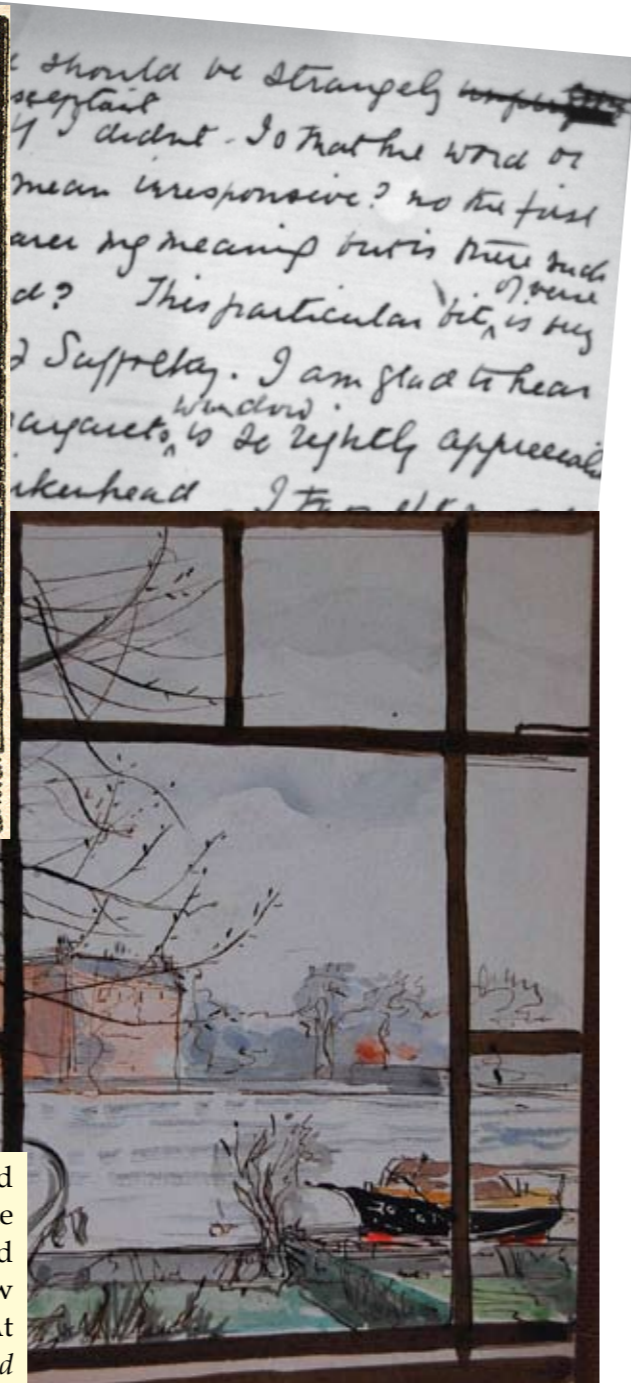


ABOVE: Putney map showing studio locations of Ellen Mary and her nieces.

BELOW & BACKGROUND: Letter from Ellen Mary to her nephew, Harry Rope, describing life in Putney.

RIGHT: Watercolour by Margaret Rope the Younger: view across the Thames from her studio.

[Shortly after the elder Margaret Rope, 'Marga', had become a nun in 1923, her cousin Margaret Rope the younger, 'Tor', moved to Putney. Both were stained glass artists and one of them made the porch window at St Peter's, Blaxhall, to an Ellen Mary Rope design.] At the time, Ellen wrote to her nephew Harry: '... I am glad to hear our Margaret's window is so rightly appreciated at Birkenhead. I thought myself it was one of her most successful windows especially from a decorative point of view. Tor misses her still very sadly. She is going to move out of the Lettice Street studio at Xmas into a new one in the house of friends at Putney - a beautiful studio with a fine view of the Thames opposite Hurlingham where their own garden runs down to the river and there is a splendid outlook on sky and water & now & then a heron finds its way to the shore and ducks of many hues swim round about but she feels very sorry to leave her old room which is full of reminiscences of happy times with Marga. My dear kind girls here are always thinking and doing for me & I feel a greatly spoiled Aunt but I was very tired when I came back, because of the nursing and house running at home, and I am now beginning to feel almost normal again.'



... and ...  
 really spoiled Aunt  
 by tired when I came  
 use of the nursing and  
 my at home, and I am  
 nimp to feel almost normal  
 now I have run on to me  
 me is too valuable to be  
 in such feeble ways  
 my little friend Ellen Mary



Polychrome panels

TOP: 'Water Babes', courtesy of Robin Fanshawe  
 ABOVE: 'Marigold, a Gleaner'

The spirit of her work fits comfortably within the Arts and Crafts Movement, itself part of the heritage of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and associated to some extent with Art Nouveau. In the Movement, pride in craftsmanship was emphasized, as well as affordability. To modern eyes, some examples of the style may appear to be rather innocent, even sentimental, but in its time it was a step forward into modernity. Ellen's involvement with the Movement can be seen in her participation at each Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society show from 1889 onwards. She exhibited panels for ceiling, wall, mantelpiece and nursery decoration as well as designs for practical everyday objects: an electrical bell push, doorplates, a tea caddy and a letterbox. She is said to have aimed to be accessible to people of relatively modest means: her panels 'were primarily designed to be executed at a low cost and repeated if desired, so that they could be used by others than the very rich.'<sup>11</sup>

Among the other sculptors she came into contact with through the Movement was Robert Anning Bell, a leading exponent of painted plaster relief. Ellen Mary herself was of course also producing panels in this medium, one example being 'Marigold, a Gleaner' - a portrait of a girl in a harvest field. This work overlapped with her design work for Della Robbia and these small plaster panels, whether painted or not, became the genre for which she was particularly recognised.

On a completely different scale to her domestic pieces, Ellen Mary was also involved in large

<sup>11</sup> The Builder (3<sup>rd</sup> December 1898), p. 508