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INTERVIEW WITH ANNE HUDSON

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Dr. Anne Hudson is Lecturer, Fellow, and Tutor at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford. She did both her undergraduate and graduate work at Oxford. Her Ph.D. thesis, which was written under the direction of Norman Davis, was an edition of part of Robert of Gloucester's Chronicle and a study of the language. It formed the basis of the first article which she published.

Dr. Hudson's work focuses now on John Wyclif, the fourteenth-century English heresiarch, and the Wycliffite movement of the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. She is in the process of editing and publishing a multi-volume edition of Wycliffite sermons, and an edition of four Wycliffite texts. She is also on the Board of the New Wyclif Society.

- Q. When and how did you begin to turn your attention to Wycliffite material? Why Lollard material?
- A. I didn't start working on Lollard literature until about six years after I'd finished my thesis. When I finished my thesis it was obvious to me that I had either got to spend the rest of my life editing Robert of Gloucester, because there are so many manuscripts, or abandon it. I decided that I'd had the interest that I could at the time out of it, so I would abandon it. My first thought was to do some work on Old English, and so I investigated the Soliloquies of Alfred. Then I discovered that Carnicelli had more or less completed his edition and that it was likely to be published soon, so that didn't seem a good idea. But this work did clarify my mind in that I realised I wanted to work in Middle English, and not in Old English. Then I moved into the fourteenth-century mystical writings, and did quite a lot of work on the *Stimulus Amoris* translation, which has been ascribed to Hilton. That effort also came to an abrupt halt when I discovered that Harold Kane of Boulder, Colorado was likely to finish an edition. So there was no point in going ahead until his edition had come out. But it was in the course of working on Hilton that I became interested in Medieval heresy, because Hilton has a certain amount to say about contemporary ideas. I then moved into Lollard writing. I only started working in that area, properly speaking, in about 1969 or 1970.

- Q. Who else was working on Wycliffite material at the time?
- A. Historians, of course, had worked in that area quite a lot; Margaret Aston notably. She was, I think, one of the few historians who at that point had used the vernacular material at all. Bruce McFarlane had also worked on Lollard history at Oxford, but in fact I didn't begin working on Lollard texts until after his death, and I never met him. I think the only work which had been done at that point on Lollard texts was Peter Heyworth's edition of *Jack Upland*. Gloria Cigman had started work, and had, I think, not quite finished her thesis on the edition of the BL Additional 41321 sermons. But otherwise very little had been done.
- Q. At what stage was the general research in the field—how did you approach the task of advancing that research? What was your methodology?
- A. It was obvious that there was quite a lot of work to be done. I started with the idea of editing something that hadn't been edited before, but I realised that the sermons that Arnold had edited were in a way basic to an understanding of Lollard writing, and that really the job of critically editing those ought to take priority over other things which on the face of it might have sounded more adventurous.
- I decided that I really ought to become proficient, to some degree, in the historical side, and in a sabbatical term I went round to a large number of record offices where the Bishops' registers are kept. During that year I, more or less, worked through the material that J. A. F. Thomson had used for his book on the later Lollards, which gave me a feeling of knowing a certain amount about this material—a certain security from the historical point of view.
- Q. The Wycliffite movement—if I may use that appellation loosely—produced a number of different works. Most critics have tended to label as Wycliffite or Lollard any work which contains even a slight suggestion of Wyclif's religious or social doctrines. Is that an adequate way to assess this body of material, or are there other distinctive features?
- A. I don't think there's a single safe test of Lollardy. Very few of the texts declare their authorship; very few of the manuscripts declare their ownership. Occasionally we're lucky and a book which has survived is mentioned in a Lollard trial. This is the case for instance with the *Lantern of Light*, which is mentioned in the trial of John Claydon in London in 1415. The details which are given in Chichele's register

about the book the *Lantern of Light* correspond in almost every particular with the book we've still got of that title. But with other texts you haven't got that evidence; or indeed sometimes you might have conflicting evidence. There's the very interesting case of *Dives and Pauper*, a copy of which was confiscated on suspicion of heresy in about 1431 at Bury St. Edmunds in the Norwich diocese. Its owner, who was a secular priest, was clearly, I think, heretical. But at almost exactly the same time—some time between 1420 and 1440—abbot Whethamstede of St. Albans commissioned a copy of *Dives and Pauper* for the library at St. Albans. Whethamstede is orthodox; it would be hard to think of anyone who was more a pillar of orthodoxy. And how is one to interpret this evidence? Fortunately *Dives and Pauper* also survives, and so it is possible to understand the situation. I think that the author was orthodox but had some sympathy with the criticism of contemporary practices in the church which by that date—it was probably written between 1405 and 1410—could be associated with Lollard writings as easily as with orthodox writings. I think probably the answer to the trial and the conflicting evidence of Whethamstede's copy, is that the text was perfectly acceptable within the monastic environment, where such things could be discussed—the monks would presumably know when they saw something questionable—but it was very much more dangerous in the hands of a secular priest. If it had got into the hands of the lay people of Bury St. Edmunds the conclusions which they would have drawn from such a text would have been very different from those which the monks of St. Albans would have drawn. But it does, I think, illustrate the problems of determining whether a text is Lollard or not. I think there are also cases where the author either didn't want to define his own position with regard to Lollardy, or was incapable of understanding the subtleties to do so. Some Lollard theories are fairly abstruse and it's perfectly likely, I think, that some of the authors of the fifteenth-century texts sympathised with some parts of the Lollard creed, but not with others. And therefore you can get some obscurities for that reason too.

- Q. If the ideological touchstones for Lollardy are as 'soft' as you suggest, where does one draw the line in distinguishing the products of Lollardy from those of more generalized movements of popular piety?
- A. It's difficult to draw a line certainly, but I think that there is evidence of organization, and this is where I think I would make the distinction between popular piety and a movement. I think there is enough

evidence, not to demonstrate a movement in all its stages, but to demonstrate it at certain points, at any rate, in the course of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, and at times down to the Reformation period. For example, in the 1420s and 1430s it's quite clear that there was considerable contact between the Lollards in the Norwich diocese, who seem to have been predominantly in the area between Norwich and the sea, (in other words the Norfolk/Suffolk border), and the Lollards of eastern Kent, particularly the Tenterden area. It's quite plain that when things got too hot in the Tenterden area there was a migration to the Norfolk/Suffolk border, apparently because it was known that there were sympathisers there. From eastern Kent to the Norfolk/Suffolk border, particularly in the medieval period when you would either have had to cross by boat over the Thames estuary or go via London, is quite a long way, further than you could get news by ordinary daily market travel. It does suggest to me that therefore there was some sort of communication between those two areas before the migration occurred.

It's quite evident equally that there were travelling preachers who moved around the country, teaching Lollard doctrine and leaving books behind them. There's one very interesting example which I'm in the process of editing at the moment. It's a text which survives in four manuscripts: three of the early fifteenth-century and one of the early sixteenth-century. The three fifteenth-century manuscripts are all very similar in form, two of them are in fact written in the same hand, and at the end of the tract that is in these four manuscripts the preacher (it purports to be a very long sermon) says that he hasn't got the time to go any further, so he'll leave the text of the sermon with the congregation. He asks them to read and criticize it and he will come back again later and answer any questions about it. He also asks them that if any opponent of his comes along and starts criticizing his text, they are to note his objections, and in particular if the opponent advances any biblical evidence against his argument. This, I think, suggests a degree of organization and also a degree of participation by the congregation. All the evidence suggests that from an early time schools, *conventiculae* they often called them, operated and that these schools were often provided with books, and were visited by teachers. There's one rather interesting case from the end of the fifteenth-century where one person, suspected of heresy, observed that it was necessary to attend the schools for a full year before you would know the doctrine properly.

- Q. In your forth-coming edition of the Wycliffite sermon cycle, you suggest that the sermon manuscripts were produced under fairly close supervision, and that this resulted in a uniform body of material. To what degree is that true of other texts with a Wycliffite background?
- A. It isn't true of all of them. It's not even true of the manuscripts of the Glossed Gospels. They vary in form and style much more than the manuscripts of the sermons. There are some manuscripts, BL MS Additional 41175, MSS Bodley 143 and 243 would be examples, of well-designed and organized manuscripts. But there are others, MS Laud 235 would be an example, and one in Cambridge, where it's much less evident that the text was properly organized or overseen. It doesn't seem to be true either of some of the manuscripts of the shorter texts. But it's very difficult to generalise. Certainly the majority of Lollard manuscripts are a good deal more professional productions than one would expect from reading somebody like Thomson. I think that the other point which I would make is that when you compare Lollard manuscripts with the average manuscript of non-Lollard sermons of the fifteenth-century, the professionalism of the Lollard manuscripts is striking. A large number of manuscripts, for example Myrc's *Festialis* or other collections of sermons, are rather scruffy little books and very much look as though they were written by the clergy for their own benefit and not intended to be used by anybody else. This is not true on the whole of the Lollard texts. There are few of them, in fact, which offer any difficulties in reading.
- Q. Are there any distinctions within the body of Wycliffite literature—differences of approach, intention or audience? Is there a difference, for instance, between Wycliffite and Lollard works?
- A. I use the two terms interchangeably and I would defend myself in doing so against the charges of those who wish to limit the two terms. There are critics who think that you should reserve the term 'Wycliffite' to those disciples of Wyclif who were at Oxford with him and knew him, and use the term 'Lollárd' for the movement that in the late fourteenth-century and early fifteenth-century was regarded as heretical. I don't think that this is a meaningful distinction. The term Lollard was first used, so far as we know, by Henry Crump at Oxford in an entirely academic setting, and apparently with regard to men who would have known Wyclif at Oxford. Equally, people like Netter in the 1420s used Lollardy and Wycliffism as interchangeable terms. I think that no useful purpose is served by trying to separate them. One of the things which

I've become more and more convinced of as I worked on the Wycliffite/Lollard texts is the extent to which the ideas found in them are traceable back to Wyclif. The expression of the ideas may be coarsened, the subtlety of the argument may be broken, but it's remarkable how frequently you can trace even phraseology or examples which are used back to the latin works of Wyclif. Some of the early Lollard texts seem to have been designed in an academic mold, and presumably with an academic audience in mind. They're based upon disputation techniques, and they depend on heavy citation of patristic, Biblical, and canon law authorities. On the other hand there are texts which seem to have been written for a more popular audience which lacked the academic slant, and which seem to have been designed to encourage the ordinary Lollard and not for any sophisticated educational purpose.

It is possible to distinguish arguments and disagreements within the movement. I think that there are certain tenets on which all Lollards would agree. But there seem to have been others on which there was some disagreement. For example, on the question of images: Wyclif doesn't seem to have been very concerned about images, and although he does talk about them very briefly in the *De Mandatis*, what he has to say is fairly conventional. Some of the Lollards were, of course, extreme iconoclasts, and carried that iconoclasm as far as making firewood of images. On the other hand, some people realised that pictures and images served some function for those who couldn't read, and were prepared to tolerate them if they were properly used. Similarly, there seems to have been some variation in the extent to which the Lollards followed Wyclif in his Eucharistic heresy. For example, there are some expurgated manuscripts of the sermons that Arnold printed which keep quite a number of Lollard views and keep some of the Lollard terminology, but they expurgate or modify the bits which deal with the Eucharist. This may simply be that the Eucharistic heresy was the easiest one on which the episcopal officers could gain a condemnation, and therefore it was common prudence to leave it out. But it may, I think, reflect uncertainty or disagreement within the movement.

- Q. To what degree does Wycliffite material interact with the style and content of contemporary literature produced outside the movement? Does Wycliffite material lead public taste, or is it a reflection of a broader trend?
- A. It's difficult to demonstrate this either way. It certainly did provoke the writing of other vernacular material. The most obvious case is that

of Reginald Pecock, who was a passionate opponent of Lollardy, but felt that the only way to refute Lollardy was to write in the vernacular, as this was the only way to reach the people who were being taught Lollardy, and who knew no latin. He was, of course, convicted of heresy in turn, and some people at any rate thought that one of his chief offences was the use of the vernacular to discuss recondite matters. Another case is the translation of the pseudo-Bonaventure meditations on the life of Christ. Whether the translation was made in the first place to counteract Lollardy isn't clear. But it was certainly authorized by Archbishop Arundel in 1410 as a substitute for the, by then forbidden, straight translations of the Bible. There were certainly sermons in the fifteenth-century which were obviously written to combat Lollardy.

From the stylistic point of view it's more difficult to say. Fristedt thought that there was a connection between the early version of the Wycliffite Bible and a version of the translation of Higden's *Polychronicon*. But many, of course, would interpret that as evidence that Trevisa was mixed up with the early version of the Wycliffite Bible translation, and see it as a link of translator rather than of influence of one on the other. I think we don't really know enough yet about other fifteenth-century translations and their style to know whether this is true or not. I certainly know of one other probably fifteenth-century translation which seems to have adopted a more literal style than the early version of the Wycliffite Bible, and that's the version of the letter of Alexander to Aristotle which has recently been edited. But whether there's any connection with the Lollards, it's difficult to say.

- Q. How significant is Wycliffite literature as literature? Was it merely a temporary and isolated aberration, or did it have longer lasting and broader impact? How was this impact transferred to other works?
- A. It's difficult to say. Most of the Lollard texts and reaction against Lollardy, I agree, seems to have been over by about 1430, though, of course, Pecock was writing in the 1440s. On the other hand, the reading of Lollard texts seems to have continued throughout the century, and there was a revival of interest in Lollard texts by the early reformers. A number of them were printed first of all in Antwerp, and later in London between about 1530 and 1550. So they were felt, presumably, to have new relevance in the reforming period. Certainly there is trial evidence in every decade of the second half of the fifteenth-century to show that Lollardy did still continue as a force,

and wherever you found Lollardy you found books, and that these were confiscated on grounds of heresy.

- Q. What are the special problems of dealing with Lollard material?
- A. The first problem is deciding whether the material is Lollard or not, which is by no means an easy task. Indeed in some instances I think it's impossible to decide. Certainly there is the problem of making sure that you haven't missed manuscripts. One of my constant nightmares is of somebody writing to me saying they've found another manuscript of the sermons which are at the press at the moment. It wouldn't altogether surprise me if this happened. I think that another problem which is less evident is that a lot of texts, including the sermons, are written in a rather allusive style, apparently for people who knew something about the ideas before they started reading. But, of course, we don't, and it's sometimes difficult to make out precisely what they mean by the texts. There's also the problem of interpreting vocabulary. I feel more confident about that now, but it is to some extent a matter of instinct, and you can always go wrong on instinct. It's very difficult to demonstrate that my understanding of the language is right, when I've got it from the feel of the passage.
- Q. How much can we learn about the group which produced this body of material from the literature alone?
- A. Quite a lot; but not, of course, time and place evidence. For that we are very much dependent on the record evidence and the evidence of the latin chroniclers. The difficulty in dealing with those sources, and they are the sources from which the history of Lollardy has largely been written, is that they are hostile to the movement. Also they are much more interested in the views which are overtly and distinctly heretical, rather than in the views which may or may not be heretical, but which may simply be radical. Equally they are not interested in showing the logic behind the heresy. In other words, they are all of them concerned to show that the movement, or the adherents of the movement are wrong. They're not concerned to show how they reached that wrong position.
- Q. Have historians been wrong in pursuing prosecution records?
- A. Not wrong, but I think it's only half the story because the chronicles, the bishops' registers and the material from the Public Record Office is almost exclusively hostile, and can be formulaic too. So I hope that by looking at this other evidence, which few people have looked at in

connection with Lollardy it may be possible to give a more balanced view. But certainly it can't be done solely from the Lollard texts.

- Q. Research into the literary products of Wycliffite/Lollard sects seems to suggest that we are on the verge of having to revise our opinions about the character of the movement. Would you agree?
- A. I hope that historians will come to see that they can't continue writing the history of Lollardy without looking at the vernacular texts. In fairness it must be said that Margaret Aston had grasped this a long time ago. Her "Lollardy and Sedition" does make ample use of vernacular material, both printed and unprinted. But she is virtually the only historian who has used it. McFarlane, so far as I can make out, only used the Clanvowe text called *The Two Ways*, and spends a lot of time in his book *Lancastrian Kings and Lollard Knights* on this; but unfortunately he didn't turn up anything very interesting since it's a rather colourless text. If he had spent the same amount of time on the sermons printed by Arnold, or even the *Lantern of Light*, he'd have got some more interesting information.
- Q. Does McFarlane's suggestion that Lollardy lost the support of the minor gentry after the Oldcastle rebellion hold up?
- A. I think that in general it's probably right. In fact Charles Kightly in a thesis from York went a lot further along similar lines to those of McFarlane and has been able to produce much more information about the involvement of the minor gentry in the early days of Lollardy. But the terminal date of the thesis is the Oldcastle revolt, and it would be only by looking at much more material for the next twenty years that it would be possible to decide finally that the Oldcastle revolt really represents a change of position.
- Q. How close are we to having a history of Lollardy that takes into account the literary evidence? Is there a great deal more literary research to be done? How essential is it to publish the texts of all the various works produced by the movement?
- A. There's a lot more work to be done. The first thing really is more editions of unpublished texts and new editions of the texts that were rather perfunctorily edited at the end of the last century. We also need editions, or if not editions at least critical studies, of some of the texts written against Lollards. There is an edition of Netter, but we need much more work on Netter's sources of evidence, rather than the nature of his objections to Lollardy, and how much he knew about the

movement. There are also some unprinted texts, particularly those by Woodford, which are not available in print (Rimington similarly) which would throw a lot of light on Lollardy. There has been a certain amount of work done but it hasn't resulted in as much publication as one might have hoped for. I hope that the next ten years may see some difference there. This is the worst possible time, since printing is extremely expensive, and the new technology has not entirely reached the scholars who need to collaborate with the publishers on this. There's no doubt that many of these publications will have a very small market, so it's difficult to convince a publisher that it's good business to take on these texts. I think that there are publishers who are still prepared to take on such editions, but I must admit that things are not splendid at the moment. As far as the English texts are concerned, the Early English Text Society is interested in publishing editions if they are up to standard. There are various other series; for instance the Heidelberg Middle English Texts will take short texts. The longer latin texts are a problem, both from the point of view of finding publishers who are willing to take them on, and also finding scholars who are prepared to do the editorial work.

Q. You are on the Board of Advisors of the New Wyclif Society. What is the role of the Society with regard to publications?

A. So far what is being done is really in the nature of preliminary investigation, but I understand that a publisher has expressed an interest in publishing texts and translations, and possibly monographs. But so far nothing has appeared. The society has also investigated the possibility of producing photographic reproductions of some early printed texts, either on micro-fiche or possibly through some sort of photocopy process. In a sense this sounds a good idea because it can be done photographically and is therefore much quicker. On the other hand, my experience in reading early printed texts is that they are by no means simplicity itself, and that the number of people who would be willing to grapple with a sixteenth-century edition reproduced on microfilm would be very small.

The society has expanded its goals. It started with particular philosophical interests, and I think in a sense that is the most important need, because, for the literary vernacular texts there are various publishing outlets. It may be less satisfactory to have them scattered over a number of series, but the basic thing is to get them out, and there are series like the two I mentioned, the Garland publishing concern and one

or two others which will take vernacular material. But it's much less evident what outlets there are for latin material. So one of the most useful of the functions which the New Wyclif Society could fulfil would be to get some of the latin texts into print.

Q. Has the Society talked about organising a conference?

A. The six hundredth anniversary of the death of Wyclif is the 31st of December 1984, and plainly something ought to be done. I think that the society is going to organize a conference. In a sense the most obvious place for such a conference would be Oxford. I suppose the summer of 1984 would be a most suitable time. It would be unfortunate if a conference were arranged without somehow trying to involve Czech scholars—because of the Hussite interest in Wyclif—but that is easier said than done.

Q. Your own forth-coming edition can properly be described as “long-awaited”; do you have a sense of accomplishment now that the first volume is about to appear, and what is your next project?

A. The edition of the sermons is to be in four volumes of which only the first is at the moment with the printer, and I see the final volume unlikely to be finished within less than ten to fifteen years. I've got another edition, which is in fact what I'm working on at the moment; this I hope will be finished within a couple of years. It's an edition of four Wycliffite texts. I've been asked to think about a general book on Lollardy, and I hope next summer to sort that out with the publisher. I've become very interested in the, as it were, after-life of the Lollard texts in the Reformation period, and from that forward into Reformation writing in English.

Steven Douglas Halasey is a former editor of *Comitatus*, and a doctoral candidate in the History Department at UCLA. He is currently in Great Britain, engaged in research for his dissertation on “The Production and Circulation of the Lollard Bible, ca. 1380-1536,” which is being written under the direction of Dr. R. H. Rouse.