

**Professor T Cecil Gray CBE KCSG FRCP FRCS FRCA  
in interview with Dr Max Blythe  
Oxford, 28 August 1996, Interview One**

**Part One**

MB Professor Cecil Gray, you were born in Liverpool, on London Road, on the 13th of March, 11th of March 1913.

CG 11th March 1913. That's right.

MB Before the war baby.

CG Oh yes.

MB Born at the Clock Inn, which your father was landlord of.

CG That's right.

MB In the top flat, which we've got here [photograph]. It is the first time in any of the interviews that we have recorded that anybody has brought a picture of where they were born.

CG I am extraordinarily proud of being born there.

MB It is terrific. You are a great Liverpudlian. Terrific. This really has been a terrific picture. You lived there only for about six months, and then moved on.

CG My parents had got married in Birkenhead, and they didn't have a house, so they set up... the flat was there, and they went to live in there. My mother had already a family of four, three boys and a girl, all youngsters. So how we fitted in that flat I don't quite know, but there it was, and I was born in that flat. And then they moved over to Merles, to a very nice little house in Merles. We were there six to nine months, I think.

MB Your story has really been a Liverpool story. Isn't it a terrific Liverpool life?

CG It's a good place. Yes.

MB Now, I am going to take you to tell me about parents. Your mother had been married before. She was a widow.

CG She was a widow.

MB And you've got a brother thirteen years older.

CG Yes. Her son was thirteen when I was born.

MB Three brothers and a sister.

CG The next brother, no the next sister was twelve, then the next brother was ten and a half, and the youngster was about four, I think. And they were all born in Macclesfield. My mother was married to one of the partners of Abraham Brothers, silk millers in Macclesfield.

MB A great Macclesfield industry.

CG Absolutely. He died; Ernest Abraham was his name. He died. She sold the business, much to my elder brother's ire, who always said all his life that his mother robbed him of his birthright, you see.

MB She went to Birkenhead?

CS She went to Birkenhead because she had these boys to educate and there were good schools there.

MB Did she have relations in Birkenhead?

CG One of my aunts.

MB She was a teacher I believe.

CG She was teaching there, yes. So she moved over to Auntie Lizzie, and she lived in a place called Chestnut Grove. I suppose it was a rented house probably, so they could go to school there.

MB What was your mother's full name?

CG Ethel, and her surname was Unwin. She came from... her father was, they were Bollington people, just outside... a lovely village outside Macclesfield.

MB Great country around there.

CG Oh yes.

MB So she came from there. Where was father from? A bit Irish?

CG My father? Oh well, he was born in Birkenhead of totally Irish parents and grandparents, and his grandparents came over with the famine in 1845. They were probably crofters I think. I think they were all very intelligent, because my father had eleven, no ten brothers and sisters, and he was the second youngest. They all did quite well in one way and another.

MB They all did well didn't they?

CG Oh yes.

MB A remarkable lot to be born into. You have got a marvellous heritage.

CG Well, unique.

MB And it was a strong Roman Catholic heritage.

CG Oh yes. Although, my grandmother on my mother's side was originally an Ingham, and if you go to the church in Prestbury, which is outside Manchester – a lovely village – you go there to the lovely church you will find the graveyards full of Inghams. She was an Ingham and they were Protestant, and she converted to marry my grandfather, who was an Unwin of Bollington and a strong Catholic. And Bollington was not very pro-Catholic and she had tales to tell about the reaction when they lived there in a house called Manchester House, which was in the main street. He was a draper and a nice man.

MB I wanted to actually get you to tell me a little about father. I think you were very close to him; he was a very likeable figure, wasn't he, always acting up? Acting the fool you said.

CG He loved to play.

MB A great landlord, great publican.

CG Yes, he had a tremendous personality. The Clock in those days, in his days, became the centre for... well I remember the Lord Mayor came in to have his pint, and town councillors. He was great friends with the police, which was very useful. So we had the Chief of the CID, who was a great bosom pal of his, and the other bosom pal, Luke Hogan, who was a great councillor and alderman in Liverpool and became Lord Mayor, was also a bosom pal. Those were his pals.

MB What was his full name?

CG Thomas.

MB Just Thomas?

CG Tom Gray.

MB And that was on top of the pub wasn't it?

CG Well, there was Gray, at the centre.

MB Oh, it was Gray right in the centre.

CG That picture, which we will show, I think you can't see it, but it is there if you saw the original.

MB Your first memories though weren't at The Clock, they were... as you say you moved on to live in a house away from the business.

CG In Merles. Yes that is right.

MB Your first memories there?

CG Oh I remember a lot about that place. We left when I was seven to go to Wallasey, a big house in Wallasey.

MB Wallasey was a big house.

CG Yes. The Merles house was a nice cottagey sort of place, a nice place. When he came home, I remember I used to totter down – I suppose at the age of three or four – to Merles station, which was up the road, and nobody bothered in those days, there was no traffic. Mother didn't worry about crossing. I used to go and meet him coming from work for lunch. I remember him one day, he came home carrying a gramophone, which was one with a big horn, you know, with a wind-up... one of the original His Master's Voice, exactly, and he brought this home and we had records from then on. He was very keen on music.

MB There was a war on at that time. He didn't get called up though?

CG There was a war on and he was called up, but because of his family they sent him off to get on with his business. The boys were all at school.

MB Right. Well he was quite senior because he had married mum when he was in his mid-thirties. So he was a very senior man bringing up a family. So that is why he didn't...

CG My elder brother was in the First World War. He was called up to join the Artist's Rifles. Ernest - and he went to the OTC, to train to be an officer, you see. Just as he got his commission, the war packed up, so he never saw that.

MB So he was lumbered. You were saying that at some stage Mum... Let's take Mum in before we do though. Mum was a charismatic lady. Very determined, forceful soul.

CG She certainly was. Quite a disciplinarian too, unlike the old man.

MB You could get it in the neck could you?

CG Well, in those days, yes, I suppose you did. Nothing very serious.

MB You were close, you got close to this lady?

CG Oh yes. I was very fond of them both.

MB There was a great family relationship?

CG There was. It was a happy family relationship, despite the other half-brothers and sisters.

MB Everybody gelled together?

CG My brothers tended to, particularly the two younger ones, tended to bully me a bit later, just for fun you know. They would go on top of the wash house roof, and suddenly throw down a pile of papers and so on, as I walked underneath. This sort of stuff. Very mild.

MB Mum got to a point though of sending you all off to school – she liked to have some freedoms – out from under her feet.

CG Absolutely. When my brothers first went... when we were in London Road, they went to St Francis Xavier's School, which was up the road in London Road, a Jesuit school. And then when we moved over to Merles, she sent them off to St Bede's College in Manchester.

MB In Manchester.

CG You know that do you?

MB Yes.

CG It was a good school then, a boarding school in those days, and they all went there and all matriculated from St Bede's.

MB But you had got a different reason and you went south. You got asthma.

CG Yes.

MB That was a tough asthma, you had some bad...

CG In those days asthma was a dreadful thing, you know. You just couldn't get your breath.

MB You'd gasp for hours.

CG Yes, it was quite difficult.

MB That must have been terrifying for a small boy.

CG Yes it was, and it came on in spasms, and it would go on for quite a time. And eventually the doctor said that I should go south, which I must say was rather a stupid prescription really, because it meant I was uprooted from the home, and went at the age of seven as a boarder to a convent. The convent was run by French nuns, who really were, I am sorry to say this, sadists. Not all of them, there was one I remember, a very kind lady, Sister Columba, and she took the second form. She was fine.

MB A gem.

CG Oh she was all right, but Polly the top one, Paulinus – we called her Polly – she was an absolute so and so. The one that taught me piano wasn't a very nice lady, because I was only a kid, you know – I was there from seven to ten. If you were playing the piano, and you were supposed to have practised, and you played a wrong note, down came the ruler on its edge on your knuckles. You very quickly learnt the piano that way, I must say.

MB A very startling way of learning wasn't it. You tried another way to dodge the blows. You tried to escape, I think, twice?

CG I ran away twice because I was very unhappy. I was miles from home.

MB But you were captured both times.

CG Oh, absolutely captured, yes, on that occasion. I can't say... you see, you are not unhappy all the time. The other kids and I, we had tremendous fun. We used to run up and down the dormitory from bed to bed and this sort of thing, just hoping not to be caught, because if we did, we were beaten, and quite severely.

MB You were a lively chap despite this asthma, weren't you, you were a live wire?

CG Oh yes. The attacks weren't that frequent at that time. They got a bit worse when I came to puberty.

MB But eventually you were released from this sentence at Bath, and you go to Yorkshire.

CG I went to Yorkshire because one of my father's nieces taught in Yorkshire, and knew Ampleforth and knew it was a pretty good school. And of course the old lady was very ambitious for her Benjamin child, I think, and chose the best that she could find. So I was packed off to Ampleforth.

MB Not far from the edge of the Wolds there, Maltonish?

CG Oh beautiful, well it is not far, about nine or ten miles from Malton and Helmsley.

MB Such a gorgeous area.

CG Oh beautiful. Coxwold, Ampleforth.

MB And you settled in there like a charm.

CG It was freedom. Max, I can't tell you the difference. It was freedom. I was free, in the prep school, you know, at ten. I couldn't believe it. The kids had their rabbit hutches down there and we could wander round. At prep school, not quite allowed to wander round the whole valley; it was an enormous valley belonging to the school. But, you know, we had tremendous freedom.

MB Was the prep school close to the Abbey?

CG Oh yes.

MB You were right there?

CG Oh yes. I have a picture of that I should perhaps have brought of the whole school, of the prep school then. Now it is at Gilling Castle. Gilling then belonged to the Fairfax Cholmondleys, and they sold it eventually to the school and it became a prep school. My prep school then became the junior house.

MB I have been to Gilling, it's a delightful spot.

CG Oh beautiful.

MB You settled in, you went into the senior school at thirteen. So from about ten or eleven to thirteen at junior school and then...

CG Scouts. You see we had scouts. In the scouts you see we were allowed to run round the moors. Oh, it was good. Mind you beatings were not bad there either.

MB A good application though. But there was a different ethos. There was a different feel.

CG Oh yes. Potty Basil, was the headmaster. Father Basil, we called him Potty, I don't know why, he had a bald head. Pretty strict. But the Benedictines were a pretty humane bunch, really. So I mean you could be tanned on the bottom with a ferrule, not a cane. They had a ferrule, not on the hand, common, common, but on the bottom and it was very rare and you had to have done something really bad.

MB When you got into that senior wing of the school... you were a bit of a musician, you were a bit of everything, I think for a time. I got the impression you tried everything.

CG Yes. I was very keen on the piano, and I had a very good piano teacher at the College.

MB Can you remember the name of the teacher?

CG You shouldn't ask me questions like that.

MB It's terrible isn't it. I took it carefully. We will come back to that at some other time.

CG Perry. Mr Perry. A super chap and a very good teacher. A good musician, a good player. I played the piano and eventually I played in the school concerts. I did reasonably well; I played a Mozart concerto, in fact, in the school concert.

MB And you took to woodwind didn't you, and played in the band?

CG Well, being keen on music as I was, they cultivated us. You see each housemaster's room was a haven. You could go into...that was their study room; at any time you could go in, and they all had great gramophones and played good music and this sort of thing, and they had a little library there where you could choose your novels from to read, it was a great place. Yes, I went in the choir and had to sing a solo when I was... just before my voice cracked, on St Cecilia's Day, and this was an ordeal. In the vespers on St Cecilia's Day and I had to sing to St Cecilia (*Professor Cecil Gray sings at this point*). I can still remember it you know, that was an ordeal. But then, because the conductor of the choir was also the conductor of the orchestra, I was dragooned into learning the clarinet. To play in an orchestra Max, is marvellous, it really is. It is teamwork in a big way and I enjoyed every minute of that, it was tremendous. And then of course acting.

MB Yes, you got right into the thick of it there. You pushed into the thick of it because you were left out.

CG That's right.

MB Tell us about that.

CG Well they had a theatre. They'd got a lovely theatre, a fine stage, and excellent lighting, and they did very good plays. I saw a lot of Barrie there, 'A Kiss for Cinderella', because I was acting in that later; 'Vanity,' one of Barrie's plays, well they were all a bit pathetic, the plays. Well, we had a lot of Shakespeare. Even thrillers, 'The Thirteenth Chair' I remember. A chap who became famous in the BBC – you see names go, I'm afraid, sorry about this, but it will come back to me. He became quite a star in the BBC, this guy, and he acted in 'The Thirteenth Chair', as the French medium. So we did a lot of it. It was a clique and two monks ran it, Father Stephen and Father John, but they had their actors and their company, and that was it. It was very difficult to get in.

MB And you didn't break in.

CG My friend Douglas Brown and I, we were mad keen. We used to act our little things and write little plays, and that sort of thing. We both had seen 'Journeys End' in London, in the holidays, with Kenneth Sheriffs, 'Journeys End', and we were both moved by this, and we were determined to do this at the school. So we went to the headmaster, who was the best headmaster Ampleforth ever had, certainly, I think, Father Paul Neville, who became chairman of the Headmasters' Conference, and so forth. A very humane man. He could beat. But he was a very humane lovely man, very tall, very impressive. We plucked up our courage. I suppose we would then be about sixteen, lower sixth types, you know. We asked if we could produce a play, because we would like to produce it as well as act it, and draw the people who had not had a chance into the play, that hadn't had a chance and who we knew were quite keen. He said immediately, he said, 'Why not, certainly.'

MB Go for it he said!

CG Yes. Go for it as you say, go for it. Absolutely. And he said, 'Yes, by all means.' Now, for 'Journeys End' you need uniforms, and of course there were the



corps uniforms but we needed other things besides that, a lot of rifles and things, and he said, 'On condition, that you get the agreement of Father John and Father Stephen.' And we went to John and Stephen and said that we had spoken to Paul, and he'll agree that we can do this if you both agree. 'What play do you want to do?' 'Journeys End.' 'Good God.' I remember him just saying that. So I said 'Journeys End,' you see. So he said, 'Well, of course if you want to do it, you do it.' And I said, 'We must do it on our own, Sir.' We called them Sir. 'We must do it on our own, Sir, you know, and produce it, and everything,' and he said, 'By all means, you go ahead. We'll give you all the help we can.' And that was the key thing, and they certainly gave the help with the scenery, and getting the kit, and the things, you see, that was marvellous. But we did the acting and the producing.

MB It was a great production, and it brought in a lot of people as well to see it.

CG Well, it was quite unique for Ampleforth really.

MB Cecil, just staying with the Ampleforth story, just encapsulating a number of other issues, I know that you have had a life-long love of the place and you have got great memories. It was also a time of your advancement as a Christian, as a very spiritual part of your development.

CG Oh, tremendous.

MB And you have stayed a very spiritual, as well as a romantic figure.

CG I don't know about being very spiritual, but yes.

MB Your faith has meant a lot to you.

CG The faith was well grounded there because they taught what they don't teach now. They taught apologetics, which was the reason why you believe there is a God. They did this way, and we had, every term, a two days silent retreat, given by some outsider for two or three days. It wasn't a holier than thou place at all, but you really got a sound grounding in the faith, and it has always been important to me.

MB At some stage there, there came in gestation a feeling that you might stay at Ampleforth.

CG Yes. At the end when you got you're A-Levels, as they are now, Higher Certificates as they were then, you got to the age of eighteen. But every year, from every upper sixth form that was leaving, there would be four or five who had asked to be accepted in the monastery, as novices. You didn't have to be a postulant, because they all knew you, you see already, your good points and your bad points. And I was absolutely determined to become a monk. My mother was absolutely delighted, and my father was appalled. Very strange. But she made a great fuss about it, and gave me a bible to take there and everything, when I went. And, of course, you didn't see your parents for the first year, then you saw them once and then that was it for the year, and you didn't see them again. I didn't last very long because I was really not cut out to be a monk.

MB You were an imp?

CG I don't know. I enjoyed the time there. I was there for two months, just two months.

MB You were devoted, but not able to stay?

CG I loved it, but there was a fellow in the school, who was the fellow who produced 'The Journeys End' with me, and he was still there doing another year to get a scholarship for Oxford, Douglas Brown. He had a paralysed arm, but still became captain of tennis, a remarkable man. He was still in the school, and I just wanted to have a smoke. We used to smoke in the sixth form of course – only on Wednesdays and Sundays, in our rooms. I just thought I would like to have a smoke, and a chat with Doug. And I left a note for him in his prayer book – I knew where he sat in the church – 'Meet me under the old chestnut tree, after supper, on Wednesday,' whatever day it was, 'and we will have a chat and a smoke.' So we did. It was winter and it was all dark. I had no trouble at all, in my habit, and went under the old chestnut tree and we had a smoke and a chat, and he told me the news and the gossip at the school. Now, the problem is that in the Benedictine spirit, you don't wait to be caught, because you want to be an integral man, and so if there is something wrong, you own up to it. So, I went to the novice master, and told him I had met Douglas, and by the way he knew Douglas very well. I told him I had met Douglas under the chestnut tree and we had a smoke and chat, and it was quite harmless. And he said, 'Brother Thomas, that is very serious.' So I got a jaw, you see. And then he said, 'Now look, you have got to do a penance for this.' Now behind the school there is a hill, it's a wooded hill, and the path goes up it like this you see, and I had to sweep it – this was autumn – sweep the leaves up the path in the monk's wood, as it was called, from the bottom to the top, in my spare time. So, all right, that was fine. About four or five weeks later, I thought 'I wonder what old Douglas...' I knew he was doing a play, so I wondered how it went. So I met him again. Same circumstances, exactly. And I had to go back again, and this time he said, 'Brother Thomas, you will have to come and see the Abbot.' I was the Abbot's sacristan, which was a very privileged position for a novice. So I went to see the Abbot, who was Father Edmund Matthews. He had been headmaster of the school, and he used to talk like this you know, 'Boy.' I went up to him and I went on my knees and said, 'Pray Father, bless me, for I have broken a rule.' And he said, 'I believe so. Father Buggins, Florence Buggins, has told me.' And I said 'Well I am very sorry, Father, and I assure you I won't do it again.' And he said 'Well I am sorry I don't think you have got a vocation, Brother Thomas. You had better get your clothes and catch the morning train home.'

MB You were out.

CG So I said, 'Give me one more chance because all I want to do is give my life to God's service, honestly I really mean that.' He said 'Well I am sorry, no.' And I was out, and that was it. I went home, and the old lady was a bit upset. The old man was absolutely delighted. I went home looking scruffy because you get scruffy in a monastery, and I had cut the top, with a Rolls razor, the top of my thumb off a few nights before.

MB Painful.

CG And that was another point which made them decide that I wasn't a very good Benedictine prospect. I used to shave, because we got up at four, or twenty to five in the morning, for the morning office, and I used to shave the night before, and I was shaving, you see, and I went splice, splice, blood was going just like that. (*Professor Gray demonstrates his shaving.* So I ran down the novice's corridor to my pal Coverdale. I said 'Christ, come here.' 'Christ Robert, look at this,' at the top of my voice. I was quite panicky. Anyway, that was done and I went home with my thumb bandaged, and looking scruffy and so forth. And then, am I talking too much?

MB No, I mean...

CG I am coming up to the next episode. I went home. I didn't feel in disgrace. I just felt disappointed.

MB Can I just ask one, a couple of questions, before we get you onto the next leg of the journey?

CG Yes. Sure.

MB They started kind of talking what you might do then, didn't they, when you got back? I just wanted to ask, in that school training, we talked about you getting to HSC and becoming involved with the Benedictines. But I haven't talked about the actual learning, you got an HSC and it included physics and chemistry, a science background. Was that important the science side, was that especially important...

CG To me?

MB At school?

CG Oh, its very useful. Oh, at school, I enjoyed it very much.

MB I just wondered if you'd actually gone... Was the teaching good?

CG Excellent.

MB Right. So you got good physics and chemistry?

CG Excellent, yes. The only exam I ever walked out of was – what did they call it in Higher Certificate – supplementary maths. I was never much good at maths, but for some reason I decided to take supplementary maths, and I just walked out. It was far beyond me.

MB You pushed off.

CG Oh, yes, just pushed off. But I took, physics and chemistry, and German, and French and English. The top two were physics and chemistry. You had to take two top subjects.

MB I was just thinking you might want to put any staff on the record in this biographical work we are conducting. Who taught you science? Is there anybody who stands out?

CG Oh yes. There was old Goodman. Goodman was a superb teacher, and a very enlightened teacher. By the time we got to upper sixth going for A-levels – or higher as it was called then – we were allowed to go into the lab, and do experiments, and practise our experiments. We went in one day and we actually, in the fume cupboard, manufactured mustard gas. That was quite a feat wasn't it. We were very pleased with ourselves, but by Jove, we got into trouble. We told Goodman you see, 'What do you think, Sir? We've synthesised some mustard gas.' 'You what!' So that was a bit of a trouble. Yes, he was an excellent teacher, a bit sarcastic, but he was very, very popular, because he was such an excellent teacher.

MB Let me bring you back now to Liverpool, to your parents, talking about where you might go on to. I think there was all kind of debate. You wanted to be a barrister for a time.

CG Well, I wanted to be a priest, still, but that was out. So I remember my father used to get in rather late from work, and we used to have supper together with my eldest brother. The old lady used to go to bed. We were having supper and he said, 'Right,' he said, 'Now,' he said, 'what are you going to do? Don't think that you are going to hang about here, because you are not. What do you want to do?' 'Well, I am very keen on acting, and producing. We did a lot of it at Ampleforth. I would like to be an actor.' He said 'Cecil, I asked you, what are you going to do?' So I said 'Well...' And he said 'No. What are you going to do?' you see. So I said 'Well...'

MB He was marking your card wrong.

CG Oh yes. I said 'Well, I am rather good at debating and like it, and don't mind speaking and so forth, and I think I would quite enjoy being a barrister.' He said, 'Do you really think that I am going to keep you till you are forty years old?' In those days barristers doing briefs got practically no pay at all, and had to keep a certain standard of living and so on. So he said 'No, come on, what do you want to do?' Eventually, my brother, we were getting desperate, and he said 'Kid', he always called me Kid, I was thirteen years younger.

MB What was the name of this brother.

CG Ernest, named after his father. His father was Ernest Edward. And Ernest said 'Listen Kid'. He was a scientist, of course, as I told you, he was Beecham's head chemist at Beechams and then became a partner in the firm and two other partners died, and he was the boss who died a millionaire. He had his MSc. A good scientist, he qualified in Liverpool. So he said 'You always wanted to be a doctor, why don't you be a doctor?' And so I said 'OK, I'll be a doctor.'

MB That was it was it?

CG That was it. And the next morning he took me down to see the dean, mid November, towards the end of November. And with my certificates, Higher

Certificates, he took me down, to meet old [W J] Dilling, who was the dean at the time, and Dilling sort of took me in just like that.

MB To start tomorrow? To start tomorrow was it?

CG Yes, literally. 'Start tomorrow, come in.' he said. 'All you have got to do, you don't need to do physics and chemistry,' he said 'All you need to do is botany, zoology and botany,' because we didn't have any of that at Ampleforth. So I had a marvellous first year just doing zoology, oh yes, and advanced organic chemistry, which was super too. I had a lovely first year.

MB So you were catching up on the biology that you hadn't done at Ampleforth.

CG I hadn't done any biology. They did botany and zoology.

MB One thing that was interesting. When we talked before you laid it on the line that almost right to the end of Ampleforth, you actually had no idea of the facts of life. It came as a real surprise, somebody came and took you to one side and told you.

CG Well I had a close friend, a fellow called Longville from Oswestry, who was a very nice boy, and he was a pal, and of course we used to wonder, I used to wonder about this. Some of the kids said babies came out of your umbilicus and this sort of nonsense, you know. And we were walking up and down, what we called 'The Walk.' We were kicked out after breakfast for about twenty minutes before lessons started. We had to go outside, not quite in the snow, but it didn't matter, out. The monitors used to boot you if you didn't get out quickly you see. So we were walking up and down, and I asked him 'Hey, do you know anything about this baby business?' And he said 'Oh yes, my father,' his father was a Colonel Longville, 'my father told me all about it.' 'Oh, how does it work?' So he told me everything, menstruation, the whole lot, and of course coitus, and I didn't believe him. I just didn't believe him at all. It's extraordinary. I said 'It can't be like that,' you know. Well really I didn't bother much about it afterwards, and when we got to university and started biology, of course it was all easy. I remember one teacher there, a Mrs Bumbling, I think she was called. She was rather a fat body and wore a white coat and she would stand up there and she'd say 'Imagine I'm an embryo.' Well it all became very clear in biology. Yes.

MB That was a good first year.

CG Oh, excellent.

MB I mean you settled in to that medical faculty. That was really exciting.

CG Oh yes. And the other interesting thing about this, Max, I will tell you. I had a confessor at home, who, when I was a teenager, used to be a great help, great friend of the family, and a great friend of the other family whom I got to court one of the girls. I never married her. His name was Father MacCaulay, and I used to go to him for confession, always, and I went when I left the monastery. I told him this story and he said 'What are you going to do?' So I said 'Well, I'm going to do medicine' I said. And so he said 'Are you pleased about that?' I said 'I don't care. I'll just do

medicine. There is nothing else I want to do except give my life to God, you see.' So he said 'Now, look here Cecil,' and I was miserable about this, actually, you may not believe it. 'Now, look here. I'll tell you, how long is your course?' I said 'Six years,' and it seemed to me a hell of a long time. So he said 'Six years, right. I promise you on my word of honour. You qualify, get through, qualify. I will go on my knees to the Abbot of Ampleforth to take you back. I promise.' I said 'Really?' 'Yes.' I said 'Fine.' I felt wonderful, completely changed, and came out and I really was quite happy, and went back and enjoyed my time there, and within about four weeks I had a girlfriend, and all business about being a monk was forgotten, you know.

MB So you began to have romances?

CG Oh yes.

MB I think on one occasion you pawned that clarinet. Did you pawn the clarinet? You sold that clarinet to take a girl to the races. A great romantic figure you were rapidly becoming.

CG I had two clarinets actually, a B-Flat, and an E-Flat. I played for a time in the university orchestra. Old Dilling who was the dean ran this orchestra. I played for a time there, but I got rather bored with that though, gave it up.

MB Cecil, just concentrating on that first year. I think that is when you met Wood. You got drawn into some anatomy, quite early.

CG Oh, Professor Wood. Wonderful chap. He was the boss of anatomy. Of course your first introduction... I was lucky because, not doing much in that first year, about half way through the second term – you didn't go into the anatomy room until your second year, you've got your first MB first, you have to pass that – and half way through the second term, Wood said to me 'By the way,' he said, 'you're not very busy are you?' I said 'No.' 'Would you like to come in and start anatomy early?' Anatomy, by the way is a hell of a thing to learn. To get this three dimensional aspect of correlation of nerves and blood vessel, muscles and which muscles are supplied by which nerve, and where does it come from in the brain. It is a hard subject and when I went in I was completely lost, but very quickly, I got dissecting and picked it up. And by the end of my second last term, I had done all the dissection practically, and he asked me if I would be a demonstrator when my year came up into the anatomy room.

MB You were going to be ahead. One up.

CG So it was marvellous. I got distinction in anatomy too. Wood was a wonderful teacher.

MB Was he clear? I mean what kind of a teacher...

CG Oh crystal clear. He was a damn good teacher. I mean, one of the difficult things to understand, the peritoneum, which is a sort of sac, which enfolds all the guts this way and that, and there are spaces which are known as lesser and bigger sacs.

And he would, gradually it would dawn on you how it worked because it was very difficult to understand. I remember the first day in the anatomy room when my year came up. There was a chap, he is still alive, one of the survivors with me, called Marcus, Raphael Marcus, a little fellow, a little Jewish chap, lovely man, spoke with a broad sort of Liverpool accent, you know. He came into the thing, and of course we all, the new intake, cluttered around the professor to learn, and there was this body struck up before us. He always told dirty jokes this chap you see. And, eventually, he was mischievous in his humour too, he got a pair of forceps out of his pocket, and he got hold of the nipple of this poor woman and lifted it up, and said 'Come on you chaps, what is this?' And there was a deadly silence. So little Marcus said 'Please sir, it's the paps.' Everybody absolutely dissolved with laughter. Yes, he was a great teacher.

MB You stayed in touch with him for quite a while.

CG Well, he became dean and I demonstrated for him, and he gave me a distinction. I never got a prize in medical school.

MB That was the golden moment at that time.

CG I never got a prize. I never got any other distinction. I just got through my exams and that was it. So, there was no great brilliance apparent, but it was great fun.

MB I have got you a first MB in mind now. This must be about 1932.

CG Yes.

MB A man beginning to take girlfriends round. Playing a bit of sport, a bit of golf, was that right?

CG Yes. I played a lot of golf.

MB Not a natural hero sportsman, but playing some golf.

CG A bit of hockey with one of my girlfriends, she was a hockeyist.

MB Right. Beginning to feel quite grown up, and going into the real second part of the medical course, and where you met quite a few interesting teachers, including Henry Cohen.<sup>1</sup>

CG Ah, yes. He was the professor of medicine. Henry, of course, was not what we understand by a professor now; they were all part-time professors in those days. There were no full-time clinician professors. All the basic science professors were full-time and researching. The clinical professors were jolly good clinicians who were good teachers, and given the title professor, head of medicine. Henry was one of those, and he was the best teacher, I think, you could possibly imagine. He was a superb lecturer; he had the most phenomenal memory, which was his strength. He never did any original research and yet his name was flaming across Britain, of

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Cohen, Lord Cohen of Birkenhead (1900-1977).

course. He was one of the architects with Bevan of the health service. First he became Sir Henry and then he became Lord Cohen. And his strength was this colossal memory. He never forgot anything.

MB He just went through points, beautiful sequential points.

CG Well, he would bring together points. For example, talking about Parkinsonism, and he would do a lecture on Parkinson's [disease], which you would never forget. There are many causes of Parkinson's but he drew it all together, you see, and presented it in such a way that it was very easy to learn and remember.

MB I think it has been said that his notes were all you needed in some ways.

CG Oh yes. Absolutely, in medicine. He was extremely good. I was on his firm, as we say, for a time.

MB When you went into the clinical side.

CG He was very naughty to his juniors really. There was one rather uppity registrar he had who knew everything, you see. Of course, Henry loved to slap him down. I remember one occasion, they used to do – can you imagine this – in a side room they would do a ventricular tap; a little hole in the skull, put a needle in to get the cerebral fluid out, you know, from the ventricle. And this poor registrar chap had been struggling to get this needle in and of course it wasn't very good to have too many attempts. Henry came in and said, 'What are you doing?' 'Sir,' he said 'I am just doing a ventricular tap and I can't get in.' 'Can't get in?' Well, he rolled up his sleeves, you see, and washed his hands. He went straight over and said, 'Give me that needle.' Out comes the fluid just like that. Oh yes, he was a master, and a very good diagnostician, he was famous all over. In fact, he really got known as a consultant because of his powers of diagnosis.

MB A great physician.

CG Yes, and he became a great friend of mine in later life.

MB You were to know each other for a long time.

CG Oh, a long time.

MB With great pleasure?

CG With great pleasure. Also, you see, he was in one way very influential. When I was put up... I was a reader when I was put in charge of the department.

MB I am going to come to that in due course. Let us take this in now.

CG Let's take this little story. I was a reader and I did quite well of course with the curare, and I was being invited over there, and everywhere. And Charles Wells, who we will talk about later probably, thought he would put me up for a chair. There was no chair of anaesthesia in those days.



MB This was in the fifties, later fifties?

CG Yes. It would be about '57, '58. And he thought he would put me up, and he would put a thing up to a committee within the faculty, and never prepared the way. He had tremendously good ideas, which later proved to be prophetic, but he never prepared the way. And he did the same for this thing and he said, 'I think...' I suppose I can imagine it. I think Cecil Gray, you know, he has done a lot, he's going here, there and everywhere...' Now, the thought of a chair in anaesthesia was unimaginable in those days, you see and nothing happened. It was extraordinary to have a reader, never mind a chair or professor. So Henry sent for me and he said, 'I'm sorry about that faculty meeting, but Charles made a bit of a mess of it really.' He said, 'Don't worry, I'll fix it.'

MB And he did.

CG And he went straight to the vice-chancellor, and in no time at all I was made a professor.

MB I'm bringing you right back now. Those years when Cohen taught, that was pre-clinical in the first case?

CG No. Clinical.

MB It was all clinical was it? You were in the clinical phase when that was happening. I wanted to keep you though to that second MB period. Any teachers that stand out from that period?

CG The early years?

MB Yes.

CG We had a lovely professor of physiology, who himself was the son of a professor in Liverpool, and whose son became a professor of orthopaedics funnily enough. This chap was a very dozy fellow, getting on a bit, and he used to lean against the blackboard, in his white coat giving a lecture, with his hands behind his back, rocking like this, you see, and he would go to sleep. So we used to bring an alarm clock in. Somebody set this alarm clock to wake him up. But there was a professor of biochemistry who was anything but sleepy. He was young, ardent cricketer and played for Liverpool.

MB Who was this?

CG Channon. His name was Channon<sup>2</sup>. He was naughty really, bit of a boy. His failure rate was very high in biochemistry, but he was an excellent teacher – brilliant teacher really in lecturing. Everybody hated him and he knew it, but he didn't care. Anyway I got through biochemistry in the second year without much trouble really, no trouble indeed. And later in life when I was qualified as an anaesthetist he had to

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<sup>2</sup> H.J. Channon. Johnston Professor of Biochemistry, University of Liverpool, 1931-43.

have an operation and he had Charles Wells who was one of my surgeons, and Charles said 'You had better go and see old Channon. I am taking his gall bladder out tomorrow.' So I went up to the hospital – this was during the war – and I went into his room. 'Oh,' he said, 'hello Gray.' He said, 'I hope you are not going to hold it against me are you, with a blunt needle?' So I said, 'I have a bloody well good mind to, sir.' So we became quite friendly. Oh, he was good.

MB You got through those years, and as I say got on to the clinical, and we have said that it was then that Cohen made impact.

CG Cohen and Wells. I was on Wells' firm too.

MB Tell me about Wells, because he was the great surgeon.

CG At that time he was assistant surgeon when I was a student. But obviously brilliant and extremely good with students. He was one of these chaps who moved in the rather upper strata of Liverpool, and he was a great dancing fellow and party man. They would ask him to get some students because of the young girls that were coming, to invite them to these parties. He was great at that. I remember him stopping once just outside my house when I was coming back from the university one evening. He said, 'Cecil, what are you doing tonight?' That night I was going out with my future fiancée. So I said, 'Oh,' I said 'I am going out tonight.' 'Well what do you mean, where are you going?' 'Actually, I have arranged to meet my girlfriend, sir.' He said, 'Come on, drop that, I would like you to come along to a party.' 'I am very sorry I can't do that.' You know, I had pledged and I didn't want to go to the bloody party. Anyway that was that. He was like that. He always wore a little rose in his lapel, quite a man. And a superb surgeon. As Jack [Dr Gordon Jackson Rees] would say, I think when we were talking about this before...

MB This is Jack Rees?

CG Yes, Jack Rees would say he was a little adventurous. Well, he was but it was always to do the best for the patient, and very often succeeded, with quite remarkable operations.

MB He had a good pair of hands.

CG Oh, a beautiful pair. That is how you tell a good surgeon. Rather like riding a horse, I always thought. You know you can tell, by the feel of the bridle was the thing. I did a lot of riding when I was a youngster.

MB So you were into riding as well.

CG And he had perfect hands. Everything came smoothly in sight. No loads of instruments all round, it was so beautiful. The incision was always just right, and his patients did very well. I worked with him very closely for years both before and after I went in the army.

MB What about the medical firms? Anybody exciting apart from Cohen that we should put on the record?

CG Well, there were oddities. Not really, no. Nobody memorable, I don't think.

MB So I have got you coming towards the end of a medical course, to a medical degree, about 1937.

CG I qualified in '37.

MB No medals. Having had a terrific time.

CG No distinctions. Never failed an exam.

MB Found a fiancée, and planning marriage, you leave there with a medical degree and start looking for a job because you really do want to settle down, I think.

CG I had a fiancée, but it wasn't the same fiancée though. My first one was a very nice girl who was a staff nurse, Dorothy Haughey(?), she was a lovely person. I fell badly for her and we got engaged. I think I pawned the other clarinet to buy the engagement ring if I remember... I certainly did something like that. But we got across each other one way and another and finally broke it off. And then I had an aunt who had cancer of the breast, whom I used to go and see. And she was visited by a lady in my parish at home, and she was one of these ladies of charity things that go around seeing the sick and so forth. She used to go and see her and she used to say to me when I was engaged – she was a Protestant by the way, Dorothy - 'Well what do you want to bother with that girl for?' she said. 'Do you know Margot Hely?' I knew Margot Hely because I was a member of the dramatic society, the parish dramatic society. So I said 'I do. I know her, yes.' So she said 'You want to look in that direction,' you know, and she went on like this. I didn't take any notice, but one day after we had had our row, Dorothy and I, we did 'A Kiss for Cinderella' which I produced, and also not uncommonly as I did, played the lead. Do you know it, it's Barrie's play. I played the policeman. It is a typical Barrie play. The hero is the policeman and the girl, the heroine, is an abandoned girl who he finds on the footstep of the front door, cast out, asleep. And your job was to carry this person out to the wing, you know, saving her from destitution. The girl who played Cinderella was too big. I couldn't see myself carrying her. I think she was a bit taller than I, really, if I remember rightly. So I devised a plan whereby this little rather frail lady, Margot Hely, stood in for us at that time.

MB You did a quick substitution.

CG We did. It was rather cleverly staged. I would stand in front of the door saying my little speech about how terrible life was for people like this, and turn my back, you see. So she used to roll off under the screen and on rolled Margot, same costume and everything, blanket over her and everything. Then I'd go back and say... - I can't remember the words, of course – and picked her up and walked off with her. Well I walked off with her and thought this is quite nice really. Of course, she was in the play and so I took her out and we got on very well and eventually, I was engaged to her. When I qualified – my mother of course was very against any of her sons ever getting married, she didn't want any of them to get married, the old man couldn't care less I don't think – and anyway eventually, when I qualified I was

determined to get married to this lovely girl. She was, in fact, but never told me, four years older than I.

MB Cecil, I am just coming to the point at which you are leaving university. Margot and you were looking to have a future together. At that point with your new medical degree, you had to start looking for a job fairly quickly?

CG Absolutely. Well, in those days, you didn't have to do a house job in the hospital and I decided I was going to go straight into general practice. So I went down... there was a man who ran an agency for general practitioners who wanted assistants, so I went down to Liverpool, and saw a fellow called Shaw, a very nice chap. And he said, 'Oh I have got just the job for you,' he said. 'Go up and see Dr Goodman Jones in Upper Parliament Street.' So I went up to see [him]. He was South African, and that was the most fortunate thing that ever happened because he too was a splendid example in teaching.

MB So you fell on your feet.

CG Oh absolutely. He was a superb chap and he offered me three hundred a year, three hundred pounds a year, and I worked very, very hard with him, but he was very good and we had a lot of fun too. But it was two surgeries a day, morning and evening, visits during the day, and sometimes a mid-day surgery as well.

MB And a mass of visits.

CG And he also had a branch surgery, which I was put in charge of. Just qualified.

MB Where was that?

CG The branch surgery was in Shere Road, in Liverpool. We did all our own midwifery, and it was hard work, a tremendous experience, and with the grace of God, I didn't make any mistakes. We used to dispense our own medicines. On Saturday night, which was as busy as hell, the waiting room was packed, they'd be up the stairs of the house, you know. We dispensed all our own medicine; it was two and six, two shillings and sixpence for a consultation and a bottle of medicine. That was great fun.

MB Just getting into that midwifery and those visits that you did, I think you told me at one time that you did as many as fifty a day.

CG Visits... Oh, in the winter, visits... Well, he had two cars. He had a big one which he used himself and he had a chauffeur. In the winter he would say, 'Look I will do the surgeries, you get on with the visits,' and there could be up to fifty in the winter, flu and bronchitis and... I had some rotten experiences because it was not all, the other practice was quite a sort of bourgeois practice really, but the Parliament Street place was a poor practice.

MB Very poor at the back of Parliament Street, wasn't it. A lot of poverty.

CG Brides Street and around there was terrible. I remember going to one of the houses, being called to the house there. The house... it was one of these terrace sort of houses, with steps going up from the hall, and it was dark and it was night. And I was told that two of the children were ill and I was to go and see them. So I went up and one of the children was dead in bed.

MB Dead in bed?

CG And the other child was desperately ill with measles. They both had had measles, got pneumonia, and one had died. Never called the doctor. Now we did not charge the poor people, ever. That was a free visit. All they had to do was ring up and we would go, and I could have saved that kid easily. And the other fear at that time, one of my terrible fears was diphtheria, which was rampant, absolutely. And to distinguish sometimes tonsillitis from diphtheria... because with tonsillitis, although it spots on the tonsils, a clear case, easy. But when it has gone on for a bit, it coats over with pus, so it looks like a diphtheriatic membrane, and if you missed one of those, that was dreadful, absolutely dreadful. So all mine were swabbed to test for diphtheria. But that was a wonderful eighteen months.

MB You couldn't have had a greater baptism, could you? You went into some incredible midwifery rooms as well.

CG Oh yes, well, the newspaper. Boil the kettle and the newspaper. That was the system.

MB People were lying on newspaper sometimes weren't they.

CG On the bed, oh yes. Poverty was terrible. There was a sculptor called Dooley in Liverpool, and he was a brilliant sculptor. His sculptures are in metal and are fetching large sums and they are all over Liverpool. He used to get on the radio and talk about 'Why don't you, instead of building new houses, why don't you tart up these old beautiful Georgian things, you know? Why don't they tart them up?' Well they've done it now. There are a lot of Liverpool old Georgian slums that have been tarted up and they are super places, absolutely. So where was I? Yes, midwifery was tough at times, and that is where I got cultivated to an interest in anaesthesia. I had an idea of being a brain man, and perhaps a psychiatrist; this was generated as I was doing this training period. When I was a student you were supposed to do twenty anaesthetics, give twenty anaesthetics, under supervision. I think I gave five and got signed up for twenty.

MB This was a real Cinderella business, wasn't it?

CG It really was, yes. This was when I was a student.

MB But that was your first, as a student, the first inkling that anaesthetics came into your life a bit.

CG Absolutely, yes. But it was crude as hell in those days, you know, open ether. I should tell you about the lady running along the corridor. Miss Tinkler, Connie Tinkler, and she was about as high as she was broad, wide you know, and thick. The

routine anaesthetists visiting, they were all... these ladies were doing nothing else but coming in part-time, and they had been taught really by watching and so forth. I remember one day we had Liverpool dockers coming in. And we had no intravenous anaesthetics at that time, so we had to induce them with open ether, you see. And this required a little skill. And I remember coming along the corridor one day, going to go into the theatre and seeing Connie disappearing, this little figure disappearing along this long Royal Infirmary corridor, chasing a great big Liverpool docker, with a bottle of ether and a mask in the other hand. You know, 'Come back, come back!' Yes, she was a funny old thing. I was going to tell you about Professor [Robert] Kelly.

MB He was in the surgical division as well.

CG Same time. He was an interesting character because he brought from America... he went over to America and brought back a machine, at least the idea of a machine, to insufflate ether, that is to blow ether and air down the trachea. This is before the Magill endotracheal tube. This was all before that. Quite a revolutionary technique, really. You introduced this galelastic(?) cavity into the trachea, connected it up to this machine. Now the machine consisted of three things. There was a pump going chuff, chuff, chuff, chuff. The joke about that was it was to insufflate ether and the sparks around this thing that was going chuff, chuff, was terrifying. And Connie, coming back to Connie just for a second, used to spill the ether bottle and again fires were not uncommon because she used to give them this insufflation of ether, air and ether. And then after the machine, there was vaporiser, over which the air passed and then it went into a warming machine, which was ridiculous because the specific heat of air is such that by the time it got to the trachea it would be at the air temperature anyway, room temperature. He brought this over, but it made a tremendous difference because general surgeons in those days used to do quite a lot of brain surgery, and even chest surgery in those days, and there were no chest units, none. The general surgeons would specialise in chests and some would specialise in brains, and Kelly used to do both. So this was marvellous because they could push this tube in here and have this air blown in, and do their brain surgery, you know have their head up back here, and no problem, or even open the chest, because if you put a bit of pressure on the air, it would keep the lung fairly well expanded. But I mean compared with modern techniques, it doesn't even star. He was a good man. He was a very good teacher too. He had a wonderful demonstration. When you were first doing your first term of surgery and he was talking about trauma in the skull, he would take an orange and he would say, 'Look at this orange.' He had a high squeaky voice like that you see, 'Now, look at this orange when I drop it like that.' You would pick it up and you see what happened you see, and he would compare this with falling on your head and the skull. Oh yes, Kelly was a character and he was the man, if you had your operation done by Kelly, you were all right. 'Who, did your operation?' 'Kelly.' 'Oh, Kelly.' And that was good, so he was a great man in his time. Now, he was the last of the part-time professors.

MB Right.

CG He was succeeded by Charles Wells, who was the first full-time professor.

MB He is going to come into our story in an enormous way.

CG Yes.

MB Just looking. Was Rawdon Smith around at that time in Liverpool?

CG Indeed he was. He was Kelly's anaesthetist... I mean Connie Tinkler did a lot of his, but Rawdon Smith was a senior anaesthetist in The Royal. He had been a general practitioner; he was a general practitioner in Mossley Hill area, in Liverpool. When we moved from Wallasey with the family to Mossley Hill he became our general practitioner. He was about the rudest man I have ever met, I think. I gather that his wife was George Melley's aunt, or niece, something like that.

MB He wrote the first book on dental anaesthetics.<sup>3</sup>

CG Yes. Well that was his one contribution, actually. It was the first book ever on dental anaesthesia. He did a lot of dental anaesthesia, and he wrote this little textbook of dental anaesthesia. I think Jack Rees has got a first edition of that, if I remember rightly.

MB At that point Cecil, we actually have come to where we want to be for the moment, and we will move on from there and switch the cameras on again.

CG Fine, that is splendid. Thank you very much, if I may say so.

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<sup>3</sup> Rawdon Smith, G.F., 1926. *Dental Anaesthesia*. Edinburgh: E. & S. Livingstone; New York, [N.Y.]: Wm. Wood.

**Professor Cecil Gray in interview with Dr Max Blythe  
Oxford, 28 August 1996 Interview One**

**Part Two**

MB Cecil, when we came to the end of the last tape, you were just beginning to get into full steam, beginning to get an interest in anaesthetics and telling me some of the problems of the primitive realm you first saw it in. However, you had gone initially into general practice after your qualification at Liverpool.

CG I did.

MB You had got into a rather nice practice, with a terrific principal, you were driven around, chauffeur driven, lots of experience, we have gone through that. But just to keep me in line with the family development, you are now married and a baby is en route.

CG Well, it came during that period.

MB It came in that period of you being in that partnership?

CG We had had our three hundred [pounds] a year and my wife had a small income, I think, from her father's trust of twenty pounds a year, and we managed with a daily, and a very nice flat in Judges Drive in Nugent Park in Liverpool.

MB And that was all right.

CG And we could still do it on that money. That was fine. There was private practice in this practice. A lot of people were panel, you know, Lloyd George's panel, and some of them were club patients. Some paid, and when they paid it was, as I say, for half a crown with a bottle of medicine, and a visit I think was two shillings or something like that, which you collected when you went.

MB So you were making a reasonable living. You got interested and got introduced, again through general practice, for giving anaesthetics for consultants you called in.

CG I gave my own anaesthetics for my patients who had dentistry.

MB Ah, dentistry.

CG And I did that because I was very interested as a student in Evipan [hexobarbitone], which was the first intravenous barbiturate. This fellow Rawdon Smith used to give it in the Women's Hospital, and this fascinated me because they went so beautifully to sleep, as opposed to the old open ether business.



MB So you managed to see that during your student days, the first use of intravenous anaesthetic.

CG Oh yes. Well, actually, I think there was one before that which wasn't used in this country and that was Nembutal, but it was very long lasting and not a very good drug for humans, excellent for animals. Evipan was quite a revolution because you made a quick recovery. It turned to be a rotten drug because people were restless afterwards, and if you gave too much of it then you got respiratory depression and so on and so forth, and Pentothal [thiopentone] took its place.

MB Was there any thought at that stage when you were giving those dental anaesthetics that you would move towards...

CG I was very interested.

MB You were?

CG No, I had no thought at that time of doing it, but I was thinking that I would give my own anaesthetics to my own patients. Then came, after twelve months, a time when I was getting three hundred a year, working – I could use a naughty word here – like so and so, really very, very hard, but very generous in the sense that I had a five week holiday, and was given a motor car to drive when ever I liked with the family. But I thought it was high time I had a rise, so I went to Ewan Jones and I said, 'Ewan, you know, this is hard work and I am enjoying it greatly, but I think three hundred is a bit mingy really, with a wife and a little boy.' 'Oh yes,' he said 'well look here I will give you fifty quid.' So, I was a bit disappointed, I thought I was going to get more. So I got fifty quid and after another four or five months, I thought this wasn't on, really. I was having a marvellous life, learning a lot, but the income wasn't really enough. So I thought I am going to buy a practice. And I heard... I saw an advertisement for a practice in Wallasey. It was a man called Seymour Davies, Dr Seymour Davies, who had, when I lived in Wallasey, as a youngster, before I went to Bath to the convent, long before that, he gave me the anaesthetic in the house to have my tonsils out, in the house. Everything was done in the house in those days, and it was open ether and I remembered it very, very well. So I saw this advertisement and I thought well I will explore this. I saw this lovely house in Liscard Road, 110, detached, beautiful old, I suppose George V house, perhaps even earlier than that. It was a really nice house and a nice practice, a rather genteel sort of practice on the whole, but some poor people. I can't remember how much I paid for it, but it included the house and the goodwill of the practice.

MB I think I remember one time I heard you mumble nine hundred pounds.

CG It was something like that, I think, yes. It was a ridiculous price really. I set up there as a single-handed practitioner, and again doing all my own midwifery. That again was a wonderful experience, but general practitioners these days just don't know what doctoring is. I mean doctoring is a vocation. You damn well give your life to it, really. You don't think you are having a rough time when you are up at night. I mean every single practitioner would be up very often at night, it could be a midwifery case. And you wouldn't get back and you would have to tell your wife to

put the surgery off till the evening, and then they would be up the stairs for the evening surgery, and that sort of thing. So it was good, and you know, you would get the most extraordinary things. A Mrs Dixon, who used to slip her jaw, dislocate her jaw, when she yawned and at three o'clock in the morning, I would have stones thrown up at my bedroom window. I opened the window and Mrs Dixon would go 'Ah, ah...' Then I would have to get up and put it back. That again was a wonderful experience, but then came the blitzes.

MB We get you into the war because you have got this practice. It must have been 1939, you actually moved into that personal practice.

CH Yes it would be. It was the beginning of 1939.

MB Just to keep us on the time scale.

CG That's right. And then came the war, and for the first few months of the war... Oh by the way, with this practice, not making a big income by any means - I can't remember what the income of the practice was, you know, but it wasn't big - yet I could have two maids, two maids! I could have a part-time chap to look after my accounts, and a gardener, which wasn't bad. And a wife who was extremely good with patients, she knew how to welcome them and make them at home. She over did it sometimes. There was one old chap who used to come to me for some Mist Bismuth Co., it was for indigestion. It was a pink bottle. Again I was doing my own dispensing, did my own dispensing. He used to come for this - nice old man - and I was away somewhere when he came, I went away for something, I can't remember what, and he came. My wife answered the door and he said, 'Oh Mrs Gray, is the doctor in?' 'No, I'm afraid he's not in.' 'Dear me, what am I going to do, I have run out of my pink medicine?' So she said 'Oh yes, I know Mr Benson,' - whatever his name was, I can't remember - 'I know very well what that is.' So she goes in, you see, and she gets this yellow tin of Bisodol, put it into a bottle, you see, added the water, and then put some cochineal in it and shook it up, and it looked exactly, and was probably, exactly the same thing, you see. He was as happy as Larry. 'Oh thank you very much Mrs Gray,' he said. It was a tremendous time and I loved it.

MB I think you said that you worked harder than ever before.

CG Very, very hard.

MB It was night and day stuff.

CG I enjoyed it. Well we always insisted on having a Wednesday afternoon off. Then my friend Dr Alexander from up the road would take over and I would take over for his, and that is how we did it.

MB Cecil, it was in that period that you started to get an interest in anaesthetics of a fuller nature.

CG Properly, yes.

MB You wanted to get involved. How did that come about?

CG Well, very simply because one of the privileges in those days was when you had a patient that you were worried about, you could call out a specialist. He came because it was all private you see, and he would come out. I used to call Charles [Wells] out, of course, for surgery. If you had got an appendix, a private patient, out it would come. I always gave my own anaesthetics. And I remember very well on one occasion, we were doing a gall bladder, this is a story against myself. It was a Mr Beasley who was a bank manager. He was one of my best patients. So I induced him, I can't remember whether I used Evipan to induce or not, I don't remember. I gave him open ether for his gall bladder, and it went like a charm, went beautifully, as always. Afterwards I said to him, 'You know Charles I am doing quite a lot of these anaesthetics.' I used to do it for him at the Cottage Hospital occasionally too. 'I am seriously thinking of doing anaesthetics.' He said, 'For God's sake don't do that.' Just like that, you know, because there was no future in it, you know. 'No don't do that, Cecil, I don't recommend that at all.' I was very influenced by Charles. I will tell you about him later when the Second World War came. So I thought, I don't know, I think I am going to do this, and I called out a physician, Leslie Cunningham, who lived in Birkenhead, one night. Oh no, first I went to see Rawdon Smith at the Royal and said I would like to do anaesthetics, I am in general practice, and he remembered me well. He said, 'Oh yes, Gray, that's fine. You come along in the summer vac, and you can give a few anaesthetics then.' Now, that is not what I wanted. I wanted regular teaching, you see. I wasn't at all happy with that. So I got Leslie Cunningham, who came out, and told him my problem. 'Oh, he said you must come and see Dr [R J] Minnitt, he'll put you right, don't you worry, he'll see you right and assess the position.' Now he worked at the Northern Hospital in Dr Minnitt's hospital. I went over to see Dr Minnitt and told him my position, and he said, 'Of course, yes, certainly, you must come along. How much time can you give me?' I said 'Two afternoons a week, I can probably manage that. I'll get Dr Alexander to cover the two afternoons a week, you see.'

MB That was the beginning and the end in a way wasn't it?

CG Yes. But then, the first thing he said to me was that you have got to do a DA [Diploma in Anaesthetics]. To do a DA, you had to have a thousand cases written up, how you had done them, pre-medication, everything, all about them. You had to have a thousand cases. So I said, 'That's fine, great.' So from the very beginning I started to take a record of everything I did. I wasn't allowed for one year to do anything but open ether and that was the best training, again, you could possibly have. I wasn't allowed to touch a machine and by Jove did that teach you how to use open ether artistically. When they opened the peritoneum, the muscles go like that, and that doesn't do surgery any good. So we had to do them fairly deep so that the muscles could be drawn aside when you opened. While they were doing the guts, they don't have any painful stimuli, so you let them come up and then deepen it again when they were closing. And also how to keep an airway, the importance of keeping an airway. I even learnt at that stage how to pass an endotracheal tube. That was wonderful, wonderful training.

MB What was Minnitt like? He must have been a fascinating chap.

CG Minnitt?

MB Yes.

CG He was, indeed.

MB Wasn't he a pioneer of gas and air?

CG Yes he was. He was, of course, the best-known anaesthetist in Liverpool and one of the best known in the provinces, certainly. Most of the chaps in London had got them themselves well known at the Royal Society of Medicine. Well Minnitt, yes, he was a general practitioner too, but gave a lot of time to anaesthesia and was intensely interested. He was a very, very Christian man, a very, I think a very sort of holy man in a way. A very fine chap and a good teacher.

MB I think there is a story about him coming away on a train journey from a meeting and working out gas and air.

CG Oh yes, that's right.

MB I think the whole system was worked out on a train journey.

CG Well, not quite. He used to go to the RSM. He became president of the section of anaesthetics of the Royal Society of Medicine, eventually. He was very faithful, on the first Friday of the month, whatever it was, up to London, to the Royal Society of Medicine, where he met a lot of the bigwigs, as you might say, of anaesthesia and got to know them and they all got to know him. Well, there was a man called Charles King, who was a maker of anaesthetic apparatus, in Devonshire Street, and of course Minnitt bought a machine off him, an anaesthetic machine – a McKesson, I think it was – off him, and got to know him very well. He did his own midwifery and he knew all about the problem midwives who couldn't give an analgesic to relieve the pain, you see. He got this idea that if you could have a method of self-administration of gas and air – not oxygen because that is another cylinder, but air and gas in the right proportions – the patient could give it quite safely and get relief of pain when they felt a pain coming on. It would never be enough really to put them right out you see. So it was safe for midwives. He mentioned this to Charles King and it was Charles who suggested one half of the McKesson machine. You see the McKesson machine was a machine which you drew the gases over, it didn't flow continuously, which was like the Boyle machine. When you breathed in, the gases came over, and the oxygen half of that, you gave oxygen, was like a drum with a valve at the top. When you breathed, the valve lifted and the oxygen came out, and there was a bag in this drum and that was connected to an oxygen cylinder.

MB Safe anaesthetic on demand.

CG Well that was it, but the thing was they bored, when the oxygen was drawn out, they bored in the tube, five holes through which you drew the air. And if the hole was the right diameter you could get the right proportion of gas and air, which was supposed to be 50%, which, in fact, meant that the patients were slightly hypoxic because there wasn't 20% of oxygen in the mixture.

MB This must have been one of the big advances of the mid-thirties.

CG Oh yes he became very famous, Minnitt. Not only that, he was an apostle in that he taught and spread the gospel. He wanted midwives to have this machine, so he ran courses for the midwives and eventually persuaded the Midwives Board to certify... say if midwives did a six week course – whatever it was, I can't remember – on the teaching of this and the theory of it, all about the danger of it and everything like this, they could be certified and then they could use this machine. That was Minnitt's very great contribution, but I reckon there were two greater contributions than that. One, he was the first starter of the Liverpool Society of Anaesthesia, way back. I would have thought somewhere about 1933 or '32, something like that. And he started it and became the secretary and remained the secretary until I was a specialist anaesthetist. For years and years, he ran this thing of anaesthesia and when the committee decided, recommended that medical education, The Royal Commission – I can't remember if it was a commission – recommended that there should be full-time academic departments in clinical subjects, that was the big revolution. When that happened he decided there should be a department of anaesthesia under a full-time head, instead of all these part-time ladies, a lot of them were surgeons' wives. He decided that and he got the committee of the Anaesthetic Society – I was on the committee at the time with another anaesthetist. By that time I had given up general practice, by the way. I took the step, I had sold my practice, after the blitzes, when the value of it had gone zilch, but I still sold it, and we rented a little house at Mossley Hill, and I took up full time anaesthesia. The war had come, which meant that the anaesthetists, specialist anaesthetists, had disappeared. So, I had to very quickly build up a very viable practice.

MB Can we just summarise that? You finished working with Minnitt. You got the thousand cases completed.

CG That's right.

MB And by the time you were ready to go and work as an anaesthetist in a professional way, the diploma...

CG Well I was put on the staff by Minnitt of the Northern Hospital as a full-time anaesthetist, because they were rare. There were three of us, in Liverpool, Minnitt wasn't, he was a GP. There was [J] Halton, myself and a fellow called [R B] Harbord, who was another protégé of Minnitt's, and he eventually became professor of anaesthesia in Leeds, and he was senior in the game to me, a year ahead of me in medical school. Fortunately, before the Liverpool department was advertised, they advertised one in Leeds and he went for it and he got it, and I said my prayers, you know. He was a great favourite of Minnitt's.

MB Just keeping you though to your pre-army service years, and that kind of position between coming out and working on the DA with Minnitt and continuing to be a GP, all of a sudden there was a point around there when you resolved to give up general practice and move. Rather a risky decision and you moved into anaesthetics full-time.

CG As I say after the blitzes, when the practice had zoomed down. Yes. I talked it over with my wife and I was very keen. I got a pretty big practice by then with Charles Wells. I had put in for a job before that at the Central Hospital in Wallasey and I was hoping to get that, in which case I might have kept up my practice, I don't know. Well, what happened was a man called Wynne(?) from Moreton had got his DA and he put in for it and he snookered me absolutely.

MB Well, you went on to making big money working with Wells.

CG It was that that made me decide to go and do it full-time; that was before I did it full-time.

MB Let me just clarify this, you mentioned that anaesthetists were moving in large numbers into the forces and therefore there was lots of money to be made.

CG They were all, except Halton, Harbord and myself, all part-time anaesthetists, general practitioners.

MB And we've put on the record you weren't acceptable to the forces at that time because of the asthma.

CG Asthma, yes that is right. I was called up like everybody else, you know, and they turned me down because of my asthma. So there I was, I set up in a little rented house in Childwall, and set up in practice and in no time I had an enormous practice. Working just as hard as I had ever worked. Charles was a dynamic man and we used to do a nursing home in the morning before a list at the Southern, then another nursing home in the evening, but those would be private practice, you see. By that time I had got a job on one of the municipal hospitals which was bringing in a few hundred quid a year for a Saturday and a Thursday afternoon, something like that, so that was handy. Charles was very prolific with his private practice, but I had also got, very important at the Northern Hospital, Professor [T P] McMurray, who was the professor of orthopaedic surgery, a very dynamic, brusque, Northern Ireland man. He had a tremendous practice; he was a sort of logical successor to Sir Robert Jones, these great orthopaedic chaps. He was given a personal chair in orthopaedics. I had all his practice and for a time I had Reg Watson Jones's practice, who was an orthopaedic surgeon in The Royal. Halton had it for most of the time but I had little bits of it when he couldn't get Halton. By that time the hospitals because of the war and the blitzes had been moved out to the periphery. Southern Hospital went to Fazakerley and the Northern Hospital came up to Childwall in the Teachers Training College. We used to have a theatre with four tables, it was the old assembly hall in this teachers training, and there were four operating tables. It would be one surgeon with four operating tables for a general surgical list. You know, you had a nurse to help you, and you'd run from table to table. That was exciting too. You probably had a houseman to help you as well. Now, McMurray's list, you'd look and there was a big blackboard like that, and all the private patients were written up on the blackboard, on the list there would be P, P, P, P, P, all the way down. A lot of them were quick cases, manipulation of the neck, and manipulation of the femur (?) and they all had to have Pentothal I really made a lot of money at that time. Then I would be taken out by Datno, a gynaecologist, down to Wales for the weekend. Oh yes, it was very good.

MB Very lucrative.

CG Yes, and all the time I had my sessions at the Northern, then eventually moved on to the Royal.

MB What persuaded you to go wild and volunteer for the services in the thick of this, 1942 you went and did that?

CG Well, one had a guilt complex really. I mean, here was I working all hours of the day and night, not so much at night, sometimes, very often in fact, when I think about it, because there was no resident anaesthetist, so you were called out at night occasionally. I must tell you about my father in that case. I realised I was really working as much as any man could and I thought to myself, it can't possibly be worse than this. I had my odd attacks of asthma and so forth, a bit, and I had to get a locum in and that sort of thing, but not terribly bad. I thought it can't be worse in the army and I was one day giving an anaesthetic to this influential so and so, for Charles Wells, at the Grange, a nursing home in Gatingdon. We were talking about the war and he [Charles] was a gunner in the First World War, and he was telling me about his experiences. He said, of course, all the best people, it was before I started medicine... or he had just started, I think, and then he joined as a gunner. He said, 'Of course all the best people went to the war.' I didn't say any thing at the time.

MB That jarred?

CG Absolutely jarred.

MB There was guilt already there?

CG Well, no I don't know whether there was guilt already there. I don't want to say that. I was very excited at the time of the, you remember the invasion from Dover. There was a great invasion from Dover out to the continent and I got very excited about that, in fact I went down to Dover to see what was going on at that time. I got really rather caught up in it in a way, and that remark of Charles really put the top back on it, and I said to my wife, 'Look, this is ridiculous. I don't suppose anybody more healthy worked harder in the army, than I am doing here. I think I had better do something about it.' And I went off to Chester.

MB Did your wife support you in that position.

CG Oh yes. I have been very lucky with my wives. They have had to be very understanding. I had by that time two children, a son and a little baby daughter. I went off, and I was also pretty impetuous sort of chap. I went off to Chester and volunteered. It was just before the African invasion, a month or two before, and they were very short of anaesthetists.

MB They grabbed you.

CG Here was I with a DA you know, and a lot of experience. So I was just the chap. 'Are you all right?' So I told him about my asthma. 'Let me listen to your

chest. Your fine, you're in.' Within about three weeks, I was square bashing. I think you have got a picture of me square bashing, somewhere.

MB I think we have got you in the uniform, yes we have.

CG As a lieutenant in Leeds. I was supposed to do six weeks in Leeds, square bashing, and you were put into the poison gas tank with a mask on and this sort of thing. I thought that wouldn't do my asthma much good if it leaked. It was as near danger as ever, but not quite. Three weeks I was at Leeds, having a jolly good time really, it was hard work. We went out on the moors with a compass and had to find our way back.

MB A little orienteering.

CG Oh yes.

MB Then you had to go to Oxford.

CG Yes. Well what happened after three weeks of this I was called up, mobilised, to report at Oxford at St Hilda's College.

MB Woodstock Road.

CG Woodstock Road, that is right. On the, whatever it was, in about ten days time or something. So off I went down to Woodstock Road, mobilised with one of Hugh Cairn's mobile neurosurgical units, which were wonderful units. There were five medical officers. A neurosurgeon who was the chief, the major; he was the boss, commanding officer of the unit. A neurologist who was the next in command, who was Charles Whittey from Oxford. Chauston from Glasgow; he was plucky because he was a Jew, and going into the army you know, he was good fun. He changed his name from Chaustein to Chauston. A man called Tuttle, who we called the Colonel; he was a splendid chap from Preston. And Jepson, who became a very distinguished chap. He was many years later he was professor of surgery at Manchester, and I got him put onto the MDU [Medical Defence Union], on the council. And I was sitting next to him one day, and he was a great man for the sunshine, and he was a pleasure loving man. He been called out of the committee meeting and came back and turned to me and said, 'You will never guess.' I said 'What.' 'I have just been invited to go and be professor of surgery at Adelaide.' That was right up his street. So off he went. And that was an officer junior to me. Tuttle and thingmagig were both senior. There was a neurosurgeon and a neurologist and I was the third. I did two years and I was invalided out. I got terrible bronchial pneumonia. My colleagues in the unit gave me up actually, that was at Phillipville, after the peace.

MB So you came back to Liverpool about the beginning of 1944?

CG Came back, which was an eerie experience on a hospital ship, very eerie indeed, full lights on. When we went out in the troop convoy, we were pretty scared of submarines, particularly going through the Mediterranean which was calm, but that was very eerie indeed. Oh it was all right it was a good ship too, had a good time.



MB You went out to Africa and had a fantastic time.

CG Oh I did.

MB That was great. Now because of our time we are winding down today, we will not take that in until the beginning of our next talk together.