

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

KELMSCOTT MANOR

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Name:	KELMSCOTT MANOR
County:	Oxfordshire
District:	West Oxfordshire (District Authority)
Parish:	Kelmscott
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.688051 Longitude: -1.6393926 National Grid Reference: SU2502598872 <a href="#">Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)</a>
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001420 Date first listed: 29-Mar-1999

## Details

Compartmentalised gardens and adjacent farm buildings and meadow of the country residence of William Morris and his family. The setting inspired Morris' writings and artistic designs, while the garden became one of the inspirations of the Arts and Crafts gardening style.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Kelmscott Manor has been so-called since 1863; earlier it was known as Lower Farm, and from at least the later C16 was the home of the Turners. The original house, comprising the south-west part of the Manor, was probably built by Richard Turner (d 1600), or by his son Thomas. The tall and compact block to the north-east was probably added by Richard's great-grandson Thomas Turner (d 1682) whose arms, granted in 1665, appear on a fireplace. Building was presumably financed by his marriage to Anna, daughter of Sir Thomas Faulcons. The family remained at Kelmscott until the death of James Turner in 1870. In 1871 a joint lease of the house and 68 acres (27.5ha) was taken by the pre-Raphaelite writers and artists William Morris and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. For Morris Kelmscott offered an idyllic, clean-aired setting for summer holidays, as well as a discrete solution to at least some of the problems caused by the romantic relationship between his wife, Jane, and Rossetti. Until he left for London in 1874 Rossetti was the principal occupant of the Manor. Thenceforward it was the Morris family's second home, although William's commercial and Socialist activities greatly limited how much time he was able to spend here. Nevertheless, Kelmscott and the surrounding countryside had a great influence on his creative work, and images drawn therefrom appear frequently in his poetry, prose and designs for textiles and wallpapers. The local traditional buildings also much impressed him, and it was at Kelmscott in 1877 that he conceived the idea of what became the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. Kelmscott became the symbol of the style of life Morris wished to be available to all, and was the focus of his *Utopian News from Nowhere* (1892), printed at the Kelmscott Press, founded in Hammersmith in 1890. Morris died in 1896 and was buried in the village churchyard, as too was Jane who in the year before her death in 1914 purchased the manor and 9 acres (4ha) of surrounding land. The Manor then passed to the Morrises' daughter May, on whose death in 1938 the property passed in trust to the University of Oxford. That trust was declared invalid in 1962 and Kelmscott passed to May Morris' residuary legatee the Society of Antiquaries, of which her father had been a keen supporter and Fellow. It remains (1998) in the Society's ownership.

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## DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Kelmscott village lies on minor roads 4km east of Lechlade and 5km north-west of Faringdon. Oxford lies c 25km to the north-east. The Manor lies at the south end of the village, looking towards the River Thames which runs past 200m to the south through flat, lush, meadow land. Between the Manor and the church, which stands at the north end of what is a very irregular village, are two buildings with Morris associations: the Memorial Cottages of 1902, and the Morris Memorial Hall of 1934. East, west and south of the Manor complex is arable or meadow land. To its north is Garden Cottage, in the Morrises' time occupied by their gardener. The area here registered is c 3ha.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** Vehicular access is via gates on the village street. From these a drive leads west to the West Meadow, separating the Manor and its gardens to the north from the Farmyard. The Farmyard and the south end of the West Meadow are used for visitor parking.

A door in the east wall of the front garden allows pedestrian access to the Manor's front door.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Kelmscott Manor (listed grade I) is a large, two-and-a-half-storey, limestone farmhouse, with rubble stone walls and ashlar mullion and transom windows. The original U-plan building with westward projecting wings of the late C16 was extended c 1670 by the addition of an elegant block providing new family accommodation to the north-east. An extensive programme of repairs was undertaken in the mid 1960s; the north porch was added in 1966.

Running west from the south-west corner of the (old) house is a single-storey service range, probably C18. This opens on the north side onto a courtyard with large, irregular stone flags. The wild strawberries which grow in the cracks supposedly inspired one of Morris' most popular designs, the Strawberry Thief of 1883. A wall at the west end of the courtyard screens what is now a small vegetable garden with a three-seater boghouse with pyramidal roof, perhaps of c 1670 (boghouse and walls listed grade II). Immediately south of the Manor, and overlooked from its upper floors, is the Farmyard. Its limestone buildings (listed grade II) include two barns, now partly used for exhibition space and a tea room, a dovecote and pigsties.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** The Front Garden, a lawn with herbaceous edge borders, lies against the east side of the house. Measuring c 25m east/west and 20m north/south, it is bounded to the south and east by the stone perimeter wall around the Manor complex, a door in the latter giving access from the village street. Along its north side is a tall and greatly over-size yew hedge, the top of which William Morris clipped into the shape of Sigurd's dragon Fafnir (Morris felt his Sigurd the Volsung of 1876 was his best work). In the angle of the hedge and the east wall is the Pavilion (listed grade II), a summerhouse with a pyramidal, stone-slatted roof. A late C17 or C18 date seems likely. Crossing the lawn from the door in the east wall to the porch around the front door is a straight, stone-flagged path, either side of which are standard roses. The view along this path to the house, engraved by C M Gere, was that which formed the frontispiece of *News from Nowhere* (1892). The roses were replaced in the 1990s.

West of the house is the rectangular Mulberry Garden, c 25m east/west by c 18m north/south. Arranged around a lawn on which there is an ancient mulberry tree, underplanted with the wild tulips so cherished by Morris, this was created in the mid 1990s. It comprises gravel paths around the edges of the garden flanked with beds of perennial flowers. A new rustic trellis (a replacement for that present in the Morrises' time) runs along the north side of the garden, while the south side is bounded by the back of the yard wall and a tall, mature yew hedge. The stone perimeter wall runs along the west side of the garden, here lowered to c 1m and surmounted with C20 metal railings, replacements for wooden ones shown on C19 illustrations of Kelmscott. In the centre of the railed section of the wall is a double, railed metal gate. The lowered wall allows views from the house and gardens to the West Meadow beyond.

A further garden runs along the north side of the property, divided by a straight, stone-flagged path which runs north from the Manor's north porch to the door in the perimeter wall which leads to Garden Cottage. A rustic pergola was erected over the path in 1998. East of the path is the Lawn Garden, laid out in the mid 1990s and comprising a roughly square lawn surrounded by gravel paths and with beds against the perimeter. West of the path is the Orchard, also replanted in the mid 1990s.

The replanting of the gardens in the mid 1990s followed a long period of minimal maintenance during which time the gardens were almost wholly replaced by rough lawns. Their appearance in the Morrises' time is recorded in various contemporary illustrations. The celebrated view of the Front Garden published in 1902 has already been mentioned; more generally instructive

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is a bird's-eye view of the later 1890s by E H New. This shows details such as the Front Garden roses and the luxuriant growth over and around the porch and the sides of the house. It also illustrates the vegetable garden which then occupied the area of the present Lawn Garden. Apparently the most photographed part of the gardens in the late C19 and early C20 was what is now called the Mulberry Garden (how long it has been so-known is uncertain), then (as now) with richly and densely planted beds of perennials. Photos also show a large yew hedge along the north side of the house, pierced to allow access through to the north door. The hedge had gone by the 1950s.

Kelmscott and its gardens were important inspirations (with Munstead Wood, qv) for the cult of the manor house and the old-fashioned, Arts and Crafts, garden movement. Morris' ideas on the garden were expressed in his own 1892 *News from Nowhere* and codified in J D Sedding's *Garden-craft Old and New* of 1890.

**OTHER LAND** The house and Mulberry Garden overlook the West Meadow, or Home Mead. In the 1990s there was planting of trees in the hedges to its north and west sides, in part to replace elms which in Morris' time had been such a notable feature of the local countryside. Towards the centre of the Meadow is a post-medieval barn. Morris' writings eulogize the local agricultural landscape, and make especial mention of hay meadows. Morris is shown reclining in West Meadow in the well-known sculpted portrait of him by George Jack which is set on the front wall of the Memorial Cottages of 1902.

The West Meadow extends on the south to the Waterside Glade, which runs behind the Farmyard along the north bank of the 8m wide stream which forms the southern boundary of the property. There is a walk and benches in the Glade, which is lush grassland with mature trees including pollarded willows. Mature trees and undergrowth also line the south bank of the stream. At the west end of the Glade a footbridge crosses the stream leading to the water meadow along the north bank of the Thames. Although the Morrisises never had a lease of the Farmyard or the ground to its south, the area forms an important part of the setting of the Manor, and the view across the Farmyard from the Tapestry Room on the first floor was much enjoyed by William Morris.

#### REFERENCES

*Country Life*, 50 (20 August 1921), pp 224-9; (27 August 1921), pp 256-62 S Coote, *William Morris: His Life and Work* (1990) Society of Antiquaries, *Annual Report* (1993-4), pp 22-5; (1995), pp 36-9; (1997), pp 30-5 *Kelmscott Manor*, guidebook, (Society of Antiquaries 1996) D Baker, *The Flowers of William Morris* (1996), pp 48-56 J Hamilton et al, *The Gardens of William Morris* (1998)

Maps OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1876

Description written: July 1998 Register Inspector: PAS Edited: March 2000

## Legal

This garden or other land is registered under the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 within the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens by Historic England for its special historic interest.