

Interviewee: Dr Peter Holt
UoS Dates: 1967 - 1971
Role(s): Undergraduate; BA Hons (History)



Interview summary:

Start 00:00 – PH left school at 16, worked on magazines and local newspapers. Later he applied as a mature student to Edinburgh University, which turned him down, and Stirling, which accepted him, and so he became student number 14.

00:40 – He did politics for one semester, but it wasn't available as a degree subject, and so he did sociology, psychology and switched then to history. After graduation: Sussex university for MA in Contemporary European studies and a DPhil; then he went back to journalism, where he has stayed ever since.

01:30 – Stirling experienced as very open and encouraging; informal ways of learning and personal encouragement.

02:20 – Most productive tutorial: full year on history of imperialism in final year with almost as many teachers as students: David Waddell for America, Bob McKean for Europe, John McCracken for Africa, Eric Richards for Economics. On one occasion Monica Clough and PH, both mature students, asked Waddell to invite V G Kiernan from Edinburgh – Waddell invited him even though Kiernan and he weren't good friends and he came for discussion, which was really exciting.

03:30 – He was 26, when he started university, others like Dave Ellcock and Bill Holden were mature students but most were young– wide range of ages; girls were keen to memorize everything (“naïve”), the boys wanted to show off; he as an older student came to learn to think

04:40 – Lecturers who were younger than him, but he found this a good thing: being close to each other, young, enthusiastic, loving their subjects, and radical. At the opening dinner he asked Alastair White what he was there to study and White replied that he was there to teach PH politics.

05:18 – “Opening dinner” was famous: friendly, everyone was mixed except the top table, where Lord Robbins and Tom Cottrell sat; through the dinner a young man was drunk and collapsed directly behind Tom Cottrell, which became a famous incident. No hierarchy.

06:40 – Met people from other subjects through United Nations Students Association: John Stewart (Biology), Holliday (Biology); Scottish students were younger, many of them living at home. There was a group of English students.


08:15 – Outstanding personalities for him: George Rudé, Professor of History for one semester; Malcom Thomis, his mentor, Bob McKean and John McCracken as great teachers of history and Monica Clough, who was a mature student (imperialism tutorial), Bill Holden a police inspector, and Professor McEwen in psychology (from Belfast University), the

Cottrells and Harry Donnelly.

09:50 – The Cottrells gave invitations to small groups of students, and so he met them. He was active in the SNP. Gwynfor Evans, a Plaid Cymru MP, came to give a lecture and Vicky Prentice, Professor Price, a Welshman in the French department and Robert McIntyre, the Provost of Stirling, were all there discussing the role of Gaelic as a first language in teaching. The last time he saw Tom Cottrell was at Gatwick Airport, the day after the Queen’s visit incident. “He was a practical idealist”; students called him Dr Cottrell; he even intervened with the police, who were “almost harassing” the students on Friday nights.

12:15 – Speaks of a young lady who had “a wild time with lots of these boys”. Her father was a minister who asked the Cottrells and Donnelly to keep an eye on her and they told him that the university was not responsible for her behaviour, and so he came to the university and talked to PH – but the young lady didn’t lose her grant for the semester. By the end of the first year 30% didn’t get through the exams, “they came too soon”. Almost the whole history department attended his wedding.

[Ends 14:31]

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