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Printed Ecologies: William Morris and the Rural Thames

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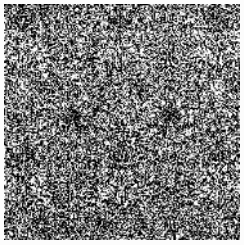

Abstract
William Morris was a Londoner and, in his day-to-day life, he looked out on an urban, polluted Thames River landscape at Hammersmith. However, he turned away from the metropolis to pursue a pastoralist vision of the English countryside in his designs, writings, and life. This article explores the expression of that pastoral in Morris's printed repeating-pattern designs, arguing that those patterns are indirect representations of the landscape he most admired: the rural reaches of the Upper Thames and its tributaries. Morris's plant motifs and visual effects reflect the botany and physical forms of the riparian environment he encountered at his Thameside country home, Kelmscott Manor. A close inspection of that landscape and ecosystem reveals not only the inspiration for Morris's designs, but also the process by which he selected and elevated certain aspects of the countryside to create his personal pastoral. His patterns are more than decorations for walls and furniture: they are intentional, highly specific evocations of a place and an environment, deeply tied to his broader vision of a rural, equitable, and anti-modern England.

Introduction

When William Morris looked out the windows of his London home, he took in a view much like Whistler's view from Chelsea. A polluted tidal river flowed under murky city air, and a hodgepodge of mixed uses, from fine homes to factories, clustered together along the banks. Kelmscott House, where Morris lived with his family from 1878 until his death in 1896, is located on the Thames embankment in Hammersmith, west London, about two and a half miles west of Cheyne Walk (fig. 1).[1] Like Whistler's home, Kelmscott House was a historic townhouse flanked by others along a riverside road, Upper Mall. Upper Mall was relatively genteel, but its surroundings were not: there were boatyards, brewery malthouses, industrial premises including a leadworks and, around them, workers' housing which Morris's daughter May Morris described as a slum (fig. 2).[2] Across the Thames, there was a waterworks upriver and a large soapworks downriver. In between, Hammersmith Bridge linked the older settlement of Hammersmith to developing suburbs south of the river. The setting was markedly similar to Whistler's Chelsea, but Morris's reaction to it was markedly different.

Figure 1

Ordnance Survey map, showing the Thames area of Hammersmith, with Kelmscott House marked (detail), 1865, 61 × 92 cm. Collection of the National Library of Scotland. Digital image courtesy of National Library of Scotland (all rights reserved).

Figure 2

Ordnance Survey map, with Kelmscott House marked. Malthouses are visible along The Creek at centre, and lead works near the Thames at right (detail), 1895, 61 × 92 cm. Collection of the National Library of Scotland. Digital image courtesy of National Library of Scotland (all rights reserved).

Unlike Whistler, Morris was a lifelong Londoner. He was born in 1834 in Walthamstow, on what was then the outer reaches of London's northeastern suburbs, and his primary residence was always in London or its suburbs. However, he held no love for the Victorian metropolis. His most well-known response to the city appears in his socialist utopian romance *News from Nowhere*, in which the future Trafalgar Square is an orchard and neighborhoods have become forests. The action of the novel begins with the Victorian main character, a stand-in for Morris, falling asleep in his home on the Hammersmith embankment and waking in another time. His first observations of the socialist utopia of the future take place around—and in—the Hammersmith Thames. The river is clean and populated with salmon, the "ugly suspension

bridge" has been replaced with a medieval-style stone one, and the leadworks, the "riveting and hammering" of the boatyards, and the soapworks "with their smoke-vomiting chimneys" are all absent.[3] Later in the book, the hero and his party leave London and journey upriver. The story ends at Morris's country home, Kelmscott Manor. In *News from Nowhere* and in life, Morris rejected the view from his windows in Hammersmith and turned instead to another riverside world: the Upper Thames.[4]

Along the Upper Thames and its tributaries, Morris found a rural world which became his personal pastoral. Like all pastorals, his was an apparently timeless ideal set against an unideal modern urban world: historic, vernacular, hand-crafted, unbothered by modern machinery or factory smoke, and full of lush vegetation and exuberant flowers.[5] This pastoral appears throughout his life and work. It is a setting in his poetry and romances; it is the utopia described in *News from Nowhere* and his socialist speeches; and it is also the visual world of his designs. This article will explore how Morris translated his idealized rural world into his designs for printed, repeating-pattern fabrics and wallpapers.[6] Alan Braddock has written that attention to ecosystems and the environment "may cast canonical works and figures in a new light by revealing previously unnoticed complexity".[7] Unlike many poetic pastorals, Morris's was not a hazy, generalized, imaginary landscape, but rather a highly specific, closely observed real one: the riparian ecosystem of the rural Thames and its tributaries, and particularly the landscape surrounding his Kelmscott Manor, which is located along the Thames on the far western edge of Oxfordshire. These sites were, and to some extent still are, characterized by traditional features which create particular visual effects in the landscape and support rich botanical biodiversity—elements which can be seen in Morris's works. By considering the specifics of the Kelmscott landscape, we can better understand what Morris valued in the English countryside and how he constructed his pastoral and presented it to his audience, the middle- and upper-class consumers of Victorian London.

Kelmscott

Morris first encountered Kelmscott Manor in May 1871. He was searching for a place to get away from London, a decision driven at least in part by the fact that his young daughters still had lingering coughs from the winter—a common complaint among residents of the highly polluted city.[8] The manor and its village (also called Kelmscott) must have been exactly what he sought because he took out a lease immediately. He would retain his affection for the place throughout his life, visiting as often as possible, drawing upon it for his writing and design, and naming his London home and his press after it. When he died in 1896, he was interred in the village churchyard. Kelmscott was his "heaven on earth", a place he could set in opposition to everything he disliked about the modern world.[9]

Morris's formulation of Kelmscott as a pastoral ideal was a conscious act. Despite how Morris and those around him described it, the village was no simple rural idyll, no place out of time. In fact, it was a major site in the shift toward industrial agriculture in the second half of the nineteenth century. In that period, the village was known not as the home of William Morris, but as the home of the Hobbs family. The Hobbs were a local farming dynasty well known in British agricultural circles for their successes with innovative animal husbandry techniques, including using animal feed rather than fattening herds exclusively on meadow grass.[10] In 1900, only four years after Morris's death, the Hobbs introduced the new technology of refrigeration to their dairy and, with the aid of a newly built rail depot, began shipping large quantities of milk to London for sale.[11] Even when Morris first arrived in the 1870s, the landscape was not devoid of

industrial influence. Only a mile and a quarter away, so close it was likely visible from the Kelmscott property, a large factory stood on an island in the Thames. This complex processed beets for ethanol, animal feed, and artificial fertilizer, and also included a gasworks; a private steam railway to transport the beets; and a telegraph system.[12] Traditionally managed rural spaces existed at Kelmscott, but modernity stood alongside. By concentrating on the former, however, Morris was able to exclude the latter, constructing his own riverside pastoral idyll. Kelmscott's Thameside setting was one of its great attractions for Morris. In the same letter in which he described the site as a heaven on earth, written the day after he first visited, Morris mentioned that the house was "close down on the river, a boat house and all things handy".[13] A side channel of the river ran alongside the property, and the main channel is only about five hundred feet away (fig. 3).[14] The boathouse was a particularly good amenity for a man who loved to fish and a family who loved being out on the water.[15] Fishing and boating were not the only things Morris liked about the Thames, however. He held a lifelong love for rivers and riparian environments. His third known surviving letter, written as a fifteen-year-old, includes a rapturous description of a water meadow along the River Kennet.[16] Some of his earliest poetry and prose includes descriptions of rivers and streams, including the grassy brooks of his childhood river landscape, the Lea valley wetlands of far northeast London.[17] These writings show an appreciation for traditional land management and its botanical results. The spaces Morris admired along both the Kennet and the Lea were unplowed, wet meadows managed with cycles of grazing and haymaking.[18] Such meadows were once common along the Upper Thames and the river's tributaries, and they were richly biodiverse, supporting a wide variety of wildflower and wildlife species, as well as the cows and sheep that ate their grass.

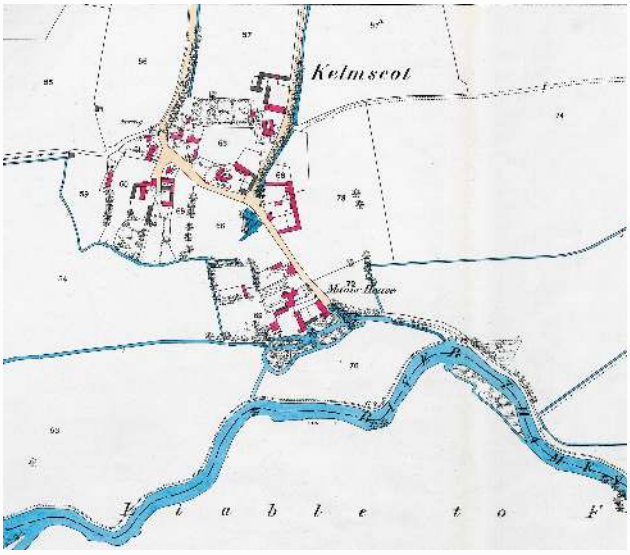

Figure 3

Ordnance Survey map showing Kelmscott Manor and surroundings (detail), 1876, 64.4 × 96.6 cm. Collection of the National Library of Scotland. Digital image courtesy of National Library of Scotland (all rights reserved).

Water meadows were not the only traditional landscape elements Morris admired. His writings about landscapes—both real and imagined—also reveal an admiration for ancient woodlands, open grazing commons, hayfields, and the hedgerows that divide them all. (This list of landscape

features may seem generically "English" at first, and there is good reason for that: they are features of the landscapes of the Thames Valley and other lowland valleys of southern England which have come to be aesthetically synonymous with a particular type of English rural idyll). Morris's concentration on these landscapes indicates a strong personal preference for a highly specific environment. In the age of increasingly easy travel by train and steamship, British downs, moors, highlands, peaks, and gentle and rugged coastlines, as well as the varied landscapes of Europe, were all within easy enough reach for artists or writers seeking inspiration from the natural world. Morris's friend, John Ruskin, for example, loved the Lake District, with its sublime fells and waters and less visible evidence of human activity, and Morris himself travelled to Iceland twice in the 1870s.[19] Downland, peak, and strange Icelandic-influenced landscapes do appear in Morris's writings, though they are absent in his visual work—and even in his stories and poems they are spaces which heroes must overcome to reach their goals, held in contrast to other places which resemble nothing more than Kelmscott and other rural Southern English locations. Morris could appreciate wild landscapes for their beauty and their power, but his own perfect place was very different: gentle, verdant, and marked everywhere by a long human history of land management. Just as Morris made a choice to turn from London, he also made a choice to turn to the familiar Southern English pastoral of Kelmscott and the rural Upper Thames.[20]

At Kelmscott, Morris deepened his creative relationship with a type of landscape he had admired for much of his life. He was able to spend prolonged periods along and upon the Thames and in country lanes and fields, gaining the sort of intimate knowledge of place that can only come from prolonged exposure. It is clear in his works that he looked very closely at his surroundings, understood them deeply, and drew abundant inspiration from them. As noted above, landscapes resembling the valleys of the Thames and its tributaries were already prevalent in Morris's written works before 1871. They were not so present in his design work, but that was about to change. In the decade since the founding of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., commonly known as the Firm, Morris had created about five original designs for printed patterns: four wallpapers and one textile.[21] Between 1871 and 1887, he designed approximately forty-one: twenty-five wallpapers and sixteen textiles. There were multiple reasons for this exponential increase in creative output, including Morris's increasing technical abilities as a pattern designer and his burgeoning professional relationship with the dyer Thomas Wardle. It is difficult to say if Morris's life at Kelmscott also contributed to this increase in productivity, but the world he observed there surely helped to shape the designs. The patterns Morris designed after coming to Kelmscott show the influence of the Upper Thames in both their overall visual effects and their motifs, with their intertwining botanical forms evoking the highly specific riparian ecosystem Morris knew so well.

The Patterns and the Landscape

Two types of landscape influence run through the patterns Morris designed between 1871 and 1887. The first is in the overall form of the patterns: the physical structures of their repeats and the interconnections of the motifs. The second is those motifs themselves, the plants which Morris chose to form his patterns. Of course, the line between the two is blurred because of the characteristic way Morris used botanical motifs to form the shape of his patterns—but so, too, is the distinction blurred in the landscape, where multiple species grow together and form features larger than the sum of their parts.

Before moving on to consider the presence of the landscape in Morris's patterns, it is important to consider how Morris drew inspiration from and depicted the world around him. None of Morris's patterns are direct visual inscriptions of a single site or plant. Some were inspired by a discrete place or moment in time: *Trellis* (wallpaper, 1862) and *Strawberry Thief* (printed textile, 1883) by the gardens at Red House and Kelmscott Manor respectively; and *Willow Bough* (wallpaper, 1887) by a single tree near the Manor.[22] However, Morris never sought to show things exactly as they were in the world around him. He detested the fashion for illusionistic plants in wallpapers and other decorative arts. What he called for, instead, was design that suited the restrictions of materials and space—for example, flat patterns for flat walls. Despite this, he also could not abide the more abstracted ornament favored by Design Reform advocates such as Owen Jones, which he found empty and meaningless. As he stated in his design theory lecture "Some Hints on Pattern-Designing", he believed all patterns should be made up of "ornament that reminds us of the outward face of the earth".[23] At another point in the same lecture, he said "any decoration is futile … when it does not remind you of something beyond itself, of something of which it is but a visible symbol".[24] Evocation was the goal, rather than either direct representation or ornamental abstraction. And the best thing to be evoked was the natural world: "I must have unmistakable suggestions of gardens and fields".[25] This, then, is the landscape representation at the heart of Morris's patterns: not a direct record, but rather a reminder, a suggestion, conveyed by a stylized depiction of a far more complex system. Morris's insistence upon "gardens and fields" is also significant because it reinforces his pastoralism: he demands not the natural world in general, nor the wilderness, but a managed, human landscape such as the one he knew along the Upper Thames and the river's tributaries. Morris also made the link to those types of landscapes explicitly clear in a series of works designed between 1883 and 1885: nine printed fabrics named for Thames tributaries, including the Lea and Kennet, where Morris had first become familiar with the distinct landscape forms and ecology of the Thames river system.[26]

One pattern form which evokes the Thamesian landscape of Kelmscott is the meander. This form is particularly prevalent in Morris's textile designs in the 1880s, including several of the Thames tributary patterns such as *Wey* (circa 1883, fig. 4). These designs feature primary stems which either inscribe an S-curve across their repeat or move in a sinuous curve diagonally from one corner of the repeat to the other. As other scholars have pointed out, this curvaceous behavior resembles another type of meander, the path of the Thames.[27] Meanders are characteristic of almost the entire length of the Thames, a river with a broad alluvial plain and very little fall in its 215-mile length.[28] Kelmscott Manor sits along the curve of one such meander, and Kelmscott House on another (see figs. 1 and 3). Morris's meanders were derived from historic textiles he studied at the South Kensington Museum.[29] However, he reshaped the style with his characteristic coloration and motifs, intertwining it with other elements to make a larger, Thamesian whole.

Figure 4

William Morris, *Wey*, circa 1883, indigo discharge and block print on cotton, 23.5 × 30.5 cm. Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (T.49-1912). Digital image courtesy of Victoria & Albert Museum, London (all rights reserved).

The Thames is not only present in the meander patterns; other aspects of its forms and appearance also contribute to the visual style of Morris's designs. Caroline Arscott evokes the physical realities of the river in her exploration of Morris and the Thames, drawing a comparison between the patterns' layering and flattening, depictions of the river in angling handbooks, and tension between surface and depth in the river.[30] A comparison might also be drawn between Morris's flattened depth and layered botanical forms and the melding between river and land, between aquatic and riparian environments.[31] The Thames is a remarkably shallow-banked river, sitting in its flat alluvial plain with little gradation between land and water (fig. 5). Along the river at Kelmscott, the fields meld almost seamlessly with the river, and the environment both bridges and masks the divide. You can walk into the fields near the manor and barely see the river until you are standing just above it, among the dense grasses and wildflowers on its edge. The two environments—land and water—are physically inseparable, and the features of the local landscape rely on the presence of the river. Water meadows cannot be water meadows without water, after all, and even the underlying geography of the land is a result of the river: Kelmscott, like London and many places in between, sits on terraces of clay and gravel laid down by eons of the Thames's alluvial action.[32] Even Morris's terrestrial plants are reflections of the presence of the river: the willow of *Willow Bough* and many other patterns grows in abundance in the wet ground of the Kelmscott riverside (see fig. 5), and other plants such as snakeshead fritillary—discussed in detail below—are even more specific to the environmental conditions of the Thames landscape. Morris's combination of riverine forms with distinctly Thamesian botany thus evokes the specific landscape and environment he knew at Kelmscott.

Figure 5

Sarah Mead Leonard, The Thames and willows near Kelmscott, 2016, photograph. Digital image courtesy of Sarah Mead Leonard (all rights reserved).

The riverine forms and riverbank species are not the only localized landscape features visible in Morris's patterns. In "Some Hints on Pattern-Designing", Morris said:

> *In all good pattern-designs the idea comes first, as in all other designs, e.g., a man says, I will make a pattern which I will mean to give people an idea of a rose-hedge with the sun through it; and he sees it in such and such a way; then, and not till then, he sets to work to draw his flowers, his leaves and thorns, and so forth, and so carries out his idea.*[33]

He was, of course, describing his own working process. The pattern he was describing may be hypothetical, but the "idea of a rose-hedge" could easily apply to several patterns, including the printed textiles *Rose and Thistle* (fig. 6), which was likely designed in 1881, and *Rose* (fig. 7) from two years later. These patterns, and many other Morris designs, share many traits with hedgerows—from their structure, to the density of their botanical motifs, to the species of those motifs.

Figure 6

William Morris, *Rose and Thistle*, printed by Merton Abbey Works, 1881, indigo discharge on cotton. Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (T.634-1919). Digital image courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum, London (all rights reserved).

Figure 7

William Morris, *Rose*, printed by Merton Abbey Works, 1883, indigo discharge and block print on cotton. Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (T.53-1912). Digital image courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum, London (all rights reserved).

Hedgerows are vegetal landscape features, field boundaries made up exclusively of plants. They are seen in many areas of England but are especially abundant in areas such as the Thames valley that lack the rock deposits needed for stone walling. Dense, mature hedgerows can be observed all around Kelmscott (fig. 8). These features begin as human-formed structures: expert hedgelayers bend and interweave living plants, usually hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), around stakes to form dense fence-like barriers which livestock cannot breach (fig. 9). The foundational plants then grow upwards and outwards while other species of wild and naturalized plants—including roses—gain a foothold and intermingle (see fig. 8). Mature hedgerows can be several feet thick and more than six feet high.[34] As well as serving their purpose as a boundary, they provide shelter and food for animals and support botanical biodiversity. The shallow diagonal meander of *Rose and Thistle*, as well as evoking the path of the Thames, also echoes the diagonal shaping of a newly lain hedge, and *Rose*'s dense symmetrical pattern, meanwhile, might be seen as a more mature hedgerow, with many different plants intermingling and providing habitat for birds. *Rose* is particularly "sunlit", an unusually light pattern for that period of Morris's work. Other patterns from the period such as *Wey* (see fig. 4) or *Strawberry Thief* layer brightly colored plants atop deep blue grounds, giving a sense of receding space without the illusions of perspective. That darkness behind the foreground plants is similar to the effect of looking at a mature hedgerow in a sunlit field: the depths of the hedge are dense with shadows while the plants near to you are illuminated, turning their flowers and leaves to the sun.

Figure 8

Sarah Mead Leonard, Hedgerow at Kelmscott with Roses in Bloom—Early in Season, 2018, photograph. Digital image courtesy of Sarah Mead Leonard (all rights reserved).

Figure 9

Vincent Jones, Newly Lain Hedge Near Awre, Gloucestershire, 2006. Digital image courtesy of Vincent Jones (CC BY-SA 2.0).

Figure 10

William Morris, Specimen of Jasmine Wallpaper, printed by Jeffrey & Co. (London), 1872, distemper colour block printed on paper. Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (E.2753-1980). Digital image courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum, London (all rights reserved).

When Morris created his patterns, he not only evoked the overall forms and visual effects of river or hedgerow, he also shaped the real plants of the Kelmscott ecosystem into the motifs that make up those forms and effects. Hedgerow hawthorn's small clustered white flowers and serrated leaves appear often—as in the wallpaper *Jasmine* (1872) (fig. 10), with its title species (*Jasminum officinale*) entwining with large masses of hawthorn. Roses, meanwhile, are a typical secondary hedgerow plant and a typical Morrisian motif, as are thistles (*Cirsium vulgare* and other similar plants). However, the rose patterns shown above do not depict the most common hedgerow rose, the dog rose (*Rosa canina*, see fig. 8), which has a single layer of petals. Morris instead chose double blooms which are more common in gardens than fields.[35] This combination of garden plant and field plant is common throughout Morris's designs, reflecting Morris's interest in a wide variety of plants as well as the sometimes blurry distinction between wild and cultivated species in the English landscape.[36] Some wildflowers are also popular garden plants and, conversely, some garden flowers become naturalized and mix in with wildflowers.[37] In the case of the double roses, the choice of garden plant over wild may have been made for the sake of legibility and style: single roses could be mistaken for other single-bloom flowers, and layered double roses are also recognizable within the visual language of design—echoing, for example, the roses of English royal insignia. Again, the overall suggestion was more important than precise accuracy, and Morris combined wild plants, garden plants, and design traditions to communicate what he wanted about the outward face of the earth.

Figure 11

Christian Fischer, Scarlet Pimpernel, 2016, photograph. Digital image courtesy of Christian Fischer (CC BY-SA 4.0).

The stylization and recognizability of Morris's plant motifs varies greatly and, as a result, any list of species featured in the patterns will likely be incomplete. However, it is possible to identify a number of plants that are associated with the landscape and ecosystem of Kelmscott and the Upper Thames. For example, *Rose* also includes the small five-petaled blooms of scarlet pimpernel (*Anagallis arvensis*, fig. 11), another common hedgerow species that repeatedly appears in other Morris patterns. Paul Sterry and Bob Press's guidebook of British wildflowers describes the pimpernel as growing "on disturbed ground", a phrase commonly applied to wildflowers and naturalized species that grow on land recently impacted by human activity such as agriculture and building.[38] As a result of that growth habit, many such plants are considered agricultural weeds, and the advent of herbicides in the twentieth century led to their decline. While scarlet pimpernel is still common, many other plants that Morris depicted, such as corncockle (*Agrostemma githago*, featured in *Corncockle*, printed textile, 1883) (figs. 12 and 13), are not nearly so plentiful today.[39]

Figure 12

Eowyn Cwper, Corncockle, 2014, photograph. Digital image courtesy of Victoria & Albert Museum, London (all rights reserved).

Figure 13

William Morris, Corncockle, printed by Merton Abbey Works, 1883, block print on cotton. Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (CIRC.87-1953). Digital image courtesy of Victoria & Albert Museum, London (all rights reserved).

The introduction of herbicides is not the only reason the botanical landscape of Kelmscott and the rest of the British countryside has changed since Morris's time. The decline of traditional land management practices also contributed to the loss of biodiversity. As I have already noted, hedgerows are important hosts of a wide variety of animal and plant species, as are water meadows. In the twentieth century, many hedgerows were torn out in favor of wire fencing. Water meadows, meanwhile, had existed partially because their land was too difficult to cultivate with traditional plows and partially because their grass was good for fattening livestock. Advances in both farm equipment and animal management in the twentieth century changed this, and riverside meadows were increasingly converted to arable fields. Even where the meadows were not plowed away, the seasonal rhythm of flooding, grazing, and haymaking was often abandoned. All these changes altered the botanical make-up of the meadows which, like hedgerows, had been havens of biodiversity in their traditional form.

Snakeshead fritillary (*Fritillaria meleagris*) is one well-known example of a species that declined precipitously with the loss of traditional water meadows. The plant's distinctive checkered, bell-shaped, dark purple flowers were once a common springtime sight along many stretches of the Thames (fig. 14). However, the loss of water meadows reduced the plant's range to such an extent that it is now considered rare in the wild in Britain. It maintains a hold only in a few field systems along the Upper Thames and its tributaries.[40] Morris would have been distressed by that change. He was fond of the plant, naming two patterns for it—*Snakeshead*, a printed textile from 1876 (fig. 15), and *Fritillary*, a wallpaper from 1885 (fig. 16)—as well as featuring variegated bell-shaped flowers in many more. He also mentions the flowers in letters and diary entries written at Kelmscott, noting when they were in bloom to family members in London and recording expeditions to gather them from the surrounding fields.[41] Many other plants that grew near, or even in, the river appear in Morris's patterns, but fritillary is a

particularly significant example because it is so characteristic of the specific ecosystem of the Thames valley. The presence of snakeshead blooms in the meadows of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire indicate the presence of a particular set of ecological conditions. Thus, the presence of those blooms in Morris's patterns is also indicative, showing both that he had access to that ecosystem and that he observed it closely, and drew upon it for his work.

Figure 14

Michael Apel, Snakeshead Fritillary, 2012, photograph. Digital image courtesy of Michael Apel (CC BY 3.0).

Figure 15

William Morris, *Snakeshead*, printed by Thomas Wardle & Co. (Leek), 1876, block print on cotton, 100 × 63 cm. Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (CIRC.46-1956). Digital image courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum, London (all rights reserved).

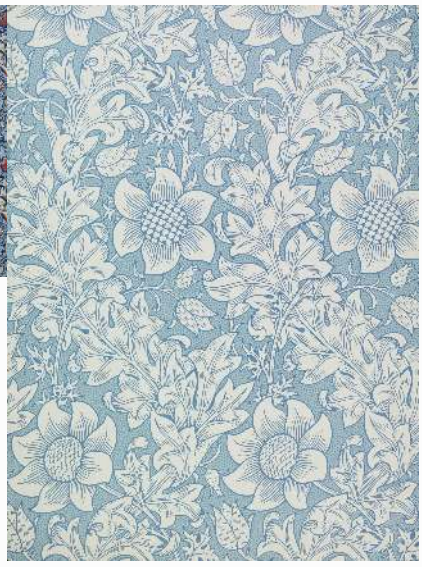

Figure 16

William Morris, Specimen of Fritillary wallpaper, printed Jeffrey & Co. (London), 1885, distemper colour block printed on paper. Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (CIRC.283-1959). Digital image courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum, London (all rights reserved).

Morris would not have recognized the word ecosystem: "ecology" only entered English in 1875, and "ecosystem" is a twentieth-century coinage.[42] Nevertheless, the rural ecosystem of the Upper Thames was precisely what he observed and chose to depict, an interrelated world of environmental conditions, human influences, and characteristic landscape forms and plant species. In so doing, Morris sought to create visual evocations of a very specific type of site: his Thameside pastoral. Within the context of Morris's writings on design practice such as "Some Hints on Pattern-Design", this evocation is treated as the goal in and of itself, the achievement of what Morris felt was aesthetically best. However, the implications of that goal reach much further than visual pleasure. For Morris, aesthetics, design and ideology were as intertwined as the motifs of his patterns or the plants of a hedgerow. Morris valued the Thamesian landscape of Kelmscott not just because he found it visually appealing, but also because it held ideological value for him. By evoking that landscape in his designs, he necessarily also evoked the ideologies that were tied up in both the place and the work: the veneration of craft, tradition, nature, and beauty (as defined by Morris) and the rejection of modern industry, urbanism, capitalism, and all the ills they brought with them.

ect place to which the characters travel, moving along an improved, de-modernized Thames to reach it. However, even that future London has been improved by the introduction of the landscape features Morris knew from the rural Thames and its tributaries—orchards, fields, forests, and gardens. It is possible to view Morris's patterns as agents of a similar process, especially when considering what Jason Edwards and Imogen Hart term the "potentially interpretable and evocative detail" of Victorian interiors.[43] Morris's designs do not exist in isolation; rather, they were products printed in London factories and sold in Morris & Co.'s Oxford Street shop, primarily to London buyers.[44] The reception of Morris's designs and politics in the homes of his consumers is a neglected subject, and much more must be known before any conclusions might be drawn.[45] However, if Morris's patterns are evocations of Kelmscott, then the presence of those products in middle- and upper-class London homes must also imply the presence of Morris's pastoral in those spaces, meaningful to Morris if not his buyers: a section of a Thamesian ideal arrayed on a wall or a settee.

Acknowledgements

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About the author

Dr. Sarah Mead Leonard is a historian of nineteenth-century landscape, material culture, and art. She holds a PhD in Art History from the University of Delaware and an MA in Historic Landscape Studies (Archaeology) from the University of York, and is now Research Historian for the North Carolina Division of State Historic Sites and Properties. She also serves as Vice-President of the William Morris Society in the United States. Her work explores individual and cultural relationships with natural worlds, physical landscapes, and built environments. Her contribution to this volume derives from her dissertation, "'The Beauty of the Bough-Hung Banks': William Morris in the Thames Landscape", which she is now developing into a manuscript.

Footnotes

1. By river, the distance is longer—four miles upstream.
2. May Morris, "Introduction", in William Morris, *The Collected Works of William Morris, Volume XIII: The Odyssey of Homer Done into English Verse*, ed. May Morris, (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1912), xvii.

3. William Morris, *News from Nowhere, or, An Epoch of Rest: Being Some Chapters from a Utopian Romance*. David Leopold, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3–8.
4. The Upper Thames is generally defined as stretching from the Thames's source in Gloucestershire to the beginnings of the urban area of Reading.
5. Morris's English pastoral is of course part of a long tradition in literature and art. My framing of the subject is informed by Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973) as well as the work of art historians such as John Barrell and Ann Bermingham. I am particularly indebted to Tim Barringer's "The Harvest Field in the Railway Age" for its approach to the subject in the nineteenth century, in *Men at Work: Art and Labour in Victorian Britain* (New Haven, CT: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2005), 83–131.
6. Morris produced designs for many media—too many to explore in a single article. By virtue of their material and manufacturing process, his printed patterns for cloth and wallpaper have the most in common and include the most visual detail and botanical specificity, and so they are the focus of this piece.
7. Alan Braddock, "Ecocritical Art History", *American Art* 23, no. 2 (Summer 2009): 24–28.
8. Fiona MacCarthy, *William Morris: A Life for Our Time* (New York: Knopf, 1994), 275. The Morrises were then living in Queen's Square, Bloomsbury, in central London.
9. William Morris to Charles Faulkner, 17 May 1871, in Norman Kelvin, ed., *The Collected Letters of William Morris: Volume I, 1848–1880* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 133.
10. Simon Townley, ed., "Broadwell Parish: Kelmscott", in *A History of the County of Oxford: Volume 17* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer for the Institute of Historical Research, 2012), 111–145. *British History Online*, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/oxon/vol17/pp111-145. The Hobbs were also the Morris's landlords until Jane Morris bought the house in 1913.
11. Townley, "Broadwell Parish".
12. Tom Hassall, "The Kelmscott Landscape Project", in *William Morris's Kelmscott: Landscape and History*, ed. Alan Crossley, Tom Hassall, and Peter Salway (Bollington: Windgather Press in association with the Society of Antiquaries of London, 2007), 6–7; and John R. Gray, "An Industrialised Farm Estate in Berkshire", *Industrial Archaeology* 8, no. 2 (1971), 171–183. The enterprise was hopelessly overextended and failed during the prolonged agricultural depression of the 1870s. The buildings were pulled down by the early 1880s.
13. William Morris to Charles Faulkner, 17 May 1871, *The Collected Letters of William Morris: Volume I*, 133.
14. The side channel is now a very shallow backwater. It could still take boats in 1871 but, much to Morris's annoyance, it silted up after alterations to the main channel by the Thames Conservancy in 1882. J.W. Mackail, *The Life of William Morris* (New York: Dover Publications, 2013), 71.
15. May Morris, William's daughter, described her family as "'wet bobs', nearly as much at home on water as on dry land". Morris, "Introduction", xxxiv.
16. William Morris to Emma Morris, 13 April 1849, *Collected Letters Volume I*, 7. Morris was then at school at Marlborough College, which is flanked by the Kennet.
17. William Morris, "Frank's Sealed Letter", *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* 4 (April 1856): 231, *William Morris Archive*, http://morrisarchive.lib.uiowa.edu/proseromances-sealedletter.

18. Water meadow can be both a general term and a specific one. In this paper, I use the more general term to refer to all intermittently flooded, riverside grazing meadows. The Kennet water meadows were of the more specific type, with channels and sluices to control the periods of immersion.
19. In a letter, Morris wrote that, on a trip to Oxford, Ruskin "refused to enter into our enthusiasm for the country and green meadows: said that there were too many butter cups and it was like poached eggs". William Morris to Charles Fairfax Murray, 26 May 1875, *Collected Letters Volume I*, 254. Ruskin also famously criticized John Everett Millais for choosing to paint *Ophelia* in a Thames tributary landscape along the Hogsmill in Surrey. Joan Evans, *John Ruskin* (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1970), 186.
20. Morris was not alone in his preference; many other Victorian artists looked to the easily accessed landscapes of the Home Counties and Thames Valley for inspiration. See Barringer, "The Harvest Field in the Railway Age".
21. Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. reorganized into Morris & Co. in 1875. Most patterns produced by the Firm are not attributed in contemporary sources, meaning the exact number of patterns Morris designed in any period is not entirely clear. While Morris was the primary fabric and wallpaper designer of the Firm until about 1885, other designers made contributions. My attributions for textile designs are drawn from Linda Parry, *William Morris Textiles* (London: V&A Publishing, 2013). I draw some wallpaper attributions from records of the Victoria and Albert Museum, while others are my own hypotheses. Only one Morris & Co. pattern designed after 1885 can be positively attributed to Morris: the 1887 wallpaper *Willow Bough*.
22. May Morris, *William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist*, Vol. 2 (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1936), 36.
23. William Morris, "Some Hints on Pattern-Designing", in *The Collected Works of William Morris Volume XXII: Hopes and Fears for Art, Lectures on Art and Industry*, ed. May Morris (London: Longmans Green and Company, 1914), 176–177. The lecture was originally delivered to the Working Men's College at the Morris & Co. premises in Queen's Square in December 1881.
24. Morris, "Some Hints on Pattern-Designing", 179.
25. Morris, "Some Hints on Pattern-Designing", 195.
26. The nine patterns are: *Evenlode*, *Windrush*, *Kennet*, and *Wey* (1883); *Lodden*, *Wandle*, and *Cray* (1884); and *Lea* and *Medway* (1885).
27. See Caroline Arscott, "Morris: The River", in *William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones: Interlacings* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 177–201; and David Faldet, "The River at the Heart of Morris's Ecological Thought", in *Writing on the Image: Reading William Morris*, ed. David Latham (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 73–84.
28. The source of the Thames in Gloucestershire is only 360 feet (110 meters) above sea level.
29. Parry, *William Morris Textiles*, 62.
30. Arscott, "Morris", 189.
31. The effects of Morris's flattening and layering are complex, especially when considered within the multiple-layered space of the Victorian interior. I am in the processes of developing the subject in far greater depth for a book project.
32. Mark Robinson, "The Environmental Archaeology and Historical Ecology of Kelmscott", in *William Morris's Kelmscott: Landscape and History*, ed. Alan Crossley, Tom Hassall, and

Peter Salway (Bollington: Windgather Press, in association with the Society of Antiquaries of London, 2007), 29.

33. Morris, "Some Hints on Pattern-Designing", 200.
34. About two meters high.
35. The single and double designation for blooms is used by horticulturalists and botanists. Single blooms, as the term implies, have one layer of petals, but a double can have two or more. Generally, single blooms are wild species or closer to wild progenitors, and double blooms have been bred to that appearance.
36. The garden plants of Morris's designs are discussed in a number of books, most recently in Rowan Bain, *William Morris's Flowers* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2019).
37. This process is so common and has gone on for so long that botanists are unsure if some English countryside plants were originally wild or are centuries-old introductions from gardens. Snakeshead fritillary, discussed in more detail below, is one such case. Andy Byfield, "A Chequered History: The Snakeshead Fritillary", *The Guardian*, 26 April 2013, https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/gardening-blog/2013/apr/26/snakeshead-fritillary.
38. Paul Sterry and J.R. Press, *A Photographic Guide to Wildflowers of Britain and Europe* (London: New Holland, 2001), 72. A well-known example of a plant that grows on disturbed ground is the common poppy (*Papaver rhoeas*), a common meadow species which bloomed in such abundance on the soil of First World War battlefields.
39. Sterry and Press, *A Photographic Guide to Wildflowers of Britain and Europe*, 19.
40. Byfield, "A Chequered History".
41. Letter William Morris to Jane Morris, 5 April 1890, in *The Collected Letters of William Morris Volume III: 1889–1892*, ed. Norman Kelvin (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press: 1996), 152; and Diary entries, April 1895, British Library, Add MS 45407 B-45411.
42. "Ecology (n.)", *The Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ecology; and "Ecosystem (n.)", *The Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ecosystem.
43. Jason Edwards and Imogen Hart, "Introduction", in *Rethinking the Interior, c.1867–1896: Aestheticism and Arts and Crafts*, ed. Jason Edwards and Imogen Hart (Farnham: Ashgate, 2017), 13.
44. MacCarthy, *William Morris*, 111. The history of Morris & Co. production and sales can be complicated, especially for their first fifteen years of operation, but the Oxford Street shop opened in 1879 and the textiles were produced at the Firm's factory in Merton, southwest London, from 1881 onwards. The wallpapers were always printed by Jeffrey & Co. in Islington.
45. While works such as Linda Parry's *William Morris Textiles* and her essay "Interior Decoration" have documented some nineteenth-century Morris & Co. interiors, the availability of sources has restricted broader and more critical study; see Parry, "Interior Decoration", in *William Morris*, ed. Anna Mason (London: Thames & Hudson and V&A, 2021), 160–181. Works on the subject tend to concentrate either on large-scale interior commissions by the Firm or on well-documented "artistic" interiors such as those of the Ionides and Howard families, Edward Linley Sambourne, and Emery Walker—members of Morris's social circle and, in some cases, close family friends. This material reflects cohesive Morris & Co. designs and the tastes of Morris's circle. It cannot, however, fully represent the consumption or reception of Morris designs, because it excludes the myriad customers who bought the Firm's goods in smaller amounts and whose homes were not documented in the

same ways. While many of these consumers were likely of "artistic" taste themselves, we know very little about them. If records of their interiors do exist, they will be scattered in family photographs, letters, diaries, and Morris & Co. sales ledgers. Additionally, scholarship to date has concentrated on documentation and has not interrogated how even the most well-known consumers thought about Morris & Co. objects or their designer. Thus, the use and reception of Morris & Co. products is due for an extensive critical study, one which might engage with the breadth of the Firm's audience and the complexity of the objects themselves.

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