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Editorial
Where Have All the Manuscripts Gone?
Morris’s Autographs in Diaspora

Florence S. Boos

In the days before the typewriter all that we know of printed materials was, of course, first inscribed manually. But Morris was an extreme case of *philographia*, in his study of medieval manuscripts, his calligraphic one-of-a-kind ‘artist’s books’ and his extensive preparations for what would become published materials in several handwritten forms – as pencilled drafts in small notebooks; penned drafts on lined pages; handsome fair copies, often on larger, more durable paper; delicately traced illuminated texts with decorated initials; copies of his poems neatly written out for friends; and finally, as corrected page proofs for the Kelmscott Press. Morris was as productive in this realm as in many others, and contemplation of the sheer enormity of the preserved drafts and calligraphic art works which he inscribed in his lifetime – *tens of thousands* of pages of them – staggers the mind.

Morris must thus have spent many hours of his busy days and nights in the physical labour of composing, rewriting and copying his extensive literary output into more legible or attractive forms (even exclusive of his voluminous correspondence, documented in five large volumes of his published letters, with a sixth forthcoming). Moreover he apparently enjoyed these acts of inscription, as testified by the precision of his firm, bold yet attractive fair copies, often of near-calligraphic quality. In later
life he could well have afforded a private secretary to copy his literary works, and there are a few rare instances of such replicas, but mostly he preferred that the pleasures and responsibilities of composing his writings, in the most literal and physical as well as imaginative senses, should be his.

Dispersal of these manuscripts began shortly after his death, however, when Morris’s executors included some in the large posthumous sale of his books and incunabula.¹ In general, though, the executors seem to have considered books as more valuable than autograph writings, which were viewed as personal items, and thus remained the property of Jane Morris. Although Jane gave calligraphic manuscripts of Morris’s *Halfdan the Black* and *King Harold* to Wilfrid and Lady Anne Blunt in 1897, a later letter reveals that she valued those which remained, as she wrote to an unidentified recipient on 26 July 1907: ‘I can only say that I could not think of parting with any of my precious M.S.S.’.²

After her death, however, May apparently began to give away or sell off many of her father’s autographs. For example, she gave manuscripts to John Quinn, a New York collector who, for a brief period, had seemed to express romantic interest in her, and she apparently sold many others, convinced she could ‘borrow them back’ when needed. Her motives were probably not entirely financial, since at Jane’s death she had inherited her mother’s share of Morris’s estate – perhaps the welter of inherited artefacts was simply too overwhelming for her to conceive an entirely coherent plan. Moreover she must be credited with eventually leaving behind the Morris autograph materials which became the May Morris and Robert Steele Bequests at the British Library, and with bequeathing Kelmscott Manor and its contents to Oxford at her death (from whence the Morris autographs it contained have travelled to the Society of Antiquaries).

May Morris may also not have envisioned that manuscripts sold to someone in Wolverhampton in central England would end up some 5,300 miles to the west in Pasadena, California, or, worse, divided – virtually shredded – among many remote repositories; or considered that sale to private collectors might make these materials unavailable for decades, even permanently. Nor was May Morris the sole owner of Morris autographs, and separate, well-intentioned attempts to secure their own Morris keepsakes for posterity by Emery Walker, Charles Fairfax Murray, Sydney Cockerell and Georgiana Burne-Jones and her children have likewise contributed, somewhat ironically, to limiting their availability. As the editor of the William Morris Archive, over the past several years I have made efforts to partially remediate this diaspora insofar as is now possible – that is, by photographing Morris’s manuscripts for regrouping on the Archive with other versions of the same text. In the rest of this article I will describe the extent and possible consequences of this initial dispersal, and suggest some ways in which we might nonetheless still examine and benefit from
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these scattered memorials (see Figure 1).

As indicated on the map, Morris autographs are located in libraries in England (in Leeds, Cheltenham, Oxford, Cambridge and several repositories in London), in the United States (in Amherst, Massachusetts; New Haven, Connecticut; Newark, Delaware; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Austin, Texas; Iowa City, Iowa and Pasadena, California), in Amsterdam in the Netherlands (home of the records of the Socialist League and some of Morris’s socialist essays) and in several private collections. Most notorious among the latter is the case of Andrew Lloyd Weber, who, in order to increase the value of his multi-million pound acquisition, is unwilling to permit any access to or photography of Morris’s illuminated *Aeneid*, said to be Morris’s calligraphic masterpiece. And we do not even know how many literary drafts or illuminated manuscripts there are or were. In one striking case, a near calligraphic-quality manuscript believed to have been at Kelmscott Manor has simply disappeared (the second volume of a three-volume translation of the Old French *Lancelot of the Lake*); one can only hope that at some point it will resurface (see Figure 2).

This dispersal is a practical problem for anyone seeking to gather such images, of course, but such difficulties pale in comparison to its effects on scholarship, and perhaps even to some degree on Morris’s posthumous reputation. Documentary source materials inspire interested questions in those who study them; for example, it is especially valuable to be able to trace an artist’s composition through several stages. In the decades of the mid-twentieth century, when close readings, the exploration of poetic development and attention to revisions were prized – an era which witnessed the creation of variorum editions for authors such as Wordsworth, Keats and Gerard
Manley Hopkins – Morris’s alleged untroubled facility with words made his works less attractive as subjects of serious study: who could care about the artistry and composition practices of a man who simply published his first drafts? As late as 1967 a major critic could proclaim that Morris’s casual facility in writing made his long poems themselves unworthy of study. In these latter days, surrounded by piles of manuscripts (metaphorically speaking), the assumption that Morris’s poetry and prose were casually composed rather than the results of herculean and sustained efforts now seems close to ludicrous.

All these dispersions may also have encouraged the view that the artefacts of Morris’s labour should be seen as a collection of rare and now expensive collectors’ curios rather than witnesses to meaningful coherence. In general more (but not all) of the drafts for the prose romances seem to have gone to the United States, as well as many (but not all) drafts for the longer socialist writings such as *Hopes and Fears for Art* (Yale), ‘Socialism from the Root Up’ (the Morgan Library) and, amazingly, two drafts of *News from Nowhere* (recently purchased by the Morgan Library from a British collector) (see Figure 3). Most but not all of the drafts for the early poems remained in England, divided between the Fitzwilliam and British Libraries, although a few
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others have ended up in Austin, Texas and Pasadena. Similarly, several generations of Earthly Paradise drafts and fair copies are divided between Cambridge, London, New Haven and Pasadena, with separate notebooks from the same set of contemporaneous early drafts in Morris’s large round hand now found in three locations.

The translations are likewise largely scattered, with the classical ones (the Iliad, the Aeneid) moving westward, and the Icelandic ones, in some cases embodying Morris’s collaborations with Eiríkr Magnússon, now found in all manner of places from Leeds to Cheltenham to the Society of Antiquaries to the Bodleian to the Huntington Library. It is a pleasant surprise to learn that many interlaced drafts for Morris’s 1873 poem Love Is Enough have been preserved, if unread, since the early

Figures 4-5 (above and right): ‘A gloss in rhyme on the story of Howard, by William Morris’, from Howard the Halt, ff. 241, 243, Fitzwilliam, MS 270

twentieth century in the Huntington Library in Pasadena, revealing that this rather abstract and opaque, if lovely poem, was built up almost by sound alone, emotively plodless to its core. Yet any glimmer of a pattern – say, of the retention of most early MSS. in the United Kingdom and of most later ones in the United States – is confounded by the vast depository of Morris’s later socialist essays and related documents in the British Library.

A further consequence of the difficulty of accessing Morris manuscripts is that even now it is difficult to know the extent of what Morris wrote. As a young woman, inspired by the efforts of Christopher Ricks, Richard Altick, William Fredeman and others to tame the corpora of other major Victorian poets, I first entered the British Library with the apparently modest aim of preparing a checklist of Morris’s poems with a view to a future collected edition (note: only his poems, not his writings more broadly). I was, at the onset, quite surprised to find about fifteen unpublished Morris poems, a fifty-six page Socialist Diary of considerable historical interest, and seven unpublished essays (one still unpublished), hiding in plain sight in Britain’s foremost repository. Forty years later this checklist – ongoing, digitised and available on the Archive – would, if printed out, be at least 600 pages. Yet an actual determination of the number of Morris’s poems remains elusive – in mathematical terms, perhaps, provable yet indeterminate – and rendered more difficult by the impossibility of gathering pages of related content into one location.
In yet another of the many quirks of dispersal, the Burne-Jones family trustingly donated their materials to the Fitzwilliam Museum Library via Sydney Cockerell, Morris’s exquisitely organised assistant at the Kelmscott Press who later became the curator of the Museum. This seems to me to have been a generous act with unintended consequences – for how could Georgiana have known that these materials would be both preserved and cordoned off from the public in succeeding years in the Founder’s Library, an obscure and (literally) shaded room off the main floor of the Fitzwilliam Museum (with entrance permitted only by advance appointment and limited information available on the Fitzwilliam Library or Museum’s websites). The Fitzwilliam forbids photography of ‘bound manuscripts’, a category which by definition includes most of Morris’s works in their possession, lovingly bound or rebound by his friends. Their holdings include items collected by Charles Fairfax Murray, Morris’s original fair copies of the 1871 and 1873 Icelandic Journals, written out with excisions marked for publication and inscribed to Georgiana, and several especially fine calligraphic manuscripts presented to Georgiana. Never available to the wider public, these latter have, as far as I know, never been reproduced, and I have met only one other person who has actually viewed any of them (Gary Aho, a former president of the William Morris Society in the United States).

So what might one find? On a recent visit to the Founder’s Library I was delighted to encounter what I believe to be a hitherto uncollected Morris poem – never reproduced in his lifetime, and since buried within the lovely illuminated manuscript of his translation of Howard the Halt (see Figures 4-5) which he presented to Georgiana circa 1874. Karl Anderson and William Whitla have documented the extent to which Morris not only translated the sagas but attempted in material ways to replicate the practices of the skalds through his diction, meter, calligraphy and even his critical approach to his own creative works. A recent article by Ian Felce explains Morris’s attempts not only to employ the words of his source text but also the principles of skaldic craft, using both drottvaett verse forms and kennings, a form of circumlocutory metaphor which even for medieval Icelanders would have required interpretation.

Morris was also given to directly personal poetic responses to the Icelandic past, for example, in his ‘Iceland First Seen’, ‘Gunnar’s Howe Above the Grave at Lithend’ and two sonnets to Grettir Asmundson (‘Nay, with the dead I deal not, this man lives’). May Morris had failed to publish another poignant poem, ‘O Fair Gold Goddess’, composed in the voice of a putative skald, Vilhjálmr Vandraeðaskáld (‘William the Troubled Skald’), after learning from Old Norse scholar Dame Bertha Phillpots that this highly personal poem was after all not a translation but an original composition. In the same way, no one, apparently, had cared to note and print the gloss on Howard
– quite understandably, considering its imprisonment in the Fitzwilliam Founder’s Library. Whatever its merits or deficiencies as a poem, Morris’s tribute embodies his efforts not only to preserve the memorials of a previous Icelandic transcriber-poet but to assume for himself the skaldic persona – to embed his observations and emotions directly and physically within the medieval text he has both translated and rendered in artistic form.

Why did Morris select this particular tale for commentary, among the many he translated? *Howard the Halt* is the first story included in volume one of the *Saga Library*; perhaps with characteristic ambition Morris had initiated a hand-illuminated version of what would later become the six-volume printed version of the *Library*, and, as we have seen, by including his commentary on the first selection he would have been proclaiming his intention to follow the precedent of earlier scribes. Yet this answer merely deflects one remove further the question: why was *Howard the Halt* chosen as the first tale of the *Saga Library’s* twenty-one translation sequence?

As saga aficionados may recall, Howard had been a warrior of distinguished lineage, happily married to Biargey and extremely attached to their sole offspring, a promising, strong and good-hearted youth named Olaf. Howard had been previously lamed in a fight, and thus his sobriquet, ‘the Halt’. Far worse, however, was the psychological blow when an influential neighbouring thug Thorbiorn, along with his henchmen, ambushed and murdered Olaf from jealousy at the youth’s popularity and good reputation; moreover, after this violent deed, Thorbiorn had further crushed Olaf’s skull and preserved the jawbone and teeth in a sack. So grieved was Howard at his son’s death that he lost all interest in life and took to his bed for the better part of three years. Biargey urged him to ask for compensation from Thorbiorn at the annual Thing, or Law Court, as was the Icelandic custom after an unprovoked slaying, but when Howard did so Thorbiorn instead opened the sack and threw Olaf’s jaw and teeth into the bereaved father’s face.

At this further affront Howard was stung to action, and with Biargey’s assistance he gathered their relatives and mounted numerous counterattacks. In addition to killing Thorbiorn, he and his kindred also slew certain of the latter’s attendants and family members, and the account of these counterattacks consumes ten of the saga’s twenty-four chapters. Such mayhem at last aroused protest (though not as much as might reasonably have been expected), and the relatives of the slain and others, among them the elderly priest Thorarin, brought the case to the Thing’s highest judge, Guest Oddleifson. The latter ruled that Howard’s killing of those known to cause mischief, including Thorbiorn, had been justified; on the other hand, Howard’s party had also killed two innocent men, and these deeds were to be set against the murder of Olaf. Nonetheless, all those involved at any level were to be exiled from the region
during the elderly Thorarin’s lifetime, so that the latter need not fear any recurrence of blood-feud. Ironically Howard prospered in his new Icelandic homestead, and later benefited from emigration to Norway, where he settled in peace, befriended the new and renowned monarch Olaf Trygvison, and converted to Norway’s newly proclaimed religion of Christianity. At Howard’s request, after his death his kinsman Thorhall built a church in his memory, using wood Howard had brought from Iceland.6

What Morris writes in response to this tale of bloodletting and survival is not literary criticism proper, but a testimony to what for him was the enduring importance of the saga’s themes. As he recounts the tale, these include a middle-aged man’s attempt to overcome inaction, depression and crippling loss:

[242v] Old Haward lived belike in yore agone
no life of dreams, but joys enow he won
And joys he lost within the fire-wrought isle […]

[243] A dream methinks all this by someone told
of many griefs, in all despair grown old;
A dream of lying down unloved, alone;
feeble, unbeauteous, but by mocking known,
And waking up a famous man and fair;
Well-loved, most mighty, bold all deeds to dare;
happy to bring the hardest thing to pass;
Nought left save longing of the wretch one was:
Of lying down most loth to wake again,
And waking up to wonder what was pain –
A dream of wrong in one night swept away
And Baldur’s kingdom come with break of day[.]

Only perchance too faint of heart was he;
Who deemed hereof, a happy man to be
E’en in a dream; – too faint heart say we then!
Nay, rather brave to watch the sons of men
Winning today the battle lost yestreen,
Blessing the place where his vain blood hath been.

[243v] Yea, lacked he all good hap whose fond desire
Smoldering a while, broke out at last in fire
To burn long after all his woe was done,
Lighting a little space of yore agone.

Morris here engages in what literary critics would call ‘strong interpretation’, even (pace Harold Bloom) ‘misprision’, since the saga does not present Howard as suffering romantic loss (‘a dream of lying down unloved, alone’) but the death of his son. Moreover, though as a former warrior he may have taken satisfaction in revenge and a restored reputation, these could scarcely resurrect his heir, sweep wrong away in one night, or bring him or the world closer to Baldur’s kingdom of justice. Arguably Morris has instead responded to his hero with deep empathy for the latter’s sense of personal loss, finding in his sudden transformation from immobility to action a fable of the possibility of finding renewed purpose in later life. This was a message which might have seemed heartening to a man who, in 1874, newly returned from two Icelandic trips and now solely responsible for Morris and Co., still grieved his wife’s perceived lack of love for him in the period before beginning his labours on behalf of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (1877 ff.), the Eastern Question Association (1876-78), the Social Democratic Federation (1883-84), the Socialist League (1885-90), the Hammersmith Socialist Society (1891-96), *Commonweal* (1885-90) and the Kelmscott Press (1891-96).

Morris’s approach to *Howard the Halt* is clearly not one favoured by literary critics today. It might be described as one of personal application. Morris takes the saga to heart as a model for emulation and reflection, rather as a nineteenth-century reader or auditor might have absorbed a sermon. Even if one’s utopian desires are only fleetingly realised, the poem asserts, these give intensity to one’s life and linger after death, irradiating one’s struggles with retrospective meaning, and for one’s successors, ‘Lighting a little space of yore agone’.

In summary, a mixture of necessity, happenstance and a few questionable decisions has made the task of making sense of Morris’s arduous composition practices as well as the range of his stunning and exquisite calligraphy more difficult, even confounding answers to such seemingly simple questions as: ‘How much did Morris write?’. But perhaps a revenant Morris would have said that the struggle to retrieve a lost past – in this case, the passion and craft behind the many incarnations of his writings – echoes the kind of time travel he himself had practised in returning to the worlds of the Peasant’s Revolt, the myths of ancient Greece or the sanguinary feuds of medieval Iceland. Etched into but never fully expressible through the media of paper, vellum,
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pencil, pen and brush, these physical evidences of Morris’s intense creative purposes may yield yet more penned but unpublished writings for discovery, or, less mundanely convey a trace of his spirit across intervening time.

NOTES
6. Ingrid Hanson, in William Morris and the Uses of Violence, 1856-1890 (London: Anthem, 2013), argues that Morris’s literary works reflect a commitment to the transformative power of violence. Though this argument neglects Morris’s many literary works centred on more peaceful themes, it is hard to ignore the relentlessly violent content of the Icelandic literature to which he was deeply attracted.
In *The Sundering Flood*, the eponymous river that divides the protagonist from his beloved, is for many ‘no sunderer but a uniter’. ‘The folk of the City and its lands’ say that:

[the flood] joined land to land and shore to shore; that it had peopled the wilderness and made the waste places blossom, and that no highway for wheels and beasts in all the land was so full of blessings and joys as was their own wet Highway of the Flood.¹

The metaphor of the wet highway, which Morris had rehearsed in *The Water of the Wondrous Isles* prior to its appearance in *The Sundering Flood*, ascribes to the flood the qualities associated with an artifice. The flood functions more effectively than its human-made counterpart, the road. In this description, connection to distant lands appears as natural as the rivers, seas and oceans themselves – it does not have to be mediated by technological developments that are shaped by the capitalist mode of production. Morris’s approach here resonates with today’s discourse on planetarity, which focuses on ecological networks that rival capitalist globalisation. As Amy Elias and Christian Moraru write, the planetary indicates ‘a historically unprecedented web of relations among peoples, cultures, locales’ that have an ecological basis.² This essay argues that William Morris’s late prose romances construe the planetary, and that, for Morris, such webs have a primeval character rather than constituting a recent development.

Morris’s planetary approach is rooted in his critique of both nationalism and capitalism. In ‘the Manifesto of the Socialist League’ (1885), Morris wrote that ‘we seek a change in the basis of Society – a change which would destroy the distinctions of classes and nationalities’.³ A vestige of capitalism, nationhood would disappear if
economic transformation took place. Elsewhere, Morris called the nation ‘a sham community’ and insisted that ‘we might live utterly without national rivalries’. The architect of international conflict, for Morris, is capitalist competition, which makes global harmony impossible: ‘it is this war of the firms which hinders the peace between nations’. Literary critics have paid much attention to Morris’s cosmopolitanism, which by definition transcends ‘national limitations or attachments’ (OED). According to Regenia Gagnier, Morris’s socialist internationalism intertwined with his ‘love of the land’, which made him a ‘situated’ cosmopolitan. His sense of belonging to a worldwide community of human beings did not imply deracination. Tanya Agathocleous similarly emphasises his ability to connect the local to the global as she discusses the way in which London became ‘an integral part of a unified world’ in News from Nowhere. In this paper, rather than focusing on the cosmopolitanism of urban environments characterised by ethnic and other kinds of diversity, I turn to that which is inspired by geographical formations and manifests itself as a longing for mobility across them, in order to contend that Morris’s passion for thinking and writing about natural environments informs his cosmopolitanism.

Morris’s ecological commitments, too, have been discussed in depth by literary critics. Many scholars from, Patrick O’Sullivan to Florence Boos, have positioned him as a precursor to today’s environmentalists. Boos writes: ‘[h]is conviction that spoliation of natural beauty leads straight to other forms of deprivation made him an important predecessor of late twentieth-century environmentalism’. His political writing laments that ‘mankind, in striving to attain to a complete mastery over Nature […] destroy[s] her simplest and widest-spread gifts’, as he put it in ‘The Beauty of Life’ (1880). The precariousness of the living world and the harm carried out by industrial development troubled him, as he pondered in ‘The Prospects of Architecture in Civilization’ (1881) our responsibility ‘to posterity for what may befall the fairness of the earth in our own days, for what we have done’. Morris’s thought reflects an awareness of the impact of what we now call the Anthropocene, and it ‘exhibit[s] a prescient eco-socialist analysis of extraction capitalism’. Of course, Morris could be utopian as well as critical: like others in late nineteenth-century Britain, he explored what would happen if humans ceased to dominate nature, especially in News from Nowhere.

While Morris’s cosmopolitanism and environmentalism have received much attention, the intersection of the two in his work has not. Eddy Kent, in his exploration of Morris’s ‘green cosmopolitanism’, has argued that Morris imagined forms of camaraderie not just between people around the world, but also between ‘humans and nature’. According to Kent, nature’s ‘reciprocal relationship’ with humans in Morris’s work offers a mode of cosmopolitanism in which interdependence with
nature is central. In this essay, I seek to go beyond a consideration of eco-cosmopolitanism as an instance of harmony with nature, and to explore the ways in which moving across natural environments introduces alterity, demanding that we step with the characters into the unfamiliar. Drawn to worlds beyond their own, protagonists in Morris’s late romances encounter strange and peculiar customs and peoples as they traverse mountains, rivers and seas. Situated as Morris’s late prose romances are in particular locales, their settings shift with great pace, spanning large stretches of land and water. As Timothy Clark writes, it is the Anthropocene which necessitates that we ‘think of human life at much broader scales of space’, and Morris’s late prose romances allow us to meet that challenge in that his characters move into and out of multiple realms that lie beyond their own, overcoming the limits set by geographical and human obstacles.

In presenting a version of the planetary, Morris provides insights that are as useful from a twenty-first-century perspective as from a nineteenth-century one. Ursula Heise articulates a challenge in environmentalist thinking today: how do we ‘shift the core of its cultural imagination from a sense of place to a less territorial and more systemic sense of planet’? The late romances, where settings catalogue unfamiliar human and geographical environments, present us with cognitive tools that would help overcome the challenge that Heise outlines. If, as Heise proposes, we must find a way out of the impasse between ‘total unity’ and ‘plurality and individuality’, Morris’s ecological imagination is helpful in that it offers a sense of expanse while recognising its heterogeneous constituent elements. The insight implicit in Morris’s work is useful today: ecology involves a distinct sense of place, but it is unthinkable without a sense of large-scale networks.

To be sure, the worlds of the late romances are far from being utopian in every way. Heroines live in fear of rape; thralldom is a threat for men and women; warriors harm one another; murder deprives family members of their loved ones. To locate the planetary amidst such plot developments need not involve a contradiction. Morris’s medievalism as a whole manifests a similar dynamic, in which the presence of evil does not suffice to negate the laudable:

Do not misunderstand me; I am not a mere praiser of past times. I know that in those days of which I speak life was often rough and evil enough, beset by violence, superstition, ignorance, slavery; yet I cannot help thinking that sorely as poor folk needed a solace, they did not altogether lack one, and that solace was pleasure in their work.

If the medieval period, as Morris acknowledges here in ‘Art and the Beauty of the
Earth’ (1881), is worth our attention because of the desirable modes of artistic production it offers, the fictional, quasi-medieval worlds of the romances also host a version of the planetary that presents a way out of the impasse between insularity, on the one hand, and capitalist globalisation on the other.

In comparison to News from Nowhere, Morris’s late prose romances have attracted the attention of relatively few critics, who have in the past decades dispelled the former conviction that these works are escapist. Before exploring the ways in which these works formulate a green cosmopolitanism, this essay first dwells on the possibility of tracing our own approaches to the environment back to the nineteenth century, specifically historicising the planetary as a mode of global interconnection beyond human control. In the following sections, individual readings focus on five romances — The Story of the Glittering Plain (1891), The Wood Beyond the World (1894), The Well at the World’s End (1896), The Water of the Windrous Isles (1897) and The Sundering Flood (1897) — and discuss a variety of techniques that capture the planetary, including the trope of transgressing geographical limits, the use of panoramic perspectives and the embedding of the local in larger networks. The final section forges an affinity between romance as a mode and the planetary as a political goal as it posits that the interplay between the alien and the familiar characterises both.

I. The Planetary and Its Temporalities

‘Chiefly eco-cosmological’, the term planetary ‘advocates an urgent conceptual shift away from globalization […] toward planet as world ecology’. Elias and Moraru write that the planet appears ‘as a living organism, as a shared ecology, and as an incrementally integrated system’ when the emphasis falls on world ecology. The globe in globalisation is a ‘financial-technocratic system’, whereas the word planet implies ties that burgeon outside, and alongside, capitalist networks. Under the category of the planetary, systemic forces create networks in which the local never loses its peculiarity, but remains attached to the rest of the world. What Morris offers through the cosmos of his late romances resonates with these visions of the planetary, as these works’ multicentric worlds reflect the diversity and size of both nonhuman and human environments and present interconnection as possible outside capitalist and industrial developments. The pre-capitalist worlds of these romances conjure up bygone times in part through their peculiar use of the English language. As Carole Silver writes, Morris

utilizes the complex and archaic vocabulary he associates with Anglo-Saxon poetry, Icelandic saga, and the work of Chaucer […]. Initially difficult to comprehend, [Morris’s unique language] pulls the reader away from the words
and objects of a modern, commercial society, gradually drawing him into the remote world of which it is a manifestation.¹⁹

The archaic character of these romances does not undermine the planetary perspective they offer. At a time when inventions based on the steam engine or new communications technologies usually inspired in subjects the feeling that they inhabited a shrinking world, Morris manages to offer a sense of scale based on ecology.

If Morris offers, as I argue, a version of the planetary, he does so avant-la-lettre by approximately a century or so. In his seminal ‘Turn to the Planet: Literature, Diversity, and Totality’, Masao Miyoshi boldly asserts that ‘literature and literary studies now have one basis and goal: to nurture our common bonds to the planet – to replace the imaginaries of exclusionist familialism, communitarianism, nationhood, ethnic culture, regionalism, “globalization”, or even humanism, with the ideal of planetarianism’. The planetary consciousness is to take as its point of departure the sense that we share a single planet, cultivated by our awareness of world-scale ecological crisis. Miyoshi highlights the presentism of the planetary movement: ‘for the first time in human history’, he writes, ‘one single commonality involves all those living on the planet: environmental deterioration as a result of the human consumption of natural resources’.²⁰ A similar mindset governs Heise’s approach: ‘while […] a globalist consciousness has forcefully been taking shape ever since space flight first enabled the views of Planet Earth from outer space in the 1960s, it has only now become a core concern of social and cultural theory’.²¹ Here, she indicates by ‘globalist’ those tendencies that other scholars discuss under the category of the planetary. To be sure, wide-scale climate change alongside ubiquitous blue marble images cultivate the sense that we share a single planet, but my position in this paper is that planetary consciousness precedes this current moment. Science fiction, for instance, offered views of the planetary world in such works as Jules Verne’s Autour de la Lune (1870; translated as Around the Moon [1873]), which enlarged the characters’ and readers’ sense of scale by describing the Earth as an object whose ‘expanse […] enormous’, though elsewhere in the same genre the view from space rendered parts of the world all the more colonisable: ‘[t]he whole of Africa in the field of vision at once!’ comments a character on the moon in Paschal Grousset’s Les Exilés de la Terre (1887; translated as The Conquest of the Moon [1889]).²² A proto-planetary vision is not limited to Morris, co-extensive as it is with ‘the nineteenth-century nexus of new ideas about deep time and global weather systems, of expanding fossil fuel-based energy systems’.²³ Located in such a milieu, Morris offers his own variant of the planetary, in which ‘here’ always coexists with ‘there’, and neither loses its peculiarity.
II. Stepping into the Beyond

As Phillippa Bennett notes, the late prose romances often present locations which, ‘residing “beyond” or at the “end”’, are ‘both in and out of the world’. Ultimately, though, these narratives show that it is indeed possible to go beyond or bypass geographical limits and, upon doing so, to enter new realms with laws of their own. In *The Story of the Glittering Plain*, Hallblithe, who, in search of his betrothed, looks for a way out of the Glittering Plain where people remain young, hears of ‘the very edge of the land’. Once he finds himself outside these margins, to survive he must go back in with the three travellers whom he has just met, this time confronting ‘a sheer wall of pale stone over which nothing must go save the fowl flying’ (p. 110). Yet the team manages to traverse the mountains by travelling through a cave, and Hallblithe, later moving to the woods by the seaside, builds a skiff and sails off, ‘los[ing] sight of the Glittering Plain and the mountains thereof’ (p. 131). After a period in which there is ‘nought but sea all round about him’, he arrives at the Isle of Ransom, where, to his welcome, the rules of the land he left behind, such as prolonged youth, no longer apply (p. 131). The confinement that the mountains impose contrasts with the extensive mobility that the residents of the Isle of Ransom – the Vikings – enjoy as they roam the seas.

This trope of overcoming limits finds its mature form in *The Well at the World’s End*, which traces the adventures of Ralph, the youngest son of King Peter. The landscape in *The Well*, for which Morris’s inspiration was his Icelandic journeys, marks the border between what is the everyday, familiar way of life and that which is unusual, bizarre and fantastic. In his quest for the well that restores and prolongs youth, Ralph comes across ‘the topmost head of the mountain ridge which men call the Wall of the World’. Yet even that wall turns out to be a border rather than a terminal fixture: The Well at the World’s End ‘lieth beyond it’. Further, when Ralph and Ursula, the maiden whom he loves, reach the well, their destination becomes not so much the endpoint of a quest as a point of departure signalling a new life, a confirmation of their union and an extension of their strength. The mountains thus mark the border between what lies here and what extends beyond. The self hovers on physical borderlines, moves into alterity, and thence, having changed, revisits the home that was the point of departure.

In *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*, geographical and human limits to the protagonist’s mobility both oppress her and allow her to attach herself to the land where she lives. The initial chapters of this romance portray her as a child who, kidnapped by a witch, comes to live with her beyond the bounds of human settlement. The witch’s abode lies on the inaccessible side of a ‘measureless’ wood. Completely cut-off from human contact, the child, called Birdalone, grows up by a lake, its islands
and the surrounding woods. Later, in retrospect, she will call herself ‘a wild creature of the woods’, emphasising her commonality with the other living beings around her (p. 252). There is no opposition between wilderness and civility for Morris. There is instead the entanglement of living beings, human and non-human, with the wilderness. Representing that entanglement in this tale is Habundia, who, ‘[a]s a nature spirit […] teaches Birdalone the lore of the earth’; Habundia serves ‘eco-feminist myth-making’, and, bound as she is to the woods, it is tempting to associate her with the emphasis that some strands of environmentalism place on location and belonging. 28 Yet this romance’s coverage of the peculiarity of place intertwines with a longing for circulation.

The eponymous water is the key that unlocks the wide world beyond the lake and the woods. One day, swimming by the small eyots, Birdalone senses how she will overcome her thralldom: ‘[t]hen she communed with herself, and found that she was thinking: If I might only swim all the water and be free’ (p. 23). The water stretches too far for her to escape by swimming, but Birdalone will soon find a magical boat and discover how to operate it. At that moment, the water, which had hitherto limited her freedom, will become the channel for exploring a vast world of interconnected realms. Fittingly, when Birdalone finally gets a hold of the Sending Boat and ventures on her journey out from ‘the House of Captivity’ (p. 50), she is completely naked, an element of nature rather than an entity who seeks to master it. To venture beyond boundaries and become part and parcel of the multifarious, alien natural environments one encounters on the way is an experience of the planetary.

Human limits are like their geological counterparts in that overcoming them unlocks new domains of experience. While Birdalone, confined to a castle, waits for the three champions who have gone to rescue the women they love, the vastness of the land and the waters motivate her to exit that human-made environment. ‘I was reared amidst the woods and the meadows, and with the burning of the sun, and the buffets of the wind; and now for lack of some deal of that I am waxing white and faint’ (p. 133), complains Birdalone to the castellan. Her desire to wander follows from her connection to living beings and other elements of the ecosystem. When she finally leaves the castle behind and voyages to the mountains, the view elicits from her the response, ‘Oh! But thou art beautiful, O earth, thou art beautiful!’ (p. 158). Beauty, rather than applying only to individual elements of the Earth, marks it in its entirety. Of course, the beauty of the Earth often made an appearance in Morris’s nonfiction and shaped his philosophy of art. In ‘Art and the Beauty of the Earth’, he writes: ‘it is this reasonable share in the beauty of the earth that I claim as the right of every man who will earn it by due labour’, and treats that beauty as the key to the production of art. 29 For Birdalone, to notice the beauty of the earth is to assign
aesthetic value to the whole as well as its parts. In her exclamation, she is able to grasp the earth as a totality – and address it in the second person, highlighting a personal relationship to it – precisely because she is focused on its beauty.

III. The Panoramic Gaze

In *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*, as in *The Well at the World’s End*, mountains both mark the limits of the present world and promise the possibility of surpassing it. Once restored to the wilderness, Birdalone looks around to absorb it: ‘they came forth on to a wide green plain, all un-builted, so far as their eyes could see, and beyond it the ridges of the hills and blue mountains rising high beyond them’ (p. 138). The gesture of looking past one’s current surroundings often involves a panoramic gaze spanning a large territory.

In *The Wood Beyond the World*, Golden Walter, who travels extensively after his wife proves unfaithful to him, comes across the opportunity to pass from his world to the space beyond it. He transitions from one to the other by going through an opening in a cliff. The nonhuman environment through which Walter enters Bear-country lends itself to a panoramic survey:

> he stopped to take breath, and raised his head and looked, and lo! he was verily on the brow of the great mountain-neck, and down below him was the hanging of the great hill-slopes, which fell down, not slowly, as those he had been those days a-mounting, but speedily enough, though with little of broken places or sheer cliffs. But beyond this last of the desert there was before him a lovely land of wooded hills, green plains, and little valleys, stretching out far and wide, till it ended at last in great blue mountains and white snowy peaks beyond them.30

The aesthetic here ranges from the picturesque to the sublime. The eye moves from one landscape to another adjacent to it, a long list of landscapes accumulating for as long as the survey lasts. There is always the next landscape, offering an expansive sense of space. Self-contained environments are subsumed into a larger serial structure, coming before or after something else. As expansive as space is, our attention turns to limits within it. Each landscape is limited in scope, replaced by another as our eyes move toward the horizon. The plurality of parts, each limited within its own contours, is precisely what communicates the sense of scale.

This conglomeration of limited parts is the aesthetic that the romances abide by, not just in the landscape panoramas they often offer us, but also in portraying multiple ‘worlds’, each with its own order. From the woods where the evil Mistress resides, to the
Bear-country, to the equally alien ‘land of Stark-Wall’ and the familiar world from which Walter originates, the realms of the romance serially pile up to offer a cosmos teeming with difference (p. 110). The plot structure of the romances similarly consists of self-contained episodes that follow one another to form a much larger arc. As adventures accumulate, the plot becomes part of a serial aesthetic in which inexhaustible heterogeneity triumphs and resists the centralised energy of organic, tightly-structured teleology. Each of the Wonder Isles that Birdalone visits as she voyages through the Great Water exemplifies this aesthetic. There is always a new realm about to unfold, to merge through the horizon as other worlds recede into the background. The plurality of these episodes matches the panoramic approach to the landscape.

During the course of Walter’s adventures, panoramic visions include human-made environments that blend with non-human ones. Upon leaving the woods where the evil Mistress executes her designs, Walter, now accompanied by the lovely Maid, sees a stretch of land where a human settlement greets them:

[they] went their ways through the pass; and it soon became stony again, as they mounted the bent which went up from out the dale. And when they came to the brow of the said bent, they had a sight of the open country lying fair and joyous in the sunshine, and amidst of it, against the blue hills, the walls and towers of a great city.

(p. 104)

The diversity of parts becomes the measure of the grandeur of the whole. Once again, each landscape is neatly delineated by what lies adjacent to it, integrated into a totality. Morris, who sought a ‘fundamental readjustment between humanity and nature, based on “fellowship”’, turns the city-scape, with its towers rising alongside blue hills, into an element of a hybrid panorama. The aesthetic that marks such designs as *The Strawberry Thief*, in which we find ‘harmony and symmetry amongst abundance and diversity’, governs the description of the scene here. Morris’s ability to sacrifice neither the part nor the whole takes its cue from natural environments that lend themselves to panoramic surveys. The cognitive and visual tools that Morris deploys for reconciling wholeness with multiplicity revolve around landscapes and the living beings that inhabit them.

Panoramic descriptions in *The Wood* complement an existing tradition of urban panoramas, which, in turn, developed out of the ‘Romantic landscape painting tradition’, as Tanya Agathocleous explains. She writes that ‘[p]erhaps the most innovative and fashionable subject of panoramas […] was the city, for the panoramic spectacle itself was an urban phenomenon’, and adds that ‘panoramic paintings –
giant 360-degree canvasses that were popular public spectacles from the late eighteenth-century through the nineteenth – were designed to provide an all-encompassing overview of the urban landscape’. For Agathocleous, the panoramic form flattens the world by detracting from the confusion that cities inspire and the unknowability that they offer: ‘[v]iewers […] were able to take in every aspect of the “world” enclosed by the panoramic space and thus to participate in the illusion that foreign lands might be apprehended at a glance’. By contrast, in Morris’s fictional panoramas, the elements in one’s field of vision unfold one by one, creating a seriality which, in turn, suggests an inexhaustible heterogeneity. As space opens up in these descriptions, it is impossible to perceive all details simultaneously, in part because the medium is linguistic rather than visual. Time elapses as words accumulate. Morris assigns to nonhuman landscapes the level of detail and depth that urban panoramas locate in human environments possess, yet he resists the urge to have the viewer or reader absorb the scene all at once. With their prolonged temporality, panoramic descriptions of human and natural environments in the late romances resist the imperial urge to master space even as they convey large-scale composites.

IV. The Local and the ‘Wideness of the World’

As the prominence of the panoramic gaze indicates, Morris stresses how places belong to larger wholes. In the late romances, one can arrive at what Heise calls a ‘sense of planet’ only by way of connecting to living beings that are rooted in a particular locale – and vice versa. For instance, in *The Well at the World’s End*, the hope of universal belonging is never separate from the particularity of place. When, at the end of the quest, Ursula says: ‘I think, my dear, that I have no country, nor any house to welcome me’, Ralph replies: ‘[a]ll lands, any land thou mayst come to, shall welcome thee’. The slippage between ‘all lands’ and ‘any land’ is telling: thinking about the universal requires one to think back about the particular. The personification of the land evokes a totality that includes, but is not limited to, human activity. In this episode, Ursula dreams: ‘well will it be in those days if I love the folk then as well as I now love these trees and the wild things whose house they are’. Living beings in the nonhuman world cultivate a cosmopolitanism whose endpoint is the kinship with humans. Homes find their meaning in their similarity to wild nests. Indeed, Ursula’s connection to Ralph is mediated through her love of the living world: ‘she […] threw her arms about the oak-bole and kissed its ruggedness, while Ralph as he lay kissed the sleekness of her feet’. This tree-hugging episode precipitates an awareness of the world as a totality that accompanies the desire for kinship: eventually, when they are at the well, Ralph cries out: ‘[t]o the Earth, and the World of Manfolk’. In regard to the episode of drinking of the well, Carole Silver claims that ‘Ralph knowingly assumes a
responsibility to society’; indeed, the scope of that society is so large that it is nothing less than a ‘world’. Further, it is not only to human communities, but the ‘Earth’ as a totality that Ralph pledges his allegiance. This episode is not just an indication of Ralph’s ‘harmony with nature’, but a reminder that only by embedding one’s self in a certain place can one experience a sense of the world as a totality.

The Sundering Flood similarly presents connection to distant parts as necessary for thriving in a particular locale. The titular river of The Sundering Flood may provide a safe haven for ships where it meets the sea, but in the immediate setting of the romance it separates Osberne from his beloved Elfhild. ‘What sunders us, this mighty Flood […] shall be to the end’, laments Elfhild, trapped in the West, while Osberne is on the Eastern side of the river (p. 39). In Morris’s final romance, the other has migrated from distant mountains and the far reaches of the sea to the very site of home: the banks of the river are not far apart, but one side remains alien to the other, as it is impossible to cross this body of water. The home is fractured.

The key to undoing fragmentation at home is recovering a sense of expanse, building a familiarity with neighbouring regions that stretch across the realm. To unite, Osberne and Elfhild must circumvent the gap that separates them, discovering their surroundings in the process. Only by awakening to a sense of vastness can they overcome that gap. For Osberne, large-scale thinking is a byproduct of war: ‘[m]ust I not take the chancehap and war by the hand and follow where they lead, that I may learn the wideness of the world, and compass earth and sea till I have gone about the Sundering Flood and found thy [Elfhild’s] little body somewhere in the said wide world?’ (pp. 80-81). Discovering the ‘wideness’ of the world is the only way to overcome the fracture within a particular locale. The plot is set up such that local lives, initially isolated and seemingly self-sufficient, must open up to a larger realm if they are to prove fulfilling. As one character assures Osberne: ‘the only way to bridge the Sundering Flood is for one of you, or both, to wander wide in the world’ (p. 133). For this purpose, after Elfhild is kidnapped by the strong-thieves, Osberne ‘carr[ies] [his] trouble to the lands of the aliens’, ‘wander[s] about the world’, and ‘seek[s] adventures’ where the river ‘sunders nought, but joins rather’, in order to find her (pp. 133, 142, 144, 145). The river is both a local fixture and a reminder of the need to step outside one’s immediate surroundings. As in The Water of the Wondrous Isles, here the natural environment is neither a self-contained place nor just an overarching highway leading outside, but both. If Morris’s late romances are full of ventures into the unfamiliar, this characteristic is in part due to the genre in which he is working. As the next section turns to examine, the interplay between the familiar and the alien is a generic characteristic of the romance, which Morris plays up through his use of medieval diction and syntax and his depiction of quasi-medieval settings.
V. Romance and the Planetary

Reflecting on her childhood in the introduction to her father’s *Journal of Travel in Iceland, 1871*, May Morris wrote: ‘we certainly had good material for dreaming ourselves into another life than our own’. She links imaginative freedom to alterity: cognitive processes allow the subject to overstep the bounds of one’s own life. Yet access to otherness is not just imaginative for the Morris family. In a letter to his wife dated 1871, Morris writes of his journey to Iceland: ‘I have seen nothing out of a dream so strange as our coming out of the last narrow sound into the Atlantic’. The country was ‘quite up to [his] utmost expectations as to strangeness’. Yet if, for Morris, Iceland was a strange land, it was one whose material traces were incorporated into everyday life back in England in the form of artifacts such as ‘silver-work and embroideries’. Considering Morris’s use of Iceland-centric materials at home, Wendy Parkins writes that the ‘presence of traces of Icelandic culture’ in his own home was a daily reminder of alterity in the midst of the everyday. As the home comes to bear resemblance to Iceland, and conversely, Icelandic materials are integrated into the home, the familiar and the alien coexist and transmute into one another. In a similar vein, Bennett writes, ‘the topographies of the last romances [...] consistently bring the reader back from fantastic and faraway lands to the features of more familiar domains’. This back-and-forth motion, which is key to Morris’s construal of the planetary, is also foregrounded by the genre in which Morris worked: romance.

Patrick Brantlinger’s designation of Morris’s romances as ‘anti-novel’ draws attention to the possibilities that open up through his choice of genre. Brantlinger notes that to write *New from Nowhere* Morris certainly could not have turned to the genre employed by, say, Charles Dickens, because ‘[t]he novel as a form, Morris suggests, is based on bourgeois individualism with its cult of personality and massive blindness to the larger workings of history and to the larger interests of society’. Morris’s choice of genre is also fitting insofar as it lends itself to the expression of a green cosmopolitanism, especially of the kind that Morris pursued as he based the imagination of alterity on depictions of landscapes. Gillian Beer notes a characteristic of the romance: it ‘invokes the past or the socially remote’, but ‘its remote sources are domesticated and brought close to present experience’. The romance thus familiarises the alien through its refurbishing of source materials. What Regenia Gagnier writes of *The Earthly Paradise* is true of the late romances as well: they are retellings of ‘pagan, medieval, and Norse myth and legend’. Morris famously offers tales that introduce temporally and geographically distant sources of material into the reading experience of a modern audience. The past and present coexist in the romances insofar as the audiences and the settings diverge in their temporality.
The tendency of the romance to recycle stories partakes in an urge to forge connections between distant entities – the past and the present, the remote and the close by. Inviting us to enter alien worlds, romance bridges our immediate surroundings with the world beyond. Consider, for example, what The Wood Beyond the World calls ‘the far land’, ‘the strange land’, and ‘the Bear-country’, where the immediate danger confronting Walter is that ‘big men’ could ‘offer [him] up as a blood-offering to that woman, who is their Mawmet [a foreshortened Anglo-Norman version of Mahumet, or Muhammad; the noun mammet, or mawmet, can also refer to a false god, or idol]’ (p. 23). Islam here becomes the relatively familiar entity that renders the outlandish customs of another land comprehensible. Yet the alterity in the late romances is not just a function of the diversity of custom. In alien realms, the natural rules that govern everyday life are different, as in Birdalone witnessing plentiful growth at the ‘Isle of Increase Unsought’. In The Story of the Glittering Plain, the land of the immortals is a realm in which simulacra have taken over the real, with images in the King’s daughter’s book replacing their real-life counterparts. Such realms invert not just the reality that the characters experience, but the actual worlds the readers inhabit.

Depicting alternate universes, the late romances resonate with the kind of planetarity that Gayatri Spivak has recently described. She explores the role of alterity in the constitution of the planetary, by contrasting it with globalisation, which is ‘achieved by the imposition of the same system of exchange everywhere’. For Spivak, the latter emerges ‘in the gridwork of electronic capital’. ‘The globe’, notes Spivak, ‘is on our computers. It is the logo of the World Bank’. She thus captures the intertwining of the digital with the economic in her polemical engagement with globalisation. In contrast, Spivak posits that ‘the planet is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system’. The planetary is characterised by an uncanny mixture of the familiar and the unfamiliar. In this dance of self and other, the subject is awakened to the existence of that from which it differs. This orientation toward the other is the motor that drives the plots of the romances, taking us to a past beyond our grasp, as well as to lands whose outlandishness is typical of the genre.

The medieval was for Morris an embodiment of otherness as was the Icelandic culture that inspired the romances. The importation of the past into the present moment introduces a curious mix, as modern audiences read these romances that rely on medieval syntax and diction.

In the experience of the reading mind and body, the present moment meets the past. In his lecture on ‘The Hopes of Civilization’ (1885), Morris writes:

Indeed, I confess that it is with a strange emotion that I recall these times and
try to realize the life of our forefathers, men who were named like ourselves, spoke nearly the same tongue, lived on the same spots of the earth, and therewithal were as different from us in manners, habits, and ways of life and thought as though they lived on another planet.50

Medieval English is already itself on the boundary of the familiar and the distant. It is English, and thus like the language that Morris and his contemporaries spoke. Yet, as Norman Talbot notes, in reading these romances ‘we experience a delightful and total immersion in a language not our own’.51 Turning its medieval inspiration into late-nineteenth-century romances, Morris introduces the unfamiliar into the familiar, and, in the act of doing so, gives us a taste of planetary scope, conceived not just through geographical span, but temporal depth.

While for many Britons in the Victorian period a number of recent developments in capitalist modernity, from railway travel to the Great Exhibition, were marked by the shrinking of distances, Morris preserves spatial expanse and temporal depth in his vision of the planetary.52 The compression of time and space is directly tied to the operation of capital in Marx’s account: ‘while capital must on one side strive to tear down every spatial barrier to intercourse, i.e. to exchange, and conquer the whole earth for its market, it strives on the other side to annihilate this space with time, i.e. to reduce to a minimum the time spent in motion from one place to another’.53 Capital needs distance in the sense that it must be invested in foreign markets, but it simultaneously conquers distance, which is to say that, under the rule of capitalism, places do not remain distant from one another for long. Morris’s planetary worlds, which exist outside such capitalist globalisation, offer an alternative to time-space compression through their temporal structure, panoramic perspective and invitation to imagine the ‘wideness of the world’.

NOTES
4. Ibid., p. 96; Morris, CW, XXIII, pp. 7, 10.
Centenary Essays, ed. by Peter Faulkner and Peter Preston (Exeter: The University of Exeter Press, 1999), pp. 21-46 (22). (Afterwards Boos).
9. Ibid., XXII, p. 121.
15. Ibid., p. 19.
18. Elias and Moraru, p. xvi.
24. Bennett, p. 53.
25. William Morris, The Story of the Glittering Plain: Which Has Been Also Called the Land of Living Men or the Acre of the Undying (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1904), p.97. Subsequent citations are to this edition and appear parenthetically by page number within the body of the text.
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32. Mayer, p. 70.
33. Agathocleous, pp. 87-89, 69.
34. Morris, CW, XIX, p. 50.
35. Ibid., XIX, p. 68.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid., XIX, p. 83.
38. Silver, p. 179.
41. Ibid., VIII, p. xvii.
43. Ibid., p. 14.
44. Bennett, p. 56.
47. Gagnier, p. 22.
49. While the otherness of Icelandic culture – its difference from the modern English way of life – was important to Morris, Norse literature was also ‘familiar’, because of an assumed racial affinity. In the preface to his translation of the Völsunga Saga, for instance, Morris wrote: ‘[f]or this is the Great Story of the North, which should be to all our race what the Tale of Troy was to the Greeks’ (CW, VII, p. 286).
50. Morris, CW, XXIII, p. 61.
Jenny Alice Morris (1861-1934), always known as Jenny, makes only intermittent appearances in the corpus of Morris scholarship. That William Morris’s elder daughter struggled with epilepsy for the whole of her adult life, that she spent large parts of her time as a boarder in a succession of private homes accompanied always by a nurse-companion, that consultation with doctors, and explorations of places where she might be better cared for, was an accompaniment to the lives of both her parents and a drain in different ways on their own health – all this is well-known. Well-accepted, too, is the love William had for his daughter and the effort he made to be with her whenever he could and to write to her when he could not. There can be no doubt that Jenny treasured his letters and preserved them with care. They have served as a key resource for establishing the chronology of his life and documenting the challenges of his many projects. Not one of Jenny’s letters to her father, however, has ever come to light. Nor does it seem that letters to her mother or to her sister May were preserved by the family. There are scattered and indirect clues as to her life, her interests and her temperament in letters that family and close friends wrote to each other and occasionally also to her. But finding the authentic voice of Jenny the woman through her own written word today is not entirely impossible. Several examples are illustrated below before turning to a more extended correspondence which has survived.

One fragment survives from the summer of 1891, when William and Jenny went to France, visiting many of the places that Morris had first seen as a young man. Already, in a letter to Jane, dated 8 August 1891, William had spoken of Jenny’s keen interest in all that she was seeing. ¹ Then, writing to Philip Webb from Beauvais, William reported that Jenny was enjoying herself hugely, and proving hard to pull away from explorations of church architecture. Jenny, at this point thirty years old, added a post-script to Webb, whom she had known from her childhood:
Dear Mr Webb/ All the lovely places & buildings which I am now seeing for the first time have brought thoughts of you to me, when you & Father & our other friends were making your first journeys in France, and have made me wish to write a line of remembrance & love to you. I can’t be finding them less beautiful & noble than you did first, though you knew more about them./ With best love from Jenny Morris²

Eight days later found William writing again to Webb following a visit to Laon Cathedral. He was doubtful that Jenny would include a note since she was still ‘busy looking with all her eyes’. She did do so, however, commenting: ‘[s]orry I am to leave Laon, in spite of the destroyers […] to see the link between us & the makers of such beauty roughly broken & to be able to do nothing about it is too much’.³ Another fragment is the full text of a formal and carefully composed thank you letter written by her in 1896. Jenny and her mother had lunched with the poet Algernon Charles Swinburne in February and, five months on, when his work was published, and clearly with a vivid memory of the visit, she wrote:

Dear Mr Swinburne/ Since you were so kind as to read to my Mother & to me that lovely part of the Tale of Balen, I have been looking forward for it to come out & wanted to tell you with what delight I finished reading it about a week ago. Father took it with him to Folkestone so I didn’t get hold of it to read till more than a month after it was published. Forgive me for thanking you for writing it & especially for that lovely dedication./ Yours affectionately/ Jenny Morris⁴

An altogether different mood had been suggested by a brief entry in the Kelmscott Manor Visitors’ Book a little earlier the same year, during what was to be William’s last visit to the Manor. Jenny had been urged to write her name. She did so, but added: ‘under protest. I am not a visitor at home.’⁵

Alongside some scattered examples such as these, however, a set of Jenny’s letters can be found in the British Library.⁶ The letters form an exchange of correspondence with Sydney Cockerell covering a period of just over two years between summer 1897 and autumn 1899 and are the focus of discussion in this article.⁷ Jenny wrote on average twice a month between these dates. She would often follow a letter from Sydney with a reply within a day or two of its receipt. She had to wait rather longer for a response, but the delay was never much more than ten days. Times when there were several letters from him without any record of ones from her tended to coincide
with episodes of illness on her part, though she makes very little of her epilepsy in what she writes. The records show a total of forty-one letters by Jenny (including one postcard) and thirty-nine from Sydney.

Jenny’s letters are informal, slipping breathlessly between topics in a clear, forward-sloping hand, often with no obvious paragraph breaks. By comparison, Sydney’s, in his minuscule and neat handwriting, appear to be more carefully crafted and controlled. Both write in a light tone of the day to day, the trips they have made, the state of the weather, the changing flora and fauna during the year, and the news from and especially the health of family and friends. There is an occasional joke recorded by one or other of them and an exchange of gifts. From time to time, Sydney sends books and once or twice adds a specific suggestion of what it might interest Jenny to do. There is warmth and a simple intimacy on both sides. There is evidence of Jenny’s intelligence, of learning from her father and of her own strong character. And yet it is not, and perhaps could not be, a correspondence between equals – a point to be discussed further later.

This correspondence begins less than a year after William’s death, a period that found Sydney with new responsibilities as an executor of the Will and trustee of family monies, including funds set aside for the continuing care of Jenny. Much work was involved. There was the question of what was to happen to the Firm, where William had instructed trustees Jane, Sydney and friend and publisher F. S. Ellis to make decisions. There was the Kelmscott Press, where Sydney had been acting as secretary. This was to be wound up, but not before finishing a schedule of publications under Sydney’s direction. There were commemorative activities. Most notably J. W. Mackail was working on the first and authorised biography, prompting searches for materials and questions about the voluminous documentation of William Morris’s work. There was also to be an exhibition in New Gallery. Questions of what should and should not be included necessitated frequent correspondence with William’s widow Jane as well as with others. Books had to be sold or dispersed appropriately, and decisions taken on many other matters concerning the family. Settling financial arrangements for Jenny and for the income that would support Jane and May were only part of this work. As the recent publication of Jane’s correspondence reveals, she turned to Sydney for advice and for practical help on a very regular basis. Furthermore, with no other regular source of income of his own, midway through the two-year period of the correspondence an arrangement was made that Sydney should work as assistant to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, and there is some reflection of his new responsibilities in his letters to Jenny. In this context, the amount of attention Sydney chose to give to Jenny in this period is quite remarkable.

Decisions about Jenny and her care now fell largely to her mother. Jane had fled...
to Egypt for the winter after William’s death, leaving Jenny in London, in the care of Mrs. Grove, sister of longstanding family friend Cormell Price, relying on him for news of her daughter. Back at Kelmscott, a new period commenced. July 1897 found mother and daughter, along with a nurse-companion and servants, enjoying the peace and quiet of the Manor. Jane was fast coming to a decision to end the lease on Kelmscott House in London, and to spend summers at Kelmscott, winters on the south coast and perhaps to find a base in London – rooms where both she, Jenny and Jenny’s nurse-companion could be accommodated. Once the decision to give up Kelmscott House was taken, there were matters to be decided of what should be left, what come to Kelmscott Manor and what be given to friends. Jobs for various workers and servants were another concern. Often unwell herself and grieving, Jane immersed herself in these practical matters, relying on Sydney to advise and take necessary action in London. Alongside this were questions of who should have copies of which Kelmscott Press books, and how Morris’s literary works should be assembled and compiled. It would be surprising if Jane kept these issues completely from Jenny, but just how much Jane chose to draw Jenny in cannot be known.

Sydney’s letters to Jenny give little hint of the challenges that business matters were presenting for him. There are no appeals to her for an opinion on the issues he and Jane were facing. What then does Jenny’s own correspondence with Sydney reveal of the woman herself? At this point she was aged thirty-five. Sydney was six years her junior. In the first place, Jenny was by no means unaware of others or lacking in insight. She was certainly aware how busy Sydney was and keen not to be a burden. Early in this letter series she wrote: ‘You understand of course that I don’t write for letters from you when you are so busy just now, but to give myself something of the pleasure of gossiping...’ (11 August 1897). The next month found her urging him again not to worry about feeling that he must always acknowledge her letters (23 September 1897). A few months on, one of his letters gave a hint that he was struggling to keep his paperwork in proportion given his suggestion that he might henceforth write to Jenny every other Sunday. She was quick to read between the lines and to chide him in reply: ‘please don’t tie yourself down to write on any particular day’ (14 March 1898).

Jenny’s self-acknowledged ‘gossiping’ gave glimpses of daily life at Kelmscott Manor during this period – encouraging the village children to pick blackberries in order to make jam, taking walks, noticing changes in the garden, entertaining the well-known illustrator, E. H. New, who was making pictures of the Manor for inclusion in the upcoming Morris biography, and other visitors as time went on. Her commitment to the Manor and love of it shines through these stories. But the memory of William was never far from the minds of both Jenny and her mother, and, by
October 1897, knowing that the anniversary of William’s death would be on her mind, Sydney wrote urging her to remember William’s achievements and to think of the gain not the loss of his life. Her reply was a poignant one, acknowledging her own distress but concerned too about her mother: ‘[b]elieve me I do keep the memory of his doings by me & think of the gain but what saddens me is that though I have my mother she has only me, who can be so little to her, though I try all I can to help her’ (4 October 1897).  

Concern about her mother’s health, that of her sister May, and that of others is a thread that runs through a great many of Jenny’s letters. She clearly wants to help in any way she can. She speaks of reading to her mother (21 November 1897); it cuts down on her own reading and her walks as well as letter writing, but she gives this reading aloud priority and considers that she does it well. She sympathises with May’s suffering from rheumatism (22 December 1897) and is very aware of the amount of work her sister takes on, hoping, for example, during the summer of 1898, that May would come to Kelmscott for a real rest (7 June 1898). More testimony of Jenny’s concern for others emerges in this period from Sara Anderson, assistant to Burne-Jones, who had been drafted in to help pack possessions as the London home in Hammersmith was being closed down. The two women had quickly made friends and although no Jenny letters appear to have survived, there are two from Sara to her. These reveal that Jenny had confided in Sara about her feelings of sadness and loss remembering her father at every turn at Kelmscott Manor, and that she was missing Sydney her ‘brother-friend’ too. With Jenny back at the Manor, Sara sent her the news: ‘I packed up your books which I hope were all right’, she said. She went on: ‘I miss my Jenny running about and attending to the comfort of everybody’.  

But there is more to Jenny than her concern for others. While she is already known to have been an avid reader, Sara’s letters offer testimony to Jenny’s store of knowledge and the range of her interests at this time. Jenny had recommended at least one book to her new friend, who recognised Jenny’s much wider knowledge and spoke of the friendship helping to mend her own education. Interestingly too, in a postcard of 19 July 1897 that starts her series of letters to Sydney, Jenny had bemoaned a lack of reading matter at Rottingdean, country home of the Burne-Jones family, where she was then staying. All she had found to read there was what she considered a rather poor Welsh grammar.

There are references to a number of books in the correspondence with Sydney. He was sending her copies of her father’s works as they were published by the Kelmscott Press and giving or lending other books too. She enjoyed Samuel Smiles’s biography of the naturalist Thomas Edward, picking up, as perhaps Sydney had intended, on its lessons of perseverance in face of adversity (8 January 1898).
is mention of a book by Robert Ball on astronomy, a Christmas present from her nurse-companion Vera Roberts and of a zoological volume lent by Sydney. She had clearly been challenged by the technical details of the astronomy book observing the following month that it went ‘as far in that science as I am likely to be carried’ (4 February 1898). Her recall at times is impressive. Sydney, for example, had written of a visit to Botley in Hampshire; Jenny’s reply linked it to her own reading long ago of the life of William Cobbett (31 August 1898). She also mentions Chappell’s carols, suggesting music as another area of interest. She had made use, too, of her copy of Gerard – a reference book much used by her father, for identifying flowers while out walking. She bemoaned that she did not have it with her during the winter stay with her mother at Lyme Regis (4 February 1898). Sydney’s response was to recommend buying the book *Flowers of the Field*, and perhaps drying plants, making a collection and comparing Lyme Regis with Kelmscott. Although the comparison was not immediately possible given an imminent return to Kelmscott, Jenny quickly bought the book and made a start on reading it (26 February 1898).

All this is to suggest that Jenny, who had shown much academic promise during her teenage years, was still pursuing a wide range of intellectual interests during her thirties when well enough to do so. Both parents left her with a legacy of knowledge and skills. It is known, for example, that she worked with her mother on embroideries, including pieces of exhibition quality. There is evidence in these letters of her high standards. At one point, for example, she sent Sydney a piece of embroidery, with a later, rather caustic comment about the quality of work of others:

> We were very pleased to hear that that you liked the piece of embroidery, though I wish that ’twas I who had done the grounding, for believe me, it would have been better done, & it was given in a hurry some years ago to someone else to do, & the whole thing would have looked better.  
> (31 August 1898)

At other points, Jenny comments on matters of printing. In December 1897, for example, she refers to a long talk with printer Emery Walker on his visit to her and her mother at Lyme Regis. They had discussed the Kelmscott Press, and she had expressed her pleasure concerning use of German woodcuts. Later, she regrets the absence of a colophon for a new printed book (25 May 1898) and elsewhere tells of her surprise at how well the Golden Type looks (7 June 1898). Current affairs are rarely mentioned in either Sydney’s letters or hers. She makes a point, however, on 4 November 1897, of noting when the daily papers come at Lyme (not until lunchtime) and a line penned in 1899 about the impending intervention in what would be called
the Boer War suggests that she had awareness of the history of contemporary conflicts, something that might cause a reader to hark back to legacies of her father’s thinking on foreign affairs: ‘I shall be very glad if folk make sure that war is not going to happen with South Africa for it will be long before England can wipe out old scores on that continent’ (27 September 1899). Sydney’s letters to Jenny, and indeed the letters of others to her, sometimes have the air of being written, if not to a child, then to someone not fully adult. Yet the content of this correspondence suggest an adult intelligence, a lively interest in affairs around her and a person aware of the needs of others and anxious to play a part. Contemporary understandings of epilepsy were no doubt a factor here, a point discussed more fully towards the end of this paper.

Jane was aware of Jenny’s need for stimulation and time, for example, in London where there were old friends to see and things to do. With winters at Lyme Regis, visits to Rottingdean and London, there certainly was travel in this period. Jenny loved nothing more, however, than to be out walking in the countryside. Jane had penned a particularly memorable phrase back in 1891 about Jenny and her father ‘like two great babes’ walking in the Surrey hills. Physically rather stronger than those around her, Jenny’s letters at this time offer plenty of evidence of walks enjoyed with her mother and with her nurse-companion. Writing from Rottingdean, where at one point she was staying with the Burne-Jones family, she comments of her nurse-companion: ‘Vera Roberts finds the hills more tiring than I do’ (11 October 1898). Although Kelmscott was her special love, wherever she went Jenny was keen to explore, understand and try to describe the area. Geography, geology, botany and architecture were all within her purview. She was acutely aware of William’s skills in this respect. ‘In half a dozen words,’ she said in a letter of 4 October 1897, ‘Father would make one see a place exactly’. But her own observational skills had been honed and developed by her father and by the frequent questioning of him that can be inferred from his responses to her. Lyme Regis was a new experience for Jenny in 1897. Having given Sydney a detailed account of a route she had taken walking out of the town, she continued, very much in Morris-like tones:

[… ] seeing a church at Up Lyme Vera Roberts & I went to have a look at it (it was as well we couldn’t get in). The tower was just look-at-able, the W door had a beautiful archway of the end of the 14th cent: but the rest of the church was abominably restored & they were still at work destroying the porch. There is no architecture anywhere here about – partly, I suppose because of the want of fine stone [found] in Oxon and Gloucestershire, for the Blue Lias spoils the look of everything. (10 November 1897)
A week and more later, there was another memorable walk and another telling commentary:

the 18th was lovely & Vera & I walked uphill out of the town E. towards Charmouth, a little village 2 miles off. The views were one of the most beautiful around here, for the Dorset side of Lyme is finer decidedly than the S. Devon country-side. As we were looking over Charmouth all the hill country to the N. & E. was magnificent to look at, & I saw two barrows. I was sure they were such by their shape […]

(21 November 1897)

And in the letter of December that year where she had reported discussions with Emery Walker, she also spoke of walking on The Cobb at Lyme Regis and watching the waves break. Making reference to photographs which must have been from her father’s travels many years before, she invoked an image of these waves ‘rising the height of an Icelandic geyser’.27

Jenny’s eagerness to know and understand the history of the countryside and its architecture is evidenced in a further and remarkable letter to Sydney, then holidaying with May and with family friend and publisher Emery Walker in Les Anderlys on the Seine in Northern France. This was not a place with which Jenny was at all familiar. But William Morris’s daughter was not fazed by her ignorance, embarking on her own research as well as commenting, as so often, on the weather and underlining that she was not one simply for a stroll in fair weather:

I helped myself out by looking at a map of 1150 (I have a very good historical atlas), being on a very small scale. Château Gaillard looked very close – were you at all near it? near enough to see I mean? The country must be beautiful, as May’s Pcard informed me, especially with so many of those great horse-shoe curves as the map showed me. I pity you all for the bad weather you had for to be kept indoors in an inn is terrible; one cannot read all the time; though I don’t think I ever came upon a day so wet or bad as to prevent one from getting out into the open air for a little while at least. Anyhow, I think you justified in complaining of the weather if you wished, & even in daring to do so to this stern weather prophet.28

There are shades of her father in Jenny’s attention to place and in the recourse to an ancient map, part of the family book collection. She takes a genuine delight, it seems,
in the doings of others and in dealing so often with simple pleasures – a turn in the

garden, spotting the arrival of spring flowers in the meadow, or picking fruit for jam.

Events in the village of Kelmscott were a concern for both Jenny and her mother
as they had been for William. Summer 1898 saw posters advertising the sale of the
inn and adjacent cottages. Jenny told Sydney: ‘it made us jump with terror, in case
they do some horrible pulling down and rebuilding’ (21 July 1898). If Jenny was
despondent or embittered by the restrictions of her own life, it does not emerge in
these letters. There is a rare hint of annoyance in a letter sent to Sydney from London.
Staying with Mrs. Grove and sister, Jenny wished she could go out when she liked,
and did not have always to wait until it was convenient (4 February 1899). But her
exclamation of frustration was quickly followed by an appreciation of the
commitments of others: ‘naturally I can’t always expect Mrs Grove & her sister to
accompany me when I wish to go & see my friends, for they have their own affairs to
see after’ (4 February 1899). The biggest stated frustration in this series of letters,
however, and one that emerges several times, is the impossibility of doing something
Jenny had so enjoyed in her younger days, namely rowing on the river. The comment
comes in one case as part of an account written clearly with Sydney’s amusement in
mind. Some people she classes as ‘house-seers’ had arrived at the Manor:

I find that Mother is personally conducting them, so I am flying to Miss

Stavely’s room, as I am not as well groomed as I should be for strangers. I
have been called down to tea in the garden & found some pleasant friends of
the Mackails, two Eton masters, one with a charming lately-married wife, &
a nice lad, her brother, taking a couple of days boating down the Thames to
Oxford before the holidays. Oh Sydney, how I envied them getting into their
boat & making off down the river on this lovely sunny evening! For the water
was in very good & weedless condition, & I would fain have taken a pair of
sculls in my hands: not very like in these days.29

(14 July 1899)

It was not that as a woman still fairly young, she was no longer capable of rowing, it
was, as she said on another occasion, that such a course of action would have
frightened her mother and given her much too much worry (6 July 1898).

A more serious emotional outburst came over the reading of a draft of Mackail’s
biography of Morris: ‘Oh Sydney, what a wretched thing a biography is for those
who know the subject even when well written & well illustrated as this of J Mackail
will be! Forgive my writing to you just at this time, for I too feel depressed enough’
(23 September 1897). It is likely that Jenny was agreeing with the feeling that Sydney,
Jane and others were privately beginning to share that the biography was going to have limitations, in part, as Jane was later to put it in a letter to Sydney, because Mackail was ‘not an artist in feeling’. 30 Being reminded of her father at every turn at Kelmscott, however, it was probably unavoidable that the draft would make painful reading for Jenny.

Turning away from Jenny’s own words, the preparation of the biography also provoked a set of exchanges that reveal something of the complex stance of family members and close friends towards her and towards her epilepsy. Clearly, no biographer could do without the multitude of letters that William wrote to Jenny during his lifetime. But what was to be said about the reasons for their production and what reference was to be made concerning Jenny’s illness? With a wider public audience how was she to be treated? Would it be better to erase all mention of epilepsy from the account or at least to say as little as possible? It was William’s close friend and publisher F.S. Ellis who had suggested direct reference might upset Jenny, a view supported by Philip Webb. The text was now at a final stage. Jane, having seen the opinions of the others, wrote to Sydney on 23 February 1899:

I also strongly objected at first to the illness being mentioned at all and then after reflection, I consented, of course if I had believed for a moment that Jenny herself would mind I should have refused – now as you all think there is a chance of her being vexed I give in entirely to general opinion and have written to J.W.M. begging him to cancel the sheet if printed, and to say less about the illness generally. 31

There is no record that anyone recommended asking Jenny about how her illness should be treated and the above excerpt does seem to suggest that the conversations were undertaken without direct reference to Jenny herself.

Many years later, as Sydney Cockerell was preparing for a collection of his own correspondence to be published, he faced a related dilemma. 32 What was he to do about the letters from Jenny that he held? Both Jenny and her sister had recently died. Who might advise him now? He sent the letters to Margaret Mackail for comment. As Margaret Burne-Jones she and her brother Philip had grown up with Jenny and May, and as Margaret Mackail she had perhaps been party to the agonising over what should and should not be said about Jenny’s illness in the biography written by her husband. On reading the letters he sent she exclaimed:

oh dear, how deeply, tragically touching to those who know! & such emanations of her beloved father. I don’t want to keep them, nor to destroy
them, nor to read them again - - - because of the pain which can’t do good. But I am grateful to you for letting me see them: they are lacerating in their simplicity. She was a great creature: how good that you were able to give her some happiness. I suppose they are ‘over simple’ for the world at large. I love her more than ever for reading them. Thank you. 33

Her letter went on immediately to consider a letter from another correspondent where Sydney had also asked for an opinion about suitability for publication. Here she argued it was right to publish and ‘[o]ne need have no feeling of invasion of privacy’.

These exchanges offer perhaps the strongest available clues as to the absence of letters in Jenny’s voice and the absence, too, of so much else to do with Jenny – of records that would give more than the merest glimpse of the doctors consulted and remedies tried, the places she stayed, the terms of her tenancies, and the details of the engagement of nurse-companions, for example, of whom there were quite a number over the years. Two interrelated factors seem to have been at work, to do with how epilepsy was interpreted and understood in both lay and medical circles at the time and to do with the family’s response and that of their friends to this.

Epilepsy is a neurological disorder in which sudden surges of electrical activity in the brain can bring uncontrolled body movements and strange, inhuman sounding vocalisations which can be quite terrifying to witness. There is no obvious warning for an observer and quick action can be needed to maintain an airway and to ensure that sources of physical injury are removed. Modern anti-epileptic drugs make seizures a rare experience and today’s sufferers can, in the main, lead full lives. Historically, however, a very strong stigma surrounded epilepsy. Sufferers were regarded with fear and suspicion, assumed sometimes to be possessed by spirits and often seen as mentally defective or morally degenerate. 34 Such ideas were still prevalent in late nineteenth-century Britain where Victorian virtues of strong moral character and hard work all too often dismissed lunatics, alcoholics, the poor and others as lacking in self-control, a burden on society and a threat to social order. Segregation and incarceration seemed the only answers. Research had begun to be undertaken by the time of Jenny’s diagnosis in 1871. 35 Anti-convulsant but seriously brain-dulling bromides, however, remained the main treatment on offer. Triggers for a seizure were not understood and old stigmatising ideas remained present not only in wider society but also in the medical profession.

In this context, all that a well-placed and concerned middle-class family could do was to search out medical practitioners who were starting to specialise in the field and protect the sufferer as best they could from anything that they or their doctors thought could contribute to an episode of illness. The options were to care for an epileptic
family member at home, employing one or more nurses given the constant vigilance that had to be maintained lest a seizure should occur, or to send the person away to an environment that might be more conducive to recovery.

Both options occurred for Jenny. Periods at home were followed by repeated efforts to try to provide quiet environments, kindly carers and perhaps weather conditions that might suit her better and reduce the frequency of seizures. Jane’s letters, in particular, show moments of misplaced hope that a cure was around the corner. ‘What a mystery such an illness is! I feel angry at not being able to penetrate it’, she exclaimed in frustration at one point in an 1890 letter to Blunt. There were times when for her own health Jane needed to be apart from Jenny and at least at one point William, too, had become ill following a particularly dramatic seizure. Jenny was loved and cared for by the family, but, in their protection of her, there was understandably an element of protecting themselves and gaining some respite from constant vigilance. Jenny’s condition was no secret from their circle of friends and close associates, Sydney Cockerell included, and they took their cue from the need to support, to keep exchanges light and to say and do nothing that might perhaps provoke an emotional outburst or an episode of illness. Jenny was by no means entirely shut away and there was recognition on Jane’s part that her daughter at times needed company and stimulation. But there could be reluctance also to expose Jenny to a wider public gaze than was necessary. Much later, in 1909, for example, there was a question of receiving a man being sent to Kelmscott to collect books. This was unsatisfactory to Jane who explained that at this time ‘it is too painful for Jenny to be exposed to strangers’.

The consequence of all this was that a protective cloak surrounded Jenny so that it was impossible to see her apart from her illness. Periods when she was well were welcomed but were always seen as provisional – the possibility of a return to seizures was never far from anyone’s mind and coloured the ways in which others engaged with her. Conspiring to keep her away from anything that might be challenging or upsetting was both cosseting and constricting; it constructed a limited world in which she could develop her talents. The period covered by this correspondence includes time in which she was particularly well. Indeed, she wrote in mid-1898 that she had never been so well as during the last year, although ‘I can’t feel it matters very much these days’ (31 August 1898). In practice, she was not without bouts of illness during this time and was to continue to have a variable experience with her illness over the next decade and more as, for example, her mother’s letters during the early 1900s testify.

Family and friends had had high hopes of Jenny in her childhood; she had seemed
set to become one of the new breed of university women.\textsuperscript{39} It was tragic indeed that her illness put an end to this, and that there were periods when she was too ill to pursue any interests or to engage effectively with others. Norman Kelvin, editor of the 151 letters William wrote to her during the twenty years between 1876 and 1896, concluded that Jenny lived a life fashioned by her father that was otherwise empty.\textsuperscript{40} Jan Marsh, writing of Jane and her sister May, emphasises her periods of good health, seeing the sadness of someone ‘pushed back into the life of the idle, protected, disregarded middle-class girl’.\textsuperscript{41} Fiona MaCarthy echoes the point, making a direct but again passing reference to her letters during this period.\textsuperscript{42} What can a closer examination of these letters add to such assessments? Was a period showing wide interests, sensitivity to others, love of the countryside and more a truly exceptional moment? It is very clear that Jenny’s condition with its acute epileptic episodes caused heartache for the family during William’s lifetime. Good times and bad followed at Kelmscott when she was living with Jane. The toll on her mother of Jenny’s variable state was extreme, and Jane’s letters of the time make painful reading. During the years after Jane’s death, Jenny’s own frustrations would sometimes come to the fore. Despite some good times of engagement with May, her health caused great concern and distress to her sister, and it clearly deteriorated markedly in her later years.\textsuperscript{43} It may still be possible to uncover more across a wider span of her life about what she was able to achieve. Yet if one were to follow William’s maxim, in his lecture on ‘Useless Work versus Useless Toil’ (1884), that ‘the one course which will certainly make life happy in the face of all accidents and troubles is to take a pleasurable interest in all the details of life’, then the evidence of her letters for this limited time at least, suggests that Jenny Morris was an exemplar.\textsuperscript{44}

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\textbf{NOTES}

1. \textit{The Collected Letters of William Morris}, ed. by Norman Kelvin, 4 vols in 5 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984-96), III, p. 334. (Afterwards Kelvin). William wrote that Jenny bought a jug as a present for her mother in Abbeville; he added that she ‘is enjoying everything to the full, and is very good and dear’.


4. \textit{The Collected Letters of Jane Morris}, ed. by Frank C. Sharp and Jan Marsh (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2012), p. 266. (Afterwards Sharp and Marsh). The text of Jenny’s letter is reproduced in a footnote appended to one of Jane’s letters to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, the original being held in the Berg Collection, New York Public Library. It is clear from her comments to Blunt that Jane too thought the new work very good, though Swinburne’s mode of declaiming it was not to her taste.

6. See British Library Add. MS 52739. Letters from this collection that are cited in the text are shown by date only. Two further letters for the period have been traced and reference to both of them is made in the text.

7. Sydney Carlyle Cockerell (1867-1962) was the son of a coal merchant, but his first love was the world of art. Introduced to Morris before he was aged twenty, by 1892 he had left the family business and had quickly become a trusted and indispensable assistant to Morris himself. He was at Morris’s side in his mentor’s last days. His immense knowledge and his lifelong love of ancient manuscripts and book collecting helped him gain the post of Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge in 1908, and he was knighted for his achievements in 1934. In her letter of 16 August 1898 to him, Jenny comments that theirs has been a friendship for six years now – correctly dating it back to 1892.


9. The New Gallery Exhibition showing works by Rossetti and by Morris was to be arranged by Burne-Jones.


11. Ibid., p. 284.

12. As Jane wrote to Theodore Watts Dunton on 29 July 1897: ‘I am alone with Jenny and a nurse companion and the quiet is good for a time for both of us. We could not bear much talk.’ Sharp and Marsh, p. 294.

13. Jane ‘was a careful preliminary editor of Morris’s literary manuscripts, with a view to a collected edition of his poetic works’. Sharp and Marsh, p. 287.

14. Sadness continued into 1898. The second summer at Kelmscott after William’s death saw the death of two others from their close family circle. Edward Burne-Jones died on 16 June and Kate Faulkner passed away on 5 July. Jane wrote to Cormell Price on 18 July 1898 that Jenny was well and often tearful, ‘but really she is brave and tries her best to bear up during these sad times’. Sharp and Marsh, p. 315.

15. Fritillaries grow at Kelmscott and at one point Jenny told Sydney that she sent some to May, commenting that ‘the dear child was grateful’ (25 May 1898).

16. Sara Anderson to Jenny Morris, July 1897 and n.d. British Library Add. MS 45346. It is likely that the term ‘brother-friend’ is Jenny’s but it is not altogether clear from Sara’s letter if this is so. The quotation comes from the second, undated letter.

17. The book Jenny read was Samuel Smiles’s, Life of a Scotch Naturalist, Thomas Edward: Associate of the Linnaen Society (London: Murray 1876), possibly in a later edition. Edward gained late recognition for the discovery of many specimens of crustaceae in the Moray Firth, both new to the area and new to science. Ill-health, however, prevented further outdoor research, and he ended his life pursuing his initial trade of shoemaker. It is a story of immense hard work and scientific achievement in the face of poverty, and of assistance to others. It would seem that here, perhaps, Sydney was urging Jenny to do more with her life.

18. Sir Robert Stawell Ball, FRS (1840-1913), was a major figure in Victorian astronomy and a great populariser of his subject. In 1886, following the widespread success of his book The Story of the Heavens, etc. (London: Cassell and Co., 1885), which was to continue to run to multiple editions, he was knighted for services to science and education. In her letter of 4 February 1898, Jenny refers to a later related publication which also won broad acclaim and ran to multiple editions, The Story of the Sun, etc. (London: Cassell and Co., 1893).

20. John Gerard’s *Herball* was first published in 1597. Running to over 1500 pages, and lavishly illustrated with woodcuts, it gave stories of known flowers of the period and the ‘vertues’ of herbs. A 1633 edition updated and corrected the original, covering 2850 plants, and had 2700 illustrations. Sydney at one point in the correspondence mentioned that he had himself acquired a sixteenth-century version of Gerard, contemporary colouring lowering the price and bringing it within his reach.

21. The William Morris Gallery holds the *Honeysuckle* embroidery, designed by William Morris and worked by Jane Morris and Jenny. The Gallery also holds an embroidered book bag described as designed by May Morris and embroidered by Jenny. The *Honeysuckle* embroidery was exhibited at the first Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society in 1888. See *Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society: Catalogue of the First Exhibition* (London: Chiswick Press, 1888). Other clear attributions to Jenny shown in the catalogues of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society include a William Morris portière, worked with Jane in 1888, a cushion designed by May Morris and worked by Jenny and Maude Deacon in 1893, and items in a case of embroidery, bead necklaces and jewellery by both May and Jenny in 1899, the period of this correspondence. Jenny also appears in a photo gallery of embroideresses for Morris and Co. See Linda Parry, *William Morris Textiles* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983), p. 33.

22. A further suggestion that Jenny was carrying out some embroidery at this time comes in a rather enigmatic postscript to a letter to Sydney of 2 June 1899: ‘I hope my sewing proves what I meant it to!’.  


25. Jenny also talks of a walk at Kelmscott with her aunt Bessie Burden, commenting that her aunt was afraid of cows and saying that she would rather walk alone (11 August 1897).

26. Blue Lias is a geological formation of limestone and shale found, among other places, around the cliffs of Lyme Regis and Charmouth. It is famous for fossils laid down in the Jurassic era. Blue Lias was used for stone building in churches and elsewhere, and today can be found made into jewellery and ornaments. Jenny was aware of Sydney’s knowledge of shells and fossils and there are other references to shells in the correspondence. As a very young man Sydney had written to Ruskin on the shell collection he was making.

27. See note 23.

28. Jenny Morris to Sydney Cockerell, 31 August 1897. NAL/MSL/1967/697/8. Chateau Gaillard was developed into a major fortification by Richard I between 1196 and 1198. If Jenny’s map was indeed as early as 1150, she was identifying the site rather than the castle itself.

29. Miss Stavely and, as already mentioned in this correspondence, Vera Roberts were nurse-companions in this period. While it is hard to track the precise dates of employment of Jenny’s companions, Miss Stavely was still on the scene in 1904, and mentioned at this point as being ill. See Sharp and Marsh, p. 379.


33. Margaret Mackail to Sydney Cockerell, 26 March 1940. NAL/MSL/1957/696–697. Three days later, Sydney wrote in his diary that he made a few small amendments before the manuscript went to the printer. This would suggest that he had already made up his mind not to include any of Jenny’s letters before sending them to Margaret Mackail. See British Library Add. MS 52678. It seems very likely that this is the same set of letters as the ones under discussion here, but no directly corroborating evidence has been found.

34. For more on the medical history of this field see M.J. Eadie and P.F. Bladin, *A Disease Once Sacred: A

35. The National Hospital for the Paralysed and Epileptic was opened in Queen Square, London in 1860, giving opportunities for research and inpatient care for deserving cases introduced by subscribers to the hospital. A few years later, the Morris family moved into premises very close by, at 26 Queen’s Square, and lived there from 1865-72. The Morris workshops continued there until 1881.


37. Jane described this dramatic episode in detail in a letter to Wilfrid Blunt in February of 1891, and later attributed William’s subsequent illness to the shock of events. Sharp and Marsh, pp. 214, 216. Both Jenny and William were well enough that summer, however, for the trip to France mentioned at the outset of this paper.

38. Sharp and Marsh, p. 429. Jenny had been particularly unwell at this time, however, as an earlier letter revealed. See Sharp and Marsh, p. 428.


41. Marsh, p. 143. Marsh’s biography of Jane and May Morris remains a valuable source of material about Jenny and its nuanced account of the significance of her epilepsy both for Jenny and for family members (pp. 142-44) makes passing acknowledgement of Jenny’s correspondence as evidence of her continuing mental capacity.

42. MacCarthy similarly writes of Jenny’s diagnosis meaning ‘relegation to the margins of society and, even in that enlightened social stratum, [being] treated as a liability, a semi-imbecile’ (MacCarthy, p. 36). She makes a slightly more direct reference to the letters under discussion here, commenting that ‘[s]ome of her letters written in her thirties are still wonderfully lucid, shot through with the strange candour of the invalid’.


Most family histories include secrets and myths. Dorothy Coles found little evidence to support the often-quoted belief that William Morris’s grandfather came from Wales and settled in Worcester, and that his father grew up in Worcester. However, she did find considerable evidence that his grandfather lived and died with his family, mainly in London. This was, to a large extent, supported by David Everett’s research. Coles wondered whether the accounts given by Morris’s biographers about his siblings might also be inaccurate. Had his brother Stanley become a farmer and cattle breeder near Southampton? Had his brother Edgar been employed at Morris’s Merton Abbey workshops as a dyer for the last years of his working life? Had the husband of the youngest sibling, Alice, died after an accident when he was out hunting? Birth, marriage and death certificates of Morris’s siblings, their partners and children were examined, as well as baptismal records, census records and wills. Morris’s letters were also studied for references to his contacts with his family, and the results of these investigations are set out in what follows. More recent research conducted by Martin Fisher and Katherine Fort, both of whom are family descendents, a volunteer at Kelmscott Manor and the author has been included, together with views of family history by later generations of the family which may be accurate or may illustrate family secrets and myths.

Morris himself is only included in terms of what is known about his contacts with his siblings, with some reference to his views of the family as an institution, which were expressed mainly in his writings about socialism. His ideas were influenced by his reading of socialist literature, including works by Frederick Engels, but probably also by his own family experiences. In an article published in Commonweal in 1885...
Morris states that ‘it is surely clear that Socialism could never assent that a family should be confined to blood-relations; for the rest there would be no hard and fast line about what a family should be; it would be what people might choose, what they might find convenient’. Meanwhile, in *The Manifesto of the Socialist League* (1885), he writes ‘[u]nder a socialistic system contracts between individuals would be voluntary and unenforced by the community. This would apply to the marriage contract as well as others and would be a matter of simple inclination. Women also would share in the certainty of livelihood which would be the lot of all; and children would be treated from their birth as members of the community entitled to share in all its advantages.’

Such statements offer an illuminating insight into Morris’s ideas about what a family might be. However, for the purposes of this article, further reference will be made to Morris’s views only when relevant to the discussion of his relationships with his siblings, whose life stories constitute the primary focus.

**I. Background**

The period preceding Morris’s father’s death has been written about before. Morris’s parents, William Morris senior and Emma Shelton, were married on 27 July 1826 at St. Nicholas Church, Worcester. Initially, they lived above a firm of billbrokers – Harris, Sanderson and Harris – for whom Morris senior worked, at 32 Lombard Street, London. Their first child, Charles Stanley, was born during 1827, but died after five days. The second, Emma, was born during 1830, followed by a third, Henrietta, in 1832. During 1833 the family moved to Elm House, Walthamstow, where William was born in 1834, Hugh Stanley in 1837 and Thomas Rendall in 1839. During 1840 the family moved again, to Woodford Hall, Essex, where the remaining children were born: Arthur in 1840, Isabella in 1842, Edgar Llewellyn in 1844 and Alice Mary in 1846. After the death of William Morris senior in 1847 the family moved to Water House, Walthamstow, then, in 1856, to a larger home named Leyton House in Leytonstone. On 26 April 1859 Morris married Jane Burden, born on 19 October 1839, in Oxford. They had two daughters, Jane Alice, always known as ‘Jenny’, born on 17 January 1861, and Mary, always known as ‘May’, born on 25 March 1862. May recalled family gatherings at Leyton House: ‘[l]ife there was a succession of amusements shared with young aunts and uncles and first and second cousins, all very animated and fond of gaiety’. In 1871 Emma Morris and Henrietta, the only child still living at home, moved to ‘The Lordship’, Much Hadham in Hertfordshire. The 1881 Census recorded eight staff, including Rebecca Cockett, who had first worked for the Morris family at Water House, and Catherine Rogers, who had joined them at Leyton House. Emma Morris died on 8 December 1894 aged eighty-nine. In her will she left her ‘plate and
Figure 1: Mrs. Emma Morris, née Shelton, Rome, c. 1860s or 1870s (credit: William Morris Gallery, London Borough of Waltham Forest).
plated articles’ to be divided equally between William, Hugh Stanley and Arthur. Arthur was to have her ‘pieces of jade’. She left £30 to her servant Rebecca Cockett and £20 to Catherine Rogers. Her diamond earrings, which might have been expected to go to her eldest daughter or her eldest son’s wife, were left to Hugh Stanley’s wife, Grace Maria. Coles wondered whether Emma had heard about Jane Morris’s affairs with Dante Gabriel Rossetti or with Wilfrid Scawen Blunt. Jane wrote to Blunt on 12 December 1894: ‘but always I have the anxiety of my husband’s health […] his mother’s death a week ago was a shock to him although she had been ill so long, she passed away quite suddenly at the last’. Jane expressed no sense of personal loss. The remainder of Emma’s estate, which totalled over £21,000, the equivalent of approximately £2,601,000 today, was divided equally between her eight surviving children. She stipulated that if any of her surviving children died before her, their share should be divided between their children, but there was no provision for the eight children of Thomas Rendall who had died in 1884.

II. Emma Oldham (1830-1915)
Emma was born on 29 October 1830. Coles explored Morris’s relationship with his eldest sister in ‘My Dearest Emma: William and Emma Morris’. Letters from Morris, written while he was at Marlborough College during the late 1840s and early 1850s, illustrate the closeness of the relationship that formed between them as children. On 14 May 1850, Emma married Joseph Oldham, a curate, born on 25 March 1821. He met Emma while he worked in Walthamstow. They lived in Downe in Kent and, from 1851, at Clay Cross in Derbyshire where Joseph was Curate and then Vicar of the newly built St. Bartholomew’s Church. J.W. Mackail wrote that when Emma married, Morris ‘felt the separation keenly: the brother and sister had been closely intimate in all their thoughts and enthusiasms’. Jack Lindsay, John Y. Le Bourgeois and Fiona MacCarthy, relying on evidence from Morris’s letters, poetry and prose writing, suggest that Morris’s deep attachment to Emma and his feelings of desertion by her when she married were replicated in his future relationships with women. Peter Faulkner points out that Lindsay also thought that as Morris matured he moved beyond his early attachment to Emma. Reviewing Le Bourgeois’s argument, Faulkner acknowledges Morris’s ‘deep affection for his sister after her marriage’ but comments that ‘it is likely to have been on a far less intense plane than Le Bourgeois would have us believe’.

Coles traced continued contact between Morris and Emma after Emma’s marriage, as Morris visited Clay Cross during 1855, and sent poems to her. Morris and Co. designed and produced the south aisle window installed in St. Bartholomew’s Church during 1879. Coles also relates some of the history of Clay Cross, a growing
Figure 2: Emma and Joseph Oldham, Dover; c. 1850s (credit: William Morris Gallery, London Borough of Waltham Forest).
industrial town, which had developed as a result of a railway tunnel being built beneath the town. The Clay Cross Limited Company, the largest employer of the area, provided part of Joseph’s stipend. Joseph remained at St. Bartholemew’s for thirty-seven years. Coles wrote that although he was dependent on the Clay Cross Company for part of his stipend he did not hesitate to voice his disagreement with their policies in issues about which he felt strongly. In 1853, Joseph successfully insisted that a new school, for which he raised funds, should only be for members of families who attended St. Bartholemew’s Church. When the churchyard became full Joseph wanted to limit burials to those who attended St. Bartholemew’s. This was resolved by the company establishing a new cemetery where two chapels were built, one for members of the Church of England and one for other denominations.

There were three children from Emma and Joseph’s marriage: Emma, known as Emmie, born on 25 April 1851, when Emma was staying with her mother at Walthamstow; Joseph William, born on 22 September 1854; and Arthur Hugh, born on 8 May 1858, when she and Joseph lived at Clay Cross. Sadly for the family Arthur died on 4 July 1867, aged nine, after an illness of two months, suffering from ‘ulceration of the bowels’. The quality of the relationship between Emma and her husband, Joseph, is not known, but together they worked for many years in a challenging parish on a low stipend. Despite their limited income, Joseph William attended Winchester School.

Emma kept contact with the wider family, spending holidays with her mother and sisters. Morris’s daughter Jenny stayed at Clay Cross during 1877 after she was diagnosed as suffering from epilepsy. Emma and Joseph also helped in the care of Rendall’s children after their father’s death. Rendall’s daughter Effie wrote that ‘[a]fter my father’s death in 1884 Clay Cross Vicarage and North Wingfield Rectory were my homes and Uncle Joseph Oldham was like a father to me’. In 1888, at the age of sixty-eight, Joseph became Vicar of the parent church of North Wingfield with a smaller parish and an increased income. Later that year, on 4 December 1888, Joseph and Emma’s son, Joseph William, aged thirty-four, who had trained and served as an apprentice in the Merchant Navy, died from drowning in Calcutta (now Kolkata). He was, at that time, serving as a private in the Royal Rifle Brigade at the military station in Toungoo, in the same regiment as his maternal uncle Arthur. Effie Morris relates that Joseph William fell accidentally into a sacred burial pool, and that his Oldham cousin, with whom he spent the previous evening, ‘wrote to his mother about it all and to comfort her that there was no question of his being drunk’. Morris visited Emma and Joseph in their new home during 1889. Emmie, their daughter, was away, but lived at home and was an artist who exhibited paintings at the Royal Academy, and Dudley Galleries in London and the Walker Gallery in Liverpool. In 1893 Morris
described Emmie as ‘a nice cheerful little woman, and very affectionate’.24

Joseph Oldham died on 2 August 1896, after a stroke, leaving all his assets amounting to £720 net to his wife. At this time, Morris, who had been unwell, and was away on a cruise to the Norwegian fjords in an attempt to recuperate, does not appear to have had much contact with Emma.25 However when Morris died, on 3 October 1896, he left his sister an annuity of £100. Emma, along with Emmie, moved to Lyme Regis, where they rented a small house on the cliff top, ‘surrounded by her brother’s yellow marigold wallpaper and his blue carpets and chinzes’.26 After Morris’s death, Jane kept some contact with Emma, and when staying in Lyme Regis in December 1908, she wrote to Sydney Cockerell that ‘Mrs Oldham is not far off’ so that I shall be able to see a great deal of her […]. She is wonderful and goes up and down hill without any help.’27 Emma Oldham died on 30 June 1915, aged eighty-five. Letters of Administration were granted to her daughter Emma (‘Emmie’) on 30 July 1915. Her effects were £396. After Emma’s death May Morris arranged for the £100 annuity paid to her from Morris’s estate to continue to be paid to her cousin Emmie.28 Emmie later went to live at Parkstone with her cousins Effie and Ada, the children of Thomas Rendall Morris. She died on 12 June 1933.

III. Henrietta Morris (1832-1902)

Henrietta was born on 8 November 1832, while the family were living in Lombard Street, London. She was christened on 17 July 1833, after they had moved to Walthamstow.29 Linda Richardson, partly using autobiographical material from Morris’s own writings, records that Henrietta, Emma and William read stories together as children and played out scenes from them; Emma and Henrietta took the lead in early years, but, as time wore on, William began to take the initiative.30 May Morris referred to Emma being ‘of gentle nature and specially fond of’ William, and ‘Henny more given to ruling […] by way of keeping the others in order’.31 Richardson argued that Morris’s relationships with Emma and Henrietta were equally close and helped lead to Morris being ‘amenable to the intellectual influence of women’, to his enjoyment of companionship and intellectual stimulation from both men and women, and the importance for him of fellowship.32 Henrietta accompanied Morris on his first trip abroad in 1854, visiting Brussels and Bruges to see the Van Eyck and Memling paintings and some of the cities of Northern France, including Amiens, Chartres, Rouen and Paris. In 1855, Morris took his holiday with Edward Burne-Jones and William Fulford, revisiting and sharing with his friends many of the same places.

Following his return from France in 1855 Morris told his mother of his decision not to take Holy Orders. He wrote on 11 November: ‘[w]ill you tell Henrietta that I
Figure 3: Henrietta Morris, Rome, c. 1860s or 1870s (credit: William Morris Gallery, London Borough of Waltham Forest).
can quite sympathize with her disappointment […] but I hope it will change to something else […] if she sees me making myself useful. Henrietta did not marry and lived with Emma Morris until her mother’s death. When Henrietta was twenty-one her mother gave her thirteen of the Devon Great Consol shares which she had inherited, and which constituted the main source of the family fortune. This must have given Henrietta some independence until the income from the shares declined during the 1870s. In middle age she converted to Roman Catholicism during a visit to Rome. Janet Grierson, the biographer of Henrietta’s sister Isabella, wrote that when Isabella returned home after the death of her husband in 1882 ‘Henrietta was by now a Roman Catholic and her bigoted enthusiasm for her new religion made life at home none too easy’. A photograph of Henrietta in a black mantilla depicts a rather severe person, but May Morris’s recollection of her having a little dog suggests a lighter side.

In letters to his mother Morris sent messages to Henrietta. For example, in 1855 he wrote: ‘I will write to Henrietta at Emma’s – my best love to her and to all’; in 1871, ‘[b]est love to you and Henrietta, tell her I saw such beautiful hill flowers in the Faroes’; in 1874, ‘I should be sorry to miss Henrietta again so, if she wouldn’t be at home that evening any other except Saturday would do’; and in 1893, ‘I got a letter from Henny yesterday enclose a nice neckerchief for me […] Thank you very much for it.’

Living with her mother meant that Henrietta was used to helping manage large households without worry about money or bills as, despite the decline in the dividends from Devon Great Consols, her mother retained sufficient income to continue to keep them living in comfort. They often took holidays by the sea with others in the family. Henrietta took responsibility for caring for her mother. Her sister Isabella wrote that ‘if Henrietta had broken down or anything happened to her I must have gone to my mother and looked after her until her death’. Richardson points out that Morris ‘was able to see how women were disadvantaged in the sexual relationship, but unable to see the harm inherent in other relationships which made women dependent such as between parents and daughters […] and that behind their masks of selfless devotion spinster daughters like Henrietta […] might cherish worldly ambition and recognition of their talents and achievements’. Despite Morris’s belief that there should be equality of opportunity for women he did not consider that he needed to help Henrietta to lead a more fulfilling life. One might compare Old Hammond’s remark in News from Nowhere that ‘it is a great pleasure to a clever woman to manage a home skilfully’. It is not known, however, what Henrietta felt about her situation, or whether she would have agreed with Old Hammond’s sentiments.

The only letters from Morris to Henrietta which have been traced are two written
after her mother's death in 1894, when his sister had to move out of the house at Much Hadham. In one he enclosed Philip Webb’s plans for combining two cottages for her. He wrote: ‘it will make a very sunny and pleasant little house […] I need not tell you how much I sympathise with your feelings about leaving the house which has seen so much of us all’. Henrietta accepted the plans, moving in with two servants, one the same Catherine Rogers who had come to work as a lady’s maid at Leyton Hall over thirty-five years before. She was by then sixty-three, a year older than Henrietta, and had a younger girl to help.

The death of Morris in 1896 affected Henrietta greatly. She wrote to Sydney Cockerell that ‘the world is different now in every way to me and I feel utterly lost and alone’. Henrietta died on 26 June 1902, aged sixty-nine, after a fall outside her home. Her sister Isabella was present when she died. Like Morris, Henrietta had developed diabetes, and also suffered from osteoporosis. Jane Morris wrote to Cockerell on 1 July: ‘I have just had the sorrow of losing my sister in law Henrietta […] It was a great grief to Jenny when I told her.’ Henrietta had appointed her sister Isabella and a solicitor as executors of her will, and directed that her assets be invested and the income paid to her niece Emmie Oldham during her life. After Emmie’s death the residual capital was to be paid to Ada Morris, one of Thomas Rendall’s children. The gross value of the estate was £421 but the net value was nil.

IV. Hugh Stanley Morris (1837-1911)
Hugh Stanley was born at Walthamstow three years after Morris, on 2 August 1837. He is named Hugh on his birth certificate but he was christened Hugh Stanley, and the family called him Stanley. ‘The first-born Morris son who died in infancy had been Charles Stanley. Stanley was the maiden name of Elizabeth Morris, Morris’s paternal grandmother. Hugh Stanley was described by his niece Effie Morris, one of Thomas Rendall’s daughters, as ‘not very strong’. In 1848 he was enrolled as a boarder at the Forest Proprietary Grammar School, Walthamstow. His younger brother Rendall, who had been admitted earlier, sometimes did better than Stanley but not always. During the summer term 1853 Stanley was placed in a higher class than Rendall for Mathematics, and awarded first prize for Greek. Stanley left school to go to a private tutor in Bonn in Germany at the end of summer 1853. Following that, as far as is known, he lived at home and was there for the 1861 Census. In 1861-62, Morris, who had invested in building Red House and setting up Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., sold two of the thirteen shares in Devon Great Consuls his mother had given to him when he reached twenty-one. His mother, who looked on the family investment in the mine as their key to prosperity, bought the shares back from William and gave them to Stanley who would, like his other siblings, have also been given
Figure 4: Hugh Stanley Morris, photography by Adams and Stillard, Southampton, September 1880 (credit: William Morris Gallery, London Borough of Waltham Forest).
thirteen shares on reaching his majority.

On 13 June 1865, aged twenty-eight, Stanley married Grace Maria Wright, aged twenty, born on 13 June 1845. Initially the couple lived with Grace’s mother on a large estate, Mayfield, near Southampton where their first child, Grace Ellen, was born on 26 May 1866. They moved to their own accommodation, Upton Lodge, Hound, near Mayfield, where another daughter, Evelyne, was born on 28 April 1868, and a son, Eric William, on 7 April 1870. The Census returns for 1871 and 1881 record that the family had moved back to the house of Grace Maria’s mother at Mayfield. Stanley and Grace Maria’s youngest child, Charles, was born there on 21 September 1873. This large household under Mrs. Elizabeth Wright included her son Robert James Wright, her sister Charlotte Rolfe and twelve staff. In the 1861 Census Mrs. Wright declared her occupation as ‘breeder of horses and mares’ but this is not given in later returns. Effie Morris wrote in a letter to the William Morris Gallery that her cousin, Grace Ellen, told her of ‘what good times they had when they were young at Mayfield Hall’, and how her Aunt, Mrs Gilmore, Stanley’s sister Isabella, told her that ‘her greatest friend in her young days was Mrs Stanley Morris, they used to ride together’.48

In May 1875 when Morris left the Board of Devon Great Consols, Stanley took his place, retaining the family influence. Morris wrote to his mother on 27 May 1875: ‘I have just come from the DGC meeting and I suppose ended my business there [...]. Stanley will tell you all about the meeting.’49 Stanley was part of the Board whose criticisms led to the resignation in 1879 of their uncle Thomas Morris, who until then had been Resident Director of the mine.50 However Stanley attended his Uncle Thomas’s funeral in 1885, which Morris did not. Stanley was himself later forced out by the Board in 1890 but he continued to be involved in investment in mining until 1901.51 There is little information about Stanley’s contact with Morris after Morris left the Board of Devon Great Consols except possibly a letter of August 1882 to May which states: ‘[y]esterday we went to Merton [...] meeting Stanley at the station’.52

By the 1891 Census Stanley and his family were living at Pear Tree House, close to Mayfield, with three female servants. Nearby at Pear Tree Farm lived a herdsman and shepherd, his wife, a dairy woman and two children. It is unclear whether the herdsman was employed by Stanley, but, if so, this would support the view that he was a breeder of Jersey and Guernsey cattle. He returns himself on his marriage certificate and on the children’s birth certificates as ‘esquire’, ‘gentleman’ or ‘Stockholder Bank of England’, and in some census returns ‘living on his own means’.

Evelyn Cozens relates how she, her aunt and her grandmother had all worked for the family. She states that ‘one boy died in childhood’, and Effie Morris refers to
one of her cousins dying at school.\textsuperscript{53} Charles died aged twenty-two on 16 January 1896 at Ceely House, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, from ‘[e]pilepsy 8 years, Asphyxia’.\textsuperscript{54} This information is consistent with the Morris family history of epilepsy. Morris’s elder daughter Jenny had also developed the disorder during her teenage years. Fiona MacCarthy writes that Morris ‘felt himself the cause of her condition, the family inheritance descending from his mother to his own symptoms of anger induced fits’.\textsuperscript{55} There are no other known references to Charles’s epilepsy but this condition was often kept secret during the nineteenth century, and indeed Morris and Jane were secretive about Jenny’s condition.

Stanley is recorded as a visitor to Kelmscott Manor on 6 October 1896, the day of Morris’s funeral.\textsuperscript{56} His lifestyle was more conventional than that of his brother, and probably more acceptable to their mother, his family an example of the bourgeois class which Morris believed had no place in the classless society which he aspired to realise. By 1901 Stanley was living at Brownhill House, Bursledon, Hampshire, with his wife, two daughters and a staff of four women servants. He died there on 8 October 1911. In his will Stanley made bequests of £100 to his wife and his niece Emmie Oldham, £50 to each of his daughters; his silver plate, his case of knives, his Kelmscott Press books and three other books to his son Eric. He also left books by Morris to his daughters Grace Ellen and Evelyne. To his wife he left all other contents of the house and his stock and implements of husbandry in and about the farm, stable, garden and premises. The residue of his estate was to go to his son Eric. The reference to stock and farm further supports the family tradition that he was a breeder of cattle.

Both Cozens and Effie Morris relate that Eric went to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) where he worked as a tea planter. He married Fanny Eleanor May Johnson in 1907 at Bursledon, but lived in Ceylon and had no children.\textsuperscript{57} He died in Ceylon on 14 May 1919.\textsuperscript{58} In New York, in 1906, Grace Ellen married Herbert Spencer Bevan, a childhood friend and a widower from Hampshire, with a child who, Effie Morris believed, was brought up by an aunt. When Herbert Bevan died in 1916, Grace Ellen returned home.\textsuperscript{59} Her stepson Emlyn Bevan was one the executors of her will when she died during 1958.

When Cozens herself worked at Brownhill, which remained the Morris family home, Grace Maria was still alive, but the housekeeping had been taken over by her eldest daughter Evelyne. When Grace Ellen returned home she supervised the garden. Cozens remembered Grace Maria as a tall straight-backed old lady, generally dressed in black. She also recalled the collection of Morris’s books, beautifully bound in white vellum, housed in a separate bookcase. Grace Maria died in 1929, Evelyne in 1935, and, as stated previously, Grace Ellen in 1958.
V. Thomas Rendall Morris (1839-1884)

Thomas Rendall was born on 27 January 1839, and probably named Thomas after his uncle Thomas Morris, the Resident Director of Devon Great Consols, and Rendall after his father’s paternal aunt, Sarah Rendall. In the family he was called Rendall. Rendall was enrolled for the Christmas term 1848 at the Forest Proprietary Grammar School in Walthamstow. Sometimes he obtained higher grades than his elder brother Stanley. In 1855 he won a prize for Biblical Knowledge, and was first in History and Geography, Theology and German. He then left the school for a private tutor in Bonn in Germany, as had Stanley. On 25 August 1857 Rendall was commissioned into the 92nd Gordon Highlanders Regiment of Foot as an Ensign. On 11 September 1860 Rendall, aged twenty-one, married Elizabeth Maxwell in Hackney, giving his profession as ‘esquire’, although he was in the army. Elizabeth, aged nineteen, was born in 1841, and came from Stirling. She was the fourth of six sisters. It is possible that she met Rendall when he was stationed at Stirling, the base of the Gordon Highlanders. Her father, a bank accountant, gave his consent and attended the wedding. Morris family stories suggest that Elizabeth was an (amateur) actress and that Rendall and Elizabeth led ‘a gay social life’ when living at Shurdington. Rendall and Elizabeth produced eight children. It is possible to trace the family’s whereabouts and their father’s occupation from their birth certificates. Their eldest child Rendall McEwen Morris was born on 15 October 1861 at Oving in Sussex while his father was still in the 53rd Regiment. The next, Ada, was born on 1 November 1863 at Hawkeshead in the English Lake District, Herbert Maxwell on 2 August 1866 at Shurdington, Gloucestershire and Arthur Gordon on 22 December 1868 at Scarborough, Yorkshire. Their birth certificates list their father as retired from the 53rd Regiment. Esme Verena was born on 30 April 1872 at Tranmere, Birkenhead; her father’s occupation was ‘gentleman’. Effie Mabel was born on 22 October 1876 at a different address in Tranmere, her father a ‘shipping clerk’. Violet was born on 14 March 1879 at the same address, her father a ‘merchant’s clerk’, and the youngest child Daisy Lilian at a different address in Tranmere on 6 August 1882, her father also a ‘shipping clerk’. Rendall’s grandson Tim Langley wrote of his being a translator for a shipping firm.
Figure 5: Thomas Rendall Morris and his wife Elizabeth, c. 1862 (credit: Don Fort).
In March 1870 Morris wrote to Jane to say that he had dined at Leyton House, and that Rendall had come to fetch him. He stated that Rendall ‘is gotten awfully fat: has taken a house at Acton (close to London) and is thinking of setting up a poultry farm there’, which Morris thought a good idea ‘if he will stick to it, and is pretty lucky’. There is no further mention of this matter so either Rendall never did it or the farm failed. In 1874 Morris wrote to his mother that he intended to continue making payments to Rendall, ‘at all events some of it’, but saying that he was in arrears. Norman Kelvin suggests that these were payments due from income from Rendall’s shares in Devon Great Consols, but as the shares had declined in value, Morris may have made up some of the amount himself. Recognition of Rendall’s need is shown in his mother’s elder sister Ann Turner’s will made in 1878, leaving a fifth of her estate to him. She died in 1883 a year before Rendall. Her net estate was valued at £600.

Census returns also indicate declining circumstances. In 1861 Rendall and Elizabeth kept two servants; in 1871, three, as well as Margaret Maxwell, Elizabeth’s sister, living with them. By 1881 there were no servants, but Margaret Maxwell was still with them. Rendall died on 4 August 1884. The cause of death is given as ‘Delirium Tremens’ which suggests alcohol abuse. The Registrar was notified by his eldest son Rendall McEwen Morris, aged twenty-two, who was present at Rendall’s death. It is not known where Rendall’s widow Elizabeth was at the time of his death. Family reports suggest she went to Australia, but this has not been confirmed. In 1901, in New Zealand, Elizabeth married Edward Cox, a widower from Essex, who is described as a painter, probably a decorator. A descendant has traced the information that Elizabeth’s eldest sister Helen probably went to New Zealand during the 1850s which could give a reason for Elizabeth going there (although Helen lived on the South Island and Elizabeth on the North).

Edward Cox died in 1927 and Elizabeth in 1928. Both are buried in Hamilton East Cemetery, New Zealand. Elizabeth’s death certificate gives her cause of death, which took place in a mental hospital, as senile dementia. Much about her life remains unknown. Her youngest daughter Daisy’s son, Tim Langley, suggests that Elizabeth was possibly persuaded to leave Britain by Isabella Gilmore. He thought that although his mother’s sister Effie probably knew what had happened, this was kept a family secret. Descendants have a photograph of Elizabeth with her new husband, and another taken in New Zealand in 1919.

When Rendall died and Elizabeth had left the family home, Rendall’s sister Isabella Gilmore took responsibility for the children whose ages at the time ranged from Rendall McEwen aged twenty-two, to Daisy who was only two. Isabella and her husband Arthur had already taken an interest in the children. In a letter written
after Christmas 1877 Morris commented that he had seen Ada recently at his mother’s with the Gilmores, and thought her much improved.74 There is also a letter from Arthur, to Ada expressing concern for her and interest in her.75

After Arthur’s death in 1882, Isabella trained as a nurse. It is unclear to what extent she took direct care of Rendall’s children. Janet Grierson states that Isabella’s sister Emma Oldham took them initially while Isabella was nursing at Guy’s Hospital.76 Isabella felt ‘at the time there were reasons monetary and otherwise which made it impossible for me to have them except in their holidays’. When the Bishop of Rochester asked Isabella to consider becoming a deaconess, after much hesitation she agreed, and was ordained in 1887.77 Later she wrote: ‘my brother Rendall’s eight children were left in my care and I had to do everything for them and very grateful I am to have done it. They are good sons and daughters to me.’78

The three boys emigrated, Rendall McEwen to Canada, Herbert Maxwell to Australia, and Arthur Gordon to Canada, probably all in 1887. The four younger girls were sent to boarding school run by the Sisterhood of St. Lawrence in Belper, Derbyshire, paid for by Isabella who took them during the holidays. Census returns show them all at the school in 1891. Grierson refers to the children calling her ‘mother’, taking them on a visit to Morris’s workshops at Merton Abbey and, with Emma, for holidays in a rented cottage at Lyme Regis. Effie recalls visiting Kelmscott House for the first time as a teenager with Isabella and a younger sister and seeing Morris and Jane. She states of Jane that ‘[s]he certainly was a wonderful personality’.79 Morris wrote to his mother after Christmas 1885 stating that ‘Ada will be able to tell you more about our household by word of mouth’.80 One of Daisy’s daughters recalls her mother saying that she had been taken by her Aunt Issy, with Ada, to see Morris, and that Isabella had said that she felt he might have given his nieces some money.81 Effie writes of seeing Jane after Morris’s death. In 1908 Jane wrote to Effie from Dartmouth, commenting that May had drawn a sketch of the Acland monument for her. Sir Thomas and Lady Acland were Effie’s employers.82

Rendall McEwen and Arthur Gordon, who both emigrated to Canada, worked there as farmers. Rendall McEwen married Margaret Ellen Clegg in 1891. Five children were born to them. Arthur Gordon married Nancy Ellen Snider, and they parented three sons. Both families have descendants in Canada today. Ada worked as a governess and, later, as she had delicate health, lived with Isabella, helping at the Girls’ Preventive Home established by Isabella. Herbert joined the Merchant Navy, then emigrated to Australia, worked as a farmer, and married Alice Atkinson. None of their three children married or produced any heirs.

Esme, who trained as a Norland (i.e. children’s) nurse, also emigrated to Canada, married Arthur Gordon’s wife’s brother, Henry Snider. Their daughter, Effie Snider,
married Thomas Dring, and bore a son, Charles. Effie Morris attended the Royal School of Needlework and then worked for twenty years with Lord and Lady Acland as a secretary. She lived with Isabella and Ada after the Aclands died, with Ada and Emmie Oldham after Isabella’s death, and later with a companion, until she died in 1969. Violet worked as a domestic nurse and married Alfred Toomey, a railwayman, in 1921. No children have been traced. The youngest child Daisy completed her schooling while living with Isabella, became a governess, and, in 1911, married Albert Langley, a coal merchant’s clerk. Their family included three children: Mary, whose son Martin Fisher’s research has contributed to this article, Tim Langley and Phyllis Millet, who are also quoted.83

VI. Arthur Morris (1840-1916)
Arthur, William and Emma Morris’s fourth surviving son, was born on 30 August 1840 at Woodford Hall. Like Stanley and Rendall he attended the Forest Proprietary Grammar School and was admitted in 1849. While there he won prizes for History and Geography, Theology and Latin. He left during Easter 1856 and went, as had his brothers, to a private tutor in Bonn.84 In 1858 Arthur joined the 60th Royal Rifle Corps as an Ensign. He became a Lieutenant in 1861, a Captain in 1869, a Major in 1880, a Lieutenant Colonel in 1885 and a Colonel in 1889.85 He took part in the capture of the Taku forts and the surrender of Peking (now Beijing) during the 2nd Opium War (1856-1860), receiving a medal with two clasps, and in the Anglo-Zulu War in South Africa (1871-1879), being awarded a medal with one clasp in 1879. He later served in India.86

Morris referred to him occasionally in letters. In 1872 he asked his mother to tell Arthur about some changes at Devon Great Consols, in which Arthur, as a member of the family, also held shares.87 In 1874 he wrote: ‘I am expecting Arthur here this morning to talk about the DGC […] things are looking a little better there’.88 Morris’s letters also refer to Arthur’s progress in the army. On 3 March 1881 he wrote: ‘[t]omorrow I go down to Hadham to see the last of Arthur before he goes to India; lucky he, that he did not have to run downhill at Majuba though I see that his old battalion seem to have run fastest and so lost fewest men’. The battle of Majuba Hill, in which British forces were heavily defeated by the Boers, took place on 27 February 1881 in the Transvaal during the First Boer War (1880-1881). Morris continued: ‘Isy is to be there, and Alice and the whole clamjamfry of them’.89 The Census of 1881 records Arthur aged forty as a ‘Major 60th Regiment’ on the troopship Jumna en route for India with his regiment. At Christmas in 1885 Morris wrote: ‘I was glad to hear that Arthur has got his Lieutenant Colonelcy. Will he stay out in India?’.90 Five years later, Arthur retired with the rank of Colonel on 5 March 1890.91 On this
Figure 6: Arthur Morris, Simla, India, c. 1861 (credit: William Morris Gallery, London Borough of Waltham Forest).
occasion, Morris wrote to his mother on 25 March: ‘I have not seen Arthur yet; perhaps I ought to call on him as he is an invalid’; Norman Kelvin comments this was probably as a result of gout, from which Arthur had suffered for thirty years. Morris’s references to Arthur seem sympathetic despite Morris’s criticisms of the role of the army in suppressing working-class rallies and in exploiting indigenous populations abroad to further imperialist expansion. In 1888 in *Commonweal*, when writing about General Charles George Gordon, he refers to ‘that most dangerous tool of capitalist oppression “the Godfearing soldier”’. As an officer in the army Arthur was furthering a policy which Morris saw as ignoring the wishes and best interests of the inhabitants of the country where they were fighting to meet the needs of capitalist profit-makers.

On 6 October 1886 Arthur, by then aged forty-six, married Katherine Cecil Annette Trower (called Katie), aged twenty-five, born on 1 January 1861 and the youngest of five children. Her father George Trower lived on dividends and an annuity. In the 1891 Census Arthur and Katie are recorded as living at the home of Rose Bateman, a stockbroker’s agent in the Cromwell Road, London. Arthur is described as a Colonel in the army on retired pay. By 1897 Arthur and Katie were living at Hove, and a son, Lionel Arthur Noel, was born on 25 December that year. The 1901 Census gives them at the same address with Lionel aged three, and four servants. Few references have been found of Arthur’s contact with the rest of the Morris family after he retired from the army, except that in 1910 he wrote to May Morris, giving her details of his army career when she was preparing material for *The Collected Works*. In this brief letter he wrote: ‘I hear about you from Alice [his younger sister] tho I don’t often see her’. Arthur died aged seventy-six in 1916 in Brighton. He left his wife all his real or personal property. The net value of his estate was £97. In 1952 Arthur’s son Lionel, aged fifty-four, a Major on retired pay from the King’s Royal Rifle Corps, married Hilda Geraldine Clarke aged fifty-five, a widow. They had no children. He died on 14 November 1971.

**VII. Isabella Gilmore (1842-1923)**

Isabella was born on 17 July 1842 at Woodford Hall, after four boys and followed by another, Edgar. Edgar wrote many years later that ‘there were the three of us, her [Isabella], Alice and myself and the red haired governess […] Issy was rather a tomboy and we had a most delightful wild garden with a great pond’, and also records that they made bonfires, cooking potatoes in the ashes. Grierson refers to Isabella attending a private school in Brighton, and a finishing school at Clifton, Bristol. On 18 September 1860 Isabella, aged eighteen, married Arthur Hamilton Gilmore, known as Archy, who was aged twenty-eight and a Lieutenant in the Royal Navy. He
was often away at sea but from 1865 was based mainly at Pembroke Dock, serving in the coastguard service. In the 1871 Census, Isabella and Arthur are recorded as living in a flat in Mayfair, London but with no resident servants.

Both Isabella and Arthur were concerned for the welfare of others. A neighbour recalled that when they were living in Weybridge around 1877 Isabella caused uproar in the village by supporting a young pregnant gypsy girl through the birth of her child. As a naval officer Arthur Gilmore ‘is reputed to have been the first promoter of canteens for the men in the Navy’, in which Isabella supported him. The 1881 Census records Arthur as a retired naval commander living in Notting Hill, London with two servants, but soon he and Isabella moved to Lyme Regis where Arthur died on 1 November 1882 aged fifty. His death certificate records effusion on the serum of the brain and paralysis. Isabella was still only forty, and after returning to her mother’s home, she decided to train as a nurse. This occupation was still regarded as rather low-grade and menial, and was disapproved of by the family including her mother. She trained at Guy’s Hospital and became a ward sister.

In 1884 when her brother Rendall died leaving eight children, although Isabella took responsibility for them, as already recorded, she did not give up her nursing career. As also previously noted, while still a nursing sister, she was approached by the Bishop of Rochester to establish a new order of deaconesses. The Bishop believed that the best way for the Church to influence and improve the lives of the working classes was to send trained women to work among them, since such people would more easily be able to establish relationships with mothers and children. Eventually Isabella agreed despite family opposition, although William and her sister Emma supported her. She wrote: ‘I had many troubling times to go through with my relations, many hard unkind things were said but it had been so before when I went to Guy’s and except for my mother being angry with me I did not trouble very much, that did trouble me […] and it was a great comfort that before she died she had entirely forgive me’.

Isabella helped the Bishop plan the training of recruits for the new order even to the detail of the clothing. Isabella wished the dress to be blue, and stressed that ‘it has to be useful and not easily spoilt by the weather’, while ‘the Bishop insisted that it was to be ‘a lady’s dress in every particular and one in which a woman would look nice’. The requirement proved to be justified, as the trainees became known in the district, and if drunks or bullies began to abuse them, local people would come to their defence. A suitable residence was found at Park Hill, Clapham. The house needed decorating, some of which Isabella did herself to save money. She approached Morris who ‘was in one of his happy tempers’ and The Firm decorated her two private rooms and the chapel, the walls of which were ‘hung with a beautiful madder chintz of my
Figure 7: Isabella Gilmore, Head Deaconess, 1906 (credit: Church of England Record Centre).
brother’s’. Isabella was ordained on 16 April 1887. She recalled: ‘I had one of my mother’s dear old servants come with boxes of things for the tea and my sister Mrs Oldham came ready for the service’, and stayed a few days. 99

The trainees worked in Battersea, one of the poorest districts of London, where there was poverty, dirt, poor sanitation, overcrowding and little education: children were neglected and there was a high level of alcoholism. The deaconesses set up a school, ran a soup kitchen, distributed clothing and blankets, taught basic sanitary standards, nursed the sick and gave religious instruction to the children. 100 Morris is reported to have said to Isabella ‘I preach Socialism, you practice it’. 101 Isabella’s religious faith was strong and while addressing people’s physical requirements her concern for what she saw as their spiritual needs was high.

In 1891 the Order moved into a larger house, ‘The Sisters’, at 83 (now 113) Northside, Clapham Common. After her mother died in 1894 Isabella used her inheritance to add a chapel. Morris put her in touch with Philip Webb, who designed it. He also designed the altar super-frontal which was embroidered by Isabella’s niece May, and the silver cross, which was made by Robert Catterson-Smith. 102 The work was completed by 1897. A stained glass window designed by Burne-Jones depicting Martha and Mary, representing the active and the contemplative aspects of the deaconesses’ vocation, was added in 1911. Two more stained glass windows by Morris and Co. were added in 1912 and 1913. 103

Initially it was difficult to find parishes willing to accept trainees, and to recruit suitable personnel, but soon they were much in demand. Isabella was an inspiring leader, although one of her trainees wrote: ‘[h]er rule over the students was strict and she had little mercy on any slovenliness or unpunctuality […] in real illness or trouble no-one could be more understanding and sympathetic’. 104 When trained, deaconesses would work with a parish priest, licensed by the Bishop. They were paid a small stipend. Isabella offered support if required and established a rest home in Lyme Regis. The role was expanded to include working with rural parishes and with the Royal Navy, based on the depot ship HMS Pembroke, Chatham. Deaconesses trained by Isabella worked in other countries, including India, South Africa, Canada and the United States.

Isabella also established many heavily-subsidised schemes, such as the provision of clothing for small loans, provident clubs, a Girls’ Preventive Home, founded in 1893, and holiday homes for children from 1898. Jane Morris contributed annually to the Girls’ Preventive Home. 105 In 1897 Isabella asked Sydney Cockerell to print the Deaconesses’ Institution Associates’ card at the Kelmscott Press. In 1906 she retired from training deaconesses but continued to tour, addressing meetings, fundraising, and being involved in discussions with Head Deaconesses about the
future of the order.

With Ada, Isabella moved to live in Reigate in 1906 and began Sunday School classes there. In 1908, she underwent a serious operation. Around 1914 she and Ada moved to Kew, where Isabella acted as sacristan at St. Luke’s Church. They were joined there in 1920 by Effie, one of Ada’s sisters. Isabella experienced a number of health problems. As well as caring for her brother Rendall’s children Isabella had maintained relationships with Jane and Morris’s daughters, Jenny and May. Frank Sharp quotes references to Isabella in letters from Jenny to Sydney Cockerell, and to May seeing her aunt often.106

In 1921 Isabella, Ada and Effie moved to Parkstone in Dorset, and on 15 March 1923 Isabella died, having become increasingly weak with heart problems and bronchitis. She was buried with her husband at Lyme Regis. In her amended will she left £10 each to Violet, Esme and Daisy, £15 to a servant and the remainder to her niece Ada with the explanation that ‘I wish her to feel that she can keep a home for her sisters if she so desires’. Isabella’s only surviving sister, Alice, is reported to have said: ‘I do not know what I would have done without her; she was so good to me’.107

A memorial service in Isabella’s honour was held at Southwark Cathedral where a monument to her was erected and a choir stall named after her. In the Cathedral there is also a chalice incorporating Isabella’s rings. A list of floral tributes at Isabella’s funeral include one ‘from Alice with dearest love’, one from ‘Emmie’, another ‘with dearest love from three Canadian nephews who fought in the Great War, Jim, Gordon and Willie’, and another was ‘with dearest love to our beloved Mother Aunt’, naming all eight of Rendall’s children, whom she befriended after their father’s death.108

VIII. Edgar Llewellyn Morris (1844-1924)

Edgar, the youngest of William and Emma Morris’s five surviving boys was born on 6 June 1844 at Woodford Hall. He was only three when his father died but remembered that distressing time, writing years later to his niece Ada: ‘money had to be found to pay off the great liabilities incurred by father’s partners’; rather denying that his father as the only active senior partner may have borne some responsibility for these debts.109 Like his elder brothers, Edgar attended the Forest Proprietary Grammar School and was enrolled in 1853. He left in 1858, and was admitted to Harrow in September 1858 but, always in the lower half of his class, he left at Christmas 1860.110 The 1861 Census does not record him as being at home.

On 11 January 1866 in Perth, Edgar married Robina Maxwell, aged nineteen, the youngest sister of Rendall’s wife Elizabeth. A daughter, Florence Ethel, was born at Trelleck in Monmouthshire on 24 July 1867. On her birth certificate Edgar’s occupation is given as ‘Landed Proprietor’. By 1871 the family were living in
Figure 8: Edgar Morris, Ambleside, c. 1870 (credit: William Morris Gallery, London Borough of Waltham Forest).
Dumbartonshire, Scotland, and Edgar’s occupation was ‘Annuitant’. Robina’s sister Mary was living with them. In November 1877 Morris wrote that he had ‘heard of a sort of place for Edgar’ as ‘superintendent of a sort of boy’s home in Dean Street, Soho’, and commented that he ‘is going to try for it on the principle of any port in a storm’. He did not obtain that position but the information suggests that Edgar was desperate for work. Morris spent Christmas 1877 with his mother, and wrote to Jenny and May that ‘Edgar and his missus and baby are here, also Isabella and her naval officer and Ada’.

The following year Morris writes of Edgar visiting Kelmscott Manor and going fishing with him. On 29 June 1878 a son Edgar Cecil was born when Edgar and Robina were at Walworth. Edgar’s occupation is given as ‘Gentleman’. In August 1880 Morris wrote: ‘Edgar expecting twins or some such mess’. Only one child, another daughter, Catherine Dora, was born on 25 September 1880 when the family were living in St. Pancras. They were still there for the Census in 1881, in a house with four other families totalling twenty-three people, including again Robina’s sister Mary. Edgar is registered as a commercial clerk.

In 1880 Edgar began working for his brother at Queen’s Square. In September 1880, Morris wrote to Jane that Edgar would send on to her worsteds and silks. In January 1881 he recorded in his diary ‘Edgar taking stock of wools: 1100 and more’. In February 1881 he wrote that Edgar had gone to look at a possible site in Crayford, in March 1883, that another member of staff, or his brother, would show Mrs. Magnusson round at Merton. In April 1883, after two trees were blown down at Merton in a storm, he wrote: ‘Edgar is getting me a large willow’ to fill up the gap, and in May 1883: ‘there is one pretty blossom tree which is new to me […] Edgar says it is the Dog-wood’. In 1884, in a letter to Georgiana Burne-Jones, Morris outlined staffing structure and payments at Merton Abbey. Edgar is not mentioned.

Edgar’s fourth child a boy, Hugh Gilmore, was born on 10 May 1887. On the birth certificate Edgar’s occupation is given as ‘Proprietor’. The family lived at addresses in Wimbledon, near Merton Abbey, from 1886, but are not recorded there after 1897. The 1891 Census mentions Edgar as a skin dyer, possibly an error, and that he was, as later recorded, a silk dyer. In 1892 Wilfrid Scawen Blunt saw him at Merton Abbey working in the dye vats, and described him as ‘a dreamy man in workman’s clothes, with his shirt sleeves turned up and his arms blue with indigo to the elbows’. He commented that Morris had said that Edgar had ‘gradually fallen in the world, and after trying one thing and another to get a living is now glad to be employed on weekly wages. He lives at Merton and is quite happy’.

In 1890 Morris wrote: ‘my brother Edgar’s daughter is here for company’.

Edgar and Robina’s eldest daughter Florence worked as a secretary. At Paddington,
on 3 June 1893, aged twenty-six, she married Herbert Philip Middlemore-Whithard, aged twenty-four, of independent means. A son, Wilfrid de Ferrand was born at Shepperton on 28 September 1897. This looks like someone who moved up in the world; two very aristocratic names, and independent means. The 1901 Census records a change of circumstances. The family were living in Lambeth and Edgar, aged fifty-six, is recorded as a retired Baker and Confectioner: the elder son, working as a pattern maker; the younger daughter working as a hairdresser, and the younger boy aged fourteen, were all still at home. Robina and Edgar certainly remained in Lambeth until 1915. In the 1911 Census the sons Edgar, Cecil and Hugh were at home and both are recorded as employed as Engineers’ Pattern Makers. From at least 1909, Edgar Cecil used his own work premises. He married Hebe Kate Trille in 1917.

By the time Edgar’s wife Robina died on 12 May 1920 aged seventy-four, they were living at Shepperton, not far from their daughter Florence and her family. Edgar’s occupation is given as retired silk dyer. Robina’s death was registered by their son Edgar Cecil. Edgar himself died on 15 October 1924, aged eighty-one, at the same address, from myocardial degeneration and acute dyspepsia syncope. On his death certificate his occupation is given as Confectioner (Master) retired. His son Hugh was there when he died.

Edgar and Robina’s eldest daughter Florence died in 1945, and their only grandchild, Wilfrid, died in 1946. In later years the family was based at South Cowpen, Wisborough Green, Sussex. Florence’s husband Herbert died in 1953, and Hugh Morris in 1954. Edgar Cecil lost his wife in 1962, and he himself died in 1973. Catherine is described in a letter to William Morris Society members as living in a very remote cottage there. She was a member of the Society and, during her later years, received an annual donation from some Society members until her death in 1978. Edgar and Robina appear to have established a close family, the children supporting their parents and each other. How long Edgar remained working at Merton Abbey, and when he trained as a baker and confectioner remain uncertain. He was still living in Wimbledon when Morris died. In 1894 he inherited money from his mother, which may have financed a career change.

IX. Alice Mary Gill (1846-1942)

Alice was born on 5 May 1846 at Woodford Hall, the youngest of the family, and only a year old when her father died. She shared a governess with Isabella and Edgar. In the Census for 1861 Alice is not recorded as living with the family, and so was possibly away at school. On 2 June 1864, aged eighteen, Alice married Reginald Butler Edgcumbe Gill, aged twenty-eight, born 26 September 1833. He came from
an old Devonshire family, and took her to live in his home district, West Devon. Gill worked as a banker for Gill and Rundle of Tavistock, a firm which supplied banking facilities for Devon Great Consols. His father, John Hornbrook Gill died in 1874, leaving £10,000 in trust, with income for life, to his son Reginald. The remainder of his estate, after other trusts and legacies were paid, was to be held by the trustees for use of his son, his heirs, executors, administrators and assigns. A stained glass window designed by Edward Burne-Jones and Morris in Reginald’s father’s memory was installed in St. Eustachius the Martyr Church, Tavistock, Devon in 1876.

In 1877 Morris wrote to Jane referring to a letter ‘from Alice apparently’ which he said he would forward to her. The Census for 1871 records Alice and Reginald at Ward House, Beerferris (now Bere Ferrers) in Devon, and for 1881 at Tamar House, Beerferris. Morris ‘went on the long promised voyage to Alice’ in February 1881. He thought their ‘house is not a bad one: plan very fair, somewhat plain, but looks human: all but the furniture which Gill would stick in it and which I suppose he half repents of now since he is getting me to do some things for him’. By the time of the 1891 Census Reginald and Alice were at Bickham House, Buckland Monachorum, Devon. They had no children. A family story refers to Reginald getting a servant ‘into trouble’. There may be some foundation to this story. The 1871 census for the Gill household includes a housemaid Elizabeth Hooper. On the marriage certificate dated 1901 of a Gertrude Hooper, aged twenty-six, a Reginald Butler Edgcumbe Gill, banker, is recorded as her father. Whatever might have happened Alice and Reginald remained together. In a future socialist society Morris envisaged that women would not be economically dependent on their husbands and that a ‘couple would be free’ but ‘if unfortunately distaste arose between them […] friendship would go along with desire, and would outlive it, and the couple would still remain together’.

On 10 February 1897 Reginald died when he was thrown from his horse while hunting, dislocating his neck. He left £1000, all the furniture, silver ornaments, china and pictures (except certain named articles) to Alice, legacies to other named people, and the residual estate to William Thomas Gill. Thus, the second part of 1896 and early 1897 was a particularly difficult time for the Morris family as Reginald’s death followed soon after that of the husband of Morris’s sister Emma, Joseph Oldham, in August 1896, and that of Morris himself in October 1896.

Sir Geoffrey Mander, who saw Alice when she was ninety-four years old, wrote: ‘since she married […] her life was cut off from that of her brother William’ although she related happy memories of him. However, Jane Morris kept some contact with Alice after Morris’s death. In February 1899 she wrote about Alice giving up her groom and coachman, and in July 1899, when Jane was planning to go to Buxton for treatment for her rheumatism, she wrote: ‘Mrs Gill will go with me’.
Figure 9: Alice and Reginald Gill, London, c. 1860s (credit: William Morris Gallery, London Borough of Waltham Forest).
Census records Alice as living in Lyme Regis with three servants, close to her sister Emma who was also experiencing bereavement.

Alice later moved to Tunbridge Wells and was living there during the Census of 1911. One of Rendall's grandchildren wrote of visiting her: ‘[i]n the hall were two large paintings of her and her husband [...] She had only a staff of two [...] Mary Geach was her cook – she had been Granny Morris’s kitchen maid and went to Aunt Alice on the latter’s wedding – she became general factotum [...]. Aunt A was short and fat with sparse grey curls atop. She wore voluminous skirts and bolero jackets and had two fat pug dogs [...]. She had an uncertain temper and was very out of touch with the modern world.’ 128

Alice died from cerebral embolism, thrombosis and senility on 27 September 1942, aged ninety-seven at her home in Tunbridge Wells. Her niece Grace Bevan, her brother Stanley’s daughter, was with her and registered her death. In her will small legacies left included those to Grace Bevan, her nephews Edgar Cecil and Hugh Morris, and niece (Florence) Ethel Whithard (three of her brother Edgar’s four children), to her nieces Violet Toomey and Esme Snyder (two of her brother Rendall’s eight children). She also left annuities to Edgar Cecil and to Hugh Morris, and to her servant Mary Geach. Her clothes were left to Edgar Cecil’s wife, who would also inherit his annuity if he died, suggesting a close relationship with them. Her estate was valued at over £19,000 net. She left the remainder to Lionel Morris, her brother Arthur’s son.

X. Conclusion

During her lifetime Emma Morris provided a focal point for the members of her family. There are accounts of various members meeting at her home, particularly at Christmas, and for holidays by the sea. There was interaction between family members, who visited each other and helped each other at difficult times (for example, Isabella’s caring for Rendall’s children after his death), and there are many examples of siblings staying with other members of the family at times of illness, bereavement, or when approaching death. Several siblings also remembered selected family members in wills. After Emma’s death it seems likely there was less contact between family members. One of Rendall’s grandchildren wrote of the Morrises as being a ‘disparate family – even Aunt Issy spoke little of her brothers and sisters’. 129 There is also reference to lack of contact between Rendall’s daughter Daisy and her Uncle Arthur’s family, because Daisy was thought to have married beneath her. Arthur relied on Alice for news of the family. 130

Despite Morris’s view that families need not be limited to blood relations, and his own very close friendships with men and women who were not related, he maintained
some contact with his siblings and their families, although not as part of his everyday life. He was ready to help at times when it was needed, sometimes possibly prompted by his mother. Morris seems pleased to have been able to assist his siblings using his professional knowledge, skills and contacts. He also tried to help his brothers Rendall and Edgar, both of whom had come down in the world. There is some record of nieces staying with Morris and his family. Otherwise his life was extremely busy with his own activities and his direct family. Comments by Morris about his siblings in Kelvin’s edition of Morris’s *Collected Letters*, although infrequent, are usually friendly and positive despite some quite radical differences in their lifestyles and beliefs, although Isabella and Emma shared his concerns for disadvantaged people. After Morris’s death Jane’s letters contain some evidence that she maintained contact with his sisters but no obvious record of any with his brothers.

Regarding Dorothy Coles’s initial hypothesis – that there are often inaccuracies in what is passed down from generation to generation – no dramatic discrepancies have been discovered about Morris’s siblings, although many matters remain unconfirmed. When and why did Edgar leave Merton Abbey, and when did he train as a baker and confectioner? Was it known in the wider family that, as well as Morris’s daughter Jenny, Stanley’s son Charles suffered from epilepsy? There is also a major secret about why and when Rendall’s wife Elizabeth left England for Australia or New Zealand, apparently around the time of Rendall’s death, leaving care of the children to be arranged within the family, and there is doubt about which child went initially to which member. There is also a lack of explanation for Emma Morris leaving her...
diamond earrings to Stanley’s wife Grace Maria rather than to Jane and the omission 
of any bequest to Rendall’s children when she died in 1894. Further exploration could 
provide more information and a better understanding of the quality of relationships 
between Morris and his siblings, and their relationships with each other and with 
their mother.

In 1895 Morris refused the offer of an unnamed person to write his family history. 
This could be explained by his expressed belief that, in a socialist society, blood 
relationships would not be of major importance, or it could be that there were things 
in his family that he preferred to be kept secret. Morris’s own explanation concludes: 
‘I don’t think I approve of the whole affair. What I offer the public is my work, I don’t 
want them to know anything else about me.’ 

However it may be of interest today, 
when family history has a relatively high profile, to consider the lives of the brothers 
and sisters of William Morris, whose work is still so well remembered.

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NOTES
1. This article is based on incomplete drafts and notes for a talk given by the late Dorothy Coles to 
The William Morris Society on 26 February 2005. (See the obituary in The William Morris Society 
Newsletter (Summer 2012), pp. 4-5). It also includes extensive later research carried out by her, held 
in the Dorothy Coles Papers in The William Morris Society Archives, Kelsmcott House, 26 Upper 
Mall, Hammersmith, W6 9TA. (Afterwards Dorothy Coles Papers, WMSoc. Archives). Dorothy’s 
structure and some of her text have been used in preparing the version of the article that is 
presented here.
3. Dorothy Coles, revised by Barbara Lawrence, ‘William Morris’s Paternal Ancestry’, JWMS, 20: 4 
(Summer 2014), 19-33. (Afterwards Coles, revised Lawrence).
34-59. (Afterwards Everett). David Everett’s research indicates a Thomas Morris, probably William 
Morris senior’s youngest brother, being christened in Worcester in 1804, and, traces since publication 
of the article, an entry in The Worcester Journal, 24 July 1811, requesting that debts be repaid to a 
tobacconist named William Morris of Broad Street, Worcester, with a threat of proceedings if not 
paid. This could be a reference to William Morris, grandfather, whose will states that he was a 
tobacconist.
5. Frederick Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, 
6. William Morris. Journalism: Contributions to Commonweal 1885-1890, ed. by Nicholas Salmon (Bristol: 
Socialist League Office, 1885), Note F.
8. See Coles, revised Lawrence; Everett.
9. Documents held at The College of Arms, Queen Victoria Street, London, EC4V 4BT and the Register of Marriages at St. Nicholas Church, Worcester 1826, no.234, available online: <www.ancestry.co.uk> (accessed 14 July 2017). (Afterwards College of Arms). The 1936 Act of Parliament which established compulsory registration of births, marriages and deaths came into force on 1 July 1837. Records from some Church denominations are available for the period before this time but these are often incomplete and not always reliable. Copies of certificates of events registered after 1 July 1837 have been obtained from The General Register Office, Southport, Merseyside, PR8 2JD, and are available online: <www.gro.gov.uk> (accessed 14 July 2017). Citations from particular certificates are not noted separately.

10. Charles Stanley Morris was born 20 August 1827 according to an entry in a family bible. This information is provided in ‘Kelsmscott Manor volunteer research paper’ (2014, revised 9 May 2017). Typed copy held in the library, Kelmscott Manor, Lechlade, Gloucestershire. This very comprehensive research includes detailed information about later generations. From the dates referred to in this paper it has been possible to fill in some gaps and to obtain relevant documents to obtain more information. (Afterwards ‘Kelsmscott Manor research paper’). Charles’s burial is listed for 7 September 1827, aged five days, in the Burial records for St. Edm und the King and Martyr 1827. Greater London Burials Index, City of London Burials 1751-1855, p. 1, no. 127. Guildhall ref. GLMs20, 210.


12. Census records for the United Kingdom from 1841 may be available locally, or from The National Archives at Kew, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 4DU. (Afterwards National Archives). In this article, the relevant year and sometimes the district are given.

13. Will of Emma Morris, probate granted 11 January 1895. Wills made after 1858 are available from Leeds Probate Registry, York House, 31 York Place, Leeds LS1 2BA; available online: <https://probatesearch.service.gov.uk> (accessed 14 July 2017). This online source provides the date of death and probate, and place of residence prior to death. Wills, dates and places referred to in the text will not be separately noted.


20. Copies of documents and further information relating to Joseph and Emma Oldham’s children’s lives are held in Dorothy Coles papers, WMSoc. Archives.


23. Ibid.

24. Kelvin, III, p. 127; IV, p. 89.

25. In a letter to Morris dated 8 August 1896, Philip Webb informed Morris that his sister Isabella had


27. Sharp and Marsh, p. 416.


32. Richardson, pp. 10-12, 306.

33. Kelvin, I, p. 25.

34. Records of the Devonshire Great Consolidated Copper Mining Company, Transfer of Shares for year preceding 30 June 1854, held at The National Archive, ref. PRO BT 31/142/445 Annual Returns.

35. MacCarthy, p. 45.


40. Richardson, p. 92.


42. Kelvin, IV, p. 255.

43. Henrietta Morris to Sydney Cockerell, 9 October 1896, held in the British Library, quoted in MacCarthy, p. 671.

44. Sharp and Marsh, p. 355.


49. Kelvin, I, p. 255.


52. Kelvin, II, p. 123.

54. Date of death provided in ‘Kelm scott Manor research paper’.

55. MacCarthy, p. 370. MacCarthy refers to George Bernard Shaw’s review in The Observer of 6 November 1949, in which he suggests that Morris’s famous rages were in fact eclampsia, a form of epilepsy, and that Jenny inherited the condition from her father (MacCarthy, p. xiii). MacCarthy also refers to Morris’s mother experiencing partial seizures, and Marsh to Morris’s mother suffering mildly from the same condition as Jenny (MacCarthy, p. 5; Marsh, p. 143). It has so far not been possible to trace the original source of this information about Morris’s mother. A project by authors, artists and doctors explored the effects that epilepsy had on the Morris family in a series of art installations, events and a novel. This was co-ordinated by the late Leslie Forbes, who completed the first part of a novel entitled Embroidered Minds of the Morris Women (2016).


57. Date of marriage provided in ‘Kelm scott Manor research paper’.

58. Documents relating to Stanley and Grace Maria’s children can be found in Dorothy Coles papers, WMSoc. Archives and further information can be found in ‘Kelm scott Manor research paper’.

59. ‘Kelm scott Manor research paper’; Effie Morris, March 1959. Effie refers to Grace Ellen’s parents being dead when she returned home during 1916, but Grace Maria did not die until 1929.

60. Reynolds, Autumn 2006, pp. 6, 9; Spring 2007, p. 11.


64. UK War Office, A List of Officers of the Army on Full, Retired and Halfpay, corrected through to 31 March 1861 (London: Clowes, 1861), p. 457; A List of Officers of the Army on Full, Retired and Halfpay, corrected through to 31 March 1863 (London: Clowes, 1863), p. 789.

65. See Langley.

66. Ibid.

67. Kelvin, I, p. 112.

68. Ibid., p. 215.

69. Everett, p. 44.

70. Material concerning Elizabeth Cox, previously Morris, has been taken from the research of Martin Fisher, Rendall Morris’s great-grandson, in ‘The Fisher/Langley/Morris/Laslett Families, 19th and 20th Centuries’ (revised August 2015); typewritten copy, plus other information, is held in Dorothy Coles Papers, WMSoc. Archives. (Afterwards Fisher). This source has been supplemented by the research of Katherine Fort, a descendant of Rendall McEwen Morris in Canada. (Afterwards Fort).

71. Fort’s research discovered that Edward Cox’s first wife was buried at Te Awamutu, New Zealand, in 1899 and his son William in 1901. Fort also traced a Helen Maxwell, probably Elizabeth’s oldest sister, who married Edward Manning in 1855 in Sawyers Bay, New Zealand, had three children and was buried with her husband in Otago New Zealand in 1907. Helen’s burial records show that she was born in Edinburgh. She has not been traced in the Scottish census records after 1851. Her marriage certificate does not give further identifying information.

72. See Langley.

73. See Fisher.

74. Kelvin, I, p. 423.

75. CERC, letter dated 18 June (no year given), ref. CERC: CWMC/IG/2, Family Letters 1920.

76. Grierson, p. 33.
83. There are fuller details about Rendall and Elizabeth’s children in Fisher and ‘Kelmscott Manor research paper’, and copies of relevant documents in the Dorothy Coles Papers, WMSoc.Archives.
85. Hart, 1890, p. 304.
87. Kelvin, I, p. 161. Devon Great Consols was to be reconstituted as a limited liability company, and the shares had been revalued. Morris reassured his mother that there was ‘no chance of all this money being called for’ and asked her to tell Arthur that ‘the price of copper was high and likely to remain so’.
88. Kelvin, I, p. 223.
89. ibid., II, p. 29.
90. ibid., II, p. 506.
92. Kelvin, III, p. 150.
93. Morris, Journalism, p. 470.
94. See Arthur Morris.
96. Elizabeth Robinson, Deaconess Gilmore Memories collected by Elizabeth Robinson (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1924), pp. 2-3. (Afterwards Robinson). In 1874 Arthur Gilmore is listed on the electoral register for Walton-on-Thames, Surrey, living in Weybridge from 1874-1877.
97. Grierson, p. 16.
99. ibid., pp. 17, 19, 15, 64, 17.
100. Sharp, p. 34; Grierson, pp. 83-102. Isabella’s work as a deaconess is fully described by Sharp and by Grierson.
101. Grierson, p. 95.
102. Gilmore, Reminiscences, pp. 75-76. The silver cross, the altar super-frontal and its design, are in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
105. Subscription lists in Annual Reports of Girls’ Preventive Home (1894-1898 and 1901), quoted in Sharp, p. 36.
106. Sharp, pp. 36, 38.
107. Robinson, p. 49.
109. See Edgar Morris. His father’s bill broking firm, Sanderson & Co., suspended business following William Morris senior’s death, which came at the time of the British Commercial Crisis of 1847-48. Emma Morris lost her husband’s income and share of the capital and probably also had to liquidate some
personal assets. (Harvey and Press, pp. 9-10).


111. Kelvin, I, pp. 414, 420, 423. The ‘baby’ must have been Florence, aged 10.

112. Ibid., I, pp. 452, 586.

113. Ibid., I, p. 591

114. Morris’s manuscript diary, 4 January 1881, British Library Add. MS 45407B.


116. Records of Electoral Registers for the Wimbledon division, North East Surrey 1886 to 1897, show that from 1886 to 1893 Edgar and Robina were at 7 Norman Road, and, from 1893 to 1897, at 74 Quicks Road. Kelly’s Directory of Wimbledon, Merton, Mitcham, Worcester Park, Sutton, Carshalton etc. 1896-1897 (London, Kelly & Co., [1897]), p. 44, also records them at 74 Quicks Road, but no one is listed at that address in Trimm’s Wimbledon Almanack, Directory and Trade Advertiser for 1899 (Wimbledon: Edward Trimm, 1899), p. 224.


120. See ‘Kelmscott Manor research paper’.


122. Kelvin, I, p. 413.

123. Ibid., II, p. 19.


129. See Langley.

130. See Arthur Morris.


A previous iteration of Notting Hill Editions’ website described this small but perfectly formed publisher as ‘devoted to the best in essayistic nonfiction writing’. The press was founded by Tom Kremer, the man responsible for discovering and licensing the Rubik’s Cube. Having made a lot of money, Kremer sunk at least some of it into Notting Hill Editions. The website also states: ‘[w]e believe that a beautifully produced book enhances the reading experience’, and you don’t get a much more Morrisian statement than that. The publisher’s website is also a thing of beauty in itself, such as websites can be, and I encourage you to take a look at their ever-growing list of both contemporary and current essays and reprints of out-of-print materials. So, in many ways, Notting Hill Editions are a highly appropriate publisher for Lavinia Greenlaw’s *Questions of Travel*. The linen-bound blue-grey cover features, like all of the press’s hardbacks, a quote from an essay included within printed in a standout colour. Even the bookmark which came with my reviewer’s copy is stylishly good looking in a
minimalistically modern way. Most Notting Hill Editions are only available in hardback, but Greenlaw’s title has also recently (2017) been published in paperback. I recently saw a whole stash sitting on the Pre-Raphaelite-themed display aisle within Tate Britain’s bookshop.

On the one hand Questions of Travel – the title taken from a poem by Elizabeth Bishop – offers a slightly truncated edition of Morris’s 1871 Icelandic Journal. This was Morris’s account of his first trip to Iceland. The prose text appears on the right-hand, odd-numbered pages of the book. ‘A helpful Introduction opens by giving the biographical context for Morris in 1871. Having just leased Kelmscott Manor with Rossetti, he then departed for Iceland, leaving Rossetti with Janey and his daughters. This journeying to a strange, spare, relatively unvisited place is often read as some kind of stoical response by Morris in the face of his wife and friend’s attraction to each other. Morris, of course, also had an increasing attraction himself to the ‘Literature of the North’ and by this point had made translations of several Icelandic sagas with one of his fellow travellers, Eirikr Magnusson.

Greenlaw writes that ‘Morris’s writing here is unlike anything else he produced. It has the shifting quality of natural speech, moving from playful to methodical to live-action, rhetorical to confiding’ (p. ix). She notes that the intended recipient of the journal originally was Georgie Burne-Jones, with whom Morris seemed as much able to ‘be himself’ (p. ix) as with anyone. In relation to the writing Greenlaw suggests that ‘[u]nlike Morris’s poetry, the journal is not constrained by an idea of style. His language […] has grain and grip’ (p. xiv). The Introduction also comments on how the journal shows Morris able to ‘[play] on the comedy of himself’ (p. viii), and in a rather lovely image Greenlaw writes of Burne-Jones’s caricatures of Morris on his return from Iceland as making him ‘look like risen dough’ (p. xi). While Morris appears more than able to live in the present of the unfolding trip, the long-term impact of experiencing Iceland is also acknowledged in terms of how it affected his later socialism. E. P. Thompson is cited: ‘[i]n the early 1870s, the years of his despair […] new strength came to him, not from his work […] [but] from the energies and aspirations of a poor people in a barren northern land’ (p. xvii).

But it is the relatively brief ‘Note on the Text’, following the Introduction, that really points towards what interests Greenlaw in this edition. She suggests that Morris’s Icelandic journal is ‘the document of a journey that becomes a description of all journeys’ (p. xxiii), so her method is to select a key resonant phrase from most right-hand pages of Morris’s text, and then use that on the opposite left-hand page as a header (attractively presented in red ink) for her own distillation of the ‘questions of travel’ that are being raised at this point in the journey. Her dialogue with Morris is to ‘direct the reader towards what Morris didn’t know he was writing about’ (p. xxiii),
and, in so doing, also to make the reader reflect on their own motivations – conscious
and unconscious – for travel. In 2017 Greenlaw was at Hay Festival talking about
Questions of Travel and the blurb for the event says that inter alia will be considered
the question of ‘our conflicted reasons for not staying at home’. Once you’ve hooked
in to the wavelength on which Greenlaw is thinking the questions quickly start to
suggest themselves: why do we travel? Who or what are we looking to find? Is the
answer always to some extent connected to the self and a certain kind of self-discovery
(or self-avoiding)? What is the difference between our anticipatory imagining of a
place and the actual reality of a place? How do the places we imagine and long to
see reside within us? With a poet’s concision, Greenlaw distills these various questions
of travel down to some kind of essence.

The best way I can illustrate this is by quoting a couple of examples. So here is
the very opening of Morris’s 1871 journal – an entry written on Thursday 6 July
1871, as Morris and his travelling partners (Magnússon, Charles Faulkner and W. H.
Evans) head off from London. Morris writes: ‘[o]f course I felt as if I had left
everything behind, yea, as if I myself should be left behind’ (p. 3) and this is what
Greenlaw picks up on:

— As if I myself should be left behind
If we travel to escape ourselves, we also find it difficult to leave ourselves
behind.
In the time before the journey is established, before you have reconstructed
yourself with new routines, habits and intimates, you are emptied of yourself.
We cannot believe we are taking ourselves with us.
As anticipation of the journey gives way to its actual start, you become fidgety.
There is a growing tension between the part of you that wants to be off,
moving and gone, and the part that wants to stay at home, even in bed. You
conjure the sudden event that would force you to cancel – illness, accident,
death – even as you fret about the taxi being late, the train delayed, that the
boat will sail without you.
You make rapid new adjustments to each other, to blankets and water bottles,
to whatever is going with you.

(p. 2)

Once in Iceland and with the journey well underway, Morris writes an entry on
Saturday 22 July 1871, from the camp in the homestead of Lithend. The phrase
Greenlaw picks out here is almost at the bottom of the prose text printed on page 59.
Morris writes:
I sat down as soon as I was clear of the wood on the bare shale of the steep slope that overlooked the valley, and turned to the mountain that rose over the bounding wall of rocks, the same scarped flat-topped mountain I have spoken of before: I could see its whole dismal length now, crowned with overhanging glaciers from which the water dripped in numberless glaciers from which the water dripped in numberless falls […].

On the opposite page is the following:

– Numberless falls

The accumulations of the journey, of geography, of yourself.
Impassable.
Collapsed perspectives.
Travel as the repetition of a failed gesture. You cannot fully change or open out.
What lies between yourself and the smoothness.
The falling away of anticipation. You are here now. How to get home?

(p. 58)

Greenlaw is attentive to the ‘outwardness’ of travel – the leaving home, the travelling away from the known to the unfamiliar and new, with all the hope and excitement and curiosity that might contain – as well as aspects of return. After a certain point on any journey there is a recognition that every day leads us nearer once again to the place we originally left. Morris’s entire entry for Tuesday 29 August 1871 is as follows:

IN A HOUSE (GEIR ZOEGA’S I THINK) IN REYKJAVÍK
A wild and broken morning: the Diana, which was away at Hafnafjördur yesterday, came in again in the night, and lies there now, a sweet sight to my eyes. It was a day of nothings, inexpressibly dull after our old life: trouble about selling our horses, a business full of shilly-shally – early bed was the only comfort.

(p. 181)

This is accompanied by Greenlaw’s dialogue text:

– Shilly-shally

The sweetness of the way home.
The journey is already the old life.
This is no life. Inexpressibly dull.
Neither staying nor gone.
Do you want to be here or there?
Shill I or shall I?

(p. 180)

Inevitably the left-hand pages also provide lots of white space around the text, as we are used to finding with poetry. Those of us who are poets know how much the blank space matters: how it can allow the poem to breathe, and how it allows necessary space for the reader’s response and reflection. Each of Greenlaw’s distillations could be read as a poem in itself; or equally could not. I often first read the Morris page, with an attentive eye out for the key phrase highlighted by Greenlaw, and then read her left-hand-page musings. This is a very appealing, interesting and original book in its dialogue with Morris. It makes the reader read Morris afresh, as well as offering a way in to a Morris text that for the general reader is likely not to be much known, if at all. It’s a book I want to keep and I know I will dip into it again periodically, and the attractive design and layout of the book are also part of that.

Rosie Miles


William Waters’s Damozels and Deities: Pre-Raphaelite Stained Glass 1870-1898 is conceived as the second part of his previous book Angels and Icons: Pre-Raphaelite Stained Glass 1850-1870, reviewed in the Summer 2013 issue of this Journal. The book is predominantly about stained glass produced by Burne-Jones and Henry Holiday and those who worked closely with both figures. The title (as admitted in the ‘acknowledgements’) is misleading as the book basically discusses artists and designers associated with the Aesthetic Movement.

Before discussing specific artists, sections on ‘Historical Context’, ‘The Religion of Beauty’ and ‘Aesthetic Neoclassicism’ discuss the cultural background and retell a familiar story about the emergence of Aestheticism and the importance of new cultural paradigms based on the Renaissance and various Classical models. ‘Edward Burne-Jones and William Morris’, by far the longest chapter on the Morris firm, describes the famous collaboration between these two seminal figures. Waters sees the culmination of Burne-Jones’s work as the large pictorial windows that he produced
late in his career, notably at All Hallows Church, Allerton, in the 1880s and then in St. Philips Cathedral, Birmingham, between 1885 and 1897. The author argues that Burne-Jones’s most important achievement was to bring the qualities of oil painting to stained glass: ‘[Burne-Jones] rationalised the design, broke away from the old formulae, brought the medium into the 19th century bringing stained glass and painting closer together’ (p. 92).

Henry Holiday is presented as an artist who deserves to be treated as more than just a ‘pupil or a follower’ of Burne-Jones, which is certainly true. Waters describes a selection of windows that Holiday designed as a freelance designer for well-known firms such as Heaton, Butler and Bayne and James Powell and Sons. The illustrations demonstrate Holiday’s commitment to pictorial stained glass and, to some extent, justify Water’s argument that he extended the painterly qualities of Burne-Jones’s stained glass. The fact that some of Holiday’s figures were modelled from life drawing is clearly demonstrated in illustrations of windows such as those at All Saints, Evesham, from 1882.

The latter sections of the book comprise a series of quite disparate chapters on ‘Studio Assistants & Apprentices’, ‘Shrigley and Hunt’, ‘Daniel Cottier’, ‘Selwyn Image’, ‘Hugh Arthur Kennedy’ and ‘Domestic Glass’. The linking factor appears to be the author’s assessment that these are the ‘progressive’ or ‘modern’ glass painters that pursued the achievements of Burne-Jones and Holiday.

Alastair Carew-Cox’s photographs are excellent throughout the book. There are over 600 images and many double-page spreads effectively compare and contrast the work of important glass painters. Admirers of Burne-Jones will derive great pleasure from the photographs and, as a whole, the photographs provide the basis for an extended visual essay on aestheticism and stained glass.

Sadly, the quality of much of the text is disappointing. One of the most frustrating problems is the book’s failure to consider the work of other scholars. In the forty-five pages that comprise the first three contextual chapters, there are forty-nine footnotes. Waters cites only six secondary sources. Five of these are cited as sources for nineteenth-century quotations and the fifth is a reference to Waters’s own book Angels and Icons. This would be understandable if the author was discussing material that was not covered by existing scholarship but the idea that there is no useful research on the Gothic Revival, Victorian design or aestheticism is clearly untenable. What the reader gets is a sketchy and superficial account of certain themes that have been discussed with far more integrity and detail in existing publications. In a similar way, the chapter entitled ‘Edward Burne-Jones & William Morris’ is inadequate in its failure to acknowledge the work of other researchers. The foundational work (Sewter’s Stained Glass of William Morris and his Circle) gets only three citations while Douglas...
Schoenherr’s excellent more recent work on Burne-Jones in the *Journal of Stained Glass* (reviewed in the Winter 2013 issue of this *Journal*) is listed in the bibliography but never cited directly. Arthur Penn’s study of the wonderful windows at St. Martin’s, Brampton, is raided for a quote and acknowledged in a footnote but then excluded from the bibliography. The refusal to acknowledge the work of other researchers in the accepted manner makes it hard to accept this book as a serious contribution to scholarship, indeed it comes across as an extended vehicle for the opinions of the author.

Many of the statements in the book lack evidence, for example Waters’s claim that Holiday was intimately involved with the technical aspects of the glass painting: ‘[h]e taught them [the glass painters] how to apply enamels when covering large areas of flesh, to use stippling and brushing methods allied to print making and he experimented with the effects of acid in dissolving away layers of colour allowing one to meld into another’ (p. 185). If this was true it would be interesting but as no source is cited the reader cannot evaluate whether this actually happened or whether this is just speculation by the author. At times the book raises interesting questions but fails to answer them convincingly. For example Waters states: ‘[s]ince it was freely available to the masses stained glass can be construed as the most democratic of the visual arts’ (p. 19). This might have been the start of an interesting discussion but no debate ensues. This statement is certainly not true in any obvious sense and just how a window installed in Cumbria might be in any way freely available to the ‘masses’ in London is very hard to imagine.

Waters approaches the subject from a very traditional art historical perspective. He basically assumes that the cultural value of a window resides in how artistic or close to painting it might be. Comments on how ‘modern’ or ‘progressive’ or even ‘abstract’ certain windows were seem to be aligned to an approach that tries to detect proto-modernist features in Victorian art as a sign of their value. While Nicolaus Pevsner’s adoption of this position might be understandable during the 1930s, it is hard to see why anyone writing now might use this anachronistic stance.

A series of misconstrued oppositions dominates the argument. Gothic Revival style windows are portrayed as conservative and caricatured as being direct imitations of medieval stained glass, which was almost never true. According to Waters, part of the evidence for the conservatism of these firms was the use of medieval style canopies and borders, but when the same feature was employed by one of the favoured firms the same argument does not apply: ‘[c]anopies and pediments frequently occur in Shrigley and Hunt’s windows; this was not a retrogressive step but common among firms in the 1880s, they had lost the stigma of antiquarianism’ (p. 290). As a consequence, this argument is both ill-conceived and inconsistent in its application.
Almost worse is a crude approach to personal lives of the artists which wildly oversimplifies the relationship between biography and art. Waters tells the reader that the wives of both Burne-Jones and Holiday had ‘difficult childbirths in 1864, resulting in a cooling of sexual relationships with their husbands. Consequently their relationships with their models became more intense and their art benefitted. Sensual, infused with sublimated desire their designs became more focussed on physical beauty’ (p. 176). Is the reader really expected to believe this simplistic psychobiography?

The book has many eccentricities. Footnote numbers in the text are in the wrong place. Quotations are italicised instead of presented in quotation marks, which means that titles of books and artworks had to be in bold italics, which disrupts the visual appeal of the book. There is no list of illustrations but two indexes, one for this volume, and one to supply this absence in the previous volume. Panels are described as ‘predella panels’ even when they are placed high in the window (p. 51).

Given the wonderful subject matter and skilful photography, the overall quality of this book is deeply disappointing. High quality studies of nineteenth-century stained glass are not common, and this book will not enhance the academic credibility of the subject.

**Jim Cheshire**


In the early Spring of 1918, May Morris wrote to a friend about her day’s work, ‘picking and chopping wood’ with Miss Lobb: ‘[s]uch a lovely day, all the shadows very blue and jewel like, and the green very green. Snowdrops everywhere.’ She was writing at a moment of change in Westminster and in the Great War beyond: ‘Votes for Women’ would become a reality barely a week later. And yet here was May Morris – activist, designer, textile artist, biographer – focussing on the essentials at home, both useful and beautiful. She was rejoicing in the flashes of natural colour as she chopped firewood.

Kathy Haslam quotes May’s letter in her essay on Kelmscott Manor, ‘Our beloved Oxfordshire home’, one of thirteen articles that grew out of a conference devoted to May Morris, held in Spring 2016 at the William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow. The collection is a remarkable survey of the multi-layered life and work of May Morris. Although May was very conscious of her inheritance from William Morris (a theme addressed directly in the essay ‘Memorialising her father’s legacy’ by Julia Dudkiewicz), this book resolutely brings her out from under his wing. New manuscript
sources and rediscovered designs lay the groundwork for many of the essays, as Anna Mason explains in her Preface. Mason also highlights the contribution of researchers from key collections, especially the Victoria and Albert Museum, with five of the essays written by current or former curators from the V&A.

This close connection between South Kensington and the Morris family is one of the overarching themes that emerge from the essays. Catherine White, in her study of ‘Decorative Needlework: May Morris and her embroiderers’, explores how May learnt her skills in her father’s workshop, supplemented ‘by a few years of study in the Art-schools and Museum at South Kensington’. She then went on to train her own team of young women, using historical textiles as the foundation for her own designs and techniques. The Order Book for her embroidery department is now held, appropriately, in the V&A’s archives, and is closely examined by Hanne Faubry and Jenny Lister in ‘Apple Tree to Vine Leaf: the Morris & Co. embroidery day book, 1892-1896’. Faubry and Lister begin the process of analysing the wide range of objects – from portières to pin cushions and piano backs – created by the women for their (mostly) female customers. They also demonstrate the fact that after her father’s death there was a mutually beneficial relationship between May Morris and the staff at the V&A, where she tried to find a permanent home for many of his things, some significant, some ephemeral. As the Keeper of Textiles wrote to colleagues in 1919: ‘I feel that with Miss Morris it is advisable to act at once’, to secure the bequest of Morris and Co. works.

The textile department at the V&A supported May Morris in her own research as she developed her career. They lent her ‘some fine specimens’ of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century needlework to show her audience at her lectures. Her professional interest in medieval embroidery is studied by Lynn Hulse in ‘Opus Anglicanum and its influence on the work of May Morris’. This essay fluently demonstrates May’s teaching methods, especially how she saw the skills of women from previous generations as vital for training modern hand-workers. As she explained in 1888: ‘I am inclined to take needle-art seriously’, and she appreciated the ‘“businesslike and thorough manner” in which noblewomen approached ecclesiastical embroidery in the Middle Ages’. Hulse explains that May Morris held up the example of medieval needlewomen in her publications and lectures. Her intimate understanding of historical techniques also fed directly into her teaching at Birmingham School of Art. As Helen Bratt-Wyton demonstrates, May reintroduced a variety of stitches into the curriculum – in ‘floss and twisted silks, gold and silver threads, linen thread and wool’. She also taught her students to consider natural models: ‘tree forms, the Oak, the Bay, the Plane’, and devoted one lecture to ‘Appliqué – Museum examples drawn in detail’. This combination of looking to the Gothic past and looking to Nature was at
the core of the Arts and Crafts tradition.

Preserving this tradition into the twentieth century was an essential part of May Morris’s work, examined by Julia Dudkiewicz. The most intensive part of this project was editing and writing biographical introductions for the twenty-four volumes of her father’s *Collected Works*, published 1910-15. Alongside the literary remains were the artistic relics, which May hoped could be cared for by the V&A in a dedicated ‘Morris Room’. As Dudkiewicz shows, this idea developed into the major centenary show exhibited during Spring 1934, for which May was the most generous private lender. She effectively acted as an additional curator of the exhibition, ‘co-writing the catalogue, revising attributions, advising on the display’.

The 1934 exhibition was a showcase for objects that were still at home with May at Kelmscott Manor. She lent the *Daisy* curtains, embroidered in the early days of her parents’ marriage, and the plain green bedroom furniture designed by Ford Madox Brown. Kelmscott Manor was a constant presence in May’s life from her childhood, and many of the essays reflect her care for this place and its people. As she explained to her old friend, Sydney Cockerell: ‘[h]aving chick nor child, it is both a melancholy and not quite simple job’, deciding who should look after the Manor when she was gone. It was essential for her, and for the memory of her father, that whoever took it on should ‘keep the “atmosphere” of his life here’. Kathy Haslam shows that May’s love of Kelmscott spilled over into the village, with her involvement in the Women’s Institute, and her desire to build workers’ cottages and a reading room.

Mary Greensted provides an insightful pendant to Haslam’s essay, in her study of ‘May Morris and Ernest Gimson: a wartime relationship’. May saw in the local people and their farming traditions a foreshadowing of her father’s hopes for a brighter future. She wrote in 1916: ‘[w]e are proud of the women of Kelmscott […] they are doing their service for the Common Weal’. After her mother’s death in 1914 the Manor had become a haven: ‘the hermit-life is more endurable here than anywhere else […] the wind wandering among the elms’. This description of Kelmscott Manor comes in a letter to John Quinn, a New York lawyer who had seemed enamoured of May when she visited the United States on a lecture tour in 1909. He took her on ‘a sleigh-ride through in the snow-bound city […] with the river and the sunset and the great star-lit heaven above the snow’. In her essay, ‘May Morris in America: spreading the Arts and Crafts gospel’, Margaretta S. Frederick follows May from the East Coast to Chicago. On her arrival, she was accosted by a customs agent, who ‘dropped everything to quote’ her father’s poems, and ‘went on to ask questions about his socialist creed’. But she was not always so well received. She caused consternation by speaking out against ‘Outrageously cheap clothing’, arguing that it ‘cannot be
beautiful any more than it can be moral'. It was a tough seven months, being constantly on the move, and meeting everyone from ‘the wife of a Wheat King’, to ‘the Socialists of the City’ of Chicago.

Many of the essays give tantalising glimpses of other outspoken women who crossed May’s path. For example, in New York she stayed with Charlotte Perkins Gilman, the author of the now well-known story ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’; it would be good to delve deeper, to understand the overlaps and contrasts in their view of the New Woman. Several contributors refer in passing to Eleanor Marx, and there are interesting parallels with May’s political and personal experience. Rachel Holmes’s excellent biography of Eleanor Marx, published in 2014, is a good starting point. Perhaps this is an area for future consideration. It would also be fascinating to tease out the complex strands of political and social debate that were generated by Emmeline Pankhurst’s lecture tour of America, also in 1909. May attended one of her talks at Carnegie Hall in October, and they must have been speaking to similar audiences.

The other voice which could be heard more clearly was that of May’s mother, Jane. Her letters, published in 2012 by Jan Marsh and Frank Sharp, show that she was unconvinced by the militant suffragettes: Jane complained that ‘the Spankhursts’ were undermining the cause of women’s rights. Throughout the essays, Jane is largely silent. This seems odd, given that the collection is so conscious of allowing women – not just May, but her colleagues, friends and clients – to tell their own stories. And all of the essays are by female contributors. Some of the authors, including Jan Marsh, feature prominently, both in this volume and in the catalogue of the exhibition held at the William Morris Gallery in 2017. This collection makes a substantial companion to the catalogue.

This book shows May Morris inside and out – at her embroidery frame and in her garden. It reflects her wide reach and her sense of place, offering insights into her work in London, Birmingham, Orkney and across the United States. Above all, it puts her at the heart of the Woman Question, crossing the boundaries between art and politics. She speaks with ‘considerable directness and simplicity’, encouraging art workers to ‘assert themselves, not as a sheltered clan of artists, but as practical members of the community’.

Suzanne Fagence Cooper
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