

Peter John Aldington OBE. Dip Arch. RIBA. MCSD



Studied at Manchester University School of Architecture, qualifying in 1956. After working for London County Council Architects Department, then for the Timber Research Development Association, Aldington established his own practice in 1963. He quickly gained an international reputation for his three village houses in Haddenham, Buckinghamshire, which he built with his wife Margaret between 1964 and 1968, including their own home Turn End.

The practice of Aldington, Craig and Collinge designed many building types, but it perhaps became best known for its houses. Their work gained many awards and was published internationally. All 9 houses completed until the time Peter retired from the practice have since been listed, two at Grade 2*, more than any other living architect in the UK. In 1986 Peter was awarded an OBE in the New Year Honours List.

Visitors come to visit Turn End from across the UK, Europe and around the world, some having become architects or landscape designers as a result of studying Peter's work.

Early Life

Peter Aldington was born 14 April 1933 in Preston, the only son of Edna (nee Entwisle), a teacher and housewife and John, a research chemist. Dr. John Aldington gained all his qualifications externally without the privilege of a University education. He played a pioneering role in the development of fluorescent, electronic flash and other modern lighting, and worked his way up from being a junior lab. assistant to become Managing Director of Siemens Brothers in the UK and subsequently the Vice Chairman of Associated Electrical Industries. From him, Aldington believes he gained his determination to achieve his goal and not to mind what people say about it.

Home life evolved around the Baptist Church and its social network. Although moving away from the church in later life, Aldington recognises that his puritanical and ethical approach to architecture shares much with his strong Baptist background.

Dr. Aldington was a keen gardener, and Peter's first ambition was to become a gardener. He took charge of the rock gardens at the family's houses in Preston, then later in Kent. He was also a keen woodworker at home and at Preston Grammar School, later saying "I'm to do with making... With hindsight I should have been trained as an artist-craftsman, not as an architect. I'm happiest when making a building I've designed. When designing a building, I'm building it on the drawing board".

University

A family friend was architect George Grenfell Baines, founder of Building Design Partnership, who designed Peter's parents' house (right). He suggested Peter take a course in architecture, followed by further training in landscape architecture. As a result, Aldington entered Manchester University School of Architecture from 1951/56 on the diploma course.



A keen photographer, Peter joined the University photographic society, rapidly becoming its Secretary. Here he organised the lecture series and annual exhibitions. The culmination of these was a pan-European competition which first made him aware of the work of Richard Einzig, who later photographed most of Aldington's early buildings, prior to Einzig's premature death.

Peter and a group of fellow students launched the student architectural magazine '244', named after 244 Oxford Road where the School of Architecture was based. The group attracted well known figures to write contributions, publishing the magazine continuously up to its culmination as the catalogue for an exhibition that they organised in Manchester Town Hall in 1956, called 'Turn Again Manchester'.

Peter later wrote down what he called his 'Formative Influences while a Student':

As a student, the big three:

Corb, through both his writings and buildings. In particular, La Tourette, Maisons Jaoul, and Ronchamp - the latter for me still the deepest architectural experience of all time.

Mies, Farnsworth House and Crown Hall at IIT.

Wright, particularly through his writings, but also many houses, especially Taliesin West and Fallingwater. All these are still heroes!

At University he also played tennis and took a strong interest in mountain and rock climbing, finding inspiration from Scottish crofts and timber mountain hostels.

First Job

After qualifying in 1956, Aldington joined London County Council (LCC) Architects Department, in the housing division. Under Chief Architect Robert Matthew, the LCC was seen as one of the best finishing schools for architects. After a year he had to undertake National Service, posted in the RAF to the Dutch-German border. Here he was attached to a photo-reconnaissance squadron and was eventually in charge of the dark room.

He returned to the LCC, enjoying the inter-disciplinary nature of the organisation, able to seek the advice of various specialists. During his last year at LCC he gained two private commissions for houses. One unbuilt project was for neighbours in Preston, dated 1962. The second was for Mike and Celia White, who Aldington met on a winter climbing course in Scotland in 1960. Seated round the fire in a hotel, Mike White asked a string of questions about a house he hoped to build, until Aldington replied "I'm not going to give you any more free help. If you want an architect, you're looking at him." Before Aldington left the LCC, he benefitted from the 'crits' given by his colleagues regarding the White's house at Askett Green, Buckinghamshire.

Askett Green was Aldington's modern interpretation of a cottage. Its thoroughness of detail and high quality construction led it to be published in magazines in the UK and Germany, deftly illustrated by Richard Einzig, who was just starting his photography career. Just as the main work on the house was complete, Mike and Celia White accepted a posting in Nigeria. Aldington, recently engaged to Margaret, offered to become the tenant, complete the decorating and make a garden in lieu of rent.



Margaret and Peter married in April 1962. They were brought together by a shared passion for climbing, mountains and wild places. Margaret was brought up in the north-east of England where her father was Docks Mechanical Engineer in Hartlepool. She undertook general and psychiatric training at the Middlesex Hospital and continued to work as a nurse, except for when she was building Turn End and when daughters Clair, born 1968, and Rachel, born 1970, were small. She was also a local councillor for 7 years. In 1962 Peter took a job more locally at TRADA (Timber Research Development Association), leaving after a year to work full time building their own house at Turn End, Haddenham.

Aldington, Craig and Collinge

It was while living at Askett Green that Aldington met John Craig and his wife Pauline. John was a Creative Group Head at Garland Compton, a London advertising agency. Shortly after meeting Peter he was put in charge of a major re-vamp of the agency's offices. Following a recommendation from John, Peter was appointed as the architect for the project. They worked together on this for three years, at the end of which Peter asked John to forsake advertising and join him as a Partner.



Between 1964-8 Aldington designed and built Turn End, Middle Turn and The Turn, he and Margaret doing much of the building work themselves. Aldington's scheme for three houses, linked but still enjoying private spaces, fitted around the existing mature trees and ancient wicket (mud) walls. Built of lightweight concrete blocks, coated externally with rough render and roofed in concrete pantiles, the houses aimed to be sympathetic to the scale and nature of Haddenham's distinct architecture. The project remains the best known of Aldington's work, celebrated as an example of sensitive modern domestic design, adapted to its site, with a complex and varied garden.

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Aldington's ideas about open planning and linking of indoors and outdoors developed further at the Quilter House, Prestwood, 1965-6. This was followed by Diggs Field, Haddenham, 1967-9, designed to suit the southern outlook of the site with a striking room-sized skylight (top right). At the same time Aldington designed a family home for his childhood friend, Brian Wilkinson, in Doncaster.



John Craig joined the practice as a partner in 1970, two important houses at this time demonstrating the versatility of their approach to briefing and design. Anderton House, Goodleigh, Devon (centre right), was constructed on a steep hillside with open views. It was restored between 2000-3 following serious flooding by its new owner, the Landmark Trust, introducing a new audience to the practice's work. Steel-framed Wedgwood House, 1975-8, Higham St Mary, Suffolk (bottom right), enabled Aldington take inspiration from his much admired Mies Van de Rohe's Farnsworth House, saying of the project "the smoothness and precision of that piece of glass was an opportunity to do something different to what we had done up to that time".



The practice also designed groundbreaking doctors' surgeries (right, Chinnor Surgery, Oxfordshire; Wellingbrough Medical Centre), shops and office interiors, and became one of the most influential designers of post-war domestic housing in Britain. Paul Collinge worked in the office as an assistant and associate, before becoming a full partner in 1980. They produced their own version of High Tech in the mid 1980s with the Royal Mail at Hemel Hempstead. During this time Peter was also an External Examiner at Birmingham Polytechnic, Newcastle University, Leicester Polytechnic, Polytechnic of the South Bank and Leeds Polytechnic. He was also asked to speak overseas, including the School of Architecture in Vienna and the Center for Urban Design, Cincinnati and was the British representative on an international study tour of Danish housing.



Later work

In 1986 Aldington retired from the practice. He continued his ethos of linking buildings with their landscape by designing new and remodelling existing gardens for a few, select clients. He designed a conservatory for the Wilkinson House, Doncaster in 1992-3 and acted as design consultant on the shelter for a new pier at Inverie in the Scottish Highlands (right). Between 1975 and 1998 he was Visiting Critic at ten Universities and Polytechnics, including twenty years at Sheffield University School of Architecture. He was Council member for the RIBA (1976-9) and served on the British Architectural Library Committee (1989-93), the RIBA Awards Group (1990-7) and as RIBA representative on the Court of the Royal College of Art (1980-5) and the Housing Design Awards panel (1993-2001). He was also an assessor for many competitions and awards including the Civic Trust Awards (1968) and Landscape Institute Design Awards (1993 & 1995). He joined the English Heritage Post-War Listing Steering Group in 2000 until its dissolution in 2003.



Aldington worked with author Jane Brown and photographer Richard Bryant on the publication 'A Garden and Three Houses' (1999), which tells the story of the three Haddenham dwellings. In 2016 he designed and wrote the book 'Houses: created by Peter Aldington', published by RIBA. Between 2014-17, film makers Murray Grigor and Hamid Shams recorded Aldington's house and garden in Haddenham for a documentary about Turn End, fifty years since its inception.

In 1998, Margaret and Peter Aldington formed Turn End Trust, to promote the integration of building and garden design; enable public access to this and other examples; and, after bequest by the Aldingtons, to conserve and maintain Turn End, its garden and associated buildings. Until recently, Turn End and its garden have been open occasionally for private visits by specialist groups. In the past few years Turn End Trust has sought to extend access to a wider range of visitors by hosting a number of public events relating to aspects of the house and garden. The Trust has a Friends Scheme, aimed to increase opportunities for public appreciation of the site, and to create networks of supporters and volunteers across the community to carry it into the future. In association with Turn End Trust, Peter and Margaret continue to welcome visitors to Turn End.

The complete archive of Aldington, Craig and Collinge, up to Peter's retirement from the Practice in 1986, was donated to the British Architectural Library of the RIBA. It is now in their care.

Sources: *Aldington, Craig and Collinge*, Alan Powers, 2009, RIBA Publishing
A Garden and Three Houses, Jane Brown, 1999, Garden Art Press