

Interviewee: Jane Cameron
Dates: 1997 -
Role(s): Estates and Art Collection



Interview summary:

Summary of content; with time (min:secs)

00.00 Angela Smith (AS) explains that Jane Cameron has held many posts in the University and asks how her career began. JC studied Design at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art in the 70s. She worked for the council in Edinburgh and in London, designed palaces for King Fahd of Saudi Arabia, pubs for Courage Brewery and shops, offices and dealing rooms in the City of London. She always wanted to return to Scotland as her family was here and her stepfather worked at the University. When she came back to Stirling she had small children and did lecturing at Edinburgh College of Art, at Duncan of Jordanstone College and evening classes at Falkirk and Glasgow College, teaching Design. She did this for seven years but it meant commuting. Her husband spotted a job as Technical Assistant at Stirling and she and another applicant, Andy Duncan, were appointed in January 1997. Technical Assistant was a term used for project management of the refurbishment schemes in the University. Peter Fairweather was Deputy Director at this time and the University was 30 years old so it was an exciting time. There had been no design input since the original architects.

03.30 Any refurbishment already undertaken had been a bit haphazard as the University was a blank canvas and they were trying to supply and fit as existing, so JC had the opportunity to do so much. She wrote a design brief for herself. She found some old-fashioned attitudes and resisted attempts to insist she used the letters after her name, and kept using her own name, accepting to be Mrs Jane Cameron. Included in this blank canvas was a lot of the original furniture from the 1960s which JC knew would be important in the future as a fantastic record in an archive of the time. She had no storage facilities but collected good pieces and found storage in offices and corridors. Seeing so much stuff go, JC was very sad. Much of it was beautifully made by Scottish furniture manufactures, like McIntosh. JC refurbished offices, residences and the houses on the Principal's hill. She refurbished the Management Centre, now the Stirling Court Hotel. When the Macrobert was being redesigned JC did not have a voice and regrets that the cultural connection between the library, the art and the creative and dramatic spaces, down to the dining room, down to the loch was not retained. AS recalls the little art gallery at the Macrobert. JC comments that these decisions are made for the best reasons and because of budgetary constraints, so it is not anyone's fault.

08.25 AS asks if there was a committee that focused on design of the new buildings. JC says there was no committee till Karen Plouviez (Director of Estates and Campus Services) arrived and created a master plan so now there is a strategy. They consulted with Margaret Richards, wife of John Richards the original architect who worked with Tom Cottrell, and the architects Page Park, one of the best firms in Scotland at the time.

10.40 JC talks about the importance of specifying products when refurbishing and recalls using her old camper van around campus to see samples in place and the importance of considering the maintenance impact of products, longevity, functional aspects. As an example, vertical blinds replaced curtains in the residences as more functional and economic. JC also worked with Jim Struthers on the graduation ceremonies, held in the tennis centre, improving the plant tubs at the front of the stage and refurbishing the chair used in the graduation. She also refurbished the Principal's house four times. She describes the different preferences of successive Principals as regards design. Andrew Miller inherited a comfortable but tired building. Colin Bell was excited about moving into a 1960s home, wooden floors and wooden blinds were installed, a few walls were painted in accent colours. Colin Bell enjoyed entertaining there. Christine Hallett preferred a Scandinavian style and the walls were painted white, new sofas were purchased and a larger dining-table was commissioned to better suit the size of the room, allowing more people to be entertained and for meetings to be held there. The architecture of the house was set, with 6 bedrooms in two separate wings with social space in the centre. There is a lovely garden and wonderful views to the distance, but the house also overlooks the campus and the student residences. JC and Colin Bell met Steedman, the architect who designed the house, and invited him there for lunch. He preferred it all white as originally designed. When Gerry McCormac arrived in 2011 he appreciated the 1960s modernism. There a bigger budget and the house was completely refurbished and money spent on the garden. JC considers the house the best example of modernist domestic architecture in Scotland. All Principals also chose art from the art collection. JC was Project Manager from 1997 to around 2003 and helped Valerie Fairweather (VF) with art installations as VF was working part-time as curator of the art collection but had few resources. The paintings collection was not given much significance then, as people didn't fully understand its value at the time. When VF decided to retire JC realized she could potentially take over the art collection and do her project management part-time. She discussed it with Colin Bell and, just before he died so suddenly, he attended a meeting where he said he wanted JC to be Art Curator. JC will always be grateful for this opportunity which has been a wonderful life experience.

17.00 AS comments that to focus on the art collection was a change in direction for the University. JC says it took time and that Estates had to juggle things to allow her to do two days a week as Art Curator and three days a week as Project Manager. JC took a course at St Andrews University for two years which meant being very efficient. She studied Museums and Galleries and received a lot of support from VF. When qualified, JC took over the art collection. JC's office as Art Curator was in Pathfoot Study Centre. The paintings were in a storeroom next door, accessible and very vulnerable. There was another person studying at the same time as JC, Mark Ulrich (MU) and he volunteered one day a week in the art collection and JC was grateful for his help. JC had some staff art exhibitions in the library but there was little budget for the art collection. JC and MU did an audit of the paintings which were lost and got permission to go to all the offices on campus and discovered where many of these pictures were. In the beginning there had been a policy from Tom Cottrell and Tommy Dunn to acquire art for the campus. Tom Cottrell wanted students to be educated more broadly. There was also an original idea that academics could borrow paintings for their offices. As a result many paintings were scattered in offices over the campus. JC and MU located works in offices, corridors and cupboards during their audit. As a result, they decided they needed a place for the art collection to be held, rather than just a scattering of pictures. JC knew from her work in Estates, that there was a suitable area under the Pathfoot Lecture Theatre and negotiated that space for the art collection.

24.00 This is how Pathfoot was established as the setting for the art collection as they married so well. The glorious modernism design of the building that sits so beautifully in the campus suited the art collection, nestling on the hillside, with the stairs rising and the vistas and views. Development to find space for offices has meant some of the views have been lost, but that is inevitable. Pathfoot was built as a temporary building, based on the Louisiana Museum in Denmark. JC thinks Tom Cottrell and John Richards visited and came back with this vision. It's a wonderful building, single storey, so the light from the wide windows comes into all the spaces and is constant. By that stage, Valerie Fairweather had already removed the Ferguson paintings from the store and they were hanging on the walls in Pathfoot. There was some concern as they were unprotected. By around 2007, MU, who had been volunteering for several years, was employed for one day per week. The Art Collection needed to build a reputation within the University so that it was recognized. People who visited Pathfoot admired the collection but were not aware that it is a significant collection of Scottish contemporary art. Karen Pluviez, Director of Estates did understand this and gave some money. Tall

floor to ceiling cases were bought to protect the Ferguson paintings which are now in places you see as you walk through Pathfoot. To build a reputation, they put on major exhibitions, a Willie Rodger Exhibition, an Elizabeth Blackadder Exhibition and a Lise Hansen Exhibition. Putting on these exhibitions was expensive and a lot of work for JC who was a part-time and still working in Estates. JC's family, especially her mother who did some research, helped out. JC recalls preparing catalogues for the Willie Rodger exhibition, hoping to sell a lot of them and make money for the collection. Fewer were sold than expected although the catalogues provide a wonderful record of the artist's work. JC had asked people who knew Willie Rodgers to write contributions for the catalogue about how he influenced their lives. The contributions showed the power of teaching to make a difference to the lives of students, a point JC used to make to Education students when she did tours of the art collection.

30.00 AS asks about lunchtime lectures which were offered. JC explains these were a way of gradually promoting the art collection. They invited very good speakers. For example, Lindy Richardson talked about textiles. There was also a John Schiller Exhibition. The University has John Schuller paintings, now permanently housed in Pathfoot. As they were building the reputation of the collection, they were also documenting it. They have digitized it and put it online. At this time, JC was refurbishing Airthrey Castle and discovered a very old piano that needed a new home. JC asked for it for Pathfoot, but as it was being moved, the piano remover, remarked that it was a very poor piano and he could get a much better one that will work. So, the piano that eventually came was a different piano, which was painted and is now a Play Me piano in Pathfoot. JC had wanted to acknowledge that there had been music in Pathfoot and this piano was like a gesture to the Music Department, music and art together. This piano is played every day. Fiona Classen, a former librarian and artist, joined as a volunteer in 2011 and worked on the digitization. The Collection got accreditation from Museums and Galleries Scotland, MGS, as they were proving they were working with a major collection in a professional manner. Accreditation status meant they could apply for grants.

34.00 They applied to the National Fund for Acquisitions, NFA, for the purchase of works as a collection should not be static and needs to grow. AS asks about decisions that had to be made, such as buying Ferguson drawings that came up or modernizing further. JC explains that, at first, they looked backwards, buying Ferguson drawings, for example, with match funding from NFA, to give them some context. She is grateful to AS and Helen Beal for the support. Rory Watson wrote a brilliant catalogue about Ferguson which was a useful document to show the University that its art collection was special. In 2011 the library opened and there was a fantastic exhibition with Douglas Hall and also Matilda Mitchell, who had worked with Tom Cottrell and helped him with the art collection. Gerry McCormic arrived as Principal and he had an interest in art. He arranged for the staff to move from library line management to external affairs and fundraising. He gave a budget for more exhibitions and came up with the scheme to have his personal Christmas card as an art card to help publicise the art. JC realized that, strategically, they needed more public engagement and made a funding application to the Robertson Trust and the MGS for a public engagement officer. Sarah Bromage (SB) was appointed to the post for four years, later obtaining a permanent post when the University saw the benefit. Sarah was familiar with the University, having lived in Airthrey Castle Yard as a child. Her father had worked in Aquaculture. Her background was academic as she had worked in the Scottish Political Archive in the History Department. She knew academia and she and JC decided to think about university research topics as themes for exhibitions to enhance the research topics of the University. The adage was to make research visible. The result was a Gallipoli Exhibition although mounting this was a challenge, finding articles of interest and music, for example, to put in the exhibition. JC also describes how thanks to her ongoing work for Estates, she identified spaces in Pathfoot that could serve as office space and further secure storage for the art collection.

42.00 JC also worked on the Garden of Time, originally the Gardener's Memorial Garden, from 2000. It had originally been a kind of Thomas White landscape. Thomas White had been a pupil of Capability Brown and the effect was planted. Over time it had gone to seed a little. Jim Struthers was the head of Gardens and Grounds and was joined by Jacqueline McKenna. The new vision for the gardens was parkland, with the water in the loch sitting on the edge of the grass which surrounds the buildings. Many of the existing memorial benches around the loch were tragically sad and difficult to look after, so it was decided that if people wanted to leave a memory for the University, they should leave it in one place and the Gardener's Garden seemed appropriate. It became the Garden of Time as a place of memory rather than sadness. AS remarks that he

planting there is vibrant which counters the element of tragedy and loss to some extent. JC managed to use a gatepost which had been knocked down in 1967 to mark the entrance. They also used one of the sculptures JC acquired, by Andrea Geile.
45.00 Further work to enhance the profile of art at Stirling was in nominating people for Honorary Degrees. John Byrne was awarded an honorary degree as was Douglas Hall who had been on the original Art Advisory Committee and who had steered and guided Tom Cottrell to buy such interesting works at the beginning. At the time, he was the Keeper of Modern Art at the National Galleries in Edinburgh. Charles Jencks also was awarded an Honorary Degree and gave a wonderful speech, telling students he had done many different things in life - artist, historian, writer, gardener.
47.00 JC began thinking about a strategic vision for the collection in the context of succession planning as she was thinking about leaving. She was aware that there were further collections, such as of science articles and silver as well as the furniture she had collected. Working with colleagues from art and archives, the idea of an umbrella term of campus culture emerged. This would include the gardens, the MacRobert, the art collection and archives. These were a cultural offer that they could provide for the students which underpinned their academic work or studies. In 2017, the 60 th anniversary year, they were able to take the furniture from store and set it out all over Pathfoot. They had an exhibition which included the music, the politics, the ideology and idealism of the period. They held a party in Pathfoot which tried to recreate the hippie atmosphere of those days, and which was attended by some original students who came for the 'happening'.
50.00 JC's colleagues, Sarah Bromage, also did brilliant outreach projects, for Cornton Vale Prison, for example. They were also involved in the Artist in Residence programme, with Alec Finley as the first. Ali Wallace did the Sounds of Pathfoot in 2017. Alan Dimmick, a photographer was the resident in the 50 th anniversary year and recorded photographs of people on the campus. SB is still running the Artist in Residence programme, with a recent artist being Audrey Grant. Another initiative of JC and SB was to develop a module in Exhibition, Design and Interpretation. JC's had experience as a lecturer in Design and Sarah was into Interpretation. The students put on an exhibition in the Library at the end of each module. The students used the Archives and Carl and Rosie also lectured on the course, as well as Jennie (Morgan) from Heritage. It is a module JC herself would have loved to have done.
53.00 JC loved working at the University. There were challenges. She saw a lot of difficult situations and at one point was a bullying and harassment officer. JC liked the challenge of unravelling difficult situations. She felt privileged to work in such an extraordinary environment and to enhance it. AC comments on the wonderful account of how JC brought about changes and how grateful the University is for what she has done.
55.00 JC adds a memory, of getting her dog, Bonnie, in 2002. Bonnie was with her all the time on campus, in the Estates Office and the Art Collection Office. In the end, she had a following and was called the Pathfoot Dog, named by the students. She would stand in the coffee queue and wait for a sausage. She was a real friend. JC used to walk around in a black coat, black boots, with this dog at her heel and the students used to call her the female Doctor Who, which was funny. AC remarks that dogs were not allowed on the campus then, but JC says she flouted the rules. She recalls that someone once said to her, and she thinks it was a compliment, that she was quietly subversive. AC finds that a very good phrase and says they have remarkable evidence of what that brought about.
Ends

Interview No:	SURSA OH / -	SURSA University of Stirling Stirling FK9 4LA info@sursa.org.uk www.sursa.org.uk	
Interviewed by:	Angela Smith		
Date of interview:	4 October 2024		
Summary completed by:	Moirra Ball		
Date:	10 August 2026		