



Q&A with Maureen Galbraith

Women's Committee, EHS

Discussant: Alka Raman

March 2026

1. When and how did your association with the Society begin?

I had been working part-time at the University of Glasgow, since June 1993, on a project funded by the Research Councils: 'Teaching Independent Learning Technologies' (TILT). A 7-hr/week job was advertised in late 1997 for admin support for Rick Trainor (then a Vice Principal at the University) in his role as Honorary Secretary of the Economic History Society, which he took up in March/April 1998. I was interviewed for the role and appointed to the job, starting on 5 January 1998.

The job advert made no mention of travelling to London (which would have freaked me out, and caused me not to apply!) But, the demands of the job very quickly grew, from the initial 7-hr/week, to 14, 21 and finally 28-hr/week, involving travel to London for EHS and ESRC meetings, Oxford for meeting with the publishers, and to various universities around the country scoping them out as potential conference venues.

2. Everyone who joins the Society first interacts with you. What does that responsibility entail?

This is probably more a question for Alice, who deals with membership. Prior to Alice, this was the responsibility of our publisher, Wiley.

I'm basically here to respond to any queries, requests, etc that members may have. I was basically the first point of contact for members of the Society on anything from a membership query, which would be passed to Wiley, to dealing with grant applications, the annual conference, the training course. Basically, if the member got in touch with a query or issue, I sorted it out for them and if I couldn't I usually knew who could.

3. What does a typical day working for the Society look like?

I don't think there is a typical working day. Much of the time is spent on email responding to queries etc. The work tends to be seasonal, driven by certain tasks, such as: Awards Committee applications, Residential training course, Meetings of Executive, Council, and AGM (for which I draft some of the papers), the Annual Report & Accounts. By far the biggest responsibility is the annual conference: you're either wrapping up the previous one, working on the current one, or sorting out the future one! A big part of the job, is sending reminders and collating responses to various issues.

4. How has your work evolved/changed over time? How did advances in technology impact/challenge your work?

Technology has, in many ways as for most people, made admin more efficient. The downside of that is that it can be difficult to switch off from accessing emails.

I think I said to you that my first President, Patrick O'Brien, used to mail hand-written letters from his home in Oxford to my office in Glasgow which I typed up, signed on his behalf, and mailed. Changed days!

The management of conference registrations has also massively changed. Before we had online registration and payment, a registration form was circulated with the *Review*, completed by delegates and returned to me with a cheque (later credit card details); these details were then processed and input to a database. Nowadays, we can download the conference registrations with the click of a key ... much more efficient!

5. You've worked with several Presidents of the Society. What was the experience like?

It was excellent ... I have been very lucky with all the Presidents I've worked with. That, for me, is the main reason that I've stayed in the job so long ... each President is very different, so the dynamics of the job change accordingly. Some have been very hands on, others not.

I must give a shout out to Rick Trainor, who appointed me to the post. If I'm any good at my job, it's in large part due to him! Rick and I had weekly meetings in his office at the University of Glasgow where we'd discuss a briefing paper that I'd drafted in anticipation of any queries that he might have on Society business ... my goal was always to be able to answer queries that he had!

6. What is involved in organising the Society's annual conference? What are the factors you must bear in mind with its organisation?

Where do I start? It's a huge task; we:

- Identify potential venues, using our conference specification, and undertake a site visit.
- Negotiate rates with the preferred venue
- Publicise the calls for papers
- Collate submissions
- Liaise with the Conference Committee on the programme
- Notify paper/poster proposers of the outcome of their application
- Circulate the programme
- Set up registration (this is Alice!)
- Collate registrations
- Provide the venue with delegate numbers and catering
- Organise at the conference
 - Meeting of Council and AGM
 - NR posters*
 - Meet the Editor*
 - Editorial board lunch*
 - Job Market Session*
 - Awarding of prizes at the Saturday dinner
- Manage delegates: I often say that I feel like their mum!
- After the conference, we:
 - Arrange attendance certificates
 - Pay the bills
 - Finalise the conference accounts

*The conferences have evolved over the years to include these aspects.

7. How different does the Society look from the time you started till now? Any thoughts on the key drivers of change?

What's striking for me is the internationalisation of the conference and thus the Society – I absolutely love this. The 2026 EHS Annual Conference presented 54 New Researcher papers from 19 countries, and 167 Academic Session papers from 31 countries. That is a big, positive change.

8. Do you have any special memories of your time with the Society that you would like to share?

There is one memory which has stayed with me, and which serves to give an idea of the kind of people that I've worked with over the last 28+ years: kind, thoughtful, supportive. As you know, Rick appointed me to the post in 1998, he subsequently moved on from the University of Glasgow (in 2000) to become Vice-Chancellor at the University of Greenwich. My mum died in 2003, and Rick took the time to come to her funeral. He didn't make a fanfare about it; just turned up and I only knew he was there as I saw him as I was walking down the aisle of the Church after the service had concluded.

Also, I'd say that for me there is enormous satisfaction in seeing the annual conference come to fruition and meeting all the delegates. Though I'm always very pleased to be going home at the end of it!

It has been my absolute pleasure and privilege to work with all of the Society's members over the course of my career. I will miss them!