COLIN LUCAS – a view of a creative life
FOREWORD

When, from time to time, enthusiastic, knowledgeable and dedicated researchers of Colin's architecture have asked me about his life and work, the questions have always tended towards what could be described as the man behind the creativity and/or the creativity behind the man. Of course this is a subject which deserves so much more than the occasional friendly telephone conversation......
DEDICATION

This memoir is dedicated to His Holiness Maharishi Mahesh Yogi whose Vedic Technologies of Consciousness have enabled it to be brought to light.

It is written for a loving, inspiring and lovely father and for a loving, inspiring and lovely family, past, present and future. I hope it gives them, and many friends, something more than ‘a view of a creative life’. I hope too that it fulfils one of Colin’s favourite New Testament sayings: ‘Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.’ (St Matthew 13, 52).
Colin on holiday in Cornwall, probably 1938
In Colin's essay on aesthetics, written for the Unit One exhibition in 1934, he comments early on 'I feel that a new thought process is needed which will enable us to probe into the meaning of subjective phenomena.'

During the early 1930s Colin was introduced to the system of philosophy taught by the Russian writer/philosopher P.D.Ouspensky, which he studied closely and deeply thereafter. The system included the study of the nature of consciousness but this proved more theoretical than practical. Attempts to turn the mind within and access the subjective were difficult and elusive.

But in 1960 Colin learned a natural, traditional meditation technique from His Holiness Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. This, for Colin, bridged the gap between his long term more theoretical study of consciousness and the actual experience of it and could well be described as 'a new thought process... to probe into the meaning of subjective phenomena', the aspiration of the 1934 essay. He was a regular and devoted meditator until his death in 1984.

50 years after Unit One, and in his last year, Colin again came across the now long-forgotten essay on aesthetics during a visit to the retrospective Unit One exhibition at the Mayor Gallery. Telling me about his visit soon afterwards, he said in a somewhat surprised way that he thought the essay was 'rather good'!

In relating this short summary of my father's search for the source and basis of creativity, indeed by definition one can say, for the Creator, it is most inspiring to be able to comment that he was clearly successful.

For example, in a letter to his daughter-in-law Caroline Lucas in 1972, which became the introduction to a posthumous private edition of his many sonnets, Colin wrote:

'Everything one wants is there, deep inside one. All the energy one so badly needs, all the happiness and sense of fulfilment one hopes to get, all the beauty and loveliness one finds in nature. It is all here now, just exactly where one is at this moment – there is no need to go anywhere. But one has to dive down very deep to find it. That's how it seems to me – I wonder if it does to you?'
Colin’s built-in understanding that the creative process is beyond solely intellectual analysis is beautifully expressed in his Sonnet 33:

No poet can explain his verse; the same
Wonder which breathes on all created things
Lives in each line he writes; the poem springs,
Borne on the murmur of an angel’s wings,
From nowhere—none can tell from whence it came;
Nor could the logic of unaided thought
Deliver lines so delicately wrought,
Telling of all he loved, of all he sought.
For when he writes, although he knows not why,
Strange memories that no man understands,
Deep diapasons of forgotten lands,
Roll in upon him from Eternity.
  Oh seek not explain, for by the same
  Miracle, Man and all Creation came.  

Colin’s creative work continued to grow. On retirement from architecture he immediately began daily landscape painting sessions, in oils, with a number of exhibitions. The last paintings, seven totally free-flowing large pastels, wondrously catch the changing colours and cloud shapes of the Atlantic sky off the North Cornwall coast.

Mark Lucas 6 29 December 2002

For Footnotes see pages 3 & 4
Footnotes:

1 A group of avant-garde painters, sculptors and architects formed in 1933 to publicise modernism. They included the painters Paul Nash and Ben Nicholson, sculptors Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth and architects Wells Coates and Colin who at 27 was the youngest. A ‘statement’ of artistic views was required (hence the essay on aesthetics) for the group’s exhibition at the Mayor Gallery in 1934 which later went on tour. Colin’s Noah’s House (1930), the first monolithic concrete house in Britain, and The Hopfield (1933), regarded as a pioneering statement of modernism, were illustrated in the exhibition. They are gratefully remembered by the writer as welcoming, colourfully light, warm and happy homes for the ‘unit human being’ of Colin’s essay to live in. His innovative architectural work continued with the Connell, Ward and Lucas partnership from 1934 until the war and at the LCC/GLC afterwards.

Towards the end of the Connell, Ward and Lucas partnership, Colin designed 66 Frognal, Hampstead for his friends the Walfords. Considered one of the best early modern houses in Britain, it was much loved by the Walfords and has recently been carefully restored towards its original, external colour. A particularly striking feature of Colin’s houses was the use of contrasting, yet naturally blending, ‘Mediterranean’ colours, inside and out, and, at the Hopfield and Frognal, individually designed furniture and furnishings.

At the LCC/GLC Colin enjoyed challenging architecture without the uncertainty which faced private architectural practice after the war, and which had indeed been a feature of the later Connell, Ward and Lucas days. Colin’s section at the LCC completed the widely acclaimed, pioneering high-rise estate at Roehampton Lane, a very large scheme set in parkland. Colin was clearly very pleased with Roehampton which he regarded, I believe, as a career fulfilment. He enjoyed re-visiting the scheme, taking it all in, particularly perhaps the award-winning high-rise blocks. There were occasional impromptu chats with residents who invariably shared Colin’s pleasure and pride in the estate. In 1972 Colin was given an OBE - in all his professional work as an influential modernist architect spanned some 50 years.

2 By his mother, the modernist composer Mary Anderson Lucas with whom he was close artistically and otherwise and co-incidentally by Geoffrey Walford, his friend and, later, client of the then controversial 66 Frognal house.

After the war Colin worked closely with Mary on the setting of poetry and other pieces for recitation to music. Her last two compositions were characteristically strongly lyrical expressions in this genre. Mary’s lovely music could usually be heard developing and trilling each morning from her delightfully situated music room above the boathouse at Noah’s House (the Ark) on the Thames. Colin’s love of music came from his mother and included early keyboard playing, continual enquiry into the significance of musical scale, and an extensive repertoire of folksong with guitar, built up from student days, which was always a feature of family social occasions.

His father Ralph, engineer and inventor, encouraged Colin’s use of reinforced concrete when he was managing the small family building firm Lucas, Lloyd & Co. after University. The experience and confidence gained early on with this then novel design medium (‘a material one could model’ as Colin put it) is a remarkable feature of his career. Colin’s student training had included a strong engineering content and there was a family background of innovative engineering, originally from Ralph’s father Francis, who completed the undersea telegraph cable link-ups which finally encircled the globe, using specialist ships of his own design, in 1902. Previously he had sailed on many voyages of the ‘Great Eastern’, starting as an apprentice engineer. Colin built the modernist Sun House (Sunlight Cottage) for his grandfather in 1931, a small squarish forerunner of The Hopfield. Ralph’s major engineering innovations were the Valveless motor car which was operational during the early 1900s (being produced
by David Brown Ltd until 1914) and the North-Lucas motor car built as an extremely advanced “one-off” in 1922. Said to have been 30 years ahead of its time, it featured a radial, air-cooled rear engine, independent suspension and an integral and streamlined aluminium chassis. Ralph’s main commercial career was in Thames barge transport from which he was able to retire early to Noah’s House. At times Ralph and Colin became quite taken by the search for the ultimate in sailing dinghy design and some fascinating prototypes were built, filling the quite large and superbly modernist boathouse at Noah’s House with even more tempting craft for the family to enjoy.

The innovative family atmosphere, briefly described, obviously provided a strongly encouraging background, but of course Colin’s sudden emergence as a pioneering modernist architect was uniquely his own creative direction. From where it came is the theme of this glimpse at Colin’s creativity and is perhaps best expressed poetically in his Sonnet 33, already quoted. (Later on Colin found that Connell and Ward ‘had begun to use the same construction quite independently’, a fascinating example of innovative ‘coincidence’).

By way of particular comment on Colin’s design approach, he seemed especially in tune with design towards the Golden ratio, that mathematical expression of orderly and elegant expansion in the universe, from sunflower to spiral galaxy which is indeed also expressed in our own physiology – no wonder we so readily relate to beauty in nature! Colin was very sure-footed in this area, as he was completely certain with colour and a delight to observe in draughtsmanship.

Over the years Colin wrote many commentaries on these philosophical ideas, for discussion with close friends.

The understanding of a unified, self-interactive subjective field of conscious creativity at the source and basis of the diversified, material, objective world is found in both the objective scientific approach of modern Quantum Physics in recent Unified Field Theory, and in the matching, but subjective and cognitive, ancient Vedic approach now brought to light and completely revived by Maharishi’s Vedic Science. This highly remarkable and most timely conjunction of the two sciences can be explored for some of its many practical applications at, for example, www.globalcountry.org and www.createpermanentpeace.com. For Maharishi’s Vedic approach to architecture see www.MGC-Vastu.com and www.Vedahouse.com.

There are 55 Sonnets of this style and calibre, written between 1950-72, which give an inspiring insight into Colin’s outlook on the beauty of life.

Colin’s eldest son. On his retirement, Mark studied to become a qualified teacher of Transcendental Meditation of His Holiness Maharishi Mahesh Yogi.

As a parent Colin was loving and generous, but neither I nor my brother Peter really got to know him consistently until well after the war. In any event we all grew increasingly, and I believe exceptionally, close as adults. Colin was not at all overbearing by nature, preferring parental advice given lightly, but assuredly, on a throwaway line.
Colin at his office in Greenwich, probably early 30s, when he was managing Lucas, Lloyd & Co., his father Ralph’s building firm. Ralph’s main business of Thames barge ‘lighterage’ transport was also here.

‘I came straight down from Cambridge and went into a building firm which my father owned and I became manager of the firm. My great ambition was to build my own designs with my own men...and my first houses were built like that.’ (AJ May 1984)

‘When I first started as a builder in 1928 we had our own men. That was a great opportunity to experiment’ (RIBA evening 1976)
Noah's House (the Ark), built in 1930 for his father when Colin was 24, was the first monolithic reinforced concrete house in Britain. Mary Lucas is on the lawn.