



The Hollow Land

William Morris

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William Morris (24 March 1834 – 3 October 1896) was an English textile designer, poet, novelist, translator, and socialist activist. Associated with the British Arts and Crafts Movement, he was a major contributor to the revival of traditional British textile arts and methods of production. His literary contributions helped to establish the modern fantasy genre, while he played a significant role in propagating the early socialist movement in Britain. Born in Walthamstow, Essex, to a wealthy middle-class family, Morris came under the strong influence of medievalism while studying Classics at Oxford University, there joining the Birmingham Set. After university he trained as an architect, married Jane Burden, and developed close friendships with the Pre-Raphaelite artists Edward Burne-Jones and Dante Gabriel Rossetti and with the Neo-Gothic architect Philip Webb. Webb and Morris designed a family home, Red House, then in Kent, where the latter lived from 1859 to 1865, before relocating to Bloomsbury, central London. In 1861, Morris founded a decorative arts firm with Burne-Jones, Rossetti, Webb, and others: the Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. Becoming highly fashionable and much in demand, the firm profoundly influenced interior decoration throughout the Victorian period, with Morris designing tapestries, wallpaper, fabrics, furniture, and stained glass windows. In 1875, Morris assumed total control of the company, which was renamed Morris & Co. Although retaining a main home in London, from 1871 Morris rented the rural retreat of Kelmscott Manor, Oxfordshire. Greatly influenced by visits to Iceland, with Eiríkr Magnússon he produced a series of English-language translations of Icelandic Sagas. He also achieved success with the publication of his epic poems and novels, namely *The Earthly Paradise* (1868–1870), *A Dream of John Ball* (1888), the utopian *News from Nowhere* (1890), and the fantasy romance *The Well at the World's End* (1896). In 1877 he founded the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings to campaign against the damage caused by architectural restoration. Embracing Marxism and influenced by anarchism, in the 1880s Morris became a committed revolutionary socialist activist; after an involvement in the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), he founded the Socialist League in 1884, but broke with that organization in 1890. In 1891 he founded the Kelmscott Press to publish limited-edition, illuminated-style print books, a cause to which he devoted his final years. Morris is recognised as one of the most significant cultural figures of Victorian Britain; though best known in his lifetime as a poet, he posthumously became better known for his designs. Founded in 1955, the William Morris Society is devoted to his legacy, while multiple biographies and studies of his work have seen publication (font: Wikipedia).

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