

# Useful and Beautiful

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"Kelmescott Manor," a woodblock print by Yoshiko Yamamoto illustrating Chapter 31 of *News from Nowhere*.

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## 2021 FELLOWSHIP AWARDS

One of the most rewarding aspects of the William Morris Society in the US is the opportunity to support scholarly, artistic, and social projects that engage with the legacy of William Morris. The Awards committee had a difficult task, and we thank all of those that applied. It was a privilege to learn more about your work.



Jade Hoyer

The 2021 Joseph R. Dunlap Memorial Fellowship has been awarded to Jade Hoyer, Assistant Professor of Art at Metropolitan State University in Denver, with a project entitled *Morris & Co Wallpaper as Educational and Artistic Resource*. This work engages her dual roles as an educator and printmaking artist. She will create two portfolios of teaching materials that offer an introduction to William Morris and repeat pattern making for university-level studio art students, from beginning students to advanced printmaking students. Second, she will create a body of work, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, an exploration into contemporary gender roles through the creation of wallpaper and a photobook stylistically inspired by Morris's wallpaper works.

Jade writes, "As an educator-artist at an institution devoted to promoting access to education and whose artwork addresses questions of social justice, I was particularly excited that the Joseph Dunlap Memorial Fellowship this year will emphasize social justice. This award will be able to offer supplemental artistic opportunities to deserving art students and support my own artistic endeavors promoting social justice. In *News from Nowhere*, Morris spoke of the potential for art being demanded of and enjoyed by all. My project supports this endeavor."

In addition, we have awarded two William Morris Society Fellowships: to Jennifer Rabedeau, a Ph.D. student in English at Cornell University, for research for her dissertation, "Medieval Afterlives: Ornament and Empire in Victorian Britain," which will explore the relationship between Morris's designs and medieval manuscripts; and to Jeff Kasper of the University of Massachusetts and Sben Korsh of the University of Michigan for "Design Activism Workshop on William Morris," a curriculum for a studio art course to be taught at University of Massachusetts.

Congratulations to all!

## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT:

Dear William Morris Society Members:

It has been an honor to serve as the Society's President this past year. When we gathered in Seattle in January 2020 at the Modern Language Society no one could imagine that just a few weeks later the first case of Covid would be reported from a long term care facility in that wonderful city. Despite the hardships and difficulties of this year, the Society has remained strong. This is due to your support as members as well as the work of a dedicated and strong Board of Directors. Thanks are extended to all of you for your continued support and commitment to the Society. Thanks to Paul Acker, Meghan Freeman, Maureen Meister, Morna O'Neill, and Florence Boos, who are retiring from the Board, and welcome to Monica Bowen, Jude Nixon, and Adrienne Sharpe, who are joining us.

Due to many changes in access to programs associated with both MLA and CAA, we did not hold an open social hour during MLA, but did promote our virtual visit to the Grolier Club and our Membership Meeting in February to all our members, and are glad for the many members who attended these. At the Membership Meeting it will be an opportunity to thank retiring Board members and to welcome new members. Regular Board meetings will commence in March of 2021 and we welcome the leadership of Michael Robertson as President during our 50th anniversary year!

Below are highlights of our work this past year:

- Our January sessions at MLA were outstanding. We offered two sessions with speakers that engaged and challenged our perspectives on Morris: *Reevaluating the Pre-Raphaelites* and *Écosocialism and the Late Victorians*.
- We were delighted to partner with the Book Club of Washington to sponsor an afternoon symposium and reception on January 11th which featured a number of local scholars presenting on Arts & Crafts architecture and furniture in the Pacific Northwest, the work of Dard Hunter, as well as the work of the Arts & Crafts Press, located in Tacoma, Washington.
- We planned a Symposium (for March 2020) with the Yale Center for British Art in association with the exhibition *Victorian Radicals: From the Pre-Raphaelites to the Arts and Crafts Movement*. Like so many events this past year, it was cancelled due to COVID, but we were delighted with the interest and response from so many and will continue to seek opportunities like this in the coming year.
- Under the thoughtful leadership of Florence Boos, we continue to produce a high quality publication *Useful & Beautiful*, full of outstanding scholarly articles, news and information. In addition, Morna O'Neill has continued to send an electronic newsletter on a monthly basis to share updates about the Society. A new feature of our electronic newsletter is the member spotlight. It has been great to learn more about our members and we look forward to continuing this feature.
- We have sought partnerships and affiliations with several organizations and are delighted to now be affiliated with the College Art Association (CAA). We are excited to offer a

robust program on William Morris at CAA this February and develop new connections with scholars of art and art history.

- We also affiliated with The Fellowship of American Bibliophilic Societies. FABS is an association of American book clubs whose members seek interaction with book collectors across the country and around the world.
- We have strengthened our relationship with the UK Morris Society and we are actively working with our British colleagues to support a symposium (to be held in London) focused on the 130th Anniversary of the Kelmscott Press in November 2021.
- We have embarked on a redesign of our web site and selection of a new membership portal. We are excited to launch the new site and membership services in early 2021.
- We have worked to streamline the management of the Society. The Board has worked hard over the year to update our financial records, streamline our internal record processing and complete a revision of our by-laws.
- In response to the significant social justice movements this summer, we issued a Black Lives Matter statement on our web site, and this year's call for applications for the Dunlap Fellowship invited projects dealing with Morris and social justice

Like many organizations, we are taking first steps in developing remote programs. In December we offered a Zoom event on "Teaching *News from Nowhere* in a Pandemic," featuring two teachers and five students. We are excited about offering sessions at MLA and CAA and hosting a virtual visit to the Grolier Club in New York this winter. We are currently planning more events so stay tuned.

In June, we will be sponsoring, along with the UK and Canadian Morris Societies, an *International Kelmscott Press Day* that will celebrate the beauty and artistry of the Press. We look forward to libraries and museums worldwide joining together to display their Kelmscott books with pride.

In conclusion, 2021 is also a landmark year for the William Morris Society in the United States. We are celebrating our 50th anniversary! Founded in 1971, the Society has for the last fifty years supported programs, scholarship and events that celebrate the legacy of William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement. With an updated web page and membership portal, collaboration with our UK Society and a number of programs and publications planned, we are well positioned for the next fifty years! We will mark our 50th anniversary with the publication of a special hand printed keepsake designed by Jessica Spring of the Springtide Press in Tacoma. We recognize and thank those of you that have served the Society over the years.

The future looks bright, even golden, for the Society as we celebrate our 50th anniversary!

Thank you once again.

Sincerely,

Jane A. Carlin





Carving the wood blocks is a slow, laborious process. Each color to be printed needs its own carved block.  
“Kelmescott Manor,” a woodblock print by Yoshiko Yamamoto as reproduced on the cover.

## THE ART & CRAFT OF PRINTING: OUR 25-YEAR JOURNEY

*Yoshiko Yamamoto*

It's been over a century since William Morris was laid to rest under the rustic headstone at St. George, the quiet medieval churchyard in the village of Kelmescott. I made a pilgrimage there four years ago with my then-80-year-old mother, leaving London in a rented car, driving sometimes on the wrong side of the road, roughly following the winding pathway of the Thames. We took our time, stopping several times to visit delightful small hamlets until finally, after several days, we reached our destination, our journey's end.

With Kelmescott Manor in eyesight, the gentle hills of the Cotswolds around us, and the willowed banks of the Thames nearby, I looked for the headstone in the graveyard. I nearly missed it; it was almost lost in the shadows, the sun having sunk low behind the trees. But there it was, sitting alone, so quiet, so simple, so much in contrast to how voluble and energetic “Topsy” had been while alive. On the headstone, just his and Jane's names carved into the broad stone with their dates. It speaks not a word to the casual passerby of his achievements in literature, decorative arts, architecture, politics, historic preservation, environmentalism, printing and publishing. I stood there looking at the headstone, thinking how the muddy flow of the nearby Thames was, in a way, constantly carrying away the memory of the river, worried that the muddy flow of history might be in the same way washing away those great achievements of this amazing human being.

And today, I'm sitting here in our home studio in Tacoma, Washington, looking out in the direction of where I should be able to see Mt. Rainier, writing about our own journey, the twenty-five-year journey that my husband Bruce and I have spent working at our private press, The Arts & Crafts Press. This endeavor was directly influenced by the ideas and idealism of William Morris. As the River Thames was always the source of inspiration for Morris, I try to look out every day to this volcanic mountain that I love. With its elegant, gleaming, white peaks, when it reveals itself to me, it so reminds me of my own country's iconic mountain, Fuji-san.

As it is in England, the summer here in the Pacific Northwest is usually cool, crisp, and beautiful. It feels luxurious to be working in our home studio, surrounded by the tall, ancient Douglas firs and western red cedars. But our northwest earthly paradise is not immune to climate change, and as I write this, the entire west coast has been covered in a thick blanket of smoke from the unprecedented wildfires that have been burning for weeks. In our Tacoma neighborhood, summer ended abruptly when the plume of smoky clouds descended upon us; like a nuclear spring, everything suddenly turned dark, cold and damp. With our daily uncertainty, posed by politics, climate change, and the lingering COVID-19, I look out the window in vain. Mt. Rainier has been hidden behind the thick smoke since the start of the massive fires. Is this another metaphor for our times? Morris's cautionary words keep ringing in my mind, his call to us to "face the latest danger which civilization is threatened with,... a danger that the strongest and wisest of mankind, in striving to attain to a complete mastery over nature, should destroy her simplest and widest-spread gifts..."<sup>1</sup>

Inside the studio, my mind is turned back to Morris's England, specifically the scenes from his utopian novel, *News from Nowhere*. Here on my worktable are photographs, maps, and sketches I made during my trip to Kelmscott Manor and the Cotswolds. For nearly twenty-five years now I have gone back to this book for inspiration and have always been amazed by its relevance to today, even albeit the absence of the successful socialist revolution that was projected in the book. I've long wanted to turn his romantic, eco-utopian vision into something that more people could envision and enjoy. A children's book, perhaps? Or a compilation of key scenes from the book I could illustrate? I have wondered about this, only recently finally deciding to do a single illustration for each chapter of the book. I have these materials gathered around me to work out the thumbnail sketches for what will become block prints.

I have so far finished a one-color woodblock print for Chapter 31, showing Kelmscott manor in the full glory of summer, attempting to capture what Morris described as "heaven on

earth." He wrote "... the garden between the wall and the house was redolent of the June flowers... The blackbirds were singing their loudest, the doves were cooing on the roof ridge, the rooks in the high elm-trees beyond were garrulous among the young leaves, and the swifts wheeled whining about the gables. And the house itself was a fit guardian for all the beauty of this heart of summer."<sup>2</sup> This bucolic image is a stark contrast to the dystopian streetscape outside my window in Tacoma today.

My work is slow. From the thumbnails, I create full-size drawings, which I then trace onto a block of wood. Then it takes hours to carve all the wood blocks necessary to produce a single multi-colored block print. And more hours to print. For each color, I have to hand crank the sheet of paper through the press. Thus, a print run of two hundred, each print with twelve colors, means I have to actually do twenty-four hundred imprints for that single artwork. But I have always enjoyed the steady, rhythmic pace of the work. I cannot rush it; it has to be done with care. For illustrating *News from Nowhere*, I'll be producing over thirty woodblock prints, some color, and some black-and-white. This is much grander in scale than any other project I have done recently. Personally, for me, I see this as a culmination of our work of twenty-five years at The Arts and Crafts Press. It's of course an homage to Morris, but more than that, it is a quest to do my part to raise awareness of these existential problems we humans are facing today.

In this essay, I want to take you on a quick tour of our Morris-inspired printing studio, from its inception through its various iterations to this day. I'm hoping that this will give you a sense of the reality of running a small letterpress business in this digital age. But I want this to be more than a record of our work; I hope this might help us consider the relevancy that Morris's idealism has for today. Talking about our own experiment and evaluating both the success and failure in our craft-based business, I would love to see it open a discussion about how viable handcraft and human labor will be treated as in the next century, should we survive this one.

Before we begin the tour, to clarify, let me write upfront that Bruce and I always saw ourselves, our studio, the work we do, as part of the Arts and Crafts Movement that began with Morris and Ruskin in late nineteenth century Victorian England. For us, it was not just a design aesthetic; we saw the Movement as a vibrant force that attempted to address the problems caused by the Industrial Revolution. Further, we saw our work at the Press as not just being influenced by the historic movement, but as an extension of it, propelled by its impulse, propelled by the question of what it means to work with our hands today, this day, now.

It has always been for us about ideals, tempered by economics, and about working at our craft, often cooperatively with others, as a means to achieve an art that has a vision about how life might be lived. And like the historic movement that spread and

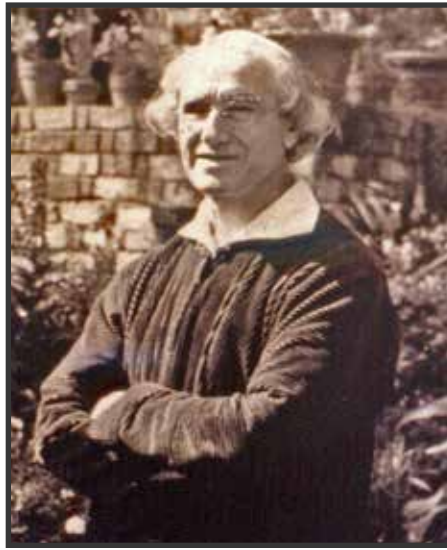


Woodblock print, "Rainier - Mazama Ridge," by Yoshiko Yamamoto.

adapted to the cultural background of each country, the Vienna Werkstatte in Austria, the Craftsman movement in America, the *Mingei* folkcraft movement in Japan, our own path has been far from linear. It was, to put it nicely, organic and complex. Or should we say, simply messy?

In 1996, we founded The Arts & Crafts Press in Berkeley, California, in order to letterpress-print and hand-bind a periodical about the Movement we called *The Tabby*.<sup>3</sup> On the side, we also created posters, greeting cards, booklets, and broadsides, and eventually block prints that would in the end become the main focus of our work. Our aesthetics were strongly influenced by the work we loved from the historic movement, the designs of Morris, Arthur Wesley Dow, Dard Hunter, Will Bradley, Arthur and Lucia Mathews, C. F. A. Voysey, just to name a few of the many we studied. We were also researching and writing about the Movement, along with editing and publishing what others were writing. Bruce also kept busy organizing lecture series, both locally and nationally, as he encouraged others in their research.

From early on, Bruce was the mastermind behind the Press. He was a superb researcher and editor, and was particularly great at organizing and planning. He also did the bookkeeping, writing, editing, securing subscribers and soliciting articles and advertisers for *The Tabby*, along with designing and laying out the publications we issued. In the beginning, with a two-person operation like ours, there was always much too much to be done. His passion though was always about crafting with words. I, on the other hand, since childhood have loved working with my hands. So naturally I was the one who took on learning the craft



Charles Sumner Greene, (c. 1920)  
at his home and studio in Carmel, CA.

of printing and hand-bookbinding, along with producing the artwork we needed for our publications and greeting cards.

I was exposed early on to the world of craft. I grew up in Tokyo where my family had an old-fashioned construction company employing traditional carpenters. The happiest time of my childhood was spent in the sawdust among those older carpenters whom I called “Uncle so and so.” They were extraordinarily skillful, able to turn out pieces of thinly-planed wood, one after another, at a steady pace, never rushed, never in a hurry. Whenever I was bored at home, I’d run to the carpenter’s workshop, staying there among the sawdust until my mother or sister would come to drag me back home.

We, Bruce and I, balanced each other well. Whether working on writing assignments or letterpress publishing, we have always been a great yin-yang team. In 1859 John Ruskin wrote that “Fine art is that in which the hand, the head, and the heart of man go together.”<sup>4</sup> Ruskin would have approved of our collaboration, uniting our heads, hearts and hands, helping us create something larger than what we could ever have achieved alone.

Growing up, neither Bruce nor I knew anything about the Arts and Crafts Movement. Our discovery of it, the historical movement, all started one afternoon in Carmel, California in 1989. We were working then as freelance writers, newly relocated to California from Tokyo. My older sister, Hideko, was in California also, researching for her master’s thesis on the Japanese influence on the architectural work of Charles and Henry Greene. Their refined Japonesque bungalows, designed at the turn-of-the-twentieth century by the two brothers, mostly



Exterior of Charles Greene Studio.



Front entry of The Gamble House (1908) Pasadena, California, designed by Greene & Greene. Photograph by Bruce Smith.



Bernard Maybeck's Albert Schneider house (1907), Berkeley, California.  
Photography by Bruce Smith.



View from the Berkeley Hills, looking towards the San Francisco Bay.

for wealthy clients in Pasadena, California, have been counted as the highest achievement of Arts and Crafts architecture in America.

One June morning of that year, Bruce and I climbed into our old Volvo and drove north from where we were then living in Central California to take Hideko to visit the Carmel home and studio of the older of the two brothers, Charles Sumner Greene. Charles was of course long gone by then, but his son, Thomas Gordon "Did" Greene, an elderly man then of about seventy, was still living in that incredible home that his father had designed as a studio for his art and meditation. When we arrived, the summer fog stubbornly hung low around the Monterey pine and cypress treetops, lingering just above the reddish, terra-cotta-tiled roof of the studio.

**Art & The Arts and Crafts Movement in America**

*The Fall 1999 Lecture Series organized by The Arts & Crafts Guild of Northern California*

**Wednesday, September 8th**  
*Arthur Wesley Dow and the Arts & Crafts Movement by Nancy Green and Arthur Wesley Dow's influence upon American Art. Pottery by Jessie Poesch*

**Thursday, October 28th**  
*When Art was Front Page News: Art & Artists in Early California by Birgitta Hjalmarsen*

**Thursday, November 18th**  
*The Art of Will Bradley by David Elliott*

All lectures at 7:30 pm at the College Avenue Presbyterian Church, 5951 College Avenue (Julia Morgan 1918) near the Rockridge Bart in Oakland.

A notice for one of the lecture series organized by The Arts & Crafts Guild of Northern California in the late 1990s.

Once inside the thick stucco walls of the studio, Did Greene greeted us and laid out for us a treasure trove of the tools, reference books, photographs, little sketches, notes and scribbled poems, that the reclusive architect had left behind. He then brought out a teak chair, beautifully polished, that had been hand-built by his father. We stood back, admiring it, keeping a respectful distance. Did laughed and said, "Go ahead, touch it. Feel the wood," adding that his father couldn't keep his hands off the wood, that he was always rubbing it, feeling its soft curves, almost caressing it. He next opened a drawer and took out the simple wooden molds that Charles had carved for his children to use to press floral patterns into the soft plaster of the walls. Like folk art, these had been used to create a simple, crude beauty, very much in contrast to the lustrous teak chair we had just felt.

The afternoon wore on quickly, and near the end of this, the first of many visits we made to the architect's home and studio, I remember standing in front of a hand-crafted, wood-paneled interior door, admiring a geometric pattern that Charles had started carving on it. It was only halfway complete, his pencil and chalk marks still on it showing where he was going to



Starting with the Chandler & Price clamshell press we acquired a collection of more than a dozen old letterpress printing presses over two decades. This beauty with its graceful curved flywheel is a Gordon clamshell from the early 1900s.

**Wake!** for the Golden Cat has  
put to flight  
The Mouse of Darkness  
with his Paw of Light:  
Which means, in Plain and  
simple every-day  
Unoriental Speech—The Dawn  
is bright.

Oliver Herford, 1904  
*The Rubaiyat of a Persian Kitten*

# THE TABBY

**A Chronicle of  
The Arts & Crafts  
Movement**

**U**sing this French  
mold-made paper  
called Lana Laid, and  
this typeface, Hiroshige,  
the first issue of *The  
Tabby* will be published  
this coming September  
by the Arts & Crafts Press,  
Berkeley.

FIVE HUNDRED COPIES OF THIS BROADSIDE  
WERE PRINTED AT THE CONCOURSE EXHIBI-  
TION CENTER, SAN FRANCISCO, IN AUGUST OF  
1996, OF WHICH THIS IS NUMBER

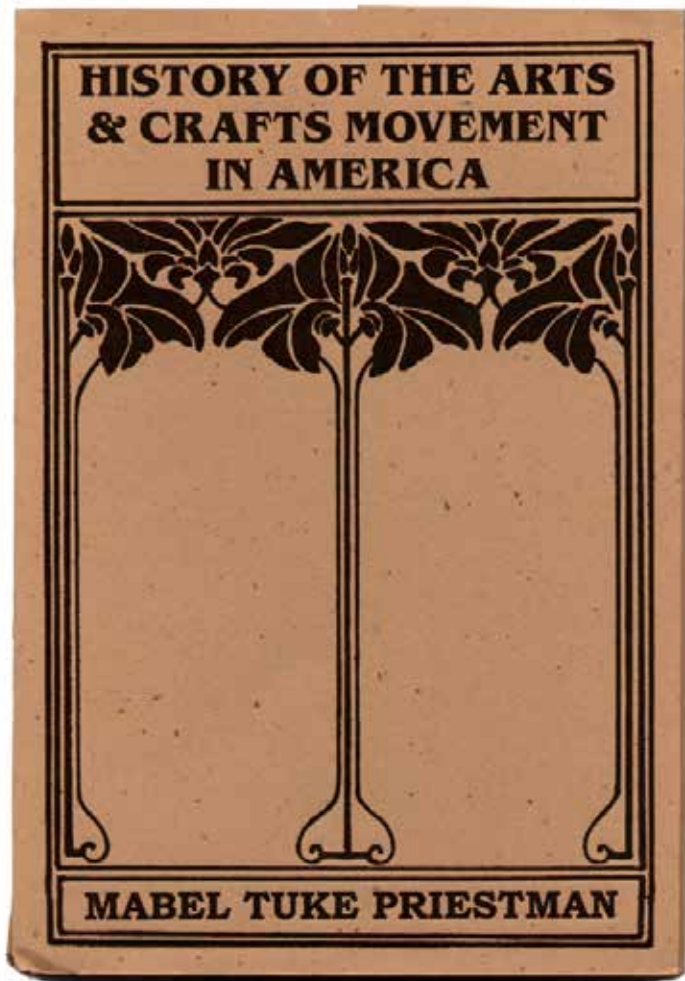
carve next. It looked as though he might walk in there that very afternoon to complete his unfinished work. It was a final touch to a magical space, one where we could feel the presence of this inspired architect. I remember on our way back home, with my sister asleep as we drove the winding, rugged Highway 1, Bruce and I talked endlessly, fascinated by this architect, this style of architecture, his crafted art.

We were hooked. We immediately went on to research more. Heading south this time, this time without Hideko, we visited the Greene and Greene Archives at the Huntington Library. One of the many things we pulled out of the archival boxes was a 1902 letter where Charles had written to one of his clients "...I am in thorough sympathy with the Wm Morris movement, in fact the whole inside of the house is influenced by it in design."<sup>5</sup> Wearing white cotton archival gloves, with a short yellow pencil in hand, we looked at the letter and wondered: What did he mean by that? The William Morris movement?



Linoleum block print of the Arts & Crafts Press printing studio in Berkeley, by Yoshiko Yamamoto. In the window, standing guard in his usual spot, is our shop cat, Ruskin

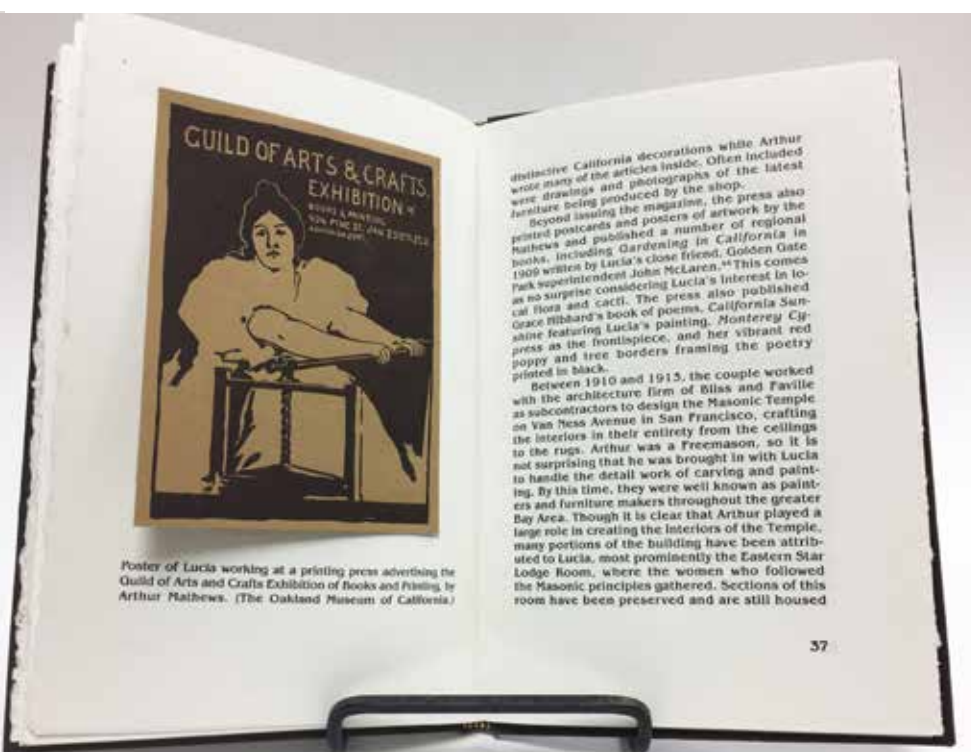
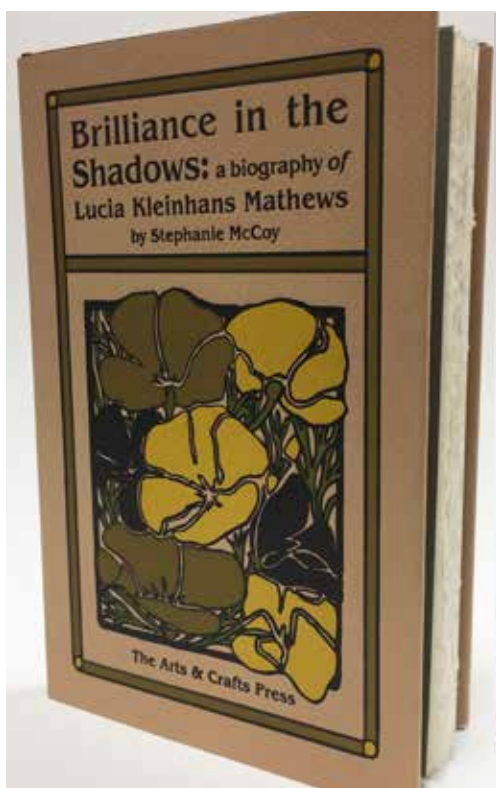




One of the first chapbooks printed at the Press, History of the Arts & Crafts Movement in America, by Mable Tuke Priestman (1997)

We turned to a few books and exhibit catalogs, but none of them offered a satisfactory answer to our question. Back then, there were few publications that offered a comprehensive overview and analysis of the Arts and Crafts Movement. We did find Robert Judson Clark's seminal and groundbreaking *Arts and Crafts Movement in America: 1876-1916*<sup>6</sup> from 1972; and then the comprehensive tome edited by Wendy Kaplan, *The Art that is Life: The Arts and Crafts Movement in America: 1875-1920*<sup>7</sup>. There were other books we would eventually discover, but these two started us off.<sup>8</sup> Their emphasis though was on America and Great Britain. The more we looked, the more we realized that the Movement was amorphous, diverse and far reaching, spreading as it did from England across the Atlantic to the United States, to Ireland, France, Spain, Austria, Russia, finally all the way to Japan. In each location, the name and emphasis changed, ranging from the British bent towards reformist moral impulses, to the French who threw the whole social moral agenda into the gutter and turned to a more voluptuous design style.

But William Morris seemed to provide the fulcrum wherever we turned, this William Morris movement that Charles Greene had mentioned. Looking at the Greenses' architecture, the way they designed their elegant Japoneseque furniture, the carpets, lighting, and gardens, all to be in harmony with the detailed wooden architecture of the house, we came to realize that Greene's understanding of Morris was more focused on the design ideals than the socialist and reformist ideals.<sup>9</sup> But there was no question of the Greenses' goal of creating beautiful houses intended to have nothing in them "that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful."<sup>10</sup>



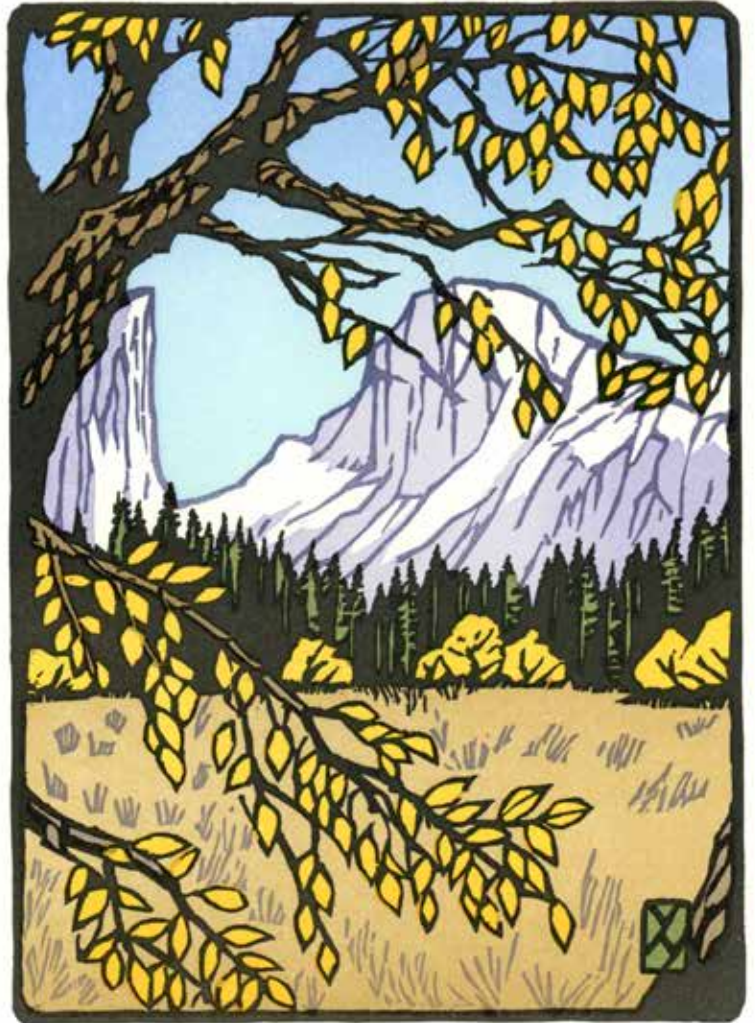
*Brilliance in the Shadows* by Stephanie McCoy (1998)



The production of the letterpress-printed greeting cards overtook that of the books and periodicals at the Press. Over the years, we printed over 200 designs.

Our Arts-and-Crafts quest continued into the 90s, especially after Bruce and I moved to Berkeley in 1994 so I could finish my degree in history. We continued working as freelance writers, but kept on with our own research, at one point making a nine-thousand-mile driving trip back and forth across America, visiting Arts and Crafts sites, utopian communities, libraries and archives. Together we ended up writing two books about the Arts and Crafts Movement, and Bruce, on his own, wrote two books about the lives and work of the Greenes. While he worked as a writer, and for a while as an editor for a glossy, bungalow-related magazine, I spent my last year of undergraduate studies at UC Berkeley writing a senior thesis about Yanagi Soetsu and the William Morris-influenced *Mingei*, or Folkcraft movement, in Japan.

For Arts and Crafts enthusiasts like us, the late 1990s was an exciting time to be living, studying, and working in Berkeley. Safely sheltered in the university's married student housing, we were able to enjoy a rather bohemian lifestyle, totally immersing ourselves into all things relating to the historic



## The Mountains are Calling and I must go.

- John Muir -

Movement. There was something quite inspiring about wandering the narrow hillside streets of the beautiful North side, past century-old, brown-shingled homes by such iconic architects as Bernard Maybeck and Julia Morgan, then down the pathways that Maybeck walked with Charles Keeler, the writer who called for simple-life living.<sup>11</sup> History was alive in those Berkeley Hills. The renowned Arts and Crafts scholar, Robert Judson Clark, who had retired by then to the Bay Area, liked to exclaim that "You can smell history in this wonderful Berkeley air!"

Times were different back then; there were great old bookstores that no longer exist today. Weekly, Bruce and I would quickly finish our big salad dinner and head out to haunt the used bookstores. There was Moe's on Telegraph Avenue where we would first check the new arrivals shelf, hoping for one more volume of Morris's letters, or maybe a Chiswick Press edition of his lectures. Then, maybe up to Black Oaks on Shattuck Avenue, looking in the back room for copies of *The Artisan* or



Often the making of the woodblock print starts out spontaneously, as seen in this watercolor sketch by Yoshiko Yamamoto. Translating that to a woodblock print is a fun challenge for the artist. As with this block print of Mt. Rainier, each color in the artwork needs its own color block, each color being printed separately.



Stickley's *The Craftsman*. And if it wasn't too late, we'd go down University Avenue to rummage through the piles of unsorted books at Serendipity Books, one day finding a Cuala Press broadside by Jack Yeats, another day turning up copies of *The Studio*. There was always so much to find, so much to read, so much to learn.

This was of course before smart phones, and we had yet to discover Google. The world was not yet at our fingertips, and we still had the pleasure of non-virtual research done with index cards, phone books, maps, city records, and bound books. The hunt was juicier. We could still expect to have the unexpected finds in the dark corners of the book stores. How joyful those discoveries used to be, and how oddly deprived it feels now, to have the world so close at hand.

And then there was "the Berkeley Arts and Crafts Mafia," as our group of friends became known to all the visiting Arts and Crafts researchers and enthusiasts coming to the San Francisco Bay Area.<sup>12</sup> We were a friendly bunch, a loosely organized group who loved the Movement. Some of us were collectors, bungalow homeowners, historic preservationists, scholars, or antique dealers. A good number were excellent

craftspeople, who also formed a short-lived Arts and Crafts Guild of Northern California; this included Dianne Ayres and Tim Hansen, with their historically-inspired textiles; Debey Zito and Terry Schmitt, who crafted such exquisite furniture; and Audel Davis with his hand-hammered copperwork. The Mafia had no hierarchy, no dues, no rules, nor sponsorship. We threw together casual dinners, book clubs, show-and-tells, slide lectures and author signings, musical evenings, all centered around the Arts and Crafts Movement.

One year we even put on a yuletide holiday pageant, written by Bruce and acted by the amateur Mafia performers, including myself, at the Berkeley Hillside Club, an Arts-and-Crafts-inspired neighborhood club begun in 1898. The Club was decorated with fresh pine boughs and its large fireplace was alive with a crackling fire. It looked sensationally 1900s! The fire in fact was roaring so strong that the black bellowing smoke filled the hall to the point I could feel it clogging up my throat. When it was my turn to belt out a song, written by Charles Keeler, with lyrics something about hailing beauty and progress, all I could feel was the frog in my throat. But the show must go on, and I mustered all my strength to finish the song. Nobody seemed to care about the frog; the night was vivid and colorful with the Mafia members garbed in the original medieval costumes designed nearly a hundred years before by Bernard Maybeck.

We gained a meeting space and a new member when Lee Jester opened his large, mission-style furniture and furnishings store, The Craftsman Home, just a few blocks from the 1915-built Claremont Hotel. Lee ran a clean, sales-oriented operation during the day, but at night he opened his back door to the Mafia for Arts and Crafts gatherings, receptions, and

lectures. One night, during a particularly entertaining lecture, I remember lying on one of the luxuriously thick rugs, woven with Voysey designs, listening and laughing and wondering how many people might have drunk too much and would be spilling red wine that night on those beautiful rugs. No fights ever broke out over the spilled wine, only good hearty camaraderie, and the occasional passionate disagreement over the finer points of the philosophy of the Movement. Berkeley in the late 90s was truly a hotbed of things Arts and Crafts.

As we were enjoying the life in Berkeley, one morning a lightbulb went off in Bruce's head. Sipping his hot Irish breakfast tea, he showed me a copy of *The Artsman*, that beautifully letterpress-printed, simple, hand-stitched journal, published by Will Price at the Rose Valley Press from 1903 to 1907. He had recently purchased it at Black Oaks Bookstore, and with his eyes twinkling behind his thick glasses, he suggested that we should consider making our own publications, that we should start our own press, just as Will Price had done with his Rose Valley Press, just as Gustav Stickley had done with his *Craftsman* magazine, and yes, just as Morris had done with his Kelmscott Press. He knew I would catch the printing bug, and lo and behold, we were soon like two little kids, endlessly planning, talking, thinking about how to make beautiful publications about the Arts and Crafts Movement.

It became our obsession; we were determined to publish. And we wanted to do it with our own hands, just as Morris had done, just as he had written how he "began printing books with the hope of producing some which would have a definite aim of beauty, while at the same time they should be easy to read and not dazzle the eye, or trouble the reader by eccentricity of form in the letters."<sup>13</sup> We wanted to tread in those footsteps



"When Poppies Bloom", a block print made by Yoshiko Yamamoto using carved linoleum blocks showing a quintessential view of California hills.



and make our own current-day version of beautiful books and periodicals, appropriate though for 1996. We decided that they had to be made carefully, by hand, made for readers, and made economically.

It wasn't easy, however, to put the words into practice. Except for Bruce, who had right out of college briefly worked packaging orders for a high-end letterpress operation in San Francisco, neither of us had any experience, or much knowledge of printing. To get started, we took a two-weekend letterpress workshop at a local printing cooperative. Then, on Saturday mornings, we'd get up early and drive across Bay Bridge to a desolate San Francisco waterfront warehouse that was packed with used letterpress type and equipment.<sup>14</sup> The place honestly looked to me more like a background for an action movie car-chase scene, but each weekend, we'd get in line early to scout out good, used printing equipment, everything from type cabinets to quoins and galleys. Once inside the rusty metal door, it was another world. Packed floor to ceiling, there were rows and rows of typecases, old black platen presses, inking fountains, and a great, old flywheel, rusting away in a dark corner. It was so jam-packed with printing equipment that we barely had room to squeeze through the aisles. After several visits, we decided on a circa 1910, 10 x 15 Chandler & Price press, which we bought at a bargain price. It was still 1995, and letterpress printing hadn't been discovered by the young millennials yet.<sup>15</sup>

And, as we started gathering material to publish *The Tabby*, we also had to make decisions about the typeface, paper and

Sadly, Mr. Iwano, the renowned papermaker, passed away two years after we had a chance to visit his studio in the Echizen area of Japan. However, we are thankful that his son has taken over the paper-making operation, keeping the great tradition alive.



The baren, a burnishing tool, is the traditional means of printing block prints in Japan. Mr. Goto, the only known person known to make this tool in a strictly, time-honored way, teaches regular classes and workshops to disseminate his knowledge and techniques of making and maintaining this traditional tool.



The Vandercook printing press has an inking mechanism with rubber rollers attached to the large impression cylinder that rolls over the blocks or type. It is hand-cranked and slow, but allows for leisurely pace of work.

cover stock, as well as its actual size and design. Bruce wrote a prospectus to send out where we explained that our goal was to chronicle not just the historic movement, but also the current-day revival, and that we wanted “to make each issue not just a work of substance, but a work of craft.” Since we were determined to letterpress print the pages, we decided we would bind each issue by hand, using needle and thread. In those younger days, we never lacked enthusiasm or idealism.

The Mafia was supportive of our effort from the very beginning. As we were wondering where to put our press, Tim Hansen and Dianne Ayres graciously offered to let us use the back of their textile studio at no charge until we found our new storefront location. There was also a fervent Trotskyite and Morris devotee, Alan Thomsen, who volunteered hours of his time, editing and critiquing our work at the Press. And for a fun get-together, Janet Mark opened up her cozy Berkeley Brown Shingle with no hesitation at moment’s notice. These were just few examples of the Berkeley Mafia support network.<sup>16</sup> Without such generosity and warm encouragement, it would have been quite difficult to get our printing operation off the ground. Like the historical Movement, mutual cooperation and interaction fostered our Arts and Crafts community in the 1990s, making the impossible a reality.

Still, we had many more obstacles to overcome. I was now a graduate student in history, studying by day, and learning to print at night. Despite my keen interest in printing, I had a whole craft to learn. Naturally, I found myself spending more and more time away from book study, working instead with my hands at the studio, initially at Tim and Dianne’s textile studio, later at our own store front location, just around the corner from The Craftsman Home. Eventually, I decided to

withdraw from the PhD program as my passion for, and the demands of learning presswork, became all consuming.

There was so much to learn, from how to set up the metal chase and adjust the height of the inking rollers, to the amount of packing to use underneath the tympan paper. And mixing ink I grew to understand was as much an art as a craft. I was such a greenhorn at first that I forgot to add cobalt dryer to the ink for the first twenty or so covers I printed for the initial issue of *The Tabby*. We were rushing to have a few copies ready for the first Bungalow Fair organized for Historic Seattle by Larry Kreisman, and without the dryer, the oil-based ink on the multi-color cover didn’t dry for months. Whenever we’d received a phone call from someone who had bought one of those first issues, reporting that the magazine remained “moist to the touch,” Bruce would start laughing while I cringed. The wet *Tabby* became quite a running joke amongst the Mafia.

Along the way, thankfully there were mentors who came to the rescue; especially Richard Seibert. He was, and is, a Berkeley letterpress printer who back then was working with the renowned Peter Koch; he now works with David Lance Goines, the great poster artist. A consummate craftsman, Richard generously taught me innumerable tricks of the trade. I was particularly impressed when he would ceremoniously pull out his magnifying glass, which he did often, to examine how much ink was deposited on the paper from the type, and how much pressure was being put on the type with the given imprint. Richard taught me that it was not just art, not just craft, but that it was also a science. And above all, it was a great challenge, and I loved it all.

Getting ready to print the first issue, I compiled quite a large stack of sample paper stocks, comparing paper after paper,



One of the three Heidelberg cylinder presses that we have used for our greeting card production.

checking them not just for their look and feel, but for how they were made: machine-made, mold-made, or hand-made.<sup>17</sup> I also spent time testing inks from different manufacturers, different types of glue, and choosing the threads we would use for binding. Just as Morris gathered paper samples, finally deciding to use linen paper, and designing his typeface, it seemed necessary for me to learn the range of material available and appropriate for the 1990s.

Economics has always been a big issue with The Arts and Crafts Movement. Morris rampaged at the end of his life, as he became more involved with socialist activities, that the work he produced was available only to the upper and upper-middle class. It was a farce in a way, these wonderful ideals for the many, but practiced by only a few, and available only to a fewer. One time, he even attacked the pricing that his close friend, the great bookbinder, T. J. Cobden Sanderson, set on his work, causing Sanderson to lament in his journal that Morris “thought my work too costly; bookbinding should be ‘rough’; ... [and Morris] went so far as to suggest that some machinery should be invented to bind books.”<sup>18</sup>

With enough historical cautionary tales like this, at our press, we felt we needed to address the issue of economy seriously, and to keep the price of our publications affordable. We did not want to be making books, or publish the magazine, to have them available only for rich collectors and institutions. We wanted to make things that were to be used, words to be read, not museum pieces to be safe-guarded behind glass. As we selected paper, our printing method, the binding style, each element that went into our production, Morris’s dilemma echoed in our minds. Should we use machinery, and if so, how? Where and how do we cut the cost down without sacrificing quality?

We also looked from the demand side. How much should the market bear for a nicely printed, hand-bound journal? If Morris was griping about the expensive price of his books, we

thought we would try and do it in reverse. Our goal became to keep each issue of *The Tabby* at fifteen dollars a copy, a price we thought a starving scholar or a student could afford. Only later did we raise it to twenty dollars as our page count increased. We also offered student discounts as a gesture of good will.

So, we decided not to handset type for the forty-eight pages of our magazine. We instead used the then-new polymer plates that were replacing the old zinc or magnesium metal cuts. And we decided not to use handmade paper, but go with the highest quality, machine-made paper we could find for the text pages. In hindsight today, I can say it still wasn’t very realistic from the supply side of the economics, considering the amount of labor we had to put into the production. If we added up all the hours we spent making these magazines, our hourly wage must have been less than \$2 an hour! Yes, for sure, we were living the life of idealists, at times foolishly so.

As I learned the trade, the presswork became increasingly enjoyable. Once I set up the chase, the metal square that holds the type or a printing block, and spread the ink onto the ink plate, it was easy to get into the rhythm of the repetitive motion of feeding one page after another into the press. Despite the clickety-clack of the press, or maybe because of it, it was actually a calm and introspective time. I would print three hundred copies of a chapbook, or one thousand copies for each issue of *The Tabby*, each page hand-fed into the press. When there were two, sometimes three colors on a page, that page had to be fed into the press one time for each color.

There were times I would stand at the press late into the night to get a press-run finished. Our black cat, a shop cat named Ruskin, would keep me company by the press, sitting and purring right next to the stack of paper I was printing. Ruskin too seemed to get into a meditative state. He learned to doze off, his long tail moving rhythmically back and forth in time with the clickety-clack of the press, dipping down low near the chase as the press opened up, swing back up to safety

as the press closed to make the imprint. Miraculously, Ruskin's tail was never caught by the moving press. It was a sight to watch.

Working at the press gave me time to think, to ponder what I was doing with this, and why – these central questions of the Arts and Crafts Movement. It was so much more than about just design, these issues about the quality of work, of quality of life, for someone who works with their hands. Of course, there was the industrial-age question of whether machines really improve our lives. And I would think about how we could help educate our younger generation into thinking with their hands. Ultimately of course, there was the question of what was the ideal society we could live in. We had yet to have Morris's socialist revolution, but these questions were no longer academic theories; they had become part of our daily practice and struggle at the Press.

Once we started *The Tabby*, we couldn't stop there. Bruce and I went on to design, hand print, and bind a series of chapbooks, plus several case-bound books, all attempting to deepen our understanding of the Arts and Crafts Movement. For our first chapbook, *History of the Arts and Crafts Movement in America*, we asked the scholar, Cheryl Robertson, to provide a contextual introduction to a 1906 series of articles chronicling how alive and vibrant the Movement was over a century ago.<sup>19</sup> Our first casebound book, and one of my favorite projects to this day, was *Brilliance in the Shadows*. Written by Stephanie McCoy, it was an exploration of the life and work of Lucia Kleinhans Mathews, a forgotten artist who, with her husband, the famed muralist and painter, Arthur Mathews, were major figures in the San Francisco Arts and Crafts Movement. Bruce and I related deeply to them as they had, working together, also founded a press, the Philopolis Press, where they published books and a small magazine. They also, at the same time, started The Furniture Shop where they designed and had built a distinctly San Francisco version of Arts and Crafts furniture and decorative arts. This book was quite an ambitious project for us, new as we were to all this. We had six hand-tipped-in plates of original drawings and photographs, and a multi-colored dust jacket. I worked late into the night for this since more than half of the pages had two colors. I even learned to work with leather, creating a special leather-bound edition with an embossed cover.<sup>20</sup>

We thought we might be able to publish *The Tabby* quarterly, but the process was so cumbersome that we quickly changed it to a bi-annual; in the end though, we were to print ten issues over the first ten years of our press. But during that time, we were also printing material from the historic period, along with current research and writing about the period. We issued chapbooks such as William Morris and Emory Walker's essay, *On Printing*, and Charles Keeler's *Hillside Club Suggestions for Berkeley Homes*. We worked with the Los Angeles Museum of Art to issue a portfolio of block prints recreating a series of

watercolors by the Arts and Crafts artist and ceramic decorator, Hannah Borger Overbeck, with a contextual essay by the curator, Carol Norcross.<sup>21</sup> And one of our last publications while we were still in Berkeley was a book of new research about the influence of the artist and teacher of design and woodblock printing, Arthur Wesley Dow. His book, *Composition*, was so influential not just on the American Arts and Crafts Movement, but on the design aesthetic over the first half of the twentieth century as it was used throughout America as a standard design textbook.

Publishing books and periodicals was deeply rewarding, but I couldn't stop myself from trying something new. I began experimenting with more colors and carving blocks, making relief prints, and greeting cards. Working with my hands came naturally to me. Drawing and watercolors were something that I had done since childhood, and I was very comfortable with carving having studied sculpture in Japan.

While I was working on the Arthur Wesley Dow book, I took a one-color persimmon design by him, and carved it onto a linoleum block. I then added five more color blocks, printing one color at a time, layer by layer, so that it would capture the rich colors of autumn. Folding the paper in the middle, it became a nice-looking greeting card. This was the first greeting card that I made, and gave me the courage to do more designs of my own. I also started experimenting with posters and block prints, giving me an opportunity to think about larger designs and themes. I closely studied Edo-period woodblock prints for their composition, especially those designed by Hiroshige and Hokusai. How I have always admired Hiroshige's bold composition in his series of Edo views and Mt. Fuji! I also pored over block prints by Hasui Kawase and Hiroshi Yoshida, artists from the early 20th century who took the medium to another level. My goal was to create an aesthetic that both merged Japanese woodblock printing with the design aesthetics of the Arts and Crafts Movement, yet have it appropriate for today. This led to a series of botanical and bird prints, and a succession of landscape prints of my now-adopted home, the west coast of America, and of course, the series of woodblock prints I've been doing of Mt. Rainier, my Northwest Fuji.

As time passed, Bruce and I began to realize the painful truth that our grand experiment of making beautiful books by hand at affordable prices was not profitable. Far from it. As we were not weekend or hobby printers, it was quite a struggle to make a living from our publishing. We needed to put the bread on the table from what we earned, and Morris's dilemma kept haunting us in those early days.

Fortunately, the greeting cards and woodblock prints began to supplement our publishing, just in time. As I carved and printed more greeting cards and artwork, they became popular in the Bay Area, first one store carrying them, then a few stores. A local sales rep started representing the greeting cards, and then a few sales reps took our products state-wide, then





Our Motto at the Press has been:

“We print, because we care and love our friends, family, and environs. So why not take it one step further and print kinder to ourselves and our earth?”

We continue to strive to reach this Morrisian ideal.



*Peace lanterns 137/170*

*Y. Yamamoto*

national. It wasn't long before the sales of greeting cards and block prints overtook the publishing income.

With business actually growing, we were soon running out of space in our small studio storefront in Berkeley. Boxes with cards and prints were stacked everywhere, and in desperate need for a larger space, and with the impossibility of finding an affordable house with sufficient space to house our printing presses, which had now grown to three, Bruce and I sadly decided that we had to leave the Bay Area.

After exploring coastal Maine, western Massachusetts, and the Pacific Northwest, we fell in love with Mt. Rainier and

the Cascade mountain range, the tall conifers, the large maple trees with leaves the size of a child's umbrella, and we made the move. We were able to find near Tacoma, the town where we live now, a large home with a two-car garage, with enough space for both us and our presses.

Though we terribly missed our Mafia friends, and the Arts and Crafts milieu of Berkeley, we hunkered down to work at our new home studio. Distribution of our then one-hundred greeting card line was taken over by a publisher who marketed them not only nationally, but overseas as well. The growing success of the greeting cards allowed me to have time to work

on the carving and printing of my artwork. But it also made it necessary to increase our card production to satisfy the demand. To meet this challenge, we acquired a Heidelberg Cylinder printing press, a 7800-pound behemoth. “Heidi,” as I called her, transformed the scale of our production overnight with her impressive Germany engineering. She was powerful, precise, the Mercedes-Benz of letterpress presses! With an automatic paper feeding mechanism, she was much faster than what I could do hand-feeding the paper into the press. And I could still have the high quality that I wanted.

Within a few years, economic stability ensued as the greeting cards became the bread-and-butter of our operation. We were still printing the last few issues of *The Tabby* magazine, but this was now subsidized by the steady sales of our greeting cards. I’m a harsh critic of my own work, but I was quite proud of the high quality we achieved with our letterpress cards.<sup>22</sup> Many of our customers would purchase cards in order to frame and hang them on the wall. And best of all, they were affordable! We priced our letterpress greeting cards at three dollars each; only later when paper costs increased, did we raise the price by fifty cents. They fulfilled at least one mission for us: an affordable art for the many. Topsy would have been proud!

Almost simultaneously, my larger block prints found an eager audience. I continued to take time to learn the craft of carving blocks, experimenting with the different types of wood to carve onto, from birch (*shina*) and magnolia (*ho*) to hard mountain cherry (*yama-zakura*), and testing various inks for lightfastness. Making block prints is a slower process than greeting card production. I have always enjoyed the tactile nature of block printing. Wood is alive. When carving, you can smell the faint scent of the wood, and there’s the pleasant sound from the chisel digging into the wood. When inking, you can see the wood grain show up on the block, sometimes transferring a ghostly pattern of the grain onto the paper if I use enough pressure. This is in such contrast to the cold uniformity of the polymer plates that I started with, printing *The Tabby* and then the greeting cards.

There is always so much to learn and do. On our regular trips to Japan, I would make a point of visiting tool makers and papermakers, craftsmen who devoted their entire lives to their craft. One especially memorable visit was the time I went to a remote village in Echizen, known since the fifth century for its high-quality paper-making. I especially wanted to meet Mr. Ichibei Iwano, a renowned, ninth-generation Japanese papermaker designated by the Emperor as a Living National Treasure. Even though he was in his late eighties, he still walked briskly around his studio that was set up like a medieval workshop. He happily showed me how he made his paper using the *kozo* plant that he himself grew and harvested. Mr. Iwano mused quietly to me how, “probably, the water might have been the secret to my paper-making,” going on to explain that “our family has always used the water from the same well,

for generations now, to make our paper.” As he showed me how he worked, it was all very quiet, only the rhythmic sound of his hands moving the paper mould in the huge tub filled with water and the finely, chopped *kozo* pulp. It was a transformative experience for me, and I left with the intense desire to make a print that was worthy of his paper.

On another trip I had a chance to spend time with Mr. Hidehiko Goto, a craftsman who makes *barens*, the bamboo discs used for burnishing the *kozo* paper onto the inked woodblocks in Japanese woodblock printing. Unlike the plastic cousins we see often in this country, the traditional *baren* is made of coils of bamboo rope held together by layers and layers of thin, lacquered paper, which is then wrapped in a large sheath of bamboo leaf. “It takes a certain type of bamboo,” Mr. Goto explained. In order to safeguard his supply of it, he told me with a quiet laugh that he had had to “buy a whole mountain to raise this special type of bamboo.”

These Japanese craftsmen were not just making products. They were working within a whole ecological chain of production, from growing the materials they needed, harvesting them, to making their own tools, all the time managing to operate a sustainable business. Though different in scale, a good comparison in this country might be a single-sourced organic coffee roaster, or Patagonia, the clothing company for whom I illustrated two books. Patagonia states that their goal is in “creating social and economic value through its business,” with a mission to “build the best product, cause no unnecessary harm, use business to inspire and implement solutions to the environmental crisis.”

At the Press, we too tried to find a balance between profit and larger social causes. We tried always to use ecological, sustainable materials, often donating portions of our profits to environmental causes. But was this enough? Even as wonderful as these antique presses were that we used, we were still working with early 20th-century technology that was based on steel manufacturing and petroleum products. As we enjoyed our business success, I continued to ponder these unresolved issues.

Over the years, the main focus of our work shifted from literary to graphic work, from publishing to greeting cards and block prints. Financially, we achieved stability, and were able to produce enough to hire young people who wanted to learn the craft, providing them with a living wage plus benefits. This might sound like a success story, and we are grateful for all the great fortune we have had in our rather messy, meandering endeavors.

But I continue to wonder if we have been able to address the central question of the Movement, the meaningfulness of handwork in this digital age as more and more workers, faced with robots and artificial intelligence, need to worry about their jobs. I have to ask how, in today’s society, there is meaning in handwork when our designs can be cut faster by CNC or

laser? And why do humans make things, whether it be building furniture, cooking a meal, knitting a scarf, or printing a book?

Looking back on our own path, I'm not sure how successful we have been in dealing with this issue of hand versus machine. We worked with everything from the 1900's clamshell press I learned to print on, to a 1940's Vandercook hand-operated cylinder press I printed block prints and posters on, to the 1960's Heidelberg cylinder press for our greeting cards. We used each press to achieve the level of production we needed in order to make our business profitable, to solve the age-old question of economics, the Morris dilemma.

Each press offered a different speed. The Vandercook, for block prints, was cranked and inked by hand; it was slow, but afforded us the joy of working at a steady pace. For the greeting cards, the Heidelberg cylinder press's automatic feed was more than ten times faster than I used to be able to print on my simple Chandler & Price clamshell press.

I remember with such fondness those early days of printing, standing hunched over the clamshell press, feeding one piece of paper at a time into its jaws. But my lower back suffered after a half-dozen years of this repetitive, bent-over motion. When Bruce and I were able to purchase the Heidelberg, we were totally enamored by its power and speed, and my back was thankful.

But using the Heidelberg was so much noisier than hand-printing on the Vandercook. Because of its higher speed, the constant vibration, even with ear plugs, I was exhausted printing on it after a few hours, and we were printing on it for thirty to forty hours a week. Printing on the Vandercook, or the Chandler & Price, was like riding a friendly old horse at a gentle pace; with the Heidelberg, it was riding a wild, crazed racehorse, barely hanging onto its mane. American designer and tilemaker, Ernest Batchelder, wrote back in 1909 in *The Craftsman Magazine*, "The evil of machinery is largely a question of whether machinery shall use men, or men shall use machinery."<sup>23</sup> With the Heidelberg, I wondered, was I using it, or was it using me?

When COVID-19 broke out this spring, bringing the country and the world to a sudden stop, we took this as a chance to reflect on our past years. After lengthy talks, Bruce and I decided to take a new step, to start a new adventure, a new challenge in our quest for our Arts and Crafts ideal. With the unsolved problems of machinery's ill-effects on our lives, I had already been thinking that it was time to "unlearn" what I have learned, to go back to where I began, and start afresh. With all this in mind, I have decided to move away from letterpress printing, this very form of printing I had devoted twenty-five years of my life to.

We decided to close our thriving commercial printing studio, and we've sold all but one of the twelve printing presses we'd accumulated through the years. We are keeping only the hand-cranked Vandercook cylinder press. We have terminated

the agreement with the distributor of our greeting cards this summer, and will print no more of them.

Even though this rupture of our work might seem sudden, in a sense, it isn't. We are still pursuing our ideals, and our quest to improve ourselves. As we face climate change, our existential crisis, we need to continue to think about our business with a new model of sustainability as our goal, a business model that puts humans, and nature, at the core of the operation.

So, I have taken this as a cue to take our next step. Watching the whole pattern of our society change overnight with the pandemic was strangely inspiring and cathartic. I am able now to work in a home studio. I'm actively enjoying "unlearning" letterpress, and learning to hand-print Japanese style. It has been a bit unnerving at first, but working with just my hands, a brush, and a *baren*, is joyful. It is a decidedly slower process, but I have always enjoyed slowness. Occasionally, I reflect on those craftspeople I met in Japan, the carpenters that worked for my father's company, Mr. Iwano, the papermaker, or Mr. Goto, the *baren* maker, and I am encouraged with the idea that maybe, with enough skill and cooperation, we can create a pattern of craft operation that does not compromise our wellbeing, or the environment. I'm feeling optimistic.

As I finish writing this essay and look at my working sketches for *News from Nowhere*, my mind travels back easily to the ever-flowing River Thames, and the exquisite vision that William Morris created for us about our possible future, a future where humans could live in harmony with the environment. As the protagonist of the novel said at the end of the novel, at his journey's end, "If others can see it as I have seen it, then it may be called a vision rather than a dream."<sup>24</sup> We must continue to uphold our hopes. As an artist and craftsperson, I hope to fulfill my own commitment in search of the Arts and Crafts ideals. So, this is the new beginning of my craft journey. I think Morris would have approved. Don't you?

Yoshiko Yamamoto and Bruce Smith are co-proprietors of The Arts & Crafts Press in Tacoma, Washington, and Tokyo, Japan. They originally founded the Press in 1995 as a letterpress publishing house, but in recent years Yoshiko has been expanding her horizons by focusing on woodblock printing, while Bruce continues to work as a writer, researcher and editor.

#### ENDNOTES

1. William Morris, "The Beauty of Life," Birmingham Society of Arts and School of Design, 1880.
2. William Morris, "News from Nowhere," *Commonweal*, 1890.
3. We told everyone that the name, *The Tabby*, was short for "tabloid" in England, but it was also an homage to the small humorous magazine, *The Lark*, that was founded by Gelette Burgess in San Francisco in 1895.
4. John Ruskin, "Unity of Art," 1859.
5. Charles Sumner Greene, letter to James Culbertson, October 7, 1902, Greene and Greene Archives.

## WILLIAM MORRIS AND HIS WORKERS AT MERTON ABBEY

David Saxby



The photograph of 1891 in front of the hay-rick at Merton shows the tapestry boys at the Merton Abbey works. The boys are (from top left to bottom right) Walter Taylor (15), George Priestly (16), Robert Uther Ellis (16), Jesse Keech (14) and George Merritt (15). Courtesy of John Kendall.

6. Robert Judson Clark, *Arts & Crafts Movement in America: 1876-1916* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972).
7. Wendy Kaplan, *The Art That is Life: The Arts & Crafts Movement in America: 1876 - 1920* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1987).
8. Especially David M. Cathers, *Furniture of the American Arts and Crafts Movement* (New York: New American Library, 1981), Gillian Naylor, *The Arts and Crafts Movement: A Study of Its Sources, Ideals, and Influence on Design Theory* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), Lionel Lambourne, *Utopian Craftsmen, The Arts & Crafts Movement from the Cotswolds to Chicago* (London: Astragal Books, 1980).
9. After his retirement to Carmel, California, Charles became interested in the single tax system and voted Socialist in an election.
10. William Morris, *Hopes and Fears for Art; Five Lectures Delivered in Birmingham, London, and Nottingham, 1878 - 1881* (London : Ellis & White, 1883).
11. Charles Augustus Keeler, *Simple Home* (San Francisco: Paul Elder & Company, 1904).
12. Our dear friend, the late Arts and Crafts scholar, Cheryl Robertson, was the first to so label our Bay area group when she came to lecture for one of the series Bruce organized.
13. William Morris, *Note By William Morris On His Aims In Founding The Kelmscott Press, A: Together With A Short Description Of The Press By S.C. Cockerell, & An Annotated List Of The Books Printed Thereat* (Hammersmith: Kelmscott Press, 1898).
14. This was James Heagy's operation at the old Hunter's Point Naval Shipyard. Unfortunately it is no longer there.
15. It was a wonderful time in 1995 to be acquiring printing presses, this time before letterpress-printing became "Martha-Stewardized" driving up the price of these old printing presses; ones we could acquire for \$500 back then now are commanding twenty times that price.
16. The Arts & Crafts network and collaboration grew beyond the Bay Area as we developed our business. Over the years, I have enjoyed working with Arts & Crafts inspired artisans such as Motawi Tileworks and Dard Hunter Studios.
17. On one of our trips to Japan, Bruce and I spent a good deal of time visiting papermakers, coming back with even more paper samples to crowd our shelves.
18. William S. Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 119.
19. Mabel Tuke Priestman, *History of the Arts and Crafts Movement in America* (Berkeley: The Arts & Crafts Press, 1996). The original articles had been published in *House Beautiful* October and November, 1906.
20. Thanks to Stephanie, we were able to work with the Oakland Museum of Art, the depository of the Mathews work, to proof-print a set of the old zinc plates from the Philopolis Press for use in the book. Stephanie McCoy, *Brilliance in the Shadows: A Biography of Lucia Kleinbans Mathews* (Berkeley: The Arts & Crafts Press, 1998).
21. Carol Norcross, *The Flowers of Hannah Borger Overbeck* (Berkeley: The Arts & Crafts Press with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2004).
22. Our work became known for quality and was featured in magazine articles and TV programs, including PBS's "Craft in America" program. Carol Sauvion, "Celebration", *Craft in America* 2015.
23. Ernest A Batchelder, "The Arts & Crafts Movement in America: Work or Play?" *The Craftsman* Aug 1909.
24. William Morris, "News from Nowhere," *Commonweal*, 1890.

Early in 1881 the Queen Square and Great Ormond Yard workshops were becoming cramped and Morris needed larger premises. With William De Morgan he started looking for new workshops, first rejecting premises in the Cotswolds and then at Crayford, Kent. However, Morris was in luck and did not have to look for long. George Welch, a table cover printer, of the Merton print works in Surrey, had decided to leave the trade and on 12 March 1881 he advertised his works in *The Times* which must have come to Morris' attention.

A few days later Morris sent George Wardle and Philip Webb to see the works, but they went to the wrong premises and reported to Morris 'that it would never do and that it wasn't worth while my going to look at them'. Luckily, Morris was not deterred and together with De Morgan went to Merton to see the right place! Afterwards Morris wrote, 'judge of our joy when we found that the "two clever ones" had gone wrong'. Morris signed the lease to the Merton works on 7 June 1881.

The works were situated by the river Wandle at Merton Abbey, Colliers Wood, then a small village between South Wimbledon and Tooting

...they were old-fashioned, though still in good repair. The riverside and the mill pond are thickly set with willows and large poplars; behind the dwelling-house a flower garden, then neglected, but soon restored to beauty when it came into Morris's hands, runs down to the water. The workshops, for the most part long wooden two-storied sheds, red-tiled and weatherboarded, are grouped irregularly round the mill lade' (Mackail, *William Morris*, ii, 35).



The boiler house, looking over the mill pond, early 20th century.



Over-looking the mill pond, with the carpet workshop on the ground floor and the block-printing workshop above, 1913.



Looking towards the entrance to the works with the 18th-century caretaker's house and the little office on the left, early 20th century.



The dye house on the ground floor with the stained-glass workshop above. At the far end of the stained-glass workshop was the original location of the tapestry workshop, 1913.

At the entrance to the works was the caretaker's house and a small office. Behind was the dye house and above was the stained-glass workshop with the tapestry workshop situated behind a curtain at the north end of the building. A large 18<sup>th</sup>-century house was used as a dormitory for the apprentice tapestry boys. Next door was the drawing and design room with a glass-firing kiln in the ground floor. Behind the house, Morris established a garden where he planted daffodils, primroses and violets and a beautiful almond tree.

From the entrance, a cinder path led past the toilet block, on the left, to a small wooden bridge which crossed the river Wandle. Here, on the banks of the river Wandle, at the end of the dye house, was a steam boiler house providing heating and steam for the dye vats. Adjacent to the mill pond was the carpet workshop, with the block-printing workshop above. Outside the carpet workshop was a bleaching field with a garden where the workers could grow vegetables and flowers.

At the rear of the works was Merton Abbey Station and next door, on the High Street, was Abbey Gatehouse, the home of Frederick Arthur Wellesley and his famous wife, the celebrated dancer and actress Kate Vaughan, a favourite of Burne-Jones and Ruskin.

We find '...every morning some sixty to seventy workmen and a little band of women, whose handiwork are pieces of tapestry, each of which is a complete work of art; painted windows, taking for design and colouring their rank among the best productions in that branch of artistic work, beautiful brocades, charming chintzes and wall paper, and rugs and carpets, always made with an eye to their artistic values as well as to their durability...' (*Pall Mall Gazette*, 28 November 1888).

After work the tapestry apprentice boys would often swim in the Wandle. Early in 1881 the Queen Square and Great Ormond Yard workshops were becoming cramped and Morris needed larger premises. With William De Morgan they started looking for new workshops, first rejecting premises in the Cotswolds and then at Crayford, Kent. However, Morris was in luck and did not have to look for long. George Welch, a table cover printer, of the Merton print works in Surrey had decided to leave the trade and on 12 March 1881 he advertised his works in *The Times* which must have come to Morris' attention.

The workforce worked from 8 am to 5 pm Monday to Friday with Saturday afternoons and Sundays free. Morris stipulated that formal clothes should be worn in the weaving departments; black striped trousers, black coats and starched collars were worn in case potential customers were to visit. Overalls or smocks were allowed to be worn at the loom but had to be removed if a photographer or visitor arrived.

Morris employed local girls from Merton and Mitcham to train as 'carpet-knotters'. The first was 16 year old Eliza, the



The carpet and block-printing workshops from the bleaching fields. In front of the building are the gardens where the workers could grow vegetables and flowers, 1913.



The 18th-century 'apprentice boys house', 1913.



The rear of the 'apprentice boys house' with the drawing and design workshop on the right. The garden is in the foreground, 1913.



The drawing and design workshop from the garden, 1913.

daughter of the caretaker Edwin Merritt. She was joined by 15 year old Diana Penn and 14 year olds Louisa Phipps and Clara Adaway. Their first carpet was the Vanderbilt *Peacock and Bird* which is now held at the William Morris Gallery. A correspondent from *The Spectator* who visited the carpet workshop in 1883 wrote of the room and of Eliza, Diana, Louisa and Clara:

...The strong, level afternoon light shines round the figures of the young girls seated in rows on low benches along the frames, and brightens to gold some of the fair heads. Above and behind them rows of bobbins of many-coloured worsteds, stuck on pegs, shower down threads of beautiful colours, which are caught by the deft fingers, passed through strong threads, tied in a knot, slipped down in their place, snipped even with the rest of the carpet, all in a second of time, by the little maidens... The workers may be as tiresome as most young people between the ages of a girl and a woman generally are, but they do not look tiresome in this bright sunlit place, so near the shining river, but merry and busily happy. It is a delightful workroom'.

Soon Mary Merritt, sister of Eliza, Minnie Phipps, sister of Louisa and Annie Adaway, sister of Clara, joined the carpet-knotters.

Above the carpet workshop, one would hear the gentle thud from the block-printers mull. In the workshop were two parallel printing-tables running the length of the room. Morris employed local block-printers William Hillier and Henry and George Hill. May Morris records,

He recovered the craft of block-printing by hand, which had fallen into disuse, and the printing-shed at Merton Abbey was among the most interesting sights in the place. Customers who exclaimed at the prices of the many-coloured chintzes would have done well to visit the works and watch the whole process of several printings, the resist printing and dyeing etc. the deliberate work of stamping the blocks, bit by bit, on the stretched material, the joins carefully registered by the printer as he went on (May Morris, 1936, *William Morris – Artist, Writer, Socialist*, Vol. I, 44).

In a small shed, situated on the river Wandle, was a washing jenny to rinse the excess dye and mordants from the printed cottons. Across a small wooden bridge over the river Wandle was the dye house. The foreman was Samuel Goodacre with John Smith, Edgar Morris (William's younger brother), Thomas Bannister, Frank Kitz and John Diprose. There was also a colour mixer called Thomas Kenyon. Wilfrid Scawen Blunt described Edgar as 'a dreamy man in workman's clothes, with his shirt sleeves turned up, and his arms blue with indigo to the elbows'.

Behind the dye house was a single-storey weaving shed which housed the jacquard looms. The carpenter Charles Harding



The drawing and design workshop from the garden, 1913.



The rear of the carpet and block-printing workshops, 1913.



Painting of 'William Morris's Garden' by Walter Taylor, 1895 (Courtesy of John Kendall).



Watercolour by Walter Taylor of the Merton Abbey works looking across the river Wandle towards the caretaker's house, 1895 (Courtesy of John Kendall).

raised the roof and added skylights. Experienced weavers from Bethnal Green were hired to work the jacquard looms. The first were two brothers, William and Frederick Chadwick, William Holloway, James Hitchins and Henry Slater:

...it was always somewhat pathetic to watch the weavers at work...on their handlooms—old men from Spitalfields who had been prosperous once and had been through bad times saddened by the changes in industrial life that with its scurry and thrusting aside had passed them by. Anyway, these few of them employed at Merton Abbey were at home here, in the queer old sheds by the willow-shaded stream (May Morris, *ibid.*).

Above the dye house was the stained-glass workshop. The foreman was George Campfield with Thomas Bowman, William Stokes and William Pozzi. More stained-glass artists followed ‘

...a long, whitewashed, well-windowed room, divided by curtains old gold in colour into compartments for each glass painter’. Here they may be seen, seated at their easels, with, perchance, one of Mr. Burne-Jones’s drawings beside them...doing their delicate work before it goes into another hand, where the pieces of glass are joined by thin lines of lead’ (*The Pall Mall Gazette*, 28 November 1888).

At Queen Square, William Morris trained two 14 year old boys, William Sleath and William Knight, as tapestry weavers. With the move to Merton, the boys were placed in the ‘apprentice boys’ house under the care of a house keeper called Annie Martin. Morris furnished a couple of rooms for himself and supplied a library for the boys’ education. The first tapestry woven at Merton was *Goose Girl* from a book illustration from a story in *Grimm’s Fairy Tales* by Walter Crane.

In 1885, Annie Martin’s 13 year old nephew Benjamin John Martin (known simply as John Martin) joined the tapestry weavers. In 1891 the tapestry weavers started their most ambitious tapestries ever woven at Merton, the *San Graal* series for William Knox D’Arcy’s home at Stanmore Hall near Uxbridge. For this commission, Morris took on a number of 14-15 year old boys to train as tapestry weavers to help Sleath, Knight and Martin. They were George Priestly, Robert Uther Ellis, Jesse Keech, Walter Taylor and George Merritt. Morris soon took on two experienced tapestry weavers William Haines (24) and George Eleman (26) who had worked at the Royal Windsor Tapestry workshop.

*The Attainment* was the first panel (of six of *The Holy Grail* scenes) to be completed and it was exhibited at the Arts and Crafts Exhibition in the New Gallery in the Autumn of 1893. A reporter for *The Daily Chronicle* interviewed William Morris at the Exhibition. He was dressed in a ‘flat and very battered soft hat, the worn suit of blue serge, the bright blue shirt, the huge walking-stick, and above all, the round and genial thirteenth-century face’. Morris proudly said of the tapestry weavers

‘...The people who made it and this by far the most interesting thing about it, are boys, at least they’re grown up by this time, entirely trained in our own shop. It is really free hand work, remember, not slavishly copying a pattern, like those ‘basse lisse’ methods, and they came to us with no knowledge of drawing whatsoever, and have learnt every single thing they know under our training. And most beautifully they have done it! I don’t think you could want a better example than this of the value of apprenticeship. Our superintendant, Mr. Dearle, has of course been closely watching the work all the time, and perhaps he has put in a few bits, like the hands and faces, with his own hands; but with this exception every bit has been done by these boys...’ (An interview at the Arts and Crafts Exhibition, *The Daily Chronicle* 1893).

The San Graal tapestries were completed in 1894.

In 1895 Walter Taylor decided to take art lessons on Saturday afternoons at the Putney School of Art but when he asked William Morris if he could attend them, Morris replied ‘*Aren’t there enough flowers in the garden for you to paint?*’ Walter painted a number of scenes of the works and the surrounding area. He said:

Imagine a swift running river with clear water and occasionally a trout leaping out of the water to catch an unwary fly. On either bank are willow trees; swallows skim the water; a moorhen or two; and very rarely a lovely blue kingfisher. A little way over there the orchard; and there a beautiful garden with delphiniums, lilies, oriental poppies, roses and many other flowers’. Walter also said ‘A familiar scene in the weaving room was Morris seated in front of the looms, smoking his favourite pipe, and discussing the form and colour of the patterns being woven, and perhaps suggesting more of this or less of that. And the sunshine streaming through the open window, and the huge hawthorn tree without, covered with white blossom, the whole creating just one delightful picture of the old-time workshop’.

In 1901 Gordon Berry joined the tapestry weavers, followed in 1904 by John ‘Jack’ Glassbrook. In 1909 Walter Taylor left the firm and took a teaching post at the Beaufoy Institute in Lambeth. Early in 1912 Glassbrook and Berry left the firm and went to weave tapestries at the ‘Dovecot Studios’ in Corstorphine in Edinburgh. The carpet workshop closed and now the carpet knotters learnt to make tapestries.

Five or six women are talking and working at one loom at the foot of the room, and three women are engaged on a smaller loom at the side...A woman from a smaller loom answers your look of surprise. ‘We are learning to make tapestry’, she says in a cultured voice, ‘and the women over there are making carpets...Come over to the other barn and see the men’s work’. She leads the way across the rustic



The Merton Abbey works looking across the bleaching fields. The medieval precinct wall of Merton Priory and the river Pickle are in the foreground, 1913.



The dye house and stained-glass workshop looking across the bridge crossing the river Wandle. The stairs to the stained-glass workshop can be seen on the left of the photograph, c1898-99 (in L. F. Day, *Art Journal*).



The stained-glass artists and glaziers at work. The curtains of ‘old gold in colour’ can be seen dividing each workstation. late 19th century.

bridge. ‘That is where Morris used to sit’, and she points out an old oak tree...What a lovely place to work in! you say. ‘Yes isn’t it? And Morris has left such a tradition of comradeship here that many of us unattached folk feel that this is our home. That’, pointing to a grey house just inside the gates, ‘is where the apprentices used to live in Morris’s time. He educated and trained them himself’ (Eliza Merritt in *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 1912).

With the outbreak of war, many of the workers signed up. John Henry Dearle kept the works going with about a dozen





The large dye vats in the dye house, late 19th to early 20th century.

staff, but John Martin left the firm in 1917 and became the first tapestry restorer at the Victoria and Albert Museum.

It was a sad time when Gordon Berry was killed in action on 24 April 1917 at the age of 30. He is buried at the Fifteen Ravine British Cemetery, Villers-Plouich, Nord in France. The 19 year old tapestry weaver at the Oxford Street shop, William Aston, was killed in action on 7 June 1917, at Ypres in West Flanders, and John Glassbrook died in Ypres, West Flanders, on 26 September 1917, age 28, from wounds he had sustained at Passchendaele. He is buried at Wieltje Farm Cemetery, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium. Hearing of the deaths of Gordon Berry and John Glassbrook, John Martin said, 'both of whom have passed into the Great Unknown for which I shall ever regret'.

Henry Marillier left the navy in February 1919 and with John Henry Dearle sought to get back the workers who had fought in the War. Meanwhile, tapestry weaving for wounded ex-servicemen was promoted by Sir George Frampton who set up a two year tapestry weaving course at The Central School of Arts and Crafts in Southampton Row in London. Walter Taylor transferred to the Central School in 1919, where on 2 June he would find 'two disabled soldiers to meet you in the Tapestry Room on the top floor'. The first were Percy Sheldrick and Frederic Reed, who after two years training went to work at the Merton works.

The tapestry looms were now housed in the former carpet workshop overlooking the mill pond. Between 1922-27 the tapestry weavers Sleath, Carter, Carnegie and Reed wove a series of tapestries for the Lower Chapel of Eton College as a War memorial to the 157 Etonians killed in WWI. In a new long shed in the garden, Percy Sheldrick wove *The Passing of Venus* tapestry. It took three and a half years to weave and it was finished in December 1926.

Henry Marillier proudly said, 'It is a remarkable fact that the entire work, measuring more than 20 by 9 feet, has been woven by a disabled soldier, Percy Sheldrick, whose initials appear in the selvedge'.

Percy Sheldrick moved to the tapestry workshop in 1929 and he started weaving *The Summons* and *The Attainment* from the San Graal series. His shed was taken over by the tapestry repair ladies, 'Around the loom studios are others...where women mend the treasures from great houses'.

In 1930, three tapestries of saints were started for Lancing College Chapel, near Worthing in Sussex. A special loom was made to cope with the vast size of each tapestry at 35 feet high and ten feet wide.

Along with Morris, John Henry Dearle was the chief designer and worked in the drawing and design studio:

Mr. Dearle, the manager in charge. He was an elderly man – very capable – peppery and had been trained up from a student apprentice by Morris in all the crafts. He did what drawing and designing was necessary ie. on new windows and new tapestries... (Arthur Wingate).

It was a great loss to the firm when John Henry Dearle died on 15 January 1932 after working for Morris & Co. for 54 years. His son Duncan took over the running of the works and William Knight, the former tapestry weaver and stained-glass artist, became the principal designer.

In 1934 the last tapestry apprentice, the 14 year old Douglas Griffiths, joined the firm and he helped on the border of the *Map of South Africa* which was finished the same year.

With the outbreak of World War II the demand for luxury goods fell. The company continued to decline until it went into liquidation in May 1940. Henry Marillier wrote to Eric Maglagon, the Director of the Victoria and Albert Museum:

The war has killed Morris & Co. and at the age of 75 I find myself feeling like Tithonus with all his youth in ashes'. When the works closed the Times of 8 June 1940 reported, 'Morris's tapestry works are probably unique in the history of the art, as having been self-supporting for over sixty years, In fact, he never received any official recognition in his lifetime, beyond a commission to decorate St. James Palace...Amid the din of war, the closing down of the Morris firm after eighty years' existence should not pass unnoticed. It marks the end of an art movement which in its time revolutionized the taste of the nation and spread a wide influence abroad. Future ages may rank the name William Morris not only high among the great Victorians but among the leading artist designers of all time.

In the autumn of 1940, the apprentice boys' house was destroyed by a bomb. From the rubble a small painting of Merton High Street was found. On the lower right hand corner are the initials of the artist 'WHK' – the tapestry weaver

William Harold Knight! The rest of the site was swept away by the Merton Board Mills. Today, the Merton Abbey works lie beneath a large Sainsbury's store and an old peoples home.

<https://youtu.be/OrGp8aTGYKY> The block-printing workshop, c1898-99 (in L. F. Day, *Art Journal* 1899).

David Saxby is the Senior Archeologist at the Museum of London Archeology and the author of *William Morris at Merton* (1995).



The block-printing workshop, c1898-99 (in L. F. Day, *Art Journal* 1899).



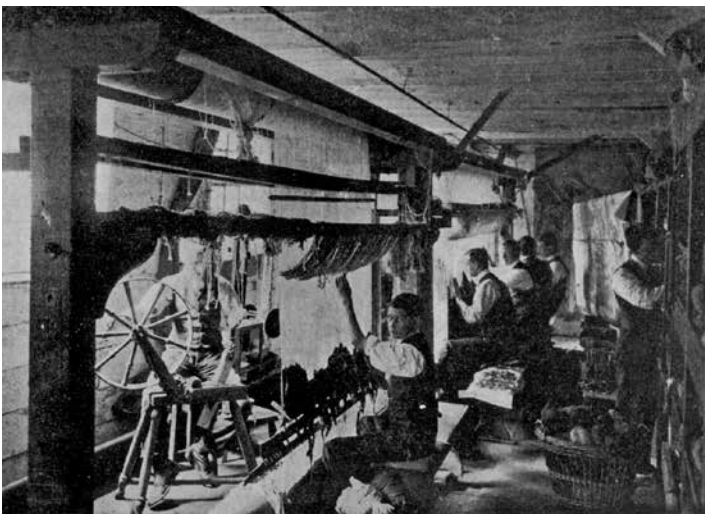
Painting by Walter Taylor of the farrier's house and yard next to the Merton Abbey works, looking across the river Wandle, 1894 (Courtesy of John Kendall).



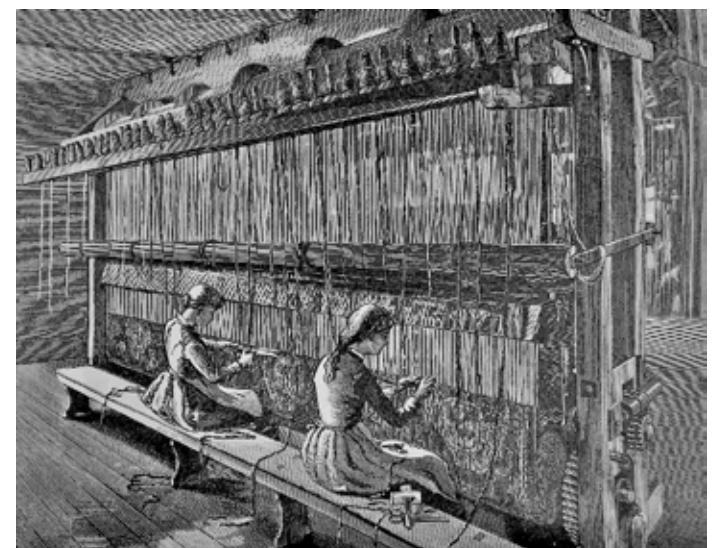
Merton High Street in c 1902. The two ladies are standing outside the 'apprentice boys house' with the end of the caretaker's house to the left.



Frederick Chadwick and his nephew Frank Chadwick in the dye workshop, c 1924.



The tapestry workshop c 1907. On the rear loom are John Martin, Walter Taylor, Gordon Berry and John Glassbrook. The apprentice is probably Harry Plant or George Fitzhenry.



The young carpet knotters in the carpet workshop in 1883. The two girls are either Eliza Merritt, Diana Penn, Louisa Phipps or Clara Adaway (from the *Art Journal*, May, 1883).

# THE VIEW FROM RUSSIA: DAVID SAXBY'S VIDEO OF MERTON ABBEY

*Anna Matyukhina*

I feel fortunate that when I first visited London in 2005 to attend the "Morris in the 21st Century Conference," David Saxby introduced me to the Merton Abbey area and revealed its secrets to me. David's unforgettable stories on the banks of the River Wandle about its history are still fresh in my memory, and it was a great pleasure for me to watch the video of *William Morris at Merton Abbey* he created this year. (<https://youtu.be/QRGp8aTGYKY>) I'm also grateful to him for his kind permission to post this video in my Russian William Morris Group in VKontakte, the Russian equivalent of Facebook, for International Museum Day 2020, where it was warmly received. I've gathered below several comments from those who were among the first to enjoy this impressive video "made to celebrate all the workers who made the wonderful goods for Morris & Co".

SOFIA MIKHALEVA

I'm deeply grateful to David Saxby for providing a rare wistful glimpse into the evanescent world of tapestries, carpets, stained-glass windows, tiles, hand-dyed fabrics, embroideries, hand-woven and block-printed textiles. It's an honour to be among the first viewers of *William Morris at Merton Abbey*, made with a thorough knowledge of the subject and its timeline, a keen susceptibility for beauty, and immense respect for William Morris's creative process. The pieces by Debussy chosen for the soundtrack perfectly convey the ethereal ambience of the epoch, the spirit of creation in the name of beauty and perfection. Infinite talent, unflinching effort, patience, industriousness, countless hours of painstaking work lie at the heart of Morris's timeless masterpieces. A master with a gift for mentorship, he was able to pass his work ethics, standards of workmanship, and aesthetic sensibilities on to his apprentices. The workshops by the river Wandle are a hopeful, enlightening, moving example of co-creation, community, and a joint quest for beauty and perfection. David Saxby retraces this quest step by step and does it with utmost attention to detail, precision, and an



Sofia Mikhaleva (27 years of age), literary translator, illustrator, graphic designer, Pre-Raphaelite aficionado, disciple of the Arts and Crafts movement, and self-professed Morrisaholic living in Moscow, Russia.

appreciation of practices now lost to obsolescence. There is something in the site by the willow-shaded stream itself that seems reminiscent of those days of inspired and industrious craftsmanship. This film helps rescue Morris's work from obscurity and brings forward the essence of the Merton Abbey works as a noble and inspired artistic endeavour.

MARINA GORDIENKO

I determined to do no less than to transform the world with Beauty,' declared William Morris, and he surely achieved this. I have deep respect and admiration for talented people who remain true to their vision and devote themselves entirely to perfecting their craft. I find inspiration in anything related to the life and creative work of William Morris, a multifaceted artist and undoubtedly a genius, that's why David Saxby's video moved and impressed me so much. It's hard to imagine the amount of research it required: how the visual material was collected bit by bit, how difficult it must have been to put together and edit the video, how the incomparable pieces of music by Debussy were selected and matched to the visuals, and how much information went into the captions. David Saxby does not just recount the story of the creation of workshops or showcase the multidimensional creative endeavours of the master craftsmen and their apprentices. He also makes the case for the nature itself being the greatest source of inspiration at the Merton Abbey works, with the magnificent landscapes, trees, wildflowers, birds, and the river finding their reflection in tapestries, carpets, and stained-glass artworks. It is no coincidence that Morris chose this site on the banks of the Wandle, for it seems to possess a particular ambience imbuing the creators with the strength and serenity, unanimity and friendly support that reigned in the workshops. In the spirit of unity and cohesion, difficulties were overcome, and masterpieces were created. And we, the audience, understand how much patience and endurance, zeal, attention, strength and talent is invested in each artwork. It is my mission to give my patients the healthy and beautiful smiles of their dreams, and in my professional work I am guided by the invaluable principle defined by Morris: 'No work which cannot be done with pleasure in the doing is worth doing.'



Marina Gordienko (58), dentist specializing in aesthetic dental restoration and full mouth dental rehabilitation living in Moscow, Russia.

Merton Abbey is one of the enchanted places revered by any Morrisophile. It was here in Surrey that he thrived, spearheaded his private arts and crafts renaissance, and created some of the most iconic, versatile, and whimsical Morris & Co. designs including Strawberry Thief and Willow Bough. Looking at the latter, you can almost feel the breath of wind stirring the delicate willows surrounding the Merton Abbey works. David Saxby, as a true artist and creative researcher, managed to capture this invisible presence of the past and encapsulate it in a video both concise and evocative. It is based on extensive photographic materials tied to the chronology of Morris living out his ideal of production in the most favourable of surroundings and working conditions. We are granted access to the workshops where talented artists, weavers, and spinners are engaged in time-consuming, labour-intensive, but infinitely rewarding ceremonies of ‘the noblest of arts’. Each picture documents the activities of workshops and introduces the viewers to real people. Captions perfectly complement the visuals: we learn about the craftsmen and their apprentices, how their fates unfolded, how the applied arts transformed their lives. The soundtrack deserves a special mention, for the music by Debussy is perfectly in synch with the measured pace of traditional craftsmanship and the dreamy aspect of the natural world. This video strikes a deep cord in the heart of all Morris admirers who are no strangers to the concepts of creativity, community, and collaboration. It’s particularly gratifying that the video dwells upon one of the most prolific periods of Morris’s creative life. He was the principal force behind the artworks that have withstood the test of time. Inspired by medieval artisans, contemporary visionaries and fellow artists, his art has remained, transcending the years to still be as beautiful and sought-after today as it was when he first produced it. His personal motto sounds just as relevant: ‘Give me love and work — these two only.’

EVELINA MAKOVSKAYA

Evelina Makovskaya (59), Head of the Department of English Language and Engineering Translation at Bauman State Technical University in Kaluga, Russia.

The creator of the video dedicated to Morris & Co.’s workshops at Merton Abbey places into the audience’s hands the thread that stretches from the bygone era to the present day. Watching this serene video, you gradually grow more aware of the magic contained in old photographs, of their singular charm, of the value that lies in their authenticity, of the voice of Time itself carrying on its soundless conversation. The author pieces together the visual narration of the workshops’ daily routine using the photographs as fragments of a mosaic, evoking contemplation, interest, empathy, respect, pride. David Saxby masterfully shows us

that time is fleeting, it is inexorably running out, but the memories captured in photographs remain forever. Old photographs document a different era of practices now lost beyond recall, and keep safe the priceless moments of life. Black-and-white photographs cannot capture the colour of clothes or hair, but they do show the colour of the soul.

HELENA AFANASIEVA

It was the revolutionary photographer Diane Arbus who said: ‘A photograph is a secret about a secret. The more it tells you the less you know.’ I work as a photographer and videographer, that’s why I watched David Saxby’s video with a certain degree of professional involvement. The contemplation of old photographs evokes an intense feeling of longing because they conjure up a particular ambience and capture a distinct sense of space and time. Pictures used in this video allow us to plunge into the past, to get an insight into the challenges of choosing the right place for the future workshops of Morris and his fellow artists and apprentices. We are given a private tour demonstrating how the workshops were equipped, who worked in them, and how the future masterpieces were designed. We witness the creation of tapestries and stained-glass windows unparalleled in their beauty, amount of detail, and ornamentation. The video beautifully transports us from the present to the past. The longer the time that elapses between us and the Morris & Co.’s workshops, the more exciting it is to admire the exquisite workmanship that has acquired great aesthetic, cultural, and decorative value. The video helps save the workshops on the banks of the River Wandle from oblivion, and keep the unheralded yet significant past events in collective memory. This is an excellent work of a dedicated art historian, with so much respect, gratitude, and consideration invested in it.



Helena Afanasieva (26), portrait and wildlife photographer and videographer living in Belgorod, Russia.

ANASTASIA SIZOVA

Anastasia Sizova (27), photographer, makeup artist, and set designer living in Moscow, Russia

Priceless old photographs: they are treasured, preserved with great care, browsed and examined with immense curiosity. In the late 19th century, photography was still quite an expensive and laborious undertaking, making the visu-

al information contained in vintage pictures all the more insightful, valuable, and tangible. The video covering the whole lifespan of the masters at the Merton Abbey works is a remarkable piece of careful and thoughtful research. It is a rarity for a comprehensive historical survey to be designed in a cohesive way that accurately reflects the aesthetics of the epoch. This video is in equal measure lyrical and scientific, paying tribute to the memory of those talented, creative, hardworking craftsmen whose hands created the immortal artworks. David Saxby eloquently and compellingly delivers his message to his viewers: the Merton Abbey works are not obsolete ruins of the past; they are nothing less than Britain's pride and glory.

IVAN MOISEENKO

The lands of southern England, the humble Merton Abbey. William Morris, a prolific and versatile artist and designer, makes the fateful decision to revive the production of printed textiles using old masters' techniques. He embarks on this noble and complicated enterprise with an association of fellow believers and like-minded artists, striving to nurture the next generation of worthy apprentices and successors. Using old photographs, David Saxby narrates the story of the painstaking work and diverse projects of the Merton Abbey workshops. The creation of magnificent tapestries and stained-glass windows required great effort, artistry, patience, perseverance, and a sophisticated taste. The same qualities were required of the art historian behind this video in order to create a faithful and detailed narrative. The very fact that this video exists is a proof that the memory of Morris & Co.'s workshops has been preserved and not buried beneath the sands of time



Ivan Moiseenko (27), chief business development officer living in Moscow, Russia.

MARIA ZALIEVA.

Maria Zalieva (27), urban planner, urban design manager living in Saint Petersburg, Russia

I have long been fascinated by the life and work of William Morris, a remarkable artist, an ingenious mastermind behind his workshops, a pioneer of artisanal techniques, a true polymath — designer, architect, translator, poet, writer, visionary, thinker, and social activist. Everything relevant to Morris's work seems exciting to me, books, prints, fabrics, even as little as a random glimpse of Morris & Co.

wallpaper in a room. I watched the video about Merton Abbey workshops more than once due to David Saxby's thoughtful and informed appreciation of Morris's legacy. A selection of old photographs accompanied by insightful captions provides a wealth of information and encourages you to take a closer look at each picture, to study the finest details, to appreciate the scale and significance of a business venture comprising fabric dyeing, block-printing, tapestry-weaving, and stained glass design. However, the video does not just chronicle the activities of the workshops. David Saxby traces the fortunes of Merton artisans and shows how inexperienced apprentices become skilled craftsmen under the guidance of their talented masters. David Saxby helps us learn more about the past, see it with our own eyes, draw upon the lessons and practices of the past, and seek to chart a new course to mastering the arts and crafts.

YANA VAVILINA

Yana Vavilina (26), hospitality manager living in Moscow, Russia

Many thanks to the creator of the video about the unrivalled workshops at Merton Abbey founded and championed by William Morris, a prominent artist, innovative designer, and tireless mastermind. This video helps preserve the memory of past events and exceptional people who created marvelous works of art. Vintage photographs bear witness to the painstaking, meticulous work of the craftsmen: fragile girls and boys in front of enormous looms are diligent and utterly absorbed, apprentices determined to match their mentors in artistry and dedication. They gain insight into the miracle of creation, they are privy to the mystery of handmade beauty, they seem to feel quiet pride at surveying their handiwork. These pictures capture the spirit of communal effort worthy of recognition and respect. It's all the more incredible that it was unfolding in rather humble conditions of newly established workshops. The face expressions of all the apprentices in the photos seem to be inspired, luminous, yet modest. The workshops gave them a chance to become masters of their craft and kept their names alive through the ages, and thanks to David Saxby and his video we get to know them today. Without the past, there is no present or future. Congratulations to David Saxby on his outstanding research.

In conclusion I should say that it was this highly appreciated video by David Saxby that helped my 9 year old son Tim to decide finally on the choice of a hero for his assigned project at the Hermitage school center. He was to imagine that he had a chance to meet a 19th century artist, and thanks to a time machine, take him to our time period where they would make something together or for each other. At first he was thinking

of choosing one of the artists whose works they discussed during their classes at the Museum (unfortunately, Morris wasn't among them), but after watching «William Morris at Merton Abbey» with me he wrote the following:

I'd like to tell you the story of how William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones, and I went to the Hermitage Museum in May 2020, while everything was closed because of the lockdown. Hopping into the time machine, I time travelled to England and got acquainted with Morris. Just like me, he was fascinated by the Middle Ages and loved nature, that's why we took to each other in no time. I relate to a lot of his ideas, for example, that at home, a person should be surrounded only by things that are beautiful and useful, and that a beautiful person starts with a beautiful house and a beautiful book. I was impressed that William worked so hard and that he was so accomplished in everything he took up — that's what I'd like to learn from him. Morris introduced me to Burne-Jones, the artist, whom he met when he was a student at Oxford and who was his lifelong friend. Together we created a lot of wonderful artworks, and that was why I invited them to the exhibition called "Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Tapestries in the Hermitage Collection". As they both died before the start of the 20th century, they didn't know that in 1902 one of the versions of the most famous tapestry, woven at the Merton Abbey works founded by Morris, was created for Russian art collector Sergei Shchukin (some of the paintings that we study this school year at our Hermitage classes used to belong to his art collection). William explored the exhibition with interest and stood for a long time in front of his tapestry "Adoration of the Magi", meanwhile Edward, who so often made sketches of his friend and with a few strokes captured the events of his life, drew William in the exhibition hall, then signed the page and gave it to me as a keepsake. As a parting gift, I gave them the 3D printer I created which could instantly turn sketches into three-dimensional models, so that customers of the famous Morris & Co. firm could, at the stage of design, get an idea of how their house would look like with the useful and beautiful things produced by William's Morris & Co.

I would like to express my deep and sincere gratitude once again to the US William Morris Society for the award of a Joseph R. Dunlap Memorial Fellowship which enabled me to take part in this conference and conduct further research into Morris and Co. tapestries the following year. I also wish to thank Galina Mikhaleva and Sophia Mikhaleva for their support and assistance.

Anna Matyukhina is a senior curator of the New Acquisitions Department at the Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia. She has published articles on William Morris and tapestry weaving as well as on Morris-related artworks in Russia.



Timofey Shulubin, "William Morris at the Hermitage"  
by Burne-Jones. May 2020

## WILLIAM MORRIS SESSION AT THE MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION

JANUARY 6-9 2022

### THE INTERNATIONAL MORRIS: THE MORRIS CIRCLE AND THE WORLD

#### **Morris and Continental Socialists**

Frank Sharp, NYC

#### **Morris, Ruskin, and Early Twentieth-Century Socialism in China**

Nan Chang, Fudan University

#### **Moncure Conway Goes East**

Margaret Stetz, University of Delaware

#### **Flora-graphic Empire: Illustrated Flower Hybrids and England's Empire**

Emily Cadger, University of British Columbia

We have also submitted a proposal for a non-guaranteed session on **The Pre-Raphaelites and Print Culture**, co-sponsored with SHARP, the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing.

Further information on MLA sessions should be forthcoming by July.

# ARTS AND CRAFTS ARCHITECTURE GOES TO SCHOOL: RESTORING AND REPURPOSING A UNIQUE 1891 AMERICAN SCHOOLHOUSE

David A. Kopp

The one-room schoolhouse which ubiquitously dotted the American rural landscape in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is a building type rarely given much attention by architectural historians. Today a cherished part of national folklore, it was, with few exceptions, a building of basic utility with little concern for style or setting. Writing in 1848, the landscape designer A. J. Downing complained that it was in most instances “a small one-story edifice built of wood or stone in the most meager mode—dingy in aspect and dilapidated in condition.” Though many of the surviving buildings reflect Downing’s assessment, in a small town twenty miles northwest of New York City, an outstanding and rare example has recently been landmarked, restored and creatively repurposed.

## THE ARCHITECT

During the nineteenth century, Newport, Rhode Island, midway between New York and Boston, evolved from a Colonial whaling port and became the prime summer resort of East Coast industrialists who built their great houses along its dramatic ocean cliffs. For roughly one hundred years, the best of America’s residential architects waged a “war of the styles” on this sea-coast battlefield to the delight of their wealthy patrons. Dudley Newton (1843 – 1907) was born and educated in Newport, and in the 1860s he apprenticed to Francis Hoppin and George Champlin Mason, both of whom practiced in the “Stick” style.

*Stick* was based in the picturesque examples of American pattern books like A.J. Downing’s *The Architecture of Country Houses* (1850). Skeletal frames were given roof-lines, window shapes and articulated wood overlays that suggested gothic, medieval half-timber, Italianate and Swiss chalet designs. Shortly after establishing his own practice, Newton shifted the paradigm. In the Jacob Cram House (1872), the articulated details of gothic picturesque are subdued by a truth in structure and utility clearly shown in the wooden frame of the walls and voids. The overall appearance is one of woven cohesion between function and ornament, expressing a vernacular style in wood. Vincent Scully sees in the Cram House a significant sea-change for American domestic architecture: “Such ‘reality’ is to be equated in England with the philosophy of the *Eccesiologist* and Street and with the work of Butterfield. As an expression of technique and social purpose it represents in wood an application of the principles of Philip Webb and William Morris as exhibited in brick in their Red House of 1859.”

While Newton’s connection to English architects cannot be explicitly documented, John Ruskin’s ideas were in wide circulation among American architects in the mid-1860s, notably through the efforts of the “Society for the Advancement in Truth in Art” and their publication *The New Path*. Although the Cram house uniquely defined a ‘modern gothic’ moment for the stick style, Newton did not remain a purist in his practice and worked in virtually every popular style in Newport in the years which followed.

## THE ORIGINAL BUILDING

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, Mahwah, New Jersey, was a retreat for wealthy New York City residents who established “gentleman’s farms” in the countryside of the Ramapo River Valley. Alfred B. Darling, a New York City hotelier, had a large horse and dairy farm with scores of



Figure 1: The Jacob Cram House of 1872, architect Dudley Newton’s “modern gothic” vernacular in wood, according to Vincent Scully, the stick equivalent of Philip Webb’s brick Red House. (Credit: Scully)



Figure 2: The Schoolhouse in the winter snow of 1892. The building at the rear contained the boys and girls toilets. (Credit: NYNJTC)



The unrestored and restored community hall on the upper level. Original windows on the end-wall are now display cases. New HVAC ductwork hangs from cables. The door at the far-end leads into the new addition. (Credit: NYNJTC)



The entry hall before and after restoration. (Credit: NYNJTC)

workers, and the hamlet around the estate became known as Darlington. His neighbor with an equally large estate was the sugar-refiner Theodore A. Havemeyer. In an effort to better provide for the education of the growing number of children of the families in their employ, in 1888, the two men agreed to

finance the building of a new schoolhouse in Darlington.

In 1880, Havemeyer had purchased a home in Newport designed by Dudley Newton and subsequently engaged the architect to plan and build a large dairy barn complex at his farm in New Jersey. When Newton returned to Mahwah to





The view from the southeast side, showing new addition and original building in historically-matched paint scheme of 1891. The original 1891 bellcote over the front gable remains in situ without bell. The vented belfry was a later addition with bell intact and working by means of its pull-rope on the second floor landing. (Credit: NYNJTC)

begin work on the Schoolhouse in 1890, he took inspiration from the local farm buildings to help define the spirit of the rural vernacular for the new school building as did Philip Webb for the estate residence at Standen (1891-1894). The front elevation of the Schoolhouse and its surface materials give the sense that the building may have actually been intended as a large dairy-barn, with a lower level for cow stalls built of local fieldstone and a wood-shingled hay-loft above. Playing the role of barn entrance, the oversized Romanesque segmented-arch portico gave shelter outside the doors and was undoubtedly inspired by the work of H. H. Richardson who worked contemporaneously with Newton in Newport.

The blending of Richardsonian, stick and shingle style elements creates a mixture of surfaces on the building's envelope which draws attention to the form while simultaneously enhancing the charming and quaint character of the details. Like his earlier Cram house, a strong sense of "reality" pervades the design at Darlington and the structure of the outside walls and perforations speaks clearly to the plan and function of the rooms within. The single large open classroom is on the ground level, and on the upper level, sharing the same footprint, is a community hall with arch-braced trusses supporting the gabled roof above. On the lower level, an office for the teacher with an inside window to the classroom is provided on the north side of the building and a library and supplies room occupies the identical space on the south side. These two rooms necessitated

the unique projecting bays with Romanesque arched windows along the sides of the building, and above, under the steeply sloping roof, are storage closets for the community hall. A large two-story vestibule with twin staircases connects the two levels at the front of the building.

While the Darlington Schoolhouse was by no means a large commission for Newton, as a small rural school it reflects the same aesthetic consideration as his large-scale projects in Newport. At a cost of \$15,000 (US), details were incorporated to make Darlington a project of exceptional craft at the start of the decade which gave birth to the American Arts and Crafts Movement and its philosophy of simplicity and utility as a reaction against the late-19<sup>th</sup> century Aesthetic Movement and its highly ornate Queen Anne architecture. Newton specified Eastlake-patterned door hardware, granite quoins, and extensive wood trim throughout. Local masons and carpenters were engaged, and their names, along with those of architect and patron, were engraved in the dedication plaque which hangs above the classroom door in the vestibule.

#### THE RESTORATION

The Darlington Schoolhouse served the community until 1944 when the last classes were held. The property passed through several private owners and was briefly used as a dance studio and carpentry shop, but by the early 1990s was

virtually abandoned. The future remained uncertain until 2005 when the New York and New Jersey Trail Conference acquired the building for its new headquarters in joint tenancy with the Town of Mahwah. The Trail Conference, formed in 1920 as a corps of volunteers to build hiking trails in the parklands surrounding New York City, is today a professionally administered not-for-profit organization that also spearheads environmental conservation and green-space acquisition.

Comprehensive engineering studies of the Schoolhouse were undertaken, including assessment of surface and structural materials, historic mortar analysis, and a complete survey of the building's electrical and mechanical equipment. Though found to be in good physical condition, there was much to be done to enable the 1891 building to function as modern office space. From the start of the project, the Trail Conference team recognized and appreciated the historical provenance of the building. Early funding came from the state and local county historic trusts, and both organizations contributed expertise in developing a preservation plan that would allow for adaptive reuse.

When built, the Schoolhouse had no internal plumbing. There was a well near the front entrance for potable water, and a separate building housed the boys and girls toilets behind the main building. Newton also made no provision for central heat. Both classroom and community hall had wood-stoves exhausting into a chimney on the rear wall of the building. A boiler and steam radiator system were later retrofitted with exposed iron pipes running along the interior walls on both levels. The goal to restore the original building without alterations to any internal walls resulted in the final innovative plan: Newton's building would be returned to its as-built condition, and a new addition abutting the rear wall would be built to provide for modern restrooms, employee kitchen, elevator, and a doubling of the original space.

A local architect who specializes in historic restorations, Winston Perry, AIA, led the team who designed the addition. Without attempting to copy the original structure, the addition complements the historic building with a sympathetic sense of wall mass and perforations, and a complex roof line that amplifies the simple elegance of Newton's gable with its restored cedar shakes. Inside, a light-toned oak scheme was used to uniquely define the new space in contrast to the 1891 structure's dark chestnut. A "green approach" was adopted throughout, and both old and new are heated and cooled using a high-efficiency deep-well geo-thermal system installed under the footprint of the new addition.

With generous funding from corporations, trusts and individuals, the restored and repurposed Darlington Schoolhouse opened its doors officially on September 12, 2015, and has since been landmarked with the United States Department of the Interior on their National Registry of Historic Places. Returning it to its original purpose, the building

is again a vital educational facility in the local community serving as the administrative headquarters and learning center for the Trail Conference and its mission: "Connecting People with Nature." It seems remarkably serendipitous that this particular organization should have found its new home in a 1891 building that so well represents in its design, materials and handcrafted construction and ornamentation the aesthetic philosophy of John Ruskin and William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement they helped to foster which seeks to improve the human condition by bringing society and nature into closer relationship through Art.

...until we have clear sky above our heads and green grass beneath our feet; until the great drama of the seasons can touch our workmen with other feelings than the misery of winter and the weariness of summer; till all this happens our museums and art schools will be but amusements of the rich; and they will soon cease to be of any use to them also, unless they make up their minds that they will do their best to give us back the fairness of the Earth.

David A. Kopp is adjunct professor of Arts and Letters at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey.



## THE WILLIAM MORRIS ARCHIVE ANNOUNCES ITS NEW VERSION!

COME VISIT US AT  
[morrisarchive.lib.uiowa.edu](http://morrisarchive.lib.uiowa.edu)

The Archive aims to gather all of Morris's writings, including previously unpublished items, manuscript drafts, important printed versions, and Kelmscott Press editions, as well as supplementary and contextual materials for each text.

The result of several years of work, this new version offers additional items and more convenient and accessible images of Morris's texts.



Fig. 1. John Everett Millais, *Ophelia*, 1851-52.  
Oil on canvas, 2' 6" x 3' 8". Tate, London.

## THE RADICAL ROOTS OF WILLIAM MORRIS AND THE PRE-RAPHAELITES

*Monica Bowen*

The ongoing traveling art exhibition *Victorian Radicals: From the Pre-Raphaelites to the Arts and Crafts Movement* features works of art from the Birmingham Museum of Art, and currently is slated to travel throughout the United States until the end of January 2022. The premise of the show argues that William Morris, the Pre-Raphaelites and their associates were “avant-garde” artists and “radicals” for their day in their interests, artistic styles, and political leanings.<sup>1</sup> While the words “avant-garde” and “radical” may be ideal from a marketing perspective, in order to pique public interest by suggesting the art is progressive or different, these words can be misleading due to their many modern definitions. The text panels within the show at the Seattle Art Museum in the summer of 2019, as well as the catalog, did little to account for the etymological changes and complex connotations of these words. Furthermore, today words like “radical” or “avant-garde” fail to acknowledge how in the 19th century the Pre-Raphaelites and William Morris turned to tradition, the past, and the constancy of nature for inspiration. Through an analysis of objects from the exhibition that depict roots and other forms of plant life, I propose alternative approaches to understanding the Pre-Raphaelites and Morris by considering the early definitions of the word “radical” and the term “avant-garde,” as well as looking to how these artists described progress in their own words.

To begin, today a common definition for “radical” is “unconventional,” although this usage did not exist until the 1920s.<sup>2</sup> During the time of the Pre-Raphaelites, “radical” emerged as a noun in mid-19th century Britain, in reference to supporters of parliamentary reform. These radicals eventually created the Liberal Party.<sup>3</sup> However, this 19th-century political

definition is misleading to connect with the Pre-Raphaelites, since the group was not founded on government politics, and as a whole sought for artistic, not parliamentary, reform. And while William Morris at one point was associated with the Liberal Party, his disenchantment with the party grew after 1880 which led to his deriding comment that in politics “Radicalism is on the wrong line, so to say, and will never develop [sic] into anything more than Radicalism.”<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, in its historically-appropriate 19th-century usage as a noun, the word “radical” is not satisfactory to connect to these artists. Instead, however, we can look to how the adjective “radical” was used in the 19th century. At this time, the word “radical” was still associated with the Latin adjective “radicalis,” which means “of or relating to a root.”<sup>5</sup> Dante Gabriel Rossetti, one of the Pre-Raphaelite founders, used the word “radical” in his own writing as an adjective to mean “fundamental.”<sup>6</sup> This usage, and its connection with foundations, follows this early definition that connects “radical” with roots that extend underground and give support.

It is this connection between “radical” and “root” that is most appropriate to use with the Pre-Raphaelites, in order to emphasize how these artists were grounded in the past to create a future with a strong and moral foundation. In practice, the Pre-Raphaelites grasped medieval and British cultural traditions by their roots to create a foundation for their art and exposed this foundation to a 19th-century audience. Visually, this “radical” foundation is suggested through Pre-Raphaelite paintings that include roots and plant life, with the most famous example being Millais’ *Ophelia* painting in the Tate Museum collection, in which the exposed roots of a fallen willow tree take up one-third of the background in the upper left corner (Fig. 1). This tree’s roots rose upward out of the ground, to be suspended in air and light, and herein *Ophelia* draws a visual contrast as she is in the process of sinking downward, below the waterline. Her outstretched arms parallel the extended roots of the tree, suggesting that her death is an uprooting of her life on the earth’s surface as she descends into dark, watery oblivion below.

Roots and upturned plants were important to the Pre-Raphaelites and their followers, both visually and metaphorically, and this paper proposes an alternative interpretation of the Victorian Radicals exhibition with a focus on roots and plants as a “radical” theme. For example, the same year that Millais began to paint *Ophelia* with its uprooted willow tree, William Holman Hunt painted *Two Gentleman of Verona*, also titled *Valentine Rescuing Sylvia from Proteus* (Fig. 2). Like Millais, Hunt also depicted upturned plants in his painting as a way to emphasize the subject matter: Proteus has attempted to rape Sylvia, and evidence of their struggle is reflected in several upturned mushrooms. They are flipped upside-down on their caps, prominently visible next to Proteus in the foreground of the painting (Fig. 3).<sup>7</sup>



Fig.2. William Holman Hunt, *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (Valentine Rescuing Sylvia from Proteus), 1851. Oil on canvas, 38.75 x 52.5 in. Birmingham Museum of Art (*Victorian Radicals* catalog #16).



Fig. 3. William Holman Hunt, detail of *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (Valentine Rescuing Sylvia from Proteus), 1851.

Sometimes, Pre-Raphaelites chose to depict or suggest exposed roots of plants, but through creative depictions of objects that are not actually roots. For example, Rossetti sometimes transformed the folds of drapery in his paintings to suggest roots, specifically his depictions of Proserpine. Rossetti created eight versions of this subject, and the painting which appears in the *Victorian Radicals* exhibition is the last one he created between 1881-82 (Fig. 4). Textured drapery is a reoccurring motif in these paintings: most of Proserpine's drapery is replete with long, thin, repetitive folds. These folds gather along Proserpine's shoulder and cascade down her arm in a curve which mimics the curve of the spray of ivy in the upper left-hand corner. The connection between the folds and plant life is emphasized further because the folds intermittently break off into smaller strands, transforming the drapery to look like the roots of a plant. These roots spread across and down the lower half of the painting, to create a "radical" composition both in terms of the roots imagery and the fundamental role these roots serve in grounding the composition.

In fact, the roots even extend beyond the edge of the picture plane, suggesting that they continue deeper underground. Proserpine, the Roman goddess who spends half of her time in the underworld where roots might be found, is herself

very much rooted to the ground in this image. Rossetti's focus on roots and plants can be connected to the influence of the art critic John Ruskin on the Pre-Raphaelites; Ruskin recommended that artists create a strong moral foundation for art that was grounded in the truth of the natural world, and Rossetti appropriately uses roots for his visual foundation of Proserpine.

Roots also are discussed as metaphors in the writings of William Holman Hunt. He described uprooting and upheaval as a means to revitalize stagnant artistic traditions in British academic art. In his autobiography, he explained the aims of the Pre-Raphaelite group:

"We young men had no disposition to lay our spring-like lives at the feet of such fatality [i.e. the demise of British art]. If the open road ended in an impassable waste, we



Fig. 4. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Proserpine*, 1881-82. Oil on canvas, 31 x 15 3/8 in. Birmingham Museum of Art (*Victorian Radicals* catalog #71).



Fig. 5. William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones, with co-workers, designers and makers at Kelmscott Press, *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer Now Newly Imprinted* (so-called *Kelmscott Chaucer*), 1896. Bound book with 87 woodcut illustrations on handmade paper, with silver clasps, 17 1/8 x 11 3/4 x 3 1/2 in. (Birmingham Museum of Art (*Victorian Radicals* catalog #81).

had to make a new way; it might be to push through the forest darkness, to root out venomous undergrowth, to substitute wholesome stock, grafting these with shoots, to ripen hereafter for the refreshment of travellers overcome by their toilsome march. It is by seeking out the teaching of the secret-revealing years that the young can justify their usurpation of the seats of their fathers.”<sup>8</sup>

This idea to “root out venomous undergrowth” parallels nicely with the original definition of the adjective “radical” in the 19th century. In 1843-44 Karl Marx wrote, “To be radical is to grasp matters at the root” and in this context the Pre-Raphaelites are radically grasping the venomous undergrowth of what they perceive is a stagnant artistic tradition.<sup>9</sup> Hunt’s imagery of grafting in new, wholesome shoots to form a new artistic tradition parallels what John Ruskin wrote about the Pre-Raphaelites, in comparing them to a “strong stem” from which the “decayed branches” of lesser artists would break off.<sup>10</sup>

In writing, both Ruskin and Hunt use language that suggests two-directional movement on a vertical axis. The paradigm for outdated or “lesser” art relates to the uprooting of “venomous undergrowth” or the downward fall of “decayed branches.” The reversal for this paradigm is the healthy art of the Pre-Raphaelites, with the “wholesome stock” that can grow downward to create a new, deeply-rooted foundation for art, and “shoots” that will grow upward. Not only can this vertical-axis be visualized like a growing plant, akin to the plants and “radical” roots shown in Pre-Raphaelite art, but the vertical axis also can be interpreted as a timeline that simultaneously reaches down to the roots of the past and rises to the future, since Hunt says that the “secret revealing years” of the past should be sought out by the young who intend to usurp their fathers.

Too often today, the categorization of art as “radical” and “avant-garde” relies on 21st century meanings of these words and is discussed as if on a horizontally-oriented continuum of progression that only moves forward in one direction, akin to a ray in mathematics. This mindset undoubtedly is influenced from the early usage of the term “avant-garde,” which was connected to the front-runners in a military advance, and later in 1825 the French socialist Henri Saint-Simon and his followers connected the term “avant-garde” to artists as the front-runners for advocating social change.<sup>11</sup> However, when considering the Pre-Raphaelites, this horizontal visualization of advancing in one direction becomes problematic, since these artists wanted to evoke change in society but also look to the past. The Pre-Raphaelites sometimes are awkwardly forced within this horizontal-axis by scholars and writers today, but in confusing and contradictory ways, such as descriptions that the group was “looking back to look forward” or making a “forward move backward.”<sup>12</sup> These descriptions are unsatisfactory and fail to consider the way that the Pre-Raphaelites and their contemporaries described themselves or were influenced by nature, which is more clearly expressed with language and visual compositions that suggest movement in two directions on a vertical axis, akin to a mathematic line instead of a ray.

Similar to the Pre-Raphaelites, William Morris also eschewed the idea of a straight linear progression, both for art and politics. Therefore, it is problematic to connect his work with the horizontally-oriented term “avant-garde” too. Instead, Morris wrote in a joint statement with Ernest Belfort Bax in the 2nd



Fig. 6. William Morris, “Acanthus” wallpaper design, 1875. Graphite and watercolor on paper, 32 x 27 in. Birmingham Museum of Art (*Victorian Radicals* catalog #69c).

edition of the Manifesto of the Socialist League (1885) that “the progress of all life must be not on the straight line, but on the spiral.”<sup>13</sup> The spiral serves as a good example of progress for Morris, because a spiral involves both forward and backward movement: forward progression, or what Morris called a “new development,” cannot take place without first curving backward and revisiting and strengthening what Morris called the “old principle.” This forward-and-backward spiral movement and visual reinforcement of the circular “principle” are clearly seen in the large borders that Morris designed for the Kelmscott Chaucer. These borders consist of repeating spirals formed by different types of plant life, such as the curved grape vines in the title page design (Fig. 5).<sup>14</sup>

Morris elaborated his opinion about the spiral and progress in the lecture “The Arts and Crafts of Today” from 1889. He explained that he thinks of this spiral as ascending in its orientation, describing that progression is a “step upward” on the spiral.<sup>15</sup> In this way, with a focus of movement on a vertical axis, and with an interest in using plant life to express such movement visually, the Pre-Raphaelites and William Morris are similar.

The Victorian Radicals exhibition includes Morris-designed wallpaper which evokes this ascending spiral design, including Acanthus from 1875 (Fig. 6).<sup>16</sup> The large leaves begin to swirl upward in the lower right section of the design, only to tuck underneath themselves on the left side and then curve upward in a tighter, sharper arc that parallels the curve of the outer leaves, to create a clear circular, spiral movement that suggests the composition and connectivity of a spiral. In this print, the strongly-delineated veins within the leaf provide a visual backbone that reinforces the shape of the spiral.<sup>17</sup> When the design is hung in vertical strips of wallpaper, as is intended, the overall composition suggests the upward surge of an ascending spiral.

Too much confusion can be caused if the Pre-Raphaelites and William Morris are discussed using the terms “radical” or “avant-garde,” based on their modern meanings and the horizontally-oriented timeline of progression that is implied. More clarity is achieved if the Pre-Raphaelites’ interest in growth and progress is discussed through the imagery of a growing plant and a vertical axis of movement, and William Morris’s interest in progress as a spiral that moves upward, but in both forward and backward directions. In order to understand William Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites as “radical” and “avant-garde” in their pursuit of artistic and societal change, one must unearth the past, utilize the early meaning of “radical,” and embrace words with a vertical visualization that suggests the artists’ visions of progress and growth.

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- 1 Wall text, *Victorian Radicals: From the Pre-Raphaelites to the Arts and Crafts Movement*, Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, Washington
- 2 Andy Hollandbeck, “In a Word: What’s so Radical about Radishes?” *The Saturday Evening Post*, June 13, 2019, <https://www.saturdayeveningpost.com/2019/06/in-a-word-whats-so-radical-about-radishes/>.
- 3 “The Roots of Radical: Getting Down to What’s Under the Surface,” Merriam-Webster, accessed January 10, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/radical-word-history>.
- 4 J. W. Mackail, *The Life of William Morris* (London, Longmans, Green & Co. 1899), 2:103. Morris commented on his disaffection with Radicalism after the election of William Ewert Gladstone to the premiership in 1880. He was associated with the Liberal Party from about 1876-1880, since he aligned with the Liberal Party’s opposition of Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli’s alliance with the Ottoman Empire.
- 5 Martin Ellis, et al., *Victorian Radicals: From the Pre-Raphaelites to the Arts & Crafts Movement* (New York: Prestel Publishing, 2018), 36.
- 6 For example, in a letter that Dante Gabriel Rossetti wrote to his mother on September 30, 1853, he explains how there is a “radical defect in the nose [of his portrait of Aunt Charlotte]” and he “erased that important feature” because the defect was fundamental and needed to be redone. See *William Michael Rossetti, Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family-Letters with a Memoir* (New York: AMS Press, 1970), 2:112.
- 7 Ruskin observes this struggle by noting the “broken fungi” and the “trodden grass.” See John Ruskin, *The Works of John Ruskin* (London: George Allen, 1904), 12:325.
- 8 William Holman Hunt, “Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood” (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1914), xiii-xiv.
- 9 Karl Marx, “Critique of Hegel’s ‘Philosophy of Right,’” (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 137.
- 10 John Ruskin, *Pre-Raphaelitism*, (New York: John Wiley, 1851), 24.
- 11 Henri Saint-Simon, *Opinions littéraires, philosophiques et industrielles* (1825). Paul Wood explains that the publication also included texts written by his followers, one of which may have been the “avant-garde” passage. See Paul Wood, *Challenge of the Avant-Garde* (Yale University Press, 1999), 36.
- 12 Rebecca Jeffrey Easby, “A Beginner’s Guide to the Pre-Raphaelites,” Khan Academy, accessed January 10, 2020, <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/becoming-modern/victorian-art-architecture/pre-raphaelites/a-a-beginners-guide-to-the-pre-raphaelites>. See also Philip Kennicott, “At National Gallery, A Look at the Pre-Raphaelites’s Forward Move Backward,” February 15, 2013, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/museums/at-national-gallery-a-look-at-the-pre-raphaelites-forward-move-backward/2013/02/14/3a6b7a68-7609-11e2-95e4-6148e45d7adb\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/museums/at-national-gallery-a-look-at-the-pre-raphaelites-forward-move-backward/2013/02/14/3a6b7a68-7609-11e2-95e4-6148e45d7adb_story.html).
- 13 Ernest Belfort Bax and William Morris, “Manifesto of the Socialist League” (London: Socialist League Office, 1885), 11.
- 14 A brief comparison of William Morris designs to a spiral composition was proposed by Stephen E. Eismann, “Class Consciousness in the Design of William Morris,” *Journal of William Morris Studies* 15, no. 1 (1992): 33.
- 15 William Morris, *Art and Its Producers, and The Arts and Crafts of Today: Two Addresses Delivered Before the National Association for the Advancement of Art* (London: Longmans & Co., 1901), 43.
- 16 The date of this design indicates that William Morris was considering this spiral-like curve in his design before he discussed it in relation to political progress in the 1880s. Other good examples of the spiral design by Morris appear in *Diaper* (1868) and “*Strawberry Thief*” (registered in 1888).
- 17 Caroline Arscott sees this design as an example of “multi-directional growth” due to the positions of these leaves, in what she calls a “swirling ensemble” in which “a closed form can become an open form.” See Caroline Arscott, *William Morris and Edward Burne Jones: Interlacings* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 35.

# MORRIS & COMPANY: ESSAYS ON FINE PRINTING

BY WILLIAM S. PETERSON.

NEW CASTLE, DELAWARE: OAK KNOLL PRESS, 2020.

*Reviewed by Peter Stansky*

William S. Peterson is the pre-eminent historian of the Kelmscott Press as well as being a wide-ranging scholar on other aspects of the 19th and 20th century British literature, particularly Robert Browning. Over the years he has put us profoundly in his debt for his series of books, edited volumes, articles, and pamphlets dealing with the Kelmscott Press. Beginning with William Morris himself he edited in 1982 *The Ideal Book: Essays and Lectures on the Arts of the Book by William Morris*. That was followed two years later by the invaluable *A Bibliography of the Kelmscott Press*. And then most important of all, in 1991 *The Kelmscott Press: A History of the William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, the magnificent story of the Press itself, necessary reading for all those who are interested in the book arts and that powerful, indeed overwhelming, nineteenth century figure: William Morris. Then, in 2011 with his wife Sylvia Holton Peterson, *The Kelmscott Chaucer: A Census*, an extraordinary compilation of the location of all known copies of the Press's masterpiece, the "pocket cathedral." It should be added that all of these books, other than the history of the Press itself, were, in the spirit of Morris, designed by him as well; they are fine examples of book making.

Now a further volume has appeared, *Morris & Company*, a collection of essays on the book arts. In a way I think the title is a bit of a tease. The name of William Morris's firm was Morris & Co. It produced an extraordinary wide range of products: furniture, rugs, stained glass, tapestries, wall papers, textiles, but not as far as I know books. The Firm had been founded in 1861 and continued after Morris's death in 1896 into the twentieth century. The Kelmscott Press, a separate enterprise, began late in Morris's life, in 1891, issuing its last book in 1898, two years after his death. Perhaps by using the term Company rather than the more common Co. in referring to the Firm, Peterson is making one of the major points of this collection. There is a temptation to see Morris as a solitary figure. He was deeply innovative, going off in new directions in so many of his design activities. But there were also others who were innovative in design. There were precursors, most notably in the book world, William Pickering and Charles Whittingham of the Chiswick Press, in the years before the founding of the Kelmscott Press. And indeed these earlier printers catered to a larger public than did Morris himself. They were, unlike the Kelmscott Press, producing not limited editions of private press books but rather books for the general market. It is extremely valuable to give credit to these figures. On the other hand Morris's impact should not be too flattened. By the high quality of his work, the extraordinary strength of his personality, his aim was to think in new ways about the book, as a total design

product. Peterson places Morris firmly in the context of the 19th century printing world, frequently ignored elsewhere, even if his ultimate effect was to change it in important ways. There is also a fine discussion of Morris's relationship with the past, commonly assumed to be a hankering to return to medieval times but of course in terms of printing that would be far less true.

Peterson also deals with another seeming paradox of Morris's work. Morris was a Marxist socialist, his fondest wish being the destruction of the capitalist world. Yet he was producing books in limited editions at high prices that could only be afforded by the few. He was also a shrewd businessman who ran his companies in conventional and profitable fashion. Some have suggested that there might be a bit of hypocrisy about this situation, that his businesses should have been run on more socialist principles, hence reducing his income. But in fact the money he made, particularly as his private income had declined, provided the funds that made it possible for him to work towards the destruction of a world he so hated, so to speak financing the revolution. In these essays Peterson also deals with another Morrisian paradox, that he was perfectly willing to employ modern techniques if it made it easier to achieve his aesthetic goals. This was true for the Kelmscott Press in his use of photography in the process of designing its types.

The sub-title is also to an extent somewhat misleading. About half of the text, rather than being essays, is in fact annotated presentation of important documents. Fascinating to read are Sydney Cockerell's frequent dated notations of his work with Morris and the Press, important as he served as its secretary for much of its existence. Included is the rather heart breaking sentence on October 3, 1896 "W.M. died quite peacefully at 11:15." This piece is particularly valuable in tracking the creation of the *Chaucer*. Also this collection has an American dimension. It includes the publication of the correspondence of two prominent American book designers, Thomas Maitland Cleland and Daniel Berkeley Updike of the Merrymount Press. There are also excellent essays on Emery Walker, so important for the Kelmscott Press, as well as on Robert Catterson-Smith, who worked on Burne-Jones's illustrations for the *Chaucer*. There are other perceptive essays here on the world of fine printing, such as one the connections of St. John Hornby of the Ashendene Press with the Daniel Press. There is as well a piece on John Betjeman as collector and book designer. Finally one is grateful to have a listing of Peterson's numerous publications, dating from 1964. That and the contents of this book make it abundantly clear how much William S. Peterson has contributed to the study of William Morris, particularly on his last great creative endeavor, the Kelmscott Press.

Peter Stansky is a distinguished British historian and author of more than 25 books, including *William Morris* (1983) and *Redesigning the World, William Morris, the 1880s, and the Arts and Crafts* (1985).

*We're very pleased to celebrate the publication of Teaching William Morris: ,The Earthly Paradox.' The following two articles reproduce the introduction by our former president Jason D. Martinek and former board member Elizabeth Carolyn Miller, followed by a review by Florence Boos.*

## TEACHING WILLIAM MORRIS: "THE EARTHLY PARADOX"

*Jason D. Martinek and Elizabeth Carolyn Miller*

Our introduction's subtitle from a caption for an 1885 political cartoon. The cartoon appeared after William Morris was arrested for allegedly assaulting a police officer, a charge he denied. Morris ultimately received leniency from the court and the cartoon shows a police officer shining Morris's shoes, suggesting that Morris was let off due to his social position and highlighting the rift between Morris's wealth and status and his radical working-class politics. Morris's career was indeed marked by paradox, as this cartoon attests, but only insofar as we assume the impracticability of traveling the distance he sought to travel -- the distance from his own lofty social position to that of the working classes. Morris traveled this distance in many different ways, not least of which was by teaching. He spent countless nights on the road, speaking to working-class audiences about social conditions under capitalism, trying to educate the masses toward socialism. But Morris could also be skeptical of the pedagogical mode -- he described his own childhood school as a mere "boy-farm," and joked, "if my parents had been poorer and had had more character they would have probably committed the fatal mistake of trying to educate me"

-- and he was often a harsh judge of his own capacities as a teacher. Describing an outdoor meeting at Ryton Willows, near Newcastle, for example, Morris describes a "fair meeting there of most attentive persons, though I guess I tried their patience as I got 'lecture' and being excited went on and on till I had gone on too long." Most teachers can probably relate to Morris's fear of having lost his audience in his enthusiasm for his subject, but in the end, Morris says, the meeting "was successful and the audience stayed till it was nearly dark."

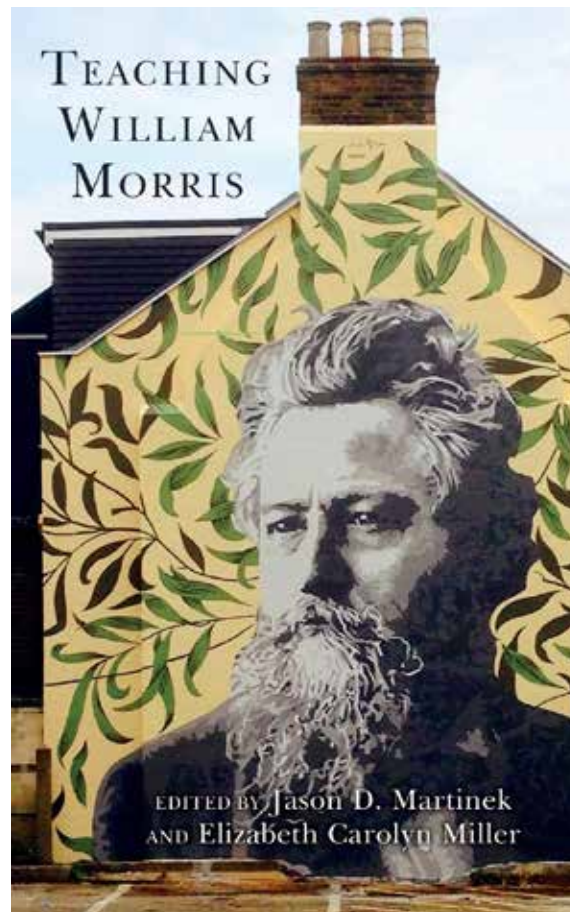
Our work as teachers in the modern classroom may little resemble Morris's "lecture" outdoor address on the banks of the Tyne, but the social conditions against which he railed have little changed since the 1880s. Just as economists have come to draw connections between the reconcentration of capital today with the concentration of capital in the Gilded Age (or Belle Epoque to use Thomas Piketty's phrase), we think that Morris's response to the greed and ugliness of the Victorian Era is as relevant today as ever, and that it does us well to revisit Morris's social ideal, resting, as it did, on the pillars of personal liberty, democracy, fellowship, environmental stewardship, and equality for all. He represents a tonic to the political conditions of Trumpism and neoliberalism, and we believe he should be an integral part of the twenty-first-century classroom.

But how do you teach someone like William Morris who made significant contributions to several different fields of study? Do

you teach him as a writer, an artist, a designer, or a political activist? Do you lop off the part that fits your course best and leave the rest of the corpus to rot? The amputative approach all too long has been the prevailing one, and unsurprisingly so. Higher education in the twentieth century emphasized specialization over generalization, and Morris, who does not fit neatly into any disciplinary category, poses a challenge to the disciplinary needs of instructors, making it difficult, nigh impossible, for them to present Morris in all of his multivarious complexity.

How can teachers succeed in capturing Morris's true multi-dimensionality within the exigencies of the modern educational system? This is a question that engages, in different ways, all the contributions in this volume. Although an entire term could easily be spent on Morris, historically there have been very few opportunities for students to immerse oneself so completely in his oeuvre. Shakespeare, yes; Morris, no. Even at the graduate level, Morris tends to be part of a larger

thematic course (e.g. Victorian literature) than the focal point. Given Morris's complexity and wide-ranging contributions, it has been nearly impossible to do him justice, which is a problem given that his work -- in all its dimensions -- seems to hang curiously together. It is difficult to see the significance of his literary works without reading them in relation to his politics, difficult to understand his politics without conceptualizing them in relation to his theories of craft, difficult to understand





his aesthetic theories without reading his poetry, and so on. There is a reason why the major biographies of Morris are so long; Morris was never idle and mastered a whole array of arts and crafts. Just as his patterns for Morris & Co. are suggestive of endlessness, of borderless botanical growth with the seeming capacity to entwine its way around everything, so too every aspect of Morris's multi-faceted career seems to connect with every other aspect.

Jorge Luis Borges was another writer who knew something about seemingly endless, labyrinthine patterns and the sublimity of interconnection, and he was also a teacher who lectured on Morris. His lectures for a course on English literature that he taught at the University of Buenos Aires in 1966 provide insight not only into his own debt to Morris, but also into mid-twentieth-century approaches to teaching this Victorian polymath. Of the twenty-five lectures in the course, three were devoted to Morris, demonstrating that Borges viewed Morris as a pivotal figure. Borges described that pivotal role rather narrowly, focusing on how Morris brought a Germanic inflection to English literature. He delved most deeply into Morris's *The Earthly Paradise* and Icelandic sagas, and he marveled at Morris's cleverness with language. Wistfully

perhaps, Borges ended his lectures on Morris with the wish that twentieth-century students had a greater appreciation for Morris's literary contributions: "Morris's work garnered what the French call a *succès d'estime*" -- work that is critically acclaimed but never catches on with the public. His thoughts on Morris's failings as a writer are also illuminating: "The defect Morris suffered from is slowness; the descriptions of battles, the death of the dragon, they are a bit languid. After the death of Brynhild, the poem [*Sigurd the Volsung*] falls off." One wonders if Borges had taught Morris's poetry in the context of Morris's political beliefs or artistic pursuits if this "slowness" might have taken on another register in his classroom. But the story his lectures tell of Morris remains, nevertheless, an illustrative one when considering the challenges Morris poses in the classroom.

G. D. H. Cole, the first Chichele Professor of Social and Political Theory at Oxford University, was another intellectual luminary who taught Morris in the mid-twentieth century, and like Borges, he tended to reduce Morris to a part of the whole. Whereas Borges focused on Morris's Germanic influence, Cole was drawn most to Morris's artist-craftsman ideal. His three-part Morris lectures are from about 1950 and were prepared for a film strip for *Common Ground* -- an attempt to reach a wide audience that was perhaps not unlike Morris's outdoor lecture on the banks of the Tyne. Cole's lectures, in contrast to Borges's, offer a wider introduction to Morris's various pursuits, but fail to provide the connective tissue to show the interrelation of these numerous parts of Morris's career. Cole loosely built his lecture around Morris's ideal of craft labor: "The gist of William Morris's theory was that, to the fullest practicable extent, everything that men made ought to be 'a joy to the makers and to the user.'" Cole was so enamored with this turn-of-phrase that he repeated it at the conclusion of his lecture. In his elaboration of Morris's theory of art, he highlighted Morris's material contributions and his emphasis on the pleasure of the producer as well as the consumer, yet he meditated little on how this theory shaped Morris's writings. As with Borges, Cole rued that Morris's popularity had waned -- "At present, both as writer and as a designer, Morris is rather out of fashion" -- but Cole looked forward to the day that Morris, or at least a part of Morris, would come back in vogue. Cole, who was a leading voice of the Guild Socialism movement of the 1920s, never entirely left that vision for the world behind, even as the movement itself crumbled. His teaching notes present a highly romanticized version of Morris, and it is clear that he saw the waning of Morris's ideas as a lost opportunity for the remaking of British society along more egalitarian lines.

Borges and Cole both provide clues into how Morris was taught in the twentieth century, but neither manage to capture -- or perhaps even try to capture -- Morris's incredible range. We think the best way to find models for how to approach Morris more holistically is to look at how he is taught today. In the twenty-first century, disciplinary silos are beginning to



come down and interdisciplinary programs and integrative learning experiences are replacing them. But long before the word “interdisciplinary” entered the lexicon of higher education, Morris embodied that ideal. Thus, as you prepare your syllabi for next term, we want you to draw inspiration from these essays about teaching Morris and to think about how you can bring greater interdisciplinary consideration to his life and works. Whether you only have fifteen minutes to talk about Morris, or an entire semester, and whether you are teaching college students or preschoolers, we hope you will find the following essays, representing a range of perspectives from a variety of scholars and teachers, to be useful, and perhaps even beautiful, as we ourselves have found them to be.

The essays in this volume are divided into five sections, broadly representative of five different avenues of approaching Morris’s life and work: “Pasts and Presents,” Political Contexts,” “Literature,” “Art and Design,” and “Digital Humanities.” As with Morris’s own career, however, threads of interconnection pass between and among them, linking the essays together across the sections as well as within them. But since all interdisciplinarity begins in disciplinarity, we have attempted to group the essays according to the authors’ primary areas of intervention.

The essays in the opening section, “Pasts and Presents,” all, in different ways, wrestle with the question of Morris’s legacy, relevance, and afterlife. Some examine the surprising histories of Morris’s reception in various pedagogical endeavors of the past, while others seek to bring Morris into the present. Elizabeth Helsinger’s “Teaching Morris in Chicago, c. 1900” sifts through the archives of the University of Chicago to show Morris’s central place in the English curriculum there at the turn of the century, and the ways that his work, perhaps surprisingly, encouraged pedagogical innovation. If this essay makes you wonder how the other half of Chicago learned about William Morris, we find out in the next essay, Elizabeth Grennan Browning’s “Naturalizing the Dignity of Labor: The Hull-House Labor Museum and William Morris’s Influence on the American Settlement House Movement,” which narrates how Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr sought to provide aesthetic and craft education to urban tenement dwellers in late-nineteenth-century Chicago. Next, John Plotz’s “Time Travelling with William Morris” teleports us to the present, describing Plotz’s endeavor to write a young adult novel about Morris, *Time and the Tapestry* (2014), as a way of making Morris’s ideas alive for a new generation of readers. In “‘Work and Fun’ and ‘Education at its Finest:’ Teaching Morris at Kelmscott House,” Helen Elleston describes the pedagogical initiatives undertaken by the Kelmscott House Museum in Hammersmith, and their innovative means of reaching students of all ages, but especially those in the middle grades. Finally, in “The Medievalism of William Morris: Teaching Through Tolkien,” KellyAnn Fitzpatrick brings the past and the present together to describe how the fantasy novels of J.

R. R. Tolkien -- as well as the films and video games they’ve inspired -- can prove an avenue toward teaching Morris in the undergraduate classroom.

The “Political Contexts” section offers various themes and topics by which Morris’s social and political views might be introduced in the context of the history, literature, or art history classroom. In “A Dream of William Cobbett? Teaching Morris’s *John Ball* in an Interdisciplinary Course on Victorian Radicalism,” Linda Hughes and William M. Meier describe an interdisciplinary course, open to graduate and undergraduate students, that focused on Victorian political radicalism as a historical and literary field of study, including Morris’s *A Dream of John Ball* and other works from his socialist newspaper *The Commonweal*. In “‘Vive La Commune!’ The Imaginary of the Paris Commune and the Arts and Crafts Movement,” Morna O’Neill reads Morris and his circle against the backdrop of the Paris Commune of 1871 and its continuing influence on British radicalism, offering ways of integrating the British response to the Commune into the art history classroom and other areas of study that touch on Morris. In “‘Living in Heaven’: Hope and Change in *News from Nowhere*,” David Latham discusses strategies for bringing “the flight of dreams” into the classroom -- that is, for teaching Morris to a pessimistic generation of students who may see little possibility for improving the world in the way that Morris hoped to do.

The essays gathered in “Literature” offer a range of approaches, including critical methods, themes, and genres through which to teach Morris’s literary work; specific examples of how to teach specific texts by Morris; and explorations of Morris’s place in the literary canon. Susan David Bernstein in “Morris Matters: *News from Nowhere* in a Seminar on Victorian Materialities,” describes teaching Morris’s utopian masterpiece in the context of an English graduate seminar on objects, thing theory, and the new materialisms, and includes examples from graduate student projects on objects from *News from Nowhere* such as red bricks and the Maple-Durham lock. In “Teaching *News from Nowhere* in a Course on ‘The Simple Life,’” Michael Robertson describes his experiences teaching Morris together with Thoreau’s *Walden*, the recent documentary *The Queen of Versailles*, and other works that consider materialism and overconsumption and how one might resist these bedevils of modern existence. Deanna Kreisel’s “Teaching Morris the Utopian” describes teaching *News from Nowhere* in a class on utopian and dystopian literature, and offers a number of suggestions for theories, supplementary texts, and angles of approach that work with and against students’ longstanding complaint that utopian novels generally, and *News from Nowhere* specifically, are “boring.” Turning from Morris’s prose to his poetry, Pamela Bracken’s “Teaching *Guenevere* Through Word and Image” offers a detailed, play-by-play account of how one might approach “The Defence of Guenevere” in the classroom by analyzing it in close comparison with Morris’s work in art

and design. Finally, Michelle Weinroth investigates Morris's liminal place in English literary history in "Morris and the Literary Canon," and traces his critical neglect to nineteenth-century debates about style and translation, debates in which Morris participated by way of his own translation work.

The essays in "Art and Design" together conceive of Morris's places within the fields of art history and design as they exist today. Imogen Hart, in "Morris for Art Historians," describes the challenges Morris poses to the traditional art history curriculum, and shows how introducing his work to students can usefully undermine their assumptions about the nature of art. In "William Morris, designer," James Housefield traces a utopian impulse through the history of design, beginning with Morris and extending to activist craft collectives and theories of human-centered design today, and establishes Morris's continuing relevance for theorists and practitioners of socially-conscious design. Julie Codell, in "William Morris and the Intersection of the Histories of Art and Design," looks at the histories of art and of design as fields of study and practice, and examines how Morris carried out a "transaction of values" between the two that is only now being incorporated into art history and design as disciplines.

In the final section of the book, "Digital Humanities," three Morris scholars describe their work to extend the teaching of Morris into the digital sphere. Florence Boos, in "Morris for Many Audiences: Teaching with the William Morris Archive," offers several means by which teachers can incorporate the online William Morris Archive -- edited by Boos, and itself a pedagogical endeavor of global scope -- into the undergraduate and graduate curriculum as a means of teaching digital humanities (DH) methodologies. In "William Morris on Social Media: A Personal Experience, 2007-2017," Tony Pinkney recounts a decade of experiments in using new digital platforms such as blogs, YouTube films, and Twitter to engage the public in learning more about Morris and his ideas. And bringing us back to design, where we started, Amanda Golden's "Digital Design with William Morris" describes a digital design course on art and technology where students design e-book versions of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in conjunction with Morris's ideals of book design.

A theme that runs across many of these essays is that Morris is difficult to teach. As Borges would attest, Morris was never the easiest sell in the classroom, but he may be particularly challenging for students today. His conscious rejection of accepted forms (social forms, aesthetic forms, political forms) only gets more confounding, and more in need of explanation, as the years go on. Clearly, for all teachers of Morris, a good class on Morris is a hard-won class, one that will require imagination and preparation. And yet we continue to teach Morris because he offers a perspective unavailable elsewhere in nineteenth-century literature and art, and because his ideas and creations continue to sustain us today. Above all, we continue to teach

Morris because we feel our students need him. By teaching Morris we hope to equip our students with the capacity to imagine and dream a better world even while recognizing the injustices of this one. The "earthly paradox" of our subtitle is, in this sense, not a reference to Morris's own contradictory social position, but to the paradoxical condition of possibility within a fallen world that Morris helps us to see. Morris was uniquely gifted with the capacity to hold together seemingly incompatible visions of condemnation and imagination, and it is this capacity for critical hope that we go to him again and again.

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Jason D. Martinek is a Professor of English at New Jersey City College and the author of *Socialism and Print Culture in America* (2015).

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## NOTES

1. For more on the circumstances surrounding his arrest, see E. P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (New York: Pantheon, 1955), 395-99.
2. *Collected Letters of William Morris*. Vol. 2, Part B. Ed. Norman Kelvin. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2014), 546.
3. *William Morris's Socialist Diary*. 2nd ed. Ed. Florence Boos. (Nottingham: Five Leaves, 2018), 109.
4. Yale University professor Edward S. Cooke, Jr.'s course "William Morris: The Theory and Practice of Craft" represents the rare exception. See "British Studies 497c: William Morris: The Theory and Practice of Craft," [https://www.paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk/media/\\_file/education/brst-497c-syllabus-sample-for-website.pdf](https://www.paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk/media/_file/education/brst-497c-syllabus-sample-for-website.pdf)
5. If you're looking for a short biography that packs a lot of punch we recommend Peter Stansky, *William Morris* (Oxford, 1984). Morris gets the full treatment in two standard biographies: E. P. Thompson's *William Morris* and Fiona MacCarthy's *William Morris: A Man for Our Time* (New York: Knopf, 1995).
6. Jorge Luis Borges, *Professor Borges: A Course on English Literature*. Ed. Martin Arias and Martin Hadid. Trans. Katherine Silver. (New York: New Directions, 2013), 237.
7. G. D. H. Cole, *Life of William Morris*. (London: Common Ground, c.1950), 8, 11.
8. But we need to provide a word of caution, tongue-in-cheek though it may be: as Elizabeth Helsinger shows in her essay, taking a Morrisian approach to Morris can be risky, for it contributed to Oscar Lovell Triggs's dismissal from the University of Chicago in 1904.

TEACHING WILLIAM MORRIS,  
Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2018

*Reviewed by Florence Boos*

*Teaching William Morris*, edited by Jason D. Martinek and Elizabeth C. Miller, provides an exciting entrance into current approaches to Morris's work. The authors' introduction observes that the multiplicity of Morris's endeavors has made it difficult to capture his achievements in any single course, since each of his contributions—literary, artistic, or political—requires a knowledge of the others for context. Martinek and Miller therefore suggest that only an interdisciplinary approach can be successful, and that “the best way to find models for how to approach Morris more holistically is to look at how he is taught today” (4). They note that presenting Morris's works to contemporary students presents special challenges, since his “conscious rejection of accepted forms . . . only gets more confounding and more in need of explanation as the years go on” (7). Nonetheless the endeavor is necessary, since “Morris was uniquely gifted with the capacity to hold together seemingly incompatible visions of condemnation and imagination, and it is this capacity for critical hope that we go to him for again and again” (7). The volume's nineteen essays are grouped into sections: “Pasts and Presents,” “Political Contexts,” “Literature,” “Art and Design,” and “Digital Humanities,” and in what follows I will comment on the eleven chapters most directly concerned with Morris's literary works.

In “Time Travelling with William Morris,” John Plotz ruminates on the aftereffects on his teaching of his authorship of a children's book on Morris, *Time and the Tapestry*. Facing some resistance in the classroom, he sensed his students' “fear that the future's best days are behind it” (43). In response Plotz argued that Morris does not offer up one more fantasy realm but rather, just as the *Earthly Paradise* had striven to “build a shadowy isle of bliss / Midmost the beating of the steely sea,” the appeal of Morris's alternative worlds is that he himself “is well aware of just how shadowy this isle of bliss is” (44). Morris's gift was to remind his audiences of the ability of art to express their connection and solidarity with those before them. This leads Plotz to what can seem a charming tangent, his account of his several weeks of reading all the books that selected users of a local library in Muncie, Indiana had checked out between 1891 and 1902, directly after the appearance of *News from Nowhere*. The fragmented nature of the results increased his appreciation for *News from Nowhere's* “attenuated, far-off vision of a deliberately implausible future . . . Our only addressees lie, as they always have, in the future” (46). Plotz concludes that what we must convey to students are the gaps and spaces in Morris's literary designs, especially in his late romances, which convey a “life without and beyond us, a world protected from human meddling” (47). In “The Medievalism of William Morris: Teaching through Tolkien,”

Kelly Ann Fitzpatrick observes that students are often more familiar with the works of J. R. R. Tolkien than those of Morris or later fantasy authors, and she finds that they become interested in Morris on learning of his important influence on Tolkien. Fitzpatrick encourages her students to trace Tolkien's indebtedness to Morris through his plots, his interest in Icelandic sagas, and his essays on translation and the concept of “secondary worlds,” which for both writers are steeped in medieval culture and language. A knowledge of Tolkien's *Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* enables students to find parallels in Morris's historical fictions *The House of the Wolfings* and *The Roots of the Mountains*, and to identify Morris's anticipation of late fantasy motifs throughout his later romances. Such comparisons lead students to an appreciation of “how fantasy writers like Morris and Tolkien used representations of the medieval to reflect, represent, translate, critique and idealize not only the Middle Ages, but also their own contemporary societies” (72).

In “A Dream of William Cobbett?: Teaching Morris's *John Ball* in an Interdisciplinary Course on Victorian Radicalism,” Linda K. Hughes and William M. Meier describe their course on nineteenth-century progressive political movements taught to a class of mostly graduate students in history and rhetoric. As their attached syllabus indicates, this was an exciting and resource-packed class, with Morris's *A Dream of John Ball* and *Commonweal* writings placed alongside readings on Chartism, Marx and Engels, terrorism, feminism, and the British Empire. The course's juxtapositions evoked new insights, especially into the hitherto little-explored relationship between Morris's writings and those of early nineteenth-century rural populist William Cobbett; Hughes and Meier observe that Morris read several of the latter's writings carefully in the years before he composed *John Ball*, and that Cobbett's name appears repeatedly in his political writings of the period. They also identify another source for *John Ball*, a Lord Mayor's Show of 1884 which had staged a pageant celebrating the defeat of Watt Tyler by an ascendant Lord Mayor. Morris's *Justice* article in response defends Tyler and “his worthier associate John Ball” and cites Cobbett, whom Hughes and Meier note forms both “intertext and paratext” (82). The course's careful organization helped students to relate the readings to one another; for example, in her final essay one student noted the relationship of Morris's beautiful landscape descriptions to Engels' dismay at the degradation of the urban environment in his *Condition of the Working Class*.

In “‘Living in Heaven’: Hope and Change in *News from Nowhere*,” David Latham narrates his attempts to overcome his students' initial cynicism when faced with Morris's utopian vision: “He can't be serious; it's Nowhere because it will never work” (115). Observing that many improvements have occurred in the 130 years since the publication of Morris's utopia, Latham asks his students why other, readily achievable

changes have been delayed. He then identifies five points of difference between conditions in *Nowhere* and those of Morris's own 19<sup>th</sup> century society: the replacement of self-interest with fellowship; a healthy and handsome population; cleaner rivers and more wildlife; less pollution and more sunshine; and citizens who enjoy work without pressure for financial rewards. Latham demonstrates several ways Morris's text is designed to stimulate identification, stir resistance, and place the literary and cultural endeavors of his own time in an ironic light. In conclusion, he argues that credible transformations in the areas of weather, health, ecology, and labor may be imagined, but that for the final intractable element, the ideal of fellowship, we must look to a non-escapist art and a new form of dream. Thus in *News from Nowhere* Morris "endeavors to show us how the force of a shared desire can transform the realm of the stories we imagine into the reality of the lives we live" (127).

In "Morris Matters: Teaching *News from Nowhere* in a Seminar on Victorian Materialities," Susan David Bernstein describes a course that applied "thing theory" to Victorian literature with some arresting and original results, as her students found sophisticated ways of relating material objects from *News from Nowhere* to the utopia's wider patterns. One, for example, studied the wooden locks on the Thames encountered by Guest and his friends as they row upriver, finding parallels between their mechanism and the concept of "assemblages," between the pauses generated by the locks and the romance's serial form, and between the enclosed pools formed as the locks are traversed and utopian space. A second student, noting that red bricks appear four times in the narrative, documented favorable mentions of red bricks in several social theorists of the period and described their metaphorical implications in several of Morris's poetic works. A third essay offered the nature-based designs of Morris's tapestries as correlatives for the weave and warp of his utopia, noting how the features of tapestry embody Morris's respect for beauty in raw materials and parallel the myriad natural ecotopian descriptions throughout the text.

In "Teaching *News from Nowhere* in a Course on 'The Simple Life,'" Michael Robertson explains how he helped a group of initially uninterested beginning students to grasp the issues raised in Morris's text. "The simple life," as he explained to his students, was not merely a matter of "plain living and high thinking" but a counter-hegemonic practice of "theoretically informed action toward social change" (151). In particular, literary utopias attempt defamiliarization, disrupting their audience's acceptance of the status quo. Robertson's students read *News from Nowhere* against the background of three other texts, Jonathan Woolman's *Journal*, Louisa May Alcott's satiric "Transcendental Wild Oats," and Henry Thoreau's *Walden Pond*. The course's great success came when Robertson organized an unmoderated debate, as his formerly lethargic students came alive as they argued over such matters as whether "human nature" could be altered by social organization and

whether the informal, self-directed education advocated in *Nowhere* was desirable or possible. Robertson concludes that "[i]ntroducing *News from Nowhere* into the course convinced me of Morris's central place in the simple life tradition; it also taught me the importance of simplicity in pedagogy" (157).

In "Teaching Morris the Utopian," Deanna K. Kreisel describes her theoretical and historical approaches to teaching *News from Nowhere* in a course in utopian fiction that included such useful background texts as Thomas More's *Utopia*, Samuel Butler's *Erewhon*, Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, and Richard Jefferies's *After London*. Her students considered several alternative varieties of utopia including intentional communities, utopian political thought, and Marxist and socialist theories, and also explored psychoanalytical approaches to the problems of repression and desire such as Herbert Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization*. She asked her students to examine the careful distancing strategies of Morris's narrative, the paradoxical tension between the "presentism" of utopia and its attitude toward past literature and history, and the persistence of gendered labor divisions and sexual jealousies even within this new society. What would it be like, Kreisel asks her students, to live in a world without utopian desire? She concludes with a reminder that in a time of increasing economic inequality and scarcity of resources, "we need more than ever Morris's hopeful 'vision rather than a dream.'"

In "Teaching Guenevere through Word and Image," Pamela Bracken elaborates on her efforts to merge the study of text and visual images in her teaching of "The Defence of Guenevere." Bracken observes that it is common to look at a book's illustrations before reading it, and that her visual-verbal method "make[s] an intentional activity out of a natural behavior" (183). Her students accordingly engage with the details of the Kelmscott Press version of the poem, pondering the meanings evoked by the floriated initials, the importation of manuscript conventions into the printed text, and the potentially ambiguous effects of the absence of quotation marks. They then examine early twentieth century illustrations of the poem by Jessie King and Florence Harrison as commentaries on Morris's text; in one striking instance Harrison represents the figure cowering on the bed beneath the "great God's angel" as male—not Guenevere herself but one of her accusers. Bracken notes that throughout years of striving to make the poem vivid for her visually-sensitive students, the placement of "The Defence of Guenevere" in the context of its artistic printing and illustration has frequently made Morris's poem her students' favorite Victorian work.

In "Morris and the Literary Canon," Michelle Weinroth outlines the background conditions that have placed Morris's literary works "in a liminal space of English Studies, at the edge of the Victorian greats" (188). She finds the reputation of his creative works the victim of an ideological prejudice against his disruptive politics, his interpenetration of word and image,

and most importantly, his creation of a translation style that captured in rhythm and sonority “the quintessential character of an ancient culture—its artisanal creativity and oral rituals” (195). Weinroth contrasts Matthew Arnold’s advocacy of a domesticating style suited to a hegemonic national rhetoric with Oscar Wilde’s prescient recognition of the “anti-literary” and anti-establishment features of Morris’s translation style as a measure of creative authenticity (198). Weinroth suggests that as students learn to be skeptical of the pronouncements of the gatekeepers of received culture, they may be more likely to cultivate “their aesthetic sensibilities in a quintessentially Morrisian vein” (198) and turn freshly to the issue of what constitutes “good” literature and even literature itself.

In “Morris for Many Audiences: Teaching with the William Morris Archive,” I reflect that my more successful efforts to teach Morris’s writings share certain features: they are highly visual; present puzzles or questions to answer; emphasize the interdisciplinary nature of Morris’s work; focus on the details of a specific text; and often take the form of a project or group effort. I describe attempts to place Morris’s early poems in the context of their later Kelmscott Press renderings (cf. Pamela Braken’s essay above), a visit to Special Collections to examine Morris’s works in association with other examples of Victorian print culture, and the joint construction of an online illustrated version of *News from Nowhere*. The latter has inspired the ongoing creation of a digital annotated text and map of Guest’s journey through London and up the Thames ([morrisarchive.lib.uiowa.edu/newssupple.html](http://morrisarchive.lib.uiowa.edu/newssupple.html)). Ph. D. student Kyle Barton I have also prepared an edition of “Concerning Geffray Teste Noire” for Dino Felluga’s COVE project, and I suggest that an appropriate assignment for a graduate class might be the cooperative completion of another such short edition.

In “Digital Design with William Morris,” Amanda Golden describes her course “Victorian Technology and Art” offered at an institute of technology. Golden asked her students to design an e-book of a chapter of Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* illustrated by their choice of Morris designs and typography and supplemented by a written rationale addressing how their project interprets the text. These juxtapositions produced some ingenious readings, and Golden notes that “the students’ digital scavenging and piecework speaks to new research methods and modes of engaging materials” (278-79). She concludes that “Morris’s accessibility, in terms of available materials and the fact that his work speaks to a multimodal approach, enables students to interpret the language and technology of his time (including fine printing) by adapting that of our own” (280).

This review is excerpted from a longer article in *Victorian Poetry* 58.3.

*The U. S. William Morris Society is very pleased to announce our three new board members for 2021-2024.*

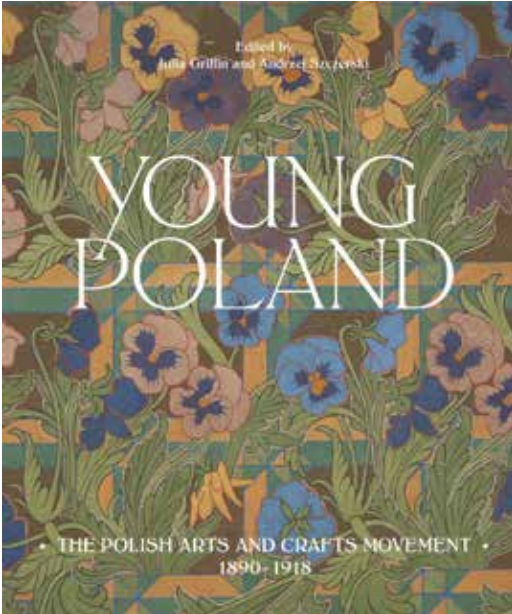
**Monica Bowen** received her MA in Art History and Curatorial Studies from Brigham Young University in 2008. She has taught art history at Seattle University and Central Washington University since 2010. Monica has worked as a docent at the Seattle Art Museum since 2013 currently serves as the Adult Tour Training Chair for the docent body. Monica has been a guest lecturer on the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and William Morris at the Seattle Art Museum (2019) and most recently at MLA (2020). She has been a member of the William Morris Society in the United States since 2018. She is interested in the influence of William Morris on the contemporary painter Kehinde Wiley, and has written on this topic for the *News from Anywhere* site for the William Morris Society in the United States (December 2018) and CAA (forthcoming paper presentation 2021). She maintains the art history blog *Alberti’s Window*: <http://albertis-window.com>

**Jude V. Nixon**, former Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences, is Professor of English at Salem State University, and habilitated professor in the Polish Academy. His areas of teaching and research are Victorian literature and culture and Anglophone Caribbean literature. He has published extensively on the Victorians, especially on Gerard Manley Hopkins, John Henry Newman, Thomas Carlyle, and Charles Dickens, appearing in journals such as *Victorian Poetry*. Professor Nixon is author/editor of *Gerard Manley Hopkins and his Contemporaries: Liddon, Newman, Darwin, and Pater* (Garland, 1994), *Victorian Religious Discourse: New Directions in Criticism* (Palgrave, 2004), *Science, Religion, and Natural Theology*. Volume 3. *Victorian and Science and Literature*. 8 volumes (Pickering & Chatto, 2011), *The Sermons and Spiritual Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. Vol. 5. *The Collected Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. 8 vols. (Oxford, 2018), and editor of the forthcoming volume, *Becoming Home: Diaspora and the Anglophone Transnational* (Vernon 2021), where his essay appears, “[E]ither I’m nobody, or I’m a nation’: Home, History, and the Diasporic Transnational in Derek Walcott’s *Omeros*.” His most recent publications include “English affairs and Norse’: Carlyle’s Igdrasil, Norse Mythology, and the Myth of British Racial Ancestry,” appeared in the *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* (2018), “Welch Israelitism: The Geopietry of Hopkins’s St. Beuno’s Dominical” (forthcoming, *The Hopkins Quarterly*), and “Forbidden Fruit: The Economy of Food in Christina Rossetti’s *Goblin Market*” (forthcoming, *AngloSophia*). Professor Nixon serves on several editorial boards, among them *Victorian Poetry*, *The Hopkins Quarterly*, the *Dickens Studies Annual*, *MIND* (Poland), *Merope* (Italy), and *AngloSophia - Studies in English Literature and Culture* (Italy).

**Adrienne Sharpe** works at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale. She earned her B.A. in art history and English from Mount Holyoke College and her M.A. in decorative arts and design history from the Bard Graduate Center in NYC. Her research focus on Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites - first, on the Oxford Union Murals - led her to participate in the UMASS-Amherst Oxford Summer Seminar, a 6-week summer study abroad program in Oxford, England. Her M.A. thesis was a case study of Morris & Company’s contributions to three American commissions, c. 1870-1896. She has published in “The Journal of the Women’s College Art Coalition,” an MHC student publication; “The Newsletter of the Victorian Society in America”; “The Pre-Raphaelite Society Newsletter of the United States”; and she contributed an article about a Walter Crane mural to an online blog at the Beinecke. She is a Co-Scribe for Mount Holyoke’s Class of 1998, regularly contributing updates to the MHC “Alumnae Quarterly.” Adrienne lives in Hamden, CT with her husband Kurt and her 2-1/2 year old Evelyn (Evey).

***YOUNG POLAND:  
THE POLISH ARTS AND CRAFTS MOVEMENT, 1890 – 1918***

*Eds. Julia Griffin and Andrzej Szczerski*



William Morris Gallery and National Museum in Kraków (NMK), in association with Lund Humphries and the Polish Cultural Institute, London, are pleased to announce a major new publication, *Young Poland: The Polish Arts and Crafts Movement, 1890 – 1918*. This ground-breaking study is the first book in any language to explore the Young Poland (Młoda Polska) period in the context of the international Arts and Crafts movements. Edited by art historians Julia Griffin and Andrzej Szczerski - who uniquely combine expertise in Polish and British design - the book will be published in November 2020 ahead of a major exhibition on the subject at William Morris Gallery in Autumn 2021.

The Young Poland movement emerged in the 1890s in response to the country's non-existence for almost a century. From the end of the 18th-century Poland underwent successive partitions dividing the country between Russia, Austria and Prussia, resulting in the country disappearing from the map of Europe for 123 years. In the words of historian Norman Davies, Poland became “just an idea – a memory from the past or a hope for the future”. With the failure of military uprisings, culture became a means to preserve an endangered national identity.

The movement originated under the more liberal Austrian partition (known as Galicia), namely in Kraków and the nearby village of Zakopane (in the Tatra Mountains), and soon spread across the nation. It embraced an unprecedented flourishing of applied arts and the revival of crafts, drawing inspiration from nature, history, peasant traditions and craftsmanship to convey patriotic values.

This pioneering and lavishly illustrated publication charts the rich history of the artists, designers and craftspeople whose schemes came to define Young Poland, including over 250 illustrations of ceramics, furniture, textiles, paper cuttings, wood carvings, tableware, stained glass, book arts, children's toys and Christmas decorations as well as domestic, church and civic interior decoration schemes.

***THE ROUTLEDGE COMPANION TO WILLIAM MORRIS***

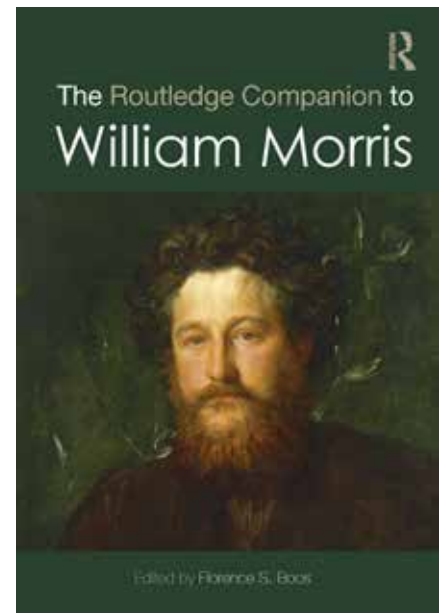
(ROUTLEDGE ART HISTORY AND VISUAL STUDIES COMPANIONS)

*Ed. Florence S. Boos*

This *Companion* draws together historical and critical responses to the impressive range of Morris's multi-faceted life and endeavors: his homes, travels, family, business practices, decorative artwork, poetry, fantasy romances, translations, political activism, eco-socialism, and book collecting and design. Each chapter provides valuable historical and literary background information, reviews relevant opinions on its subject from the late-nineteenth century to the present, and offers new approaches to important aspects of its topic.

Morris's eclectic methodology and the perennial relevance of his insights and practice make this an essential handbook for those interested in art history, poetry, translation, literature, book design, environmentalism, political activism, and Victorian and utopian studies.

632 pages—52 color and 60 b/w illustrations. Routledge Publishing, Fall 2020. Please order for your library!



# The Last Word

## FROM "OUR COUNTRY RIGHT OR WRONG" AN EARLY MORRIS POLITICAL ESSAY

*[pronouns slightly modernized]*

But what England's glory is, and what all political action should tend towards in the long run, if politics are not to be a mere game to be played at, I will tell you my idea of that, and see if it square with yours: . . .

I think of a country where every person has work enough to do, and no one has too much: where no one has to work him or herself stupid in order to be just able to live: where on the contrary it will be easy for people to live if they will but work, impossible if they will not. . . : where all people's work would be pleasant to themselves and helpful to their neighbours; and then their leisure from bread-earning work (of which they ought to have plenty) would be thoughtful and rational: for you understand they would be thoroughly educated, whatever their condition might be: such a person as this, (and there should be but very few else among us) would never fail in self-respect; they would live honourably, and as happily as national external circumstances would allow them, and would help others to do likewise: you may be sure they would take good care to have their due share in the government of their country and would know all about its dealings with other countries: justice to themselves and all others would be no mere name to them, but the rule of all their actions, the passionate desire of their lives – What King, what potentate, what power could prevent such persons from both taking and giving their due?

Well, some people today would think that dull, would prefer more gambling in life so to say; more contrast of condition, of thought[,] of aspiration: it seems to them right, nay a law of nature, that many people should be boiled down as it were body and soul for the sake of one glorious one: in short they cannot do without slaves: nay they would themselves rather be slaves than free men without them – it would save so much trouble.

Would it? Well, I don't know: in the long run I think not: but then, you see, such persons don't trouble themselves about the long run; or they would understand that ignorant and unhappy people are dangerous people; that they desire ignorantly, hate ignorantly, revenge themselves ignorantly, and not unseldom confuse in one ruin those who have wronged them with those who indolently refused to right them, and those that could not right them though they strove sorely.

For my part, . . . so that we may have no strife in the land save what may be carried on with the printing-press and the ballot-box, I say let us take the trouble – any trouble to live like free men.

[Signed] W. M.

Jan 30th 1880

2:30 a. m.

Kelmscott House Upper Mall Hammersmith