

INTRODUCTION

My absorbing and lifelong hobby has been collecting books, primarily as a source of learning, but increasingly I became interested in the book as an expression of craftsmanship, design and beauty. This small collection began after meeting Stephen Conway, a bookbinder and Fellow of Designer Bookbinders, and being enthused by his outstanding work.

I decided to form a collection of books to show the work of some of the very best British bookbinders on the subject of socialism. From an early age I have been deeply interested in the history of socialism and at times engaged in its application.

All the books in this collection were published before 1900. The collection does not cover the foundation of the Labour Party; it would take a new collection to follow socialism into the 20th century. But it is interesting to note that the Chairman of the Founding Conference in February 1900 was Frederick Rogers, President of the Vellum Bookbinders Trade Union, who also wrote a book entitled *The Art of Bookbinding*.

The first book in this collection is Robert Blatchford's *Merrie England* published in 1894. The collection then travels back in time, through thirteen other books, covering ideas, movements and individuals that influenced socialism. The final and fifteenth book in the collection is the two-volume *William Morris Writer Artist Socialist* by May Morris which covers the work of Morris but was published in 1936.

I have included as many Fine Press books such as, The Kelmscott Press and The Essex House Press, as I have been able. But for reasons explained in the text, this has not always been possible. Some of the books are therefore in ordinary trade editions which, in my opinion, does not in any way diminish their importance.

The collection is a small showcase for British Designer Bookbinders (although there are some excellent binders who are not represented here) and is, I believe, a wonderful example of their outstanding and beautiful work. I hope all those who see and touch the books gain pleasure, satisfaction and possibly the motivation to have one of their own favourite books bound in this way.

I would like to thank the following people for their help in organising and presenting the collection:

- Stephen Conway and Stuart Brockman for getting me started.
- All those bookbinders and booksellers who encouraged me along the way, particularly Oliver Clarke who wrote to me at length on the subject, and Edward Bayntun Coward for his guidance and kindness.
- My friends and colleagues in politics who made helpful suggestions, particularly Tony Benn, Michael Foot, Bob Gavron, Ken Morgan, David Evans, and Tristram Hunt for his Foreword and other helpful suggestions.
- Jocelyn Hillman and Lynne Beale for help with the organisation; Jeanette Koch for being absolutely brilliant in every respect; and finally Thompsons the solicitors and TU ink for sponsoring this book and the celebratory event.

TOM SAWYER

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Merrie England

BY ROBERT BLATCHFORD • FIRST PUBLISHED 1894

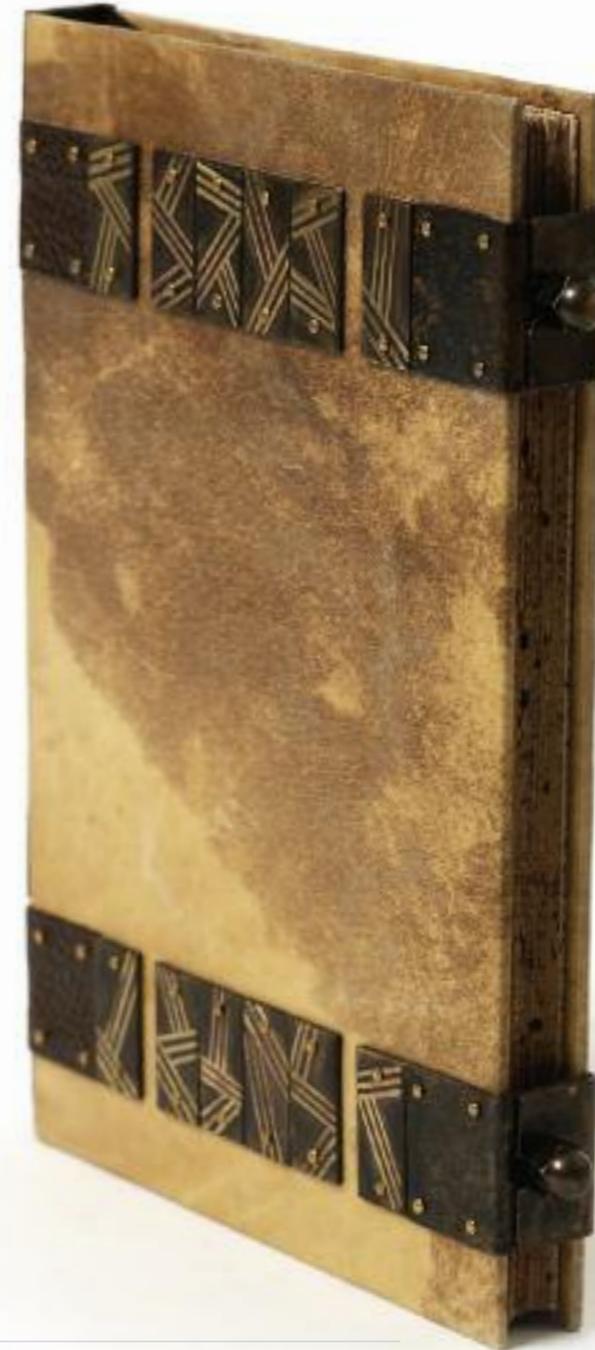
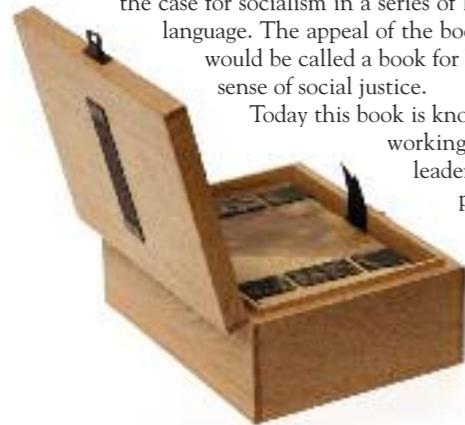
Robert Blatchford, along with Kier Hardie and others, was one of the founders of the Independent Labour Party. Blatchford came from an extremely poor background, as a child rising early to hunt through dustbins for food and as a youth sleeping rough in doorways. The army was Blatchford's university and some of his best writing is in his sketches of army life.

It was only after leaving the army that Blatchford was converted to socialism by reading the works of William Morris and Henry Myers Hyndman, two of the early socialist leaders. Blatchford began writing stories for local magazines that would eventually take him into journalism. Blatchford founded the *Clarion* newspaper in 1891 and 40,000 people bought the first issue. It had a circulation at this level for many years and spawned its own choirs, cycling clubs and rambling associations, many of which are still in existence today. Blatchford belonged to the more ethical, cultural and the aesthetic tradition of the labour movement stretching from John Ruskin to Michael Foot.

Merrie England began to appear serially in the *Clarion* whose circulation rose dramatically. This encouraged Blatchford to issue the articles in book form priced at one shilling and immediately selling 20,000 copies. Blatchford decided to take a bigger risk and published at one penny. Within one year a million copies had been sold. *Merrie England* was translated into Welsh, Dutch, Swedish, Norwegian and Hebrew. In the words of author Holbrook Jackson, '*Merrie England* created a revolution in the outlook of thousands of working men'.

Merrie England was written and published in 1894 at the high water mark of the socialist movement. The book makes the case for socialism in a series of letters from the author to an imaginary man, John Smith in plain and simple language. The appeal of the book is to the humanity and common sense of the reader. Today *Merrie England* would be called a book for beginners, for people with little knowledge of economics or history but with a sense of social justice.

Today this book is known only to students of the Labour Movement, but in its time its influence on working people was without equal. For example, Will Lawther the Durham Miners leader was given a copy of this book by the wife of a local union official and it had a powerful effect on him. He committed whole sections to memory. To pay a special tribute to this simple book and its importance, I have included a copy of a biography of its author Robert Blatchford by A. Neil Lyons. The biography is kindly inscribed to me by Michael Foot and this whole presentation is dedicated to Michael as the man above all who carried the ideas of Robert Blatchford forward into the 20th century.



Binder JENNI GREY

Merrie England

By ROBERT BLATCHFORD
Published by the Clarion, London 1894
Bound 2007

Bound in vellum with leather spine and panels of etched brass, an oak box stores the binding and a copy of Robert Blatchford's biography signed by Michael Foot.

The natural marking of the vellum and the geometric design on the brass portray the ideal of industrial development remaining in harmony with man and nature.

The binding is accompanied by an inscribed copy of 'Robert Blatchford' by A. Neil Lyons, housed in a wooden box, the whole being dedicated to Michael Foot.

Unto This Last

BY JOHN RUSKIN • FIRST PUBLISHED 1862

John Ruskin had a profound and enduring influence on the socialist movement. When the 1906 intake of Labour members of Parliament were asked which writers had influenced them most, John Ruskin came second only to the Bible.

Many of Ruskin's work could have been included in this collection. In the end the choice came down to two. I was very tempted to include 'The Nature of the Gothic', an extract from Ruskin's *Stones of Venice*, printed by the Kelmscott Press with an introduction by William Morris. Morris believed that this was one of the most important essays written by Ruskin, essentially because it teaches that art is the expression of man's pleasure in labour.

I picked *Unto This Last*, a statement of Ruskin's thoughts on political economy, extracted from the *Cornhill Magazine* in 1860. I have chosen *Unto This Last* because it was the climax of Ruskin's economic and social thought and he believed it to be the most useful thing that he had written.

Ruskin's theme, though a little obscure at times, is that writers of traditional political economy fail badly by regarding human beings simply as machines and of failing to recognise that people will only be truly motivated by what he calls social affection. Ruskin used *Unto This Last* to explain how society could be reconstructed on the basis of co-operation and justice rather than on competition and greed. This was a revolutionary message at a time when people were ruthlessly exploited by employers.



Mahatma Gandhi was one of those deeply and permanently influenced by the book. He believed that Ruskin was arguing that the individual good lies in the good of all, that all work is of equal value and that the supremely desirable life is one of labour.

Ruskin himself was not a socialist but his writings were increasingly opposed to the dreadful social divisions of his time and in favour of respect and fairness for working people. Here is my favourite quotation from the book:

'I desire in closing the series of introductory papers to leave this one great fact clearly stated. There is no wealth but life including all its powers of love and joy of admiration. That country is the rightest which nourishes the greatest number of happy and noble human beings'.

Binder CHRISTOPHER SHAW

Unto This Last

By JOHN RUSKIN

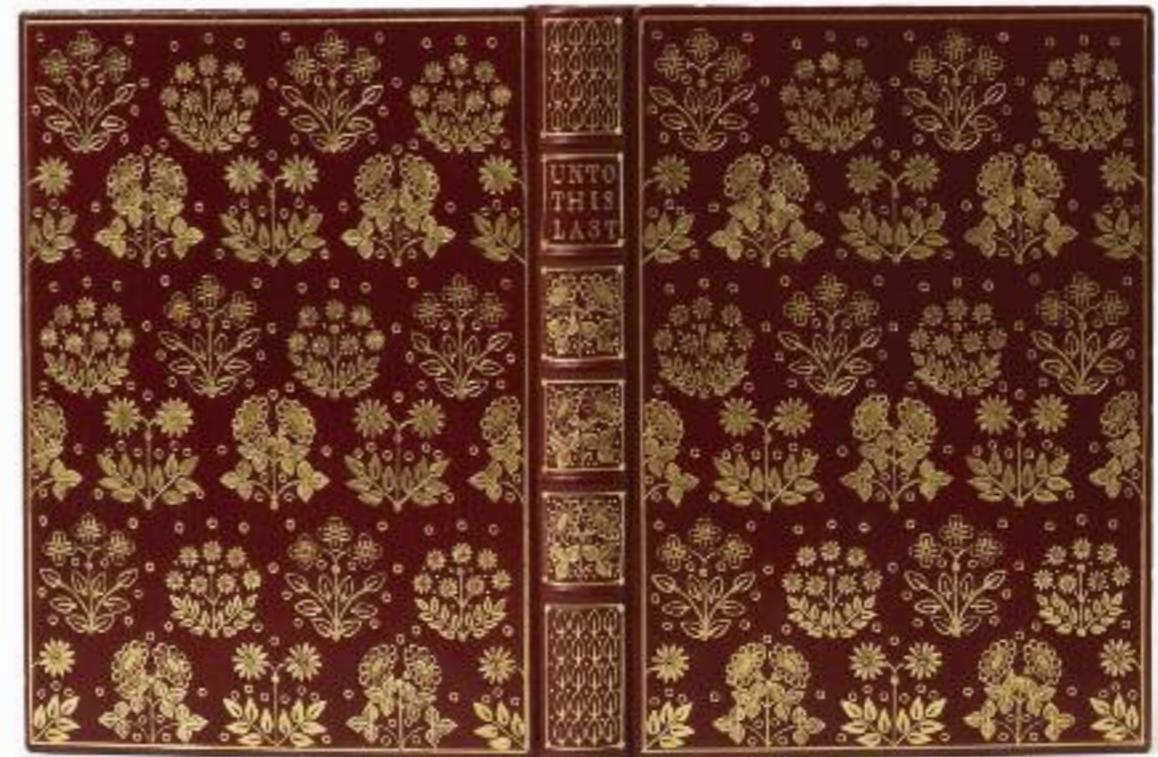
Published by George Allen 1902

Limited edition No 1 of 400 on handmade paper

Printed at the Ballantyne Press, Edinburgh

Bound 2008

Bound in full Harmatan russet goatskin. Susan Doncaster paste-paper endpapers with leather joint. Top edge gilded. Double roll three-colour endbands. Five raised bands. Tooling on inside turn-ins, edges, spine, front and back boards with a design of flowers built up with 19 separate tools in 23.75 ct. gold leaf. The inside turn-ins are tooled with a quotation from Ruskin: 'There is no wealth but life'.



A Vindication of the Rights of Woman

BY MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT • FIRST PUBLISHED 1792

Mary Wollstonecraft's 'Vindication' is one of the most powerful books in the collection. For the modern reader I suspect the 18th century style might be a little repetitive and at times difficult. But the introduction itself, only a few pages long is a direct and powerful statement for equality and education on behalf of women.

The 'Vindication' was published in 1792 and apparently written at full tilt in a few weeks. The book seethes with impatience and aspirations inspired by the author's experience of life including first hand knowledge of the French Revolution. The 'Vindication' presents a passionate case for a woman's rights to education and a useful life. Wollstonecraft turns around men's arguments for social transformation according to reason to demonstrate that they could not claim liberty and equality for only half a sex. The 'Vindication' struck a powerful chord for women and men who were questioning women's position in the late 18th century in many countries throughout the world. Already by the summer of 1792 a second edition of the book was in preparation and a French translation was produced that year. A German version appeared in 1793. The book was produced in the United States and recommended by the *Northern Star*, the journal of the United Irishmen.

Mary's work was criticised by some, but widely admired by the Chartists and the Co-operative Movement. As times moved on, George Jacob Holyoake the secular and co-operator, kept Mary's ideas alive and women socialists such as Eleanor Marx and Olive Schreiner became champions of her work. Robert Owen was particularly influenced by Mary's ideas on education and they influenced his practice at his mill in New Lanark. Owen also carried those ideas to New Harmony, the community he founded in America in 1820.

The copy in this collection was published in America. It is useful as it includes additional background and commentary. Particularly interesting are the short essays by Virginia Woolf and Emma Goldman.

I was unable to find a good copy of 'Vindication' from a British publisher. This might be my fault, although the excellent Folio Society have now put that right by producing a fine copy. I must say I find it strange that the early socialist men such as William Morris, CR Ashbee and even Francis Meynell, all of whom owned their own private press, never published a good copy of this important work. Thanks to Sheila Rowbotham, for help with this introduction.



Binder ANGELA JAMES

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman

By MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT
Published by The Easton Press, Connecticut 1992
Bound 2007

Covered with pale blue, grey and mid-brown goatskin. Inlaid piece of 18th century silk damask. Also inlays of natural calf printed in blue.

Doublures of pale blue and grey goatskin. Edges coloured and gilded with white and yellow gold leaf. Drop-back box lined with suede.

The leather colours I chose seemed to be appropriate to the 18th century. The silk, while not authenticated as Spitalfields silk, acknowledges the fact that Mary Wollstonecraft was born in Spitalfields and also represents her feminine side.

The small tricolore on the back refers to the author's time in Paris during the French Revolution and the influence this had on her personal life and her writing. The calf inlays are printed with quotes from Mary Wollstonecraft's writings.



The Pilgrim's Progress

BY JOHN BUNYAN • FIRST PUBLISHED 1678

It was on reading EP Thompson's classic, *The Making of the English Working Class*, that I first encountered *The Pilgrim's Progress*. I had a very basic understanding of the English Revolution and knew something of Levellers and Diggers and the like, but it was only on reading Thompson I realised that, although it was not a Civil War text, it was of great significance to working people.

Thompson asserted that, above all in Bunyan, we find the slumbering radicalism of the working class which was preserved through the 18th century and which emerged again in the 19th century. For Thompson, *The Pilgrim's Progress* was hugely important; he believed that along with Paine's *Rights of Man* it was one of the two foundation texts of the working class movement. Praise indeed. Further, Thompson said that Bunyan and Paine along with Cobbett and Owen contributed most to the stock of ideas that are the raw material of the working class movement. From 1790 to 1850 many thousands of young people found in *The Pilgrim's Progress* their first adventure story and would agree with Thomas Cooper, the Chartist, that it was their book of books.

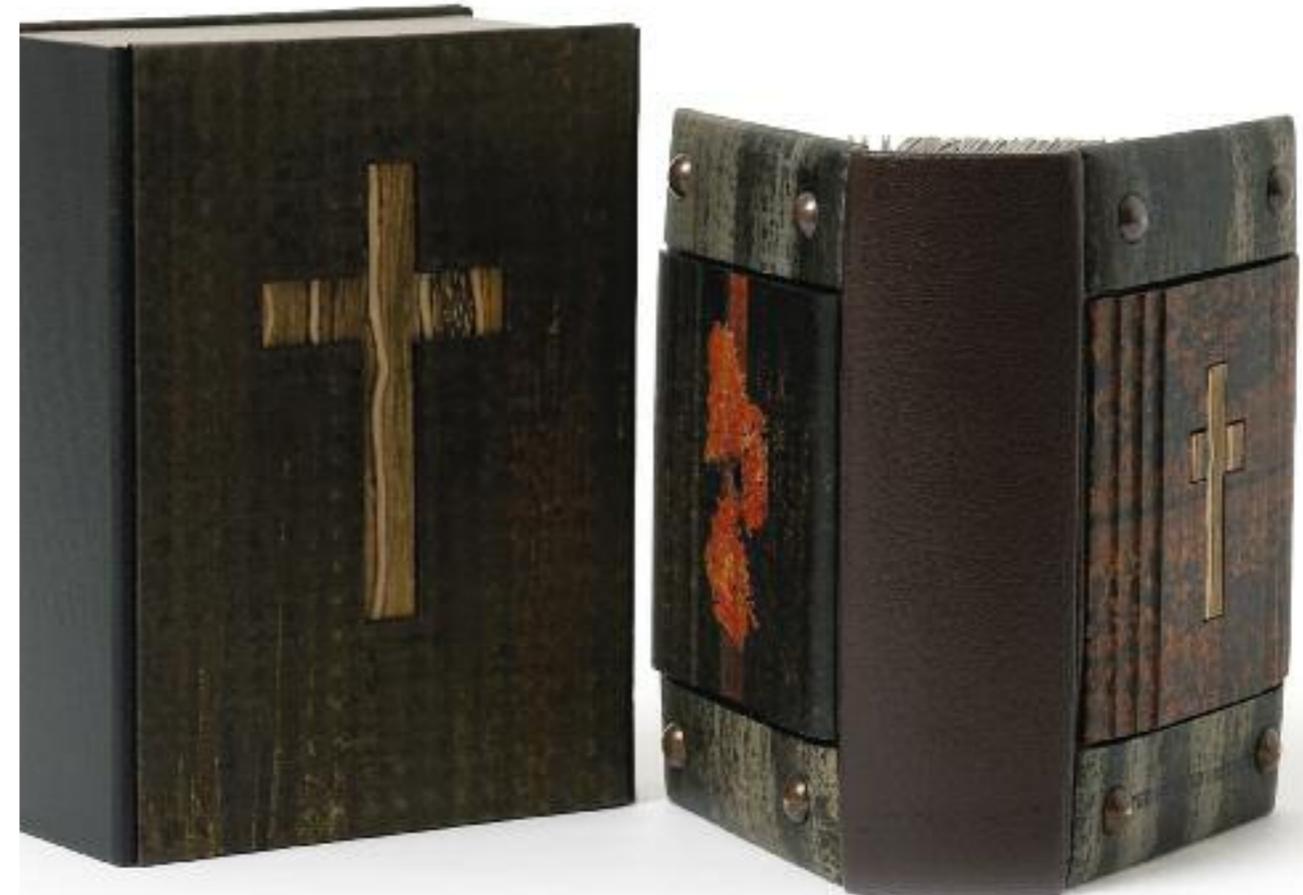
In the 300 years since it was written, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan's vivid allegory of a man's way to salvation, has been the most read book in the English language, after the Bible. Also it has been translated into over 100 languages and dialects. There is evidence of the early English socialists being influenced by the book, for example Robert Blatchford, the editor of the *Clarion*, claims to have been influenced by the book.

The Pilgrim's Progress was written for the hearts of the common people as Bunyan addressed the beliefs, dreads and dreams of ordinary men and women, and gave them a belief that they could shape their own destiny.

The story is as simple as it is profound. The portrait of a man's life on earth as a pilgrimage through unknown regions and impassable barriers. A journey where the signposts are sometimes missed and difficult people and situations are encountered. A journey where strangers may be friend or foe. Monsters and other dangers arise at every turn. Yet the

hero, Christian, is sustained by the passion of his quest and the profound lessons that he learns, usually of a deep moral nature. I was intrigued to find that the historian, Tristram Hunt, believes that *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist* is arguably an update of *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

This copy of *The Pilgrim's Progress* is plain and simple. It was published By CR Ashbee on his Essex House press. It was his third book and was printed in an edition of 350. Ashbee was a socialist of some considerable importance. He established a workshop and a community in Chipping Camden which were run on socialist lines and it gives me some pleasure to include one of his books in this collection.



Binder STEPHEN CONWAY

The Pilgrim's Progress

By JOHN BUNYAN

Published by Essex House Press 1899

Printed by CA Ashbee

Limited edition No 307 of 750 copies

Bound 2007

Leather spine with stained parchment and painted paper boards. Studs to both upper and lower boards. Titled on upper board.

The book is a detailed account of a man's (Christian) journey through life, encountering along the way the full range of human emotion and experience. The binding tries to show the extremes of the journey, from Tophet (Hell) and the Valley of the Shadow of Death, to Calvary, the Celestial City (Heaven).

Contained in a drop back box with an inset panel depicting a cross.

William Morris – Artist Writer Socialist

BY MAY MORRIS • FIRST PUBLISHED 1936

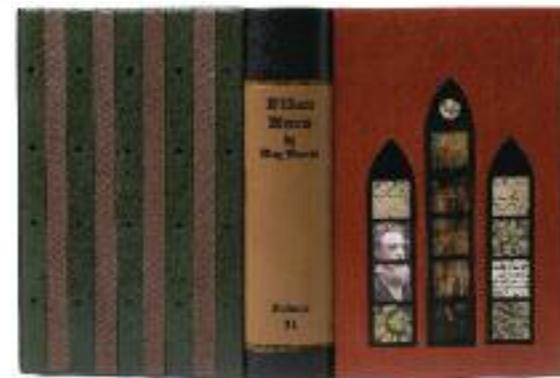
I have chosen this book, which is in two volumes, to end the collection. Unlike most of the books in the collection this is not a famous or landmark volume in the history of socialism but homage to William Morris by his daughter May. The book was published in 1936 and is a collection of material from a wide range of sources none of which May Morris had included in her earlier collected works.



Volume I includes a 92-page introduction by May Morris to her father's work as a designer, and to his theory and practice of arts and crafts. She has also written a 120-page introduction to his literary work.

To the second volume, George Bernard Shaw has contributed an essay on 'Morris as I knew him', which is spirited, candid, and of much interest. May Morris also writes at length in this volume on her father's socialism from which it is possible to gain a real feel for the love and respect in which he was held by her.

These are beautiful volumes, well written and well presented by the publisher. They are a fitting end to the collection.



Binder STEPHEN CONWAY

William Morris – Artist Writer Socialist

By MAY MORRIS

Volume I: The Art of William Morris, Morris as a Writer

Volume II: Morris as a Socialist

Introduction by BERNARD SHAW to Volume II

Published by Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1936

Printed on The Shakespeare Head Press

Limited edition of 750 copies

Bound 2006

The upper boards are bound in goatskin with paper and leather insets. The stained glass window is loosely based on the one designed by Morris in Bradford Cathedral. An image of Morris is found in one of the panels. This image is also visible through a cut-out in the slipcase. The lower boards are inset with snakeskin, tooled in black, and reflect Morris' interest in the medieval. Titled in black on the spine. Each volume is housed in a slipcase, both volumes housed in a drop back box.