

Audio title: JohnPemberton-1stOct2013

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Debs                    Okay so it looks quite long here and I might have to show you some of the pictures because of some of the questions but it's an interview that is more in-depth so it's a case of asking one or two questions and hoping that the conversation flows. Is that okay?

John Pemberton    Yes.

Debs                    Yeah okay. Thank you ever so much for doing this; it's really very good of it, especially now I know how busy you are as well ((laughs)). Because the PhD is looking at your external and internal influences into decision-making and the way you interpret things, I'd like to ask you a little bit about your background and how you came to be where you are now if that's possible.

John Pemberton    Right.

Debs                    So I've done some research and you were CEO or owner of a computer software.

John Pemberton    Indeed, for twenty-five years yes.

Debs                    So can you explain a little bit about how you came to do that?

John Pemberton    Well I actually originally studied engineering and with a firm I was an industrial apprenticeship, a management trainee thing with a firm called Smith Industries, an industrial firm which still exists and that was over a four year period including six months in university, six months in industry and I was set to do electronics engineering which really intrigued me and I did a six months period in the IT department and at the end of the six month period I was lucky enough, because you weren't guaranteed a job at the end of this process, so I was lucky enough, so the guy said

to me “we’ve just discovered you haven’t got a contract with us and I hear there’s a contract, employment contract, sign that ‘coz you were doing some useful work” and I said “ooh I can’t do that, I’m part of the training scheme” and he said “oh well does that mean you’re going to leave us now?” I said “no” and he said “well can you be back here; oh well you need time to make your mind up too go and talk to your training people, come back here in 48 hours and tell me whether you’re going to sign this contract”. So I went and saw the training guy and he said to me “well you’re doing this degree and you’ve not got a job guaranteed at the end, now you’ve got a job being offered to you so one alternative you’ve got it is you drop the degree and take the job” and I said “yes I think that probably is right for you too”; “good” he said ((laughter)) and I never looked back from that so that’s how I ended up in IT. I worked for them for twelve years and then founded my own company designing software and we built it up to about, we had 70 million revenue and 800 employees; took it public and finally sold it five years after we’d taken it public. And that’s mean that I am now retired and working harder than I was. So that’s how I ended up in the computer software industry.

Debs Oh right, so what kind of software was it?

John Pemberton Business software, business administration software, accounting, audit process inventory, distribution software.

Debs Okay so hence the accounting software of the New Forest.

John Pemberton So yes I’ve now moved on to be on the Board of the New Forest National Park and also its visitor centre there, New Forest Centre. As a result of that experience really, they want me for my general

business experience and I'm pleased to be able to contribute. The problem is it sucks me into spending so many hours doing that. It's on a voluntary basis but I'm financially independent because I managed to sell my company; so that's not the problem, the problem is the number of hours it takes and detaching oneself from these things can be extremely difficult. So that's where I am at the moment, thinking of retiring a second time.

Debs ((Laughs)) well I hope you do find some more time for yourself. So your education therefore was much more electronics than the software but it kind of fed in through quite well then the experiences you've gained?

John Pemberton Yes it did 'coz I think that certainly in the early days; funnily enough I've never actually written a computer programme in my life, I never actually was a software developer, what I did was design and project management and so on. And all those kinds of things you learnt from an engineering background equally well as you did from a more pure IT background, in fact possibly even better actually. I did do some academic courses early on in the life of my company in software development you know a week or two at a time, vocational courses. Most of my learning in that area has been pragmatic ((laughs)) on the job.

Debs What made you move to Beaulieu 'coz I read that you lived in Hampshire and so you've moved back to here.

John Pemberton Mm I was born in Hampshire, lived a lot in London for years and years. I initially did in the sort of meticulous, almost engineering type way, when I was living in London a survey of locations to live which were accessible to London because at that point I was still

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working there, which did offer great open spaces and access to a pleasant environment and quite naturally the New Forest stuck out as a place to go to so I bought a cottage down here initially and then a farm, small hobby farm, which I live on now in order to get access to some open spaces and then obviously subsequently I've stopped working in London so it's now my only domain.

Debs Because the way we met was you were wanting to do a degree, an MA and you met Paul.

John Pemberton Yes.

Debs And you started talking about things and Paul said what I was doing.

John Pemberton That's right.

Debs And you were wanting to write a book and model up the Abbey or the house here; do you remember?

John Pemberton Oh yes, yes it's not a book, it's more of well sort of monograph sort of like a paper almost, it's not written like an academic paper and I have given presentations four or five times on it and that's on the history of this house and farm that I live in. And yes I was looking to work on that as a sort of project for the course that I signed up for, which I didn't subsequently do because when I turned up for the course, it turned out to be entirely different to what was advertised. And also at that time I broke my leg as well ((laughs)) in a horse riding accident so the two came together and I dropped out of the course and never did it. But yes that was how we met yeah.

Debs So you've obviously got an interest for history.

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John Pemberton Very much so.

Debs Presumably ((laughingly)) from that and especially about the house and how it fits with Beaulieu.

John Pemberton Yes because the house, it's interesting, being in the New Forest, the land is very little disturbed in terms of what is carved out of what is now the National Park as residential or agricultural holdings and this holding has remained much the same; it's first talked about in the archives in 1170 when the then farmer who held the farm owed a debt ((laughs)) so it's recorded and so its history goes back a long while and it was owned for about eight hundred years by what is now the Beaulieu Estate, initially it was the monks of Beaulieu who built Beaulieu Abbey, they owned it and used it as an outlying farm for farming cattle in fact and then with the dissolution of the monasteries in 1538, the whole of the Beaulieu Estate passed to, Thomas Wriothesley in fact is the character it passed to and who is an ancestor of the current Lord Montague who owns the Beaulieu Estate so pretty continuously it was owned until 1897, in fact a century ago, when the Beaulieu Estate sold this farm and an adjoining one into private hands, in fact in order to pay gambling debts which their family members had incurred and that is a historic fact.

So it finally passed into private hands so that's the sort of history of the farm but it is a rich history and I got fascinated in it and particularly in the monks who had owned it and their lives and some of the incredible contrasts in their lives; it's an amazing contrast in that they have vows of poverty and service to God and to Christianity and yet ended up often in many cases, including the monks of Beaulieu, quite wealthy with great lands and huge

herds of sheep across the wastelands of England and France where one of the monastic orders originated from. And so there's some amazing contrasts in their lives and I became fascinated in that and how they lived and what they lived in so all that went into my monograph on the history of the house.

Debs It is absolutely amazing how the monks who, as you say, supposed to be vows of poverty etc were the most amazing business people really.

John Pemberton Yes it's a ((?)). And not only were they at one time that but what happened, the Benedictine monks were the first monastic order and they got it started in about 600 AD or slightly after that and various other monastic groups split off from the Benedictines and tried to found their own orders and one of the reasons they did in many cases was because they reviled how wealthy the existing orders had become and the Cistercians who ran Beaulieu; I mean this applies as well and I think they were founded around about 900 AD some two or three hundred years later and by the time they founded Beaulieu Abbey in the 1200s they had become themselves wealthy. And it is the most amazing contrast and it really gives you a view of human nature that in fact this is going to happen however well disposed your initial intentions are; it's a natural part of life really that people end up needing to put a roof over their head and need to feed themselves and so on and they're going to end up accumulating wealth and it happens to monks as well as us ordinary mortals ((laughs)).

Debs Could you remember when we did eventually meet then after that first meeting with Paul and then we came down and I showed you what I'd done with Dunster; do you remember that?

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John Pemberton I do remember that yes; I was very impressed by it.

Debs You were okay ((laughs)) I was just about to ask you what did you think of it.

John Pemberton I was impressed with it, I was particularly impressed with, I think an underlying theme of mine which was only one component of what you were doing but was the idea, because Beaulieu Abbey and almost all the other abbeys are in ruins in Britain because of the dissolution of the monasteries; in France to the French Revolution and so forth and what you could do with this graphically is you could start out with a graphic image of the foundations or what remnants of the building there were standing and then you could build it up visually on a screen into the form that the whole building took. And you could do that; you could also do it historically over time so you could build it up into its initial form which was often quite small and modest and then when they added additional wings to the buildings or new buildings, you could add those on and you could do something visually through visual media that is totally unachievable in any other way; you could build his image of a building being constructed and through time how it had developed. And that whole notion really intrigued me; it was that particular notion that drew me in. I know there were other components to what you were doing but that was the driver for me.

Debs Yeah it was obviously having an interest in history and buildings; we all go to see these buildings and we take them for what they are at face value and our imagination is very difficult to throw it back to how it used to look so being able to have this wonderful world of 3D, it seemed wonderful to be able to do this so Beaulieu

was more difficult than Dunster in that respect ((laughter)). So with your experience in technology and the things that you did with your company, was the idea or the concept of Dunster/Beaulieu something that you would have taken on or done with as the kind of company that you were; do you see what I'm trying to say? Probably not very clearly actually.

John Pemberton Well, it certainly wouldn't have been a software business that I was in, because that was very firmly anchored in commercial operation if you like. Although we had added to the product a solution which represented visually on a screen how a company was performing, in bar charts and pie charts and so forth. So you begin to get an inkling then of how a visual representation could show you certainly financial information or performance information; so that probably is a jumping off point but no I think it's a very different field of endeavour, the sort of graphic interpretation that you were working on; it's a different field of software altogether.

Debs But because you've come from that background you could understand how it could go forward perhaps?

John Pemberton Yes.

Debs Yeah.

John Pemberton Yes indeed yes, certainly I would know how you can create graphic images in software; very much so yes.

Debs So you've obviously gone because of your interest in history, you've obviously gone to other heritage sites, yeah?

John Pemberton Yes.



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Debs                   And maybe to other abbeys maybe?

John Pemberton    Yes.

Debs                   Yes 'coz I think you went to, did you go to Sibton?

John Pemberton    Well I've actually been to the Association of National Parks conference up in York and we went to Rievaulx Abbey and Amblesforth Abbey just last week.

Debs                   Oh wonderful ((laughs)) very envious.

John Pemberton    So yes I've been to quite a few; purposefully as I've travelled through Europe on holiday, certainly France and Spain, visited quite a number of abbeys as well, monasteries and abbeys and cathedrals.

Debs                   So in those visits, what did you think of the interpretation at those sites; did you think it was begging for more?

John Pemberton    They're hugely variable. There is one abbey site down in France, Fontaine Abbey, which is a UN-something site.

Debs                   UNESCO site.

John Pemberton    I can't remember the name of it now and one of the most rewarding things about that is that abbey is, almost all of the buildings I believe, still remain intact and somehow have escaped the various exigencies of French Revolution and whatever else might attack them, but I'm trying to remember how good their interpretation was. As far as I remember it was good. One of the things I've really enjoyed when I've gone to such sites as I do with art galleries as well and museums in general is an audio talk.

And that was another thing which triggered my interest in what you were doing 'coz essentially you were doing a video tour of an abbey and it always seemed to me that was a marvellous step to take forward because with an audio tour you could hear about a description of the artefact you're looking at; with a video tour, the imagination really takes off because you can see all sorts of aspects of it which you wouldn't be able to see with your eyes just looking at it; you know what it was before, I mean even with a painting you can see maybe what painting sat underneath it, which have been found by X-rays or whatever or you could see other similar compositions that that artist had made and similarly with the abbey, you could see the thing in its historic context. So audio tours actually were another springboard for me for really liking what you've done with Dunster and did subsequently do with Beaulieu into a video tour, it's another attraction of the work that you've been doing.

Debs Oh right thank you. Do you remember the Dunster navigation, sort of like when you could jump up and down? No?

John Pemberton Oh gosh you're going back a number of years.

Debs Yeah I'm going back a little bit.

John Pemberton Too many years.

Debs Yeah ((laughs)) you see this?

John Pemberton Oh yes, yes.

Debs Yes, so you could jump from the cube up and you'd have a little bit of information or video and so on and there should have been a map underneath etc. But that had to significantly change for

Beaulieu because of the lack of years at Beaulieu, if you see what I mean, in the time slices, it was like a build heyday and dissolution almost with Beaulieu so this you used to be able to navigate around with but of course in this era you've got GPS, so if you were using a phone or something like that, which was my original intention, that you'd be able to guide yourself around by that; it would tell you where you are rather than you looking to see where and having to find out where you were. Did that make a good way, you probably don't remember, but a good way of navigating do you think?

John Pemberton Yes.

Debs Or was it a bit clunky or do you think this is even more abstract maybe?

John Pemberton I do remember that and that sort of three dimensional matrix that you used to allow people access to the information if you like. That I think was possibly less attractive than the other things I've talked about it terms of the techniques you were using. Having said that, you need to have a mechanism of giving people access to other plains and if you've got one plain information if you like is the different beaches that you're trying to portray in video form and visually and another might be the historic timeline so you've now got two different dimensions and there could well be other dimensions to it, looking at it through the eyes of say one person, a monk in a monastery and then looking through the eyes of a visitor or a layman at the time and so on. So there is a need for dimensions but I must admit I didn't find, and I can't quite see how you could do it otherwise, but I didn't find it as attractive if you like as the actual visual representation but that's just me, my

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particular reaction but on the other hand you need an indexing system; as an indexing system I think it's good.

Debs                    Yeah we've just been looking at the website for the forest park and the countless lots of dropdown menus and that's what I was trying to avoid by putting them into folders of information.

John Pemberton      Well it works there yeah, there are so many websites where it's completely confusing and you can spend hours searching for the right thing and then only find it by chance or by going in a completely different way or just knowing that there may be a word on the web page which is relatively unique and then doing a Google search of the website through all the pages and it'll come up with the pages with that word on it; it's a technique I often use because the indexing just doesn't take you to whatever you want.

Debs                    What you want to go to yeah.

John Pemberton      So yes I think it's a good technique. I suppose why I'm hesitating is it's I just wonder whether that isn't; I mean I have a very structured brain because I was trained in engineering, I did a lot in my career of project management and so on, thinking of things in structured ways; I think people who don't think things in structured ways might have a bit of a problem trying to use something as structured as a matrix, but on the other hand how else you do it, I don't know.

Debs                    Yeah well I did try that out with a couple of children and they instantly seemed to know what to do, instantly seemed to know what to do and they clicked on that cube and they would get that information for that thing and the colour coding and everything seemed to work.

John Pemberton It might be one of these left brain/right brain things, it might be there are lots of kids and adults for whom it's very evident and it is for me; but I mean you're the person who's done all the research into it so you know the ins and outs of how you index things and how people access things, but it certainly works for me.

Debs Yeah, cool, okay thank you. Also the matrix, just one more on the matrix, allowed three levels of information going through, so not only could you choose characters and all those other things that those cubes gave you but you could actually choose a level of information that you went in at, so adult, child and professional so that was the initial one so that if you were an academic or a professor that you could go in at that level and the information would be relevant to you and if you were a child, you might have similar information but put it at a child's level if you see what I mean so that they could engage with it more. And that was the initial idea; we never actually got round to that for Beaulieu because we had seven months and ((laughingly)) not enough time basically. So do you think that could have worked? Coming from your financing/accounting kind of, it's usually at one level isn't it but then you've got people who might be very basic.

John Pemberton Oh you have to interpret it, to the very detail and one of my jobs with the park and being involved with the finance aspects, among others, is to explain to the members let alone the staff in the park whatever, what this information means. I think it's necessarily a good idea, I just wonder whether some people's brains might find if they've got two other dimensions they're working with and they've got a third dimension, is the information I want here that which a child might want because I am child or am I sort of at the

middle level or in fact I want some detail on this so do I go in as a professional and accept the fact there may be superfluous information; it's not a kind of universal solution but you do need to do that. It's like in a report, a business report, you'd have an executive summary at the beginning; you do need to do that 'coz people won't plough through all the detailed information. Maybe that's what, maybe you want to restrict it to say two levels; you know a summary and the detail. Any more levels than that you'd end up with people being confused as to which level do I go in at or going in at the wrong one for some arbitrary decision.

Debs No that's a good idea, yeah summary/detail I like that. It is difficult to know isn't it because an adult might want to go in as a child or rather be presented information at a sort of not little tot level but sort of eleven year old level because it's something they quickly want to understand, so hence the summary thing sounds quite good.

John Pemberton Yes I don't think it's a child thing 'coz if you had a child who's studying for GCSEs or ((?)) or something they would probably want to go in, in what you're calling the professional level. I think it almost ought to be expressed in terms of summary and detail or something like that; sort of easy read and detail or whatever term you'd use.

Debs Overview and detail.

John Pemberton Overview and detail yeah.

Debs Yeah, no that's great, that's a really nice bit of feedback on that one ((laughs)) thank you John. So I've got a little questionnaire saying what would you have done differently and that's just

answered that one really so yeah we've done that differently ((laughingly)). Overall the bit that you particularly like, the video tour and the build of the abbey, was that kind of the result, when you went there and you've seen it, because obviously you'd seen it a little bit beforehand with me creating it as it were, but when you went there as a launch guest and you saw it being demonstrated and so on, did you think that that was really good enough, if you see what I mean, in what you had hoped it would be?

John Pemberton Yes very much so in terms of what the software presented if you like. Certainly the tour aspects are one thing which I know the public like very much about it is the way you've used personalities from an abbey, such as a monk or one of the servants of the abbey or the different staff the abbeys have and so on and expressed it in their view as to what they felt about it using an actor to read their sort of monologue of their description of their daily activities or monastery or whatever so I think there are a lot of very attractive features of it and yes the build of how the thing was built over time and it just flowers the imagination. You want to see all sorts of things in the world in that form; you know how they got constructed and what with. That's probably my more sort of mechanical background; I love to see diagrams of how things are built and so on. That may be a bit sort of it's left or right brain, but I think a lot of people are like that and would want to see what the make-up was so I think that's hugely attractive and a technique which could be applied to ranges of different things.

Debs Yeah my brain definitely likes to know how things work and so building the columns in the 3D animation and putting the window

keystones together to create all the carved windows; thankfully they weren't as ornate as some ((?)) assertion but it was interesting to see. And in fact researching and working out how those things put together actually gave you a much better understanding of how the abbey was built, if you see what I mean, literally built because the model that's down there, the actual built model, they've got a stairway or something going up one of the side wings and with the way the roof comes out over, I don't know how that could work; having built it in 3D now on the screen, architecturally, with architectural software, I can't see how they could have had that roof where it was with the staircase in the wall. So it's things like that, because you don't see that in the model, but knowing that the staircase was there. So it's things like that that was really interesting to do and it's things like that that you want to be able to divulge to everybody else, the mechanics of it so your brain would have liked that?

John Pemberton Very much so.

Debs Yeah.

John Pemberton I think there was one, and I know it wasn't your fault, but there was one shortcoming of the Beaulieu project particularly which is that it wasn't followed through to the point of having, was to having the point of a single display, static display, which was a touch screen and people could work with that, but it wasn't in terms of having either a handheld device or a mobile phone which is a form of handheld device and having the software on that so they could walk around the building with it and there weren't sufficient funds and sufficient drive behind the Beaulieu Estate to do that and I think that's a real frustration because it would take



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off even more were one able to do that. So I think that wasn't a limitation within your control, but as the project was originally conceived to include that but the funds weren't available to do that, so I think that's a challenge for the future really to be in that position to do things on the basis of a portable digital display.

Debs                    Yeah because Mary-Anne and Stephen, both of them did not want the handheld at all aspect of it so I tried to factor it in because my brain was designing it so that it would eventually work on that.

John Pemberton    Did they not want it because conceptually they didn't think it was a good idea or because they knew they couldn't afford to buy ((laughter)).

Debs                    I don't know.

John Pemberton    I rather think the latter.

Debs                    Yeah the explanation to me was the fact that it was a security issue; they didn't want people walking off with--

John Pemberton    With terminals.

Debs                    Or putting somebody in, in order to let them know and to hand them out and get them back.

John Pemberton    It's interesting because I have seen, I mean a number of museums do now have; actually they give you iPhones and the Louvre, not the Louvre.

Debs                    The Tate?

John Pemberton    The opening of the major museum in Amsterdam, the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, which has re-opened in the last six

or nine months, I have been to. They give you, for a tour, an iPhone but they take a credit card as deposit and I know a little bit about credit card processing and they can take a deposit, just like a hotel can when you check into a hotel, one night's stay, they can take that money or reserve it in the credit card as they take the credit card from you so they would be in a very strong position to know that were the phone to walk, they could take the values off your credit card so I must admit, and I knew that at the time, I must admit that seemed a satisfactory mechanism but it obviously wasn't thought to be so in the eyes of Beaulieu. I suspect it was that the level of complexity to the project and the level of cost, which they just didn't want to entertain, I think that was what drove that. It's a pity but such is life.

Debs In a recent discussion with Mary, I actually agree with her to a certain level now because we talked again about the mobile aspect, the handheld aspect, and again it came up that it wasn't cost or security at this point because people would have their own phones, but that people spend all their time looking at their phones anyway so that when they come to a heritage site, it's better not to be looking at the heritage sites through the phone.

John Pemberton ((Laughs)) I'm not sure I'd agree with that.

Debs There's some aspects to it whereby you could actually, when you're there, you could actually register an interest in certain areas of the site that you want to know more information about so that when you reached those, because it would be tracking you, somehow the system would track you, where you are, so that it would pop up to let you know whether, RFID or something like that would pop up to say "you're interested in this, here's a

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bit more information” so that you’re not constantly searching through your phone for that information. So I think there’s ways of managing or balancing how much you look through.

John Pemberton There is and I think people who perhaps have that slightly reactionary view about it need to go and visit things like the Rijksmuseum and there must be a lot of other museums I’ve ((?)) before who just give you an iPhone after all an iPhone in capital cost to the museum is probably not significantly different to an audio tour device and they’re several hundreds of pounds to the museum, I know, and if they use a credit card as deposit, you know if you haven’t got a credit card, afraid you can’t have the phone so I don’t quite see that that’s a limiting problem.

Debs Can you remember, just an odd question, but can you remember at the museum that if you had your own iPhone could you download it to your phone rather than having their phone?

John Pemberton I don’t think you could in the Rijksmuseum, I don’t think so no.