

Dawn Morris (1955–2007)

Dorothy Coles

DAWN MORRIS DIED IN JULY after fighting courageously against cancer for eighteen months. All I know about her background is that she was born in Harrogate and always remained proud of her Yorkshire heritage; also that she took a degree in French and German at Leeds University.

She joined the William Morris Society in 1980, and became Membership Secretary in 1987. She was responsible for transferring to computer all our membership records, and at the same time she realised that members who lived far from London wanted some events held closer to their homes. She remedied this as far as the Sheffield area was concerned, by ensuring that almost every year, from 1989 until 2003, our programmes included at least one event based in or near there. These events were always meticulously planned and costed, and invariably showed a profit.

In 1995, amid preparations for the centenary of Morris's death, she decided that the Society ought to possess a banner, and proceeded to provide one. In March of that year, eighteen members met for a weekend at Haworth Youth Hostel, discussed the plan, and made a preliminary design, advised by a representative of a banner-making co-operative whose help Dawn had enlisted. Four further meetings followed, in various parts of the country, at which the work was taken forward, and by the end of the year, the banner was completed, and was featured in the following year's activities in London. Her other contribution to 1996 was Nine Men's Morris, a weekend conference in Sheffield, at which nine workers told us what Morris had meant to their careers. She never tried to set up a separate branch of the Society, but all of the events which she organised were included in the Society's programmes, and everyone was welcome. Always, as well as local members, others would travel long distances in order to join in.

In 2000, the Society replaced its computer. Unfortunately, Dawn was not familiar with the working of the new model chosen, so reluctantly she decided to resign from her post of Membership Secretary, although remaining a member of the main Committee. She and Fiona MacCarthy had met through both being members of the Society, and Dawn had already begun working for Fiona, typing her manuscripts and acting as secretary; work which she carried out for nine years, and which she enjoyed.

One cannot write about Dawn without thinking of her son, William. He was quite young when she became our Membership Secretary, and it showed her expertise as a parent that she felt able to bring him with her to Committee Meetings. Well-supplied with books, coloured pencils and paper, he would sit apart and keep himself busy, seeming to realise that the adults were doing work of importance to them and that he should not interrupt; never once did he cause any trouble. Dawn and William always were very close, and have remained so. Recently he was the greatest support to her during her illness.

Dawn was essentially a craftswoman, who excelled especially at all needlecrafts, and showed great skill in adapting designs such as Morris's 'Tulip and Lily' carpeting to become the pattern for a knitted cardigan, and his 'Daisy' wallpaper pattern to be an embroidery, used as part of the banner. She frequently made her own clothes using modern reproductions of Morris textiles, choosing the blues and greens which set off so well her own striking colouring; her fair skin, deep blue eyes and red-gold hair which waved and curled down her back, uncut since she was thirteen years old. Last year she grieved over losing her hair through chemotherapy; but during her last months it grew again, softly waving, and with its colour bright and undimmed.

Dawn was a strange mixture of the self-confidence which enabled her to undertake single-handed the organising of conferences, and the shyness which led her to avoid speaking at such meetings. Unassuming as she was, she may never have fully realised how strongly she could influence people. The Autumn 1996 Newsletter featured her report on the Centenary Banner, which included the statement: 'I should like to thank the people who took part, especially those who thought that I was mad and that the banner would never be finished, but joined in anyway.' Who else

could have succeeded in enthusing so many members and made them want to take part, even though some of them thought that it 'would never be finished'?

Our sympathy goes to her family, her sister and brothers, and especially to William. We too have suffered a great loss, and we shall miss her in so many ways.