A Catalogue of the Original Designs by Morris and Company in the Collection of the William Morris Society

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PART II (A): WALLPAPERS

There are seven designs for wallpapers in the Society's collection: Larkspur (1872), Jasmine (1872), Sunflower (1879), two designs for Pink and Poppy (1880), Grafton (1883) and Honeysuckle (1883). The first six are indisputably the work of William Morris but Honeysuckle was probably designed by his younger daughter May.

Morris's first wallpapers, Daisy and Trellis, were designed in 1862 but not issued until 1864. Fruit or Pomegranate, which is clearly related, has been shown by Lesley Hoskins (below, p. 206, L.3) to be rather later, c.1866. The delay in issuing the first papers may have been caused by Morris's initial attempts to print them himself from etched zinc plates, a technical innovation which proved to be a failure. Henceforward all Morris's own designs were printed from wood-blocks, cut by Barretts of Bethnal Green, by the well-established firm of Jeffrey & Company of Islington. Morris defended his practice of wood-block printing, rather than the less expensive machine-printing, on the grounds of density of colour and longevity, remarking, with some justification, that such papers would last a lifetime.

These first three papers were naturalistic, contrary to contemporary trends which favoured geometric patterns. Peter Floud, in his pioneering article, 'The Wallpaper Designs of William Morris' (1960), wrote that they 'must have seemed deplorably old-fashioned to “advanced” followers of Owen Jones, while warming the hearts of conservative house-wives', but in fact they seem to have been particularly popular in artistic circles. Lord Leighton, the illustrator Linley Sambourne and George Du Maurier all purchased the Fruit paper and the latter used recognisable versions of these early designs in his Punch cartoons satirising the Aesthetic Movement.

The early papers were followed, between 1868-71, by four adaptations of eighteenth and early nineteenth-century papers and one design, Diaper, taken from a Morris tile. The absence of original papers in this period may result from the
conservative approach of George Warington Taylor (1835–70), appointed the Firm’s business manager in 1865, who advised that further wallpaper production should depend upon domestic demand and indeed questioned the need for the four adapted papers. The original samples for the adaptations were provided by architects and their role in designing the new versions is somewhat confused. Indian has been attributed to George Gilbert Scott, Jnr. (1839–97) (Hoskins, below, p. 207, L.4) on the basis of Warington Taylor’s reference, in a letter to Philip Webb, to ‘Scott’s Indian’ but it is generally assumed that ‘Townshend’s Queen Anne’ simply refers to a sample of older paper provided by the architect Charles Townshend.

In 1871 Morris resumed designing original papers with Scroll (1871), Larkspur (1872) and Jasmine (1872) which share naturalistic organic patterns far more sophisticated than those of the early papers. Scroll and Jasmine in particular are distinguished by complex under-patterns upon which a swirling surface design is super-imposed. The underprint of Scroll was sufficiently independent of the overall design to be issued separately as Branch but in Jasmine Morris successfully integrated the under and surface patterns.

Bibliography.
R. Watkinson, William Morris as a Designer, (1967).

D1. William Morris.
Design for Larkspur wallpaper 1871–2.
pencil and black watercolour; 36 x 47 cm. (irregular).
stencilled verso: 13B Larkspur. Merton Abbey.

The design conforms to the printed version (Clark, above, p. 11) with the exception of a thistle which has been replaced with a larkspur. The paper was issued in monochrome in 1872 and polychrome in 1874; a chintz was printed from the design in 1875 and it was later woven as a silk damask in 1876. As with the majority of designs in the collection the Merton Abbey stencil was applied later, after the move from Queen Square to Merton in 1881.

Design for Jasmine wallpaper 1871-2.
pencil and watercolour; 90.3 x 64.1 cm.
stencilled verso: Jasmine 10. Merton Abbey.
versions: Birmingham City Art Gallery, B410’41. Two further designs are in the collection of Standford Berger.
Design for *Sunflower* wallpaper 1877–9.
pencil and watercolour; 101.7 x 68.7 cm.
inscribed verso: Wallpaper Sunflower 125.
printed version, Clark, p. 25.

D2. William Morris.
Design for *Pink and Poppy* wallpaper 1880.
pencil and brown watercolour; 101 x 67.9 cm.
inscribed recto: top left, April 1880 Machine Wall Paper.
inscribed verso: Pink and Poppy 26A Merton Abbey.
*Pink and Poppy* is also known simply as *Poppy*, the title preferred by Clark (Clark, p. 27).

The design conforms to the printed version (Clark, above, p. 12) but the Birmingham drawing (repr. R. Watkinson, *William Morris as a Designer*, 1967, pl. 73) is more finished.

By 1877–9, when Morris produced *Sunflower*, he had mastered all the intricacies of flat-pattern designing and increased his repertoire of styles whilst, with the exception of ceiling papers, retaining nature as his inspiration. He had also begun using ‘turnover’ patterns which stemmed from his experience of designing woven textiles from 1876. According to Fiona Clark (above) *Sunflower* is the most rigid vertical turnover pattern used by Morris for a wallpaper.

Design for *Pink and Poppy* wallpaper 1880.
pen, pencil and watercolour; 107.8 x 68.8 cm.
inscribed recto: top left, April 1880, Machine Wall Paper.
inscribed verso: Pink and Poppy Wallpaper No. 26.
stencilled verso: Pink and Poppy Wallpaper 26 Merton Abbey.

Although D2 is a monochrome design, Monk and Gooch (op. cit.) p. 58, argue convincingly that it is a later version of the design than D6 as it more closely resembles the printed paper (Clark, p. 27). Despite the inscription, ‘Machine Wall Paper’, on both the designs, the paper was printed by wood-block when issued in 1881.

D5. William Morris.
Design for *Grafton* wallpaper c.1883.
pencil, watercolour and body-colour; 68.8 x 45 cm.
inscribed recto: top left, Grafton; lower right, leave out pins.
stencilled verso: Crafton (sic) 35 Merton Abbey.

The design includes the background dots of colour which would have been printed with brass pins hammered into the wood-block. The instruction to leave them out, inscribed on the drawing, was obeyed and the printed wallpaper, issued in 1883, (Clark, p. 31), lacks the dotted background. Morris first used the technique in Pink and Poppy (1880) and it appears in many of the later papers, particularly those designed in 1884–5 and 1889–90. Grafton, alone among Morris’s designs, resembles a stencilled pattern.

D7. Attributed to May Morris.
Design for Honeysuckle wallpaper c.1879-83.
pencil and watercolour; 99.6 x 68.6 cm.
inscribed recto: top left, Machine Wallpaper. Honeysuckle.
inscribed verso: Honeysuckle 34 Merton Abbey.

The design must date from between the date on the Whatman paper on which it is drawn (1879) and the date of issue in 1883. Monk and Gooch (op. cit.) attribute the design to Morris on stylistic grounds but this is hard to substantiate in the face of other evidence. The paper was first illustrated in an article about May Morris in Woman’s World, 1890, p. 122, where it is credited to William Morris, but according to Barbara Morris (Morris & Co., Arts Council, above), who attributed the design to May, this was a mis-attribution caused by a printer’s error. By c.1909 it is credited to May Morris in Morris & Co.’s trade catalogues. The attribution to May is accepted by Ray Watkinson (above) although he points out that it is dissimilar to her later wallpaper designs. Further argument for attribution to May, by omission, is the paper’s exclusion from the otherwise comprehensive list of Morris’s wallpapers in Aymer Vallance’s The Art of William Morris: A Record (1897) and from Fiona Clark’s catalogue (see above).

The design is remarkably assured for a young and relatively inexperienced designer (May was at most twenty-two when it was drawn) and it is tempting to suggest that it may be the work of Kate Faulkner. However, in the absence of further evidence, the balance of probability supports May’s authorship.

D5. Design for Grafton wallpaper, c.1883.

D6. Design for Pink and Poppy wallpaper, 1880.
D32. Design for Windrush chintz, 1882.
The Society owns two textile designs by Morris, Bird of 1878 and Windrush of 1883. A third design, for St. James Palace silk damask of 1881 is now missing from the collection.

The Firm’s first textiles were printed in 1868 when Morris commissioned Thomas Clarkson of the Bannister Hall Print Works, near Preston, Lancashire, to supply block-printed textiles from designs which they had first printed between 1830-35 which were later described by May Morris as ‘novelties’. By doing so he was repeating the practice adopted for the wallpapers of 1868-71 which were also derived from earlier existing patterns and one can only speculate that the Firm was attempting, economically and speedily, to supply a demand from the domestic market which had been ignored during the early years of the Company. The first of his own designs, Jasmine Trellis (1868-70), which has affinities with the early wallpapers, was contemporaneous. Both Jasmine Trellis and his second design, the far more sophisticated Tulip and Willow (1873) were manufactured by Clarkson’s but their work proved unsatisfactory and from 1875 until 1881, Morris conducted a sometimes stormy collaboration with the printer and dyer Thomas Wardle of Leek. After the move to Merton Abbey in 1881 Morris & Co. were able to manufacture printed textiles in-house, although Wardle continued to print many early patterns.

Windrush was designed during one of Morris’s most creative and prolific periods and was among the first four of his nine designs named after rivers, most of them, like Windrush, tributaries of the Thames. They date from 1883-1885 and share, with the exception of Lodden (1884) and Lea (1885), variants on a common meandering line which dominates the design; the flowing line itself may have suggested the titles. Once again it was the pioneering work by Peter Floud which related these designs to a piece of seventeenth century Genoese velvet which was acquired by the South Kensington Museum in 1883 (V&A, 442A-1883) which Morris believed to be fifteenth century, although Linda Parry has observed (William Morris, V&A, 1996, p. 263) that two earlier Morris designs, Rose and Thistle and Madras Muslin, both of 1881, share similar characteristics. Morris’s design combines both realistic and formalised floral designs, the latter, a pattern contained within a flower-head, which Morris described as ‘the inhabited leaf’, was an Eastern, particularly Persian, motif which he had first used in the Bird and Vine woven fabric of 1879. According to May Morris, somewhat fancifully, the textile was ‘named in memory of pleasant summer journeys along the Windrush valley’ (William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist, 1936, I, p. 45).

Bibliography.

The textile was registered on 18 October 1883 (Clark, p. 23) and the blocks are in the collection of the William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow.

Morris made his first design for woven textiles in 1876, eight years after his first printed textile. Since he considered ‘The craft (of designing woven textiles) is a nobler one than paper-staining or cotton-printing’ (‘Some Hints on Pattern Designing’, 1881) we may deduce that his delay stemmed from technical and economic factors. The first fabrics were woven by outside contractors, never a particularly happy arrangement to Morris’s mind, and it was not until 1887 that Morris was able to produce his own designs, when he employed a French weaver, M. Bazin, to work a hand-operated Jacquard loom installed in the Great Ormond Street Annexe to Queen Square. From thenceforward outside contractors were only used if the quantity of material or manufacturing technique was beyond the capabilities of the Queen Square and, after 1881, Merton Abbey equipment.

*Bird*, which Morris was to use to furnish his own drawing-room at Kelmscott House, was among the very first textiles to be woven at Queen Square. In a letter of 25 March 1877, to Thomas Wardle (Kelvin, I, p. 358), Morris, after mentioning M. Bazin’s arrival, writes ‘I am studying birds now to see if I can’t get some of them into my next design’. *Bird* was the first of several designs, for both woven and printed textiles, drawn between 1878 and 1883, to contain pairs of identical birds. They were inspired by sixteenth and seventeenth century Italian woven silks, in the V&A, which he claimed in ‘Textile Fabrics’ (1884) successfully combined ‘the wild fantasy and luxurious intricacy of the East with the straight-forward story-telling imagination . . . of medieval Europe’ (Parry, *William Morris*, V&A, 1996, above). Morris defended the formal, almost heraldic turn-over patterns of his woven fabrics in ‘Some Hints on Pattern Designing’ (1881) writing: ‘You will not be hampered by any necessity for masking the construction of your pattern, both because your stuff is pretty sure to be used falling into folds, and will be wrought in such material that is beautiful in itself, more or less; so that there will be a play of light and shade on it, which will give subordinate incident and minimise the risk of hardness’.

May recorded the appearance of the hangings in the Kelmscott House drawing-room: ‘The walls of the room were furnished with the Bird hanging – a perfect blue with pale gleams of colour in the birds and foliage’ (Preface to volume XIII of the *Collected Works*, 1910–15) and rhapsodised over the design in *William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist* (1936, I, p. 49) writing: ‘The Bird wool hanging is the more intimate and friendly (compared to *Peacock and Dragon*) pattern to live with: a lovely blue ground, the pattern is lighter blue, the doves with shining
necks and pink toes. Perhaps of all the wall-decorations this is the most “Morris-y”.' She later presented some of the Kelmscott hangings to the V&A.

D31. William Morris.
Design for Bird double woven wool fabric; 1877–78.
pencil and watercolour; 101.6 x 68.2 cm.
inscribed recto: top left, The Property of Morris & Co. 26 Queen Square Bloomsbury, London WC (ink); 3 ply hangings. bird pattern (pencil).
inscribed verso: No. 7A Bird Pattern.

Compiler’s Note: In Part I of this Catalogue I listed the whereabouts of copies of A Study and Catalog of Morris and Company Designs in the Collection of the William Morris Center, London (1978), by George Monk and Walter Gooch, on which this catalogue is based. I have since received a kind letter from George Monk who points out that in addition to copies in private hands the Catalog was also deposited with Stanford Art Gallery, USA, and the Birmingham City Art Gallery and Museum in England.

I would like to thank Linda Parry for reading the draft of this Catalogue.