

Interviewee: Robin Ruffell (Dr Robin John Ruffell)  
UoS Dates: 1970 -  
Role(s): Lecturer then Senior Lecturer, Dept of Economics, 1970 – 2007.  
Currently Senior Teaching Fellow in the Management Education Centre



## Interview summary:

### *Summary of content; with time (min:secs)*

**Start 00:13** – Interviewed in February 1970 and was appointed from September that year. Was his first appointment. Had done his undergraduate degree at Cambridge and then his PhD at Bristol. Interviewed by Andrew Bain, Brian Loasby and David Waddell. Andrew Bain had been RR's supervisor at Cambridge and was friends with RR's main referee Michael Farrow. Was a time of rapid expansion and there were five posts to fill.

**03:01** – Arrived in September 1970. Was difficult to find accommodation and so was offered accommodation by the University at Dalnair House in Bridge of Allan. Dalnair had been the Principal's house and was divided up into seven or eight flats which were offered to new staff for one year. Enjoyed time there, it was a good way of getting to know people from across the University. An estate of houses was being built in Causewayhead and RR bought one. It wasn't finished when it was time to move out of Dalnair so RR lived with Les Simpson in Dunblane. Les Simpson became the first warden of the residences and had to move, so RR moved with him. RR still lives in Causewayhead.

**07:31** – Started off working in Pathfoot as it was the only building. Was getting very crowded as the staff that were to fill Cottrell were already being appointed. The first part of Cottrell, T70, was late. Economics was based in Pathfoot but the Institute of Finance was based in Fairview so RR was moved there. Had to share a desk with five other people but was able to work from home.

**09:33** – Eventually moved in to T70 in October. There were discussions in Academic Assembly about the building being surrounded by mud, with no lighting or heating. Teaching in those circumstances was difficult but they managed. Other parts of the building, T71 and T72, were still under construction so there was a lot of building noise.

**12:07** – More and more people were coming in to T70 so he had to keep moving offices. Most people had to share an office, RR shared with Peter Jackson.

**13:33** – Queen's visit. RR had nothing to do with it as he had broken his leg on a walk with the Economics Department to the Trossachs and was in Bannockburn Hospital in traction. By the time he returned, the semester was well underway and he took over his classes at mid-semester.

**15:35** – The teaching load was heavy but there was no sympathy from Andrew Bain as he had done all the teaching in the first year. Economics was popular among undergraduates. Almost all students took three subjects so the first Economics class was large. Everyone in the Department had to take first year tutorials as well as their own courses. The number of students was increasing vastly.

**17:22** – University was a friendly community at the beginning with everyone in Pathfoot together. This ended with the move to Cottrell as it didn't have any social space. Apart from going to lunch at the MacRobert for lunch every

Department was on its own. The long, narrow corridors with not a lot of light didn't encourage people to hang around them. Made it harder to mix with other Departments.

**18:51** – Had done some teaching at Bristol as a research student. Found it more formal at Stirling, students regarded you with a bit of reservation as you were a member of staff. Continuous assessment sometimes meant assessing students in tutorials so students were reserved about talking to staff in case what they said was held against them. Did have friendly relations with some students, it was easy to be in social contact with them. Had one or two exceptional students in that early period

**21:04** – The Ruffell algorithm was developed by RR to use when classifying degrees. Departments were getting in to difficulties deciding what class degrees should be, especially combined degrees. With a combined degree the chief examiner from the other department would come to a meeting at your department where they would sign off on the classification you had awarded the student. This either led to long meetings where people disagreed, or examiners just signing off without really considering whether the grade was fair to the student. RR wanted degrees to be given fairly at Stirling. On one occasion when RR was chief examiner for Economics he refused to sign off on a degree at a meeting with another Department. It was then escalated to the Academic Review Board. Mike Jackson was Deputy Principal and RR explained to him that he wanted to bring attention to this odd way of awarding degrees. A working party was appointed with a representative from each faculty. RR was the representative from Social Sciences and he developed an algorithm that he thought the others could agree on. Richard Bland used the computer to run this and other algorithms to exemplify how they would work. The working party agreed on it and it was presented to Academic Council and passed. This algorithm was used up until last year [2015].

**28:48** – Hadn't finished his PhD at Bristol as the computer he had been dependent on had failed and the work was being sent to Harwell which really slowed things down. Was able to use the computer at Stirling but didn't have time during semesters due to the heavy teaching workload. Took RR three years to complete, finally submitting it in 1973. It wasn't until that was done that he could consider what to do next in terms of research. Research was a private matter, no one discussed what he was going to do or when. RR worked in applied econometrics and Chuck Brown approached him to work on a project funded by the Treasury with him and David Ulph. Worked on that until 1985.


**35:02** – Changes. Increase in the number of administrative staff and a change in attitude regarding what academics should do. In the beginning RR admitted students to Economics as the selector but it was eventually accepted that this was clerical work. Less emphasis on the Head of Department. Departments now have multiple professors and the Administration now do things that are considered not a proper use of time for an academic.

**37:11** – When appointed Andrew Bain told RR to go to the Library and make a list of books missing for his topic but that kind of buying came to an end soon. Difficult to judge quality of resources as RR had never been staff anywhere else. Spent a lot of time talking about teaching and changing courses. Stirling attracted people who were interested in teaching.

**39:04** – Early on there were regular meetings of the Academic Assembly and everyone would attend. University Secretary Bob Bomont and Principal Tom Cottrell were seen to be very important people. University not very bureaucratic.

**40:52** – Heard of problems between students and the community but never personally noticed. People didn't take notice of whether or not you were a part of the University. RR had neighbours who thought they couldn't use the MacRobert as it was in the University: that attitude dragged on a while.

[Ends 42:39]

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| <b>Interviewed by:</b>       | Carolyn Rowlinson |   |  |
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