

A beautiful gift book devoted to designs by William Morris that incorporate flowers, a central motif in Morris's oeuvre

William Morris's Flowers

Rowan Bain

110 illustrations

19.0 x 17.0cm

144pp

ISBN 978 0 500 480458

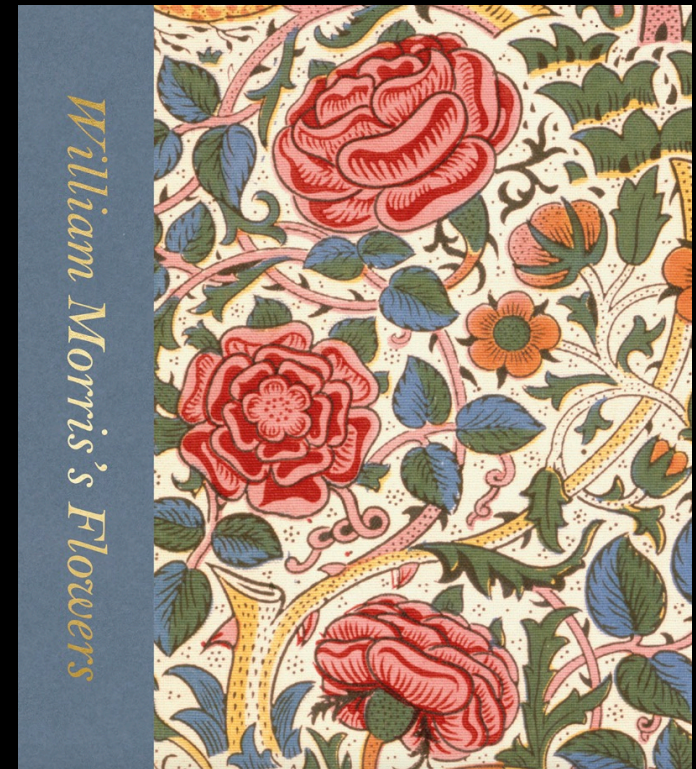
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£14.95

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A4

Book



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Key Sales Points

- A timeless subject: the floral fabric and wallpaper designs of William Morris are enduringly popular and hugely fashionable – H&M recently launched a range of fashions, homewares and accessories using them, and Loewe put them on the catwalk in 2017
- William Morris's work is hugely familiar, with representation in many public collections in the UK and abroad, including the Victoria and Albert Museum; the William Morris Gallery in Walthamstow; Wightwick Manor (NT) in the West Midlands; Standen (NT) in West Sussex; the Red House (NT) in Kent; Kelmscott Manor (Society of Antiquaries) in Oxfordshire; Kelmscott House (the home of the William Morris Society) in Hammersmith; the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide; the Huntingdon Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens in San Merino, California; and elsewhere
- In the same informal series as *Constable's Skies* (978 0 500 480328)

Introduction

'I must have unmistakable suggestions of gardens and fields'

William Morris (1834–1896) was one of the nineteenth century's most important designers (fig. 2). One of the principal founders of the Arts and Crafts Movement, he championed hand-made craftsmanship, truth to materials and the use of nature as a source of pattern design. Through his firm Morris & Co. he was responsible for producing hundreds of patterns for wallpapers, furnishing fabrics, tapestries, carpets and embroideries, helping to introduce a new aesthetic into British interiors.

Morris created a visual language that is uniquely 'Morrissian' – recognizable through his skilful arrangement of flowers, winding stems and undulating leaf shapes. His ability to capture both the beauty of British gardens and the wildness of its countryside into complex, well-ordered and attractive patterns for the home appealed to Victorian customers, and continues to resonate with audiences today.

For Morris, the negative effects of the Industrial Revolution – pollution, construction on a massive scale, and oppressive and alienated working conditions – combined to form an anxiety that Britain's 'green and pleasant land' was in danger of disappearing. Throughout his life he was to fight against this menace in remarkable ways: from challenging industrial manufacturing and its dehumanizing effect on workers by promoting quality handmade production, to agitating for full-scale revolution. His conviction that art and craft could change people's lives for the better means that Morris's floral patterns should not be regarded merely as reminders of a lost, bucolic past. Instead his patterns bring nature

Fig. 2 Photograph of William Morris
in his work smock, by an unknown
photographer, c.1876
William Morris Gallery, London
(WMG: PP1/Z62)





7. *Daffodil* furnishing fabric, designed by John Henry Dearle and manufactured by Morris & Co. Designed c.1891
Block-printed on cotton
Victoria and Albert Museum, London (V&A: T.623-1919)

Spring flowers – daffodils, forget-me-nots and stylized tulips – wrap around strands of decorative ribbon in this design by John Henry Dearle. Although his earliest designs for Morris & Co. were closely based on Morris's style, as Dearle matured he developed his own style, characterized by his competent drawing ability, clearly defined pattern outlines and the influence of Middle Eastern textile patterns. After Morris's death, Dearle became the Artistic Director of Morris & Co., creating some of its best-loved patterns.



18. *Honeysuckle* embroidery, designed by William Morris and embroidered by Jane Morris and Jenny Morris
Designed 1876, made c.1880s
Silk on linen
William Morris Gallery
(WMG: F454)

May Morris, William Morris's younger daughter, described *Honeysuckle* as 'the most-truly "Morrisian" in character of all his pattern-making in mid-life'.³⁸ Four of his most frequently used flowers for patterns – crown imperial, tulip, honeysuckle and fritillary – overlie a dense background of yew. The pattern was applied to a variety of textile mediums, including cotton, silk and velveteen as well this magnificent embroidery, which was worked by Jane, Morris's wife, and their elder daughter, Jenny Morris. May described it as 'A thing alive with light and colour'.³⁹





Wey (named after a Surrey river) is part of Morris's river tributaries series of textiles, which were exceptional for their scale and complex layers of diagonal pattern. They are the ultimate celebration of the exuberance of British flowers. In this design, large yellow sunflower-like flowers and smaller yellow marigolds criss-cross over each other, brightly contrasting against the dark indigo background.

30. *Wey* furnishing fabric, designed by William Morris and manufactured by Morris & Co.
Designed 1888
Indigo-discharged and block-printed cotton
Victoria and Albert Museum, London
(V&A: T.49-1912)



42. *Rose* furnishing fabric, designed by William Morris and manufactured by Morris & Co. Design registered 8 December 1888. Block-printed on cotton. Victoria and Albert Museum, London (V&A: T.53-1912)

The original design (43) for this printed cotton features roses shown from the side and head-on. Morris's use of shading, dark outline and oblong petal shapes gives these flowers a rather heavy impression, which is less naturalistic than his other interpretations of one of his most admired flowers.

43. Design for *Rose*, by William Morris, 1888. Pencil, pen and ink, watercolour on paper. Victoria and Albert Museum, London (V&A: E.1075-1988)





The contrasting red, blue, brown and dark green of this pattern reveal Morris experimenting with stronger natural colours, a result of his investigations into the use of the natural dyes seen in Indian textiles. As in *Little Chintz* (57), designed the previous year, Morris used the pomegranate fruit as the central focus of the pattern.

58. *Pomegranate* furnishing fabric, designed by William Morris and manufactured by Morris & Co. Design registered 22 June 1877. Block-printed cotton. Victoria and Albert Museum, London (V&A: T.592-1919)



70. *Flora* tapestry, designed by Edward Burne-Jones and William Morris and made by Morris & Co. Designed 1882–3, made 1888–5. Woven in wool on linen. The Whitworth, The University of Manchester (Whitworth: T.8368)

Flora, the goddess of abundance and personification of summer, stands here immersed in a floral background, inspired by the medieval decorative technique known as millefleurs (thousand flowers). Ribbons of William Morris's verse adorn the top and bottom of the design: 'I am the handmaid of the earth / I broider fair her glorious gown / And deck her on her days of mirth / With many a garland of renown. / And while Earth's little ones are fain / And play about the Mother's hem / I scatter every gift I gain / From sun and wind to gladden them.'

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