

## OBITUARY

We are enormously saddened to record the death of our Vice-President

### CHRISTOPHER GALLARD GILBERT 1936-1998

Christopher Gilbert, the pre-eminent furniture historian and former Director of Leeds City Art Galleries, died on September 29th, aged 62, after a kidney transplant. As well as a greatly respected personality in the museum world, Christopher was widely known among antiques dealers, researchers and collectors, not least because of his publication of numerous books and catalogues (about 30) and articles (over 125).

His books included the first two volumes of *Furniture at Temple Newsam House* and *Lotherton Hall* (1978), complemented by a third volume of more recent acquisitions in 1998; the standard work in two volumes on *The Life and Work of Thomas Chippendale* (1978), which set a new model for research; *English Vernacular Furniture 1750-1900* (1991); and (with Dr. Geoffrey Beard) the co-ordination of the vast *Dictionary of English Furniture Makers 1660-1840* (1986), which he followed up with *The Pictorial Dictionary of Marked London Furniture 1700-1840* in 1996.

In all his writing, and his long editorships of the journals *Furniture History* and *Regional Furniture*, Christopher maintained very high standards and wrote with an engaging and concise use of English. His interest in the problems of 18th century brass-inlaid furniture culminated in an exhibition at Temple Newsam House and the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1993/4 but his other continuing work on the firms of Seddon and the younger Thomas Chippendale must be left to others to bring to completion.

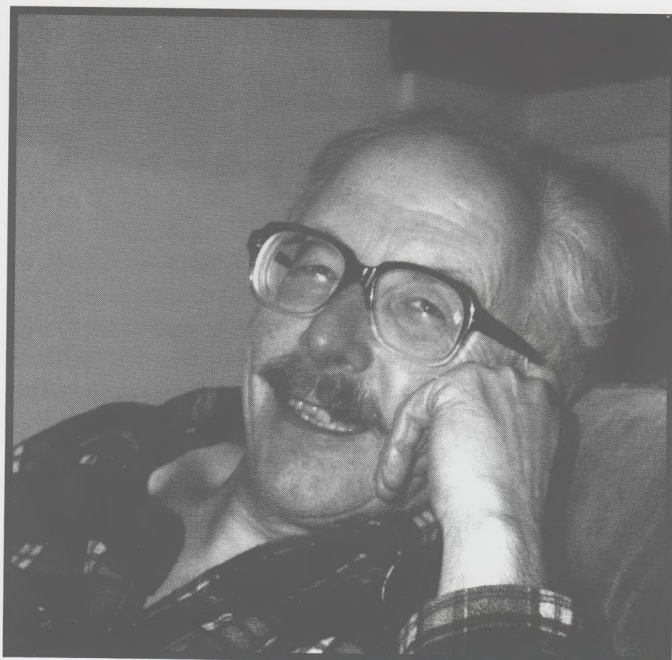
Christopher spent all his working life (34 years) on the staff of Leeds City Art Galleries and was Principle Keeper at Temple Newsam House from 1974 and Director from 1982 until his early retirement in 1995. Here he developed the collections, in many other fields besides furniture, and set about rearranging the house to return it to something of its country house appearance. He was an extremely able and determined fund-raiser and brought in many millions of pounds for purchases, from sources both at home and abroad. He further mounted several campaigns to save important pieces from export which resulted, not least, in the rescue of the important collection at Burton Constable, Yorkshire, of which he became a trustee. As the foremost Chippendale Scholar, it was most appropriate that he should have been President of the Chippendale Society and Hon. Curator of its small and choice collection which is held at Temple Newsam. He was also a Fellow of the Museums Association and of the Society of Antiquaries.

Christopher's great breadth of interest in furniture, from the grandest to the lowliest, was shown by his long involvement with the Furniture History Society, ending up as Chairman from 1990, and as a founder member in 1984 and latterly Vice-President of the Regional Furniture Society. His pioneering exhibitions of regional and institutional furniture at Temple Newsam from 1971 sowed the seeds for vernacular furniture studies and on the foundation of the Regional Furniture Museum Trust at High Wycombe in 1996, he was pleased to serve as a trustee. Christopher was always generous with his knowledge and time and, with his infectious enthusiasm, encouraging to younger furniture researchers and he was never afraid to change his views or take on board new research and opinion if they made sense to him. His scholarship, and the part he played in raising the academic standards of furniture studies will remain as a shining example to others.

As a friend, Christopher was unassuming and modest with a wonderful dry sense of humour. He had an abiding concern for the world around him which was shown by a considerable interest in ornithology and resurrecting steam railways and, apropos of nothing, early wireless sets. He is survived by his second wife Mary, who was a great support to him, and by five children from their first marriages. He will be tremendously missed.

*Christopher Claxton Stevens*

The Council has been discussing a fitting memorial to mark Christopher's memory. Various ideas are being discussed and more news will follow.



Christopher Gilbert