

The Guild of St George

The Companion

No. 14 (2014) Van Akin Burd Souvenir Supplement



HAPPY 100TH BIRTHDAY



VAN AKIN BURD

VAN AKIN BURD's 100TH BIRTHDAY GATHERING

Jim Spates



The Mayor, Brian Tobin, declaring it Van Akin Burd Day. With Van's daughter, Joyce.

Van Akin Burd, eminent Ruskinian and Distinguished Professor of English at The State University of New York at Cortland, celebrated his 100th birthday with nearly seventy-five relations and friends at the Alumni House of the University on April 19th 2014. The occasion, as was appropriate, was marked by a number of notable elements. First, the Mayor of Cortland, the Honorable Brian Tobin, read a proclamation naming April 19th as 'Van Akin Burd Day' throughout the city. Second, Van's long-time colleague, Robert Rhodes, Professor Emeritus of English, read another honorary tribute—this one arriving from the New York State Assembly, proclaiming Van a Distinguished Citizen of the State of New York. Third, in tribute to Van on this unique

versions of most of the articles—four longer, four shorter—which Van published over the course of the last decade, a decade during which, as a matter of most lives' course, few scholarly pens are active! Special family visitors, coming primarily, included his daughter, Joyce Hicks, his granddaughter, her husband and their four children. Another notable visitor was Chris Leadbeater, who arrived from Oxfordshire, England. Meeting Chris, then just a teen, during the time when he

occasion, Companion Shoji Sato, arriving from Japan, brought bound copies of a volume he had prepared, *Short Essays by Dr. Van Burd in Honor of his Centenary Birthday*. The volume, published by The Ruskin Press in Tokyo, was presented to everyone in attendance and contains English and Japanese

was doing on-site research for his classic, *The Winnington Letters of John Ruskin*, Van determined to sponsor Chris's university education at SUNY Cortland. After receiving his degree, Chris went on to a noted career as a school administrator in England, receiving a decade ago, SUNY Cortland's designation as a Distinguished Alumnus. Throughout the whole celebration Van was obviously *delighted!* Near the celebration's end, I had a chance to talk with him for a few minutes, during which he confided that he had hopes of finishing not one, but *three* more short articles on Ruskin! Such ambition being yet one more piece of evidence indicating why, for so many decades, and still, Van Burd has been our greatest living Ruskin scholar.



Van Akin Burd at 100, with Shoji Sato (left) and Jim Spates (right).

If anyone reading this tribute would care to send Van a congratulatory note, he would be more than delighted to read whatever you write. He can be reached at his home of more than sixty years: 22 Forrest Avenue, Cortland, New York 13045.

CELEBRATING A TRUE RUSKIN SCHOLAR

Stuart Eagles

What Ruskin said about true disciples is well known, but one can only guess what he would have made of scholarship undertaken for the purposes of better understanding what he wrote, drew, thought and did in his lifetime. No doubt he would have been suitably cutting in some of his retorts. Yet anyone would surely be grateful to know that among those keeping alight the flame he set burning is Professor Van Akin Burd.

I have had the privilege of meeting Van only once. It was during the year 2000 events at Lancaster and Coniston, marking the centenary of Ruskin's death. Van was a model of modesty and charm. For me, a student writing a dissertation on Ruskin and Dickens at the time, it was a unique

opportunity to meet one of the great Ruskin scholars and I felt keenly my fortune in being able to talk to him in the glorious sunshine beating down on us at Brantwood. The exemplary standard of his scholarship gives all of us who hope to contribute to Ruskin studies the highest mark at which to aim. More importantly, his painstaking diligence teaches us to keep searching for the small details that give texture to and illuminate the whole (a process Ruskin perfectly understood and beautifully described in his own studies). Thank you, Van, for inspiring us.

What follows is just a small selection of tributes representing different organisations and independent scholars

that share a sense of indebtedness to Van. If some of the same sentiments are repeated, it is because Van's qualities shine so brightly and leave the same brilliant impression on those whose lives he has touched.



VAN AKIN BURD: A (MOSTLY INADEQUATE!) TRIBUTE

Jim Spates

On the 19th of April of this year, 2014, Van Akin Burd turned 100. Few, as we know, live so long. Of these, an extremely small percentage, probably a percentage barely above zero, still publish at such an age. Thus, it is all the more remarkable to be able to say that, during the last decade, Van Burd has published no fewer than six new papers on Ruskin. Surely, there is not a soul in the Ruskin world who would disagree that Van is the living dean of studies done in that great Victorian's name. His scholarly career -- his official title, so very appropriately, at The State University of New York at Cortland, is *Distinguished Professor Emeritus* -- stretches back more than six decades into our collective past, as the following short but significant story pertinent to that career's beginning shows.

It was the summer of 1953 and Van was doing his required annual stint for the U. S. Navy Reserves in New York City. His work for that august company finished by mid-afternoon, he decided to go directly to the Pierpont Morgan Library to have a look at one of the treasures of Ruskin's legacy, the manuscript of *Modern Painters* V. Two years before, he had finished his Ph.D dissertation on this work at the University of Michigan. Finding the Morgan's Reading Room, he asked that the manuscript be brought up from the vaults. Minutes later, he was deeply engrossed. Here is how he recalls what happened next:

I must have made an unusual sight as a Naval officer in dress blues with my white visored cap on the mahogany study table in the Morgan Reading Room. Before long, I felt a tap on my shoulder, and I looked up to see a gentleman who, I learned later, was Frederick B.

Adams, then the Director of the Library. Apologizing for disturbing me, he said, 'I am curious. Why would an officer in the Navy want to see the manuscript of *Modern Painters*?' When I told him I had recently completed a dissertation on Ruskin and Turner, he understood my motive, and we became

acquainted. I told him I was seeking a topic for post-doctoral research and that I had read of the Morgan's recent acquisition of the Bowerswell Trunk from the Millais family, a

purchase filled with letters on Ruskin's ill-fated marriage. Mr Adams explained that this project had already been assigned to the English scholar, Mary Lutyens. He would keep my interests in mind, however, when they acquired something else pertaining to Ruskin. Within a year, I believe, he called me to say that the library had just purchased, from Sotheby's, Ruskin's extensive correspondence with Margaret Bell of Winnington Hall -- letters found in the London attic of one of the former teachers at the school in Cheshire. Was I interested in the project? Happily, I accepted.

—Van Akin Burd, 'How I became acquainted with the Morgan Library' in *The Friends of Ruskin's Brantwood Newsletter* (Spring, 2014).

The meeting with Mr Adams was one of



Van, in the navy.

those pivotal moments in a life, a turning which, at the moment of its occurrence, as is so often the case, was not seen at the time for the critical encounter it was. But the meeting was much more than that

singular moment which led to the discovery of one scholar's true calling. It marked a turning point in Ruskin studies. From it, after a decade and more of assiduous work arrived at its end, came a remarkable volume, *The Winnington Letters of John Ruskin* (Harvard UP, 1969), a book which all but singlehandedly relit the then barely smoldering candle of serious work on Ruskin. To say that the sum of Winnington's many reviews (which I have read) was uncommonly laudatory is an understatement. One -- distinct in its wording but hardly in its sentiment -- remarked that the book opened 'a new era of Ruskin scholarship' because it brought the all-but-forgotten genius of its subject's writing --in the form of his beautiful, deeply personal missives -- into the public domain in a way that had not been the case since the years that immediately followed Ruskin's death in 1900, a time when reading his glorious prose (as Sir Kenneth Clark put it in his fine collection, *Ruskin To-Day*) was still *de rigueur* for anyone wishing to think of him or herself as in possession of a soul!

But, as we know, Winnington was only the beginning. Not long after it was printed, Van was again hard at work on another monumental task, a project which, four years later, would result in *The Ruskin Family Letters, 1801-43* (Cornell UP, 1973, 2 vols.). Once again, the reviews glowed, praising Van's pages not merely for bringing to light what had previously been 'lost' information on Ruskin and the critical role his intense upbringing had played in the development of his thought, but because, like Winnington, it had been edited in such a masterful way that the entire era in which the letters were written came 'to life again'.

Three major works followed: *John Ruskin and Rose La Touche* (Oxford UP, 1978) —still the only study dedicated to understanding this core relationship in Ruskin's life; *A Tour to the Lakes in Cumberland: John Ruskin's Diary for 1830* (Scholar Press, 1990; co-edited and written with James S. Dearden), the first

publication of one of Ruskin's important childhood diaries (he was 11 when he wrote it); and *Christmas Story: John Ruskin's Venetian Letters of 1876-1877* (Delaware UP, 1990), a study of a critical moment in Ruskin's life not long after the death of Rose, the love of his life, during weeks when, alone in the great city on the Adriatic about which he had written so effusively, Ruskin was barely holding on to his sanity. And this list of books says nothing of the *dozens* of articles Van has published in academic journals over the course of his career, not a few of which, as mentioned above, were written in his nineties!

Here's another way to think about why Van Burd is so important to Ruskin studies. For reasons much too complex to go into here, the story of Ruskin's life has been, in one way or another, perennially mis-told or distorted. Because of this, the great Ruskin biography, eleven and a half decades after his passing, has yet to be written. Of these distortions, Van—and, before him, his close friend in Ruskin studies, Helen Viljoen—has been long aware (all one has to do is to read Van's penetrating introductions to the principal sections of *The Winnington Letters* to verify the point). However, rather than tackle the all-but-impossible task of writing a massive biography—as Viljoen did, failing in the effort—Van chose instead to do each of

his projects with an attention to detail, a commitment to 'getting it right' by means of his unflagging determination to use only the *original documents* (a determination not always in evidence in much of the literature purporting to shed light on Ruskin's life) to tell the story at hand. It was this intense focus and commitment to accuracy -- one quite literally *feels* 'this is the way it was' when reading Van's works—that has occasioned, over the decades, the panegyric reviews. In his books and articles we have example after example of works which will, by any yardstick, scholarly or biographical, stand the test of time. To put yet another way: while all the current and antique biographies of Ruskin will eventually have to be rewritten, Van Akin Burd's Ruskin studies will never be subjected to such a dubious distinction, because all of them are like the man himself: *Distinguished*.

Realizing the importance of Van's Ruskin work, It hardly needs noting that we, readers of *The Companion* and the enduring beneficiaries of Van's work, could not be happier that a 39-year-old Navy Reserve officer decided on that long-ago summer afternoon *not* to change into civilian clothes before going to the Morgan Library to examine the manuscript of *Modern Painters V*; which unusual dress

caught the eye of the Morgan's Director, F. B. Adams, who then, out of curiosity, decided to have a chat with the man in the navy dress blues; which chat led to *The Winnington Letters*; which masterful volume served as 'prologue' to another half-century's impeccable work, work which, considered as a whole, has transformed studies in Ruskin's name. 'How things bind and blend themselves together!'

And still the praise is inadequate.

NOTE

Van's books, as I've tried to say, are all superb. I recommend that anyone who is interested in Ruskin who has not yet done so read them. They are, however, increasingly hard to find. Diligence can sometimes turn up some on the web: tryaddall.com. However, it has been my long-time experience that Mike Salts, who lives in Coniston not far from Ruskin's home, Brantwood, is extremely adept at ferreting out such volumes, often at prices below those on the internet. You can reach him at: mike@coniston.org.uk.

I am grateful, as always, for Jennifer Morris's willingness to use her fine editorial eye to scrutinize these paragraphs before I sent them on to Stuart Eagles.

MY FRIEND, VAN

James S. Dearden

Van Burd is doubly my oldest friend. I don't know anyone else who is a hundred years old, and I have been actively and regularly in touch with him for fifty-five years.

Van and I began to correspond in 1959. There are three fat files of our correspondence lodged at the Ruskin Library at Lancaster which may not be opened until 2020—and an even fatter, on-going, file here in my study which will eventually join them. Van has deposited his files of our correspondence with the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York, with the same embargo.

It was in 1959 that Van and Julia and their

daughter Joyce first came to Bembridge. Van was working on his edition of the *Winnington Letters*, the manuscript of which I was eventually asked to read by Sir Stanley Unwin. They came again a few years afterwards, bringing Joyce's friend, Sudee. These first two trips were made by boat. In all I think Van came to Bembridge six times, working in the Galleries on his various books—the *Winnington Letters*, *The Ruskin Family Letters*, the *Christmas Story* and *John Ruskin and Rose La Touche*.

In his editorial work, Van has established a very high standard of scholarship and expertise which many of us lesser mortals strive to emulate.

During discussions at our first meeting we decided to compile a Calendar of Ruskin letters and manuscripts in order to bring up to date the information in the *Library Edition*. Work on this was never finished, but our (probably now outdated) record cards are lodged at the Ruskin Library.



The cottage Van stayed in when first visiting the Ruskin Galleries at Bembridge.

From that time, we always planned to prepare a book together. But it was not until 1990 that our *Tour to the Lakes in Cumberland*, Ruskin's previously unpublished 1830 diary, was issued by the Scolar Press, the forerunner of Ashgate.

In 1978, The Guild of St George established the annual Ruskin Lecture, and in 1982, at my instigation, Van was invited to deliver the lecture. It was held at Tallow Chandlers' Hall, in the City, and afterwards Van and Julia dined with directors at the National Theatre. Later that night I wrote my review of Van's lecture and delivered it the following morning to *The Times Literary Supplement*. I have my copy of the proof of it, but it was crowded out and never appeared.

Three further times Van and Julia were in England again. They were at Sheffield for the opening of the Guild's Ruskin Gallery [at Norfolk Street, in 1985] and for the civic dinner held afterwards in the Town Hall.

Since the Whitehouse Collection moved from Bembridge, Van has been in England several times more. We spent a happy week or ten days together in 2000 at Lancaster and Brantwood, and I remember with pleasure Van's later Brantwood lecture on Ruskin's 1876 Christmas Day, and how Van and Jim Spates had followed in Ruskin's 1876 footsteps around Venice. By a happy chance,

Van's article on this walk has just been published in *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, as listed in my annual Bibliography for *The Companion*.

I am very glad to have copies of all of Van's books and articles on my shelves—at least fifteen of them—and almost all autographed. This includes his privately published account of his wartime experiences, *Not a Hero*.

Van is now quite deaf, as the result of a blow when protecting Julia from a night-time intruder when they were staying with Van's sister. But despite his various problems, Van continues to take great interest in Ruskin affairs, and he still publishes the occasional article.

I am happy—and proud—to call him 'Friend'.



Dearden and Burd compare notes during the events at Lancaster University in 2000 to mark the centenary of Ruskin's death.

VAN AKIN BURD AT 100

Clive Wilmer

In 2009, I wrote a paper on Ruskin and Charles Darwin for a Darwin Bicentenary conference. Searching through my files for notes and quotations that would help me with it, I came across the offprint of an article on William Buckland, who taught and befriended Ruskin at Christ Church, Oxford. It was called 'Ruskin and his "Good Master", William Buckland', and it had been published the previous year in an academic journal. Last year, when I was writing a paper on Ruskin and female sexuality, I rifled through my offprints and photocopies again, and up came an article, published in 2007, called 'Ruskin on his Sexuality: A Lost Source'. Both these articles were work by the same scholar, and he wrote them at the ages of 94 and 93 respectively.

I am talking of our fellow Companion Van Akin Burd, who last flew to England in 2006 and this year, on April 19, reached his hundredth birthday—still intellectually active, still inquisitive, still moved by his life-long attachment to John Ruskin. Van has written a great many conference papers and scholarly articles, all of great merit, but he will be remembered—and one can be as near certain of this as possible—for in effect adding five volumes to Ruskin's already voluminous oeuvre. Those books are *The Winnington Letters of John Ruskin* (1969), the two volumes of *The Ruskin Family Letters* (1973), *John Ruskin and Rose la Touche* (1980), and *The Christmas Story* (1991). All of them involve the collection of correspondence, journal materials and the contributions to Ruskin's life of other key individuals, most obviously his parents and the young woman he loved above anyone. Van is also the author of one of the most

important of our Guild pamphlets, given as a Ruskin Lecture in 1982: *Ruskin, Lady Mount-Temple, and the Spiritualists: An Episode in Broadlands History*.

Van's books are masterpieces of the editorial art. Through them, our understanding of Ruskin has been immeasurably enlarged—his character, his life, his emotional attachments and, above all, the relation of his ideas and preoccupations to his experiences of the world. If I had to choose between the four books—and I would certainly not want to *have* to do that—I would probably go for *The Winnington Letters*, for that (as it seems to me at any rate) is a book of Ruskin's in much the same way as *Time and Tide* or *Fors Clavigera* are. All three are collections of letters, and all three reveal how Ruskin's peculiar genius was for letters and other writings similarly structured. His genius was for drawing the disparate together and for refocusing a line of thought by means of some digression or a sudden change of tone.

To have illuminated that side of Ruskin and to have expanded his oeuvre would be sufficient contributions on Van Burd's part. When we turn to the elegantly written introductions and the linking commentaries that bind these books together, we are treated to the work of a mind so deeply familiar with Ruskin, so perceptive, so sensitive to his nuances, that one has to grant him the rights of co-author. No one else would ever have done what Van has in the

same way, and I doubt if any scholar living or dead could have done it better.

In the course of the first decade of this century, Van visited England three times in the company of our mutual friend Jim Spates. It was a delight to meet him. Such journeys in a nonagenarian seemed improbable, but there's no doubt that Van enjoyed them and that all of us loved meeting him. No doubt he will not risk a trip like those again, but I won't be surprised to see another article under his name in one of the learned journals he has, over many years, graced with his presence.

Happy birthday, Van!



Van at Winnington Hall.

TRIBUTES

If we were to follow the principle that there are only six degrees of separation between ourselves and anyone else on the planet, then we would be astonished at the closeness of Distinguished Professor Van Akin Burd to the Guild's founder. Van Akin Burd knew Helen Gill Viljoen, who visited Brantwood in 1929, where she met W.G. Collingwood, who.... It is yet another reason to celebrate the living centenary of a man who has done so much to set a standard for Ruskin scholarship, and who was a pioneer in the post-war revival of Ruskin studies. His editions of Ruskin's letters, most notably *The Ruskin Family Letters* (1973) are a model of scrupulous scholarship, patient annotation, and a seemingly infinite capacity for chasing down the most minute of details. His work as an editor is matched by the sensitivity and care with which he has acted as the literary executor of that other pioneer scholar, Helen Gill Viljoen. The manner in which the extraordinary collection made by F.J. Sharp and passed to Viljoen has become publicly available is thanks to him. Van Akin Burd is also an extremely genial and caring man to know. When I first met him in New York in 1977, when he had taken the trouble to come from Cortland to meet me, he gave me careful advice on how to cross the street without losing my wallet. Thanks to him, I survived. Very best wishes, Van.

—Robert Hewison, Ruskin Foundation.

In the history of Ruskin scholarship, Van Burd takes the palm for longevity, having published over six decades since his first article on *Modern Painters* in 1953. As I contemplate retirement it is sobering to think that this was only a couple of years after I was born. The forthcoming issue of Lancaster's *Ruskin Review and Bulletin* contains his most recent piece, the account of his acquisition of a photograph of Ruskin, which is undoubtedly unique in the bibliography as the work of a centenarian. Perhaps this will spur younger scholars such as James Dearden on to even greater honours!

Outstanding among Van's achievements are the three great editions of letters which not only brought some of Ruskin's most interesting correspondence to a wide audience but brilliantly illuminated three phases of his life: the young man of genius, in *The Ruskin Family Letters, 1801-1843* (1973); the eccentric but passionate educator and nympholept, in *The Winnington Letters* (1969); and the saddened sage mourning for lost love, in *Christmas Story: John Ruskin's Venetian Letters of 1876-77* (1990). Each edition is shot through with Van's reverence for his subject combined with modesty, humanity and humour: precision with just a hint of mischief, as he revels in exercising the little grey cells in a manner recalling Hercule Poirot at his very best. Not least, he has always written elegantly and movingly, as here: 'In his love for children ... Ruskin was his most spontaneous. The plan of the editing of the letters ... is to release this spontaneity.'

—Stephen Wildman, Director of The Ruskin Library and Research Centre,
University of Lancaster.

I became aware of John Ruskin while I was a student in the late 1960s and, by the 1970s, I had begun a small collection of books both by and about him. Of the latter category, one of the names that stood out among the great communicators of the day was Van Akin Burd. When I was invited to meet Van on a rare visit to these shores some years ago I was delighted, although somewhat overawed by the thought as the date approached.

The first meeting with someone long-held in high esteem can be a daunting occasion. Will I rise intellectually to the occasion? Have I put this person unduly high in my reckoning? Should I have re-read and refreshed my memory with a few passages of his in the last few weeks so that we have common ground between us?

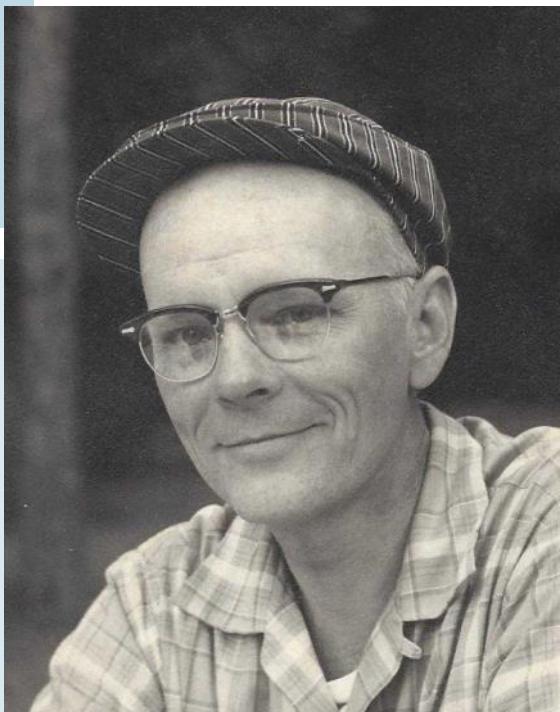
Of course, I need not have worried. Those who have had the pleasure of meeting Van will know of his relaxed, genial and welcoming ways. And of his jokes. For as we sat in one of London's busiest eating spots amid the background hum of conversation, this great and esteemed Ruskin scholar had us laughing over our soup. And when the conversation turned as it inevitably would to Ruskin, Van was not only right in there, but along with fellow travelling-companion, Jim Spates, was engaging with people on the next table and involving them in the discussion. Such is an evening with Van.

Since then, as editor of the *Newsletter* of the Friends of Ruskin's Brantwood, it has been both a pleasure and an honour to publish his work from time to time, and to have been able to include Jim Spates's birthday tribute this past spring. Great thanks are due for these first one hundred years, for his exemplary scholarship, and for the pathways it has laid for those who follow.

—Paul Dawson, Editor, *Friends of Ruskin's Brantwood Newsletter*.

In the presence of such a revered Ruskin scholar I felt a bit exposed the first time I met Van, but his sharpest questions were about swimming in the lake, which at the time I did a lot of. I thought he was being kind by avoiding too much Ruskin. Only later did I learn that he swam every day of his life until well into his '90s. Thereafter he always enquired after my swimming when we spoke—and cajoled me if it looked like I was slacking. Van wore his scholarship lightly and the very simple things of life pleased and amused him enormously. Pamela and I went to visit him in his cabin in the woods in Michigan. Van had a tea chest, a typewriter (Helen Viljoen's no less) and a single Ruskin letter. Nothing could have made him happier than to chip away in that very precise fashion of his at another piece of the geology that made up Ruskin's world. Like Ruskin, he only needed a fragment to make a mountain. Van took us to the local old-timer's hang out for a bite to eat and it was clear that he was just as at home with the company there (he had his own mug on a hook) as he was amid the gilded halls of the Morgan Library. I'm so pleased we got to see Van again this last summer at his home in Cortland. He showed us his study—nothing grand, but a genuine workshop given over to honouring the great man's legacy he did so much to enhance. Once again, Van, modest as ever, didn't dwell on past achievements. He wanted to know what was new and what might yet be done. And we had another great lunch, of course.

—Howard Hull, Director of Brantwood.



Van in the early 1960s.

Expressions such as 'Ask Van' or 'Let's see what Van thinks' are a common refrain among Ruskin scholars, yet it is still hard to believe that we are celebrating the 100th birthday of Professor Van Akin Burd.

Van is that rare type that manages to combine modesty and generosity with scholarship, the latter being the result of stamina, hard work and determination.

His superb two-volume *The Ruskin Family Letters* (1973) is but one example of his careful research. He always goes to the original source in his search for truth and accuracy, and never relies on second-hand material.

Ruskin scholars are eternally indebted to this great American pioneer who knows the streets and back-streets of Herne Hill and Denmark Hill better than any Londoner.

On behalf of the Ruskin Society, I am honoured and delighted to say 'Happy Birthday Van', and to send our very warm greetings.

—Cynthia Gamble,
Chairman, The Ruskin Society.

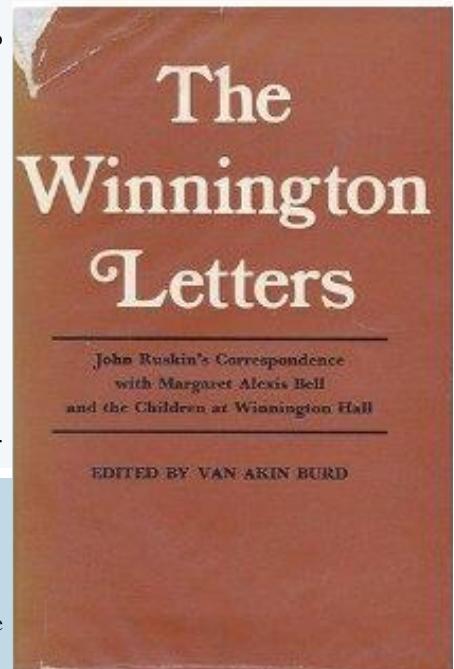
As a graduate student in the late 1990s writing a dissertation on Ruskin, I was of course familiar with Van Akin Burd's work, which I greatly admired. He was one of those essential Ruskin scholars who had helped to establish Ruskin studies. I had read and cited his books many times and, still a young scholar myself, had some idea of him as a remote and unapproachable figure. Imagine my surprise, then, to hear from my good friend Alan Davis that Van Burd had had good words for an essay of mine that had appeared in the *Ruskin Review and Bulletin*. This was unexpected news and I was both pleased and humbled to hear of it. Soon after, to my even greater surprise and pleasure, I received a letter from Van Burd, encouraging me in my research and addressing me as "a fellow Ruskinian." This first letter from Van, which meant then and means still a great deal to me, expresses what I now know to be his characteristic generosity, integrity, and warmth. He is brilliant—he has helped to pave the way for the rest of us—but he is also disarmingly down to earth. In a conversation with Jim Spates, published recently in the Companion, Van Burd remarked that he has lived a magic life. We all have much to thank him for and our own lives are wealthier—in the Ruskinian sense of the word—for knowing him. Happiest of birthdays to you, Van!

—Sara Atwood.

The Lancaster University Ruskin Programme *Bulletin 12*: January 1997 contained a short article by myself entitled 'Ruskin, The Reverend John Eagles and *The Sketcher*'. To my amazement a letter arrived the following month from Professor Van Akin Burd containing some encouraging comments and also a related article of his own from the *Philological Quarterly* : 'Ruskin's Defence of Turner: The Imitative Phase' (the subject of his PhD thesis). This essay had been published way back in October 1958. I was dumfounded that he should take the trouble to write and show such interest in what I was doing for I knew that he had officially retired from his academic post at the State University of New York, Cortland some nineteen years earlier. I wrote to Van thanking him for his letter and essay and also told him that I had an Art and Design student from Cortland working in my department for a term and had recently met the president of Cortland on a visit to the UK. From then on we would write occasional letters and cards and meet at conferences in the UK and USA. On one occasion at the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York I was able to act as his short term 'research assistant' by showing him how to use the new-fangled wall-mounted pencil sharpener recently installed! How interesting it is, to read the current Brantwood *Newsletter* (Spring, 2014) which contains an article by Van about his first visit to the Morgan Library in 1953. He is, of course, a brilliant story teller and is most amused to recall a visit to Lancaster Castle in 2000 with my wife when, to his delight, they got locked up together in the dungeons as part of the tour.

We all know Van Akin Burd as a great scholar and author of some of the finest works in the field of Ruskin Studies. He has been for me an inspiration: the master researcher and editor who has set for us all the highest of standards.

—Ray Haslam.



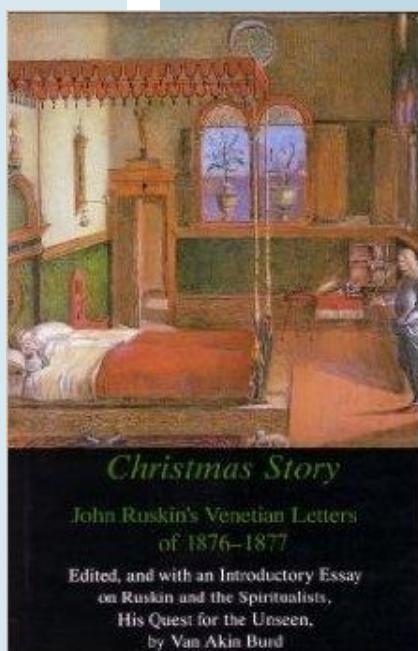
In my view, the First Master of the Guild of St George enjoyed an immediate and extended family during his lifetime. John Ruskin's extended family ranged from his first and second 'worldly masters'—Turner and Carlyle—to his 'dear brother Ned', Burne-Jones, the Whitlands College May Queens and the working-men of England.

While I was fortunate to meet one of the last individuals who knew Ruskin personally, Ms Nellie Wilkinson, the Brantwood gardener's daughter, I have been able to enjoy the friendships of 20th and 21st-century members of an extended family fascinated by the legacy of Ruskin's genius. All readers of *The Companion* will agree that Van Akin Burd sits at one end of this extended family table while Jim Dearden faces him at the honored chair on the other end. What characterizes both scholars is a love of their research subject and a kindness to newer family members. Why, I have only read and collected Ruskin for 50 years!

When Companions Jim Spates and Van visited Marianne's and my apartment a decade ago, I felt that Van and his good friend were honoring my home. Yet, recently, Jim Spates told me that Van often refers to that visit as *his pleasure*.. True to my experience with great individuals, Van has always made me feel as if I were the important one. In point of fact, I have always thought that Van's serious devotion to research and his polite demeanor must be akin to that of the Great Victorian whose philosophy and experiences he has studied and illuminated for a lifetime.

My most recent visit with Van was on the shore deck of Jim Spates' New York State home, overlooking 'the other Lake Geneva'. When Van and I were conversing and drinking tea from the Spates' Royal Doulton rose-decorated china cups, I thought of John Ruskin and his close American friend, Charles Eliot Norton, conversing by a Swiss lake of the same name. Happy 100th Birthday, Van! How fortunate I am to be a Companion at your table!

—R. Dyke Benjamin.





VAN'S CHERRY TREE

Shoji Sato

Van's centenary birthday celebrations included a very impressive ceremony, with a large attendance, at the SUNY Cortland Alumni House on 19th April, 2014. For the special event, I had prepared for publication, *Translated Short Essays by Dr Van Akin Burd in Honor of His Centenary Birthday* (in collaboration with Professor Jim Spates) and supplied a copy for each visitor on Van's big day. With the permission of Howard Hull, I planted a baby cherry tree in the garden at Brantwood just after the AGM of the Guild of St. George last year, as a symbol of the international relationship in Ruskin studies between the

West and the East. I plan to hold a traditional Japanese tea-party at Brantwood when the cherry tree is blossoming—in honour of the bicentenary of Ruskin's birth. I had worried that the cherry tree would not survive this past cold and windy winter. However, just three days before Van's 100th birthday party in Cortland, Howard informed Jim Spates that my tree was just about to blossom and everyone at Brantwood was so excited. I decided (in consultation with Jim and with Howard's approval) to name it 'Van's Cherry Tree' and I announced it at the end of Van's party.

Happy Birthday, Van!

