

Interviewee: Bob Towers (Robert Keith Towers)
UoS Dates: 1967 – 1968
Role(s): Postgraduate: one of the first to graduate with a Master's in Technological Economics



Interview summary:

Summary of content; with time (min:secs)

Start 00:40 – RT believes it to be an accident that he came to Stirling University. He originally worked in the development department of a pre-nationalised steel company in Glasgow The Head of the Development Department asked him to come in and meet Frank Bradbury, Head of the Department of Technological Economics at the University of Stirling. In the meeting RT was introduced as a candidate for the new MSc in Technological Economics. Was soon told he was on the course. He had no choice about it at all. Told where and when to go and that he'd get an introduction. It was a very unique MSc which only two other students from England were doing with him.

05:24 – The course was principally lecture based, running over two semesters with a six week break between them. During the six week break they would go back to their companies and work on a project for the degree. There were exams at end of 2nd semester then they would work further on their project till end of August. The staff to student ratio at a guess of 4 to1, more staff than students. Staff were supportive with a mixture of backgrounds. The lecturers weren't engineering or science- based which was a culture shock at first. All students on the MSc course were mature, with industrial backgrounds.

08:50 – RT had no input into his research project. His company came up with a list of projects and he was best suited for the one Bradbury approved. The project focused on foundry and casting which was not his area of expertise but he believes he took to it easily. The project was to look at a new casting technique and financially justify it.

11:00 – One or two of the subjects were outside of his area of knowledge. Micro/ Managerial Economics was a subject he really took to, taught by Brian Loasby. Great lecturer. Mike Makower's subject was tricky. Professor Bradbury did the technological side of things which wasn't particularly difficult. RT's supervisor was Andrew Bain who was Professor of Economics. In retrospect, he was a good supervisor, being greatly supportive.

13:20 – His project did help prove there was a justification for financially investing even if there wasn't a lot of money put in to foundry. It also improved quality and cut the time of the production process. He returned to his previous job, but wished for a wider range of work, and it didn't happen. So he left he left a year after graduating. His project made a marked difference to productivity in his first work. If he hadn't come to Stirling he believes he would have stayed in product development in the steel industry.

16:30 – Due to the course being part-time, he didn't spend time in Stirling that wasn't for lectures or tutorials. He barely used the Library. Any information needed he could get from his work. In retrospect he wasn't overly integrated. There wasn't a lot at Stirling other than the Pathfoot building. Regrets he didn't get more involved during his time at Stirling.

20:53 – RT's course kept him in a bubble. He wasn't aware that there were any other courses in the Department with students due to graduate at the same time as him. There weren't any joint lectures with students from other courses. He

<p>didn't spend much time in the actual town of Stirling either.</p>
<p>24:19 – He kept briefly in touch with another MSc student and a few members of staff, but he regrets not staying in touch for longer. There was also no encouragement or allowance to publish the report from his project.</p>
<p>25:30 – The lecturers and the course itself is looked back on fondly especially due to the effect it had on his career. Stirling's newness meant there were no entrenched attitudes in the University. The course was radical and pioneering. Most people didn't even know Stirling had a university. RT sees the one disadvantage was not getting more socially involved. He probably would have moved if he had been single.</p>
<p>28:44 – RT moved to the National Engineering Laboratory in East Kilbride and joined the Economic Assessment Unit. It looked at existing projects to see if they were financially worth the money spent on them. Management didn't take notice of recommendations made by the Unit though. He was there for five years. He then went back to British Steel in the Management Economics Department for 2 years. Re-organisation led to him working with a management accountant for two years where he rewrote the price list for the organisation. He then was offered a job in the Marketing Department for three years. In 1981, Plate Development Executive for a Belgian company. He developed the market for plate for nearly 10 years.</p>
<p>38:50 – It's believed that having his degree from Stirling helped get him the jobs RT had. A colleague in the NEL eventually went on the MSc course RT did. Wouldn't have got into the Management Accountancy area if it weren't for the course.</p>
<p>41:20 – In 1991 he left the Pate office and worked in a number of small companies, but the market was shrinking for steel. Whilst he was out of a job a friend directed him to the Mechanical Engineering Department of Strathclyde University, which was looking for materials/ commercial experience. 5 weeks into his work, the Dean told him about an industry based MPhil project the University was doing and asked RT if he'd like to run it. He was eventually asked if he'd like to join the University.</p>
<p>49:50 – Stirling changed the course of his career. He also enjoyed working with the Belgians. He thinks well of Bradbury and Loasby. Andrew Bain was like a stern grandfather, who ensured he graduated on time. He did feel he was in a bubble in his course, never meeting others from outside it. Never had a feeling he wouldn't pass.</p>
<p>[Ends 1:00:33]</p>

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