

Institution of Agricultural Engineers

Contribution to the Land Based Sector 2014

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Being born in Birmingham in October 1951, a life in Agricultural Engineering was not the most obvious future career for the young Richard Danby. However, when the family moved to Boddenham in Herefordshire, the interest in farming and in all things mechanical soon took hold.

Even then Richard had a keen interest in electronics and when the time came to decide on a university course it was a close run thing between electronics and agricultural engineering. Agricultural Engineering won the day and Richard enrolled at the National College of Agricultural Engineering in Silsoe in 1971, graduating in 1974. Richard made the most of his time at Silsoe and of the cultural exchanges with the teacher training college in Bedford where he met his future wife Rosemary.

The summer vacations were spent working on a farm in Herefordshire and the combine he was driving was equipped with a strange looking wooden box, fitted with an antiquated meter and a couple of switches which was an early grain loss monitor. The engraved name plate on the box gave the supplier as being 'RDS Agriculture' in Woodchester, Gloucestershire.

An unsolicited letter of application to RDS enquiring about possible employment was dismissed by the company secretary but was rescued from the bin by the company founder, Jim Brown and Richard was summoned for interview and promptly appointed. RDS at that time was a marketing and sales organisation operating from a chicken shed, with it's main product being a hydraulic trailer weighing system – still the basis of the company's main product range today. The potential benefits of electronics were recognised with the only electronic product, the Combine Grain Loss Monitor being manufactured locally in a disused chapel by a group of moonlighting engineers from a large defence electronics company. With Richard bringing engineering expertise to the company, the product range expanded to include moisture meters for grain and forage crops, grain storage monitors, followed by speed and area measurement instruments. In the 70's, electronics and agriculture seldom mixed and it was often an uncomfortable relationship. RDS engaged as much in educating and persuading that the two could co-

exist as it did in selling product. RDS was one of the first companies to introduce a microprocessor into a product used on agricultural vehicles.

Even in the early days, RDS was very active overseas and Richard was dispatched to various corners of the globe supporting new distributors and customers. In the late 70's RDS started to design and manufacture in house and Richard headed up the engineering team which rapidly expanded to meet the increasing demands for monitoring and control systems, in particular on crop sprayers. RDS gradually increased sales of products to the OEM markets and Richard led this initiative.

With the emergence and rapid growth of 'precision farming' technologies, RDS were pioneers in the area of grain yield monitoring and mapping, closely followed by variable rate application of fertiliser, spray and seed.

The company continues to grow and moved to new, purpose built premises in Minchinhampton, Gloucestershire in 2000 where it now employs just under 100 people with 21 of those in the Engineering department. The entire product range is designed in house with the majority manufactured in house or by local subcontractors.

Richard was appointed managing director in 1991, and remained in that position until his retirement in December 2013 having served the company for 40 years.

Richard negotiated RDS through two changes of ownership, most recently in 2012 when RDS became part of the Digi-Star group.

Having grown RDS from it's modest beginnings, he hands over a company in robust health and with a secure and promising future.