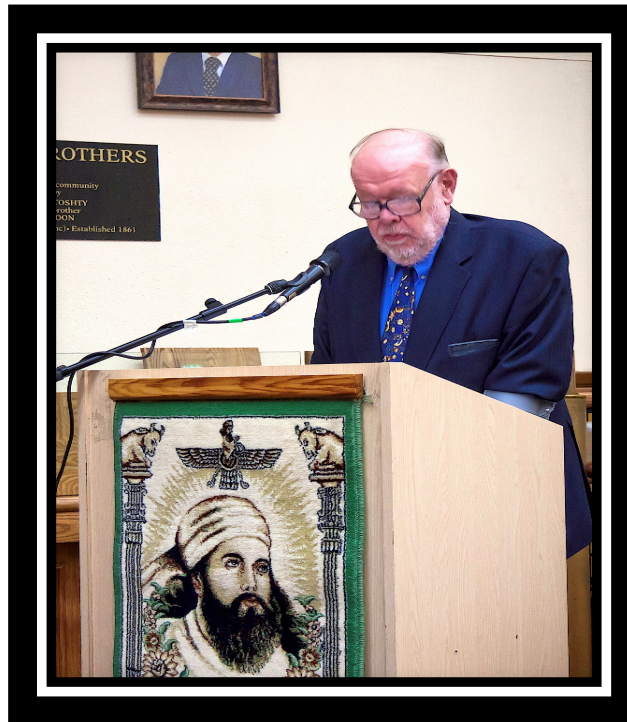




## John Hinnells 1941-2018

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A reflection from Malcolm M Deboo: President Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe

The Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe (ZTFE) and the Zoroastrian Community were saddened to be informed that Professor John R Hinnells, internationally renowned Zoroastrian scholar, passed away peacefully on Thursday 3rd May 2018, aged 76.

Professor Hinnells was an extremely tenacious individual. From the age of 6 till 13, he was in hospital for treatment of tuberculosis. I suspect this disability incurred during his childhood made him more determined to succeed and leave behind a legacy.

Professor Almut Hintze, in 'John Russell Hinnells – a Profile' in the Festschrift for John R Hinnells; 'Holy Wealth: Accounting for This World and the Next in Religious Beliefs and Practice' 2017 states; "John R Hinnells's academic work is particularly significant in four major areas; the question of Zoroastrian influence on Christianity, Mithraism, the Zoroastrian diaspora and the study of religions in general." (Profile attached.)

'Zoroastrian Saviour Imagery and its influence on the New Testament' (1969) was his first publication. It was reprinted in 'Zoroastrian and Parsi Studies, Selected Works of John R Hinnells' (2000).



As Peter Woodward, Honorary Secretary Shap Working Party wrote in his email dated 4th May 2018; "John Hinnells was the initiator and the creative force behind so much of Shap's early momentum, his contribution was unique." He was the founder Honorary Secretary of the Shap Working Party (1969). For decades he contributed the Zoroastrian festival dates in the 'Shap Calendar of Religious Festivals', which in recent years I have volunteered to take on this responsibility.

We in the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe (ZTFE) and the Zoroastrian Community in the United Kingdom held Professor Hinnells in high esteem for his scholarly work on the Zoroastrian and Parsi community. It is for this reason that ZTFE benefactor and patron, Mobed Mehraban Zartoshty, immediately agreed within minutes of their meeting at the Taj Hotel in Mumbai, in December 1996, to donate the seed capital to restart Zoroastrian studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. Professor Hinnells's hard work in establishing the Zartoshty Professorship of Zoroastrian Studies at SOAS, together with the late Professor Mary Boyce, is a testimony of the high regard he had for Zoroastrianism in the study of world religions.

From the outset when Professor Hinnells made initial contact with our High Priest of the Zoroastrians of UK and Europe, Dastur Dr Sohrab H Kutar and ZTFE Trustee Cyrus P Mehta in the 1960s, he was always welcomed to the ZTFE to deliver lectures by all successive Presidents, Trustees, Managing Committees and the wider membership. He was highly regarded and always welcomed as an honoured friend by the ZTFE! For this reason the ZTFE Managing Committee, unanimously agreed to bestow on him the title of 'Honoured Friend of the ZTFE' on 20th May 2007, together with Professor A D H Bivar and posthumously to Professor Mary Boyce. In his acceptance speech, he mentioned; "Whereas some of my colleagues specialising in other religions have received death threats, I and other academics specialising in Zoroastrian history, have received nothing but support. It is a matter of great pride that with the support of the Zartoshty Brothers, funds have been raised to establish a full time post in Zoroastrian studies at SOAS, the first such dedicated post in the world".

The last time Professor Hinnells lectured at the Zoroastrian Centre, Harrow, was during the ZTFE Sesquicentennial weekend conference; '150 years of Zoroastrian Studies', held on 22nd and 23rd October 2011.

In the 1980's Professor Hinnells initiated a global – survey questionnaire associated with his research of the Zoroastrian community on which he delivered 'The Ratanbai Katrak Lectures', University of Oxford (1985). As a result of the Katrak lectures, saw the publication of 'Zoroastrians in Britain' (1996). The ZTFE will always be in his debt for his 'Zoroastrians in Britain', which continues to be the primary source of information for those wanting to find



out more about the ZTFE and the Zoroastrian community from its origins in the 19th century until the late 20th century.

It was one of the reasons that the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe & The Faridoon and Mehraban Zartoshty Fund for Zoroastrian Studies readily agreed to sponsor the publication of the Festschrift for John R Hinnells; 'Holy Wealth: Accounting for This World and the Next in Religious Beliefs and Practice' (2017).

Professor John R Hinnells authored and edited many books on Zoroastrianism, Mithraism and on comparative religions, including; edited 'Comparative Religion in Education. A Collection of Studies' (1970), 'Persian Mythology' (1973, revised 1990) with its beautiful colour photographs, edited 'Mithraic Studies. Proceedings of the First International Congress of Mithraic Studies' (1975), 'Spanning East and West, Man's Religious Quest.

The Zoroastrian Quest' (1978), 'Parsis and the British' (1978), 'Zoroastrianism and the Parsis' (1981), edited 'The Penguin Dictionary of Religions' (1984), which subsequently was translated into Portuguese, Japanese, Italian, Russian and Korean, edited 'Who's Who of World Religions' (1991), 'Bhownaggee' (1995) which is one of the very few parliamentary biographies to be published on the second elected Asian and Zoroastrian MP and first Conservative MP, 'Zoroastrians in Britain' (1996), and 'Zoroastrian and Parsi Studies, Selected Works of John R Hinnells' (2000). (Attached is the list of publications from 1969 – 2015.)

ZTFE and the UK Zoroastrian diaspora will truly miss him.

We thank Ahura Mazda for the academic work he produced, because it created not only the awareness of the Zoroastrian faith and its contribution and influence to other world religions, but more importantly, the contemporary practitioners of this ancient religion who many though were extinct. (I suppose this was why he was readily welcomed by many Zoroastrians in their homes.)

I ask Ahura Mazda for the immortal soul of Professor John R Hinnells rest in everlasting peace in Endless Light.

**Below are some personal recollections of John from Shap members.**

John Hinnells was one of seven speakers at the first Shap style Conference held at the Shap Wells Hotel in April 4-6 1969. He spoke to a random survey of 100 secondary schools in the West Riding of Yorkshire which he and a group of colleagues had initiated and sent to the head-teacher and RE specialist in each school. As Lecturer in Religious Studies in the University of Newcastle upon Tyne he was able to liaise with the Secretary of the Department of Adult Education there, who helped in producing and circulating the



questionnaire, and organised the Conference at one of its outposts for Adult Education, the Shap Wells Hotel in the Lake District – hence the initial location and thus the name of the Shap Working Party.

My memory of John's address was the humility and gentle humour of his lively presentation and its six significant conclusions, and these are also the chief features of the book of the Conference which he edited in 1970 - the first Shap publication. The rich scholarship and the variety of viewpoints held by the speakers he attracted to speak at the Conference (on Comparative Religion in Education) were typical of him even then – and how much more through his subsequent career at Manchester, Liverpool, SOAS and Cambridge. It was only natural, or even inevitable, when a Working Party was set up to continue the ideas generated at the Conference that he should become the first Secretary, liaising closely with Ninian Smart and Geoffrey Parrinder as the joint Chairs.

As with Ninian, whom he revered and who became the model for much of his lifestyle, and similarly with Geoffrey at Kings who taught him so much, John travelled widely, especially in India and Persia/Iran. He specialised in his chosen field but with a wide ranging view of Religious Studies and Religious Education, wrote authoritatively, especially in the field of Zoroastrian and Mithraic studies, and contributed largely to the setting up of the study of Zoroastrianism at the school of Oriental and African Studies in London. He, together with Ninian and Geoffrey, was largely responsible for the creation and development of the Shap Working Party. Without his/their creativity there would have been no Shap. I have indeed the most vivid memories of a visit he, along with Ninian, Donald Horder (and myself as Shap Co-ordinating Secretary) paid to Northern Ireland in the 1970s 'to evangelise for the study of World Religions as an antidote to denominational rivalry there' - Ninian was the focus of an interview on Irish TV News; and to establish an RE post at the New University of Ulster in Coleraine. What a creative team the three of them made! Down to earth hard work, humility and humour – and creativity in abundance. Such was John Hinnells, and consequently such has been the essence of Shap.

### **Peter Woodward**

I knew John both from his Manchester days and through his many edited books, which have often been updated, and have been staples for scholars and students for many decades. Working with a group of scholars to produce a book is no mean feat and John showed his capacity to liaise with others in this as well as other ways. I also knew him during the four years I was external examiner at Derby, where he did so much to support the department there before its closure.

I know when he moved to be near Cambridge John was well networked into the academic community there and felt the loss of that when he moved to Oaken Holt to be nearer one of





his sons. It is in quite a countryside setting, with wonderful views across to the local Farmoor reservoir but a long way from town. Knowing he felt more intellectually isolated I arranged to visit him with Dr Paul Trafford, a young colleague involved in the establishment of the Interfaith Centre in Derby, so they had many overlapping memories. I also arranged a couple of sessions for us to meet with a Zoroastrian friend called Shahin Bekradnia and they interacted in a very lively way about issues to do with research and publishing and various members of the community known to them. He was always interested in politics.

Dr Chris Cotter from University of Edinburgh was in Oxford at one point researching the Bodleian archives of the British Association for the Study of Religions and I took Chris out to interview John for his project of compiling a short history of BASR. One of the interesting parts of their conversation was hearing John talk about the appointment process for the SOAS chair which he had held. Dr Jessica Frazier of the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies has filmed a set of interviews with key scholars and at one point I took her out to see John to arrange for a session at the St Luke's seminar room next to the Humanities Building in the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter of the University. This was one of the few venues accessible for John's wheelchair. That interview should be on line on the OCHS website for people to view.

These were my recent interactions and it was a privilege to try to support a scholar who has done so much for RS over so many years. He was always most appreciative and graceful in the thanks he offered visitors for their interest and time.

### **Peggy Morgan**

My first contact with John was coincidental. In the summer of 1967, along with our wives (newly married) we were both at Manchester airport awaiting a flight to Turkey. At that point in time and not yet having taken up an appointment at Goldsmiths College, I hadn't heard of him. We got chatting but it was over two years before we met again through Shap. From then on I came to have the highest regard for his enthusiasm for the study of religions which he has pursued with unremitting zeal over 50 years.

John's research and writings demonstrated both depth of particularity and the breadth of universality. Although there were others in the field, especially Mary Boyce, Zoroastrian and Mithraic Studies benefitted from his promotional energies. His many friends within the Parsi community in both India and the UK reflect their appreciation of the interest he helped generate in their past tradition and its ongoing vitality. His depth of learning is evident here.

Breadth was especially evident in his edited compilations – Dictionary of Religions and Who's Who of Religions - as was his capacity to persuade others to collaborate in such enterprise. That persuasiveness and its accompanying sense of urgency were



especially effective during his years at SOAS where he successfully challenged an almost segregated linguistic focus to become one more open to interdisciplinary studies of religion and society.

A neglected initiative which he led with Frances Young was the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's production of the first Subject Benchmarking Report for Theology and Religious Studies (2000). Drawing together a wide range of scholars from both university traditions, it demonstrated that they share common academic ground fundamental to any university or school curriculum. This is of a piece with his lifelong vision for Shap – and very much accompanied by a sense of chuckle.

### **Brian Gates**

In 1985-6, I took a year's leave of absence from teaching Religious Education at a secondary school in Inner London to complete my Master's Thesis through SOAS, under the supervision of Mary Boyce, who was, by then, professor emerita. To fund this endeavor, I found a part-time position at St. Martin's College, Lancaster, and Prof. Boyce suggested that I should contact John, at that time the Head of Comparative Religion at Manchester, to see if he would be prepared to be a local "sounding board." I had met John on a couple of occasions at Shap conferences, and was familiar with his work in the field, but was unprepared for the "House of Wisdom" that constituted his personal library, nor for his generosity in allowing me the space and time to use its resources, and his interrogation of my work as that of an equal. His mentorship continued throughout the writing of my most recent book which was published in 2011. Now that I have graduate students of my own, I think of such kindnesses and try to pass them on.

Social encounters with John introduced me to the concept of the "Parsi peg," a measure which he embraced with enthusiasm! When my husband, Bruce, and I visited John in his home in Cambridge, I watched with amusement as Bruce accepted a Parsi peg of fine whisky, and knew that I would have to drive us all to lunch!

The last time I saw John was a few years ago, when we went to see him at his bungalow in Oxford, to take him out to a nearby gourmet pub. He was surrounded by books and papers and eager to continue his work on the important Parsi figures of Bombay's past, but was feeling stymied by his physical ailments. However, John's great drive to know more and to share that knowledge, along with his ability to appreciate the good things in life, brought a cheerful, galvanizing dynamic to the occasion, which I will always value.

### **Jenny Rose**

John was a lively, inspiring and enterprising colleague, always full of projects and dealings with publishers when he was still in good health and able to travel extensively. That is how I



knew him for many years after we had first met at the 13th IAHR Congress at Lancaster University (15-22 August, 1975), the first international IAHR meeting for me, and perhaps for John too. At that time John and I were still relatively young – he thought of me as the junior person (even though I was several years older, but relatively new on the British academic scene after returning from studying and working in India for five years).

John had been on the organising committee of the Lancaster Congress (he lived in Manchester at that time) and he contributed a paper in the “Iconography Section” of the Congress on “Some Problems of Method in the Interpretation of Mithraic Iconography”. We met again at the next IAHR Congress in Winnipeg in 1980 when John spoke on “Social Change and Religious Transformation among Bombay Parsis in the Early Twentieth Century”. I mention these two examples because they introduced me to the two different areas of Mithraism and the Parsis about which I learnt over the years such a great deal from John’s research and publications.

We met at many other conferences and meetings, some of them organised by the British Association for the Study of Religions in England. Others were international ones, especially the congresses of the American Academy of Religion. We also collaborated in some publication ventures where I contributed essays to books that John had edited. I was particularly grateful for the two contributions John wrote for the Festschrift on Turning Points in Religious Studies (T. & T. Clark, 1990) which I edited for Geoffrey Parrinder’s eightieth birthday in 1990. First the opening essay, “A Personal Tribute to an Outstanding Career”, and then a thematic essay on “Religion and the Arts” [see Turning Points in Religious Studies. Essays in Honour of Geoffrey Parrinder, republished in 2016 in the Bloomsbury Academic Collections as part of “Religious Studies: Comparative Religion”.]

In later years it was sad to observe how John’s health increasingly deteriorated, although his mental energy, enthusiasm and love for his family kept him alive for a long time. Due to my own changing circumstances, especially several teaching assignments abroad and my retirement, our contacts became eventually little by little reduced to annual exchanges of Christmas letters.

John will long remain known for the pioneering research and publications he initiated and the substantial contributions he made to the field of Religious Studies both nationally and internationally. His life and work will be celebrated and fondly remembered by his family and many friends in Britain and abroad.

Ursula King