

Interviewee: Margaret Richards FRIAS.
UoS Dates: n/a
Role(s): Widow of John Richards, partner in Robert Matthew, Johnson Marshall, Architects.



Interview summary:

Summary of content; with time (min:secs)

Start 0:25 – Stirrat Johnson-Marshall and John Richards were interviewed together for the post of architects of the new Scottish university. No site had yet been decided on; they looked at four sites including Falkirk. MR and her husband John arrived at Airthrey in the early evening, the last site to be visited. They stood where Cottrell now stands and a stag thundered past them.

2:44 – JR had not met Tom Cottrell previously. They drove together round the new universities in England such as Sussex, not abroad, and had designed Pathfoot together by the time they came home; it would initially contain all departments. MR was impressed by TC's refreshing attitude to the togetherness of students and staff, and the innovation of semesters rather than terms. The Louisiana Museum of Modern Art might have been an influence on the design of Pathfoot, together with a museum in Norway and the horizontal style of Scandinavian houses. Pathfoot was the first building, on a hill to be out of the way of the traffic route into the campus. It was designed and built quickly, in a year, not using a clasp, prefabricated system. MR's only criticism of the building was that the slope meant that internal staircases were very steep.

8:55 – Courtyards were created to provide a pleasurable atmosphere conducive to study. James Naughtie once told MR that his office in Stirling was the nicest he had ever worked in.

10:14 – Mary Martin's sculpture was designed for Pathfoot Dining Room; MR thinks it looks less good in the Crush Hall. MR remembers Tommy Dunn and Norman Walker. Everyone collaborated, staff and students together. TC and JR had a strong relationship. The priority was to get the building finished on time. At a Court meeting a clause was introduced devoting 1% of the University's income to the purchase of works of art; that would not be allowed now. It was MR's idea to commission the work by Mary Martin.

16:00 – The building had to be flexible as all departments were initially in Pathfoot. The design of the campus was JR's responsibility; MR regarded the decision in the early 80s to sell off part of the campus to a commercial venture as a mistake. JR designed new halls of residence for a site near Logie Kirk but they were never built. Other architects came in whose buildings were not in the same style as the original ones. JR used the minimum variety of materials in the interests of unity but later other materials such as brown bricks were introduced. The Gannochy was very different in style.

20:26 – The original buildings were dirt-cheap, using painted blocks. The halls were cut to the bone, with rooms of a minimal size. JR always worked as part of a team, with Grahame Dixon and Mick Duncan. Duncan disliked the cladding

that was added to the Macrobert; the buildings were designed to be scrubbed to prevent staining and did not need cladding. TC and JR knew each other well and worked out where everything would go; a rumour said that TC wanted the Link Bridge to be high enough for a yacht to pass beneath it. JR liaised with the landscape architect about the grounds.

27:00 – JR did not design the residences but was involved, with Mick Duncan, in the design of the Macrobert. MR thought it was great; she remembered Scottish Opera’s opening event. Conrad Wilson, the critic, said that the Macrobert’s acoustic was dry but the auditorium was not designed exclusively for music. There were great performances in the Studio Theatre, including the mime artist Lindsay Kemp, whose event that involved whirling a pot of paint on the end of a rope was frightening but exciting. The café and restaurant in the Macrobert helped to integrate the University into the local community.

32:30 – JR designed the library which was comfortable and flexible. Interior designers supplied a nice brown carpet; Bute Fabrics supplied curtains and fabrics. JR chose the furniture which was made by Grant Westfield; desks, beds and chairs were solid and chunky. The seating in the Macrobert coffee bar and in J lounge was memorable. The Principal’s house was perfect for TC to display his art collection – a hospitality house. Matilda Mitchell was outrageously wonderful; MR remembered exhibitions in Pathfoot such as the one by Pat Douthwaite.

41:15 – MR remembered a symposium at which JR discussed ways of designing; he was very rational, and reduced and refined the client’s requirements until he got a building. A building should come from a brief; he had a perfect professional relationship with TC. TC was aspirational; he had a vision. Pathfoot was an egalitarian community with no hierarchically separate facilities. MR recalled Fred Holliday, Tommy Dunn and Jim Trainer.

45:00 – Lord Robbins was an enormous man and a good Chancellor. JR was happy with the landscape; Ed Hilliard was the landscape artist and he and the head gardener, Henry Milne, had mutual respect for each other. An International Student Barometer once ranked the Stirling campus as first in the world.

Ends 49.59

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