

<h1>SURSA</h1>	<p>SURSA University of Stirling Stirling FK9 4LA</p> <p>info@sursa.org.uk www.sursa.org.uk</p>	<p>SURSA</p>  <p>Oral History</p>
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Interviewee:	Dr Neville Dix	
UoS Dates:	Spring 1967 – 1995	
Role(s):	Senior Lecturer, Biology	

Interview summary:

<p><i>Summary of content; with time (min:secs)</i></p>
<p>Start - Came from Chelsea College, later part of University of London, after PhD at Sheffield. Taught in London for 9 years. Moved to Stirling as seeking change from some aspects of London life, such as commuting, for example, and since student experience in London very much 9-5 with little opportunity for informal contact between staff and students. ND attracted by idea of more contact with students, more opportunities for field work, field trips. Some colleagues warned of risk of being involved in too much organisation and administration. This proved correct.</p>
<p>04.45 - Knew little of Scottish education system. Professor Fred Holliday, already in post, explained important differences. For example, some students would not have any previous study in science. Part of FH's plan was to attract students from many backgrounds. ND surprised that in 1966, although Biology offered in Scottish schools, it was often an option and students doing Physics and Chemistry often could not take Biology without giving up another subject. Some of first intake students of Biology students had limited science background, in keeping with FH's vision of open and flexible system. Students mainly Scottish and younger than ND used to, often 17 whereas in London usually 19. Many of first intake were straight from school with only one or two mature students. Philosophy of university was to open to a wider range of undergraduates, and in later years there were more mature students.</p>
<p>09.00 - ND's research area mycology, micro fungi. Sounds academic, but practical ecological aspects. However, administration and organization required at Stirling in early years meant research took back seat. When ND interviewed, Pathfoot building complete, but no furnishings or equipment. Much special equipment and furniture needed for sciences, so staff visited recently-equipped labs and schools to see what currently available.</p>
<p>12.56 - When ND took up post, Pathfoot not ready for occupation, unfurnished. FH had cramped office in Airthrey Castle annexe. As nowhere for ND to be based, returned to London. Given task by FH of visiting other institutions to find out what was being done, equipment being used, type of recruitment.</p>

<p>Visited Sussex University and East Anglia, for example, among others.</p>
<p>15.35 - Once on campus, involved in much departmental administration. In addition, was on the Board of Studies. Contrast to previous institution, where many staff had limited involvement in administration. At Stirling, many members of academic staff were required to serve on committees, as number of people available were few. This put a lot of work on to individuals.</p>
<p>17.25 - Remit of Biology Department at start was to teach with emphasis on whole organism. Aim to be different from Edinburgh, where cell biology focus. Not a problem for zoological side of department. On the botany side of the Department, since many students in first semester had little or no prior study in biology, ND ran course on basic botanical fields to prepare students for further study. Over the first years, as more students with 'A' Levels arrived, they found the first courses very straightforward, but, once more advanced levels were reached, there was no longer a problem as other students acquired the same level of knowledge and progressed at a pace.</p>
<p>21.15 - Once students reached stage of project work, ND remembers a student looking at wood rotting, on which ND published short paper. Another example recalled was project looking at deterioration of manuscripts, papers etc. Library provision was very good. Stark contrast to Chelsea College London as generous amount of money available to order what required.</p>
<p>25.08 - Stirling had relaxed, informal atmosphere compared to other institutions ND had known. Staff dressed casually, rather than in suits, even the Principal wore a sports jacket most of the time. Pathfoot common room was a good meeting place for staff and students. Pathfoot building had good areas of social space, unlike later buildings, such as Cottrell Building. Stirling and other new universities did a lot to change the culture of student learning and to change the way academics interacted with students. In the past much more formal.</p>
<p>28.40 - Tom Cottrell was based in Garden Cottage when ND arrived, so ND had little contact with him. Then later TC had a house nearby, but off campus. There were occasional meetings there and also, for example, invitations for drinks.</p>
<p>30.25 - The university tried to involve staff in decisions. People became used to this democratic process. However, ND feels this did backfire sometimes when difficulties arose and people expected to be involved in those discussions as well. An example of this was the Queen's Visit. ND feels this should have been dealt with at a higher level. People unsure what happened or why. ND unaware of any adverse reaction from the public locally, but it was a shock. Publicity no institution would want.</p>
<p>35.30 - There were links with local population. ND organized annual event 'Fungus Foray' day for the public. Idea grew out of field trips popular with students. Likewise, Airthrey Gardens Group was a way to attract people to come to campus and raise funds for the gardens. At the time when university offered continuing education courses, ND ran some courses for the local public. Also, evenings in the laboratory and field trips on Saturdays or Sundays.</p>
<p>41.30 - ND retired when changes in Department under John Sargent meant a change of direction towards Biochemistry and Molecular Biology. A previous Botany Professor was Hans Meidner, a good scientist. ND felt that over time things were allowed to drift into a situation where little research money came in, and that was something that was becoming increasingly important. ND was the only mycology person in the Department, but that was not a problem, whereas financial restrictions were, in that they limited range of staff. The university had been expected to grow very quickly, but round about 1982/83, government cutbacks came. The university was virtually frozen with these financial restrictions, in spite of staff continuing to make plans.</p>
<p>47.10 - ND was involved with 'Forth Naturalist' journal. John Proctor and colleagues, for example, in Education department, had the idea of a Saturday conference, with topics and speakers, to which local</p>

public also invited. Later there was an annual journal, 'Forth Naturalist', which now is at number 35 or 36, and is still running. ND was editor for 15 years.

49.30 – ND feels that as the university settled down, separate departments became more concerned with own affairs and there was less interchange. Joint degrees were an attempt to bring departments together, and many students took joint degrees, but less interaction between departments. The original idea of a university with a lot of flexibility and interchange, as shown in the initial structure from 1967 for the first three semesters, changed with the years and gradually there was more of a focus on departments, than on programmes.

53.40 - ND feels overall he made a good move in coming to Stirling. Institution where he felt relaxed, with friendly atmosphere, informal attitudes, wonderful campus and buildings. Nice students. Nice countryside. Many plus points. Minus – university took longer to settle down than expected. ND lost a few years when he might have been developing his interests. Might have advanced career had he stayed in London or moved somewhere else. Lots of new courses and meetings at Stirling took up time, compared to other institutions, where staff involvement less. Ends with anecdote where Tom Cottrell called staff to organize something for Wednesday afternoon and football was the chosen activity. Also, mentions the Allotment Society which existed for a while.

Ends 1.02. 25

Interview No:	SURSA OH / 083	SURSA University of Stirling Stirling FK9 4LA info@sursa.org.uk www.sursa.org.uk	
Interviewed by:	Dr John Stewart		
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Summary completed by:	Moira Ball		
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