Richard Hooper

Interviewed by

Jane Bird

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Via Zoom

Welcome to the Archives of Information Technology where we capture the past and inspire the future. It's Wednesday, 1st September 2021 and we're talking on Zoom, as has become customary during the coronavirus pandemic. I'm Jane Bird and I've been reporting on the IT industry for newspapers such as The Sunday Times *and the* Financial Times *since the early 1980s. Our contributor today is Richard Hooper. Richard originally studied the arts but soon became a technology enthusiast, with a particular passion for the media. This was inspired when, as a Harkness scholar, he spent twenty-one months touring the US looking at innovative educational technology projects. I learnt in America, he says, such wonderful quips as, 'Technology is the answer, but, what was the question?' He also likes to quote the axiom coined by Marshall McLuhan, one of his heroes, 'The medium is the message'. At BT during the early 1980s Richard helped pioneer the first version of the internet, Prestel. Since then, broadband services such as browsing and streaming have enabled such huge change that he predicts mobile operators will eventually provide all our phone services and underground optic fibre our internet. Fixed phones and copper will all be gone. But while the digital world is more transparent, less elitist and more competitive, we should not embrace it uncritically, he warns. There are many risks from personal data theft and financial fraud to cyber terrorism.*

Richard, welcome. I'm very much looking forward to hearing more about your professional achievements, experiences and thoughts about where technology is heading.

Morning Jane, and good morning audience.

So, perhaps we could start at the beginning, as it were. You were born in September 1939, I think. How was your childhood? Did you have a happy time? Where were you and what was it like?

Well, I mean my father was killed in the war and so I went to boarding school at the young age, I hasten to add, at the age of six. I had my sixth birthday at boarding school. And I went to boarding school in Dorset and then I went to Sherbourne, and then I decided that I was sick of being a child in school and went into the army and did National Service for two years, and met Elvis Presley while I was there, which

was wonderful because he was working with the next-door US tank battalion – I was the 7th Royal Tank Regiment. Then to Oxford and in Oxford I sort of made the decision to try and apply for the BBC traineeship, which I did. And I really didn't have a clue what I wanted to do at Oxford. I mean I hadn't developed the sort of ground plan for the future, but once I was in the BBC I knew, this was, the media, media. And then of course becoming media, then into telecommunications and then into technology. I've been so lucky, I mean my life from '63 to now spans the convergence of those three great industries.

Yes, indeed. Okay, well, you've skimmed over a lot of time very quickly. I guess does that mean that you think those early, I mean crumbs, being sent away to school at the age of six, I guess that taught you to be very independent very early or something?

Yeah, I think it did. But I mean I didn't have any sense of what I wanted to do. I mean I've got grandchildren and children who, you know, I've got a son who's a great film director and at the age of twelve he said I'm going to be a film director, and I never had that. I mean I enjoyed my school life, I enjoyed my university life, I enjoyed time in the army, and then, you know, suddenly you find in the BBC, September 1963, this seems like home. I mean a wonderful place to work and I always remember one of the first things that happened to me was that my editor, I was working on *Radio Newsreel*, which was a news programme at six thirty in the evening, and he said, Richard, I'd like you to do a piece tonight on – I can't remember the topic – and he said, you know, why don't you prepare it. So I prepared it and I wrote it out, you know, typed it out. He said go into the studio and read it, and I went in the studio and read it and he said, I came out of the studio and he said, okay Richard, I'm going to take your script away, now go back into the studio and talk it, without a script. He of course had recorded both of them. And there was no question which was the best, it was the talky one. And I learnt from that moment, and it was 'medium of the message' time, long before McLuhan, that writing for reading is different from writing for talking. And years later I had the great joy of sort of seeing that work out in practice in terms of 'the medium is the message'.

[0:05:10]
So how did you get into technology then?

Well, that's a very interesting question, because I did ten years in the BBC and that included helping to found the Open University on the BBC side. And again, what the Open University did which was so extraordinary was to say let us use all the media that are available, from boring old correspondence texts, which were of course the heart of the course and weren't at all boring, they were rather good, to television and radio with these strange people in the BBC and Alexandra Palace in north London, and combining them all together with summer schools, with some tutoring – not very much – and I wasn't a scientist, but, you know, the scientists were sent sort of portable laboratory kits through the post, and that worked rather well. And so in a sense that was the beginnings of being caught up with technology, but my, the job after that, I was asked to run a government research programme on computer-assisted learning, uses of computers in teaching, both at school level, secondary level and adult and adult education. And so from '73 to '78 I ran this two and a half million pound government research and development programme which was, you know, that was long before PCs and laptops and all that stuff, so we were talking about rather large computers. And in my time in Harkness, which you mentioned, I had sort of seen what the Americans call computer-assisted instruction in, I remember, in Illinois, teaching nurses how to do breach delivery of babies and so that was in a sense an early meeting with it. So I spent five years very much with computers, both managing learning, computer-managed learning and computer-assisted learning. And I suppose that was really my first significant meeting with technology. And then from that was asked by Clive Hollick, Lord Hollick he is now, to go into a new company called Mills & Allen Communications, to be one of the first information providers on Prestel - Viewdata, Videotex, all those names – which was sort of, so '79 onwards, I got involved in Viewdata. And that's a lovely story, because BT invented it and are very proud of having invented it, and it was saying what can we do with a television set, a narrow band connection on telephone to a computer to provide an information service, and Prestel was the first and we sold the software around the world to Australia and America, Canada. It was pretty clunky, but it did clever things, like for example, one thing that I criticise them, the internet today, is that it doesn't really have a good micro-payment system, and I think that that is staggering. Because I think people, yes, people don't mind advertising, but quite a lot of people are happy to pay a few pence in order to read an article in *The Times* or whatever it is. And we actually had with Prestel and Viewdata, we had the ability to place a price in the top right hand of

the screen and you would say, if you press one you will go to a 50p page, or a 25p page, and there that will be the information. And this allowed BT to collect the money, then give it to the information providers, minus a small commission, and it worked really well. So there were things like micro-payments, there was of course the first ever email, which worked extremely well. There was even telesoftware, so you could send rather bizarrely inadequate visuals of Christmas cards and so on. So that was, that was really exciting. And then, as a result of being involved in that, I was invited to go to BT in 1980 to run Prestel from inside the BBC, because my predecessor, Alex Reid, who's one of the great IT people - and incidentally, I think he should be interviewed by you, Jane, Alex is a major figure in this - he went on to another job, I took over Prestel, and you know, that was the beginning of my time in telecommunications. I mean on the far edge of telecommunications, because we were value added services as it was called then, or value added network services, VANS, so that's how that worked.

[0:09:53]
Yes, that's amazing. Of course it then, the internet rather took over, didn't it? So do you think that was an opportunity lost by BT, or inevitable?

I mean Prestel Viewdata was always clunky. I mean, you know, it was forty… what was it? Twenty-four lines of forty characters, the graphics weren't very good. It showed the way brilliantly. And incidentally, something that BT's never managed to prove, but it developed the hyperlink, which of course is central to what you and I have been doing today, because you hyperlinked me an invite to this Zoom meeting. And the hyperlink, because when you said press one for a page, you pressed one, that was a hyperlink. So, you know, so I think BT felt that it had established a path, but really there was quite a gap, I mean mid-nineties, late nineties before the internet really got going, and even then… So yes, I mean value added network services, I mean it is interesting how telecoms companies have very rarely, in fact virtually never, made the sort of money that Google and Amazon and Facebook have made running on their carrier networks. I mean it is interesting that telecoms networks have tried to get into content and they go into content, they come out of content, and there are people who say just stick to the knitting, you know, provide good broadband and you'll have done us all a favour.

Yeah, yeah. So after that you moved on to Super Channel, I think, to satellite broadcasting, is that right?

Yes. There was one other important moment in BT, because I ran Yellow Pages, which was, again, a wonderful example of how it worked in the analogue world. I mean it was a FTSE 100 company, Yellow Pages was a FTSE 100 company in the analogue world and was completely – well, not completely demolished – but was hugely undermined by that nasty little box on a Google page where you could put in 'Plumber north London' and up comes plumbers, north London. And, you know, I don't think in many countries in the world Yellow Pages books are printed any more and published. But that was another interesting example of seeing the innovation come and trying to work with it and live with it and so on, Yell.com and so on. But that was- and then Super Channel, I was asked to – by the ITV companies because they were the shareholders – to help launch Super Channel, which was a, one of the first satellite channels, television channels. It had a pan-European footprint, and it was basically a pan-European service aimed at homes across the country, across Europe. And again, that sort of in the 1980s, it became clear that the real central issue of television was not international. Television isn't international really, in the sense of me sitting in Germany and watching stuff from the UK, most great and successful television is national, it's aimed at national audiences. And of course the good Mr Rupert Murdoch, with Sky, because he was only Sky when I was running Super Channel for the ITV companies, and he saw a moment when he could get a satellite spot that was aimed at the UK and that was the launch of pay television from Sky and of course they, you know, they invented the Premier League in terms of being on television and so on.

Yes. Yeah, yeah. So, that kind of kept your interest for a couple of years and then what did you sort of move on to? But you really went into technology consultancy after that, didn't you?

Yes. I mean then, I then at the sort of bright old age of sort of forty-eight, forty-nine, I started what was then unusual for a person of that age, I started a career of being a pluralist, of having, you know, company directorships and doing consultancy as well,

and I've done that for the last sort of thirty-odd years. And with different companies doing different things, always sort of in the general area of technology, media and telecommunications, some mobile phone, a mobile phone company, etc. And so that's always kept my interest and fascination with the sector.

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Yes. So that sort of really gives you the opportunity for never a dull moment, I suppose, you can sort of move on to. I'm wondering whether you would recommend that as a sort of portfolio kind of career for young people?

I mean I have a lot of friends who perhaps slightly later in their lives sort of went to a portfolio career, went to pluralism and they would always say, well Richard, what advice do you have. And I'd say, well, the bizarre thing about portfolio career – and I suspect you have a portfolio career, Jane, as well – is that it's all about your network. It's all about the people you know. You know, you sort of somehow imagine that Jane Bird and Richard Hooper are sort of reasonably clever people and that there is some office somewhere that is looking for really clever people and they've never heard of Jane Bird and Richard Hooper and suddenly they find them. Doesn't happen like that. I mean virtually none of my career as a pluralist, as a portfolio came like that. I mean, and indeed it was bizarre, I mean in 1979 when I'd done a year or so of portfolio the telephone goes. And it's Colin, Colin from ten years before who was a primary school teacher and ran one of my computer-assisted learning projects in a school in Hertfordshire, Colin Leeson. And I said, well Colin, how are you? And he said, well, I quite liked your lifestyle and what you were doing, so I eventually joined such-and-such consultancy and they'd like you to come in and run their information industries practice. I mean, you know, this was a totally bizarre ten years later from a person I hadn't talked to for ten years.

Yes.

So it's, I mean I think the answer is, it's a wonderful career, but you have to keep your network warm and you have to remind people you're around, you have to market yourself. And this notion that, you know, everybody's rational I'm afraid, do they know Jane Bird? Yes, she's a jolly good person. Right, we'll use her.

Yes. So that sort of is easier to do perhaps when you're already established. I mean you said you'd been working sort of what, twenty, twenty, sort of going on for thirty years when you…

Yes. You can't do it sort of from scratch, I think that would be… but you certainly, it is… and what is nice about it is that you get, instead of having sort of one client a year, you have five or eight clients a year and when you therefore come up against a problem on the board of a company, you say well, I mean I don't whether it's helpful, but this happened to me three years ago on… well, you sometimes can mention where it happened, and this is what we did and this is what we did wrong, and actually it's quite useful, you get a sort of wider experience.

Yeah, yeah. So over that period of time then, or I mean sort of looking back more over the full range of your career, yes, how would you kind of characterise the way it's changed?

Well, I mean, I think as I said just now, I mean I was incredibly lucky. I mean I joined the BBC and there was a thing called television and radio and media, which had virtually no connection to telecommunications or really to technology in any serious sense, although obviously television was itself a brilliant technology. And remember that Alexandra Palace, 1937 was the first ever television transmission, so I'm about a couple of miles, I live about a couple of miles from that first transmission tower sitting on top of Alexandra Park, Palace in north London. So in a sense that was, it was media and then this extraordinary word, convergence, sort of began to appear and people began to realise that actually the media did have a relationship to telecommunications and did have a relationship to technology. And right now, you know, we're sitting here on laptops and on computers looking at screens, with Google, with Netflix streaming and so on. I mean it just is the most extraordinary period of thirty years when something has gone, I mean I think they're worth, when I started my career I think there were four television channels, I think, five? Something like that. Four. And I remember a meeting, a wonderful meeting in 1987 which was at Number Ten Downing Street and Mrs Thatcher asked me to give the sort of opening spiel to senior broadcasting people because of the arrival of satellite

television to sort of look at broadcast policy, because clearly satellites changed the game. And I decided to bring with me for my presentation in my bag a piece of copper wire, a piece of coax cable and a piece of optic fibre. So one of the things I talked about, I said well, you know, this is copper, which is effectively the telephone, this is coax cable which is effectively cable television, and this is optic fibre, which is the future. And I always remember Mrs Thatcher leant across and just took the piece of optic fibre and sat there cradling it in her hand for the rest of the meeting.

[0:20:35]
And did you say how much data could be transmitted by each of them, sort of, or…

Oh yes. Well, I mean what was so wonderful about Viewdata, I mean my golly, that was fast, seventy-five kilobits a second. I think that was down, and then was it a thousand kilo…? Something like that. I mean compare with today. I mean you and I probably are on, I don't know, forty-five, fifty, a hundred, a hundred megs a second right now. No, it…

If only, I think, in my house, but yes.

Oh yes.

More like thirty, probably, but…

I think I looked up mine. I mean people don't ever look up their broad… I say to people, what's your broadband speed? And they say, well, how do you… Well, why don't you look it up, because, you know, you've been moaning about it. And they look it up and it's seventeen or something.

Yes, yes. We're not always getting the service…

So I think, I mean I just have been extremely fortunate to have been in a sector which has expanded in an extraordinary creative way and you almost don't know where the edge is, I mean I think somebody the other day said, reckoned that TMT – technology,

media and telecommunications – was twenty per cent of GDP in the UK, you know. And that now sort of includes so many things, including filmmaking and everything.

Yes, indeed. And thinking of the people that you've, the many people that you've talked about the importance of networking and having met so many people, are there individuals who you might pick out particularly as being mentors or strong influences?

I have to start with Marshall McLuhan. I mean I know, I suspect a lot of the people in the audience would know him and will have read him and younger people would probably never have heard of him and never read him. I was in America on a Harkness Fellowship, in New York City and met, I don't know how I met Father John Culkin who was a Jesuit priest, who was McLuhan's John the Baptist. I mean he was McLuhan's great marketing person. I never met McLuhan, sadly, but I had a wonderful time with John Culkin, and he of course introduced me to the books and so on, and as we've talked about, the medium is the message, which for me was in a way the driver of a lot of this. I mean, you know, you say to people the medium is the message and they say that's boring. But actually what for me it meant, in terms of my career and the career of the world we're talking about, is that every medium that you can think of has a different characteristic. So let's take television. Television is wonderful. It comes from that tower over there, it does not know or care how many television sets are connected and indeed, the cost of that tower is the same if ten million television sets are connected or ten are connected, because it's a one-way system. And then you come to the internet, which of course is two-way, and so the whole thing is totally different, you've got feedback, you've got, you know, email, etc, etc. So every medium you look at, and that was my experience with, you know, writing for reading and, you know, and I do a certain amount of mentoring of people and a bit of coaching on public speaking and say, you know, just think about the microphone, which microphone are you going to use. I mean I've written a book which I'm now going to shamelessly advertise, called *Making Meetings Work: The Art of Chairing*, published by Routledge. And I spent obsessive times on audibility and on microphones. Some microphones, you know, are better than others and if you're chairing a meeting it's quite a good idea to work out how the microphones work, and how often have you been at a meeting where somebody's standing at the

rostrum and then turns towards the screen and goes off mic. Now, we all should know that! There's no excuse. I mean mics have a, those sort of mics have a particular, you know, angle. And then you have handheld mics, which I hate because people can't handle, even pros have difficulty with handheld mics. So it's the medium is the message and in terms of influence, Marshall McLuhan. I mean he said, in 1968, the global village. Well, that was nonsense, there was no global village in 1968. Here in 2021 we are in the midst of the most extreme global village, you know. I mean I just have been spending quite a lot of time in Australia, because of Covid, and I married an Australian so I was able to stay there and, you know, the email and the Zoom to you or to anybody works exactly the same, I mean across the world. You don't have any notion of national boundaries and so on. So that's, I think he was a very, very key person.

[0:25:32]
Yes. Is there anybody else you would identify?

Well, I mean I was very lucky at BT. I mean one of the people who was, I think, the chairman of the archive, John Carrington, I mean he was my next-door neighbour in the value added services. He ran mobile communications and he's a delightful and articulate man and again, you learn things from people like John. I mean John still tells the story of doing market research for mobile telephony in probably, what date would it have been, '82, '83? And the market in London for mobile phones was, I don't know, 50,000 or something, that was the total market, because of course the phone was a brick sitting in a car. And, you know, you have to think, wait a moment. But miniaturisation is happening to this world, and of course miniaturisation is another key issue and Moore's Law, a central issue to the world we live in. No, so John, and then Alex Reid I've mentioned. I even met, you know, when I was in America, I met Buckminster Fuller and these are wonderfully far-seeing, visionary people who just have, you just learn things from them, it's marvellous. And also the, interestingly in BT, the sort of mainstream BT didn't really have a clue about what was happening, and I always remember that a senior person in BT is saying to me, well Richard, you've got to realise that the telephone network is separate from the video network and is separate from the telex network and the data network, and it'll always be separate because we as engineers optimise to each type or function of the

network. So there'll always be four or five networks. Well, I mean within how many years, five years, total baloney, because along comes this extraordinary network which does everything.

Yes.

It does voice - as we're doing now – it does voice, it does text, it does data, and it doesn't care. And by the way, packet switching of course, I mean you know, we don't remember the sort of wonderful, you know, the old telephone that was, you talked to Australia, you had a line open all the way to Australia. And then in 1967/68, the American military, remember, who basically invented the internet and invented alongside it packet switching, that was a military research and development and one of the reasons that they invented packet switching was that if the bomb goes off in a certain place, well, with an open telephone line, forget it, you're dead. Whereas of course packet switching arrives at the bomb, turns right, turns left, goes round the corner and joins the other side, you know.

Yeah, yeah. So I mean those thoughts really crystallise the difficulty of making predictions and knowing which direction technology is going to take us, don't they?

Yes.

That's extremely difficult. So how do you, what are your forecasts, how possible do you think…

[0:28:53]
Well, I have to admit to being a total failure on forecasting. I did not see mobile telephony coming. I mean you say that now, people think you're crazy, but I mean I did not see it coming. I think, I think the real serious issue that we face today is that the internet that we have unleashed around the world has such wonderful characteristics and has such terrible, terrible characteristics. And we've got to somehow sort, try and sort that out. But how you do it, I mean I was at Ofcom, I had a wonderful period at Ofcom, I was chairman of the Content Board, so that was regulating broadcast content, radio and television. How one can, can one regulate the

internet content. I mean I've been reading the OnlyFans business about pornography and so on and harmful content. I was talking to an eighteen year old, she's just left school and she's going to university and we were at some social event, and I said, do you mind if I ask you a serious question, as opposed to sort of talking about the weather? She said, well, ask away. I said, well tell me about your own age group, tell me what is it, what's going on with the internet? And she said, oh well, I would say half of my age group are on anti-depressants. Half. Half on anti… at eighteen. I said, well, okay. And she said, self-harm, harassment, you know, from grooming, and all this stuff. So I think the big challenge, which we all face and I don't think any government has yet really sorted it out, and I don't think Facebook and Google have sorted it out, is how do we get the greatness of the internet, which you and I are on right now, without the internet we couldn't be doing what we're doing, without this terrible, terrible harm, online harm as it's called. I happened to, I've done some advisory work in this area and one of the things that I, I mean there are two things: one is that, you know, if you are owner of Facebook, you are really a publisher. Now, I know the law says you're not and it's safe harbour, but the fact of the matter is, I think you have a duty of care. And if you were running Wembley Stadium, if you run, for example, if you, Jane, ran Wembley Stadium, you have a duty of care not just to the people playing football in the pitch, not just to the fans, but to the police, to the fire people and so on. You have a duty of care to people using your Wembley Stadium. And I think that, you know, the Facebooks and so on have got to have a really advanced duty of care to all the people and take more responsibility for it. And then the other thing which I bang on about, to no effect, is that I think anonymity on whatever, I cannot believe that if your name and address and telephone number was known, you would sort of threaten Conservative female MPs with rape. I mean I don't think you would do it quite so quickly if you were known to be. Now I've talked about this with government and they say oh well, anonymity's important because, you know, there are good uses of anonymity. If a wife is being assaulted by her husband then anonymity, etc, etc. And to which I say, okay, but the fact of the matter is, a lot of crime is hiding behind anonymity or within anonymity and we've really got to get at it and try and sort it out and if people know that they can be tracked down, they are less likely to do this stuff. So I think those are – sorry, I'm being a bit depressing – but I don't see us really on top of this issue on this wonderful

technology, McLuhan onwards, and the great people who've invented it, I don't see us being on top of the harm that is carried out.

I think China is trying to do things on that, aren't they? But then they have more surveillance, so they've got less anonymity in China, it's not so much part of their culture.

No. I think, I mean I think there must be, we must find ways of doing it, but I think if you, Jane Bird, run a website you have a duty of care. Okay, I won't call you a publisher, if you don't want me to call you, I won't call you a publisher, but you do have a duty of care to people who use your website. If there is online harm going on on it, you Jane Bird, me Richard Hooper, have responsibility for it and I think we've just got to take it more and more seriously. And it's not easy, it's not easy. I mean when I was chairman of Content Board of Ofcom, you know, there were some very, very difficult adjudications to make and that was on broadcast television and broadcast radio, well known, you know, eight o'clock in the morning or nine thirty at night and so on.

Yes. In terms of the technology, any thoughts as to how that, it will evolve?

[0:34:10]
Well, I mean, I'm now going to show my age [laughs], for which I don't apologise. I think the technology in some places is just wonderful. I mean I, because of Covid, I for the first time in my life went – and this sounds ridiculous – but I went to online banking and my couple of banks that I deal with, absolutely wonderful. I mean easy to use, clear, you don't get lost in it, you know, etc, etc. But that is actually probably not the norm, I mean a lot of websites, a lot of technology, I mean I have an Apple phone, you know, and it has so many features that I certainly can't sort of master them, so as I say, I summon the ten year old grandchild who immediately tells me where I've gone wrong. So I think the issue is about how making, making computing and technology easier to use, and actually, to be fair to us at Viewdata, Alex Reid and myself, one of the things that we absolutely were convinced we had to do with Viewdata was to make it easy to use. And it was easy to use and then of course we had this wonderful moment in California, we were presenting Viewdata in California

to some very high up person, clever guy, and we showed Viewdata. And he said, it's easy to use because it doesn't do very much. [laughs] Collapse of stout party. But I do think that where the technology's still failing is it's not easy to use for a lot of people. And if it's not easy to use for me as a, I hope, educated, literate, numerate person, there must be a vast number of people where it's very, very difficult to use. And yet, you know, you hardly ever see an analogue thing any more. It says if you want to fill out that form it's online. I mean I've just come back from Australia and I can tell, I spent probably two days sorting out the admin of Covid tests in Australia, Covid tests here when we arrive, passenger locator forms, and that's all done online. And, you know, it was pretty good, but it took a long time and there were bits which you didn't understand and you didn't know whether you could save it or not save it, whether you could come back to it. So I think the challenge, I mean there are two challenges. I think the technology has, I think the problem is technologists – and I'm not a technologist – ask other technologists to try out their stuff.

Yeah.

Well, they should ask people like me to try out their stuff, and I'm very happy to do it. You know, give it a go. I think it's not easy enough to use. So there's that and then there's online harm. Those are the two big issues facing our industry and ones that I sort of live with every day.

Yeah. And what about your advice to young people today who might be thinking about going into technology or media technology?

I think, I mean if you are like my ten year old grandson, Patrick Byrne [sp?], I mean, you know, you're going to do fine, you're going to be in the… I mean which companies have made absolutely wonderful progress during the Covid plague years? Technology companies. I mean look at Netflix, look at Amazon, etc, etc. Look at Zoom. I mean Zoom, I wasn't aware of Zoom a year and a half ago, and in the book that I promoted just now, my book, I've got a whole chapter at the end, chapter nine, on Zoom and Microsoft Teams and so on. So I think my advice to young people is if you are interested in the technology, then you are lucky and for goodness' sake work on it, but try and concentrate on the customer interface, the customer service. It is

so… I mean I rang a telephone number the other day, which shall be nameless, and, you know, by the time I'd pressed one for this and two for that and seven for this and eight for that, it then said, there are fourteen people ahead of you in the queue. Now, that is, I don't think that's an acceptable world, I don't think we should live with it and I think young people should go in there and really try and try things out and try and make it easier to use. Sorry to bang on, easy to use, but it's something I feel very strongly about.

And what about you professionally? What do you intend to spend the next ten years doing?

[0:38:43]
Well, I spent a lot of last year writing the book on *Making Meetings Work: The Art of Chairing*, because I've been chairing for sixty years, I worked out. And so I'm now doing quite a few seminars on the book and helping people and I do mentoring of company directors, so I've just been helping a younger woman who had never been on a board before and was on a rather interesting board and, you know, we have actually – it was Zoom because of Covid – and I do that and I thoroughly enjoy that. Really sort of trying to give my experience of boards, particularly to women, I mean younger women, and it's a tremendous experience and, you know, you… I remember, again, I talk about this in the book, but a young man who is very prominent these days – it's anonymous in the book – a young man, I said, what's a board for? Which is a sort of classic opening sentence, opening question from the mentor Hooper to anybody who sort of wanted to be on the board, what's the board for? And he looked at me and he smiled and he paused and he said, to seek the truth. I said, that's the best answer I've ever had. I mean, that is classic, you know, to seek the truth, and I thought that was wonderful. So I think mentoring, I've got grandchildren, I've got life and I'm lucky to be sort of reasonably healthy and, you know, reasonably able with technology but I could do better, as you know, Jane. Because when we started – Jane hasn't told you this – but when we started I had a machine that didn't have a camera. Classic. [laughs] So I'm now on my laptop which does have a camera. And I never knew it didn't have a camera. I'm being very honest.

So when you look back over your professional life, then what would you think of as your proudest achievement?

Oh gosh. Well, I think the Open University. I mean that was tremendous. I think, oh, I think Viewdata and Prestel was, you know, it didn't work comm…. It worked commercially, funnily enough, in the travel industry quite a while, there were about eight or ten years when if you went into a travel shop they would swing the Viewdata screen round and say okay, tell me, you know, which tour you want to go on. So I think that. I think being at the launch of satellite television. I mean I actually had in the garden of this house, I had a sort of sixteen-foot satellite… No, I'm joking, but it was a very large satellite dish and of course, again, miniaturisation. Now the Sky dish is what, this sort of size. Yellow Pages, I certainly, you know, it was tremendously good for plumbers and carpenters and builders and so on. Ofcom I'm terribly proud of. I think we, again, well it comes back to your question about what's happened in the structure of the industry that we're in. Well, Ofcom was the first converged regulator. Before Ofcom you had the Radio Authority, which I chaired, you had the Independent Television Council, you had the telecoms regulator, you had the Broadcasting Standards Council and I've probably missed one. And we put them all together in one place in 2001/2 and it became, I think, a beacon for regulation across the world. I mean Ofcom today is still considered the gold standard. And I think it was because we'd put everything together and looked at it as a converged industry, or tried to, rather than treating it as a television and a radio, and over there, spectrum, spectrum management. Well, spectrum management is, you know, I mean the irony of spectrum management is that most television sets, other than the ones on your screen on your phone, they are in fixed places in your living room or in your bedroom. They're not mobile, and yet we are wasting a lot of, you know, mobile spectrum space to talk to that television set. And that's where I think broadband will just take over. People will be using broadband fixed, you know, optic fibre under the ground for fixed services, allowing mobile to have all the spectrum it needs. So I think Ofcom was tremendously exciting for me and, you know, I just thoroughly enjoyed that time and…

[0:43:37]

Did it have teeth, do you think? Because so often that's…

I think it did have teeth, yes. I mean I can remember, I mean a small example, there was a programme where a quite ridiculous – it's a radio programme – and when you listen to it, it's sort of seven o'clock in the evening on a weekend and clearly a young girl is ringing up, you can tell from the voice when you listen to the… And they were playing a sort of sex hangman game, with what turned out to be, I think she was eight. And instead of saying, you know, come on, you should be in bed or this is not for you, they played this sort of sex hangman game. And we went bananas as a regulator and if you say teeth, we fined them a lot of money, and actually various people lost their job as a result of that. So I think, yes, I think we did have teeth, I think it does still today. But you've got to be very assertive and strong about it, you know. I think it's, you know, a critical thing and this was, again, online harm stuff. I mean this was classic online harm.

[0:44:55]
Yeah. So, we've covered a lot of ground, Richard. Is there anything you think we should have talked about that we haven't? Anything you'd like to add?

I just think it has been an extraordinary period of time which it's like probably, I mean it might come again, but certainly in our media space, I mean you as a journalist, I mean you have experienced it, I mean poor newspapers are under tremendous attack, paper is going to disappear, we're going to be reading a lot of this stuff digitally and so on. And I just think we need to be ready for it in terms of the online harm issues which I've said, and then the ease of use. You know, so that people can actually enjoy the technology and get good things out of it and not be sort of, find themselves, I mean what is it? It's seven or eight per cent of this country still doesn't have broadband, ten, nine per cent, something like that. I mean I was chairman of Broadband Stakeholder Group for a number of years and that was really a fascinating period in terms of seeing broadband grow in this country. But there are still a lot of people who are not on it and I think if you're not on broadband these days, you are not in society.

Okay Richard, well thank you very much for sharing your thoughts and experiences with us today, it's been fascinating to hear everything that you've had to say. Many thanks.

It's been a real pleasure, Jane, I've thoroughly enjoyed it, thanks for your questions. I hope I've answered them reasonably. Bye bye.

Yes. Bye bye.

[0:46:43 end of recording]