

John Wilkes, 1930 - 2011

Anthony John Wilkes crossed the Threshold on 27th March 2011, after an operation on his heart in Switzerland. He had suffered with heart problems for some years. He is well known for his invention of the Flowform as well as being a highly accomplished sculptor who will be very much missed by many people. He had wide interests in both the arts and sciences, and great technical skill.

John was born on 5th July 1930 in Wolverhampton, three and a half years after his sister Gwyneth. The family lived on an estate in Tettenhall, and his father James Henry Wilkes was a cashier working for Mander Brothers in Wolverhampton. John started school in 1937, and then in 1939 was accepted at Tettenhall College, a small public boarding school. He joined the Cubs and later the Boy Scouts and, as with everything he did, he excelled with many proficiency badges! He involved himself in games and athletics as well as playing football and hockey, and became the games secretary. He struggled academically because he was too young for his "year", and benefitted from having to stay down in a previous year when he was twelve, which proved a blessing. After that he was top of his class, later became a prefect, and did very well. Besides setting up his own chemistry lab. he started learning the 'cello and played for a time in the orchestra. He was interested in science, but a change came in 1946 when a new specialist art teacher in the school set him on the road to his eventual profession. In the upper school he joined the RAF Cadets and studied navigation and morse code, and was promoted to sergeant as an instructor. He was lucky enough to fly in Tiger Moths! He finished his school career taking Chemistry, Physics, French and Art for his Higher Certificate, achieving a distinction. In 1948 he received a grant directly into the second year of the Tettenhall Art College to study sculpture (he did not fancy the smell of oils in painting; he was always a fastidious person!). This stood him in good stead later as he learned a great deal about anatomy. He abandoned his earlier idea of studying architecture.

Through other students he met the "Oxford Group" which he experienced as having strong Christian principles, and became involved with Moral Rearmament. In 1950 he applied for entry to the Royal College of Art in London, and was one of only six accepted out of eighty applicants. National Service intervened, however, which took him to Austria. Just before that he had his first contact with Anthroposophy when he attended a course at Attingham Park and met Sir George Trevelyan and Dr. Ernst Lehrs. He went away with the books *Occult Science* and *From Jesus to Christ*. In September 1951 his National Service began in the Tank Corps, but due to his flat feet he was mercifully transferred to the Royal Signals Corps. He spent his service time in Austria where he met other Anthroposophists, notably Wilhelm Rath and Rex Raab, and eventually returned slightly before the end of his two years service to begin his studies at the Royal College of Art. He then followed parallel studies: that of the College and also of Anthroposophy, attending lectures by Walter Johannes Stein and others at Rudolf Steiner House. He heard George Adams for the first time on 1st December 1953, and also met other notables such as Kenneth Bayes for whom he then worked on architectural projects making models. He saw Rex Raab again in 1954, who became a close friend and support from then on. He met Francis Edmunds at Michael Hall School summer festivals, and was commissioned by Joan and Siegfried Rudel to create a portrait of Rudolf Steiner, which took many months. Thus he immersed himself deeply in Anthroposophy while still at college. At the College he studied under Prof. John Skeaping who had been married to Barbara Hepworth. Jacob Epstein and Henry Moore were also visiting tutors. He graduated with an A.R.C.A. Hons. degree and was immediately asked to join Bromley College of Art to teach stone carving two days a week.

John met the eurythmist Alfild Hammerstaedt in 1958 and offered - as a hopeful young man - to make a portrait of her! They got married in 1962 and had two children, Johanna and Thomas. Alfild was a great

support to him when he spent all hours on his work. In 1961 he helped with the Rudolf Steiner Centenary Exhibition in London, and then after a visit to Dornach he was asked to take over the collection of material all over the continent, and so met Arne Klingborg with whom he had a close connection for many years, visiting Jarna to give courses. That year George Adams asked John to join the Institute for Flow Research in Germany to make apparatus for water research, which he accepted and resigned from Bromley College. Alongside all this he collaborated with Rex Raab and Arne Klingborg on completing the west entrance to the Goetheanum, and in particular modelled the large bronze door handles. Another very important project in 1965 was the renovation of the models made by Edith Maryon and Rudolf Steiner (for the creation of the wooden sculptural group) which had fallen into bad repair. In the same year he received a request from Francis Edmunds to teach sculpture at Emerson College. Both projects began in 1966, and John and Alfild began their move to Emerson College in 1968.

It was when in Germany on the invitation of Theodor Schwenk in 1970 to do research on water that he made his pivotal discovery. He observed oscillating processes in a simple channel which led to the invention of the Flowform. As he said to me years later, he was looking for an organ for water to express itself. Research on this at Emerson College was encouraged by Francis Edmunds and continued to the end of John's life. He was always disappointed that little real interest was shown in the phenomenon by other anthroposophical scientists, and by then George Adams had passed away. I was fortunate to collaborate with John intensively for a while when we designed mathematically based Flowforms and measured the rhythms involved and derived a simple mathematical model of the overall form. Interesting scientific research was, however, done at Warmonderhof in Holland by Prof. Jan Diek van Mansfelt. Christopher Mann was greatly supportive and took out a patent on the Flowform. John was greatly concerned about water quality in our day, when water will become an increasingly scarce resource, and sought means to demonstrate that the rhythmic treatment of water enhances its ability to support life.

John had many collaborators and it is not possible to mention them all here, and the list would certainly be incomplete. However Nigel Wells and Nick Weidmann must be mentioned as they worked on the practical construction of John's designs. Many people were inspired by his lectures and demonstrations, and were fired to take up the work in many other countries. People also "stole" his idea and Flowforms making no reference to the inventor could be seen for example in Dornach. As the years passed by his work at Emerson College concentrated ever more on water projects and research, and he ceased taking primary responsibility for the sculpture courses. The Flow Design Research Group was founded, and later his dream of a proper building to house the work was finally realised in 2002, after years of work in a temporary hut. Many often large projects were undertaken and he was overburdened by the extensive correspondence he had to deal with. To visit him at Emerson College was to sit in a small space surrounded by papers, photographs, sculptures, models and optimistic project plans, supported by a warm welcome from Alfild!

Special mathematical curves called "path curves" were used in some designs, and we found that purely artistically designed Flowforms also involved path curves. This was an aspect of great interest to George Adams in the water research he had conducted. It led to a special design for biodynamic preparations, and Flowforms have been used for making such preparations, notably in New Zealand. Apart from artistic installations all over the world, one of the first practical applications was for sewage treatment at Jarna in Sweden at the request of Arne Klingborg, which also has been repeated elsewhere. Now it is scarcely possible to visit an anthroposophical institution without seeing Flowforms! The very extensive work done by John is described in his book *Flowforms: The Rhythmic Power of Water*. A recent new book has come out called *Energizing Water: Flowform Technology and the Power of Nature*. written by him, Jochen Schwuchow and Iain Trousdell.

John, we salute you, we will miss you, and we wish you well on your further journey.

Nick Thomas, April 2011