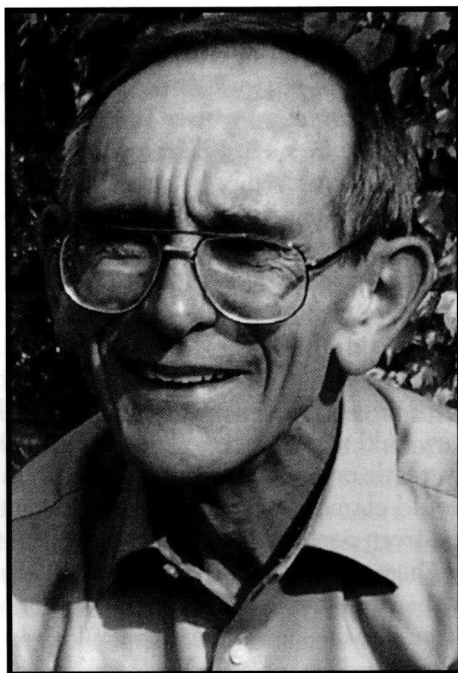


Obituary

Richard K. Morris (1943-2015)



Richard K. Morris, (Richard of Warwick or 'Mouldings' Morris), was an architectural historian and a leading authority in the interpretation of medieval architecture through the analysis of architectural detail. He died on 7th January 2015 having lived on and off with cancer for several years.

He was born in Berkeley, Gloucestershire on 15th November 1943 to Alberto Jorge 'Joe' and Mary Morris. Joe had migrated to the UK from Uruguay and worked as a diesel engineer for Listers at Dursley from the 1930s until his retirement, and it was there that he met his future wife, Mary. They had two children, Richard and Elizabeth. Richard was educated at Wycliffe School in Stroud, Gloucestershire, after which he went up to Cambridge, graduating from Selwyn College in 1966 with a BA Hons in History and Fine Arts.

In the same year he became one of Peter Kidson's first PhD students at the Courtauld Institute of Art, along with Nicola Coldstream and Paul Crossley, completing his doctoral thesis on *Decorated Architecture in Herefordshire: Sources, Workshops and Influence* in 1972. In his own work he spoke about how it was Kidson who had inspired his interest in medieval churches and had instilled in him the belief that much could still be learnt about the process of history from a detailed study of architectural fabric – a 'dusty road' that led him to national and international acclaim. He quickly gained a reputation for being a single-minded student of ballflower ornament and then moulding profiles. His clear and instructive thesis provided a model for others, the result of the conscientiousness that was a hallmark of his scholarship.

In May 1968 Richard married Jenny Gibbs and moved to Canada, taking up a teaching post at the University of Victoria, British Columbia where he completed his thesis. He was selected to become a lecturer in the newly formed History of Art Department at the University of Warwick in 1974, at which time he returned to England. With his wife and now three small children he bought a house in Kenilworth, decorating it with his favourite Canadian wallpaper. The History of Art department established by Julian Gardner had a strong medieval focus and Richard rapidly established a core component of this on English ecclesiastical and secular architecture c. 1150-1600, set within the context of European architecture.

During this time, and up until his early retirement in 2001, hundreds of students passed through the department at Warwick. Richard was an inspiring teacher. What shone through was his commitment to his students, the care with which he prepared his teaching and the legendary field trips. Once a week, Richard would drive students off to a church, ruined abbey, castle or small collection of stones in a field – and with often rain-soaked handouts, would clamber over every inch. In truth one could fill a book with anecdotes of his trips, from pushing mini-buses up hills near Rievaulx Abbey, his ability to work on the roughest of ferry crossings when all around him were green, to the famously unpromising biscuit tin that opened to reveal home-baked goods sufficient to keep everyone going. Once a year he would arrange longer trips for his students to further away places, such as Lindisfarne and Northumberland, giving up his time to prepare and run these single-handed. His boundless energy and unbridled enthusiasm – always outlasting that of his students – were as legendary as his trips. Nothing seemed to hamper him and students were often expected to go on looking at the buildings long after sundown in what he christened 'torch-light archaeology'.

A clear belief that there was no substitute for seeing buildings began long before Warwick and in Canada he would take students to the Anglican Christ Church Cathedral and study its structural rib vaults. He also organised summer field trips to Europe, one to Santiago de Compostela, and on the other, on English Medieval Architecture and its French antecedents, spending three weeks in England and three in France. While in Victoria he mounted a wonderful exhibition of brass rubbings at the university art gallery, all of which he had made himself, part of his plan of bringing medieval material to life in North America.

Richard became a Senior Lecturer at Warwick in 1979 and a Reader in 1995. During this period he established an international reputation as a specialist in medieval

ecclesiastical architecture and especially in architectural details (largely, but not exclusively mouldings), and the study of masons. This reputation was established through his large range of publications including a series of seminal articles on mouldings analysis published in *Architectural History* (in 1978, 1979 and 1992). These are the only modern attempts to set a standard for using mouldings for architectural analysis. He embedded himself in the profession, becoming an active member of the British Archaeological Association, contributing to conferences and acting as conference director and council member of the BAA during the early 1990s. He became a member of the executive committee of the Society of Antiquaries of London, 1992-97, and served on the Council of the Ancient Monuments Society for thirty-three years. It was he who took the lead in raising the £8,000 necessary to publish an updated version of John Harvey's *Biographical Dictionary of Medieval Architects*, Harvey being an even more longstanding AMS trustee.

Building on the roots established during his doctorate, Richard started methodically recording architectural mouldings on a 1:1 scale across England, and, to a lesser extent, Wales and Scotland. He established the Warwick Mouldings Archive in 1978. Inevitably this focus on mouldings and architectural detail lent itself to application on excavated architectural fragments, where their form – and in some cases stratigraphy from excavations – were the only pieces of information available upon which to build a picture of a lost building. In the late 1980s and 1990s he won a series of research grants for the Croxden Abbey Cataloguing Project, Hulton Abbey worked stones, and for similar studies of excavated and unanalysed architectural fragments from Sherborne Abbey and Eynsham Abbey. One of his latest publications was the magnificent, multi-volume survey of worked stone from the excavations of the cathedral church of St Mary, Coventry.

His students, many of them now lecturers and professionals in the field of archaeology, art history and the historic environment owe him an enormous debt of gratitude, and for them it is hard to imagine a more dedicated or passionate scholar. Common memories from these early and formative interactions include his arrival in his Bedford van (known as 'The Vehicle'), pub lunches and his unwavering commitment to the subject and to the student. Many students and colleagues have vivid memories of moulding-gathering trips, often involving Richard leaning out of clerestories, apparently precariously, to reach rib vault profiles, with Richard always the least alarmed of those present.

He remained closely involved, although by no means exclusively so, in the study of the buildings of the West Country and West Midlands throughout his career. The book he edited with Ron Shoesmith in 2003 on Tewkesbury Abbey, ten years in the making, and reflecting an interest that for him began in 1967, was seen characteristically by him to be a stimulant for further research rather than an end in itself. His own contribution to this volume and other publications on Bristol, St Albans, Chepstow, Tintern, Kenilworth, Gloucester, St Mary's Warwick ... and many more... were written with clarity and breadth. He was constantly surprising others with the range and depth of his knowledge - indeed he wrote extensively on Elizabethan architecture, especially Kenilworth and Burghley House.

All these publications were illustrated with his own scale drawings of architectural details which form the basis for the now 10,000-strong Warwick Mouldings Archive. He was driven to create this after the lack of any survey of English medieval mouldings

had been highlighted by his own thesis. His openness with the Mouldings Archive was typical of his generosity towards the discipline itself. The formal stylistic analysis in which Richard excelled slipped out of fashion in some art historical circles in the late 1980s and 1990s. Richard himself acknowledged this, but (rightly) believed that this bias against it misrepresented the important place of such a methodology. He assessed and reassessed the role that the study of moulding profiles could take in forming evidence and making judgements. When he started in the 1960s it was generally assumed that establishing the re-use of templates would provide the necessary proof to identify an individual craftsman. His work and others showed that this was so rare as to be useless but that meaningful contextual analysis was possible and important. Although theoretical rather than empirical approaches to medieval buildings may not value mouldings analysis, anyone interested in assessing and understanding a building's history or context, or who has ever used style as a means to make judgements about historical context, will know that robust evidence and clear methodologies are crucial. Richard himself acknowledged that mouldings analysis was not a straightforward process and that a sense of context had to be retained.

His teaching always included consideration of historic building materials and construction. Such consideration informed his contribution to conservation policy and practice: he went on to work as a consultant to English Heritage, the National Trust and numerous archaeological units, museums and research projects. This interest in the practical application of knowledge is shown clearly through his long-standing associations with the Diocese of Coventry, serving on their Diocesan Advisory Committee from 1978 and on the Fabric Advisory Committees of Hereford Cathedral and Lichfield Cathedrals (the latter from 1984-2014) and for whom he created a catalogue of loose stonework. He served on national bodies too, including the English Heritage Churches Sub-Committee, 1984-91.

In the end there were precious few people to turn to when formal analysis was needed. The continuing need for the database he built up and his skill in applying it is shown not least by his work on the English Heritage Windsor Castle project, the St Albans Abbey Research Committee, the Nonsuch Palace Project and the Coventry Phoenix Initiative. Richard, more than others, understood that measuring was not the end but the means, but that accuracy enabled comparisons otherwise lost to us. Buildings in his hands, and through this method, took on a new identity. He did not crudely equate a profile with a mason but used the data to plot more subtle and historically convincing patterns of influence. He was master of that solid empirical approach to architectural history that has become all too rare.

Richard once described himself as the 'agony aunt' of the mouldings world and although he contributed towards the Council for British Archaeology's practical handbook on *Recording Worked Stone*, his generosity with his time, responding to enquiries, and the number of projects to which he committed, prevented his producing his *magnum opus* on *Masons and Architectural Design in Medieval England*.

Any one account of Richard's life will inevitably be partial and this one tends towards his academic interests, providing only one reflection on his personality and contribution. He was an active canoeist and cyclist throughout his life, helping to organise local cycle

rides and days out for families and for the more ambitious cyclist; organising and leading tours of the local area for interest and amenity groups. He was a devoted husband to Jenny and father to Kate, James and Thomas, and more recently grandfather to two young grandchildren. In 2011, he took on the role of editor of the *Transactions of the Ancient Monuments Society*, a culmination to his role as AMS trustee that had begun thirty-three years before. He produced three volumes, that for 2014 being one of the longest and best that the AMS has ever published. Richard assembled and edited the 2015 volume of these *Transactions*, working on it until very shortly before he died. The end of his life was marked by calmness, a complete lack of self-pity, and quiet determination. His courage and dignity were witnessed by many. He was held in high esteem and did much to support and promote the work of friends and colleagues. All those, whose lives he touched, will be very much the poorer without his generosity, expertise and enthusiasm.

LINDA MONCKTON

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the electronic newsletter of the Society of Antiquaries, in which this appreciation
first appeared)

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