Nothing (with one small but important exception) remains of The Grange, where the Burne-Jones family lived for more than thirty years. It was in North End, Fulham, and consisted, from the eighteenth century on, of two red brick houses, standing back a little from the road, with iron gates and a short flagged path. Samuel Richardson had lived there from 1738 to 1754, (when his rent was put up to £40 p.a.), but there is no evidence that either Burne-Jones or Morris took any interest in Richardson. I’m writing not about the architectural history of the house or even about the pictures that were painted there, but from the point of view of a biographer.

The Burne-Joneses went there in 1867, eleven years before Morris discovered Kelmscott House, but why did they go there at all? Certainly, they had to move. After the death of their second baby, Christopher, they went to 41 Kensington Square, where Margaret was born. But in 1867, when they came back from their summer holiday in Oxford with the Morrises, they found that their landlord had sold the lease and they had to be out by Christmas. Still, there were always plenty of houses to let in London. Why The Grange?

North End contained two brewers, a horse-dealer, and a private asylum for ladies. This in itself shows how remote the place was, since (as readers of *The Woman in White* will remember) private asylums had to be as far as possible from any form of transport, and although the Thames Junction Railway ran through the fields below The Grange, trains didn’t stop there. Milk was still delivered in pails and there were briar roses in the lanes (but Burne-Jones was never a countryman anyway – the country, he complained, was so noisy). The north house, which was the one they chose of the two, had the advantage of a good north light and an indoor studio, but even with two children it was too big for them, and the rates were high in Fulham. They had in fact to share it at first with an old Birmingham friend, Wilfred Heeley, and his wife, who were waiting to go out to India, or they could never have managed the rent at all.

The Grange, then, had almost nothing to recommend it to Georgie except inaccessibility. The directions were said to be ‘Go down the Cromwell Road till your cabhorse drops dead, and then ask someone.’ But, as it turned out almost immediately, it was not inaccessible enough.

The two menaces from whom Georgie was in strategic retreat in 1867 were Charles Augustus Howell and Mary Zambaco. Howell was a kind of dubious confidential agent, a sparkling, gossipy Anglo-Portuguese who amused Rossetti, was ignored by Morris, and proved much too worldly and slippery for Burne-Jones. ‘Mr Howell was a stranger,’ Georgie wrote, ‘to all that our life meant.’ He lived in Brixton, and she must have thought that North End was far enough away. What can she have felt when, not long after the move, Howell suddenly appeared in Fulham? He gave it out that Ruskin, for whom he had done some charity work, was paying for him to live in North End Grove ‘in order to keep
A water colour drawing of the dining-room at The Grange by Thomas Rooke.
Jones in health and spirits.' There is no record of Howell in the Fulham rate-books.

With Mary Zambaco, that wild and wealthy Greek beauty, the trouble was not that she came down to The Grange, but rather that Burne-Jones himself kept making a dash for it, 'running up' to London in a cab to Mary's house in Porchester Terrace, knowing that in his absence - as Rossetti put it - she 'beat up the quarters of all his friends for him.' Georgie remained steadfast at The Grange, seeing to the decorating, which she calls 'a veil of green paint and Morris paper', all, of course, from the Firm. She was the source of energy, taking charge of everything. When, in 1868, her sister Alice Kipling arrived from India and had her second baby in the study, Georgie wrapped it in a rug and carried on unperturbed.

I can't say how it was that Howell eventually overstepped the mark, but he made some total miscalculation, so that after 1870 neither Ruskin, nor the Ionides family, nor the Burne-Joneses ever saw him again. Mary Zambaco went off to Paris, though not for good, in 1872. This was a time of crisis, when Georgie went away with the children sometimes to stay with her family, and once to Whitby to seek advice from George Eliot. Burne-Jones would be left moping at The Grange, living, like all Victorian husbands left to themselves, on bread and mutton chops, very lonely, and sometimes doing unexpected things. On one occasion he gave notice to the cook, because - although larger than himself and twelve times larger than Georgie - she was so ugly. The Grange, which was to have been a retreat, begins to sound like a place of desolation.

And yet it's the early 1870s that Rudyard Kipling, Georgie's nephew, is describing in Something of Myself. His parents went back to India, leaving him with childminders in Southsea, where he was miserable, but the Christmas holidays he spent at The Grange. Here he had love and affection, he says, 'as much as the greediest could desire' - and he was not very greedy - the smell of paint and turpentine, and in the rooms 'chairs and cupboards such as the world had not yet seen, for our Deputy Uncle Topsy was just beginning to fabricate these things.' And once when little Ruddie and Margaret were eating bread and dripping in the nursery Morris came in and sat on the rocking-horse and 'slowly surging back and forth while the poor beast creaked; he told us a tale full of fascinating horrors, about a man who was condemned to dream bad dreams ... He went away as abruptly as he had come. Long afterwards, when I was old enough to know a maker's pains, it dawned on me that we must have heard the Saga of Burnt Niial.'

This doesn't sound at all like what Burne-Jones himself called them - 'the desolate years'. He had quite rightly resigned from the Old Watercolour Society because they had wanted him to alter his Phyllis and Demophoon, one of the most beautiful likenesses of all of Mary Zambaco. As a result he had nowhere to exhibit his work. He lay low, sometimes when he was alone not even answering the door. But he did have the incomparable support of Morris, who had moved his family to Chiswick and began, in 1872, to come to breakfast on Sunday mornings. (This is always referred to as 'an easy walk', but it is not so very easy.) The breakfasts were partly a delightful interlude, where the two of them sat reading the comic Ally Sloper, partly a working conference. Burne-Jones depended for an income at this time on glass-designing, and was nearly always in debt to the Firm.

In 1871 a new picture - a very small but beautiful rose-pink and brown
picture – appeared at The Grange, where it was hung in the dining-room. (It was
later in the drawing-room at the house of Lance Thirkell, Burne-Jones’s great-
grandson, rather awkwardly hung behind the piano.) It had been given to Ned by
the American scholar, Professor Norton, and when it had been cleaned it turned
out to be Europa and the Bull, perhaps by Giorgone. As Graham Robertson said,
‘Giorgone was a painter and must have painted something, so why not this
Europa?’ It seems to have provided the impulse to make Burne-Jones start off on
a rather crazy three week tour of Northern Italy, leaving the studio in charge of
his assistant, Thomas Rooke, while Georgie and the children went to stay with her
sister, Louisa Baldwin. He came back penniless and dazed, having seen Pieros,
Mantegnas, Botticellis, Michelangelos, and started work on some of his loveliest
things, The Hesperides, The Mill, The Beguiling of Merlin. He was still not
exhibiting, but his friends increasingly thought that he should. The determining
factor, predictably, was another young woman. This was Frances Graham, the
younger daughter of the Liberal M.P. and generous patron of the arts, William
Graham. She saw Burne-Jones as a dreamer like herself. ‘Mrs Burne-Jones was
otherwise,’ she wrote, ‘She was rather daunting.’

Her gentle pressure on Burne-Jones to exhibit coincided with the opening of the
Grosvenor Galleries in April 1877, where he did show, with enormous success.
His Golden Stairs was the Grosvenor’s great sensation of 1880. The Grange,
therefore, opened up in the 1880s, by which time, as Georgie complained, the
respectable old name of Fulham had been taken away and replaced by West
Kensington. There had been a good deal more building, including an hotel, the
Cedars, which seems to have been a kind of landmark for people who got lost on
the way to The Grange. But the place was easier by now to get to – a bus came
from Kensington to the top of North End Lane, and The Grange was now only a
few minutes from the District Railway’s West Kensington station. Meanwhile, W.
A. S. Benson had been called in to design a new studio in the garden. Here the
huge canvasses could be passed in and out through slits in the walls, there were
hot-water pipes, and a sky-light so that it could be used for painting with
scaffolding. The garden continued to be lovely, with white lilies, stock, lavender,
acacias and a great mulberry tree. Inside, Graham Robertson says in Time Was,
the house seemed to be holding its breath. ‘The hall was dark and the little
dining-room opening out of it even more shadowy with its deep-green leaf-
patterned walls; and it is strange to remember that the Brotherhood of Artists who
loved beauty did not love light, but lived in a tinted gloom through which clear
spots of colour shone jewel-like. At the end of the dining-room stood a dark green
cabinet [now in the V&A]. Above it hung a small painting, a little figure in magical
red [the Giorgone].’

This was Graham Robertson’s first visit, so that he didn’t notice the doing-up
The Grange had had since Burne-Jones’s success at the Grosvenor – the Firm had
redecorated, providing Bird & Vine bed-hangings and yellow velvet chair-covers.
Everything was modest compared with the homes of the princely artists of the
1880s, and there was only one sofa which, under its Morris chintz, actually had
springs. However, Burne-Jones was now expected to keep open house on Sunday
afternoons. Georgie disliked presiding over so many people, but Margaret, who
was now growing up, ‘dispensed’ as Burne-Jones put it ‘lower middle-class
hospitality with finish and charm.' There was plenty for the visitors to see, as there had been a considerable expansion of work in the studio – silversmithing, gesso work, designs for pianos, needlework and jewellery as well as studies for the great canvasses of the 1880s.

Everything, of course, had to be cleaned. To Georgie the domestic help situation was ‘either a bloody feud or a hellish compact’. One of her staff, familiar from Burne-Jones’s comic drawings, was Mrs Wilkinson, said to carry so much equipment – brooms, buckets and soap – that she had to come into the studio sideways. After Burne-Jones had resigned from the Academy – he joined as an Associate in 1885 but realised at once that he had made a mistake – he said that he felt ‘cleaner than even Mrs Wilkinson could make me.’

As well as the Sunday visitors, and often at the same time, friends arrived, from the very earliest to much later ones – Sarah Bernhardt, Robert Louis Stevenson, Henry James. But there was, of course, a deeply dissonant note in these prosperous years, the imperfect sympathy with Morris. In the January of 1883 he joined the Democratic Federation, and as Burne-Jones put it, ‘we are silent now about many things, and we used to be silent about none.’ He came much less often to The Grange, and if he did come, had to leave early to ‘preach’. Burne-Jones felt that Morris was surrounding himself with the unworthy, but he also felt that he himself had failed his friend. Fellowship is heaven, and lack of fellowship is hell.

After Margaret married Jack Mackail in 1888 – Burne-Jones was 55 that year but after the wedding said he felt 97 – The Grange was no longer open to visitors on Sundays. They did sometimes appear – Aubrey Beardsley, for example, with his portfolio and his sister Mabel, or Julia Cartwright, the art historian. ‘I got into a bus which stopped short of North End Road and lost my way into the bargain’, she wrote in her diary, ‘but when I got to The Grange, all my troubles were forgotten. Philip opened the door, Lady Burne-Jones rushed to welcome me and took my coat to dry and Sir Edward came running down the stairs saying . . . what could he do for me! . . . Later, just as I was going he said I must let him give me one of his little finished drawings and he would send it after me in a case.’ Such was the courtesy of The Grange.

Although Burne-Jones frequently gave out that he would finish up in the Fulham workhouse, if they would allow him to go on painting there, the question of their leaving The Grange was raised only once. A new lease – (the old one was due to run out in 1902) – was rapidly arranged by that prince of solicitors, George Lewis, who was a great friend and admirer. If the family wanted fresh air, they had by now a small whitewashed house at Rottingdean, although Burne-Jones sometimes couldn’t face the icy cold there. This came second only to Kelmscott Manor, where the water-jugs in the bedrooms were frozen solid by morning.

For the 1890s there are detailed accounts of life at The Grange, in particular Rooke’s studio diary, which was certainly edited by ‘the Mistress’ (as Rooke calls Georgie), and perhaps started at her request. We’re told these notes were made while Rooke and ‘the Master’ were working at different levels of the huge canvasses, (although if there was one thing Burne-Jones disliked above all it was having his conversations taken down). Then there is Three Houses, by Angela Thirkell, who had been the little Angela Mackail, born in May 1890. In Three Houses The Grange appears as a children’s paradise even more paradisal than it had been to Rudyard
Kipling in the 1870s, partly because while Kipling was understood and most kindly treated, Angela was grossly spoiled. When she was born Burne-Jones entered on yet another term of hopeless slavery. He was in a state of open rivalry with Gladstone as to which of them could spoil their granddaughters the most. Angela always sat next to him at lunch, blew the froth off his beer, had her bread buttered on both sides, rushed into the kitchen to talk to Robert the parrot. The children were free to roam the whole house, except the studio, and yet she saw William Morris only once, in Georgie's sitting room. She saw him as 'an old man (or so I thought him) with the aggressive mop of white hair who was talking, between fits of coughing, to my grandmother.'

And yet Morris was often in the house. Having become a printer, he assumed that Burne-Jones would be the chief illustrator for the Kelmscott Press. The Sunday morning breakfasts returned and seem to have been times of heroic and unwise eating on Morris's part — sausages, haddock, tongue and plover's eggs, according to Rooke, 'and then he would go to the side-table and wish he had had something else.' And then, in the February of 1896, Morris suddenly leant his forehead on his hand in a way that Ned and Georgie had never seen before — never, in all the time they had known him.

If we take into account Morris's illness and the fact (which Burne-Jones faced perfectly honestly) that during the 1890s his large pictures were beginning not to sell, and that the height of his great reputation was past, we might see The Grange during these last years as reverting to what Georgie had wanted in the first place, a dignified retreat. A place, too, Burne-Jones felt, since Margaret left, 'of echoes and silence', but still it had become, or should have become, a spiritual stronghold where he could paint undistracted, as he had always wanted to, in a world 'more true than real'. However, not long after he had started work on the Chaucer illustrations he fell in love again, this time with Mrs Helen Gaskell, a delicate-looking creature, twenty-five years younger than himself, one of the Souls. He got behind with the drawings — 'you know why' he wrote to Mrs Gaskell — 'I must lock myself into a room, but I can't lock my soul up — but Morris never fails, nothing disturbs the tranquil stream of his life . . . he looked so disappointed that I had done nothing since last year — and I couldn't tell him why.' Often he wrote to Mrs Gaskell, who seems to have been a sensitive and tactful woman, by every post (and there were five deliveries in those days). 'Such strength as his [Morris's] I see nowhere — I suppose he minds for me more than anyone, yet the day I go he will lose nothing, only he will have to think to himself, instead of thinking aloud.' And then in the evening at The Grange he would sit down with Georgie for a game of draughts, or they often had some music. Georgie had a grand piano by now, and Margaret's clavichord was still in the drawing-room.

Burne-Jones survived Morris's death by only two years. At the end of a visit in May 1898 Julia Cartwright wished him good health (he was only too liable to catch influenza). He only replied 'I hope, I hope, I hope'. During the night of the 16th of June, he died in his bedroom at The Grange.

The Grange is now 'a house of air'. But when Georgie went to live permanently in Rottingdean, it must in any case have lost its character. Kipling certainly thought so when he wrote about 'the open-work iron bell-pull on the wonderful gate that let me into all felicity. When I had a house of my own, and "The Grange" was
emptied of meaning, I begged for and was given the bell-pull for my entrance, in
the hope that other children might also feel happy when they rang it'. It is all that
is left, but it means that anyone who goes to Batemans can feel they have at least
been in touch with The Grange.

The text of this article is based on a lecture given on 21 May 1994 at the AGM
of the William Morris Society held at Fulham Library, London.

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