

# Reviews

Gavin Stamp (ed.), *Personal and Professional Recollections by Sir George Gilbert Scott*, (Stamford: Paul Watkins 1995), xx + 563 pp., 23 black-and-white plates. ISBN 1 871615 26 7. £35.00.

Simon Reynolds, *William Blake Richmond. An Artist's Life 1842–1921*, (Norwich: Michael Russell 1995), xxvi + 386 pp., 33 colour plates, 118 black-and-white illustrations. ISBN 0 85955 2144. £38.00.

These two books cast a good deal of light on the world in which Morris lived and worked. George Gilbert Scott is known to us as one of Morris's principal opponents on the issue of church restoration, whose plans for Tewkesbury Abbey provoked the letter to *The Athenaeum* that led to the establishment of the SPAB in March 1877, and who was referred to by Morris, in a letter to Georgiana Burne-Jones in May 1889 (eleven years after his death), as 'the (happily) dead dog'. In an earlier letter to Thomas Wardle in April 1887, Morris wrote of Scott: 'As for the old bird, all I can say is that he is convicted out of his own mouth of having made an enormous fortune by doing what he knows to be wrong – he is a damned old thief in short.' Norman Kelvin, in his edition of *The Collected Letters*, relates this to Scott's having given way to pressure from Palmerston to change his plans for the new Foreign Office from a Gothic to a Classical structure. This was certainly often held against Scott by enthusiasts for the Gothic, but it seems to me more likely, having read the *Recollections*, that what Morris had in mind was the divergence between Scott's theories and his practice over restoration – which was, after all, the subject of the letter.

At all events, the efforts of Gavin Stamp and Paul Watkins now make it possible for us to read Scott's side of the case. The book is large and, appropriately enough, as complicated as any piece of architectural restoration. Scott died in March 1878; the book as originally published in 1879 consisted of an edited version of Scott's autobiographical manuscript with a brief Preface by his eldest son, the editor, an Introduction by John Burgeon, the Dean of Chichester, and three Appendices, 'A' concerning Scott's death and funeral in Westminster Abbey, 'B' consisting of the funeral sermon by Dean Stanley, and 'C' – extending to 38 pages – dealing with restoration and containing the text of Scott's reply to J. J. Stevenson's paper to the Institute of British Architects in May 1877 on 'Architectural Restoration: Its Principles and Practice', and a letter to *Macmillan's Magazine* replying to an article by W. J. Loftie of the SPAB entitled 'Thorough Restoration' in the issue of June 1877.

To this material, Gavin Stamp has added a Preface and an Introduction, and three new Appendices, consisting respectively of: 1. restored readings from Scott's manuscript; 2. an appreciation of his father by G. G. Scott Junior; and 3. very useful notes, arranged alphabetically, covering all the names in the book. There is also a new index, making the book a great deal easier to use. It yields four references to Morris and one note on Morris and Co. The earliest of these is in Ch. V and concerns stained glass; written in 1864, it can refer, as the son's tactful footnote tells us, 'only to the very earliest works of Messrs. Morris and Co.' Scott takes a pessimistic view of what he calls 'this most unhappy art', arguing that the only choice available is between 'reasonably good art united with erroneous principles' and 'sound principles

wedded to grotesque art'. Of this 'grotesqueness of error', caused by 'the absurd rage for antiquated drawing', Clayton and Bell are given as one example; and Scott finds it even more vexatious 'when a society of painters of the highest class, having been formed with the express purpose of uniting high art with true principles, are found producing works yet still more strange than any of their predecessors'. This is clear evidence of how radical early Morris glass appeared to a conventional sensibility at the time. The references to Morris himself occur in Ch. IX, entitled 'The Anti-Restoration Movement' and dated October 1877, seven months after the founding of the SPAB. In it Scott agrees that the anti-restorationists have a very strong case: 'The country has been, and continues to be, actually devastated with destruction under the name of restoration.' But he claims that his own position has always been 'on the side of conservatism', so that it is 'rather hard to bear that I should be made the butt of an extreme party, who wish to make me out to be the ring-leader of destructiveness.' To Scott, 'the extreme views of Mr. Ruskin against any form of restoration' are simply impracticable, and he claims to be keeping a middle course between that unpracticability and the attitude of those like Sir Edmund Beckett who think it appropriate 'to deal with old buildings as the medieval builders themselves did; in point of fact, to treat them as we should do any modern building, doing to them just what is right in our own eyes.' (Beckett appears in the 'Notes' under Denison, and is best known as Baron Grimthorpe; Stamp describes 'this deeply unpleasant man' as 'horologist, churchman, amateur architect, controversialist, bully and despoiler of St. Alban's Abbey', as well as 'tormentor' of Scott).

Scott sees himself as the reasonable man caught between two extremes. He prints a letter to Sir Edmund Lechmere respecting 'an attack on me by Mr. Morris' in *The Athenaeum*. Lechmere was chairman of the Tewkesbury Abbey Restoration Committee and had defended Scott's plans in a letter to the same journal on 31st March 1877. Scott's letter to him states that he is aware of the attacks on him in *The Athenaeum*, but does not read the journal, knowing that he does not deserve its criticism. He even says that he is 'willing to be sacrificed by being made the victim in a cause I have so intensely at heart'. In Scott's neat formulation, 'restorations or reparations are *necessary*, but I think it wholesome that those who carry them out should live in constant danger.' Morris certainly contributed what he could to that desirable endangerment. The other references to Morris are in the article in appendix 'C', published in *Macmillan's Magazine* in July 1877. Here Scott defends himself against Morris's attack, in a letter to *The Times*, printed on 4th June 1877, on behalf of the SPAB, on his plan to restore the old screen in Canterbury Cathedral. Scott defends his plan vigorously, arguing that it is based on the excitement that he felt on his 'discovery (or rediscovery) of De Estria's [early fourteenth-century] pulpitum, hidden behind [Archbishop] Tenison's stalls' of 1702, which he had accordingly decided to expose and restore – not a reconstruction, because the screen was 'almost entire'. This is not a matter of restoration, but rather 'the exposure to view of an actually existent and ancient work'. Finally, Scott replies to Morris's expressed fear that restoration will lead to total confusion and falsification by quoting from his own 1862 paper to the Institute of Architects attacking crude restoration as likely to leave a 'treasury of art-history reduced to an unmeaning blank by the hand of the restorer', and expresses his sympathy with the new preservation movement when its principles are not carried too far.

This of course raises the central problem: how far is too far in such cases? And the

question of Scott's architectural practice cannot be resolved by reference to his theoretical principles, which appear in these pages as more enlightened than one might have expected. Only a detailed account of Scott's practice can show how far he wandered from the principles expressed. That Scott himself was aware of a divergence is shown at a number of points in the book, when he expresses regret for moments of carelessness or inattention to detail, particularly in his early years. Gavin Stamp's Introduction reminds us of the scale of Scott's practice; he came to employ no fewer than thirty assistants and draughtsmen in his office in Spring Gardens in the 1870s. (A striking contrast with Philip Webb). This meant, in Stamp's words, that 'he did too much' to maintain consistent quality. Stamp quotes as 'the fairest modern critical assessment of Scott' H. S. Goodhart Rendell in 1953, who was not enthusiastic; but then goes on, rather inconsistently, to suggest that Goodhart-Rendell had an anti-High Victorian prejudice. At all events, Stamp's preference is for secular works like the Albert Memorial (which we should be able to see again one day) and the Midland Hotel at St. Pancras – and indeed the Foreign Office. Here, he thinks, Scott was 'less constrained by precedent than [in] his too numerous ecclesiastical commissions'. The Introduction is informative about Scott's relationship to other architects and sympathetic to Scott as a family man. On the issue of restoration, Stamp seems supportive of Scott. He describes Ch. VIII, in which Scott recounts his work on numerous cathedrals, as providing 'valuable historical evidence in an area of practice which remains controversial and is too often little understood'. He goes on: 'Indeed, Scott's work in cathedrals may be regarded as the most impressive and valuable part of his achievement; it was certainly that to which he seems to have devoted most care and attention.' Perhaps this is rather bland. What is certainly true is that this reissue of Scott's *Recollections* provides valuable material for anyone interested in Victorian architectural practices, and in particular in the matter of the restoration of ancient buildings.

Unlike Scott, William Blake Richmond, the late-Victorian artist, was a friendly acquaintance of William Morris, of whom Simon Reynolds, with the aid of his publishers, Michael Russell, has produced an extremely attractive and informative account. Drawing on various family papers and memoirs, Reynolds tells the story clearly and interestingly, and adds a useful appendix listing Richmond's exhibited works. The son of the artist George Richmond, friend and admirer of William Blake, after whom he was named, William Blake Richmond became a successful painter himself, specialising in portraits (his sitters including Gladstone, Florence Nightingale, Bismarck, Darwin, the Howards, Browning, Andrew Lang, R. L. Stevenson, Bishop Westcott, Holman Hunt, Arthur Evans, and many fashionable ladies, as well as Morris) and in classical scenes; he was knighted in 1897. Unfortunately for his reputation, he was involved in the 1890s in the scheme for the redecoration of St. Paul's Cathedral, for which his later mosaics were severely criticised in the press and in the art world. After this, he became increasingly defensive and reactionary in his opinions about art, an example for D. S. MacColl and Roger Fry of the out-of-touch older generation. Perhaps Reynolds is right in thinking that we can now look dispassionately at 'the successes and failures of this largely forgotten Victorian Olympian', though we may have problems with the claim made in the final clause, 'surely a master in an age of master painters' (p. 338). But at all events, Reynolds' work has now made appraisal possible.

The Richmonds lived from 1870 at Beavor Lodge, Beavor Lane, Hammersmith, which they made into an attractive and hospitable home. In the 1880s, we are told,

'Hubert Parry, the Rawlinsons, de Morgans, Burne-Joneses, Prinseps, Alma-Tademas, Ionideses, and Carlises dined regularly' (p. 200). This suggests a social world overlapping with that of Morris, who moved to Kelmscott House in 1878 and recommended Richmond for the Slade Professorship at Oxford in 1879. Richmond was involved with the SPAB, protesting with Morris about the proposals for the restoration of St. Mark's Cathedral in Venice in 1879, and lecturing for the Society in 1882. Morris met Oscar Wilde at the Richmonds' in March 1881, telling May: 'he is an ass: but he certainly is clever too.' Richmond painted the strong portrait of Morris now in the National Portrait Gallery in 1881 (and an attractively informal one of Margaret Burne-Jones in 1884, now in a private collection in Sussex). The Richmonds visited Kelmscott Manor in the autumn of 1880, and in the summer of 1881 William, depressed by the death of his mother, went there again. That visit produced Richmond's vivid account of Morris as a fisherman and on the river quoted in Philip Henderson's biography, though not by Reynolds. However, Reynolds does give a slightly different version of a story connecting – or rather contrasting – Morris with Walter Pater (taken from Arthur Richmond's *Twenty-Six Years*). In Reynolds' account, the young Arthur remembered a visit by the shy and 'correctly dressed' Pater to Beavor Lodge:

I took him into our sitting room and soon he and my father were in earnest conversation. William Morris joined them shortly after and explained that being full of inspiration that morning he had written dozens of verses. When there came a pause in the torrent of his enthusiasm, a still, quiet voice came from the corner of the room where Pater was sitting; 'Have you, have you really?' it said. 'This morning I only wrote one sentence.' (quoted p. 201)

Reynolds shows that the two families were on good terms, with Helen Richmond a close friend of May, although Arthur found Morris intimidating, 'with no great liking for little boys' (p. 148). The families shared an elderly gardener, who is referred to in Morris's amusing letter of Christmas 1883 to Clara Richmond, asking for help in disposing of an unwanted pie. On a more serious note, Morris told May, in a letter written at the time of the fall of Khartoum in 1885: 'On Saturday last I dined at the Richmonds ... I found Richmond seriously excited as to the success of British arms, & had to enlighten him on the subject of patriotism.' Later that year Richmond returned from a visit to Egypt, and impressed Morris by his enthusiasm for the scenery. The relationship lasted through to Morris's death, even though we may suppose that political disagreement may have affected the older generation. It was apparently at the Richmonds' that Jane Morris advised Cobden-Sanderson to take up book-binding. In 1896 they were still intimate enough for Richmond to make 'deathbed sketches of Morris's head (whereabouts unknown), and a tragic letter from Burne-Jones acknowledges Richmond's sympathies on the death of their mutual friend' (p. 269). Both the Richmonds were present at Morris's funeral, and in 1898 Richmond apparently delivered a personal and artistic tribute to Morris and Burne-Jones at the Royal Birmingham Society of Arts. (This lecture is not included in the standard bibliographies of Morris, although Aho includes a lecture of 1898 on 'Leighton, Millais, and William Morris' given to the students of the Royal Academy). This sound biography is therefore of considerable interest to those of us concerned with Morris and his associates.

Peter Faulkner

Jean Johnson and Richard Bishop (eds.), *The Earthly Paradise: William Morris Yesterday and Today*, (Ontario: William Morris Society of Canada 1996), 176 pp., \$14.95. Copies of the book are available from The William Morris Society of Canada, 52 Berkeley Court, Unionville, Ontario L3R 6L9, Canada.

It is most appropriate that in this special commemorative year, when so much about Morris has distanced him from us and distorted grotesquely his unique contribution (with the prize for the hugest idiocy going to the article by *The Guardian* art critic holding Morris responsible for the crimes of Pol Pot), that The William Morris Society of Canada has produced such a fine tribute to Morris. Beautiful in its simple presentation, edited with care, and offering a selection of essays which brings Morris into our present, this is the fitting centenary publication.

The publication originated in a Morris exhibition held first in Toronto in 1993, and subsequently in Quebec and Winnipeg: 'the most comprehensive exhibition of the work of Morris and his circle ever to take place' in Canada. The first section comprises papers given at the conference held during the exhibition. Charles Harvey and Jon Press's 'Visions and Realities: William Morris and the making of the earthly paradise' is a superb piece which combines intellectual history with a close sense of Morris's practical activity. Linda Parry, another guest speaker from Britain, has an equally informative contribution on 'The influence of Morris textiles upon the fashionable interior'. Douglas Schoenherr, who co-organised the exhibition with the indomitable Jean Johnson, contributes with much scholarship on the decoration of the Red House, and both Gillian Naylor and Paul Greenhalgh offer thoughts on the legacy of Morris which are more thoughtful and inspirational than much which has been intended to cover this subject in this centenary year. (Greenhalgh's rejection of Morris's socialist/utopian vision is no less worthy of serious reading for its reactionary wrong-headedness and deep pessimism, which for the present writer made it all the more challenging.)

The latter contributions to the book arise from work currently going on at the Craft Studio at the Harbourfront Centre, which is where the conference took place. Since 1974 this has been a forum for activating and energising the practical arts: a place immersed in the spirit of Morris's artistic values. The contributions are refreshing and help us to remember that if art is for all, then places for skills to be learned and developed must be accessible to all. Once again, this place owes so much to the work of Jean Johnson who, with the tremendously efficient Richard Bishop, edited this book. It stands as a fine reflection of not only Morrisian studies in Canada, but the state of intellectual and artistic vivacity everywhere in this hundredth year after the death of Morris.

Stephen Coleman

Norman Kelvin (ed.), *The Collected Letters of William Morris*, Vols. III & IV, (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1996). Vol. III, 1889–1892, 537 pp., £35. Vol. IV, 1893–1896, 465 pp., £35.

Linda Parry (ed.), *William Morris: Art and Kelmscott*, (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press/The Society of Antiquaries 1996), 146 pp., £16.95.

Arnold Rattenbury, *Morris Papers*, (Beeston: Shoestring Press 1996), 40 pp., £4.95.

The centenary year has brought appropriately diverse publications about Morris, and it is a pleasure to welcome all these very different books. It is particularly fitting that

the two concluding volumes of Norman Kelvin's splendid edition of Morris's letters should have appeared in 1996, making it one of the great instruments on which all future research on Morris must be based. All Morris scholars are indebted to Kelvin for his energy and enterprise in carrying through the years the task of editorship without losing any of his enthusiasm for the personality and the ideas of Morris as he has come to understand them. In this review I will largely take for granted the editor's achievement in order to comment on the human story spoken in the letters. But of course the basis for the discussion is the collection itself, so ably edited and so splendidly produced by a University Press still carrying out the kind of function for which such presses exist.

Volume III deals with the period from 1889 to 1892, during which Morris broke with the Socialist League. The four years yield 519 letters (two in Appendix 'C'), and the volume ends with Morris's 'Statement of Principles of the Hammersmith Socialist Society', dated December 1890, and the 'Note by William Morris on his Aims in founding the Kelmscott Press' (1895). In these letters we see Morris's touching concern for Jenny, his continuing commitment to the SPAB and friendship with Georgiana and with Webb, and his strenuous activities at the Kelmscott Press, while his lecturing on Socialism begins to decrease, though belief in Socialism remains central to his thinking. I will quote here from a few of the letters that I found particularly interesting. In the earliest, Morris shows an up-to-date awareness of the aesthetic doctrine of 'The Decay of Lying' (published in January 1889) when he tells Norton in June that he has begun another prose romance – 'I will rather carry out Oscar Wilde's theory of the beauty of lying, as it will have neither time, place, history, or theory in it.' Morris's view of Christianity is made more explicit than anywhere else in his writings that I know in a letter to *Commonweal* in March 1890 (also included in Nicholas Salmon's *Political Writings*: Thoemmes Press 1994). Here Morris argues against the Christian Socialist position by stating that Christianity bases its morality on beliefs about the nature of reality that no longer convince ('we must ask "Is this true?")' and contending that in a socialist society Christianity will be '*absorbed into Socialism*. No separate system of ethics will then be needed.' A letter to Gabriela Cunninghame Graham of June 1891 comments with extraordinary optimism on the possibilities suggested by *New from Nowhere* – and admits to ignorance of one craft: 'I am pleased to see that a good many people think my own aspirations pleasant at least, and perhaps not wholly unreasonable; for when people want a better life I feel sure they can have it. I am much interested in hearing of your prowess afield. I can't mow because I have never learned the craft of whetting a scythe.' The two letters to James Bryce of October 1892 – located by Frank Sharp and drawn to the editor's attention after the volume had gone into production – which appear in Appendix 'C', superseding the extract included in the main text, at last settle the story of Morris and the Laureateship. Morris's first letter – in which he describes himself as 'a sincere republican' – is polite but firm: 'After all the thing comes to this that *I feel* that my independence would be hampered by my acceptance which would I am sure disappoint many friends whose good opinion does much to keep me straight in life.' That straightness is one of the qualities for which Morris seems to me most admirable, and which comes out in many of these letters.

Volume IV deals with Morris's last four years. There are 405 letters in all, but only 49 for 1896, and many of these quite brief. Kelvin's Introduction summarises the

main elements: the continuing concern for Jenny, and friendship with Georgiana and Webb; the comradeship of the SPAB; the activities of the Kelmscott Press – including problems with Quaritch, as Morris becomes publisher as well as printer, and with illustrators apart from Burne-Jones, and the long endeavour leading to the *Chaucer*; the unenthusiastic relationship with the Arts and Crafts; the ‘continued moral commitment’ to Socialism; and the increasing enthusiasm for the acquisition of medieval manuscripts which gave him pleasure in his last months. Again I will quote a few of the letters that particularly struck me. In December 1893 we find Morris uncharacteristically telling Sydney Gimson, who had evidently invited him to speak in Leicester, that ‘I have nothing left to say, so that lecturing would mean a mere putting in of time.’ Fortunately the tone is usually more positive, as in the letter to Robert Blatchford at *The Clarion* in October 1894 supporting the idea of a united Socialist Party, consisting of all those prepared to declare their belief in ‘the aim of the nationalization of the means of production & exchange and the abolition of all privilege.’ I was also pleased to learn from one of Kelvin’s invaluable notes, to a letter of March 1895, that Morris was a regular participant in the Socialist Supper Club, which sounds an admirable institution. But his energy was clearly decreasing. Kelvin notes (IV, p. 285) that he took four months to produce an article on ‘The Present Outlook of Socialism in England’ for the American journal *The Forum*, where it appeared in April 1896; it is included as Appendix ‘A’, the last article by Morris on Socialism published in his lifetime. The letters of his final years are poignant in their context, but include the ringing assertion of 9th January, ‘I have not changed my mind on Socialism’. He is still writing to Jenny, to Georgiana, and to Webb, as well as to dealers in the manuscripts that he has become so attached to. Kelvin suggests that it is this attachment that accounts for Morris’s subdued response, in a letter to Sydney Cockerell of 24th June, to the delivery to him – at last! – of a finely bound copy of the *Chaucer*: ‘Douglas [Cockerell] has just been here, and I find the Chaucer quite satisfactory.’ I found the last three letters, to Georgiana, Bruce-Glasier, and Jenny, too moving for casual quotation here. All in all these volumes, taken with their predecessors, justify Kelvin’s well-judged remark that Morris’s letters ‘can be seen as a continuous orienting of desire toward dreams within a humanistic creed: desire for the pleasure of human fellowship and for the pleasure that art provides’ and an attempt ‘to work out the connection between the two desires, the two pleasures’ (IV, pp. xxxvii–xxxviii). We must all now try to ensure that any libraries that we are connected with invest in these remarkable volumes.

*William Morris: Art and Kelmscott* grew out of a seminar held by the Society of Antiquaries at the Manor in 1992. It is an attractive book, well printed and illustrated, its cover showing May’s embroidered hanging for her father’s bed. Its contents are divided into two sections, the first consisting of general articles, the second of articles focusing on Kelmscott. In the first section, then, we have Charles Harvey and Jon Press with a cogent account of Morris’s business career, Ray Watkinson discussing with unrivalled knowledge and enthusiasm the importance to Morris of his work as a painter – often undervalued, David O’Connor on the early stained glass of Burne-Jones and Morris, and Linda Parry (who has also edited the book) on May Morris, embroidery and Kelmscott. O’Connor argues interestingly that the windows produced by the Firm show ‘a real shift in direction away from the Gothic Revival, although many of Morris’s early commissions came from leading Gothic Revival

architects' (p. 49). Linda Parry provides an illuminating account of May's work in embroidery, suggesting that her designs were 'more complex in composition' and, to me unexpectedly, 'more characteristically British' than her father's, and discusses May's feelings for the Manor and for the village to which she moved in 1923. The second half of the book opens with Jan Marsh's sympathetic account of the importance of Kelmscott Manor to Morris, and then moves into greater specificity. Dick Dufty's 1963 article 'William Morris and the Kelmscott Estate' explains in legal detail how the Manor passed from the possession of the University of Oxford to the Society of Antiquaries, and shows his own affection for the place for which he did so much. Then we have Donald Insall's fascinating and particularly well illustrated account, first published in 1972, of the repair of the Manor which he carried out so sensitively and with such success. The last two contributions concern Dick Dufty. In a relaxed and informative interview with Martin Williams, he describes his life and his involvement with the Manor, and the last few pages contain appropriately his son Tom's moving tribute to him (already known to readers of the *Journal*). This is a book to be enjoyed by all who respond to Morris's affection for Kelmscott.

Since Morris's message is above all about human creativity, it is good to be able to welcome a creative response to Morris in the form of Arnold Rattenbury's volume of poems, *Morris Papers*. The book has been very handsomely put together at the Shoestring Press in Nottingham at a very reasonable price, and makes one want to see more of their work. As a note tells us, the poems are titled alternatively from wallpapers and writings. Beginning with the early wallpapers '1864: Daisy and Pomegranate', we move chronologically through Morris's career to '1894: How I Became a Socialist' and '1896: The Kelmscott Chaucer'. This arrangement enables Rattenbury to convey his sense of Morris's development, and to stress the interconnection between his designs and his socialist vision of life. This vision is one which Rattenbury tells us has inspired him – though he prefers 'anarchy's version' – and which he conveys particularly well in '1884: Useful Work versus Useless Toil', which concludes:

So where work's to be done, be sure  
hands know what they are working for.  
Knowledge is heady. Fingers draw

ourselves out of ourselves. All Art  
is the product of hand plus head plus heart.  
Add up the parts. Be whole at last.

Even this short extract shows that the poetry is clear, unpretentious, direct – and can inspire. Buy a copy for yourself and give another to a friend! And perhaps go on to read other books by Rattenbury, whose first volume was published in 1969 and whose 1994 *The Frigger Makers* celebrates the achievement of ordinary workers – makers – in truly Morrisian terms.

Peter Faulkner