The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer published by the Kelmscott Press was the last great work of William Morris, and the icon of the private press movement, the printing revival he inspired. The volume contains 87 wood-cut illustrations by Edward Burne-Jones, who was a close friend of Morris. The Gothic-inspired type was specially designed by William Morris and named 'Chaucer' after this book. The book brought together Morris’s passion for the medieval period and his commitment to beautiful hand-crafted productions and was published shortly before he died. 425 copies were printed, sold at £20 each.

This Kelmscott Chaucer had an undistinguished binding when acquired by the present owner, so that he felt justified in altering its condition. He selected Dominic Riley, a distinguished British designer bookbinder for the commission. Riley studied at the London College of Printing. He has won several major bookbinding awards, and was elected a Fellow of the Designer Bookbinders in 2008. He now works and teaches in Britain and the US.

The binder conceived the work as an overt homage to Morris, basing the design upon the mirror forms of his initials: ‘W M’. Several techniques were used (including modern digital methods to produce the stamps). The final work is grand and dignified, its geometric exactness relieved with touches of naturalistic ornamentation based on the book’s border decoration, and its use of the colour red echoes the red used for the rubrics in the text (based on medieval and Renaissance practice of highlighting headings in red ink).

Descriptive line

The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, Newly Imprinted ... (Hammersmith: Kelmscott Press, 1896), newly bound by British designer bookbinder Dominic Riley.

Physical description

Hand-printed book on paper with goatskin binding.

Dimensions

Height: 44 cm

Museum number

LOAN:AMERICANFRIENDS.716-2016

Object history note

Given/Loaned by the American Friends of the V&A through the generosity of: Paul Chrzanowski, 2016.

URL

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1407076/the-works-of-geoffrey-chaucer-book-morris-william/