William Morris - His Influence on Our Times

Fourth Year Thesis - Fashion

Camilla Odlum

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WILLIAM MORRIS - HIS INFLUENCE ON OUR TIMES

FOURTH YEAR THESIS - FASHION

C A M I L L A O D L U M

TUTOR: DR. N. GORDON-BOWE

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London Borough of Waltham Forest

J.W.Howes, F.L.A., Borough Librarian and Arts Officer,
William Morris Gallery, Water House, Lloyd Park, Forest Road,
Walthamstow, London E17 4PP 01-527 5544 Ext.390

Please quote ref.

Your ref.

Camilla Odlum
Woodville
Portlaoise
County Laios

15 January 1986

Bear Miss Odlum,

Thank you for your letter of 11 January and I enclose herewith the items which you ordered. If you are interested in moder reproductions of Morris designs I would suggest that you write to Lucy Aldwinkle, the Public Relations Officer at A Sanderson & Sons Ltd, Berners Street, Oxford Circus, London W C 1, as she is the person who has been most closely associated with the reproduction of Morris wallpapers in the Sanderson hand-printed wallpapers, and also the Morris fabric range. The firm recently (1985) produced a full colour catalogue of the range of Morris wallpapers which they are printing, some of which are done in the original colourways, others in modern colourways.

I hope the above information is of use and best wishes for the success of your thesis.

Yours sincerely

Norah C Gillow
Keeper, William Morris Gallery

INTRODUCTION

> "I feel nothing but elation when I think of Morris, you can lose a man like that by your own death but not by his".

This was the tribute paid by George Bernard Shaw to William Morris on his death in I896.

In this Thesis I shall endeavour to explain why I consider this epitaph as fitting today as it was then. For centuries textiles have been used as house furnishing and as clothing throughout the civilised world, but they have never been as popular or as diverse as they are today. As the world becomes more prosperous people are not only anxious to have well designed modern textiles and carpets around them, but they are also becoming aware of the beauty of the fabrics popular in previous generations. Nothing gives a better picture of a former age than fabric. Its texture and pattern can be preserved with the minimum of care.

William Morris comes instantly to mind as the single most important figure in British textile industry. It was Morris who designed many of the materials used in soft furnishing in the shops today, and it is because of the reproduction of his designs and admiration for his work that the standards of textile design and manufacture have improved from the printed dog roses of Victorian design to what we see today. As a designer he was unique in his own time and even more so in our day. A gifted pattern maker, he explored new methods to get the best from his designs, in colour, composition and texture. He revived old techniques of dyeing, printing and weaving.

His work must be an inspiration to all who design, print or weave in the gloom of these recessionary times.

He owed his success as a designer to four factors in his approach to his work. First, he insisted on learning the various modern and ancient techniques associated with textiles before he started to design, so that he was fully aware of the benefits and limitations available in this field. He became a textile historian of note and used this experience of tried traditional methods and pattern in his own work, and finally he had the knowledge, understanding and a deep love of all natural things, flowers, trees, insects, animals and birds, and used these motifs with great skill gained from observing nature at first hand. However, more important that this was his ability to see design in mass and not in line. He was a perfectionist in the preparation and manufacture of all his fabric, and his designs were immaculate, carefully controlled and well balanced. He began to design and manufacture only for his own use. He saw this as a pastime but he was not averse to making money when this work took on a commercial form. In 1882 he wrote:

> "On the whole one must suppose that beauty is a marketable quality and that the better the work the more likely it is to find favour with the public". (I)

It is this attitude that provides Morris's great inspiration to industry today and whereas it has become fashionable to question his contribution to the history of 20th century design, few can deny that he improved both the standard of products and the condiditions of manufacture. His designs for both wallpaper and fabrics are still in demand and I think illustration I proves this point.

It is because of this enormous contribution made by Morris that I have chosen to examine his life and try to discover the sources of his inspiration and ideas. He was undoubtedly a very talented man - and much could be written of other aspects of his life. He did more than design the finest wallpapers and fabrics of the nineteenth century, he was master of half a dozen crafts - among them stained glass and tile making. He also wrote some of the finest poetry of his age. He belongs to our own time as much as to his. I hope to study in detail one specific area of his work - the manufacture of printed textiles and fabrics. It is because of my involvement in the field of fashion that the work of Morris is of such interest to me, his use of colour and design is very exciting, and could be used to great effect in the world of the fashion designer combined with more traditional materials.

CHAPTER ONE

EARLY LIFE AND BACKGROUND

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William Morris was born in Walthamstow in I834, son of a wealthy bill broker. His father died in I844, and in I848 he entered Marlborough School, in I853 went to Exeter College, Oxford to read Theology. During this period he met his lifelong friend Edward Burne-Jones, later to become one of the best known Pre-Raphaelite painters. It was during these years that he discovered the delights of English poetry and was inspired by Milton, Tennyson and Kingsley and eventually began to compose poetry himself. He was keenly interested in all things medieval. This was not confined to Gothic architecture or decoration, but included medieval chronicles and romances. He shared this passion with his friend Edward Burne-Jones. At this time Oxford was swept by a new interest in church furnishings and architectural styles - the most admired being European Gothic. Because of his interest in medieval Gothic, Morris spent his first long holiday discovering the cathedrals and art collections in France and the Low Countries. He was particularly delighted by the wonderful tapestries in the cathedrals of Amiens, Beauvais and Chartres, and the visit made a great impression on him. He returned the following year with Burne-Jones and it was on this holiday that they both decided to give up any ideas of entering the Church and "begin a life of art", Burne-Jones as a painter and Morris as an architect.

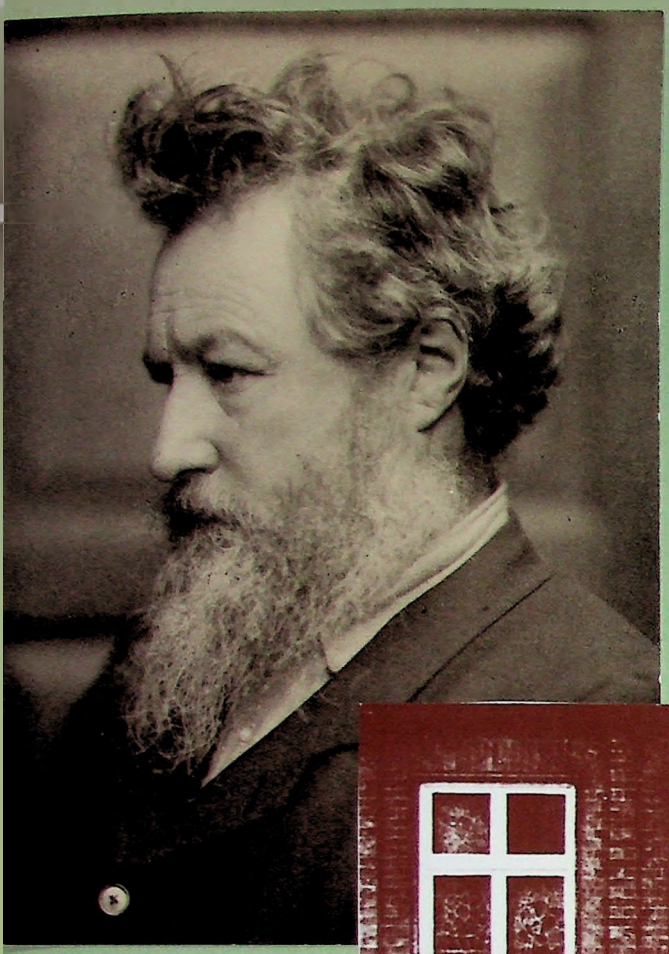
In January I856 he started work in the office of the architect George Edmund Street, who was already a church architect of high esteem. Street designed churches and church furnishing, often to his own taste and design. Embroidery was an important part

of these furnishings and the Ladies Ecclesiastical Embroidery Society produced some of the finest church embroideries of the nineteenth century from designs by leading designers and architects.

During the nine months he spent with Street he was greatly influenced by the design practices adopted in the studio and by the patterns of finished embroideries. These early impressions were to influence Morris for many years, and were his first introduction to textile design and embroidery. This was to have a profound effect on his whole career.

Street's own embroidery designs show late medieval motifs of stylized pomegranates, artichokes and thistles worked in silk and gold thread on richly coloured background cloths, usually velvet. This use of old patterns was a new idea, and it made a great impact on Morris. In fact, his only known oil painting worked in I859 of Jane Burden as "La Belle Iseult" shows a typical design of powdered thistle motifs on an embroidered tablecloth.

However, Morris realised within a short time that he was unable to achieve the skills of draughtsmanship expected of him, and in I856 he left his work with the architect Street.



I.

WILLIAM MORRIS (I834-I896)
from a photograph c.I886

2. MORRIS & COMPANY'S showrooms
at 449, Oxford Street, London.
circa I896

I. The Morris and Burne-Jones families in I874

2. RED HOUSE in Bexleyheath, Kent. Designed in I859-60 by Philip Webb for the newly married William Morris and his wife.

LA BELLE ISEULT

With Jane Burden as model and showing embroidered thistle motifs on a tablecloth.

CHAPTER TWO

EMBROIDERY

EMBROIDERY

> "I do not hope to be great at all in anything but perhaps I may reasonably hope to be happy in my work". (2)

Early in I857 Morris joined Burne-Jones in rooms at Red Lion Square. Here the two friends experimented with many decorative techniques, as well as carving, stained glass designing and clay modelling. Morris then tried embroidery. It was not until after his marriage to Jane Burden in I859, when he moved into his first home, Red House, near Bexleyheath, that his first textiles, embroideries of medieval inspired female figures were created.

It was through embroidery that Morris first displayed his skill as a designer. Because of his determination to master the principles of laying and couching he learned a great deal about the techniques of embroidery. His first known embroidery worked in I857 depicts a repeated design of birds and fruit trees surmounted by his motto "If I can". These first embroideries consisted of a series of irregular long and short stitches randomly placed, which were similar in texture and weight to woven tapestry. The embroidery was worked with thick brightly coloured aniline dyed crewel wools because these were most readily available in needlework shops at that time and the design had charming appeal enhanced now by its faded colours and stylized birds. The trees however were delicately worked, and their raised fruit provides relief to the densely textured surface. This is the only known embroidery to have been worked by William Morris alone.

I. Woollen Hanging 'IF I CAN, designed & embroidered by William Morris at Red Lion Square in I857

2. Hangings, designed for Red House in I860. Embroidered in wools on serge by Janey Morris and friends.

In the nineteenth century, the habit of collecting textiles was not nearly as rare as it is today, and Morris and many other contemporary artists and designers had a number of pieces of embroidery which they would unpick from time to time to discover the way in which they were made. It is from this awareness and appreciation of embroidery technique that Morris developed his own favourite stitches, those which would provide the effects he sought. Raised embroidery technique was seldom used in his designs and those stitches most favoured - darning, running, long and short, satin and stem stitches merely follow and accentuate the lines of the design; they never make distracting patterns by themselves. Morris now felt, that having mastered the technique to his own satisfaction he could teach others the stitches he favoured and leave them to work the embroideries from his designs.

He now designed two schemes to be worked in embroidery for the drawing room of Red House. These designs were embroidered by his wife Janey and her sister Elizabeth Burden. They consisted of panels depicting female figures and were inspired by Chaucer's poem "Legend of Good Women". Morris also designed curtains for the bedroom. These curtains were made of dyed indigo, blue woollen serge and show rows of daisy clumps in couched yellow, red and white wool. The design was inspired by a Froissart manuscript in the British Museum and was used many times, notably for glazed tiles and wallpaper. The drawing room panels were much more adventurous and original in design, and were intended to form a narrative border around the walls. They were embroidered onto plain linen, then cut out and applied to a heavy

I.

Embroidery depicting female heroine c.1861 Designed for the Red House.

2. Ibid.

silk velvet background in the same manner as late medieval and early Tudor embroideries.

It is evident from the background and the foreground of the three finished panels that Chaucer's work was the main inspiration. This conclusion is drawn from the use of the daisy as a motif, as this flower was much admired in the prologue to Chaucer's poem.

It was at this point, in the informal friendly atmosphere of Red House, surrounded by his artistic and talented friends, that the idea of forming a company was conceived, and so, in I86I the firm of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co., was founded. The founder members of the firm included, Morris, Burne-Jones, Webb, Rossetti, Ford Madox Brown, Charles Faulkner and Peter Paul Marshall. Philip Webb was an architect whom Morris first met in Oxford, and who later designed many features of Morris's work, notably animals and birds. This commercial venture came about because, as Morris himself explained to Webb in I883:

> "I built me a house very medieval in spirit, and set myself decorating it, I found that all the minor arts were in a state of complete degradation especially in England and therefore with the conceited courage of a young man I set myself to reform all that". (3)

Out of the Red House came the idea of an association of artists for the design and making of better furniture and furnishings. Embroideries of all kinds were worked by Jane Morris, Bessie Burden, Georgiana Burne-Jones, Lucy and Kate Faulkner and George Campfield.

Morris was not the first of his friends and contemporaries to consider

textiles as a medium for design. In I86I Ford Maddox Brown and Dante Gabriel Rossetti were supplying manufacturers with repeating designs. At last textile designing was gaining a respectable place in the field of interior decoration. At this period textile designing was greatly influenced by illustrations taken from two books, "Plans, Elevations, Sections and Details of the Alhambra", published in I842, and "The Grammar of Ornament", (I856). Both these publications were by Owen Jones. These, and a number of others became the prime source of material for freelance designers and manufacturers design studios throught Britain. Therefore, textiles at this time fell into two groups, those inspired by architecture repeating the various geometric and linear forms seen on stone and metal, and stock in trade designs of super realistic floral patterns dyed with the new bright aniline dyes showing roses, lilac, convolvulus, hydrangeas and lilies.

Morris went directly to Yorkshire manufacturers for the ready woven and dyed woollen serges on which he had chosen to work his early embroideries. These provided not only interesting textures and weights for his hangings but their colours, because of the nature of the wool itself, were subtle and subdued, positive but not brash. Indigo blue, a dye of infinitely varying tones and hues was to become Morris's favourite and it was by selecting heavy dark woollen fabrics for his early embroideries that he first developed his taste for the dark backgrounds which were to become his trademark. Some of these embroideries were exhibited at the International Exhibition held in South Kensington in I862. It would seem that they were embroidered woollen hangings of the type worked for the Red House. In spite of some initial adverse criticism, the firm's debut was

successful: they won two gold medals for faithfulness to medieval tradition and sold £150 worth of goods and received numerous orders. The circle of ladies embroidering for William Morris was expanded from the original cosy group of friends and relatives who were involved in the Red House work of the early 1860's. This large circle now included May and Janey Morris, Ada Phoebe Godman, Margaret Beale, Mrs Alexander Ionides and Catherine Holiday, and also a number of professionals. The work which had gone on spontaneously before could not, now that it had put on a public face, be carried on successfully without London premises. These were found at 8, Red Lion Square. In 1865 Morris was wholly taken up with the firm, moving it to Queen Square, and converting part of the house there into workshops. Although the other partners continued to design, Morris was by now in full charge. Effectively, Morris was the firm. During this period two important commissions came to the firm; the decoration of the Green Dining Room at the new Victoria and Albert Museum, and the decoration of a suite of rooms at St. James's Palace. Both schemes have survived, although that at St. James's has been modified and the Green Dining Room is no longer used as a dining-room; it is now the William Morris Room, used to display furniture and fabrics produced by the firm. By now, the firm had become essential to Morris. In it he had found work which satisfied his creative powers, gave scope to his versatility, expressed his sense of the central importance of art to daily life. It was now also important to him in a financial way, as it had not been when it began. He, as the others had not, had become involved in running the business, and he saw that it was necessary to make new developments. He resumed the designing of

ST. JAMES
Woven silk damask & figured silk
registered August I88I, later
hand-woven at Merton Abbey.

wallpapers, and began to design cotton prints. It is significant that in the decade following his taking over the firm, he produced eleven wallpaper and twenty-two chintz designs - by far the most prolific period of work in this field; while at the same time he was to study and undertake dyeing, weaving and tapestry. His involvement in block-printing and weaving from 1875 also accounts for Morris's interest in the art of repeating motifs although the patterns seen in these embroidered hangings are derived from sixteenth and seventeenth century embroideries, woven velvets and silks from Persia, Turkey and Italy. Although late seventeenth century English crewel work embroideries are always cited as the main historical source for Morris's own needlework and it is indeed clear that he was attracted by the technique of wool embroidery on a heavy cotton backing, only one of his designs, 'The Vine' of 1879, shows the characteristic meandering branch and tree forms of traditional crewel work.

In 1874 the firm of Morris, Marshall and Faulkner and Co., was dissolved, and was re-organised again as Morris and Co., in 1875 under Morris's sole management.

Morris had recently produced a number of wallpapers; now he began to think of cotton prints. Fabric printings is a more complex affair, and he approached it with very careful preparation. He had already some idea of the chief problem - colour. The dye-stuffs which had come into use since the early part of the century were unreliable; the choice of colours was between those which were safe but dull, and bright ones which faded quickly and unevenly. He turned to dyeing - as he did to other crafts - because only by knowing the process could he ensure

control of the product. As an interim measure, he worked with a limited range of the most reliable colours to be had commercially. He set up vats at Queen Square; read every book on dyeing he could find - chiefly old books, for vegetable dyes had virtually ceased to be used - and began to experiment.

In I875 began a long fruitful working association with a silk dyer named Thomas Wardle, this association was one of the main influences which affected the development of Morris's mature style. The aim of both men was to find old recipes and techniques using vegetable dye-stuffs. From this co-operation Morris acquired the facilities at Leek in Staffordshire to experiment with dyes and to produce printed textiles. The other great influence on Morris at that time was his keen interest in historical textiles. From frequent visits to the Victoria and Albert Museum (then known as the South Kensington Museum) he had the opportunity to study items of different periods and culture and his inspiration expanded beyond the confines of medievalism. His fascination with the technicalities of textile manufacture are clearly demonstrated in the embroidery designs of the I870's with their repeating design patterns of single and interlocking motifs, this can be seen in 'Dove and Rose'. It was from these studies that Morris created his own very individual style. The depth and keenness of his research and its subsequent success should teach us the value of old, sometimes forgotten methods, and encourage us to explore every avenue for different ideas and concepts.

Morris's vision of a new world arose from his understanding of the past, the coherent pre-industrial society of the middle ages, which celebrated craftsmanship, took pleasure in a simpler natural beauty and delighted in work, and in which the responsibilities of individuals to a community were universally understood.

In the I880's Morris's embroidery designs became much more complex, with patterns arranged not in a mass of hroizontal and vertical repeats as previously, but with the design arranged around a central motif and a border around the edge. He was now giving less and less time to the embroidery side of the firm and was becoming more involved in the production of carpets and printed and woven textiles. At this point I must stress however that his works in textiles run almost concurrently, like strands of the same magic fabric, linking many branches of textile techniques.

CHAPTER THREE

PRINTED TEXTILES

PRINTED TEXTILES

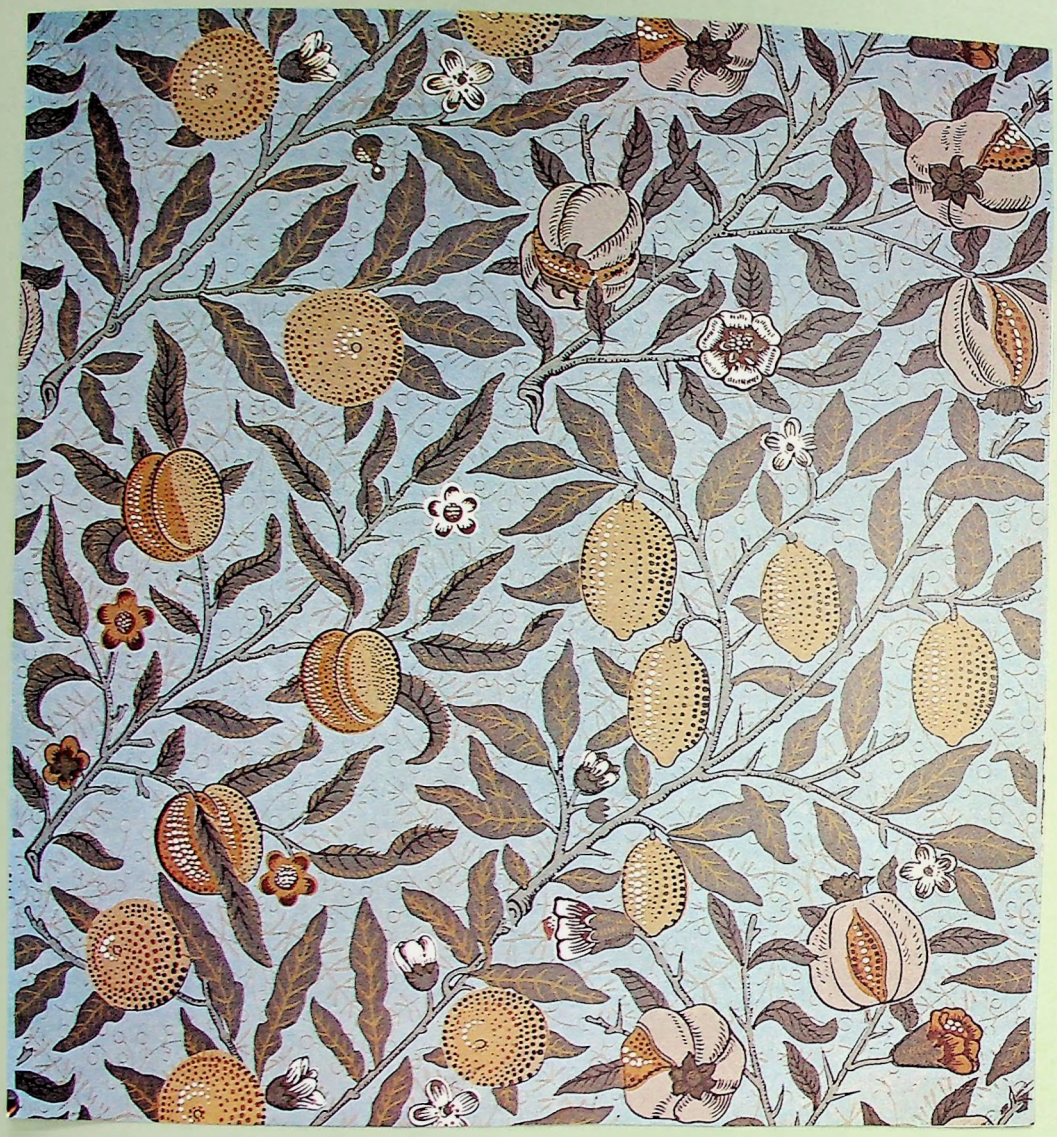
So far I have concentrated on the embroidery work designed and executed by the Morris Company, but William Morris was a man of vision. He realised that there was enormous scope for house decorators and furnishers. Patterned textiles especially were needed for use on walls, at windows and as loose covers and upholstery.

In 1862 Morris produced three repeating designs for wallpaper. Because of his keen interest in nature and gardening these designs were floral motifs inspired by the trees and flowers of his garden at Red House, and called Daisy, Fruit and Trellis.

The Daisy, the Trellis and the Fruit, Morris's first wallpapers, date from 1864. They herald seventy patterns for wallpapers, chintzes, and woven cloths made in the following years, and were made just before the firm moved to London from the Red House. All three designs have a strong naive character, though in each it is displayed in a different way. The Trellis has hints of Morris's work in embroidery; the other two show the influence of his work in tiles. This is most obvious in the Daisy, whose powdered structure relieves him of the need to link and mask his repeats. The motifs remain as forms seen against a background; he had not yet learned how to make all elements of the coloured surface play an equal part in the design. In the Trellis we have a continuous motif provided by the trailing rose stem; the naturalistic birds, and the wooden trellis, which gives the name,

DAISY WALLPAPER, 1864

One of the groun of three papers first designed and produced by Morris.



FRUIT - or POMEGRANATE.
This was the third of the wallpapers Morris designed in 1864. Its naturalism ran counter to fashion, and its structure is in debt to tile work.

TRELLIS, I862

An II block design by William Morris, believed to have been inspired by rose trellis at Red House, Morris's first home. The Red House architect, Philip Webb drew the birds.

performs two necessary acts at once; extending its uniform grid over the whole area, its rectangular form also provides a strong contrast with the meander of the plant and the naturalistic forms of leaf, flower and bird.

The production of woven and printed textiles was an important part of the development of the firm. Tapestries and embroideries were prestigious and lucrative; but once the firm had come to employ a certain number of workers skilled in particular techniques, the pattern of production must use all to the best advantage. And Morris, far from being a dreamer who happened to make a success of design by accident, was a very practical, decisive person; letters to his mother on family business, letters to Thomas Wardle of Leek about costs, production and saleability of designs show him as very clear-headed and business-like.

Part of the impetus towards the production of fabrics arose out of his wish to control the quality of colour in the silks and wools used for the firm's embroidery, always an important part of the business. His experiments in dyeing date from 1874. He went into it with typical thoroughness and energy, reading all he could on the subject in seventeenth and eighteenth century manuals. A scullery at Queen Square was fitted up for experiments, and he began to try out the old recipes on silks and wool. He had also begun to plan chintzes - the first design being the 'Tulip and Willow', made in 1873 and printed by Thomas Clarkson of Preston; but Morris had been dissatisfied with the result and did not market the print until he was able, at Merton, to produce it himself. In the meantime, new designs

were printed by Thomas Wardle of Leek.

In order to make experiments on the scale he needed if he were to do his own dyeing. Morris went up to Leek several times during the next two years, studying techniques and working in the vats himself. The Wardle family were skilled in the art of dyeing, Joshua, father of George and Thomas had been a leading Leek silk dyer in the I830's. For two years one of Wardles dye houses was used exclusively for Morris's work. In I875 Morris began experiments with Wardle and three of his dyers. Goods already sold by the firm had proved unsatisfactory because of fading. This, and the garish or muddy character of available chemical dyes, determined Morris to control the process himself. He was deeply aware of the importance of having all his dyes the soundest and best that could be, and was prepared to give up that part of his business which depended on textiles if he failed in that task. As it was only during the preceding two or three years that he had turned to textiles and this as an essential of trading policy, it was a very serious matter.

Morris made a careful choice of those commercial dyes which were reliable, and allowed them to dictate his colour schemes, using them in whatever combinations he could. At Leek he learned the use of the virtually obsolete indigo and madder vats.

Morris however was still not satisfied with the results and in I876 the standard of work deteriorated so badly that he wrote to Wardle:

"I can never be content with getting anything

> short of the best, and I should always go on trying to improve on goods in all ways, and should consider anything that was only tolerable as a ladder, to mount up to the next stage - that is, in fact, my life!"
> (4)

By I878 Wardle was printing fourteen designs for Morris & Co. 'Tulip', 'Marigold', 'Carnation', 'Indian Diaper', Acanthus', 'Iris', 'Bluebell', Snakeshead', 'Little Chintz', 'African Marigold', 'Honeysuckle', 'Pomegranate' and 'Peony'.

But things were still difficult and in I88I Morris was in danger of losing clients because of bad dyeing techniques, so he now made plans to open his own dye works. He finally acquired Merton Abbey and that gave him the incentive to start designing again and to move equipment from Queen Square. In a short time he was busy directing experiments in indigo dyeing. An American visitor on a tour of the works in I886 had this to say:

> "In the first out-house that we entered stood great vats of liquid dye into which some streams of unbleached wool were dipped, as they were brought dripping forth, they appeared of sea green colour, but after a few minutes exposure to the air, they settled into fast dusty blue. Scrupulous neatness and order reigned everywhere in the establishment. Pleasant smells of dried herbs came from clean vegetables, blent with wholesome odors of grass and flowers and sunny summer warmeth that freely circulated through open doors and windows." (5)

In his I889 Arts and Crafts lecture 'Of Dyeing as an Art', Morris described his own preferences for the colours and dyes he used in the successful production of his own textiles. He believed that all colours could be derived from four basic colours; the primaries red, blue and yellow, plus brown.

MARICOLD
Printed onto silk, tusser silk, cotton & Linen union
Designed by Morris as a wallpaper, registered 1875.

HONEYSUCKLE - By May Morris

For these colours he used the following dyes:

RED: Madder, lac-dye (derived from tree bark), cochineal and kermes (the last two are insect dyes). Morris's and Wardle's greatest success was the re-discovery of the technique using kermes, a dye Morris called 'the King'. Hardly known since the Middle Ages, a supply of the dye was brought for Morris from Athens by Aglaia Coronio.

BLUE: Indigo and woad. Woad, the Northern hemisphere's version of the Eastern indigo is best used on wool, indigo on cotton and silk. Both are 'substantive' dyes and do not need mordanting (fixing).

YELLOW: Weld (wild mignonette). quercitron bark (inner bark of the American black oak) and a wood dye called 'Old Fustic'. Yellow, Morris said 'is the commonest to be found in our fields and hedgerows .... saw wort, popular twigs, birch, heather and broom.' Yellow dyes are the least permanent and have to be treated with a solution of bran after dyeing to fix them.

BROWN: Roots of walnut tree and the husks of walnuts, Catechu, an Indian plant. Like Morris's choice of blues, neither of these dyes needed a mordant.

Secondary colours:

BLACK: Dyed in indigo or woad until dark and

then in walnut roots.

GREEN: Indigo and then weld or quercitron.

PURPLE: Indigo and the cochineal, kermes or madder. Shades of mulberry or claret were obtained by the 'saddening' (darkening) of purple with walnut.

ORANGE: Madder or cochineal with weld. By saddening with walnut all shades between yellow and red were obtained. (6)

The search for and attainment of the dyeing technique and subsequently the colours he sought (and for these there could be no compromise) is a fascinating story which can be traced, step by step, through his own correspondence. (7) These letters give far more information about Morris than simply his preference for colours, however. At times they show an uncompromising, penny-pinching, dictatorial tyrant but also a man of intelligence, dedication and determination. Surprisingly, a shrewd business mind is also evident, a characteristic Morris is seldom credited with.

Many of Morris's designs between 1875 and 1877 show a strong Eastern influence, which is shown in the patterns of Snakeshead, Little Chintz and Pomegranate. This was probably due to imports of silk from India. These were widely available in London at the time.

Morris's interest in contemporary Indian patterns soon passed,

but he always loved the historical textiles from Italy, Persia and Turkey, as demonstrated in his later designs.

Morris was by now producing repeating patterns for woven textiles and machine made carpets, and realised that his type of design was suitable for the loom. He preferred working on a large scale, of which he had this to say:

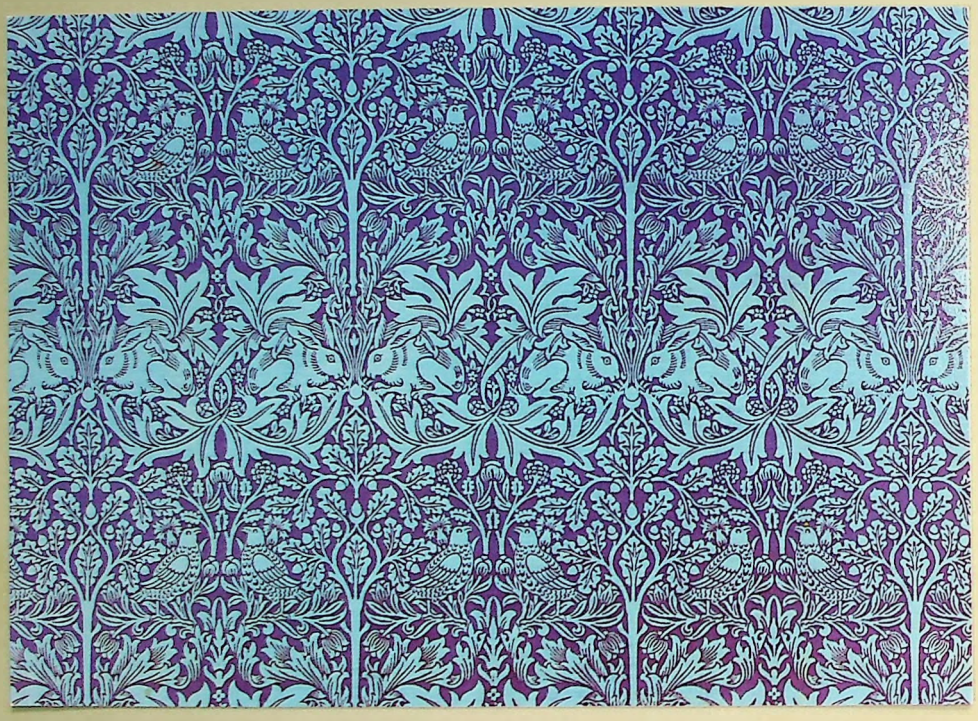
> "Do not be afraid of large patterns, if properly designed they are more restful to the eye than small ones. A pattern where the structure is large and the details broken up is usually successful in small rooms as well as big ones". (8)

In I878 the last of Morris's new designs were printed in Leek. Morris now turned his attention to weaving and carpet production. By I882 Morris and Co., were successfully using indigo in their printing process at Merton Abbey, between I882 and I885 seventeen patterns were designed to be printed by indigo discharge. These included two colour designs of natural dark indigo blue and white (Brother Rabbit, Bird and Anemone and Borage), some with half tones of indigo and weld, giving two shades of blue, white, yellow and green (wreathnet, kennet, wey and lea) and others with half blues, weld and madder producing blues, whites, yellows, greens, reds, oranges, browns and purples, (Flowerpot, Wandle, Evenlode, Strawberry Thief and Medway).

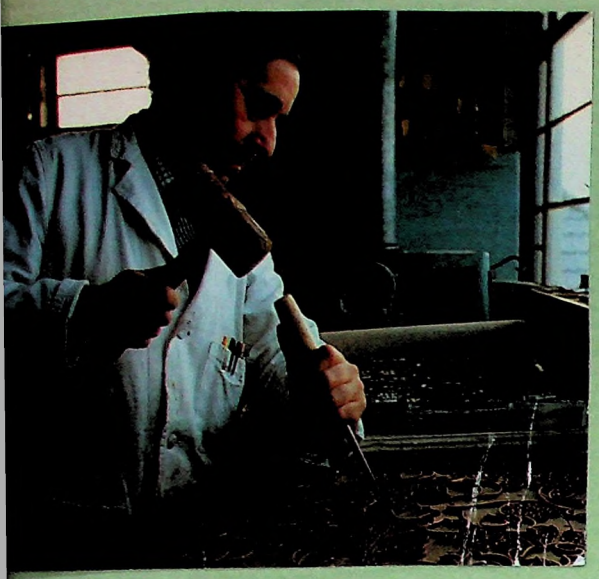
Block printing either for surface printing or discharge printing was the method used to transfer the pattern onto textiles, wallpaper, tiles etc. Morris had very definite methods by which he insisted his designs should be printed. The pattern was transferred from drawing to block by tracing paper. This had to be very accurately done, to ensure that all the blocks, each

BIRD

Double-woven wool fabric
designed by William Morris
1878



BROTHER RABBIT
Chintz - designed by William Morris 1883



I.

Wooden blocks are intricately carved & inlaid with copper to trace out delicate design detail.

2.

Hand-printing the green leaves of the design 'MICHAELMAS DAISY'

cut for a different colour of the design, matched one another. The material was then stretched onto a blanket on a long printing table, the printer pressed bis block onto a large dye pad and laid it in position on the fabric. It was then rapped with the handle of a lead-weighted mallet which ensured an impression on the cloth. The whole process was repeated until the length of fabric was completed. Then the area first printed was dry enough to receive the second colour and again the process was repeated with the next set of blocks.

The procedure for finishing and drying of the fabrics was time consuming and exacting. The dyed cloths were first washed with soap and bran, sometimes four or five times before being dried - often out of doors. The indigo discharge method was even more complicated; after washing, the undyed cotton was submerged into the indigo dye vat, on lifting out, it appeared dark green, which then oxidized by the air, changed to the characteristic blue. A bleaching agent was then block printed onto areas of the cloth not intended to be blue, for light blue a weakened solution was used. The cloth was then washed and the blue cleared from the bleached areas producing a print of dark blue, pale blue and white, if the pattern demanded these colours. The fabric was now half dried and the next colour, yellow, was applied by block printing with a mordant in these areas of the pattern requiring this colour. The cloth was then submerged in the weld vat. The next stage was the preparation and dyeing of the cloth in the same manner in the madder vat.

Between I883 and I885 Morris produced two distinctive pattern types not seen before. Large scale meandering "branch" designs and small "net" patterns for lining fabrics. These would have

I. CLOSE-UP OF A MORRIS & CO. WOODEN PRINTING BLOCK

2. Each colour has to dry before a further colour is applied.

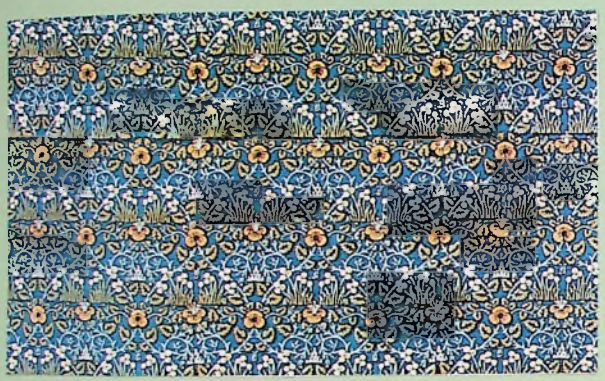
been very suitable for dress fabric, and Morris knew that there was an opportunity to expand in this area. His daughter May goes on to describe 'some broche silks for dresses' (9) that were available. These would have been lightweight furnishing silks of small-scale design adapted for the purpose. May goes on to describe dresses made herself and her mother of black 'anemone' damask worn, probably, for mourning. Most of the other fabrics were totally unsuitable for the costume of the period. However, one existing example, a dress of 'Flower Garden' (IO) silk displays the kind of sumptuous effect desirable for being presented in at court but quite inappropriate for more general use.

Unfortunately, Morris never explored this field of textile manufacture and I think that in neglecting this area we have lost the opportunity to have had such a creative genius producing fabrics for the Fashion World. Our cottons would have come alive with patterns like 'Evenlode', 'Small Stem', 'Apple Powdered' etc., and silks and velvets enchant us with delicate designs and subtle colours; however he was not interested in dress fabric and the opportunity slipped away.

It is not surprising that Morris now turned to textile weaving, as woven textiles were in great demand for curtaining and upholstery.

Early in the I870's Morris and Rossetti took a joint tenancy of Kelmscott Manor near Lechlade. The house was only used periodically by Rossetti; in subsequent years it became the home of the Morris family.

Powdered printed cotton.
Designed Morris as a wallpaper, I874, adapted for fabric. c. I902.



EVENLODE printed cotton.
Designed Morris
Indigo discharged & block-printed Merton Abbey.

ROSE printed onto cotton & linen -
Designed Morris
Indigo discharged
Merton Abbey

CHAPTER FOUR

WOVEN TEXTILES

WOVEN TEXTILES

Morris was always interested in weaving and was keenly ambitious to produce textiles of richly woven patterns and texture. Textile weaving is a much lengthier and more complex process than printing and it is not surprising that the first woven textiles were not produced until 1876. By now Wardle had established acceptable colour samples of the original printed designs at Leek and Morris now concentrated on learning the techniques of weaving and on deciding how to use it in the manufacture of his own furnishing fabrics. His aim was to produce luxury, texture, colour and complexity, and to achieve this there would be no compromise. Having learned how the loom worked, he now began to weave a variety of patterns and techniques not seen since the seventeenth century. He was able to achieve this variety with four looms in his own workshop. Six manufacturers are known to have woven textiles under contract to Morris & Co. This arrangement continued throughout the firm's history. The facilities at Queen Square were limited and by 1880 Morris had acquired Merton Abbey which was used for the production of new designs and small orders. All Morris and Co.'s contractors used the advanced power driven jacquard looms in their factories. The introduction of power driven looms meant that one weaver could look after a number of looms. However Morris could not afford the luxury of power and made do with hand activated jacquard looms. He soon realised that this method gave the weaver greater control of the process and resulted in far less mechanical looking fabrics.

Although Morris is now more widely known, for his printed

textiles than for those designed for the loom, his earliest woven textiles do show him at his most characteristic and best. The bold patterns of these designs reveal a mixture of the pseudo-medieval with the modern. Anemone reaches a sophistication in form not seen seen in printed textiles until much later in his career.

In was at this period, I877, that Morris was studying birds and subsequently produced six designs containing birds in the pattern. The first of these 'Bird', he kept for the drawing-room of his home Kelmscott Manor to which the family had recently moved. The design for 'Bird' shows the background foliage is designed in a formation of net or ogee repeats, with two different sets of birds occurring alternately through the width of the fabric. Morris's four most orientally inspired designs 'Peacock and Dragon', 'Grenade', 'Brocated' and 'Isaphan' move away from his usual colour schemes and are instead an imitation of the terracottas, Lapis blues, ruby reds and emerald greens generally seen in Islamic art of all kinds. These colours and patterns were used by Henry Dearle when in I885 he began to design repeating textiles for the firm.

In I88I Morris designed two new silk damasks called 'St. James' and 'Oak' which rely on leaf forms for their patterns, but the framework of these is more openly drawn than in previous designs, especially in the 'Acanthus' damask of I879. These designs were revived by Warner and Sons of Braintree and were woven by Courtaulds for Sanderson after the closure of Morris and Co. in I950.

One of the conclusions which I wish to draw from this Thesis

is that the popularity of Morris's work has survived almost a century and is still able to excite our interest today. Before I conclude this section on woven textiles I must mention Henry Dearle who was responsible for thirty original designs and eight reproductions sold by Morris and Co. during the period I888-I9I0. His style was well suited to Morris's techniques, much of the driving force came from Morris's own work but Dearle's mature style is quite different. The following three textiles woven from Dearle's designs, 'Vine', 'Golden Stem' and 'Sunflower', show him at his most powerful and successful as a designer. All are strongly coloured, with an emphasis on green. The patterns show Morris's device of diagonally waving lines but Dearle's use of these in his own very characteristically tightly drawn and disciplined way is quite unlike the naturalism of Morris's own work. Dearle's great interest in historic textiles continued to show in his designs especially 'Helena', 'Rose and Lily' and 'Squirrel'. For 'Rose and Lily', he used an Italian seventeenth century brocaded silk as his source, simplifying the design and substituting the crowns of the original with roses. The original textile is an exquisite example of its period, with a gold ground and pattern brocaded in polychrome silks. Not even Dearle's careful use of colour could recapture the beauty of the original and the most successful example of the design was woven with a woollen ground providing a strong contrast to the silk pattern. So popular was this silk design with the public that in the twentieth century the firm sold one of Thomas Wardle's early printed cottons, 'Crown', which shows a direct reproduction of the Italian brocade.

Morris & Co. GOLDEN LILY
A design by J.H. Dearle produced from II wooden blocks.

'Squirrel' is a far less successful design than either 'Helena' or 'Rose and Lily', and the animals are so strongly drawn that it is not surprising that the original title, 'Fox and Grape' (from Aesop's Fables), is now no longer used. The design for this textile is copied from Morris's earlier woven designs showing birds but Dearle's greatest failing, his inability to control small subsidiary background patterns, shows in this piece. It is important to note however, that not only was this design commercially popular, but it has often been mistaken for Morris's own work.

More variety in colour was introduced into the Morris and Co. woven range with Dearle's designs made between I895 and I900 and a series of patterns called after fruit and flowers, 'Apple', 'Bluebell', 'Poppy', 'Tulip' and 'Pomegranate' all show the designer's interest in and experimentation with surface texture. Silk and linen mixtures ('Apple', 'Poppy' and 'Cross Twigs') reproduce the mixture of glossy and matt surfaces first seen in silk and wool double cloths woven by Morton's at Darvel. By clever use of the two yarns (worked out at first on the point-papers), a three-dimensional quality is given to some of the subjects depicted. From I9I5 an extra texture was obtained in the form of artificial silk which could be substituted for silk for further effect and, of more importance to some buyers, thus providing a cheaper fabric. 'Tulip' and 'Pomegranate' continued the bold approach of the silk and linen fabrics in heavyweight woollen hangings and Dearle's characteristic bunches of flowers spring from all parts of the two designs.

The developments of these designs provided disappointing results and Dearle's attempts to refine his own natural style as seen in

TULIP - printed cotton. Designed Morris.
Block printed Wardle.

'New Persian', 'Carnation' and the later 'Millefleurs' does not succeed, above all in the later two designs which simply copy the style of Flemish medieval millefleurs tapestries. This change in style coincided with Morris and Co.'s change in management and commercial direction, and frequent changes in the board of directors are evident in an unsettled period of both design and production. With a few exceptions, all the later woven textiles were produced by power-loom and Dearle's later designs show both a consideration of the mechanical aspects of such production and the firm's desire to compete in the market for reproduction textiles. Eight woven reproductions were sold by the firm and it is likely that some of these, in particular, the two Genoa velvets, were manufactured abroad in France or Italy. Morris and Co.'s catalogues also hint that a number of other fabrics were also available in individual pieces or single lengths. However, Henry Dearle was a conscientious, efficient and respected organiser of the weaving sheds at Merton Abbey. Be that as it may, his hard work after Morris's death in 1896 was not enough to maintain the commercial success of the firm, and by the mid 1920's this section of Morris and Co. was suffering from general economic problems. Because of the high quality of their fabrics Morris Textiles were too expensive and it became apparent that they had outpriced themselves.

During the remaining years Merton Abbey employed only two weavers and one man, to mix colours to produce fabric dyes both for printing and dyeing yarns. By 1940 it became obvious that the firm was no longer viable, and it went into voluntary liquidation.

LODDEN - Printed onto cotton & linen
Designed by Morris 1884. Indigo discharged & block-printed, Merton Abbey.

Morris & Co.
SUNFLOWER

49.

Sanderson Wallpaper & Matching Fabric

CHAPTER FIVE

TAPESTRY

TAPESTRY

Tapestry was the first textile technique to attract Morris's attention. The following extract was taken from a lecture given by him only eight years before he died, and illustrates the high esteem in which he held the art of tapestry;

> "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 ornaments of any degree of elaboration within the proper limits of duly considered decorative work. The first thing to be considered in the designing of tapestry is the force, purity and elegance of the silhouette of the object represented, nothing vague is admissable. But 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. It also demands that crispness and abundance of beautiful detail which was the especial characteristic of fully developed Medieval Art". (I0)

Morris's first tapestry looms were in Queen Square and were set up in I877. He probably waited until he felt he had the necessary technical and artistic experience to satisfy his own high expectations of the art. He had the able assistance of Henry Dearle who was his first tapestry apprentice. As a non-mechanical technique, Morris felt that only the finest subject matter should be used. Any other form of design would be a waste of the technique. He recommended the use of woodland scenes, showing animals, birds and insects. Less skill was required for these so the work was completed more quickly. 'Acanthus and Vine' was Morris's first tapestry woven by him at Kelmscott House (i) between May and September I879. It took him 5I6 hours to weave, and a design for the panel and a notebook

listing the hours worked at it each day are both in the Victoria and Albert Museum. In it we see immediately the swirling Acanthus leaves and grapes surrounding the birds and flowers.

Edward Burne-Jones was Morris's first choice as a designer, and he proved to be one of Morris and Co.'s greatest assets. His designs of figures established the Company's tapestries as the most artistic pieces woven in the nineteenth century. Although Burne-Jones's contribution to each tapestry was vital, his drawing consisted only of figures within a general scheme. It was however the manner by which these drawings were adapted to cartoons, and then decorated and bordered that made them such a successful work of art. These sections were designed by Morris, and later by Henry Dearle.

Burne-Jones's figures grouped and carefully drawn from prepared studies were never more than fifteen inches high. From these designs, reduced colour drawings were made which were submitted to Burne-Jones for his approval, or sometimes minor alterations. The original drawing was photographed to the full life size, and returned to Burne-Jones. Morris and Dearle then drew in the foreground and background details. Flowers and accessories were added throughout by means of tracing. The weaver then took the tracing, and the original, and made a complete tracing of both. This was placed against the warp and retraced onto it from the paper.

In I88I Morris moved his looms from Queen Square to Merton Abbey, this enabled him to envisage tapestry production on a much larger scale than before. The first tapestry woven there was 'The Goose Girl', followed by 'Flora and Pomona'. Using Burne-Jones's

FLORA & POMONA

Two late nineteenth century tapestries. Morris supplied all the decorative details of the tapestries, including background designs, and using Burne-Jones's figures.

figures Morris filled in all the decorative details of the tapestries, including background designs of swirling Acanthus leaves very similar to those used in the earlier 'Cabbage and Vine' panel. Morris used the leaf motif in a similar composition to the originals with animals, birds and flower. The backgrounds are however, separate designs and these rather over-crowd Burne-Jones's gracefully delicate figures.

Morris designed only three tapestries himself. The first of these was 'The Woodpecker', in a lovely design of a bird sitting in a tree garlanded with flowers and swirling leaves.

Apart from 'The Holy Grail' series of tapestries, it is unlikely that Morris produced any designs for tapestry after I890. He designed comparatively few panels as Henry Dearle took an active part in the designing from as early as I887. Morris's background designs are strongly drawn and flamboyant in style. They look extremely well as verdures in their own right, but when added to a design with figures they tend to create an unbalance between subject and ground. Dearle's work is very different showing none of the confidence of style of Morris's but because of his subordinate backgrounds, the figures predominate.

Philip Webb supplied the drawings of animals and birds for Morris's most successful tapestry 'The Forest'. Many of the foreground floral details can be seen in Webb's drawings. Philip Webb's animal designs were charmingly arranged peeping through the leaves of Morris's magnificent Acanthus decorated ground, as though caught momentarily motionless but they are full of vitality and movement.

Although Morris was the great force and central figure in the

THE WOODPECKER

High warp tapestry designed by William Morris and woven in the I880's.

The Green Dining-room, V. & A. decorated in I867.

Detail from: THE FOREST tapestry. Designed by Morris in 1887 with animals by Philip Webb. Probably his most successful tapestry.

The Arming & Departure of the Knights' from the HOLY GRAIL tapestry series. First woven 1890-4.

firm, much of the work on the tapestries was done by the design team of Jones, Morris and Dearle, each contributing in their own way to the many beautiful works. Morris relied greatly on Dearle for the production of tapestry designs and Dearle took part in every tapestry woven at Merton Abbey until his death in I932.

The technique of tapestry weaving is time consuming and therefore expensive, and so it proved impossible for the Merton Abbey Tapestry Works to remain financially viable, and sadly in I940 the business was placed in the hands of a reciever.

CHAPTER 6

PATTERN DESIGN

PATTERN DESIGN

Before I reach the conclusion of this Thesis, I would like to draw attention to the imaginative research and time that William Morris devoted to the designing of patterns for his various fabrics. Morris was a master in the art of enriching a surface. Work of this kind occupied him from the earliest days of the firm to the time of his death. His work as a designer dates from the move to Red House. After the setting up of the firm, he seems to have given up three-dimensional design. From then on his activities seem to have been divided between the development of actual production and the making of pattern designs.

The simplicity of Morris's first attempts is most marked in the 'Fruit' or 'Pomegranate'. Each repeat is divided into four equal parts, in each of which a diagonal stem throws off leaf and fruit so as to present a fairly even distribution of forms - similar motifs are used in the Green Dining Room at South Kensington. Essentially this is a tile pattern, based not on the usual upright rectangle, but on a square. The quartering of the repeat so as to use four fruit forms instead of one, has the effect of making the pattern look at first as though the repeat were one-quarter its real size; only as the eye dwells on it do we see that each of these four quarters offers a variant on the theme of the leafy, fruited twig. Naive as this is, in some ways, the apparent naivete lessens as we consider a larger area. The quartering then has the effect of disguising the true repeat while asserting its geometric structure. In the first draft of this design, the fruit in one quarter was an olive; but before the pattern went into production,

it was changed so that all four parts had the same visual weight. At this stage, Morris's experience of pattern designing was limited: but he had the instinct which moved him towards a viable solution, even although his formal ordering of natural elements is unsophisticated and innocent.

When he first began as a designer, Morris showed a warmer feeling for natural forms than was fashionable, it did not mean that he failed to understand that construction also played a part in what he regarded as the imaginative life of the pattern. From the very beginning he shows an instinct for appropriate form, making his pattern cover the whole field, not compelling the eye to dwell on each unit, but persuading us to wander from repeat to repeat without insisting too forcibly on the formal grid. Later, when much experience had brought him a fuller intellectual understanding of the processes of pattern making, he recognised that the masking of the repeat might rob us of some of the visual stimulus, we should get from a pattern. What at first he did intuitively, he later came to modify; there are designs in which the repeat is allowed to assert itself strongly; and it is in those patterns most affected by his study of historic woven patterns - both those in which the repeats are symmetrically disposed and those which make use of the meander or ribbon. But in few patterns does he allow such harsh definition of form as was used by his older contemporaries; there are no Morris designs in the Moresque or Alhambra style so much cultivated by Owen Jones and his followers; none which are simply abstract. All take their start, as to form, from some pieces of living nature; in general, a flower, a plant, some derivative of whose natural growth enables the designer's hand to move over the geometric grid with as much

WILLOW & VINE - An original drawing by Morris for a paper never put into production, undated.

freedom as discipline; with the freedom that comes of discipline. Constant reference to nature was vital: among other things, it was the only real protection against mere imitation of historic forms.

Morris loved nature. Mackail, in his life of Morris, quotes a series of passages from letters, any one of which might be a programme for chintz or wallpaper. For instance:

> "The fields are all butter-cuppy. The elms are mostly green up to their tops: the hawthorn not out, but the crabs beautiful, and also that white-beam (I think they call it) with the umbelliferous flowers. In the garden we have lots of tulips out looking beautiful; the white bluebells and some blue ones; some of the anemones are in blossom and they all soon will be: they are very lovely. Appleblossom for the most part only in bud, but that cherry tree near the arbour opposite my window is a mass of bloom. The heartseases are beautiful; a few of the Iceland poppies are out: the raspberries are showing for blossom".

Entirely at one with his contemporaries in his recognition of the part played by geometric order, Morris required a design to play on the imagination; for him, therefore, there must always be some image. Although for him repose is an essential quality which the designer should pursue, this does not mean that designs should be blank and static; rather that they should give us something of the relaxed pleasure of a garden. A wallpaper should be able to turn a room into a bower, a refuge, without insisting on its presence in the room with us. A chintz should not hang flat, but should be allowed some play, so that the actual fabric asserts itself through the design, which should be read in flowing but discontinuous passages. Morris thinks not only of the pattern, but of its use. It is in his awareness of the inbuilt suggestions and rhythms necessary to a living design,

that Morris is different from and better than his fellow-designers.

Morris's designs were not produced freely in the sense of being unrelated to factors of material, function and technique. These factors, some deriving from the technique and some from the needs of the trade, were a part of the stimulus to create. When setting out a design, on paper, he must of course, do it exactly, steering his forms over the whole surface, linking repeat and repeat, accounting for all. But the pattern is not to work only on the surface, even in the case of wallpaper. In the case of chintz or silk or woollen hangings, this is catered for by the natural undulations of the fall of the material, and by its real texture: the eye is not, and cannot be, always at one focus. But wallpaper offers no such natural relief; it must cling flat to the wall surface.

Morris caters in the simplest and subtlest ways to give the eye relief. Intuition, long practice, and sharp perception and his determined analysis of the mechanisms of design, showed him that there is a principle. Wallpapers, he says in his lecture on "Pattern Designing", must operate within a little depth. There must be a slight illusion - not as to the forms of the motif, but as to relative depth. And quite consistently we find in his patterns that one element is developed and spread like a net over another, with differences of scale and weight as to parts, so that we are always aware of a major pattern playing over a minor one. It is important to any designer to have a repertoire of forms on which he can draw; his problem is to keep them alive through endless repetition and variation; and it is here that Morris is so much the master. One or two

Morris & Co.
BIRD & ANEMONE

Sanderson Wallpaper & matching fabric

basic grids for construction; a large flowing line to be developed as broad scrolling leaves or as a proliferating stem; contrasting leaf and flower forms, large and small; perhaps a small bird; a secondary net of leaf or flower forms to offset the main theme - this was Morris's bag of tricks. But however constantly used, they were as constantly renewed by reference to nature and the study of historic ornament.

Morris was never secretive in describing his own ideas on good design nor in declaring his own theories concerning the history of repeating pattern, and the role of designer and craftsman within society. He gave many lectures about textiles - 'Hints on Pattern Designing' (to the Working Men's College, London, December I88I), 'Textile Fabrics' (given at the Health Exhibition I884) and 'Textiles' (Arts and Crafts Lecture, I888). His theory that all pattern essentially has two basic elements - the diagonal line and the diaper in its various forms - is self evident. His own descriptions of how these could be used (illustrated with diagrams from Owen Jones's "Grammar of Ornament (I856) and F. Fischbach's "Ornamente der Gewebe" (Hanau, I874-78) show true originality however and all his own designs can be classified between the 'branch' (diagonal line) and 'net' (diaper) patterns as described by him. Morris always recognized that within this framework intuitive inspiration was the element that differentiated between a good and an excellent design and he was totally committed to the idea that designs must be sympathetic to the recipient craft and that the designer should have experience of the technique he designed for.

"The special limitations of the material should be a pleasure to you, not a

> hindrance: a designer, therefore, should always thoroughly understand the processes of the special manufacture he is dealing with". (II)

A sympathy for technique is shown in all Morris's designs and this, above all other factors singles him out from his contemporaries.

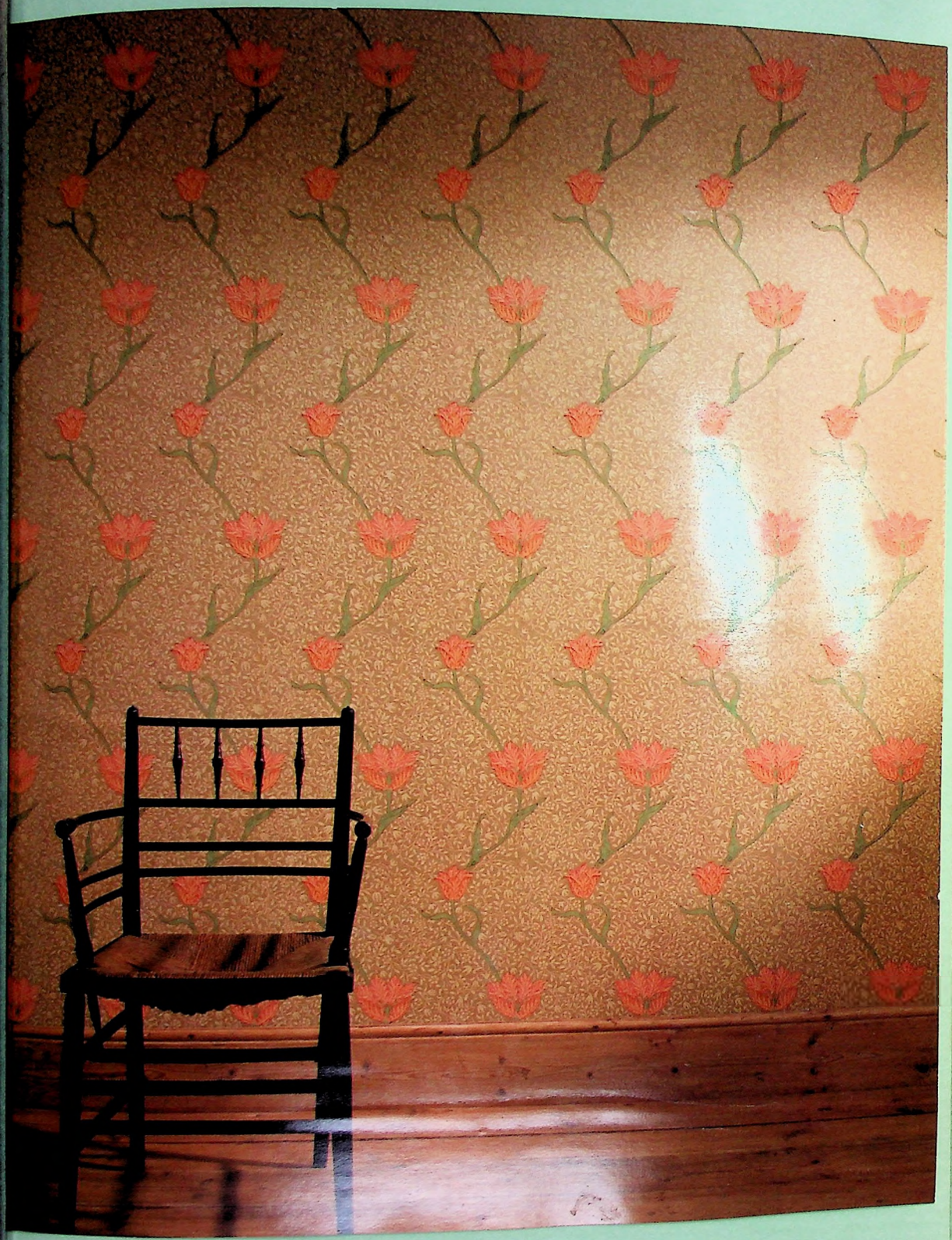
RIGHT:

Detail from
Morris's
BIRD & ANEMONE

LEFT:

Detail from Morris's
BATCHELOR'S BUTTON

Wallpapers by
A. Sanderson & Sons

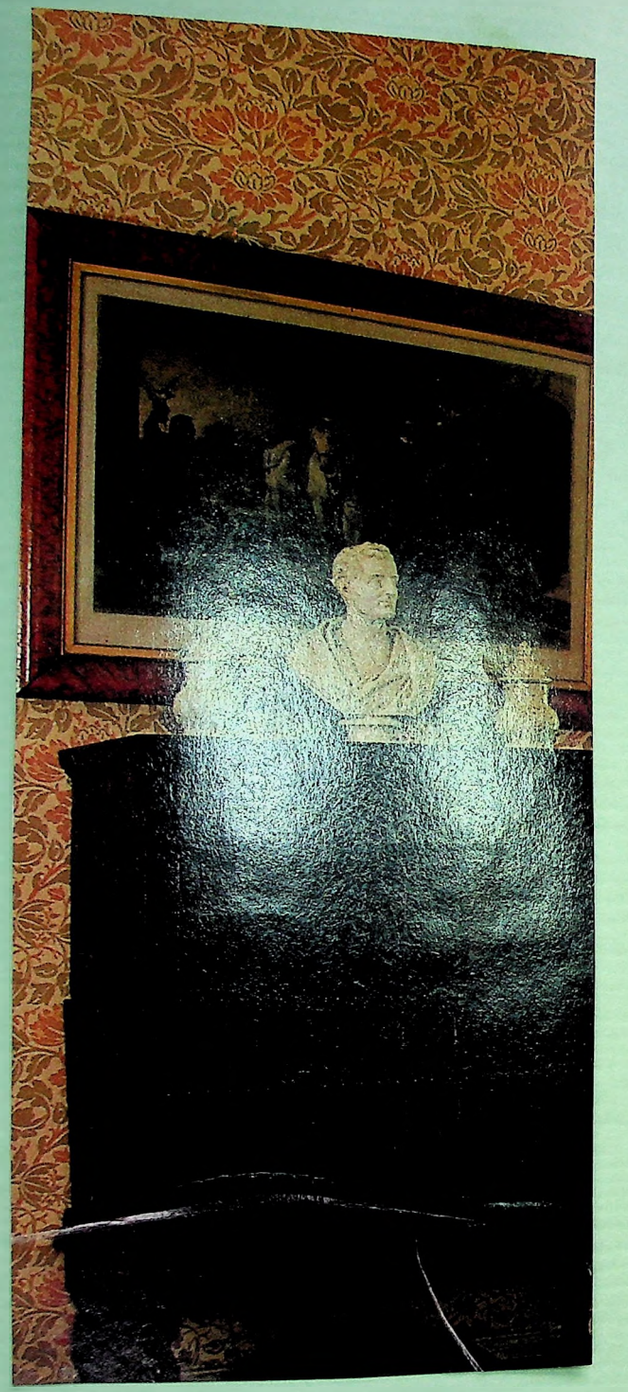


MORRIS & CO. - GARDEN TULIP
An eight block design

RIGHT & FAR RIGHT:

The old entrance hall is now a family room. Susanna doesn't have time to spend hours poring over pattern books:
She saw the WILLIAM MORRIS WALLPAPER in the shopping basket of a decorator friend.

From: COUNTRY LIVING
April 1986 edition



Morris & Co.
BIRD & ANEMONE -
Sanderson Wallpaper & matching fabric

CONCLUSION

William Morris was a designer, craftsman and theorist who was at the centre of the Arts and Crafts Movement, a group of architects, artisans and artists that revitalized the decorative arts. There are few areas of design where his influence is not felt. It would be impossible to cover every aspect of Morris's life in such a limited time, so I therefore concentrated on the areas of his work by which I am influenced in my own search for new ideas and fabrics for fashion.

I must now explain how Morris designs have survived and copies of his textiles can be obtained in Dublin today, almost one hundred years after his death.

Early in the twentieth century, Jeffrey and Co., a firm which had printed Morris's wallpapers, were taken over by The Wallpaper Manufacturers' Association. They continued to print Morris and Co.'s designs until the firm went into liquidation in I940. The blocks now belonged to the Wallpaper Manufacturers' Association. They sent them to their Arthur Sanderson & Sons factory; they were the successors of Jeffrey and Co. Sandersons are still producing block printed and machine printed wallpapers from Morris designs. They have also screen printed a number of these wallpaper designs on fabric and have recently used them in Axminster carpeting.

Their range of Morris furnishing fabrics include 'Fruit' 'Pimpernel', 'Chrysanthemum', 'Bower', 'Blackthorn', 'Golden Lily' and 'Willow Bough'.

Before Morris and Co., closed for good, a number of sets of wood

BLACKTHORN

Wallpaper - designed by
William Morris I892

blocks for printing fabrics were transferred to Stead McAlpin and Co., of Cummerdale, Carlisle. When Morris and Co., went bankrupt, Stead McAlpine bought all the blocks in their possession, and also other sets, which are now obsolete.

After the war some of these were sold by the old Bleach Linen Co. in Belfast, and in the I950's Warner & Sons issued a set of machine printed samples which include 'Strawberry Thief', 'Compton' and 'Corncockle'.

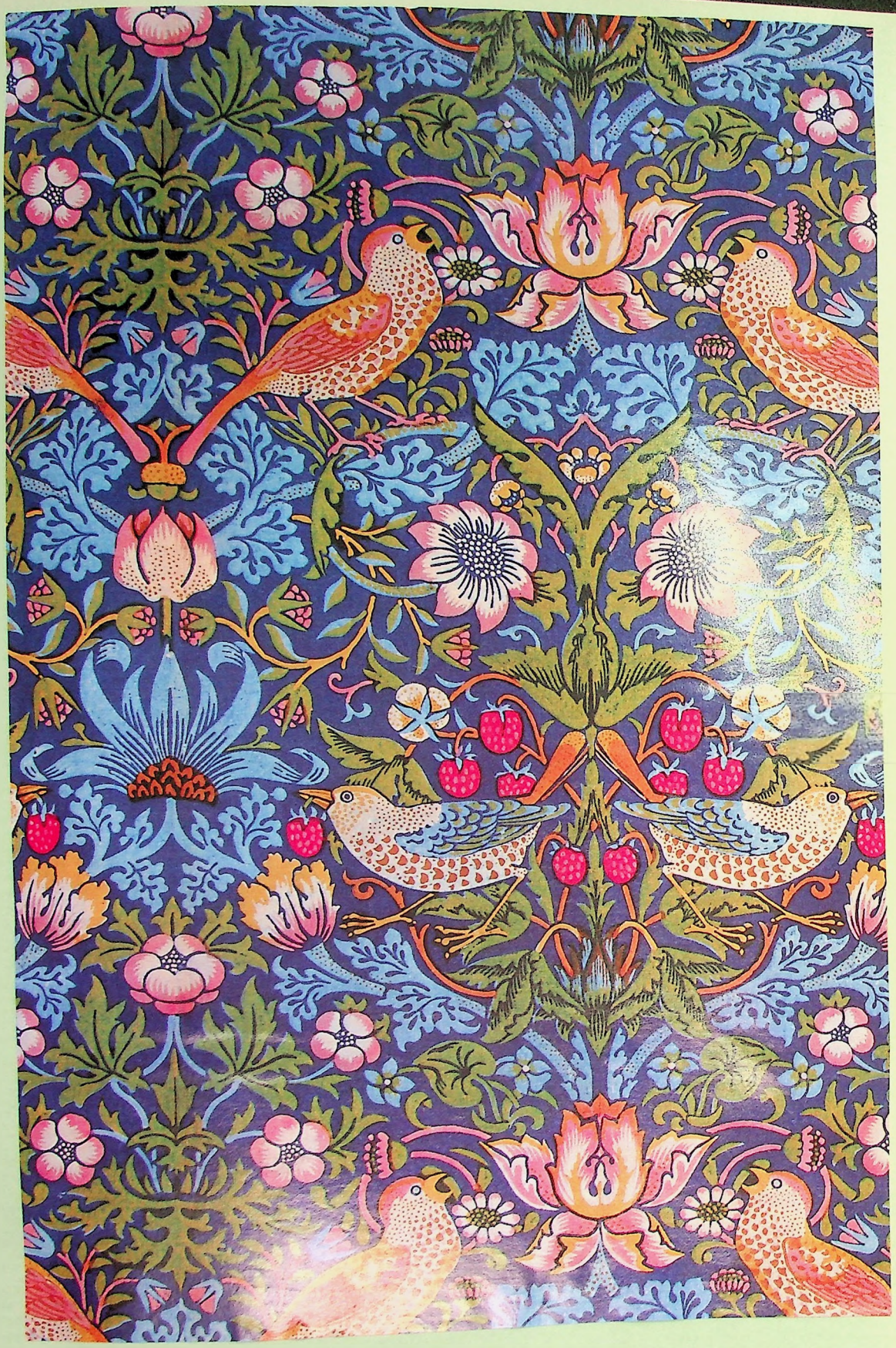
During the last twenty years, Stead McAlpine have been screen-printing a number of Morris designs for Liberty & Co., and John Lewis. The Morris fabrics available now at John Lewis include 'Strawberry Thief', 'Daffodil', Honeysuckle', 'Willow', 'Marigold', 'Snakeshead' and 'Lodden' (at Liberty's) (11)

The methods of producing these lovely Morris prints have, of course, changed. The fabrics are no longer block printed, indigo discharged or dyed with natural dye-stuffs. Pattern scales too have been altered to fit in with modern manufacturing processes and new fabric widths.

However, in spite of all these changes, much of Morris's dream lives on - he believed his public responsibility was;

> "to revive a sense of beauty in home life, to restore the dignity of art to ordinary household decoration". (I2)

Admiration of Morris's textiles simply as attractive flat patterns underestimates his genius as a designer. He never designed a textile without considering how it was to be used, and the best technique to suit this purpose. He realised from his experience of different techniques that fabrics have different characteristics



STRAWBERRY THIEF - Printed cotton. Designed Morris.
Indigo discharged Merton Abbey, II. May 1883.

Morris & Co.
MARIGOLD
Sanderson Wallpaper & Matching Fabric

WILLOW BOUGHS - MORRIS & CO.

Designed by W. Morris & adapted for printing onto cotton c.1895.

INDIAN - Adapted by William Morris from Indian designs for painted or embroidered furnishings.

Morris & Co.
LARKSPUR
Sanderson Wallpaper & Matching Fabric

and they perform differently depending on how they are used. I find this fascinating as it is one of the basic guidelines in the work of a dress designer. Fabrics drape differently if made of different fibres; silks shimmer, wools give greater depth of colour, cotton and linen are hardwearing, and a mixture of fibres such as wool, silk, linen and cotton, and nowadays, synthetic fibres, can provide endless variations of surface texture. Because of the inclusion of printed textiles in his decorative schemes, these fabrics became as important and versatile as woven fabrics.

It is interesting to note that Brown Thomas & Co. Ltd., of Dublin have recently opened a Sanderson Fabrics Department in their shop in Dawson Street. This Department stocks Morris and Co., hand printed wallpapers, and also fabrics for loose covers, curtains, etc. And so his lovely designs are still in demand and catering for a wider market than ever before, a fact which would have been a source of great delight to Morris.

I will conclude this Thesis with an extract from J.W. Mackail's address to the Socialist Society at Kelmscott House, November 1900;

> "What we think of great men matters very much to ourselves individually. It matters little to others; and least of all to the great men themselves, who were not much affected by criticism when they lived, and whose influence upon the world is hardly touched by the criticism, even though that be fairer in its judgement and larger in its view, which follows them after death".

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4. The Letters of William Morris to his Family & Friends. (Longmans I950)

5. Quoted in Philip Henderson's "William Morris - His Life, Work and Friends (Thames & Hudson I967)

6 Much greater detail of Morris's dyeing techniques can be found in an excellent unpublished Thesis by Peter Robins now in the William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow.

7. From Morris's Letters to Thomas Wardle now at the National Art Liberary, Victoria & Albert Museum.

8. "Textiles" - Arts & Crafts Lecture - I888

9. Now in the City Museum & Art Gallery - Birmingham.

IO. William Morris's Arts & Crafts Lecture in I888 on "Textiles".

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II. Linda Parry's "William Morris Textiles"
(Weidenfeld & Nicolson 1983)

I2. Emma Lazarus, "A Day in Surrey with
William Morris'.
(The Country Illustrated Magazine, July 1886
VXXXII No.J.)

NOTES

(i) The Morris family had altogether four homes during their thirty-seven year marriage. In I878 they took a lease on The Retreat, the Mall, Hammersmith, which they renamed Kelmscott House after Kelmscott Manor, Lechlade, Oxfordshire, which they previously leased with Rossetti in I872. The family resided between Kelmscott House and Kelmscott Manor until Morris's death in I896, after which Janey Morris disposed of the London house. In I9I3, the year before her death, she purchased Kelmscott Manor.

(ii) The John Lewis Partnership which now incorporates Stead McAlphine have recently given their collection of Morris & Co., Blocks to the William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow, and one set, 'Strawberry Thief', to The Victoria & Albert Museum.