Summary Article: **Morris, William**  
from *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

English designer, socialist, and writer. A founder of the Arts and Crafts Movement, he condemned 19th-century mechanization and sought a revival of traditional crafts, such as furnituremaking, book illustration, fabric design, and so on. He linked this to a renewal of society based on Socialist principles.

Morris was born in London and educated at Oxford, where he formed a lasting friendship with the Pre-Raphaelite artist Edward Burne-Jones and was influenced by the art critic John Ruskin and the painter and poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti. He abandoned his first profession, architecture, to study painting, but had a considerable influence on such architects as William Lethaby and Philip Webb. In 1861 he cofounded Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Company (‘the Firm’) which designed and produced stained glass, furniture, fabric, carpets, and decorative wallpapers; many of the designs, inspired by medieval, classical, and oriental sources, are still produced today.

Morris's first book of verse was *The Defence of Guenevere* (1858). He published several verse romances, notably *The Life and Death of Jason* (1867) and *The Earthly Paradise* (1868–70). A visit to Iceland in 1871 inspired the epic poem *Sigurd the Volsung* (1876) and general interest in the sagas. His Kelmscott Press, set up in 1890 to print beautifully designed books, influenced printing and book design.

A leading Socialist, his prose romances *A Dream of John Ball* (1888) and utopian *News from Nowhere* (1891) reflected his socialist ideology. He joined the Social Democratic Federation in 1883, but left in 1884 because he found it too moderate, and set up the Socialist League. To this period belong the critical and sociological studies *Signs of Change* (1888) and *Hopes and Fears for Art* (1892). He also lectured on socialism.

**Design work** After being articled as an architect he was for some years a painter, before jointly founding the ‘the Firm’, in which Rossetti, Burne-Jones, and other artists were partners. Famous designs include his ‘Daisy’ (1864) and ‘Vine’ (1873) wallpapers; the ‘Woodpecker’ tapestry (1880s); and his ‘Honeysuckle’ chintz (1876). He also designed windows for Middleton Cheney Parish Church in 1864, and centralized his weaving and dyeing works at Merton Abbey in 1880, where William de Morgan joined him to produce tiles and ruby-lustre ware. As a founder of the Arts and Crafts Movement, Morris did much to raise British craft standards.

**Verse and prose** He was one of the originators of the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, to which he contributed poems, tales, and essays. Following *The Defence of Guenevere and other Poems*, he published *The Life and Death of Jason* (1867), *The Earthly Paradise*, and *Love is Enough* (1875), in which year he also made a translation in verse of Virgil's *Aeneid*. *Three Northern Love Stories* was inspired by his travels in Iceland. His translation of the *Odyssey* in verse appeared in 1887. A series of...
prose romances include the *House of Wolfings* (1889), and *The Well at the World's End* (1896). The most notable product of the Kelmscott Press was the *Kelmscott Chaucer*.

Morris was born at Walthamstow, and educated at Marlborough and at Exeter College, Oxford.

**quotations**
Morris, William

**essays**
Arts and Crafts Style
A Design for Life
Urban Design in the 20th Century

**weblinks**
Selected Poetry of William Morris (1834–1896)
William Morris Designs

**images**
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