

BELOW THE BELT
The Founding of a Higher Education Institution

Edited by

Carol Hill and Sean F. Johnston

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

CRICHTON PUBLICATIONS

**BELOW THE BELT –
The Founding of a Higher Education Institution**

*Essays in honour of Professor Rex C. Taylor,
Founding Director of the Crichton Campus of the University of Glasgow,
upon his retirement*

2005
UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW
CRICHTON PUBLICATIONS

University of Glasgow
Crichton Publications

General Editor
Mark G. Ward

Rutherford/McCowan Building
Crichton University Campus
Dumfries DG1 4ZL
Scotland

First published 2005

© Copyright with individual contributors

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

ISBN 0 85261 815 8

CONTENTS

Foreword

Ted Cowan

Preface

Carol Hill and Sean Johnston

1. Introduction

Sean Johnston and Carol Hill

2. First in class: Crichton student profile 1999-2005

Jane Cavani and Wendy Anderson

3. Interdisciplinarity and core courses

Benjamin Franks with Stephen Harper

4. Gradgrind goodbye – or an experience of creative programming

Tom Pow

5. Building Scottish Studies from scratch

Valentina Bold

6. Science Studies in a liberal arts curriculum

Sean Johnston and Mhairi Harvey

7. The Crichton Placement

Carol Hill

8. And now for something completely different: the Honours Creative Enquiry Project

Mhairi Harvey

9. A heritage tour of the University of Glasgow's Crichton Campus

Donald Macleod

10. The view of the newcomer

Sandy Whitelaw

11. The umbilical cord: reflections on, and from, a satellite campus

Mark Ward

Notes on Contributors

Appendices

I. A brief chronology of the Crichton Campus

II. Staff members, 1999-2005

III. The Crichton curriculum (and course levels), 2004/2005

IV. Professor Rex C. Taylor – a brief *curriculum vitae*

Preface

This book attempts to capture a collective vision of a new institution a few short years after its foundation, and to acknowledge the seminal role of its first Director, Professor Rex C. Taylor. An enthusiastic and creative leader, he inspired his colleagues to tackle a seemingly endless series of challenges to launch a new university campus and, with it, a novel curriculum.

An edited volume such as this can never adequately depict the interactions of the many dozens of people who have brought the Crichton Campus of the University of Glasgow to life. Many colleagues at the main (Gilmorehill, Glasgow) campus have gone largely unmentioned, partly because they were involved in suggesting curricula or negotiating funding before present staff were on the scene; among them are Vice Principals, Clerks of Senate, Heads of Department, Faculty committees, Boards of Study, ad hoc steering groups and individual academic, administrative and clerical staff. Other unacknowledged individuals, particularly beyond the University of Glasgow itself, have had an informal but sometimes profound influence on shaping local possibilities and in engineering solutions or in donating time, ideas or resources. And yet other institutions and organisations have been little mentioned, despite their enthusiasm and contribution to Crichton developments, owing to the labyrinthine interconnections that make cause-and-effect relationships difficult to unravel. They include the University of Paisley, the Crichton Development Company (CDC), Dumfries and Galloway Council, the Crichton Foundation and the Crichton University of Southwest Scotland Action Group (CUSSAG).

We thank the contributors of chapters for their time and thoughtfulness in reflection and composition; Audrey Clowe for vital historical information; and, Crichton Publications for timely formatting and printing.

Carol Hill and Sean Johnston, Dumfries, May 2005

Introduction

Sean Johnston and Carol Hill

When the University of Glasgow's new Crichton College opened its doors in September 1999, its small staff had that rare opportunity in an academic's career to launch a new curriculum based on clearly enunciated ideals. In the following six years under the direction of Professor Rex C. Taylor, those ideals remained firm even as numbers grew and external circumstances mutated. The theme of this book concerns the ideas, activities and problems – intellectual, curricular and administrative – that shaped the University of Glasgow Crichton Campus during its first six years. Its dozen contributors provide varied perspectives on the problems of creation.

The original vision developed by Taylor in conjunction with colleagues at the University of Glasgow's main Gilmorehill campus was to establish a university Liberal Arts campus akin in some respects to contemporary American institutions. This was not to be based on an imported model, however. The Scottish educational tradition of philosophy was exported to America in the nineteenth century, and was based on a traditional complement of subjects extending back to the medieval period when the University of Glasgow was founded (1451). Adding a modern twist to this precedent, the new college was to offer five flavours, or degree designations, of a Bachelor of Arts degree: Environmental Studies, Creative and Cultural Studies, Scottish Studies, Health and Social Studies, and Liberal Arts. And innovation and creativity, as Tom Pow discusses, were key ingredients in the new curriculum. Within a year, the degree was changed to a Master of Arts title to accord with the traditional Scottish (and University of Glasgow) designations, and Crichton College became the Crichton *Campus* to reflect students' pride in an institution of higher education in southwest Scotland.

Along the way, the five degree designations developed suites of courses (some sixty in all) that reflected a wide, but interconnected, range of subjects. Given that most university graduates during the late twentieth century could expect to change career paths at least once over their working lives, the intention was to mould graduates having a broad educational background, aware of the interrelationships between branches of knowledge, and able to apply them to new situations throughout their subsequent careers. Ben Franks and Stephen Harper explore the advantages and implementation of interdisciplinarity, and the aims and reality of the four core courses implemented at the campus. The core courses were intended to embody interdisciplinary and general approaches to knowledge, and covered four areas.

‘Issues in Contemporary Society’ was to examine the contentious issues facing citizens in the modern world; ‘Text and Communication’ was to investigate the role of text, imagery and communication; ‘Science: History and Culture’ was to explore the ways that knowledge, especially academically-valued knowledge, has been acquired from the prehistoric world to the present century; and ‘Argumentation—Rhetoric—Theory’ was to study the bases of discourse both in academic and everyday settings.

The interdisciplinarity also was to be evident within the degree designations themselves. The original ‘Liberal Arts’ degree designation was crafted to offer history, philosophy, literature and modern languages (retitled Humanities, and to be disaggregated into separate degree options Literature, Philosophy, History, Science Studies and Media Studies in future academic years). Some courses were provided by video-link from (and to) the main campus of the University of Glasgow, and supported by local course convenor/seminar leaders. Other courses melded the subjects in new and innovative combinations. ‘Victorian Literature, Art and Philosophy’, for example, was designed to provide a synoptic view of a single historical period by combining different disciplinary viewpoints, and ‘Imagined Futures’ was conceived to enrol political philosophy, literature, history and film studies in the exploration of varying historical visions of the future.

The Crichton environment permitted normally isolated subjects to be taught in new and fertile combinations. Valentina Bold details the development of a Crichton flavour of Scottish Studies, a designation that combines historical, literary and ethnological perspectives. And as Sean Johnston and Mhairi Harvey describe, Science Studies, for example – a broad term for the history, philosophy and sociology of science, technology and medicine – could be combined with perspectives from Environmental Studies, Health Studies and Literature to yield unique combinations having both theoretical insights and practical benefits for students.

Besides such novel course offerings, the third and fourth years of the undergraduate degree were equally original. The second of two semesters in the third year was to be a choice between the ‘Crichton placement’ and an undergraduate dissertation. As Carol Hill describes, the Crichton Placement was conceived as a work placement related to the student’s subject interest. Unlike well-worn ‘sandwich courses’, however, the Crichton Placement incorporates assessment and self-reflection as key elements. Similarly, Mhairi Harvey describes how the Honours Project, a year-long activity comprising the entire fourth year of undergraduate study, was designed to promote group work, interdisciplinary approaches, and

communication to both academic and non-academic audiences. Donald Macleod surveys the subsequent coalescence of heritage-related studies on at the campus.

The courses suited a changing profile of students. As Jane Cavani and Wendy Anderson detail, the student population changed as new courses were established. Mature and part-time students, representing a pent-up demand for higher education in the Dumfries and Galloway region, dominated the initial cohort of undergraduate students. In successive years, the average student age fell and a growing proportion of full-time students studied at the campus.

Administratively, the Crichton Campus has followed a tortuous course. Established by the then Principal of the University of Glasgow, Professor Sir Graeme Davies, as a stand-alone unit directly overseen by the higher administration of the University, in subsequent years the campus formed stronger ties with individual Gilmorehill departments and, from 2004, was integrated under the administrative and financial responsibilities of the Faculty of Arts. In the early planning stages during the late 1990s, it had been realised that the University of Paisley was offering courses in Dumfries, and the two institutions decided to collaborate by sharing resources and staff for library, information technology, student advisory and marketing. Mark Ward describes how such challenges shaped the scope and activities of the campus, which, at the time of writing, oversaw some 35 staff on site. Sandy Whitelaw, who joined just two years after the campus was established, provides a perspective on its rapidly changing environment and culture.

Below the Belt reflects on the founding of a new campus far enough from the main population centres in Scotland (the so-called ‘central belt’) to have a sense of independence and creative freedom. The title also suggests both the frisson of appeal that the location correspondingly provides, and the unconventional route taken in pursuing goals.

This book is a timely project: the beginning of Crichton's second half-decade under a new Director and the graduation of its first post-graduate students is a suitable point at which to take stock of its collective accomplishments. It is also opportune that, for an organisation in which historical record keeping has to date been somewhat haphazard, most of the original academic staff are still in place, making possible a representative and balanced account. But most importantly, Rex Taylor's retirement at the end of the 2004/2005 academic year brings to a close the initial phase of the Crichton Campus, and inevitably will foster fresh visions and a shift in direction. As a record and reflection of that first period of establishment, we expect this edited volume to be valuable not merely as a personal record for those who have

contributed to the formation and growth of the campus, but also to educators, administrators and planners generally concerned with establishing new academic initiatives in Higher Education.