

Appreciation of Peter Denyer FEng

Peter Denyer was born in Littlehampton, West Sussex, and studied electronics at Loughborough University where he earned first class honours. Having married Fiona Reoch in 1977, he moved to Scotland where he did a PhD at Edinburgh University while working for Ferranti Defence Systems and later Wolfson Microelectronics.

At that time I was running the Silicon Technology and CCD Research at RSRE and met Peter for the first time to discuss CCD and CMOS imagers. Even then, well before its time, Peter was convinced that CMOS was the route to low cost imaging. Besides being a thoroughly nice fellow, he was an enthusiastic and talented young man, determined eventually to commercialise his research. He showed early interest in company start-ups, being co-founder and Director of Denyer-Walmsley Microelectronics Ltd, set up to commercialise filter designs. In 1980 Peter became a lecturer at the University of Edinburgh, where he ran a series of research projects and held multiple consultancies. In 1986 at the age of 33, he became the youngest professor at the University of Edinburgh when he was appointed Professor (Advent Chair of Integrated Electronics), and in 1989 his team announced the world's first single-chip CMOS video camera, which he and his team developed commercially, setting up VLSI Vision Ltd (VVL), to maintain the rights over the fruits of their research, expanding to open US offices in California and New Jersey.

He was truly a pioneer in bringing CMOS technology to mass produced imagers, from the "Barbie-cam" to early CMOS imagers for mobile phones and games. Five years later, he floated VVL, the first Scottish university spin-out to be listed on the London stock exchange – with a value of £25m and in 1999, he sold the company, aimed at developing CMOS image sensor technology commercially, to ST Microelectronics, based in Geneva and still providing millions of electronic image devices to mobile phone manufacturers around the world. Then, in the first decade of the 21st century he was a serial entrepreneur and an angel investor, setting up or advising numerous Scottish hi-tech businesses and expressing great pride in having created more than 100 jobs in Scotland. He gave lots of his time to support small companies and industry in Scotland, serving on a variety of bodies and giving time, advice and funds.

Among his collaborators were Dr David Renshaw and Chinese scientists Dr Lu Mingying and Dr Wang Guoyo. In 2008, the four were honoured with the Rank Prize for their pioneering 1990s work to develop mobile phone cameras. He also received a Queen's Award for Technology his work on CMOS. Later he was chairman of MicroEmissive Displays and Rhetorical Systems, which he co-founded and which was later sold to a US firm. He also retained an honorary chair at Edinburgh University and served on the board of the ERA Foundation.

It was my pleasure to know Peter through all those years, to support his well-deserved nomination to Fellowship of The Academy, and occasionally to work professionally with him, as for example in the ties we forged between MED and CDT in Cambridge when I was President and COO in 2000.

I recall with particular pleasure a visit in 2006 to Edinburgh to see one of his companies, where we detoured to the base of one of the supports of the Forth Rail Bridge, to take photographs and admire its majesty.

Peter Denyer was a talented engineer, a fine yachtsman, an insightful colleague, and a pleasure to be with. He is sorely missed by his many friends and colleagues.

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He is survived by his wife Fiona, daughters Kate and Kristy, his parents and brothers Geoff and Barry.

Born April 27, 1953, and died tragically young of cancer on April 22, 2010.

Daniel V McCaughan FREng, 2012