

Interviewee: Alastair Gentleman  
UoS Dates: 1967 - 1971  
Role(s): Undergraduate (Hons Biology). First student to register at the University. Subsequent involvement with the Graduates' Association



## Interview summary:

**Start 00:24** – Had an inspirational teacher in school, Jean Elizabeth Grant, who taught French and Latin. Applied to Newcastle University in 1966 to study French and was accepted. AG's brother told him that if he could wait a year there was a new university opening in Stirling with a trout loch on the estate. Transferred application from Newcastle to Stirling. Wanted to spend more time outdoors and so transferred from French to Biology before starting as he had a double Higher in Zoology and Botany. As Stirling was flexible this was possible. There were no faculties; he also studied English for two semesters which he enjoyed.

**04:04** – Came to an open day with his father, a keen gardener who was struck by the estate. AG was impressed with the buildings. There was only one teaching building – Pathfoot; Garden Cottage and the Principal's house. In Pathfoot there was J corridor which housed J lounge, a shower block and the coffee lounge. The coffee lounge was staffed by Wee Gladys. There were only 143 undergraduates. Would eat in the refectory. Had discos in J lounge. There wasn't to be social segregation between staff and students. The staff/student club was at Allangrange.

**08:33** – If you lived within two hours travelling distance of the University you were asked to travel in as there were no residences, and accommodation nearby was limited. AG lived in Linlithgow and would get the bus in. Ninian Fergus (?), Len [Leonard] Mair, Alec Maxwell and Margaret Bell (?) got the same bus. Len Mair, Alec Maxwell and AG decided to find a flat in Stirling for second year. Rented the attic of a mansion on Upper Bridge Street from the Callaghan family. Alec Maxwell did a general degree and so left after two years in the flat, but Len Mair and AG stayed for the three years left of their degree. The house was bought by the Smiths but they kept the same tenants.

**15:28** – Social life was slow to start with as no institutions were set up. The main focus was on the coffee lounge, J lounge and Allangrange. Discos were held in J lounge and societies would organise events in town. Sports clubs included hockey, football and rugby but staff had to be drafted in to make up numbers. A Fencing Club, Carol Swan was the only girl in the Fencing Club. Ken Smith was the first person AG met at Stirling. Badminton Club practised in an inflatable structure known as a barracuda. Judo Club. Drama Society which put on plays in J lounge. There was a well-used bar in Allangrange.

**20:16** – Attended the first lecture of the university at 8.30 on possibly Monday 17th September 1967, a psychology lecture given by Professor McEwen in the main lecture theatre. Another one in Modern Languages was going on at the same time.

**21:15** – Assessment was largely continuous. In Biology there was a mix of practical and written assessments. Remembers

Donald McLusky getting excited as Biology had a computer that could calculate averages and means.
<b>23:41</b> Not a lot of support for students. Staff were new and were in the same position as the students. AG was fortunate to have John Stewart as a Director of Studies; there was some guidance there. Staff were learning as they went and didn't have a lot of preparation time. Was a learning experience for staff and students. The Approaches and Methods course didn't last long partly because students required a Pass to continue and some of them failed.
<b>27:37</b> – Biology had a trial run for your dissertation during third year. Two students would work together on a project. Compared to modern standards what AG studied at honours level was quite basic. Colin Hunter and AG did a project on colour recognition in birds. Did a dissertation project in the final year. Although you were specialising in honours there was still the opportunity to study a broad range of courses involving different aspects of Botany that gave AG a wide range of experience. The flexible structure at Stirling allowed AG to move from French to Biology, but also allowed him to study English and gain experience outside of Biology. Transferable skills hinge on not being admitted to a faculty.
<b>37:10</b> – Chancellor Lord Robbins had chaired the committee that was looking into opening a new university in Scotland. Compared to the other possibilities, Stirling was the right choice. Falkirk got second prize and they built a teacher training college there that had a short life. Lord Robbins hosted the Chancellor's Ball in 1968. Before that there had been an opening dinner where AG was seated beside Professor Sir Michael Swann. A lot was happening to celebrate the opening of the University. These events were held in the refectory in Pathfoot, as was graduation. Big Gladys worked in the Pathfoot refectory. The refectory also held concerts: Elton John, The Groundhogs, The Writing on the Wall and Jury all played there.
<b>41:38</b> – Doesn't think MacRobert was finished during his time at Stirling. The Library was nearly done but they still did most of their work in Pathfoot. Labs had moved to Cottrell. Teaching was mostly in the new building and Pathfoot was reorganised.
<b>42:57</b> – Getting off campus. English Studies ran excursions to Perth Theatre to such plays as <i>Live Like Pigs</i> ; visited the Allan Park cinema; events took place at the Albert Halls; some students formed a folk group called The Trekkers – Barbara Bell, Carol Swan, Craig Mair and Dave Leadbetter. They often played in a hotel in Bridge of Allan and once opened for The Humblebums, which was Billy Connolly and Gerry Rafferty's band.
<b>44:31</b> – Mixed with other Scottish universities. The Biology Society held the Scottish Universities Biology Society Symposium. Also mixed by playing sports. Not any exchanging of ideas in Biology as far as AG was aware.
<b>45:54</b> – AG has been involved with the University since 1967. Was on various committees, including Secretary of the Climbing Club. After graduating stayed involved with the Graduates' Association, both as a member and on the committee. Prefers to focus on the graduates and undergraduates rather than the University and its administration. Did a number of things with the Association with a view to improving the experience for graduates and undergraduates. Chaired the Association for some time, and was asked to return by Alan Forrester after stepping down. The Association supported Dunblane Primary School after the massacre. It also produced a magazine called <i>The Bulletin</i> and ran trips to the Burn. The Graduates' Association morphed in to the Alumni Association which AG found difficult as its aim was to support the University rather than graduates. Still attends Conference which can be frustrating as so many people should be there that don't go. AG still goes to ask questions he hopes are to the benefit of graduates and undergraduates.
<b>54:50</b> – Fortieth anniversary of the university. Colin Hunter and AG thought the anniversary should be celebrated and so met up on campus to plan something. They went to the office with a view to contacting as many people as possible. The thought of two people unrelated to the University putting something together prompted the University to organise an in-house celebration. Fiftieth anniversary is approaching and AG has heard various things are being planned. It's important that there are records of the University's history. The people were always the most important thing at the University; he plans to produce a book of reminiscences of the unique experience of the Class of '67.
<b>[Ends 1:00:10]</b>

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