Peter Paul Marshall: The Forgotten Member of the Morris Firm

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Of the original members of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co., none has escaped the attention of scholars to the extent of Peter Paul Marshall. Because his only recorded contributions to the Firm are a dozen or so designs for stained glass which he made in the early 1860s, and because he had no contact with Morris or the Firm after it was reorganised under Morris's sole leadership in 1875, this lack of attention is understandable. Yet all too often Marshall has been dismissed as a useless member of the Firm, a dead weight that the others were condemned to drag along. In whatever light he is portrayed, Marshall is seldom given more than a few sentences in those books about Morris in which he appears; to my knowledge there is not a reliable account of his life in print. This essay aims to fill this lacuna, and to shed some light on Marshall's involvement with the Firm as well.

Peter Paul Marshall was born in Edinburgh in 1830, and educated at the High School there. His father, William Marshall, was an artist, and is said to have painted a series of pictures illustrating the life of Lord Nelson. The young Peter Paul Marshall undoubtedly learned a great deal about art at home. His artistic talents must have recommended him to Thomas Grainger, a well-known civil engineer who was among the earliest Scottish railway builders. In Grainger's service, Marshall developed his draughtsmanship skills, producing drawings of buildings for the Edinburgh and Northern Railroad. He evidently showed the potential to be a solid engineer. James Newlands, a civil engineer who was practising as an architect in the 1840s, took him on as an assistant in 1847. In that same year the two of them set out for Liverpool, where Newlands had just been appointed Civil Engineer to the Borough.

Marshall's years in Liverpool were very productive. In the service of the Water Works Committee he played a prominent part in the mid-century water supply improvements that were carried out in the city. He worked with Newlands on the Rivington Pike project, which commenced around 1850. Under this ambitious scheme, a reservoir was created near Rivington, thirty-six miles from Liverpool, and the water was piped via a cast iron main.

While Marshall was undoubtedly engrossed in his official duties, he did find the time to exercise his artistic talents in a more imaginative fashion. He exhibited two paintings at the Liverpool Academy – one in 1852 and another in 1854. Marshall must have received encouragement from his boss, James Newlands, who seems to have been quite an enthusiastic amateur painter himself. Newlands exhibited a total of twenty works at the Royal Scottish Academy from 1840 onwards.

Marshall's artistic interests are probably what brought him into contact with John Miller, a prominent local art collector who was an important early patron of the Pre-Raphaelites and their followers. Local artists often gathered at Miller's house on
Saturday evenings to discuss their craft, and to comment on each other's work. One can easily imagine Marshall at ease among the company, pursuing his interest in painting in order to take his mind off his work. Considering the fact that Marshall married Augusta Buchanan Miller, John's daughter, on 16 March 1857, it seems that he must have called at the Miller residence with some regularity.

At the time of his marriage Marshall was occupying rooms in Bloomsbury Square, London. Late in 1857, he was hired as the surveyor to the Tottenham Local Board of Health. From the start he demonstrated great ability in carrying out his official duties, which included the maintenance of roads and footpaths, the inspection of dilapidated houses, and the improvement and upkeep of water supply and sewage facilities. The terms of his employment also allowed him to conduct his own private practice. In 1859, for example, he was commissioned to draw up plans for additions to the Tottenham National School, and in 1868 he designed a new pulpit for Tottenham Parish Church.

It seems clear that his position in Tottenham kept him very busy indeed. He did manage to take an active and prominent place in Tottenham social life, however. In April 1858 he delivered a lecture at a meeting of the Tottenham Literary Institute on 'The English People, their Painting and Architecture'. Marshall also participated in Tottenham's Saturday Evening Entertainments, which were held for the purpose of edifying the working class residents of the locality. On several occasions he regaled the audience with Scottish songs and ballads. His performances were well received, owing in part to the high level of interest in music in Tottenham at the time.

Georgiana Burne-Jones recorded her impressions of a visit to the Marshall's home in 1862 which further illustrates his interest in the songs of his native Scotland:

It must have been in April of this year [1862] that we paid a Saturday to Monday visit to the Marshalls at Tottenham. A cheery, reckless household it was, with big Peter Paul ('Poll' was the sound his little wife gave to the name she called him) at the head of it: I remember a small cup of gunpowder being given to the boys to keep them quiet in the morning. Marshall sang the Scotch songs for which we always asked, and besides 'Clerk Saunders' we got from him the beautiful tunes of 'Sir Patrick Spens' and 'Busk ye, busk ye, my bonny, bonny bride!' In the late 1850s tensions between France and England were running high. Fear of a possible French invasion led in 1859 to the launching of the Volunteer movement in England. Early in 1860, Marshall was among the first to join Tottenham's 33rd Middlesex Rifle Volunteers. He gave a great deal of time and effort to the cause. His artistic ability was put to use in designing the buttons and badges that adorned the uniforms. More importantly, he designed and oversaw the construction of the 33rd's firing range and of various buildings erected for the use of the corps. His enthusiastic participation in the Volunteer movement attracted the attention of the local poets. In one colourful piece entitled 'The Lads of the Village', Sally Gunn wrote:

I think I never saw, though perhaps I may be partial,
A more milintary (sic) looking man than our surveyor, Mr. Marshall,
And very martial, likewise, we all thought that he appear'd
With that darling pair of whiskers, and that lovely flowing beard.

As the above paragraphs have shown, Marshall enjoyed great professional and social
success in Tottenham. The early 1860s were a very busy time in his life and he was already well known in what we may loosely term the 'Pre-Raphaelite circle' in London. It is likely that Marshall got to know Ford Madox Brown through John Miller when Brown exhibited in Liverpool in the 1850s. After Marshall settled in London, Brown probably introduced him around. He was well enough acquainted with the Pre-Raphaelite circle to be nominated for membership of the Hogarth Club in 1858.19

We must now pause to consider the momentous events in the year 1861. Little needs to be said here about the importance of that year for William Morris and for the future of decorative arts in Britain. Marshall must have been among those who called frequently at Red House. The Firm grew out of the collective effort to provide furnishings suitable to Morris's simple tastes.

Marshall's exact role in the formation of the Firm is not entirely clear. According to William Michael Rossetti, the idea for the Firm originated with Marshall.20 While it would be rash to single out Marshall as the visionary mastermind behind the Firm's genesis, it would likewise be a mistake to ignore these words entirely. Marshall was one of the older men of the circle, and had, as the preceding pages of this essay testify, a great deal more worldly experience than many of the others, including Morris. W. R. Lethaby suggests that Marshall's name was included in the title of the company because he came forward with the idea for the Firm. He also points out – correctly – that he possessed some business aptitude.21 His is a much fairer portrayal of Marshall than Mackail's. In his Life of William Morris, Mackail writes the following of Marshall:

He contributed several cartoons for glass, and a few designs for furniture and church decoration, but otherwise took little part in the work of the firm. His inclusion was, even at the moment, rather unaccountable. There had been talk of asking others to join, and the matter seems to have been hurried through at the end owing to Morris's excitement and eagerness to get to work.22

This view is illogical for several reasons. Had Marshall been allowed to join the Firm simply on a whim, his name would not have been included in the Firm's title. Furthermore, Mackail fails to give Marshall's considerable artistic talents the credit they deserve. Unfortunately, few writers since Mackail have questioned his assessment of Marshall, which goes a long way towards explaining why so little is known about him today.

One modern scholar, incidentally the first to examine Marshall's work for the Firm, has spoken quite favourably about Marshall's abilities. In The Stained Glass of William Morris and his Circle, A. C. Sewter asserts that: 'the best of his cartoons testify to a high degree of natural talent'.23 Sewter's perception agrees fully with that of William Michael Rossetti, who knew Marshall and was familiar with his paintings.

Mr. Peter Paul Marshall, a Scotchman, was ... an engineer by profession, and an amateur painter by liking. In this latter capacity he showed much more than average talent, producing several clever landscapes and an effective little picture of Stephenson making early experiments leading on to the locomotive steam engine.24 Elsewhere William Rossetti describes Marshall as 'a capable painter who might, under differing circumstances, have passed out of the amateur into the professional stage.
of work'.

As further proof of his abilities, it is worth noting here that Marshall exhibited a painting titled 'On the Grass' at the Royal Academy Exhibition of 1859.

Marshall had more to offer the Firm than his artistic talent. We know from D. G. Rossetti's letters that Marshall acted, at least on occasion, as a middleman between his artist friends and various picture buyers. In one letter, from 1863, Rossetti invited Ford Madox Brown and Marshall to dinner at his Cheyne Walk residence and advised, 'If you can come by daylight, so much the better; as I have two pictures by Scott which I want to show Marshall with an eye to Goss'. In another of Rossetti's letters to Brown, we learn that in 1866 Marshall worked to sell a painting by the struggling W. S. Burton.

Harvey and Press, in their outstanding business biography of Morris, recognise the value of Rossetti's art-world connections to the Firm. I would like to suggest that Marshall was of similar importance. His contacts in Tottenham and within the engineering profession would surely have served the young Firm well. In addition, his relationship with his father-in-law, John Miller, must certainly have been helpful to the Firm. Another important contact was Colonel Gillum, Marshall's brother-in-law and fellow Tottenhamite, and an important patron of the Firm in the 1860s. Through Gillum the Firm recruited several youths from the Boys Home in Euston Road to work in Red Lion Square.

A piece of environmental legislation that made its way through Parliament in the summer of 1868 put a great deal of pressure on the Tottenham Local Board of Health. The Lea Conservancy Act called for drastic changes in Tottenham's sewage disposal procedures. Marshall came out strongly in favour of the creation of a sewage farm in Tottenham. In the Report to the Tottenham Local Board of Health, on the Disposal of the Sewage of their District, prepared by Marshall on behalf of the Sewage Committee of the TLBH and published in May 1870, Marshall outlined his belief that the answer to Tottenham's sewage problem lay in irrigation and the use of treated sewage as a fertilizer on a farm specially built to receive it.

Not surprisingly, irrigation met with fairly strong opposition in Tottenham, just as it did in many other places in Britain at the time. Local property owners were particularly wary of a course of action that might drive people out of the parish and diminish the value of their land-holdings. Public opinion in Tottenham began to harden against the proposed sewage farm. As a result, the Local Board of Health became increasingly hostile to Marshall and those who shared his views. In September 1872, Mr Childs, a newly elected member of the TLBH, voiced criticism of Marshall's work and requested that he resign. Marshall had the support of the majority of the Board at this time, and he survived the attack. An outbreak of typhoid fever in Tottenham in March 1873 eroded this support. Marshall provided a convenient scapegoat for the Board, which had come under intense criticism. Following a row with one of the Board members in May 1873, Marshall resigned under pressure from the Board.

It was at this stage in Marshall's life, no doubt a very trying time to him, that events brought him back into contact with the Firm. I have uncovered nothing to suggest that Marshall obtained work as an engineer immediately after losing his position in Tottenham. Instead, there is considerable evidence that he sought to fall back on his artistic talents. In 1874 and 1875 he exhibited paintings at the Liverpool Autumn Exhibition. He exhibited two works at the Royal Hibernian Academy of Arts in 1875, and one more in 1876. In 1877, he exhibited a portrait of Miss Bessie Currie,
evidently a relative of the successful Victorian shipowner, Sir Donald Currie, at the Royal Academy.\textsuperscript{19}

In addition to his renewed efforts at exhibiting, Marshall sought once more to assume an active role in the Firm. He went so far as to have a letterhead printed up with the heading ‘Morris, Marshall & Co.’, and seems to have been planning to open a branch of the Firm in Fenchurch Street, in London’s East End.\textsuperscript{40} Morris presented a sample of this letterhead at the important meeting of the Firm which took place on 23 October 1874. The members ‘resolved that this meeting disapproves of Mr. P. P. Marshall’s proceedings in this matter and requests him to carry the business no further’.\textsuperscript{41} It was at this meeting that the members also resolved to dissolve the partnership and appoint assessors to determine the value of each share of the business. In the end, Marshall, Rossetti and Brown were each paid £1000 compensation when the Firm was officially reconstituted under Morris’s sole proprietorship in March 1875. In the light of his attempt to remain in the Firm as Morris’s partner, however, it is likely that Marshall was not entirely satisfied by the outcome. He seems to have been genuinely interested in working with Morris and pursuing an artistic career.

It is not inconceivable, in light of several references in the correspondence of the period, that Marshall had a drinking problem.\textsuperscript{42} It is possible, too, that Harvey and Press are correct in suggesting that Marshall’s drinking problem was the reason why Morris and the other members of the Firm rebelled against Marshall’s proposal to open a city branch of the Firm.\textsuperscript{43} Since Marshall fades from view completely after the Firm’s reorganisation under Morris’s sole control, students of the Firm can easily come to the false conclusion that 1874 marked the fall of Peter Paul Marshall into obscurity, even oblivion. The loss of his job at Tottenham, it must be kept in mind, was due more to village politics than it was to any lack of ability. In fact, Marshall’s later years at Tottenham actually saw him in the vanguard of sewage treatment. He encouraged experiments in sewage treatment techniques by allowing other engineers and scientists to perform tests at the Tottenham sewage works.

Marshall was an engineer in the golden age of engineers, a man who pitted himself against the insidious problems that had plagued and frustrated city-dwellers for centuries. Men like Marshall were the heroes of what Asa Briggs has termed the ‘Age of Improvement’. His skills and experience were in demand, so he was not fated to remain without a situation for long. In 1877, he was chosen from an initial field of 60 qualified applicants to become the City Engineer of Norwich.\textsuperscript{44} It is not likely, in light of this fact, that Marshall was an alcoholic. If he ever did have a drinking problem, he was clearly able to put it behind him.

In accepting the position in Norwich he put behind him as well any aspirations of a new artistic career that he may have had. Marshall’s move to Norwich signalled the end of his contact with the Pre-Raphaelite circle in London. It gave him the opportunity once again to shine as an engineer. Once more his professional activities earned him the praise and respect of the local paper. Marshall supervised many important projects during his time in office.\textsuperscript{45} He was responsible for the construction of the Foundry Bridge\textsuperscript{46} (over which you must pass when heading from the train station to the city centre) and the Isolation Hospital which was opened in 1893.\textsuperscript{47} He initiated the overhaul of Norwich’s sewerage system in 1887, and supervised work on the project until his retirement.\textsuperscript{48}
Marshall seems to have continued to enjoy painting, as well. One of his five sons, J. Miller Marshall (apparently named after his grandfather, John Miller, the Liverpool merchant and Pre-Raphaelite patron), took an active role in founding the Norwich Art Circle. He organised the life classes at the Art Circle in the 1880s and served as its Vice President from 1888 to 1893. P. P. Marshall was also a member of the Circle, and he sent two paintings to the first exhibition in 1885.

In 1893, Marshall’s health began to fail. He resigned from his position as City Engineer in June, and in December he and his son auctioned off the contents of their studios. The catalogue from the exhibition testifies to the breadth of Marshall’s artistic interests and talents. He exhibited more than 100 works, many of which were landscapes depicting various Norfolk scenes. There were also several portraits, including one of himself, as well as some subject pictures. Unfortunately, only one of the works in the catalogue is known to exist today.

The reports of the sale which appear in the local papers are noteworthy for their generous (though somewhat guarded) praise of Marshall’s artistic talents. They recall the sentiments of William Michael Rossetti quoted above:

Many of his contributions – more especially those of his younger painting days – show a freshness and vigour of style which, with the developing influence of after years, might have brought out work of a very high order indeed. Almost the first thought in the visitor’s mind, when making the tour of the exhibition, must have been that here, in these early efforts was the promise of a great artist; but to engineering Mr. Marshall’s energies were given, and art, although it did not altogether lose its devotee, was the poorer for the loss of work which would undoubtedly have brought with it distinction.

Marshall, together with his wife and son, left Norwich for the more hospitable climes of Teignmouth in 1894. During his retirement, Marshall continued to pursue his artistic interests. According to his obituary he designed a stained glass window for a church in Havre which was erected by an Exeter firm.

On 16 February 1900, weakened by a severe leg infection, P. P. Marshall died at the age of 69. His tombstone, like many others from the same period, is quite worn and difficult to read, yet the inscription can still be made out:

IN MEMORIAM
P. P. MARSHALL
FOR MANY YEARS
CITY ENGINEER OF NORWICH
BORN IN EDINBURGH 1830
DIED AT TEIGNMOUTH 1900
"THE DAY IS AYE FAIR
IN THE LAND O' THE LEAL"

This is an appropriate monument to a man who dedicated his life to the profession of engineering. It is up to us, however, as students of the Firm and admirers of the priceless legacy of William Morris, to remember Peter Paul Marshall’s contribution to Victorian art and design, however slight it may seem to us now.
This essay is dedicated to the memory of Dr David W. Hadley, who made it possible.

2 For information on Marshall’s early career, I have relied heavily on his obituary notices in the following publications: Eastern Daily Press, 19 February 1900, and the Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette, 24 February 1900.
5 See the file on P. P. Marshall in the archives of the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, containing notes prepared by Mary Bennett. Special thanks to Joseph Sharples for allowing me to consult it. Some Liverpool exhibition catalogues are on file at the National Art Library in London.
7 The Liverpool School of Painters, op. cit., pp. 44–5.
9 ibid.
10 The exact date when Marshall was hired is unknown. The Tottenham and Edmonton Advertiser (TEA), January 1858, refers to him as the ‘Board’s new surveyor.’ Prior issues contain only train and coach timetables.
11 The plans for these editions are at the Greater London Record Office (Acc. 1341/57/2). See also TEA, October 1859.
12 TEA, June 1868; March 1869.
13 ibid., May 1858.
14 ibid., April 1862.
16 TEA, May 1858.
17 ibid., Jan 1861; August 1862; March 1865.
18 ibid., July 1861.
24 Some Reminiscences, op. cit., p. 222. According to the Walker Art Gallery file on Marshall, the George Stephenson painting was exhibited at the London Academy in 1860.
26 The painting was exhibited under the pseudonym ‘Peter Paul’. See Algernon Graves,


28. ibid., p. 595.


32. There is a copy of the report in the library of the Institution of Civil Engineers, Great George Street, London, (Tracts, octavo, vol. 194). I would like to thank Mary Murphy for her kind assistance while I was there.

33. TEA, July 1870; August 1870.

34. ibid., October 1872.

35. ibid., May 1873.

36. ibid., June 1873; August 1873. The reports in the TEA are somewhat confusing. Marshall appears to have left his post in July.


41. ibid.


44. Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette (hereafter NCNG), 23 June 1877 (supplement).

45. Obituary notices (see note 3 above).

46. NCNG, 26 August 1879; 17 January 1888.

47. ibid., 23 March 1893.

48. ibid., 26 September 1887.


51. NCNG, 16 July 1893.

52. There is a copy of the exhibition catalogue in the Norwich Castle Museum. I would like to thank Norma Watt for bringing it to my attention, and for assisting me with my Norwich researches.

53. The painting, A Letter from Home, is in a private collection. In the same collection
is a pair of oils, *Scenes of Clerical Life*, which are reproduced in the Christie's (London), sale catalogue of Friday, 25 October 1991. There are also a few of Marshall's cartoons for stained glass in the collection of Mr. Sanford Berger, who kindly provided me with copies.

54 *Norwich Mercury*, 6 December 1893.
55 Obituary notices (see note 3 above).
56 Copy of P. P. Marshall's Death Certificate obtained from the GRO.