



Asquith: inspired by rugged landscape of the Peak District

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Brian Asquith, who has died aged 78, was a sculptor, designer and silversmith whose work remained in the forefront of contemporary design and manufacture for some 40 years.

Asquith drew his inspiration from artists and designers who had been shown at the Festival of Britain, and also from European Modernism. But the forthright elegance of his sculpture was also influenced by the rugged contours and rushing rivers of the Peak District around Youlgreave in Derbyshire, where he had his studio and where he took a daily morning dip in the River Lathkill - even if it meant breaking the ice.

He began his twin career as sculptor and designer in the early 1950s when working on a commission to make a 24ft-high Portland stone sculpture of Christ for a new church at Ruislip - at the same time as designing boilers in Sheffield. His work included numerous commissions for churches, Oxford and Cambridge colleges and livery companies.

His final major public piece was an imposing semi-circle of bronze fountains in the Peace Gardens in Sheffield, commissioned to mark the millennium, with complementary street furniture - seating, bollards, planters and wastebins.

Brian Asquith was born on February 23 1930 in Sheffield where his father, an engineer, made model steam engines. From Sheffield College of Arts and Crafts Brian won a scholarship to the Royal College of Art, where he was taught sculpture by Frank Dobson. He then joined the Army Education Corps at Colchester for National Service, also playing football for Colchester United.

Returning to Sheffield, he set up an office with David Mellor on Eyre Street, where he worked as an industrial designer, producing handtools, garden tools, boilers and other products. His industrial designs included a set of elegant in-flight crockery for British Airways; tyre treads for Dunlop; garden and hand tools for Spear & Jackson and kitchens for Magnet.

His Black Prince plastic-handled saw was the first saw to have a moulded handle. A rake and hoe he designed won a Design Council award and are in the permanent collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum.

Asquith's industrial design work helped to subsidise his work with silver and sculpture and, as the commissions began to flow in, he set up his studio at Youlgreave in 1963.

Asquith's work for churches include a cross and candlesticks in stainless steel for St Augustine's, Nottingham, a wine flagon for Winchester Cathedral, silver chalices and ciboria for Lichfield Cathedral and a huge processional cross and high altar candlesticks for Chichester Cathedral.

Other works include numerous commissions of cups, jugs, goblets and cutlery for the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths; tennis trophies for the International Tennis Federation and silverware for Oxford and Cambridge, including a tray for Sir Maurice Bowra, commissioned by Wadham College.

He also designed a centrepiece in silver commissioned by the British government and presented to Mauritius on the occasion of its independence in 1966; personal gifts given to the Prince of Wales on his investiture in 1969, and a sundial commissioned by the Victoria Cross and George Cross Association and presented to the Queen Mother on her 80th birthday.

Alongside his work as a sculptor and designer, Asquith taught and lectured at the Royal College of Art, Sheffield College of Art, Barnsley College of Art and Walthamstow Technical College and School of Art.

In 1991 he entered a creative partnership with the Milanese company Officina Alessi to design a set of tableware inspired by the Victorian designs of Christopher Dresser.

Asquith's designs were displayed at major exhibitions and museums around the world. In 2004 a retrospective of his work was held at the Millennium Galleries in Sheffield.

He won six awards for industrial design from the Design Council and a silver medal for industrial design at the Milan Triennale.

Asquith served as a member of the Crafts Council from 1990 to 1992 and was a fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.

A keen sportsman all his life, he played hockey for Hathersage and village cricket for Youlgreave, and was instrumental in moving the team's centre of operations from a disused railway wagon to a modern pavilion.

Brian Asquith, who died on March 16, married, in 1949, Barbara Tonge, who survives him with their three sons.

