

# Richard MacCormac

Born 1938.

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*This life story was compiled by Alex Reid, a friend of Richard MacCormac from their days as undergraduates together at Cambridge University, using material archived from the internet. Thanks and acknowledgement to the websites of the Architectural Review, Richard Murphy Architects, Spitalfields Life, and Wikipedia.*

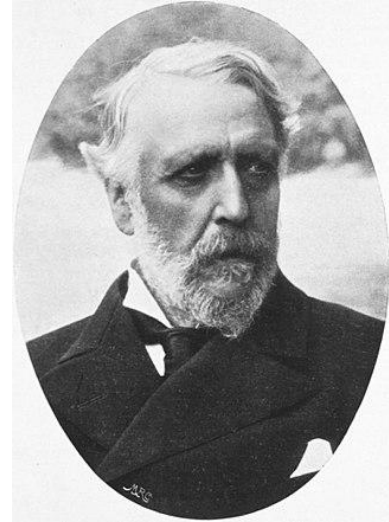
# 1. Family and Early life

Richard Cornelius MacCormac was born in Marylebone, London on 3 September 1938, the son of Dr. Henry MacCormac, (1879 – 12 December 1950), CBE FRCP, a dermatologist of Ulster origin, and Marion Maude MacCormac (1906–1998; née Broomhall).

Through his paternal lineage, MacCormac was the great-grandson of Dr. Henry MacCormac, a prominent nineteenth-century physician in Northern Ireland who was the father of Sir William MacCormac, 1st Bt, KCB, KCVO (right), who served as a house physician and surgeon to Queen Victoria and honorary sergeant-surgeon to King Edward VII.

The family was a well-known medical dynasty in the nineteenth century that originated from County Armagh and claims descent from Cornelius MacCormac, a high-ranking naval officer, and Colonel Joseph Hall, a wealthy distiller in County Armagh. Distant relatives also include a branch of the Easmon family of Sierra Leone, descended from Dr. John Farrell Easmon, the discoverer of Blackwater fever.

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## 2. Education and Early Career

After serving his national service in the Royal Navy, MacCormac was educated at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he achieved a double first before proceeding to the Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London.

MacCormac undertook a broad range of work, including social housing for the London Borough of Merton, before founding MacCormac Jamieson and Prichard in 1972. In 2011, he left MJP to set up a new practice in his own name.

After winning an open competition for the design of the University of Bristol Arts Faculty building, he made his name in the 1980s through the use of modernist design, particularly in university architecture. These included: the Sainsbury Building for Worcester College, Oxford (won the 1984 Civic Trust Award); the Ruskin Library at the University of Lancaster (Independent on Sunday Building of the Year Award 1996, Royal Fine Art Commission/BSkyB Building of the Year University Winner 1998, Millennium Products status awarded by the Design Council 1999); Bowra Building at Wadham College, Oxford; Burrell's Fields at Trinity College, Cambridge (shown right, RIBA Regional Award 1997, Civic Trust Award 1997) and the Garden Quadrangle at St John's College, Oxford.

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### 3. Notable projects



Southwark Station, Jubilee Line.

MacCormac's commercial clients included: Southwark tube station for the Jubilee Line Extension (Royal Fine Art Commission Trust/BSkyB Millennium Building of the Year Award 2000); the Wellcome Foundation Wing/Dana Centre at the Science Museum, London (Celebrating Construction Achievement Regional Award for Greater London 2000); the Cable and Wireless training centre in Coventry (Royal Fine Art Commission/Sunday Times Building of the Year Award 1994) and a Tesco supermarket in Ludlow.



Cable & Wireless training centre

MacCormac designed the new Egton Wing of the BBC's Broadcasting House. But more than halfway through the project, the BBC asked for a redesign in light of its budget restrictions, and MacCormac refused, unwilling to sacrifice the quality of his design, and hence MJP was sacked from the project. In 1999, MacCormac designed a new home in Hampstead for Arsenal F.C. striker Thierry Henry, described as "one of the finest examples of modern architecture in the UK".

MacCormac was a co-founder of the Phoenix Initiative, working on merging art and architecture for the future concept of central Coventry. The project was shortlisted RIBA Stirling Prize in 2004.

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## 4. Academic Career and Honours

MacCormac taught architecture at the University of Cambridge (1969–75; 1979-810), and was a visiting professor of architecture at the University of Edinburgh from 1982 to 1985, the University of Hull (1998–99) and a studio tutor at the London School of Economics in 1998.

Elected as a fellow of the Royal Society of Arts in 1982, he was elected to the Royal Academy in 1993. Made an honorary fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge in 2006, he was awarded an honorary Doctor of Science (D.Sc) in 2008. Made a CBE in 1994, he was knighted in 2001.

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## 5. Personal life

MacCormac married Susan Karin Landen in Surrey in 1964 and had two children, William Paul Lars MacCormac (born 1969) and Luke Henry Landen MacCormac (5 October 1971 – 30 June 1982), who died at age 10.



Jocasta Innes. Innes was born in Nanjing, China, the eldest of three daughters born to Paul Innes, a Shell Oil executive and Alice Eileen née Traill, an Irish-Argentinian teacher who ran a school for the children of other British-born residents.



An Oyster Smack of the type owned by Richard MacCormac.

In 1981, MacCormac met his long-term partner Jocasta Innes, the well-known author who wrote over 60 books. The couple resided in Spitalfields. With Jocasta Innes' death on 20 April 2013 and fighting his own cancer battle, her house was put up for sale.

In June 2014 Sir Richard published *Two Houses in Spitalfields*. Photographed by the well-known interiors photographer Jan Baldwin, and with a foreword by the historian Dan Cruickshank, it is a very personal description of the joined houses just off Brick Lane that he and Jocasta Innes shared for thirty years. Proceeds from the book are being donated to the Maggie's centres cancer charity. MacCormac's hobbies included music and reading, and he owned and sailed a 1908 oyster fishing smack in the Thames Estuary.

MacCormac died on 26 July 2014 at the age of 75 from cancer. He was buried next to Jocasta Innes in St. Mary's churchyard in the village of Laverton in Somerset.

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## 6. Memoir by Jeremy Melvin

*With acknowledgement and thanks to the Architectural Review, from which this memoir of Richard MacCormac by Jeremy Melvin is archived.*



Richard MacCormac in the study of his home in Heneage Street, London.

Sir Richard MacCormac, who died on 26 July after an 18-month battle with cancer, was an architect whose unusually wide intellectual and cultural interests enriched his profession, through writing, teaching and as an animator of ideas, but above all as a designer of buildings. Among the most notable are the Sainsbury Building, with its dreamlike effects, at Worcester College Oxford; the ethereal space of Fitzwilliam College Chapel, Cambridge; the evocative colours, light and texture of the Ruskin Library at Lancaster University; and the undulating waves of the blue-tiled roof of the training building for Cable & Wireless outside Coventry. Many of his buildings were on greenfield or campus sites, but his designs for transforming the BBC's Broadcasting House showed how his ability to place functional requirements in a physical and historical context was just as applicable in an urban setting.

Richard was born in 1938 to doctor parents from distinguished medical families. A great uncle, Sir William MacCormac, operated in the field on the young Winston Churchill during the Boer War, and advised the Tsar on treatment for battlefield injuries. The public duty that came with professional status, and the practical benefits of applied science, helped to shape Richard as an architect.

After Westminster School and National Service in the navy, he studied architecture at Cambridge and the Bartlett School of Architecture at University College London. These formative experiences were joined by a growing knowledge of the visual arts, literature and music, as well as a love of paradox, intellectual challenges and discussion as a means to resolve or at least advance them. His creative ideas were as likely to come from images, sensations or memories he derived from his wide-ranging cultural knowledge as from purely architectural sources.

His ability to hold sophisticated cultural concepts in relationship to prosaic functional or financial needs marked his capability as an architect and his contribution to the profession. He loved to cite the title of a Fabian pamphlet, published just as he was completing his studies in the early 1960s, *Architecture: Art or Social Service?* Its high-minded authors were firm in their belief in the second. Richard was equally firm that architecture was an art, but unlike some of his more publicity-seeking peers, he recognised that in being an art, and only by being an art, architecture could also perform social service.



Broadcasting House's Egton Wing, completed by MJP before they lost the project due to MacCormac refusing to make cost-related revisions.

The pamphlet's title captured the prevailing belief of the time, that architecture was in effect the physical arm of the Welfare State, and Richard's early career focused on social service rather than art. He worked on housing for the London Borough of Merton, but within a few years he was looking for more expressive forms of architecture and found them in the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, on whose compositional principles he published an influential paper. He also designed some private houses and when one of them leaked, he was tempted to follow Wright's advice when a client complained about a leaking roof, to 'move your chair'. After starting a private practice in the early 1970s with Peter Jamieson, later to be joined by David Prichard, he continued to forge a name in housing, most notably with projects in Milton Keynes.

But the days of housing as the vanguard of architecture were numbered, and when Margaret Thatcher's Conservatives came to power in 1979, over. Fortunately, MacCormac Jamieson and Prichard, as the practice became known, had managed to establish a foothold in university work, first at Bristol, but memorably, in 1983 with the Sainsbury Building at Worcester College Oxford.

The subtleties of this design start with its placement in the college's historic grounds, and continue through its exploitation of natural stone but assembled in a way that is clearly artifice. Most evocative of all is its interaction with the allusions and memories of its historic precinct that Richard used to describe as a 'dream sequence'.

He would go on to design larger buildings, with more sophisticated compositions and expressive qualities, but in this project his ability to merge the practical with the imaginative began to take off. Some commentators associated this growing expressive richness with his relationship with Jocasta Innes, which also began in the early 1980s and lasted until her death last year. He had two sons with his first wife Susan Landen, one of whom, William, survives him.

Many university buildings followed Worcester: in Cambridge for his old college, Trinity, where he would later become an honorary fellow, and Fitzwilliam; at Oxford for Wadham and Balliol, and a sequence of projects for St John's, starting with the Garden Court in the early 1990s, a senior common room completed in 2004 and the recently completed Kendrew Quadrangle.

In the late 1990s, the commission for a building to house the Ruskin Archive at Lancaster University allowed free rein to his ability to imagine an architectural analogue to Ruskin's visual and literary work, imagined essentially as a sarcophagus surrounded by textures, colours and lighting effects that allude to Ruskinian interests like nature, memory, Venice and the experience of art.



The recently completed Kendrew Quadrangle at Oxford

By this time Richard's university work would have put him in the front rank of contemporary architects, but he knew architecture had other dimensions. Rarely, for an architect of his status, he accepted the Presidency of the Royal Institute of British Architects (1991-93) and while acknowledging all but the pettiest of professional politics, he was not slow to remind his colleagues of their cultural obligations. Election to the Royal Academy in 1993 gave him further recognition and a formal outlet for his cultural activities. He was one of the prime movers in developing the RA's Architecture Programme, and in making the Royal Academy Forum a unique framework where artists of all sorts, writers, academics, scientists and performers come together to explore themes which cut across cultural disciplines. At the same time he and Jocasta were giving shape to their interconnected pair of houses in Spitalfields, where they entertained generously, with carefully chosen guests. He recorded the story of these houses in his last book, published earlier this year.

He was also determined to show that his subtle and evocative approach to architecture could work in urban contexts, on restricted budgets and for quotidian purposes. Southwark underground station brought a mysterious blue light deep underground, easing passengers on their final descent to the platforms or preparing them to re-emerge on the surface. A small office building at Crown Place, close to Liverpool Street, showed that he could meet a standard, speculative office brief while still designing a facade of expressive depth and proportional complexity. He made a study for refurbishing Spitalfields Market to show that low-rise conservation would be as profitable as comprehensive redevelopment, and he often discussed with his friend the sociologist Richard Sennett how to treat office space as a social organism. The Phoenix Initiative in Coventry animated a series of public spaces with judiciously chosen and commissioned art works.

The commission to remodel and extend Broadcasting House, so the BBC could consolidate in one location, appeared to be an ideal opportunity to demonstrate the range of Richard's abilities as an architect, and the synergetic effects between them. He understood the project on many levels: a visible and to some extent interactive symbol of the best sort of informed, cultivated public service; as a place to foster creative collaboration between talented and diverse individuals; as an intervention in the urban fabric that gave suitable accommodation and identity to its occupier as well as public space to its neighbourhood; and as an opportunity to find new dimensions to the ordinary in magnificent spaces complemented by powerful works of art.

Much of this has been achieved, and but for a faction within the BBC and its project managers whose opposition to parts of his vision led him to resign, it might all have been.

His disappointment did not dim his creative powers. Kendrew Quadrangle, housing for British Embassy staff in Bangkok and most poignantly, a remarkable, cabinet-like centre for the innovative cancer charity Maggie's in Cheltenham date from the last 10 years. He was working on another project for Maggie's from his hospital bed.

During Richard's final illness the BBC began a rapprochement. He may have died too soon to see it come to fruition, but in time his epitaph will echo Christopher Wren's at

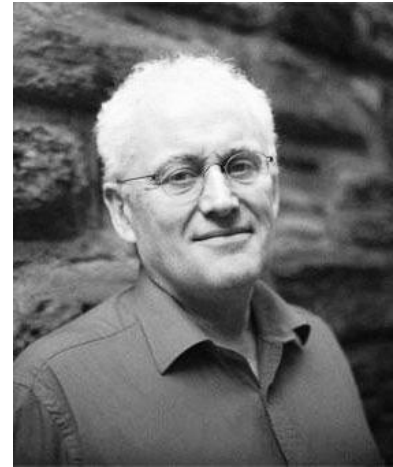
St Paul's Cathedral – for which he also suffered undue criticism – Si monumentum requiris, circumspice (if you seek his monument, look around you). For Richard MacCormac, an architect who was motivated by moral as well as creative passion, by interest in other people as well as abstract ideas, and was not afraid to fly in the face of fashionable demands for icons and tall buildings, this would be most appropriate.

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## 7. Memoir by Richard Murphy

*This memoir by Richard Murphy (right) is archived, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the website of Richard Murphy Architects.*

A few years back along with three others, I was asked to contribute one of four prefaces to MJP's monograph "Building Ideas." On hearing of Richard's death on Sunday I re-read the piece and thought I would post it again, almost un-edited but updated, because it sums up my thoughts about a man I could call a great friend and an inspiring teacher and mentor. In a massively unequal exchange I asked Richard to write the introduction to our own modest monograph two years ago and he produced a long thoughtful, critical and insightful survey of all our work. It must have been strange for him to look at our buildings where he knew how so many of the ideas in them had started in his own office.



Two weeks ago with Robin Webster I visited him in a hospice in Bethnal Green. Unable to speak through the cruellest fate of contracting throat cancer we nevertheless communicated all sorts of funny memories (many of them connected to Isi!) and believe it or not, he was still designing, this time an extension for his own Maggies Centre in Cheltenham. Robin and I offered to stage an impromptu crit there and then but with a both a look of horror combined with an impish smile the drawings were immediately slid under the bedclothes! It was a very funny and wonderful final memory I now have of a very remarkable man. This is an updated version of what I wrote:

"In a brilliant turn of phrase President Kennedy conferring honorary American citizenship on Churchill in 1963 described how in the dark days of 1940 Churchill had "mobilized the English language and sent it into battle". Without wishing to stretch the analogy too much, the 1980s were pretty dark too. British architecture was under attack from the twin forces of imported transatlantic postmodernism and home grown Prince Charles fageyism and only the rather arid "high tech" seemed to be the answer. At that time I found myself as a very junior lecturer at Edinburgh University and by luck, Richard MacCormac had been appointed our Visiting Professor. I acted as chauffeur to and from the airport in my yellow 2CV.

On collecting Richard, I simply had to utter the words "And what are you up to at the moment?" and then just sit back, listen and enjoy the ride. Why? Because Richard would describe the state of the evolution of a current particular project in language that was truly intoxicating. Light was "incandescent" as it filtered through a particular species of tree; buildings "engaged" with walls; landscape was "embraced" by a window; Soanian tricks of light "vibrated" onto wall planes; college student kitchens became "social heat-beats" of residences, shops and office became "places of local and remote exchange"; just a few of the many phrases that stick in my mind.



A yellow Citroën 2CV.

Such a rich use of the English language (and in an aside I also discovered later when I was working at Heneage Street, Richard was one the funniest raconteurs of stories I know!) seems to me almost a prerequisite to the reality that his architecture is some of the richest in the UK. And it is no accident that in compiling a list of Cambridge buildings to visit for a potential College donor, sceptical about modern architecture, it was Richard's work that stood out above that of everyone else.

He was also the most complete architect I know. He could turn his hand to any type of building, size or location. He could discuss in totally refreshing terms, ideas of urban design, materials, construction, geometry, space planning, social patterns and history. He could make connections between buildings across the centuries (Wright's prairie houses and Hardwick Hall for example) that would floor any historian or connecting his own works to those of the past, such as the reference to Schinkel sets designed for the Magic Flute in his collaboration with the artist Beleschenko at his brilliant tube station at Southwark.

His continuing ability to control detailing and invent the crafting of the building is remarkable, particularly as the practice grew in size (and how can I forget spending a month trying in vain to develop a sliding folding disappearing corner window at Fitzwillian College under his tutelage?). As a writer, his essay for the Architectural Review on the evolution of the office as a type remains for me the definitive history. Similar excursions into discussions about hierarchy in suburbia have been unequalled. And on and on. The breadth of his book and the range of its contributors tell the same story.

In the tradition of architectural family trees there are a number of notable practices that have emerged from his, Shillom Smith, Patel Taylor, Cherry Horden Lee, Wright and Wright, to name a few. Our own modest work here in Edinburgh owes a massive debt to the time I spent at Heneage Street, not to mention our 2CV dialogues. Richard remained a friend, a mentor and an inspiration and to borrow a quote from Ted Cullinan, he was. along with the late Isi Metzstein, "my architectural Dad".

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## 8. Memoir by the Gentle Author

Richard MacCormac lived and worked in Spitalfields for many years and until his death. The Gentle Author is the pseudonym of the author of the remarkable Spitalfields Life website, which chronicles the area in words and images. The following is archived, with acknowledgement and thanks, from that website.

**So Long, Sir Richard MacCormac. August 11th 2014.**

*Today we remember the celebrated Architect and long-time Spitalfields resident, Sir Richard Cornelius MacCormac, CBE, PPRIBA, FRSA, RA, whose funeral takes place in Christ Church this morning. Just two months ago, he published **Two Houses in Spitalfields** as a record of the adjoining properties that he and **Jocasta Innes** inhabited in Heneage St – each manifesting their owners' contrasted sensibilities yet by their connection emblematic of the personal relationship which bound them together for thirty years.*



*Sir Richard MacCormac photographed at Southwark Station in 2013 by Dominic Harris*

Born in Marylebone in 1938, Richard MacCormac came from a distinguished medical and naval family of Irish origin that included Queen Victoria's House Physician. As a boy, he built model boats and then did his National Service in the Royal Navy. Possessing a life-long love for sailing, in recent years he owned a 1908 oyster-fishing smack that he sailed on the Thames Estuary.

Passionate to forge an humane version of Modernist architecture, Richard MacCormac worked on social housing projects in Merton in the nineteen-sixties before establishing his own practise in Spitalfields, MacCormac Jamieson Prichard, in 1972. Reconciling an Arts & Crafts appreciation for fine materials with Frank Lloyd's delight in sympathetic geometry, he designed a series of notable buildings for Oxford & Cambridge colleges, including an accommodation block for Trinity College, Cambridge, that he considered his finest work. More recent projects included



Southwark Station and the new Broadcasting House in Portland Place which succeeded in elegantly counterbalancing George Val Myers' 1935 building, despite the meddling of BBC executives.

In Spitalfields, Richard MacCormac will be fondly remembered for his shrewd intelligence, wit and generosity of spirit. Within one month last year, he and Jocasta Innes each discovered they were afflicted with terminal cancer and both met these tragic circumstances with singular fortitude and strength of character.

The images that follow are of the pair of houses in Heneage Street, Spitalfields, London, which he shared with Jocasta Innes.



Secret door in Richard MacCormac's house that led to Jocasta Innes' house.



Stairwell with display of medals belonging to Richard MacCormac's ancestors



Model boat constructed by Richard MacCormac



Richard MacCormac's library



Richard MacCormac's study.





Jocasta Innes' kitchen



Secret door on the landing in Jocasta Innes' house leading to Richard MacCormac's house.



*“The two Spitalfields houses, and our lives, were bound together, continually touched by our shared interests. They have many characteristics in common – illusion, allusion, surprise, humour and, of course, colour, but with the distinct identities which reflect us both” – Richard MacCormac*

All photographs except exterior shot © Jan Baldwin  
Exterior photograph © Hélène Rollin

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