

A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

Roughly eight years ago we met in Manhattan with Nick Phillipson to plan a new journal to be launched by Cambridge University Press. Two Americans who knew each and had worked together well, and who were largely in agreement about what *MIH* should accomplish. We were well aware of the quality of Nick's scholarship, of course, and had heard through the transatlantic grapevine that he was a great colleague. Still, we were more than a little apprehensive. What if Nick had a totally different idea of the journal? What if the personal chemistry didn't work? Within an hour of our discussion we knew that we had "lucked out" on both counts. Readers familiar with Nick's work will surely agree that he has one of the sharpest and most imaginative minds in the discipline, and that he had been combining intellectual history with social and cultural history well before historians started making such a fuss about it. Manhattan was the right place to meet. An urban gentleman (in the best of senses), Nick is a gourmet of awesome range (everything from *haute cuisine* to deli food) and a sparkling conversationalist and raconteur. Lunch or dinner with him is an event. No one takes more care, or pleasure, in ordering a good bottle of wine. The subject of conversation need not be history; he is a lover of art and music, and has been very active in the cultural and civic life of Edinburgh, where he was a celebrated teacher at the university from 1965 to 2004.

Nick is now retiring from his editorial responsibilities. The timing is extraordinary. He is not leaving in a wake of past glories; he's at the very peak of his career. Roughly thirty years ago, Nick burst on the scene—he has a way of bursting on the scene—as one of the leading scholars of the Scottish Enlightenment. His first two books left no doubt of his versatility: a now indispensable monograph on the Scottish legal profession in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and an elegant intellectual biography of David Hume as a historian. At the same time, Nick played a key role in explaining what "polite sociability" meant, both in practice and in theory; why the universities and their cities were the centers of the Enlightenment in Scotland; and how they shaped and were shaped by it. He must have known from the beginning that all this would culminate in a densely contextualized biography of Adam Smith (whose papers were burned at his death). It will be, he would tell us, "a biography without sources." But Nick is a

virtuoso at getting spare sources to yield every last bit of their historical meaning. The book—*Adam Smith: An Enlightened Life*—appeared with Penguin in August of 2010, and there is now an American edition by Yale University Press. It is a master contribution both to Enlightenment studies and to biography.

One of the challenges in launching *MIH* was to make it a truly transatlantic enterprise, and that meant getting submissions and building a readership in the UK. Without Nick the journal simply would not have been able to do that. It was not only that Nick knew so many people; his wit, amiability and sheer kindness made it very hard to turn him down. Readers who have been edited by Nick know how good he is at editing. He has the patience—and the good judgment—to wait for a piece to “ripen” (one of his favorite words); he coaxes people into making their prose more lucid and more readable (jargon was banned); and he is quick to spot a kink or a void in the argument or in the presentation. We learned a great deal from him.

We wish Nick all the best in the coming years.

Charles Capper and Anthony La Vopa