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**HANDCRAFTING A NATIONAL INDUSTRY:
THE PRODCUTION AND PATRONAGE OF ALEXANDER MORTON & COMPANY'S
DONEGAL CARPETS**

Elaine Cheasley

A Thesis in

The Department of Art History

**Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
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ABSTRACT

Handcrafting a National Industry: The Production and Patronage of Alexander Morton & Company's Donegal Carpets

Elaine Cheasley

This thesis offers a social history of Alexander Morton & Company's Donegal carpets – their production and patronage. These nineteenth-century carpets were promoted as artistic products and appealed to upper- and middle-class consumers in Britain, Ireland, North America, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. The new carpet industry, based in Ireland, catered to the popular taste for all things Oriental and to the socialist ideals of the Arts and Crafts Movement (1850-1920). Donegal carpet designs ranged from Eastern motifs to Arts and Crafts florals to Celtic interlace. Prominent designers in the Arts and Crafts Movement created designs for these carpets which were also accepted as part of the visual arts of the Celtic Revival in Ireland.

The Donegal carpet's success can be explained using Pierre Bourdieu's theory concerning the social formation of taste. In this study of Morton's Donegal carpets, I test the validity of three aspects of Bourdieu's theory: *habitus*, cultural codes, and symbolic capital. Archival material, press accounts and historical writing reveal several issues involved in this enterprise, such as ethnicity, gender, class and cultural appropriation. These issues are addressed in an examination of this literature as well as the design transitions endorsed by Morton & Co. Ultimately, this study is an attempt to locate the Donegal carpets within the material and ideological conditions of consumption and production. In addition, a case study of the Morton designer Mary Seton Watts highlights one woman's art production.

**To my grandfather,
Colin Campbell McMichael**

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INTRODUCTION

“WE HOLD A VASTER EMPIRE THAN HAS EVER BEEN.”¹

ASPECTS OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH TASTE

In the late nineteenth century, the Scottish textile manufacturer, Alexander Morton developed a prosperous carpet industry in the West of Ireland (County Donegal). The success of this product largely depended on its reception by the public, who decided whether it was in ‘good taste’. An examination of the formation of taste will reveal how these carpets came to have value ascribed to them by a particular group within a particular context. For purposes of this thesis, the discussion of taste relies on Pierre Bourdieu’s analysis from *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993) and *Distinction* (1984). Bourdieu’s theory is fundamental to this project as it explains the social ground of aesthetic taste. He claims that, without this grounding, taste would be perceived as a universal aesthetic and cultural practice, when in fact it is a product of privilege.²

In nineteenth-century Britain taste, particularly in the upper classes, was greatly affected by the ever-expanding British Empire, which extended as far from England as Africa and

¹ Motto from a special postage stamp issued by the Canadian government, 1898, to celebrate the advent of imperial penny postage. Keith Robbins, *The Eclipse of a Great Power: Modern Britain, 1870-1975* (New York: Longman Group, 1983), 18.

² Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University, 1993), 24.

Asia.³ The continued expansion of empire was debated in English society. There were people who felt the Empire would be spreading itself thin if it continued to grow while others advocated further colonisation.⁴ The political instability marking this debate resulted in Queen Victoria taking the title of 'Empress of India' in 1876. This event promoted the image of a strong British Empire by confirming India as its centre – the 'jewel in the Imperial crown' so to speak.

Through this colonial expansion, the British public was exposed to other cultures in the Empire. Service to the Empire offered an attractive career for many young Englishmen, with the Indian Civil Service being the most prestigious posting.⁵ Letters home, diaries and other written accounts (published memoirs for example) by these people brought to life tales of these 'exotic others' for the British public's pleasure.⁶ Collectors in Britain

³ For instance, in 1843 China ceded Hong Kong to the British who later annexed upper Burma in 1886 and part of Malaya in 1896. The Suez Canal was completed in 1869 with the shares in its ownership held by French investors and the khedive of Egypt, who ruled as a monarch. In 1875, the debt-plagued khedive sold his shares to the British government (under Disraeli) and by 1882, the British had occupied Egypt (Mortimer Chambers, et al., *The Western Experience*, 5th ed. (Montreal: McGraw-Hill, 1991), 1065). At one point during her reign, Victoria was queen to a quarter of the world.

⁴ Robbins, 18. See also Deborah Weiner's discussion of the debate between anti-imperialists and Liberal imperialists over the expansion of the British Empire, in particular the Boer War in South Africa, 1899-1902 (*Architecture and Social Reform in Late-Victorian London* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 132).

⁵ Large and well-organised, the Indian Civil Service developed from the reforms that followed rebellions against the British in 1857-58. Its members saw themselves as an elite corps, and they were in practice the effective rulers of India (Chambers, 1072).

⁶ For example, Lady Rosamund Lawrence's reminiscences of her family's involvement in the Indian Civil Service and her own experiences in India with her husband: "Now that the British have left India these pages may be of interest for the picture they give, not of political strife, but of those equally true days when the District Officer was regarded by millions of Indians as his 'Ma-Bap', his Mother-Father." Rosamund Lawrence, *Indian Embers* (Oxford: George Ronald, n.d.). See also, Marian Fowler's *Below the Peacock Fan: First Ladies of the Raj* (Markham: Penguin Books Canada, 1987) which traces the lives of

showcased their interest in the colonies in 'curio' cabinets filled with goods from the Empire. This fascination with colonial peoples was also evident in English cultural products, especially the decorative arts, created in response to personal experiences or second-hand accounts of the colonies (Figure 1).⁷

Japanese art and design was also very fashionable in nineteenth-century English society. For centuries Japan had preserved its isolation, but in 1853 the landing of the American Commodore Matthew Perry soon forced the country into commerce with the West. In the following decade, Japan embarked on a systematic policy of adopting Western industry, technology, education, laws and government institutions.⁸ This 'opening' of Japan meant that its cultural goods were also available to the English market. Japanese culture became

four women through their memoirs of life and travel in India. For a discussion of the female experience of the Orient and especially of the harem, see Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity, and Representation* (New York: Routledge, 1996). Lewis examines written accounts of the harem by Occidental women within a discussion of Henriette Browne's Orientalist art work. She cites Sophia Poole's *The Englishwoman in Egypt: Letters from Cairo written during a residence there in 1842, 3 and 4 with E. W. Lane Esq., Author of 'The Modern Egyptian', by His Sister* 2 vols. (London: Charles Knight and Co., 1844) and Lady Anne Blunt's *A Pilgrimage to Nejd: The Cradle of the Arab Race. A Visit to the Court of the Arab Emir, and 'Our Persian Campaign.'* 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1881). For a discussion of the Orientalist backgrounds of many of these women travellers, see Jane Robinson, *Wayward Women: A Guide to Women Travellers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

⁷ "Cabinets [of curiosity] expressed a visual image of the inclusiveness of the European view of the world and its facile ability to incorporate and domesticate potentially transgressive worlds and customs" (John Elsner, and Roger Cardinal, eds., *The Cultures of Collecting* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), 203). For more information on cabinets of curiosity and nineteenth-century collecting practices, see Tony Bennett's discussion of the museum as supplanting and surpassing 'curio' cabinets in *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1995). Also, Douglas Cole's *Captured Heritage* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1995) contains a similar discussion within a North American context.

⁸ Chambers, 1071. See also, Hugh Cortazzi, "The British in Japan in the Nineteenth Century," in *Japan and Britain: An Aesthetic Dialogue 1850-1930*, eds. Tomoko Sato and Toshio Watanabe (London: Lund Humphries, 1991), 55-65.

increasingly popular, affecting all areas of the arts in England.⁹ For example, the 1885 Gilbert and Sullivan operetta *The Mikado* first opened at the Savoy Theatre with the chorus: “If you want to know who we are, we are gentlemen of Japan.” However, the operetta’s supposedly-Japanese setting of Titipu, elaborate costumes, and Japanese characters such as Ko-Ko, Yum-Yum, Nanki-Poo, and Pish-Tush, were not meant to be accurate representations of Japan but, rather, they camouflaged a satire of the British bureaucracy (Figure 2).¹⁰

This fashion for everything Oriental was also seen in academic circles in the form of Orientalism (the study of the Orient). Edward Said has re-defined Orientalism as a means of ‘dealing’ with the Orient by “making statements about it, authorising views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it.”¹¹ He claims the West, in this case Britain, saw the Orient as a place of romance, filled with exotic beings, and producing

⁹ For instance, the art critic for the London newspaper *Queen*, reviewing the June 1910 Anglo-Japanese Exhibition at White City in Shepherd’s Bush, London, wrote: “The colour prints of Japan have, within the last half century, taken Europe by storm. Their superb concentration, their decorative purpose of pattern and rhythm of line, have exercised an extraordinary influence on our modern art.” (Martin Hardie, “Japanese Art,” *Queen*, 18 June 1910, 1100.) More recently, similar exhibitions, held as part of the 1991 Japan Festival celebrations, took place throughout the UK. In Glasgow, the exhibition *Art for Industry: The Glasgow Japan Exchange of 1878* (Glasgow: Glasgow Museums, 1991) displayed the contents of an 1878 gift of contemporary art wares from Japan, including ceramics, furniture and other lacquer ware, metal ware, textiles and paper. In exchange for this gift, Glasgow shared its marine engineering and other industrial expertise with Japan. Another exhibition in the Festival, *Japan and Britain: An Aesthetic Dialogue 1850-1930*, was held at the Barbican Art Gallery to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the Japan Society of London. This exhibition’s catalogue offers an overview of the cultural exchange between Britain and Japan in the nineteenth century and a list of artists and products in Britain affected by this ‘dialogue’. This interest in Japan is also evident in North America where, for example, the American architect Frank Lloyd Wright owned an immense collection of Japanese screens.

¹⁰ Sato and Watanabe, *Japan and Britain*, 133; and W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan, *The Mikado or The Town of Titipu*, Lakeshore Light Opera, Dorval, 18 February 1999 (playbill).

¹¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (Toronto: Random House, 1978), 3.

haunting memories and landscapes. Ultimately, the Orientalist was viewed as superior in this East/West divide of colonialism.¹²

The expansion of British Imperial power was but one factor contributing to a specific taste developed in nineteenth-century society. In England, the harsh working conditions and extremes of wealth and poverty created by industrialisation were the cause of much social reform. Movements were developed throughout Britain in reaction to the treatment of workers, especially children. It was at this time (1892) that Friedrich Engels' scathing commentary on the English class system, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, was first published in Britain.¹³ The Arts and Crafts Movement developed within this climate of social reform, as artists became more aware of the working conditions in the industries for which they designed. One such artist/designer was William Morris, often cited as the most important advocate of the Arts and Crafts Movement.¹⁴ Morris criticised a system that allowed British craftsmen to lose both their skills and their self-respect while

¹² Ibid., 1; Lewis, 4-5.

¹³ Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, ed. Victor Kiernan (New York: Viking Penguin, 1987). For further reading on social reform see Deborah Weiner's *Architecture and Social Reform in Late-Victorian London*, which examines the architecture related to reform movements, such as free public libraries and elementary schools, settlement houses (Toynbee Hall and Passmore Edwards), working class housing (Octavia Hill's projects), art galleries and museums. See also, C. Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture 1884-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990); Standish Meacham, *Toynbee Hall and Social Reform, 1880-1914* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); and S. and H. Barnett, eds., *Practicable Socialism: Essays on Social Reform* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1888). For a discussion of social reform within the Arts and Crafts Movement in America see Eileen Boris, *Art and Labor: Ruskin, Morris and the Craftsman Ideal in America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).

¹⁴ The 1884 issue of *The Builder* notes that Morris spoke on the subject of Art and Socialism at the Whitechapel art gallery, an event organised by the Barnetts, founders of Toynbee Hall (*The Builder*, 12 April 1884, 504, quoted in Weiner, 237).

industry became rich by manufacturing technically-advanced yet ‘artistically-dead’ products. In his publications, lectures and work he attempted to redress this imbalance by recommending new standards of design which he believed would restore pleasure and self-respect to the worker.¹⁵ Proponents of the Movement adopted the Japanese attitude toward the various branches of the arts: believing all the arts were worthy of appreciation.¹⁶ They tried to dismantle the established hierarchy of the arts in Britain and promoted craft and the decorative arts as valid and valuable categories of art production. The socialist basis of Morris’s ideals is evident in his desire for beauty in objects of everyday use – supposedly available and affordable to everyone. Theoretically, members of the Arts and Crafts Movement accepted these goals but were not able to achieve them in practice.¹⁷ Many Arts and Crafts products were too expensive for the working classes. Thus, the Movement’s supporters, financial and ideological, were largely from the middle and upper classes.

The Arts and Crafts Movement also aimed to educate the public taste “to a preference for art born of one’s own day and in one’s own country.”¹⁸ This nationalism in art production

¹⁵ Linda Parry, *Textiles of the Arts and Crafts Movement* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 13. See also Peter Stansky, *William Morris* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983). For more about Morris’ socialism, see E. P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (London: Merlin Press, 1977) and William Morris, “How I Became a Socialist,” in *News from Nowhere and Other Writings*, ed. Clive Wilmer (New York: Penguin Books, 1994).

¹⁶ For an example of this attitude toward art production in the art journals, see Mabel Cox’s lengthy article “The Arts and Crafts Exhibition,” *Artist* (October 1896): 9-40.

¹⁷ See Parry, Stansky, Thompson.

¹⁸ A. H. Mackmurdo, “History of the Arts and Crafts Movement,” hand- and typewritten manuscript, from unpublished memoirs, held at the William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow, quoted in Parry, 15. In England,

was taken a step further in the Celtic Revival of Scotland and Ireland during the late nineteenth century. Each country endeavoured, through the Revivalist style, to become a reflection of its past 'glorious' self. The expression of 'beauty, health and national pride' were the main objectives of the Revival in both these countries. Most of the early work commissioned in the Revivalist style in Ireland was from churches. Eventually, however, much work was fuelled, executed or acquired by Nationalists, whose aims either remained romantic or became almost exclusively political, giving an impassioned, sharp edge to most Revivalist endeavours.¹⁹ In Ireland, the already-popular literary revival offered the visual arts a successful example to follow. In addition, the Celtic Revival in both countries had close links to the Arts and Crafts Movement, in ideology and practice, and as such, gained popularity with the upper classes who already supported this Movement.

This brief outline of factors affecting taste in nineteenth-century Britain and Ireland, sets an overall context for the following study of Alexander Morton & Company's Donegal carpet industry. The supremacy of the British Empire lasting throughout the nineteenth century led to an English sense of superiority and possessiveness toward colonial cultures.²⁰ As a result of this fascination with Britain's subjugated peoples, the academic discipline of Orientalism was developed. Closer to home (England), the consequences of

this attempt is referred to as the Gothic Revival (its proponents were often called medievalists, see quote on p.49).

¹⁹ Elizabeth Cumming and Nicola Gordon Bowe, *The Arts and Crafts Movements in Dublin and Edinburgh, 1885-1925* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1998), 9-14.

²⁰ Although not officially considered a 'colony' of the British Empire, Ireland suffered from prejudices commonly held toward colonial peoples. I discuss Ireland's unusual 'colonial' situation in greater detail in Chapter 2 (63-66).

rapid industrialisation were being documented and brought to the fore of political and social-reform debates. The effects of industrialisation, particularly on the working classes, were catalysts for the Arts and Crafts Movement, in particular, which advocated socialist ideals and universal access to art. As an extension of this Movement, the Celtic Revival emphasised nationalism expressed through art. Though primarily in Ireland and Scotland, the products created as a result of the Revival were also very popular in England.

Bourdieu's theory will help to explain *why* this nineteenth-century taste developed and how it was perpetuated. This general context will permit a clearer discussion of a specific case – the Donegal carpet industry. Bourdieu explains that a person's tastes are developed through a lifetime spent absorbing the social order, which leads to the creation of an individual's *habitus*. He claims that, through their *habitus*, people naturalise assumptions of gender, race and social hierarchy promoted in the social order surrounding them. Thus, the *habitus* informs each person's level of cultural competence and determines what is considered 'tasteful' or appealing to them. In the first chapter, I will use this concept of the *habitus* to demonstrate how the 'story' of Morton's Donegal carpet industry was manipulated to appeal to a target market.

An analysis of the design transitions in Donegal carpets is the basis for the second chapter. Such an analysis will reveal the cultural codes embedded in these carpets, recognisable to Morton's clientele. This recognition meant that the consumers assigned value to the Morton product, making it a popular cultural commodity. Relating the design transitions

to the social, political and historical context of their production will explain why these codes were familiar to Morton's patrons and how the codes were used to promote this product.

The final chapter is a case study of the designer Mary Seton Watts, exploring her anomalous identification in a 1903 Liberty's exhibition catalogue. Formal recognition by Liberty's was a privilege seldom granted designers. Most writing about Morton & Co.'s Donegal carpets overlooks the women in this organisation – weavers, designers, spinners, dyers. Thus, despite being a tangent from the topic of Morton's Donegal carpets, a discussion of the designer Mary Seton Watts specifically highlights the life and art production of a woman working for Morton & Co. In this chapter, Bourdieu's notion of symbolic capital will be used as a method for speculating possible reasons for this exception to common practice. Ultimately, my goal in writing this thesis is to test these three elements of Bourdieu's theory – *habitus*, cultural codes, and symbolic capital – by applying them to the instance of the Donegal carpet industry.

CHAPTER ONE

A 'DEALER'S LORE': AN ACCOUNT OF ALEXANDER MORTON & COMPANY'S DONEGAL CARPET INDUSTRY

To support the claim that taste is socially constructed, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has developed the concept of the *habitus*. He explains that the *habitus* is “a set of dispositions which generates practices and perceptions. [It] is the result of a long process of inculcation, beginning in early childhood, which becomes a ‘second sense’ or a second nature.”¹ Thus, through their *habitus*, a person may come to embody assumptions of gender, race, age and social hierarchy and, in effect, naturalise the social order in which they develop.² The *habitus* is the basis of an individual’s level of cultural competence and determines what appeals to her/him, what is considered ‘tasteful’. In this chapter, I wish to present the story of Alexander Morton & Company’s Donegal carpet industry and explore how this story has been manipulated by the press, promoters and historians to appeal to a certain *habitus*, that of the prospective Donegal carpet consumer.

According to Bourdieu, the dispositions represented by the *habitus* are “‘durable’ in that they last throughout [a person’s] lifetime. They are ‘transposable’ in that they may generate practices in multiple and diverse fields of activity, and they are ‘structured structures’ in that they inevitably incorporate the objective social conditions of their

¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 5.

² Nicholas B. Dirks, Geoff Eley, and Sherry B. Ortner, eds., *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 13-16.

inculcation. This accounts for the similarity in the *habitus* of [persons] from the same social class . . . Finally, the dispositions of the *habitus* are ‘structuring structures’ through their ability to generate practices adjusted to specific situations.”³ By exploring the written accounts of the Donegal carpet industry I wish to apply this concept to the readers and authors of these accounts. I will determine if their prevalent ‘dispositions’ do appear to have been established through a lifetime of inculcation, generating practices adjustable to a variety of activities, including the purchase of a Donegal carpet, and which reflect their ‘objective social conditions’.

ALEXANDER MORTON & COMPANY’S DONEGAL CARPET INDUSTRY

In extended research for this thesis, particularly favourable descriptions of the Morton enterprise kept recurring in newspaper articles; more recently, similar descriptions have appeared in the literature on the topic. A historiography of the Donegal carpet industry will be developed throughout this chapter, drawing on a number of sources. The primary archival source on the topic was a series of business papers and correspondences titled “Morton Family Papers,” held at the Victoria and Albert Museum’s Archive of Art and Design. Two of the most useful documents in this collection are an account of the industry written by James Morton for an annual report, based on notes in his diary, and a eulogy for Alexander Morton by his son for the firm’s Minute Book. Another rich archive was the British Museum’s Newspaper Library. Articles from London newspapers such as *The Times*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Standard*, *Queen*, *Black & White*, *Morning Advertiser*, *Madame*,

³ Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 5.

as well as several Irish papers including the *Irish Independent and Nation* dating from 1897-1910, are held at this library.⁴ Interestingly, the repetition of passages among the articles listed indicates that many of the critics must have used press releases or promotional material from Liberty's or Morton & Co. in order to write their pieces. For instance, a review in the Scottish *Aberdeen Journal*, 16 March 1903, consists of a series of quotes published earlier in several English newspapers. There is little difference of opinion due to location or culture, which is interesting in terms of the reception of the carpets by the press. The result of this archival research is a unified series of texts – in content, critical writing and perspective.

More recent literature about the Donegal carpets includes Jocelyn Morton's *Three Generations in a Family Textile Firm* (1971), Malcolm Haslam's *Arts and Crafts Carpets* (1991), and Paul Larmour's article "Donegal Carpets" in the *Irish Arts Review Yearbook, 1990-1991* and his book *The Arts and Crafts Movement in Ireland* (1992). Jocelyn Morton's book is a very favourable, uncritical, family account of the Morton business venture in Donegal. The archival material on which it is based is held at the Victoria and Albert Museum's Archive of Art and Design and the Scottish Records Office, Edinburgh. Haslam discusses more practical matters such as designers, advertising, exhibitions, and clientele of Morton & Co.'s Donegal carpet industry. Larmour's article offers a brief

⁴ The articles include: "Irish Carpet Exhibition." *The Times* (London), 9 March 1903, 11; "Irish Carpets." *Daily Telegraph*, 9 March 1903, 7; "The Irish Carpet Industry." *Standard*, 9 March 1903, 2; "An Exhibition of Donegal Carpets." *Queen, The Lady's Newspaper*, 28 February 1903, 347 and 14 March 1903, 438; "A New Irish Industry." *Black & White*, (Saturday) 21 March 1903, 8; "Developing an Irish Industry." *Morning Advertiser*, 9 March 1903, 6; "An Exhibition of Irish Carpets." *Madame: An Illustrated Journal of Fashion and Social Events*, (Saturday) 14 March 1903, 538; "Irish Carpet Exhibition." *Irish Independent and Nation*, (Monday) 9 March 1903, 5.

history of the firm's presence in Ireland with reference to the Irish Arts and Crafts Movement while his book elaborates upon his ideas and arguments concerning the Arts and Crafts Movement.

Woven into the following account of Morton's Donegal carpets are issues such as ethnicity, gender, class and cultural appropriation. Several possible methods of addressing these issues will be presented as well. Thus, the following 'story' of the Donegal carpets is the starting point from which I will analyse the production and reception of these carpets throughout this thesis.

EXPLORING IRELAND: THE DONEGAL CARPET INDUSTRY FROM ITS INCEPTION

Alexander Morton was a Scottish textile manufacturer whose business was one of the largest in Great Britain at the turn of the twentieth century. His firm in Darvel, Scotland produced lace, embroidery and machine-woven carpets. In 1896, Morton noticed a carpet in Maple's shop in London which 'seemed to him more interesting in texture' than the usual smoothly finished Eastern carpets from Persia, India or China.⁵ Later that year he spotted a Belgian handloom weaver working on a carpet of similar quality at the General Exhibition being held in Brussels. His son, James, later reflected on the event: "On [father's] return home he mentioned it to me and I was also much interested, especially as I was deep in the study of William Morris' work of the time and the character of the thing

⁵ "Notes written in 1916 by James Morton – Business Descriptions," Morton Sundour Archive, Archive of Art and Design, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, AAD 3/237-266 (Original notes held at the Scottish Records Office, Edinburgh, ref. GD326/197).

had special appeal to me.”⁶ Since James and his sister, Jeanie, were going for a holiday to the Continent, they agreed to visit the Brussels Exhibition. There they saw “several exhibits of Hand-tufted carpets [and among them was that of the] Institut des Franciscaines Missionnaires de Marie, 21 Rue du Cargo, Anvers (the makers of the rug Father had seen in Maple’s window).”⁷ James and Jeanie visited this convent in Antwerp, saw the rugs being made and gathered information about the production process ‘from the very charming sister in charge’. Always a ‘progressive’ firm, Morton’s was ready for new developments and was attracted to the idea that high quality, relatively small, hand-made carpets might be a valuable addition to their existing range of textiles. Thus the information gleaned from these trips was sufficient for Morton’s to go ahead with the proposal stemming from Alexander Morton’s initial interest in the carpets.

Since a high labour content would be required for the production of the carpets, but mechanical power would not, such an industry could be carried out in a technically-undeveloped, but highly-populated, area. With this in mind, Alexander Morton discussed his idea with a member of the Congested Districts Board of Ireland.⁸ This Board was ‘called into existence’ in 1891 with an annual income of £55,000 (the equivalent of

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ It is likely there were comparable opportunities in Scotland for the development of this kind of industry. However, James claimed that it “would be impracticable to make the carpet at Darvel [Scotland] on account of the scarcity and expense of labour and [he felt] that it [the Donegal carpets] would have to be made in districts where there was no machine labour, where the workers were plentiful and the wages low.” The fact that there was already an established connection between textile manufacturers in Northern Ireland and Scotland and the workers (especially home-workers) in the congested districts might also have affected Morton’s choice.

\$264,000 US, which had increased £20,000 by 1904) for the purpose of developing the poorest districts in the west of Ireland. The Congested Districts Board had been set up at Lord Balfour's instigation and functioned under the direction of the Chief Secretary for Ireland.⁹ The Board's function was to seek profitable employment for districts in Ireland which had a high density of population, but poor living conditions. The Board members quickly realised that they could encourage manufacturers to establish businesses in these areas by the bait of cheap labour.¹⁰

Mr. Wrench, the Board member who met with Alexander Morton, was 'delighted' with the Donegal carpet idea and presented it to the Board on behalf of the firm. It was agreed that the head of the Board's Textile Development Section, W. J. D. Walker of Co. Down, would meet with the Morton family.¹¹ From this meeting, James Morton and his brother Guy arranged to visit the west of Ireland with Walker to study the conditions there and determine the best location for their new enterprise. Wrench made all the necessary arrangements "without delay for Guy and James to make a tour of the districts concerned, and discuss the matter with the locals – particularly with the priests of the various little Roman Catholic communities, who knew so much about their flocks' problems and whose

⁹ Arthur James Balfour (1848-1930) was a British statesman and writer who was Prime Minister from 1902-05. He has been quoted as saying, "What was the Ireland that the Free State took over? It was the Ireland that we made." (D. G. Boyce, and Alan O'Day, eds., *The Making of Modern Irish History: Revisionism and the Revisionist Controversy* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 175.)

¹⁰ "The Congested Districts Board's Exhibits," in *Ireland's Exhibit at the World's Fair, St Louis, 1904* (Catalogue), 36; Jocelyn Morton, 91; Judith Hoad, *This is Donegal Tweed: The Traditional Techniques, the History, the People behind the Famous Textile* (Inver, Co. Donegal: shoestring Publications, 1987), 121-122.

¹¹ Jocelyn Morton, 91.

advice the latter were so ready to follow.”¹² The brothers spent several days uncovering records of the ‘sprigging’ (hand-embroidery on linen or muslin) being done by the women in their homes, the wages they earned, and the number of women working within a given radius in each district. They concluded that the conditions in Co. Donegal were such that they could ‘very materially improve them’ and attain their purpose of adding the industry of hand-tufted carpet-making to their existing productions. According to James, this trip was a “most interesting and enjoyable little tour in the districts around Ardara, Glenties, Killybegs and Glencolumbkille.”¹³

James and Guy Morton eventually settled on Killybegs, Co. Donegal as the best possible centre for their new enterprise. It had the advantage of harbour facilities, as well as the promise from the parish priest, Father Sweeny, of 300-400 ‘girls’ as workers. James Morton had several women from Wilton, England, where a hand-tufted carpet tradition was still practised, teach the process to Darvel weavers in Scotland. It was these Scottish weavers, in particular Mary Lawson and Bella Clelland, who taught the Irish weavers in Donegal. “It was in the beginning of September 1898,” wrote James, “that we embarked for Killybegs with all the elements for starting of Donegal carpet making – Herbert Downton foreman weaver, the two girls [from Darvel], Mary Lawson and Bella Clelland, the hand tuft looms, warps, and wool beaters.”¹⁴ Prior to his investigations in Ireland,

¹² Ibid.

¹³ “Notes written in 1916 by James Morton – Business Descriptions,” Morton Sundour Archive, Archive of Art and Design, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, AAD 3/237-266.

¹⁴ Ibid.

James had interviewed a Mr. Etwall, whom Herbert Downton had recommended because Etwall was a beam rug weaver and he had several daughters who could tuft. Eventually Etwall and his family were brought over from Wilton and he became the first resident foreman at the Donegal carpet factory.¹⁵

The first factory was in a hay loft where “rook windows [were] put in and the place made as smart and comfortable as possible.” (Figure 3) James Morton used his connection with Father Sweeny to enlist his workers: “I got the parish priest to intimate at the Sunday [service] that I would be in attendance at Coane’s shop, [Killybegs] at a certain day to receive and interview girls who wanted to learn the industry.” Not only did Father Sweeny ‘intimate’ Morton’s presence in Donegal, he “gave a little lecture recommending the project.”¹⁶ As a result, close to 150 women met with Morton at Coane’s shop, where their names and addresses were taken. According to James, it was a sight never to be forgotten: “They came from the hills and valleys for miles around, girls with barefeet, jet black or brilliant red hair, towsy and unkept like hill ponies and mostly shy as march hares. One could not help being drawn to them, and the experiment was going to be full of many kinds of interest.” The stereotypes of race and gender described above are as disconcerting and disturbing as the implied ‘interests’ of this ‘benefactor’. After several days of “consultation and sifting” Morton engaged a “first lot of workers” and gave a

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

rotation to others, dividing the 'honours' as much as possible among the families and districts.¹⁷

By 1899 the industry was viable and, according to Morton & Co.'s assessment, the workers were earning higher wages than in any previous employment. The quality of the product was sufficiently high for it to be received enthusiastically by some of Morton's biggest clients – British Royalty and the Governments of Great Britain, the United States, Canada and South Africa. A permanent factory was built in Killybegs and the Congested Districts Board soon financed the building of three more in County Donegal: in Kilcar (1899), Crolly (1904), and Anagry (1904). Killybegs remained the central depot where all the wool was collected and where the spinning and dyeing were done for the entire industry. The other branches were for weaving only and their products were brought to the central depot in Killybegs for finishing and dispatch.¹⁸

An important feature of this new industry, highlighted in most accounts, was that it gave great impetus to the rearing of sheep by the Donegal farmers. The carpets were made entirely of wool and it was part of the overall plan that all wool used in the manufacture

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid. Aidan Hennessy, director of the Killybegs Archive, Old Carpet Factory, Fintra Road, Killybegs, Co. Donegal, remarked that all the wool from Co. Donegal was sent to Cork (and sometimes England) for spinning and dyeing. It was then bought by Morton & Co. for use in the carpet-making. If so, and especially if the wool was sent out of Ireland, Morton's claim that it was investing in Co. Donegal and providing more work for its residents is true only of the weaving. The Killybegs Archive is an Irish Training and Employment Programme, sponsored by the Killybegs Parish Development Association, to collect local history for this area. I believe some of their funding comes indirectly from the EU as Ireland is one of its biggest recipients. Also, an attempt is being made to restart the Donegal carpet industry in the

should be spun from the fleece of sheep reared in the local mountain areas. At its peak, the industry employed approximately 500 weavers. On average, each weaver worked up to 225 fleeces annually, meaning the fleeces of many thousands of sheep would be consumed each year. As well as good business for the sheep farmers, the carpet industry provided employment in spinning and dyeing wool, in addition to the actual weaving. An average work week was 59 hours long and paid 5s. versus the County average of 1s.6d. for longer hours. According to the Grafton Gallery Exhibition catalogue of 1903, the new industry provided £15,000 in income to the sheep farmers, while £20,000-30,000 were earned by families for spinning, dyeing and weaving, making Morton's total economic contribution to Co. Donegal approximately £40,000 annually.¹⁹

THE MORTON FAMILY AND THE IRISH PEOPLE

Alexander Morton's first reactions to the people and place where his new industry was developing reflect his personal prejudices and represent a predominant view of Ireland. In a letter to James written from Killybegs, he recounts his impression of the area:

You ask me if I like this place and people. The place is like the riddlings of creation and the folks are like objects living on them. ... I cannot find anything but hard rock and bog, and it will require a divine miracle to make this place or people any better. People on such country never can and never will have a nature like those brought up for generations on a more productive soil. ... Trying to live where it is impossible to live ... make [the Irish] what I regret they are, cross and troublesome all over the world.²⁰

original premises. There is an Irish government website with information about this new industry and a recent commission they have been awarded (1999): www.irish-trade.ie.

¹⁹ *Founding a National Industry: Irish Carpet Exhibition*, Liberty & Co. catalogue no. 80, National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, London (This exhibition was held at Grafton Gallery by Liberty's); and "Notes written in 1916 by James Morton – Business Descriptions," Morton Sundour Archive, Archive of Art and Design, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, AAD 3/237-266.

²⁰ Jocelyn Morton, 94.

He continues by emphasising the fact that once the industry is settled, the Irish will be likely to take advantage of the Mortons: "When our mill is up and cannot be lifted in a day priest and people alike will let us feel how helpless we are and I am afraid will [force us], even after we are so much involved, ... to take up our sticks and turn our back on them." It is only at the end of this lengthy letter that his sense of moral superiority emerges: "If [the scheme] succeeds it will bless them [the Irish] more than they have ever known, and while the risk is very great still we are doing our duty to try and make it do. It will require continued pressure and personal effort for years to come."²¹

Despite this tirade, by 1900 Alexander Morton was very attached, financially and emotionally, to Ireland and in particular to Co. Donegal. Alexander's relationship with Ireland is rather peculiar. Despite having a family in Scotland, as well as a large estate and business there, as early as 1903 (aged 59) he spoke of retiring to Ireland: "I might ... go to Ireland for a few years and do a little farming and eke out my life and ... read and enjoy a few months or years as they may be granted to me before I pass away."²² By 1909, under the auspices of supervising the four Donegal carpet factories along with other business interests the firm had in Ireland, Alexander chose to divide his time equally between Scotland and Ireland. He had risen above his humble beginnings as a working-class weaver in Darvel to build a textile manufacturing 'empire'; yet family accounts corroborate the romantic vision of him described by the Irish writer Stephen Gwynne:

²¹ Ibid., 94-95.

²² Ibid., 146. Alexander Morton was born 9 February 1844 in Darvel, Scotland.

“This Scottish weaver found in Donegal what is the desire of every man with peasant blood in him – his way back to the land.”²³ Eventually Alexander Morton spent all his time in Ireland, leaving his wife and sons to manage the Scottish estate. Jocelyn Morton explains this self-imposed exile as “the urge to make the desert blossom like the rose.”²⁴ Indeed, the Scottish manufacturer was quite successful at his many attempts to grow fruit or raise cattle at ‘Bruckless’, his estate near Killybegs. His apple orchards were a particular source of pride in his later years, and a common feature in many of his letters to James.

Another interesting aspect of his correspondences are his frequent remarks about his wife. In 1915, he wrote: “I just feel the want of ... my wife to point out to [her the apples’] wonderful beauty.” Later, he again remarked to James: “I really cannot imagine any place nearer the centre of life than [the orchard]. I miss Mother to show her the beauties. Will it never come?”²⁵ Despite these laments for his wife’s company, there is no indication he ever considered returning to Scotland, where she clearly preferred to remain. It was only grudgingly that he made the trip to Scotland to attend the celebrations for his own Diamond Wedding Anniversary. Apparently he was “increasingly loth ... to come back to ‘civilisation’ and ceremony.”²⁶ Perhaps his wife, Jeanie Wiseman Morton, was glad of the time apart after nine children with a husband who insisted on supervising every aspect of

²³ Stephen Gwynne, *Ireland: Its Places of Beauty, Entertainment, Sport and Historic Association* (London: George G. Harap & Co., 1927), 240-241.

²⁴ Jocelyn Morton, 147.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 148.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 152.

their upbringing, particularly concerning issues of health, while escaping to his business interests when it became tedious (Figure 4). Jocelyn Morton claims there was no estrangement between the couple; their daily correspondence kept them in constant touch with one another and Alexander Morton often wished she would join him. However, 'Mother' was 'loth to cut herself off' from family friends and an ever-growing family of grandchildren. So 'Mother' stayed at the family home and "looked forward to the spells that her pioneering husband could spare to visit her."²⁷ Rather than following a neglectful husband, Jeanie Wiseman Morton chose to remain in Scotland and lead a life of her own making, relatively free from her 'pioneering' husband's interference. Whatever the cause, Alexander's isolation from his family resulted in a rich correspondence on matters of every concern, which forms the basis of much of my research.

Due to his father's interest in Ireland, James made less frequent visits to Donegal, concentrating instead on the design, colouring and marketing of the carpets. The industry grew quickly and by 1904 Morton & Co.'s turnover in Donegal carpets alone was over £20,000, while in 1906 the firm was producing carpets valued at £25,000 and employing between 500 and 600 women. It must be noted, however, that a portion of these figures was produced in Carlisle, England where the Mortons had erected looms for 80-100 women under the supervision of Herbert Downton, who came to Carlisle in 1900. Writing in 1913, James remarked that "the chief increase in [the Carpet] Department in recent years has been in the Canadian market, and whereas the exports to that quarter in 1909 were about £1000, in the year 1913 just ended the returns to Canada ... have been about

²⁷ Ibid.

£10,000.”²⁸ He credits this last ‘boom’ with his and an associate’s visit to Canada in the autumn of 1910. Clearly by this time, Donegal carpets were successful international commodities.

A COMPARISON: ALICE HART’S DONEGAL INDUSTRIAL FUND

At this point, I wish to recount another story of an enterprise established in Co. Donegal just prior to Morton & Co.’s Donegal carpets – Alice Hart’s Donegal Industrial Fund. The instance of Alice Hart in written histories of Co. Donegal is quite different from that of Morton & Co. By offering this counterpart to the Morton story, it is my intention to further highlight the extent to which historians successfully manipulate material to address issues which concern them (and often their particular audience as well).

Weaving and associated skills had been widely taught in Co. Donegal since the establishment of the Donegal Industrial Fund by Alice Hart in 1883. Hart and her husband, Ernest, visited Co. Donegal shortly after the area’s second famine (1879-83). The extreme poverty in the region prompted Hart to make a public appeal for money to meet the immediate needs of the population and provide seeds for the next harvest – the Donegal Famine Fund. Once the initial emergency was over, Alice Hart decided to revive the cottage industries of the area and established the Donegal Industrial Fund. The Fund was billed as benefiting the “workers of Ireland” through orders placed at “the Establishment”

²⁸ James makes a rather ironic typo when discussing this trip in the firm records, writing that this success in the Canadian market is “the result of the exploitation of the territory made by ... myself in the autumn of 1910.” “Notes made in 1913 on some of my activities in A.M. & Co. – James Morton,” Morton

which “was opened for their welfare.”²⁹ The Harts invested £5000 in the Fund over the next few years and soon it was one of the most successful philanthropic ventures of the 1880s in Ireland.³⁰

The development of ‘Kells Embroidery’ was a particularly successful project of Alice Hart’s Fund, awarded the gold medal at the International Inventions Exhibition (1885) in London. Hart originated the embroidery as a way of applying the existing skills of the women in Ireland to the demand for embroidered articles for domestic use. In the ‘Kells Embroidery’, dyed polished flax threads, manufactured in Ireland, were worked on various linens in designs derived from illuminated books of the seventh and eighth centuries, most notably *The Book of Kells*. Hart intended the new embroidery to be inexpensive and washable, and applicable to a variety of domestic and decorative purposes (curtains, table linen, dresses).³¹ By 1886 she had established Donegal House in London, where frequent

Sundour Archive, Archive of Art and Design, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, AAD 3/158-3/236-1991 (complete records held at the Scottish Records Office, Edinburgh, ref. GD 326/194).

²⁹ *Tracts on Social and Industrial Questions. 1877-88: The Cottage Industries of Ireland, with an Account of the Work of the Donegal Industrial Fund by Mrs. Ernest Hart, Being a Paper read before the Society of Arts, on Wednesday, May 11th, 1887* (London: Hamilton, Adams & Co., 1887), 1. I am grateful to Dr. Janice Helland for bringing this valuable source to my attention.

³⁰ See Paul Larmour, “The Donegal Industrial Fund,” in *Irish Arts Review Yearbook 1990-1991*, 128-133; Paul Larmour, *The Arts and Crafts Movement in Ireland* (Belfast: Friar Bush Press, 1992); and *The Magazine of Art* (December 1887): xi, (January 1889): xv, (August 1894): xlii.

³¹ Here are several newspaper reviews of the Kells Embroidery, as listed in Alice Hart’s *Tracts on Social and Industrial Questions. 1877-88: The Cottage Industries of Ireland*: “Beautiful designs, striking effects.” (*Morning Post*); “Remarkably cheap, artistic in effect, thorough in workmanship.” (*Builder*); “Strikingly beautiful.” (*Manchester Guardian*); “Exquisite workmanship; perfect art embroideries of every kind. For economy compare with any recent production.” (*The Echo*); “Remarkable striking and artistic.” (*Queen*). Paul Larmour, *The Arts and Crafts Movement in Ireland* (Belfast: Friar Bush Press, 1992).

exhibitions of the Fund's products were held and Irish goods were sold.³² The Fund also exhibited with the Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland and the Irish Decorative Arts Association. In 1887, Hart was given a government grant of £1000 for teaching purposes, allowing her to open technical schools for instruction in weaving, dyeing, lace-making and embroidery. Alice Hart's project was managed on sound economic principles, despite being philanthropic in nature, with all profits devoted to furthering technical teaching.

When the Harts retired to the English country in 1896, the Mortons had just begun investigating the possibility of developing their carpet industry in Donegal. By this time, the Donegal Industrial Fund had ceased operating. As such, there appears to have been very little overlap between the two organisations. In spite of this, Malcolm Haslam claims that when the Mortons arrived in the county and offered the weavers higher wages, Alice Hart "may well have felt she was being upstaged."³³ Haslam's careful representation of the situation (without many references to exact dates) belittles Hart's contribution to the region by depicting the Mortons as more generous employers whose involvement in the area wounded the pride of this philanthropic 'lady'. He suggests that perhaps Alice Hart had been irritated by the assistance the local Roman Catholic clergy had given James Morton in recruiting labour, and "no doubt she had been further disconcerted by the intrusion of common 'trade' into what she evidently regarded as her private fief, run along paternalistic lines."³⁴ He portrays Hart as a middle-class philanthropist with leisure time to

³² Donegal Industrial Fund, Donegal House, 43, Wigmore St., London, W.

³³ Haslam, 99.

³⁴ Ibid.

spare; a woman ruling her organisation with an iron fist, with condescending intentions and easily upset by competition, thus eliminating the possibility that her efforts made a valuable contribution to the region's economic status. Haslam places her firmly within the confines of traditional nineteenth-century gender roles for middle-class women: the feminine selflessness of philanthropy which belies her self-interest in the project as a means of satisfying her moral conscience; unfitted to the rigours of the public sphere (trade) yet controlling and manipulative within the acceptable limits of the private sphere (philanthropy).³⁵

In contrast to Haslam's representation of Hart, the *Magazine of Art* (1894) wrote of her: "For very many years this kindly and energetic lady has busied herself with projects for the amelioration of the condition of the Irish peasantry – passing through the rural districts of Ireland, opening communications with the weavers, and organising means for bringing the beautiful products of their diligence before the British public."³⁶ The Chairman of the Society of Arts felt that Alice Hart was "no ordinary person, but a woman of unusual intelligence and education ... having received a scientific and medical education both in Paris and London." He also believed it was the 'bounden duty' of every person to support Hart's 'scheme' which was "actually saving the lives of many poor people in Ireland."³⁷

³⁵ Joanna Bourke, *Husbandry to Housewifery: Women, Economic Change, and Housework in Ireland, 1890-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 5.

³⁶ *The Magazine of Art* (August 1894): xlii.

³⁷ Alice Hart, *Tracts on Social and Industrial Questions. 1877-88: The Cottage Industries of Ireland*, 9.

These accounts of Hart, by contemporary journals and people who actually knew her, should be considered more seriously than the apparently misinformed opinion formulated by Haslam.

The instance of Alice Hart in literature about the industries in Co. Donegal suggests that the favourable press coverage and especially the historical writing (as recently as 1992) of the Donegal carpet enterprise might be due in part to its links with the public sphere of trade and manufacturing. The substantial difference of opinion between Haslam's text and the other excerpts listed demonstrates how easily events can be misconstrued or manipulated to coincide with a particular bias.

The social context of an industry is therefore extremely important to establish. For example, Alice Hart's relationship with the Irish people she worked with is very different from that of the Mortons. Keeping in mind Alexander Morton's first impressions of his new workers, Alice Hart's reaction to the Irish people is quite a contrast: "The good opinion I formed of the Donegal peasantry when I first went among them in the period of their distress, has been confirmed by more intimate knowledge in all subsequent dealings with them." She quotes Justice O'Hagan's thoughts on the Irish as 'honest, veracious and industrious people' and claims she entirely endorses this point of view: "so honest have I found these peasants, that it has in the end proved unnecessary to adopt an elaborate system of checks."³⁸ In the Morton case, it is also worth noting James Morton's reaction to an attempted strike, in July 1900, by weavers demanding higher wages: "Do you intend

³⁸ Ibid.

this for a strike' asked we [James and his siblings] 'All we have to tell you [is] that any girl [who] goes out that door will never be allowed back whatever influence is brought to bear on us' and we gave them 5 minutes to start work or leave the place for good. They all returned to work. This might have been a very nasty picture."³⁹ Apparently, Alice Hart wasn't the only one who regarded Donegal as a personal fiefdom, under complete control.

THE POPULAR RECEPTION OF DONEGAL CARPETS

Morton's Donegal clientele, or the consumers of Donegal carpets, included British Royalty, the Arts and Crafts dealer Liberty & Co., and several Canadian banks. Carpets were made for the Prime Minister of Great Britain's residence, the Governor General of Canada's residence and the US White House. As well, they had showrooms in London, Dublin, Toronto, New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Melbourne (Australia), and Christchurch (New Zealand).⁴⁰

The popular reception of Donegal carpets, which Morton & Co. hoped for, depended on several conditions. Taste, current trends such as Orientalism, and art movements each affected patronage. As such, the production of the carpets catered to the demands of the

³⁹ "Addresses of carpet weavers at Wilton," Morton Sundour Archive, Archive of Art and Design, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, AAD 3/371. The result of this strike is not surprising given Judith Hoad's remarks on the working conditions of Co. Donegal at the time: "The labour-force ... was glad of any cash income to drag it above the poverty line. A crust of bread is better than no bread at all. Far from being kept at the bread-line by low incomes, the low incomes of the first work available elevated the population *into* the bread-line! Always people are grateful for employment in a county still notorious for the lack of it." (121-122)

⁴⁰ *Some Historic Donegal Carpets* (Brochure c.1898), National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

cultural marketplace. At the second exhibition of the Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland, November 1899, Morton & Co.'s hand-tufted Donegal carpets were introduced to the Irish art market. Morton's new carpet industry based in Ireland catered to the popular Western taste for all things Oriental and to the socialist ideals of the Arts and Crafts Movement. The designs of the early carpets were Eastern-inspired, although eventually an Arts and Crafts floral design came to predominate. As the factory settled into its Irish surroundings, a Celtic motif was taken up by the Morton designers.⁴¹ James Morton's cousin, Gavin Morton, was in charge of the firm's design department and the designs reflected the family interests and marketing strategies. Many firms had this type of internal design department, only commissioning designs from outside artists on occasion. For example, James's fascination with William Morris's ideologies translated itself into designs for the Donegal carpets. James indoctrinated his cousin with the ideals he admired and soon Gavin Morton was commissioning design work from the leading artists of the Arts and Crafts Movement.⁴²

The Irish location of the industry was often emphasised in reviews of the carpet exhibitions – the first aspect mentioned in many accounts. Critics reviewing the 1903 Grafton Gallery exhibition of Donegal carpets repeatedly congratulated the Mortons for attempting to help a poor district of Ireland: the *Irish Independent* explained the industry was developed “with a view to extending the handtufted carpet industry in the West of Ireland”; while the London paper, *The Times*, remarked that “any addition to the

⁴¹ Malcolm Haslam, “Vigour of the Outer Air: Donegal Carpets,” *HALI* 57 (June 1991): 107-113.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 95-96.

industries of so poor a country as the West of Ireland is praiseworthy.”⁴³ Other reviews focussed on Liberty’s involvement in the promotion of the industry: the reviewer for the ‘Lady’s Newspaper’ *Queen* felt that it was “in accordance with their principles of supporting and developing the industries of our own country” that Liberty’s held this exhibition, while the following month remarking upon the employment the industry provided for “a large number of women and girls, who have shown great aptitude for the work.”⁴⁴ Another woman’s journal, *Madame*, also highlighted the benefits this industry brought to women in Ireland: “All who are anxious to encourage home industries should make a point of paying an early visit to this exhibition.”⁴⁵ Other writers were not quite as well informed: writing about Queen Alexandra’s visit to Ireland and viewing of the carpets, the journalist for the English paper *Daily Telegraph* cited the home of the new enterprise as Darvel, Co. Donegal.⁴⁶ Although the aspect of the industry emphasised varied according to the interests of the paper (women’s journals were often interested in home industries and work for women, for instance), the general impression of the industry in the reviews and articles is very favourable. One writer even declared “it should be not only our pleasure, but our duty to go and see these Irish carpets, and not only see them, but buy them for our houses.”⁴⁷

⁴³ *Irish Independent and Nation*, (Monday) 9 March 1903, 5; *The Times* (London), 9 March 1903, 11.

⁴⁴ *Queen*, 28 February 1903, 347; and 14 March 1903, 438.

⁴⁵ “An Exhibition of Irish Carpets,” *Madame: An Illustrated Journal of Fashion and Social Events*, (London) 14 March 1903, 538.

⁴⁶ *Daily Telegraph*, 9 March 1903, 7. Darvel is the town in Scotland where Alexander Morton first started working as a weaver and from which he later developed his textile manufacturing business. Killybegs, Co. Donegal is what the writer should have stated.

⁴⁷ “A New Irish Industry,” *Black and White*, (London) 21 March 1903, 8.

The role of the press in the widespread acceptance and promotion of the Donegal carpets was crucial. By virtue of background, training, and education, or familiarity with emerging theories of design, critics played an integral role within the design process, serving as both its starting point and its summation. Providing “inspiration at the beginning and passing judgement upon finished products at the end, critics functioned as important intermediaries between theory and practice.”⁴⁸ In this case, James Morton’s attempt at placing his industry within the scope of the Arts and Crafts Movement would succeed only if the critics accepted his intentions, outlined in the promotional material. And they did, often highlighting the hand-crafted nature of the work and the workers’ pleasant surroundings.

The Mortons recognised the power of the educated consumer as a critic whose purchase directly influenced decisions made by designers and craftsmen, along with those of manufacturers and merchants. Criticism informed every stage of the design process, from conception and implementation to completion and distribution, utilisation, and ultimately evaluation. The role of critics as arbiters of taste functioned at every stage of production, from abstract idea to fully realised product.⁴⁹

A significant remark made by Jocelyn Morton explained that the carpets could be made to order for the patron, including size, shape, and design. This implicates the client in the

⁴⁸ Beverly K. Brandt, “One Who Has Seen More and Knows More: The Design Critic and the Arts and Crafts,” in *The Substance of Style: Perspectives on the American Arts and Crafts Movement*, ed. Bert Denker (Winterthur, Delaware: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1996), 117.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 122 and 141.

design process and in the constructed meanings, political or other, resulting in the carpet. James Morton writes of “hearty collaborations to produce the most distinguished type of design and colourings for this new Industry.” He explains that while he was “travelling much about [he] brought back ideas for design and colour and many of the things [used] in Tapestries proved useful [for carpets as well].” In the first six or seven years of the Donegal carpet business, there was no design “put into [the] ranges of Donegal that [James] did not collaborate [on], either suggesting the design, colouring or helping to colour it afterwards and generally discussing the quality and style in which it should be put on the market.”⁵⁰ Thus, the critic, the producer and the consumer were implicated in the design process of a Donegal carpet. Ultimately, however, it was the consumer who dictated the success or failure of a design. It was the consumer’s *habitus*, cultural competence, and the producer’s ability to cater to it, which decided the fate of each carpet on the market.

A ‘DEALER’S LORE’

Brian Spooner claims the West received Oriental carpets divorced from their social context and, in its desire for authenticity, tried to reconstruct this context. He notes that the weaver is embedded in a complex system of social relations and the dealer must cultivate the market.⁵¹ In its role as dealer, Morton & Co. reconstructed the weavers of

⁵⁰ “Notes written in 1916 by James Morton – Business Descriptions,” Morton Sundour Archive, Archive of Art and Design, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, AAD 3/237-266.

⁵¹ Brian Spooner, “Weavers and Dealers: The Authenticity of an Oriental Carpet,” in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 195-234.

Donegal for their consumers, translating their social context into a more presentable and intriguing one. An example of this is the Donegal Showcards entitled “Off to Work” and “Irish Camels” (sketches done in 1899/cards produced c.1905), which were also used as images for the company’s brochure *Some Historic Donegal Carpets*.⁵² “Off to Work” depicts a girl wrapped in a shawl walking down a country path, barefoot, in a long skirt, with her hair flying in the wind. “Irish Camels” depicts a series of carts pulled by donkeys filled with huge parcels addressed to dealers in Canada, South Africa, Scotland, Ireland and Britain. The sun is just disappearing behind the mountains across the water as the caravan makes its way down a path to a dock where a steam boat awaits. The Irish workers, the Eastern carpet-making tradition, and Celtic imagery all were manipulated by the carpet manufacturer so that the product would fit the consumer’s notion of good taste. That is, the product would conform to the patrons’ limited knowledge of all aspects of production. In the case of Donegal carpets, the workers were stripped of their social context and re-placed within a new discourse of Morton & Co.’s creation.

Further examples of this manipulation abound in the press coverage of the period. These accounts highlight the intelligence of the Irish worker, attracting the readers of *Celtia* (a journal affiliated with a Celtic Association) to the industry’s products: “Efforts are being made to turn the native cleverness of the Donegal peasant to good and practical account”; “This native cleverness of the people is a point so dwelt on by the promoters of the

⁵² “Donegal Carpets Showcards,” Morton Sundour Archive, Archive of Art and Design, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, AAD 4/1061-1062-1063; and *Some Historic Donegal Carpets* (Brochure c.1898), National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

scheme, Messrs. Moreton [*sic*] of Darvel, that that aspect of the case links the commercial side with the aims of the Celtic Association"; "The Messrs. Moreton [*sic*] of Darvel ... whilst travelling in Ireland were so struck by the quickness and adaptability of the western peasant that they decided to start a branch of their business in Donegal."⁵³ By comparison, another account of the same industry in an English paper, presents the Irish in quite a different light: "With a keen and patriotic insight, it was for them [the Mortons] to discover among the simple peasantry, scratching the bare hillsides for food and digging in the bog for fuel to boil the pot, minds in constant touch with nature, ideas fresh and clear, the response between brain and finger instant as a flash, and a creative power which has given to raw wool a highly interchangeable value. After all, the wealth of the country lies in the brain of her people."⁵⁴ The last remark is informed by the popular doctrine of political economy and implies the intelligence of the Scot, Morton, in his development of this industry which 'rescued' the Irish from their unhappy lot. This excerpt is one of the many press accounts with such blatant social stereotyping.

The Mortons' successful integration of their industry into the Arts and Crafts Movement, so popular at the time, further demonstrates this ability to reconstruct the reality of the workers and the industry. In this instance, the emphasis is on the individuality of the work, the hand-crafted nature of the product, and its association to 'renowned' artists. Through their promotion as a hand-crafted art-industry, the Donegal carpets found a ready place in the Arts and Crafts exhibitions of the time, such as those of the English Arts and Crafts

⁵³ Louisa E. Farquharson, "A New Celtic Art," *Celtia* (April 1903): 58-9.

⁵⁴ "Developing an Irish Industry," *Morning Advertiser*, 9 March 1903, 6.

Society in 1899 and 1903, the Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland in 1899, the Glasgow International Exhibition of 1902, the World's Fair at St Louis in 1904 and the Dublin International Exhibition of 1907. The greatest publicity in the early years was attracted by the exhibition held by Liberty's in March 1903 at the Grafton Gallery in Bond Street. The exhibition featured over one hundred Donegal carpets which had been made at Morton's exclusively for Liberty's from designs by 'well known artists' (whose names are not mentioned) supplied by Liberty & Co. There were, as a result of this exhibition, several prestigious orders made for Donegal carpets.⁵⁵ The history of this exhibition situates Donegal carpets precisely within the Arts and Crafts Movement.

The association of Donegal carpets with the North American Arts and Crafts Movement through patronage, particularly Gustav Stickley's appreciation of them, indicates the broad geographic extent of their effective promotion. Gustav Stickley, an advocate of the Arts and Crafts Movement in the US, sold Donegal carpets at his 'Craftsman' showrooms on West 34th Street, New York, and Boylston Street, Boston. The promotional message in Stickley's catalogue was "more restrained [than the Morton showroom in New York]; a straightforward description of the rugs was given and the information imparted that they were 'made in Ireland after the designs of Voysey and his school'."⁵⁶

⁵⁵ *Founding a National Industry: Irish Carpet Exhibition*, Liberty & Co. catalogue no. 80, National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

⁵⁶ Nicola Gordon Bowe, "The Search for Vernacular Expression: The Arts and Crafts Movements in America and Ireland," in *The Substance of Style: Perspectives on the American Arts and Crafts Movement*, ed. Bert Denker (Delaware: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1996), 15.

Press accounts secured this connection to the Movement, due in part to the firm's association with the prestigious Arts and Crafts promoters, Liberty & Co. Louisa Farquharson, writing for *Celtia*, quoted Liberty's as considering "that these hand-made carpets afford an excellent example of that artistic individualism which obtains only where pure handicraftsmanship is employed in contradistinction to the monotonous perfection and regularity of a machine production, and particularly so when the technical skill of the worker is aided by artist advisers in the use of colours."⁵⁷ This same passage was quoted a month earlier in *Madame*. As well, the writer for the *Standard* noted these Arts and Crafts ideals when remarking that "the individuality of the worker plays an important part in the manufacture, and adds to the artistic quality of the finished article."⁵⁸

POLITICAL, HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL OMISSIONS

In the same way as Alice Hart's contributions to Co. Donegal are overlooked in Haslam's account of the region's industries, the turmoil of Irish political and religious history is often glossed over as well.⁵⁹ The concept of the Irish as a separate race 'justified' the colonial treatment it received from the British. The Famine (1845-49) and subsequent

⁵⁷ Farquharson, 59. This quote is also used in "An exhibition of Irish Carpets," *Madame*, (Saturday) 14 March 1903, 538.

⁵⁸ *Standard*, 9 March 1903, 2.

⁵⁹ For a discussion of some of the major events and the issues involved, see: D. G. Boyce, *The Irish Question and British Politics, 1868-1996* (New York: St Martin's Press Inc, 1996); D. G. Boyce, and Alan O'Day, eds., *The Making of Modern Irish History: Revisionism and the Revisionist Controversy* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Margaret Kelleher, *The Feminization of Famine: Expressions of the Inexpressible?* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); James Loughlin, *Gladstone, Home Rule and the Ulster Question, 1882-93* (New Jersey: Humanities Press International, 1987); Nicholas Mansergh, *The Irish Question, 1840-1921* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1975); Chris Morash, and Richard Hayes, eds., *'Fearful Realities' New Perspectives on the Famine* (Portland: Irish Academic Press, 1996); Ruth Taillon, *When History was made ... The Women of 1916* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, 1996).

diaspora of the so-called 'Irish race' contribute to the Irish subaltern experience. The land clearances, depopulation and consolidation of land holdings into the hands of fewer farmers, who thus became more powerful with little violence, are examples of Ireland's purported colonial past.

National education was another instrument of empire implemented in Ireland. The role of teachers was being transformed: they were no longer "free-moving entrepreneurs of diverse background and experience who ventured to set up schools in response to popular demand. They had become, instead, paid servants in an expanding state apparatus."⁶⁰ The national school provided occupational opportunity and financial security, especially for many women, but it did so under conditions that required an unquestioning acceptance of an authoritarian and patriarchal structure. The national school teacher was subject to immediate and frequent surveillance by a clergyman manager and less frequently, by a government inspector. The school thus became the usual way of promoting an individual's inclusion in a 'national civic and religious culture'.⁶¹ Though central to the project of universal schooling, the female teacher was not rewarded on a basis similar to that of her male counterpart and from the beginning of national education her pay reflected the traditionally lower status of female education and the generally prevailing difference

⁶⁰ John Logan, "The Dimensions of Gender in Nineteenth-Century Schooling," in *Gender Perspectives in Nineteenth-Century Ireland: Public and Private Spheres*, eds. Margaret Kelleher and James H. Murphy (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1997), 49.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

between male and female incomes.⁶² The paradox of nineteenth-century school reform in Ireland was that despite the apparent promise that it would weaken the barriers deriving from class, religion or race, it became instead “an instrument that promoted a knowledge of the immutability of those forces.”⁶³

These broader political trends (of ethnic marginalisation and gender segregation) are important factors contributing to the cultural competence of the Donegal carpet consumer and therefore must be acknowledged in this discussion. Their omission in press accounts and, more importantly, in historical writing reveals the continued existence and propagation of stereotypes toward Ireland and the Irish.

CONCLUSION

Examining the literature about the Donegal carpet industry, related events and people, is meant to elucidate Bourdieu’s proposition that art and its producers do not exist independently of a complex institutional framework which authorises, enables, and legitimises them. The idealised notions of the weaver as poor women involved in gainful employment, the factory that helped an entire community regain its dignity, the Oriental motifs and techniques, the revival of a Celtic national heritage all became part of the dealer’s lore surrounding Donegal carpets. And, it is this lore which has been manipulated to appeal to Morton & Co.’s target market’s *habitus*, or cultural competence.

⁶² Logan, 48. In the 1830s female salary levels were set at 75% of those paid to males. By the end of the century female rates stood at 80% of those paid to male counterparts. While women accounted for 55% of teachers in 1900, they held but 28% of the school principalships, in each case as a sole teacher.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 49.

CHAPTER TWO

APPEALING TO THE 'EDUCATED EYE': DESIGN TRANSITIONS IN DONEGAL CARPETS

Pierre Bourdieu has argued that taste is determined by specific social conditions, such as education level, social class, race and gender. He has shown that dominant groups retain their positions of power and enhance their status by specific mechanisms, one of which is to invent the aesthetic category as a universal entity.¹ Cheryl Buckley has elaborated on this by confirming that exclusive definitions of good and bad taste are constructed and serve to isolate design products from the material and ideological conditions of production and consumption.² Through an analysis of the formation of taste in nineteenth-century society, this chapter will relocate Morton & Co.'s Donegal carpets within these conditions.

The Mortons chose to appeal to the art market of nineteenth-century Britain, Ireland and North America through the production of their Donegal carpets. The family's own situation, as wealthy, Protestant Scottish landowners with business interests in Ireland and Britain, situates them within the dominant class of nineteenth-century Irish society. The marketing, design and production of the Donegal carpets were methods used by the

¹ Cheryl Buckley, "Made in Patriarchy: Toward a Feminist Analysis of Women and Design," in *Design Discourse: History/Theory/Criticism*, ed. Victor Margolin (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 261. See also Pierre Bourdieu, "The Aristocracy of Culture," *Media, Culture and Society* 2 (1980): 225-254.

² Buckley, 260.

Mortons to retain their dominant position in society. By understanding its target market's notion of 'good taste', Morton's could create a product suitable to these consumers. Thus, an analysis of the design transitions in the carpets will illustrate the socially-constructed nature of 'good taste'.

According to Bourdieu, any art perception involves a conscious or unconscious deciphering operation.³ He claims that an act of deciphering is possible and effective only when "the cultural code which makes the act of deciphering possible is immediately and completely mastered by the observer (in the form of cultivated ability or inclination) and merges with the cultural code which has rendered the work perceived possible."⁴ In this chapter, I wish to explore the cultural codes mastered by the prospective Donegal carpet consumers which merged with those in the carpets, making this product a popular cultural commodity.

Since education level and social class play a pivotal role in the social formation of taste described by Bourdieu, it is necessary to situate the Donegal carpet patrons within nineteenth-century society. Equally important are the weavers, spinners, dyers and farmers of County Donegal who are easily forgotten in archival research. Theirs are seldom-heard voices within a barrage of marketing slogans aimed at perpetuating the stereotypes of the working classes held by Morton's upper-class clientele. These absent voices have been extremely difficult to trace and, to highlight concerns about this underlying aspect of the

³ Ibid., 216.

⁴ Ibid.

Morton enterprise, I will examine women's situation in nineteenth-century Ireland; accounts of a workers' strike at the Donegal factory; the personal references to specific workers in James Morton's papers; and newspaper reports, from Britain, Ireland and North America, of the weavers' role in the creation of the carpets.

THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SETTING OF THE DONEGAL CARPET INDUSTRY

Throughout the nineteenth century, the population of Ireland was unevenly divided between three major religious denominations: Catholics (75-80%), Anglicans (from the Church of England, 10-15%) and Presbyterians (many of whom had ties to Scotland, 10-15%). The Presbyterian population was heavily concentrated in Ulster (Co. Antrim, Armagh, Down, Londonderry), where 96% of its members lived, while Irish Anglicans were more dispersed and Catholics formed the majority of the population in the rest of Ireland.⁵

There were also important social distinctions between the members of these three religious denominations. In all parts of Ireland, Anglicans were heavily over-represented among the land-owning class, where they made up the majority of substantial proprietors. They were also heavily over-represented in the professions and at the upper levels of financial and commercial life. In Ulster, however, though Anglicans made up the majority of landed proprietors, below that level they ceded economic and social dominance to the

⁵ Sean Connolly, *Religion and Society in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Ireland: Dundalgan Press, 1987), 3-5.

Presbyterians. In the countryside, Presbyterians held larger and more profitable farms than any other religious group, and were less likely to be found among the ranks of the landless labourers. Similarly in the towns, they were over-represented among skilled workers and in middle class occupations. Ulster Catholics were a substantially disadvantaged group, overwhelmingly concentrated at the bottom of the social scale, among the cotters, labourers and smallholders of the countryside and the unskilled and casual workers of the towns. The Catholic middle class was small and its membership dominated by groups of limited prestige and wealth.⁶ In the rest of Ireland there was a more substantial Catholic middle class, although Catholics were still under-represented in proportion to their total numbers. Catholics in the early nineteenth century owned approximately one-third of the total middle class wealth in Ireland.⁷

The Famine (1845-49), and the continued heavy emigration in the decades that followed, transformed the social structure of Ireland, sweeping away large numbers of the rural poor while leaving the farming population relatively untouched. The tenant farmer had increasingly become the dominant figure in the Irish countryside by the time the Mortons arrived.⁸ Still, most tenants held their farms by the year and landlords could, in theory,

⁶ For example, publicans and butchers, general dealers and teachers (Connolly, 3-5.).

⁷ In 1861, the census report indicates that 92% of those unable to read in Ireland were Catholics, 5% were Anglicans and less than 3% were Presbyterians (Connolly, 3-5.).

⁸ Connolly, 41.

increase their rents every year and evict them on only six months' notice.⁹ Rents, even relatively moderate ones, absorbed 25-40% of tenants' incomes. Clearly rent increases could have a considerable effect on the distribution of incomes in rural society. Most of the land in Ireland was held in fairly large estates; fewer than 800 landlords owned half of the country in 1876.¹⁰

England's imperial agenda in Ireland is illustrated by these religious and social divisions. Jocelyn Morton writes, "in matters of religion the family were by tradition firm supporters of the Church [of Scotland] and regular churchgoers."¹¹ Thus their religious beliefs coupled with their business and land holdings in Ireland, made the Morton family part of the Protestant elite described above. To fully understand their position in Ireland, British society must also be discussed.

One year prior to the start of Morton's Donegal carpet industry in Ireland, Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee (1897) was the occasion of much celebration of the British Empire. Both parliamentary parties used it as an occasion to glorify Britain's world-wide

⁹ Landlords, even after the land act of 1870, managed their estates under a legal system which gave them complete freedom of contract (F. S. L. Lyons, and R. A. J. Hawkins, eds., *Ireland Under the Union: Varieties of Tension* (Toronto: Clarendon Press, 1980), 176).

¹⁰ Lyons and Hawkins, 176. While focussing on Ireland's situation, I am also well aware that similar situations, though perhaps less extreme, existed in Scotland and England at this time. For a comparison of the situations in Scotland and Ireland, see L. M. Cullen, and T. C. Smout, eds., *Comparative Aspects of Scottish and Irish Economic and Social History* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, n.d.).

¹¹ Jocelyn Morton, 44.

empire.¹² This event, coupled with British campaigns in Africa under military men like Kitchener, marked the apex of British imperial power.¹³ This was also reflected in the British Parliament, where Conservatives were concerned with maintaining their nation as the world's foremost power, while Liberals emphasised guiding colonial peoples to self-government and other 'blessings' of British society. Leaders of both parties were firmly resolved not to be content with what Britain 'possessed' and to compete actively for the African and Asian lands which were 'up for grabs'.¹⁴ In this assessment of British rule, Ireland can be considered part of what Britain already 'possessed'. Irish self-government was debated in Parliament and the 'Irish Question' was frequently raised – apparently Ireland was benefiting from the 'blessings of British society'. However, imperialism in nineteenth-century society was "discussed, debated and contested as an issue of the day, present in *everyday* activities and diverse forms of cultural production - not just those that were 'obviously' imperialist."¹⁵

The Morton enterprise is an example of these less obvious imperialist endeavours, as illustrated by their patronage. Donegal carpets were commissioned by Royalty (for the Royal Yacht, Windsor Castle, and Buckingham Palace) and the British government (the

¹² The two parliamentary parties referred to are Liberal and Unionist (which is the official title of the Conservatives).

¹³ Felix Gilbert, *The End of the European Era, 1890 to the Present*, 3rd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1984), 40.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Lewis, 13. Lewis cites as examples of this: colonial politics/process, empire building, military campaigns in Africa. She claims the reasons for protesting imperialist or colonialist measures ranged from

Prime Minister's house at 10 Downing Street). Most interesting, however, are the commissions for British colonial representatives' homes and other buildings associated with British rule in the colonies; for example, the Vice-Regal Lodge in Dublin, the Governor General of Canada's residence, and the South African Parliament Houses.¹⁶

A FASHION FOR ALL THINGS ORIENTAL

Given the celebration of empire in Britain at this time and the market Morton's catered to, it is not surprising that the early designs of Donegal carpets were closely related to their Eastern counterparts (Figure 5). According to Malcolm Haslam and Paul Larmour, the weaving of Donegal carpets was carried out by hand, based on the same principles established in the East for centuries. These carpets were in structure and method essentially the same as those of Turkey and Persia.¹⁷ Among his papers held at the Victoria and Albert Museum, James Morton had swatches of material from Eastern countries labelled 'Persian', indicating that he was familiar with the Eastern product and its construction. There are also several correspondences between James Morton and people involved in carpet-making in Eastern countries. The following excerpt is from a series of letters dated after James Morton had ceased operating the Donegal carpet industry. Nevertheless, it offers some indication of how he developed business, created designs and constructed a marketing strategy for a new product:

the moral to the economic. However, in a footnote, she cites Edward Said who claims that these protests rarely considered the subjected peoples fully human or capable of self-government (44).

¹⁶ *Some Historic Donegal Carpets* (Brochure c.1898), National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

¹⁷ See Haslam, *Arts and Crafts Carpets*; and Larmour, "Donegal Carpets."

Real Indian Weaves: Previous to the war I [James] had been in correspondence with Dr. Nesfield, who has charge of the work of a great many of the *prisons* in certain sections of India. He is brother-in-law to a personal friend and takes very special interest in good work for prisoners. I thought if we could send out our Sundour yarns and he could have them made in *fine rugs in India* we could purchase production and *make a special feature of it*. I had one or two lots sent out and had some very nice sample bits back and matter was just assuming shape when war broke out and Dr. Nesfield is now with the army. When war is over I hope he will pay us a visit and that it will lead to this industry being started at once.¹⁸ [italics added]

Reina Lewis has remarked that “it is not so much that ‘imperial culture’ developed to promote imperialism, but that, as a pervasive economic, social, political and cultural formation, the imperial project could not but influence how people thought, behaved and created.”¹⁹ Creating in and for a culture marked by imperialism, the Mortons were no exception. They were undoubtedly aware of the Victorian fascination with the Orient and chose their designs to reflect aspects of this intriguing product, the Oriental carpet. Although the Eastern techniques were copied and the designs employed similar forms and colour selection as those of the East, early Donegal carpets were using the *fashion* for the Orient as a marketing strategy rather than trying to accurately recreate a Persian design (Figure 6).²⁰ This is clear from James Morton’s “Notes on some of my activities in Morton

¹⁸ “James Morton’s notes for his programme for the development of the Sundour Carpet Industry,” Morton Sundour Archive, Archive of Art and Design, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, AAD 3/224 (1916).

¹⁹ Lewis, 13.

²⁰ An example of the ever changing nature of the carpet designs and complete disregard for accuracy is the *Naas* carpet (c.1907) woven for Liberty’s. This carpet was later renamed the *Youghal* and later still the *Killarney* (*The Studio* (June 1907)). In this instance, it is clear that the transition from Persian styles to the more fashionable Celtic ones was made in accordance with popular taste. Another example of this is a green carpet designed by Gavin Morton c.1899. Green and black were not used in Persian rugs (particularly in Pakistan) because the colours had religious significance to the people making them (Seminar on Oriental carpets at Dix Milles Villages, Pointe Claire, Quebec, November 1998).

& Co.” where he refers to the development of another type of carpet called Caledon, produced in Darvel, Scotland prior to Donegals:

[The firm] produced carpets designed to mimic Indian carpets I had seen. This was such a selling point that I asked a friend of the family, an old Indian civil servant and candidate for Parliament at the time, what the word for goat hair was and used it as the name of the carpets made to look like Indian ones – “Baleri Bal”.²¹

This cultural appropriation and manipulation for commercial benefit is also evident in newspaper descriptions of Donegal carpets, where the carpets are commonly referred to as considerable ‘rivals’ to their Eastern counterparts. In most of these accounts the author concludes that the Donegal ‘Pastiche-Persians’²² are the better quality product. These carpets could be considered, in Edward Said’s terms, as yet another representation of the Orient produced by Orientalism, “not [a] simple reflection of a true anterior reality, but [a] composite image which came to define the nature of the Orient and the Oriental as irredeemably different and always inferior to the West.”²³ By attributing ‘lack’ to the Eastern product, Morton’s, their patrons, and the critics justified ‘speaking for someone else’ which Rey Chow refers to as “violence as representation.”²⁴

²¹ “Notes made in 1913 on some of my activities in A. M. & Co – James Morton,” Morton Sundour Archive, Archive of Art and Design, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, AAD 3/158-176.

²² Haslam, *Arts and Crafts Carpets*, 8.

²³ Lewis, 16. Lewis explains Edward Said’s use of the term ‘Orientalism’ as follows: “Rather than accept the term as one that designates an area of neutral scholarly expertise (be it Oriental languages, literature, customs), Said argues that Orientalism was and is a discourse in which the West’s knowledges about the Orient are inextricably bound up with its domination over it. ... Said is able to consider how Orientalism’s classifications of the East as different and inferior legitimised Western intervention and rule.”

²⁴ Rey Chow, 14.

Clearly one aspect of the Donegal patrons' culturally-transmitted competence and aesthetic (*habitus*) is the notion of empire-building and a sense of superiority toward the British Empire's colonial peoples, authorising Morton's use of these colonies' cultural products. Returning to Bourdieu's theory, it is apparent the Mortons were led, by competition with other producers and by the specific interests linked to their position, to produce distinct products which would meet the different cultural interests of their consumers' class condition, thereby offering them a real possibility of being satisfied. Since, according to Bourdieu, a work of art only exists to the extent that it is perceived, i.e. deciphered, this possibility of being satisfied is an important factor in the success of the Donegal product.²⁵ The Irish carpet industry's success demonstrates that Morton's clientele possessed the means of appropriating and deciphering the cultural codes in a Donegal carpet.

THE ARTS AND CRAFTS MOVEMENT (1850-1920)

By 1900, in order to secure their place in the cultural markets of Britain, Ireland and North America, Morton & Co. added floral designs in the Arts and Crafts style to their repertoire (Figure 7). Using designers associated with the Arts and Crafts Movement, such as C. F. A. Voysey, Sidney Mawson and George Walton, and highlighting the destitute condition of the people of County Donegal and the hand-crafted nature of their carpet production, Morton's successfully integrated their product into the Arts and Crafts Movement. This connection is romanticised in their New York catalogue:

²⁵ Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 227-231.

As [William] Morris was the “child of Ruskin” and of the mediaevalists over whose glittering, dusky parchments he pored in his early Oxford days – so the Mortons were from the beginning of the great Art movement, near kin to Morris in their magnificent fealty to faith in a future converting the stolid drudgery of mere toil and labour into the joy of labour’s reward in adequate Art terms.²⁶

The late nineteenth century in Britain was marked by social reform movements intended to better the situation of the poor and the working classes in society.²⁷ Social settlement houses, such as Henrietta and Samuel Barnett’s Toynbee Hall (1884) and Mary Ward’s Passmore Edwards Settlement (1890), were meant to close the gap between the social classes by having college-educated people, often single women, provide services for the working classes and the poor. These settlements were committed to adult education and youth work (such as play centres and classrooms for children with disabilities), as well as housing, health and economic development for the working classes.²⁸ Other reform movements included the Kyrle Society, founded in 1878 by Miranda Hill, aimed at improving the social conditions of the poor through music, entertainment, decoration of public halls and the cultivation of small open spaces. Hill’s sister, Octavia, was also convinced of the need to preserve public open spaces, ‘open-air sitting rooms for the poor’, and was instrumental in the development of the National Trust. Hill also joined the

²⁶ “Rugs & Carpets – Rich Novelties and Beautiful Standards – Charming New Decorative Fabrics in Unfadable Colours” in *Sundour and Donegal Catalogue* (New York: Witcombe, McGeachin & Co., c.1900), 5; held in the Morton Sundour Archive, Archive of Art and Design, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, AAD 4/666 (1978).

²⁷ Tensions between imperialists and domestic reformers were sharpened by Britain’s conflict with the Boer republics in South Africa (1899). (Gilbert, 44 and Weiner, 132.)

²⁸ A. Briggs, and A. Macartney, *Toynbee Hall: The First Hundred Years* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984); J. Sutherland, *Mrs. Humphry Ward: Eminent Victorian, Pre-Eminent Edwardian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Eileen Boris, *Art and Labor* (1986); Deborah Weiner, *Architecture and Social Reform* (1994).

Commons Preservation Society to help secure access to the countryside for those living in urban, industrial environments.²⁹

The Arts and Crafts Movement also played a significant role in this social reform. Founded by theorists, architects and designers in Victorian Britain, most notably William Morris, the Movement was originally concerned with the reform of design and taste in Britain. However, Arts and Crafts reform soon meant a change in working conditions rather than simply design aesthetics.³⁰ As the harsh working conditions in which many cultural goods were produced became evident, the Movement's proponents advocated an alternative mode of production. Instead of the harshness of late-nineteenth-century industrialism, these reformers wished to create a working environment which would foster spiritual harmony through the work process and change that very process and its products.³¹ In this system, the workers were expected to make beautiful, functional objects for everyday use in any home. Belief in the restorative power of craftsmanship and the search for a 'simple life' led many leaders of the Movement to establish workshops in idyllic, rural surroundings where art was promoted as a way of life. From this socialist foundation came

²⁹ Deborah Weiner, *Architecture and Social Reform* (1994); C. Waters, *British Socialists* (1990).

³⁰ See Eileen Boris, "'Dreams of Brotherhood and Beauty': The Social Ideas of the Arts and Crafts Movement," in *The Art that is Life: The Arts and Crafts Movement in America, 1875-1920*, ed. Wendy Kaplan (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1987).

³¹ Elizabeth Cumming, and Wendy Kaplan, *The Arts and Crafts Movement* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 7-9. For an informative discussion of the Movement in Ireland and Scotland see Elizabeth Cumming, and Nicola Gordon Bowe, *The Arts and Crafts Movements in Dublin and Edinburgh, 1885-1925* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1998).

four main principles of the Arts and Crafts Movement – joy in labour, design unity, individualism and regionalism.³²

William Morris' Arts and Crafts ideology was echoed in many accounts of the Donegal carpet industry. Excerpts from the 1903 Liberty's catalogue *Founding a National Industry: Irish Carpet Exhibition*, identify in the Morton enterprise several key tenets of the Arts and Crafts Movement – the carpet's handmade quality: "The charm of these carpets when finished is largely derived from the very fact that being hand-made they have that artistic quality of individuality which no power loom can give"; the individuality of design and the joy the workers derived from the labour: "There is interest, variety and pleasure in the work, and it is such that individual skill and workmanship come largely into play"; and the Movement's opposition to the effects of industrialisation: "In Ireland there are but few teeming cities and but little material wealth, there is simplicity of life; her children have escaped the sordid, deadening effect of machine work; [and they live] in more constant touch with nature."³³ The extremely hard work involved in the hand production of carpets (and most other Arts and Crafts products) is considered a joy in these uninformed remarks. The Victorian tendency to romanticise the pastoral is also clearly operating in this instance.

³² Ibid.

³³ *Founding a National Industry: Irish Carpet Exhibition*, Liberty & Co. catalogue no. 80, National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Exhibition "held at the Grafton Gallery, Bond Street, London, W., Saturday March the 7th to Friday 13th, 1903, inclusive. Organised by Messrs Liberty with a view to extend the hand-tufted carpet industry in the west of Ireland."

Many newspaper articles contain similar passages about the Donegal carpet enterprise. For instance, Gustav Stickley ran an article expressing this same viewpoint in his 1901 issue of *The Craftsman*: “The impetus of this industry, the methods therein employed, and even the name given to the fabrics are due to William Morris.”³⁴ Such accounts further established Morton’s Donegal carpets within the Arts and Crafts Movement. The recognised name and prestige of the Movement, or its ‘symbolic capital,’³⁵ was invested in the Donegal carpet enterprise, making it a successful *international* operation.

WORKERS, DESIGNERS AND JAMES MORTON

In the written accounts of the Donegal carpet industry, there is a voice missing – that of the Irish workers. The praise accorded to the Mortons for their use of Arts and Crafts designs and designers overlooks the possibility that the weavers may have contributed to these designs.³⁶ It is very difficult to fill the gaps left by these accounts and some would argue dangerous to try.³⁷ Still, by exploring women’s place in nineteenth-century Irish

³⁴ Irene Sargent, “A New Irish Industry,” *The Craftsman* 1, no. 3 (December 1901): 34-39.

³⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 7: “Symbolic capital refers to the degree of accumulated prestige, celebrity, consecration or honour and is founded on a dialectic of knowledge (*connaissance*) and recognition (*reconnaissance*).”

³⁶ There is evidence, however, that ‘workers’ could become ‘designers’ in some textile industries. See James Smyth, “Ye never got a spell to think about it.’ Young Women and Employment in the Inter-War Period: A Case Study of a Textile Village,” in *The World is Ill Divided: Women’s Work in Scotland in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, eds. Eleanor Gordon, and Esther Breitenbach (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), 95-116.

³⁷ Rey Chow, in *Writing Diaspora*, presents a convincing argument: “But what kind of argument is it to say that the subaltern’s ‘voice’ can be found in the *ambivalence* of the imperialist’s speech? It is an argument which ultimately makes it unnecessary to come to terms with the subaltern since she has already ‘spoken,’ as it were, in the system’s gaps. All we would need to do would be to continue to study – to deconstruct – the rich and ambivalent language of the imperialist! ... Instead, a radical alternative can be conceived only when we recognise the essential *untranslatability* from the subaltern discourse to

society, examining references to the workers in James Morton's writings and explaining the design process involved in carpet-making, a more complete picture may be presented without proposing to *spea*k *for* someone.

Timothy Foley has described nineteenth-century Irish women as follows:

Women [were], by nature sensitive, altruistic, self-giving, in the words of Charles Kingsley, "born for others," virtually Christlike in their self-abnegation, unfitted to the outdoor rigours of the public sphere and [needing] the "protection" afforded by the enclosing domestic circle, though this fortress was increasingly seen by many women as a prison. Women were the *keepers of tradition*, the exemplars of morality as traditionally defined, the disinfecting element in a morally dissolute society.³⁸

Although the women involved in Morton's Donegal carpet enterprise were working beyond the 'protective' reach of the domestic circle, the firm's marketing strategy promoted these hand-made carpets as traditional, re-situating them within the realm of the domestic. Thus Morton's removed these women from the 'rigours of the public sphere', in which they worked, by defining them and referring to them as 'keepers of tradition'.

This re-placing of the women workers within the scope of the domestic sphere undermines their position as legitimate workers. The constant references to them as 'girls' in the firm's archives confirms this. Still, there is evidence that these 'girls' taught other workers and could have been involved at the design level. James Morton's notes on the Donegal carpet

imperialist discourse. ... The subaltern cannot speak not because there are not activities in which we can locate a subaltern mode of life/culture/subjectivity, but because ... 'speaking' itself belongs to an already well-defined structure and history of domination." (35-36)

³⁸ Timothy P. Foley, "Public Sphere and Domestic Circle: Gender and Political Economy in Nineteenth-Century Ireland," in *Gender Perspectives in Nineteenth-Century Ireland: Public and Private Spheres*, eds. Margaret Kelleher and James H. Murphy (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1997), 21.

enterprise held at the Scottish Records Office identify two women actively involved in the development of the Donegal industry. Bella Clelland and Mary Lawson were taught by a Wilton weaver, Herbert Downton, and then sent to Ireland to ‘act as teachers’ there.³⁹ According to one report, many of the ‘girls’ Morton hired remained with the firm for many years, often until they were married. Despite this apparent loyalty, there were problems with the workforce. James Morton’s account of an attempted strike is a reminder of how the gender roles described above played out in the workplace:

There was considerable difficulty in getting [the workers] to get the speed up. I have many records from that time of devices to get up the pace: day and week examinations, prizes for best loom, best girl and comparison between same girls at one visit and another. At the end of March 1899 we had perhaps 40 girls, and some outsiders were evidently trying to make them dissatisfied with wages. One morning they refused to start and after I had shown them that they were even now, at a new industry, earning 3 or 4 times what they ever earned before and in far shorter days, and stated very emphatically that if they were not every girl of them started in an hour’s time, the doors would be locked and they would never see the looms again – they sat down quietly to work and nothing more was heard of it.⁴⁰

He continues to downplay the event by explaining that “when these little troubles with workers arose those at home thought we should stop the thing before we got further involved, but personally I rather enjoyed the romance of it and urged that we mustn’t go

³⁹ “Notes written in 1916 by James Morton – Business Descriptions,” Morton Sundour Archive, Archive of Art and Design, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, AAD 3/237-266; “Biographical note on Alexander Morton, written for the firm’s Minute Book by James Morton, 1924,” Morton Sundour Archive, Archive of Art and Design, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, AAD 3/431-434.

⁴⁰ Ibid. Judith Hoad explains the extreme poverty of Co. Donegal meant that during the infancy of the trade union movement in industrialised areas of Britain, mass exploitation took place in Donegal: “But was it exploitation? Everyone worked with the profit motive to the forefront. Alexander Morton came from Scotland to establish his carpet factories *solely because he could employ cheap labour and thereby keep the cost of production down*. But the working conditions were good and the income, small as it was, enabled the families of the girls he employed, to buy basic necessities which brought better health and nutrition to them. As a result unions have still hardly a toe-hold in Donegal County. The well-established firms that had been founded in the wake of the Congested Districts Board saw to that. Almost a century later there are still textile companies with no union representation, but the workers tend to stay all their working lives in the one company until the company takes on the character of a sort of extended family.” [my emphasis] (Hoad, 121-122.)

back simply because [our new venture] had met a squall.”⁴¹ This description demonstrates the lack of commitment the Mortons had to the area. James Morton would transplant or cease operations altogether rather than consider the demands of his workers.⁴² His assumption that it was ‘outsiders’ who instigated the strike demonstrates Morton’s gender biases. He cannot imagine that his ‘girls’ orchestrated a strike to better their own situation or that these workers were capable of thinking for themselves. Regardless of what Morton may have thought, the women continued to demonstrate their dissatisfaction. Morton recounts that “one afternoon Etwall [the resident foreman, dismissed several girls] for late coming in and the whole crew gave ... their notice to leave. The girls have no regard for punctuality and are a bad example of indifference and lightness of Irish girls. Etwall himself has no nerve, feckless as a rash.”⁴³ Morton was obviously upset by his workers’ lack of respect for his rules and his foreman’s lack of authority in handling the situation. Though these incidents do not explain why the workers were unhappy, they demonstrate Morton’s treatment of his workers and are useful to compare with critics’ and commentators’ descriptions of the industry.

⁴¹ “Notes written in 1916 by James Morton – Business Descriptions,” Morton Sundour Archive, Archive of Art and Design, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, AAD 3/237-266. Examples of a weaver’s wage: Edward Parsons (10 Weaver’s Guild Terrace, Wilton) earned 30s. while his two married daughters each made 8s. John Stokes (1 Weaver’s Guild Terrace, Wilton), a 47-year-old weaver, earned 25s. with “no off time paid,” his 2 ‘boys’ (aged 24 and 7 years) made 23s. while his 5 ‘girls’ (aged 18, 16, 14, 13, and 9 years) could earn from 8 to 12s.

⁴² Unfortunately, this kind of attitude still plagues the textile industry. Recently for instance, Levi Strauss moved from Texas to Honduras, while Nike moved to South East Asia.

⁴³ “Addresses of carpet weavers at Wilton,” Morton Sundour Archive, Archive of Art and Design, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, AAD 3/371.

The weavers' role in the designs of the carpets is another interesting aspect of the Donegal carpet production process. It is particularly interesting when the Arts and Crafts designs are analysed. The prestige associated with the Arts and Crafts Movement eclipsed any potential acknowledgement of less famous contributors to the designs. As Ruskin wrote: "drawing may be taught by tutors but design only by heaven."⁴⁴ Yet manufacturers found that only designers with an intimate knowledge of the production techniques supplied designs which were practicable, and so they were reluctant to commission outsiders. The difficulty for the individual Arts and Crafts designers was to discover the intricacies of carpet production and to master its special demands, for without that knowledge their designs would be useless. It is also unlikely that many weavers went on to become designers since the cost alone might have dissuaded many.⁴⁵ A series of articles, entitled "Elementary Notes on Carpet Designing" (1882), lists the equipment required:

The beginner will need design paper ... ordinary charcoal paper ... soft sketching charcoal, medium soft No. 1 Faber pencils, a piece of India rubber, a foot rule; two bottles, a large one for water, and a smaller one for thick gum water; some pure gum-arabic powdered fine, a good-size notebook, a pen-knife; and, finally, a quarter of a pound each of vermilion, ivory black, flake white, middle chrome green, lemon chrome, deep orange chrome, neueider green, Vandyke brown, burnt sienna, carmine, indigo and cobalt blue, the ordinary dry colours for "gouache" painting. ... There will also be necessary a folding mirror with two leaves about fifteen inches in width and seven in height, a steel palette-knife and one of horn, a glass slab for grinding colors on; a sponge, and several each of No. 4 and No. 6 camel hair or sable brushes, and some tracing and impression paper.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ E. T. Cook, and Alexander Wedderburn, eds., *The Works of John Ruskin*, vol. XV (London: n.p., 1904), 344, quoted in Haslam, *Arts and Crafts Carpets*, 13.

⁴⁵ Haslam, *Arts and Crafts Carpets*, 31-33.

⁴⁶ Frank Forbes, "Elementary Notes on Carpet Designing," *Art Interchange* (1882), quoted in Haslam, *Arts and Crafts Carpets*, 33-34.

Although the weavers would be intimately aware of the processes, they would be unlikely to afford the materials necessary to complete a design. Still, there were some critics who felt a manufacturer should nurture any potential talent within their organisation. The women workers' handwork, responsible for the production of these carpets, was viewed as having artistic merit in an article of the *Journal and Proceedings of the Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland*:

The only advice one would feel emboldened to proffer [Morton & Co. in their venture in Ireland] is, "Pay your designers well," and, at the same time, ascertain, in respect of the lesser goods, whether you have not amongst your workers some who have a natural gift for design. Seek to develop this gently, and you will soon find you are not only bringing up a series of mechanical workers, but of artists, some of whom may eventually prove a credit to you.⁴⁷

This excerpt demonstrates that, while Morton's may or may not have heeded this advice, there were people in a position of authority who felt that workers could add more than simply labour to the value of a carpet. Although this discussion is frustrating since first-hand accounts by workers are rare, it does provide a context for the weavers in Donegal.

The weavers' contribution to design can only be speculated, whereas James Morton's involvement in design can be demonstrated by his relationships with designers. Morton's connection to the Arts and Crafts Movement illuminates his dealings with identifiable designers, since many were leading artists of the Movement. A correspondence between James Morton and the designer C. F. A. Voysey, records the development of a business relationship, even friendship, and its sad deterioration. These letters also illustrate how acutely aware this designer was of trends and public taste. Voysey's poignant comments

⁴⁷ *Journal and Proceedings of the Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland* 1, no. 3 (1901): 195-6.

reflect the realities of a designer of 'world renown' (Figures 8-9). On 17 April 1918, Voysey wrote to Morton of being "within measurable distance of the workhouse. Can you keep me by giving me anything to do? I should indeed be thankful if you could help me to keep afloat." Three days later, he wrote to Morton thanking him for £25, payment in advance for work commissioned.⁴⁸ Later still, Voysey again wrote for assistance from Morton:

26 April 1918

My dear Morton,

About this time last year I had the good fortune to sell you £50 worth of designs. Is it possible I wonder that you would come and see my new ones or allow me to bring them to you. I am in terrible low water and distracted by financial worry. I have not as much as £60 left.

No one will commission an architect of 72. I hope you and all yours are very well.

With kindest regards to Mrs. Morton and yourself. From yours very sincerely,

C. F. A. Voysey

By 15 June 1929, his tone was bitter: "P.S.: the Council of the RIBA have unanimously elected me a full fellow. A compliment which will not prevent me from starving." In another example of his displeasure with the art world and general public he wrote, on 28 June 1929: "Public taste at present makes me feel my designs are not worth the paper they are drawn on. It is a sad business to have lived too long and still keep on living."⁴⁹

Although these letters have an unhappy tone, the relationship between the two men is still amicable. Morton appears to have helped the designer on several occasions, even

⁴⁸ "Correspondence with C. F. A. Voysey," Morton Sundour Archive, Archive of Art and Design, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, AAD 4/410-454 (1978).

⁴⁹ Ibid.

investigating a copyright problem Voysey was having with another firm. However, the letters become quite hostile in the following exchange:

18 April 1931

I did not write to you after the visit which I paid to you with my son, because I felt so grieved, not to say disgusted, at the attitude you seemed to assume. I had expected it to be a pleasant visit, especially introducing my son to you for the first time as he had known of you ever since he was a child. We are really not requiring any designs such as you have ready, and after your attitude, I seemed to feel no obligation in taking the matter further.

James Morton

20 April 1931

You have only yourself to thank. At your last visit you had not a word of praise for my work and after I had shown you between 40 and 50 designs, you asked if I could not show you something fresh! It is a grievous pity your son was present to witness such treatment of a designer.

C. F. A. Voysey

This is an interesting set of letters as it demonstrates the relationship between the designer and the businessman. It reflects the differences between the two points of view, especially concerning a design. A contract between Voysey and Morton further illustrates the business side of their relationship. In it, Voysey must produce “ten sufficiently original designs to Morton a year for which he will be paid £20/design.” If there is a dispute between the parties about the originality of the design, they must bring the designs to the President of the Royal Academy of Art whose decision will be final.⁵⁰ In another series of letters between Morton and the designer, George Walton, it is clear that Morton took an active role in design creation. On 12 July 1928, Walton writes that he was very interested in the contents of Morton’s letter regarding “the hand tufted Donegal Carpets and I am applying myself to changing designs on the lines you suggest. It opens up new ideas and I

⁵⁰ Morton Family Correspondence, National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

shall do my best to carry them through successfully.” Morton replies later that summer, after receiving Walton’s designs: “I think this is a very good carpet character, and has the elements of very interesting floor covering.”⁵¹

In this exchange, Walton’s letter in particular illustrates the collaborative nature of his design work for Morton & Co. The range of designs Walton produced for Morton’s is remarkable, and shows his earnest effort to arrive at a style which would meet with the firm’s approval (Figures 10-12). He appears to have had difficulty adjusting his designs to the strict requirements of carpet weaving. Morton’s involvement in Walton’s design development could have more to do with this technical aspect of designing than with the artistic aspects of it. Still, Morton continued to accept his designs and even paid him a retainer fee. Apparently, those who knew him well could not bear to see Walton fall on hard times.⁵² As his long-time friend, Voysey remarked: “May one who has known George Walton for forty years intimately be allowed to testify to his lovable nature. He could not say an unkind word about any man. ... He was the most gentle of men with strong feelings always under control.”⁵³ Given this characterisation of Walton, it is not surprising that his letters to Morton never became bitter and that Morton’s relationship with the designer remained friendly even during difficult times.

⁵¹ “Correspondence with George Walton,” Morton Sundour Archive, Archive of Art and Design, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, AAD 4/455-515 (1978).

⁵² Karen Moon, *George Walton: Designer and Architect* (Oxford: White Cockdale Publishing, 1993), 169-173.

⁵³ Voysey testimonial to Walton, 1933 (RIBA), quoted in Moon, 169.

‘A NEW NATIONAL INDUSTRY’

Despite the industry’s acceptance into the Arts and Crafts Movement, there were some who felt that Morton’s had an opportunity to develop a unique national industry from the Donegal carpets rather than following Persian precedent or Arts and Crafts guidelines. For example, a reviewer for the *Journal and Proceedings of the Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland* wrote:

[This Donegal carpet is] obviously an attempt to vie with a Turkey carpet, which it successfully does, comparing well (we fancy) in the matter of price; still it would seem better to keep the famous Donegal industry as Irish as possible. Why not a shamrock border?⁵⁴

Though billed in a 1910 Liberty’s catalogue as “Irish Hand-woven carpets. ... Products of a peasant industry equal in quality to the Turkey carpets of old world renown,” the carpets did have Celtic motifs incorporated into their designs as early as 1902. The first recorded example of a Donegal carpet bearing a Celtic design was one carried out for the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for their offices at the Cork Exhibition of 1902.⁵⁵

The Liberty catalogues do acknowledge this design transition. In a section entitled “The Revival of Celtic Art,” the catalogue writer proclaims: “amid those inspiring hills, the inherent qualities of the Celt will again assert themselves; the high standard of ancient Celtic Civilisation will be recalled, and a new Celtic Art will interpret it, as beautiful and

⁵⁴ *Journal and Proceedings of the Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland* 1, no. 3 (1901): 195-6.

⁵⁵ *Artistic Carpets Produced on British Looms*, Liberty & Co. catalogue no. 171 (1910), National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

distinctively National as any its past History records.”⁵⁶ Indeed, Morton’s designers did interpret historical symbols and artwork in order to develop a distinctly ‘Celtic’ style of carpet design (Figure 13). These designs originated in much the same way as Alice Hart’s ‘Kells Embroidery’ did, by borrowing from historical sources. The most popular design source was the *Book of Kells*, a lavishly decorated series of gospel manuscripts produced between the seventh and ninth centuries (Figures 14-15). Despite some question regarding the Irish nature of its production, the book was seen (and continues to be seen) as the symbol of a flourishing Irish art and culture. In this discussion of Donegal carpet designs, how the historical *Book of Kells* became intertwined with Irish history, legend and nationalism is more important than the facts of its production.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the ‘Irish Revival’ was affecting all areas of cultural production (literature, music and the visual arts) and the *Book of Kells* was viewed as an inspiring symbol of Irish nationalism and creativity. Nicola Gordon Bowe explains that unlike England, Ireland had no industrial revolution to react against. In Ireland, in common with other impoverished, agriculturally-based nations seeking home rule and vernacular expression, the roots of culture and identity, and a growing spirit of national consciousness, were given substance by archaeological and antiquarian research in the nineteenth century. She concludes that this research provided a vocabulary for politics, literature, the revival of the Irish language, dress, music, theatre, architecture and the

⁵⁶ *Founding a National Industry: Irish Carpet Exhibition*, Liberty & Co. catalogue no. 80, National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

applied arts.⁵⁷ Nationality in art became a matter that was repeatedly praised by critics and commentators although only occasionally by artists themselves. To what degree Irish designers should rely on Celtic ornamental details to achieve a national character in their work was a matter of opinion but the need for some kind of ‘national’ character in Irish art and design seems to have been commonly understood.⁵⁸ Morton & Co. was not immune to this cultural trend, as seen in their Celtic-style carpet designs. Still, at a time when Ireland’s union with Britain was being questioned and Home Rule⁵⁹ was resurfacing in the political arena, it seems surprising that a Protestant Scottish manufacturer would be eager to promote an Irish national art. In order to reconcile these seemingly incompatible components at work in the same industry, i.e. Irish nationalism and Scottish business interests, it is important to investigate Irish nationalism and English notions of Ireland.

The perception of the Irish as inferior to the English was a commonly-held opinion in nineteenth-century British society. In 1869, Sydney Smith, a ‘friendly’ British observer wrote that the Irishman had many ‘good’ qualities:

He is brave, witty, generous, eloquent, hospitable, and open-hearted; but he is vain, ostentatious, extravagant, and fond of display – light in counsel – deficient in

⁵⁷ Nicola Gordon Bowe, “The Irish Arts and Crafts Movement (1886-1925),” in *Irish Arts Review Yearbook, 1990-1991*, 175.

⁵⁸ Paul Larmour, *The Arts and Crafts Movement in Ireland*, 126.

⁵⁹ The issue of Irish self-government in the form of home rule was a prominent feature of late-nineteenth-century Irish political debates. Irish Home Rule has been defined as “the restoration to Ireland of representative government in accordance with the constitutionally expressed will of a majority of the people, and carried out by a ministry constitutionally responsible to those whom they govern.” (O’Day, 142) Because of the uneven distribution of wealth in Ireland, majority rule was not always seen as the best method of governing Ireland, hence the debate. For an informative discussion of Home Rule, see Alan O’Day, “Home Rule and the Historians,” in *The Making of Modern Irish History*, eds. D. George Boyce and Alan O’Day (New York: Routledge, 1996), 141-162; and James Loughlin, *Gladstone, Home Rule and the Ulster Question, 1882-93* (New Jersey: Humanities Press International, 1987).

perseverance – without skill in private or public economy – an enjoyer, not an acquirer – one who despises the slow and patient virtues – who wants the superstructure without the foundation – the result without the previous operation – the oak without the acorn and the three hundred years of expectation. The Irish are irascible, prone to debt, and to flight, and very impatient of the restraints of law. Such a people are not likely to keep eyes steadily upon the main chance, like the Scotch or the Dutch.⁶⁰

The compliments at the beginning aside, the impression of the Irish left by this diatribe is not a particularly favourable one. Another example of this colonial attitude toward the Irish is the Archbishop Richard Whately's categorisation of the Irish native language as a "language of savages."⁶¹ These commentaries form part of the nineteenth-century debate surrounding Ireland's place as a colony or an intrinsic part of the United Kingdom – whether England was a 'mother country' or a 'sister kingdom'.

In response to the question of Ireland's 'anomalous position' within the British Empire, Henry L. Jephson, in 1876, claimed that it was 'an incontrovertible fact' that among the numerous dependencies of the British crown there was not one that stood in the same relation to Great Britain as Ireland. He argued that Ireland was not a colony, despite being governed by a governor-general as colonies were, since it did not have a house of representatives as colonies do. Jephson felt that because Ireland was governed by a deputy, it could not be regarded as an integral part of the United Kingdom, even though Irish representatives were sent to the Imperial Parliament. Jephson arrogantly concluded

⁶⁰ Sydney Smith, *The Works* (London, 1869), 355, quoted in Timothy Foley, and Thomas A. Boylan, *Political Economy and Colonial Ireland: The Propagation and Ideological Function of Economic Discourse in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 118.

⁶¹ R. Whately, *Elements of Rhetoric*, 7th ed. (London: n.p., 1870), 170, quoted in Foley and Boylan, 128.

his remarks about Ireland by stating that the only conclusive answer was “that Ireland has been thoroughly and completely united to Great Britain, and that consequently no higher privileges remain to be granted to her.”⁶²

Timothy Foley situates Jephson’s comments within a discourse which held that both Roman Catholicism and Irishness made for economic backwardness. Central to this view was the perceived “moral antipathy to economic rationality [and] opposition to individualism” of the Irish.⁶³ It is this unusual situation of Ireland, as part of the West yet suffering from similar forms of Imperial domination imposed on non-Western countries colonised by Great Britain, which provides an opportunity for the application of postcolonial theory.

In *Writing Diaspora*, Rey Chow defines the notion of a ‘field’ as analogous to the notion of ‘hegemony’, in the sense that its formation involves the rise to dominance of a group that is able to diffuse its culture to all levels of society. She explains that margins, or boundaries, always accompany this notion of a field. In this analysis, Ireland can be seen as a margin soon to be incorporated as new property.⁶⁴ In fact, as the social privileges associated with the various religious groups in Ireland attest to, Protestant colonisers had effectively incorporated this particular margin.

⁶² H. L. Jephson, “Irish Statute Law Reform,” *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland* 7 (1876-9): 376-385, quoted in Foley and Boylan, 136-147.

⁶³ Foley and Boylan, 147.

⁶⁴ Chow, 15-16.

National education was but one of the many tools used to diffuse British Protestant culture to all levels of society in Ireland. Education played a crucial role in the pacification of Ireland and in combating Irish dissension in the nineteenth century. According to Foley, education, formal and informal, set out not only to improve Irish knowledge but, in effect, to change what was perceived as the Irish 'character'. National education's goal was to provide an ordered, rational discourse, promoting affection for England and the established Church. It was perceived as an instrument of national advancement while, at the same time, an organ of empire.⁶⁵

These nineteenth-century opinions of the 'Irish character' form the background to this discussion of the Morton enterprise. This social context suggests three interconnected possibilities which might explain the Celtic designs of the Donegal carpets. First, identifying the patrons of these particular carpets could explain Morton's acceptance of traditional Celtic symbols in their designs. It might be as simple as supply and demand; the patrons, in this case the Irish Government and Liberty's, wished to have Celtic imagery in their carpets so Morton made them to order. Still, this does not explain *why* the patrons chose to have Celtic symbols incorporated in their carpets.

Assuming there is no *political* motivation behind these commissions, a second alternative is to look to the nineteenth-century doctrine of political economy for an explanation.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Foley and Boylan, 116.

⁶⁶ Timothy Foley describes nineteenth-century political economy as being "perceived as a natural science, its laws the laws of nature, which were not only seen as given and unchanging, but as virtually and utterly ruthless in their application." (Foley, "Public Sphere and Domestic Circle," 21.)

Timothy Foley claims that within this climate of *laissez-faire* economics, protectionism was sometimes allowed to operate in the specific, strategic context of enabling 'backward', agricultural countries to modernise. Operating on the same stereotypes of national character, Irish nationalists argued that Ireland "was a 'local' exception to universalist economic laws, was by nature more domestic and feminine, and being both 'young' and female was in double need of protection from the harsh winds of free trade and *laissez-faire*."⁶⁷ He concludes that it was this perceived 'delicacy' of the 'feminine' Celts which served to distance and disqualify them from political power. Keeping this in mind, Morton & Co.'s designs could be viewed as promoting this notion of the feminine, backward Celt, recalling symbols of an idealised past. For as Fintan Cullen quotes in *Visual Politics: The Representation of Ireland*, "if the Celts stay quaint they will also stay put."⁶⁸ In this analysis, there *is* consistency between Irish nationalism and Morton's economic goals.

The third possibility is to use postcolonial theory to understand how Ireland was treated as a colony of the British Empire. Fintan Cullen explains that "Ireland was an area on which the centre – that is London – could impose its imaginative perceptions."⁶⁹ One of these perceptions was of the Irish as a race distinct from the British. This racial distinction of the Celts can be seen in advertising, reviews, and promotional material for the Donegal carpet

⁶⁷ Foley, "Public Sphere and Domestic Circle," 21-22.

⁶⁸ Fintan Cullen, *Visual Politics: The Representation of Ireland* (Cork: Cork University press, 1997), 135.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 118.

industry. Yet some titles, like *Founding a National Industry*, imply a certain level of Irish proprietorship and control over this industry. However, in this case, 'national' does not refer to political agency acquired by the Irish and represented in the revival of traditional Celtic imagery. It is not meant to foreshadow the emergence of a subversive anti-colonial nationalism in Ireland, which would ultimately replace the British state to which it was opposed.⁷⁰ Nor is it a reference to nationalist causes like Home Rule and the dissolution of the Union. Rather, it was used to highlight the 'Irishness' of the Morton product. In the same way as they used Persian designs, the Mortons effectively appropriated Irish cultural symbols and used them to represent their version of Ireland.

CONCLUSION

The idealised notions of the Donegal weavers as poor women involved in gainful employment, the Morton factory helping an entire community regain its dignity in the true spirit of the Arts and Crafts Movement, the Oriental motifs and techniques used, and the revival of Celtic traditions in order to create a national industry all became part of the dealer's lore surrounding Donegal carpets. Identifying some of the design transitions which occurred in Donegal carpets and relating them to the social, political and historical context of their production, demonstrates how taste is socially constructed. The Mortons were very astute businessmen who created a 'taste' for their product by identifying their target market's *habitus* and promoting the Donegal carpet to fit the demands of this culturally transmitted aesthetic competence. The Mortons encoded their product, the

⁷⁰ For an analysis of Irish nationalism based on Gramsci's premise that a "subaltern force such as anti-colonial nationalism ... always aims at becoming the State," see Colin Graham, "Subalternity and Gender: Problems of Post-Colonial Irishness," *Journal of Gender Studies* 5, no. 3 (1996): 368.

Donegal carpet, so their prospective clients would have the means of appropriating it and, consequently, the means of assigning value to it. An American writer claimed in 1901: "The merit of the Donegal carpets is inherent. The real article has that dignity which comes from the human thought inwoven and ingrained in the threads and colours: an indefinite quality which never fails to arrest and hold the educated eye."⁷¹ Indeed, as long as Morton's promoted these 'inherent qualities', the Donegal carpets were sure to continue capturing the attention of this so-called educated eye.

⁷¹ Sargent, 34-39.

CHAPTER THREE

MARY SETON WATTS: A CASE STUDY IN 'SYMBOLIC CAPITAL'

In Liberty's 1903 exhibition, *Founding a National Industry: Irish Carpet Exhibition*, the designer of a Donegal carpet titled *The Pelican* was listed as "Mrs. G. F. Watts". The reviewer for the *Irish Independent and Nation* wrote that this hearth rug, designed by Mary Seton Watts, "attracted much attention, the design being symbolical."¹ This sudden breach of the usual anonymity accorded to Morton's designers, in both the press accounts and exhibition catalogue, caught my attention (Figure 16).

Morton's accumulated prestige by associating its product with popular trends such as the Arts and Crafts Movement and the Celtic Revival. This chapter examines how Morton's affiliation with Liberty's also increased the firm's symbolic capital and explores why Liberty's chose to highlight this particular designer, Mary Seton Watts, and how this might have benefited them economically (Figure 17). By investigating this anomaly in both Morton's and Liberty's marketing strategies, I too wish to highlight this gifted designer and her art production.²

¹ *Irish Independent and Nation*, 9 March 1903, 5. This carpet was commissioned and designed by Mary Seton Watts as a gift for "two beautiful young people who will one day ... have one of the loveliest homes in Scotland – Lord and Lady Balcarres." This design is the only work she did for Morton's. ("Letter from M. S. Watts to James Morton dated 15/3/1901, References to Designers, Craftsmen, Architects, etc. appearing in James Morton's Diaries, notebooks and general correspondence," Morton Sundour Archive, Archive of Art and Design, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, AAD 3/390-423)

² Other accounts of Mary Seton Watts (1849-1938) include: Melanie Unwin, "A Woman's Work?: Gender and Authorship, the Watts' Chapel and the Home Arts and Industries Association" (MA Thesis in the

Pierre Bourdieu identifies symbolic capital as “economic or political capital that is disavowed, misrecognised and thereby recognised, hence legitimate, a ‘credit’ which, under certain conditions, and always in the long run, guarantees ‘economic’ profits.”³ The only legitimate accumulation, for the author, critic or art dealer, consists in “making a name for oneself, a known, recognised name, a capital of consecration implying a power to consecrate objects and therefore give value, and to appropriate profits from this operation.”⁴ For those people who live on the sale of cultural services to a clientele, the accumulation of economic capital merges with the accumulation of symbolic capital. According to Bourdieu, the acquisition of a reputation for competence and an image of respectability and honourability can be easily converted into “political positions as a local or national *notable*.”⁵ Certainly Liberty’s, during the late nineteenth century, was a ‘national *notable*’ and the firm’s decision to exhibit Donegal carpets increased the prestige of Morton & Co. along with the desirability of their product. Following Bourdieu’s theory, Liberty’s invested its symbolic capital in the Morton enterprise through the promotion of Donegal carpets in the form of exhibitions and catalogues. At the same time, Morton & Co. was accumulating a capital of consecration by employing leading Arts and

History of Design, Royal College of Art, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 1997); Unwin claims there were two other books being written at the time of her thesis, by Joan Esch of the University of New Hampshire and the following catalogue: Veronica Franklin Gould, *Mary Seton Watts (1849-1938): Unsung Heroine of the Art Nouveau* (n.p.: Veronica Franklin Gould for The Watts Gallery, 1998).

³ Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 75.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 291.

Crafts designers. Although these designers were not acknowledged in the catalogue, exhibition reviews in the press often establish a connection between Morton's and the Movement by listing these designers. In this way, Morton & Co. acquired the prestige associated with these designers without formally recognising them, thereby maintaining the firm's individuality and originality. By not assigning individual credit to these designers, thus avoiding the need to share the capital accrued through this association, Morton's was able to increase its product's cultural value through the invested symbolic capital of both Liberty's and the Arts and Crafts designers.

As their product's value increased through these associations so did the Morton name, eventually resulting in an increase of Morton & Co.'s power to consecrate. These associations benefited all the parties involved, since popular products sold by Liberty's increased the firm's prestige and advanced its recognised name among the people buying these cultural goods. Also, the designers employed by Morton's could use their association to both the Donegal carpets and Liberty's as a means of incurring further commissions. In the end, all participants profited from this circular investment in symbolic capital.

But specifically, what was the symbolic capital associated with the name "Mrs. G. F. Watts" which would explain why her name was included in the Liberty's catalogue of 1903?

HER HUSBAND – G. F. WATTS

Liberty's identification of Mary Seton Watts by her husband's name indicates his significance to the firm, and possibly to Morton & Co. as well (Figure 18). Through her marriage to the British symbolist painter and Royal Academician, Mary Seton Watts (née Fraser-Tytler) acquired further symbolic capital, i.e. an already established and recognised name, a capital of consecration.⁶ The designer used her married name consistently, in her books, her art work and charitable activities. In doing so Mary Seton Watts used this newly-acquired capital to give value to her works.

Although beneficial in most instances, using her husband's name did not always appeal to Mary Seton Watts. As she grew in prestige as an artist in her own right, being associated with an artist as popular as G. F. Watts could be detrimental to her own work, overshadowing it. At the beginning of their married life she wrote: "Instead of my work, I focus on him. It will take me a little while yet to get over being under the shadow of his great work."⁷ Added to his popular public reputation was Watts's own self-image. Pamela Gerrish Nunn cites Watts as "an artist-master ... who in his self-portraits rendered himself as Poussin and Titian, in his dress evoked a Venetian senator or Renaissance friar, and

⁶ George Frederick Watts (1817-1904) was an established painter in the nineteenth century most noted for his painting *Hope* (1886). Other works by Watts include *Irish Famine*, *Death Crowning Innocence* and *Choosing* (of Ellen Terry). A few remarks by Hugh MacMillan give some indication of the esteem in which Watts was held. His book is part of a series which "aims at bringing together the lives of men of genius and character, who, in Mazzini's phrase, are 'God's born interpreters'... [Watts's] name is becoming to an increasingly large public, what it has long been to all who care for true art, the name of an honoured teacher and revered master." (Hugh MacMillan, *The Life-Work of George Frederick Watts*, R. A. (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1906), v-ix.)

⁷ Gould, 33.

eventually gloried in the title 'England's Michelangelo'.⁸ Many of his friends admired and even idolised him, but clearly G. F. Watts held himself in very high esteem as well and this could not have been easy for his wife to contend with. Still, in her book about her husband's life, Mary Seton Watts fondly recollects that after her family moved to London following her father's death in 1881, "the opportunity of seeing Signor [as Watts preferred to be called] came much more often, and as a humble student of art as well as one paying homage, ... these opportunities were to me priceless. Any attempt I then made to write an impression of a visit to him – of what he said or of what he was – always fell so short of the inspiring moments they were intended to preserve, that the pages were usually torn out of the locked and sacred book, and I copied instead the words of some master in language to express what I wanted."⁹ In 1883 she wrote that her initial fear of Watts was gone and that she felt only reverence for his "genius for understanding all the little things of life."¹⁰ Despite this constant admiration, Mary Seton Watts appears to have taken her husband's 'genius' in stride, and though she remained in awe of his talent, she felt equal to the task of being his wife:¹¹ "Before our marriage he had constantly warned me that I had made

⁸ Pamela Gerrish Nunn, *Problem Pictures: Women and Men in Victoria Painting* (Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1995), 6.

⁹ Mary Seton Watts, *George Frederick Watts: The Annals of an Artist's Life*, vol. 2 (London: MacMillan and Co., 1912), 53. This book is commonly referred to as *Annals* in published and archival material which is how I will refer to it in the text.

¹⁰ Watts, 54.

¹¹ Something Ellen Terry, his first wife, could not manage. G. F. Watts had been previously married to the actress when she was seventeen and he was forty-seven years old. Upon discussing the possibility of marriage to a friend, he was told she was too young to marry and too old to adopt. Apparently he considered adopting her before he finally chose to marry her. The fact that he later adopted a young girl, Lilian Chapman (aged 13) leaves many unanswerable questions for the researcher. Unfortunately, Watts's

myself an ideal that was not himself. Some eighteen months afterwards he asked me if I had not found out that he was very different from what I expected. I answered, 'Only in being much less irritable than I thought you would be'.¹²

After meeting through their mutual friend, photographer Julia Cameron, G. F. Watts and Mary Fraser-Tytler developed a long-standing friendship. Chaperoned by her sister Christina, her first visit to his studio in Little Holland House set the tone of their relationship. As she described it, the two women waited outside his studio where the notice "I must beg not to be disturbed till after two o'clock" hung on the door which soon swung open and "Signor came forward to meet us ... the beard was only slightly touched with grey, his hair quite brown very fine in quality, and brushed back from the forehead ... I remember the painter much more distinctly than his work; but he nevertheless so distinctly suggested to me the days of chivalry that I believe I should not have been surprised if, on another visit, I had found him all clad in shining armour."¹³ The communal living arrangements organised by Cameron's sister, Sarah Prinsep, at Little Holland House "functioned as a centre of artistic culture and cultivated unconventionality" and it was within this community that Mary Fraser-Tytler came to know G. F. Watts.¹⁴ This home,

interest in marrying and adopting young girls is far beyond the scope of this thesis. (Wilfrid Blunt, *England's Michelangelo* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1975), 174; Lilian Chapman is referred to at length in Mary Seton Watts's Last Will and Testament, Probate held at Somerset House, London.

¹² Watts, 205.

¹³ Gould, 22.

¹⁴ Jan Marsh, *Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood* (New York: Quartet Books, 1985), 152.

containing “dimly lighted, richly coloured rooms with dark passages opening into lofty studios, [always had a table] spread with boundless welcome.”¹⁵ Although remembered in her *Annals* as the birthplace of her romance with her husband, another writer recalled “at Little Holland House, instead of dressing for dinner, you undress ... somehow in the very delightful atmosphere of this house I seem to perceive a slight element of looseness.”¹⁶ Watts had an entourage of admirers, mostly beautiful young women, and was somewhat ostracised by society because of his failed marriage to the seventeen-year-old Ellen Terry. Despite this and their thirty-three year age difference, Mary Fraser-Tytler chose to spend the rest of her life with him after many years of tutelage and friendship.¹⁷ Although the marriage appeared to be a happy one, especially according to her letters and writing, there are critics who assume this was a marriage of convenience, particularly for the elderly Watts. Her 1938 obituary in *The Times* explained that Mary Seton Watts might have made a name for herself in portraiture or sculpture, but having come under the influence of Watts as a student, she allowed herself to be completely dominated by his personality; and when in 1886, at the age of 69, he asked for her to become his wife, “she did not hesitate to undertake the responsibility and the burden. For in her sincere affection for her *idol*, a burden it was.” The critic goes on to state that “the wooing itself was comparatively void of sentiment.”¹⁸ Still, the length of the marriage (18 years) and the happy reminiscences of

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ George du Maurier from *The Young du Maurier*, ed. D. du Maurier, 1951, 113-119, quoted in Marsh, 379.

¹⁷ They were married on Saturday, 20 November 1886 (Census and Public Records Office, London).

¹⁸ “Mrs. Watts: Widow of the Great Artist,” *The Times*, (London) 7 September 1938, 14.

both contradict this reading of their relationship. Regardless, their collaboration was a successful one and according to Richard Jefferies, curator of the Watts Picture Gallery, it offered Mary Seton Watts the freedom to pursue interests requiring financial backing, in particular the developments of her Potters' Art Guild.¹⁹

When Watts's public image is understood, it is clear why Liberty's might wish to associate their product with his name. However, many of the other designers commissioned by Morton & Co. had equally impressive reputations among Liberty's and Morton's clientele, yet their names are absent. Though certainly a factor in Mary Seton Watts's acknowledgement, it is unlikely that her connection with Watts was the sole reason for her special status in the 1903 exhibition.

HER OWN INTERESTS – THE HOME ARTS AND INDUSTRIES ASSOCIATION

Mary Seton Watts's own accomplishments, especially with the Home Arts and Industries Association (HAIA), could also have been significant for Liberty's and Morton & Co. In 1884, she introduced Watts to the HAIA and the couple remained ardent supporters of the Association throughout their lives.²⁰ Under the patronage of Lord and Lady Brownlow,

¹⁹ In conversation with Richard Jefferies, Summer 1998, Watts Picture Gallery at the Mary Seton Watts centenary exhibition, *Mary Seton Watts: Unsung Heroine of the Art Nouveau*. I wish to thank Mr. Jefferies for taking the time to speak with me about her work and life during my specially guided tour of the exhibition. I am especially grateful to Janet McLean and Richard Jefferies for being so generous about my purchase of the catalogue.

²⁰ In 1884, Mary Seton Watts was spending two evenings a week at a boys' club in Whitechapel teaching a clay modelling class. According to her, the goal was to "give the lads, who were chiefly shoeblacks, an interesting hour or two, and to arouse in them the knowledge of the pleasure of making something in their

the Association was formed by Eglantyne Jebb in the mid-1880s.²¹ In the *Magazine of Art* in 1885, Jebb wrote that the Association's primary purpose was to reconcile the pleasures of the rich with the needs of the poor. She claimed the Association began with individuals throughout England holding classes in the evenings and on Saturday afternoons "for teaching handwork of a recreative description to working [people]."²² According to Jebb, voluntary teaching and unconditional aid to those who held these classes for working people were the 'special features' of the organisation. Many prominent and talented women trained as voluntary teachers, including the Princess of Wales who ran a woodcarving class. These schools were supposed to be rooted in the home-life and surroundings of the people and Jebb claimed the HAIA would "gladly welcome assistance from all those who have the same object at heart."²³ Other aims of the Association included: ensuring England became the home of art through the enjoyment of beauty, and the ability to make beautiful objects available to the mass of the people and not the few; making the home the centre of interest and attraction; reducing the exodus of workers from country to town; reviving local village industries; and holding classes where voluntary teachers would give instruction in arts and handicrafts, covering both design and execution to artisans and labourers.²⁴ Jebb writes that the delight of making something

leisure time. The movement now known as the HAIA, of which I ... was a member, was young, and Signor entered keenly into my interests." (Watts, 58.)

²¹ Gould, 28. Mary Seton Watts dedicated her book, *The Word in Pattern*, to Eglantyne Jebb.

²² E.L. Jebb, "The Home Arts and Industries Association," *Magazine of Art* (1885): 294.

²³ *Ibid.*, 295.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 294-298; and Unwin, 44.

which has “called forth the full exercise of all [a person’s] powers is, in these days of divided and subdivided labour, seldom felt by the [worker].” She believed the Association should aim to help these workers lead happier lives and have “lighter hearts, tidier children, cleaner cottages, and a better moral tone all round.”²⁵ In 1895 the Wattses made a substantial donation of £1050 to the HAIA in order to establish the *Watts Endowment Fund* and by 1901 they were both vice-presidents of the HAIA (there were 41 in total).²⁶

Books about G. F. Watts usually mention his involvement, through his wife, in the HAIA but often under the pretext of her finding a new outlet for her creative ability while supported financially by his painting: “Though Mary was dedicating her life to her ‘Signor’, the artist in her could not long remain suppressed. In the early years of her marriage it found its principal outlet in the HAIA, an activity in which her husband soon became involved. ... Watts and Mary contributed money in their customary generosity, Watts painting two *ad hoc* portraits to raise a thousand pounds. ... Mary’s interest was chiefly in the aesthetic side of the work; Watts also stressed its moral value.”²⁷ In typical fashion, this writer assumes it was Watts who introduced the political or moral element into their interest since his wife was more concerned with the aesthetics of it. Mary Seton Watts’s obituary in *The Times* makes reference to this as well: “Politically Mrs. Watts was a Liberal and had been a suffragist, but she cared little for society and took no part in

²⁵ Ibid., 298.

²⁶ Unwin, 44.

²⁷ Blunt, 222. Some other books on the artist include: W. Loftus Hare, *Watts, 1817-1904* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co., n.d.) and G. K. Chesterton, *G.F. Watts*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1975.

public life, preferring to limit her many interests within her own environment of home arts.”²⁸ Despite this, it could be argued that it was *through* her involvement in the HAIA that she expressed her political ideals. Lynne Walker claims that the Arts and Crafts Movement provided women with alternative roles, institutions and structures which they then used as active agents in their own history.²⁹ I would argue that the HAIA went even further in this regard. Both organisations allowed women an alternative to the commercial system which excluded them and offered them the role of designer-makers which many of them used to acquire financial independence and personal fulfilment.³⁰

The Home Arts and Industries Association allowed Mary Seton Watts the freedom to be political within her prescribed role as woman and wife in nineteenth-century society. This role is outlined in the article “Artist and Wife” from the *Magazine of Art*: “Women are content, as a rule, to be complementary creatures. ... To appreciate neglected genius, to encourage genius in its temporary failures, to foster it in its struggles, and to enjoy its successes, is a mission which the young, generous and sentimental feminine heart is inclined to dream over as the happiest of human destinies.”³¹ Nunn explains that, starting in 1880, a distinct backlash against the female artist manifested itself, in the discourse of

²⁸ “Mrs. Watts: Widow of the Great Artist,” *The Times*, (London) 7 September 1938, 14.

²⁹ Lynne Walker, “The Arts and Crafts Alternative,” in *A View from the Interior: Feminism, Women and Design*, eds. Judy Attfield and Pat Kirkham (London: The Women’s Press, 1989), 165. For an alternative discussion of women’s roles in the Movement see Anthea Callen’s article in the same book: “Sexual Division of Labour in the Arts and Crafts Movement” (151-164).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 172.

³¹ John Oldcastle, “Artist and Wife,” *Magazine of Art* (1881): 478.

art as much as in individual works. She claims the *Magazine of Art* was one of the most active agents of this resurgence of male domination in British art. Commenting on the role of the artist's wife she writes "it is telling of the mood of this decade, in particular, that the artist's wife should be predicated not simply as the husband artist's complement, but rather his complementary other."³² In spite of her restricted role as 'artist's wife', Mary Seton Watts manages to move beyond the boundaries of this ideology by pursuing her interests, both artistic and political, without upsetting the delicate balance she was expected to maintain. Her high-profile involvement with the HAIA, an association supported by royalty and with similar goals to the Arts and Crafts Movement but more successful in their application, could have made her name a valuable commodity for Liberty's and Morton & Co.

HER PHILANTHROPY – NEGOTIATING 'SEPARATE SPHERES' SUCCESSFULLY

Through her philanthropy, Mary Seton Watts effectively negotiated her way within and across the 'separate spheres'³³ idealised in the nineteenth century. Martha Vicinus claims

³² Nunn, 19.

³³ Linda Kerber quotes Alexis de Tocqueville on the concept of separate spheres in marriage: "When ... young women married ... the inexorable opinion of the public carefully circumscribes her within the narrow circle of domestic interest and duties and forbids her to step beyond it." Kerber claims that de Tocqueville in this sentence "provided the physical image (the circle) and the interpretation (that it was a limiting boundary on choices) that would continue to characterize the metaphor [of separate spheres]." She continues by explaining that the phrase 'separate spheres' is a metaphor for complex power relations in social and economic contexts. (Linda Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 1 (June 1988): 10, 28.) However, as Margaret Kelleher aptly notes, "the doctrine of spheres, while a cultural and rhetorical construction, was no less powerful for its fictive basis. In a century of complex and changing power relations, key conflicts, negotiations and resolutions occurred along and between gender lines." (Margaret Kelleher, and James H. Murphy, eds., *Gender Perspectives in Nineteenth-Century Ireland: Public and Private Spheres* (Portland, Oregon: Irish Academic Press, 1997), 17.) Feminist writers continue to deconstruct the ideology of the 'separate spheres.' See for example, Amanda Vickery, "Golden Age to Separate Spheres?"

that philanthropy was traditionally women's particular concern and, during the nineteenth century, its definition was broadened to include virtually every major social problem. She argues that it was from this narrow base of "women's special duties and obligations that women in the nineteenth century came to expand their fields of action and their personal horizons."³⁴ This is certainly true in Mary Seton Watts's case, the most prominent example being her design and construction of a mortuary chapel for the cemetery in Compton, Surrey.³⁵ In order to improve G. F. Watts's failing health, the couple moved to Compton, Surrey and built an estate, Limnerslease (1890-91). By 1894, Mary Seton Watts had proposed to the Compton Parish Council the design for a mortuary chapel, to be completed by workers in the town under her instruction. The Council accepted her proposal and the result was the Watts Mortuary Chapel which was eventually dedicated by the Bishop of Winchester on July 1, 1898 (Figures 19-21).³⁶

A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History," *Historical Journal* 36, no. 3 (1993): 383-414.

³⁴ Martha Vicinus, ed., *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), x. Still, as Melanie Unwin rightly points out, despite the HAIA's central role in the dissemination of the Arts and Crafts ideology, it is rarely mentioned in written histories of either craft or design. She claims the HAIA's lack of recognition "lies not with the absence of its products from national collections, but also in its amateur nature and the predominantly female profile of its organisation." (Unwin, 63-64.)

³⁵ See Unwin for a more complete discussion of the Compton Mortuary Chapel and Mary Seton Watts's resulting activities with the HAIA.

³⁶ Gould, 15-16.

Through the process of building this chapel, Mary Seton Watts established the Potters' Art Guild as a branch of the HAIA.³⁷ In 1899 she exhibited the chapel altar with the Home Arts and Industries Association at the Royal Albert Hall, but it was not until after her husband's death in 1904 that the Guild was officially named. Soon after, the Potters' Art Guild was winning awards at HAIA exhibitions (Figure 22).³⁸ Interestingly, by making almost no reference to the architectural design of the Chapel building, but simultaneously referring to herself as the building's designer, Mary Seton Watts ensured her position was not viewed as encroaching on the masculine profession of architecture, which would place her in a politically radical role. Instead she aligned herself, through her Potters' Art Guild, with the craft of decoration, a traditional site of femininity.³⁹ Regardless, Mary Seton Watts's work on the Compton Chapel demonstrates her leadership, organisational and artistic abilities as well as her determination. Though she avoided 'encroaching on the masculine', she did not allow herself to be restricted by it. Instead, she pursued her interests in spite of their gendered associations, while being sure to represent herself within the accepted norms of feminine behaviour. The Chapel's success and enthusiastic

³⁷ Mary Seton Watts explained that it was in the 'spirit of co-operation' that she organised her Guild whose unglazed terracotta (mainly garden vases and pots) was the product of the Compton village industry. The *Surrey Advertiser and County Times* explained that "she saw in [her Potters' Art Guild] a means of keeping men near their birthplace and at work upon something which was different from ordinary commercial enterprise. Through many years, to her each was a friend and not so much a work man." (*Surrey Advertiser and County Times* (Saturday) 10 September 1938, 10-11; "Letter from M. S. Watts to James Morton dated 3/12/1900, References to Designers, Craftsmen, Architects, etc. appearing in James Morton's Diaries, notebooks and general correspondence," Morton Sundour Archive, Archive of Art and Design, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, AAD 3/390-423.)

³⁸ The Compton Potters' Art Guild won the RHS silver medal for terracotta in 1906 and the Home Arts Gold cross in 1910 (Gould, 15-16).

³⁹ Unwin, 25.

reception by the town of Compton and at the HAIA exhibitions (as early as 1899) secured for Mary Seton Watts a name in her own right.⁴⁰ And the continued success of her Potters' Art Guild, the offshoot of the Chapel project, confirmed her abilities.⁴¹

HER DESIGN – *THE PELICAN*

Mary Seton Watts's design for the Donegal carpet, *The Pelican*, is another example of this type of shifting between the spheres (Figures 24-25). As mentioned earlier (Chapter 2), the designers employed by Morton & Co. were seldom identified and those who were had connections to the Arts and Crafts Movement and were male. There were other women who designed for Morton & Co., but none were acknowledged in the same manner as Mary Seton Watts.⁴² Yet her position as a designer, a traditionally male role, was tempered by her choice of design.

The creative voices of many different people, involved at many different levels of production of a Donegal carpet, were often incorporated into the final product. The

⁴⁰ "The Watts Mortuary Chapel is a creation of genius, unique in England." (Blunt, 224) Considering earlier quotes from this source concerning Mary Seton Watts's abilities and interests (see note 27 for instance) this a remarkable compliment.

⁴¹ In 1907, *The Studio* wrote: "The Exhibition of the HAIA, held annually at the Albert Hall, cannot fail to create interest, though for those who hope to find much work possessing artistic merit the exhibition is usually disappointing ... Among the work which could be seen the display of Ruskin pottery (Mr. Howson Taylor) was the most important, while the Compton School, under the direction of Mrs. G. F. Watts, showed some good examples of terra-cotta ware." *The Studio* 41, no. 171 (June 1907): 65. In view of this unkind opinion of the HAIA in general, the Compton Pottery's favourable, though tempered, mention is rather significant.

⁴² For example, the Glasgow designer and teacher Jessie Newbery (Figure 23). I thank Dr. Janice Helland for bringing this to my attention.

Donegal weavers were expected to follow a pattern set out for them by a designer and were never recognised, at least not in archival material, as adding any creativity to the carpets.

Cheryl Buckley's theory of design suggests a method for analysing the symbolism and feminine voice in Mary Seton Watts's carpet design. Buckley claims women's cultural codes are produced within the context of patriarchy. Their expectations, needs, and desires as "both designers and consumers are constructed within a patriarchy which prescribes a subservient and dependent role to women."⁴³ Mary Seton Watts was well-educated and researched her designs carefully, whether for a rug, a pattern book (such as her *The Word in Pattern*), or her terracotta wares. Raised by her grandparents at Aldourie Castle, their Highland estate near Inverness, she began her education with a governess followed by several years studying in Europe (Dresden and Rome). She attended the South Kensington Art Training School when she was in her early twenties.⁴⁴ By 1872 she was studying at The Slade, established as a "declared training ground for fine artists, unusual in being the first such public fine art school to admit women on equal terms as men."⁴⁵ She also studied privately with a professor, the sculptor Aimée-Jules Dalou, after

⁴³ Buckley, 260.

⁴⁴ Watts, 53-91; "Mrs. Watts: Widow of the Great Artist," *The Times*, (Wednesday) 7 September 1938, 14; *The Surrey Advertiser and County Times*, (Saturday) 10 September 1938, 10-11. Aldourie Castle dates back to 1626 and was enlarged in 1850 by her grandfather, William Fraser-Tytler. Mary Seton Watts's family had strong ties to the region, her grandfather was the Sheriff-Deputy for forty-two years. The family also had ties to the literary elite of Scotland, such as Sir Walter Scott, Burns, and later Tennyson (Gould, 18-19).

⁴⁵ Pamela Gerrish Nunn, *Victorian Women Artists* (London: Women's Press, 1987), 50.

which she became Watts's student. Upon marrying Watts in 1886, Mary Seton Watts studied anatomy, photography and *gesso duro* with various members of her husband's Arts and Crafts circle.⁴⁶ The *Magazine of Art's* critic wrote of women's education in 1881: "It is the fault of the education of ladies that they realise so little what goes to make proficiency in decorative art. ... Their time has been spent in acquiring accomplishments which accomplish nothing."⁴⁷ Unlike the 'ladies' referred to in this article, Mary Seton Watts's education served her well and allowed her to establish her pottery as a viable product on the market.

Much of the writing portrays Mary Seton Watts as marrying 'late in life' (at the age of 36).⁴⁸ Since many well-educated women did not marry at all, or did so when they were older, this assumption is not necessarily accurate. Still, though not perhaps true in Mary Seton Watts's circle, this portrayal does offer some insight into possible attitudes held toward her by society in general.⁴⁹ Regardless, her early unmarried years permitted the

⁴⁶ Henry Moore, WJ Stillman, Frederic Hollyer, and Osmund Weeks, Walter Crane's assistant (Gould, 32).

⁴⁷ Lewis F. Day, *Magazine of Art* (1881), quoted in Bernard Denvir, *The Late Victorians: Art, Design and Society, 1852-1910* (New York: Longman Group, 1986), 208.

⁴⁸ Middle class women at this time married on average at age 25, which was at most one to three years older than the age of the general female population at marriage, which ranged between 20 and 24 (Patricia Branca, *Silent Sisterhood: Middle Class Women in the Victorian Home* (Pittsburgh: Carnegie-Mellon University Press, 1975), 5).

⁴⁹ For example, Martha Vicinus claims "the unmarried woman was an important source of humour in music halls and in operettas. ... No longer innocent and ignorant, it was obscene and comic in performances that a middle-aged woman should still want marriage – or any man would want her." (Martha Vicinus, ed., *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), xii.)

designer to take her education seriously and gave her the opportunity to expand it thoroughly. As well, her curiosity and desire to learn contributed a great deal to her design work: “Mary [Seton Watts’s] imaginative schemes in gesso and terracotta bas-relief were informed by extensive research into ancient religions and civilisations, ... a gesso ceiling scheme at Limnerslease was to have included twelve panels representing Egypt, Judaism, Brahminism, Buddhism, Assyria, and Christianity, Persia, Scandinavia, Rome, Greece, China and Central America.”⁵⁰ In her *Annals*, Mary Seton Watts recounts being interested in and trying to learn ancient symbolism, with the approval of her husband: “He liked the little concrete signs I found, especially when connected with the religious aspirations of the race to which they belonged. He called it a language which expressed the highest ideas of man, and thought it a fine study, much beyond the acquirement of antiquarian knowledge; as much so as the art that has something to reveal is beyond the art which is a mere fringe of ornament.”⁵¹

Buckley’s assumption that women’s designs are informed by patriarchy is confirmed in *The Pelican*. In a lengthy letter to the weavers who would tuft the carpet, Mary Seton Watts explains each symbol used in her design. This was unusual for a designer to do and indicates her desire to help ‘educate’ the workers – allowing them to take pride in the final product and joy in their labour. Her written explanation is often repeated in press accounts of the carpet and used to promote the industry, for it was symbolism which appealed to

⁵⁰ Gould, 42.

⁵¹ Watts, 243.

the taste of the target market: “[The carpet] included symbols such as the hearth, the symbol of the house; the heart, symbol of love; the cross, of expansion; the dragons, caretakers; light and dark chequers, the sign of watchfulness; and also birds at the four corners, representative of the pelican feeding her young in distress, with her own blood.”⁵²

As Buckley points out, the codes of design used by the designer are produced within patriarchy to express the needs of the dominant group and are, therefore, male codes. She claims that to legitimise this process of cultural coding, the “language of design is presented as a universal truth ... and inevitably, these definitions also serve the interests of the dominant group, which attempts to disguise its interests with [this] mask of universality.”⁵³ Thus in her study of ancient symbolism, Mary Seton Watts was encoding her design with ‘male codes’ established through her own education and the accepted notions of good taste in her society. Although she performed the traditionally male role of designing a carpet, the design created by Mary Seton Watts reflects her immersion in the dominant group of her society, i.e. upper middle class, male, and British. Her design appears to conform to stereotypes which saw women’s art production as an extension of the maker’s femininity, reinforcing the connection between biology and creativity. However, it could also be argued that, at the same time, women such as Mary Seton

⁵² “Carpet Making in Ireland,” *The Gael*, June 1903, 188. Interestingly, although not mentioned in her letter to the weavers, the symbol of the pelican feeding her young in her nest is also on the crest of the Stewart clan. Traditionally, the Seton clan was known for its loyalty and firm attachment to the Stewart dynasty; at one time offering assistance to Mary Stuart (Queen of Scots) and losing titles and extensive estates as a result. As well, the National Collection of Scotland contains a portrait of Mary Stuart purchased from the Fraser-Tyler family. Clearly there are many possible connections between the Stewart and Seton clans, the Fraser-Tyler name, and the symbol of a pelican used by Mary Seton Watts in this carpet. Unfortunately, I have not been able to confirm these links within the scope of this thesis.

⁵³ Buckley, 260.

Watts “worked against the ideological grain by using craft [in her case carpet design and pottery], not as amateur pursuits but as an area in which they could practice as professionals.”⁵⁴ Though Mary Seton Watts was caught between gender roles, she still managed to create her own space in which to produce art.

HER ETHNICITY – CELTICISM

Mary Seton Watts’s Celtic-inspired designs for the terracotta work on the Compton Chapel reflect her position as a Scottish woman within English society, in between two worlds. Her thoughts on the Chapel design reveal her intentions: “In trying to revive in some degree that living quality which was in all decoration when patterns had meaning, the character of our own Celtic art – ancient British, Irish and Scotch as it is – has been followed, and many of the symbols are taken from carved stones and crosses, or from those rare and exquisite illuminations on vellum, now the treasures of national museums and libraries, but once the most sacred possessions of the Celts, who with devoted labour loved thus to make beautiful their manuscript book of the Gospels.”⁵⁵ This privileging of Celtic ancestry in both decoration and desire, at a time when Scotland was being re-invented as both a tourist attraction and, politically and economically, an extension of England could be considered indicative of a form of nationalism by Mary Seton Watts, as a displaced Scot.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Walker, 170-71.

⁵⁵ MacMillan, 63.

⁵⁶ Unwin, 32; and Watts (vol. 1), 5.

Mary Seton Watts met the Scottish artist Margaret Macdonald and the Irish artist Phoebe Traquair (who lived and produced most of her art in Edinburgh) and was well aware of Scottish initiatives in art at this time. In a letter dated 15 March 1901, she also praised James Morton for attempting to design Celtic style rugs: “How glad I am that you are going to carry forward the Celtic Art ... it is our own – not just copying. There is no vitality in copying.”⁵⁷ Clearly she aligned herself with the popular Celtic Revival occurring in her native Scotland, as well as Ireland. As a ‘Celt’ herself, Mary Seton Watts’s claims to this heritage could be considered ‘legitimate’ and would have increased her power to consecrate such objects.

HER PERSONAL FRIENDSHIP WITH JAMES MORTON

A series of letters between James Morton and Mary Seton Watts beginning with her design for *The Pelican* carpet and continuing through their mutual interest in the HAIA, in particular her Potters’ Art Guild, indicate their initial business relationship soon developed into a friendship. Her reference to James Morton as her ‘Knight of Commerce’, whose work embodied the chivalrous in trade, is one of the many compliments she lavished upon him in her letters.⁵⁸ It is from these letters that Mary Seton Watts’s connection to the Donegal industry is firmly established. By way of thanks for a rug delivered to her by

⁵⁷ “Letter from M. S. Watts to James Morton dated 15/3/1901,” Morton Sundour Archive, Archive of Art and Design, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, AAD 3/390-423.

⁵⁸ “Letter from M. S. Watts to James Morton dated 28/4/1929, Correspondence with Mrs. G. F. Watts mainly in her widowhood (post 1904) on management of her Potters’ Art Guild,” Morton Sundour Archive, Archive of Art and Design, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, AAD 4/517-519.

Morton, she offers to have her husband sketch him as a gift to his future wife, a work in oil which was eventually presented to Mrs. Morton by the Wattses as a wedding gift (Figure 26).⁵⁹ An entry in James Morton's diary confirms this friendship. He and his sister visited the Compton Pottery and James writes "it was nice to see the people and the work again. Mrs. Watts was much older, but quiet and fine as ever." His visit was not business-related, as he explains "there was nothing they [Mary Seton Watts and her business manager, Mr. Nicol] wanted me to do especially, but simply to have a talk and be told of the developments."⁶⁰ Another example of their close business relationship is Mr. Nicol himself, recommended to Mary Seton Watts by James as a favour when she became too old to manage affairs herself.⁶¹ Mary Seton Watts's special place in the 1903 exhibition of Morton's Donegal carpets could be due in part to their friendship, as a mark of his respect for her.

CONCLUSION

There are numerous ways in which Mary Seton Watts accumulated enough symbolic capital to be included and identified in the Liberty's 1903 exhibition catalogue – an exception to common practices. The name "Mrs. G. F. Watts" brings to mind her artist

⁵⁹ "Letter from M. S. Watts to James Morton dated 10/12/1900, Correspondence with Mrs. G. F. Watts mainly in her widowhood," Morton Sundour Archive, Archive of Art and Design, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, AAD 4/517-519.

⁶⁰ "James Morton diary entry dated 30/3/1920," Morton Sundour Archive, Archive of Art and Design, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, AAD 3/390-423.

⁶¹ "Correspondence between M. S. Watts and James Morton," Morton Sundour Archive, Archive of Art and Design, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, AAD 3/390-423 and AAD 4/517-519.

husband, his paintings and politics. Certainly through her marriage to this artist Mary Seton Watts acquired considerable symbolic capital. It seems unlikely, however, to be the sole reason she was identified by Liberty's. The reputations and recognised names of several other leading designers employed by Morton & Co. undermine this possibility. By exploring Mary Seton Watts's own art production and design expertise, her philanthropic skill with the HAIA and Potters' Art Guild, and James Morton's friendship and respect for her, her own power to consecrate and give value to her work becomes evident. The reasons for Liberty's decision to acknowledge this particular designer can only be speculated, but by understanding how Liberty's, Morton's, and the Wattses achieved their various levels of prestige and capitals of consecration, I hope to have established a method for such speculation. As well, by examining Mary Seton Watts's personal symbolic capital, I have brought to light some of the art production of one woman designer, neglected in most art histories.

CONCLUSION

THE SOCIAL FORMATION OF TASTE – A TEST CASE

The purpose of this study has been to offer a social history of Alexander Morton & Company's Donegal carpets – their production and patronage. At their most popular, the turn-of-the-century Donegal carpets received extensive press coverage and the quintessential late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century taste-maker, Liberty's, praised Morton's endeavour in Ireland in their exhibition catalogues. In more recent accounts, the Morton industry has been depicted as 'saving' an entire Irish county from poverty and destitution. This literature about the Donegal carpets makes the Morton enterprise sound 'too good to be true', which is the reason I began to investigate this topic.

The most interesting aspect of Morton's venture in Ireland is the way these carpets were promoted as artistic products. The Donegal carpets appealed to upper- and middle-class consumers in Britain, Ireland, North America, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. Prominent designers in the Arts and Crafts Movement created designs for these carpets which were also accepted as part of the visual arts of the Celtic Revival in Ireland. The Donegal carpet's success can be explained using Pierre Bourdieu's theory concerning the social formation of taste. Identifying the complex institutional framework, which authorised and legitimised the Donegal carpet as an artistic product, has been central to this project since, according to Bourdieu, art and its producers do not exist outside of this

framework. In this study of Morton's Donegal carpets, I have tested the validity of three aspects of Bourdieu's theory: *habitus*, cultural codes, and symbolic capital.

As an introduction to the topic, the 'story' of Morton's Donegal carpets presented through archival material, press accounts and historical writing, has revealed several issues involved in this enterprise, such as ethnicity, gender, class and cultural appropriation. Examining how this product was manipulated by the press, promoters and historians demonstrates how the Donegal carpet story was written to appeal to a certain *habitus*, that of the prospective Donegal carpet consumer.

The design transitions endorsed by Morton & Co. demonstrate this point visually. The cultural codes embedded in the carpets relate to the *habitus* of Morton's clients. In this study, I have attempted to locate the Donegal carpets within the material and ideological conditions of consumption and production. In doing so, I hope to have addressed the concerns raised in my re-telling of the Donegal carpet story.

Finally, the case study of Mary Seton Watts tested Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital. Since artistic practice is situated practice, i.e. set in a given context, Mary Seton Watts's art production demonstrates the concept of symbolic capital. An exploration of her art reveals how this designer mediated aesthetic codes as well as ideological, social and material processes and institutions.¹ In addition, I have tried to demonstrate how Liberty's

¹ Janet Wolff, *The Social Production of Art* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 137.

and Morton & Co. could have increased their symbolic capital, and ultimately their economic capital, by association to Mary Seton Watts.

Research into Morton & Co. and its historical context reveals many omissions in both contemporary and recent literature about Donegal carpets. Rather than attempting to fill the gaps of previous accounts, this history of Morton & Co.'s Donegal carpets is meant to establish one useful method for exploring issues involved in the production of these carpets, such as ethnicity, gender, class and cultural appropriation.

Within this discussion of taste, Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus*, cultural codes, and symbolic capital have been applied to explain the popularity of Donegal carpets in the art market of the nineteenth century. The instance of Alexander Morton & Company's Donegal carpets confirms Bourdieu's premise that taste is not a universal aesthetic or cultural practice but, rather, is socially constructed through a lifelong process of absorbing a social order.

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Figure 1 Edmund Evans, *Aladdin; or The Wonderful Lamp*, 1875. Wood-engraving published by George Routledge & Sons, London, Glasgow, New York (27 x 23.5 cm) [Catalogue item no. 198, Sato and Watanabe, *Japan and Britain*, 130] “An Arabian fantasy is here represented in an extraordinary juxtaposition of ‘exotic’ images from Japan, China and other Oriental countries. This page shows an Arabic princess dressed in a kimono and ‘geta’ (Japanese sandals), attended by Japanese maids and African servants who are holding a Japanese fan and parasol, while Aladdin, watching the princess behind the door, is dressed in Chinese style. The architectural details show Japanese motifs in the lacquer screen of the doors and in painted tiles. A vase with hydrangea is seen in the foreground in the Japanese manner.”



Figure 2 Charles Ricketts (1866-1931), *Costume for the Mikado*, c. 1926. [Catalogue item no. 215, Sato and Watanabe, *Japan and Britain*, 133]

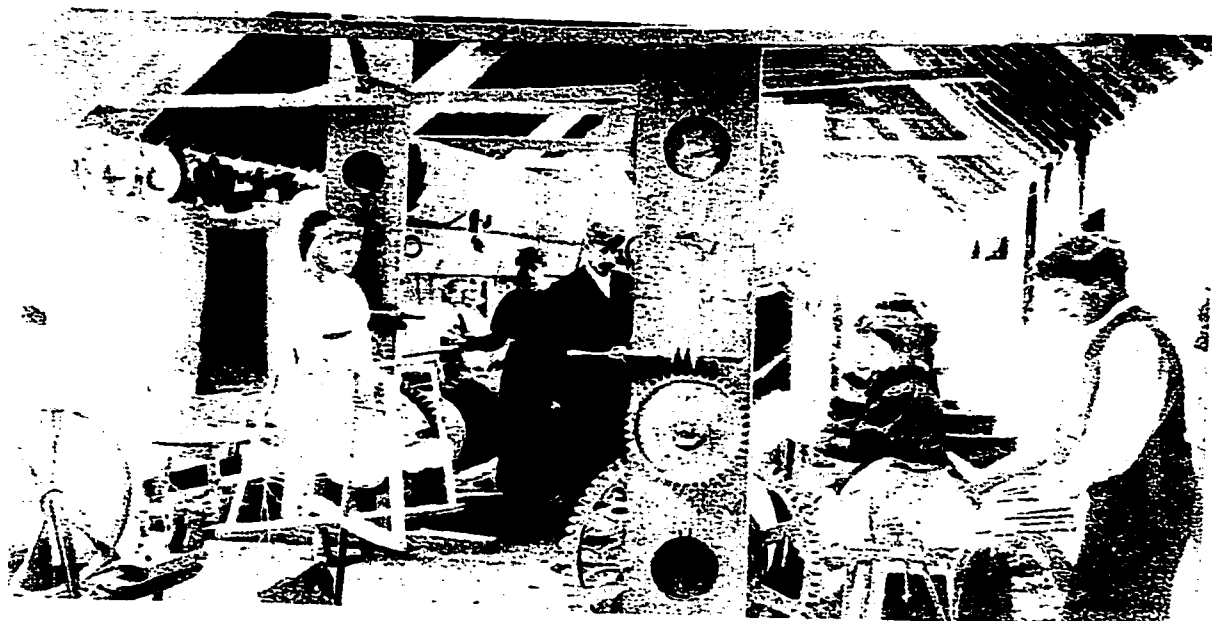


Figure 3 Spinning and carpet weaving at Morton's first premises in Killybegs, County Donegal.
[Haslam, *Arts and Crafts Carpets*, 95]



Figure 4 Morton Family Photograph: back row – William, Alexander (Alec), James, Gavin (Guy); front row – Mary, Maggie, Jeanie, Alexander (senior), Agnes, Jeanie (senior), Helen (Nellie). [Jocelyn Morton, *Three Generations*, 75]



Figure 5 Early Donegal carpet closely modelled after an Eastern example, design attributed to Gavin Morton, date unavailable. [Haslam, *Arts and Crafts Carpets*, 103]



Figure 6 Donegal carpet designed by Gavin Morton and G. K. Robertson, c. 1899. [Haslam, *Arts and Crafts Carpets*, 97]



Figure 8 The *Donnemara*, Donegal carpet designed by C. F. A. Voysey, exhibited at Liberty's in 1903. [Haslam, *Arts and Crafts Carpets*, 122]

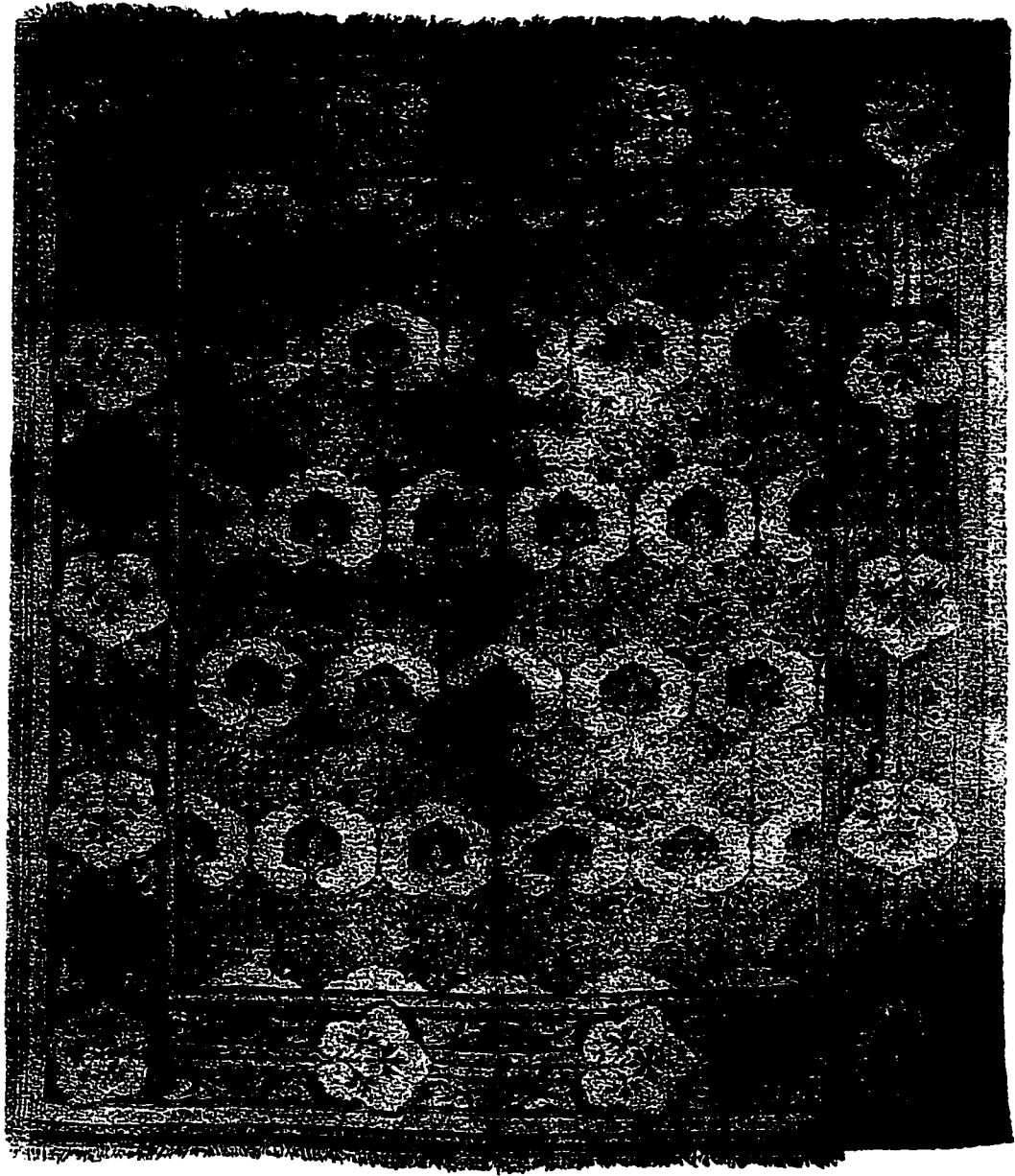


Figure 9 The *Glenmure*, Donegal carpet designed by C. F. A. Voysey, exhibited at Liberty's in 1903. [Haslam, *Arts and Crafts Carpets*, 100]



Figure 10 Drawing for a design by George Walton, c. 1899. [Moon, *George Walton*, 100]

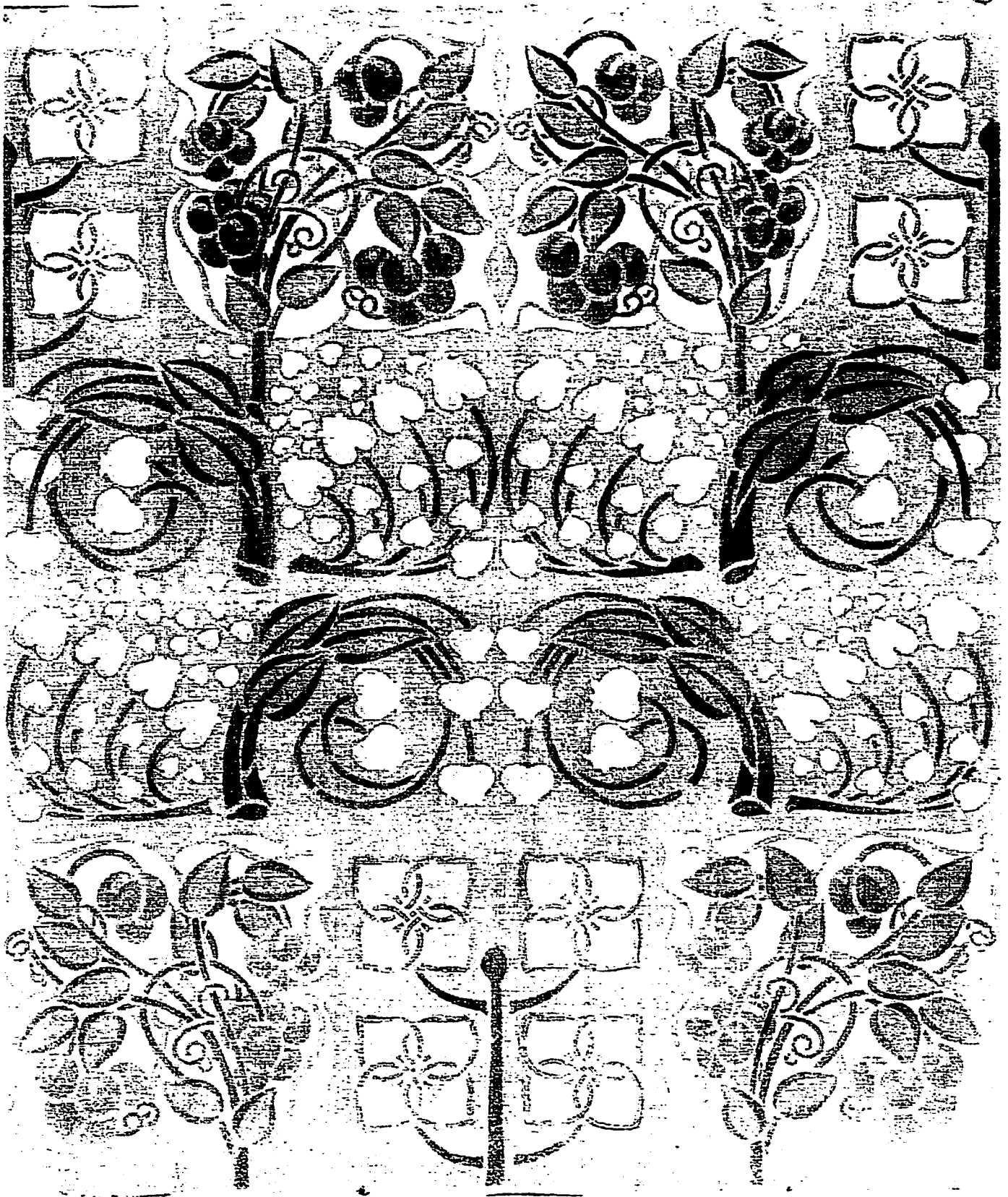


Figure 11 George Walton, detail of stencilled linen used on the frieze in the morning room of the Elm Bank, 1898. [Moon, *George Walton*, 69]



Figure 12 *Peony and Lily*, textile design by George Walton for Morton & Co., September 1927.
[Moon, *George Walton*, 174]

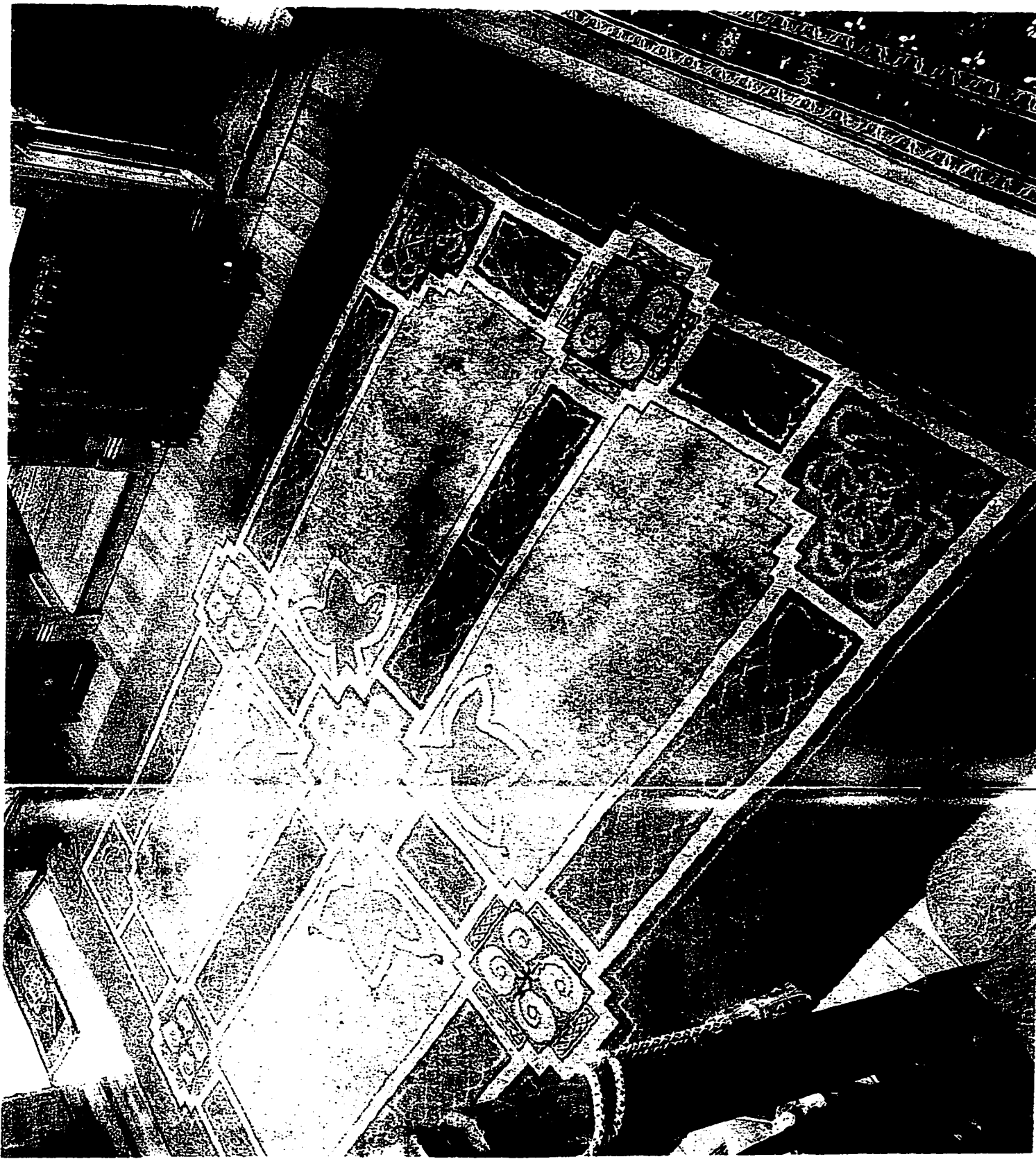


Figure 13 The *Ardmore, Donegal* carpet woven for Liberty's c. 1903. The design is an adaptation from the *Book of Kells*. [Haslam, *Arts and Crafts Carpets*, 130-31]

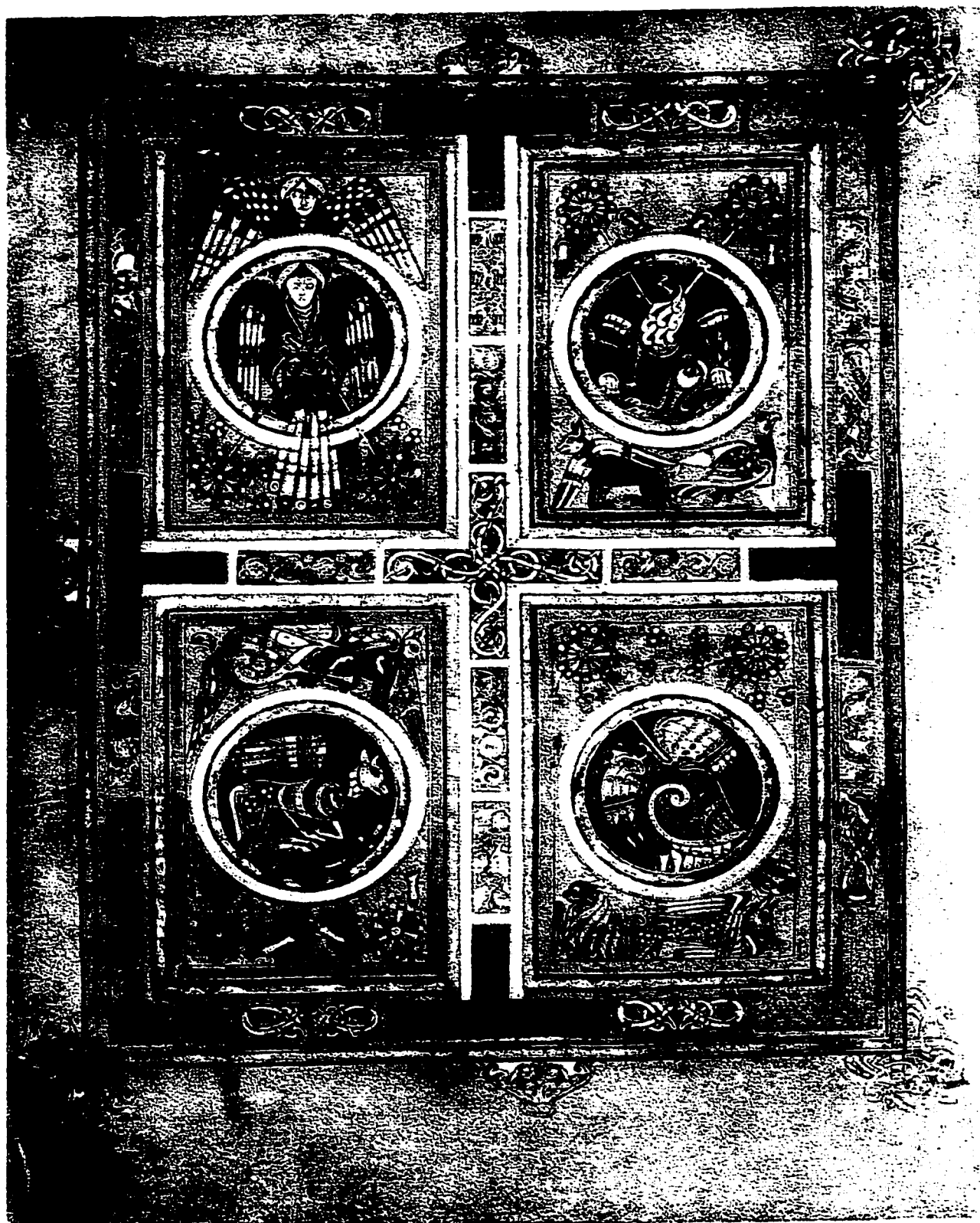


Figure 14 Folio 128v of the *Book of Kells*: Symbols of the four evangelists. [Bernard Meehan, *The Book of Kells: An Illustrated Introduction to the Manuscript in Trinity College Dublin* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1994), 40]

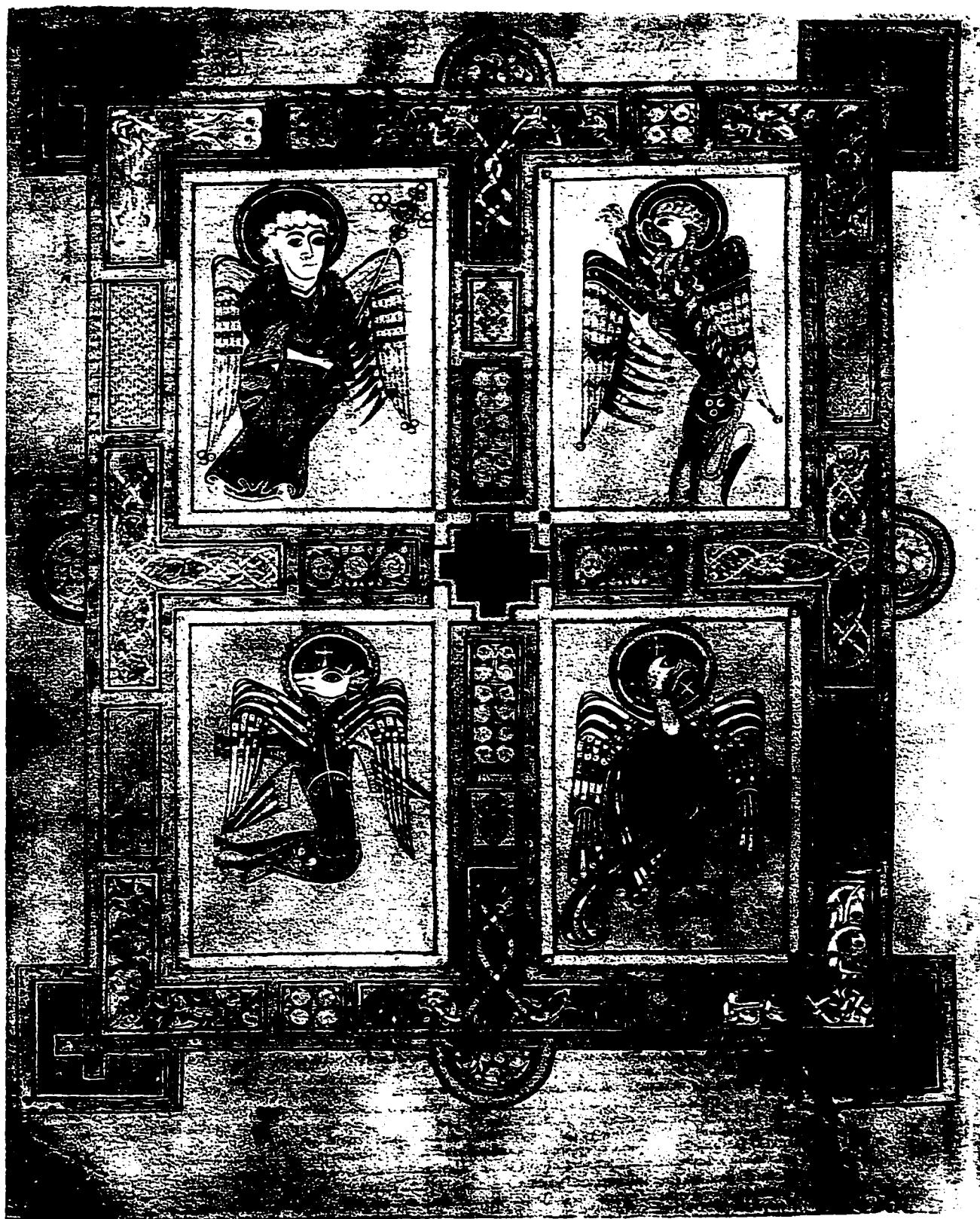


Figure 15 Folio 27v of the *Book of Kells*: Symbols of the four evangelists. [Meehan, *The Book of Kells*, 8]

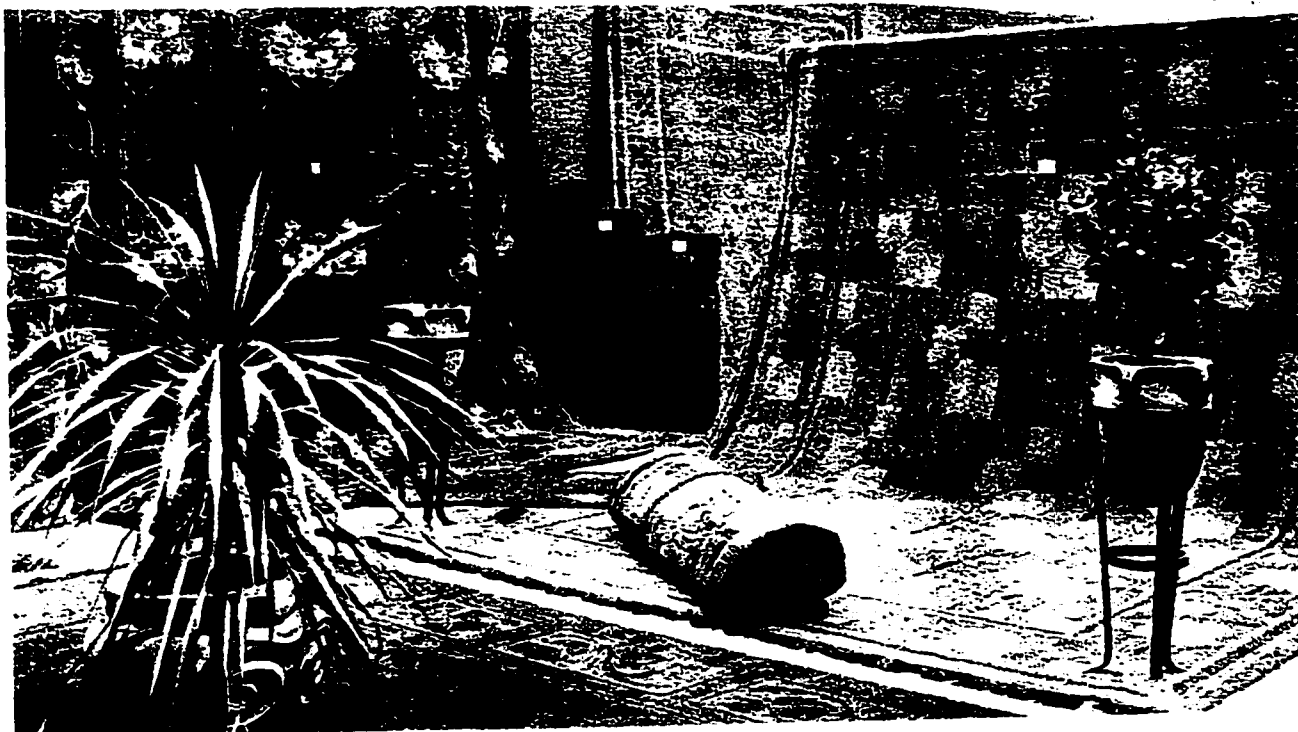


Figure 16 *Founding a National Industry – Irish Carpets*. Photograph of Liberty's exhibition of Donegal carpets (with garden pottery from the Potters' Art Guild) at the Grafton Gallery, London, 1903. [Gould, *Mary Seton Watts*, 12]



Figure 17 *Self-portrait, Mary Seton Fraser-Tytler. Oil on canvas, 1881 (68 x 55.2 cm). [Gould, *Mary Seton Watts*, 27]*



Figure 18 Mary Seton Watts and G. F. Watts in a reading alcove designed by Mary Seton Watts, Limmerslease, 1893. [Gould, *Mary Seton Watts*, 40]



Figure 19 The Watts Mortuary Chapel, Compton, Surrey, 1894-98. [Gould, *Mary Seton Watts*, 45]

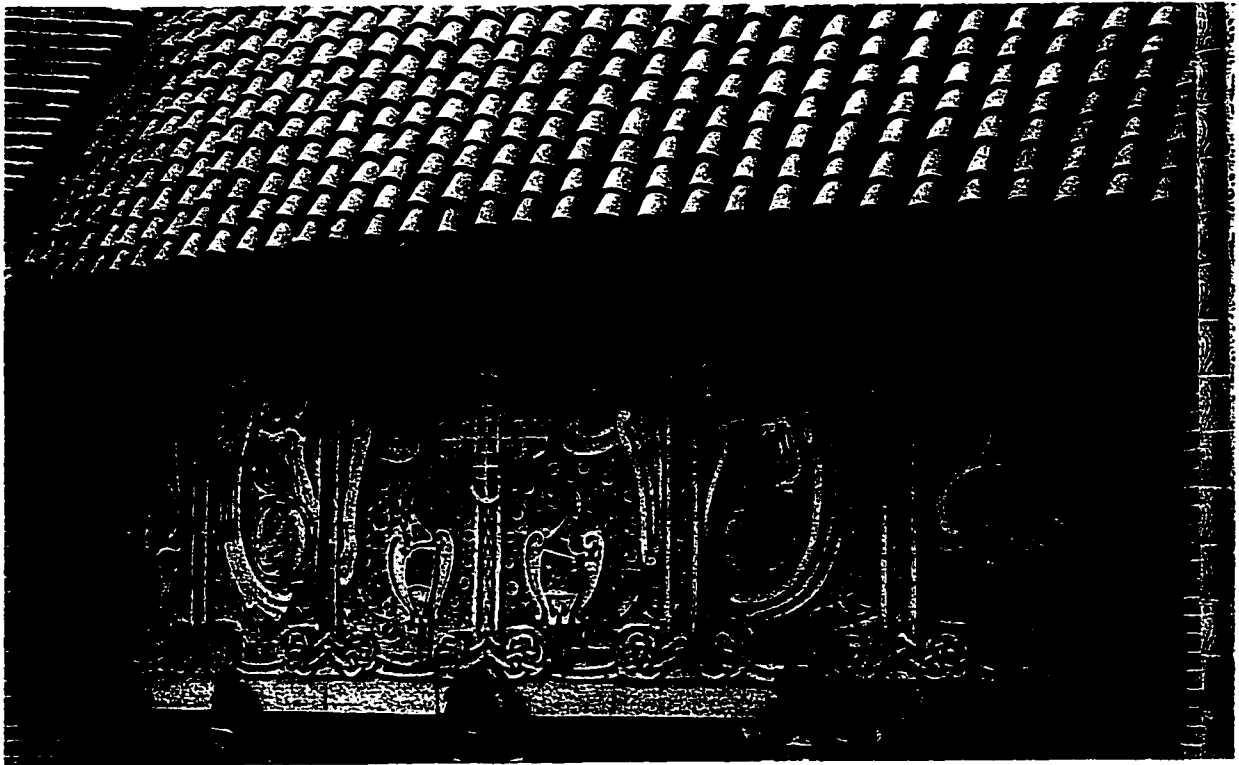


Figure 20 *Spirit of Hope Frieze, Watts Chapel, 1896-98. [Gould, Mary Seton Watts, 46]*



Figure 21 *Spirit of Truth*, detail, Watts Chapel, date unavailable. [Gould, *Mary Seton Watts*, 47]



Figure 22 Terracotta garden pottery, Potters' Art Guild, 1898-1902. [Catalogue item nos. 81-83, 86, 87, 90, Gould, *Mary Seton Watts*, 51]

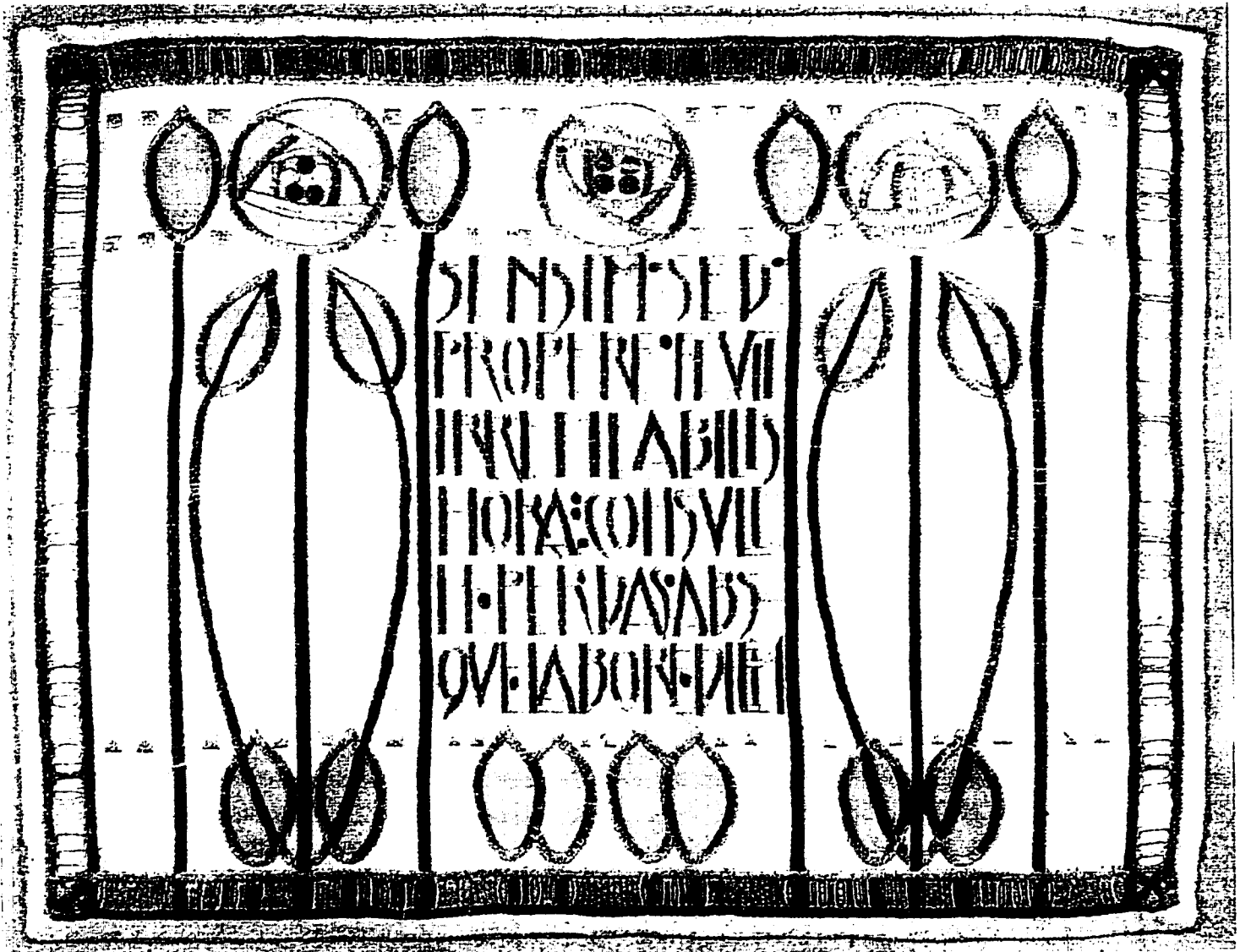


Figure 23 Jessie Newbery design: linen appliqué cushion cover embroidered in silks with edges of needleweaving, worked by the designer, c. 1900. [Parry, *Textiles of the Arts and Crafts Movement*, colour plate 82]



Figure 25 Detail of pelican on carpet reverse. [Gould, *Mary Seton Watts*, 53]