After the death of William Morris, when papers and journals were full of appreciations of his artistic and political achievements, Eiríkr Magnússon’s wife Sigríður wrote (in slightly odd English) a lecture which she hoped would help to balance the picture of Morris as a public figure. This unpublished lecture, entitled “William Morris’s Home and Social Life”, is based on her experience of Morris as both host and guest, and gives a totally uncritical account of his relationships with family, friends and employees, including a highly idealised portrait of his relationship with Janey as an unblemished romance from first to last. Sigríður is on safer ground when she writes of Morris’s first visit to Iceland in 1871, when she accompanied him and her husband on the ship and as far as the first stage of their journey out of Reykjavik, and her account accords well with Morris’s own in the *Icelandic Journals*. At this point Sigríður digresses for several pages on the subject of “the head guide, which my husband had selected,” who “pleased Morris beyond measure. ‘Jón’ was his name—a most magnificent specimen.”¹² She describes his height—“6 feet 3 or 4”, his “shoulders broad as if made to move mountains,” his “colossal head, covered with a quantity of luxuriant fair hair” and his “large fine face and blue eyes”. No wonder that, according to Sigríður, Morris thought Jón “a veritable Viking to behold”.

Although she undoubtedly romanticizes Jón, whom Morris describes only as “broad-faced, stout-made and blue-eyed” (*Icelandic Journals* p. 187), Sigríður has support for her description from other sources. Matthias Jochumsson, in his article “Vilhjálmur Morris 1834–1896” in *Eimreidin* 29 (1923), recalls Morris referring to the guide as “Jón the Strong” and comparing him in stature to “his kinsman Grettir”; Páll E. Ólason, in the standard Icelandic biographical dictionary *Íslenzkar Eviskrár* III p. 203, comments that Jón “was for a long time a very handsome man,” and a surviving photograph of Jón in his later years confirms this. Ólason’s short entry on Jón also mentions that he “was a well-informed man with a good memory”, or as Morris has it “a man deep in old lore.” (*Icelandic Journals* p. 48). Sigríður too comments on Jón’s intellectual ability and aspirations:

He was one of the many Icelanders born with thirst for knowledge, but living on a solitary farm, in a remote part of the country, far from any opportunity of education except the art of reading and religious knowledge...he had to content himself with the scanty resources found on the farm.

In some respects, however, Jón’s situation was better than that of his contemporaries among English agricultural workers. Despite the non-existence of primary schools and extreme shortage of books, literacy in Iceland in the 1830s was almost universal, and Jón was brought up, though only as the son of a servant, in one of the wealthiest and most cultured homes in his district. The farmer, Sæmundur Ógmundsson, was the son, grandson and brother of Lutheran priests and would probably have studied
for the priesthood himself if the family funds had not run out. (He was the youngest son, and his father is described by Ólason [V p. 260] as “always extremely poor”.) As a farmer, however, Sæmundur thrrove, moving twice to better farms, until he owned not only Eyvindarholt undir Eyjafjöllum (in a parish where most were only tenant-farmers) but also Thorsmörk and an area beyond the Markarfljót river where he pastured sheep. Like many farmers of the time, he also owned at least a share in a fishing boat which his farmhands manned. His household at Eyvindarholt in 1828, when Jón was born there, numbered eight farmhands and servants in addition to the family; both indoor and outdoor servants at this time always lived in, sharing rooms and often beds with members of the employing family.

Parish priests in Iceland in the 19th century were required to keep two kinds of record: a ministerialbók recording births, deaths, confirmations, marriages and movements into and out of the parish, and an annual manntal or census, listing the members of every household in the parish by name, age, status, literacy and ownership of books, although few clergy bothered to enter more than “some” or “enough” in the last column. The parish priest at Stóridalur undir Eyjafjöllum was very conscientious, if slightly eccentric in the matter of spelling and imprecise regarding ages, but the manntal itself is unfortunately in a poor state of preservation, water-stained, faded and torn, so that entries are often illegible or even missing. In 1819, the year after Sæmundur and his household moved into the district, the census shows that he and his family owned at least twenty books, including a Bible, New Testament, hymnbooks, two Psalters, catechisms, almanacs and books of sermons. It is probable that some secular books were owned which the priest was not concerned to record, since Sigridur says that Jón studied saga literature “from his earliest childhood”, but even this comparatively large stock of books, supposing that Jón had access to all of them, will not have been much to slake a “thirst for knowledge”.

Jón’s position was complicated and his frustration increased by the ambiguity of his status. He was introduced to Morris by Eiríkr Magnússon as “a connection of his wife’s, though he told me afterwards he was a bastard.” (Icelandic Journals p. 48) Jón’s mother, Ingír Ólín Jónsdóttir, was the youngest of three daughters of a well-to-do farmer at Stóra-Mörk undir Eyjafjöllum who scandalized the neighbourhood in 1820 by marrying a girl little older than his daughters within eight months of his first wife’s death. Ingír and her sisters promptly left home, although this meant going into service at other farms, and Stóra-Mörk eventually ended up in the hands of their stepmother’s second husband, so that Jón had no inheritance to hope for from his mother’s family. Ingír worked from 1822 to 1835 at Eyvindarholt and bore her son there in 1828, and Jón was convinced that Sæmundur Ógmundsson was his father.

This is not implausible. In 1822 Sæmundur was forty-six; his wife Gudrún Jónsdóttir was four years older and had borne no children since 1815. If a married man of Sæmundur’s standing (he is always given the title “Signor” when mentioned in the church registers) were to father a bastard on one of his servants, it was fairly standard practice to arrange for a bachelor farmhand to take the responsibility, perhaps encouraged by help towards setting up as a farmer himself. It may be noted that in 1821 another servant-girl at Eyvindarholt bore a daughter who was attributed to a farmhand on a neighbouring farm, although he is not recorded as having acknowledged her.
Ingiridur could certainly have been Sæmundur’s mistress; on the other hand Jón’s official father, Jón Eyjólfsson, worked as a farmhand at Eyvindarholt from 1818 to 1827, having come with Sæmundur from his previous farm, and when he left to set up as tenant-farmer at Vetleifsholt (a considerable distance away), Ingiridur went with him, which strongly suggests that they were intending to marry. The ministerialbók unfortunately gives no date more precise than the year for movements into and out of the parish, and it appears from other entries (such as that in 1818 for the arrival of Sæmundur and his household) that the priest entered moves retrospectively, largely in order of importance rather than of actual date. Thus although Jón Eyjólfsson and Ingiridur are numbers 1 and 2 of 21 leaving the parish in 1827, they may not have been the first to move. There were two dates on which most moves were made: 14 May was the standard day for servants and farmhands to change employment, whereas farmers moved in the first week of June. Jón Jónsson was born 5 February 1828 (not December as printed in Olason III p. 203) and therefore if Ingiridur moved on 14 May 1827 she might not have known she was pregnant, or indeed might not yet have conceived. If however the move was in June she probably did know; there would be no reason to suppose anything other than that she was moving to set up house with her lover, had she not left Jón Eyjólfsson within months or even weeks and returned to Eyvindarholt to bear her child. She did not stay long enough to be registered as entering the parish of Oddi, and is listed as no. 16 of 26 moving into the Stóridalur parish in 1827. Perhaps the pair simply discovered incompatibilities when they tried to live as a couple; perhaps Ingiridur attempted to deceive Jón into marrying her and he refused when he realised that she was pregnant; or perhaps she broke off the wedding plans when she found she was carrying Sæmundur’s child. Nevertheless when her son was born Ingiridur named Jón Eyjólfsson as the father and the ministerialbók records that Jón acknowledged paternity. Sæmundur, incidentally, was one of the godparents.

Until 1835 Ingiridur brought her son up in Sæmundur’s household, but in that year Jón Eyjólfsson, who had clearly remained on good terms with Sæmundur, moved back into the district with his wife Ólóf Gisladóttir to rent part of Eyvindarholt from him, sharing the farm with Sigurdur Sæmundsson, since Sæmundur himself was retiring from active farming. Faced with this embarrassing situation Ingiridur left Eyvindarholt for a neighbouring farm, leaving young Jón behind, but in 1836 she took her son with her when she left the parish for good, going first to Múlakot in Fljótsdalshlíð (Morris’s “Fleetlithe”). Very shortly after, however, Jón was sent back alone to Eyvindarholt while Ingiridur moved on, too quickly to leave a trace in the Fljótsdalshlíð parish records. Possibly she had met Gísli Pétursson, the man she was soon to marry, and found her twelve years’ seniority handicap enough without that of a bastard child, or she may simply have found Jón a hindrance to employment. He would be expensive to keep out of a servant’s wages and still too young to be hired on his own account, although as an 8-year-old he would be expected to work, tending the milking ewes in summer and combing wool etc in winter. Whatever her motives, Ingiridur decisively rid herself of the encumbrance, and Jón never lived with his mother again.

It was not however to his official father that Ingiridur sent her son: the parish census for 1836 shows Jón registered in Sæmundur’s household as “foster-child”. It is impossible to say at what point Jón began to think of himself as the natural son of the impressive Sæmundur, who had been awarded the Danish order of the Dannebrog,
rather than of the nonentity Jón Eyjólfsón, but his desire to be truly part of Sæmundur's family must have been increased by the visits home of the brilliant student son Tómas, who had not only studied at the Latin School at Bessastadir but sailed to Copenhagen for four years at University, where he became one of the leaders of the "Fjölnismenn", a group of intellectuals working for Icelandic independence. He also read Theology there, although he spent two years travelling round Europe before he came back to Iceland to take Holy Orders. Jon may have dreamed that Sæmundur, if he outlived his wife, would acknowledge him and pay for his education too; but in January 1837 Sæmundur was caught out in a blizzard and died of the results of exposure, leaving the farm to his younger son Sigurdur and a total estate valued at 8000rd, a small fortune, none of which came to Jón. Only after this does Jón appear in the manntal as Jón Eyjólfsón's son and a member of his household.

In 1841 the ministerialbók shows "Jón Jónss. a Eyvindrholti" among the boys confirmed, described as "intelligent and well behaved" and as having "learned almost all the Catechism, is a good reader". The only oddity about the entry is that, as his sponsor, Jón Eyjólfsón (by a slip of the pen "Jón Jónss.".) is not described as his father; instead he and his wife Ólóf Gisladóttir are given as "fosterparents or employers", and there is an added note that Ingírud Jónsdóttir is now a farmer's wife at Heiði (the far side of the county) but that Jón was born "Sta Feb. 1828 á Eyvhti". This looks as if doubts about Jón's paternity were now surfacing publicly.

After confirmation Jon would be reckoned an adult - by his own account (Fiskigöngur Reykjavík 1902) he was fourteen when he began to row regularly during the fishing season off the south-west coast - and the civil census in both 1845 and 1850 registers him as "farmhand" at Eyvindarholt, not as anyone's relative. (The parish manntal is missing from 1843 to 1862.) In both these records Jón is working not for Jón Eyjólfsón but for Sighvatur Árnason, who had taken over the other side of the farm after the early death of Sigurdur Sæmundsson in 1841. Sigírur Magnússon says in her lecture that "the dream of his life had been to go to the Latin School at Reykjavík", but with no financial support from either of his possible fathers or from his mother it took Jón until 1852 to earn enough money to realise even his substitute ambition "to go to Reykjavík and learn some trade." Clearly Jón had himself to pay the cost of apprenticeship for three years to Torfi Steinsen (or Steinsson), saddlemaker of Adalstræti 7 in Reykjavík, where he lived from 1852-54. According to Sigírur, saddle-making was far from being Jón's primary interest:

He knew, being in Reykjavík, books were within reach, and there he could have the opportunity of coming in contact with the college students and other educated men, from whom he could always pick up something. His leisure hours were entirely spent in studying English, French and German. His historical knowledge was perfectly marvellous, and many of the college students heartily wished that their memory might serve them as well as Jón's during their examinations, for he never forgot a date or a deed in history worth remembering.

It was presumably at this time that Sigírur first met Jón, since her father was famous for keeping open house for students and the like in Reykjavík.

The parish census in Reykjavík shows that Jón attempted to make his living there after he qualified in saddlery, being registered as "saddlemaker" at various addresses between 1855 and 1860. Presumably the competition proved too strong, and he decided to settle instead in a country district. Why he chose Fljótshlíð is not clear,
although it was an unusually densely populated area by Icelandic standards. He had visited it briefly at the age of eight, and it had been the parish of Tómas Sæmundsson, but he, like his brother, had died in 1841, shortly before his thirty-fourth birthday. On the other hand Ingibjörg, Sæmundur’s youngest daughter, was married to the farmer at Barkarstadir (Morris’s “Borkstead”) in Fljótshlíð, and it was to this farm that Jón Jónsson moved in 1861, although he did not settle there. For 1862-4 the parish census shows Jón as living at the nearby farm of Eyvindarmúli, and then from 1865 he is established for the next thirty-five years at Hlidarendakot (“Lithend-cot”), where he entertained William Morris in 1871 and 1873.

Although Jón remained on the same farm for so many years, he never belonged there in the sense usual in that society. Despite the growth of Reykjavik and the development of fishing villages, Icelandic society in the 19th and into the 20th century was still governed by the medieval law of vistbóndin, which required everyone in the country to be resident on a farm or croft, either as farmer (or his family) or in service – hence the annual parish census to see that the rules were being observed. Only a small minority of craftsmen or people with some other source of income could get permission to be husmenn or lausamenn, lodging at a specified farm but independent of the farmer, generally to the point of catering for themselves. (This probably explains the awkwardness of Jón’s “dinner-party” in 1873, when he embarrassed Morris by not eating with his guests. Jón had not been expecting the horse-couper, and there was not enough of the first course to go round four. Icelandic Journals p. 199) This was always a precarious position financially, but Jon Jónsson was clearly proud of his independence and is always registered as lausamadur, although as Sigridur says in her lecture, “he followed his trade the best he could, but really only to the extent of making a scanty living.”

It is evident that his craft alone could not keep Jón, even though he lived frugally and never married. He seems to have used the shepherding skills of his youth to help round up sheep from the mountains in the autumn (Icelandic Journals pp. 55 and 205), and to have put his strength and experience to good use in rowing almost every year during the fishing season in return for a share of the catch (Fiskigongur Reykjavík 1902). In addition, of course, he became a guide, not only for foreign tourists, who paid well but were all too rare, but also for officials who needed to cross unfamiliar tracts of country. Jón seems to have enjoyed exploring the uninhabitable interior of Iceland and was famous for his knowledge of remote areas, especially Thorsmörk, “this wild place being a sort of pet enthusiasm of his” (Icelandic Journals p. 55).

Hlidarendakot, though little more than a croft, somehow supported two interrelated households under the same roof. Jón was always associated with that of Ólafur Pálsson, who was at first able to offer him some privacy. William Morris describes Jón’s style of living when they first met in 1871:

It is a very small room he inhabits with a bed in one corner, and a bookcase in the other: there are plenty of books in the case, Icelandic, German, Danish, and English. (p. 50)

In 1873, however, Morris found Jón reduced to sharing the badstofa or common sleeping and living room with the rest of the household:

He lodges upstairs now in a queer little den marked off by a principal [rafter] unboarded from the bad stofa in which latter were two women and two lads. (p. 199)
This was because in 1872 the Hlidarendakot farmer and his wife both died and been succeeded by a younger couple with children, which had necessitated a general reallocation of space in the house.

The books which William Morris described in Jón’s tiny room, and which Sigridur says “he really treasured beyond anything,” were a remarkable collection for an upcountry saddler to have acquired out of such a limited income. Morris specifically mentions a Shakespeare and Chambers’ Miscellany (p. 50) as well as “an 18th century Icelandic poet, rather rare I believe”, which Jón gave to him (p. 58), and in addition to his foreign and modern Icelandic books Jón collected the classics of medieval Icelandic literature. Morris describes him “reading some Sturlunga to me” (p. 199), and Sigridur comments that he “spoke the most refined classical Icelandic, the result of his diligent studies of the ‘Saga’ and ‘Edda’ literature.” Jón was not, however, only a reader, but an avid listener to and gifted transmitter of oral tales. The poet Thorsteinn Erlingsson, who grew up at Hlidarendakot and seems to have regarded Jón as an unofficial foster-father,4 celebrates in a well-known poem the happy evenings of storytelling in the croft, and Jón is cited as a source both in some collections of folk-tales and in at least one work of local history.5

It was however in connection with these folk-tales that people first became aware of an eccentricity in Jón which led eventually to his being generally regarded as mad. There was nothing at all odd in the 19th century about believing in the literal truth of saga narratives: this was an article of faith with many scholars of the time. A surprising number of Icelanders even today also believes in elves. But Jón came to believe literally in all the folk-tales, and although this probably made him a better story-teller, it also made him in the end a figure of fun. It is not clear when this faith first showed itself as an obsession, but when crossing the central desert in 1873 Morris learned from him that hidden among the glaciers are valleys .. that are green and snowless while the lower lying sand is covered with snow. Jón firmly believes in outlaws living among these still – for which the others chaffed him much.(p. 220)

In 1899 this belief culminated in Jón’s application for a government grant to enable him to track down the outlaws.6

A letter Jón wrote towards the end of his life, apparently in all seriousness, shows him not only insisting on the outlaws (he claims that two of them had come in disguise in the autumn of 1904, like Grettir, to take on all comers at a wrestling match), but also that a recent outlaw wedding had been attended by elves, trolls, two dwarves – “I’ve seen two pieces of their craftsmanship and can show you them when you come south” – and a 36-foot high mountain giant who could remember Sigurd Fafnisbane and Brynhild.7 A second letter of similar date, this time to a complete stranger, accuses the outlaws of various magical practices and recommends making allies of wizards who can get past their defences by gandreid (flying broomstick or similar device).8

The high point of Jón’s life was undoubtedly his travels with William Morris, which he never tired of recounting. “Jón fairly worshipped the ground Morris trod on,” says Sigridur, and several of Jón’s letters to Morris (British Library Add. MS 45345) urge him to come back to Iceland. Others are straightforward begging letters: Jón’s strength evidently began to fail before he was sixty, to the extent that he could no longer undertake long journeys in the interior9 and the occasional presents of money from Morris became increasingly important in his battle to remain independent. The
records show that he was able to keep at least nominal independence at Hlidarendakot until 1900, after which he suddenly moved to Reykjavik, perhaps at least partly to avoid the threat of being declared a pauper. There was no old age pension at this time, of course, and he had few other resources: Morris was dead, Magnússon and his wife (who in any case do not seem to have felt any responsibility for Jón) were still living in Cambridge, and Thorsteinn Erlingsson was both in straitened circumstances and living far from his old home, from 1896 to 1900 in the Eastfirths and 1901–2 in the Westfirths, editing local papers.

Somehow Jón picked up a living in Reykjavik for several years, although still regarding himself as belonging at Hlidarendakot – in the civil census of 1. 11. 1901 he is recorded as “a visitor from Fljótshlíð” at Skólavöðustíg 11*, the guest of apprentice saddler Árni Arnason, whom Jón presumably helped with his work. During this time Jón published two eight-page pamphlets on the state of the fishing grounds, but not with any hope of gain, since he was forced to get them printed at his own cost, having failed to persuade two journal editors to publish them (Fiskimál 1900). It may indeed have been in search of a publisher that he went to Reykjavik in 1900. The pamphlets are mainly logical and vigorous arguments of the need to preserve declining fish-stocks by banning trawlers close inshore and the laying of offshore nets in the Faxaflói breeding grounds. Jón proposes a fishing-limit of “two Danish miles” (15 km) and a gunboat to enforce it; unfortunately he seems to have been so far ahead of his time that many regarded his proposals as proof that he had gone mad. Certainly there are touches of eccentricity in the pamphlets, such as an insistence on counting catches in traditional “long hundreds” of 120, not in “the posh foreign hundreds of the new generation”, but Jón’s basic argument against cut-throat competition is persuasive and may perhaps show the influence of William Morris’s ideas:

So poor a nation as we are cannot afford to have every man’s hand against his fellow, rather we all need to work together; but with our present way of thinking we are in the worst possible position. Man has ceased to be the child of Nature, when people look only to their own gain and not to that of others. (Fiskigöngur 1902)

On 23 October 1902 Jón wrote from Reykjavik another discreet begging letter in his best English:

Dear Mistress Morris,

I have sent to you a poem as a thank for your great kindness and benevolence towards me, and for reminding that I am still living, although infirm from my old age, and I hope that you shall have me in your benevolent mind as before.

With the most heartly thankfulness
Jón Jónsson
Hlidarendakoti

(This letter and the accompanying poem were found by Prof. Gary L. Aho of Amherst, Massachusetts in British Library Add. MS 45349 and brought to me in Iceland for help in translating the poem. We both read the letter as meaning that Jón had composed the poem himself, but it was identified by Anna Brynjólfsdóttir of Gilsbakki as the work of Thorsteinn Erlingsson, published with minor variations in the second edition of Thyrnar, Reykjavik 1905, as “To Mrs Morris in London, from Old Jón the saddlemaker from Lithend-cot”. It was normal practice at this time to commission
occasional poems, and Thorsteinn, who had moved to Reykjavik in 1902, was no
doubt happy to write the poem for his old friend without payment. The following
translation is my own.)

To Mrs Janne Morris
I would I had flowers to strew in your way;
now none spreads them there more sparingly than I,
but may fortune reward you better –
for if your foreign generosity did not make amends
for my native land’s coldness and my shortened days,
I should have an unhappy winter.
It was like an unclouded brightness in my mind and on my path,
that happy time when I enjoyed Morris’s company –
I knew him to be the noblest of men;
and then it was as if I knew friendship for the first time,
and that is the most precious thing I have lost in my life –
but nobody has a more treasured memory.
And still it is as if his faithfulness remembered me,
and an image of his nobility comes from you,
from princely and generous hands.
It warms in frost, it comforts in sorrow,
that, although there seems these days to be little faithfulness here,
it is still alive in other countries.
Your humanity and nobility had that warmth
which my native land and acquaintances could not provide
when evening came and the day grew cold.
Yes, deeply affectionate thanks! Your generosity and faithfulness
are the only shelter among the dwellings of men
in the path of a foreign pauper.
Although the words are Thorsteinn Erlingsson’s, he knew his “foster-father” so well
that we may be sure that the thoughts are Jón’s.

Jón was still in Reykjavik in 1905 when he wrote his strange account of the outlaw’s
wedding (the primary purpose of this letter to the son of Ingibjörg Sæmundsdottir
being to beg some leather he could make into shoes), but a postscript shows that he
feels the authorities are closing in on him:

I don’t like the way the Fljótshlíð parish is pursuing me. I don’t owe it a sou, so it
has no business at all with me. If I start humbling myself to you lot, I’ll turn into
a helpless wretch, but if I stay here, better times will come.

True to his fears, later in 1905 Jón was officially declared a pauper and transported
willy-nilly to Fljótshlíð as his home parish. Iceland, as William Morris had noted,
had no workhouses, orphanages or the like; “the paupers or lunatics are distributed
among the bonders” (Icelandic Journals p. 56) as a kind of tax on the better-off farms,
and were moved frequently from place to place, only the luckiest finding anything
which could be called a home. According to the ministeralbók, “Jón Jónsson saddler,
parish pauper, 76” was dumped initially at Grjóta, but by 30 November 1905 when
the parish census was drawn up he was living at Arngeirsstadir. In 1906 he is missing
from the records, perhaps because he was in process of being moved again, but in
November 1907 “Jón Jónsson (saddler), on the parish” was at Nédrithverá. In 1908
he was at Barkarstadir, where at least he had friends and believed he had kin, and there he died 1 December 1908, recorded as “parish pauper, 79” though actually 80 years old.

Jón Jónsson's life-story thus seems largely a sad one of poverty, frustration and rejection, across which William Morris blazed in unforgettable glory, but he had at least his share in demonstrating to Morris “that the most grinding poverty is a trifling evil compared with the inequality of classes”

J6n J6nsson's life-story thus seems largely a sad one of poverty, frustration and rejection, across which William Morris blazed in unforgettable glory, but he had at least his share in demonstrating to Morris “that the most grinding poverty is a trifling evil compared with the inequality of classes”\textsuperscript{10}, and also in the education of a fine poet. While Thorsteinn Erlingsson was studying law in Copenhagen in 1884, he sent home a poem to Jón:

To Jón Saddlesmith at Lithend-cot

Greetings to you, friend, I am thinking of you, though I am fickle and forgetful, because you best opened my childhood eyes and first showed me the world.

You told me about the centuries hallowed by antiquity which the mind rejoices to study, you taught me then about distant farmlands and the mountains which the evening sun reddens.

For you had looked on almost every part of our land with its foaming sea-girt coasts, and chosen your path across the terrible Sand with friends from distant countries.

I remember how the majestic sight gladdened you, and the saga-light of vanished times.

It gave you great pleasure, and you surely recall it, Jon, to ride about the hills with Morris.

And when the spring sun shines on Valahnukur and casts a red gleam on the woods, and travellers walk in your footsteps and survey the peaceful trees and rest dreaming against the heart of our land and gaze at the cool river-torrent, they are bound also to remember the man who woke Thorsmörk from its trance.

With this paper you now get a greeting from me, it will find you if you are still alive.

Oh, greet the ancient Lithe then and the blue sky above it!

Although times have changed and now tie you down and pleasant meetings are forbidden us, yet you have this paper to remind you of me, as a remembrance of times past.
In this article and notes the Icelandic letters ð and ð have been transliterated as th and d respectively.

1 In Reykjavik Landsbókasafn ms 2191 4to I was directed to this lecture by Richard L. Harris: “William Morris, Eiríkur Magnússon and Iceland: A Survey of Unpublished Correspondence.” Victorian Poetry 13 nos. 3 & 4, 1975, pp. 119–30.

2 Sigridur’s memory plays her false: Jón Jónsson was head guide on the 1873 trip, but in 1871 he was employed only briefly, as guide to the Thorsmörk area.

3 The Latin School had moved from Bessastadir to Reykjavik in 1846.

4 They could claim a kind of relationship, since Thórsteinn was the grandson of Íngíridur’s stepmother.


8 Grima VIII 1933, 36–40.

9 Prof. Gary Aho has brought to my attention a reference in Rider Haggard’s autobiography where he says that, on William Morris’s recommendation, he employed not Jón but a certain Thorgrimr Gudmundsson as guide for his trip to Iceland in 1888. (H. Rider Haggard: The Days of my Life 2 vols, London 1926, I, 285.) This was despite the fact that Haggard delivered to Jón a gift of money from Morris, as Prof. Aho found from letters to Morris from Haggard in British Library Add. MS 45345.