

**Shelby White and Leon Levy Archives Center  
Institute for Advanced Study**

**Oral History Project  
Interview Transcript**

**Giles Constable  
Interviewed by Linda Arntzenius  
March 22, 2010**

**Permission to use this material for anything beyond personal research  
must be requested from the Institute's Archives. Please contact  
[archives@ias.edu](mailto:archives@ias.edu) with questions.**

**Institute for Advanced Study  
The Shelby White and Leon Levy Archives Center**

**Oral History Project Release Form**

~~In exchange for good and valuable consideration, the receipt and sufficiency of which are hereby acknowledged,~~ I (the "Releasor") hereby irrevocably give, donate, assign, transfer and grant to the Institute for Advanced Study (the "Institute") all of my right, title and interest in and to all audio and/or video recordings of the oral history interviews in which I participated, together with all transcripts thereof (collectively, the "Materials"). My gift, donation, assignment, transfer and grant to the Institute includes: (i) title to the Materials, free and clear of all liens, encumbrances and interests of others; (ii) the right to all present and future copyrights, including but not limited to, the exclusive right to make, reproduce, publish (in print, on video and in all other formats) and to otherwise exploit the Materials, excerpts of the Materials and works derived from the Materials; and (iii) the right to use my name and likeness as required by the Institute in connection with its use of the Materials. For the avoidance of doubt, I hereby authorize the Institute to use the Materials (excerpts and derivative works) for any and all ~~commercial~~ educational, <sup>or</sup> research ~~or other~~ purposes.

Public access to the Materials is subject to the following conditions (please check one):

- None.
- Closed for 10 years from the date of the interview\*; full public access thereafter.
- Closed under other conditions as stated below\*; otherwise full public access:

\*I understand that prior to the date of public access, access to the Materials may be given by the Institute to its staff and to others for the purposes of preserving and cataloguing the Materials.

I acknowledge and agree that this is the entire agreement between the Institute and me respecting the Materials and shall be binding upon my heirs, representatives and assigns. It may be modified only by a writing signed by all parties. This agreement shall be governed by the laws of the State of New Jersey and the federal and state courts situated in the State of New Jersey shall have exclusive jurisdictions over disputes between the Institute and me.

Witness:

L. G. Arntzenius

Name of Witness: LINDA G.  
ARNTZENIUS

Quis Constable  
Signature of Releasor

Name of Releasor: Constable

Date: 8 Oct '10

*Linda Arntzenius:* I'm here at the Institute for Advanced Study on Monday, March 22nd, to record an interview with Giles Constable.<sup>1</sup> And that should pick you up nicely.

*Giles Constable:* Your English origins show, you pronounced the name correctly.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Oh.

*Giles Constable:* People in this country nearly always say Constable [with a long 'o']. It annoyed my father intensely.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Interesting. Yes. I wasn't aware of it. Since you brought up your name, of course, I have to ask you if you're related to the famous John Constable, the painter.

*Giles Constable:* The painter?

*Linda Arntzenius:* The painter, yes.

*Giles Constable:* Yes, indeed we are. Not direct descendants. My father knew the exact relationship, but he was a collateral ancestor. He died a long time ago, in the early 1840s. And I believe that he was a cousin of my direct ancestors. As I say, I really don't know. Daddy was in touch with his direct descendants, and they perhaps knew the relationship. I don't. But it is the same family. My great-great grandfather I think came from East Anglia.

*Linda Arntzenius:* And do you know the wonderful Constable painting that belongs to Frank Taplin?

*Giles Constable:* We did indeed know it, yes.

*Linda Arntzenius:* It's a wonderful painting.

*Giles Constable:* It is beautiful, yes.

*Linda Arntzenius:* The other thing I should say is [that] in order to encourage you to speak candidly, the oral recording will be put into the archives and you will have an opportunity to read the transcript.

*Giles Constable:* So you told me.

*Linda Arntzenius:* And also to restrict access to it for a number of years if you wish.

*Giles Constable:* Yes.

---

<sup>1</sup> Giles Constable (1929- ), Professor in the School of Historical Studies, 1985-2003; Emeritus Professor, 2003- .

*Linda Arntzenius:* While the focus is the Institute, I think it would be nice to start a little bit further back, with your boyhood in England - where you were born and when, where you grew up, and what led you towards academia.

*Giles Constable:* Well, those are two rather different questions. I was nine years old when I left. I never even went to school in England.

When my parents knew they were coming to this country – and we can return to that if you want to – they sent my brother and myself to school in Switzerland for a year in a rather feeble effort, or futile effort, to learn French.

It was the first time I'd been away from home. I was not happy at the school particularly. In any case, we came here when I was nine and my brother was eleven, and basically it was just before the War in 1938. And I think my parents thought that they might come back sometime. But then the War came and we stayed and didn't go back 'till after the War.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Your father came, I understand, to take up a job.

*Giles Constable:* At the Boston Museum. He'd been the first director of the Courtauld Institute.

*Linda Arntzenius:* In London.

*Giles Constable:* And he resigned on a question of principle and really needed a position. There were several possibilities, but he and my mother decided on the Curatorship of paintings at the Boston Museum.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Wonderful.

*Giles Constable:* I said, I think, – I mean he was very happy there. In fact, probably when they came they thought they would go back sometime, but they never did.

*Linda Arntzenius:* I understand you still hold a British passport.

*Giles Constable:* I do indeed, yes.

*Linda Arntzenius:* And not an American one?

*Giles Constable:* Nope.

*Linda Arntzenius:* No change of heart? No plans to become a naturalized citizen?

*Giles Constable:* No. I regret very much in some ways not being a citizen, but I likewise very much mind the fact, as you may know, naturalized citizens here suffer from certain legal disabilities.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Well I didn't know that.

*Giles Constable:* Are you one yourself?

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes. *[Laughs]*

*Giles Constable:* I'm surprised you didn't know it then. And that's been the case for many years, one of them being that if you live outside the country for more than three years you can lose your nationality. If you commit a crime you're liable to be deported. And it isn't so much that – well, the first of these is just possible if I decide to retire to England. I'm told that, until recently at least, the majority of private congressional bills are citizenship bills, which members will put in for one of their constituents who wants to return home, often to Greece or to somewhere like that. Bernard Berenson had to have a private bill. One of the sponsors was Franklin Roosevelt, so he didn't get much difficulty [in its] being passed.

But I still object to the fact that I should be less of a citizen than my wife and children.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes.

*Giles Constable:* Now I could hold two passports, but that would be a bore. During many years a British passport suited me quite well. If I *had* wanted to go to Cuba (I didn't particularly) I could have. It would've been the American passport that restricted me, not the British passport.

*Linda Arntzenius:* So it's not just a fondness for England ...

*Giles Constable:* No.

*Linda Arntzenius:* There was actually a lot of thinking behind it.

*Giles Constable:* Yes, some principle. I discussed this when we lived in Washington with Members of Congress and they invariably agree with me, but they say the trouble is you have no constituents.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Right. Especially if people like me don't really think about it enough to know.

- Giles Constable:* Yes. And I feel strongly [about it]. This country was founded on the principle of no taxation without representation. I pay taxes. I'm liable for military service, or was. But still. It was only, I believe, in about 1926 or 7 that the last American constituency did not allow non-citizens, though residents, to vote. The fact that Americans who have been resident in Europe for 50 years, who have no concern here whatsoever, can vote, whereas I, who have all the obligations of a citizen, cannot, likewise I feel is a mistake.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Yes. Interesting.
- Giles Constable:* And when it's explained to them, people agree with me, but they often, like you, don't know it.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Yes, that's the case I would imagine. Well, I shall look further into that. But we're here to talk about you. Did you go to Harvard directly from boarding school?
- Giles Constable:* Yes, from boarding school. I went to school entirely in this country. We had this year in Switzerland, but from here, school in America, then Harvard.
- Linda Arntzenius:* I understand Oleg Grabar<sup>2</sup> was there [Harvard] at the same time?
- Giles Constable:* He was a classmate, yes. In 1950.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Did you have classes in common?
- Giles Constable:* I don't know if we did, actually. I didn't know Oleg particularly well at college. I knew who he was, but we didn't know each other well. But in a way that sort of thing, as time goes on, becomes closer. *[Laughs]* We were, in fact, classmates.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Yes. Actually there's quite a clique if you think about it, because there's you and there's Oleg and there's Glen Bowersock.<sup>3</sup>
- Giles Constable:* Ah yes, but we're the class of '50. Glen was later. I actually taught Glen. I was one of his section men. But that was several years later.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Well moving to the Institute, you came here as a professor in 1985, after a career at Harvard and Dumbarton Oaks.

---

<sup>2</sup> Oleg Grabar (1929-2011), Professor in the School of Historical Studies, 1990-1998; Emeritus Professor, 1998-2011.

<sup>3</sup> Glen W. Bowersock (1936- ), Visitor in the School of Historical Studies, 1975; Professor, 1980-2006; Emeritus Professor, 2006- .

- Giles Constable:* Correct.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Did you have a family at that time to bring with you?
- Giles Constable:* Yes, indeed.
- Linda Arntzenius:* I'd like to ask you who approached you about coming to the Institute, and what considerations went into your decision to come?
- Giles Constable:* Well, it came as a total surprise to me. I didn't know they had an opening. I had resigned from Dumbarton Oaks because we planned to go back to Harvard; I always could.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Now "we" being?
- Giles Constable:* My wife and I.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Mm hmm.
- Giles Constable:* And the children. The children were in college then.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Right. So tell me about your wife and your children, since we're -
- Giles Constable:* Well my wife was a Radcliffe graduate. Esther Young was her name; Evhy was her nickname. And not *un*-apropos, her parents actually lived at Princeton. And we had two children. I think they were still both in school, but maybe they'd just – no, that's wrong. No. Remie<sup>4</sup> was certainly in graduate school here, John I think was about to go to college.
- Linda Arntzenius:* So they didn't go to school in Princeton?
- Giles Constable:* No.
- Linda Arntzenius:* They were a little older.
- Giles Constable:* No. Remie went to school in Cambridge and John in Cambridge and then in Washington (D.C.). And then she went to Yale and John went to Syracuse.
- And we had two years' leave between leaving Dumbarton Oaks and going back to Harvard, because I was giving the Trevelyan Lectures at Cambridge. And I knew I couldn't write them if I had an administrative position.

---

<sup>4</sup> Olivia Remie Constable (1960-2014), Member in the School of Historical Studies, 1999-2000.

In any case we'd been there seven years, and that's about what we had thought of. I think that Evhy and the children would've been glad to spend a bit longer, and I would have in some ways. But it seemed to mark a good time to move – and it was in the middle of that first year that I think it was Glen who telephoned me in Van Hornesville and said that [coming to the Institute] was a possibility.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes.

*Giles Constable:* The decision was in some ways Evhy's, because she came from here.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes.

*Giles Constable:* And it's fair to say that earlier she probably wouldn't have wanted to move back to Princeton.

*Linda Arntzenius:* When the children were younger perhaps?

*Giles Constable:* Yes. And Princeton's a small town in many ways. But after seven years of Washington, being in a really big community, she was ready. Also by that time, her mother was getting along [in years] and it was of some importance for her to be closer to her. For me the decision was one way or the other. I could do my work either in Cambridge or here. I gave up teaching but I gained both the research time and the contact with scholars. Each year there was a group of both younger and older medievalists, so that it was, in some ways, of less concern to me than it was to her. And it was she who really made the decision. Certainly if she'd been opposed to it we wouldn't have come.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Did you think about having to give up teaching, was teaching something that you enjoyed?

*Giles Constable:* Yes.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Was that something that you were sorry to lose?

*Giles Constable:* Well, yes and no. As a footnote, because it was only very partial, I did in fact teach here a bit; I taught two joint courses with John Fleming.<sup>5</sup>

*Linda Arntzenius:* At the University?

---

<sup>5</sup> John V. Fleming (1936- ), Visitor in the School of Historical Studies, 1988-1989.

*Giles Constable:* At the University. The other thing being that I have many of the nicest things of teaching here. Each year there's a group of, I'd say, from six to eight, sometimes a few more, sometimes a few less, medievalists, some junior, some senior, with whom I interact in a way that gives me the most pleasurable things of teaching. On the other hand, I don't have the things about teaching that I *don't* like. And it's fair to say that when I was young I thought I'd grow used to grading. Whereas, as I've grown older not only have I *not* grown used to it, but I believe in it even less than I did.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Interesting.

*Giles Constable:* It's not something that I really believe in. It's what professors are paid to do, to grade students, and to sort of put them into the world with A, B, C, D. That doesn't interest me very much. I'm much more interested in what a student has learnt and what they bring to the field, and therefore it is a joy to me here that I do not have to grade these people, which is something I would've had to do otherwise. It isn't as if I'd given up teaching altogether, and the teaching I gave up had some aspects that I didn't like, though a great many that I did.

I mean naturally I no longer have Ph.D. students, though I did have one at the university.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Who was that?

*Giles Constable:* Scott Bruce.<sup>6</sup>

It's a little unusual. The University doesn't usually allow people to take their doctorate under professors outside the University, but I'm told by Scott, whom I knew quite well, that the two medievalists who might have directed his thesis, Peter Brown and Bill Jordan - he told them that he wanted to work on the sign language of Cluny: Cluniac monks and their method of communication so they didn't have to speak; they used signs.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Oh, that's fascinating.

*Giles Constable:* It's my impression that Peter and Bill had never heard of Cluniac sign language. They looked at one another and said, "Well, I suppose you'll have to work with Giles Constable." Which was a considerable concession, because I was fairly firm - it was not [going to be] a committee. I think it's hard enough to please one person without pleasing two or three.

---

<sup>6</sup> Scott G. Bruce, Research Assistant in the School of Historical Studies, 2000-2001.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Interesting. Well I'm going to ask you more about that, but I want to backtrack just a little, because I asked you what drew you towards academia as a profession, and we skipped ahead.

*Giles Constable:* Well, I'm told that when I was a boy I had the usual [boyhood ambitions], you know, ... so fireman. And when I was a teenager I claimed I was going to be a businessman. I don't quite know why, but I'm said to have said that, and not just casually.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Had you any conception of what kind of businessman?

*Giles Constable:* No. I have no memory of [it]. I mean I know I did but ...

*Linda Arntzenius:* And what did your brother John go into?

*Giles Constable:* He's a doctor. Yes. I realize increasingly – and I've talked this over with friends - that probably in fact I *backed* into academic life, and that to some extent because both my brother and I kept our English accents - not through wishing to do so. It's a subject of interest to linguists that we still speak with an English accent - and if I had a fairy godmother and she appeared now probably the first wish I would ask is that I would speak the same way everybody I know in my family does, except those in England, but I don't.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Interesting.

*Giles Constable:* I've only increasingly realized the extent to which it has probably restricted my choices. Public life, which is something I actually would have been fairly interested in, was out of the question.

*Linda Arntzenius:* You mean politics?

*Giles Constable:* Yes, politics. Oh, well now, could I speak like this and go into politics? Certainly not. Probably [not] even the law. If I could have immediately become a high-level corporate lawyer, it wouldn't matter too much, but starting out in the law, no. Obviously the Military or even the Church, it would have posed serious problems. Even today, people sort of say, "How do you like this country?"

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes.

*Giles Constable:* They probably do to you too.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes.

*Giles Constable:* I don't know how long you've been here.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes, 20 years.

*Giles Constable:* Yes, well I've been here 70. And therefore I like to reply to them, "Look, I've lived here longer than you've *lived*." But they still don't really believe me.

*Linda Arntzenius:* No.

*Giles Constable:* Academe was one of the relatively few professions where people still say it's an advantage. I don't believe it, but it wasn't a positive *dis*advantage to speak the way I speak.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Right. Interesting.

*Giles Constable:* And not that I have anything against it [academe]. I've been very happy. It has occupied my interest. And up until relatively recently I would've said that it really was the interest and above all certain very good teachers who attracted me. But obviously I had to be responsive to that. And it limited my choices, the way I spoke. I have no regrets for it, but I think that is one of the factors that entered in.

*Linda Arntzenius:* When you did come to the Institute was there anything about the place that surprised you at that time?

*Giles Constable:* I wouldn't say so. I knew the Institute slightly, but only very slightly. I'd never been a member here, but on the other hand, since Evhy's parents lived in Princeton, I visited here from time to time, not only on account of them, but on account of Herbert Bloch,<sup>7</sup> who was my professor and was a member here. When I went to Dumbarton Oaks I came up and saw Kenneth Setton,<sup>8</sup> who was close to Dumbarton Oaks. So I had a general knowledge as to what the Institute was about. It had never crossed my mind that I might come here. Largely because I really was fond of Harvard, I did enjoy teaching, and I had what most people would consider was a very good job. Why would I look around for another [job]?

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes. Exactly.

*Giles Constable:* It was when Evhy said, and I know exactly where we were when she said it, "I think I would like to go back to Princeton." That settled it.

---

<sup>7</sup> Herbert Bloch (1911-2006), Member in the School of Historical Studies, 1953-1954.

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth Setton (1914-1995), Professor in the School of Historical Studies, 1968-1984; Emeritus Professor, 1984-1995.

*Linda Arntzenius:* After you'd been here for a period, did you have second thoughts about it or did you settle in? How did that go?

*Giles Constable:* I think I settled in. I have to say "I think" because you may know that she died less than two years after that.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Oh dear.

*Giles Constable:* And it's almost inevitable that I occasionally think, "Would she have died in Cambridge?" Obviously she would have. But still I just sometimes think, if we'd gone back to Cambridge, was it something here that brought the cancer on?

I don't believe it for a minute, but that move was so close to her death, which is by far the greatest tragedy of my life.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes.

*Giles Constable:* But it did and does cast a slight pall. Not one that is actively with me now, but – and it's nothing to do with the Institute, it's to do with my life - but that's inseparable.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes. And your children, were they comfortable with the move?

*Giles Constable:* You'd really have to ask them that, but I think so because we had a preliminary discussion before going to Washington. In a way, for the family, the biggest decision was to leave Cambridge. And a very big decision to leave my mother; my father had just died. We went to an Italian restaurant in South Boston that we liked very much, the four of us, and we talked it over and we held a vote and it was all in favor, none opposed.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Oh, very democratic.

*Giles Constable:* On the condition that we didn't sell the house. So all throughout this period we kept our house, and indeed, planned to move back to it. But meanwhile the children had gotten used to being away from Cambridge. They went to college in this period, Remie was in graduate school, and when in fact we moved here they were quite ready we should sell the house. I mean they didn't want to keep the house after that. They had a home in Cambridge with my mother, though she in fact died months after Evhy did, but that was still a home in Cambridge. And I think therefore they were quite happy and felt that this was our decision, not really theirs.

And I think they'd still say that they're content. It's fair to say they were brought up in Cambridge and they have connections there. So was I. Cambridge is still in a way the town that I regard as home. I don't feel the same being at home here. In Cambridge I say that's Arlie Bock's house and that's so-and-so's house. I'm beginning to do that here, George Kennan's<sup>9</sup> house and that, but it's not quite the same when it's boys you've been to school with.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Who did you succeed at the Institute?

*Giles Constable:* Basically Kenneth Setton.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Was he your intellectual predecessor as well as your – it was his job, presumably?

*Giles Constable:* Well, as you know, doubtless from talking to so many professors, the fields are not assigned here in any way.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Right.

*Giles Constable:* It's up to the School.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes.

*Giles Constable:* Indeed, when Caroline [Bynum]<sup>10</sup> retires they could put in a professorship of South American history if they wanted to.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Right.

*Giles Constable:* And they hadn't had a medievalist always. The first medievalist was Ernst Kantorowicz,<sup>11</sup> and Kenneth Setton was his successor. And I succeeded Kenneth. So to the extent that they feel committed to having a medievalist, having always been so strong in ancient history, and often having two professors of ancient history – and then having Panofsky<sup>12</sup> and Lavin<sup>13</sup> in Renaissance history - there was a certain predilection that they would have a medievalist to join

---

<sup>9</sup> George F. Kennan (1904-2005), Member in the School of Historical Studies, 1950-1955; Professor, 1956-1974; Emeritus Professor, 1974-2005.

<sup>10</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum (1941- ), Professor in the School of Historical Studies, 2003-2011; Emeritus Professor, 2011- .

<sup>11</sup> Ernst Kantorowicz (1895-1963), Professor in the School of Historical Studies, 1951-1963.

<sup>12</sup> Erwin Panofsky (1892-1968), Professor in the School of Historical Studies, 1935-1962; Emeritus Professor, 1962-1968.

<sup>13</sup> Irving Lavin (1927- ), Professor in the School of Historical Studies, 1973-2001; Emeritus Professor, 2001- .

those fields, and I feel the same now. If they were *not* to choose a medievalist to succeed Caroline, which is absolutely their right, and there are only seven or eight professors to cover the whole field of history, it's not an easy choice.

But if they're going to stick to ancient and to Renaissance/early modern, it makes sense to have a medievalist. And to that extent I was Kenneth's successor. But he worked on not much different things than I did, because I worked on the Crusades quite a bit, and he was eminently an East European. But I don't think I was chosen to any extent for that reason. I was chosen as somebody who worked in the period let's say between 500 and 1500, as he had and as Kantorowicz had.

*Linda Arntzenius:* I had to Google Cluniac studies and your name came up immediately. I wanted to ask you what drew you to that particular subject, and then also to Peter the Venerable.

*Giles Constable:* Pure and absolute chance, if you call it that. My professor (both as an undergraduate at Harvard and as a graduate student) who directed my thesis was Herbert Bloch, a classicist, and a man, as his name implies, who was a refugee and a German by training.

For complicated reasons, that you would ask him if he could be interviewed but probably don't really concern you now, he moved into the Middle Ages. He felt somewhat excluded from Ancient History at Harvard, but that's another matter. But he became a very eminent medievalist as well. He was a wonderful man. He became almost a member of our family. He knew my grandmother and knew my parents very well and knew the children.

I wanted, as a thesis, to do a text edition. And I didn't realize in my happy innocence, and Herbert didn't realize in his happy innocence, that it was an unusual and indeed a rather dangerous thing to do a text.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Why?

*Giles Constable:* A Ph.D. thesis in this country is expected to be a secondary work with a thesis, as it were. But it's not expected to be a piece of technical scholarship, like an edition.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes.

*Giles Constable:* And I think I got my degree as much on the introduction and the work on letters that is in the introduction as on the edition itself,

where most of the work went. So I was literally looking around for a text, and I didn't at one time terribly care what text I would do.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Now was this a text to translate?

*Giles Constable:* No; a text to edit.

*Linda Arntzenius:* To edit.

*Giles Constable:* In Latin.

*Linda Arntzenius:* In Latin.

*Giles Constable:* Yes, I never translated the letters of Peter the Venerable. People have suggested it, but I have worked on him long enough. I considered very seriously six or seven texts and ended up with Peter the Venerable, who was Abbot of Cluny. And therefore it's *he* who carried me into Cluniac studies. I thought of the letters of Gilbert Foliot. I thought of various others, in which case I'd be doing rather different things now.

I'm not certain actually that it was the best decision. Everybody thought that a new edition of Peter's letters was needed. The first edition, which was still the only edition, though it had been reprinted, was from 1513, and they all assumed it was very defective. Even the great expert André Wilmart thought so. It wasn't; it was actually a rather good edition based on a lost manuscript.

Anybody who relied on that edition wouldn't go very far wrong. I made some textual improvements, but above all, the value of my edition is in the notes and in the work on letters generally. And anybody who really examined my work closely from then till now could see that almost everything I have done has flowed out of the work on Peter's letters: my work on the Crusades, naturally my work on letter collections, all sorts of other questions, because *he* touched in his letters on so many questions. But it was that that carried me into Cluny, not that Cluny carried me to Peter the Venerable.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Interesting. And did you ever – was there ever a point when you thought, "I am traveling this road and I got here rather"–

*Giles Constable:* Circuitously?

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes.

*Giles Constable:* Yes.

*Linda Arntzenius:* And it wasn't a definite choice. Did you ever rethink that? No?

*Giles Constable:* There I was. Now you know I worked a good deal outside the Middle Ages.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes. Right.

*Giles Constable:* I've done some editions of modern correspondence.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Of Berenson, yes.

*Giles Constable:* Bernard Berenson. And then I've written a little book on the Gold Rush. And I just indeed, half an hour before you came, got a message from Melanie Aspey, who is the head of the Rothschild Archives in London. She called again and she had good news, potentially. And I think that means, and I'm not certain if I'm pleased or not, that the Rothschild Archives will publish this little book. I could probably find another publisher and it might get a broader [circulation].

But it is based to a great extent on two collections of letters. My great-grandfather was a Forty-niner. Now when you think of a Forty-niner you probably think of a prospector.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes.

*Giles Constable:* He was a banker in San Francisco. He was a perfectly genuine Forty-niner; he went there in August 1849 and set up the Rothschild branch in San Francisco. His agent in Sacramento, who gathered gold dust for him, was a man named Heinrich Schliemann. I'm sure you've heard of Heinrich Schliemann. He was an archeologist later, probably the best-known archeologist of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. He dug up Troy and Tiryns and was immensely celebrated.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Oh, this sounds like a pot-boiler.

*Giles Constable:* And in Athens, among his papers is a book of letters from him to my great-grandfather. Over a period of less than a year he wrote almost 300 letters.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Fascinating.

*Giles Constable:* None from my great-grandfather to him. Well, just one, which is almost a formal one. But my great-grandfather sent letters to the

Rothschilds, and those are all there in the Rothschild Archives, thousands of them.

And I went through those. Fortunately, I'm only dealing with the relationship between Schliemann and my great-grandfather, which ends in 1852. If it had gone on I don't know what I would've done; I'd have been in a desperate condition. Because I really could quite easily get interested in 19th Century economic history and the foundations of California, and I could spend the rest of my life on it, but I've got other things I want to do.

*Linda Arntzenius:* You've got other things to do.

*Giles Constable:* But I have done therefore a fair amount of other work.

*Linda Arntzenius:* I wondered if there was something that drew you towards a sort of monastic lifestyle. People have often compared the Institute to a cloistered environment, and I wondered if perhaps it was something in your temperament that drew you towards that.

*Giles Constable:* I don't think so.

*Linda Arntzenius:* So it's just pure scholarship.

*Giles Constable:* I really don't know, but I don't think so. People quite frequently, and way back – the Harvard psychiatrists used to hold their lunch and I went once or twice, because I knew some of them, Dr. Binger and others. And one of the questions they asked rather meaningfully, "Are you drawn to the monastic life?" And I said, "Not one bit so far as I know. I admire my monks; I think they do a remarkable thing. I don't want to be one." I think it's important that people who are non-monks should study monks as well as monks.

Once again, it's the correspondence of Peter the Venerable that carried me into – now mind you, most of the writers at that time, not all, but most of them, were monastic writers. There were some – they were all clerics, but there were secular clergy who wrote too, whom I might have worked on, in which case I would probably be working on rather different problems. But Peter was a great abbot in a great period of monasticism, and he naturally was involved in the spiritual as well as the temporal concerns of monks and the political. And so it's that that carried me into the area of monasticism.

The Crusades too, which I regard as to some extent a spiritual as well as a temporal movement. But that again, it grows out of – it didn't quite grow out of Peter the Venerable, because some of the

earliest work I did, with Robert Wolff, was on the Second Crusade, which was even before I started work on Peter the Venerable's letters. But Peter, indeed, in some of his letters did deal with the Second Crusade, and that was one of the reasons that when it came to choosing a text I already had some knowledge of Peter's letters.

*Linda Arntzenius:* I noticed that you often work with others, and I wondered if that was something that was intrinsic to the field that you're in, or is the impression I got due to some mentoring on your part?

*Giles Constable:* No. I would say, if I may, neither. I don't think it's intrinsic to the field. It's a little bit unusual; not very unusual. But most historians, most medievalists, really work by themselves and want to. And usually the collaborations I've had are not mentoring ones at all; they are just that we enjoy working together and have some common interests and often bring different points of view.

Take my work with Robert Benson. Benson was exactly my own age, and there was no question that we weren't teaching one another, except insofar as, when we did some writing together, we'd battle over this sentence and that.

Otherwise it just would be that one person would do one thing and another, another. The volume I am editing at present, which Dumbarton Oaks is going to publish, is a Crusading text, with an introduction by myself. It has notes on trade in the early 14<sup>th</sup> Century by my daughter, who is a medieval historian at Notre Dame; by Tia Kolbaba,<sup>14</sup> who is a Byzantinist at Rutgers; and by Ranabir Chakravarti,<sup>15</sup> who's an Indian, because it deals with Indian trade too. And there it's simply a division of fields. They know about these various fields that this text relates to.

In my work with Bernard Smith, and I've done two texts with him, Bernard enjoys translating. He was a student of mine, though he's older than I am. We thought it would be a nice idea and he's a good translator, with a better command of English than I do.

*Linda Arntzenius:* So the people that you were working with, they're not colleagues here; they're at Harvard, at the University here or?

*Giles Constable:* They would really very much vary. It's one of the nice things about this text of William of Adam that I'm editing; all these three people I mentioned were members here at different times. Not together;

---

<sup>14</sup> Tia Kolbaba (1963- ), Member in the School of Historical Studies, 2003-2004.

<sup>15</sup> Ranabir Chakravarti, Member in the School of Historical Studies, 2005-2006.

independently. Well, naturally my daughter I knew independently, but Tia I knew independently too. Ranabir I would not have known, except for his being a member here. In my work with Jim Kritzeck,<sup>16</sup> which was my first real book, Jim was an Arabist among other things, and he had edited Peter the Venerable's *Contra Saracenos*, his book against the Saracens. He translated it. He was at Harvard at that time, a junior fellow, and when the 800th anniversary of Peter's death came up we decided to do a volume of essays together. And we just divided the work.

Now I'm editing - Jane has it on her desk - a volume of Robert Benson, whom I mentioned, who died now 10 or 15 years ago. We finally have a manuscript of his unpublished work. That I'm doing with Richard Rouse of UCLA and Loren Weber,<sup>17</sup> who is a former student of Robert's. So it's really somewhat adventitious. The book I did with Bill Connell,<sup>18</sup> which is the book that has attracted more attention than any other book I've ever written...

*Linda Arntzenius:* And which one is that?

*Giles Constable:* That's the one that's called *Sacrilege and Redemption in Renaissance Florence*. The Russian translation has just come out, and I understand a Bulgarian translation is being made. We wrote it originally as an article, and then we expanded it into a small book. It's been translated into Italian, Russian, now Bulgarian, and I think there are some others. I was having lunch with him; he's somebody I know quite well, and I told him about a picture that I'd seen in the Stibbert Museum in Florence, which depicted the crime and punishment of this particular man, Antonio Rinaldeschi. And Bill said, "I have some documents on that that I've seen in the Bancroft Library in California." So we got together and I did the medieval background, he did the Renaissance present, the present for Rinaldeschi, and there it was, just sort of a meeting of minds.

*Linda Arntzenius:* How did editing the letters of Bernard Berenson and Charles Henry Coster come about?

*Giles Constable:* Well, I was very close to C.H. Coster. His nephew, John Train, was a classmate of mine, though I don't think I actually met him through John.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Did you know Bernard Berenson?

---

<sup>16</sup> James Kritzeck (1930- ), Member in the School of Historical Studies, 1966, 1968.

<sup>17</sup> Loren Weber, Research Assistant in the School of Historical Studies, 1992-1994.

<sup>18</sup> William Connell (1958- ), Member in the School of Historical Studies, 2002-2003.

*Giles Constable:* Oh, Bernard Berenson's picture is up there, which you can see when you go out. Yes, I knew Berenson, very much towards the end of his life, but quite well.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes.

*Giles Constable:* I did it with Byba's (Henry's wife's) nephew Luca Dainelli.

Luca was an Italian diplomat. He'd been ambassador in Afghanistan I think in those days. Henry was a private scholar who worked on Late Antiquity, and I edited a small volume of his essays. He was a serious scholar, but a very private man, and didn't publish much. And Luca and Byba, his wife, and I decided that it would be a good idea, at least a nice idea, to have a volume of his correspondence, particularly since all the letters were there, to and fro. In most collected correspondences you have all X's letters but not Y's or vice-versa. Here we had every single one. And we really did it as a tribute to Henry. I don't think it's had the remotest effect in fact. But it is an interesting correspondence and will, I'm sure, occasionally be used and cited. Because towards the end of his life, when Berenson no longer returned to America, Henry wrote these letters to tell Berenson what was going on in America. And they're old-fashioned letters. He actually drafted them and then copied them. And they're all at I Tatti.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Oh, interesting. Yes, well I was interested in I Tatti and the Berenson aspect of this because of Belle de Costa Greene.

*Giles Constable:* Greene, ah yes.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Of course the very – the famous relationship that Berenson had with her.

*Giles Constable:* Of course.

*Linda Arntzenius:* I doubt if she was mentioned at all in the correspondence.

*Giles Constable:* Oh, I think she possibly was. I don't have the volume here, but – well, I may. Maybe I do have it here. Let me see. She was a friend of my parents.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Was she indeed?

*Giles Constable:* Yes. Well, my father being an art historian obviously knew these people.

- Linda Arntzenius:* Yes. And of course I'm interested because she was a librarian briefly at Princeton University.
- Giles Constable:* I forgot that. Yes. Before going to the Morgan.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Again, backtracking and getting back to the Institute, I read somewhere that you said of Herzfeld<sup>19</sup> that some of his American assistants became the backbone of the OSS during the Second World War.
- Giles Constable:* Oh no, I couldn't have said that.
- Linda Arntzenius:* You didn't say that? Where did I get that from then? I was going to ask you to expand on that. *[Laughs]*
- Giles Constable:* No, I think that's a misattribution.
- Linda Arntzenius:* I wonder where I got that from? You didn't – I mean you wouldn't have known him.
- Giles Constable:* No. And I know almost nothing about him.
- Linda Arntzenius:* *[Laughs]* Oh well, I'll just take that off my list then. That's clearly not you.
- Giles Constable:* I think you really have to. Yes. I'd be glad enough to make something up, but it wouldn't be that.
- Linda Arntzenius:* It sounds good, doesn't it? Alright.
- Well, have things changed since you first came here? And if so, in what way? It's a very broad question, I know.
- Giles Constable:* Yes. And it's one, of course, to which I thought you'd probably want – you'd ask the question.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Yes.
- Giles Constable:* And was it? In some ways yes, in some no. And I still think it is a splendid place to do research and that its concentration on the life of the mind is pretty firm. On the other hand, I think it has become a very much busier place than it was. I have now been here the better part of 25 years and there is simply more going on, and that seems to me very much both for the good, and in some ways for

---

<sup>19</sup> Ernst Herzfeld (1879-1948), Professor in the School of Humanistic Studies, 1936-1944; Emeritus Professor, 1944-1948.

the worse, just the number of people, the number of events, the conferences. You yourself, a moment ago, said that some people drew a comparison with a monastery.

I would say that is much less-marked than it was in Oppenheimer's<sup>20</sup> day. Not that I was here then but what one hears. Oppenheimer I think actually encouraged that aspect, that people were here to be in their studies and do their work.

I think that ethos is less strong. There is a feeling that people are here to interact and that by seminars, by conferences, that is more encouraged. I don't think it was *discouraged*, but more encouraged now than it was.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Do you think that is since any one particular – did that start with Phillip Griffiths,<sup>21</sup> or does it go further back? Or is it just a natural progression that was inevitable?

*Giles Constable:* I suspect it goes back a bit further. I think there are some actual factors, and one I've thought of, which is that now we're receiving more public money. The people, for instance, from the NEH, whom I know best, because I don't know the people who come from the other foundations, the other schools, they always ask the members, "What do you miss at the Institute?" I, of course, am not present at those interviews, but my bet is the vast majority say, "We're very happy". But some did and do say that there isn't as much interaction, which is fashionable today. So this comes through in their reports.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Now when you say "interaction" do you mean interaction between members and faculty, or interaction between disciplines?

*Giles Constable:* Well, actually both between members and faculty and between members, often within the same discipline. The growth of these seminars, which I hold myself, is partly in response to that. One always in a way listens to criticism more than [commendation]. The day may come when people will come and they'll say – and I think a few do - "There's so much going on between lectures at the university and between lectures here, between seminars. We really don't have time for our own work."

You're interviewing members too, aren't you? Or not?

---

<sup>20</sup> J. Robert Oppenheimer (1904-1967), IAS Director, 1947-1966; Professor in the School of Natural Sciences, 1966-1967.

<sup>21</sup> Phillip Griffiths (1938- ), Member in the School of Mathematics, 1968-1970; Visitor, 1981-1982; IAS Director, 1991-2003; Professor, 2004-2009; Emeritus Professor, 2009- .

*Linda Arntzenius:* Maybe it will get to that, but primarily I'm interviewing faculty and faculty emeritus to begin with.

*Giles Constable:* Yes. I think all the members here are very enthusiastic. I've almost never heard of one who complains – well, they wouldn't have much reason to. Sometimes something goes wrong, but it's unusual. So one has to rather read between the lines to sense anything that could be better. This aspect of interchange is one that varies from year to year and almost from member to member. The art of art of running these institutions, and Dumbarton Oaks is the same, is how much organized activity there should be. And sometimes you have a group who don't want any at all, and others who clearly suffer and say, "Well there I was for a year and I never spoke to so-and-so or so-and-so." And to make yourself available without pushing yourself is truly the art of art of running research institutions.

And therefore I don't think you can say that one's right or one's wrong. But if you compared when I came in the mid-'80s to now, there is a good deal more that is going on.

*Linda Arntzenius:* But would that also be true of a university like Princeton or Harvard?

*Giles Constable:* Yes, but they are teaching institutions. We're not. We're not supposed to be. And there's been more – there has now been more emphasis on mentoring. The mathematical school has always been more pedagogic than history. We've never regarded [that as] our role - we interact with the members and professors - but we're not teaching them.

Mathematics is a more hierarchical field and now they're pushing down that hierarchy and it's a good thing. We have female mathematicians, which is immensely important. But they're getting to be almost undergraduates. And to what extent this is advanced study, is, it seems to me, a question. It certainly is advancing study.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Perhaps you can say something about the significance of the Institute for your field, advancing the field?

*Giles Constable:* You'll find when you interview the professors that that's much more difficult for history or social science, perhaps, than it is for the natural sciences or for mathematics. I think that over the years the Institute has, in history, contributed enormously, but in an entirely fragmented fashion. We have no program. Social Science each year has a field that they invite members in.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Is there a push to change that?

*Giles Constable:* It's been discussed many times, and I think that it's been decided against. And I would join that. We had that at Dumbarton Oaks too. I don't know if you know Dumbarton Oaks at all.

*Linda Arntzenius:* No.

*Giles Constable:* They're very much like a small Institute, but in specific fields. It has pre-Columbian studies, gardening studies, and Byzantine studies. And we, for several years, decided that, for instance, this year would be Byzantine liturgy.

Very good idea. But when we actually looked at the applicants, we were going to have to choose less-good liturgists in order to get a cadre to concentrate on the liturgy. Here, likewise, we've talked. I could have said when I was in the [position] of choosing, for instance, monastic historians, or choosing historians of spirituality. But in order to get people who were concentrating in that, we'd have chosen manifestly less-good scholars, because their field fitted in with our program. And that I think is against our ethos.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Because the one thing that is consistent is to choose the best.

*Giles Constable:* High quality. And also because experience has taught us, certainly me, and I think others too, that predicting interaction is a very difficult thing. Often the people you least expect to learn from one field or another in fact do. And if you've already predetermined that by having two liturgists, they may in fact abominate one another and not learn anything except mutual hostility. Whereas it could be somebody who's in African anthropology who is going to interact with your liturgist, which you could never have predicted. What you have to do, I think, is to be as open as you can at the beginning so that people see what others are doing and then to come together with them.

No one could have predicted that I'd be doing a book with Ranabir Chakravarti before he came here. Then this text emerged, and it was partly because of his being here. And yet if they had chosen somebody different because it'd be closer to my field or to his interests, it might not have worked at all.

Now fields are different in this respect. In philosophy, Morty White<sup>22</sup> could have done rather differently. I don't know whether he did or

---

<sup>22</sup> Morton White (1917-2016), Member in the School of Historical Studies, 1953-1954, 1962-1963, 1968; Professor, 1970-1987; Emeritus Professor, 1987-2016.

didn't. But I, as you can see, am rather a believer in letting the chips fall where they will. And on the whole I think they've fallen very well. I think the contribution of the Institute over the past 50 years to historical studies has been immense, though I couldn't put my finger on what. I just have to say, "Well, there's this book and that book and that" and these people carry into their teaching and their interactions in their own universities, and so it goes.

*Linda Arntzenius:* And that's something that clearly was, would you say, built into the Institute from its founding?

*Giles Constable:* No, I rather doubt that. I think one of the biggest changes, which is before my time but not entirely - the Institute was really founded by refugees - our greatest benefactor was Hitler, without a single doubt.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes.

*Giles Constable:* We'd have never been as great as we are, or had the great names we boast of, if it hadn't been for Hitler.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Right. Kantorowicz, Panofsky<sup>23</sup> ...

*Giles Constable:* Panofsky. Of course, Einstein<sup>24</sup> above all. Von Neumann.<sup>25</sup> And they were Germanic professors. And they certainly thought very much more of *de haut en basse*.

Now Panofsky was a great iconographer, and this has been a strong place in iconography, which is now a bit less fashionable, but it certainly was a very important trend. My suspicion is that Panofsky chose people to come who were strong in iconography. And that's fine, and we probably did promote the importance of iconography.

In mathematics, I remember I chaired one of the committees. You know they choose representatives from some other schools [to be on the committee choosing new faculty members].

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes.

---

<sup>23</sup> Erwin Panofsky (1892-1968), Professor in the School of Historical Studies, 1935-1962; Emeritus Professor, 1962-1968.

<sup>24</sup> Albert Einstein (1879-1955), Professor in the Schools of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, 1933-1946; Emeritus Professor, 1946-1955.

<sup>25</sup> John von Neumann (1903-1957), Faculty in the School of Mathematics, 1933-1957.

*Giles Constable:* I chaired one of the mathematicians, one of the recent ones. And this was a string theorist. It was going to be that we then would have five out of seven string theorists, which not all mathematicians believe in by any means.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Right.

*Giles Constable:* And I asked, "Well, look, all these people you're considering are string theorists. Is that really the best?" And we had some senior professors who were very opposed to it. And I was told at that time that all the best minds are going into string theory. Rightly or wrongly.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Right.

*Giles Constable:* You could choose a non-string theorist, but they would probably be ultimately a less-bright person. Well, this may have now begun to turn on us a bit. I think string theory is no longer as fashionable as it was.

But the fact is it was attracting very good minds at that time, and that's where the mathematicians followed, and the recommendations showed it. Fortunately, history doesn't have that degree of fashion, and therefore we never really got caught up in following one particular lead. It may mean that we've neglected some fashionable trends, but on the other hand it has somewhat protected us from getting all our professors with certain tendencies.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Have there been changes in your field since-

*Giles Constable:* Well, as you know, at one time cliometrics, as they called it, counting, was very fashionable. In the 1970s it was really thought that by applying mathematical techniques to historical sources - even in the Middle Ages there were enough charters and things - you could add up the number of this and that.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Oh.

*Giles Constable:* And yes, that's rather what I said. *[Laughs]* It's now gone up almost entirely. Harvard I think made too many appointments in cliometrics, and in about the 1980s it disappeared and they'd have done better to have chosen anthropologists.

*Linda Arntzenius:* And it's cliometrics?

*Giles Constable:* Cliometrics it's called. Yes. The application of mathematics. Scholars went into it. But for one reason or another students never

really followed. Some did, of course. But in fact probably a knowledge of religion would have been better for the past 20 or 30 years.

Sometimes when a student asks me, "What's going to be the fashionable field that I should write my thesis in?" I say, "You know that better than I do. If you're interested in it and keen on it, the chances are that your contemporaries will be. Whereas I would direct you probably in a direction that my contemporaries are going to be interested in. But I can't predict."

And this is a problem with the trustees. They're all businessmen, essentially all. And they think in terms of models and predictions. They love to sit me down and sort of say, "Where will historical studies be 10, 20, 30 years from now?" And they're deeply disappointed with me when I say, "God knows. I can't tell you where historical studies are now. I can tell you who's doing good and interesting work and who is doing what sort of thing, but not whether this is what's going to be interesting 10, 20, 30 years from now. It is one of the glories of the field that we don't know and do not follow models and theories in the way that the more pure sciences do." And that business does, for better or worse, I'm not so sure of that. I think the last few years shows that those models aren't always very satisfactory, but they believe in them and they run their companies on the basis that they want to know literally, I mean, where it will be three, five, seven, ten years from now, where we're going to be and what we should therefore do now about that.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes. Interesting. So do you have a lot of interaction with the trustees?

*Giles Constable:* No.

*Linda Arntzenius:* How does that come about?

*Giles Constable:* No, no. You know they meet here from time to time.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Right.

*Giles Constable:* And then I see them, and one or two I know personally.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Who would be the trustees that you would interact with most?

*Giles Constable:* Oh gosh, who now? I used to know them better and some of them have now left. Who did I really know well? Well, I still know Martin Chooljian fairly well, but I wouldn't say I really talk intellectual things

with him particularly. Vartan Gregorian I knew pretty well, but he's now retired, I think, isn't he?

*Linda Arntzenius:* I'll ask you more about that later. When you first came here Harry Woolf<sup>26</sup> was approaching the end of his tenure.

*Giles Constable:* Correct.

*Linda Arntzenius:* And then after that we've got Marvin Goldberger<sup>27</sup> and Phillip Griffiths<sup>28</sup> and the current director.<sup>29</sup>

*Giles Constable:* Correct.

*Linda Arntzenius:* So perhaps we could move through each of the administrations in turn, giving me your thoughts about the administrations and how things worked then and how they changed with each director who came in, if you could consider that.

*Giles Constable:* I'd gladly consider it, but I don't think it will help you very much, aside from these broader changes, which I don't think are even connected with the individual directors. These were reflections almost of the social world of academe in this country. Our universities have likewise become busier and more open, less concentrated on individual research. And to that extent, the Institute has moved with them and has chosen directors who will be sensitive, as the institution itself and the trustees are.

Of course, this is a fairly exceptional institution, having more trustees than it does faculty. Considerably more. And also in having trustees who have no experience of the Institute, aside from those few members who are appointed by the schools, who I gather don't play a very large role in the meetings of the trustees. Most universities have trustees who, even if they're in other fields, have been to the University; and have some basic knowledge of and commitment to the institution. Now it isn't that the [Institute's] trustees don't, but I don't think that they have a real knowledge of what's going on here.

---

<sup>26</sup> Harry Woolf (1923-2003), IAS Director, 1976-1987; Professor-At-Large, 1987-1994; Emeritus Professor, 1994-2003.

<sup>27</sup> Marvin L. Goldberger (1922-2014), Member in the School of Natural Sciences, 1966-1970, 1976-1977; IAS Director, 1987-1991.

<sup>28</sup> Phillip Griffiths (1938- ), Member in the School of Mathematics, 1968-1970; Visitor, 1981-1982; IAS Director, 1991-2003; Professor, 2004-2009; Emeritus Professor, 2009- .

<sup>29</sup> Robbert Dijkgraaf (1960- ), Member in the School of Natural Sciences, 1991-1992; Visitor, 2002; IAS Director and Leon Levy Professor, 2012- .

- Linda Arntzenius:* What do you think attracts a trustee to the institute?
- Giles Constable:* Prestige. And Jim Wolfensohn was very good about that. He attracted rich people and made this into something that people wanted to be associated with. And with good reason; they're mostly highly intelligent.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Yes.
- Giles Constable:* But how many of them have a real understanding of the Institute? I don't know how much you've heard about the Piet Hut<sup>30</sup> affair.
- Linda Arntzenius:* I haven't interviewed him yet, but I will do.
- Giles Constable:* I hope you will.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Yes, I have spoken with Professor Dyson,<sup>31</sup> and sadly, John Bahcall<sup>32</sup> died before I could interview him.
- Giles Constable:* Yes.
- Linda Arntzenius:* So I do have some recorded conversations about that topic.
- Giles Constable:* Yes.
- Linda Arntzenius:* That must've been a difficult time. Since you came in '85 you missed the Bellah<sup>33</sup> Affair.
- Giles Constable:* Oh, very much so.
- Linda Arntzenius:* You missed all of that.
- Giles Constable:* Yes.
- Linda Arntzenius:* There haven't been scandals associated with the Institute.
- Giles Constable:* Nope. I think the Hut affair could have been.

---

<sup>30</sup> Piet Hut (1952- ), Member in the School of Natural Sciences, 1981-1984; ), Professor in the School of Natural Sciences, 1985-2002; Professor in the Program in Interdisciplinary Studies, 2002- .

<sup>31</sup> Freeman J. Dyson (1923- ), Member in the Schools of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, 1948-1950; Professor in the School of Natural Sciences, 1953-1994; Emeritus Professor, 1994- .

<sup>32</sup> John Norris Bahcall (1934-2005), Member in the School of Natural Sciences, 1969-1970; Professor, 1971-2005.

<sup>33</sup> Robert N. Bellah (1927-2013), Member in the School of Social Science, 1972-1973.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Right. How do you think it was handled? I mean what do you think of how it was handled?

*Giles Constable:* Ultimately probably quite well. But only ultimately. I do believe, for better or worse, very strongly in tenure. And the fact that Piet was not doing what the other members of his school wanted him to be doing is, I think, the *risk* of tenure, but also to some extent the glory. You know he's interested in Far Eastern religion and that sort of thing. And I have always shared that interest with him, though I have nothing like the knowledge that he does.

I admit that I think that the trustees and Phillip at that time, and Phillip above all, should have strongly resisted the effort to fire him. He'd done nothing wrong. I mean, of course, if he'd done something that was disreputable or really brought the Institute into disrepute. But he absolutely hadn't. He hadn't done what they hoped when they appointed him that he was going to do. And that is really the essence of tenure.

They might say to me, "Giles Constable, we hired you to be a medievalist. What are you doing editing these letters of Henry Coster or writing about the Gold Rush?" I'm afraid I'd say, "Well, you know, that's my business. I'm still doing medieval history but I'm doing this too." In any case I'm absolutely certain they wouldn't dream of doing that.

And I really think it was the business of the trustees and director to protect Piet. I don't know the ins and outs of it, but I know that both Bahcall and Ed Witten<sup>34</sup> were involved.

*Linda Arntzenius:* What are some of the changes that have affected you personally? For example, the issue of changes to the retirement age.

*Giles Constable:* Me, not at all. You see, because I was prior to the change, I could have still been a professor if I'd wanted to be.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Ah, but you chose not to be. You chose to retire?

*Giles Constable:* Sure. Yes.

*Linda Arntzenius:* And what went into that decision? Because financially it would have been better for you to stay on -

*Giles Constable:* Stay on, yes. But I had sufficient income. I thought it was about time for me [to go] and I thought to have another medievalist here

---

<sup>34</sup> Edward Witten (1950- ), Member in the School of Natural Sciences, 1984; Professor, 1987- .

would be a good thing. Caroline is my student, and I think it's the first time ever that the student of a current professor or a retiring professor has been chosen as his or her successor. And I had no hand in it, and I take pride in that.

But it gives me a bit more freedom to travel and to do other things.

*Linda Arntzenius:* What is the real difference between professor and emeritus status? Obviously there's a financial change and you don't have any administrative duties, presumably.

*Giles Constable:* Yes, that – really the only difference is that I don't participate in the choice of members or in the choice of faculty. And that doesn't bother me.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Do you know of any other institution that works this way, that treats it faculty emeritus so well?

*Giles Constable:* As well? Very few. Very few.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Do you think this is something that will change in the future?

*Giles Constable:* Well, as you may or may not know, Phillip tried to change it, and got into some trouble. He sort of said, "You're guaranteed *an* office, but not *your* office." And there was a mighty rumble in the faculty and he backed out. And it's a problem.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes.

*Giles Constable:* But since most emeriti, certainly at this school, really remain quite active.

*Linda Arntzenius:* And long-lived.

*Giles Constable:* And long-lived. And I think, myself apart, that we are benefits to the school. If you look at the lunch table, more emeriti sit there than do current faculty. We interact with the members more than the current faculty. When I came here I was told very firmly I was not supposed to be away in term time, just as the members were supposed to be here, and they are technically told they're supposed to be, but nobody ever really enforces this. This idea, maybe not of seminars, but of being here and doing our work, was quite important.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Do you think that's changed to some extent?

*Giles Constable:* Yes.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Oh, without a change of rule or a change of [policy]?

*Giles Constable:* No. I think you'd find that the faculty now travel, go to conferences, go away very freely. And that has good sides too. And I think many of the members do too. Now to no extent do I consider it a problem, but I consider it a change. I think it used to be a more cohesive, and that was more – there were actually rules that professors weren't supposed to go away for more than a certain number of days during term time.

And then I forget how they – the way they relaxed, that is they extended, term time, I think, or they reduced term time, and they made it you could go away at other times.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Alright. Well perhaps we could move to the issue of faculty housing. Where did you live when you first came here? Because I know I've been told by people I've interviewed that everyone gets the same salary, but the way that people can be induced to come is to offer them a house or offer them other perks.

*Giles Constable:* I know much less about this. I mean speaking personally, the first house that we lived in we bought from the Institute. I think the Institute itself has had rather different policies, sometimes they have more houses, sometimes less, both by policy and by retirements and deaths, which they can't really predict.

For many years we rented a house. After my wife died we wanted to move, Pat and I, and lived out on Quaker Road. And then just two years ago we bought a house ourselves.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Where do you live now?

*Giles Constable:* Do you know where Hardy Drive is? Do you know the Stuart School?

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes. Oh, so you do not live on campus?

*Giles Constable:* No.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Or anywhere near the campus?

*Giles Constable:* Well, actually the house was built by Roger Dashen,<sup>35</sup> who was a professor here.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Oh, really?

---

<sup>35</sup> Roger Dashen (1938-1995), Member in the School of Natural Sciences, 1966-1969; Professor, 1969-1987.

*Giles Constable:* And he walked in every day, his daughter tells us.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Did he?

*Giles Constable:* Yes.

*Linda Arntzenius:* That's a good walk.

*Giles Constable:* Longer than I could do.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Now Pat – Pat Woolf, since you mentioned, was a great swimmer, or skater? Skater?

*Giles Constable:* Skater and swimmer.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Skater and swimmer. Yes, tell me about Pat.

*Giles Constable:* Well, she's Harry's widow, and my partner. And we've been together for over 20 years. After Evhy's death we came together, and her divorce from Harry. And she, you know, she taught research ethics at the University.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Oh, I didn't know that.

*Giles Constable:* And is a Ph.D. in social studies, science studies. And then she was a member I think of ten corporate boards. She's just this year retired from the last one.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes, someone told me, I think it must have been Allen Rowe, that she was a great ice skater.

*Giles Constable:* Yes, she is. Trouble is these years one can't get much ice skating. Alas she broke a bone in her hand and during the few days she could have skated here, I wouldn't let her, in case she'd fallen on that hand.

But in due time you might want to interview Pat, because as wife of the director for many years, and a memory that goes back further now than many faculty members.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes. That's right.

*Giles Constable:* Because they came here I think in '77.

*Linda Arntzenius:* So that's a good length of time.

After Harry came Marvin Goldberger, and subsequently Phillip Griffiths.

*Giles Constable:* Yep.

*Linda Arntzenius:* I don't know much about Marvin Goldberger, and I was wondering if you could tell me something about him.

*Giles Constable:* Well, I sat on the committee that appointed him, but I really can't tell you a great deal about any of the directors. I sometimes make the joke, which is not altogether without some truth in it, that when Franz Moehn – do you know who that is?

*Linda Arntzenius:* No.

*Giles Constable:* Franz Moehn was the chef here.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Oh, Franz, yes. Moehn, yes. I'm going to interview him sometime this spring.

*Giles Constable:* Where would you find him, in France?

*Linda Arntzenius:* No, he's coming here. At least he told me he was coming here.

*Giles Constable:* In any case, when Franz retired the faculty was incomparably more exercised about his replacement than about the director.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Oh really?

*Giles Constable:* I mean the Institute can operate with almost any director. Any good administrator could run this place. Even a bad administrator, which these weren't, can run it pretty well. It doesn't make a great deal of difference to them. If they began to really throw their weight around, that's another matter. But they don't.

Whereas what we eat! Franz raised the culinary level so that the Institute is celebrated for its cookery, which it wasn't earlier. It was Pat and Harry who appointed Franz, and he was a dear personal friend; he was our neighbor. And we still see him in France. But to our daily life a chef makes more difference than the director, which is why I'm sure there are things that have gone on, and I've mentioned one or two, but I find it difficult to put my finger certainly on differences between them, except insofar as I think they have reflected broad tendencies, which for all I know are also reflecting tendencies in the trustees.

*Linda Arntzenius:* So you didn't find – say that when Phillip Griffiths came in I do know that he hired a team of consultants to sort of take a look at the Institute to see the state of affairs, so to speak.

*Giles Constable:* Yes.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Did that – was that something that you recall? Was that something that exercised the faculty?

*Giles Constable:* No, not that I know of. Probably some faculty members and emeriti will tell you that there's been an expansion in the administrative staff. And whether that's a good or bad idea I really don't know. Pat will tell you that now about three people do what she did as the director's wife. She organized parties and seated people and did all sorts of things.

But I could say exactly the same of Harvard. The expansion of the administrative bureaucracy has been enormous. There are reasons for this that are almost outside of the power of the institution or an individual to resist. It's almost a fact of modern society. Now we're in financial difficulties, one obviously points to them a bit more, because one feels that maybe there could be reductions. But one gets used to this in due time.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes. I noticed there is no computer in this room.

*Giles Constable:* I don't have one. I don't use one.

*Linda Arntzenius:* You don't? How on earth do you manage to produce the volume of work that you do without a computer?

*Giles Constable:* Oh, I think much better. I handwrite.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Interesting. So you don't do lots of corrections, then?

*Giles Constable:* Oh, yes, I do. And that's one reason I handwrite; I think it's much easier. Above all, since I want to preserve the corrections. I want to know what I've done. The trouble when you use a computer is that you've lost what you had before. Whereas I will change one way, change another, change back, and put circles around things, arrows. Then I have my blessed Jane [Sykora], who types it up. I always used to type my own things.

*Linda Arntzenius:* You don't feel at a disadvantage when almost all of your colleagues and all of the academic world is using a computer and using e-mail?

*Giles Constable:* Yes, I do. But I also feel an advantage. If I had been ten years younger I think I almost certainly would have. And at that point - before I was sort of ruined by having a secretary, which I never had at Harvard - I typed all my own work. Indeed, it was rather amusing when I organized NEH summer seminars and things; I typed all my own correspondence, and the applicants would have secretaries, who had typed their applications for them!

*Linda Arntzenius:* Do you sleep at all?

*Giles Constable:* Oh yes. Oh, gracious, yes. It's really a balance between what I lose and what I gain. Only fairly recently, now about five years ago, some of my colleagues, when they heard I don't have e-mail, said: "You don't know how wise you are, Giles." Well, I do. Even my son, who's a professor, gets something like 150 e-mails a day, and there's an expectation that you reply to them immediately.

I feel in the work I do that this sort of absolutely immediate contact is not necessary. I have fax and I have telephone. I'm perfectly ready to be telephoned to. But I think in some ways e-mail creates its own *busyness*. Doubtless I miss out on some things, and I'm aware of this. But I gain. And one reason I can do a good deal of research is that I don't have e-mail. I don't need a computer to produce more; I think I'd produce less in fact.

*Linda Arntzenius:* I think you'll find there are people who agree with you.

*Giles Constable:* Even if they have e-mail, or specifically if they do.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes. Alright, getting back to the Institute again. Do you know of any other institutions where – institution where retired faculty are so involved? I think we may have touched on that already.

*Giles Constable:* Well you sort of asked it, then we veered away I think. And the answer is no. I think that, oddly enough, these new retirement rules, the law of the land, have assisted retiring faculty, i.e. one of the things they can bargain for, is for an office if they retire.

Because universities used to be incredibly strict, forcing emeriti faculty out. And often to their great loss. I know why they did it. They feared that senior professors would throw their weight around. But I know examples which have affected me personally as in the case of dear friends, like Franz Rosenthal at Yale, who was undoubtedly the greatest Arabist in this country. He was a bachelor, his life had been as a professor at Yale, except when he was in Germany; he was a refugee. And for him to be forced out was not only a tremendous hardship on him, but a great loss to Yale, a

huge loss. He wouldn't have thrown his weight around, but they feared this.

But I gather that this has improved, from the point of view of the faculty, a great deal. Now whether it's improved from the point of view of the institutions it's hard to say, because office space is one of the things in most demand. And to put four senior faculty in one office is often not the solution. But still it's fair to say that some of these senior faculty members, as they grow older, if they have an office they may only come in once a week. Is it really fair to occupy an office? Thank God we don't have to deal with that. George Kennan reached a point when he moved out of his office. Oleg moved from a larger to a smaller office.

I don't think at present there's anybody, although you may run across them as you go through the faculty, as they grow older and older, who really are occupying offices that they're not using. And since research is the object of this place and there isn't much risk that we'll throw our weight around, because we're not involved in faculty appointments or the choice of members, I would like to believe that we are an advantage to the institution. We're obviously an expense up to a point, but much less than when we were on salary here.

I don't know, although I've never studied it, of any institution which is as good. But then that's partly not being teachers. Most members are only vaguely aware who's emeritus and who isn't. We don't conduct seminars. But we're around. And the very fact that we are there at lunch more, I think, than the so-called *active* faculty, brings us very much into their purview.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Have you been involved in any development-focused activities? I know when Phillip [Griffiths] came in he introduced some talks to the trustees that were I guess meant to introduce the work of the institute to the trustees.

*Giles Constable:* I don't know that Phillip started that, did he? I thought the history school, and it was Peter Paret and myself who first started the faculty lectures, that were really addressed first to our colleagues. And they still go on about once a term, each school proposes a lecture. Then these were taken over – or sometimes they'd say, "Well why not have it at the time of the trustee meeting, so they can hear it too?" Now it may have been Phillip who first did this, but the lectures were already going.

*Linda Arntzenius:* I didn't know that.

- Giles Constable:* Local trustees I think did come, but Peter would have to confirm this – have you interviewed him yet?
- Linda Arntzenius:* Peter Goddard?
- Giles Constable:* No, Peter Paret.<sup>36</sup>
- Linda Arntzenius:* Oh, Peter Paret, no.
- Giles Constable:* The original idea was that we wanted to know what our colleagues were doing as a way of bridging the schools, and then the trustees became involved. And yes, I have been involved in that. And similarly the lectures of the Friends, which I have given.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Yes. When you first came here was the Institute's founding philosophy something that was talked about by the faculty, understood by the faculty? Was the founding letter something that was known about, you know, the sort of statement that's in the little blue book about "irrespective of creed" you know?
- Giles Constable:* I'd say yes. Now you could catch me out as to how long the thing is, but that is something that Peter (Goddard this time) in his talk to the incoming members, always cites. And therefore, I would say most members of the faculty who have been here a few years have heard it dozens of times.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Yes. But before Peter [Goddard].
- Giles Constable:* Oh, I think they did too. Yes. And certainly Oppenheimer's *soi-disant* remark, which I have no reason to believe isn't true, that "You're here to do your own work, and we'll give you no excuse not to do it."
- Linda Arntzenius:* Oh, that's right. Yes.
- Giles Constable:* And it's usually accompanied by the description - Oppenheimer had a very piercing gaze, a very intimidating gaze – that he fixed his eye upon you when he said this, and people went off and did their own work. That, I would have thought, was widely realized, both by the faculty and by most of the members here, which is why I would say there was some conflict with the amount of *non-one's* own work.

---

<sup>36</sup> Peter Paret (1924- ), Member in the School of Historical Studies, 1966-1967; Professor, 1986-1997; Emeritus Professor, 1997 -.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Right. Yes. Now I've heard it said that the freedom to follow one's own interests, the freedom that the Institute confers, can be stressful to the self-driven. Is that something that you could say a word or two about?

*Giles Constable:* It would be stressful to the self-driven?

*Linda Arntzenius:* Self-driven people. There are no demands put upon you as a member or as a faculty. You don't have to do any teaching, but the sort of person that is drawn to the Institute is very self-motivated, and sometimes, so I've heard it said, it can be very stressful if you're just here for a year and you want to produce, it's an opportunity to show your stuff, it can be stressful.

*Giles Constable:* Well, I'm sure you're correct. On the other hand, I think you've really answered your own question. I mean the devilish system, both with the faculty and the members, is that we try to choose people who are self-motivated, whose interest and desire drives them.

I fear that when I was appointing faculty at Harvard, anybody who said that – there are people who say when they get tenure that they now won't have to work anymore - we shouldn't have appointed them. We should appoint people who, from that point it makes no difference whatsoever, they are writing and researching. I likewise feel that there should be no specific goals or specific objectives to it. But I feel and have felt that [for] the vast majority of people here, faculty and members, self-driving is not a problem, but a virtue. It can be tough. But that is what primarily keeps us. It is our interest, it comes from inside, not from outside. The very fact that we're not under pressure – if a member here doesn't do these things nothing's going to happen to them. Now mind you, if they have to go back to their university and show a book, that's between them and their university. They don't have to here.

I tell people who say, "What if I'm not working on exactly what I've made an application about?" that "None of us would ever have the foggiest idea. All the application statement shows is that you have an idea, and we can judge that you have something to work on. But if you came here and worked on something else that interested you and that you felt the direction your work wanted to go, not only would we approve, but we wouldn't know. We don't check up on that."

It is to that extent, yes, rather self-motivated. But if we choose well, I believe we don't choose people who suffer too much from this, but

who want that opportunity. And I would be grieved if you ran across many faculty members who were to complain.

*Linda Arntzenius:* So you haven't come across members who have been struggling and needed some sort of counseling or help to overcome what another feels might be called a writer's block?

*Giles Constable:* No, not what I would call a writer's block. They're up against problems in their research or in their writing, and sometimes that's one thing that I consider is my duty and also my pleasure, when I say that there is a teaching aspect to it, to try to help them to overcome, which I have myself, when I don't see where I'm going next. But that's rather different than what you're referring to. I haven't encountered many who feel what you're describing.

Now this is a thing that – and probably this could be proven - when I came here we practically only chose people who had tenured positions, and that was for a reason: we didn't want them looking for jobs while they were here. And that has changed radically. Partly owing to the job situation, which, mind you was bad enough in '85, but-

*Linda Arntzenius:* So are the memberships longer?

*Giles Constable:* No. No, for a period. And again it was Peter (Paret) and I who pioneered [this], we did have two-year members. And I am very much in favor of them still, and I think we should do it, but (a) the school is not in favor, and (b) they have the idea, whether or not it's true, that foundations are not interested. The Gordon Fairchild Foundation supported them for five years, I think; maybe for three. But the Mellon Foundation refused to. And I think for just the wrong reason. They said that prestigious universities won't give two-year leaves. But they weren't prepared to take the risk, which I would've been, to say, "Okay, let them say they won't let that professor go, we'll go to people at institutions which will give them a two-year leave to give them a real opportunity to begin and carry through a project." It would have meant fewer members.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Because a year is very short.

*Giles Constable:* Very short, and that's one of the troubles. I don't know if they're still talking about it. That is what I'm now not involved in.

*Linda Arntzenius:* But that's presumably something that you would like to see happen. I know you're not involved in administrative affairs anymore, but is there anything that you would like to see change about the workings of the school in the future?

*Giles Constable:* No, the workings of the school are really pretty good. I personally am probably the only member, past or present, who would favor having an Americanist. I think the time has come. It's ridiculous that we don't have an American historian. And I think this dates back precisely to our origins and the German scholars who didn't think America had a history.

Now mind you, it ought to be a broad Americanist; somebody who looks at the position of America in the broader history of the world. I really think we should. But I don't think any of my colleagues or former colleagues are interested in that. But I can well see why not: it would mean giving up something. But I, rather than moving to the Far East, might have moved towards America first.

Again, the two-year memberships would have disadvantages and advantages. We'd have half as many members. I think it would be a good idea to experiment with it. And if you could interview those who had them, you would find they would all speak very positively of them. But then you couldn't speak to the people who didn't have them, who might have said that a year would've-

*Linda Arntzenius:* Been enough.

*Giles Constable:* And likewise, on the question of the tenure or the non-tenure, non-tenured people desperately need help now, but it's fair to say that for those who come here, particularly if they're out of a job, their main object in being here is to look for a job, not to produce a piece of research. And we can't say whether that's right or wrong. It responds to their needs, and we have to be flexible. If the time, please God, comes when there isn't quite so much anxiety, they'll be able to change.

When I first came here we had many more senior members. And I think they were valuable, because they played a role both with the faculty and with the members – now the senior people here are all faculty.

*Linda Arntzenius:* I've heard it said that the senior people won't come as visitors, because there is not enough finances to draw them.

*Giles Constable:* I would like to see the figures of their turning them down. Most of the senior figures I'm thinking of are retirees who have an income, and the stipend is ample to cover their extra expenses. I frankly think that that is what is said. It's rather like saying that institutions won't grant two-year leaves to junior faculty. Let's try it and see. And that's what we did, and they did come. Some might refuse. But

I don't know what our stipends are, now, \$40,000.00 or \$50,000.00?

*Linda Arntzenius:* So how do you explain the fact that fewer senior scholars are coming?

*Giles Constable:* I think partly because the word is out that we're not appointing them.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Oh, so it's a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy.

*Giles Constable:* Yes. But I don't know this. Just today I was looking through the list of applicants, both those who accepted and those who refused, and I may say that 9/10ths – 99/100ths – no, not quite that - of their names mean nothing to me. But there were certainly no senior applicants. And I remember when – no, not Neugebauer,<sup>37</sup> but the great archaeologist Krautheimer,<sup>38</sup> who was over 90, came here. It was a great boon. He was very active, and he was still excavating in Rome. And to have a man of that distinction! I just think that now the word is out.

*Linda Arntzenius:* So perhaps they're not being asked?

*Giles Constable:* Yes. And therefore they're not applying. It can be a problem. Some senior people won't apply for something. Well, that's their affair if they don't want to, if their pride prohibits it. But there are people who would like to be here and would come for a stipend that would cover their expenses. Because it doesn't have to fill their salaries. Somebody on sabbatical could come here, because they're getting some of their salary, and probably with whatever stipend we would offer, it would be enough to make it up. But somebody who was on full salary, that would be difficult.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes. If you were in Flexner's<sup>39</sup> position and you had the Bambergers' money translated into current value, what sort of institute would you create?

*Giles Constable:* Oddly enough, I've given more thought to this than you might think. I don't know if the name Mrs. Whitney means anything to you, Mrs. John Hay Whitney.

---

<sup>37</sup> Otto Neugebauer (1899-1990), Member in the School of Mathematics, 1945-1946, 1950-1966; Member in the School of Historical Studies, 1950-1990; Member in the School of Natural Sciences, 1966-1990.

<sup>38</sup> Richard Krautheimer (1897-1994), Member in the School of Historical Studies, 1964, 1977, 1988.

<sup>39</sup> Abraham Flexner (1866-1959), IAS Director, 1930-1939.

*Linda Arntzenius:* It – there's a museum?

*Giles Constable:* Well there is one, yes. She was the widow of the newspaper publisher. And her lawyer was quite a close personal friend of mine. She was a rather wonderful woman - she was one of the last – she had a great estate just outside New York, and a great deal of money, not by modern standards, but probably \$200 million or \$300 million, and above all, a great art collection. And she really wanted to make a unitary settlement.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Meaning?

*Giles Constable:* Well, she knew she could divide it up.

*Linda Arntzenius:* She wanted to keep the artwork together?

*Giles Constable:* And above all, the estate and the endowment. She knew this was an opportunity. Probably the last there was to do something. And Mrs. Whitney, had the support of her daughters; they didn't need the money. But she died without doing it, because she could not decide – it's a great shame.

In the Middle Ages she'd have founded a monastery, without a doubt. In the late Middle Ages perhaps a hospital. Later on a bit, a university. Now there are research institutions, much more recently, and not so many possibilities with what she could do.

*Linda Arntzenius:* So what was her dilemma? She had to choose between giving her art to a museum or founding-

*Giles Constable:* To decide what to do. She wanted to found something. And the whole thing would go together. Therefore I had spent a good deal of time talking to her and to the lawyer, suggesting various areas. Now this was many years ago, but the situation hasn't changed very much. And remarkably the choices are very few. John Harvard is a great man. Or at least a great name. Because he founded a university. Constable University may be good or bad, but we don't need another university. We don't need another black university. We don't need another hospital. Each one would do some good, but she wanted to do something *original*.

*Linda Arntzenius:* What *do* we need? What do you think we need?

*Giles Constable:* Well, going back to your question, Flexner was certainly a genius. This was about the first. Then soon after came Dumbarton Oaks as a research institution, and I don't think influenced by [the Institute]. But now research institutions are, I won't say two for a penny, but

they're fairly common. And what do you choose to do? In the terms of when Flexner was living, I can't imagine an improvement. And the Europeans, who didn't have such things, are now beginning to follow our lead. I mean Germany and -

*Linda Arntzenius:* So do you think the Institute really had an impact on the future of higher education in the United States in the way Flexner envisaged it?

*Giles Constable:* Oh yes. Yes. I hope so, yes. Though I'd also say higher research. I think it really did, and does. That I have no hesitation about. And I think that we ought to make a stronger case to *universities* to support us. And I don't know why the directors and trustees don't. Because we are the place that universities rely on for their faculty to come and do the research that they're supposed to do at the universities, but often can't. And we're not apart from them; we're a part of them.

But there are now a fair number of these. Many universities have them. There's the National Humanities Center, which is independent, Wisconsin, Cornell. I couldn't name them all. It's rather the same, though also different, that Dumbarton Oaks had the second of the concert series in Washington. The Library of Congress was first and the Dumbarton Oak concert series second. By the time I had retired I think there were over 100 concert series. And we very seriously debated, and I think still should, giving it up. I don't think that the Dumbarton Oaks concerts, lovely as they are, fill any need in Washington whatsoever. They did then, they don't now. For institutions to be flexible to the needs of their society and where they are is a very important thing. Whether there are enough research institutions now, because I made the case for that to Mrs. Whitney, but I think it didn't appeal, partly because the Institute was here and she wanted something different. And as I say, she didn't only consult with me; she consulted with lots of people, and poor dear, nobody could come up with something new.

She knew she could found a hospital. She knew she could found a university. But did Greater New York need another university? Well, you have your opinion on that, I have mine, she had hers. And hers may have been a little bit self-interested in a way. She would have liked something imaginative.

But there are only four or five great ideas of that sort literally in the history of the world. It's not easy to think of great social institutions. And people who have thought of them have merited well of the world.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Have you given – you say you've given it some thought in connection with Mrs. Whitney – did you come up with any conclusions, if you were playing a game and able to do something of your choice?

*Giles Constable:* No, I really didn't. No. She obviously could've founded a research institution, which I was principally there to talk to her about, that was devoted to some particular field. Many people say that Dumbarton Oaks, with its extraordinary combination of interests - if there were ten institutions like Dumbarton Oaks you should probably have 9/10ths of them abolished. But those are the fields that the Blisses (the founders of Dumbarton Oaks) were interested in: Byzantine studies, gardening, and pre-Columbian.

And she could've founded one interested in all sorts of special things in the history of art or the history of anything. I put this case to her, if she wanted to promote some particular field. But I think that she, again, wanted something that would be not just another institution, even if in rather different fields and doing good work in that, but she never found one. And the estate in fact did exactly what I think was what she didn't want. It was split up, this went there and that went there.

*Linda Arntzenius:* That is sad. Yes.

*Giles Constable:* But that's why I gave it some thought, and I hope if I were in Flexner's place I would do, if I had the imagination, which I don't, precisely what he did. His position now, the Mrs. Whitney position, I am pretty well buffaloed, except to go the Dumbarton Oaks model and choose some fields that you believe in, but aren't being sufficiently promoted, as it were.

I think institutions, which they practically never can be, have to be flexible. They'd have to be ready to change. And there are so many vested interests that it's almost impossible. To try and change Byzantine studies at DO, even change them a little bit, it's as much as your life is worth.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Tell me then, what Institute resources have been important to you. And I'm thinking library, the grounds, living quarters, the access to the University, location in Princeton. What things have you taken advantage of, that have been important to you in your living here?

*Giles Constable:* Well, all those you mentioned, plus unquestionably the peace and quiet to do my research would be the single most significant one. The contact with scholars – when people ask, as I told you, do I miss teaching, I say no, because I come in contact with a different

group - and here I benefit from being with younger medievalists, but I would also benefit from older ones if they were here. That is more than I would have at any university.

What is sad is the turnover. And some people may tell you that it is almost devastating. The terms here are so short that just as I get to know people - and March is a bad month in that way - they're going.

If you talk to former members, they all remember the year they've been with the cadre and have made some permanent friends. I remember many of the members, but ask me what year they were here, who they were with here, and I can't for the life of me remember. Pat has the idea, in fact, that there was a group of faculty before I came here, who used always to lunch together, and really didn't mix with the members at all, partly because they found it so hard, this constant change. Professors at universities complain of this, but they at least have two, three, four years with their students. Here it's more like two, three, four months, and they're on their way. People are colleagues, potential friends, it's very rewarding, yes, but it's also personally quite difficult.

*Linda Arntzenius:* When a member has been here and you've worked with this person for two or three months or four months, is there a feeling of obligation to follow up with them or to respond – you don't have e-mail, but to respond to them in the future? I mean is it a lifetime commitment?

*Giles Constable:* Sometimes yes. Often not. I don't know how many medieval members there have been in my 25 years, but well over 100, and there's just no way that I can keep up with all of them. But there's a decent percentage I do. If not, and somehow I regret I haven't more, that's my fault, as well as theirs. Others I really have, and at long-range.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Do you find that you are important to their future careers? Do you function, you know, giving references or writing papers with them?

*Giles Constable:* I'd like to believe it, but I don't really know. The two things you mentioned, yes. I'm writing fewer references, but as a matter of policy I'd really rather discourage it. At my age I think that I shouldn't be writing too many letters. But collaborating with them? Yes. This volume that I'm doing now is with three former members, and that is directly owing to the Institute.

Well, that's not entirely true, Tia Kolbaba I knew in any case, but I don't think I'd have asked her otherwise.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Well we're getting to the end of our interview. How did coming to the Institute change your life?

*Giles Constable:* Well quite apart from personal things?

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes.

*Giles Constable:* I think it extended it. It's no accident that many of our emeriti here live to considerable ages and remain active.

*Linda Arntzenius:* *[Laughs]* I've often wondered about that.

*Giles Constable:* Whether there's a direct connection or not, I can't tell.

*Linda Arntzenius:* It's certainly worthy of study, don't you think?

*Giles Constable:* I think it is. I really believe that the continued research and interest is, and by choosing those factors that are ones that I hope contribute to a longer life. It doesn't mean that one may not die anytime, but I think the emeriti are quite a remarkable group here, partly for the reason that they've been chosen. Because they still have an interest in living. And for them living is, what many people might consider scribbling away in a dingy old office. *[Laughter]* But for us that is life, and I think it would have been the same at Harvard in many ways.

But there wouldn't be quite that continuity. And when I say "extended my life," I got things out that I couldn't have there. I would've done other things. I would've been teaching. My old friend Franco Simone used to say, "A student more, an article less." And that's a perfectly genuine thing, but I've had about 25 Ph.D.s, and when I went to Dumbarton Oaks, I thought that was probably enough.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Did you change the Institute in any way?

*Giles Constable:* No, I don't think so.

*Linda Arntzenius:* *[Laughs]* No need to be modest.

*Giles Constable:* No.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Tell me, is there a question that you expected me to ask that I haven't asked you?

*Giles Constable:* Well, I didn't spend much time thinking about what you might ask. The only one I thought you might ask, which you did, was how the Institute changed in your time. And I didn't have much reply to that, but some. That I'd given a little bit of thought to.

I thought you might ask do I have any criticisms of the Institute, and I don't.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Are there any changes that you would like to see in the School in the future?

*Giles Constable:* I think I've already answered that. When I say I'd like to see them, I'd really like to discuss – I mean the two-year memberships, which I think were a valuable thing. They're trying to get some more senior people as members, which I think could be done even without stipends. Retired faculty members who feel rather isolated, wherever they are, might be delighted to come here. And we used to have, for instance, long-term members, visitors.

Bob Palmer<sup>40</sup> for many years was – and I'd proposed him.

*Linda Arntzenius:* What was his field?

*Giles Constable:* French Revolution history. We're weak in modern history now. And obviously Goitein<sup>41</sup> and Neugebauer were very distinguished additions, and I don't think they cost a penny. They may have had housing. Bob Palmer didn't. The other two may have had apartments. But from the point of the Institute, and I don't know whether they've actively thought of this or not, they may have rejected the idea for good reason.

But we could increase our coverage, if we're not going to appoint senior members, by having some long-term visitors, to whom it would mean a good deal to have this association, because they may feel cut off. But these are only ideas I'd want to play with with my colleagues, hear the pros and cons. They may say, "We've fully considered that and we've rejected it." Fine, that's their affair.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Right. Well, is there anything else you would like to tell me about the Institute or about your time here or your colleagues or funny things that have happened to you on the way to the forum?  
[Laughs]

---

<sup>40</sup> Robert Roswell Palmer (1909-2002), Visitor in the School of Historical Studies, 1968, 1984-1991, 1995-1996.

<sup>41</sup> Shelomo Dov Goitein (1900-1985), Member in the School of Historical Studies, 1971-1975; Visitor, 1975-1985.

*Giles Constable:* No, they really haven't. I rather hope that the Institute is going to build – you know, they've talked about it - some retired faculty housing. And even though we've moved recently, if within the next four or five years they were to build some housing close by it would be attractive to us. They know we'd be interested.

I think it would be a move in the right direction. Indeed, the majority of new members at this school in historical studies have chosen not to live near to the Institute.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Is that right?

*Giles Constable:* Oh yes.

*Linda Arntzenius:* That's a change. So are they renting in town?

*Giles Constable:* Or buy.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Or buy. Oh, you mean faculty?

*Giles Constable:* Faculty. I'm talking about the faculty.

*Linda Arntzenius:* That's a change.

*Giles Constable:* Certainly Jonathan Israel<sup>42</sup> and Di Cosmo<sup>43</sup> and Bois.<sup>44</sup>

*Linda Arntzenius:* And these are probably people with young children?

*Giles Constable:* No.

*Linda Arntzenius:* I was thinking that would be the explanation for it.

*Giles Constable:* It might be, but not. No. Patricia Crone<sup>45</sup> lives in town. Indeed, I can't think of a single new faculty member – though there may be some – who has chosen to live [close to the Institute's campus].

*Linda Arntzenius:* So it's less and less of the cloistered ...

*Giles Constable:* Yes.

---

<sup>42</sup> Jonathan Israel (1946- ), Professor in the School of Historical Studies, 2001-2016; Emeritus Professor, 2016- .

<sup>43</sup> Nicola di Cosmo (1957- ), Member in the School of Historical Studies, 1999; Professor, 2003- .

<sup>44</sup> Yve-Alain Bois (1952- ), Faculty in the School of Historical Studies, 2005- .

<sup>45</sup> Patricia Crone (1945-2015), Professor in the School of Historical Studies, 1997-2014; Emeritus Professor, 2014-2015.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Well thank you very much.

*Giles Constable:* Well, thank you. And if you think of other things you know where I am.

*[End of Audio]*