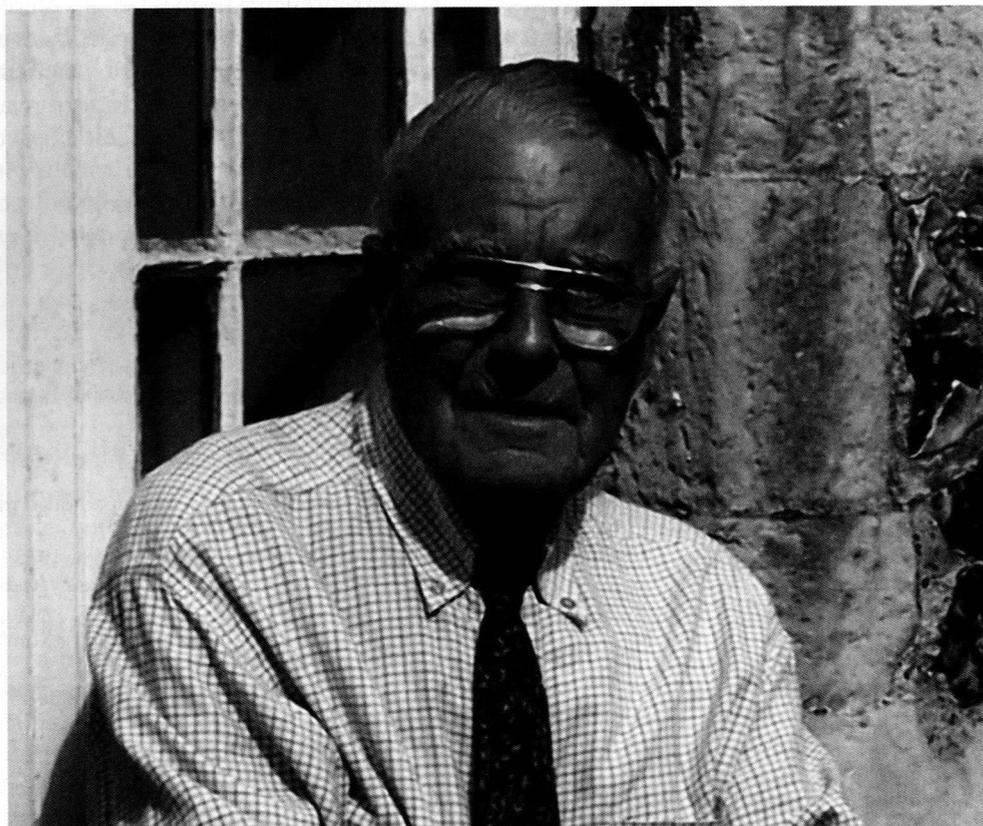


# Obituary

## Anthony Swaine (1913 - 2013)

Anthony Swaine, long-standing Trustee of the Ancient Monuments Society, architect to any number of churches owned by the Churches Conservation Trust and the Friends of Friendless Churches, and Vice-President of the AMS, died on 4th April 2013, a few months short of his 100th birthday. Longevity, even one increasingly mired in frailty, was in his genes – his mother lived to 104.



Anthony Swaine.

*Photograph, courtesy Anthony Swaine Architecture*

Anthony was born in 1913 in Broadstairs (Kent) where his father was editor of the local newspaper. And in a more exotic touch, his step-grandfather was a minister at Utrecht Cathedral. His childhood was, by his own account, painfully unhappy – he felt unloved, the more so because he thought that his brother was more accepted. He was palmed off by his mother to live with maiden aunts and he ran away on several occasions. As if to complete the hammerblow of misfortune, he was struck down by polio at the age of twelve. He did recover but the disease left a lifelong weakness in the legs. And yet the youngster discovered that he did have a great gift: a response to, and capacity to create, architecture. All his long years he was an exquisite draughtsman and the early training in the Thanet Schools of Art in Margate instilled in him an impressive command of technical detail and a respect for finish, materials and architectural repose. He could not understand the stridency and lack of context exhibited by many of the Modernist School: not for him an over-intellectualization in design. I remember leaving him quite baffled when trying to defend Venturi's extension onto the National Gallery in Trafalgar Square. It says a lot for his competence and his sense of being part of a long continuum that he taught both Building Construction and Architectural History at Canterbury College of Art for twelve years; his students there included all but the first named partner in the famous practice of Purcell Miller and Tritton. Those were the days when you learnt your trade in an architect's office, initially in his case, with Harry Stroud between the ages of eighteen and nineteen, Harold Anderson for another three years, and then the practice of Campbell Ashendon (the last two years spent in Canterbury). It was in this city that he set up his own independent practice in 1946 and where it still continues in the medieval bastion tower in Pound Lane, courtesy of Canterbury City Council. Anderson was Surveyor to the Fabric of Canterbury Cathedral and he no doubt put in a good word when the young man applied, successfully, to be Clerk of Works there, a post he held in the traumatic years of 1943-45. He was responsible for the nightly firewatch and although the city had been most devastated in the raids of June 1942, the risk and reality of further attack was ever present.

In some ways, however, it was the peace which most forged Anthony's character and his capacity for a steely resolve, a trait often well hidden by a generally quiet demeanour and rather precise bird-like mannerisms. A much loved Town Clerk had been killed during the bombing and Anthony recognized his successor as one determined to sweep away much that had survived the

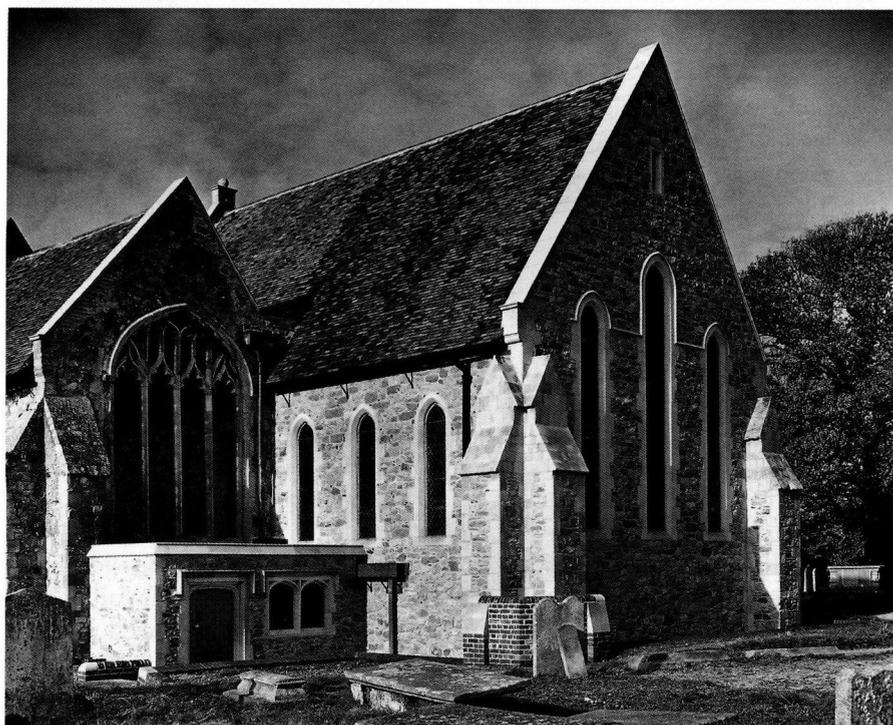


Anthony in uncongenial company – town planners meet in 1945 to sweep away areas of Canterbury which had survived the War.

War. He was uneasy in the company of engineers, planners and architects who were planning, in his own words, 'the compulsory purchase of the entire centre of the city, in order to plunge a dual carriageway across it and erect a number of sky scrapers in the centre, throwing open the Cathedral "to sit on a sea of grass like Salisbury'. There was even a suggestion to demolish the Westgate, the only medieval gate left into the city as it stood in the way of the road". He realized the need to marshal public opinion against needless destruction and in a move which may have cost him some public commissions he helped to establish the Canterbury Society, with the support of the then Dean, the Very Revd Dr Hewlett Johnson. The fact that he was in a reserved profession had allowed him to devote much energy to taking surveys of bombed property, and from there it was an easy move to employment by the War Damage Commission. Among the buildings he restored in Canterbury were Greyfriars, the Eastbridge Hospital and the churches of St Peter and St Mildred. His hand is more identifiable in one of the most unlucky casualties in the whole of Kent: the remote church at Lydd where a German bomber anxious to gain height off-loaded its bombs onto what it thought was open countryside but claimed instead the 13th-century chancel of what was already 'the longest church in Kent'. Anthony reconstructed it with an almost Cistercian austerity – it was the medieval which moved him most – and it was the rebuilt chancel at Lydd which is one of his purest and, in the best possible sense, least picturesque, of his compositions.

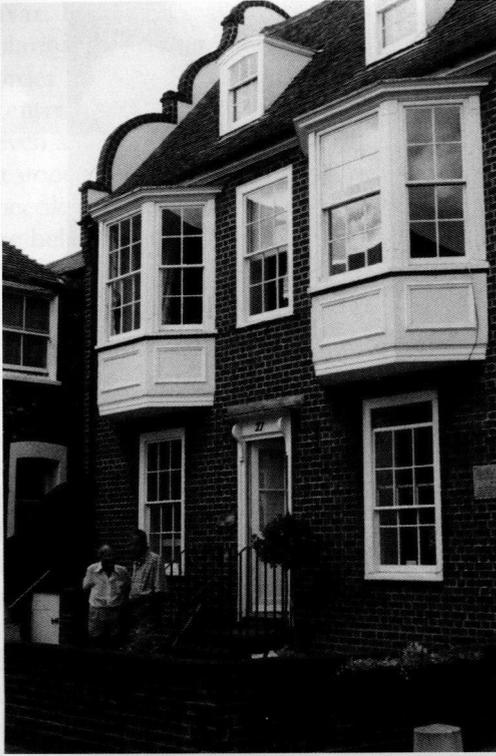
The horror of indiscriminate destruction led him to identify the best of the survivors for conservation. It was Anthony's then rare understanding of vernacular as well as polite historic architecture which led to a commission from Anthony Dale, then Chief Inspector, to compile the first statutory lists of protected buildings in Canterbury, Faversham, Whitstable, Sandwich and Tenterden – but not, surprisingly, Deal, the town where he set up home (and where the survey was carried out by the longest serving 'lister' of them all, Carole Ryan, who still works for English Heritage). He lived for some years in Abbey Street, Faversham, a town for which he felt particular affection and where he served as architectural adviser for many years. His 1969 study, *Faversham Conserved*, the direct result of the 1967 Civic Amenities Act, has become a classic, difficult to obtain for love or money. This and his associated study of Margate in 1975 were pioneering assessments of the very special qualities of historic towns, preceding the famous monographs by Donald Insall on York, Bath, Chichester and Chester. His technical prowess, clearly in the genes (his brother became famous for designing machinery for coal mining), meant that his practice was broad, including brand new houses such as those opposite the gates of the School of Architecture in St Augustine's Road, Canterbury, as well as a brand new factory for Martin Walker at Ashford. Yet it was in the treatment of historic buildings that his fame spread both domestically and abroad. A typical example is his delightful reconstruction of a 17th- and 18th-century house in Margate, where he built both the Dutch gable and the projecting bay windows (see p.174, left).

His own house at 19 Farrier Street, Deal, encapsulated his approach (see p.174, right). His love of historic buildings was not reverential: not for him the SPAB's concern with fabric over form and there was more than a touch of the magpie picturesque in his approach to conjuring up traditional character. When Anthony stepped into No.19, it was disguised heavily and disastrously by a chocolate brown pebbledash render. It

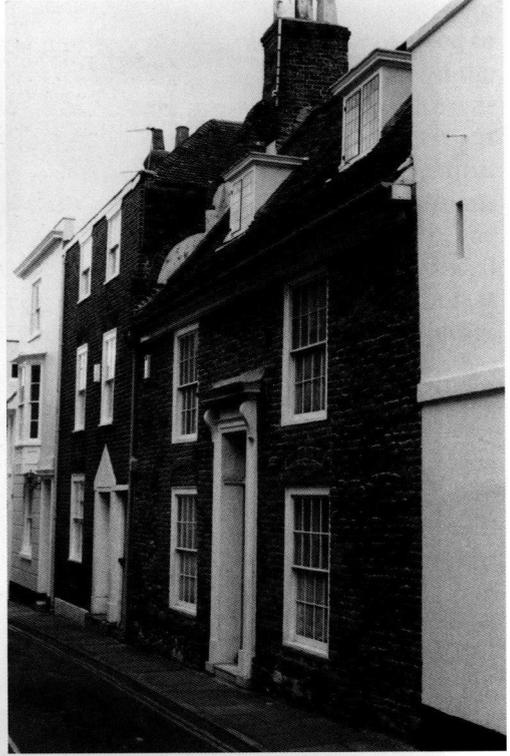


All Saints Church, Lydd (Kent). (Top) After the bombing of World War II.  
(Bottom) After Anthony's reconstruction of the chancel.

*Photographs, courtesy Anthony Swaine Architecture*



Margate – one of Anthony’s careful reconstructions. He is the shorter figure, chatting in the garden with his client.



19 Farrier Street, Deal; Anthony’s own house.  
*Photographs, Matthew Saunders, 1985*

had in fact been built as two properties in the mid- or late 17th century, with a door at either end. Thereafter it had become a public house, initially the ‘The Pilot’, then ‘The Horse and Farrier’. When Anthony got it the building was heavily degraded and on its last legs. He took off the render, replaced the 19th-century sashes with very plausible and lugless multi-pane sashes modelled on 18th-century precedents, and introduced the remarkably tall central door which he always claimed to have salvaged but which does look rather crisp in its edgings. He inherited, or more accurately uncovered, early wall paintings, probably dating from its days as a pub, and more enigmatic incisions into the bressumer of the fireplace, but he also introduced several elements salvaged from buildings demolished elsewhere in Kent in ways that delight the seeker after character but upset the purist. Even more hackles may be raised by his decision to rebuild the collapsed rear elevation in concrete blockwork, concealed externally in weatherboarding, so that he could reuse the handmade bricks for repairs on the front elevation. He did much of the work himself, being his own bricklayer and plasterer, and the house is full of delightful Swaine touches, such as the pebbles from the beach which he mortared into the floor where there were gaps between pre-existing slabs.

For someone who lived on the Kent coast, getting to France was easy, and he needed no persuasion. He had a lifelong love affair with France and Italy – people and buildings.



Self-portrait in safari suit. Here he is in a short-sleeved shirt in a delightful but rather earnest self-portrait (nearly all surviving photographs show him in a rather serious pose, an unfitting testimony for someone who had a particularly forthright laugh).

The great passion of his life, sadly unhappy in its lack of resolution, was with the French widow, Marie Louise, who lived at Bandol in the South of France and with whom he wished to be buried (but where the French authorities spent several weeks before issuing a rather heartless refusal). The most exciting tasks of his life were when he was sent by the Council of Europe to advise on all kinds of knotty problems – the repairs at Santa Madonna del Orto in Venice, where Tintoretto is buried; the church of the Annunciation in Moscow; and the conservation of the church at Notre-Dame in Calais. Fantastic Strasbourg Cathedral, where he advised on the stone repair, was a very special favourite. Maybe it was his European heritage which drew him to Catholicism, a faith to which he was converted 30 years before his death. And the climate held a very powerful appeal. He was one of nature's natural sun worshippers, at home in shorts rather than long trousers and with a permanent natural tan.

In 2003, at the personal instigation of George Ferguson, the then President of the R.I.B.A. (and now Mayor of Bristol), Anthony was awarded the first ever Lifetime Achievement Award by the Institute at the age of ninety-one. Little were people to know that he would live another ten years, in which time he would still go into the office whenever he was capable, spurred on by a passion to draw, to design and to conserve.

It was very touching to learn in July 2013 that Anthony had remembered the AMS in his will – we are due to receive one sixth of his residual estate. Thus through his generosity we can deepen the foundations of the Conservation Movement which he helped to start in its first difficult, combative years.



Strasbourg Cathedral, an unwavering Swaine favourite.  
*Photograph, Matthew Saunders, 2012*