

**Mary Philadelphia Merrifield (15 April 1804–4 January 1889)**

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As an early contributor to the literature of technical art history, in the 1840s Mary Philadelphia Merrifield (née Watkins) published key works on artists' original techniques, their materials, and processes (*Fig. 1*). The unique quality of these publications came from the author's ability to integrate scientific, empirical observations about materials within a broader interest in the role of technique in art history. She published the first English translation of Cennino Cennini's *Il libro dell'arte* in 1844, *The Art of Fresco Painting* in 1846, and the two volumes concerning the techniques of historical oil painting, *Original Treatises on the Arts of Painting* in 1849.



*Fig. 1: Mary Philadelphia Merrifield, c. 1870, albumin print, East Sussex Record Office, The Keep, Brighton. © Photo: Zahira Véliz Bomford.*

These impressive endeavours were achieved with the support of her extended family and that of Sir Robert Peel, who recognized early on Merrifield's value in the context of determining the mode of decoration for the Houses of Parliament, being rebuilt during the 1840s. She was an authoritative voice within the governmental Fine Arts Commission which oversaw this, as well as within the cultural and art journals of the day, and among practising artists.

After the 1850s Merrifield turned her attention to botanical studies, and she published in scientific journals on the classification of marine algae.