

VCH OXFORDSHIRE:
ONLINE TEXTS IN PROGRESS: BROADWELL PARISH: KELMSCOTT
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SOCIAL LIFE AND PROVISION

The Life of the Community

Public Houses and Other Public Buildings

No alehouse licenses for Kelmscott were noted in the 18th and early 19th centuries, though by the 1840s the village carpenter sold beer at the later Plough Inn (so called by 1853), where there was also a grocer's shop by the 1860s.¹ The Plough continued in 2001, threats of closure in the 1970s and in 2000 having provoked strong opposition.² A second public house, the Anchor at Hart's or Eaton weir just outside the parish, opened in the late 19th century and burnt down in 1980.³ Until the 1870s the only other public building was the church; from 1874, however, parish meetings were held in the newly built school, and from the 1920s in the village hall, superseded in 1934 by the Morris Memorial Hall.⁴



*Morris Memorial Hall
 (completed 1934)*

Clubs and Festivities

No evidence of early customs or festivities has been found, though throughout the 20th century the parish meeting, attended usually by around 5 to 15 people including the principal farmers,

¹ *PO Dir. Oxon.* (1847 and later edns); *Lascelles' Dir. Oxon.* (1853); *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1883 and later edns); *Sale Cat., Manor Fm. Kelmscott* (1898), lot 2: copy in Bodl.

² Kelmscott parish meeting min. book, s.a. 1974; local. inf.

³ Hollands, *Kelmscott*, 87; F. S. Thacker, *Thames Highway* (1968 edn), II, 48.

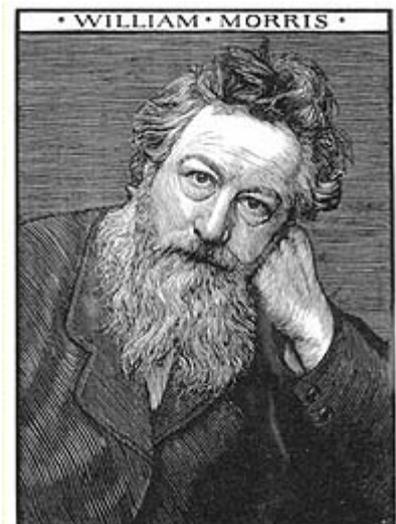
⁴ Kelmscott parish meeting min. book, passim; below (educ.); below, buildings.

organized the usual village festivities to mark national events.⁵ Country dancing, promoted principally by May Elliott Hobbs of Bradshaws Farm, was popular in the early 20th century: in 1913 over 200 people participated in a village competition, and the following year the folksong expert Cecil Sharp attended. A grass stage for amateur dramatics was constructed at Bradshaws Farm, at least one performance being attended by G. B. Shaw, who was visiting May Morris at Kelmscott Manor. A Women's Institute, the first in the county, was established in 1916, and a men's social club after the First World War, patronized partly by owners of boats moored at the Anchor. A Kelmscott and Little Faringdon Horticultural Society was mentioned in 1928.⁶ Land girls from Lechlade were accommodated in Kelmscott during the First World War, among them May Morris's future companion Mary Frances Lobb, and during the Second World War evacuees and internees were billeted there.⁷

A tennis club was started in 1955, with a court on the site of demolished cottages near the Plough, laid out to mark the coronation of Elizabeth II. After the club foundered in the early 1970s the court fell derelict, becoming a source of local controversy. A children's football ground was established in 1998.⁸ Use of the river for fishing and recreation, one of Kelmscott's principal attractions for William Morris,⁹ attracted increasing numbers of outsiders from the mid 20th century, prompting mounting local concern over resulting traffic problems.¹⁰ In 2001 there were no village societies.

The Influence of William Morris

A unique feature of Kelmscott's 20th-century life was the continuing impact of William Morris: not only through his descendants' influence on its buildings and May Morris's active involvement during the 1920s and 1930s, but more particularly through Kelmscott Manor's emergence as a shrine to Morris's life and works, a development consciously promoted by the terms of May's will.¹¹ Already in the 1920s May allowed public access to certain rooms,¹² and in the early 1950s the poet John Betjeman, a lessee of Kelmscott Manor, complained of visitors who 'say as they ... produce their Fabian Society membership cards that the house



⁵ Kelmscott parish meeting min. book, s.a. 1919, 1935, 1937, 1946, 1952, 1955; *William Morris*

⁶ Ibid. s.a. 1928; Hollands, *Kelmscott*, 92--3, 96, 106; *Kelmscott Manor* (Soc. Antiq. 1999), 8.

⁷ Hollands, *Kelmscott*, 96--7, 102; *Kelmscott Manor* (Soc. Antiq. 1999), 8.

⁸ Kelmscott parish meeting min. book, s.a. 1952--5, 1970 sqq, 1998; Hollands, *Kelmscott*, 104--5.

⁹ *Collected Letters of Wm. Morris*, ed. N. Kelvin, I, pp. 139, 350--5, 380, 419, 452; cf. *Oxf. Jnl* 27 Dec. 1783, listing a 'pleasure boat' among the possessions of John Turner (d. 1783).

¹⁰ Kelmscott parish meeting min. book, s.a. 1958, 1986, 1988.

¹¹ A.R. Dufty, 'Wm Morris and the Kelmscott Estate', *Antiq. Jnl*, 43.1 (1963), 100--14; Kelmscott parish meeting min. book, s.a. 1919, 1930--8; above, manor; below, buildings.

¹² Dufty, 'Morris and Kelmscott Estate', 101.

belongs to the people and should not be shut'.¹³ Following the Society of Antiquaries' acquisition of the house in 1962 the impact of public access on the village continued to cause concern, though restriction of visiting days and control of visitor numbers eased potential problems, and in the late 20th century relations between the Society and local people generally remained good.¹⁴

Social Welfare

Poor Relief and Charities

In the late 16th century small bequests were occasionally made to the 'poor men's box',¹⁵ presumably kept in the chapel and administered by the churchwardens. A few small bequests to the poor were made later,¹⁶ but Kelmscott had no endowed charities, and in the 18th century the destitute were supported entirely from poor-rates, supplemented by offertory money distributed three times a year by the churchwardens.¹⁷

In the mid 1770s the township spent just over £21 a year on poor-relief, fairly average for its population, including £4 10s. apparently on cottage rents. Annual expenditure, in line with national trends, rose by 1785 to £47, and by 1802--3 to £104, reaching over £182 (more than the sum raised) in 1813. The creation of large commercial farms, seasonal hiring of labour, and loss of commons, combined with national bread prices, probably all contributed to the increase, and although in 1802--3 only 6 people, under 5 per cent of the population, received permanent out-relief, another 23 received occasional relief, perhaps reflecting seasonal unemployment. By 1813--15 between 13 and 15 people (11 per cent of the population) were receiving permanent relief, and another 3--5 occasional relief.¹⁸ From the early 1820s expenditure fell, as elsewhere, although expenditure per head of population remained high compared with Broadwell's other townships, reaching 28s. in 1819--20 (one of the highest sums in the area), and remaining above 18s. for much of the 1820s.¹⁹ Poor-rates seem nevertheless to have remained relatively modest: in 1803 they were 3s. in the pound, among the lowest in Bampton hundred, and in 1820 (when expenditure per head exceeded 25s.) an advertisement commented favourably on the township's low rates.²⁰

Following the Poor-Law Act of 1834 responsibility for the township's poor passed to Faringdon poor-law union, of which Kelmscott, with a few neighbouring Oxfordshire parishes abutting

¹³ Oxf. Univ. Arch., LA3/OXF 7A/5, letter 28 Feb. 1951.

¹⁴ Kelmscott parish meeting min. book,; for the house, above, manor; below, buildings.

¹⁵ e.g. ORO, MSS Wills Oxon. 185, f. 364; 186, f. 34; 190, f. 49; *ibid.* 65/1/25.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 60/3/21, 65/4/33, 66/1/11, 67/2/30, 151/2/12.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* MSS Oxf. Dioc. d 555, f. 77; b 12, f. 45; d 580, f. 149; *Char. Don.* pp. 968--9.

¹⁸ *Poor Abstract, 1777*, p. 140; *1787*, p. 188; *1804*, pp. 398--9; *1818*, pp. 352--3; cf. above, econ. hist. (agric.).

¹⁹ *Poor Rate Retns* (Parl. Papers 1822 (556), v), p. 135; (*ibid.* 1825 (334), iv), p. 170; (*ibid.* 1830--1 (83), xi), p. 157; (*ibid.* 1835 (444), xlvii), p. 153; cf. *Census, 1801--41*.

²⁰ *Poor Abstract, 1804*, p. 398; *Oxf. Jnl* 22 July 1820.

Berkshire, became a part.²¹ The vestry continued to appoint overseers and rating officers, and in 1867 agreed to the union Guardians selling two cottages in the hamlet, perhaps formerly used as pauper accommodation.²² In 1885 the township's poor-rates yielded £135.²³

Education

Until the late 19th century the only education available in Kelmscott was in local Sunday schools. In 1759 Kelmscott children were occasionally catechized and perhaps received rudimentary instruction in reading, though by the 1800s and 1810s, when there were Sunday schools at Broadwell and Filkins, catechizing in Kelmscott had ceased.²⁴ In 1819 up to 12 Kelmscott children regularly attended Broadwell Sunday school,²⁵ and by 1831, when ten girls attended a Sunday school in Kelmscott run by the incumbent's wife, it was claimed that only a few very young children had no access to education.²⁶ The vicar's hope in 1831 that a day school would soon be established proved groundless, and in the 1850s Kelmscott still had only a Sunday school with around 25 pupils.²⁷ A non-denominational dame school with room for 19 pupils, presumably in a cottage, was opened probably in the late 1860s, and in 1871 was attended by 6 boys and 9 girls, taught apparently by the wife of an agricultural labourer. Some other children by then attended Langford school.²⁸



Kelmscott National School (built 1872)

(Oxfordshire County Council Photographic Archive, Oxfordshire Studies)

In 1872 a Church of England National school, under the management of the vicar and churchwardens, was established in a plain, stone-built schoolhouse south of the village street, on

²¹ *Census*, 1841--1911.

²² ORO, PAR 148/02/A1/1, 22 Aug. 1867 and passim; the cottages were not recorded as parish property earlier.

²³ ORO, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 2208, no. 13.

²⁴ *Ibid.* MSS Oxf. Dioc. d 555, ff. 77--80; d 561, ff. 45, 194; d 568, ff. 61, 200; d 572, f. 53; d 576, ff. 51, 167.

²⁵ *Educ. of Poor* (Parl. Papers 1819 (224), ix (2)), p. 726.

²⁶ ORO, MS Oxf. Dioc. b 38, ff. 120--23; *Educ. Enq. Abstract* (Parl. Papers 1835 (62), xlii), p. 742.

²⁷ *Wilb. Visit.* 22.

²⁸ *Returns relating to Elem. Educ.* (Parl. Papers 1871 (201), lv), p. 318; PRO, RG 10/1258, s.v. Ann Collett; cf. *Returns relating to Parishes* (Parl. Papers 1867--8 (114), liii), pp. 336--7; ORO, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 332.

land given by Charles Hobbs and his aunt Elizabeth Turner.²⁹ The first mistress seems to have been the teacher of the former dame school.³⁰ In 1890 it had accommodation for 38 children, though average attendance was only 17, and truancy and non-attendance, sometimes for farm work, remained a problem.³¹ Total income was around £40 including a government grant of £25, the rest made up of school pence and voluntary subscriptions.³² Attendance rose to around 30 by the late 1890s, when inspectors complained of overcrowding and threatened to withhold the grant, and in 1898--9 a new infant classroom was added; ventilation was improved earlier in the 1890s, after inspectors complained of unsanitary toilets and a pigstys next to the school. Reports were mixed: in 1883 pupils were allegedly 'backward' and 'undisciplined', but improvements were noted soon after, and in 1901 the school was in 'excellent order'. Between 1904 and 1914 few teachers stayed more than a year, and in the late 1920s reports were again unsatisfactory: in 1928 parents were said to be uncooperative, with children frequently congregating around village inns at night, and the following year the inspector 'almost despaired' of progress on account not only of the rapid turnover of teachers but of pupils. The roll was then 24, of whom only 14 had attended the school for more than a year.³³ A night school started in the school in 1883 was not mentioned later.³⁴ There was no schoolteacher's house, although under May Morris's will the schoolteacher was among inhabitants to be given preference when selecting tenants for the Memorial Cottages, built in 1902--14.³⁵



Kelmscott School: classroom, early 20th century

(Oxfordshire County Council Photographic Archive, Oxfordshire Studies)

²⁹ ORO, MS Oxf. Dioc. b 199, s.v. Kelmscott; *Return of Non-Provided Schs.* (Parl. Papers 1906 (178), lxxxviii), p. 23; OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XXXVI.16 (1876 and later edns); Hollands, *Kelmscott*, 75--6.

³⁰ *Harrod's Dir. Oxon.* (1876); PRO, RG 10/1258, s.v. Ann Collett.

³¹ *Public Elem. Schs. Return* (Parl. Papers 1890 (403), lvi), p. 214; Hollands, *Kelmscott*, 77, citing ORO, T/SL 74i.

³² *Public Elem. Schs. Return*, p. 214; *Return of Schs. 1893* (Parl. Papers 1894 [C 7529], lxxv), pp. 494--5.

³³ ORO, T/SL 74 i--ii, passim; Hollands, *Kelmscott*, 77, 92, 98--9.

³⁴ ORO, T/SL 74i, Dec. 1883.

³⁵ Dufty, 'Morris and Kelmscott Estate', 108; *Kelmscott Manor* (Soc. Antiq. 1999), 7--8.

In 1929 the school was reorganized as a junior school with 18 pupils, older children going to Langford or (later) to Burford;³⁶ a school bus was provided in 1950, after local lobbying.³⁷ Following the appointment of a new headteacher at Kelmscott in 1929 there was 'great improvement', but rolls remained low, reaching 23 in 1944 only because of an influx of evacuees. In 1952, when the roll was 27, all children over nine years old were transferred to Langford school, leaving 12 at Kelmscott. Proposals to close the school in 1946 and 1956 were resisted, but in 1962 all remaining pupils, 12 girls and a boy, were transferred to Langford school.³⁸ The building was sold the following year, and soon afterwards was converted into a private house.³⁹ School buses to Burford and Langford continued in the 1990s.⁴⁰

³⁶ ORO, T/SL 74ii, Sept. 1929; inf. from LEA.

³⁷ Kelmscott parish meeting min. book, pp. 78--80 (in parish custody 2001).

³⁸ ORO, T/SL 74ii--iii, passim; Kelmscott parish meeting min. book, pp. 74--5.

³⁹ ORO, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 1774, pps. *re sale of sch.*; *Thames Valley Countryside*, vol. 5, no. 17 (1965), pp. 12-13: copy in COS

⁴⁰ Kelmscott parish meeting min. book, s.a. 1992.