

Reviews

Edited by Peter Faulkner

Florence S. Boos, *Socialist Aesthetics and The Shadows of Amiens*, London: The William Morris Society, 2011, 64 pp., twenty three black & white illustrations, pbk, £6. ISBN: 9780903283298.

As a devotee of the early or ‘First Morris’ I have always found ‘The Shadows of Amiens’ quite different from the stories and poems in *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*. It has the feeling of a student assignment, and Morris laboured over it: as he wrote in a letter to Cornell Price,

it has cost me more trouble than anything I have written yet; I ground at it the other night from nine o'clock till half-past four a.m., when the lamp went out, and I had to creep upstairs to bed through the great dark house like a thief.

It was part of an ambitious programme to write about several of the churches of Northern France. He had seen these with Burne-Jones on their 1855 trip through Normandy.

In this booklet Florence Boos presents her wide-ranging Kelmscott Lecture of 24 November 2007, accompanied by copious illustrations. The lecture brings out the centrality of Morris's essay to any discussion of the importance of architecture in his philosophy, and in particular to his feeling that buildings possess a life of their own. She begins with Morris during the 1870s, and describes the foundation of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. In this project and in his later lectures and essays, you find four principles: pleasure in labour, simplicity in life, the value of craft and architecture and their links to history, and the need to live in harmony with nature. She then outlines her main thesis: ‘All these ideals and principles, I will argue, were adumbrated and prefigured ... in Morris's early writings’.

The main source of these ideals was of course Ruskin, and it is important to note that *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) was based on that writer's earlier journey through Northern France. In particular, Boos quotes a passage from ‘The Lamp of Memory’:

... there are but two strong conquerors of the forgetfulness of men, Poetry and Architecture; and the latter in some sort includes the former, and is mightier in its reality; it is well to have, not only what men have thought and felt, but what their hands have handled, and their strength wrought, and their eyes beheld, all the days of their life.

If Morris believed this, it would inevitably lead to a hatred of restoration and the foundation of the SPAB.

In discussing 'The Shadows of Amiens', Boos praises Morris for following Ruskin's example and taking us on a guided tour of the cathedral. This praise must also be given to the many photographs, especially the new ones by Boos, with which the lecture is illustrated. She admires Morris's 'camera-eye survey', but it is at this point I must quarrel with her intention in this phrase. It was not Morris's camera-eye at all. Boos never mentions that throughout 'The Shadows of Amiens' Morris bewails his inability to remember the detail of the cathedral, and admits that he is using photographs as he writes (he calls them 'my photographs' but they were presumably purchased in France). Morris wrote

... the external sculpture I am describing as well as I can from such photographs as I have; and these, as everybody knows, though very distinct and faithful, when they show anything at all, yet, in some places, where the shadows are deep, show simply nothing. They tell me, too, nothing whatever of the colour of the building; in fact, their brown and yellow is as unlike as possible to the grey of Amiens.

Like Ruskin before him, Morris relied on the new art of photography, and there are at least nine references to photographs in the text of his essay. It is to be regretted that Boos fails to mention this. Generally speaking, Boos feels that Morris's responses are 'interpretive rather than historical'; he tells us how much he loves the cathedral and the freedom of its builders, but does not understand the guild and the class-system which limited their freedom.

Boos concludes her discussion of 'The Shadows of Amiens' by announcing the assumptions which underlay Morris's early work:

a near mystical-exultation in the presence of beauty;
 an anagogic view of religious imagery as an evocation of human solidarity;
 a sense of intense obligation to bear witness to natural and created forms of
 beauty;
 and finally, a faith in cathedrals as living presences. . . .

She goes on to show, in the remainder of her lecture, how these 'modes' reappear in later works, culminating in the final section of *A Dream of John Ball*, where the narrator, or Morris if you like, converses with the 'hedg-

priest' John Ball in a medieval church. Ball's religious beliefs allow him to look for an afterlife; Morris replies that 'though I die and end, yet mankind yet liveth'.

And, of course, the imagery of 'The Shadows of Amiens' lived on in the work of Morris's followers. Included in the description of the cathedral are several references to the state of the spire at the time of Morris's visit, for example:

But from the hot Place Royale here with its stunted pollard acacias, and statue of some one, I know not whom, but some citizen of Amiens I suppose, you can see nothing but the graceful spire; it is of wood covered over with lead, and was built quite at the end of the flamboyant times. Once it was gilt all over, and used to shine out there, getting duller and duller, as the bad years grew worse and worse; but the gold is all gone now; when it finally disappeared I know not ...

Whenever I read this there is only one thing that comes to mind: this is the germ of Oscar Wilde's story of 'The Happy Prince'. Morris's essay was a stimulus to the creativity of others, and the idea of the cathedral lived on in the European imagination, re-appearing in literature, art and music.

John Purkis

Lavinia Greenlaw, ed, *Questions of Travel: William Morris in Iceland*, London: Notting Hill Editions, 2011, 193 pp., two b & w illustrations, hbk, £10. ISBN 9781907903182.

The Journals he kept during his visits to Iceland are essential reading for students of Morris. After working through them you can begin to see how 'the idle singer of an empty day' was transformed by this tremendous experience; he became a different person, working hard at everything he gave his mind to and living beyond the self. He now showed deep concern for the future of humanity. The dreamy Middle Ages he had received from poets such as Tennyson were replaced by a different past. Medieval Iceland was not inhabited by softies.

When I first discovered the Journals I was amazed at the difference between the plain style of the writing and what I had seen of Morris's work previously. I read very slowly, looking up all the saga references, and followed every step of the way on the detailed maps provided in the *Collected Works*. This way of reading provided the sense of sheer slog which the journey must have entailed for somebody like Morris, with no previous experience of this kind of travel. It must also have given him a total break from the stresses of his personal life

at that time. He learned new skills; he managed to ride his diminutive pony. Best of all, he was the expedition's cook.

The Journals have been reprinted twice during the last fifty years. I assume that they are now out of print, so I was pleased to see a new edition. This seems a very small book, and since every right-hand page has a blank facing page you would think that they had been drastically shortened. But in fact it gives us a very fair selection, including slightly more than half of the 1871 Journal; the 1873 continuation has been omitted. The book is extremely well laid out and printed in Germany. There is a nice hard cover, which will enable it to survive in the traveller's pocket.

So far, so good, but I cannot conceal the negative aspects. Notting Hill Editions have produced a series of similarly shaped books, all of which are 'devoted to the best in essayistic nonfiction writing'. If the series is an exploration of the idea of the essay, it is a welcome and timely adventure. The other titles are more recognisable as essays, and this is the only travel book.

The editor, Lavinia Greenlaw, gives us a short introduction, but her remarks are often quite at variance with the text before her. For example: 'There is surprisingly little said about the sagas in the journal'. This is quite absurd; the whole point of the journey was to visit the scenes where the saga heroes are supposed to have lived. Every day Morris explains what they are looking for and what they have found. It is only when the others want to visit the tourist sights like the geysers, that he is diverted from his purpose. Later she tells us that: 'His few observations about Icelandic society are made in passing and largely without insight'. I suppose it depends on how you read the text. Consider the famous passage referring to Olaf Peacock (6 August 1871) in which Morris carefully compares the past and the present society of Iceland, and concludes:

Yet it is an awful place: set aside the hope that the unseen sea gives you here, and the strange threatening change of the blue spiky mountains beyond the firth, and the rest seems emptiness and nothing else: a piece of turf under your feet, and the sky overhead, that's all; whatever solace your life is to have here must come out of yourself or these old stories, not over hopeful themselves.

The editor says that it showed him a way to live, and of course this is true. But she seems to me to have failed to understand the general application. How little the Icelanders have compared to people in England. But isn't this what human life really amounts to? Morris has insights, which are, as the poet says, 'too deep for tears'.

In fact this is a most extraordinary piece of editing. I assumed that every left-hand page was blank and thought this was aesthetic. Then I noticed that

one or two pages carried a few words in red and black; printing in two colours must have cost something. Apparently, these are the editor's notes. But they are not what we mean by that; they are very short comments on the nature of travel. Yet Morris's text is not of much interest for such a project; she would have done better with a jollier travel book, such as Hilaire Belloc's *The Path to Rome*. The points selected are of a most general nature, with constant reference to 'you'. This may be a general 'you' or she may be addressing Morris the author, who apparently needs to buck up and pay attention.

For example, on page 189, near the end, Morris complains about the weather on the voyage home; 'my feet were often much higher than my head' because of the rough sea. When they pass Orkney there is at last an even keel; her only note on the whole page is to quote 'a quite even keel' in red and then offer her own platitude in black: 'Going home you don't look about you, only ahead'. If these comments are directed to Morris, I hope he will improve his work! If to us, they are a poor man's version of *Scouting for Boys*.

John Purkis

Anna Vaninskaya, *William Morris and the Idea of Community: Romance, History and Propaganda, 1880-1914*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010, 256 pp., hbk, £65. ISBN 9780748641499.

Anna Vaninskaya's study of late Victorian literature and socialist politics revolves around three important ironies which she identifies in the idea of community. Each touches on the relationship between past and present. First is the use of commercial mass publishing in order to popularise apparently primitive modes of storytelling; second, the deployment of scientific analysis to the study of tribal society; and third, the fascination of the medieval guild community for revolutionary socialists. William Morris is an ideal vehicle for the interrogation of these ironies, not just because literature history and politics are in fact interrelated, but because his approach to the world was based on precisely this understanding.

As the discussion gets under way, the first of these ironies exposes a harder tension or contradiction. In a rich discussion of Morris's late romances and New Romance, Vaninskaya shows how much Morris's work owed to this genre, which was then beginning to find a growing market. Through illuminating comparisons with writers such as Rider Haggard, she carefully distinguishes the democratic and collective politics informing Morris's idea of community from the mainstream, in which community spelt muscular individualism, but shows how his plots, settings, themes, rhetoric and sources were all framed by a familiarity with and absorption in these wider cultural

currents. In revealing quite how much Morris was a man of his time, Vaninskaya demonstrates an impressive command of Victorian literature, scholarly debates about it, and of its publishing history and conventions. She glides effortlessly between debates, her prose beautiful and the analysis insightful. Interpreting the position Morris occupied through an analysis of capitalist development, her frame is one of exploitation: storytellers seeking their fortunes through commercial success, sneering at penny dreadfuls while using ever more sophisticated systems of distribution and marketing in order to ensure that their heroic tales were delivered to a mass audience.

Was Morris like them? In answering this question, Vaninskaya notes the criticisms which he fielded from enemies and sympathisers alike, about the incompatibility of his business interests and his socialism, and his failure to re-structure his own company. She also discusses the 'clichéd' charge that his inability to produce art that working people could afford was hypocritical and she presents Morris's response – that he was determined to use his financial clout in order to sweep commerce clean away. (pp. 4, 45-7, 202) Nevertheless, the irony, to which Morris was apparently blind, was that his commercially produced romances proved more powerful instruments to spread his idea of community than either the cheap propaganda of *Commonweal* or the high-end Kelmscott books on which he lavished his attention towards the end of his life. (p. 48) And behind it lies a paradox. Morris emerges as a kind of divided self: a New Romancer on the one hand and a craftsman on the other. In one guise he embraced commerce, in the other he turned to art in protest against it. Since he 'theorised ... art as an expression of social and economic conditions' (p. 47) both activities were problematical. If the first looked hypocritical, the second was futile. Morris was not in the same position as the New Romancers, but his 'crusade to restore artistic craftsmanship' (p. 47) represented an attempt to escape from modernity, though he was mired in it. This critique seems to rest on an idea of removal not so different from the clichéd one which Vaninskaya resists. Whereas the first demands that Morris remove himself from the grubby practices of the present to prove (sometimes mockingly) his commitment to socialism, hers points to his inability to escape fully from the past.

Vaninskaya examines the second and third ironies in the concept of community by probing Morris's application of modern scholarship. His attraction to ideas of Germania and the Teutonic myths explored by Victorian historians was one part of this, and established an idea of the past which Morris idealised in his romances and theorised in his politics. The other stemmed from his attraction to contemporary theories of social evolution which both presupposed the existence of a primitive condition and, having laid bare its character, plotted its re-emergence in the future. The irony, then,

is that modern analysis pointed Morris towards his medieval idea of community and that science – in the form of evolutionary theory – heightened his sense of its revolutionary re-constitution.

In exploring this aspect of community, Vaninskaya again moves expertly between the literatures and convincingly highlights the similarities of socialist and orthodox academic practice. Turning to the socialists, she finds an identity between Morris, Bax and Engels. All appear ‘scientific socialists’ – Morris the conscious utopian who gave substance to their overtly anti-utopian ideas. (p. 87) This is not an unusual treatment of the relationship but it is difficult to square with the criticisms Bax levelled at Marx and Engels in his discussions of materialist history and socialist evolution. And insofar as the Morris-Bax relation is concerned, it suggests that their well known policy differences were just that – they had no deeper philosophical root.

The bracketing of Morris and Bax is based on part on their collaboration in *Socialism from the Root Up*, but is perhaps more reliant on the broader cultural setting in which Vaninskaya locates them. It is as if the similarities between socialist and mainstream practice, the shared interest in the revival of the mark and the proprietary and legislative practices of ‘primitive’ tribes, (p. 94) trumps the possibility of significant disagreement. Their relationship is not her main concern, but the risk of the approach is not just that it detracts from Morris’s originality as a socialist, but that it also tends towards a conception of community which fails to discriminate between different understandings of federalism and fellowship, the sociological and ethical components of the concept which Vaninskaya identifies in a brilliantly contextualised discussion of *A Dream of John Ball*.

The final section of the book examines the ways in which ideas of community were expressed during the early twentieth century. Morris drops from view, and the analysis moves to a discussion of Tressell, Wells, Blatchford, and others. Here, Vaninskaya challenges two myths: that the idea of community was lost in the battle between ‘communal’ and ‘statist’ groups, and/or that it declined as the early, utopian and radical socialism of the period of the revival gave way to bureaucratic social democracy. Vaninskaya’s discussion of context and the methodological problems which it raises is impressive, and in debunking these myths she rightly highlights the fluidity of socialism, the interrelatedness of different groups and individuals and the shifting grounds on which ideas of community found root. What gets lost, though, is the sense in which Morris and others also operated in an ideological context, marked by growing sectarianism. How, for example, should we treat Morris’s late, uncompromising rejection of anarchism towards the end of his life?

The issue of context is not, then, reflected back in the choices made for this

section, or on the way in which the earlier sections of the book are framed or, in particular, on the treatment of modernity it proposes. At the beginning of the book, Vaninskaya describes socialism as the most radical and forward-looking movement – which it might well have been – but in a way which suggests it represented a break with the past. To cast socialism in this manner suggests that history is being looked at through a particular lens and that Morris's thought can be interpreted the light of this understanding. The assumption informing this reading is made clear when Vaninskaya argues in the Introduction that Morris's literary and political efforts were designed to 'remove him from capitalist modernity'. (p. 5) Yet it is not clear that Morris thought that modernity presented a problem in the way that she suggests, or that his poetic shifts between past and future were not all understood by him to be aspects of his present.

The questions which Vaninskaya's book wrestles with and provokes are enormous and her resolution is optimistic and forceful. In opening with a discussion of the prose romances and working back through Morris's socialist thought, she also raises the profile of this late work and gives it an importance, as a mature rendering of his work which most have overlooked. In taking the story forward after his death, she not only charts a history of an idea but points to its still possible realisation in our present.

Ruth Kinna

Yisrael Levin, ed, *A. C. Swinburne and the Singing Word*, Farnham, Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010, 190 pp. Hbk, £55.00. ISBN 97807546 69968.

As Yisrael Levin disarmingly remarks in his introduction to this volume, 'one may claim there is something counterintuitive, perhaps even self-defeating, in dedicating a collection of essays to Swinburne's later work'. (p. 1) Swinburne occupies a slightly ambiguous place in literary studies: most scholars acknowledge him as an important figure, yet he remains also a marginal one, remembered, most often, for the scandalous impact of his early works, and in particular of *Poems and Ballads* (1866). His later works – those written in the three decades following his 'rescue' from alcoholism by his friend Theodore Watts-Dunton, and his ensconcement at The Pines, Putney, as the latter's housemate – have often been dismissed out of hand as diffuse, repetitive, and over-literary, a case of 'arrested development' as Douglas Bush put it in 1963. The last forty years have seen a trickle of eloquent defences of Swinburne by prominent North American critics including Jerome McGann and Antony H. Harrison, and most of these have pointed out that the late poetry, while

demanding and uneven, is in fact crucial to a just estimate of his achievement. Yet these voices seem to have had little impact on the general scholarly consensus. So this book, by taking the problematic later work as its sole stated object of study, seeks to tackle the critical impasse head-on.

I should say at this point that I am by no means a disinterested commentator on this subject: I fully share the view informing the volume that Swinburne is one of the greatest of all Victorian poets, and (no doubt like some of Levin's contributors) I have had the experience of being stared at incredulously at academic conferences for stating this opinion. I therefore approached this book with real anticipation, expecting a triumphant vindication of the mature Swinburne's genius. I have to say that, despite its many strengths, I was slightly disappointed. Its main shortcoming is in fact hinted at in the Afterword by David G. Riede, whose brilliant *Swinburne: A Study of Romantic Mythmaking* (1979) first identified in his later work a fully developed nature myth worthy of comparison with those of Wordsworth or Shelley. What is needed, he says, is simply more 'rigorous engagement with the difficult late work', (p. 171) and ultimately, there is not quite enough of this in Levin's volume. To say this is to imply no necessary negative comment on the calibre of the contributors.

The major problem, I think, is that it is very difficult even to begin to engage rigorously with the later Swinburne within the confines of an article or book chapter. Not only is the late work very voluminous (he published ten volumes of verse between 1879 and his death in 1909), it is also formally complex, intellectually demanding, and extremely patchy in quality, with (what is worst of all) the 'bad' poems and the 'good' poems often looking very alike – frequently deploying the same subject matter, vocabulary, verse forms, and prosodic techniques. All of this means that Swinburne requires a considerable investment of time, energy, and patience to study, and a comparably large amount of space to explicate. There can be no doubt that such difficulties have contributed to the continuing neglect of the mature Swinburne, leading many scholars to engage in what Margot K. Louis has called 'short swallow-flights of criticism over the surface of Swinburne studies' (quoted, p. 169) rather than sound the depths. No such superficiality is to be found here; yet one senses that some contributors (including experienced Swinburneans such as Catherine Maxwell and Rikky Rooksby) have opted for manageable topics, rather than embark on the daunting prospect of attempting, within the space of twenty pages, to provide close readings of long, difficult poems virtually unread for a century and more.

Three chapters in particular do seek to rise to this challenge, however. Most strikingly, Stephanie Kuduk Weiner's study of 'Knowledge and Sense Experience in Swinburne's Late Poetry' addresses the central charge brought

against Swinburne by T. S. Eliot, the critic who contributed most fully to the poet's loss of reputation in the early twentieth century: that he was concerned with sound rather than sense, that for him meaning was merely 'the hallucination of meaning'. Kuduk Weiner, by a patient discussion of several poems (some known to previous criticism, others not) shows how Swinburne uses poetry to explore 'the relation between sense and knowledge'. (p. 12) His descriptive 'late nature poems', often dismissed as simple word-painting, 'investigate the quality of the knowledge to be gained by attending to the experience of the real world', while the sound-driven poems (Eliot's real *bête noir*) are programmatically concerned with the kind of insight which can be gained from the sensuous qualities of language itself. Weiner here seems to me to add a significant new dimension to our understanding of Swinburne as an 'aesthetic poet'.

Elsewhere, Levin's own chapter, 'Solar Erotica: Swinburne's Myth of Creation' examines how Swinburne's later poetry evolves a non-Christian myth of creation as an essentially erotic act between the elemental forces of nature. This myth is, without doubt, one of the great achievements of the mature Swinburne, seen above all in the monumental 'By the North Sea' (1880); though I am unsure as to how much Levin's reading adds to Riedel's much fuller analysis of three decades ago. Still, it is arguable that Swinburne's claims in this regard merit repetition to bring them to wider attention. John A. Walsh, editor of the Swinburne Project (a website interestingly comparable to the Morris Online Edition) uses the new methods of digital humanities scholarship to provide an 'analysis of the architectonic structures [of] Swinburne's compositions', (p. 29) focusing on his 1880 collection *Songs of the Springtides*. One cannot help thinking that Swinburne would have been amused by the thought of people using computers to analyse his poetry; yet, despite the obvious risks of reductionism in such an exercise, Walsh demonstrates how such techniques can help to uncover the complex 'conceptual networks' in Swinburne's writing, underscoring the meticulousness of his poetic craft, and giving the lie to Eliot's accusations of laziness.

Much of the remainder of the book comprises studies of Swinburne's influences and friendships – informative and enjoyable essays, but not the kind of thing likely to re-establish him in the front rank of Victorian poets. One of these chapters, however, will be of particular interest to Morrisians: Brian Burton's consideration of 'Swinburne and the North'. Swinburne was of partly Northumbrian descent, and often described himself as a 'borderer'. Such a love for the North is a significant point of affinity between him and Morris, as Swinburne himself liked to remark. (Morris seems to have been more diffident on this point). In his earlier years, Swinburne produced a series of versions and imitations of traditional border ballads, accentuating the

romantic and supernatural elements of the originals.

Rather as the Icelandic sagas were for Morris, the ballads were for Swinburne the achievement of a people closer to nature and unspoiled by the 'civilisation' represented by the South. Swinburne's most important Northumbrian-inspired work is *The Tale of Balen* (1896), his retelling of Malory's tale of 'Balin le Savage'. As personified in Balen, 'Northumberland is [...] portrayed as a unified whole with land, sea, and man comprising a single entity'; by contrast, 'the corrupt world of Camelot, the traditional symbol of English rule, national unity, and Christian virtue, is characterised as fundamentally evil'. (pp. 84, 83) Interestingly, though, Burton suggests that Swinburne's Northern vision is in important respects a conservative one, valorising Balen's 'fidelity to his family, his selfless devotion to duty, his adherence to personal notions of nobility and honour, and his sheer manliness'; *Balen* thus sits somewhere between the blatant nationalism of Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* and the radical antinomianism of *The Defence of Guenevere*. (p. 84)

As a salutary counterpoint to Burton's work, Charlotte Ribeyrol's chapter on Swinburne and France considers the influence on the mature Swinburne of such figures as Baudelaire, Hugo, and indeed Villon (a medieval poet never to my knowledge mentioned by Morris). Such associations remind us what a self-consciously literary figure Swinburne was, and one can perhaps understand the feeling which led Morris once to characterise Swinburne's work as 'founded on literature, not on nature' – even if (as Cecil Y. Lang once commented) this seems an odd remark from the author of *The Life and Death of Jason* and *Sigurd the Volsung*.

There is, then, much of interest in this volume. What is lacking, however, is a really important chapter which would add materially to the rather small number of later works (most notably 'On the Cliffs', 'By the North Sea', 'A Nympholept', 'The Lake of Gaube', and *Tristram of Lyonesse*) which have been widely accepted among Swinburneans as being of major significance. It is sad to note, in closing, the death of Margot K. Louis, the intended co-editor of this volume and a devoted Swinburnean whose work exemplified the kind of detailed, patient close reading which Swinburne above all demands. Nevertheless, as Riede insists in his Afterword, Swinburne studies a century after his death appear to be in a better state of health than has been the case for some time. Perhaps (to employ Swinburne's favourite image of the changeful, changeless sea) the tide of criticism will one day flow back more decisively in his favour.

Richard Frith

Karen Livingstone, *The Bookplates and Badges of C.F.A. Voysey, Architect and Designer of the Arts and Crafts Movement*, Woodbridge, Suffolk: Antique Collectors' Club in association with Crab Tree Farm Foundation, 2011, 248 pp, 149 coloured illustrations, Hbk, £25. ISBN 9781851496402.

I have always had a soft spot for Voysey, particularly because a well-known authority on architecture who came to stay, looked out of our window at the house opposite and said 'Undoubtedly Voysey'. Second, I have a framed postcard by Voysey of birds in a nest, inscribed 'There's no place like home'. I look at it every day and find it cheering. But maybe one can have too much of a good thing, I felt, as I picked up a volume almost entirely devoted to Voysey's bookplates.

This copiously illustrated survey contains one hundred and forty-eight reproductions of bookplates and other designs by Voysey. It is a well-made book and a joy to handle. For example, at the beginning, we are introduced to his work as an architect; also included are specimens of his designs for metalwork and wallpaper. He was essentially a practitioner of the Arts and Crafts movement, and his work is of its age, rather than for all time. He felt that his master was Pugin, and the portrayal of Voysey closely resembles the well-known portrait of Pugin as a medieval architect. So he regularly paid attention to the fittings of the houses he was engaged to build and the hinge shown at Figure 7 is a splendid example of something useful. He was a colleague of Mackmurdo and other members of the Century Guild, and this brings us to the 1890s, when bookplates were at their peak of popularity and became 'collectable'.

In fact, after many years of designing them for his family and friends, Voysey made a compilation of his own bookplates in 1932 and pasted them into an album, which found its way into the collection at Crab Tree Farm, near Chicago, Illinois. From this collection, and others in the Victoria and Albert Museum and the archives of the RIBA, Karen Livingstone has put together this authoritative study. The collection is unified in several ways, partly because Voysey designed and used his own set of letters and numerals, which is an interesting parallel to the fonts of type which William Morris originated. He also devised his own tightly controlled set of symbols: 'the love of God leads to the love of goodness, truth and beauty, and ultimately to the joy of symbolising these qualities in all design'. Unfortunately he was not gifted with the poetic vision of WB Yeats; Livingstone writes of his 'uncompromising certainty of belief' and it turns out to be a rather a trite revelation that he wishes to communicate. Does one need to be told that the heart symbolises love, and that the busy bee means work? However, there is considerable variety in the various kinds of tree he used to draw, and for the

animals and birds he would go sketching at the London Zoo. Livingstone quotes a commentator who said that 'Voysey's version of a particular bird was more like the bird it depicted than the actual bird itself'. This joke is worth savouring. The objects studied are reduced to their essentials. 'To be simple', said Voysey, 'is the end, not the beginning of design'.

Such a devotion to small things offers its own rewards, and occasionally an unexpected insight informs the design. For example, the bookplate for Kathleen Müntzer shows a dark mountain in the distance, a galleon sailing past, and in the foreground a thick forest, and a spread of 'creatures of the night'; these symbols are overridden by the sun rising over the mountain, its streaming rays bringing 'glad day' as in Blake's work. The plate is inscribed in Latin LIBER LUCIS ORIGO and SINE LIBRIS TENEBRAE; 'Without books there is darkness'. Had Voysey produced more designs like this one would have wished to give him unlimited praise; but many of them are, I feel, painfully cramped into the tiny rectangle provided for the function of the bookplate. As time went on, he began to incorporate a little rectangle at the bottom, in which the date of purchase could be entered.

Livingstone refers to Morris in passing; her account of Voysey's attitude to him is worth quoting in full. 'Although a reluctant admirer of Morris's pattern designs, Voysey quite clearly wanted to distance himself from the great man and his ideals, partly because he did not approve of his socialist beliefs. The two men also differed in their approach to design: while Morris was a practising craftsman, Voysey understood technique and was a skilled designer but did not actually make anything himself'. This is a telling criticism. Nevertheless, Voysey was a great propagandist for the ideals of the Arts and Crafts movement, and was a member of the Art Workers Guild from its foundation, becoming Master in 1924. He was also a member of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, founded in 1887, and many similar organisations. In this way, by constant networking, he drove forward and monitored the progress of the movement for which Morris was had provided the impetus. Livingstone refers to his address book as a source to support her case. Voysey possessed less talent than Morris but he used it to the full, so that even in a collection of bookplates – obviously one of the Lesser Arts – you can find evidence of genius, even if, in the English way, it pursues a slightly dotty ideology.

John Purkis

Linda Parry & David Cathers, *Arts and Crafts Rugs for Craftsman Interiors*, London & New York: W.W. Norton in association with Crab Tree Farm, 2010, 168 pp., numerous colour illustrations, £33. ISBN 9780393733204.

The idea for this outstandingly attractive book came, we are told, from Dru Muskovin, who looked after the remarkable collection at Crab Tree Farm in Illinois. A quick glance at it certainly makes the reader feel that he or she would like to make a visit to the Farm, which is, we are told, a working farm located on Lake Bluff, Illinois, with five buildings designed in 1911, now displaying ‘collections of Arts and Crafts furniture and decorative arts in settings that have been created to reflect the aesthetics of the Arts and Crafts movement’. The large size of the pages allows for many lavish illustrations, often of rooms at Crab Tree, credited to Prographics of Rockford, Illinois, who deserve credit for their contribution to the book.

But this is not simply a book to look at. It also contains much illuminating scholarship, as we expect when we see that Linda Parry has contributed substantially to it. A brief, summarising Introduction begins with Gustav Stickley, who started work as a furniture designer and moved on to interior design, and then the publication, from October 1901, of his journal *The Craftsman*. The cover of the first issue is shown here, with the title of the main article, ‘William Morris. Some thoughts upon His life: work & influence’ (*sic*). Information is also given about the foundation of the Farm in 1905, and the rationale of the book is made explicit in the claim that ‘The rugs used in his [Stickley’s] Craftsman interiors are, arguably, the most understudied of all the decorative arts of the Arts and Crafts movement’. After the publication of this book, that is no longer the case.

The first chapter, by David Cathers and Diane Boucher, gives an account of Stickley and the Arts and Crafts movement in the United States which will be particularly useful to British readers perhaps knowing little about Stickley, who deserves to be better known here for his remarkable energy and creativity. The account stresses Stickley’s attentive reading of the leading ‘British practitioners of the Arts and Crafts’, Ruskin, Morris, Voysey and Baillie Scott, ‘who most transformed Stickley’s views of art, craft, and labor’. Stickley never produced rugs himself, but he saw them as essential for ‘elegant simplicity’ he was seeking to create in his customers’ homes and made recommendations for what he thought appropriate.

There are then four chapters by Linda Parry, on ‘The Rugs of William Morris’, ‘The Rugs of C.F.A. Voysey’, ‘Donegal Rugs of Ireland’ and ‘Dun Emer Rugs of Ireland’. She points out that Stickley never sold Morris’s rugs, but was deeply indebted to him for inspiration. She provides an illuminating account of Morris’s work in this field, showing him working with characteristic

determination to improve the quality of both design and production technique. Not only did he produce fine rugs, first at Hammersmith, then at Merton Abbey; he also inspired a renewed interest in machine-woven carpeting, which had previously been used only in corridors and bedrooms.

These cheaper products were commissioned from various manufacturers, and sold under the Morris name in the shop in Oxford Street. Although fewer than ten such carpets were put into production, we are told that their commercial success led to wider use of this form of floor covering and made Morris carpeting available 'to a number of clients who were unable to afford hand-knotted Hammersmiths'. It is good to be made aware of this in view of the frequent criticism of the expensiveness of the Company's products. There are no fewer than fifteen illustrations to this chapter, some of which show the machine-woven carpets, and others the better-known hand-knotted rugs and carpets. In particular the 'Little Tree' of c. 1880 and the 'Black Tree' of 1885/7 seemed to me to show Morris at his inventive best. The rug by Dearle, c.1890, shows that the spirit of Morris could be passed on; a version of this rug was owned by May, and is now at Kelmscott Manor.

Parry's other contributions show, as does the book overall, the expanding and inclusive nature of Stickley's interests. He met and talked to Voysey when on a visit to Britain in 1912. Unfortunately no record of the conversation exists, but their attitudes to decoration had much in common. Stickley praised Voysey for his provision for comfortable domestic life: his work was 'intimate rather than pompous'; the illustrations convincingly support this. The following two chapters take us beyond England, as Stickley found sources of inspiration for his desire to regenerate rural areas in the United States. Alexander Morton had revived the failing rug-making industry in southern Scotland from 1867, and later expanded the business to County Donegal. The colours used in these woollen 'Donegals' were unusual, as most had a green warp and used strong reds, oranges, pinks and purples. As the fourth chapter shows, activity in Ireland increased with the establishment by Evelyn Gleeson in 1902 of the Dun Emer Guild at Dundrum, near Dublin. Parry describes Gleeson as 'the ideal Arts and Crafts woman: independent, practical and talented', and shows how she incorporated Celtic knots and interlacings into her attractive designs.

The interesting story of the extension beyond Europe of the geographical areas from which the rugs derived is told in the following chapters. David Cathers writes about 'Rag Rugs', defined as 'a loom-woven textile with cotton or linen warps and wefts of old cloth cut into strips'. These were 'mostly homemade throughout the nineteenth century', and production of them was revived at its end. The American Fabric Rug Company produced a line of these products, with names evoking the Colonial heritage. Next Cathers

discusses ‘Scotch Rugs’, defined as ‘flat-woven, reversible wool rugs’, associated originally with Scotland but later produced and marketed in America. He then goes on to ‘Druggets of India’. He points out that a variety of Indian-made rugs, often designed in Britain, were imported into America in the early twentieth century; of these, a small percentage were druggets, a drugget being a ‘weft-faced, flat woven, reversible rug made with cotton warps and wool wefts and dyed with synthetic dyes’. Druggets are apparently the only Craftsman floor coverings to have survived; the simplicity of the designs clearly appealed to Stickley.

Diane Boucher begins her illuminating account of ‘Navajo Rugs of the Southwestern United States’ with reference back to the ways in which Romanticism introduced the idea of a country’s ‘promoting its identity through the arts’, seeking inspiration from ‘the historical and mythological past’. Since the Native Americans were the only indigenous people in North America, it made sense for the Arts and Crafts movement to look to them for a ‘national spirit in art’ – despite the unfortunate history of their treatment by successive generations of immigrants, of which Boucher says nothing. She quotes a Native American writing in 1914 about the peculiar value of Indian blankets ‘when used as a rug, portière, or couch cover in a Craftsman room’ – and the illustrations back this up.

We remain in America for the two brief chapters constituting the rest of the book, in which David Cathers writes about ‘Crex Grass Rugs of Minnesota’ and ‘Abnákee Rugs of New Hampshire’. A hard-wearing grass matting product called Crex was created by the American Grass Twine Company early in the twentieth century, and soon came to employ five hundred workers. The advertisement for it showing a Crex porch overlooking a rose-filled garden, ‘Typical of the Home of Many’ is very appealing. Cathers notes that the story of the Company ‘includes several familiar themes: American mechanical ingenuity and industrial production; the exploitation of natural resources, aggressive boosterism; and, eventually, the creation of a consumer product by a consistent, sophisticated nationwide advertising campaign’. We have certainly come a long way from Morris at this point.

Finally, the Abnákee Rug. This was a product created by Helen Albee of Pequaket, New Hampshire, deriving, we are told, from ‘the common “hooked rug” of New Hampshire’. Mrs Albee was a philanthropically-inclined lady who wanted to help the increasingly impoverished local farm wives, and was inspired partly by ideas from Ruskin and Morris to try to do so. Interestingly, the wives proved less responsive than she may have expected; in particular, they did not share her view of the ugliness of the hooked rugs made by them and placed on their farmhouse floors. She remarked with some asperity: ‘My simple conventionalized designs had not met with their approval. I did not

use bright colours; I wove no ... cats nor puppy dogs. I had not reached the standards of native taste'. But she persisted, and made some progress; if the women did not share her taste, they were pleased to have the employment that her good management produced. Albee is an interesting final example of the eclectic form taken by the Arts and Crafts movement in the United States, of which Stickley himself is an outstanding example.

There is a useful Bibliography, reminding us of the amount of sound research which has recently been done in these areas. The final illustration is a Donegal showcard of 1899 called 'Irish Camels', which shows wagon-loads of rugs made by Alexander Morton and Co. setting out on their journey from Ireland, with one bundle designated for New York. This makes an unexpected but effective conclusion to this attractive and informative book.

Peter Faulkner

Christopher Frayling, *On Craftsmanship: towards a new Bauhaus*, London: Oberon Books, 2011, 144 pp., Hbk, £9.99. ISBN 1849430721.

Christopher Frayling's *On Craftsmanship* is a collection of articles, reviews and lectures, which purports to take an 'unsentimental, hard-headed look at craftsmanship today' in order to understand its contemporary importance. The author presents his interest in the subject as rooted in his family history, his education and his thirty-six year working life at the Royal College of Art.

The first chapter discusses George Sturt's *The Wheelwright's Shop*; an influential early twentieth-century account of traditional craft. For Frayling, the main theme is 'a schoolmaster trying hard – sometimes embarrassingly hard – to understand exactly what a small group of craftspeople actually *do*'. (p. 24) The historical interest of Sturt's writing is enhanced by his admiration for William Morris and John Ruskin; he cited *Fors Clavigera* as a direct influence on his decision to leave teaching and take over the family wheelwright business. Frayling stresses that *The Wheelwright's Shop* needs to be understood in conjunction with Sturt's manuscript journal, which records his difficulties with the craftsmen, and how they learned the skills which, for the most part, eluded him.

Through a discussion of Sturt's work, the reader is introduced to the concepts of 'formal' and 'tacit' knowledge, both of which are central to recent thinking on craftsmanship. Frayling records Sturt's eventual disillusionment with both Ruskin and Morris, glossing Sturt's critique by describing Morris as 'the original champagne socialist', a somewhat flippant comment. (p.32) Despite this, he acknowledges that Sturt continued to be guided by Ruskin's critique of the educational system, and his struggle to understand the workers

encapsulates many of the contradictions and difficulties gathered together under the word 'craftsman'. Frayling concludes: 'Only when the schoolmaster had shed both his 'Ruskinian tendencies' *and* his tendency to rely on the reassuring categories of 'reasoned science' did he even begin to understand the work and society of the craftsmen, and did they begin to understand what he was attempting to do'. (p.49)

On Craftsmanship contains some interesting perspectives on the myths surrounding creative practise. A chapter entitled 'Skill – A Word to Start an Argument' discusses a number of nostalgic notions about craftsmanship which obscure the real significance of the subject. A pertinent example is the status of the studio potter during the craft revival of the later twentieth century. The potter 'sees himself as the inheritor of traditional skills', although craft pottery 'played a negligible part in the urban economy of Merrie England'. (p.65) In a similar way the spinning wheel was accepted as 'a key symbol of the domestic crafts' despite the fact that it is based upon a fifteenth-century device totally obsolete by the nineteenth century, even among the 'handicraft end of the trade'. (p.67)

As the Introduction admits, most of the chapters are old work 'tweaked for new publication', (p.20) and sadly this is evident to the reader. 'Forever Ambridge' is basically a review of Martin Wiener's *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit* (1981): this material is likely to appear dated for a contemporary audience. To make matters worse, Frayling seems to concur with Wiener's attitude about the Crystal Palace and its contents: Pugin's Medieval Court is caricatured as the 'a bizarre expression of its [the Crystal Palace's] cultural opposite'. (p.52) This is a missed opportunity and shows a very old-fashioned attitude towards Pugin which contradicts one of the themes of the book. Pugin's pragmatic engagement with industrialists such as Herbert Minton and John Hardman, and his ability to communicate to craftsmen on an individual level, are the qualities which made him such an effective designer and should have made his work a subject of positive interest for a book such as this.

To my mind the most interesting chapter is the last: 'The New Bauhaus', which reads like a lecture and feels more recent than most of the book. Frayling muses on the thoughts of his predecessor, Walter Crane, who in 1901 reorganised the curriculum of the Royal College of Art in order to adapt it to the new century. He moves on to discuss the Bauhaus, the legacy of which he summarises as: 'craft plus alternative philosophy, and the hope that industry might be listening; art meets design through making; the experimental workshop'. (p. 132)

So what shape does he think a contemporary Bauhaus might take? It would be an agency of professional education which reaches out into the

community 'in a much more generous and informative way than is usual at present'. (p.136) It would be a research institute with 'inclusive design, design for everyone, design which really *understands* users, and a lifestyle laboratory or digital playground which businesses, artists and designers will want to wire into'. (p.137) Finally, it would be a place for learning both the traditional skills necessary for becoming a professional artist and learning '*through*' art and design: using art as a medium for teaching universal skills such as 'problem-solving, making things, resourcefulness, independence of mind'. (p.139) In conclusion he returns to Ruskin's counsel that art education should combine 'the head, the heart and the hand' and shows receptiveness to the values of the Arts and Crafts Movement which is somewhat absent in the rest of the text.

Much of this book is too dated really to deal with 'craftsmanship today' and the lack of information about the original context of the chapters makes it difficult to understand them as pieces of writing from the past. When, for example, did the interview with David Pye take place, and who were the audience? We might deduce the date to be about 1980, but should the reader really have to work this out? The absence of any notes, bibliography or even further reading is extremely frustrating, and makes following up quotations problematic, especially when the title is given incorrectly in the text, as in the case of Philip Steadman's *The Evolution of Designs*. (p.98) At times the reader is likely to sense the absence of images which were probably included in the original publication or lecture. Despite some engaging and profound material, the themes which run through this book ultimately fail to unite the chapters into a convincing whole, and it is regrettable that it lacks the scholarly apparatus which might allow the reader to pursue its interesting aspects.

Jim Cheshire

Tony Pinkney, *William Morris: The Blog. Digital Reflections 2007-2011*, Lancaster: Kelmsgarth Press, 2011, 152pp., pbk, £12.95. ISBN 9780-956761309.

On the back of this lively book, Tony Pinkney makes the claim – referring to Morris's 'Notes on News' items in *Commonweal* as a comparable body of work – that 'If William Morris were alive today, he would certainly be blogging on all the literary, cultural and political issues that so absorbed him'. Pinkney is of course well known to Morrisians as the scholarly editor of the volume of interviews with Morris, planned by Nicholas Salmon and published as *We Met Morris* in 2005, and of the illuminating *William Morris in Oxford: The Campaigning Years 1879-1895* in 2007. As he acknowledges in his Introduction, subtitled 'William Morris Unbound', the blog form offers him the opportunity to proceed in a

less formal fashion, avoiding the tyranny of the footnote – but without being led into carelessness, for he is a consistently scrupulous scholar. What he can do is to comment on Morris-related topics as they occur to him in his formal or informal reading, without having to make his observations into part of a detailed argument. But there are, as he tells us, five themes and one text around which his thoughts circle: the text is *News from Nowhere*, and the themes are socialism, cultural theory, utopianism, neo-Victorianism (the bringing together of aspects of Victorian culture which remained undeveloped at the time), and what he terms Morris's 'quirkiness and prickliness'. Overall, Pinkney wants his readers to 'unbind' Morris from the shackles of stale assumptions and to bring him into the creative aspects of our thinking.

Examples of this liberating approach can be found on almost every page. I was particularly struck by Pinkney's reflections on Utopianism as a form of thinking which should not be allowed to disappear in our bureaucratic culture. He shows the attitudes of respected figures such as Raymond Williams and Fredrick Jameson to the issue, and suggests that it would illuminate that tradition to read it in the light of our contemporary science-fiction of writers such as Ursula Le Guin. He urges the William Morris Society to take action on this, and on other matters too – the final section of the book offers 'Future Directions' for the use of the area at Kelmscott House above the coach house. Pinkney would like to see the setting up of a 'Utopian Studies Sub-Group' within the Society, to do justice to the significance of Morris's utopianism, the area in which 'the most enduring thrust of his work lies'. But *News from Nowhere* is not over-praised – its inconsistencies are admitted, while Pinkney also wonders intelligently about the implications of Old Hammond's admission that he has been in some way disappointed by the progress of the society in which he is living. Those of us who remember with exasperation John Carey's dismissive comments about Morris in his 1999 *Faber Book of Utopias* – *News from Nowhere* is said to display 'in its inadequacies, the confusion and hypocrisy that have dogged the course of English Socialism' – will be surprised to find Carey, in a personal communication to Pinkney, airily remarking: 'You should not pay much attention to my views on WM. My main grudge against him is that he is so rude about Hammersmith Bridge, to which I fondly recall being taken to feed the seagulls when I was a child'. Pinkney fairly suggests that these words should be appended to any future edition of the anthology, but seems less indignant than I am at the blithe irresponsibility of Carey's response.

Pinkney is of the generation which felt the impact of the new ideas in literary criticism which were given the general name Theory during the 1970s. He is doubtful as to whether Morris studies have fully reflected that development. This may perhaps be because Morris was not one of the central figures in the Great Tradition – to use Leavis's term – which Theory often set out to criticise. This went along with a questioning of the claims of realism as a mode of repre-

sentation. Since Morris's writings were not in the realist mode – of which he was in fact highly critical – and he did not feature in the lists of canonical texts, there was less reason to focus on him.

Pinkney says little about two other elements in the recent critique of culture which have been influential – feminism, and the work inaugurated by Edward Said. Of the latter, we know that Morris was one of the very few Victorians who resisted the claims of British imperialism; but feminists were able to point out that, in *Nowhere*, women are shown in many of their traditional roles. On the other hand, as Pinkney points out more than once, Ellen is the most dynamic presence in Morris's utopia – none of the male figures can compete with her for the reader's interest. She may indeed represent the 'quirkiness and prickliness' which Pinkney sees in Morris and wants us to recognise in him. Our attention is also drawn to more recent developments in cultural studies, one of which is a 'theological turn'. Pinkney notes that *News from Nowhere* ends in Kelmscott Church, 'not at Kelmscott manor as we lazily assume'. I do not think that readers are as careless as this suggests, or are unaware of the fact that the church has been repossessed by the local people and turned into a social centre. Pinkney goes on to wonder why 'utopia should end thus at a sacred site', and predicts that future critics may reread the book and discover 'religious significances we had not previously picked up'. A reader of Philip Larkin's 'Church-Going' might recall the agnostic poet's admiring line, 'A serious house on serious earth it is'.

Of the unfinished Morris projects, as Pinkney sees them, perhaps the most interesting are his suggestions that an attempt be made to give a full account of Morris as a literary critic, and that a book of ballads should be compiled drawing on what is known about his taste in this area. I am more doubtful about two projects suggested in connection with *News from Nowhere*, the creation of a prequel and of a sequel. But of course if anyone bold enough to undertake either was to come along, we would all be intrigued by the resulting works. The Blog is most valuable in encouraging us to widen the range of activities that we might think of in relation to Morris, that most various of men. But I do not see myself taking up singlestick, or indeed fishing, however much Morris enjoyed these activities.

Some of the blogs are presented primarily to entertain. To me the prizewinner here was that for 21 January 2011 entitled 'Burne-Jones, Luddite'. In it Pinkney quotes from Penelope Fitzgerald's biography to the effect that the painter 'was often defeated by the simplest mechanical devices, even drawing-pins'. As Pinkney notes, 'The mind boggles. I sometimes struggle with the DVD recorder or with putting a new battery into my mobile phone or with the complexities of page set-out on the laptop - but drawing-pins ...?' Indeed, it would be nice to discover one of Burne-Jones's own cartons delineating such a scene. Thus there is entertainment as well as challenge for the student of Morris here, and one can only conclude with the hope that Pinkney will have the energy to continue his

blog into the future and to attract others to Morris in this way. Good luck too to the Kelmsgarth Press, which Pinkney and his wife Makiko Minow are launching with this book.

Peter Faulkner

Paul Farley & Michael Symmonds Roberts, *Edgelands: Journeys into England's true wilderness*, London: Jonathan Cape, 2011, 264 pp., pbk, £12.99. ISBN 9780224089029.

Owen Hatherley, *A guide to the new ruins of Great Britain*, Verso, 2011, 371 pp., pbk, £9.99. ISBN 139781844677009

'Edgelands' are those spaces where the veneer of civilisation peels away. They are the debatable spaces where city and countryside fray into each other; those most despised and ignored of landscapes which are part of our common experience. The late Colin Ward, along with various collaborators, researched and celebrated them in a series of books on plotlands, caravan sites, camping grounds, smallholdings, children's hiding places and allotments. While other countries contain desert, jungle or tundra, this is arguably, Britain's wilderness.

In the spirit of the times, I spent my summer holiday in England. I visited National Trust properties as diverse as Stowe, Tyntesfield and Farnborough House. All in their different way possess gardens to die for, temples, lakes and magnificent trees abound, in landscapes artfully designed in order to look 'natural'. But of course our countryside has been carefully shaped, not just in these particular gems, but over moorland, weald and downs by many hands, over generations. And between our intensively-managed urban and rural landscapes, has grown up a strange 'no-man's-land'. It is this that Farley & Symmonds Roberts examine, in twenty eight essays with titles such as 'landfill', 'sewage', 'mines', 'airports', 'containers', 'canals', 'masts', and 'pallets'. Nothing could be more different from those National Trust properties.

Both authors are poets, and poets have always been attracted by the overlooked, the telling detail, the captured moment. If parts of our managed countryside feel (deliberately) timeless, the edgelands feel anything but. Come back a year after your last visit, and the empty factory will have been demolished, a business park constructed, the waste ground cleared and landscaped with those artificial waterfalls which only work on weekdays: the 'new ruins' of Great Britain even. Overlooked as they are, these areas play an increasingly important role in conserving biodiversity. Think of the extent of motorway verges almost undisturbed by human hands for decades.

As a 'waste-management professional', I was particularly struck by the essay on landfill. I have never come across such an accurate evocation of 'the end of the road' for our consumerist society. 'Live landfill sites are an assault on the senses. Even from a distance you can hear the two-tone klaxons, the constant roar of diesel engines straining up a system of slopes and the gulls panicky and urgent. Then there is the smell: if you've been stuck behind a bin wagon in traffic on a hot day, then you have experienced its harsh contours, though nothing prepares you for the cloying relentless reek of household waste close up'.

Once they are full and capped, they become 'landfill-as-history'. The authors visit one outside Lancaster and report: 'Beneath our feet lie over fifty years worth of decomposing material, unknowable subterranean shiftings and settlings, slow collapses and fermentations. Grease and bones, paper and wood, glass, metals, solvents, rubber, dyes, fly ash, fat trap waste ... Here we can clearly see the fine veins of Christmas tree needles marking Januaries ... the gradual inundation of plastics and particleboard as we rise through the layers of years. Deep down at the lowest levels lie the peelings and scrapings of teatimes when Clement Atlee was Prime Minister'.

Being poets, and Farley having edited a 2007 edition of the work of John Clare, they manage to pepper the book with poetic references, even to landfill. Swordy Well in Northamptonshire is the remnant of an old quarry in an area of limestone grazing which Clare knew well: he grazed livestock there. It became a landfill site for a time, and like many former such sites is now enjoying an afterlife as a wildlife conservation area now known as Swaddywell Pit Nature Reserve. It is not entirely pretty. The authors record that in its lower reaches, 'the ground is iridescent with shiny discharges oozing from the earth'. Nevertheless the orchids Clare celebrated two hundred years ago 'are still evident, and in abundance, the meadowland where the tip was capped is carpeted today with bee and pyramidal varieties'.

When Clare was a young shepherd, Swordy Well was common land, but he grew up to see the landscape transformed, and his connections to it severed as Enclosure changed ancient boundaries and landmarks, diverted water courses, and grubbed up old trees and hedges. The eventual substitute for the enclosed common land was allotments for the displaced urban proletariat, another topic of this book. 'Allotments signal that you are now passing through the edgelands as emphatically as sewage works or a power station. They thrive on the fringes, the in between spaces, on land left over (or left behind) by the tides of building and industrial development in pockets behind houses or factories and in ribbons along the trackbed of railways'. Seen from the train they do indeed seem to hark back to that feudal, swineherd England, the subsistence strips which Clare grew up with. The utter antithesis of the

privatised shiny surfaces of the city you have just pulled out of, they flaunt their functionality, revealing an infrastructure of water butts and pipe work, plastic groundsheets and transposed carpets, sheds and greenhouses which, cobbled together from leftovers, look like a refugee camp from those fleeing the consumerism of the city.

This is where Owen Hatherley's book comes in. Before the recent crash, British cities were the laboratories of the new enterprise economy, glowing monuments to finance, property speculation and the service sector; New Labour heaven made flesh. Then reality rudely interrupted. In *A Guide to the new ruins of Great Britain*, Hatherley sets out to explore the wreckage, mapping the derelict Britain of the 2010s, and the buildings which epitomise an age of consumption and greed. The book's structure is similar to that of *Edgelands*, a series of discrete essays, this time about specific cities; Southampton, Milton Keynes, Manchester, Glasgow, Liverpool, Cambridge, and half a dozen others. Hatherley's point of departure is where Farley & Symmonds Roberts leave off. Near the end of the book he visits the Greenwich peninsula, home of the Dome, the defining monument to New Labour. Once, he writes, 'this place was a Blairite *tabula rasa* ... an area the size of a small town, freshly decontaminated and waiting to have all manner of ideas laid down upon it'. But instead of the green, inclusive, continental-style new city quarter promised at the beginning of regeneration of the area, he finds 'a transplant of America at its worst – gated communities, entertainment hangers and malls criss-crossed by carbon-spewing roads, a vision of a [British] future alienated, blankly consumerist, class ridden'.

But the crowning glory of these 'new ruins,' and the one which really gets Hatherley's goat, is Manchester. 'More than any other city in Britain, Manchester has become a flagship for urban regeneration and immaterial capitalism. What other cities have dabbled in with piecemeal ineptitude, Manchester has implemented with total efficiency'. The city has repositioned itself as a 'cold, rain-soaked Barcelona'. While acknowledging that there are some good buildings which have been absorbed into popular affection – the Beetham Tower, the Lowry, as demonstrated by newsagents selling postcards of them – his real complaint is the effort expended in turning the city from one of production to one of consumption. Regenerated cities, he argues, no longer produce any great pop music, or great art, let alone industrial product. What they do produce, is property developers. Or 'immaterial capitalism'.

For Hatherley, Manchester is the opposite of 'edgelands' – those parts of the city now demolished such as the Hulme Crescents which during the 1980s became the home for Manchester's young bohemians, art-house cinema, and soon-to-be-famous Factory Records and all. While city centre stores such as Selfridges and Harvey Nicholls may in time, like the Lowry Centre, become

monuments to their age, the huge half-finished housing development of New Islington already looks doomed. When the crash came, it consisted of 'one (apparently very hard to sell) Alsop block, two small closes of houses and a whole lot of verbiage'. But the promised self-build enclaves, high streets, parks, schools, and health centres were not built during the boom, and the creation of a low-rise suburbia in the heart of a huge city, surrounded by the levelled area of former social housing, sounds to me as if it possesses all the ingredients of an edgeland-in-the-making. Hatherley even reports that the detritus of regeneration 'street furniture' includes, 'a cuddly little fibreglass bear, two fibreglass birds and a hedge trimmed to resemble a dinosaur'.

If these books sound like a couple of dystopian visions shot through with poetical and polemical humour, as the gloomy inevitability of a post-industrial, post-globalised society (with the city as focus for consumption), collapses into the 'edgelands-as-badlands' of urban social disaffection and a consumer society turning in on itself, all is not lost. Both Hatherley and Farley & Symmonds Roberts find optimism in the bleakest of contexts. Hatherley contrasts the Dome and those gated communities on the Greenwich peninsula with the nearby Climate Camp of 2009, an attempt to carve out some independent oppositional space. Cynic that he can be, he remarks that 'What's intriguing about the Climate Camp is its interest both in protest and an actual proposition of another way of living. In a time when utopianism of any sort is thin on the ground other than as an object for nostalgia, this alone makes it worth taking seriously. Many in the camp are clear that [it] provides at least a potential model of a post carbon, post growth world'. The Camp also recognised the need for enormous structural changes, both in the wider of politics and everyday life and by implication in the way we design our lives. In one leaflet produced there, explaining why they chose that site, the campers list as number one, the tall buildings of Canary Wharf – monuments to the feral rich ('swinish rich?') to which their *ad hoc*, low-rise settlement is such an explicit alternative. Hatherley comments 'There is an instructive contrast between the good will, intelligence and participation in these marquees and the viciousness, atomisation and stupidity that occurs in the glass and steel blocks they look out on'.

Farley & Symmonds Roberts take allotments as their ground zero of practical utopianism. Noting that there is a long and honourable lineage of 'Digging for Victory' in the canons of sustainability, they see the allotments of the twenty-first century as more 'Dig for Planet Earth', whose objective is to turn over as much wasted or underused land as possible to the beauty and utility of growing fresh fruit and vegetables. Morrisians will empathise. The authors rightly globalise this phenomenon, pointing to the urban agriculture movement, stretching as it does from Detroit to Havana by way of 'Incredible

Edible Todmorden'. London's 'Capital Growth' initiative which plans 2,012 community growing projects up and running in the metropolis by the end of 2012, relies heavily on bringing edgelands back into productive use, right there in the midst of the 'new ruins'. Allotments, urban agriculture, climate camps, they all speak to a future where prosperity without growth is within reach. These books both chart the decline and fall of our current society in graphic detail and almost incidentally, record some of the green shoots of new growth.

Martin Stott

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1. Contents – the Contents pages (pp. 1–2) of the last issue (Summer 2011) did not include page numbers.
2. Reviews – The list of reviews on p. 1 should have included the following as the first item

Phillippa Bennett & Rosie Miles, eds, *William Morris in the Twenty-First Century* (John Purkis)

The editor sincerely apologises to all concerned for these omissions.