

Interviewee: Sheila Mitchell
UoS Dates: 1967 - 1982
Role(s): Lecturer i/c Sociology. Latterly Senior Lecturer, Dept of Sociology



Interview summary:

Start 00:00 – Appointed in 1967 before the University was built. Early years of University. Administration was in office near Logie Kirk. Job interview. Friarscroft was office location and included bedrooms. Secretaries on the ground floor under Mrs Webber. Tea and cakes provided until catering manager appointed. Meals were eaten together, Principal and secretaries taking part. Frequently invited to meals by Principal.

05: – SM came from a Medical Sociology background. She decided to include social history of Scotland in the teaching of Sociology. Sociology section of Library had to be established – carte blanche with publishers' lists. Sat on professorial committees deciding policies. Significant people at that time: Ronnie Bell in Chemistry, Peter McEwen in Psychology, Andrew Bain in Economics. Administration very helpful under Harry Donnelly, the Secretary of the University, who had come from St Andrew's House in Edinburgh where he had been a senior civil servant. They helped to defend the independence of Sociology from empire builders who wanted to absorb it.

12:00 – SM appointed two lecturers: Alastair White to cover anthropological side, and Patrick Guiton for social theory. Only 100-200 students intake each year, most did Sociology initially. The inclusion of Statistics in the course reduced popularity

15:20 – The Principal, Tom Cottrell, brought together the entire University, staff and students, in a single course each Monday morning, including computing. Everyone knew each other. Tom brought the whole University together as if it was one department. Very nice atmosphere. Everyone knew each other. The great change was when major expansion took place.

17:50 – Academic Council originally limited to Professors, so as lecturer in charge she had to get voted on to Council, to represent Sociology. Another two lecturers in Sociology in the second year: Otto Newman and David Wilson. Those years were fun. Knew all the students. No limit on what to order for the Library. Money for buildings. You could teach what you wanted.

21:47 – SM thought Sociology should be broad in scope and should be numerate. Thought staff should be allowed to pursue their own interests. Students should also be free to choose options. University policy was for students to do a dissertation in fourth year, but initially Sociology had an option of Advanced Sociology. SM feels Sociology should be an open discipline, along with all the Social Sciences. Sociology also included Social Administration and Social Work. Tried to include everything so that students could have tasters.

28:50 – There were no student counsellors in the University and as Director of Studies you had responsibility for a number of students, including even referring for abortion, visiting in hospital. In Sociology it was helpful to have John Spurling (lectured in social work) who kept us right on student issues. Max Marwick appointed as first Professor of Sociology. SM promoted to Senior Lecturer.

30:31 – Not many women working in academic life in Scotland. Male chauvinism. SM was used to medical hierarchies. Gender balance amongst students about 50:50. Stirling had many more female students than other universities at

that time partly because no engineering, no medicine. One female professor.
36:03 – At first lived in Cumbernauld and then bought a flat in Bridge of Allan. Working all hours, and needed to be close-by. Local people very welcoming, including minister. Invited to dinner parties. Local library delighted to see academics borrowing. Local cafe used. Visits by famous academics attracted local interest
39:58 – Sociology teaching innovative, but later included more standard content such as Social Theory.
41:10 – The move from Friarscroft into Pathfoot. Then Sociology moved into Cottrell building, like a barracks. MacRobert built. Scottish Opera used to come. Theatre. Art. Matilda Mitchell, Tom Cottrell's first secretary, encouraged corridors at Pathfoot to be used for art exhibitions. Staff could borrow pictures from the University's art collection to hang in one's office. Lovely atmosphere.
45:02 – Student expansion came after about 3 or 4 years. Turned the University into something entirely different. Many young staff were appointed. Went from being cosy, where everyone knew everyone, to more mass production where staff didn't even know all their own students. SM can still remember students like Tommy Sheridan, who took Sociology only in Part One.
49:54 – Later, the thing that made things mainly different was the death of Tom Cottrell. Harry Donnelly had already died, which was very sad as he was superb University Secretary: he was succeeded by a retired army general. The first Principal, Tom Cottrell, was man of considerable integrity and enlightened ideas. He would have been able to pull things together in a way that didn't happen. University became more fragmented. Less departmental friendship and cooperation except for political reasons, which did not interest SM except to maintain Sociology as a thriving department, although she was vice chair of the Faculty.
53:18 – Legacy of choice, with students taking a variety of subjects to start with, was there from the beginning of the University, with semesters, a Tom Cottrell idea, as he was keen on cross-fertilisation. The Stirling pattern has been adopted by other universities. Sociology and other non-school subjects were popular because students could try them out in first year.
[Ends 56:20]

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