

# John Brandon-Jones (1909–1999)

The founding of the William Morris Society forty-five years ago owed much to John Brandon-Jones, the architect who died aged 90 on May Day in 1999. He was one of the three people who in 1950 had signed a letter to *The Times* which invited others to join them in setting up a new society to give Morris, and what he stood for, practical application today. The other two signing the letter were Stanley Morison (a leading typographer) and Nikolaus Pevsner. From this lead, the Society grew steadily and by the centenary of Morris's death, which was celebrated in 1996, it had 2,000 members in most parts of the world – people whose interests were artistic, literary or political, often all three together.

John Brandon-Jones's initiatives and hard work in the William Morris Society in the 1950s and 1960s played a key part in helping to establish the Society, drew in other people, and spread the word about Morris. John was of course well-known elsewhere and was active in the Art Workers' Guild, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings and the Victorian Society. Many joint events were (and still are) held bringing ourselves and members of these bodies together. He helped to introduce architects of a younger generation to the work of Philip Webb and the Arts & Crafts movement. This included those who had worked for the new local authorities from the end of the nineteenth century, and had designed social housing, schools and fire stations in London and other cities. Many of these buildings are still in good shape and in use today.

Active in the architects' offices from the 1920s, John made a link with colleagues who had been working with the Arts & Crafts movement. Thus his experience of their approach to building design was one he was able to pass on in his own work and to younger architects in the second half of the twentieth century. This was done in the style expressed so well by Andrew Saint in *The Guardian* earlier this year when he wrote that 'John's gently drawling voice, tinged with irony, was to be heard dispensing (between pinches of snuff) a fund of architectural anecdote or succinct practical sense'. In 1996 he had entranced the William Morris Society with his reminiscences of Sydney Cockerell who had befriended him as a young man.

Some of John's most exciting architectural discoveries were unexpected. During the 1939-45 war, he was posted to the very far north and was ordered to visit a large house in the Orkneys as a possible base for the naval top brass. He was most impressed by the handsome stone building he saw. After some detective work he found that it was Melsetter House and had been designed by Lethaby in 1898. John always recommended everyone to try to visit this house at least once in their life.

*John Kay*