

**Customer and job satisfaction go hand in hand for Jim Lindsay, General Manager at Airdrie Savings Bank, writes Robin Mathison**

**JIM LINDSAY**, the man heading up the UK's last independent savings bank – Airdrie Savings Bank (ASB) – knows a thing or two about the value of keeping customers happy. As a self-confessed fan of timeless rock bands such as The Who and The Rolling Stones, he can see how these bands from a different era still fill stadiums around the world – simply by continuing to do what they do best.

And, like one of the evergreen rock groups, ASB concentrates on what it excels in. In giving customers what they want in the manner they want it, the bank keeps them coming back year after year, generation after generation, proving that, even in this age of faceless banking by phone or Internet, there is still a place for the traditional branch-based approach.

ASB was founded in 1835 to encourage the local population to save, and, while the large banks grow even larger, it still numbers

out to schools to collect deposits for example – it's a very successful way of getting people started, an early form of financial education, so why change? It's actually a privilege to be involved," he says, with the air of a man who has made the right career move.

"It was a chance to work somewhere smaller, and a new challenge," he explains of his decision, "and let's just say my expectations have been met. And indeed exceeded. It's really been quite refreshing."

Leaving the Royal Bank didn't prove the wrench Lindsay may have expected. "At the end of the day it wasn't too difficult a decision to make because of the way the bank has changed through its growth. A lot of people I knew had moved on to do other things so there weren't the same emotional ties as there might have been," he says.

Lindsay enjoyed a varied and fulfilling career at the Royal Bank.

# TRADITION ROCKS AT AIRDRIE

only eight branches around North Lanarkshire 167 years later. There are plans to open another two – another example of the bank bucking the current trend – but to the communities these branches serve, size doesn't matter, and the bank's role throughout the region is as strong as ever.

Lindsay joined ASB as general manager after nearly 30 years at the Royal Bank of Scotland in March 2000, and is well aware of this legacy.

"The community element is what makes the bank. We still go

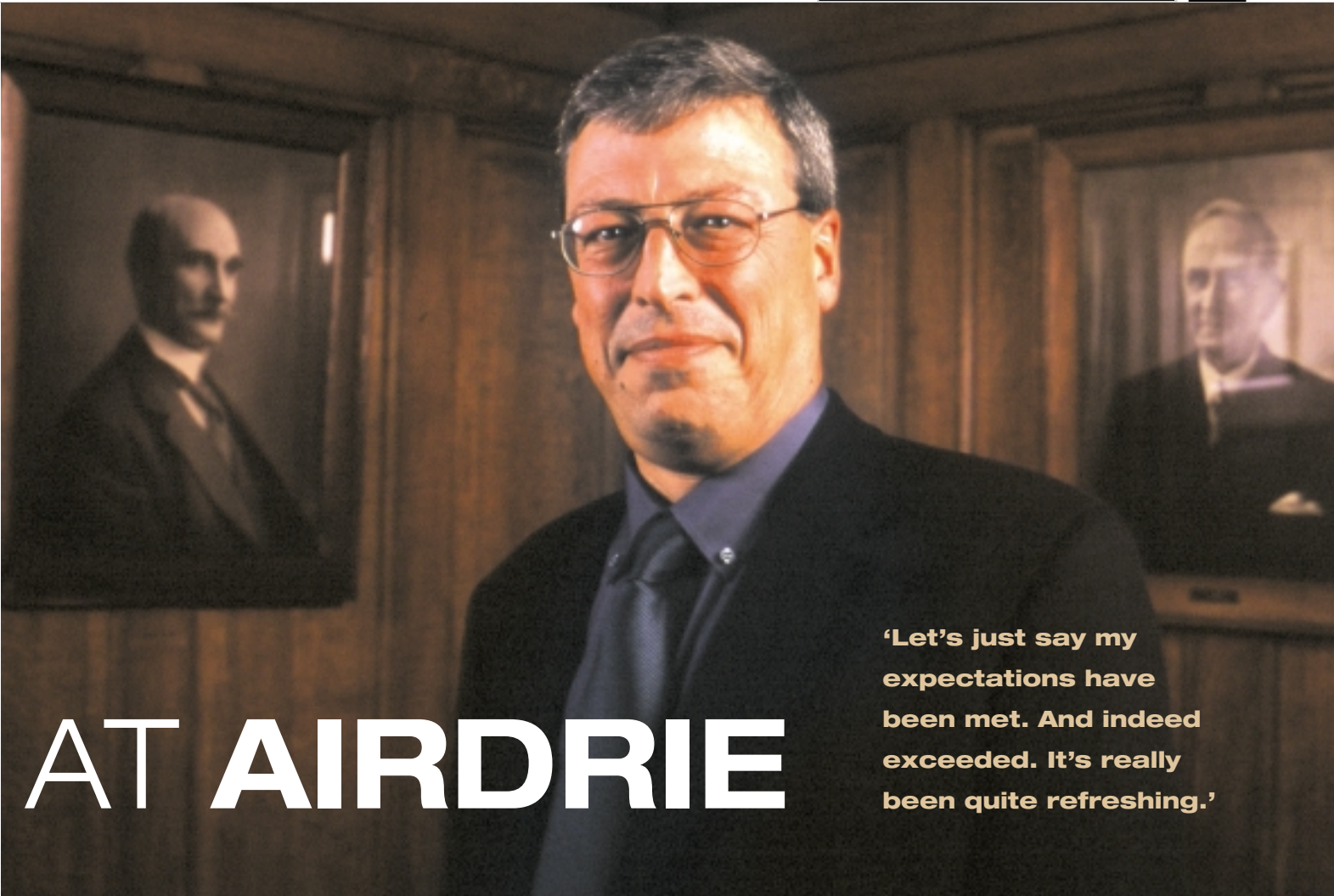
After joining the Graduate Trainee Scheme from Edinburgh University in 1973 he completed an MBA at Strathclyde University in 1982, before joining Corporate Finance Division. "What was interesting about that time was that the merger with Williams and Glyn's Bank was such a big event, and marked the start of a whole series of changes really," he says. "It forced thinking in terms of how to get costs down and income up and so on, providing an indication of what was to come."

After a spell as Secretary of the Bank from 1988 to 1991 – "an excellent position – right at the centre of things", Lindsay moved into Branch Banking Division, ending up taking responsibility for the branches in Glasgow.

"It was an interesting time (between 1991 and 1995). I was very involved in the whole change process that was happening. Project Columbus was something I was involved in and Glasgow was one of the first areas to be restructured."

Laughing, Lindsay recalls, "The only sad part of it was that the job I was doing fell away as part of the restructure. I returned to Head Office working on special projects and dealing with the mergers, joint ventures and acquisitions which the bank was making at the time. Again that was exciting – a different kind of work altogether."

It was during these times of huge changes in working practices and management that Lindsay honed his own management style through observing others. "My main characteristic is to involve other



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people," he says. "I would call my style 'participative'. Rather than just telling people to get on with things, I like to try and get people involved as quickly and fully as possible."

It would seem then that ASB is an environment tailor-made for Lindsay, and he quickly made his mark. "The difference is huge," he says. "We have only around 100 staff so you can get them all in one room to talk to them if you want. Something I've introduced is regular staff meetings, including all of the part-time staff, to give them the opportunity to hear what we are doing and provide the opportunity to ask questions. People do appreciate being asked for their thoughts, but also being listened to and responded to. I've had a great response. We have spent a lot of time on staff communication and involvement and are delighted that these efforts have helped us to achieve Investors in People accreditation very recently."

So the staff are happy, what about the customers? The contrast in moving from the largest bank in the UK to the smallest is not lost on Lindsay.

"The big difference is its mutual status meaning that there's no external pressure from shareholders to perform increasingly well each year," he says. "The Bank is governed by a Board of Trustees who represent the interests of customers and only customers. The Trustees, all local business people, give of their time for no remuneration and they have no financial interest in the bank's performance which is an excellent model of corporate governance,

I think. Of course this doesn't mean we don't look for improvements – far from it. But it means we do things because our customers want them – an example is our recently launched debit card. It's a very customer focused approach."

And it works. Lindsay recalls how, when he first arrived, he asked to look at the complaints file (in the days before it became a regulatory requirement) to see what customers were saying. However, there wasn't one – any problems were being dealt with effectively in the branches with no need for it to be taken further.

"I haven't personally received a letter of complaint this year," he says. "It's a very good barometer of customer satisfaction."

It's clear then that the personal approach works for ASB, and Lindsay is relishing being involved. "Its status as the last independent savings bank, and the way the bank is run with its involvement in the community make it a very enjoyable job.

"The heart of the bank is how it is run, and the real vision is to keep the bank independent. We want to grow a bit but in a way which is appropriate to the way the bank is run, the customers and the communities. Any advancements in technology for example will always support the face-to-face contact that is the essence of how the bank is run."

With such an attitude to customer service, this Rolling Stones aficionado won't be hearing the words "(I can't get no) satisfaction" anywhere except on his CD player. It's one complaint not often heard in a branch of Airdrie Savings Bank.

Photograph: Jeremy Hardie

## JIM LINDSAY - CAREER HISTORY

March, 2000	General Manager (chief executive), Airdrie Savings Bank.
1996-2000	Assistant Director (Special Projects), Group Legal and Regulatory Affairs – dealing with Royal Bank of Scotland acquisitions, disposals, etc.
1995-1996	Assistant Director (Special Projects), Retail Banking Operations, Royal Bank of Scotland.
1991-1995	Local Director, Glasgow Branch Banking Division, Royal Bank of Scotland.
1985-1991	Secretary's Department (Group and Bank).
1983-1985	Corporate Finance Division.
1979-1982	Executive Assistant for General Manager, Administration, and Secretary of Bank.
1976-1979	Law Department, Edinburgh: various positions.
1973	Joined Royal Bank of Scotland Graduate Trainee Scheme.

**PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS:**  
BSc (Business Studies), Edinburgh University; MBA, Strathclyde University, Completed Associateship of CIOBS in 1976 – awarded Fellowship of the Institute in 1991.  
**INTERESTS:** Golf and rugby.