

Norman Routledge: community building conservationist

Norman Routledge, who died on 15 November 2025 aged 68, devoted himself to the restoration and repurposing of historic buildings in the Bristol area, breathing new life into community assets that had seen better days. Buildings, for him, were “engines of community, creativity and belonging”, and he consistently put people, whether staff, colleagues or the wider community, at the centre of all he did.

Born in Kenya in 1957, he attended Chipping Sodbury school, outside Bristol, and later trained as an engineer at North Staffordshire Polytechnic before working for Rolls-Royce at Filton, Bristol. His life’s mission as a restorer of old buildings took off after he joined Cannon Security Ltd. in 1991, of which he became Managing Director in 2003 and whose headquarters he transferred to a former Methodist chapel which he helped convert. Norman left the company in 2012 when he set up Bristol Historic Buildings (BHB) with the aim of renovating Kings Weston House, an 18th-century mansion outside Shirehampton designed by the eminent architect and dramatist Sir John Vanbrugh. After acquiring the house from Bristol City Council, Norman converted the ground floor into a venue for events and the top two floors into a communal living space.

With the Kings Weston project underway, he turned his attention to a smaller once-thriving derelict building, Shirehampton’s venerable Lamplighters pub, which, with his business partner Dominic Gundry-White, he brought back into community use in 2014. BHB was later involved with the transformation of St Michael’s on the Mount Without church, close to Bristol city centre, which became a successful events space

From 2019 Norman was also chair of the Shirehampton Public Hall committee which oversaw the stonework restoration of the building where Vaughan Williams’s ‘The Lark Ascending’ had its first public performance. In his various projects for BHB, Norman prided himself on never having bid for external funding and never using volunteers, but employed skilled craftspeople where required and a team of young apprentices whom he trained in practical building skills.

Norman’s final and most challenging project was the restoration of Ashton Court, the huge, dilapidated, Grade-I listed mansion on Bristol’s south-western fringe. For this, he founded Bristol Historic Buildings Trust (BHBT), for which funds were allocated by Bristol Council to renovate and develop a business plan in October 2025. This was following his diagnosis of cancer and was “intended to be his final gift to the city and its people” according to BHBT Trustee Josh Nesfield. He did not live to see it completed, but BHBT has vowed to continue his work on it and “honour [his] legacy by ensuring this project remains rooted in the principles he cared so passionately about.”

“Everything I’ve ever done,” Norman said about his renovation and conservation work, “is the best I can possibly do for the building.” He lamented the opportunities wasted over decades, however, and made no secret of his exasperation with the bureaucracy with which he had to contend.

Norman leaves one daughter, Charlotte, and two grandsons.

Rob Andrews and Richard Coates