

The Roses of 3400 Laguna

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Preface

This paper is submitted as a comment on the Draft EIR prepared by San Francisco Planning Case Number 2022-009819ENV and is reference to section on "Character-Defining Features" listed on pages 3.B-15 to 3.B20

I am a resident of Heritage on the Marina at 3400 Laguna. My intention here is to bring attention and to record the existence of elements of high architectural quality in the project that are not mentioned in the draft EIR.

I am a former architect. Among other works, I designed and managed the renovation of over ninety houses in London and was number three in an architectural practice that designed twelve mass transit railway stations in Hong Kong. Working for Autodesk, I was Program Manager for three releases of AutoCAD.

All the photographs herein were taken by me.

Introduction

One of the remarkable aspects of the Julia Morgan building is the quality, consistency and quantity of particular decorative items. Representations of roses, similar to a Tudor Rose or Luther Rose, are repeated several dozen times in at least twelve different expressions. Trefoils and berries, while not as numerous, may also be observed in a variety of locations. The quality and repetition of these decorative details are hallmarks of great architecture.

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tudor_rose
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luther_rose

The interesting question here is: How important were these roses to Julia Morgan, the managers of the San Francisco Ladies Protection and Relief Society as the client and to the residents themselves?

Certainly, the project as a whole was quite significant for Julia Morgan. The commission she received the year she worked in the project, 1924, was the third largest that year out of forty-five projects list in her accounts:

http://www.coffmanbooks.com/HAMpdfs/30_HAM_AI.pdf

It is my intention to explore this matter more deeply, to seek references to the roses in correspondence and to source the brief that Julia Morgan was trying to carry out.

Elsewhere I have investigated the symbology of the rose and its possible uses and meaning. All my research so far has been based on speculation and not on any documentation contemporary with the design of the building. I intend to carry out further research into this probably fascinating topic, but any comments now would be outside the purview of an EIR.

The primary purpose of this effort is to bring to your attention:

- The deep level of consistency and continuity of Julia Morgan's design as a whole
- The very high level of workmanship and artistic flair embedded in the stonework of the project
- Consideration that the roses be listed as historic design features
- The possibility of you smiling as you walk around the building and say to yourself: "Ah, there's another one!"

The following sections catalog all the roses and other symbols that I have identified so far:

- Three Roses in Two Terracotta Panels
- Dozens of Roses in Roundels in the Parapet
- Roses in Two Front Bay Terracotta Panels
- Roses to Sides of Front Bay Corbels
- Two Roses in Three Pilaster Capitals
- Roses in Spandrels to Front Door Arches
- Roses in Window Transoms
- Rosebuds in Window Spandrels
- "Roses" in Brickwork
- Four Roses in Parlor Mantlepiece
- Roses as Brass Ornaments to Fireplace and Windows
- Roses in Corridor Column Capitals
- Four Roses in Chapel Alter
- Roses in Folding Screen

Three Roses in Two Terracotta Panels

There are three roses in the terracotta panels between the second story windows above the two ground floor bays. Each rose is composed of three nested roses. In the outer rose there are eight outside petals with gaps between petals at the quadrants. The two inside roses appear to have four petals each. Surrounding the roses there is a garland or vine with berries and leaves of a type not yet identified. In each of the corners there is a rosebud. The meticulous carving indicates a skilled level of craftsmanship.



Dozens of Roses in Roundels in the Parapet

Every few feet along the parapet that surround the entire building there are "roundels" or decorative circular medallions. All the roundels are identical in design. A large acanthus leaf dominates a rose with four petals on the lower right.



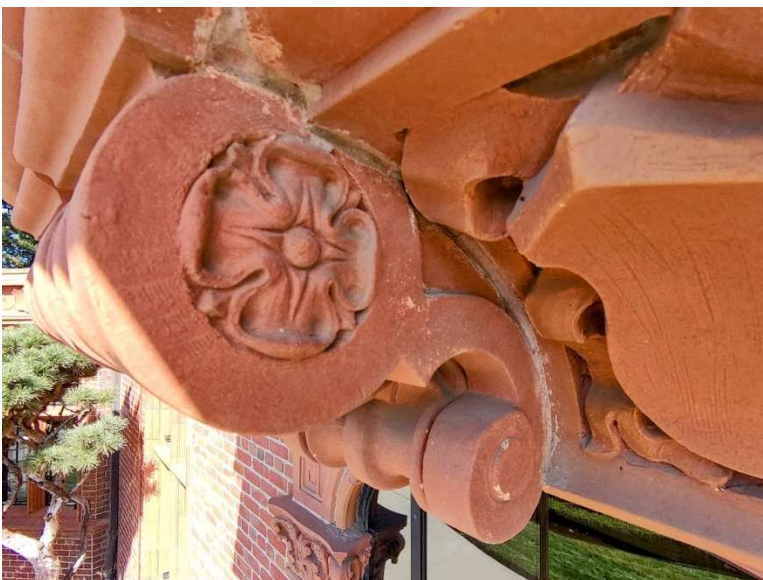
Roses in Two Front Bay Terracotta Panels

Two rectangular terracotta panels are above and below the windows in the central bay. Each bay contains a double rose surrounded by what might be buds. The is decorations are highly undercut indicating a complex manufacturing process. Handiwork is highly evident.



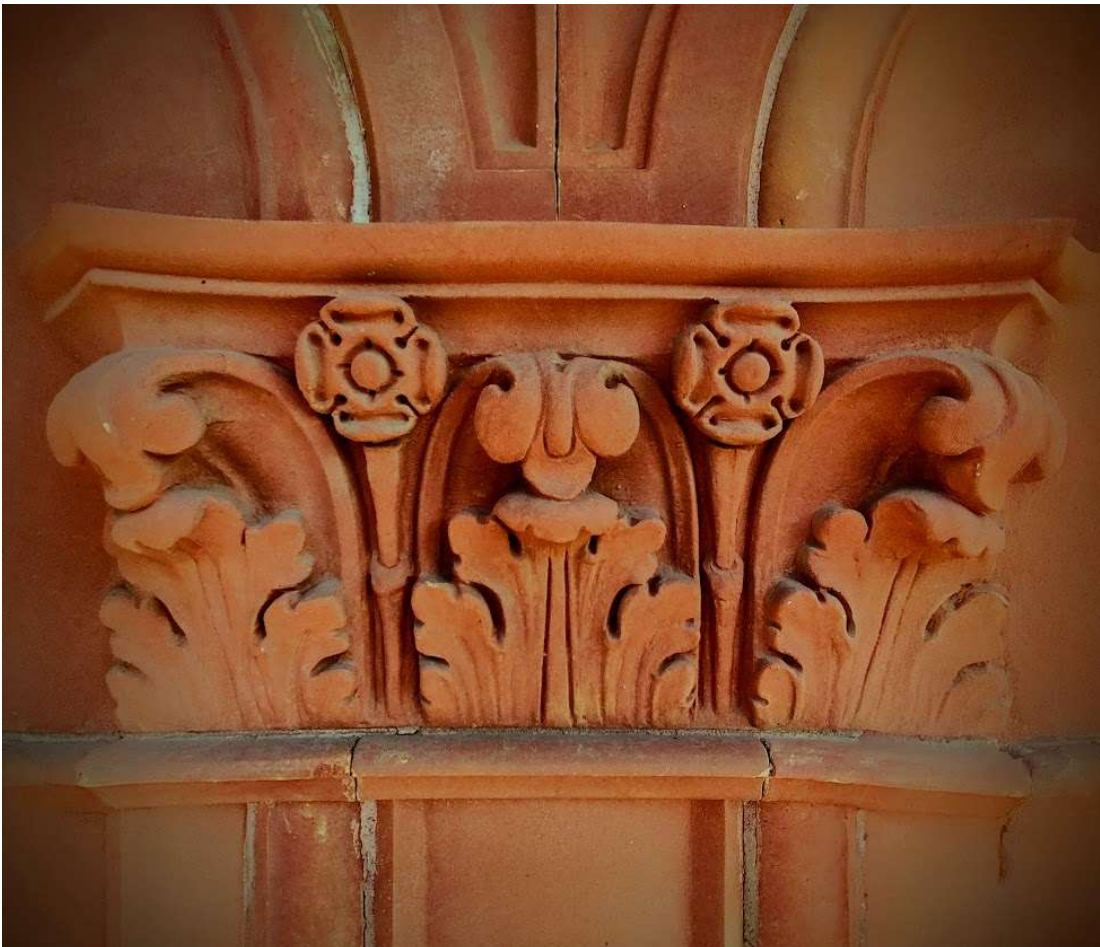
Roses to Both Sides of Six Front Bay Corbels

Under the central bay there are six separate corbels with a single four quadrant rose at each end. The overall shape of the corbel is quite convoluted, indicating the use of a complex casting process. The appearance of a rose at the end is unusual and indicates a specific design intent rather than standard practice.



Two Roses in Three Pilaster Capitals

Perhaps the most imaginative application of the rose theme on the Morgan building is the embedding of two single quadrant roses between the traditional acanthus leaves in each of the flat faces of the three pilasters (square columns) that otherwise resemble capitals of the Corinthian order. Significant undercutting is exhibited.



Roses in Spandrels to Front Door Arches

The intricate floral carving to the right of the arch is part of the spandrel, the triangular space between the top of the arch and the rectangular framing of the window. The center and side spandrels differ. The side spandrels add an extra rectangular area with what may be a vertical branch with a rose bud.



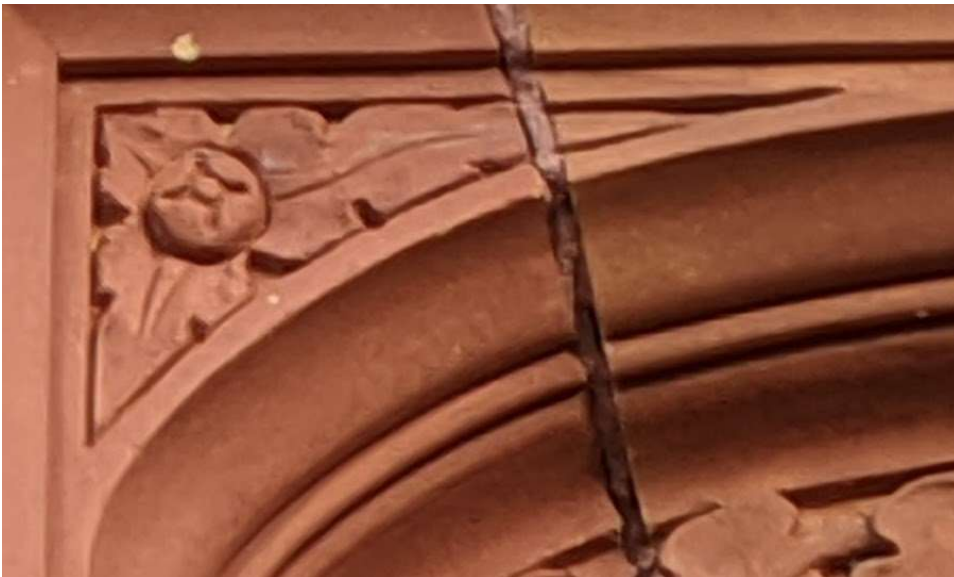
Roses in Window Transoms

The most frequently appearing rose in the building is at the center of every transom of every window. The rose and leaves are highly stylized nevertheless retain the feel of “made by human hands”. Even this most commonly used component in the Morgan Building displays the need for a complex casting process.



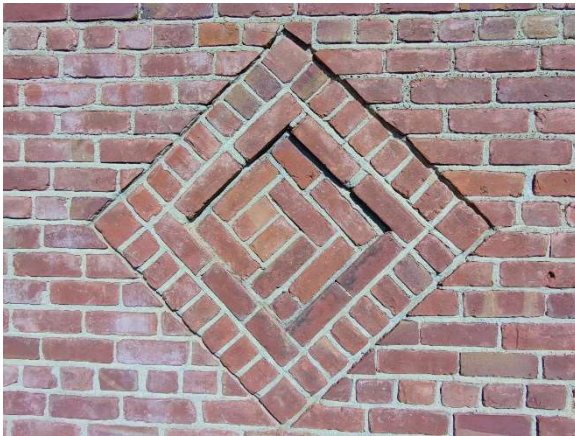
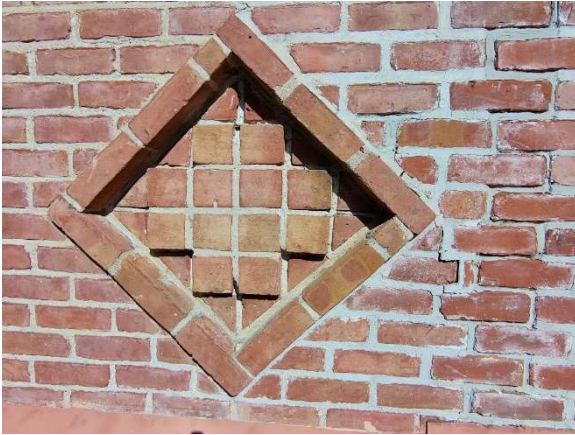
Rosebuds in Window Spandrels

The spandrels are only a few inches wide. The floral decoration looks more like a rosebud than a rose. In any case it has a stylization of leaves and flower that differs from its adjacent architrave.



"Roses" in Brickwork

There are two areas of brickwork that incorporate decorative areas that may or may not depict rose-like feelings. ;-)



Roses in Corridor Column Capitals

When the Perry Building was added in 1958, a corridor was added as a connector to the Morgan building. The design of the corridor, unlike the Brutalist-style Perry building, incorporates elements that are inspired by Julia Morgan's efforts. Highly apparent are the crudely-detailed Corinthian column capitals with a rose. Note the five not four petals.



Four Roses in Parlor Mantlepiece

Helping to confirm that the rose them was an architectural design theme and not just the whim of an individual tradesman, roses are evident inside the building made of very different materials. Four stylized quadrant roses double roses adorn the Morgan Parlor fireplace.



Roses as Brass Ornaments to Fireplace and Windows

In the Morgan Parlor, gold-colored ornaments to both sides of the fireplace. Depicting stylized double roses. Photograph taken in November 2020. The ornaments are no longer in these positions. Ditto similar ornaments in black to both sides of the windows to hold back curtains.



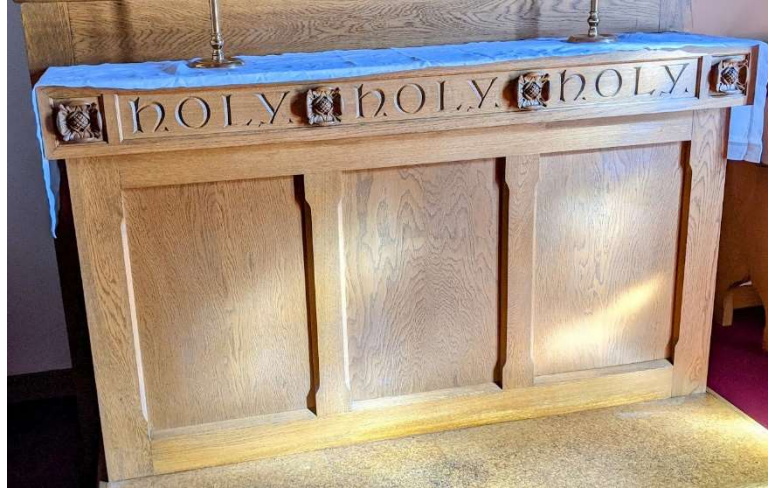
Roses in Folding Screen

On the fourth floor of the Perry Building, there is a folding screen that feels like a 1920s effort. It contains elements that look like stylized roses. More research is needed to help identify this piece as part of the Julia Morgan design.



Four Roses in Chapel Alter

The altar in the Chapel which was altered in 1958. The alter table includes four four-sided roses carved in wood. The designer of the chapel understood the importance of the roses.



Berries or Grapes in Various Locations



Two quite beautiful copper roundels affixed to roof facing courtyard. Note the large berry in the center.



Note the berry or grapes to the spandrel to the right of the arch of the fireplace.



Note the four bunches of grapes or berries

Trefoils in Various Locations

A trefoil is an ornamental design of three rounded lobes like a clover leaf, used typically in architectural tracery.



Note two tiny trefoils at 5 and 7 o'clock



Note two doors with trefoils to left of Morgan building staircase



Note alternating balusters with trefoil cutouts