

Interviewee: Matilda Mitchell (Mrs Douglas Hall, qv)  
UoS Dates: 1965 - 1974  
Role(s): Personal Assistant to Principal Cottrell. Major role in developing the University Art collection.



## Interview summary:

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

**Start 00:55:** MM had left London and came back to Scotland to find a good job and saw an advertisement in the paper for a personal assistant for the Principal of the new University of Stirling; the appointee was expected to have a degree which MM had not got.. The interview was conducted in Edinburgh by Tom Cottrell in 1965. He was taken by surprise by her forwardness. Originally MM didn't believe she was up to the job then changed her mind later on the day of the interview and said if Cottrell was still looking she'd very much like the job. He offered it to her but docked her salary. She had her own very expensive portable typewriter with which she worked on the edge of a desk in the chemistry department in Edinburgh. Chemists were good fun and she recalls playing something like cricket with them in the long corridors. Got to grips with writing academic guide pre computer: it was tough and she had to make five copies. She was the first full-time employee. She was told to furnish Garden Cottage in which the offices were housed before Pathfoot was built and she did it.

**06:20:** MM became an administrator and Cottrell ended up with two secretaries. He discussed everything with her. She was chauffeur to the possible new professors whom she would take for ice cream on their way to the University. She was in on everything and was in love with her job. Eventually MM became an information officer. One young woman was appointed as the switchboard, followed by the appointment of Maureen McKerracher. MM was much more powerful than she should have been but this was due to the place being so small. Professor Tommy Dunn was an early appointment, he had just returned from America. She decorated Ivy Cottage yellow which accountancy secretary Bob Bomont never forgave her for. MM asked the Arts Council for pictures. Tom drove a Lotus Elan fast; the University car was a maroon Rover; almost all the other University cars in Scotland were black. She recalls a time when she drove Tom to Dundee to meet the Queen Mother. She lost the car keys when she went shopping round Dundee. She only found them just in time.

15:26: The academic guide was finalized and staff were extremely pleased with some interdisciplinary pieces. Mathematical psychology was included. The Approaches and Methods interdisciplinary course was created but was stifled by Professor Dunn. Students helped set up clubs. David Clements, a student, set up the sailing club. Everybody who could did.

17:35: The Pathfoot design was a single storey building slotting into the surrounding environment..It had beautiful

gardens. It was built in a great hurry, and in the wrong order. The fact that the building was built on time was a miracle. MM can recall an early mature Ghanaian student who had been studying in Moscow called Patrick Dadzie [Editor's note: Stephen Dadzie] who studies the ecology of the loch. She also remembers they couldn't get recommendations for him due to the Cold War. Allangrange had been bought and was used for various things. People watched the buildings with huge excitement.

**21:10:** Greenhouses were being smashed up, and demolished and replaced with terrapin huts. Books started being collected for the library, John Stirling was the first librarian. There was no canteen in the early days. Everyone was on the same level. They moved into Pathfoot feeling really positive. Cleaning ladies were louder than others and older lecturers found it hard to deal with the volume of their conversation, and so a separate staff room was created.

**24:30:** They had students as young as 16 in the early days. MM can remember early mature students like Monica Clough, David Clements, Paul Martin, Alastair Gentleman and Jackie Roberts. MM became friends with a lot of the students. The students were mostly living in Bridge of Allan in the early days. There were 150 students in the first intake.

**26:28:** From very early on they started filling the place with pictures. Cottrell said they needed some for the opening of Pathfoot. Richard Demarco provided the first intake of pictures. Cottrell would sometimes lecture on art; he gave a lecture on Turner to chemistry students. Cottrell also used to race with students around the campus. MM can recall Isobel Walker and George Rudé, a Communist..

**30:00:** They copied universities in Scandinavia which spent 1% of budget on art. There was an art committee consisting of Professor Dunn, Cottrell and MM who was the secretary of the committee. Professors Dunn and Cottrell did the buying. MM had to make sure they got to the University, catalogue them and make sure the bills were paid. Tom had a friend, Leslie Waddington who had a gallery and they would discuss who to buy from. Waddington gave a lecture on art but it was a bit disappointing. Hugh Trevor-Roper, the historian, gave a lecture which disappointed everyone as it was an attack on Scotland and Scottish history.

**33:52:** MM had a close friendship with Cottrell and other staff members. After Derek Lang's appointment matters started to go really wrong. She asked if she could live in Garden Cottage. She developed a superficial knowledge of each department. She often showed guests round Pathfoot and recalls showing 36 visitors from Bavaria around the building talking loudly enough to disturb some academics.

**38:00:** Richard Demarco's works were not a permanent part of the collection, and so the university started to buy works. MM asked if they could start holding exhibitions in J lounge to which Cottrell agreed. Lecturers would often buy from the exhibits that came. Works were soon displayed in the corridors of Pathfoot. Estates and Campus services probably disliked her for the holes in the wall. By the time MM left there had been fifty exhibitions. Had friends who she found could help her bring exhibitions to Stirling whilst they were between locations. Cleaning ladies weren't always too considerate of the art pieces.

**43:22:** Garden Cottage became a hub after MacRobert opened. Jon Schueler's wife Magda was a friend and MM can recall an uncomfortable lunch she held at the cottage for him. His pictures would be part of an exhibition with two pieces becoming permanent in the University's art collection.

**46:10:** MM had a hand in designing the MacRobert's art gallery. She had to move exhibitions out of Pathfoot into the art gallery and it was a little bit sad seeing them moved. After Cottrell's passing people seemed to care less and less about the art collection. Bob Bomont had a hand in this. A great deal of art was lost.

**48:22:** One regret of MM's is that she bought small prints for the undergrads that managed to become part of the University's permanent collection. They were not meant to be there. MM wanted an outsider to come in and remove works that shouldn't be there. She recalls a dreadful battle with Margaret Morris, JD Fergusson's widow, over getting some of his paintings. She was a dreadful old lady. Morris consistently wanted things moved from J lounge and reduced MM to tears. MM also began to feel uneasy about people wanting to give pieces of work to the University as she didn't believe they would be safe. Stirling had slid in its security for 20 years. Only one picture has ever been stolen, a Graham Ovenden. Francis Davison was the first artist to have an exhibition in the gallery at the MacRobert.

**53:10:** MM can recall hosting a party in which she introduced Derek Lang to junior staff. She had many people round for dinner and recalls interesting moments from them. A lot of people stayed at Garden Cottage with her overnight. A great many artists, a few Scottish Opera actors and musicians would stay. She remembers her time in the cottage fondly.

**[Ends 59:10]**

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