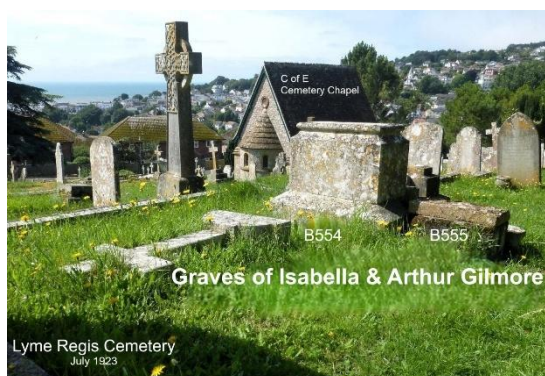


William Morris's family connections with Lyme Regis

November 2025

Researched & compiled by Graham Davies, 2023-2025

Isabella Gilmore was a sister of William Morris (1834-1896), the celebrated designer, social reformer and key figure in the Arts & Crafts Movement. I knew nothing of his sister until I was asked if Isabella was buried in Lyme Regis cemetery (enquiry July 1923). I identified her grave, with my further research revealing a story of a family's connection with Lyme Regis.



Isabella Gilmore (1842-1923)

Isabella Morris married Lieutenant Arthur Hamilton Gilmore R.N. in 1860 at St Mary's Church, Leyton. Arthur was promoted to commander in 1869; he retired in 1880 due to poor health. From living in Kensington, with a cook and a housemaid (1881 census), they moved to Lyme Regis to live at Silverleigh (Appendix), a Lodging house/apartments in Silver Street. Arthur died on 1st November 1882 and was buried in Lyme Regis cemetery.

Isabella decided to become a nurse and entered Guy's hospital training school. In 1886, when a ward sister at St Bart's hospital, she accepted an invitation by the Bishop of Rochester to help him establish an Order of Deaconesses to work among London's poor. She was ordained in 1887 as the first head deaconess of the dioceses of Rochester and Southwark.

Isabella continued to visit Lyme Regis after the death of her husband, and was known to reside at Chatham House, 46 Broad Street (Appendix)

during the period 1898-1903. She died in 1923 whilst living at Parkstone, Poole, and was buried beside her husband in Lyme Regis cemetery (Grave No. B554).

B554 Isabella Gilmore, aged 80 yrs buried 21. 3. 1923
B555 Arthur H Gilmore, aged 50 yrs buried 4.11.1882

Other members of William Morris's family also lived or visited Lyme Regis. These include his wife Jane and two daughters May and Jenny, his sisters Emma Oldham and Alice Mary Gill, and niece Emmie Oldham.

Jane Morris (nee Burden, 1839-1914), May Morris (1862-1938) and Jane Alice Morris (Jenny, 1861-1935)

Always concerned about her health and that of her daughters, May and Jenny, many of Jane's travels and excursions during the 1880s were in search of healthy locations for herself and the girls. In the early Spring of 1883, Jane and her daughters came to Lyme Regis and resided at Silverleigh for about 4 months. William Morris visited them during this period.

During their stay in 1883, May Morris recorded landscape and coast scenes in and around Lyme Regis in the form of pencil and watercolour sketches. This sketchbook is now part of the V&A museum's Prints and Drawings collection and contains, including the sketch of Buddle Bridge, 42 pages (others missing) of Whatman wove paper, watermarked 1881, bound in green cloth with Morocco spine.



Buddle Bridge

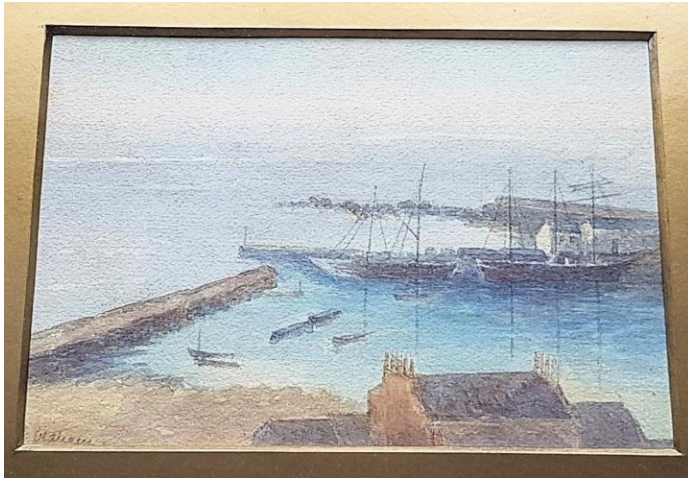
William Morris died in October 1896. The following year, on 3rd December 1897, his widow Jane wrote to Wilfred Scawen Blunt from Chatham House, Lyme Regis, '*I am leading a curious isolated life here, almost that of a hermit and somehow it suits me we have a comfortable lodging with our own servants, and near enough to the sea to get on the beach in two minutes.*'

Emma Oldham (1830-1915), William's eldest sister and her daughter, also named Emma Oldham (1851-1933).

Emma Morris married the Rev Joseph Oldham in May 1850. Soon after their daughter was born, Joseph took up a new post as Perpetual Curate (later Vicar) of Clay Cross in Derbyshire, where he worked until 1888. When Joseph Oldham (1820-1896) died of a stroke, Emma and her daughter left the Midlands and moved to Lyme Regis taking up residence at No.1 West Cliff *, today's Shire End, off Cobb Road.

* Also written in some documents as Westcliff.

Emma Oldham & daughter (Emmie) at West Cliff



West Cliff 1931, formerly Nos 1 & 2

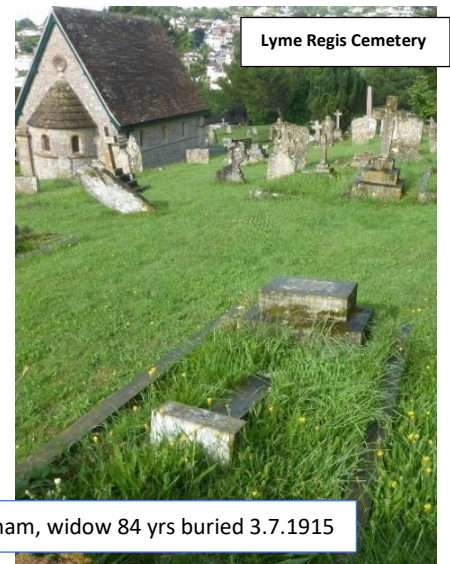
Coincidentally the Museum's attention was drawn to the above watercolour (enquiry August 2023) only a few weeks after my introduction to William Morris and his family's connection with Lyme Regis.

1911 census for No 1 West Cliff, Lyme Regis, 10 rooms
Emma Oldham, head, (80yrs), widow, private means
Emma Oldham, daughter, (59), single, artist
Anne Edwards, servant, (27), single, general domestic

I identified the artist, (signed E Oldham) as Emma Oldham (1851-1933), the painting of the harbour as late 1890s with the artist's view point probably from No.1 West Cliff in which Emmie and her mother lived from 1898.

Beginning by painting miniature portraits, Emmie went to paint watercolour portraits and landscapes. In 1889-91, she had paintings accepted and shown at the Royal Academy's summer exhibition.

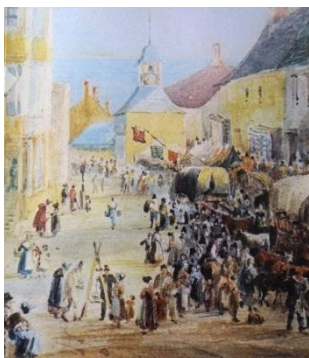
When William Morris died in 1896 he left his sister Emma an annuity of £100 per annum. This almost doubled her income and enabled the two Emmas to live in modest comfort, with one servant, until the mother died in 1915 and was buried in Lyme Regis cemetery (grave site B188). Emmie then left Lyme. She died at Poole in 1933.



B188 Emma Oldham, widow 84 yrs buried 3.7.1915

Alice Mary Gill (1846-1942), youngest sister of William Morris.

Alice Mary Morris, youngest daughter of the late William Morris Esq of Woodford Hall, married Reginald Gill on the 2nd June 1864 at St Mary's church, Leyton. He was a banker in the Tavistock area and member of an old Devonshire family. When her husband died in 1897, after a hunting accident she came to Lyme and lived at the Grove, Pound Street (1898-1905) before moving to Tunbridge Wells where she died in 1942. She did revisit Lyme and In 1937 donated two paintings to Lyme Regis Museum.



1937/1 Watercolour of
the old Shambles belltower
and market place, 1830s
(Cobb & Sea Gallery *)

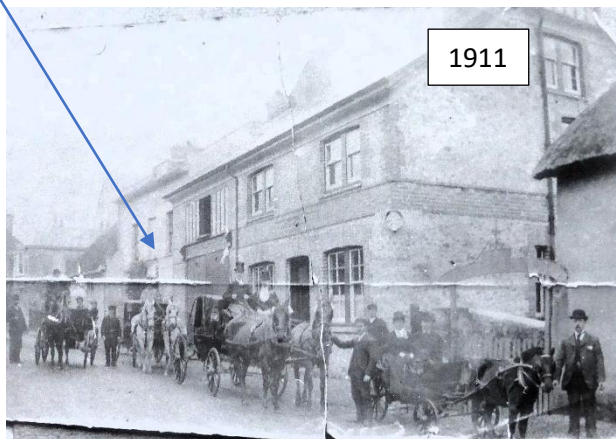
1937/4 Oil painting of
Assembly Rooms and
The Alcove; Reed, 1815
(Writers Gallery *)

* At time of writing, Oct 2025



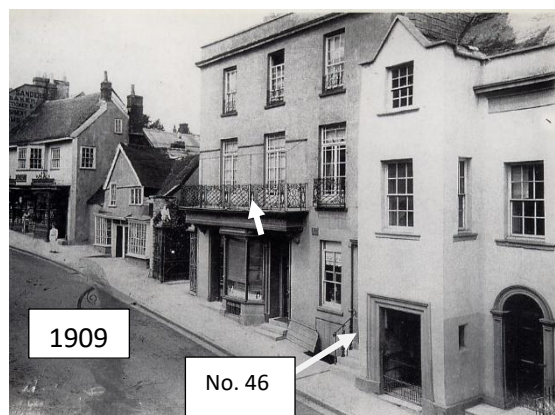
Appendix

Silverleigh



Chatham House

No. 46 Broad Street



Great House covered the site of today's Nos. 44-48 Broad Street. From the end of the 1890s into the 20th century, the name Chatham House is linked with No. 46 which has provided upper floor lodgings and business accommodation. Plaque on No. 45 Broad Street.



The Grove

[This article](#) gives a detailed description of The Grove and its owners throughout its long history from 1800 - 1952

References

Lyme Regis Museum archives, with particular reference to correspondence from the University of Saskatchewan, Canada (1983), William Morris Gallery (1992) and Dorothy Coles ((2007). Lyme Regis Museum Research Team's Digital Archive (2009-2025). V&A Museum online.