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Meeting of the Board of Directors and AGM

Companions will have noticed that we no longer publish the minutes of Guild Board meetings. The Directors have come to the conclusion that the unadorned record of a meeting means little to those who were not present at the meeting in question and could, without fuller contexts, give an inaccurate impression of our work. I have therefore been asked to offer something a little more readable.

Last September, it will be recalled, we held the AGM at the Guildhall in Bewdley in an attempt to familiarize Companions with the Guild's rural properties and the valuable work in sustainable farming that is going on there. The Guild has owned land in that area since its early days when what is now called Ruskinland was given to us by George Baker, Mayor of Birmingham, who was eventually to succeed Ruskin as Master. Cedric Quayle, our former Secretary and now for the second time in his life a Director, belongs to one of the families that joined the Guild in its early days. He owns land adjacent to the Guild properties and our Directors' meeting was held in his house the day before the AGM. Another Director, John Iles, with his wife Linda, farms the Guild's Unclys Farm on sustainable principles. At the Directors' meeting, a couple who farm on adjacent holdings and a further couple who regularly help out at Unclys were accepted as new Companions and signed the Companions' Roll the following day. These welcome newcomers are Jan and Terry Ansell and Richard and Yvonne Rundell. Sadly, the relative inaccessibility of Bewdley resulted in lower attendance figures for the AGM: a great pity, especially in view of our tour of Unclys and Ruskinland after the meeting. It was also possible to mount a small exhibition in the little museum beneath the Bewdley Guildhall: this reflected our early involvement in the area and included drawings by Joseph Southall for St George's Museum, which Ruskin had originally wanted to build among the farms. (I shall be returning to this matter later.) It remains the Directors' intention to vary the locations of AGMs; we hope in doing so to draw attention to different aspects of the Guild's business and history. The 2008 AGM, for instance, will be in Oxford, a city rich with Ruskinian associations, of course, and we trust a more accessible goal to most.

The Directors' meeting began with ongoing business. We are eager to find a web-expert to maintain the Guild's website; offers or suggestions from Companions would be most welcome. The Master and Peter

The Guild of St. George

Master: Dr James S. Dearden

Directors: Janet Barnes, James Dearden, John Iles, Peter Miller, Cedric Quayle, Clive Wilmer, Robert Wilson.

Secretary to the Board: Norman Hobbs

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Miller are busy weeding the library of the Ruskin Gallery, which includes a great many books not strictly relevant to Ruskin or the Guild. These are books that have been donated or bequeathed to us, quite often in job-lots. The Master has now offered the spare volumes to Sheffield City Libraries. In recognition of the connections between Ruskin and William Morris, we are supporting the William Morris Society and the Victorian Society in their efforts to keep the Morris Gallery in Walthamstow regularly open to the public and staffed by curators with knowledge of Morris's work. (See the foot of this article for further information on this one.) Our involvement with the May Festivities at Whitelands College, Roehampton University, continues; in the last two years, I have taken over from Jim Dearden as the speaker who hands out the Ruskin books to the May Monarch and his or her supporters.

In the last two years or so, a working group of three Directors – Janet Barnes, John Iles and myself – have been thinking of ways forward for the Guild: how it might develop in relation to the contemporary world without losing its roots in Ruskin's vision. This 'steering group' is planning to compile a Companions' Directory, which will list companions interests, activities and skills, and we shall shortly be issuing a proforma to gather up the necessary information. John Iles, moreover, coming from a background in charitable work and with a knowledge of charity law, has compiled a new budget for us with Cedric Quayle's assistance. It is our hope that these reforms will make the Guild more flexible and more focused on its primary objectives.

As Companions will have noticed when they received the AGM minutes, the Guild is now actively publishing again. The 2007 Guild lecture, Jacqueline Yallop's *Our Power to Bequeath*, is available from the Secretary Norman Hobbs at £4.00, as is the 2006 lecture by Sam Smiles, *Ruskin and Cambridge: Art, Education and the Achievement of J.M.W. Turner*. We are proud of the quality of these lectures, which make a significant contribution to Ruskin studies, and are glad to have put them in print. Jacqueline's lecture was designed as an introduction to the Triennial Exhibitions, which will begin at Sheffield in 2009; she is the Ruskin scholar who is co-ordinating with the exhibition curators on behalf of the Guild. A new edition of *Ruskin and Bewdley* by Cedric Quayle and Peter Wardle has also been published at £5.50. This was launched at the exhibition at the Bewdley Guildhall. It is a valuable record of our long connection with this part of Worcestershire.

The next two years' lectures are also likely to be of interest. Paul Tucker, who lives in Pisa and, in his work as curator, literary scholar and editor, has worked extensively on Ruskin's Italian connections, has been invited to talk on Charles Fairfax Murray, artist, connoisseur, bibliophile and friend of Ruskin, Morris and others in the Pre-Raphaelite and Arts and Crafts Movements. Murray was one of the artists Ruskin employed to copy pictures and draw important buildings; he also bought pictures for Ruskin and, very importantly, for the great Italian rooms in the National Gallery. The following year, the familiar figure of Professor Robert Hewison, who has lectured for the Guild in the past, will launch the Triennial exhibitions with a talk on the first Triennial theme: *Ruskin and Sustainability*.

Both sustainability and the collection at Sheffield are much in our minds at the moment. Louise Pullen, the Access Curator of the Ruskin Collection at Sheffield, is continuing with the laborious, long-term job of digitizing the Sheffield collection in difficult conditions and pressured by other duties. The Directors are of a view that she needs to be helped to complete the work more rapidly, so the Master is discussing the matter with the Director of the Sheffield Museums and Galleries Trust and a quest for extra funding has begun.

In the mean time, we are considering a new purchase for the Gallery: a watercolour of Venice by Frank Randal, painted in the early twentieth century and clearly affected by Ruskin's teaching. The picture is being sold at £7000, so the Master is looking into the possibility of a purchase grant. As this offer illustrates, the Gallery is not a static collection, and the small exhibition at Bewdley has encouraged the Master to think of further attractive developments. He pointed out that Ruskin had originally wanted the collection to be held at Bewdley near the Guild's rural properties – hence the Southall drawings we had been showing – but that circumstances had eventually pointed towards Sheffield. But in a world much more mobile than his, mightn't it be possible to have pictures in both places? If security arrangements

could be improved at the Bewdley Museum, it might be possible to lend them items from the collection for exhibitions, thus bringing more of the reserve collection into play and encouraging visitors to think of Ruskin's involvement with the Wyre Forest area as much in terms of art education as of the rural economy.

That rural economy was prominent in our discussions. John Iles distributed an update from the Wyre Community Land Trust, which has recently been established, its purpose being to deliver the conservation and maintenance of the whole area, including the Guild properties, land held by Natural England and some privately owned land. John reported that a Guild grant to the Trust had been instrumental in their obtaining additional funding. High on the programme is the regeneration of orchards and the maintenance of hay meadows. It has been decided that the St George's orchard on our land should be replanted at an appropriate time with the original varieties of fruit tree as detailed in a map from the 1890s which is owned by Cedric Quayle, who had loaned it to the exhibition in Bewdley. John also reported that another orchard was possibly available for purchase. He considered that, if the Guild wanted to buy, it might obtain a 100% purchase grant. He and Cedric have undertaken to explore and monitor this situation.

Properties entail care and expense. Cedric Quayle reported that the road which grants access to our properties at Bewdley, previously damaged by flood, had now been repaired at our expense and with a contribution from Natural England. Our new Director Robert Wilson, who signed the Companions Roll at the AGM, has taken over the responsibility for the Westmill properties, formerly managed by Anthony Page, who has now retired from the Board. He reported on the properties, which appear to be in a satisfactory state, though in need of some new paint. There was a discussion about the possibility of a portion of the rents being set aside for long-term maintenance projects, but no conclusion has yet been reached.

These Directors' meetings involve intensive work. They are also very pleasurable. This year's AGM, which welcomed Jim Spates and John Steers to our Company for the first time, though both were elected some time ago, was exceptionally happy. There was the Reception at the Guildhall exhibition, when we met the Mayor and some of the local people, and I shall for some time reflect with pleasure on that sunny autumn afternoon at Unclys Farm. Many of us gathered to watch the apple-press at work; we drank the fresh juice, and then had tea in John and Linda's barn. This, I thought, is what we are about!

Clive Wilmer

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The William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow

The Board has been concerned to hear from such bodies as the William Morris Society, the Victorian Society and the Twentieth-Century Society that the London Borough of Waltham Forest has decided severely to reduce the funding of the William Morris Gallery at Walthamstow. The Gallery will now be open for only two days and two afternoons per week and the Council has dispensed with the services of expert curators. We understand that such galleries are funded by local taxation and that Councils are hard pressed. Nevertheless, for those of us who value the social and artistic contribution to our society of Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement – all of whom were first inspired by Ruskin – this reduction in services is, to say the least, alarming. Companions concerned about this matter should make their objections to Cllr. Clyde Loakes, Leader's Office, Waltham Forest Town Hall, Forest Road, London E17 4JF. According to a recent report in The Sunday Telegraph, the protesting societies have been demonstrating against the Council. I should be very glad to receive any first-hand reports of the present situation at the Gallery.

Clive Wilmer

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Louise Pullen, the Access Curator of the Ruskin Collection at Sheffield, has been engaged in making a digital record of the geological specimens in the Collection. Here she reflects on her responses to her close involvement with these minerals, which occupied an important place in Ruskin's imaginative life.

Minerals, Morals and Museums: The Geology Collection of the Guild of St. George.

Ruskin, to the average visitor to the Ruskin Gallery is a name generally associated with art, architecture and art criticism. Visitors are sometimes surprised at the numerous minerals that are scattered amongst, what is in essence, a visual art collection. Yet the minerals do appear to be one of the most popular features of the gallery, particularly capturing the imagination of the children who visit. Similarly, geology first captured Ruskin's curiosity as a child, even before his interest in art had developed. This interest was retained throughout his life, and in 1885 a report tells of Ruskin skipping amongst his agate collection with childlike excitement. The longevity of his interest points out to me the importance of the mineral collection of the Guild of St George.

Like Ruskin's personal collection, that at Sheffield is particularly strong in agates. It also has a large number of specimens of amethyst, chalcedony, fluorite, quartz and opal; these, like the agates are notable particularly for their bright and beautiful colouration. However, it is not only the colourful stones that are represented; much of the collection is dull in colour but rich in texture or tonal variation. Even coal is included in the collection. Some of these specimens came from Ruskin's own collections, a number of which bear labels in his writing, giving brief descriptions of their composition, and the locality in which they were found. Other minerals he bought from dealers and some were donated or funded by Guild companions. The Guild's expenditure on minerals between January and November 1884, for example, was £312/4/0, and included a topaz, a Russian emerald, another emerald from Santa Fe and 'the finest Australian Opal'. This opal was apparently 'the finest hitherto found, and for vivacity of scintillant colour, unsurpassable by any that ever can be found'.

The aesthetic beauty of these minerals is obviously something that Ruskin considered important in his collection for the workers of Sheffield. While he is characteristically inconsistent about his expectations of the worker's educational abilities - specifically their ability to understand geology, his main aim was, as he admitted to Prince Leopold in 1879, 'to get things to show their beauty'. A number of contemporary descriptions suggest that the minerals were indeed displayed with some opulence. Their interesting textures, bright colours and shining facets must have appeared quite stunning to a metalworker used to the smoke and grime of industrial Sheffield.

Ruskin classified and catalogued the minerals in an unusual but educational manner, which he believed was suited to the average visitor, and displayed them in an order that was, he wrote, 'convenient to memory', and 'clearest for simple persons'. That is, with the minerals that were to be found beneath one's feet placed lower in the draws and, presumably, minerals found higher up in higher draws. Minerals were then classified and grouped, not according to scientific values, but according to nomenclature; for example A for agate or Q for quartz. A second letter was assigned to its specific specimen type, for example, M for mossy, and some further initials to show its place of origin, for example ML for Malham. This display and classification style removes the scientific theory and leaves the viewer with the information what the rock specimen is called, what it looks like, its original location and whereabouts in the earth it is found.

However, in Ruskin's view, the mineral collection was about more than simple geology. In *Fors Clavigera*, he states; 'Permission to handle [the Guild's minerals] will eventually be given, as a moral and mineralogical prize, to the men who attain a certain proficiency in the two sciences of Mineralogy and Behaviour'. The collection was thus to have a social purpose also. Ruskin's view of the moral value

of rocks is best described through *Ethics of the Dust*, which he wrote for the girls of Winnington School in Cheshire. In it, Ruskin uses play, classical myth, and tales from several religions to teach about the scientific composition of minerals. Stones and their manner of composition are categorised according to the traits of human behaviour – caprice, conflict, and virtue etcetera. The physical appearance of each mineral depends entirely on its 'moods'; for example, crystals appear to be created by feuding atoms and are thus a physical illustration of bad behaviour. Ruskin also cites co-operation, purity and political economy as traits of the crystal family. In modern day language, Ruskin was using minerals as teaching aids for the subject of Citizenship, an essential part of today's National Curriculum.

The moral value of minerals can also be found elsewhere in Ruskin's writings. In *Deucalion*, for example, Ruskin attributes a mineral name to each of the heraldic colours which signify a particular virtue: topaz for justice, strength or honour, ruby for love of earthly life, sapphire for love of heaven, jasper for modesty, emerald for spirit and nobility. Diamond Ruskin linked to the heraldic colour Sable, which represents the darkness turning into light.

As a 21st century curator, I do not think I would impress many people with these particular associations. However, I still teach about the mineral collection using the words of Ruskin. When reading his works, I often copy out snippets of his writing when I feel them to be particularly pertinent to the Collection. One such that I use relating to the mineral collection is from *The Eagle's Nest*: 'Science does its duty, not in telling use the causes of spots of the sun, but in explaining to us the laws of our own life, and the consequences of their violation. Art does its duty, not in filling monster galleries with frivolous or dreadful or indecent pictures, but in completing the comforts and refining the pleasures of daily occurrence and familiar service'. The Collection of the Guild of St George is both scientific and artistic in nature, and this passage to me is something that speaks strongly to me as a curator of it.

Many of the specimens in the collection are also items of 'daily occurrence'. Schist for example is a very common mineral; it does not look very auspicious to begin with until it is examined more closely, when its beauty becomes just as obvious as that of a glistening gem. It reminds me another of those snippets: 'Pick up a common bit of flint from the roadside, and count, if you can, its changes and hues of colour... the greys and blacks of its reflexes and shadows might keep a painter at work for a month'. Taken as a whole the collection of the Guild of St George is filled with the art of nature, a powerful medium with which everyone can identify, because nature is indeed a pleasure of 'daily occurrence and familiar service'. What is more, something that is pretty or colourful or shiny will always delight even the youngest of audiences – and especially the collection's curator.

When I started working with the collection of the Guild of St George, it was the minerals that most daunted me. As an art historian, with only the haziest remembrance of childhood trips to the Natural History Museum, I had not the first clue about geology. Thankfully, the minerals had been catalogued by the Sheffield Museum's geology department a few years earlier and were all in good order, but I would still have to use and label them in the gallery. However, when I pulled open a few draws and was faced with neat rows of emeralds, rubies, sapphires opals, coloured quartzes and agates, I saw these minerals were, as Ruskin pointed out 125 years earlier, very 'pretty things'. I remembered that as a child (and admittedly even today) I often picked up pretty stones, examined them and put them water to make them glisten. I did not need to 'know' about geology to be able to use this collection and appreciate it for its aesthetic value.

As I began to read Ruskin's works on mineralogy or any other of his works, it seemed to me how pertinent this collection was to an art historian. While their beauty made it easy for me to display the minerals, I wanted to find out more. I found Ruskin's brand of scientific value or his aesthetically pleasing, and morally explained view of geology was very special. A label from Ruskin on a mineral reading something along the lines of 'diamond dust from the deep mines of the African desert' sounds so much more interesting than the label of a trained geologist: 'Grey, diamond bearing weathered earth with grains of

smaragdite, pyrite and schist'. Or 'river washed Ruby and Sapphire stones' sound so much better than 'Corundum x 2. Water damaged'. So perhaps I do not need to know anything about the specimens other than examine and admire their natural beauty, and use my enthusiasm for them to inspire others in the same way.

Children in the Ruskin Gallery seem instinctively to do this - especially one small child I met who stared into the mineral case for a long while then said to me very solemnly "I am a 'geographist'". So perhaps Ruskin was right to speak especially to them, and trust that where they lead, their parents will follow when he said: [I hope that children of this generation show that geology] 'which hitherto has shown little more than monsters of a chaotic past, may at last interpret for [their fathers] the beautiful work of the creative present and teach them day by day to find a loveliness, till then unthought of in the Rock, and a value, till then uncounted in the gem'.

Louise Pullen

The Ruskin Cartoons

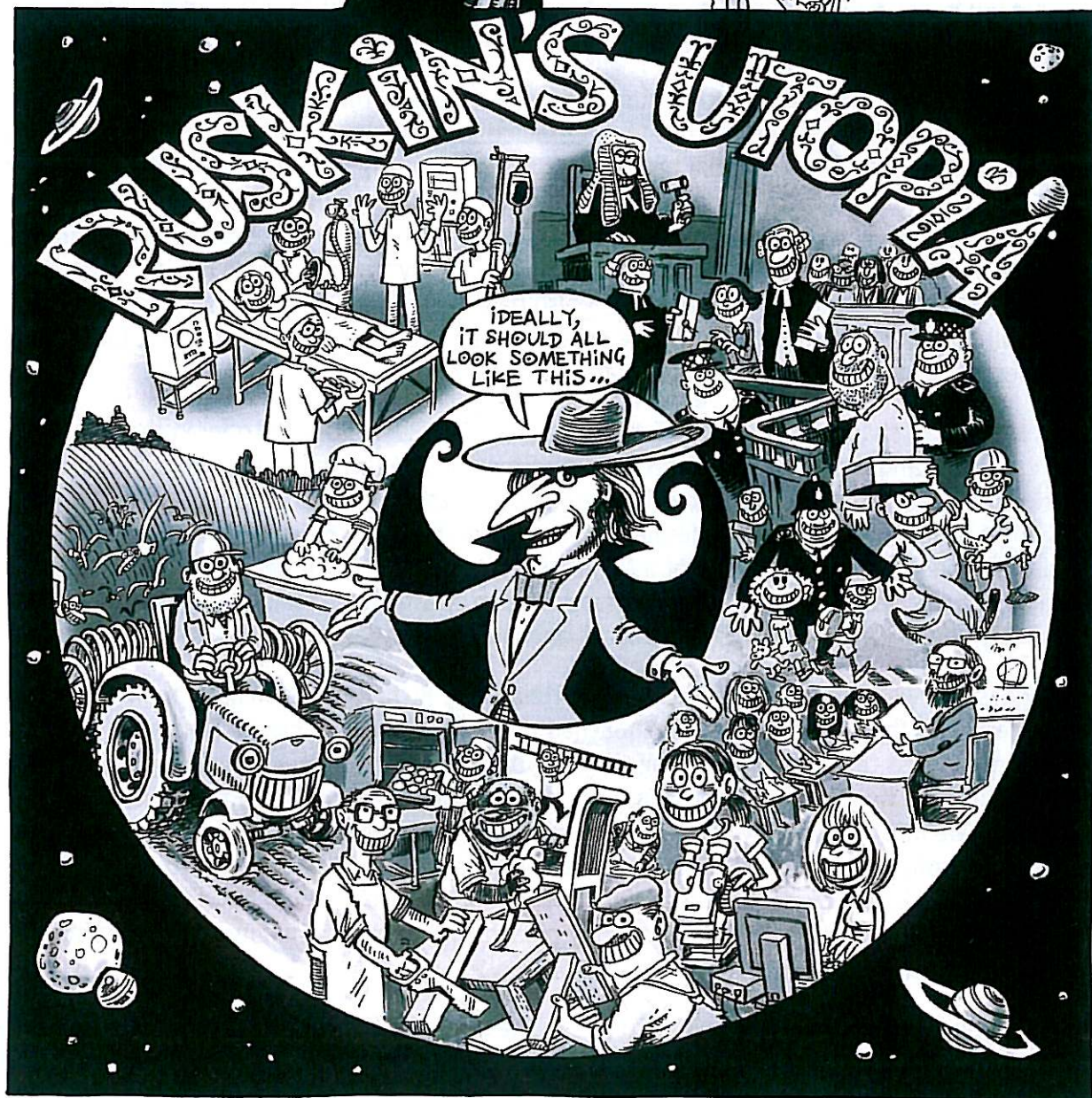
Kevin Jackson and Hunt Emerson opened up a new terrain in Ruskinland in 2005 when they brought out a cartoon version of Unto This Last, which they entitled How to be Rich. Their intention was to make one of Ruskin's most influential writings accessible to an audience that might never think of taking a copy of a work by Ruskin off the library shelves. Publication in this form might infiltrate the minds of schoolchildren or appeal to those unwilling to engage with a serious, exhortatory Victorian book in its original form. Kevin Jackson, who is a Companion, found the appropriate words, and provided a summary of Ruskin's contemporary relevance on the covers of the booklet. Hunt Emerson drew the cartoons. Here Kevin writes about the factors that prompted him to get involved in this project.

They order these matters better in France; well, perhaps. Our friends across the channel have enjoyed a long and honourable tradition of admiring what they refer to as bandes desinees and we call "comics"; the French term being neutral and technical, the English being a bit grubby, low-brow and juvenile-sounding. From Georges Perec to Alexander Jodorowski, Parisian intellectuals have doted on, theorised about and sometimes even created comics of their own. When a comic-book version of Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* was published a decade or so ago, few literate souls in France thought the project any more scandalous or strange than the practice of adapting a classic novel for stage, television or cinema. To conventional British tastes, by contrast, the whole thing sounded rather closer to Monty Python's "Summarise Proust" contest. In a word, silly.

So it took considerable originality and not a little cheek for Howard Hull, director of Brantwood, to have come up with the idea of putting *Unto This Last* into comic form. In fact, the idea is even stranger than the Proust B.D, since Ruskin's magnificent polemic has neither proper characters nor setting nor plot; Proust's epic may veer towards abstraction and circumlocution, but by comparison with a treatise on economics and ethics it looks as racy as a James Bond adventure. Still, Howard was interested in seeing whether a few of the essential tenets of *Unto This Last* might be made comprehensible, interesting and even entertaining to audiences that might otherwise never encounter them - including children of around the ages from 11 to 13, older people with limited reading skills, recent immigrants with a shaky grasp of English and so on.

And so, working with his colleague Emma Bartlett, Howard came up with some prototype pages for the proposed comic - good pages, too, and highly faithful to passages in Ruskin's original, yet somehow lacking the fundamental appeal of traditional comics: the delicious hold they take on tender imaginations with their combination of fast story-telling, romping invention and sheer fun. For reasons I can honestly not recall, Howard then asked me to be involved in the project, and for reasons I can recall exactly, I said that the best man for the job, perhaps the only man for the job, was the cartoonist Hunt Emerson.

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YES, YES—VERY NICE!
VERY BLUE PETER!
I SUPPOSE YOU
REALISE THAT THE
REAL WORLD ISN'T
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INDEED!
BUT THE CLOSER
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FOR CALLING IT
WEALTHY!

One of the great boons of working on the Ruskin comics is that Hunt and I are now good friends, since at the time I suggested his name, I had only met him once or twice, at launches for his books. I first became aware of Hunt Emerson's work back in the 1980s, when he published his blissfully funny version of "The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner". (If Coleridge has never struck you as a laugh riot, then please search out a copy at once. Hunt's technique is to leave Coleridge's verses intact, then adorn them with an unflaggingly eccentric sequence of crackpot images. It is one of the few books that literally makes me weep with laughter. If the comic form is allowed its masterpieces, this is surely one.) Howard decided to trust my word, and a meeting was arranged in central London. Howard, Hunt and I sat in the cold sunlight on a bench outside the Wallace Collection as the winds churned up dust around us. After an hour or so, Hunt said he thought he could probably give it a shot. The game was afoot.

Now the onus was on me to come up with a narrative spine. Deciding that, if you're going to steal, you should steal from the very best, I turned to Dante's *Commedia*. My Dante would be an Everyman figure (I called him Darren Bloke, the "Da-" syllable being a nod to Mr Alighieri), my Virgil would be the ghost of John Ruskin, and the story would transport the hero from the Hell of modern consumerism and greed to the Paradise of Ruskinian wisdom. My hero dreams of riches; wins the lottery; and finds, as so many real-life lottery winners have found, that this popular twenty-first century triumph brings him far more sorrow than joy. Since all the best cartoons need animals, I also gave him a dog: Skittle. This faithful hound now has a small but devoted fan club, as well he should, for he is partly there to show that fundamental happiness owes more to loyalty and love than to the quest for gain.

So much for the overall shape; how about the incidents en route? Ruskin himself offered the key, here, in the assorted parables and luminous anecdotes through which he advances his arguments. Some of these are so simple and visual - the one about the shipwrecked American man who drowned rather than let go of his gold - that I simply lifted them wholesale, trimmed them down a little, and grafted them into the story. Others, like the (partly) factual story of a Middle Eastern country which became wealthy so suddenly that its people lost the taste for humble employments, and so was forced to take on a large migrant workforce, were freely adapted from Ruskin's rather more abstract fables about the relative nature of riches.

At Hunt's suggestion, we called the completed comic *How to Be Rich*: an eye-catching and deliberately misleading title, for by the time the reader has reached the final panel - the maxim "There is No Wealth But Life" blazoned across the evening sky - episode after episode has hammered home not only the major premise that riches and wealth are far from identical, but a number of related minor premises: that - especially today - we must be attentive to the morality of how we spend as well as how we accumulate; that the quest for profit should never take precedence over our human duties to each other; that the most rewarding types of work are never undertaken primarily for gain. (Since it would have been hypocritical for me not to practise what Ruskin had so eloquently preached, I agreed, in fact insisted, that I should not take any payment for the work.)

So far, so (we hoped), Ruskinian. But comics - comics in the robust British tradition, anyway - have to be comic; they have to make people grin, chuckle and, preferably, fall around laughing. Did we succeed? By and large, it seems that we did. People laughed at it. They enjoyed it. They found it enlightening. (One nice Catholic lady from South London bought dozens of copies to give away to members of her church.) Even so, Howard and I - Hunt, not previously a Ruskin scholar, didn't much care - were braced for howls of execration from the scholars and purists; and we admitted, quietly, that such protests would have been quite hard to disarm. To our great pleasure - and relief - the real experts also saw the joke, and saw the point, too: Prof. Robert Hewison, for example, wrote a searching and highly sympathetic account of the project for the *New Statesman*. Most of the few complaints we have so far heard have come not from those who seriously believe that Ruskin has been betrayed, but from those who either did not get the joke, or did not feel that jokes like these are ever worth making.

Fair comment; but not crushing comment, especially since the response from those who were using *How To Be Rich* as an educational aide, both in classrooms and in prisons (where it seems to have been an

unexpected hit; presumably, inmates need all the laughs they can get) were almost unanimously keen. It was with this group rather than with the long-faced in mind that we set about writing a sequel, *How to See*, which introduces our naive protagonist - and his dog - to a few of Ruskin's more stimulating and non-technical ideas about vision. Here, because there was no single text to adapt, we may have strayed unacceptably far from the original; we hope not. At the very least, we have once again returned to Ruskin's own words for the comic's final panel.

How to See was launched in May, and at the time of writing the major response has been from friends and family: so far, just as favourable as last time. We await news from the classrooms with mingled anxiety and excitement. If it does well, we hope to proceed to a third and final volume, provisionally entitled *How to Work*, and intended to re-apply Ruskin's wisdom to the modern worlds of employment, unemployment and the world of passive "leisure". Aha, the critics will say: but by using one of the oldest tools of the leisure industry, the comic book, are you not doing the Devil's work without knowing it? Well, the question has obviously crossed my mind. I tend to answer it with a sentiment from a book that Ruskin knew as well as anyone ever has: the Letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.

And, as the man observed, there is no wealth but life.

Kevin Jackson

How to be Rich is published by The Ruskin Foundation, Bowland College, University of Lancaster LA1 4YT. Copies cost £1.

The May Festival at Whitelands

Clive Wilmer, one of the Guild's Directors, writes:

This is the third time I've presented the Ruskin books at the Whitelands May Festival. Each time I do so, I must admit, I can't help wondering how many of the books will actually get read. To those unfamiliar with Ruskin, he can look like some pompous Victorian heavyweight, an impression only increased when you discover that his complete works run to the sheer bulk of thirty-nine massive volumes. One collection of those books is currently engaged in pulling down the wall in my study at home. But they do get used: which leads me to reflect on the reason why I have them and why I devote so much of my life to Ruskin's legacy. In my experience, there is hardly a page among all those millions of pages that doesn't include something worth reading: something wise, or funny, or beautiful, or true. And that is really how I mostly read Ruskin – in bits. Yes, I've read the books as wholes, but I discovered him in selections and that, in a way, is how I continue to read him. So perhaps that's how you might start – just dipping into him, and though his small things are parts that stand for wholes. Students of language call this synecdoche. When sailors say 'All hands on deck', they are using the figure of synecdoche – 'hands' standing for whole sailors – and Ruskin uses this as a principle not just of language but of life. Let me give you an example.

When I was a student myself and had recently discovered Ruskin, I one day found myself not far from here in a place called Carshalton. I say a 'place'; I suppose it's strictly a town, but it was once a North Surrey village and now seems not much different from an ordinary South London suburb. Ruskin's mother, Margaret Cox, was born in nearby Croydon and still had relatives there. He himself grew up in Herne Hill and, as a boy, often visited the Carshalton area. Anyway, some forty years ago I was wandering through the centre of Carshalton, which has a large pond divided by a road, and came across what I took to be one of the pond's sources. In the V of the junction of two busy roads was a small patch of grass and flowers. It was unobtrusively fenced in to protect it from the road but was not unaffected by litter and traffic pollution. Nevertheless, at the centre of it was a spring, which kept the grass green and the flowers bright,

and, near the spring, a stone with an inscription, which read as follows:

In obedience to the Giver of Life, of the brooks and fruits that feed it, and of the peace that ends, may this Well be kept sacred for the service of men, flocks, and flowers, and be by kindness called MARGARET'S WELL.

This pool was beautified and endowed by John Ruskin Esq. MA LID, 1876.

The first chapter of Ruskin's autobiography *Praeterita* is called 'The Springs of Wandel', and this, as I subsequently discovered, was one of those springs, the Wandel being the tributary of the Thames which gives its name to Wandsworth. Margaret Ruskin had taken her little boy to play by this spring when she visited her relations. By her death in 1871 the stream had become polluted and, soon afterwards, as a way of commemorating her, Ruskin had one of the springs cleaned and restored, and he put a memorial tablet on its banks. For someone as preoccupied as he was with the moral and physical destruction wrought by industry, it was a symbolic gesture.

The gesture was in many ways characteristic. The act of commemoration was important to him, a record of deep feeling not only for his mother but for the place. It was his recognition of a world given in love: a world we do not own but which we are called on to care for. As he was beginning to see in 1876, it has never needed that care as much as it does now. To set one small patch of earth to rights in that way – to restore it to health – was like a form of practical synecdoche. You make a small thing better as an example of what might be done, hoping to inspire others to do likewise.

The organisation I represent today, the Guild of St George, was founded by Ruskin to do things of this kind: to improve small things here and there in the hope of changing St George's country for the better. The May Festival at Whitelands College is another example practical synecdoche. When Ruskin first thought of creating such an event, he never thought of writing to the Ministry of Education, encouraging the Government to set up elections for May Queens everywhere. Still less did he suggest that, since we are all equal, everyone ought to be a King or Queen. He chose one College and one College Principal and, over the years, gave books and money and works of art. As a result, in its blend of Christianity and nature worship, and in its touch of Victorian eccentricity, the Festival is unique – uniquely charming and moving – and has therefore persisted at the students' choice for more than a century. We have heard it suggested that Ruskin's invocation of innocence in setting up this festival ran the dangerous risk of sentimentalising youth. He was certainly not free of sentimentality. But we need to understand what he meant by innocence. To restore that water to its original purity was to recover its innocence, as he understood the word, and the purity of water is a source of strength and health. That in my view is the meaning of this delightful occasion, including all the fun of it.

As you know, the students of Whitelands College, every year, elect one of their number to serve them as May Monarch and, in recent times, to promote a charity of the Monarch's choice. In Ruskin's words they choose 'the nicest and likeablest' of their number, a person 'full of pure and uncontending natural worth'. In Ruskin's day Whitelands was a teacher training college for women and his idea was that they should choose a Queen of the May. Today the College is part of Roehampton University and, as is often the case in these egalitarian days, this year's Monarch is a man: Scott Scarbrough. I am sure that in the competitive struggle that is modern life, Scott has many advantages. I don't, of course, know him yet, but he is probably brilliant, witty, charming and much else besides. He may achieve that elusive thing we value so much – success, perhaps wealth and fame as well, and even that glory of modern life, celebrity. But those are not the reasons why he has been chosen as May Monarch. He has been chosen because you like him, and what you like in him has the power, in its small way, to make the world a better place to live in than it might otherwise have been.

Last September, our Japanese Companion, Norio Tsuyuki, attended the AGM at Bewdley, and later sent in this piece, which he entitles

Why Ruskin appeals to Japanese people.

At first, I must offer my thanks to the Master, James Dearden, and other Ruskinians who encouraged me to enrol as a Companion in 2003.

As the sole Japanese Companion, I was very glad to be able to meet other Companions and attend the Annual General meeting at Bewdley on 29th September 2007. I was much impressed by their comradeship and with the lasting enthusiasm for John Ruskin that has endured now for over 100 years, whereas our Japanese Ruskin circle, the Ruskin Society of Tokyo, has only been in existence for about twenty years. At present, the society consists of 132 members, whose interests include aesthetics, architecture, painting, design, literature and social reform.

So, why does Ruskin appeal to Japanese people? I would like to illustrate his appeal from the natural, economic and educational points of view, in relation to Ruskin's thoughts. Japanese people traditionally assimilate themselves to nature, in a symbiotic relationship, and believe in the pervasive power of nature. Most Japanese people are animistic polytheists, and believe in the existence of the god-like power of nature, having a reverence for mountains, rivers, plants by the roadside and trees in the forest, stones, rocks and falls.

In recent years, Japanese people have begun to regret the disappearance of our beautiful natural scenery and the dear old landscapes that were destroyed by the industrial development of the last two decades. The economic principle has become dominant, but Japanese people have begun to feel that they lack something in the way of wealth that is beyond economics. In this post-industrial stage, people are living in the midst of a highly developed consumer society, and drifting in the tide of spare time and wealth, without any overall sense of direction. These are some reasons why Ruskin's thoughts about nature resonate with freshness and hope in the hearts of Japanese people. Ruskin wrote as follows in *Sesame and Lilies*:

You have despised Nature: that is to say, all the deep and sacred sensations of natural scenery. The French revolutionists made stables of the cathedrals of France: You have made racecourses of the cathedrals of the earth. . . . There is not a quiet valley in England that you have not filled with bellowing fire; there is no particle left of English land which you have not trampled coal ashes into . . . And yet I cannot – though there is no part of my subject that I feel more – press this upon you; for we made so little use of the power of nature while we had it that we shall hardly feel what we have lost . . .

On the other hand, most Japanese people have sympathies with the thought that economics without morality is wrong, and morality without economics is incorrect, as a peasant sage, Sontoku Ninomiya (1787-1856) said. In the recent economic currents of Japan, Mammonism and money-making have been rampant. In these conditions, Japanese people have paid attention to Ruskin's critical attitudes about the national economy. Ruskin wrote as follows, in *Unto This Last*:

The real science of political economy, which has yet to be distinguished from the bastard science, as medicine from witchcraft, and astronomy from astrology, is that which teaches nations to desire and labour for the things that lead to life: and that which teaches them to scorn and destroy the things that lead to destruction. . . . Waste nothing, and grudge nothing. Care in nowise to make more of money, but care to make much of it; remembering always the great, palpable, inevitable fact – the rule and root of all economy – that what one person has, another cannot have; and that every atom of substance, of whatever kind, used or consumed, is so much human life spent; which, if it issue in the saving present life, or gaining more, is well spent, but if not is wither so much life prevented, or so much slain.

There are many serious problems in Japanese compulsory education, Japanese people may find some solutions from Ruskin and Sontoku Ninomiya. Ruskin wrote in *Sesame and Lilies* that 'there is only one cure for public distress, and that is public education, directed to make men thoughtful, merciful and just'. And in *The Crown of Wild Olive* he wrote: 'Education is painful, continual and difficult work, to be done by kindness, by watching, by warning, by precept, and by praise – but above all, by example.' On the other hand, Sontoku Ninomiya, who exerted much influence on Japanese primary school education, said: *My lifelong work is to try to open up all wild lands. Some kinds of wild lands are caused by the wilderness of men's hearts. Therefore, my first work should open up the wilderness of men's hearts. After opening up the wilderness of men's hearts, I must open up some kinds of wild lands, and improve them into rich farmland. To make national wealth and strength like this is so easy – like turning one's palms.*

Lastly, I must add the following points to this essay: generally speaking, Japanese are good at learning the externals of western thought, but bad at learning the internal significance, and they have difficulty in carrying the best of that thought into practical activities continuously – unlike your Guild of St George.

Norio Tsuyuki is a member of the Ruskin Society of Tokyo, and of the Japan Association for Cultural Economics. He serves on the steering committee of the Victorian Studies Society of Japan, and is a member of the Ninomiya Sontoku Association.

A Letter from America

This letter has been received from one of our American Companions, Professor Jim Spates, for circulation amongst members of the Guild.

Dear Fellow Companions,

This letter – sponsored by myself and two other American Companions, Mr. R. Dyke Benjamin and Professor Van Aikin Burd – concerns a neglected aspect of the legacy of Professor Helen Gill Viljoen, whose name you shall recognise immediately as one of Ruskin's great biographers. For more than 45 years (from 1929, when she visited a deteriorating Brantwood and read Ruskin's manuscripts and letters in volumes before these were dispersed in the sales of the following year, until her death in early 1974), Professor Viljoen worked tirelessly on a multi-volume biography of Ruskin, compiling, in the process, one of the greatest documentary caches in the world pertaining to the life of the man who established the Guild. (All of her biographic materials on Ruskin, thanks to donations by Professor Burd, who inherited them from Professor Viljoen, are safely housed for present and future generations of scholars in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York City).

Unfortunately – for reasons explained in my book describing her quite remarkable 'Life of Ruskin', *The Imperfect Round* (the Guild Library has a copy) – Professor Viljoen never completed more than the first volume (Ruskin's Scottish Heritage) of her envisioned four volume work, a source of great angst to herself, particularly near the end of her life, and a loss of immeasurable importance to those of us interested that the fullest possible account of Ruskin's life be available to scholars and the interested public.

Prior to her death, that sense of having failed in her great task led Professor Viljoen to decide that no marker of any kind should be placed on her resting place in her family's plot in Beechwoods Cemetery in New Rochelle, a small town just north of New York City. In October 2001, Professor Van Burd and myself visited the grave and discovered this lamentable situation: that on her grave, there is absolutely no indication of either who this remarkable scholar was or why her life's work, though never completed, was – and continues to be – so vitally important to Ruskin studies.

Not long after this visit, professor Burd and I discussed the situation with Mr R. Dyke Benjamin in New York. Mr Benjamin is, as you likely know, one of the world's greatest collectors of Ruskiniana. He agreed

strongly that something should be done to rectify the situation at Beechwoods Cemetery. This and subsequent conversations have led us to submit the present letter to members of the Guild of St George at the suggestion of the Master. In doing so. However, I add immediately that this letter contains a private solicitation to people interested in Ruskin and, as such, should not be regarded, in any way, as an official request from or as having direct sponsorship from the Guild.

The idea is as follows: Mr Benjamin, Professor Burd and myself would like to solicit donations sufficient to all the design and placement of a marker on the grave, a marker that would recognise and laud Professor Viljoen's critical importance to the scholarly study of John Ruskin's life. The 'ballpark' estimate suggests that we would need approximately \$2500 (£1250) to attain that goal.

Given the complexity of changing sterling to dollars, Clive Wilmer had agreed to receive any contributions that might be forthcoming. He would place these in a special account which would then be converted to dollars in one transaction. Cheques should be made out to 'The Helen Gill Viljoen Memorial Fund, and sent to him at the following address: Mr Clive Wilmer, The Helen Gill Viljoen Memorial Fund, 57 Norwich Street, Cambridge CB2 1ND.

With much appreciation for your consideration of this matter, Professor Jim Spates,
Professor of Sociology, Hobart & William Smith Colleges, Geneva, N.Y.14456. Email: spates@hws.edu

The Ruskin Rooms of Knutsford

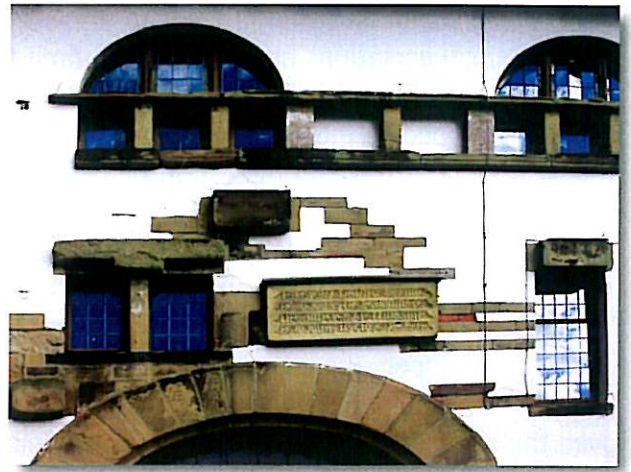
A recent outing of the Victorian Society took me to Knutsford, in Cheshire, the home for some time of Elizabeth Gaskell, and the model for her fictional town of Cranford. The gossip lives of the inhabitants of Cranford have been successfully recreated in a television series this year, so Mrs Gaskell's star has been rising steadily in the public gaze. But our principal interest was not to trace Mrs Gaskell's footsteps, but to view the buildings of the maverick architect Richard Harding Watt (1842-1913), who left an indelible mark on Knutsford, and who was a great admirer of Ruskin.



Watt was a wealthy glove manufacture based in Manchester, who moved to Knutsford in 1895. He had travelled widely in Italy, partly in search of leather for his glove business, and partly to gratify his pleasure in Italian architecture. In this latter department, he found Ruskin a natural stimulus and guide. He enjoyed making sketches of Italian buildings and their details, and on occasion he would bring back carved stones and mouldings for use in England. Watt was not strictly an architect: he was really an imaginative draughtsman who would draw designs for houses, and then employ a professional architect to execute them. In this way he created an astonishing series of villas in a new residential street called Legh Road, where he allowed his fantasy free rein in the invention of towers and turrets, temples and dovecotes, all for the haute bourgeoisie of Knutsford (which included the engineer Henry Royce). There is a splendid diversity of detail on display here, given unity by the use of chunky Mediterranean-style tiles for all the roofs. He has been called the Antonio Gaudi of Knutsford, but this, I think, is to overvalue his achievement.

What renders Richard Watt of particular interest to members of the Guild is building called The Ruskin Rooms that he designed in 1902. In the 1890s, Watt had set up a large steam laundry in Kutsford, sensing the profits to be made by taking in the dirty washing from neighbouring gentry houses (which include Tatton Park) and from the prosperous inhabitants of the town. He converted the Old Tannery into the New

Laundry. In good paternalistic style, he built decent, airy houses for the workers, and provided gardens and communal space. He also took measures to improve their minds by providing a well-stocked library in the Ruskin Rooms, where talks on matters relating to art and society were given, and where temperate recreation was encouraged. Here the principles of *Fors Clavigera*, the letters to working men, were brought to life. Work should be complemented by leisure, intelligent leisure. The workers in the laundry had only to move a few yards down the street to refresh their minds after a steamy day in the works. And, of course, the Ruskin Rooms were open to all members of Knutsford society who wished to improve themselves. When the Rooms ceased to serve their original purpose, the building became a fire station, and it is now occupied by offices.



The building is a fine specimen of Watt's fanciful invention. The architect who translated Watt's design into stone was Walter Aston. There is a multiplicity of roof levels, a tower, a minaret, windows at different levels, balconies, and a vast entrance arch. The red Mediterranean pantiles are a distinctive feature. Watt had a fondness for slabs of bare stone embedded in white rendered walls, and in the Ruskin Rooms he indulged this stylistic foible almost to excess. Stones of Venice it is not, but Echoes of Andalusia or Sicily perhaps. A quotation from Ruskin enlivens the south wall: 'Let every dawn of morning be to you as the beginning of life, and every setting sun be to you as its close'. These words are, in effect, an amplification of Ruskin's motto 'Today'. The motto of the Laundry was 'Let your garments always be white', from the Book of Ezekiel.

Ruskin & Rhodesia

Since Zimbabwe is much in the news these days, because of the miseries inflicted on its population by the tyranny of Mugabe and his henchmen, it might interest readers to learn of Ruskin's role in the foundation of the country from which Zimbabwe emerged, Southern Rhodesia.

The future imperialist John Cecil Rhodes was a student at Oriel College, Oxford, in 1873 when he heard one of Ruskin's lectures as Slade Professor, a passage of which lingered in his memory, and remained with him as an inspiration when he later became involved in enlarging the British sphere of influence in southern Africa. Here is Ruskin's exhortation:

There is a destiny now possible to us, the highest ever set before a nation . . .

We are still undegenerate in race; a race mingled of the best northern blood . . . Will our youths of England make your country again a royal throne of kings, a sceptered isle, for all the world a source of light, a centre of peace? . . . This is what England must either do or perish: she must found colonies as fast and as far as she is able, formed of her most energetic and worthiest men; seizing every piece of fruitful waste ground she can set her foot on, and there teaching her colonists that their first aim is to advance the power of England by land and sea: and that, though they live on a distant plot of land, they are no more to consider themselves therefore disenfranchised from their native land than the sailors of her fleets do, because they float on distant seas.

One can see why an impressionable undergraduate might find these words stirring, for Ruskin intended them to be so, for at Oxford he had an audience that was more able to respond to his ideas practically and positively than any other audience he addressed. Rhodes went on to make a fortune in diamond and gold mining, and then became involved in the politics of Cape Colony, rising to be the prime minister of the

Cape. Fired by Ruskin's vision (amongst other forces), he devoted himself to enlarging Britain's possessions in southern Africa, by means that were often of dubious integrity, though usually peaceful. He set up the British South Africa Company, incorporated by royal charter in 1889, to administer territory that he acquired north of Bechuanaland, and this territory became known as Rhodesia. Here was land that he felt was particularly suited to the settlement of British colonists, with plenty of what Ruskin called 'fruitful waste ground'. The local people, the Matabele, were deemed to have signed away their rights to the land, but that was a common assumption all over Africa in the later nineteenth century. Ruskin, one notes, appeared to imagine that colonisation was a matter of taking over empty land and filling it with Englishmen, who would cultivate there the civil virtues that made them so exemplary a nation. It has indeed to be said that the first fifty years of Southern Rhodesia were relatively free from the racial tensions that notoriously developed to the south, and the country was one of the most prosperous of the region. Rhodes's ambitions extended as far as the creation of a continuous line of English colonies running from Cairo to the Cape, a dream effectively realised by 1918. As we look back on the wreckage of the colonial project, we can reflect on the unexpected consequences of Oxford lectures in High Victorian times.

(Information from Brian Lapping, *The End of Empire*, 1985)

Graham Parry

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Guild Publications For Sale

- Our Power to Bequeath: Ruskin and Sustainability. The 2007 Ruskin Lecture by Jacqueline Yallop. £5.
- Ruskin and Cambridge: Art, Education and the Achievement of J.M.W. Turner. The 2006 Ruskin Lecture by Sam Smiles. £5.
- Art & Society: Ruskin in Sheffield 1876. The 1879 Ruskin Lecture by Robert Hewison. £2.50.
- Ruskin & Bewdley: The History of Ruskinians in the Wyre Forest. Revised second edition by Peter Wardle and Cedric Quayle. £6.50.
- John Ruskin's Camberwell. The Places Ruskin lived and the People he knew. A detailed record by the present Master of the Guild, Dr J.S. Dearden. £4.95.

Copies of these publications are available from the Secretary. The above prices include UK postage. Additional postage overseas: please add £1.00. Please make cheques payable to the Guild of St George.

This Year's AGM

This year's Annual General meeting will be held at Christ Church, Oxford, on Saturday November 15th, 2008. After the AGM Paul Tucker will lecture on Charles Fairfax Murray.



GUILD of St GEORGE

