# Selected quotes on ‘Old Boys’

## Talent meritocrats

INT: So, okay, so then I'm interested in how your- So, you went to medical school and at that point you were thinking that you were just going to have a conventional career as a doctor?

RES: Yes, I guess so. So, I went into internal medicine, hospital medicine essentially, got my post for my membership to the Royal College of Physicians. Then essentially, because I've been quite fast tracked-

INT: Yes, and can I just ask you about that and I'm inviting you to be immodest, but, yes was that just about unusual academic ability?

RES: Well, I do want to say it's unusual academic ability, but I had won a number of undergraduate prizes. So, I was clearly doing well.

I remember a really important moment, I think was a former boss of mine, must have been there three or four, bit longer maybe five years, maybe it was 10 years and I was chatting to him and I said something like, the sort of thing that you hear in the bank all the time as if there’s some sort of big brother overseeing everything you know, “That's not the way the bank does things.” Right, that's not the way the bank does things and he didn't quite say, “What the fuck are you talking about?” it wasn't far off that he said, “The bank is what we choose it to be basically, you are the bank. What are you doing?” That may well have been the best piece of career advice I had there really which is, yes, you're right, so there is a bank style of writing, it is called bankease but fuck that, because I think I can write in a way that's going to engage people and yes.

INT: I was going to ask I'm really interested in this generalist versus specialist thing as well, do you think that that, in terms of your rise through the bank, how do you think you demonstrated value added or why do you think that you were so successful? Was it about essentially proving a specialist knowledge and that that being a period as you mentioned perhaps with the Mervyn King side of things, that was being given more credence than perhaps previously and that you were sort of, that element of demonstrable expertise?

RES: I think there's a bit of that and I also think, again as chance would have it, that I think the way I was probably able to differentiate myself a little bit was when things went bad and we had crises which I have always welcomed because that's the window of opportunity opens up to reconfigure how things are both in the outside world and also internally. So, I'm quite good in that environment basically where the old is broken, people haven't yet established the new and I can start with a clean sheet of paper and say, “Let's orbit this planet rather than that planet.” The bank isn't necessarily very good at that, because it’s you know rightly, institutional slightly inertial and at least in central banking terms, maybe even in public policy terms, I quite like leaning in to that uncertainty and seeing it as a big opportunity to reconfigure and rethink, and that was quite helpful.

On being an ideational entrepreneur

I think in policy terms I probably would be seen as towards the entrepreneurial end of the spectrum by the Bank of England standards… Maybe it's the slight underdog in me which is definitely true right, probably wanted to challenge that a bit because group think is a real thing and the willingness to challenge especially the top, certainly the organisation that I went to, there was zero chance of doing that, zero chance of doing that, much better now.

Certainly I’m really, I’m very imaginative it’s one thing I can do is be really happy putting and pulling quite different things together

INT: Thinking about that period, would you say that that was the pinnacle of your career in terms of feeling influential and how directly were you plugged into X necessarily?

RES: Well, when I was invited into X, the answer to your question is yes, I do think it was the pinnacle in terms of influence when I was working there. I mean The Guardian ran something and they said who were the most influential people at X or generally in the government and I was in the list at the time. I think it was more, I wasn't actually very good at the actual day-by-day part of the job, when I stepped out and X said did I tell you this I can't remember, I had to leaving interview with X and he said, I said I didn't think I'd done it very well he said, “No you were a Rolls Royce in a Land Rover job.” Which is a nice thing to say, I thought it was quite nicely put. Because, what had happened is I was taken in to provide ideas and I did have a few, but halfway through my time there … but after about three months I produced some ideas and they'd like them, then X who was the adviser to X, took me aside and said, “Would you like my job?” My jaw fell to the floor, I watched him do it and to be frank I didn't want the job, but it wasn't something that you turned down. So, I took that on an that when I moved into the kind of Land Rover part of the job. In retrospect, I would have done much better to have stayed.

INT: The ideational part, yes.

RES: Because I was bad at the politics I was briefed against, I wasn't firm enough, again there is his problem too, I could often see the other side of the argument I remember arguing with X about X, X had produced, she was X and she had produced a paper that I thought was rather good and I said, “I think we should recognise this is rather good.” So yes sorry I’m not trying to hold you for a long time.

INT: No, really interesting. I want to take you, taking stock more of your entire career now, interested-

RES: Sorry, just the final thing is, just thinking, I remember how we got there. So I think in the end ultimately probably my ideas were more influential or my thinking was more influential than my actual direct involvement.

that I had a facility for explaining to a minister or gaining the trust of a minister because if you are sitting behind a minister in parliament and the opposition stand up and say, “Can the minister confirm X?” You have got to send a note or make a sign that says yes or no. The minister has to trust you at that point that he or she doesn't know what the background to it is, but unless you can confirm it, unless you could confirm X, the opposition will say the minister doesn't know what he's talking about and so on. So it is quite a subtle relationship with the minister but it is a one-to-one relationship rather than a public one… It is essentially judgement because at the level that you end up as a senior government lawyer you've got to know, you've got to be able to say, “Commonwealth section 437 says this.” By and large you have to have a sound factual basis for anything you say but government law is and I gave a couple of examples of which the Northern Ireland Protocol is one, in front of me here is an article I was reading just while I was waiting for you which is saying that Suella Braverman who says that we can override the Northern Ireland Protocol that her first advice was that the case was legally weak and I'm not of the slightest doubt that it was, but the judgement is whether it is so legally weak that it is improper to go ahead or whether it is within the permitted bounds of discretion which the courts will recognise…and I think what I was good at was telling them, “This is the boundary, of what you can do sorry but within that you can and should make your own political decision because parliament has given you that political decision. If it had been a purely legal expert decision they would have given it to a technocrat but they want you to make a political decision.” So I certainly had much more than some of my colleagues a political sense

RES: I think somebody who doesn’t rebel hard at some point in their life is extremely unlikely to emerge as an original thinker.

INT: That’s interesting.

RES: So then I went into a career of fund management and you probably don’t know anything about fund management but if I try and soundbite it, obviously you were doing analysis on companies and trying to figure out what’s going to happen to the macroeconomics and so on and so forth and what is this worth is the current price or the share price cheap or whatever. But you’re also trying to work out what other people think and if everybody else has already done the work and come to a conclusion is it likely that they’re all wrong. There’s a big premium on being original. Equally if you’re right 55% of the time that’s genius level you know you become George Soros or SAC or Damian Lewis in Billions. Most of us if we have a good fund management career are right 52% of the time. I mean if you’re wrong 48% of the time you have to be able to live with that. But you’re constantly thinking about what’s going to happen next and what does everybody else think is going to happen next. Where is the consensus and am I against the consensus or am I with the consensus?

INT: But I’m really fascinated in this original thinking idea, do you think that your capacity to do that was located – do you think that Eaton -

RES: I think it’s mostly located at home in the first instance. You know it was expected from an early age around the dinner table. My father’s most damning remark being “I’m not sure you’ve really thought that through properly”.

INT: So be exacting but also being able and willing to think outside the box?

RES: Yeah. And then I think you know in subsequence corporate life I definitely and significantly under achieved because I was often a Casandra figure.

INT: What do you mean by that?

RES: In corporate life if you tell people that they’re much loved project looks idiotic and it’s going to fail when everybody else is already lining up to say yes sir no sir three bags full sir, then that doesn’t make you very popular. But when in a year’s time you’re proven right that makes you even less popular. And I’m afraid that happened quite a lot to me.

INT: So a sort of reputation for telling them -

RES: We were the awkward squad.

INT: Right interesting.

RES: On the other hand as a non-exec director that’s really basically the job description. You’ve got to ask the difficult questions and keep asking them until you get an answer that makes sense. You’ve got to think outside the box when everybody is deciding they’re going to do X you’ve just got to be willing to say hang on a minute have you really thought this through properly. So I’m probably more professionally fulfilled today than I have been for 25 years.

RES: You were, not, it was all on merit, it wasn’t any sort of year, and you went there and did your A levels in your first year, GCSEs. You, they were so casual about it because they said if you were clever enough to come here, you can, you didn’t have to revise. In fact to this day I remember sitting next to this guy X, grandson of a legendary newspaper editor, I remember he was a very dominant fellow.

INT: Yes.

RES: And he said to me when we were doing English Language, I think he was sitting next to me in the exam hall and the first question was précis the following passage and he turned round to me and said, “What the fuck is a précis?” He’d never seen a paper before. Condense and keep the meaning it’s okay, so it was that sort of thing. It was quite liberal.

RES: And in that, and then the philosophy of getting rid of GCSEs or A levels in your first term is then you spent a year or two just studying for the sake of it without any exam thought. And you’d come back to what you had to do for a curriculum, you know. You know there were some very, very clever kids there who, you know could have done A levels aged 14 if they wanted to, but they waited until they were 16 and do it then, you know but.

…

RES: Yes, I mean I’ve never had a master plan.

INT: Yes.

RES: But you sort of take opportunities when they arise, but yes you make your own luck in a way.

INT: Yes.

RES: You know, it’s a bit like, out of the blue X asked me to represent him. You know, but I used to manage his tours and I think I did pretty well. Although, you know I was fairly loose character in those days, but you know he must have seen something in me.

INT: Yes.

RES: Because he was very straight indeed, and I’m still doing it 35 years later you know.

INT: Yes, amazing.

RES: He’s changed most other aspects of his life so. There is something then you say, “Oh right, well that opportunity’s arisen so let’s try and make the most of that.” It was a bit precarious if I’m going to capitalise any of these things, and it was when starting X, which became quite a big business you know. Turning over X at one stage, you know but it was learning it on the hoof. You know, but with very again, talented friends you know, X, you know I shared a house with X when we first came to London and X, you know these are and we were just kids you know, really.

RES: You know for X, you know you’re dealing with very high powered people now you know, and on your board and who you are dealing and so I found that, it’s where my skill laid, and I think in terms of sensibilities I just think, you know I just think I’ve probably got quite good taste. And I can spot a good piece of writing or a good, in the same way I love visual arts, you know I love buying pictures or attending at galleries or doing all that sort of stuff.

INT: And that’s interesting, about taste. I mean, where do you think, because obviously I mean that’s probably, I can imagine you know having to, having to sort of spot, talent spot to some extent has been important, I mean where do you-

RES: Yes, yes but I think that is. It’s a bit like if you’re an art expert, you can spot a real Rembrandt from a fake Rembrandt.

INT: Yes.

RES: In a way if you go and see, I was telling somebody this story last week, when first seeing X actually, you know X.

INT: Yes.

RES: I remember I was coming back from a weekend, they were on at Deptford and they were-

INT: Yes.

RES: And then somebody, X told me and said, in the late 80s I suppose, he said you should see these guys, there’s a bit of heat around them. So you know, flying I was exhausted, I went down there and saw these guys and two days later I signed them up and they’re still here.

Well somebody once said that the key, the key to editing is being comfortable with making other people look good and I think, I think you do have to be temperamentally comfortable with that… I think you’ve got to be, if you’re talking about written journalism you’ve got to be pretty comfortable with language and how you handle it. You don’t have to be Proust but you’ve got to know how to condense stuff, how to find the, you know how to find the guts, the guts in a piece.

INT: Yes.

RES: Even if [unclear 00:40:00] not necessarily news and obviously you’ve got to know what to put in the top line if news editing is what you’re doing. My editing was mostly not news or at least until kind of towards the end of my career I suppose. What else? I mean it’s quite, it’s quite powerful. I mean it’s quite influential. You know it matters, you know you choose, you know I mean people discuss journalism in terms of objectivity and balance and neutrality and I can understand why they do but they often omit to say all journalism involves a judgement.

INT: Yes and that

RES: Everything one writes is a judgement. It’s a selection. You know that as well as I do.

INT: Yes absolutely.

RES: And therefore as it were you know it’s, being an Editor is quite, it may not look powerful but actually it is quite, it is quite influential I think.

INT: That’s fascinating. Do you think, where do you think, I know it sounds like a strange question but where, where does your sense of your own good judgement come from I suppose? I mean do you think that’s about, do you know what I mean you know sort of is that something that you were confident that you had or do you think it was something that you realised through others telling you you had it if you see what I mean?

RES: I don’t think I can give you a very decisive answer to that question. I think it’s probably a mixture of the two. I’m aware that people generally think I have good judgement.

INT: Yes.

RES: I’d been in Brussels five years and by that time Peter Stoddard, my old friend, had become the editor and he and I had dinner in London and he said, “I’d really like you back in London” and I said, “That’s fine, Kay, my wife, would quite like to come back and I think I’ve done as much as I can do there. What you don’t do in five years you can’t really do and you know I might as well come back and do something else” but I then said naturally kind of, “What have you got in mind?” At this point he said, “Well to be perfectly frank I’m a bit vague about that. I’m not quite sure what it is you can do when you come back but I’d like you back anyway.” So I slightly irritated at this point in the conversation said, “Well why is it you want me back?” and he said, “I want you back for your judgement.”

INT: Interesting.

RES: And I think that was probably, I think that was a probably sincere remark and so and when you’re managing editor which is probably the most powerful job I did on the paper, it’s power is, the power of managing editor on a big, old fashioned print paper is or print and online paper is slightly like MI5. When you succeed nobody knows about it, when you fail everybody knows about it.

…

RES: Well I’d accept it [the idea of being elite]. I’d accept it with some reluctance because it’s almost certainly going to be used as a pejorative term sooner or later by somebody. I mean I, I mean I hold views that, I hold the view sorry that broadly speaking societies however plural and however rich the opportunities in them, there will always be some sorting by talent.

…

RES: I mean was, can I think of examples of class consciousness among the boys which is what I think is a question you’re going to ask me? I remember a very posh cricket player in my house discussing who was going to get into, not with me, must have just been overhearing this conversation I think, who was going to get into the first cricket 11 and he said X who was a good cricketer, “will not get into the first cricket 11 because he’s a peasant.”

INT: Wow, okay.

RES: And so class consciousness was certainly present here and there but I think, I hope I’m not colouring my own experience here but I think I had learned to be, I had been taught to be by my parents to be very wary of this kind of thing and there was a lot of, there was a lot of messaging from teachers about not being intellectually arrogant.

INT: Interesting, okay.

RES: A lot, I mean a great, that I remember a lot, a great deal.

INT: What was the, and when you, what do you mean by that, that you, about being open minded? I mean what did that look like can you remember?

RES: Well firstly not showing off intellectually. Not kind of crushing other people intellectually even if you thought you had a superior argument and maybe you did. You know don’t ram it down their throat. Don’t overdo it. You’re very, you know you’re very lucky to have got here at all. Make, you know make proper use of it roughly speaking.

INT: what did you think about yourself?

RES: I’m often asked this question particularly by students and I don’t think I had a thought. I was on a rail track and somebody else was driving the train and I was a passenger and I wasn’t thinking very hard about what stations I was calling at

INT: Do you see yourself and have you actively cultivated a sense of being able to exert influence and actually change Britain in various ways?

RES: I don’t cultivate it but it does cultivate me. Now does this mean I’m spotting that I’m cultivating it? This is a private conversation so there aren’t rules. X, when the X was considering X, he and I had a very long dinner about that subject because he trusted me and I knew about the sector. I said actually yes in order to avoid X… I think on balance that’s an important thing to do and a week later he announced it to colleagues. He no doubt had lots of conversations with lots of people but that was interesting.

X was trying to X by dividing it into lots of different smaller units and I turned him around in the sense of - This was back to knowing what his objective was, he just had the wrong answer. I did a report on X in X and the organisation of X which he backed away from. Okay, that was part of my situations because I was chair of the pay review body but none the less it was influential.

INT: Yes, that’s interesting. People particularly in the world of politics have sought you out for counselling really.

RES: Yes. I don’t actively seek people out but they do seek me out. I’ve got a rather unusual cocktail of skills which we haven’t talked about at all which people therefore find me quite interesting and balanced because I listen to them. [Laughter] I don’t talk at them.

INT: Yes it’s fascinating but you recognise that you’ve had that influence. I know it’s a strange question but do you enjoy that? Does that bring you a sense of satisfaction to have had influence?

RES: Yes, it does. Enjoy is a funny word. It satisfies me. This is where my little bit of arrogance does come in in a sense I think I’m quite analytical and I think I can think through things quite clearly and if people tell me what their objectives are I can tell a little bit about what might be a sensible way to go about achieving those objectives. Help them blah, blah, blah.

…

INT: When you say your background, do you feel it’s because essentially you could talk to ordinary people?

RES: Yes, yes. I’m extremely good. I’ve discovered a bit too late in life I’m extremely good at talking to anybody. Sorry listening to anybody and not talking to anybody, listening to anybody and they talk to me and they open up to me for reasons that I’m not quite clear about. I served in my father’s shop every weekend and all sorts of people came in and they didn’t merely come in just to buy stuff they came in for a chat as well. My father was very good at it and I learned it from him and they bought a bit more if you chatted to them nicely and that pleased my father. [Laughs]

INT: That’s fascinating. Have you ever tried to distil what that is? Is that just social skills?

RES: I actually have distilled it because I ended up doing a bit of coaching in my later life. The technique is in some of the books but it’s to be interested in the other person and not yourself. Well you go to loads of conferences no doubt and you have that stilted conversation over coffee and the key thing is to ask about them and not particularly about yourself. When they do that they start telling you things whatever about themselves, about the issues that’re confronting them and you grunt at the time and say yes at the right time and they continue to talk etc., etc.

INT: Just on that is that learnable or do you think that’s- ?

RES: I think you can be better at it than other people because for some people it’s very hard not to go back to talk about yourself. [Laughs]

INT: Yes. For you though it’s linked to your background. It’s something that you learned fairly early in life.

RES: It was natural rather than I learned it. It was what my father did and therefore what I did. It would never have crossed my mind to do anything else; I didn’t learn it.

INT: Yeah. I think that’s key.

RES: Life experience and obviously making it natural makes you better at it I guess.

INT: Yes. So for you thinking about how you’ve been able to reach where you’ve got to that’s really a key element for you in terms of the success you’ve had, that capacity through listening and to be somewhat humble in terms of how you respond to others, it’s actually allowed you to gain more information and therefore a better picture of how things work.

RES: And that’s the O-Level if you like and the A-Level, to use old fashioned language; the A-Level is then to actually understand the other guy’s point of view and therefore turn that into win-wins. So I’m one of the few- It’s possible somebody else claims they also- I’m one of a few people who are appointed to a pay review body by both the Labour and Tory governments because they tended to, on re-appointment, just move you off and that’s because I took time and trouble to understand their viewpoint and work out- Some would say this is being actually too manipulative and lacking your own values but to work out how to frame things in a way that would take my agenda forward but also take their agenda forward, so a classic win-win, so turning that listening into understanding and then manipulating, if one’s being really horrible, the situation to achieve those ends.

The first skill I think is back to the thing I think I am quite good at which is the emotional intelligence side. I cause boards to work as teams and I do that by seriously hard work in terms of making sure everybody is on board and talking to them a lot etc., etc. I’m quite good at ideas and therefore I can lead the strategic direction of the organisation without appearing to because I’m not upfront with it. I plant seeds in people’s minds and watch them come back and I run effective meetings. So people are staggered that my meetings never over-run; they come to a conclusion and they come to the conclusion that everybody’s supportive of.

RES: Well, I think one thing people always said about me is that I'm good at seeing the point, and mind you there are two kinds of intelligence. There are some very intelligent people who complicate things enormously [laughs] and probably see things that I don't see but emerge with somebody or other that is so complicated that only they probably can understand it and a few others. And then there’s simplifying intelligence which tries to produce what is the point in as simple and straightforward a way as possible.

People have said that I'm good at that which has its negatives, and obviously I think I partly got that genetically from the lawyers on my mother’s side of the family but I did have a double first in Cambridge philosophy. That must have helped a bit. I'm not being modest there. I think I have what is highly valued, and certainly in the UK, a good sense of humour and people find that can get you quite a long way in the UK actually.

INT: In terms of what- being able to build relationships?

RES: Yes. And, thirdly, people have always said that in some ways I'm a good leader. I'm very decisive. I make up my mind about things quickly and clearly

…

RES: I think I'm not afraid to challenge received ideas and somebody once described me as traditional but unconventional which I liked, my wife thought was true.

I’m different. I’m clever in a different way…I just have a totally different brain. And I have a very mathematical brain as well. So, I’m very very logical…Yeah I’m a really good problem solver. If you give me a really complex problem, I will solve it.

Yes most people panic when they’re in a terrible situation and I, in some ways, I relish being in a tight spot because, you know, Iøve got to get out of it, and I find it satisfying when I did get out of it, IN A PERVERSE KIND OF WAY

‘I’m a warrior…nothing frighthens me, noting fazwes me, and I will stand up to anybody, irrespective of who they are

I mean two things change the fortunes of that business. The first of which was, selling Ford trucks on a postcard, and I'm not joking. Yeah, we managed to get hold of a database of fleet owners and actually do the research which told us when they had last bought new vehicles: who from, why? Shared that with Ford Motor Company. Ford Motor Company let us do a pilot for about 25,000 quid I think at the time, and we were selling then 50grand trucks, by actually going to the fleet owner? and saying, this is the offer next time you want to buy a track, Ford will duuuuddu… and so with the result, yes, postcards were coming back and we were selling truck. Uh, and that ended up as actually about 7,000,000 pounds of business at the end. But it was like a, it's like snowball. You know, it just snowballed and snowballed, but the second thing. And we were successful at it by really using our imaginations more than anything else. And the 2nd and introducing computing early, actually, with databases and so on, which in those days of course, um, weren’t really top of everybody's minds. Because data rules, as you know, and nobody had really woken up to the fact in those days

## Scaffolding specialness

INT: I mean it sort of sounds like though, in the various that you were doing, you were already quite senior or you were in quite influential positions in whatever these organisations you were working in. Is that right?

RES: Yes. You know, but not because I particularly wanted it but there is some statistic, you know, that there are more tall white men named John in the United States who are CEOs than there are women who are CEOs. You know, there is this thing about being tall, being white, being privately educated, you know, all of these things, being male, is something that makes it very easy for people to become leaders because you’re almost born into it. You know, it’s a bit like- you know, they say about Eton and Oxbridge, you know, you’re- or people say you’re born with a silver spoon in your mouth but you’re almost born into that position of privilege, you know, whether you seek it or not.

INT: But that’s fascinating to me. But unpick that a bit with me. So, it’s almost that you’re explaining- it’s almost like you’re saying it happened to you without any- without you having any agency or without you having any intentionality.

RES: No, it wasn’t because I didn’t have agency because I’m- you know, I suppose I’m quite determined in things I want to do and I want to succeed in the things that I want to do, and I work very hard at the things that I’m interested in [unclear 00:35:58] work, right? So, you know, it’s not that you don’t put in the effort but it’s not that I was- you know, and I’ve worked in organisations where the monetary reward is very low, so I’m not doing it for money and in fact the opposite but it’s- but I do think it is easier and you are trained for it to a certain extent.

INT: I suppose one of the other key questions that we are interested in is you know, so you describe not necessarily feeling like you fitted in there, but do you think that the school provided you with anything that's been useful for the rest of your life in terms of whether that's academic or non-academic skills, dispositions, attributes?

RES: Yes I do. The way I phrase it to myself is that when I reached about the age of 16, I had done very well academically up to that point, 11 GCEs and that sort of stuff and there was doing quite well. Then the way I describe it to myself is that I went off the rails, in retrospect that is a silly way to describe it, but what happened was I basically, I was bored with doing science A levels and so I did, I edited a house magazine, we produced a house magazine, I starred in the house play of the I was Ernest in the importance of being Ernest, we had personal tutors who were, one of them took us through The Ring Cycle and of course in Renaissance painting and I was also doing quite a lot of painting myself actually because we were allowed to, it wasn't compulsory to do all these sports, and indeed the other possibility was joining the cadets Corp and I didn't have to do that. So I think the answer is in those terms Eton gave me a great deal of freedom to undertake a whole range of activities that I wouldn't have done, and I think it did give me, yes, a sense of confidence in dealing with the outside world. I mean when I went to Sussex I was not bashful about letting people know I'd been to Eton, and firstly I thought I ought to be, but I did tell one or two people and when I saw how they reacted which was usually very, I thought they would react unfavourably but usually it was quite the reverse, so yes, I did feel it gave me, it both was an advantage in terms of reputation but also an advantage in terms of confidence and ability to talk, to articulate, have confidence one’s own abilities and so on despite the fact that within the Eton context itself I didn't feel that self-confident.

INT: The other question I'm interested in in terms of that question of the influence of the school, is your sense of your future when you were there, I don't know if you recall but this sense of whether there was bound up in the sense of freedom that Eton was encouraging, that there was also a sense of initiating a sense in you of a particular destination in life, an influential-

RES: A sense of entitlement?

INT: No not entitlement, more an ambition and a sense that I am in an environment where I am being encouraged to see that I could get to wherever I want in life.

RES: Groomed to be a part of the elite?

INT: Yes.

RES: Yes is the answer, yes I did feel that. I did feel that I knew, I thought I would do well in whatever I chose and I would get to the top and I was, so I was not only ambitious but I also had the confidence to feel that I would fulfil those ambitions.

INT: And why was there such an emphasis on classics do you think?

RES: Because they felt that was the right sort of preparation of the brain. And I think the emphasis was on the brain rather than on feelings or anything like that. For people who were expected to run the world. Or anyhow run the UK... I think it was just an assumption. That’s what we would be doing.

would do essays like one did it university, individual essays which we would discuss and he would take me through them and say, “Well, it’s all very interesting but you haven't said at the beginning what you're trying to say.” and those lessons were once which I undoubtedly absorbed and I wouldn't have said swagger I would have said it was confidence that I could express myself on complicated issues by setting out at the beginning instead of which is my tendency, to plunge in and not tell the reader what I was talking about.

It was much more kind of overtly competitive, but that was okay, and it was-, they really, you know, they did encourage and champion free thinking, and at the time, it was this era of that school, they really (pause), yeah, they were-, they really encouraged kind of (pause), they liked people who I guess we're different or-, not different, but kind of thought differently. They encouraged uniqueness in a way that, you know, I think was quite special for a school, and so. So yeah, so I really-, I found the environment very stimulating intellectually, and I really enjoyed (pause) like for me, that male environment really worked kind of well, I think it brought out (pause). But it definitely trained me for the rest of my life, because, you know, you go from this girl’s school where everybody’s very polite to this boy’s school where, you know, it's quite rough, I mean not rough but, you know, there’s much more aggression and much more of a competitiveness and things like that. And so, I kind of learnt at a young age how to navigate this, yeah, and how to thrive in that sort of environment, either way I don't think I would have at the girl’s school.

RES: And you know to the extent where because both my parents were academics the idea that I would not go to Oxford even from the age of seven or eight years old was not even contemplated.

INT: Brilliant. Well I want to talk a bit about -

RES: The only question was would I get a scholarship to Oxford that was the question in mind and may be which subject I might read.

…

RES: Well I got a scholarship so I was in college which meant there was a lot of other very clever boys there. And there was competitive reading from the age of 13 when I arrived. You know people had shelves of literature and talked about it. And you know you were just expected to outshine all the opponents and the aristocrats who were all in the other houses.

INT: And a question I suppose even within that environment of the scholars, was it about a sort of emphasis on working really hard or was it more a sort of competition to be more spontaneously the cleverest if you see what I mean?

RES: There was emphasis on results it was an emphasis on reading widely and thinking widely. And that was as much from the teachers as it was from the peers.

But I kind of rebelled against the place most of the time I was there rusticated once and kicked out at the end but only kicked out after I’d got a scholarship to Oxford.

INT: And what did that look like was it just you sort of breaking rules?

RES: Breaking rules and ignoring this that and the other.

INT: Do you think weirdly the stuff you were saying about thinking outside the box or sort of being willing to be an original thinker, do you think that at all was something that was fostered through Eaton or the fact -

RES: I think some aspects of it were amplified by Eton because Eton does give you because it’s so upper itself inevitably that exceptionalism that sense of having been somewhere different and special. You know most people emerge from Eaton for one reason or another pretty articulate and even if they can’t string an argument together they are nevertheless willing to debate.

we’re going to kind of roll with them and we’re gong to you know our concentration is on making them learn and making them think and so on. So what was distinctive about it was that it really cared about how people thought.

INT: That’s interesting. So what, describe what you mean by that? Is it, is that in terms of you know one size fits all or a cultivation of the mind sort of?

RES: Oh no, no certainly the latter. Oh no absolutely cultivation of the mind.

RES: Yes I would say that absolutely applied to Winchester. I mean you know there was a vast variety of things you could do. I spent quite a lot of time in the Art School doing sculpture and a certain amount of painting I think. I liked that, I you know enjoyed it. It did a fair amount of sport but I was never a kind of, I was a competent sportsman at a few things but nothing that, I was never going to get into teams. Oh I did get into the shooting 8, I’d forgotten about that. In those days of course there was a core you know people playing baby soldiers and we did that. I think that was compulsory for your first few years and I don’t think it was compulsory right through and that involved going on a shooting, there was a shooting range quite close. Winchester is the home of the Green Jackets and there was a shooting range not very far away which I think belonged to them and we used it and that’s a rather

So it was the niche of finding a subject I was very good at and I was very good at it.

INT: That’s an interesting thing. What was the ethos around that? Some people have said to us that those schools were very good at was finding what you were good at and supporting you in it.

RES: Yes and I think that’s true. I’m not supporting you very well in the things you weren’t good at.

INT: Yes, yes. How did that play out? Was that about people, particular teachers, was it about an ability that you had, a natural aptitude in maths and then, I don’t know, putting you forward for things or- ?

RES: Both. Obviously I had a natural aptitude. I don’t think that the level I reached in maths you could get there without some degree of natural aptitude but I also had teachers who inspired is too a big word but certainly motivated me and interested me in the subject and there were a group of four mathematicians at St Paul’s who were all very good who he basically got to Oxbridge by nurturing us and etc., etc. Two of them got scholarships to Oxbridge.

Sport playing a major part and the heroes were the people who were in the teams. But if you weren’t good at it and you wanted to write poetry or collect butterflies or something, providing you did the normal amount of school work everybody let you get on with it, both the masters and the other boys. People were not persecuted. It was a great sense of sort of freedom and civilisation actually.

INT: It's interesting, just on that, one thing- we’ve interviewed people, already quite a few who’ve been to Eton and other Clarendon schools, I suppose one of the things they’ve mentioned- I'd be interest in your reflections- is along those lines but a sense that the school tried to bring out whatever it was that you were interested in and tried to support and cultivate it, but that the idea of what that could be was fairly broad.

RES: Yes. I think that’s what I was saying. You were at liberty to go and do what you wanted and that was encouraged in the sense of your interests. There were lots of societies and at that period the prestige of Eton was such that you could invited- any leading politician would come down to the Political Society to give a talk, for instance, and the same happened in the Arts and other areas as well.

RES: Yes. You could be no good at sport but if you were amusing, intelligent and charming and you'd have lots of people who wanted to be friends with you or be friends with lots of people.

On his own intelligence at school – actively chose to socialize with ‘less intelligent’

RES: My father took a rather unusual- not a unique line but because he knew Eton very well having been there and having been a master there during the war he didn't want me to go into college which is the highest that the scholars go into which, say, Boris Johnson went into. I was down for what’s called [unclear 00:24:19] which is the rest of the school, which is 1100 boys as opposed to 70 in college so I was not in the same house as the other scholars of my year. He thought it was much better to be with a more mixed bag of people as regards intelligence because I think he thought, rightly, that you're not going to spend your life just with very intelligent people. It's important to be able to get on with people with different sorts of intellectual ability.

I have always believed actually that Cheltenham as I knew it was a classic example of comprehensive education. Now what do I mean by that? I mean actually that whatever you were good at was celebrated. You could pursue whatever it was, and it didn't matter actually whether it was needle work or wood work, or whether actually it was the classics. And for me, that's what comprehensive education should be. Yes, I know that it was in actually in a sort of closed environment, but I would love to see the best of what we saw actually transferred into the wider educational environment.

INT: So you found a good school like you got a lot out of it, you felt like they nurtured you as an individual?

RES: Very much so, yeah.