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## INTERVIEW WITH C. WARREN HOLLISTER

Peggy Kidney

C. Warren Hollister has been Professor of History at the University of California at Santa Barbara for twenty-three years, ever since he received his Ph.D. in History from the University of California at Los Angeles. As an undergraduate at Harvard University Professor Hollister studied music, then switched his major to political science (or government as it was called then) and finally settled on a major in history, focusing on the medieval period which he had become increasingly interested in. After a year of Law School at UCLA, C. Warren Hollister followed his true calling and entered the Ph.D. program in History, which he completed in 1958. Today Professor Hollister is considered an authority on medieval history and an expert on Anglo-Norman history.

In the Spring of 1981 Professor Hollister was inducted as a Fellow of the Medieval Academy of America. The election is the highest honor which the Academy can bestow on one of its members. Professor Hollister's election represents a break in tradition for the Academy which more often names its members from among those approaching the end of their professional careers.

Professor Hollister is a member of the editorial board of the *American Historical Review*, the official journal of the American Historical Association, and is an award-winning author of many books on medieval history, some of which are already in their fourth and fifth editions.

The following interview with Professor Hollister should interest all who are preparing to enter the world of academia, and in particular the field of medieval history. Professor Hollister's candid accounts of the academic profession in general, and the trials and triumphs of his own career offer an interesting and valuable overview to us all.

- Q. Professor Hollister, among your many works you have written *Anglo-Saxon Military Institutions* and *The Military Organization of Norman England*. In what direction are you concentrating your research now?
- A. I'm working on Anglo-Norman history: Henry I, king of England from 1100 to 1135, studies in family history in this period, royal and baronial relations. I've already written a number of articles on this subject and I'm now working on a biography of Henry I.

- Q. How long do you expect it will take to complete this work?
- A. A couple of years.
- Q. Why have you chosen to concentrate your research efforts on King Henry I?
- A. His reign was long, fairly well documented, and extremely significant, and it has never received book-length treatment. Henry I was the youngest and by far the ablest son of William the Conqueror. He ruled England and Normandy during the first third of the twelfth century and was clearly the most powerful king of his time in Western Europe. He was remarkably successful at keeping the peace, and his reign witnessed extremely important advances in royal administration—the birth of the English treasury and exchequer, the first systematic use of itinerant royal justices, and the development of an elaborate patronage system.
- Q. What other projects are you involved in?
- A. I have written several textbooks, and at the moment I am working on their revisions. One of these is a short textbook entitled *Medieval Europe*, which I have just finished revising for the fifth edition. Another is entitled *The Making of England*, which I am preparing for the fourth edition. This book is on medieval England to 1399, and is the first of a four-volume series on English history. I am also preparing for a fourth edition a brief textbook on ancient history that I somehow wrote by mistake years ago.
- Q. Why do you say “by mistake”?
- A. Because a number of years ago I was going to write a Western Civilization text. Unfortunately a number of difficulties developed with regard to the contributions of the modern history collaborators. The publishers kept my manuscript, which covered from the beginning of time to the end of the Middle Ages, in a drawer until they finally decided to publish the medieval part. With some rewriting, that work became the first edition of *Medieval Europe*, and since it proved to be quite successful the publishers also decided to publish the first half of the manuscript as an ancient history text. I would never have deliberately written a text on ancient history. Medievalists don't do things like that; but they do occasionally write the first section of a Western Civilization text.
- Q. What are your involvements on the UCSB campus?

- A. My usual lecture course is "The Civilization of the Middle Ages," which has a chronological framework and is therefore similar to the course taught at UCLA. During the first quarter the course covers the period from around the time of Constantine to the middle of the eleventh century. The second quarter was originally to cover the period from the eleventh to the fifteenth century, but I have never managed to go much beyond 1300. I also teach the middle quarter of our three-quarter course in Western Civilization (covering A.D. 1050-1715). As far as graduate work is concerned, I teach a two-quarter research seminar and a one-quarter reading seminar each year, and I work closely with my graduate students on an individual basis.
- Q. How would you compare the students today to those who were students with you in the Ph.D. program at UCLA?
- A. That's a very dangerous question to answer because a number of my colleagues here at UCSB are contemporaries of mine from the UCLA graduate school, including our Chancellor, Bob Huttenback, and a number of the people in the History Department—Frank Frost, our ancient historian, and Paul Sonnino in early modern history. They are all excellent scholars. However there is a difference in that there are fewer jobs today than there were when I was a graduate student. Placement is extremely difficult, and I find that the only way to be successful in placing students in good jobs in the field of medieval history is to make them competitive; in other words, to have them publish. Departments looking for beginning assistant professors in medieval history find many candidates who have already published articles and sometimes even books—which is quite incredible. It used to be that a book got you tenure; now it gets you an assistant professorship! When I was in graduate school it never would have occurred to us to write scholarly articles, but now graduate students have to be able to present something really first-rate, preferably two or three articles in, for instance, the *Journal of British Studies* or *Speculum* or the *Journal of Medieval History*. This is the only way they'll have a chance at a job.
- Q. Have your students had difficulties getting their work published?
- A. The medieval history students here at UCSB have been very successful in getting their seminar papers polished and then published in major journals. I find that besides the help they get from professors, the students also get a lot of help from each other. If you have what I call a critical mass of very bright advanced doctoral students working together

[in a seminar], they can constructively criticize each other's work. I evaluate their work too and then the group as a whole discusses each paper. If the paper seems promising I work with the student at length until it reaches the point at which it can be published. I personally go over each paper three or four times before it is submitted for publication. Of course, one has to be professional and recognize the fact that papers often get turned down. If that is the case one must evaluate the reasons why the paper was rejected, and if the reasons are good one improves one's paper. But if one judges that the reasons are not valid then one simply sends the article to another journal. One certainly cannot allow oneself to get discouraged by a single refusal! I remember when I was on the AHA Council a few years ago: the president of the American Historical Association and I discovered that we shared the experience of having had articles turned down by the *American Historical Review*, which we were evaluating at the time. We also witnessed the fact that very distinguished scholars who send articles to the *AHR* or other major journals have them rejected as well. One simply has to bear with that. A graduate student mustn't get discouraged.

- Q. I understand you do a great deal of traveling. What is the general nature of your travels?
- A. I travel mostly to attend conferences and present papers. Last week, for instance, I was at an intensive five-day symposium at Cal Tech on family and property in traditional Europe. I have also been asked to evaluate the history programs at different universities. I have recently completed evaluations of the History Departments at Hunter College and at the University of Maryland, and the Medieval Studies Program at the University of Michigan. One of my main interests, however, is to get my students on the programs of major scholarly conferences, to which I usually accompany them. One of my Ph.D. students presented a paper at the Medieval Association of the Pacific meeting at Victoria last February, and three students will present papers at the Kalamazoo conference in May, in a session chaired by one of my former Ph.D. students. I'll be chairing another session at the Kalamazoo conference.
- Q. Professor Hollister, you studied at UCLA and are now teaching at UCSB. Could you describe the advantages and/or disadvantages you have encountered in working at a smaller institution?
- A. I've been here since 1958. That's almost twenty-three years. When I arrived here the campus population was about 2,500 and now it's at 14,000, which I guess is a little less than half the size of the student

population at UCLA. It's hard to say what it's like teaching at UCSB because it has been constantly changing. The first few years we had no graduate program. Then we set up a graduate program, but didn't have a lot of first-rate students. Now for the last decade or so we have been attracting excellent graduate students. I like working here very much.

- Q. Do you feel that you were well prepared for the demands of your profession by the UCLA program?
- A. Now, as then, it has an excellent faculty. It is actually much stronger in medieval history now than when I was a student, due to the development of the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, which didn't exist when I was there. The graduate program in medieval history at UCLA is very strong.
- Q. How did you develop your interest in medieval history?
- A. It was really a two-phased process. In the summer after my sophomore year at Harvard I didn't know what to major in. I hadn't really been exposed to history and so I majored in music one year and changed to political science or government, as they called it, the following year. Then I started reading Toynbee's *A Study of History* (in D. C. Somervell's abridgement) and it excited me very much. This was the first time I really had the feeling that studying could be exciting. Before that it had just been a job. And so I shifted my major to history and studied the medieval period which I loved. Then I decided I was going to be a lawyer and so the second phase of my conversion took place after about a semester of law school at UCLA, at which point I decided that I didn't want to spend my life working on law and shifted to history again.
- Q. What advice would you give to students who are now preparing to enter the field?
- A. First of all I'd say "*don't*," because there aren't enough jobs; in fact there are very few jobs. The students in the doctoral program here are all well aware of this situation and have come to study simply because they love history, medieval history. At the moment they are dangerously euphoric because we had a marvelous year in placement. Two of my Ph.D. students got tenure-track jobs this year, at the University of Houston and Hollins College in Virginia. The student who got the position at the University of Houston actually had the unique pleasure of turning down a tenure-track offer at Texas Tech. (These positions are extremely well known among medieval historians who are trying to

place graduate students.) We've been terribly lucky this year and the students now may have become over-optimistic.

So again my advice would be *not* to enter the field, and then, if one insists on doing so, one shouldn't expect a job. If [a student] feels that he or she *must* enter the field because he or she loves medieval history, then he or she must be prepared to face the situation as it is. One possibility, however, is to develop computer expertise in connection with graduate research work. This makes it possible for a student to enter the computer field if he or she cannot find a job teaching in the university. It's an odd situation, but it means that one won't have to go out and sell shoes.

- Q. Can you give an example of the possible application of computer programming to research in medieval history?
- A. Robin Fleming, one of my brightest doctoral students, and I have teamed with a computer scientist to produce the first computerized data base for Domesday Book, the most comprehensive land survey of Norman England and, indeed, the greatest survey to be produced in the Middle Ages. Domesday Book has been the subject of an immense and very learned body of scholarly literature, but it has never been computerized, and until that is done many of its secrets will remain closed. Another of my doctoral students, Stephanie Mooers, is computerizing the Pipe Roll of 1130—medieval Europe's first comprehensive fiscal record.
- Q. What have been some of the most difficult obstacles that you have faced in your own research?
- A. I think the obstacle that most of us face is the distance to major manuscript collections. I personally had the odd, almost embarrassing experience of not being able to go to Europe until after about seven years of teaching. I'd never been there before, I wasn't able to go during my graduate work, and I came to UCSB directly from graduate school. I simply wasn't able to get to Europe until my first sabbatical, and so I used published sources and microfilm. I actually wrote two books before I got to Europe. It is of course becoming easier to secure materials, but they are not always readily available. Naturally I make it a point to encourage my students to travel to Europe; in fact, I practically force them to go.
- Q. What is the status of your research now?
- A. At the moment I do not need manuscripts. I need time to write and

digest what I have already studied. Of course one's research is never done, but I have completed the bulk of what I set out to study in the Norman Archives and English Records. If I find I need a particular manuscript I can request a photocopy. I have had very good luck in obtaining what I have requested. Of course one has to know exactly what one wants. At the beginning of one's research it is impossible to rely on this method because one has to go into the archives and find out what's there. Once one knows what is available, one can generally send for a photocopy if one finds a piece of the puzzle missing.

Q. A final question, Professor Hollister: what have been some of the most rewarding moments of your career?

A. As I said before, in my generation we didn't publish when we were in graduate school. I, for instance, had a strong record in graduate school but I was still not quite sure that I had what it took to break out into international scholarship and publish in major journals. During my first year at Santa Barbara a colleague of mine in ancient history was just being, as they say in the UC system, "terminated" for not having published. I really didn't know if I myself could publish. I thought I could, but I wasn't sure. It seemed to me that there was the problem of megalomania, and that what one really needed was some sort of objective judgment on one's work. So I wrote several articles and sent them to various journals. I think that it was in my second year here that one day as I was going from one class to another I stopped in the History Department and found a hand-written card from the editor of the *English Historical Review* saying that he had accepted my article and apologizing that I'd have to wait a year before I would get to see it in print. This was a great moment for me, so great that I went into my office and just sat down in a daze. About a half hour later one of my students came in to ask me why I wasn't in class. I had just totally blanked out on the class I was supposed to be teaching!

Another marvelous moment happened to me this year when two of my recent Ph.D. students landed permanent jobs in this terrible job market. Knowing these students, how much they wanted to be medievalists, how able and well prepared they were, it was wonderful to be assured that now they *will* be medievalists.



**Peggy Kidney** is working on a Ph.D. in Italian Literature at UCLA. She received her M.A. in Italian Language and Literature from the University of California at Berkeley and her B.A. *magna cum laude* from Mount Holyoke College. Ms. Kidney is a member of the Phi Beta Kappa Society and a past recipient of a Fulbright-Hays scholarship for graduate study in Italy.