

## Conversations with Professor Stroud Francis Charles (Toby) Milsom

by  
Lesley Dingle<sup>1</sup> and Daniel Bates<sup>2</sup>

### Second Interview: Fifties & Sixties

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*Between October and December 2009, Professor Milsom was interviewed four times at his home in Newnham to record his reminiscences of over sixty years of an illustrious academic career, the majority of which was spent in the Faculty of Law at Cambridge.*

*The interviews were recorded, and the audio version is available on this website with this transcript of those recordings. The questions and topics are sequentially numbered in the three interviews for use in a database of citations made across the Eminent Scholars Archive to personalities mentioned therein.*

Interviewer: Lesley Dingle, **her questions and topics are in bold type**

Professor Milsom's answers are in normal type.

Comments added by LD, *in italics*.

All footnotes added by LD.

**73. There's so much to get through because you've had such a long and illustrious career. If we don't finish this time we can just stop and hopefully continue at some other point.**

Could I mention there's one character from my undergraduate days I didn't mention, and really should have. I don't know whether you've ever come across the name Ziegler.

Charlie Ziegler<sup>3</sup>, who, during the War when there was nobody much about, I think he probably taught every first year law student, and absolutely he worked from dusk to dawn. No, the other way round, dawn to dusk, every day. I think he was a lecturer in Pembroke, but he was never a Fellow. He was half Burmese. And he was a wonderful teacher, and it wasn't just Trinity people the first years I think who were sent to him, I think the whole University sent their first years to him, yes. So there was certain mechanical nature to some of his tutorials, some of his supervisions, but he was deeply deaf and beasts that we were, he had a microphone in the middle of the table and he was an old man and occasionally he'd go off to sleep and we found that tapping the microphone with a pencil worked wonders. He was a very, very good teacher actually. They gave him rooms and I think he was a college lecturer and he taught from 8 in the morning until 8 at night every day of the week except Sunday.

**74. Good Heavens - very commendable.**

And he was an extremely nice man. I think he was the only wartime teacher I had who actually asked me to his home for a meal.

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<sup>2</sup> Freshfields Legal IT Teaching and Development Officer, Faculty of Law, Cambridge University.

<sup>3</sup> Lectured to Michael Kerr and Sir Richard Stone at Pembroke. Apparently, was very deaf and had microphones hanging round his room.



**75. How lovely.**

And you know in wartime just producing meals was something you didn't do at the drop of a hat.

**76. Well in the first interview Professor Milsom we spoke about your life from 1923 to 1955 and perhaps we can deal with your academic life from 1955 onwards today. Before we do that I wonder if we could go back retrospectively to what must have been a very important event in your legal career. You say in your book or in your preface to studies in the *History of the Common Law* that you, and I quote, "had been diverted to the law by one accident and then to its history by another." When you spoke in the last interview about your time at Pennstate you'd already settled on the History of Law as what one might call your chosen topic and I wondered when this decision had come to you, perhaps as an undergraduate at Trinity?**

I quite enjoyed it as an undergraduate and my Director of Studies in my last year was H. A. Hollond<sup>4</sup>, whom you must have heard of, who said that he was a legal historian. He never wrote anything about anything as far as I know. Among the Fellows of Trinity in those days writing was somehow deemed a bit *infra dig*, I think. Patrick Duff<sup>5</sup> didn't ever write... no, Patrick Duff did write one article. Harry Hollond I don't think ever wrote anything.

**77. Was it he who perhaps inspired you to think about legal history as a focus?**

Well, yes. And I quite enjoyed it and I thought there must be more to it than what emerged from an undergraduate course in legal history. So, self-indulgence, really, but Trinity had given me a job so I didn't have to worry about that, so it didn't much matter whether I did something that people wanted or not. And nobody wanted legal history and they still don't.

**78. Well, from 1955 to 56 you were at the London School of Economics. Did you actually move to London Professor Milsom?**

Oh, yes.

**79. And what subjects did you teach there?**

Quite a lot, actually, mainly property. I think I always refused to teach tort because I knew I didn't know enough about that. Contract I thought I knew enough about, I didn't, but I thought I did. So, I think I taught Contract, but mostly it was property, and Legal History for anybody who wanted it and there weren't many fools in the LSE who did want it.

**80. Did you live quite close to the LSE?**

We were mostly in Chiswick, a year I think, in a rather miserable flat in Chiswick with a lunatic neighbour. A really lunatic neighbour. She was the nastiest woman I've ever met.

**81. In one of the flats?**

Yes, and she proved it every day, all day. It was horrid.

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<sup>4</sup> Professor Henry Arthur Hollond, (1888-1974), Rouse Ball Professor of English Law (1943-50).

<sup>5</sup> Professor Patrick William Duff, (1901-91), Regius Professor of Civil Law (1945-68).



Her husband was an MP who parked her in this flat and never came near her. So many people complained about her that eventually the land agent, who was running the flats, got in touch with the authorities. I don't know who he got in touch with - anyway, there came a little delegation with one policeman and two doctors, hoping to certify her. And she saw them off. So, our hope of release was gone.

**82. After a year at the LSE, you moved to New College<sup>6</sup>?**

That's right.

**83. Where you were a lecturer. And can you recall the circumstances of the move to New College? Did you apply for a position: how did you come to move to New College, Professor Milsom?**

They very kindly took the initiative. A friend had said, "Look, I see there's this post going in Oxford, and I'm sure it would be better for you than LSE". But I didn't apply. Somebody told them about me, and they asked me to go and dine, in the typical Oxford way.

**84. Which, of course, you were accustomed to from your Trinity days?**

Yes, so that was that.

**85. Do you have any recollections of colleagues from this period at New College?**

The Warden was an extraordinary man called Smith<sup>7</sup> and he was a bachelor and had a fairly unpleasant dog that used to chase visitors, it was all right by him. He was a real eccentric. He buttonholed somebody in the quad, he was always buttonholing people, and said, "You're Jones" and the chap said, "No, I'm not, I'm McPherson". You're not McPherson, McPherson was killed in the war. So, he was an oddball, but a kindly oddball actually.

My predecessor as Law Tutor became Bursar and that's how the vacancy for the law tutor's job came up, and that was a man called Butterworth<sup>8</sup>. J B Butterworth who left in a huff because they wouldn't make him Registrary and went to, I'm sorry, you're just about catching me in time before my memory finally goes. He went to Warwick as Vice Chancellor of Warwick [LD: 1963] and was a very good Vice Chancellor and made a first rate University of it. But he was a fairly impossible man.

**86. You were Dean, Professor Milsom, of New College from 1959 to 1964? Do you have any recollections of your role as Dean?**

Yes, I can't now remember whom I succeeded.

The things that survive in the memory are the funny bits, like the night porter ringing me up at two in the morning and saying – he was a man of few words and his one word on that occasion was "Explosions!". So, I thought this sounded serious enough for me to go. It transpired that somebody had spent a fruitful evening with those bird scarer things, which are strung out along a fuse and, if you were skillful, you could easily throw them up to hang over a gargoyle. And there were these blasted bangs going off the whole time, and I told the night

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<sup>6</sup> Founded 1379 by William of Wykeham.

<sup>7</sup> Alic Halford Smith, (1883–1958), Warden 1944–1958, Vice-Chancellor of Oxford 1954–57.

<sup>8</sup> John Blackstocke Butterworth, CBE, DL, (1918–2003), Baron Butterworth 1985, Dean 1952–56, Bursar 1956–63, Sub Warden 1957–58 of New College, first Vice-Chancellor of University of Warwick (1963).



porter to lurk in a dark corner while I walked round. But the dark corner he had to lurk in was one where they'd left a string of these damn things. He wasn't best pleased. It was needless to say, all this was enemies from Magdalen College and I don't like to think what happened to Magdalen the next night; I'd rather never know.

The other recollection was of a very rich man, whose name will come back to me in due course - you may know it anyway because he gave Kings that altar piece which they put at the east end of their Chapel, thereby ruining the Chapel in my opinion<sup>9</sup>. And he rang up the Warden and said "I live in a flat and I haven't got room for all my pictures and I've got this El Greco I want to get rid of, would you like to have it?" Well, if I'd been the Warden I would have assumed it was a hoax, but he was an experienced man and said "Yes, of course", and the benefactor was driven up by his chauffeur one Saturday afternoon. I went round to help and the Warden and I went, the chauffeur carrying the picture, the benefactor carrying the hammer and nail, the Warden and I looking scared, as it were. We got into the Chapel and the benefactor said, well, "How about there?" and the Warden said "Yes, that would be nice." So the chauffeur climbed his ladder and banged in a nail and this picture, worth a fortune, was hung. Nothing is easier than to get into a college chapel, so we had a burglar alarm fitted and it was one of those damn things that go off every time a fly passes through its rays. So, I spent a good many restless nights having to go in because the night porter had rung saying, "Sir, alarm." Nobody ever did steal it and, so far as I know, it's still on its hook.

### **87. Incredible.**

Very nice picture. To be rich enough to be casual about something like that would be really being rich. We asked him to our Grand Dinner. He said "It's very kind of you, I don't like grand dinners and I can't bear dinner jackets, so would you mind if I don't come?" I wish I could remember his name, it will come to me, but I expect Kings probably have mentioned his name in their Guide to the Chapel that they do.

### **88. I'll look it up. Very interesting. It was while you were at Oxford, Professor Milsom, that you began a series of visits to NYU. You visited NYU five times over twelve years (1958-70) and this was obviously a long and fruitful association. Do you have any recollections of how you first started going to NYU and the circumstances thereof?**

The NYU Law School. They were very well endowed, a lot of money, and they had been running for years summer courses for law teachers. Where law teachers might go and learn the kind of thing that American law teachers probably wouldn't know about. And for years Harry Lawson<sup>10</sup>, who was the Professor of Comparative Law at Oxford by that time, was going and doing this. I think he sold them the idea that they ought to put on legal history. I think it was a three-yearly cycle, Roman Law, Comparative Law, which was done by a series of mostly Frenchmen, and Legal History, which was me. And these chaps knew nothing about legal history, didn't really want to know anything about legal history, but were quite good at asking difficult questions, so it was a useful experience actually. And enjoyable because New York City in August is not the ideal, but the Dean at the time lent us his penthouse apartment, which was air-conditioned and had a roof garden.

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<sup>9</sup> Donated in 1961 by Major Alfred Ernest Allnatt (1889-1969). The altarpiece of King's College Chapel is the Adoration of the Magi by Rubens (1641). Originally painted for a nunnery in Leuven, Belgium. It was purchased at a Westminster sale at Sotheby's in June 1959.

<sup>10</sup> 1897-1983, Professor of Comparative Law Oxford, Fellow of Brasenose College.



### 89. How delightful.

So we lived in the lap of luxury, as it were.

### 90. Would this have been for a couple of months at a time?

About six weeks, usually. Yes. And both the LSE and I suppose Oxford, were very good about letting me have leave to do it. They stopped my pay for the duration, but since NYU was paying me for six weeks more than I earned in a year, that was okay.

### 91. Professor Stein used to enjoy going to America very much.

**Professor Milsom, in *Who's Who* your formal association with the Society is dated to the last year of your time at Oxford. What was your role at this point in the Selden Society. It would have been I suppose about 1964, or perhaps you joined the Selden Society a bit later.**

My memory, as you know, is far from reliable. The beginning of it all was that old Plucknett<sup>11</sup>, who was the Professor of Legal History at London, became senile, to put it brutally, and LSE eventually forged his signature on a letter of resignation. But it didn't occur to him that he ought to resign from the Selden Society, and so I and two friends - Derek Hall<sup>12</sup>, now dead, who was in Oxford, and David Yale<sup>13</sup> - and the three of us became, as it were, coadjutors to the failing Bishop, and when he died each of us pointed the finger, but the two of them ganged up on me and pointed at me, so I got stuck with being Literary Director. I was so for quite a long time - quite a tiresome job because, for one thing, if you're producing a volume every year, you've got to get people working on volumes and it's never their top priority because it's not going to do much for their CV. So you have to spend time hectoring them and then when they produce it, you have to read the damn thing, try and get rid of the grosser mistakes, and then see it through the press. And with that I was terribly lucky because my wife was very used to dealing with printers and she had seen her first husband's books through the press: Cambridge criminologist called Radzinowicz<sup>14</sup>. She had a lot of experience and she was anyway very quick on the uptake and so she did all that. I still had to read the bloody paper, but she dealt with printers, and I still get a Christmas card every Christmas from one of the printers that she dealt with. Extraordinary, yes.

So, that's how that got done. I mean, if it had been left to me nothing would have ever happened. That was the Selden Society and it went on for ever and ever and I think I'm still on its Council. Then they made me President; that was a dirty trick. That was, I suppose, its Centenary Year and our Royal Patron was persuaded to do things and we had an enormous party and, because it was known that the Duke of Edinburgh was going to be there, hundreds of our American members crossed the Atlantic to be present at this party, and I'd never seen them, I had no idea who they were. And I said to the Equerry, look, I'm not going to be able to introduce these people. "Don't you worry", he said "just let him loose", which I did and he was wonderful. He spent a happy evening talking to all kinds of people about all kinds of things that neither he nor they knew anything about. But he was really very good

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<sup>11</sup> Theodore Frank Thomas Plucknett 1897-1965. See Q.57.

<sup>12</sup> President of Corpus Christi College, Oxford

<sup>13</sup> D. E. C. Yale, former President of the Selden Society. Reader in English Legal History, Cambridge University. The David Yale Prize of the Selden Society was set up in 1999 in his honour. Fellow of Christ's College.

<sup>14</sup> Professor Sir Leon Radzinowicz, (1906-99), Wolfson Professor of Criminology



and there was a big dinner to which he came, and it was a sad time for me. My wife was... her senility was beginning to become obvious. I knew it would cause trouble if she didn't come, so I got John Baker<sup>15</sup> to volunteer his then wife Veronica to look after my wife through the dinner, which she very nobly did, while I was concentrating on trying to introduce as many rich members as I could to the Duke.

**92. That would have been 1987?**

Yes, the Centenary Year was, 87.

**93. Going a little bit back in time. In 1964 you moved back to LSE as Professor of Legal History. Are there any observations that you recall of this move back to the LSE? This would have been from Oxford?**

I was at the LSE twice, because I, rather stupidly perhaps, I let them lure me back and it was the second of these times that we were living in Greenwich.

Well, I can remember my wife and I being deeply torn, because we were happy at Oxford and we had a beautiful College house. On the other hand, it was something I felt I couldn't refuse, so we went and we bought this house in Greenwich.

**94. Did you manage to live quite close to LSE?**

No. My wife and I had a lovely day. We rang up every estate agent in London and they suggested things we might look at, so we started in the North and moved South. In the North we couldn't begin to afford any of them. I mean Hampstead and all that was totally out, and we ended in Greenwich. A nice estate agent said, "Well, I haven't got anything for you... I've got something that might be ideal for you, but the woman's mad and she's never going to sell." That would have put me off, but my wife said "tell her we're coming." And so, we went to view this house which was a very nice house in a row of nice houses, which had all been built by a dishonest 18<sup>th</sup> Century steward of the Earls of Dartmouth. They had their London, well not their town house, but their semi-town house in that road. And he invented the road and sold off plots and built all these houses. All 1690 to 1720, that sort of thing. Very pretty.

**95. Lovely.**

As we approached, my wife said "we're going to have that house", and she did.

**96. So, you would have commuted.**

Yes.

**97. On the tube or the train?**

I mostly went down Lewisham Hill to a real train and my favourite real train meandered around South London through Denmark Hill and ended up at Blackfriars, which was very convenient for the LSE. Since it was such a roundabout train and since it wasn't much advertised, I nearly always had the compartment to myself; never failed to have a corner seat, in rush hour.

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<sup>15</sup> b. 1944. Professor Sir John Hamilton Baker, Professor of English Legal History University of Cambridge 1988-98, Downing Professor of the Laws of England 1998-



**98. You could read and use the time quite productively.**

It was actually quite a nice commute. Very occasionally I came back on the tube to Greenwich Station and that meant a very pretty, but tiring walk uphill through Greenwich Park, and I'm afraid I didn't do that very often. I tended to take a bus which stopped at the end of the road, so that was all right. That was all right except for the time when, as I was leaving the LSE they were in revolt (LSE was always in revolt!), and a revolutionary handed me a paper and since I had nothing else to do I read it on the bus. It was absolute riveting stuff and I came to in Maidenhead. So, I had to telephone my wife and say I was going to be late. It was a really nasty, beautifully written piece of work and I don't think it was written by the undergraduate revolutionaries; it was written by one of my colleagues, I'm pretty sure.

We lived in that house throughout my time at the LSE and it was amiable; my two neighbours on one side were both Trinity men and my neighbours on the other side were both New College men where I'd just come from.

**99. Did you find that things had altered greatly in the eight years since you'd been away in Oxford?**

The LSE never alters. There's nearly always a riot in the front hall, with people shouting obscenities at the Governors, which is silly of them because the Governors do a lot of work for the place, bring in a lot of money.

**100. Who were your main colleagues at this time, Professor Milsom?**

At the LSE I don't think I had any, if you know what I mean. I was pretty much left to my own devices.

**101. Must have been quite nice.**

Yes, they provided me with a room which was very, very hard to find and that was good.

**102. You became a Fellow of the Academy in 1967. What did this involve?**

Well, it is divided into sections and I was put into the lawyers section and they meet twice a year and until recently I always went to those meetings. I don't now because I can't get to London or indeed outside, and anyway I wouldn't, it's all about electing new Fellows and I wouldn't know enough about anybody, you know, I'm too much out of things. So, nowadays, it's just a question of..... I think down there, there is a booklet which has just come from the Academy which, if I read up, will tell me what's going on.

Its main business is electing other Fellows, including overseas Fellows, and that's very difficult because only the really extremely eminent has one ever heard of. But it goes on... it gives one employment twice a year, and they have dinners. They invited old Plucknett to speak at one of their dinners. He was such a nice man, and I have this dreadful memory of him droning on interminably and I think we found out afterwards that he'd been reading his PhD dissertation.

He was a very nice man, totally removed from the world. His wife managed his life, I think, and had no idea what he did. So far as she was concerned he went off to business every morning. And really she was a French lady from...

**103. Had she not taught in Massachusetts?**

Indeed, she taught French and that's where he met her.



She was a very odd lady. She really, really had no idea what he did, how he spent his time.

**104. Extraordinary.**

And in his study, when a Selden Society volume got into proof, it would first come in galley proofs and he would string them at the top, plea rolls were strung at the top like that, and these things were festooned all round his study, and I think she dusted them. I think you read my notice of him.

His father was a boot maker. Or rather a teacher of. He taught at all the big technical colleges, and when that obituary was published his wife never spoke to me again. She didn't want it known that her husband's father had been a boot maker.

**105. How interesting.**

When I asked her what he'd done, early on when I was trying to find out about him, she said, "Well, I think he was a teacher". He was in a sense because he did teach boot technology, but she was really furious and she wouldn't speak to me after that obituary was published. I was really rather sad about that because she was a nice soul.

**106. How sad.**

She retired to her native Clermont Ferrand, and I'm sure she's dead by now. She was a bit younger than he, but not all that much. He's been dead a long time.

**107. I think, was it 1965?**

Something like that, yes.

**108. Professor Milsom, it was during your time at LSE that you started visiting Yale, and this too proved a very long association, because you continued visiting for eighteen years, a total of nine visits. You must have obviously enjoyed it there as well.**

Yes. They were very good to us. On the very first visit they put us up in one of their dormitories and I think my wife let her disapproval be known. Anyway, after that we were very well looked after. There were these very clever people with absolutely no knowledge of legal history or any other history, asking very sharp questions.

**109. It must have been delightful for them to have had someone like yourself as a visiting scholar.**

It lasted through so many years, if they disliked it they would have said so.

**110. So you usually went every two years or so?**

Yes, we were put up once in an apartment block in downtown Newhaven and after that they always found us a house or apartment. Somebody was on leave, that sort of thing, and so we were in more comfort. Not always, not always ideal, but it was enjoyable and it was partly enjoyable because the students were always like the NYU lot: they knew nothing, they didn't really want to know anything, but they could ask a mean question.

**111. In 1972 you were the Maitland Memorial lecturer. Presumably, this reflected your interest in Maitland. What did this position entail, Professor Milsom?**

I think I gave five lectures in Cambridge. I think they're published somewhere. They were nearly always in one of - I mean a telephone booth would have been fine - the small





lecture rooms in the old school. And once the economists were sitting in, so I had to give them in the Old Combination Room in Trinity, but that was all right.

**112. You visited Harvard in 1973, the Department of History. Do you have any recollections of this time? Did you teach courses, or was it just a short visit?**

I taught a course to undergraduate historians and another course in the Law School. It was a time of revolution and, as I was going to my undergraduate course one day, a *very* large student came up and stood over me and said, “Mr Milsom, you really oughtn’t to be giving this lecture”. I really didn’t have time to think, so I said, “Well, .....ah, but then I’m just an unreconstructed fascist pig.” He was so shocked he stood back and let me pass. Some of my flock were following me at a distance, they didn’t want to get involved in all this, but they were quite impressed.

We don’t have student revolutions these days, do we?

**113. There was a sit-in, was it, last year or earlier this year?**

Really?

**114. In the Law Faculty.**

And was it the lawyers sitting in?

**115. No.**

It was somebody else altogether, yes.

**116. That’s right. They actually occupied the Faculty and...**

For example, the economists.

**117. I don’t even think it was the economists. I think it was...**

Economists!

**118. David Feldman<sup>16</sup> was the Chairman at that time. They were demonstrating in favour of Palestine. And they stayed for about a week, and the law students finally got fed up.**

Threw mud?

**119. Yes.**

Good!

**120. No, not really. They wanted them to go, but finally it was the Old Schools that took a stand.**

What the devil they thought they could do for the Palestinians by occupying the Law School in Cambridge. It’s very mysterious.

“We must do something”. I can just see it... Just as well I never knew about it, I might have joined them. I get very cross about the treatment of the Palestinians.

**121. Yes, that’s right. But, there are ways of expressing one’s...**

Absolutely.

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<sup>16</sup> Rouse Ball Professor of English Law (2004-).



**122. They actually were occupying a lecture theatre, so that lectures had to be cancelled.**

**But, Professor Milsom, you also during this time visited Indiana. This was in 1973 where you gave the Addison Harris Memorial Lecture. Do you recall that?**

Yes. The Dean at that time of the Bloomington Campus was a very old friend of mine and he invited me to go. I gave the sort of course I always give, I think. I have two chief memories, one is that the World Basketball Championships were being held in Bloomington, and the thing about championship basketball is that everybody's over eight feet tall. And my wife and I were being put up in a dormitory, it was a nice apartment and there was the most gosh awful noise, and I was cowering and my wife stormed out and said, "Go to bed", and they did. We went to bed and to sleep, and then there was a bang on the door and a very drunk gentleman, middle aged gentleman, "I'm so sorry, I gather my students have been causing trouble. I do apologise" and then my wife had to tell him to go to bed too.

And the other thing I remember about that was that they... we found out afterwards that they had Legionnaires Disease in the waterworks on the premises. My wife and I were terribly lucky I think, because on a nice day we would go out and sit beside a little stream that ran through the grounds, which was, in fact, the water system being recycled. We could easily have got it, but we didn't.

Bloomington is dry, the campus is dry, and when we got there our host said, "Well, look, you can't be putting up with that, I'll show you where to get the stuff". Took us along and gave a special, sort of, knock on a door and identified himself and said, "These are friends, they'll want supplies from time to time". It was very funny.

**123. It must have been a nice contrast to New York.**

Oh, absolutely, a total contrast, including the one thing I've always remembered from that time in Bloomington - the roads were safer than any roads I've ever known. If you approached an intersection in a car you had to stop dead. No good slowing down, you had to stop dead. And policemen were there checking on you, if you see what I mean And so road accidents were rare, almost eliminated. Needless to say, enormous courtesy - if two cars had stopped, each would be waving the other on.

**124. I'm always impressed by how polite Americans are.**

Yes, in England, anything goes on the roads, doesn't it? It's dreadful.

**125. Yes...but even more generally. It doesn't happen in England that a man will step aside, but that's very common place in the States.**

No. Absolutely, that's right. Last time I ventured into town alone, I was nearly knocked over by a young woman, on foot. I mean, there was this old creature ahead getting in the way.

**126. How shocking.**

I very nearly went over. So I'm ashamed to say I now won't go into town by myself.

**127. I don't blame you, Professor Milsom. Well, if you ever need some assistance, it would be a pleasure.**

Thank you very much.



**128. Well, your researches in legal history resulted in your becoming a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society in 1970 and you were also a member of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts in 1975. Do you have any memories of the circumstances?**

I never went to a meeting of the Royal Historical Society. I never had anything really to do with it; that was kindness on their part.

Yes, I used to go to the Manuscripts Commission<sup>17</sup>. They had an office off Chancery Lane - a little place called Quality Court - and it was an interesting... The Commission was divided between consumers, and I suppose it was meant to be a consumer of manuscripts, and owners. The chief owner was the then Duke of Northumberland<sup>18</sup>, who came every time. He never missed and his Rolls would be waiting outside for him to take him back to Syon House<sup>19</sup> in Chiswick, which is his London establishment, as it were.

**129. He didn't write presumably - publish?**

No, no, no. But the problem that the Commission was constantly up against was that one wanted to persuade owners to let scholars come and see their stuff and the owners weren't always too willing because only the very richest had a permanent librarian and they weren't any too keen on letting their treasures just go walkabout, and scholars who wanted to visit. It was quite interesting. I think we met twice a year, and it was quite fun. And the Duke apart, they were interesting people. It ceased to exist in some Whitehall economy move and it is now part of the National Archive in Chiswick, and they have offices there, I believe<sup>20</sup>. I've never been there. Getting to Chiswick is none too easy these days. So I had to resign that when they moved.

**130. In 1970 you became an Honorary Bencher. What did that involve, Professor Milsom?**

Nothing much, really. I still get invited to all their grand do's and I hope I still normally reply, but I think they know I'm not going to come down there.

**131. Is this in one of the Inns?**

Yes, Lincoln's Inn. I guess that's my, trying to save space for *Who's Who*. I think 'Honorary Bencher' is detached from the words 'Lincoln's Inn', somehow.

**132. I couldn't find much information on the internet, but it wasn't that clear what actually is involved.**

Nothing. One gets invited to these grand dinners.

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<sup>17</sup> Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts (often referred to as "The Historical Manuscripts Commission" or just "HMC"). Founded in 1869. See: [http://www.tannerritchie.com/books/hmc\\_series.php](http://www.tannerritchie.com/books/hmc_series.php)

<sup>18</sup> See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duke\\_of\\_Northumberland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duke_of_Northumberland)

This would have been Ralph Percy, the 12<sup>th</sup> Duke, b. 1956.

<sup>19</sup> 200 acres in west London. See: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syon\\_House](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syon_House)

<sup>20</sup> [http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives/hmc\\_pubs.htm](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives/hmc_pubs.htm)



**133. It must be very enjoyable though.**

Well, at first, I used to go, and so long as I went I would know enough people to make sense of it. But when I moved back to Cambridge, I didn't go very often and now I wouldn't know any of them if I went. They were like College feasts - stuffy affairs.

**134. Well, Professor Milsom, would you be happy to continue or shall we deal with your time at Cambridge in perhaps two weeks' time? Because it's quite an important section and there's quite a bit to cover and if you feel.**

Shall we put it off then? Is that all right? I do feel badly about dragging you around here. [*But*] I'm more or less housebound, you know, I just don't go out. My kind minder does my shopping for me.

**135. In that case if we arrange for perhaps a week or two's time. I can then just thank you so much again for a wonderful interview.**

