

Interviewee: Richard Bent
UoS Dates: 1981-1985; 1992-1993 BA Hons (Business Studies), MBA
Role(s): Vice President of SUSA, 1983-1984. Also Observer on the University Court 1994-5 – 2004-5 and President of the Graduates Association



Interview summary:

Start 00:00 – Richard Bent (RB) chose Stirling as Edinburgh school pupil (other ideas were Edinburgh, Keele and a London university) despite poor reputation of Stirling because of issues in the 1970s. Stirling offered incentive of a night's free B&B and £5 – so he visited, stayed in a house owned by the Corrieris [*proprietors of a famous local café - ed.*] and having seen the campus decided to study there.

02:28 – studied Business Studies because it sounded a sensible option; in 1981 it was a new subject in universities – Business Studies as a department did not exist: [Professor] Tom Cannon had only a desk, the actual teaching being a mix of subjects like Psychology and Sociology, through which RB met many interesting people e.g. Tommy Sheridan

03:15 – mixed in halls of residence, so meeting a lot of people, socialising not based on subjects, which RB liked very much

03:40 – took RB about a year after he arrived in 1981 to become involved with SUSA, though he was immediately aware of student politics: university cutbacks ordered by Thatcher government were particularly severe at Stirling; low student numbers and talk of closure - big demonstration in Queen's Court with interesting speakers e.g. Jack McConnell (SUSA President), Dennis Canavan, Tommy Sheridan. After a year RB part of a group that formed a joke party, through which he became aware of more serious issues. RB was Left Alliance candidate for student vice-president - was elected unopposed when his opponent, Tommy Sheridan, withdrew his nomination. Douglas Campbell was elected president at same time. Most important influence during RB's first eighteen months was his membership of student radio station (Radio Airthrey), based within the student union, where he spent many hours sitting, talking, and made most of his contacts- these included Jock Scott, Murray Sutherland from years above; and people in student politics, which was run on party lines, with no place for independents

07:30 – found he had become involved in politics unintentionally, e.g. through going to demonstrations and to NUS - student union had general meetings with attendances of 1,500 because of concerns over cutbacks. The year before his presidency RB had been involved in protests when University tried to increase charges for halls, catering etc. Students had occupied and shut down the Cottrell building for a week

09:40 – Stirling one of the more politicized universities: 10 or more busloads of students to demonstrations on virtually any topic; one of few Scottish members of NUS, bringing national involvement - Miners' Strike, in which students became involved: RB, in role as radio reporter, witnessed unprovoked violence against miners

by badgeless police, something never officially investigated. Stirling students predominantly centre to left wing, though there was also Conservative society, whose members brought healthy debate to meetings

12:00 – RB elected to Council of Students Association, role was vice-president, which covered welfare and entertainment, and was observer on University Court. During RB's vice-presidency was the first time that the student union was given responsibility for university bars and their important associated income; sports and food came finally under the management of Student Union - employed a permanent full-time manager, Dave Swanson, providing continuity. RB believed that Wang, which had recently arrived on campus, donated money towards the development of the union.

15:32 – huge demonstration in London for the CND – someone took legal action to stop Stirling CSA spending money on sending buses; remembers collecting money in MacRobert foyers and receiving donations from people including townspeople, so that they could afford one bus

16:50 – memorable concerts: The Teardrop Explodes; New Order; heavy rock band called Budgie, for which just 30 people turned up, but they played the whole concert; Mari Wilson; Department S; Tom Baker (Dr Who). RB became ill through attending all-night events and trying to work during the day, but has no regrets

18:40 – welfare issues included dealing with an unwell student who had become violent and barricaded himself in a residence, insisting on negotiating only with RB; that was a scary situation, but the student was persuaded to open the door, and was compassionately treated by the university – reflects that much better procedures for such situations are now in place

21:20 – Principal at time was Kenneth Alexander – student union didn't like or trust the university; this was the heritage of the 70s, post-Queen's-visit - negotiations very formal between students and university, so he tried to personalize relationships, but there were a lot of issues: stand-off situations when university had to ask for their buildings back and students union held them for negotiating - during one sit-in the union intercepted the post and used it as a bargaining tool

23:40 – RB feels that his student union activities at Stirling University gave him above all a “real care for a mix of people”, the ability to stand up and speak to a lot of people – ability to lecture – doing the student radio and involvement in politics. Does not regret coming to Stirling and prioritising these activities over working for a better degree, because he took opportunities to develop personal qualities that employers value most in their employees

26:30 – having returned later to Stirling to do MBA in Retailing and Wholesaling, he is now a senior lecturer and MBA director at Queen Margaret University in Edinburgh; chancing on the advert in the newspaper, he recognized it asked for exactly the same qualifications he had just earned at Stirling – when to his surprise he got the job, having no formal training in lecturing, he relied on his experience as a speaker at Stirling, and that enabled him to succeed at a job he enjoys.

[Ends 29:13]

Interview No:	SURSA OH / -	<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> <p style="text-align: center;">Oral History</p>
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