

AFTERWORD

Why a spooky tale?

Charles Dickens' 'A Christmas Carol' has proved an enduringly popular ghost story. It was first published on 19th December 1843 and had sold out by Christmas Eve. Another twelve editions followed within its first year and it has never been out of print since.

M. R. James (1862 – 1936), former Provost of King's College, Cambridge and Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum, was also instrumental in making ghost stories a seasonal 'treat'.



M.R. James – 1900
Photographer unknown – public domain



Illustration: James McBryde
M. R. James's (1904) 'Ghost Stories of an Antiquary'

M. R. James would read his latest tale to friends at his college - in his own words, 'usually at the Christmas season' - thereby establishing a Cambridge tradition. Mark Gatiss explained in his BBC television programme on M. R. James, 'He could combine his historical expertise, his scholarly fascination for the strange and the obscure with the desire to thrill, delight, and above all to connect with his friends... What must have made the reading really compelling is the rich detail and knowledge that Monty brought to them.' Eluding to the entities which are invoked in M. R. James's stories, Gatiss said of the author, rather chillingly, 'It sounded as though he knew whereof he spoke.'

In this 'Afterword', the David Parr House will be linked to Monty James via William Morris and Charles Fairfax but, as it is October, first some more spookiness...

Last month's submission covered William Morris's interest in medieval manuscripts and the printing press, so I shall start with the word: 'Ghost'. The spelling of 'ghost' with the silent letter 'h' was believed to have been adopted by William Caxton due to the influence of Flemish spelling habits.

An extract from Sam Leith's review of 'Spell it out' by David Crystal, as published in The Guardian on 14th September 2012:

‘What of the H in ‘ghost’? The word in Anglo-Saxon didn’t have it: the Holy Ghost was a ‘Hali Gast’ and Chaucer’s ghosts remained, likewise, H-free. But when William Caxton set up shop in London he needed compositors, and, of course, there weren’t any English ones available. So he imported them – among their number the splendidly named Wynkyn de Worde, - from the continent. They spoke Flemish, so ‘If a word reminded them of its Flemish counterpart, why not spell it the Flemish way?’ A Flemish spook was called a ‘gheest’ – and so ‘ghost’ came in as a variation.’

According to Arthur Compton-Rickett’s ‘William Morris: a study in Personality’, ‘He was a voracious reader as a youth, though even then on the lines of romantic literature. Most of the family, Mrs Gilmore says, read at meal-times. Each one brought in a book, and there was little general conversation. He delighted in ghost stories at this time, and even Scott’s robust supernaturalism fascinated him. In later years, he regretted that a ghost story had lost its thrill for him: **‘It would be so jolly to get the creeps again,’** he told his sister, ‘but suppose that time is over.’

Of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Compton-Rickett, together with Thomas Hake, wrote, ‘If W-D [Theodore Watts-Dunton] wanted further proof of his friend’s love of animals, there were the young owls in their nests in the attics amongst the great timbers of the roof. The snoring of these owls suggested to Rossetti the sound of ghostly moans; for he had from boyhood shown a remarkable taste for the supernatural, and nothing delighted him more – especially at midnight – than to mount the stairs leading to the ‘haunted garrets,’ as he loved to call them, in company with W-D or any other guest who chanced to be staying at Kelmscott Manor, to listen to the weird noises. Indeed, when the moonbeams chanced to be looking through those attic windows, lighting up every corner, the place really did seem haunted.

William Michael Rossetti wrote of his brother’s house at Cheyne Walk, in Chelsea, ‘The racoon, as winter set in, made up his mind to hibernate. He ensconced himself in a drawer of a large heavy cabinet which stood in the passage outside the studio-door. The drawer was shut upon him, without his presence in it transpiring, and after a while he was supposed to be finally lost to the house. When spring ensued, many mysterious rumbling or tramping or whimpering noises were heard in the passage. My brother mentioned them to me more than once, and was ready to regard them as one more symptom, by no means the first or only one, that the house was haunted. At last, and I think by mere casualty, the drawer was opened, and the racoon emerged, rather thinner than at his entry. What the other stories of ghosts about the old mansion amounted to I have mainly forgotten, but am aware that a servant, a sufficiently strong-minded young woman, saw a spectre by a bed-room door in November 1870. The ghost according to Miss Caine, “was a woman, and appeared sometimes at the top of the second flight of stairs. She retreated to the room overlooking the Embankment.” My brother never held any such miscellaneous ghosts, nor did the idea of them disturb him in any sort of way, although in this and other instances he was not at all hostile to the notion that they might possibly be there.

According to Vivien Allen’s ‘Hall Caine: Portrait of a Victorian Romancer’, Caine’s young sister, Lily, asked ‘Rossetti about the ghost and found this was one subject on which he never joked. He told her that there were some things that no one could explain and that he himself had

seen and heard people who were dead. Caine offered to sleep in the top bedroom without a candle to disprove the story of the haunting but Rossetti would not let him do it.'



Phyllis and Demophoön - watercolour, 1870
Edward Burne-Jones
Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery
Burne-Jones used Maria Zambaco (his mistress) and Gaetano Meo as his models.

In 1870 [William Blake] Richmond moved into Beavor Lodge, Hammersmith, but he was both unwell and yearning for his lost days in Rome. He had glorified that in Italy he could hire models who would pose in the nude; all his figures were, like Leighton's, first drawn in the nude.

In 1872, the young Italian model **Gaetano Meo**, recommended by Mason, called at Beavor Lodge to see if he could sit for this renowned Italophile. A beautiful young lady received him and indicated where Richmond could be found in his studio. Asking Gaetano Meo how he got into the house, Richmond was astonished at Meo's description of the lady who let him in; at the time Clara, Mrs Richmond, was out. The introduction led Meo to become Richmond's chief model and lifelong friend.

One day, leafing through Richmond's drawings, Meo found some of the late Charlotte; turning to his master he advised that this was the lady who had welcomed him. This was one of a number of reported ghostly sightings at Beavor Lodge.

Text (above) from Simon Reynolds' 1995 'William Blake Richmond: An Artist's Life' (1995) – as used on Bonham's website.

On 15th July, 1883, author Vernon Lee wrote a letter to her mother describing a visit to see the De Morgans in Cheyne Row - William De Morgan (1839–1917) was a potter, tile designer, novelist and lifelong friend of William Morris. From 1863 to 1872, he designed tiles, stained glass and furniture for Morris & Co. The following extracts are from a letter in the Vernon Lee Archives, Miller Library, Colby College.

'From his workshop we went two doors off to his mother and sister. You never saw anything odder – A black old house with creaking wooden stairs all covered with faded green baize - a low, dark little parlour... In came Mrs Richmond, the artist's wife, a spectral pale woman, and began to relate her experiences of a grey lady who haunts this house at Hammersmith; while she was talking, I perceived with my ears that a second ghost story was going on the other

side... Then the old lady mysteriously said that there were things which she must tell me, but that I must return a day that her son and daughter were out in the country, as she was very nearly under a promise not to speak about them. Then Miss De Morgan, looking blacker and more scowling than ever, rushed in and tried to get me out of the house before any such communications would be made – I finally discovered that these mysterious matters were ghost stories.’

James McNeill Whistler’s painting ‘Symphony in White, No. 1’ (*right*) was included in the ‘Salon des Refusés’ exhibition.

(An aside: according to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s description of the living room at 221b Baker Street, Sherlock Holmes had a bear rug.)

Fernand des Noyers, who wrote a pamphlet on the exhibition, thought that Whistler was ‘le plus spirite des peintres’, and the painting [The woman in white] the most original that had passed before the jury at the Salon. Paul Mantz, in his article for the ‘Gazette des Beaux Arts’, considered it the most important picture in the exhibition, describing it as a *Symphonie du Blanc* some years before Whistler called it so.’

At a later exhibition, Americans were not treated with respect by the Hanging Committee. Their works were put in dark corridors and dark corners and Whistler suffered. French critics, enthusiastic over his pictures four years earlier, were not appreciative, and Paul Mantz was distressed by the ‘**strange white apparition**’ upon which he had lavished praise at the ‘Salon des Refusés’.



Symphony in White, No. 1 - 1861-1862
James McNeill Whistler
National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

Preston Manor, Brighton - Text & images courtesy of the Brighton Pavilion & Museums Trust.



Photo: courtesy of Brighton Pavilion & Museums Trust - <https://brightonmuseums.org.uk/prestonmanor/what-to-see/cleves-room/>

The leather-lined Cleves Room (left) is at the centre of Preston Manor's reputation as a haunted house, owing to a séance that was held there on 11 November 1896. The invited medium claimed to have received messages from a nun called Sister Agnes, who had been murdered as a result of jealousy between another nun and a monk.

The set of gilt leather panels were installed in 1880 and considered extremely fashionable at the time. The leather is Dutch with a design of fruit and flowers, monkeys, eagles and small birds, in gold and black on an ivory colour background.

Preston Manor has a long history of ghostly phenomena and supernatural experiences. The Stanford family were particularly troubled by sightings of the **lady in white**, while a lady in grey apparently ascended and descended the main staircase disappearing into nowhere.

Several guests staying in the south-west bedroom (now housing the remains of Charles's library) apparently reported seeing disembodied hands on the bedposts, and another recounted hearing 'weird and uncanny noises... issuing from the big dress cupboard'.

In the 1890s, the family were troubled for several years by inexplicable phenomena, including silk dresses cut into diamond patterns and mysterious figures seen on the staircase. A séance was held in the Cleves Room on 11 November 1896. The invited medium, Ada Goodrich Freer, claimed to have received messages from a nun called Sister Agnes, who had been wrongly excommunicated from the Church and buried in unconsecrated ground outside the house.

A year later, there was an epidemic of sore throats and the drains at the house were inspected. The skeleton of a woman was found under the terrace outside the dining room (now the Macquoid Room) and the bones were certified as being about 400 years old. It was supposed that these were the bones of Sister Agnes and, if she were given a Christian burial, the haunting would cease. Accounts of what happened next are confused, but it seems the remains were reburied, albeit discretely. The ghost is reported to have made no further appearances within living memory.

Paula Wrightson, Venue Manager at Preston Manor, believes, 'Such wonderfully Gothic tales are invariably too deliciously thrilling to be true. Sir Walter Scott's works were popular and widely read, not least his 1808 poem 'Marmion', which tells of an unchaste nun who, with her lover, is condemned to the terrible fate of being walled up alive for breaking her vows.'

How does Preston Manor & its leather-lined Cleves Room connect to the David Parr House?

Over several 'Afterword's, I have speculated whether David Parr and his employer, Frederick Leach, saw James McNeill Whistler's 'Peacock Room', which was originally created in the dining room of Frederick Leyland's London home, not far from the Victoria & Albert Museum.

Murray Marks, an acquaintance of many notable late Victorian gentlemen, including William Morris, Frederick Leyland, James McNeill Whistler and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, to name but four, sourced the leather-lining for Leyland's London home.

Dr. G. C. Williamson wrote in his 'tribute' to 'Murray Marks And His Friends', 'The wall was covered with some fine Spanish embossed leather. This leather, by one or two writers, has been termed Norwich leather. It certainly was purchased in the county of Norfolk but it came from a Tudor House, to which it is stated it had been presented by Queen Elizabeth, or a sovereign of about her period. There is little doubt, however, that it owed its origin to Queen Catherine of Aragon, because its principal decoration was that of the open pomegranate and a series of small, richly-coloured flowers. At the time it was erected, the information was not in existence that Catherine of Aragon had brought it over with her, when she came as the first bride of Henry VIII, the hangings in leather for twelve different rooms... There is, for example, some Cordova, with the open pomegranate as one of its principal decorations, to be found in a room in **Preston Manor**, which is said to have belonged at one time to Anne of Cleves, and this leather no doubt came from the same source as that of Sutton Place.

'It will be remembered that Ferdinand V. had just conquered Granada (period 1483 – 85) when he received news of the birth of his daughter Catherine, and so to commemorate the great victory, and the birth of his daughter, he gave to her as her badge the Granada or pomegranate... It appeared extensively in the leather at Mr. Leyland's house, and therefore, in all probability, these hangings of leather were part of the furnishings which were presented to Queen Catherine by the City of Cordova and brought over by her at the time of her arriving as the bride for Prince Arthur and afterwards for Henry VIII.

'...The story is well known that Whistler, examining the room, considered that the leather did not harmonize well with his picture; it was somewhat too dark in tone, he said, the red flowers were too prominent, he desired that here and there they should be lightened up with some patches of yellow. Marks was not very anxious for the work to be done, because in his opinion the colour scheme was perfectly suitable for that which Leyland was considering to be the chief beauty of the room, the extremely fine collection of Blue and White room, but after a while Whistler was allowed to have his way; Leyland went from home, Marks was absent abroad, and thus it was the celebrated decoration of the Peacock Room came into effect.'

Whistler didn't remove the shelving before painting the walls of Leyland's dining room, leaving thin strips of unpainted leather-lining. A black & white photo, taken in 1892, shows that he didn't paint the leather-lining behind his painting either – it should be noted that the leather behind the painting wasn't the same as that supplied for the rest of the room. It is supposed that there hadn't been enough to cover all the walls.

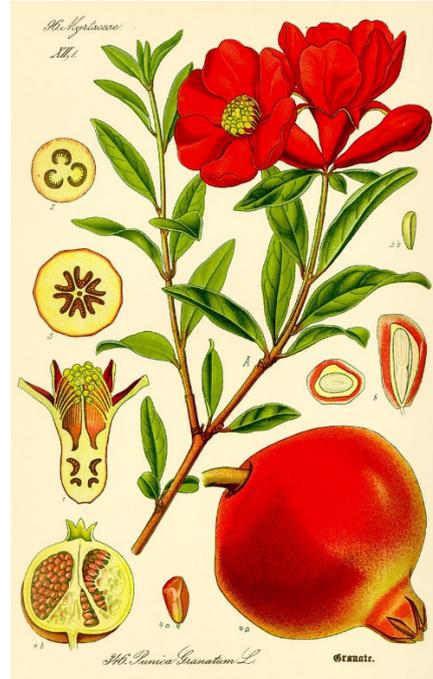
Linda Merrill, former Curator of American Art at the Freer Gallery of art, Smithsonian Institution, states in her 'The Peacock Room: A Cultural Biography' that the designs on the leather do not incorporate any pomegranates - the leather on the walls has 'spiraling [sic]

ribbons of roses and other summer flowers painted (not embossed) on a lustrous surface'. Perhaps the stylised 'summer flowers' represented pomegranate flowers? The Victorians understood (and employed) flower symbolism. Moreover, if the design was only painted on, Whistler could have obliterated the design elements he disliked, before deciding the whole room needed a total re-think.



Above: Pomegranate at different stages of flowering
Image: FloraQueen website - Photographer not credited.

Right: Otto Wilhelm Thomé – 1885
Publication: Flora von Deutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz
Public domain



Below: Growables website –
photographer not credited.

Linda Merrill's book includes an image of a wallpaper sample from the Deutsches Tapetenmuseum in Kassel, Germany: a Dutch gilt leather (Holländisches 'Guldenleder') c. 1770, which she believes most closely resembles the original leather-lining in the 'Peacock Room'. The large rose heads are unmistakable, but what of the other large, repeated flowerhead? To my mind, it resembles the pomegranate flower either with or without its petals. If the latter, artistic licence has been used as the sepals in the wallpaper design, aren't pointed, but rounded, like rose petals, making it more pleasing to the eye. Regardless, the two-tiered crown of stamen is the major feature. As for the remaining flowers, they resemble the early stages of a pomegranate's flowering, albeit stylised.



Unfortunately, it was not possible to use the image from the Deutsches Tapetenmuseum in this piece.

Paula Wrightson, Venue Officer at Preston Manor, kindly shared the following information:

'The provenance of the leather-lining in the Cleves Room at Preston Manor was investigated some years back (in the 1980s or 1990s), which established the leather is Netherlandish and dates from the mid-late 17th century. The design does, indeed, contain pomegranates and stylised flowers, which could either be pomegranate flowers or 'parrot' tulips, which might link with the leather's origin.

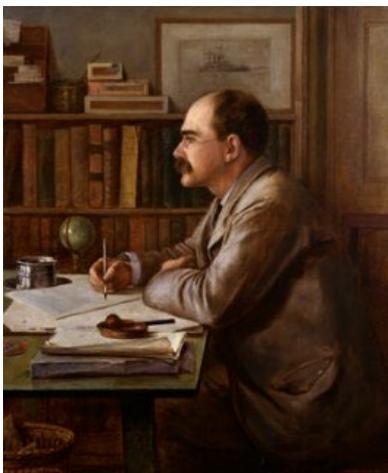
The Thomas-Stanfords, householders living at Preston Manor (until their deaths in 1932), incorrectly believed the leather to be Spanish and part of the dowry of Anne of Cleves or Catherine of Aragon. This legend made its way into the first guidebook when Preston Manor became a museum in 1933.

From the 1948 edition of the museum guidebook: '...it will be noted that the walls [of the Cleves Room] are covered with squares of beautiful Cordova Leather in the design of which the pomegranate is a prominent feature. This leather has long been traditionally connected with Anne of Cleves...'

The guidebook was written by Henry Roberts, the Manor's first curator (and family friend to the householders), who takes a whole page of the guidebook to describe how the leather may have come to be at Preston Manor and its lineage back to 'Queen Katherine of Aragon'. The argument reads with too many 'almost certainty's' and 'it is quite reasonable to conjecture's' to be taken as fact. Hence, the investigations made in more recent times.

Henry Roberts refers to Dr. G.C. Williamson as 'an authority on such a matter', who 'has thrown fresh light on it in his work 'Murray Marks and his Friends'...'

The only other house locally that I have seen with a similar leather-panelled room is Bateman's in Burwash, East Sussex (run by the National Trust). Batemans was the home to the author Rudyard Kipling, who was a friend and regular visitor (in the 1920s) to the Thomas-Stanfords at Preston Manor. I often wonder if the friends compared their leather covered rooms! The leather at Batemans is much more colourful than the muted tones of the Manor leather. I've not seen Batemans for some years, but the designs are certainly floral (they might also include some fruit).



Rudyard Kipling – 1899

Painted by Sir Philip Burne-Jones (his cousin)
(1861 – 1926)

Edward Burne-Jones was Kipling's uncle by marriage.

Kipling's daughter, Mrs Bambridge, gifted Wimpole Hall to the National Trust in 1976.



Rose and Silver: The Princess from the Land of Porcelain (displayed in the 'Peacock Room')
James McNeill Whistler – 1865
Collection: Freer Gallery, Washington D.C.
Note: Whistler painted over the leather-lined walls, which had cost his patron 1k.



'The Golden Age' wall covering
Embossed leather with brown-and-gold lacquer
Walter Crane, 1887 – manufacturer Jeffrey & Co.
Collection: Victorian & Albert Museum, London



Above: 17th-century Dutch interior with gold leather hangings
Pieter de Hooch (ca. 1665),
Collection: Metropolitan Museum of Art

Left: Gilt leather, Dutch panels, Cleves Room
Image: Preston Manor, Brighton

'There is a piece of Japanese leather paper in one of the kitchen cupboards in Parr's house'

Tamsin Wimhurst, Head Trustee of the David Parr House

Emma Shaw, Preventive Conservation Officer at MoDA at Middlesex University, kindly emailed, '**Japanese leather papers** were wallcoverings made from moulded/embossed paper to resemble the leather wallcoverings which had been developed in Europe (17th/18th century). They were often lacquered and stencilled in rich colours and were hard to distinguish from the moulded and embossed leather wallcoverings they mimicked. The Rottman company developed a range of these leather papers, embossed with 'naturalistic' floral designs and produced in factories in Japan. Japanese paper making skills and colour stencilling techniques and the artisans themselves were employed to produce wallcoverings, which were promoted for sale across Europe. It was an interesting business model for the period, as well as an innovative product line. C19th leather papers can still be found hanging in some historic houses in the UK.

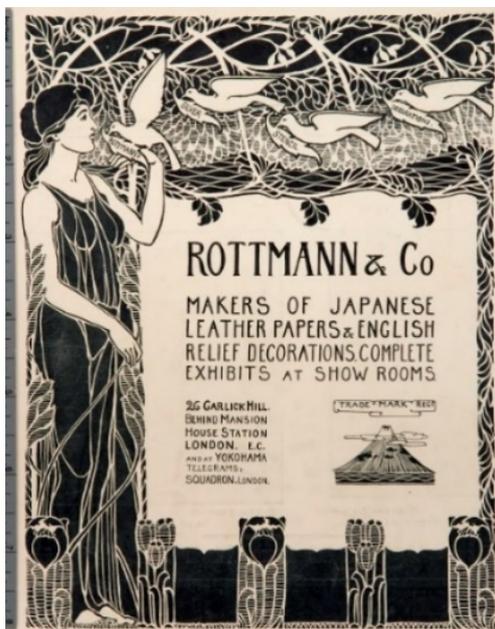


Image: MoDA, Middlesex University



'The Golden Age' wall covering
Walter Crane – 1887

Embossed pasteboard simulating leather,
with coloured lacquer

Manufacturer: Jeffrey & Co.

Collection: Victorian & Albert Museum, London

Walter Crane's wallpaper design 'The Golden Age' featured in the inaugural (1888) exhibition staged by the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society. Morna O'Neill wrote in her article entitled 'Arts and Crafts Paintings: The Political Agency of Things', (available in full on the British Art Studies website), that, 'It featured in a section of the display devoted to the wares of the wallpaper manufacturer Jeffrey & Co. whose director Metford Warner appreciated the expressive potential of design. As such, 'The Golden Age' appeared in four different treatments: one sample of embossed leather with the design hand-painted by Crane and a second sample made of embossed paste-board that simulation leather, again with the design hand painted by Crane...' The wallpaper design was also available printed using woodblock on paper.



Left: Philip Mould
Image source: Philip Mould Ltd
Usage: Creative Commons licence



Right: Charles Fairfax Murray –
self-portrait, before 1919
Image: The Morgan Library & Museum

‘Fake or Fortune’ has been one of the most popular programmes televised on the BBC in recent years, so many readers will recognise the image of Philip Mould on the left above. But, what of the gentleman to his right?

Charles Fairfax Murray (1845 – 1919) became one of the great art collectors and connoisseurs of his age – hence, the comparison with Philip Mould to enable readers to get a sense of him. He narrowly missed out on the directorship of the National Gallery, and, in the respect of the disciplines associated with connoisseurship, he set the bar for those who followed. Furthermore, art and literature owe Fairfax Murray a debt for the informative items from William Morris’s and Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s output which he purchased to ensure their safekeeping and have since become part of various collections, ensuring many are accessible to scholars or on public display.

Fairfax Murray came from humble beginnings, growing up in Sudbury, Suffolk, and made his own luck when he wrote to John Ruskin, enclosing a picture he had executed. Ruskin, who recognised that Fairfax Murray showed considerable talent, approached Edward Burne-Jones to see if he could take the lad on as a studio assistant. Furthermore, Ruskin got his assistant, Charles Augustus Howell, to find him modest lodgings.

By his own omission, Fairfax Murray lacked the talent and imagination to become an artist. Copyists were much in demand, not least by Ruskin, who commissioned him to make copies of several Italian works of art. Fairfax Murray settled in Italy and used the opportunity to study the Italian masters.

Charles Fairfax Murray came up in September’s ‘Afterword’ in connection with the V&A Museum’s ‘Green Dining Room’ as he had been commissioned to paint the panels. For many years, he worked on various commissions for Ruskin, Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. and William Morris privately.

By the time he was thirty, Fairfax Murray had become a sought-after adviser and agent for wealthy patrons and leading galleries intent on purchasing significant paintings. He attended auctions as their representative or negotiated deals with private individuals, often in stiff competition with others acting on behalf of other galleries.

Aside from Morris, Ruskin and Rossetti, Fairfax Murray was good friends with Philip Webb, the Stillmans (Marie Spartali and William Stillman), who, like him, became part of the expat community in Italy for a time, and John Middleton, Slade Professor at Cambridge. William Morris had met Middleton on his second trip to Iceland. It was through Middleton, that Fairfax Murray met the Darwin family and was commissioned to paint several portraits, including one of the widowed Mrs Charles Darwin. These, in turn, led to other commissions for portraits within the University of Cambridge. Consequently, Fairfax Murray spent a lot of time in the city.

Frederick Leach was the Darwin family's preferred decorator.

Arthur Christopher Benson, Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge, wrote in his diary: 'December 16... Fairfax Murray has asked me if I knew anything of M. R. James, Director of the Fitzwilliam, as he thought of offering them a Spanish M.S. I replied that he was one of my oldest friends. F.M. thereupon asked me to arrange a meeting. So I did.'

After the death of Edward Burne-Jones, Charles Fairfax Murray had been invited by his widow to occupy their London home, 'The Grange', which is where the meeting was held.

'He was showing M.R.J. the most splendid and sumptuous MSS., things which possess not the faintest interest for me. The colour of the miniatures is rather pleasing; but I would not give 2s. 6d. for the best MS. of the thirteenth century, except in order to sell it again.

'But he showed Monty about fifteen of these – and I saw he was in a generous mood. He suddenly said, 'I will send you all these if you like – and I want to give you all my autographs of Italian painters and all the original MSS. of William Morris and Rossetti.' I suppose that the value of this gift is several thousand pounds. F. M. went on. 'I have a very great objection to the death duties; and there are certain things in my hands I don't want to get sold – so I propose to give away everything, except what may be sold.'

'This was rather splendid and simple – he went on, 'Our friend here (me) will tell you that I want no sort of recognition. I hope it won't get into the Press – I would rather it were anonymous.' M. R. J. said with great tact, "Well, we only desire to thank people in the way they like best.'

When Fairfax Murray became increasingly ill, he was befriended by Sydney Cockerill, William Morris's secretary during his 'Kelmescott Press' years, who had, initially, been appointed to catalogue Morris's books. Georgiana Burne-Jones is noted as having said to Cockerill, 'You are the most ubiquitous person I ever knew'. Cockerill would go on to become Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum and would have had a good inkling of how much of Morris's and Rossetti's output Murray had bought and, through his attentiveness, ensured a steady flow of further gifts.

Fairfax Murray's grandson, David B. Elliot, wrote in his biography, 'Charles Fairfax Murray: The Unknown Pre-Raphaelite', of the occasion which may have been his last visit to the city, 'Fairfax Murray stayed in Cambridge for five days in 1917, 'wandering about the Fitzwilliam, attending Evensong at King's, lunching with Monty James, the Provost and taking tea with the Master of Christ's...'

David B Elliot also relates that, 'There were many other services, small and large, freely given to old friends over the years. For William Morris, Fairfax Murray's last, sad service was to make three gently rendered, simple pencil drawings of his friend and mentor in death, at peace in his bed in the garden room at Kelmscott House on the morning of 3 October 1896.

Charles Fairfax Murray and William Blake Richmond both made studies of Morris on his death bed. At the time, Murray gave one version to Sydney Cockerill. One is now in the collection of the Tate Gallery and another in the National Portrait Gallery.



Above: a close up of three V&A panels.



Image: Bibliothèque nationale de France



The 'Green Dining Room', Victoria & Albert Museum
Image: the Guardian newspaper

Charles Fairfax Murray painted the panels for the 'Green Dining Room' at the South Kensington Museum, London, (now &Victoria & Albert Museum), having been commissioned by his friend William Morris on behalf of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. Morris is known to have poured over illuminated manuscripts as a student at Oxford University. Is that where he got the idea to have flora & fauna (& zodiac) panels to break up the wood panelling? (See September's Afterword for another significant theory).

There's a wonderful photo of Frederick Leach (David Parr's employer) and his assembled workers taken, in 1882, on a day out to Clayhithe. The men are arranged in rows, like a collegiate photo. One man stands out from all the others because of his physique and his hat. The man is tall, has a Holmesian quality, and, most importantly, is the only one wearing a deerstalker. The wearer is none other than David Parr.

Incredibly, both David Parr and Sherlock Holmes were born in 1854. David Parr was born on 19th July 1854 and in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's story 'His Last Bow', set in 1914, Sherlock Holmes is described as sixty years of age - his birthday is 6th January.



Basil Rathbone in the role of Sherlock Holmes
Image:
New York Public Library Digital Collection

Having established this tenuous but fun connection, Basil Rathbone, who famously played 'Sherlock Holmes' in twelve feature films between 1939 and 1946, relates two spooky incidents in his (1956) autobiography, 'In and Out of Character'. The one following occurred when he was four:

'The dream which my mother experienced in such detail, and which caused our delay in sailing, was as follows: She dreamed we had sailed and were experiencing heavy seas in the Bay of Biscay. Suddenly terrifying sounds indicated that something very serious had happened. A steward entered our cabin and informed us that all passengers were ordered on deck immediately, and to take such warm clothing as might be at hand. Once again in my mother's arms, my father carrying my sister, my parents found themselves on the main deck. A tremendous storm was at the height of its fury, and it was evident that the lifeboats were useless, several already having been washed away. There was no question in my mother's mind but that we should all be drowned. The ship was listing badly and was powerless to keep her course. Wave after wave battered her helpless hulk. This agonizing experience was momentarily alleviated by a parade on deck, in full-dress uniform, of a band of the Seaforth Highlanders. A command rang out and their pipe band began playing 'Flowers of the Forest,' as the ship started to sink. At this moment my mother awakened.

The ship on which we had cancelled passage sailed on schedule and all on board enjoyed a pleasant uneventful trip, until they reached the Bay of Biscay. There, in one of the worst storms ever recorded, the ship sank with all hands, including a band of the Seaforth Highlanders, who played themselves into a watery grave with 'Flowers of the Forest'. The Union Castle Line can verify these facts. My mother's strange participation in this terrifying story you must accept, and bring to it such answer as you may.

'We reached England aboard the Walmer Castle, unaware of the fate that had been in store for us.'

(If there were no survivors, how does the Union Castle Line know what the band had played? It seems an odd last detail to telegraph when sending an SOS. Was the sheet music found floating on the water?)

Staying with the theme of Sherlock Holmes...

Let's play 'Six Degrees of Separation' and link David Parr to Sherlock Holmes in six or less connections. (Six degrees of separation is the idea that all people are six, or fewer, social connections away from each other). This month's attempt requires a cheat in that one degree is a terrace of artists' studios, not a person.

Edward Burne-Jones and his son, Philip, used one of the St. Paul's studios on the Talgarth Road, West Kensington, London. The studio wasn't far from Edward Burne-Jones's London home, The Grange, and is where he worked on his painting 'The Last Sleep of Arthur in Avalon'.

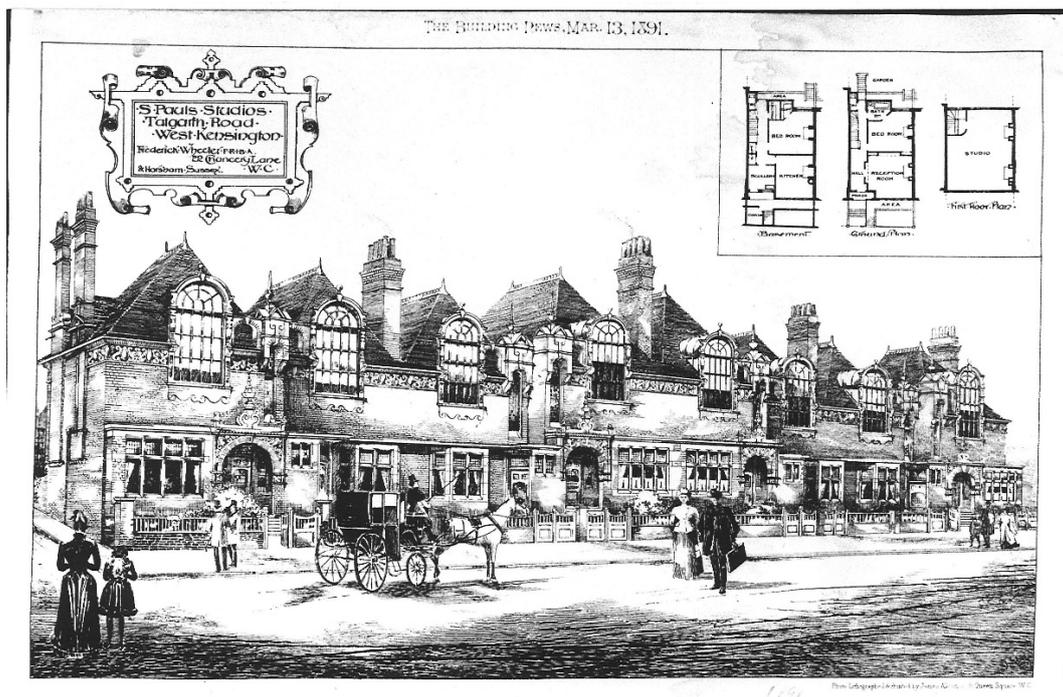


Image: The Building News, 13th March 1891



'The Last Sleep of Arthur in Avalon' – 1881 – 1898

Edward Burne-Jones

Collection: Museum of Art in Ponce, Puerto Rico



An appropriate aside for spooky October...

Sir Philip Burne-Jones's most famous work was 'The Vampire' (1897). His painting depicts a woman looming over an unconscious man, who was believed to have been modelled by the actress Mrs Patrick Campbell, with whom Burne-Jones had a romantic association.

Mrs Patrick Campbell also featured in June's 'Afterword'.

The BBC TV series 'Strike' was adapted from J. K. Rowling's book series featuring a private investigator. The production team used one of the studio houses on Talgarth Road for a murder scene, thereby remaining faithful to this detail in Rowling's 'The Silkworm' story.

The actor who plays 'Cormoran Strike' is Tom Burke. His father is the actor David Burke who played 'Dr. Watson', alongside Jeremy Brett's 'Sherlock Holmes', in the first thirteen episodes of the ITV Granada series 'The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes'. In addition, David Burke was a guest star in the, 1965, BBC TV 'Sherlock Holmes' series, playing 'Sir George Burnwell' in the episode 'The Beryl Coronet'.

Rather fittingly, David Burke played William Morris in the, 1975, BBC TV series 'The Love School' about the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, which, in turn, was a significant influence on the 2009 'Desperate Romantics' TV series.



Actor Tom Burke in front of the St. Paul's Studios, Talgarth Rd
Image: British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)



David Burke (on the right)
Image: ITV Granada

David Parr/Frederick Leach > William Morris > Edward Burne-Jones > St. Paul's studio houses, Talgarth Road, London > Tom Burke > David Burke/Watson > Sherlock Holmes

If David Parr and Frederick Leach worked on the decorative scheme at no. 1 Palace Green at the same time as Edward Burne-Jones worked on his canvases (aided by Walter Crane), then there are only five degrees of separation.

In the final scene of series four of the BBC's TV drama 'Strike', entitled 'Lethal White', Comoran Strike approaches a magnificent double-door with two mirrored swans. The scene wasn't shot in front of the actual **Old Swan House** in Chelsea, London. Problems with permissions to film aside, the Old Swan House is set back, which would have made it difficult to capture its doors in the same shots as the lead actors. By using another property on the Embankment and prop doors, or CGI wizardry, the series, nevertheless, ends true to J. K. Rowling's epilogue, which describes the doors of a mansion facing the great river as having twin swans.

David Parr worked on the interiors at the **Old Swan House**. (F. R. Leach & Sons, his employer, was William Morris's preferred firm of decorators). One suspects he would have taken pleasure in his proximity to the Thames and walking along the, then, new Embankment.

Both Dante Gabriel Rossetti and James McNeill Whistler lived by the Thames and thrived on the activity on and around the river, inspiring Whistler to sketch and paint it again and again.



Old Swan House
Chelsea Embankment
London

Designed by
the architect (Richard)
Norman Shaw and
built in 1876.

Left: Edwardx –
wikicommons licence

Right: George P. Landow
Victorian Web - public
domain



Rossetti's Drawing Room at Cheyne Walk - 1882
Note: the Thames can just be seen through the window
Henry Treffry Dunn - Collection: (apologies) unidentified



Brown and Silver: Old Battersea Bridge
James Abbott McNeill Whistler
Image: Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover.

Tom Burke played 'Athos' in the (2014 – 2016) BBC drama of **Alexandre Dumas's** 1844 novel 'The Three Musketeers'.



Alexandre Dumas (1802-1870)
Photograph taken in 1855
Collection: Museum of Fine Arts,
Houston



BBC TV drama series 'The Three Musketeers'
Photo of the lead actors taken on set.
Image: British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)

Arthur Compton-Rickett wrote in his 'William Morris: a study in Personality', 'Dickens he loved; Scott he loved even more; but **the warmest place in his affection was for Dumas**. Of the Memoires he was never tired. When jaded by a heavy day's work Dumas never failed to soothe and distract him. Contemporary fiction scarcely touched him at all.'

From the William Morris Internet Archive website's 'Chronology', under 22nd October 1873, 'In a letter to Louisa MacDonald Baldwin, Morris said he was determined to once more take up figure drawing from models. It is clear from the same letter that he has read Dumas's books 'Vicomte de Bragelonne' (1848-1850) and 'Olympe de Cleves' (1852).'

His biographer, J. W. Mackail wrote under the same year (1873), 'At present, however, what he called the mood of idleness (his idleness was more productive than most men's work) was rather strong on him. 'It is wet and wild weather,' he writes one day during that winter, 'but somehow I don't dislike it, and there is something touching about the real world bursting into London with these gales: it makes me feel lazy in the mornings though and **I feel as if I should like to sit in my pretty room at Turnham Green reading some hitherto unprinted Dumas, say about as good as the Three Musketeers.**'

Georgiana Burne-Jones wrote in her 'Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones', under August 1889, '**During these years he [Morris] read a great deal to Edward out of Dumas**, whom they both knew as well as they did Scott. Monte Cristo Edward also read over and over to himself in turn with Rob Roy and The Antiquary. About the two great writers he says: "Yes, Scott is now among the assured Immortals and is beyond criticism – *super grammaticam*... And so is Dumas... Scott is the most beautiful, and yet Dumas is more to my heart – only I love Scott the most."

On 27th September 1849, Rossetti wrote as he travelled from London to Paris, 'There are six of us: I that write away; Hunt reads **Dumas**, hard-lipped, with a heavy jowl...'

Arthur Compton-Rickett and Thomas Hake wrote in their 'The Life and Letters of Theodore Watts-Dunton', in a chapter entitled 'At Kelmscott', 'One day the studio was unceremoniously invaded by Rossetti's housekeeper a somewhat querulous person while the poet-painter was standing at his easel engaged in talk about **his beloved Dumas** with Watts-Dunton. She came in with some trivial complaint about the want of respect towards her on the part of the domestics. Rossetti flew into a rage, but presently calming down told the woman to send the servants upstairs into the studio. When they had assembled, he ordered them to stand in a row. This order having been obeyed, with the housekeep at their head, he read them a moral lecture of a serio-comic nature which soon set them laughing, and in this way he managed to establish perfect harmony in the region below stairs.'

Arthur C. Benson wrote in his diary, under 1910, '**This evening I have been reading the life of William Morris, with envious admiration of a man who knew what he meant to do, and what he had to do, and did it...**'

In his obituaries, William Morris was recognised as a poet, prose writer, scholar, translator, Socialist and decorative artist, generally in that order. At date, the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography lists his occupations as, 'Designer, author and visionary socialist'.

Similarly, 'The Illustrated Queen Almanac and Lady's Calendar' noted in their (1883) obituary of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 'By his ballads and sonnets Mr. Rossetti's is probably destined to be best remembered'. His translations of the early Italian poets were also considered worthy of the reader's attention. I counted seventeen lines devoted to his literary achievements and three (as per the printed article) to painting, which was discussed in terms of his being the leader of the 'knot of students' who became the Pre-Raphaelites, with no mention of his artistic achievements beyond his time as a student rebel.

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Emma Shaw, Preventive Conservation Officer at MoDA at Middlesex University

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Cambridgeshire Archives

APPENDIX

William Morris was invited by Professor Colvin to give a speech to the Cambridge School of Art at the Guildhall on 21st February 1878.

Morris's speech was published in full on 23rd February 1878 in the 'Cambridge Chronicle'.

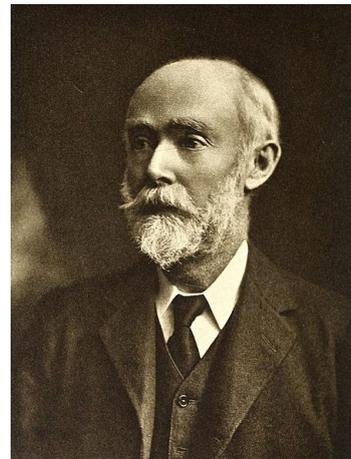
Some context:

In February 1878, William Morris was 43 years old. It had been thirteen years since Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. had undertaken the commission to decorate the 'Green Dining Room' at the South Kensington Museum - renamed the Victoria & Albert Museum in 1899.

Since 1875, Morris had been the sole proprietor of Morris & Co. In the Spring of 1877, the firm had opened a store at No. 449 Oxford Street. Sales had increased and its popularity had grown. Having taken on sales staff for the shop, Morris was free to interest himself in the process of textile dyeing, under the tutelage of Thomas Wardle, a silk dyer who operated the Hencroft Works in Leek, Staffordshire. Around 1878, Morris turned his attention to weaving.



William Morris - March 1877
Elliott & Fry
Collection: National Portrait Gallery, London



Sidney Colvin – not later than 1921
Collection: not known
Courtesy of Wikipedia

Note: the following is typed from a blotched microfiche copy. A few words were illegible.

Mr. W. Morris addressed the meeting as follows: - In these days, when even those of us who love art most are apt sometimes to be discouraged by the carelessness for art that surrounds us, it is not wonderful that people should ask, some in triumph and some in sorrow, is the desire for beauty, and eventfulness of form that produces art, an essential part of man's nature? Or is it only one of the fleeting outcomes of the necessary energy of life, like many another fashion that has now passed away for ever? That is a serious question for you and me, whose lives are being spent now in dealing with that art. For, indeed, I conceive that, to put it another way, it means are we merely trifling over the cast off habits of former ages and weakly trying to spin out the times a little before all these toys are looked upon with clear eyes and priced at their proper value; or are we working diligently, looking backward with gratitude and forward with hope, expecting while we toil to see some glimmer of the new light beginning to shine upon neglected art, on the creative powers of man, that as in the latter days shone so fully on science, on man's analytical powers. I say it is a most serious question to us, whether art has become a mere rag of the past history or is still a living fibre, of our present days. For if we must say yes to the first part of the question, then we artists

are wasting our time, or worse; we by our trifling are helping to make the age effeminate and trifling and we had better at once make an end of what we call art and hope to see some new thing take the place of it. And now I must say that the very fact that such a question can be put by any one that loves the Art, is a sign that some great change is at work in these matters. Who could have thought of such a thing once except a few devotees or grumbling philosophers with whose contempt of Art, indeed, I imagine there was mingled not a little affectation. The most of men worked on letting their hands follow their instincts of their brains and producing abundant beauty, either simple even to childishness, or sublime and mighty, according to the measure of the mind that guided their hands. There has been accomplished all that great body of Art that we in these latter days have the pleasure and advantage of studying, if we have no other pleasure and advantage, it rose from mere barbarism, how or where we know not: it changed, it wavered, grew faint, rose up again, lost on one side, gained on the other, fitted itself to all races all breeds, and through everything was still the same art with one unbroken though varying life. Where is that art now? Where is this life of so many thousand years? Has it died out? And if so, can the dead live again? Indeed in appearance, I should say it has died; or, rather, we must at least say that the link that binds the imitative conscious art of to-day with that progressive unconscious art of the past is hard to find, if indeed it can be found at all. Yet somehow we artists must find it if we are not to call ourselves triflers over effete rubbish, even as I said before. If you are astonished at my taking what must at first seem such a gloomy view of art, I can only say many people, I know, think or rather feel that that link is clean lost. I am forced to say that beyond a very small circle now-a-days, I find people living in a world that does not know art at all. For the most part even highly cultivated people eager for the good of the world with all kinds of sensitiveness, nevertheless, are utterly blind on this side of things. True, they may think it necessary or rather desirable that something should be known of art as a matter of education but they would not miss it if it were to disappear; they do not really care about it at all; they will live amidst the most frightful ugliness-quite blandly and happily: though some of them, at least, make a profession of loving the country, the mountains, the sea, and so on, all the things that inspire art in those that produce it. I say "make a profession to do so" [one unreadable word – no word suggested ?] I rather more than suspect they are not a little blunt to these impressions also. This, I am sure, can never have been the case in those past times I have been talking off [sic], and it is a puzzle to me how it can be now. A puzzle to me in one way: yet in another way I must acknowledge the justice of it, yes and rejoice in it even. I say I must rejoice in it when I think of the mass of squalor and misery, the unhelped and apparently unhelpable, hideousness which forms the greater part of our big towns. I should doubt the existence of any possible justice in the world if while 999 thousandth of the people, say, of London, are living in such a state that it is impossible for them to have any idea of beauty at all, the thousandths part were not oppressed by the [dam - misspelt?] brutality, unconsciously if they did not shame it, as they verily do. For I declare to you that though in this as in all else the rich have the advantage over the poor, the advantage in matters of taste, in appreciation of and longing for beauty, I would rather say, is but small. Glitter, show and vulgarity are greedily longed for by the poor, glitter, show and vulgarity are copiously paid for by the rich. Into such strange byways of folly has civilisation strayed at times. I must ask you not to think that I am wandering from the point. For let us consider. Those unconscious artists of past days were thinking of something more than art when they wrought the wonders that we rejoice in. They were earning their bread, they were glorifying their creeds, they were struggling with difficult and intricate pieces of knowledge while they wrought them. Their life

was in those works of art and showed in them their ways of life. But with us the life of our great cities, the places you understand, in which arts must always mostly flourish, is so distasteful and disgusting to every man, - I will not say of taste, but of heart rather, - that we who work in the arts cannot by any means help striving to escape from all that into some unreal world, in which nothing but art exists; and the result is that all we do is weak, isolated, wanting in abundance and spontaneity. Now I do not stand before you as a mere praiser of past times: I also know that injustice, the ignorance, the violence [?], and unreasoning passion [?] of those past ages. I know what the world has won since then. But I ask what it seems to have lost. Has it lost it past recovery? My discontent of the present of art is bred by the hope of its future. I am speaking of hardly what we do, not for our discouragement but for our encouragement. For, look you; the arts have gone as far in one direction as they possibly can go: say 300 years ago it had come to that at last. Then people tried to push it further in the same direction, and failed, as might have been expected. Hence these centuries of trifling, of eclipse, and neglect of the arts coinciding with the enormous increase of riches and consequent luxury, which has been, is, and will be, I most solemnly affirm, the very bane of all the arts. I say the arts have gone as far as they can go in one direction. By some means or another new scope, new life, must be found for them. Go into our museums, and look at the works there, and if you mean imitation you will despair if you know anything about the matter; so excellent, so complete, so miraculous you will find them. But if you are looking for instruction, if you are seeking insight, you will hope and rejoice rather at the sight of that unapproachable excellence. Thinking the mind of the man that brought such things to pass is still alive in its vehement and partly successful struggles for other good things, it has been blind to these hopes for a while, but when those matters that it has of late desired have been some of them attained to, some of them found out not to be desirable, the mind of the man will again turn to the embers still as I think kept alive from the old times of art: and will once more carry on the torch to be a light and a glory to the world. Like enough the youngest of us all will not live to see one of those new days, and yet I say the hope of their coming even now makes us a part of them, even as memory makes us a part of the great works of the past. For, indeed, I cannot seriously think that anything can really permanently take the place of art in men's minds, whatever the seeming outlook may be. Nay, I affirm that looking all over the world, looking at the decay of the East and the tumult of the West, as sure as I am that our present civilisation in some form must needs be pushed further afield, so sure I am that elsewhere - yes, I will be bold to say it, especially brutal America, in brutal England, our civilisation must needs be recivilised; nor do I think that anything but art can do it - I mean real living art, springing as ancient art did from religion. I use that word in no narrow sense, but in the widest imaginable sense, and again I say that in these days our civilisation halts and sickens, nay, sometimes seems as if it would take some steps on the backward path for lack of an art springing from pure and simple ways of life from the exaltation of soul that comes of the constant practice of courage, kindness, and good faith. Once more I say that whatever reaction there may be, yet assuredly some such art will arise, and in the meantime I am sure also that our task, our pleasure of preparing the path for it, of keeping alive the hope of it may well make for us artists a serious and earnest, and not a trifling life. To you especially who are studying in this school, I have but little advice to give that your own good sense would not give. You know very well that Nature can be your only final guide, your only test of right and wrong. You know very well that as you work no diligence can be too great for the sake of getting a thing right from the outset, that shuffling and pretence will always find you out, and land you in discomfort and waste of time. You know very well, and the more you know of art

the more you will know it, that you cannot study the works of the past too much, always on the condition, that you do it for the sake of study, not for the sake of reproduction; for of course it is clear to you that no one can have any call to be an artist, except in virtue of his being able to do something that nobody else can do. Even as in a wider scope it is with the arts. I mean that no words can describe a picture that no prose analysis can say what a poem means. I do not mean by saying all this to discourage those of you who are studying for the sake of educating yourselves to know and love beauty rather than for becoming professional artists of any sort, still less those who are or will one day be artists of lesser kind like myself, designers as they are called. What I say is that however humble a man's walk in the arts may be, any excellence he may be capable of will come from some grain of originality in him, and on what side that may lie he will find out by finding out what he really likes, which is not so easy a matter as it seems to be at first sight. Let me finish these few words by praising the pleasure of an artist's life. Other people work hard and are glad often I am afraid to shake off the thought of their work at the day's end and forget it, nay often if they could and were free they would choose some other work, or no work at all perhaps. But with us every day is a holiday, except perhaps the days when we fail notably. We don't like to leave off at night, and are in a hurry to begin in the morning. Nor if we were the freest and richest people in the world would we lead any other life. I must ask the rest of you to forgive me when I say that to be an artist or a husbandman [a person who cultivates the land; a farmer] seems to me to be the only quite satisfactory way of living. Ah, sir, might it not come about that by far the greater part of mankind had that happiness. It was so once. Every handicraftsman was once an artist, and I must needs think that our civilisation has gone astray in this, that it is no longer so. And once again I say without any condition, without any "if," that one day or other this will be amended, and I call upon all you here present to consider this if this is not the great end of all instruction in the arts to make men's labour a pleasure to them and a pleasure to those for whom they labour. Sir, I think that it is a very good work for us all to help in though we may be long in bringing any great measure of it about, for it will be a changed world indeed and a world that will have cured many and many an evil when every man's share of daily toil is dignified with pleasure, good will, and hope.'

Mrs. Bateson then distributed the prizes.

After the prize giving, 'Dr. Bateson said the address they had heard from Mr. Morris was a sort of weekday sermon, and seemed to come home to them. He hoped such a valuable address would prove profitable to them, and proposed a hearty vote of thanks to Mr. Morris for his admirable discourse.