

Russell, Richard Drew (R.D.) 1903 - 1981

Richard Drew Russell [commonly known as R.D. Russell, and also as Dick Russell] was born Repton in Derbyshire, on 21 December 1903. After working with his brother, Gordon Russell, designing furniture for the family business in Broadway, Gloucestershire, from 1919 to 1924, he trained for four years as an architect at the Architectural Association School in London. On leaving the AA in 1928 he returned to Broadway where he became a director of the Russell Workshops Ltd., a company founded by Gordon Russell in 1926, and which subsequently became Gordon Russell Ltd (GRL) in 1929.

Initially R.D. Russell worked on both architectural schemes and in designing furniture. Later furniture design was to occupy most of his activities. Two of his earliest architectural projects were Follifoot near Harrogate (1929) and Lobden in the Halvern Hills (1932), both designed for Mr Albert Hartley and his wife. Among his earliest furniture designs for GRL were for Claridge's hotel in London (1932).

In December 1933, he married [Marian Pepler](#) and later collaborated with her on architectural and design projects including "Lobden" (c.1934), a house in Colwell, near Malvern which was discussed in *Modern Small Country Houses*, edited by Roger Smithells. (London: Country Life, 1936 pp. 170-173).

Between 1931 and the late 1942, Russell also designed wireless, radiogram and television cabinets for Murphy Radio Ltd. which were made by GRL. In 1936 he became a salaried member of Murphy. He also set up in private practice as a consultant industrial designer that year and produced designs for Murphy from his own office in London. In late 1932 and 1933 Russell designed a range of clock cases for Garrard Clocks Ltd. and designed a showroom for the company in London. Four of the clocks were displayed at the Royal Academy's 'British Art in Industry' exhibition at Burlington House, London, in 1935. Other pre-war projects included offices for the Imperial Typewriter Company and C.R. Casson, a showroom for Louis Fox in London in 1933, a room in the exhibition of British industrial art at Dorland House in London in 1933, the study in Oakbeams, a private house in Southgate, London, in 1934-35, an aluminium caravan for the Aluminium Union Ltd., and furniture for GRL. During World War Two Russell served in the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve and worked on the camouflage of ships. He was also briefly a member of the Utility Furniture Panel.

In 1946 he returned to private practice in London as a designer and that year established R. D. Russell & Partners, an architecture and design firm in London.

In addition to designing furniture and radio and television cabinets for Murphy, post-war projects included the design of the Lion and Unicorn Pavilion at the South Bank Exhibition of the Festival of Britain 1951, the remodelling the Greek Sculpture Galleries at the British Museum in the 1960s, and the redesign the Print Room and the Western Sculpture and Oriental Art Galleries at the BM (all with R.Y. Goodden).

Between the 1940s and 1970s Russell and his practice, in collaboration with GRL, also designed a wide range of furniture from one-off pieces, such as a table for President Eisenhower presented by the Queen and Prince Philip, to furniture for schools, offices, hotels and boardrooms. In addition, Russell designed low-cost furniture for the Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society during the late 1940s and 1950s and for the P & O liner 'Oriana' between 1954-59.

In 1948 R.D. Russell was appointed Professor of Wood, Metal and Plastics at the Royal College of Art in London. He remained teaching at the RCA until his retirement in 1964. He was made a Royal Designer for Industry (RDI) in 1944, and a Fellow of the Society of Industrial Artists (FSIA) in 1946. R.D. Russell died on 16 October 1981.

Worked in

UK

Bibliography

Modern Small Country Houses. Edited by Roger Smithells. London: Country Life, 1936

R.D. Russell, Marion Pepler. London: Inner London Education Authority, 1983
[Exhibition catalogue]

Links

- National Portrait Gallery, London

<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person/mp58697/richard-drew-russell>

- Penny Sparke. Richard (Dick) Drew Russell. Oxford Dictionary of National Biography [Subscription service] <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/66040>

- Victoria & Albert Museum <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O372013/murphy-a3a-radio-russell-rd/>

- The Best of Murphy Cabinet Design 1930 to 1950. Compiled by James Reeve http://www.murphy-radio.co.uk/diagrams/Murphy_Radio_Russell&Minns_1930-1950.pdf

- Gordon Russell Design Museum

<https://www.gordonrusselldesignmuseum.org/museum-archive/r-d-russell/>

- Artnet <http://www.artnet.com/artists/richard-drew-russell/>