

***Clip: MITCHISON ROSALIND\_ROSALIND MITCHISON W C***

**Name: MITCHISON ROSALIND\_ROSALIND MITCHISON W  
CHRISTOPHER SMOUT ST ANDREW\_DUB USE FOR  
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**S1**

**10:00:06:08**

It's a great pleasure to introduce Professor Roy Murchison of the University of Edinburgh. Roy has been known for many years as a Scottish historian, but he hasn't worked only on Scottish history. She's also worked on more general 19th and 20th century social history. She's a social historian, but interests been very wide in terms of also including political history. And many people in Scotland will probably first come across her name because of her admirable one volume history of Scotland. But she's also a specialist in demographic history. And in within that general field, she's been working recently on the history of illegitimacy and on the history of the poor law. Roy, tell us where it all started.

**S2**

**10:01:07:16**

I had the extraordinary good fortune to be brought up in an academic family. Both my parents and both my grandfathers were academic historians.

**S1**

**10:01:18:08**

You're half Canadian.

**S2**

**10:01:19:19**

I'm half Canadian. My grandfather wrote the Scottish the Canadian textbooks of history. And he had this unusual surname. He was a professor wrong. And when he retired, he was succeeded by a professor. Kalis Toronto enjoyed that enormously. And so I was brought up in history, but I, I made a very definite attempt to escape. I went to university as a maths student.

**S1**

**10:01:46:20**

Where did you go to university?

***Clip: MITCHISON ROSALIND\_ROSALIND MITCHISON W CI***

**S2**

**10:01:47:24**

Oxford. After a lot of trying. Yes. I had a I've got an enormous hole in my education because I missed two years school in my teens and as a result it was very difficult to get anywhere in university terms. And maths was about the one thing I could do. Yes. And I went to Oxford as a math student and I came out with a degree in history.

**S1**

**10:02:09:00**

Was that what gave you an interest in numbers?

**S2**

**10:02:13:05**

I've always been interested in numbers because I'm not afraid of them. No, but I gave up mathematics in the same way as almost everybody gives it up. I saw the red light. I am not going to understand this very soon. And so I pulled out.

**S1**

**10:02:26:05**

And what were the steps which turned you into an academic historian?

**S2**

**10:02:31:11**

Fluke. Absolute good luck. Tell us about it. Well, I had such a lot of ill health at the end of my time in Oxford. My doctor wouldn't allow me to go into any useful job like the civil service, and I was kept hanging around doing nominal research on social reconstruction survey and therefore I was available when a job became vacant at Manchester. And Manchester would have been a terribly good place to learn to go to in normal circumstances, because really, Manchester and Sheffield were what brought the idea of research to Oxford. You know, Oxford didn't go in for research in the early days, didn't it? No, no, no. But Manchester in the war was rather hard, hard work. And I was a medievalist. I covered history, European history from 250 to 1495. And it was the first of my long experience of being a hack historian of obliged to lecture on anything that turned up. Right.

***Clip: MITCHISON ROSALIND\_ROSALIND MITCHISON W CI***

**S1**

**10:03:22:17**

A good experience.

**S2**

**10:03:24:19**

Yes. Fearfully useful because the only there are 1 or 2 patches of European history which I've never had to teach, and I always feel uncertain when people start talking about them. Was the rise of Prussia just then or a little bit later, that kind of thing. But basically I know quite a lot of European history from over quite a span and I've remembered it.

**S1**

**10:03:43:16**

And that's been useful.

**S2**

**10:03:45:10**

Yes, because it turns up somehow all the time. It enriches you. It makes you also think that explanations of one period are not invalid for another. If you want to understand something, it's worth thinking about something. A completely separate society in a completely separate world may well have been doing the same thing.

**S1**

**10:04:05:22**

And who was at Manchester at that time that sort of counted in your.

**S2**

**10:04:11:17**

Well, the conspicuous person who was not there most of the time was Louis Niemeyer, because he was busy running the Jewish agency. But he did come back and of course, I'd known name me from childhood because it was my grandfather who took him to Oxford and namely I therefore adopted the family. I think that's a Jewish thing to think in terms of families rather than individuals would.

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**S1**

**10:04:35:09**

Would name you be the prime name among historians who have influenced you.

**S2**

**10:04:41:13**

He made one care like mad about accuracy. I don't care enough. But I know that when I'm slipping to. Yes, yes. The other person who influenced me in living historians was poet. I did his special subject at Oxford. I was a medieval poet. He used to take a load of facts that you knew as well as he did and then give a little jiggle and suddenly the whole thing came alive and made you really. Is that there was life in everything. But the academic historian who influenced me, like most historians I suspect, was, of course, Maitland by his printed works. Yes. I mean, Maitland is the great historian because he makes you see that this Dryer's dust document that you're looking at can be made alive. And in fact, Maitland made me do the only initial piece of research I did at Oxford. I never published it, which was to prow through the the provincial statutes of the church in England and pick up themes that showed that the same thing had been going on for about a couple of centuries of quarrels and ecclesiastical and lay jurisdiction. It was really rather fun. And I mean, I said I was laid up in bed with acute rheumatism, and I sat there thumbing my way through Littlewoods provincial statutes. It was great.

**S1**

**10:05:59:07**

This is all very much political history and ecclesiastical history. At what point did you become a social historian?

***Clip: MITCHISON ROSALIND\_ROSALIND MITCHISON W CI***

**S2**

**10:06:08:15**

I became, first of all, interested in the borderline between politics and economics, and that borderline took me into looking at price movements where I thought that being not afraid of numbers, this was quite a sensible thing to do. And then from looking at price movement, I began to think about much more about society. So I took a track from politics to economic history, economic history to social history. But also, you see, I had to do a three year course at Oxford in two years, and I skipped the 18th century completely. And it was only when I went back to Oxford to teach the 18th century.

**S1**

**10:06:44:04**

This is now your special century.

**S2**

**10:06:45:15**

Yes, exactly. I discovered it and I dropped, being a medievalist rapidly because the 18th century, in some mysterious way, appealed to me. Why I became a Scottish historian was that when we moved to Edinburgh, my husband said to me, It's a ten year sentence. So I said, Fine, because I'd never enjoyed Cambridge. Cambridge and Oxford both treat the graduates of other universities abominably. Yes, and I love Cambridge now, but that's another matter. So I obtained the the opportunity to work on to John Sinclair, which had the great advantage of combining economic history with political history. Yes. And I did that when we were here. There was a slight crisis over the birth of my fourth child. It happened in the middle of Chapter 11, and I had a lot of time trying to smooth out. Nobody would see there was a gap. And that was my first major publication was The Life of Sinclair.

**S1**

**10:07:40:19**

And that was in.

**S2**

**10:07:42:01**

And.

***Clip: MITCHISON ROSALIND\_ROSALIND MITCHISON W CI***

**S1**

**10:07:42:17**

In the 60s, it's.

**S2**

**10:07:44:01**

62.

**S1**

**10:07:44:21**

So that was.

**S2**

**10:07:45:10**

About stakes in it, which I wouldn't have happened if I'd ever had any supervision. I'm aware of that, but I was grubbing on my own. The point is that if you want to have a family and do research, it's only sensible to use the archives of year at hand. Yes, quite. And that's the argument.

**S1**

**10:08:03:20**

And what was your relationship to universities at this point? I mean, Murdo was professor of zoology, but did you get teaching in Edinburgh University?

**S2**

**10:08:16:22**

I had again, the great luck after we came here. Job became vacant in the history department at short notice at Christmas and there was nobody else available. It's happened to me three times. Jobs have been there and I have been there and nobody else has been an obvious choice. So I was teaching in the history department here.

**S1**

**10:08:33:08**

Now that was the history department of Dennis Hay and.

**Clip: MITCHISON ROSALIND ROSALIND MITCHISON W CI**

**S2 10:08:36:01**

Richard Powell and Richard Pears, very distinguished historian. Yes. Yes. And I had I was there for three years, but I think they got a bit discouraged by me having a child in the middle of the final exams session in 1955. I then I marked all my exam papers in maternity hospital. And one of the things you can't do in maternity hospital is marked more than 15 exam papers a day.

**S1 10:09:01:11**

I bet. Were you conscious of prejudice against you as a.

**S2 10:09:06:06**

Woman and not as a woman? As a married woman? Yes.

**S1 10:09:08:24**

As a married woman. Yes. Yes. They felt you really ought to be doing history rather than having babies.

**S2 10:09:14:08**

Oh, you ought to be having babies and not doing history. It's a question of the generation. You see my mother's generation that established the right of women to be to do all sorts of jobs, but not to link it up with marriage. Yes.

**S1 10:09:27:06**

Right. And then what happened?

**S2 10:09:31:01**

Then I had ten years in which I didn't have a regular job. I had patches of jobs in Glasgow with thanks to Archie Duncan, who arranged them. And I got on with research of my own. And then another gap turned up at a moment's notice in the department you were in.

**S1 10:09:46:20**

That's right. That's where we really met. Yes, that's where we met. Yes. Yes.

***Clip: MITCHISON ROSALIND\_ROSALIND MITCHISON W CI***

**S2** **10:09:50:08**

And that's and that I just published a paper on the movement of grain prices. I counted as an economic historian. Yes, quite. And that's what the department was then.

**S1** **10:09:59:15**

Yes. So that was the point at which you became Was. At the point at which you became an economic historian in inverted commas rather than a political historian?

**S2** **10:10:11:01**

Well, I. I was established as one. Yes.

**S1** **10:10:14:12**

But then. Then you wrote Your History of Scotland.

**S2** **10:10:16:23**

Well, I was already writing it. Right. The publisher had asked for it. I brought that out in 1970. And that obliged to do quite a lot again of political history, but also to think about all sorts of things I hadn't thought about before. I learnt the great thing there is don't start a book in chapter one. Chapter one always involves all sorts of difficulties which solve themselves if you start somewhere else, right?

**S1** **10:10:42:19**

Yes. In this period of your career, your history was still to a very considerable degree, political. Yes. But you had already embarked on numbers with your with your price history. Have you enjoyed this interplay between political history and economic and social history?



***Clip: MITCHISON ROSALIND ROSALIND MITCHISON W CI***

**S2**

**10:11:11:06**

Yes. You see, history to me is the seamless web. There's no particular reason to carve it up. But if it is going to be carved up, I think almost the most important area is social history, because this is the life that it stimulates all the other activities.

**S1**

**10:11:25:05**

Have you found a pressure on you within your academic career to specialize at the expense of this sort of holistic view?

**S2**

**10:11:38:07**

No, I don't think so. You see, I've been very lucky being forced to move my area of history time and time again. I've never collected a real working library at home. I work in public libraries. I've never had any reason to concentrate on one patch and ignore the rest. And I have the one intellectual feature I have that's worth having. It's a very good memory. Yes. Yes. I don't think any other way. I'm distinguished, but I do remember a vast amount of other things that I've worked on at different times and they come in sooner or later.

**S1**

**10:12:08:08**

You're distinguished from many things apart from a good memory, and one of those is you enjoy writing. You actually enjoy writing. You know, your style is the style of somebody who enjoys it. Where did that come from?

**S2**

**10:12:21:06**

I think from mathematics really well. You really have to be careful about words in mathematics, and you spend a lot of time why I gave up mathematics was spending a lot of time trying to decide what were the necessary and sufficient conditions for certain things to happen. Necessary and sufficient are terribly good words with which to write. If you have those in your mind, and then you have also to listen for the rhythms. But I do enjoy writing and if I have to write and I write badly, I still force myself to and throw it in the wastepaper basket next day because it'll be all right then.

***Clip: MITCHISON ROSALIND ROSALIND MITCHISON W CI***

**S1** **10:12:52:00**

Right now, in the department in Edinburgh, was there anyone in particular who influenced you? I mean, how did you become more of a demographic historian? How did.

**S2** **10:13:05:18**

You. That was Michael.

**S1** **10:13:06:14**

Michael? Michael Flynn Yes.

**S2** **10:13:08:13**

Because he put up this project and it was on the.

**S1** **10:13:12:18**

Population History.

**S2** **10:13:13:13**

Of Scotland and it was a superb project. And you and I enjoyed it enormously.

**S1** **10:13:16:16**

We did, yes.

**S2** **10:13:17:09**

And that was numbered. But I've never done anything very sophisticated with numbers. My feeling is that percentages and graphs and things like that and moving averages are really all you need for the kind of material you're going to have in Scotland. Other places can have very sophisticated records and do very sophisticated arithmetic, But but our stuff isn't isn't worthy of that. I did take a computer course, a short one for a time, came to the conclusion that Scottish 18th century material doesn't merit computer handling.

***Clip: MITCHISON ROSALIND ROSALIND MITCHISON W CI***

**S1**

**10:13:49:19**

Are you sympathetic to the sort of super quantification that one sees with new economic history?

**S2**

**10:13:59:23**

Up to a point it can overdo it and the new economic history, econometric history, which involves pretending that conditions had happened and doing from that. I'm extremely doubtful about.

**S1**

**10:14:13:10**

You don't believe in counterfactual?

**S2**

**10:14:15:00**

No, because you only do some counterfactuals. I mean, look at the famous one, this one about the development of the West in America, the railways, their share. It sounds fine, but of course, if they hadn't been railways, there wouldn't be a United States of America. They'd have lost the Civil War. And you have to put the political side in as well as the economic counterfactuals. That's why I'm suspicious of it. You've got to have every conceivable aspect of history considered.

**S1**

**10:14:41:15**

How have you enjoyed A the teaching and be the sort of changing scene of teaching?

**Clip: MITCHISON ROSALIND ROSALIND MITCHISON W CI**  
**S2 10:14:54:10**

It's always been interesting. I'm not I don't regard teaching as the most interesting side of university work. I do regard research as more interesting, and this I differ from my mother and my Grandfathers. But the interesting thing is that you are required by being part of a department to take on electrical items that you wouldn't haven't thought of before. You are forced to keep up with a wide range of the subject. And I do note that now that I've retired, my range is naturally narrowing because I don't have to keep up with aspects that I used to have to. Teaching does force you to widen your grip all the time. And also every now and then some student asked the question which reveals that you ought to have thought of things and you haven't. You can be completely devastated by a very sensible question that shows the narrowness of your own thinking and that if you're not teaching, doesn't happen.

**S1 10:15:47:23**

Have you found that economic and social history has become narrower over time, or on the contrary, do you think it's widened out?

**S2 10:15:59:19**

I think it's become wider, but it is handicapped by the fact that the people who do come as students to economic social history don't know any political history and are also totally ignorant of religious history. Yes, it's extremely difficult trying to make students understand the importance of religion. Yes, it's not that the subject doesn't recognise it's important. It's the fact that these people have a very secular background and don't. That is a major change in society. It's not just simply a change within universities. I think the all this compartmentalizing of your life is a mistake, except that you when you're actually doing research, you have to be thinking about 1 or 2 things in particular. And I think they shouldn't be the Department of Scottish history either. They should be part of the General History School or a sub department of the history school. But there is a unit beyond which you don't imbibe coffee together. In terms of numbers. Yes.

***Clip: MITCHISON ROSALIND ROSALIND MITCHISON W CI***

**S1** **10:17:03:00**

And this sort of social interaction.

**S2** **10:17:05:21**

Is terribly valuable.

**S1** **10:17:06:22**

Is terribly valuable in the intellectual sense. Yes. For everybody. Yes. What else have you got from Edinburgh University status.

**S2** **10:17:18:08**

Which I never had before. Right. And I mean a totally undeserved professorship. This is terrific. You know, and and very surprising. But it does mean that I can do things without people thinking I'm throwing my weight around and suchlike, which is a great help. I've also had the great fortune being married to a scientist that Edinburgh University at large is much better known to me than many other to many other people, because I do know quite a bit of people in the science world. Yes.

**S1** **10:17:49:21**

And have you found that a valuable input into your history, knowing scientists?

**S2** **10:17:58:24**

Yes, because because they have different priorities and different ways of working and that to help and also because it enabled me, for instance, to get elected to the Economic Policy Committee, which would never have happened if I was merely a person in the social sciences. And that enabled me to see how the university was working, which was fascinating. You know, all organisations in their inner workings are worth studying even if you don't do anything with the information.

**S1** **10:18:29:04**

Yes, right.

***Clip: MITCHISON ROSALIND\_ ROSALIND MITCHISON W CI***

**S2**

**10:18:30:24**

But it also obliged me to become convener of the library committee, which was not quite such a happy event.

**S1**

**10:18:39:23**

Can you tell us a little bit more about the Scottish poor law myth that you were replacing?

**S2**

**10:18:47:21**

The myth is expressed very fully in the Royal Commission of 1844 that the Scottish Poor Law had never supported the able bodied right. It was the centuries, said the Royal Commission. It had refused to do so. I went and looked at the parishes and what they actually did and clearly the question of whether a person was able bodied or not very rarely came up. I mean, I found a man labelled Abel, and then it said once a hand. So clearly Abel meant that you could be one armed, but in practice they gave it according to need. And the interesting thing you see is that the the Scottish legal ruling of the sweet tooth, I hope that's correctly pronounced, means that if you can show that a statute hasn't been operated, it ceases to have any validity. This meant that lawyers could pounce upon myths about the Scottish people or wave them around and get their client led off being waited. If you said that the Scottish Poor Law couldn't be expected to support these people who were in serious need, then of course the expenditure was kept down and helped your people. So the lawyers had a vested interest in pretending that the law was different. The Ecclesiastics seemed to have done it by the takeover of Malthusian beliefs. By the church in the form of charmers, and that you became holier than thou if you felt that everybody had to be totally independent or living occasionally on just a little bit of charity, that state aided relief was bad for people, whereas Charitable Relief was good for them. Right. And this, as the church has gotten, has always been busy showing how much holier it is than any other church. This accounts for them. So I gave Neither sets of professions were to be believed in instant. It was great fun as realizing this.

***Clip: MITCHISON ROSALIND ROSALIND MITCHISON W CI***

**S1**

**10:20:38:04**

This concentration on Scottish history, which is really marked not quite all your publications because you have certainly worked and published on on what you might call general British social history in terms of population and so on. But this, this concentration on Scottish history, is that a good thing?

**S2**

**10:21:01:20**

Yes, because you've got here a country which is not very big in terms of its population, but is extraordinarily varied socially in various ways. And you can look at the whole of it, which you couldn't do. English history has got too many historians chasing too many, too many small stories. Scottish history has too few historians and big questions not yet tackled. I couldn't possibly hope to tackle a large area of the English poor law, but I can tackle the Scottish one. Yes, and this is such fun. The field that you are really breaking very new ground. It's very odd because when you come actually to gardening, breaking new ground is absolute hell. But when you're a historian, it's great fun.

**S1**

**10:21:46:13**

Half English, half Canadian. Have you found that to be an advantage or disadvantage working as a Scottish historian in Scotland?

**S2**

**10:21:55:04**

Well, it would be a great advantage if I was clever and could occasionally adopt a Scottish accent, which I can't do. But being Canadian is more respectable than being totally English. I would put. But Chris, not within one year.

**S1**

**10:22:09:14**

Was it your father who was Canadian?

**S2**

**10:22:11:00**

My father.

***Clip: MITCHISON ROSALIND ROSALIND MITCHISON W CI***

**S1**

**10:22:11:11**

Your father was.

**S2**

**10:22:11:24**

Canadian. He brain drained to this country. Yeah. And got a job in Oxford and married my mother, who was a very bright academic in her own right. Yes.

**S1**

**10:22:25:07**

And in what area was your mother in action?

**S2**

**10:22:28:13**

She was an early medievalist. Her passionate area was the Anglo-Saxon missions to Germany of the seventh and eighth century. Gosh. And he died young, leaving her a widow with six children so that she did practically no research after that and spent a lot of time teaching. And that's why when I changed the history at Oxford, I changed medieval history. It was what I heard going on. My grandfather also was a medieval. Yes.

**S1**

**10:22:56:18**

How about theory of different thought, social theory, economic theory, and maybe feminist theory? How about feminism and women's history?



***Clip: MITCHISON ROSALIND\_ROSALIND MITCHISON W CI***  
**S2** **10:23:08:22**

I'm very bad about theory. Altogether, I regarded as my real weakness. I see. I sort of shudder whenever it crops up. I did for a time get terribly excited reading Marx and thinking how well it applied to the 19th century, but I feel it doesn't apply to other centuries. I don't actually get very devoted to it. Feminist theory frightens me out of my wits. I'm sure that at some point I'm going to say something, make some awful heretical remark because one's only come to appreciate the changes in feminist attitudes and also to pick up how very often you yourself have deviated from what feminist theory says you should have done. So I'm awkward about it. In social theory, you can gather ideas from, for instance, social anthropology and sociology and little bits of them are useful. I don't even go. As far as Ashton's view that economic theory is the net by which you catch your facts. I don't think because economic theory is a lot less united than it used to be. When Ashton wrote that there was a coherent body of theory. Nowadays there are whole collection of schools crumbling like mad, and and none of them actually doing any good to the economy, as far as I can see. Right. So I but I am frightened of theory. It's my weak area.

**S1** **10:24:27:18**  
Tell us what you find so offputting about feminist history and feminist theory.

***Clip: MITCHISON ROSALIND ROSALIND MITCHISON W CI***

**S2**

**10:24:35:21**

It's too doctrinal and somebody reared in the wrong generation. He's going to put their foot wrong. That's me. Also, when you write, you're using phrases from all sorts of earlier people, and some of those are not acceptable to feminist history. There's just and in some of it, there's an aggressive anti man attitude. But at the same time, there's been extraordinarily valuable women's history done, particularly here in Scotland. I mean, that book of Sian. Hold on. The typesetter has instance a wonderful women's history study and an after all, they're slightly more than half the human race are women. So it is really quite important to establish their their point of view. The other women's history also gives a rather disreputable sidelight on labor history because on the whole, labor historians and people in the labor movement have been extremely hostile to the independence of their womenfolk.

**S1**

**10:25:33:10**

Have you felt that within Scotland people have been unsympathetic to women's history?

**S2**

**10:25:43:11**

Well, the leading unsympathetic one was the man who published the Statistical Abstract for Scotland, who had the employment thing and the two columns total and Men. And when I wrote and asked him who were the difference, he said, with great surprise, having published these things for 15 years, its gross bias had only now been revealed to him. That was great fun. But I mean, that seems to be a standard attitude. Employment matters if it's male employment, employment doesn't matter if it's female employment. And I think Scotland is probably slightly more backward than England on these points. I think it's harder for women to get good jobs in Scotland. And that's why I've been so lucky in having good jobs.

***Clip: MITCHISON ROSALIND ROSALIND MITCHISON W CI***

**S1**

**10:26:27:23**

You you you're suspicious of feminist theory. Yes. You're in favour of women's history? Yes. Do you think that you've had to sort of fight your corner as a woman academic in Scotland? Do you feel that you've had in writing your history the need to tell the story of the other half of the human race in a way that has been I've.

**S2**

**10:26:52:03**

Not usually enough opportunities to it, only the poor, really, and the illegitimacy study that bring you up against women. As for fighting my way, there were people who quite clearly discriminated in jobs, but I never actually had the opportunity to get back with them in what I consider an academically respectable fashion. And that was a regret to me, if you know what I mean. If I could have yielded not the sort of stab in the back, but the the proper attack, I would have done so. But people have always lived in families and how the women were treated in families and what they saw as their role seems to me an enormous, important area.

**S1**

**10:27:35:07**

You have written in in the Richard Saville collection on women's employment in 20th century Scotland that developed some of these themes you've just been talking about.

**Clip: MITCHISON ROSALIND ROSALIND MITCHISON W CI**  
**S2 10:27:50:11**

But there's been better work than that done by people since then. I mean, various studies based on interviewing women, and those have been really very valuable. And I admire other people who have done them. But it's all right because I sympathise very much with Scotland's aspirations for more self government. What really converted me was some time ago when a Labour government said that there wasn't any parliamentary time with which to reform the Scottish divorce law in the same way as the English divorce law had been reformed. And I felt, well, shucks to that. If we can't have a divorce law brought up to date, then we need our own parliament. And so I don't mind a certain amount of Scottish limelight in this way because I'm I'm not a Scottish nationalist, but I do accept the Scottish national identity needs better representation.

**S1 10:28:43:03**  
Do you find it a hot spot to approve of the act of union?

**S2 10:28:49:01**  
No, I don't think the thing that brings a hot spot to if I historic Scotland is not being totally sympathetic to crofters over the things that have happened in the Highlands. I feel myself that those things had happened in the Highlands were rough on the on the crofters things that happened in the towns were far worse on the on the poor. Yes. And that therefore, sympathy has to be distributed. And a lot of people in the Highlands think that sympathy should not be distributed.

**S1 10:29:16:14**  
Yeah. In terms of the sorts of sources you do use. How do you cope with the weaknesses and the biases and the twist in, for example, the Kirk session records, which is the backbone of your law studies?

***Clip: MITCHISON ROSALIND ROSALIND MITCHISON W CI***

**S2**

**10:29:35:03**

Well, Kirk, session records will record certain things. I mean, you can't actually bias accounts very much if the money was paid out and you've got to keep a check of it. That's okay. You know, this money went what actually happened to it afterwards is another matter. And you have to see everything through Calvinist theology and Calvinist language. And you have to reckon much more serious is the fact that nobody bothers to record in a parish record what everybody knows, and that's what you miss, that you have to get. Set it and all the aspects that the church would not have approved of. That is presumably going on in the same parish at the same time. Right. Are very difficult to pick up. I think you have to reckon it's the silences that are significant.

**S1**

**10:30:19:01**

But is that history from below or history from above or history from somewhere else?

**S2**

**10:30:25:20**

Its history collected from the local elite? Yes, but about the local elite? Yes. And so in a sense, it's history from above, but at a fairly low level.

**S3**

**10:30:37:01**

Mm hmm.

**S2**

**10:30:38:06**

But then everything always is history from above, because only the above in the 18th century can write.

**S3**

**10:30:44:16**

Yes.

**S1**

**10:30:48:24**

How about other things which throw light on your pole or stuff apart from the Kirk Session County?

***Clip: MITCHISON ROSALIND ROSALIND MITCHISON W CI***

**S2**

**10:31:00:04**

Yes. The very fragmentary evidence we have of county activities, Justices of the peace and things. But there there are terrible holes in that record. You usually have 2 or 3 shires at any one moment giving you what they are interested in bothering to record. And if they are only interested in recording road repairs, that's all you'll get. So you pick things up and newspapers in the second half of the 18th century give you a certain amount, but it's very patchy. You are engaged in constructing from miscellaneous sources. You've got a certain number of lawsuits. But then again, those are being handled in the elite world very much and only some of them are available. I think it has to recognize the record is severely fragmented.

**S1**

**10:31:46:09**

How do you actually set about the task of putting together a study like that? Well, I mean, where do you begin?

**S2**

**10:31:54:24**

It's birdwatching. You know.

**S3**

**10:31:56:18**

You.

**S2**

**10:31:57:15**

Put your nose into things and snuffle around saying there might be a story here and suddenly you discover there is a story here, but you it's what the bird watcher happens to see. And he may not be there at the right moment seeing the right things. It it has the weakness of private birdwatching instead of organized birdwatching. And but I think it is a feeling that, you know, you're sniffing. There must be a story somewhere. And you go on till you begin to find something. And the most exciting moment is when you having established something, you hear somebody referring to it as a well known fact. Gosh, you know, your head swells at once.

***Clip: MITCHISON ROSALIND\_ROSALIND MITCHISON W CI***

**S3**

**10:32:38:24**

Yes. Yes.

**S1**

**10:32:40:10**

And lastly, is there anything you would like to have studied or worked on or done research in or even places you would like to have been at which you haven't been able to get around to do?

**S2**

**10:32:56:03**

Well, when I went to Manchester for an interview for the job I got there, I was asked what my research project was and I said that having done only two years history, I wasn't yet ready for research. But I had it had been suggested to me that the Knights of Malta would provide a very suitable subject. And I looked at it with great enthusiasm because it would have been going abroad and using medieval Latin. I'm quite a good Latin. It was then, yes, and really having a very good time. I gave that up when I married. It was quite clear that one couldn't conduct a married life and look after children and be working in Malta. Yeah, and I suspect that marriage inevitably means that women historians are likely to be slightly more home based than they would choose on their own. But I never did anything about it afterwards. And I settled down in Cambridge to work in the Bishops of Elis record office. In what time I could get. Yes.

**S1**

**10:33:54:12**

That was immediately after your marriage?

**Clip: MITCHISON ROSALIND ROSALIND MITCHISON W CI**  
**S2 10:33:55:21**

Yes. Until the children came along. And then, as I say, I got this project of working on to John Sinclair when we came to Scotland. So there's all sorts of types of history I have never written. I did write one piece of British history. In other words, I wrote a study of the influences on an uncle of mine as he grew up, a slightly debunking my family's own family history. Yeah, and that was great fun to do. Yes. And that involved quite a bit of research on English universities at the turn of the century. But no, I mean, the answer is the enormous range of history that I haven't explored and I haven't explored literary history properly. I mean, I don't read all the people I ought to read. I don't read the great historians because their style is usually such that I can't think my own thoughts when it's going on. As far as I'm concerned, Macaulay and Gibbon are too dominant for me to read them. And Carlisle? I think his style is absolutely unspeakable. So there's a limit to the number of people I can read and a limit to the number of subjects that I can be useful on.

**S1 10:35:02:10**  
Yes. Yes.

**S4 10:35:04:01**  
I.

**S2 10:35:05:02**  
Good luck. Still won't override basic fact that there's only so much time and so much energy.

**S1 10:35:12:11**  
That's for sure. Yeah, but you've done an awful lot. And you've still got the book on the poor law.

**S2 10:35:21:13**  
I've got three and a half finished. Three and a half chapters done. Chapter one isn't touched yet.



***Clip: MITCHISON ROSALIND\_ROSALIND MITCHISON W CI***

**S3** **10:35:26:02**

No, it's waiting.

**S2** **10:35:26:21**

Till the end. Well, but I think it.

**S1** **10:35:29:04**

Was earlier on.

**S2** **10:35:30:07**

Nobody wants to publish anything just now anyhow. And give me another two years and I shall finish it.

**S1** **10:35:35:07**

And then what will you do?

**S2** **10:35:36:08**

Try and get a publisher to take it on. That's a major work. Then I thought actually I would write a history of my Canadian family or for the for the benefit of my own children not to be published.

**S3** **10:35:46:07**

Right. Yeah.

**S1** **10:35:47:22**

Well, good luck with it all. And thank you very much.

**S2** **10:35:50:12**

And thank you.