

Interviewee: Richard Kilborn, Professor
UoS Dates: 1970 - 2008
Role(s): Lecturer, Dept of German, 1970 – 1981
Dept of Film and Media Studies, 1982 – 2008.
Currently (from 2011) Hon Professor in Communications,
Media and Culture



Interview summary:

Summary of content; with time (min:secs)

Start 00:08 – Came to Stirling in 1970. Had been teaching English at the University of Munich. Degree was in German. Stirling was hiring three lecturers for the German department. Already had an affiliation with media as had also worked as an announcer on Bavarian radio in Munich.

02:16 – Stirling was a new cultural environment. Beautiful campus but was used to big cities. Being from the English Midlands, couldn't understand the accent at first. Struck by the enthusiasm of the teaching staff.

03:44 – Interviewed by Jim Trainer, Arrigo Subiotto and Ian Lockerbie. Moved in the summer of 1970.

05:33 – University was extremely helpful when it came to finding accommodation for new staff. University had acquired properties in the local area, especially Bridge of Allan. Offered RK a flat in Bridge of Allan. The rent you paid was dependent on how much you earned. RK received a letter from Bob Bomont informing him his monthly rent would be £19 and ten shillings, which was particularly low. Move from big city to Bridge of Allan took getting used to.

08:06 – Early years were joyful. Great staff/student ratio, eight students to one member of staff. Stirling was innovative, had a semester system which few universities used at that time.

09:18 – Director of Studies scheme. Were responsible for seven or eight students. Would meet once before each semester to discuss progress, read progress reports and agree on programme of study. In the mid-seventies a student complained after a director gave false advice. Bob Bomont sent out a missive saying they were no longer Directors of Studies but Advisors of Studies.

11:15 – Periodic assessment also innovative. The decision was taken early on that assessment would be continuous and not based on final exams. Both students and staff benefited from this.

RK had come from a very large university. Had been warned his classes would be small. Taught a first semester course on the German novella with Mike Mitchell which only had one student, Miss Mills.

14:31 – Lots of extra-curricular activity. Would take a group of students each semester to The Burn in Aberdeenshire [Editor's note: actually in Angus] for a reading weekend; recalls it was once candlelit because of power cuts due to miners' strike.

16:03 – All facilities were shared by staff and students. Shared a staff/student club at Allangrange which eventually became post graduate accommodation. For the first three or four years it was a social space used equally by staff and

<p>students. When the number of students began increasing there were concerns about how that would impact the positive relationships between staff and students.</p>
<p>17:33 – When RK joined the German department there were three existing members of staff. The arrival of three new lecturers – Peter Russell, Peter Meech and RK – doubled the size of the department. There was an expectation that all new staff would live within ten miles of the university.</p>
<p>19:06 – Pathfoot was the centre of the University as Cottrell had not been built yet. Wonderful times in Pathfoot.</p>
<p>20:01 – Chemistry and Physics were big departments at the time. Physics was led by Hans Kleinpoppen from the University of Marburg, who had brought lots of postgraduates and post-doctoral fellows with him. This gave RK plenty of people to speak German with. Doc Adam from Physics asked RK to teach him German as so much went on in German in the Physics department.</p>
<p>21:53 – In 1973 or 1974 RK offered conversational German lessons at lunchtimes. People from across the University took this up. Betty Bruce the telephonist and a porter were the star pupils.</p>
<p>23:10 – Lots of interdepartmental enterprise in the first decade. Two or three members of the English department including Donald Low and John Drakakis were showing an interest in teaching media. This was the embryo of the Film and Media department. A steering committee was formed of Ian Lockerbie, Donald Low and John Drakakis. They pushed the case for having Film and Media as a legitimate academic subject.</p>
<p>24:37 – MacRobert theatre was important. A bequest from Lady MacRobert to build a theatre on campus. Built in the early 1970s. Created a cultural community. Some film showings but mainly live music and theatre. The first administrator of the MacRobert was Anthony Phillips and he made a considerable impact.</p>
<p>26:23 – University decided to embark upon a series of educational exchanges. There were 20 separate exchanges with the United States. It was very successful and students had to compete for places.</p>
<p>27:22 – German was a happy, hardworking and fun department to work in. Students had far more contact hours than they do now. During the 1970s problems began to show. Competition among universities for students became greater which impacted on the quality of students coming into the department. In the late 1970s all three language departments (German, Spanish, French) had to seriously consider how to improve their recruitment. RK suggested offering a beginners' course to students who wanted to pursue a degree in languages but had no previous experience. They would study an intensive language course in first year and those who were highly enough qualified would move in to the mainstream course for second year. A successful scheme but very hard work.</p>
<p>31:11 – The local community had some suspicions about the University. Probably fuelled by the fact that there was a period of student rebelliousness in the late 1960s. The community recognised that the University was of considerable economic significance. The University was good at sharing facilities and encouraging local people to use the MacRobert and visit campus.</p>
<p>33:37 – There was a host family scheme for international students. RK and his family would have international students over for lunch on a Sunday. Positive thing.</p>
<p>34:25 – Queen's visit in October 1972. Some people consider it to be a dark chapter in the university's history but RK doesn't see it exactly like that. It did impact financially as some funds dried up and the bad publicity meant the University couldn't launch its second appeal for funding. RK was present. Jackie [John] McKie was famously photographed toasting the Queen on the link bridge. Wasn't a full blown act of rebellion just a group of students making a mild attempt at protest. Was blown out of proportion in the media. RK later used front pages about the incident to show students the power the media can have on people's attitudes. Led to a series of disciplinary hearings. Also, however, put Stirling on the map. In the three years following RK can remember the Sociology Department having students who were political activists such as Tommy Sheridan and Jack McConnell.</p>
<p>38:27 – There were years of steady expansion. University took a short time to get itself together again following the Queen's visit. During this period Jim Trainer became a senior manager in the University and shielded the German department. Became aware of a tension in the Department between traditionally minded academics and those including RK who wanted to offer newer more challenging courses related to current times. This anticipated his later conversion to Film and Media.</p>
<p>41:29 – Switch from German Studies to Film and Media. The late 1970s and early 1980s were a difficult period in the University's development. Cut in funding in 1980 or 1981 of 28%. Was thought Stirling may have to merge with another university. The university was unsure how to proceed. Had to reappraise all the activity of all departments. Two or three years previously a division of Film and Media had been founded with one member of staff, John Izod. In 1981 the University was looking at ways to move members of staff around departments. RK seized the opportunity to move in to the newly formed Film and Media Department. Aware it was a risk as was moving from a secure department to a fledgling department. Small departments were liable to be considered surplus to requirements and closed, as happened to Music and Fine Art. The University generously allowed RK to go to the University of London to do a Master's degree in Film and Television. Thirty years on the Department is one of the largest at Stirling and German has closed. When RK returned from London he hit the ground running and learned on the job. One of the first three universities in the UK to</p>


offer an honours degree in Film and Media. 2500 applicants battled for 40 places. It was a delight to teach students who were bright and enthusiastic, and whose presence came to be seen as a real gain for the University.

51:52 – As a result of exposure to two disciplines RK's interests are diverse. Interested in media adaptation, and in areas of the media that have been traditionally neglected by male academics such as soap operas, serialised drama and documentary. Strong connection with documentary in Stirling as it is the birthplace of John Grierson. Stirling University houses the Grierson Archive. RK and John Izod have written a book together on documentary, *Confronting Reality*.

55:08 – Student recruitment. The German Department became aware of the need to actively recruit students. RK went around schools to talk about studying German in an attempt to bolster the diminishing numbers of students. When RK moved in to Film and Media this wasn't required as there was great competition for places. In the 1990s the University made a particular effort to recruit students from Norway. University would send staff every year to Oslo for recruitment. RK, Stephen Ingle and Mike Jackson were involved.

1:00:02 – The early German Department were all men and there was no attempt to address this gender imbalance, despite most of their students being women. Became more aware of gender issues in Film and Media as gender is a main interest in that field of study. At a departmental level, Film and Media made an attempt to improve its gender imbalance. Students were evenly split. In the last 20 years staff have been more international.

[Ends 01:03:35]

Interview No:	SURSA OH / 044	SURSA University of Stirling Stirling FK9 4LA info@sursa.org.uk www.sursa.org.uk	 SURSA Oral History
Interviewed by:	Gordon Willis		
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