DONALD A. BULLOUGH

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On 13 June, 1998, scholars from many countries gathered in St Andrews to celebrate the seventieth birthday of Donald Auberon Bullough. The theme of the meeting on the days surrounding that date was Early Medieval Rome and the Christian West: this book is the proceedings of that conference. We offer the volume to him as a memento of an academic gathering distinguished by intellectual vibrancy and social conviviality.

Donald Bullough could never be described as a conventional historian. A Corresponding Fellow of the Monumenta Germaniae Historica who has published no monumental edition of a standard text, he has nevertheless contributed much to our understanding of textual transmission in the early middle ages. He has led no research team nor founded a “school” of inquiry. With one notable exception, he has avoided publishing the sort of monograph which Britain’s Research Assessment Exercise seems to demand. Indeed, he claims that he would not have flourished in the academic climate of the 1990s.

Donald’s strengths lie elsewhere: in lectures subsequently turned into articles, in inspirational footnotes and in his own unrestrained intellectual vibrancy and social conviviality. To celebrate his scholarly career *viva voce* as “Friends, Neighbours and Fellow-Drinkers” was a fitting way to share his friendship and acuity, his wit and his wisdom. To follow the Bulloughfest with a volume on its early medieval theme shares that celebration with a wider audience.

Donald’s originality as a historian developed early. His boyhood enthusiasm for the middle ages began not only with country churches but also with place names, and developed with the encouragement of an inspiring schoolmaster at Newcastle-under-Lyme High School. From there, he went up to St John’s College, Oxford. Here his interests matured into a love of European history at a time when English administrative and political history reigned supreme in medieval circles within the English academic establishment. In early medieval Italy he soon found a focus for research which British scholars had not addressed since Thomas Hodgkin in the nineteenth century.
These interests were encouraged by his research supervisor, Michael Wallace-Hadrill, of whom Donald has himself written with respect and affection. Donald’s familiarity with continental scholars and scholarship, especially German and Italian, was rare in post-war Britain: it reflected a gift for languages and a love of travel which he had acquired from his father.

Carving out a name for himself with early articles on the administrative history of Carolingian Italy, Donald displayed from the start his characteristic intellectual hallmarks: a mastery of technical detail, a talent for formulating the incisive question which can open up an entire new field of enquiry and an ability to catch the incoming tide of academic interest. An article on “Urban change in early medieval Italy: the example of Pavia” published in 1966 demonstrated those qualities to the full: after a generation of intensive work on late antique and early medieval urban topographies throughout the Roman world, it remains barely challenged in its assessments. If this article opened up urban transformation as a field of inquiry in its own right, the first group of studies presented here is some acknowledgement of that.

Direct links with Rome have not so much been the immediate subject of Donald’s research as a constant backdrop to it. His long association with the British School at Rome was inaugurated by his appointment as Rome Scholar in Medieval Studies in 1951 and has continued more recently in his service as a Council member and, in 1984, as acting Director. Rome has featured obliquely in much of Donald’s more recent work on the well-springs and legacy of the Carolingian renaissance, as it did in that of his own special hero, Alcuin. The essays gathered here in the second section pay tribute to this: more than one takes his “Roman Books and Carolingian renovatio” as its starting point. In that article, as in his The Age of Charlemagne, his specialist Italian perspective modulated and re-appraised the all-too-common northern European bias of Carolingian studies.

Although the cultural transformations of the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries of which Rome was one significant pole are intensively studied, few have brought the same range of skills to the problems as Donald Bullough. To define his contribution as one focused on Carolingian manuscripts would be to miss its interdisciplinary expanse. Ranging through studies of Latin and the Old English vernacular in tenth-century England, of the archaeology of burial and of urban space, of art historical representations of rulership, of court
liturgy, of the writing of history and hagiography and much more, Donald’s output reminds us of Alcuin’s breadth.

And Donald shares with Alcuin a passionate commitment to teaching. As a young lecturer at Edinburgh from 1955 until 1966, then as professor first at Nottingham (1966–73) and finally at St Andrews (1973–91), teaching was not simply a form of communicating knowledge but, as for Alcuin, a form of moral engagement. Like Alcuin, Donald adjusts his teaching and his learning to his audience. Whilst some colleagues comment on the immense breadth and detail of his learning, on the torrent of words and ideas and on the phenomenal memory, other friends, not specialist early medievalists, comment on how lightly he wears his erudition, how clarity and charm sweep the outsider into the discussion.

And there is always more to be said, as those with inquisitiveness and time know well. Generosity with knowledge is perhaps an old-fashioned virtue in a fraught, ever-hurried academic age, but Donald’s colleagues, friends and pupils have all benefited from his joy in sharing his learning and his gift for asking shrewd questions. Generosity in criticism marks Donald too: only once has he sallied into explicit controversy, under the banner of Past and Present, only to withdraw in grace and discretion. But in general, those with whom he disagrees, or whom he finds to be simply wrong, may find themselves quietly reproved in a precisely phrased footnote. Such criticism is never corrosive, always in the spirit of correctio which Carolingian kings knew so well. His greatest generosity with knowledge or with criticism, however, remains private—in conversation, in correspondence and in the help and assistance which he gives to those who inflict half-finished drafts on him. Colleagues, friends, former students and some never previously acquainted with him in person offer Donald Bullough these reflections on Early Medieval Rome and the Christian West in recognition of his inspiration and generosity.