

***Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH***

**Name: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB  
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**S1**

**00:00:29:04**

It's a very rare thing for a historian to be inescapably identified with the period in which he's researched and written so much. Professor Sir Geoffrey Elton's name is inextricably linked with The Tudors and Tudor, England. So much so that I think nobody thinks of England and the Tudors without thinking of the name of Elton Geoffrey. It's probably unusual for something to be so linked to the history of Tudor England without so many people knowing that you were not born in England but have a Central European background.

**S2**

**00:01:01:06**

Yes, well, of course, to my mind, that's assures my credibility more than if I had been born here. Yes, I was born in Tübingen in southern Germany, where my father, just after the first war, was a student. I left the town at the age of 13 months. I don't remember too much about it. We then moved to Frankfurt and then to Prague, where my father had a chair before coming to this country just before the war.

**S1**

**00:01:27:13**

So most of your school days were spent in Prague? Yes. At the age of the age of 18. Did you have any idea then that you want to be a professional historian, or is this something that.

**S2**

**00:01:39:16**

Well, in a way, that was predestination. I'm a fifth generation academic and several in that previous generation were historians like my father. For one, though, he was an ancient stone. So I've been really thinking of myself as a historian from about the age of seven, when I wrote the history of an imaginary planet inhabited by teddy bears.

***Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH***

**S1**

**00:02:02:11**

So from a very early age, then you were toying with history. But what is history in the German idealist mode or the sort of pragmatic British approach to history?

**S2**

**00:02:15:01**

I think I've always had essentially an approach. I've always believed instinctively that the history I wanted to know about was what I could get out of the sources and not any kind of major construct to solve my problem or the world's problems. So I was predestined in a way for the English approach to it as well. Yes. Yes.

**S1**

**00:02:36:07**

The whole family background seems to me to be one in which a whole lot of ideas were flying around continually. I know you have an uncle who was very active in Weimar period in developing ideas of Christian socialism and repudiating the relevance of Marxism to hunts.

**S2**

**00:02:55:02**

Yes. Yes. Well, yes. I never really believed in a clergyman. Yes, yes, yes.

**S1**

**00:02:59:18**

Very much of that rub off on you?

**S2**

**00:03:01:04**

No, he was a philosopher by training. And then he got religion, became a Lutheran pastor. And when I knew him well enough to talk to him, he'd been in concentration camp and come over here. And I must confess, I never really caught on to him or his ideas. He was fundamentally, I think, a nice man, but he appeared to be like all these confessional church people, very single minded and very wrapped up. No, I'm afraid this is not actually rubbed off.

***Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH***

**S1**

**00:03:37:16**

Although I did remember reading to that your father, when he moved to moved away from Germany or away from Prague, moved slightly from a German idealist approach to history to a British pragmatic approach to history.

**S2**

**00:03:54:20**

Yes, my father always was a late 19th century liberal by nature, and so on. I never have been. He had, I think, probably a German idealist approach up to a point. You've got to remember, if you're doing ancient history, you're dealing with history in which the evidence is thin and scattered and a great deal more imagination, if you like, or reconstruction or filling in, has to be done by the historian if he is to get anywhere at all. Most of the evidence he uses is what we would call secondary chronicle evidence. So the approach is of necessity, different. They're quite independent of any training or any tradition.

**S1**

**00:04:32:01**

So the historian looking back retrospectively on you would not see such a big jolt because of this change of scene.

**S2**

**00:04:40:09**

You never can tell what people will see in you, but I wouldn't have said so.

**S1**

**00:04:43:13**

No. Yes, you came to.

**S2**

**00:04:45:19**

I came to this country and I decided after a little bit that I had accidentally, by the action of Providence, arrived in the country that I should have been born in. I see.

***Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH***

**S1**

**00:04:55:09**

Yes. Yes. You came in 1939. That must have been a very interesting time to come. With the circumstances particularly fraught.

**S2**

**00:05:06:07**

Well, we left Prague four weeks before Hitler marched in. We left it on a Czech passport and therefore could go through Germany. We crossed. The channel on some Valentine's Day. For the last time, I think it was as flat as a millpond. And I went straight off to a school in North Wales which had declared itself willing to take my brother and myself free of fees as a sort of service to humanity. It's all a bit rushed and peculiar. I'd never been in a boarding school and never been away from home, but I was, after all, getting on for 18.

**S1**

**00:05:43:22**

So in a sense, the family spotted what was about to happen and moved quickly, perhaps more quickly, than others who were caught out.

**S2**

**00:05:52:24**

Some more quickly and some less quickly than some others. It was all a bit of a scatter.

**S1**

**00:05:56:21**

Yes. And then having settled into the school, then eventually you found yourself going into the army.

**S2**

**00:06:03:14**

Oh, well, no. First of all, I became a schoolteacher, didn't I?

**S1**

**00:06:06:01**

Did you? Oh.

***Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH***

**S2**

**00:06:06:24**

Yes. Yes. After when I've been at that school for six months, I took school certificate, having meanwhile acquired English, which I had done before I got here. And then I stayed on for a year trying for a scholarship at Oxford and by good fortune, escaped that altogether I would have hated Oxford and I think Headmaster at the end of that year said, All my teachers are leaving me for the war. Stay on, do a London external degree and do some teaching for £40 a year and and and room and board. Right. And that's what I did. I taught about 25 to 27 hours a week. And then the evening I sat down to read my books to study for the London degree.

**S1**

**00:06:56:06**

So you embarked on that more or less before you entered in the.

**S2**

**00:07:00:02**

Oh, yes, yes, yes. At that time, I couldn't enter the British army. I was still a citizen and I finished my degree in the summer of 43, at which point Churchill finally got Parliament to pass an act which allowed the British Army to accommodate friendly alien citizens. And so I was moved into the army in the spring of 44 with intelligence. No, no infantry.

**S1**

**00:07:29:18**

The infantry, which subsequently moved on.

**S2**

**00:07:31:23**

After the war.

**S1**

**00:07:32:15**

Yes. Yes. Oh, that was after the war. Yes. Yes, yes. What impelled you to go into the army?

**S2**

**00:07:38:14**

What was the law?

***Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH***

**S1**

**00:07:40:09**

It was the law as a consequence, Yes.

**S2**

**00:07:42:08**

I was called up. Yes. In fact, I had already been a volunteer member of the Home Guard, but that didn't count. I had to go into the army.

**S1**

**00:07:50:13**

I see. Yes. Yes. You weren't going to be a I was.

**S2**

**00:07:53:12**

I was dragging a rifle round. Landed? No, but that didn't suffice when.

**S1**

**00:07:58:07**

Destined to be a Corporal Pike, then? That's right. No. And that meant taking time out from the undergraduate studies?

**S2**

**00:08:06:15**

No, no, I'd finished my undergrad.

**S1**

**00:08:07:20**

You'd finished.

***Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH***  
**S2** **00:08:08:06**

By then? I finished my degree. Finished in the summer of 43. Yes. And on the strength of my examination, the university awarded me the Derby Studentship. Yes. And this was very nice. It meant that I could undertake research when the time came, but it also meant that I didn't know what to do because taking an external degree in the way I had done, I didn't know anybody in the university. You see, the only person I did know was the ancient historian at University College London, a friend of my father's who said, Why don't you go and talk to Jay Neil evacuated just down the coast from you. University College was in part of Bangor. And so I went to see Neal, and that's the only reason I became a Tudor historian. I hadn't specialised in the tutors before, but Neal declared himself willing to accept me as a graduate student of his when I came back from the war. Being Neal, he said that in the tone of a voice of a man who said Highly unlikely to happen, of course. So it had to be the Tudors, isn't it?

**S1** **00:09:09:04**

So it was completely accidental, completely landed in. And this period and then your period of wartime service didn't change that desire to.

***Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH***  
**S2** **00:09:17:06**

Know, even though the first thing I ever wrote, which was on the terminal date of Caesar's Consulate in goal, was finally typed up on the typewriter of 31 field security section of Graz and sent off to the Journal of Roman Studies who published it. Know that? See, I had to be Neal student, the way things had worked out. So I came back from the war and presented myself and another piece of accidental interference took place outside Neal's office. I met two of the young women who were doing individual parliaments for him, which he had a number of people working on for master's degrees, which he then combined into his books and so on. And we got talking. They said, What are you going to do? And I said, I don't know. I'm going in there to find out. And they said, Piece of advice on no account of Parliament and for preference no to Elizabeth. So I went in and said, I'll do Henry the eighth, sir. He was a bit astonished, but gave me the only piece of advice I ever got from him. In that case, he said, You better start reading the letters and papers offended you. That was the total of my supervision from Neil. And he was quite right. Now, what I didn't know was once again this curious bit of accidental good fortune, providential treatment, if you like. Virtually at that moment, Paula went gaga and Paula had for 50 years reserve the reign of Henry, the aids to himself. No one was allowed to work on it. People whom he could control, he moved forward. So back thus he couldn't control, he reviewed out of existence. And so here was a territory, Tibet opening, which on which nothing really modern had been done for a generation or two. That was good luck and I exploited it.

**S1** **00:11:05:24**  
How did you fall across Thomas Cromwell?



***Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH***

**S2**

**00:11:08:11**

I came across Thomas Cromwell because I read the letters and papers as instructed, and I kept coming across this fellow who had been mentioned in the books, but not really being given the kind of prominence that the record seemed to show he held. And that is how it happened. That is why I maintain I know that it is possible to approach a historical period and problems without answers. In your mind simply asking what is the evidence say to you? They even said to me, Why don't you look at this fellow on whom everything seems to be turning. That's how it happened.

**S1**

**00:11:42:02**

So so there you were in 1943, poised on the brink of.

**S2**

**00:11:46:15**

This was 1946.

**S1**

**00:11:48:02**

Oh.

**S2**

**00:11:48:14**

This is. I've come back from the war.

**S1**

**00:11:50:06**

You come back from the war by then? Yes. So? So all this was sorted out after I.

**S2**

**00:11:54:23**

Started my research in September 46th. I finished the dissertation in September 48, typing it by the London rules with five copies on a typewriter that I acquired in 1934 and went off to Glasgow for a year to teach. And then of course in that year I was also examined in the PhD of what that kind of thing is.

**S1**

**00:12:20:06**

And you quite dedicated then to, to embarking on an academic career you hadn't. Oh well.

***Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH***

**S2** **00:12:25:23**

There's no point in doing the research on lesser Yes there's no.

**S1** **00:12:28:16**

Research on this. So then you ended up at Cambridge and.

**S2** **00:12:34:00**

I had one year at Glasgow and like everybody else who had a year at Glasgow, fled as fast as I could in those days. And I was lucky I got away. And, well, you know, the reason why I got a job at Cambridge who I owe it to.

**S1** **00:12:47:18**

I do explain this. I often wanted to hear about this in great detail, particularly since you're so associated with Cambridge.

**S2** **00:12:53:18**

Oh, it's a mr. Attlee.

**S1** **00:12:55:04**

Mr. Athlete.

**S2** **00:12:55:20**

And the post-war Labour government, who you may remember, abolished the university seats. Now the member for the University of Cambridge was Kenneth Thorne, the tutor specialist in the history faculty. He wished to stay on in Parliament, but the university told him in that case he'd have to give up his lectureship. And so he then sat for an orgy constituency at very short notice indeed. They wanted a tutor man and various people, including Neil, recommended me. And so that's how I came to Cambridge.

**S1** **00:13:29:15**

What was Cambridge like in those days? It must be a rather small department.

***Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH***

**S2**

**00:13:34:03**

It was it was it was bigger than Glasgow, for instance. It was not as big as it now is, but it wasn't ever really small. It was fairly active. It was not all that different from what it's now. I think a number of us, including I hope myself, have given it a higher polish of professionalism, perhaps, but. What? Of course, the thing I discovered and which was different from everywhere else that I'd been, was the college teaching. Now the senior tutor at Clare, now an honorary fellow of the college, knew my father himself, being an ancient historian, Nick Hammond. And he badly he just lost his historian John Parry, who went off to become principal at Swansea, I think. And so he wanted someone to see and so he co-opted me for Clare, and I started teaching Clare almost as soon as I arrived here without a fellowship for a number of years. And that's the big difference is the size of fellowships. In those days the colleges had not yet exploded into the present sizes, but in the university, not really much difference. The size of the student body hasn't changed much either. It's. I The students look different. Of course, they've grown younger over the years.

**S1**

**00:15:00:00**

Of course. Yes. And many more women around.

**S2**

**00:15:02:06**

But. Yes, but it really hasn't changed all that much. No, I've been here for 40 years now, and I. I think I now know my way around. Yes.

**S1**

**00:15:12:03**

In that time, Jeffrey, what sort of intellectual influences do you think of impinged on? So you're giving me the impression of what you're saying. So for somebody who's very much made his own way, very much a person who's formed his own ideas without absorbing those of others. Could you identify any influences? Well, I think.

***Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH***  
**S2** **00:15:33:11**

The by and large, I would claim if it doesn't sound too conceited, that that impression you got is essentially correct. That is to say, it didn't need influences. It all came out of general upbringing, tradition and inclination. But more particularly, I would say there were two people whom I would recognize as influences upon my kind of work. One was VH Galbraith, who was director of the Institute of Stock Research. When I researched there in 48, 49, 47, 48, and who was an immensely influential man as a teacher. He was a natural born teacher and one learned simply by observing him, by listening to him, by being with him. And the other, I suppose, was taught if taught, whose work on the medieval administration was something that had not been taken further than about 30 and 99 at that point. And it seemed to me that if you wanted to be involved in the use of the government archives at the public record office, his kind of example was something worth considering, not so much the answers as the questions, the investigation of the machinery, the politics behind the machinery. We could add, when you get to the 16th century, the politics of individuals, much better knowable, going to a different kind of record material, letters and such like you could expand it. Therefore, those would be the influences that I think did play that part. Certainly not Pollard, whom I increasingly came to have my doubts about. Certainly, Neal, on whom I started a lot of doubts.

**S1** **00:17:23:03**

There seemed to me around the time you were saying you work to be a kind of recovery, The Tudors as a form of glorifying them. I'm thinking here, of course, the one things of the Olivier sort of remaking of the Henry the Fifth and the pushing of England into a sort of glorified. But you seem to have presented a sober view of the church, the Tudor revolution in government and something.

***Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH***

**S2**

**00:17:52:15**

Yes, I don't think that's quite right about. Yes, about this glorification. Locke Not amongst historians, you see, unless you count Rose as a historian, which is a matter of opinion.

**S1**

**00:18:01:17**

Well, I did have that. Yes, I'm sure of it.

**S2**

**00:18:04:12**

And Neil, of course, had this almost ex-service devotion to Queen Elizabeth. But otherwise, I mean, Olivia and so on. That's the end of the war. 45. In fact, I was in the Army when that movie was made. And the Shakespeare is always a different story. But as far as the historians went, who were working on the 16th century, quite a number of them Americans, they didn't glorified in this patriotic sense, but they did think and this is the point of some importance, they did think that when you get into the 16th century and I agree with them, there you are for the first time, really in a position to deal with a large number of identifiable human beings because of the change in the form of materials. And that gives the 16th century a kind of personalized splendor which you can't readily find in the early press. They have, of course, improved that first, fifth, 15th and early centuries. But that is the thing that the 16th century proved attractive in the 17th century, if you want it really to involve yourself in civil wars and knocking off kings heads, fine. But the 16th century has that special new life to it. You see. Now, some of that can, of course, become highly patriotic. There's always the armada and things of that kind. But I don't think the working historians of my time or since were really very interested in that aspect.

**S1**

**00:19:30:12**

But Cromwell is a very unheroic figure to seize upon. Is this significant that you you fell upon an heroic figure?

**Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH**  
**S2** **00:19:39:02**

No, I told you I fell upon Cromwell because he said from the record, boy, it's time somebody looked at me. I have changed my mind about him in various respects. And in a way I have. I wouldn't say I've made him more heroic as the years went on, but I have made him more multifaceted and more interesting. I think he is not just the administrator, however ingenious or even revolutionary that I first saw. There is also a man of considerable intellectual power and interest with a good deal of passion for religion. As I said in a piece I wrote, I'm very sorry in the way that he fell for religion too. I had hoped that he would resist, but it's not the case. He didn't. So I won't say he's a heroic figure, but he is a very interesting figure, recognizable for once, because we have that evidence. The evidence is not all one would wish. I wish, for instance, he'd written little papers for the Sunday Times or something, you know, that would give us a lot of information. But we have his archive of collected papers and things like that. We know something about it.

**S1** **00:20:49:18**

Yes. The other personality you've written on there is Thomas Moore. There's that portrait of you in Clear, which has the shade of Thomas Cromwell in the background. I always jokingly said it's really the shade of Thomas Moore as a way of perhaps a joke.

**S2** **00:21:04:17**

That's not a joke. That is offensive.

**S1** **00:21:06:09**

Remarks What attracted you about about Thomas Moore then?

***Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH***  
**S2** **00:21:10:24**

Nothing attracts me about Thomas Moore. But he was there, wasn't he? And you can't avoid Thomas Moore if you're dealing with the reign of end of the 80s. Obviously, if you're concerned to understand what happened in the early Reformation, you run obviously straight into him. Now, on top of that, when I was beginning really to sort of spread myself on this a bit, that was the time when the Yale factory producing Thomas Moore's Collected Works began to put forth its products. So as a reviewer, one came across. This one began to talk to people who were working on this. Moore became a very active element in the story. At that point, what put me off Moore was not so much more himself. I'm sorry about, in a way, about some of the things I said about him. It was the attitude of the hero worship was the saint worshipers, the hagiography that had passed for history where Moore was concerned. And I'm afraid when I get that sort of thing, the only thing I can concentrate is destroy the hagiography.

**S1** **00:22:12:20**

Although I seem to take latterly in your discussion about you've been increasingly interested in his psychology, and I had the impression if you were ever to be attracted to Psychohistory, it would be via the. Person of Thomas More. Well, I.

***Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH***

**S2**

**00:22:24:00**

Shall not be attracted to Psychohistory, so that's quite safe. The more has a very interesting and complex psychology. And the more who is this devoted father of a family and makes all those extremely nasty remarks about women. The more who is supposed to be kindness and cells and so on and wears a hair shirt and and lambasts every heretic in sight. He heartily approves of Burning Man alive for the sake of their face and things like that. There's a very mixed up character anyways, and I thought one needed to come to terms with that, make him understandable by understanding him myself. I think I understand him, and I'm not saying that everybody would agree with that by him. Of course not. But I think at least I have said. Questions be for people who are previous to that. We are content with the realism of the simplest bit of, you know, Holy Saint looking to heaven halo around his ruddy head and all that. Yeah, that was not fair to the man.

**S1**

**00:23:24:04**

So you have, in spite of what you say, been very much into sort of unmaking heroes or, or building up people who are non heroes.

**S2**

**00:23:34:11**

I'm trying to get at reality.

**S1**

**00:23:37:11**

How far has that influenced some of the later things you started? Interesting things like policy and police history of crime, the grass roots spread of the Reformation. Here we're moving you on to your 72 book policy in Police. Do you think that is a subsequent development of what you're looking at in the earlier work, or was it a new direction?



***Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH***  
**S2** **00:23:57:20**

It was really because the thing that I myself don't now quite understand is that when I finished that PhD and in fact left the neighborhood of the Arrow, I appear to have something like 15 years of work in my files. During those two years of working on the dissertation, I had collected an awful lot of things I didn't use in the dissertation, many of which came out as papers, and I had always really, from the first, wanted to concern myself, not only with Cromwell reforming the administration, which was the first book, but with Cromwell active as well. I later called it the chief of police enforcing that thing that again, the evidence of the material pressed me in that direction. It was so evident that much of his correspondence dealt with that kind of thing. So from the first, I really quite wanted to do that book. It was long delayed largely by the fact that I used the material for a special subject in the history Tripos, which gave it a five year delay before I could even think of putting it into print. Then the fourth lectures came conveniently for it to be used there. But my involvement in this material went back really to my graduate student debt.

**S1** **00:25:08:16**

So there's a kind of continuum. There is, yes. Yes. One other thing I'm intrigued to hear about is this great range of graduate student you've produced through Cambridge is being said that there are lots and lots of built in pupils, but there's no Elton's school of history. Well, I.

***Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH***  
**S2** **00:25:28:04**

Hope both those facts are true. The first one is certainly true. That is to say, they've been. I've forgotten the figure, but it runs into about 65 or 70 people who've most of them finished the PhD with me. 1 or 2 have not one man arrived from the States wanting to work with me, unfortunately visited the PO, met one of my students there who enthusiastically introduced him to the most obscure motels in the Exchequer, and the men turned back and went back to the state. So he never actually registered even. But yes, something like that. I hope it's not a school because I'm against schools. I was never a member of a school. I believe in people following what the historical evidence and their skills and teach them. The only thing which I would like it to be a school is that they do know the difference between sound work and bad work. Otherwise they're on their own. I've always taken the line that once the man has finished the PhD, he is no longer my student. He may be my friend, but he's not my student. Right. And that is a different relationship.

**S1** **00:26:32:00**

How quickly did it take to generate this kind of interest in doing? Research. Under the research on the Tudors, I said research under the Tudors. Sometimes it sounds The Tudors are dominating you. Yes. How did it take to develop, so to speak, substantial numbers of research students?

**Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH**  
**S2 00:26:48:13**

Well, it happened imperceptibly, and I really find it very difficult now to recall it from my first student. But by the time I'd been here teaching here for about seven years, I still only had singles. And then for reasons which I don't know, don't understand. People started showing a greater interest is partly no doubt. I was publishing and getting into the books that way. People were beginning to search, as you said at the beginning, associate the Tudors with my name. If they didn't want to go to London, where Neil was working notoriously only on Parliament, nothing else. Where else would they do it? That kind of thing. So they started coming. And then of course, that is a thing that snowballs once you've got it going, once you've got a seminar, which means you must at least have about eight people. It becomes a kind of natural center of attraction. People come to it because they've heard you can actually learn something there, that kind of thing. And I think that's what happened.

**S1 00:27:51:08**  
You mentioned Scarisbrick, because one of your pupils reminded me of some of the others who have gone into subsequent academic life because it strikes me they're all very diverse in. Yes.

**S2 00:28:01:06**  
Of York. The church historian, as David Lloyd's, who did the middle period. There's Dale Hoke at Williamsburg working on Edward the sixth, Norman Jones, who's just published a book on usury between 1572 and 1624. And there is David Starkey at the LSE, with whom I've fallen out, and that's John Guy at Bristol, who was stayed more or less in the early Tudor bit on Thomas more and the Council and Woolsey and such like. And there's quite a number of other.

**S1 00:28:39:20**  
Stunts you would one would not immediately identify as, in quotes, built in men or women. No, I hope not.

***Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH***

**S2**

**00:28:45:08**

I really do hope.

**S1**

**00:28:46:10**

Yes. Now, Jeffrey, the other interesting side of your writing has been about European history and what led you to move out of the English context into looking at the wider European context?

**S2**

**00:29:01:06**

Well, to be absolutely truthful, Gillian Clark asking me to edit Volume two of the new Cambridge Modern History that pointed my nose towards the rest of the world.

**S1**

**00:29:09:16**

This is early 60s, is it?

**S2**

**00:29:11:05**

No, no, that came out in 58. He commissioned me in 53.

**S1**

**00:29:14:06**

Oh, I see. Yes. Yes.

**S2**

**00:29:16:11**

And that, of course, combined with my European ancestry and so forth, which gave me a certain natural interest and concern and an ability to read some of the languages and so forth encouraged me to arrange around. And I wrote that textbook.

**S1**

**00:29:33:19**

As Reformation.

***Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH***  
**S2** **00:29:35:11**

Reformation in Europe, mainly because I had edited that volume in the Cambridge history and therefore felt I was up to date with a good deal of stuff. You say. But I've never I can't say I've ever been a primarily European historian after. But the interest developed in various ways. The Luther year helped and kept getting asked to say yet another thing about Luther and Company.

**S1** **00:29:59:04**

Yes, although it seems to me both that Reformation Europe appears in 63 and I think the Renaissance and Reformation also at the same time, it gives you another identity as a historian. And I remember as an undergraduate being told, here's Elton with a secular interpretation of the Reformation that somehow or other was rather different from your identity as the constitutional and administrative historian. Were you conscious at the time of offering?

***Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH***

**S2**

**00:30:25:06**

I must say I've always rather resented the idea that one is a constitutional historian or a political or a stone of ideas. I can't see how one can avoid being all those things if one is serious about the period. I would agree that the technical social history, especially the clear metric style of his Johnson, is probably something that you can't mix with the rest of the equipment. But although I approached this period and the subjects first from the angle of how did they govern themselves, which was the natural question to answer, when you looked at the records, the records produced by government departments, I never thought, this is all I want to do. I wanted to write about that period and I followed the records and the questions as they led so that I myself do not think of myself as a minister, historian or churches doing any of those things. I have always thought that one had to. If you're doing 16th century history, it seems to me truly English is Tudor history. There are two things You have to become expert in two areas of belief and thought. The one is theology. The other is the law. But doesn't mean that you have to be a historian of theology or a historian of the law. You need those that equipment. Do any history in that period, you say? And that is what I've been trying to do.

**S1**

**00:31:45:07**

So you would say that Reformation Europe was not really a new departure for you, although it was perceived as such from outside?

**S2**

**00:31:51:22**

Well, it didn't feel like it.

**S1**

**00:31:54:16**

But this secular approach to the reformation, if I called that, although presumably what you're saying is that it's not so much secular as emphasizing things like the law and politics and administration, which have got shoved to one side and.

***Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH***

**S2**

**00:32:08:10**

Treating religion as a problem of history rather than a problem of faith. Yes. Yes.

**S1**

**00:32:13:00**

Was that a particular contribution, do you think, of English historiography to the Reformation? I'm very conscious as a Reformation historian of it being confessional coloured right up until virtually the end of the 1960s and the early 70s in Germany. Do you think this is a peculiarly English thing? Are you typical this qua English historiography, or is this sort of something of your own insight?

**S2**

**00:32:38:02**

I don't know. I think it is obviously different from the main line of German Reformation historiography, which, as you say, remained wedded to the navel of Luther. But I think if you look at even the church history or reformation history have written in this country by churchmen like Gordon Rupp, for instance, there was always a fair contribution of the world. And an avoidance of that excessive concentration on. Details of the faith and so on. So I fitted into that. I took it further because I didn't have the faith at all. So I think I probably took it further. I try to actually what I try to do with asks is another matter. I try to get you in a balance in this, allowing for the fact that people obviously were worried about that ultimate salvation and the way to it and the questions of religion. I still wish to remember that there were other things troubling them as well and concerning them at all levels of society. And that was certainly contrary to what passed for reformation history in Germany, but not in America. Well, perhaps too, but not really in this country where I had always been a strong. Stream of what you might call secular history, what I would call real history.

**S1**

**00:33:57:14**

So again, you wouldn't see there being a distinctive Elton approach.

***Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH***

**S2**

**00:34:00:23**

I don't think so, no. Well, not consciously so.

**S1**

**00:34:03:20**

Not consciously. So if other people.

**S2**

**00:34:05:11**

See it there, well, I'm not going to say they are wrong, but I certainly was not aware of it.

**S1**

**00:34:08:23**

Yes. Yes. The other area.

**S2**

**00:34:11:24**

The one thing that I do contribute in all these things is a certain skepticism. Against all the unquestioned articles of faith. And I don't mean religious faith. I mean historical faith. Yes. Yes. That has certainly been one of my very conscious concerns in all I've done is always to ask, Was it really like that? The fact that you've said so for 200 years doesn't prove a thing. Let's find out. That is really what I think. I hope I have continued. That certainly is what I was trying to do. Yes.

**S1**

**00:34:42:07**

The other area you've been involved in publishing is theory of historiography. How did you get into writing on historiography as well? And we start the practice of history directly. Is this just as pragmatic or. Yes.



***Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH***  
**S2** **00:34:53:14**

Well, it was because. Young editor of the Sydney University Press. For some reason that now escapes me, he wrote and said, How about a book on this? And although I hadn't ever thought of doing it, I had no other book on hand at that point, really. So I said, all right. Yes. And then, of course, once you do one small work of that kind, you are liable to be asked to do more and more questions arise. So it's never quite given up that strand either. I haven't followed the debates. Since 1967 when I published that book with the kind of intensity that the specialist in that field no doubt would do. Some of them, especially the more recent American works, people like Hayden White and so on, I find either totally incomprehensible. If I do understand them, I wonder why they exist at all. But, uh, I got interested because it seemed to me, as I think I said in that book, the people who talk about how history and why history and such like our people don't do history. And it seemed to me it was necessary for somebody who, on the one hand was very much involved in the. Basic work, then it is gritty of history. But on the other hand did have partly by long tradition and training, Central European, if you like, and all that kind of thing, a liking in the overarching generalization and producing answers. Might as well try his hand on it. That's really what I was after.

**S1** **00:36:28:02**  
So you wouldn't see yourself as having a consistent philosophical stance of history so much as a consistent attitude towards how it should be done?

**S2** **00:36:37:01**  
Yes, I think I would call myself an empiricist if that's a consistent philosophy. Yes. Yes.

***Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH***

**S1**

**00:36:43:04**

Although I detecting a number of things you've said there's a pattern of things have sort of happened. Yes, the right subject was there. And occasionally you've used the word Providence did this and Providence did that. Do you see any element in what you've done?

**S2**

**00:37:03:14**

Well, this is this is one of my big problems. You see, on principle, I do not believe in Providence. On looking back upon my life. And I haven't ruled out some of the more peculiar things that happened in that respect. I have to admit that time and again, at some crucial point, it looks as though somebody intervened and push things in the right direction. I finally come to the conclusion that there is probably is a providence and that it is busy convincing me of its existence. But at the moment I admit that existence it will stop looking after me. I therefore have no option but to continue to deny it. You see.

**S1**

**00:37:37:22**

I see. One of the things that strikes me very much about your whole personality is just how characteristically British it is and how you dedicated yourself to British issue, right down to sort of things like cricket and a passion for cricket. Tell us a bit about this cricket business, because I think there's an interesting somebody who comes from Prague goes to Wales where they're not renowned after. Oh, come.

**S2**

**00:38:09:08**

On. That school was a cricketing school.

**S1**

**00:38:11:12**

Bleddyn Williams Where does cricket come from and how did you get hooked on this passion? I mean, for you.

***Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH***

**S2**

**00:38:16:09**

It came it was a post-war phenomenon. When I was working at the record office in 47, it was a lovely summer, and you started work at about 9:30 and they opened and by about 3:00, if you worked really intensively well, your eyes were falling out of your head. You had to stop. And so I used to go to Saint John's Wood to Lord's, to watch Dennis Compton play. Had there been no Dennis Compton, I'd never have got interested in cricket. But to find a cricketer who wants is out there keeps you interested, amused and cheered. That was it. It also so happened that there I met one of my ex colleagues from rival school days, then senior master, now retired, who was a cricketing buff, and he explained it all to me with Compton as the example. So I got interested. Yes, yes, I can take it or leave it. I used to be interested in soccer before the war, and I used to back the arsenal from all the way from Prague. You know.

**S1**

**00:39:12:12**

I've often thought that perhaps in one sense, a dedication to cricket is a more philosophical stance. If one can say, well, it can.

**S2**

**00:39:20:10**

Become yes.

**S1**

**00:39:21:03**

Yes, yes, yes. Although you've been to cricket matches with quite a lot of professional historians, what are they like at cricket matches? I remember you telling me stories of people you've been to.

**S2**

**00:39:31:02**

No, not a professional. Historians.

**S1**

**00:39:32:17**

Not very many. Professional?

***Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH***

**S2**

**00:39:34:06**

No. You're talking about the Dean of Clare.

**S1**

**00:39:36:00**

The Dean of Clare.

**S2**

**00:39:38:01**

I don't think I want to go into that. Oh.

**S1**

**00:39:40:05**

No, no.

**S2**

**00:39:40:24**

It becomes actionable. No, I haven't. It's a long time since I've watched a match in the flesh.

**S3**

**00:39:48:07**

Yes.

**S2**

**00:39:49:03**

Partly because Fenner's, of course, is interesting only in term time. And I never had the time. Yes. And at the end of term, it ceases. I have not really seen live cricket for a long time. TV helps with. Hmm. Well, it's a very odd game, which even when you begin to get absolutely, totally bored with it, suddenly you're right. And who would have forecast Ian Bolton?

**S1**

**00:40:10:24**

Well, one other area I wanted to get you to talk about is all your publishing activity and your activity in in educational matters, which you've had quite a long career now, and particularly with publishing close association with the Cambridge University, Grange University Press. Well, several things.

**S2**

**00:40:31:24**

Rather than I became a syndicate. The press in 60. See, I think it was in the days when you were appointed for two periods of

***Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH***

seven years each. So I ran to 77 and I got very interested in that in book production. And learned a lot about it. And if you're an active author, it's just as well you know something about it, because there's hostility between authors and publishers, authors and editors. So it's unwise. Doesn't help either side. Good. Many publishers deserve it, but that's neither here nor there. But my own, as it were. Enterprises were all a little bit peculiarly specific, called forth by some circumstances. The first thing I did was when I was on leave for a sabbatical, even 65, if I was working at the piano and discovered there to my astonishment and horror that there was some kind of standing feud between the piano and the historian centred upon the interest of historical research. And I thought it was desirable to bridge this. And that is how I started listening. Index Society and the production of photographic reproductions of indexes and lists to be distributed around the world, which has in fact turned out to be, well, successful. We've published some 250 titles now, so at the time I found that the people were interested, the historians at the Institute, Oh, well, of course nothing will ever come of that. They said, Well, of course you take the line. Nothing ever does come of it. We got it going then, and I used a London printer to do this work, which later proved useful in other enterprises. And when I was president of the Royal Society, there were two things it seemed to me were very necessary for the profession for which it seemed to me that society was the proper place to form a centre and an initiative. One was bibliography of British history, which was lacking. And that's been done since 75. And the other was this was just after the first of the oil crisis collapses of the printing and publishing trade. And therefore, could we not find some way of getting young people's work into print? And that started the serious studies in history, which is has now reached, I think, 56, 57 volumes. But it was simply a question of realizing that these problems existed, which they did, and then a willingness to pursue them and push through collecting money, contributing money and putting some beef behind it. The bibliography For ten years I didn't do by myself. I had a team of editors, but I did all the typing up in the end for the printer and the indexes and all those little games. After ten years, I decided I

***Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH***

had done enough to lay down the main lines and could hand it over to people who could use a computer. And that's been happening. But that is, these enterprises were all really called for by a specific stimulus. They were not planned. They were not foregone notions. The Royal Stock Society was at that. In my four years in turmoil, it's usually a very peaceful place in which nothing happens. Right. And I'm afraid that wasn't my way of handling it. I kept them at it. They had to think and do and so forth. They liked it in the end, but they were a bit astonished at first. And when the time came for me to find a successor, I warned them that in my opinion, four years of King's stock were enough. They now need a king log.

**S1**

**00:44:07:21**

You've had two experiences of editing a volume of the new Cambridge Modern History. And what how did it strike you having to do a job like one?

**S2**

**00:44:18:02**

I'm now bringing out a second edition of it.

**S1**

**00:44:19:15**

Yes, that's what I mean when I say two experiences. I was just about to say, what urged you to go back and relive what.

***Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH***

**S2**

**00:44:25:02**

Urged me was the press. They demanded it. See, it's not my idea. Yes, it is an interesting exercise. Of course, you see, when I started that in 53, as I say, Gene Clark came to have a word with me. And you never met. And Clark Evans was. No. The strange thing about him was that you were talking to him and all of a sudden you realized he wasn't there anymore. He'd evaporate. He was a very quiet, gray man. And, well, he evaporated. And I was stuck with this enterprise. I took several private decisions. One was that I would not ask any person of eminence whom I could not dragoon into delivering. I made one exception of that with Stephen Dorff, and he single handedly held me up for a whole year. The other was that I would on the go for younger people, really active still in the game and we got the whole thing out within five years from the first commission to the actual appearance. Volume three, which was commissioned at the same time, took seven years longer to come out. But since I asked, when I asked its editor at the time that my contributions were coming in, how he was doing, and he said the whole thing had rather slipped his mind, I wasn't altogether.

**S3**

**00:45:43:18**

Surprised.

**S2**

**00:45:46:11**

Um, so five years got it done. There were of course, weaknesses in it. I had to I couldn't find anybody to do a chapter on the Constitution of the Holy Roman Empire because the man who was doing it fell ill. So put in three useless pages of my own. I resolved also that if you get the sort of man who said you'll have that chapter in two weeks from now and it doesn't come be another two weeks, and so on and so on. So in the end, I would have to say, look, I must have it now by the last stage of stating I cannot after that accept it or receive it because it's too late for inclusion, be too late to commission somebody else. So there would be nothing on this subject. But there will be a footnote explaining why I wrote one such letter and held it for 24 hours and the chapter arrived.

***Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH***

**S1**

**00:46:34:01**

This sort of editor we all live in fear of.

**S3**

**00:46:36:03**

Yeah.

**S2**

**00:46:36:24**

But the second edition, which is in hand, as you know, was entirely the idea of the press. It's working out all right. No one has been well, no one was quite as quick as you were in reading their proofs. But meanwhile, Konigsberg and Hall and Fennel have sent theirs in as well.

**S1**

**00:46:57:10**

You've got a reputation for being fairly outspoken or forthright on your views of other historians, sometimes even very spiky views. But I was wondering about your historical heroes. You've written this most recent volume on Maitland. Who would you count as the sort of the the great historians that you would meet apart from? Maitland Yes.

**S2**

**00:47:20:12**

This is the unanswerable question. There isn't anybody else. Well, I have my I have. I have doubts about just about every historian, including Maitland, here and there. Of course, no one is perfect. Mommsen would be another. I mean, the old Theodor Mommsen would be another that I have a high regard for. But then, of course, he worked in an area in which I'm no expert, although I have worked a bit in it. I used to have a high respect for Nehemiah, but I lost that when I discovered that this man who. Spent his life working on the House of Commons one way or another, declared the General of the House of Commons was of no interest. Therefore, I approach the whole thing. Back and foremost. Um. I have respect for a number. I mean, as I said, Galbraith in towns where people are respected. Admired? No, just. Just. Oh, and John Baker.



***Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH***

**S1** **00:48:23:03**

So if we had a historians equivalent of Desert Island Discs and you had to pick out your eight historians to take you, would you rise to the number of eight or would you take Maitland as your book with that case?

**S2** **00:48:36:16**

Yeah, I.

**S1** **00:48:36:22**

Would take my.

**S2** **00:48:38:06**

Take one metal. Now, at that point, I think I would go back behind the professional era and I would be interested in the likes of Not McCauley, I think, but certainly Clarendon. Gibbon. Um. Humphrey Wanli one of the people like that. For some reason, not the French, but that's me. Prejudice. Yes.

**S1** **00:49:02:21**

Yes. And then your last professional posting is Regis Professor. It seemed to me you were implying something that I think in your your lecture that there was almost a certain providential element in in that there's a connection with other Regis professors.

**S2** **00:49:25:19**

No, no, no, no. Not the country. I say. It seemed to me very strange to write my name after that list of illustrious names. No, there was nothing providential about it. A lot of people afterwards said it would have been. A shame if I hadn't got it. They hadn't appointed me. But that's neither here nor there. It certainly wasn't. Incidentally, I do want to get that on the record. Nothing to do with my politics. My successor, appointed by the same government, is intensely anti-conservative. So indeed. Well, a lot of people have said the other thing.

***Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH***

**S1** **00:49:59:03**

But it's a post that has that has a reputation to uphold. And you must have been very conscious.

**S2** **00:50:06:19**

Well, of course, I was very proud of it.

**S1** **00:50:08:19**

You're a very sticky time for the historical profession. Yes.

**S2** **00:50:11:21**

Well, I suppose so, Yes. I don't I can't remember. They were in the historic large numbers, weren't convinced the times were sticky. But no, I was proud of it, of course. And in a way, I wouldn't say I'd been angling for it ever since I came here, but it had been a possibility on the horizon, which it was nice to think about. And it did have that. As far as personal history went, the only peculiar attraction that it was, after all, founded by a Hanoverian King who came. One of my ancestors found a school at Waltham Battle next door to Hanover.

**S1** **00:50:46:02**

Well, that was the providential. That was the.

**S3** **00:50:48:00**

Secret. Yes, that's right. Ways of Providence.

**S1** **00:50:51:20**

But I detect in your inaugural lecture a sort of sense that there was a testing time ahead for for history, particularly in British history, and that it seemed to me you were trying to make an intervention there was conscious.

**Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH**  
**S2 00:51:05:19**

I was yes, certainly Yes. I was trying to intervene in the course of of serious history as distinct from. Really fashionable history. Yes, because in my opinion, the arguments for this or that subject to be taught have too little relationship nowadays with what the teaching and learning history is actually about. And the main thing that really worries me in this present climate is the concentration of the last 100, 150 years, the concentration on an era in the history of the world when even the so-called third World in many ways has a strong European tinge. So everything you look at in your history course is very much of a muchness. There's insufficient differentiation across time and space. And the one good virtue, one of the good virtues, one of the best virtues in the in history as a teaching subject is to take the student away from himself and his time and his environment and his concerns, and to remind him that there is a much greater and longer world into which he may by all means fit himself, but which he is not the sole manifestation of. And you can't do that for the last 200 years of history, as every American historian proves. That is my worry there. Therefore, continuous history in at least one area reaching back a thousand years I think is essential.

**S1 00:52:26:24**

Now, the one that's the most domestic question I've saved up for last, perhaps because it might seem a little bit too internal, but this your association with Clare College, because you've been at Clare almost so long that again, Elton and Clare tend to be identified?

**S2 00:52:44:06**

Oh, no, no, no, no, I wouldn't think so. I would say no. But she is the senior tutor on that one.

**S1 00:52:50:12**

You're very much committed to the college as a place. I know the side of you. It seems to me that that isn't seen from the side view that's seen through publishing and other things.

***Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH***

**S2**

**00:53:01:20**

Well, it has to be said, I think it is true that whenever I get myself involved in any given scene, I take it seriously. I find it very difficult to stand aside from it, at least for a long time. Now that I'm retired, things are attitudes and reactions are changing. But I, for instance, I never found it possible to sit on the history faculty board year in, year out and just go to sleep. And similarly in Clare, now what happened to me, of course there was that I was I told you I was taken on to teach for Clare as soon as I arrived. And then I got the fellowship as soon as my first book. Appeared. So I was then a fellow of the college. Now it's a nice college, the peaceful, college friendly college for his things that I could prove it with. And so, yes, I've been in many ways committed to it. But what else it will do? Look for another fellowship. And people have quarreled with colleagues before. But I don't quarrel with environment scenes that I'm in the middle of. I didn't quarrel with the army. I rather like the army. I prefer to survive it as I did, but I was never really infuriated by it. So many people seem to have been. I never met any adverse sergeants. I became one myself in the end.

**S1**

**00:54:16:00**

Except, of course, it strikes me that the relationship declared has been one of very, very deep affection. Perhaps one might not say about the army.

**S2**

**00:54:25:05**

In many ways, retrospectively, I'm quite affectionate towards the army. But yes, it's not the same. I suppose so, Yes, yes, yes. Well, if you're a member of an institution of that kind, you either are a member which involves a degree of affection or you're not. And as I say, if I'm a member of anything, I am a member. That's all the history.

**S1**

**00:54:49:03**

And what.

***Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH***

**S2**

**00:54:49:24**

You are. Chisholm comes in the same category.

**S1**

**00:54:51:23**

Oh, tell us about patriotism. I mean.

**S2**

**00:54:53:17**

I'm a patriotic Englishman now, right? Yes. And I feel strongly about that.

**S1**

**00:54:59:04**

In spite of much discussion about the nature of patriotism and different sides of it.

**S2**

**00:55:04:09**

Yes, yes, yes, certainly. No, I'm very simple minded on that one. I much resent the move into Europe. I got out of Europe. Why am I being pushed back into it?

**S1**

**00:55:12:02**

What would you say constitutes patriotism in the strongest and best sense that you'd appreciate it.

**S2**

**00:55:18:15**

Preferring all things.

**S3**

**00:55:19:12**

English within.

**S1**

**00:55:20:10**

All things English.

**S2**

**00:55:23:19**

Chauvinism, in fact. Yeah.

***Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH***

**S1** **00:55:25:18**

Well, can there be a patriotism? Without chauvinism? There's not much.

**S3** **00:55:29:09**

It is a.

**S1** **00:55:29:17**

Touching the question. Yes. Yes. What plans do you have ahead, Geoffrey? Are you going to go back to dip into archival material which is so much dominant?

**S2** **00:55:43:18**

I thought of that, but my first enterprise looking into the papers of William Cecil, Lord Burley turned out today. He bores me. It may be that the time has gone over for this. I've done too much of it in my day. I'm almost certainly going to accept an invitation to write a book on the English and a collection of peoples of Europe published by Blackwell's. I have been given a free hand. It doesn't have to be any relation to anybody else's ideas about the English. And since that series, the Peoples of Europe includes a book on the Mongols, the freedom must be considerably.

**S1** **00:56:23:11**

What will constitute the English for you?

**S2** **00:56:26:05**

Too early to ask.

**S1** **00:56:27:04**

Too early to ask.

**S2** **00:56:28:18**

My immediate impression is that there are at least three moments in time during which they gelled, and that is probably the structure Anglo-Saxon, the age of Chaucer and necessarily, needless to say, the age of Thomas Cromwell.

***Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH***

**S1** **00:56:45:03**

Not the age of the Tudors, as you would now retitle your book, would you? England under The Tudors.

**S3** **00:56:51:20**

England. Thomas Cromwell. No, no, no, no.

**S2** **00:56:54:24**

No. It covers time that he was not there.

**S1** **00:56:57:12**

Do you feel there's been a total consistency of approach over all your career? You've not changed direction or change basic opinion on things. You felt that this is.

***Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH***  
**S2** **00:57:09:08**

This is a thing that is very difficult, it seems to me, to judge from inside it as I'm bound to judge it. I think myself that it both direction and emphases have changed at intervals or changed back again, so forth. As I said at the beginning, my guiding star always has been ask no questions until you've seen what the evidence says you should ask. And that, of course, gives you new directions and changes of direction at all points, which are a bit beyond your own control. But what remains, I think the same in a general thought behind it all, which I've also tried to do in teaching, is this concentration on the. Primacy of the past. Our task as historians is not to satisfy ourselves or our age, but to do justice to the past. If we can then use a proper past to help ourselves, fine. But that's the second stage. So much that goes on now, especially in the American discussions on this seems to me to say that what matters is the historian. Or critic or whoever it might be. And I think that is very false and very bad. I remember the phrase that Thomas Nippert used at the International Congress of Historians in San Francisco in 75. He said, it is our duty as historians to restore to the past that freedom of choice, which once it had. And I think that's very well said. And I entirely believe that that is to say, these people we are talking about didn't know what was going to happen next. Didn't know that you or Karl Marx or whoever it might be had already laid down their future or the present day history and had already decided what mattered in them. And for for him, they were human agents, animated by reason and feeling and all the rest of it. And they are what we are after. It is our duty to them that I wish to fulfill. And the only way to get at them is through the historical records of what is left behind. Properly handled, properly understood. So that to that extent, there is a sameness. Yes, no question of it. But because it's such a mixed up affair at the history of mankind, the particular manifestations to me and through me, I suppose to my readers, have of course changed.



***Clip: ELTON GEOFFREY\_GEOFFREY ELTON WITH BOB SCH***  
**S1** **00:59:29:08**

So we really come back to the practice of history as you've always conceived it. Well, that seems to me to be a very good point on which to end. And thank you very much. Thank you.