Cabinet Secretary Sir Jeremy Heywood Interview with Anthony Seldon
Friday 22nd March 2013 at 10 Downing Street

Key:
AS - Anthony Seldon
JH - Jeremy Heywood

[Introductory Remarks]

AS: This is interview number six with the Cabinet Secretary Sir Jeremy Heywood, and the difference with this interview and the earlier ones is that Sir Jeremy is the current Cabinet Secretary. So it's very exciting to be here on this very wet, miserable March afternoon in 2013 interviewing Sir Jeremy, here in the pillared room in Downing Street. And the first question, Sir Jeremy, is how would you describe the role of Cabinet Secretary?

JH: The role of the Cabinet Secretary, I think, is to be at one and the same time the Prime Minister's chief policy adviser from a civil service perspective - in these days of coalition, the Deputy Prime Minister's chief policy adviser as well - but also, at the same time as that, to be the sort of adviser to the Cabinet and the custodian of the Cabinet system. So I help the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister think through what should be on the Cabinet agenda, I sit next to the Prime Minister in Cabinet and take a record of what's been discussed and what's been agreed, and every now and again the Prime Minister bashes his finger and says, 'that should be in the minutes Cabinet Secretary', so we take particular notice at that point, and making sure that then is followed through … but I think the core of the job is really to be the sort of policy adviser to the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and the custodian of the way the Cabinet operates.

AS: And is this written down in a rulebook that says, 'this is the job of the Cabinet Secretary in the United Kingdom,' or is it just by word of mouth?

JH: If it is written down somewhere I wish someone had shown me the book. I suspect lots of books have been written about it and press releases were written at the time when we made the change from Gus to myself and Bob Kerslake because obviously at that time we were splitting up an integrated job - Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Home Civil Service - so we thought quite a bit about the job description at that point, but I'm not aware that there is a manual anywhere that tells you what the Cabinet Secretary's job is. I wish there was.

AS: This is a vast job. How, in fact, day by day, do you decide what you are going to give your attention to? Are you reacting to the flow of work or are you able to define what you are going to give priority to?

JH: You can, to some extent, shape your own agenda. Obviously, if you are going to be advising the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, you have to some extent be responsive to their requirements and their diaries. So, sometimes I will

have a set of meetings in my diary for the day and be looking forward to some long-term thinking and that gets completely sidetracked by, you know, a sudden requirement to be involved in an issue of the moment. But there is quite a good balance in the job between responding to the day to day, which I don't do that much of, but sometimes the issue is so critical that the Prime Minister or Deputy Prime Minister wants to have me, you know, in the room for those sorts of crises. There's a mixture between the day to day, the sort of policy implementation side where a senior minister or the Cabinet has asked the Cabinet Secretary to get involved in helping drive delivery, through to quite long-term thinking. I mean, I've just started a sort of horizon-scanning group, for example, to fill a little gap which I thought was in the Cabinet Office before and we'll be thinking great thoughts about, you know, what the world will be like in 15 or 20 years time. Hopefully those will be quite long meetings which don't get interrupted by the day to day. So it's quite a diversity, it's one of the things I like about the job.

AS: And is there a typical day? What kind of workday does the Cabinet Secretary have?

JH: There isn't really a typical day. There are some patterns, so Tuesdays we have Cabinet in the morning and that takes an hour and a half of the day and then in the evening, I have to sort of finish the minutes off. Wednesdays we have the Permanent Secretaries meeting as a group at ten o'clock while the Prime Minister is preparing for Prime Minister's Question Time. We meet… every morning we kick off in the Prime Minister's office with a morning meeting. He often has an afternoon meeting as well. I have a regular session with the Deputy Prime Minister, obviously, one on one, so there are sort of fixed points in the day. I generally start at about 6:30 with my first sort of dip into my Blackberry. I've got two Blackberries actually, so I have a few Blackberries to clear off overnight, reading the press summaries. I come into work at about 7:30, get here about 8. By that point you really need to be on top of what's happening in the sort of media, and as I say, the Prime Minister has a morning meeting which quite often sets the agenda for the sort of working day, but I do try to avoid just getting sucked in to, you know, what's happening in Number 10 minute by minute. That is the previous job I used to do in Number 10 and the Cabinet Secretary is supposed to sort of stay in formation a little bit, stick to my diary and actually make sure that the urgent doesn't crowd out the important.

AS: Does the Blackberry enhance the work of the Cabinet Secretary? And how did these people cope before Blackberries? Or was life easier?

JH: I think life was easier in some ways. Definitely the pace of government has increased and I think Blackberry contributes to that and facilitates it in some ways. I have this argument with my wife the whole time as to whether holidays are better with Blackberries or not. In the olden days, you know, you could go sort of, not so olden actually, maybe sort of ten years ago, you could go a whole day without really thinking about work but you'd have a looming sense of all the things that you didn't know about back in the office and so that would sort of ruin the evening and you'd have several phone calls and probably spend your whole evening catching up. This is my theory. Whereas if you've got a Blackberry

you can just do little bits of work during the day and have your evenings free. My wife doesn't necessarily agree with that, but...

AS: She thinks that that is just a bit of excuse?

JH: If she had her way she'd probably take both my Blackberries and throw them in the sea.

AS: And, um, what advice did you get about Blackberries and any other matter from Sir Gus O'Donnell, who we interviewed for the programme?

JH: I don't think Gus gave me a single piece of advice about Blackberries actually. But no, I mean, Gus and I have been working together for many, many years, he brought me back into the Civil Service in 2007, when I was languishing in the City, and we spent a lot of time together, so it was really a process of osmosis by which he imparted his considerable wisdom rather than a set-piece moment in which he told me how to do the job.

AS: Was it helpful, and if so in what way, in doing the job of Cabinet Secretary, the fact that you had worked here, in Number 10, and knew many of the people?

JH: It's incredibly helpful. It's really, really important to understand how Number 10 works and the pressures on the Prime Minister and to get to know, obviously, the people... But just knowing how the Prime Minister likes to operate, how he likes to be advised, just knowing the daily rhythm, but also fundamentally having been through quite a few crises, knowing what is a real crisis versus what looks like a short-term crisis, I think that just makes you more confident about doing the rest of the job. It gives you a sense of perspective about how to handle the daily business. I think frankly if you hadn't had that experience, and came in as Cabinet Secretary, you'd probably be run ragged because you'd probably want to get sucked in to pretty much everything to start with, just to sort of prove yourself and make sure you understand what's going on. Having been through quite a lot of that in a more junior role, I don't feel the need to be just, all the time, dealing with the urgent, and I think that is the distinction really between the Cabinet Secretary role and the roles I have previously played.

AS: How does one tell the difference between a real crisis and a peripheral crisis?

JH: It depends whether it survives more than one news cycle.

AS: And you can sniff that out? You have the nostrils for it, do you?

JH: I mean, I wouldn't claim any superior knowledge on this but you basically get a sense over time as to whether an issue is sort of developing into an even bigger problem or can be managed down. It's a team effort. The great thing about Number 10 is it's a team. You know, you've got great press people, you've got great special advisers, the private office is always there, and any particular issue you quickly assemble the right group of people and you, almost by intuition, you don't need to write down 'you're on this team today,' people just come together

and my role is increasingly not to do the running around and the drafting of speeches but just to sort of add a few bits of wise advice in.

AS: And you talk about knowing how Number 10 works. Does it, in fact, work pretty much the same regardless of the prime ministerial incumbent?

JH: I think in many ways it does, I mean, obviously, the way the garden rooms work and the duty clerks work and the custodians and the switch board, you know, most of the staff know what their roles are, do them brilliantly, day in day out, regardless of who the Prime Minister is. But I think the private offices' working methods and timetables can change. The role of a policy unit, the nature of the policy unit, the way the press office is configured, the relationship with all of the above to the Treasury, to the Cabinet Office, to other departments, all of those things do change depending on the characters of the Prime Minister and the nature of the government.

AS: Is it important for the Cabinet Secretary to have a public face?

JH: Not really, no. I mean, I think it's important that senior civil servants - and the Civil Service more generally - know who the Cabinet Secretary is and know that that's the person who will look after their interests and try and protect them and try to inspire them in some way, so I think there's a sort of, there's a facing the civil service role, and of course, as Cabinet Secretary you do appear before Select Committees and so on. And I know that Gus made a few speeches in his career and a few Cabinet Secretaries have done the same but in general, it's a sort of job which faces the politicians and faces the Cabinet and, you know, you operate effectively trying to sort of support them. You shouldn't be a big separate public figure in my view, it's not really what the role is there for.

AS: So looking back over Cabinet Secretaries since the war, there hasn't really been a significant change in their public profile, they have always been pretty much backroom faces?

JH: Yeah, I think as a general rule, that is the case. I think, you know, by the time he had done sort of six years, I think Gus was quite a public figure, had done quite a few interviews and magazine pieces and so on, but even Gus, who is probably the most media savvy and most media friendly of recent Cabinet Secretaries, even he was pretty much a backroom guy, you know, that's definitely my philosophy as well.

AS: The Cabinet itself, the most important body in British government… collective responsibility, does that still apply do you think?

JH: Very much so, yes. Obviously, I and my office from time to time get requests from people…So you occasionally have some exceptions but generally speaking, we do insist, and people are happy to comply, with the rules that all Cabinet Ministers must have an opportunity of commenting on and approving an announcement or a change of policy before it is made. Sometimes that goes to a Cabinet Committee meeting, full Cabinet, more often it is a written write round,

but I think everybody thinks it's valuable, that they have an opportunity to sort of put their departmental or political view before something becomes the government's policy, and that's a really important principal of Cabinet government.

AS: And at what point does it become the policy of Cabinet, when the Prime Minister sums up at the end of the meeting?

JH: Yes. As I say, there's not that many issues that go to Cabinet for formal approval, as opposed to a Cabinet Committee, or a written write-round, but until the chairman/chairperson of the Cabinet Committee has either written to say that it is now agreed, or summed up a meeting to say that has now been agreed, it isn't the collectively agreed policy. But it is all the more important, I think, in a coalition that both sides of the coalition feel they've got the opportunity of expressing their point of view. I mean a lot of the issues we deal with were set down in the Coalition Agreement in black and white, in very clear language, so it's pretty clear what the coalition policy is. But in other areas, in some areas, the coalition parties come to an issue from different perspectives, and if both of them are going to go out and defend it, they've both got to have the opportunity of sort of helping to shape it.

AS: One of the most significant changes to Cabinet in the postwar period has been the cutting down from two to one regular meeting a week. How do you manage in an hour and a half to capture the essence of everything that is going on?

JH: Well we don't try and capture the essence of everything that's going on. We do have, always have a discussion about parliamentary business, so whatever's important that's going on in Parliament, that is discussed. We have two or three domestic policy items and we usually have a couple of foreign policy items but we don't try and cover the whole waterfront in every meeting. There are other Cabinet Committees and lots of things don't need to come to Cabinet.

AS: So is Cabinet more for discussion and less for decision?

JH: Yes, I think that the full Cabinet is more for discussion, more for advanced warning of issues, for early steerage of issues, rather than taking formal papers and agreeing points A, B and C. That is usually left to Cabinet Committees, sub-committees of Cabinet essentially.

AS: And your role during the meetings is partly as a prompter to the Prime Minister, but also to write the minutes themselves and then do you circulate them that evening? How does that process happen?

JH: Well, there's a lot of secrecy about this, and I'm not going to give away all of the secrets, but no, I mean, my role in Cabinet is, yes, as you say, to prompt the Prime Minister, to make sure he sees who is trying to intervene, occasionally pass him notes but not often. I mean, he reads his brief, he's a very good chair of a meeting, and I take the note and then, you know, with a team of secretaries at

the end of the table, they, together with me and my team, put together the record in the evening and we do try and give it out in the evening or within 24 hours anyway.

AS: And the job of Cabinet Secretary in a coalition government. Did you go back at all and study what Edward Bridges did as Cabinet Secretary in the Second World War? Is it particularly difficult?

JH: I didn't go back and study the history books, maybe I should. You need to give me some references Anthony.

AS: Will do. To follow.

JH: I mean, obviously, I didn't become Cabinet Secretary until the coalition had been operating for quite a few months, in fact, well over a year, so I had already seen it in action from a different perspective. So, you know, that aspect of it didn't particularly surprise me, or didn't call for any particular preparation. As I say, I think it is all the more important in a coalition to have a well-functioning Cabinet, Cabinet Committee and collective responsibility system, and I feel as though we do have that.

AS: And the decisions on what items are taken in full Cabinet and what are taken in Cabinet Committee, is that one shared between the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister?

JH: Well we have a team of people, including representatives from the Deputy Prime Minister's Office and the Prime Minister's Office and we meet to discuss the forthcoming agendas, and there's a debate about that, and then we put it formally to the Prime Minister and also give the Deputy Prime Minister a chance to comment, and it is usually not a matter of contention.

AS: The people who you've met in your time, and this question goes back to your time working in the building, perhaps it would be interesting just to have on record how you first came into Number 10, into the Prime Minister's Private Office and follow that story through. And your return.

JH: Well I first came into Downing Street in 1997, in the autumn of 1997, when I got a phone call from Jonathan Powell, saying, completely out of a blue sky as far as I was concerned, saying the Prime Minister would like to meet me with a view to interviewing me for a job, as a sort of Treasury or domestic affairs, I think, Private Secretary, which was a bit of a surprise. So I rocked up there, I think, the next day, and Tony Blair was sitting on his sofa, one of his sofas, eating an apple, eating his lunch, and I had what was probably the easiest interview of modern times. I mean, I concluded from that he had either decided that before I went in that I had got the job or, you know, or the opposite. But he certainly didn't find anything out about me or my ability to do the job from the interview that we had. It was a perfectly amicable half hour. It felt like, you know, just whiling away the time while he was having his lunch. I heard nothing then for weeks. And then suddenly I got summoned to meet Derry Irvine in his chambers. By contrast, I

then had an absolutely grueling hour and a half interview from the Lord Chancellor and I must have passed that because then I got offered the job within, sort of, a few hours after this. So I found myself in Downing Street in '97 and I stayed until the end of 2003 I think, went off into banking for a bit, and then Gordon Brown persuaded me to come back with, a combination of Gordon Brown and Gus, of course… and Ed Balls actually. That persuaded me to come back and take a new job in the Cabinet Office as a domestic affairs Permanent Secretary in charge of domestic affairs policy, at the point at which Gordon Brown became Prime Minister. I did that for a bit and then he decided that he wanted me, not in the Cabinet Office, but to come into Downing Street. And I was a bit reluctant to do that because I had felt I had already done my stint in Downing Street as sort of Principal Private Secretary, and by then I was a sort of Permanent Secretary, and I didn't really want to come back in to do my old job. But we, sort of, bandied job titles around and we agreed a structure for the job, which I, in the end concluded might work, so I came back into Downing Street in the beginning of 2008 and we had an extraordinary period because it was, you know, the financial crisis and you know we had a huge task of re-capitalising the UK banking system and then we had the G20 summit in London, which was an extraordinary moment, so it was a really intense period. Then we had the sort of run down to the general election in 2010 and I stayed on as Permanent Secretary to the Prime Minister really until the end of 2011 and then became Cabinet Secretary, so, it was really 2008 to the end of 2011 that I was back in Downing Street. So, different roles with three different Prime Ministers.

AS: And before even your conversation in the den with Tony Blair you had been very familiar with this building because of your work as Private Secretary to the Chancellor of the Exchequer?

JH: Yes, but actually, as Principal Private Secretary to the Chancellor, I didn't really come here very often. There is a tradition now that whenever the Chancellor of the Exchequer meets the Prime Minister, the Chancellor's Private Secretary comes and joins the meeting, but in those days, we are talking about Black Wednesday and those sorts of times, the Prime Minister didn't really allow anybody from the Treasury in the room, apart from the Chancellor. So the Chancellor went on his own into those meetings, so I came here a few times but not very often.

AS: But you knew about the operation of the building…

JH: Yeah, but you never really know about an operation of a building until you actually come and work here.

AS: So what did you learn? What was the biggest surprise when you actually physically came into the building?

JH: Well that's a good question. Well what strikes you fairly early on is just the sort of extraordinary Rolls Royce machine that supports the Private Secretaries in Downing Street. I mean, it's a lovely place to work from that perspective, you've got some wonderful staff in the garden rooms and the duty clerks,

everybody is incredibly friendly. I mean, the Treasury is quite a small place and quite a lot of good *couer d'esprit* and you know, quite friendly, despite its image. Coming to a much smaller place like Downing Street, sort of 150 or 200 people, whatever it was then, it was a small, friendly, non-hierarchical, fast-moving place, more like a home almost. But the thing in terms of the job content that really struck you as being a Private Secretary in Downing Street is that you were the person who had to give all the advice, whereas being the Private Secretary to the Chancellor, you had a whole machine - the Treasury - providing the advice and all you did was provide a little big of challenge and sort of, you know, help along the way. But suddenly, if you are working for the Prime Minister, you're the person who has got to write the 3-page note on what's going on in the economy. Of course, you can attach a Treasury paper if you can extract one from the Treasury, but you're much more the sort of principal adviser as it were, as opposed to the person just stapling together the papers and making sure that they go in the box.

AS: And is there a kind of unique energy about this building that allows people to work these very long hours, to keep focused?

JH: Yeah, I think, you know, other parts of Whitehall too, have their moments. Places like the Treasury and the Foreign Office are under a lot of pressure, and the MoD when we're fighting a war, but yeah, I think Number 10 is uniquely sort of 24/7. There's always somebody, somewhere in Number 10 having a bit of a crisis. You're unlucky if it's you, if every crisis follows you around, and that's the tough thing about being the Principal Private Secretary or whatever. Obviously it's the Prime Minister who has to deal with everything, but yeah, at any one time there is always some part burning the midnight oil, worrying away about either a current crisis or trying to stop the next one.

AS: And intellectually, was it more demanding being in the City or being here at the heart of government? Or does it require a different part of the mind?

JH: They're not as different as you might think. I mean certainly, having spent most of my career in the civil service, to go and try and become an investment banker required quite a lot of mental agility and lots of new learning, and there's some very, very clever people who work in banking, investment banking, working on very complicated products, possibly too complicated, and giving serious high integrity advice to corporate leaders, much the same way as we give high integrity advice, I hope, to political leaders. So many of the same core skills are required, but fundamentally banking is about making money for your clients, and therefore for your bank, and therefore for yourself, whereas money doesn't really feature in the motivation of people working in Downing Street. Anyone working in Downing Street could triple, quadruple their money if they wanted to but they're there because they want to serve the Prime Minister and the government of the day.

AS: In terms of the quality of the intellect and also the volume of work, which is the more demanding?

JH: What the volume of work or the…

AS: Ah, sorry, the volume of work and the intellectual depth and capacity that is required in banking as against running Number 10.

JH: I think in quantity of work there is not much to choose between them. Actually people in banking work incredibly long hours. I would say in terms of depth of intellect, again, it's not as different as you might think, there are very, very clever intelligent, analytical people on both sides. To me, working on major public policy questions - the sort of big issues of the day - is more demanding than just trying to sort out how to IPO a company or whether to take over a company. I think the breadth of discipline you need to be on top of, you know, somehow trading off social, economic, fiscal, environmental, there are so many factors involved in good public policy making, so many different barriers to delivery that need to be considered. If you compare that with the task of advising corporates, I think it is a more complicated terrain, although that's not to say that people working in the City and the private sector more generally aren't some very, very able people because they certainly are.

AS: And the jobs of being Principal Private Secretary to the PM, and latterly Perm. Sec. here in the building contrasted to being Cabinet Secretary… Are they demanding in different ways? Can you describe the human qualities you need to carry out both those tasks?

JH: Yeah, I mean they are slightly different, obviously. As Cabinet Secretary you have to give more advice, really, in your own right, because quite a lot of… if something goes wrong with a particular minister's conduct, or if there's a letter from an MP about some impropriety or allegation of impropriety, it's the Cabinet Secretary's view that they want, not the Civil Service's view, so you've got to put your own name to that and therefore there is much more personal responsibility in that sense. Whereas, if you're the Principal Private Secretary, you're there really to sort of make sure that the trains run on time, if you like, that the papers are in the box, and of course your views are sought, but you are one voice out of many and it's more of a sort of challenge role rather than the person who has to be publicly accountable for the advice. Quite often I am in Cabinet and the Prime Minister will say, 'well I think we need a paper from the Cabinet Secretary on that,' or I'll be half listening to Prime Minister's Questions as the Prime Minister says, 'the Cabinet Secretary says X.' You're just much more of a figure in your own right and therefore you have to be that bit much more careful that the advice you are giving is fully rigorous, fair and so on. So I think there is a bit more personal accountability as Cabinet Secretary.

AS: Isn't it the greatest fun in the world, to be Principal Private Secretary to the Prime Minister, seeing everything that the Prime Minister does and what he's saying and who he's meeting, but without quite that degree of personal responsibility. Isn't this the perfect job for anybody?

JH: Well I'm quite lucky - whichever job I'm doing at any point in time I think is the perfect job. So I really enjoyed being Principal Private Secretary to the Chancellor and to the Prime Minister, but I love being Cabinet Secretary and I wouldn't compare the two. I certainly wouldn't want to go back now to the rough and tumble of being Principal Private Secretary.

AS: Would it be a necessary progression into Cabinet Secretary to have done that job for the Prime Minister or just a desirable progression?

JH: I don't think it's essential. Gus didn't play that role. But having some understanding of how Number 10 works is a real advantage, I think. I wouldn't completely rule out future Cabinet Secretaries doing the job without having that experience. I think if they didn't have either Treasury or Cabinet Office experience it would be really quite difficult.

AS: Gus, of course, had Treasury experience and he had been Chief Press Secretary from 1990 to '94, so he'd had a parallel kind of experience?

JH: Yes so he had got Number 10 experience but he hadn't got PPS experience. It certainly helps a lot but I think it would be too extreme to say you couldn't do the job without that experience.

AS: The pressure on the Prime Minister at the ERM ejection compared to the whole crisis in 2008, you were close to both those, can you compare them in any way? Was one more intense?

JH: No, they were both very, very intense. They were both all-nighters. I think the ERM one, there was, you know, probably an extra ingredient of, sort of, was the whole government falling apart? Was the whole government's economic strategy now in ruins? Whereas, with the banking crisis, which was every bit as acute, it was much more a sense of, you know, I think people were just sort of shocked. It had crept up on us more quickly in a way. I mean, the ERM crisis, my recollection of 1992 was my entire summer holiday was spent worrying, without a Blackberry, as to what was happening to sterling and it was a long, slow burn. It was obviously very rapid when it happened but… in the banking crisis too, there was a build up, but I don't think it was quite the same sort of focus on, 'is the UK going to do this, that or the other?' To that extent, we took people by surprise, by sort of jumping ahead of expectations, rather than just giving in to the inevitable. So I think the government felt more in control at that point and there was therefore less criticism of the government's whole strategy falling apart. I think everyone was just caught up in the sort of enormity of the moment and we didn't have time, really, to think about that as we then spent the next few hours and days and weeks trying to persuade the rest of Europe to do something similar to what we were doing because it was all very well propping up our banks but if everybody else's banks were going, it wouldn't help the permafrost in the financial system. So, it is difficult to compare one crisis with another. They're all equally difficult to manage.

AS: And along with 9/11, were they the three biggest crises or would you point to anything else?

JH: I think those were the three biggest ones I was involved in. Obviously I wasn't here for 7/7, I was taking my spell in banking, but I imagine that was a pretty horrendous day in Downing Street. On the plus side I think the G20 summit - the London summit in 2009 - that was an equally momentous day I think, but in a more positive direction.

AS: Can you describe your particular memories of that event?

JH: Of the G20?

AS: The G20, yes, in London.

JH: My clearest memory of that was seeing the British Prime Minister basically cajoling, I won't use the bullying word, but he sort of pushed through a incredibly ambitious communiqué when leaders were sort of straggling back from lunch and hadn't quite sorted themselves out, they didn't have their Sherpa advisers behind them, and Gordon just basically sort of seized the moment before any of the officials were in the room really, to sort of go through the communiqué line by line, get approval, and it was a remarkable feat of diplomacy. I'm not sure I would call it diplomacy but it was very successful. And we ended up with an extraordinary set of decisions which I think even the leaders themselves were shocked they had agreed, but the sort of momentum of the moment carried it and I think that was a really important moment for the world economy, and it was good to be a part of it actually.

AS: And was it fortunate that there was a Prime Minister who was so economically literate at the time? How did he manage to bring that coup off, would you say?

JH: Well he had been the Finance Minister and had been very closely involved with the IMF, so he knew the terrain pretty well and that was definitely a huge advantage. He had a clear information advantage over everybody else in the room. He was also in the chair and decided the work practice of when we were going to sort of sprint towards a conclusion as opposed to sticking to the agenda that had been previously agreed, so he had all the cards in his hand. But I think the Civil Service played a really, really important role preparing him and sort of doing a lot of the clearing the way of negotiations, so it was a very good team effort, Treasury, Cabinet Office, running up to that. It was a good performance all round for UK plc, but more importantly, actually for the world economy. It got a shot of confidence at precisely the right moment.

AS: And President Obama came over for that London G20 that spring. Was he one of the more remarkable men you've seen, or would you point us to anybody else?

JH: Well I'm not going to pick and choose amongst world leaders. It is definitely true that at that time he was highly charismatic, his first trip, and we, as we sometimes do, lined up downstairs and clapped him in, and he had that sort of star quality. But that whole… I mean, we had a wonderful dinner in that room over there, for the G20, just leaders. Number 10 is beautiful on those sorts of evenings. Very intimate, you just sort of see the power in the room and you just know you are sort of involved - around the edges, albeit - of a historic moment and it's great to be a part of that.

AS: So that was in the state dining room. Can you tell a historic moment from a mundane moment?

JH: Yeah, you never quite know which moments are going to sort of last in the memory but there are some moments which clearly are. I mean, it's not often that we host a gathering of leaders on the eve of a massive international summit designed to save the world. That only happens once or twice a career I suspect. But there are other magical moments which we have. The Queen, for example, we had some of the Queen's celebrations with her former Prime Ministers and various jubilees and various anniversaries, those have been really lovely afternoons or evenings as well. Seeing the Queen with all of the Prime Ministers, I haven't actually seen the play, I must go and see it, *The Audience*, but they are obviously deeply respectful of the Queen and seeing all her living Prime Ministers together, as we did, I think it must have been 2002 probably, that was a tremendous evening.

AS: It was the fiftieth anniversary. The year before there had been 9/11. Is there anything that you feel you can say for this record about your recollections of that day here in this building?

JH: Well I think you've heard it from others, from Richard Wilson in particular. I mean it really was an extraordinary afternoon. I can't remember where I'd been, probably at the ICA for lunch or something, and I came back to sort of see pictures on Sky News or whatever we had up in the Private Office of the first plane going in and people were sort of quickly saying to me, 'you'll never guess what's happened.' And at that point no-one quite knew whether this was just like a terrible accident or… and then literally as we were standing there, another one went in and it was just quite extraordinary. So, the Prime Minister was actually not in the office, I think he was down in Brighton wasn't he at Trade Union Conference…

AS: Absolutely, that's precisely where he was.

JH: …and the foreign policy adviser wasn't there so it was basically me and the Duty Clerk and a couple of other people left there. And I remember Tony Blair phoning up and saying, 'you better just double check there aren't any aeroplanes coming towards Downing Street.' And that was the last thing that had been on my mind, I'd just been watching the TV to see what was going on, but then I went into a sort of rather fruitless round of phone calls trying to find somebody who might know how to handle this situation. It wasn't very satisfactory, frankly.

We've certainly tightened up our procedures since then. Some people were up in Easingwold on a training course and other people were out for lunch and we didn't have their mobile phones and it was just, you know, not great. And then the Prime Minister came back, obviously, and I think it was that afternoon he sort of assembled all Britain's leading experts on the Taliban and Al-Qaeda and we sat down and spent the next two or three days trying to work out what on earth this was all about, you know, a massive attempt to understand the nature of this phenomenon that we hadn't really focused on, and that was again, the system at its very best. Everybody from MI6 and the Foreign Office and MoD and obviously the Cabinet Office, rallying around and being supportive to the Americans and obviously looking immediately at our procedures. It was a very, very tough period.

AS: So, amongst other memorable moments which you referred to is the ending of a premiership and the clapping out. Can you describe any particular clapping out and then the arrival of the incomer, perhaps in 2010?

JH: Yeah, they are amazing occasions, those, because clearly we'd had the long drawn-out departure of Gordon Brown. I mean he became aware obviously fairly early on that he wasn't going to stay on as Prime Minister but he was feverously trying to find a way of keeping Labour in the game. When it became clear that wasn't going to happen he composed himself and sort of decided when he was going to leave and so on and unusually for that sort of situation, because it had been a long drawn-out period as opposed to just losing the election overnight, as it were, a lot of his special advisers and his political team were still there and of course we had been working with these people for three years. So, they had become close colleagues, they're political, we're civil service, but nevertheless you work closely together for a period, so there was a scene of great sort of emotion as Gordon Brown and Sarah and the kids left and Gordon made a very sort of beautiful speech to the staff, and seeing some friends leave, it was a tough time, but obviously all the civil servants knew that within sort of 45 minutes we were going to get the incoming government through the door. So we had to clean up the place and get rid of all the New Labour memorabilia and just make sure we were ready to go with a new regime because that is what the people of Britain had decided. So, it was quite tough to, just on a human level, to sort of shift from the emotion of the Brown departure and all the special advisers, but yet being completely up for the new regime coming in. And I can't quite remember what the timeframe was but it felt like five minutes really. I think it was more like half an hour… but I think we carried it off really well. The great virtue of the Civil Service is that it is very professional when it comes to maintaining that impartiality and that continuity and it was much remarked upon at the time. Of course, we had a coalition to deal with as well so that brought an extra piece of sort of uncertainty, but just shifting very quickly from one regime which we'd all served very loyally, to another regime that we were very eager to serve loyally, that is just almost like the hardest, but in some ways the most exhilarating moment you ever get. In that moment it sort of sums up the duty of the civil servant, to be completely impartial and to work with whoever is elected, and there is nothing that brings it home to you more than having to turn around on a sixpence in the space of an hour.

AS: And the staff then lineup for the incoming of the new Prime Minister, just these minutes later, and clap the new Prime Minister in...

JH: Well I'm just trying to remember now. It felt quite late in the day by that point so I can't remember whether we had a rather bedraggled crowd or not but certainly Gus and I were there at the front door and then we had another sort of moment the next day when Nick Clegg came as well. I'm trying to remember now, it was about 8:30 or 9 o' clock in the evening I think by the time it sort of happened, but yes I'm sure that some staff were outside and I'm sure some staff were inside. It certainly felt like a very momentous moment.

AS: And that's a very special moment between the incoming Prime Minister and his most senior advisers who are going to be working with him.

JH: Yes. Well actually, Ed Llewellyn, Steve Hilton, Andy Coulson, the team came in before David and Samantha Cameron came in because obviously David and Samantha went to the Palace whereas the advisers came through 70, so we'd already showed them around Downing Street and started to sort of get to know each other as it were, and then for them, of course they went out into the street to wave their boss in. That must have been a fantastic moment for them because they had been working for that election victory and you know, when you're working that hard it is great to see it in action. We worked quite late that night from my recollection, unless my recollection is misleading me.

AS: And very quick question there on the wife who you mentioned. Does the wife of the Prime Minister play an important part in this building? Has it changed?

JH: I think it probably varies from wife, spouse to, you know… but obviously the wife to the Prime Minister, or the husband to the Prime Minister, plays a fundamental role in supporting the Prime Minister, keeping them sort of earthed, and actually quite often get involved in hosting charity receptions and sort of being with the Prime Minister for big events here, so there's quite a big time commitment as well.

AS: And you, Sir Jeremy, it's been now 20 years since you first started working intensively with people in this building, even if as Principle Private Secretary to the Chancellor you were not coming in much personally, you are going to be around for a good number of years, that's a very long 25 year period it might be, of exposure to this building at the heart of British government. It's akin to a kind of length of service of an Edward Bridges or a Norman Brook. Two quick final questions. Do you ever have moments where you slightly wished you were on the other side and were a politician yourself?

JH: Never. No, I'm absolutely sure…

AS: You chose right.

JH: …I chose the right course.

AS: You certainly wouldn't have had 25 years if you'd chosen the other route. And the principal changes, apart from the much loved Blackberry, which I think deserves an airing there on the camera, apart from the digital technology over that period, what else would you point students and lovers of this building and its history to?

JH: I think we've said it already, I mean, it's the pace of the media, the pace of government. I think that is largely due to pace. The degree of, sort of, impatience on the part of the public for speed of response… It just feels much tougher. I think the Civil Service has become much more open as well. I think the Civil Service has become much less hierarchical. It's a younger organisation in feel. So much has changed, most of it for the better actually.

AS: That was so stimulating, interesting, listening to you, thank you very much indeed Sir Jeremy.

JH: Thank you very much