

SIR NIKOLAUS PEVSNER

In the death of Sir Nikolaus Pevsner we have lost—we, the members of the William Morris Society particularly—an honoured friend who was also a world-famous figure: one with whom thousands not only of artists, architects, art historians, but of the general public had been made familiar by two monumental enterprises: the *Pelican History of Art*, launched thirty years ago under his editorship; and the *Buildings of England*, which covered this country county by county, town by town, building by building: to some, though, and surely to many members of this Society, he was perhaps best known for his *Pioneers of Modern Design* and the succession of related studies that followed it, in which he drew attention as nobody had for years, to the stature of Morris as a designer.

A membership now growing to be world-wide includes many who have special debts to him in the fields of art and architectural history and their search for Morris. Sir Nikolaus came here nearly fifty years ago, one of the many refugees from what had become Hitler's Germany. He came already learned in matters English, and more knowledgeable than ourselves about our design history of the last century, with William Morris clearly perceived as the most significant figure of that age, as the greatest designer, but also as the inspirer, with Philip Webb, of modern, functional thinking. Others have laboured since in the field then newly ploughed, and all have been and remain in Nikolaus Pevsner's debt.

He was, of course, one of the three—the others were John Brandon-Jones and the late Stanley Morison—who, on behalf of the recently formed and then tiny William Morris Society, signed the *Times* letter of 13th September 1955, which invited 'those who believe with us that Morris's life and teachings have value to Britain and the world today' to join that society which, founded in October 1953 by a meeting of enthusiasts at Red House, had by April 1956 a membership of one hundred and eleven—with two Honorary Members and two in the USA. We have grown tenfold since then, and at all times the Society has been generously served and advised by Sir Nikolaus, in whose Bloomsbury office the Committee met for a good many years, often under his urbane chairmanship.

Though in recent years housebound by illness and unable to come to any of our gatherings, he never lost his links with and concern for the Society. When he became incapacitated and it became clear that the affairs of Kelmscott House demanded a more active Trustee, he readily acceded to my request to resign as Trustee and there begins another saga. All will be saddened at his going.

Hans Brill, Chairman