# A PORTRAIT OF WALTER MORRISON (1836-1921) TREASURER OF THE PALESTINE EXPLORATION FUND FOR 54 YEARS, RADICAL REFORMER AND SECRET PHILANTHROPIST

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1. INTRODUCTION

A man of simple personal tastes, [Walter Morrison] had an acute sense of the responsibilities of wealth. His benefactions were enormous, but they were all considered with elaborate care, while the same care was also expended in making them as secret as possible. Few men of our generation can have succeeded on so large a scale in practising the scriptural doctrine of the methods of charity *(The Times* 20 December 1921).

Walter Morrison was twenty-one years old and just graduated from Balliol College Oxford when his father James died in 1857 leaving him £300,000 and the Malham estate in Yorkshire. With a small fortune (£300,000 would today be worth approximately £28 million) Walter had no need to work. However the values he adhered to and the interests he chose to pursue for the rest of his long life (he died in 1921) were already part-formed by his parents. As he explained to a nephew,

Life which is all beer and skittles may suit the Oriental, or the Italian, but it is deadly dull work to the Northerner, especially to a Morrison, all of[[1]](#endnote-1) us more or less morbid. I found this out before I was your age, and got into business, and I suppose I should be wretched now if I had no hard work and anxiety (Morrison archive, Walter Morrison to Hugh, 3 September 1891).

Walter’s father James Morrison (1789-1857) was one of the most extraordinary of nineteenth-century merchant millionaires (Dakers 2011). The son of a village innkeeper, he was sent to London as apprentice to a haberdasher. There, he proved to be a genius at making money and was dubbed the Napoleon of shopkeepers, creating a business with a turnover in 1830 of nearly £2million, the equivalent of £200 million today. He invested in North American railways, he was involved in global trade from Canton to Valparaiso, and acquired land, houses and works of art to rival the grandest of aristocrats. He left his wife and all his nine surviving children fortunes.

James Morrison’s example at his principal country estates of Fonthill and Basildon encouraged all his surviving sons to take their responsibilities seriously as landowners, and Walter was no exception at Malham. Walter was, like all the family, an enthusiastic traveller, however he followed his father’s interests in business, both at a local level in Yorkshire and abroad, in South America, and was also the only son to follow his father into Parliament.

James Morrison sent five of his six sons to university but Walter alone revealed a scholarly inclination, indeed the influence of his Oxford college, Balliol was profound. When he was there, the reputation of the college was at its highest; it was known for accepting the cleverest young men in the country, and to engender an intoxicating mix of character, leadership, duty, public service, originality and academic brilliance. Though he was naturally shy (a Morrison trait), he was tutored by the charismatic Benjamin Jowett and gained first class honours in ‘Greats’ (Classics). He was a natural scholar – a Yorkshire neighbour and friend described his ‘extensive and peculiar learning’ (Dawson 1922, 4) - and he developed a passion for the Near East and the Bible Lands, which he put into practice after graduation. However, he also left Oxford with a burning desire to bring about reform in education, housing, employment, the church and parliament; his inheritance provided him with the means to make a difference.

1. THE MALHAM ESTATE (1)

Tuberculosis (better known as consumption) was the major killer in Europe throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, with a high mortality rate among young adults. Walter had symptoms as a teenager and his sister Emily had died aged 26 years. Soon after his father’s death, Walter was coughing up blood from his lungs and an extensive tour was organised, taking in North America, Europe and the Near East. Consequently his first extended visit to Malham was delayed until 1860. From then on, Malham became the centre of his life and he usually spent some four or five months there, from August (the glorious twelfth) through to early December. For the coldest months, from Christmas through to March, he returned regularly to Southern Europe, Morocco and Egypt.

The Malham estate comprised over 10,000 acres and had been bought by James Morrison in 1852 for £90,250 from Thomas Lister, 3rd Baron Ribblesdale. It contained some of the most dramatic upland limestone landscape in the country, including a grouse moor, the mountains of High Craven and Gordale Scar (fig.1). Tarn House (fig.2), like Morrison himself , was solid and substantial … with big rooms, big windows and a big outlook’ (Dawson 1922, 8). Originally a hunting box, it was situated in a dramatic position, on a man-made ledge above Malham Tarn. Some time in the 1860s Walter added an Italianate style belvedere tower, also a wrought iron and glass verandah across the front.

He built up a deep knowledge of the area through serious walking, including, regularly, the six miles from Settle railway station to Tarn House, ‘a toilsome walk over the hills’ according to a guide book published in 1886. He is reputed to have papered his smoking room with 6inch Ordnance Survey maps to prevent his servants tidying them away. Towards the end of his life neighbours found him increasingly eccentric. ‘He walked with his hands behind his back and his chest sticking out…he was indifferent to other people and seemed to be living in a world of his own’(Mitchell 1990, 7). However he enjoyed sharing Malham with the appreciative (he preferred the single guest who was a good walker), then he could cast off his morbidity to become ‘the most gregarious and talkative of men. His hospitality was boundless’ (Dawson 1922, 9).

Walter’s visitors reflected his political and intellectual interests, from the education of the working man and proportional representation to the archaeology of Yorkshire or the Bible Lands. Several shared an Oxford education. Two novelists were early guests, both ‘muscular Christians’, Charles Kingsley (1819-1875) and Thomas Hughes (1822-1896).

Kingsley called when working on *The Water Babies.* The Malham estate provided the inspiration for the landscape across which Tom is pursued, Malham Cove becoming ‘Lowthwaite Crag’. According to Walter ‘you can see the black mark made by little Tom as he slipped down it in a state of profuse perspiration’ (Mitchell 1990, 16). Walter also told guests that the chimney sweep was based on a local firm that had the contract for sweeping the Malham chimneys.

Thomas Hughes shared a common interest with Walter in the Volunteer movement. In 1859 war between France, Piedmont and Austria provoked fears of invasion and led to a national appeal for able-bodied men to join volunteer corps. Hughes raised and commanded the Working Men’s Corps, largely recruited from the Working Men's College established in London by Kingsley and F.D.Maurice, while in Settle, the North Craven Rifle Corps was formed with Walter its secretary, then lieutenant. In June 1860 Hughes’s two companies paraded at the Volunteer Review in front of Queen Victoria in Hyde Park, while in August Walter held a shooting match, lunch and tea for his local volunteers at Malham. It was his first formal duty as the young squire, and he described the occasion to his mother in some detail in a letter written 6 August 1860.

My dinner to the Volunteers came off on Thursday last. On the whole it was a success. I had some 160 men there, from three companies…. Proceedings began with lunch of bread and cheese and one pint each man of ale …. A few inexpensive additions gave quite a new character to the thing. Thus I gave pickles, which went down with my guests in every sense, I gave them cucumbers and lettuces; and for the latter I had provided a sufficiency of Bottles of vinegar and oil. But the vinegar and oil had been distributed along the tables at equal distances and though every one understood the vinegar, the oil seems to have greatly puzzled them, & one actually supposed that it was intended for the hair….at the expense of 4s [I] provided long clay pipes for all, and plenty of first rate tobacco. Mrs Hartley of the Lion

Hotel of Settle had made me an enormous pie, so large that it came up in a carriage by itself, accompanied by the cook, and it was also not unappreciated. Proceedings terminated by foot-racing, leaping, the great thing being a race for 100 yards backwards on the uneven ground in front of the house, numerous were the entries, and very numerous the falls (Morrison archive).

Walter became Lieutenant Colonel of his volunteers in 1865, he paid for a Drill Hall to be built in Settle and attended the School of Musketry at Hythe to improve his own marksmanship. In 1871 he was made Hon. Colonel of the 3rd Volunteer Battalion Duke of Wellington’s (West Riding), maintaining the connection throughout his life. One of his final gestures was to help equip the Volunteers when they were re-formed as Territorials and sent to fight on the Western Front in 1914 (Anderson & Bundy 2007). Whatever private interest or public venture engaged him, his involvement was life-long.

1. PARLIAMENT

Walter was only twenty-five in 1861when he was elected to Parliament by the Liberals of Plymouth. He took a house of his own in London, first in Bolton Street, then 77 Cromwell Road, close to the museums of South Kensington. His election manifesto included the reform of civil and criminal law and the abolition of church rates and the game law, and he made his maiden speech during a debate proposing the introduction of examinations for the Foreign Office. A Parliamentary Committee was investigating the topic, with the Morrisons’ old family friend Rowland Hill advocating promotion by merit. Walter spoke of the ‘impression out of doors’ that only those with friends in government were likely to gain admission then he went on to make a broader plea for reform in general and the need to increase the male suffrage.

Walter was later considered to be ‘a rare and rather tedious speaker’ (Dawson 1922, 6). But he was diligent in attending Parliament and genuinely seeking political and educational reforms. He was of an independent mind and cared very little whether reform was put through by the Tories or his own party. Lord Palmerston’s government had been elected in 1859 on a programme of electoral reform, but Palmerston delayed bringing in legislation. The Liberals again won the General Election in 1865, but Palmerston died in October, leaving Lord John Russell to take over the leadership and introduce a new Reform Bill.

In the new Parliament Walter found himself part of the small group of friends who were his regular guests at Malham and shared similar political goals, Thomas Hughes, the blind political economist and MP Henry Fawcett, the radical aristocrat Auberon Herbert, son of the Earl of Carnarvon and Walter’s contemporary at Eton and Oxford, John Stuart Mill and Lord Hartington, son of the Duke of Devonshire. Hughes was secretary of the Social Science Association and Walter a subscriber. Henry Fawcett was also a subscriber, reading a paper on proportional representation in 1859.

Disraeli was successful in wrecking Russell and Gladstone’s Reform Bill, a Tory government took office the following year and Disraeli produced his own reform proposals which increased the suffrage by a million, mostly the urban working class. Even though Disraeli was a Tory, Walter was supportive. His contribution to the debate was over the representation of minorities and proportional representation.

Walter’s ideas were based on Thomas Hare’s influential *Treatise on the Election of Representatives: Parliamentary and Municipal*, first published in 1859, which proposed all MPs be elected to Parliament by equal numbers of voters, also that minority parties be represented. The subject occupied Walter for many years. He made a long speech on 15 June 1870 on the 2nd reading of the Representation of the People Act Amendment Bill then in 1872 he moved the second reading of the Proportional Representation Bill, supported by Hughes, Fawcett and Herbert. He believed the ‘only final solution of the re-distribution question was to take population as a basis, and apportion Members according to population.’ Needless to say the Bill did not become law although the concept of proportional representation has remained at the centre of Liberal policy ever since.

Walter’s other campaign in Parliament was the separation of education and specific religions. He joined the debate in 1863 when Parliament was considering relaxing the rules that insisted clergy subscribed to the whole of the 39 Articles and the Book of Common Prayer, known as the Tests. Walter referred to the case of his Balliol Professor Benjamin Jowett who was accused of heresy by fellow dons when he spoke in support of relaxation. ‘Parliament was now in much the same position as when jurymen refused to carry out the law in cases of forgery, robbery, and other such crimes to which the penalty of death was attached. Public opinion was far in advance of legislation.’

The following year he supported the abolition of the Tests for graduates at Oxford and Cambridge, still mandatory for those wishing to take their MA degrees, become fellows and professors or to teach in public schools. He commented that this control of the educational system by the Church of England was ‘retarding the progress of opinion in this country; for there had always been a tendency among the clergy to set themselves against freedom of thought’ (Hansard online). The University Tests Bill finally became law in the summer of 1871, henceforward all academic appointments at Oxford and Cambridge became open to all belief or none.

Walter meanwhile chose to support the founding of a new northern university which would also be open to ‘all belief or none’, just as his father had been behind the creation of London University in 1828. The Yorkshire College of Science opened in 1874 and Walter was one of the first governors. He had pointed out in Parliament seven years before (during the 2nd reading of the Uniformity Act, 29 May 1867) the number of nonconformists ‘who in point of wealth, talent and position were capable of taking their place abreast of the members of the Church of England’ and who should be ‘attracted’ to universities. In and out of Parliament, Walter tried to act on his beliefs, to put his words into actions.

4. THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT

One such example was his and Thomas Hughes’ campaigning for the Co-operative movement, advocating the self-government of producers and profit-sharing ‘as the means of overcoming the antagonism between capital and labour and giving the workman his fair and self-respecting place in society by a painless, voluntaristic revolution devoid of the spirit of class-war’ (Cole 1944, 170).

Both Walter and Hughes were ‘again and again venturing and losing their money in Co-operative productive concerns formed as companies on a profit-sharing basis’ (Cole 1944,159). However Walter’s involvement in co-operative farming was questioned by the radical George Holyoake (1817-1906) at the 1872 Social Science Congress in Plymouth (Walter’s constituency).

There had never been any agricultural partnership of farmer and labourer in the country worthy of the name of co-operation. Mr Walter Morrison, MP, had lately, according to report, bought a farm in order to try whether agricultural co-operation was practicable. As he was credited with sagacious humanity they would – unless the business traditions of his house failed him – one day see what wit and work his men could display, and what pride they would take in creating a balance at his bankers for him (*The Times,* 17 September 1872).

For all Holyoake’s sniping, the balance at Walter’s bank was not improved through his co-operative projects. In 1873 he provided most of the capital towards buying the Monkwood Colliery near Chesterfield for the Co-operative Mining Society of Newcastle-on-Tyne with the aim of establishing co-operative mines in all the coalfields in the country. ‘It began production on a plan which assigned a prior dividend of 10 per cent to the invested capital and provided for the equal division of the remaining profits between capital, labour, and the consumers. Attempts were made to induce the employed miners to take up shares, but these met with no success and the pit was worked at a heavy loss’ (Cole 1944,162). It was wound up in 1877, Walter losing £22,000. He never gave up the ideals, however, and shortly before his death he lent the County of York Agricultural Co-Operative Association £1000 to buy a mill, even though he admitted it was ‘an exceedingly foolish thing.’

5. IMPROVED INDUSTRIAL DWELLINGS

In London, Walter tried to make a difference to the living conditions of the ‘worthy’ poor by supporting the Improved Industrial Dwellings Company, founded in 1863 by the wealthy printer Sydney Waterlow (1822-1906). Like the national co-operative movement, the company sought to improve the living and working standards of artisans, following the examples set by Angela Burdett-Coutts and the American businessman George Peabody (an old friend of James Morrison) in the East End.. Walter was joined by his fellow MPs Auberon Herbert (again) and the Quaker Russell Gurney at the inaugural meeting of Waterlow’s company held at the Mansion House in 1867. Within two years Walter was a Director and by the 1890s he was chairing the half-yearly meetings.

Waterlow’s was one of the most successful of the companies, the Directors applying sound business methods to their philanthropic activities (*The Times* 12 February 1872). It guaranteed to pay (and exceeded) a 5% dividend to its investors, and by the end of the century it had housed 30,000 people in 6000 tenements. Many of the blocks survive, and a number are now owned by the Peabody Trust (Tarn 1973, Burnett 1976).

6. PALESTINE EXPLORATION FUND

Walter spent many ‘laborious days’ sitting in Parliament, supporting the Co-operative movement and on the board of the Improved Industrial Dwellings Company. By contrast, his connection with the Palestine Exploration Fund as treasurer and funder was a labour of love that lasted nearly sixty years and perhaps represented his greatest passion apart from the Malham estate. From mid-century, there was an increasing interest in Britain in the exploration of the Bible Lands to ‘confirm and illustrate the Bible ….The public believed that a new means of providing the divine nature of the Bible had been sent from heaven to bolster the evidence supplied by miracle and prophecy’ (Machaffe 1981, 321). A number of bestselling books supported this link between archaeology and the Bible, including Edward Robinson’s *Biblical Researches in Palestine, the Sinae, Petrae and Adjacent Regions* (1841) and Josiah Porter’s *A Handbook for Travellers in Syria and Palestine: Including an Account of the Geography, History, Antiquities and Inhabitants of these Countries* (1858), the latter published the year Walter made his grand tour through the Near East. Suffering a crisis of faith, the artist William Holman Hunt had made his first visit to the Holy Land in 1854 to experience the locations of the Biblical narratives, and painted ‘The Scapegoat’ at Oosdoom beside the Dead Sea.

A.P. Stanley’s *Sinai and Palestine (*1856)was tentative enough: ‘to find a marked correspondence between the scenes of the Sinaitic mountains and the events of the Israelite wanderings is not much perhaps, but it is certainly something towards a proof of the whole narrative’ (Stanley 1856, xvii). However he inspired George Grove (later to write the monumental *Dictionary of Music)* to seek Dean Stanley’s friendship and make two visits of his own. Then Stanley’s visit to the Holy Land in 1862 accompanying the Prince of Wales started an influx of intrepid tourists (Moscrop 2000, 46-47).

Three years later Grove and Stanley proposed to form a fund with the mission to engage in ‘the scientific exploration of the Holy Land, its reduction to maps and photographs, its exploration and archaeological excavation, and the identification of its sacred sites.’ An announcement appeared in the newspapers: ‘No country should be of so much interest to us as that in which the documents of our faith were written, and the momentous events they describe enacted. At the same time no country more urgently requires illustration’ (Besant 1886, 16). The committee attending the inaugural meeting on 22 June 1865 was distinguished, with A.H.Layard, Sir Henry Rawlinson, Sir Roderick Murchison, Antonio Panizzi, William Spottiswoode FRS and Professor Richard Owen FRS. The Archbishop of York expressed their purpose: ‘we are not a religious society, we are not about to launch into any controversy, we are about to apply the rules of Science … to an investigation by the Fund concerning the Holy Land (Moscrop 2000, 70).

He continued with what seems now to be breathtaking presumption.

This country of Palestine belongs to you and me. It is essentially ours. It was given to the Father of Israel in the words ‘Walk the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it, for I will give it unto thee’….We mean to walk through Palestine in the length and in the breadth of it because that land has been given unto us. It is the land from which comes the news of our redemption. It is the land to which we turn as the fountain of our hopes…it is the land to which we may look with as true a patriotism as we do to this dear old England which we love so much (Moscrop 2000, 70).

Walter agreed. He wrote in the introduction to *The Recovery of Jerusalem* ‘the Ordnance Survey of Palestine was so obviously a duty for the English nation to undertake that it is needless to dwell on its importance (Morrison 1871, xxii). The ‘climate of the times linked empire, religion and Britain’ (Moscrop 2000, 124).

The first few years were financially challenging as the Fund was unable to raise sufficient money or manage expeditions efficiently. Angela Burdett-Coutts, provided £500 towards the first expedition in 1865 to map Jerusalem, the main purpose being to provide the city with clean water. However, once Walter became Treasurer in 1869, regularising the administration and creating a system for managing expeditions out in the field, the Fund became viable. It was fortunate Palestine was also of colonial importance as the British were keen to obtain a military foothold. Both the War and Foreign Offices wanted accurate maps of military sensitive areas, so officers from the Royal Engineers were regularly seconded to the Fund’s expeditions. The interests represented by and reflected in the activities of the Palestine Exploration Fund were consequently varied and sometimes controversial: ‘military endeavour, the Promised Land, the Church of England, British identity and scientific and investigative progress’ (Moscrop 2000, 2, 124).

In 1871 the Fund began to survey the whole of Western Palestine. The work was led by Lieutenant Claude Conder of the Royal Engineers joined by Lieutenant Horatio Kitchener – the latter apparently selected by Walter. Lieutenant Charles Warren, also seconded from the Royal Engineers, led the excavation of the still-buried remains of ancient Jerusalem including the First and Second Temples and William ‘Crimea’ Simpson, probably the first war artist, recorded the work in a series of magnificent paintings. When these were exhibited in London the following year, Walter bought half and presented them as a gift to the Fund (fig.3).

7. THE MALHAM ESTATE (2)

At the General Election in 1874, Walter lost his seat, largely through his support of the Co-operative movement. Many of his former supporters, in particular the shopkeepers of Plymouth, were opposed to co-operation. Walter remained out of Parliament for twelve years. He was only thirty-eight years old and turned his attention to Malham.

There had been a disastrous fire in 1873 (23 April) and according to a newspaper account only the external shell of Tarn House remained but Walter rebuilt the house within the old walls. When Ruskin visited in 1878 he had nothing to complain of. ‘I find Mr Morrison wonderfully nice, kind and amusing, and the house quite delightful, with all the books in it that I want, and the finest trout in Europe for dinner, & with game coming in. I’ve a notion that I shall be here rather often, if Mr Morrison likes me. I like his Irish butler too mightily.’ Malham is one of the most remote and inaccessible places in Yorkshire, Ruskin, again, commenting, ‘I’ve been up at Mr Morrison’s and all over the wild hills behind, yesterday, and it was just moor – moor – moor [and many more moors, trailing away into a pen picture of moorland]’ (Ruskin Papers, 11,12 August 1878).

Walter’s investment in his estate was regular and generous, beginning with the restoration of the vicarage in Kirkby Malham, the village where he worshipped. In 1879-80 he paid over half of the restoration of the church itself, then he paid all but one pound for the restoration of the organ. In 1874 he set up and paid for a subscription school close to Tarn House, and at the same time provided the land and paid for a new school and master’s house to be built just outside Kirkby Malham (he was chair of the governors for fifty years). All over the estate he busied himself with building projects, from the Buck Inn in Malham to complexes of farm houses and cottages, all designed with distinctive steep roofs.

Up until his death in 1921 he continued to provide support to numerous members of the community. For example in 1897 he bought Keighley Brewery for £30,000 to keep it under the management of its former owners the Scott family. Before and during the war he offered a further £10,000 to help, and was still owed money at his death. Since 1870 Walter had been a director of the local Craven Bank, becoming Chairman in 1905. He was also director of the Carlton Iron Company near Stockton-on-Tees (becoming chairman in 1881). The latter company acquired coal and ironstone mines, including the East Howe and Mainsforth Collieries at Ferryhill, and built coke ovens and furnaces. Its largest project was the creation of an industrial complex, the Village of Carlton Ironworks (now Stillington), around a handful of cottages. There was accommodation for over a thousand, a school, church, chapel, Workingmen’s Club and shops including, naturally, a Co-operative store. A terrace and a street were named after Walter and he continued to provide loans and gifts of money to the company until it was taken over in 1920.

8. ARGENTINA

Walter’s responsibilities on and around his northern estate even when combined with the demands of the Palestine Exploration Fund and the Improved Industrial Dwellings Company were insufficient occupation and he decided to join forces with his elder brother Charles who was beginning to make large sums of money from investing in Argentina. British influence in Rio de Janeiro, Valparaiso and Buenos Aires had been strong since the beginning of the nineteenth century. Charles and, to a much lesser degree, Walter, made money as investment bankers, becoming major share-holders first in the struggling Mercantile Bank of River Plate (established in 1872), then in the River Plate Trust, Loan & Agency Company, the latter formed by Charles in 1880 (Jones 1980, 158). The company was to become one of the most profitable of all Anglo-Latin American ventures, at the centre of a ‘network of Anglo-River Plate mortgage, investment, utility and railway companies…linked by directorships, common management services, and overlapping investment patterns’ (Jones 1980, 344).

Walter also sought a project of his own and in 1874 he joined the board of the Central Argentine Railway, becoming Chairman in 1887. He took his responsibilities personally: ‘I am the Chairman of a very humble Railway … in South America and in that Railway we have some fifteen thousand shareholders.’ He was clear about the economic significance of the railway being ‘domiciled’ in Britain where ‘I know that we spend an enormous amount of money for railway material and plant’ (Morrison archive: John Morris 80th birthday speech). He was also to become Chairman of the Argentine Land and Investment Company which invested in the land across which the railway was constructed.

Building the railway had begun in 1863 but, inevitably, there were difficulties raising capital. The intention was to open up the interior of Argentina, gaining access to the valuable copper and silver mines. Cordoba was reached in 1870 but the railway only began to make a profit in the 1880s, with returns on investments of 6% . In the early 1890s the Central Railway was being challenged by the rival Buenos Aires and Rosario Railway Co. and Walter sailed to South America to resolve the situation. He arrived in Buenos Aires in February 1891, his sister-in-law Mabel Morrison writing to her son Hugh, ‘he likes the climate immensely & says it just suits him, he weighs 12 st 2lb takes no medicine of any kind & says he is up to work of all sorts’ (Morrison archive). He successfully negotiated the amalgamation of the railways, becoming a business partner of George Drabble, the rival director, and establishing the River Plate Fresh Meat Company which used ground-breaking refrigeration to transport beef across the country. At his death in 1921 Walter had several million pounds invested in companies all over the world but half a million pounds remained in South America. A town and railway station on the Central Argentine Railway in Cordoba changed its name from Zuviria to Morrison in 1907, and a street in Fisherton, a suburb of Rosario, was named Morrison (Anderson & Bundy 2007).

9. LIBERAL UNIONISM

Walter’s period out of Parliament ended when he was elected in 1886 as the Unionist MP for Skipton. He had decided to break from the Liberals over Gladstone’s policy of Home Rule for Ireland, joining the new Liberal Unionist party established by Joseph Chamberlain and his old friend Lord Hartington. He frequently joined them on platforms at Liberal Unionist meetings in Yorkshire and in London. At Malham he apparently smashed all his yellow (Liberal) crockery and had it buried along with his dead horses: blue was now the preferred colour. His brothers Alfred and Charles were unimpressed by his new allegiance, Alfred writing July 1886 ‘the Liberal Unionists were not a real party that could last’ (Morrison archive) and recommending his own son become a Conservative.

The 1886 election had involved Walter fighting against a friend and neighbour, Sir Matthew Wilson. He wrote to his nephew Hugh on 26 July ‘I was obliged to run here, much against my will, against the sitting member, who is 84 years old, because I was the only living man who could hope to carry the seat against him. The question involved at the election was too momentous to let private feelings prevail; I did what I could to get some other candidate, but no one else had a chance. I did not expect to win & thought I should have been beaten by a small majority’ (Morrison archive).

Walter won the next election in 1889 but after his defeat in 1892 he was targeted by a nasty smear campaign in the local press. Walter could afford to be a generous landlord – in fact too generous – on his own estate. To his tenants and dependents he was open-handed almost to a fault; it was a common complaint that ‘his easygoing generosity had the effect of setting an impossible standard for less fortunate neighbours’ (Dawson 1922, 11). It was easy for him to reduce rents year after year, his main income coming from overseas investments. He was, however, incensed when he was accused of the opposite. After losing the election he was vilified in the local press for putting up the rents of those who had voted against him (*West Yorkshire Pioneer* 27 October 1893; Anderson & Bundy 2007). The *West Yorkshire Pioneer* had suggested Walter’s tenants were ‘sold up to the last rag and stick, and cast upon the world helpless and homeless’ (*The Times* 30 May 1894), while Walter was actually remitting 43% of rents. An earlier piece in the *Pioneer* had also suggested Walter’s investments in South American railways were helping to lower the price of imported grain and meat, thus impoverishing his own tenants (*West Yorkshire Pioneer* 24 June 1892). Walter vehemently denied the allegations and the Skipton Unionists rose to his defence, presenting him with an illuminated memorial of their appreciation: ‘we have seen with indignation the grossly unfair and untruthful personal attacks which have been made upon you by an anonymous writer backed up by all the artifice which the ingenuity of partisan spleen could suggest to the Editor of the local Separatist paper (Morrison archive). However, with no adequate apology from the Editor, he engaged Sir Henry James QC (a fellow supporter of the Union) to clear his name in the High Court (*The Times* 30 May 1894). The jury found for the plaintiff with damages of £500 against the Editor and the printer, plus costs.

10. GIGGLESWICK SCHOOL

Walter’s final term in Parliament, from 1895-1899, coincided with the first of his major philanthropic gestures. His gifts and loans always reflected his personal interests; sometimes the recipients were caught off guard. He had been governor of Giggleswick School, close to Malham, since 1864 and to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria he decided to fund a chapel. He wrote without warning to the headmaster in March 1897:

I have an idea in my head of offering to build the School a Chapel with a Dome as an architectural experiment, employing Jackson, the famous Oxford architect. …We have very few domes and it might give a hint to others. But I should like to hear any suggestions of yours. A Domed Building on the site should look well. It would need much thinking out as we do not understand Domes. The Round Church at Cambridge gives some hints (Bell 1912, 198).

Walter’s classical education, his extensive and regular travels through North Africa, Palestine and Syria, his scholarly interest in the archaeology of the Bible Lands, provided him with the inspiration, to see a ‘Chapel with a Dome’ in the middle of the Yorkshire dales. Not surprisingly locals referred to it as the ‘heathen temple’ (fig.4).

The headmaster, the Rev. George Style agreed to Walter’s offer, and the school received not just a chapel but also a gatehouse with a porter’s lodge and a cricket pavilion. Walter’s choice of architect was Thomas Graham Jackson, best known for his own version of late sixteenth and early seventeenth century style of architecture called ‘Jacksonbethan’ and ‘Anglo-Jackson’. During his lifetime Jackson had an almost unrivalled reputation as an architect of collegiate and school buildings, a sensitive restorer of historic builders, a scholar and writer and was the first architect to be granted an hereditary title (Jackson 2003, 1-2). He had been a contemporary of Walter’s at Oxford, both rowing for their colleges and he was immediately intrigued by the proposal. ‘Palestine suggested a dome, and the chapel was to have a dome. This delighted me. I had never built a dome (very few architects have) and I jumped at the offer....I had *carte blanche*, Morrison’s only wish being that there should be nothing left for anyone else to do’ (Jackson 2003, 230).

Walter paid for and planned with Jackson the decoration and furniture of the chapel to prevent later unsympathetic additions. The finest skilled craftsmen of the day were engaged. The dome was lavishly decorated with glass mosaics, George Frampton designed the bronze statues of Edward VI and Queen Victoria, different marbles were obtained from Thessaly, the Peloponnesus, Scyros, Euboea, Galway, Tuscany, Carrara, Serravezza and Belgium, Jackson provided designs for the stained-glass, cedar wood for the furniture was imported by Walter from Tucuman in Argentina. Two of Jackson’s pupils cut and scraped the *sgraffito* decoration, putting on linen blouses and working at plasterers’ wages. The total cost was £50,000 (Dawson 1922, 12), and the overall impact unusual, to say the least.

The text below the clerestory windows, presumably chosen by Walter, was appropriate. ‘Let us now praise famous men, and our fathers that begat us. Rich men furnished with ability, living peaceably in their habitations. Their bodies are buried in peace, but their name liveth for evermore. The people will tell of their wisdom, and the congregation will show forth their praise.’ Walter, holding a model of his chapel, is included in one of the stained glass windows. The gift to Giggleswick was only the beginning. After his defeat in the 1900 election Walter decided to retire from politics (he was sixty four years old). He spent the next twenty years giving his fortune away.

11. PHILANTHROPY

The Yorkshire College of Science (where he was still a governor) was one of the first major beneficiaries. In 1904 it became the University of Leeds, and Walter was invited to join the Court. In return he gave books and £10,000 towards a new building in which to study agriculture.. In 1909, on inheriting from Charles the Basildon estate, their father’s collection of pictures and Charles’s properties in the City of London, Walter began to plan further gifts to institutions. He began with a hospital, the King Edward VII, giving £5000 every year from 1910 until his death. Also in 1909 he gave £1000 each to University College London towards the purchase of the Egyptian collection of Flinders Petrie, to the Crystal Palace Fund to preserve it for public use, to the City of London Territorials and to the Oxford University Endowment Fund.

The Palestine Exploration Fund was encountering more financial worries so Walter stepped in (he was still Treasurer), personally supporting excavations at Gezer (Tell Jezer). He borrowed from the Craven Bank where he was the Director, then, in 1911 bought the Fund a house. Number two Hinde Street in Marylebone cost £4,500 and became the headquarters of the Fund (it still is), with sufficient space to house the growing collection of artefacts (fig.5).

The offer Walter made, in 1911, to his old Oxford college was much more controversial. The chapel of Balliol had been rebuilt in 1857 but the design of William Butterfield, ‘external polychromy of red and white stone’ was immediately criticised (Howell 2001, 283). When the decision was announced to replace Butterfield’s stained glass in the east window Walter urged ‘that the whole of the Rasher of Bacon monstrosity should be cleared away’, replacing it with a replica of the original chapel, and he offered £20,000. He proposed that T.G.Jackson be the architect. Jackson produced a design ‘which the college admired in the rough’ but a campaign to save Butterfield’s work was mounted and the chapel saved, to Walter’s annoyance (Jackson, 249; Howell 2001, 286). He countered, in 1913, offering a larger sum, £30,000, to the university rather than his college – to be divided between a professorial pension fund, a readership in Egyptology and the promotion of the study of agriculture.

Shortly before the outbreak of war Royal Engineers were assisting both the Palestine Exploration Fund’s survey of the Wilderness of Zin led by Sir Leonard Woolley and the British Museum Hittite excavations at Carchemish – Walter part-funded the two projects. The War Office was particularly interested in Zin, an area which was a possible invasion route for British forces if Turkey allied herself with the central powers and hostilities broke out. T.E.Lawrence, working at Carchemish, was moved to Zin, commenting, ‘[we] are obviously only meant as red herrings to give an archaeological colour to a political job’ (Moscrop 2000,207).

During the war Walter’s gifts continued, including £10,000 to the Countess Benckendorff’s fund for Russian prisoners in Germany and £10,000 to the City of London branch of the Red Cross. In 1919 he retired as treasurer of the Palestine Exploration Fund, though not before he had helped to start an endowment fund for the proposed British School of Archaeology in Palestine. He gave £1000, together with Robert Mond (*The Times* 3 June 1918). The school survives as the Kenyon Institute in Jerusalem. Walter had also helped to found the Society of Biblical Archaeology in 1870 and this merged in 1919 into the Royal Asiatic Society. In 1920 he gave £1000 toward the enlargement of the Taylor Institute in Oxford, and the very large sum of £50,000 to the Bodleian Library. The latter was a response to a letter from Lord Hugh Cecil published in *The Times* on 18 June: ‘Is there no millionaire who would like to write his name beneath that of Bodley, and so earn for it undying fame, by giving to the curators of the Library all that they need to maintain and organize that noble collection of books in the fullest usefulness of learning?’ His gift was ‘probably the largest single sum of money contributed to any of the institutions or departments of the University’ (*The Times* 29 July 1920) and he was awarded a Doctorate of Civil Law (DCL), evidence of Oxford’s ‘undying fame’.

Walter died at Sidmouth on 18 December 1921. *The Times* was critical of his philanthropy, accusing him of using his money ‘to advance his own interests’. He also had ‘real defects of manner and sympathy’.

He was never popular in the ordinary sense, because he never took any serious trouble to adapt himself to his surroundings. His speeches and conversation were often pitched far above the heads of his audience. It would almost be true to say that they never varied whether he was addressing a body of archaeologists or of rustic electors, a shooting party or a children’s fete (*The Times* 20 December 1921).

Like his father and brothers, Walter was shy and ill-at-ease in a public arena. He found public-speaking difficult, preferring private intercourse, be it around a committee table with men who shared his interests, or in a club (he was a member of the Savile with his brother Alfred), and went out of his way to avoid the public gaze. His only piece of self-advertisement was probably his portrait in the stained-glass window of Giggleswick Chapel. He also allowed Giggleswick School to commission his portrait from Hubert Herkomer in 1902 (fig.6).

When asked by a journalist to share his life-time of experiences he replied ‘I refuse. In the first place, I never kept a diary and I never kept a letter. In the second place, I hate snobbery; and to give publicity to one’s scattered recollections is a form of snobbery I abominate’ (Mitchell 1990, 7). He remained single and no hint has emerged of any secret relationship; two of his brothers and a sister were also unmarried.

His will was found to contain unusually generous gifts to his servants, totalling £50,000 (1). His cousins shared £200,000 and his nine nieces and nephews shared £1,500,000 worth of stocks and shares. Like his brother Charles, Walter’s investments were global, from the markets, railways and waterworks of London to Yorkshire, Ireland, Argentina (his Central Argentine Railway), and China. His nephew Archie benefitted the most. Walter had already given him the Basildon estate and the painting collection amassed by James Morrison; now he inherited the Malham estate and a large trust fund of £400,000 which Walter intended he use to ensure Basildon and its heirlooms would pass intact to his son.

The editor of *The Craven Herald* summed up the esteem with which he was held by his neighbours and tenants in Yorkshire, a very different view to that expressed in *The Times*:

There was nothing meretricious about him. He was genuine; a fine type of Nature’s gentleman … His patriotism was a burning passion … Straight in all his dealings, he had no place for the man who did not ‘play the game’….Craven mourns its ‘Grand Old Man’, one whose like we shall ne’er see again (Mitchell 1990, 45) (fig.7).

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End-Notes

1 Walter’s will was drawn up in 1912 with codicils added in 1916, 1919, 1920 and three in 1921.His butler William Skirrow and his wife Martha received £6000; his Malham gardener George Petty £1000; groom Robert Battersby £1000; housekeeper Bella Lodge £000; steward John Whittingdale Winskill £1000. All the remaining servants at 53 Coleman Street, Cromwell Road and Malham shared £10,000. Robert Cooper, formerly of Coleman Street, received £20,000 and a generous annuity; J.H.Mann of Coleman Street £4000.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig 1

*Gordale Scar, Malham,* photograph, author.

Fig 2

*Tarn House, c. 1860s,* photograph, Malhamdale Local History Group, www.kirkbymalham.info.

Fig 3

To follow example of work by William ‘Crimea’ Simpson from PEF Collection, given by Walter Morrison

Fig 4

*Giggleswick School Chapel,* photograph, Giggleswick School

Fig 5

To follow photograph of exterior of 2 Hinde Street, Marylebone, headquarters of the PEF

Fig 6

*Portrait of Walter Morrison*, Hubert Herkomer, oil painting, Giggleswick School.

Fig 7

*Walter Morrison’s grave, St.Michael the Archangel, Kirkby*

*Malham,* photograph, author.

1. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)