

KELMSCOTT MANOR, THE HOME OF WILLIAM MORRIS  
AND ITS REPAIR FOR THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES OF LONDON

Kelmscott Manor stands in the remote river plain landscape of the upper reaches of the Thames in Oxfordshire; a region of old stone buildings protected by great clusters of elms. Although the name 'Manor' has no historical justification, it indicates the importance of the house to the neighbouring village; a small quiet settlement of cottages and barns, built of the local Cotswold stone and slate and with a strong affinity to its landscape. The Manor is surrounded by its own collection of outbuildings, two splendid and almost cathedral-like barns, a dovecote, a privy; all the necessary appurtenances of an English yeoman farmer's house. The scenery, although not spectacular, is beauti-

ful in its own way, with splendid wide skies above the gentle meandering river: moss and lichens grow readily on the stones, and the buildings are in harmonious repose with their surroundings.

Kelmscott Manor is of two dates; the main earlier part was built in about 1570, and the later additions were made in 1670. Building methods and styles in this Cotswolds region remained virtually unchanged for several centuries, although the 17th-century additions, with their classical pediments over the windows and their more splendid panelled interiors, show how the Renaissance had made its mark even in this remote area. The Turner family, whose arms appear on the

Fig. 1. — Kelmscott Manor from the north west, after renovation.



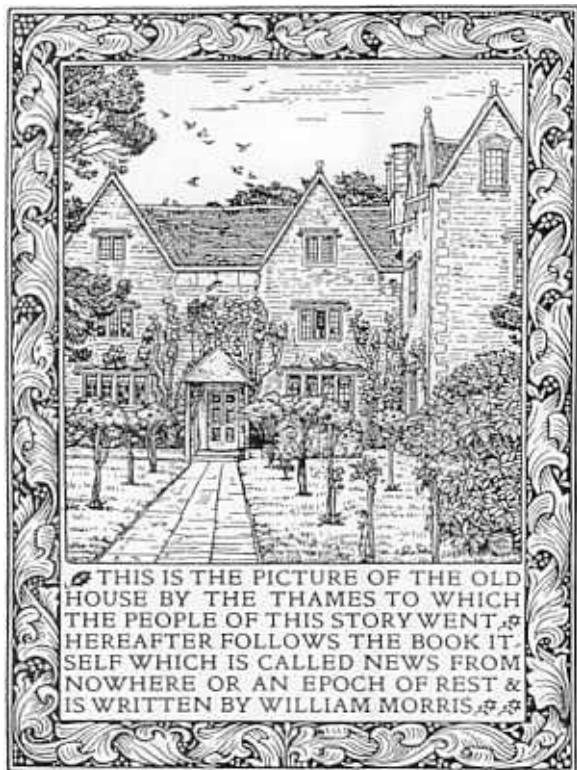


Fig. 2. — Frontispiece of *News from Nowhere*, showing the east front of Kelmscott (Kelmscott Press 1892) as drawn by C. M. Gere. The border was designed by Morris. The 17th-century wing is on the right.

chimney-pieces of the later rooms, rented and later owned the house for most of its life. It was from a branch of this family that in 1871, William Morris and Dante Gabriel Rossetti took a joint tenancy of the house.

Morris needed a country retreat from the enormous and increasing pressures of his life in London, as most people do, and fell in love with Kelmscott on first sight. He wrote :

"I have been looking about for a house for the wife and Kids and whither do you guess my eye is turned now ? Kelmscott, a little village about two miles above Radcott Bridge — a heaven on earth."

Morris continued to rent the Manor and spent more and more of his time there until his untimely death in 1896 at the age of 62.

Some years later, his widow Janey bought the house with some acres about it, and it duly passed to their younger daughter, May, who lived there until her death in 1938. May was a woman of strong character who idealised her father and was determined that the Manor should remain as it had been during his life. Accordingly, in her will, she bequeathed the house to the Univer-

sity of Oxford together with a small endowment, making extremely strict conditions regarding its use and repair. Paradoxically, under these stringencies it became in fact increasingly difficult for the house to be maintained as a living memorial to Morris. It was obviously desirable that the house should continue to function as a true family home, whilst at the same time providing public access to the possessions of Morris and his circle. But under the terms of May Morris's will, it proved impossible to carry out proper repairs or to provide modern comforts and improvements. No tenant would pay an economic rent for a house with such restrictions and such lack of amenities. Thus it declined, until eventually in 1960 the University were able, by complex legal manoeuvres, to prove the will invalid. They then required the Manor to pass into the hands of the residuary trustees of May Morris, the Society of Antiquaries of London.

The new Owners, released from the restrictive will, decided that the house must be thoroughly and sympathetically repaired and modernised, whilst maintaining and improving the public access to the rooms most closely associated with Morris. This work has now been completed; and the house truly lives again, both

Fig. 3. — William Morris, aged about 53.



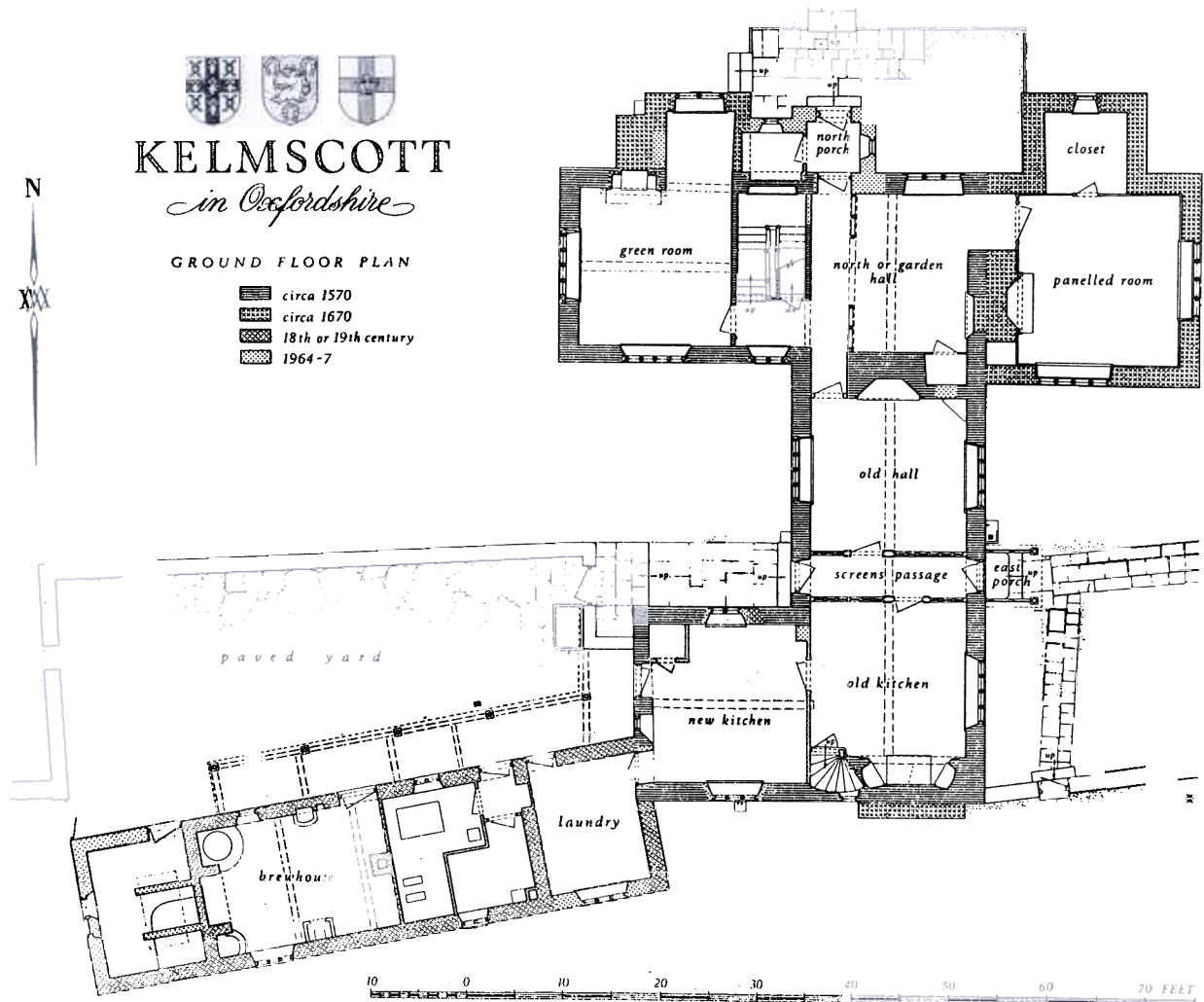
as a pleasing country home and as a memorial to Morris. That this is so, is due to the altruism of the Society of Antiquaries, who most admirably put far more into the enterprise than could ever be justified in terms of financial return.

Kelmscott, although a beautiful house in an idyllic setting, is neither large, nor stately, nor architecturally remarkable. Its wide reputation is in fact due almost entirely to its association with William Morris during his most active period. Already established as free thinker, designer and craftsman, Morris had also turned his attention to the conservation of historic buildings. In a letter to the Athenaeum of the 10th March 1877, he protested against the harsh and insensitive Victorian restoration that every Parish Church was suffering, and pleaded for a society to be formed to protect old buildings from these 'acts of barbarism'.

"What I wish for therefore, is that an association should be set on foot to keep a watch on old monuments, to protest against all 'restoration' that means more than keeping out wind and weather, and, by all means, literary and other, to awaken a feeling that our ancient buildings are not mere ecclesiastical toys, but sacred monuments of the nation's growth and hope."

On the 22nd March 1877 the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, affectionately from its birth called 'Anti Scrape', was formed by Morris, who acted as its first Secretary and enlisted the help of many eminent people of the time. Morris's manifesto for the Society remains today unaltered, the aims, ideals and challenges of the Society being unchanged nearly a century later. Morris indeed laid down the whole foundation of much of the modern philosophy and practice in the care of old buildings.

Fig. 4. Ground Floor plan of Kelmscott after renovation.



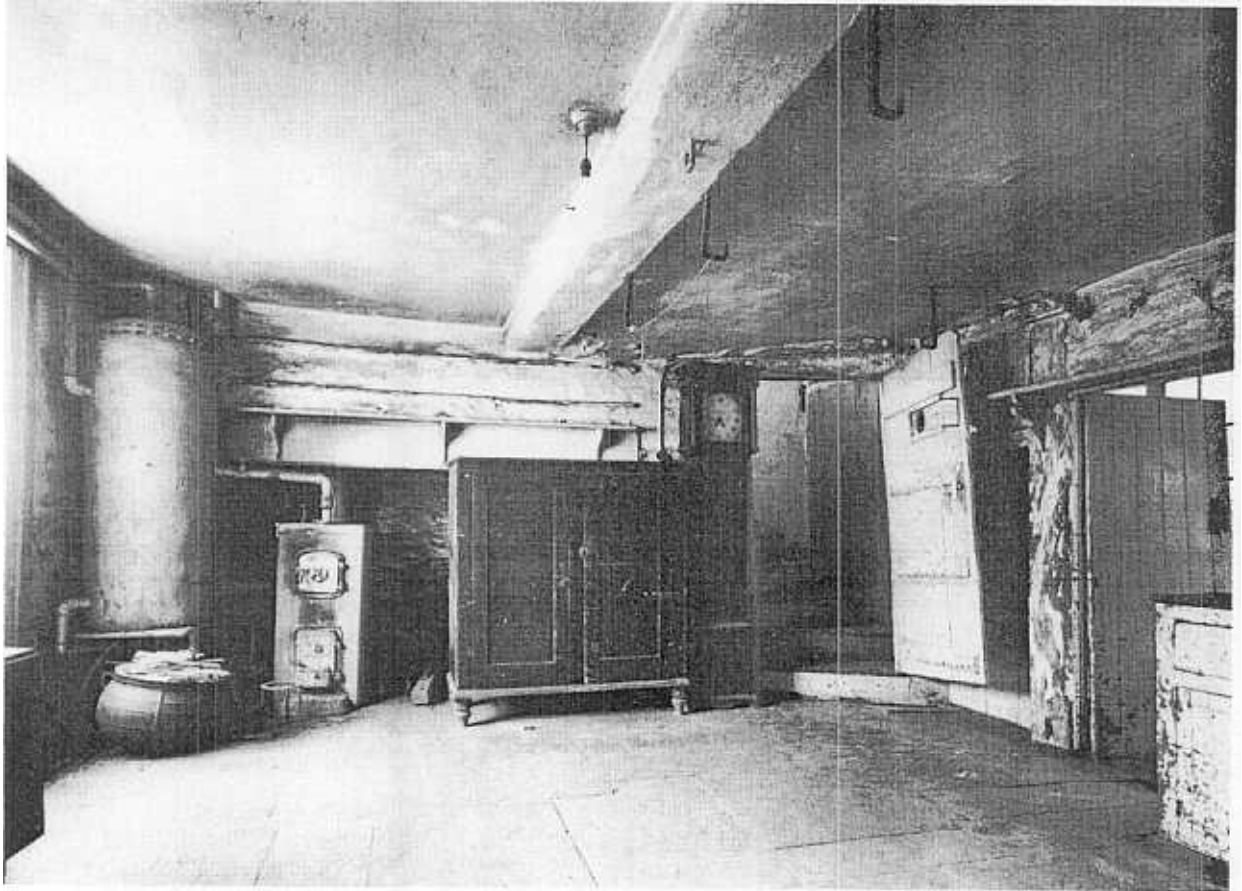
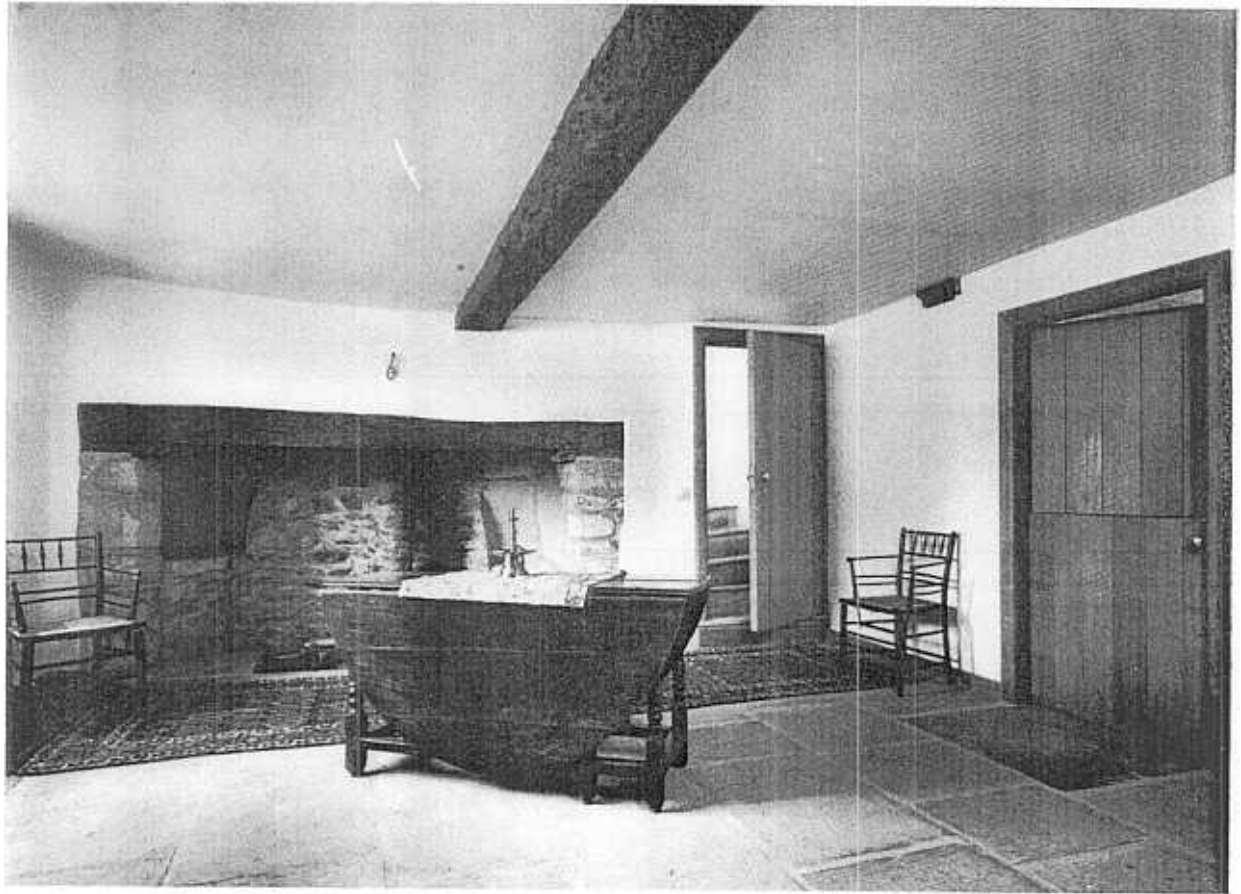


Fig. 5, 6. — The old kitchen, before work started (left) and after completion (right).

The main message of this manifesto for the S.P.A.B. is simple; to treat old buildings with sensitivity and humility and with a conservative hand, preserving everything possible of value from their past. The energies of the time were being directed almost exclusively to the conjectural restoration of the great Medieval Churches, by which their history was stripped away to an arbitrary point in time. In practice today, there are considerable difficulties in rigidly applying Morris's principles to the alteration or conversion of houses like Kelmscott. Modernisation is often the only practical means by which they can be saved, and some signs of history must be sacrificed. In such cases therefore, it is necessary both to interpret and to develop Morris's philosophy, and individual compromise must result. But the basis of the manifesto remains totally valid; there must be absolute conviction of the priceless and irreplaceable value of our old buildings and of the necessity to conserve them and to continue their living history.

The commission, in 1968, to work upon Morris's own home was indeed a challenge. The brief was admirably clear and direct — to repair the building, to rationalise its twin functions of family home and showplace for the Morris possessions, and to provide good modern facilities for each. In practice, the work was unusually difficult, due mainly to the advanced result of neglect upon a basically vulnerable construction. But the first need, to rationalise Kelmscott's planning problems, was comparatively simple.

The plan of the original house was very typical of its time, a half 'H' or as Morris put it, "In plan the shape of an 'E' with the tongue cut out". The main entrance led into a screened passage leading right through the house, serving a simple arrangement of rooms. The larger 17th-century rooms with sympathetic classical details were added in a square block at the north east corner. The arrangement of the house had been a problem since the days when it was first opened to the public after May Morris's death. Broadly



speaking, the central and south sections are the tenant's living rooms. The North rooms are those especially associated with Morris and his circle, which contain their possessions, and are thus the showrooms. The prime difficulty was that these two functions were hopelessly confused. The public visiting the Morris rooms had necessarily to enter through the east domestic door, straight into and through the private part of the house. They then went upstairs to the Morris rooms at the north end, but to get to the great Attics, had to retrace their path through the private part of the house, to the south circular stairs and then back again. With the increasing public interest in Morris, it was obvious that more visitors would be coming to Kelmscott and that the circulation had to be re-ordered. The solution was happily quite straightforward and involved no new physical barrier between the two halves of the house. At the north end, a new porch entry for visitors was added, designed in the still valid Cotswold vernacular. This restores the doorway to its

former and rightful position, and incorporates a small cloakroom for the use of visitors. To give access to the attic from the north end of the upper floor, a split stair was inserted, of the only type that would go in the space available. These arrangements enable the visitor to enter and leave at the north end, thus maintaining the privacy of the domestic south section of the house.

The private living quarters had become seriously ill-equipped for modern living standards. The main feature of the Kitchen was its only fitting apart from a shabby sink — a monstrous and obsolete heating boiler. Attempts had been made to improve sanitary conveniences by adding a cloakroom with a cheap pseudo-Gothic door. This however was badly placed, blocking the original screens passage doorway to the rear of the house. The solitary first floor Bathroom contained antiquated fittings, and when formed had been given an ugly and inharmonious window, conspicuously placed upon the entrance front. All services were minimal





Fig. 7, 8. — The east bathroom before and after re-conditioning. The wallpaper, here and elsewhere in the Manor, is a modern



reprint from Morris' original blocks, produced by Messrs. Sanderson Ltd.

and obsolete, doors and fittings mainly so worn as to be unserviceable and decorations virtually non-existent. Some of the rooms had been sub-divided with cheap partitioning, and a fine and unusual 17th-century oak screen had been removed from the north Entrance Hall and patched up to partition a bedroom. External doors and windows had been blocked, interchanged or altered, resulting in architectural anarchy.

The private accommodation was accordingly re-ordered and equipped to a good standard of present day convenience. A new Kitchen was formed in the former Scullery, and the old Kitchen was converted into a Dining Room. The intrusive cloakroom was demolished and a new one formed in the service wing. Three new Bathrooms were formed, and fully adequate services were installed, together with central heating, the latter being underfloor in the principal ground floor rooms.

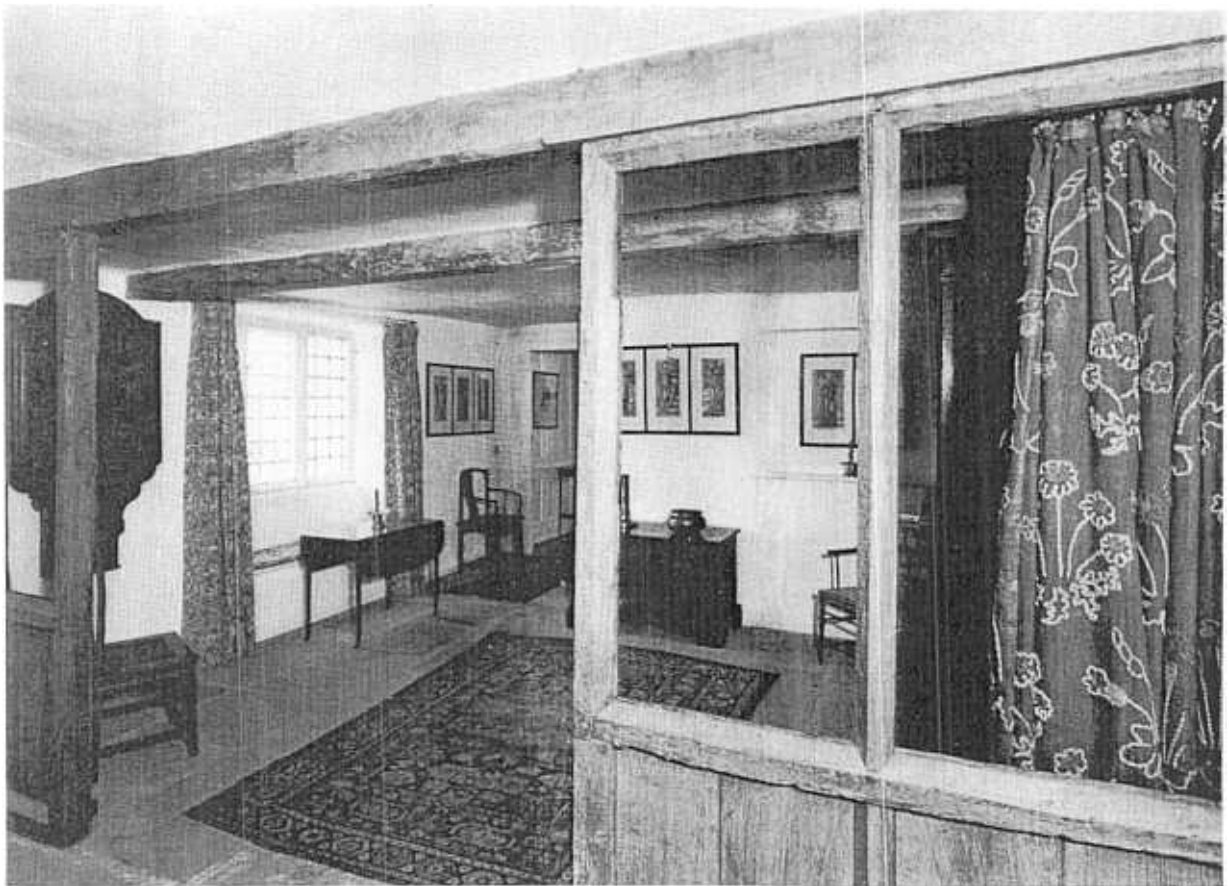
Disfiguring partitions were removed to reinstate the original room arrangements, and the 17th-century screen was restored to its rightful position. Later windows were removed and altered originals reinstated. Spacious, convenient and delightful living accommodation has resulted, fully evocative of the original interiors, and harmony has returned to the exteriors.

Whilst rationalisation of the planning of Kelmscott Manor was a comparatively simple matter, its structural repair produced many problems, due to extensive and serious defects. When first inspected in 1963, the house was a melancholy sight. Signs of decay were everywhere, from the ravages of damp at ground level, destroying floor carpets and wall plaster alike, to the holes in the stone roof slating, patched with roofing felt but still admitting the rain. This was not the "slow and gentle decay" of which Morris once wrote, but an altogether more savage and destructive attack.

As always, most of the problems had resulted from the natural ageing of structure and materials, accelerating far beyond the degree of repair and maintenance which the building had received. But inherent weaknesses in its original construction also made it all the more vulnerable to the normal processes of ageing. This was not a first apparent, and the building's superficial defects tended often to mask the seriousness of its more deep-seated problems. These could only be fully revealed by deep probing. It was thus characteristic of Kelmscott's ailments that the further they were exposed, the worse they were seen to be. Problems associated with the external stone walls of the house were a case in point. They are thick and massive and appear strong. But when opened up, their construction proved to be no more than a sandwich of thin inner and outer skins of small stones, unbonded

and filled with a core of river mud and pebble. Paradoxically, this non-homogeneous construction had largely enabled the building to survive for four centuries the wet and unstable ground of its riverside site. The resultant unequal foundation settlement would almost certainly have caused severe and damaging cracks in a more monolithic construction. But the lack of bond and the weak lime mortar joints of the walls meant that movement could be taken up relatively harmlessly by the gradual re-adjustment of individual stones, instead of a crippling break-line fracture. Nevertheless the walls had little strength to resist unaccustomed loads and pressures caused by changed conditions, so that serious and rapid failure was beginning to result. At the north end of the house, just such a situation was found. Here, a recent re-arrangement of external doors and windows had weakened the wall. Instead of being

Fig. 9. — The garden hall showing (background, right) the recess of a window of the original house blocked by the Turner addition beyond. The screen, originally glazed, had earlier been moved elsewhere and boarded over.



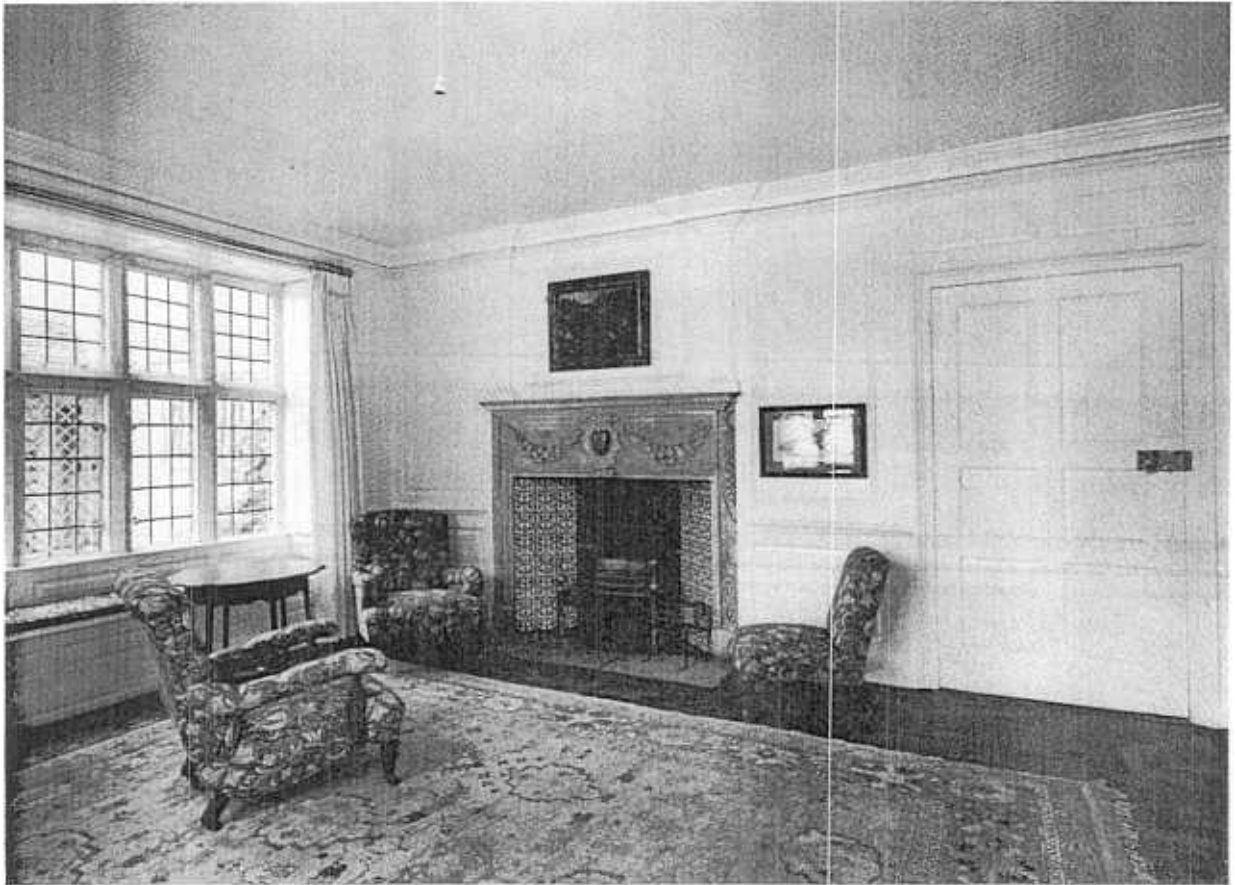


Fig. 10. — The panelled room in the seventeenth-century part of the house. The classical details of panels and fireplace indicate the architectural refinements of this section. The panelling was painted white when Morris first rented the house,

and it is thought that this room influenced Morris and Philip Webb, who was a frequent visitor, in creating the contemporary liking for plain white walls. The painting over the fireplace ("The Tulip Garden") is by Peter Breughel the Younger.

evenly distributed, the very heavy roof and floor loading, together with the self-weight of the gabled upper wall, had been wholly concentrated upon two slender piers below. These, unable to support the load, had firstly subsided, and secondly split and buckled. A major section of the wall was thus in danger, and indeed part did collapse during the works.

Morris's own principles indicate how repairs should be tackled in cases such as these. He wrote:

"Often, no doubt, some subsidence of the soil, or what not, may endanger an old building; but always, if it is well looked after, the said danger can be met by the engineering skill of the day, and the building may be made absolutely sound without any tampering with the surface ..."

Sophisticated repair techniques can usually fulfil this edict, and the structure can be saved with a minimum of disturbance to the original work. In the north wall, a reinforced concrete beam was inserted, set length by length into the core of the wall. This at the same time evenly re-distributed the heavy loads and also tied together the loose masonry.

Elsewhere too, the strength and adaptability of reinforced concrete enabled serious defects to be remedied by conservative repair. A great central stone chimney stack was found to be set eccentrically upon its base and widely cantilevered outwards at one side. This projection was supported on a heavy oak bressumer, carried in turn upon plates built into the masonry. But all the timber, carrying the great weight of masonry



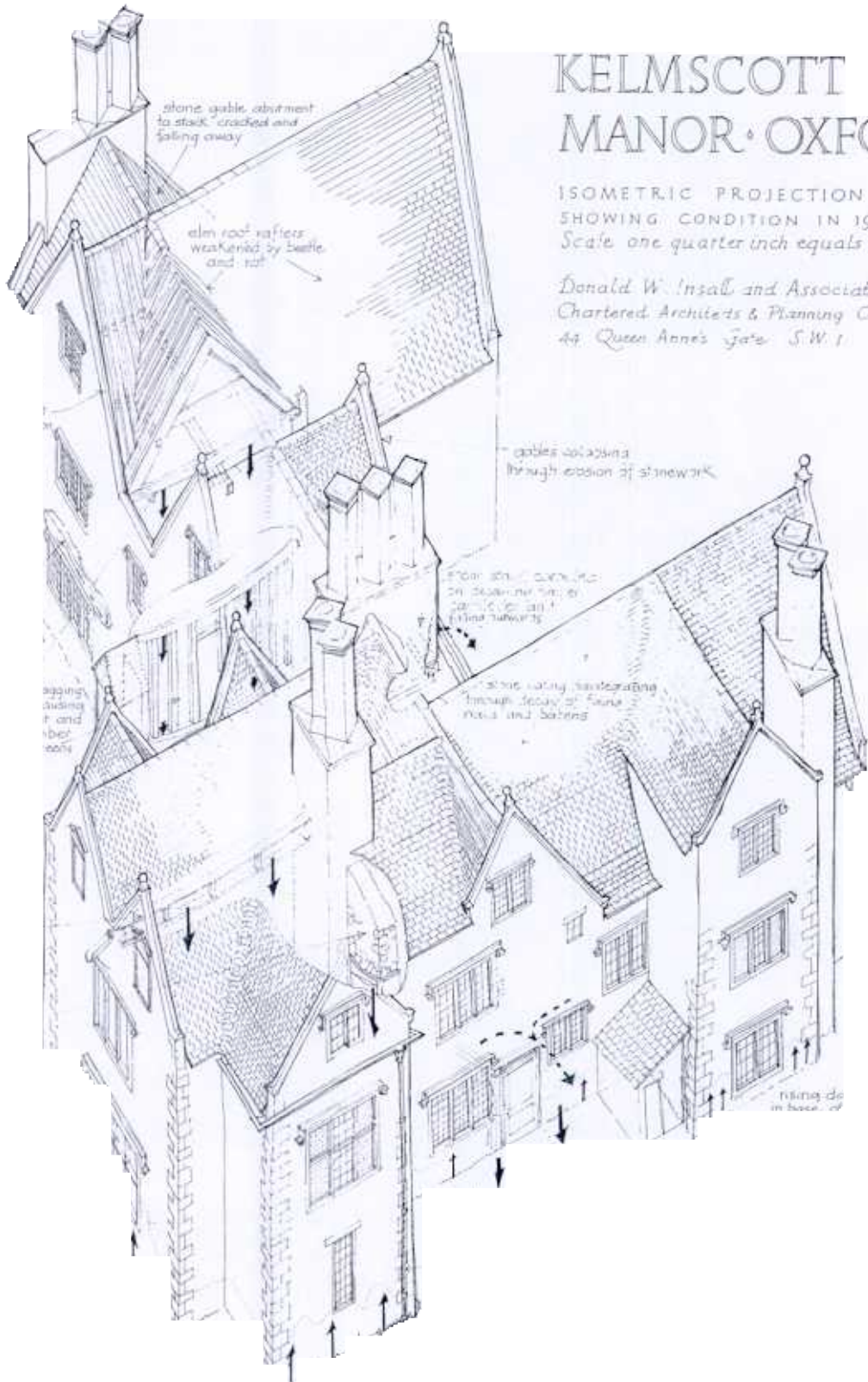
above, was completely rotten. Tell-tale cracks had already appeared in the stonework above and spoke of its failure. Here, the rotten timbers were little by little carefully removed, and replaced by concrete underpinning, bonded securely to the old stonework. Any other method would have necessitated the demolition and rebuilding of the whole of the chimney, at great expense and with much loss of original work. Perhaps the most serious example of Kelmscott's 'penchant' for concealing its worst defects was found in Morris's own Bedroom. Here, investigation of a sag in the ceiling revealed that a great mass of masonry, carrying in turn part of the roof, was supported by a single oak plank, no thicker than a broom handle. Its deflection showed that it was literally at breaking point and a catastrophic collapse could have occurred at any time. This again was shored up and replaced with reinforced concrete, without further disturbance.

The timbers throughout the ground and first floors were in poor condition, and many were decayed by wet rot and beetle attacks. These had been largely encouraged by severe rising damp throughout the building, causing also serious damage to joinery, plaster and finishes.

The damp was combated in two ways. The outside walls were protected by a drained 'dry area' outside — that is to say, a system of gravel filled trenches incorporating porous drains to collect the ground water and carry it away from the building. Inside, the earth based ground floors were taken up and reconstructed in concrete, incorporating damp proof polythene membranes, above which were laid the under-floor heating pipes and the timber and stone slab floor finishes. The upper outside walls were then repaired. Decayed timber lintols over openings were replaced with concrete, which was also used to back-reinforce the tottering

Fig. 11. — Kelmscott Manor from the north-east before renovation was started.





# KELMSCOTT MANOR · OXFORD

ISOMETRIC PROJECTION  
SHOWING CONDITION IN 1919  
Scale one quarter inch equals

Donald W. Insall and Associates  
Chartered Architects & Planning Co.  
44 Queen Anne's Gate S.W. 1

Arch.  
mb



Fig. 13. — A cutaway section of an external wall of the Manor, showing the inner and outer skins of small stones with a core of loose rubble and mud.

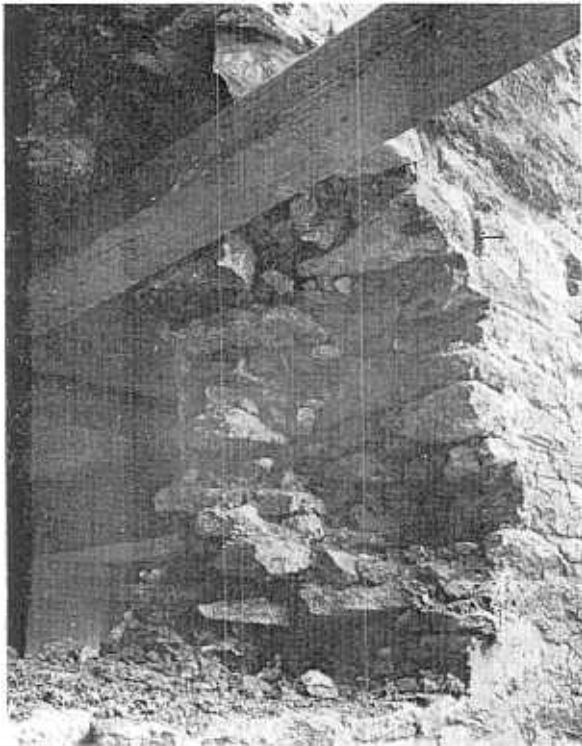


Fig. 14. — The north front of the Manor, before the recent renovations, showing the disfigurements caused by piecemeal alterations, and the weakening of the central section.

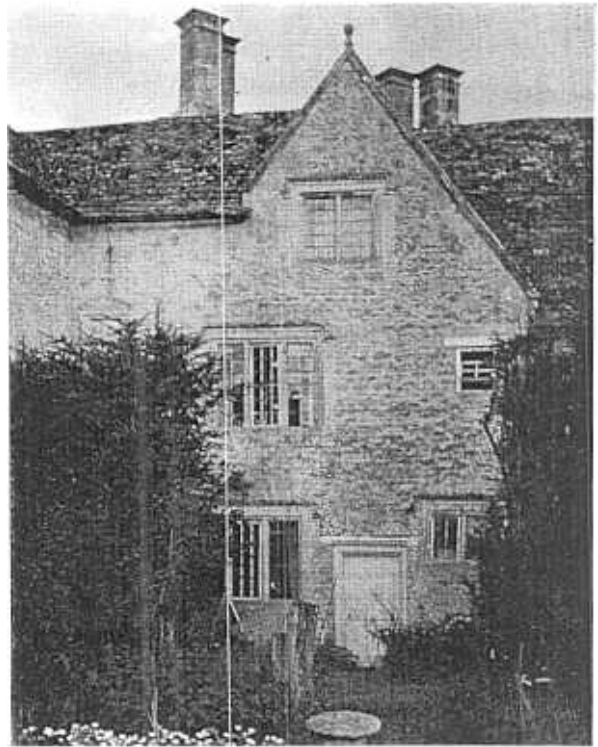


Fig. 15. — The North Elevation as it now is, re-ordered and with the new porch and public entrance. The dotted lines show the position of the reinforced concrete beam inserted length by length to distribute the weight.



NORTH ELEVATION

10 0 10 20 30 40 50 60 FEET



Fig. 16. — The condition of the base of the central chimney stack as revealed by opening-up.

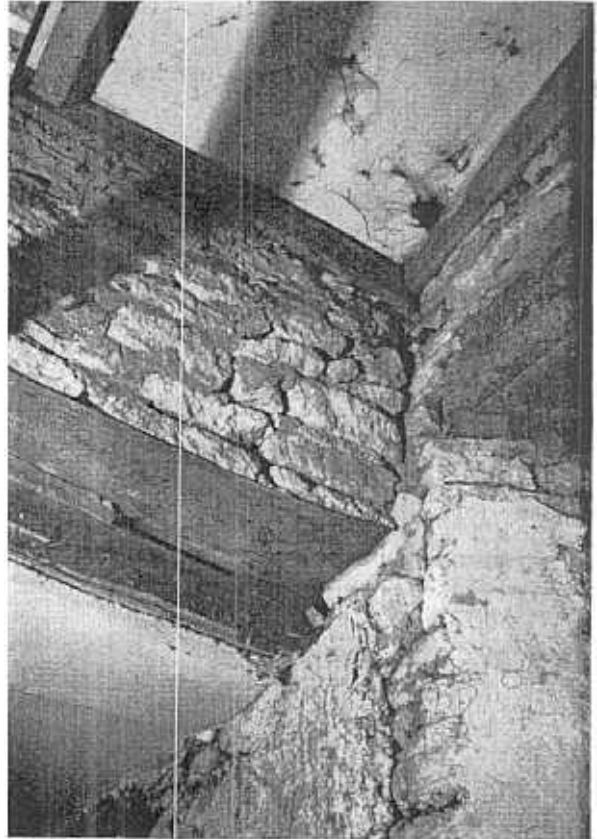


Fig. 17. — The great weight of masonry supporting the attic floor, chimney and roof which was found to be bearing upon an oak board, one inch thick. This was greatly deflected and upon the point of collapse.

gables. Plastic stone was used to repair decaying window stonework, but at higher levels the attrition of parapets and finials was so bad that they needed renewal in natural stone. Much of the stonework was carefully re-pointed. Hard cement had been used in the past, but this was often found to be paper-thin; and when removed, it revealed large cavities in the walling behind.

In the internal first floor timbers, much use was made of mild steel angles and plates to restore strength to decayed joints. Sometimes new timber had to be scarfed in, and occasionally complete timbers needed renewal. All timber, old and new, was chemically treated against beetle and rot before new elm board floors were laid.

The worst of the timber problems were found in the complex roofs of the building. The heavy stone slating was laid upon elm rafters, which in turn were supported by oak principals and trusses. The slating had been leaking for many years, due to corrosion of the iron nail fixings, and the timbers were terribly damaged by rot and beetle. Even where patches of tiling had been re-laid, the added felt underlay had increased the problem by causing condensation. The roofs were therefore totally stripped, section by section. The vulnerable elm rafters were found so weakened that nine out of ten had to be renewed. In this, new semi-seasoned oak was used. The heavy oak framing was more resistant, but when decayed produced greater problems. In one case, both ends and the centre of a main roof truss

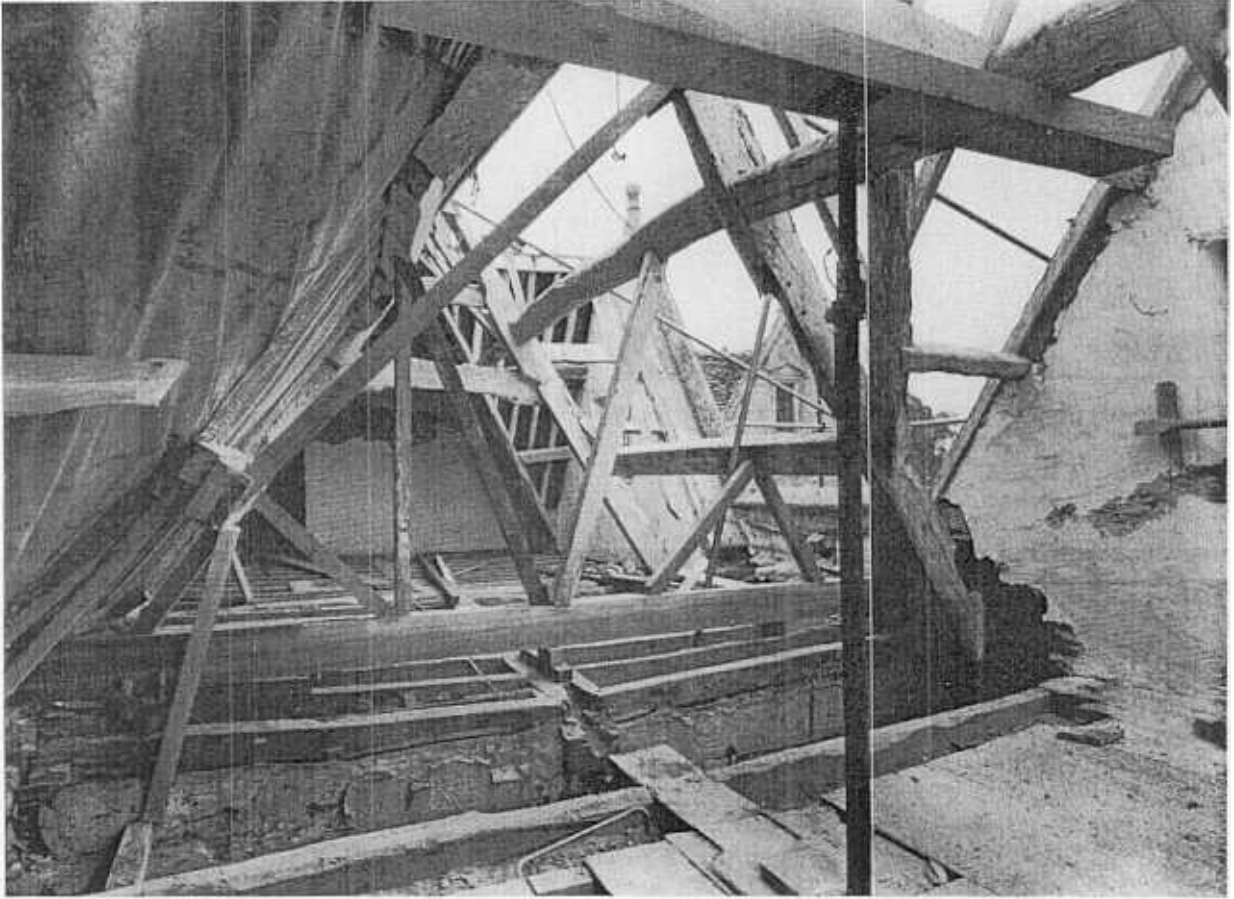
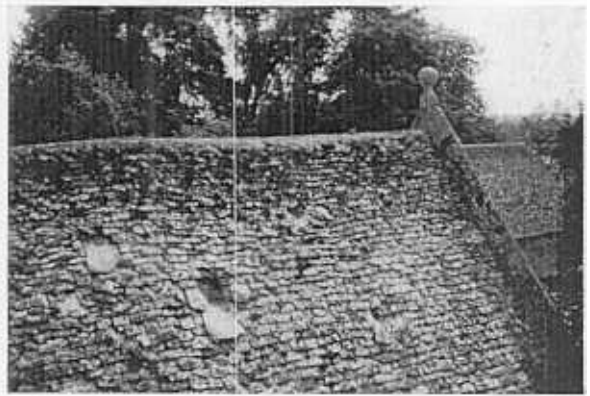


Fig. 18. — The condition of the roof when opened up was poor, and a large proportion of the rafters had to be renewed.

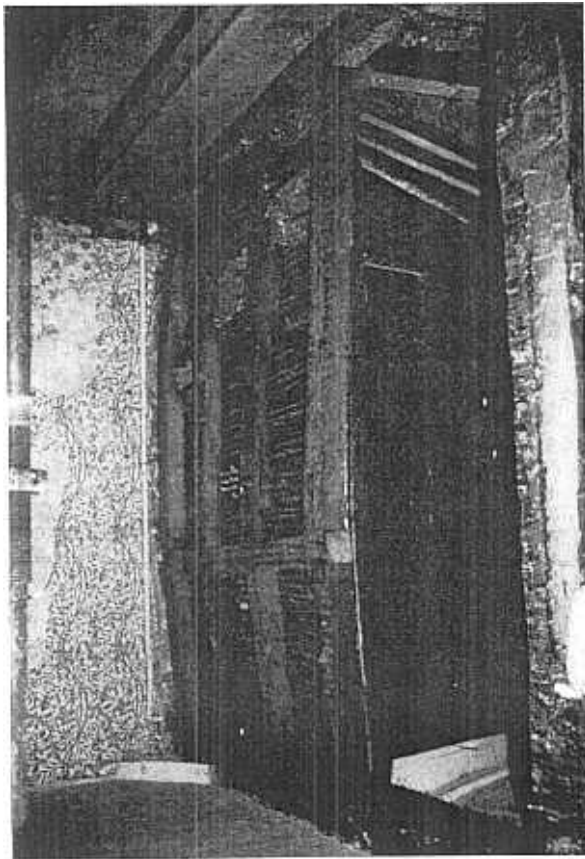


Fig. 19. — The great attic over the main range of the sixteenth century house after repair.

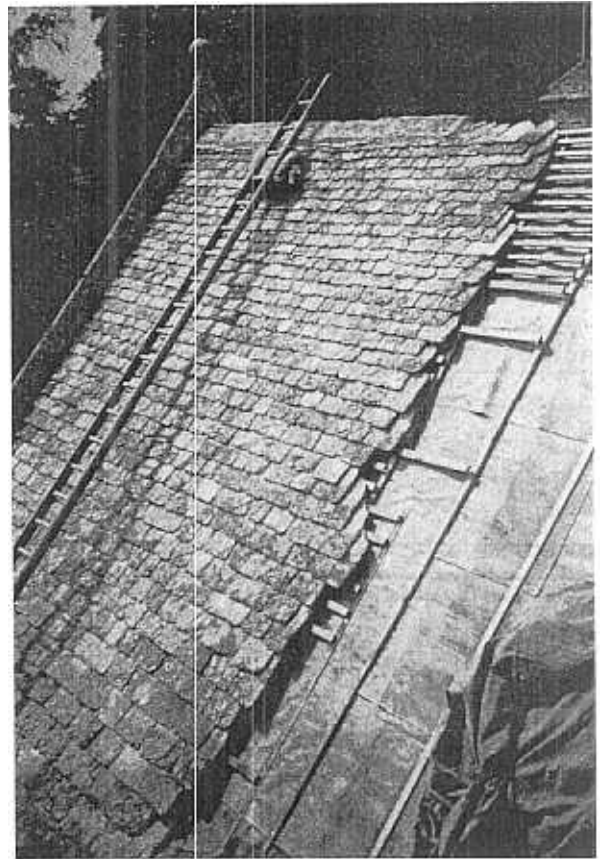
Fig. 20. — The roof had been patched with felt in many places, causing rain to enter the roof structure.







21. — A thin partition below, distorted by the abnormal roof load.



22. — The slates being relaid as before in diminishing courses, the smallest to the ridge.

beam all proved to have been totally destroyed. As a result, the great weight of roof, which should have conveyed to the outside walls, was bearing instead upon thin internal partitions. These were flexed like a bow by the unaccustomed load, and the thin oak ground floor screens had been punched several inches into the wet ground. A new oak beam was inserted, and metal and timber insertions again restored structural logic.

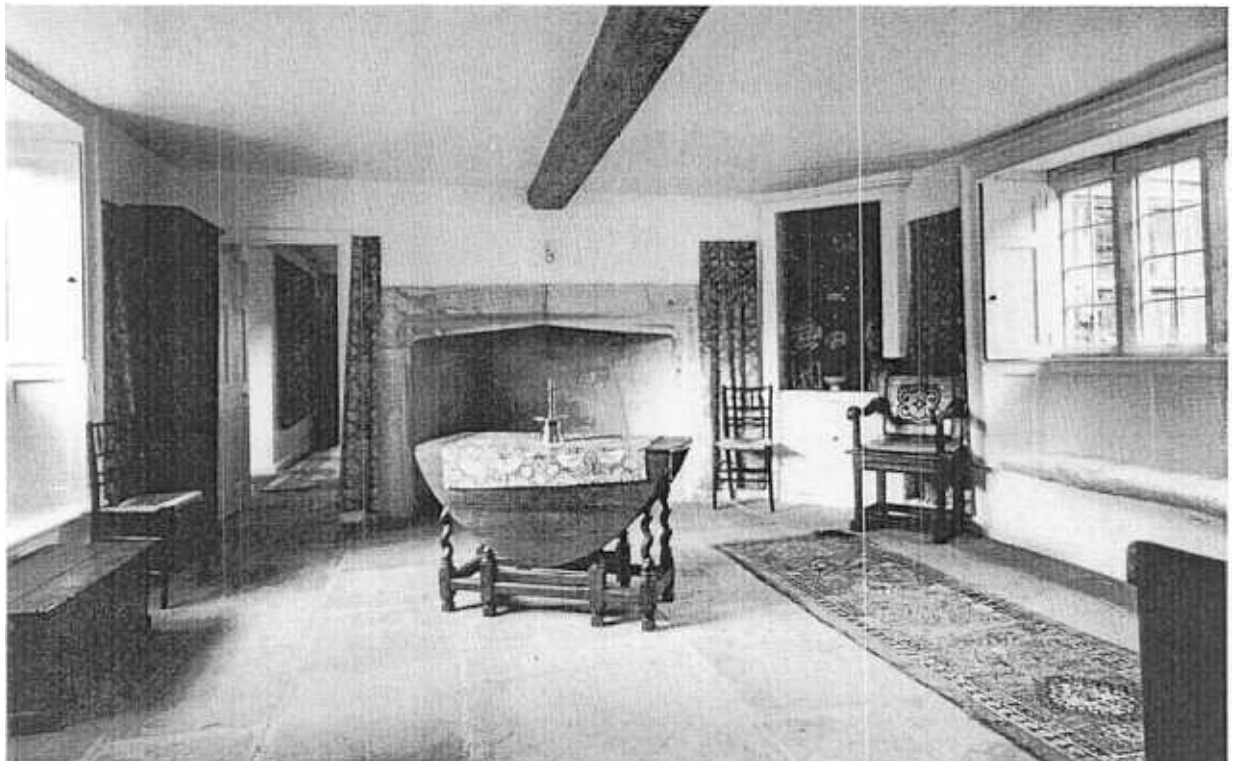
Chemical treatment again followed repair; and finally the stone tiles were relaid, but this time over an insulated construction and with non-ferrous nails. The slates were hung, as before, in diminishing courses; as Morris put it — "sized down, the smaller towards the top, and the bigger towards the eaves, which gives one the same sort of pleasure in their orderly beauty as a fishes' scales or a bird's feathers".

At length, the finishing works were begun. Outside, the leaded windows were re-made, and the inefficient and unsightly cast iron gutters and downpipes were replaced with traditional simple cedarwood gutters, set as spouts to discharge clear of the building. Lead parapet gutters were renewed; and each section, formerly inaccessible for maintenance, was provided with a concealed trap door.

Inside, the final works of reinstatement began. The major problems seemed over; but even to the end, the building concealed its worst troubles. The old circular wooden stair at the south end had two dangerously worn treads. It was decided to renew them — apparently a simple matter. But when removed, it was revealed that they had merely been nailed over an earlier, and totally decayed timber stair. This too had to be taken away and proved in turn to be resting



Fig. 23, 24. — The former Victorian grate in the dining room (above) and the original stone fireplace discovered behind it (below) and left exposed.

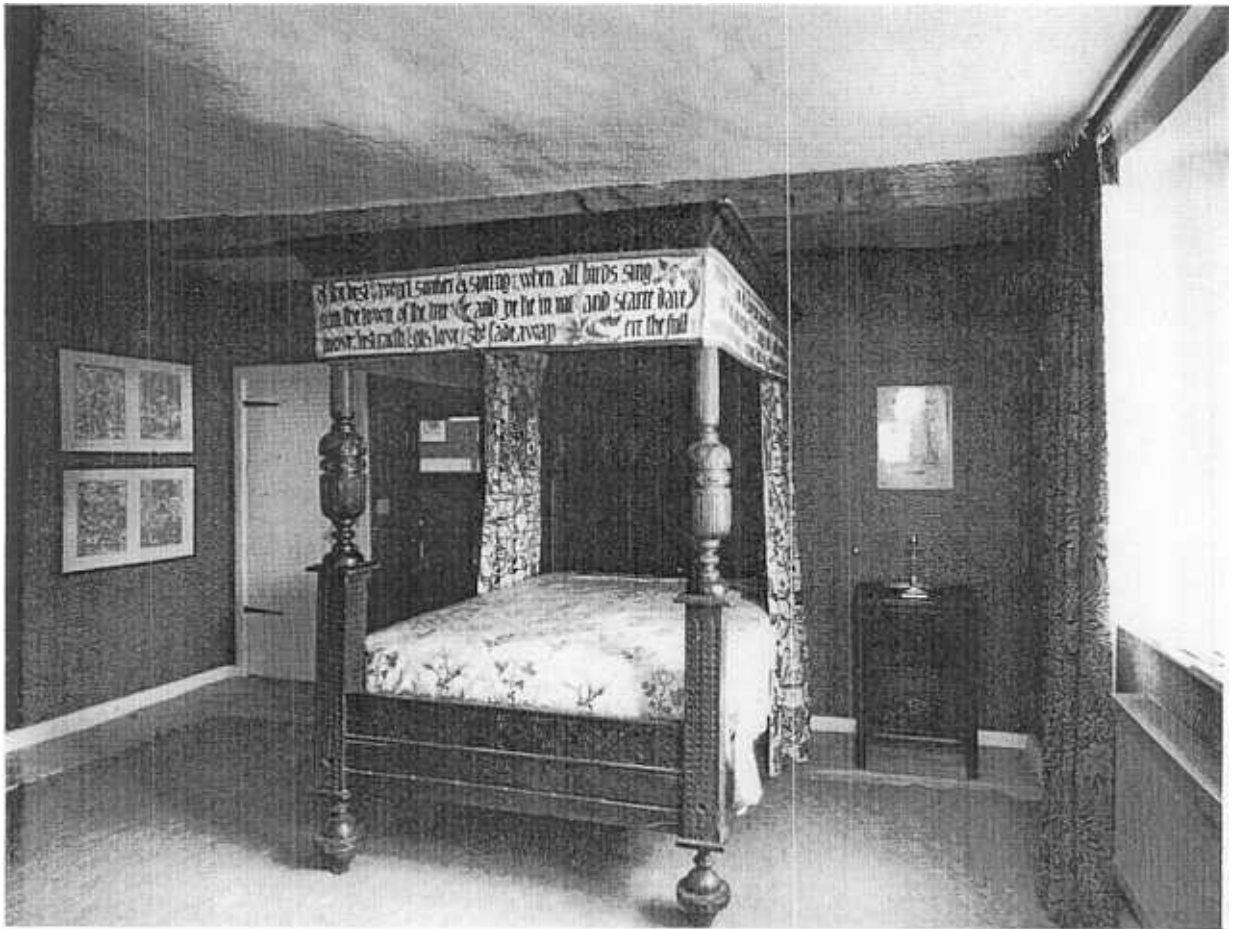


simply on a pile of loose stones which disintegrated completely when the stair was removed; so that a simple decision to renew two worn treads resulted in the necessity of putting in a whole new staircase from top to bottom.

In such examples as have been described, a literal interpretation of Morris's philosophy of conservative repair is often difficult and sometimes impossible. But nevertheless, these principles will always form a sound foundation for repair work, however far it is ultimately necessary to develop and interpret them for each problem. The same difficulties apply to the tangible evidence of a building's history. Morris wrote — "every change, whatever history it destroyed, left history in

its gap and was alive with the spirit of the deeds done midst its fashioning". But problems arise when the legacies of history must needs be disturbed, for repair. Again, each case can only be decided upon its merits. Kelmscott provided two contrasting examples, upon which differing decisions were made. In the Dining Room of the house, a mid-19th-century iron grate had to be removed during repairs to the chimney. Behind was found a splendid 16th-century stone fireplace. The problem here was to decide which should be retained for the future — the relatively worthless grate, which however served the room when Morris knew it, or the stonework, which though of infinitely greater value was not feature of 'Morris's Kelmscott'? Here it was

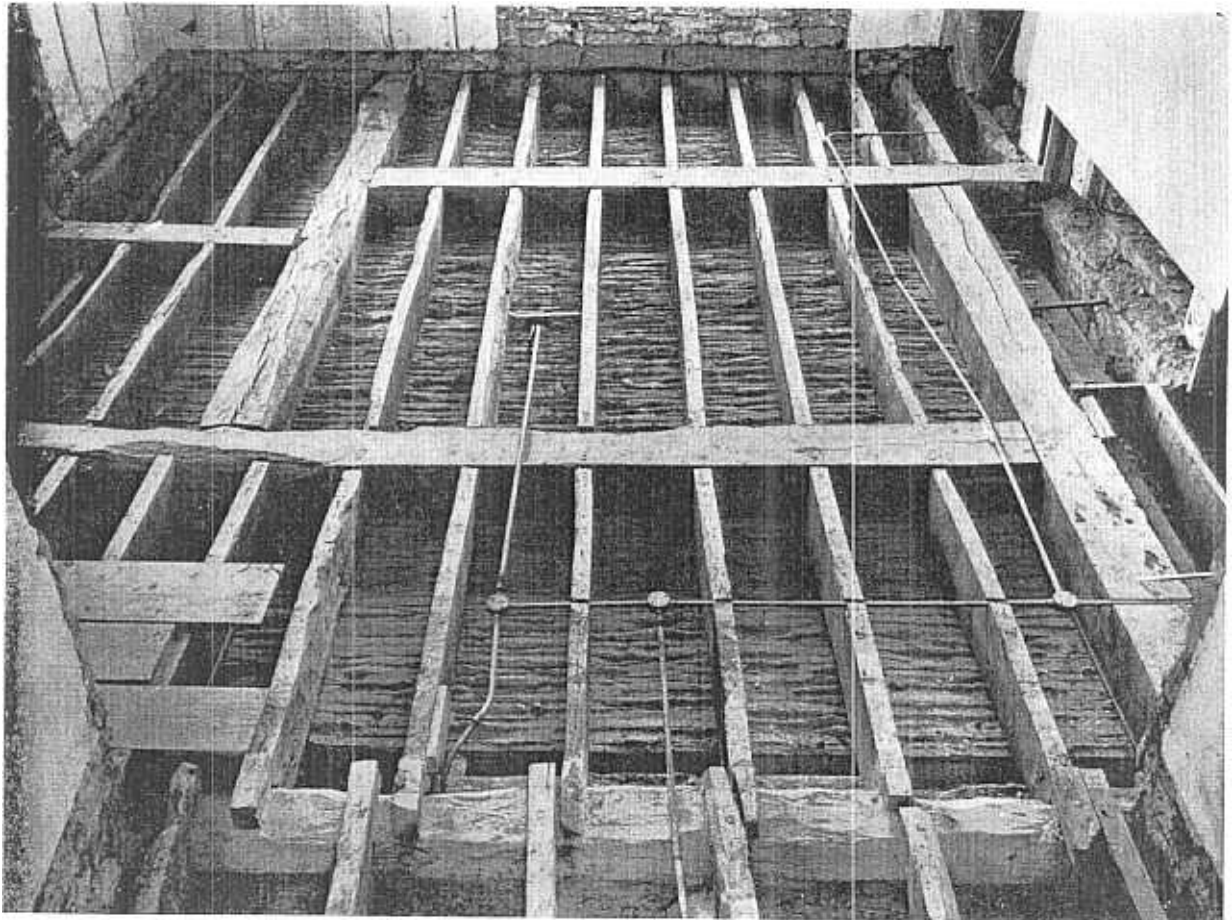
Fig. 25. — Morris' bedroom with the early seventeenth-century bed. The valance displays a poem written by Morris in 1891, for the bed and the hangings and cover were embroidered by his daughter May. The colours have been restored to their original strength and freshness.



decided that the original fireplace was of over-riding value and interest, and it was carefully conserved and left exposed as a fine and veracious feature of the room. But in Morris's Bedroom, when a blocked 16th-century window opening was discovered, it was decided that priority should here be given to retaining the room as Morris knew it. So it was carefully covered in again. When the re-decoration of the house came to be considered, there was really very little doubt that Morris's own wallpaper designs should again be used. The original papers were so damaged and mutilated as to be beyond repair. But the designs are in any case as valid now as when they were first designed, and fortunately they remain readily available. So the

glowing wallpapers once more provide a background for the superb possessions of the house, the works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Edward Burne-Jones, William de Morgan, Philip Webb, Ford Maddox Brown; but mainly of Morris himself. All the contents have been carefully repaired and cleaned, and like all the work to the house itself, this has been an object lesson of patient, sensitive and intelligent craftsmanship. William Morris loved craftsmanship; and one feels that this aspect at least would have pleased him. Conversely, he was the inspiration for the work and at Kelmscott Manor one can evoke him. All who worked at the house grew to love it, but none more than he did. It is best described finally in his own words :

Fig. 26. — The construction of the floor of the tapestry room is geometrical in design. This was a device reputedly introduced by a professor of geometry at Oxford University in the seventeenth century as a means of constructing long spans with lengths of timber shorter than the span.







" A house that I love; with a reasonable love I think : for though my words may give you no idea of any special charm about it, yet I assure you that the charm is there; so much has the old house grown up out of the soil and the lives of those that live on it : some thin thread of tradition, a half-anxious sense of the delight of meadow and acre and wood and river; a certain amount (not too much let us hope) of common sense, a liking for making materials serve one's turn, and perhaps at bottom some little grain of sentiment : this I think was what went to the making of the old house. "

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Fig. 27. — The main staircase in the earlier part of the house.

## RESUME

Le Manoir de Kelmscott est une maison en pierre d'une très grande beauté, située au milieu des prés tranquilles et fréquemment inondés qui bordent la Tamise dans la partie nord de l'Oxfordshire. Par son style c'est une création typique de l'architecture domestique des XVI<sup>e</sup> et XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles dans la région des Cotswold. Le corps de bâtiment principal est une simple ferme de paysan propriétaire de la deuxième moitié du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle; mais il a été très sensiblement agrandi un siècle plus tard, dans un style un peu plus élégant et avec des détails où on relève les signes d'un classicisme encore tâtonnant. Il en résulte un ensemble architectural hautement pittoresque, ramassé sur lui-même, sous des toits aux pentes abruptes, en pierre du pays.

La célébrité de la maison repose essentiellement sur le quart de siècle pendant lequel son destin est resté lié à celui de William Morris, fondateur de la Société Protectrice des Bâtiments Anciens. Morris avait loué la maison en 1871 et il l'a conservée comme maison de campagne jusqu'à sa mort en 1896. Elle fut achetée alors par sa veuve, et demeura propriété de la famille jusqu'en 1937. Pendant toute cette période elle abritait une grande partie des plus belles œuvres d'art et d'artisanat laissées par Morris et son entourage; mais ces objets étaient éparpillés dans les différentes pièces, sans souci de présentation, parmi le bric-à-brac familial, et rarement montrés aux visiteurs. De plus, le bâtiment était en mauvais état, la raison en étant, en partie —



et paradoxalement — le refus tout à fait compréhensible de la famille d'admettre la moindre transformation susceptible de porter atteinte à sa force évocatrice.

Par conséquent, lorsque, en 1960, la maison fut acquise par la Société des Antiquaires de Londres, son actuel propriétaire, celle-ci se trouva devant un certain nombre de problèmes spécifiques quand il a fallu songer à son réaménagement et à son affectation future. D'un côté, en raison de l'intérêt croissant du public à l'égard de la personnalité de Morris, on pouvait s'attendre à une augmentation du nombre des visiteurs. De l'autre, il avait été décidé que le Manoir devait demeurer essentiellement un lieu d'habitation et non un musée. En fait, les deux fonctions jumelées : musée et demeure, s'entremêlaient, auparavant, à un point tel qu'aucune des deux n'était remplie correctement et qu'une incertitude totale régnait quant au destin futur du bâtiment et de sa solidité. On est parvenu à la conclusion que certains réaménagements et certaines nouvelles installations intérieures étaient indispensables; ces travaux ont représenté, d'ailleurs, une fraction importante de l'ensemble des opérations de réparation et de rénovation dont l'exécution s'est échelonnée d'avril 1965 à octobre 1967.

Une solution au problème central finit par être trouvée : il suffisait de réaménager le Manoir de manière à séparer les « chambres Morris » de la partie qui devait demeurer habitée. Une ancienne entrée secondaire a été réouverte à l'usage du public, pour lui permettre d'accéder directement aux salles d'exposition. On y a ajouté un porche abritant un vestiaire. A l'intérieur, on a prolongé l'escalier existant d'une volée conduisant jusqu'aux greniers, pour permettre d'accéder à ceux-ci sans passer par les pièces habitées. C'est ainsi que les « chambres Morris » constituent tantôt un ensemble autonome, tantôt — lorsque la maison n'est pas ouverte aux visiteurs — une partie de l'intérieur dont disposent les occupants actuels.

La partie privée de la maison a également été réaménagée. Compte tenu de ce qu'aucun foyer ne saurait se passer du confort de l'électro-ménager, il a été prévu une cuisine moderne bien équipée, de même que trois bonnes salles de bains. On a renouvelé l'ensemble des installations de service en veillant à ce qu'elles soient d'aspect aussi discret que possible, et on a installé un système de chauffage central. On a profité par ailleurs de l'occasion pour rectifier certaines modifications antérieures plutôt mal inspirées. Par exemple, on avait découvert un beau paravent du xvii<sup>e</sup> siècle, découpé et rapiécé, qui servait de cloison séparant en deux une chambre à coucher; il a été remis en état et rendu à sa fonction initiale dans le vestibule du rez-de-chaussée. De même, on a démoli un W.C. qui fermait l'accès au passage dit « des paravents », datant du xvi<sup>e</sup> siècle. Les ouvertures vers l'extérieur ont, pour la plupart, retrouvé leurs fonctions d'origine, alors que des portes avaient été transformées en fenêtres et vice versa; on a cru toutefois devoir respecter certaines modifications considérées comme ayant acquis une valeur spécifique en

tant que témoins de l'évolution du Manoir à travers le temps.

Si le réordonnement intérieur de la maison posait des problèmes relativement simples, les réparations extérieures et les travaux de consolidation représentaient une opération extrêmement compliquée. Les murs, fragiles et de construction médiocre, et victimes du manque d'entretien et de l'altération naturelle dû au vieillissement, étaient à plusieurs endroits près de s'effondrer. Les toitures laissaient passer la pluie, tandis que l'humidité ascendante avait pénétré les planchers et le bas des murs, provoquant des dégâts importants, tant dans les parties structurelles que dans les couches de finition extérieures. Les planchers, de même que les charpentes des toits, étaient partout envahis de cloportes et de champignons d'humidité et, par ailleurs, les pierres des pignons, des parapets et des encadrements des fenêtres étaient sérieusement détériorées.

Le plus grave était peut-être le manque de stabilité de certaines parties de la structure principale. Les murs extérieurs, en apparence solides, se sont révélés, lors des sondages, n'être en réalité que des noyaux en argile de fond de rivière protégés à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur par un revêtement de moellons non jointoyés. Il s'agissait en fait d'une technique présentant à l'époque des avantages pour une construction en bordure de rivière, car elle permettait au bâtiment de s'adapter librement à un terrain instable. Mais en l'occurrence la solidité de l'ensemble, qui résultait plus de sa masse que de la résistance de ses différents éléments de structure, avait été sévèrement entamée du fait de la pénétration de l'humidité, venant s'ajouter à l'effet néfaste des diverses modifications irréflechies introduites postérieurement. La façade septentrionale, notamment, avait été affaiblie par le percement de portes et de fenêtres supplémentaires; c'est ainsi que l'ensemble de la charge exercée par toute la partie supérieure du mur, plus le pignon et le toit, était supportée par deux minces piles en pierre, qui avaient, bien entendu, commencé à céder sous l'effet de ce poids tellement concentré et indu. A l'intérieur, une énorme cheminée centrale, en pierre, reposait en porte-à-faux sur des poutres complètement pourries. De même, on s'est aperçu que, dans la chambre à coucher de Morris, une simple planche, fléchie à un degré dangereux, supportait au-dessus de la porte une lourde masse de maçonnerie sur laquelle reposait, à son tour, une partie de la toiture.

Pour permettre de supporter et de redistribuer ces charges, on a introduit, en les coulant tronçon par tronçon, des poutres intérieures en béton. De la même façon, on s'est servi de béton pour remplacer, là où il le fallait, les sommiers en bois au-dessus des fenêtres et pour renforcer de l'intérieur ceux des pignons qui menaçaient ruine. Les revêtements en pierre ont été réparés avec de la pierre artificielle, là où cela était encore possible; ailleurs ils ont été tout simplement reconstruits en pierre naturelle. Lors du grattage des

jointoyages en ciment dur, on a découvert de nombreux vides importants dans les murs; ceux-ci ont été bouchés par injection avant le rejointoyage, pour lequel on a employé du mortier de chaux.

Pour la lutte contre l'humidité ascendante, une « zone sèche » a été créée le long de toute une partie des façades de la maison, tandis que le sol du rez-de-chaussée a été entièrement refait en dur, avec, en dessous, un système ininterrompu de membranes imperméables à l'humidité. Par ailleurs, on a remplacé les gouttières, qui captaient mal les eaux, étant insuffisamment adaptées aux formes irrégulières des avancées du toit en pierre; le nouveau modèle de gouttière, muni de gargouilles, permet de rejeter les eaux loin des murs. La réparation de la toiture a exigé un travail très long, car il a fallu, en procédant par étapes, tout enlever et tout refaire entièrement; en effet, les pointes et clous d'ardoise, de même que les voliges, avaient cédé, et la charpente — en bois d'orme — était sérieusement détériorée par l'humidité et minée par les perce-bois. C'est ainsi que neuf poutres sur dix ont dû être remplacées; on a choisi, comme matériau de remplacement, le chêne semi-séché, et on s'est aperçu qu'il convenait à la perfection. Il a suffi, d'ailleurs, de blanchir à la chaux les surfaces des poutres nouvelles destinées à demeurer apparentes, à l'intérieur ou à l'extérieur de la maison. Les fermes, en chêne, étaient dans l'ensemble en moins mauvais état; toutefois, l'une d'elles était pourrie, non seulement aux extrémités mais également en son milieu, et à tel point qu'elle faisait supporter l'énorme poids de la toiture — qui aurait dû reposer sur les murs extérieurs — à de simples cloisons intérieures, qui s'en trouvaient, bien entendu, affaissées et déformées. La poutre maîtresse a été remplacée par une poutre en chêne; quant aux éléments de la charpente qui n'étaient pourries que par endroits, on s'est contenté, suivant les cas, de remplacer leurs extrémités par un assemblage à mi-bois ou de les renforcer avec des plaques d'acier.

*Fig. 1. — Le Manoir de Kelmscott vu du nord-est, après les travaux de rénovation.*

*Fig. 2. — La façade orientale du Manoir de Kelmscott. Dessin de C. M. Gere, servant de frontispice à Nouvelles de Nulle Part (édité par la Kelmscott Press en 1892). Le motif adopté pour l'encadrement est de Morris lui-même. A droite, l'aile du bâtiment qui date du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle.*

*Fig. 3. — William Morris à 53 ans.*

*Fig. 4. — Plan du rez-de-chaussée du Manoir, rénové.*

*Fig. 5 et 6. — La vieille cuisine, avant les travaux et après leur achèvement.*

*Fig. 7 et 8. — La salle de bains de la partie orientale du Manoir. Le papier peint, ici comme dans les autres pièces de la maison, est une réimpression moderne exécutée par la Sté. Sanderson Ltd. à partir des clichés authentiques utilisés par Morris.*

Une fois les charpentes réparées, on a posé une couche isolante en feutre, mis en place de nouvelles voliges prétraitées et remis les dalles de pierre qui faisaient fonction d'ardoises, en les posant comme auparavant par rangées dont la largeur diminuait vers le bas, et en les fixant avec des clous en acier inoxydable.

Au premier étage il a fallu remplacer quelques poutres et solives dont les extrémités encastrées étaient pourries; mais dans la plupart des cas il a été possible de faire une réparation avec de simples bandes d'acier et des tasseaux. Tous les éléments des charpentes ont reçu un traitement insecticide et fongicide et les parties nourries des planchers ont été remplacées par des planches d'orme très sec, joliment veinuré; la fixation s'est faite par vis, pour permettre au bois de travailler. Quant à l'escalier en colimaçon de l'extrémité sud de la maison, il a fallu le refaire entièrement, car il avait été construit, a-t-on constaté, sur les restes de deux escaliers antérieurs, tous les deux abîmés et ne reposant que sur un amas de moellons hétéroclites.

Ce qui caractérise, en effet, le Manoir de Kelmscott, c'est le fait que partout, lorsqu'on en est arrivé aux sondages, on a découvert un état de dégradation plus avancée que ne l'avait laissé prévoir l'examen superficiel. Ce même phénomène se rencontre, il est vrai, dans d'autres vieux bâtiments; mais il s'agit ici d'un cas extrême. Les travaux ont été exécutés d'une manière admirable; ils avaient été confiés à une entreprise locale qui, tout naturellement, était à même de comprendre les problèmes inhérents aux constructions traditionnelles du pays et aux caractéristiques des matériaux de construction locaux. La surveillance est allée, bien entendu, jusqu'à des questions de détail et il a fallu un total de 75 visites de contrôle sur le chantier; les problèmes particuliers évoluaient et se transformaient de semaine en semaine et il fallait les aborder avec une souplesse exceptionnelle pour pouvoir espérer les résoudre d'une manière adéquate.

*Fig. 9. — La « salle du jardin » avec (au fond, à droite) l'embrasure de la fenêtre de la construction primitive, obstruée à la suite des aménagements ultérieurs. La cloison, initialement vitrée, avait été déplacée et recouverte de planches.*

*Fig. 10. — La salle des boiseries, dans l'aile datant du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Les motifs classiques des boiseries des murs et de la cheminée reflètent le caractère hautement raffiné de l'architecture de cette partie de la maison. Lorsque Morris en devint locataire, les boiseries étaient peintes en blanc, et l'on pense que cette salle est à l'origine de la mode des murs blancs, répandue peu après sous l'influence de Morris et de Philip Webb, qui était souvent l'hôte du Manoir. La toile au-dessus de la cheminée (« Le Jardin des Tulipes ») est de Pierre Breughel le Jeune.*

*Fig. 11. — Le Manoir de Kelmscott vu du nord-est, avant les travaux.*

Fig. 12. — Projection isométrique montrant l'état du Manoir en 1965.

Fig. 13. — Coupe d'un mur extérieur du Manoir, montrant le noyau de pisé et de pierres tout venant, avec revêtements intérieur et extérieur en pierres de petite dimension.

Fig. 14. — Façade nord du Manoir, avant les travaux; on la voit ici défigurée par des modifications successives et partielles qui avaient provoqué un début d'affaissement de la partie centrale.

Fig. 15. — L'élévation nord dans son état actuel, après restauration dans son style primitif et construction du nouveau porche et d'une entrée pour le public.

Les pointillés indiquent l'emplacement de la poutre en béton armé introduite à l'intérieur pour permettre une redistribution des charges.

Fig. 16. — La partie inférieure du corps de cheminée central, dans l'état où on l'a trouvée lors de son dégagement.

Fig. 17. — L'énorme masse de maçonnerie qui soutenait le plancher du grenier, la cheminée et la toiture; on s'est aperçu qu'elle s'appuyait sur une simple planche de chêne de 2,5 cm d'épaisseur. Celle-ci présentait un gauchissement très important et était même sur le point de céder.

Fig. 18. — On a trouvé la toiture en très mauvais état et une forte proportion des chevrons a dû être remplacée.

Fig. 19. — Le vaste grenier au-dessus du corps central du bâtiment du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle, après les travaux de réparation.

Fig. 20. — Le toit avait été réparé à de nombreux endroits avec de simples morceaux de feutre qui laissaient pénétrer la pluie à l'intérieur.

Fig. 21. — Une cloison très mince déformée par les charges exceptionnelles du toit.

Fig. 22. — Mise en place des ardoises selon la méthode primitivement adoptée, par rangées dont la largeur diminue progressivement vers le bas.

Fig. 23 et 24. — En haut, la grille de cheminée victorienne de la salle à manger. En bas, la cheminée de pierre découverte derrière celle-ci et actuellement dégagée.

Fig. 25. — La chambre à coucher de Morris avec son lit du début du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle. On peut lire sur les volants un poème écrit par Morris en 1891, le dessus de lit et l'ensemble des volants ayant été brodés par sa fille May. On a réussi à rendre aux couleurs tout leur éclat ainsi que leur fraîcheur d'origine.

Fig. 26. — Le plancher de la salle des tapisseries est de conception géométrique. Ce système avait prétendument été introduit au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle par un professeur de géométrie de l'Université d'Oxford comme moyen d'obtenir des portées dont la longueur dépassait celle des planches employées.

Fig. 27. — L'escalier principal de la partie la plus ancienne du Manoir.