

## 'I consider I am now to collect facts not form theories': Mary Merrifield and empirical research into technical art history during the 1840s

Review of:

*La Donna che amava i colori. Mary P. Merrifield: Lettere dall'Italia, 1845-1846*, edited by Giovanni Mazzaferro, Milan: Officina Libraria, 2018; 205pp; 19.90€ pbk; ISBN 88-99765-70-5

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The Keep Archives at Brighton house a series of notebooks, which contain a batch of transcribed letters, written in English from Continental Europe (mostly Italy), dating between October 1845 and June 1846. At first glance, they appear unfocussed, covering myriad topics from how to cook polenta or eat a boiled egg without an egg-cup, comments on the advantages of learning languages, and a note that a train-line now connects Venice to the *terra ferma*. It quickly becomes apparent, however, that the major points of discussion concern the finding of historical manuscripts on painting techniques and analysis of their contents as well as thoughts about places visited, works of art seen, and experts encountered in connection with this hunting down of primary source material. One also soon realises that the letters were written by a Victorian middle-class woman, who left her husband and four children at home in Brighton, taking only her oldest child, her eighteen-year-old son Charles, and a lady's maid with her, and that her fact-finding mission was underwritten by the British government.

Who was this person? She was Mary Philadelphia Merrifield (1804-1889), whose expertise on historic painting materials and techniques led her to publish important editions of historic manuscripts, culminating in her *Original Treatises ... on the Arts of Painting* of 1849.<sup>1</sup> Her work was publicly acknowledged at home and abroad: she was made an honorary member of the Accademia di Belle Arti of Bologna, elected a member of the Royal Society of Arts in London, and awarded a civil pension. Giovanni Mazzaferro publishes Merrifield's foreign correspondence from Italy of 1845-6 in full for the first time, via an Italian translation, and proves himself an excellent guide through her letters.

### **Context: The finding of the letters, other scholars' work, and Mazzaferro's contribution**

Mazzaferro's work, here and elsewhere, has certainly shed much light on Mary Merrifield, adding to the growing scholarship about her, especially in the last decade, which Mazzaferro summarises concisely in one note.<sup>2</sup> Reviewing the scholarly landscape about Merrifield in more detail is a salient reminder of a larger and burgeoning interest in the role of women in all areas of academia, including in the nascent field of art history from the

<sup>1</sup> Mary P. Merrifield, *Original Treatises: dating from the XIIth to XVIIIth centuries on the arts of painting, in oil, miniature, mosaic, and on glass; of gilding, dyeing, and the preparation of colours and artificial gems: preceded by a general introduction; with translations, prefaces, and notes*, London, J. Murray, 1849.

<sup>2</sup> Giovanni Mazzaferro, *La Donna che amava i colori. Mary P. Merrifield: Lettere dall'Italia, 1845-1846*, Florence, 2018, 7, note 3.

nineteenth century onwards. The work of the paintings restorer and art historian Zahira Véliz Bomford deserves particular notice as she has been researching Merrifield's life and scholarly output for decades and is working towards a definitive monograph. Indeed, it is Véliz Bomford who, in 2016, found the letters that Mazzaferro has now published, together with another batch relating to Merrifield's earlier research trip to France in 1844-5.<sup>3</sup> Véliz Bomford included some in depth analysis of both sets of letters in an article for the *Burlington Magazine's* ongoing series about the history of conservation and in a paper she delivered at a conference at the National Gallery in November 2017.<sup>4</sup> Alexandra Loske, art historian and oral historian at the University of Sussex, followed up on these findings through an exhibition about Merrifield at Brighton Museum & Art Gallery's Museum Lab (January-May 2017), which served to make Merrifield's life and work better known to a wider audience. The exhibition drew attention to Merrifield's correspondence, and Loske continues to lead a collaborative research project with The Keep Archives and Brighton Museum & Art Gallery to transcribe all 150 letters relating to Merrifield's continental research trips of the mid-1840s, an undertaking that will ensure the correspondence is available in its original language and in its entirety.<sup>5</sup> Merrifield and her work on technical art history also featured in the 2009 doctoral dissertation of Caroline Palmer, which broadened the discussion by comparing Merrifield's work with that of other contemporary women writers on the arts, including Maria Callcott, Anna Jameson and Elizabeth Eastlake.<sup>6</sup> Last year the part of Palmer's thesis which discussed Merrifield's study of historic artistic techniques reappeared in a blog by Giovanni Mazzaferro.<sup>7</sup>

The new edited translation of Merrifield's correspondence of 1845-6 is only the latest fruit of a long-standing interest that Mazzaferro has taken in disseminating information about Merrifield to an international audience via his dual-language blog – a fact he modestly hides away in a footnote.<sup>8</sup> Most recently, to mark the publication of this book, Mazzaferro

<sup>3</sup> The letters are preserved within a group entitled 'Ten booklets of transcriptions of letters from Mary P. Merrifield to her husband, John, 4 Grand Parade, Brighton, and her parents, during her trips to Venice via Dieppe, Paris, Turin, Milan and Padua in 1844-45 and 1845-46', at the East Sussex Record Office, The Keep, Brighton, ref: ESRO, ACC 8642/1/1.

<sup>4</sup> See Zahira Véliz Bomford, 'Mrs. Merrifield's quest: a new methodology for technical art history', *Burlington Magazine*, June 2017, 465-75. Her paper, 'Mary Philadelphia Merrifield's writing on the arts: navigating networks in the Victorian age', delivered at the conference, 'Knowing "as much of art as the cat"?: Women writers on the Old Masters', National Gallery, 10 November 2017 (<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/whats-on/calendar/knowning-as-much-of-art-as-the-cat-19th-century-women-writers-on-the-old-masters>), will be published in a special issue of *19 – Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Spring 2019).

<sup>5</sup> See 'Victorian colour researcher Mary Merrifield's epistolary travel diaries', <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/clhlwr/research/merrifield>. See also Alexandra Loske, 'Mary Philadelphia Merrifield: color history as expertise', *Visual Resources. An International Journal on Images and their Uses*, October 2016 (<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01973762.2016.1214802>).

<sup>6</sup> See Caroline Palmer, 'Women writers on art and perceptions of the female connoisseur, 1780–1860', unpublished PhD diss., Oxford Brookes, 2009. See also Caroline Palmer, 'Colour, chemistry and corsets: Mary Philadelphia Merrifield's 'Dress as a fine art'', *Costume*, 47:1, 2013, 3-27 (DOI: 10.1179/0590887612Z.00000000012).

<sup>7</sup> See <http://letteraturaartistica.blogspot.com/2014/05/caroline-palmer-mary-philadelphia.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, 8, note 3; see <http://letteraturaartistica.blogspot.com/>. The version of the blog in Italian is the one to look at as the English translation is rather patchy.

has posted an annotated transcription of two letters – nos. 10 and 20.<sup>9</sup> An advantage of the online version is the availability of the material in the original English (as well as in an Italian translation) and another is the inclusion of illustrations of the most important works of art discussed in these texts.

Mazzaferro has been blogging about Mary Merrifield regularly since 2014. He started off by posting a summary of her life, much of the material from which, in updated form, informs the substantial introductory essay to the current book.<sup>10</sup> He went on to reconstruct, in three related posts, Merrifield's Italian trip of 1845-6, using the only information then available – what was recorded in the *Original Treatises* (1849). From that published source, he ingeniously retraced the libraries, archives, public and private art collections visited, the people met, and the paintings inspected. While the subsequent discovery of Merrifield's related correspondence has meant that some information in those posts is now outdated or incorrect, Mazzaferro has decided to keep them visible because, in his opinion, 'they testify what information was available before the letters were discovered and how the research on Mary P. Merrifield has evolved in recent years'.<sup>11</sup> His decision is justified for other reasons. There is a wealth of information contained in these well-illustrated blogs – some of which does not find a place in the present volume – which reveals Mazzaferro's command of his immediate material and its hinterland. It was a fillip to consult these blogs while reading the current book so I would encourage Mazzaferro to bring them up to date through adding corrective glosses, where necessary.

Mazzaferro's scholarship into Merrifield has encompassed more than her trip to Italy of 1845-6 and her *Original Treatises* book of 1849. For one thing, he has written blogs which help to contextualize Merrifield's work, including a two-part online feature about Merrifield's first publication – her translation of Cennino Cennini's *Treatise on Painting* – and the press reviews it generated,<sup>12</sup> while another blog offers a useful overview of the British art world's obsession with the so-called 'Venetian secret'.<sup>13</sup> It demonstrates how Merrifield's research into historic documentation can be viewed as a later chapter in a long drawn-out saga involving various ill-fated attempts by the British art establishment to uncover what was held to be lost knowledge concerning how the Old Masters had produced their well-preserved oil paintings. Nor should it be forgotten that in 2015 Mazzaferro published his first book, *Le Belle Arti a Venezia nei manoscritti di Pietro e Giovanni Edwards*. This publication is essentially another facet of his research into Merrifield given that she studied these papers during her Italian research trip.

<sup>9</sup> See <https://letteraturaartistica.blogspot.com/2018/06/mary-philadelphia-merrifield13.html> and <https://letteraturaartistica.blogspot.com/2018/06/mary-merrifield84.html>.

<sup>10</sup> See [http://letteraturaartistica.blogspot.com/2014/05/giovanni-mazzaferro-mary-philadelphia\\_21.html](http://letteraturaartistica.blogspot.com/2014/05/giovanni-mazzaferro-mary-philadelphia_21.html).

<sup>11</sup> See [http://letteraturaartistica.blogspot.com/2014/05/giovanni-mazzaferro-mary-philadelphia\\_21.html](http://letteraturaartistica.blogspot.com/2014/05/giovanni-mazzaferro-mary-philadelphia_21.html).

<sup>12</sup> Giovanni Mazzaferro, 'Mary P. Merrifield and the First English Translation of Cennino Cennini's *Book of the Art*: the Press Reviews', Part 1, 14 April: <http://letteraturaartistica.blogspot.com/2017/04/mary-philadelphia-merrifield.html>; and Part 2, 21 April 2017: <http://letteraturaartistica.blogspot.com/2017/04/mary-philadelphia-merrifield50.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Giovanni Mazzaferro, 'Indiana Jones and the "Venetian Secret": from the Provis Manuscript to Mary Philadelphia Merrifield', 4 March 2016: <http://letteraturaartistica.blogspot.com/2016/03/venetian-secret.html>.

A final aspect of Mazzaferro's blogs is his transcriptions of earlier research undertaken by his father, Luciano Mazzaferro, on all the manuscripts that Merrifield commented on in her *Original Treatises*.<sup>14</sup> This sub-group of blogs assesses Merrifield's contribution in light of related work being undertaken by other scholars at the time as well as how her work is regarded today. Viewed as a whole, the quantity and quality of Mazzaferro's contribution to Merrifield studies deserves recognition. Hitherto Mazzaferro's blogs have been rather overlooked, at least in British circles. But his latest contribution, being in traditional paper format, should reach different audiences, who can then be guided to material currently available only through digital platforms. Mazzaferro's research into Merrifield is part of his overarching research exercise to investigate core primary and secondary texts relevant to the historiography of art history. His work is especially important for encouraging contemporary Italian scholars not to overlook the work of certain pioneering British nineteenth-century scholars in relation to medieval and Renaissance Italian painting, including its manufacture and iconography. It should encourage international exchanges of ideas on the historiography of art history, especially between Italian and English-speaking scholars.

### **Mazzaferro's introductory essay**

The edited translation is prefaced by a twenty-five-page introduction, which while not claiming to be a full biography – Mazzaferro points readers to Véliz Bomford's future monograph – is deliberately wide-ranging to reflect the multifaceted nature of Merrifield's interests and activities. Although arranged in such a way that there are some odd jumps between subsections and some repetitions, Mazzaferro covers many important bases. He notes the tendency to pick and choose from Merrifield's life according to whether scholars are approaching her from the angle of art or science, and suggests that neither restricted viewpoint does her justice. Consequently, Mazzaferro, engaging with the available secondary literature across various disciplines, makes a point of including information that summarises her broad range of activities, and offers some suggestions as to her motivations. He notes that, after the 1840s, she published on other aspects of art including a practical manual about watercolour painting and articles about colour as it related to both exhibits at the Great Exhibition of 1851 and to fashion for women and children. He also notes the interest that Merrifield expressed in her letters in foodstuffs and agricultural production, suggesting that this might well relate to the Irish Famine of 1845.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, he draws attention to Merrifield's interest in the natural world, which is hinted at in the letters through passing references to nature, but which was given full expression later on when she wrote a book about natural history in the Brighton area and engaged in cutting-edge research about algae, interests which Mazzaferro hypothesizes may have been generated by the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species* in 1859.<sup>16</sup> Merrifield's ongoing, related interests in education and books for children are also recorded, which, as Mazzaferro points out, were topics which interested other women art writers of the day, notably Lady

<sup>14</sup> E.g., see [http://letteraturaartistica.blogspot.com/2014/06/luciano-mazzaferro-original-treatises\\_19.html](http://letteraturaartistica.blogspot.com/2014/06/luciano-mazzaferro-original-treatises_19.html).

<sup>15</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, 'Progresso e amor di Patria', 19-20.

<sup>16</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, 'Una scienziata poliedrica', 16.

Callcott and Elizabeth Rigby,<sup>17</sup> the latter the future wife of the painter, connoisseur and arts administrator, Charles Eastlake – of whom more later. Mazzaferro also records Merrifield's association with the women's movement from the 1860s, although he argues that she was not a radical feminist.<sup>18</sup>

Mazzaferro takes the time to fill out the picture of Merrifield's early life which, he admits, is hard to do given the lack of information.<sup>19</sup> Adding to what Véliz Bomford has published, he presents the scraps of evidence concerning her origins (her parents were of Welsh descent but moved to London; her father was a lawyer) and upbringing (Mazzaferro surmises she must have been educated in languages, sciences and art, although he does not state how or where she received such an education). He cites a few of the latest pieces in the jigsaw, noting the painstaking archival work involved in bringing new evidence to light, including her father's will, discovered in the Public Record Office, which confirms that he died when his daughter was only four years old and a reference to Merrifield's marriage to the lawyer John Merrifield in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, which indicates her elite status.

What the introduction captures particularly well is the unusual nature of Merrifield's domestic arrangements.<sup>20</sup> While Mazzaferro is at pains to note that his subject shared Victorian values and was convinced of the important role of women in the upbringing of their offspring,<sup>21</sup> he admits that it was anything but normal behaviour for a Victorian wife and mother of five children to take herself off on lengthy foreign trips. Nor was it usual to have her husband and some of her children heavily involved in work for which she took the credit. The letters reveal the extent of their involvement in a way that was not previously recognised: her husband wrote the Introduction for her second publication, *The Art of Fresco Painting* (1846), because she had ran out of time to do so herself before setting off for Italy; he discussed how useful it would be to have illustrations to accompany the text of her book and talked through other possible commissions, urging her, for instance, to take up Eastlake's suggestion of producing a translation of Theophilus's treatise (something she ultimately relinquished to the more able Latinist Robert Hendrie); one son, Frederic, compiled the index to her 1846 book; and another, Charles, not only accompanied her to Italy, as he had done on her first research trip to France the year before, but also was responsible for transcribing most of the archival documents.<sup>22</sup> Mazzaferro reiterates a point made by other scholars that at a time when women usually worked for men, it is striking to find things reversed in the Merrifield house.

Mazzaferro is also right to highlight how the letters can be read as revealing historical records of the trials and tribulations that Merrifield faced on her Victorian-era journeys, including adverse weather, discomforts caused by dirty hotels, overpriced food and complex transport arrangements,<sup>23</sup> matters exacerbated by her own poor health.<sup>24</sup> The

<sup>17</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, 'Il viaggio in Italia', 28.

<sup>18</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, 'L'orgoglio di una donna', 25-6.

<sup>19</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, 'I suoi primi quarant'anni', 9-10.

<sup>20</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, 'La famiglia Merrifield', 23-4.

<sup>21</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, 'Introduzione', 9.

<sup>22</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, 'La famiglia Merrifield', 23. See also Letter 8: Milan, 15 November 1845, 57, where Merrifield, on advising her husband about how he might phrase the dedication to Sir Robert Peel of *The Art of Fresco Painting*, noted: 'Sono molto grata a te e al mio caro Fred per quello che entrambi avete fatto per il libro'.

<sup>23</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, 'Il viaggio in Italia', 26-8.

<sup>24</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, Letter 35: Milan, 10 May 1846.

letters are equally fascinating for what they record of life in Northern Italy, especially in Piedmont, Lombardy, the Veneto and Emilia, in the years preceding the revolutions in the Italian Peninsula in 1848.<sup>25</sup> Mazzaferro describes Merrifield as an observer whose eye was 'sharp and never banal'.<sup>26</sup> He highlights some of her interesting observations, including her indignant comments about the lot of many women, the over-dominance of the church, the presence of censorship, and the fact that intellectual life was under threat from the papal government's curtailing of the influence of universities. Mazzaferro points out that this picture of Italy as old-fashioned is balanced by Merrifield's recording of the technological advances she witnessed there,<sup>27</sup> including her first sight in Venice of what she describes as a 'an omnibus on water' (the antecedent, one imagines, of today's *vaporetto*), and witnessing the opening in January 1846 of the railway bridge connecting the lagoon city to the mainland, which, in turn, enabled her own departure a few weeks later by rail.

The introduction usefully places Mary's letters in a parallel context too – that of the London art world during the early part of Queen Victoria's reign.<sup>28</sup> Here the most important debate concerned how the newly-rebuilt Houses of Parliament should be decorated – in terms of imagery and medium – and who should undertake the prestigious commissions. These all-important questions were discussed, finalised, and then acted on by a Fine Arts Commission, set up by the British government in 1841, with Prince Albert as President and Eastlake as Secretary. Once it had been resolved to use only artists born or working in Britain and to employ the medium of fresco, the commissioners became keen to disseminate up-to-date information about the technique given that the painters selected for the task were not well-versed in it. It is this desire for knowledge about techniques which explains why people started to become very interested in researching the methods employed in the past by the most esteemed Old Masters. The results of government-inspired research were published in regular *Reports*, which, as Mazzaferro's footnotes demonstrate, are an important repository of information about the state of knowledge of technical art history in Britain during the 1840s; they clearly deserve to be studied more fully. While Mazzaferro refers to the work of Charles Heath Wilson (he went to Italy and Germany in 1843 to study medieval frescoes and other murals, his resulting research being published in the *Second Report* of 1843),<sup>29</sup> it would have been appropriate also to mention the related work of William Dyce, one of the painters chosen to produce a mural for the Houses of Parliament and someone very interested in art education in Britain. Dyce's notes from a study tour, undertaken in 1845 'to see the frescoes of the old Masters and pick up information on many points of practice', were appended to the *Sixth Report* (1846), which Eastlake apparently 'devoured', calling it a 'very valuable contribution'.<sup>30</sup> The reports reveal the names of those in an expanding camp, who were the exponents of a new kind of art history no longer dependent on connoisseurial opinion but rather on evidence provided by hard facts found in archives.

<sup>25</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, 'Introduzione', 9.

<sup>26</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, 'Il viaggio in Italia', 27: 'un'osservatrice acuta e mai banale'.

<sup>27</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, 'Il nuovo che avanza', 29-30.

<sup>28</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, 'Gli anni quaranta', 11-13.

<sup>29</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, Letter 16: 11 January 1846, 102, and especially note 1.

<sup>30</sup> See Carly Collier, 'British artists and early Italian art, c.1770-1845: The pre Pre-Raphaelites?' unpublished PhD diss., University of Warwick, 2013, 230.

Mazzaferro's introduction fills in some gaps about Merrifield's research work prior to her employment by the Fine Arts Commission. He notes that it was on account of being inspired to play what role she could that she entered the field and produced, comparatively early on, the first ever English translation in 1844 of Cennino Cennini's *Libro dell'Arte*,<sup>31</sup> based on the 1821 Italian edition by Giuseppe Tambroni and which contained an ample section dedicated to fresco painting as practised in Italy at the end of the thirteenth century. To answer why she felt up to this demanding task, especially as we now know that her language skills were good but not excellent, we would need to know more about her training in science, languages and art history up to this point; it would also be useful to find out more about any family involvement in the production of this first book and about her relationship with the publisher, Edward Lumley.

Mazzaferro suggests that her work gained importance 'when compared to Wilson's disappointing report',<sup>32</sup> and that it was Merrifield's desire to extend her knowledge of sources that led her to write her second book, *The Art of Fresco Painting* (1846),<sup>33</sup> the publication which brought her to the full attention of the government. Worth mentioning here, because Mazzaferro does not go into the details (he does in his blog), is what her second book of 1846 comprised. A roll-call of its contents is impressive: a fifty-page introduction in which she examined all the pigments referred to in the book and rationalised their naming, followed by two sections of extracts, the first one being more extended citations from Vitruvius, Theophilus, Alberti, Cennino, Vasari, Borghini, Armenini, Pozzo, Pacheco, Palomino and John Martin; the second being shorter excerpts from the work of other writers, Alessandro da Morrone, Vasari, Lanzi, Bottari-Ticozzi, Malvasia, Baldinucci, Ridolfi, Gaye, Mengs, and Bellori. Listing all the primary sources immediately demonstrates how taxing this second book was in comparison with her first as it involved the compiling of an anthology from published (and very rare) historic texts on artistic techniques (the first book had been a straightforward translation from just one text) and an ability to decipher scripts in more languages than just Italian. According to Merrifield's assessment of the book in one of her letters, the main purpose was 'to give in one Vol. what is now contained in 9 or 10, & in foreign languages'.<sup>34</sup> This idea of disseminating correct information to a native, largely monoglot readership had fuelled her 1844 translation and would become a leitmotif in her work.

Another big question is how Merrifield came to the attention of the government and whether the main factor was her timely publications. Palmer has suggested that she had a significant meeting with Eastlake and Véliz Bomford has suggested that as Mrs Merrifield's husband, John, had been born in the same year and just 15 miles away from Eastlake, that

<sup>31</sup> Mary P. Merrifield, *A Treatise on Painting: written by Cennino Cennini in the year 1437; and first published in Italian in 1821, with an introduction and notes, by Signor Tambroni: containing practical directions for painting in fresco, secco, oil, and distemper, with the art of gilding and illuminating manuscripts, adopted by the Old Italian masters. Translated by Mrs. Merrifield. With an introductory preface, copious notes, and illustrations in outline from celebrated pictures*, London: Edward Lumley, 1844.

<sup>32</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, 12: 'quando confrontato con la deludente relazione di Wilson'.

<sup>33</sup> Mary P. Merrifield, *The Art of Fresco Painting, as practised by the old Italian and Spanish masters, with a preliminary inquiry into the nature of the colours used in fresco painting, with observations and notes*, London: C. Gilpin, 1846.

<sup>34</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, Letter 3: Paris, 15 October 1845, 39: 'l'oggetto del libro consiste nel fornire in un solo volume ciò che ora è reperibile solo in nove o dieci opere diverse, e per di più in lingue straniere'.

their Devonian families may have known each other. Through whatever mechanism, Merrifield was employed by the Fine Arts Commission to carry on her work in the field and to collect source material specifically about oil painting in Italy; the British government agreed to pay her expenses for a six-month trip starting in the autumn of 1845.<sup>35</sup> As she put on record in the Introduction to her third publication of 1849, she was directed 'to proceed to the North of Italy, for the purpose of collecting MSS. [and 'other sources'] relative to the technical part of painting, with a view principally of ascertaining the processes and methods of oil painting adopted by the Italians' with 'part of the expenses of publication defrayed by Government'. It seems that her research and publication were viewed as some kind of an extension to the Commission's earlier *Reports*. Surely this employment makes her among the first women to be paid by the British government for research; perhaps she will prove to be the very first in the field of art history?

That Merrifield's focus was on oil painting rather than fresco painting seems odd given the Commission's original emphasis on the fresco technique; this issue has not been addressed in any depth hitherto. A likely answer, according to Mazzaferro, relates to the Commissioners' larger vision to promote best practice among British artists more generally, an ambition which stemmed from their concern about the poor state of preservation of many British school pictures.<sup>36</sup> I would suggest that Eastlake probably played a particularly influential role in the shift of emphasis. For one thing, he himself was interested in the history of oil painting at the very same moment (he published his *Materials for a History of Oil Painting* in 1847). For another, through his role as Keeper of the National Gallery, from 1843, he was responsible for the conservation of the national collection, many of whose oil paintings, not least the historic British School pictures, were in a poor state of preservation, a situation that made him keen to find out how he might rectify matters, in part through studying the comparatively well-preserved examples of the continental Old Masters.

Merrifield's task was to source relevant manuscripts which could shed light on the desired and supposedly lost secret of the greatest sixteenth-century Venetian colourists which enabled them to produce pictures of great brilliance which were also highly stable – and hence durable. By the time she returned home in late 1846, she had found and had had transcribed numerous important historic manuscripts. Gaining her employer's permission to publish them under her own name, she produced her third publication, *Original Treatises* (1849).

The contents of this two-volume publication, based on her findings on her research trips, are worth recording here, not least because Mazzaferro omits doing so. It consisted in 300 pages of text, where Merrifield set forth the knowledge she acquired and offered some conclusions and an extensive and up-to-date bibliography. The first part examined the historical evidence about individual artistic techniques associated with illumination, mosaics, glass, gilding, dying, preparation of colours and artificial gems (excluding oil painting). The second part transcribed the oral interviews she had undertaken with Italian artists and restorers. The book also offers explanations of pigments used in painting, their properties and names; records recipes for making oils and varnishes; and provides a

<sup>35</sup> See Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, Letter 31: Bologna, 12 April 1846, 165, and Letter 32: Bologna, 19 April 1846, 168, 171. See also Véliz Bomford, 'Merrifield's methodology', 469, note 41, and 468, where she suggests Merrifield 'was in correspondence with these Commissioners [Peel, Sir Francis Egerton, and Eastlake] even before she was working formally under their patronage'.

<sup>36</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, 'Gli anni quaranta', 12.

summary of the procedures used in the manufacture of paint. The reviews of it pointed out the practical use that her work could be put to – as had been the case with assessments of her earlier publications. *Blackwood's Magazine* hoped Merrifield would continue to contribute to the field because they felt 'quite sure that her judicious mind and clear style may be most profitably employed in the service of art, to whose practical advancement she has contributed so much.'<sup>37</sup> But she did not carry on in the field, and switched, as noted above, to researching natural history.

Mazzaferro offers several likely motivations for Merrifield's involvement in technical art history, a prime one being patriotism. Although in the Introduction to her second book, *The Art of Fresco Painting*, Merrifield noted that the Commissioners had found a 'gentleman fully competent to the task' of recovering information about the fresco technique from old treatises she explained: 'the subject coinciding with my own pursuits and inclinations, I was induced to pursue the inquiry, from the persuasion, that the introduction of the art into this country, would be the means of founding a great English school of painting'.<sup>38</sup> Here she was reflecting a standard view; many contemporaries and earlier commentators had debated how best to encourage a revival of the British School of painting. However, few were actually in a position to undertake the primary research needed to bring important historical technical treatises to light apart from Wilson, Dyce, Eastlake and Hendrie; Merrifield's being willing and able to do so is, therefore, noteworthy. Unsurprisingly, in the light of her nationalistic sentiment, she sent a copy of her 1844 publication to Sir Robert Peel, the Prime Minister, in the hope that it would be of use to the Fine Arts Commission with which Peel was heavily involved. In a similar vein, she dedicated her subsequent book of 1849 to Peel.

A second motivation, according to Mazzaferro, was her innate love of colour,<sup>39</sup> which he says shines forth in her letters in the descriptions of places and people,<sup>40</sup> and which was linked to her profound interest in pigments and minerals. The latter interest relates, in turn, according to Mazzaferro, to a third motivation: her abiding love of natural science. He points out that ever since her translation of Cennini, Merrifield had been keen to find out which were the pigments used by painters of the past, and at the same time she was interested in colour theory and knew of seminal texts being produced at the time such as Eastlake's translation of Goethe's colour theory (1840) and the 1839 publication by the French chemist, Michel Eugène Chevreul.<sup>41</sup> Mazzaferro stresses that when she wished to determine the physical composition of pigments, she did this primarily 'and above all through experimentation that she did herself or through the help of friends who were chemists'.<sup>42</sup>

While I fully agree that Merrifield was interested in science and am aware that she conducted some chemical experiments at certain points in her life, from reading the batch of letters under review and from my understanding of what Eastlake was hoping to achieve through the Fine Arts Commission, I would suggest that in fact she undertook very little experimentation during the time she was employed by the British government. I would go

<sup>37</sup> *Blackwood's Magazine*, 57:356, June 1845, 718.

<sup>38</sup> Merrifield, *Art of Fresco Painting*, vii.

<sup>39</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, 'L'amore per i colori', 20-3.

<sup>40</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, 'Il viaggio in Italia', 28.

<sup>41</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, 22.

<sup>42</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, 21: '(e soprattutto) in virtù di esperimenti condotti personalmente o con l'aiuto di amici chimici'.

so far as to say that it is misleading to overemphasize her practical use of experiments in this period, precisely because she was tasked to work in other ways. Indeed, the letters themselves make it abundantly clear that Merrifield pursued what might be defined as a two-pronged attack to find out about historic painting techniques.

Firstly, and above all, she hunted down facts via scouting out historic manuscripts. She proudly laid out in one letter of February 1846 the archival material she had uncovered thus far: one manuscript which dealt exclusively with colours and which no-one else had been allowed to see; the Edwards papers from which she had got copies of all she wanted (despite the opposition of a powerful Venetian nobleman – Agostino Sagredo); a manuscript on colours in the University Library of Padua, where women were not usually granted admission as well as relevant material in Venice's Marciana Library.<sup>43</sup> All this meant that she was in possession of three complete manuscripts and parts of two others, a tally that only grew during her remaining time abroad.

She also noted in the same letter that she had a mine of information derived from interviews. Conducting oral interviews with those credited with expert knowledge was her second major research method. In 1845, for instance, Merrifield met the notorious Venetian restorer-cum-forgery Antonio Fidanza, who told her that he had discovered the 'Venetian secret' and was willing to divulge it in full detail to the British government in return for a £200 fee, an honorary title, and a pension for his wife after his death.<sup>44</sup> She noted down everything that he was willing to tell her during a very lengthy conversation even though she regarded his claims as spurious. What was taken rather more seriously were the rumours that Pietro Edwards, a Venetian citizen of English origins who had been in charge of the Venetian state's conservation studio in the late eighteenth century, had discovered 'the secret' and sold it to the Venetian State. Merrifield was consequently tasked with gaining access to the Edwards papers, something she achieved by getting in touch with Giovanni Edwards, the son of the deceased restorer. Although it turns out that she was not given full access to what was potentially available,<sup>45</sup> recent scholars have confirmed that, nonetheless, her conclusion, published in *Original Treatises* that there was no secret hidden in the Edwards papers, is correct. Eastlake in his *Materials for a History of Oil Painting* had likewise dismissed the notion of the existence of a secret formula – in his case he was specifically talking about the technique employed by the Jan and Hubert van Eyck – declaring instead that there was no fundamental difference between the pigments and vehicles used in the past and the present, only that earlier painters had been far more careful in the preparation and application of their materials, for instance avoiding the mixing of stable and unstable pigments – good practices which had ensured the longevity of their productions.<sup>46</sup> It is worth reiterating that both scholars were reaching the same conclusions at precisely the same moment, albeit using different primary sources to do so.

Dismissing unreliable sources and 'fake news' from the equation, Eastlake and Merrifield were keen to uncover genuinely illuminating documentation and relevant

<sup>43</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, Letter 24: Padua, 22 February 1846, 134-5.

<sup>44</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, Letter 10: Milan, 3 December 1845, 69-70.

<sup>45</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, 94, note 13; also Letter 19: 25 January 1846, 115.

<sup>46</sup> See Susanna Avery-Quash and Corina Meyer, "'Substituting an approach to historical evidence for the vagueness of speculation": Charles Lock Eastlake and Johann David Passavant's contribution to the professionalization of art-historical study through source-based research', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 18, June 2018, 17-18.

information. This approach was in line with the current assumptions of German university academics, who from the 1820s had been formulating the ground rules for how best to conduct historical study, and who were convinced of the value of working from empirical evidence.<sup>47</sup> Some of Eastlake's contemporaries in Germany, including F.T. Kugler, J.D. Passavant and Gustav Waagen, espoused this approach in their studies relating to the fledgling branch discipline of the history of art. Interestingly, Eastlake was in correspondence with Passavant in Frankfurt over early Northern European oil painting techniques at the very same time that he was also in touch with Merrifield about Italian oil painting techniques on account of her work for the Fine Arts Commission.<sup>48</sup> In both cases, he discussed historic documents, many of which were resurfacing in the archives, some through the hard work of his correspondents, Passavant and Merrifield.

Mazzaferro emphasises such an empirical research method as the golden thread ('una continuità assoluta')<sup>49</sup> running through all of Merrifield's eclectic endeavours. Interestingly, he draws attention to her awareness of the English tradition of empiricism in science, specifically to the fact that more than once she referred to the father of empirical scientific study in Britain, the seventeenth-century scientist Francis Bacon. In her *Original Treatises*, for instance, she recorded Bacon as stating that experimentation should always precede theory.<sup>50</sup> This helps explain, in Mazzaferro's estimation, why Merrifield constantly expressed her mission to be a fact-finding one, and he quotes from one letter where she wrote: 'I write down every thing I am told, without forming an opinion of its correctness, because I consider I am now to collect facts not form theories which can be easily deduced when the facts are sifted & digested'.<sup>51</sup> I chose part of the phrase as the title of the current review, as I believe that it is the key to understanding Merrifield's *modus operandi*. Mazzaferro thinks this methodological stance explains why Merrifield did not spend time on concerns of a traditionally connoisseurial kind – he is particularly insistent to make sure his Italian readership fully comprehends that Merrifield was not interested in making attributions.<sup>52</sup>

In Mazzaferro's estimation, Merrifield is not a 'philologist' either, a noun he conjures up only to dismiss immediately. As proof, he draws attention to her noting that she never bothered to transcribe documents she came across which contained information similar to material she had already gathered, which, as Mazzaferro rightly points out, would not have been the reaction of a true philologist.<sup>53</sup> In this connection, Mazzaferro also reminds the reader of the basic fact that nearly all of the manuscripts published in *Original Treatises* had been transcribed by Merrifield's son, Charles.<sup>54</sup> I would only add that in several letters Merrifield stresses the advantage of speaking foreign languages, and draws attention to her

<sup>47</sup> See Avery-Quash and Meyer, 'Eastlake and Passavant', 24-5.

<sup>48</sup> See Avery-Quash and Meyer, 'Eastlake and Passavant', especially 6-16, 29-30.

<sup>49</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, 'Una scienziata poliedrica', 15.

<sup>50</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, 16.

<sup>51</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, 16: 'credo che io sia qui per mettere insieme fatti, e non per elaborare teorie che potranno essere facilmente elaborate quando i fatti saranno passati al setaccio e selezionati'. The passage comes from Letter 18: Venice, 18 January 1846, 112.

<sup>52</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, 'Di fronte alle opere d'arte', 30.

<sup>53</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, 'Una scienziata poliedrica', 16; and, by way of example, Letter 6: Turin, 2 November 1845, 50.

<sup>54</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, 'Una scienziata poliedrica', 16.

own lack of fluency in Italian on more than one occasion. Merrifield can never be considered a philologist as her language skills were simply not up to the mark.

If Merrifield was not a connoisseur or a philologist what does Mazzaferro define her as? He describes her consistently as a 'natural scientist',<sup>55</sup> whose particular study of the natural world was 'primarily technical, with the aim of attempting to reconstruct the materials and processes involved in producing paintings'.<sup>56</sup> Launching off from Merrifield's reference to Bacon, Mazzaferro is keen to emphasize her practical experiments as part and parcel of this scientific, empirical approach. He says 'References to her own scientific experiments are frequent in her art historical work, which further confirms her regard for the scientific method',<sup>57</sup> and he cites an experiment and mentions Merrifield leaving Venice with some paintings, acquired 'for experimentation (or destruction)'. My reading of the situation is slightly different: I would suggest that there is no evidence in her letters from Italy or in the resulting *Original Treatises* which attests to a systematic use of experimentation on her part. Mazzaferro himself mentions the fact that in one letter she notes that she had not brought her chemistry set with her, which implies she did not have the relevant equipment to do any science. Furthermore, when one reads the passage about her acquiring paintings for experimentation in the original English, it becomes clear that she had acquired them because Eastlake had asked for them.<sup>58</sup> Elsewhere, I have pointed out the tension that existed in the scholarly community in Britain at the time and the existence almost of two camps – one, headed up by Eastlake, who promoted the use of historic documentary sources as the most fool-proof way to get at unassailable facts, and the other, led by leading British scientists, including Christopher Barber and John Haslam, who took an opposing view, promoting chemical experimentation as the bedrock for investigating how paintings were made in the past.<sup>59</sup> Bearing this context in mind, if I were I asked to define the type of scholar Merrifield was, at least as evidenced through her private correspondence under review here, I would say she was an empirical researcher, someone who relied principally on primary source material to build up her knowledge base. The importance of Eastlake's influence on all this is something to which we will return.

### The translation and scholarly apparatus

The Italian reader will get an excellent sense of the contents and style of Merrifield's letters from Mazzaferro's translation; his aim to achieve a 'free but respectful' translation has been very largely achieved.<sup>60</sup> He has taken the sensible decision to give idiomatic phrases that are

<sup>55</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, 'Una scienziata poliedrica', 16: 'una scienziata della natura'.

<sup>56</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, 'Di fronte alle opera d'arte', 30: 'la sua prospettiva, di fronte alle opera d'arte, è innanzi tutto tecnica, nel tentativo di ricostruire materiali e fasi di realizzazione dei quadri'.

<sup>57</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, 'Una scienziata poliedrica', 17: 'I riferimenti a esperimenti eseguiti personalmente sono frequenti nelle opere dedicate al mondo dell'arte: ulteriore conferma dell'importanza che la studiosa riconosce al metodo scientifico'.

<sup>58</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, Letter 21: Padua, 5 February 1846, 124.

<sup>59</sup> Avery-Quash and Meyer, 2018, 10-11, 31. See also Jilleen Nadolny, 'A Problem of Methodology: Merrifield, Eastlake and the use of oil-based media by medieval English painters', in I. Verger, ed, *ICOM-CC Preprints, 14th Triennial Meeting, The Hague, 12- 16 September 2005*, London: James & James, 2005, II, 1028-33.

<sup>60</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, 'Criteri di edizione', 32: 'una traduzione rispettosa degli originali, ma libera'.

particularly hard to translate in their English original in the notes.<sup>61</sup> Another reasonable editorial intervention is the insertion of the full names of people where abbreviations are found in the original, which Mazzaferro has been able to do, thanks to his command of the subject.

A careful comparison of the original English of Merrifield's texts with Mazzaferro's Italian translation reveals only a handful of mistakes, most of which are inconsequential, such as misspelling of names,<sup>62</sup> the inadvertent changing of the gender of person,<sup>63</sup> or a misreading of a title.<sup>64</sup> A few further points are, however, worth making to ensure that Mazzaferro's translation is as accurate and nuanced as possible. Firstly, there are a few instances where an incorrect meaning has crept into his translation. One such blip occurs where, towards the end of her Italian sojourn, Merrifield says: 'I consider that I have now completed my search', going on to say that therefore she feels she can progress to sorting out her notes. However, the Italian translation wrongly suggests that she does not feel her work had yet been accomplished.<sup>65</sup> The fact that she *did* feel her work was finished backs up what we have been saying about Merrifield and her opinion that it was the gathering of data – not its analysis – that she regarded as her chief concern.

Secondly, there are a few places where interesting nuance has been lost. One such example concerns Merrifield's receiving visitors: whereas the Italian translation reads: 'Domenica ho avuto altri impegni mattutini',<sup>66</sup> the English version had employed the French word 'levée'. There is a subtle difference here as the original wording suggest that her reputation was such that important people chose to call on her – in this instance, the older Sig. Vallardi and Francesco Rossi, the Brera's Librarian – rather than, as Mazzaferro's translation implies, that the onus was on her to do the 'leg work'. My second example is the passage where Merrifield discusses her business as being principally a fact-gathering exercise, and her declaration that she will be able to elaborate a theory once 'the facts are sifted & digested'. Mazzaferro chooses to translate this phrase as 'quando i fatti saranno passati al setaccio e selezionati',<sup>67</sup> but I think the final verb would be more accurately rendered by 'digerito', as 'to digest' is not the same thing as 'to select' – the point being that Merrifield is not employing any critical faculty in the first and major part of her task but simply listening and absorbing everything she has picked up, and that only once she has – to use the Biblical phrase – 'read, marked and inwardly digested' all the facts, would she feel ready to draw out any conclusions.

<sup>61</sup> E.g., Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, Letter 3: Turin, 30 October 1845, 45, note 2, Merrifield declared that her 'money vanishes like butter before the sun'.

<sup>62</sup> E.g., Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, 11 should read Charles HEATH Wilson (again misspelt as 'Heat' in the index); while on page 37 it should read Sir Henry Ellis, KNIGHT (not 'Knigth') of Hanover.

<sup>63</sup> E.g., Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, Letter 15: Venice, 4 January 1846, 99, and note 26, where, in relation to trying to obtain an interview with the scholar Bianchini, Merrifield suggests Lord Shrewsbury as a useful go-between but Mazzaferro mistranslates this as 'Lady Shrewsbury'.

<sup>64</sup> E.g., Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, Letter 13: Padua, 19 December 1845, 91 – the Italian has translated a pair of names as 'Mr. and Mrs. Evans' and the relevant note consequently refers to 'Mr. Evans a sua moglie'. In fact the original talks of a 'Miss Evans'.

<sup>65</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, Letter 35: Milan, 10 May 1846: The translation incorrectly states: 'Non credo di aver completato le mie ricerche'.

<sup>66</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, Letter 10: Milan, 3 December 1845, 69.

<sup>67</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, Letter 18: Venice, 18 January 1846, 112.

Footnotes have been included, according to Mazzaferro, largely to shed light on Merrifield's two parallel contexts: the English as well as the Italian one. The notes come into their own when Mazzaferro cites relevant secondary literature which enables the reader potentially to engage in further research about the people – whether collectors, scholars, restorers, art dealers, and librarians – or collections cited.<sup>68</sup> Equally useful are the references to the latest critical editions of the manuscripts which Merrifield was looking at. For instance, with reference to the manuscript called *Secreti diversi* which she inspected in the Marciana Library in Venice, Mazzaferro notes that the most recent edition is the one published by Frezzato and Seccaroni in 2010.<sup>69</sup> Another useful aspect of the notes is the way Mazzaferro enhances the information, especially about pictures, provided in Merrifield's private correspondence through citing relevant passages in her published *Original Treatises*. For instance, her brief remark in one letter that she had been to the Brera Gallery at Milan, is filled out in a footnote by a reference to what she went on to write in *Original Treatises* on the pictures she had inspected in that collection, including a substantial paragraph about Leonardo's unfinished *Virgin and Child with a Lamb*.<sup>70</sup>

Mazzaferro also uses his footnotes helpfully to contextualize arguments in art-historical circles at the time, which may not be fully appreciated by readers today. A good instance is found in the text where Merrifield is discussing a book just published by Pietro Selvatico, where she notes the author had given an almost literal translation of the work of Merimée and that he had praised the French chemist's scholarship to the hilt, adding, however, that she was not in agreement. In the accompanying note, Mazzaferro explains that in his *Sull'educazione del pittore storico* Selvatico had suggested that painters in the past had deliberately mixed varnish and colours to obtain a particular brilliance while Merrifield and other English writers vehemently disagreed, thinking that it was precisely the mixing of varnish with colours that led to the rapid deterioration of painting, as seen in the work of artists of the historic British school<sup>71</sup> – and was thus something that definitely was not to be encouraged as best practice, especially as it had no historical basis to it.

Mazzaferro's index is good as far as it goes (it would have been helpful, however, to have employed commas between surnames and first names); it lists the majority of people mentioned in Merrifield's correspondence, with some notable exceptions. I cannot, for instance, fathom why none of the members of Merrifield's family are mentioned, especially in the case of Charles who did so much to assist his mother. The additional inclusion of reference to places, manuscripts and books, pigments and vehicles and even key concepts such 'access to archives', 'professional jealousy', etc., would have significantly increased the usefulness of the book. Perhaps Mazzaferro could make a more comprehensive index available via a blog?

There are two basic elements lacking, in my view, from this otherwise commendable publication. Firstly, it was disappointing to discover that the book has no bibliography of any kind; a booklist could have drawn together excellent material currently scattered in the notes perhaps with some additional titles relevant to the themes discussed. Secondly, the lack of illustrations to accompany the text is a missed opportunity. The cover illustration,

<sup>68</sup> E.g., see Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, 75, note 3, where he lists the literature pertaining to Count Lochis and his collection.

<sup>69</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, 135, note 5.

<sup>70</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, Letter 10: Milan, 3 December 1845, 72-4, note 14.

<sup>71</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, Letter 15: Venice, 4 January 1846, 99, and note 29.

albeit charmingly evocative of the Mazzaferro's subtitle for his book ('una donna che amava i colori') reproduces a colourful portrait by the Victorian painter Margaret Sarah Carpenter, presumably of a female relative, Henrietta Carpenter. That neither painter nor sitter has anything to do with the book is clear from the fact that neither woman is included in the index! Surely it would have been more appropriate to offer a likeness of Merrifield herself – although rare, Loske recently came across a (monochrome) *carte de visite* photograph.<sup>72</sup> Had expense allowed, other images might have been included to enrich the text, such as a page from one of the newly-discovered letters at The Keep, Brighton; an image of an original manuscript that Merrifield looked at in Italy; the title-page of *Original Treatises*; and perhaps one of the pictures discussed, such as the 'non finito' painting by Leonardo from the Brera.

### A final reflection on fledgling source-based art history in England and Italy

By way of conclusion, I would like expand a little on a topic that I see as central to the whole of Merrifield's Italian endeavour: her working relationship with Charles Eastlake. What does their correspondence tell us about their mutual research interests and *modus operandi*? Mazzaferro acknowledges that the letters 'demonstrate that the trip's milestones had been agreed on with Eastlake and that he was supplying her with the names of people from the Italian art world that he thought she should try to contact'.<sup>73</sup> Contacts for networking was certainly something that he supplied her with but that was not the only thing, nor the most important. In my opinion, the emphasis should be placed on his prime role in encouraging her in the methodology of empirical research, especially in relation to hunting down primary source material in archives.

Merrifield came back with a lot of primary source material for the Fine Arts Commission. It is clear from certain letters that Eastlake furnished Merrifield with the names of certain manuscripts that he wished her to track down. One text, among several others, on his desiderata list which she found was Antonio Francesco Albuzzi's *Memorie per servire alla storia de' Pittori, Scultori ed Architetti milanesi*; her partial copy is preserved in the National Art Library.<sup>74</sup> In addition we have seen that she made copious notes from oral interviews but what we have not yet noted is that quite a number of the people whom she interviewed had been suggestions from Eastlake – Giovanni Edwards being just one prime example. Likewise, it is worth underscoring that her purchases of relevant secondary literature included a number of books which Eastlake had asked her to track down;<sup>75</sup> while among the specimens of minerals which she brought home, including Dacet's blue, some were acquired

<sup>72</sup> This photograph of Mary Philadelphia Merrifield is preserved at the Keep, Brighton: ACC 8642/1/19. For a reproduction, see <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/clhlwr/research/merrifield>.

<sup>73</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, 46, note 3: 'Emerge in maniera sempre più nitida che il viaggio è stato concordato nelle sue tappe fondamentali con Eastlake, il quale segnala a Mary Merrifield nominativi di persone di spicco del mondo della cultura italiana da visitare.'

<sup>74</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, Letter 9: Milan, 26 November 1845, 64, and note 1.

<sup>75</sup> E.g., see Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, Letter 21: Padua, 5 February 1846, 125-6, where Merrifield notes having acquired for Eastlake the Venetian edition of Neri's book, *Arte Vetraria* of 1663. See Letter 29: Bologna, 29 March 1846, 155-6, in which Merrifield asks her husband to tell Eastlake that the *Libro dei conti* of Guercino had been published and that it mentions ultramarine, cloth, priming, etc., and that she could try and get hold of a copy of it for Eastlake. A list of the books that Merrifield brought home, including some for Eastlake, is listed in Letter 39: Cologne, 2 June 1846, 195-8.

for Eastlake.<sup>76</sup> Nor should we forget that the discussion relating to her attempt to acquire some specimens of paintings stemmed from a desire on Eastlake's part.<sup>77</sup> This particular mission relates to another discussion in her letters where she notes the possibility of acquiring specimens of fresco by the seventeenth-century painter Bartolomeo Cesi from Gualandi in Bologna – ultimately this initiative failed because the asking price was considered too high.<sup>78</sup> This aim of acquiring real specimens of various artistic techniques is, surely, part and parcel of Eastlake and Merrifield's aim to get at primary sources of any kind, whether written or visual.

The pair certainly respected each other and praised each other's work, Merrifield on one occasion writing a paean to her husband about Eastlake's brilliant intellect, which she compared with Bacon's.<sup>79</sup> Eastlake commended in the highest terms her findings to the Fine Arts Commission<sup>80</sup> and also acted as her advocate and secured her more time to complete all the work that she wished to do abroad. There is only one obscure episode where some kind of misunderstanding between them is hinted at, concerning the Fine Arts Commission (specifically Peel's secretary, William H. Stephenson) asking her in March 1846 not to send her oral interview material to Eastlake.<sup>81</sup> Given that on her return and once she had handed over her material to Peel, she informed Peel that he might share her research, pre-publication, with only Eastlake and Hendrie, as she regarded them as 'labouring in the same field as myself',<sup>82</sup> and given that she acknowledged Eastlake's scholarship as well as his unstinting and constant assistance in her 1849 publication, it seems that no serious rift had developed between them.

The *modus operandi* of Eastlake and his circle was the beginning of the new turn in art history which would affect the way the discipline developed in Britain, at least in certain circles. This branch would co-exist alongside the more-established practice of connoisseurship and alongside a third *modus operandi* – the writing about art in a manner that privileged the viewer's emotional reaction to it as exemplified in the earlier writings of William Hazlitt, and later on in those of John Ruskin and Walter Pater. Eastlake's approach, encouraged by his positions at the Fine Arts Commission, the National Gallery and at the Royal Academy (he was elected President of the Royal Academy in 1850), was important for ensuring the development of this particular methodological outlook in Britain – one that was grafted onto a continental school of thinking with origins in Germany, as already noted.

One thing that Merrifield's letters and Mazzaferro's scholarly commentary on them importantly attest to is the fact that certain Italian scholars were also actively at work

<sup>76</sup> E.g., see Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, Letter 6: Turin, 2 November 1845, in which Merrifield records having collected mineral samples as a record of Moncenisio; and Letter 15: Venice, 4 January 1846, 101, where she mentions buying specimens of *Terra Bruno* and *Biadetto*, the latter being a pigment that Eastlake was keen to get hold of.

<sup>77</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, Letter 21: Padua, 5 February 1846, 124, where she notes that Giovanni Edwards is helping with her attempt to get the pictures exported.

<sup>78</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, Letter 30: Bologna, 6 April 1846, 158-9; Letter 33: Bologna, 24 April 1846, 173; Letter 34: 2 May 1846, 179; and Letter 35: Milan, 10 May 1846, 186.

<sup>79</sup> See Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, Letter 31: Bologna, 12 April 1846, 164-5.

<sup>80</sup> See Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, Letter 27: Bologna, 16 March 1846, 147.

<sup>81</sup> See Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, Letter 27: Bologna, 16 March 1846, 147-8.

<sup>82</sup> Letter from Mary Merrifield to Robert Peel, 9 October 1846, British Library, Peel Papers, Add Mss. 40597, f. 192. For a slightly different interpretation of this evidence, see Véliz Bomford, 'Merrifield's methodology', 474.

promoting empirical source-based art history, something that has tended to be overlooked because of the traditional focus on the Germanic contribution. An important addition to this debate is Mazzaferro's drawing attention to the role of Gualandi, the Bolognese scholar who has been mentioned at several points in this review and whom Mazzaferro persuasively argues deserves to be better known. Gualandi's legacy was in the production of pioneering historical accounts in the 1840s, based on archival source material: his *Memorie originali italiane risguardanti le belle arti* was published in six series between 1840 and 1845, and his *Nuova raccolta di lettere sulla pittura, scultura ed architettura* appeared in three volumes from 1844 to 1856. What is worth noting in the current discussion is that Gualandi's work was known to – and appreciated by – the British art world of the day. Mazzaferro quotes an article in the *Art Union* in January 1843 which calls attention to his activities (as well as those of the French art writer, Alexis-François Rio): 'M. Rio ... is now at Bologna, and has visited Signor Gualandi in his studio, which is in the celebrated Galleria Fava, painted by the Carracci. ... Other writers, we believe, are now in various parts of Italy, following out Signor Gualandi's plan of searching public and private archives for documents interesting to the History of Art.'<sup>83</sup> All this strongly suggests that Gualandi was acting as an advocate and catalyst for an empirical source-based art history in Italy in the way that Eastlake was doing in England and Passavant *et al* were doing in Germany. There were other people working in the same way in the Italian Peninsula, arguably, one of the most important being Rawdon Brown, the English-born historian based in Venice, who devoted most of his life to finding and publishing documents relative to the history and art history of the Veneto. As Merrifield noted in one letter home from Italy, in fact citing what a Murray guidebook said of him, Rawdon Brown was the only person 'capable of knocking sense into the Italian archives'.<sup>84</sup> What is important to note is that in many cases the connections that Merrifield effected with this group of scholars in Italy in the mid-1840s, including with Gualandi and Rawdon Brown, were taken up and developed by Eastlake, once he became Director of the National Gallery in 1855, in which capacity he would travel abroad each year to scout out potentially eligible masterpieces for the national collection and discuss with acknowledged experts material for his scholarly schools catalogues whose contents were derived largely from empirical research from primary sources or reliable secondary commentary.

Gualandi's action plan of systematically scouring Italian archives and bringing useful primary sources to light was clearly in its early stages, so far as Merrifield's experiences in Italian archives and libraries attest; she points out numerous instances where these institutions were not yet run on systematic, professionalized lines. In one letter from Milan of November 1845, for instance, she speaks about the frustrations arising from a lack of proper cataloguing – that on the one hand in private libraries (in this case she is talking specifically of Conte Melzi's great manuscript collections) the collections were 'not yet ordered' and in the case of public libraries few of them had searchable catalogues – even that of the celebrated Ambrosian Library at Milan was 'notoriously badly done'.<sup>85</sup> Another frustration Merrifield constantly mentioned was the fact that it was virtually impossible to find scribes to copy documents, with the consequence that invariably her son Charles had to do the work, which, in turn, meant that she lost time through not being able to make use of

<sup>83</sup> *Art Union*, January 1843, 15; quoted in Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, 52, note 15.

<sup>84</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, Letter 9: Milan, 26 November 1845, 66: 'che abbia avuto il coraggio di battere palmo a palmo gli archivi italiani'.

<sup>85</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, Letter 9: Milan, 26 November 1845, 66: 'notoriamente, è fatto male'.

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him in other ways, including as a translator.<sup>86</sup> The clearest statement on the matter occurs in a letter from Padua in March 1846 where Merrifield noted that in Italian libraries there was no one willing to be paid to copy old manuscripts unlike in Paris, where she had been able to find help comparatively easily.<sup>87</sup> Mazzaferro's edition of letters captures a moment of flux, when teething problems were being worked through and progress was being made both in terms of recognizing the usefulness of primary sources and the consequent necessity of properly looking after precious and unique historical documentation in terms of conservation and making it accessible to scholars in various ways.

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<sup>86</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, Letter 27: Bologna, 16 March 1846, 147.

<sup>87</sup> Mazzaferro, *Lettere dall'Italia*, Letter 28: Bologna, 22 March 1846, 151: 'Nelle biblioteche italiane non ci sono persone che studino i vecchi manoscritti e che siano pronte a copiarli a richiesta (come succede invece a Parigi)'. In fact she did find a copyist, thanks to Gualandi, who she employed to make an entire transcription of all her manuscript work; see Letter 29: Bologna, 29 March 1846, 153.