Reviews


A highlight of the William Morris centenary year in 1996 was the conference organised by the William Morris Society at Exeter College, Oxford. This attracted 180 participants of whom 60 gave papers. This handsomely produced volume, ably edited by Peter Faulkner and Peter Preston, contains 18 of these papers written by scholars from Australia, Britain, Canada, Italy, New Zealand and the USA. It also contains some superbly produced colour plates which were partly funded by the William Morris Society.

The editors, as to be expected from two well-respected Morrisians, have provided a wide-ranging Introduction to the collection. They note the many books on Morris that were published during the centenary year and single out three groups of texts for particular attention: the V&A Catalogue (edited by Linda Parry), the final two volumes of Norman Kelvin's *The Collected Letters of William Morris*, and my own publications on Morris's political writings. They then go on to consider the various contributions to the volume, and conclude – most appropriately – that 'in a society where art and culture are all too readily commodified, and where the vigilance that liberty demands of us is still necessary, the courage and commitment of Morris's lifelong endeavour offers a sustaining hope' (p. 17).

The book is divided into four parts. Part I – on 'Morris and the Environment' – consists of a single essay by Florence Boos entitled 'An Aesthetic Ecocommunist: Morris the Red and Morris the Green'. Boos's central contention is that Morris was 'an important predecessor of late twentieth-century environmentalism . . . from "deep" ecological and ecofeminist "theorists", to "pragmatic" activists and resource planners' (p. 22). Amongst the latter she cites Arne Naess, Carolyn Merchant, Ramachandra Guha and Winona LaDuke. I found this all rather unconvincing as no evidence is advanced to suggest that any of these activists had even heard of Morris. It seemed to me that any similarities in their ideas were merely coincidental. In any case Morris believed that environmental degradation was a symptom of capitalism and could not be addressed until the system had been swept aside and replaced by communism. This is precisely what he depicted in *News from Nowhere*.

Part II of the book is devoted to 'Morris and Literature'. It opens with an essay by William Blissett entitled 'Shadow of Turning in *The Earthly Paradise*'. Blissett makes the valid point that despite the recent work of American scholars such as Boos, Carole Silver, Charlotte Oberg and Blue Calhoun, *The Earthly Paradise* seems to be suffering the same critical neglect as the prose romances did twenty years ago. He then goes on to provide an accessible and elegantly written introduction to the poem which concentrates on the recurrent motif of turning. Maybe this, along with the imminent publication of Boos's new edition of the poem, will encourage a reassessment of this important work.
The poem which many believe to be Morris’s greatest achievement – Sigurd the Volsung – is the subject of two of the essays in this section. Simon Dentith, in ‘Sigurd the Volsung: Heroic Poetry in an Unheroic Age’, considers what he terms as ‘the paradox . . . that William Morris should be at once one of the most admirable critics of British imperialism, and the poet most committed to the values of epic’ (p. 60). His answer to this paradox is that epic poetry ‘while it undoubtedly speaks out of specific social and historic situations . . . can be made to do so with very differing political inflection’ (p. 69). I thought it a pity that Dentith didn’t pursue this line of thought or, indeed, refer to John Goode’s essay on the poem in which he argued that it should be seen as a precursor of Morris’s socialist works such as A Dream of John Ball and News from Nowhere. The other essay on the poem is Amanda Hodgson’s ‘The Troy Connection: Myth and History in Sigurd the Volsung’. This begins with a clearly written – and concise – account of the Victorian debate about whether Homer’s Iliad, and the existence of Troy, was a myth or based on historical fact. Hodgson then goes on to argue that a similar argument took place over the story of Sigurd and the Niblungs and that both these debates can be identified in Sigurd the Volsung. She concludes that ‘Morris, so often presented and self-represented as oppositional to the dominant culture of his day, produced in Sigurd the Volsung a text deeply involved with contemporary preoccupations and contradictions’ (p. 79).

The next essay in this section is Adriano Corrado’s ‘Beatrice and Ellen: Ideal Guides from Hell to Paradise’. Corrado compares Guest’s experiences in News from Nowhere to those of Dante in the Divina Commedia. Her central contentions are ‘that there are deep structural and thematic analogies between News from Nowhere and Dante’s poem’ (p. 83) and that Ellen and Beatrice as guides ‘perform the same function’ (p. 83). Although I’m sure that Morris was familiar with Dante’s poem, and I’m willing to accept that there are some superficial similarities between it and News from Nowhere, I found the comparison of Ellen with Beatrice rather improbable.

Norman Talbot, in his essay on ‘William Morris and the Bear: Theme, Magic and Totem in the Romances’, argues that Morris’s prose romances ‘subtly interlace totemic identification and related heroic-age name and emblem topoi with folktaile and medieval romance conventions’ but that this is ‘always translated into his own strongly egalitarian social vision’ (p. 101). As far as this goes Talbot makes a convincing case. However, I felt that his argument would have been that much stronger if he could have linked it to the late-nineteenth century literary and political context in which the books were written. In The House of the Wolfings and The Roots of the Mountains Morris was clearly taking part in the debate between Morgan and McLellan over whether the early Teutonic tribes were endogamous or exogamous. This debate has obvious implications for the interpretation of the totemic imagery in the romances.

The final essay in Part II of the book is Norman Kelvin’s ‘News from Nowhere and The Spoils of Poynton: Interiors and Exteriors’. The main part of this essay is concerned with contrasting the aesthetic and cultural basis of the novels. Despite some very perceptive and erudite comments about both books, Kelvin’s argument is almost entirely negative, and near the end of his essay he admits to having ‘so far stressed the many differences between News from Nowhere and The Spoils
of Poynton’ (p. 116). This is hardly surprising as Morris had little sympathy with Henry James. I couldn’t help feeling that Kelvin’s conclusion would have been valid if any contemporary novel had been compared with News from Nowhere.

Part III of the collection – ‘Morris, the Arts and Crafts and the New World’ – opens with Christine Poulson’s essay on ‘The Oxford Union Murals and the Holy Grail Tapestries’. Poulson draws attention to the subtle changes in inspiration that informed the choice of subjects in the Oxford Union Murals (1857–8) and the Holy Grail tapestries commissioned from Morris and Co. in 1890 by the mining millionaire, W. K. D’Arcy. She suggests that Rossetti was probably responsible for choosing the subjects from Malory’s Morte D’Arthur for the murals at the Oxford Union. Rossetti, in characteristic fashion, decided to concentrate on the adulterous Sir Launcelot rather than the chaste Sir Galahad. The resulting paintings are therefore of erotic subjects ‘dealing directly or indirectly with adultery, fornication, sexual obsession and sexual betrayal’ (p. 126). Poulson points out that it is Launcelot, rather than Galahad, who is also the protagonist in the Holy Grail tapestries. She takes issue with Fiona MacCarthy, who has suggested that Morris selected the subjects for the tapestries, and argues that the choice was probably that of Burne-Jones and that he returned to the subject of the Oxford Union Murals as a tribute to Rossetti.

The next essay in this section is Rosie Miles’s “The Beautiful Book that Was”: William Morris and the Gift of A Book of Verse. A Book of Verse was the handwritten, illustrated and illuminated collection of poems that Morris presented to Georgiana Burne-Jones for her birthday in 1870. Miles considers the book as an ‘imagetext’, placing it in the context of Morris’s interest in illuminated manuscripts and arguing that its various elements combine to produce ‘a composite artefact ... beyond replication’ (p. 143). However, the existence of a facsimile does somewhat undermine the latter part of the argument.

Following Miles’s essay are two on the influence of Morris on the Arts and Crafts in the United States. The first of these is Pedro Beade’s ‘William Morris in New England: Architecture and Design in Late Nineteenth-Century Rhode Island’. Beade concentrates his attention on the activities of Sydney R. Burleigh (1853–1931). Burleigh, along with two associates, Charles W. Stetson (1858–1911) and John G. Aldrich (1864–1952), built a house called the Fleur de Lys on College Hill, Providence, Rhode Island, in 1885, which Beade describes as the ‘most outstanding example of Arts and Crafts architecture in the United States’ (p. 145). Lindsay Leard-Coolidge, in her essay on ‘William Morris and Nineteenth-Century Boston’, traces the development of Morris’s influence in the city. She suggests that most Bostonians first heard of Morris as a result of the favourable criticism of his poetry by Charles Eliot Norton, Henry James and George William Curtis. However, it was not until 1883, when Morris & Co. exhibited at great acclaim at the Foreign Fair, that he was recognised as a talented designer. My only slight quibble with this essay is that although Leard-Coolidge refers to Morris as ‘an influential poet, designer and social thinker of enormous stature in the United States, and particularly in Boston’ (p. 156), no reference is made to how Bostonians responded to his socialism.

E. Lisa Panayotidis-Stortz’s essay has the ponderous title of “Every Artist would
be a Workman, and Every Workman an Artist”: Morrisian and Arts and Crafts Ideas and Ideals at the Ontario Education Association, 1900-1920’. In this she claims that ‘Morris’s and the social and aesthetic ideas of the Arts and Crafts Movement became the ideological engine of the philosophical, institutional and curricular change in the formation of Ontario’s early technical education policy’ (p. 166). This is an extravagant statement that needs to be backed up by a great deal more evidence than is presented in this essay. I must admit I was left thinking: ‘What policy, what ideas and how were they implemented?’

The final essay in this section is Ian J. Lochhead’s ‘The Dilemma of Place: Arts and Crafts Architecture in the Antipodes’. Like Beade, Lochhead’s essay is mainly concerned with the work of one architect. In this case it is Samuel Hurst Seager who, after training as an architect in London, settled in New Zealand in 1885. Lochhead begins by making the point that in colonies such as New Zealand and Australia there was no indigenous tradition of local architecture so that many important buildings were constructed using designs borrowed from outside the Antipodes. Seager was important in this respect as he was directly influenced by ‘Morris’s belief that architecture should be both the expression of the society and the environment which produced it’ (pp. 174-5). Lochhead argues that by utilizing Morris’s ideas Seager built in New Zealand houses which ‘approach the organic relationship between architecture and nature which was Morris’s ideal’ and in doing so lay the foundation for an ‘authentic regional architecture’ (p. 182).

Part IV of the book is entitled ‘Morris, Gender and Politics’. It opens with Jan Marsh’s essay on ‘William Morris and Victorian Manliness’. As usual with Marsh’s work this is clearly written, entertaining, challenging and controversial. However, I found it difficult to understand what was particularly Victorian about her definition of manliness as the meaning of the word has hardly changed during the last 140 years (a fact which raises its own questions). Furthermore the feminist sub-plot where manliness is associated with militarism, financial control and sexual domination meant that other equally important – but less overtly sexist – attributes tended to be ignored. Were all manly Victorian men really middle class? I must also take this opportunity to clear up a misunderstanding. Marsh points out that Morris, particularly during his days in the socialist movement, frequently used the terms ‘manly’ and ‘manlike’ ‘as standard forms of praise’ (p. 185). He did, but not in the narrow Victorian manner implied by Marsh. Morris used these words in their medieval sense of ‘belonging to human beings’. As such they were genderless and could be applied to both men and women.

Ady Mineo, in her essay ‘Beyond the Law of the Father: The “New Woman” in News from Nowhere’, discusses the position of women in Nowhere. This is without doubt one of the most controversial aspects of the book. Mineo argues that Morris ‘in his vision of a renewed society where both men and women are liberated from patriarchal values and norms’ prefigures ‘the changes envisaged by post-feminism’ (p. 204). In depicting the new woman we are told that ‘Morris erases every form of discrimination based on the criterion of the double standard’ (p. 201) between the sexes. However, to be fair to Mineo she does modify her case at the end of the essay where she acknowledges that not all aspects of patriarchy have been eradicated as ‘Nowherian women are, in the main, engaged in household chores’ (p. 205). It seems to me that feminist arguments about News from Nowhere
all flounder – like Marsh’s argument about Morris’s masculinity – on definitions of ‘manly’ and ‘womanly’. What Morris presents in News from Nowhere is men being men and women being women, i.e. they are both being ‘manly’. The pertinent question, therefore, is whether in presenting men and women in this way Morris is actually confirming stereotypical views of the sexes?

The third essay in this section is Janis Londraville’s ‘Lady Griselda’s Dream: May Morris’s Forgotten Play’. This essay is an expanded version of an article that originally appeared in the Independent Shavian. Londraville takes as her subject May Morris’s neglected play Lady Griselda’s Dream (1898) and makes a convincing case that the title character is based on Patient Griselda from Chaucer’s The Clerk’s Tale. She points out that both Griseldas suppress their own individuality and creativity for the sake of the men they love. In her original article Londraville placed most emphasis on linking the play to similar themes of sublimation in the works of George Bernard Shaw – particularly Man and Superman – and May’s own unhappy experiences in her relationship with the American art-dealer John Quinn. She expands both these arguments in this essay. However, I was pleased to note that she now also accepts that tensions inherent in the relationships between Rossetti, Jane and Morris may also have influenced the play.

Much of the recent work on Morris’s political views has been in the controversial areas of his relationship with anarchism and in particular the ideas of Kropotkin. Ruth Kinna, in her essay on ‘Morris, Anti-Statism and Anarchy’, does some useful work in challenging the view that Morris can be classified as an anarcho-communist. She begins by making the important point that in the 1880s and 1890s it was often impossible to distinguish anarchists from socialists and even anarchists from anarchists. The implication of this is that attempts to impose theoretical models of anarchism on the period are unhistorical. Kinna then goes on to compare Morris’s ideas on art with those of Kropotkin. She argues that there were substantial differences in the two men’s views on the role of art, on the nature of historical change, and the organisation of the future socialist society. The significance of these important differences in philosophy need to be considered in all future discussions of Morris and anarchism.

This section, and the collection, ends with David Goodway’s essay on ‘E. P. Thompson and William Morris’. Goodway sets out to show ‘how it was Morris who enabled Thompson to revise his Marxism radically, formulate his mature political philosophy and thereby proceed to the fundamental, organizing innovation of The Making of the English Working Class’ (p. 230). Goodway begins by outlining the central events in Thompson’s early academic and political career and then explains the origins of both William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary (1955) and The Making of the English Working Class (1963). I found this part of the essay concise and illuminating. A minor quibble I had with the latter part was that Goodway never tells us what Thompson’s Marxist beliefs were before his engagement with Morris. The only hint we are given is that he may have subscribed to ‘classical Marxism’ (p. 234). However, Goodway makes a convincing case that it was Morris’s ‘moral realism’ – economic determinism combined with morality (which Thompson termed ‘agency’) – which enabled Thompson to challenge both ‘positivist social science’ and ‘Marxist orthodoxy’.

48
This is a challenging volume of essays which will no doubt further encourage Morrisian studies as we approach the new millennium. The editors, and the University of Exeter Press, are to be congratulated for producing such a fitting tribute to one of the greatest men of the Victorian age.

Nicholas Salmon


‘A sorry sight indeed’, wrote William Morris of Millais’s submission to the Royal Academy in 1884, ‘the record of a ruined reputation, of a wasted life, of genius bought and sold and thrown away.’ And that, more or less, has been the twentieth century’s judgement on the marvellously gifted boy with golden curls who, aged eleven, was the youngest ever student at the RA Schools, and the most conspicuously talented member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (PRB), whose Isabella of 1849 still ranks as key work of the movement, and whose Return of the Dove inspired Morris and Burne-Jones to choose careers in art.

Of the PRBs, John Everett Millais (1829-1896) has received least critical or biographical attention. The carefully-selected exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery (NPG) this year aimed to restore something of his artistic reputation, although to show only portraits implicitly concedes that the later subject pictures are as worthless as Morris thought. To judge by the ‘Idyll, 1845’, he continued, ‘one would suppose Mr Millais is now heartily sick of his art, regrets his past career, and laments that he does not live a life of pure commercialism.’ This was of course Morris in his Socialist years, but others agreed. As G. H. Fleming notes in his new biography, Harry Quilter too damned the Idyll as ‘poor in colour, weakly humorous in conception, wooden in drawing, laboured and dull in painting, and utterly unworthy of a great artist.’

It was generally agreed that commerce was the cause. ‘What has come to the daring and splendid youth who once took us by storm?’ asked Margaret Oliphant in 1875. ‘Mr Millais has resigned himself to mammon, or what is the same thing, to portrait-painting.’ But as the NPG exhibition shows, portraits were more than bread-and-butter (and not just because they built Millais a true palace at Palace Gate, with marble floor, pillars and fountain at the top of the grand staircase). Indeed, they fulfil the four-part criteria Morris set out in his 1884 article for imaginative expression, formal beauty, truth to nature and skill of execution, and arguably Millais’s genius was best revealed in portraiture, where the subject was given rather than chosen. In this respect, the famous 1854 portrait of Ruskin by the Glenfinlas waterfall (on view for the first time in 1884, incidently, when Morris could have seen it at the Fine Art Society) was forerunner to the later images of Carlyle, Tennyson, Gladstone, Disraeli, Salisbury, etc. As Gladstone’s biographer,
Professor H. C. Mathew, explains in his catalogue essay, Millais’s public portraiture is an important comment on the values of the political elite in the 1870s and 1880s that has mostly gone unrecognised. Similarly, Kate Flint discusses some of the female portraits on show – the dashinghoingly dressed Hoare twins and the three whirl-stist-playing Armstrong sisters – in terms of the ‘display’ involved in late-Victorian match-making, allowing a critical reading of pictures otherwise dismissed as merely flattering.

The exhibition, however, belongs to Malcolm Warner, who provides the 55 catalogue entries and the essay on Millais’s portraits of handsome, unblinking children, in which the best of these, from the 1860s, are seen in relation to both Reynolds and Whistler, as well as Victorian discourses on childhood, and to the prodigy’s desire to regain the unconditional acclaim of boyhood. Given Warner’s defence of selected canvases, the force of Morris’s criticism is magnified, for while Millais’s gifts were not ‘wasted’, they were sometimes squandered, as if he could not distinguish good from bad work.

As well as several familiar drawings, the ‘Pre-Raphaelite’ section of the NPG’s catalogue includes a small oil head of Annie Miller, the model for Holman Hunt’s Awakening Conscience, who sat to Millais in April 1854. This was the most momentous month of his life, as he silently watched Effie Ruskin leave her husband and file for the annulment that would open the way for her wedding to himself. The whole exciting episode is the centrepiece of Fleming’s biography – the first since that by J. G. Millais of 1899, which ignored the Glenfinlas sojourn and its results – which is notable for lively writing, narrative dispatch and careless errors of fact and transcription (surely Highland heather is mauve, not maize-coloured)? Owing to the very real danger posed to Millais’s career, it remains a remarkable story, which must have contributed to his later life, for in a society where Effie was ostracized for having married twice, it was important to succeed among, and on the same terms of wealth and renown as, the denizens of clubland and grouse-moor. There is, one feels, a good deal more still to be said about the man and his art.

Jan Marsh


Wendy Hitchmough is an historian specialising in the architecture and design of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and is an especial expert on C. F. A. Voysey. This beautifully illustrated book (with photographs by Martin Charles) is, on her own admission, not a comprehensive survey of Arts and Crafts gardens, but a selection of key gardens where she has considered the social environment that determined the way they were worked and enjoyed and the planning and planting as an expression of the commitment and philosophies of their designers.

She defines the Arts and Crafts reforming movement as one emanating from the writings and practice of Ruskin and Morris and she argues that Red House was
not only architecturally foremost in the movement but that it had the first Arts and Crafts garden. The original orchard trees were kept at Webb’s insistence, for he believed that the root of architecture was in the land. She believes the parts that were designed by Morris in the medieval manner with a sequence of enclosed spaces, hedged by sweetbriar or wild rose and enclosing simple scented flowers, to be the forerunner of the gardens designed by Jekyll and Lutyens. The garden was laid out with the modest dignity and sense of place that Ruskin advocated and was a definite reaction to the artificiality of the high Victorian garden. Although Webb’s plans show white jasmine and roses between the dining room windows so that their scent would drift into the windows of the drawing room above, the garden was not designed to be an extension of the house that later Arts and Crafts gardens were to become.

Jekyll was certainly influenced by Ruskin. She had met Morris and Rossetti, and her natural approach to design and her interest in perpetuating country crafts were akin to Morris’s efforts in founding SPAB. She identified gardening as an acceptable occupation for women. Indeed, a gathering of horticultural students at her house was raided by the police on suspicion of subversive suffrage activities.

Old-fashioned gardens – such as Brickwall – which had been untouched by High Victorianism, and which so impressed Rossetti, are described, as is Kate Greenaway’s house and garden in Hampstead. Hitchmough compares Earshall, Hidcote and Rodmarton Manor and argues that whether it be cottage, castle or manor house the design could be made to illustrate the cause of the romantic nationalist, the fashion-conscious socialite or the pioneering socialist and that all could claim some allegiance to the Arts and Crafts movement. She also considers the garden-within-the-house designs of Frank Lloyd Wright, Baillie Scott, Voysey and Mackintosh, and the way garden design developed following the First World War.

This is a thought-provoking book, linking the growing interest in historic gardens to the well researched Arts and Crafts movement. It has a useful list of gardens to visit so the reader can ponder Hitchmough’s theories in situ.

*Sonia Crutchlow*


This volume presents papers given at a seminar held in 1993 to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the British Archaeological Association and the Royal Archaeological Institute. Its subject is the development and subsequent manifestations of nineteenth century historicism in the culture of the period. This phenomenon is defined in three ways by Chris Brooks in his introductory essay: it emphasised the narratives of causation – the stories of how the past and, by inference, the present – came to be; it reflected the present in the past and contrasted
the two eras; it demonstrated a fascination with the material products – the buildings and objects – of that past.

Through consideration of the growth of archaeological societies and of the careers of individual antiquarians the reader develops an understanding of the intellectual climate of the period and sees how attitudes were formed and accepted ideas challenged. However, the papers are not only concerned with the academic study of the past. The importance of history to the public is emphasised in W. Vaughan’s paper ‘Picturing the Past’ which considers representative works of history painting by artists including John Martin, Poynter and Alma Tadema. Vaughan charts the development of these artists and their work as they sought to give more authenticity to their paintings, but shows how ultimately such pieces, in any period, involve a necessary degree of invention. Examination of individual works, such as Poynter’s Faithful unto Death, also reveals the contemporary resonances discernible in the image.

Such a volume needs must consider Morris as one of the students of the past in this period, principally because of his campaigning to save ancient buildings. Brooks and Miele both explicitly consider Morris and his role, but other papers are useful in providing examples of the cultural world in which he moved, from controversy over religion and architecture in the wake of the Oxford Movement, to the development of the meta-narratives of Darwin and, by extension, Marx. Brooks sees Morris as very much part of the historicism of the period and regards News from Nowhere as one of its most remarkable products. Miele, employing Walter Benjamin’s ideas of authenticity and relating it to ancient buildings, explores the restoration of, and campaigns to preserve, ancient architecture. The recognition of building as product and document is considered and its development charted, allowing the reader to appreciate those whose calls to care for ancient buildings predated Morris and the ‘Anti-Scrape’. However, Miele also accuses Morris of fostering ‘an unhealthy love of old things’ in the public at large, ultimately giving rise to the heritage industry. This charge is laid at the end of his paper and deserves to be more fully developed and debated elsewhere.

This is a useful and interesting collection of papers shedding light upon cultural life in the period. However, the focus is on the earlier and high Victorian periods. The later crisis in Victorian self-confidence is not described, and Morris’s Marxist interpretation of history and architecture is not included, nor is his pioneering regard for landscape as historic document. Furthermore, a particular product of this cultural milieu, the preservation society, as distinct from the academic archaeological society, is not considered, although such societies are very much products of Victorian historicism. Nevertheless, if one goes on to read the introductions to Morris on History (ed. Nicholas Salmon) and Morris on Architecture (ed. Chris Miele), in the series published in 1996 by Sheffield Academic Press, as well as Hunter’s Preserving the Past (1996) then one will be able to see what developed from the world depicted here. The range of papers – from geological contributions to archaeology to the Anti-Scrape via explorations in the Aegean and attempts during the nineteenth century to define a Victorian style – probably means that not all papers will interest all readers, but a collection of such wide scope is sure to offer rich variations upon a theme. The reader will not only discover individual delights but will gain an understanding of the extent to which
the Victorian age defined itself in tangible and theoretical forms by reference to the distant past. This book could be twice as long, but what we have is an excellent piece of work and I am sorry to have missed the conference which led to it.

Martin Brown


Most readers will know that Mark Samuels Lasner is the current president of the William Morris Society in the United States and editor of its *Newsletter*. He is also a recognised authority on late-Victorian art and literature and a well-respected bibliographer. This attractively produced book, fittingly sporting a yellow jacket, is a welcome addition to his previous books on William Allingham and William Morris.

The *Yellow Book* is described on the jacket as ‘the quintessential magazine of the British 1890s’. From the start it set out to challenge what it considered to be ‘the bad old traditions of periodical literature’ and to produce ‘a book – a book to be read, and placed upon one’s shelves, and read again; a book in form; a book in substance; a book beautiful to see and convenient to handle; a book with style’. For most people it is still associated with the decadent illustrations provided by Aubrey Beardsley who served as its art editor until his dismissal in April 1895 following the arrest of Oscar Wilde. I was therefore fascinated to discover from Lasner’s interesting introduction that he was only associated with the publication for the first four of the thirteen volumes that appeared between April 1894 and April 1897. Of more importance in determining the style and contents of the *Yellow Book* was Henry Harland, an American-born novelist and short story writer, who acted as editor throughout the life of the magazine.

It was probably as a result of the *Yellow Book*’s desire to challenge traditional orthodoxies that it never carried an index. Lasner points out that although some partial or incomplete indexes have subsequently been published, these have still required the reader to skim through the contents lists of the volumes themselves to find specific items. Now that Lasner’s book is available this will no longer be the case. He has divided the contents of each volume into ‘Literature’ and ‘Art’ and further sub-divided the ‘Literature’ section so as to identify drama, essays, fiction and verse. He has also done some impressive work in identifying the anonymous contributions to the magazine and naming the authors who submitted their work under pseudonyms. The entries themselves read like a *Who’s Who* of late Victorian art and literature. Amongst the literary figures are John Buchan, Francis Burdett, George Gissing, Edmund Gosse, Kenneth Grahame, Henry James, E. Nesbit, Theodore Watts-Dunton, H. G. Wells and W. B. Yeats, while the artists include Walter Crane, C. M. Gere, Laurence Housman, Sir Frederic Leighton, Walter Sickert and Aymer Vallance.
This book is a must for anyone interested in the cultural milieu of the 1890s. It is also an essential purchase for all owners of an original set of the *Yellow Book*. In fact it could be described as the indispensable fourteenth volume in the series.

*Nicholas Salmon*


Members of the Society who in the past few years have heard or read various vice-presidential papers by Christine Poulson on Arthurian themes in the nineteenth century will be pleased that the whole book is now available. A scholarly study that yet wears its learning lightly, *The Quest for the Grail* is a lucidly written exploration of how Malorian legend was used and interpreted in both visual and verbal art during the Victorian era.

The key factors, with which the book starts after a brief account of Arthurian myth in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, were the (sometimes problematic) subjects chosen to decorate the Royal Robing Room of the new Palace of Westminster, and Tennyson’s poems, particularly the *Idylls of the King*. Both brought the Round Table and Grail Quest into cultural prominence, as symbolic narratives of (male) leadership, fellowship and idealism. This sets the scene for Chapter 3, a detailed artistic and biographical analysis of the appropriation of the legend by ‘our guys’: William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. While the Oxford Union murals were in one sense wholly in keeping with the Westminster subjects – the debating chamber being a kind of junior parliament in which future leaders of the nation honed their political and rhetorical skills – the scenes chosen would have been controversial had they been visible: adultery, fornication, bewitchment. They answered of course to young men’s preoccupations – sexual desire, temptation and transgression.

Chapter 4 focuses on Galahad, the chaste and (to some) Catholic knight who alone attained the Grail and who is here shown to have reached his apotheosis as emblem of the fallen hero only around 1900. (How fascinating to learn that the famous philosopher and philanderer was almost christened Galahad Russell instead of Bertrand.) Morris and Burne-Jones, in their High Anglican youth, were among the first to adopt Galahad. Poulson discusses Morris’s ‘A Christmas Mystery’ at some length – and though G. F. Watts’s visual rendering was the most iconic, it is perhaps fitting that Galahad should feature so frequently in Morris & Co. commissions for memorial windows at the start of the twentieth century. Symbolising both young manhood and spiritual grace, Galahad was an apt figure for patriotic sacrifice, and is still potent as the name of a recent British warship.

The Grail itself, through its historical associations with Knights Templar, freemasons and occultists, is linked by Poulson to the rise of Victorian spiritualism (with its magical noises, winds and glowing lights), Wagnerian opera (Burne-Jones
thought Parsifal 'really and truly the sounds to be heard in the Sangraal chapel'), as well as to the 1998 World Cup - symbols of ultimate aspiration. Such connections demonstrate the wide-ranging thought that makes The Quest for the Grail more than a picture catalogue, which nevertheless keeps closely to its central thread. Chapter 6 examines Burne-Jones's response to Merlin's relationship with Nimuë, in whose role as femme fatale he symbolically cast Maria Zambaco, and links this also with Victorian fears of uncontrolled sexual desire, contemporary mesmerism, and historical inquiry into seventeenth century witchcraft. Throughout the book careful reading of pictures and poems is accompanied by illuminating social and intellectual contextualisation.

Chapters 7 and 8 cover the story of Tristram and Iseult in its various Anglo-Germanic manifestations, and that of the Lady of Shalott, a rather hackneyed topic today but here analysed in intimate relation to the tale of Elaine, the other legendary damsel doomed to float down-river in death. This leads into, or rather back to, discussion of the other women of the Idylls, including ghastly Enid, who loved Geraint ever better the worse she was treated, and of course Guenevere, who for Tennyson and most of his readers was held responsible, through her sexual betrayal of Arthur, for destroying the whole Round Table and the state it represented. A rearguard action in defence of traditional gender conduct, the Idylls powerfully prescribed correct moral conduct for women. Somewhat surprisingly, however, Morris's equally powerful, if ambiguous 'Defence of Guenevere' does not here come under the same scrutiny.

But it is made plain how Morris and his friends detested Tennyson's reduction of Malory's knights and ladies to men and women of his own time. At Red House Tennyson's 'Morte d'Arthur' was irreverently known as the 'Morte d'Albaret', while Swinburne and Rossetti joked of writing an epic to demonstrate that Guenevere was superior to God - on the grounds that love is greater than morality. More seriously, Poulson argues persuasively that for Burne-Jones in later life, Morris became an Arthurian figure - a wronged and suffering leader who strove above all for fellowship. Although the vast unfinished Arthur in Avalon has been taken as a self-image, it can equally be read as a tribute to Topsy - the once and future king whose time will return.

Historically, The Quest for the Grail suggests that the myth of Arthur owes its Victorian popularity partly to a vigorous sense of English nationalism in mid-century (aptly, the greatest hero of the age was named Arthur Wellesley) and partly to cosmic fears aroused by new theories relating to what may be called global cooling - the scientific idea that the solar system and Earth in particular was slowing and getting colder. The book thus has breadth and depth, judiciously mixed. It is ample yet also brisk, with an impressive range of reference and many thoughtful observations positioned where they will be most convincing. The volume is handsomely produced and easy to handle. If it does not have the wealth of colour illustrations one would like, the pleasures of the text are fully compensatory. One added bonus is the first (to my knowledge) colour reproduction of Rossetti's Death of Breuze sans Pitie, the least known of the chivalric drawings from 1857-8 which Morris owned - for a while. I suspect, incidently, that Rossetti's relatively short-lived Malorian phase was cut short by Ruskin's critique of its ultra-medievalism - expressed in letters to both Watts and Morris. Never one to stand
still, Morris himself moved forward too, and the greatest merit of The Quest for the Grail is the way it places each exponent and each manifestation of Arthurian re-mythologising in historical sequence and context, through a model of inter-disciplinary analysis.

Jan Marsh


In this thoughtful book, Simon Dentith takes on the difficult task of discussing the large topic suggested by his title in only 180 pages of text. The book appears in a series called Social History in Perspective, directed at a student audience and aiming to 'present the most recent research in an accessible way'. Its seven chapters consist of an Introduction defining its central terms and emphasising the complexity of the subject, and six chapters organised not chronologically but on specific topics of concern throughout the period. These are, first, aspects of class, with 'Connections' and 'Divisions' as contrasting emphases, followed by chapters on Rural England and the City. Then we have chapters on Gender and on 'Ethnicity, Race and Empire' (which I found particularly well managed), and a brief Conclusion. Dentith's own account is usefully supplemented by a section giving Suggestions for Further Reading for each chapter. From these, a student - or at least, a conscientious one - would find him or herself introduced to a range of relevant critics from Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson to Elaine Showalter and Edward Said, and so be in a position to work through the period with the best modern intellectual tools.

Dentith is primarily a literary scholar; so it is no surprise that the cultural form that receives most attention is literature. Nearly all the major writers of the century are referred to or briefly discussed, from Jane Austen to Conrad - though Byron and Keats are absent (there is little room for the pre-Victorians), like Hopkins (whose absence is matched by that of his whole Church), while Henry James is mentioned only in relation to the country house novel.

Morris, by contrast, receives what readers of this journal will consider to be his due. In particular, his Socialism is emphasised. In the chapter on social divisions, Dentith quotes a passage from the Workman's Times of February 1892 describing a meeting at which Bruce Glasier read from News from Nowhere in an atmosphere of silent attention when 'Quite a religious feeling seemed to pervade the hall'. Dentith sees this as evidence that the socialist movement could 'both produce and assimilate high cultural forms - in this case, Morris's Utopian romance'. The same chapter traces the ideas of Ruskin and Morris through into what are termed 'the Arts and Crafts experiments at the end of the century', stressing their practical and political dimension. However, it is in the chapter on Rural England that Morris makes his most prominent appearance, and in the context of 'Late-century Ruralism'. Morris is said to have drawn 'upon versions of rural life' in his unsparing critique of industrial capitalism as well as in his design activities. Dentith's account of News from Nowhere emphasises its commitment to the
abolition of the city/country dichotomy, but argues that ‘The affective centre of the book is the countryside, culminating in a trip up the Thames’. He then states: ‘Certainly the future for Morris . . . was a rural one’, though noting his – in this context, paradoxical – influence on architects and planners like Howard and Unwin. I have some reservations about this: it seems to me that the London Morris envisages is of equal value to his Kelmscott, although the structure of the book leaves the reader in the countryside as a way of calling all the traditional energies of nature to the urgent human task. On the other hand, it may be that the trace of ruralism has been responsible for reducing the political impact of Morris’s book; the point is worth pursuing, though not here.

Morris features again in the chapter on Gender, where *The Defence of Guenevere* is briefly and aptly considered in the context of other poetry dealing with sexual politics, from Tennyson’s *The Princess* to Meredith’s *Modern Love*. He appears perhaps more unexpectedly in the consideration of Culture and Empire, where he is referred to in the context of ‘cultural “atavism”’, the tendency for the literature of Imperialism to employ simpler literary modes like the adventure story and the rousing ballad. Dentith makes the point that this ‘reversion to ancestral or primitive forms, need not have only one political inflection – as all the work of the revolutionary socialist and anti-imperialist William Morris testifies’. Is it really the case that all Morris’s work does ‘revert’ in this way? Perhaps this is a way of raising the important question of Morris’s allegiance to the Gothic, or of asking us to reconsider the form of the late romances, but it remains rather too cryptic. However, it does contribute to Dentith’s important stress on the different ways in which cultural forms can be inflected.

The discussion of the poetry referred to above is the most sustained, and therefore to my mind the most illuminating piece of criticism in this packed book – over eleven pages are given to the eight poems or collections. But elsewhere there are signs of the pressure of space. There are no architects, and hardly any architecture; painting is represented mainly by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood; and while music figures illuminatingly as choirs and pianos, there is no consideration of that remarkable bourgeois cultural form, the Gilbert and Sullivan comic opera. This is merely to say that the book is a comparatively short one. Looked at in another way, it is remarkable how much Dentith manages to crowd in – rather like Frith, whose ‘panoramic pictures’ like ‘Derby Day’ and ‘The Railway Station’ are referred to as among the many attempts of the period ‘to provide inclusive metaphors of the whole social order’. The problem of length is due to Dentith’s principled refusal to restrict ‘cultural forms’ to works of high culture. Clearly, as he shows, each class had its own forms, all of which would repay consideration. But for him to be able to look as carefully as one would like at all the material he refers to would require a far more substantial book. In its present form, it is a good and useful work; but it contains the potential for something even better.

Peter Faulkner

This accessible volume is the first extended study of the impact of Pre-Raphaelitism in Canada and it certainly suggests that Morris's influence was significant, in literary terms and particularly in the 'ideological re-definition of art as craftwork' (p. 2).

In the introduction David Latham broadly characterizes Pre-Raphaelitism as the presentation of 'a literary subject in a naturalistic setting with a decorative style' (p. 7), epitomized in Morris's La Belle Iseult and articulated by him in his 'Address on the Collection of Paintings of the English Pre-Raphaelite School' (1891). In a useful summary of the development of Pre-Raphaelite painting and poetry in Britain, Latham numbers among Pre-Raphaelite characteristics a concern with the 'mutable moment' (denoted by 'Scarlet Hunters', taken from Bliss Carman's poem 'The Grave-Tree'); attention to detail; intensity of colour; representation of partial enclosures; and use of the 'grotesque'. Interesting points made here are not, unfortunately, given due attention in the rest of the volume.

Pre-Raphaelitism has now come to describe 'the Victorian aesthetic movement that led to the socialism of William Morris and the Arts and Crafts guilds and to the decadence of Oscar Wilde and the Rhymer's Club' (p. 1). Latham highlights the complexities of the Pre-Raphaelite politico-aesthetic agenda in a section which outlines the directions the 'movement' took in Canada from the 1870s. The 'fashion for Pre-Raphaelitism' (p. 13) was evident in artistic and literary communities in the 1880s, and more marked in the spheres of the decorative arts and architecture than in painting: 'it is the Morrisian democratization of art that took root in Canada' (p. 19).

In illustration of this state of affairs the first three essays focus on poetry. D. M. R. Bentley argues that the 'sensual medievalism' and 'pastoral socialism' (p. 43) of Morris's poetry are noticeable elements in the work of Confederation poets. Morris's Defence of Guenevere 'influenced' Charles G. D. Roberts's 'Launcelot and the Four Queens' (1880). Archibald Lampman's 'The Land of Pallas' (1891), ultimately a 'gradualist' (p. 38) utopia, is compared with Morris's News from Nowhere. The most thought-provoking discussion here is of Francis Sherman's 'In Memorabilia Mortis', an elegy which associates Morris with a distinctively Canadian environment.

Karen Herbert, in "'A Moment Where the Path Grew Sunlighted'", designates Sherman as Canada's 'foremost Pre-Raphaelite poet' because of his 'empathetic insight into the natural consciousness of Canadian landscape, together with the aesthetic awareness that Morris's writing provided a language for the expression of this insight'. This essay is a distinctive and more theoretical analysis of 'influence', which takes Morris's notion of 'seeing' rightly and the Pre-Raphaelite interest in the relation of the material to the visionary to show how a fellow 'explorer-poet' mapped his 'natural and cultural terrain' (p. 46).

I was unclear as to the rationale for the inclusion of Karen Kitagaw's poems ('A Circle of Pre-Raphaelites') - intriguing thought they are. The poems, and the suggestion in the introduction that they represent a 'distinctly postmodernist
reading of the Pre-Raphaelite circle’ (p. 2), could usefully have been contextualised. That said, ‘Bright Armour’, after Morris’s *The Defence of Guenevere*, cleverly and shockingly inverts the ‘rescue narrative’ to tell of a maiden who, carried off by a ‘soldier in shining armour’, brutally kills him, dons his armour and wanders in a state of madness.

The subsequent six essays deal, some more briefly than others, with the roles individual figures (such as the engraver Frederick Brigden, Sr.; the painter and graphic designer J. E. H. MacDonald; the hand-binder Minnie Pratt) played in the dissemination of Morrisian principles, and particularly with the impact of the Arts and Crafts Movement from the 1880s onwards.

The latter three of this ‘group’ of six essays constitute a more convincing analysis of the ideological and cultural contexts in which these figures worked. W. Douglas Brown defines ‘Arts and Crafts architecture’ before discussing the architect Eden Smith’s adaptation of English vernacular forms for a Canadian urban environment, as evidence of an Arts and Crafts emphasis on the integration of the arts. Eden Smith produced house plans for the Chair of Political Economy at the University of Toronto, James Mavor, and this point provides a useful link with Lisa Panayotidou’s discussion of ‘the man who knew William Morris’ (p. 161). Panayotidou argues that Mavor, who corresponded with Morris in the late 1880s, played on this friendship to fashion himself as a cultural commentator specializing in promoting Arts and Crafts ideals as a socio-aesthetic alternative to industrialization and urbanization in turn-of-the-century Toronto. His appropriation of Morris’s socialist approach extended awkwardly though, she suggests, into Mavor’s ‘ill-founded’ criticism of Morris’s ideas and representation of him in “a state of chronic Pugnacity’” (p. 169).

From reinvention to reincarnation. David Latham, in “‘Stepping Stones to Socialism’”, asserts that ‘No Canadian resembles an English Pre-Raphaelite more than Phillips Thompson resembles William Morris’. The journalist and socialist poet Thompson argued, in Morrisian spirit, for a democratic programme for revolution, but specifically as a ‘dissident intellectual in colonial Canada’ (p. 175). This was an ‘evolving’ role and Latham neatly discusses *The Politics of Labor* (1887), which advocates evolutionary rather than revolutionary reform, as an exemplification of this.

In a fitting concluding essay William E. Fredeman assesses the status of Pre-Raphaelitism in the Canadian cultural consciousness. He gives an account of the transition from the Pre-Raphaelite ‘revival’ launched in the 1960s by a ‘concatenation of events and publications’ (p. 202) to Canada’s becoming a key centre for the study of Pre-Raphaelitism, with the acquisition of major manuscript holdings in the Special Collections at the University of British Columbia – in which Professor Fredeman played a significant role which is not emphasized here.

*Scarlet Hunters* conveys a good sense of the variety of forms the Pre-Raphaelite ‘spirit’ took and, significantly, it is the first volume in the Archives of Canadian Art and Design’s Studies in Canadian Culture series. However, a full list of illustrations (citations are at the end of the individual essays) and captions accompanying figures would have been welcome.

Inga Bryden

Like most exhibition catalogues these days this book poses a particular problem for the reviewer: how to read it? The paperback is not only large, but floppy as well. Spread out flat on a desk or on my knees it soon made my neck ache and it is too heavy and unwieldy to read in bed. In the end I sat in an armchair with my feet upon a footstool and propped it up on my knees. One wonders if books like this are actually designed to be read and yet, to treat this catalogue simply as a record of the exhibition or as a work of reference would be to miss a good deal.

The book opens with essays by John Christian, Alan Crawford and Lawrence de Cars. John Christian’s amusing and thought-provoking essay, ‘A Critical Somersault’, traces the history of Burne-Jones’s critical fortunes after the First World War. Like Morris, though not for exactly the same reasons, he went very much out of fashion between the wars. Several explanations for this – not enough of a realist, not a great draughtsman, too escapist – were offered by contemporary commentators but by far the most entertaining is that of the critic whose *Apollo* review of Burne-Jones’s centenary exhibition in 1933 attributed the ethereal qualities of his work to bad health: ‘Who knows but what a different diet would have made a different man of him?’

Alan Crawford covers familiar ground in ‘Burne-Jones as a Decorative Artist’ and is perhaps strongest on the book illustration. Lawrence de Car’s brisk and authoritative essay, ‘Burne-Jones in France’, focuses on the ways in which French artists and aesthetes paid homage in the 1880s to Burne-Jones as one of the precursors of Symbolism. He was particularly admired by Puvis de Chavannes and Moreau (whose picture, *The Apparition*, appeared at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1877 with Burne-Jones’s *The Beguiling of Merlin*) and later by Proust. In the 1890s his reputation remained high even as it declined at home. In Belgium, where he was especially admired by Kknoff, he was even more feted and his celebrity lasted well into the twentieth century. A friendship was formed with Kknoff but on the whole, Burne-Jones’s response to this adulation was somewhat ambivalent, as Christian notes later. The excesses of European Symbolism were not to his taste.

The catalogue is divided into seven sections organised chronologically, each with an introductory essay by John Christian. Stephen Wildman wrote most of the meticulous and very detailed catalogue entries. Between them they have brought together a vast range of material. The work exhibited ranged from the vast tapestries of the 1890s to designs for jewellery, funerary monuments, and caricatures of Morris. They were drawn from collections as far afield as Melbourne and Puerto Rico. The only significant omission is the colossal *Arthur in Avalon* which was too large to transport. The scope of the exhibition is well-represented in the range and excellent quality of the illustrations.

Among the essays interspersed with the catalogue entries, ‘Ruskin and Italy’ is particularly acute in the way that it outlines Ruskin’s relationship with Burne-Jones and the influence of Venetian and Renaissance art for which Ruskin was the channel. ‘A New Voice’ offers a lively account of Burne-Jones’s patrons, admirers,
and associates and the social and artistic milieu in which they lived and worked in the 1860s. Burne-Jones, like Morris, was a formidably hard worker. ‘My holiday is to begin a new picture’, Wildman quotes him as saying. His working methods are described in the essay, ‘The “Seven Blissfullest Years”’. There was perhaps something neurotic in his propensity to return again and again to the same subjects, even to rework the same images or the same pictures, as if he could not finally decided that they were finished. The results were by no means always an improvement on the originals.

‘Fame at Home and Abroad’ describes how Burne-Jones burst into public notice at the opening exhibition of the Grosvenor Gallery in 1877 and the subsequent emergence of a Burne-Jones myth, to which the artist himself shrewdly contributed. He was aided by acolytes like Graham Robertson, whose description of his first meeting with the artist is wonderfully overblown: ‘He might have been a priest newly stepped down from the altar, the thunder of great litanies still in his ears, a mystic with spirit but half recalled from the threshold of another and fairer world; but as one gazed in reverence the hieratic calm of the face would be broken by a smile so mischievous, so quaintly malign, as to unfrock the priest at once and transform the magi into the conjurer at a children’s party.’ Burne-Jones’s charm and intelligence were, and clearly remain, immensely seductive: Christian’s own account is only saved from hagiography by an astringent awareness of the artist’s failings, which included a tendency to vindictiveness. He cut a poor figure in the Ruskin-Whistler libel case in which, Christian suggests, he was motivated by personal dislike and professional rivalry with Whistler.

The description of Burne-Jones on the cover as ‘Artist-Dreamer’, at first struck me as a little whimsical, a little fey, but on reflection that seems quite appropriate as long as one resists taking Burne-Jones entirely at his own evaluation. Overall the picture of Burne-Jones which emerges from these pages is full and well-rounded.

Christine Poulson

Richard and Hilary Myers, William Morris Tiles. The Tile Designs of Morris and His Fellow-Workers, (Shepton Beauchamp; Richard Dennis 1996), 152 pp., £38.00. ISBN 0 903685 43 4.

The fruit of many years’ research, this fine book was unquestionably the most important publication on Morris & Company’s work to appear in the Morris Centenary year. The authors, who have long been the acknowledged authorities in the field, document an area of the Firm’s activities – one which relied especially on collaborative design and production – which has hitherto received scant attention from historians. Yet the ‘tally of at least three dozen patterns and well over one hundred different pictorial designs’ discussed and illustrated here constitutes a significant element in the Firm’s output of architectural decoration, especially in its first decade. It is not surprising to see among the patrons of tiled decoration the familiar names of G. F. Bodley, G. E. Street and G. G. Scott Jnr., whose commissions for stained glass and painting did so much to sustain and
promote the enterprise of Morris and his partners. Scott, in particular, instigated two of Morris's masterpieces in the medium, described here in detail for the first time: the magnificent tiled reredoses of angels in the Sussex churches of Findon and Clapham mark a high point in the Firm's ceramic work which was never surpassed.

Morris & Co. tiles are, in the Myers' words, 'as far removed as possible from the products of Victorian industrialism'. Indeed, so doggedly handicraft were Morris's methods of manufacture that they can elicit accusations of amateurism or even wilful perversity from present-day ceramicists. The Firm's limited kiln facilities, however, at both Red Lion Square and Queen Square enforced a dependence on the less durable 'overglaze' technique which, whatever its deficiencies, does preserve the spontaneous 'touch of the brush', identified by J. W. Mackail as an essential quality of Morris tilework. When the brush was in the hands of such fluent talents as Kate and Lucy Faulkner, it is then a matter of art transcending any perceived limitations in the materials. The reader is well served by a clearly explained and illustrated analysis of the tile-decoration techniques used by the Firm's own painters, by associates such as William De Morgan and by 'subcontracted' Dutch firms who later supplied many of the patterned tiles.

In discussing (and illustrating) for the first time every known Morris & Company tile design, the authors inevitably challenge a number of received views. The 'Swan' pattern, for example, was for many years ascribed to Webb despite consistent evidence pointing to Morris as the designer. There is rather less certainty about some of the individual figures from 'The Months', the well known overmantel designed for Queens' College, Cambridge (versions also at the William Morris Gallery and elsewhere), but the Myers' suggested attributions are undoubtedly the most plausible yet.

In the case of one particular group of designs from the 1870s, which display elements characteristic of both Morris/Webb and of William De Morgan, the absence of documentation or original designs clouds the issue. It is clear, however, that after De Morgan's period of direct association with the Firm (mid-1860s - early 1870s), during which tiles such as 'Sunflower' and 'Artichoke' were first produced, a fairly close collaboration continued, with Morris supplying designs ('Rose', 'Tulip and Trellis', 'Poppy') for De Morgan to decorate in his own pottery. Properly placing such patterns in the context of Morris's 1870s work in other media, the book includes illustrations of Morris's often closely-related designs for wallpapers and textiles.

Among the many noteworthy revelations of this book are the previously neglected contributions as tile-designers of Philip Webb and of his close friend Kate Faulkner. Webb's taste for Delft-style blue and white tiles and his talent for designing in a personal re-interpretation of the Dutch idiom were among the many ways in which he gently nudged the Firm towards a wider aesthetic of craftsman-ship than simply Pre-Raphaelite medievalism. It was no doubt his admiration of traditional Dutch ceramic manufacture which led Morris & Co. to subcontract production of its blue and white tiles to factories in Holland in the 1870s. The kitchen fireplace in the basement of Kelmscott House is adorned with some of these Dutch-painted tiles in Webb's delightful 'Wreaths' pattern. Kate Faulkner's role as designer and executant remains frustratingly shadowy. Webb regarded her as a
paragon among craft-workers, an opinion supported by her sensitive tile-paintings of Burne-Jones’s ‘Penelope’ and ‘St Cecilia’ designs (Fitzwilliam Museum), probably the finest of all surviving examples. Her own designs are equally impressive, especially the ‘Hawthorn’ tile which, as R. and H. Myers point out, echoes in its relief decoration the gesso technique for which she was renowned.

Outstanding and definitive books on Morris and his circle sooner or later gain the accolade of being known simply by their authors’ names. Alongside ‘Mackail’, ‘Sewter’, ‘Parry’, ‘Kelvin’ and the others in this pantheon, ‘Myers’ can justly expect to take its dual place. No serious library on Morris’s arts and crafts can dispense with this well written and beautifully illustrated book.

Peter Cormack

Peter Stansky, Another Book that Never Was: William Morris, Charles Gere, The House of the Wolfings, (San Francisco: The Book Club of California 1998), pp. 46, 18 b/w illus. No ISBN. For details of The Book Club of California write to the Membership Secretary, 312 Sutter Street, Suite 510, San Francisco, California 94108-4397.


The Book Club of California was founded in 1912 as a non-profit making association for ‘book lovers and collectors who have a special interest in the literature and history of the Pacific Coast, in the graphic arts, and in fine printing’. If this volume is anything to go by their members enjoy privileged access to some very special books indeed. This is a truly beautiful book. Designed by Christine Taylor of Wilsted & Taylor Publishing Services of Oakland, California it is printed by The Yolla Bolly Press of Covelo, California on Mohawk Superfine paper. The binding by Cardoza-James is of Iris cloth with Fabriano side and end sheets. It would be a truly sumptuous addition to any Morris library.

Peter Stansky’s text is also fascinating. The title of the book is, of course, a reference to Joseph R. Dunlap’s account of Morris and Burne-Jones’s unsuccessful attempt in 1865 to produce an illustrated edition of The Earthly Paradise. However, Stansky’s story is in many respects just as interesting. Some years back he tells us that his sister, the art critic Marina Vaizey, gave him a present of four drawings that Charles Gere had made for a proposed – but never issued – illustrated Kelmscott edition of The House of the Wolfings (three of which have subsequently appeared in the final volume of Norman Kelvin’s Collected Letters of William Morris).

Gere is best known to most Morrisians as the designer of the famous frontispiece to News from Nowhere depicting the entrance to Kelmscott Manor. According to Cockerell it was the success of this drawing which led Morris to ask Gere in December 1892 to illustrate The House of the Wolfings. Stansky, using the correspondence in the Collected Letters, traces the development of the project.
Although the work proceeded relatively well during the summer of 1893, it is clear that by the autumn Morris was becoming more and more disillusioned by Gere’s designs. Although many illustrations were produced – some of which are now missing – it seems that the project was eventually abandoned near the end of 1894. The main things that emerges from this correspondence are just how meticulous Morris was in insisting that Gere considered the composition of each design, that he was historically accurate, and that he kept rigidly to the text of the story.

We shall never know why Morris eventually rejected Gere’s illustrations for *The House of the Wolfings*. Stansky is of the opinion that they ‘perhaps did deserve to be published in a Kelmscott Press edition’ (p. 40). I tend to agree with him on the evidence of the surviving illustrations produced in the book. However, one can also appreciate some of Morris’s reservations. Perhaps, as Stansky implies, Morris was never totally happy with any illustrator other than Burne-Jones (although, it should be added, he was not always entirely happy with his work either).

As this book is limited to 350 copies it is unlikely that many Morrisians on this side of the Atlantic will ever possess a copy. This is a shame as it deserves to be on the shelves of everyone interested in Morris’s work for the Kelmscott Press. Both The Book Club of California and Peter Stansky are to be congratulated on producing such an elegant volume.

I have no doubt that both William Morris and Charles Gere would have been delighted with Marc Fasanella’s *Mary: A Christmas Story*. Described by Fasanella as ‘a rather agnostic account of “Mary’s” [as in the Bible] celebrated pregnancy . . . [of which] the mature William Morris would have approved’, this is a beautifully illustrated, hand-bound volume in the best Arts and Crafts tradition. Indeed, the copy I have in front of me is exquisitely bound in real wooden boards.

The book is one of the results of Marc Fasanella’s sabbatical year in which he arranged an exhibition – ‘The Artisan and the Virtual Age: Reflections on William Morris’ – which was held from 27 October 1998 to 3 December 1998 at the Avram Gallery at Southampton College, New York (a report of which appeared in the *Newsletter* of the William Morris Society in the United States in January 1999). All the exhibits at this event were hand-crafted by Fasanella ‘in an effort to bring to light the role of the artisan in our technology-orientated society’ – an aim that Morris would no doubt have thoroughly endorsed.

The book itself is a wonderful piece of craftsmanship. It is illustrated with a series of individually designed nude studies of Mary alongside the text written by the mysterious Dante A. Puzzo. As the latter also provided a commentary on Fasanella’s original exhibition I suspect he might have more than a passing knowledge of the designer! Whatever the case, these are contemporary illustrations in the tradition of Burne-Jones, Walter Crane and Charles Gere but imbued with a sensuality none of the former possessed. If you can get hold of a copy buy it!

*Nicholas Salmon*

To many of us the Royal Society is a vaguely familiar name, but we would have difficulty in describing its exact nature and function. We probably do not realise that it was founded as long ago as 1754, in the spirit of the early Enlightenment, as the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, incorporated by Royal Charter in 1847, and granted permission by Edward VII in 1908 to adopt the prefix Royal. This is partly because it has evolved quietly over the years, as Allan shows in this informative book, in a peculiarly English way, being simultaneously independent of the state, but having strong links with the Establishment. This book is the successor to three previous histories published in 1913, 1934 and 1954; as Allan, the historical advisor to the Society, puts it in his brief Preface, this one is ‘less detailed but more up-to-date’ than its predecessors. The historical narrative is divided into nine sections, each of some thirty years, followed by a sequence of relevant illustrations, reproduced with reasonable clarity considering the photocopy medium, and often of great intrinsic interest: for instance, A Perspective View of Mr. Stanfield’s Saw Mill, or the Transactions plate for An Improved Anchor, apparently the ‘test drawing for his premium by young Millais’, or the leaf-handled Prize-winning Jug by Minton (c. 1850) or Voysey’s certificate as a Designer for Industry. The book takes us on a rapid and illuminating tour of the Society and its activities from 1754 to 1993. There are also no fewer than seven Appendices. The first of these reproduces the texts of three early accounts of the Society, by Edward Bridgen in 1765, a second anonymous account in The Microcosm of London in 1811, and by S. T. Davenport in 1868 (the last in typically cramped Victorian double columns of small type). Then there is an illustrated account of the early medals awarded by the Society, followed by a page of reflections on the role of the Society today by the present Director, Penny Egan. This is followed by a list of recent Officers of the Society, and the Principal Medallists since 1954. Then there is a graph of the Society’s membership, showing a continuous increase in the last fifty years; and a series of Suggestions for Further Reading. Next comes a detailed Chronology from 1722, when a ‘Chamber of Arts’ was first proposed, to the year 2004, which will be the Society’s two hundred and fiftieth anniversary. Finally, we have a List of Illustrations, and a Name Index. All in all, a thorough and useful compilation, if not, in its A4 format, a particularly elegant one.

The approach adopted, necessarily perhaps, emphasises those involved with the organisation and leadership of the Society. Those with the longest entries include Prince Albert, Sir Henry Cole, the Duke of Edinburgh, Hugh, Duke of Northumberland, the Duke of Sussex, the Prince of Wales and Sir Henry Trueman Wood, along with the less exalted Robert Adam, James Barrie, Stephen Hales, K. W. Luckhurst, G. E. Mercer, Samuel More and William Shipley. Marx unexpectedly scores four times, Morris twice, like Hogarth, Lutyens, Smollett and Fiona MacCarthy, while Ambrose Heal, Reynolds and Voysey appear once each; interestingly, Pugin,
Carlyle and Ruskin do not appear at all. Marx, it appears, was actually among those written to in 1869 with the aim of increasing the membership, and his formal letter of acceptance is reproduced. The first mention of Morris appears, ironically, in a chapter called ‘Empire and Royalty’, where his active membership of the Society’s applied art section is mentioned. The Society, we are informed, offered £150 in money prizes, and twenty bronze medals, to the Arts & Crafts Exhibition Society in 1889. The second mention is of a course endowed by the Cantor Trust on ‘The Life and Art of William Morris’, perhaps in the centenary year of 1934. It would be interesting to know who delivered the course, and how it was received.

This is a reminder that what we have here is the official history of the organisation and development of the Society, which cannot give much space to the kinds of detail that a non-member like myself might find more interesting. But many of these can be found in the Chronology; from these very diverse entries an informative history of British culture might be written. For instance, for 1840 we read: ‘Gold medal awarded to C. A. Bruce for cultivating tea in Assam. Silver medal to J. E. Millais for an historical composition’, or for 1870: ‘Popular education campaign. Railway nationalisation campaign (to 1873)’. And the main text of course contains many important facts; for instance that it was the Society, in collaboration with the Royal Academy, that in 1935 promoted the first major exhibition of British Art in Industry since the nineteenth century, from which grew the Council for Art and Industry (later the ‘Design Council’), with its concomitant award of Designer (later Royal Designer) for Industry. The fact that ‘the Society gained in prestige through its association with the then highly popular Prince of Wales . . . who . . . performed the opening ceremony’ reminds us of the mixture of social and artistic elements that has made the Society a uniquely English institution. We may feel that the Queen was guilty of some exaggeration when in 1974 she remarked that, ‘more than any other body in the United Kingdom’, the Society establishes ‘the national standard of culture and civilisation’. But in our period of increasing specialisation, it is heartening to learn about a body with such wide interests and such open-mindedness. Long may it flourish.

Peter Faulkner