

“MORRIS’S TRUEST FOLLOWER”:
CHARLES J. FAULKNER

Florence S. Boos

Although Morris’s early friendships with Edward Burne-Jones and Dante G. Rossetti are often discussed, his friendships with Charles Joseph Faulkner, Philip Webb, and Cormell Price reflected other aspects of his character. Unlike Burne-Jones and Rossetti, Faulkner is not well-known, and so there are fewer public traces of his actions and idiosyncrasies. In recent years articles have appeared on other early Morris associates Vernon Lushington and William Fulford, as well as Peter Paul Marshall, a founding member of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co., but perhaps because of his mathematical career, early death, and lack of descendants, Faulkner seems to have attracted less interest from historians or family memoirists, with the exception of an *ODNB* article by William Whyte and a history of University College, Oxford which provide hitherto unpublished information on his Oxford career.¹

Born the year before Morris, and like Burne-Jones from Birmingham, Faulkner (1833-92) was the son of Benjamin Faulkner, a maltster and brewer, and his wife Ann Wight, and was educated at the Birmingham proprietary school.² He matriculated at Pembroke College in 1851 at age 18, where he notably failed the College’s preliminary exams in divinity before turning to his chosen subject of mathematics. Morris and Faulkner met at Pembroke in 1854,³ and Faulkner became the only one of Burne-Jones’s prospective ‘Brotherhood’ whose chief accomplishments were not artistic or literary, though he seemed willing to engage in amateur artistic efforts in support of his friends’ efforts. At Oxford he earned two firsts in mathematics and one in natural science, won junior and senior mathematics scholarships, and was elected to a Fellowship at University College in 1856 and appointed a tutor in 1857. In 1857 Faulkner joined the “Jovial Campaign” to paint the panels of the Oxford Union Debating Hall; Burne-Jones recorded that “Charley comes out tremendously strong on the roof with all kinds of quaint beasts and birds.”⁴ In 1858, he traveled with Webb and Morris to France, and the next year he served as best man at Morris’s marriage with Jane Burden. Faulkner never married, and Georgiana Burne-Jones described him in 1861 as the oldest son of a widow, with one younger brother and two sisters, Lucy and Kate. For many years Kate Faulkner prepared tiles, gesso work,

and designs for Morris and Co., and Lucy Faulkner Orin-Smith published a small book on house furnishings in 1877.⁵

In many ways, Faulkner shared the more physically vigorous, concretely skeptical, and politically alert sides of Morris’s character. Dixon’s *Memoirs* describe him as Morris’s fishing and boating partner at Oxford;⁶ he loved practical jokes, which Morris seemed to bear patiently as a kind of therapy for his inexplicable temper; and he shared Morris’s great love of strenuous travel, his patience and dexterity in the execution of handicraft designs, and his conscientiousness in practical affairs. He was also a founding partner of ‘the Firm’—Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co.—which he served as accountant and assistant, and in order to work for this new enterprise he resigned his tutorship and left Oxford to work in London, supplementing his £150 annual salary from the Firm by working as an engineer for an engineering company from 1861-64. In Mackail’s account, he had been “unable to bear the loneliness of Oxford now that all the rest were gone,” and had “resigned the mathematical tutorship which he held together with the Fellowship at University, and had come to London to learn the business of a civil engineer. As a man with a head for figures, who could keep the accounts of the business, he was a valuable associate; and ... he contributed a good deal of work as a craftsman. He helped in executing mural decorations; he painted pattern-tiles, and figure tiles on which the design had been drawn by a more skilled hand; and he even, in March, 1862, successfully cut a wood-block, on which Rossetti had drawn the well-known illustration for his sister’s poem of ‘Goblin Market.’”⁷ During this period Faulkner described the Firm’s activities in letters to Cormell Price, then in Russia, remarking at one point that he had fired the furnaces to make glass,⁸ and describing with detached amusement a typical meeting of the partners, which had “rather the character of a meeting of the ‘Jolly Masons’ or the jolly something else than of a meeting to discuss business.”

Beginning at 8 or 9 p.m. they open with the relation of anecdotes which have been culled by members of the firm since the last meeting. These stories being exhausted, Topsy and Brown will perhaps discuss the relative merits of the art of the thirteenth and fifteenth century, and then perhaps after a few more anecdotes business matters will come up about 10 or 11 o’clock and be furiously discussed till 12, 1 or 2.⁹



When the Firm dissolved in 1874, Faulkner renounced his legal claim in favor of Morris, along with Burne-Jones and Webb, and against the opposition of Peter Paul Marshall, Rossetti, and Ford Madox Brown. May later remarked of the dissolution that

There is no doubt that he [Morris] felt the break-up keenly at the time, though his nearest friends could not fail him then or thereafter—the sun could more easily go backward...¹⁰

By 1864 Faulkner needed more income than the Firm could provide, and he returned to University College, Oxford, becoming a praelector in mathematics, though he spent his vacations in London. Whyte describes him as among a small group of tutors that founded a series of combined collegiate lectures in mathematics in the late 1860s, lecturing on a range of topics.¹¹ Though this is seldom mentioned in his friends' recollections, Faulkner also had a successful administrative career, serving as bursar (vice-bursar, 1864-6; senior bursar, 1866-82; dean, 1871-75; dean of degrees, 1875-89; registrar, 1866-82; and librarian, 1884-89). These were years in which University College expanded the range of subjects available for study and opened its fellowships and scholarships to those not intending to become clergymen, and as tutor and administrator, Faulkner would have advocated for and participated in these shifts. His artistic concerns are reflected in his successful opposition to a 1873 proposal to decorate a College addition in a High Gothic design, a style by then associated with ecclesiasticism and conservatism, and when former Master's Lodgings were converted into student rooms, he arranged for the College to order Morris and Co. wallpapers.¹²

According to Whyte, Faulkner took his administrative roles "very seriously, visiting college properties, managing college revenues, and cataloguing the college archives."¹³ The archives of University College confirm his meticulous care that college properties contain proper sanitary provisions and were in good repair. He was cold to ecclesiastical appeals for additional revenue, but favored the division of land to provide smaller livings and other means of helping less prosperous tenants to survive hard times.¹⁴ In the 1870s fellows would have received somewhat above seven hundred pounds a year, and College offices and a tutorship would have brought this to about a thousand pounds.¹⁵ Perhaps the added income from these administrative posts was needed for Faulkner to help support his sisters and donate to causes in which he believed; as we shall see, he was a generous contributor to *Commonweal* and the Socialist League. His efforts enabled him to leave at his death the quite respectable estate of £5072, still less than one-tenth that of Edward Burne-Jones.¹⁶

One of Charley's less subtle traits, mentioned earlier, was a fondness for bad practical jokes, sometimes at Morris's expense. Once at Red House he and Burne-Jones threw apples at Morris, then teased him for having a black eye.¹⁷ Another time, during the early days of the Firm, Faulkner arranged for books and candlesticks to fall on Morris's head during a meeting, and

Bumping and rebounding they rolled to the ground, while Morris yelled with the enraged surprise of startled nerves, and was understandably very near to serious anger, when Faulkner changed everything by holding him up to opprobrium and exclaiming loudly in an injured voice, "What a bad-tempered fellow you are!" The "bad-tempered" one stopped his torrent of rage—looked at Faulkner for a second, and then burst into a fit of laughter, which disposed of the matter.¹⁸

On still another occasion, later recalled by Webb, "After Morris had had a 'storm,' Faulkner put a label, 'He is mad,' in his hat, and then walked out."¹⁹

Morris eventually learned to put up quite equably with the nonsense of his friends. The *Memorials* record Burne-Jones's account of a later expedition:

... How we teased Mr. Morris on the river [at Oxford in 1875]. We took our lunch one day, and it was a fowl and a bottle of wine and some bread and salt—and Mr. Faulkner and I managed to hide the fowl away in the sheet of the sail, and when we anchored at a shady part of the river and undid the basket, lo! There was no fowl. And Mr. Morris looked like a disappointed little boy and then looked good, and filled his dry mouth with bread and said it didn't much matter, so we drew out the fowl and had great laughter.²⁰

Most remarkably, Faulkner cheerfully accompanied Morris on his two arduous trips to Iceland in 1871 and 1873. Of these journeys, May Morris remarked that

His [Morris's] courage... was nothing to that of Charley Faulkner. My father's old college-friend was not in good health and thought the careless open-air life would benefit him... but he went chiefly out of sheer affection for my father, interested in, though not sharing his absorbing passion for the things of the North. He suffered untold miseries... , endured the long days in the saddle the best he might, and during the journey was several times on the verge of illness... his shortsight almost amounted to blindness, and many a time the wisdom of those admirable little ponies... saved him from disaster. Yet with all this, and not living in the magic dream that possessed his friend, he managed to keep going by sheer pluck and enjoyed it, rough times and smooth times and all.²¹

Finally, like Webb but unlike Burne-Jones, Faulkner saw eye to eye with Morris politically. He coauthored with Cornell Price an early article on “Unhealthy Employments” for the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*,²² with its conclusion that “indifference to others’ misery is a crime which cannot go unpunished” (271), and joined Price, Morris, and the Burne-Joneses at the demonstration of “workmen’s neutrality” in 1878. When in 1886 Morris was arrested for “obstruction” (that is, lecturing on socialism at Bell Street, Edgeware Road), Faulkner testified in his defense. Most significantly, as a don he helped found an Oxford branch of the Socialist League in 1885, and Tony Pinkney describes him as its “driving forcefrom the beginning.”²³ The inner alienation he must have experienced as an administrator as well as his wholehearted commitment to socialism are shown in his comment, “It makes me feel fresh again to be aiming at something in which I can feel an interest, after the miserable dreary twaddle of university life.”²⁴

Faulkner also gave £100 towards the inauguration of *Commonweal*, to which he contributed two articles in 1887 and 1888, before he was paralyzed by a stroke in October of the latter year. The 1887 article, “Inhuman Arithmetic,” attacks political economy for reducing men to ciphers. Like Philip Webb, Faulkner was an anti-parliamentarian, and in “Law and War,” which appeared in the *Commonweal* issue of 7 January 1888 and the two succeeding weeks, he asserted (as did Morris) that “we shall not be flurried by the thought of the great struggle which shall put an end to it all.” In a letter from Faulkner to Joseph Lane of 18 May 1887 commenting on Lane’s *Anti-Statist Communist Manifesto*, he argued against its direct attacks on religion and expounded a kind of libertarian anarchism:

...what we wish to do is destroy *authority*, and among other authorities that will disappear will be those who pretend to know more than others about ‘the next world’ and about ‘god’ ...we may safely leave all men to speculate freely ...the socialist should be free to think and to speculate on any subject whatever ...what he is forbidden to do, which is the very aim of socialism to prevent, is the interfering with other people...²⁵

Faulkner’s efforts on behalf of socialism drew some local opprobrium; in 1885 the *Oxford Magazine* described his views as “alehouse anarchism,” and hostile undergraduates christened a donkey “Comrade Faulkner” after their College librarian and Dean of Degrees.²⁶ Even the *Daily Telegraph* objected when Faulkner joined Morris in supporting the defenders of Khartoum against General Gordon: “He denounces public men all around[, asserting that] ... Colonel Burnaby [a calvary officer killed in

the attempt to retake Kartoum]—for even death does not disarm his criticism—was a scoundrel.”²⁷

MacCarthy claims that Faulkner “devoted all his energy to Morris and the Socialist League, jeopardizing his academic career;²⁸ she may be following Mackail’s rather dour view of the effect of Faulkner’s political activities:

The work and all the load of toil and obloquy it involved had almost been too much even for Morris’s immense energy and bounding vitality: on the weaker constitution of Faulkner it would seem to have acted with dangerous and finally fatal result.²⁹

Faulkner suffered a stroke in 1888 at the age of 55, and remained paralyzed, though not unconscious, and was cared for by his sister Kate in London until his death in 1892. MacCarthy’s view of the causes of his stroke seems a mild echo of Burne-Jones’s comment on Faulkner’s death, “Oh yes, [his socialism] killed him, by the most painful of deaths.”³⁰ Since Faulkner had been in ill health as early as fifteen years previously, this seems a stretch, but such responses cast in relief Faulkner’s intrepidity in standing by the beliefs he shared with his friend. As such books as Maurice Ashley and C. T. Saunders’s *Red Oxford: A History of the Growth of Socialism in the University of Oxford* (1933) and Tony Pinkney’s *William Morris in Oxford: The Campaigning Years, 1879-1895* (2007) have argued, the efforts of early socialists to promote their ideas in a university known for its conservative politics were not without some later influence; had Faulkner lived another fifteen years he might have been gratified to find allies in another generation.³¹

All records of Faulkner’s character in fact confirm Val Prinsep’s late recollection of him as “the most genial of men.”³² For example, Georgiana Burne-Jones remembers Faulkner’s attentiveness to Ford Madox Brown’s eldest son: “The little ten-year-old Nolly sat up all evening and clung most of the time to kind Charles Faulkner, demanding amusing stories from him ...”³³ To his friend and biographer W. R. Lethaby, Philip Webb later spoke of Faulkner as “the man of the clearest honesty” he had known. “He was most invincibly kind, loyal and persistent and Morris’s truest follower.”³⁴ He remembered Faulkner’s kindness to the undergraduates at Oxford, and of his having taken special care of one much teased youth. Webb believed that “Socialism was a great gain to him too: in the early times he felt too severely towards the orthodox”³⁵

To Mackail in June 1898, Webb wrote that

... as to the friendship to the last between the two men: assuredly it was that of the greatest confidence and affection. The unbreakable courage and clear

honesty of Faulkner held Morris as closely as friendship, pure and simple, could bind two men together—regardless of difference in quality of mind. They each did for the other what they could not have done for anyone else... C. J. F. had the capacity of seeing the value of that towards which he had no natural attraction; and this, to me, seems to be one of the rarest of fine qualities.³⁶

Charles Faulkner was a quiet, unpretentious man of acute skeptical intelligence, whose “clear honesty” aided Morris in essential ways. His steady support for the more active and iconoclastic sides of Morris’s character comes through in the recollections of their more conventional friends, and his accompaniment of Morris to Iceland was a significant mark of friendship and devotion. It was not only on the ponies in Iceland that “Morris’s truest follower” rode with him through “the rough times and smooth times and all.” His incapacitation in 1888 deprived Morris of important emotional and intellectual support as he encountered factionalism and disappointments in his socialist endeavors of the late 1880s and 90s.

1. Keith Gibeling, “Peter Paul Marshall: Forgotten Member of the Morris Firm,” *JWMS* 12.1 (1996): 8-16; and David Taylor, “Faith, Doubt and Belief in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Vernon Lushington and the Religion of Humanity,” Diss. University of Roehampton, 2008.
2. Mackail collected reminiscences from R. W. Dixon and Burne-Jones for his biography, but by then Faulkner had died and Burne-Jones and Faulkner had not been close.
3. Whyte states that he was the second son of Benjamin Faulkner and his wife Ann; May Morris recalled visits to Mrs. Faulkner and her daughters in London (*CW*, 3, xxv-xxvi).
4. From a letter home, Mackail, *Life*, vol. 1, 120.
5. *The Drawing Room: Its Decoration and Furniture*, London: Macmillan, 1878. See Emma Ferry, “The Other Miss Faulkner: Lucy Orrinsmith and the ‘Art at Home Series,’” *JWMS* 19.2 (Summer 2011): 47-64.
6. W. R. Lethaby, *Philip Webb and His Work*, new edition, London: Raven Oak Press, 1979, 32.
7. Nicolas Salmon and Derek Baker, *A Chronology of William Morris*, Bristol: Thoemmes P, 1996, 11 April 1861.
8. *CW*, vol. 11, xii.
9. Whyte records that in 1871/2 Faulkner gave a series of lectures on elementary differential calculus, problems in “mixed mathematics,” “differential calculus and applications,” and “dynamics of a particle,” all relatively elementary topics. Letter to author, 28 July, 2010.
10. Rather strikingly, Faulkner was the last Fellow in mathematics to be appointed at his college until 1962 (Darwall-Smith, *A History*, 502). From time to time he was called upon to defend the sciences in a still largely clerical setting, and one of his students who was later to receive a “first” in natural science recalled that Faulkner had defended his work when he was criticized by another tutor for his ignorance of Gospel miracles.
11. Class snobbery persisted; the same student recalled that “the Fogger” was mocked for his Mercian speech and “Birmingham boots” (Darwall-Smith, *A History*, 371). Darwall-Smith notes that as late as the 1880s, “[s]ome undergraduates, valuing gentlemanly ways above intellectual achievement, found some Fellows—like the Brumme Charles Faulkner—hard to respect” (*A History*, 403).

12. Darwall-Smith, 367. He and another Fellow, Charles Fytte, had opposed the High Gothic style.
13. Whyte (*ODNB*).
14. University College Archives, 1859-85, UC:EB4/J1, 1-6. Faulkner resigned 1882.
15. Darwall-Smith, 398.
16. Whyte (*ODNB*).
17. *Memorials*, vol. 1, 220.
18. *Memorials*, vol. 1, 226.
19. W. R. Lethaby, *Philip Webb*, 21.
20. *Memorials*, vol. 2, 57. She recounts another occasion on which Burne-Jones and Faulkner took great delight in deceiving Morris in a game of whist played with a dummy (*Memorials*, vol. 1, 279).
21. Faulkner’s name appears steadily throughout the *Memorials* in the accounts of decorating at Red House and social events for the Firm; and when the Morris and Burne-Joneses took a joint holiday in Oxford in 1867, “Faulkner was in college, but we met every evening, and then Morris read what he had written or the men played whist—without practical jokes now. I remember noticing how beautifully Faulkner shuffled the cards with his skillful fingers” (*Memorials*, vol. 1, 304).
22. *CW*, vol. 8, xv.
23. “Unhealthy Employments,” *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, May, 1856, 265-71. The authors document some of the worst industrial hazards of the period and offer practical and political remedies. Mackail remarks, “Price and Faulkner brought to Oxford actual knowledge of the inhuman conditions of human life in the great industrial areas; their special enthusiasms were for sanitation, for Factory Acts, for the bare elements of a possible life among the mass of their fellow-citizens” (*Life*, vol. 1, 64).
24. An account of Faulkner’s role in the Oxford Socialist League appears in Pinkney, *William Morris in Oxford: The Campaigning Years, 1874-1895* (Grosmont: Illuminati, 2007), 107-112. He notes that after Faulkner’s stroke the Branch “was in danger of being left entirely rudderless without him.”
25. MacCarthy, 515.
26. B. L. MS. 46,345, in “Charles Faulkner,” Florence Boos, ed., *William Morris’s Socialist Diary*, London: Journeyman Press, 1985, 52.
27. *Oxford Magazine*, vol. 3 (1885), 58; Whyte (*ODNB*).
28. *The Daily Telegraph*, 17 February 1885; Kelvin, *Letters*, vol. 2, 390, fn. 2.
29. MacCarthy, *William Morris*, 578. She notes that “The League files in Amsterdam hold the poignant records of his efforts: his fruitless attempts to get the newsagents in Oxford to distribute *Commonweal*; his donation of his MA gown, now green with age, for a Socialist League performance; his and Webb’s subsidy of the League. They were both paying one pound toward salaries and one pound to the *Commonweal* fund every week in 1888.” She attributes Morris’s grief at Faulkner’s stroke to guilt.
30. Mackail, *Life*, vol. 2, 218.
31. MacCarthy, *William Morris*, 579.
32. Ashley and Saunders, Oxford: Holywell Press, 1930; Pinkney.
33. Valentine C. Prinsep, “The Oxford Circle: Rossetti, Burne-Jones and William Morris,” *Magazine of Art* 27, n. s. 2 (1904), 171; Prinsep describes Faulkner as “a clever and very ingenious man.”
34. *Memorials*, vol. 1, 293.
35. Lethaby, *Philip Webb*, 246.
36. Lethaby, *Philip Webb*, 247.
37. Philip Webb to J. W. Mackail, 4 June 1898; Mackail notebooks, WMG, cited in MacCarthy, *William Morris*, 578.

Florence Boos is a Professor of English at the University of Iowa and edits *The William Morris Archive*, <http://morrisedition.lib.uiowa.edu>. Her *The Early Writings of William Morris is forthcoming from Ohio State University Press in 2015*.