

Interviewee: Fred Holliday (Professor Sir Frederick George Thomas Holliday, died 2016).
UoS Dates: 1966 - 1975
Role(s): Founding Professor of Biology
Deputy Principal
Acting Principal



Interview summary:

Summary of content; with time (min:secs)

Start 00.53 – The period prior to arrival at the University of Stirling in 1966: Fred Holliday (FH) was a lecturer in Zoology at the University of Aberdeen with responsibility for teaching Biology to Medical students. The night before his interview for the post of chair of Biology was spent in his campervan on Sheriffmuir. Tells an amusing anecdote about how he prepared himself by raiding the waste paper bins outside Garden Cottage, the venue of the interview, revealing valuable intelligence about the University.

03.35 – The interview: the composition of the interview panel is described. Dr Cottrell dominated the proceedings. FH was informed that the Biology department would be a link between Social Sciences (Psychology and Sociology) and Physical Sciences (Chemistry and Physics). Biology would not be a major player in Sciences. The focus for Biology was to be on whole organisms, to avoid conflict with the interests of other Scottish Universities, e.g. Cell Biology at Edinburgh University. This suited the teaching and research interests of FH.

05.20 – His contribution to the future department was ‘Human Ecology’, a broad based course which had been taught and well received by both students and staff of the Medical Faculty of Aberdeen University. The potential of this course was enthusiastically received by Dr Cottrell and Professor Dunn.

08.00 – A phone call from Harry Donnelly (University Secretary) that evening offered him the chair of Biology. On acceptance, he was invited to a meeting of an interim academic development committee the next day to discuss future plans for the University.

08.58– Return to University of Aberdeen where his Professor Wynne- Edwards tried to persuade him to stay where he could continue his research and be promoted in due course.

09.28 – The departmental plan for Biology: reflects on the wisdom of the focus on whole organisms which bucked the general trend in other Biology departments towards cellular and subcellular Biology. He is enthusiastic about the broad approach offered by the given directive. It would allow the study of small organisms (bacteria, protozoa) and progressing to ecology and environmental Biology.


11.25 – Selection of academic staff to meet the broad syllabus is mentioned. Also FH intimates that he had not given thought to the duration of his appointment, “it was a big job with no time limit”.

12.40 – Degree structure: although many decisions were made by academics outwith Stirling University, the semester system and the Part I & 2 structure of the degree programme resulted from interaction between Dr Cottrell and Professor Dunn (friends and colleagues at Edinburgh University). In fact all these decisions were made before the

formation of the Interim academic committee.
14.48 –“Tommy Dunn had a huge influence on Tom Cottrell”
15.05 – Selection of professors: his view is that Dr Cottrell preferred to have professors who were not set in their ways, explaining why so many were young and inexperienced. He and Professor Bain were only 29. Dr. Cottrell had remarked to him that older professors, set in their ways, contributed less to the university. “The young Turks had rallied to the cause”.
16.35 – Dr Cottrell’s vision for sciences at Stirling did not materialise. He had high hopes that Chemistry, Physics and Technological Economics would be the major players. Physics and Chemistry had eminent Professors (Ian Percival & Ronnie Bell FRS) and research staff but failed to recruit students. According to FH “It was the time for biology”. In addition to direct recruitment students came from Psychology and Sociology attracted by Human Ecology. Biology became and remained big.
19.20 – Tensions between Biology and Chemistry are revealed. Biology students were encouraged to take Chemistry but it was not a requirement. Chemistry wanted Biology to force students to take Chemistry to boost their student numbers. After consideration by the Biology staff this was rejected as it would be detrimental to recruitment to Biology from Psychology and Sociology. Instead Biochemistry was embedded in Biology courses
20.26 – Professor Ronnie Bell FRS: the question of how Dr Cottrell managed to attract Professor Bell, a prominent chemist, is raised. FH suggested that Professor Bell respected Dr Cottrell as a “very good physical chemist” and “wanted to be associated with his dynamism”.
21.10 – The relationship between Psychology and Education: FH indicated that Dr Cottrell wanted Education at Stirling to be different, in that it should be based on rigorous research. Education students should be offered the opportunity to study teaching subjects concurrently with Education courses. This approach was met with considerable external resistance. Personal relationships between Professors of Psychology and Education were not good! Instead its relationship with Biology was good and so a link between Psychology and Biology developed.
23.58 – Continuous assessment was debated at Academic Council which was looking for the best way of “interpreting” students. There was a need to balance between the fear of exams and the feeling that exams did not matter. The solution was the ratio 60/40 in favour of exams. FH considered it worked well – a good balance.
25.33 – Teaching Approaches and Methods was not liked. He and a group including Professor Bain thought it did not work. It was introduced too early in the careers of students. He thought it was a brilliant idea but should have been a Part II course.
27.55 – Recruiting of Biology academic staff: FH wanted people he knew and who would be participants and could teach to larger (broad front?) levels with authority. Later he was able to choose specialists.
31.45 – The staffing formula was introduced later to meet the demands as departments grew. The decision was made by the Academic Council. Biology and Psychology, fast growing departments, were given more staff while others such as Physics and Chemistry suffered. The formula was based on Dr Cottrell’s calculation of unit costs. The role of the UGC in funding is also mentioned.
33.26 – The roles of and interrelationships amongst the Academic Board, Academic Council and Court: The Academic Board was the link between the departments and the Court, but this led to conflict with Academic Council which considered the Academic Board was usurping the powers of the Council and that the Court was playing too great a role in Academic matters. The Academic Board fell by the wayside, much to the disappointment of the Principal.
37.20 – Dr Cottrell’s extensive use of mathematical models in papers to academic committees to facilitate decision-making was met with some resistance from professors in non-Science departments. The Professor of French threatened to retaliate by presenting his Council papers in French.
38.50 – The first Biology research students are mentioned, principally Stephen Dadzie, the first overseas postgraduate, originally from Ghana but recruited from Leningrad where he was studying fisheries. His initial project, before starting his PhD, was a survey of the Biology of Airthrey Estate, including the loch. Peter Tytler and Neil Macfarlane were also mentioned as divers involved in a sub aqua survey, which provided the basis of legal protection for the resident trout from poaching.
42.50 – An amusing anecdote about rabbit control on the campus, in which the improbable use of an elephant gun is recounted.
45.25 – The establishment of fish research and Aquaculture as mainstays of research in Biology. A major programme of fish tracking of trout was initiated by FH supported by a research team including Archie Young, Peter Tytler and later Monty Priede. The origins of this research stemmed from an interest in fish energetics: a main component was the cost of swimming. Fish tracking was designed to follow the swimming activity of fish in their natural environment. Special electronic tags, developed by Mr Young of Shared Technical Services, were attached to fish, the signals from which could be used to monitor their movements. More sophisticated tags which allowed monitoring of heart rate and feeding activity were subsequently developed. The techniques were transferred to Loch Leven which was the site

<p>of an International Biological Programme, which ultimately determined the energy flow through this freshwater system, including the fish. This system was ahead of the time (in the 60s) and produced a stream of publications.</p> <p>47.55 – An important link was formed between the University and the Scottish Marine Biological Association's (SMBA) Marine Laboratory at Oban, which allowed awarding of postgraduate degrees to students studying at the SMBA. At the same time the Biology department had access to research ships. Peter Tytler, a research lecturer, was based at Oban. The Nuffield Foundation approached FH to negotiate the establishment of a centre for the study of fish diseases in support of fish farming in Scotland. Dr Ron Roberts, a vet, was recruited and he built up a substantial reputation from which the Institute of Aquaculture was formed. The relationship between Aquaculture and Biology is briefly discussed. Dr McLusky is also named as actively researching the Biology of the Forth. Although opportunist there was a real plan (for the department) involving whole organisms in the Aquatic Environment.</p>
<p>52.20 – The move to Cottrell Building: Interim Development Committee decided that Biology and Psychology should be the first of the Science departments to move which was embraced enthusiastically. John Stewart was engaged to liaise with planners/architects.</p>
<p>53.45 – Involvement in University committees: Airthrey Loch Users, Chaplaincy, Site Development Committees, of which the latter was a nightmare because of a tight time scale and the demands of students. Delays meant boarding students in Callander and Dollar.</p>
<p>55.30 – Stirling students: in contrast to his previous experience FH was closer to his students; small numbers contributed to this. Such relationships were only possible with honours students elsewhere.</p>
<p>56.18 – The Queen's Visit (October 1972): "Difficult times", the overall recollection was of pain felt throughout the University. Decision to hold it was controversial. The death of Harry Donnelly, Secretary of the University was crucial. Student restlessness throughout the world was a contributory factor. The Vietnam War and the situation in South Africa were influences, which caused students to dislike much of what was being done in the name of their countries. Knowing all this was the Queen's visit wise?</p>
<p>58.40 – Response to early signs of student unrest: Dr Cottrell wrote a letter to the Student President warning the students to consider carefully what they might do. This letter did not help. It was decided not to "close the place".</p>
<p>59.30 – FH and Dr Cottrell were with the Royal Party throughout the visit. The students formed a sit-in/occupancy of key areas on the route. They were noisy and out of hand, making comments to the Royal Party. The Queen was dignified and displayed tactful "not hearing"! It was not a drunken rabble, but FH refers to the 'toast' by a bottle wielding student. The police were under instruction to be "very soft – unprovocative".</p>
<p>01.01.20 – The aftermath: The Queen, her party and the police left, leaving FH and Mr Charlie Allardyce, HeadPorter. The Principal and the Secretary (Sir Derek Laing) were very upset, as were many students. "Not a Good day!" The Press had sound and TV recordings of the incident (evidence for disciplinary action?), which they later refused to release. There was outrage in the community. Letters were sent. What should be done- "doing nothing was not an option"?</p>
<p>01.03.25 – Disciplinary action: the Disciplinary Code was deficient and not sufficiently robust. The Discipline Committee was conducted like a Scottish Court, with legal representation on both sides. There was no compulsion on witnesses and no Procurator Fiscal to present the case. What followed was very difficult.</p>
<p>01.04.05 – FH is appointed Deputy Principal: his primary role was to sort it out, "but 'it' took on a life of its own"!</p>
<p>01.04.35 –Community response: their worst fears about students were being realised. To allay fears, expressed in letters full of vitriol, much work had to be done, such as talks to the Rotary Club and other local forums were initiated. Staff was divided as was the Disciplinary Committee, who were doing their best.</p>
<p>01.05.25 – Huge national issue: Professors of Law throughout the land were taking an interest. The strains on Dr Cottrell were great. His normal analytical approach to problems did not work. This was such an emotional issue that cold analysis did not work.</p>
<p>01.06.26 – Dr Cottrell's failing health: during long walks with FH he showed signs of breathlessness. Consequences for His family were distressing. Students express concern.</p>
<p>01.07.00 – Death of Dr Cottrell and consequences: FH calls a meeting of staff. Concerns expressed about Approaching graduation ceremony. FH is appointed Acting Principal and attends a meeting of vice chancellors, in which huge concern is raised. Great help and support is given by Principal Wilson of Glasgow University. He tells an amusing anecdote about the 'Wee Macgregor' to illustrate their ensuing staunch friendship.</p>
<p>01.08.02 – Difficult decisions: drawing the curtains in the Principal's office.</p>
<p>01.08.20 – Emotional pause: clearly upset by the memory</p>
<p>01.08.43– Business as usual: Principal's office back in operation. Huge support is given by staff and students. The Principal's office was seen by some to have got it wrong. Deputy Principals Jim Trainer and Duncan Timms were supportive.</p>
<p>01.10.01 – Graduation Ceremony: decision is made to proceed. Graduation address had to be composed. Dr Cottrell's</p>

<p>memorial service was trying. Mrs Cottrell was devastated. Guilt felt by some who had none, no guilt felt by others who should have.</p>
<p>01.10.54 – The involvement of UGC (University Grants Committee): it had a high regard for Dr Cottrell and what he had achieved at Stirling. Reveals disagreements with Dr Cottrell, but asserts that if the Principal was convinced was won over. Describes how he (FH) coped with his new role. [Editor’s note :see also 21.40]</p>
<p>01.12.15 – Resignation of Sir Derek Lang: the Secretary of the University was devastated by the Queen’s visit and resigned. Bob Bomont, the University Accountant, was appointed replacement. He was a staunch ally to FH. Disciplinary committee proceeds. Appeals committee set in place. Roger Young enquiry considered unhelpful and was shelved. FH’s assessment of his strength was not pursuing things!</p>
<p>01.13.30 – John Reid becomes Student President: John Reid becomes a firm friend. Call for another enquiry. Asa Briggs is appointed. John Reid and FH are advised by Professor Briggs to call a halt and move on. This advice is passed on to staff and students.</p>
<p>01.14.00 – UGC response: UGC was in close touch with events and was very apprehensive. A new university in trouble with a young Acting Principal (39), with some staff not seen as helpful was a concern. It feared for the university. FH did not wish to use this knowledge as a “big stick” but wished to see a return to normality and recapture the original spirit.</p>
<p>01.15.05 – No evidence of bias against Stirling by UGC or other funding organisations. It was necessary to restore faith that things could be done well at Stirling.</p>
<p>01.15.54 – British Association Meeting at Stirling: considered a key to recovery. It was an opportunity for the university to show that it could function normally and do it well. Honorary degree awards and Duncan Timms’s book on the region were significant contributory elements.</p>
<p>01.16.50 – Bomb hoax: an attempt to disrupt the honorary degree ceremony in the Church of the Holy Rude was ignored – a big gamble!</p>
<p>01.17.48 – Professor William Cramond is identified as the candidate for the Principal: FH is told by Lord Wheatley, Chairman of the University Court, not to apply. Expresses disappointment he cannot continue. Agrees with Lord Wheatley that he would be a constant reminder to the university of its past. “It would not have done.”</p>
<p>01.18.35 – Return to the University of Aberdeen: appointed Professor in the Zoology Department, where he began This journey. He took some of the philosophy of Stirling with him, particularly the need to establish firm links with the community, to provide support when times are bad. This approach was continued in his next career step as Vice-Chancellor of Durham University.</p>
<p>01.20.10 – Community relationships and the University of Stirling: patchy, with better links with Bridge of Allan and Dunblane than with Stirling. There was a constant demand for speakers. FH was giving one talk every twelve days! After the Queen’s visit a talk entitled ‘A University in the making and the testing’ was composed. A winning point was open access to the university campus. Also staff inserted new blood, providing talks and chair persons for local committees.</p>
<p>01.22.35 – Reflections on time at Stirling: sources of pleasure were friendships e.g. Jock Scott (technician), Mike Moore (colleague), Mrs Ella McLean (old resident and local historian), Val Heard and Alastair Gentleman (undergraduate students), and the beauty of the site and his involvement with its development.</p>
<p>01.24.38 The Burn was used for a gathering of University Courts. FH attended with Tom Cottrell in a University car, Harry Donnelly and then Derek Lang arrived themselves. There was good will and good humour among the attendees. The Queen’s visit was discussed there.</p>
<p>[Ends 01.29.25]</p>

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