

Interviewee: Ian Thomson, Dr  
UoS Dates: 1969 - 1989  
Role(s): Director of Physical Recreation.  
D Univ (2009)



## Interview summary:

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

**Start 0:04** – IT was the first Director of Physical Recreation from 1969 – 1989.

**00:28** – Had previously been a teacher in Physical Education colleges. Thought the new University sounded exciting and offered a challenge

**00:53** – Had previously been in touch with the University in 1967 to encourage them to offer a degree course in Physical Education. This was turned down. IT thought if he came to work at the University he could persuade them.

**01:37** – It was a beautiful campus with not many buildings when IT arrived, only the Pathfoot building. A loch which could be used for sailing or canoeing and a few playing fields and tennis courts, IT thought the environment was made for Physical Education

**02:24** – Was surprised that a student was one of four individuals who interviewed IT. Was impressed by the informal relationship between staff and students. Mainly young staff with a good mix of young and mature students. Didn't feel held back by unnecessary rules.

**03:46** – IT felt the best part of Stirling was the open environment. Everyone was encouraged to put their ideas forward. Lots of innovative ideas such as the two semester system, an unpopular 'introduction to studying' course and continuous assessment. People were prepared to be adventurous.

**04:39** – There were negative aspects. IT remembers submitting a course for Sociology of Leisure and having a member of the Board of Studies ridicule it. Some people were negative and afraid to be too adventurous. They didn't want "Mickey Mouse degrees" or for other universities to consider Stirling frivolous. Had also never experienced political students before. Even before the Queen's visit Stirling had a reputation for being left wing and radical.

Remembers early Student President Michael Connarty.

IT felt that there were a few who wanted to destroy the university rather than be constructive.

**07:10** – Stirling was the first university to develop graduate assistantships in Physical Recreation whereby a young graduate did things like swimming lessons in exchange for a fee waiver for a higher degree. IT was a joint supervisor of this along with Chris Turner of Sociology. At the same time IT was invited to teach a course within Sociology and the Education Department offered a non-graduating course in Physical Education which IT taught. This developed into an MEd in School, Society and Sport.

**07:34** – The breakthrough for Physical Education came when Deputy Principal Michael Jackson met IT on a train. IT was on his way to Loughborough University to be an external examiner. Michael Jackson was interested to hear that at Loughborough Physical Education had the third largest research budget in the University. At the time universities

were considering what to do in the new millennium. Stirling had previously considered a focus on Chemistry but Michael Jackson thought they might do something with sport. A first chair in Sport Studies was then appointed, Grant Jarvie. The Department took off from there. Michael Jackson was at the heart of this. Sport could be combined with other subjects, which rescued some departments with small numbers of students.

**10:59** – Meeting Princess Diana at the opening of the Tennis Centre stands out.

**11:42** – Derek Lang who became University Secretary when Harry Donnelly died was committed to outdoor education. He and IT found a house on the shores of Loch Rannoch and purchased it from the Forestry Commission with money from the Wordie family. Had to sell the Centre off when the university ran into financial difficulties.

**13:12** – Derek Lang also convinced the UGC to fund a swimming pool. Stirling was the first university in Britain to build a pool. IT and Estates and Buildings Officer Norman Walker went to Germany where they saw a pool with a moving floor. This is now standard but Stirling would have been the first pool in Britain with a moving floor but budget cuts meant they had to abandon it.

**14:35** – Got £500,000 from the Gannochy Trust to develop another facility. Remembers being grilled about the Queen's visit but the funders were willing to put it behind them.

**15:01** – Went to London to get money for the Tennis Centre.

15:40 – By this time IT was retired but still was involved with approaching Sport Scotland to persuade them they should build a national swimming centre.

**16:21** – Looked forward to going to work every day. Stirling was a small university which made huge progress in a short space of time. IT was twice the chairman of the British Universities Physical Education Association and recalls everyone talking about Stirling as an outstanding example of sports development. It was also the first university to really open its doors to the community.

**[Ends 18:37]**

<b>Interview No:</b>	SURSA OH / 004	<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>
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