

Lionel Selwyn (1928–2001)

Peter Faulkner

Among the sadnesses of the Society's year was the death of one of its longest-serving and most active members, Lionel Selwyn. Lionel was a Londoner and a craftsman, born in Kilburn and educated at Kilburn Grammar School and the London College of Printing, and spending his working life in the printing trade, with his father's firm, the Oxford Printing Co., based in Soho. His courageous pacifist views led him to refuse National Service; he served a three-month prison sentence, and then worked on the land in Ireland for two years. His political idealism led him into the Socialist Party of Great Britain, of which he was a member from 1945 to 1990, and he was responsible among other things for the redesigning of the Party's monthly journal, *The Socialist Standard*. He joined the William Morris Society in the year of its foundation, 1955, and became an active member. His practical contributions to the Society came in the form of his consistent and bracing advice on typography – it is to Lionel that we owe to a large extent the quality of the programmes, letter-headings and publications of the Society in recent years – and as a member, and later Chair, of the Programme Committee, responsible for arranging all the Society's public events. Under Lionel's leadership the programme was lively and varied, and meticulously planned. But above all his contribution was on the human level. He could always be relied upon to be present, quietly in the background, and to undertake those backroom activities that make public events possible. I remember in particular the delicious buffet meals after the Kelmscott Lectures of the nineties, and Lionel's smiling pleasure in the fellowship of such occasions. It says much for his vigour and enterprise that he took up cooking only after his retirement, but became a real expert, able to provide for such splendid public occasions, as well as for numerous more private ones. For he was very much a family man, having married Brenda in 1962 and having three children, Peter, Catherine and Alice, as well as two grandchildren, Martha and Daniel. Our condolences go out to the whole family.

Lionel was a man of great intellectual range and curiosity, with a wide knowledge of history, literature and music, which he was generous in sharing with anyone in whom he found a comparable enthusiasm. Thus many members of the Society, like myself, will remember with continuing pleasure their conversations with him. His contributions to discussions were always well informed and good humoured, as were his contributions to work on the Society's committee. It was on the committee that I mostly encountered him, and I came to see him as a beacon of common sense, remaining steady when others might take extreme positions, a reminder to us in his behaviour and attitude of the equal recognition of others' points of view that marks the true democrat. Lionel had the ideal background for a Morrisian, in a skilled trade that Morris himself practised. He also had the attitude that I would like to ascribe to Morrisians, of really thinking in a fair way about the good of the Society, and not of personalities. His service to the Society continued to the end. He agreed to become a member of the Kelmscott

House Trust in 1999, despite not being in robust health and surely out of a sense of duty. At meetings of the Trust, he continued to behave with the dignity, moderation and good humour that for me were his essential characteristics. He will be – already is – greatly missed.