

Editorial

Patrick O'Sullivan

This is 'my' second issue of *JWMS*, and I must confess until recently to having been nonplussed as to what to write about. As in all numbers of the *Journal*, it is not so much a lack of stimulus which leads to such inhibition, as the wide-ranging nature of the topic matter and content, both of which reflect the tremendous breadth of Morris's interests, and the enormous depth of his expertise and skill. One way in which an editor can attempt to continue to accommodate such diversity is via membership of the Editorial Advisory Board, which, from this issue, is augmented by four new members – Phillippa Bennett, already Hon. Secretary of the William Morris Society, Peter Cormack, until recently at the William Morris Gallery, Jim Cheshire of the University of Lincoln – a university 'new' even by my ex-Polytechnic standards, and Rosie Miles, former editor of *JWMS*, whose continued input to editing this *Journal* I have particularly appreciated. I welcome them all the Board, and promise to try not to work them too hard – although some of them already have practical experience of my editorial style.

The current issue appears to me typical of the range and scope of Morris's life, work and ideas. For example, we begin with a substantial article by Peter Faulkner on Morris's (and May's) relationship with the landscape of Kelmscott, a topic also examined in a recent publication (Alan Crossley *et al.*, eds, *William Morris's Kelmscott: Landscape and History, 2007*, reviewed *JWMS* xvii (3), Winter 2007), to which Peter's article is a response. Here, he argues that, far from seeing Kelmscott and its economy as a rural idyll, Morris possessed a very clear idea of the harsh conditions under which late nineteenth century labouring people lived, and of the power of the landlords to influence their lives.

Many of Morris's contemporaries or near-contemporaries recorded their names or initials on the Glazed Screen at Red House, and these have been painstakingly deciphered, and their authors identified, by Olive Mercer and Jane Evans. Two commissions executed by Burne-Jones for Morris & Co. – *The Attainment*, the climax of the famous 'Holy Grail' tapestry series – one version of which, by strange coincidence, was recently auctioned, but failed to reach its reserve price – and a memorial window at Tabley Chapel in north west England, are discussed, respectively, by Kathleen O'Neill Sims and Rosalyn Gregory. We also include the

latest installment of David and Sheila Latham's invaluable sequence of annotated William Morris bibliographies, this time for the period 2004–5, and John Le Bourgeois contributes a short response to Peter Faulkner's review of his book *Art and Forbidden Fruit*. Finally, there is the usual wide range of reviews, of books on Morris's links with Oxford and London, on Holman Hunt, and on possibility of Rossetti (and hence perhaps Morris, and Burne-Jones) being a Rosicrucian; on reading Morris's writings, and their relationship to the work of other Victorian writers; a book on Morris's relationship to British anarchism; on portraits of Late Victorian artists and writers, and on Morris's designs, and their connection to various Great Exhibitions.

How to bring these articles together is not any easy task. Thus Morris continues to 'beckon us forward', and to demand that we keep our minds open and our ideas flexible. 'Looking Backward' over my first nine months as editor, with the price of food as well as that of oil and metals continuing to rise, and the United Nations expressing concerns about the prospect of widespread food riots, I am sometimes persuaded that the 'eco-wars' so beloved of many science-fiction writers may already have begun. And I also must admit that some of the predictions I have read recently have produced in me the kind of exasperation which Edward Bellamy's modernist utopia apparently provoked in Morris.

Market capitalism is, by its own inadequate standards, a robust and versatile economic system, mainly, of course, because it does not bother to count the cost, either personal, social or ecological, of anything it does to human beings, to societies, or to nature. And it has been pronounced dead before, only to be reborn, not least during the 1980s. But if it has finally run its course, then the ideas of William Morris, described below as 'the truly creative socialist thinker of the nineteenth century', will surely be more important than ever. For who else knew better than Morris how to build a just, fair and truly sustainable society? And if it has finally run its course, then because of all the poverty, misery, oppression and destruction it created, these are surely grounds to rejoice.