

It is with great sadness that Rye Conservation Society announces the passing of its President John Griffiths, who died in St Michael's Hospice on 13 April 2020.

John knew and loved Rye all his life. He spent school holidays in Rye staying with his grandparents in their house in Watchbell Street, where his mother had been born and where he and Helen lived for many years following his retirement.

His grandfather had a building firm and, after the Second World War, undertook war damage repair work. John's interest in building conservation began then. He qualified as an architect and worked in northern Nigeria for the international architect Maxwell Fry before returning to the UK to become Staff Architect for Granada Television. He was Founder Director of the Manchester Building Centre and the Manchester Design Centre, the latter affiliated to the Building Centre and Design Centre in Haymarket, London. For this he was named 'Man of the Year' by the Architects' Journal.

John joined the Civil Service as Head of Technical Information for the Ministry of Public Building and Works (now DEFRA, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs), responsible for government building exhibitions, films and HMSO leaflets on good building practice. Seeing a need for more public involvement, he set up the Building Conservation Trust which established a permanent exhibition in Hampton Court Palace, where the public could access practical building conservation advice.

Amenity and civic matters were always an active concern of John's, wherever he went. He became a trustee of the Surrey Historic Buildings Trust and was Clerk to two livery companies: the Tylers and Bricklayers Company and the Worshipful Company of Chartered Architects from 1995 to 2000.

Upon moving to Rye following his retirement, he was invited in short order to join the committee of Rye Conservation Society and became its chairman in 2011, stepping down in 2018 when he was elected President.

During his time as Chairman he helped to forge links with other amenity societies. This has given members a practical first-hand insight into conservation issues experienced and fought in other historic towns in the South East. Together with Helen, who personified the saying 'behind every man is a great woman' he took great pleasure in arranging study visits. I have always suspected however that John and Helen took more pleasure in the advanced reconnaissance for suitable eating places and comfort facilities than the actual visits themselves, which on more than one occasion John described as 'trying to herd cats.'

John had a fund of jokes which he used to entertain members at the Christmas party and Annual Lunch although, unlike his predecessor as President Sir Donald Sinden in later years, he usually remembered the punch line!

Above all John loved Rye, its old buildings, cobbled streets and its setting, a love which is vividly illustrated in his book 'A look at the buildings of Rye' which also highlighted his skill as a photographer. He also cared passionately about the future of our town and the Society hopes that it can mark his contribution to its work when the current emergency is relaxed.