



## Gerald Cole MBE (1929–2014)

It was with great sadness that we learned, just as the last newsletter was going to print, of the death of Gerald Cole. Gerald was a long-standing member of the Society and served on the Council during the mid 1990s having volunteered to fill the previously vacant post of Honorary Archivist, the archive then being held at the Regional Furniture Society Study Centre at High Wycombe.

Gerald was born into a family of cabinetmakers in Spennymoor, County Durham and he gained his woodworking skills and love of furniture at the bench. Following National Service, Gerald became a teacher of woodwork and technical drawing, the start of a distinguished career in Education which saw him rise to the position of Schools Inspector.

Gerald loved to combine practical research with academic study and indicative of his enthusiasm and willingness to get involved, he volunteered to assist Dr Bill and Gerry Cotton when they travelled to the island of Stroma in 1997 to research and record the abandoned furniture there. He was a tremendous asset and being a fit and active hill-walker, took in his stride the hardships of the expedition, excavating pieces of furniture in buildings long occupied by sheep and living in an old nurse's house without electricity or running water and with only a wheelbarrow to transport equipment.

Gerald will be remembered by his many friends in the RFS for his professionalism, terrific sense of humour and as

someone who could be relied upon to ensure that new members felt welcome and at ease. It was a delight to examine and discuss furniture with Gerald as he not only appreciated how pieces looked but understood how and why they had been made in a particular way. Also an active member of the FHS and Tools and Trades History Society, he was passionate about passing on skills and knowledge and in retirement in Cumbria, he was involved with NADFAS, lectured on Furniture History and served as Furniture Advisor to the Carlisle Diocesan Advisory Committee. Gerald continued to enjoy practical woodworking in various forms including, together with a friend, Roy Thompson, the recreation and raising in Carlisle Cathedral of a replica oak screen using medieval tools and technology in order to demonstrate how it had originally been done. It was an inspiring experiment on a grand scale, starting with an oak tree donated to the project by the Forestry Commission. The two friends had hoped to carry out all the practical processes in the creation of the screen but, as Gerald commented regretfully, they were not allowed to cut down the tree themselves! Gerald spoke about the project to the RFS at the Church Woodwork day in Cirencester and to other audiences including students at his local college in Kendal where Gerald was in his element, explaining and demonstrating the processes involved and bringing History to life for his young audience.

A remarkable man, always generous in giving of his time and energy, in 2005 Gerald was awarded the MBE for services to Heritage and the Community. He is survived by his wife Mary and daughters, Hilary, Alison and Rachel.

*Jenny Cowking*