

Iain Vallance

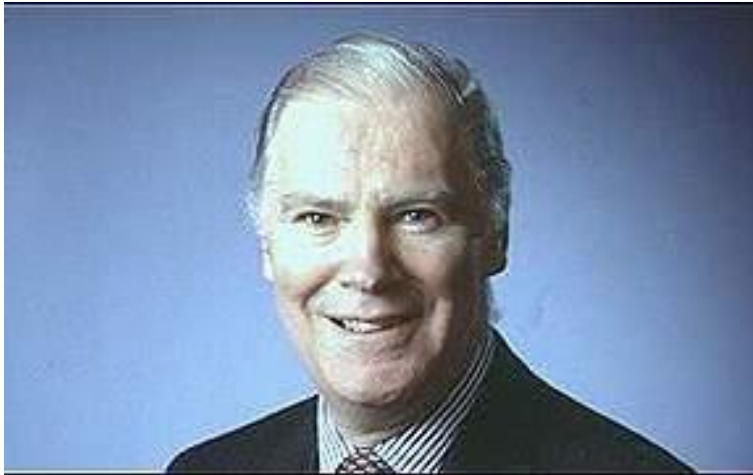
Born 1943. Chief Executive and Chairman of British Telecom.
Available online at www.livesretold.co.uk



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1. Introduction



This introduction was archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from Wikipedia.

Iain Vallance, Baron Vallance of Tummel, is a British businessman and a retired Liberal Democrat member of the House of Lords.

Early life and education

Vallance was educated at the Edinburgh Academy, Dulwich College, London and The Glasgow Academy. In 1965 he graduated from Brasenose College, Oxford with a Bachelor of Arts in English language and literature, and in 1972 from the London Business School with a Master of Science in business administration.

Career

Vallance worked in the Post Office from 1966 to 1981, as director of central finance from 1976 to 1978, as director of telecommunications finance from 1978 to 1979 and as director of materials department from 1979 to 1981. In 1981 he moved to the soon to be privatised British Telecommunications, for which he worked until 2002. After a period in finance, Vallance became Chief of Operations in 1985, and Chief Executive from 1986 to 1995, as chairman from 1987 until he resigned as chairman in 2001, and finally served as president emeritus from 2001 to 2002.

Honours

He was made a Knight Bachelor in 1994^[5] and was created a life peer with the title Baron Vallance of Tummel, of Tummel in Perth and Kinross on 22 June 2004. Vallance also received an Honorary Doctorate from Heriot-Watt University in 1995.

2. Interview

The following interview with Iain Vallance, after he stood down as chairman of British Telecom, was archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the Archives of IT website at www.archivesit.org.uk.

Early Life

Lord Vallance was born in Kent on 20th May 1943. However, he says that being born English was a mistake, as his mother had travelled from Scotland to see his father stationed “down south” just before he was posted to the Far East. He considers himself Scottish and, as a life peer, has the title of Baron Vallance of Tummel in Perth and Kinross, where his mother’s family comes from.

Education

Lord Vallance enjoyed his school days and describes it as a mixed experience of three parts with schools in Scotland and London as the family moved for his father’s career.

He started school at the Edinburgh Academy before moving to London at the age of ten when his father was working for the General Post Office (GPO) in the Home Counties. Lord Vallance was accepted at Dulwich College where he was part of the “Dulwich Experiment”. He gained his O levels at the age of thirteen as a result of the College’s experimental policy to push pupils hard to sit exams as soon as they were able.

His parents returned to Scotland and Lord Vallance went to the Glasgow Academy and a return to the Scottish system of education.

After completing school, he went to Oxford to read English.

Early Career

After an enjoyable time at Oxford, Lord Vallance decided he wanted to be a broadcast journalist and had lined up a role in the United States in TV journalism. Unfortunately, he was forced to change his plans when the US Government changed the immigration rules to ensure that aliens would be liable for the draft to fight in the Vietnam War.

Having already taken the civil service exams for graduates, Lord Vallance’s options lay between HMRC and the GPO. He chose the GPO saying: ‘it seemed okay for my parents’.

The GPO

In 1966 Lord Vallance began on the postal side of the GPO and enjoyed being out looking at what people were doing on the ground. The GPO sponsored him to go to the London Business School to do an MBA for two

years before returning to the office of Sir William Ryland, who was the Chairman of the GPO at that time. This experience gave him the opportunity to see the organisation from the very top, which he found intriguing, covering all three sides of the organisation, postal, Girobank and telecommunications.

Thereafter, Lord Vallance spent some time at central headquarters as Director of Central Finance Accounting and then moved to telecommunications headquarters as Director of Telecommunications Central Finance Planning. During his time in finance, he witnessed the transformative move away from electromechanical switching into a complete digital network based primarily on System X which had been developed by the GPO, GEC (General Electric Company) Plessey and STC. It was first demonstrated publicly in 1979.

Around the same time, Prestel was also born, a revolutionary 'viewdata' system which could amass data such as timetables for railways etc. It used GPO lines and had Arnold Weinstock's UK GEC computers behind it. Prestel was sold in 1994.

Lord Vallance was subsequently appointed Director of Materials, where he was responsible for the purchasing and supply of everything but the switching. He describes what he inherited as 'a wonderful mess.' A mess that his predecessor, the chairman, Sir George Jefferson, asked him to sort out. Lord Vallance selected a team that mixed people of different ages and experiences, radically to change the way in which the procurement was done, shifting it from disparate "tribal organisation", as he calls it, to a modern system.

Members of the team which sorted out materials procurement and supply were also to prove instrumental in achieving structural and cultural changes across BT as a whole and in the company's move towards total quality management.

Lord Vallance's career continued to progress within an environment where the Chairman, (Chairmen), encouraged younger employees. In 1981, at the age of 38, he was invited to join the British Telecommunications Board from its inception as a separate corporation, as Board Member for Organisation of Business Systems (BMOBS); a role that would see him make major changes in the architecture of the organisation and the systems that supported that architecture.

This led to the development of the Customer Service System (CSS), one of the biggest civil computing projects in the world at that time. CSS supported a major organisational restructuring from a functional arrangement, based on regions and telephone areas, into one that was designed to meet the requirements of different customer types. CSS was

designed with a great deal of input from the people who were doing the front line jobs and who knew exactly what the interfaces were between themselves and the customers, and between the different engineering and other units of BT.

It was not an IT department imposing something upon an organisation. The way the system was developed provided Lord Vallance with a learning point which he believes was useful throughout his career: ‘if you want to design a successful IT system, you do so from the bottom up; you don’t impose it from the top.’

Having had a spell as Managing Director, Local Communications Services, Lord Vallance went on to become Chief Operations Officer, in time for British Telecom’s privatisation, and Chief Executive Officer one year later. He became Chairman and CEO, in 1987, at the age of 44.

BT, Regulation, Unbundling and Mobile

Lord Vallance witnessed major shifts from the GPO as a government department; to it becoming a public corporation; then its division into separate public corporations for posts and telecommunications; and finally, the privatisation of the latter and the emergence of British Telecommunications plc (BT). Even when privatised the company was heavily regulated, as a “de facto” monopoly and subject to the many provisions of the Telecommunications Act. It had a fine balance to strike between shareholders’ demands the needs of businesses and residential customers, and the strictures of the regulator, as well as keeping pace with the opportunities and threats emerging from new technologies and competition.

For example, under market pressure to provide the additional bandwidth that the new optical fibre technology offered over the old copper network, BT sometimes found it difficult to respond effectively within the regulatory terms under which it had to operate. Lord Vallance says: “One of the difficulties was that there was not an economic case for investing as much in a fibre network as there would have been had we had freedom to use that network fully on our own behalf – for example in the provision of cable television.’

As BT saw competition emerge in the UK, supported by the regulatory framework, it recognised that it was bound to lose market share and so looked abroad with investment in Europe and elsewhere. ‘BT was the first sign of any fixed network competition at all in Europe,’ says Lord Vallance. But continental regulatory regimes protected the incumbents, whilst in the UK the opposite was the case.

In the US, BT bought McDonnell Douglas’s private network, together with stakes in McCaw Cellular and MCI, with the ambition of bringing them

together to establish a mobile network for local coverage and a competitive long distance and international network. While BT successfully made money out of its various deals, its strategic dream was seen off by US regulations which limited the amount of share ownership in any company that had radio bandwidth. Its stakes in McCaw and, for similar reasons, in MCI were eventually sold. Again, outside the UK. the regulator tended to favour the incumbents.

Back at home, BT was forced to unbundle its local loop and make it available to its fixed line competitors and, by extension, to give them access to all BT customers.

BT also established a mobile network 'Cellnet', subsequently O2. Again, the company was subject to regulatory restrictions which ultimately meant that it was slower to expand than the competition. For example, it was not allowed 100% ownership of its mobile subsidiary. It was also restricted in how it grew by the parent company's poor Price-Earnings (P/E) ratio, that went with being a regulated utility, and its consequent inability to conclude deals using equity. The crunch came when the company was requested to buy out its German mobile partner, as the deal had to be done in cash. This contributed to BT's financial issues and brought them to a head with Lord Vallance stepping down as Chairman in April 2001.

Had regulatory regimes outside the UK been as pro-competitive as inside, there might have been a different story.

The mobile arm, the called mmO2, was sold in late 2001 as part of the demerger demanded by the financial markets in return for an equity injection. Lord Vallance says of the move: 'it was a lunatic thing to do. It would have been preferable to spin off what is now Openreach, which was always going to be constrained as a regulated utility, and to keep all the future competitive growth elements together.

BT/Post Office Tower



Lord Vallance recalls with fondness the symbol of the then GPO Tower. He says; ‘I always love to see the old Post Office Tower, because although it was conceived and constructed by a Civil Service Department, it is perhaps one of the greatest symbols in London of IT and modern technology’.

It was built, complete with a revolving restaurant at the top, as a centre for the microwave network to get over the skyscrapers and the tall buildings around London. It is still in use today, as is the restaurant floor, for BT occasions.

Martlesham Heath



The BT laboratories at Martlesham Heath, Suffolk.

As well as delivering mail, acting as a Giro bank and providing the first telephones in homes and businesses, the GPO also had an influential research and development capability at Martlesham Heath. Besides having a very significant impact during the Second World War, Martlesham has served not only the GPO and its successors, but also the wider telecommunications industry as a whole, as a fount of good research and technology. As just one example among many, its leading edge work in optoelectronics has contributed to the field right across the world.

Successes

Lord Vallance says that there are several things that contribute to his “finest hour”. However, the one that he is perhaps most proud of, is an emotional one; the ability to reduce the numbers of staff at BT in the UK in a humane way.

Following the switch from analogue to digital, BT needed to reduce the number of employees by more than 100,000. This was conducted without

any industrial action, post privatisation, and all through voluntary redundancy. Prior to the programme, Lord Vallance and other Board members travelled the country talking to thousands of people at roadshows explaining the situation. In addition, BT set up opportunities for retraining people and keeping them on temporarily while they found their next roles. He believes this was doable, in part, because he was not an outsider but someone with lifelong GPO credentials. He says: “That, I think, is the one thing that I managed to do for the old GPO family.”

Lord Vallance is also proud of delivering the earliest examples of the concept of bringing work to people rather than people to work. Scotland was used for the first two experiments. When the nuclear power station in Dounreay was being closed, BT introduced a plan to employ a number of the nuclear plant’s brightest people at the end of a line from Thurso. The second experiment also took place in the Highlands where BT transferred work to telephone operators in their own homes, to avoid them having to travel long distances to get to the telephone exchange in Inverness, particularly in the winter months.

Mistakes

Lord Vallance believes that he did not court or educate the City enough while he was BT Chairman. He left that largely to the finance directors while he focused on the broader strategy. He says; ‘even though some of our strategic moves did not come right, many did and our core business in the UK improved beyond measure. But we were operating in virgin territory, not just in technology terms but with the additional dimension of unpredictable regulation across the world. In retrospect, I could have explained all that better.’

Asked for his thoughts on why the UK has some of the very best science, technology and engineering capability in the world in its universities, and also one of the most advanced financial markets in the world, we can’t seem to produce long lasting, brilliant engineering and technological companies such as Siemens in Germany, Lord Vallance believes there are three main facets at play.

Engineering and science nearly always are long term. However, the UK financial markets tend to focus on the short term looking quarter by quarter and lacking the appetite for patient capital, compared to Germany, where patient capital is big. Equally, in Germany, the status of engineers and scientists is higher than in the UK.

We need to help people develop as bi-linguists; fluent, not just in scientific and technological language, but also in financial and commercial language.

The UK lacks the equivalent of Germany’s Mittelstand, the smaller, generally family owned supporting industries that feed into the big players

like Siemens. This is something which has been built up over many years, which is not replicated here.

However, Lord Vallance believes there is light ahead, in that the Treasury has been looking recently at how to promote patient capital. And as Chair the Edinburgh Business School(wholly owned by Heriot-Watt University), he believes that there are chances of encouraging bilingualism in that kind of University environment. We need to enable scientists and engineers to study finance and commerce at the same time, with a crossover between disciplines , rather than being taught in silos as they tend to be at the moment.

Advice

If you want to transform an in-bred, traditional set-up, then promoting the best youngsters and bringing in outsiders are the surest catalysts for change.

If you want to design a successful IT system, then drive it from the bottom up (from the people who are going to use it). Don't let your IT department and senior managers impose it from the top.

3. The Great Redundancy

The following article by Caroline Phillips was archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from her website www.carolinephillips.net. The article was originally published in the Evening Standard.

TODAY is probably the world's biggest ever redundancy party. Thousands of British Telecom employees will be celebrating becoming former British Telecom employees. In fact there's never been a Black Friday quite like it. More than 30,000 jobs are to be shed this year, of which 19,000 go today. And with generous redundancy payouts for them all, the mood promises to be one of Gold Rush fever. As if everyone has won the pools.

Which has led to speculation that the pubs will be awash with BT chaps waving fat cheques and drinking themselves silly after organising a giant conga out of the BT headquarters.

There have been parties all week. Parties all round the country. Yesterday the celebratory wrist exercises started at 11.30 am. The venue? Upstairs at The Sir Christopher Wren pub in the shadow of St Paul's, within a square mile of HQ and about a dozen other BT buildings.

One man drinks three pints before midday. "Downstairs in the function room other BT folk are ringing the changes. The room has been booked from 12.30 until the evening and up to 150 people are expected. But there isn't a Beattie in sight. The assembled party goers are all male.

Bill is counting 20 lots of £20 notes and leaving them behind the bar to pay for the drinks. 'Some of them just leave a credit card behind the bar,' says landlady Julie Wood. 'We've had a party every day this week. Some go on all day.' After all, they've had their salary slips, so they know the redundancy money is in their accounts.

'The atmosphere's like the Notting Hill Carnival,' says one Invisible Man - like many, he signed the Official Secrets Act in the days when BT employees were civil servants and doesn't want to be named. 'Some of The Suits are getting £200,000 pay-offs. And people in their twenties are getting deals that exceed £20,000.' This Invisible Man wears a white short-sleeved shirt and grey slacks, called 'BT Image Clothes' by these folk.

Employees have been raring to accept voluntary redundancy. The revellers tell stories of the faxes that have been pouring out of the machines in BT over the last few weeks. One is an unprintable version of the song Please Release Me Let Me Go. Another is a tasteless joke involving Princess Diana. "

Stories of those who have been turned down are legion. 'I know a whole department which applied,' says bearded Alex, who has taken off a half day

to be at this party. Unusually, he is still employed, and happy. 'One guy had a terrific fight. It was war. He was shouting and thumping at the table trying to get out. The ones who have asked to go and haven't been allowed are incredibly bitter.

'One technical officer was told he could go. He sold his house and got a place at college and a grant - and then he got a letter saying he couldn't leave. "

Another man whose application was accepted adds: 'There are people who have ordered cars in the belief that they're going to get redundancy, and they've been turned down.' He is 54 years old. 'I was turned down twice. I'm glad - because this is a much better offer.'

An anonymous engineer of 54 is holding the party today. He has left the company after 33 years. 'I'm happy to go,' he says, with a grin. 'I won't look for another job. I've got plenty to occupy myself at home. Only time will tell if I've got enough money never to work again.' The music blares. How does he feel about his job prospects? 'You can always take early-morning cleaning jobs if you've got to make ends meet.'

His friend, a man with a kindly face and coloured shirt, has also worked for the company for 33 years. He's divorced and has three children over 18. 'I used to enjoy the job, but morale's got so low now.' He's drinking bitter shandy to stay sober. 'I've already been to a party on the Regalia boat this week.' Nearby a man pretends to kiss his friend with abandon on the cheeks. 'I've retired,' he continues, with glee. He says he's been counting the hours since he was told in April that he could go. 'When people ask what I do, I'm going to say I'm a 'pensioner bumming around'. I'm going to spend every day playing golf. I've got to go to the dole office to get national insurance credits. If a job comes up I bet I'll get it,' he says morosely. 'But I don't want one.' He's having his Redundancy Party on Friday. 'I'm putting £200 behind the bar.' "

Dave Flack, 27 and single, has long hair and a gold earring. He wears jeans and T-shirt. He doesn't mind being named. "He has worked for 11 years, doing private wire maintenance. Latterly he was paid a salary of £19,000. 'I don't have a job to go to. I'll probably do part time work for BT through Manpower.' Why did he decide to leave? 'Because I wanted a change.' He also got 'over £20,000' redundancy. 'Hopefully I'll be able to buy a house.'

Chairman Iain Vallance hasn't joined them. He's out of town today at the BT AGM in Birmingham. 'He's a dove,' says the 54-year-old would-be golfer. 'He really knows how to look after people.'

Down the street, more former BT employees are revelling al fresco outside the Master Gunner pub. This is the party for Rick Hullett, who is bald, genial and drinking whisky. They're all signing someone's leaving card

which reads 'congratulations'. It's 2pm and the atmosphere is like that in a coach of football fans. Lots of roars and cheers.

Andy Yates, 30, is 'happy' to leave after 14 years. He's getting 'over £30,000'. 'I'm going to North London University to do computing and information technology.'

There are 20,000 people who have been refused a redundancy package because of oversubscription. 19,000 jobs will go today with another 11,000 to be axed by the end of the year. Payoffs range from between £17,000 to £204,000.

4. The 2001 Crisis

The following article was archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the Business section of the BBC website at www.news.bbc.co.uk. It was published on 26th April 2001.

British Telecom, hampered by a huge mountain of debt and a share price less than a third of its level a year ago, is fighting its greatest crisis since privatisation in 1984. Shareholder confidence had virtually collapsed in the telecom giant's management.

The resignation of Sir Iain Vallance - linked in many shareholders' minds with the company's problems - has provided at least a temporary boost to the company's share price. But it is still unclear what strategy his successor Sir Christopher Bland will adopt to turn the troubled giant around.

Falling share prices

BT had hoped to float or demerge its BT Cellnet wireless and Yell yellow pages division, to help cut its estimated £30bn debt mountain by at least £10bn. But those hopes have been dashed by the collapse in stock market valuations - meaning that BT would get a much lower price than it wanted if it tried to sell off these sections now.

Plan B for the board is thought to be asking shareholders to buy a further £5bn worth of shares, money which would be used to cut the debt. The big institutional shareholders had said they would only do this if there are changes at the top of the former state monopoly, so Vallance's resignation may pave the way for this share sale.

The problem for BT is that if they do not cut their debt, they will see their credit rating down graded, which in turn will increase the rate of interest it will pay on loans.

That the company is in such crisis seems astonishing, given that just five years ago, BT was the fourth biggest telecoms operator in the world, measured by stock market value.

So what has gone wrong?

Stiff competition in the telecoms market, the huge cost of paying for third-generation (3G) mobile phone licences, pressure from the industry regulator Oftel to lower its prices, have all been given as reasons why BT is in such crisis.

The company has also blamed the cost of investing in the Japanese and Irish telecoms markets and the expense last year of taking over Securicor's minority stake in its mobile phone division, BT Cellnet. City commentators also cite BT's rapid expansion - taking stakes in a raft of overseas telecoms

firms. In the past year, BT's profits have crashed along with its share price, a far cry from the days when the firm was seen as one of the great hopes of privatisation.

From monopoly to competition

For much of this century, British Telecom ruled unquestioned as a monopoly in the UK market.

It was only in 1981 that the British Telecoms Act brought this to an end and put in its place a duopoly, where BT competed with Mercury, a Cable & Wireless subsidiary. The next step along the road to full competition was privatisation.

In 1984, BT helped to revolutionise the image of share ownership as more than 2m small investors bought stock. But it was not until March 1991 that full competition hit the British market, effectively bringing to an end the duopoly shared by BT and Mercury.

The watchdog bites

With the liberalisation of the phone market came renewed pressure on BT from the telecoms watchdog Oftel to open up more of its network to competitors and cut its prices.

BT resisted this, arguing there was enough evidence of competition to allow price controls on domestic phone charges to be relaxed. But the regulator stepped in, most recently a month ago, when Oftel proposed further price cuts.

BT is also currently engaged in a heated battle with its competitors over providing access to its local exchanges, an important step in allowing them to introduce high-speed internet services.

Failure in the US

As competition flooded the UK market in the 1990s, BT increasingly found itself looking further afield in an attempt to boost the revenues it was losing at home.

One obvious market to set its sights on was the United States. But where its mobile rival Vodafone succeeded - in January 1999 it took over the American mobile firm AirTouch and later that year successfully established a link-up with Bell Atlantic - BT's ambitious attempt to merge with MCI in 1997 failed at the last moment.

MCI had issued a profits warning, and while BT tried to renegotiate the terms of the merger, its rival WorldCom, a rapidly growing and aggressive US operator, managed to snatch the firm from BT's grasp.

In July 1998 BT attempted a comeback, clinching a deal with America's AT&T to form a \$10bn global joint venture. But this venture did little to address the fundamental problem of BT's limited reach and lack of size.

Looking elsewhere

BT has also made several attempts to consolidate its position on the European market - some more successful than others.

The group's wireless business includes controlling interests in Germany, Ireland and Holland, as well as Cellnet in the UK. But in October this year, the BT-backed Blu consortium failed to win a 3G mobile licence in Italy because of quarreling among shareholders. And talks about a merger with Spain's former phone monopoly Telefonica also ran aground. The company also has minority stakes in non-core operations in Asia: India, Japan, Malaysia, South Korea and Hong Kong.

Some analysts argue that in attempting to be a player in so many markets, BT has simply overstretched itself. Their criticism appears to be vindicated as BT has now announced that it will sell some of these global assets.

5. Elizabeth Vallance

The following tribute to Iain Vallance's wife Elizabeth was archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the obituary pages of the Guardian. It was published in October 2020.



Elizabeth Vallance had a family history full of paradoxes. On her maternal side her grandfather, David Kirkwood, was a militant Red Clydeside trade unionist, the last person to be imprisoned in Edinburgh Castle during the First World War for sticking steadfastly to his pacifist views, and ultimately a member of the House of Lords. By contrast, her paternal grandfather, William McGonnigill, left Scotland aged 16 to become a cavalryman, defending the Khyber Pass against the Pashtuns and becoming pipe major of the Gordon Highlanders during the First World War, leading his regiment over the trenches, unarmed except for his bagpipes.

This heritage may help to explain her complex and often contradictory personality. An academic by training, she was an activist and a “doer”. She combined a formidable intellect with a Presbyterian work ethic. As the wife of Iain Vallance, a prominent British businessman and now Lord Vallance of Tummel, whom she married in 1967, she might have spent her life entertaining and being elegant. As well being both those, she also built a career of her own: first in academia and then in leadership roles in the private, public and third sectors.

She was born Elizabeth Mary McGonnigill in 1945 to William McGonnigill, a company director, and Jean Kirkwood, a journalist, and grew up in the smart Glasgow suburb of Bearsden. After Laurel Bank, one of the city’s most demanding girls’ schools, she took a first in politics and philosophy at St Andrews University and then an MSc at the London School of Economics followed by a PhD at the University of London.

From there she became a philosophy lecturer at Queen Mary University of London, working with Trevor Smith (now Lord Smith of Clifton) to set up a politics department that she eventually headed. Their students included Peter Hain, a future cabinet minister; Colette Bowe, chairwoman of the Banking Standards Board from 2014 to 2019; and David Sullivan, who became a pornographer and the co-owner of West Ham United football club.

Vallance wrote two books on women legislators, *Women in the House* (1979) and *Women of Europe* (1986), both of which focused on their impact on equality issues.

However, she came to feel that in the academic world she was learning more and more about less and less. At 45, she embarked on a masters in leadership and strategy at the London Business School, which paved the way for a string of non-executive directorships.

She also flourished in the public and voluntary sectors. For nearly a decade she chaired St George's Healthcare Trust, followed by a number of strategic and advisory roles in healthcare. She served as a magistrate, taking a brisk approach to feeble excuses from lawyers and their clients alike. She was a member of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, most notably reporting on MPs' expenses, and of the court back at the London School of Economics, where she had been a student.

A diehard Liberal, Vallance not only believed in social justice, she also worked to make it happen. She held clear but pragmatic feminist beliefs and in 1980 was a founder member with Lesley Abdela, a former parliamentary researcher, of the all-party 300 Group to promote women in parliament and public life. It began in response to their dismay that of 635 MPs elected in 1979 under the country's first female prime minister, only 19 (3 per cent) were women. Today the proportion is 34 per cent.

Yet she saw no incongruity in being a feminist while being feminine: wearing a smart pair of high heels, painting her nails and wearing lipstick. Both parts of her personality, the feminine and the feminist, were of equal importance.

Her commitment to social justice went beyond her pragmatic feminism. Shocked by the reports of violence against minority groups in London in the 1990s, she set up Me Too, a charity to support and assist victims of harassment and to educate people about its causes and effects. Among the other causes she cared deeply about were I Can, a children's communication charity; the National Autism Project; and, most recently, Young Minds.

As chairwoman of the board at the Centre for Mental Health for eight years, Vallance transformed it from being wholly funded by the Gatsby

Charitable Foundation to raising all its own funds. She was always firm in her leadership. In 2015 she summed up her wide experience of chairing charities with “ten commandments”, as ruthless as they were sensible. They included injunctions not to micro-manage the chief executive, to “keep to time and keep others to time”, and to know “when and how to move trustees on”.

In later years Vallance was an occasional correspondent to *The Times*. In 2005 she argued in favour of votes for prisoners, saying that if prison is about rehabilitation, “it surely makes good sense to engage prisoners in what goes on in the outside world and, in anticipation of their release, to encourage their participation as citizens”. Her other letters covered subjects such as equal pay for women and the inadequacies of the first-past-the-post electoral system.

She is survived by her husband, their daughter, Rachel, a psychologist, and their son, Edmund, who is a writer. Rachel remembers her as a fiercely loyal mother. When Alleyn’s School sent a letter home reprimanding Rachel for her “cavalier behaviour” after missing a lesson in the last term of the upper sixth, Vallance returned the letter with a note to the headmaster saying: “Rachel is nearly 19. She can legally vote, get married, have children, drink and smoke. I therefore suggest that all further correspondence on this matter is addressed to her personally.”
