



Interviewee: Duncan (Professor D W G) Timms and Elizabeth Timms

UoS Dates: DT: 1972 – 2006; ET 1980 -1981, 2006 - 2008

Role(s): DT: Professor, Dept of Sociology, 1972 - Deputy Principal, c 1978 – 1986, and Acting Principal, c1980 – 1981
Dean of Faculty of Human Sciences 1989 – 2004
Emeritus Professor
ET: Postgraduate student ,Dip Social Work
Tutor in Social Work



Interview summary:

Summary of content; with time (min:secs)

Start 00:24 – Professor Duncan came from New Zealand in 1972. Difficult starting up a new department at the university in New Zealand when overall student numbers could not be increased. Parents in Britain. Introduced to Stirling by Max Marwick whom Duncan had known in Australia. Stirling said by Max Marwick to be a radical new university. Stirling promoted itself as overcoming the ‘two cultures’: common grounding for all students and specialisation later, many combined Honours programmes, and good staff-student relations. Duncan and Elizabeth arrived in winter when there were strikes and power shortages. Unfurnished and unheated house in Churchill Drive. University doing well.

02:42 – Queen’s Visit October 1972. This turned into a farce-tragedy because Tom Cottrell et al didn’t know how to react. For next 18 months University tore itself apart. Hans Meidner and Frank Bradbury reacted sensibly. Tom Cottrell good at handling small institutions.

04.00 – New Principal: Bill Cramond, with a background in psychiatry, treated the University very well - as a patient. Bill and his wife Bertine were very sociable, brought different parts of the University together. Duncan becomes Deputy Principal under Bill Cramond. Pressure from outside to make cuts, or even to close the University, seen as dangerously radical. Some from Russell group of universities wanted closure of new places like Stirling.

05:53 – Cramond left around 1980, and Duncan was Acting Principal before Ken Alexander came as Principal. Difficulty of maintaining student numbers led to lowered entrance qualifications. Ken Alexander was outgoing and politically astute and developed links, and with Duncan introduced new subjects like Business Studies and Environmental Science.

08:10 – John Forty came as new Principal in about 1986, from background in Computing Science [*Editor’s note: NB Physics*], and was less sympathetic to humanities and social sciences.

08:57 – Late 1980s time of mergers: failed attempt to merge Paisley and Stirling (Ken Alexander and Duncan for: 32 against). Development of Nursing Studies by taking over Callendar Park.

10:17 – Stirling was a leader in use of IT in learning: development of e-Learning.

11:44 – Development of Faculties. Duncan became Dean of Faculty of Human Sciences and was keen on links between

psychology and sociology.
12:15 – Colin Bell came as New Principal: another brief golden period. The setback that came with his sudden death had as negative an impact as the 1972 Queen’s visit..
12:48 – Christine Hallett took over as new Principal. Apart from Colin Bell, most Principals after the early days lacked vision of Stirling as different, which disappointed Duncan
14:12 – Elizabeth Timms talks of early small-scale university, collaboration and flexibility. Creative writing in English Studies. Social links between different types of staff, academic and non-academic. Henry Milne (Head Gardener), John Riddy and wife Felicity (née Maidment), Tom? [<i>Editor’s note: Jack</i>] Cunningham (Chief Porter). Worked together to defend vulnerable University. Duncan in University Croquet Team with Gordon Peacock (Librarian), Jack McConnell (President of SUSA). Learning together rather than the more conventional discipline-based university of recent years
17:57 – Bob Bomont (University Secretary). Purchase of Fish Farm in Bannockburn. Bob more prepared to take risks than his successors. Move from distinctive university to more conventional, and more difficult to get imaginative things done.
21:06 – Role of Court: Council not prepared to take a strong line. Lord Stewart as Chair of Court had been very good, others less imaginative. Constituencies within Court. Court’s role in financial allocation. Court’s role in student discipline, heavy-handed in 1972 and later.
23:51 – University’s vulnerability after 1972. Outside forces exerting pressure. Local people turned against the University. Some bus drivers would not stop at the University. Fewer local applicants.
26:30 – Early innovative atmosphere. Dollarbeg. Ewan Stewart (Lord Stewart) and Lord Wheatley as positive forces in early development. Monty Finnieston was very good Chancellor and amazing character, great memory and little sleep.
28:39 – MacRobert: Duncan was Chair for about 10 years, bringing in BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra.
30:21 – Sport: demands for training conflicted with academic and social life at Cambridge.
32:27 – Other key decision-making roles: Secretary and Registrar. Fred Smyth important registrar, but thereafter role of registrar became less powerful. University Librarian: Gordon Peacock and Peter Kemp. Duncan worked closely with Peter Kemp (new role: Director of Information Services) in changing role of Library with expansion of IT. Stirling was one of the leading universities in integrating information services.
36:24 – University Secretary: Bob Bomont and Kevin Clarke, the latter conventional, disagreeing with Duncan over IT.
38:09 – Recovery from Queen’s Visit: new subjects and pressure to have socially useful subjects. Sociology seen as dangerous. Hans Meidner pressed for Student Counselling Service and Advisers of Studies, and was seen by students as sympathetic. Student isolation on campus for longer through semester system. Semester system advantages: allows students to try something new without too much commitment. Advisers of Studies system (especially important for Stirling’s flexible programme, and campus setting) was abolished by Christine Hallett.
44:42 – Campus: Henry Milne and Joyce Dunn. Campus as beautiful and as something distinctive for Stirling. Need for good support systems for students. Positive role of Student Associations. Estates and Buildings worked to include students with disabilities, e.g. at graduation. Staff and students shared common facilities, e.g. restaurants. Buildings largely complement the campus.
51:02 – Faculty of Human Sciences: importance of secretariat – Monica Cessford. Faculties’ role in academic planning and resolving problems of finance or personnel.
52:51 – Monitoring and accountability: increased bureaucracy. Elizabeth: example of student expenses. Heads, Finance Committee and Finance Officers might be more ‘can do’ or more risk-averse.
58:59 – University changing through Queen’s visit or just enlargement: Tom Cottrell already struggling, but had got this rather different University going. Principals living on campus helped pull everyone together. Approaches and Methods common course had already finished when Duncan arrived.
1:02:28 – Work and home: Duncan as Acting Principal didn’t use Principal’s house, but they did entertaining. Staff links through children at Bridge of Allan school. Living close to Peter McEwen.
1:03:58 – Gender in social and academic life. Dinner parties: Joyce Dunn maintaining the tradition that women should withdraw after meal. Prof Juliet Cheetham mistaken for secretary.
1:07:11 – Links between work and home: Scandinavian connections through academic interests. Elizabeth was part of Duncan’s role at University from the first, and they originally wanted to buy a house on campus. Stirling had students living on campus but staff commuting in. With staff families and their children living off campus, for students it could become a hothouse atmosphere. Duncan and Elizabeth speak of the original offer of the job.
1:12:27 – Stirling’s potential to be different: had been more exciting than more renowned traditional universities – exciting and cooperative, people working together and having fun.
1:14:31 – Links with Nordic countries: Swedish glass. Involvement with Sweden through statistics project. Stayed for summers in glass district. Duncan later became Chair of the Scottish Glass Society, and established links with Swedish glassmakers. In conjunction with John Riddy, commissioned the Swedish design wooden chalets on Stirling campus. Scottish engraved glass exhibited in Sweden to encourage Swedes to get back to engraving.

1:29:28 – Andrew Williamson Trust: annual lecture on politics. Jo Grimond the first. George Younger dined with the Timms at their home in Alloa: security officers in the bushes. Original trust negotiated with Ken Alexander. Helped the University to make friends in high places.
1:35:28 – Characters at the University. Cleaning Tommy Dunn’s room: heavy smoker. Enid Marshall (Business Law) lived in her room for a while with small dogs: cleaners’ ultimatum. James Holden (Professor of Business Law) came to see Duncan and spoke slowly to write down every word. Ken Alexander’s appointment as Principal was threatened by University’s ban on dogs: dog reclassified by Court as honorary cat. Now fewer characters: eccentricity doesn’t fit in with performance targets.
1:40:32 – John Riddy: personal library fell through top floor in Airthrey Castle, which led to renovation. Riddy brought in the Open University Summer School. Robert Innes brought in fiddlers from Shetland and Angus, and also Jean Redpath. Pibroch competition indoors in Airthrey Castle. Jan Garbarek as part of Scandinavian season.
1:45:21 – At retirement 18 months of pension lost.
1:48:48 – Elizabeth: oral history interview revives memories of a University set up with initiative, with people working to make it happen, sometimes in all their eccentric ways.
[Ends at 1:49:32]

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