

In the spring of 1970 Carter completed his term as president of the Bibliographical Society; and from the autumn onward, his life was dominated by health problems, including some small strokes. He died on 18 March 1975, two months short of his seventieth birthday. During his last year he was awarded the Bibliographical Society's Gold Medal, and two of his publications were tributes to Percy Muir and Graham Pollard, two friends with whom he had been closely associated since the late 1920s. I am glad that Lord Redcliffe-Maud, in his unpublished oration for Carter's funeral at Eton on 5 May 1975, referred to Carter's "unpatronising kindness to people younger (or less learned) than himself." And it was equally important to mention his "extraordinary success in setting himself rigorous, incorruptible professional standards without ever losing his amateur status." These, along with personal loyalty, were prominent among his defining characteristics.

There are many reasons to remember John Carter. The first one I want to mention is his prose style—not that it is more important than his bibliographical contributions, but because it is basic to the role he played in bibliographical history as a communicator to a wide audience. And he does deserve attention as a writer. His prose, stylish and witty, is a joy to read, and once people start reading, they want to read more. That is why the *ABC* has sold so well: it is not simply consulted as a reference book but read all the way through, since one entry leads a person on to the next. Even people not particularly interested in the book world, when they are exposed to an essay of his, want to find another one. And in the process, of course, they learn something about books. Which brings us to his role as an educator. The impulse for a good deal of his writing, I think, was to educate—both the general public and his book-world colleagues, to set them on a sensible course of thinking about books as physical objects. (Sadleir, reviewing the *ABC* in *The Spectator*, referred to Carter's "qualities as an educator.") That motive underlies not only the *ABC*, *Binding Variants*, *Taste and Technique*, and *Printing and the Mind of Man* but also the running commentary formed by his extensive journalism.

Furthermore, he had the knowledge to be a generally reliable guide. He not only had the practical experience of examining thousands of books as a bookseller and a collector; he also had a thorough acquaintance with the history of his field and the literature of bibliographical scholarship, gained through reviewing many hundreds of books about books (it is hard to imagine that anyone has ever reviewed more of them). Occasionally, however, he faltered. His editions of Browne (the second one), Catullus, and Housman showed that he had not thought as carefully about textual criticism as he had about bibliophily and bibliography. Even in those areas, there were some minor missteps when he commented on original