

Obituary: Ray Leigh MBE, RIBA, AA Dip., Hon. FRCA

It is with sadness that we announce the death of Ray Leigh on 13th March 2025. He was Chairman of the Gordon Russell Trust - formed to protect the company's unique collection of furniture and archival material - and under his leadership the Gordon Russell Design Museum opened in Broadway in 2008.

Ray graduated from the Architectural Association and, as a young architect, joined the practice of Professor Richard (Dick) Russell and Robert Goodden. In 1951, he contributed to the Lion and Unicorn Pavilion at the Festival of Britain, working on the model theatre, internal walkways, exhibition cases and interior fittings. Ray continued his partnership with Dick on significant projects such as the interior design of the SS *Oriana* and the Greek Galleries at the British Museum.

In 1967, Ray met Dick's brother, Gordon Russell and accepted the position of Design Director at Gordon Russell Limited. A year later, Gordon inscribed a copy of his autobiography to Ray, calling him an "enthusiastic new boy in this adventure." Ray went on to foster a highly creative atmosphere within the company, engaging both in-house designers and consultants to create fresh, contemporary furniture often featuring his own designs while retaining the craft skills unique to Broadway. During his tenure as Managing Director, he oversaw international expansion into the USA and Japan.

Following Gordon Russell's death in 1980, Ray became Chairman of the company. Nine years later, amid a global recession, he oversaw the sale of Gordon Russell Limited. When the firm's workshops finally closed in 2000, he led efforts to establish a museum in one of the original workshops behind The Lygon Arms in Broadway, culminating in the Gordon Russell Design Museum's opening.

Ray detailed much of his work and the Gordon Russell story in two self-authored books: *Advance the Product. Gordon Russell Furniture – A continuing adventure 1946–1986* (2015) and *A Change of Direction. Gordon Russell Furniture 1930–1940* (2017). He also co-wrote *Drawn to Design. The Work of Sir Gordon Russell* (2013) with Trevor Chinn.

In 1996, following in Gordon Russell's footsteps, Ray was appointed President of The Design and Industry Association. Ray Leigh was awarded an MBE for services to design and industry in 2018. Three years later, he received a commemorative wooden box crafted by a Rycotewood student in recognition of his outstanding service as Liveryman and Past Master of The Worshipful Company of Furniture Makers (1970–2020).

The Gordon Russell Design Museum has created the "Ray Leigh Design Prize" to challenge students at Rycotewood Furniture Centre to create a small craft object for batch manufacture, with prize-winning work sold through the museum shop. Ray's dedication to design, craftsmanship and the Gordon Russell legacy will be long remembered.