

For
Katherine and Nicola

William Morris

Design and enterprise
in Victorian Britain

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- 56 H. Rossetti Angeli, *Rossetti*, p. 115.
- 57 HFAD, MMF & Co., Minutes, 4 Nov. 1874.
- 58 WMG, J191, Mackail Notebooks, Vol. I, f. 10.
- 59 Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, Account Book of Sir Edward Burne-Jones; City of Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, Account Book of Philip Webb.
- 60 Mackail, *Life*, Vol. I, p. 307.
- 61 Kelvin, *Letters*, Vol. I, p. 245, to Charles Fairfax Murray, 11 March 1875.
- 62 Ibid., p. 249, to Emma Shelton Morris, 25 March 1875.
- 63 See, for example, Henderson, *Life, Work and Friends*, p. 150.
- 64 Mackail, *Life*, Vol. I, p. 307.
- 65 H. Rossetti Angeli, *Rossetti*, p. 115. On the importance of Madox Brown as a designer see Watkinson, *Pre-Raphaelite Art and Design*, pp. 149–51.
- 66 Kelvin, *Letters*, Vol. I, p. 178, to Aglaia Coronio, 11 Feb. 1873.

Experimentation and growth: Morris as designer–craftsman, 1875–81

With the reconstitution of Morris & Co. under his sole ownership, William Morris was freed from many restrictions – legal, financial and commercial – and he set out, with his usual vigour, to complete what he had begun in recent years. His endeavours, through elevating the status of the designer and encouraging originality in design, contributed to a revolution in the decorative arts. The ‘Morris look’, with its rich colours, simple elegance, naturalistic inspiration and flowing lines, became familiar to the public at large. Within a decade, his designs and products were widely admired throughout the western world. All this required a tremendous amount of hard work, and sound commercial judgement.

The immediate priority was to give his customers more choice, inspiring Morris to produce a whole range of sumptuous new designs. In May 1875 he wrote to a friend that he was ‘up to the neck in turning out designs for papers, chintzes and carpets and trying to get the manufacturers to do them’.¹ The years which followed were the most creative of Morris’s career in business. Between 1875 and 1885, he made 21 designs for wallpapers, 32 for printed fabrics and 23 for woven fabrics, together with perhaps 24 for machine-made carpets and others for hand-made carpets and rugs, tapestries and embroideries (see Table 6). They mark his emergence as an undisputed master of flat pattern design. His wallpapers, Floud tells us, ‘demonstrate an instinctive mastery of the art of pattern development hardly reached by even the cleverest of his contemporaries, and bear a classic imprint quite lacking in papers which in their day must have seemed much more *avant-garde*’.²

More designs extended the range of products, but there remained the problem of quality in manufacture. Where he could find outside firms capable of meeting his specifications, Morris willingly subcontracted work to them. The new wallpapers, like Morris’s early designs, were printed by Jeffrey & Co., and the work was ‘done so carefully and with such anxious desire to satisfy all Mr Morris’s requirements that there was no necessity to take them more completely into our hands’.³ Other products too were subcontracted to manufacturers in the trade. In 1875, Morris produced a design for printed linoleum, which was already a very popular cheap floor

covering. The material required specialist expertise and factory production methods, and Morris turned to one of the leading manufacturers of floorcloth – probably Nairns of Kirkcaldy, although it is impossible to identify the firm with any certainty.⁴

Morris also turned to the trade for the production of machine-made carpets. The earliest patterns were for Kidderminster carpets. Kidderminsters – also called double or triple cloths – were in effect composed of two or three separate woven fabrics on top of each other, each of a different colour, with its own weft and warp. The different colours might be brought to the surface wherever the design demanded, thus linking the cloths together. Multiple cloth carpets were less durable than pile carpets, but were cheap, and could be very attractive, if the pattern was bold enough to exploit the limited range of colours available. Two- and three-ply Kidderminsters were made for Morris & Co. in Yorkshire by the Heckmondwike Manufacturing Co.⁵

Within the next few years, the range offered by Morris & Co. grew considerably, with the introduction of other types of machine-made carpets. Brussels and Wilton pile carpets were first produced for the firm in or around 1877. (In a Brussels carpet, raised loops are left in the warp forming a looped pile. If the loops are cut, leaving a free pile, the result is Wilton.) Wiltons in particular proved very popular; Parry refers to twenty-four different designs, in a variety of colourways.⁶ The Wilton Royal Carpet Factory Co. was commissioned to produce Real and Patent Axminsters to Morris's designs. These were both woven versions of handmade carpets which traditionally had not been woven, but knotted or tufted from short lengths of yarn. The essential difference between Real and Patent Axminsters was that the power-loom used for Patent Axminsters produced a coarser fabric. In consequence, Morris's designs were necessarily much bolder than for Wiltons or Real Axminsters, and Patents were

Table 6 William Morris designs for wallpapers and fabrics, 1861–96

Period	Wallpapers	Printed fabrics	Woven fabrics	Total
1861–68	6	1	0	7
1869–74	8	1	0	9
1875–80	11	13	16	40
1881–85	10	19	7	36
1886–96	17	2	3	22
1861–96	52	36	26	114

Notes: Some dates are approximate. Two designs tentatively identified as by Morris or J. H. Dearle and two by Morris or Kate Faulkner are included. Designs exclusively for carpets are omitted, but those used for both woven woollens and three-ply Kidderminsters are included.

Sources: C. C. Oman and J. Hamilton, *Wallpapers: A History and Illustrated Catalogue of the Collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum* (1982), pp. 369–87; L. Parry, *William Morris Textiles* (1983), pp. 147–72; Victoria & Albert Museum, Box VII.43.G, Morris & Co., *Chintz Silks, Tapestries, etc.* (catalogue, 1912); 57.C.65, Morris & Co., *Wallpapers* (catalogue, 1912).

considered particularly suitable when large patterns were required.⁷ They were often sold as stair carpets in varying widths, and, at about £0.65 per square yard, cost roughly the same as the Wiltons.⁸ Handwoven Real Axminsters, which were available to Morris & Co. by the early 1880s, were altogether more expensive. They could be made in very large sizes if required, and represented the finest quality then obtainable. They were priced accordingly; Morris & Co. offered four grades, at £1.20, £1.92½, £2.50 and £3 a square yard.⁹

The woven fabrics which Morris began to design after 1875 were also placed with the trade. The first silk fabrics and silk and cotton mixtures were woven in 1875/76 by the Macclesfield company, Brough, Nicholson & Co. The managing partner, Joshua Nicholson, had set up in business in 1872, and was soon one of the country's leading experts in silk weaving. Morris made several visits to his factory, and they became good friends. Other leading firms were also used, including H. C. McCreas of Halifax, which manufactured silk and woollen mixtures, and Dixons of Bradford, which wove most of the firm's lightweight woollens. Another was Alexander Morton & Co., of Darvel, Ayrshire, which wove muslins (light woven cottons) and 'double cloths' (heavy silk and wool mixtures) for Morris.¹⁰

Morris's use of these outside contractors is evidence that he had no objection to using machines in manufacturing, as long as quality was not thereby compromised: firms like McCreas and Nicholsons used the latest equipment in their factories, and, in general, Morris was quite happy with the quality of the weaving. The Wilton Carpet Works produced all the Brussels, Wilton and Axminster carpets sold by the firm in Morris's own lifetime, and even when he set up his own weaving-loom he still used Nicholsons for large orders. Moreover, he discovered that fabrics woven by power-loom were best for upholstery work, as handwoven fabrics were too fragile, and tended to wear unevenly.

One thing, however, that did trouble Morris was the low quality of the dyed yarns used by his suppliers. These were generally unattractive and impermanent. Similar problems occurred with fabrics which Morris imported from France. French fabrics had an excellent reputation for quality and design, but they did not satisfy Morris: 'today we have bad accounts of another set of silk curtains of our selling: green this time, dyed at Lyons; as far as dyers are concerned I wish the days of Colbert back again; it was red last time, and Tours'.¹¹ Most troublesome of all were printed fabrics. Morris's disastrous experience with his *Tulip and Willow* chintz has already been mentioned, and it indicated that the use of Clarksons was no more than a stopgap. By the end of 1875, he had become 'deeply impressed with the importance of our having all our dyes the soundest and best that can be'.¹²

Morris's response to problems of this kind was a straightforward

combination of self-confidence and pragmatism: he was quite happy to give outside firms their head if they were up to meeting his requirements; if they were not, then he simply resolved to learn for himself how to do the work properly. This, in effect, was something like serving an apprenticeship in several trades – notably dyeing and weaving (and, much later, printing). Perhaps the most remarkable of these ventures was his mastering of the ancient dyer's craft from 1872 to 1877.

Before the 1830s and 1840s, most textile manufacturers worked with a range of organic dyestuffs, many of which had been continually in use since ancient times. Principal amongst them were indigo, a blue vegetable dye; kermes, a red insect dye, and madder, also red, but of vegetable origin; walnut roots or shells for brown; weld yellow, from the wild mignonette; and other yellow and brown dyes from trees like poplar and willow. Later additions came from the New World; cochineal, a bright red insect dye, and American logwood, which gave a range of reds, yellows and browns. Together, these dyestuffs provided the four basic colours needed; the primaries – red, yellow and blue – and brown. Other colours could be made by combining them; greens, for example, were made with indigo and weld, while black was achieved by dyeing with indigo, followed by walnut roots. Walnut in fact was often used to darken colours – saddening, as it was called.

In the nineteenth century, however, this traditional palette was progressively displaced by new chemical dyes. The first of them was Prussian blue (1810), followed by a rather bright, acid green based on arsenic in the 1830s; rather later came the coal-tar derivatives – the aniline dyes – beginning with mauve in 1856. By the 1870s, textile factories had almost all gone over to the newer chemical dyes, which were cheap and readily obtainable in large quantities. They had the added advantage of being quick-drying, and thus were suited to mechanical application by roller rather than by the old method of hand-blocking. By comparison, the traditional dyestuffs were difficult to use – especially the most permanent of them, kermes and indigo. The work was highly skilled; it was often necessary to use mordants (setting agents), and at times other chemicals had to be printed on to parts of the cloth to make them resist taking up the dye.

The world of commerce, therefore, had no doubts: the new dyestuffs were preferable in every way to the traditional alternatives. Morris, however, having realised that the rich colours of the old fabrics, carpets and tapestries he so much admired were produced by traditional animal or vegetable dyestuffs, was highly critical of the anilines:

The fact is, that every one of these colours is hideous in itself, whereas all the old dyes are in themselves beautiful colours; only extreme perversity could make an ugly colour out of them. Under these circumstances it must, I suppose, be considered a negative virtue in the new dyes, that they are as fugitive as the

older ones are stable; but even on that head I will ask you to note one thing that condemned them finally, that whereas the old dyes when fading, as all colours will do more or less, simply gradually changing into paler tints of the same colour, and were not at all unpleasant to look on, the fading of the new dyes is a change into all kinds of livid and abominable hues.¹³

It is a measure of Morris's ability as a designer and colourist that he nonetheless managed to provide his clients with attractive and successful decorative work in the early 1870s. But he was becoming increasingly restive with the limitations of the 'provisional' palette which had been forced upon him by the use of modern aniline dyes, with their choice of bright gaudy colours or dull, muddy ones. When he tried to get his fabrics dyed by traditional methods, he found to his dismay that the age-old art of vegetable dyeing had passed almost completely out of commercial use in a mere thirty or so years, and detailed study and careful experimentation were required in order to rediscover it. As noted earlier, Morris began dyeing experiments at Queen Square in 1872, when his family moved out to Horrington House, Turnham Green. He spent a good deal of time searching for old herbals and treatises on dyeing, such as Gerard's *Herbal*, Philemon Holland's edition of Pliny's *Historia Naturalis*, and works by Hellot (Paris, 1750), Matthiolus (Basle, 1543) and Fuschius (Venice, 1590).¹⁴ After careful study, he began to experiment, at first working alone or with a young assistant. About this time, his friends frequently recorded that Morris's hands and clothes were permanently stained with dye, and his uncouth appearance more than once caused servants of friends or clients to refuse him admission to their houses or to redirect him to the tradesmen's entrance. Doubtless such indignities were worth putting up with: all his experiments were successful to some extent, largely because of the careful research which he had undertaken before beginning them.¹⁵

At Queen Square, Morris was able to produce a variety of wools and silks for the firm's embroideries. But kitchen coppers were too small to produce the large quantities of yarns need for carpets and other woven fabrics; nor was there enough space for textile printing. The solution was found when the firm's manager, George Wardle, introduced Morris to his brother-in-law, Thomas Wardle, who had set up as a silk and calico printer and dyer at Leek, Staffordshire, in 1870.¹⁶ Thomas Wardle himself was experienced in aniline dyeing, but he remembered the older processes of vegetable dyeing from his childhood: his father, Joshua Wardle, had been a leading silk dyer in the 1840s and 1850s. Like Morris, Wardle was interested in the revival of traditional techniques, and agreed to turn one of his two dyehouses over to Morris's experiments.

Morris visited Leek in July–August 1875, and began his work with the help of Wardle and three of his employees. It was the first of many visits over the course of the next two years, as Morris and Wardle experimented tirelessly. A regular correspondence began, with Morris sending detailed

comments on the colour matching and fastness of each bunch of fent (samples) which Wardle supplied. Early in September 1875, for example he reported:

if 810 gets any dirtier or redder even but a little than it now is, it will be ruined. In green 968 the lighter colour might be a little fresher: this fent washed very badly, the darkening of the yellow in soap obviously making the evil worse. 968 leaves nothing to be desired if it were only faster: the colour is quite perfect. The fent of marigold (unnumbered) might be a little lighter and brighter: it was much better than the other greens. . . . 1018 yellow marigold – a bad match being much too dark: otherwise satisfactory, colour not bad and seems well printed. 1019 tolerable match but rather duller and darker than pattern.¹⁷

Morris's letters to Wardle – the most important series of business letters to have survived – reveal much about his activities in this period. They show him to have been determined to achieve and maintain the highest standards: 'I mean that I can never be content with getting anything short of the best, and that I should always go on trying to improve on goods in all ways, and should consider anything only tolerable as a ladder to mount up to the next stage.'¹⁸ At first, though, the results were discouraging, and Morris's letters include scathing references to Wardle's head dyer, Kay, who evidently felt that he knew his trade better than Morris. In October 1875, Morris wrote:

I confess I am quite discouraged: Kay does not seem to be able to do anything even the simplest matching, and it is all a matter of luck how things go: I believe he thinks we can't do without him and that he can do anything he pleases: I don't suggest sacking him at once in the face of all the present orders, but I can't be forever under his hippopotamus thumb.¹⁹

A month later, he was complaining that Wardle's dyers had disregarded his orders, which 'almost entirely nullifies whatever advantage may be derived from my artistic knowledge and taste, *on which the whole of my business depends* . . . I will say no more than to beg of you to impress upon them the necessity of following out their instructions to the letter *whatever may be the results*'.²⁰

By early 1876 Morris had reason to be more optimistic. In March, in the midst of one of his visits to Leek, he wrote to Georgie Burne-Jones, 'I trust I am taking in dyeing at every pore (otherwise than by the skin of my hand which is certain). I have found out and practised the art of weld-dyeing, the ancientest of yellow dyes, and the fastest.'²¹ A couple of days later, he told Aglaia Coronio:

I am working in Mr Wardle's dye-house in sabots and blouse pretty much all day long: I am dyeing yellows and reds: the yellows are very easy to get, and so are a lot of shades of salmon and flesh-colour and buff and orange; my chief difficulty is in getting a deep blood red, but I hope to succeed before I come away: I have not got the proper indigo vat for wool, but I can dye blues in the cotton vat and

get lovely greens with that and the bright yellow that weld gives. This morning I assisted at the dyeing of 20 lbs. of silk (for our damask) in the blue vat; it was very exciting, as the thing is quite unused now, and we ran a good chance of spoiling the silk.²²

Designer-craftsman
1875–81

Success eventually came, and Wardle took over much of the firm's dyeing and printing. Most important of all, perhaps, was the introduction of a range of block-printed chintzes. The first chintz to be marketed was the *Tulip*, a design registered by Morris in April 1875, and first printed by Thomas Wardle towards the end of that year. By 1878 he was printing fourteen designs for the firm, including *Honeysuckle*, one of Morris's best-loved designs, which was printed on to cotton, silk, velveteen and linen. Some designs, with small square or diaper patterns, drew upon the example of imported Indian textiles, in which Morris took a particular interest.²³

In addition to block-printing, Wardle began dyeing for woven textiles. By April 1876, Morris was asking him to dye about 200lb. of low quality wool a week for his three-ply Kidderminsters, as the Heckmondwike Manufacturing Co. had agreed to use yarns supplied by Wardle. He added, 'if this could be settled, we could try to make arrangements for the dyeing of our other woollen yarns to be done by you: they are of a finer quality and so would bear a higher price'.²⁴ The terms were evidently satisfactory, and the first order was placed by the end of the month for sufficient yarn to weave 200 yards of carpet.²⁵ This part of the work went well, and Morris was able to assure Wardle that 'nothing could be better both to tone and relief of colour'.²⁶

Morris soon became eager to extend the range of products dyed at Leek. In May 1876, he asked Wardle whether he would be prepared to dye the firm's piece-goods (serges and Utrecht velvets from the Manchester firm of J. Aldam Heaton) once the dyeing of wool hanks for carpets was under way.²⁷ Silk and cotton yarns were dyed for the woven fabrics produced for the firm by Nicholsons and McCreas, and about the same time Wardle also began dyeing silks and worsted for embroidery, although Morris felt obliged to apologise for the relatively small quantities involved.²⁸

Inevitably, perhaps, some problems remained; Wardle was using a mixture of natural and chemical dyes, set by steam, and blues and greens were much more difficult to get right than yellows or reds. Morris was particularly unhappy about the use of Prussian blue, but he had to make do with it, using a variety of other dyes to mitigate its 'coldness'.²⁹ The alternative was to use indigo, but technically this was by far the most intractable of the traditional dyes. Wardle made several attempts to use indigo, beginning in 1876, but found it very hard to achieve a solid, unstreaky blue. The indigo vat took several days to prepare, and required constant attention, for the dyer had to be able to recognise when it was

ready. And if it was not kept sealed, the dye 'liquor' quickly oxidised, making it colour-fast and useless for dyeing the cloth. Cloth or yarn had to be dipped evenly, too, because inevitably some oxidation took place in the liquid near the surface of the vat, which dyed less strongly as a result. In October 1876, Morris noted that dyeing silk with the indigo process was still unreliable, because the colours were not fast, and decided to continue with modern chemicals for the time being: 'it seems more than a pity to lose our order as we shall do if we put it off much longer: so I propose to get this silk dyed by you in the fastest modern way possible'.³⁰ He returned to the subject of indigo dyeing in the following April, when he asked Wardle to dye a small parcel of silk: 'we have more orders coming in for silk, and have a chance of putting that business on its legs if only we can get the indigo dyeing done: I really must implore you to do something to get us started in this line'.³¹ But although Wardle did not cease trying to deal with this problem, it was never satisfactorily overcome. Morris was obliged to abandon his plans to begin indigo dyeing on a commercial scale until he could set up his own dyeworks.

Nevertheless, Morris was in no doubt that his experiments in dyeing and printing were crucial to business success, expensive and time-consuming though they may have been: 'for me giving up the dyeing schemes means giving up my business altogether, and to give up the printing would be a serious blow to it, especially as last midsummer our balance showed a loss on that account of £1,023'.³² Above all, it was his unique eye for colour that set Morris apart from contemporaries; this in turn required him to master the techniques of dyeing and printing. Yet, as a practical man of business, Morris also demonstrated an awareness of manufacturing costs, and was always concerned that the cost of experimentation should not be permitted to drive the cost of the finished goods to an unsaleable level. On 5 November 1875, he agreed to Wardle's proposed prices for the next six months. But he added:

I must say, though that I hope at the 6 months end you will find it possible to reduce the prices considerably: if not I can't help seeing that the sale is likely to be limited. The prices are more than double Clarkson's for block-printed cloths, and his prices are I am sure from the way we began business with him calculated above the usual scale.³³

Despite these difficulties, the collaboration with Wardle offered many new opportunities which Morris was quick to exploit. Through his mastery of the old vegetable and animal colours – kermes, madder, weld, and so on – Morris was able to maintain the emphasis on quality and durability which was characteristic of his business; and he was also able to create a range of products which was quite distinctive. Morris was delighted with the 'frank full hues of the permanent dyestuffs' now at his disposal, and immediately abandoned the 'provisional' colour schemes used until then.³⁴ As he told

Wardle: 'I am sure you understand that we want to get something *quite* different from the ordinary goods in the market: this is the very heart of our undertaking since we felt that the ordinary manufacturer throws away precious opportunities that the natural fibres and dyeing drugs give him'.³⁵

By 1877, Morris was largely able to delegate the task of dealing with the Leek dyeworks to the managers of his new shop in Oxford Street, Frank and Robert Smith, and turn to new projects which had only now become possible. In particular, his attention was drawn once again to woven fabrics: handmade carpets, brocade weaving and tapestry. But although he continued to use firms in the trade for plain fabrics or large orders, he was no longer content simply to supply yarns to subcontractors; now he wanted to set up his own looms.

In March 1877, Morris wrote to Thomas Wardle:

I very much want to set up a loom for *brocade* weaving: would it be possible to get a Frenchman over from Lyons under the present circumstances of the trade there? I would give a year's engagement certain to a real clever fellow who would do what I wanted him to do: I am dazzled at the prospect of the splendid work we might turn out in that time.³⁶

By brocade, Morris meant a woven cloth with a raised pattern. In particular, he meant the weaving of figured silks, and this, as his letter indicated, was widely regarded as a French speciality. With Wardle's help, a Lyonnais weaver named Louis Bazin was recruited to help start the new venture. Morris hired workshop space in Great Ormond Yard, near Queen Square, and had an upper floor rebuilt with large windows to provide good lighting.³⁷ Bazin arrived in June 1877, and at once set to work to erect the loom which he had brought with him. This was a Jacquard loom, and, throughout his business career, Morris was to prefer this type of loom to the more traditional hand-loom or draw-loom.

A genuine hand-loom consisted of a frame across which threads were fixed vertically and in parallel (the warp). The weaver had to pass the weft thread by means of a shuttle between the individual fixed warps, much as a skier negotiates a slalom course. The method allowed the weaver complete freedom in his choice of yarn, and in the manner of the weaving. There was no necessity for a regular repeat, and the design was only constrained by the weaver's skill and imagination. It was, however, a very slow process, and had long been replaced by the draw-loom, in which the warp threads lying above the weft were pulled up, leaving a straight, unimpeded path through which the weaver could simply throw his shuttle. This operation, known as forming a 'shed', was done by tying cords or 'leashes' to the warp threads, and attaching them to a rod which could be raised when necessary. If alternate warp threads were raised, a plain pattern would result; but more elaborate patterns could be introduced by raising

different combinations of warp threads. Each assembly of leashes and rods was called a 'heddle', and a separate heddle was needed for each horizontal line. This explains why most woven fabrics repeated after a fairly short distance. Even so, weaving was still a slow and labour-intensive occupation; it took a very long time to set up a loom, and the weaver required the assistance of a 'draw boy' to help raise and lower the heddles.³⁸

Around the turn of the nineteenth century, however, a new kind of loom was invented by a Frenchman, Joseph Marie Jacquard. Each warp thread could be connected to a hook, which the weaver could move upwards. The operator only needed to raise a selection of the warp threads to make a shed, and a device was needed to prevent some of the hooks from rising. This took the form of a rectangular card, in which holes were punched opposite the hooks that needed to be lifted. A separate card was needed for each shed, and they were presented one at a time in the correct order. For each row of the design, therefore, some warp-threads were raised as the hooks passed through the card, while others were held down, allowing the weaver to throw his shuttle across the loom. The Jacquard loom's advantages over the draw-loom were obvious. Punching holes in a card was a much faster and more reliable process than tying up the leashes to the warp threads. It greatly reduced setting-up time, and, because sets of cards could readily be stored or copied, it was easy to reproduce a design, or switch to a different one.³⁹ The commercial advantages of the Jacquard loom were soon appreciated, and it was widely used from the 1820s for many types of weaving. Though it could be powered either by hand or by steam, Morris used only hand power.

Those who viewed Morris as a medievalist and anti-industrialist might perhaps have been surprised by his willingness to adopt the Jacquard loom. It was, after all, widely used in the fearsome mills of the industrial north, and, even if the weaver had any aesthetic judgement, he could not use it for the punched cards controlled the whole operation. But, against this, the Jacquard loom had many advantages. In particular, it offered the designer greater freedom, permitting more sophisticated designs than the draw-loom. Morris's prime concern was always the quality of the product, and the hand-operated Jacquard tended to produce goods of a greater consistency, as well as of higher artistic merit, than the older types of hand-loom. Its use, however, as Parry has noted, did mean that Morris's 'handwoven' textiles were 'a far cry from the fabrics associated with the term today'.⁴⁰

Things did not go smoothly at first. For a while, Bazin was seriously ill, and weaving could not start until October 1877. He then started working on Morris's *Willow* pattern, a figured silk which had been adapted from a wallpaper design, but ran he into immediate difficulties with the Jacquard cards, and the design became unrecognisable. Eventually it turned out that he put them in the wrong order, causing Morris to comment that

'these weavers don't understand much about getting a pattern together: they can just weave, and that is all'.⁴¹

Once this problem was overcome, Morris soon had reason to be pleased with the quality of the work produced at Great Ormond Yard. The *Willow* silk brocade was soon followed by many other woven silk and wool fabrics, for Morris was hard at work on yet more designs. He carefully examined old silks, particularly the collection at the South Kensington Museum (now the Victoria and Albert Museum), and also studied from nature. In 1877 he told Thomas Wardle that 'I am studying birds now to see if I can't get some of them into my next design',⁴² and four of his next six designs featured birds. They were *Bird*, a woven wool double cloth first produced in 1878, which was one of Morris's favourites; *Peacock and Dragon* and *Bird and Vine*, of woven wool; and *Dove and Rose*, a silk and wool double cloth. The other two designs were *Flower Garden* and *Acanthus*, originally for furnishing silks, but later also available in mixtures of wool and silk or silk and cotton.⁴³ From 1877, Morris concentrated on designing for his own looms; only large orders (such as for St James's Palace in 1881) and some of the silk and wool mixtures like *Dove and Rose* were thenceforth placed with outside contractors.

As the volume of work increased, more weavers were recruited. Most of them were old men, experienced workers from the rapidly declining Spitalfields silk industry. Morris's daughter May later commented that 'it was always somewhat pathetic to watch the weavers at work here on their hand looms – old men from Spitalfields who had been prosperous once and had been through bad times, saddened by the changes in industrial life that with its scurry and thrusting aside had passed them by'.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, they were an invaluable asset to the firm, and accordingly were relatively well paid. By the end of the decade, the weaving work was going very well, and Morris's only real cause for complaint was the lack of space for any further development.

Even as he was engaged in designing woven textiles for his own looms, Morris was turning his thoughts to the production of carpets and tapestries. In April 1877 he told Thomas Wardle that 'the tapestry is a bright dream indeed; but it must wait until I can get my carpets going . . . Meantime much may be done . . . I saw yesterday a piece of ancient Persian, time of Shah Abbas (our Elizabeth's time) that fairly threw me on my back: I had no idea that such wonders could be done in carpets'.⁴⁵ It should not, however, be concluded from this that Morris had only just become aware of the splendours of Eastern carpets. He had long been an admirer, and since the days of Red House he had been building up a large and valuable collection of antique rugs and carpets, the finest of which he hung on his walls, in defiance of western practice. He had also become extremely knowledgeable, and from the late 1870s was often consulted on possible acquisitions by the staff of the South Kensington Museum.



Plate 10 Dove and Rose point paper.
Working drawing for a silk and wool woven fabric, designed in 1879

Morris did not wish to produce loom-woven carpets, but set out to gain experience in hand-knotting, emulating the Eastern masterpieces he so much admired. This too was something of a venture into the unknown, for hand-knotted carpets were not being manufactured in Britain at the time. He began by a careful examination of an antique Persian carpet, analysing every detail until he fully understood the processes involved. He then set up a frame in a back attic at Queen Square, where a few trial squares were made under his personal supervision. As soon as production began in earnest, more space was needed; and in the autumn of 1878, when Morris's family moved from Turnham Green to Upper Mall, Hammersmith, several carpet frames were set up in the spacious coach-house and stables. As a result, the firm's handmade carpets became known as 'Hammersmith' carpets, and often had a small hammer and capital M woven into the borders, together with wavy lines to represent the nearby Thames. About six young women were recruited, and Morris hired a carpet-knotter from Glasgow to come for a few weeks and teach them how to do the work. The greatest width of the carpet frames at Hammersmith was twelve feet, and each worker was expected to knot two inches of carpet a day.⁴⁶

The technique used in the manufacture of Hammersmith carpets was fundamentally very simple. The warp threads, of worsted or (after 1880) of cotton, ran vertically, and were stretched between two horizontal beams. The weavers sat in front of the loom, and as they worked the completed carpet was wound on to the lower beam, and the warps unwound from the upper. The weavers worked to a pattern prepared on squared point paper – one square representing each knot – which was hung in front of them on the looms. The yarns, which were usually of wool, were cut into two-inch lengths, and each piece was individually knotted around two warp threads. As each row was finished it was beaten down to form a dense mass. Hammersmith carpets were differentiated from Morris & Co.'s Real Axminsters by their denser and deeper pile. In fact, although many of them have proved exceptionally hard-wearing, they were not particularly fine as hand-knotted carpets went, at about 25–28 knots to the square inch. Morris's designs took this into account, having bold patterns and colours without thin lines and fine detail. Evidently, he did not expect too much of his knotters, and also made something of a compromise between his desire for quality and the need for realistic selling prices. Even so, hand-knotted Hammersmith rugs and carpets were very expensive – a 16 foot by 13 foot carpet for Alexander Ionides cost £113 in 1883⁴⁷ – and were sold in relatively small numbers compared to the firm's power-loom-woven carpets.

Most of the early examples were rugs. Some were intended for hanging on walls, and accordingly were designed with patterns which worked in one axis only. Larger carpets soon followed. Although Morris's designs changed as he continued his studies into antique carpets and gained

experience as a manufacturer, blues and reds frequently predominated rather than greens or yellows, and they featured complex curving patterns of acanthus, willow, and other stylised leaves, surrounded by large and striking borders, often in contrasting shades. Morris's big carpets were amongst his loveliest and most successful creations, partly because they were conceived as the central element in an ambitious decorative scheme. Amongst these were designs for Naworth Castle and Rounton Grange, the homes of two of Morris & Co.'s most valued clients, George Howard and Isaac Lowthian Bell. The Naworth carpet must have been made after the firm moved its workshops to Surrey in 1881, as a 30 foot by 15 foot carpet could not have been woven on the comparatively small looms at Hammersmith.

By October 1882 Morris & Co. had produced enough rugs and carpets to supply an exhibition at the firm's new Oxford Street showroom. In a brochure, Morris set out his aims in producing hand-knotted carpets, pointing out that the great tradition of carpet-making was fast fading in the East, and that if it were to be kept alive at all it would have to be through the efforts of western designers and craftsmen. He obviously believed his own efforts to have been successful, later declaring of Hammersmith carpets that 'there are no such carpets made elsewhere, not even in the East'.⁴⁸

Yet Morris had still not satisfied all his ambitions in the field of woven textiles. He had become intrigued, probably through his historical researches, by the possibility of reviving the fading art of tapestry making. In a lecture delivered in 1888, he pronounced that:

The noblest of the weaving arts is tapestry: in which there is nothing mechanical: it may be looked upon as a mosaic of pieces of colour made up of dyed threads, and is capable of producing wall ornament of any degree of elaboration within the proper limits of duly considered decorative work . . . special excellencies can be expected from it. Depth of tone, richness of colour, and exquisite gradation of tints are easily to be obtained in tapestry; and it demands that crispness and abundance of beautiful detail which was the especial characteristic of fully developed Medieval Art.⁴⁹

The principal reason why Morris held tapestry in such high esteem, it seems, was that, unlike other types of fabrics, it called for no compromise. Only the finest pictorial matter was suitable for the technique: 'the shuttle and the loom beat it on one side, the needle on the other, in pattern-work; but for figure-work 'tis the only way of making a web into a picture'.⁵⁰

Two types of tapestry-loom were in use in the nineteenth century: the upright loom, also known as the high-warp or *haute lisse*, and the horizontal low-warp or *basse lisse*. The *haute lisse* was the more ancient, having been used to create the late medieval Flemish tapestries of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries which Morris most admired. (They were known as Arras from the town most celebrated for its tapestry work.) The

weaver worked from behind the tapestry, and was able to watch the picture developing by looking through the warp threads at a mirror hanging in front of the loom. Although he followed a design which he marked on the warps, the work was entirely 'freehand', and the weaver was allowed a good deal of artistic licence. It was, needless to say, a highly labour-intensive process, and good quality work was very expensive. Attempts had been made to increase efficiency by making the warps horizontal, and laying the cartoon or pattern on a table, under the warp, for the weaver to follow. The result, however, was mere mechanical copying, and the *basse lisse* was rejected by Morris as artistically debased.

When Morris turned his attention to tapestry, therefore, he naturally turned to the ancient *haute lisse* method. This was still in use at the famous Gobelin factory in Paris, but Morris was intensely critical of the work done there. Its workers were engaged in copying oil-paintings and doing small floral panels: 'a more idiotic waste of human labour and skill it is impossible to conceive', he asserted; arguing that it had lowered the art to the status of a mere 'upholsterer's toy'.⁵¹ For although he believed that 'tapestry at its highest is the painting of coloured pictures with wool upon a warp',⁵² he insisted that it should never be mere *imitation* of oil-paintings or the like. He took a similar view of two other workshops, one at Beauvais, and one in Windsor, which still used the old high-warp loom. The latter was the Royal Windsor Tapestry Works, opened under Queen Victoria's patronage in 1876, which specialised in landscapes and other 'realistic' reproduction work. Morris remarked that it 'has most unluckily gone on the lines of the work at the Gobelins, and if it does not change its system utterly, is doomed to artistic failure whatever its commercial success may be'.⁵³

Morris first began to study tapestry seriously in the autumn of 1877. He looked up descriptions of the loom and weaving techniques in old books, most notably a French textbook dating from the eighteenth century, and he visited the Windsor works to learn something of the way in which the looms were built, though he could find nothing to admire in its products. Technical knowledge might easily be acquired, but figure-weaving demanded artistic skills of a high order. This Morris understood, as he explained in a letter to Thomas Wardle, setting out the qualifications needed before a person could do first-rate figure work:

1. General feeling for art, especially for its decorative side.
2. He must be a good colourist.
3. He must be able to draw well: i.e. he must be able to draw the human figure, especially the hands and feet.
4. Of course he must know how to use the stitch of the work.

Unless a man has these qualities, the first two of which are rare to meet with and cannot be taught, he will turn out nothing but bungles disgraceful to everyone concerned in the matter.⁵⁴

Morris did concede that an exception might be made in the case of 'leaf and flower pieces (greeneries, *des verdure*s), which would generally be used to make out a set of figure-pieces'; these would be within the compass of 'most intelligent people', and 'it would be only by doing these that you could cheapen the work at all'. But 'nobody but an artist' would meet his criteria for figure work, and Morris concluded: 'I have no idea where to lay my hands on such a man, and therefore I feel that whatever I do I must do it chiefly with my own hands.'⁵⁵

Before the end of 1878, tapestry had become more than the 'bright dream' of a year earlier. Morris somehow found the time to experiment by having a tapestry-loom installed in his bedroom, where he could practise weaving techniques in the early mornings before going to work. Very soon he had taught himself the basics of the method, and began to weave his first tapestry panel. The design was called *Vine and Acanthus*, although Morris nicknamed it *Cabbage and Vine*. He worked at it through the spring and summer of 1879, keeping a record of his progress in a notebook, which reveals that in all it took him 516 hours to complete.⁵⁶

Having thus familiarised himself with the processes and difficulties of tapestry weaving, Morris began to teach others, so overcoming the difficulties envisaged in his letter to Wardle. He had another loom built at Queen Square, where he taught what he knew to Henry Dearle, who became his first tapestry apprentice. Dearle had previously worked as an errand-boy in the glass-painting workshop, but proved adept in tapestry work, and he in turn soon became responsible for training others. The firm was now ready to begin weaving tapestries on a commercial scale, but this had to be delayed until the firm had moved to larger workshops in 1881 its description may be left to a later chapter.

By any standards, Morris's achievements in the 1870s were both prolific and diverse. What, then, were the keys to his remarkable productivity in this period? How did he set about doing the things he judged worth doing? To begin with, Morris made the best possible use of his time. He had the enviable ability to switch effortlessly from one activity to another.⁵⁷ The sheer variety of his business activities seems to have obviated any need for hobbies (though he enjoyed fishing and boating). And he was always ready, once he had mastered a technique, to pass on his knowledge to others, and leave them to carry out the physical work, thus freeing himself to engage in new interests and commitments.

More important still was the fact that Morris was a thorough professional in all things, with a method of working which he applied to each of his many activities – painting, pattern design, weaving, and dyeing – and indeed to literature and social criticism. His method had four principal dimensions: systematic research and exploration of the topic; identification of best practice and suitable models; experimentation to identify through personal experience the problems involved; and

modification of ideas, techniques or methods to bring his own work to fruition.

This approach demanded a great deal of hard work, for the older methods of production which Morris favoured were more difficult than the newer ones both in the learning and the application. Yet Morris was not simply doing things the hard way out of sentimental loyalty to a bygone age: he was seeking alternatives to the deficiencies of his own time. It will often occur to thoughtful people that, unless the course of history does, as some naïvely believe, follow a set, predetermined path, there have been numerous points when, but for some more or less random factor, that course might have followed a different direction from the one which has led to our present reality. These alternative histories are, of course, entirely hypothetical, and may be illusory, even as possibilities; but that they are indeed imaginable will not be denied. Thus history can be seen as being forever approaching junctions along the road, with no indications as to which choice of route should be preferred. But unlike some rural footpaths, the tracks of history do not peter out: any one of them will lead to somewhere. And it was a view widely held among the Victorian intelligentsia – Morris included – that the road along which they felt themselves to be travelling was a very dangerous and ugly one. The basis of this view, and in particular Ruskin's exposition of it, has already been touched upon. Its implications for Morris were clear: his own age could not supply him with satisfactory models in his chosen field; therefore he had to look elsewhere – that is, largely in the past, before things started to go wrong. He was not engaged in a futile attempt to put the clock back: he was rather looking for old materials, because only then could he find a new starting-point for the development of his ideas.

Mere originality was not enough; as Morris himself stated, 'however original a man may be, he cannot afford to disregard the works of art that have been produced in *times past when design was flourishing*' (our italics).⁵⁸ Thus his textile designs, which at first were naturalistic and free-flowing, underwent a radical change in 1876 as a result of his discovery of medieval woven textiles at the South Kensington Museum. Subsequent designs, with a few exceptions, tended to be more formal and symmetrical – such as his *Mohair Damask* of 1876, a design for woven wool and mohair which was based on a linen fabric believed to have been printed in the Rhineland in the fifteenth century. Other designs drew upon woven silks and damasks from medieval Spain and Italy. The link was less direct in the case of printed fabrics, but the medieval example was still a potent influence.⁵⁹

It should be noted nonetheless that Morris's researches were largely of a technical kind. He had, of course, long been familiar with the old works of *art*; now he had learned to understand many of them as *craft*. He had felt the need to do this largely because he saw the older work as superior to

most of the new in those almost intangible qualities of texture and finish rather as most people in our present age, irrationally but irrefutably prefer wood to plastic. But he owed much of his success as an actual designer to his understanding of the materials used, and the techniques which applied to them. Every material has its own specific nature, which if the designer works with it, offers rich rewards; if he does not, the result is artistic failure.

Yet Morris did not tie himself completely to earlier models, either as craftsman or as designer. He quite happily adopted any modern techniques which served his purpose, such as the Jacquard loom; the various chemicals used as dye-setting agents; and, later in life, photography as an aid in designing tapestry and typefaces. And while stressing the importance of studying old examples, Morris also believed that the designer was 'bound to supplement that by a careful study of nature because if he does not he will certainly fall into a sort of cut and dried conventional, method of designing'.⁶⁰ This insistence on working directly from nature was central to the ideas of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood but was also quite natural to Morris. As a child, he had spent many hours poring over the illustrations in a copy of Gerard's *Herbal*, which was to provide the inspiration for many of his own designs for wallpapers, textiles and stained glass; and throughout his life Morris loved the plants and flowers of the countryside and garden. But even the natural world should not dominate the designer; just as Morris was prepared to learn from the antique, but not to reproduce it, so he was prepared to draw on nature, but not to create purely naturalistic designs.

In adopting this approach to design and experimentation Morris was putting into practice Ruskin's advice on design. Indeed, it is probably true to say that no one went so far as he in following Ruskin's prescriptions. Ruskin not only elevated decorative art, but also made the case, in his various writings, for the artist, designer and craftsman to be seen as one: 'no person is able to give useful or definite help towards the special applications of art, unless he is entirely familiar with the conditions of labour and materials involved in the work'.⁶¹ These sentiments were later echoed by Morris, after years spent mastering the diverse crafts that formed the business of the firm. It is no coincidence that Morris carried on pursuing Ruskin's ideal long after most of the other partners in MMF & Co. had given up. (Madox Brown continued to design furniture at intervals, but was never involved in the practical learning of crafts. Other important similarities to Ruskin can be identified. 'NEVER encourage imitation or copying of any kind except for the sake of preserving great works', Ruskin had exhorted in 'The Nature of Gothic'.⁶² Morris also accepted the Ruskinian notion that goods should not be over-finished. 'NEVER demand an exact finish for its own sake, but only for some practical or noble purpose'.⁶³ Fitness for purpose was a guiding

Ruskinian principle, and it was reiterated by Morris in his own writings.

By and large, Morris can be seen to have followed Ruskin's prescriptions quite closely. Yet he did not – could not – follow the master to the letter. As he wrestled to develop and market his products, he felt obliged to make compromises; to allow serial production, and sell goods of which he did not entirely approve. Ruskin himself was never more than a theorist and observer. As Morris, the more practical man, grew in experience and confidence, he began to extend and develop his ideas about design and production beyond those of Ruskin.

By the late 1870s, these ideas were reaching a wide audience. Morris's reputation had never stood higher. He had become an external examiner at the South Kensington Museum, and was regularly consulted about purchases for its collections. In the late 1870s and early 1880s, he was also becoming known as a public speaker. His first important lecture, 'The Lesser Arts', was delivered in London to the Trades' Guild of Learning towards the end of 1877, and was followed by many more. This meant that Morris had to work out his ideas thoroughly and coherently; and the texts of his lectures provide a very clear exposition of his artistic *credo*, the fundamentals of which have been set out above. They were often concerned with practicalities. Thus, in 'Some Hints on Pattern Designing', delivered at the Working Men's College in 1881, he made the key observation that 'ornamental pattern work, to be raised above the contempt of reasonable men, must possess three qualities: beauty, imagination and order'.⁶⁴

The need for beauty was obvious, although Morris had much of interest to say about how it might be achieved. In 'Making the Best of It', he described the tints he preferred for colouring walls:

a solid red, not very deep, but rather describable as a full pink, and toned both with yellow and blue, a very fine colour if you can hit it; a light orangy pink, to be used rather sparingly. A pale golden tint, i.e. a yellowish-brown; a very difficult colour to hit. A colour between these two last; call it pale copper colour. All these three you must be careful over, for if you get them muddy or dirty you are lost. Tints of green from pure and pale to deepish and grey: always remembering that the purer the paler and the deeper the greyer. Tints of pale blue from a greenish one, the colour of a starling's egg, to a grey ultramarine colour, hard to use because so full of colour, but incomparable when right.⁶⁵

He then went on to discuss the juxtaposition of different colours, and the use of colour in pattern-designing, drawing upon historical examples from Persia, France and Italy.⁶⁶

Morris's ideas on imagination were more complex. First, there was 'meaning' – defined as 'the invention and imagination which forms the soul of this art'.⁶⁷ Then there was the need for the artist to respond imaginatively to his models: 'True it is that meaning may have come down to us traditionally, and not be our own invention, yet we must at heart

understand it, or we can neither receive it, nor hand it down to our successors. It is no longer tradition if it is servilely copied, without change, [which is] the token of life'.⁶⁸ Finally, the decorator had to use imagination to overcome the limitations of his medium, for his art could not be imitative to the same degree as that of the painter. Conventionalisation was therefore essential, and this required both inventiveness and imagination. This did not mean, however, that the designer did not need to observe from nature, or possess good drawing skills:

On the contrary, unless you know plenty about the natural form you are conventionalising, you will not only find it impossible to give people a satisfactory impression of what is in your own mind about it, but you will also be so hampered by your ignorance, that you will not be able to make your conventionalised form ornamental. . . . It follows from this that your convention must be your own, and not be borrowed from other times and peoples; or at least you must make it your own by thoroughly understanding both the nature and the art you are dealing with.⁶⁹

In his lectures, Morris called for a balance between straightforward naturalism on the one hand and abstract pattern-making on the other – neither of which was acceptable. The extent to which the design should mimic nature, for example, was dependent upon the medium: the coarser the medium, the more stylised the design. It also depended upon the scale of the design; small, frequently recurring ornament should be less naturalistic than larger, freer designs.⁷⁰ In all this, as was frequently the case, Morris often echoed the views of Victorian designers like Pugin, Dresser and Owen Jones, who had been influential since the 1850s. It would be quite wrong to view Morris as a revolutionary or isolated figure in the history of design. He was in fact one of many who turned away from the intensely naturalistic, three-dimensional designs which typified the work of industrial designers in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. At the same time, Morris was opposed to purely abstract designs, and rejected the more geometric patterning of Owen Jones, Burges or others like them who drew on Islamic decorative arts. 'You may be sure that any decoration is futile . . . when it does not remind you of something beyond itself,' he posited.⁷¹

Order was another theme to which Morris frequently returned in his lectures. By this he meant two things. First, he devoted a good deal of time to analysing the structure of patterns. In 'Some Hints on Pattern Designing', he described in some detail the basic grids upon which flat patterns might be created – squares, chequers, diagonal stripes, vertical or diagonal meanders, and the like – demonstrating the breadth of his knowledge and understanding with a profusion of historical illustrations.⁷² By 'order', though, he also meant working according to the nature of the medium, not straining it, but exploiting its opportunities:

Now order imposes on us certain limitations, which partly spring from the nature of the art itself, and partly from the materials in which we have to work; and it is a sign of mere incompetence in either a school or an individual to refuse to accept such limitations, or even not to accept them joyfully and turn them to special account, much as if a poet should complain of having to write in measure and rhyme.⁷³

But even beauty, imagination, and order – the self-contained virtues of the decorative arts – were not enough. For these arts existed not just in themselves, but in the world as a whole; Morris saw this as calling for 'moral qualities'. All his lectures in the late 1870s and early 1880s were essentially concerned with the development of his ideas on the necessity of art as part of everyday living, its contribution to human happiness, and the relationship of art to the burning social questions of the day.⁷⁴

Morris was always insistent that art should not be confined to the leisured and the privileged: 'I do not want art for a few, any more than education for a few, or freedom for a few.'⁷⁵ Thus he had no patience with Aestheticism, which saw art as something rare and precious, to be enjoyed only by a refined elite. Not everybody would be capable of great art; but all should be given the opportunity and encouragement to contribute to the full extent of their abilities. The decorative arts might be the 'lesser arts' in comparison to architecture, which was the mother of all the arts, but they were vitally important nonetheless as a means of brightening the daily lives of the people: 'I say that without these arts, our rest would be vacant and uninteresting, our labour mere endurance, mere wearing away of body and mind.'⁷⁶

But Morris was well aware how far this ideal was from the reality of everyday life, and this led him to develop in these lectures a wide-ranging critique of nineteenth-century industrial society. Fundamentally, it seemed to him that the nineteenth century – the 'Century of Commerce', as he called it – had seen an appalling decline in standards. 'England has of late been too much busied with the counting-house and not enough with the workshop', he argued.⁷⁷ The manufacturers, 'who never did a stroke of hand-work in their lives', had become 'nothing better than capitalists and salesmen', concerned with profit margins rather than the maintenance of quality. Artists, designers and craftsmen had likewise been forced to respond to the dictates of the market-place for, with the separation of entrepreneurial, design and production functions, their status had been debased, and they had become the hirelings of manufacturers who knew little and cared less about art or industrial design. Hence the prevalence of 'sham' or 'shoddy', as Morris often called the products of nineteenth-century industry.

All aspects of life were affected by this trend. Nineteenth-century housing, for example, was castigated by Morris as 'the basest, the ugliest, and the most inconvenient that men have ever built for themselves, and

which our own haste, necessity, and stupidity, compel almost all of us to live in'.⁷⁸ The destruction of trees and fields by the sprawl of monotonously and cheaply built suburbs around Britain's great cities was the target of his particular ire. 'How can I ask working-men passing up or down these hideous streets day to day to care about beauty?' he asked.⁷⁹ Morris's concern over the environment in which his fellow men had to live and work – his attacks on the pollution of Britain's rivers by industrial dyestuffs, or the fouling of her atmosphere by industrial chimneys – made him as a notable forerunner of today's Green campaigners.

Taken together, Morris's lectures of the late 1870s and early 1880s provide a profound analysis of work and art in industrial society. So many of the contemporary problems, however, were harder to produce – not surprisingly, considering that many of them continue to plague us today. Indeed, he was distinctly pessimistic about the situation, believing that contemporary civilisation was indifferent or even hostile to art, and that the difficulties involved in bringing about a fundamental change in the situation. In the fullness of time, he concluded that art could only flourish if capitalism itself was to disappear; but in these lectures he was still talking in moral rather than Marxian terms. He was clear of the prevalence of 'sham' and the degradation of the human environment, the responsibility of all classes, but was concerned to emphasise that it was primarily the duty of craftsmen to maintain standards. In 'The Lesson of the Past' he declared that: 'I say all classes are to blame in this matter, but also that the remedy lies with the handicraftsmen, who are not ignorant of these things like the public, and have no call to be greedy and isolated from the manufacturers or middlemen; the duty and honour of educating the public lies with them'.⁸⁰

Morris included in his moral concern not only the quality of the product, but also the use to which the product was put. On the latter point he would not compromise, as is shown by his activities on behalf of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) or Anti-Squatting Society, which came to be known. In 1876-77, his anger began to swell at the over-restorations then being carried out on many medieval buildings. The Victorians, as well as rebuilding and repairing genuine dilapidated buildings, justified in 'correcting' medieval work which was still sound. Sir Gilbert Scott was the principal culprit, although many of the other architects were also guilty of over-restoration. The trouble stemmed from the Ecclesiologists and their followers, who believed that they had discovered a set of rules governing church architecture. Churches or houses which did not match their prescriptions exactly were deemed to have been constructed by architects who did not fully understand these rules. Moreover, architects like Scott were insistent that buildings should conform to a single coherent architectural style (preferably Decorated Gothic). This belief, however, put at risk a good majority of England's medieval

churches, most of which were an amalgam of different styles, and had been extended or modified many times during their existence. Admittedly, the later additions were sometimes of a poorer quality than the early work, but even so they provided a historical record of centuries of devoted care and continuous use. With supreme arrogance, Victorian architects set out to 'restore' Britain's ecclesiastical buildings in conformity with their notions of correctness; Scott, for example, demolished the entire east end of Oxford Cathedral, and rebuilt it in its 'original' Norman style.

Morris, of course, was not the only person concerned about the consequences of restoration. Pugin and Ruskin were both highly critical of the restorers,⁸¹ while the *Athenaeum's* art critic, F. G. Stephens, had published a number of articles criticising restorers, and Scott in particular. Even the much-maligned architectural profession had mixed feelings about restoration; the author of Butterfield's obituary in the *RIBA Journal*, for example, commented that 'we are wrapt in wonder that he could appreciate so much and spare so little'.⁸²

But it was Morris's action and example that proved decisive. His intervention was provoked by the restoration then being carried out by Scott at Tewkesbury Abbey. On the face of it, this was a worthy project: the Abbey certainly needed urgent structural repairs, and much of the interior work was to remove unsightly post-medieval additions. Yet the essential issue was about history and truth on one side and appearance and structural soundness on the other. In a letter to the *Athenaeum* in March 1877, Morris wrote:

My eye just now caught the word 'restoration' in the morning paper, and, on looking closer, I saw that this time it is nothing less than the Minster of Tewkesbury that is to be destroyed by Sir Gilbert Scott. Is it altogether too late to do something to save it – and whatever else of beautiful or historical is still left us on the sites of the ancient buildings we were once so famous for? Would it not be of some use once for all, and with the least delay possible, to set on foot an association for the purpose of watching over and protecting these relics, which, scanty as they are now become, are still wonderful treasures, all the more priceless in this age of the world, when the newly-invented study of living history is the chief joy of so many of our lives? Your paper has so steadfastly and courageously opposed itself to those acts of barbarism which the modern architect, parson, and squire call 'restoration' that it would be a waste of words to enlarge here on the ruin that has been wrought by their hands . . . still there must be many people whose ignorance is accidental rather than inveterate, whose good sense could surely be touched if it were clearly put to them that they were destroying what they, or more surely still, their sons and sons' sons, would one day fervently long for, and which no wealth or energy could ever buy again for them. What I wish for, therefore, is that an association should be set on foot to keep a watch on old monuments, to protest against all 'restoration' that means more than keeping out wind and weather, and, by all means, literary and other, to awaken a feeling that our ancient buildings are not mere ecclesiastical toys, but sacred monuments of the nation's growth and hope.⁸³