

WIL HUDSON

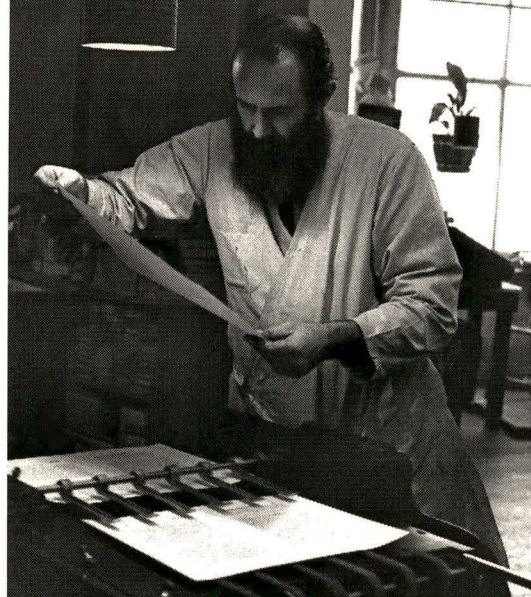
New photos of an old friend

Some interesting images associated with the Alcuin Society recently showed up on the online photo-sharing site flickr.com: photographs from the early 1970s of printer Wil Hudson. Hudson was a key figure in the Society's early years who printed (along with various ephemerae) Theatrical Trip for a Wager. Fascinated to discover the photos, Amphora contacted the person who posted them—the photographer's son, Sean Johnston, PhD, Reader in History of Science and Technology, University of Glasgow—and asked about their history...

My father, Harold Johnston, was a plasterer with a lifelong avocation as a serious photographer and camera collector. In his trade he befriended Keith Shields, a sculptor and artist who knew Wil and a variety of artists, illustrators and sculptors working in Vancouver's East End. In early 1970 my dad began to visit Wil's print shop near Victoria Square, usually with me (then aged 13) in tow. During most of the visits, he photographed Wil at work.

The location, below ground level on Cambie Street, had no toilet and served as both shop and home. Besides Wil, it hosted at various times cats, a girlfriend and a typesetting apprentice, Jeffrey. I remember the corresponding smells and orderly disorder of printed sheets, books and mechanical parts. Wil, despite his bohemian existence, was remarkably equable, polite and tolerant of kids.

For a time, my father's connection had a business dimension: Wil needed archive-quality photographs of engravings to be produced for a small-print-run book for the Alcuin Society, and they worked together to create them. I recall watching my dad photograph the originals, and developed the prints with him in his darkroom in our basement in Burnaby. An early rite of passage was my delivering of the finished prints to Wil down-



town after school one afternoon, carried in a portfolio bearing labels he had printed: *Hal Johnston & Son, Photographers*. Probably bemused by my solemnity, Wil and Jeffrey took me to the corner diner for something to eat while they looked over the prints.

Wil was outspokenly critical of convention (displaying the framed poem "Behold the aspidistra! indifferent to what may pass . . . nor does it blossom or ever bear fruit, just like the middle class"), but came often to our suburban home through the 1970s, usually accompanied by artistic folk.

In 1971, Wil moved from the Cambie Street shop to an unamenable industrial unit off Commercial Drive. There he did more commercial printing, including Linotype work, and partnered or shared the space for a time with another printer. Our visits, still frequent, no longer absorbed the bustle of Cambie Street life.

My family kept in touch with Wil through his period at Baffin Island during the late 1970s, where he oversaw the Kingait Press Inuit printing co-operative, and his subsequent return to B.C. After my father's death in 1985 and my marriage the following year, those remaining links disappeared too.

Hal Johnston's photographs can be seen at www.flickr.com (search "Wil Hudson").

SPEECHLESS

In *Amphora* 147, we reported on a new collection of four seminal wordless novels titled *Graphic Witness*. The collection included the Canadian artist Laurence Hyde's *Southern Cross*. Last fall Montreal publisher Drawn & Quarterly also issued a new edi-

tion reproducing the work, with an introduction by woodcut novel historian David A. Beronä. Drawn & Quarterly is one of Canada's most dynamic publishers, and we hope to run a feature about the imprint in an upcoming issue.