

OBITUARY

Clive Hicks

Architect who designed the first dedicated hospice after dancing with the Royal Opera Ballet

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Clive Hicks helped to design the first purpose-built hospices, creating octagonal rooms full of light for terminally ill patients



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When Dame Cicely Saunders, the pioneer of the hospice movement, appointed the firm of Stewart, Hendry & Smith to design the world's first dedicated hospice for terminally ill patients, she instructed the architects to design "a house where people could find relief from pain". In Clive Hicks, a young South African working for the London firm, she found an architect who shared that vision.

Hicks, who was also a talented photographer and former ballet dancer, believed that hospices should be beautiful, harmonious and uplifting places rather than merely functional sites for dying. He worked with Dame Cicely on designing that first hospice, St Christopher's in Sydenham, east London, which opened in 1967, and others, including St Joseph's in Hackney,

A characteristic of his hospices was to fill them with natural light. His patient rooms were often octagonal, partly to maximise views into the flower-filled courtyards, partly to allow quick but discreet access for medical intervention and partly because of symbolic importance of the number eight. Hicks recognised that the number is associated with rebirth and new beginnings, which is why fonts are usually octagonal, and he believed that an eight-sided room would have a subconscious effect on raising patients' spirits. This interest in the connections between the mind and nature would flourish again in later life through his books about the Green Man.

Clive Gayford Hicks was born in Pretoria, South Africa, in 1932. His father, Vivian, was a railway engineer and amateur radio enthusiast who had made contact with Oswald Gayford, an aviator from Suffolk, during his record-breaking nonstop flight from Cranwell in Lincolnshire to Walvis Bay in South Africa, which gave him a middle name for his eldest son.

After growing up in Port Elizabeth, where he was top of his class even after moving up a year, he went to Wits University in Johannesburg at the age of 16 to study architecture. While at university he attended a ballet performance in January 1953 with a group of friends that changed his life. Gripped by the beauty and grace of the dancers, he found a ballet class for adult beginners and discovered that he had natural talent for dancing.



After a successful debut at the Johannesburg Festival in 1956, when he danced a pas de deux with Margot Fonteyn, he decided to try the London stage and was taken on professionally by the Sadler's Wells Ballet Company and later danced with the Royal Opera Ballet at Covent Garden.

However, he soon returned to architecture, joining Stewart, Hendry & Smith in 1959 until it merged 30 years later with Lawrence & Wrightson, where he remained until retirement.

He was a meticulous collector — 78rpm jazz records, coins, stamps, polished stones — but his main love and talent, besides ballet and architecture, was for photography. Family holidays would involve journeys around the British Isles in a VW Kombi van for the purpose of photographing castles, churches, ruined abbeys and stone circles.

One of his favourite photographs was taken at Chartres Cathedral in France on the midsummer solstice. At a few minutes before 2pm on June 24, the feast day of St John the Baptist, a shaft of light pierces a window on the south side of the cathedral, striking a nail driven into a grey flagstone to create a shadow by which the cathedral clocks were set. Hicks, with the support of some helpful nuns, was able to take the perfect photograph of the light at that same moment also

With Bill Anderson he produced a series of illustrated books on architecture, including *Cathedrals of Britain and Ireland* (1978), *Holy Places: A Guide to the Legendary and Sacred Sites* (1983), *The Rise of the Gothic* (1985) and *The Green Man: The Archetype of our Oneness with the Earth* (1998).

The last, Hicks felt, was his greatest achievement. The Green Man, a term first coined in 1939 by Julia, Lady Raglan, had become a forgotten concept in western consciousness, although images of faces covered in foliage, symbolising the power of nature and renewal, are seen in many churches. Hicks and Anderson boosted the popularity of the Green Man, and Hicks, who also published *The Green Man: A Field Guide* on his own in 2000, was invited to speak about his findings at festivals and conferences around the world.

He strongly supported adult education, lecturing at night classes on the history of architecture; was a passionate defender of the Garden Suburb movement and helped to found the Brentham Society to protect and promote the Brentham estate in west London; and played an active role in the Study Society, a Kensington-based organisation that taught a form of meditation associated with the Advaita, or non-dualist, school of Indian philosophy.

He married Colleen Foster, a fellow South African, in 1962 and they had four children: Andrew, a writer; Jonathan, a banker; David, a graphic designer; and Susan, a teacher. He died at home a week before what would have been his 85th birthday, unafraid and ready. "He had a firm and unwavering faith in the underlying goodness of the universe and the essence of God as love," his son Andrew said.

Clive Gayford Hicks, architect, photographer, author and ballet dancer, was born on September 14, 1932. He died of heart failure on September 6, 2017, aged 84