

# Leonard Manasseh OBE RA RIBA

Membre de L'Academie d'Architecture

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Leonard Manasseh, the architect, who has died aged 100, listed among his recreations in Who's Who "being optimistic".

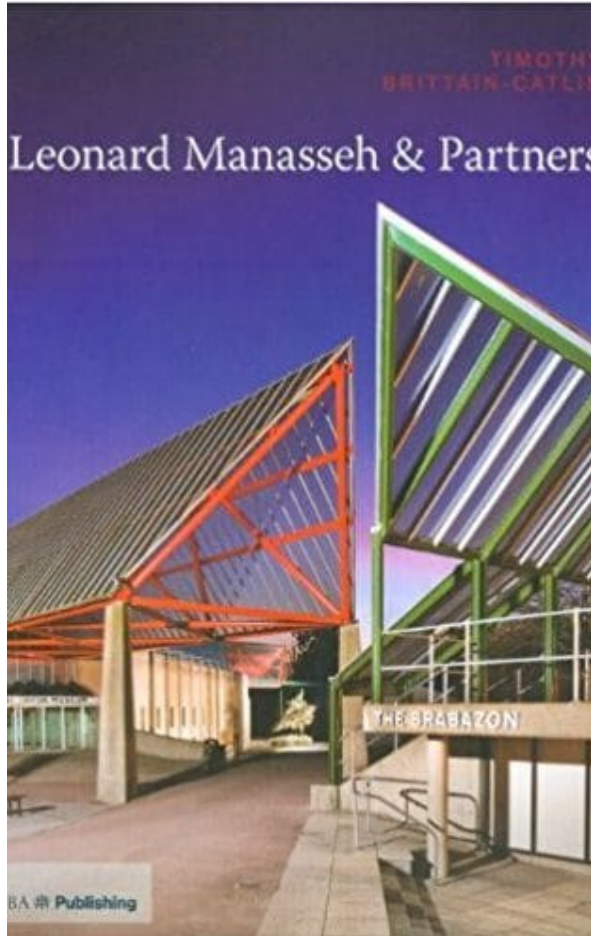
He was a pragmatist not a dogmatist, making a distinctive contribution to the architecture of the post-war decades and bringing wit, verve and a sense of place to the interpretation of Modernism.

He was born on May 21 1916 in Baghdad, to a Sephardi merchant family with connections in Singapore, and was sent to school in Britain. After Cheltenham College, he went in 1934 to the junior part of the Architectural Association, going on to complete his studies in the first years of the Second World War.

Manasseh belonged to a notable generation of idealistic rebels and took part in their politicised pantomimes and other recreations. He won a student competition for a school design in the News Chronicle and in 1964 became the President of the Association when it was riven by an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to amalgamate with Imperial College.

After service in the Fleet Air Arm, Manasseh worked at Hertfordshire County Council and the nascent Stevenage New Town before winning a competition for the design of a restaurant for the Festival of Britain, which was almost immediately cancelled as an economy.

He went on, however, to design the '51 Bar on the South Bank, a lightweight structure incorporating a nude figure by Daphne Hardy Henrion that he later installed in the garden of the house he built in Highgate, itself a characterful as well as thoroughly practical design.



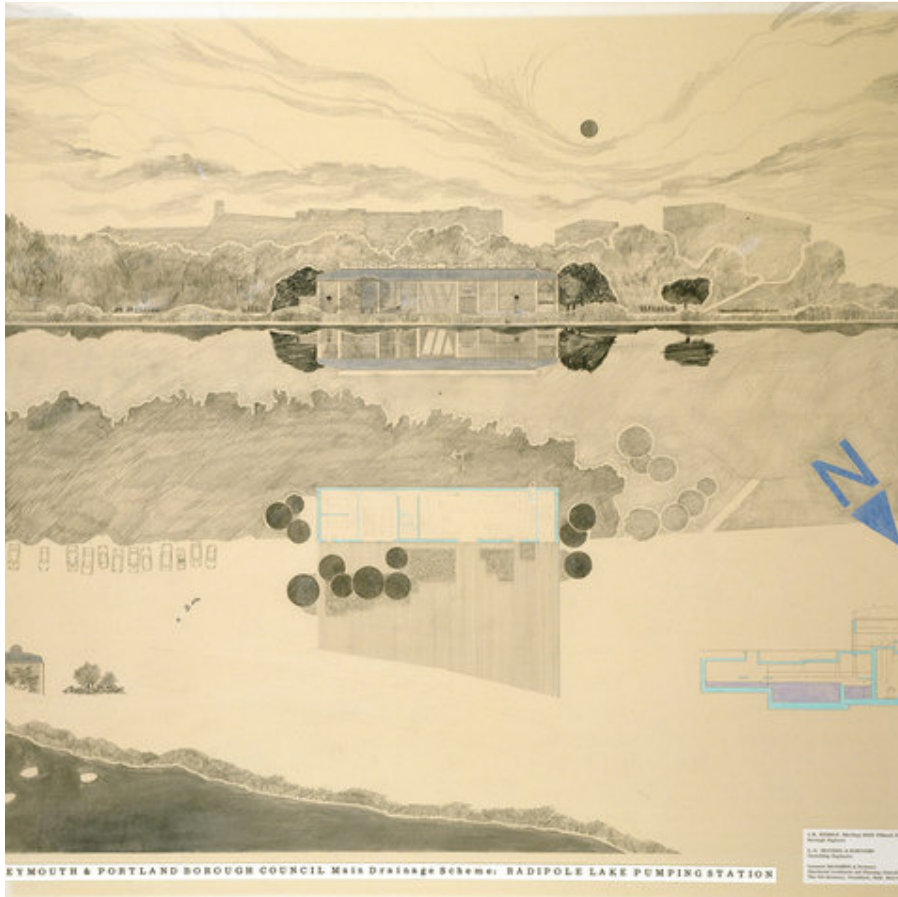
Leonard Manasseh & Partners, by Timothy Brittain-Catlin; the cover shows Manasseh's Brabazon Restaurant at Beaulieu

For most of the duration of his practice, Manasseh worked with Ian Baker (1923-2010), an architect whose ideas closely matched his own. They did not trumpet their achievements in a number of fields, including schools, housing and museums, but the book, *Leonard Manasseh & Partners*, by Timothy Brittain-Catlin, published in 2011 with the Twentieth Century Society, made amends.

In its early years, the practice designed one-off houses, and later housing groups for private clients, areas of Harlow and Basildon New Towns and compact GLC schemes in Hoxton and Waterloo. Brick was used throughout, with bold, angled skylines.

Education buildings included the Gilbert Murray Hall of Residence at Leicester and the Rutherford School (now King Solomon Academy) off Lisson Grove (1957-60), which stood out for its pyramid forms on the roof, one covering the assembly hall and the other, inverted à la Brasilia, acting as a water tank. An article in the *Listener* asked, "Is your pyramid really necessary?" but concluded that these ones were.

Furzedown College, an LCC teacher training complex in Tooting (1960-65), was a substantial if less conspicuous work. The inventor and philanthropist Jeremy Fry had been Manasseh's student at the wartime AA, and among several jobs that Manasseh carried out was a factory and office complex for Fry's company Rotork, beside the River Avon on the edge of Bath.



Manasseh's 1979 design for Radipole Lake Pumping Station for Weymouth and Portland Borough Council, Devon

In 1960, Manasseh undertook a “facelift” scheme for Hampstead and made friends with an older AA contemporary, the architect-planner Elizabeth Chesterton, a long-time resident of the village. Their collaboration led to his offer of a partnership, but she preferred to rent space in Manasseh's office and to work together when the occasion offered.

Her development plan for King's Lynn, commissioned in 1964, was friendly towards the existing older buildings, but included a site for new Law Courts on South Quay, completed by the Manasseh Partnership in 1981 in a tough version of what had then become a prevailing “vernacular” mode.



Leonard Manasseh in 2008

In 1965 Lord Montagu of Beaulieu commissioned a master plan from Elizabeth Chesterton for his estate with its numerous summer visitors drawn by the collection of vintage cars. She brought in Ian Baker as designer of the new National Motor Museum while the Brabazon Restaurant was Manasseh's.

The buildings featured proto-high tech steel frames in bright colours and all were linked to parking and other parts of the site by a monorail. For the Duke of Wellington at Stratfield Saye, the same team created the Wellington Country Park and its buildings.

Manasseh remained involved in his practice during the 1980s but took on more public duties. In 1979 he and John Partridge were elected to the RIBA Council "Hurrah for Architecture" party with as much support as the next three candidates combined.

He became a Royal Academician in the same year and in 2016 the first RA centenarian. He was the first architect president of the Royal West of England Academy (1989-95). Manasseh was an artist himself, drawing colourful Christmas cards to the end.

Manasseh was married, first, to Karin Williger (dissolved 1956), and secondly to Sarah Delaforce, who predeceased him. Three sons, one from the first marriage and two from the second, survive him.

**Leonard Manasseh, born May 21 1916, died March 5 2017**

*This article was originally published in the Daily Telegraph*

Howard Nash writes:

Leonard was a President of FBUA and organised the Annual Reunion held in Cambridge in 1978. His Secretary and successor as President was Patrick

Campbell Jones, who organised his Reunion in Winchester 2 years later, and at which Leonard took everyone to see the Motor Museum he had just built at Beaulieu for Lord Montagu

Leonard was a regular attender of our events, even coming quite recently in his wheelchair to a Member's Reception at the Royal College of Physicians. Such a lovely man. Unforgettable really. Small details stick in the mind. I cannot think of him without also remembering his spectacularly colourful socks.

After rather losing contact with him when Sarah died, Monique and I rejoiced in December 2016 to receive a Christmas card from him, out of the blue, and hand drawn of course'