

## Mark Girouard (1931-2022)

Mark's public life was one pursued in many directions but not in such a logical order as to guarantee professional success. His greatness is certainly due to his willingness to take risks. That pathway is lucidly revealed in the honest and engaging prologue to the essays in his book *Town and Country* (1992). Like so many architectural historians coming of age in the years during and after the war, his time in National Service was spent partly overseas and then billeted in great buildings; in his case, crucially for his future work, at Eaton Hall, the great Victorian house in Cheshire. He continued to explore houses often sadly neglected at that time, as well as continuing his familiarity with country houses in the care of his relatives (crucially Hardwick Hall) and personal friends. Within a short time, he was working for *Country Life* and was also in the forefront of the legendary battles to save the Euston Arch and the Coal Exchange, as well as the foundation of the Victorian Society. During his years at the journal he learned how to recount the history of buildings, analyse them and research their documentary history. Subsequently, in his mid-30s, as an architectural student at the Bartlett School he discovered that he had less affinity with building design and practice but he developed a commitment to modern buildings and friendships with architects for life. This sometimes came at a cost when his enthusiasms collided. In his personal, moving, yet analytical biography of his friend *Big Jim: The Life and Work of James Stirling* (1998) he reveals that the great architect didn't speak to him for three years when he refused to support the plans for No. 1 Poultry because it involved the demolition of listed buildings. Stirling had the grace to make the first move at reconciliation, and at his death his widow naturally turned to Mark for his biography.

The years at the Bartlett were productive in other ways for just after he left he published *The Victorian Country House* (1971). It is a huge compilation of evidence of both surviving and lost houses such as few other scholars have achieved for any period. It was his crucial insight into what the layout of these massive

piles told us about social and domestic history that led to his most successful book, *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History* (1978). He charted a new history, stressing that the plan and outward style of a building was determined by the way in which the great house functioned at different periods: the needs of defence, the obligation to entertain formally, the opening up of access between house and garden, the separation of male and female servants all took their dominant turn. Mark never liked the soubriquet of 'country-house historian' (research on the nineteenth century having also produced *Victorian Pubs* in 1975), yet he set the highest standards of investigation and interpretation of those buildings.

Across a long life of authorship Mark constantly re-considered his own work. This is most emphatic in his work on the life and times of Robert Smythson. It started with his thesis at the Courtauld Institute under Margaret Whinney, led to his cataloguing of the drawings by the Smythson family in the RIBA (published as a volume of *Architectural History* in 1962), and then to *Robert Smythson and the Architecture of the Elizabethan Era* (1966), re-issued with additions in 1983 but differently expressed as *Robert Smythson and the Elizabethan Country House*. In 2009 there came *Elizabethan Architecture: Its Rise and Fall, 1540-1640*. One might suppose that marketing had the determining hand in these titles but the books actually do different things. First, he needed to establish the peculiarity of the style of the period, stemming from its contemporary mind-set of interest in geometry, complexity and pattern. Later this shifted to an emphasis on the broader place of this style in British architectural history. Mark's task was not finished, however. Just a year ago, after a long battle with serious illness, came his *A Biographical Dictionary of English Architecture 1540-1640*, placing the known figures amongst the unknown, the metropolitan alongside the provincial, with the most scrupulous examination of buildings and still deeper documentary research. This Smythson

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Mark Girouard on his 88th  
birthday outside Ham House.  
Photo by Blanche Girouard.

oeuvre is worth reading sequentially by a student working on any period to inspire the courage to think anew, to keep searching, and also to absorb and acknowledge, as Mark did, the work of other scholars that he himself had first inspired. Few however will have the stamina to revise and rejuvenate their work over a lifetime as he did.

I once stood alongside Mark at the great Danish royal palace of Frederiksborg, and he said: 'I suppose this is the sort of building that James I really wanted for his palace'. He would have known full well that James never saw the building as it now stands, yet he was searching for a cultural, architectural idiom from the period that was shared between the ambitious rulers of northern Europe. Only the best scholars are able to articulate the obvious, maybe bend the truth, and thereafter get cited as a thought-provoking point to begin our lectures or seminars. It

was this perception of the broader lines of cultural definition that formed the basis of his great books on *Sweetness and Light: The 'Queen Anne' Movement 1860-1900* (1977) and *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (1981), the latter of which he often claimed as the favourite of his publications. At the celebration of his 90th birthday last year at the Paul Mellon Centre he said, perhaps deliberately flippantly, that his writing about Bolsover Castle as part of the chivalric tradition was 'a lot of nonsense' - but he was surely aware that proposing such a context pushed us all to think of resonances across time and place. At his funeral just eleven months or so later, a life so latterly devoted to the solitary task of writing for the benefit of all of us was also revealed as one full of great friendship and affection from so many who so admired him.

**Maurice Howard**