

Navigating Networks in the Victorian Age: Mary Philadelphia Merrifield's Writing on the Arts

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Conventional Victorian society posed many impediments to a woman aspiring to scholarly writing. For Mary Philadelphia Merrifield (1804–1889), these were negotiated through the varied interplay of several networks — social, political, and scholarly — with which she engaged to advance her undertakings. My focus here is on the particular conditions and contacts that shaped Merrifield's writing on the fine arts between 1840 and 1850, a period that saw her active in Brighton, where she lived, in London and elsewhere in the United Kingdom, in Paris, and in numerous northern Italian cities.¹ Her access to a series of social and professional networks enabled her to be an astute judge of her cultural climate, to produce serious scholarly work for general and specialist readers, secure its publication, and lay the foundation for earning income as a contributor to art journals in the 1850s.

The art world in the 1840s

The cultural climate referred to above is that upsurge in the 1840s of immense popular and artistic interest in reinvigorating the national school of artists through the opportunity offered by the need to decorate the new Houses of Parliament built after the destruction by fire of the medieval Palace of Westminster in 1834. Initially viewed as a catastrophic event, before long, in the press, the fire became a 'fortunate' calamity that created

¹ For Merrifield's contribution to a methodology for technical art history and an assessment of her historical importance as a writer on artists' techniques, see Zahira Véliz Bomford, 'Mary Merrifield's Quest: A New Methodology for Technical Art History', *Burlington Magazine*, 159 (2017), 465–75. Other publications have approached her work from perspectives of literary history, colour theory, or women's writing. See Caroline Palmer, 'Colour, Chemistry and Corsets: Mary Philadelphia Merrifield's *Dress as a Fine Art*', *Costume*, 47 (2013), 3–27; Caroline Palmer, "I will tell nothing that I did not see": British Women's Travel Writing, Art and the Science of Connoisseurship, 1776–1860', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 51 (2015), 248–68; *Letteratura artistica: Cross-Cultural Studies in Art History Sources*, ed. by Giovanni Mazzaferro <<http://letteraturaartistica.blogspot.com/>> [accessed 11 March 2019], where Merrifield's writing has been featured since 2014; Alexandra Loske, 'Mary Philadelphia Merrifield: Color History as Expertise', *Visual Resources*, 33 (2017), 11–26.

an impetus for a new era of British art to flourish.² Legislators, artists, journalists, and the Prince Consort eagerly seized upon this opportunity to elevate artistic practice in Britain, inspired in part by examples in Bavaria and Versailles. Parliamentary select committees and Royal Commissions were formed to determine the modes of architecture and sculptural and pictorial programmes that were most apposite to the practical purposes and the symbolic significance of the Parliament buildings (*Fig. 1*). By 1841–42, the commissioners had determined that fresco painting would be employed in the pictorial decoration of the new buildings, and that ‘the introduction of fresco painting would have a beneficial effect on the character of national art’.³ In both official and popular imagination, this artistic technique was invested with moral as well as artistic virtue. The only problem was that, in Britain, nobody knew very much about painting frescoes. This was the perfect opening for writers — like Merrifield and Sir Charles Eastlake (1793–1865) — awake to the opportunity of providing the reliable technical knowledge requested by the Royal Commissioners.⁴ These two writers were to become the authoritative voices on the historical techniques

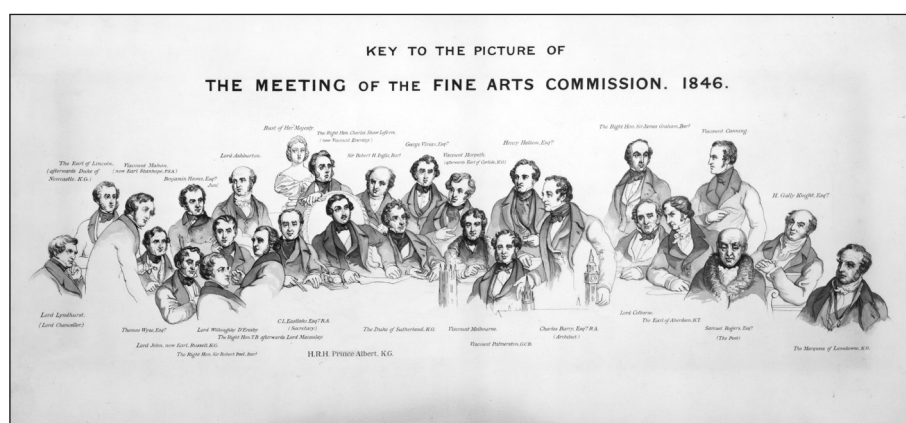


Fig. 1: George Scharf, Key to the Picture of the Meeting of the Fine Arts Commission 1846, 1872, pen, ink, and wash, 46.7 × 102.5 cm, National Portrait Gallery, London.

² [Joseph Hume], ‘Report from the Select Committee on the House of Commons Buildings’, *Westminster Review*, January 1835, pp. 163–72 (pp. 163–64).

³ All those who gave evidence to the select committee agreed on this point. See, for example, William Dyce’s comments, in HC Select Committee on Fine Arts in Connection with Rebuilding of Houses of Parliament (HC Paper (1841) no. 423), p. 26. ProQuest UK Parliamentary Papers Online. See also, Emma L. Winter, ‘German Fresco Painting and the New Houses of Parliament at Westminster, 1834–1851’, *Historical Journal*, 47 (2004), 291–329.

⁴ Charles Lock Eastlake, *Materials for a History of Oil Painting* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1847).

of fresco. At the same time, there was a growing interest in the recovery of ‘lost knowledge’ of the materials and artistic processes of art that, materially, had stood the test of time, specifically the Italian and Flemish Primitives. In critical and art historical opinion this art, too, was undergoing a revision: what had seemed naive conceptions in the age of Reynolds were being transformed by the articulate responses of writers like Maria Callcott (1785–1842), Anna Brownell Jameson (1794–1860), and Charles Eastlake into the expressions of an age of artistic purity. The important role played by Maria Callcott in this shift in cultural taste is explored in detail by Caroline Palmer’s article in this issue of *19*.

***Il libro dell’arte* (1844) and *The Art of Fresco Painting* (1846)**

During the 1840s Merrifield published books that responded directly to the need outlined in the reports of the Fine Arts Commissioners for reliable knowledge about historical painting techniques, and a growing professionalism is evident in her endeavours. In 1844 she published the first English translation of *Il libro dell’arte* by Cennino Cennini, dated to the early fifteenth century.⁵ Merrifield’s translation followed an 1821 Italian edition.⁶ In this first English edition of Cennino, Merrifield assumed a well-accepted gender role as a translator of existing texts, even to the extent of including the Italian editor’s introduction, with an incisive and informative preface by Merrifield and illustrated with lithographed line drawings by her hand (*Fig. 2*). Even though this first endeavour in art publishing was at first glance a translation, a socially acceptable activity for an educated lady, the notes and preface reveal a deeply enquiring mind at work. As Caroline Palmer observes, ‘she did more than simply translate, however; her extensive annotations indicate that she conducted chemical experiments to test Cennini’s methods, and to check the accuracy of her own translation’ (“I will tell nothing”, p. 262). She found a publisher and secured the patronage of Lady Follett, to whom the work is dedicated. Merrifield’s translation was reviewed in the *Quarterly Review* by Lord Francis Egerton who refers at least five times to ‘forgotten processes’ or techniques lost in ‘oblivion’ and similar allusions to the quest for long-lost knowledge that the Cennino translation had made accessible to the contemporary artist and connoisseur.⁷

⁵ Cennino Cennini, *A Treatise on Painting*, trans. by Mrs Merrifield (London: Lumley, 1844); Mrs Merrifield, *The Art of Fresco Painting* (London: Gilpin; Brighton: Wallis, 1846); Mrs Merrifield, *Original Treatises Dating from the XIIIth to XVIIIth Centuries on the Arts of Painting*, 2 vols (London: Murray, 1849). For a modern critical translation of *Il libro dell’arte*, see Lara Broecke, *Cennino Cennini’s ‘Il libro dell’arte’* (London: Archetype, 2015).

⁶ *Di Cennino Cennini trattato della pittura*, ed. by Giuseppe Tambroni (Rome: Salviucci, 1821).

⁷ [Francis Egerton], ‘Painting in the Fourteenth Century’, *Quarterly Review*, December 1844, pp. 77–94.



Fig. 2: Mary Philadelphia Merrifield, *Virgin and Child on a Tablet* by Giotto in the Possession of Baron Camuccini, line drawing reproduced as a lithograph illustration to Merrifield's translation of Cennino Cennini's *Il libro dell'arte*, Plate 8, p. 117. Photo: Z. Véliz Bomford.

The Art of Fresco Painting, published in early 1846, was also in part a work of translation. Commentaries on the pigments and processes of true fresco, taken from Italian and Spanish sources, were translated and anthologized by Merrifield. She also expanded the scope of her own interpretative contribution with a substantial introductory essay, 'An Inquiry into the Nature of the Colours Used in Fresco Painting by the Italian and Spanish Masters', and extensive annotations to the translated texts. Merrifield's husband, John Merrifield, underwrote publication costs, and he also drafted the introduction at her request.⁸ They had hoped to find

⁸ Letter from Mary to John Merrifield, Paris, 15 October 1845, Brighton, East Sussex Record Office (ESRO), ACC8642/1/1. All references to letters written by Merrifield to her husband and mother during her travels on the Continent are taken from this

an economical way of illustrating the volume by means of lithographs of celebrated fresco paintings, but this proved impossible. Here, the dedication was to Sir Robert Peel, prime minister (until summer 1846) and one of the commissioners on the fine arts. It is perhaps in this publication that Merrifield first asserts her authoritative knowledge about artist's colours, their chemistry, and application. The content here is based almost entirely on published, if rare, sources and it appears that this manuscript was actually completed before Merrifield departed on her first documented research trip abroad in late 1844. Her reputation as an expert voice on the subject of artists' historical practice was growing.

Original Treatises (1849)

Finally, in 1849, *Original Treatises on the Arts of Painting* (Fig. 3) — also dedicated to Peel — was published. It was the fruit of five years of research and writing. Merrifield's work on this ambitious project

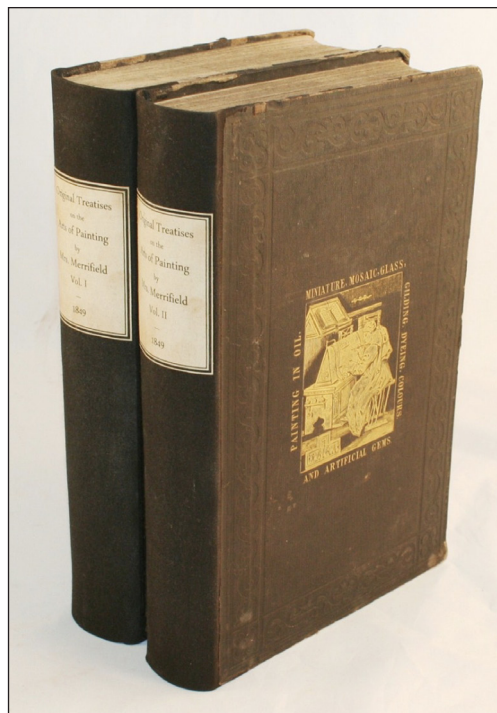


Fig. 3: *Original Treatises*, Mary Philadelphia Merrifield's translations of unpublished manuscripts on the fine arts, in the original binding, as published in 1849.

archive and shelfmark, unless otherwise stated, and will be referenced by date only. A useful overview of the archival material held at the ESRO is given in Loske.

benefited from the advantages of a parliamentary commission: expenses were paid, and Merrifield's identification with the work of the British government did much to overcome the conventional marginalization of women from libraries and archives she would have anticipated encountering on the Continent, where these usually remained entirely within the male sphere.⁹ *Original Treatises* followed in part the format of *The Art of Fresco Painting* but focused on oil painting. Instead of translated excerpts from published (if rare) sources, unpublished manuscripts in their entirety were transcribed, translated, and extensively annotated by Merrifield. A lengthy introductory essay in six chapters contains Merrifield's own arguments, judgements, and conclusions, occupying the 'margins' of the publication, mirroring the still peripheral placement of women's writing on the wider literary stage. The voice that emerges here is pragmatic, factual, rational, and deductive. She offers empirical, evidence-based knowledge and insight, and her conclusions are argued systematically. In this, Merrifield's approach is, as noted by Caroline Palmer, 'scientific'.¹⁰ This can be seen as a departure from the writing of Anna Jameson, for example, whose art history is a development more in line with traditional connoisseurship.¹¹ The completion of Merrifield's third book, published with government support by Murray, helped to secure a modest income from writing for quarterly publications and art periodicals well into the 1850s.¹²

In the introduction to *Original Treatises*, Merrifield wrote that the work was 'begun and finished under the pressure of great domestic anxiety and ill health, which sometimes rendered it scarcely possible to give that attention which so arduous a task required' (1, p. xi). We will now turn our attention to the networks of support that enabled her to complete this task and mention in passing the troubles that made it arduous.

⁹ This author has been unable to locate a contemporary document from the parliamentary archives, and it may be that the commission referred to by Merrifield was perhaps of an informal nature (*Original Treatises*, 1, p. v.). The administration of funds relating to her research was managed through a secretary in Robert Peel's office, not through the Fine Arts Commission, where Charles Eastlake was secretary. On 2 May 1857 she was awarded a Civil List pension 'in consideration of the valuable services she has rendered to literature and art, and the reduced circumstances in which she is placed, 100l' (*Morning Advertiser*, 7 July 1857, p. 3).

¹⁰ Caroline Palmer, 'Mary Philadelphia Merrifield and the Alliance with Science', <<http://letteraturaartistica.blogspot.com/2014/05/caroline-palmer-mary-philadelphia.html>> [accessed 11 March 2019].

¹¹ For Anna Jameson's approach to connoisseurship, see Susanna Avery-Quash's article in this issue of 19.

¹² For further information, see bibliography in this issue of 19.

Family support

Evidence for the networks Merrifield utilized to enable her writing emerges from the preliminary matter of her books, from family and professional correspondence, and from family documents. The various networks I have identified pertain to family, Brighton friendships, politics, the art establishment, art publishing, and Continental contacts. Needless to say, these networks often intertwined.

The most detailed picture is that of Merrifield's family network, sketched in the many letters she wrote to her husband while travelling to Paris and later to northern Italy between 1844 and 1846. For the period of her Continental travels, she had left at home in Brighton her husband, four of her five children, and her elderly mother. Travel was essential to Merrifield's purpose of discovering and transcribing historical manuscripts on the fine arts. The letters on the whole suggest a pragmatic, unromantic attitude to all she encountered. Sensitive to the discomforts of travel, it took time for her to adapt personally to unfamiliar surroundings. But as for countless travellers before and after her, the received topos of the South working on the northern spirit proved true, and she wrote from Bologna on 6 April 1846: 'I am very anxious to return home, although I should like to live in Italy if you were all here.'¹³ She was rarely effusive, however, except very occasionally when writing of art: shortly before her departure from Paris, she wrote of the Louvre,

I do not know how I shall part with it [...] when I am there I forget husband, mother, children, & everything else, there seems no world to me beyond the pictures. I see nothing but the pictures. Yes I did, I saw a man asleep there, the Goth!
(25 January 1845)

The experience of travel must nevertheless have been lived as 'an adventure of the self'.¹⁴ Certainly, her scholarly writing gained greater authority.¹⁵ The letters now in the East Sussex Record Office are, in fact, clean copies (although a few of them have heavy corrections), but there is an absence of evidence to indicate whether these were made by Merrifield at the time of writing, or if she subsequently transcribed the letters that reached home. It seems logical that by copying the letters when they were written, Merrifield

¹³ On the phenomenon of the lure of the Mediterranean for the British, see, for example, John Pemble, *The Mediterranean Passion: Victorians and Edwardians in the South* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

¹⁴ Chloe Chard, *Pleasure and Guilt on the Grand Tour: Travel Writing and Imaginative Geography 1600–1830* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 73.

¹⁵ For the connection between travel and art writing by women, see Palmer, "I will tell nothing".

kept a running account of her activities and encounters for herself; and she would also have a record, should any of her letters go astray.

Abroad, the presence of Merrifield's companions — her son and aunt or a ladies' maid/companion — facilitated her activities in the libraries and archives. At the same time, her husband's letters from home were encouraging and he acted as collaborating editor on occasion, while managing their large family in Brighton. Merrifield's letters to him contain constant queries regarding his health. He was asthmatic, and in 1847 suffered a severe fall that left him with the use of only one leg, which impaired his professional activity.¹⁶ This must have been a devastating blow to his family, both personally and economically, and it is likely that the 'domestic anxiety' mentioned in the preface to *Original Treatises* was connected to this. John Merrifield retired from law practice in 1850. His declining health during these years focused Mary's efforts on her publishing pursuits as a way of supporting their still young family.

John Merrifield, like Mary's father Charles Watkins and her guardian Robert Studley Vidal, had been called to the bar at Middle Temple, and he wrote and edited works on the law.¹⁷ Mary Merrifield's own family had strong connections in East Sussex: her mother was the daughter of the vicar of Alfriston in the South Downs, a descendent of the Elizabethan jurist Sir David Williams (also of the Middle Temple).¹⁸ Her father's mother was Philadelphia Constable of an old family of landowners near Burwash in the Sussex Weald. The Merrifields had five children and the eldest, Charles Watkins Merrifield, an able linguist even as an adolescent, accompanied his mother on both her research trips to the Continent. Keenly intelligent, he was an indispensable amanuensis, transcribing manuscripts and, later, translating texts. As a duo it was easier for them to go in and out of libraries than it would have been for Mary alone, and it also made the labour of transcribing, checking, and correcting their manuscript copies less onerous. Rich though her letters to her husband are with family anecdote and engaging descriptions of her travels and work, at its heart is the *mostly* sympathetic understanding between husband and wife. John understood Mary's challenges and her ambition, and frequently wrote on her behalf to librarians, booksellers, and, indeed, to the secretary of the Fine Arts Commission! Only rarely did she make it clear that he had crossed a line:

Merrifield tells me in every letter what to do & then says I need not do it unless I like & am able now I do not hesitate to say that

¹⁶ John Merrifield suffered a severe fall after which he could walk only with crutches. See 'The Late Mr Merrifield', ESRO, ACC8642/1/1.

¹⁷ John Merrifield, *The Law of Attornies* (London: Saunders and Benning, 1830).

¹⁸ A biographical note written in a nineteenth-century hand among the Merrifield papers (ESRO, ACC8642/1/4), relates that Mary Merrifield's mother is descended from Sir David Williams (d.1613), Attorney General in the reign of Elizabeth I.

I am not able to go about book hunting [...] when I am settled at home I can explain satisfactorily what I have done & what I have left undone but I hope he will take no steps till my return.¹⁹

From the lines of her family correspondence emerges a woman of a very high but perhaps also very nervous intelligence, a restive intellect supported in her scholarly work by her family because her mind required such engagement. Yet at times the intensity of her research process could be too much, and she wrote home to her husband from Paris: ‘I had such a severe attack on my nerves on Saturday last accompanied with the head ache that the medical man has ordered me to be quite idle for a week and to do nothing’ (24 December 1844).

Professional networks

After returning from Italy, not only Charles, but a younger son Frederic Merrifield helped with the translations. Also, during this period, Merrifield secured a place for Charles — apparently through her contacts in the Fine Arts Commission — as a secretary in the Office of the Privy Council.²⁰ He was just nineteen years old. Later in the year, Merrifield submitted the preliminary report on her findings to Sir Robert Peel, and John Merrifield gave two presentations on the fine arts to the Royal Brighton Literary and Scientific Institution (of which he was a founding member), probably extracted from Mary’s notes.²¹

Many of the Merrifields’ friends also attended the institution lectures and both the Brighton publisher Arthur Wallis, who helped in the publication of *Fresco Painting*, and William Seymour, described by Merrifield as her ‘highly-esteemed friend’, were active in the life of the institution.²² This

¹⁹ Letter to her mother Mary Watkins, Boulogne, 6 February 1845, emphasis in original.

²⁰ Letters from Charles Watkins Merrifield to his parents, ESRO, ACC8642/1/7.

²¹ Established in 1841 with the goal of creating a public library for Brighton, the institution, which met regularly in the Albion Rooms, was for nearly thirty years a principal site of Brighton’s cultural life: ‘The primary object of this Institution, which disclaims any political or polemical character, is to promote a taste for Literature and Science amongst the resident population and visitors of Brighton. The advantages which it offers are the use of a rapidly increasing Library, for reference and circulation, containing 5,000 volumes’ (*Brighton Gazette*, 13 January 1848, p. 1). See also, *Brighton Gazette*, 10 September 1846, p. 1, where one of John Merrifield’s addresses on the fine arts is listed.

²² *Original Treatises*, 1, p. ix. Although women attended the meetings of the Brighton Institution (there is regular reference to ‘Ladies and gentlemen subscribers’), no women are listed as having addressed the meetings during the 1840s or 1850s. I have yet to find documentary evidence that Mary was a member, but circumstantially it seems very probable.

network of Brighton friendships was also fundamental to the progress of Merrifield's writing career. The younger Merrifields, too, were active in the cultural and learned activities in Brighton — Frederic at age fifteen was one of the organizers of the Brighton Art Loan Exhibition in 1846, and in 1849 delivered an address 'On the Modern Prejudice against Innovations', as well as others on natural science.²³ Mary's own contact with scientists in the 1840s is not well documented, but she consulted her Brighton neighbour Hermann Schweitzer, who was an analytical chemist, and there were regular series of lectures on scientific subjects at the Albion Rooms.²⁴ The Merrifields themselves were interested in scientific advances of the day, and experimentation at home was not uncommon:

I was very happy indeed to receive the family letter on Friday morning last, and it would have given me unmixed pleasure if it had not contained the account of all the electrical machines & Edwin's receiving such a shock. I am afraid they will do each other some mischief with them, or with the acid for the Voltaic pile. (1 March 1846)

Other key friendships may have originated through Mary's Middle Temple connections — her father, her guardian, and her husband were West Countrymen at the Middle Temple, as was Sir William Webb Follett to whose wife the Cennino translation was dedicated. Follett, who was Attorney General in the second Peel government, may have helped to bring Merrifield's work to the attention of the Fine Arts Commissioners and Sir Robert Peel. The Folletts are a possible point of connection/conduit between Merrifield's Brighton network and that of the politicians sitting on the Fine Arts Commission. The Folletts and the Peels visited Brighton regularly in the 1840s: Sir Robert's sister lived in Brighton and Lady Follett settled there when she was widowed.

Merrifield's access to a network of political power was achieved and used judiciously in order to secure public support for her research. But she also belonged for a period to the art establishment, through the Fine Arts Commission. She knew and corresponded with Charles Lock Eastlake — certainly during the period of her travels. As secretary of the Fine Arts Commission and an eminent researcher in the study of original sources on artists' techniques, he worked on closely related matters. The intellectual relationship that existed between them is interesting and

²³ 'Brighton Art Loan Exhibition', *Art Union*, October 1846, p. 350. The address was presented to the Royal Brighton Literary and Scientific Institution on 20 March 1849 at the Albion Rooms, Brighton (*Brighton Gazette*, 8 February 1849, p. 1).

²⁴ Schweitzer contributed occasionally to scientific journals. See, for example, 'Iodide of Iron and its Preparations', *Pharmaceutical Journal and Transactions*, 1 (1841-42), 517-19.

complex, and deserves greater attention than is possible here. The connoisseur and politician Francis Egerton, 1st Earl of Ellesmere — who had positively reviewed Merrifield's *Cennino* in the *Quarterly Review* — was another member of the art establishment who was instrumental in the support she received for her research.²⁵ He also lent her books; and, in her turn, she lent books to Sir William Stirling Maxwell when he was preparing *Annals of the Artists of Spain* for publication.²⁶

Like Anna Jameson, Mary Merrifield was dependent on art journalism to secure success for her books, and, in time, to provide a source of income for shorter pieces of writing. The importance of this network increased after John Merrifield became disabled in 1847. There is evidence in the family papers that the artist and critic John Eagles (1783–1855) was a correspondent,²⁷ as was also Benjamin Robert Haydon (1808–1846), who appears to have written to congratulate Mary on the publication of her *Cennino*.²⁸ Merrifield herself reviewed Jameson's *Legends of the Madonna* in 1853 for the *Edinburgh Review* and, also in these years, signed numerous articles on the history and technique of fresco and oil painting as well as on costume and colour theory.²⁹ She also contributed — directly and indirectly — to the cleaning controversy debates swirling around the National Gallery in the late 1840s.

For her research journeys, Merrifield supplied herself with letters of introduction from eminent British librarians to their Continental colleagues. Letters from Antonio Panizzi and Sir Henry Ellis of the British

²⁵ The reviewer is most enthusiastic in recommending the timely usefulness of Merrifield's book, returning more than once to the 'recovery of lost knowledge' as one of its principal virtues.

²⁶ Merrifield borrowed a number of books from the Earl of Ellesmere, whom she acknowledged for 'the loan of many valuable books' (*Original Treatises*, 1, p. ix), further confirmed in her correspondence of 1849 with William Stirling, who was engaged in 'rescuing the work of my old favourite Pacheco from oblivion. Nothing would have given me greater pleasure than falling into your views, but the copy of the work formerly in my possession was purchased by me for Lord Ellesmere to whom I returned it.' Mary Merrifield to William Stirling-Maxwell, 28 September 1849, Glasgow City Archives, Ref. T-SK 28-33 [29-5-126], transcribed by this author in 2004.

²⁷ Mary to John Merrifield, 25 January 1846. Merrifield probably refers to Rev. John Eagles, an artist, writer, translator, and poet, whose writing on the fine arts appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine*. Merrifield's line to her husband, 'Mr Eagles will not now be able to review it', was in connection with a comment about the publisher of her *Cennino* translation, Edward Lumley, whose plans to publish full-length translations of artists' printed treatises may have been damaged by the appearance of Merrifield's book of technical sections on fresco painting. The Merrifields mentioned Eagles in other letters also, in a way that implied personal acquaintance and correspondence. See letters from Mary to John Merrifield, 18 January 1846 and 29 March 1846.

²⁸ 'I have received your letter [...] and was indeed gratified to see Mr Haydon's letter' (Mary to John Merrifield, 16 December 1844).

²⁹ [Mary Merrifield], review of Anna Jameson, *Legends of the Madonna*, *Edinburgh Review*, January 1853, pp. 230–39.

Museum were the starting point, alongside others from Lord Francis Egerton. From the four or five initial contacts in Paris and Italy, such as Jacques Joseph Champollion-Figeac in Paris (brother of the archaeologist who deciphered the Rosetta Stone), receiving and presenting letters of introduction became a leitmotif of Merrifield's correspondence with her husband: 'I get lots of letters of introduction and shall know all the great Libraries of Northern Italy before I return' (3 December 1845); 'My letters increase like a snowball' (19 December 1845). And the system worked: her contacts proliferated and some were immensely helpful — Rawdon Brown and the Abate Giuseppe Cadorin in Venice, for example, whose letter helped her to find the important manuscript in Bassano. In turn, she investigated a list of queries in England for the abate. Other introductions were incidental, like the Italian master who taught Charles in Paris, and who facilitated the travellers' subsequent entry into Italian life by letters of introduction to his sister in Milan.³⁰ Of the many artists she met and interviewed, Felice Schiavoni (1803–1881) appears to have been by far the most sympathetic, and his observations, recorded in *Original Treatises* as well as in her correspondence, were recognized as accurate and coherent by Merrifield.³¹ The sheer quantity of ties established by these letters is astonishing and the success of the research journey that they helped to shape attests to the high esteem that the Merrifields — mother and son — earned from those they met. This network of librarians, archivists, historians, booksellers, and artists persisted even after Merrifield's return to England, as she continued to correspond with a number of colleagues during the preparation of her manuscript for publication.³² In early 1847 Merrifield sent a copy of *The Art of Fresco Painting* as a gift to the Fine Arts Academy at Bologna and was made an honorary member of the academy at that time.³³

³⁰ 'I think I was very fortunate in getting the young man I engaged for an Italian master for him. He is quite a Gentleman, a native of Milan which he left for Political opinions. He was two years in Germany & speaks German and French, and is now studying Spanish, & working at Latin in order to take the French degree of B.A. and is besides studying law in order to be called to the French bar [...]. He is very well informed & well acquainted with literature and the state of Europe [...]. He has given Charles much information concerning Italy' (Mary to John Merrifield, 12 January 1845).

³¹ 'Signor D', whose opinions are recorded in *Original Treatises* (I, pp. cxxxiii–cxxxvii), has been identified as the artist Felice Schiavoni. See Véliz Bomford, 'Mary Merrifield's Quest'; and also the letter from Mary to John Merrifield, 28 January 1846.

³² See Susanna Avery-Quash, "'I consider I am now to collect facts not form theories": Mary Merrifield and Empirical Research into Technical Art History during the 1840s', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 19 (2018) <<https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2018/08/avery-quash-rev.pdf>> [accessed 11 March 2019].

³³ Giovanni Mazzaferro, 'Mary Philadelphia Merrifield in Italy, Part Two: Emilia and Veneto', <http://letteraturaartistica.blogspot.co.uk/2014/06/giovanni-mazzaferro-mary-philadelphia_25.html> [accessed 11 March 2019].

This overview of the complex social, political, and scholarly networks that came into play to enable Merrifield's work in the 1840s reveals the location of her writing within a complex social nexus. While her gender meant that certain social obstacles needed to be overcome in order to pursue the research and writing she wished to undertake, her social class, her intelligence, and her focused purpose enabled her to attain international recognition for her publications. Only partial detail is possible at present, but further research into family, art publishing, and friendships promises to uncover more information about her skilled navigation through the networks that structured her world. Perhaps the single most telling snapshot of Merrifield's moment of triumph when she surveyed her networks was when she alone — with the help of letters of introduction from Cadorin, Rawdon Brown, and the Podestà of Bassano — obtained permission to copy the Bassano manuscript of which she proudly wrote to her husband, 'my obtaining a copy of the Ms. at Bassano has created quite a sensation, for it has always been refused to all others' (22 February 1846). But Merrifield did not exploit the professional networks which she constructed in the 1840s for long. By the middle of the 1850s, her thirsty intellect had found a new subject of endeavour — the study of algae. From her botanical correspondence, a new and independent set of networks emerges. By the middle of the 1860s, she focused entirely on the classification of marine algae (*Fig. 4*). Natural science was always a Merrifield passion and she was not alone within her family in publishing in scientific journals or in loving the natural history of their Sussex landscape, which she described with as clear and sympathetic an eye as that she turned on the works of sixteenth-century artists. For Merrifield, the Downs 'possess a beauty peculiarly their own, in the long serpentine lines into which they fall, the variety and harmony of their colours, passing from blue in the distance through grey, to the warmer tints of green, broken orange and russet'.³⁴ Her turn away from the fine arts and towards the scientific world — in which she was absolutely always at home — coincided with the departure of her second son Henry to the New World, and the shift became absolute after his death in the American Civil War.³⁵

Mary Philadelphia Merrifield's achievements were enabled by the complex networks of connections and interconnections indicated here, but the enduring quality of her scholarly work is uniquely her own. The tenacity of her scholarship — evidenced in the critical apparatus she assembled for each of her major publications — is impressive by any standards. The

³⁴ Mrs Merrifield, *A Sketch of the Natural History of Brighton and its Vicinity* (Brighton: Pearce, 1860), p. 21.

³⁵ Confederate States Army Casualties: Lists and Narrative Reports 1862. Washington DC, United States National Archives and Records Administration, M836. Lists of killed, wounded and missing soldiers, together with narrative reports of the action, submitted after battles.



Fig. 4: Mary Philadelphia Merrifield, *Sporochinus comosus*, 1870–80, pen, ink, and watercolour on paper, 20.2 × 12.6 cm, Department of Plant Sciences, University of Cambridge. Photo: Z. Véliz Bomford.

reliability of most of her conclusions has continued to inform the practice of art conservation and technical art history into the twenty-first century. She had the singular ability to integrate scientific and artistic aspects of painting practice, anticipating the future interdisciplinary nature of the field. At the heart of Merrifield's methodology in the study of art was the priority of reconciling documentary evidence and material fact, an activity that continues to animate the research of all her intellectual descendants. Her proud ownership of the work she completed was expressed in a letter to Robert Peel: "The opinions I have expressed on this subject are entirely my own, and they have not been revised or corrected by any person."³⁶

³⁶ Mary Merrifield to Robert Peel, late 1848, London, British Library, Peel Papers, Add MS 40432, fol. 254.