

Charles Francis Annesley Voysey, eldest son of the Rev. Charles Voysey, was born on the 28th May 1857 at Hessle, near Hull, in Yorkshire, where his father and uncle were then running a school. A few years later, after a short period in Jamaica, his father became Vicar of Healaugh, a small Yorkshire village near Tadcaster. The Rev. Charles Voysey was a remarkable character; independent and unorthodox, he was proud to claim descent from the Wesley family. He was eventually deprived of his living and expelled from the Church of England for denying the doctrine of everlasting hell, after a trial for heresy. The trial took place in 1871 and the family then moved to London. The young Voysey was sent to Dulwich College, but he failed to settle down at school and left after eighteen months to complete his education under a private tutor.

In 1874, C.F.A. Voysey was articled to John Pollard Seddon (1827-1906). Seddon was the son of a London cabinet-maker; he had been a pupil of Professor T.L. Donaldson and, from 1852, in partnership with John Prichard of Llandaff, a well-known ecclesiastical architect who had worked under Pugin. J.P. Seddon started his own practice in London in 1862 and designed a large number of churches and vicarages; while Voysey was with him, his work included the University College at Aberystwyth. Seddon designed furniture for his father's firm as well as for his own buildings and some of his pieces were decorated by Rossetti and other members of the Morris group.

During 1879, Voysey worked for Saxon Snell (1830-1904), an architect who specialised in the design of hospitals and workhouses. Voysey did not find this type of work at all congenial and soon left Snell to join the staff of George Devey (1820-86). Devey had established a flourishing country-house practice; his clients were aristocrats and bankers, among them the Earl Spencer, Lord De l'Isle and Dudley and members of the Rothschild family. Devey had been a pupil of Thomas Little and as a young man he had had drawing lessons from John Sell Cotman; he was a fine watercolourist and had at one time thought of painting as a profession.

After two years with Devey, Voysey made up his mind to set up on his own. He was now twenty-five, and he took an office in Westminster towards the end of 1881 or early in 1882. His practice started slowly with small alterations and surveys for other architects but in 1883 he entered the competition for the new Admiralty Buildings and was unplaced. Unfortunately his drawings have not survived for it would have been of great interest to know how his mind was working at that time.

One of Voysey's closest friends in the early days was Arthur H. Mackmurdo (1851-1942). A protégé of Ruskin, with whom he had travelled in Italy, Mackmurdo was associated with Morris and Webb in the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. He set up the Century Guild in 1882 and it was from him that Voysey obtained the technical information needed for the design of wallpapers and textiles. Voysey's earliest designs in this field were made in 1883 and were sold to Jeffrey & Co. for whom Mackmurdo was already working.

During the period of waiting for more substantial architectural commissions, Voysey produced a series of designs for Jeffrey and by 1890 he was also working for Turnbull & Stockdale. In 1893 he obtained a regular contract from Essex &

Co. for wallpaper designs and, in 1895, a similar contract from Alexander Morton for textiles. He also worked for Woollams and for Wylie Lochhead.

In 1884 Voysey was elected to the newly formed Art Workers' Guild and in the same year he became engaged to Mary Maria Evans, to whom he was married in 1885. At the time of his engagement he designed a house for himself and his future wife, hoping to get a friend to advance the money for the building. The house was never built, but in 1888 the plans were published in the *Architect* and caught the eye of M.H. Lakin, who asked him to build a similar house at Bishop's Itchington, in Warwickshire. This was Voysey's first complete building and it soon led to other commissions for small houses.

During the late 1880s Voysey began to show in his work the characteristics which in a short time made him a celebrity. His earlier designs, all unexecuted, were strongly reminiscent of Devey and of the more romantic buildings of Norman Shaw. A series of designs appeared in the *British Architect* from 1889 onwards. In the later examples Voysey turned away from picturesque, many-gabled elevations, rambling plans and extravagant construction, producing instead compact and economical designs for smaller houses with simple hipped roofs of low pitch and walls of roughcast brickwork. Voysey recorded that several of his early clients were Quakers who were attracted by the plainness of his work and encouraged his pursuit of simplicity.

It is also possible that the development of his new style had some connection with the fact that in 1890 he moved from a commonplace brick villa in Streatham to a charming small Regency house in Melina Place, St John's Wood. This house was one of a pair, faced in white painted stucco, with wide eaves and a low pitched slate roof. Voysey's next-door neighbour in Melina Place was his friend, Edward S. Prior, also an architect and an original member of the Art Workers' Guild.

As early as 1893, Voysey's wallpapers were sufficiently well known to be mentioned in an article by Henri Van de Velde in the Brussels magazine *Emulation* and before long his work was also being described by writers in France and Germany. By the turn of the century, when Hermann Muthesius was collecting information for his book on the English House, Voysey's work had acquired a considerable reputation on the Continent and it was also being noticed in the United States.

In the late 1890s Voysey designed two or three houses for richer clients. By comparison with earlier and later work these were almost fussy. New Place, Haslemere, Norney near Shackleford, and Sir Walter Essex's house facing Tooting Common, designed in 1897, all show a type of semi-classical detail that Voysey soon abandoned. In fact he seems to have tired of these details even before the Essex house was built; he designed a revised and much simpler scheme and, when this was turned down by Lady Essex, he threw up the job and the house was eventually built by Walter Cave on lines similar to Voysey's first scheme.

In 1898 Voysey was working on designs for several houses in the north of England. Only two were actually built, Moorcrag and Broadleys, both on the road from Bowness to Ulverston. These houses, though comparatively large, revert to the simplicity of earlier and smaller work. Broadleys has a hipped roof with wide

eaves characteristic of earlier work at Perrycroft, near Malvern. Moorcrag was designed a few months later and was given a roof of 50 degree pitch with cross-gables at either end; this type of roof was used in many designs during the next few years, including his own house at Chorleywood designed in 1899 and completed in 1900. Spade House at Sandgate, Folkestone was also designed in 1899 for H.G. Wells.

It is worth remarking that although Wells and other progressive writers and artists of the period were among Voysey's clients and admirers he had no sympathy with the socialist ideals of William Morris or the Fabians. He remained a firm believer in the established order of things and thought that every man should keep his proper station in life. He placed the architect somewhere between the gentry and the upper servants!

During the period from 1900 to 1907 Voysey was working on some of his most satisfactory houses and also designed much of his best furniture. The early influences of Devey, Shaw and Mackmurdo had been outgrown, and every detail of his work was drawn from personal experience of building and the crafts. Unfortunately his increasing conviction that he had the only right answer to every problem combined with attacks of illness to make him more and more touchy in his dealings with clients. He abhorred compromise and any sacrifice of principle to expediency. His inflexibility undoubtedly lost him a number of clients in the years immediately preceding the First World War.

In 1909 Voysey designed a small stone house for his friend A.W. Simpson at Kendal, and in this case there was complete understanding between the architect and the client, who was himself an expert craftsman. Another building of the same date was Lodge Style, a 'Gothic' bungalow on the outskirts of Bath. The introduction of noticeably Gothic details into a number of his designs at this time perhaps was a protest against the popular Wren revival.

James Morton, for whom Voysey designed many of his finest textiles, remembered that in 1909 he was asked by Francis Newbery to try to get Voysey to accept the post of Art Director on the decorative side of the Glasgow School of Art, but although he had comparatively little building work at that time it proved impossible to persuade him to leave London.

Voysey's architectural practice virtually ceased with the outbreak of war in 1914, but in the 1920s he continued, or reverted to, his work as a designer of papers and textiles. He made a number of charming drawings for Morton Sundour fabrics, and as late as 1925 the Essex Wallpaper Co. still advertised that their latest pattern books included 'many papers by C.F.A. Voysey, the Genius of Pattern. These supply the Something Distinctive for which you are looking'. His architecture had gone out of fashion with the rise of 'Banker's Georgian', but in the spring of 1927 an interesting series of articles on his work was published anonymously in the *Architect and Building News*. Possibly the author was Voysey's friend H.B. Creswell, who was often a contributor to that paper; certainly the articles marked the first sign of a revival of interest in Voysey's work. In 1931 the Batsford Gallery staged a Voysey exhibition in association with *Architectural Review*. This was inspired by John Betjeman, who wrote an article on the man and his work in the *Architectural Review* of October 1931. A few years

later Nikolaus Pevsner was writing of Voysey in his *Pioneers of Modern Design* and also in the Dutch *Elseviers maandschrift*, while in Denmark Kay Fisker was praising his work in an article entitled 'Tre pionerer fra aarhundredskiftet' (1947).

In 1936 Voysey was one of the first to be awarded the newly established distinction of Designer for Industry by the Royal Society of Arts, and in 1940, a year before his death, he received the RIBA Gold Medal. Voysey was never quite sure whether to be pleased or amused or distressed by his rediscovery and the honours that followed; but he certainly felt that many of those who sang his praises had completely misunderstood his philosophy and the lessons that he had tried to teach.

One of Voysey's last appearances as a lecturer was in February 1934, when he addressed the Architectural Society of the Bartlett School, with Professor Richardson as Chairman. A summary of his talk was printed in the *RIBA Journal*, XLI, 1934, p. 479. At the Bartlett, Voysey repeated many of the ideas that he had put before the Architectural Association in 1911 in a lecture entitled 'Patriotism in Architecture'. He deeply distrusted foreign travel because, as he said: 'Each country has been given its own characteristics by its Creator and should work out its own salvation. . . . The best architecture in the past has always been native to its own country and has grown out of a thorough knowledge of local requirements and conditions. Requirements include body, mind and spirit. Conditions include Climate and National Character.' Commenting on the contemporary scene, he said: 'Modern architecture is pitifully full of such faults as proportions that are vulgarly aggressive, mountebank eccentricities in detail and windows lying down on their sides. Like rude children we have broken away and turned our backs on tradition. This is false originality, the true originality having been, for all time, the spiritual something given to the development of traditional forms by the individual artist.' In this last lecture, as always, Voysey stressed the need for self-control, and in conclusion he said that: 'All true culture depends upon the love of truth, the love of beauty and the love of God, and can never grow otherwise.'

Forty years earlier, in an interview published in the first volume of the *Studio* in 1893, Voysey is quoted as saying: 'It is not necessary for artists to be bound merely to tradition and precedent, or to be crammed to overflowing with the knowledge of the products of Foreign nations. They should use their God-given faculties, and if they have thoughts worth expressing, the means to express them sufficiently are, and always will be, at hand. Not that we need shut our eyes to all human efforts, but that we should go to nature direct for inspiration and guidance; then we are at once relieved from restrictions of style or period, and can live and work in the present with laws revealing always fresh possibilities.'

In everything that he said or wrote about design Voysey returned again and again to the necessity for a proper respect and reverence for the Creator and all the works of Nature. When he spoke, as he often did, of 'fitness' he was not thinking of the material fitness of the functionalist or the exponent of structural expression. To Voysey a house was not a machine for living in, it was a home, and home to him meant spiritual as well as material shelter, a place in which mind and spirit as well as the body could find rest and comfort.

The foundation upon which Voysey based his faith was the early teaching received from his father. The Rev. Charles Voysey had come into conflict with the ecclesiastical authorities of his day because, as his son put it, 'He believed in a Good God instead of an Angry One!' Voysey was a boy of fourteen when his father was deprived of his living and the event left a lifelong impression. Up to that time he had been taught at home by his father and had had little companionship of his own age; his three brothers were too young to make suitable playmates, and his father's position as vicar of a small Yorkshire village tended to cut him off from the children of the neighbours. His two elder sisters were boarders at a school to which Ruskin was a frequent visitor, so it was only to be expected that he was introduced to Ruskinian ideas at an early age.

Voysey said that the choice of an architectural career was suggested by the fact that his grandfather Annesley Voysey (1794–1839) had been an architect who built houses, churches, bridges and lighthouses, combining the practices of architect and engineer. An additional reason was that in those days anyone could call himself an architect without having to pass an examination! Annesley Voysey is stated to have designed the first purpose-built office block in the City of London in 1823; he later practised in Jamaica where he built a church at St Antonio in an Italianate-Romanesque style. He died in Jamaica at a comparatively early age and his memorial can be seen in his church. The Rev. Charles Voysey obviously had some knowledge of the profession to which he apprenticed his son, for he also had several architect friends, among them George Devey who became a member of the Theistic Church established by him after his arrival in London.

With this background, it is not surprising that the young Voysey did not find it easy to fit into the life of a public school, but he soon found his feet when he entered the office of J.P. Seddon, with whom he got on very well. Seddon appreciated Voysey's unusual talents and gave him the opportunity, while still a pupil, to paint life-size figures of angels on the walls of one of his churches and he later employed Voysey to design a large mosaic wall-panel for the exterior of one of the University buildings at Aberystwyth. Decorative work of this kind must have made a pleasant change from the routine tracing and detailing usually allotted to an architect's pupils. On completion of his articles, Voysey remained for a time as a senior assistant to Seddon, and then after a short period under Saxon Snell he was glad to accept the offer of a post in the office of his father's friend George Devey.

Both Seddon and Devey were interesting men, and Voysey was lucky in coming under two such masters. Seddon was an early member of the Architectural Association, and he has been quoted as telling that body that: 'We want neither a new nor a universal style, we should know nothing about styles; the very name is a hindrance to architects, however useful to the antiquary.' And again he said: 'Let us leave to posterity our productions and be sure that if we work simply, neither copying nor striving for singularity, we cannot so far emancipate ourselves from the feelings of our own age and country but that they will give an impress to our work, though we may not discern it for ourselves.' The quotations already given from Voysey's lectures are sufficient evidence that he never forgot the teaching of his first master either in his theory or in his practice.

Under Devey there were different lessons to be learned; Voysey came into contact with country-house design on a big scale and with work of the highest quality, carried out for clients who could afford and appreciate the best craftsmanship of the time. He was also fortunate in being given practical experience as resident architect, or clerk of works, on some of Devey's smaller buildings and he travelled to Ireland on survey work; this greatly increased his self-confidence in dealing with practical matters, and he fully appreciated the value of the training. Looking back in later years, Voysey criticized Devey because he considered that much of his design was no more than brilliant pastiche. In the long run it was probably the teaching of Seddon that made the greater impression, but the influence of Devey can certainly be seen in Voysey's early published drawings for a series of houses designed for imaginary clients.

It seems likely that it was Seddon who introduced Voysey to the writings of A.W.N.Pugin, which became his primary source of inspiration in later years. In 1915, Voysey wrote in *Individuality*, p. 89: 'Pugin designed to the best of his ability to meet the requirements and conditions which were presented to his mind, classifying them and anointing them with his devout spirit, allowing his moral sentiments to play like a dancing light on every detail.' Voysey greatly admired the New Palace of Westminster and attributed all that was good in it to Pugin, saying that no one could compare with him for knowledge of Gothic and Tudor architecture and that for all his knowledge he managed to avoid falling into the habit of copying.

'Search the Houses of Parliament from top to bottom and you will not find one superficial yard that is copied from any pre-existing building.'

Pugin had laid down the principle that: 'There shall be no features of a building which are not necessary for convenience, construction and propriety', and this remained at the back of Voysey's mind in every design that he made. He followed Pugin in his belief that each part of a building should be clearly seen and should indicate its purpose. Pugin had also said that: 'An edifice which is arranged with the principal view of looking picturesque is sure to resemble an artificial waterfall or a made up rock, which are generally so un-naturally natural as to appear ridiculous'. It was probably because he saw signs of this weakness in some of Devey's designs that Voysey was afterwards critical of his master's work.

When it came to the consideration of ornament in building Voysey followed Pugin rather than Ruskin. He believed that any decoration that was used should have a meaning, and he had a lifelong interest in symbols, which he used not only in details of his buildings but also in the design of book plates and badges, and in his designs for textiles and wallpapers. Voysey believed that although it was possible to have architecture without decoration (provided that the proportions and materials were good) not even the most exquisite and elaborate decoration could save an ill-proportioned building and turn it into architecture. In his book *Style and Society*, 1971, p.13, Robert Macleod, writing of Pugin, says: 'If his arguments were successful in drawing attention away from stylistic superfluities to a more fundamental consideration of his principles, it would in the end dilute the archaeological fidelity to Gothic forms which was the other half of his gospel. And in the end this was what happened.' Something of the

sort certainly happened in the case of Voysey; in some of his early designs there is clearly a Gothic, or Tudor, element, but this was eliminated in his maturity and only returned in some late works as a protest against the Wren revival.

Among his immediate seniors Voysey rated Norman Shaw very highly; he also admired the work of Butterfield, Brooks, Bentley, Sedding and Oldrid Scott. He said that it was from Bodley, Burges, Godwin and Mackmurdo that he learned that nothing was too small to deserve the attention of the architect. He admired Morris as a designer, but had no use for his socialist theories; when John Betjeman offered to lend him a book by Morris he replied: 'Many thanks for the offer of Morris's book. I do not feel I want to read him. He was too much of an atheist for me.' However, in an interview published in the *Builder's Journal & Architectural Record* in September 1896 Voysey said of Morris: 'It is he who prepared the public mind and educated it, and who has done for me what I might not have been able to do for myself, made it possible for me to live.' On another occasion he said that after visiting the Morris Shop he did not care to go again lest he be tempted to copy!

It is curious that although there are frequent mentions of Shaw, Morris and Mackmurdo in Voysey's notes and published writing there is no direct reference to Philip Webb. Yet of all the architects in practice in the latter part of the last century Webb's uncompromising approach seems the nearest to Voysey's, and Webb above all lived up to Voysey's ideal as expressed in a letter to the *British Architect* in August 1912, when he wrote of 'struggling to keep up the dignity and honour of the profession by resisting the tradesman's attitude to commissions. If a painter is commissioned to paint a picture the one who commissions him does not order him how to do his work, but leaves him free and accepts the result. . . . It is because the public have no knowledge of or interest in art and are saturated with shop-keeper's ideas, that this principle has to be fought for. . . . I have done my best all my life in this direction, and have lost many a commission in consequence.' Webb, like Voysey, would turn down a commission rather than compromise. Another similarity lies in their approach to planning: Edwin Gunn said of Voysey: 'His plans often looked primitive but they worked' – a remark that could be applied with equal justice to many of Webb's buildings. Both Webb and Voysey regarded with suspicion the brilliant but theatrical effects achieved by Shaw, effects that must have had something to do with the ultimate corruption of the young Lutyens. Voysey considered Lutyens by far the ablest of the younger generation and maintained that it was his conversion to the Palladian style, more than anything else, that destroyed the prospect of a natural and healthy development of architecture in England. Shaw and Lutyens, whether in Classic or Romantic mood, could never for long resist the temptation to spring a surprise and were often more preoccupied with the impression on the visitor than with the comfort of the owners.

Voysey, like Webb, was a builder of houses to be lived in, and writing of human needs in relation to domestic architecture he noted the following essential qualities: 'Repose, Cheerfulness, Simplicity, Breadth, Warmth, Quietness in a storm, Economy of upkeep, Evidence of Protection, Harmony with surroundings, Absence of dark passages, even-ness of temperature and making the house a frame

to its inmates. Rich and Poor alike will appreciate these qualities.'

Some of the qualities that Voysey tried to give to his houses were obviously abstract or symbolic, but he also had ideas on the practical side of building that were unconventional and progressive in their day. He advocated solid ground floors to do away with the cold, damp air spaces below. He fed his fireplaces with air from outside the house, to avoid draughts, and for ventilation provided air flues alongside his smoke flues (an idea that he may have picked up during his short period with Saxon Snell, who was a pioneer in sanitation and ventilation). Voysey believed that a low room with proper ventilation saved heating costs and was at the same time more friendly as a living space; he also claimed that his iron casement, set in stone mullions, was less liable to rattling and more economical in upkeep than a timber window, although admittedly the Voysey window was more costly in the first place.

Voysey outlined his method of design as follows: 'Put down all the requirements in tabulated order of importance then all conditions, from which two lists you will be able to formulate a third – of materials. Then ask the everlasting Why are we doing this at all? Let motive strike the keynote of the tune of ideas, the key and rhythm of your song. You want, we will suppose, a home with all the qualities of peace and rest and protection and family pride, the privacy and mutual enjoyment, the hospitality and large-hearted generosity of proportion. The doors will be wide in proportion to height, to suggest welcome – not standoffishly dignified like a coffin lid for the entrance of one body only. Then in the offices for the servants use, let them be cheerful and not shabby and dark – someday men will be ashamed to do ugly things, and cheap and nasty treatment of servants will be regarded as dishonouring to the master – we must have light, bright, cheerful rooms, easily cleaned and inexpensive to keep. Not mocking the abodes of the wealthy, but sincerely sufficient for our use. This manner of going to work is the exact opposite of the usual method which is to seek the books and museums, or monuments of ancient time, or worse still the example of foreigners, and so to save personal thought and enquiry. – Forms that are stolen not only make us ridiculous, but leave our faculties starved and our characters degrading.' ('The Aims and Conditions of the Modern Decorator', *Journal of Decorative Art*, xv, pp.82–90).

Voysey was a small and slightly built man with light blue eyes and sandy hair which thinned and receded at an early age. The National Portrait Gallery has a fine drawing of Voysey as a young man, by his friend Harold Speed (A3) and the Art Workers' Guild has a portrait of Voysey as Master painted by Meredith Frampton.

Shortly after Voysey's death, Robert Donat, who was married to Voysey's niece, broadcast a personal study of 'Uncle Charles' (published in *Architects' Journal*, xciii, 1941, pp.193–4) from which the following passages are quoted:

'If you had wandered through various rooms of the Arts Club in Dover Street, London, any time after eleven o'clock in the morning until about the same hour at night, you would almost certainly have noticed an elderly gentleman with features greatly distinguished by the cut of his nose and the arch of his brow, the

extraordinary sensitiveness and pugnacity of his mouth, and the distant, dreaming look of the visionary in his eye. Probably the first thing you would have noticed was the narrow, immaculately clean starched collar, the colour of which was the brightest thing in the room. It was a beautiful blue. You would probably also have noticed that the collar of his jacket had no lapels. He designed all his clothing himself, and he had a rooted objection to anything that harboured dust or dirt of any description. Therefore there were no unnecessary nooks and crannies in his clothing, not even cuffs to his trouser bottoms. He was clean and prim and gentle, but of firm disposition.

‘He was the sort of man you would never dream of taking any liberty with. You would probably have hesitated to introduce yourself. Automatically he commanded your respect. There was nothing forbidding about him and yet there was aloofness and distinction in abundance.

‘If I have conjured up a vision of a very sweet, gentle, kind old gentleman I have only half succeeded, because there was so very much more to him than that. You may have got the impression that butter wouldn’t melt in his mouth. It certainly wouldn’t unless it happened to be the very best butter. But if there was the slightest defect in the butter I’m afraid, without more ado, he would have spat it out. He liked only the best of everything.

‘Of all his remarkable attributes, the most remarkable thing about him, I think, was his smile. It was a lovely smile. There was more kindness and more simple delight in humour and more sheer affection in that smile than in any smile I have ever beheld. One of his greatest friends was his brother [Ellison Voysey]. To see these two brothers together was always a delight. They were both inordinately fond of oysters, and on one or two occasions I had the pleasure of taking them out to a famous restaurant on Piccadilly Circus and watching them consume a dozen or two of the best. But consume is an inadequate word – a ridiculously inadequate word – to describe the gradual disappearance of those oysters.

‘Neglected he was, to a certain extent, but neglected by his own choice. He drew apart from the world, like many a great artist before him, simply because he couldn’t altogether cope with his work and with the world at the same time. He chose his loneliness but he didn’t particularly like it. He had all he needed and more, and his rooms in St James’s Street, though simple, were extremely comfortable and were filled with beautiful things of his own designing.’

Punctuality and business-like habits were of the essence of Voysey’s way of working. Correspondence must be attended to at once, working hours were strictly adhered to, and overtime was never found necessary. The letters were handwritten by the principal and press-copied by one of the pupils, no telephone disturbed the tranquillity of the office, yet, nevertheless, an amazing amount of work was done. Every building was meticulously detailed and in addition Voysey designed the wallpapers and fabrics, the furniture and carpets, the brass or silver lamps and fittings, the spoons and forks, the hinges and handles for doors and drawers as well as ceremonial keys and presentation caskets! Designs were made for mosaic and enamel, marble inlay and stained glass: models were made for carved work and sculpture, and in nearly every case the designer’s instinctive understanding of form and colour was backed by actual experience and

experiment in the craft for which he was designing. Like Webb and Street, Voysey designed every detail himself and his pupils or assistants had little to do but to make the necessary copies.

Even during the busy years at York Place the office retained something of its family character, for Voysey never employed a large staff of assistants. The office consisted of two rooms, one opening into the other. Both were carpeted and hung with watercolour drawings and photographs, and the folding doors to the private office were usually left open so that the pupils might overhear and learn from conversations between the principal and his client or contractors. Voysey himself worked at the drawing-board alongside his pupils and clerks and he encouraged them to read all the inward and outward correspondence so that they should learn all that they could of architectural practice.

In his old age, Voysey kept a large collection of drawings in his rooms at St James's Street in two chests designed by himself. When in 1941 illness made it impossible for him to continue living on his own, his son carried him off to Winchester, where he spent the last few months of his life. The drawings in their chests were removed and sent to a place of safety along with the treasures of the RIBA Collection. In 1943 in accordance with his father's wish, Charles Cowles Voysey presented the drawings to the Institute as a permanent memorial; they are fully described and many of them are illustrated in a special volume of the Catalogue of the Collection.

The drawings cover all the varied aspects of Voysey's work, and include 88 designs for buildings, 8 designs for extensive alterations or additions to buildings, 260 designs for furniture, 226 graphic designs and 208 designs for wallpapers and textiles. This represents the great majority of Voysey's surviving drawings, and only the wallpaper and textile designs are surpassed by the Victoria and Albert Museum's collection, which has recently been enriched by a number of designs from the Morton textile firm.

Because the drawings cover such a span of years and such a wide variety of designs, they give a good idea of how Voysey worked. Changes can be discerned over the course of his career; Voysey's development as a designer of houses is discussed above and his development as a wallpaper designer was first discussed by Peter Floud (*Penrose Annual*, LII, 1958, pp. 10-14). But what is remarkable is that despite these changes Voysey's designs retain a high degree of consistency: they show how in a single-minded way he worked out solutions to functional and visual problems according to his principle of fitness for purpose, and then reused the same solutions over a period of years, sometimes modified or elaborated. And they also show how unified was his approach to design, whether he was dealing with buildings, furniture or decorative work.

The very appearance of the drawings did display a remarkable uniformity and neatness which reflects Voysey's character and ideas. He apparently kept such strict control over his assistants that only very slight differences in the drawing betray the presence of different hands. H. Gaye and H. Stevens are the only draughtsman's names inscribed on drawings.

Most drawings, with the exception of the ones belonging to the later, less

successful, years which are made on poorer quality paper, are on half-imperial sheets of Whatman paper which exactly fitted the drawing board which Voysey designed for himself. The drawings are treated in a similar way whatever they are for. They are fitted economically on to the sheet and are carefully labelled in a script designed by Voysey himself, with occasional misspellings which betray Voysey's unconventional education. The client's name is almost invariably given with full titles – Voysey was very aware of social distinctions. Except in the case of later drawings, which are often in pen, plans, elevations and sections are usually drawn in with precise lines in hard pencil and are often washed in clear, bright colours. Voysey disliked the greenery-yallery of what he called the 'Spook school' (see *Magazine of Art*, II, 1904, p.211) and there are some finished perspectives in gay, almost garish watercolours.

There are no topographical drawings of buildings: the only study drawings are of plants and birds and the occasional figure motif: there are no preparatory drawings, such as the thumbnail perspectives made by other architects such as Philip Webb; and there are few alternative designs. These omissions could be due to selection, but they consort very well with what is known of Voysey. Cowles Voysey says that his father drew with ease and confidence, seldom using an eraser. Voysey was against working from sketches of other people's designs: '... there is a wide difference between the influence of memory not deliberately referred to, and the determined espousal of a pre-existing design. What you can remember is your own, what you sketch you steal' (*Individuality*, 1951, p.88). He advocated that the designer should '... gather his knowledge of form by making careful diagrams of flowers and plants, by drawing plans and elevations and sections, he will then learn the true form of every part, with its structural relation of parts' (*ibid.*, p.13).

The drawings for both houses and furniture show clearly how Voysey evolved certain types, and then repeated them many times.

In Voysey's designs for small houses, such as Tilehurst, Bushey (B33) or Littleholme, Kendal (B24), everything is brought together under one simple roof, but in a house of larger size the main rooms and the offices are usually contained in separate blocks which are either placed side by side, as for example at the house near Puttenham, c.1896–7 (B17) or Norney, near Shackleford, 1897 (B19), or are at an angle to one another, as for example at Broadleys, Windermere, 1898 (B20), or The Homestead, Frinton, 1906 (B38). Frequently the entrance lobby, sometimes with the stairs, is in a separate projection, as for example in the house at Bracknell Gardens (B32), the house at Kidderminster, 1899, or Littleholme, Guildford, 1906. There are other features which continually reappear: for example a pair of bay windows with a verandah in between, as in the house near Puttenham, c.1896–7 (B17), or in Moorcrag, Windermere, 1898 (B21), or stone-walled terraces, as at Broadleys, Windermere, 1898 (B20), New Place, Haslemere, 1897 (B18), The Pastures, North Luffenham, c.1901 (B26), or pitched roofs with cross-gables, as in Norney, near Shackleford, 1897 (B19), or The Pastures, North Luffenham, c.1901 (B26). And of course the typical Voysey details, such as the white roughcast, the iron casement windows with stone dressings and the elegant iron gutter brackets, reappear constantly.

There are a large number of drawings for unexecuted designs which, though sometimes not the most exciting drawings aesthetically, are very revealing about aspects of Voysey which are not usually stressed. It is also interesting to see from unexecuted designs what Voysey's attitudes were to older buildings. His somewhat unfortunate design of c. 1907–08 for additions to the Colchester office of the Essex and Suffolk Equitable Insurance Society reveals that he was quite prepared to tamper with a classical building which he probably considered dull and alien; whereas in 1910–11, when his designs for a convalescent home at Holmbury St Mary were turned down, he was deeply reluctant to tamper with a vernacular, old English barn in order to convert it for a new use.

Many of the drawings are particularly interesting either because they show designs which, though executed, no longer retain the appearance which Voysey intended or because they show objects, such as pieces of furniture or ephemera such as letterheadings, etc., which may well have been executed, but can no longer be traced.

Few of Voysey's houses retain their original bright colouring: in the drawings they have pristine white walls which contrast with the red of tile copings, chimney-pots and curtains, the bright green of drain pipes and water butts, the black of gutter brackets and tarred plinths and the gay colours of flowering creepers. Time has wrought even greater changes in the gardens, and in order to see the neat appearance which they were supposed to have, with shaped beds and clipped shrubs, formally laid out, it is necessary to look at such drawings as those for the gardens at Lowicks, Frensham, 1895 (B 16), at New Place, Haslemere, 1897 (B 18) or at Henley-in-Arden, 1909 (B 43).

JOHN BRANDON-JONES

In this section of the exhibition the items have been arranged in five chronological groupings, charting the course of Voysey's architectural career:

### **1874 – c.1890**

These years cover Voysey's development from an articled clerk to an architect-designer with an independent practice of his own.

Two examples of decorative work done by Voysey for J.P. Seddon are exhibited, (B1) and (B4). We have no examples of the work that Voysey did while in George Devey's office. We know that he was responsible for two cottages for Devey on the Spencer Estate near Northampton, but these have not been identified. Examples of Devey's own drawings have been included to show the type of work that Voysey would have seen while in his office, (B2) and (B3).

Between 1882, when Voysey began practice on his own, and 1888 when he obtained his first architectural commission, he made a number of designs for imaginary clients. One of these is exhibited (B5) and it reveals how greatly Voysey was influenced by Devey in these early years.

Of the very early works by Voysey exhibited here, the house at Castlemorton still has a touch of the Devey manner (B11) but the houses at Bishop's Itchington (B7) and at Bedford Park (B10) already convey an impression of individuality and maturity.

### **c.1890 – c.1895**

During these years Voysey began to establish his reputation as an architect. In 1893 he was given his first substantial commission, the design of Perrycroft at Colwall (B13) and in the same year a long article on his work appeared in the first volume of the *Studio*, for which he designed the binding.

### **The late 1890s**

Voysey introduced some rather mannered – even eccentric – detailing into the more expensive houses designed in 1897, such as New Place (B18) and Norney (B19), but with the lake-side houses near Windermere, Broadleys (B20) and Moorcrag (B21), there was a return to simplicity.

### **c.1900 – 1909**

Voysey was now at the height of his career, he had a series of commissions which gave him the opportunity to achieve what he had always wanted – the design of a complete home with every detail of the interior, not only the fittings but also the moveable furniture, carpets, curtains and wall-coverings. The Orchard (B24), designed for himself and his wife in 1899, was the first such house, and it was widely illustrated in the architectural press in Britain and abroad. Many other publications followed – for example The Pastures at North Luffenham, 1901 (B26), a dining-room at Birkenhead, 1902 (B29), Hollymount near Beaconsfield (B37) and The Homestead at Frinton-on-Sea, both of 1905 (B38). Two important interior designs carried out in London were Garden Corner on the Chelsea Embankment (B39) and offices for an insurance company at Capel House, New Broad Street both in 1906 (B40).

### **c.1909 – 1933**

Voysey was dismayed by the revival of classical forms encouraged by the architectural schools and popularised by Lutyens and other younger men. He reacted by introducing details of Gothic origin into his own work wherever an element of decoration seemed appropriate.

In 1909, he used a pointed arch in the porch of Brooke End at Henley-in-Arden (B43) and in the same year he built a miniature courtyard house at Coombe Down near Bath with every detail taken from a Tudor precedent (B41). Two unexecuted designs for larger houses are dated 1914 and have eccentric courtyard plans, pointed arches, crenellations and towers (B46) and (B47).

One reason for the decline in Voysey's practice from 1910 onwards was the fact that his work appeared to be increasingly reactionary. Voysey had, from the beginning, believed that Pugin and Ruskin were right in claiming a moral superiority for Gothic and he now saw himself, as the last disciple of Pugin, fighting for the Gothic tradition of honest English building against a generation of architects who had fallen under the influence of an alien style, and against the critics and theorists who supported and encouraged them. As a result Voysey found that he was losing clients to rivals who were prepared to follow the new fashion and although he entered for several competitions for public buildings, among them the Manchester Exhibition Hall in 1933 (B50), he was never among the prize winners.

In selecting the designs shown in this exhibition an attempt has been made to represent as many different types of building as possible and a number of schemes for unexecuted buildings have been included because they reveal aspects of Voysey's work and opinions which are not usually seen or understood.

The mention of Voysey's name immediately brings to mind one of those delightful, simple, white houses with low spreading lines which rightly made him famous. Such houses were built for middle-class clients of simple but artistic tastes who wanted 'a cottage in the country', or if not actually in the country, at least in a suburb. But Voysey was a believer in the social hierarchy, and when asked by an aristocratic client, the Earl of Lovelace, to design a new house at Ockham he produced something more elaborate and more traditional (B14). When designing for a restricted site in town, Voysey would abandon his customary horizontal planning and favoured a 'tower house'. The only design of this type actually built was the house at Bedford Park (B10), but two unexecuted tower houses are included in the exhibition, (B9) and (B31). The very ingenious arrangement of plan and section of the terrace houses in Hans Road designed in 1891 (B12) is another example of Voysey's versatility.

Voysey nearly always clothed his buildings in a white roughcast coat, which emphasises the clean-cut geometrical forms. But he maintained that economy, rather than aesthetics, first led him to this method of construction when designing a cheap cottage for himself (B6) and there is some evidence that he would have used roughcast less often if he had had his own way. He would certainly have preferred a stone facing for the house at North Luffenham (B26) and he would have used local stone at Glassonby (B22) and red brick for a house in Hampstead

(B32). He did in fact build in stone at Kendal for his friend Arthur Simpson (B42) and for the Gothic house near Bath (B41).

When designing buildings other than houses Voysey's work shows considerable variety, suiting the form and material to the requirements and the conditions of the site. The drawings for Lincoln Grammar School (B27) show stone facings with Tudor detail except for the inner courtyard, and Sanderson's Factory at Chiswick, built in 1901 (B28), is severely functional in form and faced with white glazed brick. For a Library at Limerick, designed in 1904 (B34), Voysey intended to use a chequer pattern in two colours of stone, and the competition design for the Government Buildings at Ottawa, 1914 (B45) shows a stone façade in Perpendicular Gothic obviously inspired by Pugin. In 1923, when the development of the Devonshire House site was under discussion, Voysey wrote to the press advocating residential use in the form of three tower blocks of flats and he illustrated his letter with a sketch showing a Gothic tower of monumental proportions (B49).

The majority of the drawings exhibited are gay watercolour perspectives, many of them probably prepared for showing at the Royal Academy, or small-scale plans with sections and elevations in pencil and coloured washes. A few larger-scale drawings have been included to show the care which Voysey devoted to the details of joinery and chimney-pieces (B17), a letter plate (B25) or a pigeon-cote (B26). There are also examples of Voysey's colourful plans for neat, geometrically planned gardens (B16, B18 and B23) and drawings for decorative details illustrating his love of heraldry (B40). Only a selection of Voysey's work is illustrated by the architectural drawings and photographs exhibited and the notes to the catalogue entries do not cover the subsequent histories of the buildings concerned. All available information as to subsequent additions or alterations has been included in the chronological list of existing works.

JOHN BRANDON-JONES AND JOANNA HESELTINE