THE WILLIAM MORRIS SOCIETY

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The life, work and ideas of William Morris (1834-96) are as important today as they were in his lifetime. The William Morris Society exists to make them as widely known as possible.

The breadth of Morris's ideas and activities brings together those who are interested in him as a designer, craftsman, poet, and political activist, and who admire his robust and generous personality and his creative energy. Morris's ideas on how we live and how we might live, on creative work, ecology and conservation, politics and the place of arts in our lives, remain as stimulating now as they were over a century ago.

Established in 1955, the Society is a worldwide membership fellowship. It publishes a magazine and a journal covering all aspects of Morris's work. It also runs a small museum and holds a varied series of talks, exhibitions and events throughout the year exploring Morris's work, his wider circle and his enduring relevance.

The Society's office and museum are in the basement and Coach House of Kelmscott House, Hammersmith, Morris's last London home. Visit our website at williammorrissociety.org to find out more about the Society and the benefits of membership.

The Society maintains close ties with its US and Canadian counterparts, whose members receive the UK publications. For more information visit morrissociety.org or wmsc.ca

See also:

The William Morris Society:
williammorrissociety.org

The Journal of William Morris Studies homepage:
williammorrissociety.org/publications/journal

The US William Morris Society's online archive of the *Journal*:
morrissociety.org/publications/journal-of-william-morris-studies

The William Morris Internet Archive:
marxists.org/archive/morris

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Editorial

Oswald Birchall is not a well-known figure, even among the keen Morrisians who make up the readership of this journal. Stephen Williams' two deeply researched articles in this issue should help to correct that. Birchall, a Church of England clergyman, became rector of the village church in Buscot, only two miles up the Thames from Kelmscott Manor, in 1884. Within a matter of months, Morris had convinced his new neighbour to join the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB), and the two men worked together on architectural preservation for the rest of Morris's life. They also worked together on political causes, although here the relationship was more complicated. Morris, was, of course, committed to revolutionary socialism. Birchall also considered himself a socialist, but he was convinced that the best path to a socialist future lay through the co-operative movement: alliances of producers and consumers that offered an alternative to the capitalist marketplace.

Morris regarded the co-operative movement as a distraction from the task of overthrowing capitalism. Yet it's a testimony to his esteem for Birchall that he joined the Lechlade Co-operative Society, which his friend established. Birchall, in turn, invited Morris to give a talk on socialism in Buscot in late 1887. Williams vividly depicts the imbroglio that ensued. When Morris, Birchall, and an audience of villagers arrived at the local school, they found the gates locked. The school managers refused to let them in. 'The socialists are not a party. They are the scum of the earth,' one manager told the assembled group. Undeterred, Birchall led them to the rectory, where Morris gave a rousing speech about Bloody Sunday, which had taken place only the previous month, when police brutally broke up a demonstration in Trafalgar Square.

Stephen's second article is the most extensive account yet of one of Morris's most successful, and personally meaningful, SPAB campaigns. Inglesham church, constructed in the thirteenth century, lies a few miles up the Thames from Kelmscott and Buscot. Morris described it as 'a very remarkable example of early Gothic architecture, seldom equalled, and never surpassed among buildings of its size for refinement and beauty of design.' The medieval village of which it was originally a part had been depopulated well before the nineteenth century, and by 1886 the unused church was in dangerously bad repair. A twentieth-century plaque in the church gives credit for its preservation to William Morris. Morris certainly played an important role in preserving Inglesham church, but Stephen highlights the crucial contribution of Birchall, who served as volunteer clerk of works throughout the twelve-year duration of the repairs.

Kelmscott House in Hammersmith, Morris's other Thames-side home, now houses the William Morris Society's important archival collections. Recently the archives were enriched

by a donation of documents from the early years of the Women's Guild of Arts (WGA), founded by May Morris and Mary Elizabeth Turner in 1907. The Art Workers' Guild, established in 1884 to promote the Arts and Crafts, did not accept women members for the first eighty years of its existence; the WGA stepped into the breach. Marion Tempest Grant's deep dive into the Morris Society's archives has resulted in an article that demonstrates how May Morris and other WGA members used the organisation to shape a professional identity for women craft workers during the early twentieth century.

Also in this issue, Tim Barringer offers vivid insights into the major *The Rossettis* exhibition at Tate Britain and the Delaware Art Museum, while the book reviews demonstrate once again the range of William Morris's interests and his deep connection to so many important people and influential movements in the nineteenth century and beyond. The books reviewed cover Edward Burne-Jones, socialism, the art of tapestry, and the craft of authorship.

We are fortunate to be able to include Anna Mason's tribute to Linda Parry, who died late last year. Everyone interested in Morris owes a debt to Parry, who was for many years a curator at the Victoria & Albert Museum – beloved by Morris in its original incarnation as the South Kensington Museum. Her 1996 exhibition on Morris was enormously popular at the V&A and in the three cities in Japan where it toured afterwards, and the accompanying catalogue that she edited set a standard for Morris scholarship and pointed the way for hundreds of scholars over the next twenty-five years. Her book *William Morris Textiles*, originally published in 1983 and revised thirty years later, remains an essential resource for anyone interested in Morris as artist, craftsman, and entrepreneur. Those of us lucky enough to have known Linda remain grateful for her vast knowledge, her remarkable generosity, and her exceptional personal warmth.

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This editorial ends by announcing a new beginning: Kirsty Hartsiotis will become editor of the *Journal of William Morris Studies* starting with the next issue. Kirsty is an accomplished art historian and curator and an experienced editor, and I'm certain that under her guidance the *JWMS* will grow and improve, while remaining an authoritative, essential resource for everyone who cares about the life, work, values, and influence of William Morris.

Michael Robertson
Interim Editor

ERRATUM NOTE

The short article 'Prehistoric Morris: A Caricature by E. T. Reed', which appeared in issue 25.1 of this journal, has been retracted by the author. In correspondence received by the journal, it was correctly pointed out that the caricature in question is, in fact, meant to depict not William Morris, but Val Prinsep, RA. This identification is in keeping with the fact that the other characters depicted are all members or Associates of the Royal Academy and can be corroborated by comparing the figure with photographs of Prinsep. The author and editors wish to thank the correspondent for this timely correction and apologise that the mistake was not spotted sooner.

The 'semi-socialism' of Oswald Birchall, Friend, Neighbour and Political Associate of William Morris

Stephen Williams

When William Morris died in October 1896 one of the most poignant memorials came from his friend the Rev. Oswald Birchall, near neighbour on the upper Thames, socialist ally and collaborator in the work of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB). Writing in the socialist monthly *Brotherhood*, Birchall stated that Morris was 'at the bottom of all the movements towards socialism in this time in this country, the inspirer of socialist ideas, and even the father or grandfather of all socialist societies. This ought to be acknowledged more than it is. We who survive shall hardly see his like again for downright honesty and unselfishness'. Birchall went on to reveal that it was the influence of Morris that led to his own 'renewed attraction to socialism, in middle life', which began in the mid-1880s and remained his creed until the end of his life in 1913.[1] In tribute, Birchall made himself available to 'assist' clergyman William Fulford Adams of Little Faringdon church at Morris's Kelmscott funeral on October 6, 1896.[2]

It seems likely that Birchall and Morris first came into contact in the autumn of 1884, just prior to the former assuming the rectorship at the church of St. Mary the Virgin, Buscot in Berkshire, two miles southwest of Kelmscott Manor along the

Thames path. A shared interest in the preservation of the nearby church of St. John the Baptist at Inglesham connected the men, which led to Morris encouraging Birchall to apply for membership of the SPAB in the spring of 1885 on the understanding that he would be able to help with its conservation.[3] The SPAB committee minutes tell us that consideration of Birchall's application for membership, proposed by Morris, was immediately followed with an instruction to the Society's secretary that he contact the new member about the church at Inglesham.[4] Birchall was told that the committee was 'very anxious' about the condition of the church and rumours about its 'restoration'.[5] It seems certain that Morris would have taken up the Inglesham case with Birchall personally when he was next at Kelmscott, a conversation that we know soon led to matters other than SPAB business, because sometime later Morris wrote to his daughter Jenny that he had received a 'long letter from Mr. Burchall [sic] this morning about semi-socialism; he is really a very sensible man'.[6] Morris put Birchall in touch with the London-based Christian Socialist Society and its journal *The Christian Socialist*, which published a number of Birchall's letters between 1887 and 1891, helping us understand his views at the time on the condition of agricultural labourers, land nationalisation and above all, co-operation. It is to a discussion of these matters, Birchall's social and political ideas, that this essay will give attention, along with consideration of how these concurred or contrasted with those of Morris.

In the most general terms, Birchall's admiration for Morris's breadth of vision will be apparent, as will the shared passion of the two men to replace capitalism with socialism. However, in their respective attitudes to the effectiveness of participation in organisations ostensibly working for this social change, Birchall and Morris were sometimes at odds. Birchall felt this to be most acute around his long-term commitment to the co-operative movement – both its retail and productive forms – which he believed had the potential to revolutionise society by gradually displacing capitalism. For Morris, this was at best wishful thinking and at worst dangerous, as some aspects of co-operation endorsed the quest for profit as the legitimate natural order of things, thereby incorporating members into the very system that exploited them. There were, no doubt, frank discussions between Morris and Birchall over their differences, but these would have been conducted in a friendly and comradely fashion, as each had respect for the other, and together they shared a dislike of the sectarian manner in which much socialist discourse took place. For his part, Birchall wanted more exchange between socialists and praised the magazine *Brotherhood* as an example of how there can be 'friendly discussion of theological and moral questions, together with political economy, from the standpoint of a very genuine and thoroughgoing socialism, of a constructive rather than destructive nature, and yet not watered down'.[7]

Figure 1: Oswald Birchall in the 1880s. Courtesy of Penny Whitney.

It was significant that Birchall chose *Brotherhood*, successor to *The Christian Socialist*, to publish his tribute to Morris.[8] Birchall admired its editorial perspective and somehow its very title encapsulated so much that he took from Morris and believed to be the ethical underpinning of socialism.

Co-operation and socialism

Birchall's reference to his 'renewed attraction to socialism in middle life' clearly indicates an earlier interest, most likely adherence to the tenets of Christian socialism, which emerged in the late 1840s and was to have an influence in England throughout the remainder of the Victorian period. We know Birchall read the work of leading Christian socialist Frederick Denison Maurice, because he mentioned it when in retirement.[9] Maurice had written his first *Tract of Christian Socialism* in 1850 setting out his basic beliefs, including a statement that co-operation was 'the watchword of the socialist … Anyone who recognises the principle of co-operation as a stronger and truer principle than that of competition, has the right to the honour or disgrace of being called a socialist'.[10] From the commencement of his work for socialism in the mid-eighties up to his death, Birchall would use Maurice's words in one form or another to state his belief in the indivisibility of co-operation and socialism.

After graduating from Brasenose College, Oxford in 1867 Birchall's first two appointments as curate were in Lancashire towns where co-operative enterprise was underway: at Heaton Mersey a co-operative store (possibly short-lived) had been established in 1863, and at Church Kirk near Accrington, where he had been born in 1843 and where his father was the vicar, a branch of the successful Accrington Society was opened in 1861.[11] We have no record of Birchall's direct involvement in in these societies, but it does seem likely that as a young Christian socialist he would have supported their efforts and seen this activity as the germ of a new way of organising society. Lancashire in these years was also the site of considerable agitation to establish producer co-operatives.[12] In his arguments for co-operation Birchall would stress the need for it to be 'universal', by which he meant a movement that integrated production and distribution – factories and stores – over which a spirit of brotherhood would prevail.

The rector of Buscot and its environs

This was certainly very much the spirit with which Birchall's engagement with the newly invigorated socialist movement commenced in the mid-1880s, just as he assumed the rectorship at Buscot in 1884 after six years there as curate, and which Morris would characterise as his 'semi-socialism'. Keen for Buscot villagers to hear Morris's views, Birchall asked his friend in the first week of November 1885 about

possible arrangements for such a meeting, seemingly suggesting the nearby town of Lechlade as a possible alternative. Morris replied: 'I don't see much use of speaking to the Lechlade tradesmen, who would be very hostile and would not understand me any better than the labourers; but to the latter the field labourers I should much like to speak, and to show them the evils of party government; so if you could get me an audience in the Buscot school room I should prefer it to the town'.[13] Three days later Morris told Birchall that if he was able to fix a meeting at Buscot he would 'prepare something of the very simplest & most elementary kind'.[14] As it turned out, Morris's appearance at Buscot didn't come off for another two years, more of which later.

In the meantime, Birchall had moved things on apace in the previously sleepy Berkshire-Gloucestershire border towns. Firstly, he had organised a meeting in Buscot in August 1886 to assess if a co-operative society might be established in the village. To add weight to the case, Birchall invited the prominent Joseph Clay and others from the Gloucester Co-operative Society, who spoke about their experiences as working men running a successful retail operation since 1860. Birchall backed this up but went further, arguing that the spirit of co-operation also needed to be extended to production, which in a village setting would mean agricultural labourers combining to rent land and grow food for sale at the co-operative store. The meeting did not favour Birchall's ambitious proposal but did express support for what was referred to as the 'Rochdale system' of co-operative retailing. Names of potential members were taken, but it soon became apparent to Birchall that not enough villagers had come forward to make it a serious proposition, perhaps not surprising as Buscot only numbered a population of around 450 people.[15]

There was a similar negative outcome to a meeting organised by Birchall in Faringdon in October 1886 which witnessed organised opposition by 'certain tradesmen' doing 'their utmost to create a disturbance'.[16] Attention then shifted to the market town of Lechlade-on-Thames, three miles to the north of Buscot, with a population of more than twice the size and some recent experience of agricultural workers' trade union organisation.[17] Here Birchall, quickly learning the lesson of the recent Faringdon meeting, ensured the support of James Mitchell, the town's postmaster and ironmonger, who was known to Morris: a man 'highly respected by all classes in the district', reassuring many locals of the soundness of the proposal.[18] With a similar line-up to that at Buscot, the well-attended meeting at the Swan Inn on 6 November 1886 listened to Birchall and the Gloucester men make the case for co-operation. Birchall spoke of 'the good that ensued upon the people when co-operation had taken hold and he looked forward to the time when labourers, aided by co-operation, would work out their own emancipation, and so settle the land question once and for all.'[19] Amidst 'considerable enthusiasm', those present agreed

to establish the Lechlade Co-operative Society, with a committee made up by a majority of working men, led by Mitchell and Birchall. Within a few weeks 120 members were enrolled, £130 of share capital was paid up and premises found. Trading commenced soon after with butcher's meat and groceries being sold from the High Street store.[20]

Some years later Birchall revealed that Morris had been one of the early members of the Lechlade Society, clearly an act of solidarity with his friend.[21] We know that Birchall consulted Morris about progress of the Society, including events in November 1887 when there was discord among members. To this Morris wrote that he was 'sorry to hear of your split in the co-operative, but I fear such things will happen as long as people are so ignorant – poor souls', a sentiment clearly meant but in need of some context.[22] In truth, while Morris believed co-operation would be one of the defining features of socialism, he had little time for co-operative initiatives under capitalism. He once conceded that co-operation 'if it does nothing else … will teach workmen how to manage their own affairs', but then went on to describe its role in creating 'a new middle class… thrust in between the rich and the proletariat… a necessity now for the monopolist class; the co-operative movement as it has developed is being used as part of this attempt: this I shall have to denounce'.[23] Arguing that the process of co-operative development would 'drift more completely into mere joint-stockery', Morris then explained how the leaders of co-operation – 'these profit grabbing co-operationalists' – will by their actions expose to those within the movement holding 'nobler views' that it was really working as a 'barrier' to societal change.[24] This, Morris believed, would help those honest co-operators 'turn their eyes to socialism, the real movement of labour, which will make the workers the arbiters of their own destinies'.[25] For Birchall, this view was mistaken because 'strictly speaking, socialism includes co-operation, [and] if we exclude co-operation … there is no definition of socialism that will suit all people who call themselves socialists'.[26]

A subscriber and contributor to *The Commonweal*, communicant with the Socialist League office and willing supporter of its campaigns, Birchall nonetheless urged readers of the *Co-operative News* to 'make the Socialist League unnecessary by doing its work in our way', with the qualification that 'seeing we cannot attempt to do all things, let us not be jealous if they do their work in their way'.[27] Acknowledging the range of labour issues profiled by *The Commonweal* with its 'dreadfully startling' accounts of hardship, Birchall called on these workers and supporters to establish 'co-operative associations with a view to productive experiments'.[28]

Birchall was keen in early 1887 to discuss with Morris proposals recently advanced by the Rev. Herbert Mills, a Unitarian minister from Liverpool, to abolish the poor law, workhouses and charitable relief societies by setting up self-supporting industrial

villages, where the unemployed could earn a living and bring back barren land into cultivation.[29] Acknowledging Birchall's news that he had invited Mills to a meeting of Lechlade co-operators, Morris reported that he had recently met Mills and 'had a long and interesting conversation with him. I hope before March is very old to be at Kelmscott for a few days & then we can have a proper talk about these things'.[30] In the event, Morris soon firmed up his views on the proposals advanced by Mills, which he criticised, along with other schemes for co-operative land colonies, for their latent compulsory conditions for relieving unemployment and the 'evasion' of the demand of socialists that monopoly in the means of production should cease'.[31]

Once again Birchall differed with Morris, arguing that Mills's ideas offered 'One of the best plans for the state to relieve the present distress by establishing co-operative estates instead of idle workhouses', a view he put forward when Mills visited Lechlade in January 1887.[32] Birchall presented these proposals as not only urgently needed to relieve immediate distress but as contributing to the establishment of co-operative communities of producers on the land, a step in the reconstruction of society along equitable socialist lines.[33]

Birchall would align this perspective with support for proposals to bring land into public ownership, as advanced by the Land Nationalisation Society (LNS), under the slogan, 'To restore the land to the people, and the people to the land'. Just as the publicly owned land occupied by workhouses might be used by resident communities for co-operative production, so Birchall wanted all land to be made common property under the administration of local authorities, which could then be let to individuals and self-governing co-operatives. For Birchall, letting land to co-operatives would be unproblematic and the most desirable option, although he wanted to allow for individual cultivation providing it did not exceed ten acres, in this way preventing the emergence of a peasant interest that might work as a barrier to further social change.

Despite being politically opposed to the Liberal Unionists, Birchall had some respect for its principal Parliamentary speaker on land issues, Jesse Collings, who he believed 'has always been one of the best friends of the farm workers'.[34] In addition to supporting agricultural workers' trade unions, Collings had made repeated attempts to introduce legislation supporting small holdings, which Birchall and others had criticised for being too permissive towards peasant proprietorship. However, the bill introduced into Parliament by Collings in 1891 included provision to limit individual holdings to 10 acres (previously Collings had set this at 50 acres), and gave the go-ahead for co-operative societies to take larger plots if approved by the local authority. Although the bill was eventually lost because the Salisbury government failed to find the Parliamentary time for its consideration, Birchall regarded it as an important staging post because it gave notice of land municipalisation that he believed to be

inevitable.

The synergies between the vision for transformation of the poor law system and the policy of the Land Nationalisation Society are apparent, and it comes as no surprise that the Society's president and leading public figure, Alfred Russel Wallace, was himself a great admirer of ideas advanced by Herbert Mills.[35] Birchall himself would refer to both men, suggesting their ideas constituted elements of what Wallace conceived as 'social economy', a form of transitional post-capitalist society brought about by gradual change quite distinct from Morris's revolutionary ideas.[36] To advance this cause, Birchall brought national LNS speakers to the Lechlade district, frequently put the case for land nationalisation himself at local debating societies and in the press and served as both local correspondent and general council member of the Society until 1912.[37]

Notwithstanding the marked dissimilarities between Birchall and Morris on major issues of socialism, the Buscot rector didn't give up on his efforts to organise a meeting in the village so that local workers could hear what their near neighbour had to say on social matters. This finally came off in the first week of December 1887 but not without drama, as managers of the school where the meeting was to be held prevented access by locking the gates. The two managers, both farmers, then visited Birchall at the rectory to state their authority to act in this way and gave further justification by asserting that the action was supported by school manager William Henry Campbell, another farmer, local JP and heir apparent to the Buscot Park estate following his father's death only weeks earlier. Birchall protested on the grounds that as school treasurer he had not been advised of objections; he seriously questioned whether Campbell was a school manager having previously rejected the invitation to have his name put forward; and he asserted the right of socialists to use public facilities, including the school hall, for meetings, just as the Conservative-supporting Primrose League had recently done. The tone of the response to Birchall's arguments was summed up when one of the men said to Birchall that 'The socialists are not a party. They are the scum of the earth'.[38]

Determined that the meeting would go ahead, Birchall and Morris gathered up those waiting outside the school and sought a venue. They explored the possibility of meeting at the village inn but the publican, Morris reported, 'fearing, not without reason, the wrath of the squire [Campbell] and farmers', denied access to his room.[39] At this point, Birchall led the group to the rectory where Morris spoke on the events in London on 13 November 1887, known as 'Bloody Sunday', when police used extreme violence to prevent a demonstration reaching Trafalgar Square. Morris wrote in *The Commonweal* about the Buscot meeting that 'the true story of the "riots" was clearly quite new to them, the *Pall Mall* (not to mention *The Commonweal*) being of

course tabooed in the neighbourhood; but they were clearly much impressed by it, and will spread the word wherever they go'.[40] Birchall was full of admiration for the men 'who listened attentively to him (Morris)… having…already taken their places as co-operators in that great movement for the regeneration of society, which can neither be stopped in its course, nor betrayed into foolish disturbances. It is too late now to keep the people in ignorance. As to the doings at Buscot, is coercion to be introduced into the villages of Berkshire?'[41]

For Birchall, these events brought into sharp relief the dominant role of landowners and farmers in rural communities. The two Buscot farmers who tried to prevent discussion of socialism were representative of many in their position who were trying to hold back progress. Against this power many agricultural workers were cowed. 'They dare not', Birchall wrote, 'take any steps openly for their own good or fellow workers, unless they have the protection of some great men like Lord Wantage or the Earl of Radnor; and their conduct in this and other matters proves to me that they are afraid to act like men'.[42]

When the red van of the English Land Restoration League toured Berkshire in the early 1890s encouraging farm labourers to join the Berkshire Agricultural and General Workers' Union, Birchall assisted their arrangements, gave financial aid, directly supported the union branch at Buscot when it was established in August 1892, and when the paternalist Wantage protested about 'stump orators mischievously stirring up discontent locally', he took the mighty aristocrat to task in the local press.[43] Beyond support of agitation on wages, Birchall also encouraged the local co-operative societies in Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire to take land for farming, allotments and gardening to be let at fair rents to individuals and collectives. The recently formed Bolton Co-operative Commonwealth Society and the colony at Starathwaite, Westmoreland set up by Mills were cited by Birchall as models of what could be done by re-occupying unused land, improving the reward for labour, fostering a spirit of brotherhood and working towards the displacement of the landlord class.[44]

Similarly, on the housing of agricultural workers, when Birchall's own survey of neighbouring parishes revealed that in only six were there good modern cottages provided by the landlord, it confirmed the lack of progress in the housing stock and sanitary conditions uncovered two decades earlier in a report of the Oxford Diocese of the Church of England.[45] This survey of 1877 in Beds, Bucks and Oxon found that in only one in five parishes was there satisfactory accommodation, water supply and drainage, a condition directly attributable to negligent landlords who, nevertheless, were absolved from blame in the report's tame conclusions.[46] Identifying the basic housing requirements for families as three bedrooms, sitting room, kitchen

and washing shed outside, Birchall was doubtful these would ever be provided by landlords and wanted co-operative societies to build cottages for labourers. The return on capital invested through fair rents paid by tenants would, over time, enable the number of co-operatively owned homes to grow and eventually replace traditional landlords.

Shared views

If there were significant differences between Birchall and Morris on how to progress to socialism, the two men can be said to have shared distaste for relying on the state to institute and manage socialism, preferring instead a decentralised approach within which democratic control could be exercised. Like Morris, Birchall recoiled at Edward Bellamy's vision of a socialist future in his widely read *Looking Backward, 2007-1887*, commenting that it 'may well come to pass; but I rather shrink for the idea of such centralised socialism'.[47] For Birchall, the basic unit of socialism would be the co-operative, which might begin as a group of labourers deciding to 'organise and educate themselves in social matters, and then get hold of a little land for co-operation';[48] but this simple act would prefigure co-operation at its most advanced encompassing all human activity, a belief Birchall once framed as co-operation being 'the highest form of religion'.[49]

The two men were also broadly in accord in their views on establishment politicians and parliamentary matters. Morris's antipathy to parliament derived from his view that it was a corrupt institution based on class rule, incapable of reform, which socialists needed to shun, as any socialist involvement in parliament would inevitably lead to compromise, incorporation and legitimisation of the power of capital over labour.[50] Very much in a similar vein, Birchall stated that 'most reforms, so called, are for the benefit of one narrow class against another, and falsely pursued in the name of the people who are not, and cannot be, consulted.'[51] Prior to the 1892 general election Birchall warned co-operators not to raise their hopes of radical measures if there was a Liberal victory, doubting they would make time for 'social matters even if they could agree among themselves'. Indeed, he went on to say that Liberals, like the Conservatives, would do all in their power to keep the voice of the working class 'shut out' of politics, especially at local authority level, giving as an example the exclusion of possible candidates in poor law guardian elections because they did not meet the rateable value qualification.[52]

When Gladstone's Liberal government was elected in 1892 it did deliver some reform of local government with the introduction of elected parish and district councils, forming tiers below the established county council administration. In contrast to some socialists who saw great potential in the new 'parish parliaments'

(Morris was not among them), Birchall was circumspect, possibly because he looked at things from a Buscot perspective.[53] Here, any chance of electing a parish council with significant representation of agricultural labourers was unlikely and, in the event, only one, who was nominated by Birchall, put his name forward.[54] Something like this pattern was reproduced across Berkshire villages, which compared unfavourably with those in Oxfordshire where a significant number of agricultural labourers were elected to parish councils.[55] For a time Birchall had marginally higher hopes that the district councils might offer better scope for reform, but in Berkshire it turned out that these bodies were almost universally packed with those from landed and farming backgrounds.[56]

Ultimately, Birchall was critical of the failure of the Liberal government of 1892-5 to do anything beneficial for working people. He drew the conclusion that the socialist, co-operative and land nationalisation movements needed to redouble their efforts in doing things for themselves by demonstrating the practical application of their common fundamental principles of collectivism in economics and brotherhood in ethics. Efforts had earlier been made in Oxfordshire to establish stronger links between trade unions and the co-operative movement, an initiative Birchall wanted re-invigorated and extended.[57] Progress along these lines, he knew, would be slow, as it was dependent on workers educating themselves and each other in the principles of co-operation, a difficult task in a society so deeply saturated in individualism and competition.[58] But for Birchall, like Morris who spoke of 'making socialists' through education, there could be no worthwhile short cuts to the co-operative commonwealth, which could only become a reality with the winning of hearts and minds for fundamental change.

Conclusion

This article has attempted to explain what William Morris meant in 1886 by reference to Oswald Birchall's 'semi socialism' and to identify where the views of the two men were shared or diverged. Morris was unable to think of socialism coming about without a cataclysmic struggle and revolutionary change, because the owners of capital and land would resist their expropriation by the insurgent working class. Alongside this, Morris was also suspicious of measures for the 'palliation' of workers' grievances which led him, in E. P. Thompson's words, to 'denounce all partial reforms as compromises and betrayals', a stance that left him and the Socialist League detached from mass working-class organisations, including the co-operative movement.[59] In contrast, Birchall conceived of socialist development as a process that could be incremental, with what he called 'universal co-operation' increasingly encroaching and displacing spheres of capitalism until it ceased to function as a viable

economic system. Believing the political tide was flowing in this direction, Birchall wrote in 1889 that the 'zeitgeist…or the diviner spirit of the age, has passed over our age to the side of Christian socialism or the development of universal co-operation'.[60]

In making this case Birchall did not advance anything like the Fabian tactic of permeation of established institutions, but believed it was by creating new economic, social and political organisations working towards co-operation that change would come about. And he was in no doubt that although this would be incremental it would be revolutionary change, making clear to co-operators in 1896 that, 'Above all, the present competitive system of society must be destroyed, root and branch, and full universal co-operation put instead of it, so that the means of subsistence shall be under full public control – whether you call it collectivism, socialism or communism'.[61] In bringing about this change, especially the transformation of private capital into a public asset, which he acknowledged was a 'more important and difficult' question than that of land, Birchall asserted his preference for it to be made by voluntary co-operation, but was clear that if it met with opposition 'I still believe in the principle which I once gathered from the sayings of a Whig dean and a Tory bishop, that all claims to property must give way to the good of the people, and that one generation cannot bargain away the rights of all future generations'.[62]

Holding these views within a rural community and the Anglican church sometimes put Birchall in a difficult position, but he did not bend, a characteristic noticed by his friends. George Hawkins, secretary of the Oxford District Co-operative Society, told delegates at the National Co-operative Congress of 1888 that Birchall's unselfish efforts came at a 'cost of loss of much social position and esteem among his friends'.[63] Joseph Clay of the Gloucester Society paid tribute to Birchall's 'true grit' when proselytising for co-operation and wished there were many more clergyman with the courage of 'the rector of Buscot'.[64] Both men recognised that without Birchall's efforts the co-operative movement would have been weaker, and certainly the Lechlade Society would not have got off the ground.

Birchall himself once recounted how the 'co-operative parson is abused by the middle class without regard to politics or religion…one is first assailed in the local newspaper… Then come the anonymous post cards …Sometimes there is a private letter from a brother parson deprecating the dragging of the church through the mire of socialism'.[65] In such circumstances support of like-minded clergymen would be important, which sadly Birchall did not have, recounting in 1896 how he 'was once accused of being the only parson in the Diocese of Oxford who would allow Morris to be heard in his parish. I could not deny the charge'.[66]

Writing more than twenty years after Birchall's death, May Morris remembered his brave socialistic work with her father and his kindness. She wrote: 'If all clergymen

were like him English people would understand the true spirit of the Christian faith and be inclined to accept gladly all it had to offer them'. She went on to reveal that the Birchall she knew was 'a very poor man, in a stately rectory whose great gardens ended in a pleasant willow shaded walk beside which our little stream flowed dreamily down by Kelmscott meadows….In this home of echoing rooms he and his wife lived frugally, giving what they could not spare to the poor in simple loving kindness'.[67] May's remembrances convey a respect and affection for the Birchalls that was also felt by her father and mother, as the two families socialised together and shared friends and acquaintances. Following Morris's death in 1896 Oswald and his wife Kate kept up contact with Jane Morris, who visited the Birchalls in Malvern Hills, where the couple had moved after his retirement from the rectorship at Buscot in October 1900.[68]

Birchall was always vitally interested in Morris's ideas on how we might live under socialism. Encouraged by Morris, he joined and contributed significantly to the SPAB because he valued the best buildings of the past and wanted future generations to enjoy the artistic labour of workers, especially medieval craftsmen. Appalled (as was Morris) by the growth of commercial advertising on large bill hoardings, he joined (as did Morris) the Society for Checking the Abuses of Public Advertising and encouraged its activity.[69] Aware of the growing encroachment by landlords, farmers and capitalists onto public land, footpaths and roadside strips, he joined the Commons Preservation Society and lobbied for tighter national and local regulations.[70] Inspired by the range of wildlife seen daily in the countryside and on the Upper Thames, he frequently contributed short pieces to *Nature Notes*, the journal of the Selbourne Society, with birds as his speciality. And as a vegetarian since his middle years, he regarded vegetarianism as a vital component of the 'true social economy' of the future, in which the lives of all creatures would be given equal respect to that accorded to human life.[71]

On such matters Birchall concluded his tribute to Morris in November 1896. After assessing Morris's contributions to poetry, art and socialism – 'this generation has lost its greatest poet, and its greatest artist and socialist' – Birchall remembered how his friend 'loved a beautiful old house, and a beautiful old garden, and was ever eager to protect a wild common, or forest or river scenery'. These passions Birchall shared with Morris, along with the belief that ultimately only socialism – in some form – could put an end to the exploitation of the natural world and its living populations.

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Oswald Birchall, Inglesham Church and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings

Stephen Williams

With undoubted justification, the south aisle wall of the Church of St. John the Baptist at Inglesham, Wiltshire, features a copper plaque bearing the inscription, 'This church was repaired in 1888-9 through the energy and with the help of William Morris who loved it'. The memorial, installed by the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) on completion of the repairs to the church, excludes from mention the indispensable efforts of the Rev. Oswald Birchall, who worked tirelessly on its conservation over a fifteen-year period. Typically modest, Birchall made no attempt to put his name forward for credit and frequently referred to Morris as the agent behind the work at Inglesham. As a way of redressing matters, this essay will offer an account of Birchall's work on the fabric of the church at Inglesham, paying particular attention to his roles as catalyst for preservation and trusted intermediary between villagers and the SPAB, crucial when there were sharp disagreements. Birchall's skilful negotiations of these conflicts proved decisive in securing parochial support – or at worst acquiescence – for the SPAB-led programme of preservation which was reported on by the Society as an exemplar of local practice. The absence of any significant involvement by Morris in the day-to-day work at Inglesham signalled the confidence he and the committee had in Birchall's competence. Insistent at the beginning of the project that it be overseen by a professional clerk of works, the Society, again assured by Birchall's proficiencies, allowed his remit to stretch to overseeing most of the day-to-day repair work and liaison with builders. The essay will also briefly survey Birchall's wider endeavours on behalf of the SPAB, which were prolific and consistent over a near thirty-year period of membership. Finally, consideration will be given to how Birchall's activities in the SPAB and conservation more generally were inspired by Morris, whose views on art, labour and society he shared.

Oswald Birchall's arrival at the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Buscot, Berkshire

in 1878 to take up the office of curate followed earlier postings in Lancashire and Hertfordshire.[1] The rector of Buscot, Frederick A. Dawson, was advancing in years and happy for the thirty-four-year-old Birchall to take a leading role in church and parochial matters. And when Dawson de-camped from the rectory to live with his daughter and her clergyman husband in Devizes, the curate, his wife Katherine (usually Kate) and their only child Basil moved in. Appointment as rector of Buscot following Dawson's death in August 1884 gave Birchall the formal authority to play a more expansive role in the affairs of this upper Thames district, which took in the border towns and villages of Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire.

Already a keen student of church architecture and local history when he assumed the rectorship, Birchall expressed disapproval of the restoration of his own Buscot church undertaken by Dawson's predecessor, Thomas D. Hudson, in the mid-1850s, describing it as 'in a very bad style' and 'extravagant', a verdict in tune with Morris's critique of Gothic revivalism adopted by most church architects working in this period.[2] It was precisely this activity , the restoration of over 7,000 churches between 1840 and 1873, that so angered Morris and led him to take the leading role in establishing the SPAB in 1877.[3] Society secretary Hugh Thackeray Turner summed up the SPAB critique of these restorations when he wrote that they had robbed the churches 'of a great part of their historic value, and passed from the ranks of national monuments to become simply churches with no more claim on the piety and veneration of Englishmen than if they had been erected yesterday'.[4]

Birchall's tours of the district on foot with a copy of John Henry Parker's *Ecclesiastical and Architectural Topography of England* as his guide became more than just an antiquarian exercise when he joined the Society in 1885.[5] Birchall's extensive reports to Turner alerted the Society of any planned restorations, often accompanied by detailed notes, names of those involved and sometimes photographs. In following up this case work, Birchall's advice to clergymen whose churches were of interest was sometimes decisive in preventing restorations, all too common in Oxfordshire and Berkshire.[6] Birchall would think nothing of paying repeated visits to these clergymen to explain the Society's case for repair and not restoration where he thought there were open minds. In some cases, reports in the Society's case files reveal that Birchall's approaches, like Morris's, were resented and he was sent away by the parson or the architect, and in some cases both.

Inglesham village and church

Visits to the vicar of Inglesham church, George W. Spooner, preceded Birchall's instigation of the SPAB's concerns about the condition of the building in 1884. Given the proximity of Inglesham to Buscot, less than two miles away, it is inconceivable

Figure 1: Inglesham church from the south. Courtesy of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, all rights reserved.

that the two men had not met earlier, and given Birchall's interest in ecclesiastical architecture, previous visits to the unrestored medieval gem of St. John the Baptist church seem almost certain. At Inglesham he found a small ancient structure of stone built in the Early English Gothic style, with chancel, nave of two bays, aisles, south porch and western open campanile turret containing two bells. Almost certainly originating in the 11th century, it was added to significantly in the late 12th and early 13th centuries and then again with minor additions for the next three hundred years when the outline Birchall discovered was in place. After the 16th century there were no structural alterations to the fabric of the church.

At some stage the medieval village to the east of the church became deserted, a likely effect of the decline in the wool trade from the 16th century onwards. The church was left in a small settlement of farms where the River Thames meets the Severn Canal and the River Colne empties into the Thames. Inglesham's two major landlords, New College, Oxford and the Earl of Radnor, took the rents but showed little interest in what they would have considered an isolated, declining and de-populating village. There was growth to the south of the old village in what became known as Upper Inglesham, which by the 19th century was where the majority of parishioners lived, meaning for them a walk of more than a mile to attend church

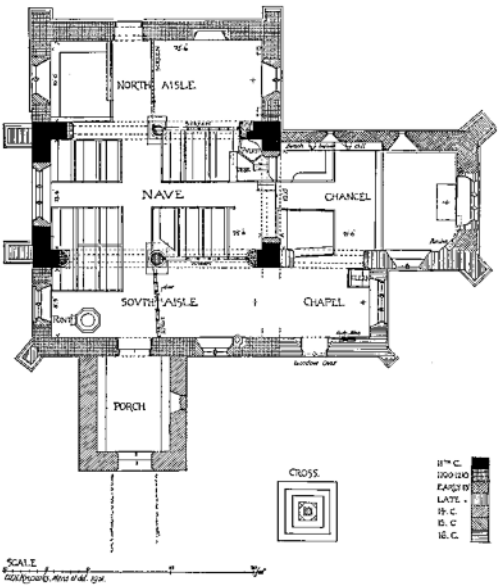


Figure 2: Plan of Inglesham church. Reproduced by permission of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society.

services. Farmers and villagers there began to call for a new church on their doorsteps, a voice that grew stronger after 1882 when a formerly detached part of Coleshill to the south, known as Lynt, was brought into the parish. Added to this, the administrative removal of Inglesham from Berkshire to Wiltshire in 1832 and the abolition of church rates in 1868 further undermined church finances, which in turn led to neglect of the building.

Birchall raised the condition of the church in correspondence with William Morris in the autumn of 1884, to which Morris replied on October 14 saying that he and a 'professional member of the committee' had visited the church 'Tuesday afternoon last', the consequence of which was that the two men had prepared a short report 'as to what we considered necessary repairs'. Morris went on to say that the report 'will of course be quite at your service when the matter is gone into; or if you advise it I will send Mr Spooner a copy of it at once. I should mention that we saw Mr Spooner & I had a long talk with him; he seemed on the whole to be of our way of thinking.' The letter concluded with Morris advising Birchall that he would be 'happy to subscribe to any fund that is got up for *repairing* the church, but it would have to be conditionally of the repairs following the lines marked out by our Society. I think the best time for our Society to move in this matter would be *after* the fund is set on foot.

Any literary help of mine you may need in the matter is at your service. Hoping we may meet when I come to Kelmscott again'.[7]

Some points of clarification are necessary on what was, almost certainly, Morris's first letter to Birchall. The letter, held by the British Library in its collection of Morris papers, would have been sent by Birchall (with five others from Morris) either in response to J.W. Mackail's 1896 appeal for letters to help with his biography of Morris, or to May Morris in 1909/10 when she was assembling material for her father's *Collected Works*.[8] Not untypically, Morris's letter of October 14 does not give the year, but Norman Kelvin felt confident to add 1886 in parentheses when he included it in his *Collected Letters of William Morris*.[9] This, however, cannot be correct for the following reasons.

Firstly, Morris's use of 'Dear Sir' in the letter suggests an earlier formality than later adopted with the rector where he begins letters with 'Dear Mr. Birchall'. Secondly, Morris's stated willingness to 'subscribe to any fund that is got up for *repairing* the church', indicate a locally generated appeal might be started to which he would be able to contribute. That this did not come off meant that the Society had to establish its own appeal more than two years later in the Spring of 1887. And thirdly, and most conclusively, Morris mentions visiting Inglesham with an unnamed 'professional member of the committee', this being John H. Middleton, friend of Morris, architect and art historian.[10] Morris and Middleton's short report, in Middleton's hand, is included in the SPAB archive but is not dated.[11] We know, however, that the report was made available to Birchall soon after it was composed because he referred to it in a letter to Turner only days after being admitted to the Society in early May 1885. Recounting recent events at Inglesham, Birchall wrote that after receiving a copy of the Morris and Middleton report he 'communicated to all the persons immediately concerned, and did my best to get up a subscription from the neighbourhood and otherwise carry out part, at least, of the report; but though I got sympathy from strangers, no money could be got from the parson or elsewhere'.[12] This chronology is confirmed in the Annual Report of 1887 where it is stated that Birchall 'took up the matter [of Inglesham] even before he joined the Society'.[13] Morris's letter to Birchall of 14 October, therefore, can only have been written in 1884, and Morris and Middleton's visit to Inglesham to assess the state of the church took place on 7 October 1884.[14]

Birchall and the SPAB

Birchall's enthusiasm to do something about the repair of Inglesham church, clearly evident in the autumn of 1884, resurfaced in April of the following year when he submitted an application to join the SPAB. Along with his half-a-guinea entrance fee,

Birchall enclosed a note to Middleton, one of the Society's honorary secretaries, saying that Inglesham church 'will not be unwisely restored while the present vicar remains, but needs lesser repairs, which the people ought to do from time to time'.[15] Birchall's application was approved at the SPAB committee meeting of May 7 – his name was proposed by Morris and seconded by chairman, Essex E. Reade – at which point Turner was instructed to write to the new member with the request that he accept designation as the Society's local correspondent for Oxfordshire and give immediate attention to Inglesham church, which they were 'very anxious about'.[16]

Very soon Birchall was able to reassure the committee that Spooner had told him that as far as he was aware there were no current plans for restoration. If a plan did come forward, Spooner said the architect must be William F. Unsworth, who had worked on the new theatre at Stratford-upon-Avon, and with whom he had discussed the condition of the church. Interestingly, Unsworth had recently domiciled a son with Spooner who offered 'tuition and careful training' of young boys at a cost of 45-50 guineas per annum.[17] Birchall was obviously able to skilfully side-line Spooner's preference, because Unsworth's name does not appear again as things proceed along lines set out by the Society. Mention was also made of discussions about restoration some years earlier, when Charles Ellicott, the bishop of Gloucester and Bristol and Canon Hyde W. Beadon, the rural dean of Cricklade, brought the architect William Butterfield to Inglesham to produce a plan. Butterfield's proposal would have cost £1,000 and was objected to at the time by Spooner, as was the alternative scheme for a new church to be built at Upper Inglesham.[18] These events, dating from 1876, inspired by Beadon, who Birchall believed to be an arch-restorationist, appear to have had an extended currency, so that even a decade later they were still unnerving those in the Society who had an eye on Inglesham.[19]

By the summer of 1886 Birchall's and Turner's combined efforts had secured the consent of Spooner and the bishop to go forward with a plan for repair work at Inglesham. The Society's favoured architect John T. Micklethwaite was commissioned to survey the church and provide a report with recommendations for repair.[20] Micklethwaite described the church, almost all of which he believed was built in the 12th century, as one of 'great beauty and much interest but in need of repair'. The report called for attention to some of the walls and foundations, nearly all of the roofs, and the installation of drains around the building. The architect estimated this work would cost up to £550 and should, he emphasised, be supervised by a clerk of works 'to ensure the builder and his men understand it was repair and not restoration.'[21]

Gathering support and fundraising

Birchall's immediate suggestion for raising the necessary funds was to set up a local

committee, but it soon became clear that he would have to shoulder responsibility for this, especially when Spooner declared he could not help in any practical sense.[22] The rector also had to contend with the latent opposition to repair, particularly from Inglesham's farmers – from whom the two churchwardens came – who resented interference by an 'outsider'. Claiming to 'know well and represent' the feelings of parishioners, these farmers voiced strong objections at the Inglesham vestry meeting in November 1886, resolving that any fundraising should have an upper limit of £100 and if any work was needed beyond that the plan to save the church should be abandoned and a new church built at Upper Inglesham, where the majority of the village population lived. Birchall expressed dismay at the views of the farmers, who also declared a preference for a highly ornamented church rather than the simple beauty of the medieval building. However, in deference to Spooner, who had been clergyman there since 1857, the meeting resolved to maintain the existing church while he was alive, but called for some rearrangement and alterations to the interior. Birchall told Turner that he had hoped for 'a more conservative spirit at Inglesham.'[23]

Overcoming these objections meant Birchall had to spend time talking to the farmers about the merits of the Society's plans – he wrote an 'Appeal to the Churchwardens of Inglesham' – backing this up with a restatement of the diocesan authority of Ellicott and Spooner.[24] This cajoling was obviously to some effect because by Christmas 1886 a reconvened vestry meeting had given approval and in the new year the favoured builder, Joseph Bowley of Lechlade, was asked following a visit by Archdeacon John P. Norris, to undertake some urgent work: removing earth from the walls, attending to the most acute problems with the foundations and filling in cracks to the walls. Birchall, while encouraged by progress, cautioned against further work until a clerk of works had been appointed.[25]

Archdeacon Norris's intervention proved decisive in moving things along. His support for the SPAB plan was fulsome and featured in the Society's Annual Report for 1887, where the Inglesham church received its first mention. Norris's letter is worth quoting at length because it neatly summarises the case for conservation and gives due attention to the uniqueness of the church at Inglesham:

> I rejoice that your Society has a watchful eye on Inglesham church. Standing secluded from thoroughfare, along the water meads of the Upper Thames, unknown to Murray's handbook, unnoticed by John Henry Parker (though not more than 20 miles from Oxford), this dear old church has happily been left alone, and can show Romanesque details of singular interest, untouched by the restorer's chisel. The chancel walls and nave arches are nearly 700 years old, and such as art students can ill afford to lose. But owing to want of proper

> drainage the foundations of the walls are rotting, and in some cases sinking, and the church may, some wet winter, on the breaking up of a long frost, be found ruinous, unless a timely effort be made to save it. What is needed is not to restore what is lost, but to preserve what remains. A hundred pounds would go a long way towards laying its foundations dry; and if more could be obtained the roofs might be made good. The benefice is only £200 a year; the population is only 100. But its incumbent and his churchwardens will give all the help in their power, but they have no local resources on which to draw.[26]

An extract from Norris's letter was included alongside Morris's words for the *Appeal for the Preservation of Inglesham Church* issued in April 1887, the production of which was entirely overseen by Birchall. Morris's short but elegant preface described the church as a 'very remarkable example of early Gothic architecture, seldom equalled, and never surpassed among buildings of its size for refinement and beauty of design.' Morris went on to emphasise the small population of the parish being poor and there being no hope of raising the funds needed for the repairs without help from 'the more wealthy neighbours'.[27]

Birchall sent out several hundred copies of the appeal to a targeted audience and by June just under £30 had been subscribed: Morris and Birchall each contributed £5; the squire of Buscot, Robert Campbell gave a similar sum; and there were various smaller donations. Significantly, New College, Oxford, the largest landowner in the parish with 500, acres promised £100 when 'the whole of the work was taken in hand', but not before.[28] Birchall took this to mean that New College expected 'other landlords also to come forward with proportionately adequate contributions', particularly the Earl of Radnor, whose estate at Inglesham was close to 350 acres.[29] After some prompting, Radnor did promise a hardly proportionate £20 but failed to deliver the cheque.

A successful bazaar in July 1887 held on the banks of the Thames in a field adjoining Birchall's rectory raised £60, but brought its own problems when one of the churchwardens, Jasper Reynolds, a landowner who farmed his own land, claimed to act as spokesman of the farmers and insisted that the proceeds should be handed to the churchwardens to spend at their own discretion.[30] Reynolds believed that Micklethwaite's drainage plans were unnecessarily elaborate and expensive. In spite of advice from Birchall and Spooner that the work must follow the specifications set out by Micklethwaite, a memorial to the Archdeacon proposed an alternative, less expensive plan and concluded that if the Society decided to go ahead with its own scheme, they should meet the full cost.[31] The Archdeacon was again supportive of the Society, informing the churchwardens of the necessity of following the architect's

advice and reassuring a frustrated Birchall that all would be well. Making sure Birchall had all the relevant correspondence to be able to work effectively locally, Norris wrote, 'I enclose a rough copy of my reply to the C wardens. If you smile, remember we are dealing with bucolic folk'.[32]

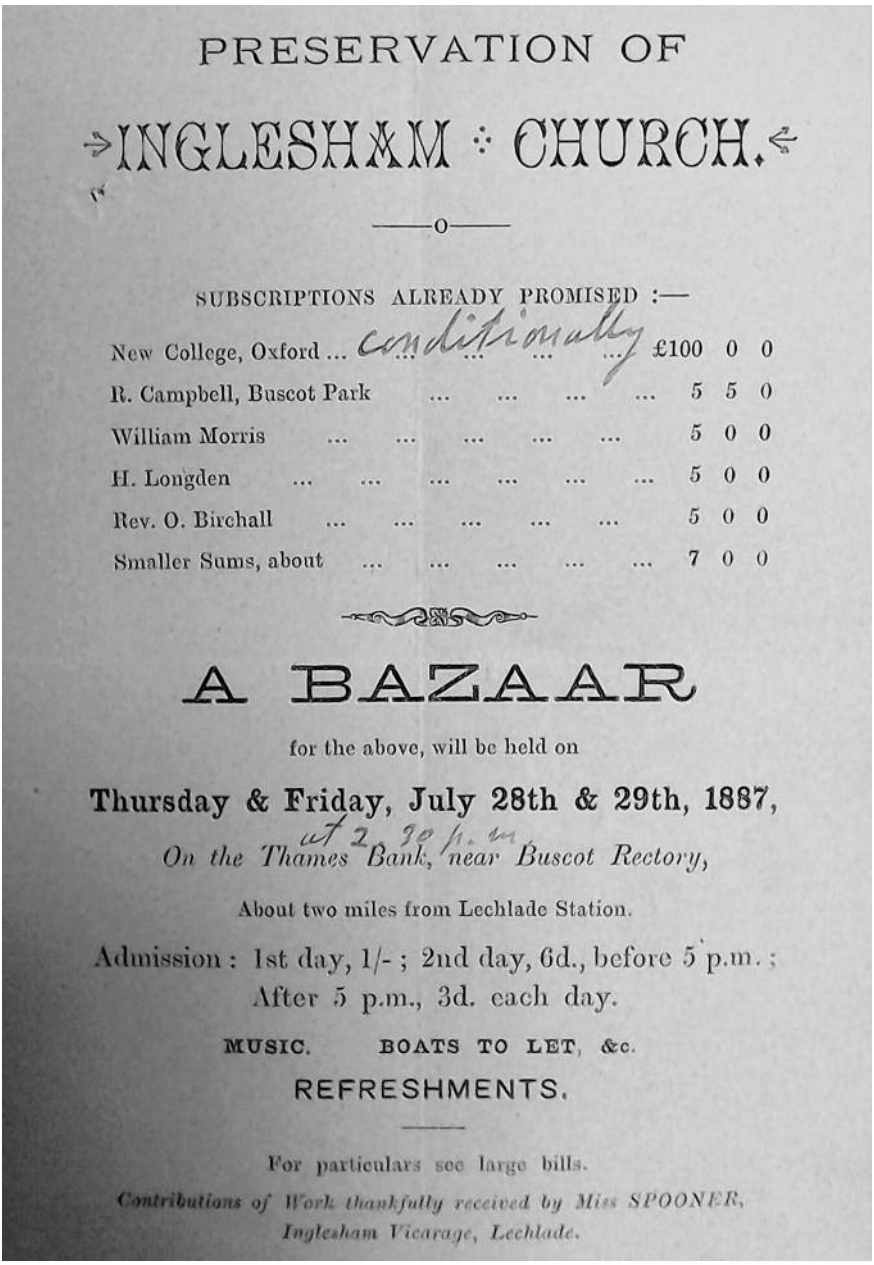
Birchall was also concerned that with winter approaching any further delay might make it impossible to commence outside work in the current year, causing further damage to the fragile walls and their foundations. He was, therefore, relieved to be told in the third week of October that Reynolds had made clear that although he would not go back on his views about Micklethwaite's drainage plan, he would offer no further objections.[33] This change of position came too late to enable work to commence as planned, and it wasn't until June 1888 that what we can call stage one, substantial work on the walls and foundations, was completed by Bowley at a cost of £50.

Broader SPAB work

Since joining the SPAB Birchall had been in regular contact with secretary Thackeray Turner, not just on Inglesham matters, but also with regard to his role as Oxfordshire local correspondent, which he was happy to interpret as having elastic boundaries to adjacent counties. This saw Birchall active in the late eighties on churches at Wigginton, Tadmarton, Burford, Shilton, Bampton, South Leigh, Wardington, Shillingford, Balking, Longworth and Standlake, which he saw for the first time in 1886 while walking the sixteen miles from Witney to Oxford.[34]

At Standlake Birchall discovered a fine church originating in the 12th century, already suffering the effects of recently commenced restoration by architect Clapton C. Rolfe.[35] Stone paving had been removed to make way for encaustic tiles, walls had been stripped of plaster and faced with new stone, old stone had been re-tooled and manufactured 'cathedral' glass had been installed in place of the original. These changes, typical of much Victorian church restoration, were for Birchall and Turner to be deplored and efforts were made by both men to convince clergyman Lewis S. Tuckwell to stop the work. Disappointingly, these efforts came to nothing, with Tuckwell rebuffing the intervention of the Society. Birchall was also critical of the church's patron, the President of Magdalen College, Oxford, and of the Bishop of Oxford for failing to intervene.[36] With further plans to extend the restoration to the chancel, north transept, and the north aisle, Birchall told Turner in September 1886, 'The architect deserves to be gibbeted as well as the vicar; for he will go on spoiling other churches in the neighbourhood if the money can be found.'[37]

A frequent visitor to other parts of the country, Birchall would always take in visits to local churches and report any important news to the SPAB office. When Turner



PRESERVATION OF

INGLESHAM : CHURCH.

—o—

SUBSCRIPTIONS ALREADY PROMISED :—

New College, Oxford ... conditionally	£100	0	0
R. Campbell, Buscot Park	5	5	0
William Morris	5	0	0
H. Longden	5	0	0
Rev. O. Birchall	5	0	0
Smaller Sums, about	7	0	0

A BAZAAR

for the above, will be held on

Thursday & Friday, July 28th & 29th, 1887,

at 2.30 p.m.

On the Thames Bank, near Buscot Rectory,

About two miles from Lechlade Station.

Admission : 1st day, 1/- ; 2nd day, 6d., before 5 p.m. ;
After 5 p.m., 3d. each day.

MUSIC. BOATS TO LET, &c.

REFRESHMENTS.

For particulars see large bills.

Contributions of Work thankfully received by Miss SPOONER, Inglesham Vicarage, Lechlade.

Figure 3: Leaflet advertising Buscot bazaar for Inglesham church, 1887. Courtesy of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, all rights reserved.

knew of Birchall's vacation plans, he would frequently ask him to visit and report on local buildings of interest to the Society. Consequently, within the SPAB archives we find Birchall's name connected to more case files with substantial contributions than any other member, an enthusiasm acknowledged in the Annual Report of 1888 where the inclusion the Oxfordshire correspondent's full report was accompanied by Turner's remark that it demonstrated 'how we are helped by him, and it is a pity that we cannot find a larger number of correspondents to help us in the same energetic way.'[38]

Further repairs

Meanwhile, with something like £80 left in the Society's Inglesham appeal fund at the end of the summer of 1889, Birchall liaised with Micklethwaite concerning work on the south aisle roof. With Birchall now acting in effect as clerk of works, scheduling the repairs, sourcing and ordering materials, dealing with delays and acting as the architect's representative on site, Bowley commenced work on the roof in September, repairing old timbers and renewing the old gutters and spouts with the old lead recast. During that month Morris and Middleton met with Birchall at Kelmscott to review progress which, while generally positive, allowed the rector to express his anxieties about where the money would be found to continue work once the south aisle was finished.[39] The Society had recently made a renewed appeal, written by Morris for the annual meeting of 1889, to which Birchall himself contributed £10, but it was clear that funding the work would not be easy. An application for support to the Gloucester and Bristol Church Building Society was flat-batted back with the proviso that any grant would need to be matched by local contributions, a condition Birchall believed to be impossible at Inglesham where 'the landowners and farmers will not give a penny to the church, school or the poor'.[40]

Birchall was also finding it difficult to get those who had already made a pledge to honour it with cash to pay the bills. The Earl of Radnor, who had agreed to a contribution of £20, died in March 1889, and despite repeated attempts by Birchall and Norris to get his heir and the second son, who inherited Coleshill House and land close to Inglesham, to honour their father's pledge all they got was prevarication and buck-passing. After four years of fruitless correspondence, Birchall tried to get at least something from the family asking for half of what originally promised and that this be given in memory of the deceased Earl, who had left close to £300,000 in his estate.[41] Eventually, and only when the work was nearly finished, did a cheque for £10 arrive at the Society's office. Similarly, New College's condition on their commitment that it would be paid only when the work was complete wasn't helpful, as Birchall told Turner in early 1891: 'At present each party seems to be waiting for

the other to contribute first. The bishop waits for Diocesan Society, the Society waits for the parishioners, the landowners wait for the farmers, the farmers wait for the landowners, and the College are waiting for all the rest'.[42]

When Bowley completed the work on the south aisle roof in February 1890, Birchall's attention shifted to the third stage of the repair: the roof of the nave and the bell gable. A stroke of good luck and some clever footwork by Birchall ensured the money was in place by 1893 to pay for these repairs. Firstly, when the wealthy London financier Alexander Henderson moved into Buscot Park in 1889 Birchall, as the residing clergyman whose 'living' was derived from the estate, made it his business to speak to the new squire. Birchall already knew that Henderson was interested in art and particularly the work of Edward Burne-Jones, a connection – through Morris - he astutely emphasised during their meetings where local matters were discussed, including the work at Inglesham church.[43] Despite the church being over the parish boundary, Henderson offered £50 towards the work.

Coincidentally around this time, Morris told Birchall that he would contribute a further £40 to the appeal on condition that the donation would remain anonymous and that it would only be paid when the balance of £160 was found to cover this stage of the work.[44] This allowed Birchall to ask New College to deliver on its £100 commitment first made in the summer of 1887 and reaffirmed in June 1891. In the event, when payment was due, the College Bursar quibbled about the terms of the agreement and the proportion of the work completed, eventually sending £60 in November 1892.[45] By this time the work was nearing completion, as Morris found when he visited the site at Birchall's request.[46] Morris was happy with the work of builder Joseph Woodward of Lechlade, whom Birchall had appointed for this stage of the work, believing the tasks should be spread around the competent local contractors.[47]

Birchall's direct engagement with the work on site meant he came to know a great deal about the relative abilities of the local builders and the movement of craftsmen between different contractors. This allowed him to operate in a largely independent way, taking decisions on a day-to-day basis without reference to Micklethwaite, an arrangement that was without equal within the Society where local correspondents 'were kept on a short lead'.[48] For the same reason, some years later, Philip Webb advised Jane Morris to consult Birchall about her plans to build cottages in Kelmscott village in memory of her husband. Webb described Birchall's 'energetic and generous dealings with "anti-scrape"' [SPAB], in which he demonstrated he was 'a good man of business – and he would be likely to know something of trade politics in the Lechlade district'.[49]

Between completion of the third stage of work in September 1893, when the bells

of the turret were re-hung by Woodward, and the turn of the century, there was no substantial repair work on the church. The appeal fund was now exhausted and sadly Oswald and Kate had lost their son Basil to tuberculosis in October 1895. Unsurprisingly, this knocked the usually purposeful and driven Birchall off course. Added to this, Oswald's own health became increasingly problematic, forcing him to take time away from Buscot and retreat to the Malvern Hills, an area he and Kate had a particular affection for and where Basil was buried. It was only during 1898 that Birchall's energies returned and he seriously resumed work to complete the repair of the church.

Fortuitously, reorganisation within the Church of England in 1897 saw the Diocese of Gloucester and Bristol split, with a new bishop of Bristol, George F. Browne, taking responsibility for Inglesham. Browne was a former professor of archaeology at Cambridge University who through contact with the Society over Inglesham joined the SPAB and then chaired the annual meeting of 1898. Within months of his appointment Birchall had written to Browne and received a very positive reply that the Society included in its Annual Report of 1898, worth reproducing in full because of its importance and referencing of individuals prominent in the Inglesham story:

> My dear Rector of Buscot,
> I visited Inglesham church in 1893 with Mr. Micklethwaite, and discussed it with Dr. Middleton, one of my most intimate friends and an intimate friend of Mr. William Morris. I know and approve of the views of all three. I take the deepest interest in this venerable relic and record of the past. It must be made quite safe against decay; and as long as I am the bishop of the diocese no plan for its treatment will be passed which tampers with its characteristic features. I regard it quite safe in Mr. Micklethwaite's care.[50]

Birchall met Browne at Inglesham in August 1898 and was impressed with his attention to architectural detail and commitment to conserve the building, particularly the chancel roof which he regarded as a priority for repair.[51]

A final appeal and retirement

With this added authority, a fresh national appeal was launched in the Spring of 1899 with a target of £75 to be achieved by June. Birchall wrote to the *Daily Chronicle* that, 'For almost 400 years the building had been left almost untouched and forgotten by non-parishioners when it was rediscovered by William Morris, the poet, to whom the whole nation owes great debt of gratitude for care and aid bestowed on this and other

churches.'[52] Among the larger donations, Jane Morris gave £20 and Bernard Shaw three guineas, with many smaller contributions from across the UK. With this, Birchall was able to report personally to the SPAB committee in June 1899 that with the appeal target met, the fourth and final stage of the repair to the chancel and north aisle roofs could commence under contractor John King of Lechlade. Joseph Woodward had died in July 1897 and his best men had gone over to King.[53]

Birchall's attention to detail continued to the completion of the project, with him telling Turner at the end of October 1900 that although the specified work was complete (stage four costing £116) he had identified some crumbling of the stones around the west windows and asking if Philip Webb might take a look when next in the neighbourhood.[54] This Birchall wrote from a temporary address in West Malvern where he and Kate had moved following his retirement on health grounds the previous week. Birchall had alerted Turner in June 1900 of his planned retirement but had made clear his commitment to continued supervision of the work at Inglesham. Turner, writing on behalf of the SPAB committee, thanked Birchall for 'The help you have always given us' which 'has been of such great value that we shall suffer surely by losing its continuance'.[55]

If Turner anticipated Birchall's retirement would mean a retreat from the Society's work, he was mistaken. When asked to in 1899 to join the committee Birchall accepted, but it was understood that he would be there in a consultative role and not a regular at its meetings. The secretary continued to receive reports from Birchall on churches and ancient buildings under threat in his new home county of Worcestershire and a variety of places where he and Kate visited on their tours. A watching brief was kept on Inglesham church, with local contacts telling him in 1901 that the west windows he reported on had been repaired. Gratified to hear this, he nevertheless advised Turner to ensure that any SPAB member visiting the church be sure to speak to the new curate, 'who does most of the duty' (Spooner being 88 years old), 'lest he should wish to play pranks with the building'.[56] Following Spooner's death in August 1907 Birchall was disturbed by news of a deterioration in the condition of the church and the nearby parsonage because of delay appointing a new vicar, telling Turner that he hoped the new incumbent would 'do his best to raise funds with the co-operation of the bishop'.[57] Turner ensured that these sentiments were reiterated in the Society's Annual Report of 1908.[58]

Birchall and Morris

These remarks to Turner may have been Birchall's last written words on the church at Inglesham, because he died in October 1913, and none later have been found. His concern for the building and the people who worshipped there stretched across four

decades, representing a commitment worthy of recognition that did not come in his own time, even if it is now partially acknowledged.[59] Always careful to see that Morris received credit for the rediscovery of the church and the inspiration for its conservation, Birchall's tribute in November 1896 characteristically described how his own work for the Society was always 'under him'.[60]

In this piece Birchall went on to say that Morris 'became one of the greatest contributors to the preservation of the old church, when so called people of the well to do sort in the Diocese … would only play the part of the priest and Levite in the parable – or rather the old story'. That Morris did indeed act as the 'Good Samaritan' to the church through financial support is beyond doubt, but it can be argued that his greatest contribution was in advancing the arguments for conservation of ancient buildings and then forming the SPAB in 1877 to carry forward the work. It was precisely this that inspired Birchall to join the Society and work on its behalf. This he made clear on many occasions but perhaps most explicitly in 1894 when addressing delegates at a conference of co-operators:

> Restoration of an ancient building as I have always known it practised, is a fraud … Now I defy, and I must say that the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, who are best to judge this matter, defy any modern architect to produce a truthful restoration, or even a beautiful imitation of a good ancient building. In the old work 'architecture is frozen music', the old spirit is there, not of the stone, but of the workers. Most of our beautiful churches were built by the loving co-operation of common workmen, of whom every one was a natural artist. The rise of the great architecture did not at once destroy all beauty; but for two hundred years architecture has been dead; and by this time the spirit of the workers is dead, crushed by the competitive, money-grabbing system of society, now fully developed, which can put no spirit, truth or beauty into its work.[61]

The influence of Morris's thinking on art, architecture, labour and society is clearly evident in this passage, as it is in Birchall's tribute of 1896 and his remark to Turner two days after Morris funeral that the breadth of his vision was such that 'in the SPAB I fear his place will never be filled'.[62]

There can be no doubt that Birchall understood and was committed to what Miele describes as Morris's 'integrated vision of "protection" as a large and coherent ideology' composed of a rejection of the Gothic revival, a socialist critique of Victorian arts, crafts and architecture and the drawing of an analogy between architecture and fine arts.[63] Overlaying this, for Birchall, was Christian socialism (not

shared by Morris) and belief in co-operation with its pervasive spirit of brotherhood that embraced a commitment to protect the natural and built environments from the damaging effects of individualism and competition.[64]

There is, thus, a coherence and consistency in Birchall's many letters written for publication not only on the preservation of ancient buildings, but also on river conservation, protection of wildlife, retention of common land and open spaces – all, at this time, increasingly exposed to harm by the enforcement of private interests and the quest for profit. Birchall saw these very forces at work in the decision in 1898 to pull down two old houses in Pembroke Street, Oxford to make way for development of the site for profit. Instead, he wanted Christ Church College to buy the freehold and keep the old buildings standing as long as they would stand. When they fell the plot should be left open.[65] Like Morris, Birchall deplored the spread of intrusive bill hoardings carrying commercial advertising, often in areas of natural beauty, including along the banks of his beloved River Thames. When Lord Beauchamp sold land in the early 1890s for development of a reservoir in West Malvern, Birchall said the area would be spoilt 'except for the wealthy who do not care for common beauty'.[66] Membership in the Commons Preservation Society registered Birchall's support for common land and wayside strips in their 'natural state for the sake of their own beauty and for the use of inhabitants of the parish'.[67] And he denounced the 'thoughtless selfish and unwomanly custom of ladies wearing dead birds, or other animals in their dress. Such practices threaten to destroy many beautiful and even useful creatures from off the face the face of the earth', concluding prophetically that 'nor can we tell all the mischief that might come from their loss to man, whose part is to maintain the even balance between the lower living beings'.[68]

It was this holistic framework, similar to Morris's own world view, that gave overall meaning to Birchall's efforts at Inglesham, where he used his considerable abilities to work as fund-raiser, publicist, conciliator, negotiator, and de-facto clerk of works. All these things Birchall was between 1885 and 1900, helping to bring to completion the conservation of the church of St. John the Baptist, an unreserved success and exemplar of how the SPAB's philosophy could be applied in practice.

Over the years there has been much praise for the Society's work at Inglesham. As the work moved to a conclusion in 1898 Joseph Ashby-Sterry praised the Society's 'infinite service to this country, circumventing the plans of modern Goths, Vandals and Iconoclasts'.[69] In 1903 W.H. Hutton remarked that 'There is hardly such another church perhaps in this land. It looks as if it has not been touched since Queen Anne was on the throne'.[70] Awarded Grade 1 listed status by National Heritage in 1955, the church attracted national attention when John Betjeman identified it as one of his favourite ecclesiastical buildings.[71] A similar accolade came from Richard Taylor – 'This place, more than any I have visited, is radiant with history' – in his series

Churches – How to Read Them for the BBC.[72] And most recently, Diarmaid MacCulloch devoted a whole episode to the church – 'beautifully preserved by William Morris and his admirable architect' – in his series *Church Crawls in Solitude* for the Churches Conservation Trust.[73]

Writing in 1896 about Leigh church, near Cricklade, Wiltshire, which he had walked fifteen miles through fields to visit, Birchall described 'a beautiful old church' which 'tells us of days gone by'.[74] This evocation is distinctly redolent of Morris who in his writings aimed to 'capture the mood and feel of buildings'.[75] For Birchall, Leigh Church, like so many others including Inglesham, was 'a rare old village church more important as a building than some cathedrals', because it was built from local materials by local craftsmen without pretension or crude embellishment.[76] Sadly, despite the best efforts of Birchall and Turner, Leigh church was partially demolished and a 'new' church built with some of its old stones a mile away. Fortunately, this was not the fate of church at Inglesham, which we are able to enjoy just as Morris and Birchall did in the 1880s precisely because it was preserved and is cared for today by the Churches Conservation Trust who open its doors daily to visitors.[77]

NOTES

1. See Stephen Williams, 'The Semi-Socialism of Oswald Birchall, Friend, Neighbour and Political Associate of William Morris', in this issue of *Journal of William Morris Studies*.
2. Oswald Birchall to Hugh Thackeray Turner, 22 May 1886, Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) Archive, Inglesham file.
3. Hugh Thackeray Turner, *The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings: A Chapter in its Early History*, London: SPAB, 1899, p. 14. For the SPAB see From *William Morris: Building Conservation and the Arts and Crafts Cult of Authenticity, 1877-1939*, ed. Chris Miele, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005; and Andrea Donovan, *William Morris and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings*, London: Routledge, 2008.
4. Turner, *Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings*, p. 14.
5. John Henry Parker's *Ecclesiastical and Architectural Topography of England* (1848-1855) included volumes on Oxfordshire and Berkshire that we know Birchall consulted whilst on walking tours. For the practice of Victorian antiquaries walking and observing, see Paul Readman, 'Walking and Knowing the Past: Antiquaries, Pedestrianism and Historical Practice in Modern Britain', *History: The Journal of the Historical Association*, January 2022, vol. 107, issue 374, pp. 51-73.
6. A total of 415 churches in the Oxford Diocese were restored between 1840 and 1876: *Church Building and Restoration: Returns showing the Number of Churches (including Cathedrals) in every Diocese in England, which have been built or restored at a cost exceeding £500 since the year 1840*, House of Commons, March 1876. For Berkshire, Arthur I. Dasent, a SPAB member, found 101 churches restored in the previous twenty years, 'The Ecclesiastical Antiquities of Berkshire 1889', *Notes and Queries*, 11 and 25 January 1890.
7. William Morris to Oswald Birchall, 14 October, British Library Add MS 45347, ff. 126-7.
8. The location of the Morris letters to Birchall in the Library's collection gifted by Dr. Robert Steele, May Morris's literary executor, inside a volume relating, in part, to material she was assembling for work on *The Collected Works* is suggestive that Birchall sent the letters to May. It is also possible that May took over letters collected earlier by Mackail.

9. *The Collected Letters of William Morris, Vol II, Part B, 1885-1888*, ed. Norman Kelvin, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987, pp. 580-582.
10. See 'John Henry Middleton, 1846-1896', L. H. Cust, revised by Richard Smail, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
11. Report on Inglesham Church by William Morris and J.H. Middleton, SPAB Archive, Inglesham file. It is likely that Middleton first visited Inglesham as Morris's companion. He certainly knew about the Madonna and Child bas relief on the outside wall (later taken inside) by the Spring of 1883 because he referred to it as 'the most ancient piece of sculpture known to the author' in a book review of that year: *The Academy*, 21 April 1883, p. 280. Morris's first reference to Inglesham church dates from August 1880 when he told Georgiana Burne-Jones that he and a group of friends visited and found 'a lovely building about the size and style of Kelmscott, but handsomer and with more old things'. William Morris to Georgiana Burne-Jones, 24 August 1880, *The Collected Letters of William Morris, vol. 1, 1848-1880*, ed. Norman Kelvin, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, pp. 584-5.
12. Birchall to Turner, 14 May 1885, SPAB Archive, Inglesham file.
13. SPAB, Annual Report 1887, p. 24.
14. Julia Griffin includes a record of a Morris visit to Kelmscott Manor in October 1884 in her study, 'Kelmscott Manor, Mr. Morris's Country Place (1871-1896)', in *The Routledge Companion to William Morris*, ed. Florence Boos, London: Routledge, 2021, p. 104
15. Birchall to J.H. Middleton, 27 April 1885, SPAB Archive, Inglesham file.
16. Turner to Birchall, 11 May 1885, SPAB Archive, Inglesham file.
17. *Wilts and Gloucester Standard*, 5 January 1884, p. 1.
18. Birchall to Turner, 21 May, 1886, SPAB Archive, Inglesham file.
19. *Wilts and Gloucester Standard*, 17 June 1876, p. 2.
20. SPAB Committee minutes, 15 July 1886, SPAB Archive. For Micklethwaite see 'J.T. (John Thomas) Micklethwaite 1843-1906', Paul Waterhouse revised by Donald Findley, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
21. Micklethwaite's report, dated 25 August 1886, is included in the Inglesham file at the SPAB Archive. Large extracts of the report were reproduced in *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, 1922, vol. 44, pp. 43-46, which itself was based on an earlier report in the 1899 volume of *Transactions* of the same society, vol. 22, pp. 47-49. Some of Micklethwaite's conclusions about dating of the church were convincingly challenged by W.H. Knowles, 'The Church of St. John the Baptist, Inglesham, Wilts', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, 1931, vol. 53, pp. 191-205. For a description of the church, particularly the interior, with photographs see Charles E. Keysar, 'An Architectural Account of the Churches of Great and Little Coxwell, Coleshill, Inglesham, Buscot and Eaton Hastings', *Berks, Bucks and Oxon Archaeological Journal*, Spring 1921, vol. 26, no. 2, pp. 33-38.
22. Birchall to Turner, 2 July 1887, SPAB Archive, Inglesham file.
23. Birchall to Turner, 26 November 1886, SPAB Archive, Inglesham file.
24. Birchall to Turner, 8 and 23 December 1886, SPAB Archive, Inglesham file.
25. Birchall to Turner, 1 February 1887, SPAB Archive, Inglesham file.
26. SPAB, Annual Report 1887, pp. 24-25. Norris's reference to 'Murray's Handbook' pertains to the series of travel guides published by John Murray. *The Handbook for Travellers in Wiltshire, Dorsetshire and Somerset* came out in 1859.
27. Morris's contribution is included in May Morris, *William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist*, vol. 1, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 160.
28. SPAB, Annual Report 1888, p. 31.
29. Birchall to Turner, 9 July 1887, SPAB Archive, Inglesham file. The author is grateful for the assistance of Dr. Michael Stansfield, Archivist and Records Manager at New College, Oxford, in the matter of

College land ownership in Inglesham parish.

30. Birchall to Turner, 28 September 1887, SPAB Archive, Inglesham file.
31. Attached to Birchall to Turner, 6 October 1887, SPAB Archive, Inglesham file.
32. J.P. Norris to Birchall, 8 October 1887, SPAB Archive, Inglesham file.
33. Birchall to Turner 22, October 1887, SPAB Archive, Inglesham file.
34. See the SPAB Archive for the relevant case files.
35. For Rolfe see Andrew Saint, 'Three Oxford Architects', *Oxoniensia*, 1970, vol. 35, pp. 53-92. Saint's verdict on Rolfe's Standlake restoration (1879-92) is that 'there can be no more impressive example of a thorough, discreet and tasteful Victorian restoration', p. 100.
36. Birchall to Turner, 2 June 1886, SPAB Archive, Wigginton file.
37. Birchall to Turner, 20 September 1886, SPAB Archive, Standlake file.
38. SPAB, Annual Report 1888, pp. 31-32.
39. Birchall to Turner, 10 September 1889, SPAB Archive, Inglesham file.
40. Birchall to Turner, 21 January 1891, SPAB Archive, Inglesham file.
41. Birchall to Turner, 20 January 1893, SPAB Archive, Inglesham file.
42. Birchall to Turner, 22 January 1891, SPAB Archive, Inglesham file.
43. Fiona MacCarthy, *The Last Pre-Raphaelite: Edward Burne-Jones and the Victorian Imagination*, London: Faber, 2011, pp. 403-404.
44. Birchall to Turner, April 1892, SPAB Archive, Inglesham file.
45. Alfred Robinson to Birchall, 26 November 1892, SPAB Archive, Inglesham file. New College made the final payment of £40 on completion of the repairs in 1900.
46. Morris to Turner, 7 October 1892, *Collected Letters of William Morris, vol. II, 1889-1892*, ed. Norman Kelvin, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996, p.454.
47. Birchall to Turner, 13 July 1892, SPAB Archive, Inglesham file.
48. Miele, *From William Morris*, p. 47.
49. Philip Webb to Jane Morris, 11 July 1900, *The Letters of Philip Webb, Vol III, 1899-1902*, ed. John Aplin, London: Routledge, 2016, p. 119.
50. SPAB, Annual Report 1898, p. 36.
51. Birchall to Turner, 8 September 1898, SPAB Archive, Inglesham file.
52. *Daily Chronicle*, 7 April 1899, p. 6.
53. SPAB Committee minutes, 15 June 1899, SPAB Archive; *Faringdon Advertiser*, 24 June 1899, p. 4.
54. Birchall to Turner, 31 October 1900, SPAB Archive, Inglesham file.
55. Turner to Birchall, 29 June 29 1900. SPAB Archive, Inglesham file.
56. Birchall to Turner, 5 July 1901, SPAB Archive, Inglesham file.
57. Birchall to Turner, 11 November 1908, SPAB Archive, Inglesham file.
58. SPAB, Annual Report 1909, p. 35.
59. Birchall's work at Inglesham is mentioned and given credit in the following: Frank C. Sharp, 'William Morris's Kelmscott Connections', *Journal of the William Morris Society*, Spring 1999, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 44-53; Peter Faulkner, 'William Morris at Kelmscott', *Journal of William Morris Studies*, Summer 2008, vol. 17, no. 4, pp. 5-32; Christopher Miele, 'A small knot of cultivated people: William Morris and Ideologies of Protection', *Art Journal*, Summer 1995, vol. 54, no. 2, pp. 73-79; Miele, *From William Morris*; Chris Miele, 'Morris and Architecture', *Routledge Companion to William Morris*, pp. 169-187. The Churches Conservation Trust guide by Anthony Barnes, *St. John the Baptist's Church, Inglesham, Wiltshire*, originally published in 1996 and subsequently revised and reprinted, mistakenly gives the name of 'Basil Hawkins Birchall' as providing 'almost daily supervision of the repair'.
60. Oswald Birchall, 'William Morris', *Brotherhood: A magazine designed to help the peaceful evolution of a juster and happier order*, November 1896, p. 75.
61. *Co-operative News*, 9 June 1894, p. 657.

62. Birchall to Turner, 8 October 1896, SPAB Archive, Inglesham file.
63. Miele, *From William Morris*, pp. 52-53.
64. See Williams, 'The "semi-socialism" of Oswald Birchall'.
65. Birchall to Turner, 18 November 1898, SPAB Archive, Oxford Improvements file.
66. *Nature Notes: The Selbourne Society's Magazine*, November 1896, p. 236.
67. *Witney Gazette*, 26 May 1888, p. 8.
68. *Co-operative News*, 5 July 1890, p. 687.
69. *The Graphic*, 30 July 1898, p. 19.
70. W. H. Hutton, *Thames and Cotswold: Sketches of the Country*, Westminster: Archibald Constable, 1903, p. 96.
71. *Collins Guide to English Parish Churches*, ed. John Betjeman, London: Collins, 1959, p. 390; <https://www.spab.org.uk/news/noticing-everything-john-piper-john-betjeman.html>
72. Richard Taylor, *Churches – How to Read Them*, (Episode 6, 'The Victorians and after') BBC, 2010.
73. <https://www.visitchurches.org.uk/what-we-do/news/cct-launches-netflix-for-people-who-love-churches-with-world-leading-historian.html>
74. *Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard*, 16 May 1896, p. 5.
75. Miele, *From William Morris*, p. 36.
76. Birchall to Turner, 14 March 1896, SPAB Archive, Leigh Church file.
77. This essay has concentrated on the fabric of Inglesham church because this was what Morris, Middleton, Micklethwaite, Birchall and the SPAB set out to save from restoration. The interior is of equal importance and can be found described in a number of the sources given as notes.

The Women's Guild of Arts: Professional Craftswomen Identity and Education, 1907-1920

Marion Tempest Grant

In 1907, May Morris and Mary Elizabeth Turner, with assistance from Mary A. Sloane, Ethel Everett, Mabel Esplin, and Letty Graham, founded the Women's Guild of Arts (WGA).[1] The Guild became a leading arts and crafts association for women creators and designers and offered a variety of networking, educational, and other professionalisation opportunities for its members and associates. The Guild was modelled after the organisational structure and activities of the Art Workers' Guild (AWG) and was founded as an alternative for women, who were not permitted to join the AWG on the basis of sex. The AWG had been founded by a group of architects, designers, sculptors, and painters in 1884 who wished to unify artists and serve as a forum for discussion related to arts and crafts fields.[2] Many pioneering artists from the British Arts and Crafts movement were AWG members, including Walter Crane, William Morris, and John Ruskin. With women barred from joining the AWG for the first eighty years of its existence, the WGA was established to provide a space for craftswomen to similarly 'socialize their art'[3] – that is, to facilitate opportunities for these women to network and participate in a supportive community of members encouraging and watching the progression of each other's work and skillsets, regardless of their field of handicraft.[4] Another of the Guild's chief aims was to expose the membership to 'the best thought, the best work, of the world outside [their] circle'.[5] The executive committee accomplished this by curating a lecture series delivered by some of the most eminent figures of the movement, many of whom belonged to the AWG.[6]

The WGA played a crucial role in fostering a sense of community for craftswomen, providing professional support, and challenging prevailing gender norms and stereotypes typically applied to women creators and designers in the British art world of the early twentieth century. Throughout its first thirteen years of operation, the Guild organised lectures, events and exhibitions, offered stipends to

members, and served as a haven for working women artists and designers. I argue that by providing an opportunity for women art workers and designers to connect, learn, and showcase their work, the Guild enabled its members to serve as leaders in the development of an identity for professional craftswomen in the climate of the British Arts and Crafts movement. Further, its lecture series was in part established to protect and maintain the professional feminine identity the Guild was curating. In this essay, I will unpack the Guild's collective understanding of the professional craftswoman as described in the association's materials and the strategies employed by the group to preserve and promote this identity. Fundamentally, member participation in the educational opportunities the group offered was important to its leadership as it expanded the members' knowledge base while protecting the Guild's reputation as an association of skilled and knowledgeable professional women artists and designers.

Membership in the Guild was offered to any skilled craftswoman regardless of location; anyone outside of a 10-mile boundary from Charing Cross was considered a 'country' member and was offered a half-priced membership to make up for the costly and lengthy travel to meetings.[7] The Guild grew so influential that artists from outside of England were keen to join, including craftswomen from Germany, Ireland, Italy, and Wales. The Guild's membership included some of the most prominent women of the period, including Pre-Raphaelite artists Evelyn de Morgan, Jane Morris, and Marie Spartali Stillman. A few aristocrats also subscribed to the WGA, including Lady Alix Egerton, Lady Isabella Caroline Somerset, and Countess Feodora Gleichen. Many of the Guild's members, like Agnes Garrett, were leaders in social and political causes of the period such as the suffrage and socialist movements.

Despite what is undoubtedly an influential group of women, little research has been produced on the Guild, partly owing to a lack of primary materials available. Recently though, a few boxes filled with documents related to the Guild's undertakings, once owned by the group's Honorary Secretary Mary A. Sloane, were gifted to the William Morris Society (WMS) in England. Zoë Thomas's recent monograph *Women Art Workers and the Arts and Crafts Movement* (2020) analyses these uncovered materials for the first time. Thomas demonstrates that women art workers were an influential and powerful force in the Arts and Crafts movement and uncovers the centrality of gender in the social construction of 'expertise' in this artistic movement at the turn of the century, which made it more difficult for craftswomen to assert themselves as professionals.[8] This paper similarly draws from the Guild's archival materials, but my analysis focuses on the documentation that was produced yearly by the Guild, including the member roll, annual reports, Chairman's addresses, and the Secretary's Reports. These materials served as discursive spaces for the Guild

to articulate their conception of women's professional artistic identity and the standards the group associated with this status. It was especially in the sentiments published in the annual report and Chairman's addresses that the Guild sought to shape both the collective identity of their guild and define the 'professional craftswoman' in Britain's artistic sphere in the early twentieth century. Analysing these materials across a period of thirteen years enabled me to identify how women's professional identity was developed and then subsequently maintained and protected in the Guild by the educational opportunities they offered. I highlight the importance of learning opportunities outside of conventional education institutions made available to this group of women in order to develop their artistic expertise and skillsets and demonstrate their professional identities.[9] My periodisation for this article, 1907-1920, reflects the limited Guild-related documents that remain. While some materials in the collections at the WMS do carry on past 1920, there is a noticeable drop in available material. However, by focusing on materials created in the first thirteen years of the Guild's existence, I offer a close study of the early documents describing the establishment of the WGA, how this group conceived of professional feminine identity, and how this status was protected through the educational opportunities organised by the Guilds' executive committee, all topics which have yet to be explored in detail.

The emergence of the Arts and Crafts movement in Britain sparked an expansion of paid opportunities for women, and by the 1880s many were engaged in careers related to arts and crafts fields like needlework or lace-making. Despite this, feminist historians like Cheryl Buckley[10] and Ellen Mary Easton McLeod[11] show that women's contributions to the British Arts and Crafts movement have not been sufficiently explored. In her dissertation, Heather Victoria Haskins offers some insight into this lapse and argues that women's near-invisibility in histories of the movement stemmed from their lack of representation in art criticism in the periodical press of the period. In her monumental study, she takes up the reception of the craftswomen who exhibited with the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society (ACES) between 1880 and 1916 and finds that women were increasingly not named in published criticism of their craftwork. This lack of coverage influenced the lack of scholarship recognising women's contributions to the movement.[12] Anthea Callen produced a trailblazing work, *Angel in the Studio* (1979), offering a feminist retelling of women's participation in the British Arts and Crafts movement, which has served as a model for similar recovery work ever since.[13] Scholarship on the women artists central to the WGA, like May Morris, has been taken up by Jan Marsh and others.[14] In her research, Marsh situates Morris as a leading practitioner of the movement and demonstrates that her contributions were marginalised due to the handicraft she specialised in: embroidery.

Marsh writes, 'embroidery was one field men did not aspire to dominate. This was considered "essentially the woman's art" […] the reasons being that it did not require workshop or studio premises'.[15] Zoë Thomas's already mentioned monograph explores the network of craftswomen associated with the WGA as they sought and facilitated new professional identities for themselves. Her landmark study explores how socialisation and professionalisation opportunities were facilitated by guild-culture, a topic that has typically only been taken up with male-dominated associations.[16] Nicola Thomas's research shows that the late nineteenth century witnessed a boom of arts and crafts associations emerging and that these groups were fundamental for community building among like-minded crafts practitioners. In her work, she demonstrates that these organisations embodied the aesthetic and socialist principles of the Arts and Crafts movement in the early twentieth century. Rosie Ibbotson's work on guild culture and fraternalism during the British Arts and Crafts movement has a particular focus on the AWG. Her research demonstrates that guild culture functioned, in part, to unify craftsmen from different fields.[17] We see this dynamic replicated by the WGA. She argues the exclusion of women from fraternal organisations such as the AWG inevitably contributed to their erasure from work on the movement.[18]

'A society of picked artists'[19]: establishing the Women's Guild of Arts and designing the professional craftswoman

Art work was deemed one of the few socially acceptable forms of employment for women during the mid- to late-nineteenth century. This is partly due to handicrafts historically being an encouraged leisurely pursuit for middle-class women, and paid labour associated with crafts appeared to be an extension of this.[20] However, by the end of the nineteenth century and in response to an increasing number of women engaging in the Arts and Crafts movement, the term 'amateur' developed gendered implications and was often applied to women artisans.[21] Early in its formation, the WGA was eager to quell any association with amateurism. The Secretary's Report for 1908, written by May Morris, describes the early moments of the Guild's creation. A small group of women gathered at the studio of Mary Sargent-Florence on 18 January 1907 to discuss forming a society of like-minded individuals who were pursuing a career in arts and crafts. Together, they compiled a list of women artists and wrote to them with invitations to join as foundational members. At a subsequent meeting on 9 May 1907, the group established themselves as a guild and spent the remainder of the year finalising the details of their association, including selecting their name. According to the 1908 report, the name 'Women's Guild of Arts' was 'severely criticized' by some friends and members as 'ungrammatical' and

'unmeaning'. Morris seems sympathetic to these views, explaining in the report that she felt the 'Guild of Women Artworkers' would have been a simpler and more obvious name for the group.[22] Morris likely preferred the version she proposed because the term 'artworkers' announced the professional orientation of its female membership. The report ends by identifying the type of craftswoman eligible to join the Guild, and we see in this description the group's aversion to recruiting amateurs to their ranks. The author details that 'a society of picked artists' must grow slowly, offering membership only to those artists whose work they judge as competent and sincere in order to protect the integrity of the Guild.[23] After receiving nominations, applicants were required to demonstrate that they had both theoretical and applied knowledge of at least one field of handicraft and present work that demonstrated these skills. This Secretary's Report reflects Morris's ongoing efforts to filter out any amateur craftswomen who might risk tarnishing the reputation the Guild was building as an association for professional craftswomen.

The WGA valued and solicited feedback from its membership throughout its lifetime. The above-mentioned Secretary's Report ends with a call to its membership to attend all meetings, in the spirit of 'comradeship, eager to give out some [of] your own mental activity [and] to absorb [that of your] fellow'.[24] On 20 December 1910, the Guild invited its members and associates to engage in a debate focused on discussing the scope and power of guilds. The annual reports and yearly Chairman's addresses demonstrate that the executive committee often acknowledged criticisms and feedback from members and associates during meetings, so it is more than likely the discussion informed how the Guild facilitated future activities and the role the Guild played in supporting these craftswomen. The aims of the Guild were most aptly described in the 1913 Chairman's address, published in the annual report of the same year. In this statement, the Chairman, who was likely Mary Watts at the time, claims:

> [The Guild's] material object is, in gathering together representatives of the different arts, to be of use to the members of the Guild, a usefulness which partly consists of our encouraging each other to think in common, to watch the progress of each other's work and the work of those moving on similar (and dissimilar) lines, and to do everything possible to bring ourselves in touch with the best thought, the best work, of the world outside our circle.
>
> The Art Workers' Guild, as you know, has been established for a great many years, and seeing the extraordinary benefit this body has been to its members, it was thought that a service might be rendered to women art-workers by the formation of an organisation on similar lines.[25]

The archival materials of the WGA demonstrate a continual effort of the organisation and its members to align and describe itself as the women's equivalent of the AWG, likely as a tactic to legitimise and publicise the group. Occasionally, in correspondence, members of the WGA referenced this unique partnership. For instance, in a letter to May Morris, American-born artist and editor Pamela Colman Smith wrote to say she 'always understood that the women's Guild of Arts was nominally an offshoot of the Men's Guild – and in sympathy with it'.[26] Members and Masters of the AWG were invited to join the Guild's events and were involved from the WGA's conception. At the end of its founding year the WGA hosted a bustling meeting in Clifford Inn Hall, lent to them by the AWG, where William Lethaby, Walter Crane, and Halsey Ricardo, all members of the AWG, delivered speeches to the women's association. Following this, the WGA continued to host their meetings in the AWG's guildhall, rent-free, even after the AWG moved to a new location in Queens Square, Bloomsbury in 1914. Opportunities for collaboration between the two groups and their members at conferences, lectures, workshops, and social events increased gradually as the years went on. Between 1911 and 1920, at least one AWG member delivered a lecture to the WGA each year. On 17 May 1916 May Morris and William Lethaby, former Master of the AWG, collaborated on a conference on the topic of 'Art and the Public'. The WGA Report for 1916 describes that 'the leading critics and representatives of the Press were invited' and that there were 'many influential speakers and a large attendance'.[27] On 19 January 1917 the two groups hosted their first joint meeting on the topic of William Morris, where May Morris delivered a lecture on her father. These moments of partnership, amongst others, between the two guilds are evidence of the efforts taken by the WGA's leadership to expose their membership to art outside of their coterie, thus opening them to new skills and handicrafts. In attempting to establish themselves as the women's equivalent of the AWG, which at that point was one of the most esteemed guilds for craftsmen, the WGA positioned themselves as a society of similar pedigree for skilled women artists and designers.

Guild expansion and collective identity

As with any newly founded association, recruiting members was a focus in the early years of the Guild's existence. Twenty women joined the Guild in its second year, including Pamela Colman Smith and sculptor Esther Moore. The application process to join the Guild is outlined in the constitution, included at the back of the annual members' roll. It was a rigorous process designed to protect the collective identity of the Guild and its members as a group of skilled craftswomen. The member roll, printed by the Chiswick Press, was a small booklet containing information relevant

to the Guild, including the names, occupations, and addresses of its members. To become a member, a candidate had secure a nominator, one of the members of the Guild, who forwarded their application to the executive committee at least one month ahead of a membership election. If the executive committee believed they were eligible, their candidacy was announced at the next membership vote. A two-thirds majority vote was required for candidates to become members.[28] The Guild's archival materials contain four versions of the constitution published in the 1911, 1912, 1914, and 1920 versions of the member roll. The seventh item in the constitution details this process and is one of the only policies that remained unchanged in this period:

> Candidates must submit several examples of their work or other proofs of efficiency for inspection at the meeting at which the election is to take place. The craft or crafts on which the candidate stands for election must be stated, and a clear statement must accompany these exhibits as to whether (a) the design is the candidate's, and (b) the execution is wholly or only in part her own. At this meeting a proposer and seconder must be found, one of whom must be a member of the committee.[29]

In establishing such a thorough process for admitting members, the WGA ultimately acted as gatekeepers of Englishwomen's professional status in arts and crafts fields, adopting the exclusionary tactics craftsmen had used against them and for which the Guild had been formed in part to circumvent. By asserting their difference from amateurs, the WGA established a professional hierarchy built on rejecting those women who did not reflect the required high standards of training and experience.

Achieving this desired level was likely inaccessible to most working-class women. Anthea Callen has described how, while appearing to offer women several advantages, the Arts and Crafts movement also 'insidiously perpetuated the class, sexual and labour divisions inherent in late-Victorian society'.[30] She describes four tiers of women who participated in the movement. The first was working-class women who were employed in rural or cottage industries. The second included aristocratic upper-and middle-class women who did not need to work but were invested in renewing the crafting tradition and facilitated handicraft training and employment of women in need of work. This could have included figures like members Lady Alix Egerton or Countess Feodora Gleichen. The third tier was 'impoverished gentlewomen,' who needed to earn a living to sustain themselves. Pamela Colman Smith fits in this tier. For most of her life, Smith struggled to support herself financially through her work, despite taking on multiple occupations including editor of *The Green Sheaf* (1903-1904), proprietor of the Green Sheaf Press (1904-1906), and performative storyteller of

West Indian folklore she learned during her childhood in Jamacia.[31] Callen's fourth group is women she refers to as the 'elite inner-circle'. These were women who were connected, typically by birth or marriage, to key male figures of the movement.[32] This of course would include May and Jane Morris, Edith Dawson, Evelyn de Morgan, and many other members of the WGA. Due to a lack of biographical data for most of the members, it is impossible to place all of them within Callen's model; however, based on the available information we can infer that the majority of the members would have fit into tiers two, three, or four.

There are several reasons working-class women would, inadvertently or not, have been largely excluded from the WGA. To begin, they would not have the same access to time or material resources with which to hone their craft and prepare objects for the Guild's consideration in comparison to middle- or upper-class women. Additionally, while working-class women may have had the technical knowledge to execute beautiful handicraft work, many were not able to develop their design skills, which was a element assessed in the application for membership. Finally, the cost of membership, which was up to ten shillings, may have been a barrier. Gerry Beegan and Paul Atkinson's work on boundaries in design recognises that professional organisations are tools by which individuals attempt to define themselves and signal their non-amateur status. Further, the process of professionalisation invariably serves as an exclusionary system by establishing guidelines that might reject individuals or groups based on class, income, ethnicity, or gender.[33] The women of the WGA needed to assert their professional status in opposition to the work of amateurs and in the process created a systemic barrier for low-earning women. Ultimately, the WGA's conception of the professional craftswoman identity would have been largely inaccessible to working-class women.

The Guild established three subscription bands for individuals to join the WGA. The first was elected membership. The annual fee was five shillings for country members and ten shillings for those who lived in London. Members held voting rights, were notified of all events, and were entitled to bring three guests to all gatherings.[34] The second type of subscription was associates, a position that emerged in 1909 for 'friends interested in art'.[35] Like the members, associates were notified of all Guild events but were able to bring only one guest. Associates were women who possessed an interest in arts and crafts fields but did not reflect the professional standards set by the organisation or did not wish to pursue the time-consuming and rigorous process of obtaining membership. Despite not possessing membership status, and therefore no voting rights, associates, regardless of location, were required to pay a yearly subscription fee of ten shillings.[36] The third option to join the Guild was as an honorary associate. These were 'distinguished men or women who have rendered

signal services to Art or to whom the Guild is indebted'.[37] During the period 1907-1920, six honorary associates were inducted to the Guild. In 1913 embroiderer Una Taylor, who worked for May Morris,[38] was recognised as an honorary associate alongside AWG members poet Laurence Binyon, architect William Lethaby, and engraver, printer, photographer and close friend of the Morris family Emery Walker. In 1914, Eric MacLagan, also an AWG member, became an honorary associate. At the time the WGA was established, MacLagan became the head of the textiles department at the Victoria and Albert Museum, an institution that had special ties to the Guild as I will later discuss. Sometime between 1915-1919, member Mabel Esplin became an honorary associate but died shortly after the 1920 members roll was first drafted.

The honorary associate role, which was adopted as a Guild policy in 1912, was a topic of great debate among Guild members. Mrs. A. P. Trotter formally proposed inviting men to serve as honorary associates. This scheme was voted on and passed at the Guild's annual general meeting in December 1912. By the following meeting on 31 January 1913, the Guild's executive committee reported that over thirty members had written to express their support of this adopted resolution. However, the resolution was met with contention by several members of the Guild who felt concerned about the role for two reasons. The first was that admitting men as associates would disrupt the dynamic of the Guild. Secondly, that honorary associates, a category designed particularly for men, did not pay for their subscription to the Guild while ordinary associates, always women, were expected to. As a letter to the Chair describes:

> We are wholly in sympathy with the desire to widen the interests of the Guild, and we fully appreciate the value of the lectures given by men and women outside our membership; but we disagree with the proposal to admit men and women as Honourary Associates: because, while it gives us no advantage which we do not at present possess, we regard it as endorsing a policy which has of late limited the functions of the Guild almost entirely to listening to lectures.[39]

The letter draws attention to a fear that the honorary associate role would entrench an emerging dynamic that privileged craftsmen; women would continue more often to be spectators rather than leaders of these regular events and expected to pay for their association to the Guild while men would not. These sentiments were recorded in a letter that was signed by twelve members, ten of whom were 'past and present members of [the] Committee'. This statement was submitted to all members of the

Guild and the Chairman, with a call for a 'fuller and freer discussion of the subject than was possible under the conditions of the meeting of December the fifth'.[40] A debate on the topic was hosted on February 28th but ultimately, the honorary associate position endured.

Between 1907 and 1920 there were at least 168 members and associates who held active subscriptions to the WGA, although there may have been more members whose identities remain hidden due to missing archival material. Seventy-one of these individuals (approximately 42%) were associates and ninety-seven individuals (approximately 58%) were elected members of the Guild. The annual roll recorded the occupations of their members, and this provides remarkable insight into the handicraft fields the Guild's members most engaged with. Members would confirm their occupation type and how they wanted their name to appear on the roll by written correspondence. In cases where there is more than one occupation type listed for a person, they likely submitted work in two distinct fields of handicrafts.

Within this period, the 97 full members of the WGA participated in 32 occupation types:

Painter (21)
Embroideress (10)
Illustrator (7)
Decorative Painter (4)
Stained Glass Worker (4)
Enameller (3)
Metal Worker (3)
Carver (2)
Modeller (2)
Tempera Painter (2)
Wood Carver (2)
Decorative Sculptor (1)
Glass Painter (1)
Lace Worker (1)
Medallist (1)
Tapestry Weaver (1)
Sculptor (12)
Etcher (8)
Jeweller (6)
Illuminator (4)
Designer (3)
Gilder (3)
Bookbinder (2)
Lithographer (2)
Stained Glass Painter (2)
Weaver (2)
Writer (2)
Fresco Painter (1)
House Decorator (1)
Leather Worker (1)
Pottery Painter (1)
Unknown (1)

The above chart is significant in that it shows which fields of arts and crafts could have been more accessible to women. Some factors influencing higher representation in these disciplines could include training, quantity and quality of resources required for developing skills, and exposure to that field. As shown above, the five most popular

occupation types were painter, sculptor, embroideress, etcher, and illustrator. As mentioned previously, painting and embroidery are skills that were readily acceptable forms of female leisure, and most women of the middle and upper classes would have had exposure to those art forms. Additionally, each of those handicraft fields requires far less equipment for training and creation in comparison to other forms listed, like stained glass or metal work, which were understood as more masculine handicraft forms and to which women did not have easy access to training.

The popularity in these five fields also likely corresponds with early and founding members recruiting candidates from their social, associational, educational, familial, and professional networks in the following years. For instance, Evelyn De Morgan and Jane Morris had personal relationships with Pre-Raphaelite painter Marie Spartali Stillman, who joined the Guild shortly after it was founded. Many of the women connected to the WGA possessed active membership in other societies, especially suffrage and alternative artistic associations. Founding member and tempera painter Christina Herringham also established the Society of Painters in Tempera in 1901. Painter Estella Canziani was a member of Herringham's society and was likely introduced to the WGA through her, as Canziani became a member in 1911. Several founding members of the Guild attended the Slade School of Art, including decorative painter Emily Ford, stained-glass painter Mary Lowndes, and sculptor Countess Feodora Gleichen. There is a strong chance that if they recruited members to the Guild, it may have been from the connections they developed while training at the Slade School. Sculptor Ellen Mary Rope also attended Slade School of Art and was an early member of the Guild. Three nieces of Rope joined including Dorothy, a sculptor who began living with Rope in 1911[41] and became a member in 1913. Sculptor Margaret Agnes Rope joined in 1913 and stained glass worker Margaret Edith Aldrich Rope in 1917. Finally, in her position as head of the embroidery department at Morris & Co., May Morris worked alongside many skilled workers. As mentioned previously, Una Taylor worked at Morris & Co., and there's a strong possibility that Morris invited other former colleagues to join the WGA. In the examples highlighted here, it is clear that the many overlapping networks embedded in the WGA spanned social, associational, educational, familial, and professional connections. The WGA relied heavily on the associational labour and connections of its members and associates to recruit craftswomen they felt exemplified the Guild's professional standards.

'Socialize our art'[42]: the Guild's lecture series

One of the most enduring activities of the WGA was its lecture series. These lectures discussed arts and crafts skills, objects, or artists, and were delivered at the Guild's

ordinary meetings. The Guild's constitution of 1911 guarantees that there will be at least five meetings, and therefore lectures, per year.[43] In 1907, the Guild focused on establishing itself and for this reason, does not appear to have hosted any lectures. Afterward, the WGA generally over-delivered on this element, facilitating about six lectures per year for its membership. In 1908, the Guild managed to only organise four lectures but rectified this by hosting seven the following year. In addition to the Guild's ordinary meetings, 'at-homes', which were more social, informal gatherings hosted at the homes or studios of members and associates, were arranged for the Guild. Additionally, the Guild sometimes collaborated with other associations, predominately the AWG, on events and lectures. However, this section of the article will focus solely on the lectures organised by the Guild at their regular meetings in the first thirteen years.

Early on, lectures and the discussions that followed these talks were central to the Guild's activities. However, at one point some members expressed frustration that the Guild was leaning too heavily into hosting these sorts of events. This issue is reflected in the 1913 annual report:

> One or two criticisms of the Guild's activities have come to my notice: one is that it is growing to be too much of a lecturing society; another is that we may run the danger of becoming too social. Well, what is to be the activity of our Guild? The point of contact with the outside? We must meet, we must discuss, we must brush up against other people. For, after all, the inspiration derived from the experiences of so small a body would very soon come to an end if not enriched from other sources. This body of ours does, in its own small way, stand as an expression of the necessity for gathering together and concentrating the energies of creative artists, and I think we have already accomplished something of our immediate aim, which is, to socialize our art, as it were, by some sort of record of work done year by year, and by an exchange of experience and of thought.[44]

This speech makes the position of the Guild clear; for members and associates to expand their knowledge and develop their craft, they must be continually exposed to work and skillsets beyond what is found in the Guild. Between 1908 and 1920, the WGA facilitated seventy-seven lectures at their ordinary meetings related to arts and crafts or the interests of the Guild. Nine per cent of the lectures were delivered by an honorary associate. Members and associates were speakers for 36% of the lectures, and 55% were delivered by non-members. Notably, fifteen lectures were delivered by AWG members and eleven by former or eventual Masters of the AWG including

Selwyn Image, Thomas Okey, Henry Wilson, and Laurence A. Turner. Men served as lecturers to the Guild during this period more often than women delivering almost 58% of the lectures. In total, thirty-four women delivered lectures to the Guild, and only four of these individuals were not members or associates of the WGA.

There are several reasons leading to craftsmen speaking at these sessions more often than craftswomen. To start, while the WGA's leadership made a continual effort to offer presentation spots to its membership, many were hesitant to seize these opportunities. The manuscript for the 1913 Chairwoman's address, most likely written by May Morris, states, 'speaking from knowledge, as one who has something to do with bringing out lecture-lists, I know that not all those members who might be able to speak have been found willing to help to turn the Guild into a school of budding orators'.[45] Since there was a lack of WGA members willing to present at one of the promised five lectures per year, external sources were sought. Another factor influencing the high percentage of male speakers is the Guild leadership's dedication to exposing their members to what they considered to be the best the British Arts and Crafts movement had to offer. In that same manuscript, Morris wrote, "It is undeniable that the principal workers in most crafts are men, and from the first our Guild has felt that, in view of the edification of our members, the best authorities in every branch of Arts and Crafts should, regardless of sex-distinction, be invited to come and talk to us, and be encouraged to come into our midst in the intimate and comradelike way that is so stimulating to an artist's work capacity.[46] Morris makes her stance unequivocally clear: men were invited by virtue of their skill rather than their gender. Finally, the WGA's close association with the AWG, a much larger body of artists, meant the Guild's leadership had ready access to male craftspeople. The Guild's leadership used these lectures as an educational tool for members to develop their expertise and as an opportunity to establish the Guild's collective identity as a guild for excellence in the arts and crafts rather than a group of craftspeople distinguished by their gender.

Analysing the associational data and gender of the speakers for the lectures leading up to 1920 demonstrates that the Guild's lecture series served a dual function. Firstly, for those who chose to speak, it was an opportunity for WGA members to establish themselves as experts in a particular arts-and-crafts field by sharing their knowledge on the topic. Secondly, the lecture series also served as an opportunity for the Guild's members and associates to develop their own expertise. Analysing the topics of these lectures offers additional insight into the various artists, art forms, and issues that were discussed at these meetings. In conducting my analysis of these lectures, I applied up to two tags of the most relevant topics discussed in each lecture and then studied this list for trends.

Forty-seven of the seventy-seven lectures were on the topic of a particular arts and crafts field or skill. This included sessions on lace-making, jewellery design, and stained glass. Painting was by far the most discussed art media in these twelve years of the lecture series. As mentioned previously, 'painter' was the most popular occupation type of the members. While some women took the opportunity to demonstrate their expertise at the regular meetings, the Guild more often invited external speakers to present on this topic. Not only does this reflect an interest in exposing the Guild members and associates to techniques found outside the Guild, but demonstrates that the Guild was intentional about who was invited to speak. Aware of the many painters in their ranks, the Guild's leadership likely invited expert painters knowing those talks would be of interest to a large portion of their membership. Despite no members working as architects during this period, five lectures related to architecture were organised, likely due to its centrality to the British Arts and Crafts movement. This again demonstrates that the Guild's leadership was interested in challenging members to look beyond the scope of their work and develop their identities as knowledgeable practitioners.

Lectures on a historical topic, either of a particular artwork or of a particular arts and crafts field were offered fifteen times. Hosting and advertising lectures that analyse historical approaches to various arts and crafts fields or works would have helped to establish the Guild as a group of knowledgeable women artists while also facilitating educational opportunities for their membership. Similarly, presentations on the careers of well-established artists would have encouraged the Guild's membership to reflect critically on their own careers and artistic practice. Twelve lectures discussed historical and contemporary artists, all of whom were men, including William Blake, Agostino di Duccio, and William Morris. Notably, May Morris was the only woman to give these types of lectures and delivered two of four sessions on her father, William. Nine lectures of the series explored art produced in other countries including China, Germany, Greece, Japan, Persia (now Iran), and Serbia. Ibbotson claims that artists of the Arts and Crafts movement often drew stylistic references from global cultures past and present.[47] Marsh has likewise asserted that developing historical knowledge was equally important to the practical application of skills and that this was made evident in the texts written by numerous craftspeople.[48] Publications by some protagonists of the movement argued for the importance of the historical study of crafts produced in historical and international contexts. In *Decorative Needlework* (1893), May Morris writes that while a historical study of Arts and Crafts may appear unnecessary to some, it cannot be dispensed with, and that the study of the periods with the best decorative style 'is a great help to the student while taste is being formed'.[49] In *Form in Civilization*, William Lethaby similarly advocates for craftworkers

to take up historical study of handicrafts.[50] Almost all of these lectures on international topics were delivered with a lantern, and the visuals in these presentations likely inspired members with decorative motifs, ornamentation, and designs they were not typically exposed to. These lectures would have expanded the members' knowledge base well beyond that of an amateur.

In 1911 and 1912, the Guild offered season tickets to meetings and lectures to dozens of students of the 'various schools of art' in London, which included the Central School of Arts and Crafts as well as the Royal College of Art.[51] Aside from serving as a learning opportunity for these young artists, gifting these season tickets to the lectures series was undoubtedly a recruitment strategy. Invitations to experience the Guild first-hand may have encouraged the young students to eventually join. The topics in the lecture series facilitated by the Guild between 1908 and 1920 effectively address the sentiments outlined in the 1913 Chairman's address to expose its membership to art and knowledge beyond their circle. These lectures reflected international, research-informed, and diverse interests, which would enable the Guild members to market themselves as experts. In this way, the lecture series not only served an educational and professionalising purpose for its membership, but also a way of helping to preserve the Guild's collective identity as a group of professional craftswomen.

Guided tours, exhibition openings, and other educational resources

In addition to the lecture series, the WGA offered a range of other educational opportunities for its membership between 1907 and 1920. These included trips to museums in London with art collections that reflected the Guild's interests. The Guild established a special relationship with the Victoria and Albert Museum. Between 1911 and 1913, the education department of the museum offered free yearly passes to all members and associates of the WGA.[52] As well, special visits to the museum were arranged for the Guild. On 23 March 1912, a dinner and inspection of the new lace exhibit at the museum was organised by member Eleanor Rowe.[53] The next year she organised a dinner and guided tour by honorary associate Eric Maclagan of the museum's Italian sculptures.[54] At least two other museum visits were arranged for Guild members and associates during this period. This included a guided tour of the Chinese paintings at the British Museum, led by honorary associate Lawrence Binyon, in March 1912.[55] In 1914, the members enjoyed a guided visit to Sir John's Soane's Museum, where a curator led them through the collections and hosted tea afterward.[56] Other resources and opportunities available to the guildswomen to support the development of their artistic knowledge during this period included a Guild library and admittance to exhibitions and conferences organised by the WGA.

Fundamentally, the ample educational opportunities organised by the Guild demonstrate a keen desire to establish themselves as expert in the arts and crafts making it impossible for their membership to be dubbed amateurs. This meant the Guild was able to protect their conception of the professional craftswoman identity and the group's collective identity as an organisation for skilled workers and designers.

Conclusion

By the end of the Victorian period, a range of art organisations was available for male arts-and-craft workers which, as Zoë Thomas describes, resulted in 'a highly masculinised, urban culture in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries'.[57] The WGA played a significant role in establishing the identity of the professional craftswomen in the British Arts and Crafts movement. While the Guild emerged after the movement was already underway, the group was revolutionary in offering a space for women to collect, discuss, and learn about the movement while collectively asserting their distance from amateurism. The WGA conceived of the professional craftswoman as someone who demonstrated high levels of technical proficiency and design capabilities in her chosen field(s). She would engage in a supportive and collegial atmosphere established at the WGA and regularly attend and participate in meetings. She was well-versed in theoretical and historical approaches to the arts and crafts and possessed knowledge of handicraft work produced in international contexts. Further, she was interested in expanding her expertise and accomplished this by participating in the educational opportunities facilitated by the WGA.

The WGA served as an important space for middle- and upper-class women to develop and model the identity of the professional craftswomen in the context of the British Arts and Crafts movement. Establishing and protecting the collective identity of the Guild as a group for expert women artists and designers enabled the members to assert themselves in opposition to amateurism, thus elevating their professional statuses in exhibitions and the British marketplace of the early twentieth century. However, the Guild's mission to create a professional space for some women ultimately came at a cost by excluding working-class women and reinforcing class hierarchies.

NOTES

I would like to thank The William Morris Society, and in particular Mallory Horrill, Collections and Exhibition Curator at the Society, for granting me access to the Women's Guild of Art archival materials.

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Review Essay: *The Rossettis* at Tate Britain and Delaware Art Museum

Tim Barringer

Exhibitions of the work of Dante Gabriel Rossetti have always scandalised the London art establishment, provoking its panjandrums to splenetic outbursts about the artist's alleged transgressions, aesthetic or moral. The critical response to his early oil paintings from 1849 onwards was so vituperative that Rossetti withdrew altogether from exhibiting his work publicly, turning to watercolour and relying on a network of private collectors, among them the young William Morris. Only after Rossetti's death in 1882 did the Royal Academy hastily organise a retrospective exhibition, shown the following year. In 1973, responding to a changing *Zeitgeist* and the Pre-Raphaelite revival of the late 1960s, the RA mounted *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Painter and Poet*, acknowledging Rossetti's literary as well as his visual achievements, difficult though the former are to represent in an exhibition setting. Scroll on to 2003, when the soi-disant leaders of taste refused to provide a London venue for the excellent exhibition curated at Liverpool by Elizabeth Prettejohn and Julian Treuherz. Insufficiently noticed in Britain, this outstanding exhibition with an authoritative, well-illustrated catalogue received acclaim when shown to huge audiences at the Van Gogh museum in Amsterdam. It is to the credit of the current regime at Tate, then, that the present exhibition has come to fruition, and to the Delaware Art Museum for bringing it, in revised form, to the United States. Given the extended history of disavowal by the metropolitan elite, it's no surprise that *The Rossettis* garnered a chorus of abuse, this time from superannuated modernists such as the *Guardian's* Jonathan Jones, who, predictably deriding the "lurid, lusciously-lipped beauties," awarded the show two stars out of a possible five.

The clueless and inadequate response of the London critical establishment makes it all the more important that we take *The Rossettis* seriously. A very different exhibition from its predecessors, this show proceeds from a contrasting premise. In place of the focus on Dante Gabriel (hereafter DGR) alone, it is the Rossettis in the plural – the

family—that constitute the exhibition's subject. While this approach shines a little light on the contribution of William Michael, chronicler and custodian of the Rossetti legacy, its main effect is to propel into the spotlight two women, the distinguished poet Christina Rossetti and the painter and poet Elizabeth Siddall. In a significant gesture that is both feminist and revisionist, these figures no longer appear only in relation to DGR, as reclusive sister and neurotic "muse," but stand in their own right as notably original cultural producers whose work deserves serious attention. This will not surprise students of English literature; Christina Rossetti's star has been in the ascendant, whereas DGR's poetry has fewer advocates now than in his lifetime. The readings of Christina's works offered in the exhibition's graphics and catalogue are generally perfunctory; the celebrated *Goblin Market*, in particular, has been the subject of rich interpretations, many emphasising its queerness, of which no hint here. If feminist literary criticism has reinscribed Christina Rossetti in the canon, watercolours and drawings by Elizabeth Siddall have remained until now at its periphery, difficult of access and (compared to the ubiquity of DGR's work in print and digital circulation) little reproduced. Other female artists of the extended family, notably the exceptionally talented Lucy Rossetti, daughter of Ford Madox Brown and wife of William Michael, are not included, a regrettable lacuna.

Installed in the Linbury Galleries at Tate Britain, the exhibition immediately announced its purpose in an opening room including only a single painting, Dante Gabriel's *Ecce Ancilla Domini*, 1849-50, superbly lit. For years this work had been lost in the intellectual inanity and disastrous display conditions of the Tate's former permanent collection hang (other Pre-Raphaelites have recently been redeemed through inclusion in a splendid installation, including an apt intervention by the artist Jeremy Deller). In *The Rossettis*, *Ecce Ancilla Domini* emerges as one of the great paintings of the nineteenth century, the annunciation revealed not as a mystic marriage, but as the terrifying violation of a teenager by an aggressive, outside force. Christina Rossetti modelled the figure of Mary, seated on her simple bed, who pulls her body against the wall to fend off the incursion of the Angel Gabriel, his tunic open from head to toe to reveal a mature, athletic male body. In this work, Rossetti was able to sustain the binarism of early Pre-Raphaelite art, realist and revivalist, painting every strand of Mary's hair with daguerreotype precision, but alluding, too, to the chalky surfaces of fresco and the skewed perspectives of pre-Renaissance painting. The modernity of the fraught sexual encounter, as well as the deliberate defiance of academic convention, propel this work from the era of the Crystal Palace into our own time.

If the choice of opening image was a strong one, the exhibition's intent was more powerfully signalled by a series of text panels inscribed with important shorter poems by Christina Rossetti. Newly engineered sound cones allowed the visitor to hear each

of the poems expertly read by leading actors, without sonic interference. Christina's distinctive voice ("You know I never loved you, John/ No fault of mine made me your toast") was effectively introduced. It remains an open question as to whether poetry is best appreciated by standing in a busy gallery.

Carol Jacobi, lead curator of the exhibition, is to be congratulated both on the opening gambit and on the rhythm of the following rooms. The exhibition's subsequent moves were more conventional, following chronologically through the lifespan of the major characters. Through text panels and in the catalogue, Jacobi began by introducing the family as political refugees: Gabriele Rossetti's involvement in revolutionary politics, demanding a constitution for the Kingdom of Naples in 1820, caused him to forsake Italy for London. The importance of Dante Alighieri for the father and all his children forms an important line of connection through the exhibition. Gabriele's biography also establishes a benchmark for the terms 'Radical' and 'Romantic' coupled, to unfortunate oxymoronic effect, in the exhibition's subtitle (think of the BBC's ghastly Pre-Raphaelite hokum 'Desperate Romantics'). Though there are clear lines of influence from Romantic poetry and thought to the Rossettis (and DGR was a prime mover in the rehabilitation of William Blake's reputation in the 1860s), it is equally clear that the Rossettis and the Pre-Raphaelite movement in general were not a part of the Romantic movement, which peaked decades earlier. Since there is no intellectual grounding for the title, one can only imagine that someone in Tate's all-powerful marketing department is a keen watcher of BBC bodice-ripper series.

Of interest to the specialist was an unprecedentedly large selection of very early works by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, indicating the influence of Gavarni and French comic illustration and of Punch cartoonists such as John Leech. Particularly striking, though hardly identifiable as works of DGR, were a group of pen-and-ink drawings of a couple of drunken revellers including *The Bivouac after the Ball* (1845, National Trust). As James Finch notes in the catalogue, Rossetti's work of the mid-1840s leans, as in the drawings to texts by Edgar Allan Poe, toward the macabre, a tendency vividly present here. Through sheer, indeed excessive, volume of work presented, by this point DGR had already begun to dominate and, despite all efforts to the contrary, the male genius was starting to steal the show.

The familiar story of the founding of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, magisterially narrated by Elizabeth Prettejohn in the catalogue, passed by rather quickly in the exhibition, where the familial format rather undercut the homosocial group sensibility of the early PRB years. The major emblem of this moment was William Holman Hunt's *Rienzi* (1848-9, Ramsbury Manor Foundation), which includes the face of Dante Gabriel as a brother vowing vengeance. This was a jarring

presence, however, since, while much of the foreground figural group remains from 1849, the rest of the canvas was extensively repainted by Hunt many years later, in the acidic, luminous style of 1886. The astounding linear study for Millais's *Christ in the House of His Parents* (c.1849, Tate) likewise made little sense in this context; a comparison between DGR's *The First Anniversary of the Death of Beatrice* (1848-9, Birmingham Museums Trust; listed as No.59 in the catalogue but not shown) and, say, Holman Hunt's *Lorenzo At His Desk In The Warehouse* (1849, Louvre) might have established the close stylistic interaction of the Brothers more effectively, and given a truer sense of the radicalism of the PRB.

The major achievement of the exhibition is to position Elizabeth Siddall, permanently one hopes, as a significant Victorian artist, a protean individual talent rather than a follower or imitator of Rossetti. Those of us privileged to see Jan Marsh's breakthrough exhibition of Siddall's work in Sheffield in 1991 have waited a long time for these works to be assembled again, with significant additions to the small Siddall canon. Marsh contributes a useful essay on the growth of the Siddall myth; "discovery" in a milliner's shop; catching a chill in the bath while posing for Millais's Ophelia et cetera. Marsh, whose work on the artist is foundational, reminds us that Siddall operated as an independent artist with her own account at the colourman Roberson's; that she travelled, often solo, across Britain and to the Continent. The catalogue thankfully avoids the once ubiquitous diminutive, "Lizzie," but adopts the spelling "Siddal" which, indeed, Elizabeth used herself by the mid 1850s; in the 1980s, it began to be felt that this represented a liberating move on the young female artist's part, self-fashioning against the patriarchy. Sources are ambivalent, however. Elizabeth was the daughter of a Sheffield cutler, who had moved to London because of structural changes in the trade. The deletion of the final "l" could perhaps represent a different and more insidious form of patriarchal violence, the snobbishness of the pretentious, bourgeois Rossetti family who found the artisanal Yorkshire associations of her patronym too lowly, preferring conjure up "Stendhal" rather than "bradawl". Rossetti snidely mocked the northern accent of his patron Thomas Plint (who allegedly asked Rossetti to paint a "soonset floosh"), but Elizabeth was not too grand to return to Sheffield in 1857, where she arranged to work in the studios of the Sheffield School of Art, dedicated to the education of industrial designers in metalwork.

The work by Siddall assembled at Tate Britain unmistakably reveals her to be an artist of high originality and vision, far less anxious and prevaricating than Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and prepared to disregard the niceties of Victorian artistic culture to a degree that justifies the use of the overworked term "avant-garde." *Last Farewell before the Crucifixion*, an undated drawing in pen and wash, recalls the explosive power

of Ruskin's copy of the central portion of Tintoretto's *Crucifixion* (1845, Lancaster, The Ruskin). Might Siddall's sketch for a possible illustration for *St Cecilia* in the Moxon Tennyson have pre-dated Rossetti's notably similar, though more fully orchestrated, version? Siddall presents the tension between earthly music and that of heaven, described in Tennyson's poem, with terrifying directness; Rossetti allows the saint to fall into the arms of a distinctly earthbound angel, lost in fleshly rapture.

Yet Siddall's work presents a fundamental challenge when shown with that of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and, indeed, any other artist of the period. As a result, probably, of the cost of materials and the lack of dedicated studio space, she worked only on a very small scale. Many of the works are in period frames, with reflective glass. Placed next to exuberant works on a much larger scale, her watercolours almost disappear. Time and again the Tate installation positioned Siddall's work next to related compositions by Rossetti; labels encouraged the viewer to value Siddall's contributions, which push at the boundaries of convention more bravely; but in the context of the huge gallery spaces, the works were rendered almost invisible. In some cases, a large laminated version was displayed – rather missing the point. In the end, however, it would have been more effective (as at that revelatory Sheffield installation in 1991) to separate Siddall's work and to allow her to be seen alone, rather than as part of a larger familial unit. Her early death, and consequent tiny corpus of work, precluded the kind of long-term dialogue with Rossetti that might have allowed for a treatment like the concurrent exhibition *Manet/Degas* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. We still need a comprehensive Siddall show with full catalogue, but the present exposure of these fragile works on paper doubtless means that it will be many years before that comes to pass.

Questions of race are rightly at the centre of art-historical debate today, and a body of literature is emerging on art and empire. A key work is Rossetti's *The Beloved*, to which an entire room was dedicated. Its title derives from the Song of Solomon in the Old Testament, and includes on the frame texts such as: "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine" (Solomon 1:2). "She shall be brought unto the King in raiment of needlework: the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee" (Psalms 45:14). These verses were traditionally read typologically as referring to the love of Christ by his flock, but Rossetti's point of departure in *The Beloved* is the sensuous language describing the unveiling of a woman before her future husband. Among the group accompanying the unveiled bride, differences of skin colour and ethnic identity are dominant. In a classic imperialist trope, Rossetti perhaps alludes to the abundance of forms of human beauty, while assigning to the white figure the place of honour. The exhibition's text panels and labels had relatively little to offer on this topic. In the political and

discursive context of our own time, as in the mid-1860s, the most significant figure is the Black child in the foreground. Debates about slavery were necessarily prominent since Rossetti was preparing the work during the American Civil War. Indeed, though early sketches were made from a girl, the final sitter was an African-American boy whom Rossetti spotted in London, travelling with his 'master.' *The Beloved* is among DGR's most successful compositions, but is it a testimonial to nineteenth-century racism? In the catalogue, a memorable essay by Chiedza Mhondoro, Assistant Curator at Tate Britain, adapts from Saidiya Hartman the practice of "critical fabulation." She imagines the experience of the young boy entering Rossetti's Chelsea home to sit for the painting. Such speculative approaches, backed up (as here) with close and detailed research, offer intriguing possibilities for future Pre-Raphaelite scholarship.

Rossetti prepared a superb group of pencil studies of people of colour represented in the painting, some of which are reproduced on pp. 166-7 in the catalogue but not credited there to their owner, Birmingham Museums Trust. Most visitors to Tate probably enjoyed seeing these exquisite pencil drawings, framed and glazed in the same manner as the other Rossetti works; to compare them with the final picture was instructive. The word *facsimile* in a very small font, below the labels' tombstone information, however, revealed that the works were not present in the exhibition, and that we were looking at good quality photographic reproductions. This move fundamentally undermines the experience of museum visiting; it further raises significant questions around museum ethics. If what museums present is not real, there is no difference between Tate and Google Images. Photographs of these drawings should have been reproduced on laminated text panels, not faked up to look like the real thing.

The Beloved also marks an important moment of contact between British avant-garde painting of the Aesthetic Movement and the French avant-garde painting that has become a keynote in the history of modern art, particularly as narrated by American textbooks.

Rossetti's inclusion of a Black figure whose skin contrasted dramatically with a sexualised pale-skinned woman may be a response to Manet's *Olympia* (1863, Paris, Musée d'Orsay) which Rossetti must have seen when he visited Manet's studio late in 1864. How do we compare the two works? For a mind as conventional as that of Jonathan Jones, a simple binary of "good" and "bad" would suffice; but future scholarship could draw from the comparison a more complex argument about the visual politics of race, empire and beauty in the mid-1860s.

A further major question for future scholarship is the extent to which the aesthetic and the political are intertwined in the Rossetti family circle's productions. For William

Morris and (recent scholarship has argued) Edward Burne-Jones, artistic activity was by its very nature a political act. Members of the extended Rossetti family circle, such as Ford Madox Brown, engaged in activism both through the image and in the world – as with Brown's experimental soup kitchen in Manchester. Where the "romantic" elements in his formation are explained in the early stages of the exhibition, Rossetti's radicalism is taken for granted and never questioned. The Tate exhibition *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde* (2012), not cited in the present catalogue, argued that the radical anti-academic politics of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and Madox Brown were continuous with and formative for the explicit revolutionary politics of Willliam Morris. An examination of the early years of collaborative experimentation that led to the founding of "the Firm," eventually Morris & Co., could reveal much more.

The extent of Rossetti's influence and involvement in the Firm remains shadowy, but (a point not emphasised in this exhibition), early Morris interiors (foreshadowed in his painting *La Belle Iseult*, 1858, Tate) owe much to the exquisite worlds conjured up in Rossetti's watercolours of the mid-1850s. Indeed, the Red House is, at some level, a three-dimensional realisation of the vision of small, richly wrought images such as *The Blue Closet* (1857, Tate). Such works emerge as DGR's masterpieces, revealing by contrast the crudeness of the later oil paintings.

A rather disappointing room in the *The Rossettis* dealt in summary fashion with DGR's work as a designer. The walls simulated a flamboyant purple wallpaper somewhat freely adapted from a tiny doodle of DGR's, the motif appearing on a far larger scale than he or Morris would ever have countenanced. This part of the exhibition struggled to reconcile a vague argument about love, domesticity and marriage with one about DGR's involvement in the Working Men's College and collaborative working methods in design. Taken seriously in the latter context, DGR might appear as more of a radical and less of a desperate romantic.

One of the most intriguing gestures of the Tate show, in the very last room, was the inclusion of *The Torch*, an incendiary "Journal of Anarchist Communism," edited by Helen and Olivia Rossetti, daughters of William Michael and Lucy Madox Brown Rossetti. Here is a form of activist radicalism Morris would have understood; and here too is unquestionable female agency. As if to gesture at a sphere of influence too large to be accommodated even in the exhausting dimensions of the Linbury Galleries, this final room also included a video of extracts from Ken Russell's visionary and psychedelic BBC film *Dante's Inferno* (1967) and an example of Sunil Gupta's queering of the Rossettian inheritance in his series of posed photographs, *The New Pre-Raphaelites*. If the large rooms of late paintings had been thinned out a little, this section could have been argued more fully.

It is astonishing that this important exhibition did not travel to a major European institution (why not Berlin? Paris? Rome? Stockholm?: is this isolation the new insularity of post-Brexit Britain?). The major American museums are still in thrall to a Paris-based narrative of the nineteenth century, endlessly recycling lucrative Impressionist blockbusters (though the recent loan of Victorian paintings from Puerto Rico to the Metropolitan Museum signals a change of heart). Full credit, then, to Delaware Art Museum, which, thanks to the bequest of Quaker entrepreneur and collector Samuel Bancroft, holds the finest Pre-Raphaelite collection outside the UK, for providing an international venue for *The Rossettis*. The exhibition was reconfigured for the smaller, but still impressive, halls of Wilmington, and substantially augmented by loans from the astonishingly rich collection of books, manuscripts and drawings amassed by Mark Samuels Lasner and housed at the University of Delaware. The Delaware installation, devised by Sophie Lynford, Annette Woolard-Provine Curator of the Bancroft Collection, moved more swiftly through the DGR juvenilia, ensuring that, through judicious placement of key works, the radical visual innovations both of DGR and of Siddall could more clearly be perceived. Where the earlier iteration of the exhibition was sometimes prolix, the Delaware narrative was crisply articulated. Historic wall colours were adeptly deployed to provide aesthetically appropriate settings, even within a modern building, and to emphasise key works. A significant innovation in the Delaware installation was a focus on on DGR's frames, underpinned by new research. The distinctive "Reel and Roundel", "Leaf and Berry" and "Medallion" frames are a key element in our perception of a Rossetti work, and (in a way that Morris surely appreciated) navigate between fine and decorative art, the flat and the three-dimensional, with inventive bravura.

The Rossettis, then, was in both iterations an important exhibition which will have introduced large audiences to a more complex account of a significant Victorian artistic family, and notably to the achievements of Elizabeth Siddall. The accompanying publication includes some interesting and persuasive ideas, notably in Jacobi's introduction and Mhondoro's essay on *The Beloved*; Prettejohn authoritatively positions the Rossettis in relation to a larger history; but the other essays feel very familiar. This book cannot be described as a catalogue; although there is a list of exhibited works, the absence of catalogue entries means that most of the discourse inhabits a tiresome level of generality, and even using the index, the reader in search of detailed visual analysis or iconographic interpretation will often be frustrated. A mysterious numbering scheme running through the book does not refer to the ordering of works in the show and is not cross-referenced with the list of exhibited objects; captions do not include key information such as the owner of the work, which in some cases is nowhere to be found. The existence of other resources, such as the

Rossetti archive online, might obviate the need for old-fashioned entries with information about provenance and exhibition history, but the detailed expository discussion of works of art, especially those with arcane subject matter, should surely be more prominent than it is here in a publication relating to an exhibition. This is a particularly egregious fate for a complicated work such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti's ultimately uncompleted *Found*. A series of illustrations (pp. 100-101) reproduces a range of studies for the work, but with no accompanying text to explain the process or offer an interpretation. Compare the still-invaluable catalogue to the 1984 *Pre-Raphaelites* exhibition at Tate, where each work exhibited receives a crisp, accurate analysis based on original research. Tate Publishing, a part of the for-profit entity Tate Enterprises, has for *The Rossettis* designed a book with a Barbie-pink jacket whose texture is reminiscent of cheap giclée prints attempting to mimic the surface of oil paintings. The lugubrious colour reproduction on matte paper is universally soggy and disastrously inaccurate: were the colour proofs even checked? Such a bibliographic train wreck is particularly grotesque given the superb examples of Aesthetic Movement book design in the exhibition, a genre in which the Rossettis were themselves pioneers. The Rossettis, romantic, radical or neither, were all about books, but thanks to bad decisions by Tate Publishing, this one is a dud.

THE ROSSETTIS
Tate Britain, 6 April-24 September 2023; Delaware Art Museum, 21 October 2023-28 January 2024

Reviews

Andrea Wolk Rager, *The Radical Vision of Edward Burne-Jones* (New Haven & London: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art and Yale University Press, 2022), 332 pp., 164 illustrations, £45, hbk, ISBN 9781913107277

Andrea Wolk Rager has written the most profound and insightful study of Burne-Jones's work to have been published for many years. Impeccably researched, persuasively written and beautifully illustrated, the book dispels many negative preconceptions about the nature of Burne-Jones's art and the imaginative impulses behind it. Although some readers might initially question the definition of the term 'Radical' in its title, the author makes a wholly convincing case for Burne-Jones's development of a counter-cultural critique just as potent, in its way, as that of his friend and lifelong collaborator William Morris.

Compared with Morris's many inspirational and trenchant utterances on socio-political, cultural and ecological issues, Burne-Jones's recorded views on these subjects, and his perceived antipathy to Morris's Socialist activism from the 1880s onwards, might seem to indicate a more circumspect and pessimistic attitude to the manifold

evils of Victorian capitalism. However, rather than any significant conflict in their philosophy, Rager emphasises the fundamental unity of their idealistic visions, attributing their differences in approach more to the undeniable contrast in their temperaments. In this she takes a somewhat divergent view from that of Fiona MacCarthy, Burne-Jones's most recent biographer, but it is one meticulously and comprehensively based on an analysis of the artist's work, rather than depending disproportionately on the evidence of his words, which could sometimes be cryptic or flippant, or simply designed to charm or bemuse his interlocutors.

The book's Introduction focusses on a discussion around Burne-Jones's 'now famous statement' about his aims as an artist:

> I mean by a picture a beautiful romantic dream of something that never was nor will be, in a light better than any light that ever shone, in a land no one can define or remember – only desire [….] & then I wake up …

Rager's central argument is that Burne-Jones's dream-utopianism, far from being an escapist fantasy, was a carefully constructed world of imagery that challenged the accepted norms of Victorian society and its whole politico-economic basis. Each of the book's subsequent six chapters and its Conclusion examines a particular theme or series of works of art that embodies Burne-Jones's radical concerns, beginning with the various depictions of Adam and Eve as archetypes of laboring humanity. The earliest of these is the monumental group that forms part of the 1857 trio of stained glass lancets designed for Bradfield College. For Rager, this is not humanity condemned to drudgery after the Fall (as it was invariably represented in Victorian religious art) but 'a new model of utopian salvation' characterised by 'satisfying physical labour, pleasurable handicraft, and intimate familiarity with nature'. Linking this with Burne-Jones's much later frontispiece design for the various editions of Morris's *A Dream of John Ball*, she argues that the artist developed a consistent iconography that presented a potent 'mandate' of egalitarianism to his nineteenth-century contemporaries. Some of the most interesting examples illustrated are from the 'Secret Book of Designs' (1885-98), in which the artist explored the Adam and Eve theme for projects such as his American Church mosaics in Rome.

Perhaps the most popular and reproduced painting by Burne-Jones, *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid*, is the subject of Rager's second chapter. Interestingly, its original impact at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1884 was rather more muted than when it was shown at the 1889 Paris Universal Exposition, where European critics contrasted the picture's 'apotheosis of poverty' with the exhibition's accumulation of capitalist industrial technology and all the gross inequalities and exploitation it symbolised: for

Robert de la Sizeranne, *Cophetua* was 'the revenge of art on life'. Rager charts the evolution of the picture's composition through Burne-Jones's sketchbooks and his creative re-invention of motifs from Italian painters such as Mantegna and Botticelli, and suggests the particular importance of the painting's intricate details as inspiration for the designer-craftworkers of the Arts & Crafts Movement. Whereas the social message is explicit and predominant in *Cophetua*, Burne-Jones was in other works necessarily constrained by the dictates of patronage, although he found ways of subverting conventional aesthetic hierarchies and of imposing his Ruskinian notion of the supremacy of decorative or applied art over mere easel-pictures. For the ambitious sequence of *Perseus* pictures (1875-98) commissioned by the politician Arthur Balfour, for example, the artist conceived the series as a complete chamber of mural images, partly painted in oils and partly in modelled gesso with gilt relief lettering. Rager somewhat eschews the more bizarre psycho-sexual interpretations of Burne-Jones's version of the Perseus legend and concentrates more on the formal and technical elements of the commission, for which the preliminary studies are very extensively illustrated. Her remarks on the symbolism of the concluding picture, *The Baleful Head*, ingeniously link it with themes of the 'return to prelapsarian harmony' investigated in her first chapter.

Burne-Jones's genius for re-imagining traditional Christian iconography is probably best exemplified by the mosaics that he designed between 1881 and 1894 for the American Episcopal Church in Rome, the subject of the book's fourth chapter. An epic achievement beset by logistical complications (and only partially completed), the mosaics are nonetheless one of the greatest triumphs of nineteenth-century artistic endeavour. In the design that was Burne-Jones's own favourite, Adam and Eve are shown standing before Christ, his arms outstretched 'as if he were on a cross' but shown as 'hovering in the tree of life' (in the artist's words). Rager identifies a sort of pantheistic undercurrent in this ostensibly Christian imagery, which 'reformulates' ideas of salvation and redemption while celebrating 'the concurrent resurgence of all organic life'. It is not hard to believe that Morris, who worked closely with Burne-Jones on the technical aspects of the commission, would have responded positively, notwithstanding his rejection of conventional religion, to his friend's overt and dynamic reconstruction of theological tropes. The American Church mosaics (which are here fully illustrated in detail) are, Rager asserts, Burne-Jones's visual counterpart of Ruskin's and Morris's writings, constituting 'a vision of ecological salvation in the language of Christian apocalypse and redemption'. Indeed, Rager sees this ecological dimension as a notable characteristic throughout Burne-Jones's oeuvre, highlighting the harmonious relationship between the fictive architecture and landscape depicted in paintings such as *The Mill* (1870-82).

An important theme throughout the book is Burne-Jones's distaste for the commodification of art and his constant desire to create work that would be seen by the widest possible public, not just by plutocratic picture-collectors. It was especially appropriate, therefore, that it was for the city of Birmingham – the artist's birthplace – that he created two masterpieces, featured in the penultimate chapter, in his later career. The huge *Star of Bethlehem* watercolour (1887-91) was painted for Birmingham's new public art gallery and was a re-working of a design first produced for tapestry. The four stained glass windows for St Philip's Cathedral, Birmingham, were made between 1885 and 1897 and are the culmination of his forty-year engagement in the craft. Rager discusses these major public works in the context of Burne-Jones's many other depictions of the Nativity, stressing especially the ways in which he articulated the role of the Magi as symbols of worldly power and wealth subordinated to simple humanity. Quoting the artist's conversation with the scholar Sebastian Evans, she highlights Burne-Jones's syncretic (or transcendent) theology, which acknowledged that belief in the vital 'possibility of betterment' could be translated into 'any religious language you please: Christian, Buddhist, Mahometan, or what not'.

The concluding chapter is a brief but penetrating essay on the meaning of Burne-Jones's painting *The Wheel of Fortune* (1875-83), which for Rager communicates 'the pervasive egalitarian message embedded' in all the artist's work. Whilst not defining it in such precise terms, Burne-Jones himself spoke of 'a force' impelling him to confront contemporaries, through visions of beauty, with a perpetual protest against their accepted values and aspirations. Andrea Wolk Rager's elegantly designed book cannot be too highly recommended, not only as a work of exemplary art history, but also as an invaluable statement of the perennial function of thoughtful creativity in motivating social change.

Peter Cormack

Florence Boos (ed.), *William Morris on Socialism: Uncollected Essays* (Edinburgh : Edinburgh University Press, 2023) 432 pp., £125.00 hbk, ISBN 9781474458085, £90 Ebook (epub), ISBN 97814744581O8, £125 Ebook (PDF), ISBN 9781474458092.

There have been several collections of Morris's essays over the years: some are in the *Collected Works* edited by May Morris and some in her two later volumes *William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist*. Other print anthologies include those by G. D. H. Cole, A. L. Morton, Eugene Le Mire, and most recently by Owen Holland. Moreover, many of Morris's lectures are freely available on line at the William Morris Internet Archive, part of the Marxist Internet Archive (MIA). A sceptic might wonder whether there

is really a need for another such volume. The short answer is 'yes'. This is a wonderful resource, both in terms of the essays themselves and the commentary by Florence Boos, who brought Morris's *Socialist Diary* into print forty years ago. And since anything Morris-related by Boos promises to be fascinating and the scholarship impeccable, I was excited to be invited to review it. My sense of anticipation was mixed with curiosity, first because I was unclear in what sense these essays were 'uncollected', and secondly because I wondered what they might add to our understanding of Morris's socialism.

Only one of the twenty-six items in the book is widely known and reproduced, 'How I Became a Socialist', included here because of its importance. Of the remainder, four are not available elsewhere and a further seven only digitally at the MIA. Three more were similarly available online only until included in Holland's 2020 collection. Nine others were excerpted by May Morris in *William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist*, but are incomplete both there and at the MIA. Sixteen of these pieces are therefore newly transcribed in full from the manuscript sources for the first time – itself no small task. Many, but not all, of the manuscripts are held in the British Library; others are scattered or lost. There is also a newspaper report of Morris's last known socialist lecture, 'One Socialist Party' from January 1896. These essays are, then, genuinely 'uncollected', in that they are either wholly unavailable elsewhere, unavailable in print, or available only in abridged form. And while the MIA is a wonderful resource which I have used extensively over the years, the experience of reading Morris's essays sequentially, with useful contextualisation, in a nicely-produced book (good paper, decent ink, adequate margins) is entirely different and much more pleasurable and gives a real sense of the continuity and changes in Morris's views over his last eighteen years. Boos also draws our attention to how much further work might be done in collecting Morris's writings on other topics.

The essays are arranged chronologically in three parts: the first, 1878-1881, covers Morris's transition from liberalism to socialism; the second the phase of Morris's most intense socialist activity from 1883 to 1889; the third the period from 1891 to 1896, including six pieces from the very end of Morris's life published in 1895 and 1896. Each essay is prefaced with a short introduction, often including the dates and places of each lecture's delivery. This locates Morris's lectures in his socialist campaigning and in the movement as a whole. 'Misery and the Way Out', for example, was delivered nine times by Morris from 1884 including to an audience of 3000 in Edinburgh, but Boos records that it was also read 'by others' in Bradford and Leeds in 1886. I was puzzled by this. What, I wondered, were they reading from? Several of Morris's lectures, such as 'Monopoly: or How Labour is Robbed' and 'Useful Work versus Useful Toil' (not reproduced here) were published as penny pamphlets, and

others appeared in journals such as *Commonweal*; Boos's headnotes imply that this one was not. A little digging revealed that Liverpool University Library houses the Glasier Papers, which include a handwritten copy of 'Misery and the Way Out' made by John Bruce Glasier, dated 1885, 'for use of Bradford branch of the Socialist League'. It would be interesting to explore whether the text corresponds precisely to Morris's manuscript, but in any case it is testament to Morris's generosity, Glasier's industry, and the status of Morris in the socialist movement at the time.

Besides the headnotes to each piece, Boos offers a substantial introduction to the whole, reflecting on consistency and change in Morris's views, and characterising the substance of Morris's socialism in terms of four themes: anti-imperialism; socialism as radical equality; commitment to peaceful revolution; and the need for socialist unity. Anti-imperialism is a starting point for Morris, initially in his speeches for the Eastern Question Association against war with Russia and extending to his consistent support for Irish Home Rule. (Morris's views on Ireland are another under-explored theme in the literature.) And as Boos writes, 'A few years later he would follow Marx in also viewing [colonial] wars as a necessary byproduct of capitalism's hunger for expanding markets' (p. 6).

Radical equality is, as Boos says, central to Morris's socialism – or to use the term Morris does, 'equality of condition'. Morris's terminology cuts through any nonsense about 'equality of opportunity' versus so-called 'equality of outcome', as socialism was later pilloried for pursuing uniformity. Morris asserts firmly that equality of condition would develop 'the great variety of capacity existing in the individuals of the race, and which socialism would foster as sedulously as the present system depresses it' ('Socialism', 1885, p.198).

The later pieces, written towards the end of Morris's life, are fascinating. Boos sees both Morris's commitment to nonviolence and his wish for socialist unity as consistent themes in his socialism; I read the later pieces as showing a distinct shift in his later years. In these late pieces his wish to avoid a cataclysm and to bring about social transformation by peaceful and electoral means is palpable, but I read him as unconvinced, hoping against hope. Certainly Morris is campaigning for the formation of one socialist party, having himself been participant in schisms in the 1880s. But also palpable is his fear that it will not be full socialism that will result, and merely an amelioration of the conditions of the working class. He fears that people will not want socialism enough. For, as he said in 'How I Became a Socialist' some years earlier, 'civilization has reduced the workman to such a skinny and pitiful existence, that he scarce knows how to frame a desire for any life much better than that which he now endures perforce' (p. 321).

There is of course room for differences of interpretation, or at least differences

of emphasis, in reading these essays. One issue where I differ from Boos is the influence of Marx. She argues that '[t]hough respectful of Marx … [Morris] also held to the conviction that socialism is fundamentally an ethic, not a deterministic science', continuing that 'he largely avoided specialist terms such as "surplus value," "commodity fetishism," and "exchange value" in his attempts to convey this ethic in jargon-free language to radical, reformist, and working-class audiences' (pp. 179-180). It is true that Morris tries always to express himself in terms accessible to ordinary people: that is one great strength of his political writing, although he does occasionally use the term 'surplus value' (e.g., 'Socialism', p. 200). This and other Marxist concepts such as labour power and ownership of the means of production are woven through his lectures. Nor is he wholly free from determinism: 'We Socialists … believe that we know why these classes exist and how they have grown into what they are, a growth inevitable indeed, but so far from being eternal that it will itself destroy itself and give place to something else, a society in which there will be no rich or poor', and 'all we have to do is to help [in] developing the obvious and conscious outcome of this progress' ('Socialism', 1885, pp. 186, 193.). For me, reading these essays in full underlines how thoroughly Morris understood and shared much of Marx's analysis of capitalism. But the long-standing attempt to claim Morris for 'ethical' rather than 'economic' socialism sets up a false opposition. I defy anyone to read the first volume of Marx's *Capital* without registering the moral outrage that informs it. Morris's approach to ethics and economy is both/and rather than either/or: 'We of the Socialist League … condemn not only the obvious evils of modern Society, but also the ethics and the economy of which they are the result' ('The Political Outlook', 1886, p. 208). The economic basis of socialism is equality of condition, the ethical basis the 'full recognition of man as a social being' ('Why I Am A Communist', p.328).

Of course, even the most scrupulous of readers can be guilty of 'confirmation bias', tempted to stress the aspects of Morris's argument that chime most closely with their own. I don't claim to be any exception to this. All the more reason for others to read this collection for themselves, and reflect on Morris's words here embedded in a commentary of meticulous scholarship by Florence Boos.

Ruth Levitas

Marcus Waithe, *The Work of Words: Literature, Craft, and the Labour of Mind in Britain, 1830–1940* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023), x + 307 pp., £90.00 hbk, ISBN 9781399512299.

Marcus Waithe's *The Work of Words* is an ambitious, important study of the mostly Victorian habit of linking writing and craft. That there is a meaningful connection

between writing and skilled manual work was a significant idea in the nineteenth century, and Waithe's book examines the many different forms it took, with a wide range of authors claiming that writing, mostly their own writing, has a parallel in the making of things, for an equally wide range of reasons. Waithe does not argue that there was a steady development in the use of the analogy, but he does find links in the way it was used despite differences in the writers' class and gender, in their politics, or in the specific time they wrote. Waithe, however, is less interested in representations of work in the texts he examines than in the idea of work that authors brought to the writing process, leading to a good deal of anxiety but also leading to much creativity as well. Though recognising that 'the authorial turn towards craft could be vocational, generational, class-inflected, or politically driven' (p. 5), Waithe makes the point that if craft was primarily understood as resisting alienation, treating writing as craft was a way middle-class writers could see themselves as transcending the economic matters of class or compensation. Indeed, Waithe looks at the way valuable work – that which produces valuable products and is said to lend dignity to the worker – could be a common cause between social groups and individuals with diametrically opposing ideologies. Waithe's book, however, does not dive deeply into the attitude of the working class towards the apotheosis of work; rather, it examines educated middle-class writers who for the most part were not punching a clock or even making a chair, but who could only express an equivalency to physical work in their writings. (The enthusiasm to underline a connection between writing and craft comes a lot more frequently from writers than from skilled labourers.)

William Morris, of course, is one of the most significant exceptions. But the women writers Waithe examines would also be driven by something other than 'feelings of loss, social guilt, and deracination' (p. 16), as male writers might experience. Waithe uses Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Olive Schreiner as examples of women who employ the 'physical turn', crossing easily between forms of work to outline a woman's potential role in both literary and social circles. Before his discussion of Morris, Waithe also examines Thomas Carlyle, Ford Madox Brown, William Gladstone, and John Ruskin, as well as Barrett Browning. Though these might be expected names in any discussion on the origins and importance of artisanal ideals in literary culture, the material Waithe focuses on, which includes letters and diaries, is frequently surprising, not the texts that might be expected in an argument about nineteenth-century writing and working. Instead of another examination of *Past and Present*, for example, Waithe focuses on a review Carlyle wrote on Ebenezer Elliott's *Corn Law Rhymes*, while also examining the way Carlyle turned to an image of his father to conceptualise a relationship between physical and intellectual work. Waithe suggests that Carlyle's drift towards authoritarianism, though clearly underway in his

earlier writings, corresponds with a fading faith in craft. Carlyle is also discussed in relation to Brown's "Work" (as is Brown's own written commentary on his painting), and Barrett Browning's "philosophy of determined literary action" (p. 63). That Carlyle's presence looms large is not surprising, though with Gladstone and Ruskin, Waithe notes continuing shifts in the idea of work ethics and in the way politicians and social theorists could create and exploit identification with manual labourers.

Morris, however, 'stands out … because far from merely performing craftsmanship, he earned his living by practising the applied arts' (p. 117). Waithe's treatment of Morris is original and exciting. Instead of imagining isolated interchanges between the writer and the physical worker, Morris 'posited a common fabric, pinned in his case to a closely theorised conception of the poet as all-round maker' (p. 118). Waithe focuses on Morris's preference for the idea of craft over the idea of inspiration when conceptualising the poet's work: Morris argues that poems require work, effort and knowledge, not a visiting muse. At stake is Morris's 'belief in the common basis of all crafts' (p. 121), an expansive idea of making things that Morris, Waithe shows, applies to society and governance, especially in Morris's later years after his turn to socialism. Morris's dedication to bookmaking, for example, extends beyond the words on the page to the presentation of the words on the page, to the book's cover, and all the way to an imagined society that rejects capitalist meanness. What Waithe rightly calls an 'integrated view of cultural and material production' is discussed as a governing principle, a way of thinking, even before Morris's leap into socialism, so that the habits of a true craftsperson could model for a working society (p. 122). Morris's ability to create and produce so many different items – from the wide variety of literary genres he attempted to the profusion of his 'lesser arts' – is not thus seen simply as a rejection of encroaching divisions of labour, of market cheapness, or even of the restrictions that specialisation engenders, but also as a deliberate attempt to exemplify the idea of the 'future integration of artistic, social and political power' (p. 124). The need to reconcile artistic and political practices with the devotion, ability, and pleasure encompassing physical labour, when labour is not alienating, lends a sense of purpose beyond the self even as it revitalises the worker. Waithe's understanding of Morris's comprehensiveness recognises that such might be the privilege of the middle class, as did Morris himself, but it nonetheless spells out the moral basis for his endeavours, whether in the arena of poetry, design, furniture, or politics.

The Work of Words continues to examine craft consciousness in literary work, from the analogy of the blacksmith in Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* – which Waithe reads as not just 'testing the relation between forge production and literary production' but also as responding to 'the Victorian romance of the metalworker' (p. 144) – to

the analogy of words as tools in Ruskin's *Fors Clavigera*. He concludes his discussion of nineteenth-century work by looking at Gerard Manley Hopkins and his insistence that an element of 'divine creation needs to be part of the picture' (p. 172). As readers experience throughout Waithe's book, the meanings attached to literary work and craft, though consistent in the insistence of a close relationship between them and the seriousness and sense of responsibility lent to art through the linking of the two, are substantially different from author to author as we move from the formation of the arts and crafts movement and then move away from it.

Still, most of Waithe's book is focused on 'this turn towards literary handicraft' (p. 139) in the nineteenth century. To conclude, he looks at the persistent language linking craft and literature in twentieth-century modernism, with discussions of Schreiner, the sculptor and typographer Eric Gill, and Ezra Pound. Though very different in their use of a craft/literature metaphor from earlier writers, Waithe focuses on the ways that work in the modernist period was used to construct or reform social relations, a more explicitly politicised use of the connection between craft and literature but one nonetheless reaching back to Carlyle. The last section of the book is a fascinating reflection on the idea of craft and art in the present day, asking what 'became of the argument that writing bears a relation to physical craftsmanship?' (p. 213). It is a significant question and well worth reflection as we seem to be entering the age of 'AI' generated or assisted writing, and what seems to be the complete erasure of the idea that writing is and ought to be a craft.

Rob Breton

Helen Wyld, *The Art of Tapestry* (London: Phillip Wilson Publishers, 2022), 256 pages, 253 illustrations, 232 in colour, £45.00 hbk, ISBN 9781781301128.

This book is a wolf in sheep's clothing. It is large format, on glossy paper, full of colour photographs, and published in association with the National Trust, leading to the mistaken view, at first glance, that it is another sumptuously illustrated, expensive and superficial coffee-table book. Nothing could be further from the truth. This is the first broad history of northern European tapestry since W. G. Thompson's *History of Tapestry* (3rd ed. 1973) and is informed by original research and scholarship.

The superficial prominence of the National Trust is justified, as they are owners of the largest collection of tapestries in the United Kingdom and, more importantly, have facilitated and supported Wyld's research programme. Wyld, however, does not restrict her material to National Trust collections. She ranges far wider, from Orkney to continental Europe, and the book culminates in William Morris's successful rebirth of tapestry making in the UK. Her emphasis on the development of tapestries is

enriched by consideration of ownership patterns and particularly the purposes of their commissioners, makers and subsequent purchasers.

This latter is essential in considering tapestries, as they differ from other artworks in the large capital required for buildings, looms, designs, and threads (including gold and silver) and in the many skilled workers required. In consequence it was in the Low Countries (modern southern Belgium and northern France) with their well-developed commercial life that large-scale, high-quality tapestry production was established by merchant financiers. They had the capital and the trading links to commission weavers to produce large tapestries that they then offered for sale. As the size of the industry grew (in Brussels of a population of 50,000, a quarter were dependent on it), the weavers themselves began also to play a speculative role with their standards set by their self-governing guilds.

Another source of capital was rulers and the aristocracy, the prime example being in France with Louis XIV who, with a combination of state protection, finance and patronage, reorganised the industry. Production was concentrated in three *manufactures royales* in Paris (Gobelins), Beauvais and Aubusson, their success dependent also on the entrepreneurial spirit of the weavers who were competing in an international market.

This competition required high production qualities but also improved designs. The development of design is often associated with Raphael in the sixteenth century, Rubens in the seventeenth and Boucher in the eighteenth, and these were important figures, but the situation was more complex, and Wyld draws out the important interaction between weavers and the painters who created the cartoons upon which the tapestry design was based, or whose paintings were copied, showing the importance of the synthesis they created from their own skills and that of the painters.

In the sixteenth century England was the beneficiary of immigration as a result of the religious wars in Flanders, but large scale production took off with the patronage of Charles I, who established the Mortlake workshop, spending almost as much on tapestries as on his famed collection of paintings. The English revolution interrupted this, but Charles II re-established patronage of Mortlake, though removing its monopoly, and it never recovered its earlier strength. Subsequently the most important centre become London's Soho district, but here the leaders were upholsterers, indicating the decline of tapestries in the UK from important works of art and powerful symbols to a decorative role.

Wyld's chapter 'Ritual and Presence' brings out the essential social roles tapestries played in court and church ritual and in projecting power and identity. Tapestries were often on the move, from residence to residence, decorating the streets in a welcome or hung in churches for holy days. They also formed the stage dressing for

coronations, in halls for the reception of visitors, in the state bedroom, anywhere where the projection of power and propaganda was necessary. Their importance and power is demonstrated by the sale of nearly all Charles the First's tapestries by Cromwell, turning them from royal symbols to commercial objects, and by the more determined French revolutionaries who burnt those of Louis XVI, retaining the precious metals. In both cases this was not an act of vandalism but part of dismantling the autocratic power of the monarch.

Some of that power came from the images that Wyld deals with through a chapter that takes up different themes – from the verdure, the pastoral and the hunt, to foreign encounters and imperial presentations. The descriptions of these are subtle and effective, culminating in a discussion of the death of the author that brings out the collective artistry of tapestries and the influence of the market on both subjects and styles.

The concluding chapter deals with the history of tapestries in nineteenth and twentieth century England, and it is this that most reflects the National Trust collections. William Morris makes an early appearance with his advocacy of the South Kensington Museum (now the V&A) acquiring in 1887 a fifteenth-century *War of Troy* tapestry for £1,200 that had been sold from the House of Lords in 1810, as part of a series of five, for £10. These figures demonstrate the low esteem that tapestries were held in at the beginning of the nineteenth century in the UK and their re-emergence as valuable commodities that the rich used to rewrite history in the latter half of the century.

Production in England recommenced with Prince Leopold, Queen Victoria's youngest son, who was stimulated by the display of European tapestries at the Great Exhibition of 1851. He supported and patronised the Royal Windsor Tapestry Manufactory, established in 1878. It was founded on the view that there was a role for tapestries in modern interiors as exemplified by their popularity amongst the French bourgeoisie, but they also chimed with the fashionable gothic style being adopted in the United Kingdom. Its tapestries were unashamedly English nationalistic – subjects included *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and the *History of King Arthur* – but it soon struggled and ceased by 1879.

In 1881 Morris established at Merton Abbey a workshop with four looms. Typically, Morris had taught himself weaving from an old French technical manual. Here he demonstrated his commitment to personal design and creation; at the same time he collaborated with colleagues including Edward Burne-Jones, Philip Webb and John Henry Dearle. He sought to resurrect the purity of Gothic art, criticising the Gobelins for mimicking paintings. In contrast, the designs made by Morris & Co. were overwhelmingly simple figures on a rich verdure. In contrast to Linda Parry

(*William Morris Textiles*, 2013), who considers the tapestries Morris saw as a boy in the Queen Elizabeth Hunting Lodge, Epping Forest, influential in this respect, Wylde traces the influence to Morris's 1853-54 trips to Paris, where he saw *La Vie Seigneuriale* in the newly opened Abbey (Musée) Cluny. Although he knew they dated from the sixteenth century, he considered them to be in the spirit of the fourteenth century. He believed that was the high point of medieval art, and Wyld considers that this youthful observation informed his work.

This work was commercially successful also, being sold widely in the United Kingdom and abroad, particularly within the US and the British colonies. Wyld perceptively integrates Morris's ideas, designs and production together with their very rich businessmen purchasers to tease out how his principles were not simply historicist, writing that 'his work was a radical response to the modern world, not simply a revival of the old'. Writing in 1912, the American tapestry scholar Helen Churchill Candee was perceptive enough to describe the best of Morris's tapestries as 'most enchantingly medieval and most modernly perfect' (p. 203).

Wyld concludes by reviewing the social role of tapestries, mainly in England and the USA, making clear the influence of Morris's ideas and advocacy across new collections and displays, public and private. She finishes by considering modernism and tapestry through Graham Sutherland's *Christ in Glory in Tetramorph*, commissioned for Coventry Cathedral, setting it in a wider European post-war context. Its legacy she perceives is powerful and widespread in the numerous works commissioned from modern artists for public buildings – a tradition, she notes, continued by Dovecot Studio, Edinburgh, whose original weavers, Gordon Berry and John Glassbrook, came from Morris & Co. at Merton Abbey in 1912, in which manner Morris's influence continues into our time.

This is a book not just for tapestry enthusiasts or Morrisians but for any reader who enjoys both a grand sweep of history and a careful situation of art within the commerce and politics of its times. It is also beautifully written and is highly recommended.

Ian Wall

In Memoriam: Linda Parry, MBE, FSA (1945-2023)

Linda Parry was the foremost international authority on William Morris as a designer and maker. Over five decades she built up an unsurpassed knowledge and understanding of his designs, manufacturing techniques and global influence. Her research was forensic and precise – avoiding at all times Morris's hatred of vagueness – yet always informed by her empathy and deep admiration for her subject: 'It is not the patterns, the colours and the textures of his furnishings that appeal to me most but the struggling artisan that designed and made them. This is one of Morris's greatest legacies for today… Ambitions, however small, are seldom achieved easily but they are definitely worth the struggle.'

After taking an art foundation course in the mid-1960s, Linda trained as a textile designer at Liverpool College of Art, followed by post-graduate study at the Central School of Art and Design in London, where she wrote on the tapestries of Morris and Burne-Jones. Her first museum posts were at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (Trainee Curator and Assistant Curator), followed two years later by a move to the V&A's Textiles and Dress department in 1971. As her close colleague Christopher Wilk recalls, 'Linda began as an entry level curatorial assistant but over the course of the next 34 years she was promoted through each and every position in

Linda Parry. Courtesy of Don Parry.

the V&A's Textiles and Dress department, eventually becoming Chief Curator… As a department head Linda was valued not only for her expertise, but also for her intelligence, her calmness in what could be a demanding work environment…, and, above all, for her sensitive management of those around her including, in particular, her nurturing of younger colleagues.'

When Linda began her research on Morris and his circle in the 1970s, there was much to be discovered. The V&A's 1952 exhibition, 'Victorian and Edwardian Decorative Art', curated by the charismatic Peter Floud, sparked interest amongst a new generation of art historians and collectors in a period that had become deeply unfashionable. Many of the finest examples of Morris & Co.'s work remained in

private hands and Floud and his colleagues began the painstaking work of tracking down individual commissions. Twenty years later, Linda took up the baton, contacting the descendants of Morris & Co. clients, interviewing former employees of the firm or members of their families, and trawling carefully through public and private archives across the globe. The dispersal and destruction of many of Morris & Co.'s records made this task especially challenging. Norman Kelvin's *Collected Letters* were yet to be published and it's a testament to Linda's tenacity as a researcher that she uncovered so much without access to most of the resources that Morris scholars today rely on. Her familiarity with Victorian and Edwardian periodicals, particularly trade and art magazines, informed much of her work, and she had an extraordinary visual memory. Her instincts, when it came to placing the date, design and production of the firm's textiles were usually confirmed when further documentary evidence came to light.

An important early influence at the V&A was her senior colleague Barbara Morris (1918-2009), who had worked alongside Floud, conducted her own research into Morris's textiles and published on his long and fruitful relationship with the South Kensington Museum, as the V&A was then known. Writing Barbara's obituary for this journal in 2010, Linda recalled, 'I first met Barbara as a young curator joining the V&A's Textile Department staff during the early 1970s and, gingerly stepping in to study an area she had made all her own, I was dazzled by her eminence and presence. She proved a courteous and generous colleague, instructively critical at times, but also appreciative and generous with her praise. It was a great privilege to have known and worked with her.' This tribute could equally be spoken of Linda herself, as all those who had the good fortune to know her will attest.

In the 1980s Linda published *William Morris Textiles* (1983, expanded and revised in 2013) and *Textiles of the Arts and Crafts Movement* (1988, reprinted 2005). These built her reputation and remain unrivalled today. With clear direct prose, Linda not only explained the techniques and materials that Morris took such pains to master, but used these to elucidate his whole design philosophy. From his first experiments with embroidery to the glorious tapestries of his final years, we gain a greater understanding of his life's work and personality. The chapters on the firm's decorative schemes and retail trade are particularly instructive, and the gazetteer of printed and woven textiles indispensable. Publications on Morris's art and design proliferate, but very few are informed by such close and sensitive study of the works themselves. With her own background in textile design, Linda grasped Morris's design genius – his ability to see patterns in mass and not line – and she shared his love of colour, materials and texture. Curators are privileged to be able to handle the works that most can only see behind glass. Through her writing, Linda helped us all better

appreciate the tactile qualities of Morris's art and how his furnishings were intended to be used and displayed within the home.

In 1996, on the centenary of Morris's death, Linda mounted the largest and most comprehensive exhibition ever devoted to his life and work with over 500 exhibits. There were more than 218,000 visitors in just under four months, an unusually high number for a V&A show in the 1990s, and it subsequently toured to Japan. Together with the catalogue, edited by Linda and including contributions from 17 experts, the exhibition was a watershed moment in Morris studies, inspiring a new wave of scholarship. The ambitious scope of the project – presenting Morris in all his polymathic glory – was Linda's vision. Its success owed much to the positive relationships and good will that she had built with scholars, collectors, dealers and colleagues over the previous two and a half decades.

Two major projects occupied her last decade at the V&A. Between 1998 and 2001, Linda was the senior expert on the nineteenth-century galleries, part of the creation of the museum's new British Galleries. As Christopher Wilk recalls, 'It's difficult to explain just how controversial this project was, in that it removed authority from the individual curatorial departments and handed it to the group of curators working on the new galleries… again Linda's personality and approach to work made her a perfect contributor, as she carried authority among her colleagues and was so widely respected by them.'

Soon afterwards Linda had the idea for an exhibition on the International Arts and Crafts Movement. Co-curated with her colleague Karen Livingstone, the scope was typically ambitious, considering developments in Britain, Europe, America and Japan. The show opened at the V&A in 2005 and then travelled to Indianapolis, San Francisco, Tokyo and Kyoto. The catalogue, also co-edited with Karen, was shortlisted for the Berger Prize for Art History.

Linda retired from the V&A in 2005 and the following year was awarded an MBE for 'services to art'. She remained active in her field, working on the new expanded edition of *William Morris Textiles* (2013) and in 2016 contributed a masterful and meticulously researched essay on the pattern designs of C. F. A. Voysey to the V&A's monograph edited by Livingstone. Other publications in this period included *Arts and Crafts Rugs for Craftsman Interiors* (2010), a handsome volume on the Crab Tree Farm Collection in Illinois.

Throughout her career Linda was incredibly generous in sharing her expertise with others. She served as Honorary Curator of Kelmscott Manor (1992-2005), advised the National Trust during the acquisition of Red House, was a Patron of the Friends of Red House and a Trustee of Emery Walker's House at 7 Hammersmith Terrace. She served multiple terms as a William Morris Society trustee and starting

in 2002 served a five-year term as the Society's President. She was also a longtime member of the *Journal of William Morris Studies*' editorial board. Advising on curatorial matters, including interpretation and conservation, Linda also played a vital role in helping all these institutions develop their collections, supporting many new acquisitions through lending the weight of her expert opinion. She was also a board member of the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture (MoDA) in London and the Textile Museum in Toronto, Canada.

Staff at the William Morris Gallery in Walthamstow enjoyed a close friendship with Linda over many decades, and it was here that she decided to deposit her personal research archive in 2017 for all to consult. This immense archive reveals not only the thoroughness of her research approach – Linda shared Morris's voracious appetite for work and determination to leave no stone unturned – but also her extraordinary kindness. Every letter of enquiry, be it from a prominent collector or aspiring student, was answered with care and full consideration. She was never protective of her findings, frequently allowing others to take copies of her notes or borrow files containing years of her own research, and she took genuine pleasure in the successes of those she mentored. What mattered most to Linda was the development of her subject, and she was open, collaborative and scrupulously fair in the pursuit of knowledge.

Linda had a mischievous, dry sense of humour and was great fun to work with. You often knew what she was thinking from a single look or twinkle of the eye. Her pragmatic, no-nonsense approach would no doubt have found favour with Morris. Together with her husband Don, her cherished and life-long partner, she offered warm and generous hospitality to the many Morris devotees who visited their beautiful home in Kent. Linda commanded the respect and admiration of all who knew her and will be greatly missed. Her contribution to Morris studies will be felt for decades to come.

Anna Mason

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Guidelines for Contributors

Contributions to the *Journal* are welcomed on all subjects relating to Willam Morris. Articles may concern Morris's own life and work, or those of his circle – as directly influenced by, or influencing, Morris himself – or the wider implications of Morris's ideas in any field, including design, literature, printing, political thought and environmentalism.

1. Contributions should be in English. They should be *c.* 5,000 words in length, although shorter and longer pieces will also be considered.
2. Articles, which should be in Word, can be sent as an email attachment to: journal@williammorrissociety.org
3. In formatting the article, please follow *JWMS* house style by consulting a recent issue of the *Journal*. Back issues are available online at: https://morrissociety.org/publications/journal-of-william-morris-studies/archive
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6. Please include a short biographical note of no more than fifty words in a separate attachment.

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