



Celebrating 50 years  
**Politics & International Relations**  
1963-2013

**FIFTY YEARS AND MORE:  
THE DEPARTMENT OF  
POLITICS AT THE  
UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH**

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## **Annex 9: Alice Brown (1979-2002; student, Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, Professor; 2008-present as Professor Emeritus and Honorary Fellow)**

### **Introduction**

I look back at my time at the University of Edinburgh, and the Department of Politics in particular, with great affection and gratitude. I can honestly say that if it had not been for my experience as a student and member of staff within the Department, I would not have enjoyed many of the opportunities that subsequently opened up for me. I should explain that I left school at 15 (without the permission of my parents) determined to earn a living. I married young and had two children before deciding to return to study in 1979 when I was in my thirties. I was encouraged to do so by my husband, Alan, who had himself returned to study History at the University when he was in his mid-twenties. It is worth noting that we both received mature student grants that provided some financial assistance to allow us to pursue our studies. And, of course, there were no student fees at the time.

My experience of the Department is, therefore, drawn from my time as a student, as a member of staff (including as Head of Department) and later as one of the University's Vice Principals.

### **Student Life**

Why Politics? I had not originally intended to study Politics when I became a student at Edinburgh. Indeed I signed up for an Economics and Business Studies degree. Having worked in the private sector before returning to full-time education, I soon tired of studying business and looked for a greater intellectual challenge. I found it in the study of Politics. Initially I took Politics as an outside course, but then became hooked. It was at this time that a new Honours Degree in Economics and Politics was introduced, largely following pressure from the then Head of Department, Professor John Mackintosh. This was an ideal opportunity for me, as I saw it, to combine the two areas that interested me most – Economics and Politics – and to develop my understanding of the links between the two subject areas.

Another important factor for choosing to study Politics was the way in which the Department welcomed mature students who had pursued a non-traditional route to higher education. I made friends with the younger students but also with others who had returned to study later in life such as those who had come through the trade union movement and initially studied at Newbattle Abbey College. Housed in a tenement building in Buccleuch Place, students made themselves at home in the Department and especially valued the fact that the Department had its own Library which could be used over the weekend as well as weekdays. The Politics Library became home from home for many and a forum for meeting and debating political ideas.

First year lectures on British Politics whetted my appetite for the subject. I thoroughly enjoyed Henry Drucker's lectures and the way in which he sought to connect much of the study of Politics to the practice. For example, because of Henry's interests and connections, students were able to participate directly in election campaigns. Students from the Department were involved in the famous Hillhead by-election in 1982 when Roy Jenkins from the recently formed Social Democratic Party (SDP) won the seat

from the Conservative Party and caused an embarrassing defeat for the Labour Party who had hoped to gain the seat themselves.

During the first year I was also introduced to the ideas in Political Theory and still remember the impact of reading Aristotle and Plato for the first time. Other texts, such as Bernard Crick's book, *In Defence of Politics*, still stick in my mind and I became engrossed in the writings of Paul Addison and Andrew Gamble who sought to explain post-war history, politics and economics.

My interest continued through my second year when we turned to look at European Politics and comparative study. I particularly recall the excellent lectures given by Richard McAllister and David Holloway, who participated in the lecture series. The decision was then made that I would transfer to a joint Honours course in Economics and Politics.

In the next two years – 1981-1983 - my Honours courses covered a range of topics including Economic Policy – a course I would later go on to teach – and introduced me to new ideas including Marxist theory taught by John Holloway. I also opted to write a dissertation on Training Policy – a lively topic at the time because of high youth unemployment. I have a real sense of *déjà vu* as many of the debates about youth unemployment today mirror those of the 1980s. My dissertation was my first real introduction to independent research, which I thoroughly enjoyed. Supervised by the then Head of Department, Professor Malcolm Anderson, I learned the skills of quantitative as well as qualitative research methods and set off to interview people as part of the study. It was then that I interviewed the late John Fairley, who at the time was working at the GLC in London. (John and I went on to work together on different labour market research projects. Those were, of course, the days of Thatcherite Britain which provoked strong and opposing opinions about the impact of the Conservative government's policies in general and on Scotland in particular.

I graduated from the University with a First Class joint degree - an MA in Economics and Politics – in 1983. I was also honoured to receive the DP Heatley Prize that year although I have to confess that I did not know who DP Heatley was at that time. Having read a draft of Charles Raab's excellent history of the Department, I now know about DP Heatley's part in the story of the study of Politics at Edinburgh.

At that stage, I thought I would be leaving the University and looking for employment. However, with the encouragement of Malcolm Anderson and the late Professor Vincent Wright who was the external examiner of my dissertation, I decided to consider postgraduate study. I was fortunate in that an ESRC studentship was advertised to support the study of the Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS). This involved the Department of Economic History and ACAS collaborating in supporting a full-time studentship. I applied and was successful, and then began my time as a postgraduate student supervised by Roger Davidson in the Department of Economic History and Malcolm Anderson in Politics. Little did I know at the time just how instrumental and helpful this work would be to me in later life.

### **Academic Career**

My first academic job was a temporary lectureship in Economics at the University of Stirling from 1984-1985. One year later (1985-1986) I returned to Edinburgh

University to teach Economics, as a temporary replacement for Stuart Sayer who was on sabbatical leave. This included responsibility for joint teaching of the Economics and Politics course on which I had been a student myself. I held two further temporary posts, the first in Politics (1986-1987) and the second a joint post with Extra-Mural Studies (1987-1990) before obtaining my first tenured post as a Lecturer in Politics in 1990. I was promoted to Senior Lecturer in 1992 and then awarded a Personal Chair in Politics in 1997. During this period I was Head of the Politics Department (1995-1998) as well as Head of the Faculty Planning Unit (1996-1998). In 1998 my career took a new turn when I was appointed as Co-Director of the Institute of Governance (formerly the Governance of Scotland Forum) with Professor David McCrone; and appointed as a Vice-Principal of the University one year later in 1999 by the then Principal, Professor Sir Stewart Sutherland. In 2002 I left the University to take up the position as Scotland's first Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, a post I held until my retirement in 2009.

My time in the Department covered the three key areas of academic life – teaching, research and administration – and my memories of these are summarised below. It is important to note the significance of the interaction between these three roles as well as the impact and relationship with public policy and engagement in public life. I have, therefore, organized my reflections under these headings.

### *Administration*

When I was a student in the Department of Politics I could never have imagined that one day I would be the Head of Department. Malcolm Anderson was Head of Department during my initial period in the Department, followed by the late Chris Allen. Professor Russell Keat joined the Department when I was Head and subsequently took over this role from me at the end of my term of office. I had enormous support from these colleagues in progressing my career and in addressing the many challenges that come with the responsibility of heading up the Department. For example, Russell worked directly with me when I was Head in helping to prepare the Department for its first experience of the Teaching Quality Assessment (TQA). His input was invaluable, not least because the introduction of this initiative was a huge challenge for the academic community and marked a shift in government policy towards universities. It is true to say that a number of colleagues did not welcome this shift. Nevertheless it was a policy that had a number of positive outcomes for the Department. I particularly recall our first 'Away Day' at a venue outside Edinburgh on the east coast. It served to bring colleagues closer together as a team and helped facilitate a collective approach to teaching – quality and content - in the Department. And we had some fun on the way! It also helped pave the way for the second government initiative, the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), which followed and which concentrated on research and the links with teaching. In preparing for the TQA, I also worked closely with David McCrone, who was Head of the Department of Sociology at the time. I learned a lot from Dave's experience of being a departmental Head and am grateful for all the advice he gave me during the TQA period and more generally during my time as Head.

Before becoming Head of Department, I held other administrative posts. I was a Director of Studies, a role that improved my own understanding of the courses offered in the University and the opportunities for cross-disciplinary work; and introduced me to the workings of the University administration – an area that had previously been

completely baffling to me. It was during this time that the then Head of Department, Malcolm Anderson, asked me to take on a new role as Women's Adviser. He had decided to create this position in response to demand from a number of women students who felt that it would be important, in certain circumstances, to be able to discuss issues with a female member of staff. Of course, like most academic departments, female staff were in a minority in Politics. Nevertheless, I had the pleasure to work with a number of first class women – including Mary Buckley, Pippa Norris and Kimberly Hutchings – and also to see the promotion of women I had taught and supervised like Fiona Mackay. My administrative role developed further in the roles of Co-Director of the Institute of Governance and as one of the University's Vice-Principals with responsibility for Community Relations.

### ***Teaching***

My teaching responsibilities in the Department covered giving lectures to the first year Politics students on British Politics, and my area of specialism was post-war political history. This extended up to the time when Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister in 1979 and the period of Conservative government from 1979-1997. As indicated, I also taught on the Honours course on Economic Policy. In addition, I developed new areas of teaching, namely Women and Politics and Scottish Politics, which were to prove to be central to my research interests and role in contributing to public policy. Women and Politics was a course initially taught by Mary Buckley. I then taught the course jointly with her before taking over responsibility for the course when Mary moved on to a Chair in Politics at Royal Holloway, University of London. Teaching this course enhanced my own understanding of feminist theory and stimulated my interest in researching the role of women in politics and public life.

My other new area of interest, Scottish Politics, could not have been developed at a more appropriate time. During the 1980s and 1990s the campaign for a Scottish Parliament gathered momentum. I taught a number of courses for undergraduate and postgraduate students over the years on this topic, and a lot of this teaching was either delivered jointly with Dave McCrone or collaboratively with others including Lindsay Paterson and Eberhard Bort. It was a fascinating time and provided a unique opportunity to link the theory and practice of politics at a crucial stage in Scotland's history.

Over the years I also supervised a number of students undertaking PhD study, two of whom now work in the School of Social and Political Science – Fiona Mackay and Ailsa Henderson. I thoroughly enjoyed teaching and learned a lot from those I taught. As a teacher, it is extremely rewarding to see your students thrive and flourish and very satisfying to see them develop their careers. I taught a number of people who are prominent in politics and public life including John Swinney (Cabinet Secretary in the current Scottish Government), Douglas Alexander (former Minister in the last Labour Government at Westminster) and others in the media such as Emma Simpson and Paola Buonadonna (both BBC reporters), to mention just a few. It is rewarding too when former students come up to you and introduce themselves. This still happens to me even though it is some time since I taught in the Department.

### ***Research***

Much of my teaching helped inspire my research interests and research projects. My first major research grant from the ESRC was obtained with Professor Janette Webb,

then in the Department of Business Studies. Jan and I had a mutual interest in arbitration which was the subject of both our PhDs but which we approached from different academic disciplines and perspectives. It was through discussions with Jan that we developed our ideas for a research project on studying the experience of women returners to higher education. We were successful in obtaining further research funding for different gender research projects that we conducted with Fiona Mackay and Esther Breitenbach.

Esther, Fiona and I obtained other research grants over the years from the Equal Opportunities Commission and the ESRC and others to study the role of women in political and public life and measures to increase the participation of women in politics. This research was to be extremely relevant in the debates surrounding the creation of a Scottish Parliament in the 1990s as one of the key questions was how to achieve more equal representation of women in the new parliament. This was reflected in the work of the Scottish Constitutional Convention and the approaches taken by the different political parties to the issue. Scottish politics and constitutional change were also central to my research and publication activities. In pursuing this work I collaborated with Dave McCrone and Lindsay Paterson.

It is important to note, as is outlined in Charles' history of the Department, that the work on Scottish politics and constitutional change was part of a long tradition within the Department. Very early on in my academic career I was asked to participate in the Unit for the Study of Government in Scotland and also to co-edit the Scottish Government Yearbook with David McCrone. David and I were editors for some years until Lindsay Paterson took over the role. In response to demand for more frequent publications. The quarterly journal, *Scottish Affairs*, was established to replace the Yearbook and it continues to thrive today. The three of us – Dave, Lindsay, and I – also jointly published a book on *Politics and Society in Scotland* and were responsible for other publications with Professor John Curtice and others analysing the results of the British and Scottish Social Attitude Surveys.

Interest in Scottish politics and constitutional change was widespread and the Department was often approached by media from different parts of the world to help explain political developments in Scotland. This leads me neatly to the inter-relationship with the outside world and public life.

### ***Public Life and Public Policy***

I referred earlier to the way in which Henry Drucker involved students in political life during their studies in the Department. Henry was also responsible for establishing the JP Mackintosh lecture series, following John's untimely death. What was unique about the series is that Henry very much involved the people from John's political constituency in East Lothian, and the lectures were held alternately at the University and in the constituency. This was a development that was highly valued by those who knew and worked with John during his political career.

Other members of staff were also involved in interacting with the policy community. For example, very early on in my academic career I recall Malcolm Anderson hosting dinners in his flat in the New Town for politicians, civil servants and other policy-makers including Alex Salmond and the late Robin Cook. The object was to make important links between the department and the outside political and policy world and to this end they were successful.

As an academic, I very much believe in being engaged in public life and contributing to public policy debates. It is a fundamental way in which academics can be accountable but also a valuable way of improving the research that we undertake. I believe it also reflects well on a Department when its members are active in this way.

Such participation can take different forms. I very much enjoyed serving on organisations including the Political Studies Association, the Economic and Social Research Council and the Scottish Funding Council and I learned a lot through the positions I held on bodies such as the Committee on Standards in Public Life (the Nolan Committee), the Equal Opportunities Commission in Scotland, the British Council and the Hansard Society. Most directly related to my teaching and research interests were the roles I played in serving on the Scottish Constitutional Commission of the Scottish Constitutional Convention (where we made recommendations for a new electoral system and gender balance in the Scottish Parliament) and accepting the invitation from the then Secretary of State for Scotland, the later Donald Dewar, to be a member of the Consultative Steering Group that made recommendations for the Standing Order and Procedures of the new Scottish Parliament in 1999. I feel very privileged to have played a role at the heart of constitution building in this way. I was only able to do so because of the knowledge, skills and expertise I gained in the Department of Politics as a student and an academic, and I hope I was able to feed back some of the value of these experiences to my students.

### **Conclusion**

In writing this personal reflection I have been reminded about just how rewarding my time in the Department of Politics was and how this experience opened up so many opportunities to me in the most unexpected way. I was immensely proud, therefore, to be made an Honorary Fellow of the Department and then to be granted the title of Professor Emeritus in 2008 before receiving an Honorary Degree from the University (Honoris Causa) in 2010.

I have not done justice to all I learned and the skills I gained in the Department of Politics - from those who taught me and those who became my colleagues and with whom I worked directly in teaching, researching and engaging in public life. Can I take this opportunity to say a huge 'Thank You' to all of you. I owe you a great deal.