

## THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO WILLIAM MORRIS

In his short life, William Morris (1834–96) combined the roles of poet, author, painter, designer, translator, lecturer, political activist, journalist, weaver, bookmaker, and businessman. This volume draws together influential voices from different disciplines who have participated in the recent critical, political, and curatorial revival of his work, with essays exploring the contemporary resonance of his remarkable legacy. As a critic of capitalism, his thinking has thrived in these years of financial crisis; as a theorist of work and craftsmanship, his legacy interacts with a more recent ethics of making that questions the values of ‘off-shored’ production; and as a protector of landscape and buildings, Morris’s concern with what is precious strikes a chord in our age of environmental crisis. At the same time, a careful and scholarly approach observes the particularity of Morris’s context, in a way that confounds the ‘false friends’ of hasty historical reception and reveals unexpected connections.

MARCUS WAITHE is Professor of Literature and the Applied Arts at the University of Cambridge, and a fellow of Magdalene College. He is the author of *The Work of Words* (2023), *Words Made Stone* (co-written with Lida Cardozo Kindersley) (2022), *Thinking through Style* (co-edited with Michael Hurley) (2018), *The Labour of Literature in Britain and France, 1830–1910* (co-edited with Claire White) (2018), and *William Morris’s Utopia of Strangers* (2006).

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THE CAMBRIDGE  
COMPANION  
TO WILLIAM MORRIS

EDITED BY  
MARCUS WAITHE  
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 Marcus Waithe  
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*In memory of Duncan Robinson CBE (1943–2022),  
art historian, former Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum  
and Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge*

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## Note on *The Collected Works*

Unless otherwise stated, all references to Morris's works come from *The Collected Works of William Morris*, edited by May Morris, 24 vols (London: Longmans Green and Company, 1910–15). This edition is available in its original printed form or as one of the facsimile reprints issued by Thoemmes Press (1992), Elibron Classics (2000–11), and the Cambridge Library Collection (2012) (also available electrically via Cambridge Core: [www.cambridge.org/core](http://www.cambridge.org/core)).

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- i. 'The Defence of Guenevere'; 'The Hollow Land'
- ii. *The Life and Death of Jason*
- iii. *The Earthly Paradise: A Poem* 1
- iv. *The Earthly Paradise: A Poem* 2
- v. *The Earthly Paradise: A Poem* 3
- vi. *The Earthly Paradise: A Poem* 4
- vii. *The Story of Grettir the Strong; The Story of the Volsungs & Niblungs*
- viii. Journals of Travel in Iceland, 1871, 1873
- ix. *Love is Enough; Poems by the Way*
- x. *Three Northern Love Stories; The Tale of Beowulf*
- xi. *The Aeneids of Virgil*
- xii. *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung & The Fall of the Niblungs*
- xiii. *The Odyssey of Homer Done into English Verse*
- xiv. *The House of the Wolfings; The Story of the Glittering Plain*
- xv. *The Roots of the Mountains*
- xvi. *News from Nowhere; A Dream of John Ball; A King's Lesson*
- xvii. *The Wood Beyond the World; Child Christopher; Old French Romances*
- xviii. *The Well at the World's End* 1



*Note on The Collected Works*

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- xix. *The Well at the World's End* 2
- xx. *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*
- xxi. *The Sundering Flood*; Unfinished Romances
- xxii. *Hopes & Fears for Art*; Lectures on Art & Industry
- xxiii. *Signs of Change*; Lectures on Socialism
- xxiv. *Scenes from The Fall of Troy*; Other Poems & Fragments

## Chronology

The following chronology charts the key turning points in Morris's life. Readers needing a more detailed source should consult: Nicholas Salmon, with Derek Baker, *The William Morris Chronology* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1996).

- 1834 William Morris is born on 24 March at Elm House, Walthamstow, third child and eldest son to Emma (née Shelton) and William Morris (snr), a senior partner at City of London brokers Sanderson & Company.
- 1840 The family move to Woodford Hall, near Epping Forest, a Palladian mansion with extensive park and farmland.
- 1842 Morris visits Canterbury Cathedral, and goes brass rubbing.
- 1843 Morris rides each day to Miss Arundale's Academy for Young Gentlemen, Woodford, on a Shetland pony.
- 1846 Devonshire Great Consolidated Copper Mining Company is registered, a joint stock company in which Morris's father and uncle are major shareholders.
- 1847 Morris's father dies and is buried in Woodford churchyard.
- 1848 Morris is sent to the recently founded Marlborough College in Wiltshire, where he spends free time exploring local antiquities and prehistoric monuments. The Morris family moves to the Water House, now on Forest Road, Walthamstow.
- 1851 A 'rebellion' takes place among the boarders at Marlborough College, during which fireworks are let off.
- 1852 Morris begins private tuition under the Rev. F. B. Guy of Walthamstow.
- 1853 Morris goes up to Exeter College, Oxford, where he makes friends with Edward Burne-Jones. With a wider group of companions, they form The Set, and eagerly consume John Ruskin's 'The Nature of Gothic' chapter, just published in Volume II of *The Stones of Venice* (1851–3).

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- 1854 Morris visits the major Gothic churches of northern France and Belgium. The cathedral at Rouen makes a particular impression.
- 1855 Morris begins writing poetry; and he resolves to become an architect after a second tour of northern French churches, this time with Burne-Jones and William Fulford. He thereby abandons his plan to take holy orders. Morris and Burne-Jones set a pattern for their literary interests on discovering Robert Southey's 1817 edition of Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* in Cornish's bookshop, Birmingham. In the autumn, Morris successfully passes his degree at the University of Oxford.
- 1856 Morris and his friends publish *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, the first number of which includes Morris's 'The Story of the Unknown Church' and 'Winter Weather'. Morris joins the office of the Oxford architect G. E. Street and in London meets Dante Gabriel Rossetti. In the autumn, Morris and Burne-Jones move to lodgings at Red Lion Square, where they eventually design their own furniture. By the end of the year, Morris has abandoned his plan to become an architect in favour of the life of a painter.
- 1857 Morris meets Jane Burden, to whom he would propose in February 1858. He spends the early autumn painting frescos with his friends on the ceiling of the Oxford Union.
- 1858 Morris publishes *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems*.
- 1859 Morris marries Jane Burden and commissions his friend Philip Webb to design Red House – a family home situated at Upton in Kent. In this year, he also joins the Corps of Artistic Volunteers.
- 1860 Morris and his family move into Red House.
- 1861 The firm of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Company ('the Firm') is founded and establishes premises at 8 Red Lion Square, London. Morris's eldest daughter, Jane (Jenny) Alice Morris, is born.
- 1862 The Firm exhibits at the International Exhibition, South Kensington Museum, London. Morris's youngest daughter, Mary (May) Morris, is born.
- 1865 The Morris family moves from Red House to 26 Queen Square, London, to which the Firm had also moved its premises earlier the same year.

- 1866 Morris and Burne-Jones discuss an edition of *The Earthly Paradise* illustrated with wood blocks (later abandoned). The Firm decorates the Green Dining Room at the South Kensington Museum. In this year, it also contracts work on the chapel of Jesus College, Cambridge to the Cambridge firm of Frederick R. Leach.
- 1867 Morris publishes *The Life and Death of Jason*.
- 1868 Morris publishes volume 1 of *The Earthly Paradise* (Parts I and II). He also begins to learn Icelandic under the tutelage of Eiríkur Magnússon.
- 1869 Morris and Magnússon publish their translations of ‘The Saga of Gunnlaug the Worm-tongue and Rafn the Skald’, *Eyrbyggja Saga* and *Grettis Saga* (*The Story of Grettir the Strong*). Morris also publishes Volume 2 of the *Earthly Paradise* (Part III). In this year, the Morrises make a convalescent trip to Bad Ems, a spa town in Germany.
- 1870 Morris publishes a translation of *The Story of the Volsungs and Niblungs*. He embarks on experiments with calligraphy and illuminated manuscripts.
- 1871 Morris and Rossetti jointly acquire the lease on Kelmscott Manor, Oxfordshire. Around this time, Rossetti commences a romantic affair with Jane Morris. Morris makes his first visit to Iceland, accompanied by Magnússon, Charles Faulkner and W. H. Evans. He keeps an Icelandic journal.
- 1872 Morris publishes *Love Is Enough*. He completes a vellum illuminated manuscript of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. He also works on (but never finishes) *The Novel on Blue Paper*. Morris attends the annual general meeting of the Devon Great Consols Mining Company in his capacity as a director.
- 1873 The Morrises move to Hornington House, Turnham Green Road. Morris and Burne-Jones travel to Florence. Morris and Faulkner make their second expedition to Iceland.
- 1874 The Firm is commissioned to create a window for Christ Church, Oxford. Rossetti gives up his tenancy at Kelmscott Manor. Morris and his family visits Belgium.
- 1875 The firm of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Company is reconstituted as Morris & Company, with Morris taking full control. In this year, he publishes *Three Northern Love Stories & Other Tales* and *The Aeneids of Virgil*. Morris suffers an attack of gout and visits Leek in Staffordshire to receive instruction in dyeing from Thomas Wardle at the Hencroft Dye Works.

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- 1876 Jenny Morris develops epilepsy, ending her plans for higher education. Morris enters the public debate on the Eastern Question surrounding Turkish rule in the Balkans and the massacre of Bulgarian Christians. In the autumn of this year, he publishes *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs*.
- 1877 Morris declines an approach about becoming Professor of Poetry at Oxford. He becomes Chairman of the newly established Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. Morris & Company open showrooms on Oxford Street. Morris publishes his translation of *The Odyssey*. At the end of the year, he delivers ‘The Decorative Arts’ before the Trades Guild of Learning, an early landmark in the public lectures that would span the rest of his life. He also gives his first political lecture, for the Eastern Question Association in Lambeth.
- 1878 Morris learns how to make hand-knotted carpets, and publishes *The Decorative Arts: Their Relation to Modern Life and Progress*. The Morris family travels to Italy, and they move into Kelmscott House (formerly The Retreat), Hammersmith.
- 1879 Morris completes the *Acanthus & Vine* tapestry, and becomes Treasurer of the newly founded National Liberal League. He protests against the planned restoration of St Mark’s, Venice.
- 1880 The Morris family and some friends travel on a boat named the *Ark* from Kelmscott House in Hammersmith to Kelmscott Manor in Oxfordshire, a journey that prefigures the one made by William Guest in *News from Nowhere*. Morris & Company decorate the Throne Room at St James’s Palace.
- 1881 Morris protests against the proposed widening of Magdalen Bridge in Oxford. Morris & Company open their works at Merton Abbey, South West London.
- 1882 Rossetti dies. Morris becomes Treasurer of the Icelandic Famine Relief Committee.
- 1883 Morris is elected an honorary fellow of Exeter College, Oxford. He joins the Democratic Federation (later, the Social Democratic Federation (SDF)), and having become a socialist proclaims this on the occasion of delivering his lecture ‘Art Under Plutocracy’ at University College, Oxford. In this year, he reads Karl Marx’s *Das Kapital* in a French translation.

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*Chronology*

- 1884 Morris publishes *Chants for Socialists in Justice*, the campaigning newspaper of the SDF. He delivers his lecture 'Useless Work *versus* Useless Toil' at venues across the country. Morris, along with Ernest Belfort Bax, Edward Aveling, Eleanor Marx and others, leave the SDF and found the Socialist League (SL).
- 1885 Morris is arrested for crying 'shame' on hearing the verdict of a trial at Arbour Square Police Court. In a letter to Thomas Wardle, he denies suggestions that his wallpapers could cause arsenic poisoning. He is laid low by a particularly severe attack of gout. Morris begins publishing *The Pilgrims of Hope* in the campaigning newspaper of the SL, *Commonweal*.
- 1886 Morris and E. Belfort Bax publish *Socialism from the Root Up* in *Commonweal*. And Morris begins publishing instalments of *A Dream of John Ball*. He sustains an intense schedule of open-air speaking at socialist rallies around the country.
- 1887 Morris commences writing entries for his *Socialist Diary*. He publishes *The Odyssey of Homer* and writes a socialist play, *The Tables Turned; or Nupkins Awakened*, first performed at the SL Hall on Farringdon Road. Three people are killed by police and more than a hundred injured on 'Bloody Sunday' in Trafalgar Square; at a subsequent protest, mounted police run down a protestor named Alfred Linnell. Morris speaks at Linnell's funeral. In this year, the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society is founded.
- 1888 Morris attends a lecture at the New Gallery by Emery Walker entitled 'Letter Press Printing', which would inspire him to set up the Kelmscott Press. Morris publishes *The House of the Wolfings* (dated 1889). He also publishes *A Dream of John Ball* in book form. Morris attends the Second International in Paris.
- 1889 Morris publishes *The Roots of the Mountains*.
- 1890 Morris publishes instalments of *News from Nowhere* in *Commonweal* and begins the serialization of *The Story of the Glittering Plain*. He renews purchasing incunabula and other rare books, and visits Joseph Batchelor's mill in Little Chart, Kent, in search of suitable paper for the Kelmscott Press. The Hammersmith Branch of the SL, headed by Morris, secedes to become The Hammersmith Socialist Society.
- 1891 *News from Nowhere* is published as a book by Reeves & Turner. Morris founds the Kelmscott Press, and the prints *The Story of the Glittering Plain*. Morris also publishes *Poems by the Way* at the Press. He begins publishing the multi-volume *Saga Library*.

## Chronology

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- 1892 After the death of Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Morris declines his proposed candidacy as the next Poet Laureate. The Kelmscott edition of *News from Nowhere* is published.
- 1893 Morris publishes *Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome* (a revised version of *Socialism from the Root Up*). The Kelmscott edition of Thomas More's *Utopia* is printed.
- 1894 Morris publishes *The Wood Beyond the World* at the Kelmscott Press. His mother dies.
- 1895 Morris writes letters of protest about tree-felling in Epping Forest and also writes to the Thames Conservancy. He publishes *The Tale of Beowulf* at the Kelmscott Press and delivers 'The Woodcuts of Gothic Books' at Bolt Court Technical School, Fleet Street.
- 1896 The Kelmscott Press prints *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* and *The Well at the World's End*. Morris spends several months unwell and travels to Norway accompanied by a doctor. He dies at home on 3 October 1896. A doctor declares that 'the Disease is simply being William Morris, and having done more work than most ten men'. Morris is buried in the churchyard at Kelmscott. Morris's secretary, Sydney Cockerell, winds up the operations of the Kelmscott Press, including publishing *The Sundering Flood* and other works still moving through the Press on Morris's death.

## Abbreviations

The following commonly cited works are given parenthetically in the text using the stated abbreviations. Other references appear as endnotes, initially in full and then following a short-title system.

Arnot	R. Page Arnot, <i>William Morris: The Man and the Myth</i> (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1964)
<i>Blue Paper</i>	Penelope Fitzgerald, <i>The Novel on Blue Paper by William Morris</i> (New York: Journeyman Press, 1982)
CL	<i>The Collected Letters of William Morris</i> , ed. Norman Kelvin, 4 vols (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984–96)
Henderson	Philip Henderson, <i>William Morris: His Life, Work and Friends</i> (London: Thames & Hudson, 1967)
<i>Ideal Book</i>	<i>The Ideal Book: Essays and Lectures on the Arts of the Book by William Morris</i> , ed. William S. Peterson (Los Angeles: University of California, 1982)
<i>Journalism</i>	<i>Journalism: Contributions to Commonwealth 1885–1890</i> , ed. Nicholas Salmon (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1996)
Lindsay	Jack Lindsay, <i>William Morris: His Life and Work</i> (London: Constable, 1975)
MacCarthy	Fiona MacCarthy, <i>William Morris: A Life for Our Time</i> (Faber and Faber, 1994)
Mackail	J. W. Mackail, <i>The Life of William Morris</i> , 2 vols (London: Longmans, Green, & Company, 1899)
Meier	Paul Meier, <i>William Morris: The Marxist Dreamer</i> , 2 vols, trans. Frank Gubb (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1978) (original French title: <i>La Pensée Utopique de William Morris</i> (1972))
<i>Memorials</i>	Georgiana Burne-Jones, <i>Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones</i> , 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1906)



## List of Abbreviations

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Peterson	William S. Peterson, <i>The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure</i> (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991)
PW	<i>Political Writings: Contributions to Justice and Commonweal</i> , ed. Nicholas Salmon (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1994)
Ruskin	<i>The Library Edition of the Works of John Ruskin</i> , eds E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols (London: Allen, 1903–12)
Socialism	William Morris and E. Belfort Bax, <i>Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome</i> (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1893)
Socialist Diary	<i>William Morris's Socialist Diary</i> , ed. Florence S. Boos (Iowa City, IA: Windhover Press, 1981)
Sparling	H. Halliday Sparling, <i>The Kelmscott Press and William Morris Master-Craftsman</i> (London: Macmillan and Company, 1924)
Tables Turned	Pamela Bracken Wiens (ed.), <i>The Tables Turned</i> (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1994)
Thompson	Paul Thompson, <i>The Work of William Morris</i> (London: Heinemann, 1967)
TSL	William Morris and Eiríkur Magnússon (eds), <i>The Saga Library</i> , 6 vols (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1891–1905)
UL	<i>The Unpublished Lectures of William Morris</i> , ed. Eugene D. LeMire (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969)
WMA	<i>William Morris Archive</i> , ed. Florence S. Boos, <a href="http://morrisarchive.lib.uiowa.edu/">http://morrisarchive.lib.uiowa.edu/</a>
WMAWS	<i>William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist</i> , eds May Morris and Bernard Shaw, 2 vols (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1936)
WMM	Tony Pinkney (ed.), <i>We Met Morris: Interviews with William Morris, 1885–1996</i> (Reading: Spire Books, 2005)
WMRR	E. P. Thompson, <i>William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary</i> , rev. ed. (London: Merlin Press, 1976)
Vallance	Aymer Vallance, <i>William Morris: His Art, His Writings and His Public Life</i> (London: George Bell and Sons, 1897)