

**Former Cabinet Secretary Lord Turnbull Interview with Lord  
Hennessy  
Monday 14<sup>th</sup> January 2013 at 10 Downing Street**

**Key**

Lord Turnbull: **LT**

Lord Hennessy: **LH**

**LH:** My name's Peter Hennessy, I'm Attlee Professor of Contemporary British History at Queen Mary, University of London and I'm talking to Lord Turnbull, Cabinet Secretary 2002-2005. Andrew when you became Cabinet Secretary did you feel you were part of an apostolic succession?

**LT:** I can see why people thought that was the case, given most my predecessors. No I didn't and particularly the process by which I was chosen was a selection from a number of candidates. So whereas in earlier times it was pretty much: choose someone if the Prime Minister's happy with them then you take it and move on to another candidate if that doesn't work. My predecessor Richard Wilson, although he had spent time as I like to tell him in the Treasury as a 'finishing school', wasn't a Treasury person like Robin Butler or Robert Armstrong. And well the fact that I'd been succeeded by Gus made it look like that again but again there was a process.

**LH:** Does that mean that you're the first truly meritocratic Cabinet Secretary?

**LT:** I do attach great importance to the meritocratic philosophy, given where I come from...

**LH:** Grammar school boy and all that!

**LT:** However I was not the first grammar school boy, I think you'll tell me that Norman Brook was...

**LH:** Norman Brook, Wolverhampton Grammar School.

**LT:** Yeah, I wasn't a pioneer in that sense.

**LH:** You knew three of your predecessors particularly well I think? Robert Armstrong, Robin Butler and Richard Wilson. Did you pick up tips on how to do the job from them?

**LT:** Yes, well I wouldn't say tips in the sense that I had conversations with them and they told me what to do and what not to do. But I had worked so closely with all of them. Robert Armstrong was the Cabinet Secretary in my first spell as a Private Secretary at Number 10...

**LH:** That was in the eighties with Mrs. Thatcher.

**LT:** ...in the eighties. And Robin was the Principal Private Secretary. I had worked with Robin on public expenditure in the Treasury. And then as Permanent Secretary at

the Treasury I had worked closely with Richard Wilson when he was Cabinet Secretary. So it was more osmosis than picking up tips.

**LH:** You all have a different style. What do you think you picked up from their styles, or don't you see it in terms of style?

**LT:** I don't really think I was trying to consciously adopt a style. A style would be what was me rather than: I'll think I'll do it in a certain way. I would have done it differently from Robin simply because he was a different personality. But there wasn't a conscious choice, that was genetic.

**LH:** What do you think the Turnbull style is in a nutshell?

**LT:** Turnbull style is quite kind of functional: get things done, make things happen, make them work effectively, get people to come together, rather than very overt, extrovert leadership. And there is the famous Myers Briggs test and I come out not just as an ISTJ but in each of those...

**LH:** What does ISTJ stand for?

**LT:** Oh, something like Intuition, Thinking, Judgement... No, 'I' is introvert versus extrovert...

**LH:** Oh I see.

**LT:** But I am also quite an extreme version of it. So anyone on the introvert or extrovert scale I am quite hard over on the 'I'. And the opposite end, if Richard Branson did it he would get absolutely the opposite readings on each of these four scales.

**LH:** There's a thought: Richard Branson as Cabinet Secretary! We might come back to that! How great an advantage do you think it was for you to have been in the Number Ten Private Office for two spells - the last one with John Major - through very difficult times as the Principal Private Secretary?

**LT:** No I think that was an enormous advantage. I'd seen a lot of the Cabinet Office processes at work, the way that the secretariats work, how the honours system works, I knew how Number Ten worked. Yes, no that was a big advantage.

**LH:** Do you think that having lived through several crises in your various manifestations as a Senior Civil Servant but particularly in Number Ten in those difficult times with John Major that - your nerves are probably pretty good anyway - but do you think that you've been tempered by experience to be quite good in a crisis?

**LT:** Well I think that is one of the things that the Civil Service prides itself on. When there is a problem it's not the special advisors that are digging us out of the hole it comes back to the civil service.

**LH:** The old sweats?

**LT:** Yes, now that can be a bit of a fault in the sense that you tend to rely on the fact that you can always get yourself out of a hole, but it is an important facet, and one of the key parts to it is the Civil Service is a cohesive entity and when you have to call in something from another department it's probably someone you were on a Civil Service course with twenty years ago. And so you know other people and their instinctive reaction is to respond positively to your cry for help.

**LH:** And the special advisors being temporary can't do this even if they're good? To the same extent anyway?

**LT:** That's right. That isn't in a sense a criticism of them, it's that there not there to do that job.

**LH:** Yeah. You were the first professionally trained economist to hold the job of Cabinet Secretary, was that an advantage too?

**LT:** Yes it was. I'm not sure I think of myself as a professionally trained economist, I think of myself as 'PhD incomplete'. I did pretty well at economics and I got a first, but then I went onto this PhD and I realised that there was a kind of glass ceiling particularly in the academic world. If you didn't have the maths, all I had was O-Level maths, there was a limit to how far you could go as a professional economist. But understanding the concepts is very important. And also it's a very rational subject, it trains you in rationality. Working twenty odd, thirty odd years in the Treasury, a spell in the IMF, it was more the way in which economists think that was relevant than mastery of the higher econometrics.

**LH:** You'd also had some experience in development economics I think, in your VSO years?

**LT:** It wasn't VSO, it was the Overseas Development Institute. A very, I think, laudable... it's a fraternity. Vince Cable was probably our most famous member. Suma Chakrabarti, James Bowman. One of, not sure if it was Peter or Robin Melfred's son. There were quite a lot of people who had been through this scheme. I spent two years in Zambia. A lot of it wasn't really working as an economist it was just bringing some administrative competence. I was the Secretary of the Railway Users Committee, aged twenty-five.

**LH:** Life's been downhill since then!

**LT:** The purpose of it, this was absolutely life-saving stuff. In the dispute with Rhodesia they would allow a hundred railway trucks a week to come north, and you had to decide...

**LH:** And this was when Rhodesia was under rebellion?

**LT:** Yes, and you had to decide whether they carried coal, maize seed, explosives or anything else. And they were all crying out: 'I need an extra three trucks this week.' And you had to exercise some judgement. 'We do need the coal this week but I'll see you right next week.'

**LH:** That is a real job! You were the first Cabinet Secretary too, to have to not quite apply for the job but to put in a paper of how you saw the job and what you could bring to it? Manifesto...

**LT:** Can I just, there is a bit more I can say about the economics.

**LH:** Oh let's do! Can we cut that bit so carry on as if we are the same question?

**LT:** I think it was a big advantage having served in the monetary policy division at the time of, in the early eighties and then to have spent three assignments on public expenditure. I felt I knew the way the public accounts were put together and the way, what was the definition of the borrowing requirement and how it interacted with debt. But there was also this major element or experience which was the attempt to stay in the ERM and the failure of the ERM. But also triumphantly in a way it gave us fifteen pretty good years. The creation of an alternative economic policy out of the ashes of the ERM.

**LH:** 92?

**LT:** In 92. Understanding all that, all those things were an absolutely essential piece of background knowledge.

**LH:** When I first knew you I picked up, I don't think you will put in like this, a sense of shame that we'd let public expenditure get out of control for so long, so often as a country. You didn't like that did you?

**LT:** Well in the mid-eighties that wasn't the story at all. In the mid-eighties public expenditure was held roughly constant in real terms while the economy grew and as a proportionate of GDP it fell quite substantially. I think the thing I regretted was we always said that finance should determine expenditure rather than the other way around. By 2007 we had committed ourselves to the view that the economy was capable of growing at two-and-a-three-quarter percent. And public expenditure virtually the whole of it was based on that assumption.

**LH:** You never fell for that though personally did you?

**LT:** No I was always sceptical. I would always have planned on a more cautious basis. It seemed to me that the government was giving itself the benefit of the doubt. What has happened since of course is that we in early 08 before the crisis really broke, we'd just had the kind of Northern Rock warm-up act, we expected money GDP in 2014 to be two thousand billion. We now think it will be about 1650. But of course public expenditure was planned on that basis and you can see why it's taken so long to bring public expenditure back into line with much reduced...

**LH:** Revenue?

**LT:** ...economy. Revenue itself is probably an even smaller proportion of that 1650 than it was of the two thousand. That... I think that there should have been a stronger grip in that period.

**LH:** Can we go back now to the beginning of the century, 2001-2, when you are in the running to be Cabinet Secretary to succeed Richard Wilson. It's the first time ever I think that the candidates were plural candidates in the way you described them a moment ago, but also you had to put in an equivalent of a personal manifesto on how you would do the job, which horrified some of the ancients I think. First of all can you remember what you put in yours?

**LT:** Well the first part of that is not correct. In '97 there were several candidates but the Prime Minister Tony Blair hadn't worked out what the process should be. And it consisted of: bring us in here to talk to him on something, Richard Wilson claims he...

**LH:** Because you were a runner then too weren't you?

**LT:** I was a runner then too. And I have to say that I don't regret not getting it at all as it gave me the four years in the Treasury. He claims he thought he was being asked about some aspect of the Home Office business...

**LH:** This is Richard Wilson?

**LT:** Richard, he had no idea that it was really an interview. And then the only idea that Tony Blair had got was to send us off to talk to Derry Irvine.

**LH:** Yeah. So he had you on the sofa first, then he sent you to Derry Irvine, the Lord Chancellor?

**LT:** Yes. I went around to see Derry Irvine, he was in his Dinner Jacket at the Lord Chancellor's rather splendid apartments. And he said to me: 'You're a Christ's man are you?'

**LH:** That's Cambridge, by the way...

**LT:** And we talked about Christ's for about ten or fifteen minutes and I got the impression actually he didn't really enjoy his time there that much. Because this was the time of my elder brother, a four-times Cambridge Football Blue was there. And it was full of England Internationals of all sorts in all sorts of sports. And a studious law student from Glasgow wasn't really part of the dominant culture. And then I thought, I've got to get this off this subject because I would need to lay out what I can do with this job. And then I was just about to get and he said: 'I've got to go off to my dinner now.' So I completely blew that. So the idea of reviewing a group of candidates coming from '97... 2002 was different in the sense that it was much more systematic. There was a pre-assessment by civil service commissioners particularly **(INDECIPHERABLE 17:12)** and David Simon. And we were all asked to put in a note on what we would do, that I've always called 'The Prospectus'.

**LH:** David Simon was a Minister but also had run BP, so he was brought in to put the process on the managerial side of it all, as it were...

**LT:** Yes.

**LH:** So 'The Prospectus'?

**LT:** 'The Prospectus', it was largely about what I thought he was, he wanted the Cabinet Secretary to do which was about the reform of the Civil Service, what I thought the changes that needed to be made. And also some structural changes in the role. There is the perennial debate about whether the job should be split or whatever.

**LH:** Head of the Home Civil Service, Cabinet Secretary and Advisor on Intelligence and Security, all those three ingredients.

**LT:** Those were the three pieces. Anyway he seemed to prefer my version of it and gave me the job.

**LH:** He made it plain to you he wanted you to be the delivery Cabinet Secretary, that it would be not quite in the old way of the Consigliere, that it would be the deliverer of Cabinet?

**LT:** Yes, very much... In the end you have to be a Consigliere on a number of issues but it was... he wasn't looking to his Cabinet Secretary to be a major policy advisor.

**LH:** And you were happy with that?

**LT:** Yes I could make that, make that work. Now the other change, and I think you're probably coming on to, was than rather than the split between Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Home Civil Service I believed I could do the job better by combining the two. The third leg of this was that the Cabinet Secretary at that point was in a sense the pinnacle of the intelligence and security system and the accounting officer of the secret vote and brought together these, the three agencies and their budgets. I came to the conclusion that post-9/11 the demands coming from that source were too great for it to be done on a part-time basis. I had seen two instances where I had seen a Cabinet Secretary pulled into something that had started way back. First there was the, Robert Armstrong in what was it called?

**LH:** Spycatcher, Peter Wright and Spycatcher.

**LT:** Peter Wright, Spycatcher. So you send your Cabinet Secretary down there to sort out an issue...

**LH:** To Australia, yeah.

**LT:** ...that he hadn't spent much time on prior to that. And to some extent the same thing happened with Robin Butler and Matrix Churchill...

**LH:** Which was arms to Iraq... or ingredients of arms to Iraq to be more precise.

**LT:** Right. Now this was helped by the fact that working on an almost on a kind of supernumerary basis in the Cabinet Office was David Omand who had been a permanent secretary in the Home Office, he had been ill, he'd...

**LH:** He'd run GCHQ too.

**LT:** He had started life at GCHQ and had spent a lot of time in the MOD, worked in the Home Office. He was in the Cabinet Office not being fully utilised. I thought this guy is absolutely the person to do this other job. I went to talk to the intelligence committee, the parliamentary committee, they were a bit sniffy about this idea but looking back on it what has happened is that job has grown now into the National Security Advisor. So I think that the step I took was definitely a step in the right direction and was, of the various load-shedding moves I could have made to fulfill this requirement to be more hands on in Civil Service delivery, that I think was the right one to make.

**LH:** Though Gus O'Donnell took it back for a while and the National Security Advisor came back with Mr. Cameron coming in?

**LT:** He took back, I don't know that he took back all of it, but he certainly took back the...

**LH:** ...accounting bit...

**LT:** ...accounting officer of the Security services vote. But that didn't last so that's why I think in the end I feel that I made the right move.

**LH:** Was it a disadvantage though in one sense for a while in the run up to the Iraq war that you weren't in charge the, not in charge of, but the overseer of the intelligence world, given how central it was to all sorts?

**LT:** Well, if I had been the overseer of the intelligence world I would have been sucked into the Iraq war more or less full time and would have not been able to perform the other parts of the Cabinet Secretary's role. But it was also the way in which the Prime Minister wanted to run things, he liked a much smaller group.

**LH:** This is the Prime Minister's group on Iraq as I think it was called?

**LT:** Yes.

**LH:** Not a formal Cabinet committee?

**LT:** His principal advisor would be David Manning and...

**LH:** And he was the Foreign Affairs Advisor of the Cabinet Office of Number Ten, yes.

**LT:** ...and Chilcot is still to report if he ever does...

**LH:** Well I think he will one day.

**LT:** But we won't be very interested in it by then.

**LH:** Some of us will! Anyway do carry on!

**LT:** You've got at least three books to come out of it. The... no, lost my thread here.

**LH:** It was the amount of time you would have had to absorb...

**LT:** Yes, No. By the time I came in in September, 02, I formed the conclusion that basically the die was cast.

**LH:** I think you were right weren't you?

**LT:** All the way through there was a time lag between what the Prime Minister had agreed with the Americans, what he was going to do, and what he was telling his Cabinet colleagues and what he was telling the Civil Service.

**LH:** So the Crawford meeting with George Bush previous in March or April. April I think.

**LT:** He had one in April and then there's the famous, there is a conversation that they have on the phone in July, and it's pretty clear that by then we were engaged in serious military planning. Clearly the process of diplomacy to make this possible still needed to be gone through, the first and the second resolutions. But the idea that...

**LH:** ...of the United Nations.

**LT:** ...if the Americans were going to do this, the British were going to be with them, I think that was pretty much settled. And the dossier, the infamous dossier, appeared about two weeks after I got there. I was... spent almost all my time on other things, I never got into that dossier at all. So I think...

**LH:** Do you think you should have done with a fresh mind? And you've got a naturally sceptical turn of intellect, which is what a Civil Servant should have.

**LT:** I don't think the Prime Minister was interested in fresh minds by that stage. I think that in the questioning I got at Chilcot, particularly from Laurie Freedman, he seemed to think that I could step out of the road and say, 'hold on!', you know, 'shouldn't we stop this juggernaut?'. I think the juggernaut was well and truly rolling by then.

**LH:** Tell me about the War Cabinet, it wasn't an official, it wasn't a Cabinet committee in quite the way than a lot of the War Cabinets - in fact they usually are - but it was definitely a War Cabinet and you were its secretary as Cabinet Secretary.

**LT:** No I don't think I was its secretary, I think I would say the OD secretary was it.

**LH:** So it was David Manning? And his Group at the Cabinet Office?

**LT:** Well David Manning, of course, we have this dual or triple hatting that he becomes the Foreign Affairs Private Secretary at Number Ten, the Foreign affairs advisor at Number Ten and he is the head of the unit and arrangements have subsequently been criticised. But I...



**LH:** So you looked after the full Cabinet?

**LT:** I think it would be someone like Desmond Bowen.

**LH:** Desmond Bowen. So you looked after the full Cabinet with the Prime Minister's group on Iraq was a different bit of the secretariat? One of your people but a different part of the secretariat?

**LT:** Yes.

**LH:** Do you think you should have been secretary of the War Cabinet in the way that Cabinet Secretaries in the past have been?

**LT:** Well what did secretary of the War Cabinet mean? Organising the meetings... there were very few papers it was almost entirely done by varying contemporaneous oral report. John Scarlett coming in and giving a briefing...

**LH:** ...the Head of the JIC...

**LT:** ...the military, Michael Boyce...

**LH:** ...Chief of the Defence Staff...

**LT:** ...likewise and then reports from the Foreign Office on where they were getting in the diplomatic ...

**LH:** Weren't you anxious about that on the grounds that you do need a proper paper flow? I think Robin Butler's privy councilors committee was quite critical about that. Good papers were written in the Cabinet Office but they were not circulated. I mean did you not worry about that? Because you're a good process man.

**LT:** Well the famous options paper was written back in – I think - March of 2002, could have been shared more, shared more widely, but there was a very particular style by which the Prime Minister wanted to run this. And it wasn't a traditional Cabinet Office style. When, I made two appearances before Chilcot. The second one was on the same morning as Richard Wilson and we covered some pretty similar ground and what between us we were able to demonstrate was that this style of working was not a bad habit that the Blair group slipped in to. It was a quite conscious decision. There are things they had written in advance or reported ex-post that they had been thinking, that the Civil Service process was too bureaucratic, you can see it in all the newspapers today. And they wanted something more streamlined.

**LH:** There's dangers in that?

**LT:** Absolutely, yes. And when you have an incident-like the row with the BBC, David Kelly...

**LH:** The Hutton Inquiry, yes.

**LT:** ...very, very little was written down. And the one person that managed to construct a narrative for this and demonstrate that there was some rational purpose behind what the government had done was David Omand. None of the other participants were remotely interested.

**LH:** And he'd taken a note for his own purposes. He wasn't a proper note-taker was he?

**LT:** Or else he'd done it reconstructed from his own memory, yeah.

**LH:** Do you regret that... maybe this is a question I shouldn't ask you but do you think you actually should have said: 'wait a minute this isn't the way to do it'?

**LT:** I think that, they had their particular way of doing it. I don't think they were particularly interested in what the Cabinet Secretary thought on this.

**LH:** Well I think they should've been Andrew, but that is not for me to say. I'm here to ask the questions not to pontificate!

**LT:** But I don't think even in the period when Richard Wilson was Cabinet Secretary I don't think he was involved to the extent that he might have been in earlier times.

**LH:** I'm not a betting man but I think once Chilcot has reported, in the future Cabinet Secretaries will be deeply involved in all that. I'd bet a bit of money on that.

**LT:** Well I think Chilcot will say that they should be, but whether they will be history will tell us.

**LH:** Let's move back now to public service reform which is what the Prime Minister wanted you to concentrate on. Is there something especially difficult about Civil Service reform? Is it the Mount Everest of challenges for those who would reform institutions in this country?

**LT:** There's plenty that's difficult about it and it isn't simply that civil servants are bureaucratic, risk-averse or whatever. It is that public service is inherently difficult for two reasons. One is that almost by definition public service is providing those services which the private sector or families themselves cannot provide. So you are providing housing for the people that can't find their own housing. You are providing pensions and welfare. A bank can say, 'I can't make any money having a branch in a run-down inner city or in a rural area', they just close the branch. The government has to ensure that there is a payments mechanism that is operating nationally so problems are inherently difficult. And a lot of the people you are dealing with by definition are people who don't want to be dealing with you. And they lie and cheat and I mean a lot of them are part of the criminal world or they have behaviour, anti-social behaviour that you don't approve of. Trying to change that is very, very difficult if they don't want to co-operate with you. The second is the lack of measurable outcomes. And I'll add a third which is you have to bring together a lot of different considerations, weigh up the competing demands and produce some kind trade-off for which there is no, there is no calculus in terms of what their trade-off is and ultimately a trade-off is

either political or it's a matter of equity. So it is inherently very, very difficult stuff to do.

**LH:** So the Civil Service is in many ways is a sump into which the all-too-difficult problems fall which the private sector and anyone else won't touch?

**LT:** It certainly has a great many of those that after the big changes in the boundaries in the public sector the privatization world by definition the government is left with those services that it is going to take responsibility for. And it then has a what you might call a make or buy choice: Is it going to run those services using its own people, its own staff? Or is it going to ensure that those services get delivered, but by co-opting, forming contracts with people from the private sector, or the third sector? Now the NHS was formed on that basis in 1948. Half of it, the primary care, hospital care, was done on the 'make' basis. The hospitals were nationalized, the doctors became the employees of the state. The other half, the primary care, the dentists, the opticians, was on the 'buy' basis, that you co-opted by a combination of a sort of contract and their own ethics people to serve the states purpose. And the sector that you've spent your career in, universities, are the same. They are not - these great universities - they are not state bodies but they serve a state function. And making that choice is difficult and making sure that you get the benefits of co-opting other people rather than simply using your own people while at the same time having an adequate degree of control is very difficult. The other area which is based on, I think is greatly influenced by Julian Le Grand's thesis 'of Knights and Knaves', is how do you, what relationship do you establish with professionals? Do you treat them as Knights, who will do the right and serve their people because that's what they believe they are there to do? Or do you treat them as Knaves who have a great deal of self-interest? And I think that by '97 the Knave theory was probably in the ascendancy and recognising that doctors, policeman, civil servants even...

**LH:** Yes, civil servants come into the Knave category with some Secretaries of State don't they? Yes.

**LT:** ...many can find characteristics but definitely had own agendas and own interests. And left to themselves, have the educationalists delivered a top-class education system in this country? No. Left to themselves, have the doctors produced a top-class health service? The answer was: it was pretty good but it was capable of improvement. For example, the model of the doctor's surgery where he sits in his office which is usually where you're registered near your home and you go to visit him in his place of work at times that he or she dictates. That's a case where they basically decide for themselves on what the right mode and standard of service is. And that needed to be challenged.

**LH:** You believe in the Knave theory then do you, by and large?

**LT:** No I believe I'm somewhere in the spectrum, but I definitely do not believe in the Knight theory. I think all these suppliers of public services have their own vested interest. They want, they want to deliver a good service, but very often if they want change they want someone else to do the changing and they'll stay with their, in their particular comfort zone.

**LH:** But there are Knightly elements, I mean you do believe in the public service impulse don't you?

**LT:** Well I've spent many hours and I've got more hours to come on the banking sector.

**LH:** Oh you're on the parliamentary commission, yes.

**LT:** Their knavery has been pretty widespread. No, the answer is you've got to, both elements are present but don't be starry eyed that left to themselves you can give a hundred plus billion a year to the medical profession and say, 'do the best that you can with it', because they won't necessarily produce the answer, or they won't necessarily produce the change that you need.

**LH:** On your watch as Cabinet Secretary deliverer, what do you think my students in the future, historians of the future, will say, 'well you can trace the Turnbull spore through here'? You shifted a bit of business.

**LT:** Well, I have to admit... I didn't invent delivery. I think delivery had contested paternity. The Treasury will say that they created this concept of the public service agreements, that they had the comprehensive spending reviews, 'here's your money', and when you got your brown envelope from Gordon Brown saying, 'here's your money', there was a whole list of, 'and here's what you are expected to deliver for it, and here's the huge number of reviews that you've got to undertake', and so on. A rival version of this was developed in Number Ten. It started, this was under Michael Barber the President of the Delivery Unit.

**LH:** Tony Blair's Head of the Delivery Unit, yes.

**LT:** He ran in effect a pilot project for this in the Department of Education working with David Blunkett where certain aspects of the education system were specifically targeted - numeracy and literacy - and delivery plans were created to improve that. And it had, for a while, I think it had an effect a bit. It didn't, it didn't last and it wasn't quite enough. And these two systems for a time there was a competition. Gordon Brown was very worried that if you commit yourself to deliver x, the Delivery Unit would come along to the Prime Minister and say, 'we're falling behind schedule, you must get more money out of Gordon Brown to get us back on schedule'. To be fair to Michael Barber, but it is also a shortcoming I think of the system, there is not a single pound sign in any delivery unit document. They were entirely about outcomes or intermediate outcomes. We want to reduce street crime or we want to raise... reduce asylum applications and increase asylum repatriations so that they reach a crossover and you produce a plan to do that and if things fell behind schedule Michael did not go to the Treasury to ask for more money. He asked for a revision of the plan. And these two things then proceeded to coalesce and the Delivery Unit was then placed where I think it really belongs which is as part of the public expenditure side, the public expenditure side...

**LH:** The Treasury.

**LT:** ...should be doing three things: looking at the resourcing of the service; looking at the outcomes that the service is supposed to be producing - which was the kind of Barber Delivery Unit - and looking at the value-for-money, the costs of producing. Now the value-for-money bit... up to 2004, value-for-money was of very little consequence. That was the thing I worked with Peter Gershon, to begin the process of...

**LH:** So you think that's your area where you really had influence?

**LT:** Well, if you said what was the thing I had most influence on, there was, this was the professionalization of some of the functions in the Civil Service. It, the mandarin class are basically recruited to be policy-advisors, first of all policy-advisors and managers of government process. What then happens is that the HR director or the director of property or the director of finance is someone drawn out of that class, very often someone who is not actually thriving very much as a policy analyst is then taken on and put in to one of these functions. Or occasionally - of course its good for them - as Robin Butler did at the Treasury, you say, 'well make him the establishment officer because it is all part of his kind of life's training'. What didn't happen was, you'll say, well we want, if you have a fully, really well functioning organisation, the policy function has got to be top class, it's got to be based on proper evidence and challenge. But all the supporting services have got to be equally good and so the people running finance have got to be more professional, the people running procurement or managing projects or HR likewise. And round Whitehall a number of units were created in order to be the central point at which this development of professional skills could take place. Because you couldn't do it everywhere you would spread yourself too thinly. So we had what was called, was originally called the Office of the e-Envoy. This was a rather hubristic name, because it implied that we know the truth we were going to tell you benighted people out there that the e-era has come, whereas actually they'd got into the e-era before we had. So it eventually became the Office of the Chief Information Officer for Government. The Office of Government Commerce which was to create a centre of expertise on procurement but also to take over centrally the procurement of some, of some major categories, energy or negotiating the big IT suppliers. The shareholder executive and partnerships UK, and maybe there was one more of these than we actually needed but I think that, plus this initiative called professional skills for government was a very important way of raising the skills not just in the traditional mandarin Whitehall area but the skills across the whole, the whole of the government department.

**LH:** Can I ask you a very wide historical question now? The students always latch on to the old debate about Prime Ministerial power and collective Cabinet power. Do you think, are you ever worried about the pressures on collective Cabinet government? We have it at the moment because it's Coalition and Mr. Cameron said he wanted anyway a National Security Council and his apparatus is classically on that model. But you've seen many years and many prime ministers in operation here. There is always a difficulty with collective Cabinet government, with the desire to take shortcuts. Do you worry about that? Or do you think it's just the old fusspots like me?

**LT:** In a way I'm surprised at just how much of it remains. If you look at the US system there is something called the Cabinet but it doesn't work in the same way. It is a series of bilateral relationships with the President, they're all appointed by the

President and have only one basis of power which is the President has appointed them...

**LH:** Because they're not in the Congress, no.

**LT:** They haven't been elected and they've got no, they're not competitors in any sense. For the most part I think the idea that you argue your corner, you get the best deal you can, you sign up to the outcome and you then implement it, has survived. The only area where I'd say it definitely hasn't survived is: do you go away afterwards and say, 'well I didn't like that all, I wish we hadn't done that'... through the memoirs process, which is, some degree...

**LH:** Or you leak?

**LT:** Or you...

**LH:** Even while you're still there...

**LT:** Surprisingly people do in the end make these political compromises. The Coalition is a mass of compromises.

**LH:** Are you a believer in collective Cabinet government then? Do you think it's important that we have that as the aspiration, even though people fall short a lot of the time?

**LT:** Yes, I think that what the Americans would call inter-agency co-operation is quite strong. I remember a story Nigel Wicks told me that when he was a Sherpa...

**LH:** This was before the G7 summits?

**LT:** Before the G7, when they were G7 summits.

**LH:** Yeah.

**LT:** His American counterpart in the US Treasury was sending things by telegram in effect and Nigel said... on the finances of Russia and how dire they were, and Nigel said to David Halford, 'You shouldn't be doing this you know, this should be encrypted to the embassy and then, the US embassy, and then they can bring it around here'. And Halford said, 'if it's a case of the Russians knowing or the State Department, I'd rather it was the Russians'. And you know we, by and large, the service - and that includes the Foreign Office not technically part of the Civil Service - do see ourselves as part of a unified administration. And there are arguments, there are people - let's say, Tony Benn, when he was at the Department of Energy - who try to run a policy which isn't the policy of the government, but if you look at how, compare with other countries where often in a Coalition what happens is that they don't just, they divide up the departments and the Liberals look after this or the Free Democrats look after that or the Christian Democrats look after that. And here all departments, their ministerial teams are all mixed up, and that is quite deliberate because that is trying to maintain this belief in collective responsibility. So, so, I think

it is, it is just how much of it is still operative which is really the notable thing rather than the opposite.

**LH:** You've served closely three very different Prime Ministers as either as Private Secretary, Principal Private Secretary at Number Ten or Cabinet Secretary. You must have a really good feel for how Number Ten and the Cabinet Office - the central bits - reshaped themselves to reflect the Prime Ministerial styles of government, their temperaments, their personalities, their priorities? How flexible is it, the centre of government in those terms?

**LT:** Well again it is also how kind of durable it is. You shouldn't underestimate the influence of geography, the fact that these ancient houses are used for the head of government reflects in many ways what the government, how the government runs. Other people that come here, when the Americans come here or when the German Chancellor comes here I think they are amazed at just the paucity of resources. I don't know what this building now accommodates, call it 300 people let's say.

**LH:** Are you putting that with the Cabinet Office?

**LT:** No the Cabinet Office is, is, but that also creates an important distinction. This is why we have, we talk about Number Ten and we talk about the Cabinet Office. And Australia doesn't, and New Zealand they don't have, they talk about P and C, Prime Minister and Cabinet and it's a single, single department. In many ways it should function like that but there is this constraint which operates... so everyone who works here works under...

**LH:** So you don't think we have a Prime Minister's department here that dare not speak its name?

**LT:** I think we do have a Prime Minister's department that dare not speak its name. If a Prime Minister said, 'I am renaming this Prime Minister and Cabinet Office', the cry would go out from people like you that the Prime Minister has annexed the Cabinet Office and stolen it from the collectivity...

**LH:** Certainly would!

**LT:** ...whereas I took the opposite view, which is: if you emphasise the separateness at Number 10, you run the danger that it will try to become self-sufficient, and it will fill this place with advice, and won't go next door as often as it should do. And you want, if you say that the Cabinet Secretary serves the Cabinet, and Number Ten serves the Prime Minister you reduce, you're reducing the closeness of the relationship between the Cabinet Secretary and the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister should turn to the Cabinet Secretary almost as the first port of call.

**LH:** So you think this place should come out and say what it really is, in your view, that it is a Prime Minister and Cabinet Office?

**LT:** Well I think now...

**LH:** Or a Prime Minister's department? We should actually get through this fiction as you're describing it...

**LT:** I think they are inseparable because the Prime Minister cannot function without the Cabinet Office and I always argue that if you looked at the, if you set out the objectives of the Cabinet Office, the first one was not to serve the Cabinet but to serve the prime minister as the leader of the Cabinet. [**LH:** As Chairman of Cabinet yeah.] So it is his Cabinet in a way and he should be encouraged to make the fullest use of the resources that lie on the other side of the door.

**LH:** Very interesting. Andrew if a sixth former asked you and he said, 'Lord Turnbull' or she said, 'what's the essence of the Cabinet Secretaryship, the key to doing the job?', what would you say?

**LT:** I would say it is making sure that the full resources available to government get deployed and that they, the right people are in the room. That at the point a decision is made, the right information is available, and that the people who have a genuine interest in that subject are there, and that the decision then comes out of that. That you, its opposite is a series of decisions where Minister x comes to the Prime Minister and says, 'I want to do this', and he says, 'alright, sounds alright to me'. And Minister y comes in and says, 'yeah, but you realise what the effect of that is on my programme?' 'Oh,' says the Prime Minister, 'well we better change it then.' The answer is you've got to make sure that Prime Ministers take on Cabinets, take decisions when they've got... at the best time, when they are best equipped to take it. And you don't allow a series of bilateral, in a sense premature decisions to get taken. So you have to harness these very considerable resources and not allow a series of short cuts to take place.

**LH:** So it's a combination of groundsman and umpire, to use a cricketing metaphor? Priming the pitch and saying you've got to do all this otherwise it won't work.

**LT:** Maybe it's a bit more than that, you've got to get the right people in the right place so you're Chairman of the Selectors...

**LH:** You're everything! Final question, if I was a newly appointed Cabinet Secretary and the gap between it being announced I was going to be and taking up the job, I would call on people like you, the old and the bold who had done it before, and I would say, in your case I would say – well, in everybody's case – I would say, Andrew tell me above all what I mustn't do in this job, tell me about the pitfalls of being Cabinet Secretary. What would you say?

**LT:** Well I would say that you should try to understand what it is that Ministers want, and as much as talking to the old and bold you'd talk to those who have other relationships with the Prime Minister and say, 'well what makes this guy tick you know, what really, how do you get the best of out them, what is it he really dislikes?' You actually understand what it is you're coming in to, which is just as important as equipping yourself with the history of the ages.

**LH:** So it is a matter of emotional geography, as well as the physical geography of the layout or the history?



**LT:** Yes, yes. I mean obviously number one would be go and talk to Peter Hennessy...

**LH:** How kind!

**LT:** ...but finding out what is going on, what are the frustrations that the Prime Minister and the Cabinet are feeling so that you've got a good idea of what the problems are. So though you may have written the prospectus we talked about earlier you shouldn't feel that, 'I've written the prospectus, that's what I'm here to do, this is my mission.' Because it isn't entirely your show, you are helping other people produce, being successful in their show.

**LH:** That's a kind of Jeeves-like interpretation of the job, no disrespect to Jeeves, he was a genius! From the neck up he stood alone, as you know! It is a Jeeves description though, isn't it.

**LT:** It is slightly more than Jeeves but the whole Wodehouse assumption is that Bertie is a numskull really.

**LH:** Oh we don't think that!

**LT:** And that, no, you should never...

**LH:** No we don't think like that.

**LT:** ...politicians, the thing you have to remember is politicians aren't stupid. They have a different base of legitimacy and a different accountability, and when push comes to shove their legitimacy trumps your legitimacy.

**LH:** As a Civil Servant.

**LT:** Yes.

**LH:** Andrew, thank you very much.