

Benedict Read (1945–2016)

BEN READ WAS born in 1945 in Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire, the youngest son of the art historian Herbert Read and the musician Margaret Ludvig. The family soon after moved to Herbert's home county of Yorkshire, giving Ben a strong sense of his own Yorkshire identity, something he inherited from his father, who had a profound influence on his life. Ben was educated at Ampleforth College, and studied classics and English literature at Queen's College, Oxford, followed by a BA at the Courtauld Institute in London.

From 1970 Ben worked as a librarian in the Courtauld's Witt and Conway photographic libraries, and was later appointed Deputy Witt Librarian. Before the internet these photographic libraries were essential resources for art historians and dealers; Ben assisted many visitors not just in navigating the collections, but in giving advice on what might be fruitful avenues of research.

During this time he was also writing what will undoubtedly stand as his magnum opus, *Victorian Sculpture*, published by Yale University Press in 1982. Ben described a conversation he had with his father, when he admitted that he rather liked Victorian sculpture, the kind of art Herbert had spent much of his life attacking. Expecting to be told in no uncertain terms why Victorian art was bad, he was surprised to hear his father encourage him to pursue the subject on the basis that what you like is what you will be best at.

Ben's method of working followed the pattern he established as a student, filling notebooks and card index files with synoptic biographies of the sculptors who made it into the subsequent book. In the 1970s there was no definitive list of Victorian sculptors or their work, and the hostility towards Victorian sculpture at that time meant Ben was almost the only art historian 'who praised the sculptural accomplishments of Victorian artists', as Roberto Ferrari wrote.

Ben was later aggrieved at the implication made by the organisers of the exhibition *Sculpture Victorious* at the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, and Tate Britain, London, in 2015 that his book was little more than an encyclopaedia of greatest hits, to paraphrase Ferrari. But it should be remembered that before its publication there was no substantial work on mainstream Victorian sculpture, and even the names of many sculptors were long forgotten. An element of recovery was necessary before social and political analysis could begin, and in Ben's later writings that analysis did take place.

During the 1970s and 1980s Ben offered Courtauld students a number of pioneering courses on Victorian art. This was a happy time for Ben, when he made many of his closest friends, but the imposition of a new rule at the Courtauld in the late 1980s, which effectively banned ancillary staff from the teaching programme, brought this period to an end.

In 1991 he was appointed a lecturer on the newly established MA in Sculpture Studies programme at Leeds University. Co-founded by Terry Friedman and Anthony Hughes, with funding from the Henry Moore Foundation, this course

intended to study art history from the perspective of sculpture rather than adopt the usual bias towards painting. Also in 1991 he was a founding member of the Public Monuments and Sculpture Association, and between 1997 and 2015 chairman of the *Sculpture Journal's* editorial board.

In 1994 Ben was asked to make an art-historical contribution to the restoration programme for the Albert Memorial in London. His research was subsequently published in the book *The Albert Memorial: Its History, Contexts, and Conservation*, edited by Chris Brooks (2000). He also contributed chapters to *The Houses of Parliament: History, Art, Architecture*, edited by David Cannadine *et al.* (2000), to *The Edwardians: Secrets and Desires*, edited by Anne Gray (2004), and most recently to a comprehensive history of the Royal Academy of Arts in London, due to be published next year. He contributed several reviews to this Magazine.

On a visit to Cyprus in 2006, Ben discovered that a former British colonial administrator on the island named Rupert Gunnis was the same Gunnis who in 1953 had published the first extensive dictionary of British sculptors for the period 1660–1851. In 2008 he took part in the Fourth International Congress on Cypriological Studies in Nicosia, and his paper on Gunnis in Cyprus was published in the conference proceedings. Yet, Ben's interest in art was not confined to Victorian sculpture, and he was frequently asked to write catalogue essays for contemporary artists, including the sculptors Michael Sandle and Nicola Hicks and the painter Clive Head.

Ben had suffered from Type 1 diabetes since early childhood, but it was only in his later years that complications began to cause problems, including a gradual deterioration in his eyesight. He died at his home in London on 20th October 2016.

MICHAEL PARASKOS