**Guild of St George**

**Ruskin & the Crafts, Reading III, 17 February 2023**

**Ruskin’s impact on artists and craftsmen and on the Arts & Crafts Movement**

**INTRODUCTION**

Welcome to the third of the Ruskin Readings under the overall heading of ‘Ruskin & the Crafts’. Today’s session focuses on Ruskin’s teachings on “mixed media”.

I am the Convener and First Reader, Nicholas Mander. Amongst a galaxy of Ruskin scholars, specialists, makers, practitioners and advocates I feel particularly honoured, as one of the most recent Companions of the Guild, to be invited to act as Convener to this session.

I find in the index to Ruskin’s collected works he uses the term “angel” many times, and I feel he has always been a kind of angelic messenger, prophetic and transmitting heavenly wisdom, enigmatic, whispering, perhaps cautiously watching like the angel in Carpaccio’s dream of St Ursula, standing backlit at the foot of the bed of the dreaming saint (Fors Clavigera, 15). First, vicariously and almost without knowing it, as an heir of families, architects and craftsmen who knew him, or who were inspired by him in their patronage of buildings, education, social reform and art collecting. Then through a lifelong engagement in literature and art and architectural history, also of Continental wanderings, familiarity with places Ruskin loved and knew. And lastly as a steward, to use Ruskin’s word, of an ancient house and associated farm and woodlands whose almost miraculous survival and repair owed everything to late followers of Ruskin and William Morris, and their principles of repair and the protection of ancient buildings, ruins and their weathered surfaces.

There are four of us reading in this session: I am proud to introduce our three artist-craftsmen: the first in silversmithing, jewellery and metalwork; the second in lime and plaster, repairing old surfaces and creating new and beautiful surfaces; and the third in glass engraving.

First, Harold Linley Mornington Messel, whose names resonate with the talents of his forebears in the arts, patronage, architecture and design. I attended his christening when those talents were given to him and have watched his career unfold.

In his youth, we explored Coniston and the Lakes together, travelled in Italy, climbed mountains, and my wife and I were among the first to commission paintings and jewellery from him as he explored different fields for his talents and creativity.

He finally focused on silversmithing, where he soon established himself with his characteristic discipline and determination as a master, with commissions from discerning and important patrons.

Then Daahir Mohammed- who has recently finished his year as a William Morris Craft Fellow of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB). Somalian by heritage, he left for Switzerland at the age of nine, where he trained as an apprentice in metal fabrication and tool making.

This gave him a solid grounding in precision, a passion for quality of craftmanship and served as a stepping stone to his career as a Bristol-based plasterer, committed to the use of lime in new work and in conservation.

Tracey Sheppard has just served a term as Master of the Art Workers’ Guild, that other great Guild founded on Ruskinian principles. Following her degree in English Literature and Fine Art, she turned to engraving, employing naturalistic designs and lettering.

In 1987 she was elected Fellow, and later Chairman, of the Guild of Glass Engravers. She lectures and teaches on behalf of that Guild and has exhibited in all Guild National Exhibitions since 1983.

It was the genius of the Arts & Crafts movement to recognise that the ‘artist’ and the ‘craftsperson’ were one and the same person, whether they were always aware of it or not. You cannot be an artist without the skills associated with using materials; you cannot be a craftsperson, working with the same or similar materials, without what John Piper called the ‘seeing eye’ of the artist.

The Guild of St George has the same understanding of its place in the scheme of things: it is ‘an educational charity working through art, craft and the rural economy’, attempting to see a wholeness and a unity in those three strands. What gives them their emotional drive can be seen in this short quotation from Ruskin’s *Notes on Educational Series*:

Unless you are minded to bring yourselves, and all whom you can help, out of this curse of darkness that has fallen on our hearts and thoughts, you need not try to put beauty into shadows, whilst all the real things that cast them are left in deformity and pain. [21, p. 104]

In her contribution to the revised edition of *Ruskin To-day, No Wealth but Life* (2023), Anna Somers Cox has mused on why we treat Ruskin as a thinker who is relevant to contemporary issues:

Part of the reason is that he is so alive in his writing; we are transported by his streams of consciousness, his preacher-like power. He is so visibly present that we long to know what he would think if he were among us today, as it would certainly be vehement, vivid and shocking.

At a deeper level, I think the reason we feel he has something to teach us is that we respond to his tormented moral conscience; his belief that art is a profoundly serious matter, but that the dignity of man is still more important. In fact, for various years of his life he hardly wrote about art, the squalor and brutality of society having overwhelmed him and persuaded him that there were greater priorities.

In his autobiographical work, which he called *Praeterita*, “first things”, Ruskin gives an account of his endeavours to undertake manual work:

I have to say that half my power of ascertaining facts of any kind connected with the arts, is in my stern habit of doing the thing with my own hands till I know its difficulty; and though I have no time nor wish to acquire showy skill in anything, I make myself clear as to what the skill means, and is. Thus, when I had to direct road-making at Oxford, I sate, myself, with an iron-masked stone-breaker, on his heap, to break stones beside the London road, just under Iffley Hill, till I knew how to advise my too impetuous pupils to effect their purposes in that matter, instead of breaking the heads of their hammers off, (a serious item in our daily expenses). I learned from an Irish street crossing-sweeper what he could teach me of sweeping; but found myself in that matter nearly his match, from my boy-gardening; and again and again I swept bits of St. Giles’ foot-pavements, showing my corps of subordinates how to finish into depths of gutter. I worked with a carpenter until I could take an even shaving six feet long off a board; and painted enough with properly and delightfully soppy green paint to feel the master’s superiority in the use of a blunt brush. But among all these and other such studentships, the reader will be surprised, I think, to hear, seriously, that the instrument I finally decided to be the most difficult of management was the trowel. For accumulated months of my boy’s life I watched bricklaying and paving; but when I took the trowel into my own hand, abandoned at once all hope of attaining the least real skill with it, unless I gave up all thoughts of any future literary or political career. [35, pp. 427–8]

*Time and Tide, by Weare & Tyne* (1867) consists of twenty-five letters ‘to a working man of Sunderland on the *Laws of Work*’:

132. Now, farther, observe that in a truly civilised and disciplined state, no man would be allowed to meddle with any material who did not know how to make the best of it. In other words, the arts of working in wood, clay, stone, and metal, would all be *fine* arts (working in iron for machinery becoming an entirely distinct business). There would be no joiner‘s work, no smith‘s, no pottery nor stone-cutting, so debased in character as to be entirely unconnected with the finer branches of the same art; and to at least one of these finer branches (generally in metal-work) every painter and sculptor would be necessarily apprenticed during some years of his education. There would be room, in these four trades alone, for nearly every grade of practical intelligence and productive imagination.

133. But it should not be artists alone who are exercised early in these crafts. It would be part of my scheme of physical education that every youth in the state—from the King‘s son downwards,—should learn to do something finely and thoroughly with his hand, so as to let him know what *touch* meant; and what stout craftsmanship meant; and to inform him of many things besides, which no man can learn but by some severely accurate discipline in doing. Let him once learn to take a straight shaving off a plank, or draw a fine curve without faltering, or lay a brick level in its mortar; and he has learned a multitude of other matters which no lips of man could ever teach him. He might choose his craft, but whatever it was, he should learn it to some sufficient degree of true dexterity: and the result would be, in after life, that among the middle classes a good deal of their house furniture would be made, and a good deal of rough work, more or less clumsily, but not ineffectively, got through, by the master himself and his sons, with much furtherance of their general health and peace of mind, and increase of innocent domestic pride and pleasure, and to the extinction of a great deal of vulgar upholstery and other mean handicraft. [17, pp. 426–7].

For Ruskin, writing was itself a craft. Another of his key insights was the vital importance of well and truly *seeing*. These two insights come together in the following passage from *Modern Painters* III, Part IV, ‘Of Many Things’ where he speaks of two of his greatest heroes, Sir Walter Scott and Turner:

§ 27. Again: another very important, though not infallible, test of greatness is, as we have often said, the appearance of Ease with which the thing is done. It may be that, as with Dante and Leonardo, the finish given to the work effaces the evidence of ease; but where the ease is manifest, as in Scott, Turner, and Tintoret, and the thing done is very noble, it is a strong reason for placing the men above those who confessedly work with great pains. Scott writing his chapter or two before breakfast—not retouching; Turner finishing a whole drawing in a forenoon before he goes out to shoot (providing always the chapter and drawing be good), are instantly to be set above men who confessedly have spent a day over the work, and think the hours well spent if it has been a little mended between sunrise and sunset. Indeed, it is no use for men to think to appear great by working fast, dashing, and scrawling; the thing they do must be good and great, cost what time it may; but if it be so, and they have honestly and unaffectedly done it with no effort, it is probably a greater and better thing than the result of the hardest efforts of others.

§ 28. Then, as touching the kind of work done by these two men, the more I think of it I find this conclusion more impressed upon me,—that the greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to see something, and tell what it saw in a plain way. Hundreds of people can talk for one who can think, but thousands can think for one who can see. To see clearly is poetry, prophecy, and religion,—all in one. [5, p. 333].

Throughout Ruskin’s writings, in various contexts, he stresses the importance of wholesome work. This is sometimes coupled with a concern for stewardship, as defined in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, that is to say looking after what we have been given – as a nation, as organisations like the Guild of St George and the Art Workers Guild, as individuals – and doing it *well*. Imagine if, in all countries, national and local governments were motivated and equipped to look after all the buildings in their ownership and care and to do it *well*, which means doing it skilfully, with appropriate materials and after proper training in the necessary skills. We should then hear no more about sub-standard housing, and the terrible impact this has on health and well-being. In Ruskin’s 1868 *Notes on the General Principles of Employment by the Destitute and Criminal Classes* the following ‘divisions of occupation’ deserve attention:

5. Repair of Buildings.—A body of men in various trades to be kept at the disposal of the authorities in every large town for consistent repair of buildings, especially the houses of the poorer orders, who, if no such provision were made, could not employ workmen on their own houses, but would simply live with rent [i.e. broken] walls and roofs.

7. Works of Art.—Schools to be established on thoroughly sound principles of manufacture and use of materials, and with simple and, for given periods, unalterable modes of work; first in pottery, and embracing gradually metal work, sculpture, and decorative painting; the two points insisted upon, in distinction from ordinary commercial establishments, being perfectness of material to the utmost attainable degree; and the production of everything by hand-work, for the special purpose of developing personal power and skill in the workman. [17, p. 546]

In November 2022 the Guild of St George held its AGM at Glasshouse College, Stourbridge, where our host was Aonghus Gordon, founder and chair of the Ruskin Mill Trust. In the book *Ruskin To-day, John Ruskin for the 21st century*, Aonghus has written as follows:

Each of the Trust’s three main colleges have been founded through the reclamation and ‘repair of buildings’ that were formerly icons of Victorian manufacturing. The Trust offers challenged young people who are falling out of the traditional models of educational delivery an experimental journey based on craftsmanship and practical work. The innovative curriculum works with thematic core subjects relating to the manufacturing history of its industrial buildings, whilst also reclaiming land for organic and sustainable methods of land husbandry. Ruskin Mill developed a curriculum entitled *Descent into Matter*, which is based on a Ruskin-inspired poetic image of man’s interdependency with materials and landscape, engaging lawful materials from the three kingdoms that serve a direct economic and social purpose. Work in pottery, metalwork, glass and stonework is carried out with materials sourced from the landscape wherever possible … [*Ruskin To-day* (2023), p. 100]

Let us now follow up some Ruskinian threads relating to specific craft materials or skills, beginning with pottery, to which there are many references in his *Works*, beginning with the lecture on ‘The Relation of Art to Use’, one of the inaugural lectures given by Ruskin at Oxford in 1870. Ruskin here states:

Now, all the arts are founded on agriculture by the hand, and on the graces and kindness of feeding and dressing, and lodging your people’.

He continues:

117. Now look at the working out of this broad principle in minor detail; observe how, from highest to lowest, health of art has first depended on reference to industrial use. There is first the need of cup and platter, especially of cup; for you can put your meat on the Harpies’, or on any other, tables; but you must have your cup to drink from. And to hold it conveniently, you must put a handle to it; and to fill it when it is empty you must have a large pitcher of some sort; and to carry the pitcher you may most advisably have two handles. Modify the forms of these needful possessions according to the various requirements of drinking largely and drinking delicately; of pouring easily out, or of keeping for years the perfume in; of storing in cellars, or bearing from fountains; of sacrificial libation, of Panathenaic treasure of oil, and sepulchral treasure of ashes,—

and you have a resultant series of beautiful form and decoration, from the rude amphora of red earth up to Cellini’s vases of gems and crystal, in which series, but especially in the more simple conditions of it, are developed the most beautiful lines and most perfect types of severe composition which have yet been attained by art. [20, pp. 108–9]

**[NICHOLAS]**

Later in the same year Ruskin gave the ‘Six Lectures on the Elements of Sculpture’ which we know as *Aratra Pentilici*. Here he speaks of:

**[DAAHIR]**

… the ingenious and observant race of man [being] surrounded with elements naturally good for his food, pleasant to his sight, and suitable for the subjects of his ingenuity; - the stone, metal and clay of the earth he walks upon lending themselves at once to his hand, for all manner of workmanship.

151. Thus, all good building will be with rocks, or pebbles, or burnt clay, but with no artificial compound; all good painting with common oils and pigments on common canvas, paper, plaster, or wood,—admitting sometimes, for precious work, precious things, but all applied in a simple and visible way. The highest imitative art should not, indeed, at first sight, call attention to the means of it; but even that, at length, should do so distinctly, and provoke the observer to take pleasure in seeing how completely the workman is master of the particular material he has used, and how beautiful and desirable a substance it was, for work of that kind. In oil painting, its unctuous quality is to be delighted in; in fresco, its chalky quality; in glass, its transparency; in wood, its grain; in marble, its softness; in porphyry, its hardness; in iron, its toughness. In a flint country, one should feel the delightfulness of having flints to pick up, and fasten together into rugged walls. In a marble country, one should be always more and more astonished at the exquisite colour and structure of marble; in a slate country, one should feel as if every rock cleft itself only for the sake of being built with conveniently.

152. Now, for sculpture, there are, briefly, two materials — Clay, and Stone; for glass is only a clay that gets clear and brittle as it cools, and metal a clay that gets opaque and tough as it cools. Indeed, the true use of gold in this world is only as a very pretty and very ductile clay, which you can spread as flat as you like, spin as fine as you like, and which will neither crack nor tarnish. All the arts of sculpture in clay may be summed up under the word ‘Plastic,’ and all of those in stone, under the word ‘Glyptic.’ [20, pp. 306, 307]

On ornament or the decorative use of fine workmanship Ruskin has much to say but we can make a start with the chapter on ‘The Virtues of Architecture’ in the first volume of *The Stones of Venice* (1851) where he says:

§ 13. So, then, the first thing we have to ask of the decoration is that it should indicate strong liking, and that honestly. It matters not so much what the thing is, as that the builder should really love it and enjoy it, and say so plainly.

The architect of Bourges Cathedral liked hawthorns; so he has covered his porch with hawthorn,—it is a perfect Niobe of May. Never was such hawthorn; you would try to gather it forthwith, but for fear of being pricked. The old Lombard architects liked hunting; so they covered their work with horses and hounds, and men blowing trumpets two yards long. The base Renaissance architects of Venice liked masquing and fiddling; so they covered their work with comic masks and musical instruments. Even that was better than our English way of liking nothing, and professing to like triglyphs.

§ 14. But the second requirement in decoration, is that it should show we like the right thing. And the right thing to be liked is God’s work, which He made for our delight and contentment in this world. And all noble ornamentation is the expression of man’s delight in God’s work. [9, pp. 69–70].

Sadly, Ruskin found it impossible to admire the work of the virtuoso silversmiths of the sixteenth century, or their ingenuity in combining their silversmiths’ work with other beautiful materials, as it was tainted for him by the visual language of the Renaissance. A classic piece of his anti-Renaissance rhetoric is to be found in ‘Fiction, Fair and Foul’ (1880–81), one of the miscellaneous essays and articles published in *On the Old Road*:

102. Taking thus the Greek vase at its best time, for the symbol of fair fiction: of foul, you may find in the great entrance-room of the Louvre, filled with the luxurious orfèvrerie of the sixteenth century, types perfect and innumerable: Satyrs carved in serpentine, Gorgons platted in gold, Furies with eyes of ruby, Scyllas with scales of pearl; infinitely worthless toil, infinitely witless wickedness; pleasure satiated into idiocy, passion provoked into madness, no object of thought, or sight, or fancy, but horror, mutilation, distortion, corruption, agony of war, insolence of disgrace, and misery of Death.

It is true that the ease with which a serpent, or something that will be understood for one, can be chased or wrought in metal, and the small workmanly skill required to image a satyr’s hoof and horns, as compared to that needed for a human foot or forehead, have greatly influenced the choice of subject by incompetent smiths; and in like manner, the prevalence of such vicious or ugly story in the mass of modern literature is not so much a sign of the lasciviousness of the age, as of its stupidity, though each react on the other, and the vapour of the sulphurous pool becomes at last so diffused in the atmosphere of our cities, that whom it cannot corrupt, it will at least stultify. (34, p. 372)

There are surprisingly few other references to silversmiths in Ruskin’s voluminous writings, though there are more references to silver as a raw mineral of great value and of deep interest for study. Inasmuch as *Unto This Last* (1860) is regarded as being one of Ruskin’s most abidingly influential texts, it is worth noting what he writes in the fourth and final chapter, ‘Ad Valorem’:

57. Now I do not ask, though, had I written this paragraph, it would surely have been asked of me, What is to become of the silversmiths? If they are truly unproductive persons, we will acquiesce in their extinction. And though in another part of the same passage, the hardware merchant is supposed also to dispense with a number of servants, whose ‘food is thus set free for productive purposes,’ I do not inquire what will be the effect, painful or otherwise, upon the servants, of this emancipation of their food. But I very seriously inquire why ironware is produce, and silverware is not? That the merchant consumes the one, and sells the other, certainly does not constitute the difference, unless it can be shown (which, indeed, I perceive it to be becoming daily more and more the aim of tradesmen to show) that commodities are made to be sold, and not to be consumed. The merchant is an agent of conveyance to the consumer in one case, and is himself the consumer in the other: but the labourers are in either case equally productive, since they have produced goods to the same value, if the hardware and the plate are both goods.

And what distinction separates them? It is indeed possible that in the ‘comparative estimate of the moralist,’ with which Mr. Mill says political economy has nothing to do, a steel fork might appear a more substantial production than a silver one: we may grant also that knives, no less than forks, are good produce; and scythes and ploughshares serviceable articles. But, how of bayonets? Supposing the hardware merchant to effect large sales of *these*, by help of the ‘setting free’ of the food of his servants and his silversmith,—is he still employing productive labourers, or, in Mr. Mill‘s words, labourers who increase ‘the stock of permanent means of enjoyment’? Or if, instead of bayonets, he supply bombs, will not the absolute and final ‘enjoyment’ of even these energetically productive articles (each of which costs ten pounds) be dependent on a proper choice of time and place for their *enfantement*; choice, that is to say, depending on those philosophical considerations with which political economy has nothing to do? [17, pp. 78–79]

Of the jeweller, or of jewellery, Ruskin has rather more to say. One highly significant reference occurs in Letter 67 of the series of Letters addressed to the Workmen of England, *Fors Clavigera*, where Ruskin clearly recognises that jewels may be of such interest that they deserve to be ‘laid by’ by in treasuries and museums. This reference is in the two paragraphs which contain one of Ruskin’s most attractive suggestions, namely that instead of a National Debt we should have a *National Store*:

4. In order to understand that of a National Store, my readers must first consider what any store whatever, serviceable to human beings, consists of. A store properly means a collection of useful things. Literally, it signifies only a quantity,—or much of anything. But the heap of broken bottles which, I hear, is accumulating under the principal cliff of Snowdon, through the contributions of tourists from the summit, is not properly to be called a store; though a bin full of old wine is. Neither is a heap of cannon-balls a store; though a heap of potatoes is. Neither is a cellar full of gunpowder a store; though a cellar full of coals is. A store is, for squirrels, of nuts; for bees, of honey; for men, of food, clothes, fuel, or pretty things, such as toys or jewels,—and, for educated persons, of books and pictures. And the possession of such a store by the nation would signify, that there were no taxes to pay; that everybody had clothes enough, and some stuff laid by for next year; that everybody had food enough, and plenty of salted pork, pickled walnuts, potted shrimps, or other conserves, in the cupboard; that everybody had jewels enough, and some of the biggest laid by, in treasuries and museums; and, of persons caring for such things, that everybody had as many books and pictures as they could read or look at; with quantities of the highest quality besides, in easily accessible public libraries and galleries.

5. Now the wretches who have, at present, the teaching of the people in their hands, through the public press, tell them that it is not ‘practical’ to attempt to bring about this state of things;—and that their government, or money-collecting machine, must not buy wine, potatoes, jewels, or pictures for them; but *must* buy iron plates two feet thick, gunpowder, and red tape. And this popular instruction is given, you will find, in the end, by persons who know that they could not get a percentage themselves (without the public’s coming to know it) on buying potatoes or pictures; but can get it, and a large one, on manufacturing iron, on committing wholesale murder, or on tying up papers with red tape. Now the St. George’s Company propose to themselves,—and, if the God they believe in, lives, will assuredly succeed in their proposition,—to put an end to this rascally and inhuman state of things, and bring about an honest and human state of them, instead. And they have already actually begun the accumulation of a National Store of good and useful things; by the collection and administration of which, they are not themselves to derive any gain whatsoever, but the Nation only. [28, pp. 640–1)

There are no references in Ruskin’s literary *Works* to ‘plasters’ or to ‘mortars’ though he must have been aware of them, especially when formulating his views on the importance of undisturbed surfaces which have been ‘long washed by the passing waves of humanity’. But there are plenty of references to ‘lime’ or to ‘limestones’, reflecting his deep interest in building materials and in stones and minerals generally. We will take one, beautiful, example - namely the approach to Verona and the intense localness of its stones, including marbles of great beauty.

He begins like this:

4. The road ascends continually; the vine-clad slope on your right becoming steeper and prouder—the great wall drawing itself out, tower above tower,—and the blue of distant Lombardy flowing deep and deeper over its lower battlements. After walking the horses about a mile, there is a level bit of road which brings you to the upper angle of the wall; and thence, looking down the northern descent, you may see a great round tower at the foot of it—not forked,—this, in battlements, but with embrasures for guns.

Now, the rock-banks under which you have passed were the cradle of modern science. The battlemented wall was the cradle of civic life. That low circular tower is the cradle of modern war and of all its desolation. It is the first European tower for artillery: the beginning of fortification against gunpowder. The beginning, that is to say, of the end of all fortification; of the system which costs you fifteen millions a year, and leaves at this instant England without defence.

Then he enlarges our prospect of the landscape and its superb local materials for building, in paragraph 5:

5. While you think of these things, let the horses go on quietly,—for the road now turns away from the city and still ascends—until, in another half hour, you will find yourself almost on a mountain summit, broken down into crags to the eastward, and grey—or grey-purple—with the lurid but lovely blue of the field Eryngium. From this brow you may see entire Verona, and all the plain between Alp and Apennine; and so, if you please, we will find a place where the rocks are mossy, and sit down, and consider, a little what this landscape of all the landscapes in the world has specially to say to us.

Then the heart of the matter: in paragraph 6:

6. And, first, let us note exactly where we are. We may now see easily that we are on the point of a vast promontory or spur about ten miles long, thrown out from the Alps; and of which the last rock dies into the plain, exactly at that eastern gate of Verona out of which we came to climb it. Now this promontory is one of the sides of the great gate out of Germany into Italy, through which the Goths always entered: cloven up to Innspruck by the Inn; and down to Verona by the Adige. And by this gate not only the Gothic armies came, but after the Italian nation is formed, the current of northern life enters still into its heart through the mountain artery, as constantly and strongly as the cold waves of the Adige itself.

Now the porch of it here towards Italy is literally like a scene in the *Arabian Nights*. It reminds one precisely of some such passage as—'And at the end of the plain the prince came to a gate between two mountains; and the mountains were mixed of marble and brass.’ That is here literally true. The rock of this promontory on which we are seated hardens as we trace it back to the Alps, first into a limestone having knots of splendid brown jasper in it, as our chalk has flints, and in a few miles more into true marble, coloured by iron into a glowing orange, or pale warm red—the peach-blossom marble, of which Verona is chiefly built:

and then as you advance farther into the hills, into variegated marbles, so rich and grotesque in their veinings, and so fancifully lending themselves to decoration, that this last time of my stay at Verona I was quite seriously impeded in my examinations of sculpture, and disturbed in what—at the age of 51—may yet be left in me of poetical sentiment, by involuntary misgivings whether the churches were real churches, or only museums of practical geology in connexion with that of Jermyn Street. [19, pp. 430-2]

The reference to Jermyn Street at the end is to the Museum of Practical Geology established in 1850, in Jermyn Street near Piccadilly. It reminds us that geology and petrology were two of Ruskin’s greatest interests, and that their study leads to a better understanding of so much else: for example landscape, and its structure; building materials, and their performance; archaeology, and the evidences of the past; and history, its stories and their interpretation.

Unlike plasterwork, silversmith or jewellery, *glass* occupies half a page in the Index to Ruskin’s literary *Works*. The numerous references are divided into *general*, where Ruskin as always showed his interest in the nature of the material itself; *manufactured glass*; and *stained or painted glass*.

It is not well known that Ruskin collaborated with the antiquary and artist Edmund Oldfield (1817–1902), Fellow of Worcester College, Oxford, and Assistant Keeper in the Department of Antiquities at the British Museum, in the design of the huge east window of the church of St Giles, Camberwell, designed by George Gilbert Scott and completed in 1844, following the destruction of the old church in a fire of 1841. The stained glass company of Ward & Nixon, Frith Street, Soho, had produced a design which was considered inadequate for this important position. The church rebuilding committee therefore specified that the company should execute a new design ‘to be prepared by Mr Ruskin and Mr Oldfield’. Seven very detailed letters survive from Ruskin to Oldfield, Ruskin being on a long journey through France and Switzerland with his parents. The final letter, 7 August 1844, neatly combines Ruskin’s enthusiasm as an Alpinist with his concern that the east window of the Camberwell church should be as good as it could be. In the result, the window is a splendid composition of rich purple and red medallions, quite clearly inspired by the glass at Chartres:

I never spent so delightful a time in Switzerland, for by keeping myself in constant training, I was able at last to walk with the best guides and knock up all the bad ones; and so obtained access to some of the real arcana of the Alps. Last Saturday week I came upon a herd of thirty or more chamois, high on the Aiguille d’Argentière; a thing rare even in the memory of old guides. I am happy to find there are so many yet, as there was some fear of the race diminishing. I was away at Monte Rosa when your letter came, which made further delay; but I hope the window has been going on. I quite agree with all your remarks; only one or two things we shall have, I think, to remember in introducing new designs. First, that I believe you will find your blues very much more prominent in glass than on paper, and reds vice versâ; so at least I was told by an Oxford authority the other day; so that the quantity of blue being in the present window very great, we must be careful not to knock out too much red. I thought that I had fully expressed my concurrence with you in putting the angel and dragon into [that part of the design lettered] C. I intended to do so at least; and I am sure your group of saints will answer well for the segment. I thought the Baptism had been knocked out long ago, and that Ward was designing another. I had much rather you would, however. All that you say respecting my borrowings from M. Angelo is perfectly just. I borrowed not from taste but from weakness, because I found I could not design quaint or characteristic figures without an original. I found that mine looked absurd without being expressive. Indeed, in the whole design I had no view to its actual execution, but merely to the giving Ward an illustration of the kind of colour and character we wanted. I fully feel that you have too much on your hands, but how can I help you? I am just going to Paris. I have only a week to spare—put a day for Versailles, one for La Madeleine, Notre Dame, etc., and four for the Louvre. How am I to do anything for windows? [12, pp.446–7]

Intriguing is a letter from Ruskin written from Brantwood 7 December 1880 in which he is exhorting the artist and writer Kate Greenaway (1846–1901), who had already published her illustrations to *Under the Window* in 1879, to devote herself to designing and painting stained glass windows for churches. Ruskin apologises for not having responded to a letter from her with an example of her book illustrations for children and then, unexpectedly, says:

But – alas – do you know you have done me more grief than good for the moment? The drawing is so boundlessly more beautiful than the woodcut, that I shall have no peace of mind till I’ve come to see you and seen some more drawings, and told you – face to face – what a great and blessed gift you have – too great, in the ease of it, for you to feel yourself.

These books are lovely things, but, so far as I can guess, from looking at this drawing, your proper work would be in glass painting – where your own touch, your own colour, would be safe for ever, - seen, in sacred places, by multitudes – copied, by others, for story books – but your whole strength put in pure first perfectness on the enduring material. Have you ever thought of this? [37, pp. 331–2)

I’d like here to emphasise that crafted Gothic tradition embraced by John Dando Sedding, the architect known for Holy Trinity Sloane Street, the ‘Cathedral of the Arts and Crafts movement’ (where my grandparents were married), who for me is a key link. Sedding had served his apprenticeship in the architectural studio of George Edmund Street, as William Morris, Norman Shaw and Philip Webb had done, where he got to know Ruskin. In an uncanny apostolic succession, Sedding’s pupils included Herbert Ibberson, and Ernest Gimson and Ernest Barnsley, who were at the heart of the Cotswold flowering of the Arts and Crafts revival. Norman Jewson was the pupil of his cousin, Berty Ibberson and later worked in Sapperton, Glouestershire,

with the two Ernests, Gimson, and Barnsley, whose daughter he was to marry. It was Jewson who saved the house I live in now from ruin in 1925/6,

and whom I got to know in his last years, as a living link with the titans of the Arts and Crafts movement. Jewson exemplified for me Ruskin’s dictum, in accordance with his advice to Sedding, that working by hand was working with joy; that the making of a work of art or architecture must be one ‘In which the hand, the head, and the heart of man go together’ (*The Two Paths* (1859), lecture 2.) and here also in Ruskin’s *The Stones of Venice*:

It is only by labour that thought can be made healthy, and only by thought that labour can be made happy, and the two cannot be separated with impunity.

In 1876 Sedding had met Ruskin, by then nearly 60 years of age. Under his influence he developed a freer Gothic style, introducing natural ornament into his designs. He encouraged his students to study old buildings at first hand, focusing on the practicalities of craft techniques. His designs included wallpaper, embroidery, art metalwork and church furnishings, and what he called ‘gardencraft’. He emphasised texture and ornament; the naturalistic treatment of flowers, leaves and animals, always drawn from life; and the close involvement of the architect in the simple processes of building and in the supervision of a team of craftsmen employed direct. He was elected a member of the Art Workers’ Guild in 1884, the year of its foundation, and served as its second master in 1886.

On Sedding’s early death the torch was passed on to Harry (Henry) Wilson who completed Holy Trinity, Sloane Street, including working closely with a small army of superlative craftsmen who produced the stained glass – the east window designed by Edward Burne-Jones and executed by Morris & Co. – the furniture and the metalwork intended to be seen in a flickering light. It is to be remembered that Edward Burne-Jones and his wife formed a close friendship with Ruskin which lasted for many years.

It is perhaps not too fanciful to see in the interior of Holy Trinity, Sloane Street, echoes of one of Ruskin’s most enduring loves, the mysterious interior of the Basilica of St Mark’s, Venice?

**Compiled for the Guild of St George by Nicholas Mander and Peter Burman, Feb 2023**