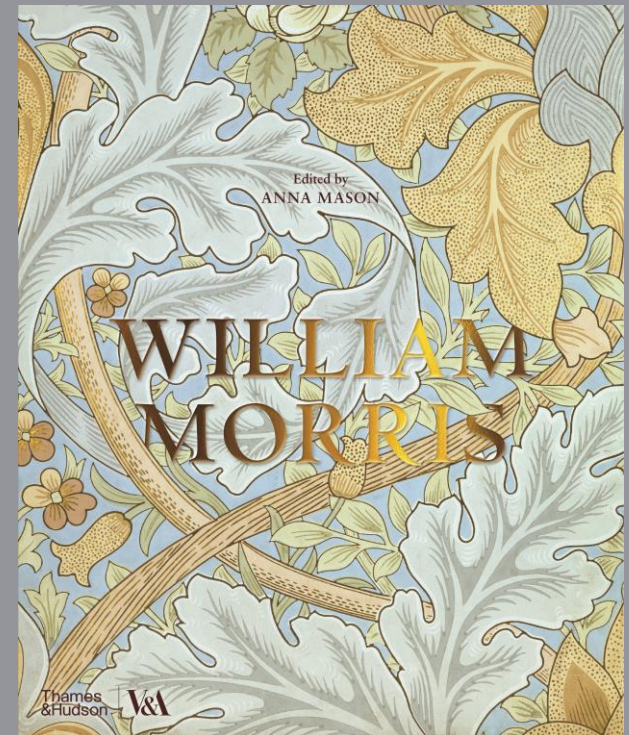


William Morris

Edited by Anna Mason

Marking the 125th anniversary of William Morris's death, this is the most wideranging, comprehensive – and beautiful – illustrated study of William Morris ever published.

600 illustrations
28 x 23.5cm
432pp
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A4

Book

Key Sales Points

- The most comprehensive illustrated study available of design pioneer William Morris (1834–1896), published to mark the 125th anniversary of his death.
- Covers every aspect of Morris's wide-ranging interests and career, from his work as a writer, activist, conservationist and businessman to his far-reaching and ongoing influence as an artist, designer and maker.
- Includes contributions from an impressive array of renowned experts, including former William Morris Gallery curator Anna Mason, former Deputy Keeper at the V&A Linda Parry, award-winning Morris biographer Fiona MacCarthy and V&A Director Dr Tristram Hunt.
- William Morris's designs are perennially popular and can be seen on a wide range of products from bedding in Japan to water bottles and notebooks in Europe, and jewellery in China.

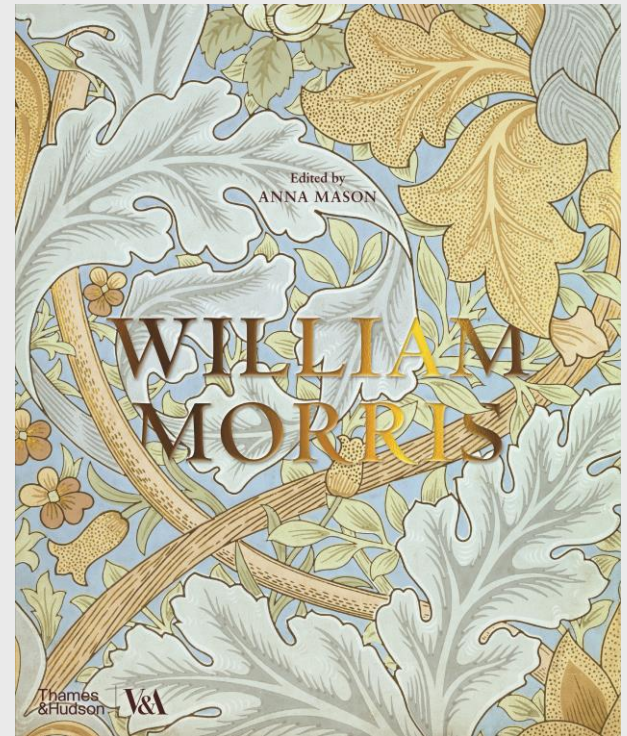




Fig. x One of Edward Burne-Jones's account books with the firm, 1861–82, providing evidence of the authorship and dating of designs. Notes and caricatures reveal much about his relationship with Morris.
Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge
WM0026

freedom of action. Most notable was George Wardle, general manager from 1870 to 1890, who took overall control of operations at Merton. He fully concurred with Morris's views on design and manufacture, and his contribution to the success of the firm has not received due recognition. John Henry Dearle supervised the tapestry, weaving and fabric-printing departments. His best designs are often mistaken for those of Morris, and he became the firm's principal designer after the death of Morris in 1896. Frank and Robert Smith also made a major contribution to the mature firm. They had worked for Morris on the commercial side of the business since the mid-1870s, and they were later appointed joint commercial managers. Morris obviously had a great deal of respect for their business acumen, and this was recognized in the late 1880s when he made them partners. His aim was to maintain his income while progressively withdrawing from active participation in the

business. The deed of partnership (now at The National Archives, Kew, IR 59/173) signed by Morris and the Smiths on 19 March 1890 allowed the brothers to buy into the business on very favourable terms, and the firm continued to develop in the 1890s under their leadership, despite Morris's almost complete withdrawal from active management.

The overall picture revealed by our research into Morris & Co. is of a financially healthy and well-managed business with considerable scope to charge premium prices. But there were always limits; Morris operated in a highly competitive environment and succeeded because he understood it very well. The truth is that William Morris was a practical, hard-working, hard-headed, imaginative and original man of affairs. The success of Morris & Co. owed much less to good fortune than it did to Morris himself.

IV THE POLITICAL ACTIVIST

Nicholas Salmon

In the 1880s Morris joined the fledgling socialist movement intent on destroying capitalism, eradicating class difference and ending the despoliation of the natural environment. He wanted nothing less than the total transformation of society, a new way of life in which everyone could enjoy the dignity of meaningful and creative work, nature could thrive and art flourish as an integral part of everyday life. As he wrote in 1883, 'the contrasts of rich and poor are unendurable and ought not to be endured by either rich or poor ... feeling this, I am bound to act for the destruction of the system which seems to me mere oppression'. Morris's commitment to activism and to appealing directly to the working classes marked him out from other social critics and reformers at the time and shocked many of his middle-class contemporaries.

His first taste of public campaigning came in 1877, when he founded the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings in protest against reckless restoration practices. He also lent his support to environmental protection, speaking out against the lack of town planning, uncontrolled pollution of town and countryside, litter and advertising. In his own field, the decorative arts, he began giving lectures to art students and societies,

using his public profile as a decorator and poet to urge for a less wasteful and more considered approach to design and manufacture. However, his experiences during these early campaigning years convinced him that piecemeal reform and philanthropy were insufficient to tackle the scale of the problem that society was facing. More than that, they were potentially a harmful distraction, masking deep inequalities and encouraging working people to aspire to nothing more than benign subjugation rather than genuine freedom. He became a committed revolutionary and as his fellow activist Walter Crane later wrote, in his dedication to the cause, 'it is certain that William Morris spent some of the best years of life, he gave his time, his voice, his thought, his pen, and much money to put Socialism before his countrymen.'

William Morris's early life gave little indication of the important role he was to play in the British socialist movement. The son of a wealthy city businessman, he entered Exeter College, Oxford, in 1853 with the intention of taking holy orders. At that time his views were High Church and he spent his first few terms immersed in such religious works as Henry Hart Milman's *History of Latin Christianity* and Kenelm Digby's *Mores Catholici: or, Ages of Faith*. At one point he and Edward



Fig. x The West Front of St Mark's, Venice, John Wharnton Bunney, 1877–82, showing the building under restoration.
Ruskin Gallery, Collection of the Guild of St George, Sheffield [WM0063]



Fig. x The Morris-Dance Round St Mark's, this Punch cartoon satirizing the SPAB's campaign shows what a high profile it had in England, 10 January 1880.
National Art Library, V&A [WM00622]

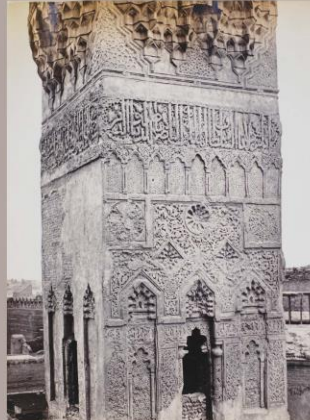


Fig. x Detail of the Mosque of the Sultan Kaloun, Cairo.
National Library of Wales [WM0622]

Morris also delivered many of the lectures which became fixtures of the Society's Annual General Meetings and which are reprinted in its Annual Reports. The paper he delivered to the 1884 meeting, titled 'Architecture and History', was one of his most important essays on historic buildings and it had a polemical cast to it, reflecting his recent reading of Marx. What those attending thought of it is unclear, though the meeting ended promptly without any questions from the floor.

It was Morris's idea to expand the Society's activities outside the United Kingdom. It seems to have originated in the spring of 1878 when he joined his wife Jane and their daughters who were travelling in Italy. In Venice he saw mosaics being removed from St Mark's Cathedral for restoration. On his return to England, he encouraged the committee to extend its activities across Europe. A 'foreign' casework committee was constituted in March 1879, its members comprising Morris, Webb and notable painters, Burne-Jones, Boyce, Charles Fairfax Murray as well as Colvin and George Howard, later Earl of Carlisle, a close friend and patron of Morris. The manifesto was translated into French, Italian, Dutch and German.

The painter John Bunney, who assisted Ruskin and was many years resident in Venice, became the Society's Venice correspondent (fig. x). The subsequent campaign the Society ran to oppose the culture ministry's proposals for St Mark's was the most widely covered one in its early history. There was extensive correspondence in British and Italian newspapers and public meetings held throughout Britain. Morris himself spoke at gatherings in Birmingham and Oxford. Letters from him and Ruskin were read to the Manchester meeting that was chaired by the local MP. There is no doubt that the exposure arising from this did more to promote the Society in Britain than any other early campaign and in entirely positive terms. In the event, as Frank Sharp has argued, the confrontational tactics Morris pursued with the Italian government and the absence of any real support from Italians backfired, creating indignation locally (fig. x) [WM0063]. [WM00622]

Later foreign casework was conducted more sensitively, through appropriate channels. Italy continued to be the main focus of work, with forays into Germany, Spain, Greece, the Middle East and India, and the Society could legitimately

Fig. x Interior of St Sophia, Thessaloniki.
The Courtauld Institute of Art, London [WM0624]





Fig. xxx Detail of a study for the painted doors of the *St George* cabinet, William Morris, 1861 (see G.26).
V&A (E2787-10271) [WM0105A]

VII PAINTING AND DRAWING

Julia Griffin

'I shall have enough to do, if I actually master this art of painting...'

William Morris to Crom Price, July 1856

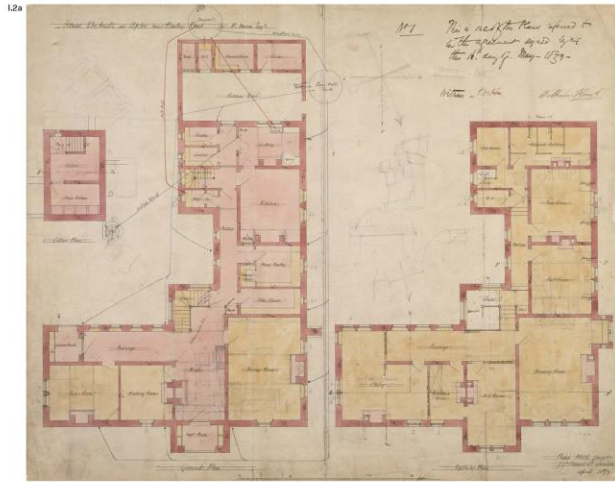
Morris's engagement with figure drawing and painting has often been portrayed as a short-lived and inconsequential pursuit – an unwelcome distraction from his true vocation for the applied arts. The story goes that in the summer of 1856 he resolved to become a painter under the charismatic influence of the Pre-Raphaelite artist and poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti. The verdict of Morris's first official biographer, John William Mackail, has shaped many subsequent life writings:

For the two years or so during which he worked hard at painting, he was moody and irritable ... He became not only a pupil but a servant ... How long Rossetti's daily influence might have kept him labouring at what he could not do, when there was work all around that he could do, on the whole, better than any man living, it is needless to inquire.

Mackail described Morris's figure drawings for illuminated manuscripts and stained glass as 'obviously faulty' and stated that in his design work he turned to Webb and Burne-Jones for the depiction of animals and figures respectively. He went as far as to conclude that Rossetti's influence was one of the two 'great disturbing forces' in

Morris's life (together with socialism).

In fact, Rossetti's artistic mentorship was, arguably, one of the most significant formative influences on Morris's creative vision. Proclaimed by John Ruskin as the 'greatest genius of the age' and the leader of the Pre-Raphaelites, Rossetti inspired and facilitated the professionalization of Morris's fine as well as decorative arts practice. Morris's experimental engagement with painting, both on canvas, but perhaps more significantly on walls and applied to furniture, was an essential part of his artistic development, honing his natural faculty for pictorial storytelling, ornament and colour. As a university graduate with no formal arts training, the discipline of drawing from life (both from models and from nature) – an activity that Morris took up with Rossetti's support in the late 1850s – was vital preparation for his career as a designer. However challenging he may have found the process, Morris recognized its value. In 'The Lesser Arts', a lecture of 1877, he argued that life-drawing was essential training for the decorative arts designer, 'both because the lines of a man's body are much more subtle than anything else, and because you can more surely be found out and set right if you go wrong.' Above all, the pictorial idiom of Morris's paintings as well as his figurative



12 Architectural drawings for Red House, Bexleyheath, Kent Philip Webb, 1859

Pencil, pen and ink and watercolour
Presented by Lady Burne-Jones

a Ground- and first-floor plans
53.3 x 66 cm

V&A (E.69-1916) [WM0202A]

b North and south elevations
52.1 x 63.5 cm

V&A (E.69-1916) [WM0203B]

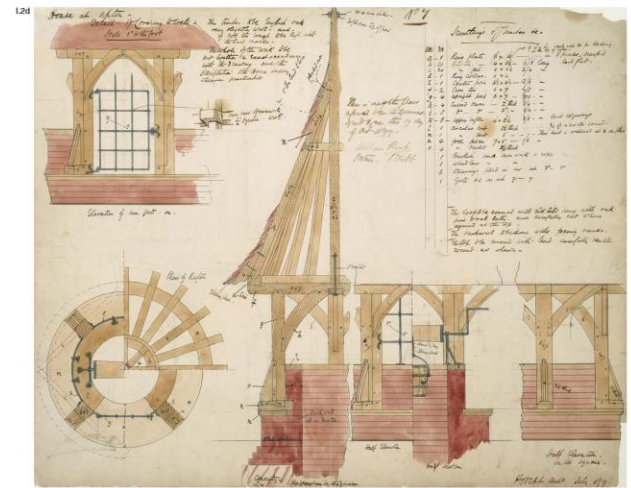
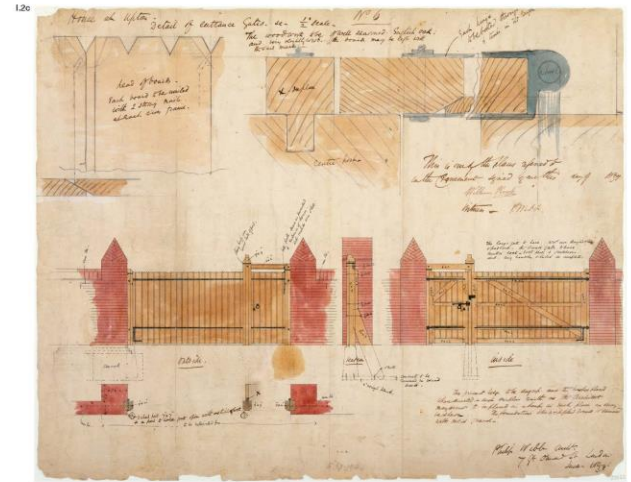
c Entrance gates (design for stables on reverse)
52.1 x 65.4 cm

V&A (E.69-1916) [WM0203C]

d Well-head
53 x 65.8 cm

V&A (E.64-1916) [WM0203D]

These drawings formed part of the agreement with the builder, William Kent. The original building contract, dated 16 May 1859, was rediscovered and donated to the National Trust in 2013. Together, the designs and contract reveal Webb's close attention to materials and techniques, with detailed specifications for all the different trades involved. Unusually for contract drawings, the designs have numerous adjustments in pencil, suggesting Webb's determination to achieve the best possible result for his friend, who was also a demanding client. The L-shaped plan shows how the house radiates out from the main staircase and also that the kitchen faces west, receiving full sun while dinner was being prepared. It was practical oversights such as this that prompted Webb, years later, to reflect that houses should only be designed by architects over 40 years of age.



1.14 King René's Honeymoon cabinet

Designed by John Pollard Seddon, assisted by William Burges, 1861
Manufactured by Thomas Seddon, 1861–2
Oak inlaid with various woods, painted panels and metalwork, 133.3 x 279.5 x 94 cm

V&A (W.10-1927)
Purchased with Art Fund support [WM0251]
This cabinet, designed in 1861 by John Pollard Seddon for his architectural office, was made by his father's cabinet-making firm. Seddon also designed the metalwork and inlay but commissioned ten panels depicting the Fine and Applied Arts from the Morris firm (J.P. Seddon, *King René's Honeymoon Cabinet*, 1898). William Burges drew the lion rampant for the Seddon coat of arms on the sloping top.

In 1862 Seddon's brother, the painter Thomas Seddon, had written to Ford Madox Brown expressing his admiration for King René of Anjou, a noted artist and patron. Madox Brown later suggested imaginary incidents from the king's life as a suitable theme for the cabinet and designed the left-hand panel representing *Architecture, Painting and Sculpture* were by Burne-Jones, while Rossetti was responsible for *Music* and also for the smaller panel, *Gardening*. The other small panels were *Embroidery* by Val Prinsep, *Pottery, Weaving, Ironwork* (showing Morris as a smith) and *Glass Blowing*. Morris designed the decorative backgrounds.

Displayed by Seddon at the 1862 International Exhibition, the cabinet received mixed reviews. However, the South Kensington Museum, recognizing its importance, attempted, unsuccessfully, to purchase it from the exhibition and finally acquired it from Seddon's daughter, Margaret Birch, in 1927. Several of the firm's designs were adapted for stained glass (H.13.14) [H Stained Glass: WM0168A-D and WM0157] and worked up into paintings.



114



115

1.15 St George cabinet

Designed by Philip Webb and painted by William Morris
Manufactured by Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., 1861–2
Mahogany, oak and deal, painted and gilded, copper handles, 96 x 178 x 43 cm

V&A (Q41-1906) [WM0254A]
This cabinet was made for the 1862 International Exhibition, the first

public showing of the firm's work. Webb charged £1 10s. for his design and Morris conceived and executed the decoration (see G.26). Rossetti described it enthusiastically in a letter to Charles Eliot Norton on 9 January 1862, 'I wish you could see a painted cabinet with the history of St George, and other furniture of great beauty which we have in hand.' It was exhibited with some of Webb's drinking

glasses on top and priced at £50. *The Building News* (8 August 1862) criticized the lack of co-ordination between the structure and the painted panels: 'This studied affectation of truthfulness, in placing ironwork in the midst of a picture, is one of the many sins which have to be purged from the Mediaevalists.' Morris used Burges's revived medieval method of layering tired varnishes on silver leaf

for the decoration inside the cabinet but did not follow his lead in integrating painted decoration into the overall structure. The cabinet appears in a list of the firm's stock approved at a meeting on 11 February 1863. At a later date it belonged to Laurence Hodson of Compton Hall, near Wolverhampton, an enthusiastic client of the firm and was acquired from his sale (Christie's, 6 July 1906).

1.16 The Backgammon Players cabinet

Philip Webb and Edward Burne-Jones
Manufactured by Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., 1861–2
Painted and gilded deal, oil on leather and metalwork, 185.4 x 114.3 x 53.3 cm

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (26.54)
Rogers Fund, 1926 [WM0250]
Webb's accounts of 1861 record a payment of £1 10s. for the design of the 'chess players' cabinet. It was displayed at the 1862 International Exhibition and purchased by the politician Henry Labouchère, later Baron Taubton, for Quaintock Lodge in Somerset. A letter from the firm in the Metropolitan Museum archives (11 December 1862) records that it had to be repaired after minor damage in transit to and from the exhibition.

Burne-Jones painted the leather panels with a scene of a couple playing backgammon in a garden setting. Often said to recall the atmosphere of the garden at Red House with its trellised enclosures, the subject also appears in medieval manuscripts. He executed several works on this theme, including an exquisite large-scale pencil drawing of similar dimensions to the cabinet doors (1861, Fitzwilliam Museum). When it came to painting the cabinet, he simplified the detail, especially the background, but added patterns to the costumes.

The extensive patterning on both the exterior and interior (fig. xx) [WM0250A] has all the hallmarks of Webb's design, though an entry in Burne-Jones's account book for the period January–April 1862 ('Gold cabinet woodwork 5£ painting 10£') suggests he may have had a hand in its execution. Compared to the painted patterns on other furniture produced by the firm, including the St George cabinet, it is extremely refined and carefully applied.



116

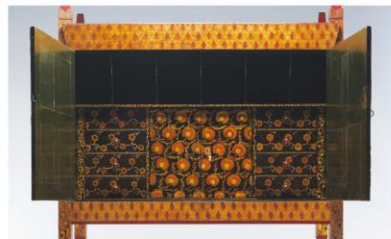


Fig. xx Detail of the interior suggesting the influence of Japanese lacquerware. [WM0250A]

L.10

L.10 Design for *Acanthus* wallpaper

William Morris, 1874
Pencil, watercolour and bodycolour,
81.5 x 65.2 cm

V&A (Circ.297-1866) WM0349

The two layers in this design are given equal weight. A very similar conjunction of tiny background motif and scrolling leaves also appears in Morris's calligraphic and illuminated manuscripts.

The design is largely worked in watercolour and the printer would have had to interpret this in distemper – hence the colour notes on the front. The comment 'get Mr. Morris to paint in front leaves' is probably a request from Jeffrey & Co. Notes on the back include 'The property of Mr. Morris 15/12/74'. Another version of the design, in different colours, is in Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

L.11 Wallpaper, *Marigold* (42)

Designed by William Morris,
registered 4 February 1875
Block-printed in distemper colours,
repeat h. 27 cm

William Morris Gallery, London Borough of
Waltham Forest (B91) WM0348

The design was well under way by late October 1874 as Rossetti then wrote to Morris, 'I have been making a pattern for a new colouring of the marigold paper and will send it with remarks.'

Although printed in only one colour, the design achieves complexity by overlaying a lightly meandering vertical stem carrying curving sprays of foliage and flowers on a densely patterned background. A similar format had been used for *Stroll*, c.1871, and *Light Larkspur*, c.1872. *Marigold* was registered as a fabric in April the same year (M.41).

L.12 Wallpaper, *Pimpernel* (82)

Designed by William Morris,
registered 29 February 1876
Block-printed in distemper colours,
repeat h. 42.4 cm

V&A (E.497-1019)

Given by Morris & Co. WM0351

In general effect and colouring, *Pimpernel* is similar to *Acanthus*. However, the pattern is more like the mirror repeat of the *African Marigold* printed textile, registered in October 1876.



L.11



L.12



Fig. 20 Peacock and Vine embroidery, designed by Morris and Philip Webb, displayed in Philadelphia in 1876.
William Morris Gallery (WMO0362)

XII TEXTILES

Linda Parry

'I think it of capital importance that a pattern-designer should know all about the craft for which he has to draw',
Some Hints on Pattern-Designing, 1881

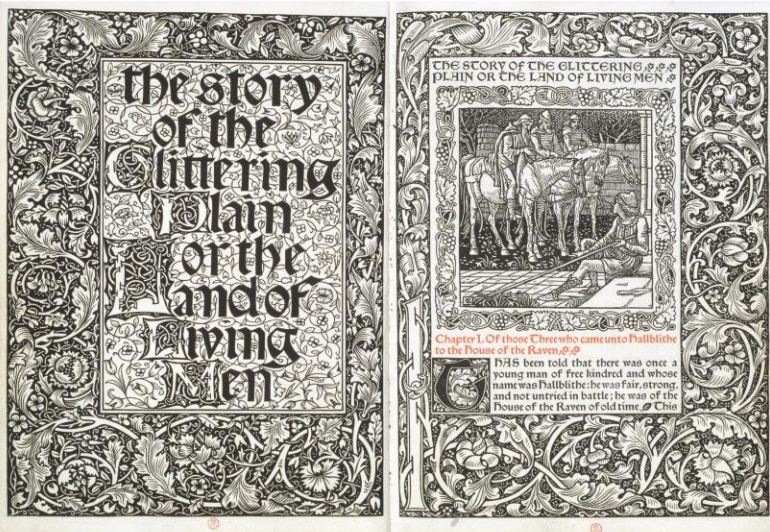
Morris remained fascinated with textiles throughout his life. His first interests were purely aesthetic, developed through a natural love of pattern and texture. In an attempt to produce the effects he most admired this was followed by a preoccupation with the complexities of technique. Visual and practical aspects became equally important to him, and his ability to balance and harmonize these two vital elements in his own work, a rare quality for a textile designer of any age, is the single most important reason for his success.

Designing and making textiles helped Morris to solve a number of problems. Having failed in his early ambition to be a painter, they provided the means of creating figurative art on a grand scale. More modestly, they improved the appearance of his own homes and those he furnished and decorated for others. Furthermore, by undertaking the complex preparations and often hard physical labour involved in manufacture his intellectual and manual needs were exercised and frequently fulfilled.

His career as a designer both began and ended with the design and production of textiles, and this chapter shows how this activity outpaced his involvement with any other form of the visual arts.

His earliest crudely worked panels, embroidered from about 1856, were attempts to reproduce medieval-looking hangings. His last examples, tapestries woven shortly before he died, finally achieved this dream. What developed between was a long and complex search for perfect patterns, colours, textures and effects for the home. Because such interests tend to be associated with women rather than men and as Morris is seen to have succeeded in these activities with apparent ease, this side of his achievements is frequently underestimated, depreciated or simply misunderstood. Yet a study of his textile career, because of the length of time and consistency of his interest, provides a fascinating analogy for his life as a whole.

Morris's childhood brought him into contact with good quality yet conventional textile furnishings. Although his family lived in considerable middle-class comfort, original art and avant-garde design were absent from the home. As an adult he remembered only one textile item, a crevel-work embroidered picture of Abraham and Isaac. In describing the subject and technique he added nothing of its history. For someone who was to become one of the great textile historians of his generation this is strange but shows how, in



Q.20 *The Story of the Glittering Plain* by William Morris

Kelmscott Press, issued 17

February 1894

Paper, 29.1 x 21 cm leaf

National Art Library, V&A (L.879-1894)
Purchased for £5.5s. from the Kelmscott Press
[WMO648A]

b Design for title-page

William Morris, 1894

Graphite, ink and Chinese white, 35.6 x 25.4 cm

Inscribed: 'Reduce 1/16 in width'

The Huntington Library, Art Museum and Botanical Gardens [WMO648B]

This was the only text published in two separate editions by the Kelmscott Press. Morris was so impatient to get the first edition into print that he proceeded without the planned illustrations from Walter Crane (D.10).

In February 1894 this second version was published in a larger format, set in his Troy type with 23 illustrations drawn by Crane and engraved on wood by Arthur Levereit.

As the sizes of type which Morris installed at his Press were restricted to those suitable for text composition, they were not large enough for displayed lines; so he produced title-page designs in which he combined his talents as a decorator with his gift for designing larger letter forms. In the fourth, fifth and sixth lines of the design for the title-page, Morris was disturbed to find a distracting vertical stress in the words 'Plain', 'the' and 'Land'; created by the stems of the letters i, h and d falling so closely beneath each other. When his design was cut on wood, the three words were staggered to avoid this.



Q.21 *The Well at the World's End* by William Morris

Kelmscott Press, issued 4 June 1896

Paper, 28.5 x 20.4 cm leaf

National Art Library, V&A (L.898-1896)
Purchased for £4 9s. 3d from the Kelmscott Press [WMO660]

This work was longer in production than any other Kelmscott book. Cockereil saw proofs in April 1892, and by October of that year Morris was busy on the borders. The main reason for the delay was the trouble Morris experienced in finding an acceptable set of illustrations for his text. Charles Fairfax Murray was named as his choice before he commissioned Arthur Gaskin, an artist of the Birmingham School and a most talented illustrator. He visited Kelmscott House in 1892 with samples of his work, which Morris admired. An extensively illustrated edition was planned, for which Gaskin received £250. Unhappily, the outcome did not please Morris, who eventually settled for only four illustrations by

Burne-Jones; that shown here is 'The Chamber of Love in the Wilderness'. These were used at the head of each 'book' with the title below lettered by Morris, who also provided a great variety of borders, initials and a 14-line initial word. The text was set in Chaucer type from Longman's trade edition, which was printed at the Chiswick Press while the Kelmscott edition was in production.

Q.22 Wood block for *The Well at the World's End* by William Morris

27.8 x 19.5 x 2.5 cm

British Museum (1897.1228.17) [WMO660]

Wood block engraved with a Morris border and used for the right-hand page above. Powdered chalk has been applied to engraved portions of the border so that the design can be 'read' in black and white, much as it would appear. The block is marked 'Border 7' and the top edge is stamped with the name of its maker or supplier: 'J. SCOTT WHITEFRIARS ST EC'.

