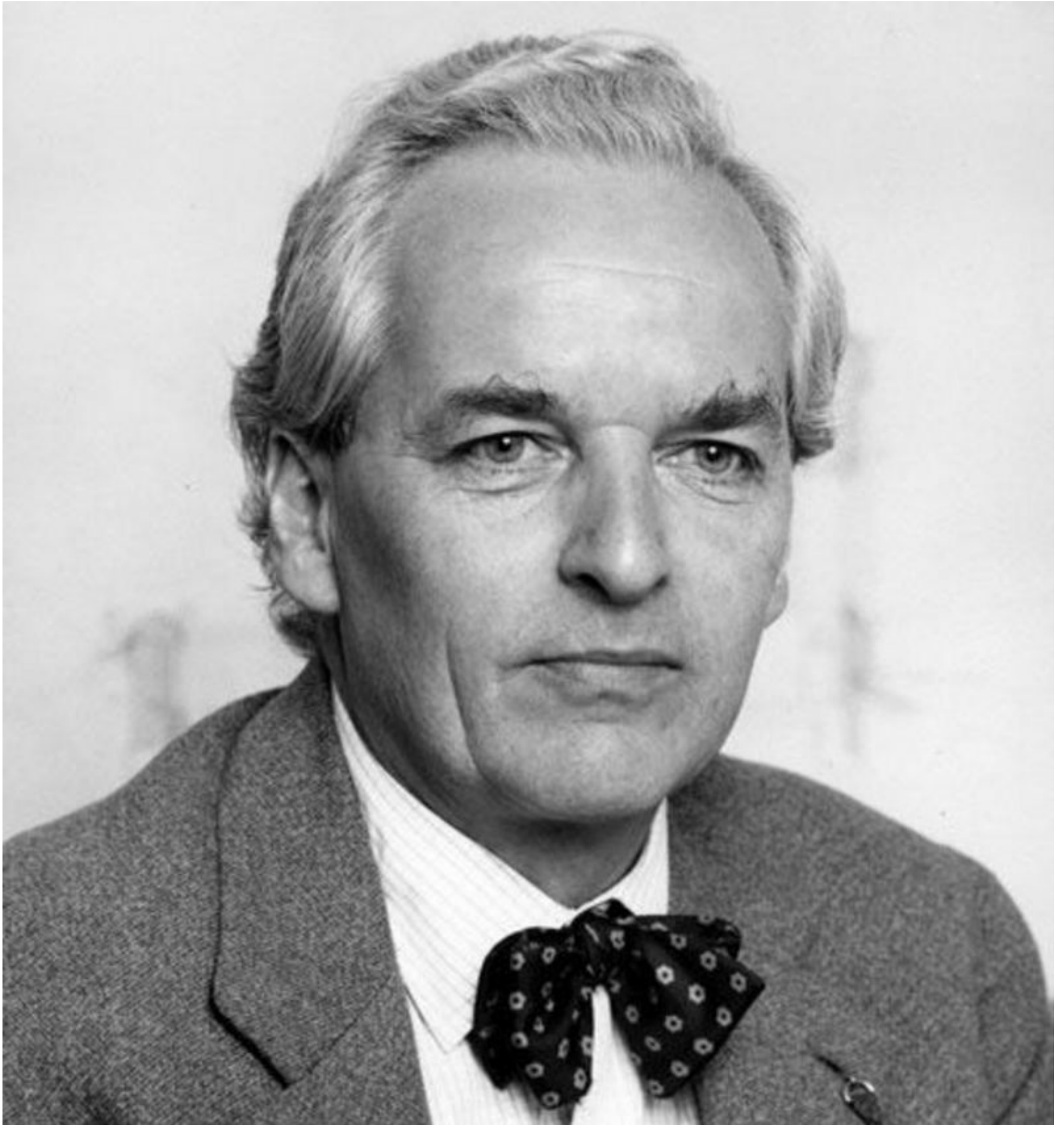


# Sir Andrew George Derbyshire

## 1923-2016



Sir Andrew George Derbyshire Born 7 October 1923, Eccleshall, Sheffield Died 3 March 2016, Stevenage

Andrew's 'Letter to the Survivors', dictated to me two days before his death, included the following: 'I must make some effort to testify my deep gratitude to those who have loyally supported me and made their contribution to our work of architecture and planning.'

That he should have chosen those words, acknowledging his life as a collaboration, testifies to the modesty of a man who was also an intellectual giant, a consummate professional, admirably thorough, deeply ethical and a huge influence on his colleagues, on his clients, through his work, on society and – of course – on me.

He grew up in Chesterfield, and went up to read a Natural Sciences Tripos at Queen's Cambridge, graduating during the Second World War when he served in the Admiralty Scientific Service as an experimental officer researching radar at sea.

After the war, he transferred to the architectural science division of the Building Research Establishment. Here he met and worked with Peter Parkin and Bill Allen who encouraged him to apply for a grant to attend the Architectural Association. He graduated in 1951.

For his final dissertation he collaborated with Pat Crooke and John Voelcker on a project called Zone Grid. This was presented at Aix en Provence 1953 as a contribution from MARS, the British section of CIAM, and illustrated in the Team 10 retrospective of 2005.

After an unhappy spell at Farmer and Dark, Andrew returned north to work at West Riding County Architects under Hubert Bennett, where he designed a prefabricated system for schools in wood and steel and built a prototype at Snaith Secondary Modern, which I remember visiting with him as a toddler. Between 1955-61 Andrew joined Sheffield as deputy city architect to J Lewis Womersley. While there he designed Castle Hill Market which, though many loved this most singular building, was not listed and was demolished in 2013.

Andrew joined Robert Matthew Johnson-Marshall & Partners in 1961 to work on the York University development plan with Stirrat Johnson-Marshall. He was taken into partnership in 1964, and made chairman in 1983 and president in 1989. He retired in 1998. RMJM was sold and its much-publicised troubles under this different ownership caused Andrew considerable distress.

When the family moved south in the 1960s a period began which Andrew often described as the happiest of his life. RMJM was based in Welwyn Garden City and Marylebone and we rented a flat in the Queen Anne Bocket Hall while my father designed and built a house for the family in Hatfield. In 1963 we moved in and his widow, Lily, lives there to this day.

Andrew's annus horribilis was undoubtedly 1982 when he lost the presidential election to Owen Luder and failed to succeed to chair of the Property Services Agency, possibly owing to his politically active past catching up with him. But he was to be rewarded with a knighthood (Knight Batchelor) in 1986, giving rise to the acerbic comment in Private Eye's Piloti column: 'A decent man and a good architect who is the only member of his profession to be knighted in recent years – a back-handed slap in the face for the RIBA establishment.'

I had the honour to read Andrew's obituary at an RIBA Council meeting in Edinburgh, and to quote his words of 40 years ago: 'What depresses me infinitely is that we seem to have moved hardly at all towards getting the design skills together, getting the professional institutes together, and getting the designers and constructors together. All this internecine struggle is very destructive. We ought to stop it.'

His last years were blighted by a £1.2m asbestos claim against his estate and that of RMJM Scotland partner, Vernon Lee. I successfully fought this with Marcus Lee, Vernon's son; happily we won, with costs.

Andrew leaves Lily, three surviving children, five grandchildren, two great grandchildren and three step grandchildren.