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Kelmscott House. Hammersmith, London.

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H-Museum subscribers interested in William Morris (1834-1896) are probably familiar with the William Morris Gallery at Walthamstow (northeast London), the Gallery (in fact a substantial museum run by the London council authorities) being the large house in which he spent a large part of his youth, from 1848 to 1856.[1] But they may not have paid Kelmscott House the attention which it deserves. <p> Kelmscott House, a plain Georgian brick dwelling which was William Morris's London home from 1878 to his death in 1896, is located on the banks of the Thames in the West London borough of Hammersmith. The house is now the property of the William Morris Society, which rents out the upper floors for income, keeping the basement and coach house as its headquarters. The Society, however, is too modest in its literature, as it does not indicate that the rooms are more than a mere administrative office. Though it is not a "proper" museum, Kelmscott House holds a lot of museographic interest. The first room which one enters from outside contains a Morris relic of outstanding interest, namely one of the two magnificent second-hand iron Albion hand-presses which he bought when he decided to turn to printing in 1891. <p> The central room is now a library open to bona fide William Morris scholars. The books are not directly accessible—one has to use old-fashioned index cards and ask a very helpful Society volunteer to go and get the actual books from the reserves, which only takes a few minutes. This precaution is justified by the fact that many of the works are extremely precious: first editions, fragile pamphlets, and deluxe bindings in vellum or by twentieth-century British designer-bookbinders. This is the place to go if you actually want to have an inkling of what Kelmscott Press hand-made paper felt like—in conventional William Morris museums his books are in glass show-cases. The furniture in this reading room is associated with the Arts

& Crafts movement, so dear to William Morris. <p> Then, after climbing a few steps, one reaches the historic coach house, first used by Morris for making carpets, and later the seat of the Hammersmith Socialist Society, his breakaway faction (1890) from the Socialist League founded (by Morris and others) in 1884, which he now found overly dominated by Anarchists. The orators who gave the solemn Sunday evening lectures on Socialism in that coach house included Annie Besant, Kropotkin, G. B. Shaw and the Webbs, and among the younger members of the audience one could sometimes see Gustav Holst (the composer of "The Planets"), H. G. Wells, Oscar Wilde, and W. B. Yeats. Various group photographs and autograph letters by these activists are displayed on the walls, together with an assortment of William Morris tapestries and designs, and other mementoes, like a "Sussex chair" made by Morris & Co. A replica of the Hammersmith Socialist Society banner made by a member of the William Morris Society hangs near the glazed sliding door of the coach house. <p> The researcher visiting Kelmscott House will also find on sale there a large selection of hard-to-find pamphlets and printed lectures and essays on William Morris, some published by small "private presses," others published by the William Morris Society itself (notably past issues of its excellent Journal), and most of them unobtainable in conventional bookshops. <p> At Number 16, a few yards from Kelmscott House along the Thames, one can see the house which William Morris rented from January 1891 as the printing shop where he set up his Kelmscott Press—the press which produced the superbly decorated books in the old style with which his name is associated, many copies of them now being in the Library at Kelmscott House. <p> Kelmscott House does therefore undoubtedly deserve a special trip to Hammersmith for the serious William Morris enthusiast, but anybody interested in

the Arts & Crafts movement or the British Socialist movement or both will find a visit rewarding—the more so as it is situated in quiet unspoilt surroundings, with architecturally interesting old dwellings around it. An added incentive is that one is not disturbed by noisy crowds: I was the only caller when I went, and the Visitors' Book indicates that this is very common. <p> Note <p> [1]. William Morris Gallery at Walthamstow (northeast London), <http://www.lbwf.gov.uk/wmg/home.htm>. <p>

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