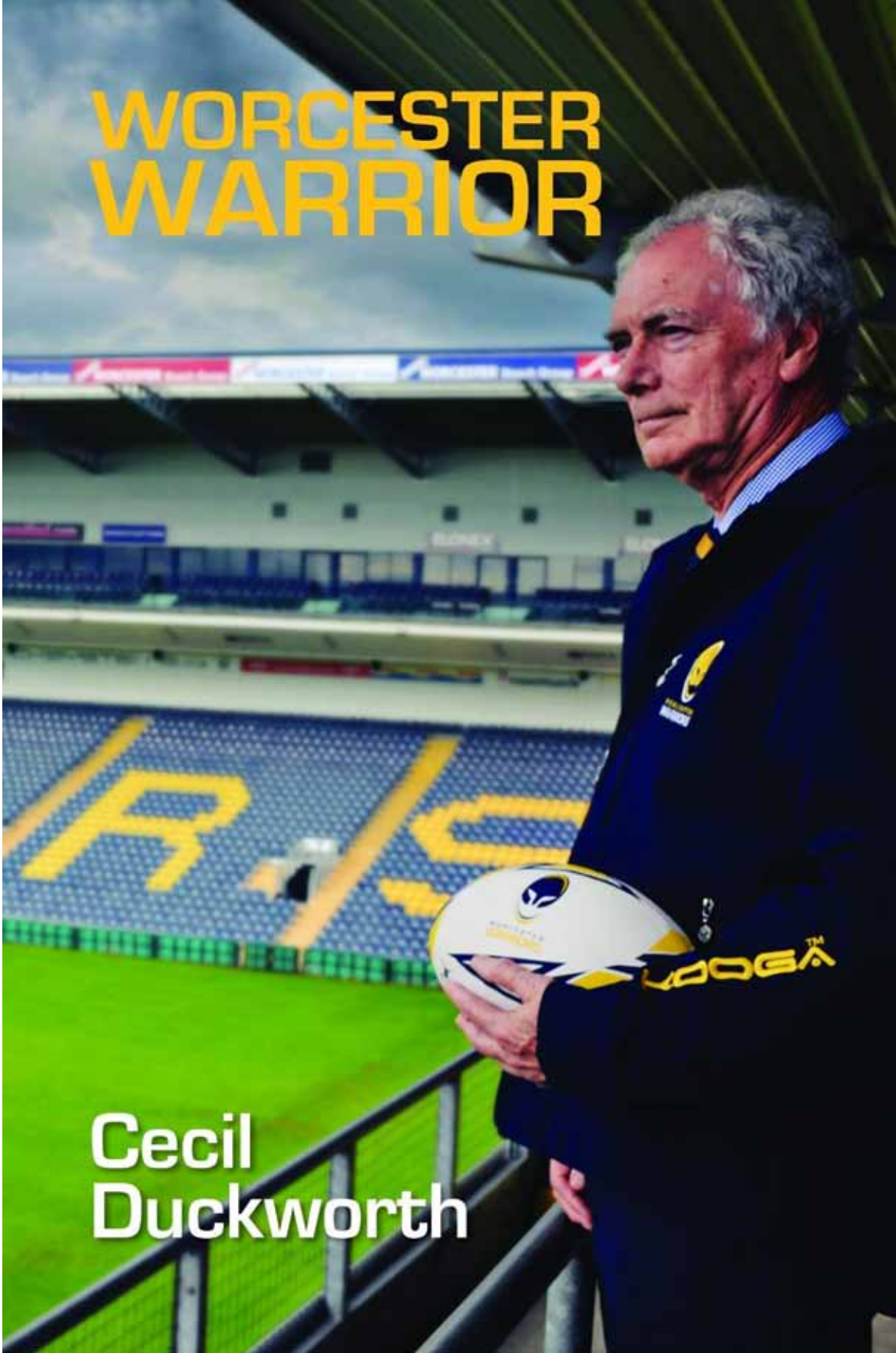
WORCESTER WARRIOR



Cecil Duckworth

ISBN HB 978-0-9570481-5-7
ISBN 978-0-9570481-4-0
ISBN EB 978-0-9570481-6-4

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Published in Great Britain
in 2012 by
Polperro Heritage Press
Clifton-upon-Teme, Worcestershire WR6 6EN UK
www.polperro.press.co.uk

Warriors are not what you think of as warriors. The warrior is not someone who fights, because no one has the right to take another life. The warrior, for us, is one who sacrifices himself for the good of others.

His task is to take care of the elderly, the defenceless, those who cannot provide for themselves, and above all, the children, the future of humanity.

Sitting Bull

Contents

Foreword

I am not someone who can say I've known the author for decades. I've known of him all my adult life of course; starting out as a young corporate lawyer in Birmingham, everyone had heard of the 'owner' of Worcester Group. But I only got to know Cecil through that glorious game of rugby. I joined the board of my former clients, Leicester Tigers in 2006 and Cecil was already working his magic at Sixways. We have since had many a chat, many a shared charity initiative, many a good old grumble or a laugh.

So I came to this book in the same way as most of those who are turning these pages; I know him but don't know how he 'did it' or how he 'got there'. What lit the fire? What were the mistakes? How did it all happen? What makes one of our country's great, modest, inspiring entrepreneurs tick? And what do you do when you can have all you materially desire, when you have climbed all those personal mountains?

Dear reader, you are about to read a page-turner; a journey from which you can learn so much, from which you can take the mistakes and steal the gleaned experience and from which you can bleed the talent, the lessons, the ups and the downs and put them to work in your life, both business and personal.

'I didn't want to be Mr Average' sits with 'my second idea of developing a central heating boiler'; having 'an instinct about people' blends with bank managers of the old-school who made judgements on the person who wanted to borrow the money (legion are the small businesses today who crave a return to genuine 'people business' banking); 'evolution, a step-by-step approach' segways into 'besides, I felt we had a responsibility to export overseas'.

This book is worth ten management consultancy tomes! It's all here ... and the theory is put into practice before your very eyes. It wasn't all plain sailing. The 1973 oil crisis; the 1983 factory fire; the sheer self-destructive ideological bloody-mindedness of Liverpool pre-Thatcher trade-unionism

in the seventies. But 'I always felt there would be a way out of the morass'; 'if you spend all your time worrying about the catastrophe, you probably don't concentrate on the solution'; 'instead of spending most of their time wondering if they were going to survive, they could spend all their energy doing what they were good at' and 'no, I never thought I couldn't go on, I thought we can get out of this, we can recover and I began to set about planning how we could' are pointers for us all as to how to deal with those slings and arrows of fortune.

It was Napoleon who said 'give me lucky generals' and the author has had his share of Lady Luck's benign munificence. An unreliable Jensen starts when it simply just must; a PM who is there on the necessary day; he is in the right place at the right time on many an occasion. But then (as I can attest from my own saunter through life) 'the harder you practise, the luckier you get!'

Cecil Duckworth has been a child of his time. Risk-taking at a time of pervasive socialist risk-aversion in the sixties and seventies; feeling liberated by the Thatcher revolution and making the most of it; leaving his business baby behind and diving into the unpredictable cauldron of vested interest-ridden, newly created professional rugby. It was all new for us all, it was all new for him, and this book takes you through how he turned the lot to advantage. Ever the practically-minded engineer with bucket loads of common sense, leading from the front, Cecil will (I am sure) be the first to say he couldn't have cracked it without the support, the love and the belief of Beatrice (oh! and the small matter of three hundred quid!).

But for me, the privilege of penning this foreword has been enjoyed because of two personal matters: I have believed all my life in what I call 'socially-inclusive wealth creation'. Governments should get off the backs of business and free them up to create wealth, generate tax-paying profit and sustainable employment. But the wealth creators must meet Governments half-way; they must reach out to the communities they affect by their actions, they must be there making a difference for good every day to improve communities and the quality of people's lives. I pay tribute to a man who clearly 'gets it'. Second? I said at the start that I didn't know Cecil, I knew of him. I am so very pleased that by reading this book I now know him.

Lord Digby Jones

Former Director-General of the CBI and former Minister of State for UK Trade, now UK Business Ambassador and Chairman or Advisor to many UK businesses

1

Origins

Where do ideas come from? What triggers a thought that there might be a better way of doing something? And in pursuing that thought, fulfilling the idea, is it chiefly inspiration, luck, or quiet persistence that wins out in the end?

It wasn't my idea to write about my life. I did want to get across some thoughts about being an entrepreneur, based on my experiences both in industry and rugby. And I wanted to talk about the work I have done in founding charities such as the Worcestershire Duckworth Trust. But I have no intention of sitting back in retirement. I have a great deal yet to achieve. On the other hand people said this was a good time to assess my life so far: they wanted to know what motivated me, where my ideas were formed, and that meant pausing to look at my life as a whole. It wasn't easy, because my nature is to look ahead, not to reflect on the past. However, I suppose it all began in 1937, when I was born in a village on the edge of Macclesfield in Cheshire.

Macclesfield is a friendly market town, once the centre of the silk industry. It lies in the foothills of the Pennines, east of the Cheshire plain. Today, the Peak District National Park is ten minutes' drive away. Chester is about 30 miles west, Stockport and Manchester to the north. But in the 1940s, when I was a small boy, few people had cars. The way out of that small world began at the bus stop opposite the Cock Inn across the road from our semi-detached house. There were fields behind our back garden. Milk was delivered in churns by pony and trap. We grew fruit and vegetables and kept chickens, mostly for eggs. I had my own bantam cock called Percy and my younger sister Myrtle had Jemima.

For any small boy born at that time, early life was inextricably linked to the war. My father, who had worked in a hospital in Macclesfield, was in the army and rarely home. He survived Dunkirk and was later wounded, so I

have one memory of visiting him in hospital; and another seeing him in uniform at Crewe, although the really vivid imprint from that day is of the massive silver barrage balloons in a blue sky. There are other isolated images: the day a German aircraft came down a few hundred yards from the local church, just missing it, and my father being first on the scene to find the two Germans mortally wounded. Towards the end of the war a V2 rocket came down in Bluebell Wood, not far from our house. That was quite something; the V2 was the German *vergeltungswaffe* 2 – retaliation weapon – and the world's first long range ballistic missile. On another occasion a friend and I walked over to the nearby airfield and a man in uniform, who I think was an officer, welcomed us and showed us round a Lancaster bomber. At the end he looked at us in sudden alarm and said you are so-and-so's son, aren't you? "No," I said cheerfully. "God," he said, "run like hell – you're not supposed to be here!" I never knew who he thought we were.

The war was simply part of life for me. I had two sisters: Sheila, who was older than me, and Myrtle. At home, we were obsessed with making sure the blackout was in place, and we slept under the stairs if the bombers came. For my parents, it probably exacerbated problems already in their marriage.

My father, Charles Duckworth, was a good-looking man, but my mother Jean was much more intelligent. I suppose she was the dominant influence, because my father was away so much in the war, although he and I shared the contents of the greenhouse – I did a good trade in selling tomatoes and cucumbers locally. My mother was from Yorkshire, and very bright, with wide interests: she loved music, books and was very keen on cricket, Len Hutton of course being a hero. The Roses games at Old Trafford between Yorkshire and Lancashire were always packed out and I remember going to watch the cricket and Manchester United with various school friends. In those days you could often get to Manchester on a platform ticket... There were holidays with my mother and two sisters in North Wales – boarding houses, and sitting on damp sand in Colwyn Bay and Rhyl. The highlights of the week being a donkey ride, a trip to a show on the pier and a knickerbocker glory.

My mother was a seamstress during the war to help make ends meet, working from home on a hand wheel sewing machine – I remember her excitement when electric sewing machines arrived. She changed from nursing to social work, and when I was about 12 or 13 she got a full time job at the local hospital. Working full time she said she would need some help with the housework on Sundays. There were three jobs, for the three of us: cleaning

upstairs, cooking Sunday lunch, or cleaning downstairs. I chose cooking the Sunday lunch. We had a series of roasts, and I became a master of puddings. I made crumbles, bread and butter puddings and sponge puddings with the various fruits we grew – apples, gooseberries, blackberries. I never weighed anything, I just did it by taking so many spoons of flour, sugar, etc.

I suppose it was in those days that I showed some talent for business. I was in the Cubs, and there was a trip to Paris planned. I had to find some money for it, so I got myself a paper round to begin with. It epitomised the nature of that pleasant neighbourhood: only one *Times*, two *Manchester Guardians,* about six *Daily Telegraphs*, then the *Mail, Express, Daily Despatch* and *Daily Herald* which were in print years ago. I sold my cucumbers and tomatoes to people with long drives. On mornings when I was running late it was tempting to slip over or through a fence so avoiding going up and down those long drives. I hoped not to be seen and, as far as I know, I wasn't and I always got a Christmas tip. One family gave me 5/- (25p) which in today's money would be £5.60. I earned 7/6p a week (£9.00). Getting up early was not my thing (it still isn't!) and when it was raining it was hard work, particularly on Thursdays when the *Radio Times* made the bag heavy and difficult as the bags were not waterproofed so if the papers got wet it was not easy getting them into the letter box without ripping the paper.

My sister Myrtle fell in love with the horses owned by one such family, and still has a horse today. There was a farm close by, too, so I managed to get a Saturday job there, driving the tractor and helping with the animals and harvest. I saved up enough money and had a great time in Paris. Two things I remembered from the trip, one going around the Louvre and the other was playing football. We had been told to take our football boots and we played on a cinder pitch and to this day I'm staggered the African boys played in bare feet. They were very good too.

It was, in most ways, a happy childhood. My first school was Broken Cross Primary, and on my first day I sat next to John Cornford who became a life time friend. We both have memories of a much taller boy called Vincent who became our protector and made sure we were both looked after. It was 1942 and I remember the air raid sirens going off from time to time and we would all assemble in the air raid shelters and sing *Ten Green Bottles* and *One Man Went To Mow*. John and I grew up together and as boys we played football and cricket and since have played a lot of golf. He was my Best Man and we have had many holidays, golfing trips and family holidays with our wives and children. Later on we were in business together which proved to be very successful.

When I was about eight I met another boy called Peter Holland, who again became a life long friend. Peter was an outstanding sports player: a very good table tennis player, tennis and squash player and a pretty good cricketer, he was also a good footballer and excelled at rugby. Indeed it was he who stimulated my interest in rugby. His wife, Janet, was also to play an important role in my business life.

Peter, John and I plus a number of other good friends who I still see from time to time grew up together. We had a great time but looking back I wish I'd worked harder at school. I was moderately good at sport, captain of both football and cricket teams and I also won the 100 and 200 yards races. I left school at 16, not really sure what I was going to do. Because I was good at maths someone suggested accountancy.

I joined an accountancy firm in Macclesfield, Mellor Snape & Co where I was paid 35 shillings a week. Very quickly I could see that the partners there were earning much more money than those who weren't qualified. It was obvious, therefore, that if I was going to get anywhere I had to get qualified. There was one guy in particular I recall who was very bright but hopeless when it came to the actual exam and he didn't get qualified. I could see how big the difference was; he got all the lousy jobs and was always broke. But getting qualified was a problem for me. In the early 1950s the only way to qualify as an accountant in Macclesfield was to take a correspondence course, which I did. But a correspondence course takes an immense amount of self-discipline. If it was a sunny evening I would rather be playing cricket. It's also a lonely business. There was another factor, too. My parents' marriage was breaking up. My father was more and more difficult with my mother so it was not the best environment in which to study.

Gradually I realised that I was slipping so far behind with my studying that I didn't think I could catch up and eventually came to the conclusion that a correspondence course was not for me. I told my mother I wasn't sure I'd got the ability to get qualified. It was a traumatic moment. I realised I might end up like the guy who never passed his accountancy exams, in a reasonable position but never getting any further. And that wasn't for me. I wanted the opportunity to be one of the top people. I didn't want to be Mr Average.

At that time both my sisters were working; Sheila had just been transferred from Macclesfield to Worcester, some 100 miles south. My mother said: "I think I ought to take you away from this environment". So she and I got the train to Worcester, where I could stay with Sheila in her digs. I had a

friend who told me I could get a degree-equivalent qualification by taking an HND (Higher National Diploma) in mechanical engineering, and go on to become a chartered engineer. As I was good at maths, engineering suddenly seemed a possible answer to getting into a profession where I could get a qualification. I managed to get a five-year apprenticeship with a Worcester company called Redman Engineering, which would allow me to study at the same time with day release and night school. In 1953 only 5% of school leavers went to University.

Redman's had moved from Surrey to Worcester after the war where they had a factory at Gregory's Bank in the city and was one of the leaders in manufacturing punch presses, machines used throughout industry for forming shapes or cutting holes in sheet metal, in Redman's case chiefly for the motor industry. Later it was to become part of the engineering group Redman Heenan Froude. Heenan and Froude (famous for building Blackpool Tower) were also leading designers and manufacturers of dynamometers (devices used in engineering for measuring torque and power characteristics of machines).

It was a new beginning, not only for me but for my mother who had said simply that she "had to get out". She took a job as matron at a nursing home in Stourbridge, about 25 miles from Worcester, where she could be central to our lives. We lost all contact with my father, something I was never comfortable with and years later I went to see him. It was an emotional meeting. He had got his life together and although I told him I had started my own business, he never came to Worcester to see how I was doing which, to this day, I find extremely... disappointing.

I was in a new city where I knew no one except my sister Sheila. It was lonely at first and I missed my friends. I was earning £5 a week but that didn't go far after paying rent and the suddenly apparent necessities of living: having to buy boot polish, shaving cream, razor blades, etc. which were all provided when I lived at home. But my main motivation was to become a qualified engineer. At the time I hadn't given any thought of starting up my own business. I had no distractions and I had become very disciplined and focused on passing exams.