

WANDLE INDUSTRIAL MUSEUM

EDUCATIONAL INFORMATION SHEET supporting KS 1 & 2 History:

*KS1 - lives of significant individuals..who have contributed to national and international achievements
- significant...people and places in their own locality*

KS2 - a study of..a site that is significant in the locality

WILLIAM MORRIS IN MERTON

By the 16th century the Wandsworth area was already known as a base for hard-working craftsmen with skills associated with the textile and clothing industry, most notably the migrant workers from France known as the **Huguenots**. By the late 18th century the River Wandle and its mills had attracted felt hat-making, fulling and cloth dyeing, silk weaving and wig-making among many others. It was therefore no surprise that **William Morris**, the greatest artist-craftsman of the Victorian period, should lease a 7 acre site at Merton Abbey by the Wandle in 1881, taking over an existing works. He moved his successful and expanding business from Bloomsbury in Central London and set up more spacious workshops in **Merton** (*see workshops site model at the Museum*). A neighbouring site was owned by **Littler & Co** since 1877, producing printed silks for **Liberty's** of Regent Street. Close friend **William De Morgan**, a fine-art potter, had also set up buildings and kilns nearby. The Merton Abbey area therefore became a renowned centre for such crafts, with William Morris gaining an international reputation for fashionable interior design work.

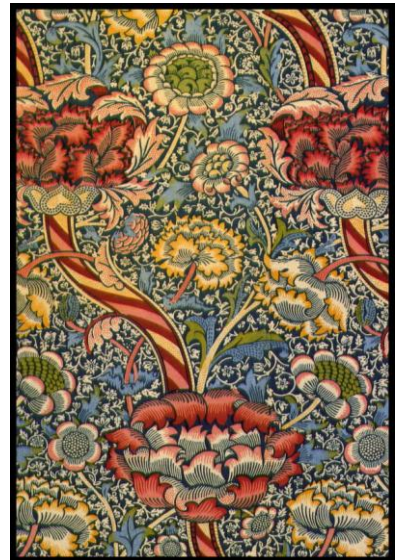
Morris's first 14 designs were printed on silk in Staffordshire. Although chemical dyes were available, Morris encouraged the employment of older dye workers, skilled in traditional dyeing techniques. Before chemical bleaching was used, cloth lightened by exposure to sunlight would cover the meadows near the Wandle. This became a recognised feature of the growing textile industry of the Wandle Valley. The Morris works used natural dyes in the production of his sought after printed fabrics and wallpaper using the skilled technique of block printing (*see examples at the museum*). Further unique designs were used for tapestry and carpet making, stained glass and furniture coverings.

William Morris was also something of a social reformer in caring for his workers, and their general working environment was considered much more pleasant than the norm for Victorian factories. Young boys from the local area were recruited by Morris. Many lodged on site at the works, followed apprenticeships and had some education provided too. Although he lived in Hammersmith, William would make regular visits to Merton to check progress on his latest designs and processes – but he rarely stayed there!

Despite the proximity of their operations in Merton, it is unlikely that William Morris and Arthur Liberty ever met each other. Morris was very much a designer who excelled at creative production, whilst Liberty was more the industrial entrepreneur, servicing the high-end market of well-to-do London society. Morris was also a poet and a novelist, but is best remembered for his association with the **British Arts and Craft Movement** and recognised as one of the most significant cultural figures of Victorian Britain.

Some suggested follow-up activities and research:

- Why were textile factories attracted to the River Wandle?
- What is “*madder*” and what is it used for?
- How old were the young boys employed by Morris?
- List some of the **types of products** made at William Morris & Co works. *e.g. printed cotton fabric.*
- Find out the *names* of some of the Morris **fabric patterns** produced at Merton. *e.g. The Strawberry Thief.*
- Research the names of some other members of the **Arts and Craft Movement.**
- What is **now** built on the site of the William Morris works in Merton?



What the Wandle Industrial Museum can do for you:

The Museum is able to cater for school groups, either at the museum itself or by visiting your school, to learn more about the **traditional methods used for printing materials**. This includes a film showing the **art of block printing**, a talk on the **patterns produced** and the opportunity for students to **produce their own print** to take away!

For further enquiries or to make a booking please contact us as below:

The Wandle Industrial Museum 020 8648 0127 or email office@wandle.org