sick and into their modes of thought, to such a degree as to ensure a considereate tenderness in dealing with them. ’Gowers’ ethos summarised: doctors should never allow a computer or data get between them and their patients.

Marjorie: In the novel, Leslie at first equated ‘conspiracy of silence’ with the medical condition aphasia, but people with aphasia are not silent; they are extremely expressive in their own way, although their means of communication can go unnoticed, even by family and friends. I am very interested in how William Morris’s use of language, if he had epilepsy, would have been affected.

Julia: British design education challenges young designers to think things through from first principles: to avoid presumptions – and isn’t this what artists do and what scientists have to do? Iterative craft practices across all disciplines also feeds thinking.

Renata: Perhaps ‘story’ comes from a wish to get to the ‘truth’ but by different routes, routes available to minds that want to uncover links ‘across’ a horizontal axis rather than walk up and down vertically. I joked to Leslie that I like ‘happy endings’. With a novel like Embroidered Minds – and I don’t read novels, just textbooks, a happy ending for me would be if through this work, society became more aware and more understanding than it used to be.

Images C, E, H, I, L are from originals held in the Gowers collection at Queen Square Library, Archive & Museum.
Jan’s chapters written in Jane Morris’s imagined inner voice inspired Caroline; medical and academic contributions from Dr. Renata Whurr and Professor Marjorie Lorch encouraged Leslie to read about 19thC neurologists and scour the archives here, where she found Gowers beautiful drawings of the brain. His images, reflecting the fine embroidery stitched by the Morrises, inspired Sue and Julia.

William Gowers: ‘I need hardly remind you that between what we term “theory” and “fact” the transition is gradual... Observation alone is certain... But there is a region in which we must recognise hypothesis as absolute. It is the region below the surface whence no reflected light can pass, but whence all observed phenomena proceed.’

*The Dynamics of Life* an address, 1894

**1st DISPLAY**

Sue Ridge’s forbidding Morris influenced wallpaper seethes with traceries of lines which turn out to be patterns from an epileptic EEG - ‘a region below the surface’, under the wallpaper. Hanging against the EEG pattern, Caroline Isgar’s delicate images of women are framed on metal clipboards, as are copies of Gowers’ etchings. Does this conjunction hint at division between science and art? Or at unity?

**Story:** Midnight, 1929, attics of the National Hospital, Queen Square. In a tiny wallpapered consulting room, Jenny, the eldest daughter of William and Jane Morris, accuses neurologist Dr. Q of conspiring to hide a terrible secret about her family. ‘Something bad happened to me in 1889, but I can’t remember what it was - and everyone wants it covered up. They destroy the evidence as soon as it’s found. They unpick the stitches in my memory. ’ As she lists connections between the hospital and her family, Q feels the wall paper rustle to life.

I am doubled, thought Jenny. I stand divided. On one side there’s me, an embroidered mind, on the other is Doctor Q. Should I destroy him - or myself?

*From the forthcoming novel - ‘Embroidered Minds of the Morris Women’*

**Leslie:** Until starting this project, all I knew about the Morrises was that William had designed wallpaper and married Jane, a Pre-Raphaelite ‘supermodel’. William Gowers for me was just a ward at Queen Square’s National Hospital, where my epilepsy was being treated. Then Renata Whurr, who had worked at the NHNN between 1983 and 2007, showed me how Queen Square in Victorian times had been a tightly woven circle of art, design and science. For example, at Number 24 was the hospital; at Number 26, between 1865 and 1882, was William Morris’s bustling design firm. Intrigued, I visited the William Morris Gallery, where I learned from curator Anna Mason that his daughter Jenny had suffered from epilepsy, which had cast a shadow over her younger sister May. William too was suspected of having had the condition, but no hard proof of it seemed to exist. What astounded me was that Morris biographers didn’t mention this hospital except in passing, although it was in his time entirely dedicated to the care of epilepsy and paralysis. How can anyone have missed the implications?

**Anna:** What you find can depend on what you’re looking for. As a student, I was a mediaevalist, and walked around the Square for years without being conscious of its medical institutions.

William Morris: ‘Science - we have loved her well, and followed her diligently, what will she do? I feel she is so much in the pay of the counting house...’

*The Decorative Arts*: Lecture to the Trades Guild, 1877

*Sue:* I’m sure the Morris family would have intensively researched treatments for Jenny’s illness, as any family with biographer Jan Marsh. Nor does the novel explain why Morris biographers didn’t mention this hospital except in passing, although it was in his time entirely dedicated to the care of epilepsy and paralysis. How can anyone have missed the implications?

**Our collaboration:** the visual art created by Caroline Isgar, Sue Ridge, Julia Dwyer and Andrew Thomas in no way illustrates the novel written by Leslie Forbes with biographer Jan Marsh. Nor does the novel explain the art. Each discipline has expanded on the other.

**EMBROIDERED MINDS** is a collaboration between artists, writers and academics to investigate the relevance today of a ‘conspiracy of silence’ about epilepsy in the family of designer, poet and social reformer William Morris. Our investigation takes the form of a 4-part novel, each part linked with site-specific art exhibitions in locations related to the Morrises. While informed by archival material, the project is not about what did happen, but what might have.

Exploring the history of Queen Square’s National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery (NHNN), we discovered mysterious connections between 19th-century neurologist William Gowers and the Morrises. This exhibition, launched for the Gowers’ celebration at the History of Neurology and Psychiatry Symposium, weaves art by Gowers with the artists’ current work and extracts from the novel. By allowing story to embroider history, we hope to enlighten both.

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in a similar situation would today. Personally, I'm interested in the rich history surrounding the subject of the Morrices and epilepsy. Art, History and Science are equally important to me. With any site-based project, the work grows as the artist carries out research and then starts making, then the making generates more research.

Caroline Isgar: Initially I responded to the siblings' relationship in the shadow of Jenny's epilepsy. Then Jan's chapters in the novel, where Jenny and her mother Jane are embroidering together, gave me another perspective. Rather than portray identifiable Morris women, I chose to create archetypal portraits overlaid with patterns that suggest wallpaper and embroidery, but also the condition of being veiled, restrained. Orchestration of colour and pattern parallels the Morris women's personal lives and their status as women at that time. I wanted the sense of images being memories, timeless, so that we can identify with the experience now.

‘Q watched Jenny drift towards that place his friend Edgar Allen Poe had termed “the gulf beyond”. An Absence seizure.’

From the forthcoming novel - 'Embroidered Minds of the Morris Women'

History, lost & found: Etching, Gowers' son recalled, was 'well suited to his precise and detailed style, and he became an enthusiastic and prolific etcher'. The proudest moment of Gowers' life, it seems, was when one of his etchings was exhibited at the Royal Academy.

In their 2012 biography of William Gowers, his great-granddaughter Ann Scott, together with neurologists Andrew Lees (of the NHNN) and Mervyn Edie, record how they discovered a lost album of Gowers' drawings and etchings at Queen Square's archive.

Caroline: My choice of medium relates to Leslie's narrative: changing states of etching plate like changing states of mind. Drypoint suggests a less controlled line: crude tools, delicate marks, fragments; intensity of line softening with each printing.

Leslie: From what undiscovered country of the mind does 'story' - fiction, art - emerge and diverge from science and history? Even if a creative person wore EEG wires for a lifetime, could statistics answer this question? Stories are born with the storyteller; stories are migrants, shape-shifters; stories often don't wind up where their creators had intended.

Marjorie: People shouldn't equate creativity with problem solving. Some scientists are like composers or etchers, searching for problems instead of solutions. Science too is a creative act. The scientist must choose what to study and how. To access people's inner lives, though, fiction and art can be more effective than a purely academic approach. Inclusive rather than exclusive, they can be better teaching tools: communicating science through people's artistic response to it. The first lecture I give my students is to encourage them to move from being passive receptors of facts to active researchers.

Anna: As the Morris Gallery’s curator, I became familiar with Queen Square through the Art Workers’ Guild, founded by admirers of William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement - which Morris and John Ruskin inspired.

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Anna: It’s possible May destroyed Jane’s and Jenny’s letters, but if so, I don’t believe she did this out of spite. Jenny’s condition was regarded as a private family matter. There are examples of Jenny’s embroidery in the Gallery, she was certainly very proficient but her passion was for literature. Unfortunately scholarly pursuits were thought to cause seizures.

Jan: Medical opinion declared it inadvisable for people with epilepsy to marry [it was still against the law in the U.K. until 1970, in fact] so William would have known that Jenny required lifetime care. And Jane and May, ill or healthy, needed financial security, therefore he redoubled his efforts with product expansion, marketing etc to ensure that his business was a commercial success. At the same time he threw energy into idealistic political activity, half-hoping that a socialist revolution would bring about such changes as the NHS has done.

3rd & 8th DISPLAYS
Sue’s jewel-like x-rays of a Queen Square archive box containing Gowers’ triple-wick candle, Von Frey hairs (which test a patient’s reaction to pain), Weber’s 2-point discriminator compasses and electrodes. On one image the x-rays are collaged onto Leslie’s brain scan, which is displayed next to books by John Duncan, Leslie’s epileptologist at Queen Square.

4th DISPLAY
A sense of vertigo overcomes anyone viewing Sue’s epileptic tulip wallpaper. Its selvedge edge is adapted from original drawings of a seizing woman in the archives’ Gowers collection.

Jan: Fictionalising Jane Morris’ letters and thoughts, as I do in the novel, was one way of apprehending how she felt about her daughter’s epilepsy, and whether she believed that William had the condition himself. Very little direct evidence of Jane’s inner life is recorded in the form of diaries, and she did not express feelings openly to others (or if she did, they did not share the knowledge). In biography one must imagine what it was like to be the person one writes about - imaginatively consider how they experienced the world and responded to it, how other people assessed them. Thus biography is a balance of objective and subjective storytelling.

Leslie: I am convinced that Morris had epilepsy, largely because his symptoms correspond to mine and to a condition known as Temporal Lobe Epilepsy. Is it possible that TLE, common to a long list of novelists, poets and artists, might have led to Morris’s obsessional nature and his creativity? Can TLE be inherited?

Renata: There might be an inherited predisposition, the result of a slight weakness in the brain’s architecture of connections. However, epilepsy is an over-encompassing diagnosis of Morris’s symptoms. Various conditions could be responsible.