things, filled this gap.

MB And some exciting issues

JW Very exciting

MB In the Lords to ..

JW Now, just to go back for a moment about the General Medical Council because on the last interview I spoke a little about that and I think there are analogies to this in the present day. Lord Cohen of Birkenhead was President of the Council for thirteen years. He was a man of razor sharp intellect; he was one of the most outstanding figures in the British medical profession. He was somebody whom I was proud to call a friend and for whom I had the utmost admiration but, you know, in the last three or four years of his presidency, he began to develop a kind of aura of infallibility, a certain degree of increasing autocracy; there was a strong feeling that father knows best, and I think it was his decision virtually to persuade the Council to strike off the register doctors who had failed to pay the newly introduced annual retention fee. Those doctors did so because they wanted more democratic representation on the Council, and that decision led to the Merrison Report on the medical profession and to the reconstitution of the GMC. That was welcome. But, I think, Henry Cohen in retrospect, thirteen years was too long. He should have left at the height of his powers and I think there is an analogy, if I may say so, because I felt the same about Margaret Thatcher, whom I think many people admired, as I did in the early years, for many of the great achievements that were introduced into British life that I think that she was in danger or indeed had outstayed her usefulness as a prime minister. Now, after Henry Cohen retired on the grounds of ill-health and, as I say, I admired him enormously and was very pleased to call him a friend, after he retired, I... the Council passed a resolution that no future president would serve more than seven years, very properly. So, my term of office was '82 to '89 and on the very day, the 16th February '89, seven years to the day, it was out and finished. And that again was a tremendous loss, you know, it had been so much a part of my life that I felt considerable withdrawal symptoms, but I look back upon it with pleasure and I am sure that decision of term of office was right.

MB But the marvellous fortune of having the transfer to the House of Lords?

JW I know, I know.

MB So timely.

JW Absolutely. Now, let me tell you a little about that because it was interesting. You don't actually use the title until it is formally conferred in *The London Gazette* and announced and so the first thing that happened to me was that I was called to see Garter, King of Arms, Sir Colin Cole, whom I had met before when I had got my knighthood, but hadn't got to know at all well, and he said, 'I'm required to discuss with you the designation of your title.' And I said 'Yes.' He said 'You may choose to take any name that has not been adopted by any other peer or you may keep your own surname.' Well, I said, 'That's easy because I'm keeping Walton because, for example, when Lord, when Hugh Trevor-Roper became Lord Dacre, nobody knew who the devil he was,' you see, 'so it will certainly be Walton.' He said, 'On the assumption that you have reached that conclusion, I have done a little research.' And I said 'Yes.' He said 'There has never been a Lord Walton, but there has been a Lord Watton. There is a Lord Walston, there is a Lord Woolton and there is a Baroness Wootton. Under the circumstances, the possibility of confusion between your name and that of other peers may arise. It is therefore my decision that you should add to your *nomen dignitatum* a geographical location.' So, I said 'Yes.' And so, he said 'Well,' he said - I said 'Yes,' I said 'in that case it will be Detchant.' 'Detchant?' he said. 'Never heard of it.' And I said 'No, you won't have done, it's a tiny hamlet in north Northumberland where we've had a house for over thirty years.' And he said 'Ah, in that case I must be satisfied that it exists.' So, he turned to a *gazetteer* on his desk and turned over the pages and there it was - Detchant, Northumberland. So, he said 'That's all right.' So, my name now, my surname officially is Lord Walton of Detchant - of Detchant in the county of Northumberland, so that is the title. He then said to me 'Well, you will have chosen your introducers?' And I said 'Yes.' I chose Lord Porritt, former President of the Royal College of Surgeons and former Governor General of New Zealand and who, of course, running for New Zealand as a young man came third in the 100 yards in 1922 won by Harold Abrahams. And I, also, chose Lord Richardson, one of my predecessors of the GMC. So, he said, 'The final question I want to put to you is the question of your robes.' By this time, I was beginning to think that Colin Cole was a little bit of a stuffed shirt, but I realised that he wasn't when he said, 'Well, you may purchase them, and at the last count - £3,000 plus VAT.' I said 'Yes?' So, he said, 'You may hire them from Eden Ravenscroft.' I said 'Yes.' He said 'Well, there is a third alternative.' I said 'Yes?' And he said 'Well, don't tell him I said so, but you can go to Black Rod and borrow them from the Quartermaster's store.' Done! So, I borrowed them from the Quartermaster's store and actually borrowed them again in a ballot when Betty and I went to the State Opening of Parliament in November 1989. Well, now, it happened that, of course, that you can only speak in the Lords after being formally introduced. My formal introduction with the supporters, Richardson and Porritt, was a memorable occasion and, of course, my whole family were there including, Ian and Ann and Victoria came from Switzerland and Drew didn't because he had just started Durham University, the elder grandson, but Andy and Judy and their two children came from Burford and Chris and Denise came from...

MB Being one of the most memorable of occasions?

JW Absolutely. And, of course, we had lunch and Colin Cole and his wife came

along and was utterly charming with the rest of them and, of course, my introducers and their wives. And then after that, of course, I had to make my maiden speech which I made on the Queen's Speech, simply to say that I was going to make contributions on embryo research, on the Health Service and so on and it apparently was well received. But, I was thrown in at the deep end because I'd only been there a week or two when along came the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill where I put my name down to speak on the Second Reading. There were something like seventy-eight speakers listed, of whom I was number forty-seven, and it seemed that what I had to say in which I gave details of the scientific background and discussed the ethical and religious view seemed to make an impact because I was then lobbied not only by my own cross-bench peers - and incidentally I chose to be a cross-bencher, as most doctors and scientists do. In other words, I didn't wish, whatever my voting intentions might be in the future and have been in the past, I didn't wish to be tied to any political party, so I'm one of over two hundred cross-bench peers who are independent and I am therefore not subject to a party whip.

MB A very privileged position?

JW Well, it is a privileged position and, I think, an important one. It means that you can sometimes support the government and sometimes be against them. But, I was then lobbied by a group of people, both in the House and outside, to be a kind of front man on the scientific and medical aspects of embryo research and when the committee stage came round in a House which was full, about three hundred and fifty people, the House was crowded, no fewer than three former prime ministers, Harold Wilson, Callaghan and Lord Hume were there and umpteen cabinet ministers of both parties, the committee stage. The Duke of Norfolk proposed an amendment to ban research. He is, of course, a very leading Roman Catholic. He was followed by the Archbishop of York and I came third and you could hear the castanets on the inside of my knees, but it, I don't want, I hope, to sound in any way immodest, but innumerable peers came up to me afterwards and told me that they had been going to vote against the research until they heard what I had to say and I'd changed their minds. And later, I had a meeting with David Weatherall and David Barlow with a selected group of MPs before the Bill went into the Commons and again I was told by quite a number of members of parliament in the Commons that what I'd said, and recorded in Hansard, had had a major influence, so that, naturally, was a great satisfaction to me.

MB And, similarly, you had an opportunity to have an influence on the National Health Service Bill?

JW Yes, we didn't get quite so far. There were a number of us who spent a lot of time on the NHS Bill. We were opposed to a number of the government's measures relating, for instance, to flexibility of terms and conditions of service for doctors in self-governing hospital trusts etc, but with the help - well, I say help, I mean there were a number of us including myself, Lord Adrian, Lord Hunter, Lord Dainton, Lord Butterfield, Baroness Cox and a number of others, who had an awful lot of say and it's interesting, Max, that I hadn't realised how hard you work. There were times on the Embryo Research Bill when I was there until 1.30 in the morning. There was even one time on the Health Service Bill when I'd anticipated catching the last train back to Oxford, but by 9 o'clock it was perfectly clear that the amendment with which I was involved was going to come up very late, so I had to ring The Athenaeum to see

if they had a room. Thank God they had one and I went back there at quarter to two in the morning to sleep in my underpants without a razor before catching the 7.20am back to Oxford the next morning. You know, this is the sort of thing which is an unexpected experience. So, I have found it fascinating, rewarding, more demanding than I'd expected, but a very interesting part of my life.

MB And this will go on as the central theme?

JW Well, it will, but then, of course, I'm going to be very selective in only speaking unless there are special circumstances on medicine, science and education and, at the moment, this particular session, there isn't too much on that particular line, so I am listening and learning.

MB And there are times now for you to pursue other interests such as the interest in neurology that continues. Perhaps I could, in the last few minutes of this interview, take you to that interest, Lord Walton?

JW Well, I was, as you know, Chairman of the Research Committee of the World Federation of Neurology and Chairman of its Research Group on Neuromuscular Diseases, that latter group which I have chaired now for many years organises quadrennial congresses on neuromuscular disease, of which the last was in Munich in September last year, 1990. I was, also, made first Vice-President of the World Federation and then in New Delhi at the World Congress of Neurology when Dr Richard Masland from New York retired after eight years as president in 1989, I was elected to succeed him as President of the World Federation. The World Federation has seventy national neurological societies and associations affiliated to it. It organises the quadrennial congresses of neurology, but it, also, sponsors Pan-American, Pan-African, Pan-Arab, Asian and Oceanian and Pan-European congresses of neurology. It's thirty research groups are involved in organising and promoting international programmes of research in a vast range of subjects within the neurological field and I am finding it very rewarding and exciting. We publish a quarterly newsletter which goes to twenty-two thousand neurologists the world over. In the last year I was in Madrid in January and Thailand in March, in the United States in June, in Canada in November, in Munich in September and so on. This year, I am going to Houston, Texas for a week to lecture and, incidentally, one of the lectures there is going to be on a totally different subject, on the history of medicine, about which I have had an opportunity of saying very little. I've been a great admirer of the former Regius Professor of Medicine in Oxford, William Osler, one of the greatest physicians who ever lived, who was Regius Professor in Oxford from 1905 to 1919 and Betty and I have the privilege now of living in a flat and using the offices in his former home at 13 Norham Gardens, often called 'The Open Arms'. There are nineteen Osler Societies which have been created world-wide to hallow his memory concerned with the history of medicine and I was privileged to give the annual McGovern oration last year in the United States to the American Osler Society and I'm talking about Osler in Houston, as well as doing several lectures on neurology and clinical demonstrations which I still try to do. One thing I always enjoy at home or overseas is being invited to see a patient without knowing anything about the patient's background, being presented with a history, examining the patient and then discussing the differential diagnoses in front of an audience. I remember in America once in New York in the Bronx at the Albert Einstein Medical College, a patient who

had been examined by me and was just being wheeled out in a wheelchair where he said, 'Gee, who is that guy? He talks just like Richard Burton.' Well, anyhow, I've had a lot of experiences. When I start to get all the diagnoses wrong, then I shall give that up. But, later this year we are going, also, to the States to the American Academy of Neurology again, briefly, in April and then we'll be going in September to the Pan-American, no, to the Asian and Oceanian Congress in Tokyo and then on to Vancouver to hold a meeting of the World Federation at which we shall be organising the next World Congress in Vancouver in 1993. And then later in October we are going to the Pan-American Congress in Montevideo in Uruguay, then on to New Zealand and then to Australia and then in December to the Pan-European Congress in Vienna, so apart from the House of Lords and the things I am writing and the textbooks which I am revising and which I am hoping to continue work with this year, it's going to be an active life.

MB It must be a very exciting time to be associated with neurology. I mean, your life's been associated with neurology, but at present so many incredible things are happening with developments that you couldn't have foreseen when you first became associated with the discipline?

JW Well, I talked in 1986 about muscular dystrophy and, of course, one of the reasons for embryo research being so crucially important is that in 1987 the gene responsible was isolated and characterised fully, the missing gene product, a protein called dystrophin, was identified. It has now become possible with the gene's specific marker to identify the female carriers who will pass the disease on to their sons. Also, to identify *in utero* the affected males so as to carry out abortion only of affected males and to allow the unaffected males of the pregnancy to continue. But, in relation to embryo research, the crucial thing is that you can now harvest the ova from a female carrier, fertilise them *in vitro* in a test-tube with the husband's sperm, allow the conceptus to develop to the sixteen-cell stage, take out a cell from the part of the conceptus that is going to produce the membranes and the placenta, not the part from which the foetus is going to develop, and can, on that single cell, look to see whether the gene is present and if it is allow the conceptus to degenerate, as eighty per cent do after normal human conception. But if the gene is not there you can implant only normal conceptus so that the carrier woman in future should be able to have non-affected sons and non-carrier daughters. So, that is really why embryo research is so crucial. But, of course, throughout all this, Max, it sounds a very hectic life, but one mustn't forget the fact that a Geordie, as I said, we love our Northumbrian home at Detchant. People think that that's derived from the French, Detchant, somebody even called me Lord Walton de Detchant, but in fact it means Ditch End, so it is singularly unglamorous, but it's a lovely little place. We look down over Holy Island where, of course, Christianity came to the north-east of England with Cuthbert and Aidan; we are five miles from one of the loveliest villages in the land, Bamburgh, and I am now privileged to be president, after presiding over the World... still presiding over the World Federation of Neurology, but formerly the GMC, the BMA, the RSM, people often call me 'Rent-a-President' - I hope that doesn't sound too facetious, but I am now President of Bamburgh Castle Golf Club which was recently regarded by the *Sunday Express Supplement* as the scenically most beautiful golf course in the United Kingdom, if not in the world.

MB On that happy view point, we are going to come to the end of this interview and it seems very glamorous, that association with Northumberland that continues, and I shall look forward to talking further with you in five more years time about what has happened in the interim.

JW Thank you, Max.