

## *The flow of history*

I WRITE THIS NEAR the banks of the Fraser River in New Westminster, British Columbia's original capital and the long-time home of esteemed type designer and printer Jim Rimmer. I've spent the afternoon walking the river west from downtown, across railway tracks and through an industrial precinct whose roots stretch back to the city's origins.

The scent of the river and rain, the creosote and general grit are part and parcel of an industrial heritage to which printing belongs. But like the river flowing to the sea, the heritage is ever changing; one never lives in the same moment twice, and the first edition, once done, can only be followed by a second. An edition can be destroyed and a heritage forgotten, but it doesn't negate the fact of its existence.

This issue is the third to mark the 50th anniversary of the Alcuin Society. The shifting environment for publishing and book design was acknowledged in the first (*Amphora* 169) while the second paid homage to the efforts of the Alcuin Society to acknowledge, through its annual awards program, excellence in book design in Canada (*Amphora* 170). While the circumstances and skills brought to bear on design projects change, the Society has found a niche for itself in celebrating the best in the business (and a business it is, as much as an art), and occasionally withholding awards for categories in which excellence failed to manifest itself.

This issue focuses on the flow of opinion that has surrounded the evolution of printing, design and the book arts in general over the past 50 years. Laura Walz digs into the life and times of Wil Hudson, the printer whose craftsmanship inspired the founding of the

Society, while Phyllis Reeve reviews a book documenting one effort to establish a centre for literary culture in Vancouver, a city that has enjoyed a share of literary residents far out of proportion to its population, from Pauline Johnson and Robert W. Service to Malcolm Lowry and Douglas Coupland and too many others to name. George A. Walker muses on the power of images, a salient topic in an increasingly visual culture attuned to absorbing information on a screen rather than a physical page.

Walker's thoughts, and those of other contributors to recent issues of *Amphora*, reflect an evolving sensibility among those who make and distribute books. The retrospective at the heart of this issue highlights a long-standing concern with the effect of technology on print culture, an issue Andrew Steeves touched on in *Smoke Proofs*, reviewed in *Amphora* 169. Both point to the fact that print culture remains vibrant not in spite of but thanks to technologies that have reinvigorated how people interact with the printed word and the letterforms that comprise it, and their presentation.

The book arts, like New Westminster, are very much in a state of transition. While the industrial heritage remains important, a shift is happening in how print culture functions. The past will never come again, and the first 50 years of the Alcuin Society documented in the pages of *Amphora* are a prelude to the future. Should the Society be so fortunate to mark a century of existence, one expects the book arts to be as much a force as they are now—in a different form, perhaps, but equally vital.

~ Peter Mitham, editor