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On the cover: Turf-roofed church at Viðimýri, Iceland

This newsletter is published by the William Morris Society in the United States, P.O. Box 53263, Washington, DC 20009. Editorial committee: Florence S. Boos, Linda K. Hughes, Elizabeth C. Miller, John Plotz, and B. J. Robinson. Layout: Susannah Horrom. Please submit articles and items of interest to us@morrissociety.org.

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A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Summer Greetings, fellow Morrisians!

The William Morris Society in the US has had a busy first half of the year, and I hope you were able to participate in some of our many offerings. In January we hosted two well attended sessions at the Modern Language Association in Boston, “Morris and New England” and “Print and Beyond: Publishing Rossetti, Morris and the Aesthetes,” the latter co-sponsored with the Society for the History of Authors, Readers and Publishers. We also led a visit to Trinity Cathedral to view Morris & Co. stained glass windows designed by Edward Burne-Jones. A breakfast meeting for Committee members at the conference enabled a number of us to meet for the first time, as Society business is conducted via conference call for the year preceding.

In March the Society sponsored an excellent, and extremely well attended, talk by Frank Sharp, co-editor with Jan Marsh of The Collected Letters of Jane Morris (Boydell Press, 2012). The lecture was graciously hosted by Michael Ryan, head of Rare Books and Manuscripts at Columbia University’s Butler Library. In April Society members were given a terrific tour of the exhibition The Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Art and Design, 1848–1900 by Diane Waggoner, Associate Curator at the National Gallery of Art, Washington. Participants shared a congenial lunch of British fare at the Museum’s Garden Café afterwards. And in May Mark Samuels Lasner, Senior Research Fellow at the University of Delaware Library, participated in a public ‘conversation’ with Dr. Waggoner at the gallery on the associated exhibition, Pre-Raphaelites and the Book. This gem of an installation is comprised primarily of objects from Samuels Lasner’s Collection, housed and on long-term loan to the University of Delaware Library. (The exhibition will be on view through August 4).

You will notice that color has been added to our previously monochromatic Newsletter, a detail William Morris would undoubtedly have appreciated! The Committee will spend the summer continuing conversation regarding the best use of the Society’s various methods of communication via media technology. These include our Twitter and Facebook sites, the website, blog (News from Anywhere) and Newsletter. As summer’s end nears we will once again begin consideration of nominations for the 2014 slate of Committee members and officers. More on these and all of the various administrative workings as work proceeds.

Best wishes to you all for a happy and productive summer.

Margaretta

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www.morrissociety.org
**EXHIBITIONS**


This exhibition provides an exquisite selection of historically and visually significant books from the Mark Samuels Lasner Collection and the National Gallery of Art. Among its rare items are a copy of Carlo Lasinio’s illustrated *Pitture a fresco del Campo de Pisa*, which inspired William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais, D. G. Rossetti and their friends to declare themselves “Pre-Raphaelites”; a copy of John Ruskin’s *Modern Painters* with his annotations and corrections, and signed by his father; copies of *The Germ* and *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*; the first book illustrated by Edward Burne-Jones, Archibald Maclaren’s *The Fairy Family* (1857); and one of the 250 copies of Morris’s *The Roots of the Mountains* bound in Morris and Co. chintzes. Even those who are aware of the existence of these books will be delighted at their sheer loveliness and variety.

**MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION CONVENTIONS 2014 & 2015**

The William Morris Society will sponsor our annual session at the Modern Language Association, to be held 9-12 January 2014 in Chicago. This session, *William Morris, the Arts and Crafts and the Midwest*, will be moderated by Jason Martinek. Our speakers will be:

- Sandi Wisenberg, Co-Director, School of Continuing Studies, Northwestern University, “The Politics of Glessner House”
- Barbara Johnson, State of South Dakota Humanities Scholar, “Morris Stained Glass in Chicago”
- Elizabeth G. Browning, University of California-Davis, “Hull House and the Arts and Crafts Movement”
- Florence Boos, University of Iowa, “Morris, the Arts, and the Chicago Morris Society, 1903-1905”

In late breaking news, we have been granted a second MLA Convention session on “Pre-Raphaelite, Aesthetic and Fin de Siècle Children’s Literature.” For a list of speakers and topics, please see our website www.morrisociety.org. We will update this with the time and place of sessions by early July.

The Society also plans to arrange a lunch or dinner, a group visit to the nearby Second Presbyterian Church to view Morris and Co. windows, and a tour of the Glessner House.

**MLA 2015: THINK AHEAD!**

The 2015 Modern Language Association will be held 8-11 January in Vancouver. The Morris Society will sponsor a panel on “William Morris: the Ecological and the Oceanic.” For this we seek papers on Morris and ecological concerns, the environment, and ‘green’ politics, and/or oceanic journeys, Morris’s influence in Asia and Oceania, or trans-Pacific approaches to Morris studies. Please send abstracts for proposals by 15 March 2014 to Florence-boos@uiowa.edu.

We will also apply for a second, co-sponsored session. Further details and a call for papers will be available on our website after 1 July 2013.

**WILLIAM MORRIS SESSIONS AT THE MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION CONVENTION, 3 AND 5 JANUARY 2013**

Our two sessions this year were well-attended. Indeed, since the room for the second session was too small for everyone to sit, we’ll make a further effort to obtain a larger room for 2014. After the 5 January session about 25 of us gathered to eat lunch at the Typhon Asian Bistro restaurant (good food, slow service) and walked to visit nearby historic New Old South Church and Trinity Cathedral, the later designed by Henry H. Richardson and containing four stunning Morris and Co. windows designed by Edward Burne-Jones.

The session on “Morris and New England,” held from 5:15-6:30 p.m. 3 January in the Sheraton Hotel, Boston, was moderated by Andrea Donovan of Minot State University. Abstracts for the four papers are given below.

Morris and New England Panel: Left to right, Margaret Laster, Andrea Donovan, Paul Acker, Mike Kuczynski, Mareen Meister
“Morris and Company Windows at Trinity Church,” Michael P. Kuczynski, Tulane University

Among the examples of William Morris’s presence and influence in New England are the Morris and Burne-Jones stained glass windows at Trinity Episcopal Church in Boston. Morris and Co. produced four of the numerous pictorial stained glass windows now at Trinity: a triptych of Nativity windows in the church’s north transept and a single-paneled depiction of David’s charge to Solomon in the baptistery. This paper explores several connections between these windows and the personalities of Trinity’s famous Louisiana-born architect, Henry Hobson Richardson, and its tutelary spirit and nineteenth-century rector, Phillips Brooks. Richardson and Brooks had both met Morris and Burne-Jones before the windows were finished and installed, and recorded their mutual admiration of Morris the man and his arts and crafts aesthetic.

Trinity is one of America’s finest nineteenth-century buildings, a triumph of the eclectic medieval-revival style known as Richardsonian Romanesque. Its Morris and Co. windows were completed and installed in 1882, five years after the church’s consecration in 1877. They are more traditional, more naturalistic in design, and purer in hue than the experimental opalescent stained glass by Trinity’s master American decorator, John LaFarge, which art historians nevertheless continue to prefer. Morris and Burne-Jones deliberately designed their windows in persistent bright reds, blues, and greens that bring them close in spirit to Richardson’s idea of his building’s sturdy form and Phillips Brooks’s beliefs concerning the earthbound, material character of the best religion and art.

The Nativity triptych recalls medieval manuscript decoration and pays tribute to Phillips Brooks’s authorship in 1867 of the well-known Christmas carol, “O Little Town of Bethlehem.” Burne-Jones designed the three central narrative panels (the adoration of the shepherds, visit of the Magi, and flight into Egypt), while Morris was responsible for the lush foliate borders filled with angelic musicians. Across the bottom of the triptych, a line of angels displays sculls of asemic medieval music, a device that links the three panels. Morris uses the motif to establish a numinous atmosphere for Christ’s story, as when the heavens rang out in Luke’s gospel, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will!” (Luke 2:14). Brooks’s carol begins and ends with visions of angels “gathered all above,” keeping watch over the Christ child and announcing glad tidings to mankind, just as the upper and lower orders of angels do in the triptych.

The David window in the baptistery, entirely a Burne-Jones production, had a double significance for Phillips Brooks. Literally, it refers to the building of the visible temple, Trinity Church itself. Allegorically, it alludes to the invisible temple, the congregation of the faithful, into which the young are initiated through baptism, which is represented in the window by an octagonal structure—an ancient symbol of baptism—that surrounds the central figures of David and Solomon themselves. This congregation of the faithful forms the essential mystical foundation for any material church, a temple Brooks explored as early as 1864 in a little-known sermon to the American Sunday-School Union, “David’s Prayer for Solomon,” based on the same scriptural verse that inspired Trinity’s window, 1 Chronicles 29:19.

“Arts and Crafts Architecture in New England,” Maureen Meister, Tufts University

During the second half of the nineteenth century, several influential Bostonians spent time in England, befriended Arts and Crafts theorists there, and brought ideas about the movement to New England—including ideas about architecture. These relationships resulted in a distinctive vision for the buildings in this part of the country at the turn of the twentieth century.

The connections between the leaders in New England and England developed over several
decades. One important link was Charles Eliot Norton who, through his travels, established friendships in the middle of the century with John Ruskin, William Morris, and Edward Burne-Jones. Like them, Norton found much to admire in the pre-industrial past, especially the Middle Ages. In 1874 Norton began teaching art history at Harvard, and when a Society of Arts and Crafts was chartered in Boston in 1897, he was elected its first president. Another influential figure was the Boston architect H. H. Richardson. He recommended Morris's products for his projects and visited Morris in England. Attracted to the idea of collaborating with a team of artisans, Richardson demonstrated how this approach could be realized. During the 1870s and '80s, Richardson employed several young architects who would become leaders of the Society of Arts and Crafts. Less well known but also noteworthy was the architect Henry Vaughan. An Englishman, Vaughan worked for George F. Bodley, an early patron of Morris's firm. After moving to Boston in 1881, Vaughan designed churches based on the English Perpendicular style, enriched by Arts and Crafts ornament, which were widely admired.

This new direction was reinforced by other architects who studied and trained in England before setting up practice in Boston. They included Herbert Langford Warren, Richard Clipston Sturgis, and George Edward Barton. All of them would hold offices in the Society of Arts and Crafts. As in England, architects were at the forefront of Boston's Arts and Crafts movement. They promoted building designs that were revival styles, embellished by handcrafted ornament that was grounded in historical sources and produced by craftsmen who were viewed as colleagues. Believing that the English heritage was the region's heritage, they designed English Gothic churches and Tudor houses. They maintained close ties with English Arts and Crafts architects, especially C. R. Ashbee. Absorbing the English interest in vernacular architecture, the architects in Boston also developed an appreciation for the region's colonial and federal buildings. The work of Charles Bulfinch was much revered. Following the example of Morris and Philip Webb, who rallied to preserve the Gothic architecture of England, the Boston architects entered into a battle that saved Bulfinch's Massachusetts State House. When hired for civic and residential projects, the architects promoted Colonial Revival designs.

Most of the architects shared Morris's rejection of commercialism, avoiding commissions such as department stores. They did not design factory buildings, and most of them never designed tall office or apartment buildings. Sturgis and Barton took on projects that served the urban poor. On the other hand, the Society rejected Morris's Socialism. Its leaders were committed to design reform and advocacy of the craftsman.

Throughout New England, the architects produced churches, houses, town halls, and schools, admired today for their quiet beauty and exquisite detail. Considered from a number of perspectives—their architectural styles, their uses, and their underlying ideas—these buildings are indebted to Morris and his compatriots.

**“Morris and Company Windows for Vinland Cottage,” Paul L. Acker, Saint Louis University**

Newport, Rhode Island was one of many sites along the New England coast that claimed ‘Viking Antiquities,’ archaeological traces of the Viking discovery of America as described in the two Old Norse Vinland sagas, *The Saga of Erik the Red* and *The Greenlanders' Saga*. Determining Viking landfalls from the saga accounts was difficult at best but nonetheless the Vinland sagas spurred a considerable amount of antiquarian activity. In Newport, a round stone tower, now known to have been built in imitation of Norman towers by a colonial governor, was dubbed the ‘Viking Tower’. It was featured in a poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow which took its cue from another pseudo-Viking antiquity, “The Skeleton in Armor,” found near Fall River, Massachusetts in 1832. This poem in turn inspired Catharine Lorillard Wolfe (1828-87), a tobacco heiress and “the single richest woman in America” to have her Newport home designed and decorated with Vinland themes in mind. Mrs. Wolfe commissioned a frieze from Walter Crane and stained glass windows from William Morris.

In a letter dated 11 April 1883, Morris outlined his scheme for the windows: “I propose Odin, Thor and Frey, the 3 great Gods, above the adventurers of Vinland.” For these Vinland ‘adventurers,’ historical personages named in the Vinland sagas, Morris proposed the well known Leif Eiriksson, together with the commander of a second voyage, Porfinnr Karlsfni and his wife Guðríðr, who gave birth to the first European child born in America. In my talk I show images of Burne-Jones’s original drawings for these windows. I interpret their iconography in the light of Burne-Jones’s customary practices as well as the Old Norse sources which Morris consulted for this particular project. I also discuss the fate of these windows and of the Vinland mansion itself, which is now part of Salve Regina mansions such as the Breakers, built by the Vanderbilts.
In anticipation of her now finished dissertation on the Gilded-Age collector and patron, Catharine Lorillard Wolfe (1828-1887), Margaret Laster presented a paper on the stained-glass windows at Vinland, Wolfe’s Newport, Rhode Island, summer house, the work of the Boston-based architects, Peabody & Stearns. In the early 1880s, William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones designed and created these windows and a larger decorative program for Vinland, all based on the theme of Newport’s mythic Viking past. Using an extant panel from the original ensemble, now in the holdings of the Delaware Art Museum, as a starting point, this paper strove to recreate the dynamics of this unique commission, one of the firm of Morris & Co.’s earliest large-scale projects for an American domestic interior. It situated the commission within the larger context of the rapidly developing resort town of Newport, soon to be the premier watering place on the Eastern seaboard, and focused, as well, on the complicated relationship between the artist, Morris, and his determined American patron, Wolfe.

The second session, “Print and Beyond: Publishing Rossetti, Morris, and the Aesthetes,” was co-sponsored with SHARP, the Society for the History of Authors, Readers and Publishers. Held in the Sheraton Hotel 10:15-11:30 a.m. 5 January 2013, it was moderated by Margaretta Frederick, Chief Curator and Curator of the Bancroft Collection, Delaware Art Museum.

“The Vinland Windows in Newport,” Margaret Laster, City University of New York

The term ‘architecture’ implies a space that can be entered and navigated. A book can fulfill the function of a decorative object, but it is also a way to actively consume information. Similarly, the pages of Wood also suggest space, though it is not a space that appears to be immediately traversable. The dark block of text appears to recede into space in contrast to the lighter tone of the page. The visual illusion is the opposite of the physical reality of the printed page. The printed matter projects towards the reader rather than recessing. Readers are forced simultaneously to navigate a superficial material space and unconsciously strive to transcend a surface decorated with type in order to interact with or relate to the narrative.

The concept of linking books and buildings is not new. In the fifteenth century and later it was common for manuscripts to contain architectural frontispiece elements. These images functioned as a kind of meditative entryway into the text, a way for readers to prepare their minds for the content.

The practice constructs a foundation for the association of a book with building or space. I expand on this by reading Morris’s design and analyzing the manner in which the reader might become absorbed in the physical topography of the book. People experience architectural spaces with the body and memory, and that space ceases to be purely mathematical and material any time it engages the dweller or the reader to daydream or recall memories of the past. By engaging with forms: letters, illustration, and a book which reference the past, Wood might lead to additional associations with the past or an imagined past. Like the frame of the house, we might see the typographic grid as forging the space of a book and similarly organizing the human memory and psyche as the house becomes lived in and the book experienced. This allows the dweller to incorporate herself into the structure just as Burne-Jones built himself into the Chaucer.

“Printing a Pocket Cathedral: Morris’s The Wood Beyond the World,” Laura Golobish, Nashville Public Library

In 1894, William Morris’s colleague, the Pre-Raphaelite artist Edward Burne-Jones compared the Kelmscott Press’s iconic edition of The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer to a “pocket cathedral.” This has become one of the most quoted and minimally analyzed statements made in reference to the press. The term ‘cathedral’ suggests an ornamental architectural space designed to aid one’s absorption into devotional activities, and the Chaucer is a dense network of borders, illustrated capitals, and engraved illustrations atypical of Kelmscott production. No volume is completely representative of the press. However, most Kelmscott volumes were minimally illustrated. In “The Ideal Book,” Morris supports books that have an “architectural arrangement.” This refers to a holistic composition in which all elements function harmoniously. This is a basic structural description that can be achieved without illustration, and means that volumes other than the Chaucer are suitable for analysis as architecture. Therefore, I demonstrate how the Kelmscott Press edition of The Wood Beyond the World, with its single illustration, draws the reader into a transformative space that functions like a cathedral.

“William Morris and Socialist Print Culture,” Elizabeth Carolyn Miller, University of California, Davis

My paper, “William Morris and Socialist Print Culture,” addresses Morris’s career in socialist print after his conversion to socialism in the early 1880s. For the purposes of this paper, I define “socialist print” rather narrowly to include only the declared socialist press, and not, for example, Morris’s work on the Kelmscott Press in the 1890s, which many critics would argue was “socialist” though not avowedly political.
hope to demonstrate that Morris's career in socialist print was not premised on the idea of contributing a socialist voice to the existing public sphere, but instead was an attempt to create an alternate, oppositional print sphere entirely separate from the mainstream press. His socialist newspapers were never intended to engage in what Jürgen Habermas would call "communicative rationality," but rather, as with many aspects of Morris's politics, his career in socialist print demonstrates a revolutionary rather than incremental approach to social change, a desire to make a clean sweep of existing institutions, including the fourth estate.

Morris's turn toward print production corresponded nearly exactly with his turn toward revolutionary socialism. He had been thinking about print production at least since his early work as a university student on the short-lived *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, of which he edited only one issue before handing the editorship over to someone else. Later, in the 1860s, he had an unrealized plan to publish an illustrated version of *The Earthly Paradise*. But Morris didn't actually dive into print until he became a socialist. Shortly after his political conversion in the early 1880s, Morris helped launch *Justice*, the newspaper for the Social Democratic Federation and England's first socialist newspaper, and he became a regular contributor. In a February 1884 contribution, Morris declared that socialists had no business "ally[ing] ourselves from time to time with this or that body of politicians as they seem to agree more or less with our views and aims." Instead, he said, "let us set about the great work of organizing and educating discontent." This was where the socialist press came in. He proposed "making our voices heard as socialists on every opportunity, but holding ourselves aloof from every movement which has not the furtherance of Socialism as its direct aim" (my emphasis; 9 Feb. 1884: 2). This positioned *Justice* in a space, as Morris would later describe it, of "desolate freedom," wholly separate from existing political debate (*Commonweal* 17 March 1888). In October 1884, Morris would go on to declare in the pages of *Justice*: "I am determined not to contribute articles to any capitalist paper whatsoever" (11 Oct 1884:6).

Shortly after making this declaration, Morris helped form the Socialist League with a group that broke from the Social Democratic Federation, and it was at this time that Morris became editor of the Socialist League's newspaper, the *Commonweal*, launched in 1885. This was Morris's first major printing project, and in a later interview he attributed his rising interest in print, which culminated in the Kelmscott Press, to his time spent on the paper: "In the course of my life I had obtained a good deal of knowledge of type. Particularly I was much among type when I was the editor of the *Commonweal*" ("Master Printer Morris" 96). Note that for Morris, socialist beliefs and the effort to seize the means of print production seemed to go hand in hand.

In its efforts to depict its pages as autonomous from capitalist society, the *Commonweal* created not so much a subculture as an alternative culture based in the print space of the paper. It preached a revolutionary vision that called for disengagement with contemporary politics in service of total social transformation. The paper's mission, as Morris and E. B. Bax put it in an editorial, was to educate in preparation for eventual revolution: "our function is to educate the people by criticizing all attempts at so-called reforms. . . and by encouraging the union of the working classes towards Revolution" (1 May 1886:33). This was a tall order, and it is perhaps not surprising that the paper had its best successes in achieving this message through literature rather than through journalism.
placement at every turn. The chapter headings act like marginalia, in that for the reader they destabilize the relationship between the primary text by Malory and the illustrations by the artist/author Beardsley. At the same time their specific size and placement adjacent to the text was selected by yet another “author,” the editor, in a non-sequential and idiosyncratic manner, and then they were produced mechanically, not by hand. Beardsley knew the Malory text well, and he understood the kinds of chapter titles he was illustrating. But since Beardsley could not anticipate where his chapter headings would be inserted, the chapter headings are actually engaged in conversation with each other. They are adjacent to but detached from the primary text.

As grotesques, his creations are free to exist in an alternate, marginal, and liberating space, which is both joyful and terrifying. While Malory's chapter headings invariably herald an account of male virility, male bravery, and otherwise conventionally-Victorian gender dynamics, Beardsley's images offer a counter text. Ostensibly justified by his understanding of the resilience of a pagan tradition into the Christian era, Beardsley’s alternate world of satyrs, youthful androgynes, angels and peacocks suggests instead a prolonged celebration of hybridity and transformation. This emphatic embrace of threshold themes introduces a kind of crisis, which is altogether the disruptive role of the “third sex,” to use a term from the period.

The chapter headings evolved over 18 months and nearly one thousand pages of text. His contemporaries and scholars since have discussed these changes in the second half of the project using terms such as “more perverse,” “decadent,” and even “demonic.” These can be vague terms too often invoked to stand in for blanket descriptions of Beardsley's work. So I was surprised to find that the subjects have really not changed. He still contributed satyrs, peacocks, angels, somnambulant youths, and herms with the same regularity. A notable variation, however, is the way Beardsley began to introduce fashion from different periods in the later installments. And since the pictures contributed are mostly of women (or male transvestites), we see a variety of types of female dress. These are the Beardsley women we know, and his public was just getting to know, from his work as an increasingly popular artist in modern visual culture—the artist of Wilde’s Salome and the artist and art editor of The Yellow Book periodical. As such, the chapter headings become more connected to the world outside the book, namely with the notoriety of the artist, than with the primary text. In this way, Beardsley has violently upset aesthetic laws of an equal author/artist partnership, not to mention rules about formal and stylistic unity. Like a New Woman, he refuses to stay in his proper place. Perhaps what makes Beardsley’s work “perverse” is the way the margins invade the center.

FRANK SHARP LECTURE

Clara Finley

Forgiving Janey,” the Morris Society’s co-sponsored talk with Columbia University’s Butler Library on March 26th, had an excellent turnout. To an audience of over 80 people, Frank Sharp —independent scholar and co-editor with Jan Marsh of The Collected Letters of Jane Morris—presented a convincing, broad portrait of Jane Morris as a craftsman, politically engaged person, and good friend with a good sense of humor.

Previous to this new volume, Jane Morris had been widely misunderstood. Scholars tended to portray her as cold, silent and stern, placing heavy blame on her for her two long-term affairs. Now, for the first time since her death, Sharp and Marsh’s volume offers the chance to vindicate Jane from some of these misconceptions, and to flesh out a true picture of her character, supplementing the heretofore slim canon of texts, which was made up primarily of letters
exchanged between Jane and her two lovers; small appearances in biographies of Morris; and of course, the iconic paintings.

Sharp addressed some of the misconceptions first, including the often-aired idea that Jane and Morris's marriage was an empty sham. While Sharp agreed that there were obviously strains in the marriage, he could cite evidence that Jane had provided solid love and support for her husband. He referred in particular to an 1872 letter from Morris to Aglaia Coronio, in which he wrote “I am so glad to have Janey back again; her company is always pleasant and she is kind and good to me.” In the Introduction to the Collected Letters, Sharp and Marsh characterize the Morris marriage as tender and loving.

Sharp also addressed the misconceptions around the subject of Jane's character. Jane's personality has often been misunderstood as a direct result of the paintings by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. The countless images of her swathed in her own frowning, silent, magnificent beauty have misled many viewers. In her life as now, her image preceded her, setting up an almost tense relationship between Jane and her canvas-bound counterparts. Sharp read aloud a letter in which Jane refers to one of Rossetti's iconic paintings as “my old abomination the study for Venus Astarte”. A parade of Jane's contemporaries, including Henry James and Emma Lazarus, interpreted Jane through the lens of these paintings before getting to know her personally. The same misunderstanding goes on today, but with Jane herself absent there is much less hope for correcting these misconceptions.

So, if Jane Morris was not silent and cold, what was she like? To start, she was a socially and intellectually successful middle class Victorian lady. Sharp cited evidence of her accomplishments (French, Italian, piano) and her wide reading, noting the dramatic transformation that she'd undergone from her childhood of poverty. She made this large socio-economic leap much more smoothly than did the other women of the Pre-Raphaelite circle, he argued, which is just one of her many remarkable accomplishments.

It seems Jane was playful, too. To give a truer sense of her lighthearted nature, Sharp seasoned the talk with jolly excerpts from the Letters, including this one, taken from a letter Jane wrote while on holiday in Italy in 1893:

“Did I tell you of the absurd charade I took part in? …I had to appear as a lover serenading at my lady'[s] window in a large Italian cloak and sombrero. I managed to play a little love-ditty on my mandoline without dropping it, so all passed off well that time—the next scene I wished to be polite to the aunt of my promised bride, and lo! my hat became such a difficulty that I almost fled—”

Thankfully for her, Jane's acting abilities were surpassed by her business skills. It may come as a surprise to fans of the static, radiant Jane of Pre-Raphaelite art that she was a keen businesswoman. She was in charge of embroidery at Morris & Co. from 1865-1885; she assisted with the Kelmscott Press during Morris's life, and wound it up after Morris's death; and she assisted with the activities of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings.

Sharp also presented us with the evidence for her ardent support of Irish Home Rule, and spoke of Jane in her role as a lifelong Liberal (radical wing). One letter even reveals how politics entered her conversations with Morris, when she wrote this line to Jane Cobden: “I taxed him [Morris] this morning with not caring about home rule…” She also supported Jane Cobden in her successful bid for a seat on the London Council. Her views on suffrage were complicated however: she objected to aggressive campaigning, and commented in one letter that women should become better educated before being granted the right to vote.

Among the many significant letters which were published for the first time in this volume, there is a letter in which she pushes Rossetti to exhibit in the Grosvenor Gallery, arguing that if he waits for the perfect opportunity, he'll never exhibit at all; a description of Swinburne in old age; a letter from the time of Rossetti’s death; and delightfully gossipy letters to Cornwall Price, the headmaster of Westward Ho!.

Unfortunately, there are no surviving letters from Jane to Morris. Such letters would cast light on the remaining shadows in our picture of Jane herself, and her relationship with Morris. Sharp posits that their daughter May Morris may have destroyed them.

Even in the absence of such letters, however, enough material has survived to provide readers with an entirely new view of Jane and her relationship to Morris. One of the most interesting new dimensions of the marriage to emerge was presented by Sharp in his talk: he proposed that Jane's class transformation was a strong influence on her husband's Socialism. Indeed, Morris's beliefs clearly depended on the idea that, given access to beauty, art, leisure, and education, a person of any class could transform themselves completely. Given that Jane did exactly that, and in such a dramatic fashion, Sharp argued, her success story must have loomed in the background of his subsequent thoughts on social issues.

Of this fifteen year long project collecting Jane's letters, Sharp commented: “I liked her when we started, but at the end I had a genuine admiration for her.” The same can be said of reading the Collected Letters themselves, or at the very least, going to hear a talk about them.
REPORT ON THE
PRE-RAPHAELITES EXHIBITION AT
THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

Elizabeth C. Miller & John Plotz

The Morris Society arranged a Saturday April 20th tour of the exhibition “The Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Art and Design 1848 - 1900” with curator Diane Wagggoner, as well as a Monday May 6th joint presentation by Ms. Wagggoner and Mark Samuels Lasner, several of whose books have been featured in the exhibition. An illustrated tour of the exhibition has been provided on the Morris Society blog, morrissociety.blogspot.com. Below, Elizabeth C. Miller and John Plotz comment on the displays and their U. S. reception.

Elizabeth C. Miller: American fans of William Morris will have noticed that Morris and his fellow Pre-Raphaelites are enjoying a good deal of attention in the national conversation of late, thanks to the “Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Art and Design” exhibition at the National Gallery of Art in Washington D. C. While some of our members were able to participate in a special exhibition tour for the William Morris Society in the United States, led by curator Diana Wagggoner on April 20th, those of us who could not be in Washington for this event may nonetheless be following the national reception of the show with a great deal of attention. Those in the latter group, however, such as myself, have doubtless been frustrated, not only because so much of Morris’s career has been ignored in the press surrounding this event may nonetheless be following the national reception of the show with a great deal of attention. Those in the latter group, however, such as myself, have doubtless been frustrated, not only because so much of Morris’s career has been ignored in the press surrounding this exhibition, but because the critical reception of the show has frequently been so wrongheaded.

In Britain, the original version of this show, mounted at the Tate Britain under the title “Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant Garde,” was named one of the most important exhibitions of the year by the Guardian newspaper. When the exhibition crossed the Atlantic and arrived on the shores of our nation’s capital, however, it greeted a critical establishment far less willing to grant the Pre-Raphaelites serious consideration. While the National Gallery exhibition garnered a positive review in the Wall Street Journal (no doubt Morris would be alive to the irony) and elsewhere, a review in the New York Times has generated wrath in the Victorianist community. In online blogs and the VICTORIA listserv, many have expressed incredulity at the review, which is so pungently condescending and outrageously superior that it takes your breath away. Perhaps most shockingly, the reviewer, Roberta Smith, claims that the exhibition “provides a yardstick by which to gauge your own sophistication.” She suggests that those who fail to measure up – that is, those who actually like the show – are essentially undereducated: “If you are genuinely interested in art and emerge from this show thinking that you have seen scores of outstanding paintings, you should spend more time studying other examples,” namely Cezanne and Manet. Smith’s idea of “modern” art and thought is quite firmly French, and she relegates the Pre-Raphaelites’ line of influence to “the visual platitudes of Norman Rockwell and Walt Disney” as well as “the heavy-handed neo-medievalism of countless movies and television shows, most recently ‘Game of Thrones.’”

A whole gallery of the National Gallery exhibition is devoted to the works of William Morris, and Smith concedes that this room is perhaps “the least oppressive in the show.” She has little else to say about Morris, however, and her entire review largely ignores the political motivations of Morris as well as the Pre-Raphaelites. Perhaps it is not surprising that the New York Times, a paper infamous for its erroneous reports on the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq on the eve of war in 2003, should fail to give full consideration to the political and social context of Morris’s work, as well as that of the Pre-Raphaelites. I eagerly await more informed responses to the show from scholars of Morris and his circle.

John Plotz: I was lucky enough to spend a day at the National Gallery recently, taking in not only the breathtaking (and Morris-rich) “Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Art and Design” but also a learned and scintillating companion exhibit on “Pre-Raphaelites and the Book”, which draws heavily on the expertise and generosity of the Society’s own Mark Lasner, and the rich trove of materials in Delaware. The catalogue has sat near me for weeks now, open first to one of the exhibition’s thematic sections (Origins” perhaps, or “Nature”) and then to another: “Salvation,” for example, contains both Ford Maddox Brown’s “Christ Washing Peter’s Feet” and his celebrated “Work.”

However, like many Society members, I visited the show principally for the work by Morris, Burne-Jones and their circle. This has received much less press coverage than the Rossetti, Millais and Holman Hunt paintings of the 1850’s and 1860’s or Julia Margaret Cameron’s wonderful compelling photos “Hypatia” and “Mariana” (aptly filed under “Beauty”). But to get from “Nature” to “Mythologies” (where Burne-Jones’s remarkable “Laus Veneris” hangs across from the sad-eyed Jane Morris who looks out from a medieval castle wall in Rossetti’s late, great “La Pia”) every visitor has to walk through “Paradise.” And “Paradise,” much like Kelmscott Manor itself, turns out to be a place filled with stunning works by Morris, Burne-Jones and their collaborators. No list can do the room justice: there are two Kelmscott
Chaucers on display, a gorgeous “Backgammon Player’s Cabinet” designed by Phillip Webb and painted by Burne-Jones, a Webb Sussex Chair, wonderful Morris wallpaper samples (among them Trellis and Tulip and Willow); the list goes on. Also on view were a few of the nearly full-sized embroidered heroines that Elizabeth Burden and Morris conceived during the early years at Red House: fascinating to consider that these exquisite, brightly colored figures are the workmanship of Elizabeth herself, Jane Morris, Georgiana Burne-Jones, Kate Faulkner and others. Many sets of skilled hands also collaborated to produce such staggeringly beautiful (and sublimely overwhelming) tapestries as Morris and Co.’s “The Arming and Departure of the Knights of the Round Table,” which nearly covers two walls of “Paradise.”

Perhaps the Morris and Company piece that will stick with me most, though, is an 1863 series of small stained-glass panels called “King Rene’s Honeymoon.” Morris made the understated but exquisite floral surrounds for each panel, while Rossetti contributed an ornate “Music” and Ford Madox Brown a stately “Architecture.” The other two panels, “Painting” and “Sculpture” are by Burne-Jones and they offer a wry commentary on Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic ideals and anxieties. In “Painting,” a tall stately brunette solemnly watches King Rene painting a gorgeous, florally themed blonde beauty; while in “Sculpture” that same blonde, hands clasped anxiously, watches Rene sculpting a stately brunette! The abstract figuration surrounding human figures, frieze-like flattening of the pictorial plane, and the vivid coloration of these glowing panels all prefigure the contribution that first generation Pre-Raphaelite work made to Morris and Co.’s later aesthetic ideals. These panels vividly bespeak, moreover, the collaborative ethos that Morris and his circle were to develop so robustly throughout his career.

Yet as Elizabeth Miller points out above, the whole second generation of Pre-Raphaelite art, and the great contributions made by Morris and Co, have been largely overlooked in the kerfuffle about the present show. As far as I can see, nobody has spoken out publicly about the crucial role that Morris and Burne-Jones played in transforming Pre-Raphaelite radical energy into their revolutionary aesthetics of the 1880s and 1890s. Even setting aside the link between Morris’s aesthetics and his political radicalism (which Miller’s new book Slow Print details so wonderfully) there is also the astonishing debt that world-changing artists and designers like Frank Lloyd Wright acknowledged to the impact of Morris-led Arts and Crafts—his 1901 manifesto was called, after all, “The Art and Craft of the Machine.”

My major reaction to Roberta Smith’s tirade in the New York Times was to be stunned at its unexamined translation of her own narrow aesthetic tastes into a denunciation of the “badness at the core” of Pre-Raphaelite art, which she also coolly blamed for the “onset of kitsch.” To call art kitsch means that you think it was originally composed in stale, conventional ways, tapping into pre-existing tastes and exploiting viewers’ laziness, their cozy acceptance of certain kinds of pre-digested beauty; it would take a fairly profound misreading of any of the Pre-Raphaelite art on view here to think that described their intentions or their methods.

It makes sense to me that Smith essentially omits Morris and the “Paradise” room from her account. Not only because the later Modernist book arts that Morris inspired are far from kitsch, but also because time spent in that room reveals a fascinatingly diverse range of artisanal practices (weaving, furniture-making, printing) that Morris and Burne-Jones revived to breathtaking effect. There is simply no way for Smith to lump all that beauty in with dorm-room poster aesthetics.

My reaction to the subsequent debate about the status of “Pre-Raphaelites as an Avant Garde” that has raged among scholars (on the Victoria list-serv, for example) is more complex. Partly because my approach to the Pre-Raphaelites has been through William Morris and the “second generation,” I am less inclined than some to find that the Pre-Raphaelites in the 1850’s pioneered an aesthetic that was “revolutionary” in just the same sense as Picasso’s turn towards cubism, or any of the of the art-world-shattering events of the early 20th century (there are no urinals as artworks here). In his defense of the show, Tim Barringer makes a parallel between the current wave of knee-jerk condemnation of PRB kitsch and the early wave of attacks on the PRB for being crude and shocking. However, I am not sure that Barringer is right to link the two sorts of attacks, partly because my own reaction in favor of the Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic is very different from John Ruskin’s spirited (1851) defense of their “truth to nature.”

The pleasure I take in the PRB painters is historical: really coming to terms with the past requires both a flash of recognition and pleasure and a sense of the ways that their painterly aesthetic differs from the ideals of the present day. Although I do love many of these PRB pictures, I don’t think we need to be prepared to avow our preference for them over Cezanne or Rothko in order to delight in Brown’s and Rossetti’s brilliant exploration of the problem of making a piece of canvas into both a storytelling space and a storehouse of brilliant impressions of nature. Whereas, when it comes to the “Paradise” that Morris and Burne-Jones and their co-workers wrought, I feel nothing but awe.
WITH WILLIAM MORRIS IN ICELAND:
THE SECOND WEEK

Florence S. Boos
Photography by Gary Aho

In honor of the William Morris Society's forthcoming trip to Iceland 18-27 July 2013, we are reprinting the following account of a 1986 Morris Society trip which originally appeared in our April 1987 Newsletter.

AUGUST 9TH, 1986 SATURDAY

As we waited in Blönduós for a new driver, I read in Morris's Diary and tried unsuccessfully to nap. On the road, we turned south down Langidalur; the mountains became more gently sloped before they finally opened into a wide, beautiful dale with winding rivers. We passed then through a dryer plateau with barren tundra, and through another valley, whose silver lake formed a shining circle in the sun. Darker mountains rose ahead as we drove east, and the large fjord of Skagafljótur ("headland fjord") lay on our left. In it, we could see the block-like island of Drangey ("cliff island"), where the spell-ridden Grettir made his last stand. Across from the island we stopped at a windswept little promontory by a small bust of Stefán G. Stefánsson (1853-1927), a late-nineteenth century poet and "west-Icelander" who emigrated to Alberta, Canada and wrote nostalgically of his now-distant home.

From the promontory, we looked down on another fine dale, carefully planted and irrigated, and continued east through it to Viðmýri ("willow-swamp"), site of the most distinctive church we have so far seen, roofed entirely in turf with a handsome red crook at the top and dignified dark board walls front and back [see cover photo]. The cheerfully flowered grassy roof seemed an unusual emblem of natural harmony. In its cemetery, Karen found a burial stone of a day-old child, one infant grave among many. The church, built in 1834-35, was decorated with a painting of the Last Supper, and its carefully wrought screen was depicted with other worthies along the wall. The elaborate altarpiece was covered in a plain cloth of dark crimson, and the woodwork was painted in red, gold, white, and green. We viewed several wall-engravings, stepped-up-the-pyramid mountain formation Morris described in his journal, and Ruth pointed out patches of purple "willow-herbs."

From Sauðárkrókur, we continued along the gleaming dark blue fjord, past a nesting island for eiderdown ducks and through a peaceful yellow-green dale. As we drove east toward Hólar, we passed the field of Grettir's slayer, Pórbjörn Óngull ("Thorbjörn Hook"); Morris and Magnússon translated the name as "Thorbiorn Angle."). I noticed again and again the steps-up-the-pyramid mountain formation Morris described in his journal, and after we left, we stopped to study a large, ornate sundial just outside the gate, inscribed with directions of the azimuth, and we stopped on the way and the deep blue of Skagafjörður, where we could see an iceberg and assorted skerries ("sker," rocky islet: a good Icelandic word). We lingered in town after lunch, and after I walked along the pebbly harbor while several people stopped for a swim.

Afterwards, we continued north to Sauðárkrókur ("sheep's crook"), near where Morris probably turned east toward Akureyri. Sauðárkrókur (perhaps 1000 souls) is the largest town we have seen in some days, bright-roofed and clean, with a fine harbor. We spiraled slowly up a gravel road to a cemetery above the town, and ate a quiet, rather sheltered lunch beside its low white stone walls. As Bill and I walked through the graves, we noticed that all the stones were post-1850, with much else that is extant. Before we left, we studied to a large, ornate sundial just outside the gate, inscribed with directions of the azimuth, and looked out over the town and the deep blue of Skagafjörður, where we could see an iceberg and assorted skerries ("sker," rocky islet: a good Icelandic word). We lingered in town after lunch, and after I walked along the pebbly harbor while several people stopped for a swim.

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From Viðvíkursveit ("wide-bay country"), we came to Hólar ("hills"), site of a bishopric and school from 1106 to 1798, and now the home of an agricultural college. As we approached, its large red roofs and white walls contrasted cheerfully with the mountains beyond. The church displayed on its altar an original Guðbrandsbíblia, and the translator himself was depicted with other worthies along the wall. The elaborate altarpiece was covered in a plain cloth of dark crimson, and the woodwork was painted in red, gold, white, and green. We viewed several wall-engravings, a bleak crucifix, an inscribed baptismal font, and two tombstones carefully protected under wooden covers. Amusement was provided by gaudy emblems of the four virtues and seven vices arranged behind the screen.

The square of the church was furnished as "Thorbiorn Angle." We lingered in town after lunch, and after I walked along the pebbly harbor while several people stopped for a swim.

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Eugene happily climbed a simple white wooden bell tower near the church, which commemorates the 400th anniversary of Jón Arason’s death; the cemetery’s sadly effaced stones were shaded by ash trees quite large by Icelandic standards, and a carefully planted “forest” stood nearby. Here and elsewhere there seems to be an attractive custom of planting a small tree, often a fir, next to the grave sites, and family members are often buried together in a little stone enclosure or pen, and sheltered from the wind by one large stone.

On our return, we again passed Drangey, Grettir’s last refuge, and stopped at Flúgumýri (“fly swamp”), where the Sturlunga Saga records a burning of the stead in 1273. A 1727 painting of the last supper, quite ancient for preserved Icelandic art, graced its small red and white church, where Eugene again tried to play the organ, and a herd of healthy-looking cows grazed in the fields nearby. On the way home, several delicate rainbows appeared in the light which streamed down from blue patches of sky over the clouds and mountains nearby. Eugene seemed happy with his small purchase (two illustrated placemats), and more generally with the day. I wrote a card to Ray Heffner [a colleague at Iowa] after dinner.

August 10th, Sunday

Rain and mist shrouded our visit to Laxdalur (“salmon valley”), site of the Laxdæla Saga. We drove north again from Geitaskarð, through Blönduós, past Hóp to Bórðeyri, and then across the peninsula to Hvammsfjörður (“hollow-firth”), where we turned north at the hamlet Búðadalur (“booths’ valley”), and further north towards Svinadalur (“pigs’ valley”); our language teacher once explained that Iceland’s last domestic svin were slaughtered sometime in the fifteenth century . . . ). We passed the site of Olaf Peacock’s house at Hjarðarholt, and, some distance off the narrow road to its north, the lonely boulder where Bolli is said to have killed Kjartan. The bleak gray drizzle created an appropriate atmosphere, as Eugene, Bill, Gary, and I climbed up to the rock and looked back at the little bus in the rain. Morris called the environs “a most evil bog”; emotional response to the friends’ mutual betrayal may well have heightened his distaste: “. . . it is an awful place: set aside the hope that the unseen sea gives you here, and the strange threatening change of the blue spiky mountains beyond the firth, and the rest seems emptiness and nothing else: a piece of turf under your feet, and the sky overhead, that’s all; whatever solace your life is to have here must come out of yourself or these old stories, not over hopeful themselves. Something of all this I thought . . . and now and again a few times I felt homesick—I hope I may be forgiven” (108). “Auðvitað,” as the Icelanders would say (“Of course”). Walking back from Kjartan’s stone, I looked with astonishment at some bright red mushrooms on the sparse wet grass.

We drove on past Ásgarður, and the rolling slopes once again became real mountains, riven by reddish-black crevasses down their sides. In contrast to Morris’s depression at Hjarðarholt (Kjartan’s home), his identification with the unfortunate Bolli may also have influenced his response to Sælingsdalur (“chieftain’s valley”; “saell” of course also means “happy” or “blessed”), which he thought too humble for the resonance of its name. I also found it hard to imagine twenty men hiding there in ambush, for all the land’s clefts and turns; perhaps the eleventh century supported more bushes.

The dismal day cleared a little as we drove on; the slate blue fjord and tiered headlands and mountains began to emerge from the mist. We saw a large “glaucous gull” (identified by Margaret Power), with brown striations on its wings and tail. In Laugar for lunch, we stopped to see a sculpture by Ásmundur Sveinsson in the town center. Later, at Krossholar near Stadarholt on the peninsula, we climbed a wind-lashed promontory to view a cross which commemorates Unnur djúpuðga (Unnur the Deep-Minded), matriarch of the Laxdaelingar. The wind
gusted fiercely to sixty knots or more, and we huddled against rocks and ledges to take pictures of the cross and wide view of the mist-covered horizon below. At another little red and white church at Hvammur on the peninsula nearby, Ruth helped Bill decipher a dignified pillar which honored Snorri Goði, and we paused to view the still-darkened dale to the front and left and bleak hills to our right. On the return journey we stopped in Hjarðarholt at another rather Gothicized small church above the river in which the young Kjartan and Bolli would have swum, as narrated in "The Lovers of Gudrun."

A    fter we had rounded the firth and stopped again to rest at Búðadalur, I noticed a mock-heroic bumper sticker: "London-New York-Paris-Búðadalur." Morris's response to isolation was (usually) that the world is wherever any sentient being dwells, and of course he was right. Still, I confess I do not remember much else about Búðadalur, beyond its few houses in the mist, and the interior of its inevitable gas station-café-general store. Fog accompanied our journey to a new night's refuge, and I napped; as I awoke, we were traversing a flatter, rocky region, dotted with many cairns. The mountains on the right rose starkly grey-black, greener as we approached Snaefellsnes on the south side of the peninsula. We passed Ölkelda and Staðastaðir ("ale-springs" and "places of places"), and arrived at our luxurious guesthouse at Ytri Túnug ("outer tongue"). Quite new and spacious, the building is airy, warm and pleasant; I shared a room with five other women upstairs, and Bill and Eugene roomed with Gary.

M  ost strikingly, we are for the first time directly by the sea. A few hundred feet from the house, the familiar crabgrass and dandelions yield to a broad sand beach washed (today) by a gentle tide of white waves. The weather was now what the Icelanders call skár, better-than-it-might-be, and the sea shone a light blue and turquoise beneath the beautiful lavender sunset. Morris mentioned a similar phenomenon at Snaefellsnes—the light suddenly radiates through the clouds, and cascades in a kind of visual allelujah. Violet shells are everywhere on the shore, and the twilight washed everything—white foam, broad beach—in the soft bright colors of a Monet painting. I looked out over the sea for a long time, wondering whether Icelandic voyagers marveled that this ocean touches North America.

A    ugust 11th, Monday

W  e all awoke much more alert, even though Eugene, Bill, Holly, Neville, Gary and others had played Hearts till two. The sky was bright, and we looked fondly at the sea from our breakfast tables. In our little bus once again, we continued west along the shore, across a clear river, beneath several sharply peaked mountains and fairly large waterfalls, and through the hamlet of Lýsuholl ("gleam hill"). Snaefellsjökull still hovered in the distance when we stopped for a rest at the peaceful little inlet of Buðir ("booths"). The mountains above rise steeply from the coastal plain to the north, and Morris remarked correctly on their many colors of stone, in striking combinations of red, orange, green, and black. Neville, who brought his binoculars, discovered sheep for us on incredibly high ledges in the distance, isolated, placid figures against the green. Morris also commented on Búðahraun, a large mossy lava-field southwest of Buðir, which would have been very difficult to traverse on horseback. In today's light the sea is deep-green and turquoise blue, and Buðir's wild grasses and yellow-green moss are streaked with an immense variety of nameless flowers.

O    n the road to Arnarstapi ("eagle's cliff") we scattered a cloud of artic terns, and passed large volcanic cliffs circled by hundreds of terns. Morris was pleased by Arnarstapi and its adjoining meadows; the stapi itself overlooks steep shores and narrow, rocky inlets in a larger firth which reaches out to the sea. As we walked along a bit of the firth, we could see behind us to the east the headlands from which we came, a waterfall and Snaefellsjökull above us to the left, and thousands and thousands of nesting birds on the islets in the firth. Their endless caws echoed loudly in the sea-air. Several sheep ambled past, and Eugene happily pursued six of them over some hillocks. I came so close to a tern perched placidly in the lake that I began to worry it might be hurt. A few hundred feet inland stood a grim-looking memorial to fishermen drowned at sea.

A    fter this we drove off contentedly toward Hólahólar ("hills of hills"); the lava was more uneven still, bizarrely shaped black rocks covered everywhere with green moss. Hólahólar itself is aptly named; a cluster of grassy conical mounds, some of which enclose small grass-grown craters. When we walked to a stone sheepfold nearby, we had quite a
good view of the sea, and could look from one of the mounds down the dale toward Búdir, and up again toward Snaefellsjökull. In the bus again, we finally rounded the tip of Snaefellsnes, past a large boulder balanced incongruously on the narrow tip of one sharp peak. The terns continued to wheel around the deep green slopes of the mountains to our right. We stopped briefly at Hellissandur ("cave-sands"), where another statue commemorated drowned fishermen, and we contemplated Snaefellsjökull over our tea. Somewhat beyond, we passed Rif ("reef"), a handsome point with sea views on both sides (Morris remarked happily that he had kept the sea in sight since Ingjaldsholl, and spoke fondly of "the hope of the sea"), and passed Ölafsvík, a relatively large sea town which was inaccessible by road until the 1960’s. Ruth commented that in Morris’s time the trading station lay to the east of the town (now the site of a couple bucolic steads and a small waterfall.) Morris and his companions approached the town warily below Búlandshöfði ("farmlands-head"), whose vertical sides plunge almost directly into the sea. Any delay would have left them helpless in the rising tide, and his descriptions of the gravelly mountain shale and the evidence of our eyes sometimes make me wonder how the group’s horses found any secure foothold at all. Somewhat beyond Ölafsvík, we stopped briefly at Kirkjufell, a steep mountain which Morris compared to a chateau. He also called the complex of mountains beneath Helgrindur ("Hell-gates") we turned back, gracefully into the bay, a sight Morris also admired.

Within the bay, we rounded the tip of Snaefellsnes, past a large boulder balanced incongruously on the narrow tip of one sharp peak. The terns continued to wheel around the deep green slopes of the mountains to our right. We stopped briefly at Hellissandur ("cave-sands"), where another statue commemorated drowned fishermen, and we contemplated Snaefellsjökull over our tea. Somewhat beyond, we passed Rif ("reef"), a handsome point with sea views on both sides (Morris remarked happily that he had kept the sea in sight since Ingjaldsholl, and spoke fondly of "the hope of the sea"), and passed Ölafsvík, a relatively large sea town which was inaccessible by road until the 1960’s. Ruth commented that in Morris’s time the trading station lay to the east of the town (now the site of a couple bucolic steads and a small waterfall.) Morris and his companions approached the town warily below Búlandshöfði ("farmlands-head"), whose vertical sides plunge almost directly into the sea. Any delay would have left them helpless in the rising tide, and his descriptions of the gravelly mountain shale and the evidence of our eyes sometimes make me wonder how the group’s horses found any secure foothold at all. Somewhat beyond Ölafsvík, we stopped briefly at Kirkjufell, a steep mountain which Morris compared to a chateau. He also called the complex of mountains nearby Gundarjörður “a noble kind of place,” and I photographed their steep crevices and glacial crags from the peninsula east of the bay.

Somewhat later, we passed a bird sanctuary and several stands of fish drying-racks between Setberg ("bench rock") and Hallbjarnareyri ("Hallbjörn’s Sandbank"). At Kolgarafjörður ("coal-pit firth"), beneath the Tröllantinder ("trolls’ peaks"), the mountainous headlands and small glaciers curve gracefully into the bay, a sight Morris also admired. Beneath Helgrindur ("Hell-gates") we turned back, and stopped briefly near Búlandshöfði to watch large grey-white gulls make graceful perfect glides up and down the cliffs, and return again and again to the same spot with no noticeable motion of their wings. The land became rougher near Holtsá ("hill river"), where we turned left to return south across the peninsula, and climbed steeply into the mountains at Frøðarheiði ("foam-heath"). As we came over the pass, we looked down into a broad valley, from which the curves of the southern beaches of Snaefellsnes opened out on the firth. The golden light of the afternoon sun illuminated the sea at 5:30 p. m., one of the most sweeping and vertiginous views we have had.

Later, we reached the familiar coastal meadows of Lýsuhóll near our house, and several stopped to swim at an authentic but rather rank-looking Ólkelda; the rest of us continued home. After a friendly dinner, Bill and I walked for a while by the sea. The deep blue sky and pearl of the ocean are a concrete blessing; for a little while, one needs less for having seen them. I wrote until 11:35 p. m.

**August 12th, Tuesday**

Handsome cumulus clouds hovered over the sea as we left Langholt, and climbed north from Vegamót past Straumfjarðará ("stream fjord river") toward Kerlingarskarð ("old woman’s pass," “carline’s pass” to Morris). The name comes from rather indistinct stone profiles at the top of the pass which would justify “Karlaskarð” just as well. Little glaciers flowed down mountainsides into small rivers and handsome little falls, some of them multi-tiered, and further into the lake where the legendary troll-kerling drowned when she was caught fishing at dawn, a fatally compromising act for trolls.

We passed Grettistak, site of another feat of Grettirian prowess (he heaved a large boulder), and looked down toward Áltafjörður ("swans’ fjord") on the right, and Breiðafjörður on the left. Morris greatly admired “Broadfirth’s” great expanse, many skerries and low strands. We then turned left to Berserkjahraun, whose legend in the Eyrbyggja Saga interested Morris. The field is aptly named, for it is the wildest configuration of convoluted lava we have seen; berserkers were clearly needed to cut a path through it. At intervals along the path’s edge stood nearly symmetrical cairns, under one of which Valerie placed a poem. The lava’s edge was abruptly and clearly defined; a hundred feet from it, we saw a farmstead with its house meadow, beneath the dark, sharply outlined, glaciated mountains beyond.

When we finally emerged from the berserk’s lava, we turned north toward Stykkishólmur ("lice island"), along the strand between Breiðafjörður and Áltafjörður. A beautiful cove lay to the left of the peninsula, and I recognized Morris’s description of the plain stretching down to the firth in the grassy uneven meadows to our right. High peaked mountains lay behind us as we approached Helgafell, a “holy mountain” whose venerable literary associations are amicably belied by its dimensions and appearance; Bill accurately described the grassy-sided hill as a “cozy little bump.” *Eyrbyggia Saga* and *Gísla Saga* episodes took place at Holy Mountain, and Gudrun spent her final years there as a rueful nun in the *Laxdæla Saga*. A grave which may be hers is now surrounded by a railing and marked by a brown stone which reads Guðrun Ósvifursd. 1008.
Ruth informed us that legend allows three wishes to anyone who ascends Helgafell’s gentle slopes, and does not speak or look back. Bill waived his wishes, and commented quietly on the view as we climbed. I observed the legend’s obligations with due piety, and made three concrete and three more abstract wishes in the stone enclosure at the top (let the gods choose). As so often in Iceland, the view from the enclosure was sweeping and beautiful; it extended out toward the bay towards Breiðárlónstadir and the many small islands in Álftafjörður. The little stone shrine itself was rectangular, rather smaller than the room of a twentieth-century house.

We presumably did not profane the “cozy bump” by stopping for lunch at a small pond at its base. Bill talked for a while with a young German father touring Iceland in a microbus with his wife and small child, and then we queued up for our departure. I looked fondly back at our sacred bump, and thought of Gudrun Ösvifursdóttir as we left.

Stykkishólmur is a large pleasant town of twelve hundred souls, whose pier and harbor front on the bright blue firth; its largest structure is a regional hospital run by an order of Dutch Catholic nuns. At the harbor we queued up again and filed into a small launch for an excursion to the islands of Breiðafjörður. All but Hrappsey (“boor’s island”) are now uninhabited, visited only by sheep, tourists, and vast flocks of seagulls, brown cormorants, long-necked glaucous gulls, and round orange-billed puffins. Margaret, our birder, was especially touching were the puffins, so far. Her checklist of observed species soon rose to more than thirty. Especially touching were the puffins, who could only achieve flight when they had vigorously agitated the water for thirty or forty feet.

We lingered after dinner on this, our last night together in the country (tomorrow we will be separated in Reykjavík), talked in little groups, and sang folk songs far into the night. Nigel Kelsey led the folk singing with an amazing repertoire of hymns, songs, and ballads—art, folk, popular, political, romantic, and satirical, American as well as British (Bill loves to sing the first three or four stanzas of “Joe Hill,” from the “Little Red Songbook”; Nigel knew all five). We lingered together till after one, then scattered slowly and a bit sadly to bed. This exhausting trip has been a small testimony to the human desire to see and appreciate. And after our brief stay in Reykjavík, we may never see each other again.

August 13th, Wednesday

One of the clearest, most beautiful days of our trip favored our departure. As we made our way down the fjords, Snaefellsjökull slowly began to dwindle to the faint hachure which remains visible in Reykjavík.

On the way down around Faxaflói ("Mane bay"), we stopped first in Staðarstaður ("place’s place"), home of Ari Thorgilsson Fröði (“the Wise”), 1068-1148, a conciliator and author of the Islandingabók and one of the sources for the Landnámabók. A stone monument there is inscribed with Snori Sturluson’s praise of Ari as the first to write “new and old wisdom” in the Norse language. At best one can only hope to write new and old wisdom, as the preacher remarked, and we both found Snorri’s praise more moving than several score literary homages to revenge murderers. I waded through a flock of twenty energetically cackling geese to visit the nearby church. Its pulpit dated from around 1700, and its (rare) chandelier from 1713, but the most striking antiquity was a tombstone of a priest, Sigurður Sigurðsson, dated from 1690. The pastor was at home, and seemed pleased when we praised a sailing ship he had suspended from the ceiling; it seemed more than appropriate for a country of rowers and seafarers.

We stopped again briefly at Vegamót ("crossroads") and passed Mikilholt ("large hill"), site of one of Morris’s camps, and Fagraskógarfjall (“Fair Woods Mountain”), where we slowed for a small herd of horses, among them a slender foal which leaned uncertainly against its mother. Several rivers and craters briefly rose above us, pitch-black and impressively stark, and many
small, sparsely vegetated mountainsides and darker peaked ridges. We briefly visited Rauðamelsölkelda ("red-gravel ale springs"), and stopped in a lava field at one small hot spring, which seemed to us by now blasé hot-spring viewers rather anticlimactic. As we walked back to the bus, I thought about our imminent dispersal once again, and Karen remarked that, "It took me so long to get used to these people, and now it'll seem so strange not to see them."

Near Rauðamelur, we also stopped briefly to view a small ruined church by high basalt colonnades, and the more impressive Eldborg ("fire castle"), created by two eruptions separated by 1000 years, the second and more violent during the time of the settlements. Somewhat later, we passed Grettirsbiðir ("Grettir's hideout") in Hítardalur ("basin valley"). Morris thought "such a savage dreadful place, that it gave quite a new turn in my mind to the whole story, and transfigured Grettir into an awful and monstrous being, like one of the early giants of the world."

The Hitará itself was a small, clear river, near a beautiful small glacier in a pacific, evenly-created mountain to our left. Near here, Morris described the sight of birch bushes against the distant but visible Langjökull and Eiríksjökull in the east. As we passed Grímstaðir ("Grímur's place") to our left and the region of Mýrar ("swamps") to our right, I gazed for a while at a particularly bright waterfall which cascaded in two small slender tiers. We stopped briefly at Borg ("castle") to view a sculpture of an episode in Egils Saga, in which the despairing Egill tries to starve himself to death, but is tricked by his daughter into drinking a little milk. Beyond lay the open horizon, reddish cliffs, and glaciers in the east, and the now-distant Snaefellsnes to the northwest. Morris responded intensely to this setting, perhaps in tribute to the Egils Saga and to other sites he visited nearby.

At Borgarnes, we stopped to eat in Skallagrímssgarður (Egill was Egill Skallagrímsson), a remarkably flowered and verdant little park. The flowers are grown in greenhouses, then transplanted lovingly to their beds amidst the shrubs. A genuinely striking sculpture near the garden’s entrance shows the impressively homely Egill with his slender, lifeless son (also Skallagrímur) draped over his saddle; I hope he was also as devoted to the daughter who saved his life.

When we left Borgarnes, we began to navigate the final fjords down to Reykjavík, along Melaveit ("gravel district") by Borgarfjörður into Hvalfjörður ("whale firth") and around Esja to the capital. Along the way we passed the largish industrial town of Akranes ("fields’ ness"). In Hvalfjörður, we stopped at Saurbaer ("dirt farm") to view Hallgrímskirkja ("Hallgrim’s Church"), a light and elegantly simple construction with stained glass by Gerður Helgadóttir, the artist of Skálholt, a fine organ with brown keys and white flats, and an altar cloth in which Christ is shown inspiring Hallgrímur Pétursson, the 17th-century author of the Pasitiulmaír ("Passion Psalms").

Further round the firth, we could see Skálafell ("hall mountain") to the south, and the sun-capped Botnsúlur ("basin columns"), which we originally saw at Pingvellir from the other side. The firth is bordered by fertile fields and broken by many skerries; we passed a disused whaling station at its head. When we stopped at Botnavogur ("bottoms inlet") to eat and look up the firth, sheep placidly ate seaweed nearby, and we enjoyed the peaceful sight of the white spire of Hallgrímskirkja across the firth. We rounded Esja, passed what Ruth noted as the largest farmstead in the country, and continued by Kollafjörður ("heads firth"), where several plants now process fishmeal into fertilizer.

When we finally entered the suburbs of Reykjavík, we could see the pyramidal spire of its Hallgrímskirkja above the roofs, and we drove straight to it. Glad to see something familiar at last, we climbed the tower with our fellow tourists, and pointed out the Tjörn ("tarn"), university, city center, and our sometime house at Hávallagötu 1. It was strangely moving to see our temporary dwelling place so soon and so briefly, just as in memory, but irrevocably without us; I stood as long as possible to absorb all I could. We were still perhaps a bit stunned from the trip, and knew we would have only a day to visit the university, our former Icelandic teacher Margrét Jónsdóttir, Rob Berman and
Wincie Jóhannsdóttir at the Fulbrightstofnun, and prowl a few bookstores. We collapsed, more or less, in our comfortable guesthouse rooms, which included a separate small one for Eugene; ours was also stocked neatly with a little refrigerator and small desk.

Hilmar Foss, the Society's only Icelandic member, met us all the next morning at the National Library (Bjóðbókasafn). Hilmar brought us into contact with Kjartan Helgason last fall, and conferred with him and us about preliminary arrangements for the trip. He now introduced us all to the head librarian, who welcomed us, praised Morris as a "friend of Iceland," and asked one of us to read Morris's "Iceland First Seen," and finally read his own translation of an 1872 letter, in which Iceland's founding father Jón Sigurðsson called Morris's poem "beautiful," but added that "it is a pity that Morris thinks that our 'mother' is rather gray and haggard-looking, dull and dreary; I can understand that but do not agree. The poem about Gunnar's Howe is still more in the same vein, and I think we shall not have a go at it. We are so dull and lifeless that it is rather too much to paint the gates of Hell right before our eyes. What we need are the songs of life, and that is why I prefer 'Iceland First Seen,' because there we find some hope of survival. It may be an illusion, but I think not, and I would at any rate not like to be disillusioned." The great man's faint praise is understandable, but I think he misread the underlying sense of Morris's text. The characterizations in "Gunnar's Howe" of Iceland as a "grey minster of lands" and "tomb of time past" clearly honored both the history and the courage of its inhabitants. The "gates of Hell" only opened in Jón's imagination.

Afterwards, Gary and I visited the main reading room, where we recorded some of the titles from Mark Watson's collection of foreign-language books on Iceland, especially those from the decades just before and after Morris's trip, 1865-85 (mostly such ephemera as Off to the Geysers; The Polar World; To Iceland in a Yacht; Snioland or Iceland: Its Jökulls and Fjalls; etc.). Afterwards, Bill and I walked together to the Fulbright office, and later met Margrét at the Norraena Húsið for coffee. With the group in one of the woolen stores, Bill also bought me a capelike purple coat. I protested, and after Morris's trip, 1865-85 (mostly such ephemera). Florence Boos is the author of The Design of William Morris's Earthly Paradise and the forthcoming Love and Work Enough: The Early Writings of William Morris. She is the editor of several of Morris's works, including The Earthly Paradise (2001), and general editor of the Morris Online Edition http://morrisedition.lib.uiowa.edu. [Bill Boos kindly helped with the Icelandic place names.]
RETURN TO NOWHERE: CONCLUDED

George W. J. Duncan

[continued from January 2012 Newsletter]

CHAPTER 18

So, after stowing our bags in the boat, we were off. It was a cool but sunny morning, perfect for going up the river.

The riverbanks were lined with mature trees, and set back some distance from the river's edge was a variety of houses, mostly modest cottages. A few of the houses were larger, and I surmised that they held extended families or groups of people who wished to live together under one roof.

Not long after we started upstream, we observed a small crowd gathered around a pair of old houses in the process of being demolished. The workers were not looking at the buildings themselves, but rather at the ground in front of them. This activity piqued Ellen's interest and we made for the shore, where we found a place to tie up our craft.

We made our way toward the site, where a boy of perhaps fifteen years of age eagerly came up to us to tell us about what was going on.

'Neighbours, you must come see what we've found. Ancient ruins, something really old. Come, come!'

The words “ancient ruins” got Ellen, this community's historian, very excited indeed, and our pace picked up considerably, until we were at the edge of a shallow excavation that had been opened up adjacent to the half-demolished houses. The men and women that had been working on the demolition, and some on-lookers, stood at the edge of the site, talking eagerly amongst themselves.

Right away, Ellen made the observation that what had been exposed were the remnants of a Roman villa, very old, and in part, well-preserved considering the disruption that must have occurred when the pair of houses had been built in Victorian times. The most remarkable aspect of the ruins was a mosaic floor decorated with the figure of a gladiator ringed by a menagerie of African animals. Some of these included a giraffe, a lion, and an elephant.

‘Look here,’ said Ellen, ‘See that big hole near the wall? That’s where someone dug a well. And look over there! You can make out the walls of some of the adjoining rooms. See the door?’


I was familiar with Roman culture and archaeology from visiting museums, and from watching programs on TV. I had a long-standing interest in Roman Britain that began in grades 9 and 10, when I took two years of high school Latin. The first year of the course was based on the daily life of a family from Pompeii, and the second year, a Roman-British family. The mosaic was beautiful, but like most archaeological remains, it was broken up in certain areas, which was a little disappointing. I wondered what the villa would have looked like during the time of the Roman occupation. Based on what we could see, it must have been magnificent. Now, it was only a fragment of a distant past.

Once we had a thorough look at the excavation, it was time to move along, and we returned to our boat. Ellen had been given an excellent drawing of the mosaic floor made by one of the workers, who just happened to be a skilled draftsman. This drawing would become part of the collection at the British Museum when we returned from our excursion. The workers were unsure if the ruins, and the remarkable mosaic, could be adequately protected from the elements, so they suggested that they would likely fill in the excavation after completing the demolition of the more recent buildings.

Our next stop was Hampton Court. I had never actually been to England before this, but I knew of Hampton Court from my reading of *News from Nowhere* and also from a peculiar news story from several years back. There was quite a sensation when a security camera at the Hampton Court Palace had caught what appeared to be a ghostly figure opening an exterior door in a part of the building where nobody was. At the time, it was an unexplained occurrence, but later the ghost was declared a hoax. It was a pretty scary-looking spectre, hoax or not. In any case, the
incident made an impression on me, and probably encouraged more visitors to the historic site.

Our arrival at Hampton Court aligned with the noon hour, and we moored our boat at the smaller of two docks located along this part of the riverbank. Ellen brought out one of the bags she had packed earlier that morning, and proceeded to lay out our lunch on a blanket she had placed on a piece of level ground. She had carefully planned our mid-day meal in advance, taking care to create a picture-perfect picnic lunch. In the sunshine, with the river flowing by and the birds singing joyfully in the trees around us, we ate a variety of cold foods and sipped away a half a bottle of wine. It was idyllic. I couldn't imagine a more perfect day.

We didn't actually venture to the palace itself, as Ellen was not prepared to face Clara that day, which I understood, given the circumstances I learned about the night before. Although it was uncertain whether or not Clara would actually be there, it was decided best not to take the chance.

Chapter 19

Back on board the boat, we continued our journey up the Thames at a leisurely pace, taking in the scenery and savouring all the magnificent summer day had to offer. When we approached Runnymede, Ellen sat fully upright and eagerly pointed to a cottage set back from the river's edge.

We landed at a small dock that aligned with the cottage, and secured the boat. The boat was emptied of its contents, and we brought everything onto the river bank, except the battery, which was left in place. I figured that one charge of the battery provided enough "force" to make one round trip.

Ellen and I picked up the bags and walked up a path that led to the cottage, which was sited on a slight rise overlooking the Thames. As we got closer to our destination, I got a better look at the cottage. It was a one and a half storey, stucco-clad brick building, apparently of some age, with patches of stucco falling away from the underlying red brick, which imparted an artistic character to the place. The gable roof was punctuated with heavy chimneys at both ends, and a pair of dormer windows. The cottage had a beautiful simplicity, a true vernacular building that was in harmony with the landscape within which it had been constructed.

At the front of the cottage, there was a dooryard garden enclosed by a low masonry wall made of reclaimed brick. As I approached a diminutive wooden gate in the wall, I noted that here and there, blocks of carved stone were inlaid into the brick.

Ellen saw me scrutinizing the wall and the artistic fragments within it, and explained, ‘Those are bits of antiquity, carefully saved by my grandfather from the remnants of a medieval building that used to stand near this place. Old Hammond helped him gather the blocks of carved stone, and the old bricks, and put this wall up around his home.’

Inside the garden wall, I found a classic English garden, a riot of plants and colours that at first looked wild and disorganized, but upon closer examination, was a carefully orchestrated jumble of plants. A flagstone walkway led from the gate to the door, which was framed with wooden benches on either side.

The door was painted in a well-weathered coat of grey-blue, and its upper half was glazed with bubbly, hand-blown glass. Ellen opened the door, which of course was not locked (nor did it have anything like a lock to secure it) and we stepped inside a room panelled floor to ceiling with natural oak that had mellowed into a toasty brown patina after many years of exposure to the sun and air. The room was low-ceilinged, with exposed
beams and a flagstone floor. The interior was sparsely furnished, but looked comfortable all the same.

I assisted Ellen with the bags, which we took into a kitchen which was dominated by a wide fireplace, and we unpacked their contents of food and other miscellaneous items we would need for a brief stay. There was a tiny extension off the side wall of the kitchen where we washed up after our journey up the river.

Ellen and I later went into the living room, where I sat on a couch, while she sat cross-legged on the floor, facing me. I told her how much I liked her cottage, and how William Guest’s description had so perfectly captured its essence. I assumed that her grandfather had passed away, since he was not mentioned and there were no articles in the cottage that suggested he still lived there.

This seemed to me like the end of a journey, just like in News from Nowhere when Guest and his companions finally arrive at Kelmscott Manor for the hay-harvest. This thought suddenly filled me with apprehension, and I wondered if I would begin to fade from view without warning, and it all would end. My discomfort prompted me to ask Ellen about how she recalled William Guest’s last few minutes among his new-found friends.

‘I was thinking about William Guest, and how he described his unexpected departure, and I wondered what you might remember,’ I asked.

Ellen thought about my question for a moment, then said to me, ‘It’s a long time ago. Twenty years. Honestly, it’s difficult to remember exactly the way it happened.’

I was sympathetic, but I still needed to know. ‘Well then, tell me anything at all you can think of. I really want to know anything you can tell me. It’s just that I’m worried...’

‘No, I understand completely,’ she quickly interjected, seeing where I was heading with my thoughts. ‘Guest had gone for a swim with Dick just before the hay-harvest feast, and I had gone into the church with Clara to sit with some of our friends that had arrived the day before. I glanced up at the door when I saw Dick come in, and I wondered where Guest was. For a moment I thought I saw him, but then concluded I was mistaken. Dick had no idea where he went, as he was momentarily distracted as he came through the door and saw Clara and me. And that is all I know.’

A silence fell between us, and for some time, there was nothing more to say. I sensed that Ellen had something further to tell me, and she was biding her time, looking for the right moment. Then, she stood up, looked at me with an incredible warmth and caring in her expression, and sat down beside me, taking my hand in hers. Ellen rested her head on my shoulder, and as I gently stroked her hair, I thought to myself that I could do this forever, maybe open a wood shop and build furniture for houses just like this. She sighed softly, and by the sound of her breathing, I could tell she had drifted off to sleep. That’s the last thing I remember of Ellen and Nowhere.

I must have fallen asleep after that, because I dreamt that I was in a boat in the middle of the river, while Ellen stood on the shore, motioning that I should return. The wind was picking up, and the water was getting choppy. Ellen was reaching out for me, at first seeming to be very close, then in the next instant, she was receding away. For some reason, I stood up in the boat, lost my balance, and promptly fell into the water, sinking deep below the surface. When I came back up again, I was awake.

**Chapter 20**

I opened my eyes to the sight of the numbers on my clock radio flashing 12:57. I was holding onto the extra pillow, and in an instant realized that I was back in my own bed. What a dream, I thought. I recalled so much of it. Maybe it was a series of dreams that I had during the night. Maybe the migraine headache, and the medication, had combined to create this extraordinary experience.

Feeling a little disoriented, I got out of bed and went into the kitchen to make some coffee. Fortunately, the power had come back on some time in the night.

When the coffee was done, I sat in front of the TV, watching the news on a morning show. Six NATO troops killed by a roadside bomb in Afghanistan. Partisan politics in Washington and Ottawa threatening the fragile economic recovery. Another shooting in the east end. Man, I thought, this could be an Earthly Paradise, just like Morris had envisioned, if only people could get it together. Like the new society I had been dreaming of.

On the coffee table were the keys to my truck, and beside the keys, my well-worn Penguin Classics edition of News from Nowhere, just where I had left them the night before. Thinking about a passage in the book that was particularly hopeful, I fanned through the pages until I reached the very end of the story. It was the part where William Guest interprets Ellen’s last mournful look as he fades from existence before her very eyes. I smiled to myself as I read the words: “Go on living while you may, striving, with whatsoever pain and labour needs must be, to build up little by little the new day of fellowship, and rest, and happiness.”

I nodded yes to myself as I considered that change sometimes happens slowly, incrementally, and we as individuals can be a catalyst for the transformation of things that seem impossibly entrenched and rigid. Today was going to be a good day.
I sipped my coffee, contemplating again the events I had experienced so convincingly in my dream state, smiling at the memory of all I had seen and done. I felt a kind of happy sadness because I knew what had happened wasn’t real, but at the same time it had filled me with a renewed positive outlook. Then a thought popped into my head, and although it seemed to make no sense at all, I had an impulse to check the pockets of my jeans. I went into the bedroom, picked up my jeans from the floor, and pulled out my wallet, some tissues, some loose change, keys and...there was something else. There was something tangled up with the keys. When I pulled it out, I could hardly believe what I was seeing. It was a tiny brass calliper, a little tarnished, but still...

AFTERWORD: RETURN TO NOWHERE

It was in the year 2000 that I purchased the Penguin Classics edition of *News from Nowhere* and became captivated by Morris’s vision of a future society of fellowship, and rest, and happiness. Later, I attended a book discussion group hosted by the William Morris Society, and the discussion that unfolded at that gathering is reflected in the first chapter of my story, *Return to Nowhere*. No, I didn’t fall asleep after the book discussion group and wake up to find myself in Nowhere, but in my daydreams I tried to imagine the future world as Morris imagined it. What would it be like to visit Nowhere and experience what William Guest experienced?

This imagining planted the seed of *Return to Nowhere*, where the main character lives in the present day, the post-9/11 world of political and economic upheaval, and the age of global warming. After attending a book discussion group, he falls asleep and wakes up in the society that William Morris (in the guise of William Guest) envisioned, 20 years after the time of Guest’s visit in *News from Nowhere*. The year is 2122. When considering the plot of my story, I didn’t want my character to go back to 2102 and meet William Guest. Instead, I thought it would be more interesting for my character to visit some time after that original journey, to see what evidence there was of Guest’s visit, to meet some of the same people he met, and to see what changes had occurred in the new society. The idea was to retrace William Guest’s footsteps, but also to muse about how that society continued to evolve, while contrasting Nowhere with the present-day world.

My idea was to allow the reader to puzzle out whether the main character in *Return to Nowhere* is a time-traveler, or if his visit is perhaps a vision or a dream as it might have been for William Guest in *News from Nowhere*. When Morris wrote his story, the future was an open book as far as the 20th century was concerned, and the historical development of the new society as chronicled by old Hammond could have been an actual possibility. But from a 2012 perspective, we know that history did not unfold as described in *News from Nowhere*, so if my story picks up 20 years after William Guest’s visit, and my character’s historical perspective doesn’t match with the historical development of Nowhere, how can that be? Does Nowhere exist in an alternate universe? Certainly this is a paradox for the reader to ponder. Maybe my character is not visiting a real place at all, but the place of Morris’s imagination.

I’d like to express my appreciation to Florence Boos for her encouragement on this project, and for reviewing the text and offering many helpful suggestions as the story was created chapter by chapter in 2011. Thank you, Florence!

George Duncan

George Duncan is senior heritage planner in Markham, Ontario and an architectural historian interested in the documentation of Ontario’s heritage buildings, local history and cultural landscapes. He has authored several books, including *York County Mouldings from Historic Interiors* (2001) and Thoreau MacDonald’s *Sketches of Rural Ontario* (2004), and has recently published a chap-book concerning Ontario’s vanishing barns, *William Morris and his World*. After learning about Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement, he now sees their influence wherever he goes.

NOTICES

NEW MORRIS INTERVIEW SERIES

Our Media Coordinator Clara Finley has initiated a lively series of interviews with long-time Morris Society members. See “The Morris Interview Series,” No. 1, for an interview with Florence Boos in December 2012; and No. 2, for one with Jack Walsdorf in April 2013. [http://themorrisian.blogspot.com](http://themorrisian.blogspot.com).

NEW: THE WILLIAM MICHAEL ROSSETTI WEBSITE

Chris Manno’s W. M. Rossetti website is now available for researchers at [https://wmrproject.tcu.edu](https://wmrproject.tcu.edu). The site contains 211 articles annotated and arranged for multiple searches, with informative charts which elucidate the subjects and chronology of Rossetti’s critical writings.
**William Morris French Translations Win Prize**

A French publishing company, Les Editions Aux forges de Vulcain, has received the Prix Spécial du Jury du festival Les Imaginales (Festival of Science Fiction) award for its translations of Morris's prose romances: *Le Lac aux îles enchantées* (*The Water of the Wondrous Isles*) and *Le Puits au bout du monde* (*The Well at the World's End*), *Un rêve de John Ball* (*A Dream of John Ball*) and *Le pays creux* (*"The Hollow Land"*), translated by Maxime Massonat. These are the first translations of Morris's romances into French, and two more titles annually until 2022 are planned. See http://auxforgesdevulcain.fr.


**Arts and Crafts Watts Tour**

In association with the Watts Gallery Foundation, Arts and Crafts Tours has arranged for 28 September-5 October visit to places central to the work of George and Mary Watts. To join, contact artsandcraftstrous@gmail.com.

**The C. F. Voysey Society**

The C. F. A. Voysey Society, formed in 2011, announces the advent of its journal, *The Orchard*, edited by George Butlin, editor@voyseysociety.com. An important Arts and Crafts architect, Voysey (1857-1941) is often cited as a link between late 19th century ideas and buildings of the 20th century. He designed a series of country houses, including several in the Lake District and Surrey, which featured rough rendered walls with buttresses and ribbon windows below huge sweeping roofs and chimney stacks. He also designed fabrics, carpets, wallpaper, cutlery and furniture, often featuring his cut-out heart motif. The Royal Institute of British Artists and the Victoria & Albert Museum hold collections of his decorative work.

*The Orchard* is named after the house he built for himself in Chorleywood, Hertfordshire, and includes articles on topics ranging from previously unpublished carpet designs to one of his few non-domestic buildings—the Winsford Cottage Hospital. The Society supports the Winsford Trust in its fight to retain the building for community use.

**British Influence on U. S. Socialism**


**Teaching Materials for U. S. Morris Society Website**

We’re planning a section of the website which would gather teaching materials for presenting aspects of Morris’s life and works at all educational levels. This would house lesson plans, course syllabi, visual displays and links, videos or podcasts, and any other items which might help teachers design classes in Morris and Arts and Crafts related-topics. If you have taught Morris, or have suggestions for this venture, please send these to jmartinek@njcu.edu and Florence-boos@uiowa.edu.

**Morris Online Edition Joins NINES**

The Morris Online Edition has been accepted in entirety into the NINES consortium (nines.org/Networked Interface for nineteenth-century electronic scholarship), a University of Virginia-based organization which provides peer review, data-searching and other forms of access for nineteenth-century scholarly websites. A graduate student in Charlottesville, Virginia has been engaged to prepare the several thousand new files for entrance into the NINES databases. Recent new material on the site includes images of the calligraphic manuscript of Morris’s translation of *Lancelot du Lac* from the Society of Antiquaries and introductions to *News from Nowhere* by Tony Pinkney and *King Florus and the Fair Jehane* by Peter Faulkner.

Editors are still sought for Morris’s *The Glittering Plain*, translation of the *Odyssey*, and for Scandinavian material (*Grettir the Strong, the Volsunga Saga, Three Northern Love Stories*, and notes to *Sigurd*). If you are interested, please write Florence-boos@uiowa.edu.
The wind's on the hills
And the night is cold.
And Thomas' fire still
Twist near and all.
But kind and dear
Is the old house here.
And my heart is warm
Midst winter's harm.

Rest then and rest.
And think of the best.
Twist summer & spring.
When all birds sing
In the town of the tree;
And ye lie in me.
And scarce days move
Least earth & the love
Should fade away
If the full of the day.

I am old & have seen
Many things that have been
Both grief & peace;
And come and increase;
No tale I tell
Of ill & well.
But this I say:
Right fear not, on day
And for worst & best
Fate Right good is rest.