

# The Companion

## The Newsletter of The Guild of St George

Number 12 (2012)

[www.guildofstgeorge.org.uk](http://www.guildofstgeorge.org.uk)

### RUSKIN IN TODAY'S WORLD

I am delighted to be taking over as editor of *The Companion* and urge you all to feel free to send in contributions for future issues. Much of the groundwork this time was done with characteristic diligence and flair by Graham Parry, whom I'd like to thank warmly and sincerely on behalf of all Companions for his exemplary work in recent years. It is a particular pleasure to include material by Graham, and another former *Companion* editor, Francis O' Gorman, and I am personally grateful to both of them for their continued support and enthusiasm.

Francis, a Professor of Literature, is well placed to assess literary value, and brings his judgement to bear on our Master, Clive Wilmer (probably to Clive's surprise, as on this matter at least he was not consulted!). Clive's book, *New and Collected Poems*, was published earlier this year by Carcanet. In celebrating Clive's considerable achievement, Francis reminds us that Clive, like former Masters of the Guild, has made a real and enduring contribution to cultural life. I have dipped into an unusual source — the memoirs of a Chinese journalist — for an account of one such 'Past Master', Hugh Charles Fairfax-Cholmeley. And Clive's predecessor, Jim Dearden, whose inestimable contribution to Ruskin Studies is appreciated by us all, is interviewed by Graham Parry. This sits neatly alongside Jim Spates's interview with Dr Dearden's friend, the eminent American academic, Professor Emeritus, Van Akin Burd, whose meticulous, foundational editions of Ruskin's correspondence will ever remain landmarks in Ruskin scholarship.

Jim Spates and Sara Atwood have combined forces to edit a new regular column conveying information and news about North American Companions. In Dickens's bi-centennial year, 'American Notes' commended itself as a title. Ruskin's birthday was elaborately celebrated especially towards the end of his life (and the day has been marked since) and 2012, the Diamond Jubilee, is in fact a year of anniversaries. As Shoji Sato notes in his article, it is 150 years since *Unto This Last* was published as a book (with its far-sighted preface). It is also a century since the

death of Octavia Hill (1838-1912) and Cook and Wedderburn completed the Library Edition of Ruskin's *Works*, and these are commemorated respectively with a new article by Robert Hewison (to be published later this year) and an exhibition at the Ruskin Library, Lancaster (closing 21 September) curated by Stephen Wildman and Jim Dearden.

I am particularly keen that through these pages we further strengthen and augment the international nature and worldwide reach both of the Guild and of Ruskin's legacy. It is especially satisfying, therefore, to present contributions from French, Russian and Japanese Companions, as well as Britons and Americans, and to present reviews of books originating from France, Italy and the Netherlands. Through *The Companion* we can come together in print in a truly cosmopolitan community and we can appreciate the extent to which Ruskin informs debate all over the globe.

The Guild's ongoing work and activities are recorded in a number of reports. Clive Wilmer reviews Zoë Bennett's thoroughly engaging lecture, 'The true use of faith' (available as a booklet from our secretary, Norman Hobbs). I am sure that all Companions who attended last year's AGM were inspired, as I was, by Aonghus Gordon's account of the place of Ruskin in the Mill's innovative blend of practical skill-development and therapeutic learning. Aonghus's article, which I am particularly pleased to publish, underlines Ruskin's continuing relevance in education. I have written an account of the symposium, 'Who pays for the environment?' jointly organised with the Ruskin Library and Research Centre, which took place at the Art Workers' Guild in February this year. Such events provide an opportunity for Companions to meet and in gathering together we learn more about the Guild, Ruskin and the role of both in the modern world. It is a chance to discuss, debate and exchange — to think carefully about what we have done, what we continue to do, and where we might like to go in the future.

## The Guild of St George

Master:	<i>Clive Wilmer</i>
Directors:	<i>Janet Barnes, James Dearden, Chris Harris, John Iles, Peter Miller, Cedric Quayle, Clive Wilmer, Robert Wilson, Jacqueline Yallop</i>
Secretary to the Board:	<i>Norman Hobbs</i>
Editor of <i>The Companion</i> :	<i>Stuart Eagles (stuar eagles@hotmail.com)</i>

It is always useful to learn more about the Guild itself and to ensure that others can access reliable and digestible information about us. To that end, the Guild now has an excellent new website (see [www.guildofstgeorge.org.uk](http://www.guildofstgeorge.org.uk)). Louise Pullen, who is running the site, has recently added, in the form of PDFs, the issues of *The Companion* and *Fors* that she has been able to find, so Companions will now have access to these. To find the Companions' private section of the website you must type the following address:

[www.guildofstgeorge.org.uk/companions-registration](http://www.guildofstgeorge.org.uk/companions-registration)

Companions will need to use this to create their login. (The address is not available directly from the online web-pages, which will make it more difficult for non-Companions to create a log in.)

In addition, I was asked to improve the entry for the Guild on the ubiquitous Wikipedia, usually the first but regrettably rarely the best place to which casual internet users are transferred by their search engines (see [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guild\\_of\\_St\\_George](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guild_of_St_George)!) I would urge you all to contact me with any improvements, suggestions and — most urgently — corrections.

Louise Pullen gave a fascinating presentation last November at the Art Workers' Guild to members of the Ruskin Society, using digital images of selected items in the Guild's collection at Sheffield to provide a taste of the treasures which that cultural granary houses. The Guild continues to be involved in the May Monarch festival at Whitelands College, now part of Roehampton University, the history of which provided the basis for an entertaining and informative talk at this year's Annual Birthday Dinner hosted by the Ruskin Society at the Athenaeum. This year's festival was held on 19 May. By the time you read

this it is probable that the Guild's trip to St George's Field, Sheepscombe and Ruskin Mill, Stroud will have taken place (Saturday 9 June) and we hope to carry a report of it next year.

I recently visited this beautiful, tranquil spot at Sheepscombe — donated to the Guild by Miss Margaret E. Knight in 1937 — and can only express my deeply-felt gratitude that such unspoilt and mercifully 'unimproved' areas continue to thrive. High on ground overlooking the village, it borders the cricket pitch bought by the celebrated local author, Laurie Lee (1914-1997). I also travelled recently to Holcombe, near Bath, to see the bungalow, Green Pastures, that Mrs Mary Hope Greg bequeathed to the Guild in 1949 (subsequently sold in the early 1960s). In Mark Frost's review of Sue King's recent book, we also take a fresh look in this issue at the Mill at Laxey (which I enjoyed visiting in 2002). Nothing, I think, makes the history and legacy of the Guild more tangible than personally attending events and visiting such sites, experiencing and seeing them oneself.

Not merely as a country, but together with much of the rest of the world, we continue to struggle with the debilitating hangover that has resulted from our binge on financial speculation. Unencumbered by any sense of restraint we have been free to over-indulge to a dangerous extent. (Given how long-standing the roots of our economic problems are, perhaps we should think of ourselves in this metaphorical vein as old soaks dealing with the consequences of our disease!) Dickens's Mr Pancks in *Little Dorrit* (1855-57) neatly exposes the old problem buried in the new complexity of the 'sub-prime' fallacy that caused the sorry house of cards to topple over: 'Credit is a system whereby a person who cannot pay gets another person who cannot pay to guarantee that he can pay.' We are all familiar with Ruskin's unsparing attacks on such human folly, discussed



Cynthia Gamble, Louise Pullen and Clive Wilmer after Louise's presentation on the Guild collections to the Ruskin Society, November 2011. Photo: Robert Whelan.

at length at the first of the Guild's co-sponsored symposia in 2010. Ian Hislop doffed his cap to Ruskin's critique and his philanthropic efforts in his recent television series *When Bankers were Good* (sic!) in which he considered what lessons modern bankers might learn from their Victorian ancestors. More substantially, the slew of newspaper articles invoking Ruskin's economic philosophy as an antidote, or at least a palliative, to the apparently corrosive form of capitalism that prevails, justifies a hope that Ruskin is gaining currency. Witness, for example, David Barnes's *Observer* piece, 'John Ruskin can help to rail against the dehumanising power of capitalism' (6 November, 2011). 'Ruskin,' he writes, 'dreamt of a world where we yearned for a better, not a richer, society, a world where families could present their children with the words "these are my jewels". We should too.'

Some of the lessons we might draw from Ruskin and Dickens were recently surveyed by Daryl Lim in *The Oxonian Review* (see [www.oxonianreview.org/wp/there-is-no-wealth-but-life/](http://www.oxonianreview.org/wp/there-is-no-wealth-but-life/)). Mr Lim, a history finalist at St Hilda's College, Oxford, has written a fine dissertation on the early reception of *Unto This Last* and it is to be hoped that he continues with his promising work in the future. In the meantime, all of us who care about Britain's cultural life must try to survive the swingeing cuts that are hacking chunks out of, among other things, our libraries, art galleries and museums. This has had a direct impact on the Guild, as cutbacks at Museums Sheffield have led to the postponement of the second of our triennial exhibitions, details of which Clive Wilmer gives in his *Letter*.

There are always oases to be found in the funding-deserts! One such is that gleaming beacon of hope and encouragement, so intimately bound up with the recent history of the Guild, the *Campaign for Drawing*. 'The John Ruskin Prize 2012 for a New Look at Nature' is a joint enterprise between the Guild and *Campaign*. Open to anyone 18 and over (students and artists) working in painting, drawing, printmaking or mixed media, and resident or domiciled in the UK, the competition closed on 1 June. The judges — comprising Clive Wilmer, Howard Hull, the *Campaign's* director, Sue Grayson Ford and the artist, Peter Randall-Page — are looking for fresh and unusual interpretations of the natural environment. Ten short-listed artists (announcement: 6 July) will have their work included in an exhibition (and sale) at Brantwood (running: 8 September-14 October). One night's accommodation will be provided to allow finalists to attend a Private View of the exhibition on 7 September at which the winner will be announced. First-prize is £1000 and the opportunity to exhibit at Brantwood and the aforementioned triennial exhibition at the Millennium Galleries. The winner will also receive a specially commissioned pencil-case made from oak grown in Ruskin's Wyre Forest. Like Ruskin, the *Campaign*

and the Guild are issuing a challenge in the hope of stimulating a creative and enthusiastic response to the natural world.

It must be a matter of satisfaction, even celebration, that new editions of Ruskin's books are being published. Pallas Athene is conspicuous in producing attractive volumes with accompanying essays by leading Ruskin scholars. *The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century* is the latest in a line that already includes *Unto This Last* and a facsimile edition of the Kelmscott *Nature of Gothic*. In addition, Oxford World's Classics has just issued Francis O' Gorman's edition of *Praeterita* which joins Dinah Birch's edition of Ruskin's *Selected Writings*. I also know of modern editions of Ruskin in countries as far-flung as Russia, Turkey and China. In May, Ruskin was the subject of discussion at the Scuola di San Rocco in Venice. It remains to be seen what the legacy of Ruskin's big-screen treatment in the forthcoming *Effie* will be, but if it points more people to Ruskin's books then it is to be welcomed.

I cannot end without expressing my sincere thanks to all who have contributed to this issue of *The Companion*, and especially to the Master and Directors of the Guild for entrusting me with editing it. They join me in reiterating my heartfelt thanks to Graham Parry for all his hard work on behalf of the Guild. He has set the high standard to which I now aspire. This can only be achieved with the continued support of Companions from whom I always welcome articles, pictures, news and views. After all, this is *your* journal, not mine. And in an edition which is replete with Companions' testimonials to Ruskin, it is a great pleasure to end my first editorial by welcoming the following Companions to the Guild: Celia de Piro, Aonghus Gordon, Chris Harris, Prof. George Landow, Dr Laurence Roussillon-Constanty and Andrew Russell who all signed the roll in Sheffield last year; and those yet to do so — Nichola Johnson, Tatiana Nikitina, Emma Sdegno, Robert Taylor, Prof. Diane R. Leonard, Dr William C McKeown, Mrs Christine Parker, Prof. Jeffrey Richards, Prof. John D. Rosenberg, Shoji Sato, Prof. David R. Sorensen, Sue Grayson Ford, Dr Rachel Dickinson, Prof. Bob Steele, Rev. Dr Alison Milbank, and Emma Bogaard. Let us all together carry Ruskin's legacy forward.

*Stuart Eagles* ([stuarteagles@hotmail.com](mailto:stuarteagles@hotmail.com))



*Green Pastures Cottage, Holcombe, near Bath, bequeathed to the Guild in 1949 and sold in the 1960s. Photo: Stuart Eagles.*

## A LETTER FROM THE MASTER OF THE GUILD

Dear Companions

This year *The Companion* has a new editor, Stuart Eagles, whom I'd very much like to welcome to the job. As I do so, I would like to give my thanks and those of the other Directors to our outgoing editor, Graham Parry, whose work on *The Companion*, notably in his excellent articles, has been exemplary.

Most of you will know Stuart already, but for those who don't I'd like to say a word or two about him. He is one of the outstanding new Ruskin scholars, the author of a remarkable history *After Ruskin: The Social and Political Legacies of a Victorian Prophet, 1870-1920* (OUP, 2011). In 2010 he gave the Ruskin Lecture on Ruskin and Tolstoy: part of his long-term study of Ruskin's reception in pre-Communist Russia. Stuart has contributed a good deal to the life of the Guild, most recently in his work on Wikipedia, for which he has written the Guild's entry as well as a magisterial entry on John Ruskin. I am sure he will be a brilliant editor.

Last year we took on two new Directors. Jacqueline Yallop is known to many of you as a former Curator of the Ruskin Gallery, as a Ruskin scholar and as our Ruskin lecturer in 2009; she now works as a free-lance writer and has published two novels. Jacqueline's long experience of Sheffield will be of especial value to us. The other new Director, Chris Harris, happens to be the son of a former Master, Anthony Harris, which gives him an excellent pedigree. He is by profession an accountant in the charity sector and we have taken him on to be the Guild's first Treasurer. I am sure both of them will add a great deal to our achievements.

At Sheffield this year's big event will be the opening of the second Triennial exhibition in the Millennium Gallery. This is to be called *The Force of Nature: Picturing Ruskin's Landscape*. Curated by Louise Pullen and Rowena Hamilton, it promises to be a dazzling show with innovative contemporary work alongside Ruskin, Turner and company. This year's Ruskin Lecture at the AGM on 17 November, which will now take place in Oxford, will be on the theme of landscape. It will be given by our fellow Companion, Howard Hull, Director of Brantwood.

As you may have heard, however, Museums Sheffield is in the throes of a major funding crisis, having lost its Arts Council grant. Forty-five employees have been made redundant and both the Chief Executive and the Finance Director have resigned. As an effect of this, *The Force of Nature*, which was to have opened in October, has had to be postponed to Saturday 15 December. Because the opening is so close to Christmas, the private view will take place much later than you might expect:

from 6.00 to 8.00 pm on 9 January 2013. It will be opened by that enthusiastic and eloquent son of Sheffield, Roy Hattersley. One good consequence of the changes is that the exhibition will probably now run for six months rather than three. Incidentally, our Keeper Kim Streets, whom some of you know, has just been promoted to the post of Chief Executive Officer at Museums Sheffield. The Board very much welcomes that appointment and sends Kim every good wish for her future and that of Museums Sheffield.

The Board is also embarking on a major new project in Sheffield. What Ruskin set up in Sheffield was an educational collection. Ever since the Collection moved from Norfolk Street, I have been worried that the people of Sheffield were losing their awareness of it. It no longer seemed to play a significant role in their lives; some people could not see the point of it and many didn't know that it existed. But when Ruskin founded the St George's Museum, he chose Sheffield as its home for precise reasons. It was designed to play a part in the lives of working people, situated as it was with its back to the smoky city and its face to the Peak District. *The Ruskin-in-Sheffield Project*, as we are provisionally calling it, will reach out to the city. It will go out to meet the people, collaborate with schools and arts organisations, run tours of the city and classes on relevant themes. It will not only talk about Ruskin and nineteenth-century Sheffield, but about contemporary Sheffield too, using Ruskin as a lens through which the city and its culture can be seen. Janet Barnes has taken responsibility for planning the early stages, but we shall soon be taking on a project director.

Life continues to develop at Bewdley. St George's Bungalow, which has recently been vacated, is being refurbished. When the work is finished, the Bungalow will be integrated more closely into our work at Bewdley, which is led, as you know, by John Iles. I shall have more to report of that at a later time.

Stuart has described elsewhere how you can view the Guild's new website. I'd like to thank Louise and Director Peter Miller for all the work they have done on this. If you have any problems with it, please contact one of them — Louise at [Louise.Pullen@museums-sheffield.org.uk](mailto:Louise.Pullen@museums-sheffield.org.uk) and Peter at [peter.miller@kenselman.com](mailto:peter.miller@kenselman.com).

I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible in the course of the year.

All good wishes.

*Clive Wilmer*

## OBITUARIES

### David Guy Measures (1937-2011)

It is with great sadness that we learn of the death on 4 August 2011 of the artist, David Measures, for 47 years a resident of Southwell, Nottinghamshire. He spent a lifetime recording Britain's natural history in images of birds, mammals, plants and especially butterflies. Those butterflies, with their natural kaleidoscope of colours, formed the subject of his major studies: two books, *Bright Wings of Summer* (1976) and *Butterfly Season: 1984* (1996) and the focus of an episode of David Bellamy's 1970s BBC television series, *Bellamy's Britain*. Measures was a keen observer of the natural world whose art (watercolours, pen drawings, sketches) captured the living essence of its subject, depicting what he could personally see, immortalising *life*, in all its infinite variety, as it unfolded before his eyes. His work was always done in the countryside he spent a lifetime exploring with endless love and fascination — walking, swimming, rowing. He never worked in a studio. He always kept detailed field diaries recording the circumstances of his work. Sketches of birds were accompanied by birdsong in musical notation; the times and locations of his nature-studies were meticulously noted; he depicted butterflies in flight instead of analysing microscopic detail in (and to) death. His art, as Julian Spalding points out in his obituary of Measures in *The Guardian*, was 'delicate' and 'energetic' — in Ruskinian terms, it was *praise*.

Born in 1937, the son of a bank manager, he grew up near the banks of the Avon and in the shadow of Warwick Castle. He attended Warwick School and then studied for four years at Leamington Art School. Later he took a teaching diploma at Bournemouth and studied painting at the Slade School of Art in London. A teacher inspiring the next generation of artists throughout the rest of his career, he moved after a short spell at Lancaster Art School to Nottingham Art School (present-day Nottingham Trent University) where he remained from 1964 to 1992. He served as head of printmaking and enjoyed travelling to Italy and Spain. In retirement, he concentrated on his art, embracing studies of orchards and landscapes (including Cressbrook Dale, Derbyshire) and was always creative in his approach and method.

*Laurence Johnson* writes to say: 'Marianne and I first met him in 1973 when he and Ken Lee brought a group of students to Brantwood to re-enact the lives of Ruskin and his circle (as described in my article in *The Ruskin Newsletter* IX,



David Measures (1937-2011). Photo: Maggy Milner.

Autumn 1973) and he became a dear friend thereafter. As we had lost contact for some years, it was a delight to see David and Christine at last year's [i.e. 2010] A.G.M.'

Measures had completed a study of a hobby falcon, *A Hidden Surprise*, shortly before his death. He is survived by his artist wife, Christine Cummins, and their two children.

### Rev. Michael Lawson Malleeson (1942-2011)

All losses are great, but a sudden, accidental death can be all the harder to take and it was with shock and sadness that we learned of the bicycle accident at Heaton which killed Rev. Michael Malleeson on 1 December last year. An enthusiastic cyclist and traveller, he and his wife had peddled through Europe, Russia, America and Cuba in their upwards of 45 years together. There is some consolation in knowing that to the end of his life he remained actively engaged in and with all that he loved.

The retired vicar of St John's Church, Killingworth in North Tyneside, which he served from 1993 to 2006, he was descended from priests dating back to the seventeenth century, including the Rev. F. A. Malleeson (Michael's grandfather), vicar of Broughton-in-Furness, with whom Ruskin corresponded (some of their letters being first published in 1879). *Christine Parker* remembers meeting him for the first time in 1977 when she was a neighbour of Michael's sister, Jane Boyd. It was not until 11 years later that their common interest in Ruskin was discovered: 'Michael responded by writing to me to encourage me in my studies and tell me about his own research. He was very interested to hear about the Ruskin Seminar Group at Lancaster University and subsequently was able to attend on one or two occasions.' A Companion, he came to the 'Art and Economics' Symposium in 2010 where perhaps many of us saw him for the last time.

Rev. Malleeson was born in Hereford, the son of a smallholder. He studied at the University of Wales, Swansea and worked in hospital administration in Newcastle. He trained at Lincoln Theological College and was ordained Deacon in 1970 and made a priest in 1971. He served at two churches in the Diocese of Wakefield (including St John's) and became Vicar of St Alban's in Windy Nook, Gateshead, serving there from 1980 to 1993. Active in his retirement, he strongly supported the work of St Gabriel's Church, Heaton and nearby parishes. He also served as chair of the school governors at Holystone Primary School in Whitley Bay. As the wealth of tributes which poured in to the diocese demonstrates, he was a well-respected and much-loved member of the community. The Assistant Bishop of Newcastle, the Rt. Rev. Frank White, said: 'Michael has served in the dioceses of Durham and Newcastle in a number of different situations and has been a very faithful and well-respected priest.' He was appreciated for the quiet diligence with which he oversaw his responsibilities, the great care he took of those around him and his modesty in the face of all his achievements. In the words of his friend and colleague, Rev. Sue Wilson, he will be remembered above all for his 'gentleness, love and wry humour'.

He is survived by his wife, Eileen, two children and three grandchildren.

## THE WORLD OPEN FORUM, BRANTWOOD, 2012

The World Open Forum was conceived in 2010, at a meeting at Brantwood, as a way of reviving radical thought in the heart of the Lake District, very much in the tradition of Ruskin. Its initial distinctiveness was as a counter point to the narrow focus and general profligacy of the World Economic Forum in Davos. So we committed ourselves to a parallel meeting in early February, with limited likelihood of skiing. As an antithesis of the elitist Davos gravy train, the Open Forum is inclusive, open to all-comers who have an interest in discussing the broad problems that face us in terms that are not purely economic.

The Forum has now met on two occasions, in 2011 and 2012. At our first meeting we considered the idea of *Recivilization*, suggested and introduced by Howard Hull. In 2012 we asked 'What makes our common life?' — a theme that arose from my development of a new British Standard (BS8904) for sustainable communities.

One of the joys of the Open Forum is that we are a travelling circus. We have now established a pattern, starting with the first day at Brantwood, reconnecting with our Ruskinian roots, we then transferred to Grasmere and the Jerwood centre for day two, concluding with day three, in the Ambleside area, this time at the home of Thomas De Quincey in Rydal. So not for us, sitting in dreary conference halls trying to listen to a string of speakers, we are regularly on the move, continually challenging each other in different and always inspiring situations.

While the highlights are many, our ability to see and be in the presence of original documents at the Jerwood Centre, in the shadow of Dove Cottage, has brought a sparkle of realism and connection with past great thinkers. To see a fragment of a letter describing my own valley of Easedale allowed me a rare moment of seeing through the eyes of our predecessors.

We have laboured on the question of the future of the economy, possibly as much as others in snow-draped Davos, but our deliberations are much more rounded in terms of possible solutions and the role of community action. This has led us for two years now into a consideration, for our final session, of the role of the value of education, with a particular poignancy given the uncertain future of the long tradition of higher education at Ambleside, started by Charlotte Mason. We mulled over the idea of a 'Dartington of the North' and whether the forum had a role in making this happen. There is a good deal of support for this idea as a practical outcome of the forum — and any input or feedback would be welcome.

We are always hearing Ruskin's words *There is no wealth but life*, and exploring the intersection of ethics, sustainability, community and place. It is the difficulty of expressing what we feel, in words that are readily understood, and in practical actions that make a difference, that provides the challenge — and the reason why we will meet again in 2013. You are welcome to join us!

*David Jackman, The Ethical Space*

### WHO PAYS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT?

An Account of the Symposium: 11 February, 2012, Art Workers Guild

The promotional material sent out for this event made a bold claim. 'The aim of this Symposium will be to look as fearlessly as possible at the real problems that confront us with the help of Ruskin's words and ideas.' This was our task on a bitterly cold day in February. We were warmed by four half-hour presentations, a keynote address and a discussion that involved the speakers, organisers and guests.

In introducing the day, *Clive Wilmer* explained that this symposium had arisen directly out of its predecessor that focused on 'Art and Economy' — the question of how we think about and treat the environment being of increasingly pressing concern. As Governments refuse to spend money on protecting our planet today in order to save it for tomorrow, it falls to the rest of us to spell out the multiple costs of inaction. Ruskin anticipated many of our contemporary concerns and articulated a narrative on which we can build. Tracing Ruskin's sense of crisis to *The Queen of the Air* (1869), Wilmer said that this work was fired by an anxiety that too many people never 'saw the sky or breathed fresh air' and that the world faced irrevocable damage as a consequence of human greed. The sober tone of *Queen* was replaced by the 'nearly hysterical' view of climate change expressed in *The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century* (1884). Wilmer demonstrated that Ruskin's ideas were informed by keen observation, couched in distinctively Christian terms. Justified by now widely-acknowledged developments Ruskin, he said, is 'a fit prophet for our present situation'. Ruskin's

relevance was the recurring theme of the day.

Companion *Mark Frost*, who is a plant breeder as well as a scholar and lecturer in English Literature at the University of Portsmouth, set the discussion on a firm footing with a vital summary of Ruskin's key ideas framed by the question of 'how we place a value on environment'. 'Ruskin's response to nature,' he said, 'can act as a lens through which to think about solutions, approaches, or simply ways of seeing that have contemporary resonance for us.' Frost was consistently alive to Ruskin's sources (Evangelicalism, Natural Theology, Romanticism, personal scientific observation) and the development of his ideas over time. He explained that Ruskin believed that by re-evaluating our relationship with the environment we would not only gain deeper pleasure from it but a profounder sense of our responsibilities to it. Frost described Ruskin's engagement with nature and the environment as 'combining the attributes of the scientist and the poet'. 'Go to nature,' Ruskin told artists. The 'innocence of the eye' is expressive of a childlike wonder at looking. In seeing nature, by leaning to draw, we are reminded of the duties of stewardship. Only as stewards are we able to transform ourselves, society and the environment. At the root of Ruskin's argument is his insistence on the interconnectedness of all things. Oxygen and iron, for example, are needful to existence, providing the 'vital energy' that breathes life into the lifeless. Ruskin saw beyond the banal. Without iron, he said, we cannot

even blush! Ruskin wished his audiences ‘not only to see, but to embrace; not only to value, but to protect’. After the 1860s, when his thoughts became increasingly politicised, Ruskin focused on the Guild as the ‘most ambitious response to the problems of modernity’. He supported campaigns for protecting landscapes and buildings. *Storm-Cloud* was his profoundest warning about man-made climate change. He linked his observation of weather patterns with the effect of factories: the darkening of the skies doubled as a symbol of the darkening of human souls in a society that had descended from reverence to greed, unable to understand the role and value of the environment. An ageing, beleaguered Ruskin saw that his childhood world had been overrun by the railways, tourism, architectural vandalism and agricultural revolution.

Frost was particularly strong in highlighting the contemporary resonances and enduring relevance of Ruskin’s interventions in historical debates. In 1876, a successful campaign against the extension of the railway from Windermere to Keswick resulted in part from a pamphlet to which Ruskin contributed the preface. Although the attempt the following year to save Thirlmere from development as a reservoir by Manchester Corporation failed, Ruskin voiced concerns central to our contemporary debates. Individuals must become nature’s representatives against the exploitation of the commercial interests of real estate. The cultural value of the environment — the enjoyment of natural scenery — must be fully realised, and the ecological effects of destroying complex eco-systems fully acknowledged. Framed by his Christian motivations, Ruskin’s thesis is scientific, moral, cultural and spiritual.

We have a responsibility to protect the natural world. It cannot be separated from cultural and social associations, nor its complex interwoven history. The environment is a result of dynamic interactions between landscape, humans, plants and animals: conservation is a continuum. Ruskin was at the forefront of the argument that Nature is a multi-faceted resource. ‘His insistence on stewardship and on finding a means to evaluate it that isn’t founded purely on financial calculations is central to his work.’ We are not merely to conserve and protect: ‘nature itself can provide solutions to social, economical and ethical problems’. An eloquent and effective presentation was neatly summed up: ‘In a world of carbon off-setting — cost-benefit calculations being made by some environmentalists in well-meaning attempts to protect natural resources — we may lose sight of Ruskin’s simple point that while we can apply financial analysis to the environment we run the risk in doing so of buying into the very value-system that is the cause of so many ecological problems.’

The keynote address shifted the focus significantly to strategy. Our speaker was **Sara Parkin**, co-founder, director and trustee of Forum for the Future and an environmental campaigner of forty years’ standing. In introducing her, **Stephen Wildman** noted that Ruskin had only the previous day been quoted in a *Times* leader on the national desire for beauty. Parkin’s emphasis was on co-operation — forging a partnership between central and local government and business. She noted



Cartoon from The Spectator, 19 January 1991.

how the different questions one asks lead to different answers, demanding different logical responses to how we lead our lives. Ruskin, she said, thought in systems; he was trying to provide a framework for our thinking. Not the first to consider climate change and environmental damage, Ruskin’s interventions were nevertheless powerful and significant. But why have we failed to do enough about these problems?

Only 20% of people (including Ruskin but few of today’s leaders) think in outcomes — in terms of the consequences of decisions. We cannot pay for the environment! As human beings, we are no different *from* the environment. But there are actions we can take, by cooperating in communities to enhance our resilience. For example, debt amnesties were an opportunity to start again, going back to, or forward to, a sense of social obligation. It is here that Ruskin’s concentration on human relationships is fruitful. His analysis of capital scrutinised the relationships between labourers, consumers, the production of goods and services. For Parkin, as for Ruskin, the meanings of words are crucial. Capital (from head (of cattle)) equates to resources; and wealth is not merely money, but about flourishing and prospering in a deeper sense. A sustainable environment might best be defined as when environmental, social and economic goals are achieved at the same time

It is not in nature that we will find solutions for ourselves, she said: it is down to us. The environment will be fine. It may be different. But it will get rid of us before we get rid of it. The environment is not fragile. We need to be humble. We need to change what we do and how we do it, not *for* the environment, but *for ourselves!* But there is perhaps a problem with the language here. The notion that the environment ‘will take care of’ or ‘look after’ itself, and ‘will be fine’ of *itself*, regardless of what *we* do (and this approvingly came up again later in the discussion) imbues the environment with what seems to me to be essentially human traits of well-being as opposed to mere survival (cf. pathetic fallacy). It seems somewhat at odds with the argument that we are responsible as humans for making the environment fit for us, because it is part of us and we are part of it. But Parkin insists that it’s an unequal relationship, because the

environment will infinitely adapt, whereas our ability to adapt is restricted insofar as survival depends on certain vital elements.

‘Ruskin’s error,’ she insisted, was to hark back to something that was better before rather than to look forward to a brighter future. The future required us to stop dwindling down the stocks by constant spending of one sort of another, and instead to enhance the flow of benefits from capital of every kind. But (as Ruskin recognised) financial capital should facilitate our objectives, not *be* our objective. We need to (re-)design the economy to achieve new outcomes.

Ruskin, who believed in the interconnectedness of all things, helped to pioneer the argument that we must take our responsibilities to the environment seriously. As such, Forum for the Future employs some sensible and no doubt necessary strategies. It is not difficult to understand why politicians and businessmen are most effectively persuaded by a flow of diagrams, charts and graphs, and keenly-marketed, deceptively simple concepts. Parkin praised Ruskin’s ‘insight’ and the ‘essence of his leadership’: to be guided by our ends, as human beings, rather than to be blinded by means would surely have appealed to his sense of logic. He would have approved, too, of the notion that this is a moral question — that it is up to us.

In the lengthy, wide-ranging discussion that followed, Parkin likened the argument over the need for us to change to bringing up children (need *to* change, rather than *for* change, underlining our responsibility to act). In particular, behaviours can be encouraged with incentives (or benefits of outcome). Would we save the tree or the child, if forced to choose? You choose the child, yet the child ultimately needs the tree... Parkin spoke of an intellectual and even a criminal corruption of power endemic in the conspiracy of deals (it seems an apt collective noun) that underwrite the pact between big business and government. The challenge is to tell a story that brings about change by attracting rather than compelling, she said, and it was clear that her presentation was a realisation of that understanding. Self-reliance rather than self-sufficiency was a crucial distinction. We have human responsibilities as well as human rights. Parkin’s final comments ended on a positive note: seeing hope in the next generation to achieve the type of changes that are now widely recognised as not only necessary but desirable.

The next two presentations spoke of the practical applications of Ruskinian ideas.

**Michael Ramage**, Fellow in Architecture at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge and a prize-winning environmental architect, explained the Ruskinian context to some of his own work. Acknowledging that sustainable development is a slippery term, he argued that it is best defined as ‘a way of meeting the needs of our present generation without compromising the opportunities of future generations’ — and it has economic, social and environmental aspects. This requires buildings that sustain environment and economy in local communities with local materials. This is neither a vision of the future nor an historicist viewpoint, but should be seen as contemporary and viable today. His presentation benefitted from a series of stunning photographs and short video clips. To help demonstrate the value of craft, Ramage showed a film of an African brick-

carrier whose ingenious loading of bricks on his head to carry across a narrow bridge impressed the audience. The values of skills and economies should not be separate.

Sustainable buildings are low or zero-energy environments (heated by bio-mass, day-lit, and built from long-lasting materials; serving as human capital). King’s College Chapel, Cambridge (of which Ruskin was not an admirer!) and the hall of Sidney Sussex College were given as historical examples that can help to inform contemporary architecture and engineering. The challenge of sustainability is not, above all, scientific — but cultural. When we calculate who runs up the (high) bill for the environment, 30% of emissions are found to be from buildings (considerably more than from cars).

Selecting examples from his own work of how this can be combated, Ramage described the careful engineering of Crossway, Staplehurst (featured on *Grand Designs*): a passive (energy-efficient) house — see [crossway.tumblr.com](http://crossway.tumblr.com) The even weight-bearing across an arch stretching over the entire building enhances stability and the sun’s energy is captured by solar panels. With only slight alteration, very contemporary buildings (with, for example, super-efficient insulation) can be achieved.

In northernmost South Africa, Ramage described a building he had worked on that respects the significant cultural environment and natural landscape in which it is placed. Sympathy he defined as ‘not to blend in necessarily; nor to stand out unnecessarily’. Architects and engineers need to ask how buildings are constructed as well as what is to be constructed. We must build for the future to give our children equal, if not greater, opportunities than we have enjoyed. ‘There’s no reason,’ he said, ‘why we cannot do that with all of our buildings.’

**Clive Wilmer** absolutely captured the mood of the audience when he said how much the talk had invested us with hope and optimism, a feeling that was maintained after lunch with the presentation by Guild Director, **John Iles** (recently to be seen in *Escape to the Country*, tx. 26.01.12 BBC1) talking about Uncllys and the Guild’s presence in the Wyre Forest — see [www.uncllysblog.blogspot.co.uk](http://www.uncllysblog.blogspot.co.uk)

Companions will be familiar with the untiring efforts of John and Linda Iles — in the words of Clive Wilmer, ‘to breathe life’ back into this land identified with Ruskin since George Baker’s donations of the 1870s. Respect for nature is commensurate with hope for people, Iles said. Part of the environmental movement since 1976, an engineer in the electricity industry before that, Iles had been an early convert to the long-term benefits of insulation above nuclear power. Concluding that the only way forward is to ‘just get on and do it’ Iles exemplifies that spirit of ‘doing’ so central to Ruskin’s identity. Saved from ‘development’ partly by its poor quality, the land consists in 6000 acres. Ruskin spoke of the ‘beautiful, peaceful and fruitful’ — and whilst the Wyre Forest offers the foremost, the last is the challenge to which Iles has risen so successfully and inspiringly. Briefly summarising the Guild’s Bewdley history, he ended with the Ruskin Studio opened in 2010 and constructed from local oak.

With 100 acres of trees, the area includes wild flower meadows (orchids, cowslips) and an orchard boasting 120 different varieties of apple which had recently produced

10,000 bottles of juice from fruit that would otherwise have been wasted. The land remains mercifully un-'improved'. No chemicals are used, no mechanical ploughing is done. **Mark Cleaver**, the farm manager, described the cultural landscape and how cattle are used for grazing and biodiversity is respected. Uncllys is part of the Grazing Partnership that promotes traditional practices nationwide. 'It's all about people, it's about reengaging people back with the landscape and respecting it,' Iles said.

Visiting groups are welcomed and encouraged to respect nature's richness. This includes, for example, craft workers, and therapeutic work with recovering alcoholics and autistic people. Indeed, it was made clear that everyone is welcome and every effort is made to give all the opportunity to flourish. **Fran Fowkes** of the Small Woods Association explained how young people are being trained as forest apprentices. The Guild's lands are being used to make things (woolcraft, oak fencing, bread-making) but above all, one might say they are being used to promote wealth as Ruskin saw it: to nourish 'noble and happy human beings'. People are finding a 'new life in themselves' by fruitfully making things, building new communities, battling rural poverty and giving true meaning to the word 'asset'. It is the nearest the area has come to realising Ruskin's ambition, and the future promises a craft centre, accommodation and further wealth-creation of the Ruskinian kind.

**Tony Pinkney** from Lancaster University, William Morris blogger and at one time a Green Party councillor, marked a shift from the specific and practical to the literary and ideal. He surveyed the particular and personal visions of the future in recent green utopias, asking how they can help to inform our own sense of mission as green activities, environmentalists and so on. Acknowledging the rather slippery terms of his central question, he defined recent as 1970s onwards. Green utopias, he said, are often an ideal (or an extreme) of social simplicity: low-tech agricultural economies. Often mirror-images of utopia-dystopia characterise the developing literature; one man's utopia being another man's dystopia. Bellamy's *Looking Backwards* and Morris's *News from Nowhere* exemplify this phenomenon. Raymond Williams said that socialism was not about being simpler but infinitely more complex. It has a political and technological dimension: Power is centralised, issues are debated more — and more advanced technology is ubiquitous. Recovering the historical contexts to utopias, Pinkney argued that we do not need either one or the other but both Moore and Bacon; Bellamy and Morris. Aldous Huxley is a sound mix of dystopia and utopia, he said: *Brave New World* has its counterpart in *Island*, whose 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary is celebrated this year.

Displaying maps of utopias from several different novels, Pinkney turned to Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (1975), a novel focused on the organisation of science, technology and research. It is Future-primitive. It interrogates the problems with overall political structures and local detail. Six years later, in 1981, Callenbach released a prequel that like Morris's chapter, 'How the Change Came' describing the Civil War, scrutinises what made the utopia possible. Plausible accounts of how to get from A to B seem necessary; the vision of a future is not sufficient. If the model is one of revolution then perhaps the achievements of the sword must be defended by the sword.

Pinkney described Kim Stanley Robinson's trilogy — *Red Mars*, *Green Mars*, *Blue Mars* — as 'the science-fiction achievement of the 1990s'. An unusual ecotopia, it describes a double revolution; 'revolution and revolution reloaded'. The first was characterised by terror and bloodshed (red); the second was less-violent (green). Tiny, local details show the emergence of political awareness in what is an 'energising and politically-invigorating book'.

What emerged from Pinkney's talk was the fundamentally political nature of utopia. What we can learn from these post-Marxist imaginings of radical social change is perhaps how to mobilise ourselves towards green, social transformation. If we cannot rise to that challenge, we will never get there.

**Howard Hull** opened up a 45-minute general discussion by describing the recent World Open Forum (detailed elsewhere). Notions of Environment, he said, come back to human sentiment — what's in our hearts. How can we make the change happen? It is similar to the dilemma we face over the economy. We recognise the difficulties but the point is to move forward. Ruskin was keenly aware of bio-diversity — the interconnectedness (in his terms) of air, water and soil. Our focus must necessarily be at once global, because of the chain of influence, and Local, because it is at the local level that we as individuals and communities can respond. This latter point is exemplified in Brantwood, Uncllys and Michael Ramage's architecture. Ruskin saw social, political and community elements to wealth. Our capacity to change depends on our belief in ourselves.

With the discussion opened out to the floor, a dizzying array of points were made: about new social housing; the tradition of craft; the practicalities of making bricks from local clay in the Wyre Forest; the problem that square buildings are easiest to build but least efficient to run. **Brian Lewis** — publisher, artist and poet — remarked that the day had been quite 'brilliant': the Guild has grown from an intellectual institution dominated by university people to become a practical organisation, developing tools to push forward the wider debate. It does not have a bullet-point strategy but shows practical leadership. It is focusing on the vision, selling that vision and finding the real wealth in life.

**David Barrie**, not wishing, he said, 'to cast a pall' over that optimism said that most leaders of politics and economy would 'simply roll their eyes at what we have been talking about'. The current crisis opens up new possibilities, but how could we supplant or overthrow the colossal vested interests in the established model, he asked? Did it require civil war or a catastrophe? **Michael Ramage** responded powerfully: challenging engineers by getting them to think about designing the sharpest implement that you can get closest to a man's throat without cutting it was the way to recruit people to Gillette, rather than offering them work on men's cosmetics — a point that neatly encapsulates how to package the debate. **Tony Pinkney** recognised Barrie's challenge with an anecdote about how Lancaster's Occupy movement had been aggressively (if temporarily) closed down by a police operation despite the fact that they had made material improvements to a crumbling eyesore of a disused hotel whose owner had neglected it for years..

**Howard Hull** re-emphasised the combined need for individual action (attitudinal change) and systemic change (the provision of a government framework) and **John Iles** expressed faith in the resilience of humanity and our ability to adapt. Though, as **Barrie** said, governments were still wedded to economic growth, there are, **Stephen Wildman** thought, signs that governments had accepted the need to re-balance economies. And there is a sense of hope in the projects in which the Guild is engaged in partnership with others.

It was suggested that people might be minded to change by looking at their own children and considering their legacy. Hope, Redemption and Salvation — in their eternal, human sense, not any dogmatic sense — were beacons. Hull recounted how a former volunteer at Brantwood had given a rendition

of Ruskin's lecture 'Traffic' to members of the Occupy movement in Buffalo, NY. It is evidence of the power of ideas and language. **Clive Wilmer** responded that it was precisely Ruskin's language that had first gripped and inspired him, but it must be recognised as a block to many modern readers. The responsibility of the Guild, he said, is to reach out to those blocked from Ruskin's words. Endorsing Lewis's comment about the practical nature of the Guild today, he said that the symposium, though 'a small gesture,' was a part of that effort. 'You cannot care for Ruskin,' Wilmer had said in his speech opening the day's discussions, 'without caring for his message. And his message is as alive and urgent in 2012 as ever it was. More so, indeed.'

*Stuart Eagles*

## JOHN RUSKIN'S 'EYE FOR BEHOLDING' AND THE RISE OF 'NATURE DEFICIT DISORDER'

*Born in Gloucester, Aonghus Gordon spent his formative years in Venice. He completed a BA in Ceramics and Art History followed by teacher training, gaining a Post Graduate Certificate in Education at Breton Hall, Leeds in 1981. In 1982 Aonghus created the Ruskin Mill Arts and Crafts Centre, founded the Ruskin Mill Educational Trust in 1996, co-founded Hiram Trust in 1994 and co-founded Waldorf College in 1999 as well as establishing Glasshouse College, Stourbridge in 2000 and Freeman College, Sheffield in 2005.*

*He was awarded Entrepreneur of the Year in the UK in 2005 and went on to establish Clervaux Trust, Darlington, for excluded children in 2008, as well as the Biodynamic Farm provision Plas Dwbl, Wales in 2011, part of the newly inaugurated Living Earth Land Trust. He co-founded Brantwood Specialist School for children with learning difficulties, Sheffield in 2011 and is currently building a further and higher education centre to open in 2012. The Field Centre will be launching the MSc in Practical Skills Therapeutic Education in September 2012, delivered by the Crossfields Institute and validated by the University of the West of England. Aonghus lectures frequently in Russia, Saudi Arabia and the USA.*

One of John Ruskin's many braids of genius can be seen in his commitment to 'seeing' and 'nature'. His untiring endorsement of them both is, in short, one of his great legacies. In 2003, Howard Hull, Director of Brantwood, delivered a lecture at Ruskin Mill. This was a seminal moment for me personally, as Hull was able to bring to life the John Ruskin as 'seer' and activist. I felt a deep commitment to this remarkable man. The commitment was ignited from the perspective of what might be termed for Ruskin's time a 'counter-cultural' view of the world. He advocated values, not drawn from cultural tradition so much, but from his sourcing of life both aesthetically and scientifically perceived in the Natural World. Hull endorsed his commitment to what we might today call 'communities of practice'; the Murano lace makers of Venice, the Cutlers of Sheffield. He endowed honour into hand-skill. Hull of course had a captivated audience — it was riveting — artists, crafts people, tutors, storytellers and not least the eclectic community of Nailsworth and Stroud. His lecture still rings from the mosaic floor in the Trust's art gallery.

I have also been fortunate enough to have lived in Venice for seven years, and when you read Ruskin you can see Venice, not only from Ruskin's description but Ruskin writes as if viewing a canvas; it's not linear, it braids, it is as if light shimmers from the canals, it ricochets back and forth from the buildings. It could be said that Venice, herself a teacher of nature, offers sensory integration. I'd like to recall one of the many moving incidents of Ruskin's own life. At around the age of 14 he was given a small travel book (*Italy* by Rogers), which was illustrated by Turner. Due to his father's occupation as a merchant, the young Ruskin was able to visit a number of the sites depicted by Turner. Ruskin took this book of landscapes and indeed, from

these very same view-points from which Turner had painted, Ruskin discovered something remarkable, as Hull describes:

For Ruskin, Turner had captured something absolutely sublime, not just pretty but something actually almost fearfully beautiful, something that was profound and Ruskin was so moved by this ... that he felt that he had to understand how it was possible that a human being with just a ... pen could make a mark that could somehow capture something so deep and so profound about the experience of standing before nature that it was a spiritual ... almost God-like experience (Hull, 2003)

150 years on and the decline in the opportunity for our children to engage in full sensory development, of 'seeing' and 'doing' in nature, is increasingly being shown to be at the heart of many contemporary syndromes, exclusions and distress. The second half of the 20th century has seen a meteoric rise of what I would wish to call 'second-hand image-giving' through visual media, computer games and the 'virtual world'. The corresponding increase in preference in our culture and national curriculum for virtual and 'menu-based' learning (and entertainment) has been catastrophic, mirrored by a near-epidemic increase in Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and ADHD. By contrast, the growing recognition of 'Nature Deficit Disorder' (Louv, 2005) and issues of 'inclusionality' (Rayner, 2004) re-establish the importance of nature and relationships to the living world. John Ruskin was a visionary of his time: he saw the power of nature and the arts as a key in enabling young people towards fulfilling their potential. He is also a visionary for our contemporary need for visual aesthetic, practical, social and imaginal inclusionality.

This crisis of nature deficit was at the core of the founding of Ruskin Mill Trust in 1983. The students who access our Practical Skills Therapeutic Education (PSTE) curriculum have little if any biography of outdoor education. Recently, Stephen Moss was commissioned by the National Trust (one of John Ruskin's visions) to research how this national body of preserved landscapes and buildings might avail their resources to support children's development, not only for education but also recreation. Moss says: 'Nature Deficit Disorder is about two things: poverty and technology. It is a symptom of increasing hours spent in a virtual environment' (Moss, 2012).

And Moss spells it out further:

On average, Britain's children watch more than 17 hours of television a week; that's almost two-and-a-half hours per day, every single day of the year. Despite the rival attractions of the Internet, this is up by 12% since 2007.

British children are also spending more than 20 hours a week online, mostly on social networking sites.

As children grow older, their 'electronic addictions' increase. Britain's 11 - 15-year-olds spend about half their waking lives in front of a screen: 7.5 hours a day, an increase of 40% in a decade. (Moss, 2012, p. 4)

Whether or not we see the rise of media-based images as one of the great post-war achievements, the social and neurological evidence for art, craft and nature-based learning as a restorative intervention is unassailable (see Dr Aric Sigman's 2008 report *Practically Minded*). In the face of this rising assault on the senses of our children, Ruskin's towering and seminal insight stands as a beacon:

The greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to see something, and to tell what it saw in a plain way. Hundreds of people can talk for one who can think, but thousands can think for one who can see. To see clearly is poetry, prophecy and religion — all in one. (*Works* 5.333)

Here we see Ruskin as one of the great 'seers' of coherence and cohesion. Is Ruskin alluding to the sacred in being able to be 'touched' through the eye, engaging with our world and encountering a universe beyond? Tragically, however, second-hand images are dispensed in their millions and very often with an element of propaganda — manipulation. The victims of this manipulated image-making process are vulnerable communities, individuals who have not been given the tools to enter into the primary world of experience and thus develop discernment. The students coming to the Ruskin Mill Trust have largely been fed on this technological diet of visual stimuli.

The Trust's curriculum sources at the very heart a 'Ruskinian' inclusional aesthetic where nature, art and natural science afford new learning opportunities. This curriculum is not based on secondary visual stimulation but on primary participation in time and space, enabling a 're-stepping' of primordial experience. This primordial experience places nature as the primary image-giver; it is worth remembering that the word 'imagination' contains the word 'image'. I believe it is in the capacity of a self-generated image that you are able to gain access to your own power in creating autonomy, imagining your own future path, and following it.



Ruskin Mill, near Stroud, Gloucestershire. Photo: Stuart Eagles.

Part of the method of Ruskin Mill Trust in developing this autonomy centres on putting students into the 'spirit of place'. It is inconceivable that we are likely to gain the opportunity of authentic experience without the primary senses being touched, ingratiated, by what we may call the 'affordance of nature'. It is precisely in this affordance of nature that we develop and stimulate the power of imagination. D. H. Lawrence has something to say here about place and the spirit of locality:

Different places on the face of the earth have different vital effluence, different vibration, different chemical exhalation, different polarity with different stars: call it what you like. But the spirit of place is a great reality. (Lawrence, 1923)

It was Ruskin's destiny that he set himself a task to better understand how this remarkable dialogue between man and nature could express an extraordinary sublimity, not only in Turner but, for example, in how the Venetians were able to build a vision-imagination of Venice (Ruskin's *Stones of Venice*, 1851-1853).

Ruskin gives us further insight as to how the human being might access this degree of sublimity:

The thoughtful man is gone far away to seek; but the perceiving man must sit still, and open his heart to receive. The thoughtful man is knitting and sharpening himself into a two-edged sword, wherewith to pierce. The perceiving man is stretching himself into a four-cornered sheet, wherewith to catch. (*Works* 11.52)

One of the great challenges for students with special needs is often to 'enter into' their body and to become practically skilful. Work, skill and self-reflection are human requirements for effective participation in society. From pre-fabricated, virtual and textbook-based learning, our students arrive and are offered a learning experience through natural resistance, brought about by an integrated environment. This requires them to be challenged both on a personal and inter-personal level through interaction and collaboration, often through an outdoor curriculum. The integrated curriculum of listening, communicating, moving, working, generating judgement, social awareness, health and safety and the adaptation with inclement weather brings them into the bigger picture of the environment as a learning platform. Again, one could say that the Spirit of Place is the generative principle in the role of our syllabus:

Place-based education is the process of using the local community and environment as a starting point to teach concepts in language, arts, mathematics, social studies, science, and other subjects across the curriculum.

Emphasizing hands-on, real-world learning experience, this approach to education increased academic achievement, helps students develop stronger ties to their community, enhances students' appreciation for the natural world, and creates a heightened commitment to servicing as active, contributing citizens. (Sobel, 2004)

Place-Based Education endorses the work of Ruskin Mill Trust but also Ruskin's view of 'nature as teacher' which lies at the heart of the Practical Skills Therapeutic Education curriculum. It is a real-world learning experience that incorporates outside 'authoritative' forces in which accountability for self and others may engender sound judgement. Sobel goes on to say:

Another way to think about this focus on place is to understand that a 'grounded' or 'rooted' learner stands within the world, acting on its many elements, rather than standing outside looking in, acting in large measure as an observer, which is the typical stance expected of the students in schools. (Sobel, 2004)

Increasingly, national bodies (e.g. the National Trust, DEFRA), academic research, countless individual writers (e.g. *Toxic Childhood* by Sue Palmer, 2007) are pointing towards our addiction to a 'virtual world' and its impact on health. Ruskin Mill Trust is ahead of the curve, as was John Ruskin himself. It is not always comfortable, however; you are required to stand your ground; you encounter adversaries — political, economic and paradigmic interests. It can be a dynamic but also a solitary route. John Ruskin had thousands of friends who appreciated his unique lenses — he, too, had his adversaries. However, it is also the task of change-makers to establish footholds from which to build powerful platforms for change. The recent achievement of Ruskin Mill College's award of 'outstanding' by Ofsted is a testament to the hard work of a practitioner community working through nature.

Ruskin Mill College has outstanding success in developing students' practical craft and land-based skills. Students have excellent successes in achieving a range of national awards. They develop highly effective communication and personal skills which enable them to participate confidently as valuable members of the wider community. (Ofsted, 2010)

The responsibility of being able to 'see' is that it requires the courage to communicate and in doing so, to raise your head above the parapet. It is the role and the responsibility of organisations like Ruskin Mill Trust as a national provider to communicate these new vistas and insights for societal change and to offer succession for the public at large. Society may then access and participate in these new methods and in doing so, generate new practice.

John Ruskin was one of a handful of 'seers' who I believe was gifted with a distinguished extra-sensory capacity. He had the courage and the foresight to pen his vision for a shift in society's values during his lifetime. It is important to recognise that John Ruskin's continuum has been braided into the Ruskin

Mill Trust's methods. Thank you to Ofsted for recognising a quality of learning that takes its lineage from Ruskin 150 years ago.

I'd like to conclude with two aphorisms, one from Goethe who I believed greatly inspired Ruskin:

NATURE! We are encompassed and embraced by here — powerless to withdraw, yet powerless to enter more deeply into her being. Uninvited and forewarned, we are drawn into the cycle of her dance and are swept along until, exhausted, we drop from her arms. (Goethe)

— but I wish to give the last word to Ruskin:

Now this is Nature! It is the exhaustless, living energy with which the Universe is filled. (*Works* 3.383)

For further information please visit [www.rmt.org](http://www.rmt.org) and [www.thefieldcentre.org.uk/msc-programme/](http://www.thefieldcentre.org.uk/msc-programme/)

## References:

- Bulow, C and Gordon, A (2012) *Reimagining Potential: The Development and Validation of Practical Skills Therapeutic Education: A Collaborative Action Inquiry*. (Masters Dissertation, Rudolf Steiner University College, Oslo).
- Hewison, R (ed) (2006) *There is no wealth but life: Ruskin in the 21st Century*. Lancaster: The Ruskin Foundation.
- Hull, Howard (2003) *There is not Wealth but Life*. Talk given at Ruskin Mill, 17 January 2003.
- Lawrence, D. H. (1923). *Studies in Classic American Literature*. Retrieved April 2012, from <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/LAWRENCE/dhlch01.htm>
- Louv, D. (2005). *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*. London: Atlantic Books.
- Moss, S (2012) *Natural Childhood*. National Trust.
- Rayner, A (2004) *Inclusionality: The Science, Art and Spirituality of Place, Space and Evolution*. e-book available from [www.syncretist.co.uk/alanrayner](http://www.syncretist.co.uk/alanrayner)
- Ruskin, J (1851-1853) *The Stones of Venice*. Republished in London by the Folio Society (1981).
- Seamon, D and Zajonc, A (eds.) (1998) *Goethe's Way of Science: a phenomenology of nature*. New York: New York University Press.
- Sheldrake, R (1990) *The Rebirth of Nature: The Greening of Science and God*. London: Century.
- Sigman, A. (2008). *Practically Minded*. Ruskin Mill Educational Trust, Nailsworth.
- Sobel, D. (2004). *Place-Based Education: Connecting Classrooms and Communities*. The Orion Society.



George Allen's early home, Robin Hood Inn, Newark

## THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

Zoë Bennett, *The True Use of Faith. The Ruskin Lecture, 2011.*

(Published by the Guild of St George at £6.00 and obtainable from the Guild Secretary.)

The year 2011 marked the four-hundredth anniversary of the King James Bible. Since Ruskin was, in the words of our fellow Companion Michael Wheeler, ‘the most biblically literate of all nineteenth-century writers’,<sup>1</sup> it seemed a good idea that the 2011 Ruskin Lecture should in some way be devoted to his reading of the Bible in general and the King James in particular. But Ruskin’s engagement with the Bible and, indeed, with Christianity is a complex and sensitive matter. W. R. Inge, Dean of St Paul’s from 1911 to 1934 and author of the classic study *Christian Mysticism*, greatly admired his writing on religion, but recognised its unconventionality. In 1926 Inge drew attention to a peculiarity of nineteenth-century thought: ‘the deepest and most forceful [religious] teaching,’ he wrote, ‘has come from lay writers.’<sup>2</sup> Among these deep teachers he numbered Ruskin. Any reader of his work is likely to notice the pervasiveness of his religious concerns and the religiousness of his sensibility, but there is a tendency to underrate the depth and importance of his religion.

When it came to choosing a lecturer for 2011, we were looking for someone who could deal with Ruskin’s unconventionality as well as with his knowledge. Zoë Bennett, who in her professional life is a Practical Theologian, struck me as the obvious choice. Relatively new to Ruskin studies, she had noticed an insecurity about Ruskin and religion ‘at one of the earliest meetings of Ruskin devotees’ that she attended and, in her 2011 Ruskin Lecture *The True Use of Faith*, she recalled:

a great moment ... when someone said he wanted to name the elephant in the room — GOD. At this point the meeting divided into factions ... By far the larger group insisted that Ruskin outgrew God; that religious feeling in him was merely vestigial; that his moral sensibilities were humanist not Christian; that religion in him was transcended by an embracing of the human. The much smaller group of us wanted to say that the Christian religion and tradition in which Ruskin was formed shaped him in ways which remained living and active; that you cannot separate a person from what shapes them in that sort of way, especially if that person remains deeply attached to their tradition in ways which are reinforced daily, as Ruskin was in his reading of the Bible.

With regard to the elephant, I am sure that Bennett is right. Part of the trouble is that in our secularised era it is the non-religious — and particularly the anti-religious — who seem to determine what falls satisfactorily into the category of religion. Early Ruskin, the Ruskin who grew out of eighteenth-century Natural Theology, qualifies for ‘religious’ in the Richard Dawkins sense, as he also does in the intolerance he came in time to regret. The later Ruskin, whether in his humanist phase or his ecumenically Christian phase, does not. But for some of us — and I suspect for Zoë Bennett — *Unto This Last*, which belongs to the humanist phase, is the most profoundly religious of his books. It is that period of doubt within familiarity and of Ruskin’s recognition that the Bible is not to be understood simply as the word of God that occasions the argumentativeness of the later Ruskin with whom Bennett is mainly concerned. ‘If

there is any divine truth at all in the mixed collection of books which we call a Bible,’ she quotes him as writing to Joan Severn, ‘that truth is, that the Word of God comes directly to different people in different ways’, those people thus becoming — for those who engage with them — ways to God.

So Bennett’s interest in Ruskin centres to a large extent on his reading of the Bible — on how he read it and, in particular, on what we may learn of that ‘how’ from his handwritten annotations of the Bibles he owned. She focuses in particular on a Greek Gospel Lectionary of the 11th or 12th century: a vellum text which he annotated in ink on almost every page: not ‘a practice to be imitated’, as W.G. Collingwood remarked, but the Master had apparently ‘got into the habit of thinking with his pen.’ Ruskin’s startling lack of reverence for the valuable books he owned — one could compare his habit of cutting the pages he liked best from priceless illuminated manuscripts — is more than matched by his response to what he had always thought of as ‘sacred writings’, even if after the mid 1850s he no longer thought of them as anything but human in their sources. Bennett quotes him as commenting on the ‘farewell discourses’ at the end of St John’s Gospel, ‘where Jesus tells the disciples they are not of this world’:

‘[W]hat utterly useless passages all of these,’ he, in effect exclaims. It is extraordinary to find him quarrelling not only with the scriptures but with Jesus himself or, at any rate, Jesus as the scriptures represent him. What that indicates, for Bennett, is an intimacy and inwardness with the Bible that could only come from the sort of continuous reading initiated by his mother and — whatever it tells us about the state of Ruskin’s faith — it points to a living involvement in a Christian reading of life, uninterrupted by his ‘unconversion’.

It also tells us that the value of the Bible, for Ruskin, was nothing if not practical. It is characteristic of Ruskin that he should dislike the association of Christianity with unworldliness. In spite of his supposed medievalism — a notion much to be questioned, in my current view — Ruskin had much to say against ‘monkish doctrines’. For Zoë Bennett the characteristic features of his Biblical interpretation are as follows: ‘a partiality for justice and servanthood as the heart of the gospel; a settled preference for practical obedience as the form of faith; a dislike of religious exclusivity and arrogance; and a suspicion of the obscure, otherworldly, and mystical.’ One might further comment that, after his ‘unconversion’, he is more inclined to read the Bible in Greek and, in his reading, to give pious or holy words more down-to-earth translations: such that ‘blessed’ becomes ‘happy’, ‘holy’ ‘helpful’, ‘righteous’ ‘just’, and ‘angel’ ‘messenger’. This might lead us to suppose that the secularist Ruskinians from that early encounter of Bennett’s were in the right: Ruskin, they might argue, steadily abandoned the hieratic and mystical language of the King James in favour of an increasingly secular humanism. But that isn’t the whole picture, for the plainer language reinforces a more practical reading of the Gospel, and anyway reflects a development in Ruskin’s literary taste — his own late writing is plainer and

more conversational than that of *Modern Painters*. Moreover, as Bennett's other observations indicate, as his own preferred language becomes plainer, his commitment to servanthood and obedience becomes more marked. In other words, Ruskin did not abandon Christianity but, as Inge noticed, became part of its modern, even radical development. *Unto This Last* is his political response to the divine commandment that we love our neighbour.

The Guild of St George features significantly in this argument. Bennett notices a remarkable quality in his writing and thinking which she felicitously compares to Stanley Spencer's pictures of Christ turning up in modern English settings. Ruskin and Spencer, she argues, both possess the capacity to 'overlay' the Biblical story upon contemporary life, and that habit of thought — a kind of practical Christianity — provides (she argues) 'the ethos of St George's Guild, which is about working out in practice the vision and values ... which Ruskin held'. Does that mean, in effect, that the Guild is a religious body, if a non-sectarian one? It certainly seems to. Something Companions should perhaps do more often is look at the articles of St George's Creed, as they are set out in the 58th Letter of *Fors Clavigera*. In these articles, says Ruskin, 'no sincerely good and religious person would find, whatever his own particular form of belief might be, anything which he could reasonably refuse, or which he ought in anywise to

fear or profess before all men...' It depends, of course — *pace* Dawkins and Co. — on what we mean by a religious person. It certainly wouldn't have included, for Ruskin, those who conceal their heartless behaviour beneath a veneer of sanctimony, or those who use quotations from the Bible to justify vindictive punishments.

The lecture was elegantly delivered and proves readable on the page. I hope it will provoke more thought along these lines. I am grateful to Zoë Bennett for getting us to admit, after too long, that there is indeed an elephant in our room, and for showing us why we need to talk about it. Ruskin was fond of quoting a line of Wordsworth's — 'We live in admiration, hope, and love' — which recalls the cardinal virtues in St Paul, the surprising one, 'admiration', standing in for Paul's 'faith'. The Guild of St George is all *about* admiration — of nature, craftsmanship and human goodness — but another word for it might be reverence.

*Clive Wilmer*

1 Michael Wheeler, 'Habitual Music: Ruskin and his Contemporaries Reading the King James Bible' in Hannibal Hamlin and Norman W. Jones (eds.), *The King James Bible after 400 Years: Literary, Linguistic and Cultural Influences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 234.

2 W.R. Inge, *The Religious Tradition in English Religious Thought* (London: Longman, 1926), 91, 95

## JAMES DEARDEN: AN INTERVIEW

James Dearden's involvement with Ruskin began over sixty-five years ago, for he was a pupil at Bembridge School in the Isle of Wight which had been established in 1919 by John Howard Whitehouse, the devoted disciple of Ruskin. Whitehouse had created the Ruskin Galleries there, where he housed his great collection of books, manuscripts, prints and drawings, and all the material he had bought at the dispersal sales of Ruskin's home in 1930 and 1931. Having long been Warden or Headmaster of Bembridge, Whitehouse died in 1955. Two years later, Jim Dearden returned to the school, where he has spent most of his professional career. He taught letter-press printing there, and he also had the responsibility of sorting out the archive of Ruskin material that J.H.W. had assembled. He was later formally designated the Curator of the Ruskin Galleries. Since this archive was the most significant collection of its kind in the world, it is not surprising that Jim has come to know every Ruskin scholar of note in the last fifty years, either by personal contact or by correspondence.

Working in such an environment, it is hardly surprising that he began to form his own collection of Ruskiniana. Since he has always had a strong interest in printing, both practical and historical, it has been the bibliographical side of Ruskin, along with the biographical, that long held the greatest appeal for him. Book-collecting has been an enduring passion. Over the years, Jim has built up a remarkable collection of works by, about and associated with Ruskin, together with ephemera and busts, medals and all manner of tributary artefacts. It's striking how one collection can beget another!

The Whitehouse archive at Bembridge over which Jim came to preside was established for the study of Ruskin. The

Guild of St George, of course, was founded to advance the ideals of Ruskin, and where possible put them into practice. Jim did not make the transition from one to the other until 1979, when he became a Companion. He had long been close to the Guild, especially so since 1969, when he had arranged the Easter conference at Brantwood to mark the 150th anniversary of Ruskin's birth. This conference effectively inaugurated a renewal of Ruskin studies across a broad front by bringing together people who would insist on Ruskin's importance and relevance to contemporary society in ways that had not been attempted for a generation and more. The Guild itself was not in good shape at that time, or during the 1970s. Most of its collection had been moved to Reading University where it was divided between departments and much of it was in store. Sheffield Council was beginning to think about reclaiming the collection for the city. The contentious problem of what to do with the Verrocchio Madonna was exercising the Guild. This was the greatest treasure of the collection: it needed restoration, and the cost of the restoration came to more than the Guild could realistically afford. Should the painting be sold? Jim was opposed to the sale and wrote an article 'Does the Guild betray its trust?' in *The Ruskin Newsletter* in 1975, but to no avail. Though still feeling that it was wrong to dispose of the painting, Jim acknowledges that the money raised from the sale (it went to the Scottish National Gallery, where it is now known as The Ruskin Madonna) provided the capital, and consequent interest, for the Guild to embark on all manner of Ruskinian ventures.

As soon as Jim became a Companion he was elected a Director, and thereafter became active in the negotiations for the return of the Guild collections to Sheffield, and in finding

a suitable home for them. Eventually rooms were found, and the Ruskin Gallery opened in Norfolk Street in 1985, with Janet Barnes as Keeper; at its entrance stood the beautifully inscribed slate slab cut by David Kindersley. This very congenial small gallery continued until 1997, when Sheffield council decided to sell the property and the Guild was obliged to volunteer to move into the complex of glass boxes that compose the new Millennium Galleries. Jim was much involved in solving the problems raised by this displacement, along with Julian Spalding, who was then Master. Of course, the Guild's collection requires a great deal more space than the current gallery allows. Jim has played his part in augmenting it. He is inclined to think that one of his most enduring achievements on behalf of the Guild was obtaining the Bunney Collection. John Bunney had attended Ruskin's art class at the Working Men's College, and then became a professional artist, based in Venice. Ruskin commissioned many studies for the Guild, but Bunney had large holdings of his own work and of contemporary artists'. He also kept diaries, which are of value as a record of Ruskin's dealings with him, and of the activities of artists and English visitors in Venice. Bunney's collection of more than nine hundred paintings and drawings has now come to Sheffield, and the diaries will follow in due course.

These are not the only treasures that Jim has secured and placed where they can be seen by the public and consulted by scholars. In 1976 he was able to buy three portraits of Rose La Touche for Bembridge. He regrets that the Education Trust was not able to raise the money to buy James Northcote's portrait of John Ruskin at the age of three when it came up for auction in 1987, but fortunately it was bought by the National Portrait Gallery which deposited it on permanent loan at Brantwood.

Another way in which Jim has consolidated links with Ruskin is the revival of the association with Whitelands College where Ruskin had established a May Queen Festival in 1881. The connection had lapsed, but in 1981, to mark the centenary of the event, Jim went down to Whitelands, then in Putney, to present the books, make the speech and give the queen her gold cross, the design of which descended from the first one made by Burne-Jones. For twenty-five years he maintained this tradition. Jim was also responsible for reviving the Guild's periodical newsletter — which had lapsed — for communication with members. He also came up with the title; so the first *Companion* appeared in 2001, with John Spiers as editor. The most notable event of these *fin de siècle* years came when he was asked to take the 'Ruskin and Victorian Art' exhibition to Japan in 1996-7. The outstanding Japanese scholar Ryuzo Mikimoto, whose fortune came from the cultured pearl industry, had long been an admirer and translator of Ruskin's work, and had made his own collection of Ruskin materials. It was his grand-daughter who arranged for Jim to address the Ruskin Society of Tokyo and enjoy their incomparable hospitality. He was invited to open the exhibition, which was sponsored by the Tokyo Shimbun.

Jim became Dr James Dearden in 1998, when he was



Jim Dearden. Photo: Caroline Washington.

awarded an honorary doctorate by Lancaster University for his contributions to Ruskin scholarship. He succeeded Julian Spalding as Master of the Guild in 2004. His election followed the critical Annual General Meeting of that year, when there was much argument about the future direction of the Guild: whether it should develop an academic bias that would align it more with the Ruskin Foundation at Lancaster, or attempt to pursue the ends of economic and environmental amelioration that Ruskin had envisaged for the Guild at its foundation. Jim effectively espoused the latter course. Once installed as Master, he set about improving the landholdings of the Guild, with a particular desire to make its fields and meadows more supportive of flowers and wild-life. After working for a while with the National Trust, the Guild began to concentrate on its properties around Bewdley and in the Wyre Forest. This new focus resulted in the building of the new studio barn at Uncllys Farm, raised on principles of local craftsmanship that would have met with Ruskin's approval. Jim re-started the Annual Ruskin Lecture series in 2005, and began planning the first of the Triennial Exhibitions, 'Can Art Save Us?', which opened in the Millennium Galleries in 2009, to a large and responsive audience. In Jim's time as Master, the tempo of the Guild's activities increased, with the funding of a broad range of projects, and the membership enlarged. He retired as Master in 2009.

I asked Jim about his many publications. One that he regards as particularly helpful for understanding the

development of the study of Ruskin since his death is *Ruskin, Bembridge and Brantwood*, which gives an account of the formation of the Whitehouse Collection. His most enjoyable book without doubt is *John Ruskin: A Life in Pictures*. Compiling this comprehensive and wonderfully informative record of images of Ruskin — paintings, drawings, photographs and caricatures — gave him immense pleasure, and stands as an indispensable pictorial biography of our cynosure. The major book that Jim has been working on for years, his *Catalogue of Ruskin's Library*, should be published by the Oxford Bibliographical Society later this year.

As a coda to our interview, I asked Jim Dearden whether he had met, in his long career, any other figures who had known Ruskin, besides J.H. Whitehouse. He threw open a window onto a lost landscape. Yes, he replied, in the late 1950s he had met two elderly ladies in Coniston. Both had been in service

at Brantwood: one had been a parlour maid, and had married Ruskin's coachman. The other had been a kitchen maid. Around the same time, Jim had met an old man who as a youth had been the postman for Brantwood, and remembered the bearded sage in his bastion on the hill. Jim reminded me that Whitehouse had known Arthur Severn, who owned Brantwood until 1931 (Whitehouse bought the house the year after Severn's death) and Severn had known Ruskin's mother Margaret, who had been born in the eighteenth century. The ghosts were beginning to thicken, so we felt it advisable to end our talk, he to go back to the Isle of Wight and to his wife Jill, who has participated in so many of the Guild's meetings, I to Yorkshire. I was left in no doubt that Ruskin and the Guild have given shape, pleasure and purpose to Jim's life, and that he has returned these gifts with interest.

Graham Parry

### CONVERSATIONS WITH AKIN BURD

As readers of *The Companion* are aware, **Van Akin Burd**, Distinguished Professor Emeritus at The State University of New York at Cortland, has written dozens of scholarly articles on the great Victorian who is the subject of these pages and is the author or editor of no fewer than four acclaimed Ruskin 'classics' — *The Winnington Letters of John Ruskin* (Harvard University Press, 1969), *The Ruskin Family Letters* (Cornell University Press, 1973; two vols.), *John Ruskin and Rose La Touch* (Oxford University Press, 1979), and *Christmas Story: John Ruskin's Venetian Letters of 1876-77* (University of Delaware Press, 1990). Just turned 98, Professor Burd continues his Ruskin work, having published four articles in the last three years. For all these reasons, there is little doubt that he is the living 'dean' of Ruskin studies.

At the request of the Master of the Guild and the editor of *The Companion*, during the past year, **Professor Jim Spates** of Hobart and William Smith Colleges (Geneva, New York) conducted a series of informal interviews with Professor Burd during his regular visits to Burd's home in Cortland, New York. What follows are some highlights of those talks, reflections by Professor Burd on a 'life with Ruskin' which is now well into its seventh decade.



Jim Spates with Professor Emeritus, Van Akin Burd, with many Ruskin books lining the shelves. Photo: Jim Spates.

**JS:** Van, you completed your PhD on Ruskin and Turner at the University of Michigan in 1951. It was a time when Ruskin was all but ignored in scholarly circles. How did it happen that you chose him as the subject of your life's work?

**VAB:** Well, it's a fairly complicated, but I think interesting story. I began my appreciation of Turner and the Pre-Raphaelites while I was an undergraduate at the University of Chicago in the 1930s. I learned about them in one of my courses. I also found out that the Art Institute of Chicago had some of their paintings and so, whenever I had 'free days,' I would go to see them. I was especially taken with the Turners and Rossetti's beautiful 'Beata Beatrice.' I still have my undergraduate anthology of Victorian writers but my marginal notations fail to show any special interest in Ruskin. It would take a World War, assignment to Naval Intelligence duties in Charleston, South Carolina, and a careful reading of Proust to make that happen.

I am ahead of my story. Leaving Chicago in 1936, I did some public school teaching. I had long been a reader of Melville's novels and, in the summer of 1938, decided I wanted adventure in the area of the South Seas he so often wrote about. I took the summer off and shipped to the Fiji Islands where I spent considerable time getting to know not only the islands but the local people. There are some interesting stories about this, but they will have to wait for another time.

I enrolled in the Master's Program at Stanford University in 1941. My wife, Julia, and I married in 1943. Not long after, I enlisted in the Navy, being assigned, as I mentioned, to Charleston. While we were there we read the classics. One was Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*. I started to wonder: How did Proust learn to write like this? What was the source of his interest in art, architecture and, especially, Venice? Visits to the Charleston Library told me that he had been a dedicated reader of Ruskin and had even translated some of his works into French. My posting in Charleston ended near the end of 1945 when I was sent to Okinawa to help with the resettlement of the local people after the American invasion of the island. I was certainly not a hero.

**JS:** Perhaps not in the military sense but, in due course, you would become a hero to not a few others for another reason!

**VAB:** Well, at the time, I had no clear idea of what the future would hold. After the war, I was intent on getting my PhD in literature, and Julia, Joyce (our young daughter), and I returned to Chicago. We had no money, so I hoped to use the G.I. Bill to pay for housing. But the university had set no housing aside for veterans. Then I learned that the University of Michigan had such places. That decided it. We moved to Ann Arbor and for the first year and a half lived in one of their apartments reserved for veterans. It was no great shakes — our only heat was a coal stove! Later, with the aid of the GI Bill, we moved into a better apartment in Ann Arbor.

Eventually, I had to decide on a subject for my dissertation. I discussed the matter with my advisor, Professor Clarence Thorpe. I told him I wanted to write on the connection between Proust and Ruskin. 'Impossible!' he said. 'The subject is immense! You'd have to do two dissertations, one on each man to do justice to it!' Professor Thorpe made it clear that, if I chose Proust, I would have to become fluent in French. That seemed

like an immense task at my 'advanced' time of life, especially in light of the fact that I had a family, and could not expect to live on government largesse indefinitely. 'Besides,' Thorpe added, 'everybody's doing Proust these days. He's *au courant*. But *nobody's* doing Ruskin!' By that time, I had read a lot of Ruskin and was in increasing admiration of his genius. Of course, as I read, I found out that he had written an immense amount on my early love, Turner. And so, all these things came together and Ruskin became my choice. My dissertation was on Ruskin and Turner.

Let me tell you another amusing story. In due course, it was time for me to defend my dissertation, and, as usual, a committee of scholarly eminents was formed to put me through my paces. Not long before that was to happen, my advisor, Professor Thorpe, died. He was replaced by the very intimidating Professor Warner Rice, a Milton scholar, who, as far as I knew, didn't know much about Ruskin. So, on the day of my oral examination, I was more than a little nervous. After we had been discussing Ruskin for some time, out of the blue Professor Rice asked me about a Browning poem I should have known. I *did* know it but, in the stress of the moment, I couldn't recall anything and had to say so! Not long after, I was asked to leave the room while the eminents decided my fate. I did so in some trepidation. After what seemed a long time, another professor emerged, approached me, and reaching into his pocket, pulled out a Ruskin cigar and handed it to me. That was how I knew I had passed, even though I would not learn this was 'officially' the case until I went back into the room! [For some time 'Ruskin cigars' were sold in America, their boxes emblazoned by one of his later portraits. All his life Ruskin was a vocal — indeed, strident — critic of smoking of any sort! — JS]

**JS:** How did it happen that you came to spend your entire career at State University of New York (SUNY) at Cortland?

**VAB:** Well, that too is an interesting story. After I got my degree, I started looking for positions. SUNY Cortland had an opening in their Department of English at a salary of \$5,600, which, in those days (it was 1951), was a considerable amount, especially if you had a family. However, it hardly escaped my notice that Cornell, a considerably more prestigious place, was nearby. One day during my first Cortland year, I went to Cornell to see if a position might be available. One wasn't. I told the chair that I would like to be notified if one did come available. 'If that happened,' I asked as I left, 'what would the salary be?' '\$3200,' he said! And so I stayed on at Cortland. Over the years, I had three opportunities to leave but we were happy there, so there was no reason to go.

**JS:** Your first book was *The Winton Letters of John Ruskin*. How did you come to write that?

**VAB:** An unexpected chance. After the war, some officers chose to remain in the reserves for a number of years. I was one. Once a year we had to go for refresher courses in our specialty which, in my case, was intelligence collection. As it turned out, one year my course was in New York City. For some time, I had known that the Pierpont Morgan Library there had a great deal of original Ruskin material — letters and manuscripts. Given my continuing interest in Ruskin and Turner — the first article I published after my dissertation (in *PMLA*) was on their relationship — I decided to go to the Morgan to look at the

manuscript of Ruskin's *Modern Painters V* which, as you know, has wonderful chapters on Turner. I had also become aware that, not long before, the Morgan had purchased, from the Millais family in England, a major collection of unpublished material pertaining to Ruskin's life. While at the Morgan I asked to look at 'The Bowerswell Trunk' as that collection was called. (It had come across the Atlantic in a small green trunk and was kept in it for some time.) As soon as I began reading, I knew it contained 'blockbuster' material about Ruskin's life that no previous biographer had had access to, including much about his disastrous marriage to Effie Gray. I asked the Morgan's curator, F. B. Adams, if the trunk's contents might be reserved for me to edit and publish. He said no because the Morgan had already promised 'first access' to Mary Lutyens [*Lutyens eventually published three books largely based on the collection: Effie in Venice, Millais and the Ruskins, and The Ruskins and the Grays* —JS]. So I asked him to let me know if the Morgan ever bought anything else of significance regarding Ruskin. Not long after, I received a letter from Mr. Adams telling me that a considerable collection of letters which Ruskin had exchanged with Miss Margaret Bell of Winnington Hall in the 1860s had been purchased. Would I be interested in editing these?

*The Winnington Letters* was very intense work. It demanded much scholarly sleuthing to ferret out many of the details of Miss Bell's life. I spent a lot of time in the nearby Manchester Public Library doing that. One thing I discovered was that, early on in their relationship, Miss Bell figured out how to manage Ruskin. When the book came out, one reviewer said that it had opened a 'new era of Ruskin scholarship,' had set a 'standard' which other scholars should use as a model. I was — and still am — proud of that assessment.

**JS:** I recall that *The Winnington Letters* contained material which was not in the Morgan's collection. What can you tell us about your search for this additional material?

**VAB:** The Winnington project was responsible for my first use of the Ruskin collection then housed at Bembridge on the Isle of Wight. It was during Jim Dearden's early years of caring for J. Howard Whitehouse's invaluable Ruskin materials. I was the second American scholar to work at Bembridge, I think, only Helen Viljoen having preceded me. My wife, Julia, came too. Jim was very helpful in finding the letters which were important to my project and making them available to us to copy. There being no photocopy machine then — it was the mid-1960s — transcribing had to be done by hand. It was very tiring and exacting work. We stayed in the Master's House and, every day, went to chapel with Jim and the boys. (We always sat in the back!) We returned the next summer. By this time, Jim had gotten an early copy machine. My daughter, Joyce, and a friend of hers who had come with us worked the machine. Another memory is that one night — we rented a house in Bembridge town this time — we had Jim and his wife, Jill, to dinner. We fixed hamburgers, which they had never had. Jim and Jill have been good friends of ours ever since, despite the distance which separates us. I should mention two other things. First, I was among the most fortunate of scholars to have had a wife like Julia. She never resented my Ruskin work and often helped — transcribing, proof-reading, and so on. She was always ready to go on our many trips to England and the Continent.

Second, people who are interested in Ruskin owe an immense debt to Jim Dearden. Not only did he open up the Whitehouse collection to scholars, he invented a remarkably useful way of cataloguing it. This system is still the primary way the collection is catalogued at The Ruskin Library in Lancaster.

**JS:** After *The Winnington Letters* came an even larger project, *The Ruskin Family Letters*.

**VAB:** Yes, a much larger project. So large, in fact, that when I published my two volumes I had only brought the letters into the early 1840s! I think this is my most important book because it is as complete a record as we are likely to have of Ruskin's formative years. To make the book as complete as possible, for a number of summers, I worked at Yale's Beinecke Library which houses many hundreds of the family's letters. When the book finally came out, it was also very well reviewed.

**JS:** But I also remember that, some time ago, you told me that the project disappointed you.

**VAB:** Yes, and for an obvious reason: I didn't finish the letters. The family letters go on until 1871, the year Ruskin's mother died. I thought long and hard about continuing and recall that Jim Dearden, in particular, urged me to go on. But I *knew* how much *effort* it had required to take the story as far as I did and thought I probably didn't have enough years left to finish the rest. (I may have been wrong about that!) But, also, I was teaching full time and to continue would have meant devoting almost every moment of every summer to the work for a very long time. Someone else will have to finish it someday. It really needs to be done.

**JS:** And this decision not to go on with the Ruskin family letters led to two other major projects, *John Ruskin and Rose La Touche* and *Christmas Story*?

**VAB:** Yes. Neither was a project I had planned but, just about the time I was finishing *The Ruskin Family Letters*, Helen Viljoen, who had long been my 'friend in Ruskin,' died and left me her complete Ruskin legacy, including all the chapters of her unfinished Ruskin biography, dozens of boxes full of notes and transcripts, and much more. She hoped, I think, that I would finish the biography. But when I read her chapters, I saw that this would be an immense task and decided against it. Eventually, I gave all her materials to the Morgan where they can now be accessed by any interested scholar.

Like myself, Helen was much indebted to the Morgan and so, when she died, she left the Library two important unpublished items that had come her way over the course of her own long Ruskin road: Rose La Touche's small diary — which gave me the idea for *John Ruskin and Rose La Touche* — and the remarkable set of letters Ruskin had written Joan Severn when he was in Venice during the last months of 1876 and January of 1877, a time when he was desperately searching for some sort of contact with Rose's spirit. [*Rose's death in 1875 left Ruskin bereft.* —JS] That became the framing material for *Christmas Story*. For that project too, I had to do a lot of research — going to Venice, for instance, so I could visit the places where he had stayed and recreate the walks he had taken during his disturbed days there. I also traveled to Broadlands, the Mount-Temples' home in the south of England — what an impressive house! —

to find out what I could about their interest in spiritualism, an interest which had brought the bereaved Ruskin to their séances before he went to Venice. Given full access to Broadlands' archives, I had another piece of luck. I discovered Lord Mount-Temple's handwritten notebook on the séances, detailing when they were held, who had attended them, which 'spirits' had been 'contacted,' and the like. I consider both pieces of research — the story of Ruskin's days in Venice and of the Mount-Temples and their séances — among the best I have done. They were both stories which, to be told properly, necessitated a great deal of detective work.

**JS:** Do you have a favorite among Ruskin's books?

**VAB:** *Modern Painters I*.

**JS:** Among so many great works of genius, why that one?

**VAB:** It's the Ruskin-Turner connection. It's where I began.

**JS:** What still perplexes you about Ruskin's life? Is there anything about him which you'd like to know which you don't yet know?

**VAB:** I'd like to understand the mystery of his sex life — or, rather, lack of it. It's a puzzle still despite the attempts of many to figure it out. Let me give you an example. I'm working on a small article now, explaining how a virtually unknown small book of Viljoen's, *The Ruskin-Froude Correspondence*, came to be. She inherited the letters from that obscure collector of Ruskiniana, F. J. Sharp, of Barrow-in-Furness. Not long before

she died, she published the correspondence with a 'vanity press,' which, despite promises to the contrary, did nothing to promote it. To save space for other inventory, the press destroyed all unsold copies. As a result, only a few exist. I plan to call this article, 'The Book that Almost Disappeared.' But now to the intriguing issue: after Carlyle's death, the historian and biographer, J. A. Froude, published the letters of Carlyle's wife, Jane Welsh Carlyle. The letters made it clear that Carlyle was impotent. There was a huge controversy about it at the time, about whether Froude had overstepped the bounds of scholarly decorum by making such a personal detail public. But the interesting thing is that from the letters contained in Viljoen's volume, we learn that Ruskin, whose marriage to Effie Gray was annulled on the grounds of non-consummation — a fact which, given that the judgment had been much discussed in public, had caused Ruskin considerable embarrassment — supported Froude's right to make the expose. You might think he'd have taken the other side, since such information about Carlyle, with whom Ruskin had been close friends for decades, might have brought his own sexual problems into public view again. It's fascinating to think through.

**JS:** Van, you've been working on Ruskin for seventy years! Do you have any regrets?

**VAB:** Well, there are things I'd like to have done and there are things I'd still like to do, but, to tell the truth, I've no regrets. I've lived a magic life.

*James Spates*

## AMERICAN NOTES

Editors: **Jim Spates** ([spates@hws.edu](mailto:spates@hws.edu)) and **Sara Atwood** ([satwood8@cox.net](mailto:satwood8@cox.net))

The St. George's Guild...proposes [an] education, wide as the fields, true as the laws, and fruitful as the roots of the earth to all, without distinction, who desire to enjoy the happiness proper to men, and to fulfill the duties assigned to them.

— Ruskin, "The Master's Report: 1879" (*Works* 30.17)

As Mr Ruskin's Guild moves ever deeper into its second century, there is little doubt that its founder would be delighted to learn that a goodly number of its Companions live not in the UK but in regions almost as 'wide as the fields': across the broad, cool waters in North America. However, to this point in Guild history, there has been little focus given to these distant members as such. As a result, at the request of our present Guild Master and the editor of these pages, this column inaugurates a series of entries intended to inform the Companionship generally about this North American contingent and any Ruskin-related activities which may be 'taking fruitful root' in their western locales. (We are most grateful to the editor for suggesting, in an honourific nod to Mr Dickens, one of Ruskin's favourite authors—at least most of the time!—the title

of this column.) Naturally, we welcome ideas for future entries, including discussions of any matters pertinent to the Guild, and will accept happily any volunteers among our North American numbers who would be willing to have a brief 'Ruskin biography' (see below) of their own grace in coming columns.

Perhaps our first order of business should be to print a list of the North American Companions, along with their e-mail addresses in the event anyone wishes to be in touch. (In a few cases, when Companions either don't use e-mail or when we do not have e-addresses for them, we have provided their snail-mail addresses.) Many thanks to Guild Secretary, Norman Hobbs, for generating our list.

As of this moment, the North American Companions of the Guild of St George are:

Dr. Sara Atwood, Chandler Arizona:	<a href="mailto:satwood8@cox.net">satwood8@cox.net</a>	Professor William McKeown, Memphis, Tennessee:	<a href="mailto:mwcarls@memphis.edu">mwcarls@memphis.edu</a>
Professor Linda Austin, Stillwater, Oklahoma:	<a href="mailto:linda.m.austin@okstate.edu">linda.m.austin@okstate.edu</a>	Professor John D. Rosenberg, New York, New York:	<a href="mailto:jdr6@columbia.edu">jdr6@columbia.edu</a>
Mr. R. Dyke Benjamin, New York, New York:	<a href="mailto:Benjamin.dyke@gmail.com">Benjamin.dyke@gmail.com</a>	Ms. Allison Smith, New York, New York	
Professor Van Akin Burd, 22 Forrest Avenue, Cortland, New York 13045		Professor David R. Sorensen, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania:	<a href="mailto:dsorensen@sju.edu">dsorensen@sju.edu</a>
Professor Richard Harvey, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania:	<a href="mailto:weaverharvey@aol.com">weaverharvey@aol.com</a>	Professor Jim Spates, Geneva, New York:	<a href="mailto:spates@hws.edu">spates@hws.edu</a>
Mr. Robert J. Knight, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario:	<a href="mailto:sknight@cogeco.ca">sknight@cogeco.ca</a>	Professor Bob Steele, Vancouver, British Columbia:	<a href="mailto:drawnet@shaw.ca">drawnet@shaw.ca</a>
Professor George P. Landow, Providence, Rhode Island:	<a href="mailto:George@landow.com">George@landow.com</a>	Professor Samuel Zeveloff, Department of Zoology, College of Science,	
Professor Diane R. Leonard, Chapel Hill, North Carolina:	<a href="mailto:sesame@email.unc.edu">sesame@email.unc.edu</a>	Weber State University, Ogden, Utah 84408	

**Brief Biography.** In order to make North American Companions better known to each other and to Companions generally, we propose to include in each of these columns one or two such profiles. Given that this is our first posting and that, for this reason, there has been no time to contact others, it seemed reasonable to devote the first of these 'Brief Biographies' to one of this column's editors.

*Jim Spates*

**Sara Atwood.** My first experience of Ruskin came during an under-graduate course on Victorian prose; we read excerpts from *The Stones of Venice* and *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*. I was intrigued, but not yet hooked. I went on to write a Master's thesis on Anthony Trollope, but sometime during the middle of this project I took Ruskin up again and began to read him more extensively. As I read, it became clear that there would be no going back. I had never encountered such masterful prose or such forceful ideas. I'd been impressed with Carlyle as an undergrad (and remain an admirer), but where Carlyle was histrionic and mannered, Ruskin was intimate, allusive and wide-ranging. As Keith Hanley has aptly put it, Ruskin 'put a human face' on many of Carlyle's ideas. Ruskin was — and remains — real to me in a way that no other writer does. I was struck, as so many have been, by the clarity of his vision and by his ability to broaden my perception. Most surprising was his prescience; his insights into the failures and disease of society might have been written to-day. He had recognised the roots of modern discontent and urged his contemporaries to tear them up, turn the soil and plant healthy seed. Yet the problems he railed against — materialism, social injustice and fragmentation, irreverence, a disregard of the natural world and of the arts, misguided education, the loss of community — are with us still. He was one of those who *knew*. His vision of a world governed by the Law of Help, centred on 'the things which lead to life,' became for me a noble truth. I wanted above all to share his ideas with others, to get everyone, everywhere, reading Ruskin.



*Sara Atwood and son, Liam, on Ruskin's Seat at Brantwood, Coniston.  
Photo: Sara Atwood.*

This desire has driven my work on Ruskin, from my doctoral dissertation to my book, *Ruskin's Educational Ideals* (Ashgate, 2011), and the many essays I have contributed to journals. Here in the States, where Ruskin is far less-known than in the UK, the challenge is even greater. So I have brought Ruskin into the classroom, where my often-reluctant students read such works as 'Of Kings' Treasuries' and 'The Work of Iron,' sometimes discovering that they not only 'get it,' but that they like it. I try to put Ruskin's ideas into practice, too, whether it be by taking my students outside to sketch and write, by asking them to look closely at paintings, rocks, and trees, or by asking them to consider the ways in which Ruskin's concept of value might transform our thinking — which is the first step towards transforming our actions. As I have written elsewhere, Ruskin himself is a life-enhancing companion, partly because of what he shows us, but also because of what he enables us to see for ourselves.

Ruskin has brought me much inspiration and insight. He has also brought me many 'friends in Ruskin,' such as the Companions, from whose knowledge and wisdom I continue to benefit.

As I like to say, Ruskin was a teacher above all else and he is still teaching.

**News.** When the noted American Ruskin scholar, Helen Gill Viljoen, died in 1974, she was buried in her family's plot at Beechwoods Cemetery, New Rochelle, north of New York City. Her will provided no instructions or money for a grave marker to be placed over her resting-place, perhaps for the reason that, because she had published so little of her work on Ruskin's life (a 45-year undertaking which saw only *Ruskin's Scottish Heritage* (1956) — the first of her four-volume biography — and *The Brantwood Diary of John Ruskin* (1971) in print), she believed her life to have been a failure. This vacancy (all the other family members have gravestones) has always seemed more than a trifle sad to a number of Companions who admire Viljoen, not just for her published writings but for the invaluable and immense Ruskin legacy of her unpublished material (now housed at the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York). Thus it was that, last year, her longtime friend, Professor Van Akin Burd, thought it time that such a marker be created and placed. A collection was taken up among a number of Companions and others who admire Viljoen's work and, in the late fall of last year, a stone was set. The winter months being what they are in this part of the world, there has not yet been a chance for those interested to visit the grave to view the lovely rose-coloured headstone which not only gives Viljoen's name and dates but which designates her, appropriately, as a "Premier Ruskin Scholar." These inscriptions are flanked, on the left side, by a bas-relief of Ruskin's "To-Day" crest, and balanced, on the right side, by a carved rose created from an impression made from the rose image on W. G. Collingwood's memorial which stands over Ruskin's grave in Coniston. (Collingwood's generosity regarding

his personal knowledge of and access to little-known materials on Ruskin's life was what set Viljoen determinedly on her 'life of Ruskin' in 1929.) It is hoped that a visit to the grave will soon be possible now that warmer months have arrived and that a picture of the gravestone and those visiting it will be included in a later column. At which point — and again appropriately — a complete list of those who donated to this important redressive Ruskin effort will be provided.

*Jim Spates*

**David Sorensen**, of St Joseph's University, Philadelphia, another of our American Companions, will be known to readers as a distinguished scholar of Thomas Carlyle — one of Ruskin's most important and acknowledged masters. With Brent E. Kinser of Western Carolina University, he is editor of the *Carlyle Studies Annual* which in recent years has carried notable essays on Ruskin, including Sara Atwood's 'Imitation and Imagination: John Ruskin, Plato and Aesthetics' (*Carlyle Studies Annual* 26 (2010), pp. 141-64). Professor Sorensen was the senior academic editor of the *Carlyle Letters Online* (see

<http://carlyleletters.dukejournals.org/misc/print.dtl>) a hugely significant project which has made Carlyle's correspondence freely available worldwide in a scholarly context. Readers will no doubt be excited to learn that Professors David Sorensen and Francis O'Gorman are in the process of trying to secure funding for a major undertaking of keen interest to Ruskinians — namely, to put his fully-searchable diaries online. More information will follow in due course.

To underscore the international theme of this issue of *The Companion*, it is worth noting that among Professor Sorensen's numerous papers are thorough and insightful analyses of the Russian novelist, Ivan Turgenev, and the liberal philosopher, Alexander Herzen (whose bi-centenary we also celebrate this year), written in terms of their personal and intellectual relations with Carlyle. Carlyle met both men at Cheyne Row and they were all keenly aware of each other and their work, separated as they were by national and cultural backgrounds. Professor Sorensen is interested in the exchange of ideas between Carlyle and his international contemporaries; *The Companion*, as the organ of the Guild, actively seeks to build links with Ruskin disciples all over the world.

## A LIVING LEGACY IN RUSSIA

*Companions will remember that the editor addressed the Guild on the subject of 'Ruskin and Tolstoy' at the Bar Convent, York, in 2010. Ruskin's star continues to rise in the modern Russian Federation and there are signs of hope that this will be sustained, with more than a hundred (mostly young) people subscribing to the Ruskin page on Vkontakte, the Russian Facebook! We are delighted to welcome two distinguished Russian contributors to this issue who explain what Ruskin means to them. **Tatiana Nikitina** is senior researcher at Tolstoy's museum-estate, Yasnaya Polyana, and **Professor Natalia Dushkina** teaches at the Moscow Institute of Architecture — a leading architectural historian, she is also a practising architect specializing in town planning, preservation and heritage.*

Once, John Ruskin rushed into my life. It was all of a sudden, but it was for life. One day, while looking through a collection of maxims compiled by Lev Tolstoy, I noticed the frequency of mentions of the thoughts of one sage, whose last name sounded surprising, uncustomary, but in a Russian manner. 'Who is this man, who my favourite Tolstoy refers to so often?' — I thought then. There was an intrigue that became the prime cause of my interest in John Ruskin. The more I came to know his thoughts, the more I appreciated them and got a better understanding of

Tolstoy. For me Ruskin is a 'discoverer' of Tolstoy, and, at the same time, a thinker who brought me closer to England, and made it more conceivable for me. Later on, I visited Coniston and saw Ruskin's manor house, smothered in bright flowers, the expanse and the beauty of the lake washing Brantwood. I could not but recall the house at Yasnaya Polyana, surrounded by flowerbeds and the 'mirror' of the Big Pond. This close connection between Tolstoy and Ruskin is not accidental. These two men were united not only by the 'fatal century', but *Genius Loci* as well. They are alike, and their estates confirm it. John Ruskin for me is the affirmation of Tolstoy, the beauty and infinity of Brantwood confirming the beauty of his thoughts and the infinity of his genius, it is love and gratitude for life.

I cannot but express my heartfelt thanks to all the nice people, those 'guides' to Ruskin's world and his passionate followers, who helped me understand him, and who have been guarding his legacy and keeping the memory of him so reverently. They are Rupert Belgrave, Stuart Eagles, Howard Hull, Katharine Judelson, Ann Potter, Stephen Wildman and Clive Wilmer.

I am very pleased to join the Guild of St George, because the meaning of manual work was so understandable and important for the two geniuses, that I could not help being infected by it too. Becoming a member of the Guild is a big honour for me.

*Tatiana Nikitina*



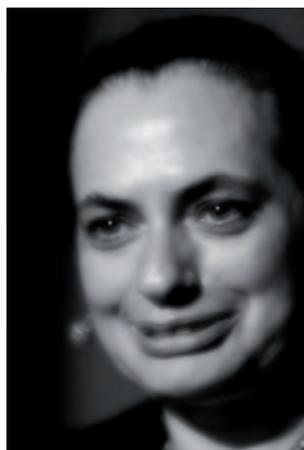
*Tatiana Nikitina*

I heard the name of John Ruskin, for the first time, rather late in my life — when I had already graduated from the Moscow Architectural Institute. For Russia, being cut off for decades from the West in the 20th century, this could be taken as natural, especially among contemporary architects with their involvement in Modernist tradition with its absolutely different scale of values.

However, this is to glance only superficially and quickly. Ruskin was never forgotten in Russian cultural and intellectual life, even in the soviet period. His name was pronounced continuously in French transcription as Рёскин [Reuskin]; texts were read either in the original or in French as well as in [often] incomplete Russian prerevolutionary translations; dissertation researches were published as Ruskin's influence on the Russian Silver Age at the turn of the centuries was very significant.

Thus, the tradition of honouring Ruskin was preserved at the refined academic *milieu*. His name came to me directly from this sphere — from my teacher of Urban History, Professor and Architecture Academician Tatiana Savarenskaya, a well-known admirer of British culture. She wrote a few essays on Ruskin and in her dissertation — a special Chapter 'John Ruskin's aesthetics and his views on the Art of Town Planning'. Professor Savarenskaya addressed my attention to *The Seven Lamps* and *The Stones*.

The year 1980 marks the date of my introduction to Ruskin's 'Ideas' and 'Ideals'. The world to which he brought me turned out to be fascinating. His text — iridescent, tuneful, and sometimes viscous — influenced me in a strange, if not a magic way. As many senses and meanings were not clear (or even closed) for me at that time, I have immersed myself into this enigmatic universe and emerged through architecture. The Italian context to Ruskin's interpretation, and especially Venice in its magnificent and sensual dresses, became a key for my understanding.



Professor Natalia Dushkina

Since that time, one of the new stages in my life began — with articles and conference presentations on Ruskin, with purchasing his texts and books on him over the world, while travelling; with photos of his 'addresses' in Venice and Italy; with daring and not yet fulfilled (if ever) a full translation of *The Stones of Venice* into the Russian language.\* I need to acknowledge him in revealing to me the 'content' of Architecture and its spiritual links



Yasnaya Polyana, Tolstoy's museum-estate. Photo: Alexander Plyakin.

to the categories of Time, Memory, Eternity, Patina and all those notions which inevitably and firmly attach you to the celebration of heritage. The imperative of preservation, in a way — the sacralisation of Authenticity, which is always provoking sharp opposition in today's super-commercialised world — became my guiding 'Lamps' in my professional and educational life.

Gradually, my occupation with the field of architectural history and Ruskin began to be forced out (*sensu stricto*) by protection activities — in saving monuments and sites. Moscow — this great historical city, which suffered devastating destructions in the 20th century — is covered by the wave of new 'capitalist transformations' during the last two decades. In every public discussion I am addressing common reason and trying to confront the destruction of authentic buildings in the historical core of the city, destruction which is carried out for gaining momentary super-profits. Ruskin's name and quotations from his texts are being actually used today, and sound anew in the sharpest debates. Among the beloved is the following quote obtaining an enormous moral force: 'We have no right to touch them [monuments — N.D.]. They are not ours. They belong partly to those who built them, and partly to all the generations of mankind who are to follow us.' [*Works* 8.245: *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*.]

When I am writing these lines, John Ruskin is looking at me from his portrait by Sir Hubert von Herkomer, 1879, published by Tim Hilton on the cover of his almost thousand-paged fundamental monograph. The book was issued by Yale, ten years ago, found in Chicago during the conservation conference and brought to my home library in Moscow. Ruskin's sad eyes deepened into himself; his pressed up, somewhat intense lips conveying to me signs of sympathy, and the necessity of persistence and confidence. I doubt that he is thinking of the futility of his efforts.

**Natalia Dushkina**

*\*Only the Travellers' Edition has been published to date, translated by A. V. Glebovskaya and L. N. Zhitkova, in an inexpensive, well-illustrated hardback edition by ABC in 2009 (of which the Ruskin Library has a copy).*

## UNTO THIS LAST: RUSKIN'S POLITICAL ECONOMY 150 YEARS ON

It is 150 years since John Ruskin's thoughts on political economy were published by Smith, Elder and Co. in 1862 (originally serialised in the *Cornhill Magazine* in 1860). Although Ruskin believed it to be the best of his writings, it could never be accepted positively by society in those days. That is because the classical political economy which supported firmly the unprecedented prosperity of Victorian industries should not be criticised. We must realise that in the 1860s, orthodox political economy was effectively the 19th century religion. The criticism of Joseph Schumpeter in his *History of Economic Analysis* focused on the fragility of Ruskin's economic analysis.

There is a definite reason for objecting to Ruskin's way of handling economic problems (I am not speaking, of course, of his generous and not unsuccessful practical work in the interest of the welfare and civilization of the masses): he failed to do in this field what he did as a matter of course in the field of art. We know that he prepared himself most sedulously for his career as an interpreter of art; that he mastered techniques and studied historical detail according to the canons of scholarship. It is 'genius' that speaks from his interpretations, but genius tutored and made effective by learning. In the field of economics he did nothing of the sort; all he did was to add generous indignation to half-understood observations and undigested pieces of reading.<sup>1</sup>

Ruskin was not a theoretical political economist but a social reformer. He would have never intended to be an economist but rather to prepare a manifesto of political economy for humanity, that is, his peculiar propaganda of humanitarianism. Political economists have not answered Ruskin's proposals properly. Any economist should be at least a social reformer.

I would like to introduce how we, Japanese, accepted his thoughts. It was in the early 1900s that Ruskin's versatile thoughts had been well conveyed to the Japanese public. In a translation by Tenrai Sumiya (1869-1944) of May Alden Ward's *Prophets of the Nineteenth Century: Carlyle, Ruskin and Tolstoi*, published in 1903, Ruskin the social reformer was first introduced, compared with Carlyle and Tolstoi. It was Kenji Ishida's translation of *Unto This Last* in 1918, which was an epoch-making event in the accurate Japanese understanding of Ruskin as a social reformer. This book was well accepted and was widely read both for the text and for its preface by Professor Hajime Kawakami (1879-1946), a humanistic political economist of the Kyoto Imperial University, who spread Ruskin's social ideas in Japan in the first two decades of the 20th century, and who introduced Ruskin rather than Karl Marx to Ryuzo Mikimoto (1893-1971). In the preface he introduced Ruskin in context with Karl Marx as follows:

The new political economy, which stands abreast with that individualistic and mercantile political economy which has prospered since the age of Adam Smith, is divided in two. One is Socialistic Economy and the other Humanitarian Economy, Karl Marx, a great thinker in Germany in the second half of the 19th century, was a giant who represents the former, while our John Ruskin, who is called one of the three great men of letters [John Stuart Mill, Thomas Carlyle, and John Ruskin – S.S.] of the age of Queen Victoria, was the greatest representative of the latter.<sup>2</sup>

Kawakami did not worry too much about the theoretical quality of Ruskin's political economy and placed high value on his humanitarian standpoint.

Shortly after the end of the First World War, publications by and about Ruskin accelerated, particularly in appreciation of the social side of his writings, possibly as a result of the publication of Ruskin's *Library Edition*, edited by E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn during 1903-1912. Many of Ruskin's writings began to be translated and interpreted in close succession. It was noteworthy that Ryuzo Mikimoto translated about half of those editions and scholars of English literature and Christian socialists undertook the other half. Surprisingly, Ruskin studies in England in those days were fading out as Kenneth Clark remarks in his *Ruskin To-day*.

Ironically, but not exceptionally, the decline in his fame seems to have coincided with the publication of a superb library edition of his works, one of the most thorough and devoted pieces of editing ever undertaken.<sup>3</sup>

Ruskin's reception in Japan during the 1920s, when Marxism was declared taboo under the stormy Public Order Maintenance or the Peace Preservation Law (1925), underwent changes. Masami Kimura (1919-2003) informed us in his essay:

Ruskin and his social aspects were cited as an antidote to Marxism. And his views on duties were utilized in a reactionary way for supporting totalitarian aspects of nationalism. . . . Mikimoto and other Christian socialists followed in a very mild form, while in fact they were able to survive simply because they maintained the apolitical stance found in their Ruskin studies.<sup>4</sup>

Kimura regrets that this misinterpretation resulted in a substantial delay in the resumption of Ruskin studies in Japan along pre-war lines. I am not sure whether there was any common issues with J. H. Whitehouse's close contact with an Italian fascist, Mussolini.

Ruskin's legacy as a social reformer has been passed down to us through hard effort. What is our role as Ruskinians in the 21st century? His concerns were the unfair distributions of wealth between classes in a nation in the 19th century. Our current problems are escalated to the misdistributions between nations, developed and developing, and the worldwide destruction of the natural environment.

My fellow Ruskinians, let's get together and hand over Ruskin's banner to our next generations with the new idea of him as a global reformer, under his mottos: 'There is no wealth but life' and 'the pursuit for pure air, water and earth' which are more valid now than ever before.

*Shoji Sato*

1 Schumpeter, Joseph, *History of Economic Analysis* (Oxford University Press, 1954) p. 411.

2 Ishida, Kenji, (tr.), *Unto This Last*, with a preface by Prof. Hajime Kawakami (Kyoto: Kobun-do, 1918), p.2. The translation is based on Mikimoto's "Ruskin's Influence in Japan", TRSJ (Vol. VII-5, July 1937).

3 Clark, Kenneth, *Ruskin Today* (London: John Murray, 1964), p. xiv.

4 Kimura, Masami, "Japanese interest in Ruskin: Some Historical Trends" in Rhodes, R. and Janik, D. I. (eds.), *Studies in Ruskin: Essays in Honor of Van Akin Burd*, (Ohio, Ohio University Press, 1982) pp. 215-244.

## PAST MASTERS

I have often wondered what former Guild Masters were really like. The official records give a sense of a man, but they're no substitute for intimate, personal knowledge. An unusual source presents itself in the case of Hugh Charles Fairfax-Cholmeley (1864-1940) Master of the Guild from 1925 to 1934. He was the squire of Brandsby Hall, Yorkshire, in fact the last in a line of keen yeoman-farmers that stretched back to the sixteenth century. In 2005, his 90-year-old son-in-law, the naturalised Chinese journalist and Communist Party member, Israel Epstein (1915-2005) who was born in Warsaw when it was under Russian control, set down some of the memories of Elsie (d. 1984), his late wife, in *My China Eye: Memoirs of a Jew and a Journalist* (Long River Press). As a writer, Epstein was well-placed to absorb and articulate the memories of those members of the Cholmeley family he personally knew, but the point from which he observed them, given that in his own words he and Elsie were 'so different in origin' (p. 6), makes him all the more fascinating to read.

Epstein's parents grew up under Russian-rule in modern-day Lithuania. As Jewish Socialists involved in the failed Russian Revolution of 1905, they had been exiled briefly to Siberia. A bookkeeper, Epstein's father moved briefly to Japan, then back to post-Tsarist Petrograd and eventually to China. Epstein was educated in a series of foreign schools, adopting English from childhood as the common language with which he felt most comfortable and he used it throughout his professional career. His political convictions were formed in the prevailing culture of anti-Fascism in the 1930s. For 25 years he was editor of the monthly magazine he helped to found, *China Reconstructs* (now called *China Today*) which promoted the People's Republic in a positive light.

Elsie, on the other side of the globe, was similarly moulded by her albeit very different circumstances. She studied at Reading Agricultural College and farmed with her family in Yorkshire, but sought new work when the 1930s depression brought bankruptcy. She trained for, and found, a clerical job in London, which she then lost. Joining the ranks of the unemployed, she was able not merely to sympathise with but to share the plight of many of London's poor, joining protest marches as she became increasingly radical. 'Experience,' Epstein tells us, 'combined with earlier ideas drawn from her father, a liberal inclined to the radical views of William Morris, drew her to the Left. As a feminist she could have gone to the U.S. or U.S.S.R., different as they were, not because her political views were as yet well defined. But because the status of women there seemed better than in contemporary England.' (p. 7)

Elsie found work with the Institute of Pacific Relations, a job she obtained by 'chance and family connections' (p. 9). She worked in their New York office, but toured the world, visiting Hong Kong in 1939 where she met Epstein. They escaped from Japanese occupation together in 1941. 'With Elsie we chose not only each other but the same road-map through life. We were married in 1943.' (p. 9) Epstein takes up the story (my notes in square brackets):

Of Elsie's background, there are some facts, from what she told me at various times, and from experience before our fates brought us together.

Her father ... inherited several farms but later in life had to sell most of them. For English country gentry, the family was not typical. As Roman Catholics they had for three centuries been barred from the civil and military careers that made their class in society a pillar of Britain's conservative establishment. [Hugh's father, Thomas Charles (1825-1890), who adopted the prefix Fairfax, was a Royal Naval Captain. Consequently, Hugh was born in Naples.]

Though Hugh Cholmeley broke with Catholicism, to which the rest of the family continued to adhere, it was not to conform more to the prevailing social conventions, but to stray further. From his university days [he matriculated at Christ Church in 1884] he tended toward radical views, often proclaiming them with a bright red necktie to shocking (sic) the prim and proper. A family story tells how a stuffy aunt ordered her doorman, if her nephew came so attired, not to let him in by the front entrance but to hint that he hop over the hedge and enter through the backyard. She was willing to see the young reprobate, but not to face neighbours' comments.

The young man himself, starting from volunteering at Toynbee Hall, which philanthropically helped London's poor, began to lean toward Socialist ideas. He came to admire William Morris and frequented circles that included, among others, Bernard Shaw.

Unconventional, too, in setting up his own household, he remained single until around forty, then [in London in 1903] married his gardener's daughter, Alice [Jane] Moverley (1885-1953), who was to become Elsie's mother. [In fact, Alfred Moverley had first been employed as gardener by Hugh's father and his Paris-born mother, as evidenced in the 1881 census.] But first he supervised her education, *à la* Pygmalion. Prior to the wedding he sent her family out of the village to London where he (sic) bought them a home in the then still-rural suburb of Hampstead. So his freedom from conventions had limits.

As a squire, he was a paternalist reformer. He equipped his village with water taps and a public telephone, angering nearby landlords who feared that their tenants would want the same. To widen the mental horizons of his tenants, he built a small red-brick auditorium, "Cholmeley Hall," where they were expected to gather each Sunday afternoon to hear him read from that mouthpiece of Liberal views, *The Manchester Guardian*. This was far less popular than the running water, as Elsie would amusingly recollect. After church in the mornings they would prefer to do something else. But to her father the cultural infusions might well have seemed a desirable antidote to a sermon. Though his ethics were Christian, he was not pious.

After renouncing Catholicism, Hugh Cholmeley himself attended Anglican Sunday services — it was the done thing. But he disliked the local parson, and so boycotted Brandsby

church. Each week he drove past in his pony trap with a loud jangling of bells on the way to the church in the next village.

This English eccentric, part Tolstoyan, part rebel, was artistic and musical. He had a good baritone voice and a repertoire of English and Italian folk songs, self-accompanied on the guitar. Music was part of his heritage to his daughters. Elsie learned the cello and her youngest sister Rosamond ... the violin — both performing with quartets of fair quality ...

Another thing for which Elsie thanked her father was his determination that his daughters, as well as his sons, should be educated. At that time, socially comparable young women were mostly rounded off for marriage at finishing schools. But he wanted them prepared to earn a living. (pp. 20-21)

‘Elsie’s father’s (sic),’ Epstein tells us, ‘continued to influence her after she joined the working world’ (p. 22). His values are eloquently expressed in a letter he wrote her when she was in her twenties:

You are right about not being able to write unless you have something you want to say. All other writing is worthless even if people attain the art of writing about nothing ...

Which is one reason why you should read, cultivate ideas about topics of world interest and ... interest yourself in important affairs, in human nature ...

With all great artists and writers, the higher they are in the scale the wider their interests ... You will find poets like

Shelley and Byron deeply & seriously interested in reform movements and even politics of their day; even painters like Michelangelo, Raphael etc. had unsuspected intellectual & practical interests. William Blake, of all people, the mystical idealist, was deeply versed in political and social questions. And you can’t get ideas worth having unless you take the trouble to go into questions thoroughly & not merely superficially, but the moment you begin to do that the ideas come fast enough ...

Then if you have the faculty of expressing them it is easy. (qtd. p. 23)

Cholmeley did possess such a faculty — in writing, but perhaps more importantly in practice. He does not invoke Ruskin directly in his letter, but his affinity with Ruskin’s own thinking is plain enough.

This charming pen-portrait, from such an apparently unlikely source,\* helps to ‘flesh out’, in a very real sense, the Guild’s story. Epstein’s own remarkable life is woven into the fabric of world history. Imprisoned for five years from 1968 during the Cultural Revolution, much of it spent in solitary confinement, he never lost faith in his Communist ideals. By the time he died, he was an honoured member of Chinese society. His memoirs are the culmination of a remarkable seventy-five-year career as an author.

*Stuart Eagles*

*\*It might usefully be noted, however, that a ‘Chinese’ translation of Sesame and Lilies was published in 2009.*

## ISLE OF MAN RUSKIN SOCIETY

The following is from the *Isle of Man Times*, Saturday, 20 March, 1897:

### Isle of Man Ruskin Society

A party of members of the Isle of Man Ruskin Society left Douglas (per Electric Train) for Laxey, on Saturday. On arrival, accompanied by Mr Rydings, they proceeded to St. George’s

Mill where an interesting inspection was made. Mr Rydings proved most untiring in answering the many questions that were put to him with regard to weaving, and explained the different processes from the primitive stage. Great satisfaction was

evinced on viewing the different cloths manufactured by Mr Rydings, which are what they appear to be, not a particle of cotton being used in the mill, and are thereby clearly distinguished from many placed on the market which may be effective to the eye, but not genuine. A short visit was made to the Laxey Lead Mines, after which Mr Rydings escorted his visitors to “The Firs.” Mrs Rydings was very affable to her guests, and, after a pleasant tea, some music and conversation, the members parted from their president, his amiable wife and daughter, impressed with pleasant recollections of their visit to St. George’s Mill. The members were recipients of a memento, in the form of an article, entitled “Some Reminiscences of John Ruskin,” by Mr Egbert Rydings.



*Laxey Woollen Mill, Isle of Man, April 2012. Photo: Paul Fargher.*

**Sue King, *A Weaver's Tale: The Life and Times of the Laxey Woollen Industry, 1860-2010* (Laxey: St George's Woollen Mills, 2010). 176pp. £14.99. ISBN 978-0956455314.**

The result of painstaking research by Sue King, *A Weaver's Tale* is both an excellent piece of social history and a welcome addition to Guild scholarship. Commissioned to celebrate the woollen industry in Laxey, the book traces its development from Manx weaving in Viking times to the present day. Concentrating on the period from the nineteenth century onwards, the study shows that in common with the rest of the British Isles, a tradition of small-scale cottage spinning and weaving had by the 1860s been squeezed out of existence by large-scale manufacture on the mainland. As in Langdale, where Marion Twelves and Albert Fleming drew on Ruskinian ideals in promoting a revival of hand work in linen, Laxey, a rustic village on the east coast of the Isle of Man, witnessed attempts to arrest the apparently inevitable triumph of economies of scale and to value traditional woollen crafts. That the Laxey experiment was, on these terms, less successful than Langdale, was not for want of trying. The catalyst at Laxey was the arrival in 1870 of Egbert Rydings, a figure well-known to Guild enthusiasts. King's work provides the most detailed examination of Rydings' work so far available, tracing his humble early life amidst the mills of Rochdale to his involvement as Guild treasurer and his leadership in creating St George's Woollen Mills in the late 1870s. As well as providing a sympathetic portrayal of Rydings' achievements — in literature as well as industry — King's work also asks some searching questions about the nature of the business, and in particular its much-vaunted credentials as a producer of 'homespun' cloth. After the failure of early attempts to foster hand spinning and weaving as a cottage industry at Laxey, Rydings chose in 1879 to seek Guild support in purchasing Moughtin's Corn Mill in the village, and converting it for woollen manufacture. As King points out, this involved installation of a water-powered spinning mule, a condenser machine, a carding engine, a dyeing house, and drying shed, all of which meant that the Mill could hardly defend its highly-effective campaign to market itself as a producer of 'Laxey Homespuns'. Rydings emerges from this account (and from all others) as a philanthropic employer who somewhat reduced working hours, provided workers with recreational activities, and enriched the cultural life of the community. Even so, King points out that Laxey workers were subject to a range of hazards familiar to all involved in mechanised textile manufacture. The gruesome list included unpleasant levels of noise and humidity, the likelihood of respiratory diseases as a result of airborne fibrous particles, the dangers of moving machinery, the potential for burns and slips due to chemicals used in various parts of the building, and even the problem of 'Mule Spinner's Disease' or cancer of the scrotum, caused by mineral oils. In addition, the romantic and environmental connotations of the Mill's waterwheel power were considerably offset by the fact that 'the scouring and dyeing contributed to the appalling state of the lower Laxey river as the chemical waste was emptied directly into the river'. Given Ruskin's consistent commitment to pure air and water, and to handicrafts, it was probably as well that he never attempted the short journey from Brantwood to Laxey. King's frank account

provides clear evidence that while it provided a number of obvious benefits to employers, Rydings' well-meaning scheme, like so many early Guild ventures, strayed some way from its founder's ideals. King argues that 'the real success story in terms of Ruskin's teaching was probably Egbert himself — a working man who taught himself and others to appreciate the value of craftsmanship and the countryside', and whose dual commitment to industry and literature made him that Ruskinian ideal — a worker with the hand and with the brain.

King also provides some welcome correctives to some familiar but inaccurate claims about Laxey, chief of which is the idea that the Mill closed in the early 1900s as a result of the famed, but uneconomic, durability of its cloth. In fact, the Mill merely passed out of the ageing Rydings' hands as he retired from business in 1901. Guild involvement with the Mill ended at this point, but the Mill has survived changing fashions and economic conditions to this day. After Rydings' death in 1912, the Mill continued to use the still dubious term 'Ruskin Manx Homespuns' until the 1950s, and while the name St George's Woollen Mills was dropped in 1923, it appears to have reasserted itself pretty quickly thereafter. King traces subsequent developments, with increased mechanisation and modernisation in the 1940s, the introduction of distinctive Manx tartans in the 1950s, and the radical decision in the 1960s to replace powered machines with traditional handlooms. Balancing reduced outputs with the ability to produce 'short runs of high quality, hand-made products in exclusive designs', this proved a canny decision in ensuring the Mill's long-term future, and ironically moved it closer to the arts-and-crafts tradition than it had ever been in its past. One wonders whether this change may also over time have reinforced the pervasive notion that the original mill had also been a genuine centre of handicrafts. After 1970, hand production also offered opportunities to position the Mill within a burgeoning heritage and tourism industry on the island, and the Mill perhaps became as reliant on income from visitors as from its luxury products.

One of the joys of King's book is its wealth of cultural history. Each chapter maps changes at the Mill against a local backdrop, giving a flavour of life in Laxey over the decades, flagging up key social and economic developments, and providing choice insights into local personalities. Those with an interest in textile history and fashion will find much of interest here. Accessible and intelligent, *A Weaver's Tale* is of value in terms of what it tells us of the Rydings years and in providing a rich sense of the enduring imprint of St George on the island. Generously illustrated and pleasingly presented, King's work is a must for Guildsfolk and social historians alike, but would also make an excellent accompanying guide for travellers making a Ruskin pilgrimage to the Isle of Man.

**Mark Frost**

*Readers will be pleased to learn that a special pamphlet is planned — to be published by the Guild — to highlight some of Sue King's research findings into the life of Egbert Rydings. See back cover.*

**John Ruskin, *Les deux chemins: Conférences sur l'art et ses applications à la décoration et à la manufacture (1858-1859)* translated by Frédérique Campbell** (Les presses du réel, 2011). ISBN 978-2840663911.

In recent years Ruskin scholarship has benefited from a welcome renewal of interest from various quarters of French Academe: the legacy of Ruskin has been re-examined in the light of new arguments and new translations of his more canonical texts (*The Stones of Venice*, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*) have encouraged stimulating research in various disciplines from art history to literature or even economics. In spite of this, many other — and often more accessible — texts have yet to find their French audience and it is a great source of satisfaction to see the publishing house “les presses du réel” rise to the challenge through this translation of *The Two Paths* by Frédérique Campbell.

Just like Cynthia Gamble and Matthieu Pinette's *L'œil de la Bourgogne*, *Les deux chemins* is a very smart-looking hardcover. The front cover bears an excellent reproduction of one of Ruskin's fine drawings (detail of an iron portal in Bellinzona) and immediately draws the reader's attention to the main topic of the five lectures given by Ruskin in 1859: how art and architecture stem from the same 'vital law', how the decorative arts should be taught and practised by students — all aspects that demonstrate how Ruskin was able to combine a practical and a theoretical approach when urging his audience to observe and learn from nature. The book includes 13 illustrations reproducing Ruskin's drawings and five appendices.

**Cynthia Gamble and Matthieu Pinette, *L'œil de Ruskin : l'exemple de la Bourgogne*** (Les presses du réel, 2011). 240pp. €28. ISBN 978-2-84066-453-6.

Writing a book on Ruskin for a French audience is always a tricky business as so much background information needs to be provided to give the reader a clear sense of the man and his writings and every effort in that direction should therefore be admired and encouraged. When the attempt comes from the collaboration between a French curator and a highly respected scholar and active Companion who is recognised on both sides of the Channel as an authority on Proust and Ruskin it is all the more welcome as a contribution to Ruskin studies. And indeed, the first thing that needs to be mentioned about *L'œil de Ruskin* is how the book captures the 'spirit of Ruskin'. The volume itself is an elegant-looking hardcover whose sobriety and plain white colour would have met with Ruskin's approval. It is complemented by 22 beautiful illustrations offering a wide range of visual elements, such as journal extracts or drawings. Judging by appearance alone, the book would make a handsome gift.

The contents also offer much to anyone who would like to know about Ruskin in general or is more specifically looking for traces of Ruskin's travels through Burgundy, that lovely hilly part of France well-known for its medieval heritage — as well as its exquisite wines. For those who read English, know something about Ruskin and expect new insights into Ruskin's interest in France and Burgundy, however, the impression is likely to be somewhat different and the text raises questions that I shall come back to shortly.

The book is divided into ten chapters and a coda and roughly follows the chronological order of Ruskin's visits to Burgundy. In addition it provides a useful chronology of

The text is introduced by a short but perceptive introduction that allows the reader to reflect on his/her expectations and on Ruskin's relevance today and appreciate the need to experience reading Ruskin's writings in full rather than through selected passages from his major works usually available in French.

Throughout the volume the standard of the translation is exceptionally high and Ruskin's writing style well-preserved through an artful choice of words and near-perfect knowledge of both French and English. The translation runs smoothly from beginning to end and the footnotes provide all the information necessary to understand the allusions or references in Ruskin's text. The only thing I would question in all the choices made by the translator is the decision not to convert the imperial system to the metric system — thus forcing the French reader to revise his/her basics on the matter! Aside from this minor point, the book reads very well and should be recommended to all French readers — including students — as an excellent introduction to Ruskin's ideas on art and architecture.

*Laurence Roussillon-Constanty*

Ruskin's main trips to Burgundy and an index of place names. The introduction gives an excellent overview of Ruskin's life and writings and offers a concise and truthful portrait of Ruskin as a complex and multi-faceted character. To the majority of French people who have never heard of Ruskin, this is indeed an excellent *entrée en matière* and synthesis. It is followed by a short chapter on how the Ruskin family travelled which gives useful background information on the subsequent chapters.

In these first pages, the reader will soon realise that two kinds of fonts have been used to differentiate the French text from the original quotes in English: when French is used, the text appears in plain black while English quotes are printed in slightly paler ink. While the reason is clear and well-justified, the effect is rather odd as the print itself seems deficient and the reader's eyesight slightly impaired. The translation of Ruskin's quotes (mostly from the diaries but also from his major texts) into French that appear in brackets in the body of the text are mostly accurate and offer the reader a chance to almost read Ruskin in the original — a clear advantage over providing the translations in footnotes.

For a reader proficient in both languages, however, the way the text is laid out will encourage parallel-reading and draw his/her attention to rather odd choices of words and to frequent mistranslations of key-notions in Ruskin's text. While it does not matter greatly if 'rice pudding' (69) is translated as 'pudding au riz' (instead of 'riz au lait'), it is more problematic to see Ruskin's diminishing 'powers' (144) translated as 'pouvoirs', which makes it sound as if Ruskin were some kind of wizard or thought of himself as endowed with supernatural powers.

We know how particular Ruskin was about the words he used (as he reiterates in the preface to the 1859 edition of *The Two Paths*), and how in his case words — not just their meaning but also their connotation and *bon usage* — do matter. Granted, experience has shown that translating Ruskin into French is always a challenge and often a near impossible task. What is regrettable here is that close proofreading by the editor or a native speaker would surely have helped clarify Ruskin's text and prevented the reader from being distracted from the overall argument of the book.

From Ruskin's first journey to Burgundy in 1833 to his last stay in Dijon in 1888, the story unfolds and allows the reader to follow in Ruskin's footsteps along the famous 'old road'. The narrative ingeniously ranges from anecdotes, direct quotes and keen insights into Ruskin's approach to nature and art. As one progresses through the book, one gets a sense of how Ruskin's travelling experience constantly feeds into his writing and how life and text seem to merge into one. Throughout the volume, the distinct expertise of each author is clearly felt: Cynthia Gamble's thorough knowledge of both Ruskin's and Proust's writings allows the reader to appreciate how biographical

***Ruskin, Venice and Nineteenth-Century Cultural Travel*, edited by Keith Hanley and Emma Sdegno** (Venezia: Libreria Editrice Ca' Foscari 2010). 474pp. ISBN 9788875432898.

This substantial paperback consists of a selection of papers which were presented at a conference of the same title held in Venice on 25-27 September 2008. The research was supported by The Arts and Humanities Research Council, UK and organised by The Ruskin Centre at Lancaster University in collaboration with the Università Ca' Foscari Venezia.

It should be said at the outset that this is a hefty academic book and as such provides the reader with a wealth of information and insight written by numerous international scholars. Many chapters are based to a high degree on subject-specialist knowledge, backed by extensive footnotes and bibliographies; however, several of the essays should appeal to a wider audience. The two editors begin the volume with chapters of their own, followed by twenty-two chapters organised around three section headings. Keith Hanley begins the book with a brilliant introductory essay 'Ruskin, Venice and Nineteenth-Century Cultural Travel: The Quest for Restoration'. This provides a rich, deeply condensed and highly perceptive overview of the central themes. Co-editor Emma Sdegno's equally fine introductory chapter, 'Ruskin and the Myth of Venice' explores the idea of 'myth' as attached to Venice and Ruskin's use of 'juxtaposition' through which 'he enacts his own myth of Venice'.

In the first of the three sections, 'Visiting Venetian Painting', Paul Tucker considers Ruskin's developing art criticism in 'After Tintoretto: Ruskin's Venetian "Picture-Work" in 1845 and its Impact on his Art Critical Language'. This work, he argues, intensifies the approach already used by Ruskin for his accounts of natural phenomena in *Modern Painters* 1. The result is a 'narrativized description', dramatic in style, which he examines in relation to Elizabeth Helsinger's 'excursive seeing' and Emma Sdegno's idea of 'suggestiveness'. Tucker goes on to analyse Ruskin's verbal representations of visual art in

detail finds its way into the artistic or literary production of both men and how their aesthetics are related, while Matthieu Pinette's expertise on Burgundy's architectural treasures and local heritage provides useful and detailed information on the main monuments viewed, described or pictured by Ruskin. Both approaches give a sense of perspective and depth to what would otherwise be a somewhat linear narrative. The result is an entertaining and informative book that combines scholarly comments and relevant anecdotes. The chronological perspective may at times seem a bit monotonous but the overall progression is smooth and relieved by interesting interludes such as chapter VIII, which literally works *à rebours* and concentrates on Proust and Burgundy.

Overall the book undoubtedly fulfils its promise and allows us to see Burgundy through Ruskin's eyes, shedding light on both the place and the man as it does so. As such, it is definitely worth a read and will probably find an audience among French tourists and French readers wishing to know more about *ce grand homme*.

*Laurence Roussillon-Constanty.*

terms of what he calls 'correlated *speech acts*'. Tintoretto is also a focus for Anna Laura Lepschy in her essay 'Ruskin and Taine: Observing Tintoretto'. She compares the two writers and their appreciation of the artist through 'emotional responsiveness'. In the following essay 'Ruskin and Canaletto' Tatiana Filipovska, considers Ruskin's critique of the artist and contrasts this with his praise of Turner along with an examination of more supportive responses to Canaletto's work. In 'Importing Italy: Ruskin, Italian Art and Dante Gabriel Rossetti' Laurence Roussillon-Constanty examines their differing approaches to Italian art in text and painting. Both are shown to have held strong feelings for the country combined with knowledge of Dante and Italian art. Ruskin's emphasis is seen as being based within the representational and the narrative whilst by contrast Rossetti focuses on the symbolic. This division is interesting bearing in mind Ruskin's knowledge of typological (or prefigurative) symbolism. In the final essay 'Regionalism and Ruskin in the Ottocento Artistic Narrative', Laura Watts Sommer considers the work of the nineteenth-century painter Francesco Hayez and suggests that Ruskin's neglect of contemporary Italian art in *The Stones of Venice*, 'perpetuated a European preconception of aesthetic limitations in the newly formed Italian state'. She notes, however, that Ruskin's focus was on a much earlier period. The essay develops into a refreshing and interesting examination of a modern Italian artist of the time.

Moving on to the section 'Transporting Venetian Architecture', Stephen Kite's essay, 'Ruskin's Careful Watchfulness' focuses on Ruskin's discoveries during the 1845 tour in terms of his growing interest in architecture. In a beautifully written account he shows Ruskin's knowledge as increasing through the drawing act; by being held in the presence of his subjects. Anuradha Chatterjee's 'Travelling

to the Surface: John Ruskin and the Production of the New Theory of the Adorned “Wall Veil” examines the way in which Ruskin’s architectural writings have been criticised, ‘shrouded in a stigma’ with regard to his supposed inability to discuss the three-dimensional aspects of architecture. His work was seen to be ‘rife with fictions and inaccuracies’. In a brilliant exposition she shows how these interpretations are the result of a failure to challenge the boundaries of historical and architectural writings. Because of this, she argues that ‘Ruskin’s views fit into a radical history of architectural modernism which recognises surface as a key determinant’. In ‘Geo-Aesthetics: Venice and the Architecture of the Alps’, Anthony Ozturk traces the historical reaction to the Alps from ‘mountain purgatories’ to Ruskin’s ‘Mountain Glory’. Ruskin inherited the ideas of earlier writers but his extraordinary vision takes him to new destinations. The stones of the Alps and the stones of Venice are brought together in what Ozturk sees as a ‘seamless iconography . . . of intertextual narratives’. Henry James’ resistance to Ruskinian influences concerning Venice is explored by Rosella Mamoli Zorzi in ‘Against Palladio: Reading *The Stones of Venice* in the Train Between Vicenza and Venice’. James never quite appears to fight off Ruskin’s opinions, though at times he seems to be on the edge of doing so. In a chapter almost overwhelmed by footnotes, Ross Jenner in ‘Lordship and Servitude: Ornament and the Particular in *The Stones of Venice*’ traces Ruskin’s attention to the idea of individual workfulness and the aesthetics of the particular and the unfinished.

In the final section ‘Literary Travel with Ruskin’, Anna Magdalena Elsner’s essay ‘Death in Venice — Exploring Ruskinian Themes in Proust’s Depiction of Venice’ examines Proust’s narrator’s reactions to the city in the novel *A la recherche du temps perdu*. The relationship between Proust’s work and Ruskin’s writings in which mourning and emotion is incorporated against ‘interminable nostalgia’ is carefully explored. Kristian Moen’s essay, “‘This image Traced in the Camera Obscura of the Mind’: Transforming Visions in Theophile Gautier’s Venices’ traces the travel writing of Gautier and the impact of the train and the photograph in terms of set design and tableau. Joshua Parker in ‘Venice Unveiled’ explores American treatments of Venice and in particular Henry James’ *The Wings of the Dove* against Ruskin’s writings focusing on the veil as metaphor. In ‘John Ruskin’s Venice

Seen by a Pole, Maria Konopnicka’s Impressions from *Travels* (1884) and *Italia* (1901)’, Olga Plaszczewska examines the large Polish historical engagement with Italy and Venice in particular through the writings of this Polish traveller. David R. Sorensen’s “Shattered Majesty”: Ruskin, Carlyle and the Venetian Restoration of Frederick the Great’ explores aspects of the Ruskin/Carlyle relationship in shared thoughts about the importance of human imperfection. Tony Hilton traces aspects of places not visited by Ruskin, but of importance to him, in “Sailing to Byzantium”: Ruskin’s Imaginary Travel to Greece’. Hilton helps us to disentangle problems involving Ruskin’s use of the terms ‘Byzantine’ and ‘Christian Romanesque’. Carmen Casaliggi’s essay ‘From Venice to England: Tradition, Modernity and Commerce in *The Stones* and *The Harbours*’ is concerned with the relationship between these two books and Ruskin’s sensitivity to the locations described in both. Finally, in ‘Ruskin and the Chamonix/Venice Chronotope’ Andre Helard examines Ruskin’s engagement with his designated ‘two bournes [or homes] of earth’. These involve two expressions of time, Venice being seen as bearing the ‘time of history’ whilst Chamonix is considered within ‘geological time’. The Alpine scene or ‘architecture’ and the Venetian are contrasted in the form of different kinds of beauty.

The volume contains a large number of illustrations in both monochrome and colour, and though small, they provide a valuable aid to the memory. A few errors appear within the illustration titles, for example Illustration 9.6 ‘Strasbourg Cathedral’ is R.P. Cuff’s copy of Ruskin’s etching of ‘San Michele at Lucca’ (Plate V1 in *Seven Lamps*). Unfortunately, Ross Jenner is missing from the ‘Notes on Contributors’. Somewhat oddly, perhaps, there is little reference to unpublished sources and few to on-line hypertext-based research material relating to Ruskin and Venice. However, this is an important book and a must for all who are interested in Venice and in Ruskin’s engagement with the city. It brings together an excellent range of research, observations and ideas from a variety of disciplines and offers fresh insights into areas once thought to be well explored. The editors and contributors are to be congratulated in providing us with such an interesting and informative collection of essays.

**Ray Haslam**

**Lars Spuybroek, *The Sympathy of Things: Ruskin and the Ecology of Design*** (Rotterdam: v2 Publishing/NAi, 2011). 400pp. £28.95. ISBN 978-9056628277.

Lars Spuybroek writes not as a Ruskin insider, but from a position that means his perspective is both unusual and refreshing. While *The Sympathy of Things* will not appeal to all Ruskin readers, it is a very welcome addition to scholarship in our field. A Professor of Architectural Design at the Georgia Institute of Technology, Spuybroek is also closely associated with Rotterdam’s V2 Institute for the Unstable Media, an avant-garde organisation that has since 1982 been working to promote innovative ideas at the intersection of art, culture, environmentalism, and technology. A recent kindling of their interest in Ruskin will lead next year to a volume of essays devoted to exploring the implications and applications of Ruskin’s theory of Vital Beauty. Through Ruskin and a range

of other ideas, Spuybroek’s work seeks to invigorate modern design by recuperating a Ruskinian commitment to beauty and decoration.

The first thing to note is that *The Sympathy of Things* is neither a light nor an easy read. Spuybroek’s starting point is ‘The Nature of Gothic’, and he pays close attention to several other elements of Ruskin’s work, but readers are also challenged by a dizzying array of other subjects: one is confronted with ideas from Bergson, Heidegger, Latour, Lippinger, Darwin, Worringer, Kant, and Kierkegaard; led into discussions of solitary wasps, benobo monkeys, and headhunter masks from Borneo; and taken through involved discussions of aesthetic and

architectural theory. The present reader needed three months to complete his reading of the volume, and the sheer range and ambition of the volume means that for all but the most erudite, this text will prove challenging.

The second point to make is that it would be tempting, as a Ruskinian, to reject Spuybroek's analysis early on. Those with a sound knowledge of Ruskin's architectural principles will in the first two chapters find it difficult not to draw attention to apparent problems in the treatment. Spuybroek largely ignores many of the elements of the Gothic that were most central to Ruskin, paying little attention to the specifically Christian morality underpinning Ruskin's historical reading of Venetian architecture, and underplaying Ruskin's commitment to an objectivist aesthetics. Spuybroek's claim that Vitalism was more important to Ruskin than Christianity or that 'with Ruskin, a line of reasoning never relies on his Christianity' (p. 14) will not convince most Ruskinians. Spuybroek's analysis of 'The Nature of Gothic' over-emphasises its formal elements while underplaying its ethical dimensions. For Ruskin, of course, the two were inseparable and mutually supporting, and his entire approach rejected a purely formal analysis of buildings.

Having said all of this, I would still like to suggest that Spuybroek's work is worthwhile, invigorating, and rewarding, and that the kinds of objections I have outlined are in the end beside the point. Ruskin Studies has produced many excellent scholarly accounts of Ruskin and the gothic, including, most recently Robert Hewison's masterful *Ruskin on Venice: 'The Paradise of Cities'* (2009). Spuybroek is clear from the beginning that his focus is quite different and, like Ruskin, he is committed to both formal and ethical aspects of design. His method in 'revitalizing' Ruskin is not to situate him within his own historical context, but 'to wrest [him] from history, to see whether you can filter out the typical statements of the day and discover what is left on the table, and, out of these parts, construct a creature we can recognize as one of our own'. By unusually placing Ruskin 'in the context of historical figures that have appeared after him' (p. 7) Spuybroek aims to transform 'a historical Ruskin into a theory of digital design' (p. 9).

Spuybroek shares Ruskin's conviction that the construction of buildings is, or should be, drawn from the same constructive and proliferative tendencies found in mountains, trees, leaves, and animals, and finds much of his argument on the Ruskinian

notion that all creative acts are the result of ongoing co-operation between the elements involved in creation. Although he makes less of 'The Law of Help' than he should, Spuybroek draws very productively on the idea of sympathy at the heart of 'Vital Beauty' in suggesting that all matter, whether organic or not, engages in sympathetic relationships with other matter, and that these encounters lead to beautiful things. It is beyond the scope of the present review to do justice to the perambulations involved in constructing this argument, but those willing to follow Spuybroek with an open and patient mind will find the journey rewarding.

*The Sympathy of Things* is excessively diffuse, passionate, and in some ways ill-disciplined, and yet its passion and ambition is welcome. Its delight in trampling back and forth across the accepted boundaries of disciplinary studies is not a cause for criticism. Indeed, the work is often deeply reminiscent of that most ambitious, undisciplined, and interdisciplinary of writers, John Ruskin. Just as Ruskin launched withering attacks on the proponents of classical architecture, so Spuybroek takes aim at the direction aesthetics has taken since 1900, condemning much of twentieth-century design as a 'fatal obsession with the sublime' that has led to a situation in which 'we can hardly imagine any longer how unthinkable it was a hundred and fifty years ago to leave the surface of things ... as plain and bare as we know them today' (p. 69). And just as Ruskin threw up his hands on seeing the arrival of Victorian Gothic, Spuybroek is equally dismissive of those who call for a conservative, Heritage-minded return to the design of previous centuries, calling instead for an avante-garde digital design aesthetic rooted in the present but resting upon a re-invention of decoration. While it is frustrating that Spuybroek does not do more to define 'the digital' or to demonstrate what the kind of approach he advocates would actually mean, it is clear that he is successful in making Ruskin pivotal to an attempt to '[find] our way back to beauty' (p. 9) and to do battle with the 'vast universe of smooth, polished objects' (p. 75) that constitute our modern world. Like Ruskin's best work, Spuybroek's study is founded on a frank and unapologetic joy in the energy of things, a desire to engage fully with all subjects and all phenomena, and a commitment to the possibility of improving human life, creativity, and our capacity to appreciate beauty.

*Mark Frost*

**Fiona MacCarthy, *The Last Pre-Raphaelite: Edward Burne-Jones and the Victorian Imagination*** (London: Faber and Faber, 2011). 656 pp. £25. ISBN 978-0-571-22861-4

Ruskin's attack on Whistler, it is sometimes forgotten, arose in a rich and particular context. Letter 79 of *Fors Clavigera*, like most of the other letters, touched on a surprising range of topics, which were all by the end of it woven together. One of these topics is work — how it is valued in society at large — and Ruskin concludes by contrasting Whistler, who asks 'two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public's face', with another painter who works 'with utmost conscience of care' and, by implication, charges reasonable prices. That painter was his close friend Edward (or Ned) Burne-Jones, whose paintings had been shown with Whistler's at the new Grosvenor Gallery. 'His work,' Ruskin says earlier in the letter, 'is simply

the only art-work at present produced in England which will be received by the future as "classic" in its kind...' and he goes on to praise 'imagination of the highest power in Burne-Jones, under the conditions of scholarship, of social beauty, and of social distress...' That was in 1877. In 1883, no longer as close to Burne-Jones as he had been, Ruskin praised him again in an Oxford lecture for 'the indefatigable scholarship and exhaustless fancy [that had] fitted him for [the] task' of giving visible representation to the deepest myths and visions of past time 'in a degree distinguishing him above all contemporary European designers' [*The Art of England*].

Ruskin's praise for Burne-Jones must have been as gratifying for the painter as such things can ever be, for Ruskin, as Burne-Jones knew, did not lavish praise thoughtlessly and had indeed had occasion to criticise him. The miseries of Ruskin's life in the 1870s and '80s had had their effect on a friendship which had never from the start been exactly equal. Ruskin was the older man and, in the early years, more learned about art, and extremely wealthy as well, where young Jones was poor. He took it upon himself to school this talented painter and was hugely generous towards him, but the generosity always included some element of control and, as Burne-Jones matured, he began politely to rebel. As Fiona MacCarthy depicts it in this new biography of Burne-Jones, *The Last Pre-Raphaelite*, the younger man was notably more patient with Ruskin than others of his protégés had been. Everyone knows what happened to Ruskin and Millais, and Rossetti ended up almost loathing his patron. William Morris, who valued Ruskin's writing more than any of them, seems to have simply kept out of his way; it is noteworthy that neither Burne-Jones nor Morris was a Companion of the Guild, which would surely have profited greatly from their involvement. What Burne-Jones and his wife Georgie understood, as the others appear not to have done, was that Ruskin was deeply lonely and had a tendency to use his money and authority to buy his way into friendship and influence.

In all her biographies Fiona MacCarthy has handled such frailties with tact and sympathetic insight. She combines these human virtues with an encyclopaedic knowledge of the early days of modern design. With books on C. R. Ashbee, Eric Gill and Morris behind her and a biography of Walter Gropius in the making, she understands how artistic problems and solutions arise from the ways in which artists lead their lives — not least because people like Ruskin and Burne-Jones are bound to live in rebellion against the prevailing conventions. Burne-Jones made no issue of this and just got on with his work, but it was never easy, and when clashes occurred they were painful. The turning-point in the two men's friendship came in 1871 — six years before the Whistler trial — when Ruskin read Burne-Jones his lecture on 'Michael Angelo and Tintoret'. In that lecture, for the first time, he denounces Michelangelo. He may not have realised how much harm this occasion did, but MacCarthy quotes Burne-Jones as saying: 'as I went home [from hearing the lecture read] I wanted to drown myself in the Surrey Canal or get drunk in a tavern — it didn't seem worth while to strive any more if he could think it or write it.'

What had happened? There seem to be two answers to that question. In his endeavour to develop from the fanciful medievalist of the early work to the 'classic' artist Ruskin praised in *Fors*, Burne-Jones had gone to school with Michelangelo. Any study of his use of anatomy — in stained glass as much as in painting — is bound to trace his manner back to the great Florentine. Michelangelo had brought into his mostly fantastic and mythological art the weight and presence of the human figure. Burne-Jones's teachers meant a great deal to him emotionally. Thinking of Michelangelo as a teacher, he felt great love for him. In consequence, he was affronted by Ruskin's attack and hurt that it should have come, in effect, from another of his teachers. But MacCarthy also comes up with the

sort of private reason which marks her out as a great biographer. Burne-Jones had fallen desperately in love with his model Maria Zambaco and, seeking comfort and advice, had confided in the man he thought of as a kind of father. Ruskin was appalled. Very close to Georgie Burne-Jones, and destabilised by his courtship of Rose La Touche, he fell back on the primness of his upbringing. Burne-Jones realised all too well that the attack on Michelangelo's 'sensualism' was in part an attack on himself.

When Ruskin realised that he had damaged a deep friendship, it is hard to tell. MacCarthy includes a further quotation that was new to me. The two men stayed in touch and it is much to their joint credit that they did so, but the old, easy friendliness was gone. So the painter was both surprised and delighted when Ruskin wrote to tell him he was going to lecture on his work at Oxford: 'I want to come and see all the pictures you've got...' the Professor wrote, 'I want to reckon you up, and it's like counting clouds.' The result was the highest and best-informed praise the artist had ever received. But Ruskin had reservations, about which, on this occasion, he was uncharacteristically silent, perhaps fearing to give yet more offence. MacCarthy's account is typically penetrating:

[W]hen he had gone to view Ned's paintings in his studio Ruskin was less enthusiastic, as shown by a frustrated little entry in his diary: 'At ... Ned's, but vexed with his new pale colours and linear design.' Ruskin found it disquieting that Ned was now seen by many as the figurehead of the 'Aesthetic Movement' in art he so distrusted.

It was in a sense an emblem of Ruskin's failure. The artist his lecture celebrated had been noteworthy as much for 'social beauty, and social distress' as for beauty and imagination. Without his teacher, he was leaving all that behind, and the cultural emptiness that Ruskin feared was on its way. He must have felt he had lost Burne-Jones, as he had lost so much else.

I have taken the liberty for this Guild publication of pursuing a single thread through MacCarthy's book. Burne-Jones's friendship with Ruskin is a matter of importance, not only for the value of their own achievements, but for an understanding of the directions the art world has taken since. But I shouldn't omit to add that *The Last Pre-Raphaelite* is, as one had hoped, another narrative triumph for its author: one of those books that, for anyone at all familiar with its subject-matter, is a treasure-house you want never to have to leave. If I am to make fine distinctions, I have to say that it's not *quite* as well written in detail as MacCarthy's *William Morris: A Life for our Time*, that the occasional minor error has escaped her learned eye, and — something I had not noticed before — that MacCarthy is less reliable when it comes to literature — including Ruskin's books — than she is on matters of art and craft. Neither 'ebullient' nor 'cynical', for example, is a word I would ever apply to FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*. Never mind. I look forward to seeing Burne-Jones's life at rest on my bookshelf next to that of his great friend William Morris, certain that like its companion, it's going to be consulted again and again.

Clive Wilmer

Clive Wilmer has a remarkable eye for places: for the living nature of a historical past; for hidden spiritual meanings; for the testimony of buildings; for the vividly apprehended world around. In these matters, as in others, Wilmer's poetry makes a great deal of sense beside the works of John Ruskin. But Wilmer is far from being a 'mere' Ruskinian, a poet simply converting Ruskin into verse. Here is the established voice of an exceptional writer, for whom language is the supplest tool in the creation of verbal mosaics, of patterned and precious — and also fragile — meanings. The religious dimension of Wilmer's poetry is unmissable. This is writing that demonstrates a continual return to hopes, a scrupulous sense that spiritual meanings *might* be present in places, things, events, people. 'Near Walsingham', in which the poet contemplates the holy places around the ancient Norfolk shrine, captures a compound of desire, anticipation, and caution in an apt line: 'What we might say | Of what it tells would speak of God' (p.49). That perception of things that *would* tell of God is worth remembering throughout this new volume. Such a state lies behind the lovely miniature 'Overnight Snow':

There are star-crystals shining white on the blank earth.

It is a visitation from on high,

Where there is nothing but exploding worlds

And radiant fragments of infinity. (p.174)

Those words might stand emblematically for the distinctive religious temper of this collection. Music, buildings, places: each has a form of revelatory potential, a promise, but in no dogmatic or exclusive sense. Ruskin's world is here too, and sometimes explicitly. 'Fonte Branda in Siena' draws directly on the last paragraph of *Praeterita* as the starting point for a memory of that red-bricked, darkened water spring, which Ruskin last saw with Charles Eliot Norton. Fonte Branda is 'on the point of speech' (p.95), Wilmer says, as if Siena lost its best spokesman in Ruskin, who, in *Praeterita*'s final paragraph, lost his power of speech as well. The silencing of voices alongside the continuance of testimonies despite silence are common points of reference in this volume. The notion of being about-to-reveal, about-to-speak, might serve, indeed, as a worthy motto for much of the poetry. The suggestiveness of Wilmer's verse, often compact and even terse, raises the emotional and intellectual temperature of his writing to an exceptional level. There is promise and possibility in a multitude of places. In 'At the Grave of Ezra Pound', it is the delicacy of the understated that is acutely present, as Wilmer — imitating the lettering of Pound's grave in San Michele, Venice — asks the reader to call a physical object to mind through the most economical of means. This is the first part of the poem:

I

here lies a man

of words, who in time

came to doubt their meanings

who therefore confines

himself to two words

only here

EZRA POUND

minimal

the injury done

to the white stone

none

to the earth

it rests upon (p.92)

The suggestiveness of the uninjured earth, the almost undamaged stone, wonderfully deals with Pound's sophistication and refinement as a poet, as well as with the destructive side of his life and writing that makes his tomb, even now, no unconflicted place to visit.

European in cultural range, entranced by the visual and musical creations of great minds, Wilmer's poetry ruminates on often fragile revelations, which engage the head as well as the heart. European he is in a more literal sense because of his energy as a translator: from the Hungarian, Russian, Italian, Latin, German. Concluding this volume is Wilmer's version of Mandelstam's 'Hagia Sophia', on the great basilica (then mosque, now museum) of Constantinople/Istanbul. In Mandelstam's glowing poem, there is almost a summary of Wilmer's own absorption with open-eyed, often sorrowful, but lingeringly affirmative promises:

Of sphere and wisdom formed, it will out-gleam

Peoples and centuries, as it has of old,

And resonating sobs from seraphim

Cannot corrode that dark veneer of gold. (p.283)

Mandelstam's death at the hands of Stalin's regime adds anguish to this optimism about the continuance of wisdom. But Mandelstam's memory serves not, I think, simply to ironize 'Hagia Sophia' — the basilica's name means 'holy wisdom' — but to make its optimistic testimony feel more hard-won, more durable, more believable because it is not above a world of sobbing. That is a luminous end to a collection of depth, intellectual power, and hope by a poet of rare grace.

*Francis O'Gorman*

## RUSKIN'S FLORA

A year ago the Ruskin Library at Lancaster mounted an exhibition on Ruskin's geological interests. In the last months of 2011, it followed this with a related exhibition, 'Ruskin's Flora: the Botanical Drawings of John Ruskin' (10 October – 16 December 2011). It was curated by Professor David Ingram of the Lancaster Environment Centre, and formerly Regius Keeper of the Royal Botanic Garden at Edinburgh, and Professor Stephen Wildman, the Director of the Ruskin Library and Research Centre at Lancaster. The material on display drew on Ruskin's sketches and notebooks over many decades, and illustrations from *Modern Painters* and *Proserpina*. No exhibition of Victorian botany would be complete without a few pressed flowers, and they too add their forlorn notes to remind us of the emotions that they had once aroused.

It's easy to overlook Ruskin's lifelong love of wild flowers, which first became a matter of record in his visits to Chamonix in the early 1840s, when he began to make drawings that were both botanically intelligent and aesthetically delightful. As David Ingram remarks in the catalogue: 'Ruskin not only loved wild plants, but also understood both their aesthetic "soul" and their physical structure, so that his watercolours, drawings and sketches are often beautiful works of art of a high order, and, being the result of acute botanical observation, are frequently as accurate as the best botanical observations'. His understanding of the 'inshape' of botanical specimens caused him to start using the authentic depiction of plant forms in paint as a touchstone for judgements on artists — old masters and contemporaries — in the later volumes of *Modern Painters*. Inevitably, it is Turner who shows most insight and understanding of the organic forms of plants and trees.

For Ruskin, plants had always had a larger significance than the purely botanical. From his youth onwards he gave them allegorical or spiritual associations, and made them expressions of his emotional life. His spirits were always lifted by the Alpine Gentian, with 'its peace of pale, ineffable azure, as if strange stars had been made for earth out of the blue light of heaven'. His restless fantasy even urged him to reform nomenclature. He wanted to rename the genus *Saxifraga* (so plentiful at Brantwood), giving his reasons thus: 'The second tribe (at present *Saxifraga*) growing for the most part wild on rocks, may, I trust, even in Protestant botany, be renamed Francesca, after St Francis of Assisi; not only for its modesty and love of mountain gravel, and poverty of colour and leaf; but also because the chief element of its decoration, seen close, will be found in spots or stigmata'. Protestant botany indeed! The phrase speaks volumes.

He tried to put together his observations and thoughts on the flora of England, Scotland and the Alps in *Proserpina*, or *Studies of Wayside Flowers*, an appropriately rambling work that he published in sections from 1875 until 1886. Fanciful, mythological, eccentric, 'it gives plants human minds and personalities, and the divine purpose is frequently referred to'. Emotions are attributed to plants, and their relations with Nature as 'Mother and Judge of their behaviour' are discussed in a whimsical way that reminds one of the manner of proceeding in *Fors Clavigera*. It is hard to imagine what kind of reader would

have benefited from *Proserpina*, but the book does demonstrate Ruskin's intense powers of close study of plant forms, even if he appears indifferent to contemporary botany. Ruskin's library contained a large number of botanical books, most of them out of date, but as E. T. Cook remarked, he valued them mostly for their illustrations. 'His interest in science was "unscientific"; he cared, in natural history, only for the beauty of the creatures or plants, and for the sentiments that clustered round them.'



Inevitably, thoughts of Rose La Touche tended to intrude into his reflections on flowers. In 1872, Ruskin had been drawing in the Uffizi, and, fascinated by Botticelli's 'Primavera', he copied the roses 'from the clearest bit of the pattern of the petticoat of Spring, where it is drawn tight over her thigh . . . no man has ever yet drawn roses as well as Sandro has drawn them.' He used this detail of roses as a vignette on the covers of *Proserpina* and *Fors*, and it became his private emblem on all books published for him by George Allen of Orpington.

The exhibition at Lancaster gave serious and illuminating attention to the complexities of Ruskin's long involvement with flora. It is pleasingly illustrated with drawings and watercolours from the Whitehouse Collection (which is now in the care of the Ruskin Foundation) and it is accompanied by material from the University Herbarium relating to the flora of Cumbria, complemented with work by contemporary artists who have been inspired by Ruskin. The catalogue by David Ingram and Stephen Wildman gives excellent coverage of the exhibition, and is informed by impressive research. It also contains a most useful bibliography. It is available from the Ruskin Library and Research Centre at Lancaster University, Lancaster LA1 4YH, price £5.

**Graham Parry**

*As readers of the Ruskin Review and Bulletin will know, this exhibition has been expanded and given a permanent presence online at [www.lancs.ac.uk/users/ruskinlib/Flora/Flora.html](http://www.lancs.ac.uk/users/ruskinlib/Flora/Flora.html). Rebecca Patterson writes, 'Professor Ingram is carrying on his research to identify many of the plants which John Ruskin sketched, and we will continue to add his ongoing research and further images to the botanical web pages.'*

## NEWS FROM BRANTWOOD

Brantwood, the former home of John Ruskin at Coniston, is offering a vibrant programme of learning courses for 2012. Surrounded by the glorious Coniston fells, with half a mile of lake shore and 250 acres of woodlands, meadows and gardens to explore, there is no more inspirational environment in which to study. Whether you are looking to expand your horizons, deepen your knowledge or learn new skills, the combination of expert tutors, good food, great company and, now, the chance to stay in our newly refurbished accommodation, all add up to a memorable experience!

14-16 September

### **Living Ruskin**

**With Richard Lemmey**

What would happen if we adopted Ruskin's ideas in our lives today? Experience the landscape and natural world that affected Ruskin so strongly at Brantwood and explore those aspects of life that absorbed him so much – wealth, value, social justice, ethics and spirituality. Making use of the landscape, craft and observation, we will explore Ruskin's ideas from a current perspective and examine how we might adjust our lives as individuals and as members of organizations.

Fri 4.30pm – Sun 2.00pm

£312 per person (residential course)

1-5 October

### **Poetry in Architecture**

**With Professor Hendrik Louw**

Ruskin's first book on architecture sets an appropriate, open-ended framework for exploring his ideas on the subject, past and present. The course will involve seminars and debates and include visits to both historic and modern buildings in the Lakes of exceptional quality in terms of design and craftsmanship.

Mon 4.30pm – Fri 2pm

£490 per person (residential course)

For further information and to download a brochure pdf visit [www.brantwood.org.uk](http://www.brantwood.org.uk)



*Brantwood, Coniston. Photo: Stuart Eagles.*

## RUSKIN BIBLIOGRAPHY, 2011-2012

Atwood, Sara (ed.): *Nineteenth-Century Prose*. Special Issue: John Ruskin. Vol. 38, No. 2, Fall 2011. San Diego: San Diego State University (incl.: S. Atwood: Ruskin and Cultural value; C. Wilmer: Ruskin and the challenge of modernity; A. Davis: Misinterpreting Ruskin; C. Casaliggi: Craft and Labour in John Ruskin's Romantic Tradition; M. Frost: Of Trees and Men; P. Yeandle: Art, Ethics and Pleasure: The influence of Ruskin on the Rev. Stuart Duckworth Headlam; L. Roussillon-Constanty: Beyond Proust: The Legacy of Ruskin's Thought in France; S. Eagles: "For Fear of Bears", Ruskin in Russia).

Bennett, Zoë: *The true use of faith*. The Ruskin Lecture 2011. Bembridge: Guild of St George, 2011.

Corthell, Ronald (ed.): *Prose Studies*, Vol. 31, Issue 2. Abingdon: Routledge, August 2009 (incl.: K. Hanley and R. Dickinson: Nineteenth Century Cultural Travel; C. Wilmer: A Venetian Excursion: John Ruskin in Verona; P. Finnerty: Rival Italies: Emily Dickinson, John Ruskin and Henry James).

Creswick-Dawson, Annie: *Benjamin Creswick, Sculptor. A Life Transformed*. Oxford: The Searchers, 2011.

Crossley, Brian: 'A Child's Caned Chair used by John Ruskin'. *Regional Furniture Society Newsletter*, No. 55, Autumn 2011.

Davis, Alan: *Ruskin Review and Bulletin*, Vol. 7, No. 2, Autumn 2011 (incl.: R. Hewison: The Elements of Ruskin; C. Gamble: John Ruskin and a Venetian episode in the life of the National Gallery; S. Bunney: Burgess, Bunney and Ruskin; C. Pool: The other Adele; G. Mawby: Ruskin, Silence and the Swedish Nightingale; B. Richards: Caravaggio; J. S. Dearden: Charles Richardson; M. Frost: The Great Interlaken Cutlery Mystery).

Davis, Alan: *Ruskin Review and Bulletin*, Vol. 8, No. 1, Spring 2012 (incl.: C. Wilmer: John Ruskin's response to Darwin; A. Davis: Drawings by artists of Ruskin's circle; R. J. Eaglen: Numismatic interests of John Ruskin; M. Seddon: A bridge by any other name: the search for the Ponte dei Pugni, Venice; S. Wildman: Ruskin Bibliography 2011).

Dawson, Paul (ed.): *Friends of Ruskin's Brantwood Newsletter*, Autumn 2011 (incl.: B. Crossley: A caned chair; S. Eagles: Lunch at Denmark Hill; P. Dawson: The Ruskin Settlement in Florida and the Utopian Ruskin College Movement).

Dawson, Paul (ed.): *Friends of Ruskin's Brantwood Newsletter*, Spring 2012 (incl.: J. S. Dearden: A Ruskin book with an interesting background; D. & J. Measham: The Ruskin Rooms, Knutsford; S. Wildman & S. Clark: Ruskin and the Druces: A visit to Brantwood in 1884; Tribute to John Dawson).

Gamble, C. & Pinette, M.: *L'oeil de Ruskin. L'exemple de la Bourgogne*. Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2011.

Ingram, David, & Wildman, Stephen: *Ruskin's Flora: The Botanical Drawings of John Ruskin*. Lancaster: Ruskin Library, 2011 (exhibition catalogue).

King, Sue: *A Companion's Story. Egbert Rydings at Laxey*. Bembridge: Guild of St George, 2012.

Kite, Stephen: *Building Ruskin's Italy*. Ashgate, 2012.

Ruskin, J.: *Praeterita*, edited by Francis O'Gorman. Oxford: OUP World Classics, 2012.

Ruskin, J.: *The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century*, with a Foreword by Clive Wilmer and an Introduction by Peter Brimblecombe. London: Pallas Athene, 2012.

*James S. Dearden*

# A Companion's Story

## Egbert Rydings at Laxey



**Sue King**

JUST PUBLISHED

A silk weaver by trade, Egbert Rydings moved from his native Lancashire to settle at Laxey in the Isle of Man in 1870. A self-educated man with an entrepreneurial flair, he read *Fors Clavigera*, John Ruskin's *Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain* and he fell under Ruskin's spell. In 1876 he became a Companion of Ruskin's Guild of St George and in an attempt to put Ruskin's teaching into practice in 1879 he bought a share in a mill at Laxey. With the Guild's initial support this developed into the successful St George's Mill, which, in a different form, is still flourishing today.

Writer, musician and skilled businessman, Rydings turned his hand to many things and became a prominent figure in the nineteenth century Isle of Man. He died in 1912.

Available from Norman Hobbs, Clove Cottage, Mitten Road, Bembridge, Isle of Wight. PO35 5UP  
Price £11.00 including postage. Please make cheques payable to The Guild of St George.