

Interviewee: Valerie Fairweather (sometime known as Valerie Walker)
UoS Dates: 1973 - 2003
Role(s): Cataloguer and Evening Assistant, Library, 1973 - 2000
Warden of Geddes Court, 1989 - 1996
Collections Curator, 1989 - 2003



Interview summary:

Summary of content; with time (min:secs)

Start 00:36 – Came to Stirling University in 1973 with husband, who was taking up post as Senior Lecturer in French. Left job as Deputy Librarian in academic library in England. Loved beauty of campus and the sculpture around the campus especially the George Wyllie exhibition including a question mark coming out of the loch. Impressed with all the art on display arising from 10% (corrected to 1%) spent on art in the University. There was a policy of distributing paintings to staff for their offices.

05:12 – Became an Evening Senior in the Library (without an interview) getting there on her yellow moped from Tillicoultry for a few years. When children at school catalogued in the library during the day. Carrels full of students.

Remembers in particular 1982 when Librarian used Ceefax VF watching with library staff and students the sinking of Belgrano during Falklands War on TV.

07:50 – Remembers sit-ins and protests probably at time of Queen's Visit (12 October 1972). Changed cataloguing system – VF was square peg in round hole so changed to art collection.

08: 54 – Became Warden of Geddes Court after party at Felicity Riddy's, when accommodation Officer Marjorie Russell, an inspirational woman, approached VF about this role which she got after interview. Responsible for seven years for 200 first-year students. Student crises took priority over the day job in the library. She tried to keep the noise levels in hall down. On one occasion an ironing board was thrown out of a window. Family non-disclosure to staff in the residences sometimes made job difficult e.g when a female student who suffered from psychotic episodes had to be sectioned and when 3 girls were suicidal. Later a flat was made available in Polwarth Hall for female Islamic students. Very rewarding role. Cleaners made VF aware of certain things which might have been missed and helped students cook.

<p>18:27 – University’s social side. Joint social facilities at the time not good for discussing student problems in private. Separate staff club set up in sports centre. George (John) Reid as MP came and spoke with people at the club. Copy <i>Sun</i> to be found there. Memory of legendary MacRobert rock buns. Joiners were helpful with the Art Collection.</p>
<p>23:05 – Remembers big Tam McGovern. VF championed non-academic staff. On VF’s leaving do all great and good present and the non-academic staff, including joiners and electricians who made a guard of honour for her. She sometimes found senior academics and members of the administration patronizing.</p>
<p>26:24 – Started work in the Art Collection on loans to other institutions. Remembers the Fergussons stored in a pile in a boiler room in Cottrell when Pathfoot was being ‘re-jigged’. Honorarium of £500 pa to negotiate the loan of paintings and artworks.. VF experienced cataloguer and painter. Visited Scottish Amicable to see Managing Director, Ken Hurry about Fergussons and asked for money to conserve them. Received large grant from Scottish Amicable and all were re-framed and restored and an alarm system was installed. Guy Peploe (artist’s grandson) suggested contacting company in the Borders who funded postcards.</p>
<p>31:11 – VF attended University Museums in Scotland (UMiS) meetings. Ian Carradice, St Andrews and Macmillan from Talbot Rice, Edinburgh. Hosted a meeting at Stirling University after asking Bob Bomont for money for the event’s catering which was well received by other members.</p>
<p>32.40 – The University took part in the Drysdale Report looking at university collection provision in Scotland. Scottish Museums Council gave VF one paid day a week. Art job moved to auspices of Information Services becoming half-time post. 25th anniversary 1992 VF involved in two exhibitions – one on best of the University’s art collection and one on the Scottish Colourists held in MacRobert. Guy Peploe wrote foreword. VF borrowed Cadell’s painting <i>The Orange Blind</i> (Woman in black hat) from Glasgow. Sylvia Dow, Education Officer, was very important. Team of seven final year students invigilated the exhibition 24/7. VF appeared live on BBC Jimmy MacGregor’s 12 noon programme.</p>
<p>38:39 – Scottish Sculpture Open held at same time included Diane Maclean’s <i>Shoe</i>, which is still at Stirling. Scottish Sculpture Trust run by Andrew Guest. Remembers George Wyllie servicing his <i>Locomotive</i> work which ended up in Pathfoot concourse. Hepworth piece also lent to retrospective at Yorkshire Sculpture park.</p>
<p>44.56 – VF managed to get library wall painted as Robin Davis had been unable to get it done. Funds available and Estates and Services were good. Richard Robbins (sculptor and painter and son of Lord Robbins) visited Stirling and VF asked him for some of his own work. He invited VF to London – led to works now in Stirling including <i>Adam and Eve</i> and some paintings.</p>
<p>48:56 – Caught whooping cough from a member of staff when warden. Scottish Arts Council (SAC) was getting rid of its back collection and invited registered galleries to apply for them and attend Open Day. Since VF unwell, later ended up with personal viewing with Wendy Lawes. Proposed gallery at Pathfoot open to the public with security. VF received all her A list and half B list from SAC</p>
<p>52:47 – Dinner with Elizabeth Blackadder and John Houston after Colourists exhibition.</p>
<p>53:47 – Colin Bell, Principal, keen on using Principal’s house for art. VF nearing retirement by this time. Shared her knowledge with Jane Cameron</p>
<p>55:20 – <i>Pursuit of Knowledge</i> sculpture was a commission in memory of Tom Cottrell. Deputy Principal Sally Brown spoke to VF about the misuse of Tom Cottrell’s memorial art fund for shortfall at the MacRobert. VF complained to the Principal and £10,000 was granted for a sculpture competition which was won by a work by Iain McColl. Significance of crystal in the work (the figure holds a crystal) as Cottrell had been a crystallographer.</p>
<p>59:28 – University very supportive of its staff. Totem pole carved in situ; history of it unknown.</p>
<p>61.43 – Students drove mini across frozen loch and people skated too. Howard Maskell enjoyed cross country skiing. Fun races; Dumyat race annually. VF vividly remembered Colin Bell’s speech in Queen’s Court to staff and students resisting Britain’s involvement in the Iraq War.</p>
<p>[Ends 1:04:04]</p>

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