



Ninian Eadie

Interviewed by

Richard Sharpe

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Welcome to the Archives of IT. It's Monday the 4th of July 2016, and we're in the Worshipful Company of Information Technologists.

Not long ago there was a large British computer company, employing tens of thousands of people around the world, producing some innovative technology. It was called ICL. And a man who has worked almost in every part of ICL, in development, in sales, in marketing, et cetera et cetera, is Ninian Eadie, who we introduce to the archives today. Ninian, welcome to the archives.

Good morning.

Good morning. You first joined the computer industry in a company called LEO.

Yes, that's correct, yes.

In 1960.

1960. I, I just missed the valve era, LEO had made maybe about sixteen machines, and they had just announced the first transistor machine. And, several other companies in the UK at that time had also, were moving to transistors. So, my first job really was teaching programming on the new machine, and selling this new transistor machine in, mostly the retail business.

And LEO stood for Lyons Electronic Office.

Yes, that's correct.

And it was developed by Lyons, the teashop and bun company. That was the first computer to be really used for business in the world.

Yes. I mean, Lyons was a pioneer of organisation and method, and they were a great believer in budgets and variances and so on. And, they bought, they started, they built this machine because they wanted a computer and they believed it could continue the O&M development track they were on. And so, their, as a company, they saw

themselves as being in the application of computers rather than really in the manufacture, they did manufacture computers but they were interested in proselytising other companies to use computers for commercial purposes. Which was quite a new idea at the time.

Was it difficult to persuade people to use computers for business?

Yes, it was extremely difficult. It was a sort of, religious sort of thing, you had to go around and say, you know, it was wonderful. And people would say, 'Can you really do it?' On one occasion I remember in these days I went and cold-called on a customer, and he said he was very pleased to see me, and after a stony silence of a bit he said, 'Well have you brought your computer with you?' [laughter] At that time of course they occupied, [laughs] almost a football pitch.

[02:40]

Very good. Then you moved to South Africa.

Yes. After I had been selling, selling for a while, I got, I was asked to go out as a sales manager to a joint venture we had with Rand Mines as the sales manager for what was essentially a bureau company. And the Rand Mines operation were using LEO III/2, which was the second of these transistorised machines, for native pay, we had about, 130,000 natives on this payroll, and for stores. And, data transmission on this system, we had to collect all the data from [inaud] all the way down the reef[?], bring them back every day and process this data, and the data transmission was done by an African in a van. On one occasion I remember he had an accident on the way and this brought the whole computer operation to a halt. [laughs] So he used to go out one way, dropping off payslips, and coming back producing, getting the latest day's data.

[03:54]

Then you moved to the Post Office.

Yes. When I got back from South Africa... Well, before I did the Post Office, when I came back they didn't really have a job for me, so, I got, English Electric had taken us

over while I was out there, and they asked me to do the corporate rebranding, which I did with a chap called Wally Olins, who was the chap who subsequently did the corporate branding for Orange, at that stage they were just starting out as a company. So, that involved redoing all the stationery, sign, signage, you know, everything. But this was all quite new. And at the end of that, I was asked to become the consultant for the Post Office. And the Post Office then consisted of, what we think of the Post Office, the mail, but it also was British Telecom, telephones and so on, Premium Bonds, the Savings Bank, and later on the National Giro which Wilson invented.

And there was the big application, National Giro.

Well, no, I mean, the big application at the... Well the billing system was the big application. I mean it was huge, and we had a couple of machines in each of our five centres around the country, these big machines. The Giro, and Premium Bonds of course was also very, you know, I mean, previously there was one of these applications which never... Well it was eventually finished, but, when I took over it, they'd been trying to program it for eighteen months or something, and, you know, for the next two years we were trying to complete these programs, all in Intercode. But subsequently with the Saving Bank we, well I like to think I got better at it. I mean we had, I don't know, 100 programmers at the Post Office, so it was quite a big operation. So we did the Savings Bank, and we did that in CLEO, which, a high-level language. And then the Giro was a System 4, which was the IBM compatible machine. And that was, well I wrote all the appli... Well, I say I, I was sort of, writing all the applications for the National Giro, on a contract basis. I think I charged them £28,000 for this. [laughs]

Right.

And it worked. Very good. [laughs]

[06:25]

That takes us up to 1968, which is an important year, because, this new company called ICL is formed from what was previously ICT, International Computers and

Tabulators, and English Electric Leo Marconi, and it was all merged into one. What was the feeling and what was the impression that you got of this merger?

Well of course, it was, it was promoted by the Government who wanted a single UK champion. I mean the two companies were completely misaligned I would say. I mean, ICT was a hardware company, been selling tabulators, very successful computers, but they were in the business of selling a lot of hardware, and LEO was in the business of applications. LEO was a company which was industry-specialised, and ICT was a company which was geographically specialised. So our attitudes were completely different. And of course, at the time of the merger we had a lot of customers and potential customers for, for System 4 which was our new IBM compatible machine, and they had lots of customers for the 1900. And, in many cases both parties lay claim to the same customer, who was just about to place an order with them. So the infighting was horrendous I would say. I wasn't personally, because I was still at the Post Office, I wasn't personally involved in any infighting, I don't think anybody tried to take my patch away from me. But ICT didn't understand what I was at all. And, they initially wanted to rank me as a salesman, until it was explained that I, you know, had hundreds of programmers and, you know, half the company turnover and so on, so... In which case, they said that maybe I was a regional manager. So yes, it was a, was a curious time. But I came into contact then with Arthur Humphreys, who was a wonderful, wonderful chap. I came into contact because, we were, I was just trying to take the company into the first real-time systems. I had commissioned this new operating system called the Lasis[sp?] Monitor[?] for the Heathrow customer system, which was being written by Computer Sciences, and, I had to go into Arthur all the time to discuss the bids for this, because it was an open procurement. And I used to take my figures in to him, and he used to look at the figures, look at the bottom line, and he said, 'You've bloody changed them again!' [laughter] Anyway, we eventually got the contract for that. But I, I didn't then subsequently go on and do the installation of that system. I, I was moved on then, and, I was given the Finance Region, which was the country-wide, all the insurance companies, banks and stockbrokers.

Arthur Humphreys was a force of nature, wasn't he?

Wonderful man, yes. Absolutely adored by the customers, I mean, absolutely adored. He spoke very few words, told it the way it was, and customers trusted him. Oh, you know, a tremendous chap.

Good. Good. And you worked quite closely with him from there on?

Well... Well, yes, only, I mean, he... Yes. Yes, for, for a bit, but when I went in to finance region, you know, I mean I was selling, you know, well, selling mostly 1900s, in Finance Region. And Finance Region was under, well under attack from IBM I guess, the big financial institutions felt that they were much safer with IBM than with this British lash-up. So, although when I took it over we had a, well we had, maybe two-thirds of the insurance business, and maybe half of the banking business, and most of the stockbroker business during the time I was there, we progressively lost business to IBM, we lost the Stock Exchange, we lost Prudential. And although we were making huge profits all the time, because it's a great area for making profits, I guess I wasn't so popular for these big losses, I had the Prudential around my neck like an albatross as the man who had lost the Prudential, you know.

Yes.

[11:10]

So after I had been there for three years I, I then moved back into marketing, working first of all in local government and then as the marketing manager for, for the Government, whatever it was then, division I suppose, under Peter Hall.

And Government then was a very big customer of ICL.

Yes. I mean, huge, because, the Government had a procurement, had this procurement policy, and the procurement policy basically was that you had to buy it from ICL. But in order to win the contract, you know, you had to have 1,000 lashes and be tortured miserably, at the end of which they announced that you were the best person to buy from. [laughs] So, although it sounds as though it was an easy ride, they were always trying to prove that they had really, you know, put you through the wringer. So yes, it was a very big, a very big customer, both for 1900s and for what

was, then became the New Range, which was the merged, the merger, or the merged hardware between System 4 and 1900. When I took over the Government patch, then, I took it over basically because I had been the launch manager for New Range, and I had spent a lot of time selling customers New Range systems, and we had just had the first installations when I took over at Bureau West, and basically these computers didn't work at all really. I mean, they... Meantime, between breaks, when I first went there was less than an hour between system crashes as we would say, black screens as we would say today; by the time I left we managed to get it up to six or seven hours, but I mean...

What was the problem?

[pause] Well, we had, we had had an influx during this period, you talked about Arthur Humphreys, but then, the board, I don't know how these things go, but they recruited as managing director a chap called Geoff Cross, and Geoff Cross brought with him some UNIVAC people, including a chap called Ed Mack and a chap called Brian O'Heron. Brian O'Heron was a project manager, who I have a lot of time for, he did a lot of good work. Ed Mack took over the development, and he brought some of his friends [inaud] and various people, and they, the idea was to have three different operating systems, one for back[?] systems, one for online systems, I can't remember what, there was B. Eventually, it was whittled down to B and K. I had K [inaud] space[?], and B at Bureau West. And I think the, you know, I don't know, they, they fouled up with code I think basically. So, you know, they were constantly hitting new breaks. I mean, having come from building large commercial applications, I had put in place at the Post Office a very rigorous procedure for specifying things in great detail before work was started, and then as work was started, putting in a very extensive test regime for these commercial applications, and I don't think the same rigour was really applied to it. But it was a catastrophe, I mean, really, you could say it was the downfall of, of ICL, because although while I was in Government, and universities, we got lots and lots of business, and I persuaded all the customers that they ought to move... I mean ICT people, they just kept selling 1900s, said, 'Don't touch this stuff,' so they were doing OK. I got all my customers moved on to this new hardware, and I got the business and I got the profits, but of course they ended up hating us for it, particularly the universities, so... And I think in

the end it was the ruin of the, the company. I mean they did get it to work eventually, but I mean it took them, ten years or something before it worked properly.

[15:30]

Right. Right. But also you had a small machine, 2903. Did you ever sell that?

Well I launched the 2903. I mean the 2903 was a 19-0... well I know, 2A I suppose, which, Roger Hill, who eventually worked for me in marketing, I mean, he put it into, into low-level cabinets, because all the machines were in high-level cabinets in those days, in racks, and painted it orange, because the New Range was painted orange, and then, sell it, it was a wonderful new machine. I mean it wasn't a new machine, there was nothing new about it at all, it was just a rebranding and repackaging of something which already existed. And yes, it was a very successful machine, and at a time when we didn't have any small machines, it was something, something was needed. So it was... But I can't claim other than launching it that I was, had any responsibility for, for that decision.

There is perhaps an apocryphal story, that Cross was on a plane working through his papers; and he got off the plane and phoned back and said, 'We're going to have this 2903 thing.' Is that right?

I don't know, but I can quite believe it, because the whole project was a three-month project, I mean, from start to finish. I mean it wasn't a, you know, in those days new machines took two years. I mean, it was needed, and, it was done, done fast and quickly. My main contact with Geoff Cross is, we had, we had a little club for all those people who had the misfortune to have these New Range, and he used to take us off to different places to have dinner, and we went down to Madrid for dinner, because, we were all suffering so much. [laughs]

[17:20]

And compare Cross's leadership to Arthur's leadership.

[pause] Well, I mean... Cross was, Cross was... Well first of all, on the customer front, Arthur was very good with customers. Cross didn't believe in customers

basically. When I was in trouble on the Stock Exchange, the Stock Exchange, whatever they have, board or, you know, they invited Geoff Cross to come along and tell them why they should buy our machine and he refused to go. Which was quite embarrassing for me as the local manager, but that was typical of Cross, he didn't believe in pissing on the ashes as he called it. He saw that the thing was lost, so he was bugged if he was wasting time on it. But I did learn, things I learnt from Geoff, he was Finance Director at UNIVAC, so he was a finance man, and what I did learn from him is that, that it's very easy to make profit, because you, you start off by working out how much revenue you are sure you can achieve, and then you simply cut the costs in order to leave you with profit. This was a bit of a revelation to me. He introduced profit and loss accounts. When I, when Geoff Cross came, Lyon Lightstone, who had been on the board for, for many years, was the sales director, said that, he had never ever seen a profit and loss account, and when he did see it, there was only one profit and loss account for the whole of ICL. What Geoff Cross did is, he introduced profit and loss accounts for every single business, so you had your own profit and loss account. Obviously there were some things you couldn't control, like the corporate HQ and the development costs, you got loaded with a percentage. But, Geoff cut all the corporate costs in a, you know, in half. And he was very supportive of those, those salesmen. But also he's a man for detail. I mean, I can remember, he decided he would cut out free loan equipment. ICT had, you know, if ever you had a problem, you would say, 'Don't worry, you can have this bit of equipment, you can have it on loan, we'll talk about later when you have to give it back.' And they never gave it back of course. So there were pages and pages. So I got this printout of free loan equipment that was given to everybody. I thought, well that's all right, I'll have to, you know, do this. And then I got a call from Geoff Cross, 'Can I come down to see you?' And he had got this printout, and pages and pages of printout. He got his pencil out and he said, 'Right, now,' he started at the first line. 'Where is this? Why is that there?' And if you said, 'Oh well, so-and-so in development said this...' He'd say, 'Right.' Pick up the phone, 'Is it true that you said this?' Yes. Right, so he went... [laughs] So anyway, that was the end of the free loan equipment. So that was, he was very detailed. But he, but he was, well, a brute really, a brutal character. And the people he brought with him were, distasteful people really, largely. I mean not Brian O'Heron, I had a lot of time for Brian, but, a lot of them were not very nice people I thought.

In what way?

Oh bullies basically. Bullies, yes. The... [laughs] Stefani[sp?], who was one of the project, second level project managers, and Tony Bewley[sp?] was our personnel director in GPCD, and they all wanted parties on a boat. And they all, they used to gang up on people, they used to say, we'll get that chap.' So they were all... So they decided to gang up on Bewley[sp?], who was a very nice chap really. What they didn't know was that he was a, a judo black belt from Cambridge. So, Stefani[sp?] invited him to come up and have a fist fight, and Bewley[sp?] just destroyed this chap. [laughs] So that quietened him down for a little. But they were like that.

It actually got to fisticuffs?

Oh yes. Yes. Yes, absolutely, yes. Yes, he chucked him a long way, and that was, decisive. But, but also they were very, very sexist and, not very well behaved in other ways, which I won't go into.

That's not any way to run a company, is it?

No. It's very divisive I think. Well, they were tough, difficult, difficult times, and, dealing with these customers was very hard I think at the time. But anyway, as I say, I... The other thing, I was asked to do the launch of, worldwide launch of this New Range, and I did this, and we did all these slides and presentation, and obviously as a salesman, I mean I said it was absolutely the cat's whiskers, you know. It was going to do everything, you know. Wonderful, wonderful machine. And we invited Ed Mack, who was the development chap who was trying to write the operating system for this, and, he came down to the dry run of this, and he was absolutely ashen-faced [laughs], when he heard this description of what he was supposed to be producing but wasn't actually producing. [laughing]

[22:43]

So this must have drained your R and development budget a lot, this New Range, and all of this programming of the three operating systems, and then down to two?

Yes. Yes. Eventually it was reduced down to one in a... And then we renamed that, I renamed it VME. And... But yes, and, as a result, there was nothing really getting done on the small systems front, and when the company, well when Geoff Cross went, I don't really, I can't really tell you why he went, but Chris Wilson was appointed as Managing Director and he had a pretty, was left with a pretty bad hand to play I think. Wasn't very well either at the time, Chris. And, so then, the Government decided, well we went, we were the first people in the barrel when Margaret Thatcher decided she wasn't going to support industry. Well actually the first people were Rolls Royce, who I knew pretty well actually, and so they, they were let go. And we were the next people to come up with the need for a loan. And so, the Government eventually did give us a loan, but they also gave us Robb Wilmot and, and Christopher Laidlaw.

[23:58]

Can we just backtrack a moment. What was the strategy of launching the New Range, the 2900 range, from the top? It started off with the biggest machines. What was that strategy about?

Well, we... Well I mean, the big machines made all the money, I mean, basically. I mean, and the money was made, some of it was made on the machines but of course most of it was made on the maintenance. I mean all these machines had five or six engineers attached to them, plus there may be some support staff that the customers were paying for. And, you know, I mean, even, when I was running services which was ten, fifteen years later, I mean, we were making £120 million a year of the profits, but, I mean the company was making no profit, and services was making £120 million, you know, so it was a lot of money. So, so I think it was quite rational. Of course, we had always been in the big machines. I don't think the small machines... You have to sell a lot of machines to make money, and we had this machine called the, I'm jumping ahead a bit, called the System Ten, Singer machine, Geoff Cross bought this company called, well the international business was Singer, Singer were the sewing machine company, which was my first project actually, in Clydesdale. But they, they were disaggregating their business, and they had a house-building business, Singer sewing machines, and they had this computer business, and we bought the computer business, international computer business, from them. And they had this

machine called System Ten, which we, was a very successful machine, and after the mainframes was probably the only thing in some ways that the smaller countries had to sell. But when Robb Wilmot came, and I... Anyway, we did, started doing product line profitability for these machines, and, you could work out that if you were direct selling a machine like this, you had to sell at least five a year to, to pay for the salesmen and make a return on the machine. And although lot of these machines were sold, there was no third party distribution. And they were all sold direct, and the salesforce was very expensive, so if you've got an expensive salesforce, it's better to sell a million-pound machine than a, you know, £20,000 machine.

[26:32]

Yes. There was a significant event in 1979, when IBM really put the hammer down with the launch of the 4300 range, which was a four-fold increase in price performance. What ripples did that have in ICL?

Well I think, I think that the... Well, I mean at the time, I suppose if you ask me, ICL was not in small machines at all, and, apart from this System Ten, which was an accident, I mean it was alleged that Geoff Cross won it in a poker match, but I can't, absolutely, I wouldn't be surprised really, but, apart from System Ten, and, some of the small 1900s, we really, really weren't in the mid-range at all. And it was obviously very necessary to get into the mid-range. It was almost impossible to, we did try and get the New Range down, we had a thing call called 2960 which was a smaller New Range, but there was a limit to how far you could shrink this thing. And so, there was an urgent, from our point of view there was an urgent need to get into smaller systems, and that coincided really with this period of, of Chris Wilson and bankruptcy, and Robb Wilmot coming. The first thing Robb Wilmot said was, we must be big in the small systems, and by small systems we meant, the PC hadn't been invented at that time, so, I suppose you could call them servers now, you know, medium size systems. So, I suppose that was kind of, how we were trying to defend ourselves.

[28:15]

So in 1981, this young tyro Robb Wilmot comes from Texas Instruments UK, and also Sir Christopher Laidlaw, as he later became, is brought in as Chairman, and he's from BP. Totally different approach, again. Is that right?

Yes. I mean... Yes, I mean, I worked... I suppose you could say... Well, the reason I, I got to know Robb Wilmot is that, I wanted the company, although I was in charge of all the biggest systems in Government, I thought the company should get into the smaller systems. I found a small system called a Perc[sp?], which was one of the first CAD workstations. So I took it along and set it up in Robb's office, and told him that that's what I thought we should be doing. Not long after that he reached down and made me the Director of Product Marketing. And what the Director of Product Marketing was, was Robb's gofer really. I mean I was a super, super duper gofer really. Robb worked all hours, but only for six weeks at a time. After six weeks he would have a nervous breakdown, and he would disappear for a week. But I never got to disappear for a week. So I worked full-time, all the time. And I mean, when I say full-time, I can remember one evening coming back at ten o'clock, taking my mail home to do the mail, and being unable to carry it, because it was so heavy. He used to send me these Post-It notes, little yellow things. You could get a dozen in a day, and they would range from, you know, 'I think we should fire this person because I don't like his face,' to, you know, some huge strategic... On one occasion I remember with Mike Watson, who was his Technical Director, being in the back of his car and he was in the front, and I was horrified to find that he and Robb were talking about feasibility of putting up a satellite. I mean Robb's ambition had no bounds at all. When I took over we had this thing called the DRS, Distributed Resource System, which was due for launch in six months. He said it had to be launched in, three weeks' time. Wouldn't take no for an answer. Switched the operating system from an operating system which it had been inherited from Utica to UNIX, he would, expected you to do presentations. I mean he, you would go to a meeting with him, you didn't know what the meeting was about, you know, with customers. And then he'd say, 'Mr Eadie will explain our new strategy for you.' They were sitting there waiting to see what the new strategy was. And then he'd say. And then you explained. Well, you made it up. He had these operating meetings every Monday. Everybody who was involved in the management of the company would go to these, there may be 30 people at this operating meeting. And I would be on my feet for, two

or maybe three hours, going through every aspect. Well fortunately I knew, you know, a lot about the company, but, I'd have to go through every aspect of these things, all we were doing. So it was, you know... And there were people, you know, crashing out, and, I mean Hugh McDonald, who was my marketing chap, I mean he. [laughs] he was on his way to Bracknell one day, and, he stopped at a red traffic light, and he fell asleep. And when he woke up there was this huge crowd. Because they, they all thought he had died. But he, he, you know...

[32:25]

He was exhausted.

He was absolutely... We were all, all exhausted, yes, all exhausted. But we did radically change everything. But you've to remember that this is before the PC, there was no Windows or anything, the PC hasn't yet been invented, local area networks haven't yet been invented. So we first of all had this thing call the One Per Desk, and this, this was a product, one of these meetings Robb said to me, 'Come to a meeting. I've got a meeting with Clive Sinclair. I'm sure we can do some business with Clive Sinclair.' And I brought along my communications chap, Gordon Peep[?], with me, and we got into this discussion. And, Robb said, 'Clive Sinclair's producing this new machine called the Quantum Leap, the QL.' Robb said, 'Well I'm sure we could share the gate array for this for some kind of new system.' So he turns, he says, 'Well, what had you planned to do?' you see. Hadn't planned anything before they went to the meeting. So he said, 'Well, going to produce this machine which is going to [inaud] telephone,' and, it was the fashion for machines with telephones at the time, a telephone and so on. So they produced this. And, it used this gate array from Clive Sinclair, which of course didn't work properly, but that's another story. It used to, when you switched it on, it either came up working or it came up, a thing where it just failed after, 30 minutes or something. It would work again, you switched it off, it would come back. And then we had the operating system which was the operating system which was eventually used on all these telephones, Zion[sp?].... Yes, Zion[sp?], yes. You know the Zion[sp?]?

Yes.

It's the same operating system that was used on...

Yes. Did you sell many of One Per Desk?

Well it depends how you look at it really, how you look at it. [inaud] STC was a telephone company, and telephone companies, you know, they make millions of handsets, and, it didn't really sell very well. And, we had planned to make, manufacture, a lot of the latest phone line production thing for this. And I had to go to Arthur Walsh and, I said, 'a big problem with this One per Desk, you know, they're not really selling fast enough, we've got a big stock of these damn things.' And he said, 'Well, how many have you got?' you see. So I said, 'Well, I don't know how many, 20,000.' He said, 'Ach, it's fine then,' you see. [laughs] He was expecting something like half a million you see. [laughter] So it was a machine which didn't sell, it didn't make money, but it was terribly popular. I mean, all our best customers had a One Per Desk on their desk. It was a lovely little machine really.

Right. But it comes out of this spontaneity of Wilmot.

Yes.

Just, going into places that, he hasn't really worked out what he's going to when he gets there.

That's right. Absolutely, yes. Absolutely.

[35:44]

There was a story that if you told him that he had hurt your feelings, he'd have to go into a, into his office and look up the word feelings in the dictionary.

I don't know. I mean he, he certainly... Well, I've got be careful, he's a living person, but I mean, you know, he was certainly a person who was a, whatever it is, on the autistic spectrum. He didn't, didn't... Well I always said that, the only things he wasn't any good at were people and technology.

Right.

Right? But, he, he used to spot-judge people, but do it wrong. So you would put up somebody in one of these presentations and say, I remember putting up my industry marketing man, or, you know, it was a competitive marketing man, on a presentation, and then he said, 'You've got to get, fire him tomorrow.' Well, I didn't, I hid him in the basement, and produced him again later, you know. But, a lot of people were fired, I mean Peter Simpson was our commercial director, got fired. He was absolutely a cornerstone of the company's commercial operations really. So, he was very like that. And then on technology he was, he, you know, he, he had a lot of contacts in the States, because he was a silicon man, and he did understand, obviously, gate arrays and silicon and, and so on, and because of his contacts we were able to... I mean, things like, Ethernet for example, I mean there was no standard. There was a thing called Token Ring which IBM had, and then Ethernet, and Ethernet had a chip which maybe cost \$300 to produce. We went, Robb and I went over to, because we used to go over for a couple of weeks, and, hire a car and go around Silicon Valley talking to his mates and so on, and we went to, 3Com I think it was, and said, 'We ought to make this a standard, this Ethernet. And then get some volume behind it and get the price down.' Of course now I think you can get an Ethernet thing for a dollar or something. And then he rang all the chief executives of, Bull[?], and, you know, right round, and said, 'Chaps, we're going to make this a standard, you know, we don't want IBM, this Token Ring.' And, we did make it into a standard, and now, you know, it's a big, it was as big...

He called that one right.

Yes, he did. So he... But... Yes, yes, so, I would say, it was a scattergun approach, you know, maybe, ten, well, not even, five per cent of his ideas, you know, were, bore fruit, and the other 95 per cent were... I used to filter them heavily, so I used to get these things, look at them and say, rubbish, you know. He never followed up, he didn't have a follow-up system, that was the great thing. He had the idea; if you liked it, you picked it up; if you didn't, he never really came back and said, 'Whatever happened to that thing I told you to do?'

[38:38]

And Chris wasn't able, Chris Laidlaw, wasn't able to calm him down or direct him or focus him?

Well I think he tried very hard, and I think to a degree he did do, but... I, it was a mark... I mean, looking back on it, I mean I think it was a hype thing, you know, I mean, the company was on its knees really. Wilmot convinced everybody, outside the company and quite a lot of people inside, that there was a great future, this company was doing fantastic, amazing things. And I mean, that was really, I think, the thing he, he brought to it. Whether the ideas were amazing or not, everybody believed they were amazing. And that, in the end, enabled him to sell it to, the company to STC.

[39:28]

Right. You came out with a product line as well, network product line, NPL?

Yes.

Can you tell us about that?

Well, again, you, this, we're... We're going back now to, the very early days of, well maybe, probably the very early days of personal computers. I mean the CP/M computers, I mean, Windows hadn't been invented at that stage. We had the DRS, which was invented by the chaps in Utica, the Singer people in Utica actually. And the DRS was a multi-microprocessor, multiple microprocessors, and it worked on a local area network, which Robb and I decided to call Microlan, you know. [pause] Communications bandwidth was, a wide area network bandwidth was very limited, I mean, so this governed really everything you could do with terminals. I mean... So the only way you could get the rapid response of a personal computer which people were coming to expect, the instant response, and communication, was through client-server systems. So, you know, you had to as much work as you could down on the front end, on the client, and only go back to the server if necessary because the line you had was rubbish between the two and probably not up either. So, we really had, had this concept of having a tiered system where you had, servers on Ethernet connected to downstream to the clients, some of them on Microlan, and then

connected through [inaud] networks onto central servers, to take advantage of, really of the bandwidth, and put the processing where it could provide the, the response. So I think that was a, that was a good marketing ploy. I think network product line was probably Robb's coining, might have been mine, I don't remember now. But, but again, it was, it was easy to draw these things, and to make them work. [laughs]

Yes.

And things like client-server, I mean nobody talks about client-server now, because, reality is, is, we all use client-server systems, and, although we talk about doing everything in the cloud now, it isn't really true that we do everything in the cloud. I mean it's really true that we have a client-server system and some things are done in the cloud and, an awful lot of stuff, like the graphical interface and all the rest of it, is done down at the front end. We could discuss whether it's a good idea to have everything in the cloud or not. It's a different, [laughs] different question.

[42:37]

And Wilmot made a strategic alliance with Fujitsu.

Yes. This was early on in my time as Director of Product Marketing. So, I was heavily involved with Fujitsu from, '82 perhaps onwards. The reason for that was that we were producing a second version of the New Range hardware, we wanted to produce it as a gate array system, not, I shouldn't say gate array, custom silicon system. Even in those days fabricating your own custom silicon was an expensive business, not as expensive as it is today, it would probably cost you, several billion, in those days it was too expensive for us, so we had to find a partner who was prepared to do the, do the fabrication for us. And also, incidentally, to do the cooling system. The whole thing was on a, on a pretty large platter which had water cooling going through the middle of the platter, and then the, the jips[?] are on fins[?] on, mounted on the top of the platter. So, so we had to persuade, so, Robb obviously persuaded Fujitsu that we were the bee's knees and they should really come in and do this joint work with us, and, which they did do, and I mean it was very nervous, because, you know, you only get one, one shot at this silicon really, it has to be perfect, you can't go back and change it afterwards like all the other systems we had had. So, nobody

was confident they all could get it right first time. But anyway, they did produce this, and that was the basis of the Series 39 system which was very successful. But it was also the start of the relationship, the longer-term relationship with Fujitsu. So we got to know Fujitsu through this, alliance or whatever it is, on that.

[44:38]

And as part of this alliance, ICL was going to try and sell an IBM compatible mainframe [inaud]?

No, I don't think that it was ever true.

Really?

No. No. No.

It was announced.

Well it may have been announced, but it certainly was never, we certainly never tried to do that. We did try and sell mid-range systems of Fujitsu, but, Fujitsu was, probably still is, an unbelievably old-fashioned company, because it is the telecom supplier of Japan. So from their point of view, you know, international's a sideline really; what matters is the domestic market. You can say the same about ICL, but I mean, and many other companies, maybe IBM too, but... So, they're quite an old-fashioned company, and, you could, it was very difficult to get them to recognise that Europe had its own requirements. I mean we had promoted very heavily our UNIX System V which we had done with Sun for the SPARC system, they were also selling SPARC as a CAD system. So we ought to have been able to produce a UNIX System V Fujitsu mid-range server system, but we never ever managed to persuade them to do it. We had this project called the Daruma. The Daruma is a, is, they give you a little, I've still got it at home, a little man, sort of thing, squat man. When you start the project they black out one eye, and then when you finish it you black out the other one. Mine's only got the one eye blacked out. But, it was like pulling teeth. I mean there were some funny things. One of the first things we tried to sell for them was, was a, was a printer, facsimile, you know, combined system, you know, like the little

ones you get now on your desk, except this one was, you know, the size of a, you know, one of these huge photocopiers. And we put it on the standard Hanover Fair, and for the whole of the Hanover Fair there were five Fujitsu engineers with screwdrivers trying to get this thing to work, which they never did at all. [pause] But no, it was very very hard to get... Because I was working very closely with them in the mid-range things, trying to sell things which they could, could make, because we thought it ought to be a big opportunity, but it was not an opportunity which ever materialised, until eventually, eventually, I went to the main board of Fujitsu, which was a fairly scary business, and said to them that if they didn't get into the international PC business, you know, that they were going to be in trouble, because they were relying on making components, discs, all these things for PCs, and no reason why anybody should buy them from Fujitsu, so they needed to get into... And they, very reluctant, even though they had quite a big PC business in Japan, but it was a very weird business, I mean it wasn't a sort of international machine, and they eventually decided to go for the laptop business, and they did go for specialising in the laptop business. But they were quite reluctant to get into the PC business. But we developed quite a big PC business in the end, but on the back of the Nokia Data merger, which is another subject, because after this STC...

[48:24]

So you were taken over by STC.

Yes.

Very soon after that STC had its own financial wobble, didn't it.

Well they could never afford, they never had the money to buy ICL, that was the problem. [laughs]

Yes.

And they came into us, the first meeting I went to them, they, we had this policy, which, we all had these little cars and, Minis and Christ knows what else to show the company that we were terribly cost-conscious. Went to the first meeting with them,

was at Chewton Glen, do you know Chewton Glen? Well it's a very expensive place down on, in the New Forest. And, all the, all the STC people arrived in these Daimlers, and we had all these battered old cars. And then, the finance director of STC gave us a stiff lecture on how they wouldn't put up with any nonsense, there was going to be brutal cost-cutting and so on and so forth. And we gave a piece about how cost-conscious we were. And then we went to dinner, and the finance director, who was sitting next to me, ordered a £350 bottle of wine. [laughter] So.

And did they insist on a reorganisation of ICL, or did they just leave it?

No. No, they didn't really. They... Arthur Walsh was another counter, you know, counter, I mean, in the ITT tradition of conglomerate accountancy and so on and so forth, and he was another very detailed account man, and when I did my first review with him, I remember going with him, and, I suppose I was running International, but we had three layers of slides, so, the first slide we put up said, you know, this is, this is what such and such, and he would say, 'What's that on line three?' you see. So, we then had a second slide which was the breakdown of line three. And he'd say, 'Oh, that's interesting. What's that line?' So... We had it, we had it absolutely, bang to rights as they say. [laughs] So, yes, so, no. But, Arthur was, yes, he was a chap who believed that everybody should have a quadruple bypass, whether they needed it or not. [pause] Yes, so, yes after that I got moved by Peter Bonfield, because Robb went, Peter took over as Managing Director. And Peter moved me to, well we had, Peter moved me to run International, which was basically, everything outside Europe, Eastern Bloc, Middle East, Far East.

[51:13]

[inaud] STC. Were you looking for synergies with STC?

Oh yes, very hard. And that was, obviously because I was the technical guy or something, I mean, that did fall on my shoulders. So I mean, I went along, I went through all the research and the theory. Kenneth Corfield's theory was that there was this great convergence between telecoms and computers. And Robb, one of his things he had done was, he did this joint venture with Mitel, so we were selling telephone exchanges.

Successfully?

No. No, but we had [inaud] telephone exchanges. Because, everybody thought that telephones and computers were going to converge. So I went through all their research labs to see what I could pick out of there. It wasn't very much, they had one LCD thing which might have been useful for things like Kindle[?] but didn't have fast enough refresh grades. And, on the telecommunications side, I mean we never, never really did. I mean I think it, I think it imploded quite quickly really. I mean, it never really, never really got anywhere, because Kenneth Corfield got, well he got so much trouble one way and another, and, Robb then managed to sell it on to, to Fujitsu. But by that time I was off running the international business.

[52:42]

So you were now running international business, from 1987.

Yes.

And you were responsible for activities outside Western Europe, including the United States, Asia Pacific, Africa, India, Middle East and Eastern Bloc. What was that like?

Lovely. Lovely. I mean, we are sitting here, you know, a few days after the Brexit vote. I have to say I voted for remain. However, the great thing about International was, first of all that everybody spoke English, didn't matter where you were, everybody spoke English, and secondly, the only thing anybody was interested in was making a profit. So if there was a deal to be done, and there was some money and, you know, you could do a deal. They weren't worried about whether you were British or, you know, or anything like that, you know, it was a very, very very straight business. We were making good money in South Africa. We had problems in Australia where I had to put a new managing director in. We had some problems in the States which nobody had ever managed to make a go of really, which, we sort of focused onto the retail business. But overall we made, we were making good, good money in it, which is always a nice thing to be able to report, good money. We could always produce a little bit more money when Peter was a bit short of, you know, his

profit target or something like that, we could always find another mainframe, usually in South Africa, which we could pop in and... And so, so it was a, a nice, nice business to run. And I went to all these places as well, I mean, Abu Dhabi, we had the business with the ADNOC, the off-sea[?], Admarc[?] rather, the off-sea oil company, and ADNOC. And the, we had a joint venture with the, with the Russian merchant marine, to make PCs. We had a PC business manufacturing in Kazan, in Kazakhstan, Kazan, I think it's in Kazakhstan, that I never did go to. It was just the time the wall came down. Went to Poland. All over Africa, Egypt, you know, all sort of... I mean, lots of difficult accounting problems with local currencies and, that was a... And the other good thing was, that it was run by me, myself and an accountant, David Small[sp?], who was my accountant, and I, ran the whole thing, just the two of us.

Where were you based?

Overseas. From the moment I got there I made it clear that I was not available for any meetings at all, and that I should only be found on an aeroplane somewhere. So I spent most of my time, usually in tree-week blocks, you know, three weeks in the south, three weeks in, you know, around the place. I was motivated partly by the fact that one of my predecessors, who had been recruited from Rank Xerox, did spend his time in the office, and he got fired. [laughs] So, that was very nice, a very successful period.

[56:09]

And I then got moved to the equivalent job of president of Europe. And that, to sort of, join the Brexit thing, is exactly the opposite. Nobody's interested in making money; everybody is interested in politics. The French will only talk to you in French, under any circumstances, particularly if it's sensitive. Everybody is worried about their national prestige; they're not really worried about the common good of the business. People won't do what they're told. [laughs] It's a nightmare, absolute nightmare really. And of course when I took it over, the problem was that the mainframe business was dying. I mean it was still very strong in the UK, where the old mainframe, big customers, but the, all these European countries had a few mainframes, you know, in France or Germany, with a lot of customer servicing, and these machines were gradually being replaced by other things, IBM things and so on. And what they then were left with was, they had a System Ten, the old Singer

machines, which was never intended to be a business computer, it was a controller for retail originally. So it didn't really have anything much to sell. And I was trying to persuade each of the companies to build a separate service, I mean, service, software business, custom software business, alongside, where possible, I bought small software companies and tried to put them into the things. Very difficult of course, to mix the two. So I wasn't always successful. The German business became 100 per cent PC business. Well, that's another sort of story. But I mean generally speaking, I mean it lost money, and had always lost money, there were very few, the businesses, France I believe once made money but, way back in the Seventies or something. Nobody else made any money at all.

So that was a grim four years you had?

Well it was grim, except that we bought this, our, my Finnish managing director was always trying to persuade us that we ought to buy Nokia, because it's, a large part of the Finnish economy, and eventually we did get approached by Nokia as to whether we would like to buy their business. They had bought the Ericsson business in Sweden previously, and the Data Cell business. So they were the repository of the Northern European computer businesses. So, Peter and I went over it [laughs], and, some exciting negotiations with Olli, Olli Kalli[sp?], I can't remember his name. The previous managing director had thrown his computer, Nokia one, had thrown his computer out of the tenth floor window and jumped out after it. I think it was the chairman actually. So things weren't going well at the time. [laughs] So we bought the business, and essentially what we bought was the PC business in Sweden and, and Finland, and it was about a third of the Finnish exports. I mean it was big business. And, what we did was, I'm getting slightly into the next period, is that we reversed the ICL personal computer business, which was doing some business in the UK but not very exciting really, but we reversed this into the Finnish business, I reversed it into the Finnish business. We made the Finnish PC business *the* PC business. We moved some of the staff from Bracknell over to Finland. And then subsequently, David Mills, who was running the business, we bought a business called Aquarius, which was an East German computer, PC computer manufacturing, and we built, we got rid of everything in Germany, apart from the PC business, and we built, as I say, a

business, which I think, at one stage we had about, seven, seven or eight per cent of the European market. And, we actually made some money.

[1:00:51]

But making these two businesses, the Nokia data thing was a very sensitive acquisition, because, all acquisitions are problematic I would say, Finnish acquisitions more so than most. They are lovely people, I love the Finns, but they, they are very very difficult people as well. They will only, they take a lot of persuading to do things, but once you persuade them to do things, it's impossible to stop them, you know. They go straight through brick walls and, and things. So the first thing I had to do was to read up their exploits during the war, when, after, after Hitler declared war on Russia the Finns decided that this was their opportunity to conquer Russia. This is very Finnish. [laughs] So they joined with Hitler and tried to conquer Russia, not very successfully really, but they, they made a good go of it. But once you understand that, you sort of understand this, this Finnish psychology... The Finnish managing director, they get very depressed, he used to ring me up at one o'clock in the morning and saying, 'I'm sitting in my car in the garage. I'm so depressed, everything is going so badly,' you know. You'd say, 'Now there there. It's all right, it'll be much better in the morning.' [laughs] They are a manic, manic depressive [inaud]. But however, we did, had a very successful... Of course we had operations in each of the countries, so... I appointed the best person in each country to run the, run the country; in some cases the Finnish person, some places the British person. Some of them were very surprised because they all expected they'd be fired, instead of being appointed managing director. The Spanish chap I put in managing director, he was horrified, he had already gone out and found himself another job. [laughs] And, that was, that was very successful, and did mean that Europe did very briefly, while it had this Finish business, did briefly go into profit. But it also had a year when it very nearly bankrupted the, the company. We had, one year we went into profit, but with the PC business, as you know, it's all in the Christmas period, and, when we got to Christmas we were looking at the sales, and, we said, well, how much are our losses going to be? Might be 20 million, might be 30, could be as much as 60 million, you know, if it's 60 million, [strangling vocal sound] you know. In the end I think it was only 20 or something. Sales were, a desperate business. Very very exciting. [laughs]

[1:03:42]

Then you were brought back as Group Executive Director for Technology, from 1993 till '96.

Yes. So, I suppose at the end of that... Oh one thing I should tell you was that, Arthur Walsh, who, you know, was the STC man, he, he... It was some time... He eventually admitted that, because I ran the development, he assumed that I was an engineer you see. [laughs] Well of course I'm not an engineer at all. So he was horrified to discover I was a salesman. No, so I was given the technology businesses, I had everything which was roughly technical. So one time I had maintenance business and we did, I was trying, tried to get the maintenance business into third party maintenance, not successfully. We had a big, we bought, the European business of Sorvus[?], which was an IBM compatible maintenance company. We tried to... Because I could see that the maintenance business, you know, wasn't going to be a mainframe business, and they had to get anything else. I said, I don't really mind if you're maintaining washing machines, you know, we've got these engineers, they all know electronics, they're all over the countryside, you know, for Christ's sake, we can find something else for them to do, you know. Then I had the manufacturing D2D, which again, the mainframes, you know, I mean, they, they were making money but they, we got them into the contract manufacturing business, making... And eventually that enabled us to sell that business, Richard Christie[sp?] sold it in the end, to Canadian, the Canadian ex-IBM manufacturing business in Canada, which they had spun off as a separate company. Then I had Technology Plc, which was a little distribution company which the UK company had bought, which was selling not only ICL PCs but also IBM PCs. And I tried very very hard to keep that into a tightly-focused PC business, but Keith Todd insisted on giving them bits of the ICL business, which they would have been better... I also tried to keep them in the UK desperately, because Marie Van Ingen was Dutch, she desperately wanted to expand into Holland. Well, after Europe I had had... I always say[?] as a marketing person, you should never expand overseas until you've saturated your home market. That's not[?] my philosophy. Because ICL did the opposite, you know. I mean, the first, the first LEO III we sold was in South Africa, you know. Stupid really. Then... So I had Technology Plc, I had the PC business which was the Nokia data business, and then I had research, which there wasn't much left of by then, which included the

Munich tripartite agreement with Bull and Siemens, which I bought out, Bull and Siemens share in this, for about 600,000, and then, later on they managed to sell it to somebody for, 30 million or something, 25 million, I can't remember what it was. And the mainframe business, which was then starting building machines based on Intel chips to replace the custom silicon we had. And run UNIX as well as VME, a dual, dual system. [pause] At one stage I was, I even had the, the corporate computing for ICL's Intel corporate computing. [laughs] I always used to get landed with anything Keith Todd couldn't think what to do with. [laughs] So, anything that was technical was, mine I suppose at that stage.

[1:07:47]

And then in '96 you retired?

Well, I then announced I was going to retire at 60, because, the business had become a real, really, a drag. You know, people think they have a problem now, but nobody had had a salary increase for, the last three or four years, you know, the mainframe business was disintegrating, the, you know, the business was breaking up along, you know, specialised lines. We were having to, I spent my last year divesting things, selling off the Far East, selling off Spain, all these companies which clearly would never ever make a profit. Well, I suppose as a long-term ICL person, you know, to leave hardware completely, which is what the company eventually did, and to abandon all these countries, people, I had grown up with them, knew terribly well, I mean, it became distasteful really I suppose. So I said I'm going to retire, and that's when Keith sort of put me on all these distasteful jobs. [laughs] So I just, was doing divestment corporate computing, you know, selling off things to Fujitsu. And then I, left.

Thank you very much Ninian Eadie.

[pause in recording]

[1:09:21]

We're back at the Archives of Information Technology with Ninian Eadie. Ninian, where and when were you born?

Oh, I was born in 1937, in a village called Wombourne, which is five miles to the south-west of Wolverhampton.

And, what were your parents doing there?

Well my father was a civil engineer. He originally worked for Robert McAlpine as their chief engineer, set up in business on his own between the wars, and his business was building hospitals, schools and council houses.

And your mother?

My mother was, first of all trained as a classical musician, up to whatever the top level is there, and then, after that she trained as, what we would today call a physiotherapist, and she worked at the Haslar Naval Hospital. Her father was a GP.

What did you say, what would you say now that you got from your parents that helped you in your career?

Well I think, my father was a Scotsman, Glaswegian. I mean he believed in hard work, he believed in business I suppose, and, as a result I never really wanted, while those around me wanted to do politics, or teach, or, become an academic, I always wanted to go into business. My mother, I mean, was just extremely hard, a hard-working woman I would say, and her success, certainly her musical success, you know, was the result of dogged determination I would say.

And do you have that?

Yes. Yes, I mean I am extremely, extremely persistent, and I play a long game, and Peter Aylett[sp?], who was my boss when I was running Government, he said that, that he would never choose me for an assault, but if a long siege was required, I was his man. And of course Government was mostly long sieges. [laughs]

[1:11:46]

It was quite a big family.

Yes. I was the youngest of seven. My father had two wives, he had four children by his first wife who died, and then three boys by, by my mother.

What was the family atmosphere like?

Oh, very difficult really I would say. As the youngest, I was not very popular. Having two families, you know, the first family didn't like the second family, and, well, not so much vice versa but you know, there was a lot of tension I would say in the, in the air. My eldest brother was 20 years older than me, so, it's a big, big span.

[1:12:36]

Where did you go to school?

I went to school first of all in the Midlands, that was, towards the end of the, of the war, in what is now Telford, Wellington, it's now part of Telford, prep school, private preparatory school. And then I went from there to Winchester. My elder brother, my, the second family, the eldest one went to Rugby and the second one went to Winchester, and then I followed him to Winchester.

What were the characteristics of Winchester at the time?

Well, it was a bit like a mediaeval monastery really. A lot of, whatever it is. They weren't particularly well-behaved I would say. Quite shocking. [laughs] Of course it's a fantastically beautiful spot, so, beautiful on the outside, corrupt on the inside is always my description of Winchester. [laughs]

Right. And you, you went on to Oxford.

Yes. Well, I... At Winchester I was a historian, read English and, did English and history, really were my subjects, and I was, I suppose the most, top English person at Winchester. I was in the top form for five terms or something like that. So it was assumed that I would get a scholarship to Oxford, and that if I didn't get the open

scholarship they'd offer me an entrance anyway. But in the event I got neither, so, I left Winchester without any entrance to Oxford at all. I went into the Navy for National Service straight away, and, obviously I had been preparing to go into the Navy, I went in because all my brothers were officers in the Army, and I couldn't stand the thought of having to sloop[?] 'em all the time. So I went into the Navy. And I had to take my Balliol, Oxford exams at sea, in an aircraft carrier in the Mediterranean. And then I went for my interview in Balliol in my bottom, trousers, sailor. And I always think that's the only reason I got in to Balliol really. [laughs]

[1:14:55]

What did the Navy teach you?

Well, of course I hated... Loved and, love-hatred relationship with the Navy. I mean I adored everything naval, the ships, driving the ships around the Mediterranean, being at sea, navigation was terrific, and I absolutely hated everybody I met in the Navy. [laughs] I hated the hierarchy, and, so on. I had to share a cabin with an officer who was one rank above me, I suppose I was midshipman, was a, lieutenant I suppose. Maybe... Yes, he was a lieutenant. And I remember him telling me that I should not address him unless he had spoken to me first. And this was the Navy for you, you know. And of course there aren't many of you in, I mean if you're on a ship, frigate or something, there are only five officers or something like that on the ship. So, if you're the junior one, you know, so, you're hated by the ratings and hated by the officers, so... [laughs]

You don't like hierarchy?

I hate, hate hierarchy, and, yes. So, I guess... However, I mean, having said that, I mean, they do knock a lot of discipline into you in the Navy, I mean it's no different from the Army in that respect. They don't make you an officer in the Navy until you pass your final exams, not like the... No such thing as an officer cadet, you're a seaman, and if you don't pass your exams you stay a seaman. Quite a lot of my friends did remain seamen for their whole National Service. Anyway, I mean I, I was very pleased to do the National Service first, because, I suppose having gone in at eighteen or something, I mean, at least, you know, I had had a few of the rough edges

knocked off me before I got up to Oxford. And I'm sure I benefited a lot, was able to take more benefit from Oxford having done the two years' National Service than if I hadn't.

[1:16:54]

A great change of culture.

Yes. Oxford was a liberating, complete, wonderful, wonderful experience, complete liberation. No hierarchy. Walk into any room, any lecture, any meeting, don't have to say who you are, doesn't matter if it's your subject. When my son went to university I said to him, 'The only advice I'm giving you is, never go to any lecture that is on any of the subjects you are supposed to be reading.'

Why?

What?

Why?

Well I never did. [laughter] I never, never never did. I went to quite a lot of lectures but never on any of the subjects I was reading.

And you were reading PPE?

Yes. I always reckoned it was, a bad use of time sitting in some lecture; figured I'd get the textbook and read it and that would save me, a whole course of lectures.

[laughs]

[1:17:50]

So you, you graduated, and then you looked for a job, did you?

Yes. Well, I mean, I think... I mean there was a careers office, but it wasn't a very, you know, a very well-organised, the way it is now I suppose. We did have, I remember one or two IBM people came around and lectured us on how we ought to

join IBM. But what I did was, I went to the career office and I said, I'm going into industry. Was very unpopular, I mean, almost as unpopular as rowing. I mean my economics tutor told[?] me, Lord Mallog[sp?], I mean he, when he discovered I was rowing, I think that was the end of it. And, say you're going into industry, you're not one of us really, just was, the Civil Service sort of thing. So, so I simply picked out some different industries and thought, well I'll go round and talk to them and see what it was like. So I picked an oil company, I can't remember which one it was now, and I picked a, a cosmetics company up in the East End of London, and I picked a computer, couple of computer companies, IBM and, and then went round and saw what they had to, had to offer. And the people in the cosmetics company, the chap there, he said, 'Well you don't want to join here, whatever you do,' he said. 'I mean all the board of directors are family members,' he said, 'there's no future for you in here.' He said, 'What else have got on offer?' And I said, 'Well I've got these couple of computer companies.' He said, 'A great future in computers. You ought to do that.' So that's what I did. [laughs]

[1:19:26]

And you applied to LEO and got a job there.

Yes. And I liked LEO. The atmosphere was very informal. It was a very small company at the time, I mean, I don't know how many people there were in LEO, including manufacturing, I mean, a couple of hundred or something like that. I mean, in the sales side, maybe... I don't know.

This is 1960.

Yes.

And there were jobs aplenty?

Twelve, fifteen. Oh, as an Oxford graduate, you've got to remember only, at that stage only five per cent of graduate people were going to university at all, so, as an Oxford graduate I mean, yes, you, you did expect to get offered wherever you, you know, you were choosing, not the other way round

And you went into sales.

Well, not strictly speaking. Sales hadn't been... I should tell you. It hadn't been invented at that stage in the thing. We had things called consultants. And a consultant was supposed to do everything that was required to be done by the customer, from, you know, selling, but then also installing his machine, advising him on, you know, his, how to use the computer in the business, and so on and so forth. So, after a short period in programming, teaching programming really, because the system then was that I went on the Intercode programming course for, to learn the autocode effectively as it was then, and then, I, after that I taught the subsequent courses. So I mean... [laughs] And then I was put onto writing the language definition for the high-level language compiler, which I didn't know anything about, but, I didn't realise then that nobody knew anything about these things. [laughs] So you were invent... You know, you were expected to invent these things. So then I was made a consultant, a junior consultant. And my first job was to go up to the Singer manufacturing company in Clydesdale with Mike Jackson, who was my senior consultant, and, at Clydesdale they had 20,000 people working on one six-acre site. At one end of the site trees and pig iron went in, and at the other end came out sewing machines, needles. They made all their own nuts, bolts, needles, the curved cabinets, the wrought-iron stands, everything. It was completely vertically integrated from one end to the other. And it had a cost accounting system which nobody understood at all, including all the people there. And we were all invited to come in and give proposals and so on. We didn't, we were not successful. I can't remember who won, but, I think they went through three or four manufacturers, one after the other, and today there is not a man on the site.

[1:22:24]

What do you do, what did you do when you were not at work?

Oh. At that stage, well I was, I was doing some, I started doing some dinghy sailing on the river at Ranelagh, in the national twelve. And I also had a sculling boat at London Rowing Club, I used to go and scull in the evenings. And I shared a flat with

a chap who, the same time I joined LEO joined IBM. So while I was doing my programming, he was doing plugboards. [laughs]

[1:23:07]

And you mention you got married. When was that?

Ah, well after I went out to South Africa, I mean I got, I worked for a bit selling work for Doug Comish, I was selling retail systems to, and we sold, say, in our first year we sold six systems, which was half of the total number of systems which were sold that year. And then, I was asked to go out as the sales manager for, for this joint venture in Rand Mines in South Africa. And I got married in, in South Africa.

To a South African woman?

To a South African, yes.

Right. And you have two children?

Yes.

What are they doing?

Well, one is, one went into the computer, well, various bits of the computer industry, worked for various companies, [inaud] International, so on, but has now got twins, which are keeping her busy. And, the other one had, did what I would have liked to have done, did English and got a doctorate in, whatever they do in English now, doesn't involve much English, critical theory or something.

Did you direct your daughter towards...?

Not in the slightest, no. No. My daughter, the daughter got in to computers because she was unemployed, and she used to go down to the employment agency, and, she said that it was so bad, she applied to the DHSS, or, Manpower Services or whatever it was, for a job in the employment... She thought she could do a better job. And

when she got there, they said, 'Well you can either work on the employment desk or you can work in computers. And we'll pay you an extra £50 a year if you work in computers.' So she said she would work in computers. So that's how she got into computers. [laughs]

[1:24:50]

In your career, what do you think has been your biggest success?

Well it's, it's an awfully difficult question to, to answer that, because, I mean I, I would like to think that I was able... ICL was quite an old-fashioned company, and ICT an even more old-fashioned company. And I think, you know, I was able, perhaps because of my LEO background, to move the company at various different points when it needed moving into new areas. So, you know, I was able to move the company into online systems. I mean first of all into terminal systems. I mean when I did the New Range launch, I did the slides, mainframe with terminals all round it, and everybody said, 'You can't do that because they haven't been invented.' So I said... And we had to make a film, and the only way we could film a dumb terminal was to have the chippy make it up out of cardboard. Right? We sent down to Marconi, they didn't have one. So, but then we went into proper online systems, so I had to do, I'm not a mathematician but I had to get the company understanding things like queuing theory, pure code[?], all this sort of, real-time systems. And then, later on I pushed the company into, into the smaller systems, you know, servers, PCs and so on, which were very much needed by the international operations, because they could no longer really sell the mainframes. So that was a, you know, a big change of direction.

[1:26:39]

I was, I moved the company into what I called, Robb called, business centres, so I tried to set up separate groups selling PCs, separate groups selling servers, separate groups selling One Per Desk and so on, and make these profit centres in their own right, really to try and get some movement and innovation going in this rather turbid, turgid atmosphere. Of course it was very unpopular, and everybody fought like cats and dogs, but I mean, at least they were alive, you know, whereas before, I mean, wasn't convinced about that.

[1:27:23]

And then, later on, you know, I tried to get the company to, you know, understand the, the changing nature of the business, and, to move the company to separate out the, the product business and the service business, which eventually enabled the company to survive as a service and consulting business, which it is today in Fujitsu Services. But again, that was very much me pushing the company to, to split out the different types of businesses we were in, and the skillsets. I persuaded the company to, the board to stop looking at the company as market segmentation and try and look at skill segmentation, and say, well we have a group of engineers who are good at fixing things, you know, we have people who can sell things, sell anything really, particularly, you know, big things, and we've got groups of people who can... Oh you know, the skills, the segmentation should follow the skills, rather than arbitrary market segmentations.

[1:28:38]

And then of course I had some, you know, moments of, whatever it is, glory or whatever it is, when I pushed the boat out in things like the launch of New Range, I guess, when I became known to everybody in the company. And when I went from my job as Marketing Director for marketing, whatever it was, for GPCD then, for the Government thing, my boss then, Peter Hall, said, 'Well you've been asked to do New Range; you can go and do it if you like but don't think you can ever come back here.' So I did go and do it. And I did then come back as one of his top managers.

[1:29:23]

You're a persistent man?

And when I went work with Robb Wilmot it was the same, I mean, it was a kiss of death really. I mean you know, not many people would have survived their time with Robb Wilmot.

You're a persistent man?

Well persistent, and... I mean I rowed, and I always thought that the thing about rowing, which is the most brutal sport of any really, I think, in terms of physical thing, that you did learn, one thing you learnt about rowing, apart from, you know, rowing as a team, was that you, you did learn to push yourself beyond pain, you know, if you

were not suffering severe pain when you're rowing, then, [laughs] you're not doing it properly basically. And, business is much the same, I think, you do have to do... And I think from sailing, you know, what I learnt from sailing, I mean sailing's a funny sport, it's quite different to rowing, because in sailing you, you compete in a race and there's somebody up there who sprinkles good and bad luck across the course. There's no rhyme or reason about it, you know, you know, you get a lucky [inaud], you get a bad break, and so on. What you have to learn is how to minimise the disadvantages, when you hit the bad break, how to minimise that, and how to take advantage of the good break when you get it. That's how you win a sailing race. You can't actually control the... And business is like that as well, you know. When things go wrong you have to be able to cut the losses, minimise it, and then occasionally, something goes right and you have to know how to pile in and...

[1:30:57]

Do you still follow the technology?

No I don't really. I think the businesses, from my point of view the business became quite distasteful towards the end of my career. Really, the old product business I suppose, was disappearing. The contraction, we were getting rid of people, I mean, large numbers of people. I mean, you have a company which, when I joined it had 37,000 employees; I don't know what it has now, eleven or... When I left I think it had 11,000. Getting rid of whole companies, countries, which you were personally attached to. I suppose...

How did you deal with that?

Mm?

How did you personally deal with that?

Well you do what you... You do what you have to do, and you, you know, you try and be sensitive to the, the people, but, you know, I mean in the end you have to make difficult decisions really. But, enjoying it isn't the same thing. I think there are people who enjoy this, but I certainly don't enjoy that because I, very much am a

people person, and, you know, I always felt with people that, you know, everybody was in a job because somebody had thought they would be good at it, you know. When they didn't succeed in it, it was really the fault of whoever had put them in the job, not them; you know, they obviously didn't perceive the person's strengths. But it didn't mean they didn't have strengths, you know, if you can get people in to the place where they can play to their strengths, then you have a strong company. So, when I took over from Tomo Razmilovic in International, Tomo's approach was, you know, he said, oh, he would fire a few of the country managers every year, regardless, you know. I would try never to if I could possibly avoid it, fire anybody; I'd try and, if I didn't think they were in the right job, I'd try and work out what the job was, which they were good at. Because these people had come through the organisation, they were very, all bright. Everybody we had in ICL, they were all bright people, they were all graduates, some of them were mathematicians, you know. I often thought, you know, you've got all these wonderful people, why, [laughs] why aren't they doing better, you know. [laughs]

[1:33:19]

What's your biggest mistake that you've made in your career?

[pause] Oh. That's very tough isn't it. Well, I'll tell you what my biggest mistake was. When I went to run Finance Division, the top salesman I had, who was bringing in all the business, was corrupt. And, he was taking kickbacks from the customer, he'd say, 'You buy this machine, you give me this money, and, you know, we do a deal and you get to keep part of it and I get to keep part of it.' You know, all this sort of stuff. Well when I realised that this was happening, I went to my boss then, and said, 'This is the situation. I really don't like this at all, you know, I need your advice. What should I do?' And he said to me, 'He is your top salesman. Do nothing.'

You should have fired him?

I should have fired him immediately. After that, there was plenty of other trouble as a result of that down, downstream. But that was a very very bad, bad mistake. So, you know, you don't want to have any truck with that sort of stuff really.

[1:35:04]

Right. You were 36 years in the business, and you stood up on the 5th of December in 1996, you were then Group Executive Director of ICL, and you gave a speech about [inaud] structures, did you not?

[laughs] Well I, yes I was asked by Imperial, Imperial College, because my research director had, was linked up with Imperial, because we had, you know, different universities which we had relationships. Anyway, asked me to give a speech. And it was to their management, whatever you call it, management, group, not, not their management group but whatever they're called, people who teach management theory at Imperial. So, so I had a think about it, and, thought I would, since I was retiring, I thought I could just say what, what I felt. [laughs]

And what did you feel?

Well what I felt was that, when you look back as a line manager, that... Well, that the senior management are always looking for a silver bullet, you know, if only everybody would do x, you know, we would become infinitely rich and prosperous. And the line manager of course is trying to get on with the sordid job of, selling, or, making computers, or manufacturing computers or whatever it is that they do. And the line manager's viewpoint I think is that the, is that the only way to success is, you either become a better salesman, or you become a manufacturer of more reliable equipment, or you become a better designer, or whatever it is. And you produce better products and better services and new customers come to you. The personnel department, who persuade the line managers, think that, some ism or other will, will do a great job. And I, before this talk I had a look back, and, wrote down all the various different isms and courses that I had been sent on which were meant to improve me and my team. And I produced a list of about, two pages, all about 20 or more different things which had been inflicted on me as a line manager at various different times. And then I picked four or five of them and, went through them to see how much good I thought they had actually done.

And how much good had they done?

None. None at all really. Very quickly forgotten. And, the one that was most worrying I think was, we put a lot of effort into improving quality. Crosby[sp?] was a big thing, Peter Bonfield was a big, you know, was persuaded that we should always have quality courses[?], and, so on and so forth, and we then went in for all the, well we became, ISO this, that the next thing and so on. And then we went into the competitions, and at least two of my divisions won, one won the European quality prize, and the other one the UK quality thing. And we knew everything that there was to know about quality, and we could tell everybody else about quality. But, it doesn't make any difference at all to the quality of the products or services; in fact was major diversion, because, in people's minds they thought that quality was a process of filling in lots of forms to say that you've been through this stage and that stage, and actually, quality isn't like that at all. And I went over to Fujitsu to see why their machines were... Well, their machines were quite different to ours. Ours, when you went to a customer you said, 'Can I see your service record?' And he would show you a record of the service uptime, which might be 97 per cent or something, 98 per cent if it was very good. I went to Fujitsu and said, customer, I said, 'Take me to your...', customer, I went down to Toyota I think it was, said, 'Can I see your service record?' Absolutely blank. Blank, couldn't understand what I was talking about. So I said, 'Well, the thing which says how often the machine breaks down,' you see. So, we all looked at each other, and they, 'Oh, yes,' they said. 'Yes,' they said, 'it's true, Fujitsu machine does break down.' I said, 'Well...' They said, 'Well it did break down, was it last month or the month before.' A big argument. [laughs] They couldn't remember when it had last broken down. So we had a process, when we were doing the Series 39, you had to put on the, on the customer gate array and board and so on, you had to a lot of hand wires. And we had a rule which was, you were not allowed more than, I can't remember what it was now, twelve hand wires or something. If there are more than twelve hand wires, then the whole thing had to be redone, because, everybody knew that, if you put twelve hand wires on, one would be wrong. Right? And I went over to Fujitsu, and they had, a very similar system. This bloody thing, covered, covered in hand wires, you know. Never seen anything like it. And it's all done by these little girls of 21 or 2. Because they only work from sort of, 19 to 23, 24. When they get married, they have to go. Every hand wire's correct. Right? No problem about incorrect hand wires. You know. Doesn't exist. They knew that the hand wire has to go on correctly, you know. That's the difference, you know, it's

a complete, complete mindset difference. Has nothing to do with Crosby[?] I'm afraid. [laughs]

Thank you very much Ninian Eadie.

[End of Interview]