## Remembering Robin: A Few of Many Thoughts

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Robin and I arrived at Bishop's the same year, thrown around the periphery of the old guard. We became friends, part of the new recruits that slowly and inevitably became a new old guard. It was a post at which Robin stood with wisdom, maintained by a strong sense of duty to his new academic home — a domicile that he tended often above and beyond any call, and never for the sake of the recognition he deserved.

One evening early in our tenure, during a poker game, Robin made a comment concerning some issue of national economic policy. He said, "That's not rational." It was the way he said it that struck me. It was as though in those words, spoken unpretentiously, he was calling up centuries of accumulated wisdom. It was more than the judgement of a professional historian. He would often say such things in that way.

He was, to be sure, an historian. He knew the madness that awaited people and institutions and nations when they ignored their roots in that which transcends them. Those roots included tradition: its legacy of the search for the best, and its lessons of the impositions of the worst. For Robin this was not only a matter for the historian: it was a moral and theological position that informed much of what he did — indeed, who he was. So he lived it naturally and easily because that was essentially Robin.

And, consistently, he took on tasks that demanded much of him. He gave his most when doing the right thing involved someone or something that he loved and valued. The last involvement, though only one of many, was service on a committee whose job was no less than determining a future for Bishop's in the face of drastic budget cuts. We could see it drain his energy. We could see his concern. And although we wished, for his sake, that he not do that job, at the same time we knew that he had to, and that there was no one better to inject some rationality into the process. That's why the University — the institution — misses him and owes much to him.

Just as Bishop's was not merely a place for Robin to teach, so the Eastern Townships was not merely a place for him to live. He studied it appreciatively and lectured on its history to his classes as well as to many groups throughout the region. His Eastern Townships Research Centre and this journal bear witness to his devotion of time and energy.

Both Robin and Mary Ann came from Montreal, and — typically — they retained close ties with their friends there while making friends here. Many of his Montreal friends were students he taught and motivated during his time at Concordia. But Robin and Mary Ann were at home in the Townships. One got the impression that was so even before they moved here and bought their house overlooking the St. Francis River in Ascot. That home was where they raised Christopher and Steven, now graduate students in Physics and Classics respectively, and where they welcomed and entertained (and sometimes cared for) their friends.

A true aficionado of sports, Robin felt watching a game was best done with friends and appropriate refreshments. Because his love of sports was combined with his love of Bishop's, he was a Gaiter fan par excellence. When he was unable to attend football games because he was hospitalized, he would telephone and ask how the Gaiters did (and why). Bowl games (super or otherwise) were often watched with friends at his home. Following Robin's death a moment of silence was observed at a Bishop's basketball game in his honour. That was how it should be.

And finally, he was his own person and somewhat out of place in the (post-) modern world — a fact he recognized. He would occasionally state that he would have to step aside to make room for the next generation with its methods and with its attitudes. He had the satisfaction that he had contributed to the education and upbringing of the best of that generation; but sometimes he failed to recognize that people like him should never step aside, because they and what they give are invaluable and irreplaceable.

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## Quelques souvenirs de Robin Burns

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J'ai connu Robin Burns surtout entre 1987 et 1989, alors qu'il présidait le Centre de recherche des Cantons de l'Est, au conseil duquel il m'avait invité. En tête d'un procès-verbal, je le vois s'appeler "chairman" et, à la fin, "chairperson", ce qui montre bien l'influence que des collaboratrices aussi dévouées qu'Andrée Chartrand ou Monique Nadeau-Saumier purent avoir sur lui. On dira par la suite "the Chair", ce qui donait toute une solennité au poste, qu'il occupait avec la dignité requise. Il menait les réunions avec

rondeur et bonhomie, n'imposant jamais son point de vue, sachant écouter et toujours très sensible aux personnes. Il fut le véritable moteur qui mit en marche ce Centre, qui mène depuis lors, sans tambour ni trompette, mais avec efficacité, son petit bonhomme de chemin.

En 1989, Robin partit en année sabbatique, avec un projet sur les Cantons-de-l'Est et la Première Guerre mondiale. Je n'ai jamais vu de livre ou d'article de lui, si ce n'est son « The Montreal Irish and the Great War » (*CCHA*, 1985). Peut-être est-ce parce que je ne lis pas assez de revues d'inspiration irlandaise... Je savais bien qu'il était le spécialiste de D'Arcy McGee, dont il a écrit la biographie pour le tome XI du *Dictionnaire biographique canadien*. On me dit qu'il a entrepris bien des recherches, dont son perfectionnisme l'a empêché de publier les résultats. On reconnaît là un syndrome présent chez plus d'un de nos collègues universitaires. Cela les prive d'une partie de la "gloire" et du renom qui s'attache à la fonction de professeur; cela ne les empêche pas de fournir, dans la mesure de leurs moyens et avec beaucoup de bonne volonté, une contribution appréciable à la formation des étudiants et à l'avancement collectif des connaissances. Parti trop tôt, Robin Burns restera dans ma mémoire comme un collègue distingué, plein d'humour, simple et fort apprécié.