

A PORTRAIT OF CORINNE

Corinne Wilson was born in 1935. Her mother, Lucile, was of French Canadian origin; her father, Gilbert, came from Cumbria in the north of England.

The first years of her life were spent in Montreal, Canada together with her younger brother David with whom she always had a close and loving relationship. When she came back to England in 1944 she went to school at the Sacred Heart Convent, in Hove Sussex. At the age of twelve she knew already that she wanted to be involved with the repair of ancient monuments and historic buildings and a special male teacher was brought into the confines of the convent to give her drawing lessons.

On leaving school in 1952, Corinne went to London University and studied at the Bartlett School of Architecture.

After receiving her degree she worked first for the reputable architectural firm of Powell and Moya, and then in 1963, after a short time at the GLC Historic Buildings Section, she obtained a position with the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works, as English Heritage was known then.

She undertook important pioneering work in stone preservation and cleaning in conjunction with the Building Research Establishment. The Tower of London, Audley End House, the Jewel Tower and main Hall at Westminster, Holyrood House, Bolsover Castle and the Emperors heads around the Sheldonian Theatre in Oxford all benefited from her experiments.

Corinne was always at home in a quarry and discussing stone and carving with masons. Her love of stone came from her father, a professor of geology. Indeed, it was through this interest and a mutual friend that she met Keith, who became her personal "corner stone".

Her early interest in archaeology found her on the digs at Sutton Hoo in 1966 and 67 which are now world famous..

In 1968 she was invited to join the London office of Purcell, Miller and Tritton as an Associate, and she had her first taste of a cathedral, working on the repairs at Ely Cathedral and visiting its high places. She was always fully assured on the often mountainous scaffolding knowing no fear!

She became a Senior Partner of the firm and set up a branch office at Sevenoaks when she was appointed Consulting Surveyor to the Archdeacons of the Rochester Diocese. Her work on the many churches in Kent was recognised by her receipt of an MBE in 1988.

She also became involved in National Trust buildings at Chiddingstone Village and the Old Clergy House Alfriston.

Upon her appointment to the Dean and Chapter of the Cathedral here in Winchester in 1974, she started a further local office. She was the first woman ever to be appointed as a cathedral architect. A programme of works over 15 years included major stone and roof repairs with re-leading. She altered the Cathedral quire and installed new lighting. She became a popular figure with the local community and her *roof tours* of the upper parts of the Cathedral with her intimate knowledge were legendary. She is still a much loved figure there and, together with Keith, has been a regular supporter of all that the Cathedral does. I know the Dean, who is here today, would echo that.

In 1980 she was appointed Consultant Architect to the repairs and alterations of the Brighton Pavilion. That continued for twelve years and in 1989 she was the Leading Consultant for the Albert Memorial repairs.

Other buildings that came under her care at this time included Wilton House, Ealing Abbey, Charleston Farm-House and the ruins of Cowdray House.

For the National Trust there was Mompesson House in the Salisbury Cathedral Close, Mottistone Manor, Lacock Abbey, and Mottisfont Abbey.

She also prepared a report on the Royal Naval College buildings Greenwich, at this time.

In Italy, one of her most prized achievements was the re-ordering of the chapel of the English college in Rome where she worked closely and rewardingly with the Rector and students.

Following this came the re-ordering and redecoration of the St John's Seminary at Womersley in Surrey, another emotionally satisfying experience for her, employing her deep understanding of liturgy.

In 1991 she was persuaded to postpone her retirement and she joined English Heritage as their National Cathedrals Architect. A lot of exhausting travelling around the country was involved. This was reduced when she became English Heritage representative to the Church of England's Cathedral Fabric Commission until 2006, but her architectural independence, clear thinking and vast experience meant she was much in demand for site visits.

She was a member of many societies associated with archaeology and architecture, often on their committees and was a popular lecturer. She was particularly proud to be elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 1997 and attended many of their meetings and enjoyed the company of the members. She was a Trustee and founder member with her husband Keith of the Hampshire and The Islands Historic Churches Trust, started in 1989. She chaired its grants committee and attended dutifully to its correspondence almost to her end.

In her latter years she chaired the Fabric Committee at St George's Cathedral Southwark for which she had a special affection. She was also a member of the Fabric Committee of Chichester Cathedral for a period.

Corinne was an Appeal Trustee and member of the Art and Architecture Committee of Westminster Cathedral. In fact, it was there that she married Keith in the Lady Chapel in 1979, the beginning of a long and happy marriage.

They shared a passion for Corsica visiting it almost every year of their married life. They were the only English members of F.A.G.E.C. (Federation d Associations et Groupements pour les Etudes Corses), the island's history group. She became very knowledgeable about the many Romanesque churches on the island seeking them out year by year and lecturing on the subject.

Her mastery of the French language made her a welcome member of the Franco-British Union of Architects going back to the 1970's. A regular happy annual event for Corinne and Keith was the Society's reunions in different towns and cities throughout England and France.

Corinne and Keith lived in Michelmersh near Romsey for thirty years where they lovingly restored and adapted the Old Victorian Rectory and where Corinne could indulge in her love of gardening. She set up a team of villagers with Keith and chaired a group which produced The Michelmersh Village Design Statement booklet that was to be upheld as an example for future Statements.

In 2007 they moved into Winchester into their present charming home, though only the Bennetts could have seen it as an ideal retirement project with a garden which would challenge a mountain goat! Ever since the Michelmersh days Corinne was a faithful and active member of this parish. Her friendly presence, and in particular her lovely smile, was appreciated by so many, hence the large assembly that is with us all today.

Many tributes and letters have been flowing in daily and have been a great comfort to Keith:

A former office staff member writes of *being set on the road by Corinne* and, recalling how being taken by her on his first church inspection, *watching with amazement as she hurled pigeon nests complete with eggs and chicks from the tower roof.*

Another colleague refers to *her wonderfully collaborative way of working, always ready with an experienced opinion, always sure of herself but never over-bearing or insistent, it was a genuinely shared collaboration.*

Last but not least, since 1979 when she was invested, Corinne has been a regular and proud member of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem in which she rose to become a Dame Commander, and this explains the presence on her coffin of the symbols of this ancient order which she had specially asked to be placed there.