

Blackwell The Arts & Crafts House

Blackwell
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Open daily 10.30am - 5.00pm

Admission: Adult - £6.50
Children over 5 and
Full-time Students - £3.80
Family - £17.25

Press Information

William Morris: A Sense of Place

Exhibition 26 June - 17 October 2010

Morris's sense of place is the unifying thread which runs through this comprehensive exhibition at Blackwell, The Arts & Crafts House. Covering Morris's domestic life, design work and writings, his feelings about the wider environment of countryside and city and conservation work the exhibition investigates Morris's instinctive 'feel for place' which became an underlying factor in his wellbeing, creativity and ideas on a fairer society.

Designs, textiles, books, samples and personal objects have been collected by Curator, Dr Kathy Haslam from public and private collections to illustrate the life and work of the Father of the Arts & Crafts, displaying them in the beautiful surroundings of one of the finest surviving Arts & Crafts houses in Britain.

Morris's early/childhood homes were key to forming his precocious sense of place and the love of nature that underpinned his subsequent life and thinking. Morris's formative years will be illustrated with references to Woodford Hall and Water House in Walthamstow, close to the ancient Epping Forest which inspired Morris with its natural beauty and the appeal of being a survival of past ages .

Material illustrating his adult life, sharing lodgings with Edward Burne-Jones at Red Lion Square, and his first married home, Red House in Bexleyheath which he planned to make "the beautifullest place on earth" will show how Morris's taste developed and how this home became the focus of creativity for Morris and his friends, a place of fellowship and happiness that all would look back on in later years with great affection. The Red House idyll came to an end in 1865 and the family moved to London. By 1871 Morris had began looking for "a little house out of London" and discovered Kelmscott Manor, describing it as "a heaven on earth". Morris's harboured utopian visions for the infusion of inspiration, through art and nature, into everyday life. The industrial society into which Britain had evolved by the mid-nineteenth century represented inequality, exploitation and ugliness to Morris, setting him on the path to Socialism and the foundation of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings.

With the expansion of Morris & Co. Morris set about searching for a site suitable for textile production on a larger scale, finding Merton Abbey, a former silk-weaving factory. Morris's criteria combined the practical and romantic; he was unable to work in an environment that he could not also take pleasure in, and the Merton Abbey site felt 'right' to Morris. With his instinct for place, he declared that Merton would "fit us like an old shoe".

Sadly, there was for Morris a sense of being condemned to live in a place and time already too compromised by the stamp of industrialisation and the social inequalities that went with it. In his writings, many of which were printed as part of his final great endeavour, the Kelmscott Press, Morris created entire Utopian countries and societies - Blackwell remains one of these ideal environments amongst an irreversibly industrialised world. Sadly, there was for Morris a sense of being condemned to live in a place and time already too compromised by the stamp of industrialisation and the social inequalities that went with it. In his writings, many of which were printed as part of his final great endeavour, the Kelmscott Press, Morris created entire Utopian countries and societies - Blackwell remains one of these ideal environments amongst an ever increasingly irreversibly industrialised world.

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