

EMERY WALKER

 Arts, crafts and a world in motion

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PREFACE

This book came about through my having carried out some design work for the Emery Walker Trust, who have the care of No. 7 Hammersmith Terrace, now Emery Walker's House, on the north bank of the River Thames in Hammersmith, west London. Although Walker was a crucial figure in the private press movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and an active and highly respected member of the world of graphic design, printing and typography until his death in 1933, as a man he seemed both present and strangely absent, credited for making plans a reality for many others, but a figure who kept himself assiduously out of the spotlight.

This book is an attempt to give both a fuller impression of Emery Walker as a person, and a comprehensive sense of his life, career and achievements, until now dealt with in detail largely in limited run, privately printed books that are expensive and difficult to find. An excellent way to get a sense of someone is through their correspondence, and the book contains 143 examples, either from, to, or about Walker. Small biographies of some of the key correspondents supplement these, showing how wide, significant and influential were Walker's social and professional circles, and how the different members often interlinked. To give further context, interwoven into the thread of letters are fourteen sections that examine some of the key stages and achievements of Walker's career.

It can of course be left to the reader to decide how they approach the book: in a strictly linear fashion, or not. But whichever route is taken, I hope the result will be a greater understanding of Emery Walker: his work, the personality that drove his long career, and the fascinating, highly charged social and political backgrounds against which that career was played out.

KEY TO THE LETTERS:

The name in red capitals denotes the sender, that in black upper and lowercase the recipient. The reference number of the letter follows the recipient's name, enclosed in square brackets.

The codes in square brackets after the date of the letter denotes the source. These are:

[BL] : The British Library
[BODLEIAN] : The Bodleian Library
[CUL] : Cambridge University Library
[EWT/V&A] : Emery Walker Trust / Victoria & Albert Museum
[FOL] : *Friends of a Lifetime*
[HRC] : Harry Ransom Center
[LTES] : *Letters from T.E. Shaw to Bruce Rogers*
[ST BRIDE] : St Bride Library
[TSOW] : *Doves Press: The Start of a Worry*
[WILSON] : The Wilson, Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum
[WMG] : William Morris Gallery

INTRODUCTION

Walker was keenly preoccupied with the appearance of the everyday book, and not only with its rich relations. It is scarcely too much to say that his influence, direct or indirect, can be discerned in nearly every well-designed page of type that now appears, and that to him more than to any other man this century's great improvement in ordinary book production has been due. SYDNEY COCKERELL

Emery Walker carried everywhere with him an atmosphere of genial friendliness ... Our mutual love of fine printing and our similar temperaments made our companionship congenial. We spent much time amongst his books. He respected me, I know, for having acquired some learning without early advantages in education, and when we talked of Oriental books and scripts which I had studied, he gave me his complete attention as though I was a museum expert.

J.H. MASON

I can remember him quite well as a small boy when he used to come to Shelley House in Chelsea. We liked the old man but used to laugh at him because he said 'D'ye see, d'ye see, d'ye see ...' after every sentence and we used to count them. EDWARD HORNBY

Emery Walker has always been a simultaneously prominent yet shadowy figure in the history of printing, publishing, typography and graphic design during the late nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth. He is important because through his work with William Morris' Kelmscott Press, and subsequently his own Doves Press, he made possible a dramatic recalibration in the way people looked at books, typography, graphic design, and ultimately, design in a wider field. The output of these presses inspired a movement, and the philosophies involved in their working methods were swiftly taken up by others who, leaving Morris' medieval touchstone far behind, adapted them to their own purposes, and to a future world.

Present yet absent: not only do all Walker's homes from 1879 until his death in 1933 still stand, but at No. 7 Hammersmith Terrace, on the banks of the River Thames in west London, now Emery Walker's House, much of the interior as Walker knew it was lovingly preserved by his daughter Dorothy. So it is possible to walk through his front door, around

his living room and drawing room, and see the wallpaper, the furniture, the pictures and objects, that he would have seen. It feels as though he has just popped out for 'a swift half' at The Black Lion pub around the corner, and will be back at any moment.

Or so I felt at first. But the more, in my mind, I waited, the more it seemed that he had decided to make a night of it, even to stay for a lock-in. There are several portraits of Walker on the walls of No. 7, but they gaze back steadily but impassively, giving little clue to the man himself. What kind of person, in reality, was he? Probably the most popular photograph of him, taken in a garden, presumably seated, with Walker holding a cat on his lap, presents a slightly raffish, even dandyish image. A buttonhole of two tiny flowers, one still in bud, with their foliage, is artfully arranged in his lapel, but his bowtie is disarranged, perhaps deliberately, on one side. His luxuriant moustache gives him a slightly comic appearance, bringing to mind James Finlayson, the permanently exasperated victim/adversary in early Laurel and Hardy films. Stories of Walker breakfasting, or sustaining his evening round of committees, on a diet of red onions, seem a discordantly eccentric detail for a man otherwise pictured unsmiling in suits and hats, a practical, focussed businessman.

Most accounts of Walker as a man, subsequently written by those who knew and worked with him, are testimonials to the excellence both of his personality, and of his contributions, his energy, and the help and advice he gave so freely to those who wanted to follow the creative path that he and William Morris had beaten out. As Priscilla Johnston recorded in her biography of her father, the calligrapher Edward Johnston was promised, if he came to London, to be introduced 'to Somebody Walker, the man who is carrying on Morris' Press'. His constant availability was likened by Philip Webb to that of an essential utility, water, but free of charge. For Charles St John Hornby of the Ashendene Press, he was a mine, 'from which to draw a wealth of counsel'. Elizabeth Yeats, sister of the poet W.B. Yeats, started the Dun Emer, later known as the Cuala Press, in 1902, with her sister Lily, and recalled: 'Mr Emery Walker of the Doves Press helped me with the start of my Press—he advised me most kindly—he is an old friend of ours—and the kindest of men.' Bernard Newdigate, of the Arden Press and Shakespeare Head Press, went even further: 'Others besides myself would gladly and gratefully own that nearly everything that is worth anything in their own practice as printers comes directly or indirectly from his counsel and example.'

A certain amount of twentieth century typographic history has an element of hagiography about it, the writers tending to have been friends or colleagues who had an interest in maintaining a particular