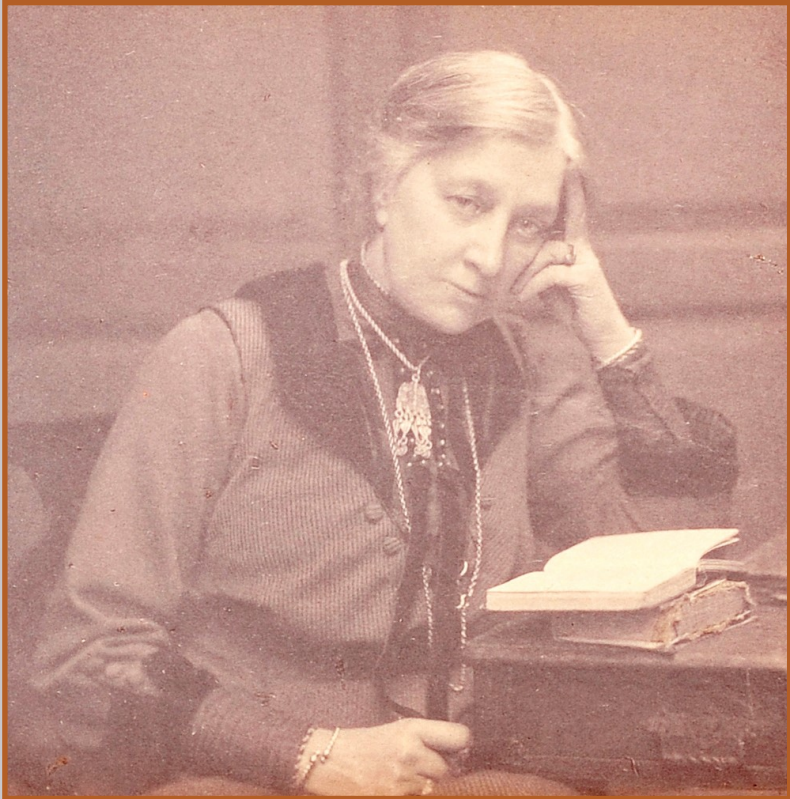


**‘Treasuring things of the least’:
Mary Hope Greg, John Ruskin &
Westmill, Hertfordshire**



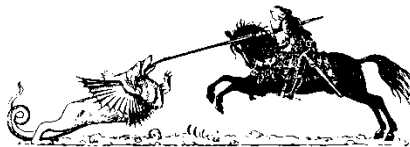
Liz Mitchell



The Guild of St George

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The Guild of St George

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Illustrations

Front cover

Mary Hope Greg (c. 1922) and a 'sprig of yew' by Mary Hope Greg from her nature diaries (Ruskin Collection, Guild of St George (GoSG)/Museums Sheffield (MS)).

Facing page 1

Interior of Westmill Museum (c. 1924).

Page 1

Westmill Village Hall (Alec Hamilton).

Page 3

Thomas Tylston Greg (date unknown).

Page 4

Copper comb, found in London, 5-6th century (Ben Blackall); cut paperwork silhouette, 1781 (Liz Mitchell); both from the Mary Greg Collection (Manchester City Galleries (MCG)).

Page 5

Dolls' house, 19th century, from the Mary Greg Collection at Manchester City Galleries (MCG).

Page 12

Westmill Museum (c.1924).

Page 17

Winnington Hall, near Northwich, Cheshire (Stuart Eagles, 2017).

Page 20

Letter from John Ruskin to Ray, undated (1879) (Ruskin Collection, GoSG/MS).

Page 23

Revd Stopford A. Brooke (1888).

Page 25

Portrait of Mary Hope by Hubert von Herkomer (1885) (MCG).

Page 27

Pages from Mary Greg's nature diaries (1904) (Ruskin Collection, GoSG/MS).

Back cover

'Forbear not sowing because of birds': the west window at Westmill Village Hall (Alec Hamilton).

Acknowledgements

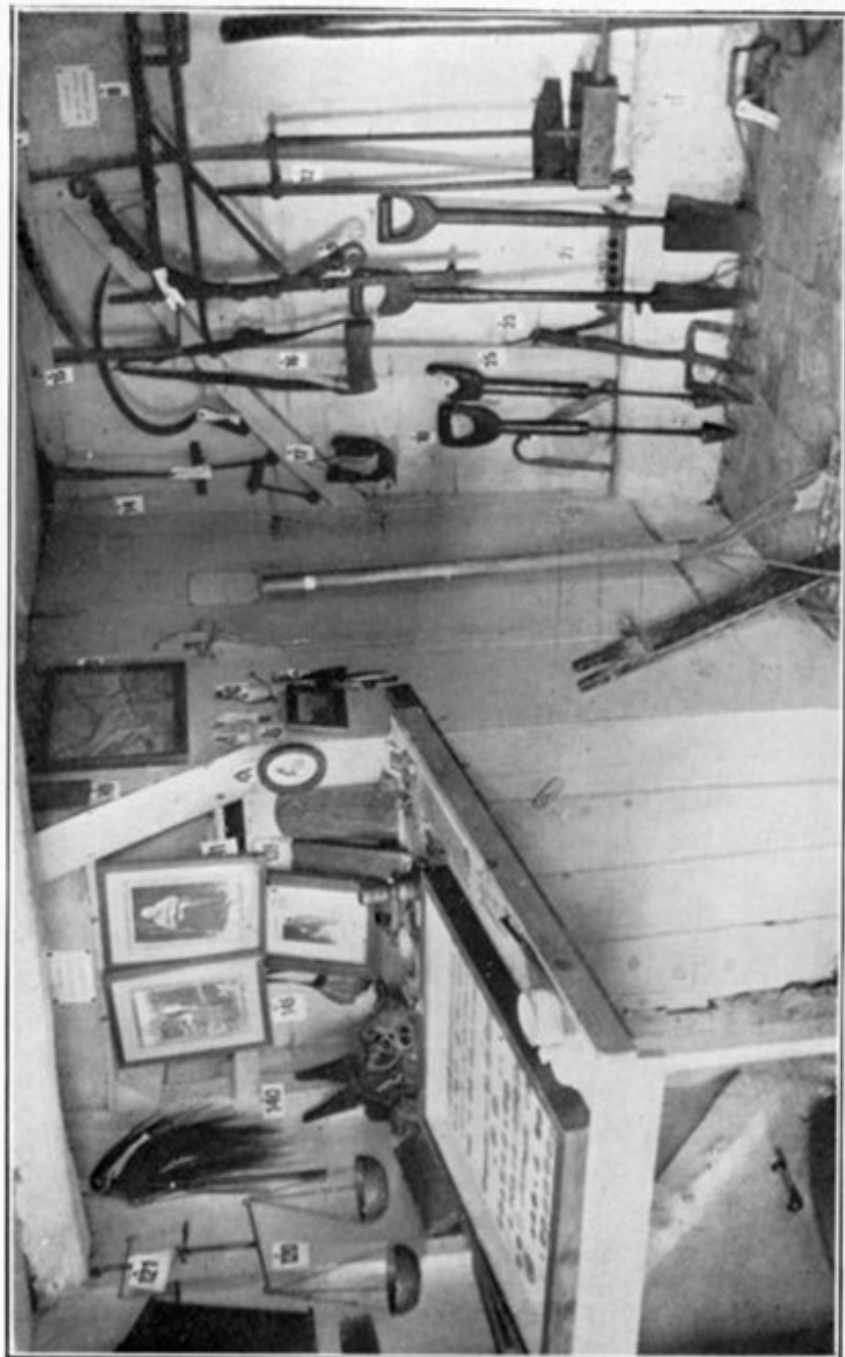
This booklet is based on Liz Mitchell's PhD research into the collections of Mary Hope Greg at Manchester City Galleries. It formed the basis of a talk given at Westmill Village Hall as part of a Guild of St George Companions' Day on Saturday, 24th June 2017.

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www.marymaryquitecontrary.org.uk.

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WESTMILL MUSEUM—INTERIOR.
From a photograph.

**‘Treasuring things of the least’:
Mary Hope Greg, John Ruskin &
Westmill, Hertfordshire**



*Westmill Village Hall, barn conversion by
Charles Spooner (Alec Hamilton).*

At the opening of the Westmill Village Hall in 1901, Thomas Greg gave a speech in which he explained the significance of a motto in the stained glass of the west window (*see back cover*). Chosen by his wife, ‘whose name I wish to associate with the building and opening of this hall’, it came from an old Hertfordshire farmhouse, and read simply ‘forbear not sowing because of birds’. ‘If we are to venture nothing, to attempt

nothing, to have no ambitions or aspirations because of possible failure', he explained:

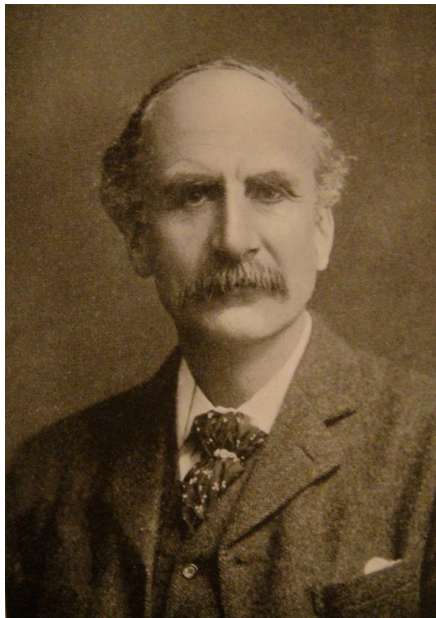
we shall do nothing [...] and so with possible failure ahead of me, as well as possible success, I have laid my money on this horse 'Village Hall', and hope to win at least a consolation stake.¹

Greg was heir to the Coles estate which included much of this Hertfordshire village. He and his wife had moved there from London after their marriage in 1895 and immediately involved themselves in village life.

Thomas Tylston Greg (1858-1920) was born in the industrial North West, into a wealthy and influential family of cotton magnates based at Quarry Bank Mill, in Styal, Cheshire. A man of diverse interests, he trained as a barrister, practised briefly as a solicitor, and was for a short while art critic to the *Manchester Guardian* and *Birmingham Daily Post*, before settling into the role of country gentleman. He was also an enthusiastic collector of antiquities and archaeological objects, developing a particular interest in historic British pottery. In 1895 he married Mary Hope of Bebington, Cheshire. Aged 38 and 45 respectively, they married late and did not have children. Their marriage was instead later described by a family friend in terms of the companionship of shared interests, in particular a keen love of nature and enthusiasm for collecting. Both were also passionately committed to the preservation of rural life, at a time when the depopulation of the British countryside was accelerating. During the first two decades of the

¹ Thomas Tylston Greg, *In Varying Mood* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1924) pp. 88-89.

twentieth century, they set about making a series of improvements together in Westmill, including the refurbishment of tenant housing, the expansion of the local school and, in 1901, the provision of a new village hall which, in Thomas Greg's words, was to be 'as beautiful and as good as my means would allow'.² Converted from an old barn by Arts and Crafts architect Charles Spooner (1862-1938),³ the hall was to be the focus of village life, and would in the fullness of time, he hoped, include a lending library, handicrafts courses, concerts, readings and amateur theatricals.



Thomas Tylston Greg (date unknown).

² Ibid., p. 89.

³ See Alec Hamilton, *Charles Spooner: Arts and Crafts Architect* (Stamford: Paul Watkins Publishing, 2012).

In 1920, however, following complications after a failed surgical procedure, Thomas Greg died, at the age of 62. It was thus left to his widow to resolve his affairs and continue the work they had started together. Although Mrs Greg was driven initially by a sense of duty to secure her husband's legacy, his death appears to have prompted in her a late flowering of philanthropic zeal and energy pursued in her own right. In 1922 she oversaw the transfer of his substantial collection of British pottery into the public ownership of Manchester City Galleries, in her husband's home city. What began as a fairly straightforward gift became an ongoing commitment to the wider development of several museums and the preservation of traditional crafts.



(Left) Copper comb, found in London, 5-6th century (Ben Blackall); (right) cut paperwork silhouette, 1781 (Liz Mitchell); both from the Mary Greg Collection at Manchester City Galleries.

Over the next thirty years she would assemble and give to Manchester over 1,500 objects reflecting domestic life, collected under the title Handicrafts of Bygone Times. She developed an interest in museum provision for children, putting together a parallel collection of dolls, dolls' houses and toys for Manchester's suburban branch galleries. She championed the development of a 'children's section' at Bethnal Green Museum in London's East End, acquiring and commissioning similar material for the collections there, and she became a close friend and ally of its pioneering curator, Arthur Sabin (1879-1959). She gave other objects and groups of objects to over thirty museums in Britain and as far away as New Zealand. In Westmill, she established the T. & M. Greg Trust, to ensure the ongoing preservation of the village beyond her own lifetime, and even founded her own small museum there, comprising collections of rural implements and domestic objects housed in a converted labourer's cottage. She did all this between the ages of 70 and 99.



Dolls' house, 19th century, from the Mary Greg Collection at Manchester City Galleries (Manchester City Galleries).

Until recently, little was known about Mrs Greg and the wide range of her philanthropic activities beyond those enacted with her husband. This is probably due, in part, to the fact that although she spent the last thirty years of her life engaged in public service, she was not a public figure. Instead, like many women of her class, she chose to go about much of her work in her husband's name, even after his death. But it is also perhaps partly because her abiding interest was in the small things of life: the unregarded, ordinary, and humble things that often represent the most intimate and meaningful aspects of our daily lives. Echoing John Ruskin's words, she later described her mission as 'treasuring things of the least'.⁴ Recent research has revealed both the extent of her activities and the centrality of Ruskin to her philosophy.

In 1935, by then aged 85 and living in a small flat in London, Mrs Greg wrote a letter to the Master of the Guild of St George, T. Edmund Harvey (1875-1955). Prompted by her reading of the Guild's latest report, it set out her lifelong interest in Ruskin and her desire to support the work of the organisation he had founded. The Guild of St George was the most ambitious of the eminent Victorian's many social projects intended to address the corruption and degradation of humanity that he saw as an inevitable consequence of industrialisation. Founded in 1871, it focused on three interconnected areas of activity – rural economy, craft revival and art education for the working man. Its members, or 'Companions', were mainly affluent middle-class men

⁴ Gloucestershire Archives D2218 2/3: letter from Mrs Greg to Miss Adlard (20 October 1929).

and women, some of whom – most notably Ruskin himself – donated money, objects or land in order to support a number of projects, from farming co-operatives to craft education to the development of a museum.

After Ruskin's death in 1900, the Guild worked to keep his ideas and values alive by adapting them to the shifting circumstances of the twentieth century. In the 1920s and '30s, it aligned itself with the growing conservation movement and with the renewed call for craft revival in the aftermath of the First World War. Such interests resonated with Mrs Greg, and she became a firm supporter of the Guild's work. She was elected a Companion of the Guild under the Mastership of Hugh Charles Fairfax-Cholmeley (1864-1940), probably in the late 1920s and certainly before 1934. Over the next fifteen years, until her own death in 1949, she donated objects and money, contributed towards the distribution of Ruskin's writings and circulated her own Ruskin quotation cards among friends and acquaintances. She was later designated a Companion Extraordinaire in recognition of her contribution, the only person to be honoured in this way. She bequeathed to the Guild eleven properties in Westmill, Hertfordshire (three of them subsequently sold), and a bungalow, Green Pastures, in Holcombe, near Bath, Somerset (also since disposed of).

Letters are key to understanding Mrs Greg's life and work. Written histories and official records consistently fail to recognise the contributions of women to public life. Many women worked 'behind the scenes' and it is often in private papers that evidence of

their contribution emerges. Mrs Greg was a busy and energetic correspondent, managing her various projects primarily by letter and maintaining a wide circle of contacts. The archives at Manchester City Galleries include 700 of her letters, and correspondence also survives in museums and archives across Britain. For an upper-middle-class young woman of the late nineteenth century, letter-writing was a key social skill, and an ability to ‘straddle the conversational and the correct’⁵ was regarded as a sign of good breeding. The letters Mrs Greg wrote in later life moved confidently between business and social matters, and clearly facilitated the development of friendship as well as ensuring the success of her projects. They form a significant body of evidence, offering insights into her motivation, personality and personal biography.

In contrast, she only produced one piece of writing for public consumption: the introduction to the 1922 *Catalogue of the Greg Collection of Handicrafts of Bygone Times*, recently donated to Manchester City Art Galleries. The collection, then totalling 700 objects, included a diverse range of material, from antiquarian and domestic objects including pottery, cutlery and clothing, to artisanal and amateur crafts such as ironwork, straw-work and embroidery. She described her motives in assembling it in terms of a sense of responsibility toward both the past and the future, and a desire to evoke a sense of wonder in visitors to the gallery. She explained:

⁵ David Barton and Nigel Hall, *Letter Writing as a Social Practice* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2000) p. 35.

[...] we owe it to those who have preceded us and have left us those specimens of their painstaking and beautiful work and to those who will come after us to do likewise, to treasure good work and produce something into which we have put our best, our love, our intelligence, our power.⁶

This sentiment applied to all her works and might well be used to describe her overarching philosophy. Both its meaning and choice of words bear a striking resemblance to Ruskin's concept of 'the great entail', the notion that we are custodians of our inheritance and have a duty to pass it on in the best possible condition to future generations:

God has lent us the earth for our life; it is a great entail. It belongs as much to those who are to come after us, and whose names are already written in the book of creation, as to us; and we have no right, by anything that we do or neglect, to involve them in unnecessary penalties, or deprive them of benefits which it was in our power to bequeath.⁷

Ruskin continues with a reflection on trusting to the future, his analogy of the harvest foreshadowing Mrs

⁶ Mary Greg, Preface to *Catalogue of the Greg Collection of Handicrafts of Bygone Times* (Manchester: Manchester City Art Galleries: 1922) p. 5.

⁷ John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) in E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (eds.), *The Works of John Ruskin* (39 vols.) (London: George Allen, 1903-1912), vol. 8, p. 233. Hereafter referred to as *Works*.

Greg's choice of motto for the Westmill Village Hall window:

And this is the more, because it is one of the appointed conditions of the labour of men that, in proportion to the time between the seed-sowing and the harvest, is the fulness of the fruit; and that generally, therefore, the farther off we place our aim, and the less we desire to be ourselves the witness of what we have laboured for, the more wide and rich will be the measure of our success.⁸

In 1928, in a letter to Manchester's Assistant Curator William Batho (d. 1937), Mrs Greg expressed much the same idea:

I am glad indeed to hear so many visitors have seen both the collections. How glad I should be – we all should – if we could know if any of them ever make a single thing as a result which will be a delight to themselves or their children and also for those who come after. We must leave the answer to the future.⁹

As the introduction also makes clear, Mrs Greg's intentions for the collection at Manchester were, above all, that it should provoke action. She wanted to inspire those who encountered it to continue the 'good work' by making things themselves:

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Manchester City Galleries Archives: letter from Mary Greg to William Batho (27 September 1928).

I cannot do better than quote Carlyle who says: 'Produce, produce were it but the pitifullest infinitesimal fraction of a Product, produce it in God's name. 'Tis the utmost thou hast in thee; out with it then, up, up. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy whole might, work while it is called today', so that what you make may be beautiful and worth handing on.¹⁰

Thus, while projects such as the Collection of Handicrafts of Bygone Times may be understood in many ways as a nostalgic reflection on the past, they were also, much like Ruskin's social projects half a century earlier, an exhortation to *do* something in the present, for the benefit of those to come.

In 1880 Ruskin had set out his own ideal vision of the museum, in relation to the St George's Museum, in Walkley, Sheffield, founded by Ruskin five years earlier as part of the Guild of St George. The museum, he asserted:

[...] is only for what is eternally right, and well done, according to divine law and human skill. The least things are to be there –and the greatest – but all *good* with the goodness that makes a child cheerful and an old man calm; the simple should go there to learn, and the wise to remember.¹¹

This passage is instructive when considering the range of Mrs Greg's wider interests: her focus on children and the donation of objects related to childhood to museums in

¹⁰ Mary Greg, *Catalogue of the Greg Collection*, pp. 5-6.

¹¹ Ruskin, *Works*, vol. 34, p. 260.

Manchester, London and later Liverpool and Salford; and the setting up of the Westmill Museum, described in its modest catalogue as ‘a shrine to the memory of Men of Little Showing, housed in the Temple that was their Dwelling-house’.¹²



WESTMILL MUSEUM—EXTERIOR.
From a photograph.

Westmill Museum (c.1924).

Opened in 1922, the Westmill Museum consisted primarily of domestic and agricultural objects sourced from Mrs Greg’s friends, both locally and further afield, with an open invitation for further donations extended to all local residents. Mrs Greg made the most of her professional contacts in developing the museum. In Manchester, William Batho advised on the printing of

¹² Guy Ewing, Introduction, *Westmill Museum* (Westmill: T & M Greg Trust, 1924) p. 1.

the catalogue and had various items framed for her.¹³ A year later she thanked him for his help, commenting that ‘our little museum grows in interest’.¹⁴ Westmill was one of several such initiatives established in rural communities during the interwar period. In 1929 Eleanor Adlard, Honorary Secretary of the Winchcombe Church Parvise Museum (now the Winchcombe Folk and Police Museum) in Gloucestershire, responding to the findings of a Royal Commission on National Museums, wrote a letter to *The Times*, in which she stressed the equal importance of ‘small, parochial’ museums. She argued:

The farm labourer’s breast plough, his master’s wooden cider bottle, the hautboy [i.e. oboe] which cheered up the church choir, local tokens, the housewife’s ‘lazyback’ kettle grid, the carter’s brass horse bells and ornaments – all these are obsolete, but redolent with tradition and country lore. Such collections are still possible, and if sponsored by the county archaeological society and guided by the nearest town museum curator, the most timid amateur can face fearlessly what lions may arise, and do a real national service.¹⁵

Identifying a kindred spirit, Mrs Greg sent Miss Adlard a copy of the Westmill catalogue, explaining that ‘it is so good to meet with anyone who is so keen on what one is so deeply interested in oneself & I feel the

¹³ Manchester City Galleries Archives: letter from Mrs Greg to Mr Batho (10 December 1922); and letters from Mr Batho to Mrs Greg (12 April 1923 & 13 July 1925).

¹⁴ Manchester City Galleries Archives: letter from Mrs Greg to Mr Batho (5 May 1923).

¹⁵ Eleanor Adlard, letter to *The Times* (14 October 1929) p. 10.

work of treasuring things of the least is most important.’¹⁶ Going further, she advised Miss Adlard to ensure that she did not neglect ‘lesser finds’ in favour of more glamorous or grand donations, explaining in relation to Westmill, that ‘you will notice in our catalogue that many things do not seem worth having – but I felt we ought not to refuse anyone who offered their treasures’.¹⁷

Reading across the different sources, both private and public, a unifying philosophy thus emerges that brings together Mrs Greg’s diverse projects, one that might be well summarised in Ruskin’s assertion that in a museum one should find nothing ‘that vanity has invented for change, or folly loved for costliness; but all that can bring honest pride into homely life’.¹⁸

It is perhaps not surprising that John Ruskin’s teachings had some influence on Mrs Greg. Born in 1850, her early to mid adulthood coincided with the high point of his reputation. Described by Leo Tolstoy as ‘one of those rare men who think with their hearts’,¹⁹

¹⁶ Gloucestershire Archives D2218 2/3: letter from Mrs Greg to Miss Adlard (20 October 1929).

¹⁷ Ibid. For further information about both Westmill Museum and the Winchcombe Church Parvise Museum, see Bridget Yates, *Volunteer-run Museums in English market towns and villages*, (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Gloucester, 2010).

¹⁸ Ruskin, *Works*, vol. 34, p. 262.

¹⁹ Leo Tolstoy, ‘An Introduction to Ruskin’s Works’ (1899), *Recollections and Essays*, translated by Aylmer Maude (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937) p. 188. In fact, Tolstoy’s encomium was originally published as an introduction to a Russian selection of Ruskin in 1898. See Stuart Eagles, *Ruskin & Tolstoy* (York: Guild of St George, 2016).

Ruskin's passionate prose and social activism attracted a large and devoted following, verging on hero-worship, during the latter years of the nineteenth century. Between 1879 and 1896, nine regional Ruskin societies were founded, dedicated to the promotion and circulation of his writings and the support of his practical projects. They provided close-knit, independent philanthropic communities that looked to further his work on their own doorsteps, predominantly in urban industrial and commercial centres. The first Ruskin society was founded in Manchester, closely followed by Glasgow, Liverpool, Birkenhead and Sheffield.²⁰

Mary Hope was born into a large, wealthy and well-connected family of Liverpool bankers and landowners. Her grandfather Samuel Hope was a Liberal Nonconformist, noted for his philanthropic work in the city. Mary was the seventh of thirteen children born to Samuel's son, Thomas Arthur Hope, and his wife, Emily Hird Jones. The family owned land in Cheshire, Flintshire and County Tyrone; they lived in a succession of properties in Liverpool, the Wirral and London and are known to have associated with other prominent Liberal families, including the Greg family into which Mary eventually married. Her early life was thus situated within an overtly progressive philanthropic and civic-minded context. It seems reasonable to speculate that the Hope family was at least aware of the Liverpool Ruskin Society's work, although no evidence

²⁰ See Stuart Eagles, *After Ruskin: The Social and Political Legacies of a Victorian Prophet, 1870-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) pp. 148-198.

has so far been found to connect anyone with the Society directly.

However, Mrs Greg's letter to the Master of the Guild, written many years later, offers up another possible connection. 'For years Ruskin has been an inspiration to me', she wrote in 1935. 'I was for a time at a school in Cheshire where he I believe chiefly organised the education and where he visited and for which he wrote *Sesame and Lilies*'.²¹ This is the only direct reference found in Mrs Greg's letters and other private papers to her own childhood. It suggests that she may at some point have attended Winnington Hall, Northwich, a small progressive private school for girls, with which Ruskin was closely associated during the 1860s. Winnington's founder and head teacher, Margaret Bell (1818-89), had first invited Ruskin to visit the school in 1859 after hearing him speak at a public meeting in Manchester. They immediately became friends and over the ensuing decade Winnington became a kind of retreat for Ruskin during a period of re-evaluation in his life. He became something of a visiting tutor, teaching art, divinity and other subjects, playing cricket and croquet. Winnington gave him a space in which to examine more closely his own religious beliefs through bible discussion with the daughters of Anglican and dissenting liberals, and to develop further his own theories of education. It introduced him to North West intellectual society and, in return, increased the school's status within such circles. He began a regular correspondence with pupils and staff, writing every week during term time from the spring of

²¹ Sheffield Archives GSG21/18: letter from Mary Greg to the Master of the Guild of St George (22 December 1935).

1859 until 1864. The ‘Sunday letters’ were written both to individuals and collectively to his ‘birds’ (as he called the Winnington girls). A continuation of his teaching, they were serious in content, ranging from biblical exegesis to mineralogy, but could also, on occasion, be playful.²²



Winnington Hall, near Northwich, Cheshire.

In 1865, Ruskin did indeed publish a book based on his Winnington experience, although this was not, as Mrs Greg later recalled, *Sesame and Lilies* (1865) but *The Ethics of the Dust* (1866). The latter took as its form a dialogue between an elderly lecturer and his young female pupils. *Sesame and Lilies*, however, also drew on Winnington in its discussion of female education. Ruskin

²² Van Akin Burd (ed.), *The Winnington Letters: John Ruskin's Correspondence with Margaret Alexis Bell and the Children at Winnington Hall* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969).

argued explicitly that boys and girls should enjoy the same schooling. Girls, he claimed, whose intellect ‘ripens faster’ than boys’, should be introduced at an early age to ‘deep and serious subjects’, encouraged to avoid unnecessary frivolity and instead to ‘add the qualities of patience and seriousness to [their] natural poignancy of thought and quickness of wit’.²³ This was a radical argument during a period when most girls were educated at home for the purposes of becoming good wives and mothers. At Winnington, however, students were encouraged to think for themselves, and on subjects that were not always deemed appropriate for women in polite society. Pupil Frances Colenso was described at the time by her mother as ‘quite impregnated with Winnington ideas, in harmony with those around her there – She will have to learn to give up her own will at home!’.²⁴

It is impossible to state conclusively that Mary Hope was a pupil at Winnington. Surviving archive material is scant, and information about its pupils partial at best.²⁵ However, her specific reference to attending a

²³ Ruskin, *Works*, vol. 18, p. 129.

²⁴ Cited in Jeff Guy, *The View Across the River: Harriette Colenso and the Zulu Struggle Against Imperialism* (Oxford: James Curry, 2002) p. 26.

²⁵ A small amount of archive material, including pupil Florence White’s notebook, two photographs c.1866 and A. S. Irvine’s research correspondence for a history of Winnington Hall are held at Cheshire Archives and Local Studies: DIC/BM15/24, 15/27, 16/1-2, DIC/X10/406, 10/413. Ruskin’s letters to Winnington (542 in total) are held at the Morgan Library & Museum, New York. See Van Akin Burd (ed.), *The Winnington Letters: John Ruskin’s Correspondence with Margaret Alexis Bell and the Children at*

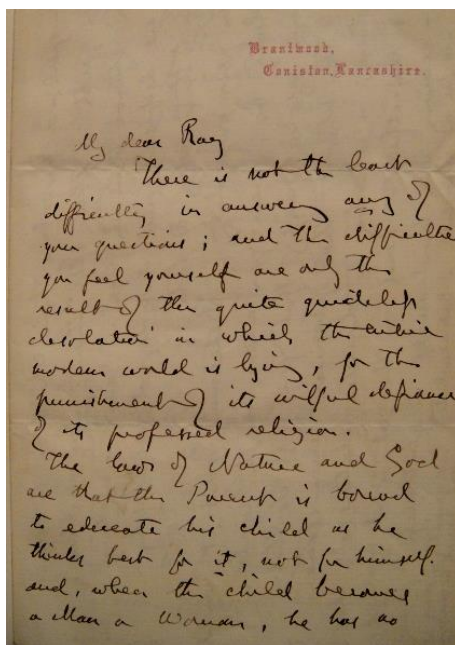
‘school in Cheshire’, her age during the school’s short lifetime (8-20 years old), and her family background of North West Liberal Nonconformism make it distinctly plausible. As no other evidence has been found for a specific Hope family connection to Ruskin, this would also account for the strength of Mrs Greg’s attachment to his teachings, an attachment that lasted well beyond the period of his popular appeal. Ruskin found several lifelong friends among the pupils of Winnington, some of whom became early Companions of the Guild of St George.²⁶ No evidence has been found to indicate that Mrs Greg was aware of this – her comment to the Master in 1935 would suggest that she was not. However, among the various donations she made to the Guild towards the end of her life, there are further documents that support a connection between her and both John Ruskin and Winnington Hall.

In 1939 Mrs Greg gave the Guild a small bundle of letters, written by Ruskin between September and November 1879 to a young woman by the name of Ray. Ray’s side of the correspondence does not survive, but from Ruskin’s replies it seems that she had written to ask his advice on the sensitive matter of marriage and obedience to one’s parents. Over the course of six letters, Ruskin advised his young friend to be resolute in determining her own fate, but to do so with as much respect and humility towards her parents as she could muster:

Winnington Hall (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969).

²⁶ For example, Frances Colenso, Dora Livesey, Constance Oldham and Lily Armstrong.

The laws of Nature and God are that the Parent is bound to educate his child as he thinks best for *it*, not for himself, and, when the child becomes a Man or Woman, he has no further power or Authority over its Mind or Body. He must neither dictate its religion – its duty – or its occupation. Every Man and Woman must choose and fulfil these, according to their own conscience. Much more, they must choose the partner of their lives according to their own love.²⁷



Brantham,
Conisland, Lincolnshire.

My dear Ray
There is not the least
difficulty in answering any of
your questions; and the difficulties
you feel yourself are only the
result of the quite needless
'absolutism' in which the entire
modern world is lying, for the
punishment of its wilful defiance
of its professed religion.
The laws of Nature and God
are that the Parent is bound
to educate his child as he
thinks best for *it*, not for himself,
and, when the child becomes
a man or woman, he has no

*Letter from John Ruskin to Ray, undated (1879)
(Ruskin Collection, Guild of St George/
Museums Sheffield).*

²⁷ The Ruskin Collection (Guild of St George) Sheffield Museums Trust, CGSG6142iii: letter from John Ruskin to 'Ray' (undated).

The letters thus indicate a mentor/mentee relationship of some intimacy. They suggest that Ray was facing a difficult decision with regard to marriage, one in which she was at odds with her parents' wishes. The final two letters end on a lighter note, but again demonstrate an intimacy between the correspondents as Ruskin discusses a mutual friend, Alice, and refers in passing to 'old Winnington dances'.²⁸ But who is 'Ray'? Ruskin's habit of giving his young friends pet names causes difficulties for the historian. There is no known associate of Ruskin by this name,²⁹ and it is thus tempting to suggest that 'Ray' was a pet name for Mary – referring to 'Ray of Hope' perhaps? Circumstantial evidence supports this theory. In 1879, Mary Hope was 29 years old, unmarried and living with her parents. Making a good marriage was regarded as the primary duty of middle-class Victorian girls, although in the event Mary would not marry until the age of 45. Even at 29, she was beyond ideal marrying age, as girls first entered the London season in order to meet potential suitors from the age of about 17.³⁰

All we can know for certain is that Mary Greg gave these letters to the Guild of St George. It is hard to imagine, however, how she would have come to own them had she not been their original recipient. Furthermore, given the intimate nature of their content, it

²⁸ Ibid., CGSG6142vi: letter from John Ruskin to 'Ray' (27 November n.y.),

²⁹ Apart from a housemaid by the name of Martha Ray at Brantwood.

³⁰ See Pat Jalland, *Women, Marriage and Politics 1860-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986)

seems unlikely that a woman of Mrs Greg's principles and upbringing would feel she had the right to give away letters that had belonged to anyone but herself.

The Ruskin letters should also be considered alongside another document in the Guild papers. Among the Greg correspondence, there is a typewritten copy of another letter.³¹ The date of the copy is not recorded, but the date of the original is given as 13 August 1879, some three weeks before Ruskin's second letter to Ray. It is addressed 'My dear Miss Hope' and signed Stopford A. Brooke. It too appears to be written in response to a serious personal question on which advice is being sought, in this case on the subject of charitable work. The Reverend Stopford Brooke (1832-1916) was an Anglo-Irish churchman, Chaplain in Ordinary to Queen Victoria from 1872 to 1880. He was also a poet, literary critic and friend of John Ruskin. His letter to Miss Hope addresses the question of usefulness, and the importance of putting to good purpose one's own learning. 'Culture is not knowledge', he advises, 'it is the power of feeling and using knowledge rightly for noble uses. It is to be sensitive to the right things and to enjoy them, and to be able to make other people see and enjoy them'.³² With the benefit of hindsight, this could almost read as a description of Mrs Greg's museum patronage, over forty years later. Moreover, Brooke goes on to suggest that:

[...] if you are weary – rest a while – And divide
your work; do half as much among the poor –
and give the rest of your time to *producing*

³¹ Sheffield Archives, GSG21/18.

³² Sheffield Archives, GSG21/18: undated copy of a letter from Stopford Brooke to Miss Hope (13 August 1879).

something. But let it be creation, production: put reading into form, or art thinking into form – force things out of vague thought into the open air.³³

This sentiment is markedly similar to that expressed by Mrs Greg in her later use of Carlyle’s exhortation, ‘Produce, produce, were it but the pitifullest infinitesimal fraction of a Product’.



Revd Stopford A. Brooke (1888).

Assuming that this document is a genuine copy of an original letter, the question arises as to whether the Ruskin letters address the same correspondent. It seems probable that they do – they are of similar date, similar purpose, and were both given to the Guild by Mrs Greg.

³³ Ibid.

Both also address personal anxieties. Finding a purposeful role in life was a cause of difficulty for many unmarried women of Mary Hope's generation and background. Despite the social expectation that all women would marry, many did not, and the role of spinster was not an attractive one. In *Sesame and Lilies*, Ruskin had argued that, whereas a man's knowledge and learning should be 'foundational and progressive', a woman's should equip her to be useful.³⁴ Brooke's letter to Miss Hope advises that 'self cultivation, unless it can be put into form, may not be useful at all'. Yet finding a useful outlet, for an unmarried woman, was a vexed question. Charitable work among the poor had long been a respectable activity for upper-class young women, but the growing institutionalisation of philanthropic endeavour in the latter part of the nineteenth century through predominantly male-organised committees, gradually reduced the range of opportunities available to women. Excluded from practical social work, they were increasingly restricted to socially acceptable home-based activities such as the sewing of garments for the poor and the organising of charitable concerts.³⁵ Mary Hope was born into a family with a history of philanthropic commitment. To what extent she or her sisters were involved in charitable work remains unknown, but Brooke's letter suggests a debilitating sense of frustration and doubt on the part of his correspondent.

Little else is known about Mary Hope's life until her marriage sixteen years later. A pencil portrait, by

³⁴ Ruskin, *Works*, vol. 18, p. 128.

³⁵ Margaret Simey, *Charity Rediscovered: A Study of Philanthropic Effort in Nineteenth-Century Liverpool*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1992).

Hubert von Herkomer (1849-1914), dated 1885, survives in the Manchester City Galleries collection.³⁶ The circumstances of its production are unknown, but it is inscribed 'To Miss Hope, with kindest regards' in what appears to be a different hand to that of the artist. Herkomer knew both Ruskin and Brooke; he painted



*Portrait of Mary Hope by Hubert von Herkomer (1885)
(Manchester City Galleries).*

³⁶ Manchester City Galleries, 1941.74.

Ruskin's portrait in the autumn of 1879 during the same period as the letters to Ray were written. In 1885, the date of Mary's portrait, he succeeded Ruskin as Slade Professor of Fine Art at Oxford. Herkomer and Brooke were joint vice-presidents of the Sunday Society, which campaigned for the Sunday opening of museums, art galleries, libraries and gardens. No evidence has been found of any of the Hope sisters' involvement in charitable organisations or other aspects of public life in Liverpool or London. However, a letter to Mrs Greg from Peter Entwistle, Deputy Curator of Liverpool Museum, written in 1923, concludes: 'I well remember yourself and your sisters years ago when you were in Liverpool'.³⁷ A native Liverpoolian, Entwistle had worked at the Museum since at least 1881.

A third gift to the Guild also hints at a direct connection with Ruskin's teaching and reveals another dimension of Mrs Greg's personality and interests. Both she and her husband were keen naturalists, Mr Greg developed the grounds of Coles Park to include a significant collection of trees, while Mrs Greg kept a nature diary for nearly twenty years from 1903 to 1922. In 1939 she gave the two volumes of her diary to the Guild, describing them as 'amateurish, I had no lessons. I tried to paint little things which I thought of interest or beauty – this Ruskin had taught me to aim at!'³⁸ This statement could refer simply to Mrs Greg's reading of Ruskin, but in light of other sources, it might support the theory that she had known him personally. The diaries

³⁷ Hertfordshire Archives, D/Esm F5: letter from Peter Entwistle to Mrs Greg (19 October 1923).

³⁸ Sheffield Archives, GSG21/18: letter from Mary Greg to the Secretary of the Guild of St George (15 June 1940).

are indeed amateurish, in the sense of being motivated by love; they are charming in their combination of detailed watercolour sketches, observations of weather conditions and the changing seasons, and the gathering of proverbs and poems on the subject of nature. In the frontispiece to the first volume, there are two inscribed extracts – one from Ruskin’s passage on the great entail quoted earlier, and one from the poem ‘Across the Moon the Fog Lies Fair’ by Canadian Romantic poet Charles Robert (1860-1943). It reads:

Make thou my vision sane and clear
That I may see what beauty clings
In common forms, & find the soul
Of unregarded things!³⁹



*Pages from Mary Greg's nature diaries (1904)
(Ruskin Collection, Guild of St George/
Museums Sheffield).*

³⁹ Final verse from Charles G. D. Roberts, ‘Across the Moon the Fog Lies Fair’, *Songs of the Common Day* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1893) p. 1.

In her diary Mrs Greg recorded monthly rainfall; the first appearances of hedgerow flowers; the return of swifts at the start of summer. She noted aspects of daily life including the ploughing of fields, the gathering of the harvest and encounters with local characters such as roadmender Henry Patmore, ‘a fine old man of the old school’.⁴⁰ Her entries range from the purely documentary, such as lists of plants in flower, to more lyrical descriptive passages:

that wonderful subtle beauty which comes with veiled sunshine & mist & yet a deep blue sky colouring the mist - & the scent of damp earth & leaves & grass & the dew over everything making the gossamer of the spiders [sic] webs look like soft woolly thread – & to crown it all the delicious throaty caw of the rooks.⁴¹

They also give a sense of her determination and strength of will:

I so enjoy being out in a good wind, being half lifted & carried along by it or still better meeting it full in the face & battling with it!⁴²

During 1904-5, Mrs Greg made regular entries in her diary, diligently recording daily observations of the changing seasons. From 1906, however, they become more sporadic, with months and even years between

⁴⁰ The Ruskin Collection (Guild of St George) Sheffield Museums Trust, CGSG04942: Mrs Greg’s nature diary, volume 1, p. 32 (25 February 1904). Patmore died in 1911 aged 85 (information from Stuart Eagles).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, volume 1, p. 114 (27 September 1904).

⁴² *Ibid.*, volume 1, p. 141 (30 December 1904).

entries. But a single entry in June 1914, the first in over six years, draws on Wordsworth to articulate a kind of epiphany in nature, notwithstanding her failure to keep the diary going:

[...] not because I care less for what I see and learn – in this world so full of beauty and interest but because I have not the same leisure or strength to go about in the sweet wild places – my joy in it all is indeed far deeper, more reverent, more spiritual – for ‘I have felt a presence that disturbs me with the joy of elevated thoughts’ as I look at the sky and stars and sun and moon, birds, flowers, trees, everything!⁴³

This is the only entry for 1914 and she was not to revisit the diary again for a further three years.

Included with the entry quoted above, however, were the words of a recently published poem, ‘Immanence’, by the Christian mystic Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941). The poem articulates a theme that seems to underpin much of Mrs Greg’s philosophy of life in its refrain, ‘I come in the little things’. The poem speaks a narrative of home, through repeated architectural metaphors for the human heart – porch, threshold, lintel – and draws a parallel with nature in the imagery of the nest. It finds God not in the grand gesture but in the everyday – more particularly in the harmony between humanity and the natural world – and can be read as a paean to both the English countryside and the patterns of everyday life, threatened not just by industrialisation but by the shadow of war.

⁴³ Ibid., volume 2, p. 97 (June 1914).

The poem's use of 'things' as a way into spiritual revelation is also suggestive of Mrs Greg's attitudes to material and spiritual worlds. She was born into a family of Baptists, married a Unitarian and, after his death, served for a time as church warden at St Mary's (Anglican) Church in Westmill. If she did attend Winnington Hall, it would have brought her into contact with a range of religious perspectives, as it did Ruskin who went through his own religious crisis during this period. More significantly it would have introduced her to educational ideas founded in Nonconformist attitudes towards faith as the achievement of human potential rather than atonement for original sin. Winnington Hall and other progressive establishments followed the theories of eighteenth-century Swiss educationalist Johann Pestalozzi (1749-1827), who believed in personal development through the investigation of individual experience rather than learning by rote. Advocating the unity of 'head, hand and heart', a phrase later popularised by the Arts and Crafts Movement, he developed the model of the object-lesson, which aimed to stimulate natural curiosity through hands-on investigation and observation of the material world. Encouraging children to keep a nature notebook became a standard feature of progressive schooling, and it is noticeable that the second volume of Mrs Greg's nature diaries is not a plain notebook (as is the first), but a school exercise book produced for the Parents' National Educational Union (PNEU), an organisation that promoted a Pestalozzian learning model. Mrs Greg's use of Evelyn Underhill's poem can thus be interpreted in terms of a combination of progressive ideas, bringing

together faith, education, moral and physical health and the material worlds of both humanity and nature.

Mrs Greg left Westmill in 1927. Thomas Greg's will had stipulated that the estate be sold and, in any case, as she wrote to her friend William Batho in Manchester, 'I had for some time found living there too much of a burden and so lonely'.⁴⁴ She took a flat in London, and although she clearly missed country life, continued to devote herself to museum work until her death in 1949, shortly before her 100th birthday. Her ashes were returned to Westmill and buried with those of her husband at St Mary's Church.

My research into Mrs Greg began with an interest in her collections at Manchester City Galleries, where I was previously employed as a curator. In Manchester she had long been recognised primarily as the wife of the collector of a nationally significant pottery collection. However, at the turn of the 21st century, the growth of interest in amateur craft and everyday creativity, coupled with a need to make the best of those collections in long-term storage, directed our attention to Mrs Greg's own collections, much of which had not been seen in public for many years. It was only then that the extent of her wider activities began to emerge.

Mrs Greg was a conservationist, naturalist and amateur curator whose work was grounded in a Ruskinian belief in the unity of art, nature and humanity. She negotiated the boundaries of public and private life,

⁴⁴ Manchester City Galleries Archives: Letter from Mrs Greg to Mr Batho (19 December 1927).

and of gender and class-based social propriety, in order to realise not just her husband's ambitions but her own. Surviving evidence is circumstantial in places, but nonetheless suggests that she had access to some of the most progressive thinkers of her age on matters of society, culture and art, and that the teachings of John Ruskin remained an abiding influence on her life and work. It paints a picture of a young woman attempting to find a purposeful role in life, a role that perhaps only really became possible after her marriage.

Mr and Mrs Greg's legacy is still visible, in museum collections in Manchester, London and elsewhere, and also in the village of Westmill. The Westmill Museum has sadly gone; it closed with the onset of the Second World War and appears never to have re-opened. At some point in the 1960s its contents were transferred to Stevenage Museum and the building was subsequently demolished. However, the T. & M. Greg Trust endures, maintaining several properties in the village, the children's playground and allotments. Several houses still carry commemorative plaques in memory of Mr and Mrs Greg's work together there; and then there is the motto in the west window of the Village Hall, also maintained by the Trust. Its message is as relevant as ever in our unpredictable world:

Forbear not sowing because of birds.

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Guild of St George Publications

The Guild currently publishes two or three lectures each year. These include the annual Ruskin Lecture, the Whitelands Ruskin Lectures and other occasional publications.

The Guild also publishes a wide range of cards based on images from the Ruskin Collection in Sheffield. Full details of all these cards and publications can be viewed on the Guild’s website www.guildofstgeorge.org.uk or send a self-addressed stamped envelope for a fully illustrated coloured brochure to:

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The Guild of St George

The Guild of St George was established by John Ruskin in 1871. Ruskin strove to make Britain a pleasanter and happier place in which to live. His aims and aspirations for the Guild were set out in the ninety-six letters of *Fors Clavigera* (1871-1884).

Today the Guild is a charitable Education Trust which tries to put Ruskin's hopes into practice. It owns and supports the Ruskin Collection housed at the Millennium Gallery in Sheffield and runs a community-based project, *Ruskin in Sheffield*, to engage local people with the city's Ruskinian heritage. The Guild initiated an annual John Ruskin Prize for drawing, run by The Big Draw, now an independent charity but originally set up by the Guild in 2000 and called The Campaign for Drawing. The Guild publishes the Ruskin, Whitelands and other occasional lectures and monographs, as well as *The Companion*, an annual magazine detailing its activities and exploring aspects of the organisation's history. The Guild owns farm houses, woodland, meadows and orchards near Bewdley, in Worcestershire, and is currently deepening its links with local communities there through the *Ruskin in Wyre* project. It also owns a wildflower meadow in Sheepscombe, Gloucestershire, managed by Natural England.

An exhibition of works from the Ruskin Collection, focusing on Ruskin and Science, is due to take place in London and Sheffield in 2019, to celebrate the bicentenary of Ruskin's birth.

This booklet is the text of a lecture given at Westmill, Hertfordshire, where the Guild owns eight Arts and Crafts properties.



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'Forbear not sowing because of birds': the west window at Westmill Village Hall (Alec Hamilton).

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GUILD of St GEORGE

The charity for arts, crafts and the rural economy, founded by John Ruskin in 1871.



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