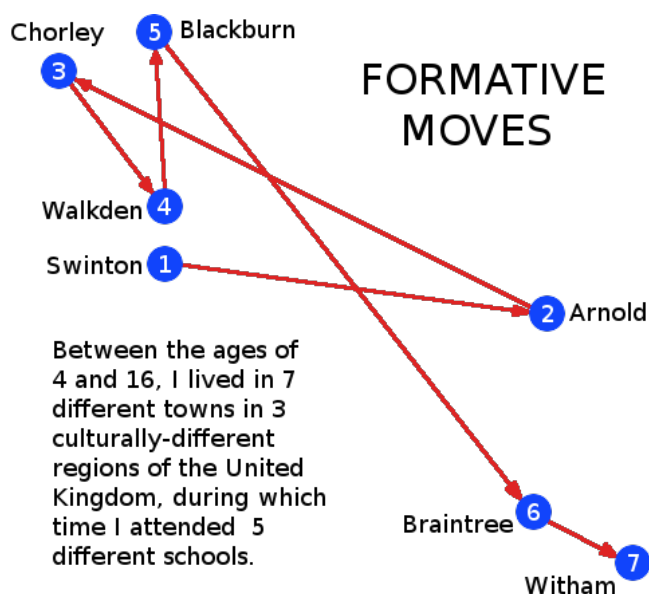


## Chapter 1: My Career Gone

*It seems to be a cherished belief in Western society that if you get a good education and work hard then wealth and well-being are bound to follow. My career has been an irrefutable and painful demonstration of the fact that this is simply not true. [Footnotes] [PDF]*

### Education

My education was very fragmented. In order to progress in his career, my father had to move frequently to different parts of the country. I was taken out of a school just as I was beginning to find my feet and make friends. I was then placed in another school in a strange class in a strange place full of strange people with a different regional accent. There I was left to pick up, as best I could, the disjointed thread of the national curriculum, which unfortunately was not presented in synchrony by the different schools. Thus, in geography for instance, I covered Africa twice, skipping North America completely.



Consequently, my [formal education](#) was of limited success. I did not fit in well with the system. My formal qualifications are menial. They do not reflect my real education, which came afterwards. An education won by a life-long course of personal study, which alas the world does not recognise.

### School and College

I attended one of the [top Grammar Schools](#) in the country. I should have done better, but I left with only six 'O' levels and 'A' level physics. I loved maths, so I endured a [college evening class](#) for the following year, while doing a student apprenticeship with a [public utility](#). I passed with a good grade and went to a [college of advanced technology](#) to study applied physics. Naively swayed by the novelty of student life, I studied little and socialised too much. I failed.

Undeservedly I was reprieved. [Another college](#) accepted me for a BSc degree course. In the first year I had dedicated mature lecturers who loved their chosen vocation. I passed Part I of the degree well in all three subjects: Maths, Physics and Chemistry. I worked very hard during the next two years for Part II, but I failed in mathematics. We all did. Sadly, our Part II maths lecturers were young graduates who had little in the way of communication skills. Their sole interest was their post-graduate research. Lecturing to us was for them an unwelcome chore. Economics denied me another chance. I tried a correspondence course but became ill and had to give up on doctor's orders.

## Personal Study

By nature I am a thinker. I learn by reason rather than rote. For me, formal education had been too heavily biased towards the latter. Nevertheless, the mathematical and physical knowledge I encountered in my degree course appealed to me, and my pursuit of it was rekindled by a book I found in the library of the research establishment where I got my first job following college.

I remember struggling with electromagnetic theory. My lecturers were unable to explain the concepts and I suspected that they themselves may not have really understood them properly. But in that library I discovered a book on electromagnetic theory by Max Planck, the man who invented it. I was rather awed by the book and thought that if I could not understand the college text books, how could I possibly understand what was written by the original scientist? Especially since it was merely an English translation of his original German. I started to read it anyway and found, to my great surprise, that it was very clear and that I did understand it. The moral of this discovery, which I took very much to heart, was that if ever I wanted to know about something in future, I should get it straight from the horse's mouth.

Thus I resumed my education at, what was to me, a new and far better college: the college of organised self-study. My tutors were the originators in their respective fields. My knowledge was forged by re-enacting their thoughts and reasonings. They ignited within me a life-long interest in all the sciences from fundamental to social. And the course itself, although part-time, has continued to this day.

## Employment

I spent the 10 years from 1966 to 1976 in full-time [employment](#) with four different companies as a research assistant, programmer, systems analyst and technical writer. As well as the welcome knowledge and experience I gained in electronics, radio communications, air navigation and simulation, data processing, public telephony, writing and document production, I received a far less welcome baptism into the world of commercial immorality and career politics.

## Electrical Research

My first job after college was as a [research assistant](#) in the a laboratory affiliated to a public utility. My first project was to measure the relative performance of [electrical contacts](#) made of different metals operating in different atmospheres. For this, I designed and made a test housing from a large piece of brass, some piping and the reinforced glass dome from an old-fashioned street lamp. The remainder of my year there was spent assessing the performances of military [aperiodic aerials](#) and defining new national standards for acceptable levels of [radio interference](#) for domestic and industrial appliances.

This latter task involved the use of the most sophisticated radio receivers then available. They covered the whole radio spectrum from audio frequencies all the way up to centimetric microwave. For a while it was interesting. The great highlight of these experiments was, I remember, when I happened by accident during measurements to pick up a police transmission. The whole lab gathered round. It was an exciting police chase all the way from the south coast to the heart of London. The villain kept getting apprehended and then escaping. The police radio operator was performing like a football commentator. It certainly raised the buzz of conversation in the canteen that lunch time.

## A Change of Direction

I quickly discovered that research was for the most part laborious and boring. I had been given that job on the understanding that I would pass my degree. When the results came I had to take a pay cut. Without a degree in such an organisation, prospects were nil. I had to change my job.

During Part II of my degree course the college acquired its first ever digital computer, an IBM 1620. At the time I was working on my main [physics project](#) researching into a new light interferometry method for measuring small distances accurately using a cadmium gas laser. This required the scanning of hundreds of wave phase measurements to find matching fractional phases. An ideal task for the new computer. I joined a supplementary class to learn the FORTRAN programming language so I could program the computer myself to process the data from my experiment. This fired my interest in computers.

## Flight Simulators

Having decided to leave my electrical research job, the natural choice was computers. My landlady found a newspaper advertisement for a job as a [programmer](#) to develop software for a new generation of [flight simulators](#). I applied for the job and got it. It was at this time that I got married. I had met my wife at college. We started off in an exceedingly small cottage, which we bought with a bank loan. Everything was new: a new wife, a new house, a new job.

At my job interview I had made a big mistake. I knew about maths. I knew about science. I knew the practicalities of electronics. I had a good sense of mechanics. I knew how to organise data. But I knew nothing of business or commerce. I had been taught nothing about them at school, at college or anywhere else. So when asked what salary I was looking for, I naively replied that since I had never done this kind of work before, I would leave it to the firm to pay what they considered appropriate until I had proven myself either way. They started me off at £18 per week (1967 value), which was a very a low wage indeed.

I worked hard, learned hard, achieved results. Although I was employed as a programmer, I was, by default, also fulfilling the roles of design engineer and systems analyst because there was nobody else available for my project. The project manager was very pleased with me. At the time, I was getting 22% less than each of two test and calibration technicians who worked for me on the long evening and early morning shifts during the commissioning of the radio navigation functions of our £3,000,000 (1967) flight simulator.

I asked for a rise, reminding the company of what they agreed at my interview. I received a terse official response that it was not company policy to give more than a cost-of-living rise at that time, but that in my case, because my salary was so abnormally low, they would agree in the following April to raise my salary to £1350 a year. This was what the technicians were already getting. By this time I had discovered that my peers were being paid 55% more than I was.

Also, I was finding it hard to keep up the loan repayments on my cottage, so I rejected their offer and left. I later learned that they had had to pay 70% more than my leaving salary for my replacement. This was more than the salary I was going to get for my new job. Furthermore, my replacement would need at least three months on the project before he would become productive. To me, company policy seemed stupid. The company would rather shoot itself in the foot than bend its rigid and over simplistic policy.

Although I lost no love on the firm itself, I did like the people with whom I worked. However, what above all else kept me there for 2½ years was pure job-satisfaction, a passionate interest in what I was doing.

## A London Software House

My next job was as an analyst/programmer with a high-profile London [software house](#). I took it because it seemed prestigious and the salary was high, at least by my standards. But there was a catch. One was expected to sacrifice family, home and all aspects of personal life for the job. To be willing and able to be posted anywhere in the world at the drop of a hat for as long as required without complaint. It was a world far removed from the idyll of developing software to enable computers to serve mankind.

At the individual level, it was a world of competitive intellectual snobbery. At the corporate level, it was a greed driven scramble for profit and superior commercial image. Structurally, it was a tenuous tyrannical hierarchy ruled through the ancient and cowardly art of management-by-back-stabbing. It was not my scene. I endured its rancid atmosphere for eighteen months and then left by mutual disagreement.

Ironically, I was very happy with my first assignment. It was to write a report on the minicomputers currently available in the western world, classifying and tabulating their various features. However, I was then put in a rather nebulous position on a project where the software house was a subcontractor to a major electronics company who was producing a large computer system for a government [civil aviation task](#). It was the archetypal [white elephant](#), devouring a vast amount of public money, only to be eventually scrapped in favour of a superior off-the-shelf American system. It was a fiasco of thoroughly bad management at the highest levels, and a shameful waste of technical talent.

## An American Multinational

Programmers have a reputation for being bad communicators, so I decided at this time that I needed to learn to write. I applied for, and got, a job as a technical writer with a [large multinational](#) manufacturer of public telephone exchanges. This required us to move house. My task was to document the software used to [control the routing and administration of telephone calls](#) for a new marque of computer controlled telephone exchanges.

This was interesting work. I had to travel to different parts of Europe for a few days at a time to gather technical information. I then would return to my U.K. base and create from it a cogent well structured technical document. Meeting and talking shop with foreign programmers and engineers was very refreshing and broadening. Even the travel itself, because it was only occasional, tended to hold its novelty, as did the short stays in the foreign hotels.

Here once again, job interest held me. This time for five years. My main work was explaining the workings of various aspects of the software that drove these new telephone exchanges. I innovated a special [method of diagramming](#) the software processes involved in telephone call control. I also wrote an in-depth exposition of a bespoke telephone [traffic measurement suite](#) for a particular national telephone administration. I even became at various stages involved in the camera-ready production and printing of the documents I had written. It was all a worth-while experience.

However, the unit I worked for was small. After five years I was still at the very bottom of the organisation. For one reason or another I did not gel with the boss. Not that it was the fault of either of us. It was simply that elusive ingredient known as personal chemistry. So there was for me no upward path with that organisation. Besides, I had reached the end of what I could usefully learn. I wanted to return to programming.

I was being targeted at the time by a contracting agent who telephoned me repeatedly at work. He said that he had a special opportunity for me to write the system overview for a major corporate's

packet-switched [data network](#), but that I would have to work at home. I left my job and took the contract.

## My Own Business

This first home-based contract lasted 9 months. It was unique. The agent never found me another one. But it did provide the means for me, then in 1976, to set up [my own business](#). However, at the end of the 9 months I was on my own. The view from my window was of a world in which I knew nobody, let alone where to find work. The taste of freedom was sweet, but it had also laid upon me a heavy burden.

## Sounding Out

I decided on a systematic approach. The more visible the better. I spread an A0 sheet of tracing paper over a large-scale map of my area. On this I drew concentric circles around my home marking distances every 5 miles out as far as 35 miles. I marked each town with a 1cm circle in which I wrote its dialling code. I then looked up in Yellow Pages the names, addresses and telephone numbers of all the computer-related companies in each town and wrote them in annotation boxes pointing to each respective town.

I designed and sent a mailshot offering these prospective clients my services in programming, technical writing and the production of technical sales literature. I followed up a week later with a telephone call. I managed to get a meeting with about 5% of them. I covered more miles than I care to remember. Most of them proved to be a waste of time. They were simply curious. I got work out of four of them to produce technical brochures for their own services. A fifth hired me to do the systems analysis for the software required for a market gardening operation. Then something intervened.

## Small Systems

A relative who owned a commercial vehicle dealership telephoned me out of the blue to ask if I could provide his firm with a computer system for their [ledgers and payroll](#). This was just before microcomputers hit the scene. Minis and mainframes were far too costly. Accounting machines were too inflexible. I wrote and set up their system on a large programmable calculator with a full-sized printer attached. The system served his firm for five years while the business grew. By that time the manufacturer for whom they dealt was offering a mini-based dealer system with which they replaced the one I had installed.

Following this I implemented a [payroll system](#) for a toy manufacturer. It printed company cheques for paying employees. This was my first system based on the new breed of microcomputer, in this case an ITT2020, which was the precursor in Europe of the Apple II. The next 5 years saw me positively glued to my little ITT2020 for which I later developed some rather heavyweight software. I eventually gave it to my son's school when in the mid 1980s such machines were superseded by the IBM PC.

I continued actively to develop my business of implementing small computer systems for small firms. I developed relationships with several distributors and one major computer manufacturer to act as a value-adding re-seller for them. However, once again something intervened before this could get under way.

## Back To Writing

Again I got a phone call out of the blue. This time from a former colleague at the multinational I had left in 1976. Things had changed. Divisions had merged. There had been a big management shake-out. Certain people were no longer there. A new generation of technology was rising. They were in overload. My former colleague, who by that time was the departmental manager, asked if I could take on the task of decompiling and documenting a [tendering system](#) written in PL/I for one of their European clients. The time scale required that I take on two more people. One of my first [technical brochure clients](#) was short of work so I hired two of his people to help me out on the new project.

I thought this project would be a one-off. However, a varied string of others followed. These included: [writing an overview](#) of the software architecture for the first generation of distributed processing ISDN digital exchanges, writing and illustrating the [user manual](#) for an accounting package to be shipped with a well-known microcomputer, writing and illustrating the [software section](#) of the user manual for one of the first PCs, and writing a [market education booklet](#) aimed at Third World governments on the economic and social arguments for establishing modern communication networks in remote areas.

## Subcontracting

My former colleague's overload continued and increased. He asked if I knew where to find suitable people to do various jobs both in the U.K. and abroad. His suggestion was that I could find them and subcontract them to him for the duration of each project. I found and validated some good people myself. But most came by default.

Over the next 10 years I subcontracted up to 7 engineers and writers at any given time on various projects throughout Europe. The financial responsibility was new to me. I had to put up my house as security for the vast credit gap created and I wrote a special accounting program to handle the administration. It was a profitable and stable time for my business but it was also a potentially vulnerable one. I had to keep other options open for when this source of income would end. It ended rather abruptly in the late 1980s. The various parts of the multinational's European operation were either sold or disbanded. My contacts quickly disappeared to the four winds. It was the end of an era.

Since starting my business in 1976, I had acquired a decent desk and 3 filing cabinets, various small computers including my first IBM PC and later a PS/2, printers and modems, a telephone answering machine and other useful bits and pieces. I had also had my house extended to include [a study](#) where I could work in peace and quietness. I had also been preparing something else.

## Software Development

Throughout the decade since I started by business, I had booked only half my time to the revenue-earning work. I spent the other half of my time developing some proprietary software of my own. During my early prospecting among companies in my area, I had seen a need in the market, which I shall expound in a later chapter. To meet this need, I developed, marketed and supported a software package for [contact management](#) and communications. An Apple II version was ready in 1984. PC and network versions followed in 1985 and 1986. I installed and supported it at 20 sites with over 150 individual users.

For it I wrote and produced a 400-page fully indexed on-line tutorial, [user manual](#) and help facility. I also trained the staff, at those sites that requested it, to apply the software to marketing their



company's image and products. I further designed and produced a formal [packaged project](#) for setting up and kick-starting computer-based marketing departments within client companies.

## **Predators**

A computer salesman who had seen my software told me that a customer to whom he had mentioned it, and who had the necessary capital, was keen to market my software. I met him. We seemed to get along so I provisionally agreed in principle. Almost immediately he was killed in a flying accident. I wrote a letter of sympathy to his wife and thought that was the end of that.

A short time later I had a telephone call from a man who said he had been the other man's business partner. He asked if I would hold off going to anyone else to market my software, allow him time to clear up his dead partner's business affairs, and consider going ahead with him. I was in no hurry so I agreed. Naively, I entered into a written agreement with this man's small limited company, giving it exclusive marketing rights for my package. To cut a long story short, this man and his co-directors tried by various nasty and devious means [to cut my share](#) of the sales profit to practically nothing and wrest from me the copyright to my source code. They failed.

Within the following 3 years, two other companies tried in various other ways to do the same. By then I had decided that I was going to market and sell it myself. However, 10 years after its first release I had sold only 20 copies at an average price of less than £1000 each. Having spent 15,000 hours developing it, I could not see it ever breaking even, let alone making a profit. I did not have the capital to launch it into the open market so I decided to call it a day.

## **Enterprise Initiative**

During this time, the government was promoting a scheme whereby it would pay half the cost of business and marketing consultants to come and audit one's business and report as to the best way forward. I applied for 2 separate items: a Business Initiative and a Marketing Initiative. My applications were accepted. The DTI-assigned consultants visited me from time to time during the latter half of 1988, delivered 2 reports telling me what I already knew and charged me £4,763 + VAT. The DTI presumably paid them as much again.

The consultants' reports contained advice and a forward plan, which, had I been a multi-million pound turnover company, might have been of some use. But they were of no use or benefit to me. Contrary to my previous decision, the reports insisted that I should make the selling of my software the mainstay of my future business. The consultants had apparently conducted a survey of all the similar packages available and had come to the conclusion that mine was not only good, but that it was the best. I reluctantly took their advice and once again had literature printed and started trying to market it. One of the consultants did keep in touch and was instrumental in a couple of sales of my software. But nothing worth the investment ever came out of this so-called Enterprise Initiative, despite its having been officially recorded as a success.

During my reluctant resumption of marketing my software, I happened to land two software development contracts. The first was to develop a special PC package [for a news wholesaler](#) to dial out to hand-held units at newsagents' shops overnight and up-load the previous day's sales figures for a whole range of newspapers and magazines. I did not get paid for the final three months' work because the client [went bust](#). The other contract was to develop an X25 [network management](#) package for a communications equipment supplier.

## Recession

My career had spanned 25 years. It had involved me in a vast number of [IT projects](#): initially as a [corporate employee](#), then as a self-employed [programmer](#), [technical writer](#) and [software developer](#). Most of these projects I had expedited from start to finish entirely on my own. Then in 1990 the recession hit. Apart from one or two one-day jobs and the sale of four of my software systems at a greatly reduced price, there was nothing. Over the next year I spent all my savings on advertising, mailing, telephoning and travelling. Still nothing. My funds ran out and in April 1991 I registered as unemployed. From that day to this, my family and I have existed on this miserly thing called [welfare](#) so reluctantly given by the state.

## Unemployment

I am now 61 and have just begun my 13th year of continuous unemployment. I have over 30 years experience in the computer industry. I have spent half my time over the past 13 years searching for work. I have spent the other half in the intense study and practice of the current so-called high demand cutting edge skills. This has included many personally initiated [in-house software projects](#) in both C and Java.

So despite having what most would consider a fairly [impressive Curriculum Vitae](#), I still have no work. This situation seems to me to be, to say the very least, incongruous. I have therefore set myself the task of finding out why this society refuses to allow me the opportunity and the means of turning my work into my needs of life. This book is the record of my quest to find the answer, and my suggestion for a fairer way of turning work into wealth.

**Addendum Jan 2014:** Since I last updated this chapter in April 2003, I remained unemployed until I left the UK in 2004 for a better and more respected life in another country. I retired in 2007. I am now 71.

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