

Remembering Walter McGhee Hooper (1931 - 2020)

When Walter Hooper received the Clyde S. Kilby Lifetime Achievement Award from the Marion E. Wade Center in 2009, his award certificate read as follows:

Walter Hooper
editor, biographer, researcher, bibliographer
valued friend of the Wade Center,
whose myriad and notable accomplishments
continue to honor his high regard for the words of
C.S. Lewis
by helping us better understand his writings,
and telling the story of his life,
thus ensuring C.S. Lewis's legacy
for the generations to come.

“ . . . all His biddings are joys.”

C.S. Lewis, *Perelandra*



*Clyde S. Kilby Lifetime
Achievement Award
given to Walter Hooper in 2009
at the Marion E. Wade Center.*

These words still encompass the legacy of Walter Hooper whose dedication to preserving and making accessible the writings of C.S. Lewis has enriched the lives of countless readers throughout the world. In addition to this very public work of scholarship, Walter was also greatly loved and valued by many who knew him as a friend. We have asked a number of these to share their memories of this gentle, fun-loving and devout man who found great joy in sharing his love for the works of C.S. Lewis with so many others.

A Providential Friend

Remembering Walter Hooper (1931 - 2020)

I am grateful to God not only for our fifty years of dear and ready friendship but for Walter Hooper's astonishing steadfastness. Stakhanovite work habits, zeal for evangelizing on behalf of the master, and generosity to other scholars, whom he considered peers, together invite this question: Has any writer ever had a more devoted steward than Lewis had in Walter? Answers from all quarters must lead to this: Every reader drawn further into Lewis's work, having heard of Hooper or not, owes him a great debt.

And I am thankful, too, that my friend lived long enough for my wife and me to have visited him two years ago, long enough for me to have heard from him that his happiness was settled, not least because he knew the care of his papers was in maximally capable hands at both the Bodleian and the Wade Center. He was taking his leave, and he was ready.

In 1977 or 1978 Walter recommended me to Macmillan as the person to edit *C.S. Lewis at the Breakfast Table*. Before that we had made a couple of visits to publishers who were impressed and motivated by the existence of the New York C.S. Lewis Society. Later he was relieved that I would write a tricky passage for his introduction to *All My Road Before Me*, and years after that I was delighted to write the entry on The Law of Inattention for his *Companion*.

The quiddity of the man is difficult to render briefly, so memories must be cherry-picked from a very large bowl. He, along with his mother and aunt,



Photo courtesy of Jim Como.

Walter Hooper, Jim and Alexandra Como.

cared for my family when, on sabbatical in Oxford, I learned of my father's sudden death and left my wife and son to return to New York. Years earlier, he had encouraged me—practically threatening me—to keep looking for the Midlands army hospital at which my father had served, as the three of us careened (I driving like Mr. Toad in Kenneth Grahame's *Wind in the Willows*) in search of the place.

On one visit to the U.S. he was lugging a preposterously heavy suitcase. What could be inside? I asked. Take a look, he said. I found blank paper. But why? I asked. Because, he answered, English paper is of a different size than American, and, "I need to work here." I've told others how, when about to cook spaghetti, he tried to count the strands, Paxford-like, until I assured him that no strand would be left behind if we cooked the whole pound.

To my children he was Uncle Walter, to Alexandra an ally, as when he cajoled me into driving to Connecticut to retrieve some fine china. I resisted until he described the beauty of the set, "second," he added, "only to Alexandra's own." We use it to this day. His high spirits were most evident in the post-mortems that followed a dinner party. Then, for example, his gift for nicknames would unfurl. A friend with almost no facial affect became the U-Boat Commander; another very tall and accomplished but arrogant gent became The Magnificent. He was a genuinely funny man.

This is a sketch only, and it excludes our epic first meeting, which lasted from 3:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m. But I cannot close without noting Walter's deep satisfaction at receiving the Clyde S. Kilby Lifetime Achievement Award at the Wade, and my own at being present. He did indeed fight the good fight, finish the course, and keep the faith.

Now may Walter rest in peace, but I suspect he is either brewing a pot of tea to share with his great friend or, more probably, writing yet another entry in his diary.

JAMES COMO
FOUNDING MEMBER
THE NEW YORK C.S. LEWIS SOCIETY

A Shared Dedication to Owen Barfield

Remembering Walter Hooper (1931 - 2020)

I have a strong, if random, memory of Walter when we met by chance while I was on honeymoon near the cathedral of Orvieto, in Italy. It was the Feast of Corpus Christi and the entire city was dressed in medieval pageantry. Walter was his usual self—busy, passionate, full of anecdotes—and I was able to introduce him to my wife. For some reason, it is this image of suddenly coming across Walter in Italy that springs to mind just now, as opposed to my visits to his flat in Oxford for tea. In a way, this occasion was characteristic of my family's relationship with Walter; our paths were always interlinked in some way. We could go for lengthy periods without communicating; and then, at significant moments, there he was.



Used with permission from the Owen Barfield Literary Estate.

Walter Hooper, Oxford c. 1985



Used with permission from the Owen Barfield Literary Estate.

Walter Hooper, contracted to the C.S. Lewis Company, with Owen Barfield, retired Lewis Trustee, 19 November, 1985.



Used with permission from the Owen Barfield Literary Estate.

Owen Barfield as literary trustee of the C.S. Lewis Estate, Walter Hooper as administrator, speaking to Cecil Harwood the other literary trustee, c. 1975.

Grandfather was C.S. Lewis’s literary trustee, and he and Walter collaborated for over thirty years. Owen was a great supporter of Walter’s and later appointed him as a co-trustee of the estate. Walter was at Grandfather’s bedside when he passed. And it was thanks to Walter that the Owen Barfield collection (all 33 linear metres of it!) was deposited at the Bodleian Library in Oxford. He personally handled the hundreds of letters written by schoolchildren to my aunt, Lucy, because of Lewis’s dedication in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. On Lucy’s behalf,

Grandfather asked Walter to reply, “What I could not do for myself, the dedication did for me. My Godfather gave me a greater gift than I had imagined.”

Walter was a trustee of the Owen Barfield Literary Estate for a decade before handing that role over to me. Grandfather valued Walter’s lifelong service and dedication, and we remember him with gratitude.

OWEN A. BARFIELD
GRANDSON OF OWEN BARFIELD
TRUSTEE OF THE OWEN BARFIELD LITERARY ESTATE

In the Service of Another

Remembering Walter Hooper (1931 - 2020)

I first met Walter Hooper when I was a student at Oxford in the early 1990s and joined the University's C.S. Lewis Society, which met weekly in Pusey House, just a few steps from the Eagle and Child. Those were magical evenings, with exceptional guest speakers who sparked lively dialogue, friendly disagreements, and often a good deal of laughter.

In his kind, congenial way, Walter was always somewhere near the center of the conversation. With his remarkable knowledge of Lewis's life and work, Walter always had a telling anecdote ready to mind, or a passage to share from Lewis's writings that would reinforce a point someone else had made or perhaps gently challenge a line of thought by providing deeper insight.

The essential contributions that Walter made to the Oxford University C.S. Lewis Society exemplify the remarkable contribution he has made to the enduring worldwide influence of C.S. Lewis. The church's greatest writers and thinkers have never done their work alone, but always with the support, the friendship, and often the sacrificial service of brothers and sisters who recognized the significance of their work and found their own calling in causing others to increase.

For more than half a century, Walter served as a faithful brother in Christ to C.S. Lewis and a devoted servant of God. A distinguished scholar in his own right, Walter studied Lewis's letters, tracked down his essays, revised footnotes, and wrote interpretive comments with the constant goal of allowing the Christian message of C.S. Lewis to have its full, divinely intended influence in the world.

I see Walter's work as a prime example of the communion of the saints, which every Christian holds as a matter of practical doctrine. Our service to one another in the family of God flows from our co-union with Jesus Christ and has a profound spiritual influence in the world.

Whether they know it or not, nearly all of Lewis's contemporary readers have benefitted from Walter's quiet, faithful stewardship. I consider it an added privilege to have known him personally—to have been welcomed by his hospitality and treated as his friend. Walter taught me many things not only about C.S. Lewis, but also about what it means to offer generous service to a fellow Christian that advances the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.

PHILIP RYKEN
PRESIDENT, WHEATON COLLEGE

A Generous Spirit

Remembering Walter Hooper (1931 - 2020)

The two words that I see most often on social media describing Walter Hooper since his passing are kind and humble. I would add at least one more: generous. After a meeting of the Oxford C.S. Lewis Society in 2002, Walter invited me to his home later that week for tea. Our friendship evolved into an abiding brotherly love. We've enjoyed many meals, conversations, laughs, celebrations, and shared insights about our mutual affection for the work of C.S. Lewis.

I collect C.S. Lewis first editions and books related to Lewis. Walter was always keenly interested in my collection. In 2010, Blackwell's Rare Book Department in Oxford approached me about purchasing a first edition set of *The Lord of the Rings* that, according to an inscription written by Walter, was given to Katherine Farrer (who went by the initial K) by J.R.R. Tolkien as a present to thank her for help in editing the manuscript. After the Farrers passed away, K's brother gave *The Lord of the Rings* set to Walter. In 1999, Walter gave the books to a very close friend for his friend's fortieth birthday. Unfortunately, Walter and his friend subsequently had a falling out, and his friend, unbeknown to Walter, put the books up for sale. Before buying the books, I told Walter of their existence, and he wrote to me that



Steve Beebe and Walter Hooper at Magdalen College, Oxford.

he “knew them well” and shared the story of their provenance. He hoped I would buy them. After I agreed to buy the books, knowing how special they were to him, I offered to return the books to Walter as a gift. I treasure this note from Walter:

I was touched almost to tears by your offering me K Farrer’s copy of *The Lord of the Rings*. No, like the various Ring-Bearers, I had the book once, and now it is your time. I loved that book, and it was a wrench to give it away, but it fills me with joy to learn it will soon be yours.

To be doubly sure, I again offered the books to him. He again wrote back,

I doubt anything has touched me as deeply as your offer of the Farrer Copy of *The Lord of the Rings*. Thank you very very much, but after long thought I believe it has passed out of the possession of both the Farrers and Walter Hooper—and should by Aragorn and his Heirs be the sole and legitimate property of—Steve Beebe!

Vintage Walter. On other occasions I offered them to him. Finally, I told him I was just keeping them for him. Yet he always smiled and said, “They are in the right hands now.”

Walter’s friendship and generosity were boundless. On another occasion Blackwell’s asked if I was interested in a first edition copy of *The Illustrated Man* by Ray Bradbury. What was special about this book was its inscription: “To C.S. Lewis from Joy Davidman, Christmas 1952,” in Joy’s unmistakable handwriting. It was, in all probability, the first gift in their relationship, given to Jack by Joy when she stayed at The Kilns during the Christmas of 1952. I purchased the book and Walter was very pleased that I bought it. (He knew that I intend to keep my Lewis collection intact with any proceeds given to support student scholarships—something I learned from Walter, who donated proceeds from some of his Lewis book collection to his church.) Walter then told me this story: During that Christmas 1952 visit, Joy asked Jack if he would sign her copy of *The Great Divorce*, a book that was central to her conversion to Christianity. Lewis not only signed her book but added two inscriptions Walter included on page 61 of *C.S. Lewis: Companion and Guide*. Walter knew the inscriptions because Lewis had given the book to him. It was during my next trip to Oxford that Walter and I met at The Old Parsonage for lunch. Before we ordered, he handed me a beautifully wrapped small parcel. I had no idea what it could be. “Open it,” he said with a twinkling smile. When I tore off the wrapping paper, there was Joy Davidman’s personal copy of *The Great Divorce* with the famous Lewis inscriptions, including Lewis’s and Davidman’s signatures. There was an added



Photo courtesy of Steve Beebe.

Walter Hooper and Steve Beebe at the Old Parsonage, Oxford.

inscription from Walter, giving the book to me. I was dumbstruck. Then I cried. Walter thought the book that Joy had given to Jack during that 1952 Christmas visit should reside side-by-side with the book that Lewis signed for her. Generosity personified. Both books (as well as my other rare books) are securely stored in a safety deposit box, though I do take them out occasionally for lectures and classes.

Walter Hooper is indeed kind and humble. He is also the most generous person I've ever met. Walter will always be known for his unparalleled C.S. Lewis scholarship. Yet it is his love, compassion, empathy, unbounded generosity, and selfless reflection of The Source of All Love that I will miss the most.

STEVEN A. BEEBE
REGENTS' AND UNIVERSITY DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR EMERITUS
TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY

A Link in the Chain

Remembering Walter Hooper (1931 - 2020)

I first met Walter in 2012 at the Oxford Oratory, and in the years that followed I would often chat with him after weekday Mass. He would always greet me, on my return to Oxford on any given visit, with energetic warmth: “It’s so good to see you! How have you been?” It struck me deeply that this gentle, elderly man had known Lewis and Tolkien personally; there was a real connection, a direct continuity, with the authors whose work is the focus of my own scholarship. Their writings have touched millions, yet they too were flesh-and-blood people who had laughed and grieved, who had chatted with friends and walked along the streets of Oxford in damp and chilly English weather, who had prayed and worked faithfully without knowing, at the time, what their legacy would be. Walter was, to use St. John Henry Newman’s words, “a link in a chain, a bond of connection between two persons”—not just for me, but for countless others around the world.

HOLLY ORDWAY

FELLOW OF FAITH AND CULTURE, WORD ON FIRE INSTITUTE
VISITING PROFESSOR OF APOLOGETICS, HOUSTON BAPTIST UNIVERSITY

A Good Steward

Remembering Walter Hooper (1931 - 2020)

The following was originally read at the celebration of Walter Hooper's receipt of the Clyde S. Kilby Lifetime Achievement Award from the Marion E. Wade Center in 2009.

October 21, 2009

Dear Walter,

As you know, C. S. Lewis once considered including some angelic correspondence to go with the diabolical correspondence we find in *The Screwtape Letters*. If any of these celestial messages were ever discovered, I wonder if they might include an exchange like this one:

My dear Jophiel, messenger of the Mighty Beauty,

Greetings from the City of Everlasting Joy. As you are aware, that great mind, great heart, and great soul, C. S. Lewis, is soon to leave the world of shadows, to join us here in the land of Limitless Light. That will be a time of great rejoicing here, but it will leave a daunting, lifelong task unfinished there.

Mr. Lewis has nourished and inspired thousands of pilgrim souls, in his life and in his writings. But his work can be greatly magnified, reaching myriads and even millions, if there can be found a good steward of his legacy: someone who can help Lewis's voice echo down the ages on behalf of the Kingdom.

The steward we seek must be a goodly clerk, someone who can search and sort and organize, to spend ceaseless hours sifting through letters, notebooks, musty old magazines, and dusty archives. He must be an excellent scholar and editor, someone who can turn a raw manuscript into a finished book, who can write biographies, critical prefaces, interpretive pieces, and who can chase down a thousand obscure details in order to provide thorough annotations for generations of readers as yet unborn.

This good steward of the legacy must also be something of a saint as well as a scholar. He should be a generous soul who demonstrates warmth and friendliness toward an endless stream



Photographer: Taryn Bullis. Used by permission of the Marion E. Wade Center.

Walter Hooper receiving the Clyde S. Kilby Lifetime Achievement Award in 2009, at the Marion E. Wade Center. [left to right - Chris Mitchell, Walter Hooper, Alexandra Como (obscured behind Walter), and James Como.]

of pilgrims and well-wishers and is consistently supportive and helpful to other clerks. He may have to endure financial hardship, criticism, and even calumny. He will need to be unfailingly gracious and patient with those who overtax his resources or who misconstrue his character. Perhaps above all, this good steward must be a man of genuine humility, someone who doesn't dwell on his own accomplishments, but who simply wants to do the job well to fulfill his vocation for the greater glory of God.

Jophiel, you know the children of Adam and Eve better than I. Do you suppose there might be someone on your world such as I describe?

*Yours in the radiance of hope,
Suriel*

*7 June 1963
(Tellus Standard Time)*

My dear Suriel, messenger of healing and peace,

Greetings from a world that sees God only in glimmers, awaiting still the full Glory.

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That is a most singular request you have made for someone to become the Good Steward of the Legacy. In earthly terms, one would not expect to find the gifts and character qualities you describe all in one person. But, as you well know, with our Heavenly King all things are possible.

I have found the man you are seeking. At this moment he is strolling towards the Kilns, hoping to arrange an appointment with an author he greatly admires. He doesn't know it yet, but the young man will be meeting C.S. Lewis for the first time this afternoon and sharing a pot of tea (several pots, actually). His name is Walter Hooper.

The rest we leave to Providence.

*Joyfully yours,
Jophiel*

DAVID C. DOWNING
CO-DIRECTOR, MARION E. WADE CENTER