

AUDIO INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

## Ferguson, John: transcript of an audio interview (04-Jun-2014)

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## Ferguson, John: transcript of an audio interview (04-Jun-2014)\*

**Biography:** Mr John Ferguson OBE BSc (Eng.) BA MA CEng FICE MIMechE FCIWEM FCIWM (b. 1927) worked at the Greater London Council's (GLC) Department of Public Health Engineering from 1966 as a Project Manager for the Edmonton waste-to-energy plant and other capital developments for waste infrastructure. In the 1970s he was Head of the Design and Development Division of the Department, then its Deputy Director. From 1982 he was General Manager of the GLC's Waste Management branch of public health engineering, until the GLC's dissolution in 1985. He was appointed the Director of the new London Waste Regulation Authority in 1986, and worked there until its incorporation into the Environment Agency. In 1996 he became Chair of the Thames Regional Environment Protection Advisory Committee, and served until 1999. He was President of the Institute of Wastes Management (now CIWM) from 1990 to 1991, and of the International Solid Waste Association from 1998 to 2000.

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**LF: Lynda Finn**

JF: John Ferguson

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**LF: John, can you tell me your full name?**

JF: Yes, my full name is John McCallum Ferguson.

**LF: And your year of birth?**

JF: It was 13 October 1927.

**LF: Where you were born?**

JF: I was born in Highgate in London.

**LF: And your employment status?**

JF: I'm now retired but active as a trustee of the Waste Management Industry's Board and so on.

**LF: And your parents' occupations?**

JF: My father qualified as a civil engineer. He was in the First World War as a Sapper, [but] actually trained before that to be a mining surveyor in the Lanarkshire coal mines. During the First World War he went on to be promoted in the field to a Second Lieutenant, and then after that was over he qualified in 1923 as a civil engineer. Then, with my mother, who didn't have a particular profession, she was very young when they got married and had their first child, my elder sister. They then went out to South Africa for three

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\* Interview conducted by Ms Lynda Finn, for the History of Modern Biomedicine Research Group, 04 June 2014, in the School of History, Queen Mary University of London. Transcribed by Mrs Debra Gee, and edited by Ms Emma M. Jones and Professor Tilli Tansey.

years carrying on the work of civil engineering, installing railways on the sugar plantations and so on. When that was finished they came back to London again and I was born in 1927, and then my father started work with a company, which was in the steel handling and that was based in Upper Thames Street in the City of London. He worked his way through there to become Managing Director of the company, and he always was a very positive person as a father, so I was very fortunate having a loving mother and father.

**LF: You were the second child?**

JF: Yes, my first sister was born in 1922 and my second sister was born in 1933, also in Highgate. And my elder sister has died, but my younger sister is still alive.

**LF: Tell me a little bit about your childhood. You lived in Highgate?**

JF: Yes, and went to a tiny school in Highgate but we moved to Woodside Park, which is in north London, and I went to a small school which my elder sister also went to, so I went to school with her. And then, about 1935, we'd lived there for about two years or so, I was very fortunate in being able to get admitted to Highgate School. They had a junior school just at the top of Highgate Hill, and I always thoroughly enjoyed it. The school moved down to what was called Cholmeley House in Bishopswood Road in Highgate, just about the time of the Coronation of King George VI [in 1937]. It was delightful to go to this beautiful new building and with all the sports facilities you could want. So I stayed there, and in fact a decision had to be made with pupils at Highgate when the Second World War broke out in September 1939: would the school stay totally in London or not? Well, by far the majority went to Westward Ho! [in Devon] but a small group of us stayed in Highgate. I was pleased about that because I could continue to be a day person.

In January 1941 I went into the senior school, which was still in Highgate. This was run by people, by a headmaster, well a master in charge called Tommy Twidell, and he was a Greek scholar. I always enjoyed his attitude to education. An example would be, even though the war was in its sort of deepest sense running in 1942, he took us to the Royal Academy for an exhibition of Greek art, which was just an eye opener to me; it just kept what was happening in proportion because we were going through then all the trauma of bombing and so on. Then we came up to, by the way I left in 1943, I managed to get my matriculation into London University in January 1944 so that was when I started to get involved in Higher Education. I still keep in touch with Highgate School, in fact this coming Saturday we have a reunion for those of us who were both in Westward Ho! and in London, but I enjoyed being in London throughout that period because it gave you a dimension of just what was going on as a result of the Second World War. I had uncles who unfortunately had to go and serve, and, of course, they would visit us on their leave in London, which was good because you'd get a perspective on what was happening. My Uncle Dan, he was with us right until a day or so before the D-day landings; he was actually with us on the 3 June, and then off he went and he was in the landings two days later as a military policeman. It was that sort of dimension that adds to what makes up one's personality.

**LF: And there was no encouragement for you to be evacuated along with the other children?**

JF: This was discussed with my mother and father, and this is what I like: they said, 'Well, what do you feel?', and I said, 'Well, I'd rather stay in London.' 'Well, sure there is a risk but nevertheless, if that's what you wish, we fully support you.' Whereas my younger sister, because she was only seven or eight years old, she went to St. George's School in Harpenden, and I know now talking to her she didn't particularly like it, you know why should she be boarding and I was in London. My elder sister, of course, was already in the, what they called the Women's Auxiliary Air Force, the WAAF. She was posted all over England, in different postings. So I had the choice, and I'm always pleased that that happened.

**LF: Thank you. Let me then take you on to Higher Education. So you went at the age of 18...?**

JF: No, no, I was only 16 when I got my matric. Then I went to the, what was called the Polytechnic Regent Street into the Department of Science there.

**LF: What had you decided to study?**

JF: Well, it was interesting. The man in charge was a Dr Topping. He was in charge of science and physics and he was, again, you meet people like this who have an influence, and I was still a little uncertain as to whether I would go into more physics, more pure science...

**LF: But you decided on science quite early?**

JF: I decided, yes; Lynda, that was what I always wanted to do. It's one of these decisions that as a child you make, and I'm sure influenced by my father and all the activities he carried out because he was always showing me as a child what railways do this and what machines can do that, because he built up the fleet of earthmoving equipment and so on, and invented things. As long as it was science based, so I was determined to get a Bachelor of Science degree. Whether it was in science or engineering, I hadn't quite decided. And in those days you spent two years getting an intermediate degree and then I got that, and then of course National Service came along and I started my National Service in 1947.

**LF: Sorry, just for the record, I'm not sure that I asked you exactly what your degree was in.**

JF: Well, I didn't get that until a little later. That's why I stopped at the intermediate, but good question. It was an intermediate in BSc Engineering, that's important. Then I did my military service, which I thoroughly enjoyed, believe it or not, because it was a progression through a series of tests and developments that happened in those days. We're talking about the end of the 1940s, 1947 to 1949; I wanted to get into the Royal Engineers. Again, you can see my thinking: my father got in, and I would like to do so. I was very fortunate, I managed to go to the Mons Cadet School, and then from there to the Royal Engineers training school and I qualified there in, became a second lieutenant, in 1948. Then I managed to work my way up, but serving in this country, in what was called Railway Group. I managed to get a captaincy in that. In fact, at that stage two of my colleagues who were permanent officers said, 'John, you're doing so well at 21, why don't you go for a permanent commission in the Royal Engineers?', but I still wanted to get a degree. I thought that was more important. I know I could have done that through the Army, but in those days they offered ex-servicemen or women the chance to get grants. I got a fully granted course, again back at the Polytechnic Regent Street to go for an external degree in engineering, which I did and got by 1951, which pleased me. Anyhow, that was the way in which I'd become, a student member of the Institution of Civil Engineers. That was important, because I got involved in organizing visits and so on for students. We went to Brussels, for example, on a visit in the late 1940s, and it's those sorts of incidents that form the way your career might go.

In the meantime, my father and mother were still living in Woodside Park and when 1951 came and I'd qualified, you go off for a few weeks - only weeks in those days - with your colleagues who you graduated with. Then I joined my father's company because there were already two sons of the other director, they were joint managing directors, so it was like a family business, which was great.

**LF: Can you tell me the name of the company?**

JF: Yes, William Jones Ltd. And they were, as I said, originally in Upper Thames Street, but in 1941 they were totally bombed out, utterly bombed out. My father said he discovered the company's safe on the top of a pile of rubbish. They moved from different parts of central London like Holborn, then they moved to Mayfair, and then they finally came to Adam House in Fitzroy Square, so that was their office. Their works were in Westmoor Street, Charlton - a rather strange connection there because that is the site of the Thames Barrier. More of that in a few moments, but that's where their factory was: making, maintaining the earthmoving plant, manufacturing earthmoving plant and railway materials. I had to start on railway layouts and earthmoving schemes, investigating schemes for example, German multi-bucket excavators,

and projects like that. So that's what kept me in my first two or three years there. I wanted to qualify as a chartered civil engineer but you had to do, in those days, anything from seven-to-ten years from your graduation to get enough experience.

The interesting point was I got involved in the development of handling machinery for sewerage treatment works, which was, again, another aspect of engineering that had its effect much later on, because I got involved with the people who were in the Institution of Public Health Engineers. I had to present machinery to people from these institutions, we had to design equipment for different parts of the world. For example, later on in my career with this company I was involved in the provision of sewerage treatment handling equipment to Libya in the days of King Idris, in the days before Gaddafi, two or three years before he came to power; it was just bubbling then. But it was very interesting, having to go to places like Tripoli and Benghazi, and deal with the installation problems and so on that were necessary on overseas matters like that. Because of this type of equipment, I also got involved in an organization that became known as the International Solid Waste Association [ISWA]. I also remember I had the opportunity to exhibit at a town in northern Italy called Trento where they had their annual congress and small exhibition. I went there, and I was absolutely amazed at their knowledge and foresight in the academic side of, shall we call it, waste handling, in all its aspects from collection to different forms of treatment, composting, incineration, and so on. That was a fundamental point then, because I'd just qualified as a chartered civil engineer in 1965 and I was fascinated by this scope of international development.

**LF: Can you approximately date this period in your career?**

JF: From the time I joined the family business in 1951, as I said, I ran through different forms of engineering work, mechanical and civil. Incidentally, in 1956 I got married and we lived, my wife Kathleen and I, in central London, and I've continued to live in central London ever since, in different parts. But that was a critical moment in my life, as with any woman or a man who may get married. My wife was a State Registered Nurse and very active in social work and other matters like that, but just to continue getting the times right: so it was in the first half of the 1960s where I really expanded out into this public health engineering equipment and overseas work, and so on, and that took me up to, by 1965, having qualified as a chartered engineer. I knew that that was the time to look around for other opportunities. It was also, just by coincidence, when London's government totally changed, and they introduced this amazing concept of having a Greater London Council [GLC], which was a very fundamental political change in the way London was run, and they were changing the way work was organized.

London [County Council] had always had a very strong architects' department, lawyers department, education, that was all very strong, but on the public health engineering side the Middlesex County Council had developed the drainage systems for outer London, and with the coming of the Greater London Council the Middlesex County Council was absorbed and they thought, wisely, 'we have to form a totally new department for public health engineering', and this is what caught my eye. This public health engineering department was to cover flood control, sewerage treatment and drainage, and waste management. It was the first time I'd seen this concept, and I thought, 'well, I'll have a go'. They were advertising for qualified civil engineers to join the department, and an eminent engineer, to begin with joined, his name was Vick, then followed by, quite shortly after the formation of the department, Stanley Dainty. Stanley Dainty was the Chief Engineer of the Middlesex Drainage Authority, and he brought his knowledge of engineering in but was very keen to have waste management, and the politicians wanted that because they were amalgamating the waste management services of, I think it was, 65 different authorities and they were having to organize the disposal. Collection was left with the new London boroughs, there were 32, I think, plus the City of London. So they would go on collecting, but we would have to deal with the reception of these wastes, their transportation, treatment, and afterwards, disposal. That was a marvellous opportunity for an engineer to go in.

**LF: Can I just ask you: so prior to the formation of the GLC was it the case that each of the London boroughs was responsible for its own disposal?**

JF: Yes, 65 of them, yes, and you can see why it was a great opportunity and fully backed politically by all the parties. I found that I was the first chartered civil engineer to join this part of the Public Health Engineering Department on waste management. They drew other senior officers from all over the country who had had experience in different cities of running their systems, so I was joining a cadre of very well qualified, shall we say, waste engineers, although they had all sorts of titles like superintendent, or so on. So I was the first chartered civil engineer to join this group and get involved in what was called the Design Development Division under the initial control of a Mr Stirrup who unfortunately died within a few weeks, and he was succeeded by a man I'll always look up to, Philip Patrick. He was a Pathfinder in the Second World War, he was a man whom I could see from my experience in the Royal Engineers, a sort of man you can look up to who will take decisions and you can talk to late at night and so on. I was very fortunate in that. So my first work was, for example, on getting a small transfer station going in North London. But the big project was the Edmonton waste, we call it nowadays, "Energy from Waste", but it was called "Edmonton Incineration Plant".

**LF: Before you talk about that, and I want you to talk about that, can you say a little about the waste transfer project?**

JF: The initial waste transfer project was as simple as you can get: how do you transfer waste from collection vehicles into bulk vehicles and then haul that bulk load out to landfill in Hertfordshire? What we had to do was take over a derelict structure, put three holes in the floor of that structure, put walls around those floors for safety, and barriers, and then the collection vehicles could discharge their loads directly into the vehicles below. It's as simple as that. That simplicity was repeated in more and more sophisticated ways and it's even now used today, but it was so simple. I had to get it done, and I always remember the general works contractor was a company called Murphy, and there was a lovely man, Joe Murphy, who was actually the original Murphy. He had this knack this man of getting very good foremen to carry out the works, so we were using Murphy's staff to actually do the concreting, the breaking out and all that work under our direction. It was an interesting thing when you see what Murphy does nowadays.

**LF: But it sounds as if you pioneered this piece of work?**

JF: Pioneered... hmm, I think that's a strong word. I just had to do it.

**LF: Had anyone done it before?**

JF: I'm trying to think, had it been done before? It was just a sensible thing to do. [Laughs] I did go on with a number of other clients using the same sort of technique with, it's a matter of safety, and I'll cover that in a few moments, but no, it was the start, it was the very first thing I was told to do. 'Go and get that done.' We had a boss in the GLC, Philip Patrick's boss was a man called Frank Flintoff, a character in waste management, and he was the sort of man that I always like. He would say, 'Well, what's your solution?', and you come up with it, and he said, 'right, get it done'. I like bosses whom will do that, and you don't argue about it or fuss about it, you get it done. So that was good fun, and it was a good start, being the only civil engineer in the Design Development Division.

When we started to think about the Edmonton plant, it was just a sewerage treatment plant but it had land available there, which we could build on, from memory about seven or eight hectares. It was big enough to put in a major plant to deal with up to say 1800 tonnes of waste per annum. So it was a very big development, and, again, I had another engineer I worked with, who was well known. He was known as 'Higgie', Mr Higginson, and he had the responsibility for incineration plant design, but we were part of a big team, this is what was interesting. We had the architects who were the old LCC (London County Council) architects, we had those; we had their scientific advisors for things like air quality there, quality of noise, this expertise that had to be taken account of. We had a fully established Department of Mechanical and Electrical Engineering under a man called Belcher, but we were the project leaders. Because we needed a big team of civil engineers, we employed W S Atkins and Partners, which still exists under a

slightly different name, but we chose them, and, of course, I had to in fact lead this team, not for the whole project but for this civil engineering side. Remember, we had to dig, it was known by the press as the biggest hole in London, which always amused me because we got a lot of press on that. Anyway, we did have to excavate this huge hole for the bunkers to take the waste, and equally big holes for the turbine house, the foundations.

**LF: Which years are we talking about?**

JF: We're talking from, the conception was going on through 1966 and 1967, and the actual start from memory was 1968 through to 1972: four years' construction. Because we had to build a chimney, we had to look at stations like Drax Power Station to see the form that the chimney would take, and so on, what foundation work had to be done, which roads had to be built in from the North Circular Road. We had to have room for recovery, for treatment of the ash and clinker, and so on. All that had to be worked out. Meanwhile, at the back of the plant we had to keep on keeping the waste moving through these simple transfer systems, so it was a four-year period, yes, up till when we opened, from memory. We opened in 1972.

The plant actually worked very well. Because it had roller grates, which was quite an innovation for grates, the waste would roll down them and come out with the clinker at the bottom, so it was a very good start to the activities. While I say this, we were, of course, having to work on other schemes because we had to cut down the number of totally inefficient stations, of which there was something like, again, about 60 different stations. We had to phase them out. Landfill was becoming almost an exception in London. We did have one great big site called Sipson Road, which was on the south side of the M4, close to Heathrow, where we did in fact carry out all sorts of improvements in landfill techniques. But for most of our landfill, we were having to look way out of London for the quantities that the 3.5 to 4 million tonnes of waste we had to deal with per annum. We were already planning to have improvements on the Thames, the stations were dreadful. We had to plan a series of stations on the Thames, and stations that would be served by rail out of different parts of London, so in this same period we were also starting to plan, for example, improvements at the wharf at Westminster: Grosvenor Dock. We had to make some improvements, but we couldn't do very much because the structure was there, it was more to do with improvements to health and safety, trying to cut down the amount of dust, making sure that people had adequate safety gear on and so on. There was another one at Walbrook Wharf, which was in the City of London. That too needed some improvement, but that the major task we took on, was we found a site near Battersea Power Station, and it still is there - if you see the developments of Battersea Power Station now with the multi-billion pound developments, you'll see a small red roof sort of tucked along the river bank there - and that was Cringle Dock, because there is a Dickensian Street called Cringle Street there. It was a site with a suitable river frontage, it had a depth to put in a series of chutes, and I go back to my concept of bringing vehicles in, tipping in through chutes, into a bunker, and from the bunker, lifting the waste out and putting it into treatment plant, which in the case of Cringle Dock to begin with was to pulverize the waste and then load it into barges. The reason we pulverized at that stage was to make it a more homogeneous material to landfill down at the well-known site called Mucking, that's where the waste was going, and it meant that the...

**LF: Where is or was Mucking?**

JF: That's down near Pitsea, near that part of the north bank of the River Thames down near Pitsea. There was this tradition of the use of barges for waste, which was pretty archaic in the sense that these other undeveloped stations were taking crude waste, putting sheets over them, then taking the sheeted barges down the Thames, and from time-to-time spillage would take place, spreading stuff on the beaches and so on, so this was a definite improvement in getting Cringle Dock. Now, I'm just trying to remember the dates of Cringle Dock because these all fit in across a period from 1965, 1975, and even on to, yes, let's say it's that period. At the same time we were having to develop new stations to rail haul, and this was a concept. I've got sketches that I made on my living room table in my flat where I sketched out, 'Let's have it look like this.' This is what I did with Cringle Dock, actually, 'let's have it this way'. Before I leave

Cringle Dock, again we had the help of the architects of the LCC who had done work like the Royal Festival Hall and those sorts of architectural features, and they brought their thinking in and their enthusiasm into doing waste plants, which I found marvellous. It was the same with the mechanical engineers, they thought, 'we've got new things to do here', and that was good. Again, we used a company of civil engineering consultants called Mott, Hay and Anderson. I had to, it's very interesting, I had to choose a consultant because you didn't want to keep on Atkins who did Edmonton, you'd want someone else to do Cringle Dock, so I thought, 'I wonder, who were the consultants for Tower Bridge?', and it's funny, it was Motts. So I went along to Mott's offices, and met a very nice engineer called Prosser, he was the senior partner, and he asked me, 'Why did you choose us?' So I said, 'Well, I knew what you'd done on Tower Bridge.' They were excellent, first class.

I was project managing these teams, and it was quite an experience doing this because you had to make sure that the project was done to time and cost, because behind us was, and I'll come on to this I hope a little later, the political support. I'm just giving you the technical features at the moment, but political support was very important.

So then we, as I said, we had to think about other long-haul arrangements for going to places in Kent, and to Hertfordshire, and out into Oxfordshire. We started then looking at sites where we could go, one good example is Transport Avenue, which was very close to the flyover of the M4 going out towards London airport. We found a perfect site for a transfer station where we would elevate the platform, take collection vehicles up, tip through holes with barriers on, into, and in this case we had decided to go for what are called ISO containers: International Standard Organization. They are the containers you see throughout the world in shipping, and I thought: 'Let's go for those. If we can get that standardization it means then we can have handling, cranes and so on all using this totally safe system of lifting and handling and moving by rail.' And so we actually started, and from memory I think we went to one of the military testing establishments to knock about these containers in every possible way, because we were going to order hundreds of them, hundreds.

Meanwhile, we were negotiating with British Rail to get trains that would actually take, let me see now, 800 tonnes of waste, and each of these containers would take about 20 tonnes, something like that. So you had container trains, then we had to find places out, for example, in the case of Transport Avenue, in Oxfordshire, because it's an easy run out to Oxfordshire. So we went to people like the big sand and gravel excavation companies, and I remember going out to near Didcot Power Station where ARC, that's the old, I think it was Amalgamated Roadstone Company, these have all been taken over since, but nevertheless they had a huge excavation there, which I knew would last for 20 to 30 years. Therefore, we could arrange to build rail heads there and have a contract with them for the unloading of containers, their transport, their tipping and then back onto the rail, because we wanted to arrange daytime loading, night-time haulage, daytime unloading, and so on, to get this circular system going. That was all new, people hadn't done this before, so that was a method of project management. As the years went by, I was very fortunate to build up the Design Development Division, year by year, year by year a little more, and get qualified engineers in so that over the ten years I was beginning to get qualified engineers from different parts of the world who would then project manage these projects on my behalf because I was moving up the divisional scale from being a Senior Engineer into an Assistant Divisional Engineer, and so on. When Phil Patrick left, from memory anyway it was about that time, I was Assistant Divisional Engineer with responsibility for a various number of teams working...

**LF:** And this was approximately which year?

JF: I'm trying to think. It would probably be about 1977, something like that. We then had to also do the same arrangement with haulage to Kent, and with haulage for example from Hillingdon. That plant still operates today from Hillingdon out to Hertfordshire. We had to build one of these plants, multi-hopper containers, because we'd switched to the concept of using containers for the haulage on both road and rail. I'll come on to now where we then had the opportunity to develop another river site, it's known as Western Riverside, and it still functions, but there we made the decision that no longer were we going to



pulverize the waste, it was not really necessary for the landfill end. They would take raw waste, and because of the improvements in compacting systems and so on on the landfill sites, we decided to make Western Riverside into a containerised river system. Western Riverside is upriver from Chelsea, up that way. That too went through its development process, but we're now talking about going on into the early 1980s in which...

**LF: Before we do that, I do want to take you back to something, John, and that is we were talking about what was then called the Edmonton Incinerator. Just let me take you back to that briefly: it's changed its name as you have said, but how was it greeted when it was opened? What sort of reception did it have?**

JF: We'd done so much work on noise, and the quality of the effluent, that's what worries people: what is going out of the chimney and being dispersed. We had done a great deal of work scientifically, there are papers available on that, and also it was, it was nothing that could upset people. We didn't get the reaction that you get nowadays if you say you want to build an energy-from-waste plant. It was quite a nice looking plant. It was modern, you didn't get clouds of dirt coming out the chimney because of the high quality of the gas cleaning plant, but I think it was the work that we did to it, and we were very pleased. The flow of vehicles, I mean they came off the North Circular Road, they went onto our specially designed road layout around the plant and then back onto the North Circular Road so they were not impinging on people's local road systems. I think that's why it's gone on, and still today it's operating there at this moment. I think at the present time they are still planning to go on using it a little longer, although we had thought it might have been phased out by now, but it's a very interesting question, the length of the life of these plants. It's something I'm very pleased about. The same remarks I would apply to the other plants that I've just mentioned briefly, like Cringle Dock or Western Riverside, or Hillingdon Plant. It was because we tried to design with the people who lived around in mind: for Transport Avenue we came off the major A4 routes so we were not bringing traffic, and so on. Once these looked like, because they're all totally enclosed, they had very high quality air cleaning. For example, Transport Avenue you would see three what looked like chimneys, but they were pulling air in for cleaning and so on, so you'll see vents but nothing ever comes out of them. I think if people see nasty smoke coming out they're going to be upset, but that was never the case, and that's why I'm pleased I can say this to you now they've all been very well received.

Okay, we move much later on in history to the whole need for recycling and so on, which is admirable and is happening. For example, when you think some London boroughs are recycling, what, 40, 50, 60 per cent of their waste, but there still is this basic waste which you can't recycle. Anyhow, you see, we had to have this sort of multi-view of all the things that were happening. I just mentioned waste, but at the same time as we were handling all the 3.5 to 4 million tonnes of household waste, and there was at least three times to four times that of construction, demolition, and that type of waste being moved: excavation waste. As London developed, you got this constant need to find places for those wastes. Well, we were very much engaged in that. For one thing, they had to find landfill for those materials so we had to make sure that our landfills were contracted out to take 30 years from a rail haul site, or the residuals from Edmonton for many years on contract so that we knew that we would still have outlets while we were competing with the construction industry and these other industries for the disposal of their waste.

We also had to battle on the fly-tipping problems, but that comes later when we really recognized it, but initiatives were starting in the beginning of the 1980s for recycling; for stopping the illegal transfer of waste; the dumping of waste; the clinical waste saga. For all those activities I was, you know, having to see how we could develop systems to cope with that because we, in the Greater London Council, had our Design Development Division, and of course we had the operational side and the operational side was responsible for the staffing, the running of all these plants, and so on. So yes, each plant was built and initially run then we had to get in staff, and that was the Operations Division's side.

**LF: John, we've got you to the early 1980s, I think you were Divisional Engineer. You're going to tell me more about that in a moment, but for now tell me about the extent to which the GLC was a**

**pioneer in this area.**

JF: We had to be pioneers. We were coping with a major population centre with the biggest city waste flow of I'd say 3.5 to 4 million tonnes of household waste, having to take it outside the boundaries of London by various means. That is why we pioneered the use of containers, containerised river haul, the development of high quality energy-from-waste plants at Edmonton and at the Southeast London Incineration Plant, all of which were conceived, built, and brought into operation during the period of the 1970s to early 1980s. This was certainly an example that interested other cities, but in particular other countries on the international scene because we were leading on these different quality developments in which we, at all times, took account of the environment in which these plants were built: the way in which vehicles would come in from a multitude of different authorities; the safety of those employees who were on those vehicles; the health and safety aspects of the operators in our plants, and the way in which we dealt with these matters in a pioneering way. It was a delight, the sense of innovation, and this led to enthusiasm both in staff and the elected members, who were, of course, at the back providing finance and all the other aspects that are needed getting a range of projects like this off the ground. Bear in mind that every one of them had to go through the planning situation, and that was not easy, but they all succeeded in getting planning permission for a whole range of the developments I discussed.

**LF: Was the political support pretty universal?**

JF: It's one of the key aspects that I found joining the GLC, and I found it as supportive as I would expect throughout that 20-year period from 1965 to 1985/86 in that the elected members from the 32 boroughs and in the City of London were from different political persuasions, but were united on the importance of public health work. They worked closely together in ensuring that we could get our projects sufficient finance, planning consent, the acceptance of long-term contracts for haulage, both on river and rail and road, with landfill sites that would take our wastes not for a few years but for long-term: 25-year contracts, 30-year contracts. This was fully supported by elected members throughout the period, and this was invaluable in that it was almost a uniting factor between different political factions that this was a vital service to Londoners.

**LF: You mentioned health and safety. You'll have seen major changes, certainly over the length of your career, and in this critical period. Do you want to say a little about that?**

JF: Right from the beginning, these activities involved outside people, that is the boroughs' collection vehicles, and other collectors or waste coming into our property, and we had responsibility for their health and safety. The fact that a vehicle would reverse, that's in itself not a totally safe operation, it has to be carried out very carefully, so we had to design plants so that they could reverse safely, could be seen to be reversing properly. There were safety barriers at all unloading points throughout the GLC plants where the safety barrier would only go up once the vehicle was ready to reverse and unload. High visibility clothing was the norm, the use of helmets was the norm. These were all introduced because we did have, the advantage of a large authority was to have a very active safety organization. We had our own Chief Safety Officer and four Safety Officers to work in ensuring that the standards we'd laid down were actually carried out. I found the attendance of Safety Officers, particularly the Chief Safety Officer, vital at project management meetings: it was as vital as having for example, a legal advisor there or the Planning Officer. It was a team that involved health and safety from the very beginning right through to the operation, and I found that a very helpful attitude to getting plants designed, built and then operational. It was fully backed by the elected members because they felt very strongly about the aspects of health and safety, not only of our own staff but of those people who came into the plant as operatives from other bodies.

**LF: Were there other cities in the country sort of looking over the shoulder of the GLC, and hoping to model some of their practices on the GLC?**

JF: Well, we always did, through the Institute of Public Cleansing, which became the Institute of Solid Wastes

Management and then the chartered body, we always had the opportunity to exchange views. I had the chance to give papers on the plants I've mentioned: Edmonton, Cringle Dock, Transport Avenue, and the development of them, where of course you met your fellow professionals in waste management from all over the country. Remember, this involves Wales and Scotland and Northern Ireland as well. We would keep in touch with all that was happening in Glasgow, or in Manchester, or in Bristol, or Birmingham, for example. These large conurbations, I had very strong discussions with Stan Dagg, for example, who was the Director of Cleansing in the City of Glasgow. We even went to the extent of organizing a formal conference up there in 1990 of which we took a large part in organizing, myself as one of the, shall we say, leaders in waste management from London, in exchanging views both on the politics and on the technicalities of waste management, because, Scotland, having its own ministers and so on, it was interesting to get their viewpoints and get people from the political scene in London, whether MPs or House of Lords, to speak there. This is what's so important, to exchange these views and how you manage between one city and another.

The same with what was happening in New York or Chicago or Houston. What's happening in Melbourne or Sydney? Exchanging views like that. Berlin, for example, I remember delivering a paper in Berlin to the International Congress of ISWA (International Solid Waste Association) where they wanted to know what on earth were you doing about fly-tipping? This was the thing that worried everybody in 1986, the scourge of fly-tipping. I remember giving a lecture there to fellow professionals from all over of 400 to 500 delegates. This was certainly an important part of my work, and I think of the work of the Department. I go back again to early on in my career when I went to Trento, it gave me a feeling for this international body of women and men who were interested in both the science and the engineering and practicalities of waste management; it was very stimulating, I would say, to do this.

**LF: Let me take you back then to your career when the GLC was abolished, because we know you moved, well you moved on from the GLC, but just tell me a bit about your career from the early 1980s when you were Divisional Engineer through the promotions and your expanded role.**

JF: Well, as I said a little earlier, we were concentrating on a number of particular problems such as the burning of tyres, solving that or the question of abandoned vehicles, the need for ever-increasing civic amenity or recycling centres for the public, and clinical waste issues. All this was happening in the early 1980s, but we had the clear sign that the GLC was to be abolished. We had, from memory, two years notice of that. Now, there was a great discussion going on, 'well, what should happen to waste management in London?' Should it then revert to the London boroughs, in other words let them take on all responsibilities that we had in the GLC Public Health Engineering Department. At the same time, the National Rivers Authority and HMIP, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution, they were suggesting that it might be a good idea to form a body that joined together flood defence, river control and, shall we say, the hazardous end of pollution control, HMIP's activities. Question mark: waste? What are we going to do about waste? We had developed sufficient expertise I think to argue a case that waste regulation should not be handed down to the boroughs but would better be part of an environment agency.

Just pausing there, I think my comments on the NRA (National Rivers Authority) and HMIP actually come much later in the timescale that we are now discussing: the last couple of years of the GLC, and why we managed to find through Parliament's decision an independent, London-wide regulation authority. That developed from work that we'd been doing in the GLC on regulation, and the control of bodies of people that handle waste and so on. So it was strongly argued that it would be better to have one London-wide authority for regulation, and we actually had to work quite hard at that in getting Parliament engaged through the activities of the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee which was chaired by Lord Gregson, who was on the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution chaired by Lord Nathan - both of whom took a great interest in our activities in the GLC public health engineering waste side during the mid-1980s because of our activities on, for example trying to get a common standard of competence within the industry, trying to deal with the outcome of what was known as the "Pitsea experience", where you had to get much better control over the handling of waste and the knowledge of what waste is.

**LF: Please say a little more about the Pitsea experience.**

JF: The Pitsea experience was a fatal accident when the House of Lords committee under Lord Gregson was invited to investigate this and produce what is known as the Gregson Report in which a whole number of recommendations were made, including the need for far higher standards of knowing what is on board a vehicle, which led to the concept of having every vehicle registered, transfer notes, and so on. Now, we were much involved in supporting this, and so I think particularly Lord Gregson and Lord Nathan were enthusiastic that this sort of body that would be big enough to keep initiatives going, particularly in London, was formed, and the outcome was positive. It was, I think, in 1985 they decided that, yes, they'd dissolve the GLC but still set up a London-wide waste regulatory body. We had a working party on that chaired by one of the London borough chief executives. From memory I think he was from Ealing, and he and I and a small group of us, only two or three people, we got together: 'Now how can we have a London-wide regulatory body?' This was in 1985. It was decided that, again, it should be made up of a board or a board of elected members from each of the London boroughs and the Corporation of London, and a number of officers responsible for the carrying out of the activities of regulating London's waste. Regulating in a sense of licensing, this whole concept of licensing all the transfer stations, of which there were hundreds, incinerators and so on; registering the carriers of waste. It developed a little bit later into the whole certificate of technical competence concept, which Lord Gregson was very enthusiastic about. In fact, a little later, within the next two or three years, we saw the setting up of the Waste Management Training and Advisory Board of which Lord Gregson was the first Chairman, and myself and Roger Hewitt were the two Deputy Chairs. This was financed by the industry and supported by the Department of the Environment.

**LF: Do you remember which year it was set up?**

JF: The London Waste Regulation Authority was set up in 1986. This was the concept that we wanted to create and [we] were talking about it in the last year of the GLC. I was invited, it was an interesting thing to be invited to be the first Director of that authority, and...

**LF: I want to know about that, John, but I just want to take you back a little to the GLC because you were promoted a number of times.**

JF: Yes [laughs].

**LF: We've got you to Divisional Engineer in the early 1980s. You went on from that.**

JF: Oh right, yes. Well, I can't give you the exact date but when I became General Manager, of course, then I was responsible for the operations and the design and development side.

**LF: So you were General Manager of...?**

JF: Of what was called the "Waste Management Branch".

**LF: Of the Public Health Engineering Department?**

JF: Colleagues of mine were, for example, Ray Horner, who was in charge of the [Thames] Barrier; there was another manager in charge of drainage and so on. So it was the [Thames] Barrier, the drainage, the rivers, and the waste management. Yes, that's interesting because it must have been at the same time the National Rivers Authority was being developed, because that's where responsibilities went, from memory, for the drainage and the Barrier and so on, at the same time as the London Waste Regulatory Authority was being formed. How interesting. So there we are.

**LF: And then you went to the London Waste Regulatory Authority [LWRA] in 19...**

JF: 1 April 1986. And very fortunately we were still based in County Hall, it hadn't been sold, and I had the good fortune to have a Chief Clerk as it was called, Mrs Delia Buckle, who had ended up as, funnily enough, as Director General of the GLC in her very last, when the final Director General retired she took it on. She became the Chief Clerk, or I think that was the formation time of the London Fire Civil Defence Authority (LFCDA) so we shared the same clerk, the two authorities, we shared the finance, legal, HR, personnel, with the Fire Brigade. It was a good idea to share that out. So that was a good start. We had a great many similar members, not totally because they were separate members of the LFCDA and separate for the LWRA, but it was the same concept of a Board. We had, I think it was four or five meetings of the Authority a year. We set up an executive committee in which the leader of the leading party was the Chair of the Executive Committee of Members. Then I developed a structure for the officers to have a series of, I think it was four area officers in London, roughly North, South, East and West, and I had an Area Manager in charge of each of those offices with staff who could understand licensing, pollution control and so on. I had an inner core of people responsible on the Board for, recycling, surveying, and land surveying, and I had my own finance administration. So I formed this Authority. Effectively, you start from scratch and you do it but I was getting people from mainly from the old GLC, a lot of them wanted to retire anyway but I managed to get a whole number of people to join me.

**LF: How was that then, starting up a new body, clearly an innovative body after the demise of the GLC, with known experts, people you'd appointed?**

JF: [Laughs].

**LF: It sounds as if it could be both exciting but quite daunting. How was it?**

JF: It was both, because I think the strength was that we wanted to do certain things: we wanted to make sure all London's waste was traceable, and we were fully backed by Parliament in that and by our members. We wanted to make sure that every site we knew what it was handling, that it was licensed, and we wanted to know that everybody who was managing these sites was competent, technically competent; so we had those three things. There was great encouragement to everybody because they could understand that's what we wanted, and we might no longer be handling the waste through the transfer stations or running the plants that had now been devolved from, funnily enough, they could devolve them to individual boroughs. There was the east group, there was the northern group, the western group, some of the south and a few boroughs that went on doing it themselves. That's what happened when the GLC was divided back into boroughs, they actually carried on in very much the same way. In fact, today North London still operates as a body with the, I think it's the five boroughs, operate together. West London's the same: West London Waste Authority, it's made up of the same group that formed in 1986, that's right, and they're still running. Some boroughs will never join into things, they like being independent. I think Bexley's one, and one of the best recyclers in the country. They've got different strengths, so there we are, so it was exciting and daunting, as you say, to get into this. To start with, I think I started with about 87 people, by the end of the ten years we were about 130 because some activities grew, the need for recycling became more, and Jeff Cooper took a tremendous part because he came from the GLC. He was our first Recycling Officer in the old waste branch and then became in charge of the whole recycling initiatives in the LWRA and stayed there.

**LF: Say a little more about that, because there were significant changes in that very period. It had been a trend that had been developing. Can you say a little more about the impact of recycling, what do you think shifted the public mind?**

JF: Throughout this whole period, it's very interesting to look at statistics, from like 1900 right through to the beginning of the next century and see how, for example, ashes and cinders were the main waste product in 1900. You move forward to about 1990 and you'll see that packaging becomes the huge thing, and it's the development of plastics during the 1960s and 1970s: how people's buying habits, material used in the

home, wrapped, whatever. I mean, take a television set: there's more packaging than the television, or the prepacking of tomatoes, or so on. For example, in London how the street markets have got smaller and smaller, the way in which we were very actively trying to find ways to recycle, there's nothing very new in that. They were doing that back in the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s, they were always picking belts and so on, but we've found that the manufacturers have tried to make the materials more recyclable, and this is all during this period, particularly I would say from the 1980s through until now of course.

The change in packaging is what encouraged people like Jeff Cooper and his colleagues to go and explore different things. I mean, for example, Jeff and Lawrence Peterken went to the States, in 1983 I think it was, to look at the latest systems of recycling there. It's by that sort of thing that you bring back enthusiasms for 'let's try and do this' and so on. It was quite clear that the best way was to try and get the recycling done as early as possible, and that's what we've seen happen. We've seen the provision of separate containers. Again, containers have changed enormously over the years for recyclables to be recycled by the householder, this is the change. That's why you can hear places like Richmond or Bexley have very high recycling rates, because they encourage every possible way of doing it. Then, while we were the very first authority to have a Recycling Officer, Jeff Cooper, back in the 1980s, now of course I think every authority throughout the country, district, county, so on, they've all got Recycling Officers because that's the way the members want, and if the members want it it's quite clearly what the communities want. So that is what's changed. It's had an effect on total quantities, but I'm afraid we keep on producing more and more waste, that's the only problem. We haven't seen a great dip in quantities, but the way in which they're dealt with has changed so we can see more and more recyclates.

**LF: So John, we've been talking a bit about your time, in fact it was ten years, working for the LWRA. Let me just ask you to reflect on that period. Tell me the best and the worst times at the LWRA, the latter period in particular.**

JF: Yes, well one of the best things was that we had developed, almost a tradition of having, an annual conference each year and, together with the annual conference, we had an annual report and this went on for ten years, so one every year. At the annual conference we'd get people from all over the world to come and talk, politicians, technical people, and so on. It was because London was big enough to do this, and it had the full support of the members, they were so enthusiastic about it. So this was one of the best things, and there is this history, which was done by, we were very fortunate in having two people called Peter Rowland and Pam Maidment who were administrators within the Authority. Just as an aside, dear Peter Rowland who is still with us, he's an expert on Dickens, but he had this marvellous way of reporting as a rapporteur and so we had this record taken of the conferences. That was one of the best things because it enthused people to think back: 'I came to your conference a year ago. Now here I am on the platform speaking,' and it could be an MP or member of the House of Lords or someone from Paris, or someone from New York. It was certainly this international feeling that was going on, and was very good for the members. Of course, we were reporting on what we'd done, and we'd carried out our ambition to know what was happening to London's wastes, to know the quality of the people that were on the certificates of competence and so on and we had great support from the Department of the Environment. They were really interested in improving waste management. It can't always be the way, they have other priorities, but during that ten years that was taking place.

Disappointment: it was, well, it's a disappointment when you can see the end of an Authority coming along. In fact, I was asked if I would stay on for the last couple of years because the members already knew it was planned to abolish the concept of the LWRA and move it into the Environment Agency.

**LF: What was the reason for that?**

JF: Well, it was a reverse reason in a way. During the period of the LWRA there were problems with how waste regulation was being organized elsewhere in the country. It wasn't satisfactory. And at that time the National Rivers Authority and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution were being seen as successful bodies for regulating the rivers and the pollution control at government level, or certainly at national level.

There were, of course, many, many rivers boards, and many drainage boards but you had to get some sort of coherent agency that would run all of this, but an 'agency' was the concept, remember, not an 'authority'. It was to be an agency, and this came out during the political discussions. Then the question came up: what do we do about waste?

**LF: What was the political significance of the Government deciding on an agency rather than...?**

JF: Because they wanted to keep it at arm's length from the elected members. Now, that's disappointing because I had found the proximity of elected members very good over the 30 years. I'd found them very helpful, but that was the concept of the Government at the time.

**LF: What do you think was behind that? Why did they want to keep elected members away from it?**

JF: Well, you can have conflict between a central government and elected members at a local level. It's just going to happen because one party or other will be in power and might not share the same views at the local level. I mean, that's what happened with Ken Livingstone and Mrs Thatcher, there was a problem there. Anyhow, the agency concept was being promoted in, let me see, 1993/94/95, that time, and we took a decision in the Authority, and this was by the Authority, and we went along to the House of Commons, my Chairman Mrs Wykes and myself, and Bill Townend, a well-known Officer of our team. We went along and argued that, taking all things into account, it would be better for the LWRA, and activity similar to that, to be part of an agency. We had to decide whether we were in favour or not, and we said, 'No, if we're going to be, it's better that it goes into an agency,' and we agreed with it but there are pros and cons. That's how that was formed.

We were actually studied by, I remember, Ed Gallagher, who was the acting Chief Executive Officer of the agency, coming and spending some time with us and sending his acting Finance Officer and other acting people along to study how we had organized an authority because they were going to have to set up an agency with members and so on. So it was quite an interesting time that, and how we actually did, for example, police checks on carriers. It was practical testing, and that happened in the last two years of the Authority, where we were looked on as a testbed for regulation, and in fact that's what happened. By 1996 we were wound up, and the, I think all that's left now, well of course then came the London Assembly and the Fire Brigade is under the control of the Assembly.

**LF: And had you decided to retire at that point?**

JF: Well, fortunately I was asked in January 1996 if I would become the Chair of the Regional Environment Protection Advisory Committee for London Thames, just as a chair. It's a paid job but it's a chair, and you assemble a group of people as activists, who are not paid: paid expenses but not paid [a salary]. And I found that interesting to form that, but I did that for three years, and that was really long enough.

**LF: But you decided to retire from the LWRA, is that right?**

JF: Well, I had to because I had gone beyond my normal retirement. That's why they asked me would I serve two more years because in 1993 I must have been 65, that's right, something like that, anyway. So right, anyway, they asked would I stay on till the end of the Authority, which I was very willing to do.

**LF: Did many of your colleagues at the LWRA move over to the Environment Agency?**

JF: Yes.

**LF: So by and large people were...**

JF: Almost all of them did. They were absorbed into the Agency, much to my pleasure because one or two like Bill Townend, he went in. That's right, he went into the agency, got his OBE. Yes, it was nice, they all

went in there, and some of them I still see.

**LF: Tell me a little bit about what you did after 1996. You did your period of chairing...**

JF: I did this chairing, but that was only like a couple of days a week, which I enjoyed but we were not wanted. It was quite clear we were not wanted by the Environment Agency officers. In fact they've all disappeared now these regional committees, it's become a totally different organization now, the Agency; it's not like that at all. I think they found, 'what's the point of having these people?' They're interested and so on, but it's not helping us that much, so they disappeared after, I think they went on for maybe three more years after I had left, but I was more interested in other things. I mentioned very early on my dear old master at Highgate, Twidell, and the Greek art exhibition. My wife and I had an interest in art all the way through, because when we started in London, as I say, she was a State Registered Nurse, but then she joined Islington as a social worker. Islington had some terrible problems, like emptying the mental hospitals, you know, getting people out of hospital into home. Anyway, she was working on that, a pretty stressful job, but incidentally she also had a very interesting job working for the marvellous Medical Officer of Health for the Borough of Finsbury in the 1960s called Dr Blithe Brook, and he set up workshops for elderly people and she ran them. Then the same thing happened in Westminster, and she went and ran Westminster's as well. That was interesting because it was such a contrast to the work I was doing, Kathleen's work with elderly people and with disabled people and so on. She went on doing that until she retired, but we shared this love of art, and as our social life we loved going to art classes right throughout the 1960s, 1970s. We both got into yoga, which I still do nowadays, I've done it for 35 to 40 years.

Now that's interesting because it leads on to answering your question: I wanted to do more in art so when this opportunity came, oh Heavens, what was the year? It was 1999, 2000, that sort of time, I'd been doing a lot of classes in drawing, those sort of things, painting and that, and then someone said to me, 'Why don't you take a foundation course in fine art?' And that was at the well-known City Lit in Drury Lane, and the woman there said, 'You know, if you do intensive drawing for the next six months, I'll take you on the foundation course,' and I joined. That was three days a week. Great! I did that, went through all the drawing work, I loved it.

What's so nice when these things happen, and I think it's because, by the way two of my uncles were RSAs, you know Royal Scottish Academicians, my mother's brothers I mentioned before about someone going across on D-day, that was one of my artist uncles. He went across the Channel, but there we are so it shows it was in the family. So my father on the engineering side and my mother on the art side. It's very interesting, because since I had this opportunity for foundation at the City Lit my tutor there, oh he was a great guy, he said, 'John, just go and see if you can get in on a BA.' I said, 'I've never thought of doing a BA in Fine Art.' He said, 'Yes, apply.' So I applied to just down the road, the college there at Whitechapel and also to St. Martin's. I went to St. Martin's, and being a Londoner, having done my graduation in central London, have worked for London for so many years, I thought, 'Hmm, I like Central St. Martin's,' and, believe it or not, I got in. No age problem, got in and I did full-time fine art. Thank God it's not nowadays because I couldn't have afforded it today, but it was like a thousand a year or something back in the year 2001. So I did that for three years, and then at the end of that, having got my BA, they said, it was the woman who ran the Master's course, said, 'why don't you apply for the Master's course?', which is only two years there. So I did, and got in on the Master's course.

What's been so enjoyable is that I've met so many people on those two courses that I'm still in touch with from all over the world. One of my good friends, Jomi Kim comes from Kyoto. Another one from Seoul in Korea, and so on, around the world. And there's no age business, it's just artists, you are artists, and that's what I love. Of course I keep meeting artists, people I've known, and if you've been to St. Martin's, of course, where they had the fine art and MA in fashion on the same floor in that lovely old building that is now becoming Foyle's today, I think, or tomorrow; Foyle's new development. But we had these lovely studios. They were, I was just looking at these offices here, but the ones in Charing Cross Road were so knocked about but they were just full of character and that just suited me. As you worked your way up



you'd end up, you'd start in a multi-person studio and slowly towards the end of your MA you got your own studio, which was, you know, looking out over south Soho. It was a marvellous thing to do and I still keep in touch. As I am a Trustee of the CIWM I still keep in touch with that and the London and Southern Counties Centre (L&SCC) of CIWM. But the combination of fine art, I've found quite a few people in the waste management side who are also interested, maybe their spouses are, or their husbands are artists or something like this. You find this lovely continuum.

**LF: What an interesting connection.**

JF: Oh, it is lovely. But you see how it ties in, and I often think of dear old Mr Twidell and his love, because he was a very strict Greek scholar and he taught us Greek and so on, but he had this nice side of him about art. It's just that these little things happen along the way. It's like, you know, my wife's interest in social work and so on was fascinating to do that because she was a Soroptimist, you know, so you met the other leading women in different professions that way. It was very fulfilling.

Now can I just mention, I do feel I must pay tribute to so many people that I've worked with. As you go along, you work with people, I still keep in touch with the draughtsman who was at the family firm, who used to do the drafting of the drawings that I wanted done. Then you go on and you meet, funnily enough one of the brothers there my contemporary, he became a civil engineer and so on, supported my joining the civils, those sorts of things. Then the team, I've mentioned several of them at the GLC, people I really remember like Philip Patrick, but they were such good examples and most of them had been through the Second World War. Then I had to recruit staff, and it's nice that they shared this enthusiasm for what was going on. I think that was why we were a happy bunch of people, and the same in the London Waste Regulatory Authority. Also, throughout, people on the political side like Peter Black and Arthur Edwards, Peter Black was the Chair of the Public Health Services Committee. He was Conservative. Arthur Edwards and the Chair of the Public Health Services Committee, he was the Labour party, but they worked together. They both were so supportive of what I was trying to do. These are nice men and women that you meet along the way. Brian Marsh was Chairman of the London Waste Regulation Authority, from memory, Member for Hackney. Mrs Wykes was Member for Bromley. Again, they were so enthusiastic and they came to conferences, they took part in what was happening. These are such characters to help you along the way. And again, I mention Mr Higginson, I always remember Higgie was one of the officers in the GLC, and he's the expert, he was the expert on analysing all the waste that you get.

Now Higgie said to me in 1988, I lost my wife in 1987, and he said to me that summer, he said, 'John, why don't you stand to be the President of the Chartered Institution?' And what a nice thing to say, 'Now you go for that,' and I did because I'd been councillor for that for a while, and I succeeded in getting that. At the same time, going back to Trento and that meeting, that's where I met the international people and a whole host of people I got to know, and my wife got to know them too, in particular Håken Rylander who was the Swedish representative for the International Solid Waste Association. He said, 'John, you should think of your way forward to becoming President of ISWA,' which I found, again, it happened in the year. I was President of CIWM in 1990, but I became president of ISWA in, I think it was, 1998. So these groups of people, I became so friendly with groups from Denmark, and particularly the Netherlands. There was a marvellous man, Han Den Dulk, he was the President of the Netherlands' Association, who always had a strong tie with Great Britain because of the Wars, and he served in this country during the Second World War as a Dutch person.

So these people make such a difference along the way, and so you can see why. A slight digression: in the years 1995 through to 2000 I became very much involved in the need to get a Royal Charter for the Institution, and I shared this desire with our secretary at that time, Michael Philpott, and our Honorary Treasurer, who was Roger Hewitt - they're still both around - but we had to get the negotiations, and this is an interesting activity, how you negotiate with the Privy Council to get a Royal Charter. That took us something like three to four years to go through all the various systems because you have legal advisors; you're interviewed by the officer for the Privy Council; the representatives for the Department of the

Environment; you have to get backing from other institutions like the Institution of Civil Engineers, of which I am member, and the Institution of Mechanical Engineers, of which I am member, and so on. But it was, again, an experience to get a body of women and men who can be recognized as professionals and recognized in the sense, recognised by other people as being worthy of a charter.

**LF: I was going to ask you to say a little more about the implications of having a Royal Charter. What difference does it make in practice to a professional body?**

JF: It's very clear, and we knew this, it would enable people to join us knowing that they would become chartered because the word, it has a cachet, it has a recognition in this country. We are, I think, the only country that has such a system of charters, and of course they go way back, I think it's 600 years or so to chartered bodies, but it recognizes a certain standard of qualification. For example, when we were having the discussions, initially they said: 'Every one of your members, if you're thinking of becoming chartered, must have an honours degree.' Now that, actually, has changed a little bit because we said: 'We have many who are practical people who have never even got a degree,' at that stage - you know, the older men and some women. Now what has happened, we are now close to 50/50, men and women, because we're getting more and more women coming in under environmental specialties who have got Honours degrees but they're women and they want to be chartered, and they're bringing in this completely new thinking. For example, on the Centre Council of the L&SCC of CIWM now, London and some of the counties, I think we've got four men and four women.

**LF: So the gender balance has changed significantly?**

JF: Marvellously, and the charter made that difference on gender balance, on recognition of a certain standard of qualification, those are the main things that I can think of. Of course, we are over 100 years old, as you know from Lewis Herbert's history. Even on that though, they questioned us. I remember it being said: 'It doesn't matter if you're 200 years old unless you realize the responsibility.' One of the important ones we did bring in, and I'm so pleased, that's within the charter document, is you must have an international recognition. Well, we'd been working hard, certainly I had, with other colleagues, working hard in getting international recognition, and it was good that I could say, 'Well, J C Dawes in 1932 was a Founder Member of the International Organisation for Urban Cleansing, Technical Urban Cleansing.' He was a famous President of the old Institute of Public Cleansing. Then, jump forward to 1965, 1967 we had James Sumner, another OBE, another President of CIWM at that time, who was the Ministry of Health Inspector for Waste. Dear James, or Jim as he was known, he too became Vice-President of ISWA when it was being formed, and I'm sure it upset him, but he was due to become President and they voted in an American. [Laughs]. It happens, these bodies, you know, they voted in this American guy and James had retired then, and anyway. But it enabled us to say, when we were going for the charter, we've had these international connections way back to 1932 for goodness sake, we've always been interested, and we got the evidence and showed it to them. So that helped, and in our charter is the importance of our international development and reputation, and so on.

**LF: Just remind me which year the charter was awarded?**

JF: 2002, from memory. I can always check on that because, yes, that's right, because we had a special meeting, I think it was 2001 at Northampton to get the general council, because I had four resolutions to put to the general council at the Institute saying, you know, 'is this what we want?', and it was actually a special meeting, general meeting, of all the members. Funnily enough although we are now 7,000 strong, the actual voting we had then was less. We had 1,200 in favour and one against, that sort of voting. Twelve hundred in favour, two against or something. Some oddity, probably a mistake. But anyhow it was unanimous, virtually, and that enabled us to go back to the Privy Council and say, you know, 'We'd like...' So it was great because it does put a stamp, you're a chartered body. We were very pleased at that because you don't have to have the word 'chartered', because the Institution of Civil Engineers is a chartered body, that's why you're a CEng if you're a fellow, well a member of that body. That is interesting plus one other little factor that has come along that is of equal interest lately, has been the role of charity commissioners

because we are, as a body now, we are a charity, and in the last two or three years the Charity Commission has become much more careful about the way in which charities carry out their work. So while we're called "General Councillors", we're officially Trustees of a charity and that carries a whole host of responsibilities, which I'm very pleased with, being a charity and a chartered body these are equal responsibilities which we do try and keep alive; we have to keep alive to run the body properly. So that's an interesting conjunction of two well-known organizations, the Charities and the Privy Council. [Laughs] Interesting, isn't it?

**LF: You must be very proud to have been able to achieve that, or be able to be a major player in achieving that?**

JF: It was great! I always say, you know, my father was always interested, he was always interested in qualifications and so on because, I mean, he was very young really when he qualified, straight out of the Army, and two or three years later, working at home, that's how you did it then, you didn't have classes or anything to qualify as a chartered engineer then. I think, gosh, no wonder I followed, or wished to follow in his footsteps. But then I love thinking about my mother's artistic things because it's good, you take Jeff Cooper for example, Jeff loves art as well. You know, if we're abroad or somewhere we would always share, or if Mrs Cooper comes, you know we'll all go and see some art exhibition or other, and that gives it, it's another important dimension to your life, isn't it? Because, as you gather I haven't any children, we didn't have children, but if you have a very happy marriage, that's what matters, it's not the business of having children. Well, that's what we thought, so we were alright that way, you know. But I've got dozens and dozens of great nephews and nieces because my sister had two children. One of them became a cartographer / mathematician, he went to Cambridge and so on. So it's nice that, and of course Kathleen's family had lots of children, lots of children, and it's nice because they're all there. [Laughs].

**LF: So you have long birthday lists.**

JF: And wedding lists nowadays, and christening lists. [Laughs].

**LF: If you could look forward 50 years, 100 years, what changes might you anticipate?**

JF: We had a meeting the other night organized by the United Kingdom Environmental Law Association, well, they were involved. Anyhow, we were talking about what might be happening in 2050, for example, and do you know the outcome of that discussion, the final point was: Are we going to be subject to a pandemic because of the lack of interest in the quality of water, the effect of chemicals on groundwater and the infiltration of groundwater by those chemicals, and the cycling of micro-pollutants into drinking water? It's happening now and they are worried about it. Is that going to affect human beings both in developed countries and in developing countries? That was the thing, rather than will there be improvements in systems of transport and maybe energy from waste? We can improve and improve those systems, but are we forgetting about the water side of waste, and is rather too much discussion going on on the solid side because the community thinks about recycling and the waste that they throw out. They forget about what goes down the toilet and down the bath, and out of the factories and so on. This, to me, is something that is as important to keep our minds on the target about pollution control and so on.

**LF: Thank you very much, John.**

JF: It's a pleasure.

**LF: It's been a real pleasure to talk to you. Thank you so much for your time.**

JF: Oh well, it's been good.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]

**Further related resources:**

1. Finn L (intvr); Jones E M, Tansey E M (eds) (2016) *Coggins, Chris: transcript of an audio interview (23-Jun-2014)*. History of Modern Biomedicine Interviews (Digital Collection), item e2016106. London: Queen Mary University of London.
2. Finn L (intvr); Jones E M, Tansey E M (eds) (2016) *Cooper, Jeff: transcript of an audio interview (19-Jun-2014)*. History of Modern Biomedicine Interviews (Digital Collection), item e2016107. London: Queen Mary University of London.
3. Finn L (intvr); Jones E M, Tansey E M (eds) (2016) *Dennis, Barry: transcript of an audio interview (30-May-2014)*. History of Modern Biomedicine Interviews (Digital Collection), item e2016108. London: Queen Mary University of London.
4. Jones E M, Tansey E M (eds) (2015) *The Development of Waste Management in the UK c.1960-c.2000*. Wellcome Witnesses to Contemporary Medicine, vol. 56. London: Queen Mary University of London.