A Call to Art: William Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites

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Exhibition Introduction

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What might a slower, simpler, kinder society look like? This question grew louder in the Victorian age (1837–1901). Faced with the squalor and suffering caused by rapidly expanding cities and unchecked industrialisation, many reacted by looking to the past to create a vision for the future.

William Morris (1834–1896) — designer, poet and political activist — led a revival of traditional arts for interior design and decoration, proposing ‘how we might live’. He declared:

‘The past is not dead, but is living in us and will be alive in the future which we are now helping to make.’

Alongside Morris, artists calling themselves the Pre-Raphaelites challenged the art of their time, blending natural imagery with imaginative visions drawn from literature and legend. Women were an integral part of this

creative circle, carving out roles as professional artists and designers.

Together, they confronted the challenges of pollution, mass production, excessive wealth and violence against women — issues that remain urgent today. Through their art and politics, these artists and craftspeople outlined radical alternatives for a fairer society.

A medieval story re-imagined

William Morris and many of his fellow artists looked to the past to shape a vision for the future. Medieval tales of King Arthur's knights inspired them to create romantic images for their own time.

Morris's favourite love story was that of Tristram and Iseult as told in Sir Thomas Malory's Le Morte d'Arthur of the 1400s. Sorrowfully separated from Tristram, Iseult shares her bed with the dog given to her as a love token. This is Morris's only oil painting on canvas. His wife-to-be, Jane Burden, aged 18, poses as Iseult.

La Belle Iseult
William Morris
1858
Oil paint on canvas
Tate: Bequeathed by Miss May Morris 1939
N04999

Morris in midlife

‘I hate sitting,’ Morris wrote in 1877, but the artist William Blake Richmond, a family friend and neighbour, persuaded him to pose for this portrait.

This is ‘as I remember him,’ wrote Richmond’s son, ‘blue shirt, no tie — very alive’. Morris is depicted as a confident businessman and famous poet in his 50s, embarking on a political career.

William Morris
William Blake Richmond
About 1880
Oil paint on canvas
Lent by the National Portrait Gallery, London. Acquired 1922
NPG 1938

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Section Introduction

‘History has remembered the kings and warriors, because they destroyed; Art has remembered the people, because they created.’

1 Sources and Inspirations

William Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites saw the modern, urban, industrial world as ugly, oppressive and exploitative. They found inspiration in art, craft and stories from the medieval past.

Medieval Gothic architecture, traditional poetry, music and tales of courtly love were rediscovered and revived in the 1800s. Art critic and social commentator John Ruskin, artist Edward Burne-Jones and William Morris were among those who visited buildings and museums in Britain, France, Belgium and Italy, made studies of medieval architecture and costumes, and collected armour, prints, books, furniture, ceramics and textiles for their own homes.

Through their shared love of the past, these artists imagined other ways of living in which everyone could benefit and find value and pleasure in creative, collaborative work.

A new direction

As students, Morris and Burne-Jones read the work of John Ruskin, whose essays and art criticism were to have a lasting impact.

Ruskin praised medieval Gothic architecture for its craft, collaborative production, and reverence for the natural world. The idea that art was an expression of rewarding and pleasurable work would inspire Morris's own endeavours.

In 1892 Morris reprinted Ruskin's key text, 'The Nature of Gothic' (1853) under his own imprint, the Kelmscott Press. In his preface, Morris wrote that 'it seemed to point out a new road on which the world should travel'.

Proof pages for the Kelmscott Press edition of John Ruskin's 'The Nature of Gothic'. Bound with William Morris's 'Preface' and a copy of the chapter from The Stones of Venice
About 1892
Letterpress and woodcut with pen and ink on paper
On loan from Cambridge University Press & Assessment

Playing the knight

As a boy, William Morris wore home-made armour while riding his pony in Epping Forest. Knowledgeable about medieval warfare, and inspired by examples like these, he later commissioned a helmet and chainmail from a blacksmith in Oxford.

Morris's early poems romanticise combat: 'Tonight I make good cheer/Because this battle draweth near' — The Eve of Crecy (from The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems, 1858).

Helmet
Unrecorded maker working in Augsburg, South Germany
About 1580–90
Steel, iron, brass and leather
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bequeathed by James Stewart Henderson, 1933
HEN.M.5A-1933

Gauntlet
Unrecorded maker working in Augsburg, South Germany
About 1620
Steel, iron and leather
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bequeathed by James Stewart Henderson, 1933
HEN.M.5E-1933

‘Arise Sir Perseus’

In this dramatic study, Burne-Jones shows the ancient Greek hero Perseus clad in armour, while he is battling to save the princess Andromeda from a sea-monster. The use of grey and white on black paper enhances the sense of an underwater world. Pre-Raphaelite artists often reimagined classical mythological figures as knights in medieval armour.

Study of Armour: Perseus in ‘The Finding of Medusa’
Edward Burne-Jones
Before 1880
Watercolour, bodycolour and white heightening on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Given by the Executors of the estate of Sir Edward Burne-Jones, 1909
679

Gothic beauty

Inspired by Ruskin’s praise of Gothic architecture, Morris toured cathedrals in northern France in 1854, shortly after this sketch was made.

Morris said the town of Rouen was ‘still in its outward aspect a piece of the Middle Ages’. ‘No words can tell you how its mingled beauty, history, and romance took hold ... it was the greatest pleasure I have ever had.’

Entrance to South Transept of Rouen Cathedral
John Ruskin
May 1854
Graphite, black chalk, pen and ink, wash and white heightening on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bequeathed by James Richardson Holliday, 1927
1579

Weaving stories

Morris declared tapestry to be ‘the noblest of the weaving arts, in which there is nothing mechanical’. He studied old examples, taught himself the techniques, found design inspiration in their details, and revived the artform.

This medieval cushion cover of the kind he studied depicts the biblical story of Tobias with his faithful dog, guided by the archangel Raphael.

Cushion cover
Unrecorded maker, England, possibly working in London
1575–99
Tapestry woven in metal thread, wool and silk
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bought with the Grace Clarke Fund, 1953
T.1-1953

A rousing call

Morris’s medieval heroes included Wat Tyler and John Ball, who led the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381 in England. Morris was inspired by their rallying cry against social inequality: ‘When Adam delved and Eve span/Who was then the gentleman?’ Their call invoked the biblical account of the beginning of the world without class divisions. Burne-Jones illustrated their slogan for Morris.

When Adam Delved and Eve Span
Designed by Edward Burne-Jones, about 1888
Printed by Carl Hentschel, 1895
Woodcut on paper
William Morris Gallery, London Borough of Waltham Forest
P300

Psychic story

Inspired by Greek and Roman myths and legends, in the 1860s Morris and Burne-Jones planned a (later abandoned) illustrated book of the story of Cupid and Psyche.

The images were engraved on wood by Morris, his friends and family, including craftswoman Elizabeth ‘Bessie’ Burden. Her engraving is dynamic and energetic. Morris’s is more static and reminiscent of the Italian imagery he and Burne-Jones admired.

Left: **Psyche is abandoned by Cupid**, designed by Edward Burne-Jones, engraved by Elizabeth Burden

Right: **Venus and her Handmaidens**, designed by Edward Burne-Jones, engraved by William Morris

Blocks cut about 1866–68, printed 1880s
Wood engravings on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bequeathed by James Richardson Holliday, 1927
P.12171-R(a) and (b)

Cupid and Psyche

Morris and Burne-Jones probably saw this Italian panel when it was on sale in London in 1863. It narrates the ancient myth of the love between the princess Psyche (seen in white) and Cupid, god of love. They admired this early pictorial style, where the story unfolds across multiple episodes, and soon planned an illustrated book of this tale.

Panel from a wedding chest: The Story of Cupid and Psyche
Jacopo del Sellaio
About 1473
Tempera paint with gold on panel
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bequeathed by Charles Brinsley Marlay, 1912
M.75

Prints from the past

Prints by the German artist Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) and his circle were admired and collected by Pre-Raphaelite artists. A selection owned by William Morris still hangs in his bedroom at Kelmscott Manor, his home in Oxfordshire.

The style and subject matter of such early prints inspired Victorian illustrations. The legend of Saint George, who fought a dragon and became England's patron saint, and the biblical story of Adam and Eve, were popular subjects illustrated by Morris, Burne-Jones and others.

Left: **Adam and Eve**
Albrecht Dürer
1504
Engraving on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bequeathed by Charles Brinsley Marlay, 1912
P.3108-R

Right: **St George Killing the Dragon**
School of Albrecht Dürer, perhaps Hans Baldung Grien
About 1504–05
Woodcut on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bequeathed by Charles Brinsley Marlay, 1912
P.3445-R

‘My chief joy’

Morris studied — and later owned — several medieval manuscripts, including this Book of Hours made for Christian devotion and prayer. He admired their ornate decoration and in the 1870s created his own manuscripts, calling them his ‘chief joy’. Morris’s daughters watched him pass a sable brush through his hair to pick up the traces of grease that allowed it to lift gold leaf for decoration.

Book of Hours (known as the Pabenham-Clifford Hours)
Unrecorded makers working in England
About 1315–20
Illuminated manuscript on parchment, bound in polished oak boards with a white goatskin spine by Robert Proctor, Cambridge, 1988
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Folios 37 & 55 given by Samuel Sandars, 1892, and reunited with the volume bought from William Morris, 1895, received after his death, 1896
MS 242

Earthly Paradise

The Earthly Paradise is an epic sequence retelling Norse and ancient Greek and Roman myths and legends, including the story of Cupid and Psyche. First published in 1868–70, it made Morris famous as a poet.

In 1896–97 Morris reissued the text under his own imprint, the Kelmscott Press. He designed the typefaces, decorative borders and initials, which are inspired by medieval examples.

‘The Story of Cupid and Psyche’ in The Earthly Paradise, Volume III
Written and designed by William Morris
Kelmscott Press, Hammersmith, 1896
Letterpress and woodcut on paper, bound in vellum
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Given by Jane Morris, 1909

‘Mr. Morris is the pre-Raphaelite poet ...
He has abundance of vivid, positive colour,
sharp outline, and great richness of word ...
but it is all cold, artificial, and angular.’

2 The Pre-Raphaelite Movement

The first paintings by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood were exhibited in London in 1849. This group of young artists, poets and critics — among them Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Holman Hunt and John Everett Millais — rejected the art of their day and aimed for what they perceived to be the simplicity and sincerity of early Italian art. They believed that art should be meaningful, beautiful and socially engaged.

A wider circle, including Elizabeth Siddal, William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones, shared their ideals, expanding the ‘Brotherhood’ into an influential artistic movement.

Women were at the heart of Pre-Raphaelite art, giving rise to the enduring idea of the

loose-haired, alluring ‘stunner’ that is still familiar today.

Many of these works dramatise stories of romance and betrothal, betrayal and rejection. Recurring themes of vulnerability and seduction challenged the double standard that excused men and punished women for what was seen as sexually immoral behaviour.

Enchantment

The Pre-Raphaelites delighted in tales stemming from Arab and Persian oral traditions. These included the collection of stories A Thousand and One Nights (known as ‘The Arabian Nights’).

Golden Water is based on the story of siblings who regain their royal status through a speaking bird, a singing tree, and a never-failing source of water. In this work, Rossetti places Princess Parizade in an English orchard.

Golden Water (Princess Parizade)
Dante Gabriel Rossetti
1858
Bodycolour on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
The Ricketts and Shannon Collection.
Bequeathed by Charles Shannon, 1937
2148

Buying inspiration

Morris bought this painting in 1856, his first of several purchases from the Pre-Raphaelite circle. The work explores a brief moment of discord between lovers and the fragility of young love. Its format inspired Morris's own painting, La Belle Iseult. The meticulously rendered bark and leaves connect directly with John Ruskin's studies from nature and Morris's own textile designs.

April Love
Arthur Hughes
1855–56
Oil paint on canvas
Tate: Purchased 1909
N02476

Love and class

Exploring love across class barriers, John Everett Millais illustrates John Keats's poem Isabella, or the Pot of Basil in this study for a painting. Millais shows the moment when Lorenzo, a poor clerk, offers Isabella a slice of orange. Their romance angers her wealthy brothers sitting opposite.

In the poem, the brothers kill Lorenzo. Isabella buries his head under a basil plant and tends it mournfully.

Study for Lorenzo and Isabella
John Everett Millais
1848
Pen and ink on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bequeathed by James Richardson Holliday, 1927
1396

Helen of Troy

Pre-Raphaelite artists often depicted tragic heroines from myth and legend. Rossetti shows Helen, the most beautiful woman of ancient Greece and legendary cause of the Trojan War. Behind her are the Greek ships and the besieged city of Troy burning in defeat.

This was probably a wedding gift for the Pre-Raphaelite model Annie Miller, who posed as Helen.

Helen of Troy
Dante Gabriel Rossetti
1863
Oil paint on panel
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
The Ricketts and Shannon Collection.
Bequeathed by Charles Shannon, 1937
2293

Challenging expectations

A young girl passes wedding cake nine times through a ring — a traditional custom for a bridesmaid to summon a vision of her future husband. Her yearning expression and sumptuous flowing hair challenged the idea that women should be depicted as demure and became characteristic of Pre-Raphaelite painting.

Across all social classes, marriage was a primary concern for women. Soon, this girl will be marriageable, with hair neatly styled and gaze modestly lowered.

The Bridesmaid
John Everett Millais
1851
Oil paint on panel
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Given by Thomas Richards Harding, 1889
499*

Joan of Arc: a mighty woman

Rossetti depicts the medieval heroine who led the French army against the English in the 1400s. Despite the inscription ‘Jehane la Pucelle’ (‘Joan the Maid’), she is shown as a powerful woman with flowing red hair, wielding the sword she believed was God-given. At a time when women were often depicted as passive, Rossetti’s image presented Joan as a model of female defiance.

Joan of Arc
Dante Gabriel Rossetti
1882
Oil paint on panel
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Given by Charles Fairfax Murray, 1909
685

The Minotaur myth

Burne-Jones dramatises the story of a mistreated woman in a famous scene from Greek mythology. Ariadne helps Theseus find his way through the Labyrinth to kill the monstrous Minotaur, giving Theseus a ball of string to find his way out. He later abandons her on a rocky island. Ariadne also appears in designs by Burne-Jones for tiles and stained glass made by Morris & Co.

Theseus and Ariadne
Edward Burne-Jones
1862
Watercolour, bodycolour and gum arabic on paper, laid on canvas
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
From the estate of Mrs Celia Tate.
Accepted by HM Government in lieu of Inheritance Tax and allocated to the Fitzwilliam Museum, 2023
PD.32-2024

The other Dante

Dante Gabriel Rossetti was inspired by his namesake Dante Alighieri (1265–1321), the medieval poet from Florence. This drawing depicts an unhappy wife from Dante's 'Purgatory' (part of his Divine Comedy) who died after being banished by her cruel husband. The drawing's title quotes from Dante's poem.

Ricorditi di me che son la Pia
(Remember me, I am la Pia [the Pious])
Dante Gabriel Rossetti
1868
Red and black chalk on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bequeathed by Sir Ivor and Lady Batchelor, 2015
PD.155-2015

Harmony

In the 1870s, the Pre-Raphaelite style evolved into softer forms and smokier tones. Storytelling gave way to creating an almost musical, atmospheric mood. Between the musicians here stands Eros, the god of love and desire, enduring themes of Pre-Raphaelite art. Pastel colours further enhance the sense of harmony.

The Bower Meadow
Dante Gabriel Rossetti
1872
Coloured chalks on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Given by Alice Dew-Smith, 1920
1011

Shakespearean scene

Holman Hunt's drawing depicts a scene from Shakespeare's Measure for Measure. Claudio, condemned to death for immorality, implores his sister Isabella, a novice nun, to save him by sacrificing her virginity.

Shakespeare's plays were regularly illustrated by the Pre-Raphaelite circle. Morris and his university friends enjoyed reading them aloud to each other in a dramatic manner.

Study for Claudio and Isabella
William Holman Hunt
1850
Graphite, pen and ink and wash on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
The Ricketts and Shannon Collection.
Bequeathed by Charles Shannon, 1937
2073

Bare courage

This illustration was for an edition of Alfred Tennyson's poems published in 1857. The poem retells the medieval legend of Lady Godiva whose tyrannical husband would only spare the people of Coventry from a harsh tax if she agreed to ride through the town naked. Holman Hunt depicts Lady Godiva clothed but about to undress, reframing female vulnerability as heroic empowerment.

Godiva
Designed by William Holman Hunt, engraved by the Dalziel Brothers, London
1857
Wood engraving on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bequeathed by Campbell Dodgson, 1949, received 1951
P.188-1951

Medieval haunting

Elizabeth Siddal was a Pre-Raphaelite artist and drew inspiration from medieval tales, literature and song.

In this intimate scene, intensely painted in jewel-like colours, the tragic heroine May Margaret is visited by the ghost of her lover, Clerk Saunders, murdered by her brothers. Through the window, we see the medieval town beyond. Siddal's literary reference is the traditional ballad of the same name collected in Sir Walter Scott's anthology Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border, first published in 1802.

Clerk Saunders
Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal
1857
Watercolour, bodycolour, gum and white heightening on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Given by Charles Fairfax Murray, 1910
680

Tales of the unexpected

Supernatural tales were often used by the Pre-Raphaelite circle. In folklore, encountering one's double foretells death. Here, lovers in medieval dress greet their doubles with dismay. The figures are likenesses of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal, who married in 1860. With hindsight, the subject seems a bad omen. Siddal died in 1862.

How They Met Themselves
Dante Gabriel Rossetti
1860–61
Watercolour, bodycolour, gum and white heightening on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bought with the Perceval Fund, 1937
2300

The Psalm singer

The Pre-Raphaelites often illustrated biblical tales. Simeon Solomon shows David, musician-poet of the Psalms, holding a harp. The model may have been Italian-born harpist and artist Gaetano Meo.

Solomon's work frequently explored his gay identity and Jewish faith and the love between David and Jonathan perhaps held particular significance for him. He also depicted David in stained glass for Morris & Co.

David
Simeon Solomon
Undated
Watercolour, bodycolour and white heightening on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Given in accordance with the wishes of the late W. Barclay Squire, by his sister Charlotte Fuller Maitland, 1927
1199

Fanny Eaton

Simeon Solomon sketched Jamaican-born Fanny Eaton for a painting of Jochebed, Moses's mother. In the 1860s Eaton became a favoured model among Pre-Raphaelite artists. Today her impact and presence in their art is recognised, encouraging us to reconsider perceptions of race and beauty at that time. Eaton's features are seen in Burne-Jones's stained-glass window depicting the 'Libyan Sibyl' made by the Morris firm for Jesus College, Cambridge.

Study of Fanny Eaton for The Mother of Moses
Simeon Solomon
7 November 1859
Graphite on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bequeathed by Guy John Fenton Knowles, 1959
PD.55-1959

Blamed and shamed

This design for a tile depicts an episode in the ancient Greek epic of the siege of Troy. The Trojan prince Paris abducts the beautiful Helen, leading to war between the Greeks and Trojans. An example of a woman blamed and shamed for men's actions, Helen was a popular figure in Pre-Raphaelite art and featured in designs for needlework, stained glass and paintings.

Design for a tile: The Abduction of Helen
Edward Burne-Jones
About 1862
Graphite, pen and ink and wash on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bequeathed by James Richardson Holliday, 1927, with a life interest to his widow, relinquished 1931
1547

'Where is thy work? ... Who were thy friends?'

3 Friendship and Fellowship

William Morris attracted a creative group of friends — young men and women who joined in with the projects of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, using their skills to make art for all and to rethink 'how we might live'.

Key members included embroiderer Jane Morris, artists Georgiana and Edward Burne-Jones, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Ford Madox Brown and Elizabeth Siddal, architect Philip Webb, designers and craftswomen Kate Faulkner and Lucy Faulkner, and embroiderer and wood engraver Elizabeth Burden. The group formed a charmed circle.

From 1860, many of these friends gathered to furnish and decorate Red House in Kent, William and Jane Morris's first home together. Their creative endeavours led to the formation in 1861 of the design partnership later known as Morris & Co. — often referred to as 'the Firm'.

Edward Burne-Jones

Edward Burne-Jones — known as ‘Ned’ — met Morris at Oxford University and from their first meeting they were to be great friends and artistic colleagues.

Born in Birmingham, the son of a poor frame-maker, Burne-Jones intended to be a clergyman before deciding to become a painter. With the Morris firm, he combined image and storytelling in designs for tiles, stained glass and tapestries.

Edward Burne-Jones
Charles Fairfax Murray
July 1869
Graphite, brown wash and white heightening on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Given by Charles Fairfax Murray, 1915
778

Philip Webb

Architect of Red House and chief furniture designer for the Morris firm, Philip Webb’s legacy in architecture and conservation is significant. Webb was a loyal colleague to Morris in politics and campaigns for the conservation of historic buildings. He was also a close friend to designer Kate Faulkner, with whom he collaborated on several projects.

Philip Speakman Webb
Charles Fairfax Murray
1873
Brown ink wash and graphite on paper
Lent by the National Portrait Gallery, London.
Given by wish of Sir Sydney Cockerell, 1963
NPG 4310

William Morris: restless energy

Morris was temperamentally restless except when designing or writing. This portrait was made when he was 35 and becoming famous as the poet of The Earthly Paradise.

The artist, Charles Fairfax Murray, started as studio assistant to Burne-Jones and worked for Morris as a glass painter and illustrator. He became a great collector of art who gave significant works to the Fitzwilliam.

William Morris
Charles Fairfax Murray
About 1870
Pencil and brown watercolour on paper
Lent by the National Portrait Gallery, London.
Given by Christopher Hughes, 1949
NPG 3652

Charles Joseph Faulkner

Lifelong friend and original partner in the Morris firm, ‘Charley’ Faulkner met Morris and Burne-Jones at Oxford University. He helped to paint the decorative ceilings at Red House and some of the Firm’s first church commissions. As a mathematician, he kept the early business accounts for the Firm, before returning to teach at his university college. This is his only known likeness.

Portrait of Charles J. Faulkner aged 24
Unrecorded photographer
About 1858
Photogravure printed by Walker & Cockerell, London, reproduced in Georgiana Burne-Jones’s Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones, Volume I
Macmillan and Co., London, 1904
Private collection

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

Often regarded as the leader of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Dante Gabriel Rossetti was both an artist and a poet. Meeting Morris in London in 1856, he played a key role in promoting the Morris firm through his social and artistic contacts. When he was 27, Rossetti drew this image for Elizabeth Siddal, his future wife, as she left to spend the winter abroad.

Self-portrait
Dante Gabriel Rossetti
September 1855
Pen and ink on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Given by Charles Fairfax Murray, 1909
683

Locked in time

This locket contains the hair of both Elizabeth Siddal and Jane Morris and is inscribed: ‘Two beautiful women the wives of two great poets’. It is emblematic of an enduring fascination with women who were at the heart of Pre-Raphaelite art, often fetishised and idealised as muses or ‘stunners’. This emphasis obscures their roles as active contributors to the movement.

Locket containing hair of Elizabeth Siddal and Jane Morris
Unrecorded maker
1914 or later
Gilt metal, blue enamel, glass, cream silk and hair
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Given by Virginia Surtees, 1993
M.1-1993

Jane Burden

Born into poverty in Oxford, Jane Burden first posed for the Pre-Raphaelites aged 17. In 1859, she married William Morris and she became a noted embroiderer and key partner in his creative enterprises. This drawing, a study for a Nativity scene, was made when Jane was expecting their first child.

Jane Morris
Dante Gabriel Rossetti
1860
Graphite and grey wash on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bequeathed by James Richardson Holliday, 1927
1429

Fair as the moon

In her poem, In an Artist's Studio (1856), Christina Rossetti captures the essence of her sister-in-law Elizabeth Siddal: 'Fair as the moon and joyful as the light'.

The two dates on this portrait mark 1850, when Siddal first met Rossetti, and the year 1865 when the drawing was completed. This indicates that it was re-worked after Siddal's death in 1862.

Elizabeth Siddal
Dante Gabriel Rossetti
1850–65
Watercolour and graphite on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bequeathed by James Richardson Holliday, 1927
1575

Stitching together

In the 1860s Georgiana Burne-Jones stitched several embroidered panels with figures from Arthurian legend, intended for her own home. Among these was the figure of the powerful enchantress Morgan Le Fay.

Figurative embroideries such as this expose a paradox at the heart of the circle: women were often both the subjects of its art and the indispensable makers of its products.

Panel with the figure of Morgan le Fay
Designed by Edward Burne-Jones,
embroidered by Georgiana Burne-Jones
1863
Wools on cotton velvet
Victoria and Albert Museum
T.119-1985

Subsection Label

Elizabeth Siddal

Elizabeth Siddal — known as Lizzie — was an artist and close collaborator within Morris's circle. She first encountered members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood when she modelled for several artists, including Walter Howell Deverell and John Everett Millais. She shared their interest in medieval stories, Shakespeare, poetry and traditional ballads. In 1857 she exhibited with the Pre-Raphaelites.

In 1860, Siddal married Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and joined the friendship circle of the Morrises and Burne-Joneses. She planned a book of fairytales illustrated with woodcuts with Georgiana Burne-Jones. Her brother-in-law, writer and critic William Michael Rossetti, later remarked: 'She had much facility of invention and composition, with eminent purity of feeling, dignified simplicity, and grace.'

Siddal died in 1862 from an opium overdose after the stillbirth of her daughter led to severe postnatal depression.

Border ballads

Siddal, and other Pre-Raphaelite artists, took their subjects from books such as Sir Walter Scott's collection of ballads from the Scottish borders. These are Siddal's own copies.

These studies, made in preparation for Clerk Saunders (on view in the previous section), reveal how Siddal experimented with different versions of the same scene. After her death, Rossetti brought together all her artworks, pasting photographs of her sketches and drawings into memorial portfolios. This is the only portfolio that survives intact.

Left and right: **Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border, Volumes III and IV**
Compiled and edited by Sir Walter Scott
Adam and Charles Black, Edinburgh, 1830s edition
Printed books with engraved illustrations, bound in red cloth by John Gray, Edinburgh
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Given by Charles Fairfax Murray, 1917
PB 12-2021

Centre: **Three versions of Clerk Saunders**
Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal
In a portfolio of photographic reproductions of drawings by Siddal, compiled by Dante Gabriel Rossetti about 1867
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Given by Charles Fairfax Murray, 1916
PH.1-1916

Compositional study

This is one of several studies Siddal made in the early 1850s depicting the life of the Virgin Mary. Her angular, elongated figures are blocked out for later refinement. Siddal studied medieval manuscripts in the collection of the art critic John Ruskin and at the British Library. Yet this is a strikingly modern study, notable for its energy and tense emotion.

Study for the Nativity
Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal
About 1854
Pen and ink and graphite on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bought with the Biffen and Gaskell funds, 1992
PD.102-1992

Studies of Siddal

Siddal was a renowned model for several Pre-Raphaelite artists, most famously posing for John Everett Millais's much-loved painting Ophelia (1852).

Rossetti made numerous informal studies of her. 'Each one a fresh charm,' wrote artist Ford Madox Brown in 1854, 'each one stamped with immortality.'

Right: **Study of Elizabeth Siddal**
Dante Gabriel Rossetti
1854–55
Graphite on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Given by Charles Fairfax Murray, 1913
747*2

Left: **Study of Elizabeth Siddal, seated at a window**
Dante Gabriel Rossetti
June 1854
Pen and ink and graphite on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
The Ricketts and Shannon Collection.
Bequeathed by Charles Shannon, 1937
2147

Fanny Cornforth

Fanny Cornforth was born Sarah Cox in rural Sussex, the daughter of a blacksmith. She posed for several Pre-Raphaelite artists and became one of Rossetti's favourite models. Rossetti later gave her several of his paintings, including his portrait of Swinburne, which hangs nearby. But, like many models, she was socially excluded from the group owing to her occupation and working-class status.

Fanny Cornforth
Dante Gabriel Rossetti
About 1862–65
Graphite on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
The Ricketts and Shannon Collection.
Bequeathed by Charles Shannon, 1937
2157

Georgiana Burne-Jones

Georgiana Macdonald — known as 'Georgie' — was at the heart of the group of friends around William Morris. She practised painting, stencilling, wood engraving and embroidery and was also an accomplished musician. She was steadfast in defence of her friends, especially Morris, whose belief in art for all and social activism she shared.

Macdonald married Edward Burne-Jones in 1860 and this portrait was drawn by Rossetti as a wedding gift.

Georgiana Burne-Jones
Dante Gabriel Rossetti
1860
Graphite on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bequeathed by Sophia Mary Kitson, 2024
PD.31-2024

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Poet and literary critic Algernon Charles Swinburne met Rossetti, Burne-Jones and Morris in Oxford in 1857. In the early 1860s he was often in their studios sharing his poems, until alcoholism hampered these friendships.

In this portrait, Swinburne's delicate jawline and slender neck reflect an androgynous aesthetic. The intense, distant gaze adds to the image of him as a creative young man.

Algernon Charles Swinburne
Dante Gabriel Rossetti
1861
Watercolour, bodycolour, white heightening, graphite and gum on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Given by Charles Fairfax Murray, 1909
682

Books do furnish a life

Georgiana Burne-Jones's own artistic pursuits were curtailed as her husband's career flourished. However, she was an active socialist who led and facilitated grassroots projects, and an intellectual, practical and emotional anchor in Morris's own political life.

Later she became the first chronicler of their circle, through her rich and insightful biography, Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones.

Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones, Volume II
Written by Georgiana Burne-Jones
Macmillan and Co., London, 1904
Printed book with photogravures
Private collection

Italian romance

In 1861 Cornforth and Swinburne modelled for an illustration to Rossetti's translations of medieval Italian poets. Swinburne recounted how they posed for this scene of lovers in a garden by 'embracing ... in the most fervent and abandoned style'. Typical of Rossetti's work at the time, this image became an iconic representation of Pre-Raphaelite romance.

The Rose Garden
Dante Gabriel Rossetti
1861
Etching on paper, pasted into proof copy of The Early Italian Poets, translated by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, bound in marbled paper, with leather spine
Chiswick Press, London, 1861
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Given by Charles Fairfax Murray, 1917

Subsection Label

Inspired by Red House

Morris built Red House, his family home from 1861 to 1865, in Bexleyheath, Kent. Designed for him by Philip Webb, it was surrounded by orchards. Its location, close to the medieval pilgrims' route in poet Geoffrey Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, encouraged Morris's own storytelling.

Planning a 'palace of art', Morris set his friends to decorating the rooms at Red House. Their weekends were legendary. 'It was the most beautiful sight in the world,' one friend recalled, 'to see Morris coming up from the cellar beaming with joy his hands full of bottles of wine'. The time at Red House marked a brief period when art, friendship and everyday life came together.

The work decorating and furnishing Red House led to the launch of the business of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co.

Kindness and cruelty

Similar in style to furniture painted for Red House, this simple cabinet was decorated by Burne-Jones in the week before his wedding to Georgiana Macdonald. It carries a modern message. On the front, medieval women feed birds and animals, in contrast with acts of cruelty to animals on the sides. Animal welfare and protection of the natural world were growing concerns for Victorians.

Ladies and Animals sideboard
Edward Burne-Jones
1860
Pine, oil paint, gold and silver leaf
Victoria and Albert Museum.
Given by Mrs. J.W. Mackail
W.10-1953

A love of daisies

These hand-painted quarries (pieces of stained glass) may have come from Red House, and other windows painted with the same designs can still be seen there. The birds were drawn by Webb, and the flowers by Morris.

The daisy was a personal emblem for Morris, following Chaucer, who loved most ‘these flowers white and red that men call daisies’.

Stained-glass panel
Designed by Philip Webb and William Morris,
possibly made by James Powell & Sons, London
About 1860
Stained and painted glass, lead and softwood
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Given by the Friends of the Fitzwilliam Museum, 1980
C.3-1980

Daisy delight

This was the first textile embroidered by Jane and William Morris for Red House. Jane found the fabric by chance in a London shop, Morris designed the pattern with his favourite daisy motif, and they embroidered them together.

Jane recalled how the completed hangings ‘covered the walls of the bedroom to our great joy’. They took them to all their subsequent homes.

Daisy wall-hanging
Designed by William Morris,
embroidered by William and Jane Morris
About 1860
Coloured wools on dark blue woollen serge
Society of Antiquaries of London (Kelmscott Manor)
KM033.2

Inspirational illuminations

Morris based the Daisy embroidery on a wall-hanging he saw in a medieval illumination, ‘The Dance of the Wodehouses’ (wild men). The illumination appeared in manuscripts of the historian Jean Froissart’s Chronicles made in the 1400s. Morris owned two copies of the 1844 publication which reproduced this image, where the hanging is visible in the background in green.

Plate XXXII from Illuminated Illustrations of Froissart.
Selected from the MS. in the British Museum by
H.N. Humphreys
William Smith, London, 1844
Hand-coloured lithograph
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bequeathed by A.D.W. Bartlett, 1986

Birds and the bees

Trellised roses in the Red House garden inspired Morris's very popular wallpaper design. Based on the pattern of sinuous stems on a grid format, it is populated by birds and bees drawn by Philip Webb. In the early 1860s Morris attempted to print wallpapers himself in the Firm's workshops at Red Lion Square, Bloomsbury, before outsourcing production to specialists in hand-printed wallpaper.

Trellis wallpaper
Designed by William Morris and Philip Webb,
November 1862
Printed by Jeffrey & Co., London, before 1940
Block-printed paper
William Morris Gallery, London Borough of Waltham Forest
B31

Freedom from fashion

These figure studies were probably sketched in the Red House garden. Women in the Pre-Raphaelite circle actively rejected mainstream fashion, preferring loose, full-skirted gowns, without corsetry or hoops.

The flowing fabrics and defined waists of these gowns echo Italian dress of the 1400s. Burne-Jones studied medieval clothing and hairstyles, making copies and sketches from paintings and reference books.

Sketches of female figures
Edward Burne-Jones
1860
Graphite, watercolour, white heightening and gum on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Given by Charles Fairfax Murray, 1908
677

‘The very paradise’

The idyllic setting of this drawing evokes the convivial atmosphere of the garden at Red House. A space of friendship and recreation, and harmony with nature, the garden was carefully designed by Morris and Webb, complete with rose trellises.

Burne-Jones’s source here was an allusion in Chaucer’s The Franklin’s Tale to backgammon playing in a garden — ‘it were the very paradise’. In their medieval dress, the two figures connect to the decorative schemes within the house and the group’s love of the art and literature of the past.

The Backgammon Players
Edward Burne-Jones
1861
Graphite on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
The Ricketts and Shannon Collection.
Bequeathed by Charles Shannon, 1937
2004

Stitching history

Morris’s decorative scheme for Red House included 12 embroideries depicting heroines from literature, history, mythology and the Bible. Panels were stitched by Jane Morris, Elizabeth ‘Bessie’ Burden, Kate Faulkner and Georgiana Burne-Jones.

As a professional needlewoman, Burden returned to these embroideries in 1889, creating this screen, which she sold for £80.

Screen with embroidered panels:
Left: **Lucretia**, centre: **Hippolyte**, right: **Helen**
Designed by William Morris, about 1860
Embroidered by Elizabeth Burden, about 1861–65
Wool and silks on linen, oak frame
The Castle Howard Collection
TX0120

Female heroines

The Roman goddess Artemis was one of the heroines drawn by Morris for embroideries at Red House. Morris's scheme was inspired by wall-hangings of historical and mythical 'noblewomen' in Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire, commissioned in 1573 by the Countess of Shrewsbury (known as 'Bess of Hardwick').

This design is now known to have been embroidered for Red House by Kate Faulkner, but the embroidery remains untraced.

Artemis
William Morris
1861
Coloured chalks and ink on paper
Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery Trust, Carlisle
1949.125.77

Painting and decorating

Three episodes illustrating the medieval story of Sir Degrevaunt and Lady Melidor survive in Red House, painted on the drawing room wall. In this preparatory design musicians serenade the happy couple after their wedding.

The composition echoes scenes painted by the artist Giotto in Padua in the 1300s, showing similar musical instruments. At Red House, the mural narrative was left unfinished.

Design for the decoration of Red House: The Wedding Procession of Sir Degrevaunt
Edward Burne-Jones
1860
Pen and ink on card
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Given by Charles Fairfax Murray, 1917
869

Designs for furniture

As a wedding gift for the Morrises, Rossetti painted designs on their furniture at Red House. This study depicts a moment from a poem by Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) where he glimpses his beloved Beatrice.

The foreground figure is a drawing of Mary Nicholson, who worked as housekeeper for Morris and Burne-Jones at Red Lion Square and who stitched Morris's earliest embroideries.

Study for The Salutation of Beatrice
Dante Gabriel Rossetti
About 1859
Graphite and pen and ink on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
The Ricketts and Shannon Collection.
Bequeathed by Charles Shannon, 1937
2154

Repeated in Red House

In this scene from Dante Alighieri's Divine Comedy, Dante meets Beatrice during his journey through Purgatory to Paradise. Rossetti painted a version of this drawing on one of the cupboard doors on built-in furniture at Red House. Originally designed by Morris for rooms he rented in Red Lion Square, Bloomsbury, the furniture was adapted by Webb for its new home.

Dante and Beatrice Meeting in Purgatory
Dante Gabriel Rossetti
1853–54
Pen and ink, watercolour and gum on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Given by Sir Sydney Cockerell, 1937
2292

Red House

© National Trust Images. Photo: Andrew Butler

Section Introduction

‘With the arrogance of youth, I determined to do no less than to transform the world with Beauty.’

4 Morris & Co.

Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. was founded in London in 1861 to provide artist-designed furnishings and decoration. The founding partners were William Morris, engineer and painter Peter Paul Marshall, Charles Faulkner, Edward Burne-Jones, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Philip Webb and Ford Madox Brown.

‘The Firm’, as it was known, aimed to challenge what Morris described as the ‘costly rubbish’ of the time and to promote traditional craft techniques. It launched with a display of furniture, stained glass, tiles and embroideries at the 1862 London International Exhibition. This led to commissions to decorate and furnish churches, Cambridge colleges and grand houses.

Women were part of the creative workforce

from the start — managing production, stitching embroideries, painting tiles, cutting woodblocks and designing patterns.

In 1875 the Firm was restructured as Morris & Co., under Morris's sole direction. It flourished for many years after his death in 1896, finally closing at the start of World War Two.

'The daisie, or else the eye of the day'

Morris made a bold statement with his first wallpaper design. He rejected the ornate floral patterns then fashionable for wallpapers. Instead, he favoured flat, stylised, accurately observed forms from countryside flowers and foliage.

The medieval poet Chaucer, whom Morris deeply admired, called the daisy 'the eye of the day' (or day's eye), as its petals open at dawn.

Daisy wallpaper
Designed by William Morris, 1862
Printed by Jeffrey & Co., London, before 1940
Block-printed paper
William Morris Gallery, London Borough of Waltham Forest
B42a

Fruitful wallpapers

Morris's flat repeating patterns for wallpapers became one of the Firm's most successful outputs. He described printing patterns on paper as a 'quite modern and very humble — but as things go useful — art'.

Early patterns such as this, the second wall-paper he designed, use simple, stylised motifs and structure. By the 1870s, he had mastered more spatially complex scrolling patterns.

Most of the 70 wallpaper patterns produced in his lifetime were designed by Morris himself, making these his best-known and lasting achievements. As papers and printed fabrics, they remain widely recognised.

Fruit wallpaper
Designed by William Morris, 1862
Printed by Jeffrey & Co., London, before 1940
Block-printed paper
William Morris Gallery, London Borough of Waltham Forest
B9d

Early tiles

Philip Webb designed some of the tiles that were a signature of the Firm in the 1860s and 1870s, often featuring local birds or flowers. Technically difficult to make, they were not a commercial success.

Like Morris, Webb looked to medieval sources, such as illuminated manuscripts, for inspiration. He also studied blue and white Dutch tiles, known as delftware — by then available from London dealers or on display at the South Kensington Museum (now the V&A).

Left: **Hen and Chick tile**
Designed by Philip Webb for Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., London
About 1860–70
Hand-painted on tin-glazed earthenware blank produced in the Netherlands
Linda Parry Bequest, 2024.
William Morris Gallery, London Borough of Waltham Forest
C283

Centre: **Goose tile**, right: **Duck tile**
Designed by Philip Webb for Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., London
About 1860–70
Hand-painted on tin-glazed earthenware blanks produced in the Netherlands
Victoria and Albert Museum
C.74-2005 and C.75-2005

Cinderella sweeping

Edward Burne-Jones designed a series of tile panels illustrating fairytales, including Cinderella, for the newly established Firm. Preparatory drawings like this use flattened perspective and strong linear shapes. Cinderella wears medieval-style clothing as if she has stepped from an illuminated manuscript. Her downcast gaze and solemn expression convey sadness in a mode favoured in Pre-Raphaelite representations of womanhood.

Design for a tile: Cinderella Sweeping
Edward Burne-Jones
1861
Graphite and brown wash on textile
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bequeathed by James Richardson Holliday, 1927
1242.1

An early commission

Illustrating Cinderella, Burne-Jones's designs for this tile panel were influenced by German wood engravings of the mid-1800s. According to his wife Georgiana, depicting the folktale characters was a welcome outlet for his 'abounding humour'.

All six narrative scenes were signed by Lucy Faulkner, who painted many of the Firm's best quality tiles.

Cinderella tile panel
Narrative tiles designed by Edward Burne-Jones, painted by Lucy Faulkner, 'Swan' tiles designed by William Morris, for Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., London
1863–64
Hand-painted tin-glazed earthenware
National Museums Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery
1981.210

Angels large and small

Burne-Jones's account books record what he was paid for designs for the Firm, along with his wry comments and satirical sketches.

In one book, he lists stained-glass designs for St Michael and All Angels church, Hampshire, with payments for Angels 'large' (£3 10s, about £489 today) and 'small' (10 shillings, around £16).

In the other, he caricatures himself as dismally thin, and Morris as jolly and rotund.

The books also log purchases Burne-Jones and his wife Georgiana made through the Firm, including furniture for their home.

Account books of Edward Burne-Jones with the firm of Morris & Co., London
1861–82 and 1883–1900
Pen and ink and graphite on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge. Given by Sir Philip Burne-Jones and Margaret Mackail, 1921
Burne-Jones XXXI and XXXII

Buying and selling

Morris & Co. opened a showroom on Oxford Street in 1877. Sample wallpaper books were sent to towns like Cambridge so orders could be placed through local firms such as F.R. Leach & Sons. By the early 1900s, the Firm's catalogues illustrated furniture ranges and embroideries, allowing customers to order without visiting London. Agents in the United States and Australia reached international buyers.

Specimens of Furniture and Interior Decoration
Morris and Company, London
About 1912
Lithographs on paper, bound in printed paper covers
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge

Jewel-like

Writer and art critic John Ruskin asked Morris in 1883 about the Firm's techniques for achieving bold colours in stained glass. Morris's reply here explains their use of 'pot metal' — glass made in a traditional method where metal oxides are added to create colour. The thickness of glass and density of colour, he writes, help to achieve the desired 'jewel-like quality'.

Letter from William Morris to John Ruskin
15 April 1883
Pen and ink on paper
On loan from Cambridge University Press & Assessment

Team spirit

Morris's designs for stained glass included figures playing musical instruments. In this example, the figures' patterned clothing and medieval setting reference the stained glass, tiles and textiles Morris saw in churches.

Stained-glass production required a team. At the Firm, Morris supervised the colours, lead lines and assembly of whole windows. Painters, led by foreman George Campfield, added the details of faces and drapery to the glass.

Stained-glass panel: Minstrels playing cymbals and flute
Designed by William Morris, 1868
Made by Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., London, 1870s
Stained and painted glass, lead
The Stained Glass Museum, Ely
ELYGM:2016.14

In defiance of materialism

In 1862 the Firm was commissioned to supply stained-glass windows for St Michael and All Angels at Lyndhurst in Hampshire.

Burne-Jones depicted saints and angels welcoming souls into paradise, in a graceful and two-dimensional style characteristic of his early designs for church windows for the Firm. In reaction to the modern world, he declared: 'The more materialistic science becomes, the more angels shall I paint.'

Large cartoons (full-size preparatory drawings) like these guided the Firm's stained-glass painters.

Left: **Design for stained glass: Saints John the Evangelist, Peter, Paul and John the Baptist**
Edward Burne-Jones
1862–63
Graphite, brown ink and washes on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Given by Charles Fairfax Murray, 1909
690a

Right: **Design for stained glass: Angel Leading a Soul into Paradise**
Edward Burne-Jones
1862–63
Graphite, brown ink and washes on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Given by Charles Fairfax Murray, 1909
690b

Subsection Label

Embroidery

Under Jane Morris and her sister Elizabeth ‘Bessie’ Burden’s supervision, the Firm set up a network of embroiderers working from home. They stitched portieres (door curtains to protect against draughts), bedcovers, fire screens and cushion covers to Morris’s specification.

As well as fulfilling commissions, from the mid-1870s the Firm sold prepared embroidery kits, with the designs outlined and partly stitched, and the silk or wool threads enclosed.

In 1885 May Morris took over management of the embroidery department, establishing a workroom in the family home in Hammersmith, employing women from her social circle and training girls from the local school. According to May: ‘Unless embroidery is clear and bright as the day and fresh as spring flowers it is not worth looking at and not worth doing.’

Poppy panels

These panels were stitched by Helen Lucas-Tooth who immigrated to England from Australia with her husband, a politician and baronet. Lucas-Tooth purchased several embroidery patterns from Morris & Co., which were sold with the threads required to stitch them at home.

This design was by John Henry Dearle, who progressed from shop boy to pattern designer and art director at the Firm.

Horned Poppy panels
Designed by John Henry Dearle for Morris & Co., London, about 1890
Embroidered by Helen, Lady Lucas-Tooth
Coloured silks on cream silk
Murray Edwards College, University of Cambridge

Ada's artichoke

In 1876, Ada Godman and her husband, wealthy clients of the Firm, commissioned Webb to design their country house, Smeaton Manor in North Yorkshire. Godman requested a Morris design for wall-hangings which she embroidered herself over many years.

Morris studied Italian silks and velvets, and Arab, Persian and Central Asian textile patterns. Echoes of these are seen in the repeating structure of the artichokes.

Artichoke wall-hanging
Designed by William Morris, 1877
Embroidered by Ada Phoebe Godman
Wools on linen
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bought with the Adnitt, Marlay, University Purchase, and Webb Funds, and Grant-in-Aid from the Victoria & Albert Museum, 1979
T.1-1979

Flowerpot kit

Kits for home embroideries or ready-made cushion covers and fire screens sold well at a lower cost than other outputs of the Firm. Morris drew inspiration from Italian lace panels of the 1600s in the South Kensington Museum (now the V&A). This sample stitched by May Morris was perhaps a display item to show customers what the finished embroidery could look like.

Flowerpot embroidered picture
Designed by William Morris, about 1876
Embroidered by May Morris, 1890–1900
Coloured silks on wool
Victoria and Albert Museum.
Bequeathed by the maker
T.68-1939

The finest needlewoman

Catherine Holiday was one of the skilled embroiderers who worked on a freelance basis for Morris & Co. She had developed her own stitching techniques and was, according to William Morris, the finest needlewoman of them all.

For one tablecloth, her fee was £50 (roughly equivalent to £4,000 today). If it sold for £100, she would receive a further £40. Morris supplied the designs and Holiday chose the colours and stitches. Morris dyed embroidery silks in modern colours, which he saved especially for her to use.

Sunflower bed cover
Designed by William Morris, about 1876
Embroidered by Catherine Holiday for Morris & Co., London
Silks on linen
Victoria and Albert Museum
CIRC.196-1961

Tapestry of truth

This drawing was made for Morris's celebrated illustrated edition of the poet Geoffrey Chaucer's works — known as the 'Kelmscott Chaucer'. It depicts Philomene, one of Chaucer's 'Good Women', at the loom.

Philomene is raped by her brother-in-law Tereus, who cuts out her tongue. Unable to speak, she weaves a tapestry to tell her sister. Together the sisters murder Tereus's son in revenge.

Legend of Good Women: Philomene at the loom
Edward Burne-Jones
About 1892–96
Graphite on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Given by Stanley Baldwin, 1921
1050.65

Learning by doing

From his first investigations unpicking old embroideries to his later endeavours at weaving and carpet-knotting, Morris preferred hands-on experience, learning by doing as he went. Burne-Jones caricatures this by sketching Morris sitting in his hobnailed boots stitching a floral design.

William Morris working on a needlework tapestry
Edward Burne-Jones
About 1871
Graphite on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bought with the Gow Fund and a contribution from the Museums and Galleries Commission/V&A Purchase Grant Fund, 1998
PD.58-1998.f.4

Art in service

Deaconess Isabella Gilmore, William Morris's sister, commissioned the Firm to design a chapel serving Anglican churchwomen ministering to the poor in south London. She wanted 'something perfectly simple ... the green of a field and a great big silver cross'. Gilmore used a bequest from their mother Emma to fund the scheme.

Webb designed the chapel and fittings, including this altar table decorated with stylised leaf forms.

Altar table
Designed by Philip Webb, 1896
Made by John Garrett and Son, London, 1897
Carved oak
Victoria and Albert Museum.
Given by Gilmore House Ltd
W.4-2003

Exquisite embroidery

May Morris stitched the embroidery on this superfrontal — a cloth placed over the top of an altar on feast days. She used a range of stitches to execute the design, balancing intricate borders, grapes, interwoven vines and five large gold crosses. Webb described the work as 'beautifully well done'. Through pieces such as this, May Morris firmly established embroidery as an artistic discipline.

Superfrontal
Designed by Philip Webb, 1896
Embroidered by May Morris, 1898–99
Silks and gold thread on linen
Victoria and Albert Museum.
Given by the Rochester and Southwark Deaconess's House
T.379-1970

Divine design

The Morris firm was commissioned to decorate St Martin’s, a new church in Scarborough, in 1861. The Firm supplied stained-glass windows designed by Morris, Burne-Jones, Madox Brown and Webb. The pulpit was painted with a scene of the Annunciation, based on this design by Rossetti, showing the Virgin Mary in a medieval garden receiving the divine news that she would give birth to Christ.

Design for a pulpit: The Annunciation
Dante Gabriel Rossetti
1861
Bodycolour on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bequeathed by James Richardson Holliday, 1927, with a life interest to his widow, relinquished 1931
1574

Subsection Label

Kate Faulkner

In her own lifetime, Kate Faulkner was celebrated as a professional decorative artist and designer. Having long been forgotten, her contribution and that of other women at the Firm is now receiving greater recognition — and several of her pattern designs are still in production today.

Born in Birmingham in 1841, Faulkner moved with her family to London in 1861 and immediately became a friend and collaborator in the Morris circle. At the Firm, she worked alongside William Morris from the beginning as a designer, maker and workshop supervisor. Faulkner was skilled in tile painting, woodblock cutting, embroidery, carpet knotting, pattern designing and gesso work.

She sold her designs to other manufacturers, earning an international reputation in a role that today we would describe as a freelance designer.

Silvered screen

In 1886, Morris & Co. was commissioned to refurbish Whitelands College Chapel in Chelsea, supplying stained glass, furniture and fittings. This ornate screen — known as a reredos — was decorated by Faulkner. She described how ‘The colouring upon the silver being all transparent, every part ... catches the light’. Her final bill of £162 would be equivalent to around £27,000 today.

Reredos (screen behind an altar) from Whitelands College Chapel, London
Designed by William Morris, decorated by Kate Faulkner
1886–90
Oak and silvered gesso
On loan from the University of Roehampton

Painted patterns

Faulkner’s talents as a pattern designer and painter are evident in her decoration of this large plate. She covers the whole surface with starflowers (borage), using just one colour and variations in spacing. Plates like this were sold in the Morris & Co. shop for display on a mantelpiece or high shelf.

Decorative plate
Designed and painted by Kate Faulkner for Morris & Co., London
1880
Hand-painted onto a ceramic blank made by Pinder, Bourne and Co., Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent
Victoria and Albert Museum
C.324-1930

Designing patterns

Faulkner designed repeating patterns for tiles and painted them to order with a long-handled brush at a table in her drawing room. The tiles were then fired in the nearby Morris & Co. kilns and supplied for interior design projects undertaken by the Firm. Faulkner's great friend, the architect Philip Webb, regularly chose her patterns for use in the houses he designed.

Pair of tiles in 'diagonal wreath' pattern
Designed by Kate Faulkner, 1870s
Made by Morris & Co., London, about 1880
Hand-painted earthenware
William Morris Gallery, London Borough of Waltham Forest
C251 and C253

A woman of craft

Kate Faulkner, a professional designer and skilled craftswoman, met and worked alongside William Morris soon after she moved to London in 1861. From its early days, the Firm produced painted tiles, using designs by Morris and Burne-Jones. Kate painted these with her sister, Lucy Faulkner, in the drawing room of their family home in Queen Square, London.

Penelope, heroine of Greek mythology, included in Chaucer's Legend of Good Women, was famous as a model of domestic virtue. She is shown here holding a weaving shuttle.

Penelope tile
Designed by Edward Burne-Jones, painted by Kate Faulkner
About 1865
Hand-painted earthenware
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Given by Ernest Barnsley, 1922
C.3-1922

Peonies

Faulkner created around eight pattern designs for Morris & Co. between 1875 and 1888, for wallpapers or furnishing fabrics. Like Morris, she carefully observed and drew stylised versions of local flowers and plants to make repeating patterns. These were hand-printed using carved wooden blocks, one for each colour. This sample still has the Morris & Co. label identifying it as a registered design protected by copyright.

Peony
Designed by Kate Faulkner, 1877
Manufactured by Morris & Co., London, 1877–1919
Block-printed cotton
Victoria and Albert Museum. Given by Morris & Co.
T.587-1919

Carnations

Only four people besides William Morris regularly designed patterns for the Firm — and Kate Faulkner was the first. The others were May Morris, John Henry Dearle and, from about 1913, Kathleen Kersey.

This is the earliest of Faulkner's recorded pattern designs. She drew inspiration from close observation of nature, creating simplified, repeating shapes, produced in a range of colours.

Right: **Design for wallpaper or textile: Carnation**
Kate Faulkner
About 1875
Watercolour on card
William Morris Gallery, London Borough of Waltham Forest
A1070

Left: **Carnation**
Designed by Kate Faulkner, 1875
Manufactured by Thomas Wardle, Leek, Staffordshire, for Morris & Co., London
Block-printed cotton, bound and lined
The Whitworth, The University of Manchester
T.8067.2

Mallow

Faulkner came from an artistic family and aspired to be a designer. She may have attended design classes when she first moved to London or learned the skill of repeated pattern design from Morris himself. They were great friends and collaborators. Her patterns were produced by Morris & Co. from 1875. Morris later recommended her work to other wallpaper manufacturers.

Design for wallpaper: Mallow
Kate Faulkner
1879
Watercolour on paper
William Morris Gallery, London Borough of Waltham Forest
A452

Sublime figures

Burne-Jones described these designs as ‘four colossal and sublime figures of angels’. Made for stained-glass windows in Salisbury Cathedral, the designs proved popular and were later adapted for tapestries for churches.

In these drawings, the use of coloured chalks gives an ethereal quality that emphasises the otherworldliness of the angels despite their imposing size. Their androgynous depiction further conveys their heavenly nature, free from the limitations of physical bodies. For Pre-Raphaelite artists, angels symbolised beauty and imagination.

Right: **Design for stained glass, later adapted for tapestry: Angeli Ministrantes** (‘Ministering Angels’)
Edward Burne-Jones
1878–79
Coloured chalks on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Given by Charles Fairfax Murray, 1910
699.1

Left: **Design for stained glass, later adapted for tapestry: Angeli Laudantes** (‘Praising Angels’)
Edward Burne-Jones
1878–79
Coloured chalks on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge. Given by Charles Fairfax Murray, 1910
699.2

A thousand flowers

Morris revived the art of tapestry, employing a team of young weavers. In this example, John Henry Dearle adapted Burne-Jones’s designs for angels, replacing one set of angelic wings with a millefleur (‘a thousand flowers’) background. The techniques developed at the Firm to suit both the designs and the weavers’ skills created open, textured fabrics that were looser than medieval examples.

Angeli Ministrantes (‘Ministering Angels’)
Designed by John Henry Dearle with figures by Edward Burne-Jones, woven by John Martin, William Haines and George Eleman for Morris & Co. at Merton Abbey, London
1894
Wool, silk and mohair on cotton
Victoria and Albert Museum. Purchased with Art Fund support and the National Heritage Memorial Fund
T.459-1993

Subsection and Film Label

Cambridge Interiors

Between 1862 and 1878 the Morris firm contributed to major decorative schemes in Cambridge, including at Queens' College, Peterhouse and Jesus College.

At a time of religious revival, these Cambridge colleges honoured their medieval origins and pious founders through decorative schemes — aligning with the Firm's own practice of looking to the past to shape the future. These commissions survive as significant examples of the Firm's work in stained glass, tiles and patterning. Painting and wood carving were undertaken by local firms.

David Parr joined the Cambridge firm of F.R. Leach as an apprentice in 1871. His nationwide work decorating houses and churches with Morris designs inspired him to hand-paint the surfaces of his own small, terraced house in Cambridge — connecting his working-class home to the grand decorative schemes of the Cambridge colleges.

Film of interiors in Peterhouse, Queens' College, Jesus College and David Parr House
Duration: 4 minutes
Audio description provided
Check with venues for visit information

Heavenly hosts

Morris designed a host of angels for the painted ceiling of Jesus College Chapel, each carrying a scroll with a quotation from a Latin hymn. In his drawing, the delicate detailing of face and clothing is balanced by strong blocks of colour.

The painting of Morris's figures on the Chapel ceiling, executed by F.R. Leach & Sons, used bolder blues and reds, and gold for the angels' wings.

Design for the ceiling of Jesus College Chapel: Angel Holding a Scroll
William Morris
About 1866
Coloured chalks on paper
Jesus College, Cambridge

Heavenly music

Angels feature repeatedly in medieval art — including in stained glass in churches, paintings and illuminated manuscripts. Inspired by examples he saw, Morris designed a series of elegant figures playing musical instruments which were used for stained glass, tiles and painted decorations. This design was used for a window in Jesus College Chapel, where it is one of eight musical angels forming a heavenly group.

Design for stained glass: Minstrel Angel with Violin
William Morris
About 1867
Graphite and brown wash on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bequeathed by James Richardson Holliday, 1927
1233

Women wronged

These designs were used for stained-glass windows at Peterhouse, in a private room for academic fellows. Chaucer's poem The Legend of Good Women (about 1386–88), recounting stories of women betrayed by men, inspired the subjects. Ironically, at the time Peterhouse was an all-male college.

Hypsipyle, queen of Lemnos, was deserted by Jason. Ariadne of Crete helped Theseus defeat the Minotaur but was abandoned on a rocky island. Phyllis killed herself when rejected by Demophon and was transformed by the gods into an almond tree.

Preliminary drawings for stained-glass windows for the Combination Room, Peterhouse
Left: **Hypsipyle**, centre: **Ariadne**, right: **Phyllis**
Edward Burne-Jones
1864
Graphite and red and black chalk on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Given by Frank Brangwyn, 1943
2673.1-3

The Queens of Queens’

A central feature of the Old Hall at Queens’ College is the fireplace and tiled overmantel supplied by the Firm as part of a major renovation project. Figurative tiles representing saints, angels and the Labours of the Months were designed by Burne-Jones, Madox Brown, Morris and Rossetti.

In 1873, Madox Brown provided these two additional tile designs for the overmantel — rare surviving examples of his work for the Firm. They depict the College’s two royal founders: Margaret of Anjou and Elizabeth Woodville.

Left: **Design for a tile, Queens’ College: Queen Margaret of Anjou**
Ford Madox Brown
1873
Black chalk and wash on paper
By kind permission of the President and Fellows of Queens’ College, Cambridge

Right: **Design for a tile, Queens’ College: Queen Elizabeth Woodville**
Ford Madox Brown
1873
Black chalk and wash on paper
By kind permission of the President and Fellows of Queens’ College, Cambridge

A year in tiles

Labours of the Months were a common theme in medieval manuscripts, stained glass and sculpture. Illustrating seasonal activities, they were adapted by Morris, Burne-Jones, Rossetti and Madox Brown in designs for a tiled overmantel at Queens' College. February's figure keeps warm by a blazing fire. December depicts a pig-killing, in preparation for Christmas feasts.

The Firm often reused designs across different media. December also appeared in stained glass made for the home of a textile manufacturer in Keighley, Yorkshire.

Left: **Design for a tile, Queens' College: February**
Edward Burne-Jones
About 1862
Graphite and brown wash on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bequeathed by James Richardson Holliday, 1927
1546

Right: **Design for a tile, Queens' College: December. Man Killing a Pig**
Dante Gabriel Rossetti
About 1862
Graphite, pen and ink and brown wash on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bought with the Biffen Fund, 1979
PD.16-1979

Centre: **Stained-glass panel: Labours of the Month — December, Killing a Hog**
Designed by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, made by Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., London, for Silsden House, Keighley, Yorkshire
1863
Stained and painted glass, lead
The Stained Glass Museum, Ely
ELYGM:2002.2

‘Have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful.’

5 At Home

From 1878, William and Jane Morris split their time between Kelmscott House in Hammersmith and Kelmscott Manor in Oxfordshire. They furnished both with carefully chosen objects. But not with wallpapers of Morris’s own design: instead, he insisted that — in the medieval manner — rooms should be hung with fabrics, tapestries and carpets.

As well as his passion for medieval artworks, Morris admired designs and objects from across the globe, including from Italy, Iceland, Iran, South Asia and Arab lands. He owned and displayed items of furniture, metalwork, stoneware, textiles, books and manuscripts. Some of these personal possessions came to the Fitzwilliam Museum thanks to his friendship with Sydney Cockerell (Fitzwilliam Director, 1908–37). Cockerell had worked as

Morris's private secretary and then Secretary to the Kelmscott Press in the 1890s and he remained close to the family after Morris's death.

Jenny Morris

Jenny was the Morrises' elder daughter. A promising scholar, she also made jewellery and embroidery. Her creativity was curtailed by disability related to epilepsy, for which she required constant care from the age of 15.

The artist Evelyn Pickering — who made this sensitively observed portrait of Jenny — and her husband, ceramicist William De Morgan, were among the Morris family's closest friends.

Jenny Morris
Evelyn De Morgan
1890s
Pastel on paper
William Morris Gallery, London Borough of Waltham Forest
D276

May Morris

May Morris managed the Firm's embroidery department from 1885 to 1896 and was a noted textile artist, designer, teacher and writer.

This portrait by family friend Edward Burne-Jones captures May's determined gaze. She and her sister regarded the Burne-Joneses as 'Uncle Ned' and 'Aunt Georgie'.

May joined her father's Socialist campaigning. She later edited his literary works and preserved the family's home Kelmscott Manor.

May Morris
Edward Burne-Jones
1880s
Oil paint on canvas
Society of Antiquaries of London (Kelmscott Manor)
KM056

Jane Morris

As well as being a renowned needlewoman and managing the embroidery department of the Morris firm for over 20 years, Jane Morris was remembered for the warmth and order of her home.

This is one of Rossetti's many depictions of Jane. Her image, with tilted neck and untamed hair, is the archetype of Pre-Raphaelite beauty.

Bruna Brunelleschi
Dante Gabriel Rossetti
1878
Watercolour, bodycolour, white heightening and gum on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Given by Francis Falconer Madan, 1946
2759

Portrait of a poet

Artist George Watts persuaded Morris to sit for him in 1870, for a ‘Hall of Fame’ series of portraits of ‘the men who make England’. Morris’s reputation at this time rested on his poetry, which may have prompted the inclusion of wispy lilies floating around his head. Watts’s portrait was widely reproduced in prints such as this example by engraver Malcolm Osborne.

William Morris
Printed by Malcolm Osborne,
after a painting by George Frederick Watts
About 1913
Mezzotint on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Given by Philip A. Cohen, 1937
P.28-1937

Keen pleasure

May Morris’s practical handbook Decorative Needlework demonstrates simple embroidery stitches from darning and chain stitch to buttonhole and feather stitch. She wanted everyone to enjoy what she called the ‘keen pleasure’ of making something by hand, however modest the ambition. Morris provided precise instructions on harmonies of colour and pattern, and she designed the decorative cover for the book.

Decorative Needlework
Written by May Morris
Joseph Hughes & Co., London, 1893
Printed book, bound in cream cloth, with stamped decorative cover
Private collection

Shamrock motif

Jane Morris designed the shamrock motif for the cover of this collection of poems by her lover Wilfrid Scawen Blunt. The title — In Vinculis (‘In Chains’) — refers to Blunt’s imprisonment for advocating Irish self-government, or ‘Home Rule’, a key political issue of the time. Jane also supported Irish nationalism, while William Morris regarded it as a distraction from the struggle for Socialism.

In Vinculis (‘In Chains’)
Written by Wilfrid Scawen Blunt,
cover designed by Jane Morris
Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., London, 1889
Printed book, bound in cream cloth, with stamped decorative cover
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bequeathed by Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, 1922

Autumn days at Kelmscott

In this letter, Jenny Morris writes to her friend Phillis Paine (born Ellis) who undertook transcribing work for the Kelmscott Press. Jenny discusses a coverlet she stitched with her sister for Phillis’s first child, born in 1895 — ‘I enjoyed very much doing my share of it’. She also describes her delight at spending long October days with her father at Kelmscott Manor.

Letter from Jenny Morris to Phillis Ellis
6 October 1895
Pen and ink on paper
Pasted into autograph album belonging to Phillis Ellis, given to her by Thomas James and Annie Cobden-Sanderson 14 June 1894,
bound in white vellum at the Doves Bindery, London, the autographs compiled 1894–1902
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Given by B.W.F. Paine, 1957
MS 1-1957

Use and beauty

This bodice was designed, made and worn by May Morris. The indigo-dyed fabric and simple cornflower motif echo the Daisy needlework created by her parents for Red House in 1860. Like them, May favoured natural plant dyes.

The sleeves of the bodice, full at the shoulder and tapering to a tight cuff, are in a fashionable 1890s style known as ‘leg o’ mutton’.

Bodice
Designed, made and embroidered by May Morris
1890s
Indigo-dyed wool
Society of Antiquaries of London (Kelmscott Manor)
KM616

Icelandic inspiration

Morris translated Norse sagas in collaboration with Icelandic scholar Eiríkur Magnússon, who worked at Cambridge University Library. His pleasure in the work was ‘great indeed’.

Morris practised his calligraphy writing out three stories including ‘Hen Thorir’. Scholars have likened this tale of a much-hated merchant, feuds and a violent end to the drama series Game of Thrones.

The Story of Hen Thorir
Translated by William Morris and Eiríkur Magnússon, written out and illuminated by William Morris
1873–74
Illuminated manuscript on paper, bound in gold-tooled leather by Roger De Coverly, London
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Given by Georgiana Burne-Jones, 1909
MS 270*

Harmonious cooperation

The Golden Legend is a medieval collection of saints' lives translated from Latin by William Caxton (1483). Phillis Ellis transcribed the text for this Kelmscott Press edition from an original copy borrowed from Cambridge University Library.

Morris modelled himself on Caxton as a master printer directing a skilled workforce, believing everyone should work together in 'harmonious cooperation'.

The Golden Legend of Master William Caxton done anew
Written by Jacobus de Voragine,
transcribed by Phillis Ellis, edited by Frederick Ellis,
designed by William Morris
Kelmscott Press, Hammersmith, 1892
Letterpress and woodcut on paper,
bound in quarter cloth
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bequeathed by Jane Alice Morris, 1935

Crafting fine books

In 1891 Morris established his own publishing imprint, the Kelmscott Press, returning to his early ambition to make books inspired by medieval examples. He revived the art of bookmaking, designing his own typefaces, ornamental borders and initials. This volume of the complete works of the poet Geoffrey Chaucer is the most ambitious — containing 87 illustrations.

The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer
Edited by Frederick Ellis, designed by William Morris,
with illustrations designed by Edward Burne-Jones and
engraved by William Harcourt Hooper
Kelmscott Press, Hammersmith, 1896
Letterpress and woodcut on paper, bound in pigskin at
the Doves Bindery, London, in 1902
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bequeathed by Jane Alice Morris, 1935
PB 5-2001

A favourite epic

Morris owned objects from around the world, including this illuminated manuscript, one of many he purchased in the last decade of his life. Composed by the poet Firdawsi around 1000 CE, the Shahnameh (‘Book of Kings’) is a medieval chronicle of the legends, history and language foundational to the culture of Persian-speaking areas of Iran, Central Asia and South Asia.

Morris listed the Shahnameh as one of his favourite epics, observing it was among those that ‘are in no sense the works of individuals, but have grown up from the very hearts of the people’.

Shahnameh (‘Book of Kings’) by the Persian poet Firdawsi
Iran
1620–21
Ink, opaque watercolour and gold on paper, bound in leather
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bequeathed by Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, 1922
MS 311

Grouped Label

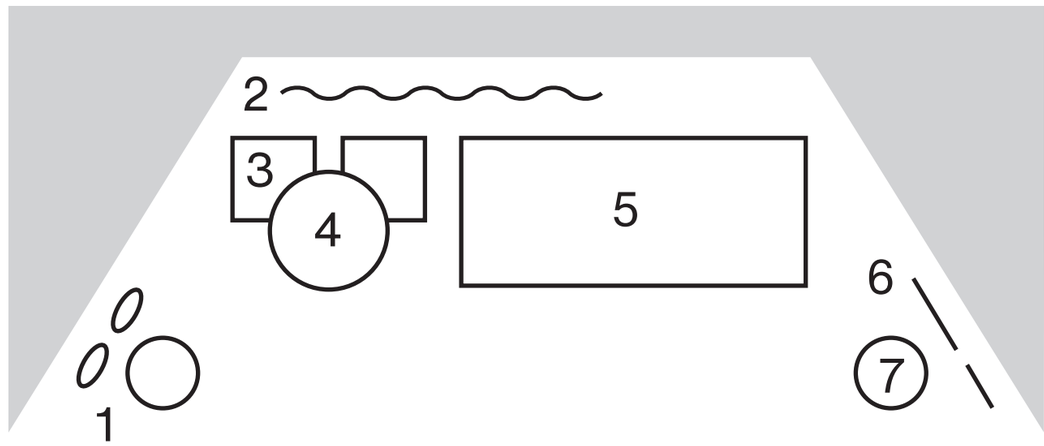


Image label

Photograph of the drawing room in Kelmscott House, by Emery Walker, 1896. Two of the dishes displayed on the upper mantelshelf are in the exhibition.

William Morris Gallery,
London Borough of Waltham Forest

1. Potty for pottery

‘I understand more of pots than of pictures’, Morris wrote after visiting Italy in 1873 with Burne-Jones. He purchased examples of contemporary ceramics, and perhaps these antique items.

The bowls were made in the hilltop town of Deruta in Umbria, renowned by the 1500s for pottery production. Morris displayed them in the drawing room of Kelmscott House.

The jug is a typical example of maiolica — a pottery style from Florence known since the 1400s for its vivid colours.

Above: **Two bowls**
Unrecorded makers working in Deruta, Italy
About 1500–50
Tin-glazed and painted earthenware
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bought with the Glaisher Fund, 1931
C.13-1931 and C.14-1931

Below: **Maiolica jug**
Unrecorded maker working in Florence, Italy
About 1440–60
Tin-glazed and painted earthenware
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bequeathed by Dr J.W.L. Glaisher, 1928
C.2165-1928

2. Slowly and carefully

‘I am studying birds now to see if I can’t get some of them into my next design’, Morris wrote in 1877. In the Kelmscott House drawing room, long lengths of this fabric woven at Merton Abbey hung from picture rail to skirting board. Morris always favoured textile hangings, despite his many popular wallpaper designs.

Curtain in Bird pattern
Designed by William Morris, 1878
Made by Morris & Co. at Merton Abbey, London
Woven wool
Jesus College, Cambridge

3. Simple seats

Some of the most famous Morris & Co. designs are the plain Sussex chairs, adapted by Webb from simple rush-seated chairs made in rural Sussex in the late 1700s and early 1800s. The Morrises used Webb’s Sussex chairs to furnish their own homes.

From the mid-1860s, the Firm produced these chairs commercially, in a small range of designs, and they sold in great quantities. In 1909 the Fitzwilliam Museum purchased 150 Sussex chairs for use in its galleries.

Two Sussex chairs
Designed by Philip Webb, about 1860
Made for Morris & Co., London, about 1909
Beech with rush seats
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge

4. A well-travelled table

Philip Webb designed furniture for the Firm, ranging from large built-in pieces to smaller portable items such as worktables. Furniture design arose when the Morrises sought items for Red House and found nothing suitable commercially available. This side table was made for Jane Morris, and it remained with the family in each of their subsequent homes.

Worktable
Designed by Philip Webb
Unrecorded maker, London, England
About 1860
Oak
Society of Antiquaries of London (Kelmscott Manor)
KM220

5. Treasured chest

In keeping with their admiration for traditional skills, Pre-Raphaelite artists and the wider Morris circle valued antique items for their history and craftsmanship. Made in the 1600s to store fabrics and other household goods, this Italian chest stood in the dining room of Kelmscott House. After Morris's death, it was owned by printer and photographer Emery Walker, who lived nearby.

Cassone (Chest)
Unrecorded maker, possibly working in Venice or Crete
1600s
Cypress wood
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Given by Dorothy Walker in memory of William Morris and Sir Emery Walker, two of its previous owners, 1934
M/F.1-1934

6. Damascene designs

Morris ‘loved everything Persian’, according to Burne-Jones. These richly decorated tiles from Damascus, made during the height of Ottoman craftsmanship in the 1500s–1600s, are among the objects Morris collected and treasured.

Ceramics of this type were exported from Damascus to Europe and North America and were available through dealers — which is probably how Morris acquired them. His admiration for Islamic art and design was profound.

Left: **‘Flower vase’ tile panel**
Damascus, Ottoman Syria
About 1550–1699
Moulded, painted and glazed stonepaste
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Given by the Friends of the Fitzwilliam Museum, 1928
C.3-1928

Right: **Three ‘Vine trellis’ tiles**
Damascus, Ottoman Syria
About 1560–1600
Moulded, painted and glazed stonepaste
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Given by the Friends of the Fitzwilliam Museum, 1928
C.4G-1928, C.4J-1928 and C4K-1928

7. Hand-made pottery

This jar was made in the Westerwald area of Germany, visited by Jane and William Morris in 1869. Over the years the Morrises acquired more than 30 pieces of the wheel-thrown, hand-decorated stoneware made there for daily use.

In 1882, Morris warned this traditional craft might soon disappear, insisting that vessels should be made by hand rather than mechanically ‘pressed into a mould’.

Two-handled jar
Unrecorded maker, working probably in
Höhr-Grenzhausen, Germany
About 1700–1800
Painted and salt-glazed stoneware
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Given by May Morris, 1920
C.42-1920

Section Introduction

‘I do not want art for a few, any more than education for a few, or freedom for a few.’

6 Luxury vs. Socialism

William Morris was well aware that the quality and fair wages behind Morris & Co. goods made them unaffordable for most people — they were only available, as he put it, to ‘the swinish rich’ living in luxury.

Political involvement in anti-war campaigns drove him to a new idealism. In the early 1880s he joined the radical Socialist movement, based on the ideas of German philosopher and economist Karl Marx, which aimed to overturn the class exploitation of market-driven capitalism.

To the criticism that Kelmscott Press books were expensive, Morris replied: ‘if we were all Socialists things would be different. We should have a public library at each street corner, where everybody should read all the best books, printed in the best and most beautiful type.’

Morris became an eloquent advocate for Socialism through speaking, writing and organising. His vision inspired future politicians in the labour movement and continues to inform hopes for a fairer, greener society.

Morris in print

This image of Morris is based on a photograph first published in 1884, when he was becoming involved in the emerging Socialist movement. Widely reproduced through prints, it became a popular portrait of Morris.
The woodcut appeared in printmaker Robert Bryden's Portraits of Men of Letters (1899), featuring fellow writers and thinkers including John Ruskin, Robert Browning and Walt Whitman.

William Morris
Printed by Robert Bryden, after a photograph by Frederick Hollyer
About 1899
Woodcut on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Given by the Friends of the Fitzwilliam Museum, 1990
P.194-1990

Audio Label

William Morris's Words

Morris began as a hesitant public speaker but during the 1880s he became a powerful orator on political matters. His urgent conversational style remains compelling today.

These extracts of Morris's speeches and poetry were selected and recorded with members of the Fitzwilliam Museum's Action Forum Group:

'Simplicity of life, begetting simplicity of taste...'
From 'The Lesser Arts' 1877
Read by: Jacqueline Lam-McArthur
Duration: 46 seconds

'This is what I want done...'
From 'Town and Country' 1892
Read by: Rona Smith
Duration: 51 seconds

'Let me tell you that though simplicity in art may be costly...'
From 'The Art of the People' 1879
Read by: David Archer
Duration: 30 seconds

'Luxury cannot exist...'
From 'The Art of the People' 1879
Read by: Jacqueline Lam-McArthur
Duration: 1 minute 33 seconds

'I know as surely as I know that I breathe...'
From 'Art and the People: A Socialist's Protest against Capitalist Brutality' 1883
Read by: Rob Hales
Duration: 41 seconds

'Look you, as I sit at my work at home...'
From 'Art and the Beauty of the Earth' 1881
Read by: David Archer
Duration: 58 seconds

'Now I do not stand before you as a mere praiser of past time...'
From 'Address to students and staff at Cambridge Art School' 1878
Read by: Rob Hales
Duration: 28 seconds

'Of Heaven or Hell I have no power to sing...'
From The Earthly Paradise 1868
Read by: Rona Smith
Duration: 58 seconds

‘I think I may assume that...’
From ‘Town and Country’ 1892
Read by: Jacqueline Lam-McArthur
Duration: 39 seconds

‘Go on living while you may...’
From News from Nowhere 1890
Read by: Rob Hales
Duration: 23 seconds

‘Lo, when we wade the tangled wood...’
From ‘Drawing Near the Light’ in Poems by the Way 1891
Read by: Rona Smith
Duration: 44 seconds

Image credit

‘William Morris Speaking from a Wagon in Hyde Park, May 1 1894’, illustration by Walter Crane, published by George Bell & Sons, London, 1911
William Morris Gallery, London Borough of Waltham Forest

By royal approval

In 1880–82 Morris & Co. was commissioned to decorate the state rooms in St James’s Palace, London. Queen Victoria personally approved this design with its monumental swirl of foliage and flowers for the Grand Staircase. Despite his private dislike of monarchy, Morris created something suitably grand. The large multi-coloured design required 68 blocks to complete the hand-printing process.

St James’s wallpaper
Designed by William Morris
1880
Block-printed with distemper on paper
The William Morris Society
WMS-WP-4-15

A commission for Balmoral

In 1887 Morris & Co. was commissioned to create wallpaper for Balmoral Castle, Queen Victoria's home in the Scottish Highlands. Morris responded with this design of a thistle — Scotland's national flower — entwined with the royal cypher for Victoria Regina Imperatrix (Victoria, Queen and Empress). Despite his personal antipathy to the monarch, he delivered.

Balmoral wallpaper
Designed by William Morris
1887
Block-printed paper
The William Morris Society
WMS-WP-4-4

Too posh for a palace?

Morris designed this woven silk fabric for the throne room of St James's Palace, London, choosing oak — a traditional symbol of strength and nationhood. The Firm's initial proposals for the Palace furnishings proved too costly, however, and in the end this design was not used. The Oak pattern in crimson and gold silk was among the most expensive fabrics sold by the Firm.

The commission at St James's Palace coincided with Morris's turn to radical politics. He would continue to wrestle with the contradiction of making luxury goods while campaigning for a fairer society.

Curtains and pelmet in Oak pattern
Designed by William Morris, 1880–81
Manufactured either by Joshua Oldfield Nicholson, Macclesfield, or by Morris & Co., Merton Abbey, London
Hand- and power-loom jacquard-woven silk damask
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Given by the Friends of the Fitzwilliam Museum, 1980
T.1A & B-1980 and T.1C-1980

Sitting soft

In contrast to simpler pieces, Morris & Co. also produced bespoke furniture, including three sofas in an elegant Regency style typical of the early 1800s. This luxurious sofa was in the bedroom of Rossetti's Chelsea home. His studio assistant described it as 'old-fashioned' but 'very pretty'. Rossetti decorated the oval medallions with figures of Amans ('the Lover'), Amor ('Love') and Amata ('the Beloved').

Sofa and cushion
Designed and painted by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, possibly made by Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., London
About 1862
Painted and gilded beech, velvet
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Given by Charles Fairfax Murray, 1918
M/F.1 & A-1918

Designed for daily life

Ford Madox Brown designed these plain, practical pieces for the Firm for modest houses and servants' quarters. Using simple stained wood without any conventional ornamentation, such as decorative tiles or brass fittings, these early items of furniture were an experiment in the production of low-cost accessible design.

The only known examples of these pieces are at Kelmscott Manor, suggesting that not many were sold. They nevertheless inspired architects such as Ernest Gimson and William Richard Lethaby to design their own versions in the 1890s.

Left: **Towel rail**
Designed by Ford Madox Brown, made by Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., London
About 1861
Painted softwood
Society of Antiquaries of London (Kelmscott Manor)
KM306

Right: **Washstand**
Designed by Ford Madox Brown, made by Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., London
About 1861
Painted softwood
Society of Antiquaries of London (Kelmscott Manor)
KM298

‘Equality of condition for all’

Morris led his local radical group, the Hammersmith Socialist Society, from 1891. A fellow member recalled how Morris followed this banner to meetings and ‘his ever-readiness to mount the stool, sell literature, go round with the hat, or face up to a violent or molesting interrupter.’

The banner’s worn condition shows it was frequently used. Banners have a long tradition in protest movements and remain symbols of resistance today.

Hammersmith Socialist Society banner
Unrecorded maker, London, England
About 1890–91
Hand-painted cotton or linen, mounted on linen
Courtesy Marx Memorial Library & Workers’ School, London

Image Label

William Morris and members of the Hammersmith Socialist Society, unrecorded photographer, 1892
© National Portrait Gallery, London

Light work

Philip Webb designed these candlesticks for the Morris and Burne-Jones families in the early days at Red House. Made simply in brass or copper, the design was inspired by an example from the 1400s or 1500s in the South Kensington Museum (now the V&A).

Very few examples of these candlesticks are known to have been made. They were perhaps experimental pieces, designed for the homes of these young artists as an alternative to what was commercially available at the time.

Two candlesticks
Designed by Philip Webb
Unrecorded maker, London, England
About 1860
Moulded and pierced copper
Society of Antiquaries of London (Kelmscott Manor)
KM183.1 and KM183.2

Capital value

Morris welcomed the critique of capitalism in Das Kapital by Karl Marx, German philosopher and political analyst. But he confessed to suffering ‘agonies of confusion’ regarding its economic theory. Morris read the French translation, as no English version yet existed.

He commissioned a lavish cover for this, his own copy, reflecting how he valued both the book’s contents and fine craft, creating a contradictory, luxury object.

Le Capital
Written by Karl Marx
Maurice Lachatre et Cie., Paris, 1872–75
Printed book, bound in gold-tooled goatskin by Thomas James Cobden-Sanderson, 1884
Private collection, UK

A Dream of John Ball

Morris used his knowledge of medieval history to write a time-travelling account of the 1381 Peasants' Revolt. In a dream, he joins rebel leaders John Ball and others in their hopeful but doomed insurrection against the nobles.

First published in the Socialist paper The Commonweal, the text is still regarded by many as a message of hope and a call to action today.

A Dream of John Ball and a King's Lesson
Written by William Morris
Longmans, Green and Co., London, 1928
Printed book, bound in paper covers; with woodcut illustration, 'When Adam Delved and Eve Span', designed by Edward Burne-Jones, 1888
Private collection

Spreading the word

William Morris was the Socialist movement's chief propagandist, known for his engaging conversational tone and vivid imagery in his writing and speeches. His talks were published as cheap pamphlets to counter the mainstream press.

Morris's personal conviction came when, as he wrote, 'the seeds of a great change were beginning to germinate' amid what he saw as the 'filth of civilisation'. He believed art should set out the 'ideal of a full and reasonable life' — beauty and creativity enjoyed by all.

Left: **How I Became a Socialist**
Written by William Morris
Twentieth Century Press, London, 1896
Printed pamphlet
The William Morris Society
WMS-E10

Right: **Monopoly, or How Labour is Robbed**
Written by William Morris for The Freedom Library
W. Reeves, London, 1890
Printed pamphlet
The William Morris Society
WMS-E30

Turn and turn again

Burne-Jones drew many affectionate caricatures of Morris, whose friends were amused by his restless enthusiasms — from painting, poetry and tapestry to politics and printing. As Burne-Jones observed: ‘And all things he does splendidly.’

These images of Morris cartwheeling date from a period when his political outlook was evolving — and anticipate his later radicalism. In Burne-Jones’s words, Morris ‘wanted to smash everything up and begin the world anew.’

Three sketches of William Morris performing cartwheels
Edward Burne-Jones
About 1871
Graphite on paper
From a volume of sketches by Burne-Jones, possibly compiled by Aglaia Coronio before 1906, bound in oak boards with a white pigskin spine
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bought with the Gow Fund and a contribution from the Museums and Galleries Commission/V&A Purchase Grant Fund, 1998
PD.58-1998.f.9, f.11 and f.12

Folly and Rage

These are two of Burne-Jones’s most dramatic designs for Morris & Co. Made for a sequence of windows in Jesus College Chapel, Cambridge, they personify the vices of Folly and Rage. At Jesus College, these vices are accompanied by Injustice and Fear, contrasting with the virtues of Temperance, Prudence, Justice and Fortitude.

In medieval tradition, vices and virtues were paired as opposing moral forces. The dynamic energy of these designs echoes the anger Morris and Burne-Jones felt about society in the 1870s.

Left: **Design for stained glass in Jesus College Chapel: Folly**
Edward Burne-Jones
1875
Graphite on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bequeathed by James Richardson Holliday, 1927
1231a

Right: **Design for stained glass in Jesus College Chapel: Rage**
Edward Burne-Jones
1875
Graphite on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bequeathed by James Richardson Holliday, 1927
1231b

‘Forget six counties overhung with smoke ... think rather of ... the clear Thames bordered by its gardens green.’

7 Nature, Rivers and Environmentalism

William Morris and many others at the time deplored the polluted environments that were a result of urban and industrial overdevelopment of the natural world. His patterns and political writings invoked greener and cleaner meadows and rivers as symbols of hope for the future.

Morris believed all creative disciplines were equally valid and that craft should restore dignity and joy to the worker, as a direct counter to the misery of factory labour. In his view, well-crafted design should be integrated into every aspect of daily life. This idea was central to the Arts and Crafts movement that developed in Britain in the 1880s and 1890s.

The great stink

This night-time view of the Thames, painted by Holman Hunt from his studio, obscures the factories opposite — lead-works and soap-works with their smoke-vomiting chimneys — and the river's foul state.

Industrial and household waste had so poisoned the water that in 1858 the stench — the notorious 'great stink' — forced Parliament to commission London's first city-wide sewage system.

The Thames at Chelsea, Evening
William Holman Hunt
1853
Oil paint on panel
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Given by Charles Fairfax Murray, 1917
868

Dreaming of a greener world

On the Thames, upstream from Chelsea, artist George Price Boyce, a member of the Pre-Raphaelite circle, celebrated this unspoilt rural scene. Partly dating from the 1500s, the watermill remains a picturesque historic site preserved from redevelopment. Such survivals mattered deeply to Morris, who founded the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings in 1877 to campaign for their preservation.

The Mill on the Thames at Mapledurham, Oxfordshire
George Price Boyce
July 1860
Watercolour, gum, bodycolour and white heightening on paper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bought with the Fairhaven Fund, 1971
PD.52-1971

Turn to nature

Art critic and author John Ruskin advised students ‘to go to Nature ... rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and scorning nothing’. He added: ‘If you can paint one leaf, you can paint the world.’

Morris applied the same principle to his designs, studying plant forms closely.
He considered the best for patterns to be the ‘most familiar and most delightful’, such as rose, lily, oak and vine.

Study of a portion of tree trunk with ivy and another trailing plant
John Ruskin
29 July 1876
Watercolour, bodycolour and white heightening on card
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bequeathed by Henry Rogers Broughton, 2nd Lord Fairhaven, 1973
PD.922-1973

Nature observed

Barbara Bodichon was a Pre-Raphaelite follower and collaborator, and a friend of Elizabeth Siddal and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. She travelled extensively, dividing her time between Algeria and Sussex. She painted in the open air, combining close observation and a deep love of nature with great imagination.

Bodichon used the money she made from her art to co-found Girton College, Cambridge, in 1869, and to advocate for women’s rights.

Study of Sunflowers
Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon
1875
Oil paint on canvas
The Mistress and Fellows, Girton College, Cambridge
26

The cost of industry

In general, Victorian society was proud of its growing cities, railways and heavy industry. Yet the resulting slums, toxic smoke and raw sewage could not be ignored for long. This view of crowded London dwellings beneath a railway viaduct, by French artist Gustave Doré, has become one of the most recognised symbolic representations of Victorian urban squalor.



Over London — by rail
Wood engraving after a drawing by Gustave Doré in
London: A Pilgrimage, written by Blanchard Jerrold
Harper & Brothers, London, 1890
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bequeathed by Henry Scipio Reitlinger, 1950,
transferred from the Reitlinger Trust, 1991
PB 103-1991

News from Nowhere

Throughout his life, Morris protested against the pollution and destruction of the natural world. This ‘utopian romance’ distils that conviction into a vision of an ideal post-industrial society built on equality and fulfilling work. It charts a journey by boat, up the Thames from Kelmscott House in Hammersmith to Kelmscott Manor in Oxfordshire.

When he published the text in 1892–93, Morris chose an illustration of Kelmscott Manor by artist Charles Gere as the opening image. This has since come to represent the idyll of the Morrises’ beloved home and become emblematic of utopia.

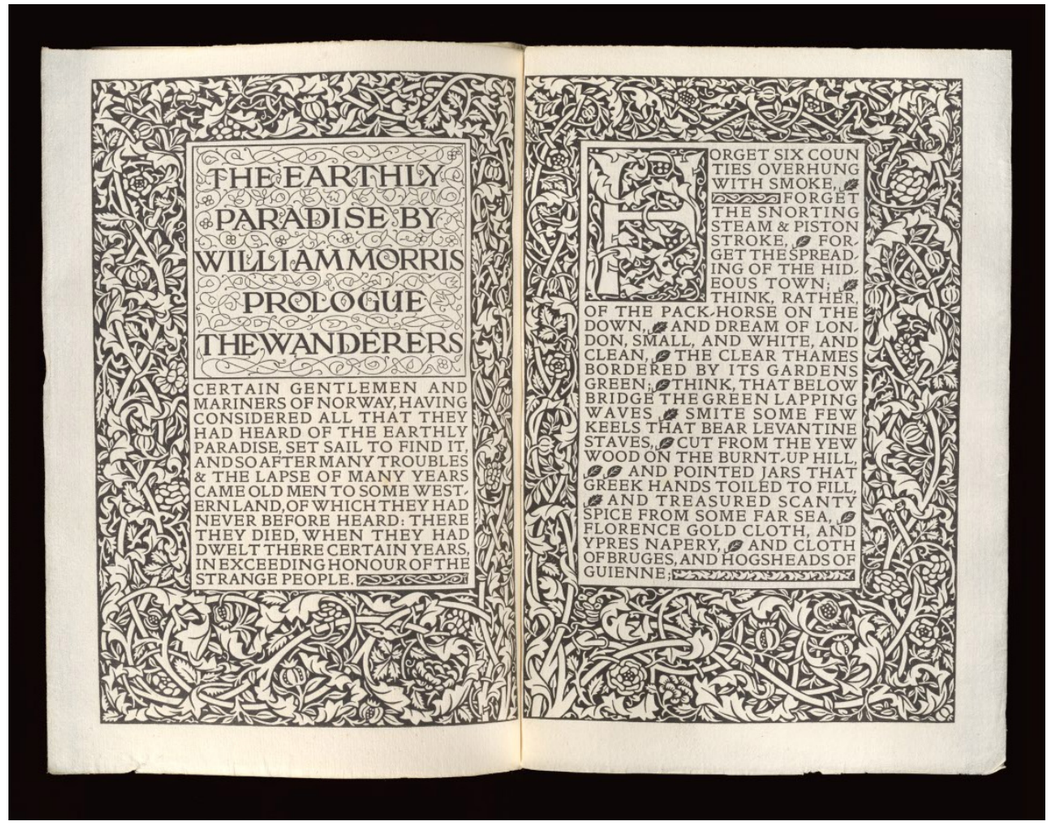


News from Nowhere, or, An Epoch of Rest: Being Some Chapters from a Utopian Romance
Written and designed by William Morris
Kelmscott Press, Hammersmith, 1893
Letterpress and woodcut on paper, bound in vellum; with woodcut frontispiece designed by Charles Gere and engraved by William Harcourt Hooper
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bequeathed by Jane Alice Morris, 1935

Tales for a better world

In The Earthly Paradise (1868–70), Morris retold 24 legends — from Greek and Roman myths to Norse sagas — in verse. Framed as tales exchanged by travelling storytellers, the work evoked a pre-industrial age of community and made Morris famous as a poet.

For this Kelmscott Press edition, Morris designed decorative letters and borders full of leaves and flowers, inspired by medieval examples.



The Earthly Paradise, Volume I
Written and designed by William Morris
Kelmscott Press, Hammersmith, London, 1896
Letterpress and woodcut on paper, bound in vellum
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Given by Jane Morris, 1909

Botanical roots

John Gerard's Herball (first published 1597) was a lifelong favourite for Morris. As a boy he enjoyed both text and images, and he later read it aloud to his children. In the 1870s this botanical manual informed his experiments in creating natural dyes from madder, woad and poplar plants. The Herball's woodcuts inspired his wallpaper designs filled with flowers and foliage.



The Herball or Generall Historie of Plantes
Written by John Gerard, enlarged and amended by Thomas Johnson
Printed by Adam Islip, Joice Norton and Richard Whitakers, London, 1633
Printed book with woodcut illustrations
The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
Bequeathed by James Richardson Holliday, 1927
PB 162-2020

Willow Bough

Willow trees held deep personal meaning for all members of the Morris family, who associated them with Kelmscott Manor, their cherished second home. Jane Morris's favourite portrait — painted by Rossetti in 1871 — depicts her holding leafy willow twigs. In Willow Bough, one of the most popular Morris & Co. patterns, the delicate leaves are seemingly stirred by a gentle breeze.

Willow Bough wallpaper
Designed by William Morris
1887
Block-printed paper
The William Morris Society
WMS-WP-W21

Nature into pattern

Morris's floral patterns are his most enduring and widely recognised artistic legacy. They reflect his love of the countryside. Rambling and climbing plants were favourites, lending dynamism and structure to the designs. In Jasmine and Larkspur, flowers and foliage create a tangled, exuberant quality that echoes the natural planting popular at the time.

This 'house style' was continued by the other four pattern designers in the Firm, notably John Henry Dearle, who designed Spring Thicket, and May Morris, who created Honeysuckle, which hangs nearby.

Left: **Jasmine wallpaper**
Designed by William Morris
1872
Block-printed paper
The William Morris Society
WMS-WP-J2

Centre: **Larkspur wallpaper**
Designed by William Morris
1875
Block-printed paper
The William Morris Society
WMS-WP-L1

Right: **Spring Thicket wallpaper**
Designed by John Henry Dearle
1893
Block-printed paper
The William Morris Society
WMS-WP-S12

Rivers and reflections

Morris's love of rivers began in boyhood near the Lea wetlands in Essex. His homes at Red House, near the Cray, and Kelmscott Manor, near the Thames tributaries Windrush and Evenlode, deepened this connection. Morris named designs after these rivers, evoking the lush, waterside imagery of his utopian novel News from Nowhere.

A keen fisherman, Morris was dismayed by toxic pollution — yet the Firm's workshops depended on the river for washing textiles. Even natural dyes could harm river ecosystems.

Left: **Cray**
Designed by William Morris, 1884
Manufactured by Morris & Co., London
Block-printed cotton
The Whitworth, The University of Manchester
T.11724.1

Centre (below): **Evenlode**
Designed by William Morris, 1883
Manufactured by Morris & Co., London
Block-printed indigo-discharged cotton
The William Morris Society
WMS-T9

Centre (above): **Lea**
Designed by William Morris, 1885
Manufactured by Morris & Co., London
Block-printed cotton
The Whitworth, The University of Manchester
T.14014.2

Right: **Windrush**
Designed by William Morris, 1883
Manufactured by Morris & Co., London
Block-printed cotton
The Whitworth, The University of Manchester
T.11719.5

Untamed hope

The light and uplifting design for Honeysuckle mimics the untamed exuberance of the plant. This very popular Morris & Co. design, still in use today, reminds us of the joy to be found in nature. The lasting legacy of William Morris and his circle is a message of truth, beauty and hope.

Honeysuckle wallpaper
Designed by May Morris, 1883
Printed by Jeffrey & Co., London, before 1940
Block-printed paper
William Morris Gallery,
London Borough of Waltham Forest
B52a

Wall Quote

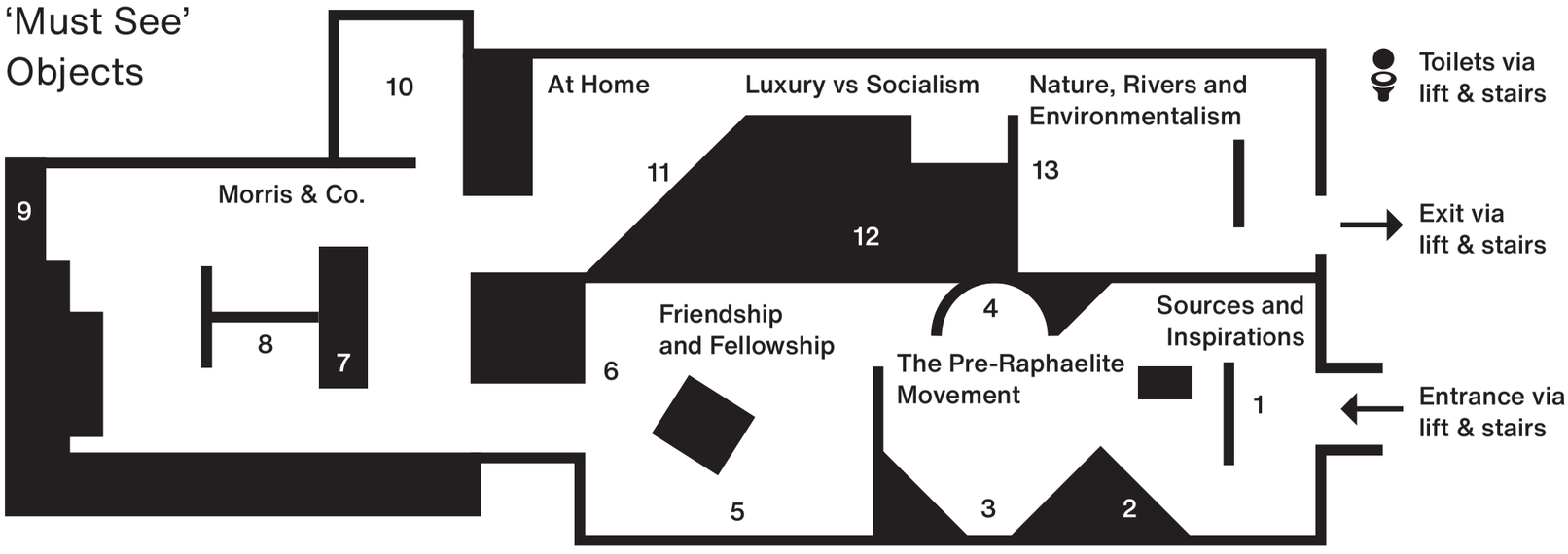
‘... if others can see it as I have seen it, then it may be called a vision rather than a dream.’

William Morris, News from Nowhere, 1890

A Call to Art

William Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites

‘Must See’ Objects

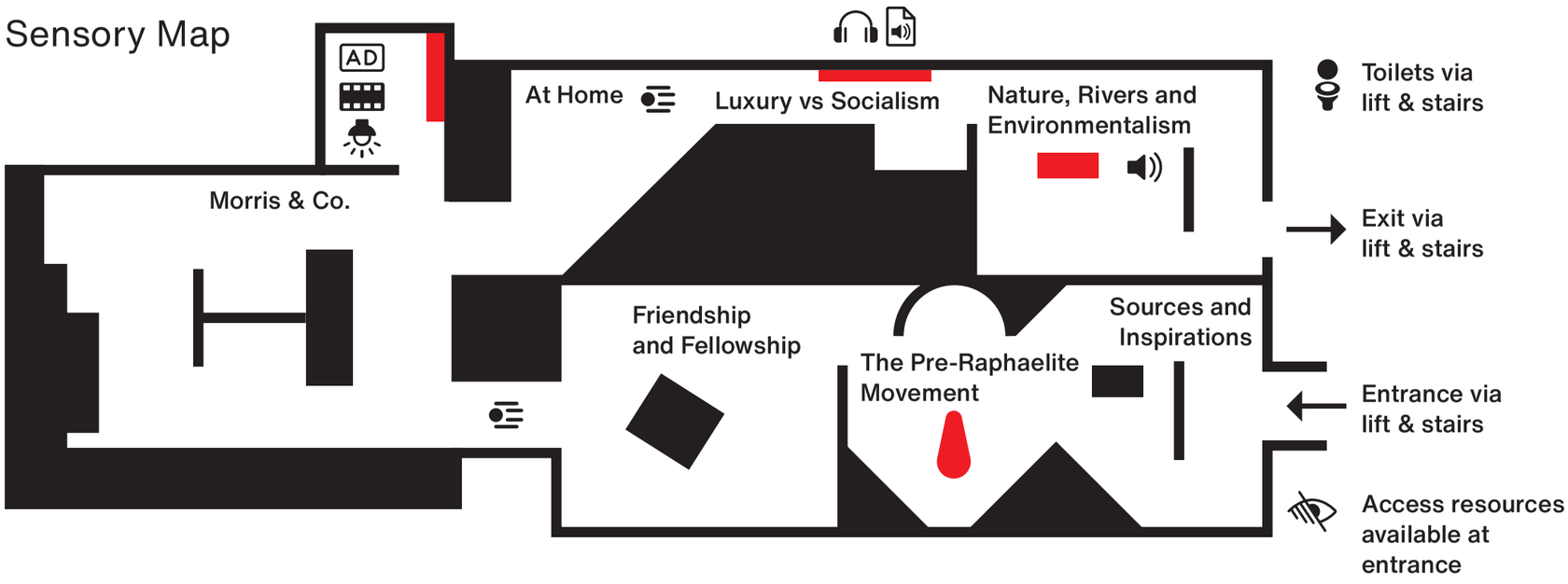


1 La Belle Iseult by William Morris, 1858
2 The Nature of Gothic by John Ruskin, about 1892
3 The Bridesmaid by John Everett Millais, 1851
4 Clerk Saunders by Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal, 1857
5 The Backgammon Players by Edward Burne-Jones, 1861
6 Georgiana Burne-Jones by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1860
7 Fruit wallpaper designed by William Morris, 1862
8 Sunflower bed cover embroidered by Catherine Holiday, 1876
9 Penelope tile painted by Kate Faulkner, about 1865
10 Film of Cambridge interiors
11 Shahnameh (Book of Kings) by Firdawsi, 1620–21
12 Curtains and pelmet in Oak pattern designed by William Morris, 1880–81
13 News from Nowhere by William Morris, 1892

A Call to Art

William Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites

Sensory Map



Seating
Sound on headphones
Film with captions no sound
Large Print Guide
AD Audio described
Background sound
Transcript of Audio
Darker space
Wheelchair