

Interviewees: Nan (AD) Roberts (nee Wallace); Willis R Field (nee McLeod); Helen W McInnes (nee Fraser)

UoS Dates: 1967-1970

Role(s): Undergraduates:
NR: BA Gen (Sociology and English)
WF: BA Gen (French and English)
HM: BA Gen (History and English)



Interview summary:

Summary of content; with time (min:secs)

Start 00:04: Nan Wallace, now Roberts, Willis McLeod and Helen Fraser were in the first intake of students in 1967 and shared a flat. NW studied Sociology and English for a General Degree and worked for British Airways, in Travel and Tourism and Tourism. Helen Fraser, now McInnes, was student number 93 and came to Stirling after hearing Professor Munn from the Mathematics Department talking at her school. Her then History teacher at school thought Stirling would be perfect for her. Studied History and English at Stirling and one year of Philosophy. Recalls Professor Bird asking deep questions about Philosophy to which she still can't respond, so thinks just as well she discontinued Philosophy. Left with a General Degree, determined to make something of the year she had intended to spend doing Honours degree. Joined VSO and worked in Northern Nigeria for two years, working in girls' secondary school. Returned to Edinburgh for teacher's training at Moray House and also did course in Teaching English as a Foreign Language at Edinburgh University. Then worked for British Council in Norway for two years, teaching English. Thereafter returned to Scotland and went into Scottish education.

02.45 WMc came to Stirling because intrigued by the idea of something new and different. Liked idea of General Degree as had no vocation at all. After completing degree also felt she wanted to do something different and worked as volunteer in the Ivory Coast, her degree having been in French and English. This very good for her French, but when returned to do teacher's training at Moray House WMc found staff very suspicious about level of her French as from Africa and she fought for the whole year to persuade staff to accept her French was good enough. Thereafter, went into Further Education at Stevenson College, teaching English as a foreign language. Then worked in Switzerland, before returning to the UK and taking first job offered, which was in Further Education in Essex. Planned to return to Edinburgh in a few years, but instead spent 39 years in same college teaching, finally involved in teacher training. Finished her career as Deputy Principal of the college.

04.45 NW recalls that, in an earlier discussion, they all agreed that the style of education at Stirling, the semester system and continuous assessment, made it a positive experience and they felt the likelihood of gaining a degree increased compared to other universities. Scottish students in their day were often immature and Stirling's situation meant it nurtured its students at the same time as giving them a lot of freedom. They also appreciated the democracy and the fact that their opinion counted. They felt valued.

05.45 HF compares the atmosphere in school then. Whereas she felt in school the idea was to instill fear into pupils along with the idea that they were not very good, at Stirling she found so many people were very positive about trying to educate students and open their eyes. The fact that everything happened in the same building meant staff, post-graduates and undergraduate students mixed and she considers this opening up of new worlds to students was part of

her education. There were no divisions. All people used the same coffee lounge. HF recalls holding a party in her second year in her flat, where not only fellow students but also staff, even her Professor of History came along. This different from other universities. The chance to talk to staff was very positive, for example, HF went to Africa because member of the History Department, Dr McCracken, inspired her to do something different and make a difference.

07.10 NW recalls Tom Cottrell coming to speak at her school and speaking to pupils, possibly considering if they would fit in at Stirling. Tom Cottrell was inspirational. The group recalls that he invited students, in groups of 6, to lunch or dinner at his house. He had done some homework to find out about the students and asked questions to put them at ease. His wife was very gracious. This was a special thing for Tom Cottrell to do and, along with other features of Stirling, helped them, as young adults, to blossom. HF observed that many students she knew from Stirling have gone on to do further degrees and other interesting things in life. Stirling opened students' eyes to what they could do.

08.45 They agree that the first students were not very radical. Stirling got this reputation later, on the basis of one the event, the Queen's visit. They had found people later on expected them to have been radical, having come from Stirling University, but feel they were quite ordinary. There must have been attempts to stir things up, but they can't remember much response. The townspeople of Stirling possibly had some apprehension before the students arrived, worrying about the effect they would have on the town. However, things worked out well. The first Charity Day where the students were out in the town collecting money, was well received by local people. They feel there was a harmonious atmosphere at Stirling without disagreements and people largely working as a unit. NW feels there was possibly more political activity as the university expanded in years 2 and 3. A teenager in 1967 was very different from a teenager nowadays, and that they were quite naïve. The group mainly recalls some mild, fairly lighthearted disagreements over a Tiddlywinks competition on the cobbles at Old Bridge in Stirling town, won by the girls, and over watching The Magic Roundabout and Top of the Pops on TV when people crowded into Allangrange.

10.25 NW served on the Entertainments Committee and recalls a group coming to play – *The Flower People* possibly. The committee was on a very tight budget and decided to do the catering in the flat in Bridge of Allan. The next-door neighbour resented the fact that all these young men were in the flat and complained to the landlord who ejected them all. They all then sat on the wall eating their 'spag bol' till time for them to play. This was 1968. The early students were trailblazers as they had to organise all the committees. They also had to make the best of not having many facilities. She recalls going in a minibus to Queen Victoria School in Dunblane, where they could swim once a week. There was a pitch for hockey, but WMc recalls that students had to get tetanus injections before they could play as the field had previously been used for animals.

13.05 HF recalls when the second intake of students arrived, there was a feeling at first that they were trespassing on the territory, but this didn't last long as numbers were still very small. They soon became friends and all were still together in Pathfoot. By year 3 there were sports facilities. They also recall the ambulances heading up to Airthrey Castle maternity hospital which was still open.

14.15 HF, WMc and NW consider themselves very privileged to have been educated at Stirling, such a unique experience. Students came for many reasons, but a key attraction must have been that this was the first new Scottish university in hundreds of years. They were lucky to have been the right age to come to this first new Scottish university. Students must have made positive choices to come to Stirling and have in common an interest in new ideas and this probably helped the bonding in the first years.

15.00 HF chose Stirling because she wanted to move away from home, but loved the beauty of Stirling, walking in the surroundings. In the first intake many students came from nearby regions, so at weekends the university was very quiet as they went home. Most students in the first year were in bed and breakfast and some hosts expected them to head home at weekends. There was a Sunday night bus from Edinburgh which quite a few Stirling students used as there were no Sunday trains then. Once students were able to move into flats, they could entertain more. HF recalls inviting people for Sunday lunch.

17.20 HF recalls at the last reunion Professor Holliday talking about the preparations the staff made for the arrival of the first students. The day before the university opened members of staff in their wellies, including Prof Holliday and Tom Cottrell, were busy all day scrubbing out the entrance halls, for example. She takes this as an illustration of the commitment of the staff to the students. They were 100% behind the students and that vitality couldn't fail to rub off. They agree that the fact that staff members were so approachable was a major factor. HF recalls her History lecturer, Malcolm Thomis, saying she didn't have to call him Sir. This was so different from school. She feels that in her teaching career she has tried to be accessible to students and that this attitude came from her experience at Stirling.

[Ends 19:41]

Interview No:	SURSA OH / 99	<p style="text-align: center;"> SURSA University of Stirling Stirling FK9 4LA </p> <p style="text-align: center;"> info@sursa.org.uk www.sursa.org.uk </p>	<p style="text-align: center;"> SURSA </p> 
Interviewed by:	Gordon Willis		
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