



John Denys Neale

John was born in Kings Heath Birmingham 11th October 1936, the son of Harold Denys, a policeman and Winifred Evelyn (née Javan). He was educated at Yardley Grammar School, and went on to do a student apprenticeship with the Signals Research and Development Establishment. He completed this in 1959 and went on to work for SRDE in Christchurch.

After leaving SRDE he worked for Decca Navigation and Plessey before moving to Scientific Furnishings in Chichester where he became Engineering Manager. The company was known for its laboratory glassware, but John had been recruited to help them diversify into electronics. His main responsibility was to develop printer and tape controllers for mainframe

computers.

In those early days, computers were independently designed by a number of companies, sometimes for a specific client. They all used different tape standards. This all changed forever in 1964 with the arrival of the IBM 360 which set a new hardware standard. In 1968 John recruited Ivor Smith to join him as Project Engineer at Scientific Furnishings and they started work on tape controllers.

The IBM 360 was so successful that most of their clients started to migrate towards it. The transition left them with a big headache – how to convert all their data from the old tape formats to the new standard. John recognised a golden opportunity and left Scientific Furnishings to set up his own company in October 1970, persuading Ivor Smith to join him. Initially they worked from John's living room in Rowlands Castle. John was later joined in the venture by Roger, his twin brother.

Their big break came when Phoenix Insurance decided to update to the IBM 360 from their old system. Once again they had no way of transferring their huge database from the old system to the new. The only way they could achieve this was by manually re-entering all the information. Since John understood both formats, he managed to persuade them that he could take on the task of automating the transfer. He was given (in those days) a huge order which he used as the basis to build his company, appropriately called Transdata Ltd.

John and Ivor saw other opportunities, and in 1972 Transdata competed with Texas Instruments in the early attempts at portable computers and held their own with an Executive Terminal. Much of the advertising and marketing was based on the James

Bond image of a 'Man in a briefcase', but the Model 305 Portable Transmission Terminal was a huge success

Transdata grew from its early beginnings to a successful company developing their own products, manufacturing, and servicing. It grew a sales organisation and soon John was chairman of a company with over 100 employees. They developed computer systems and successfully sold long service agreements to their blue-chip clients, building up a field service division. By the late 70's they had become one of the main players of the British computer industry

At one point, Transdata had a factory in Havant opposite IBM. John mischievously erected a sign announcing Transdata as 'The British Computer Company' which was clearly visible to the executives across the carriageway – complete with a large Union Jack. It was ironic that the company was eventually swept away, as were so many British computer companies, by the advent of the IBM PC in 1981

John was always fond of the sea, and had spent time in the RNR on minesweepers. In 1965 he happened to sail with a friend across the Solent in a 12 foot Firefly by torchlight. It was, by his own admission, a somewhat foolhardy adventure but the beer tasted good afterwards and his passion for sailing was kindled.

During the height of his success with Transdata, John met a fellow commuter in the buffet carriage on the daily train from Petersfield to Waterloo. They shared interests in sailing, food and good ales, and Chris Martin was to become a lifelong friend and fellow adventurer.

Chris owned a 27 foot sloop *Seagay* and they had many an adventure in the Solent and Channel. A fellow sailor recalls them going aground on Black Rock in the Solent, and as the water dropped away John busied himself in the galley. He served up a home made pea soup which he spiced up with some freshly chopped chillies. The soup was far too spicy to eat, but they eventually floated off and were none the worse for the experience

John eventually persuaded Chris that a larger boat would enable them to extend their cruising area, and in 1979 they jointly purchased *Werewolf*, a 40 foot wooden Buchanan sloop. For the next 15 years of ownership they cruised the Channel, Ireland and Spain accumulating adventures with the many friends who joined them. John enjoyed cooking on board, and Chris was a natural skipper once clear of the shallows. The arrangement served them well.

Those who were lucky enough to sail with them both will remember the continuous snacks of toast and pate, seafood salads and various other appetisers which appeared at regular intervals. There was always a good breakfast, lunch and evening meal and John would be sure to remind us that the sun had appeared over the yard arm with a small libation, elevenses up! Once, during a full gale at sea, John appeared in the companionway offering the anxious crew in the cockpit a slice of freshly-baked fruit cake and a hot drink. The effect on morale was immediate

There can be few who sailed with them who didn't experience an unintentional grounding at some point, usually on a falling tide. As the water receded and she started to settle on her side, Chris would don his black Wellington boots and disappear over the side with a fork and pan. Digging in the mud, he would soon unearth enough cockles or whatever other harvest he could gather from the seabed. John then took charge and a delicious spaghetti alle vongole would follow. To John, it was just another adventure.

In 1983 John was notoriously involved in the sinking of a Portugese fishing boat off Vilamoura as part of the crew of a boat belonging to a Dutch friend. As the boat started sinking, another fishing boat came alongside and noisily insisted on taking off a crew member to ensure the boat put into port. John cheerfully volunteered for this, and by the time the boat docked some hours later he had become an honorary brother to the Portugese crew, despite their lack of a common tongue. Such was his personality. Once released from arrest, the crew returned with John to Petersfield where they all dined on the story for some time.

In recent years, John enjoyed travel making the most of the boom in cheap airlines. His energy was seemingly boundless and belied his advancing years. Not many sixty-somethings take blind trips to the Steppes where it was minus 29 degrees, or live for several days in Greek bikesheds waiting for a ferry!

He continued to sail until this summer when his terminal illness was diagnosed, and his medication made him too weak to continue. He was admitted to Petersfield Hospital on 10th October and eventually jumped ship very peacefully during the first dog watch of 18th, ironically the day of his mothers funeral.

John is survived by his twin brother Roger and his younger sister Christine