

the press
conference

with LORD HESELTINE

Mention you are interviewing Michael Heseltine and people are instantly interested. His name produces a strange sense of fascination, even affection. I can't think of another old Tory from the Thatcher era who could instil such a reaction. And I am not exactly sure why.

I guess he is memorably charismatic, a rare breed of politician who said it straight. But I don't recall his policies particularly, or his political achievements. I remember him resigning over the Westland affair and his involvement in the Matrix Churchill scandal, although the details of each are hazy. I recall him standing against Margaret Thatcher, but losing to John Major. He became Deputy Prime Minister and then I remember that painful photograph of him after a heart attack.

Of course, there is the Tarzan nickname and the unforgettable demented Spitting Image puppet, and then I know about his glorious arboretum of some 3,500 trees, which he has planted in the 50 acres of his Oxfordshire estate.

And then there is Heseltine the businessman who built the magazine company Haymarket from scratch to be one of Britain's leading private companies. It publishes more than 100 trade, consumer and contract titles and licences them around the world. Haymarket turns over £190m a year and has given 72-year-old Lord H the No.226 slot on the new Sunday Times Rich List — with a family fortune estimated at £241m. Actually, when you consider the extraordinary multiple dimensions to Hezza's life, it is no wonder we are intrigued.

We meet at Haymarket's HQ in Hammersmith, West London, where he works three days a week. I expect a dynamic, forceful character, but he is low key, almost distant at times. He has a delightful baritone haw haw haw chuckle that is vintage Belgravia, and eyebrow bristles that seem to be reaching for the ceiling. I am to be granted 30 minutes, but he remains impeccably polite when I am still there an hour later.

Haymarket is flying high. How does that make you feel?

I have an immense sense of pride at what we have achieved. There were three of us in 1957 and now there are 2,000. But the big thing is the excitement of the pace of growth. We have six subsidiaries overseas in the world's biggest economies, and they are all growing as mini Haymarkets.

You were not involved with Haymarket during your political career, but came back in 1997.



What impact have you had since then?

I nudged the business into an international dimension. I had spent so much time travelling the world, I had a feel that if we could do it well in one country there was a sporting chance that we might be able to do it in some others. It was a perspective I got from government, but a formative experience was going to see Terry Mansfield of *Natmags* in '97. I was waiting in his reception area and he had 30-something editions of *Cosmopolitan* on the wall. I thought, 'That is very interesting, we don't have anything like that.' And so I came back and I said, 'Look, why don't we see what we can do with some of our magazines overseas.'

You have made the business grow enormously by licensing your titles.

Yes. It has made a huge difference. For example, *F1 Racing* magazine — there are roughly 30 of those and there are 20 or so of *Auto Car*. Now there is a *Campaign Middle East*, a *Campaign Romania*. We license our brands while retaining complete quality control. We have a team of people who are exploiting

our licence opportunities all over the world and if they keep up what they have shown they can do, we might have 150 licences in two or three years time.

This is undoubtedly a lucrative company, but I can't help wondering if it is enough for you. Do you miss the profile, the cut and thrust of politics?

I do not distinguish between this and politics. I have always said that I will be remembered for my trees and the arboretum that we have recreated. I am never one who spends his time moaning about the past. I had a privileged political career. But it was over.

We lost the election. End of story, good night. I have never looked back. It takes no part of my waking life. I was so lucky to have known where I was going — back to Haymarket. I always get asked about not being Prime Minister, and I always say I would like to have been. And I discover that an increasing number of people think I might have been all right.

You have openly backed David Cameron to lead the Conservative Party. What do you think of

Portrait
Phil Adams