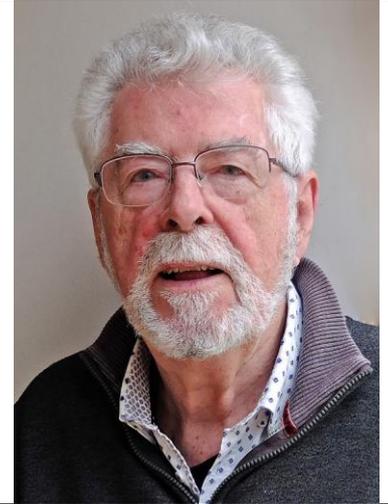


Interviewee: Grahame Smith  
Dates: 1970-2000  
Role(s): Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, Professor  
Chair of the Board of Studies for Arts  
Deputy Principal  
Retired 2000. Emeritus professor.



## Interview summary:

### *Summary of content; with time (min:secs)*

Start 00:00 GS was born in London in 1933. His family moved to Glasgow in 1938; he considers himself a Glaswegian. He went to Woodside Secondary School and left when he was 15 with no academic qualifications, to contribute to his family's income.

03:05 He took random jobs, until he did National Service with basic training as a wireless operator at Catterick Camp in Yorkshire in a severe winter. Then posted to the Army Training Corps at Glasgow University.

06:20 A medical at the end of National Service revealed that GS had tuberculosis requiring a major operation and months in hospital recuperating; he was given a pension and had time to read.

09:05 Attracted by the hope of becoming a student he passed Higher English and History, and later German; most Scottish universities required O-grade Latin but Aberdeen didn't and he was offered a place as a mature student there, at first with political rather than literary interests. At the end of four years he obtained a First Class degree in English. David Buchan was his contemporary as a student.

12:48 GS had assumed that he would become a teacher but was offered a research scholarship to Peterhouse in Cambridge. Some of the famous names giving lectures were disappointing but F R Leavis and Raymond Williams weren't. GS met his wife Angela, also a research student, in Cambridge.

15:00 GS decided to try for academic posts. He was interviewed at the University of Sheffield by the well-known critic William Empson but didn't get the job. He realized that the Oxbridge candidates were wearing sports jackets whereas he was wearing a suit and tie.

17:20 He wrote 20 letters to distinguished American universities such as Harvard, Yale and Stanford asking for a job; he received 19 polite refusals and the offer of an assistant professorship from UCLA, which he accepted.

20:00 He had wonderful teaching and stimulating colleagues at UCLA with a good salary and access to Californian film and jazz culture. He flew home after a year, and married Angela who had obtained a post at another university in Los Angeles. His first book, *Dickens, Money and Society*, was published by the University of California Press and was favorably reviewed by the distinguished critics Raymond Williams and Arnold Kettle.

24:00 GS needed a job in the UK as it was a condition of the Fulbright Travel Scholarship he was awarded to enable him to travel that he should return to the UK. He wrote more letters of application and received a telegram from the

University of Wales in Swansea offering him an assistant lectureship. He stayed there for 5 years.
26:50 He had a very heavy teaching load but welcomed it because of its range and depth. He taught courses in nineteenth-century poetry, in Dickens, in a range of poetry and in nineteenth-century American literature.
29:00 On holiday in Glasgow GS and AS visited the University of Stirling, when only Pathfoot was built. GS saw David Buchan's name on a door and wrote to ask him what he thought of the department. He received a wildly enthusiastic reply saying that the professor, Tommy Dunn, looked like an Italian film director. GS wrote another letter, was invited to meet TD and was offered a job.
32:50 GS stayed at Stirling from then on. Asked about the effect of having to live away from home when he was a student, he said he valued the opportunity to make new friends. Academics used to expect to move around but the system changed in the mid-70s.
36:00 GS's positive reasons for staying at Stirling were that he fell in love with the beauty of the campus and with the freedom of the degree structure. TD asked what he wanted to teach rather than telling him what he had to do. He valued the semester 8 dissertation, a 20,000 word project instead of final exams, at the end of which each student had a viva with two members of staff and an external examiner. Colleagues were stimulating and the teaching was wonderful. The semester system and regular sabbatical leave enabled research.
43:50 GS's other major interest at Stirling was film. Ian Lockerbie was the key person in insuring that the Macrobert became one of the British Film Institute's new regional film theatres. With IL, John Brown of the Scottish Film Council and Anthony Phillips, the director of the Macrobert, GS created film seasons for the film theatre. When John Izod was appointed to the BFI funded lectureship in film studies GS asked if he would like help; together they taught a course on Francois Truffaut and Orson Welles called 'Authorship in the Cinema'. GS also used examples from film in his teaching in English Studies. Stirling encouraged freedom from academic boundaries.
53:19 At a time of Thatcherite financial crisis in the early 80s staff were encouraged to go on secondment elsewhere if they could. GS and AS went to the University of Malawi for two years where their friend John McCracken, an historian of Malawi, was already on secondment. Malawian students opted mainly for courses in post-colonial writing so GS had plenty of time to write a book on Graham Greene, including his political journalism.
58:50 Back in Stirling the social life was great, the department was congenial, and GS valued the cultural richness provided by the Macrobert, and the fun of its bar at lunchtime. Ian Milligan was a cantankerous colleague but was also very able. David Buchan wanted to be able only to teach folk-life studies and the department didn't try to accommodate that wish. He left and went to Canada, and sadly died before he could take up a special chair created for him at Aberdeen.
1:07:20 The poet Norman MacCaig, who took up school-teaching to give himself plenty of time in holidays for writing, retired at 60 and TD invited him to join the department. He brought a great variety of Scottish and European poets to read at the University including his friend Hugh MacDiarmid. The critical stance of the department hardened over the years; it became rather enclosed apart from its post-colonial dimension. Not much Scottish literature was taught which was a limitation,; Alastair Wood's courses in American literature were popular with students.
1:15:00 GS enjoyed his administrative posts such as chairing the Board of Studies for Arts and, as Deputy Principal, visiting every department to prepare for Teaching Quality Assessment. The results were excellent. He wanted to and did return to teaching in the years immediately before his retirement.
1:19:00 GS found retirement compulsory difficult as he missed his colleagues and teaching. He wrote a book that was well reviewed, <i>Dickens and the Dream of Cinema</i> , and then spent four years studying the History of Art at the University of Glasgow. He didn't want to take final exams so didn't graduate but enjoyed writing essays. Now he runs an informal literature discussion group on nineteenth-century fiction at the Smith Gallery.
Ends

<b>Interview No:</b>	SURSA OH / 116	<p style="text-align: center;"> <b>SURSA</b>  <b>University of Stirling</b>  <b>Stirling</b>  <b>FK9 4LA</b> </p> <p style="text-align: center;"> <a href="mailto:info@sursa.org.uk">info@sursa.org.uk</a>  <a href="http://www.sursa.org.uk">www.sursa.org.uk</a> </p>	 <p style="text-align: center;"> <b>SURSA</b>  Oral History </p>
<b>Interviewed by:</b>	Jim Valentine		
<b>Date of interview:</b>	1 May 2018		
<b>Summary completed by:</b>	Angela Smith		
<b>Date:</b>	23 February 2020		