

Ted Hollamby (1921–1999)

Ray Watkinson

On the twenty-first of January, at Eltham, with a service conducted by Barbara Smoker of the Humanist Society, there took place the funeral of the man who we must think of as the founding father of the William Morris Society – Ted Hollamby, who died, suddenly, at the age of seventy-eight, on the 29th of December 1999. The Society was represented, and Doris and her family supported, by Sonia Crutchlow and Derek Baker.

It was from Red House in 1955 that the famous letter was sent to the *Times*, over the signatures of Nikolaus Pevsner, Stanley Morrison, John Brandon-Jones, Robin Page Arnot, Graeme Shankland and Edmund Penning-Rowse. Sir Sydney Cockerell, once William Morris's secretary, became our first President, Graeme Shankland our first Secretary, and Freeman Bass our first – most idiosyncratic! – Treasurer. Of these, only Edmund Penning-Rowse is still with us.

Over the forty years since, Ted and Doris Hollamby made thousands welcome to this historic house, first home of William and Jane Morris, in which their two daughters were born, which was designed by Philip Webb, and which, in April 1952, became the Hollamby's home.

Ted was born in Hammersmith, where still in his childhood, as in Walthamstow, the memory of Morris was strong, and where was set up the Hammersmith School of Building with the School of Art – of which in the 1930s Ted Hollamby became a student. In this very special School came together the teachings of Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement that flowed from his work, and the Modern Movement. Here Ted became a student member of MARS – the Modern Architectural Research Group, as did many other young architects of the immediate pre-WWII years, for whom the fame of Gropius was joined to that of Morris.

During the war, Ted served in the Marines. Returned to civilian life and the practice of architecture, he worked for a while for the Miners' Welfare Commission; then moved to the regenerated Architects' Department of the London County Council under Leslie Martin – from which he moved to become Borough Architect of his native place, Hammersmith, in 1962.

For some time the Hollambys lived in St. Peter's Square, not far from Kelmscott House, alongside friends Dick and Mary Toms. In 1952 they learned that Red House, empty after some years of occupation by the Borough, was for sale. They lost no time in going to look it over, and within the month were installed there, with the Toms family. So began the long years of fulfilling life and work – bringing the house into repair, tending the gardens, inviting folk to visit and pay honour to Webb and Morris who had created it in 1859.

Over the years, more and more visitors have enjoyed the house and its garden, due to the hospitality of the Hollambys. Hundreds of members of the WMS have thus been able to see and study the place where Morris and Janey and the girls spent five of their happiest years, and where every other year for a long while we have held a Garden Party.

Over the past dozen years the Society has worked with the Hollambys to set up the Red House Trust. The aim of this body is to ensure that in the future the house shall continue to be cared for, to be open to the public, and a living presence – not just a memorial to Morris. It will inevitably be also a memorial to Ted and Doris, its rediscoverers and rescuers, and there from year to year the Society will remember that here we were born. Thanks to Ted and Doris.