A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

This will be my final letter as president of the William Morris Society in the United States. It has been a privilege to hold this office for the past three years, and a pleasure to serve with the dedicated members of the Society’s governing committee in planning and carrying out our initiatives and activities.

By the time you read this, we shall have had a vote for new members of the governing committee and a new group of officers will be in effect. A ballot was posted on our website and blog in mid-December and members eligible to vote received notices via email or post. The election itself took place at our annual meeting, held on 5 January in conjunction with the Modern Language Association’s annual conference, this year held in Seattle at the Washington Convention Center. As always, the society held two sessions of papers (one in collaboration with SHARP, the Society for the Study of the History of Authorship, Reading, and Publishing). Our “outside” event, which incorporated the Society’s annual meeting and election, was held in a nearby restaurant.

During my tenure the Society had more activities and events than I can summarize here. All—lectures, museum visits, social gatherings, participation in scholarly conferences, the News from Anywhere blog, our Facebook page, the new website—were covered in our newsletters and noted on the internet. Perhaps the most notable event was the conference, “Useful and Beautiful: The Transatlantic Arts of William Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites,” which the Society co-sponsored with the University of Delaware, Winterthur, and the Delaware Art Museum in October 2010. This was a tremendous success, attended by several hundred people. There were talks, panel presentations, exhibitions, receptions, and even a recital of early music. The success of this event was due to the enormous efforts made by many people, although Mark Samuels Lasner must be singled out for his leadership and coordination.

The Society also arranged several special visits to museums. Two were particularly memorable: a 2008 tour of the reopened Pre-Raphaelite galleries at the Delaware Art Museum, led by the museum’s chief curator (and member of our governing committee), Margaretta Frederick, and, early last year, curator Diane Waggoner led a group through The Photographic Lens: British Photography and Painting 1848–1878 at the National Gallery in Washington.

A recent major development was the launching this past year of a vastly improved website, thanks to the efforts of Florence Boos and her professional helper, Karla Tonella. The site now has a much more attractive appearance and conforms to current standards. In addition, the contents were updated and reorganized, navigation tools enhanced, and membership payments and donations via PayPal greatly simplified. Because the UK Society now has their own website, promoting Kelmscott House Museum, the focus of ours—though featuring Morris-related matters worldwide—is now on US events and activities. We also established the News from Anywhere blog and a Facebook page to allow us to communicate with members and other interested parties in a timely way between newsletters.

The make-up of the governing committee changed during my presidency—and will continue to change due to the implementation of a revised election procedure instituted by updated by-laws put into effect in
March 2011. Under the new system, members of the committee may serve only for two consecutive three-year terms, ensuring that new people will be brought on board. To get the elections going properly, current legacy members will be stepping down, three per year until we reach the point of the first election of the committee as a whole, which is to occur in 2014. Speaking of stepping down, let me express my gratitude to Elaine, Ellis, Margaretta Frederick, Frank Sharp, Adrienne Sharpe, Kathleen O’Neil Sims, and Hartley Spatt, former committee members who have all served—generously and collegially—with me during the last decade. I also want to thank those who are continuing on, Florence Boos, Andrea Donovan, James Martinek, Elizabeth Miller, and Mark Samuels Lasner. The committee started meeting via conference call on a monthly basis in addition to our occasional face-to-face meetings. Such regular communication greatly helped us move forward with the website, governance issues, and the Delaware conference.

Our major concerns continue to be—membership and money. Despite a solid increase in new members due, in part, to the “Useful & Beautiful” conference and the more effective presence of the Society on the internet—the total numbers again show a year-to-year decline. Please tell your friends who are interested (I almost wrote “love”) William Morris, his friends and associates among the Pre-Raphaelites; the Arts and Crafts and the Aesthetic movement; and Victorian art, literature, and politics, of the benefits of joining the William Morris Society. To this end we have included with this Newsletter a membership brochure which we hope you will pass along. Note that the cost of membership given on the form is lower than it is now; we will honor the lower dues for anyone who joins using the form found in the brochure. (And let us know if you can use more brochures.)

As for money, well, there is no non-profit that cannot use more of it. The cost of printing and postage keeps rising, especially since our publications are produced in, and shipped from, the UK. There are also the Society’s two Fellowships, the Joseph R. Dunlap Memorial Fellowship and the William Morris Society Fellowship, which have provided support for research and creative works dealing with Morris by recipients in the US and abroad. It is now possible to donate to the Society via our website (www.morrissociety.org) or directly through PayPal (webmaster@morrissociety.org) and every level of help is gratefully welcome.

Again, it has been an honor to serve as the president of the society, and I look forward, with you, to supporting our new elected president and governing committee.

In fellowship. Fran Durako

THE MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION CONVENTION 2013

The January 2013 MLA convention will be held in Boston, and the Society will organize a visit to Boston-area Arts and Crafts sights. Proposals are sought for a panel on “Morris on the East Coast,” a topic which might encompass literary, political, and personal connections as well as art, design, bookmaking, and architecture. These should be sent by 15 March 2012 to Florence Boos, florence-boos@uiowa.edu. We are also applying for a second panel on “Pre-Raphaelitism in Many Media,” with a similar deadline; the exact title of this will be posted on the website.

NEW MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNING COMMITTEE

In October 2011 the governing committee of the Society appointed Andrea Donovan and James Martinek as new members to fill vacancies. Andrea Donovan is the author of William Morris and the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings (2007). She has taught art history and humanities at Minot State University since 2007 and holds a PhD in European and Art History from Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Her degrees include work in painting, design, art education, art history, architectural history and historic preservation, European history, and cultural studies. Jason D. Martinek teaches in the department of history at New Jersey City University, and is the author of “‘The Workingman’s Bible’: Robert Blatchford’s Merrie England, Radical Literacy, and the Making of American Socialism, 1895–1900,” in the Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era (July 2003). He was the recipient of the 2010 Joseph Dunlap Memorial Fellowship. He is currently finishing a book manuscript titled “Reading and Radicalism: Literacy and American Socialists’ Print Culture of Dissent, 1897–1920.”

EXHIBITIONS

The Cult of Beauty: The Victorian Avant-Garde, 1860–1900

Legion of Honor, Art Museums of San Francisco, San Francisco, CA, 18 February–17 June 2012

Already a hit at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and the Musée d’Orsay in Paris, The Cult of Beauty: The Victorian Avant-Garde, 1860–1900 is coming to San Francisco. Here is the press release: “The first major exhibition to explore the unconventional creativity of the British Aesthetic Movement, tracing
the evolution of this movement from a small circle of progressive artists and poets, through the achievements of innovative painters and architects, to its broad impact on fashion and the middle-class home. The superb artworks on view encompass the manifold forms of Victorian material culture: the traditional high art of painting, fashionable trends in architecture and interior decoration, handmade and manufactured furnishings for the ‘artistic’ home, art photography and the new modes of dress. The Cult of Beauty showcases the entirety of the Aesthetic Movement’s output, celebrating the startling beauty and variety of creations by masters as diverse as artists Dante Gabriel Rossetti, James McNeill Whistler, and Edward Burne-Jones and designers E.W. Godwin, William Morris and Christopher Dresser. The Legion of Honor is the only U.S. venue on the world tour that includes the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and the Musée d’Orsay in Paris."

This is a wonderful show, no question. Really a must-see. But a few caveats. First, unlike the Victoria and Albert’s splendid centenary Morris exhibition (1996) there is virtually no mention of Morris’s political activities (indeed his literary work gets scant attention and the connection between Aestheticism, the Arts and Crafts, and socialism is ignored). Second, while there are wonderful images of women, there is very little work by women, a curious oversight given the importance of female creators—and consumers—to the Aesthetic movement. And, finally, we understand that the San Francisco version of the exhibition is somewhat truncated, lacking a number of items displayed in London, including most, if not all, of the books.


Making History: Antiquaries in Britain
Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, CT, 2 February–27 May 2012
An exhibition titled Making History. Antiquaries in Britain might not seem of interest to Morrisians until you discover that this selection from the collections of the Society of Antiquaries of London—the oldest learned organization set up to study the past—emphasizes the William Morris connection. Morris became a Fellow of the Society not long before his death, and, more importantly, the Society has owned Kelmscott Manor and its contents since 1962. The dozen or so objects associated with Morris from the Burlington House and Kelmscott Manor collections include the Acanthus and Vine tapestry; the St. Catherine embroidery made for Red House; Jane Morris’s jewel casket, decorated by D.G. Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal; ceramic tiles illustrating “The Legend of Goode Wimmen” painted by Edward Burne-Jones; original printed blocks engraved for the unrealised illustrated edition of The Earthly Paradise; tools for the Davoes binding of the Kelmscott Chaucer; Morris’s calligraphic manuscript, The Story of the Yngling; and last, but not least, Morris’s original ballot when he was elected a Fellow of the Society. Additional Morris-related items drawn from the Yale Centre for British Art will augment this section of the exhibition.


NEW BOOKS

The Socialist Aesthetics of William Morris by Florence S. Boos
Delivered as a Kelmscott Lecture in 2007, this talk has been expertly typeset by David Gorman for the William Morris Society and is illustrated with photographs of Amiens Cathedral. (William Morris Society, May 2011, $20; copies may be ordered from Kelmscott Bookshop, 34 West 25th Street, Baltimore, MD 21218, [410] 235-6810, info@kelmscottbookshop.com).

The Multifaceted Mr. Morris by Jane Marguerite Tippett
Lead Graffiti, a letterpress studio operated by Ray Nichols and Jill Cypher in Newark, DE, is pleased to announce the publication of The Multifaceted Mr. Morris. This is the catalogue of the Morris exhibition mounted in the Mark Samuels Lasner Collection at the

Socialist Aesthetics & The Shadows of Amiens

Florence S. Boos

The Multifaceted Mr. Morris

by Jane Marguerite Tippett
Lead Graffiti, a letterpress studio operated by Ray Nichols and Jill Cypher in Newark, DE, is pleased to announce the publication of The Multifaceted Mr. Morris. This is the catalogue of the Morris exhibition mounted in the Mark Samuels Lasner Collection at the
University of Delaware for the “Useful & Beautiful” conference held in October 2010. More than 30 books, manuscripts, drawings, and other works are described and an introduction tells the story of how the collector came to collect Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites. The author is a PhD student in Art History at the University of Delaware. Printed letterpress in Caslon type, with eight color plates, 150 copies will be available, 100 in wrappers and 50 specials, signed and bound in cloth. More information: http://leadgraffiti.com.

“WILLIAM MORRIS AND HIS WORLD”; A COURSE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PUGET SOUND
Jaki Nestor and Elisabeth Schyberg

“William Morris and His World” is the title of a fine arts core class taught at the University of Puget Sound by Library Director, Jane Carlin. First taught by Carlin and art history professor Cindy Damschroder as an honors special topics seminar, the class was recently adapted to reflect Morris’s influence in the Pacific Northwest and also to showcase how his ideas have transferred to the present day by showcasing local artists and architects.

The course focused first on William Morris and then spread outwards to the fine web of art and history that surrounded Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement. Highlighted were the history and motives of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the diffusion of the Arts and Crafts to America through the efforts of Elbert Hubbard. Nevertheless, William Morris is the headline to this course, and it has been exciting to see all the modern day results of his design influence. Mediums such as textiles and architecture still exhibit many of the characteristics of design that Morris advocated.

The professor, Jane Carlin, a self-professed Morris enthusiast, created this course with as many hands-on learning opportunities as possible. Between guest lectures, assignments in exploring Tacoma, and in-depth exhibits, this class had so much to offer. In addition to all of this, this course included a collaboration with another neighboring college, Pacific Lutheran University (PLU), in order to create a book that reflects Arts and Crafts aesthetics. By conducting meetings with the Art of the Book class from PLUS, we created a book of our own making. This task embodied the heart of the course as it required craftsmen, or in our case, craftsmen-in-training, to collaborate and produce an object of beauty and function.

One of the many opportunities presented was a guest lecture by Jack Walsdorf, a Morris enthusiast and ardent collector of all things Morris and Kelmscott. On Wednesday, 22 September, Walsdorf gave a presentation connected with William Morris and the Art of the Book, the exhibition of a portion of his collection held 26 August–14 October 2011 at the Collins Memorial Library. He then came to speak in our class, this time specifically about William Morris and Elbert Hubbard and the Arts and Crafts movement in America. During his public lecture, Walsdorf chronicled his adventures as a collector, explaining how his “love affair” with Morris was ignited while working as a librarian in Oxford amidst the many antiquarian booksellers and fine presses that abound in that area. After one year of book collecting in Oxford, Walsdorf had accumulated many volumes. Walsdorf calculates that he has collected thousands of books throughout his lifetime, to the extent that there have been repeated sales of his collections as they became too large. Always, he remarked, he was drawn to what he called “the vice of book collecting” even when his house became structurally unsound from the number of books in his library. In class, Walsdorf gave an informative talk about “the finest American imitator of William Morris,” Elbert Hubbard, whom he remarked was “influential in the development of book collecting” as a pastime. Walsdorf brought along from his collection a number of Roycroft works, which he gave the class an opportunity to examine.

None of us knew anything about William Morris before taking this class, from which we have learned so many fascinating and inspiring things. My favorite aspect of the course was discovering how widespread Morris’s influence is on the world of architecture, books, art, and design. I have loved learning about the holistic approach Morris advocated for the creation of all kinds of arts, and this study has further inspired me to learn about the Kelmscott Press’s impact on modern fine printing. Not only did we receive a historical approach to Morris’ world, but we supplemented this with study of the social conditions and artistic perspectives
Jack Walsdorf (right) and fellow Morris scholar Robert L. M. Coupe (left) admiring some of the Morris works from Walsdorf’s collection in the University of Puget Sound Collins Memorial Library.

Jack Walsdorf in the classroom addressing students in the “William Morris and His World” class.
of the time, and the way in which Morris' philosophies continue to resonate throughout the design world. As a student working towards the goal of becoming an editor for a publishing company, I fell in love with this course. When the school year started off I had no clue who William Morris was, and the only thing I understood was that the class had something to do with Arts and Crafts. Since then I found myself often absorbing the ideologies of William Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites into my daily life. Instead of simply publishing books, I want to publish an experience. Just as William Morris advocated a return to the appreciation of nature in its purest form and a return to the craftsmanship, I want to advocate for the printed book.

For more information about the “William Morris and his World” course, see: www.pugetsound.edu/news-and-events/campus-news/details/891.

Jaki Nestor is a sophomore at the University of Puget Sound majoring in English with a minor in Classics. She is the business manager for the Puget Sound student newspaper, The Trail, and is also a Hall of Residence advisor. Jaki plans to study abroad in Oxford next year, perhaps retracing William Morris's steps! This class was their first introduction to William Morris.

SEARCHING FOR A FAMOUS BOOK: A CENSUS OF THE KELMSCOTT PRESS CHAUCER
Sylvia Holton Peterson & William S. Peterson


Bill began by offering a brief account of the history of the production of the Kelmscott Chaucer. Morris, he said, was convinced that the printing of books had deteriorated badly in the nineteenth century, partly because of the growing industrialization of what had once been a small-scale craft, and his major concern therefore was aesthetic. He wanted books to be beautiful again. His attempt to revive the arts of the book was based, in the first place, on a careful study of the work of early printers and an investigation of the fundamental materials and techniques of the craft. By the early 1890s, in a series of lectures and essays, he was able to outline a set of radical proposals intended to alter drastically the appearance of the nineteenth-century printed book.

The most ambitious volume that he envisioned for the Kelmscott Press was an edition of Chaucer’s works, with the types and ornaments to be designed by Morris and a series of eighty-seven wood-engravings to be furnished by Sir Edward Burne-Jones. In fact, the Kelmscott Chaucer was the first edition of Chaucer to offer a comprehensive scheme of illustration for all of the Canterbury Tales, since previous versions had been mostly content to repeat the pattern of the earliest manuscripts: images of the individual pilgrims, all on horseback, and a group portrait of them seated at a large round table in the Tabard Inn. Burne-Jones employed none of these conventions. His Chaucer looks rather world-weary and depleted, and Burne-Jones illustrated only those tales that reinforced his own vision of Chaucer as a poet of courtly love and sophisticated teller of French and Italianate stories—not, let it be noted, the sturdy medieval bard that Morris found in the Canterbury Tales. Chaucer’s tales of bawdy realism Burne-Jones passed over in silence.

Even apart from its sheer size and complex scheme of illustration, there were several major obstacles to the completion of the Kelmscott Chaucer. Burne-Jones, for example, created a series of delicate pencil sketches for his designs that could not be easily translated into the bold strokes required for a medieval-looking engraving, and a young Birmingham artist, Robert Catter-son-Smith, had to redraw the designs for that purpose. And then in the spring of 1893 there was a serious crisis in the book’s production when yellow stains began to appear on the sheets that had already been printed. Morris eventually concluded that the stains were caused by an inferior English ink that he had been using, and he turned in desperation to a German ink manufacturer, Gebruder Jänecke of Hanover. In August, Morris declared triumphantly, “The Hannover ink was tried on Friday and worked well: I shall use no other now.” Finally, there was a prolonged effort, ultimately successful, to persuade the Clarendon Press to allow Morris to use the text of Skeat’s new scholarly edition of Chaucer.

At last, the Kelmscott Chaucer was triumphantly published in June 1896. “It should have come out when Morris and I were at Oxford in our first term,” Burne-Jones remarked, “and we should have lost our senses with bliss.” Instead it came at the end of Morris’s life, when he was able to pour into this single volume all his bibliophilic passion and his unmatched skill as a designer of ornaments.

Sylvia provided more personal background for the subject. She discussed how she and Bill decided on the subject of their joint project and outlined the steps they took in trying to locate the vellum copies (13 were
assumed at the beginning of the project, but they later found 15 and the 425 paper copies. All in all, before their deadline of 31 December 2010, they found approximately two-thirds of the copies. The most copies, 172, are in the US; 60 are in the UK, and 18 were located in Japan.

Sylvia also talked about her invaluable e-mail contacts with special collection librarians all over the world, their travel to libraries and private collections to examine particularly interesting copies of the book, and their interest in recognizing the many binders of the book. But the individual history of each copy of the book lies in the owners and in the possibility of tracing a succession of owners. It is certainly not possible to reconstruct the ownership history for every copy, but with the help of auction and bookseller records, library and owners’ records, one can learn a great deal.

Because a census such as this one is never final, the Petersons have begun a blog (kelmscottchaucer.wordpress.com) on which they are able to record information about copies of the Chaucer as they are discovered or as they come up for sale.

After the talk, the audience had the opportunity of examining the Library’s three copies of the Kelmscott Chaucer: a vellum copy in a quarter-linen binding, with bookplates of Cortlandt F. Bishop and Lessing Rosenwald; a paper copy in the Doves binding with bookplates of Carl Edelheim and Lessing Rosenwald, and another paper copy rebound by Don Etherington in 1977.


THE ART OF THE BRIDWELL LIBRARY KELMSCOTT CHAUCER
Stephanie A. Amsel

W. B. Yeats proclaimed of the Kelmscott Chaucer: “To me it is the most beautiful of all printed books.”

I first saw a Kelmscott Chaucer in the Rare Books reading room of the New York Public Library. When I opened to the title-page, the curator gently but firmly squeezed my shoulder, and kindly asked me to please push my chair back so my tears wouldn’t soil the pages.

The Kelmscott Chaucer is indeed a beautiful work of art, which is exactly what William Morris predicted it would be. Morris said that he began to print books “with the hope of producing some which would have a definite claim to beauty, while at the same time they should be easy to read and should not dazzle the eye, or trouble the intellect of the reader by eccentricity of form in the letters.”

Although Morris was a Victorian, at heart he was a medievalist. He loved medieval thought and art. Morris was convinced that “only by rediscovering the older traditions could the Victorian artist reunite labor and pleasure.” Even though he railed against the invention of printing, and machines in general, he created a press that produced lasting works of art by enhancing the fine art of printing that began with Gutenberg. He became interested in the printing and binding of fine books, and was influenced by medieval illuminated manuscripts of the fourteenth century and the work of early printers, including Caxton. Morris believed that medieval illuminated manuscripts represented the “craftsmanship of the Middle Ages at the very highest level,” and that these manuscripts were superior to the printed book as an artistic medium for conveying text, decoration, and illustration.

In August 1894, Morris wrote that he was “publishing a Chaucer which was being printed at the Kelmscott Press and will be ornamented with pictures designed by Sir Edward Burne-Jones and borders, etc, by myself.” The Kelmscott Chaucer is the most famous of Morris’s printed works and occupied much of his time during the last six years of his life. The Chaucer was the culmination of the shared aesthetic and artistic collaboration between Morris and Burne-Jones, which spanned nearly forty years.

There are in all four copies of the Kelmscott Chaucer housed at the Bridwell Library at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas—three copies printed on paper and one copy printed on vellum. One of the paper copies I find particularly appealing. It is a copy printed on paper, bound in full pigskin, tooled and stamped with oak leaves, floral designs, and tree branches, by the Doves Bindery. (The Doves binding is based on a binding by Ulrich Schreier of Salzburg [1478] found on a book Morris owned.) Understood to be one of two early copies made ready for Morris and Burne-Jones on 2 June 1896, it bears a touching inscription from Burne-Jones to his daughter, Margaret Mackail, the words accompanied by a swirling decoration of leaves and branches in black ink.

There is a noticeable difference between this and the other copies printed on paper and the copy printed on vellum. The ink soaks into the paper, leaving a richer look and feel, one that is not as glossy or shiny black as the vellum copy. According to Eric White, the curator at the Bridwell Library, the vellum often cockles and retains moisture in ways that may not be found in the paper copies. All copies of the Kelmscott Chaucer...
were printed in red and black and contain 87 woodcut illustrations by Burne-Jones. Over the many years the *Chaucer* was in production Morris designed a decorative title-page, 14 large borders, 18 different frames for the illustrations, and 26 large initial words, plus many decorated initials, some that he had used in earlier books.

Accompanying the *Chaucer* given by Burne-Jones to his daughter is a box that includes items formerly preserved with the book: letters, manuscript notes, drawings, and proofs for the illustrations. Of special interest are the original designs for borders by Morris. These have a bluish hue, due to the use of Chinese white with the heavy black ink to create the rhythmic, writhing, bold designs for the final borders. Also included in the box is a whimsical drawing by Burne-Jones showing Chaucer hugging the two artists and declaring “Bless ye my children” to Morris and Burne-Jones, who look more like sheepish young men than old men who had just completed a work that represented a life-long journey for beauty and perfection.

Colin Franklin, one of the world’s leading experts on Morris and the fine press movement, was the bookseller who provided Bridwell Library with many of its finest books. It was from Franklin that the library purchased another notable copy of the Kelmscott *Chaucer*—the copy printed on vellum, inscribed by Morris to Burne-Jones just days before he died. The shaky handwriting indicates how frail Morris was.

Franklin, who felt that the vellum copy of the Kelmscott *Chaucer* was one of the greatest books ever made and that a “great library must ever live and grow,” did not underestimate the significance of the Bridwell Library’s fine press holdings. After arranging the sale of the *Chaucer*, he declared that the collection was now worthy of “the proudest boast in literary history, those last two lines of Shakespeare’s eighteenth sonnet:

So long as men can breathe or eyes can see.  
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.”

The exquisite paper and vellum Kelmscott *Chaucer* editions breathe life into a beautiful and stunning collection, providing lasting joy to the students, scholars, and patrons who visit and use the Bridwell Library.

4. Peterson, 47.
5. Peterson, 238.
7. Peterson, 244.

Stephanie A. Amsel holds a PhD in English literature from the University of Texas at San Antonio. She lives in Dallas, Texas and teaches rhetoric and composition courses, focusing on medieval texts, at Southern Methodist University.

Edward Burne-Jones, *Bless Ye My Children*, ink, May 1896, and inscription by William Morris in a copy of the Kelmscott *Chaucer* (Bridwell Library, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University)
RETURN TO NOWHERE: REVISITING MORRIS’S UTOPIAN ROMANCE

George W. J. Duncan

I was the odd man out in a gathering of university students, intellectuals, professors and moneyed matrons in the program room of a west-end library. A circle of mismatched mission oak and moulded plastic chairs was arranged in the centre of an oak-panelled reading room on the second floor of the Runnymede branch, a neighbourhood library of the old style built in 1922. I had chosen to sit in one of the mission style chairs, which I admired for its design and antique status, but didn’t appreciate for its lack of comfort.

On this particular evening in late June, the library’s book discussion group had chosen to discuss William Morris’s utopian romance, News from Nowhere, a book that I had read and enjoyed while I commuted to my previous job by public transit in 2000. That was before the world had been turned on its end with millennial terrorist attacks, environmental catastrophes and an economic meltdown. At that time, the 2000s held so much promise, and one could imagine a future society that might embody some of the best of Morris’s vision. How far from utopia we were to find ourselves, only a short time later.

One of my friends had told me about the book group’s plan to discuss News from Nowhere, and I decided to drive across town after work on a Thursday evening to take part. I had experienced a somewhat difficult day filled with some unexpected snags and one lengthy, unscheduled meeting that caused me to have an improvised lunch well past the time when I usually had my mid-day meal. The result was the beginnings of a searing migraine headache. Nevertheless, my anticipation of the book group discussion spurred me on to make the journey through the tangle of late afternoon rush-hour traffic. If only I had some pain killers.

Not knowing any members of the group, I felt a little awkward and kept to myself. I sat a small distance apart from a group of fiftyish women who were focused on their conversation about how they planned to spend their summer. One of them was in the process of building a cottage in Muskoka, and was obsessing about whether or not the wooden beams and ceiling of the great room should be stained white or left in their natural state. Her friends had differing opinions, of course, but in the end the woman decided she was right and that white stain was the only way to go.

Everyone looked up when a professorial gentleman strode into the room and wished the group a good evening. He was dressed in earth-toned Harris Tweed and sported mock tortoise-shell glasses and a trim moustache and beard. With a look of satisfaction at the size of the gathering, the man, who was obviously the group leader, introduced himself.

“Good evening, all. For any of you who may not already know me, my name is Richard Rawcliffe. I’m facilitating this evening’s discussion of News from Nowhere.”

When I said earlier that I was the odd man out, it was not only because I wasn’t a regular member of the book discussion group, or that I lived in the east end of the city. It was rather that I wasn’t a scholar or academic but a carpenter and custom furniture builder. What had brought me to Morris was my interest in the furniture and architecture of the Arts and Crafts Movement of the late 19th and early twentieth centuries. At least in my blue jeans and western-style cotton shirt I looked a bit like a some of the others in the circle around my age.

One of the younger people in the crowd, an attractive girl with long, chestnut brown hair whom I assumed was a student, asked the group leader about his latest research on Pre-Raphaelite poetry.

“Dr. Rawcliffe, are you any closer to publishing? I’ve been looking forward to reading about your research on the Pre-Raphaelite poets of eastern Canada.” When I looked over at her, she gave me a tiny smile of acknowledgement.

“Richard—please—just Richard,” he said. “Thanks for asking, Deborah. I’m working on the notes just now. The article won’t likely be published till next spring. It’s been interesting. I think you’ll like what you read.”

Dr. Rawcliffe opened the discussion by asking if everyone had read the book. There was a general agreement that all those present had indeed read News from Nowhere. Next he asked, “Well, what did you think of it?”

The older crowd seemed to enjoy the book more that the younger members of the group. Some of those under 30 found the book naive and simplistic when it came to serious matters such as crime and punishment and education. How Morris viewed the role of some of the women in the new society was found to be offensive by those with strong feminist views.

People described their favourite characters and why they felt the way they did about them. At last I gathered the nerve to speak up after a few others had said what they wanted to say.

“I liked the grumbler,” I said. “He was an interesting character because he didn’t completely buy into the new society. He plainly found it boring.”

As I elaborated on my point, Dr. Rawcliffe and some of the others nodded in agreement. I caught a glimpse...
of Deborah looking at me, sizing me up. Maybe I was impressing her with my insight.

There was much discussion around some of the themes in the book, and about a number of the actual places that Morris described as William Guest explored the landscape of his England reborn. The question of the relevance of *News from Nowhere* to the contemporary world was knocked around for some time, and there was a general agreement amongst most of the participants that Morris was writing about a sustainable society that was in harmony with the planet, rather than at odds with it. Yes, *News from Nowhere* had some definite value to modern readers, in spite of some of its viewpoints that didn’t quite mesh with today’s attitudes.

While caught up in the animated discussion of the book group, I had downplayed the effect of my migraine. With the evening wrapping up, the pain came back to the forefront of my attention, and I thought about heading home. I noticed Deborah talking to the Prof. and when it looked as though she was ready to move on, I approached her and found her willing to talk to a stranger. “I’m an English major at the U. of T.,” she told me. “This book group really inspires me. Have you been to a book group meeting sometime?”

I replied that I hadn’t been to this particular book discussion group before, and that I didn’t live nearby. I explained that I was a carpenter and furniture builder with an interest in Morris, and that I had gone to school in Montreal. My field was geography, but somehow I had ended up working with my hands, running a small business. She was impressed that I had an intellect as well as talent as a craftsman, not unlike William Morris himself.

When our conversation started to trail off, I told Deborah that it was nice to meet her, but that I had to get home as it was a bit of a long drive to back to Scarborough. She reciprocated by saying it was good talking to me, and that maybe she’d see me at another book group meeting sometime.

I drove home in the warm June evening air, my head pounding but at the same time filled with thoughts of Morris’s utopia, and brown-haired Deborah. When I returned to my apartment, I had a bite to eat and took some painkillers with codeine before I got into bed and settled under the covers. As I drifted off to sleep I imagined what life would be like living in that world of Clara, Dick, the grumbler and Ellen.

I awoke to brilliant sunshine and birdsong, in a room that was not my own. To my right, a leaded casement window stood slightly ajar, and I could just see the dappled green of trees in early summer leaf in the background. I was lying in a four-poster bed with turned and carved posts in some dark, exotic wood, comfortably nestled in a luxuriant mound of soft blankets and pillows. The bed had a canopy and curtains of rich, colourful tapestry. I was dreaming.

Ahead in my view was a small fireplace bordered in smooth stone, with a stone mantel shelf supported on scroll-shaped brackets. To my left was a simple but substantial dresser with a door next to it that I assumed led to either a bathroom or a closet. I thought to myself that this must be a castle or some English great house, probably inspired by the book group’s discussion of some of the places in *News from Nowhere*.

Then it occurred to me that although I was dreaming, I seemed to have all my wakeful faculties about me, which was not the way this usually worked. If I were dreaming, it was strange that I knew that, as if I was dreaming about having a dream.

My headache was gone, and I felt pretty well rested. The pale yellow walls of the room enhanced the brightness of the morning sun, and I decided that I was meant to get up and go on with the day my subconscious mind had intended to show me.

At this point, I accepted that I was dreaming, which was the only thing that made sense. I had no choice but to go with it, or hope that I would wake up soon. It was odd to have choices under these circumstances, and I was somewhat disoriented, to say the least.

I got out of bed and found my clothes neatly arranged on a cane-seated chair. I had no recollection of how I had arrived in this room, or in this old-fashioned bed for that matter. As I buttoned my shirt, I heard the sound of footsteps outside the door and a woman’s voice calling out, “Time to wake up, time to wake up! Breakfast is served in the dining hall, and it’s not getting any warmer!”

With the realization that I would have to confront other people outside of the safe haven of my bedroom, the dream began to take on another dimension. All of a sudden I was not so confident. What if things took an abrupt turn and I was in some kind of nightmare in a haunted castle, or in an isolated country mansion being terrorized by a crazed killer?

When this line of thinking didn’t have the effect of jarring me awake, I waited until the woman passed by, then gently opened the heavy oak door. It moved easily on well-oiled hinges that were made of wrought iron in a medieval style. There was a long hallway with many
similar doors on either side, looking somewhat institutional, something like a building at a university.

Up ahead was a break in the wall, on the left side, that appeared to open into another, larger space. I ventured into the hallway in that direction, and for the first time heard the sound of many voices, male and female, and the clinking of plates and cutlery. Breakfast. And I was hungry.

As I passed by one of the doors, it opened and out walked a beautiful young woman who instantly reminded me of Deborah, the university student I had met the previous evening. I stopped and looked at her. She had long, straight brown hair and stunning blue eyes that echoed the blue of the dress she wore. The dress was intricately embroidered around the neckline and sleeves.

I spoke to her in a tentative tone, “Deborah?” It made sense to me that my dream would be populated with familiar faces. She regarded me with a kindly, warm expression.

“Caroline,” the woman said. “You must be confusing me with someone else. But who are you?”

I thought for a second, then responded, “George. I’m George. I’m a visitor here.”

Caroline looked me in the eye, and in a matter-of-fact tone said, “Well, we both have that in common then. Let’s get some breakfast before it’s all gone,” she laughed, and we went into the dining hall, walking arm-in-arm.


3

We walked into a good-sized dining hall with wood-panelled walls and an open ceiling that showed off substantial roof trusses and a wooden plank ceiling above. Just like William Guest described when he wrote about the hall at the Hammersmith Guest House. The walls above the panelling were finished in red brick. The floor was made up of patterned, polished stone, arranged in a geometric mosaic design. A few of the stones were covered with the coiled shells of tiny ammonite fossils, which I later learned was a rare type found in a small Somerset village called Marston Magna.

On the outside wall were four tall windows divided by moulded stone mullions and principally glazed with clear leaded glass. In the centre of each window was a stained glass panel depicting different grains and vegetables: wheat, oats, apples and grapes.

On an end wall there was an enormous fireplace, with an opening perhaps eight feet wide, large enough for a person to stand in. The cut stone lintel of the fireplace was carved with sheaves of wheat, and in old Roman letters, the words “PLENTY FOR ALL.” I looked around for the inscription about the lecture room of the Hammersmith Socialists, but could not see it. Maybe I would find it later.

A group of men and women were gathered at a long trestle table in front of one of the windows, seated on stout wooden benches. I really felt as though I was back in school in Ste. Anne de Bellevue, about to have a meal in the venerable dining room of Stewart Hall.

The people looked to me like they were actors in a theatre production, taking a break before the dress rehearsal for a performance of a Shakespearean play. The men wore what looked like longish, untucked shirts, mostly in earth tones, and were girdled with wide leather belts. They wore their hair long, but tied back, and they had close-fitting pants. On their feet, they had sturdy leather sandals or low leather boots.

The women also wore their hair long, but kept it loose. They wore bright coloured, medium length dresses in some kind of light material, either with sleeves or not. The dresses were loose and airy. A couple of the women, like Caroline, went barefoot (when indoors I presumed), while the others wore light sandals.

A man with dark coloured hair spoke up first: “Caroline, nice to see you up and about so early on this fine sunny day. I know how you artists like to stay up late and sleep in to make up for it. And look, you’ve brought a guest,” he observed, and continued, “Welcome. Please sit and join us. I see you are a traveller.”

I thought it appropriate to respond, saying, “Thank you and good morning. Yes, I am a traveller. I’m from Canada.” As I spoke I recalled the dilemma faced by William Guest when asked about where he was from. Like Guest, I didn’t want to answer in a way that would reveal just how far from home I really was.

The same man, who later introduced himself as Andrew, then responded, “But you aren’t speaking French. I understand that the people of Canada are francophones.”

“I guess not everyone. I mean, I speak a little high school French,” I said, which precipitated a confused look from the dark-haired man and some of the others. At that moment I realized I misspoke. Remembering William Guest’s commentary on education, I recalled that the future society didn’t have high schools, or any other formal schools for that matter.

I was sitting between Caroline and the man who had been addressing me. The table was set with grey-blue glazed earthenware plates, obviously made in a pottery studio rather than mass produced. Each plate had a slightly different floral pattern in its border. There were solid-looking mugs, most filled with coffee, similarly decorated. In the centre of the table was a large glass bowl of apples. The bowl was made of bubbly, clear glass with a pale blue-green tint. Serving bowls and
platters contained generous amounts of bacon, scrambled eggs, plain and toasted bread slices, and other types of fruit.

A fair-haired woman in an oatmeal-coloured dress was the next to speak, asking me about my journey. She wore a pendant on a fine silver chain that appeared to be an antique Roman coin. I was trying to be careful not to become entangled in a story that would not add up for my new friends, and I focussed on the coin while I thought for a moment before speaking up.

“Do any of you remember another visitor at the Guest House, a man named William Guest?” There was some recognition of the name by a couple of the people around the table, so I continued: “Well, I am following in his footsteps, hoping to see something of your country and learn about your customs. You see, when Guest returned home, he wrote a book about his visit here, and the people he met.”

At that point, a tall woman who seemed a little older than the people I was seated with came over to the table and said, “The Guest. Yes, I remember him. His clothes were odd, very unlike our custom. He told us he was a great traveller, and we found much of what he said puzzling, I must say.”

Caroline asked, “Do you know this man, this William Guest?”

“Oh no, I don’t know him. He wrote his book many years before I was—that is many years before I found a copy to read.” After that, I decided it was time that I should introduce myself.

“Although I too am a guest, please feel free to call me George.” For some reason everyone chuckled at this comment, perhaps out of some level of discomfort, and nodded their agreement.

The older woman, who was now standing behind me with her hands resting on my shoulders, spoke up. “That’s enough questions for now, neighbours. Time for our guest to have some breakfast.”

I knew the point that I was dreaming. In truth I didn’t really know what I was doing, or how this was happening to me. I was caught up in the way the experience or the story was unfolding, and didn’t have a lot of time to analyse it. Dreams don’t always make sense.

I enjoyed a fine meal with my new-found friends, and was thankful that people were mainly occupied with eating their breakfast instead of focussing on me. The coffee was particularly helpful to me in starting my day, and I ate very well indeed, until I was content.

It wasn’t long before the conversation turned back to me. As a stranger in the midst of a group of people who obviously knew each other very well, it was natural that I would be the focus of attention. The woman who had come to my rescue earlier now thought it appropriate to continue where we had left off.

“Some of us, that is, those of us who met the Guest all those years ago, have wondered what became of him. You see, after he left the Guest House, he journeyed up the Thames with a couple of our people, and simply disappeared.”

The older woman continued: “If you’ve read the account of his visit, perhaps you might have noticed if he mentioned Annie. I’m one of the first to have met him after his arrival at the Hammersmith Guest House.”

So this was Annie. Still at the Guest House after all this time. “Yes, William Guest mentioned you in his book, and wrote very kindly of you. He appreciated everything you did to make him feel welcome.”

Annie seemed pleased with my response. I wanted to ensure that people asked about William Guest rather than me. I really had no explanation to give them about how I had arrived in their midst.

“But to answer your first question, what I can tell you for certain is that Guest returned home after his visit here, which we know because he wrote his book about his visit. He called his book *News from Nowhere*. It was quite popular and became influential in the development of social and economic reform, and spawned the Arts and Crafts movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.”

The man sitting at the end of the table, to my right, expressed interest in my answer and asked “Guest—or rather, George, if I may, are you a scholar? When you spoke of the Arts and Crafts movement just now you reminded me of one of our old friends, now gone. Old Hammond. He was the keeper of our history, a really fine fellow. He was very interested in movements and old books and the like.”

“Yes, William Guest wrote much about old Hammond. They spent a lot of time together, talking about how things came to be in your society and how you live your lives. He found what Hammond had to say very interesting because he had come from such a different place. But no, I myself am not a scholar. I am, however, interested in history. Anyway, just how long has it been since William Guest’s visit?”

Annie replied: “Let me think now,” she said as she looked intently at the man who had asked me if I was a scholar. “I’d say it was twenty years ago this month, is that not right, Robert?”

This was Robert, or Bob, the weaver. The man who had changed places with Dick so he could act as William Guest’s tour guide. I was meeting some of the same people that Guest had met. Much time had passed since then. What might have changed since then, I wondered. And what of Ellen?

Bob asked about what *News from Nowhere* said about Guest’s disappearance.
"That part of the book, near the end, takes place in Oxfordshire, at the beginning of the hay harvest. On the evening of Guest’s arrival in the company of Dick, Clara and Ellen, he bathed before the evening feast. After bathing, he followed Dick into the old church that had been set up as a banquet hall."

All eyes were on me as I continued on with my story. None of the others spoke as they wondered what I would say next.

"As Guest stepped over the threshold into the church, he realized that no one could see or hear him, as if he was a spirit or had somehow been rendered invisible. When he caught sight of Ellen seated at one of the tables, he thought she was able to glimpse him for a moment, but then it was if he was never there."

"Feeling quite dejected, Guest turned and went out of the church, walking along a nearby road. Dark clouds rolled in, and the next thing he knew, he woke up in his home in Hammersmith, apparently having dreamt the whole thing."

Bob responded, "That can’t be exactly how it happened. People don’t just disappear. Perhaps Guest was using some literary device to make his departure more mysterious or dramatic. He certainly was not a ghost, but a man of flesh and blood."

"Well, that’s what the book says. I can’t think of an explanation. All I can tell you is that according to what William Guest wrote, one moment he was here, and suddenly he was not."

There was some murmuring among my breakfast companions. They were clearly confused about what I had told them, and were suggesting to each other some more plausible alternatives. Caroline, who had not said much during the meal, turned to me and asked if I found William Guest’s story strange.

I told her that I supposed I did find the story strange, but as I didn’t know William Guest I could never know for certain what had happened to him. What I didn’t say was that my unexpected arrival in Nowhere made no more sense than William Guest’s disappearance before the hay harvest feast.

5

“So then, since you have travelled so far to see our fair country, and now that we have breakfasted so well, shall I take you on a bit of a tour?”, Andrew offered.

"By all means, yes, there are many things I’d like to see while I’m here. Yes, thank you," I responded.

I stood up and thanked everyone for welcoming me, and expressed my appreciation to Annie and the others who had assisted in the preparation of the excellent meal. Bob the weaver, it turned out, was a talented cook and had personally baked the delicious loaves of hearty bread. He was quick to take credit for his work and accept the praise I offered.

I turned to Caroline and shook her hand while I expressed my pleasure in meeting her, and also thanked her for inviting me to breakfast. She responded with an affectionate kiss on my cheek and quietly said, “I hope you have a good day seeing all the things you’ve come to see. Do come back later and join us for dinner. I wouldn’t want to miss you.”

Andrew and I left the dining hall and walked out of the front door of the Guest House into the sunshine of a glorious early summer day. A few people were about this morning, dressed in a similar manner to those in the Guest House, but naturally with some differences as to colours, patterns and other adornments. As described by William Guest, these were a good-looking people, fair of face, physically fit and careful about their appearance. However, unlike the descriptions in News from Nowhere, diverse cultures were represented.

Across the road was the broad expanse of the Thames. The river was lined with shade trees and flower gardens, and off in the distance I could see small sailboats out on the water and the stone bridge mentioned by Guest in his narrative. Again I heard the birdsong, then noted the absence of noise. No cars, no airplanes, no ringing of cell phones.

We walked a short distance down the river road until we reached a handsome red brick stable. The proprietor came out of one of several arched doorways to give us a hearty greeting. He must have known my companion very well, as he gave him a robust hug.

“Andrew, looking for some transportation on this fine day?” Not waiting for an answer, he added, "And who is this? A traveller in our midst I’d say, by the cut of your clothes. Welcome! Welcome!"

A light buggy and a lively, dark brown horse were provided to us, and soon we were on our way to the local market square.

As we clip-clopped along at a leisurely pace, we passed many attractive red brick and half-timbered buildings that were evocative of medieval architecture, but not pure copies of that mode of building. More like an interpretation of traditional, home-grown forms. London was built up and urban, but there was plenty of greenspace as a backdrop for the city. The area where we were was chiefly residential, and none of the dwellings were particularly large. The Hammersmith Guest House was the most substantial structure I had seen so far.

We had only gone along the road for ten minutes or so when Andrew looked at some people seated in front of a small cafe. His expression was one of disgust, the first instance of any negativity I had detected so far among these generally positive people.

"Refusers. I have no use for the likes of them. How can someone not want to work? How can they be happy?"
I thought it appropriate to ask him about the “refusers” since this was clearly a point of concern in the new society.

“From William Guest’s description of your society, it seemed that all of your citizens willingly make a contribution to the well-being of everyone; that to work is the natural order of things. Since working has apparently become a pleasure for all of you, not to work would seem like a bad thing.”

“This is a recent development for us. About a year ago, a small group of people realized that if they did nothing, they could still enjoy the benefits of our way of life. That is, once they got past thoughts of guilt or responsibility.”

Andrew went on, “Some of us thought that maybe these neighbours had read about the aristocracy of the past, or about the class of people who produced nothing but were somehow tolerated in those far-away days. The people who called themselves lawyers, consultants, and chief executive officers, among other things. Or maybe the refusers just happened upon the idea of laziness on their own. I don’t fully know.”

I knew all about lawyers and CEOs. I too was angry when the heads of large corporations had received substantial bonuses during the recent economic crisis, even though their poor management had directly resulted in so much hardship for so many people. It seemed so inappropriate to receive a bonus for poor or indifferent performance, when they hadn’t earned it.

I asked him about what was being done about the “refusers.” From the description of crime and punishment in News from Nowhere, I understood that this society relied on people’s consciences to compel them toward desirable behaviour.

“So what is to be done about these people? They are not making a contribution, and that is obviously of great concern to you, as you feel so strongly about it.” Andrew was looking at me with a serious expression, expectant upon my next words. “I imagine you wouldn’t want to have more of their kind, for other people to get the idea that they can do nothing and reap all the benefits.”

Andrew nodded his agreement, and said, “At the moment, we are holding out some hope that the ‘refusers’ will become bored with their existence and will realize that they are missing the work that is life. At least, I hope that is the case.”

Once we were well past the cafe, my tour guide’s mood changed, and he enthusiastically began to speak of the market square, and all that we would see there.

We turned off the river road, and once we were beyond the riverside cottages, the landscape changed from urban to semi-rural. The road passed through small- and chief executive officers, among other things. Or maybe the refusers just happened upon the idea of laziness on their own. I don’t fully know.”

Andrew went on, “Some of us thought that maybe these neighbours had read about the aristocracy of the past, or about the class of people who produced nothing but were somehow tolerated in those far-away days. The people who called themselves lawyers, consultants, and chief executive officers, among other things. Or maybe the refusers just happened upon the idea of laziness on their own. I don’t fully know.”

I knew all about lawyers and CEOs. I too was angry when the heads of large corporations had received substantial bonuses during the recent economic crisis, even though their poor management had directly resulted in so much hardship for so many people. It seemed so inappropriate to receive a bonus for poor or indifferent performance, when they hadn’t earned it.

I asked him about what was being done about the “refusers.” From the description of crime and punishment in News from Nowhere, I understood that this society relied on people’s consciences to compel them toward desirable behaviour.

“So what is to be done about these people? They are not making a contribution, and that is obviously of great concern to you, as you feel so strongly about it.” Andrew was looking at me with a serious expression, expectant upon my next words. “I imagine you wouldn’t want to have more of their kind, for other people to get the idea that they can do nothing and reap all the benefits.”

Andrew nodded his agreement, and said, “At the moment, we are holding out some hope that the ‘refusers’ will become bored with their existence and will realize that they are missing the work that is life. At least, I hope that is the case.”

Once we were well past the cafe, my tour guide’s mood changed, and he enthusiastically began to speak of the market square, and all that we would see there.

We turned off the river road, and once we were beyond the riverside cottages, the landscape changed from urban to semi-rural. The road passed through small-
I expressed an interest in getting a closer look at the mote-house, so Andrew drove up to the main door, and asked a boy who was minding a dog to mind our horse and buggy as well, just for a few minutes.

A few market carts were positioned around the arcade, stocked with bread and other baked goods, fruit, and smoked meats. Within a couple of the recesses were displays of milk and cheese, protected in the shade.

“On market day, there is so much more. Today we have the daily essentials, which are enough for the neighbours to get by on till the next market day comes around,” Andrew explained.

While we stood by one of the baker’s carts, two women came up, and greeted the proprietor by name. They selected a loaf of unsliced bread for each of them, and a dozen cookies as well. Then, to my surprise, the women gave Chitra, the baker, what looked to me like several coins, which she thanked them for and placed in an ornately decorated metal box.

“You have money now?” I asked of my tour guide. “I understood from William Guest’s writings that your society had no need or desire for currency.”

“You’re speaking of the tokens the women gave the baker. Not money in the historical sense. Guest was correct. It’s true that we don’t have what you call currency. Still, we need some way of ensuring an equitable distribution of food and other necessities among our people. We try to discourage people from taking more than their need or share, for whatever reasons might compel them to do so.”

Andrew went on to explain that the tokens allowed those that produced the food or other goods to keep track of what was being used, to assist them in deciding how much of anything to produce. At the same time, the tokens enabled individuals or family groups to gage their consumption, in fairness to everyone. Every month, a fixed number of tokens were provided to families and others for them to use as they pleased. In this way, there was little in the way of hoarding or over-consumption.

I responded to this interesting description of a new form of what I considered currency in Nowhere, asking, “How long has this system been in place?”

“For about seven years now. It was a community decision in response to a few problems that came up. In other neighbourhoods, the same thing, or variations of it, have been tried. Still, most of England remains under the earlier system where there are no tokens given in exchange for goods.”

Having said all that was needed about the tokens, we entered the mote-house though an enormous, round-arched opening in which were placed two sets of double doors made of dark-stained oak. The doors had an intricate pattern of small panels, with those in the centre glazed with coloured glass.

Inside, we found no other visitors, and when we spoke, there was an echo that accentuated both the generous floorspace and ceiling height, and also the emptiness of the place. What really stood out as far as I was concerned was the continuous mural that wrapped around the circumference of the building.

“The shape is round so that all who assemble here are on equal footing. From the outside, the mote-house is many-sided, but inside we finished it as a perfect circle.”

I asked about the mural, which seemed to tell a story, which I assumed was something from the country’s history.

“The mural, yes, it is a wonderful piece of art. The mural depicts the struggle of our ancestors under the tyranny of the old way of life, then shows the wonderful transformation that took place and resulted in our present mode of living cooperatively with each other. It’s here to remind us of our history, and particularly to instruct our young people so that they appreciate what we have.”

After exiting the mote-house, Andrew and I retrieved our horse and buggy and continued along the road. Seeing the mural, and explaining what it meant, seemed to have been a very moving experience for Andrew, as he had become very quiet, almost solemn, as we went out of that place.

The area around the market was built up much more than the settlement area along the river road. There were some larger buildings to be seen, but still nothing compared with what I knew of in my world of 2011. The absence of tall buildings in glass and concrete, and the utter lack of motor vehicles, was such a contrast to my experience of city life that it made the place seem unreal. It was like a very large stage set, or a living history museum village on a grand scale.

As the built-up area began to thin out, the road went into a much larger wooded area than the one we had passed through just before arriving at the Hammersmith market.

I had given Andrew an idea of some of the things that had been shown to William Guest when he visited, and he was happy to oblige. He himself had not met Guest, or even heard of him before today for that matter, as he had been a child of two and had not lived locally at the time Guest was here.

The woodland provided some much-needed cool shade for us as the heat of the day increased. Andrew asked me what my contribution was in my community, which was his way of asking about what I did for a living.
“I’m a carpenter and furniture builder,” I said. ‘I’m a craftsman, I suppose you could say. I run my own business.”

Andrew didn’t fully understand the concept of a business, but warmed up to my description of my trade.

I continued: “I mostly make custom kitchen cupboards and built-ins. Bookcases and entertainment units. I use veneered plywood for a lot of it, but also some solid wood trimming. For the really high-end stuff almost everything is solid wood: pine, cherry, oak.”

Andrew nodded, and offered, “Skilled workers in wood are always in demand. You know, if you like you could stay and build your beautiful furniture right here.”

I smiled at this comment, but said nothing, imagining my life amongst these people out of time. I remembered that this was all a dream, and almost said something to this effect to Andrew, but thankfully stopped myself in time.

Where the wooded area ended, there was a section of park-like open space laid out as a botanical garden just before we arrived in a built-up place that looked almost like a traditional shopping street.

“Piccadilly,” Andrew announced.

We stopped in front of an inn, where my tour guide spoke to a gentleman who took our horse to be fed, watered and rested while we enjoyed a light mid-day meal. The inn was rendered in the medieval black and white style, with steep gables, leaded casement windows and artistically-arranged half-timbering. It looked like it was hundreds of years old, except, I was told, it was built around eighty years ago.

As I was dressed in my blue jeans and western-style shirt, and wore my hair shorter than the average man in Nowhere, I got some curious looks from the staff and patrons of the inn. Andrew was kind enough to explain on my behalf that I was a visitor from overseas, and people smiled and welcomed me but thankfully didn’t ask too many questions. Without our asking, the man who appeared to be the inn-keeper brought two pewter tankards of ale to our table, and holding one for himself, raised a toast to me as his guest from the far-away land of Canada.

Our lunch consisted of battered fish and French fried potatoes—fish and chips. It was nice to have something so familiar in a place that was so very different from home.

We left our horse and buggy at the inn’s stable, and ventured along the street on foot, looking at the rows of artisan shops and other “businesses.”

Across the road from the inn was a small shop that sold tobacco and related products, and I wondered if this was the same place where William Guest had obtained his fancy pipe, pouch, and Latakia tobacco.

We didn’t venture into the shop, but I commented, “I’m a bit surprised that you have tobacco shops when your people otherwise seem very careful about their state of health. Where I come from, smoking has been banned from most public places. The negative effects of smoking have been widely proven, with cancers of different types and heart disease linked directly to tobacco use.”

Andrew didn’t know what to say at first, clearly having taken some offence at my remarks. In an instant, though, he regained his composure, and explained, “Well, I can only say that we allow ourselves some indulgences. Some neighbours do enjoy smoking, and they respect those who don’t want to share in the smoke. But you should know that our tobacco growers have developed varieties that have less of the toxic effects of the old-time tobacco, and of course there are no additives put in to encourage habit-forming.”

The artisan shops generally had their working area, where the goods were produced, in the back, and at the front a place where finished items were displayed. They were mostly small operations, sometimes with only a single person as the proprietor. There were potters, glass-blowers, weavers, bakers, butchers, and metal-workers, to name a few.

“This shop should interest you,” Andrew said when we arrived at a barn-like structure that had stacks of lumber piled outside.

A sign above a pair of plank doors, painted in black with gilded letters, read: “BOYD AND SON FURNITURE MAKERS.” This was right up my alley, and I was very interested indeed to see what the shop had to offer.

Matthew Boyd, a solidly-built man of middle age, gave us a hearty welcome and invited us inside. His hair, moustache and beard were covered in sawdust. His son was further back in the shop, turning on a foot-powered lathe. He was also covered in sawdust, and was too intent on his task at hand to take notice of us.

The showroom had a number of completed pieces, all done in different styles and finishes. There were two kitchen tables with turned legs, in a country style, a tall wardrobe with panelled doors reflecting a medieval character, a sturdy garden bench, and several cane-seated chairs. Some of the pieces were finished to show the natural wood, others, like the garden bench, had painted finishes with hand-done decoration.

I noticed the absence of power tools. Back at home, my shop was almost fully mechanized, with a table saw, router, band saw, planer, etc. I had a few hand tools, but only for specialized tasks, as well as some old ones just for nostalgic purposes.
“I see you mainly use hand tools here. Do you have any machinery at all?” I asked of our host.

Mr. Boyd replied, “Me—no I don’t have any machinery in this shop. Ting, another woodworker down the road, uses a water-powered rip saw and a planer, and I suppose that’s all right for him. As for my son and I, we enjoy the handwork, even for the most mundane processes of shaping the lumber. It’s very satisfying to gradually peel off the wood shavings with a perfectly-sharpened plane. Ever tried it?”

I told him that, yes, I had used a Stanley smoothing plane in shop class when I was in high school, and that it was very satisfying, if a little slow.

Matthew Boyd and I had much to talk about. The terms “Stanley” and “high school” went over his head, but there was no request to explain. Instead, he invited me into his shop, and to meet his son. Andrew saw that I was going to be a while, and excused himself to run some errands, letting me know that he would return in a couple of hours to take me back to the Hammersmith Guest House.

I tried my hand at using a number of the woodworking tools, many of which reminded me of examples I had seen in antique shops or museums. The tools were as beautifully-crafted as the furniture they helped to produce. Matthew and his son were patient teachers, and the afternoon passed by pleasantly as we talked about design, hardware, woods and joinery.

Later, Andrew came back as promised, and I was amazed at how quickly the time had passed. I thanked my hosts, who gave me a small brass calliper as a gift. We walked back to the inn, thanked the stable hands, and the afternoon passed by pleasantly as we talked about design, hardware, woods and joinery.

BRITISH PRINTERS, INCLUDING WILLIAM MORRIS: HEPHAESTUS BOOKS’ NEW PUBLISHING PARADIGM?

B. J. Robinson


On the book’s back cover, Hephaestus Books announces itself as a “new publishing paradigm, allowing disparate content sources to be curated into cohesive, relevant, and informative books. To date, this content has been curated from Wikipedia articles and images under Creative Commons licensing, although as Hephaestus Books continues to increase in scope and dimension, more licensed and public domain content is being added. We believe books such as this represent a new and exciting lexicon in the sharing of human knowledge.”

British Printers does little to live up to its claim for being “cohesive, relevant, and informative.” Its table of contents follows the order of its title, picking up after Peter Stent with Henry Sampson Woodfall, Wynkyn de Worde, William Blades, Charles Ricketts, Richard Grafton, George Bradshaw, John Day (printer), etc., etc., referencing 121 British Printers in all, and concluding with References for “Article Sources and Contributors” and “Image Sources, Licenses and Contributors.” This book’s complete absence of critical method —or even common sense—in its wholesale and indiscriminate reproduction of Wikipedia articles “related” to British printers is so egregious that it hardly bears comment. One example of its lacking any common sense is its including at the end of each article External Links. These links only relate to the Internet, since the book itself includes no cross-referencing (or index) whatsoever.

To comment on the articles themselves is to bring to the fore all the many, and valid, complaints readers have about Wikipedia. But the book’s focus on printers might be expected to shape the content, especially since the book claims to be “curated”. However, the articles receive no amplification, comment, or editing at all. So, for instance, the article on William Morris makes no mention of his own 1893 “Printing” lecture. And while it includes a section on both Kelmscott House and the Kelmscott Press, it omits mention of his 1895 “A Note by William Morris on His Aims in Founding the Kelmscott Press.” The simplest editing might have offered some internal coherence. For example, since it almost begins with Morris - his being the second article - the book could have used Morris’s “Printing” (1893) as a structuring device, offering rationale for its then referencing Caxton, de Worde, Caslon, and Baskerville, among others, as these are British printers whom Morris considers and critiques. Instead of such a logi-
cal ordering device, this book entirely lacks structure; it does not even use the basic methods of alphabetical or chronological order.

Other than noting with horror such mindless exploitation of Morris’s (among others) work, why even consider this book? It seems to me worth considering as a cautionary object, because it would not exist without also exploiting three innovations of our digital age that are and will continue to alter publishing: Creative Commons licensing, open (peer) review, and Print on Demand technology. The sources it includes in its References are unknown, public domain, or licensed under Creative Commons. The open access that Creative Commons-like attribution allows offers readers a wealth (I use that word advisedly) of scholarship and research that in the past would be delivered via expensive discipline-specific journals (more information about Creative Commons is available at their website: http://creativecommons.org). This drive away from exclusivity, this open sharing of knowledge that Creative Commons allows, seems in line with Morris’s interest in, for example, free and universal education. But Morris promoted an education that was not perverted, institutionalized, routinized, or driven by economic need. This book fails on all these counts. When publishing companies like Hephaestus mindlessly exploit this open access to charge print costs for useless (an appropriately Morrisian word) books, then open access raises problems that ought, at least, to be noted.

Another issue that needs consideration is open review, upon which sites like Wikipedia depend for their existence. The Institute for the Future of the Book (www.futureofthebook.org) suggests that open review comprises a future publishing model that is a real possibility for the future of the “book.” Their Commentpress “is an open source theme and plugin for the WordPress blogging engine that allows readers to comment paragraph by paragraph in the margins of a text. Annotate, gloss, workshop, debate: with Commentpress you can do all of these things on a finer-grained level, turning a document into a conversation” (www.futureofthebook.org/commentpress). And their Gamzr 7h3ory by Mackenzie Wark modeled the sort of interactivity through open discussion and review that current technology allows (www.futureofthebook.org/gamertheory/). Even electronic reading devices like Kindle allow for rudimentary openness with their ability to share readers’ highlighting of texts. The ramifications and implications of this open model are really widespread and unpredictable. At this point, British Printers suggests to me that, at the very least, readers, editors, and publishers should ask for clear distinctions between print and online, or digital born, productions. British Printers as a curated print text would have benefited from open, pre-print, interactive review—to the extent that it probably would not have been printed at all (which, to me, clearly would be a good idea).

Print production is vastly facilitated by Print on Demand technology. Such technology produces low cost books which is an ideal that Morris would have lauded, I think, and sadly was unable to achieve with his own beautiful Kelmscott Press books. In “Printing,” Morris notes the very least that readers require of books is neatness and clarity in the letter and simplicity and directness in content. And so long as the printing of v00 books has such neatness and clarity, simplicity and directness, their technology can serve many purposes. That one of these purposes is to create opportunities for “new publishing paradigms” like Hephaestus Books seems, however, an adverse one.

Both print on demand and electronic/digital books are beginning to force traditional publishers to tout printed books as objects of beauty, which, on the other hand, seems to me a potentially positive trend. In her 3 December 2011 New York Times article entitled “Selling Books by Their Gilded Covers,” Julie Bosman notes how publishers are reacting to lower print sales by designing more beautiful, artistic books: “Many new releases have design elements usually reserved for special occasions—deckle edges, colored endpapers, high-quality paper and exquisite jackets that push the creative boundaries of bookmaking.” Let us hope that these print publishers emulate Morris’s Kelmscott Press books by producing physical objects that merge new technology with design that respects and appeals to readers’ senses and mind together. For the problematic British Printers’ including him in this first of its “new paradigm” productions suggests to me Morris’s continuing relevance in this time of change in the publishing world.

B. J. Robinson is professor of English at North Georgia State College and director of the University Press of North Georgia. She serves on the Newsletter committee of the William Morris Society in the United States.

AN UNLIKELY WILLIAM MORRIS ENTHUSAIST

Petra Clark

Recently, a curious piece of writing pertaining to William Morris was rediscovered in a collection in the Special Collections Department of the University of Delaware. Among the papers of James Riddle Maxwell (1836–1912) is a seven-page, handwritten and almost certainly unpublished essay simply titled “William Morris.” Maxwell, a native of Newark, DE (where the university is located), was a civil engineer who, after studying at military school and at the forerunner of Delaware Technical College, was employed by
various railroads in the western United States and in South America during the late nineteenth century. In 1902, after serving as the chief engineer of railroads in Peru and Colombia, he returned to Newark to retire. Maxwell’s papers comprise personal correspondence, family and business records, student notebooks, diaries, and a remarkable collection of photographs of the places he visited and the projects he worked on. Interestingly, “William Morris” is not the only short, seemingly off-the-cuff piece on a non-technical subject that Maxwell wrote; also included in his papers are a dozen other manuscripts with such diverse titles as “At the Zoo,” “Biography of Louisa May Alcott,” “Central America,” “Edmund Greenleaf,” and “Mules.” Clearly, Maxwell was no ordinary civil engineer.

As with the other essays, it is not clear exactly for what purpose Maxwell intended his “William Morris”: it could have been an exercise in composition, notes for a lecture he might have given or heard, or a summary of his reading. The last possibility seems to be at least partially true, since large sections of Maxwell’s composition appear to have been copied or paraphrased from Elbert Hubbard’s brief biography of William Morris published in his 1900 book, *Little Journeys to the Homes of English Authors: Volume Six.* Starting in 1894, Hubbard wrote several, sequential series of biographical sketches of famous people issued separately—and then collected—under the generic title, *Little Journeys*, so it seems likely that Maxwell’s own essay was the result of reading Hubbard. The uneven narrative and colorful, curious punctuation and spelling (retained in the transcript which follows) alternatively suggest that Maxwell wrote his piece quickly, perhaps for an occasion at which Morris’s or Hubbard’s work was to be discussed. Regardless of its source or purpose, Maxwell’s “William Morris” makes for amusing reading; what it lacks in style and factual accuracy is more than made up for by clear enthusiasm for the subject. It also shows how the interest of Americans in Morris at the turn of the century shows up in very unexpected ways.

**WILLIAM MORRIS**

To Wm. Morris we owe more than the great majority realize; he was the pioneer in the movement to make our homes more attractive and artistic; at one time the stiff and ugly “horse hair” was the conventional thing, but now through his influence all that has been changed. He made a study of the middle ages and decided that art and life were much lovlier [sic] than they are now, and the best thing was to return as nearly as possible to their way of living. To do this, he indeed influenced some of his friends to form a company, with him as its head; they issued a modest circular calling attention to the fact that “A company of historical artists will use their talents in home decoration”; this was ridiculed by the dealers in whose hands it fell; but little by little their influence was felt throughout the whole country.

In this group of friends were Rossetti, Burne-Jones, Ford Madox Brown, and Arthur Hughes who were painters, Philip Webb an architect, Peter Paul Marshall a landscape gardner [sic] and engineer, Charles Joseph Faulkner a designer and Wm. Morris an “all around man” able to turn his hand to anything. They began by making a thorough study of the best interiors of the middle ages and found that the furniture instead of being in sets was made in single pieces, with reference to the placement and use for which it was intended, of course it was handmade and strong enough to stand for generations; the floors and walls were either hard wood or mosaics; on which were placed skins, a piece of tapestry or a handsomely woven rug. In the house furnished by Morris these designs have been carried out, in fact they are said to have rather a sparsely furnished look. The rugs are always placed so as to show a large extent of polished floor, there are few pictures but those of the best, and gilt frames are discarded for dark wood, the furniture is hand made and strong; Morris always said “use plenty of timber and make it strong”; the tables are of beautiful wood and not hidden by a cover, there may be a square of linen but that is all; the well known Morris chair is an invention of his; and he almost discarded cloth in covering furniture, preferring leather instead; he it was who brought back the round dining table, and introduced large fire places again.

When this company was formed it was with no idea of gain, but to elevate the taste of the general public; but they soon found they could not get their designs carried out by the manufacturers, so they were forced into it themselves, not only making furniture, but carpets and wall papers, in fact every thing belonging to the artistic furnishing of a house; and so successful a business manager was Morris that he made a fortune for each of his friends; he himself was independent of this for his father was bountifully able to supply him with the “where with all” to carry out his ideals.

It was at Oxford that the intimacy with Burne-Jones was formed; Morris with the stronger and more dominant character was the leader; the first author that especially attracted them was Mrs. Browning and that because of her elopement with Mr. Browning, she fulfilled Morris ideal of womanhood in being willing to leave a home of luxury for the man she loved, while to Burne-Jones her elopement was a sign of depravity, and in his defending her Morris read her poems and became interested in them for their own worth. It was after this that he commenced his first poem “The Defense of Guenevere.” The five young men next took up Ruskin and after reading “The Nature of Gothic” went out and studied it on the streets, this led them with some oth-
ers to draw up a remonstrance against “the desecration by officious restoration, and the tearing down of time-mellowed structures to make room for the unsightly brick piles of boarding house keepers,” this being sent in to the authorities was duly pigeon-holed with the remark that young fellows sent to Oxford to be educated would better attend to their books and mind their own business. Their interest in the middle ages led them next to take up Chaucer and Spencer [sic] and they also read Malory’s Morte d’Arthur, this love of the old seems to have run through his whole life as most of his poems are translations from the Nibelung Leid [sic], the Scandinavian myths and the Icelandic Sagas. Burne-Jones went to Oxford to study theology, but after Morris convinced him that he was intended for an artist, he left there and went up to London to study painting under Rossetti; Morris himself said [sic] on until he received his degree of B.A. then he articulated himself to a local architect with the hope of bringing back a taste for the Gothic, but he soon found that an apprentice[sic] ideas were not asked or wanted; after a year of this he left in disgust and went to study “pure art” under Rossetti, it was here that he fell in love with and married the favorite model of Rossetti who appears in so many of his and Burne-Jones paintings, indeed Whistler is said to have remarked “that without Mrs. Morris to supply stained glass attitudes and the lissome beauty of an angel, the Pre-Raphaelites would have long since gone down to dust and forgetfulness.”

Win. Morris was an avowed socialist, although he was too practical to think that the time had come for life on a communal basis, but his sympathies were all with the working man, and he did everything in his power to better their condition. He believed men should replace competition by co-operation, he used to say “I’m going your way, so let us go hand in hand, you help me and I’ll help you, we shall not be here very long, for soon, Death, the kind old nurse, will come and rock us all to sleep, let us help one another while we may.” And that was the extent of his socialism. He has been thought by many not to carry out his ideas because all the products which he manufactured were so high in price that only the rich could buy but according to him, socialism aims not at how cheap a thing can be made but how good, he said, “Make it as excellent as it can be made to serve its end, then sell it at a price that affords something more than a bare subsistence to the workmen who put their lives into its making, in this way you raise the status of the worker, you pay him for his labour and give him an interest and pride in the product; cheap products make cheap men; the first thought of socialism is for the worker who makes the thing, not the man who buys it.” These were his ideas and he stood manfully by them for he would have been Poet Laureate of England had he been willing to call himself a student of sociology instead of a socialist. He took up literature as a diversion after more serious business of manufacturing was on a firm basis, but he brought the enthusiasm and energy of a boy to it; in his eyes it would have been degrading it to have made it a business.

His view of life was the broadest possible for one man to have as he not only touched but was a master in so many and varied walks of life, he was an artist in the broadest sense [sic] of the form, he has left his stamp on the fashions of house keeping and we are told could paint beautiful pictures, compose music, write sublime verse, address a public assembly effectively, produce plays, speak in fours [sic] languages, resurrected the lost art of binding books artistically as they were in the olden times, and besides all this master of six district trades, a weaver, a blacksmith, a woodcarver, a painter, a dyer and a printer; certainly a wonderful man when we think how few there are that can do one of these things well.

---

1. “William Morris” has been transcribed from the autograph manuscript in the James Riddle Maxwell Papers, MSS 170, Special Collections Department, University of Delaware Library. All biographical information about Maxwell and details pertaining to the contents of his papers are derived from the Special Collections finding aid; see “Finding Aid for the James R. Maxwell Papers,” www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec/findaids/html/mss0170.html.
4. Hubbard, who considered himself a follower of Morris (and claimed to have met him), was, of course, a printer as well as a writer. In 1895 he founded the Roycrofters, a publishing firm which first produced books initiate of Morris’s Kelmscott Press but grew to become a collaborative Arts and Crafts decorative arts firm in East Aurora, NY.

Petra Clark, who is a student in the M.A. program in English at the University of Delaware, is currently the Graduate Assistant in the Mark Samuels Lasner Collection in the University of Delaware Library. She is pleased to be contributing to the William Morris Society Newsletter for the first—but hopefully not last—time.

---

COMING SOON!
Purchase the publications of the William Morris Society in the United States
online
www.morrissociety.org
OCCUPY LONDON!

Martin Stott

One man with an idea in his head is in danger of being considered a madman, . . . a thousand and society begins to tremble, a hundred thousand and there is war abroad, and the cause has victories tangible and real; and why only a hundred thousand? Why not a hundred million and peace upon earth? You and I who agree together, it is we who have to answer that question. “Art Under Plutocracy,”—William Morris

It is hardly surprising that the world wide ‘Occupy’ movement has sprung up. The surprise is that it didn’t happen earlier. The last few months have seen the most extraordinary conjunction of events in the global economy and polity as the Euro zone struggles to survive, American politicians bicker over the budget while failing to deal with the debt, European governments fall, apparently at the whim of the market (where did democracy go?) and social unrest breaks out on the streets of many cities. And all this before the impact of the Japanese earthquake and tsunami, rocketing energy prices and the “Arab Spring” are factored in. The Occupy movement has caught the imagination with its “we are the 99 per cent” slogan precisely because such a diverse range of people can identify with being part of that 99 per cent.

The strange thing is that the Occupy movement has been attacked for being impractical and utopian. But the established political elites in the West are the ones struggling with envisioning a future no longer based on a global economic model that has been riding for a fall for 20 years. The warning signs have been clear. It has been five years since Bear Stearns in the US and Northern Rock in the UK crashed. Economic commentators like Nouriel Roubini were warning long before that, as were many environmental critics of global overconsumption. But globalization seemed triumphant. Now we know that politics has changed forever because politicians can no longer argue that a minor economic “blip” can be corrected in time for tax giveaways, another artificially engineered economic boom and the resumption of apparently ever-rising standards of living, just before an election.

I visited the Occupy the City encampment outside St. Paul’s Cathedral in London in October. I was struck by how different it was from its media portrayal: much bigger, much more diverse, creative, humorous and outgoing. There were well over 1,000 people thronged on the steps of St. Paul’s and in the surrounding precinct, office workers, shoppers, tourists, the occupiers, media, church people and visitors. Knots of people were discussing, explaining, arguing. A library, a bookshop (“Starbooks”) spontaneous discussion groups, speakers, and workshops had sprung up. Ideas were being traded and new ones born. Some of the tents had slogans from previous engagements—“Climate Camp 2010.” That struck a chord. Here we have a movement challenging the right of a tiny elite to order the world in a way which exploits 99 per cent of humanity, while trashing the planet into the bargain. The state of the world economy may be the current focus and the possibility of catastrophic collapse a reality, but there does seem to be one word missing in the American debate over the debt crisis—austerity.

In the UK talk of the “new age of austerity” is familiar. I write in the week when the government has announced that the decline in tax receipts, the crash in production and the rise in unemployment (with the consequent extra expenditure on unemployment benefits) means that its deficit reduction strategy will require another six years of cuts, all in the week which saw the largest strike in the UK for 40 years. Climate camp activists and others have long argued that if the planet isn’t to fry (as UN climate change talks in Durban stall yet again, that seems an increasingly improbable dream), western societies need to change and simplify their lifestyles dramatically, that austerity for the global rich, equitably shared, isn’t all bad. It is worth
reminding ourselves just how “inequitable” we are talking about. Europeans consume almost 45 times as many resources as the people of Bangladesh. The American consumer’s global footprint is ninety times their size.

It is a puzzle that in the land of rugged individualism there is so little discussion about individuals living beyond their means. The Republican discourse is all about how the Government is spending too much. But isn’t the US deficit founded on overconsumption? Wasn’t the property crash and the financial crisis it triggered the result of criminal lending policies that encouraged people who couldn’t afford it, to believe that they could invest in the American Dream? Now is the time for prosperous people on either side of the Atlantic to change their ways. The British philosopher John Gray put it this way recently:

For as long as it was able to engineer an illusion of increasing prosperity, free-market globalisation was politically invulnerable. When the bubble burst, the actual condition of the majority was laid bare. In the US a plantation-style economy has come into being, with debt servitude for the many co-existing with extremes of volatile wealth for the few.

The Occupy movement has at its core the Morrisian impulse, “Have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful.” Applied societally or globally, such an approach would transform the way we look at consumption. The demands of the Occupy movement may be inchoate or even conflicting, but they have verve and initiative. Their recent occupation of the empty premises of Swiss bank UBS in the City of London was characterized as the establishment of a “Bank of Ideas.” The people camped outside St. Paul’s or in the hundreds of other locations across the globe may have no solutions yet, but at least they are engaging with reality, a reality that will necessarily see that 1% take a substantial share of the impending austerity, unlike the ruling elites still in thrall to a defunct market utopia.

Martin Stott has spent over thirty years working on sustainable development issues in the UK. He has just been made redundant/laid off as Head of Environment for a major UK local authority and is now establishing a sustainability business. He was elected to the UK WMS national committee in 2011. He can be contacted via his website: www.martin-stott.com.

THE LAST WORD

“The spirit of the new days, of our days, was to be delight in the life of the world; intense and overweening love of the very skin and surface of the earth on which man dwells, such as a lover has in the fair flesh of the woman he loves; this, I say, was to be the new spirit of the time. All other moods save this had been exhausted: the unceasing criticism, the boundless curiosity in the ways and thoughts of man, which was the mood of the ancient Greek, to whom these things were not so much a means, as an end, was gone past recovery; nor had there been really any shadow of it in the so-called science of the nineteenth century, which, as you must know, was in the main an appendage to the commercial system; nay, not seldom an appendage to the police of that system. . . . More akin to our way of looking at life was the spirit of the Middle Ages, to whom heaven and the life of the next world was such a reality, that it became to them a part of the life upon the earth . . . .

“But that also, with its assured belief in heaven and hell as two countries in which to live, has gone, and now we do, both in word and in deed, believe in the continuous life of the world of men, and as it were, add every day of that common life to the little stock of days which our own mere individual experience wins for us: and consequently we are happy.”

—Old Hammond to Guest, Chapter 18, News from Nowhere
The Multifaceted Mr. Morris.
The exhibition.
The contents.
From the Mark Samuels Lasner Collection.
Edited by Jane Marguerite Tippett.

The Multifaceted Mr. Morris.
The book.
Printed slowly & patiently via letterpress.
Caslon. Hahnemühle Bugra Butter.
56 pages. 8 color photos.
Handbound.
With a scavenger hunt of images.


Designed & printed privately by Lead Graffiti, Newark, Delaware.

Available through Oak Knoll Books and Lead Graffiti.

oakknoll.com | leadgraffiti.com