Bryan Mills

Interviewed by

Alan Cane

08th January, 2016

At the

WCIT Hall,
32a Bartholomew Close, London, EC1A 7JN
Kindly provided by The Worshipful Company of Information Technologists

It's the morning of January 8th 2016 here in London, England. I'm Alan Cane, and I'm talking today to Bryan Mills, founder and former Chairman of CMG, now LogicaCMG, and one of the pioneers of the UK's nascent computing services industry.

So Bryan, since we're talking about nascency…

Good morning.

…let's start at the very beginning. Tell me when you were born and where please.

Gosh. I was born in 1931, in Hammersmith, to a man and wife who had been childhood sweethearts. My father at the time rejoiced in the title of unskilled workman for the Post Office.

What did that involve I wonder?

Sweeping floors mainly at that time. And, we lived, as I say, in Hammersmith. When I was about five we migrated from a small, rather poorly constructed terrace house where one afternoon I pulled a bit of wallpaper off and the wall came down, while my father was asleep, we moved to half of a Victorian house on the borders of Chiswick. Five and a half rooms, no bathroom, inside loo, no running hot and cold of course, running cold, where we lived until, oh, in fact my parents lived, until sometime in the Sixties when, their children having become rather richer, they moved to a semi in Hounslow, by which time my father was a temporary acting inspector. [laughs]

Ah. So they had come up in the world.

Well, yah, I mean, he, he joined the Post Office originally because of the pension. He was… I should explain. My grandfather was killed in the big German push on 1918, spring of 1918, leaving my grandmother a widow of 34 with five children, the youngest a babe in arms, and throughout my father's teenage as it were he was the main support of the family. I mean, my grandmother was scrubbing floors. Because, a gunner's pension was, nothing to write home about.

Indeed.

We were a rather curious family, because, one of my grandmother's sisters was married to a Norwegian baron, who had been a captain in the Life Guards, and subsequently, when he retired, an antique dealer. Another was a dressmaker. They were a very mixed bunch.

Indeed. And what did your mother do? Did she work?

Well my mother, when they married my mother was working in the Food Halls at Harrods. I still have the silver tea set that they gave her when she left. Because in those days when you married you left.

Oh right.

And in any case, she was going to have me, so, that rather put the kibosh on it. Until about 1950 she, she looked after us at home. But, in 1950, by which time my youngest sister was twelve I think, or thereabouts, no, ten, she started working at Cadby Hall for Lyons, on the accounts. And she did that as a semi, it was partly part-time, until she and my father retired to Hounslow.

[04:05]
Right. So how many siblings did you have, or do you have?

There were four of us. I was the eldest; the next, Vanessa, was a great beauty. She married Alex Bernstein of Granada, and, unfortunately died of leukaemia a few years ago. My brother, who was born in '38, now runs a family firm at Wrexham where he's the Chairman. His wife is the necessary female dragon that every small family firm requires, one son's the sales director, and the other's the operations director. But, I mean that's, he did that with money that he made. He built a firm for an American group up from three people, one of whom was him, to 30 million a year turnover, in Ellesmere Port. And when they sold it he took retirement and bought this factory in Wrexham. And my youngest sister, the one that prompted your question,

she was married until he died very lately to a guy called Ronnie Bedford, who was a very well-known scientific and medical journalist.

I knew him well.

You knew him well. Well, you know what a great guy Ronnie was.

He was.

And, my sister married him – well, they were lovers for a while, until his daughter was grown-up enough to stand it, and, when she was the membership secretary of the British Medical Association, which was part of her chequered career, which included being a minutes secretary for IATA – the International Air Transport Asociation, and PA to the president of Columbia in New York. So, she had a fairly chequered career. So, we were an interesting example of Fifties social mobility.

Well, very much so, I mean…

Because, we all started at elementary schools. I went to Latymer, purely by chance. It was... I wanted to go to Clement Danes, which was on Wormwood Scrubs, and my parents said, 'It's a long way away; Latymer's just in walking distance.' And besides, we… My father actually got a primitive scholarship back when he was twelve or something, but the uniform couldn't be afforded et cetera et cetera, so, he didn't go. So I went to Latymer. My brother followed me there. My sister, Vanessa, went to a school called Burlington, which used to be in Piccadilly St James's and is now at Wormwood Scrubs, and a younger sister followed her there.

[07:01]
So a very upwardly-mobile family. Was that something to do with your parents, their attitudes to life, I wonder?

My sixth form schoolmaster used to say, the most important decision in life is the choice of your parents, and it's too late for all of you,' [laughs] which of course is biologically true. But, we were undoubtedly very lucky in our parents. Supportive.

They were ambitious for you?

No, actually weren't. They weren't ambitious for us, but they supported us… In fact, none of the four of us, including myself, would I describe as ambitious, in any sense like, for example, Martin Sorrell is ambitious, or… We've always just done what was put in front of us.

Well you seem to have transcended, all four of you, your quite, quite humble start in life.

Well yes, but, because we, we were lucky I think in… We were well brought up [laughs], to be kindly and so on, polite. And as I say, my parents supported us in whatever we felt inclined to do, which has led all four of us down some interesting byways in our time.

Mm. Did your parents have any political convictions, were they at all interested in politics or…?

As far as they were anything, they were Labour. They read the *Daily Mirror*. My father was, a real enthusiasm was classical music, and, he was also one of the very first hi-fi people, built his own crystal set back in the Twenties, and…

So there was an element of technology…

Not… Not in my case. I just listened. [laughs]

[08:58]
[laughs] Fine. So you went to Latymer Upper School. How did you get on there?

Well, I suppose I was reasonably successful. A stream all the time, prefect. Nothing sporting, because I'm not sporty. [pause] Latymer in those days, when getting into Oxbridge was the object of the exercise, or, no, was the measure, there were three schools which scored very heavily. One was Manchester Grammar, one was Eton,

and one was Latymer. And, we used to get twelve or fourteen places a year. Fred Wilkinson was a remarkable headmaster. He, in the First World War he, as a rookie, put his head above the parapet and found himself looking down a German sniper's rifle. And he gave himself up for lost. And the German looked at him, grinned, shook his head, and lowered the barrel. Which left Fred with a conviction that everyone was much the same, and most people were decent. And when he became head, when… He became headmaster of Latymer sometime in the, must have been in about '42, '43. I went to the school, I think… I've never been completely clear about this in my own mind, but it was either '43 or '44. And, he encouraged those attitudes. And in '48 when, you have to remember, Germany was in ruins, he launched a relationship with the Johanneum Gymnasium in Hamburg, which in 1949 led to a party of us, of which I was member, going to Hamburg, staying with our German oppos, acting a bit of Shakespeare and a bit of *Midsummer Night's Dream*. I was principally a props man in those days. Rowed on the Alster. That relationship, founded in 1949, we celebrated with a dinner in the school, because it still persists, in 2009, and it's still going on. And it's been a great feature. And in one, there was a recent case where a boy was orphaned, and his exchange parents adopted him. So it's a, it's real amalgam.

Well indeed. Mm.

Hamburg was a fascinating place in '49. I got off the bus at the wrong stop at one point, and walked for two and a half hours without seeing a single complete building.

Ah.

Boy, did we do a job. Yah. Anyway.

[12:28]
Just taking you back a little bit. I don't quite understand how you, coming from this, you know, very modest background, got entry to Latymer. How did that work?

The Eleven Plus.

It was the Eleven Plus?

The much-maligned Eleven Plus.

It was the Eleven Plus. That's fine. That's fine.

And, the point was… These still seem to me to be in many ways the good old days.

Mm.

If you got your Eleven Plus, and you went to a grammar school, the County Council, certainly the LCC as it was in those days, gave you a grant, paid your fees and gave you a grant. The grant was magnificent, it was £5 a term, which was a lot more in 1940 than it is today, but, and it bought me the occasional tweed jacket. But, there was no interview process. I mean the intake into Latymer was roughly 120 boys a year. The school was 1200 boys strong, a big school. And it was split like a Battenberg cake. A quarter of us came from, were LCC scholars; a quarter were Middlesex County Council, in the days when Middlesex did exist; a quarter were Governor's Scholarships paid for out of the original Edward Latymer Foundation; and a quarter were fee-paying. And when you arrived, you were actually, your first form was made up in that way. But they sorted you, streamed you. Another, of course, improper concept nowadays. And put you into the appropriate stream.

[14:24]
OK. So you weren't sporty. What sort of academic interests did you have? You said you were A stream throughout, so…

Passing exams. [laughter] I mean, what I did in the sixth form was principally history. Because I've always regarded myself as a, a bit of a historian. That's still my favourite reading. But… Because, [laughs] when I went up for the interview at Cambridge, the senior tutor said to me, 'What were you thinking of reading?' You can tell how long ago this was. 'What were you thinking of reading?' I said, 'I thought History, sir.' 'Oh no,' he said, 'we've got lots of third-rate historians. You

can read Russian or Law.' And since I'd had my belly-full of Russian by that time, [laughs] I, I chose Law.

OK, so you went up to Christ's, there.

Yah.

And, you must have been one of the very few sort of, people from a working-class back ground there, in those days?

No.

No?

One of the great things about that period was that…. And besides, by that time, I had done my National Service.

Ah. OK.

And I'm a chameleon. I'd been commissioned.

Oh I see, that's the gap between 1950 when you left Latymer and 1953 when you…

Yes. 19… Yah, 1950. October 1952 when I got to Cambridge.

Yes.

Yah. I mean, again, what happened was that, the normal conscription time was the end of the summer vacation, i.e. September, but if you were competing for an Oxbridge, well, a university place but, as far as I know, it certainly applied to Oxbridge, they let you stay for the December examinations and interviews.

Mhm.

Have you read Alan Bennett's description of, of attending his interview at Cambridge?

No. No, I haven't.

Oh you should. It's absolutely spot on. I mean, he is a brilliant writer. He's mad as a bat but he's a brilliant writer. And, you went up, and you did the, what were in fact the college scholarship exams, and if you did well, you got an exhibition or a minor or a major scholarship. I didn't. But getting a place was good enough. Because if you got a place, you got awarded what was then called a state scholarship. And one of the features of, it's a circuitous way of answering your question, one of the features of the state scholarship was that you had a grant, which, again, was not magnificent, it was £93 a term. But, almost everybody from the public schools and so on, except for the very rich, their parents gave them that as an allowance. It enabled, it sort of set the level, if you see what I mean.

Oh, indeed. Mm.

So, financially, I mean we all went back to vastly different circumstances. One of my friends, from Shrewsbury, he rowed a boat, college boat, back from Marlow to the Tideway, and one of the other crew members, a guy called Nigel Hensman, whose sister I fancied terribly, but, she took no notice of me, she was up at the same time, Nigel said, 'Oh my mother said, would you care to come to dinner in the evening after we get back?' So one of course said yes. And they finished up in Belgravia with a footman behind every chair. [laughter] And, so, you know, life, life had its, its quite acute differences.

Was extraordinary. Extraordinary, yes. Yes.

[18:40]
So, as I say, I, in the January I joined the Army, was sent down to Shorncliffe, where the barracks had been built at the end of the Napoleonic War. And they gave you six weeks' basic training, and then they sorted you into potential leaders, and the rest. And, the potential leaders then went to War Office Selection Board, which, again, I

found quite unbiased. If you passed, depending on which arm you wanted to go into, you went to either Eaton Hall in Cheshire or Mons in Aldershot if you were… Eaton Hall was for infantry, and… I can't remember how I'd actually decided. At the time I was a Royal Fusilier, which is a City of London regiment, but, I decided I wanted to go into the Intelligence Corps. I think… The only two military people I knew were this Norwegian baron uncle, or great-uncle rather, and the brother of a very old friend of my father's, who had been at Oxford and had gone into the Intelligence Corps. And when Great-Uncle Torleif said, 'I suppose you'll be going into the Household Cavalry,' [laughs] I said I didn't think I had the income or, or the background, except possibly as a trooper. And, so it seemed like the Intelligence Corps was the obvious alternative. So, I went to Eaton Hall. You did three months there, quite, very interestingly. Was commissioned. My barrack roommates included Reggie Bosanquet, Colin Tennant, and Michael Mosley, Oswald's third son by Cynthia Curzon, as well as a guy called Ben Moore, who is still a friend of mine, who had at Perse And, [laughs] the first night we were all, well, some of us were thinking, Michael Mosley? Mosley? Mosley? And eventually Ben sat up in bed and looked across at Michael who was in, the other side, and said, 'Are you Oswald's son?' [laughs] And Michael said, 'Yes. Why?' [laughter]

[21:21]
Was there anything in your Army experience which, you know, has influenced your subsequent career do you think, either positively or negatively?

It shaped me.

Mm.

[pause] It certainly didn't influence my career or my, if you call my life a career, which I don't really, it's a series of events. It shaped me, and mostly I think for the better. It taught you a lot about leadership. It taught you that, mostly it was not a case of can't, it was a case of won't.

Mm. Mm.

And that the penalties of won't were extremely severe. [laughs] And… And, I also learnt… Because, being in the Intelligence Corps, you, you weren't in a regimental mess; you were in various mixed function messes. I mean for example, in Salisbury where I was the second-in-command of the field security at Southern Command, I was billeted on this lovely Air OP pilot's widow. Air Observation has the highest death rate amongst officers.

Oh really? Mm.

Well you fly a little plane.

Mm. Yes.

Because drones do it now, but in those days people did it.

Mm.

And, she seemed at the time quite, almost middle-aged. I suppose she was thirty-eight. [laughs] I was nineteen. Anyway, we got on like a house on fire. And, so that, I mean, so I lived in Cathedral Close at Salisbury.

Oh right.

I went to Sunday morning service and had sherry with old ladies in the Close afterwards. Ted Heath didn't live there then. And, so that was there. And then in Germany I was in, as a result of some misdemeanours on our collective parts, I finished up in Hamburg. And, the mess at Blankenese was a very mixed, dentists, all sorts of people. And what I learnt was that, army officers are not the blockheads of character. If I dare say a journalistic caricature, they have widely interesting ranges. They're quite unexpected people. My boss in Salisbury was called Nigel d'Abernon McAllister-Smith, and he had been educated at the universities of Santiago and Texas. He had been a cowpuncher, and he was currently married to the daughter of a chief of the Yugoslav secret police.

[laughs] Right.

My boss in Hamburg had been court-martialled because flying… He had been an Air OP pilot, and flying home one day after a rather too-generous lunch, he saw some friends on the road below, went down to salute them, and took the wings off his plane on the telegraph poles. He wasn't injured, it was all very slow motion. But his life was lived like that.

I can imagine.

So it was an extremely educational experience.

OK.

And I suppose that's what I would really say about it. And I finished up as a, pretty good officer, imitation of an officer and a gentleman. [laughter]

[25:09]
OK. So let's go on to Christ's and Cambridge. You did Law and Economics.

Economics. Well Law, I've explained.

Yes. Fine. I know why you did Law, but, why Economics?

Well, I was lucky enough in my first term at Cambridge to meet a girl at Girton whom I subsequently married, and, she was reading Economics. [laughs]

Ah.

Also, actually, the first two years of Law were quite interesting, because they were Constitutional and Roman and things like that. The third year looked to me a bit of a slog, and although I was told by my tutor I could have got a First if I had stayed with it, I did the second part of the Economics Tripos, which is two years, in a year. Consequently I only got a 2:2. But, it was, it was very very interesting. Because at

that time, I'm talking about 1954/5, Keynes's students and colleagues were still teaching, people like Joan Robinson, Kahn were all there. And one of your ex-colleagues, Sam Brittan, was in the same, one of the tutorial groups I was in.

Oh yes.

I can remember walking back across Christ's Pieces arguing my case for what I've always believed in, which is floating exchange rates, and Sam, although I'm sure he'd deny it now [laughs], was in favour of fixed.

[laughs] Mm.

So, anyway, that's, that was how it worked out. And then…

[26:56]
And, I mean do I detect a sort of, stream of socialism in what you have been, you know, in your experiences to date, do you think?

I'm…

I'll get on to this later when we talk about…

I'm a social Liberal, and an economic Conservative.

Mm. OK. Yes.

And, since the most important bit of government is economics, provided it, it behaves properly in the social liberal front… I did vote for Harold Wilson in '64. Doug Gorman described me as the only truly floating voter he had ever known. [laughter]

[27:35]
Very good. Did you have any interests, I mean, interests outside your studies while at college?

Rowed for the college.

You rowed?

For the college, yes.

Oh. So you, you took up athletic interests when you were…?

Well I rowed at school. I mean, I…

Ah, but you had told me you weren't, weren't interested in sport.

Well yeah, but I mean, I didn't, I wasn't sort of, top-notch rowing. I, I took it up, because, as I told the gym master, and nearly caused him to have an apoplectic fit, I said, 'You can do it sitting down sir.' Which was a really profound mistake on my part, but… I liked it, and it had a… Rowing had a very good social life.

Mm. Fine.

And, I suppose really, my interests at Cambridge, apart from working, which was, I didn't… In my… After the first two terms I didn't go to a law lecture except Lauterpacht on international law. Because once again, there's somebody who was actually saying, writing what international law was. But the economics thing, it was moving so fast, you had to go to the lectures, because the books didn't have it.

No, indeed.

But, apart from that, I was lucky enough to be quasi-engaged. I mean, girls were very scarce in Cambridge in the Fifties.

Mm, indeed.

And, and I picked an absolute winner. Well winner in those circumstances, not in life as it turned out. But… And so, I was rather preoccupied being engaged, but I also

belonged to a thing called the Original Christian Minstrels, which is a highly politically incorrect body. I'm now going to be highly politically incorrect, and who knows, the video recorder may explode. But there used to be things called Nigger Minstrels.

Mm. Oh.

And, one of the nineteenth-century members of Christ's, a fellow called Scott-Gatty, wrote many of the Original Christian Minstrels, Nigger Minstrels songs, and founded a club at the college called the Original Christian Minstrels. And we sang the Nigger Minstrels songs. 'Keep down de middle of de road,' and so on. But also the cockney music hall songs. 'I'm Henery the Eighth I am,' you know, that sort of stuff.

Mm.

Belonged to a dining club called the Beaufort, which was very smart, run by Jack Plumb, who was the doyen of the tutorial staff. [pause] Didn't do much else actually, to be honest, apart from rowing and socialising. Rowing takes up a lot of time actually.

[30:40]
It does. So, I mean as a result of your Army service and, and Cambridge, I mean did you feel you sort of emerged as a, a well-rounded individual?

Never thought about it Alan, to be honest. [laughter] I mean, as I say, I'm…

I suppose what I'm asking is, did you feel you came out rather more mature than, say, students come out of college these days?

Oh, it was quite interesting actually, because, the way it worked back in those days was that, if you were reading an arts subject you did your National Service before you came up. If you were reading a science or mathematical subject, they thought you would lose your grip, so they actually, you were allowed to postpone your National Service till after you had finished your university career. And if you went on to do a

PhD or something, you went on postponing it, like a, almost like a Continental student, you know.

Right, yes.

And the gap between somebody like… Well, I was part of a set of four. There were other groupings. Life, your friendships in life are like a Venn diagram aren't they, with overlapping sectors.

Yes.

But this four consisted of me, not by any means the leader I hasten to say, a guy called Michael who had been at Latymer with me right through the school career. Michael's National Service was as a Parachute gunner, including Egypt. Peter Dixon, who is, they're both still good friends of mine, who had been a Signals officer, Shrewsbury. He was the fourth generation of the Dixons to come to Christ's. And Christ's turned his son down for that reason.

Really?

His son had to go to Caius. Yah. They actually said, 'There have been too many of your family here.'

That's extraordinary. [laughs]

Well, this was, when would it have been? John is now… It would have been in the, in the Eighties. And, I mean Peter was bitterly upset at the time.

I'm sure.

And a guy called Humphrey Boyle, who was also a third or fourth generation Christ's family. I'm trying to remember what Humphrey had done in the Army. I don't think he was Cavalry, although, temperamentally he was Cavalry. Anyway, the four of us, it was quite amusing really. We all rowed. Three of us… All four of us were

Christian Minstrels. Two of us were members of the Beaufort[sp?], Humphrey and myself. Two of us were members of the Marguerites, which was the top college sporting club, which was Michael and Peter. [laughs] And so it went on. But we, I mean, Humphrey, because he lives up in Yorkshire, a bit remote. He was Lord Lieutenant for a while, I think, or is it High Sheriff? Anyway. So… But, with our backgrounds, the Army background, I mean, two others of our friends were, the guy who said to Michael Mosley, 'Are you Oswald's son?', who was a second generation Christ's man, he went to Korea and got a big hole blown in his chest, and another chap called John Whybrow, who lost both his legs in Korea. We four were lucky in not being sent to Korea, it could have been tough and go.

Mm. Yes indeed.

But… And several people in my barrack room at Eaton Hall did go to Korea and some of them died. So, anyway. That meant you were, you know, you were two years older, which is a big gap at that time anyway, but compared to somebody who was just straight out school, it was a different world, you know.

Right. Indeed.

I'd been the official Territorial Army guy to the Reeperbahn [laughter], you know, for taking visiting Territorials.

[35:25]
OK, let's move on then. So you had your degree, your 2:1 in Law, your 2:2 in Economics. And, presumably you were looking for a job?

Well, yes, well actually in those happy, far-off days, jobs were looking for us.

And you became Assistant Principal at the Commonwealth Relations Office.

Yes, well that…

What did that mean?

One of the few times in my life I've cried.

Oh. You'll have to explain that I think.

Well how it worked was that, for the private sector there was the milk round, and they came round, and they talked to you and if they liked you they invited you to come and see their factory, and, that was the first time I had seen anything like the Old Trafford Industrial Estate or the Yorkshire Copper Company. If you wanted to go into the Civil Service you had the choice of two forms. There was a formal, academic, exam, which was, well, I say, it was formal academic, and there was a less, more like a sort of, very grown-up Eleven Plus. And when I was a teenager I thought I would like to be either a diplomat or a barrister. I realised as time went on that I was not prepared to submit myself to the poverty-stricken bit of being a barrister from a working-class family. [laughing] And, I really had never seen myself as the kind of person who might pass the exam for the Civil Service.

Despite the fact you had an excellent academic record in passing exams to date?

Well I had got there… Yeah, but, you know, it's… Also… Anyway. To cut a long story short, I actually entered for the exam, the Eleven Plus one, and in fact came fifth out of 1,000 candidates. And was provisionally offered… The top, the top department is the Treasury; the next department is the Foreign Office; the Home Office collects the rubbish; and the others are scattered in between. And, it may not be like that now but that's how it was, certainly seemed, then. Anyway. I was offered this provisional… It was always a provisional offer, depending on your final exam results, in the Foreign Office, as a third secretary, you know, which I was really bucked about. And, an almost unheard of event occurred, apparently. They withdrew it, and offered me the Commonwealth Office instead, which in those days was a separate entity. And that was when I, when I got that letter, that was when I burst into tears. Well, I actually went to the Buttery, where there was a guy called Bill, and I burst into tears there, telling him what had happened. And he shut the Buttery, which, shut everyone else out, and fed me port and Stilton until I cheered up. [laughter] [38:55]

So, anyway, so I went into the Commonwealth Office. And the trouble with the Commonwealth Office in those days was that, it was nearly as big as the Foreign Office, but the Commonwealth was not by any means as big and important as the rest of the world. And, it really… It was very interesting. I learnt some quite interesting things. I mean, one of the things I learnt was that you can prove anything with logic. It depends on what you want to prove.

Right.

So you can write a minute to argue this or that. And particularly if you don't have to put any numbers in it. If you don't have to say that course A will cost 3,000 people their lives, and course B will cost ten, you can prove anything. But anyway. And I wrote some good papers there, and for a time I was the office expert on riparian rights on the Upper Zambezi. Because at the time we were building the Kariba Dam, or at least arranging the finance for the Kariba Dam.

Mm. Yes, yes.

Anyway, after about, ten or eleven months of this, arriving in a leisurely manner having watched the rehearsals for the Trooping of the Colour on Horse Guards, and leaving at six, and spending quite a lot of time reading in the library, I decided I didn't want to do that any more. And my then wife was what is now called an HR director, was then called a personnel manager, and she knew various people, and so she arranged various appointments for me.

Sorry, who was she HR manager for, or personnel director for?

Well, Temple Press, which published the *Motor Sport*.

Oh yes. Mhm.

Remember?

Yes, indeed.

I mean she… Well you won't… You don't need thumbnail sketches of everybody I my life, but she was quite important.

Mm.

Anyway. In amongst other people she arranged a meeting with a guy at, Urwick Diebold, do you remember?

Mhm.

Well Urwick Orr as it was. Remember?

Urwick Orr, indeed, yes.

A wonderful brigadier type person, retired, big grey moustache. And we had this quite jolly interview, and, at the end he said, 'You know, I think you would make quite a respectable management consultant. But, wouldn't it be a good idea to do some managing first?' Something that hasn't been said to a would-be management consultant for at least the last 30 years. So I said, 'Well put like that sir, yes it does sound a bit that way. What would you suggest?' He said, 'Why don't join one of these new-fangled computer companies?'

[41:45]
Just taking you back one step. Management consultant. This was something you were thinking about, or…?

Yes. I was thinking of becoming a management…

How did that… Why did you think of that?

Well because Elizabeth suggested it. [laughs]

Oh I see. I see.

I mean I went to see, what was it, who was the guy who was running Trust House Forte in, when it was called, just called Trust Houses?

Oh.

Lord somebody. He was a very well-known figure at the time. Anyway, she arranged an interview for me with him, and various other people.

Right. Mm.

And… But I thought management consultancy would be quite an interesting activity actually. And Urwick Orr had a very good reputation and so forth. In fact they were effectively the only management consultants in that, 1956 we're talking about.

Mhm. Mm.

And in fact…

I mean at that time, was it clear what a management consultant did?

Well Urwick Orr certainly thought it was, and I did. I mean, you were, in those days you were a management consultant. You advised management on how to do things better.

OK. So… Right.

[43:00]
Anyway. So he said, 'Why don't you get some experience, and join one of these new-fangled computer companies?' And of course being me, I went off and joined Burroughs, who at that time were not really a new-fangled computer company; they were an 1896 manufacturer of adding machines. [laughs]

Indeed, yes.

And so, I went from turning up at Whitehall in a pinstripe suit on Friday… I should say by the way that, when I handed in my resignation, I instantly got a meeting with the head of, it wasn't called the head of personnel or resources, I can't remember what his title was. He was a chap called Barraclough if I remember rightly, in the Foreign Office, who said, 'We don't really want to lose you dear boy. I mean, wouldn't you like to come and be a third secretary now?' So I said, 'No, thank you, I don't think so.' 'Well, what about taking a sabbatical, seeing if you like it outside, and coming back if you don't?' And I said, being always a person who believed in, if you were crossing a bridge, you burn it behind you, I said, 'No, I, I think not, thank you very much sir. Very kind of you.' And so I, from Friday advising the Earl of Home, who at the time was the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, by the following Friday week I was trying to sell mechanical adding machines to sweetie shops in Peckham. It was a bit of a culture change [laughs], to say the least. In the same suit I should say.

[laughs] Did they give you training?

Burroughs gave you an excellent sales training. Really good. The guy who… I was their first actual graduate. Previously they had always recruited qualified accountants. Because, although I describe it as adding machines, the real money was in selling accounting machines, which you no doubt remember.

Yes. Mhm.

A thing called, well, the one that filled most of my time was called the Sensimatic, which was a box about yay big, with a moving carriage like a typewriter, and 3,000 moving parts inside it, driven by an electric motor, you know. And, I was the first graduate, as opposed to qualified accountant or, treasurer, or, which were the kind of people they had always previously recruited. But the sales training was really excellent. And, and again, you meet unusual people. The guy who trained me and then a couple of years later became my zone manager as they were called, during the war he had captained a schooner in the Adriatic running guns to Tito's lot with, as

company, his mistress, a Yugoslav princess, on board. [laughter] There were some very interesting people about just after the war.

Well indeed, yes. And you stayed with Burroughs quite a long time.

Nine and a bit years

Yes, indeed.

Until 1964, yah.

[46:37]
Mm. What did you enjoy most about the job?

[pause] The company.

Mhm. Mhm.

I mean, I don't mean…

So do you mean the people or the…?

The people. Yes.

Yes, the people. Mhm.

They were very good fun. [laughs] Plymouth Brother. The guy who had been the chair, President of the Rugby Football Union, Cyril Gadney. A vast man, enormous man. [pause] A chap who had been at Winchester and Sandhurst. It was a very mixed lot. And they were good company.

Did you learn lessons there which, you know, have been beneficial…?

Oh, you learnt… Well one, one of the lessons I learnt was, was selling. I wasn't a top-notch salesman, but I wasn't bad. And I made a decent living. I mean, I was earning, in the, at the end of the Fifties, beginning of the Sixties, about £3,000 a year.

Yes. Which was pretty good money in those days.

Which was very good money at the time.

Indeed.

And, so it was… I mean, and they, they looked after me, in a variety of ways. I mean I can remember, my first eighteen months or so were very unsuccessful. And, my branch manager, the branch was in, on the corner of Stratford Place in Oxford Street, a guy called Peter Pentz, and to give you some idea of the scale, he was on the British Boxing Board of Control, and he had a flat in Park Lane. And he was a Canadian, notorious for very few words. And I was working late on a proposal one evening and waiting for Elizabeth to come in and collect me, and, Peter said, 'Oh, come into my office for a moment.' I sat down across his desk. He looked at me for a while, and said, 'You must hear the wolves on your doorstep.' We'll I'd sold sweet Fanny Adams, you know. So, he said… I said, 'A bit sir.' You notice all these sirs, which nobody would now say, but were de rigueur in those days.

Mm.

'Yeah,' he said, 'a bit puzzled by you really. Tell you what,' he said. 'I think, you should go and talk to Jim Power.' Jim Power was the manager of the newly-formed City branch. He was a Liverpool Irishman. Another outstanding character. Anyway, I went up to see Jim Power you see. And he gave me the applicants test, which for some reason no one had ever given me. And it was crystal clear from this that I didn't know a debit from a credit, or door side from window side as they say. And, Jim said, 'You don't know any accounting, do you? It must make it hard selling accounting systems.' So I said, 'Yeah, I suppose you're right sir.' He said, 'Well you'd better go off and get a qualification.' So I went off and did a correspondence course with the Institute of Cost and Works Accountants.

Mm. How long did that take?

About six months.

Right.

And I did learn that debits were the door side and credits were the window side. And started selling, you see. And from that time on Jim regarded me as a bit of a protégé. So, a bit later, which would have been in about 1960, he recruited me into City Branch, where I formed a little team with the guy who had captained the schooner, Doug Gorman…

Ah.

…as the systems engineer as he was called, and me as the junior salesman, part of the sales team. And, when the brown stuff hit the fan, and it became quite clear that Elizabeth was going to die, they said to me, 'Mm. Well you, come in when you can. And, we'll take you out of that group and put you in this group with Tim.'

[51:52]
Sorry. Not wanting to intrude too much, but what happened to Elizabeth, what was the problem there?

Well, she died of cancer of the cervix, which today would have been completely treatable, but then was both misdiagnosed and mishandled. And the process took about, a year I suppose.

Yes. I just wanted to…

No it's OK. I mean…

…finish up Burroughs. Do carry on.

A big disaster.

Yes. Yes.

But, Burroughs said, you know, or the Burroughs management said, 'Well here you are, go in with Tim.' The way the commission system worked, there was a commission coming in for machines to be installed, so there was no pressure to sell. 'Come in when you can.' And they put up with me like that for the nine months until she died. Which, I was, I was very appreciative of, and made me feel, almost disloyal when I left to start CMG. [laughs] But, they were a good company, but I, I had decided… Well, I'll come on to why I left in a moment.

[53:06]
So, so Bryan, I mean you had been working for a number of years for Burroughs, you had your own group there. But, what, you were getting itchy feet perhaps?

I didn't have my own group. I was the second-in-command of a group of three. [laughs] No. I mean, it…

Well you were part of a group which was working together.

I was part of a group, yah. And it was, it was good fun. But one day I was sitting in a meeting in Jim Power's office, and his new secretary walked in. And I thought, as I have now thought three times in my life, that one.

Mhm.

And, she was a young Irish girl. He had recruited her in a nightclub. A critical part of her duties was taking his betting slips down to a local bookmaker's. She used to make his letters up because she couldn't take shorthand. But she was very beautiful. And after a slightly fervid pursuit, fending off other people, she agreed to marry me. And she instantly got pregnant. And since… And she was talking about twelve tall sons. She was about ten years younger than me.

Twelve small[sic] sons?

Well she was the eldest of twelve.

Ah. OK.

Irish family, you know.

Tradition, right. [laughs]

And, I thought to myself, how am I going to support twelve sons, tall or not? And I had decided that, for whatever reason, I was not going to make the top in Burroughs. I was very well thought of, I was well paid, but, I wasn't going to… And, I wasn't sure I wanted to make… Because the root to the top involved a lot of geographical movement. I perhaps should have said that one of the reasons I left the CRO was that it was obviously clear from Elizabeth's state of health that we would never have been able to go to places like Nigeria together. And, I wasn't particularly keen to be moved around the countryside. And I happened to read a Burroughs internal book. God knows why they had written it, but it dealt with setting up a punch card service bureau. You've got to remember, this is 1963, 4, and computers were only just appearing on the horizon.

Yes. Would the IBM 360 have been available then?

It was still the 1401.

1401, yes.

The Burroughs B200. And they were brand spanking new as well.

Mm. Mm.

And, I read this book, and it seemed that actually, if you substituted for a punch card installation, and Burroughs had a particularly good punch card computer, the B200

had three sort of manifestations. One was punch card, one was mag tape, and one drove their cheque sorter.

Oh yes.

Remember their magnificent cheque sorting machine. Which is still, you know, in existence. And, the punch card machine in fact, had they majored on that and gone for IBM and Hollerith's as it was then, and Powers punch card installations with it, they'd have wiped the floor with them. I can remember going to see an installation, I think it was a newspaper somewhere in Fleet Street. This was while I was, this was part of being a Burroughs salesman, if you see what I mean.

Yes.

And, there was this sort of machine standing on a little dais in the middle of this vast empty room. And the chap who was showing us said, 'That has replaced all the tabulators, sorters and collators and printers that were in this room, and they filled the room.'

Mm.

And I thought, gosh, you know, there's a, there's a thought. So I was… In those days you drove into the City to work.

Mm. [laughs]

I was driving in from Putney to the City, passing Lambeth Palace – I remember it quite vividly actually – and I thought, yes, one could set up a service bureau. And what's more, all these people have got spare time on these machines. I mean that's where things like, the one that Sandy Douglas was involved with, at BP was it? C-E-I-R, some…

C-E-I-R.

Some name like that.

Yes. Yes.

[58:30]
Anyway. All these, all these people with computers were trying to sell their spare time. And I thought, so you could buy the spare time from them, and use it to run a, a computer bureau. So, I thought about it a bit more. And then I thought, well now, what do I need to do this? Believe it or not, I didn't think about money. [laughs] It didn't occur to me that you needed to borrow a large amount of money to start such an entity. I thought about people.

Mhm

And I thought, I need somebody who really knows about computers. And I've got somebody sitting across the desk from me in the form of Doug Gorman. So I'll have a word with him. And I really need somebody who, unlike me, is a really dedicated, top-notch salesman. And I've got another one, there's my old friend Bob Collins, who had been on the first training course in Burroughs with me, was the godfather to my eldest child. You notice? C, M and G.

Mhm.

So, I approached Doug, and we sat on a wall in Ropemaker Street. Because he had just, at that moment, decided to resign and go to Coopers.

Oh right. Mhm.

Sat on this wall, and we talked about it. And he said, 'I'll discuss it with Judy,' his wife. Because, she was the absolute compass of his life, Judy was. Smashing woman. And, so he came back after a bit and said, 'Why don't you come over to Blackheath, with your wife, and we'll have a, a family powwow about it,' which we did, with Penelope Gorman, now one of the two richest women in the UK of course, seated on her chamber pot in the corner, [laughs] a thing I remember vividly.

Anyway. We thought it sounded a good egg, and Doug knew Bob, and, thought that he'd fulfil the selling bit of the role. So, we then sort of, sat down and started to think about, well, how do you set it up? So we need two things. We need somebody who's prepared to sell us computer time. And of course we needed a legal entity. So I went and talked to one of my Cambridge friends, who at the time was a partner in Radcliffes, a firm of solicitors in Westminster, and Angus, whose funeral I attended five, six weeks ago, alas, said, 'That sounds a good idea. I've only got one problem,' he said. 'I've an existing client doing something like that, and, I wouldn't want to get into difficulty with conflict of interest.' He said, 'I'll tell you what. The three of us can have lunch together and we can discuss it.' His existing client was John Hoskins. [laughs]

Ah. OK. Mm.

So, we sat in the St Stephen's Club in Queen Anne's Gate and had lunch, a very jolly lunch. And John agreed that he didn't think there'd be a conflict of interest, and I agreed, I didn't mind either. And so, Angus… So then he said, Angus, 'And of course you need an auditor.' And he said, 'I know a very nice little firm, four-partner firm, in the City, called Dearden, Harper and Miller. The young partner there, Richard Brandt, is a, a real enthusiast for all these kinds of things. So we'll go and talk to him.' So we went and talked to Richard Brandt. And he, he introduced us to his senior partner, Bill Lamaison, who was a magnificent man. [laughs] He was sitting in his office, in his braces, with his jacket over the back of his chair, and, every so often he'd get up and have to get something from a filing cabinet. The first time he got up, he knocked his jacket off the back of his chair. He walked across it, to and from the filing cabinet. And when we had agreed we'd work together, he said, 'We'd better all go out and have lunch on that,' you see. And I remember walking down, I can't remember the name, a little street that runs from Eastcheap down to the Embankment, you know, it's not the Embankment, near the Customs House, with Bill walking in front talking to Doug, with his footprints in dust on the back of his jacket. [laughing] Anyway. And so that turned out well. And Richard Brandt said, 'You know, we've got one real problem, and that is, recording the time which our clerks spend on clients' work. And if you could produce a computer solution for that, I think we wouldn't be the only people who would be interested.' Now as it happened, I had

produced such a system on Sensimatics for Touche Ross, who at that time were in Salisbury House, on Moorgate?

Mhm. Yes.

And so I knew quite a bit about how it worked.

Mm. Sorry, this was a computer program, on punch cards, or…?

No. Well, Touche Ross were using accounting machines.

Ah, right. Right.

Keeping their records on cards, you know?

On cards, yes.

But what Richard Brandt[sp?] was talking about was a computerised system.

Mhm.

And so, talking to Richard, and thinking about what I had done for Touche Ross, we evolved ACT, Accountants' computer Time Ledger [Accountants' Time Ledger, ACT], which was our first product. And…

[1:05:02]
Now who… I mean, you defined that, you defined what it was going to do. Who actually wrote it?

Well… [laughs] That brings us to the fourth member of the party.

Ah, OK.

Doug said, 'I'm not really a programmer,' although he was in fact a shit hot programmer. Sorry. But, he said, 'Young Bob Fawcett,' who's just joined us, 'is a very good programmer. So why don't we ask him to join in?' So, there were the four of us. I designed the system and most of the paper and so forth; Doug turned that into a proper systems analysis, travelling to and from Exeter where he was by that time working for Commercial Union, for Coopers. Bob started to write the programs, Bob Fawcett that is, and Bob Collins stated to sell it off plan.

OK.

We found that none of the Burroughs computer users wanted to sell us any time. But Doug had a friend in Honeywell, who at that time were out in Brentford, and were just introducing their 200 series, which competed directly with the 1401, and were desperate for custom. And they had got a customer called Twinlock, you may remember, stationery suppliers?

Mhm, I remember Twinlock, indeed.

Down in Beckenham.

Indeed.

Who were willing to sell computer time. So, we had the ingredients of a solution. And, as a result of Doug's introduction to Honeywell, Bob left Burroughs, Bob Fawcett, left Burroughs and joined Honeywell, and was working in their computer room, at that point as an operator. And so, we were all, at this time, still in our day jobs.

[1:07:10]
So you were still working for Burroughs at that, at this time?

Yup, all still in our day jobs. And, we got to a point where it was agreed that I would give up my Burroughs job to act as a collator and coordinator and so on, and we would really launch the thing. So, I did, resigned and so forth. And the others

subsidised me out of their earnings. Because none of us had any capital. And we started to do what we did for all of my time in CMG, which was that we financed our first piece of office equipment, which was an electric typewriter, by going to a leasing company, and leased it. The leasing company was called Black Arrow, and it just happened to be part of the Granada Group. And my sister had just married the heir to the Granada Group, Alex Bernstein. [laughter] So, Black Arrow were quite happy to be helpful. Although, it turned out from their point of view a thoroughly satisfactory commercial transaction, because, we leased that typewriter, we leased the fitting-out of a complete computer room, which was completely new to them, because, in theory they're like a bank, the lease is, the piece of equipment is collateral for the loan.

Yes. Mm.

Now, that's all right with a typewriter, although in reality, as I learnt subsequently working with what Black Arrow turned to be in Ireland, Hamilton Leasing, the stuff they get back from the leases when they do repossess are like all banks' collateral, they're useless. Because they're, you know, you don't want to be selling second-hand and so on and so forth. So, but we persuaded them, no doubt helped by Alex's situation, or my sister's situation, that, they could finance this complete computer room, which of course, there was no real collateral there. And then they financed the computers. And I mean we were buying, we were buying Honeywells at the rate of one a year, when we got going, which we did quite quickly.

So at this point you were running it on your own machines?

No no, this… Well, I haven't… I've jumped to explain the financial basis.

Oh OK. Mm.

But you notice, no actual borrowed money.

No.

CMG never… It had £1500 of actual capital put into it.

Mm.

And there was a stage a couple of years later when we were really tight for payroll and my rich sister lent me a couple of grand. But, that was all. Everything else was generated cash from the business. Coming back to where we had got to.

Yes.

[1:10:54]
We started selling ACT. And it was a, it was, I honestly believe it was the first complete purpose-written package, software package…

Really?

…application software package, that was sold in the UK. And it was absolutely complete. You got the stationery, you got the binders for holding the stationery, you got bags for delivering the material to and fro. Because it was all punch card and hand-written stuff, you know.

Yes, of course.

I mean I've got a… And, the point is that, accountant customers were so charming. It was all run from my home in Putney, this bit of it, and they'd ring up, and Catherine would answer the phone, and in the course of the conversation Jonathan would cry, and they'd say, 'Oh I can hear the baby crying Mrs Mills. I'll hang on while you deal with him.' [laughter] And I've got a vivid recollection of a senior partner's wife of one of the firms of accountants walking up my front garden path with her ACT input bag, or the company's, her firm's, ACT input bag in her hand, and two children on the other hand [laughs], and my wife standing at the door with our eldest son on her arm, to take it.

Mm.

So we went through that phase.

[1:12:26]
Let me just see if I've got this right. So, you had realised that there was this spare computer time on many companies' machines which could be sold off to a third party.

Could be bought by us…

Could be bought by you and…

…and used to do processing for other people.

Indeed. And…

Who couldn't afford a computer.

But the… Indeed. But the creation of ACT seems to have been almost fortuitous. I mean…

Yes.

So you had… Well, if you had not had ACT, what would you have developed, do you think?

We would have done ad hoc bureau processing.

Oh I see.

Such as came our way.

Right.

I mean, soon after we got, we got a few customers on ACT, somebody, one of our contacts said, could we do their payroll? So we took on their payroll. Then came a

quite significant breakthrough, which was still at the stage where we were operating in a very scattered way from Doug's house, my house, Bob Collins's house. Bob Fawcett at that stage was still living at home so he didn't have a house. Somebody came to Doug and said, 'There's a department… Owen and Owen [Owen Owen], department store in Liverpool, they've got a very severe programming problem. Could you help them with it?' So, we looked at each other. And I can remember sitting around the fire at Doug's place, and three of us talking about it. And, we agreed that, Bob agreed, that, Bob Fawcett agreed, that yes, he would go up to Liverpool, stay up in Liverpool – you see at that point he was unmarried – for a few days at a time. Sort it out. We had an anxious debate about how much we could charge, and agreed that £80 a day was probably as much as we could get away with. And, off Bob toddled to Owen and Owen [Owen Owen]. And then, somebody came and said, 'I am a consultant to British Relay Wireless.' You remember British Relay Wireless?

Mm.

'And they've got a Honeywell 200, and they have programming problems. Could you help them?' That was a guy called Jim Donaldson, with whom I'm still in touch, who at that time was a consultant with PE. And so we, we said yes we could, but we needed more resources. And so we started recruiting our friends, basically. In fact really more Doug's and Bob Fawcett's friends, because they were in the programming community.

Right.

Meanwhile Bob Collins was still selling ACT and indeed payroll, our own payroll. And, we recruited two, three, four people. And we started doing programming jobs in Assembler. And we then were introduced to somebody, a market research company, and they wanted to do a job called the Air Index, which analysed air traffic between airports. And, their budget meant that we really couldn't afford to write it in Assembler. And so we're going to have to turn it down. And I persuaded my colleagues that, it was basically a punch card job, and so we could use a Honeywell

package called TABSIM, which is as its name suggests simulated tabulating machines, combined with this new-fangled COBOL stuff.

Ah. Right.

And the programmers all said, COBOL? That's a, girl's game, sort of thing, you know. [laughter] But eventually it was agreed that if I would do the TABSIM, God help me, they would write the programs in COBOL. Now that really was an educational experience for me, because that was the first time I had ever actually written a program. Well, I mean TABSIM wasn't really a program, but, it took you through all the nausea of programming.

Mm. Right.

Did punching the cards, you know. Sticking silver paper over the holes you had put in the wrong place. All that sort of thing. And doing it at Brentford at two in the morning, which was the only time we could get on the Brentford machine. So… But it worked, the COBOL worked. The programs came out much quicker than anyone expected, and everyone was converted.
[1:17:51]
And it just so happened that that coincided with the Honeywell 200 really beginning to take off, and they being pleased with us. And so we got Rank Xerox, we got Granada, Granada Books, not the television stuff. We got British Relay Wireless. British Relay Wireless had moved their computer into new offices in Croydon; would we like to occupy a bit of the space, because it would be handy for both of us if we did? And this basement in Blackheath is getting a bit, is not really entirely suitable for what you've got. And so, in a couple of years we were ten or twelve people working in proper offices in Croydon, with a computer at our beck and call, and, we had got a, a business going.

Mm.

On the way, we had parted company with Bob Collins, because, he was a man with his finger in many pies, antiques, second-hand machines, his Burroughs job, and we

said it was a case of in or out: he either came full-time into CMG, as the rest of us of course by this time were, or, he had to go. And he went. I'm still friends with him. He lives in a large house. Do you know the Ferranti dealership at Runnymede, off the M25?

Not [inaud], no.

Junction 13. As if you're going to Egham. And on the right-hand side as you come off it there's this long white building, which is a Ferranti dealership.

Oh yes. Oh yes.

If you look up, there's a big green slope called Tite Hill. At the top there's a William Chambers eighteenth-century house, and Bob Collins lives in that. [laughter]

Right.

[1:19:58]
Anyway. So, we had now got this business which had two parts. It had the ACT, and we had written a payroll package, we'd got some payroll processing business, and the software, the program writing business, in which respect we were like no other service company of the time. CAP, Logica were all software consultancy type businesses. We did both the software and the consultancy, and the processing.

Yes, who was the competition at that time then? Would it have been CAP and Logica?

Sometimes.

Mhm. Or was there plenty of, plenty of business to go round?

There was plenty of business about. To be perfectly honest, when I was at Burroughs we thought a lot about National Cash and Olivetti, but, actually, thinking about your competition is, in my opinion, a waste of energy. You don't know what they're going

to do. All you know is what you can do. Mimicking them is never a good idea, because you won't do it as wholeheartedly as they do it. And so, I discouraged my people from talking and thinking about the competition.

Right.

Anyway, so we've now got this business, which had these two aspects to it, the processing side and the software side. And we had got a lot of work. And the COBOL in particular… The thing was, most of the software competitors were writing in Assembler, and we were simply cutting a… We were, per hour we were the most expensive. In output terms, we were undercutting them. And we also adopted a model which was based in fact on what Doug learnt at Coopers & Lybrand, where our quotations for software were expressed as… Our estimate… There's three stages. There's the preliminary stage, the design stage, and the programming stage. And we used to give a ballpark figure for the whole project, a fixed price for the preliminary stage, and two estimates for the other two stages, was how we arrived at the total price. But when we said something was a fixed price for a section, it was a fixed price. So when we had finished the first bit, the design and programming both became fixed. But, we billed on a time and material basis fortnightly, up to a maximum of our fixed price estimate. So it was a fixed price, but, we billed, and were paid in most cases, on a fortnightly basis. So, it was not unusual for us to recruit somebody. And I mean at this point we were doubling every year. We'd recruit somebody on day one, and put them to work; bill them for the first time on day fourteen. We paid on day 28, at the latest, by which time we had the money to meet their salary.

[1:23:36]
Right. Right. So you had actually a splendid cash flow.

Oh we had… We… CMG in my time never had an overdraft.

Really? Mm.

Never borrowed any money and never had an overdraft. Leased things, but…

Who evolved that, was that one of your ideas, or…?

I think mostly me. But mostly out of pure ignorance, if you see what I mean. [laughter] In other words, I didn't realise that it was such a startlingly original thing to do. [laughs]

Well, indeed, yes.

But it worked. I mean obviously, things like ACT and the process, which was the payroll, we billed on a sort of, delivery basis. But people were very good. I mean people… At one point we were working for the Commercial Union as a result of Doug's connection with them through Coopers, and I mean they used to send their cheques down by hand to Croydon.

Oh right, yes.

Yes. I mean, you know, and, these were not small cheques.

Yah, indeed.

So, if you like, the build-up depended on a number of things. One was the, it wasn't so much a realisation, as pure, again, pure ignorance, the assumption we made that you could get resources and pay for them as you used them, whether it be computer time or property or whatever, and people. Secondly, that, we never used sprats to catch mackerel. In other words, our price was our price for the work that you were asking for, sir. No, we're not going to do that for twopence, because you'll do… Lots of people wrote the programs for bureau jobs on a cheap basis, on the belief that they were going to be paid, they're going to recover it from the bureau processing. You never did. So, our programming quotes were our programming quotes, whether we were going to do the processing or you were going to run it on your own stuff.

Mm.

[1:25:54]

But, no, there are a number of interesting things happened during that early time. As I said, we were recruiting our friends, or our acquaintances, people… So we weren't buying pigs in poke. We knew what we were looking for. And one of them, a chap called Richard Ball, said, 'Well you know, we're in… It's all very risky. What about a slice of the action?' So we thought, mm. Slice of the action. Hang about, how do we do this? And thus was born the CMG share scheme, which again, I mean, for example Steve Shirley had a very good scheme working at FI, but it wasn't as fundamental as ours was, because, we, we said to ourselves, well look, these are going to be real shares, they're not going to be options. People are actually going to… And people are actually going to have to buy them. So they're real. Now in order to do that, you have to have a price, and you have to have a marketplace. So, the way it finished up was that… Oh, and we thought, and if someone's got a rich aunt, they'll buy us out. We don't want that to happen. So, we initially started by saying you could only have x per cent of your salary or profit share. It started by saying you could spend your profit share, because all… There was always a profit share on shares. But we found, of course, that people didn't have rich aunts, or if they did, that's not what they wanted to do. [laughs] And we gave that up.

[1:27:53]

So how did you value the company?

Sorry?

How did you value the company so you could set a price?

Ah, well that's, that…

Oh OK.

That was the, as you say, you have to have a price.

Yes.

Well we started by using the auditors, the aforementioned Dearden, Harper and Miller. Apart from, once we had ridden over Bill Lamaison's objection to the idea of staff owning shares at all, which he regarded as thoroughly socialistic and, 'Are you communists?' he said, to which we said, 'No' [laughs], although Doug was, and remained till he died, a champagne socialist. But, we started by using the auditors. Which was OK. But, it was an auditor's valuation; it wasn't a market valuation. And auditors' valuations are very cautious. And therefore we were in fact selling the company off too cheaply. And this was at a time when, for example somebody turned up from General Electric in America, [laughs] two big guys with crew cuts and moustaches and, steel-rimmed specs and Burberrys, who said, 'Write your own cheque,' to sell CMG to them. Which we decided not to do. And, a year later Europe was littered with the burnt-out remnants of what they had actually bought. But, we were selling the company too cheap, even if it was to our staff. So, I went round the merchant banks, and because they had been my territory when I was a salesman I had some contacts and so on, and we got one of them to, on a fee base, to value the company. And we used that. It only happened once a year, so… Well that was OK. A couple of years passed. And it was obvious they were getting stuck in a rut. So we decided that we needed to change the merchant bank. But we didn't really think it was a good idea just to drop a merchant bank. So what we did was, we overlapped them for a year. So, there was a year when we had two, a year when we had one, a year when we had two again. And we explained what we were doing, they accepted, and they got paid their fees and so on, so forth, all perfectly OK. And so we got a price which was as near the market price as you can get. And one of the things that I found very interesting, and in a way cheering, each bank approached the pricing issue from a different angle. One would approach it from assets, one from cash flow, one from a multiple of profits. But their answers, because, when we overlapped them, we had two sets of answers, and we never told either of them what the other had said, or give them any idea of previous valuations, how close together they were, convinced me that it was actually a professional activity. [laughter] But, so…

Mm.

[1:31:22]

So we, we now had a pricing policy, we had a marketplace, and we sold the shares. And as a result of that, over time, one of my happiest memories is when a woman who joined us as a temporary secretary, Barbara Ward, when she retired, at the age of 65, from CMG, the farewell party took the form of a Concorde flight to Barbados, and a three-day party in Barbados, all paid for by Barbara. And on that flight there were 120 people, you know. There were couples. And apart from me, there were 60 multimillionaires. By that time I wasn't, I was broke by that time, because this is after my Irish excursion. And I, I had been as near as damn it bankrupt a couple of times in between. But, the fact was that Barbara, Barbara's shares were worth 80 million. And, on that plane there were 60 multimillionaires that my share scheme had created. Which I was really quite chuffed about.

Well indeed. Indeed.

Anyway.

[1:32:53]
Let me talk just a little bit about, or ask a little bit, of the culture of the company. I mean, you had the system called Commander?

Ah that comes much later.

Does it? Oh I see.

After my time.

After your time.

Yah.

OK.

The culture of the company was based on a number of principles, some of which will sound rather pi. First of all we were honest. Secondly, we never under-quoted to get

business. Thirdly, it was completely transparent. In other words, everything, including the personnel files, were open to everybody. Not, very few people took advantage of it. But, if you wanted to, you could go and look in them. Which included our assessor. We did, we started doing formal appraisals from about, eighteen months into the, after the foundation, and carried them on all the way through.

Mhm.

So it was completely open. It was socially as equal as we could make it. Obviously, if you've got an organisation, you have to have a hierarchy, but the fact that I'm your boss does not mean you have to agree with my political opinions in the pub. And we did our damnedest for gender equality as well, although, for whatever reason, it never worked. When I say it never worked, I mean there were some outstanding examples, but, we never really achieved a situation, which we would have liked to have had, which was fifty-fifty between the sexes, you know.

Yes.

There were some outstanding examples, like Barbara Ward, you know. But…

[1:34:58]
So what was the driving force behind these three principles then, you and your founding members?

Yes, it was just, it's just…

That's how you thought you should...?

Bob Fawcett, Doug and I, thought that's how you should run a company.

That's how you should run a company. [laughter] Fair enough.

I mean, to some extent though, some of the, some of it, some of the more, what you might call less social, more managerial things… Do you remember Stafford Beer?

Oh yes.

Do you remember his 1963 book *Decision and Control* I think it was called?

Mhm.

I read *Decision and Control*, and many of the CMG operating principles were built on *Decision and Control*. CMG was a cybernetic system in Stafford Beer's sense. It was a black box for the inputs and outputs, and you correlated the inputs and the outputs, without necessarily understanding how the black box worked.

Mhm.

We believed in communication. One of my sayings was, instructions go through channels, but information flows any which way.

Right.

And so, it would be quite in order for a Dutch salesman to ring me up one day and ask me something, but equally, it was equally in order for me to ring him up and ask something, and his manager would not be fussed.

Mm. Mm.

He would not be allowed to fuss, because if he did fuss… Because, that was another thing. We had, and this always strikes people as contradictory, but just as in the Army there's a sharp distinction between officers and men, in CMG there was a sharp distinction between managers and non-managers. You were either a manager or you weren't. If you were a manager, you had a budget, you were accountable for it, you had people reporting to you. There were no semi-management jobs. And we didn't believe in matrix management either. [laughs] Command, you know, the hierarchy

ran straight down. [pause] So… I'm trying to sort… I mean some of the principles are in that text I gave you.

Mm. Yes.

And they were genuinely implemented. And we were not… In our totality we were unique. In the individual elements of it, lots of… I mean, Philip had some of them, John Hoskins had some of them. I mean, John Sharp, who is the guy who is today the high priest of the CMG religion [laughs], or the tribal shaman or, whatever you like to call him, John joined after I left in fact, but he was originally working as a programmer in a commercial company in Manchester, and he was being paid about, £500 a year or something. And, he saw a couple of adverts, including one for Hoskins. So, he came down to London, and he was interviewed. And at the end of the interview, the interviewer said, 'Well,' he said, 'I think you would do us very well.' He said, 'Would three grand be enough?' And John Sharp practically fell out of his trousers. [laughs] First of all, the three grand, but also the idea of being asked if it would be enough. [laughter] And, that was the atmosphere at that time. We were, we were consciously paying significantly more than people with apparently comparable jobs in other, in in-house installations, were earning, and I think that was probably true of CAP and Logica as well. I'm not so sure, because I don't know.

[1:39:08]
Do you think CMG had much influence on the rest of the industry?

They mostly thought we were mad.

Ah. [laughter] But, highly successful and mad.

Well, I mean, for most of the years I was there, we were growing at something like, 30 or 40 per cent. You know there's a rule which says that, if you divide your compound percentage growth into 69, you will get the number of years it takes you to double.

Oh right.

So if you're growing at 69 per cent a year, obviously you're doubling every year, but if you are growing at 30 per cent, you will be doubling every two years. And we grew steadily for, almost all the time I was there, in revenue terms, not necessarily in profit, but in revenue terms, at 30-odd per cent a year. Which meant, and this brings us to another quite important point, which meant that we were recruiting all the time. And one of our rules was, any doubt, out. In other words… And that related to the process of being interviewed. You turned up, and you, all your interviews took place on one day, you turned up, and you reported to reception. Reception in Croydon in particular, there was a girl called Carol George. If the first interviewer got a shake of their head from Carol, the interview didn't last very long.

Really? She must have been very perceptive.

Any doubt, out. Well, how people treat a receptionist…

Ah.

…is a very critical feature of life. Anyway. So, after you'd past the Carol[sp?] test, which you were completely unaware of of course, you would be interviewed by somebody who was going to, who was currently doing the job that you were applying for. So if you were applying to be a punch girl, you were interviewed by a punch girl. If you were being an accounts clerk, you were interviewed by an accounts clerk. Same rule applied. If they said, 'm, that was it. You were then passed on to the manager, to the first line manager of that part. Because there were only actually two levels of management inside a CMG operating company. And if he said yes, or rather didn't say no, you were passed on to the managing director. And the managing director either made you an offer or not. All within the day. Never had to hang around waiting for a letter or anything like that. And…

What… Sorry. Do carry on.

We weren't engaged in competitive recruiting, in the sense that, very often a company is looking for one, the ideal person to fill one specific job. We never were. We were

looking for a programmer, a systems analyst, an accounts clerk, and the first one that was good enough, we took.

Right.

Now, having been taken in, what happened next? [laughs] You went on a, well you were obviously given a very brief practical induction, you know, taken round, introduced, this is how it works and so on. But, within your first six months you went on a group familiarisation course. The thing about a group familiarisation course was that, it took place away from all our operations. Secondly, as far as we could manage it, it consisted of people who were not only mixed as to their job in the company, but also as to their geographical locations. So, an ideal course would have a Dutchman, a German, an Englishman, a Scotsman, a man, a woman, a programmer, a punch… You know.

Mm. Mm.

And the third thing was, that the instructing course were members of the board, always including at least one founder. And we took them through two days of, this is how CMG works, this is the history, these are the policies, these are what we expect you to do. They were all, as it were, how you behave in this company. In other words, it was cultural brainwashing.

Mhm. Mhm.

And, it involved a fair bit of *in vino veritas* as well. I mean my first memory of Jo Connell for example is, on her group familiarisation course, flying paper aeroplanes from the top floor of a Brussels hotel with her. [laughter] So, that was your first thing.

Mm.

Then later on there'd be, there was a kind of potential leader's course, where if you were being considered for management, you went on that, and again, the instructors

always included at least one founder. We spent quite a lot of time doing this. I, I always used to say, if I have to give an instruction about anything that's going to happen in less than six months to a year's time, something's going wrong.

Mm. True. What was staff turnover like?

Pretty low.

Pretty low. So, staff were really, fairly happy with the way the company was managed?

When it was merged with Logica, we held a wake, and the London one was in the Knights pub, a pub called, with, Knights something or other. Anyway. 800 people turned up in the course of the evening. This is for a company which is superficially defunct, right. 800 people turned up in the course of the evening, and we drank the pub dry. And the same thing happened in Holland.

[1:45:38]
Mm. You had operations in Continental Europe, but never in the States. Is that right?

Didn't like the idea of the States. Too far away.

Too far away. OK. OK.

Holland was a complete accident. *Reader's Digest*, who were friends of ours, and for whom we had done work, said, 'The Dutch operation's got a problem. Could you do anything about it?' So we sent a couple of our best guys over there, one of them being Nick Scholfield, whom you may remember.

Oh yes, mm. Yes.

The other one being Clive Paul, who left at an earlier date than Nick and didn't, wasn't as successful in the company as Nick. And after they'd been there for about

three months, we were over there talking to them, and they said, 'You know, we think there's a business here. We think we could do business, certainly in software. We don't need to speak Dutch. Bureau processing, different perhaps.' So we said, mm, yeah, that sounds good, a good idea. OK. And by that time they had two or three guys working with them, you know. We said, 'OK, you're the, you're the managing directors of the Dutch company then.' Because that was the other CMG feature, we never had single managers. Every, every subsidiary had two managing directors, every group…

How did that work? Didn't they quarrel?

Not in our hearing. [laughter] No, it would be… I mean, we chose them to some degree to match. But, no, usually, you know, if you take two people, one will be hot on admin, and the other will be creative.

Ah.

Right. Put 'em together.

OK.

And, you see, as somebody who left us because of this said to Doug and myself and Bob one day, he said, 'The trouble with dealing with you three,' he said, 'it's like dealing with a Hydra. It doesn't matter which head you speak to, you get the same answer.

That's a very interesting observation.

And what that meant was that we… We debated everything, loudly and… But, policy, the policy, when it was agreed, was the policy. And we had hammered it out. It was supported by an intellectual framework, a logical intellectual framework. You could defend it. I mean, this particular guy, South African who I had recruited, worked with me as a salesman in Burroughs, we teamed him up with a software guy, and we were doing one of our traditional subsidiary visits where we spent two days in

a subsidiary, talking to everybody. And, we were having this meeting, and one of the programmers, a very attractive girl, burst into the room in tears. And she said, 'That bastard Pat Molloy is being paid more than me, and he's not half as good.' So we dried her tears and patted her a bit, said, 'OK, we'll look into it love.' And so, we had a look at the lists. And guess what? All the women were right down the bottom of the pay scales.

Mm. Surprise surprise.

Well it turned out to be, to Doug and Pete, our, the two guys in charge, it turned out a big surprise. Because we said… We went through them one at a time and said… And we got them to rank them, and we… This became something we did regularly. You forcibly… It was called a sick bag list, because we started doing it on aeroplanes, in the days when there were paper sick bags, and they provided you with something to write on. And, you just listed all your people in order of how much you valued them. And then you checked to see that their salaries corresponded, regardless of their gender, and other things such as their colour and so forth.

Mm. Well indeed. And that made a big, a big difference?

Yah.

OK. OK.

And she was quite right, the programmer she was complaining about was much further down the scale than she was. And we forced them to correct it, and they, they didn't… That was, they were one of the pairs that left to do their own thing. Because, you know, we, people had to pay us, and for example, we were doing Forte's payroll, and Forte were notoriously slow payers, so we said to Doug, we were again on a visit, and payroll was due, and we said, 'Ring up Forte's managing director now, and say that, unless his cheque arrives within the next three hours, his payroll's not going to leave this building.' 'You can't do that!' 'Yes you can Doug, just do it.' 'No you can't! He'll leave, he'll…' 'Do it.' Rang up. The cheque was in the building within three hours. Payroll left on time. [pause] I suppose one of the, the

overriding principle was that, you stick to your principles regardless of the short-term disadvantage.

[1:51:44]
You left CMG in '81?

Yes.

Why was that?

[laughs] This is a sad tale.

Oh dear.

As far as I can make out, it was a combination. Do you remember '79? Crisis, what crisis? Bin bags in the streets, bodies not being buried.

Mm. Oh yes. Oh yes.

I was totally pissed-off with England.

Ah.

Right?

Mm.

I thought I'd built myself a gilded cage. As it turned out, too late to do anything about it, the gilt was on top of Plasticine, not iron. Thirdly, I was mistakenly under the impression that when my wife said she wanted to go back to Ireland, she meant with me. And, it took me, it took me till, about '85 to really grasp that last mistake. [laughs] [redacted].

Oh. Mm.

But… So one day we were walking in the woods on the estate and house I bought in Ireland one bright sunny October day, and she said, 'Why don't you find yourself a nice English blonde?' She was a brunette by the way. So in due course I did, and have. But, no, it was as simple as that, and, it was beset by the usual confusions. I mean for example, I only learnt fifteen years later that there had been a proposal, I should become a non-executive director, but, Doug was frightened by the fact that I had bought myself a small service bureau in Ireland, really just to have somewhere to put my bum.

Mhm. Mhm.

Because, you know, I was used to having an office and a bit of support and so on and so forth. And so, that idea vanished down the drain hole, and with it, I suppose, my five billion quid that I would have made from the… No, sorry, two billion, beg your pardon. The company was valued, when it was floated, at six billion. And my share would have been two.

If you had still been…

If I had still been there. [laughs] Or still been a shareholder.

Oh I see, so, when you left the company, you…

Oh well that was the rule. When you left the company, you sold your shares.

[1:54:38]
You sold your shares. I see. Oh, right. Wow. And you went to Ireland, to do, to do what?

Ah, well, there's a poem of Robert Browning's, Childe Rolande to the Dark Tower came. The traveller is crossing a Mordor-like wasteland and he comes to a path with a fork in it, he selects his path. And when he's gone a few paces along it, he looks

back and the other path has disappeared. And that's what life is like. You choose your path. My mother used to say, you've made your bed, you must lie in it. And, so, I don't, strangely enough have regrets I do momentarily have the odd moment when I would dearly like to reach into my back pocket and give one of my kids 50 grand, and I can't. A flicker of thought. And then I think, but, the path I chose, it gave me, not entirely [laughs] a planned sort of way, but part of it fulfilled a childhood ambition. What I did in Ireland was, I bought one of the three finest Palladian villas in the British Isles. I did it over, not as well as the bloke who I sold it to who spent five million on it; I only spent about half a million, which was rather more than half of what I had. It gave me my children's teenage. Because, I was not engaged in CMG while they were in those teenage years, as I had been when they were younger, and, I value that. It also gave me the experience, which was very enjoyable, of leading the life of a minor eighteenth-century lordling. [laughter] Because that's what, if you've got… I mean, the local town was built at the gates of my house. It wasn't that my house was in the local town, if you see the distinction. And it was… I used to come down in the morning and walk across the hall going, [inhales and exhales], it was so beautiful. It was like living in a Rembrandt. So, for the six or seven years I could afford it, before the money ran out, it was great. You know, my daughter's sixteenth birthday party, which was at the point where I had already discovered my present wife, and, it was towards… I said to her, you know, 'This is, you're getting this instead of a 21st love.' We bussed her school friends up from Dublin, because she was at a boarding school in the hills above Dublin. We bussed her friends up, in evening dress. They danced all night. In the morning they went out on the lake in boats. And at noon the coaches came and took them back to Dublin. And, the social credit alone that she derived in the school from that party never fails to astonish me. I have dined in Chinese hoteliers' dining rooms, in Singapore, on the strength of that party. [laughter] So, you know… And, that was a, I mean that was a very educational experience as well, because, as you know from this morning's conversation, I'm a purebred 'ammersmith townie. And living in the country, and believe you me, County Cavan is deep country, with all the concerns of cattle and water and trees and so on, gives you a different perspective.

I mean, did you simply, play the role of the landowner in Ireland?

Yup. Well I mean, I had, I had 100 acres of land and 500 acres of lake. My, the estate that Cromwell gave the original Coote, who was, who built the house, was 3,000 acres, you know, including the whole… But…

[1:59:48]
Mhm. Did you have any income during this period?

Yes, because, by about 1983 I was working for Steve Shirley. [laughs]

Oh. Right.

Well we were having tea together in the Dorchester, on one of my visits to London, and she said, 'Well what are you doing with CMG now?' And I said, 'Nothing, you know, I'm completely cut off from it.' And I did, and this was another, if you like, emotional mistake, not so much for me it seems but for other people, I thought it best that having gone, I went. So I really did cut myself off. So I said, 'Well, yeah, nothing.' 'Good,' she said. 'Will you work for me?' [laughs] So I said, 'Yes.' And about five minutes later I was on the UK board, and about five minutes after that she bounced into the room I was sitting in and said, 'I've just sacked the UK chairman. You'll do it, won't you?' [laughter] So, so I did. And of course that… You see, again, talking of paths, that's where, how I got my current wife. She was the regional director for the south-west. She came in and gave a presentation to the board, and I thought, mm, that one. Took a couple of years, but…

[laughs] Ah. You're clearly somebody who is prepared to, fight a long war for what you want.

Probably, yes. I'm not impatient.

[2:01:26]
No. No indeed. Pi Holdings, tell me what happened with them.

Well Pi Holdings was a, that was very educational. [laughs] When I came back to England, after I, the whole business in Ireland had collapsed, Bob Fawcett had also

left CMG by that time. Because CMG changed. What I'm going to say now, I'm only, I'm only repeating what I have been told. After I left, the character changed. Partly because for the first time people had their arms twisted to buy shares in order to buy me out. [pause] And, Doug, as you know, probably, had his problems. The Dutch, who never fully bought in to our principles, I don't believe, had a much bigger say in how things were going. I mean we employed ten per cent of all the IT people in Holland. And when I went there with ServiceTec and Andy Anderson introduced me to the Dutch people, Andy said, 'And Bryan of course founded CMG,' and some people in the back said, [Dutch accent] 'That is impossible. CMG is a Dutch company. He is an Englishman.' [laughter] So, you know.

Bizarre, mm. Mm.

But, it changed its character a bit. And, once… I don't know whether it would ever have gone public if I had stayed. I certainly don't… I… I was astonished when they borrowed that money to buy Admiral. Because as I've been saying, we didn't borrow money. [laughs]

No. No.

And, so it changed. Anyway, I came back to England. And Bob and I decided that we would like to do something again. And we teamed up with a young investment banker, and a small investment banking house, and we set out to acquire companies. And, we…

[2:04:26]
Why did you do that? I mean, if I understand you correctly, I mean, acquisition has not been one of your driving forces.

It wasn't a driving force. It seemed to me the only way of getting to be a reasonable size reasonably quickly in the current environment.

Mhm.

And I didn't, neither Bob nor I had any, new ideas, [laughs] which in many ways was the underlying problem I, I think, with the benefit of hindsight. But, so we made, we made our… We overpaid for the acquisitions by and large. As I think I said when we were talking before we started, I did not realise how brutally ruthless you have to be to stand any chance of making an acquisition or a merger work.

Mhm. Perhaps you would expand on that a bit.

Well, it really comes down, I suppose, to my view of company cultures. You need a consistent culture in a company. You are going to have one, whether you design it or not. As I've said, with our group familiarisation courses, our potential leaders, our associate directors' training, our quarterly management meetings, we went to a lot of bother to inculcate, develop, get consensus on, the group's cultural behaviour patterns. We bought three companies. An IBM company up in the north, up in Birmingham, called, oh gosh.

I've got the names here, I think.

Yes. I can't remember. It's ridiculous. Callidus was the second one, a company out in Henley, and SIA.

Timegate.

Timegate, that…

Orion. Craigmore.

Yah.

CSS. SIA.

Yah. Now, the only one of those where we actually, where it actually turned out to be a good company, was SIA, and that was because, they didn't have a leader, and I put one of my ex-CMG guys in charge of it, and he actually imposed the CMG culture.

Which actually was not too hard with SIA, because they were a very intellectual outfit, and so principles and logical structures and so on, they liked.

Mhm.

Timegate, we, I, because I was the chair, effectively the chairman, and, I'll come on to one of the mistakes I did make, positive mistakes as it were, as opposed to negative mistakes, we backed the wrong horse. There was a, the guy who there was a very pleasant, enjoyable, but thoroughly bigoted Northern Irish Protestant, and he had a number three who was the right man to back, and, we didn't do that.

Mm.

Calidus just thought that they were going to treat us as if we were VCs, and they'd bowl along as they always had. I should have sacked the managing director within 20 minutes of getting there, and I didn't. And they did have their own culture, which in some ways was quite an effective one, but, it was also, not functional in other ways. The mistake I made was, I bought SIA from a guy who had bought it himself as an investment. I remember vividly my first meeting with him, as he does. And, I, I thought, well I'm not sure I like you. Anyway, we did the deal. And he came on board as my FD. And what I should have done was make him instantly the group MD. Because, apart from being one of the cleverest accountants I've ever met, he is also a very effective manager. And we're still very good friends. He, he was, until quite recently, the Chairman of Rethink, the mental health… And I sit on one of…

Mm. And which you're…

I sit on one of Rethink's subsidiary boards.

Right.

As a result of Bob asking me, another Bob asking me. A rather curious feature actually. He and a guy, the husband of another friend of ours, were all born one day either side of me, and our wives are all agreed that we're very alike, and we're all

typical Sagittarians, you know. [laughter] Now, how the movement of the universe can affect, God knows, but it is a curious fact. Although we're different as chalk and cheese in some ways, we've got certain very fundamental characteristics which we share. Anyway. And I should… And that was the biggest mistake I made. And, so, we, it never… I mean, Timegate didn't do too badly; SIA did moderately well; Callidus went its own merry way. The outfit, Craigmore I think it was called…

Yes.

…that really was, that was based on a software product which was all smoke and mirrors. I didn't realise it. And, I mean, actually what it really showed me was that, I had led too sheltered a life, in business terms. Because, starting your own company, building it up, having it successful, you really don't have to deal with some of the inevitable unpleasantnesses [laughs], you know, because you, you smooth them out. [laughs]

Absolutely.

And, that's one of the lessons I learnt from that. And I mean, what eventually happened was that, the VCs ganged up on me, the only time in my life I've ever been sacked, as I say, over breakfast at the Goring. They put my friend, the Rethink guy, in charge, and he wound it down and sold it, sold the bits. And, I think didn't do too badly out of it probably. But he's much smarter than I am at that sort of thing. [laughs]

Just a few… I mean, because you left CMG, it's probably not sensible to ask you questions about its subsequent progress.

It's not very helpful, because I, I have opinions, but they're mostly second-hand. [laughs]

[2:12:30]
Yes, I understand that. So we won't… I just wonder, what do you think your proudest achievement over your, proudest achievement has been?

Oh CMG, undoubtedly.

CMG. Mm.

I mean, just its very existence in the form it took. I'm proud that it made people rich, because, you know, that was one of the, that is the objective of business. I'm proud that it did, it always behaved honestly by its customers, certainly in my time there. In other words, if it made a mistake, it corrected it at its expense, we never lied to people, you know. It just… And that's… But, you know…

And your biggest mistake, what would you think that is?

Oh biggest mistake was Pi Holdings, unquestionably. Principally because I put the rest of, the remnants of my money into it and lost it all. [laughter]

Oh dear. What honours have you received?

Not very many.

Not very many. [laughs]

I have an honorary PhD from Bucks New University, which is a pretty marginal thing.

No, not at all.

Other than that, no, no specific, nothing has come my way.

But you were founder of, of the…

Of the CSA?

The CSA.

Yah.

Yes.

Yes, oh yes.

Yes indeed. Indeed.

Well, actually, when I… I think the honest truth, that was a team effort. It was very fortunate that Barney Gibbens, God rest his soul, was President of the Software Houses Association; I was chairman or whatever it was called of COSBA; and Ernest Morris was a leading light in the consultancy. And, I don't know quite how I had come to know Ernest. I suspect through Doug. And whereas the two previous presidents, or chairmen, or whatever they were, of COSBA and SHA, had always been at each other's throats, Barney and I, in a casual sort of way, had always got on pretty well. And, so, we, it was quite easy for us to suggest to each other, particularly for CMG, in fact, what actually happened was that the board, the executive committee of CMG said to me, just like this, 'Well what you had better do, now you're Chairman of COSBA, is merge it with SHA, hadn't you, and make a decent trade association out of it.' [laughs] So I went, that's what I went and did.

Mm. Excellent.

With help from Ernest Morris[sp?] and Doug. Ernest Morris[sp?] wrote the constitution.

[2:15:36]
What do you think of the current state of the current state of the software and services industry?

[sighs] [pause] I don't think… I think there's so many different components to it today, that it's impossible to give an overarching view. I mean, except to say that, if I look back over, what is it now, 50 years since I got into it, because, Burroughs wasn't really it, the way in which what we used to call computing and we now call

information technology, permeates the whole of modern life to, to a degree which, back into the Sixties we hadn't any idea that it could become so omnipresent. I mean, just the fact that, you know, you carry this thing in your pocket, everywhere, and what's more, it works everywhere. You know, I've just come back from a cruise from Singapore to Hong Kong. Occasionally I couldn't get Wi-Fi. God! [laughs]

Disaster.

What a disaster, you know. [laughter] And, and I was exchanging text messages with my children and friends throughout the trip. Even when I couldn't get Wi-Fi.

Mm.

You know, I… And, looking at the kids, and the way they live, I don't think it's quite as bad as the tabloids tend to make out, and I, I really don't believe that it dehumanises relationships.

[2:17:36]
I think a final question. What advice would you have for somebody starting out in this business today?

The trouble with that question really is that, if you need advice about starting up, starting out, as opposed to operational issues as you're going along and how you deal with banks and things like that, then you probably shouldn't be doing it. Because, whatever the, whatever the motivation is, you have to have a strong enough motive to do it. And I mean, as I think I've made probably all too clear, my motivation was not exactly a conventional one. And, other people start for other reasons.

Mm.

But I do think, you can either call it a motive or you need a, you need a good idea. Looking back, I had one good idea: you didn't have to own a computer in order to use it. Everything else followed, really from that.

From that. Yes.

And, the real question is, both, is your, a double-pronged question, is your idea good enough, and do you believe in it strongly enough to be willing to carry it out? And as my wife says, who, my current wife of course, says, being a Yorkshire woman, she said, she always says, you, meaning me, and her previous husband John, 'You are both optimists. I would never have started any of the things either of you have started, because I can see all the problems.' And, she quite rightly says, neither John or I see the problems, except as, well, things, you know, you have to walk over or through. [laughter]

Well, perhaps we'll let the distaff side have the last word. Bryan, it's been a great pleasure to talk to you today to hear your opinions and your history. Thank you very much.

It's a great pleasure Alan, and, I only hope it's not for too wide a publication. [laughter]

[End of Interview]