

Howard Greaves, 1941–2018

AMONG THE MEMORABLE vignettes presented when family and friends gathered to honour former Alcuin Society chair Howard Greaves, who died January 23, was that of Howard as Nimrod coursing through British Columbia's forested interior in his Saab to fulfill his responsibilities as a publisher's rep.

This was the image conjured up by violinist Hank Luck, who played Edward Elgar's song "Nimrod"—a work both quintessentially English and often played in remembrance of loved ones lost.

Appropriately, "Nimrod" was Elgar's tribute to Augustus Jaeger (a name meaning "great hunter"), an editor who encouraged Elgar to persist when his artistic career seemed lost. Howard also possessed this gift for encouragement. The longest-serving chair of the Alcuin Society, he provided steady support and had a legendary knack for drawing people together.

Many of his friends from outside the Alcuin Society were people with whom he spontaneously struck up conversations, or who were drawn into discussions with him at coffee shops. One of my earliest memories of him outside the Society was in the upscale patisserie at Meinhardt's on Vancouver's toney South Granville strip; it seemed natural that where Howard was, conversation flowed freely. Or as one friend remarked: "Howard was a magnet for wonderful company."

The reputation was one that followed him. Adrian Peetoom recalls how, as a travelling representative of educational publishers, Howard knew what he liked and wanted others to enjoy it too.

Born in England in January 1941, Howard worked first for Penguin Books (a lifelong love) then Dillons Bookshop in the U.K. prior to immigrating to Canada in the late 1960s (he relates some of his career in England in "The Glory Days of the Independent Bookseller," *Amphora*, no. 168 [Fall 2014]: 25–26). His first job in Canada was in Montreal with the old Classic Bookshops chain, which involved expeditions around

eastern Canada. Ultimately, a position with Fitzhenry & Whiteside took him to Vancouver.

It was here that he and his wife Winsome raised their sons, Magnus and Orson, who recall a house full of books as they grew up. Howard, often travelling, knew from experience the importance of always having something to read—advice he passed on to them. But reading wasn't just a selfish pursuit, a pastime or means of self-improvement; it could also be for the benefit of others. For many years, Howard would travel to UBC to read texts for audiobooks benefitting the visually impaired.

Books were also about community, not just through the Alcuin Society, but also his own trade group, BCALMER, the British Columbia Association of Learning Materials and Educational Representatives. While changes in the educational publishing sector have reduced the group's membership to a handful, warm feelings continue to distinguish a group Howard helped bring together.

Despite having almost won a lifetime ban for the volume of fines he racked up, Howard made peace with the Vancouver Public Library and served with the Friends of the VPL for many years. It was here that he met Jim Rainer, who introduced him to the Alcuin Society. Jim recruited Howard for the Society's board in 1997, and when Jim stepped down as chair in 2004, Howard stepped up. His election that year led to a 13-year reign, making him the Society's longest-serving chair. He resigned early in 2017, and Sarah Sutherland was elected his successor at last year's annual general meeting.

An online obituary and reminiscences are on the Alcuin Society blog: <http://alcuinsociety.com/howard-greaves-1941-2018>.

~ Peter Mitham, editor