

## CHAPTER 1 ✎ VELLUM COPIES

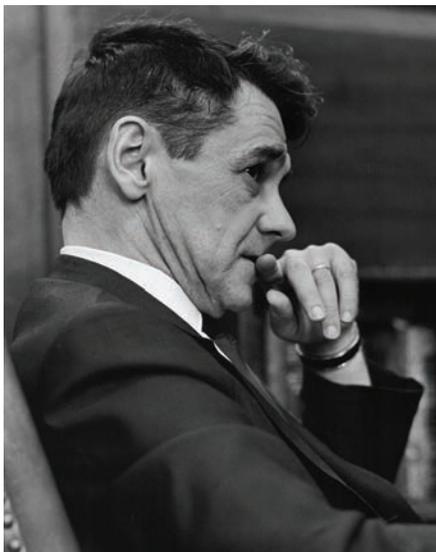
NINETEENTH-CENTURY English publishers, when they wished to produce a special version of a book aimed at wealthy collectors, usually printed a few additional large-paper copies (sometimes described as “L.P.” in booksellers’ catalogues), in which the original text setting was retained but leaves of more ample dimensions were substituted. Morris himself did this in a few of his pre-Kelmscott books, but by the 1890s he was strenuously opposed to the practice, because it ruined the proportions of margins and set the text adrift in an immense sea of paper.

However, it was clear from the beginning that the expensive Kelmscott Press books would appeal primarily to collectors, and it must have seemed self-evident, therefore, that Morris would somehow have to produce a few “specials” of each title. His solution (as was often the case for Morris) was to follow the example of the earliest printers, including Gutenberg, by printing a handful of copies on vellum rather than paper; he proceeded to do this with nearly all the Kelmscott publications, beginning with the first book, *The Story of the Glittering Plain*, which was issued in the spring of 1891. Initially Morris was able to use some vellum that he had bought years earlier for his experiments in calligraphy, but that ran out quickly, and he had to find other suppliers. He then turned to an Italian source of vellum (but found himself in competition with the Vatican), and eventually he discovered two English manufacturers—Henry Band (of Middlesex) and William J. Turney & Company (of Worcestershire)—who met his high standards.

In private, Morris and Emery Walker both expressed reservations about the suitability of vellum for printing, and certainly his pressmen found it an exceptionally difficult material to work with. The existence of these costly special copies serves also to remind us of one of the amusing paradoxes of the Kelmscott Press: that Morris, an avowed Marxist, professed to despise the capitalists who bought his products. The *Chaucer* in particular was a spectacularly opulent book, obviously aimed at well-to-do buyers. Not surprisingly, the vellum copies of *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* stirred up a frenzy of excitement among collectors and speculators. Here was *la crème de la crème*—the most desirable copies of the most remarkable book published by the most celebrated private press in history. With these superlatives ringing in their ears, Morris’s contemporaries (the seriously affluent ones, that is) found the vellum *Chaucer* almost irresistible.

Because of the fame of the Kelmscott *Chaucer*, there has always been a strong interest in the story of the vellum copies, but confusion about the number printed has bedevilled every attempt to write an authoritative account of them. In 1898 Sydney Cockerell declared flatly that there were “13 on vellum” and added that two of them were in the Doves pigskin binding (*A Note by William Morris*, pp. 44, 47). That sounds straightforward enough, but behind the scenes Cockerell acknowledged that there were many extra vellum sheets (“overs”) of the *Chaucer*, created as insurance against spoilage, and the question of whether these spare sheets might be bound into one or more additional volumes inevitably arose. In a letter to J. & J. Leighton, 28 February 1896, for example, he remarked that “Mr. Bowden [the foreman of Morris’s printers] will look out all the Chaucer overs, so that you can make up as many good cop-

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ies as possible, & then report again, in case it may be worth while to reset two or three of the sheets.”<sup>1</sup> By 1951, when Cockerell’s own vellum copy was exhibited at the Victoria and Albert, the catalogue declared (undoubtedly with Cockerell’s authorization) that it was “one of only fourteen copies printed on vellum.”<sup>2</sup>

In a letter to May Morris, 21 October 1923, Cockerell acknowledged that an “extra (retree) copy was given by your father to Walker, I think,”<sup>3</sup> and presumably that accounts for the fourteenth copy cited in 1951. Even Morris, writing to Cockerell in the summer of 1894, had been aware that the projected figure of thirteen was probably unreliable: “The number of the Chaucer is to be 325 paper [later increased to 425], and 13 (— or 14?) vellum.”<sup>4</sup> But the slightly uncomfortable fact is that we have found *fifteen* vellum copies, for which we can find no explanation in Cockerell or any other reliable source.

The leading authority on the subject was the late Decherd Turner (1923–2002), successively the librarian of the Bridwell Library (Southern Methodist University) and the Humanities Research Center (University of Texas at Austin), who attempted to compile a census of the vellum copies only of the Kelmescott *Chaucer*.<sup>5</sup> Turner, who was exceptionally well-connected in the world of rare books, for many years carried on an exhaustive correspondence with dealers, auction houses, librarians, and collectors; near the end of his life he approached three persons (Steven Bakker, Eric White, and Jay Dillon) about the possibility of collaborating with him, but at his death the census was unfinished. We believe that there were at least three reasons for his failure to complete the project: in his later years Turner was caring for his wife, who was seriously ill, and found it difficult to get out of the house; he was (as he admitted) baffled by the Internet and by computer technology generally; and, perhaps most importantly, he seems to have been startled and confused by the discovery (by Steven Bakker) in 1985 that Heribert Tenschert, a Swiss dealer, was offering in *one* catalogue *two* vellum copies of the *Chaucer*, neither of which had a discernible provenance—and which, by his own count, brought the number of vellum copies to a completely unexpected fifteen.

We sympathize with his sense of bewilderment, which we confess we shared when we first examined the Tenschert catalogue, because we too are unable to solve all the mysteries presented by these fifteen copies. Nevertheless, we have reconstructed the provenance of each as fully as possible, and we have also listed, in Chapter 3, seven vellum copies in catalogues that cannot be definitely attached to known, located copies. We are not suggesting that there are *more* than fifteen copies; but we hope that when additional information emerges in the future, it may be possible to connect the seven mystery copies with the fif-

1. Kelmscott Press letterbook (William Morris Gallery). It is possible, but highly unlikely, that Cockerell is here referring to paper copies; however, in his correspondence and diaries he never refers to the paper “overs” in this kind of language. Cockerell recognized the immense value of even the vellum scraps.

2. *The Festival of Britain: Exhibition of Books Arranged by the National Book League at the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1951* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1951), no. 17.

3. BL Add. Ms. 52740, fols. 100–01. There is also in the British Library (shelfmark C.43.h.17) a bound, incomplete vellum set, assembled from “overs” and discarded leaves, and purchased from May Morris in December 1923.

4. *Letters*, 4:180.

5. For two lengthy obituaries, see Nicolas Barker, “Decherd Turner, Jnr.: Collector-Librarian of Rare Acquisitiveness,” *The Independent*, 5 August 2002, p. 16; and “Decherd Turner,” *The Times*, 8 August 2002.

teen known copies, since several of the latter display conspicuous gaps in their history of ownership.



## 1.1 BRITISH LIBRARY

British Library, London. † ¶ Doves binding (1899). Walker copy. [C.42.l.12.] Book-label (printed at the Kelmscott Press: *Bibliography*, D10.3) of Emery Walker, 3 The Terrace, Hammersmith. In Doves Bindery oak box.

PROVENANCE: Emery Walker (gift from Morris). — Dorothy Walker (by descent from her father, 1933). — Deposited in the British Museum by Dorothy Walker, 1940. — British Museum (purchased from Dorothy Walker, 1958). — British Library.

EMERY WALKER (1851–1933) acted as Morris’s chief adviser at the Kelmscott Press, which was founded largely as a result of an illustrated lecture about letterforms that he delivered in November 1888. The son of a London coach-builder, Walker had risen to become England’s leading process-engraver and an authority on typographical matters both modern and historical. He declined to become Morris’s formal partner at the Kelmscott Press, but, as Cockerell remarked in his *Times* obituary, “he was all the while a virtual partner, and no important step was taken without his advice and approval.” He was cofounder with Cobden-Sanderson of the Doves Press, and his views on the Caslon types, leading, and word-spacing had a profound influence not only on Morris but on the printing trade as a whole.

For his other copy of the *Chaucer*, see Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum (*Paper Copies*); originally laid in the paper copy was an invoice, dated 31 May 1899, from Cobden-Sanderson—“Binding vellum copy Kelmscott ‘Chaucer’ in oak boards & white pig skin & tooling done to William Morris Pattern”—that was undoubtedly for this vellum copy.

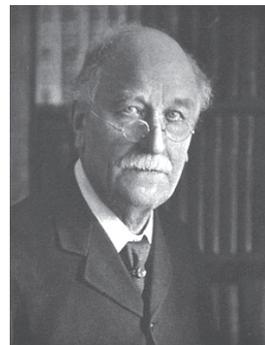
(CHARLOTTE) DOROTHY WALKER (1878?–1963), Walker’s daughter, deposited the vellum *Chaucer* in the British Museum during the Second World War, as she recorded in two memoranda to her executors (at the Emery Walker House): [1 February 1939] “I gave all Doves Press (vellum copies) except Bible & Agricola, to the British Museum, telling Mr Marsden that they would be given on my death, also wayzgoose programmes (in drawer of small bureau in dining room). When I gave the Kelmscott Press vellum copies (except Chaucer & Froissart, Godfrey of Boulogne & Sidonia the Sorceress) I said that the Chaucer & Froissart should also go to B.M. at my death, they had already copies of Godfrey & Sidonia given by W.M in exchange for some leaves of another book. But as mine are inscribed to EW by W.M. I think they should go with the set. ¶ [1940] 1940? July? Took K.P. vellum Chaucer & vellum Doves Bible & Froissart leaves to B.M. also Doves’ Tacitus on vellum for safe custody in the War. ¶ Fetched from the depths of the B.M. on Friday Nov. 23rd. They were actually under the Kings Library when an incendiary did a lot of damage.”

## 1.2 CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY

Rare Books Department, Cambridge University Library, Cambridge, England. † ¶ Doves binding (1898). Hodson–Charrington copy. [Sel.1.16.]

Bookplates and labels: (1) Laurence W. Hodson, Compton Hall, near Wolverhampton (*Bibliography*, D10.7); (2) John Charrington, The Grange,

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Sir Emery Walker

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EXHIBITIONS: Fitzwilliam Museum, 1918 (lent by Emery Walker). — Victoria and Albert Museum, 9 February–8 April 1934 [*Centenary of William Morris* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1934), no. 262 (“Lent by Miss D. Walker”)].

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Alston, R. C., comp. *Books Printed on Vellum in the Collections of the British Library*. London: British Library, 1996. (See p. 43.) — Tidcombe, *Doves Bindery*, pp. 266–67 (with photograph). ¶ [WALKER] [Cockerell, Sydney.] “Sir Emery Walker: A Master of Typography.” *The Times*, 24 July 1933, p. 7. (Obituary.) — Franklin, Colin. *Emery Walker: Some Light on His Theories of Printing and on His Relations with William Morris and Cobden-Sanderson*. Cambridge: Privately printed, 1973. — Greensted, Mary, and Sophia Wilson, eds. *Originality and Initiative: The Arts and Crafts Archives at Cheltenham*. Cheltenham: Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum in Association with Lund Humphries, 2003. (See no. 41 and frontispiece.) — Harrop, Dorothy A. *Emery Walker, 1851–1933*. London: Nine Elms, 1986. — *History, passim*. — [Kent, David, ed.] *Emery Walker: “The Master of the Art of the Book.”* [Austin, Tex.: Carol Kent, Printer, the Press at the Humanities Research Center, 1988]. — Newdigate, Bernard. “Contemporary Printers, II: Emery Walker.” *Fleurion*, no. 4 (1925): 63–69. — Nordlunde, Carl Volmer. *Sir Emery Walker and the Revival of Printing*. Trans. Betty Klitgaard. Copenhagen: Nordlunde’s Bogtrykkeri, 1959. — Peterson, William S. “The Library of Emery Walker.” *Matrix* 12 (1992): 3–14. — Rooke, Noel. “Sir Emery Walker 1851–1933.” *Penrose’s Annual* 48 (1954): 39–43. — Schmidt-Künsemüller, Friedrich-Adolf. “Emery Walker.” *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch* (1950): 306–17. — Reid, Aileen. “7 Hammersmith Terrace, W6.” *Country Life* 197 (30 October 2003): 70–73.

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### CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY

EXHIBITION: "William Morris," Victoria and Albert Museum, 9 May–1 September 1996 [Parry, no. O26 (with photograph of the binding)].

BIBLIOGRAPHY: [CHARRINGTON] F. S., H., J. W. G., and H. R. Creswick. "Obituary: Mr. John Charrington, 1856–1938 [sic]." *Cambridge Review* 60 (1939): 305–06. — *Who Was Who*. ¶ [HODSON] Ashbee, C. R. *Craftsmanship in Competitive Industry, Being a Record of the Guild of Handicraft and Some Deductions from Their Twenty-one Years' Experience*. Chipping Campden and London: Essex House Press, [1908]. — "Deaths." *The Times*, 7 March 1933, p. 1. — *Letters*, 4:208–09. — Parry, *William Morris* (see EXHIBITION, above), pp. 172, 247, 250, 295.

### HARVARD UNIVERSITY

EXHIBITIONS: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 4 May–16 July 1961 [Eleanor M. Garvey, *The Artist and the Book, 1860–1960, in Western Europe and the United States*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts; Cambridge, Mass.: Department of Printing and Graphic Arts, Harvard College Library, 1972), no. 45]. — "Centuries of Books and Manuscripts," Houghton Library, 3 March–10 April 1992, and Grolier Club, 19 May–31 July 1992 [*Centuries of Books and Manuscripts: Collectors and Friends, Scholars and Librarians Build the Harvard College Library* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard College Library, 1992), no. 68].

BIBLIOGRAPHY: [BAKER] "Baker Mourned at Yale: School of Drama to Be Closed on Day of Funeral." *New York Times*, 7 January 1935, p. 17. — "Prof G. P. Baker, Play Expert, Dies: Famous Playwrights Taught by Him in His 36 Years at Harvard, 8 at Yale." *New York Times*, 7 January 1935, p. 17. ¶ [JONES] Griffin, Penny. "Jones, Henry Arthur," in *ODNB*. — Jones, Doris Arthur. *The Life and Letters of Henry Arthur Jones*. London: Gollancz, 1930. — *Letters*, 4:153. — "Literature and Drama: Message in Mr. Henry Arthur Jones's Will." *The Times*, 11 January 1929, p. 10. — "Mr. Henry Arthur Jones: A Famous English Dramatist." *The Times*, 8 January 1929, p. 17. (Obituary.)

Shenley; (3) "Presented by J. Charrington, M.A. Trinity College, 2 November 1918." Inserted at the back of the book is a print entitled "The Yard of the Tabard Inn on the Morning of the 17th April, 1387" by P. D. Hardy, 1900.

PROVENANCE: Laurence W. Hodson. — Sotheby, 4 December 1906, lot 422 [*Property of Laurence W. Hodson, Esq., Compton Hall, Wolverhampton*] (sold to Sydney Cockerell for £260). — Sydney Cockerell. — John Charrington (probably purchased from Cockerell). — Cambridge University Library (gift from Charrington, 2 November 1918).

LAURENCE WILLIAM HODSON (d. 1933) probably acquired the book directly from the Kelmscott Press; his name appears in a list, sent by Cockerell to Jane Morris, 2 March 1898, of persons who "have a full set of K.P. books or else have all those written by Mr Morris" (BL Add. Ms. 52738, fol. 37). Hodson, director of the Springfield Brewery Company, Wolverhampton, knew Morris well and had hired Morris & Company to redesign the interior of Compton Hall in 1895–96 (and commissioned three of the most celebrated Burne-Jones–Morris tapestries depicting the search for the Holy Grail).<sup>1</sup> In 1897 he visited the Kelmscott Press, and the following year, when the Press closed, he provided the money for C. R. Ashbee to purchase Morris's printing equipment. He is described and quoted as "Shareholder No. 9" in *Craftsmanship in Competitive Industry*, Ashbee's history of the Guild of Handicraft, but Hodson, in a letter to Ashbee, 27 July 1908, inserted in the British Library copy of the book (shelfmark X.510/215), complained that Ashbee had misrepresented his views. He added that he was "a bit out of the swim just now" and regretted that he was no longer able to provide financial support. Two years earlier, in 1906, Hodson had gone bankrupt: he was forced to sell Compton Hall (now a hospice), and his library—which included the manuscripts of most of Morris's writings, many of them earlier purchased by Charles Fairfax Murray—was dispersed in a Sotheby sale on 4 December of that year.<sup>2</sup> His vellum *Chaucer* was purchased by Sydney Cockerell, who presumably was representing a client (probably John Charrington).

JOHN CHARRINGTON (1856–1939), chairman of the oldest coal business in England, was a collector of prints and early illustrated books who had strong ties with both the Fitzwilliam Museum and the University Library, and he became an important benefactor to both institutions; the print room of the Fitzwilliam, in fact, bears his name. His friendship with Sydney Cockerell<sup>3</sup> dated back to the 1890s, when they had met at the Coal Exchange. (Cockerell was briefly in the coal trade before he went to work for Morris.) Charrington was the author of *A Catalogue of the Mezzotints After, or Said to Be After, Rembrandt* (1923) and *A Catalogue of the Engraved Portraits in the Library of Samuel Pepys, F.R.S., Now Belonging to Magdalene College* (1936), both published by Cambridge University Press.

Charrington also owned a paper *Chaucer* (see Biblioteca Huicalco, *Paper Copies*).

1. Cockerell's diary for 1899 (BL Add. Ms. 52636) indicates that he visited Hodson at his home near Wolverhampton and "spent the evg in looking at his treasures which include several fine manuscripts from W.M.'s library" (16 August 1899).

2. The furnishings of the house were sold at Christie's, 6 July 1906.

3. Charrington's letters to Cockerell in the British Library (Add. Ms. 52709, fols. 194–217) do not shed any light on the *Chaucer*, but it is most likely that he bought it directly from (or through) Cockerell, from whom he purchased several other Kelmscott books.