British wild plants, observed directly from nature, are central to many of William Morris's iconic textile and wallpaper designs. Morris drew his inspiration from nature, medieval textiles and art, history and mythology, and Islamic art. He was the central figure of the Arts & Crafts Movement which celebrated traditional crafts, beauty in everyday objects and the landscapes of Britain. He had a deep personal commitment to socialism and social equality. He continues to be an inspiring character and designer and we are inviting people to celebrate his designs in the Patchwork Meadow Project, but also to bring his ideals to creating wild plant based designs that reflect the culture and landscape of Britain in the 21st century.

**Inspiration & work:** Morris's influences were as many and varied as his range of work and interests. He was greatly influenced by the designs and techniques of medieval textiles including tapestries and embroideries, but also by the designs of the Islamic world.

His interest in mythology, history, poetry, literature and art history is well documented and one of his main legacies lies in his application of that knowledge into textile (weaving, tapestry, embroidery) and stained glass production, the creation of poetry and illuminated manuscripts, his painting, writing, illustration and publishing.

Morris' contemporaries and colleagues in the Arts and Crafts Movement including Burne-Jones, Philip Webb, Walter Crane, Henry Dearle, and his daughter May Morris were also influenced by British wild plants in their work.
Techniques & materials: Morris researched and applied many traditional techniques in his work particularly in wood block printing for his textiles and paper, weaving and dyeing techniques. He also swam against the tide of Victorian chemical dyes in the use of vegetable dyes in his textiles.

Morris’ plants: the daisy pattern was Morris’ first commercial pattern and the origins of the design can be seen in the daisies embroidered on blue serge by his wife Jane for their curtains at Red House. Morris’ daisy design was inspired by images in medieval manuscripts. The choice of daisy is an interesting one in that it is one of our best known wild plants and beloved in many cultures. Chaucer said of the daisy that of all the flowers of the meadow he loved it the most, and the daisy appears many times in Shakespeare from ‘painting the meadows with delight’ to forming part of Ophelia’s crown of madness.

The wild strawberry in one of Morris’ beloved designs ‘the strawberry thief’ is a key plant of both mythology and also Christian plant traditions. The strawberry in Norse mythology is connected with Frigga and weddings, and with Venus in Classical mythology. It is associated with both sensuality and purity and is often depicted with the Virgin Mary in illuminated manuscripts and Christian art. In Shakespeare Othello gives Desdemona a strawberry spotted handkerchief which becomes part of her downfall.

The corncockle that appears in Morris’ textile first appears in Britain in the Iron Age, one of the arable plants that travelled with the first farmers from the Middle East and across Europe. Corncockle appears in Chaucer, Shakespeare and John Clare and according to the Revered Hildegard Friend writing in 1883 there is a suggestion that cockle is a pre-Saxon name which may have been the original British name for the plant. Corncockle is almost extinct as an arable plant in Britain and in steep decline across Europe.

Borage appears in many medieval, Tudor and Stuart textiles and is associated with courage. There is a widely reported tradition that crusaders were given a stirrup cup with a borage flower floating on the top for courage when they set off. Borage is a plant of southern Europe and the Mediterranean and was introduced and became naturalised in Britain many centuries ago.
Project Ideas for the participating in the Patchwork Meadow: we welcome any contributions based on the designs and artwork of William Morris and his Arts and Crafts contemporaries, in any textile based medium. We are also inviting participants to create a William Morris design for the 21st century which reflects his ideals of cross-cultural influences, traditional craft techniques, the beauty of the British landscape, history and mythology. If you would like to contribute a square please enter ‘William Morris Meadow’ in the ‘Project Name’ line of the submission form of the online gallery.

Events: we hope to hold an exhibition of the William Morris inspired squares at the William Morris Society in Autumn 2013. We will update information on this on the website.

Places to visit:
- The William Morris Society (Kelmancott House, Hammersmith, London)
- The Red House (Bexleyheath) (http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/redhouse/)
- Kelmscott Manor (Oxfordshire) (http://www.kelmancottmanor.co.uk/home)
- The William Morris Gallery (Walthamstow) (http://www.wmgallery.org.uk/)
- The Victoria and Albert Museum & online collections (www.vam.ac.uk)

References:
Cavallo A. 1998, The Unicorn Tapestries at the Metropolitan Museum of Art
Crane, W, 1906, Flowers from Shakespeare's Garden
Crane, W, 1899, A Floral Fantasy in an old English Garden
Mabey, R. 1996, Flora Britannica
Some of the wild plants associated with William Morris’ Designs

**Acorn/oak** (*Quercus species*) - Brother Rabbit (William Morris); Acorn (William Morris); The Oak Tree (John Henry Dearle) - the oak is important in British, Norse and Classical mythology & associated with thunder gods; a common element of heraldry & historical textile design - the letter ‘D’ (Dair) in the Ogham tree alphabet

**Apple** (*Malus sylvestris— wild apple*) - Apple (William Morris); Apple (John Henry Dearle) - the apple is important in British, Norse, Classical mythology and also in the Bible - the letter ‘Q’ (Ceirt) in the Ogham tree alphabet

**Bellflower** (*Campanula species*) - Bellflower Design - clustered bellflower was said to grow where the blood of Vikings had been spilt

**Blackthorn** (*Prunus spinosa*) - Blackthorn (William Morris) - the source of sloes for sloe gin - the letter ‘Z’ (Straif) in the Ogham tree alphabet

**Bluebell** (*Hyancinthoides non-scripta*) - Bluebell (William Morris); Bluebell (John Henry Dearle) Celandine (John Henry Dearle); Lily (William Morris)- the UK has half the world population of bluebell. It is named for the Greek youth Hyancinth beloved of Apollo

**Borage** (*Borago officinalis*) - Borage (William Morris) - naturalised in Britain, associated with courage, said to be given to crusaders about to set out on their crusade

**Bramble/Blackberry** (*Rubus fructicosus*) - Bramble (Kate Faulkner)- Wallpaper design - still collected for berries, there is a tradition that you should not collect them after Michaelmas Day as the Devil or the fairies spit on them. The bramble or briar is used as a metaphor for abandonment and decay in the Bible

**Campion** (*Silene species*) - Campion (woven wool) - named for the drunken God Silenus

**Celandine** (lesser celandine *Ranunculus ficaria / greater celandine *Chelidonium majus*) - Celandine (John Henry Dearle) - lesser celandine is used medicinally and has been found on prehistoric sites in Britain - it is the subject of a poignant poem by Edward Thomas
Columbine (*Aquilegia vulgaris*) - Violet & Columbine - the columbine is associated with Christ in Christian art, it is also associated with spurned lovers. One of Ophelia’s flowers in Hamlet

Corncockle (*Agrostemma githago*) - Corncockle (William Morris) - an extremely rare arable plant, it has been part of the British landscape since the Iron Age and appears in a range of historical literature

Cornflower (*Centaurea cyanus*) - Corncockle (William Morris) - a very rare plant of arable fields; named for the Sicilian nymph Cyane who tried to stop Hades abducting Persephone; Tutankhamun was buried in a wreath of cornflowers & it was depicted on Egyptian tomb paintings

Daffodil (wild daffodil *Narcissus pseudonarcissus*) - Daffodil (John Henry Dearle) - national symbol for Wales; named for the Greek youth Narcissus; associated with Hades who used them to entice Persephone away from her companions

Daisy (*Bellis perennis*) - Daisy on Jane Morris curtains at Red House; Daisy wallpaper & fabric (William Morris - 1864); Bower? (William Morris) - favourite of Chaucer, widely referenced in British literature & poetry; used as a wound herb

Eyebright (*Euphrasia species*) - one of 7 most powerful Irish herbs to protect against natural and supernatural harm

Fritillary (*Fritillaria meleagris*) - Fritillary (William Morris); Blackthorn (William Morris); Snakeshead? - a rare plant of wet meadows

Honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*) - Honeysuckle (William Morris); Honeysuckle (May Morris); In Compton? (William Morris) - sign of strength & endurance in Celtic mythology; part of the private symbol of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, the woodbine of Shakespeare, the letter ‘U’ (Uilleann) in the Ogham Tree Alphabet

Iris (*Iris pseudacorus* Yellow Flag; *Iris sibirica*) - Iris (John Henry Dearle) - said to be the plant basis for the heraldic fleur de lys

Jasmine (naturalised) (*Jasminum species*) - Jasmine trellis (William Morris)

Larkspur (naturalised) (*Consolida ajacis*) - Larkspur (William Morris) - the scientific name associated with the hero Ajax of Greek mythology

Marigold (naturalised) (*Calendula officinalis*) - Marigold (William Morris) - naturalised for many centuries; one of the heraldic devices of Mary Queen of Scots
**Meadowsweet** (*Filipendula ulmaria*) - Meadowsweet wallpaper (William Morris) - found in Bronze Age burials, used as a healing herb in Celtic mythology, its Irish & Gaelic names translate as 'the belt of Cúchulainn'; one of the flowers used to create Blodeuwedd in Welsh mythology; a favourite strewing herb of Elizabeth I; a source of salicylic acid used in aspirin

**Michaelmas Daisy** (naturalised) (*Aster species*) - Michaelmas Daisy (John Henry Dearle) - named because it flowers around the time of Michaelmas

**Pimpernel** (*Anagallis species*) - Pimpernel (Morris & Co - Sanderson wallpaper)

**Pink** (*Dianthus species*) - Pink & Rose (William Morris) - a favourite flower of Tudor & Stuart Britain, a popular motif in Islamic art

**Poppy** (*Papaver rhoeas*) - Poppy (William Morris) - the symbol of Remembrance, often depicted on ancient Egyptian wall paintings; said to be created from the blood of the dead youth Mekon by Demeter

**Seaweed** - Seaweed (John Henry Dearle) - in Welsh mythology the magician Gwydion created a ship from seaweed to attack his enemies

**Sweet briar** (*Rosa rubiginosa*) - Sweet briar wallpaper (John Henry Dearle) - often depicted as the plant that encircled Sleeping Beauty during her long sleep (Burne-Jones; Anne McBeth)

**Thistle** (*Cirsium or Carduus or Sonchus species*) - Rose & Thistle; Thistle wallpaper (Morris & Co - Sanderson) - national flower of Scotland

**Violet** (*Viola odorata & V. species*) - Violet & Columbine; Blackthorn (William Morris) - associated with love and spring; the violet is the symbol of Athens; a golden violet was given for the best poem at the 15th century Toulouse Floral Games; the favourite flower of the Empress Josephine & the symbol of Napoleon’s supporters

**Wild Strawberry** (*Fragaria vesca*) - Strawberry Thief (William Morris) - associated with Frigga, Venus, the Virgin Mary - symbol of sensuality and purity; used in heraldry

**Willow** (*Salix species*) - Tulip & Willow (William Morris); willow bough (William Morris) - associated with sorrow from the Biblical story of the Jews hanging their harps from the willow branches and weeping; willow and osiers traditionally used in a range of crafts

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