



Obituary

Godfrey Rubens (1925-2019)

Peter Faulkner

Godfrey Rubens was a distinguished architectural historian and early member of the committee of The William Morris Society. He was born in Hampstead in 1925, and served in the Royal Navy during World War II. He studied art at Camberwell College, and during the late 1950s set up the Shepherd Mill Pottery in Hampstead. He was secretary to the editorial board of *Realism: The Journal of the Artists' Group of the Communist Party* in 1955-56, and contributed to several issues. He taught painting and craft, as well as art history, at a number of London colleges, including the Central School of Art, the London College of Printing and the Woolwich School of Art. He was teaching at the Guildford School of Art during the period of student sit-ins and strikes, and was one of a number of teachers dismissed for supporting the students. He then undertook a PhD on William Lethaby at the Bartlett School of Architecture, which led to his most important publications.

Rubens is recorded by Martin Crick in *The History of the William Morris Society* as having sold copies of the *Daily Worker* on the streets with Ray Watkinson – I remember the two men as having been good friends and allies when serving on the committee. Crick also notes that in late 1979 Rubens 'alarmed the committee', who had asked him to survey the archives at Kelmscott House, by reporting that 'there was no inventory of the Society's possessions, totally inadequate storage facilities, and almost non-existent security' (p. 90). Characteristically, he took the lead in rectifying the situation: he was both a scholar and a practical man.

Rubens's publications include an edition of W.R. Lethaby's *Philip Webb and His Work*

(1980) and his masterful *William Richard Lethaby: His Life and Work 1857-1931*, handsomely published, with numerous illustrations, by the Architectural Press in 1986. This is scholarship of the highest quality, enhanced by a powerful prose style. The book runs to ten chapters, covering Lethaby's early life, his architectural and craft practices, his work for the London County Council, his ideas about architectural education, his time at the Royal College of Art, his work at Westminster Abbey and on other old buildings, his ideas as a theorist and his achievement as a writer, and, finally, a Retrospect. The book includes 143 black-and-white illustrations, and concludes with a thorough bibliography of Lethaby's publications, and an index. It is also remarkable for its strikingly fine design. Much later, in 1995, Rubens gave the Kelmscott Lecture on the appropriate subject of 'Morris, Lethaby and the Arts & Crafts', which was unfortunately never published. Rubens lived near Oxford for the last part of his life, and in 2011 published the useful guide-book *The Pre-Raphaelites and Their Friends in Oxford*. Rubens is to be saluted and valued for his contributions both to architectural scholarship and to The William Morris Society.