

HOWARD ERSKINE-HILL

Howard Henry Erskine-Hill

19 June 1936 – 26 February 2014

elected Fellow of the British Academy 1985

by

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Howard Erskine-Hill, Professor of Literary History at Cambridge University and Fellow of Pembroke College, Cambridge; he specialised in eighteenth-century English literature with particular interest in Alexander Pope. His major publications include *The Social Milieu of Alexander Pope* (1975); *The Augustan Idea in English Literature* (1983); *Poetry and the Realm of Politics* (1996); and *Poetry of Opposition and Revolution* (1996). Editions include Pope's *Horatian Satires and Epistles* (1964) and *Selected Letters* (2000).



HOWARD ERSKINE-HILL

Writing the memoir of a friend can be surprisingly disconcerting. As you work through the personal archive you encounter, if not exactly a stranger, a more complex and complicated individual than you had imagined. We knew Howard in very different capacities but, as the personal ‘Commonplace Books’ now deposited in the library of Pembroke College, Cambridge, attest, neither knew him fully. He had many other students, colleagues, and friends, and a difficult family history of which he seldom spoke. This, then, is very much a collaborative effort attempting to convey something of the rich diversity of Howard’s life, drawing upon both personal reminiscence and the written remains.

Held in the chapel of Pembroke College, Cambridge, Howard’s memorial service was remarkable for the sheer number of former pupils, many from years long past, who turned up to pay their respects. But Howard was an exceptional and devoted teacher who evoked affection and admiration in equal measure. In a ‘Commonplace Book’ entry for 14 June 2005 he records how,

Last week, after the regular lunch for third-year Pembroke English students, one of them said to me: ‘You’re not like a lot of the other university dons who are always looking at their watches to go back to their computers or the UL. You like to teach us!’ This was said very casually but intentionally. I was *so* pleased! How unexpected! What a grace! It is of course what I hope to be.

In the aftermath of Howard’s passing pupil after pupil confirmed that sense of dedication, writing of his kind but firm oversight, his dry, if often mischievous, sense of humour, and his unfailing humanity. It is important to begin with that. While the world at large will remember the scholar, those who knew Howard well will recall how the scholarship reflected the man.

Howard was born on 19 June 1936 in Wakefield, Yorkshire, the only child of Henry Erskine-Hill (1902–1989), a Scottish architect, and his first wife, Hannah Lilian Poppleton (1910–1991). His mother stemmed from a well-known family of worsted spinners and knitters in the nearby mill town of Horbury where Howard grew up with his cousin, John. The town is perhaps best known as the place where Sabine Baring-Gould, curate in the 1860s, wrote for the Sunday School procession the hymn ‘Onward Christian Soldiers’—not quite Howard’s taste in hymnody, militant though he could be. Howard’s father came close to designing a new Episcopal cathedral for Aberdeen but was pipped at the post by Ninian Comper. There was a strong Anglican tradition in the Erskine-Hill family; Howard’s grandfather became first Provost of what was to become Aberdeen Cathedral and his great uncle was Vicar of Horbury and Canon of Wakefield.

Despite such strong Anglican leanings, however, Howard was educated at Ashfield College in Harrogate, a Methodist boarding school, where he formed some lifelong

friendships, notably with the future author Arnold Pacey. He credited the English teacher, Bill Radley, with cultivating his love of literature and inspiring his future career. So it was that, exempt from National Service on account of his asthma, Howard read English and Philosophy at Nottingham University, graduating BA in 1957, then PhD in 1961 with a dissertation entitled ‘Tradition and Affinity in the Poetry of Pope’.

During the Second World War Howard’s father served as an army officer but moved to Ireland shortly after when the marriage fell apart. He was to remarry and have two children, Stephen and Diana, whom Howard eventually discovered and got to know. After Stephen’s death Howard developed a particularly strong bond with his half-sister, though she was profoundly deaf, and they went walking together in the north, following up family traces and places. In a poem entitled ‘Family Affairs’ (dated October 2013), Howard recorded how it felt ‘Strange to meet half-brother and half-sister, / And through them see again my errant Dad.’ The allusion was doubtless to Tasso’s ‘padre errante’, and conjures up a complex mixture of affection and critique. Howard was on sabbatical at the Research Triangle in North Carolina when he received news of his father’s death in 1989. His mother had accompanied him, and he felt unable to leave her to attend the funeral because, as the same poem records, she ‘at least never walked out on me’. Although their relationship was often difficult, Howard was immensely protective of Hannah, who had been left in such difficult circumstances after the divorce that he sent her ten shillings each week from his student grant, a notable sum at the time. Eventually she joined him in Cambridge and they lived together in the comfortable surroundings of 194 Chesterton Road until her death in 1991. It is evident that Howard saw in their relationship a strong reflection of that eulogised by Pope in the concluding section of his ‘Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot’:

Me, let the tender office long engage
 To rock the cradle of reposing age,
 With lenient arts extend a mother’s breath,
 Make langour smile, and smooth the bed of death.
 Explore the thought, explain the asking eye,
 And keep awhile one parent from the sky!
 (‘Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot’, ll, 408–12)

Commenting on this passage, Howard writes that ‘a personal, even confessional poem, comes to rest with allusion to an unusual circumstance of Pope’s life: his own unmarried position and his mother’s great age. It is a situation as peculiar to him as Horace’s having a freedman father was to the Roman poet.’¹ But it was a ‘peculiarity’ Howard shared with Pope. Not for the only time the critic found personal empathy

¹H. Erskine-Hill, *The Augustan Idea in English Literature* (London, 1983), p. 314.

with his poet. In Howard's case, the loss of his mother was partly filled by Diana, herself a published poet, who to his grief in turn developed cancer and died in Dun Laoghaire just as Howard himself was losing his bearings.

Following the award of the PhD, Howard taught in the English Department at the University of Wales, Swansea, from 1960 to 1965, reaching the grade of Senior Lecturer. Appointed to a lectureship at the University of Cambridge in 1965, he was promoted to Reader in 1984 and Professor of Literary History in 1994, a post he held until his retirement in 2003. He was conferred with a LittD in 1988. A Fellow of Jesus College from 1969 to 1980, Howard moved in that year to Pembroke College where he remained for the rest of his career. Following his election to the British Academy in 1985 he proved to be an active member of the Fellowship, regularly attending section meetings and serving on the Publications Committee for seven years from 1987 to 1994. He also organised a major symposium in May 1994 to mark the 250th anniversary of the death of Alexander Pope. The event culminated in Howard's delivery of the Warton Lecture, 'Pope and Slavery', to a packed and appreciative auditorium. That lecture, together with five other papers from the symposium, were subsequently published under his editorship as *Alexander Pope: World and Word*, in the *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 91 (1998).²

By the time that volume appeared Howard enjoyed an international reputation as one of the leading authorities on Pope. While at Swansea he had published a much admired edition of the *Horatian Satires and Epistles* (Oxford, 1964), but secured his academic reputation with *The Social Milieu of Alexander Pope: Lives, Example and the Poetic Response*, published to great acclaim in 1975. Donald Davie spoke for many when he remarked in the *Modern Language Review* that 'this is one of those rare books which truly deserve the description: humane learning ... [Erskine-Hill's] book is a great achievement, and also a great pleasure. It is even in its sober way entertaining as well as instructive. I do not know when literary scholarship in England came up with anything so deeply satisfying.'³ Based on the premise that 'a literary artist, like any other man, lives in a shared world', *The Social Milieu* presented an analysis, through six meticulously documented biographical studies, of 'Pope's society, and of the social poetry which, as a member of that society, Pope produced'.⁴ Dismissing reports of the death of the author as greatly exaggerated, Howard emphasised the poet's agency, creative, moral and conflicted, by examining his complex engagement with the dynamics of contemporary political and social life. At the heart of his concern

²The other contributors were Hester Jones, Claude Rawson, Julian Ferraro, David Nokes and Thomas Keymer.

³D. Davie, 'Review of *The Social Milieu of Alexander Pope*', *Modern Language Review*, 73 (1978), 407.

⁴H. Erskine-Hill, *The Social Milieu of Alexander Pope: Lives, Example and the Poetic Response* (New Haven, CT, 1975), p. 1.

was the relationship between history and exemplarity, and the ethics of using, and abusing, living persons to point literary morals. Pope's heroes he identified as John Kryle, the celebrated 'Man of Ross', John Caryll, the Jacobite peer, William Digby, fifth Baron Digby of Geashill, and Ralph Allen, the model for Fielding's Squire Allworthy. His villains were Peter Walter, Fielding's Peter Pounce, and Sir John Blunt, of South Sea Bubble fame, or infamy. The distinguishing criterion Howard credits Pope with using was philanthropy, understood as the socially responsible use of material resources. By investigating hitherto neglected archives he brought the whole gallery of rogues and heroes to life, contextualising the poetry as never before. If the work had a fault it was a failure adequately to recognise the inevitable gap between reality and representation. There is a lot more to the psychology of satire than just 'the strong antipathy of good to bad', and one suspects that Pope's motives were often less impartial, and even less lucid, than Howard suggests.⁵ Nevertheless, he succeeds magnificently in elucidating the materials from which the myths were fashioned.

The Social Milieu was intended as the first of a two-part study and the project was completed in 1983 with the appearance of *The Augustan Idea in English Literature*, a massive exploration of the relationship between poetry and power from the ancient world to the eighteenth century, gauged through varying responses, from the hostile to the celebratory, to the 'idea of the Augustan'. Howard's basic contention was that this 'idea' was plural and relentlessly self-reflexive:

The word 'Idea' in my title is not intended to suggest that the English reception of Rome's Augustan Age involved one idea alone, as it might be for example, of peaceful empire, or of enlightened patronage of poets. 'Idea' must perforce stand for a shifting pattern of ideas, some diametrically opposed, if pressed to their extreme forms. The grateful view of Virgil and Horace; the penetrating and hostile view of Tacitus; and the Christian providential view of Eusebius, each quite different from the others, are the major components of what may for the sake of brevity be termed the Augustan Idea. Separated out, they formed the arguments in a debate about the nature of Augustan Rome. Drawn together they composed a compound image in which compatibility was more evident than contradiction.⁶

Amongst the study's most innovative features is the recognition of 'Augustan' elements in political iconography and courtly literature long before the Restoration in the writings of Donne and Jonson. But Howard's main interests lay in the eighteenth century and the work culminates in a subtly nuanced set of essays on Pope's imitations of Horace, mingling acutely close readings of the texts with minute attention to the political circumstances in which they were written.

⁵'Epilogue to the Satires: Dialogue 2', l. 198.

⁶Erskine-Hill, *The Augustan Idea in English Literature*, pp. xi–xii.

The introduction to *The Augustan Idea* provides the clearest, and for some the most provocative, articulation of Howard's critical philosophy: 'Evidence has been presented and conclusions based on that evidence. I acknowledge the principle of truth as the end of scholarship, and have no interest in the production of subjective myth in the guise of criticism, or in the mere multiplication of readings none of which has any greater probability than the rest.'⁷ No one is mentioned by name but a former colleague, detecting a personal slight, took immediate umbrage—not unlike Pope's Belinda. In the course of a somewhat bilious critique in the *Kenyon Review* Frank Kermode professed to find Howard's comments 'quite deplorable', particularly from 'so pedestrian an author'.⁸ It was a foretaste of intellectual battles to come. Yet Kermode's response hardly came as a surprise; there was bad blood there already, owing to previous protracted disputes in the English Faculty. On hearing news of Kermode's imminent departure to the United States in 1981, Howard confided to his *Commonplace Book* the opinion that 'nobody has done such disservice to his subject and to our Faculty. I should like the church bells of Cambridge to ring to celebrate his going.'⁹ In a highly Popean manner policies had become personalised and persons politicised. The antagonists had far more in common than they imagined, but neither could see it. And the silence of the bells was ominous. While welcoming the advent of Christopher Ricks as Chairman of the Faculty Board the following year Howard admitted, 'I still can't stop myself disagreeing with him.'¹⁰ But why should he? Whether he knew it or not, such disagreements were the engines of his intellectual life.

Beginning with Niall Rudd's warm appraisal in the *London Review of Books*,¹¹ the general reaction to *The Augustan Idea* was, pace Kermode, highly positive. According to Paul Hammond, for example, 'Dr Erskine-Hill has not only brought alive a significant intellectual tradition, but also shown that the key texts which are located at the critical moments of that tradition are more careful, complex, and, in the end, costly achievements than we had realized.'¹² The most prevalent criticism of the work, best articulated by Emrys Jones, was not to its content but its structure. In the second half, Jones observed, 'the author seems at some points distracted into side-issues, at others over-attached to some of his favourite themes, such as Horatian influence or imitation. The problem is partly that, by the final sections of the work the Horatian has, in

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁸ F. Kermode, 'Review of *The Augustan Idea in English Literature*', *The Kenyon Review*, n.s. 6 (1984), 132–5.

⁹ *Commonplace Books*, 31 December 1981.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 6 November 1982.

¹¹ N. Rudd, 'Review of *The Augustan Idea in English Literature*', *London Review of Books*, 4 August 1983, 22–3.

¹² P. Hammond, 'Review of *The Augustan Idea in English Literature*', *The Review of English Studies*, n.s. 36 (1985), 604–5.

a sense, displaced the Augustan—an outcome that would undoubtedly have pleased the poet if not the *princeps*.’ But Jones concluded that he had ‘learned a great deal, and have been made to think about a large and important complex of ideas. I will certainly return to *The Augustan Idea* for further stimulus and enlightenment.’¹³

It was adherence to the principles that so offended Frank Kermode that led Howard to oppose the proposal to confer an honorary degree on Jacques Derrida at Cambridge in 1992.¹⁴ What was at stake, in his view, was nothing less than the validity of truth itself, a concept Derrida appeared to disable, thereby rendering evidentially based research impossible. To honour the man, he argued, was to endorse the methodology and undermine the educational standards to which students and teachers should aspire. The flysheet he composed with the eminent philosopher Hugh Mellor charged that ‘the major preoccupation and effect of [Derrida’s] voluminous work has been to deny and to dissolve those standards of evidence and argument on which all academic disciplines are based’. According to the opposed camp, Derrida was attempting ‘to reveal the links between thought, language, and the world’. In the Senate House on 21 March 1992, Howard, together with Ian Jack, Hugh Mellor and Raymond Page, cried ‘non placet’ against the proposed award, thereby triggering a debate in Congregation some weeks later. In the meantime the controversy reached the national press. For those unacquainted with Latin *The Times* helpfully translated ‘non placet’ as ‘roughly, you must be joking’ and quoted Howard as saying that,

The heart of the matter is that Derrida does not seem to have a theory of knowledge in which one can distinguish probability from non-probability or truth from falsehood. His theory does not recognise the touchstones which allow us to distinguish the likely from the unlikely ... It is not good enough to argue that because someone is influential he is worthy of an honorary degree. (*The Times*, 9 May 1992)

Howard drew particular comfort from the support of so many international philosophers, remarking that ‘throughout the campaign professional philosophers inside and outside Cambridge supported the non placet side. In particular, the letter from nineteen philosophers all over the world, published in *The Times* on 19 May 1992, including the name of Willard van Orman Quine, made it clear that there was international opposition to what Cambridge was proposing to do on the part of those best qualified to judge.’ The issue was debated in Congregation on 16 May, with eventual victory to the proposers by a margin of 336 votes to 204. The opponents had not necessarily expected to win. As Howard explained, ‘our goal was something more

¹³ E. Jones, ‘Review of *The Augustan Idea in English Literature*’, *Modern Language Review*, 80 (1985), 423–6.

¹⁴ For a full account of the matter see H. Erskine-Hill, ‘Viewpoint’, *The Cambridge Review*, 113, no. 2319 (December 1992), 173–7.

important: to deny anyone the possibility of claiming that Derrida now represented an orthodoxy in Cambridge. We wished to put down a marker that would make it clear to all who had not much considered the issues, and especially junior members, that there was plenty of intellectual space for the development of their own views and that the controversy concerning the value of Derrida was very much alive.¹⁵ Nonetheless, the outcome dismayed him for he saw it as tantamount to ‘symbolic suicide’ on the part of the university (*Guardian*, 18 May 1992). Or, as he later put it somewhat more colourfully, Cambridge had appointed ‘a pyromaniac to the post of chief fireman’.¹⁶ Resentments lingered for many years, worsening an already fractious atmosphere within the English Faculty.

Although the politics in which Howard interested himself were primarily those of the state, he focused upon personalities. For him, public life was the stage upon which principle was tested and he was fascinated by the various acts of courage, cowardice and betrayal it produced, particularly as represented in poetry and drama. His work in this area culminated in the simultaneous publication in 1996 of the two companion volumes *Poetry and the Realm of Politics* and *Poetry of Opposition and Revolution*, dealing between them with the politics of literature from Shakespeare to Wordsworth. In the introduction to the first volume Howard best articulated the critical principles that informed not just the current publications but his lifelong aims:

The chief contention of this book is that there is a political comment, often involving contemporary political ideas and historical circumstance, in some of the most powerful poetic works of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English literature, works which have in the past been usually read for their aesthetic achievement and generalized wisdom. I argue that this political component is an eventual part of their aesthetic life, and that that, in its turn, is part of that wider historical culture which it is the vocation of scholarship to explore with as much imagination and disinterestedness as it can.¹⁷

A particular strength of the two-volume project is its analysis of the ways in which various writers such as Milton, Dryden, Pope, Dr Johnson and Wordsworth struggled with experiences of defeat, disaffection or disappointment. For private as well as professional reasons, Howard was always fascinated by the lost cause, the missed opportunity, the road not taken, a feature of his writing that is particularly evident in his frequent recourse to Jacobite history, and the fine analysis of Wordsworth’s *Prelude* that concludes *Poetry of Opposition and Revolution*.¹⁸ But it was Pope, a selection

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 174, 175.

¹⁶See B. Peeters, *Derrida: a Biography* (Cambridge, 2013), p. 433.

¹⁷H. Erskine-Hill, *Poetry and the Realm of Politics: Shakespeare to Dryden* (Oxford, 1996), p. 1.

¹⁸H. Erskine-Hill, *Poetry of Opposition and Revolution: Dryden to Wordsworth* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 169–247; Howard described the *Prelude* as ‘a kind of poetic companion of my life’ (p. viii).

of whose letters he edited in 2000, and whose biography he was writing at the time of his death, who remained to the end the centre of his scholarly attention.¹⁹

In the absence of romantic attachments, close literary friendships, notably with the poets Donald Davie and John Holloway, and his many pupils and colleagues, provided the emotional ballast of Howard's life.²⁰ With Davie he developed a particularly close bond, cemented by the poet's dedication to him of 'Reminded of Bougainville', a meditation on the Falklands War inspired by a late-night conversation in Cambridge. On receiving the typescript, Howard records that,

I wept for some minutes. Why should this be? I think these were tears of release. Partly that a poet I admire so much should inscribe a poem to me—thus, gratified self-importance on my part. Partly, and perhaps more relevant, that in this tenuous way I was linked with an episode which so stirred my imagination, and with this expedition in which I so much longed to have been included, absurd as such an idea might seem.²¹

A further instance of appreciation occurred in 2008 with the appearance of the Festschrift *Literary Milieux: Essays in Text and Context, Presented to Howard Erskine-Hill* edited by David Womersley and Richard McCabe with contributions from Alastair Fowler, Tom MacFaul, David Nokes, Paul Hammond, Julian Ferraro, Niall MacKenzie, George Rousseau, Robert Mayhew, Hester Jones, Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, Claude Rawson, Valerie Rumbold, Thomas Keymer and Peter MacDonald. Commenting on the collection the editors noted that,

the pervasive concern with intellectual and political context evident in our essays reflects Howard's own scholarly approach, but their chronological range [from Spenser to Wordsworth] falls far short of his. The bibliography of his writings supplied at the close of this preface attests to the astonishing scope and depth of his interests and also to the diversity of his readership. His works range from the most magisterial of research monographs to the most accessible of student introductions and the two categories are intimately related. In Howard the teacher and the scholar are one.²²

And the bibliography is truly astonishing in charting not just the intellectual life of an indefatigable scholar but also, in the section headed 'Letters', a lifelong commitment to asserting and defending personal principles. The final category, 'Poetry', is misleading in listing only one item, some verses from a sequence on Augustus contributed to *Pembroke Poets*, edited by Robert Macfarlane and David Quentin (Cambridge, 1997). In fact, Howard wrote poetry throughout most of his life as a means of exploring the

¹⁹ H. Erskine-Hill (ed.), *Selected Letters: Alexander Pope* (Oxford, 2000).

²⁰ See Howard's obituary of John Holloway, *The Independent*, 9 September 1999.

²¹ Commonplace Books, 12 February 1983.

²² D. Womersley and R. McCabe, 'Preface', in D. Womersley and R. McCabe (eds.), *Literary Milieux: Essays in Text and Context, Presented to Howard Erskine-Hill* (Newark, DE, 2008), p. 7.

intricate relationships between his work, his friendships and his attitudes to the wider world.

The letters Howard directed to various newspapers and politicians chart his changing political views from militant Labour and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, via the Tories, to the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP). The transition was difficult. Much as he admired Mrs Thatcher's stance over the Falklands, news of an election in 1983 filled him with doubt. 'Who can I vote for?', he asked himself on 12 April, 'four years ago I had no hesitation in giving my vote to Mr Callaghan and Labour. Now I cannot easily vote Labour ... If you believe in democratic procedure and in defence, you cannot vote Labour this time. If you believe in government support for the economy and unemployment, you cannot vote Tory.'²³ As time went on, however, he became increasingly antagonistic to the European Community and ever more supportive of Mrs Thatcher's euro-scepticism. On 12 May 1991 he wrote to the then former Prime Minister, dissuading her from stepping down from the House of Commons so that she could lead opposition to the European project. 'I am originally a Labour voter who came over to the Conservatives during your premiership', he explained, 'your record on the Unions, and your example on the Falklands War, converted me; and I have subsequently written to you to express support for your policies: when you gave the USA landing rights for its Libyan raid, when you departed for the Madrid summit, and on the resignation of Sir Geoffrey Howe.' This was just the introduction: he had a particular point to make, and one that is very resonant today:

Shortly before you resigned you seemed to envisage the possibility of holding a referendum on entry into a federal EC. I wrote to the papers to support this (the *Independent*, I think, published a letter) and I am still convinced that an honest and open referendum is the only way in which the United Kingdom can properly decide whether to support closer European integration, without shattering one or both of the main parties. Country should in any case come before party on this issue: neither side of the dispute can welcome the centuries of frustrated nationalism which are likely to ensue if a British Government joins a federal EC without the wholehearted support of the British people.

After Thatcher left the Commons, dissatisfaction with her successors, and anxieties over what he regarded as the progressive loss of national sovereignty, eventually led Howard to UKIP.

Howard's religious views underwent a transformation no less radical than his politics. Despite (or because of?) his Methodist schooling he spent his student years as an atheist and maintained essentially the same outlook into middle age. But shortly

²³ Commonplace Books, 12 April 1983.

after Brian Watchorn became Dean and Chaplain of Pembroke in 1982 Howard started to appear at Sunday Evensong in Chapel. He relished the stylistic elegance of the Book of Common Prayer and regularly read the First Lesson from the Old Testament of the King James Bible. If asked to read from the New Testament, he often came close to tears. Yet the Church of England was fated not to be his final destination. Unhappy at the ordination of women as priests, he was eventually received into the Roman Catholic Church. But although the Catholic chaplaincy, Fisher House, became his spiritual home, he by no means abandoned College Chapel, continuing to attend evensong on Fridays and Sundays, before proceeding to dinner in Hall. On the demise of the antique gong that had traditionally summoned Fellows to dine he drew on his command of mock epic to extract a humorous memento mori:

Aeneas, Hector, captains all,
 Great Agamemnon, all did fall,
 Princes and Pawns shall pass away,
Timor mortis conturbat me...
 Now Time's fell hand it hath done wrong,
 To Pembroke Senior Parlour's Gong
 Resounding bronze must age decay
Timor mortis conturbat me...

The gong was restored.

On New Year's Eve 1981, having recently migrated from Jesus College to Pembroke, Howard recorded in his Commonplace Books, 'not a bad year. I am happy at Pembroke, more than I could have been at any other Cambridge College'. That happiness was to last and, in the years following his mother's death, take on an ever deepening significance. At his home in Chesterton, shared with a feisty little Dachshund named Bounce (named, naturally, after Pope's favourite dog), he gathered a considerable collection of antiquarian books, prints and Jacobite medals and memorabilia. There also he received special friends and entertained in remarkably generous style. But college life provided the wider society that, especially in the final years, served as an antidote to the encroaching loneliness of age. After several months of decline, exacerbated by a bad fall, he slipped away peacefully on 26 February 2014 at the Cambridge Manor Care Home in Brian's company, and was buried, according to Catholic rites, with his mother in the churchyard at Fen Ditton. As well as providing for Fisher House, Howard left the bulk of his estate to Pembroke, including his personal collection of pictures. He had previously secured for the college the substantial collection of his friend. Monica Partridge, firming up the creation of a college Fine Arts Committee which, it is hoped, will stand as a memorial. Perhaps his best epitaph, as both scholar and teacher, was written by his favourite poet:

Blessed with a taste exact, yet unconfined;
A knowledge both of books and human kind;
Generous converse, a soul exempt from pride;
And love to praise, with reason on his side.
(Pope, *Essay on Criticism*, II. 639–42)

Note on the authors: Richard McCabe is Professor of English Language and Literature at the University of Oxford, and a Fellow of Merton College, Oxford; he was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 2007. Revd Canon Brian Watchorn is the former Dean of Pembroke College, Cambridge.

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