



St Pancras: *the Portico Project* – a collaboration with B² Architects

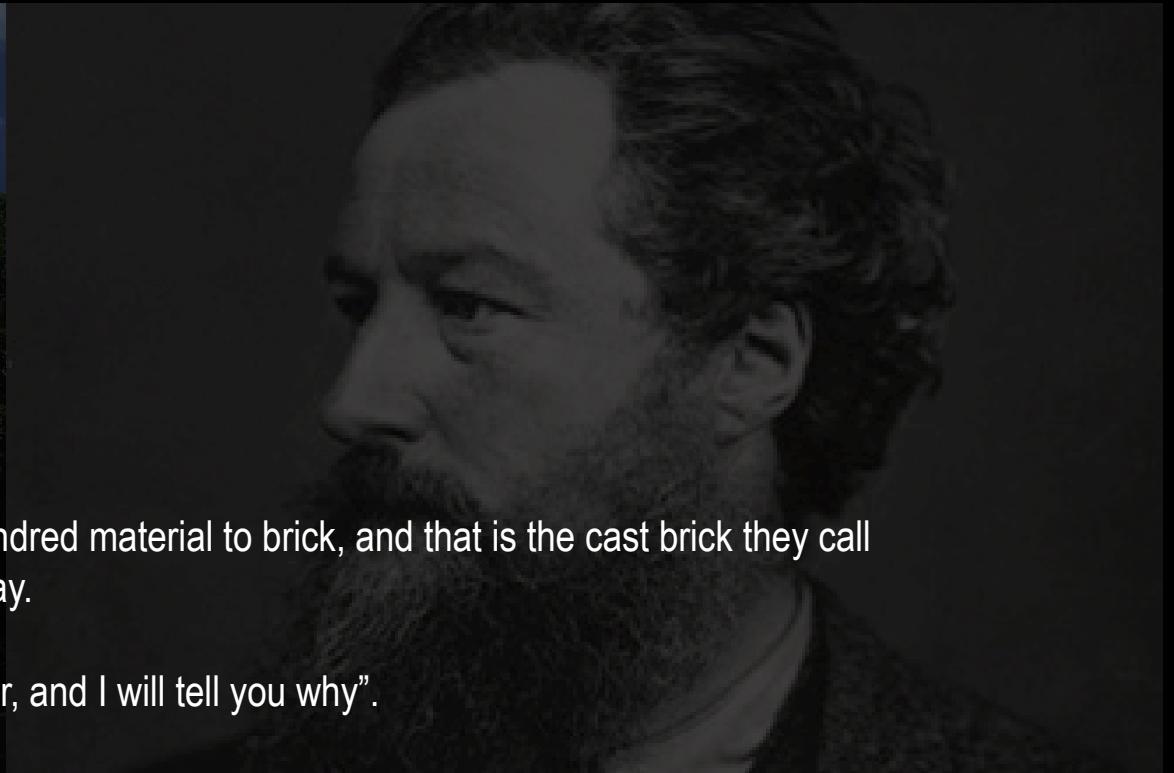


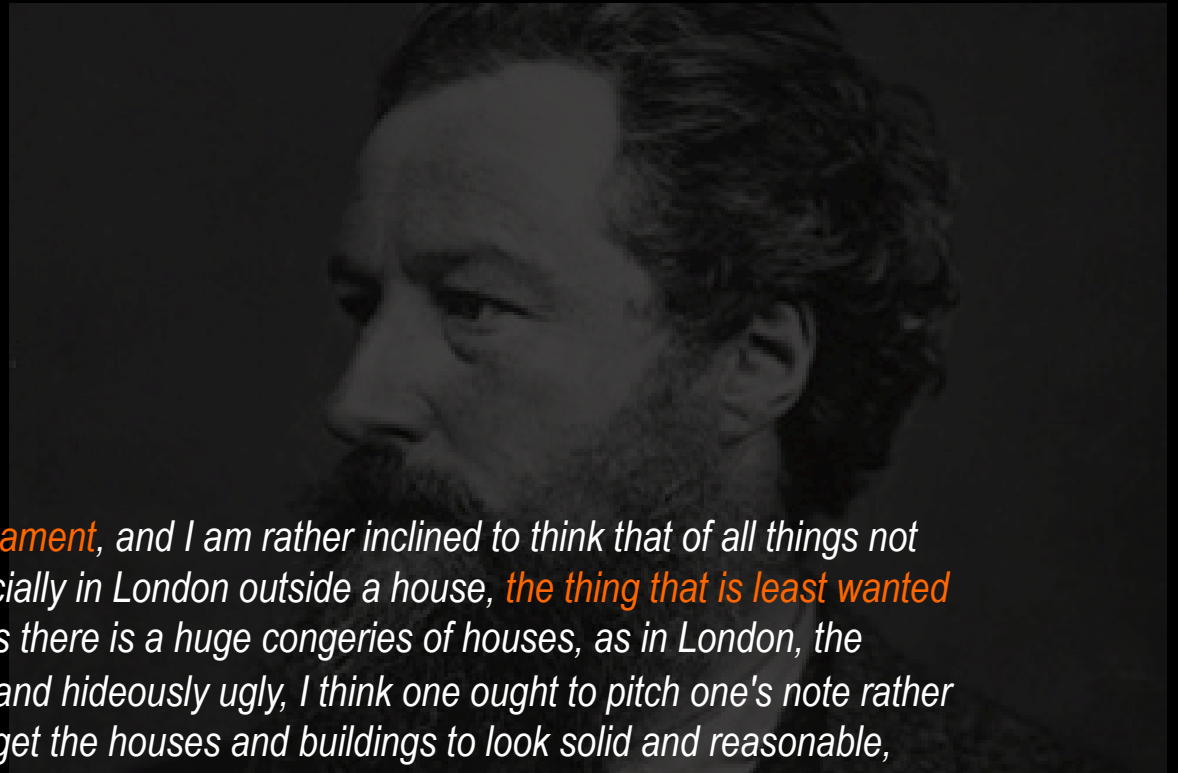
lead, stone and terracotta: repairing materials and their connections



“Now there is, by the way, another kindred material to brick, and that is the cast brick they call **terra-cotta**. I cannot abide it, I must say.

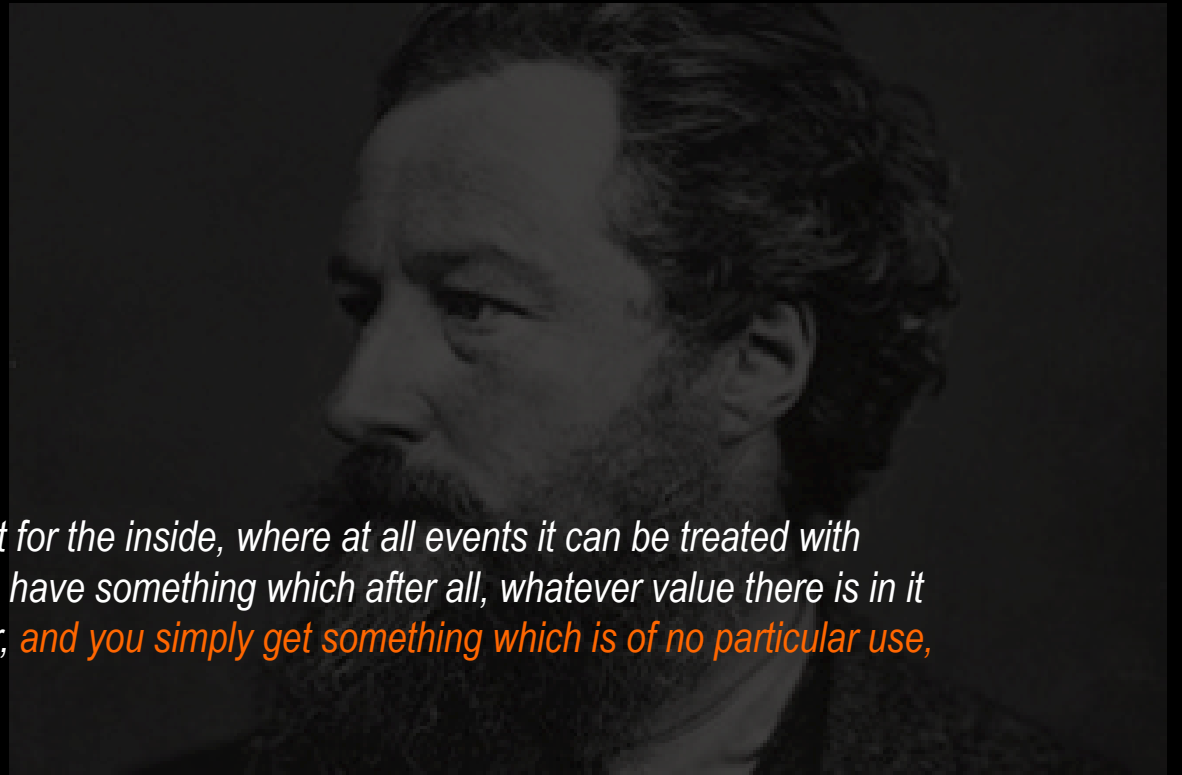
I do not think I need treat it any further, and I will tell you why”.

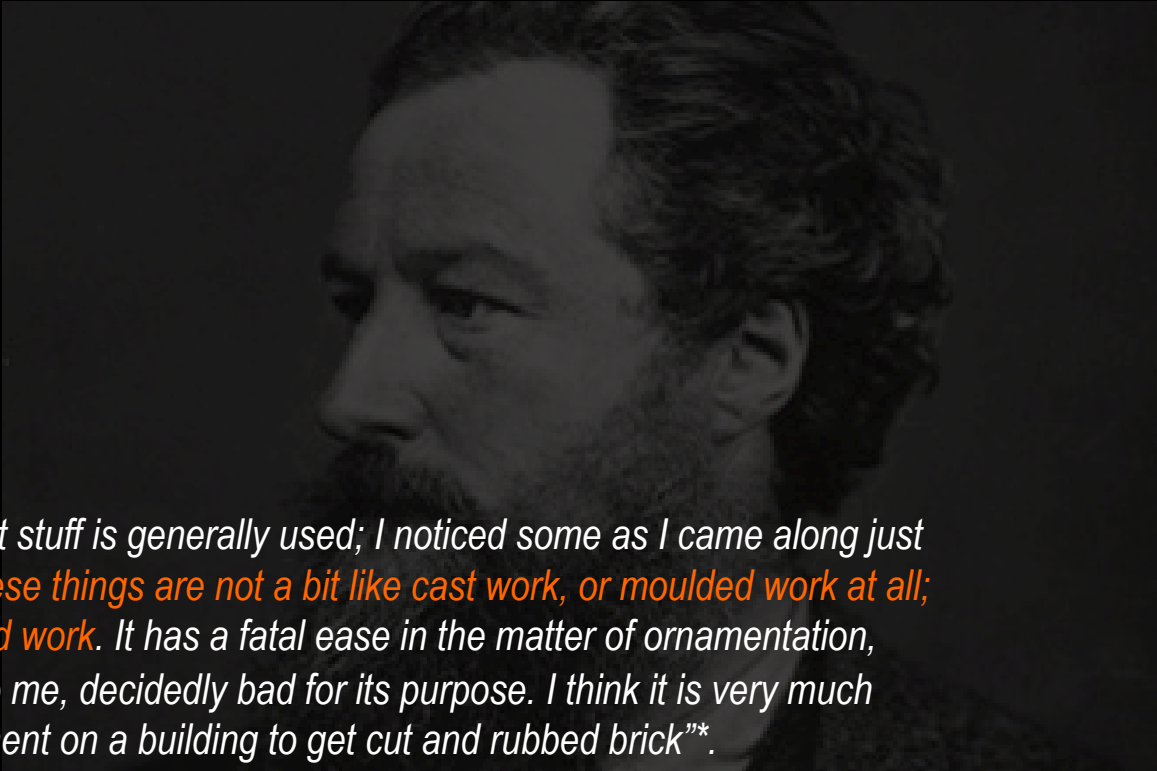




"It is used for nothing else except ornament, and I am rather inclined to think that of all things not wanted at the present day, and especially in London outside a house, the thing that is least wanted is ornament. That is to say, as long as there is a huge congeries of houses, as in London, the greater part of which are lamentably and hideously ugly, I think one ought to pitch one's note rather low, and try, if one can manage it, to get the houses and buildings to look solid and reasonable, and to impress people with their obvious adaptation to their uses; where they can be made big to make them big, and not to bother about ornament".

“Such ornament as there is, to keep it for the inside, where at all events it can be treated with delicacy, and you do not feel that you have something which after all, whatever value there is in it as ornament, will presently disappear, and you simply get something which is of no particular use, except for collecting dirt.”





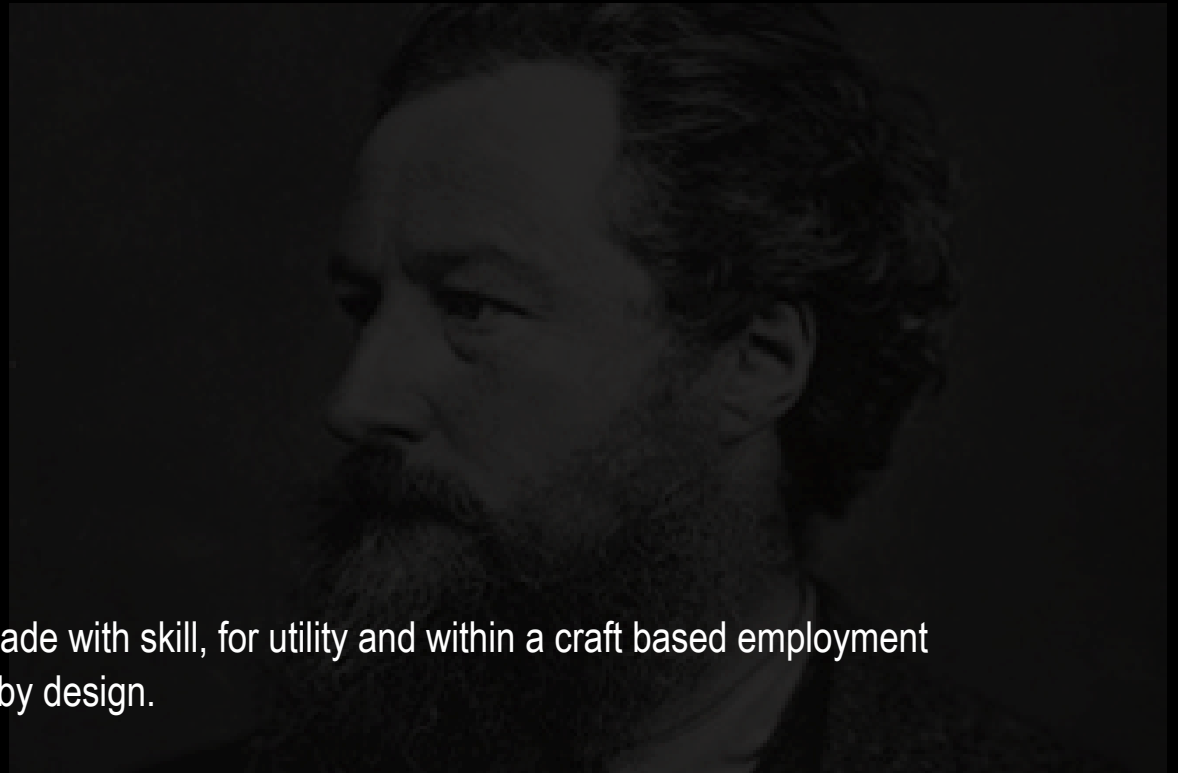
*“You know perfectly well how that cast stuff is generally used; I noticed some as I came along just now, and I said to myself: **After all, these things are not a bit like cast work, or moulded work at all; they look like a bad imitation of carved work.** It has a fatal ease in the matter of ornamentation, which makes the material, it seems to me, decidedly bad for its purpose. I think it is very much better if you want to have brick ornament on a building to get cut and rubbed brick”**

THE INFLUENCE OF BUILDING MATERIALS ON ARCHITECTURE *

20th November 1891 at a meeting sponsored by the Art Workers' Guild at Barnard's Inn, London

Morris on terracotta needs revisiting:

Morris felt the work of architecture, made with skill, for utility and within a craft based employment structure created art by default – not by design.



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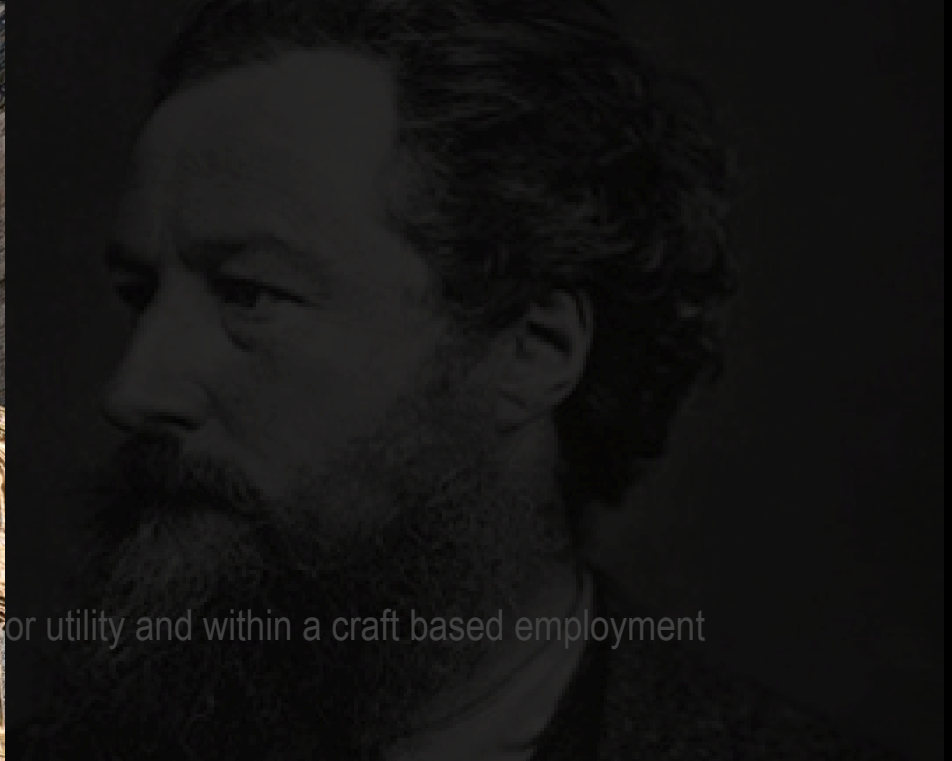
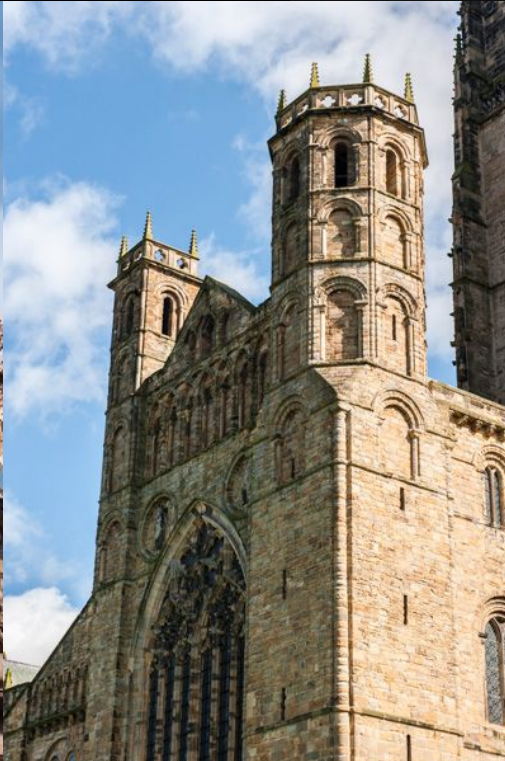
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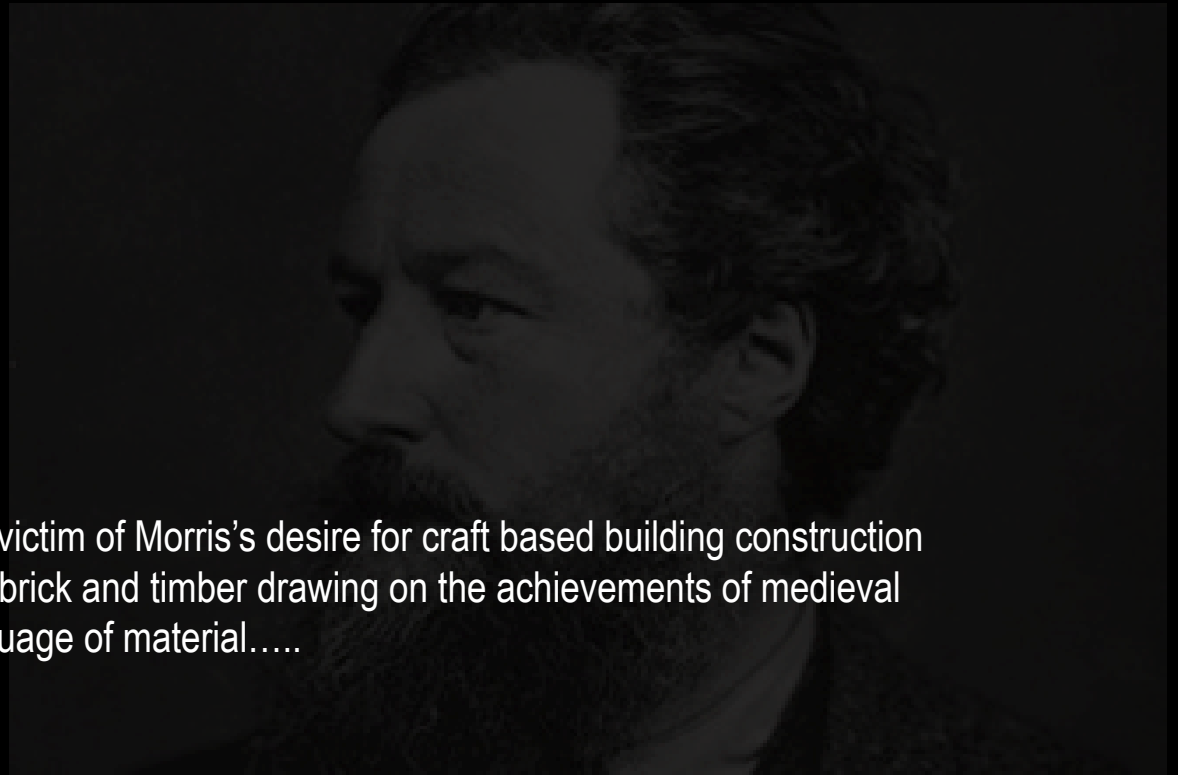
The process of terracotta was neither moulded nor cast (actually it is both), but results in an imitation of carving – a question of ‘truth’.

Gathering dirt, an inappropriate delicacy for an exterior that should be reserved for the interior – a highly provocative observation on appropriateness of craft – should a department store have the same external elaboration as a cathedral.....

where does that leave terracotta?



a cheap alternative to stonework – a victim of Morris's desire for craft based building construction using the primary materials of stone, brick and timber drawing on the achievements of medieval guilds to find a true architectural language of material.....

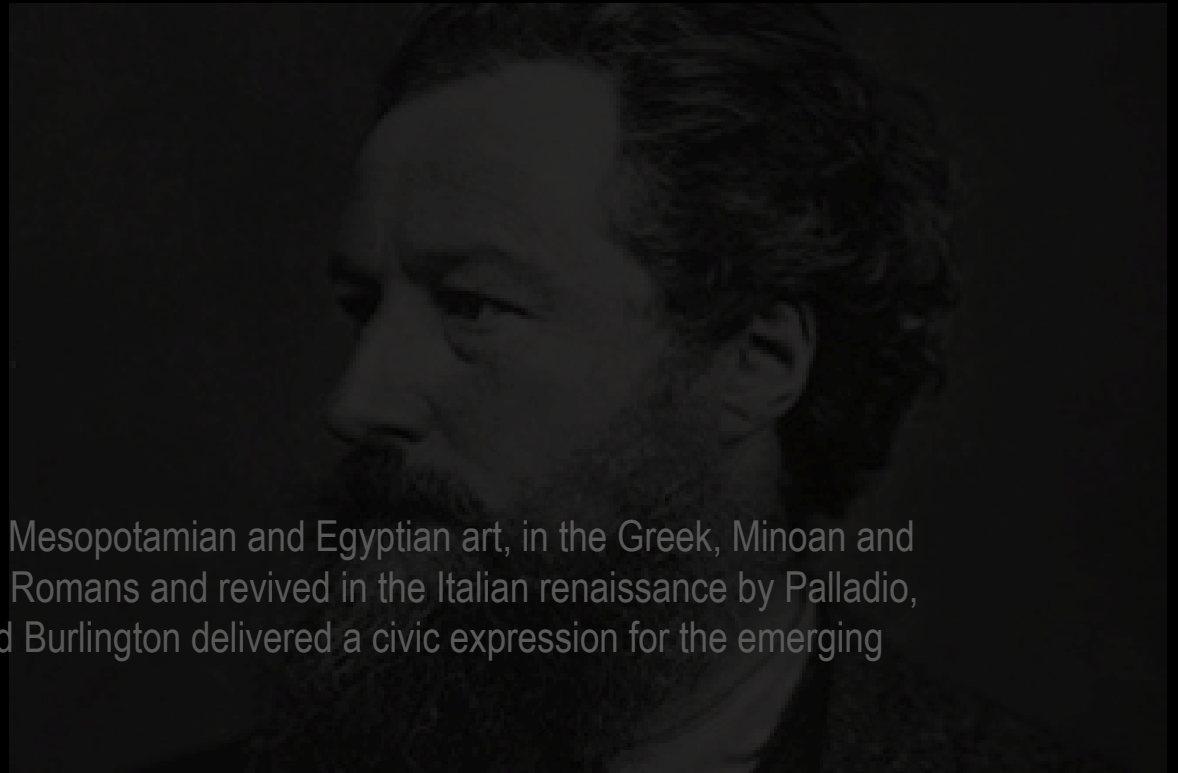


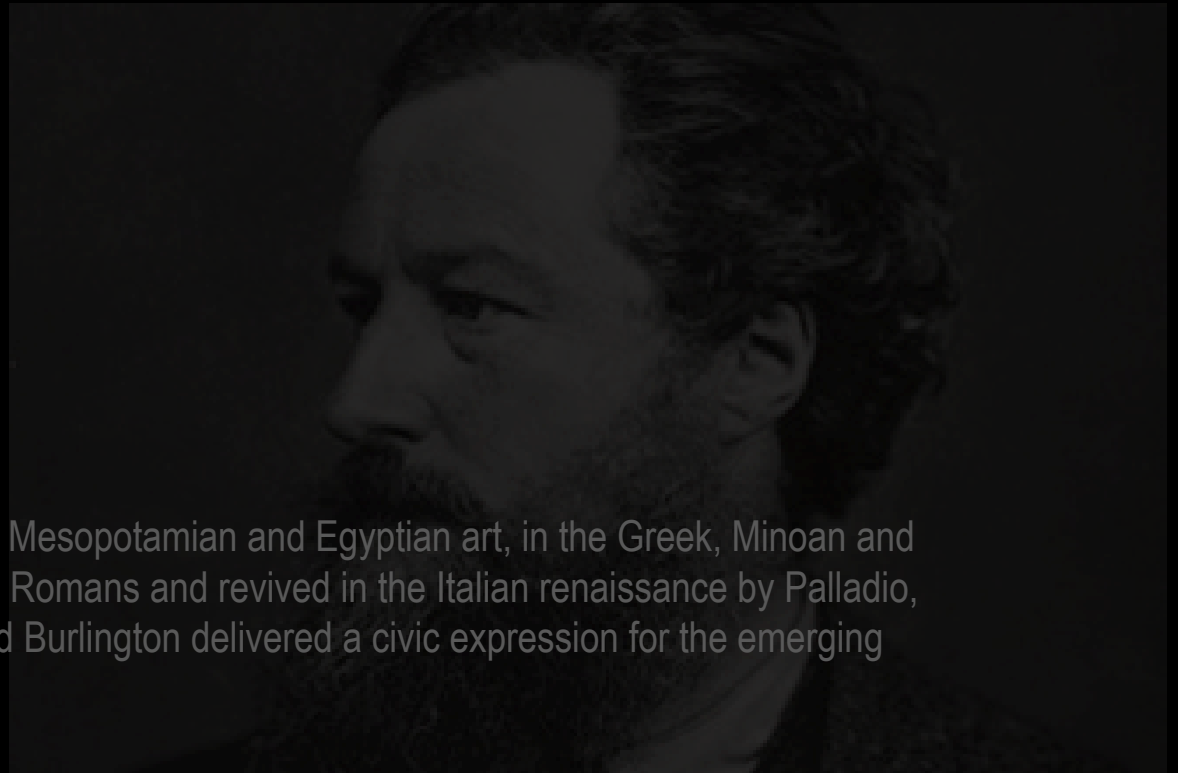
however, terracotta has been used in Mesopotamian and Egyptian art, in the Greek, Minoan and Etruscan civilisations, adopted by the Romans and revived in the Italian renaissance by Palladio, from whom Inigo Jones then Kent and Burlington delivered a civic expression for the emerging British empire.....



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so what truth do we look for.....and how far back should we look?





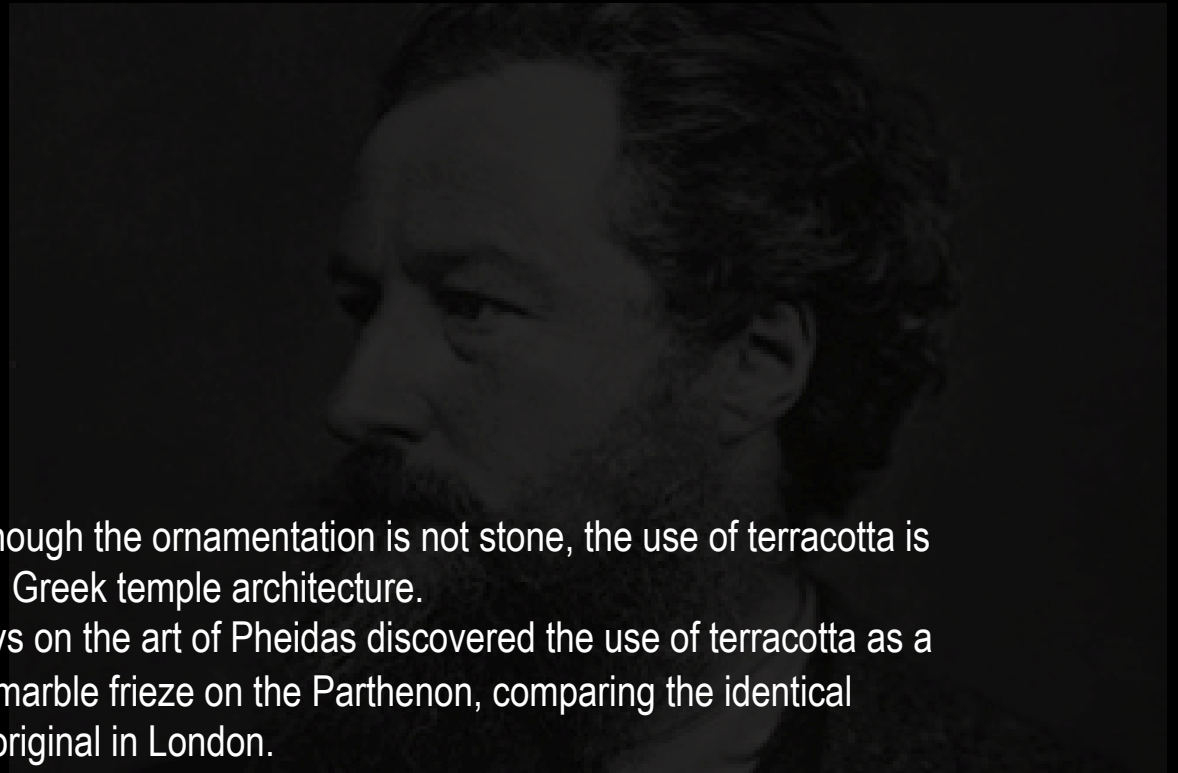
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perhaps 'authenticity is the wrong critique to apply to terracotta.....

At St Pancras one can argue that although the ornamentation is not stone, the use of terracotta is entirely in line with its common use in Greek temple architecture.

Charles Waldstein in one of his essays on the art of Pheidias discovered the use of terracotta as a means of finalising the design of the marble frieze on the Parthenon, comparing the identical terracotta figure in the Louvre to the original in London.





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What this tells us is that the Inwood's use of terracotta is far from inauthentic.

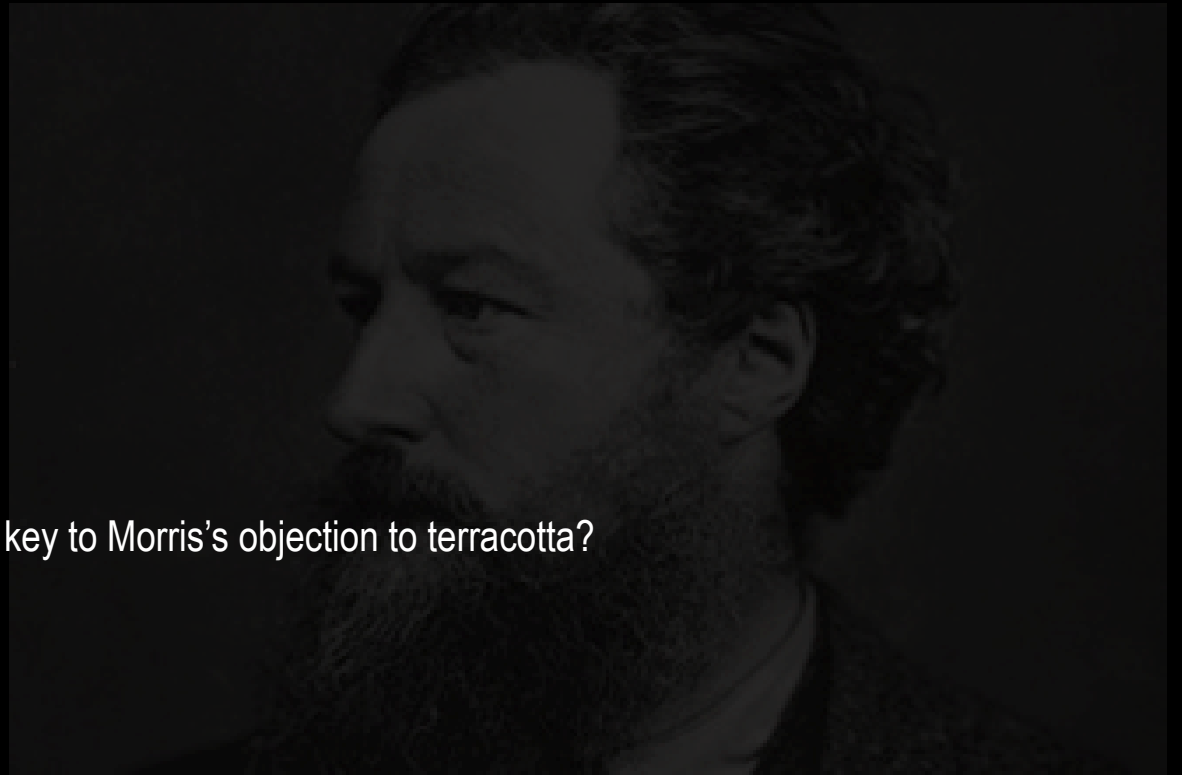


1st Century AD - terracotta was part of the material lexicon of the Greek temples, a refinement of the ceramic process specifically for architectural decoration.



Acroterion – a terracotta temple figure - the inherent properties of terracotta decoration that brought it into being in the first place – light weight and an ability to create serial decoration economically - remained pertinent in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

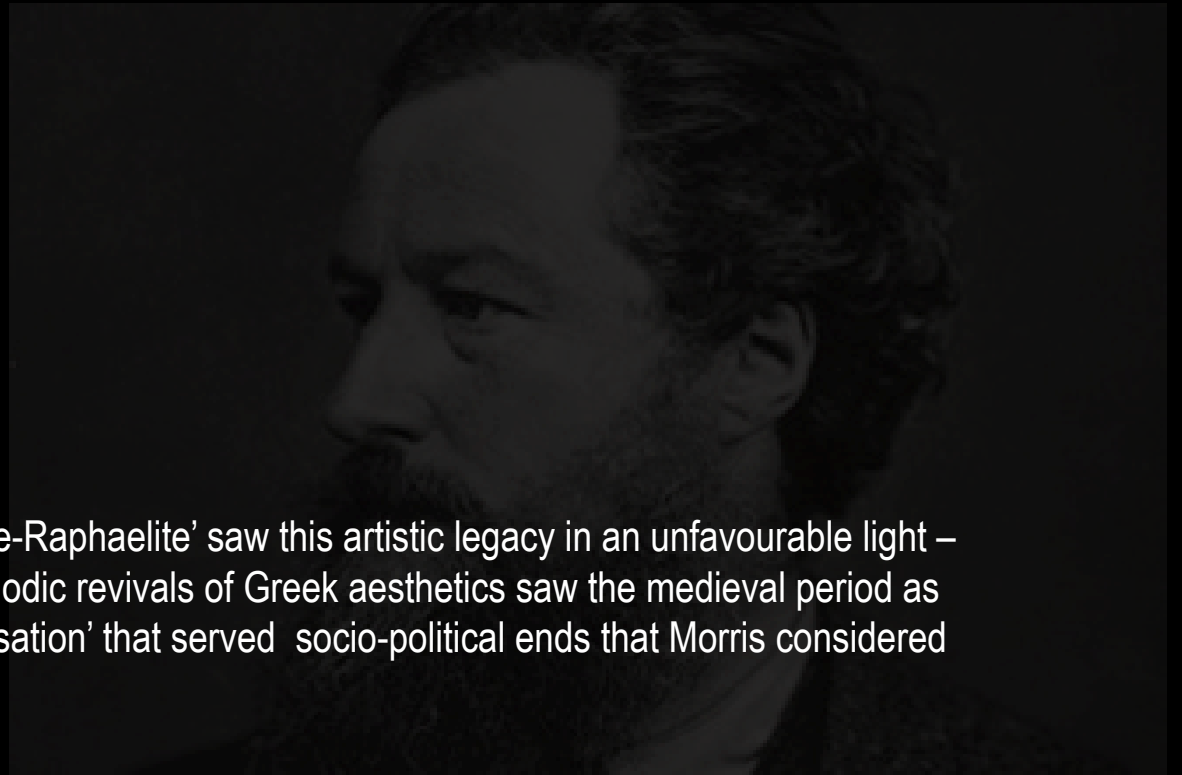
was imitation or historicism really the key to Morris's objection to terracotta?

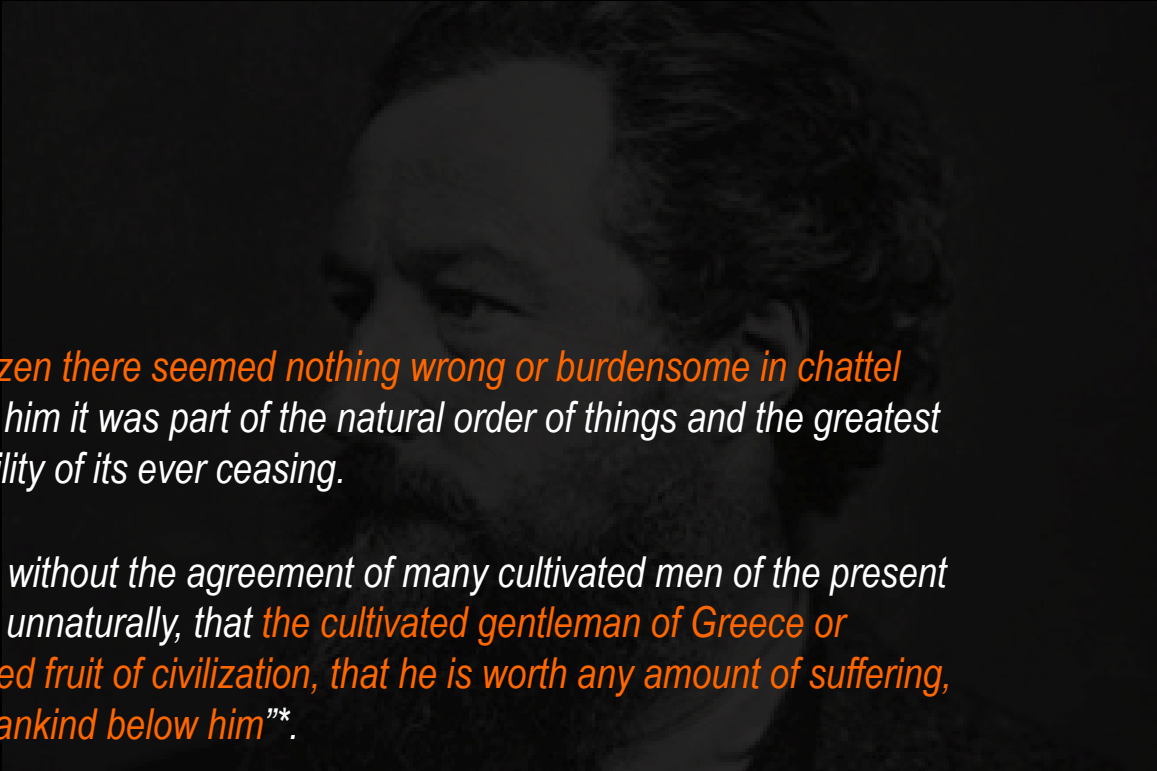


Greek sculpture and the culture of perfection - a benchmark of naturalism in art that shaped the post-enlightenment view of the way statehood is manifest through art – political high realism. Every European empire, or aspirational empire has adopted this principle in the way it defines its own cultural output – Roman, British, American, Napoleonic France, Stalin's Russia, the 'Third Reich'.



It is unsurprising that Morris, as a 'Pre-Raphaelite' saw this artistic legacy in an unfavourable light – both politically and artistically the periodic revivals of Greek aesthetics saw the medieval period as a 'dark age' between periods of 'civilisation' that served socio-political ends that Morris considered corrupt and exploitative.





“Meantime to the cultivated Greek citizen there seemed nothing wrong or burdensome in chattel slavery, and all that it gave birth to: to him it was part of the natural order of things and the greatest minds of the day could see no possibility of its ever ceasing.

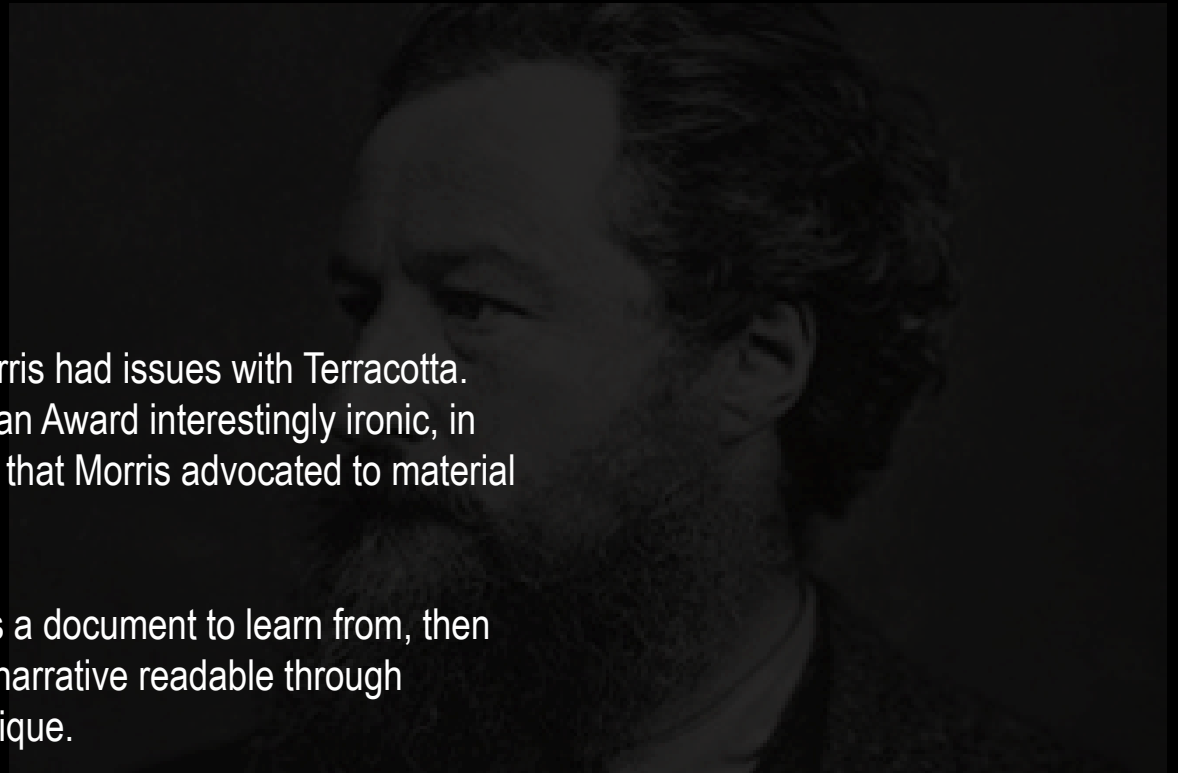
So might our citizen have argued, not without the agreement of many cultivated men of the present day, who, I observe, do think, and not unnaturally, that the cultivated gentleman of Greece or England is such a precious and finished fruit of civilization, that he is worth any amount of suffering, injustice, or brutality in the mass of mankind below him”.*

ART AND LABOUR*

1 April 1884: before the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society at the Philosophical Hall, Leeds

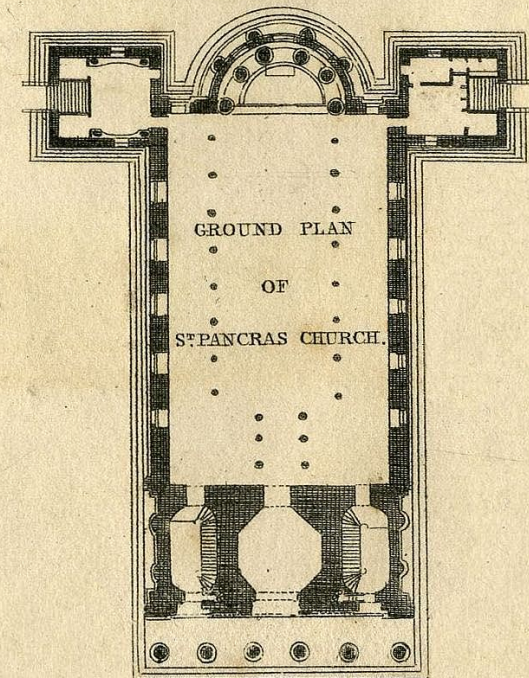
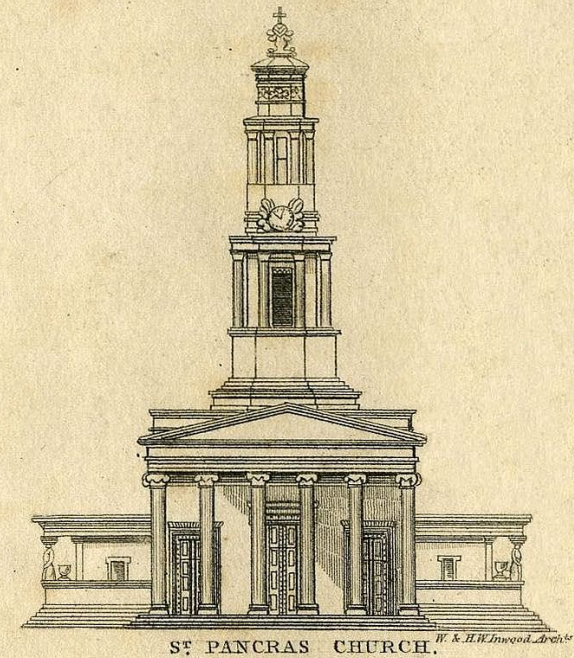
So, both artistically and politically Morris had issues with Terracotta. This makes winning the John Betjeman Award interestingly ironic, in that I am applying principles of repair that Morris advocated to material that Morris detested.....

However- if as he states, a building is a document to learn from, then St Pancras gives us a socio-political narrative readable through attention to detail, material and technique.



St Pancras - an unrivalled example of 'Greek revival'

Henry William Inwood was in Athens at the time that the plans for St Pancras were accepted, and he brought back to England plaster casts of details of the **Erechtheum**, and some excavated fragments.





the Erechtheum

the original



the Erechtheum

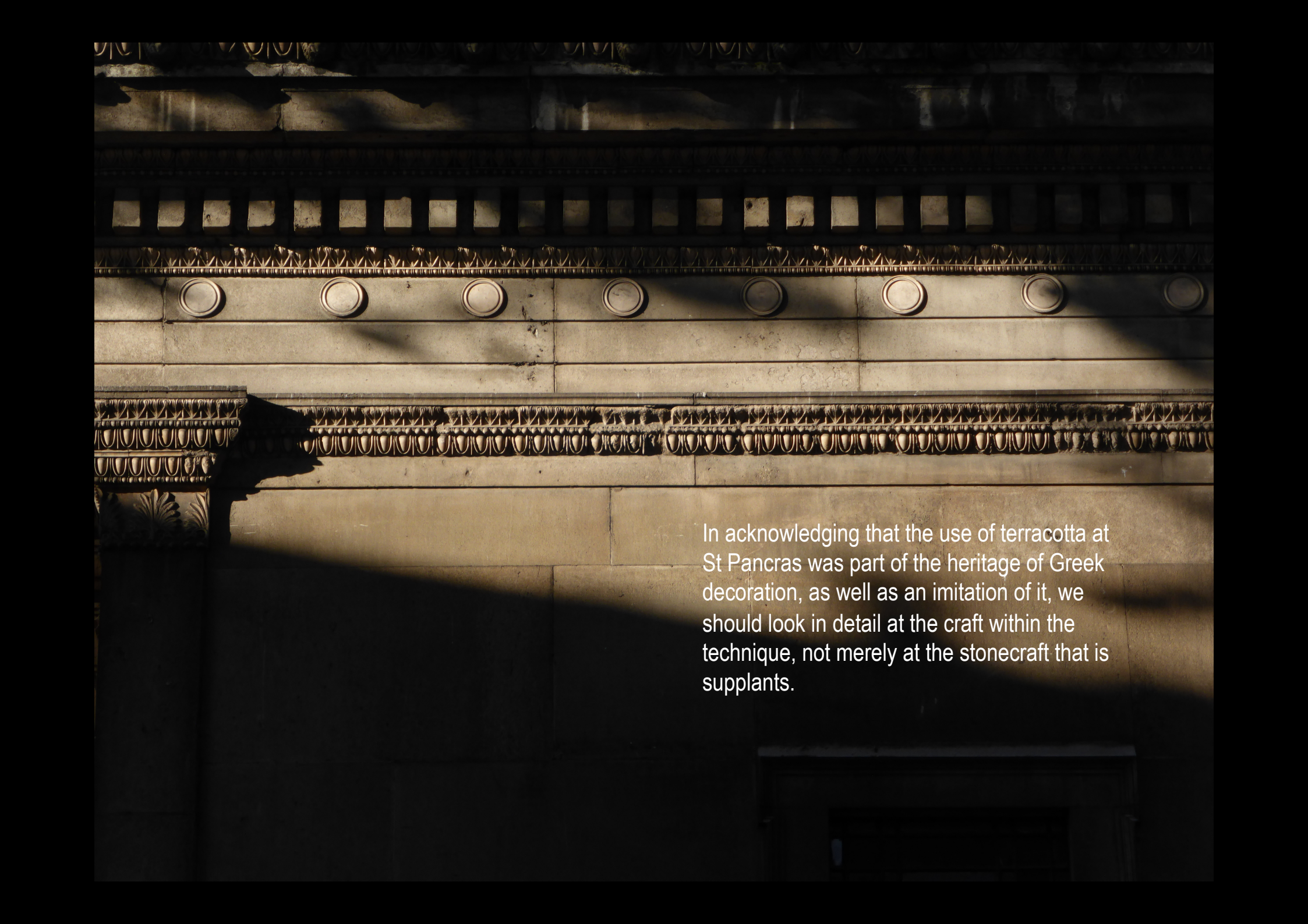
the original – actually all copies, an original figure stands 900 metres away from St Pancras church in the British Museum.....



the Erechtheum

the copy, in terracotta by John Charles Felix Rossi

Unlike the original figures on the Acropolis, each of the St Pancras caryatids holds an extinguished torch or an empty jug, reflecting their position as guardians of the dead.



In acknowledging that the use of terracotta at St Pancras was part of the heritage of Greek decoration, as well as an imitation of it, we should look in detail at the craft within the technique, not merely at the stonecraft that is supplants.



A curious hybrid process – use of moulds imply casting, however the creation of the moulds involves carving, along with the requisite skills in handling clay ware, glazing and firing and careful assembly on site.



A curious hybrid process.

skilled handwork



A curious hybrid process.

skilled handwork

pressing replaced by slip casting



A curious hybrid process

skilled handwork

pressing replaced by slip casting

ever more regulated firing



from St Pancras – casting a cast



from St Pancras – casting a cast

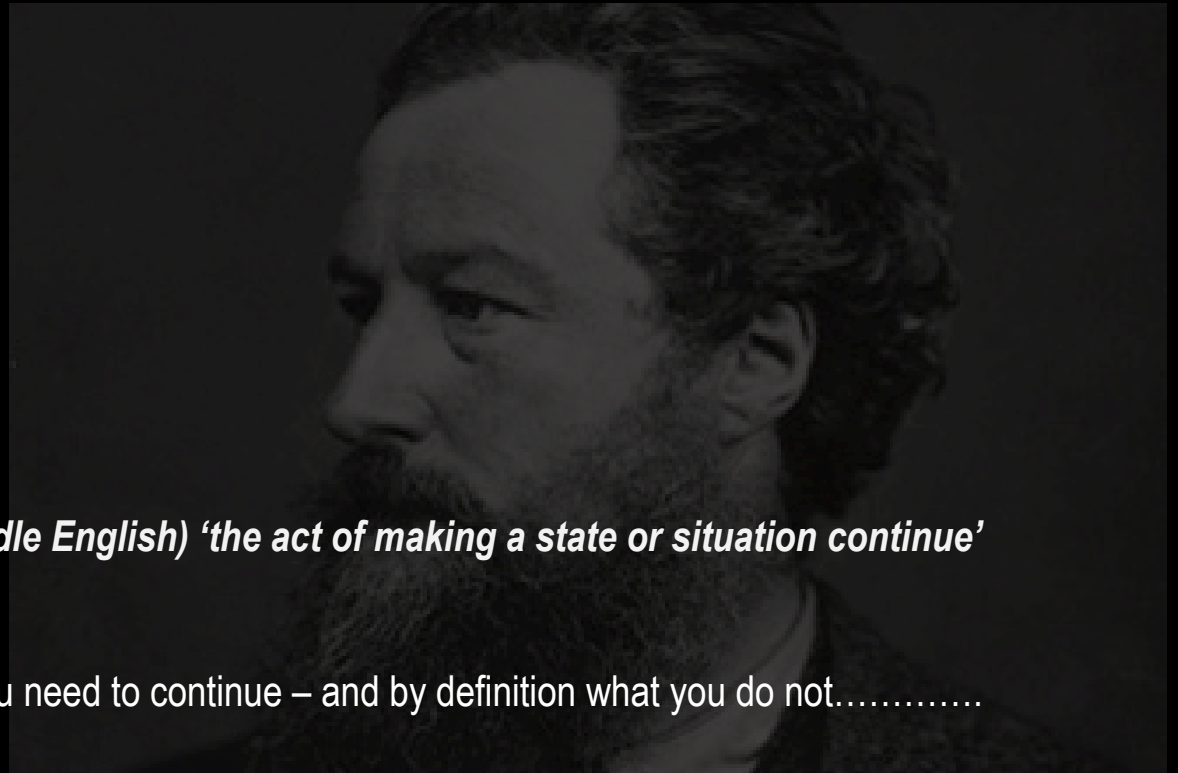


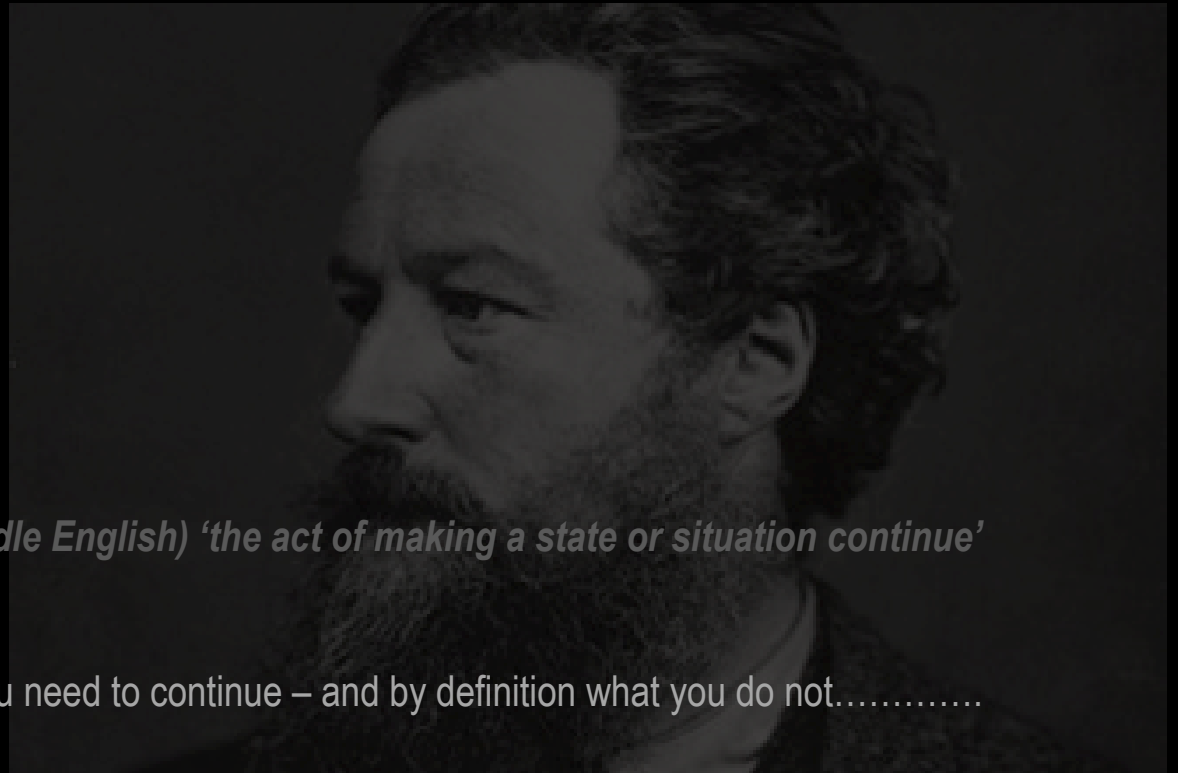
from St Pancras – casting a cast

technically very interesting.....
but what would Morris say?

Maintenance – *Maintenaunce (Middle English) 'the act of making a state or situation continue'*

First define what state or situation you need to continue – and by definition what you do not.....





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Iron cramp erosion to parapets and copings, fractures to terracotta enrichment

Coping erosion – run off dissolving decoration and surfaces

Lead failure through thermal movement, failure of all edge details leading to erosion and ingress

Encrusted terracotta losing surface fireskin

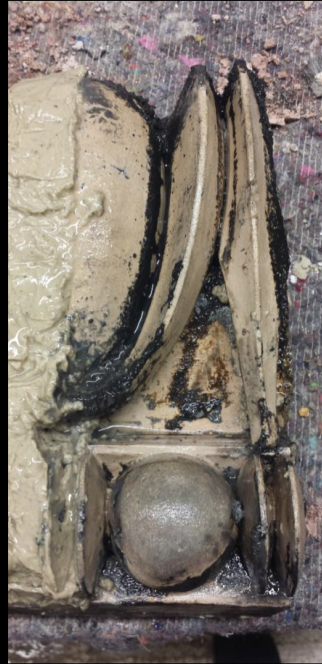








Sally Strachey Historic Conservation:
ammonium carbonate poultice dwell times



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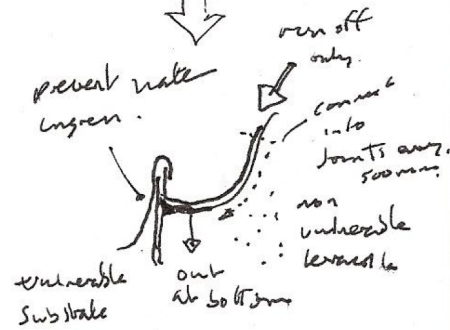
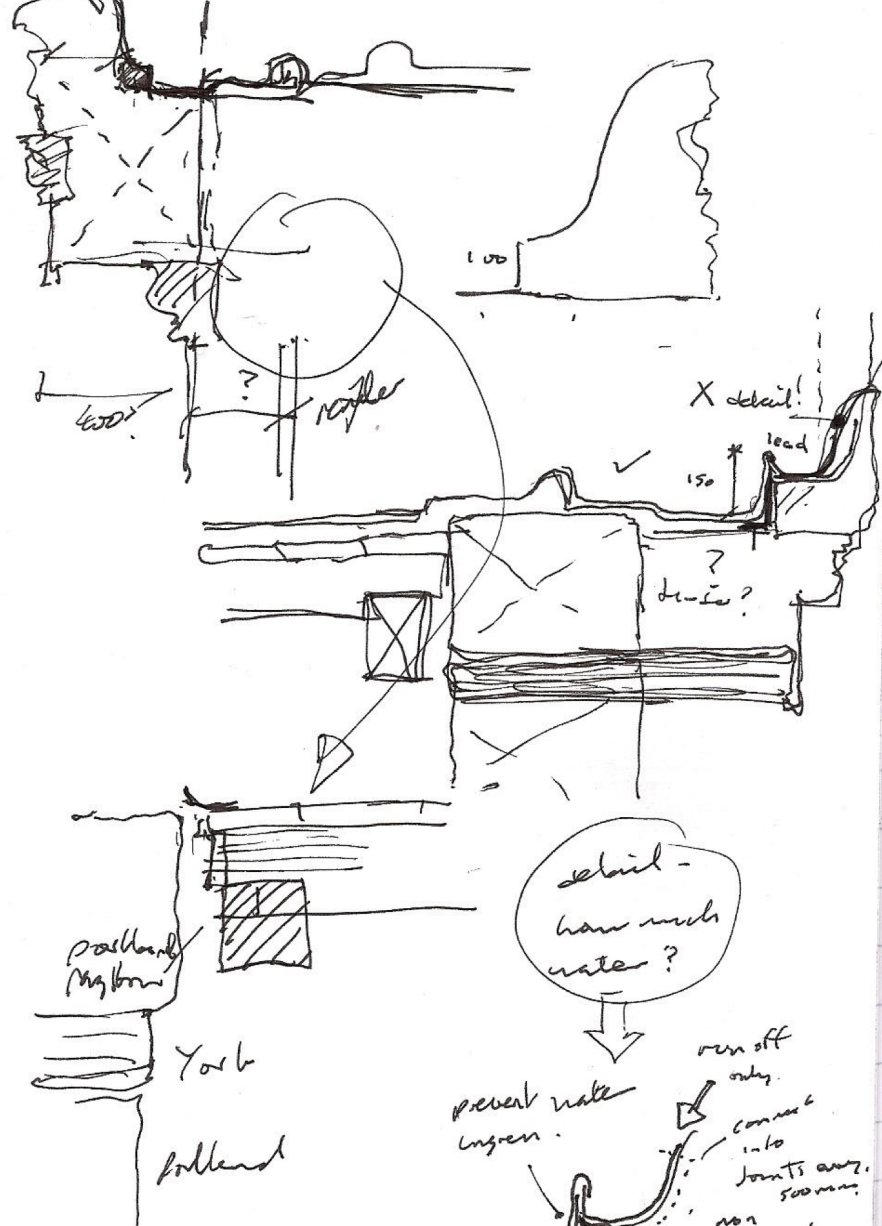




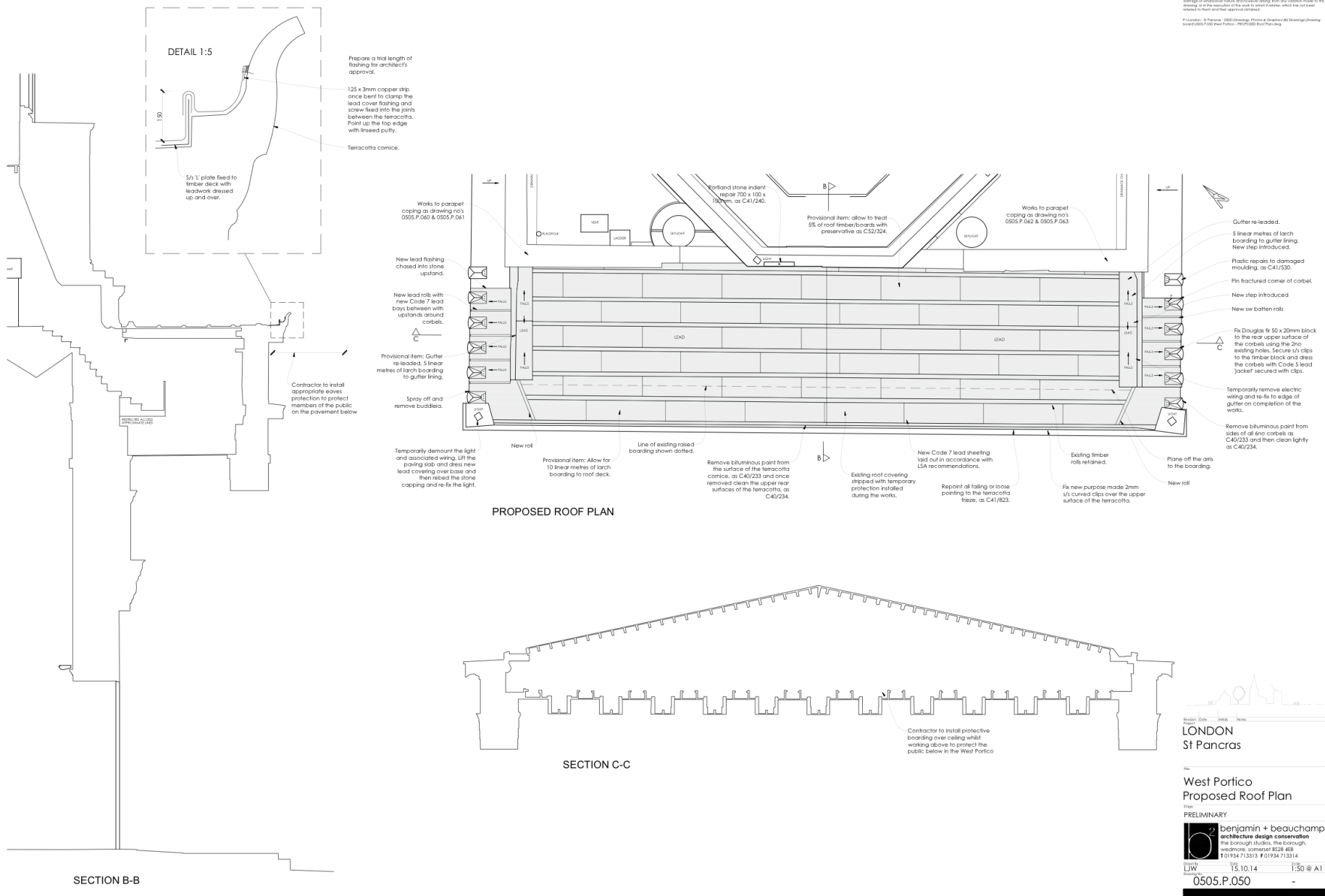








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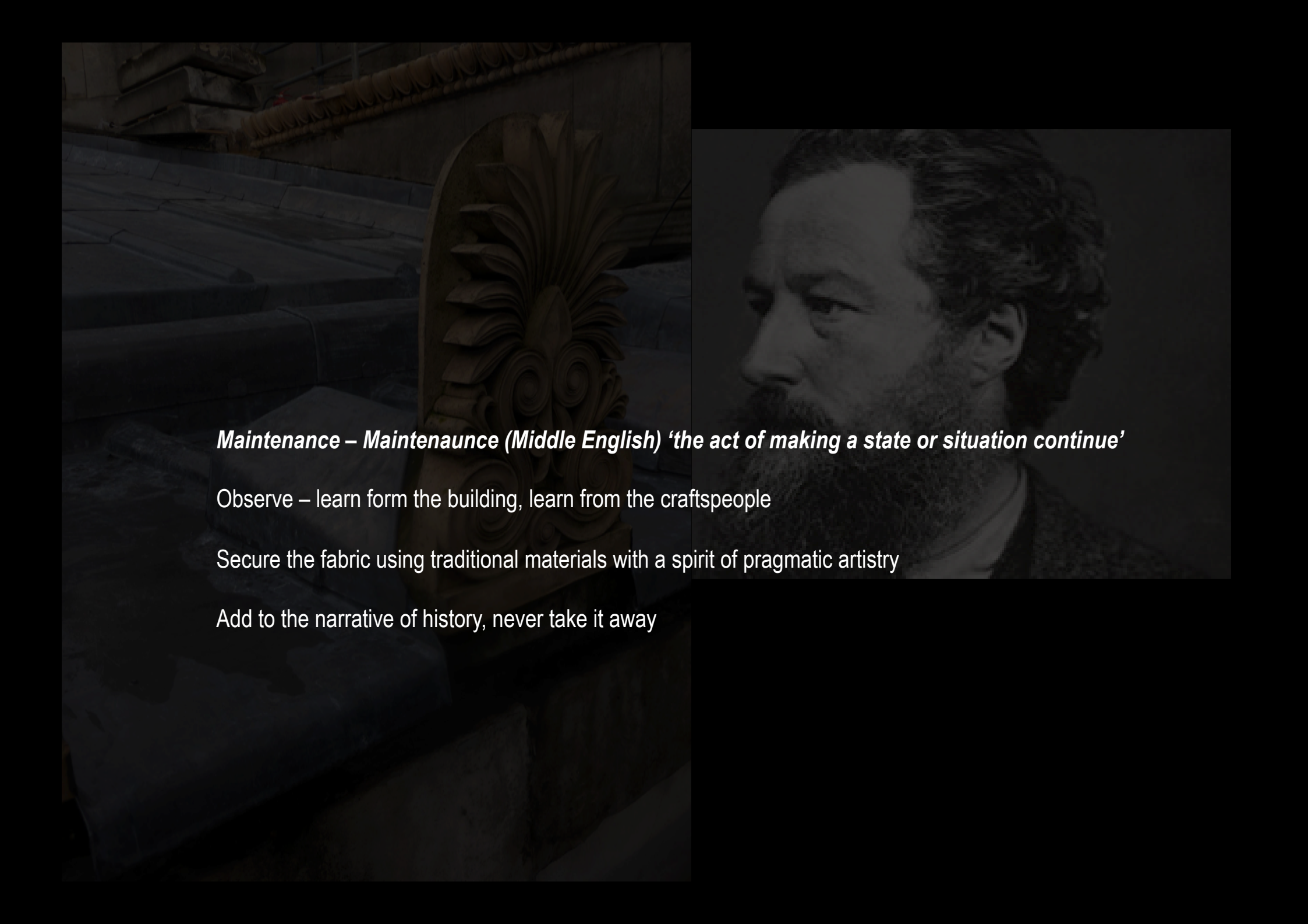













Maintenance – Maintenaunce (Middle English) ‘the act of making a state or situation continue’

Observe – learn form the building, learn from the craftspeople

Secure the fabric using traditional materials with a spirit of pragmatic artistry

Add to the narrative of history, never take it away



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Thank you



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