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Remembering John Docherty, editor, author, and generous human being

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In Memoriam:  
John Docherty

Creation under me, in, and above,  
Slopes upward from the base, a pyramid,  
On whose point I shall stand at last, and love  
From the first rush of vapor at they will,  
To the last poet-word that darkness chid,  
Thou hast been sending up creation’s hill,  
To lift thy souls aloft in faithful Godhead free.  

George MacDonald, *Diary of an Old Soul*

The George MacDonald Society has lost a dear old soul in John Docherty.  
John’s importance to the Society specifically and the study of MacDonald and Lewis Carroll generally cannot be overstated—John was a key figure in MacDonald scholarship and will continue to have an impact on MacDonald studies.

John was instrumental in the evolution of the George MacDonald Society since its inception in 1981. He served for many years in key administrative positions: as Secretary, as editor of *Orts*, and as editor of the *North Wind* journal.

May his soul be “aloft in faithful Godhead free.”

**Remembering John Docherty, editor, author, and generous human being**

Roderick McGillis

I first met John Docherty in 1995. The two of us delivered papers at an annual meeting of the Inklings, a society devoted to the work of J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and writers associated with the Oxford Christians. John’s passion for the work of George MacDonald was intense and captivating. His energy and enthusiasm were infectious. He was an enthusiast in the eighteenth century sense of the word: a commanding force that may, and in his case did, serve a humanizing function. For John, the study of MacDonald and Lewis Carroll was a métier and not a career path. His love for detail and his erudition served him well as both an editor and an
Some years after I first met John, he welcomed Frances and me to his home in Sussex. Here I experienced another side of this complex person. Oh, the generous scholar was much in evidence; he eagerly showed me his library and his papers and his work in progress. He also feted us heartily. We ate well, we visited his marvelous vegetable garden, we cycled nearby roads, and we walked nearby hills and dales. On our jaunts in the countryside, John was the consummate guide giving us historical and literary information at every turn. He also provided more directly practical information regarding dock leaves.

We were a small group of cyclers, five of us as I recall. We had had a briskly energetic day and perhaps fatigue was beginning to set in. In any case, one of our small party tumbled from a bicycle and ended up in a thick bed of nettles. Most of us hesitated to plunge into the nettles to help our companion, but not John. He offered assistance right away, and then he proceeded to treat the nettle stings with dock leaves—on the spot. The leaves did much to alleviate the irritation. When we returned to Forrest Row where John lived, he prepared a bath with efficacious salts to soothe both the wounded body and the wounded soul. After dinner, all of us gathered in John’s small garden where we laughed and talked until the stars prepared to take their leave.

John’s gift for giving manifested itself in other ways. He was a mentor to younger scholars, freely giving of his time and knowledge. From my brief friendship with this energetic and enthusiastic man, I could understand his connection to George MacDonald. Indeed, John strikes me as an example of persons I have met in the MacDonald community: generous, sensitive, caring, and open. His work on the friendship of Carroll and MacDonald is testimony not only to his perspicacious mind, alert to implication and innuendo, but also to the dynamic of friendship itself, its complex variations of emotion and reason. When friends hold a public conversation through their literary work, they put into action that opposition that is true friendship. John’s work and his life were a web of oppositions; that is, he exemplified true friendship.

I last saw John in 2005. We once again met at an academic conference, this one at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. The conference marked the centenary of George MacDonald’s death. John was his genial self, genial in the full sense of the word. Since that occasion in 2005, I have not had much communication with John. This I regret. He is a genial spirit and I shall miss him.