



### **Obituary - Sir Richard MacCormac KBE,CBE, FRSA, by Richard Coleman**

My answer was 'Richard MacCormac' when at my interview with Sherban Cantacuzino, the then Secretary of the Royal Fine Art Commission asked me who I would put forward to the PM as the next Architect Commissioner. Cantacuzino then proclaimed that it was indeed Richard who he had just recommended. By the time I became the Deputy Secretary Richard was installed and thereafter, for thirteen years, I worked with him on Commission projects. His death on the 26th July remains a big shock to me.

His work impressed me from the start. As I began my architectural course in 1972, Richard set up his practice, having first worked with the iconic practice of Powell and Moya. I went to see his housing project at Milton Keynes, a humanist approach when Rogers and the Grunts were in 'rationalist' mood. His Cambridge and Oxford University colleges were next, culminating in St John's College Oxford where he paid homage to Sir John Soane.

A particular gem was his Chapel at Fitzwilliam College Cambridge where he pursued interlinked geometries both curved and rectilinear. He told me he was working on themes of polarity that put the user in a state of freedom, between contrasting forms, rather than the tendency of a singular dogma, he saw from his contemporaries. It was a great shame that his richly detailed Spitalfields Market scheme was never realised, where his concern was to make architecture fit a program of varying sized 'transactions' an essential ingredient for a good urban environment - the counterpoint to the burgeoning 'one scale fits all' at Canary Wharf, at the time. The Ruskin Library at Lancaster was one of his favourites, the plan based on the sacred form of a 'Vesica Pisces' contained a manuscript archive in the centre, all of wood, like a casket, visible but inaccessible to the visitor.

Among many award winning schemes across the country those easily visited in London are at 10 Crown Place Hackney, Warwick Court Paternoster Square The City, Welcome Centre Science Museum, The BBC HQ Portland Place and Southwark tube station. Sadly the two projects we worked on together, Tonbridge College Chapel and 77 Victoria Street, were not realised, but his help in realising my successful exhibition and book on 'Integrity in Architecture', with which we collaborated with Lord Rogers of Riverside, was a great success. On that occasion we were referred to as The Three Dick's and went on to present our findings to the then minister Richard Cabourn!

Richard was a great writer, a rare skill among architects, and his essay on 'Architecture, Art and Accountability' where he discusses the distinction between imagination and reason, has to be one of his most important.

Richard's legacy is permanent and unmissable. I cannot think of even one of his buildings which would not be worthy of inclusion on the national 'List'.

**Richard Coleman, Architect, London and grateful friend.**

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