

PhD Pioneers: The Living Experiences of The Open University's First PhD Graduates

Oral History interview clip transcript

Name of Interviewee: **Professor Stephen Potter**
Interviewed by: **Elizabeth Currie**
Date of interview: **25/03/2021**

Important

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Personal/sensitive information regarding individuals who may be living has been removed from transcripts where necessary.

Towards the end of this interview, there were several instances of complete audio cut-out due to a technical issue on the day. These are marked with [Silence].

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Professor Stephen Potter Interview

phd_008_001_01
Clip 1

[00:13:16-00:16:15]

let's start with the interview, which is all about the atmosphere of the OU at that time. One nerdy thing about me is I've kept a diary since the age of eight, and I still keep it going now, so we're into 50-odd years of diary keeping, no a bit more than that, anyway. But let me quote you from my diary of the summer of 1974. I said, three people interviewed me, now they were Daphne Hudson, Peter Cresswell and later Ray Thomas who was Head of the New Town Study Unit and that was the research group I was going to join. And I said the atmosphere was hurried and near chaotic, I fitted in perfectly and enjoyed the matter very much. We talked for a very good while. I mentioned my interest in energy and was surprised to find that would fit in well with any research I may do - and they had a good letter from Michael Stewart there. Michael Stewart was my Economics tutor for whom I'd done some research assistant work over the previous summer. And then I say after an hour or so a chap called Rob Redfern took me around the library and talked about accommodation. I then noted in my diary, I returned to find they wanted me, the Head of the Study Unit - that was Ray Thomas - then saw me and I then had a chat with my girlfriend who'd joined me at the time. I had just got engaged, it was a mad, mad melee that was occurring at the time, we were just on the way to tell her parents in Stafford that we'd got engaged, that all happened at the same time. But we talked together and agreed to do that. I later discovered that Ray Thomas having arranged this interview for his potential student had forgotten all about it and he'd gone off for his lunchtime jog leaving Daphne and Peter in the office and I turned up, they were hoping Ray would return at any moment, he didn't, so we started chatting. After an hour or so I realised that had been the interview. So they sent me off to have a look around the university. The library incidentally was in the old Geoffrey Crowther Building at that time and that's the bit that's been totally demolished now. Because the Jennie Lee Library hadn't yet opened, so you're in pretty early years of the university. So Ray eventually turned up, Daphne and Peter, I don't know the details of it, but told him what had happened, so basically when I returned they'd convinced Ray to offer me the studentship.

So that's how it happened.