

Nicholas Salmon (1957–2001)

Peter Faulkner

The death of Nicholas Salmon at the early age of 44 has deprived William Morris studies of one of its most energetic and wide-ranging scholars, and the Society of one of its most colourful characters. Those who knew Nick will have vivid memories of his stocky figure, his untrimmed hair, his all-weather shorts, and above all the range of his knowledge and his abounding enthusiasms. After obtaining a BA in English at the University of East Anglia he went on to an MA in Victorian Studies at the University of Leicester. While he was at Leicester he contracted ME, and this makes the range of his subsequent achievements all the more remarkable. From Leicester, Nick went on to the University of Reading, where he wrote his Ph.D dissertation 'William Morris: the Political Vision 1883–1890'. His extensive research on the Socialist periodicals *Justice* and *Commonweal* was to provide the basis for much of his subsequent published work, but the title of the thesis was perhaps misleading, as one of Morris's strongest appeals to Nick lay in the extraordinary breadth of his interests, and the fact that his vision was so inclusive.

In 1993 Nick was one of the applicants for the Society's Peter Floud Memorial Prize, of which he proved a worthy winner. He soon became an active member of the Society, being elected to the committee in 1994 and enlivening meetings with the force of his enthusiasm as well as his passion for accuracy – few minute keepers could present a record in which his keen eye could detect no flaw. In 1994 his scholarship began to bear public fruit, when the Thoemmes Press of Bristol brought out the first part of their William Morris Library, which began with his hefty and important volume *William Morris. Political Writings. Contributions to Justice and Commonweal 1883–1890*. This made available for the first time a wide range of Morris's contributions to the Socialist periodicals and has become a valuable source for later Morris scholars. It was followed in the Morris Centenary year 1996 by the equally substantial and valuable *William Morris. Journalism. Contributions to Commonweal 1885–90*. In the same remarkable year he also produced *The William Morris Chronology*, a wonderfully informative work undertaken with Derek Baker, and *William Morris on History*, which he edited for Sheffield Academic Press in a series of which he was General Editor. He also acted as advisor on the political aspect for the Morris Centenary Exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum, contributing a typically forceful essay, 'The Political Activist', to the Catalogue edited by Linda Parry.

In the same year Nick became editor of the Society's *Journal*, which he remained for five years; he always maintained a high standard of scholarship and included a wide range of material, making special efforts to encourage first-time contributors. It seems fitting that he contributed his 'Catalogue of Articles in *The Journal* (1961–2000)' to the last edition that he edited. Anyone who saw his marginal annotations to submitted material had lively evidence of both his wit and his scholarship. An enthusiast for the democratic potential of the internet, he

cooperated in setting up a website making widely available Morris's political writings, another very important source for future scholars.

Nick's interests were by no means restricted to Morris matters. While at Leicester, he began compiling material on the history of Amersham, where he lived. This was to result in publications like *Yesterday's Town: Amersham* in 1991 and a centenary history of Amersham Hospital, and in his generous encouragement of many local historians, particularly through his association with the Amersham Museum. In 1997 Nick and Bridget bought a cottage (some might have called it a ruin) at Darshill near Shepton Mallett with its surrounding woodlands, and proceeded to restore it along conservationist lines, joining the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings in the process. Characteristically, in view of his commitment to the idea of community, Nick became chair of the Darshill and Bowlish Conservation Society in 2001.

The Introduction to Nick's 1994 *Political Writings* concludes, 'although Morris failed to convince his contemporaries of the need for social revolution, his work stands as a testament to his implacable belief that there must be a better future for mankind'. Those of us who knew Nick were aware in him of a similar implacable idealism and commitment to humanity. Fortunately, the writings that Nick published are there to remind us of his scholarship and his idealism, and the Society also hopes to bring out further publications from the writings which he left behind.