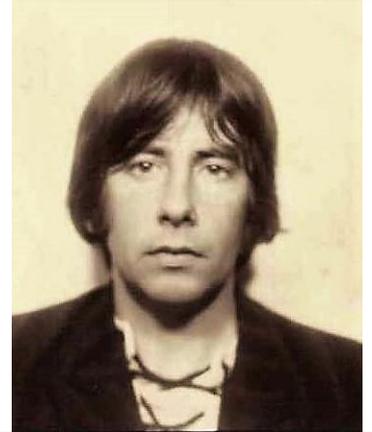


Interviewee: Tommy Geddes  
UoS Dates: 1975 – 1980, BA Hons (Politics and History)  
Role(s): Undergraduate, President of the Student Union 1976-77



## Interview summary:

**Start 0:00** – came to Stirling by accident: he got an apprenticeship at Dounreay, and didn't think about university; was an instrument mechanic for four years and became a tradesman and involved in trades unions. "By accident" he was told to apply in 1973 for a TUC scholarship and he went to London School of Economics for a year. Rather than just doing the year and going back to work as planned, he became a student and wanted to stay a student (which he did for 9 years); and so he looked around for universities which did not demand formal qualifications and Hull and Stirling each offered him a place. Stirling was closer to home and in Scotland, and so he came to Stirling in 1975.

**03:25** – he studied history and political studies, though he started with politics and economics.

**03:45** – on his first day he met Ian McKay, who was president of the Students Union, and TG asked a question and Ian grabbed him afterwards and invited him to a Broad Left meeting. Somehow TG got involved and in less than 12 months he got elected president, "much to my surprise and much to the horror of my mother who still thought I should go back to being a tradesman".

**05:19** – it was quite a professional campaign, based in a flat on campus. Ian King and his wife Becky were campaign managers for him and his vice president running mate Dave Howie; a pretty intense campaign; University had just a couple of thousand students, but the turnout was about 50%.

**06:52** – "most incredible time" as a president; political head of an organization was life-changing for him; main responsibility was to represent student body to the university; representing the student union in NUS Scotland and NUS UK; social side wasn't run by the student union then; but they ran the shop and entertainments mostly in Pathfoot, and basically day-to-day-stuff of the union: there were campaigns but no occupations in his year; one of his biggest events was a campaign against rent increases.

**09:45** – there were 2 left wing groups, the Communist and Labour Parties and "we were the moderates in politics"; when he was elected on a Broad Left ticket, he was a member of the Scottish National Party; most of politics was international: anti-apartheid, women's movement; what changed him most in Stirling was how he viewed women and the role of women in society; he sees it as most successful thing in politics of his generation, how the role of women was changed.

**12:19** – he was most impressed by the women he met in Stirling and the student union, "they were way ahead of their time". Women on campus who impressed him: Jane Mackay, Maggie Monteith who ended up working

in Hollywood, and Anne Payne, who was vice president in the year before him and who married Ian McKay. In NUS Scotland: Jeane Freeman, Minister for Welfare in the Scottish government, his long-time friend, who was head of NUS Scotland.

**14:09** – after his presidency at Stirling, he joined the Scottish Executive of the NUS and helped NUS Scotland gain more autonomy. Recalls Alex Salmond, a student leader in the University of St Andrews. This was before the campaign for devolution in Scotland, in which TG, John Reid and Martin Curry played a part.

**15:42** – Stirling was a new university at that time; lots of the big universities like Glasgow were not in the NUS, so Stirling quickly became a big player in NUS Scotland, and also nationally. Stirling students John Reid, Jack McConnell, TG's protégé who became First Minister of Scotland, Dougie Herd, a big player in the disability movement in Australia, and Martin Curry were all office-bearers. Candidates for NUS President Charles Clarke [former Home Secretary] and Alastair Stewart [ITN newscaster] came up to seek Stirling's support.

**18:17** – TG was mostly involved in the apartheid movement and CND (he was the NUS Scottish representative), and also in Irish issues, when terrorism was at its height. Visited Northern Ireland and met Andy Tyrie and Gerry Adams. It was difficult to keep a student movement going in the north of Ireland when there was a "kind of war situation in Belfast". NUS UK had a joint membership in the north; an example of cross-border organization. TG reflects on the importance of the issues in which the student movement was involved.

**21:04** – NUS Scotland and NUS UK made "the biggest difference" in the people they produced: important people came up from student movement, they learned politics through being students; most difference they made was locally; but most important job was representing the student body.

**22:32** – incidents during his term of office included a strange incident: early in his presidential career, a woman student arrived via London but couldn't get her bags from Customs, which had impounded them. In the end he went to London personally and retrieved them. Most tasks related to academic failures. One other special incident: somebody sprayed graffiti over the Principal's house, and he asked the student union officers to find out who it was. Although they did not succeed, TG and the student union backed the university and were keen to make sure that "bad behaviour didn't further sully the reputation of the university".

**25:17** – he spent his first week at university in occupation in the Court Room and met another student who in turn met a slightly older 'leftie'. When her parents heard about it they took her away; Stirling had a bad reputation for revolutionary politics at this time.

**26:22** – he worked together with David Howie, his vice president, all year but remembers mostly the summer: 1976 was the hottest summer on record and they spent a glorious summer on the beautiful campus, worked all day and were expected to socialize in the evening; his predecessors Ian and Anne, who got married, got criticism for not going out enough, because you were supposed to be available to your constituents at all times.

**27:33** – a culture grew up and continued through the Broad Left student leaders– from John Reid to TG, and Jack McConnell, among others, for about 10 or 12 years. The Socialist Workers' Party was in power for one year, and demonstrated a more confrontational type of politics.

**28:45** – Harry Adam was his successor, last of the Broad Left student leaders for a few years; he is now vice chairman of the University Court and TG is a trustee of the student union. Ian McKay, TG, and Harry Adam were on the same continuum.

**29:55** – he went to Aberdeen for three years to do a PhD (without finishing it), then he went to the University of Essex and worked as a member of staff for the student union and the general manager was Malcom Jenkins who was general manager in Stirling while TG was president; he then worked for UKCOSA (UK Council for Overseas Students and now UKCISA), hired by his boss Andy Masheter, who was a big player in international education and on the NUS steering committee with him; he then went to South Bank Polytechnic, London for a study on international students and met Pauline Perry [Baroness Perry], who deeply impressed him. He learned a lot about government as her executive officer. TG was at South Bank when in 1992, it turned into a university and Pauline Perry became the first woman to be vice chancellor of a UK university. Eventually he went to the University of Winchester where he stayed until he retired, finally as deputy vice chancellor.

**33:37** – "All that came from Stirling"; "It's all linked and started in Stirling in 1975/6". He owes all this to

Stirling. If he hadn't become involved in the student union, his career wouldn't have happened in this way, even though none of this was planned. He considers himself as lucky, because he came to Stirling with no qualification and ended up as deputy vice chancellor of a university.

**Ends 34:30**

<b>Interview No:</b>	SURSA OH /96	<b>SURSA</b> University of Stirling Stirling FK9 4LA  <a href="mailto:info@sursa.org.uk">info@sursa.org.uk</a> <a href="http://www.sursa.org.uk">www.sursa.org.uk</a>	<b>SURSA</b>  Oral History
<b>Interviewed by:</b>	Carolyn Rowlinson		
<b>Date of interview:</b>	23 June, 2017		
<b>Summary completed by:</b>	Julia Schoenthaler		
<b>Date:</b>	13 November 2017		