

Front row left to right: Sam Bullock, Mary Catterson-Smith, Robert Catterson-Smith, Mrs CF Watt, May Morris, Caroline 'Dollie' Radford, Jenny Morris, Anna Maria Pascall, Madame Jeanne Desroches, Mme Cecile Desroches, Marianne 'Annie' Grove.

Middle row left to right: Mr F Bradley, Alfred Pascall, Ernest Radford, Mr Brandhandler, Andrew Watt, Robert Steele, Mr Grant, unknown, unknown, Mr Koulo, unknown, George Howe, Emery Walker, William Morris, Mr Grant, unknown, John Davies, Arthur John Smith.

Back row left to right: Unknown, unknown, Henry B Tarleton, Charles Kitching, Harry Windsor-Fry, William Dean, Mr WH Grant\*, Heinrich Mordhurst (\* WH Grant was the eldest of three brothers, all in the HSL and all pictured).

# 'A garden party at Kelmscott house... would be pleasant'

Martin Stott tells the story of the 1888 photograph of the  
Hammersmith Socialist League







The Socialist League, or SL, was founded in January 1885. It grew out of the Social Democratic Federation and its creation reflected the breach with HM Hyndman. At its height in 1887 the SL had about one thousand members. The Hammersmith Socialist League was one of twenty branches in the country, nine of which were in London, and was without doubt the most important SL branch. Morris was its Chair, edited the SL newspaper *Commonweal*, and was a nationally recognised figure, and the HSL attracted a range of members from an area far wider than Hammersmith itself. Apart for

Morris many other HSL members, including May Morris, ET Craig, James Tochatti, Walter Crane, HB Tarleton, Sam Bullock and Emery Walker, were or went on to become, significant figures in the co-operative, trades union, Fabian and socialist movements, the worlds of art and design, or a combination of these spheres.

It is not surprising therefore that the only known photograph of the Hammersmith Socialist League, as opposed to photographs of some of its leading individual members, has become so iconic in labour movement histories, and in books and exhibitions about William

Morris and his circle. It has been widely reproduced in contexts as diverse as Fiona MacCarthy's *William Morris: a life for our times*, Florence Boos' *William Morris's Socialist Diaries*, and the William Morris Gallery's *William Morris in 50 objects* as well as exhibitions such as the V&A's 1996 Morris centenary exhibition, and Jeremy Deller's recent *Love is enough: William Morris and Andy Warhol*. Despite its fame, very few original copies survive; the V&A, The Wilson in Cheltenham, the William Morris Gallery and the University of Delaware are the only public collections with copies.





However it is striking that rather little is known about the photograph – or photographs, since there are two slightly different versions – including who took it, when, where, why, and beyond a few ‘famous names’, who is in it. Acquiring an original copy in 2008 impelled me to find out.

Four sources of information were critical in pulling together the story of the photograph: the HSL papers in the British Library, William Morris’s collected letters, Jane Morris’s collected letters and the Emery Walker archive in the National Portrait Gallery.

Trying to work out when it was taken was likely to provide clues as to much else. In this respect the fact that the banner is that of the HSL is crucial because the HSL lasted less than six years, from January 1885 to November 1890. The picture was taken in the summer: the group is outdoors and the trees are in full leaf. A key breakthrough came when having placed the

photo on my website I was contacted by Jean Wise who was researching her family’s involvement in the early socialist movements. She is the great granddaughter of Alfred and Anna Maria Pascall who both appear in the photograph. She was able to provide a partial list of those present in the photograph<sup>1</sup>, something neither the V&A nor the National Portrait Gallery had. This enabled me to take a look at the minutes of the HSL in the British Library<sup>2</sup> where amongst other things, the dates of election of members are recorded. It rapidly became apparent from those records that that the picture was taken in the latter part of the life of the HSL because many of those present were admitted to membership in late 1887 or during 1888. Examples include Harry Windsor-Fry elected 4 September 1887, Alfred Pascall and Sam Bullock elected 23 October 1887, and Mary Catterson-Smith elected 4 March 1888. Turning to the minutes of the HSL from that period produced

an intriguing and unique reference. On Friday 20 July 1888 the HSL Ways and Means Committee minutes record: ‘Tarleton proposed and Mrs Howe seconded that weather and W Morris permitting, the branch have garden party at Kelmscott House during the summer. That it was generally agreed would be pleasant.’

A garden party in Kelmscott House garden would both be unusual for a group of activists more used to gathering for political activity or education, and equally unusually, would be an opportunity to dress up. To have a photograph recording the occasion would not be far-fetched.

A careful reading of both William Morris’s<sup>3</sup> and Jane Morris’s letters<sup>4</sup> provides some important clues. Jenny Morris is in the photograph. She was 27, suffering quite seriously from epileptic fits and was considered to be in need of specialist medical care. She had been suffering from the condition for about a decade and it was taking an emotional toll on her





Above left: *The Hammersmith Socialist Society* possibly by Sir Emery Walker, glass plate negative, 1890-1891. Given by Emery Walker Ltd, 1956, © National Portrait Gallery  
 Above right: *Hammersmith Socialist League*, anonymous, albumen print photograph c1884 © Victoria and Albert Museum

parents, particularly Jane. At the beginning of August 1888 Jenny was sent away to Malvern to a nursing home. Although she did return to Kelmscott House for short visits, she never returned permanently. On 7 August 1888 Morris wrote to her:

'My dearest Jenny,

I am bound to write you a little line however shabby; you know I am not much of a letter writer I am so glad my dear that you like the place as it will do you all the more good I am sure.'

He goes on to describe the weather, a meeting with 'Uncle Ned', Edward Burne-Jones, his speaking engagements, and a demonstration in Petersham Park, Richmond on 6 August, a Bank Holiday. Clearly these are events that Jenny had missed. Kelvin comments that, 'This is the first of a series of letters written to Jenny in the latter part of 1888 when she was confined to nursing homes.'

Two days later on 9 August, Jane wrote to Wilfred Scawen Blunt from Kelmscott House:

'My dear Mr Blunt,

Thank you for your note. Jenny is gone to Malvern and I have good news of her, she is making herself happy in various ways and the doctor says there is every hope of a complete cure for her – so I must hope on. It has been a dreadful grief for us all, worse for me than for anyone, as I have been so constantly with her. I never get used to it, I mean in the sense of not minding every time the thing occurs. It is as if a dagger were thrust into me.'

These letters provide a clear final date for the photograph to have been taken: the end of July 1888, immediately before Jenny's departure to Malvern. For Jenny to be there and in the photograph, the garden party must have taken place on Saturday 28 July 1888, Sundays being reserved for outdoor political meetings. That it was taken in the garden of Kelmscott house is

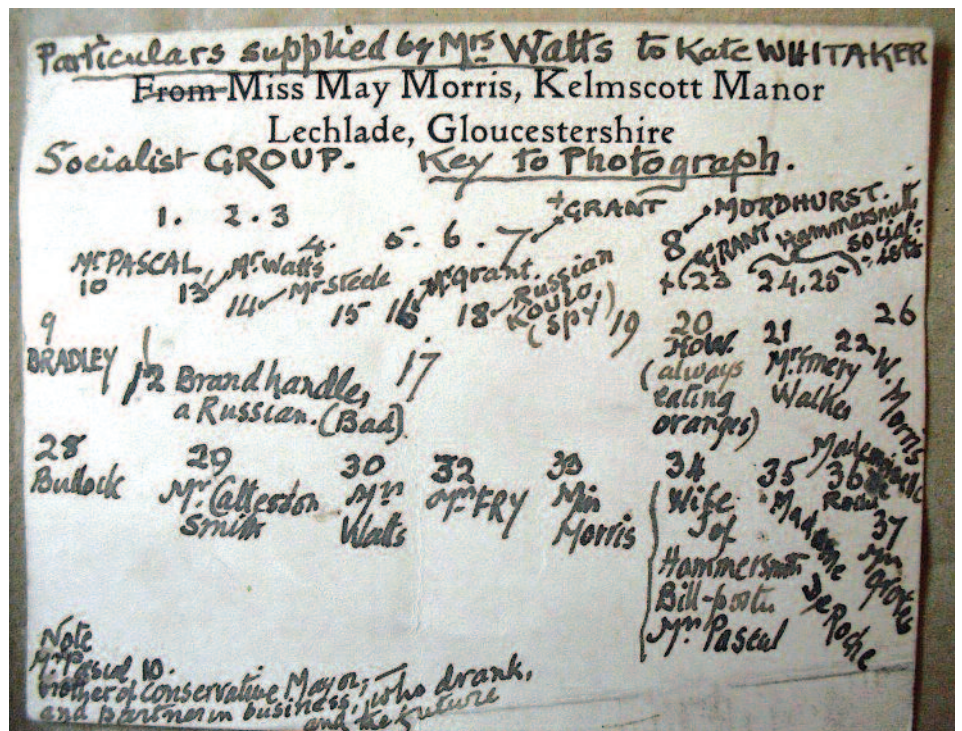
hardly in doubt. The space is a mown lawn with flower beds just visible on the far right, the party seated on chairs and benches probably taken from the Coach house. A photograph also taken in the garden in 1891 of the Hammersmith Socialist Society, as the HSL became at the end of 1890, provides more evidence.

Taken from a different angle, the photograph is also of a much bigger group with three banners, and taken when the leaves had fallen from the trees. The different angle and its much wider framing allows the silhouettes of houses in the background, which were either out of shot or obscured by the trees in full leaf in the earlier picture, to become apparent.

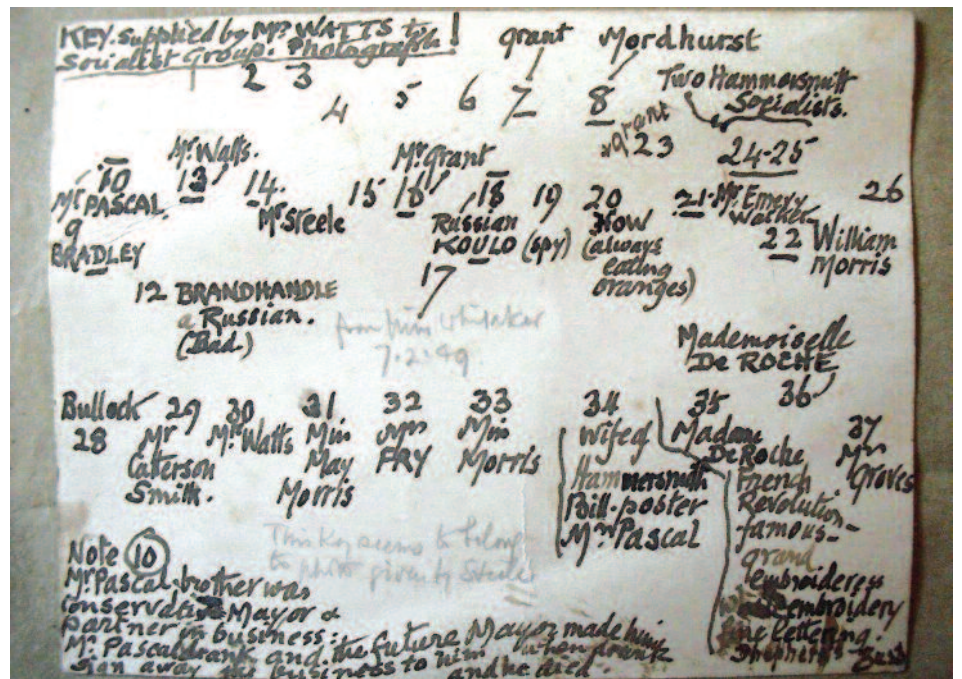
This picture provides an important clue to the photographer. Stetz<sup>3</sup> tentatively suggests that it is the work of the well-known Victorian photographer Fredrick Hollyer. Hollyer knew the Morris and Burne-Jones families well, worked extensively with Burne-Jones and took a



Middle right: *Chants for Socialists* by William Morris, showing the Socialist League header designed by Walter Crane, 1892 edition, © The William Morris Society Collection  
Far right: Walter Crane's design for the membership card of the Hammersmith Branch of the Socialist League, © The William Morris Society Collection



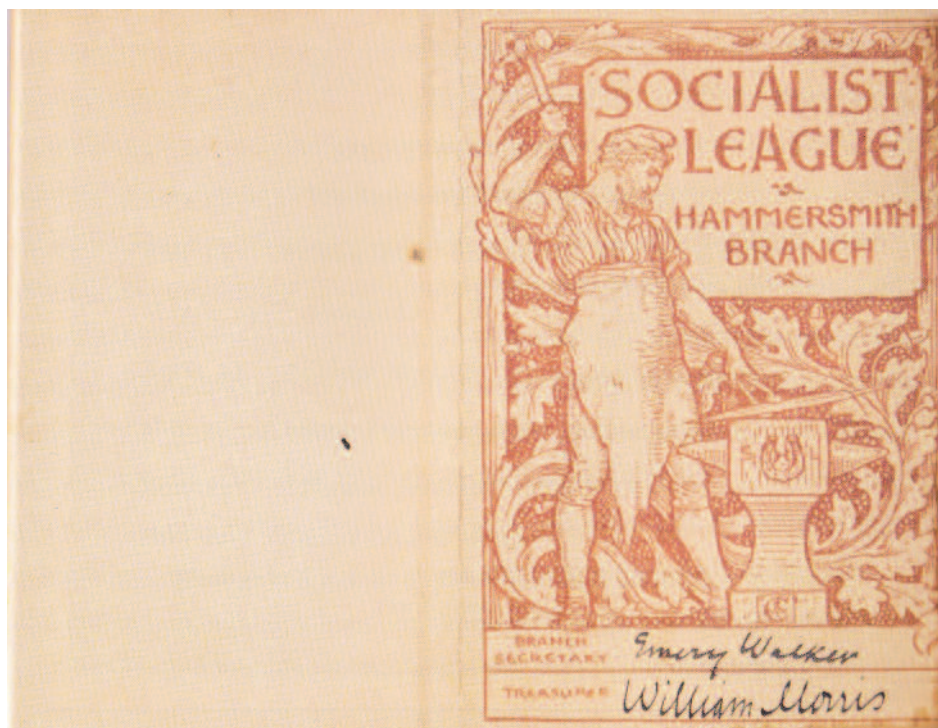
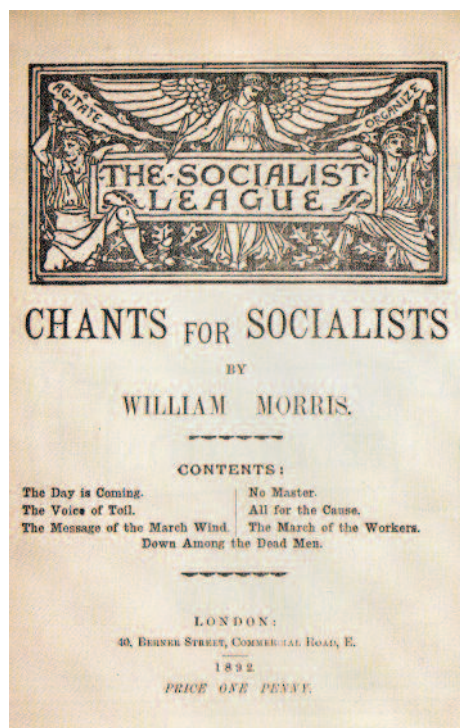
In the first, he is on the right hand edge of the picture, ready to go back and check the first exposure and discuss any technical changes with Pellatt, before returning to a position right beside Morris for the second and final shot.



With the letter she encloses a hand-written and annotated list, ie the 'little note', by Mrs Watt, with what seems to be a rough copy written on

Writing the note many years after the photograph was taken, Mrs Watt, while not being able to recall the names of all those present that day and mistaking Caroline Radford for ‘Mrs Fry’, provides some fascinating information on some of those present. Thus; Mr How(e) ‘always eating oranges’, Mr Brandhandler ‘a Russian (bad)’, Madame de Roche ‘French revolution, famous - grand embroideress..’ Koulo, ‘Russian (spy)’. She also remarks in relation to Mr Pascal that his ‘...brother was Conservative Mayor & partner in





business: Mr Pascal drank and the future Mayor made him sign away the business to him when drunk and he died.

A three-page pencil commentary, probably written by Kate Whitaker, accompanies the letter and note. Possibly contemporaneous, it takes the list and adds comments which seem to have been a record of a discussion or informal interview with Mrs Watt.

Some of these comments relate to the roles those in the photograph had at that time, others to what they went on to become, and others to their history. Thus: John Davies, 'a good outdoor speaker', George Howe 'often the banner bearer', her husband Andrew Watt 'first secretary of the shop assistants union', F Bradley, 'keen worker for the shop assistants and early closing movement - lost his work and suffered much', 'Annie' Grove 'started the Socialist Choir', Madame Desroches 'a pioneer of the group called St Simone in Paris fled during the Revolution 1848-9 on New Year's Eve to save being sent to Devil's Isle. Awarded a pension of £20 pa when the coup d'état was declared for the help she gave to the wounded on both sides. Buried in Hammersmith cemetery with our banner unfurled by William Morris.'

In 2016 the descendants of Robert and Mary Catterson-Smith sold the family archive at Sotheby's. This included original copies of both versions of the photograph, one annotated many years later by Robert Catterson-Smith. The annotations confirm Mrs Watts' identifications, including 'a Russian', and adding a couple of descriptions; George Howe 'a brickmaker' and AJ Smith 'sculptor'.

The photograph has significance on a number of levels. From a personal perspective this is the only known photograph of Morris with his adult daughters, then aged 26 and 27. It is also the last photograph of Morris with Jenny, and the last photograph of Jenny at Kelmscott House. Within a few days of the photograph being taken, her illness would sunder the family.

Politically it has significance because it was a big convivial and mixed group, something that was not common outside Socialist circles in Victorian times. The composition of the photograph with nine women, prominent in the foreground, was itself a statement. At the time it was taken, the Hammersmith branch of the Socialist League was a really important part of socialist politics; Morris was the leading light in the SL and its highest profile public figure, so important indeed that a police spy seems to have successfully infiltrated not just the HSL but the photograph itself. The Branch too had many other important members, not all present on that day in July 1888, whose influence in coming decades went right across and can be owned by many strands of the labour movement, from the Fabians and the Independent Labour Party to the trades union movement. The photograph also exemplifies the extraordinary creativity of the branch members ranging from Morris himself and May, to Walker, 'Annie' Grove, and important educators such as Cecile Desroches and Robert Catterson-Smith, as well as absent or future members like Walter Crane and TJ Cobden-Sanderson.

Photographically, its significance lies in its very existence. Very few other political pictures survive from this era, especially ones that can be so closely associated with a specific period of time and a particular group of people. There are surviving records of the HSL and its activities through Morris's writings and his and others articles in *Commonweal* which give the photograph a uniquely rich context. Having said that, while much is now known about it, important gaps remain. Six of those present remain unidentified. There is no record in HSL minutes of the photograph having been taken, nor are there contemporary participants' letters, diary or journal entries referring to it, or daybook photo records from Walker & Boutall, which along with the original glass plates from which the surviving pictures would have been

printed, have been lost. Robert Catterson-Smith's annotated copy of the photograph, and Mrs Watt's recently discovered key, recollections and commentary, both written almost fifty years after the event, are therefore all the more important as the only known surviving written records by people who were actually present on that historic day.

**Martin Stott is Chair of the William Morris Society.**

#### Acknowledgements

This article is developed from a talk I gave to the William Morris Society on 31 January 2015. I am very grateful for the assistance a wide range of people gave me in putting both the talk and the article together, in particular: Prof Florence Boos who introduced me to the British Library manuscript archives, and tipped me off to the Catterson-Smith photographs; Jean Wise who provided the vital first clues as to who is in the photograph; Jan Marsh and Martin Crick for thoughts and comments on the authorship of the Sparrow documents; Helen Elletson, Curator at the William Morris Society; Carlen Kremer and Anna Mason at the William Morris Gallery; Constantia Nicholaides at the National Portrait Gallery; and Kirsty Hartsiotis at The Wilson, Cheltenham.

- 1 Jean Wise, personal communication 17 September 2012
- 2 British Library: Hammersmith Socialist Library papers; minute books, Add MS 45891 and Add Ms 45892
- 3 Norman Kelvin ed, *The collected letters of William Morris*, Vol 2 1885-1888, pp 792-794
- 4 Frank C Sharp & Jan Marsh eds, *The collected letters of Jane Morris* (The Boydell Press 2012) p169
- 5 Margaret D Stetz, *Facing the late Victorians: portraits of artists and writers in the Mark Samuels Lasner collection* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007) p84
- 6 List of members of the Socialist League and the Hammersmith Socialist Society 21 November 1890. 'Socialism' box, The Wilson Library, Cheltenham
- 7 Clara Sparrow: letter of 27 November 1936 and accompanying documents, WMS archive