

Let there be Light! Illuminating the goings on in the Hindu Kush

David Cunningham was invited to become a Scholar by Elder the late Nick Hudson of exalted memory, a fellow publisher and good friend, who also, in David's absence in India, dobed him in to deliver the 1999 Oration.

David was the General Manager of the Oxford University Press's Australian Branch from 1976 to 1985 when he fell out of favour with the Press's authorities and was given the boot. Before he came to Australia, he was General Manager of the OUP's Pakistan Branch (1969-73) and before that he was a Press trainee in Calcutta (1964-8).

David had read History at Cambridge and naturally, when working in the sub-continent, became interested in its history, as well as becoming a firm Indophile. One of his publishing projects when in Pakistan was to start a series called 'Oxford in Asia Historical Reprints', and in that series, he included Sir George Scott Robertson's *The Kafirs of the Hindu-Kush*, which is the main authority on that community of Unbelievers before their forcible conversion to Islam in 1896, the very year the book was published. The series was a very hands-on affair, and David himself prepared the index for the new edition of Robertson's book, so getting to know its contents intimately.

When in Pakistan David travelled widely including visiting Kabul in Afghanistan and the remote northern Pakistani district of Chitral where some three villages of Kafirs survive because Chitral, being under British suzerainty, was not subject to the forcible conversion of the rest of their country by the Amir of Afghanistan.

It seemed inevitable that with this extraordinarily insightful experience, David's choice of a topic for his Oration was pre-destined. Its mish-mash of fact and fiction would both amuse the Scholars and whet their appetites to learn more about the culture of Kafiristan, called since its forcible conversion to Islam, Nuristan or The Land of Light.

David Cunningham (2024)

1999 Oration: '*First Light in Nuristan: Crabtree's Contribution to the Development of the Society and Religion of the Kafirs of the Hindu Kush*'.