James Watt Dinner: acceptance

I am immensely honoured to be joining the ranks of the most eminent engineers of Scotland in the Engineering Hall of Fame. In reality, the honour recognises the many engineers that I have had the privilege of working with during my lifetime at Wolfson Microelectronics. We have, I am proud to say, contributed to that most tremendous engineering achievement that is microelectronics which are fundamental to our way of life today. Since my earliest professional life I have always been interested in applying my knowledge of physics to real world problems and joining Edinburgh University's new industrially focused Microelectronics Institute in 1970 was a perfect opportunity. Initially providing technology and custom solutions for others, as many of you will know, we branched out to form an independent design company in 1985 which we developed into a fully-fledged international semiconductor product company quoted on the London Stock exchange in 2003.

Fortune favours the brave as we successfully addressed the expanding markets in the Far East and USA at an early stage to become suppliers to many major Japanese, Taiwanese and Korean customers and notably, Microsoft for their Xbox games console and Apple for their revolutionary iPOD. [*anecdote on Xbox meeting*] But luck also played a part as our low power products were ideally suited to the emerging portable digital devices that we are all familiar with now. Ironically, these digital products require analog signal processing to interface to humans, the technology that we had focused on. Starting with voice recorders and navigation devices our products were integrated into a host of applications such as music players, cameras, games consoles and most importantly mobile phones which are the major driver for the market today. At present, I am pleased to say the world's leading phones have a number of our chips inside.

Although the company was acquired by the US company Cirrus Logic in 2012, our long term competitor, the merging of the companies' technologies and products has provided a world leading enterprise that retains a strong engineering team in Edinburgh: and incidentally is currently led by a former Wolfson employee.

As I said, in being recognised today, I have been influenced and supported by many, but I would like to mention two who have been pre-eminent. First Jim Reid who joined the Institute as a young engineer and was a co-founder of the company. Jim was the engineering powerhouse that ensured our products passed muster even for the most demanding customers in the world. [*anecdote on Samsung lock in*] Jim sadly died recently but his contribution was immense. The second is John Carey, also no longer with us but it was his guidance and challenge that gave me the confidence to achieve what I have. John a British engineer, was one of the original Fairchildren from Fairchild Semiconductors who initiated the whole semiconductor industry and had several successes in the US founding AMD and Integrated Device Technology. He had enormous experience and mentored me in successfully developing Wolfson. [*anecdote on John's input at the pricing meeting*]

In conclusion, I should like to say that I have tremendous satisfaction from the success of Wolfson and Cirrus, but my overriding satisfaction is with the continuing eco system of microelectronics engineering that has been created in the local community and Scotland more widely. Much of the inward investment of international manufacturing companies has evaporated as they failed to establish product ownership locally. At a rough assessment there are now about 1000 former Wolfson engineers working in the microelectronics ecosystem in Edinburgh with others running significant companies further afield. Long may it continue with many new companies following suit in the future.

A D Milne