

## Memorial for Keith Stewart (1922-2013)

Sept. 15, 2013

John Keith Stewart was a man known for his quiet excellence. Born and raised in Washington state in the Pacific Northwest, he went south to Stanford as an undergraduate, but came east to earn a doctorate in English Literature at Princeton, and then joined the English Department at the University of Cincinnati, where he taught literature for 38 years. His specialty was the Eighteenth Century, often called the Neo-Classical Period or Age of Reason, when Satire was the favorite literary form. The chief satirists of the age were Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, and Samuel Johnson, and it was for Johnson that the original Literary Club in London was founded. Keith was a member of the Samuel Johnson Society before he was elected to the Literary Club of Cincinnati in 1991, and the last of the five papers he gave to the club was a Budget paper on "Samuel Johnson and the Black Dog." Like all Keith's papers, it was thoroughly researched and carefully written, with some Johnsonian touches of self-analysis and dry wit:

A summer ago I read through for the first time all the available letters of our distinguished predecessor of a clubman, Samuel Johnson, as they appear in five handsome and generally well-edited volumes published by Princeton in 1992. It is about these that I write. The paper may serve as minor expiation for having entirely forgotten that in September of 2009 we might--and should--have celebrated the three hundredth anniversary of Johnson's birth.

Keith was a member of the Literary Club for over twenty years, always attentive but never assertive. He could be a lively conversationalist like Samuel Johnson at times, but unlike Johnson, he did not suffer from the "black dog" of melancholy. He wrote as cheerfully about Johnson, who was constitutionally gloomy, as he did about everyone else. He loved books, and so it was natural for him upon retirement from the university, to volunteer for work in repairing

old books at the library. He took the job seriously, starting with a course in book preservation, and learning to do the delicate hand work needed for restoring old books, not everyone's cup of tea. He could wax enthusiastic about the satisfaction of returning battered books to their shelves, where they might attract new generations of readers.

He was a dedicated teacher of Eighteenth Century British Literature, and helped the library acquire books of that period. He also made one very special gift to the library: not a book but an antique map of the City of London in the mid-eighteenth century, which was the Age of Johnson. Engraved in 1749 by John Roque, topographer to the king, the map is huge, measuring 6 ½ feet by 13 feet. Keith had discovered it, during a sabbatical year in England in the 1950s, while he was hunting in an Oxford bookshop for old maps and books. He and his wife Betty rolled it up and shipped it back with them on a transatlantic steamer, and later cleaned it themselves and mounted it on the wall of their Cincinnati condominium. In 1999, Keith gave a paper on it for the Literary Club called "Restoring Roque." At that time, it was still reserved for private viewing by their family and friends. But they decided to make it public, donating it to the library, where it can be seen today in full display, framed with a protective shield, on a wall in the University of Cincinnati Archive and Rare Books Reading Room. It is well worth a visit. The map shows central London on both sides of the Thames, with the locations of major buildings and streets and just three bridges across the river, in Samuel Johnson's London, when the only traffic would have been on foot, by horses and carriages, or by boat. Keith declared that "For someone interested in 18<sup>th</sup> century literature, it is a Garden of Delights." He knew what he was talking about. His genial, soft-spoken, scholarly presence will be missed by everyone who knew him

Respectfully submitted by William Pratt