The Expedition of The Ark

by J M Baïssus

The manuscript is to be found in the May Morris Bequest at the British Museum: Add MS 45.407—Vol. XVII 605 h. 6. (A). It consists of twelve lined foolscap pages written by William Morris in ink. The first four pages are in the well known blue paper (watermark: E Towgood 1872). The text is written on the face only. There are some pencil remarks on the backs in various hands. It looks as though the author had either given readings of the text, or circulated it, and the remarks were added afterwards. The punctuation of the original is reproduced.

Description of an expedition by boat from Kelmscott House Upper Mall Hammersmith to Kelmscott Manor Lechlade Oxfordshire with critical notes.

Persons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>William Morris</td>
<td>Mrs. William Morris</td>
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<td>William De Morgan</td>
<td>Jane Alice Morris</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cormell Price</td>
<td>Mary Morris</td>
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<tr>
<td>Richard C. Grosvenor</td>
<td>Elizabeth Macleod</td>
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<td>Eliza (housemaid)</td>
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Started on Tuesday August 10. 1880 at 3 oc: p.m in a small boat houseboat called the Ark belonging to Salter of Oxford and a rowing boat belonging to Biffen called the Albert.

The Ark was rowed by two of Biggens men* and the Alfred by WM & Price as far as Kew where both boats were made fast to some barges and towed by a mercantile tin kettle as far as Twickenham.

Rowed on as far as Teddington Lock where Biffens men were dismissed. Hired a man to tow and went on without incident to Kingston.

Hove to for tea on the left bank just above Kingston about 7 oc: 

During tea man and pony from Oxford arrived and took the party in
tow. Moulsey Lock was reached in twilight; and Eliza left the Ark and went home by train from Hampton Court Station.

In Moulsey Lock W.M. made an effort to light the party by means of a candle lamp with a spring in it, but unluckily the spring slipped and the candle fell into the lock whereupon WM gave vent to an emphatic by D to the undisguised delight of several various parties in pleasure boats ranged along side of the lock. On going out of Moulsey Lock the Ark swayed heavily towards the weir on account of the rudder being fouled by the Albert; great excitement of RCG++ at the helm but no damage.

Towed on in darkness+++ up to the Magpie Inn at Sunbury which was reached at 10.15 (note by RCG 'tow not as a rule in the dark')

On arrival WM exclaimed "what a stink", the waiter replied "It is nothing sir I assure you", R. CG put in inquisitively "Is it a sewer", waiter in answer "yes sir quite sure" (note by RCG. After this unfortunate jeu d'esprit all some of the males of the party seemed to think that they were entitled to indulge in the most abominable puns for the whole of the rest of the journey)

Supper at 10.30. Pickled salmon Poached eggs Ham etc. Bed at or about 12 oc++

Price & W.M. slept in the Ark the rest of the party in beds Lovely hot day and night.

Wednesday Aug. 11.
WM. fished at 6.a.m. caught one gudgeon and one small dace, WM. D.M & Price bathed also R.C.G. (at 8.30). started at 10. oc: towed on without incident to Penton Hook Lock.

Hove to just above the Lock for dinner at 1.30;++) weather very fine and hot. D.M. & WM shied at their food started again about 2.30 towed on to Runnymede calling at Staines for soda water ginger beer & milk.

Hove to for tea on left right bank; boiled water etc. about 6.30 (Note by Price 'Etna?') (Note by D.M. 'High Tea') W.M. barked his shin on reentering the Ark and gave vent to his feelings by another By D, which was big enough to be recorded, (note by author 'this narrative may and should be filled up at frequent intervals with such expletives as may seem to require the fit the occasion without fear of corrupting the text or in any way leaning towards exaggeration of the facts') Towed on to Windsor Bridge which was reached at 8.15 sunset beautiful and very hazy.

Whole party lodged at Bridge Hotel. Supper (Note lemon squash). Bed early. The Ark was moored at Goodman's and a youth received
5s/ for taking care of her for the night (? Did he?) Very hot day, hazy evening, dark night, rather cooler. W.M. indisposed.

Thursday August 12.
D.M. & R.C.G. bathed below the weir at 8 o.c: Breakfast 8.30 Whole party (except Mrs. M.) went to see Eton College & Fields Bought vegetables and bread

Started at 11.30. W.M. convalescent (note. cockle?) Stopped at Surly Hall to take in water and soda water (Note Price gave an entertainment gratis with an umbrella & shawl and a champagne bottle).

Proceeded safely as far as Bray Lock where the Ark came into collision with two barges which were aground on the shallows; Starboard cabin door slightly damaged.

Hove to on right bank just above Bray Lock. W.M. set to cooking in seclusion of cabin, and in due time filled the whole party with delight and with provisions of a most satisfactory kind (note very thick soup, rice, vegetables, meat, etc., results shewing both knowledge and skill). C. Price was appointed boteler by acclamation (his own). Liquor excellent

Washed up and started again at 5 oc.
Towed into the middle of Maidenhead Regatta.

The Ark was sculled majestically through a crowd of inferior craft and passed under Maidenhead Bridge not without dignity amidst considerable excitement

Hove to above the Bridge whilst Price (boteler) went to the Post Office for his letters; party still rather flustered owing to the excitement of passing through the Regatta.

Waited half an hour for Price and then started up the lock without him.
Left Maidenhead Lock all hands on board. W.M. stated (emphatically) that Cliveden reach was the ugliest part of the whole river.

Towed on in most beautiful sunset past Cookham all safe up to Marlow Lock when it became nearly dark and the Ark was swung violently across the stream by a mill race the whereabouts of the Lock being invisible; matters further complicated by the arrival of a large “tin kettle” (of pleasure) which whistled and steamed horribly (note here insert various orders of expletives!) (note by RCG effect of darkness, and roar of waters?)

Reached 'the Complete Angler' just above the Lock at 9 oc: Supper. Bed
Lovely day, air fresh, night fine.**

Aurora Borealis visible at Great Marlow at 10.30 P.M.

**Friday August 13**
WM, D.M. & RCG bathed at 8 oc: sky cloudy, fresh breeze. Breakfast at 8.30 started at 10 oc:

Towed without incident past Bisham Abbey up to Hurley Lock. Hove to at 11 oc: and the whole party landed and looked at Lady Place; remains of old abbey. on safely to Hambledon Lock; Lock keeper Mrs Lomax great indignation of Mrs Lomax (a widow with a growing family) because the party refused to pay 1/6 for the Ark and 3d. for the Albert; tearing up of receipt for 3d. by Mrs Lomax; emphatic denunciation by W.M. of Captain Burstall and Thames Conservancy; offer by Price to undertake paternal relation towards the Lomax children (note by D.M. Was this and endeavour to advertise merits of educational establishment in Devonshire)

Towed to Henley reach and stopped for dinner on right bank; W.M. cooked in cabin of Ark; result excellent. Price boteler as before and liquor satisfactory; party invaded by swans (who retired without breaking any man's arm) started again at 4 oc: and hove to above bridge at Henley. W.M. visited the post office and tobacconist.

Miss Macleod took a baby on board the Ark; Price offered to adopt it and was for feeding it on the spot with honey out of a spoon.

Towed on to Wargrave where the Ark ran aground on a mud bank; all the males of the party gave conflicting orders in loud tones (mostly emphatic); eventually D.M. restored order and happiness by taking off his boots and socks, stepping into the mud and pushing her off.

Reached Sonning Inn safely at 7.30

D.M. & RCG bathed above the weir in happy ignorance of the contrary orders of Mr Witherington (mill owner) Rest of part took up quarters at the White Hart. Excellent supper; Lady howling song overhead; great hilarity Mrs M. and Miss Jenny slept at the Inn, Miss Macleod and Miss May at the clergy house, R.C.G. & D.M. at Mrs Browns (note by R.C.G. domestic insects), W.M. & Price in the Ark. Lovely day, fresh and very warm, cloudy evening. Note by all the party: spring water at the White Hart.

**Saturday August 14**
cloudy morning. RCG & DM called at Mrs Browns at 6 oc:; D.M. got up and insisted on RCG doing the same; RCG miserable but helpless; DM&RCG bathed again above the weir at 7 oc: after rousing WM from his slumbers in the Ark Excellent breakfast at 8oc: **(note by
R.C.G. eels eggs & spring water) started at 9.30 with food and water for the day; W.M. in a great hurry to be off.

Towed on to Caversham, W.M & D.M. discussing the inequalities and injustice of our social system with vigour and emphasis and eagerness but suggesting different solutions. At Caversham W.M. attempted a soda water bargain with a haughty lady just above the bridge (Mrs Bona?) at the White Hart but failed to come to an arrangement (note RCG. inconvenient variety in the shape and make of soda water and ginger beer bottles on the banks of the Thames)

Towed on past Maple Durham to Pangbourne where we took in soda water and lemonade; hove to for luncheon. under oak tree on right bank below Goring (note by Price wasps nest); no cooking by William Morris on account of haste. Got under way at 4 oc: passed Streetley and the Beetle and Wedge at Moulsford, also two gents bathing in the rushes on the towing path side of the river (note by the ladies—discovery of Moses by a lady among the rushes on a former occasion) Reached Wallingford at 6.45 (note large family just below the bridge, 12 children at least)

Took up quarters at the Town Arms Hotel kept by one Thirza Ransom; place smelt horrible

Miss Macleod Miss Jenny Miss May Price and R.C.G. went out rowing. W.M. remained behind astonished

Indifferent supper;¹ smell still rampant; W.M. partook of five lemon squashes (note by R.C.G. eggs)

Ladies slept at the Inn, W.M. D.M. & Price in the house opposite, R.C.G. at the George

Fine sunny day cloudy evening (note after this day the party scarcely saw the sun again until the Wednesday afternoon following) rain during the night (Note by all the party Wallingford is a dirty looking uncomfortable parliamentery borough.)

Sunday August 15.
cloudy ill looking morning. R.C.G. in bed at 8.55

Abominable extortion in the charges of Thirza Ransom.

Indignation (suppressed) of Mrs M, W.M. & R.C.G.

²start effected at 9.30; warned all the people on both banks of the river to avoid the Town Arms Hotel. (note for the future go to the Inn at Shillingford Bridge just above Wallingford)

Towed on past Shillingford to Days Lock Dorchester

Hove to above Lock and whole party except Mrs M walked up to
Dorchester Dykes (note by R.C.G. wild flowers and view of Dorchester church one way and Sinodon Hill the other) Somewhere hereabouts occurred the incident of Miss May and the apricot (or half apricot) (note opposite this it is hoped by the author that the said lady will place a note of penitence for pride [1]

Towed on to Clifton Lock and stopped for dinner just above it W.M. (though angry) was appointed cook with excellent results as on two former occasions.

During dinner D.M. recounted the story of his having partaken of mangy roast dog at Southampton at an hotel kept by a lady whose christian name was Thirza (see above); shortly afterwards D.M. was introduced to “Stony Stratford” and became much exhausted with laughter especially as Miss Macleod declined at first to admit the joke; (note by a lady during dinner “potted grouse is made of black beetles”) [2]

After dinner washing up and careful sorting of goods preparatory to leaving the Ark in the evening. Started again at 4 oc: towed up to Culham Lock (note by the lock keeper I do not keep the Lock, the Lock keeps me)

At this spot a number of children appeared and whined a melancholy and persistent ditty “Please sir throw us a copper (note by the smallest infant “Crow us a thropper”) D.M. and Miss May injured their own moral sense and that of the children by doing so.

Towed on to Abingdon (note by all the party “the spire’); on the towing path an infant saved his own life by nearly tumbling into the water and R.C.G. saved the lives of the whole party by jumping on to the top of the Ark under the Bridge and pushing her uphill through it (note by R.C.G. This was one of the many instances in which life was saved in various ways and by different people throughout the expedition)

After this evening became cold and the Ark was towed past Nuneham and Sandford to Iffley (note by D.M. original birthplace of hypotheses)

Oxford was reached at 8.30 and the Ark moored at Salters. The party landed and left her pleased and satisfied with their experiences in her and regretful at parting from her. The ladies went to the Kings Arms Hotel taking bags etc. W.M. & D.M. packed up goods and furniture of the Ark. Excellent supper. Miss Macleod, Miss May [3] and Price inspected several interesting buildings in the dark, excipe Brazenose quadrangle which was illuminated with gas for them.

Bed at 11 oc: whole party in Hotel.

Cold, cloudy day. Note by the author During this and the preceding
day the whole party were frequently caused to groan in spirit by a succession of puns so outrageous that no words could describe them and no intelligent individual do ought else but shudder at the recollection of their numbers and nature.

Monday August 16
Breakfast at 6.30 cloudy morning

W.M. & Price started soon after 7 oc: to convey the cargo ex the Ark from Salters to Medley Lock (note by the author, this expedition is believed to have been full of incidents which must be left to the above named to describe)

The Ladies (except Mrs M.) accompanied by D.M. & R.C.G. walked into Medley Lock to meet the said WM & Price.

Start effected from Medley Lock at 9 oc: in two pair oared boats towed respectively by William Bossom and one of his men

Hove to just above Godstow Lock where Price disappeared in order to revisit the home of the four Miss Lipscombs (note “Lipscomb” to comb the lips to embrace or k.ss) (note 2 by D.M. towing path Godstoe): a loaf of bread and some soda water & lemonade were taken on board. W.M. & R.C.G. went in search of Price (note by all the party Godstow is a beautiful place).

Towed on to Kings Weir where (note by D.M. “weir”) the boats were hauled over wooden rollers.

Shortly afterwards W.M. started fishing and caught a perch the size & weight of which was variously estimated (note by the author ‘said perch was incorporated into the system of RCG on Tuesday Aug 17 at 10 oc:)

Towed on round Witham woods to Swinford Bridge and weir where (see note above) the boats had to be towed uphill through a corner of the dam which was opened for the purpose (note this was the first curiosity or peculiarity of the upper waters)

on through Penkhill Pound Lock (note by D.M. derivation of Penkhill πανκαλλων) up to Skinners Weir (note 2 by D.M. Skinner sive Sinner the aboriginal Skinner was a Sinner)

Hove to at New Bridge (called so because it was built in the fourteenth century and remains untouched to this day) at 2.45 and cast off Mr William Bossom & his man (notes by WM as to the conversation and peculiarities of Bossom)

Rowed boats on about a mile and hove to for luncheon on a high bank overlooking river meadows and hay making (note by the author ham sardines bread cheese champagne and soda all in large quantities)
Started towing about 4 oc: WM & Price each taking a line great energy and emulation at the start recent food notwithstanding Price eventually obtained the lead.

After a while Miss Macleod and Miss May took the line from Price (note by the author "Pride?". These ladies should explain why they separated") [4]

The line was soon handed to RCG [5] who shortly afterwards managed to get entangled on some thorn bushes growing on a high bank and WM thereupon forged his boat ahead of the other; not long however did his triumph last for in the many windings of the upper waters D.M & Miss Jenny remained firmly aground on a sandbank, during which proceeding Price succeeded in repassing their boat to the great raising of the spirits of his towees (note by the author ἡπαξευλεγόμενον)

Proceeded in this order (towing and rowing in leading boat) as far as Tadpole Bridge without incident except sudden disturbance in the internal economy of Price (note by D.M. Pressure of tow rope on chest and abdomen during process of digestion) (see also note by author on Luncheon above)

Both boats hove to above bridge where ricks of reedy meadow-hay were being piled up; went to the public for hot water and tea-cups. During preparations D.M. had a ride in a two wheel cart drawn by human tandem (Price & R.C.G.), after which tea compressed milk and then captains

Started again about 7.30 and rowed up to Rushy Pound Lock.

Above Lock D.M. proposed that rowing versus towing should be tried by the two boats for the benefit of science. R.C.G. took the tow line and started with a slight lead of WM & D.M. who did the rowing.

Proceeded in this order up to Radcot Bridge which was reached in the dark about 9 oc: by the leading boat; R.C.G. was taken on board in order to assist in forging the boat uphill through the weir which is situated under the bridge [6]. Price took the sculls and the first attempt was a failure through want of sufficient impetus; floated down again for second attempt; Price used utmost endeavours and failure No 2 was owing to R.C.G. dropping the boat hook (and nearly upsetting the boat (note by Miss Macleod) at the critical moment; floated down a second time to recover boat hook and make third attempt; unluckily at this moment boat No 2 came dashing up to make their first attempt, and the two boats narrowly escaped a severe collision in these troubled waters; boat No 1 picked up boathook, took to oars and on the third attempt passed successfully uphill under the bridge; boat No 2 then took up the rowing and after two failures, in one of
which an oar went over board succeeded in joining their its companion.

Both boats were then rowed in darkness (except a candle lamp at the bow of the leading boat) up to Kelmscott On the way W.M. followed the example given by Price below Tadpole Bridge (see note to that event)

The party reached Kelmscott Manor and Mrs. Morris at about 10.30. [7]

Finis coronat opus

NOTES

The pencil remarks on the back of the pages apply to the text opposite. In the early part of the manuscript they are easily identified by the various reference marks reproduced in the text. Later on these marks disappear and the place of the remark indicates the part of the text concerned. In this case reference figures between brackets have been added.

+"Biffens men": one a boy, the other a bad case of chronic poisoning, his eyes were gogglesome (W.M.) probably because of gin.
+mem: to have it out with the imposter who sold it 7/6 (W.M.)
++Mr. Grosvenor has here omitted to record the Gallant Conduct of C.P. [written in a different hand, editor]
+++curious, & rather pleasant muddling ones way across to the inn in the dark (W.M.)
+*note about the weather: wind N.N.W., most splendid day with a burning sun (WM)

X grey morning from 4 a.m. when I was awoke: wind shifting to N where it stuck all the cruise: cleared into a very hot day about 9½ a little murkness, like London smoke pursuing us, about noon; the most lovely weather with a good bit of wind: clear golden sunset.

—D.M. & W.M. shewed an extremely healthy appetite half an hour after the rest of the party (Note by J.M.)

++country pleasant above Chertsey Lock: Laleham very characteristic, & Penton Hook decidedly beautiful: big willows all about and right up to Staines very fine (WM)

×oFrom Bell Weir Lock right up to the cut at old Windsor the river very fine, as is well beknown! (WM)

×oo×well, well well! (WM)
I think in the long run (WM)
somebody said it rained in night, but I don't think it did: it blew hard

In spite of gammoning Eton is very fine: chapel a sublime late
Gothic little old quad & cloisters beyond every thing delightful: item
looking from Clewer meadows up to Windsor is not an every day sight.
also large quantities of fruit: also a very large cucumber (bought by
C. Price)
deuce of a stream below Bray Lock almost rapids—hence the squash
(WM) very pleasant banks though.

there was a man at work over osiers there, & made sort of stack of
them the bundles were useful at dinner time: wasps more plenty than
welcome

"a mountain before a plain; a plain before a suburb, a suburb
before a dust heap, a dust heap before a sewer, but a sewer before
a gentlemans house"—(note by our communist).
country very delightful from Cookham Lock onward: hills (low
chalk banks call them) fall back from the river which is very wide:
the whole full of character (WM)
it has been grey and cloudy in morning, clearing later than yesterday.

note by Mrs Morris: eggs numerous.

(Note by the ladies) The supper was very good—beans were delicious
[pencil, different hand, editor]

start much delayed by the non appearance of RCG at the appointed
time.

[1] Note by M.M. She ain’t penitent. Note by B.M. She ought to be then.
[2] Eggs exceedingly good (Note by RCG)
[3] Note by M.M. & B.M. Why omit the eldest and the best of the
ladies, Miss Jenny?
[4] Note M.M. and B.M. separated because the carotétid artery of the
former was in danger
[5] Note by B.M. the boat was towed for at least a quarter of a mile
before it was given over to R.C.G.
[6] Note by M.M. there is no weir under Radcot Bridge only a very
strong stream. [This note appears on page 12, editor.]
[7] Note by J.A.M. A noteworthy feature of this journey was, that
everybody perpetually gave orders in a very loud voice, & that
nobody ever paid the slightest attention to them.