

The Royal College of Physicians and Oxford Brookes University
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**Lord Richardson of Lee in interview with Lord Walton of Detchant
Oxford, 21 October 1991**

LW Lord Richardson, John, if I may, thank you so much for agreeing to talk to us for this historical archive with the Royal College of Physicians, what we really would like to do is just to hear something about your life and work. Now, you are a Yorkshireman and the son of a solicitor. No medical tradition in the family?

LR None whatsoever anywhere.

LW Really?

LR Mmm.

LW And brothers and sisters?

LR One brother.

LW And what did he do in his career?

LR He had a splendid brain, one of the cleverest men I've ever met, but it really came to nothing. He was a dilettante with the stage and he died when he was very young.

LW Did he?

LR Mmm.

LW Do you have many abiding and notable memories of your childhood and family?

LR Oh yes, very. Very clear. Perhaps the most tragic and perhaps even the most clear one was looking out of my nursery window at the age of seven and seeing a telegraph boy coming up the steps, through the garden and up the steps, towards the house that was on terraces and shouting out to my mother "There's a telegram boy to say daddy is coming on leave." It was to say that daddy was wounded, missing and presumed dead and that is an absolutely vivid ingrain on my memory, but lots of others are much more cheerful and pleasant, particularly concerning my mother's parents. My grandmother was a particularly charming, understanding and intensely interesting woman and she created in my mother's family home a most wonderful atmosphere of cosiness, friendliness and understanding of children.

LW Now, you went on to school at Charterhouse. Were your schooldays there happy?

LR No. I was, I really wasn't at all the type of boy who was likely to be happy in my house at that time. There was no privacy of any sort whatsoever, from morning until night, no privacy, and even when you became senior and had a little cubby-hole to yourself, people were always walking in and out and I found that difficult. I wasn't particularly successful. I was the sort of person who played games for his house, trials for the school and the only success was to play scratch rugby which, of course, was despised by a soccer school like Charterhouse.

LW Yes, indeed, I understand. When did you decide that medicine was going to be your career and what influenced you?

LR I suppose I would be seventeen or eighteen, I'd had my appendix out, and I thought it was all rather splendid that people could do these sorts of things, but I hadn't the faintest idea really what I was going into, so that I went up to Trinity thinking you went to Cambridge to read Medicine and found that I, what other people had been doing about First MB, I had been doing nothing, and I was two or three years behind public schoolboys.

LW So, you hadn't, in fact, done sufficient science?

LR I hadn't done sufficient science. All, I had done that really helped was mathematics, so the physics and in those days mechanics, were very simple. There was no problem about that, but by God, I had to work hard at the other subjects.

LW At Chemistry?

LR And so on, but that shows how really dilettante I was in my decisions, but I had no-one to advise me. My grandparents, both my grandfathers were in a totally different world from medicine. One was a politician.

LW Who was Master of Trinity when you went up there? Was it a notable figure?

LR Oh yes. It was the great Sir JJ.

LW Oh, I see.

LR He was a very notable figure and an extraordinary eccentric. But, what was so surprising, he would, I was asked to The Lodge. You weren't asked much because Trinity was so huge, but my great-uncle had acquired the most remarkable degree, it was the days when the Firsts were one, two three, four and not just one ones and twos and this man in three years had become, I think I'm right in saying, the sixth or seventh mathematician in the, I'm sure I'm right, in the twelfth classic in three years and this was quite extraordinary. He wasn't very practical in his life. He became senior tutor at Trinity, he became an arch-deacon, but with his great mental capacity, he might well have gone further. Well, this was known, you see, and the next John Richardson to go up, great-uncle John on my side, was asked to dinner at The Lodge very early and the Master sat there in total silence until Lady Thompson who was the

most dominating woman took the ladies away and then he suddenly said “They were quite wrong to have moved Gadny.” Gadny was an international rugger player at the time and this was his comment on the university rugger side. And he was similarly clued right up on the boat, the university boat, and the great man’s after dinner conversation would have been considered suitable for Hall, but very much more knowledgeable than most people who were sitting at our table.

LW But, you enjoyed Trinity?

LR Oh yes. Every moment.

LW And then, of course, you went on, there being no clinical course in Cambridge in those days, to St Thomas’ which became so much a part of your life. Was that a deliberate choice to go to Tommy’s?

LR There was a splendid old master of Trinity Hall who was a friend of one of my grandfather’s and I had no-one to ask what I should do, so I went to see him and I said “Which hospital would you advise me to go to?” “Well”, he said “George’s has always had nice people at George’s because nice people go to George’s and if you go there you will be one of the best. Now, if you go to St Thomas’, you’ll be terribly ordinary and might one day do something.”

LW I see, how perspicacious.

LR So, I went to Thomas’.

LW Right, and in Thomas’ you had a considerable success academically and won several medals and a fellowship?

LR That sort of thing, yes.

LW What’s perhaps the most prominent memory of your clinical training and what was it that really made you feel that you were going to be a physician in general medicine?

LR Well, I was absolutely riveted from the very first time I went in to the ward. I really was fascinated by clinical medicine, nothing else; surgery and the rest was a bit of a bore to me, but my first entry was really rather splendid. There was a clinical tutor attached to the medical unit called Dr Isaac Jones who was an Australian of enormous personality, a marvellous teacher, a bit bogus really, but a wonderful inspirer, and he lined up the junior students outside the door and he stood in front of them and he said “Gentleman, you are the thin red line between death, disaster and disease. Follow me.” And with that, he stumped into the ward. Well, this was regarded as rather ridiculous, but good fun. A few days later, I was looking at someone who was propped up in his bed and puffing and blowing and this same chap came and put his hand on my shoulder and said “What do you see?” Well, I saw a man sitting in bed. I saw puffing and blowing, nothing more. He said “Cheyne-Stokes breathing. Cheyne-Stokes breathing. Look at it. Important. He’ll be dead in a

week.”

LW In front of the patient?

LR Oh no.

LW No, quite.

LR Not in front of the patient.

LW I hope not.

LR Well away. No, he was good over that.

LW Good.

LR The man went out alive a month later.

LW I see!

LR So, that intrigued and made this

LW Was there anyone else in your clinical training who influenced you and who inspired you?

LR Oh yes. Sir Maurice Cassidy had a particular feel because of his quiet, gentle, human approach to patients and when people had tried to persuade a patient, say, to have a labotomy or something like that and they'd all have their go, Sir Maurice would come and he would just pat the patient's arm and say "You know, I have been thinking about you, Mr Jones, I've no doubt the right thing is to have an operation and if you agree we'll try and get it done very quickly." Always agreed. And this was most impressive to a young, non-medical thinking sort of young man.

LW Quite. So, you got your degree, the MBB chair of Cambridge in '36 and then picked up the membership one year later?

LR Yes.

LW In 1937, and then the MD in 1940. What was the subject of your thesis or was it by examination?

LR No, it was by what was called dissertation. You had to at Cambridge defend your thesis, but as I was in the army and going abroad, they very kindly let me have it more the rarer way and I didn't have to appear to defend it. It was on the relationship of the thyroid gland and the adrenals and was half-clinical and quite a lot of actual animal research.

LW I see. Now, very unusually for the time, you married Sybil, dear Sybil, in 1933

when you were still a student?

LR I did, yes.

LW That must have been regarded as very exceptional?

LR Well, it was exceptional, it was completely exceptional and, of course, I tried very hard to keep the whole thing under the carpet, not to be dubbed as hopelessly irresponsible. But, about three days before my wedding, the medical unit on which I was, the boys, presented me with the most beautiful silver sauce bowl with St Thomas' crest on it, so of course the telephone was seized and more champagne was ordered and the whole unit came down and all the young ladies of Stanmore where that wedding took place benefited from these splendid young boys, so it made the wedding really rather something.

LW Well, you had a wonderful life together and, of course, Sybil was a most distinguished portrait painter. I know the General Medical Council will always treasure the portrait of you that she did and which hangs proudly on the walls, so you must, of course, naturally miss her greatly now.

LR I do.

LW Indeed. You had two daughters?

LR Two. Terribly tiresome as young women and marvellous middle-aged women.

LW Good. And one of them living in London, I think?

LR Both living in London.

LW Both living in London, I see. So, that you see them regularly?

LR Yes.

LW Your army career, you became a Major in 1939, presumably as a medical specialist, and then a Lieutenant-Colonel in '42. Where were you. Where did you serve?

LR In the first year, in a hospital ship between France and Southampton. After that, I was posted very fortunately for me to Edinburgh Castle and there was no consulting physician for the army in Scotland, so I really had the lot and although I was pretty young and inexperienced, it was the most marvellous chance for me and what was very attractive that right up in the castle, they'd taken over a floor, a barrack block, and we had a great range of consulting rooms, so that, for instance, if I saw something that surprised me in the nervous system, I'd walk along and have a word with Richie Russell, a name very familiar to you. Equally, with the surgeons or dermatologists, eye doctors and this was tremendously efficient, of course, but highly educational to me and they really were the most distinguished possible lot. President of the Royal

College of Surgeons of Edinburgh in the making, two of them, and professors and every single one, several professors, and every single one reached some sort of position that was a bit unusual. So, it was wonderful experience.

LW It was good, very good, medical experience.

LR Then I went to North Africa on the torch business and that was interesting.

LW Was the hospital ship in which you served, was that involved at all in the Dunkirk

LR It was tremendously involved in St Nazaire.

LW Was it?

LR Yes, we were all over the place, but at St Nazaire, we were sailing for there and we got a signal from Belle-Ile to say that we were interned. France had fallen and we were interned. Then another signal came to go, that we were to go back to Quiberon Bay and we waited there. We'd taken off a lot of wounded from there, from time to time, and we loaded wounded the rest of the day there and then we were told we were finally in the bag, but we had got a French pilot, a poor little man, on board hoping that we were going to get out. The senior officer, a Naval officer, went to argue with the French Admiral and eventually at 10 o'clock at night, the Admiral said "Well, I'm tired, I'm going to bed, I'm not going to note, I shan't be in a position to notice anything," you know "I'm going to bed." So, we crept through the minefield and we got out into the Atlantic but, you know, we'd broken the whole law of the Geneva Convention, this ship was crowded with competants, and if a submarine had stopped us, well, they'd have had to have sunk us, they wouldn't have had any alternative.

LW Which hospital ship was she, because I was in one after the war?

LR Oh, were you? This was the *Dorsetshire*.

LW The *Dorsetshire* which eventually was sunk off Anzio.

LR Yes.

LW That's right, tragically I think, when the bomb dropped down its funnel, if I recall.

LR Exactly, yes.

LW Well, I was on the *Oxfordshire*.

LR You were on the *Oxfordshire*?

LW Yes, after the war. Interesting experience. Now, when you left the army then with all of this professional experience behind you, you became First Assistant to the

Medical Professorial Unit in 1946?

LR That's right.

LW And then a year later, a Physician to St. Thomas'. I suppose that you must have so many memories of that hospital. Which things of your professional career there stand out most, do you think?

LR Well, when I was about to retire, I thought I was going to be very intelligent and that I would face an advance, leaving my colleagues, the staff-room, the students, the absolute fascination, my greatest fascination, my house officers and the youngest people in training and I, to be slightly vulgar, I had to face the fact that I'd been rather, well, I was Senior Physician and those sort of things, and I believed the Senior Consultant, that I would become a little bit more ordinary, so to speak. But, what I had failed totally to recognise was that as I was driving near the place, I'd suddenly think I'll go round to Thomas' and see, and there was nobody for me to go round to Thomas' to see and no right to go in and see anybody and, you know, I'd have almost keened if I hadn't been a Yorkshireman and been a Scotsman or an Irishman or other. Over this, I really, and it took me six months or more to get away from looking after really ill patients and that I think are my most vivid memories of Thomas', and staff meetings sometimes, rather difficult.

LW Of course. And, of course, you had a number of notable publications, quite apart from your papers, you wrote or co-authored a very fine "*Practice of Medicine*" textbook and wrote on connective tissue diseases and, also, on anti-coagulant therapy, so those publications stood the test of time.

LR Yes, I suppose so. The textbook, I never really was terribly pleased with it, but it was all right. The connection tissue was, of course, the first clinical one that had been written in this country and was simple stuff. The anti-coagulants was with a man called Ingram who really was unquestionably the brains of the whole affair. We had marvellous reviews and very poor sales.

LW Yes, which is not unfamiliar in medical publishing.

LR Yes.

LW You became President of the International Society of Internal Medicine in 1966 and did that for four years?

LR Yes.

LW What was your impression about that society and its role in world medicine?

LR Well, I felt it was very important, in the same way that I did over the European Society for Medicine ensemble, namely to try and keep the general position, the general attitude, in front of people's minds when they were setting about their career, not to stifle specialisation within but to keep it going and the International Society

really was very international. It was very high level and I enjoyed it very greatly, but I did have an awfully awkward beginning because I was pitchforked into it a year before I was due for reasons connected with the president who it was decided in his country that he was persona non grata. Well, that came at the time that the Warsaw Pact countries were invading Czechoslovakia, and Czechoslovakia was one of our members. This was a week before going to Poland and I knew from, I had one or two Polish friends with positions, that they were stretching their efforts and their personal money and everything to entertain us, but of course I had to cancel the whole thing. We couldn't possibly go when they were invaded, including Poland. The only thing, the only dividend I got out of it was a telephone call from the Foreign Office when a very classy, charming person sort of said "Hello, Sir John, I wonder if you could give me a bit of your valuable time. We are slightly concerned about the International Society. I don't know how you feel about it?" And I said nothing and I let him go on. And in the end, he had to come out and said "You know, the Foreign Secretary rather hopes you might cancel." And I had the pleasure of saying "I cancelled yesterday."

LW I see. Right. In this country, of course, you were President of the BMA, '70-'71 and, at the same time, for two years, President of the Royal Society of Medicine. Two fascinating jobs, but very different.

LR Very different. It was unfortunate for me that they happened to come at the same time and I can't quite recollect why I thought it was necessary to accept one that I shouldn't and would have done much better to have perhaps waited or not done it, but I did have my reason at the time and I can't remember what it was. And, also, it worked after a fashion.

LW What do you think was the most interesting experience arising out of the RSM, for instance, during your presidency. Any notable events?

LR Well, yes, it occurred in my library at my home. Edwin Stephens, who will be only too well-known to you, and his wife have been patients of mine, especially his wife, and he rang me up one morning and said "I would rather like to give a large sum of money to something you're interested in." I was rather interested in the Royal Society of Medicine. So, he said "Well, I'm somewhere in the Oxford direction, I would like to call in on you this evening, if I may." So, I had to do some hard thinking. And it had always struck me that the RSM was the absolutely exquisite expositor to us doctors and it would be rather nice if we could get the lay people, there wasn't a lay section then, and get the lay people in to talk to us and us to them at a high level. And I knew Edwin Stephens and his, the sort of things that might appeal to him. So, I suggested this and said "But, I think it ought to be a great occasion. I think it ought to be something that people would be delighted to be invited to do and people who are invited to attend and a splendid reception afterwards. And, of course, we must call it the Edwin Stephens Lectures." It was all fixed over a drink by the fire in my library and I suppose the first, perhaps that was my great moment, because in the building, perhaps the Edwin Stephens, or the first Anglo-American Conference and standing at the top of the stairs of Chandos House, the great curving staircase, Sybil and I and Kirkpatrick and doing the announcing, watching the people coming up in evening dress and smiling at us and us at them as they came up, our friends, was a

most remarkable moment and Sybil and I turned to each other and said “This is absurd. This is the Duke and Duchess of Chandos.”

LW Yes, of course!

LR And, for a moment, we were right back in time and, in point of fact, my maternal grandmother was descended from the brother of the beautiful Duchess of Chandos who married after she had disposed of the Duke, the Duke of Argyll, and she was unusual in marrying two dukes, especially as she was the daughter of an impecunious Irish parson, it was from the impecunious son of my grandmother. So, that was, perhaps, was a moment and I hadn't thought of that, John, until you, I was more interested in Edwin Stephens, but then I suddenly remembered the staircase at Chandos House.

LW Edwin Stephens, the Lectures, of course, has gone on from strength to strength and is one of the most notable events of the Society's year. Now, of course, you came very close on two occasions to being elected to the presidency of this Royal College?

LR Well, the first time I really was, was in that sort of thing, the second time, no, Cyril beat me quite handsomely. But, I was, in fact, in three run off elections for three different men and I think that's probably a record.

LW I think it probably is.

LR Because Charlie Dodds, they were trying to suggest, he'd been there a good long time, and to my amazement I found I was in the second round and got quite a lot of votes. With Max, I won the first round with quite a margin, but I knew I'd lost because there were over fifty votes for whips, supported by you people, you professorial characters.

LW Yes, I suppose that's right. It was the academic vote, I suppose, that went for Max.

LR Well, it was, and it's highly understandable. Of course, there's never been a president, what, since Russell Brain who hasn't been a professor.

LW That's true. That is true. But, then of course, not very long afterwards, along came the notable event of the General Medical Council where you may not remember, but I as a relatively young member of the council met you on the stairs and said “I hope very much that you are going to allow your name to go forward for the presidency.” And you said “I'd like to very much.” Of course, that went the right way.

LR Yes, it did, quite handsomely.

LW Quite handsomely. Well, you must have had, and you did have, seven years, I think?

LR Seven years.

LW Seven marvellous years and as Michael O'Donnell once said 'you chaired the Council with grace and distinction' and we all remember that with great affection. What do you think were your most notable memories of the GMC?

LR Well, I enjoyed it enormously and although I really, perhaps even passionately, wanted to be president of this college because I had ideas in those days and one of them was the conference of the college that didn't exist; they were the three major colleges and I wanted to expand it. However, having said that, I still feel that if I had to choose, I'd have chosen the GMC, unquestionably. To me, it was more my thing and had, well, very considerable significance because we were in the middle of the Merrison Enquiry. We were sending in all our evidence and I had to be responsible for that, we had to appear before Merrison and then we had to implement it. And, I suppose, my moment was not in the GMC building, but was in the architect's. Do you remember that conference?

LW I remember it very well.

LR And it was very difficult in the sense that I had to get through things, agreements about Europe and agreements about Merrison and, therefore, there were two sets of opposition and to keep them apart and keep the thing apart was the real problem and, you know, they were so good. They allowed me to divide it completely and to keep it completely and all the people who liked talking and wanted to talk refrained from cutting in and fogging the issue and I think that day really did go very well.

LW It did.

LR I was apprehensive. I didn't see why I had to do it, I thought the department could perfectly well have got the profession to finally agree to the Merrison proposal, but there it was.

LW Yes, it went very well. That was the occasion you will recall that Henry Miller told Merrison that he should go and investigate the Vatican. I think

LR Yes, it was.

LW Do you remember?

LR That's right. And he said the conference was the dullest thing he had ever attended.

LW Yes, but nevertheless extremely effective.

LR It wouldn't have been effective if it hadn't been thoroughly dull. No, I was rather annoyed with Henry, I thought it was slightly silly and there was no need for him to say anything.

LW Everybody got annoyed with Henry from time to time, likeable man though he was in many ways.

LR Yes.

LW You chaired, of course, the Joint Consultants Committee as well which was a major responsibility and the Postgraduate Council for England & Wales, so each of these was in many ways a demanding task.

LR Yes, but in a sense, you see, they fitted together, rather. They all helped a bit with the GMC.

LW Which people did you find in government most easy to negotiate with when you were in the Joint Consultants Committee? Was there any particular Secretary of State or Minister of Health whom you

LR Yes, Robinson.

LW Yes.

LR He was a marvellous, he really was, he was a lightweight from a politician's point of view, but unquestionably one that, we trusted each other completely. I mean, you could drop a brick to each other and help the fellow to pick it up. I remember so sad, we were at Lancaster House for some great do, and Kenneth and his wife said to Sybil and myself "Will you wait at the end?" We waited and he looked at his watch and he said "In two minutes I shall cease to be the Minister and I want you to know first." And it was a horrible moment because they were, he was terribly distressed because he didn't realise that he was getting things done because we trusted him and we had Dick Crossman in his place.

LW Yes, very different.

LR Very different.

LW Kenneth Robinson was one who I think was not only admired, but almost in a sense revered by the medical profession

LR Oh, he was, yes.

LW as being someone who understood.

LR Absolutely.

LW One of your other major interests, of course, has been the Society of Apothecaries and everyone will say to you how did you manage to fit it all in, on the court and then the master?

LR Well, the Society of Apothecaries was jam all the way, it's an absolutely delightful thing to be in on. It's beauty is so really seductive. I went there the other day to go quietly round, just with the clerk, and I was really absolutely delighted. I hadn't seen it empty before and you can see how very beautiful all our possessions and pictures and arrangements were. So, I did it out of joy and being the master was a big undertaking. I had a marvellous secretary who wrote down everything that I did that she thought might be of interest. Unhappily, she died of a bilateral cerebral tumour before I retired, but I've got the list and I did forty-two things outside the Hall and goodness knows how many dinners and conferences and things like that with them. But, you know, as you know, you've had a busier life than I, you can fit it in if you make up your mind.

LW Organisation of time, I think, is the problem.

LR It's the organisation of time limits.

LW Absolutely, yes. You've done, of course, many outstanding lectures, eponymous lectures, in the medical profession in the UK. I suppose the Harvian would be one of your most demanding and

LR The one I was really petrified of.

LW Yes.

LR I didn't feel I was up to it, you see, honestly.

LW Well, it read extremely well and it was very good to listen to.

LR Yes. But, you see, so many of them were, Harvian orators, are real scientific heavyweights who've got something to talk about and even to produce an idea perhaps that was original. I didn't have that and I just took what I'd got and tried to make the best of it.

LW Well, it came over very well if I may say so. Now, among the many offers that you've received over the years, honorary fellowships of the Swedish Medical Society, Royal Society of Medicine and an honorary fellowship of Trinity College, your old college, that must have

LR Isn't that marvellous, yes.

LW given you - did you go back to receive it for some formal event?

LR No, you just, the telephone went in our flat at the, the GMC flat, and a voice said "This is Hodgkin." So, I said "Yes." He said "Alan Hodgkin, from Trinity." "Oh, Master, yes of course." "Well", he said "I'm ringing you up to ask you whether you'd like to be an honorary fellow?" So, I was absolutely startled. I said "Of course, I would. But, Master, this is all wrong." "Well", he said "we didn't think so when we elected you yesterday." So, that's how it happened. And that was my official

introduction.

LW And, of course, you became an honorary fellow of most of the colleges, the Royal College of Pschiatrists, the Royal College of Surgeons and, of course, Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh as well. Each one of these must have brought you enormous pleasure?

LR Oh, enormous, yes, yes. Oh, yes, of course it does.

LW But, you would go to some of them, to their particular ceremonies to have you conferred

LR Oh yes, all of them.

LW All of them.

LR To every one.

LW Every one.

LR A very good do.

LW Yes. And in Ireland too?

LR Yes. A very, that really did intrigue me because De Valero was the president and I don't really go in for photographs very much, but I've got a marvellous one of sitting next to De Valero and one of the lot of us, all the new fellows and De Valero and I was really, it was quite a long time ago, I was pretty junior among a galaxy of Irish talent, Southern Irish talent mostly, but old De Valero was playing the English card and being extraordinarily nice to the Englishmen and I enjoyed it and when I think of what, how I would have reacted as a schoolboy in 1924, and I did think of this while I was talking to him, I would have been only too keen to have taken a knife to his guts! I was most amused at myself by being so, indeed, flattered by his attention and to be able to say, as I can now, I received my first honorary doctorate from De Valero.

LW Oh, that was the first one, was it? I see. Well, then later you got honorary doctorates of science from Hull and from the National University. Then, a DCL at Newcastle and two other doctorates of law from Nottingham and Liverpool.

LR I think I could really say that my doctorate at Newcastle was conferred by a certain, he was then Sir John Walton

LW Well, I didn't confer it, the Chancellor conferred it, but it was just at the time that I was being installed as BMA president. That was a very interesting and enjoyable time. Marvellous. Did you find in receiving these honorary degrees a remarkable variation in the way in which the different universities handled them?

LR Extraordinary, yes. And, indeed, the colleges were rather different. Very different. I enjoyed those occasions and so did Sybil very much indeed.

LW Now, national honours. Did the knighthood in 1960 come as a surprise or were you really half expecting it?

LR Oh, I was expecting it. You see, I'd been the Prime Minister's doctor for three years and what happened was that St Thomas' put up my name. Of course, they did it because they knew I was the Prime Minister's doctor and thought it would be nice to have a K on the staff. They wouldn't have put me up if I hadn't have been, but I was put up in a legitimate way. But, when Macmillan came into power, he came in after Anthony Eden, as you remember

LW Yes, I do.

LR And you, also, remember about Anthony Eden's medical disasters. Well, now Macmillan was sixty-odd and Kennedy was forty-odd, the new president, and it was perfectly obvious that the image could be very wrong and the aged Prime Minister following a prime minister who'd gone for health reasons of various kinds and a young go-ahead, driving and, in fact, as we've discovered, a remarkably potent President and Macmillan, who I doctored from the North African days, so it was a long time from 1943, asked me if I would continue and go and see him at No. 10. So, I thought well, I had better do a bit of thinking about how we could cope with the Press. So, I suggested to the Prime Minister and to his Press Officer that I went absolutely regularly at 8 o'clock on a Thursday once a month and that if I was seen around and it was inconvenient to the Prime Minister for anybody to know that the doctor was around, everyone could truthfully say, especially those who didn't know the details, oh, it's routine. Dr John arrives and sees the Prime Minister. And that was to keep me out of the public eye. It had a tiresome thing for Sybil because people would tactfully say "Is John still the Prime Minister's doctor?" Because no K or anything, recognition, had arrived. It had another tiresome thing in that they went off to New Zealand and Australia and both would have done very well to have had a doctor with them and, at one point, they were really most unfortunate in the doctor that was acquired. So, when he felt really confident, he pushed me through but assured me, which I thought was awfully nice of him, he said "You know, you may think this is a racket, but you have been properly put up." Which was typical.

LW An incredible man, the fact I remember very well in Oxford going to his 90th birthday party in Balliol which was a notable occasion when he looked half asleep throughout the entire event, but then made a sparkling speech, You must have found him very entertaining and interesting as a person?

LR Oh, he was the best thing in my education. He was a tremendously, and very inspiring.

LW And then the baronetcy came in

LR Well, yes, that was very kind, but having no son, you see, it wasn't of much

significance. But, he gave, in his resignation list, he gave three, one to his parliamentary private secretary, another to his press secretary, a sort of Bernard Ingham, only a very different personality in the Macmillan era, and to me.

LW A life peerage in '79. That, again, must have given you very great pleasure and I know that you've had, what, twelve fascinating years in the Lords?

LR Oh, I've enjoyed it enormously. It's the most wonderful thing to join, yes.

LW What would be again your most prominent memories of your time in the House?

LR Oh, when I was honoured to be asked to introduce Lord Walton of Detchant!

LW Well, it's very kind of you to say that, but I'm sure that you've had many other notable contributions to debates over the years.

LR I think probably nothing to do with me because I've not done much, but the debate about the war criminals was magnificent. The old boys coming up who never had appeared but had been there and had been to Belsen and been in Winston's Cabinet when Winston said "This is enough. We will do no more in this prosecution." They were magnificent. It was a most wonderful time. And the possession of the Hansard is really something. They had to make an extra printing, but one day, my children, my great-children are going to value that.

LW It's a remarkable record and as a debating chamber, the quality of the debate is so outstanding, isn't it?

LR It is outstanding, yes.

LW What do you think is the most important contribution that members of our profession can make in the House?

LR Oh, I think to really, I think our case needs putting clearly. I think we are so very much misunderstood by intelligent lay people who are, after all, very full of their own world and we are, in a sense, just the sawbones and it's not a bad idea that there are people there who can really inform the House. I always regret that I didn't go in, I've forgotten, it was when I was President of the GMC, I think about 1972, I was informed, no, I'm quite wrong. It was before I was President, it was 1972, I was informed that my name was going to appear in the New Year's List. I was, of course, delighted. I was then informed that I was not going to appear in that list because the Merrison Enquiry was about to be set up and the Government were advised that it was just possible that Sir John Richardson would be the next President and that it would not look at all good for the Government who were trying to be impartial in appearance, whatever they may have felt about the products of Merrison, should be enabling someone who is at any rate known in the GMC as a possible candidate and that was rather a disappointment. Well, not really, because I did become the President and that occupied me completely, but I might have been much more energetic, you

see. You've done so much more than I. You've gone on to

LW Not at all.

LR I declined to go onto the Select Committees and things like that.

LW Oh, did you? I see.

LR I declined twice. The first time because of the GMC and the second time because I wanted to stay, to keep Sybil in Devonshire, and I felt we owed it to each other.

LW Of course. Well, turning back to your personal life with Sybil, an extraordinarily happy marriage which obviously went on for, what, sixty

LR Very nearly sixty.

LW Very nearly sixty years. What were the things that you both enjoyed doing together most?

LR It's a very, very silly answer, but the truthful one was as long as we were together, we were perfectly happy and however much the disasters of life, big or little, and in our case little. When I got TB, for instance, after the war and had to disappear, having been away for all those years, that was a disaster for us and, of course, could have been the ultimate financial disaster, no streptomycin or PAS in those days, nevertheless, even then we could enjoy our loss. Dinner at home before I went into the Brompton.

LW How long were you under treatment?

LR A year. Well, I was away for a year. I had a pneumothorax for five and the pneumothorax taught me something because everytime it was done I felt utterly exhausted for about two hours. Then I, in the end you get addicted, you know, or did in those days, it was very easy to be frightened of having it let up. I insisted because I wasn't going to allow myself to become addicted and two or three days later, it sounds just like a silly story, I thought to myself what the hell's the matter with me? And I realised I felt well and I hadn't felt well for, well, for perhaps one or two years before the TB was found.

LW How did it come to light? Was it just with coughing?

LR No, it was, it had a certain dramatic quality. In those days, when you went on the staff at Thomas', you had to appear before the governors and the most marvellous archiac charge was read out to you and one of the phrases is rather like this 'that if you see anything that is wrong, you will report to the governors and no more meddle therein' which I think is rather marvellous. Well, I did that in the middle of the afternoon. So, when I came out, I thought I wonder what I ought to do and I still mulled it in my mind, I was working at the Brompton and I was telling people to have

their chests X-rayed. So, I said to myself, I'll go down and have a chest X-ray. I've told the others and I must do it myself. And the department was empty except for a radiographer and I asked her to do it. I said "Bring me the film, will you? Your doctors have left and I'll be able to read it." So, she brought me the film and I held it up. I said "No, no, not that, this chap's got a cavity up here." And she burst into tears. She said "I'm sorry, Dr Richardson, but it's the only one in the dryer." So, that was how it was found.

LW I see.

LR Not a good moment.

LW And it took about five years to get better.

LR Well, I was at full work after

LW Of course, after a year.

LR But, to really feel well, but I think it was the pneumothorax, you know, having the thing down, does something to you in a sort of vague way.

LW How did you come to choose Devon for your home. Was this because it had been a family tradition or because you went there on holidays?

LR As you know, John, Sybil was half-Spanish, her mother was a very aristocratic Spanish lady and her other half was a yeoman in Devon. So, I reckoned we ought to go into the warmest, hopefully the warmest, part of the country and I met a friend of mine who was Admiral Sir Charles Norris who, we were discussing a very embarrassing thing. One of our mutual friends had been doing a 'King David'. In other words he'd been sending his managing director up north so that he could, the chairman, seduce the managing director's lady. A real King David. And we were embarrassed and we were very English and we didn't know what to say when we finished this conversation and he said to me "Have you had a good Easter?" I said "Yes, we spoilt it really, we're house-hunting in Cornwall." "Oh", he said "I had a marvellous one. I went to a place I consider heaven on earth. It's in Devon. Would that be any use?" So, I said "Yes, of course." "Oh", he said "I'll send you the prospectus." The prospectus arrived and in my usual way I didn't bother to look at it. I threw it to my secretary and said "Let me see this sometime." And she who knew my ways so well and was a disciplinarian always put things into my bag for the weekend and at 10 o'clock at night on the Saturday, I opened it and to my horror I read 'To be sold by the order of Vice-admiral Lord Ashbull KBE, DSO' etc. etc. A friend of mine. A patient of mine. And Charles Norris was a friend of his and he would, doubtless, have said "I have given your prospectus, Edward, to a doctor, John Richardson, I think we know each other, don't we?" And Edward would wonder why the hell I hadn't rung up. So, I rang up and he asked us down and we spent the evening together. The ladies went up first. When I arrived in our bedroom, Sybil was reading. She peered over the top of her glasses and said "We're going to buy this, you know", and went on reading.

LW And, of course, naturally, being a very obedient husband, this is exactly what you did.

LR That was what was done, yes. Yes, well, it wasn't terribly difficult. The whole idea was for her.

LW Yes, indeed. Now, in Devon, you've got a big garden now, you're still looking after the place?

LR Yes. Well, I've got the man who used to be my chauffeur because there is rather a lot, but I do garden pretty hard. I enjoy it. It's something to do, especially nowadays.

LW But, what have been your main leisure interests, John, then. You mentioned sport at school, playing rugger and other games and I think you mentioned to me that you were rather keen on riding at one time?

LR Yes, I did a lot of riding when I was young. In fact, we used to have riding holidays into our middle age. But, for the rest, you know, I was very busy. I always garden. In London, funnily enough, we had three quarters of an acre, no, no, a third of an acre, that's quite a garden.

LW It is.

LR And it was rather a good garden, rather sophisticated, and that I greatly enjoyed.

LW Are you a countryside lover. Any interests, for instance, in birdwatching or natural history?

LR Oh yes. Our little, our small area is absolutely crammed with wildlife. It's a very, lovely, you can see anything. The only thing of nuisance are the badgers. We never see them because I won't get up in the middle of the night and they undermine trees. We've got, I suppose, probably half a dozen or more badger sets.

LW Yes. I don't think I've ever seen one, except in captivity. But, you have actually seen them?

LR No, I haven't because I haven't got up.

LW No, quite, quite. And one of the things I noticed was missing from your entry in *Who's Who*, quite a lot of people at the end put down what their interests are in sport or in music or reading and so on, you don't, so that there's no particular

LR I just put down 'living in the country'.

LW Living in the country. Indeed.

LR And that's what I meant.

LW That's what you meant. Walking?

LR Oh, yes.

LW And fell walking as well?

LR We did a lot of walking. Sybil was an enormous walker. As a very old lady, we used to go on long, really quite long, walks and go up Devonshire hills and she used to go up them like a youngun.

LW Your part of Devonshire is not one that is so heavily over-run with tourists in the summer, or is it?

LR Well, no, it's not too bad. Ilfracombe used to be very grand in the Edwardian days, but it's dull now, thank goodness, and in our valley, it's pretty inaccessible. They're no problem at all. There's a right of way up my drive, up our drive, to go over the hills and through our fields and so on, and they behave beautifully. If I pick up a Coca-Cola can at the end of the summer, I'm indignant. They really do behave nicely.

LW Good. Well, you've had a wonderful and fascinating life and you've held most of the high offices in British medicine, save the Royal College which almost happened, but not quite. If you were starting again, would you do it all over again?

LR Yes.

LW You would?

LR Yes.

LW Nothing you regret?

LR Oh, many. My failures. I mean, clinical failures.

LW We all remember those.

LR I mean, I don't really regret the College because I preferred the GMC and I couldn't have done both. It wouldn't have worked. So, I certainly don't regret the College, but I look back on my failures and I'm stupid enough to almost torture myself over them.

LW Yes. I think that's one of the hazards of clinical medicine, isn't it, that these memories, more perhaps than your successes, stand out very often?

LR Oh, the successes are easily forgotten because they generally are largely attributable to somebody else. We are surrounded by people supporting us.

LW And is there anything else in life, looking back, that you feel in your professional role that you would have liked to have done, but haven't succeeded in doing?

LR Yes and no. Before the war, I had got, it's almost certainly surprising because I'm not that sort of person, I had quite a lot of interesting research on the go and it, the war came, and it totally disappeared. One man who I had done some

END OF INTERVIEW.