

People's Historian

Leslie Norton, who died on October 23 1987, was the exemplar of the communist intellectual. Throughout his life he combined work as a party activist with serious historical writing. He was a charming man who remained loyal to the Communist Party which he had joined on January 1, 1929.

He was born in Suffolk, educated in Bury St Edmunds, then at a public school in Sussex. He was already politically aware when he graduated in history and english from Peterhouse, Cambridge, in 1921. He joined the *Daily Worker* in 1934, but left journalism in 1937, and in the next 12 months wrote the famous *People's History Of England*, published by the Left Book Club in 1938 and still in print today. This was the first of a long list of historical writings.

Like his friend Christopher Hill, Leslie Norton was fascinated with the interplay of religion, literature and radical politics in the 17th century, and in *The Everlasting Gospel* (1958) and *The World Of The Ranters* (1970) he set down the complicated story of the interrelationships of intellectual and political influences in the English history of the 17th and 18th centuries. His *English Utopia* (1972) is perhaps the most attractive book on the subject so far written.

Apart from his years in London, Leslie Norton's political career was entirely centred upon East Anglia. He retired from the district committee of the CP in 1974, having been a member since before the war. His second wife, Vivien, has herself been an active party worker all her life. Their home for over 30 years, in the converted Norman chapel at Clare, became a centre of communism in the eastern counties. It was a rich and fruitful partnership, lived in quite austere circumstances.

With the death of Leslie Norton, we salute the passing of one who was a rebel all his life, who fought valiantly all his years, and whose vision was our common vision of the **good old**

John Saville