



Recording Work Memories: the 60 Voices Project

Interviewee: Mike Hammond CBE

Mike Hammond was born in Hampshire, however because of his father's time in the services he travelled a lot, spending the first five years of his life in Germany and attending 13 different primary schools. Eventually attending Grammar School in Manchester, Mike aspired to study geology, however, was unable to do this due to failing A-Level French; Mike still doesn't understand why it was a requirement.

Subsequently, he undertook a series of odd jobs across Manchester including selling TV's, demonstrating washing machines and making cardboard boxes in a factory. Mike however, heard they were recruiting executive officer in London for the civil service. This greatly interested Mike as it would provide a chance to get away from Manchester and would also get his parents off his back about a secure career.

Mike joined the civil service in 1966, working for the Ministry of Overseas Development, which eventually became the Department for International Development, where he worked for a large majority of his 52 years in the civil service. He worked 11 years on loan to the Foreign Office with his first stint lasting for two years from 1977-79 and a second stint from 1987-95. The first conversation he had within the Civil Service was regarding always wearing a suit and tie. At that point he knew conformity might be an issue. The stints at the Foreign Office were therefore sometimes interesting.

During his time in the Civil Service, he worked in 16 different countries and headed development offices in 6 countries: Uganda, Ghana, Zambia, Rwanda, South Africa, and Afghanistan. One of the first job posts Mike had abroad was in Barbados at the age of 25, something that Mike noted as being a life-forming experience, even beginning to attempt to play cricket during his time working there.

His time working in Uganda in 1987 was particularly difficult, as the country was recovering from a six-year civil war that raged in the country until 1986. Mike spent four years there as he helped set up a wide variety of aid programs. He went back in 2000, as the head of a new development office, finding it very rewarding in seeing the amount of progress the country had made in its infrastructure and in the way the nation tackled and recovered from the HIV crisis that had ravaged the country.

The work in Uganda came with many difficult moments, however. He remembers how he went to a football stadium holding thousands of Ugandan women and children who were looking desperately at him and his colleagues, asking "Where is the food?" – a very depressing memory, but Mike and his team did everything they could logistically to try and feed everyone. Mike admits that whilst they had a lot of success in Uganda there were things that they could have done better.

He also had the privilege of meeting Nelson Mandela in Uganda, as Mandela was doing a speech very near to where he was living at the time. He wasn't sure if he was allowed to go

to the speech at the time, as this was the year of Mandala's release, and the Ugandans were very security conscious. Standing on the airfield where the speech was taking place, somebody from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs came up to Mike and told him to sit near the front away from the main crowd. As the speech finished, Mandala walked past him and asked him "Hello, who are you?", as Mike stood out as one of the few white people in the area. The two spoke for a couple of minutes before Mandala left, a memory of a great man he still treasures.

A humorous story that Mike has from his time working in Uganda was how the President was never able to pronounce his name, and just called him 'the tall man from DFID'. The name stuck and in a final story in the newspapers, even they referred to him by this name. Another humorous story from his career is how a Nigerian colleague of his in the late 1960's would come into the office every Friday wearing a traditional dress. However, one Friday there was a new security guard at the door, and he was mistaken for a visiting dignitary. The colleague went along with it, and he was sent straight up to the ministers' waiting room before people realised who he was.

After a final stint in Afghanistan, Mike retired from the civil service at nearly 72 years of age in February 2019. He began a role as a consultant, however this wasn't something he particularly enjoyed, so he decided to stop full time work. He also became involved in the CSRF immediately upon retirement. Since retirement, Mike restarted running regularly again and has started to take part in 10K runs, including the Great Manchester Run and the London Vitality 10K. Furthermore, he has also taken time to travel. During his life, Mike believes he has visited 62 different countries, and around 45 of them during his time in the Civil Service. He was awarded a CBE for services to International Development in 2017.

The advice Mike would give regarding retirement is to focus on your physical and mental wellbeing, as it is important to always occupy your mind and keeping both brain and body sharp and active which helps to combat loneliness and mental stress. He also notes how important it is to keep engaged socially to keep in touch with the world so as not to become lonely and isolated.

Mike has been a prominent part of the CSRF since his retirement. His Mother was an ex-chair and currently Michael is the national treasurer on the board of the charity, a position he took immediately after retirement. Mike has recently also become a trustee and vice-chair of a small UK charity helping street kids in Uganda named SALVE.