

Obituary

Gabriel Olive, 1921-2006

Members will be saddened to hear of the passing of Gabriel Olive on 10 December, following a short stay in hospital. Gabriel was a founder member of the society and one of the most active researchers on the subject of regional furniture, with furniture of the west country being his particular interest. In 2002 he curated a society exhibition in Winchester on west country furniture, and a compilation of some of his previously published articles, from *Regional Furniture*, *Furniture History* and *Antique Collecting*, plus work especially written at this time, was published as a book to coincide with it. *Farm and Cottage Furniture in the West Country* is a most important book on the subject, illustrating the value Gabriel attached to setting furniture in context, through his knowledge of social history and love of buildings and literature.

Gabriel's family were teachers, his grandfather having founded a school that was run, in turn, by Gabriel's father. Gabriel himself attended Bradfield School, from where he went to Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, as a choral scholar, reading history and classics. His time at Cambridge was interrupted by wartime service in India but he returned to complete his studies, taught for three years and then decided on what proved to be a most important career change. He joined Roger Warner, the son of a friend of his mother's, in his antiques business in Burford, as an assistant cabinet maker and restorer. These few months with Roger Warner enabled Gabriel to combine his woodworking skills with his interest in using old tools and period techniques.

In 1952 Gabriel opened his own antiques shop, in Wincanton. This was when I first met Gabriel; he was up a ladder, exercising his considerable joinery talents on the first floor window of the shop he was just opening. He left the elm board he was working on and came down to show my father and me some of the period fittings remaining in the shop, sharing his pleasure in their survival when many in other situations had been stripped out. Being in the same business and area and liking the same things, it was perhaps not surprising that our friendship was not immediate. We met at sales, often in competition for the same articles: walnut, oak or some mahogany furniture (although Gabriel was definitely not a brown furniture man); ceramics (delft was a great favourite of Gabriel's); early metalware, or anything interesting and unusual. However, with the sale over, we found we could discuss the articles we had, moments before, contested so fiercely.

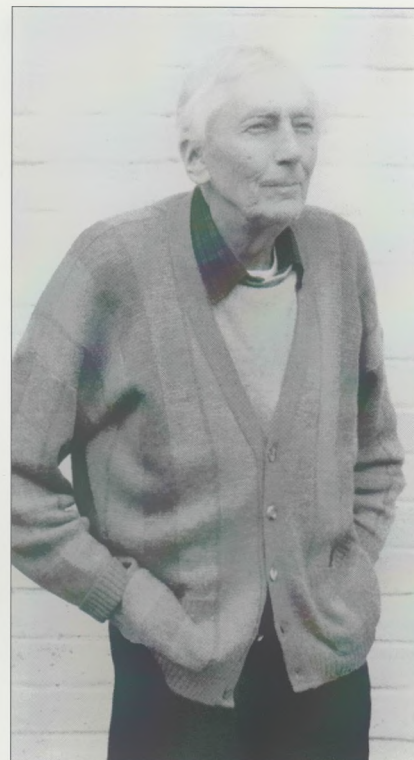
It was then that I became aware of Gabriel's incredibly wide knowledge, both scholarly and practical.

When calling at the shop I met his first wife, Eileen, and later their children, Michael and Lucy. I remember Gabriel's pride in Michael's successes and Lucy's achievements as a potter. When later, on Gabriel's orders, Polly and I joined the Furniture History Society, and in due course the Regional Furniture Society, our discussions continued, always with humour, especially when we stayed with Gabriel and Ruth Olive (his second wife) and also met his stepsons, Simon and Neill.

Many members will remember Gabriel's considerable contributions to any society discussion, and also the pleasure he took in helping students of all ages. When Gabriel closed his shop he began lecturing for the extra mural department of Bristol University, a move that may have allowed more time for writing than previously.

His contribution to the development of the society has been considerable and includes the exhibition at Winchester and the series of visits he arranged in east Somerset and in the Salisbury area. One very typical Gabriel event was on an evening when the annual conference was in Exeter and he talked on the fireplace and its accoutrements. He illustrated this from his intriguing and extensive collection of metalware dating from the 16th to the early 20th centuries, closing by producing a toy cat to sit beside the fire.

Gabriel is irreplaceable; he passed away with still so much to offer and will be sorely missed for his enthusiasm, erudition and capacity for friendship. On behalf of the society, I extend our deepest sympathy to his wife, Ruth, to Eileen, Michael and Lucy, Simon and Neill, and the other members of Gabriel's family.



Michael Legg