



Capturing the Past, Inspiring the Future

Sir Rod Aldridge

Interviewed by

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9th January 2019

At the

WCIT Hall,

32a Bartholomew Close, London, EC1A 7JN

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Welcome to the Archives of Information Technology, where we capture the past and inspire the future. It is Wednesday the 9th of January 2019, and we are in the Livery Hall of the Worshipful Company of Information Technologists, in the City of London. I am Richard Sharpe, and I have been researching and writing about the IT industry since the early 1970s. And in my research, and also in the other contributions to the archives, we normally have quite clear distinctions, public and private for example. Are you in the public sector, or the private sector? User or vendor? Are you a user of information technologies, or are you a vendor of technologies and services? Political and technocrat; technocrats don't involve themselves in politics. But here, a man making his contribution today, Sir Rod Aldridge OBE, actually spans all of those splits, and therefore is a very interesting character to make a contribution to the archives today. Thank you very much for coming along, and making your contribution, Sir Rod.

[01:13]

You were born in Hove in 1947, and your father was a sheet metal worker, which means, basically, skilled working-class guy, on the south coast of England.

Very much so. I mean we, we were very much a working-class family. I had a, an incredible upbringing, because, I was an only child of, as it were, my mother and father, and we were a very, quite a tight unit. Interestingly, they owned their own home, which I thought, at that age, period of time, was quite an exceptional thing to have. But he was a very skilled operator in what he did. He was a union man, and some of my beliefs around how you treat people in employment came from, from that. And, he was made redundant at an age of 50, which was not easy in that, that world. So, although you say I was born in Hove, there is a slight twist to that, because it was actually Portslade where I was born, and when you lived in Portslade you always said, 'It's near Hove, actually.' Because Hove was more upmarket than Portslade. Portslade was a very solid, working-class area, good people, but they knew their place, is I think the, the description.

And it's just across the bay from Portsmouth, isn't it?

It... It is more... The reference point is more Brighton. And if you look, you come along the coast towards Worthing, and, and there, there is Portslade. So, I went to school in Portslade, and then, I grew up really in that whole, Brighton, Hove area.

Were you good at school?

School was, in my terms now, was a very serious disaster. I don't think it got the best out of me. I mean I failed my Eleven Plus, which I think was quite a defining moment for me. It was quite an upsetting thing to go through. But actually, it was probably one of the things that really motivated me most to prove that that was wrong. So I had a secondary school education. And I always felt that that never stretched me; it almost provided an education which was OK. I luckily was good at sport, so I had a lot of fun in playing football and cricket. But, I left school at sixteen with, a handful of GCEs. I actually had four, and I failed English, which I took as a second time and got. So, I didn't have an easy start, and I think a lot of my work I do now in education comes because I want to change that for young people, because remarkably it's still the same today.

[04:16]

If you had passed your Eleven Plus, you would have been able to go to a grammar school?

Correct.

You would have had a different form of education, not a secondary modern form of education. And, the route perhaps would have been open to university and so on. But that was all blocked off. That must have been quite a blow to your parents, as well as you but to your parents.

Oh I, I think that they were massively upset about what happened to me, not, not angry with me, I think they just were sort of upset, because, their whole life was about me in many ways, and they wanted me to be successful, and being successful in that day and age was, you went to the grammar school, and it was a sort of, a mark of acceptability, and, they wanted to have that as a, as a, you know, something that they

achieved for me, because they put a lot of effort into, into helping me in the way that they could. It was quite limited, but they, they gave me a very solid home and belief and, and a lot of love, which in some of the cases I see now with young people, that's a remarkable thing. So you're completely right, the grammar school would have given me more confidence, it would have opened up a network of opportunities for me. University was definitely beginning at that time. I mean, it wasn't a natural for a lot of people to go to university, but it would most definitely have been on my agenda, where it was never on my agenda. I mean I, I never had a chance to do A Levels. But as you will see as we develop, I then went on and professionally qualified as an accountant, which says to me there was something in me at that point from my, eleven to sixteen, that range, which wasn't stimulated in me within the education that I received. And that makes me feel angry.

[06:00]

And so you left school with a handful of O Levels. You didn't go on to do A Levels. And, what was in front of you? Perhaps, perhaps you're in the military. You're around Portsmouth. Perhaps the professions. And you managed to get in to become an accountant.

Well, it didn't start that way, but I mean, I had little option. I mean there was no advice given to me about what I could do. I was good with numbers, all right, so I've always liked maths, and therefore, it sort of, provoked people to think of me like, working in a bank, OK, or, going to work in a firm of accountants or something where I could train and develop. And I had a couple of interviews around that, thanks to a maths teacher that believed that I had some talent, and felt that I would work well with it. But I found my way into local government, and it was an opportunity that came up through the youth service that was around at that time to work in a local authority, East Sussex County Council. And interestingly, the job that I applied for was in the education department. Why education, I don't know. And I ended up being interviewed, but being offered a job in the finance department, the treasurer's department. And that job was to be the post boy. So I was the man who knew a lot about people, but people didn't know a lot about me, and they would, in many cases, ignore me because I was the post boy; that meant that I, I was something that was there but, not to be reckoned with.

Almost invisible.

Invisible. Which is quite fascinating, because it meant that I used it to learn about people, how to work with people, how to assess people, and I learnt a lot about the organisation, because it enabled me to go anywhere in that organisation. So, I did all the filing of confidential papers; I, I did a lot of the post that was collected and sent out. And I learnt a lot. It was quite a tough regime, and not something that probably, my mother and father didn't say I was working as a post boy; they probably said I had a very good job with the local authority, which...

Where physically was this?

It was East Sussex County Council, which was in Lewes.

Lewes.

So I, I moved out of my very tight, close community, where I had, you know, quite claustrophobic, I think my home life was, because I, you know, protected, and I moved into commuting to Lewes each day.

[08:32]

Quite often we've found in the Archives that people who have been successful in later life have had some early trauma. Yours is Eleven Plus. Quite often as well with other people, it was death of the father for example. So, you had that trauma. And you got into local authorities. And interestingly, you're talking about two things there that I'm sure you're aware of, people and information.

Yes.

About the flow of information through an organisation, where it goes, what happens to it, and the people who handle it, and what they're like as they interact, and as they handle it. Those are the two things you've been dealing with all your life.

Yeah, I mean it's an interesting way of putting it. And I, I think you, you... You had to promote yourself. You learnt. I mean I was, I'm a quick learner. I mean I, you know, I don't accept where I am, because I'm ambitious, and therefore, one has to work at who's going to help me progress. And that's a skill, I think. I think you've got to befriend people, and I think you've got to be open and receptive. And all that... I mean local government turned out to be an amazing, it was my university of life, frankly, because it supported me in, not only work and development of me as a person in my job, but it also supported my development and training as an accountant. Because I had to, I had to get my other GCSs that I had failed, because I needed five, the job said I had to have five GCSEs and I didn't. And then, I progressed and did a local government exam, and then got onto qualification as a public services accountant, with what is now the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, at that time was the IMTA as it was, which was the local government examination body. And that presented me with a, an opportunity to correct, as I saw it, what I didn't achieve academically within, within school, because, I passed that exam at the age of twenty-two, and it was the equivalent of a university degree, in a sense. And I did all that studying under my own direction. So this was a correspondence course where I had to work in the evenings. Which was quite tough, you know, after doing a four days job.

[10:51]

And you passed it.

And I passed it, yes. Which was, was a great sense of pride. Because it's almost like a passport. I mean the great thing was, you could get a job anywhere in the public sector, so I could have moved anywhere in the country. Ultimately, over time it became broader than local government, and I could have got a job in gas, electricity, or, as it was then, and, or, in central government. So, mm.

And what did you decide to do with your new, effectively, degree?

I, I moved around, in terms, I got promoted. So I moved within East Sussex County Council. Then got another job working in Brighton, right in, at the heart of my own city as it were, Brighton which was a county borough at that time, and I worked in the

accountancy division, which was the prime section within the, within the treasurer's department, and I learnt an awful lot from that. I qualified there, because there were three parts to the exam, and I qualified in Brighton. I then moved to another local authority, in Crawley, where I was a principal accountant. And I looked after the education sector that they had just been given responsibility for. And, we're talking here of a, of a nine-year span in, in working in local government itself. And I probably would have had a career in local government, but, I moved ultimately to work for the very institute that was, that gave me my qualification, CIPFA, and, which was a national body. And this introduced me to a wide range of people, civil servants, journalist, senior people working across the public sector, and I worked with those at the institute, which really promoted and supported members. So I was really up-to-date in technology.

[12:50]

Why did you make that move, into CIPFA?

[exhales] It was partly because, the job that I had at Crawley, which was around education, was about to change, because the current Government was about to reorganise local government. And a part of that reorganisation, my job was effectively gone, because the education would have gone back to the county. That is one side of the story. The other side, I think it was time for me to move. And CIPFA was a highly regarded organisation, a phenomenal chief executive, a guy called Maurice Stonefrost, who went on to be the controller of the GLC as it was. And so, it was, it was full of talented people, quite a small organisation, but you worked with talented people everywhere. So I worked with, you know, the leader, the person who led Birmingham, the one who, who led Liverpool, the person who did all the transformation in Yorkshire, in London. So these were incredible people that I learnt from. And I saw that as an opportunity. It became a problem, because I ended up being there another nine years, and, and I got stuck in my career at that point. So that was, that was semi-worrying, although I was enjoying myself. And I was probably the equivalent of a, a third-tier officer in a large local authority. But I couldn't get a job out of the place.

[14:15]

You had bumped into computers by then, had you?

We, we had bumped into computers, and it was really, that world. So, the institute had a range of panels, as they called them, and one of those panels was, technology, and interestingly, Bernard Harty, who was the, one of the, the original man who established the Worshipful Company, he was the chief executive at that point. So I started to work with Bernard as well around technology. And the panel that I looked after on the technology was faced with an opportunity that was driven by the Conservative Government of the time, Thatcher, who was trying to restructure local government, some would say demolish it, and was doing it through driving more efficiency into local government, and they introduced something called compulsory competitive tendering. And what we saw was, that there was an opportunity to standardise the systems that were going to be needed to be able to deal with the requirements of that. And a lot of that was around a computer system, because every local authority was exposed to it. And so what we did was, we put together a consortium that designed a functional specification that would be able to offer that solution to local government. And that then introduced me to all the computer suppliers, because they were interested in, in designing that system.

[15:47]

What did you think of them, when you first met them, the computer suppliers?

I had seen a lot of them, obviously, in operation within local government. I, I think I've been quoted as saying I think that they were very well-dressed salesmen, that were very competent again in a local authority to sign up to probably long-term leases on computers which were most probably over-ambitious in what was needed. However, they had this sort of love-hate relationship with the public sector, because the public sector needed them, computers obviously was the way forward. At that time, ICL was the large operator, with Honeywell and IBM. And, you know, these were people that earned a lot of money through selling. And, and I had to work with them on the design of this specification. So that was quite a, an interesting added experience that gave me an entrée to a new world. Because what CIPFA did was, they offered a seal of approval to the system, so we, not only did we then design a function specification, we went on to write it. And we had to work with ICL and

another organisation called McDonnell Douglas to actually design and implement the system in local authorities.

McDonnell Douglas had a range of computers with integrated databases, didn't they?

They, they... They more, they specialised much more in having a, a smaller operation that was a stand-alone operation.

Yes.

But their long-term gain was to attack and dismantle the mainframe. And the mainframe was mainly a Honeywell or an IBM or an ICL.

Right.

And, actually, through this work we did, CMC, or McDonnell Douglas, became quite a prominent operator in local government, they did very very well out of it.

They had an operating system in a range called Pick I believe.

Pick, correct.

And this was an American company though.

They were based, they were originally for America, correct.

Yes. Yeah. But they had a relatively successful subsidiary here in the UK, focused on local government.

Yeah, based in Hemel Hempstead. And, you know, they, they developed, through, mainly through this need for local authorities to, to work in a way that I said, they became very prominent. I mean, what was quite interesting was, what we were doing, although, I don't think we knew it at the time, within CIPFA we were creating both an opportunity and a problem. The opportunity was that, we became very central to...

And the consortium, we had 157 local authorities in it; it was the largest consortium ever put together in Europe of local authorities, which shows the power of a professional institute. But what we were doing is, that we had relationships with these local authorities in a way which we never had before. Equally, we had a commercial relationship with the technology industry where the specification was sold to them, and I then went on to sell it in a different way to fifteen other technology-driven companies. So all of a sudden CIPFA was generating money and, and profits. Which, when you're a professional institute that is under a charitable status, is not easy, because you are actually in danger of affecting your charitable status. So they had to set up a company, and that was the company which became CIPFA Computer Services, to run these operations.

[19:25]

Did it not occur to you at that time that you might jump from the public sector into the private sector, and work for the likes of Honeywell, McDonnell Douglas, ICL or IBM?

That... That could have been an option. I was really, really quite taken with working in the public sector. And I saw the private sector as a massive risk, because I saw the way they operated. Didn't like some of the way they operated, it was more cutthroat. And, the first port of call for me was to apply for jobs in, therefore, the sector that I, I had grown up in, and I think have been very good to me. However, and I was, at this time I was around my late thirties, and, I actually applied for fifteen jobs, all at a level which I felt was right for me, all the people that I had worked with within the CIPFA environment, and I got no appointment, I wasn't appointed to any of them. I mean, in some cases, a lot of occasions I got interviews. The point was, their belief was that, although I, they knew me, I had not worked with a large number of people, so I had not managed a large number of people. I had worked in a very small organisation. And, and I didn't get a job. And I frankly was, was quite panicking at this stage, in my, 37, 38 range, what am I going to do with myself?

You were in London by now?

I was working in London, which is where CIPFA was based, so I became a commuter, because I, I was living in, in Crawley. I was happy with my family being there, and me to commute. But, as the ambitious person I was, the critical thing was, what was I going to do? Now, what I have said in quite a number of things that I've spoken at, if I had got any one of those fifteen jobs, and some of them were, when I list them, I'm horrified at where some of them were for example, the biggest thing that happened to me in my business life would never have happened. And I think that, I often ask people at the age, you know, how many people in the room are below 40, and do you know that the biggest thing that could ever happen to you in your life is going to happen to you? And, my, my scary story to me is that, if I'd have got the job to be perhaps the, the deputy treasurer of the London Borough of, the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, I could have become the chief executive of that local authority, but I would never have developed Capita.

[22:08]

So, in essence you're a lucky man, that you didn't get any of those jobs.

I'm lucky I didn't get those. I think it also taught me that when you see an opportunity that you believe is right... So your point about moving from the public to the private sector, I was nervous about that, and I was offered the job of being the chief executive of CIPFA Computer Services, and although it was within an organisation that I had worked with for nine years, and knew the people, I still felt it was a risk, because, they would have back-filled my job, because at this point I was what they called an under-secretary at CIPFA, so I, it was very senior, there were only three of us, but I would have to move into this company which they had formed. And once I went to the company, that job, my job, would have been, would have been, gone. And so therefore, if that company had not worked, or they decided to close it, or sell it, I was not in control of that.

So you took a big risk in your late thirties, very big risk.

I took a big risk in my thirties to do that. It went well. 37, 38, when CIPFA Computer Services started, I became the Chief Executive. And all of a sudden, all this work that we had done within the institute, in, in almost like, creating a market

around technology, so we were asked to do IT strategy studies, we were asked to implement computer systems that they had selected to deal with compulsory competitive tendering, we were asked to do training and development of staff, all of a sudden we had clients, so we, we worked with, a lot of work with Honeywell, a lot of work with McDonnell Douglas. We were, we were moving to becoming a consultant, which is not a world I had ever worked in. And, we started to grow the people, so that when I first started in CIPFA Computer Services it was just me; all of a sudden there was four of us, and then all of a sudden there was twelve of us, and all of a sudden there was then sixteen, seventeen of us. And then we began to think, what is going on in this market, in terms of what Thatcher is doing? There's a massive opportunity here. And, we are sitting in the middle of this. But, we don't own anything. And they're paying, they're paying us, and they're giving us bonuses, but we don't actually have any equity, or we don't actually have any stake in this. And so, what happens if they decide they want to sell it? You know? So all of a sudden something where I was well outside of my comfort zone, I mean my father would never have thought of being the employer that owns the business, would he, nor, nor would... All of a sudden we were starting to think, well, this, we want to own this.

[24:59]

And, that is where the big risk came, because we, we forced a management buyout.

They didn't want to do it?

They most definitely didn't want to do it. They didn't see any need to. They thought of me as somebody who had come from their world, and why would they want to sell a business to us, and if they paid us, that's what we should be satisfied with. And I, I was sitting in one... I went to see my bank manager at the time, and I sat in the waiting room, and in front of me, for some unknown reason there was a book that had been produced on management buyouts. And I picked this up, and I read it, and I, well I didn't read it, I, I got it, I subsequently got a copy. And I thought, I need to explore this. So I went to see the guy who wrote the book, and I asked him to talk... I told him about my circumstances. And, he then introduced me to 3i, who were the, a venture capital company at that point, and I met somebody at 3i, and the suggestion came about that we could, we could do a management buyout. You know, the business had a track record of three years by then. It was making profits, and it, it had

a good market. And so we started that discussion with 3i. And then I had to start the discussion with the owner, my, my employer, which was very uncomfortable. Very uncomfortable.

[26:36]

And how did you persuade them? Did you load them with gold?

No, no, not... Well, we ended up with a deal, but I mean, in, in the short term, we had to persuade them that we were serious. So, the fact that we got an offer from 3i to provide the money to buy the company, meant that somebody thought that we were serious, and they couldn't ignore that. However, the first time I put it to them... So I, imagine me, I had been there, by then, nine years within the institute itself, three years in the company that they owned, and I had to go in to present to the council, which was something like, fifteen or eighteen people, people I had known, I had to sit there and, and explain to them why I didn't want to work for them any more, and why we wanted to buy the company. And it was hostile, very very hostile. In fact in the book I've just written, I've actually re... I found the script that I used to, to speak to them about it, and, I think to myself, my God, I, I had a nerve there, and I'd never done anything like this before. They refused. OK? So they then said, 'Well we're not going to allow, we're not going to allow you to do that. We're going to merge you with another company,' that they had got, because they were quite a commercial operation. And, that's what's going to happen. So I went back to 3i, and then 3i agreed to also give us an offer to start afresh, right? So we would, we would leave everything we had created over a three-year period, and we would go and start afresh. And when 3i gave us that offer, what CIPFA realised was that, if they didn't take the value that we were offering them, it was something around £280,000 to £300,000, we were going to pay them, if they didn't take that, we were just were just going to go. So basically they would have lost, potentially lost everything. And so in the end they agreed to it. But of course, to fund that, I then had to mortgage the house. 37, by then, 39. My wife was expecting our fourth child. And I had to mortgage the house to put my stake in, which was somewhere around £25,000.

[28:52]

And one of the contributors to the Archives says, never mortgage your house. But you did.

I mortgaged my house, but when you actually think about it, there was... When I signed the deal with the bank manager, I'll never forget his face, I knew in my own mind that he would never take my house. Because I wouldn't allow that to happen. And, the energy and the period that followed, because there were four of us in this buyout, and the staff that followed us, all of them came. The energy that came from that time, it was probably one of the greatest periods I've ever worked in in an organisation. We, we just went for it. And so we became successful, because, we couldn't afford to fail. We couldn't afford to fail, not only because of what you've just said, about, but equally, pride. And pride is a great motivator.

[29:49]

And so you powered ahead, and you got into an area which, you hadn't necessarily been quite big in, you mentioned the consultancy work. And this was, the new idea of outsourcing.

Yes. What emerged was that, because of the changes that Thatcher was, was, the Prime Minister was instigating, the local authority had to change the way it was going to think and act. And so they were spending quite a lot of money on consultancy. So, my IT strategy work was a consultancy assignment, my implementation was consultancy. And, what we could see was that, once you did the strategy, and even if once you have implemented it, what was the, you still had, you still had the same problem in the organisation, because they had nobody that could, could then take the thing on. So, we decided, what we would do to them, we suggested to them, is that, rather than you, you retain the problem, why don't you outsource the, the whole area of activity, to somebody like us, and we would become a specialist. And so were started with technology. Because a lot of the IT installations in local government, when you look at the, they had a lot of spare capacity, because they were over-sold, a point I made earlier, and equally, they had a lease which at some point they had got to renew or do something with. And they decided that they probably didn't feel comfortable with that. So we, we went to them with the idea of outsourcing all of our

technology, including the lease, all the staff, to us. And so the first deals were around technology in two county councils.

Where?

In Berkshire, which no longer exists now, County Council, and also Oxfordshire County Council.

[31:39]

Why did they go for it?

[pause] I think that there is definitely a, a band of people in any sector or, or organisation, who want to be first. And, we found two chief executives that were very keen to, to be in the front of all of this. We did a very, an amazing deal. British Telecom came to us, and British Telecom, at that time had just been moving away from being a phone company to being really more of a technology company, and they said to us, believe it or not, they wanted to get into the public sector. And you can't believe now that BT couldn't get into the public sector, they couldn't, didn't operate... The chief executive... They said they wanted to work with us. They had watched our buyout. And we ended up forming a company with them called Telecom Capita, which we as a mini, a small company, had 51 per cent, and they had 49 per cent. And, we then went and marketed ourselves in BT Tower, we had an event, and all of a sudden there were a lot of people who wanted to talk to us. And so, these two deals came from it.

Who did you work with in BT to put that together?

We worked with, fairly senior people, in their, I can't remember what part of the organisation they were in. But they were in the, the joint venture part of it. But what was quite interesting was, it just taught us, it taught me how bureaucratic an organisation it was. I mean they talked about having to walk the idea around the various floors of the organisation. I mean, BT then subsequently changed quite dramatically. And interestingly enough, they had become quite nervous about the contracts that we were winning, because, all of a sudden, you know, 200 people were

joining us from Berkshire, 200 people from here, and 200... And so they were looking at this and thinking, well, we're not sure where all this is going to end up. Because you took on some of the liabilities of the lease, all of the staffing. Yeah. Mm.

[33:40]

It has been said, by me and by other people as well, that outsourcing is basically the revenge of the chief executive or the financial director, because they have been bamboozled by these technology people in-house, with all of their hifalutin technical talk, and they've been over a barrel by these people, and outsourcing is a way to say, 'Go. Go away.' Do you agree with that?

[hesitates] No. The way I put it is that, some of the things we're talking about here, like IT, if you actually think about it, they're not core to your business. They're core to how you can deliver things, but the running of it is not your prime business. Your prime business is to deliver services to the customer, which is the public. So we are a specialist of back office services. Because don't forget we were white-collar, back office. And we specialised therefore in saying to somebody, we will save you money from your non-core activities that you can put into your mainline business. And, we contractually will sign up to improving the performance that you were getting. So your service levels and your outputs, we will invest in, to improve. And by the way, we will take your people, who frankly, the way you treat these people, it is very apparent that they are considered to be non-core. They generally are working in very poor conditions; there's no investment that goes into their training and development, because you don't, you don't value them. We do. And this was the story that developed in, in the mind of the... So the treasurer, or the chief executive, had to be somebody who wanted to believe in that. However, there is sense in what you said, because equally, at the beginning it was also a way of packaging a problem, and passing it to somebody else, and saying, 'Well it's not us any more, it's them.' And that was quite a dangerous period, because, you contractually signed up for a five- or ten-year deal, and you were therefore accountable, and if things didn't go well, you, you were put forward as being the reason why things didn't happen.

[36:05]

So... Luckily, because we started with technology, if you think about it, technology and the delivery of it is very specific in what you have to do to provide basic systems. So if you provide payroll or anything like that, payroll, you understand. What we then did is, we then broadened out into saying, well if we're providing payroll for you, why don't we then take over the running of all the people that you have got a payroll for? So gradually, we expanded out, and then we went into some of the collection of the money, the Council Tax. We said, well, why don't we do Council Tax systems for you? Then, why don't we collect the money for you? So gradually what happened was, we expanded our offer.

[36:47]

One of the things that's been put to me about outsourcing is that very often, here are two pioneering local authorities, Berkshire you say and Oxfordshire?

Oxfordshire.

What they probably would have done already is to have some accountants in, or some consultants in, and have tried to cut the costs. And, by then they had it quite down to the bone, and then they outsource it. So you, as their contractor on the other side of this outsourcing process, have a hell of a job to get any more productivity out of that, because it's already been squeezed out. Is that what, was that happening as well?

At the time when we started, don't forget, this was new territory, new area...

Yes.

This was not the case.

OK.

They possibly would have employed consultants to actually do some of that.

Right.

So we went to people who wanted not to take that responsibility on, but gave it to us. And we went open book with them about what the savings were going to be, and how we were going to go about it, so they became a partner more than anything. And, and we then found, you mentioned the two, but very quickly we found others that wanted to do different models. So, we found one that wanted to close their operation in London, which was Westminster City Council, make everybody redundant, and move it to, were very happy for it to be moved to the North West, which is a very unusual thing. We found some people who wanted to outsource the whole finance department. We found some people who... You know, in other words, the sector became braver. And there was a momentum. Before we knew where we were, we were running 20 and 30 local authorities, and we were winning, you know, consistently. Because the competition had an inability... The competition was really the computer suppliers, but they had an inability to move away from selling boxes. Because delivering services was not really what their forte was, or, or even consultancy services. So the competition had a real problem. And that, that is what opportunity is. If you can shape a market, and, and deliver in that market, you will, the momentum you can get is colossal.

[38:57]

What you then raised, frankly, is more where the problems are that became later, because people then became nervous about, if, if Capita's making fifteen per cent profit margin, and it's offering 20 per cent savings to the people when they outsource, somewhere in the system there's 35 to 40 per cent of, of costs that's going to come out of here. And so, yes, they began to think, well maybe we should be smarter, and we may look foolish if, if they are making a massive amount of money. I took the strategy of changing the relationship at that point where I believed that we should share with you what we're going to do and what we're going to make, and we should be open about that at the point we win the contract. So people relaxed in our style. I mean I think this was part of my role, you know.

[39:57]

And you are now building an operation which eventually employed something like 75,000 people?

Yes.

As a result of these big chunks of people coming in, yes? Which is in big steps.

Yeah. Because what happened was, everything started in local government, and then all of a sudden we won a very big operation in central government, in the Department of Education, where we did all the teachers' pension activity for every teacher in the country. So all of a sudden we had gone from local government to central government; we've gone from IT, we had then gone into delivering whole services. And every time we win a contract, there were chunks of people who were joining. I mean the interesting thing is, a lot of those people had never chosen to work for Capita.

No.

They had chosen to work for the organisation.

Mm.

So, again, you had to sort of, they had to understand your culture, what your vision was. And a lot of these people went on to get very major jobs in the company, because, the structure that they were in, restricted their, their growth. I mean people who ran large IT operations for example, there's no utter reason why they can't run other things. And that would never have happened to them where they were. So all of a sudden unions became more interested in us, and, you know, back to my father's background, I had made a point of, of being very open to the unions and negotiating with them, how we were going to operate. And in a way, our, our route was a better way for their members than to leave them in an organisation which, frankly they could have lost their jobs. We were growing, and therefore we needed the people.

Right.

Yeah.

[41:36]

And who did you use as your non-executive directors to help you, guide you through this at board level?

We... Obviously I never worked with... No.. Because I... I mean the curious thing is, the only company that I've worked in is Capita. I had no previous company experience you see. So, when we first started, obviously we had our management buyout team. I had to change the team, I had to add people. The people I met, the person I met at 3i, subsequently joined us and went on to be the chief executive of Capital. So I worked with him for 20-odd years.

Is that Paul...

That's Paul Pindar.

Yes.

Yes. So, Paul and I met at the point of the buyout, and I went back after the buyout and persuaded him that rather than being in 3i doing deals to survive, he should come and work with me. And, we wanted a finance director. So I persuaded him to be the finance director, which wasn't an easy take, but I mean, what we went on to achieve was, was quite special. But we needed... Your point about non-executives, we needed external advice, and we were very fortunate that we attracted a couple of guys, one in particular who used to be the, Derek Fowler, who actually introduced me to the Worshipful Company of Information Technologists, who was the Deputy Chairman of British Rail, and he became one of our non-executive directors, and that was, that was incredible. And we, we also gradually built around non-executive routes to help us.

[43:12]

How deep did the shareholding go? You had shares; obviously Paul had shares. Presumably some of the non-executive directors had shares. How deep did the shareholding go in the company?

Well, obviously what happened to us was, we did the management buyout, and at the point the management... So... OK. When we first acquired the company, you could

argue we had 100 per cent of the equity. But... Then we, obviously 3i took something like 30 per cent of the company when we, when we floated – when we did the buyout. And then of course, when we floated, because... So we bought the business for, £230,00, £300,000; we then floated it two years later, because we had a track record of three years within CIPFA, two years after. So we floated it on what's now AIM, and we floated it at £8 million. Right?

Not bad.

No. And CIPFA refused at the point of the buyout to take a stake in it, because they thought it was a negotiating ploy. We offered them 20 per cent.

That was rather silly of them.

Rather silly, yes.

They could have had 20 per cent of £8 million.

They could have had 20... Yes.

For doing nothing.

So they would have had 20 per cent of £8 million.

Yes.

Then when you have external shareholders in, your overall pot goes down.

Yes.

So we then had external shareholders at that stage. But the amazing thing is, from the point of the management buyout, at the point of the flotation, by the time I left, £1,000 invested at the time of the flotation was worth £126,000. So the returns were quite colossal.

Mm.

[44:51]

What we did was, we had a lot of share option schemes for staff. So we, the senior management would have share options as well as opportunity to buy shares. Because share ownership was the mechanism that was used to encourage people to growth. We didn't pay high salaries.

Right.

We paid more a medium level in salaries.

So you used the shares.

The shares were the thing. Which brings a different problem, because it means that when you floated, your shareholding is your major wealth, and, and frankly, it's very difficult to sell anything, because if you sell, other shareholders or analysts or the press say, well why is he selling?

Well indeed. Yes. You sold quite a, a lump of shares once, as did Paul separately. This was reported. And your share price goes down.

It goes down, yes.

Why is he selling? They ask.

Correct.

Yeah. Does he know something we don't?

Correct. I mean, this is always a problem with a, a public company.

Yes.

I think the advantages of a public company, to be honest, I liked the accountability. So every six months we had to report. I'm very proud of the fact that I, I had 32 reporting periods of, six-monthly reporting periods of, all the time I was a public company, and we met targets on every occasion. That meant that the business was run in a, in a very results-orientated way, which meant the team were run that way, all the company felt that way. So, there were benefits. But, your wealth equally, if you miss any of those targets, the company share price could be halved.

Yes.

So your wealth could, you know... Which is not comfortable.

[46:38]

And during this period, and particularly later, as it turns into the new century, outsourcing got rather a bad reputation. Why was that?

Because I think, people were uncomfortable about the amount of outsourcing that was going on. Just to give an illustration, not something that's in my world, that I wasn't in, but, I mean refuse collection. No local authority now collects refuse, I mean it's all outsourced, in most cases. So, there was a sort of, there was a momentum, cleaning, catering. There was... Then all of a sudden the professional services which you were involved with were being run, large chunks of things from Government were being outsourced. And people got nervous about, performance, they got nervous about returns that some people were making, I mean you know, certainly in one of the elections, the chief executives of all the organisations, all their wealth was, was put out, where they lived, and all this. So it got quite uncomfortable. And what I did, I went to the CBI, and I suggested to Digby Jones, who was then the head of it, that we needed to have an organisation like the CBI to represent the industry. Because Capita, I couldn't defend myself against, you know, to the *Mail*, or to the *Times*, I couldn't defend myself easily. Whereas as a, as an entity, an outsourcing entity, we could. And that's what we did. So I, I chaired a group of fifteen or so organisations that were part of that, which was called, with the CBI, and, that helped. Because

equally, Government ministers were prepared to have a dialogue with us about some of these issues.

That was the CBI's Public Services Strategy Board?

Strategy Board.

Right.

And, it meant therefore that, a Government minister would meet us, whereas they wouldn't meet me as Capita. Very interesting, because, they wouldn't do that because they'd think it was part of, a problem with procurement. Unions became more attracted to, to talking to us in that way. But, it became more and more hostile. I mean, obviously I've been out of the industry now for ten or twelve years, and really now this is, this accelerated, this, this feeling, quite dramatically.

I remember doing some research in the late Nineties for a consultancy, an information consultancy, called Kable, k-a-b-l-e, you may remember them.

Yes.

And they were asked by central government, actually by Number 10, 'Can you tell us how much outsourcing is being done? Because we haven't got a clue.' And I had to dig around, and found the most amazing pieces of outsourcing. And I did make a prediction which was wrong: there's one thing that won't be outsourced, and that was elements of the Ministry of Defence. But in fact they did. The defence of embassies across the world was actually outsourced to private mercenaries. And, it was just an open door wasn't it? There was, there is nothing that is sacred about any service that we deliver, said central and local government.

No, but I think it's gone too far. I mean, I've been quoted to say that. But I, I equally think the things that we outsource, that were outsourced in my field, I think there were material improvements in performance. There was material benefits to the staff that transferred, who really had a career. And frankly, the customer, the end customer, I

think they got a better deal, because money was saved, and, and everything else. But conceptually, if you don't like that feeling, because you are not, you haven't got so much accountability, so much control, if conceptually you are against that, then you use it in a hostile way. And I think central government has done this, to its detriment. I mean, you know, you have a, a public accounts committee that will look at you. You, you will have questions in the House. You have select committees. So, to be a permanent secretary, that you've outsourced something, I mean you mentioned MOD, I mean they just outsourced to Capita all of their recruitment. Now I would not have touched that.

Mhm.

I mean, you are dealing with things which are... I dealt with things where you could measure the performance before, the performance after, and how materially I could change that performance. And I knew how to change it. How do I know how to improve recruitment?

Mm.

It's not my specialism.

Yes.

You see my point?

Oh yes.

And I think it's now been outsourced because they don't want to do it.

Mhm.

Yeah?

Rather than...

Rather...

It could be done better by someone else.

Yes.

[51:10]

Right. Yes. What was your relationship with the suppliers? Because they now see you. They're not dealing with, 170 or so local authorities, for example. They're often dealing with two or three big outsourcing operations, which means you've got much more clout compared with those other local authorities.

Yeah, they, they had a real problem. You know, I, I'm often asked about competition, how we positioned ourselves. It's quite interesting, because if you think of, think of a, a plain sheet of paper, obviously we had technology companies top left; bottom left would be the consultancies, management consultancies; you then have some of the specialist systems providers, which could be HR, could be any financial systems. And then all of a sudden, construction emerged, yeah, because people were building things, and they thought well can we run it?

PPI, PPP.

Exactly. And so, all of a sudden, what Capita did was, we positioned ourselves smack in the middle, OK? And what we had done therefore, we had moved the way somebody buys services. Because we, we sat right in the middle of it. And if you're an IT provider, bluntly, to be running some of the services that we, we ran, they had not a concept to be able to ever do it. I mean, they designed systems, implemented systems, sold boxes and what have you. But to change the culture, to be able to provide services under contractual responsibilities, they couldn't do. So, frankly, the industry had to catch up, and some of that catching up was done in a way where people took on things purely because they felt they should get on the bandwagon, that they couldn't run. And some of the failures that happened subsequently have been because they didn't have the culture to be able to operate in that way.

[53:04]

You were competing with, IBM, for instance, they came into these services.

Yes.

BT tried to.

Yes.

Didn't make a great success of it to say the least. Cap Gemini Sogeti.

Yes.

EDS.

EDS. EDS were a major IT provider to Government.

Yes.

But, they were a major IT provider. To actually run the Criminal Records Bureau, or to do congestion charging in London, they wouldn't know to operate in that, it's not their forte.

Yes.

And so, the competition, we, we became... I think your point is, we became a threat to them.

Yes.

What we had to do was to make them a partner. And so, you know, frankly, we could provide our solutions on any box, couldn't we? This is what you're saying.

Yes.

And in some cases, in software, we designed our own software. Because all of a sudden we became the largest supplier of software to local government, outside of ICL. So, we, not only did we have the systems, but we also had all the technology, we had the transformation, we had the management consultancy skills, and all of this was sort of packaged into a bid.

[54:20]

And it didn't have to happen where that local authority was, did it? You could shift it to the North East, the North West.

And what we said...

Or India.

Well the way we did it was, we actually moved to a business centre structure. So we were run from a business centre. We would make the host the winner of it, that would be the host, and then we would run other contracts from it. And you would centralise all your management, all your technology. So one of the big ones we did was in Blackburn with Darwen, where we created 500 white-collar jobs in an area where there were no white-collar jobs. So they were quite attracted to that. And then all of a sudden, people didn't mind where the service is being provided from. They didn't want to see it, or feel it, or anything. We did move some of the work to India. We moved, became quite a big operator in India. I think the company has got over, eight or ten thousand people there. But we didn't move front line jobs, so we didn't do telephone operating from India. We moved heavy jobs that involved calculation, and we found the mindset of the people incredible. The accuracy levels were phenomenal. The staffing you could attract obviously were quite senior, well-qualified. But there were other issues as well. And initially with the India point you mentioned, India was not something that a government department would have outsourced saying, all the jobs are going to India. I mean that was just not something you did. You did it over time, and over performance enhancements.

[56:02]

You didn't really become, apart from India and using other sources, you didn't become an international player.

No, very, very specifically.

There was a deliberate choice.

A deliberate, complete deliberate choice.

Why was that? Because EDS could, but you decided not to.

[hesitates] I think the answer... There were two answers to that. One, I think, we felt there was so much opportunity in the UK, and that we were so well positioned in it. I mean I can't remember the numbers that we quoted about, what the size of the market was, but, you know, there was less than ten per cent outsourced, whatever the size was. And, we felt that we knew the client, we knew how to operate, et cetera et cetera. So we would stick where we were. I think a lot of people tried to become international, and it means that you either make a, a wrong acquisition, because you, somehow you've got to get a position. I think your whole dynamics change and the way you run your business. And it just didn't suit us as a team. And we made a virtue to the City and to shareholders that we were a UK-based company. I mean, you know, I think it's easier possibly to move in as a technology provider, I mean, which EDS did, particularly with their start they had in Government, quite quickly they sold very well to Government. I don't think it's worth...

Like the Inland Revenue for example.

Inland Revenue was one of their first big deals. Massive deal. And they became a very big provider to Government. Yeah. But they didn't, they never really cracked other sectors in the UK.

[57:39]

Towards the end of the century we have this rising problem, and I wanted to get your view on it, whether it really was a big problem, Y2K, the great concern that systems were not ready for the new century.

Perhaps we'll be having the same conversation about Brexit in, in some time. Do you know what? I can't... I, I really... It really never resonated. It was a reason for people to do things by the way, which, which is always a great opportunity.

Right.

Just as decimalisation was, and, and other things. I think there was a lot of, a mystery around how you would flick from, you know, just before to just after. But I mean once you got through that, and you persuaded people that it was very doable, I don't think it became a very big issue.

[58:34]

OK. You did say in the year 2000 that you won't bid for any PPP business unless you meet the minister. What did that mean?

It means that, I believe that I am a partner, and if I'm a partner, I want to work in a partnership, and I don't want to work in an environment, particularly, it's particularly relevant to central government, where the messages to the minister, about the contract, are performed – are, are, are designed and, and briefed, by the civil servant. If there's an issue with the contract delivery, and you, you have a problem, the way to solve the problem is not to blame; the answer is to solve it. But in the culture of that world, they protect their minister to the point where the minister is not, is being told that it's the problem of the contractor. I mean it's very interesting by the way, in congestion charging, which was the largest transportation change ever in the world, we never met Ken Livingstone, at any point. They kept him, the Mayor, away from us. And I said that I don't think that's the way that this relationship should work. And so I worked, I worked very much in building relationships with politicians, you know, who, in ministerial terms, as I did in working with the permanent secretaries or, or below.

You had to be bailed out though on that deal, didn't you, 2003?

The congestion charging?

Yes. £31 million.

The base contract... Well there were two things that happened by the way. They extended the zone, and so, we were given more money to extend the zone. The other thing was, that happened was, the, the people who refused to pay as it were was a lot higher than was originally thought, and we had to readjust the way we operated in some of that. Because otherwise, you don't want to keep taking people to court. So we enhanced the system so that frankly they couldn't say that the number plate was wrong. They couldn't say they weren't in the car. And, and that... So that was... But your, your point is, is right, because I remember that headline. It was actually in the *Evening Standard*, I believe, at the point we had our results where our profits had gone up, [laughs] and then they used that as an example of why we had made the money. But, I am enormously proud of the team that delivered that. It was the most incredible risk I feel in terms of us as a company. Because if it had gone wrong, we would have been in the front line of all of the, the stick about it. But it didn't, and the, in my book I put down some of the stats, the achievement of it, and the, the enormity of, of the challenge was, was incredible. But... Actually, it's a very good example. Can I just say, about a technology point. In terms... One of the reasons why that was successful was that the spec was frozen, it was agreed. The consultants that were around it, PwC, were incentivised to meet the deadline of the implementation of the system. They were not incentivised to keep going. So they had a similar... The Major said, 'It *is* going to be implemented on this date, and we're not going to vary the date.' So all of a sudden, the system was frozen, which meant that we could develop the system. We had a three- to five-month trial of it, OK, which is huge. So it meant all the cameras were installed, the system, the way you checked it, the centre was set up. It meant therefore that on the day of operation it wasn't the first day, it was, you know, we had been going for some time. And I wrote a paper to the Prime Minister about why that system, why that technology-driven system worked, and why there were many systems that involved technology that had failed. And it was purely about what I've just said, which I think's a big lesson in anything that's technology-driven.

[1:03:14]

A massive failure was the national programme for IT in the NHS. NPfIT I think it was called. You became a bidder for that, did you not, Capita did, along with others. But it imploded before...

We did, but we never won.

Yes.

And we had...

No one really won it, did they? [laughs]

Well, I mean again, you know, this is the trouble, isn't it, because a lot of money was paid. And so, it depends whether you think that's a success or a failure. We had a very clear bidding process within Capita where we qualified massively throughout... You know, bearing in mind, these things take anything between nine months and a year to bid, all right. And if you bid and get it wrong, or you bid and, and you win on not making money from it, it is very very dangerous. And so we would quality out. In the end we were winning, you know, four or five, four out of five. I mean, our qualification was heavy. And so the Health Service one, which, the spine, and then all the... You know, it was tailor-made to... It should... It's absolutely right. But you just imagine transferring all of those records that are out there onto a computer system, it is, it is really, really complex. Yeah. And so, a lot of money was spent, and, and it's not been solved now, has it?

No.

No.

No. Mm. [laughs] I've got bits of... When I go and see my GP, sometimes he's got bits of paper, sometimes he's got things on the screen, sometimes he's got things on

the screen from my hospital, and then, not from my hospital. It's still a mess isn't it. It's hardly integrated.

[1:04:56]

In... Looking at the cuttings about you particularly, Sir Rod, and the company, Capita, and you know what Private Eye calls it, we don't need to go there, and I don't just mean Private Eye, but I mean as well the, the general press, it seems to me, although I do not believe in conspiracies, that you and particularly the company became a target. And any little thing happened around your company, it was really blazoned. For instance, you sold, in 2004, £3.5 million worth of shares, and, why shouldn't you? OK? You're in your late sixties; you want to do things presumably with it. As soon as you did that, bang, it was on the front page of the financial papers, and bang, your share price takes a hit. What was going on?

[exhales] I don't know. I mean what is going on is that people take an interest in... I mean we have a... You know, one thing I, I do believe in this country that I think we get wrong is that we actually can't handle people who are successful, or, or companies that are successful. We always feel that there's something that needs to be understood about it. I mean, when I look back, it is possible that I approached some of these things in the wrong way. I took the line that if I was a company that was employing the large number of people that we, we were, and if you look at the things that we were providing, I mean, you know, frankly, I, I use the example, if, you know, you go to a dinner party, and around the table, I'm probably, I'm probably collecting the TV licence for everybody, I'm probably dealing with somebody's pension, and, and by the way, if you haven't paid your Council Tax I probably know about it. So, I was everywhere. And I felt that they needed to understand what the company was like that sat behind it, and, and indeed the person that was running it. You know, if I was the person that had, you know, fast cars and yachts and, and lived outside the country, and didn't do anything about it, then people should know about that. But I wasn't. I was a person that grew up in a family that had the, you know, working-class element about it, and hard work, and I believe in people. We treated our staff well, very very well, and people were very... And I think people should know about that. So I, I went out of my way to talk to journalists about those sorts of things, and what we felt as a company, how, what our ethos was, what our values were. And do you know

what is unbelievable? That when people give you contracts, no, there's only, in all of my 22 years, there's only two organisations that ever asked to come and talk to us as a management team and as a board. I... You know, if I give a, if I give a building contract to somebody, I want to know, I want to know about them. So...

Who were these two?

One was a local authority, which was Westminster, and, another one was a, you know, a quango type organisation. And they asked to come and meet the board, including the non-executives, which, of course they could speak to the non-executives independently if they wanted to. So, what happened here was, obviously, as activities get larger, certainly as we, we developed and went into the FTSE, the intensity of what you talked about, we went into the FTSE, which was an amazing... I mean, there are not many, I don't know how many, I think there could be none, that went in FTSE having started a company in the way it was started, to go all the way to the FTSE. You, you, the intensity of the publicity went, up. When we did big things, like congestion charging we talked about, immediately people want to know who's running it. And so I think that definitely became a problem. We had to increase the amount of support. We had no organisation around communications. We had to do more work with analysts, because, every time you see what you just said there, on the front page of the *Financial Times*, analysts are on it as well. So you've got all this, when you don't win something, you've got to justify something. So it was, it was... I, I got a lot of attention. I mean, my place in London, sometimes there were journalists outside, which wasn't very pleasant. It goes with the territory.

[1:09:25]

OK. And, in that vein, I sense, and gain, you may not think that this was so, I sense that in 2006 they got you. Because, you gave a loan to the Labour Party to help Blair get his third term of a million pounds, and, [clicks fingers] you felt you had to leave, when it was, when it was not only exposed but you were deeply criticised for it.

It... It was an interesting time for me. I mean I had come to the conclusion... You know, I, I'm, at this point, I'm just approaching sixty, I come to the... I've been in Capita 20-odd, 22 years. I come to the conclusion, I wanted to retire, or move on.

And I have to say, as a, a person that starts anything, I mean this would be true of other people you've interviewed, it's not an easy decision, because emotionally you're, you're wound up in it, I mean it's your life.

And you're not, not just the chairman, you're the executive chairman.

I am Executive Chairman. And I had drafted a piece about, which I was going to put to the City, about standing down. I had decided that I didn't want to become non-executive, and I was going to retire. Around this time, I was, I had known a lot of people in Labour circles, and, they made, they always wanted me to donate, and I always refused. And I made that very clear every time that they ever asked. And, at some stage in that period they asked me if I would loan some, loan the money. It was an emotional time personally, what I was going through. And I decided, I'm leaving, I decided I would do it. I freely say now, it was wrong. I don't think it's wrong for the reason that somebody shouldn't do it, because you have a right to be able to do that, and it's a loan, and it's my money as it were. I think I was wrong in the position I held, and my timing was wrong. So, at the moment when all of a sudden this, and I write in the book, of the five days that changed my life, because, all of a sudden this, I use the word tsunami, came at me, because all of a sudden there was, there was publicity around others that have... And I thought... I didn't know there were others, yeah? And then all of a sudden, when it was announced, I decided that I, it was wrong for me to put the company in that, that position. So, rather than, you know, to do that, I decided to stand down as, as Executive Chairman, I became Chairman, and then to retire from the business. But, your point is well made. I lost control of something that I should have done in a far more, pleasant way. I mean I should have left a company that I had started, that had achieved so much, in an up, and I left it in a, in a very, for me, for me a very upsetting time.

[1:12:37]

Do you think that if you had had a chairman, who might have been older, he would, or she would, have said to you, 'Rod, this is not a good idea'?

Um...

Because you're chairman and chief executive, and there has been, particularly in the American press, the criticism of the president and the CEO being the same person.

I. I... I referred earlier on to, the first non-executive I had was Derek Fowler, and Derek Fowler always said, 'come the inquiry', was his phrase. So, come the inquiry, anything you do, think about it in terms of what happens if it either goes wrong or something... If Derek, who sadly had died by then, if Derek... If I had had a Derek around me, I think a Derek would have told me not to do it. I wanted to. I knew I was going to leave. I wanted to do other things, and I had already started that. And I said to myself, by the time this becomes public, yeah, because it would have been in the accounts of the Labour Party, I'm no longer there. My timing was changed, not by me but by others around Blair who basically started the idea of wanting him to go.

Mm. OK.

Yeah. And what I should have done, I, I should have taken a breath, deep breath, and I should have said no.

[1:14:00]

So, you left, you retired from Capita in 2006. And, you hit the ground running.

[laughs]

Yeah.

You formed the Aldridge Foundation, to further the work of your charitable trust. You develop this, you develop that in the, you know, in the last twelve or so years. And one of the major areas of development I just wanted some quick words from you on, Sir Rod, is, the National College for Digital Skills, called Ada. What's that about?

Again, you know, it's sometimes opportunity comes your way, or you create opportunity. One day we were in our offices, and two chaps, two gentlemen, basically knocked on the door and said, 'Can we have a desk?' And, the names were Mark Smith and Tom Fogden. And basically, these two had the idea of wanting to

develop a code college, because they felt that coding and, and that, was a... They were both teachers by the way. And they decided that they wanted to do this. And there was an opportunity to bid for a national college that the Government was going to introduce, one of which was going to be on coding or, digital. And they said, 'Would you be prepared to work, can we work in your desk, work the idea up?' And then, before I knew where I was, they were then saying, 'Would you be the sponsor of it?' Before I knew where I was, I was then the chair of, of the bid. And before I knew where I was, I was then in front of the Mayor, Boris Johnson at the time, wanting to bid for the money to get it. And before I knew where I was, I was doing a breakfast at Number 10.

You were being reinvigorated. [laughs]

I... Yes. Absolutely. And, and I... And what it is, is now a place, it's a college as opposed to an academy or a school, where young people can go to do their qualifications, their academic qualifications, but equally there are apprenticeship opportunities then to work in the industry. Because what became very apparent was, the industry needed a massive number of people to be recruited in this. And at the moment, as a country we'd not really got our heads around how we were going this. And so the National College of Digital Skills, which is based in Haringey, is designed to be the home for creating such people over, you know, the next five, ten years. And it's now open. It's been very successful, I'm a governor of it. They are not part of my multi-academy trust, because they're not a college – they're not an academy, they're a college. But they, significantly they have designed in their vision that they want to attract women, which, because in the sector, the IT sector, few are. They want to use it as a way of addressing social mobility, because there are lot of people that could come from the backgrounds that I now do in my, my foundation, we specialise in very challenging communities, young people obviously. And a lot of young people have got the characteristics where technology really interests them.

Mm.

So, I think it's going to be quite an exciting period.

It has been quite an exciting period.

[laughs] Yes.

It's been quite an exciting story. The son of a sheet metal worker, and mother a housewife. Thank you very much for your contribution to the Archives Sir Rod Aldridge OBE.

Thank you very much.

[End of Interview]