

## Interview of Dr. George B. Stow

**Interviewer:** Ashley Maurer

**Date:** March 26, 2015 at 12:30 P.M.

**Recording Location:** Dr. Stow's office, 3rd Floor, Olney Hall, La Salle University, 1900 W. Olney Ave., Philadelphia, PA 19141.

**Log Created by:** Ashley Maurer

**Recording Equipment:** Galaxy S5 Mobile Phone Voice Recorded Application

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### Abstract

Dr. George B. Stow is the initial and continuing Graduate History Program Director at La Salle University since its inception in 2004. Dr. Stow received his B.A. in Classics from Lehigh University, his M.A. in History from The University of Southern California and his Ph.D. in History from the University of Illinois in 1972. Dr. Stow specializes in English medieval history and his doctoral dissertation *Historia Vitae et Regni Ricardi Secundi: A Critical Edition* is dedicated to King Richard II of England. In recent years, Dr. Stow has presented papers at the International Congress on Medieval Studies at Western Michigan University, written and published a joint publication, *Patterns in World History*, a college level textbook, with Dr. Charles Desnoyers of La Salle University and Dr. Peter von Sivers of the University of Utah, and is currently conducting research on the 14th century chronicler Thomas Walsingham. In 1972, Dr. Stow began his career as part of the history faculty at La Salle University and was elected a fellow of the Royal Historical Society in 1988. In 2003, he received the Lindback Teaching Award for excellence. His most notable publications are 2004's "The Continuation of the Eulogium Historiarum: Some Revisionist Perspectives" in the *English Historical Review* and 1984's "Richard II in Thomas Walsingham's *Chronicles*," in *Speculum*.

The interview is intended as an academic interview that spans the breadth of his vast experiences as a scholar, student, teacher, advisor and director at the university level over the last forty years and beyond. Starting with Dr. Stow's most recent achievements and endeavors, the interview regresses through history, beginning with the last ten years of the Graduate History Program at La Salle University and ending at the beginning of Dr. Stow's career.

## Interview Log

00:00-01:10

### Introduction

Those present were interviewer Ashley Maurer and interview subject, Dr. George B. Stow. Permission was confirmed from Dr. Stow to be interviewed and recorded. The interview took place in Dr. Stow's office on the third floor of Olney Hall at La Salle University on Thursday, March 26th, 2015. (Error: recording states the date is Thursday, March 27th, 2015.)

Interview Plan: To begin with Dr. Stow's experiences during the last ten years in the history graduate program at La Salle University and work backwards in time through his academic career.

Dr. Stow's academic background is covered: B.A. in Classics from Lehigh University, M.A. in History from University of Southern California (USC), Ph.D. in History from the University of Illinois. Dr. Stow has been at La Salle University since 1972 and Program Director of Graduate Studies in History since 2004.

01:11-5:40

### The Graduate Program at La Salle University

The La Salle history department was looking to fill a niche in the field. A proposal was made and then taken to administrators who saw that it had promise. Dr. Stow saw that it would be an excellent addition to make the school more well-rounded and augment the reputation of the university. The "...motivating factor was... to fill a little niche...developing a unique program, and as they would say, pardon the pun, the rest is history."

The intentions of the program were to try to cover three major areas, American, European and World history which "was coming into its own."

Dr. Francis Ryan, Dr. Charles Desnoyers, chair of the history department and Dr. Stow were the three "founding fathers" of the program and as a team had to look at examples and models from around the country. "This program, at least in terms of its structure, its organization and a good part of its content was [with] Dr. Ryan. He comes from an educational background to begin with, and as a practicing scholar and historian his ideas were just absolutely phenomenal and crystal clear, so conceptual and contextualizing, it was just marvelous." The next step was to push the program through the committee process. It was also important to bring in faculty to hear how they felt in regards to future growth for such a program. The final stage was getting the Pennsylvania Department of Education in, with two outside scholars, to appraise the program and test its worth.

5:41-7:09

Dr. Stow became the program director as Dr. Ryan was tied up developing the American Studies program and Dr. Desnoyers was chair of the department with other obligations. (6:14: Dr. Stow asked to pause the tape for a moment) Dr. Ryan and Dr. Desnoyers suggested that Dr. Stow become “air traffic controller,” as they put it. Dr. Stow had had little experience as an administrator, dedicating his work to mainly scholarly endeavors, but agreed to take on the project.

7:10- 10:00

### **The Role of a Graduate Director**

The role of Program Director initially began with a recruitment campaign through flyers and letters to department heads, social studies chairmen and undergraduate schools, and to an extent continues to this day. Dr. Stow also meets with principals of high schools and program directors, central administrators for counties, etc. In its early phases he would “pitch the program.” The other part of his role is to be attentive to inquiries from prospective students, via phone or email, in which potential student interviews will be conducted. Dr. Stow also oversees the sequences of courses along with the Administrative Assistant, Lauren DeAngelis. He looks at academic projections, how many students will need a course in a given year, for example, and decides if the course will run in that particular academic year. He also attends committee meetings with deans and advises students on the tracks of the master’s programs.

10:01-11:57

When Dr. Stow meets with a potential student for the first time he always asks them, “Why do you want a Master’s in history, and what do you intend to do with it?” If they are practicing teachers, many times established in their careers, they must keep up with Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) requirements or Act 48 Credits.\* For Dr. Stow, these students are showing that they are keeping pace with the changes in their field. Other students are interested in pursuing a Ph.D. Dr. Stow asks then what field they are interested in pursuing. Dr. Stow sees many different varieties of students such as those who are working teachers and those who plan to go forward in their personal higher education, whether for Ph.D. or terminal Master’s degrees. “As a matter of fact, we have brought in many of our own graduates to teach as adjuncts here in our undergraduate program at La Salle.”

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\* As of November 23, 1999, in congruence with Act 48, every five years educators must complete one or more of six college credits, six credits of continuing professional education courses, 180 hours of continuing professional education programs, activities, or learning experiences or any combination of credits or activity hours that equal 180 hours (each credit equals 30 hours).

11:58- 16:15

Dr. Stow is happy with the caliber of the students that the program is bringing in. Through the application process, prospective students have to submit not only transcripts, but also possibly the GRE, Graduate Record Exam, which give Dr. Stow the ability to assess the student. At times he works alongside Dr. Ryan and Dr. Stuart Leibiger, current chairman of the history program. If an application is on the border, he can consult with them, “we screen very thoroughly here,” and follow rigorous admission criteria. “We have a good quality crop of new students coming in,” Dr. Stow says.

From admissions to the completion of a degree Dr. Stow believes that what makes the La Salle program unique, for lack of better words, is its flexibility. “I have taken a chance on some students, I would say several students, and they have gone on to do very well. They are admitted on a probationary basis, but they go on to succeed.” Of course, there are some that have not done, but Dr. Stow states that they were just speaking of “how fortunate we are to have really stellar students... it really has been really nice working with people like that.”

Another aspect of the diversity of the program that it is “satisfying, or heartwarming even,” for an instructor to find out that well established adults in the corporate sector come to La Salle simply for a love of history. He relates a story of a stockbroker from Manhattan who took the train from the Main Line to NYC for work, and then back to La Salle to do his studies.

16:16 – 19:24

### **Growth in the Graduate History Program**

Currently the official enrollment at La Salle in graduate studies is around 40 students, but the current enrollment, in class students, is more like around the high 20s or low 30s. Many students in the program are adults with day jobs, and “there are all sorts of things that may crop up in their lives, their personal lives, that impedes their progress semester in, semester out.”

“When I think back to the number of students who were in this program the first year, I believe it was, I know it was no higher than 6, and at one point, something tells me it was down to 4, but it certainly was below 10, I know that. When I held the first social get together, at the end of the fall semester in 2004, I remember that I reserved a room over in the student union, and I remember I invited the Dean to say a few remarks. So the Dean was there, and many of our faculty, we outnumbered the number of students who showed up for that event, and now it really is, I think it’s a tribute, not to my directing this program, but it’s rather a tribute to the superb qualities of the faculty here and to the nature of our courses and to the university and its mission that we have succeed as well as we have.”

Dr. Stow states that there is a dwindling national trend for enrollment and applications in the humanities across the country. He recently read about it in a nationwide survey of graduate

history programs done with assistance from the American Historical Association which showed that “without a doubt” enrollments are down. When at conferences Dr. Stow discusses the La Salle program with colleagues and they “are pretty impressed.”

19:25 – 23:25

When asked why he believes applications are down in Master’s history programs Dr. Stow states that there are a few factors involved. The first factor was that there are less tenure tracks positions over the last few years, “I could talk ‘til the cows come home about that one factor,” he says. “When I was finishing my undergraduate degree, in 1967, there were jobs going vacant, begging for applicants, and I remember one of them was in medieval history, and I remember it was the University of Vermont. They could not find anyone to take that post... three or four years later, I was on the job market, before I finished my degree, and right around that time, 1971-1972, the trap door began to shut. Schools were cutting back on the number of humanities courses, I think another factor was that there were fewer and fewer students were really taking solid courses in the humanities, they were beginning to drift into the sciences or into computer science, practical degrees.”

The second factor is, with an interconnection to the first factor, that many schools are pulling back on their humanities courses, for the earlier mentioned practical reasons, but also because states and institutions are running out of funds. Economic factors lie heavy in the results. Many institutions have cut back on their tenure posts and use adjuncts as they do not receive any benefits. An institution can save a lot of money this way, but this creates “academic gypsies” going from school to school each semester to make ends meet. Dr. Stow is wary about the career possibilities for those going into the field now. “George, we have lived through the golden years,” his former colleague told him at a medieval conference in years past. Dr. Stow looks now to that conversation and thinks how true it has become over the last twenty odd years since the conversation took place.

23:26 – 26:10

When asked about the five year track position for undergraduates to obtain their Master’s Degree in their fifth year Dr. Stow sees growth. There are many students who do not know what exactly they want to do. He believes that perhaps they are waiting for a “log jam breaking” in the tenure position arena. (Dr. Stow steps back to remind me that many tenured professors, due to economic factors, are not retiring and perhaps this adds to the issue of lack of available positions.) These young students are not quite sure what they would like to do, and by obtaining a Master’s Degree they can enhance their education before they have decided where to head. An example was for students who may be interested in getting into law programs in the future, in which it is necessary for many to get into a top 25 school.

26:11 – 28:59

### **Academic Diversity in the Graduate Program**

Dr. Stow says that “hands down” the American sector of the program is the most preferred; Dr. Leibiger has directed more graduate thesis than any other professor. When Dr. Stow asks why American is more popular, he believes that there are more teaching positions available in the field than for European or Global perhaps, though Global is rising.

Going back to the flexibility of the program, Dr. Stow elaborates on the option of independent studies in the program, allowing a student to move forward in the program, even if a course is not available. As an advisor, Dr. Stow is able to assist the student to have continued progress and he questions if other area institutions are able to do that.

29:00 – 32:15

Dr. Stow talks of the beginning of the Master’s Program in Public History. He originally started noticing similar programs popping up about three or four years ago. He got the advisory team and the “founding fathers” together, along with Dr. Lisa Jarvinen, a faculty member very interested in public history, to decide if it would work. After they got the green light through the same channels used at the onset of the original program, they were able to put together the program; one which Dr. Stow feels has been successful. Eight students graduated from that program last May and most of them with have positions in public history. It is a promising program, which now has its own director, Dr. George Boudreau.

An ongoing challenge Dr. Stow has noticed is continually finding financial aid for prospective graduate students, but it seems to be a challenge across all programs on campus. He does wish that the university was able to offer assistantships to students to help fund their education, but they are currently unavailable. Because of this, he has lost some potential students.

32:16 – 34:03

The graduate program relies on many full time faculty members. On occasion, when faculty are on leave or sabbatical, Dr. Stow looks for suitable replacements in adjunct faculty; this comes into play the most in the public history track, more so before the entrance of Dr. Boudreau. “Philadelphia is rich in these specialists,” he says, and as it is his responsibility to find faculty he finds it simply par for the course

34:04 – 39:26

“Continued growth that is my major objective. If I am still in this chair, five years even, from now, I would hope that all three tracks would continue to grow, not decline, but continue to grow.” He sees that the curriculum may change through the years, based off of national trends, For example, when the public history track began he saw, at Colorado State in Fort Collins, CO

and NYU in New York City, that bonafide programs must have a course in archival management. He then began to “talk that up” among the faculty, and they were able to shift a course in museum studies into the new course of archival management and delete it from the M.A. in History Program. “The faculty is always looking for trends,” so it is possible that the formats may change over time. Dr. Stow is always looking for diversity and improvements.

39:27 – 47:39

### ***Patterns in World History: A Textbook***

Before speaking about *Patterns in World History*, published in 2011, by Dr. Stow, Dr. Charles Desnoyers and Dr. Peter von Sivers I stated to Dr. Stow that I had sent questionnaires to his colleagues about working on the publication to get their insights to the project.

“I remember the very day, and almost the time of day, when it suddenly dawned on me that maybe this would be something I might be interested in doing. It had to do with my daughter then beginning college, and I remember, this particular day, after working all day long on an article, and not getting, almost anywhere with it, and I remember sitting on the outside, it was a warm, early spring day, of our former home, and sitting at the top of the driveway on the grass, waiting for her to come home around dinner time with our marvelous English setter named, of course, Wellington, and I remember reflecting that, ‘Well wait a minute, if I’m going to work this hard, I think I outta get paid for it.’ I think that’s a line actually from Dr. Johnson in that marvelous biography... he makes a remark, something to the effect that don’t write anything unless your compensated for it. And I also began to think about tuition bills, how on earth am I going to pay for all these things, so a light went off in my head on it, I need to write a text book.” Dr. Stow worked up a Western Civilization treaty and met with a publisher on the University of Pennsylvania’s campus. She told him that the new upstart in the field, in 1997, was world history. “I didn’t know much about it at that point,” he says. She said that he needed a team to get such a project started. He went the next day to Dr. Desnoyers to see if he was interested in starting a project with Dr. Stow doing the west, Dr. Desnoyers working on Southeast Asia, China and India, his expertise, and Dr. Desnoyers recommended Dr. von Sivers for Africa, Middle Eastern and South American history. They had worked with him the AP\* history program over the years. By the fall of 1997, they sent out three proposals to major world history text book publishers, in which all three jumped on the idea. They signed to one (later confirmed in the interview as Longman Publishing). When they had completed close to twenty of the final thirty one chapters the publishers pulled the plug on the project. They then learned that it is a common practice for publishers to sign numerous projects and as time progresses weed them down until they find the ones they feel suit them best.

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\* The AP program refers to the College Board Advanced Placement Program to help students to prepare for college level courses, SAT testing and academic college readiness.

They then took the book and were able to meet with the Vice President of Oxford University Press publications. OUP saw the value and wished to create a “world class, pardon the pun” world history text book. Within weeks of the original meeting they were signed with the publisher. “We look at ourselves now as very fortunate in having Oxford not only take an interest, but in really helping us prepare and publish a really solid, well received, world history textbook.” The Oxford name has been proven to him in the project, allowing them to create a pedagogic approach that is not “dumbed down.”

47:40 – 50:09

### **The Textbook Writing Process**

“At first I thought it’d be a walk in the park, and then I began to really almost become terrified when I found out that a whole section of western history... has to be covered in something like thirty one pages.” This was a “daunting challenge” and Dr. Stow had to push aside his passion and main interest in the profession, research and writing of articles in medieval English history. He had to transform his methodology in order to write the chapters. Each author also had to write, to reiterate the workload, beginning of chapter vignettes. Dr. Stow was asked to write on the Stone Age and the dawn of civilization and well as on the advent of the 21st century. As a medievalist he had to research these topics. “It required a lot of shifting of gears.”

50:10 – 57:32

*Patterns in World History* is in its second edition and Dr. Stow is very happy with its success, but is a bit surprised. After the progress of the first edition Dr. Stow, along with his fellow colleagues, suspected that it was moving in the direction of a second edition. They hope with its established reputation that it will go forward to a third or even fourth edition.

With the second edition, in the summer of 2013, OUP told them that there must be some additions and revisions. Along with the second incarnation, they were able to create a brief edition, which didn’t require as much work, as it just needed to condense the original material. The first major change to the second edition was adding eight to ten primary sources to the end of each chapter which allowed for students to have primary source work in one volume as opposed to buying an additional source. The second change was to add a “counterfactual” mini essay at the end of each chapter: a development or theme of the chapter that runs counter to everything said in the chapter. This required “quite a lot of thinking and research.” For example, as the Middle Ages are described as an “age of faith”, and “quite rightly so,” as Dr. Stow confirms, the counterfactual discussed the exception, a “fly in the amber,” to the theme, which has heresy. Dr. Stow chose to write about the Cathars.\*

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\* Dismissed as heretics by the Catholic Church, the Cathar movement grew from Byzantium roots in the 10th century. Main points described to the Cathars include a rejection of the rebirth of Christ and a rejection of the sacraments.

“I don’t think I’ve ever worked as hard. It was a very demanding year to grind out these chapters and to meet tight, tight, tight deadlines” for the second edition, begun in the summer of 2013, and published in the fall of 2014.

57:33 – 1:01:01

The text is intended for world history courses, and as it’s traditional to split the coursework at year 1500, it was divided into two volumes. Dr. Stow would like to see the book adopted, or included, in a list of recommended history textbooks for high school AP Global History classes around the country, though the publishers are at this time reluctant as there are different regional standards and it may not always be suited to address those issues. Dr. Stow has a friend at an exclusive boarding school on the east coast who received positive comments about the book and he hopes that word will get out and it will be adopted in AP high school programs.

Dr. Stow has only read reviews from faculty and colleagues, which were helpful, but he hasn’t paid much attention to them. I read him a single line review from Candace Gregory at Sacramento State University: "*Patterns of World History* has set a new high benchmark for world history textbooks." “Do I love it?” Dr. Stow smiles.

1:01:02 – 1:06:20

### **Pedagogy and the Lindback Teaching Award**

I read to Dr. Stow a quote he gave when he received the award, “Quite honestly, I wondered if my teaching would ever warrant the Lindback Award. Anybody who says they don't think about the possibility of receiving it just isn't being truthful.” – “I wish I could take that back,” he laughs, “but it’s out there.” He felt that he sounded presumptive, but more realistically, and modestly, he looks back and thinks to the nice comments he has received over the years, and believes that all teachers hope that “someday their efforts will be rewarded.” The award helps to prove that he has affected students’ lives over the years. When asked if he feels it is more important to be remembered as an excellent teacher or an excellent researcher he smiles, “I knew that was coming.” Research and publishing “is either in your bones or it’s not. It’s in my bones, and it always will be. But then again, on the other hand, the teaching aspect, in many ways, I think there is an interconnection. I think that if you have a kind of mind that wants to structure an argument and back it up with evidence and fact and present all this in a convincing, clear, easy to understand fashion, which is what you do in scholarship, well that just applies across the board, doesn’t it?”

Dr. Stow’s classroom teaching has always been done in the same fashion; he is always improving and revising. In addition, he reviews for 30-45 minutes before every class he conducts. The idea of working on his own research and strolling in 10 minutes before class with the plan to simply “talk” is unacceptable. The correlation between research and teaching sometimes works in reverse for him; “There are times when I am working on a monster... I

remember just recently, as I'm in the course of trying to explain something orally to a class, I'll come up with a phrase... and I'll say 'I'll be damned' that would really help in setting up this article, or it's a major point that I can tack on, I'll come back here [to his office] and note it down." Even at his night stand he has a note pad and always writes thoughts down if he wakes in the middle of the night.

01:06:21 – 1:14:40

### **The College Professor Workload and Meritocracy: The Best and Worst**

"Contrary to the way it appears, that is to say, our faculty have a daunting teaching load" which requires serious "discipline" to set aside also time for research and publication. For Dr. Stow, La Salle has always been generous in research grants, which he is grateful for. "They recognize the value of scholarship" and allow professors to do their work.

The worst is not necessarily specific to La Salle, but it is the difficulty of committee work, which, for him, has always felt like an hour or two of discussion with no solid result, "I don't have that kind of mind." I then mentioned his previous interview in regards to the merit system. Dr. Stow first describes the basics of how a merit system works: a professor may publish an article in a given academic year, and the chairman of that department has a purse in which they can financially grant the professor. For Dr. Stow it is not just the money, as academics are not in the field for that, rather, those grants "re-compensate" for the travel and other expenses of the project. Dr. Stow believes that through the merit system those who do not publish and continue their studies, or have good evaluations, should not earn at the same level of those who are constantly working towards a higher goal. Unfortunately, the tenure system allows for that "escapism". When asked if he has seen instances of this through his time at La Salle he smiles and says, "how about if I just say no comment."

He does relate an anecdote of when he was young at La Salle: he was invited to the faculty dining room for lunch with all the "old timers" of the college. Someone asked him what he thought of La Salle, "I started to mouth off, what we need here is a merit system." "Why do we need that, George?" a man asked. "We'll weed out some of the dead wood," Stow said. One of the senior members then looked to Dr. Stow and glared as he asked, "What dead wood, George?" Dr. Stow laughs. In the end he is still a proponent of the merit system as "[it acts as] an incentive for teachers and also for scholars to continue what they're doing and do it well." He doesn't hold it against the school however, as La Salle may not be able to fund such a system.

1:14:41 – 1:17:33

### **Scholars at La Salle University**

Dr. Stow refers to the scholarly work coming of La Salle today as "very impressive." He then goes on to say, "I think it's fair to say that the history department at La Salle University is the

best published faculty, hands down going away, on this campus in this university. Each one of us has produced a least one book.” He refers to Dr. Leibiger’s “fantastic” ability to publish continually and Dr. Lyman Stebbens “is setting the world on fire.” Dr. Stow is impressed and proud of the faculty, and many, if not all, are excellent teachers and the “rara aureus” in that they all get along, which is “kind of unusual.”

1:17:34 – 1:21:33

Over the years the boost in scholarly work at La Salle has been an increase in publishing, as well as the university’s requirement upgrades for full professor and tenure positions. The faculty is also much more diverse today than when he started; when he began some professors did not even have Ph.D. but now the faculty is a “well-oiled machine.”

He has not seen much change at La Salle in regards to the Christian brothers, though there numbers have diminished over the years he is not sure how one would measure the change, if any.

Because of the “emerging changes” in tenure and promotion, there has been a change of the workload for a professor. A professor needs to have strong evaluations, publications and be able to meet students “on their level.” Research was not very important when he began, but now they are much more important and more stringent.

1:21:34 – 1:26:50

### **Curriculums and History**

Originally referred to as a service department in his 2006 interview, Dr. Stow states that the school is still one in many ways. He relays the example of courses that are required throughout the university, such as the global history courses. Additional connotations to what it means to be “service department” have changed as he has dedicated himself to the graduate program for the last ten years. In previous years, two history courses were required of every student; today it has reduced to one. With the new core curriculum he is not certain if there will be even a requirement for one.

“She who doesn’t know history is bound to repeat the mistakes of the past,” he says using the old proverb. History is necessary for an understanding of current events. Dr. Stow relates the example of the current issues in the Middle East and the region’s past and its evolution today. World War I and the peace settlements have, even today, a “direct implication” on the Middle East. These studies are necessary to have “content knowledge” on current affairs. “It is a vitally important thing.” The trend at colleges, and even high schools, is to down play the important of luminaries, such as the founding fathers for example, and to reflect more upon modern individuals that are more “fashionable” today. As a traditionalist he believes both should be included.

1:26:50 – 1:28:40

He questions if a foreign language has ever been required at La Salle. “How can any really sit and call him or herself educated unless they have at least some knowledge of a foreign language?” It should not necessarily be required, but it should be a part of the curriculum. He would also like to see a push back to two history classes required.

1:28:41 – 1:33:55

### **A Young Man and History**

When asked if it was his plan to go into history from when he was a young man, Dr. Stow smiles and says, “Are you kidding?” He relates a story from a fifteen year high school reunion, embarrassed to go back before that time, where numerous people said incredulously, “*you* are a college professor?” He didn’t remember opening a book in school, “I had no interest in academics, none at all... Even I sometimes pinch myself, and I think all of us are introspective, and we look back on our pasts, and I can only describe my progression, development, as a kind of metamorphosis. Well then as a historian I ask myself what caused this, what brought this about? Who knows? I think I always had it in me, but it was never developed when I was a young, high school guy.” He graduated from high school in 1958 and tried one semester at Kutztown University, “the only place I could get into.” He worked during the spring semester, first, at a car wash and then as a landscaper, “There I was with my little lunch pail, picked up on the corner.” He looks back to that summer as the “beginning of a transformation” and looks back to an embarrassing moment cutting the lawn of a former junior college girlfriend’s home with her mother cursing him for doing it wrong.

Since the draft was on, he and two of his friends, with whom he is still very close, volunteered for three years in the army. By volunteering for extra time they were able to go into the army’s security agency “an upscale branch of the army” rather than infantry or artillery. Most men were college graduates and “did not want to be grunts either,” and some even had master’s degrees. This period was the most transformative of his life, serving two years in England. “If you had asked me, two years before that, would I have gone to hear lectures and to discussions of classical music, I would have thrown a beer in your face.” He laughs. “I think a lot of us go through this awakenings or epiphanies, if you will.” He had a post in the army library and began to read “voraciously” wherein he decided he wanted to get a Ph.D. and become a college professor.

1:33:56 – 1:36:14

### **The College Experience**

“I came to it when I was ready for it.” He compiled two years of credits at Kutztown so that Lehigh would consider him as a transfer student. “My father was outraged,” and he began his sophomore year a second time at Lehigh. “When I walked onto that campus [at Lehigh] I had chills running down my spine. That’s how serious I was about this, I thought I’d died and gone to heaven.” He also thanks the army for the way it instilled discipline in him, giving him a sense of time management and determination. He worked his way through college; “one night, in particular, standing there at a scale, I worked in the produce section, and I was bagging oranges and I had this little stand there I was working with and I had taped up there on the side of this Greek verbs... Now there weren’t many guys,” he laughs, “who were studying Greek verbs while working in the produce department.”

1:36:15 – 1:40:47

Surprisingly, it was not Dr. Stow’s time in England that got him interested in country’s medieval period. “I liked Latin because you don’t argue with it... what I did not want was to do a Ph.D. dissertation that would be so narrow and so specialized and so pedantic as to worry about the AE ending on a certain verb or how it began to evolve, I wasn’t that it into. I was interested in history and why things occur, how things evolve etc.” In the end, using his language skills to their best end he found that medieval history was the best course. “A real example of this metamorphosis, or transformation that I mentioned earlier... so I left England in 1962, discharged from the army. I go back and get my degree; I got my bachelor degree in ’67. In 1970 I had passed all my language exams, all my comprehensives for the Ph.D., and I was clear to write the dissertation. I was lucky enough, in the spring of ’70 to have won a very prestigious pat on the back,” he smiles, “a national award, the Woodrow Wilson Dissertation Fellowship. Very lucrative. So I was able, I was fortunate enough to go to London, England to work on my dissertation... \* and it turns out that I was interested in this one chronicle. I was interested in chronicles, medieval chronicles, Latin and history combined, well it turns out the specialist at the time was a professor at Leeds University.” Dr. Stow wrote to him before he left for England, the professor responded and they were able to correspond. In the fall of 1970, only 8 years since his time in England with the army, he was able to meet the Leed’s professor where he went “into the same bars [of his army days] a totally different person. And the memories are vivid, and I thought how do you explain the coincidence of this?”

1:40:48 – 1:42:15

Because of the influence of one of his undergraduate professors, Dr. Stow progressed to his lifelong study of the reign of Richard II. The professor did not publish on Richard himself, but he

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\* *Historia Vitae et Regni Ricardi Secundi: A Critical Edition*, Philadelphia, 1977.

recommended the chronicle that Dr. Stow studied, a work not previously updated since 1729. His connection at Leeds put Dr. Stow in touch with a Regis Professor at Oxford; “I remember the first time I walked into his study at Oxford, he asked me what I was doing, and as I mentioned it he said, ‘Why didn’t I think of that?’ he said, ‘I must have a copy of that somewhere.’ He took me over to what he called his ‘monkey’s closet,’ it was a big trunk. ‘Start rooting around there my boy! Do you see it?’ I didn’t see it anywhere. ‘Well you have a very appropriate topic, you know.’” Dr. Stow consulted with him several times through his dissertation.

1:42:16 – 1:45:49

### **The International Congress on Medieval Studies at Western Michigan University**

When asked the importance of the congresses Dr. Stow says, “It’s invaluable. Every time, I have been going since 1969, it was the first year I went there in graduate school in Illinois, but every time I’ve gone, sitting around, having beers or even attending a paper, or delivering a paper, a person gets new ideas. Especially when you give a paper and you have people in the audience who are scholars and know what you’re doing, and can find flaws or recommend things you’ve never thought of, or can challenge it and say, you know that’s a load of nonsense, in so many words, well you know what, maybe it is, maybe I’ll back out of that one and go this way. Where else are you going to get that?” The conferences are “formative” experiences for Dr. Stow. Again, relating back to the importance of publishing in academics, one needs to write papers and present, which, more often than not, leads to publication.

Because of a meeting with a scholar at the conference they were able to reconnect in England which led to a publication in the *English Historical Review*. “If I may say so, it’s very difficult for American scholars, especially medievalist, to get published in the *English Historical Review*.” The genesis of his publication began with his paper in Kalamazoo.

1:45:50 – 1:49:20

In 1988, Dr. Stow received his fellowship at the Royal Historical Society, a British organization, but he believes it is more difficult to be published as an American in the *English Historical Review* than to become a fellow. “I actually had the temerity, if not perhaps the unmitigated gall, to write to the editor. I sent her an email and I said I’ve got this piece, but before I submit it to you I have to ask you a frank question, what are its chances of being accepted in the *English Historical Review*, which I understand is reserved mostly for British scholars?” She nicely wrote back stating that have a “couple of Americans,” he laughs, “...you can get in too you little upstart.”

In 1984\* [2004] he sent it off, waiting for the mail to receive back a thin envelope saying you are in, or, as he received, a thick one full of two blind reviews from two scholars. One liked it with

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\* Dr. Stow originally says “1984” in his interview. The self-corrected date is later relayed in the interview as 2004

modification and the other would not consider it without heavy alteration. Dr. Stow questioned if he was willing to go through it all again. He spoke with Dr. John Rossi, a senior professor at La Salle University, who told him “you have no choice; they’re interested, you’ve got to revise this thing. Think of the rewards or benefits if you get into the English Historical Review.” To Dr. Stow this was the capstone of his career.

1:49:21 – 1:52:30

Publication in the English Historical Review in 2004 is perhaps Dr. Stow’s greatest academic achievement, though he states that his piece in *Speculum* in 1984 could perhaps trump that, “If I may say so, [it] has put me on the ‘international’ map.” It supplied him with so many connections, as the leading medieval studies journal. “I was stunned when I was accepted” and even today people refer to the article, which he believes started his career. Looking to his time in Kalamazoo, Dr. Stow mentions a time when a Chaucer scholar, a man he had not met before, acclaimed him for his work in the article, which, for the gentleman, made Chaucer’s interest in history and style crystal clear. He then sent Dr. Stow two articles he was referred to in.

In 2014 at the conference, Dr. Stow met with a Colgate University Chaucer scholar at a luncheon. She invited another man to meet with them at their table, as she introduced Dr. Stow the man said, “‘Oh George Stow, you’re the one who does the work on the chronicles.’ and then the Colgate scholar said, ‘Oh everybody knows George Stow,’” he smiles. This proved that his career in scholarship had paid off.

1:52:31 – 1:57:13

### **The St. Albans Chronicle: A Continuing Study**

Professor John Taylor, his colleague from the University of Leeds, has taken issue with Dr. Stow’s dating and sequencing of the St. Alban’s chronicle in the past. In 2003, he was initially devastated by it, but he felt that Taylor still had something incorrect. In 2007, he was in Leeds at the medieval conference where he met with Taylor at his home, as he had retired by that time, to have lunch. Afterwards “he walked me out to my car, and I gave him a bottle of wine, for everything he had done for me, and I sensed it would be the last time I’d see him, he was already in his early 80’s and he had a bad limp and some problems and stuff, and I said ‘John, I want to tell you something,’ [he’s] very stoic, a reserved formal man, he says, ‘Oh yes, what’s that?’ and I said, ‘Well, I have to tell you, John, I’m not really happy with your remarks. Your take on my work, I don’t think it’s right, John.’ He just sort of looked at me, and I said, ‘Furthermore, I have to tell you John, one of these days I’m going to get around to writing a piece that going to challenge your interpretation, and I said now I want you to know when I do so it will be with a sense of disloyalty.’ He kind of looked at me, funny like... (Dr. Stow laughs) it wasn’t like, how dare you, it was almost like, well almost like, go for it. Like I said, he didn’t say much.”

The project continues to be a very “daunting” case as there are many distractions in life; he had mentioned to his wife “the boss” just recently, and reminisced about looking back to when his kids were infants when they lived in Ardmore, Pennsylvania, and he spent the whole summer at the library at Haverford College. He does not have the kind of free time he had in the past, but he feels that this project may become his capstone. Dr. Stow then laughs and muses, “I’ve rattled on a lot about myself haven’t I? What a big shot.”

1:57:14 – 1:58:27

### **Legacy, Family and Monty Python**

When asked how his wife and family relate to his work he states that his wife is from the corporate sector and she is not interested in his subjects, but has always been very supportive and wants him to be fulfilled. Dr. Stow sees himself, to the last months of his life, researching something. “I like to think I am a regular person, maybe not normal,” he laughs, “but I like to have a few beers, I used to play squash, I’m interested in fast cars. My goal is to get a Mustang GT, maybe even this summer. And yet, this stuff is in my bones, and its esoteric stuff at that.”

1:57:28 – 2:04:17

When asked of his legacy to the history field he answers, “I remember when I was in graduate school, somebody asked me that very question... and at that time I said if I can contribute one iota, one thing, by way of a new interpretation to some aspect of Richard II’s reign I will have felt fulfilled. Well, like I say, down the road now... everything I have tackled has been to take a received tradition and to try to revise it, it’s what I am doing now, challenging.”

Dr. Stow begins to wrap up the interview and muses about a conversation with a colleague recently, “Somehow he brought up Monty Python, and I said I’ve never seen a damn one of their movies and I think they’re silly and I never will. But I said, one of them, one of the surviving Pythons is a friend of mine. He said, ‘what?!?’ I said, yeah I correspond with him [Terry Jones] all the time.” We then spoke of how Terry Jones brings history to the masses, and Dr. Stow said he would pass my sentiments on to him. He hadn’t heard from him in three years, and suddenly he received an email from him, stating that he read Stow’s work on Richard II and Froissart in the *Chronique*, published in 1985. “You think these things are long forgotten, but the point is, you never know when somebody will look at it over the years and say ahhh, and that’s what he did.”

Three years ago Dr. Stow met with Terry Jones at a conference at the University of Pennsylvania on Richard II and 14th century England. Jones wrote to him asking him to come see what he had used of Dr. Stow’s work. Still the comic, Terry Jones used comment bubbles on his slides and showed an image of Dr. Stow in a brutal winter day, bundled up in a balaclava with his dog. Dr. Stow found this humorous, albeit slightly embarrassing.

2:04:18 – 2:05:35

### **Conclusion**

I thanked Dr. Stow for his time discussing his opinions and his progression from a young man to the historian and scholar he has become. Dr. Stow also relates the importance of a sense of humor, laughing that he has spent two hours talking about himself.