

1992-1993

Good Things in a Mixed Reign

W The main problem facing non-profit societies, as I see it, especially those in the arts, is one of sheer survival. Actually, the Alcuin Society hasn't done too badly in this regard. It has never received [until 1995] any government subvention, though it deserved to. Instead, it has struggled over the years to stay solvent by way of membership fees, sale of publications, book auctions, the very occasional private foundation grant—and being under the wing of a book-loving angel in the guise of printer extraordinaire Don Atkins.

Increasing the membership is perhaps the most attractive way of both enhancing the Society's effectiveness and improving its financial situation. But is it possible in this era of the Information Super Highway and information super hype generally? I think it is. There appears to be a growing backlash against the flood of superficial and meretricious material that assaults us daily. How else explain the phenomenal popularity in Europe and North America of a recording of Gregorian chants by the Benedictine monks of Santo Domingo de Silos? People are getting tired of things slickly commercial and may be turning again to the greater spiritual comfort of fundamental values.

If indeed the tide is on the turn and a growing number of people in Western society are rediscovering the joy of books and reading, how can these people be reached? That is the question that has faced all past chairmen of the Alcuin Society, myself included.

We cannot be all things to all men. My view is that we have two main choices. We can continue—as we have for some time—to broaden the Society's appeal, encompassing readers, buyers, collectors, and book arts devotees; or we can narrow the focus to book arts. The debate still goes on, and your contribution to the debate would be welcomed by the board.

I finally come to the question I'm supposed to answer: What do I remember about my term in office? I am particularly proud of the fact that the Society was able to publish *In Praise of the Book* during my tenure, largely owing to the magnificent contributions of Don Atkins, Gene Horvath, the Koerner Foundation, editors Barbara Hemphill and Jean MacDonald, and designer Gwen Murray. I am also proud of the fact that we successfully

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continued with our annual competition to recognize excellence in Canadian book design. Thanks are due here to organizer Anne Yandle and to judges Ronald Hagler, Roberto Dosil and Dennis Nagy. The award-winning books now have a happy home in the Special Collections division of Simon Fraser University Library, where they are accessible to faculty and students, and particularly to those in the publishing program, where book design is an important component of study.

I am also pleased that we were able to sponsor a number of quality speakers in the Vancouver area: Courtland Benson on contemporary bookbinding in England; Dr. Roy Stokes on the *Book of Kells*; Dr. Wally Chung on collecting CPR books and memorabilia; Stephen Lunsford on the qualities required of a serious book collector; Ian Williston from England on the relationship between the private collector and library collections; Dr. Richard Cavell on Canadian book illustration; and Shirley Jones of Red Hen Press, also from England, speaking about and displaying her own magnificent works of art.

Well, that's it. May the Alcuin Society continue to flourish for another one hundred issues of *Amphora* and for another thirty years! And may you all continue to enjoy buying, collecting, reading and savouring well-written and well-produced books.

