

The De Morgan Foundation owns an unparalleled collection of ceramics and oil paintings by William and Evelyn De Morgan. The husband and wife duo were key proponents of the Arts and Crafts Movement in the late 19th and early 20th Century.

The De Morgan Foundation is a registered independent charity and receives no revenue funding from the government. All our income goes towards managing the care of the De Morgan Collection and providing access to it through loans, tours, research and educational activities.

About the De Morgan Foundation Collection

The De Morgan Foundation Collection was formed by Mrs Wilhelmina Stirling. She was the younger sister of artist Evelyn De Morgan. Mrs Stirling was a fascinating woman who published her sister and brother-in-law's biography and other books on diverse subjects. She inherited some pieces from her sister and brother-in-law and actively sought out other works to add to her collection which she assembled at her home, Old Battersea House in London.

Mrs Stirling died at the age of ninety nine in 1965. She bequeathed her substantial art collection to be looked after in Trust for perpetuity and the De Morgan Foundation Charity was formally created and charged with this duty in 1967. Mrs Stirling leased the property from the Borough Council who, after her death, granted a long lease to the American publisher, Malcolm Forbes. He restored it and for a period of time gave the De Morgan Foundation space to display elements of its collection. Between 2002 and 2014 the De Morgan Foundation provided access to the De Morgan Collection through its museum *The De Morgan Centre* in Wandsworth, London. The Centre closed to the public in June 2014 as its lease was coming to an end.

As of January 2015 the De Morgan Foundation provides access to its drawing, design and manuscript archives by appointment from its office in Compton, Surrey. It provides access to the De Morgan Collection via a series of temporary exhibitions and loans.

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The De Morgans

William (1839-1917) and Evelyn (1855-1919) De Morgan were both highly respected artists in their own rights. They married in 1887 and in addition to their art, they became involved in many of the leading issues of the day including, prison reform, pacifism and spiritualism.

Together they were also involved with the Suffragette movement. Evelyn was a signatory for the "Declaration in Favour of Women's Suffrage" in 1889 and William showed his support by serving as Vice President of the "Men's League for Women's Suffrage" in 1913.

They were described by Sir Edward Poynter (President of the Royal Academy) as "...two of the rarest spirits of the Age."

William Frend De Morgan 1839-1917

The most important ceramicist of the Arts and Crafts Movement, De Morgan rediscovered the lost art of lustre decoration and the brilliant colours of Islamic pottery, particularly the bright turquoise which features prominently in his ceramic work. He was especially inspired by Isnik work of the 16th century. De Morgan began his artistic career working alongside contemporaries William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones, before opening his own potter's studio in Chelsea.

De Morgan worked primarily as a ceramic designer, and had a substantial staff of decorators. These included Joe Juster and Charles and Fred Passenger, whose initials can often be seen on De Morgan pieces.

During his career, De Morgan worked on a range of commissions, from stately homes to the Czar of Russia's yacht, and his tiles decorated the public rooms and corridors of several P&O Liners.

De Morgan was also a stained glass artist, inventor and chemist. After his pottery closed in 1904 he embarked on a career as a novelist and in the final years before his death he published seven novels, all of which enjoyed enormous success and brought their author the financial security which had until then eluded him.

De Morgan was actively involved with the issues of his day such as education, prison reform, the suffragette movement, pacifism and spiritualism

Evelyn De Morgan (née Pickering), 1855-1919

Evelyn was inspired to become an artist by her uncle, the symbolist painter John Roddam Spencer Stanhope. In 1873 she was one of the first women to attend the recently opened Slade School of Art. She won many medals and awards at the Slade and as an up and coming young artist was invited to exhibit at the opening exhibition of the influential Grosvenor Gallery, alongside such established names as Edward Burne-Jones, George Frederick Watts and Lawrence Alma-Tadema.

Evelyn spent much of her time in Italy, particularly in Florence where her artist uncle lived. The influence of Botticelli and his contemporaries is apparent in the style of many of her paintings.

In 1887 Evelyn and William De Morgan married. While each continued to practise their own work, they jointly became interested in and involved with many of the social issues of their day.

Key Objects

The De Morgan Foundation has over 250 ceramic objects in its collection, including the following William De Morgan ceramics:

- Blackbird vase
- Seabird and fish dish
- BBB tile
- Dodo tile
- Galleon Tile Panel



Blackbird Bottle, 1888-1907

Decorated by Joe Juster

This baluster necked bottle reflects the Victorian fascination with the Middle East in both form and decoration. William Morris inspired English country blackbirds populate the body of the bottle whilst the neck is decorated with a Persian inspired peacock feather pattern which merges both Eastern and Western cultures.

Seabirds and Fish dish, c. 1872-1904

Decorated by: Charles Passenger

This whimsical dish of Seabirds and Fish is characteristic of De Morgan's sense of humour. The iridescent gold lustre decoration shows De Morgan at the height of his technical prowess.

BBB Tile, 1872-1904

This thistle tile is one of De Morgan's most iconic patterns and was produced throughout his career in a range of colour-ways including blue, yellow, manganese and green. Its title "BBB" was named after the fireplace manufacturer *Bernard Bishop and Bernard* for whom it was produced.

Multi-Lustre Dodo Tile, 1888-1904

One of the most iconic creatures of the Victorian period; De Morgan's Dodo tiles were a staple of children's nurseries.

Galleon Tile Panel, c.1895

This tile panel, depicting Galleons in full sail with Sea Creatures, Landscape and Sunrise was designed for the P&O ship the *s.s.Malta* and is typical of the schemes which he designed for 12 P&O ships between 1882 and 1900. It was acquired by the De Morgan Foundation in 2007 with assistance from the Heritage Lottery Fund and The Art Fund.

Oil paintings in our collection by De Morgan's wife Evelyn include:

- Ariadne in Naxos
- Night and Sleep
- The Hourglass
- Flora
- The Prisoner



Ariadne in Naxos, 1877, Oil on Canvas

Evelyn was one of the first three women to study at the Slade school of Art which opened to the public in 1871. The Headmaster at the time was Sir Edward Poynter and Evelyn's early classical works were undoubtedly influenced by his style. The production of large oil paintings of classical subject were a deliberate choice for this young female artist, who was positioning herself in the art world as a professional artist to be reckoned with. Her ambiguous name "Evelyn" left some confusion and early articles reviewing her work express some surprise that this Evelyn was a lady and not a male artist

Night and Sleep, 1878, Oil on Canvas

In this painting the couple who represent Night and Sleep float through the sky scattering poppies onto the earth beneath. This painting overtly references the Victorians use of laudanum as a sleeping draught (which was made from tincture of the opium poppy). Night and Sleep was one of Evelyn's earliest paintings and her first to be exhibited at the radical Grosvenor Gallery.

The Hour Glass, 1904-1905, Oil on Canvas

Along with her husband William De Morgan, Evelyn was part of the nineteenth century circle of artists and designers which included Edward Burne-Jones and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Janey Morris (wife of William Morris) modelled in this painting which is symbolic of the passing of time. Even in old age Janey's beauty is apparent. The medieval inspired setting and robes shows the influence of De Morgan's Pre-Raphaelite artist friends on her artistic style.

Flora, 1894

Evelyn De Morgan's most well known and loved painting is Flora, the Roman Goddess of flowers. The painting was made entirely in Florence and is a celebration of the city and its Renaissance artists. It is clearly inspired by Botticelli's *Primavera*.