



Obituary

Sonia Crutchlow (1937-2018)

Peter Faulkner

Voluntary societies like The William Morris Society depend a great deal on the extensive work done for them by volunteers, some of whom may be flamboyant characters, but the majority of whom are quietly industrious people who simply get on with the necessary jobs. Sonia Crutchlow was one of these. Her earlier career as a civil engineer involved highway planning and construction; she became the Society's office manager during the early 1980s, and in that capacity succeeded in bringing much-needed order into the running of the Society. (The basement at Kelmscott House was first taken over by the Society in 1983, and fully opened as its new headquarters on 11 April 1987; Christine Poulson was appointed to the post of Curator in January 1988). I greatly appreciated Sonia's work when I was Honorary Secretary of the Society between 1997 and 2006, as I am sure did my predecessor, Derek Baker. Her diverse interests included classical music, yoga, swimming and cycling, as well as gardening: she grew her own vegetables, and enjoyed trips with the Garden History Society, including visits to Italy and Ireland.

Helen Elletson, our valued Curator, was appointed in January 2000 to succeed Christine Poulson, by a committee which included Sonia. Helen records that she worked with Sonia for many years, sharing an office, and that she learnt a great deal from Sonia's 'clear vision and determination'. Sonia served at various times on the Collections, Library and Display Committees, in all of which areas her input was substantial and constructive. She managed the Society's shop, and contributed items from her own practice as needle-worker; Helen remembers having a purse made for her in a Morris material.

The first reference to Sonia in Martin Crick's *The History of the William Morris Society 1955-2005* – published as the result of a proposal to the committee made by Sonia herself in July 2000 – is in relation to the controversial relationship between the Society and the Kelmscott House Trust. Her name is given as recipient of letters from Nick Salmon and Joseph Mirwitch during early 2001, both deploring the position of the Trust as advanced by its Chair, Hans Brill. In August 2001 three new Trustees were appointed, and Sonia took over from Joan South as Secretary; the Trust was then wound up. Sonia was also involved in the Red House Trust, which was established in March 1998, with Sonia as Chair. It was wound down in June 2003, with its mission accomplished. After retiring from the post of office manager, Sonia became Chair of the House and Garden Committee, showing her usual energetic interest in both aspects of that Committee's work. She remained on the House and Garden and CLD committees.

In 2014 the Society received a substantial grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund to refurbish the Society's premises, catalogue its collection and develop a learning programme, in partnership with the Emery Walker Trust. Sonia, who had had a good deal to do with the application to the HLF, characteristically played a major part in relation to the capital works as they were carried out, greatly improving the appearance and the value of our premises. She stepped down from CLD in early 2018, her last formal link with volunteering with us.

Sonia's constructive volunteering was not restricted to The William Morris Society; she was also active at Hampton Court and at Fulham Palace for some twenty-five years, and it is good to know that a garden is to be planted there in her memory. The Society is currently considering making a comparable act of commemoration.