

Interviewee: Eric Richards (Professor)
UoS Dates: 1967 – 1971?
Role(s): Lecturer and founding member of the Dept of History



Interview summary:

Start 00:40 – ER had been at the University of Adelaide for four years and wanted to return to his home country. He was amongst the first wave of appointments at the University of Stirling in the History Department. In either April or May of 1967 he was interviewed by Tom Cottrell, and George Rudé, who was also at the University of Adelaide though he had been appointed to the chair in Stirling. Two people were appointed to the History Department. ER recalls receiving his colleague Malcolm Thomis's letter informing him of his success at obtaining a position at Stirling whilst Thomis received ER's letter.

05:15 – ER and his family moving into a house on Churchill Drive in Bridge of Allan. There were originally only three lecturers in the History Department, ER, Malcolm Thomis and George Rudé. Everyone knew each other due to the small size of Pathfoot, a space which everyone shared. Tom Cottrell was adamant that everyone teach a common course; this was Approaches and Methods. ER taught Logic. Lectures were done by Professors and everyone including staff had to go. It didn't last for long.

07:09 – Rudé was responsible for setting up the Department and the focus on post 1700s teaching with a wide geographical spread across the department. ER can imagine that people thought the department would teach medieval Scottish history and looking back he sees this as a failing on their part. He felt that the lecturers were a diverse bunch with different backgrounds and cosmopolitan interests and that there was a great chemistry amongst them. ER was on appointing committees; there were interesting applicants. He believes fewer qualifications were required then to get into positions and that there was a lot of flexibility for lecturers to advance if they wished. Pathfoot was a building site.

09:34 – There was extreme beauty in the campus and a worry that building on it would ruin the overall look of the place. ER recalls his second daughter being born in Airthrey Castle which was then a maternity hospital. He was very interested in the sports facilities at the university. He played tennis in a Swedish inflatable court which allowed for play in all weathers. It had to be deflated once a year. A game of football was once played in the inflatable court which ER recalls resulting in one goalie's thumb coming out of joint and he personally had to drive the player to hospital. There was no distinction between staff and students especially in sport. They ate and drank together at lunch-time. Cottrell who fostered an egalitarian ethos appointed people who had previously taught outside of the UK.

13:00 – A large number of the first intake of students were young people away from home for the first time. They had to be looked after and there were a few with whom they had difficulty. There were a few mature students. ER recalls one key mature student was Monica Clough who was a worldly, urbane and experienced person who was part of the social cement at the University and was intellectually excited by being there. She helped both the young students and also the staff. ER later went on to work with Clough and published a book with her. Through Clough's network of

contacts ER met a great many people in the Highlands who gave him access to family archives. . He can also recall ex-students such as George MacKenzie who became top archivist at Register House in Scotland.

16:44 – ER left after only four years at Stirling. He became nostalgic for Australia where more opportunities were opening up. It felt like things at Stirling weren't as interesting as at the start. Another issue that caused him to leave was the loss of George Rudé whom the University perhaps lost faith in. It was felt that Rudé's replacement David Waddell was not as intellectually exciting as Rudé was. ER had made many good friends at Stirling and recalls feeling some guilt at leaving

20:08 – ER can remember the Library being built and how impressed he was by the scale and cost of the new Library. The move to Cottrell changed the atmosphere of the University. The History Department became more inward looking and there was a loss of the early intimacy of the place.

21:42 – There were informal meetings in people's homes amongst the historians where papers were read and discussed. ER can remember John McCracken creating a new world history course focusing just before World War I. It was seen as important for there to be excitement and engagement in the University. There is a problem when departments grow bigger, there is often more fragmentation.

24:41 – ER talks about his work in the Highlands of Scotland and how there is an echo from Stirling as many felt the University at the time should have been placed in Inverness

28:34 – The students were not overly political in the early days. There was a greater focus on sports and drama. There was also a strong emphasis on art and collecting pieces of work. Cottrell managed to bring exhibitions to the university and there was an eye for design inside as well as outside the buildings. 1% of the University's income was set aside for artworks. ER comments on the career of George Rudé.

[Ends: 36:29]

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