Capturing the Past, Inspiring the Future

John Yard CBE

Interviewed by

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Welcome to the Archives of Information Technology, where we capture the past and inspire the future. It is Monday the 21st of January 2019, and we are in the headquarters of the British Computer Society in central London. I am Richard Sharpe, and I have been researching and writing about the IT industry since the early 1970s.

[00:23]
Today's contributor to the IT industry is unique. John Yard CBE is unique in that he was in full-time employment in the same employer in the public sector, the Inland Revenue, which later became Her Majesty's Customs and Revenue.

Revenue and Customs.

Revenue and Customs. Came from a background which was not necessarily that of an academic, and certainly had very little to do with computers as far as I can see.

Mhm.

Your father was a postal clerk, John, and your mother was a factory worker.

That's correct, yes. So we...

Where was this?

This was in Ruislip, where we lived, with, not very much money. My grandparents had been forced out of their house, Grandad had been made redundant, so they came to live in this small three-bedroomed house with us. And then, when I was about ten my father suffered a stroke, was paralysed down his left side, and struggled to work. So, things were tight in terms of money. And I had two sisters as well. So it was all quite crowded, and, a struggle for my parents.

[01:39]
Your mother worked in a factory?

She worked in a factory, making chocolates of all things.

Right.

She loved them for the first week, and hated them thereafter. [laughs]

Because you could eat all that you wanted...

Exactly.

...and that put you off completely.

Exactly. But, the difficulty of her looking after my father, who was ill with the stroke, and very frustrated at the age of 40 to be disabled and not being able to walk properly, paralysed all the way down his left side, and looking after my grandparents, put a huge pressure on her.
[02:14]
My father then died when I was 21, and within six months my mother died, leaving two sisters, one of whom had just got married, but the other one who was ten years younger, and at that stage was only ten. So she had a bit of a rough time really trying to sort out how she was going to be looked after. And that... She went to live with someone and that didn't work out. Eventually, her best friend's parents adopted her. I knew them quite well. And then the mother died three years later. She's grown up to be one of the most sane people I know. Against that background, I had gone to a grammar school.

[02:57]
Right. You passed your Eleven Plus...

I passed the Eleven Plus.

...in 1955, or thereabouts.

Yes, that's right. Gosh. [laughs]

Which got you into a grammar school, which was important.

Yes.

Because, that meant you weren't in a secondary modern or, a normal secondary school, but it did mean you needed a uniform and a cap.

Yes.

And it means extra expenditure.

It did. Fortunately... It wasn't particularly near, it was in Marylebone, which was a bit of a trek from where I lived, but they paid the fares, but not the uniform. So, I was adding to the financial pressures on the family if you like. So I went to that school, and, and thoroughly enjoyed that, I have to say. It was a, a fantastic, really enjoyable experience. I was really sad when it came to leaving school. And they said to me, I ought to look at going to university, which was much less common in those days.

Mm.

But, we couldn't afford for me to go to university. I needed to go and earn some money. And just as well that I did, given that three years later, as I say, they both died. I don't think it's exceptionally tough compared to things that happened to a number of other people of that generation, but there certainly wasn't the easy life to be able to just drift into whatever you fancied doing. It was a question of, get into something.

[04:18]
Yes. And you left with A Levels in history, English and geography.

Correct.

So you had an arts background.

Yes.

Because you were, one was heavily streamed then, into arts or sciences. The local authorities would have had grants for universities for tuition fees, as they were then, and also for living fees and so on.

Yes.

But you decided not to go to that route.

It, it didn't seem as though... A) it seemed quite difficult to, to sort it out. And the school said, yeah, you should look at that, but, there wasn't really a huge amount of help about how that would be done, and how it would be done in relation to some of the things I was doing at home, in terms of support, which wouldn't have been done if I wasn't there.

Yes.

So, you know, it made it difficult.

[05:06]
So here you are, 1962, eighteen or so years old.

Yes.

And you decide to do what to earn your sheckles?

So I, I did a couple of restaurant jobs, working with Joe Lyons as it was then. And then I drifted into a temporary job with the Ministry of Labour in Ealing, which I could cycle to. And I worked there for, I suppose the best part of a year. And the guy said, 'You really ought to get a job in the Civil Service. We, we like the colour of your jib.' And, I thought, I don't know really. I'm, I'm not that bothered by it. But I did go for an interview, and got offered a job, what at that time was the Inland

Revenue, without really thinking anything about it. It was a job, and, they were going to pay me, and it was in London. And seemed fine. So I just drifted into that.

[06:01]
And what was the job?

So I, I went there as an executive officer responsible for assessing Stamp Duty, which I had never heard of at the time. And, I was given a short training course, and started to do that. It was OK. Seemed a little bit...

What was the position of an executive officer in the Civil Service?

So I would have... I had enough responsibility to make judgements about, how much duty should be paid on, on relatively straightforward documents.

Right.

The more complicated cases would go to a, a higher executive officer.

Right. And so there were...

So, a bit of responsibility.

...EOs as they were called...

Yes.

...and AOs, administrative officers.

They were the next level down. And they were doing...

The next level down.

Yes. They were doing the more clever...

So you immediately came in as an EO.

Yes. Having gone in as a filing clerk in the Ministry of Labour, I then jumped a stage, through the interview process, and got into...

Good. Good. And Stamp Duty was then being charged on house transactions?

House transactions, shares.

Where were you based then?

That was in Bush House, which is at the bottom of Aldwych.

OK. Very nice location.

Yup. And I was a working in London. I was young and fancy free. [laughs]

Yes. Good.

So, yeah, all of that seemed fine. Without, if I'm honest, any particular interest in the job. It was OK, they were quite decent people there. I could do it. But it wasn't really stretching me very much.

[07:33]
At that time, '62, '63, there were just over 300 computers in the UK.

[laughs] Right.

There were about 7,000 computers in the world. Of the 300, or, just over 300 computers, a fifth were US made, of the ones in the UK. You hadn't seen a computer yet.

No.

You were working with pen, pencil, ink.

Pen, pencil and ink. I can't remember now when a calculator first hit the scene, which was really my first introduction into, a bit of technology if you like. [laughs]

Right. Right. You had no interest in technology, in amateur radio, or, crystal radios, or anything like that?

No.

Not a technical bone in your body so far.

No.

[08:20]
OK. So then, '63, '64, what happened, what was your next job?

So I, I did that for two or three years, and then, an opportunity came up to do something called Pay as You Earn Audit, which was travelling around, inspecting firms, companies, and checking that they paid, they had operated the Pay as You Earn scheme correctly. And I was quite keen to do something that involved meeting people, and getting a bit more stuck in, if you like. So I applied for that, and, and got that job. And, and really enjoyed the fact that I was travelling round the south-east, going in as a very green [laughs] and young person, to the surprise of all the people I saw. But I found quite quickly that people, once they knew what you were talking about, they forgot that you were young. Because when you first got there, there was this surprise, my God, surely not. [laughs] And then, you know, that, that... I'm sure that helped build a lot of confidence around what I was doing and how you could do it. And it led to, you would find things that weren't right. There was, how to get them to put it right for the future. Do you need to negotiate a settlement for the past, do you need to charge them a penalty? How do you go about doing that? How irritated are people, are they threatening you? So, it was a real education, because you

saw all sorts, from Billingsgate fish market at five in the morning, threatened with a knife, to, you know, posh solicitors and firms in the City.

[09:57]
Right. And this is an area which is quite complex, PAYE, and it's the, it's the employer's obligation to collect that PAYE from their employees.

Correct.

Hand it correctly to the Inland Revenue. And one, technical errors can occur, clerical errors can occur.

Yes.

And two, it is, and it used to be, and presumably this is what you were also hunting, an area of fraud, was it not?

Yes. Exactly.

Yes? You would collect it from employees, but you wouldn't declare these employees to the Inland Revenue, and you'd have some extra money.

And that was the serious case, which we called a criminal prosecution, and that was the one where you earned your spurs. So I, I had, I found one of those, and took that...

Did you? Where was that?

That was in Kensington.

Right.

So, yeah, I mean I, I feel that that job probably gave me the confidence to realise that I could probably tackle most things without any problem.

Mhm.

Which was obviously a good thing.

Mhm.

[10:55]
So I was... I did that for about three years. I suppose that...

In your early twenties.

I'm in my early twenties.

Yes.

And at the age of 23 I was promoted to become a higher executive officer, at that stage. I was the youngest in the country at that time. And I was running an audit centre. So I had about, ten people working for me, and, was in charge of an area of the country, to go and sort these things out. So, that was quite a responsible job, at quite a young age, and again, quite testing in that most people were twice as old as I was at that stage that I was managing. So that was interesting.

How did you tackle that? You had changed from being, to an extent, being an expert on the taxing position, whatever, stamps or PAYE.

Yes.

Stamp Duty. And now you're managing other people...

Yes.

...who are also experts. How does that work for you?

It was helped by the fact that I, I knew what they were doing, and I, I would talk on the same level. Some of them had done it longer than I had. But, I found that the right way to deal with that was to listen to what they were saying, and, and find ways in which you could, not, I say challenge, not challenge in an aggressive way, but enter into a discussion about, well, what about this? Well there's another angle here. Or did they say this, or that. And that again began to develop ways in which you could now not only do the job, but could get other people to do the job in the right way. And none of this was with training courses; it was all, off the seat of your pants really. [laughs]

[12:34]
Right. Right. But you were in quite a bureaucratic structure.

Yes.

Which is, Civil Service. You know your grade, they know their grades. Things are quite open in that way.

Yes.

You know how much other people are earning; they how much pretty well you are earning.

That, it was open in that sense. What was less clear, in the, as opposed to the stamps job where you were visible, here, you had much more freedom. So you saw a guy that came down, probably once a quarter, to see how things were going, but, actually, you were pretty much left to it. And I loved that. I thought that was terrific, that you could go out... And what you were judged on was whether you were getting results. So... I suppose a bit like when you're self-employed, you, you need the next job. And you would say, well I've got this case, and I've recovered this amount of money. I need to know I'm going to get some more, and keep the, keep the money rolling in, if you like, and...

And did you have targets?

There were some targets. They were, they were a bit vague in... They weren't as precise as you would see today. But it was clear that people looked to see who was getting in the most money. There was always a slight nervousness about targeting yield on the basis that it would be, you would be going out to deliberately try and batter the old lady or whatever [laughs], or people who were a bit worried and nervous about it, rather than going for what was a fair settlement.

Mm.

So that was always a bit...

[14:05]
Physically, where was this?

This was based in the, the Elephant and Castle, and then at New Malden. But covered a wedge of the country going down to the south coast.

Right.

So Portsmouth; one bit was down in Kent; then I moved across, and I was down in Chichester, Portsmouth, in a triangle coming right up to central London.

And still no computer?

Still no computer.

[14:26]
Right. When did you first bump into a computer, or the product of a computer?

That was quite a long time later. My... Just to slightly backtrack. Before I got involved in computers, my brother-in-law at the time worked for a company that was doing computerisation, and we talked a bit about the way that you might be able to take some of what I saw as very administrative, paper-based, processes and automate

those. He knew a bit about programming, which I didn't know, but through that I could see that there were ways that people who were more technically aware than I was could convert what I was seeing as a fairly standard set of processes into something that could be done automatically. So I, I had got that inkling I suppose you would, you would call that. But, around the time I'm talking about, late Sixties, early Seventies, computerisation, really no, no real awareness of it at all.

Right. Not at your level.

Not at my level.

But some work was being done, presumably, in the Inland Revenue on the use of computers.

There were bits. It was a bit sporadic. The, the breakthrough came round about the early Eighties with the computerisation of Pay As You Earn.

Right.

Which at the time was the biggest computer project, certainly in Europe. And that was when I really started to see what this is all about.

[16:08]
That was in the early Eighties.

That was in the early Eighties.

What position were you then?

So I then, I had a... I've jumped a bit, because I had a change of career. So I was then in audit. I was running this audit centre. And I did that I suppose for four or five years. And, somebody phoned me up and said, 'There's a trawl going round where they're looking for tax inspectors, and you ought to apply for it.' It was a friend of mine. And, I said, well I don't really want to do that. You've got to do exams, and,

all the rest of it, and I'm doing pretty well here, so, I don't think I'll bother. So I screwed it up and threw it away. And, he phoned me again and said, 'No no, you really do need to have a go at this. It's a fantastic opportunity.' Normally it was graduates that come in. So I, I did fill in a form. I had an interview. I got the job quite easily. And I became... I went onto, effectively the graduate training scheme to be a tax inspector.

Right.

Five years later if you like than most people who had just left university. So I spent, three years doing the training, and qualified; two years doing the postgraduate training in a tax office; and then I was posted to head office in, 1975 I would think.

Where was head office then?

London.

OK.

Not Bush House. Somerset House.

Right.

[17:35]
So there I was... Oh no, sorry, it wasn't London. I beg your pardon. It was London, but it was in Woburn Place. It was near, not far from here, Russell Square.

Right.

So I was sat there, looking at what they called district procedures, the process by which things were done. Now this was when I started to realise a lot more that... It was interesting to see, when you broke down the steps of the various processes that I had just taken for granted, to start to think, when it's so cumbersome, that you've got to do this all the time, you've got to get a bit of paper out. At the same time, I had

seen around some of the investigation cases, so this was investigating tax evaders when I was running, when I was in a tax district, to analyse a bank account, as an example, you would have a great big sheet of paper, you would be putting all these figures down, and writing them down, and looking at them. So pre-spreadsheets really. And then you were beginning to see spreadsheets come in, and think, oh, it's miraculous. [laughs] Now I can see all the patterns, just by flicking around, instead of having to, try, to write it all out really, and, and analyse and see what the patterns were. Because it was the patterns that told you whether someone was, what someone was doing.

[19:01]
So you were beginning to understand very deeply the process of, where the information comes from, what has to happen to it, where it goes to.

Yes.

You were very much acting as, well, what one would have called contemporaneously a systems analyst.

It... Yes.

As well as putting the procedures together.

Yes. That's much more where I was.

Right.

And then from that, trying to find ways of, both thinking of doing things differently, and changing the policy, to make things simpler, and then also seeing that you could make the process flow more easily.

Was there anybody in this period... This is the late Seventies?

Yes.

Was there anybody in this period, John, in the Inland Revenue, kicking around headquarters saying, 'We could do this with computers'?

Yes.

Were you are of that?

There was a chap, and that, that guy was Steve Matheson. Now Steve Matheson was an entrepreneurial guy. He had been Denis Healey's Private Secretary. And, he saw, and was a very charismatic individual, the opportunity to use computers. And he basically set up, towards the end of the Seventies, early Eighties, this computerisation of Pay As You Earn project. Now at the time, that was a huge endeavour. But it was seen very much as something that, that was on one side. There was a division that was created to look at this. I was vaguely aware it was there, without a huge amount of knowledge of it. But I began to see that, that this was where the future was going to be, in terms of how you would, how you could harness the power of these machines in order to do things better and more efficiently. But I was on the outside of that at that stage.

[21:06]
So the big one, the big early one is PAYE.

Yes.

And the computerisation of that.

Yes.

And that was driven internally by the Inland Revenue.

Yes.

By, Matheson?

Yes.

By Matheson. And, how did he put that together, do you know?

He saw... He had a vision that this was the right way to go.

Right.

And he persuaded the board that this was the right thing to do, and to get funding for it, including in due course a building in Telford, which is still where the Revenue is; the ability to be able to get outside expertise, contractors in; to be able to help with the technical development; and created a group of people that had done some of the early IT work in the Revenue to come and work for him. And he was a leader that people would follow to the ends of the earth. He was a genuinely charismatic individual, and had the drive, and the confidence, to pick this up and make it happen. Despite, as people had begun to realise how much money was being spent, people saying, 'Is this the right thing to do?' And he stuck to his guns and found ways of, of getting it through.

Who was the supplier then? ICL was the supplier?

It was mainly ICL, and, and as was then, CSC.

CSC.

Yes.

And who wrote the software, do you know?

So that would be, it would be a mix of some people that were on the revenue side, particularly some of the contractors that came in.

Right.

Working with the ICLs and the CSCs. ICL really, they were ICL at that stage, Fujitsu now, but they were mainly around the infrastructure side. CSC were a bit more around the, the clever stuff if you like.

Right.

But there were a couple of key consultants at the time, one was a guy called John Cowl, who's American, and, you know, really knew what he was doing, and drove some of that through. So people were beginning to see that this was going to be real, and it was going to do things.

[23:19]
So this was early Eighties.

Yes.

A really big roll of the dice for the Inland Revenue.

Yes.

If this thing doesn't work, there's a huge, a huge, a huge amount of money which is not flowing in to the Treasury.

Well I suppose, in a way there was a little bit of protection around that, because, the roll-out was staged. So, you could carry on with the existing system if the new one didn't work.

Mhm.

And... So, so in a way the revenue, the yield, the flow of money, was never seriously in danger. What was in danger was, the savings that were expected from it.

Right.

Because, if you had spent all this money and it didn't work, you would still need all the people that you said you were going to save. So, I don't think the tax yield was at risk, but the, the Revenue's costs were at risk.

And to your knowledge, was it a financial success for the Inland Revenue?

It, it was both a financial success and a, a procedural success. And laid the ground not only for Inland Revenue's approach to computerisation, but really, the rest of the Government; DWP, the Home Office, and a lot of the other big departments really followed in the wake of, of that, that computerisation, that activity.

[24:42]
You were still an onlooker though.

I was basically an onlooker. Where I started to get involved... And that was when there was a project looking at the computerisation of Schedule D, which was all over the place. Nobody really... I don't think people even realised it was a project. And I came in. I had a variety of responsibilities, but that was the main thing. And I could see Steve Matheson had made such a success of this Pay As You Earn, and I thought, we need to get on the back of this and do this. So that involved a number of issues. Firstly, don't get in my way, [laughs] was Steve's thing. You know, 'We've got this big Pay As You Earn thing. We need to make it work. And I can't be flapping about with these other things. Even though I know it's important.'
[25:30]
So I had to find a way that, that worked *with* him, and what they were doing, which I did. And then I got some people that were working for me and got them to think differently about the way they were doing it, and driving it forward as a proper project. Appointed an individual who, who worked for me at that time, a guy called Ron Skelley, and said to him, 'Look, go up, go and live in Telford, and work from there, closely to these guys that are doing the Pay As You Earn thing, and let's set up a team to go alongside that, and develop this new approach to Schedule D.' And I was then full-on into, how do you computerise a manual system, how do you go about doing that, and making this work? Learning some of the lessons that had come out of

Pay As You Earn. At the same time realising that the Pay As You Earn system was sucking, well not sucking, was, was going through a whole series of enhancements to make it better in the light of real money. And my role very much was, with both driving it but also making sure that we understood how it looked from a user perspective. So you are not driving a computer system for the sake of a computer system; you are driving something that makes it easier for people to operate this system, to do their job, so that the boring bits can be done automatically, and the bit that requires intellectual thought, they've got more time to think about how they do that, the bit that's much more difficult to computerise. And nagging away at, no you can't do that because it's easy from a computerisation viewpoint; we need to find a different way of doing it. And getting that user interface was really the key factor in, in driving the whole programme forward.

Again, your main supplier was going to be ICL?

At that stage, that was ICL, yes.

And who else was helping you from outside?

I had one or two freelance contractors that were working with me, and there were freelance contractors working in Telford for Steve, as I said earlier. And I will come back to the freelancers a little bit later, because, they, they dictate what happened as we got into the Nineties.

[27:54]
And, Schedule D, just to explain it to people who might not know it, is actually more complex than PAYE, is it not?

Yes.

And there are, I don't know how many tens of thousands, but there are tens of thousands of people who are on Schedule D, which is a self-declaration process.

Yes.

And they have to get their results, annual return in by the 31st of January of that year.

Yes.

And then, you do some calculations, previously manually, now partly on computer and partly manually, and then you say, 'Yes, that's right. And by the way, you owe us this amount, and we want some of it by the 31st of January, and some of it in June.

Yes.

Yes?

And that...

It is the most, in terms of payments, seems to me the most arcane system I've ever come across.

Yes, and it, the whole payment on account and the appeal process, and estimated assessments, it's a complicated process, and, and driven very much by the fact that the Revenue are in the driving seat in that they will issue an estimated assessment, against which you appeal prior to getting in your accounts, but you will need to make a payment on account beforehand. So all of that had to be thought through and understood, and the way it all interacted together. And, and where people also had an employment, there was the way in which you linked people who were on PAYE and on Schedule D, so that you didn't lose sight of where they were. And that was the start of beginning to see that one of the major problems around developing these large-scale computerised systems was the way in which you integrated things so that you kept them up-to-date. So as a small example. If your address changes and you know about that on the Schedule D side, you ought to inform the Pay As You Earn people; or, what was even more difficult, if someone dies, you really ought to let everybody know so you're not writing, and the widow sees a letter addressed to her dead husband, or whatever. So those were... There was a lot of complexity in the

way in which those systems had to be developed, and, which required a proper understanding of the way the process actually worked.

[30:21]
Yes. Is it therefore your contention, it might not be, I don't know, but is it therefore the your contention, that it would not really have been a success, either PAYE or Schedule D, if it had been driven by technology, rather than by those who knew the administrative processes that were necessary?

Absolutely, that is my contention. And that, I think, is why the CIO role really needs to be somebody who understands and knows how the business operates, what it needs to achieve, and how it goes about doing that. And some of the pitfalls. If it wants to do the thing completely differently, the issues it needs to face, as a business. You need enough knowledge to be able to have a dialogue with the technicians, but the detail of how to actually programme something is for experts.

Right.

In my view. So you need a chief technical officer, who I think would be subordinate to a chief information officer, who should be driving what needs to be done.

This was presumably at this stage in batch process?

Yes.

Right. And how did you envisage turning this into a more interactive terminal-based process?

Yes. Well that... We're now into the, the mid-Eighties.

Yes.

Moving on from there. There began to be a concern that, the Revenue was heavily into computerisation now, both on the Schedule D side and the Pay As You Earn side, and a number of other smaller systems were being developed.

[32:06]
So how you have a centralised system for PAYE and Schedule D.

Yup.

And presumably Corporation Tax is along the same trajectory.

Yes.

And you have this centre in Telford...

Yes.

...running these computers, these ICL computers, with various software doing this. What problems do you then find in this period of the early Nineties?

So, our problems then were that, we had a series of systems. They were technically complex, and a lot of that technical knowledge was in the hands, in the brains of, contractors, who we had known for a long time, but nonetheless, that was creating a significant risk in that the pool of knowledge was concentrated in the hands of a very small number of technically competent people. That was a risk we worried about, combined with the fact that these people were starting to blackmail us when it came to negotiating their rates, as they began to realise their scarcity value, and the knowledge they had. It was that which led us to think about, is there a way in which you could use the industry to do the automation work, allowing Revenue staff to focus on what they really know about, which is the way in which you process and assess and collect and investigate tax.

[33:33]

So from what I, what I hear you're saying now, John, this is now necessarily a big push from the politicians, it's not the Treasury saying, 'You've got to save money.' It's the Inland Revenue itself saying, we must look at outsourcing as a potential way out of this problem.

Yes. So this was the, this was an ideal. It was no more than that at the beginning. It was the germ of an idea about a possibility, which started to get looked at reasonably seriously by a small group of us as to whether this was really something that was feasible. And there were some conversations that took place with senior people in the industry, but it was all very high level and all very general. But – this was the Major government – with the market testing initiative, and the drive from Government to say, why is it that so much of the administrative function of the public sector is not done by the private sector? Because, they thought at the time that the private sector can do it more cheaply, more efficiently, and better. So now, there was the opportunity for a marriage of convenience. Here was the Revenue thinking something very radical, and here were ministers saying, 'We don't think you should be doing administrative stuff.' So that led to the conversation about, well, shall we have a look at this? Should we be looking to see whether or not we could do that? And of course, there were huge worries about whether or not that was feasible or not.

I would have thought that some people in the Inland Revenue were saying, 'These people are insane.'

And there were. And, it required a huge amount of work to look at how feasible this was, and whether it would then be worth going to the market, a) to see if they were interested, and b), if they were interested, to run a competition, and to see whether or not the resulting price that you would pay would be less than you were paying doing it in-house, and, and still being able to run the whole thing effectively. So...

Did you have a clinching argument in your favour, or was it a series of arguments that you were putting forward?

It, it would have been a series of arguments, but helped enormously by the fact that, there was the drive from the Conservative government at the time to get stuff out of

the public sector. There was a feel that the public sector wasn't very good at doing these things, and the private sector was really very good at doing them.

Was that your view?

No. I think... My view was, there were opportunities to get more involved with the private sector, but the important thing was going to be, and this is something that we'll come back to, if you're going to outsource something, you have not solved your problem. All you are doing is changing the way in which you are going to manage it. But, you've got to put the effort in after you've done the deal, to manage the supplier. And the reason why, in my view, outsourcing has got such a bad name is that people look, and see it's all very exciting and very sexy when you're going through the competitive process, you're looking to see whether you should choose A or B, and eventually, you get to the point of saying, 'Great.' Everyone goes out, everybody has a glass of champagne, and the flags are flying. And then, the people that have been involved disappear, and go on to the next thing. The sales guys from the supplier take their bonus and bugger off, and the procurement people and the people that have run it on the client side, do likewise. And my argument was, if you're going to do it, the hard bit is not the competition, even though that's where the focus is, and it's important to do it properly, because, whether you choose A or B, they both could do it. The problem you've got is that nobody, none of the suppliers, have got enough high calibre resource to deal with and cope with all of their clients. So if you outsource, you are going to be in competition with all of their other clients, and you have got to manage them to make sure that you are top of the tree, and get the pick of the resource. Because that's really why you've gone to the market, to get the skilled resource that you can't get yourself.

[38:46]
And so you won the argument inside the Inland Revenue.

We won the argument.

With you colleagues.

And...

And you were allowed to put it out to tender.

We put it out to tender. And a colleague of mine, Geoff Bush, was running that procurement, and, he was the... Sorry, just go back. He was the head of IT, Director of IT. He was asked to run that procurement, and I was asked to come in and take his role as the Director of IT, on the basis that after the outsource had happened, I would then run it. And I was told by most of my friends and colleagues that this was a complete hospital pass, and I must be bonkers to do it. But it was a great challenge. [laughs]

[39:33]
1994.

1994, that contract was let.

To EDS.

To EDS.

Now if I took an organisation as bureaucratic, with its long history, and I don't mean that in a bad way...

No no no.

...with its long history, and its roots in English political and civil life, called the Inland Revenue, and compared that with anything that was more alien to it than EDS, I don't think I would have picked anybody more alien than EDS.

No.

You have this immensely ferocious Dallas-based company...

Yup

...run by a man called Ross Perot, who had taken over General Motors's IT. They put him on the board, and eventually, just to get rid of him, they bought the company.

[laughs] Yes.

Just to get him off the board. Because... He had also run for President I believe.

Yes.

He ran this as a ferocious marketing operation. How did you deal with that? You were just landing yourself right in the hands of...

Yes. I, I think, the thing that people forget is that actually Ross Perot had moved on.

Right.

He wasn't there, in EDS, when we were doing this deal.

Right,

It was a guy called Les Alberthal. And, and basically, it was the, it was a classic fast-growth company. You had this disruptor in Perot, and everything was all over the place, and the storming, and then you had a consolidator. And that was this guy Alberthal. Nonetheless, you know, they had seen, this was a fantastic opportunity to try and win this, against the ICLs of this world, and against CSC, who were, who both were major, major partners in the way in which we had done IT in-house.

[41:23]
What won it for EDS?

They came across very well in terms of bothering to listen and to react to what was being said as we went through the procurement process, which took the best part of

two years. So, you, you felt that they were under-, bothering to understand what the issues were, and doing things that would help sort out some of the problems, and coming up with some quite innovative stuff around things that we had struggled with during the course of the, the negotiation and, and the procurement. My worry, from my particular position having to pick the pieces up at the end, was, who is going to run it? Because you are the smart sales guys in your posh suits, and I know you're going to go away. And one of the things they did was to get their team, the team that was going to run it, in place early on, and that I think was another factor that helped give people confidence that, that they could do this. Now...

Was there any political concern, there might not have been, I'm just asking, that you are going to hand this into a Dallas-based company, and not let it to, ICL, was there any pressure at all?

Yes, there was a bit of pressure around that. I think, where it went was that people felt it should be a, a proper competition, a fair-based competition, and that, there was a big, there was a UK, a clear UK subsidiary of EDS. But, whilst there were worries, they were, people accepted, they didn't, they didn't stop it because of that. That, I, I think that as a real risk, that it would have been stopped because of that.

Right. But it wasn't.

But it wasn't.

[43:21]
And you went with EDS from 1994.

We did.

And they took it over.

Yes.

And they saved you money.

They saved us money. Now, when you look at the PAC record, you will see that...

This is the Public Accounts Committee.

Public Accounts Committee. You will see that, there's a lot of stuff about, well actually, this deal's costing a lot more than the original deal. And the reason for that was that we kept asking them for more and more. So there was a, a price per, this and that work, and then what they, what we wanted them to do was that, and that, and that, and that, and surprise surprise, that price would have gone up. That price compared to what it would have been if we had stayed on the old system was lower.

Right. What was the value of this contract?

[coughs] About one and a half billion.

One and a half billion. That's quite a large amount of money.

That's...

[44:20]
Yes. And you had a gradual tapering off, did you? You didn't just switch it on one day from you to EDS?

No, it was switched on on one day. Because, the majority of people who worked on IT all went across to become EDS employees.

OK.

So one of the big things that I was involved in was, here are these people, comfortably off civil servants working in Telford, life's a breeze, suddenly being told, you're going to work with this big American conglomerate. Have I got a job? What is going to happen? Now this was at a time when the civil servants were getting no pay rises. And I can remember going up and standing in front of them on one occasion and

saying, 'Here's the *Evening Standard* headline saying nought per cent pay rise for civil servants, and worries about jobs. You've got the opportunity to go to an American company that's growing, in a field that's growing, i.e. computerisation.' People were not convinced. [laughs]

Not everybody. No.

But, you know, and this was very difficult for the staff, this huge amount of uncertainty in what had been for them a very certain world.

Mm.

So...

Did you make redundancies?

We didn't. They made a few, but it was very controlled. And... [coughs] And the way in which the bid was put together was to explain, to get them to explain what redundancies they wanted to make and how they were going to do that. So that we were not just throwing people over the wall.

Sure.

Because we had to manage, you know, here's a workforce that you're hugely dependent on, and they did take some industrial action, but, it was all very minor actually, but, there was a real worry that people would down tools, say, 'We're not going to do this.' Quite strong unions.

[46:03]
Surely. So in 1996 you were appointed Director of Business Services.

Yes. So now, I'm running this deal, and I now pick up responsibility, basically for all the administrative processes, district procedures, procurement more generally, commercial procurement, running the car fleet, and all the commercial stuff. So I

picked up a whole range of, really of, estates, and, and all of that. So... And part of the reason for that was that, we wanted to outsource the estate, and we did another contract to, to push that out.

You are fifty-two.

Yes.

This is quite a responsibility for a man of fifty-two isn't it?

Well, I suppose no worse than, than in a big private sector organisation.

You're dealing with a budget of about two billion by now aren't you?

Yes. That was a big budget, a big budget and a lot of people.

Right.

[47:06]
But on the IT side, the next problem that really cropped up was round about '97, '98, when the National Insurance system, which had been run by DWP, was passed across to the Revenue. Now this was the, this was a major system, dealing with the whole country's National Insurance, run by Accenture, which was in all sorts of trouble. And, there had been parliamentary hearings about it. Accenture and the Department, DWP, were not talking to each other, or were talking very aggressively to each other, and threatening each other, and it was going nowhere. My boss at the time, the Permanent Secretary, had done a deal whereby the Contributions Agency and their staff were coming across to the Revenue. He was keen on that, because it showed the rest of the staff that we were a growing department, and that was attractive at a time when numbers were reducing. I sent him a Christmas card that said, 'That's all very well, but under the Christmas tree is this ticking time bomb which is the National Insurance system.'
[48:18]

So that landed on my plate. Now, we've got an outsource with EDS, a failing deal that's coming in run by Accenture, and these two systems are very closely connected, and I need these people to work together. EDS and Accenture at that time still, in their different guises, were very much competitors. So I had to try and find, a) find a way that I could resolve the problem with Accenture and get that onto an evil keel, and then get EDS and Accenture to start to get on with each other. And EDS said, 'Well you don't love me any more, you keep sorting out Accenture.' And, I, I did a deal with Accenture which they did not believe I could do. I went to them shortly after this came across and said, 'I can solve this problem for you, but you need to help me.' And I said, 'I can put my hand on the key, but I can't turn it unless you put your hand on mine and turn the key as well.' And this guy was a hardnosed Aussie guy. And he looked me between the eyes and he said, 'I don't believe you.' And I said, 'Well I, I'll tell you what. Let's wait a month. I will go and see a minister, and explain what I'm going to do, and if I've done that, and that has moved things a bit and created an environment within which we can do something, I expect you to put your hand on mine and help me turn this key.' And I did do that, and went back, and when he saw that that was done, and we did actually start working properly together. And did a deal. Which got nerves onto an even keel, and it's still being used today.

[50:04]

In all of this story, it does seem to me, I just want to emphasise this and get your understanding of this again, that, if you had been a technologist, you wouldn't have been able to do this.

[pause] I don't think so. Because, it was about, having to understand the way that a supplier that to my mind was subservient to the organisation was providing a service that would meet the needs of the organisation, which they couldn't know themselves. They could only know that through the mechanisms that you put in place to get them to understand it, for them to believe that when things were going on, that they knew that I had the confidence of the board to drive things forward.

[51:02]

Now, there are some interesting things about all of that, because, the deal was done; the board's attitude, board of Inland Revenue this is, the board's attitude was, we've done the deal. Great, end of story. My message about, this is the start of something

big, was ignored. And, surprise surprise, it turned out that the, there were some flaws in the deal. We had to do a renegotiation. That involved some more money in return for some more effort. And I had to go to the board and say, 'Look, I think you need to put some more money into this, even though you would like to put the money into tax offices at the front line.' I was pretty unpopular, to, to the point where people really found it difficult to talk to you. [laughs]

Did they come to you as well and say, 'John, are you sure that we shouldn't take this back in-house?'?

They didn't go as far as taking it back in-house, but surely we can do something different. Where does all this money on IT go? It seems like a black hole. And, trying to go through and show them. Because we had got models of where all the costs were, as part of the original outsource. But of course, trying to get people to understand some of the elements of infrastructure is really really difficult. And there was the feeling that, well, you're just hiding money. [laughs] And, you're not using it an embezzled sense, but using it for, for the good of your division rather than elsewhere.

Yes.

So there was a lot of effort involved in, in getting that, getting that understanding. [52:43]
Now, we supported all of this by a series of board-to-board meetings. So I said, if I'm going to run this, I want a meeting every six months, with the CEO of EDS, the group CEO, not the UK guy, and my boss, the Permanent Secretary of the Revenue, alternately in Dallas and London. And the reason for those meetings was not that, the meetings themselves were usually quite straightforward, but the run-up to them was often very hectic, because that was when you were going to say, 'I'm going to go to Dallas and say to your guys that you are just not performing. You're not doing this, you're not doing that. You're ripping us off, whatever. So the nearer you got to the actual meeting, the harder the conversations got to try and get to the deal, including on occasions the Saturday... Not the Saturday. On, say, the Thursday night before the meeting, people would go out, and I and my opposite number would actually be

saying, 'No, we are sat here until we've sorted this.' But that was an important mechanism, because neither side wanted to actually go formally to their boss and hear them say that they were screwing up.

Good. Good.

And that involved, you know, getting... I used to say to my opposite number, 'I need to understand your bonus arrangements. Because if you're getting bonused on growth, and I'm being told to cut, then we're going nowhere, are we? And I need to be able to tell your guys, don't be so stupid pushing this guy to get, deliver on, on growth.' So there were some quite hard conversations around all of this, and, and quite, quite personal conversations to get people to then trust you, that you weren't trying to do them down; you're actually trying to work and manage each board, who really, you know, didn't know anything really about what was going on, and get them to understand that, you know, your simplistic reaction of, go and get more money out of them, or just give us back, just charge us much less, those simplistic things were never going to work.

[54:50]
This is the late Nineties, and at that time people are knocking on your door saying, 'Oh John, oh John, it's, everything, the whole sky is going to collapse on the 1st of January 2000. We've got this terrible problem of Y2K.'

Yes.

Did you believe them?

I... I certainly believed that we needed to take it seriously. [laughs] And we put... Again, a colleague of mine, who was working for me, I got him to run a project, and again to lead it from the user side, even though most of the issues needed to be looked at from a technical perspective. So we did, we had a big project to, to do all of that.

Was it necessary?

[sighs] I mean in the event, probably not. But, who knows? You couldn't take the risk, was what it came down to.

[55:41]
OK. So, one massive landmark is that, PAYE and Schedule D are computerised. Another massive landmark is that, it is outsourced, to EDS. And now we're going to talk about the third, massive, bombshell, that you were involved in very directly, John Yard CBE, which is, EDS loses the contract.

Yes. [laughs]

Now this is unprecedented.

Yes.

Because as far as, presumably EDS is concerned, it's all very, all nice on the boards and all these board meetings alternately Dallas and London, and, and so on and so forth, but they, in EDS's mind, they've got you.

Yes, absolutely. And this was, not only in EDS's mind, but in everybody else's mind.

Yes.

And I said, no, that's not the case.

What led you to think that you need to change?

It wasn't so much that we necessarily needed to change, but certainly that we needed to avoid complacency, which was the danger of going on the way you were. Because although that was a better deal than the one you had at the time, you know, we're ten years in, the world is moving very fast around the technical front. The Internet wasn't really around, certainly not in terms of our organisation in '94; by, halfway through the contract, it was, but did they have the skills to do that? They used niche suppliers and so on. So, there were things that needed to be thought about in terms of, where do

we go from here? And, I was holding conversations with EDS to say, 'Look, this contract comes to an end, and we do need to complete it. It cannot be right that just because you were here in '94, you can stay forever. So, you need to know we're going to do that. I would expect you to bid. I want you to bid. But, I want you to realise that we are not saying that it would automatically go to you.' Now that, that was the EDS bit. Now the second thing was, how the hell am I going to persuade anybody in the market to risk putting money in to try to unseat EDS? Because the world at large knew that we had a good relationship with them, that the deal was seen as a successful deal, and working well. Indeed it was seen as a model, for a number of other deals.

[58:16]

So I put together, [coughs], excuse me, a slide pack, and went and saw the CEOs of the fourteen major IT companies in the world. And, you know, I was fortunate that people, people let me in. And I went through why it was that this would change, some of the challenges that we were facing, and persuaded people that this was a very real competition, and that it was not a shoe-in for EDS. Now, one thing I did do, because this had never happened before, was persuade the Treasury, much against their better judgement, that you're going to have to be prepared to pay a bit of the transition cost for the non-incumbents. Now they hated that. And I can see that it shouldn't be done generally, but I think to break the mould, it was necessary. And, [coughing] they, they did agree, not easily I might say. But, I was able to persuade the market to respond. So we got bids from BT, in conjunction with CSC, Capgemini, who you obviously know about, and, who was the other one? BT... [pause] Ah. It's gone out of my mind for the moment. It'll come back in a minute. But we had three, three players. [coughs] Oh, of course EDS, CGI, Capgemini, and, and BT with CSC. So we had a proper competition. IBM looked very closely at it, and, I thought they were going to bid, and then decided not to.

Why?

My understanding was, informally from them, that they didn't believe that we would change.

They were wrong.

They were wrong.

And you did.

And we did.

What clinched it for Capgemini?

I think the, the main factor was that, again, rather like EDS the first time round, they were paying more attention to what was needed, and what was required going forward, as opposed to going back. And there was a lot of, I think complacency on the side of EDS, [coughs], who partnered with Accenture to do this. They did not have a good partnership, which didn't help. And, I think there was a degree of complacency that, you know, really, no one else is going to be able to do this. And it came through.

[1:01:07]
In 2003, was introduced the Tax Credit system with EDS.

Yes.

Which did not go well.

No. Now that's a very unfortunate story, because, I think EDS are wrongly blamed for that. Tax Credits was a very complex system. [coughs] There were lots of changes to the requirements as it went through, and EDS were working hard to meet those changes, and introduce the new system. They were asked towards, a few months before it went live, is this, can this system still be delivered? And their response was, it is possible that it could be delivered, but it is very risky.

They were quite upfront about that.

Yup. It requires a fair wind and everything going right. The project on its red amber green scale was red. But nonetheless, they were asked to go ahead and do it. And there was a, a, software glitch, that caused all the problems, and they got the blame.

[1:02:24]
You were involved in a project called the electronic filing system.

Yes. This was to do with the fact that for self-employed people, they could submit their returns electronically, which is now fairly common, but in the early 2000s, was not there. And we were looking very much at the way in which we could use the Internet and enable people to be able to file their returns over the Internet. And, in the early 2000s we worked with a couple of smaller companies, and EDS, to start putting in place the way that that could be done. And, it was very much a front runner for the way that government services are now provided, and that we perhaps take for granted, but in those days was, was novel. And of course, fundamentally changed the way that the Revenue operated. Most of our operations were done by clerks receiving paper returns, and making assessments and reviewing them. Here, we were getting to the position where we could actually get the, the individual to put the information in, for the system to calculate the amounts due automatically, without the need for all that clerical involvement. And whilst it's commonplace now, as I said just now, it wasn't commonplace then, and was a forerunner of the way, not only the public sector but lots of the private sector organisations now operate their systems.

[1:03:57]
Do you in hindsight, John, see the Inland Revenue, not necessarily as an old fuddy-duddy operation full of people pushing paper around, but as quite a pioneer in IT?

Yes. I think it's always been, pretty much, a front edge there, particularly in terms of the way in which it's driven largescale IT.

You became CIO.

Yes. It was a bit, it was a bit odd, that, really, because, I really was the CIO all the way along, but I think it became a fashionable, more of a fashionable term.

Yes.

So I was the CIO with all these other bits and pieces as well.

Right.

And, having done the deal with Capgemini, one of the things I had said to my boss was that, 'I think really, you should let me go before we do the outsource, the re-competition. Because, in my view, the sensible thing to do is to get the person who is going to negotiate the deal to run it.' And they wouldn't let me go. So, I said, 'Well, I'm going to go at the end of it, and, you can't hold me after that.' [laughs]

When you were sixty?

Yup. There were problems with the pension thing before, if I went early, without it being approved if you like.

[1:05:24]
And so you left but didn't leave, to the extent that you helped to mentor the person who became CIO.

I did a little bit of that.

Yes.

But, again, you tend to find that, and not surprisingly, that, people come in, and they want to do it their way.

Sure.

And the individual concerned was very much a, you know, this is all rubbish, it's absolute rubbish, you know. And I said, 'Look, fine.' It needed a change. I had been

there too long. Someone else needed to do it, and do it their way. It doesn't mean when I was there it wasn't right to do it my way.

Sure.

So I did a bit of that, but I didn't really want to be Banquo's ghost.

[1:06:01]
And then you became basically a freelance, a consultant...

Yes.

...with your own company. And, for instance, you were parachuted in in various places.

Yes.

2005 to 2007, NHS Southern Cluster. There's a... Is there a problem with the BT and Fujitsu solution...

Yes. So...

...that you had to sort out? What was the problem?

So a guy there... Richard Granger was running the NHS Connecting for Health system as it was then.

Yes. Yes.

A very aggressive individual. Made his name very much by saying that he had done the fastest procurement ever at the lowest cost ever. Got all these suppliers in, who of course then started to realise that, actually this is a bit trickier than they thought. In the Southern Cluster, which was the whole of the south of England, BT had been doing that, and there was a revised deal done where they brought in Fujitsu to, to do

it. [coughing] Richard asked me if I would go and help with that, really to try and manage the supplier relationship. So I went and duly did that, and found that the management was in a terrible state. There were faults on both sides. I have always I suppose gone on the basis that you have a choice. You can go to war, and go to court, and you go through all of that process, or you can try and find a way through it. If you go to war, I am not the person to help you. Go and get your lawyers. When you've gone to war, and you find that you've won, or lost, you will realise that actually all you've done is lost a battle or won a battle, and the war is still going on. Because you've still got to deliver the bloody thing. But... So I was trying to sort that out. In the end, I did about eighteen months there, and, I was happy to stay on for longer but they didn't want to pay the rate. And I said, 'Well in that case, I'm not going to stay.'

And we're there dealing with this NHS project which was one of the most public and most awful of IT screw-ups ever.

Yes. Exactly.

In the public sector.

Yes. And I will...

Quite shameful really.

Yes. Appalling. Absolutely appalling.

Now on the record, what was the cause of that?

I think there were, a couple of causes. One I think was that the procurement was, too fast, too simplistic, and left the suppliers with something that they couldn't achieve. Now, they should have said no, but they didn't. But nonetheless, you've got to recognise that, if that's what you end up with. Secondly, it was driven by an organisation at the centre, rather than by the users themselves and the client organisations, and you need to have your user organisations on side. If you haven't

got people wanting something done, and actively trying to find ways to get things that they want, as opposed to having it done *to* them, it won't work. And the feeling was very much, this was just being imposed. So as an example, on one user forum I went to, they got users in from various hospitals and trusts around the place, and these were the people that were often off on sick leave. They weren't the key drivers of any of these organisations that were the people that would have said, 'Look, what we really need is this.' So it was doomed from the start, because it didn't have the involvement. And I think the third factor was, we call it a *national* health service, but actually, it's a series of health services, based on local areas, which are fairly autonomous. And that's never been cracked, right back to the Wessex scandal, probably in the Seventies or Eighties, I can't remember exactly when it was. So, I, I then got... You know, eventually I got involved in the court case that followed, as a result of the, that failure.

[1:10:31]
And you were involved in helping to solve or helping to pull various chestnuts out of fires in other disputes, one international, IBM and Hong Kong.

Yes.

What was wrong there?

So there, IBM did a piece of work for the Hong Kong government, and, just before the time limit expired for a challenge, the Hong Kong government took, took them to court basically, and said that they hadn't done all these things. And there was an argument about what the requirement really was, and how the contract was worded. I was asked by IBM and their lawyers to act as, [coughs], excuse me, a technical witness, about the way that these deals were done, and, you know, whether it was reasonable. So I wasn't the only one, but, that was, that was my role in all of that. And eventually they settled, as I thought they probably would, but it took them quite a while.

[1:11:35]
HS2 and Fujitsu.

Again, that was a much smaller piece of work. There was a bit of dispute going on between them. It turned out really to be a storm in a teacup, when you got, when you got down to it, and, really, I think it just needed somebody to go in and say, 'Look, you're actually saying the same things guys. [laughs] You're not really apart at all.' Now I, that was only a very small bit. I, I've no idea how that's gone now; there may well have been all sorts of problems since then.

[1:12:05]
Food Standards and Capita.

That again was another fairly small one. They... I ran a workshop for their difficulties. There were a number of actions that came out of it. And, I got told by Julie Pierce, who was the CIO there, that that, that that was then running on a much more even keel, and I wasn't then involved any further. So I was a catalyst if you like for moving some of those things.

[1:12:33]
Becta and Microsoft.

Yup, that was Microsoft asked me to get involved in all of that. They were having this terrible row with Becta, which was a government agency on the education side. I spent a bit more time on that one, and saw both sides. Understood what they were saying, and then got them together for three days, effectively acted as a mediator. And started by saying what I've just said to you: 'If you want to go to war, I'll go now. But if you want to settle it, there are a number of ways in which you can find things here that would not be detrimental to either side, and we just need to work through what those are.' And, people did, and they found a solution, and lived happily ever after. [laughs] Until Becta got dissolved.

[1:13:20]
Some of your work as a freelance has been gate reviews. What are gate reviews?

Oh, right. Now this is the Government. What the Government set up in Peter Gershon's era was, a series of reviews from people who had been around projects, to

go and look, and review a project in the course of a week. Look at the documents beforehand, go and interview the people, make an assessment as to whether this is on track or not, and any recommendations about what should be done. I did two or three of those: I probably did a few more than that, but, I had a slight frustration with them, because, I felt you were just beginning to get some idea of what it was about, and then, you walked away. And, the whole concept was that, that's exactly what you should do, and they should sort it out. And I, I found that frustrating. I was... I've always been much happier really rolling my sleeves up to, to sort the issue, rather than tell other people what the issue is. [laughs]

[1:14:22]
And you've helped at least two universities on their strategies, Queen Mary University and Exeter.

Yes.

What, what strategies were you proposing there?

The Queen Mary was the bigger of the two. I was on their council for eight years. And I got onto that I think because, somebody knew I knew about IT, and their IT was in a terrible state. And, I mean literally held together with bits of string. And, I, I basically was chairing an IT strategy board to try and get them to think about where they should go and how they should get there. And for a bit was actually chairing that on a monthly basis to get them to, well to gee them along I suppose basically. [laughs] Get them to understand prioritisation, and what really mattered, and, and so on. So those were the sorts of things I was doing there.

Right. And Exeter?

That was again a much smaller thing. The guy, who had been at Queen Mary, asked me to go and talk to a new CIO down there. But I, not, not much came out of that.

[1:15:25]
What are the biggest mistakes you've made in your career?

I suppose the biggest mistake was a tendency to trust people too early on. I know... When I first worked on a, a project, a proper project, which was before the MIRAS thing, I did a, a reform of the process for investigations. But, I realised that to get, to get people with you, you had to, you couldn't just say, take what they said at face value; you had to... You had to do much more to understand what their real motivations were. And my mistake was to assume that, you know, they'd heard what I had said and that would be fine.

Right.

And, it's made me much more conscious that when I'm doing some of this mediation work or whatever, when I've been running some of these big projects, doing the outsourcing, you've got to find a way to really understand what it is that's getting under people's skin. What is it that's really bothering you? Forget what you can say in public. Forget what you can put on the record. What's it, what's it really, what's the real problem? And people sometimes aren't really clear themselves.

No.

But I think I underestimated the importance of that.

[1:16:52]
Right. It's a personal question, which you don't have to answer. It's not a consistent pattern, but there is a certain pattern here, in the archives, we have found, that very successful people, and you, John Yard, are a very successful person, have some trauma or other, probably around their father, when they're nine, ten or eleven. They either lose them, or they lose something about them. Rod Aldridge for instance, Sir Rod Aldridge, failed his Eleven Plus. A big thing.

Yes.

Big thing. If you hadn't passed your Eleven Plus...

Yes.

...you would have been a postal clerk, wouldn't you, probably?

Yes. Yes.

Your father had a stroke when you were ten. Do you think that that has given you the impetus to go from a man who leaves school in '62 with just three A Levels to a man now who is conferred by people in the industry about billion-door contracts?

[hesitates] Yes, I think it's played a part. I mean, I suppose what I found was that that, that that event, followed by the death of both my father and mother ten years later, but the initial event, I mean I was helping them sort out the money, pay the rates and things like that. And I suppose it made me determined to, to get things done and sort things out. Made me, it made me organised. And certainly I think gave me a sense that life is for living and grabbing, and you've got to, you've got to go out there and take it. You know, you, you can die. People did. So I think that was really what I took from that. Now whether that then deep down is the spur that's, that's brought on this, I don't know.

You certainly did go out and grab life. Thank you for your contribution to the archives, John Yard CBE.

Thank you.

[End of Interview]