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Oral History

Interviewee:	Ann Gilmour (nee Prentice)
UoS Dates:	1968-2009
Role(s):	Laboratory Technician (Biology 1968-1970; Research Technician, Institute of Aquaculture, Institute of Aquaculture 1985-1993 and 1998-2009)

Interview summary:

Summary of content; with time (min:secs)
Start 00:00 – In 1968 came to Stirling as junior lab technician in Biology Department in Pathfoot building, where whole university was then located. Had worked with Nature Conservancy for two years on temporary contract; had particularly enjoyed doing fieldwork. Had always had been interested in the environment and Biology. An additional draw to Stirling was that her future husband lived nearby.
02:40 – Worked under Professor [Fred] Holliday - research work for Donald McLusky involved collecting crustaceans from Forth mudflats. Four technicians supervised by Jimmy Wright.
04:30 – Live dissections were permitted in teaching labs; during frog dissections, benzene apparatus was lit to record nerve impulses - today neither lighting benzene nor using live frogs would be allowed. Technicians also had grotesque task of preparing frozen monkeys for storage in formaldehyde. On one occasion two live monkeys borrowed from pet shop escaped in teaching lab. Rats from the university's animal house were also studied via fresh dissections, as were cockroaches.
09:20 – Genetic research on Drosophila, and flour beetle Tribolium. Much of research done with staff was fish orientated, involving liaison with Pitlochry and Oban fisheries. Salt water fish research for Peter Tytler. AG made regular trips to Aberdour in van to fill carboys of sea water for use in tanks in the cold room in Pathfoot. Not until arrival of Institute of Aquaculture was proper aquarium installed, in area that was then a greenhouse for plant research, e.g. by Stan Matthews on peas. Early days of computing, with technicians punching results into cards.
12:45 – Staff and the few students got on well; AG initially shared a house with a Stirling student. Fred Holliday, very hospitable and generous, made little distinction between academic and technical staff.
14:55 – Contract ended in 1970, and despite having gained an HND qualification, with the university's encouragement, she was not appointed to the permanent post. Before she left she helped move equipment into the new Cottrell building. Remembers the delights of working on the beautiful campus. Her new post

with Distillers Company in Menstrie, for which she was interviewed by Magnus Pyke, lasted for two and a half years. Afterwards took a break from employment to be with her family for eleven years.

18:55 – Successfully applied for post in the Institute of Aquaculture, where Alan Porter, technician in nutrition department, was very helpful. First post was in nutrition, looking at diet for trout. Barbara Ross's project, but AG worked mainly with John Webster. Making up the diet was unpleasant and smelly, and involved trips to Aberdeen to use a pellet mill machine. Fed trout at the University's freshwater facility at Howietoun. AG helped construct outdoor tanks for the trials. Fish project ran for three years, and comprised field work, fish husbandry and analysis in lab.

23:50 – AG has impression that the closest to a computer that the Institute possessed was a titration unit. The Institute under Ron Roberts was acquiring an international profile. The big tropical aquarium had been installed, though AG's work did not use it then. Had most to do with PhD and sometimes MSc students, who were mainly from overseas, many from Thailand; one of the best aspects of her job was meeting students who had sacrificed much to pursue their studies.

27:20 – AG was kept on to participate in an innovative cryopreservation project for the ODA, led by Dr Krishen Rana. Involved partly Philippines, partly Scottish salmon fish farming, with the object of cryopreserving fish eggs. AG regularly collected consignments of living oysters at Stirling station, at Glasgow airport and at Oban. Project eventually concentrated on a technique for frozen sperm, which ultimately was used successfully worldwide.

29:30 – Describes the technique and challenges of cryopreservation. As salmon breed in midwinter, much cold work at fish farms was involved. Thanks to the project, AG became expert at using liquid nitrogen. The aim of the tropical work, at the Central Uzon [State] University facility in the Philippines, was to maintain and improve the genetic viability of the fish stocks. Challenges of cryopreservation in tropical heat.

33:35 – Overall AG worked on two projects spanning five years as Krishen Rana's research technician. Recalls Thai students Supranee and Pen Punh. Tropical house was opened by Minister [for Overseas Development, Chris Patten]. Genetics building (Wolfsen Laboratories) was in the opened by Princess Diana, who impressed with her intelligence and charm.

36:30 – At the end of her contract, AG left the University to work for five and a half years at Bioreliance, a pharmaceuticals testing company based in the business park on campus.

38:10 – Grateful to be invited to interview by Professor Brendan McAndrew, head of the Genetics and Reproduction group at the Institute of Aquaculture. The genetics projects to which AG was appointed were based in Bangladesh, trying to keep carp breed stocks healthy. Dr David Penman led project; AG worked on phenotyping. By this time both computerisation and genetics had progressed. AG extracted DNA from fish scales collected by outreach workers in Bangladesh - still in awe seeing a strand of DNA appearing in test tube. Tricky process to multiply the DNA to the volumes required for analysis.

42:40 – Much of her work was training students in the techniques, which became a very popular topic for PhDs and MSc dissertations. Predominantly international students, with whom AG loved working. In lab situation essential to have a healthy respect between staff and students, and the processes required dedication and focus.

45:00 – Trips to Thailand and to Hungary to sample carp. Students enjoyed practical work but not writing up. Over the years AG noticed a trend towards students expecting her to do their work - even their calculations - for them. She firmly resisted, believing that a PhD had to be earned.

47:55 – John Taggart, a brilliant and humorous colleague, taught her everything about genetics labs. Materials used to run the machines were extremely expensive, and specialised equipment was maintained by company engineers. Huge advances over the years in lab equipment, e.g. automatic pipettes and disposable equipment, and the computer.

52:00 – Looking back, the University had a family feeling in the early years. AG felt that as the rest of the University expanded, the Institute of Aquaculture remained a self-contained entity that was able to meet social needs. Christmas parties; remembers Elizabeth Stenhouse cooking loads of trout to take to a party in Bridge of Allan. Barbeques at Howietoun. Hugely successful international food nights - prize for best dish.

55:50 – At last in 2008 AG was awarded a permanent post, but this coincided with redundancies in Aquaculture, and in deference to younger colleagues she took early retirement in 2009. Fortunate to have had career that allowed her to learn about others' lives, and that opened her mind to much that would otherwise have been closed to her.
[Ends 58:30]

Interview No:	SURSA OH / 072	**SURSA** **University of Stirling** **Stirling** **FK9 4LA** **info@sursa.org.uk** **www.sursa.org.uk**	SURSA Oral History
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