

C. F. A. VOYSEY



JOHN BRANDON-JONES

IN WRITING and in speaking of architecture Voysey always demanded an open mind, ready for all healthy development, prepared to accept conditions that it cannot alter such as the advent of the machine. He knew that man's habits, customs, conditions and ideas were for ever changing. 'We must shake off the fashionable convention of obedience to style,' he said, 'and be sincerely ourselves, and recognize our limitations.'

The Voysey House is white and its windows are grouped in horizontal bands. These two easily observed characteristics seem to have been enough to link Voysey with the style of architecture at present known as 'Modern', the coincidence of white walls and horizontal lines is, on the face of it, supported by the call for *fitness* that recurs so frequently in Voysey's writings on art and architecture and, as he himself has noted: 'Men are quicker to discern likeness than difference.'

Voysey himself, like Frank Lloyd Wright, had no respect for his self-appointed successors and not a little resentment at their claims. Those who have time to study his own sayings and his own buildings can judge for themselves how far it is justifiable to class him as a 'pioneer of the Modern Movement'.

Charles Francis Annesley Voysey was born in 1857, in the same year as W. R. Lethaby, and one year after Sullivan and Berlage.

Voysey's father was Vicar of Healaugh, a small and isolated parish in Yorkshire. The family was a large one and according to Voysey his two elder sisters exercised a 'salutary and humbling effect upon their brother'. Two younger sisters separated him from his three brothers, who were in consequence too young to make satisfactory companions for him in his childhood. As a result of these circumstances much of his time was spent with his father.

It is not surprising that these early years should have been of supreme importance in developing the character of the son. The Reverend Charles Voysey was himself a most remarkable man. 'He believed in a Good God instead of an Angry One', and he was eventually deprived of his living and expelled from the Church of England for denying the doctrine of everlasting Hell.

Charles was fourteen when the family migrated to London and settled in Dulwich near to the famous public school to which the boys were sent as day-

scholars as they became old enough. The eldest son, however, was unable to settle down after eighteen months, was withdrawn and educated by a private tutor until the time came for him to choose a profession. His grandfather, Annesley Voysey, had been one of the old school of engineer-architects, a builder of bridges and lighthouses as well as of homes and churches. This, coupled with the fact that anyone could then call himself an architect without having to pass an examination, caused him to agree to be articled to a distinguished architect for five years.

Voysey's professional education began in 1874 in the office of J. P. Seddon, a contemporary of Brooks and Bodley, who had in hand a number of churches and vicarages as well as the University of Aberystwyth. In later years it amused him to recall that, in spite of the fact that the art master at Dulwich had reported him as 'quite unfit for an artistic profession', Seddon entrusted him, while still a pupil, with the painting of life-size figures on the walls of one of his churches. His pupilage completed, he remained with Seddon for a year and then spent a short period with Saxon Snell. In 1880 he received an invitation to join the staff of George Devey. Voysey regarded this chance as providential. The work in the office was interesting and varied and he was given several 'outside' jobs that he enjoyed and remembered.

In 1881 Devey bought some land in Northamptonshire, adjoining the estate of one of his clients, on which he decided to build a pair of small cottages. Voysey was given complete control of this work; he made all the necessary drawings, ordered the material, engaged the workmen and lived on the spot while the work was in progress. He had to send a weekly time-sheet to the office and the only limitation imposed upon him was that the total cost of the two cottages must not exceed five hundred pounds!

Devey himself was a fine water-colourist and in his youth had been a pupil of J. S. Cotman. His practice was extensive, and he specialized in the design of country houses for the nobility and gentry. Among his patrons were several members of the Rothschild family and also the Princess Louise, for whom he built a shooting lodge in Scotland. He seems to have been one of the first of the 'Gothic' architects to realize that the men of the Middle Ages had themselves built small houses as well as buildings of monumental scale, and that for the domestic architect at least there was much to be learned from farm-house, cottage and barn, and it seems likely that his experiments helped to pave the way for the greater originality of Philip Webb and Norman Shaw. It is also clear that the earliest of Voysey's published designs were very much coloured by the work that he had been doing as Devey's assistant.

There can be little doubt that the bed-rock of Voysey's life and art was the

religious and ethical creed in which he was trained by his father. It was natural in such a home that he should come into contact with the teaching of John Ruskin; in fact Ruskin was a patron and frequent visitor to the school at which Voysey's sisters were pupils. It was probably Ruskin as much as anyone who turned Voysey towards the Gothic rather than the Classic in his search for architectural ideals. Pugin, too, he regarded as a master.

'Pugin', he said, '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 considered that no other architect of the nineteenth century could compare with Pugin for knowledge of Tudor architecture and that for all his knowledge he managed to avoid falling into the habit of copying.

'You may search the Houses of Parliament from top to bottom,' he wrote, 'and you will not find one superficial yard that is copied from any pre-existing building.'

Pugin and Ruskin were the great prophets of Voysey's generation. He was also influenced by some of his immediate predecessors and near contemporaries, especially by Norman Shaw and by Mackmurdo. He recorded the debt of architectural students of his generation to Butterfield, Brooks (Mackmurdo's former master), Bentley, and Oldrid Scott, and said that it was from the work of Bodley, Burges, Godwin, and Mackmurdo that he learned that nothing inside or outside a home was too small to deserve the consideration of the architect.

In the years immediately following his apprenticeship, the critical years during which his own architectural handwriting was formed, the principal conscious influence was Norman Shaw, partly by direct observation of his buildings and partly through the Art Workers Guild. He considered that the period, in the 'eighties, when Shaw was in full practice, was 'more Gothic than Classic' and that so long as Sedding and Mackmurdo and Morris were working for the Crafts as handmaids to architecture much good work was done, but he lamented that soon after Shaw's time the Classicism of the Georgian type became fashionable and 'corrupted even the great Lutyens'. He had a very great respect for the ability of Lutyens and regarded his desertion to the Palladian camp as a severe blow to the establishment of a real English architecture.

Although he did not put Morris on the same level as Ruskin and Pugin he very much admired his work and paid him the curious compliment of saying that having once visited the Morris shop he did not dare to go again lest his own designs should degenerate into copies of Morris! On the other hand, he was completely out of sympathy with the social and religious opinions of Morris. He

wrote to a friend: '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.'

Writing of himself, in later years, Voysey said that he had worked upon the principle that 'good design must grow out of requirements and conditions – that fitness is the basis of beauty, and distinction in design depends more upon personal character than scholarship.' Speaking of his early days in practice he said that 'the temper of the time was revolutionary against over decoration and elaboration, and there was a revolt against scholasticism, possibly unconsciously felt at the time'. These convictions were parallel to those of Sullivan, but the particular twist that was given to them in Voysey's work seems to have had its origin in the religious tendency of his childhood training and of his heredity. His own father had left the Church to become famous as an independent preacher and further back he was proud to trace his pedigree to Susannah, the sister of John and Charles Wesley.

Voysey believed that the moral and aesthetic aspects of an architect's work were essentially interdependent. In this respect his ideas were founded upon Ruskin and Pugin. 'It is not enough', he wrote, 'to have a vague sentimental liking for artistic work, sound reason must be sought to explain one's likes and dislikes.' But, the reasons he was thinking of were not the reasons of a materialist; he explained what he meant by 'fitness' in the following terms:

Fitness is a Divine Law, and the more we investigate Nature the more we become impressed by its fitness; therefore we do wisely to work on the same lines and strive diligently after fitness. Can it then be fit to use foreign styles to express English thought and feeling? The English architect down to the Tudor period was content to learn and understand all the conditions of his own country, to understand the character of his own countrymen and to express their emotions and aspirations. He was keen to learn the possibilities and limitations of his material, and, in order that we may benefit by his experiences in this direction, we should study all the pure English examples we come across, never forgetting that it is only unalterable technical qualities which we most need to learn, and not those accidents of passing fashion, or the changing manners and customs of different periods. It is very important that we should notice, for instance, the way the stone in different districts was used, rather than the existence of battlements or moats, which tell not of the history of building so much as of the manner of life of the people.

Respect for tradition was to Voysey natural and right, but he felt that it could become a dangerous enemy to progress if it was allowed to check men's

efforts towards greater fitness and improved methods of serving their own time. 'Reverence for the past is admirable when exercised by the individual for his own guidance, but mischievous when imposed upon others.'

Although Voysey said that he would speak neither for the Classic nor for the Gothic style there was never the least doubt where his sympathies lay; he did not believe that good could come from working in any style, but he considered that an Englishman had much to learn from the Gothic builders because they were his fellow countrymen and had worked under similar conditions. The great Classical architects were foreigners who had worked under completely different conditions and the results of their experience were in consequence hardly applicable to building in England.

In a paper read to the Design Club in 1911 Voysey spoke of styles, and contrasted the Renaissance and the Gothic. This paper is one of his best, and every serious student of twentieth-century architectural ideas should read the complete report published in *The British Architect* for January 27th, 1911. It is only possible to reproduce a few short extracts here.

The clamouring for style is merely a cloak to hide our want of discrimination and many think that the establishment of a national style would make it easy for them to be in the fashion; most people want to be in the fashion as to taste. The discernment of fitness needs careful consideration of many subjects, and a wise, brave judgment, which the average man finds beyond his power or inclination. The Architectural Profession has done its best to encourage the adoption of the style called English Renaissance, because it is possible for the average man to obtain a degree of proficiency in it; it is easily crammed, and is a sure crutch for the halt and lame ...

Renaissance is a process by which plans and requirements are more or less made to fit a conception of a more or less symmetrical elevation, or group of elevations. The design is conceived from the outside of the building and worked inwards. Windows are made of a size necessary to the pleasant massing of the elevation, rather than to fit the size and shape of rooms.

The Gothic process is the exact opposite; outside appearances are evolved from internal fundamental conditions; staircases and windows come where most convenient for use. All openings are proportioned to the various parts to which they apply, and the creation of a beautiful Gothic building instead of being a conception based on a temple made with hands, is based on the temple of a human soul.

It was of course the baleful influence of the Renaissance that seemed to Voysey, and also to Lethaby, to be the stumbling-block in the way of a real revival of the art of architecture. It was therefore against Classical theories of design that they levelled their heaviest artillery. Eventually the English Renaissance revival fell to their attack, but twenty years later the attackers were dismayed to find that they had demolished one style only to let in another. The neo-Georgian had gone the way of the Gothic Revival, as Norman Shaw had prophesied – but it was replaced by a new importation of Continental fashions. And the architectural students still preferred foreign travel to a serious study of the English climate. On the subject of 'Modern' architecture, Lethaby wrote to a friend: '– my double eye! Only another kind of design humbug to pass with a shrug. Ye olde modernist style – we must have a style to copy – what funny stuff this art is?' There can be no doubt at all that Voysey would have applauded Lethaby's sentiments.

Speaking of human needs in relation to domestic architecture, Voysey noted the following qualities as essential: repose, cheerfulness, simplicity, breadth, warmth, quietness in a storm, economy of upkeep, evidence of protection, harmony with surroundings, absence of dark passages or places, evenness of temperature, and making the home the frame to its inmates. Rich and poor alike will appreciate these qualities, he said, and the effect he sought to obtain may be understood from the following quotation:

Try the effect of a well-proportioned room, with white-washed walls, plain carpet and simple oak furniture, and nothing in it but necessary articles of use, and one pure ornament in the form of a simple vase of flowers – not a cosmopolitan crowd of all sorts, but one or two sprays of one kind – and you will then find reflections begin to dance in your brain; each object will be received on the retina and understood, classified and dismissed from the mind, and you will be as free as a bird to wander in the sunshine or storm of your own thoughts.

In 1882 Voysey set up on his own account in Broadway Chambers, Westminster. It was not for several years that his practice grew large enough to occupy his full time, but he refused his father's offer to write to friends and well-wishers on his behalf. Voysey felt that a client should choose his architect because he had a liking for the man and his work, and that the advice of an architect so chosen would be more readily accepted than the advice of an architect chosen to favour a friend, or as an act of patronage. It also is probable that his religious and moral views would have been offended by any action that might have seemed an interference with the ordained course of events. Although

he would not agree to accept help, even from his father, he did what he could to help himself, he entered for a competition – the Admiralty Offices in Whitehall – and in due course he heard that his scheme was unplaced.

Exhausted by the effort of preparing a complete set of competition drawings single-handed he decided to take a country holiday, and went to stay with a friend, the master of a preparatory school for boys. On the staff of the school was Mary Maria Evans, who later became Mrs Voysey. His engagement proved an added incentive to work, but the only jobs he had were surveys and small additions or alterations. Then, as luck would have it, he paid a visit to his friend Arthur Mackmurdo and found him at work on designs for wall-papers and woven fabrics. It was obvious that there were opportunities in this field and Voysey obtained from Mackmurdo the technical information necessary to make a start. Success was immediate and Voysey sold his first design to Jeffrey and Company in 1883. His talent in pattern design was soon recognized as outstanding, and the leading manufacturers of the period began to compete for his work. Ten years later, in 1893, he was able to obtain a regular contract, with the Essex Company, under which he supplied them with twenty designs a year and they undertook to accept and pay for the work without the option of refusing designs they were unable to use. While he was building up his practice Voysey found that his income from paper, textile and carpet designs was an invaluable stand-by.

Success as a decorator did not satisfy Voysey. He wanted to build, and as a start he designed a small house for himself and his future wife, hoping to persuade a wealthy friend to finance his venture. The scheme fell through and the house was never built, but in 1888 the drawings were published in *The Architect* and caught the eye of M. H. Lakin, later Sir Michael Lakin, who gave Voysey his first important commission. This was The Cottage at Bishop's Itchington in Warwickshire, designed in the same year (Fig. 8). Gradually other commissions came in, most of them from strangers who had seen the architect's work. The brother and sister of the first client both had houses built by Voysey. They and other early clients were Quakers who found the characteristic severity and simplicity of his work sympathetic to their own beliefs.

Voysey married in 1885 and for the next fourteen years carried on his practice from his home. He lived for a short time in Bedford Park, then moved to Streatham Hill and then to St John's Wood, where he lived first at 11 Melina Place and afterwards at 6 Carlton Hill. In 1899 he removed with his family to Chorley Wood and established a separate office at 23 York Place, Baker Street. His own house, The Orchard, was not completed until 1900, but while it was being built he rented a house near by. The office at York Place was retained

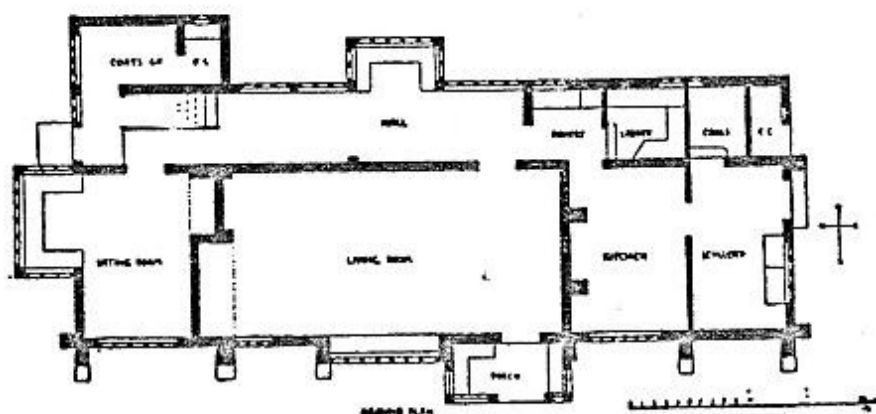
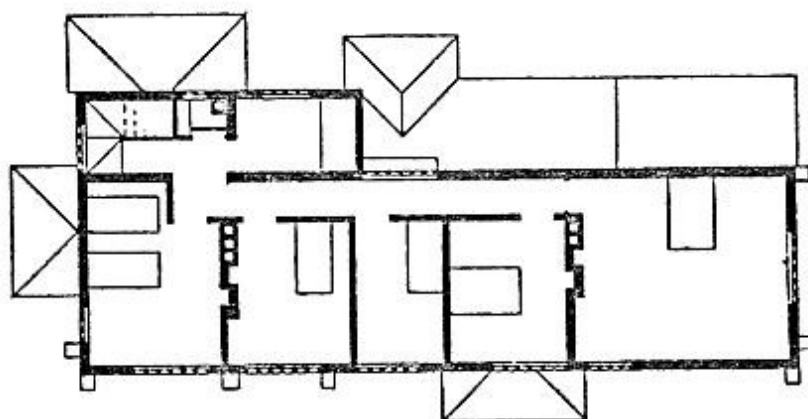
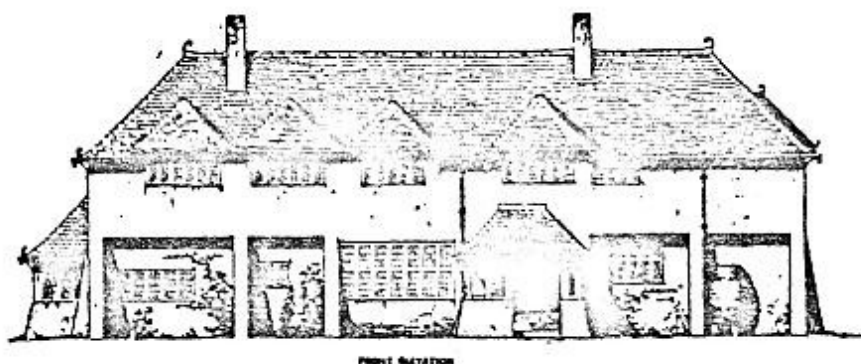


FIG. 8. *The Cottage, Bishop's Itchington*

until 1913 when the buildings were demolished. Temporary accommodation was then obtained at 25 Dover Street until Voysey was able to settle at 10 New Square, Lincoln's Inn, where he remained until 1917. In his later years he lived in a flat at 73 St James Street and once again his work was done in his home.

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. His office consisted of two rooms, one opening into the other. Both were carpeted and hung with water-colour 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.

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 wall-papers 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.

Voysey did not design in a 'style' nor did he make any conscious concessions to popular taste or to intellectual or academic theories. Changes of fashion, therefore, meant nothing to him and were never reflected in his designs. This gave to his work an amazing consistency, but both in planning and in details and mouldings a steady development can be traced. The unwary critic, however, may be confused by the fact that some of the designs were published for the first time several years after they were made. Reference to Voysey's own notebook, now preserved in the R.I.B.A. Library, is also occasionally confusing, because many of the buildings were entered several times if alternative schemes were prepared, or if the execution of the work was delayed.

The tall white house in Bedford Park (Fig. 9) so often illustrated by writers on the history of architecture, Voysey's first London house, has often been dated 1888, and one writer has placed it as early as 1882, although it was not in fact built until 1891. It is true that Voysey made drawings for a house in Bedford Park for J. W. Forster in 1888, but it was very different, both in plan and in elevation, from the building that later attracted the attention of the critics and historians. The drawings made in 1888 can be seen at the R.I.B.A. and they show a house with a conventional suburban plan. The front door leads into a narrow hall half filled by the stair, and the kitchen, scullery and outbuildings form the customary tail that ruins the garden behind. The elevation is also conventional with a forty-five degree tiled roof, a splayed bay running through two floors and a Tudor arch to form a porch. The upper part of the walling is

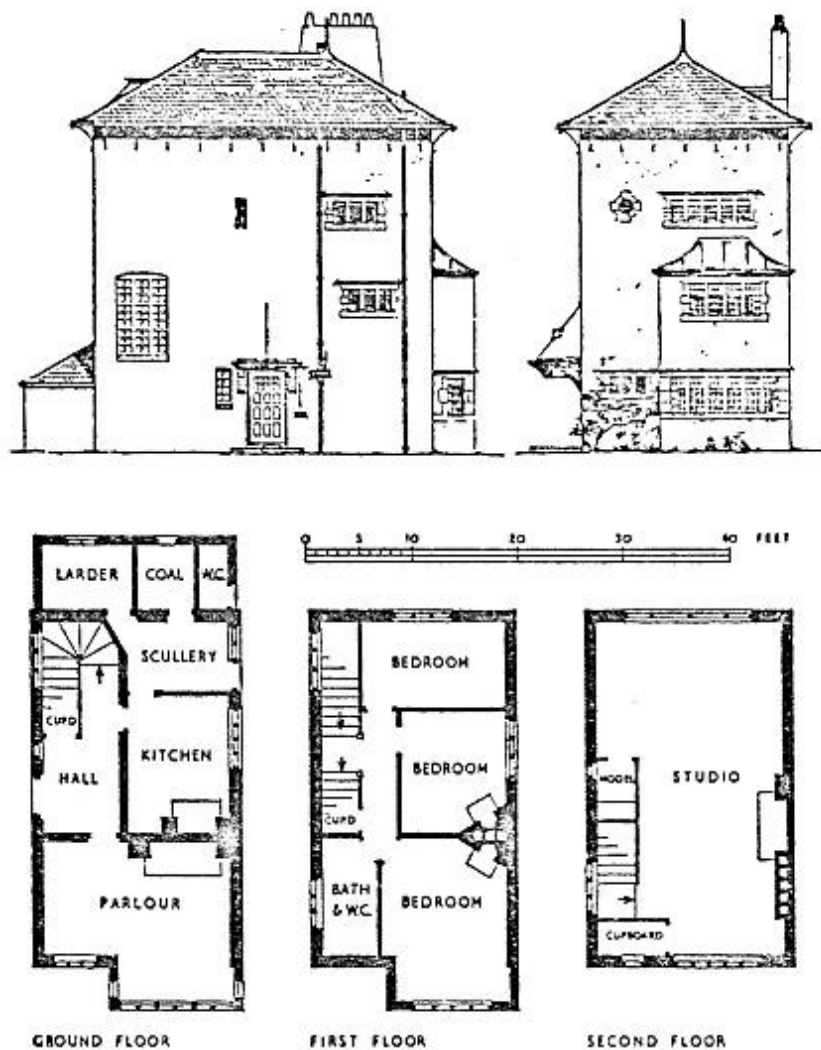


FIG. 9. *House at Bedford Park*

rough-cast and the ground floor is red brick. It might have been a good little house of its kind but there was nothing in it to mark an epoch.

A revised plan for the Forsters' house appeared in the *British Architect* in September 1891, and shows the house as it was actually built. The note accompanying the drawings gives the contract price – £494 10s. – but it indicates that the work had not in fact started at the time of publication. It is also interesting to read that the architect has had to prepare 'no less than eighteen sheets of contract drawings in order that the Contractor may *not* put in the usual thing – ovolo mouldings, stop chamfers, fillets and damnation generally!' It may seem pedantic to complain of an error of only two or three years in dating this little house, but the point assumes considerable importance when an attempt is made to assess the influences that affected Voysey's development. It is essential to place his early designs in the correct sequence, and a study of the drawings makes it clear that The Cottage, at Bishop's Itchington, and Walnut Tree Farm, at Castlemoreton, come before the executed design for the house in Bedford Park.

During the early and middle 'eighties Voysey was mainly employed on the alteration and decoration of existing buildings. Some of these jobs were undertaken while he was still an assistant to George Devey, and the designs made at this time are very like those of Devey himself. Later in the 'eighties Voysey began to produce a series of designs for houses for imaginary clients, the drawings of which were published in the *British Architect* from 1889 onwards. Most of these schemes were reminiscent of Devey's work and of early Norman Shaw designs, but in some of the less ambitious houses that appeared late in the series Voysey discarded the Tudor mannerisms characteristic of Devey and began to show his own hand (Fig. 10). The 'House with an Octagonal Hall'

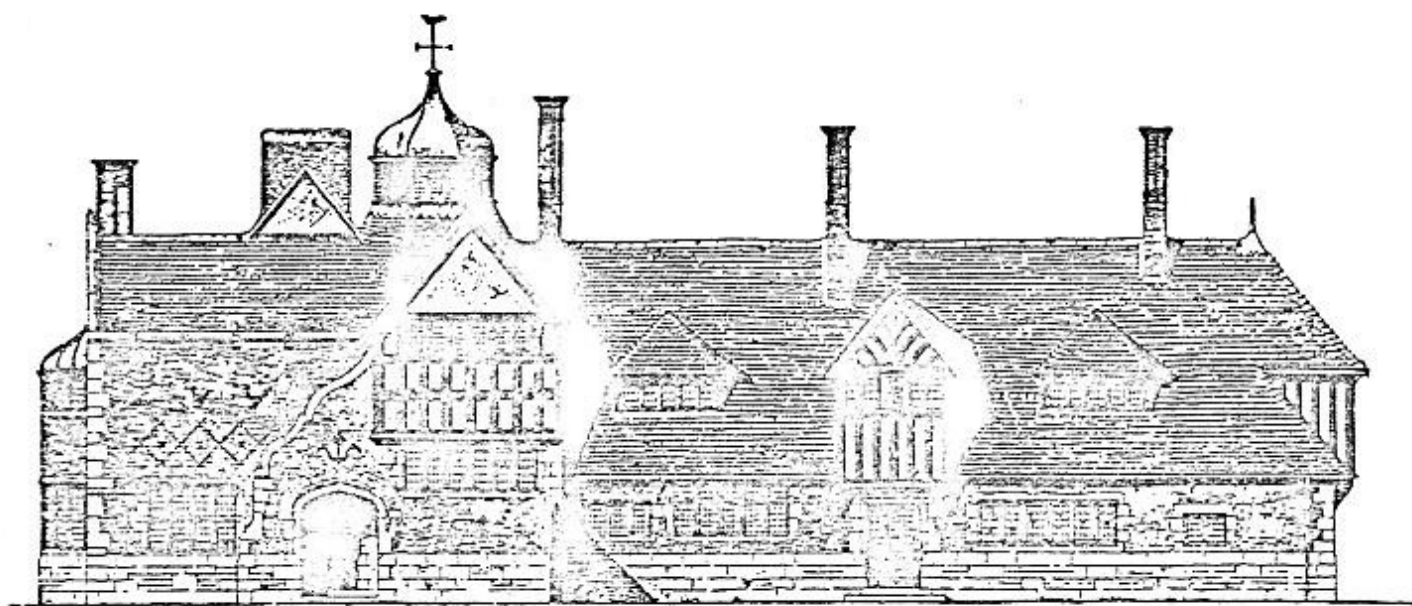


FIG. 10. *Project for house for imaginary client, 1889, by C. F. A. Voysey*

which appeared in April, 1889, might well have been designed by Devey; the tiled roofs were decorated with dormers and Dutch gables, and the brick walls were broken up by patches of stone and half-timber. Just a year later, in April, 1890, came the design for a 'Cockney Villa minus ostentatious jimcrackery' – a square white box with a low pitched slate roof. Both in plan and in elevation the Cockney Villa seems to be the link between the first and the final designs for the house at Bedford Park.

Voysey himself said that his early work was influenced by Norman Shaw, and he was also in close contact with Mackmurdo, who, as we have seen, had helped him to find his feet as a designer of textiles and wall-papers. There is no doubt that Voysey was familiar with Mackmurdo's 'House for an Artist', the drawings of which were published in *Hobby Horse* in 1888, and Mackmurdo had already introduced, in his furniture and in the exhibition stands of the Century Guild, the lean classic profiles that became so popular a few years later.

Another factor, at least as important as the example of his older colleagues,

was Voysey's removal from a very ordinary semi-detached house in Streatham to an attractive Regency house in St John's Wood. The Streatham house, 45 Tierney Road, had the standard speculator's plan with the trailing out-buildings behind, the basic type to which Voysey's Bedford Park plan of 1888 belonged. The St John's Wood house, 11 Melina Place, was one of a pair. The entrance door was at the *side* of the house, opening into a square staircase hall and allowing the sitting-room to take up the full width of the front. Voysey apparently realized that the side entrance was the solution to the deep narrow plan and applied the same principle in the revised plans for Bedford Park. It is hardly necessary to add that 11 Melina Place was stuccoed and had a low pitched slate roof.

It is also interesting to notice that M. H. Lakin, for whom The Cottage, at Bishop's Itchington, had been built in 1888, again employed Voysey in 1890 – this time the design was for a new wing to The Cliff, at Warwick. The old house was stuccoed, its details were neo-Classic and its slate roof was hidden by a parapet. Voysey's new wing was also given a parapet and a slate roof; but, in contrast to the sash windows of the old building he used stone mullions and leaded panes.

Consciously, or unconsciously, Voysey seems to have responded to the severity and discipline of the Classical work with which he became acquainted at this critical point in his career. He was searching for 'truth and beauty' and, in spite of the prejudices instilled by his study of Pugin and his training under Seddon and Devey, he undoubtedly appreciated the neat and practical planning, and the simplicity of the Regency houses.

Some of Voysey's early published designs have roofs broken by innumerable gables and dormers and are planned in a way that would have made them difficult and expensive to construct, but economy was not a matter of importance in planning for imaginary clients – nor had it been very necessary in Devey's office when work was being carried out for the Rothschild family and their friends. But, as soon as he began to practise on his own account, Voysey realized that it was essential to cut down the cost of building and this necessity reinforced his instinctive preference for simplicity and led him to adopt plain rectangular plans with unbroken rooflines. His houses, large and small, were designed for easy construction, and by paying attention to details of planning he made the savings that enabled him to use first-rate materials and allow generous room sizes, while still keeping within reasonable limits of cost.

On the practical side of house-building Voysey had many unconventional ideas, some of which have recently been rediscovered! He advocated solid ground floors in order to do away with cold, damp, air spaces below; he fed

his fire-places with air from the outside of the house in order to avoid draughts and cold feet; and for ventilation he provided air flues alongside the smoke flues. A low room with proper ventilation saved heating costs and was at the same time more friendly as a living place than a room of Classical proportion. Iron casements set in stone were less liable to rattling and more economical in upkeep costs than the customary wood casement, though they were comparatively costly in the first place; recent visits to one or two of Voysey's houses certainly confirm his theories on the subject of windows, the fifty-year-old casements are as sound as ever, wrought iron he used for the frames is practically rustless and requires a minimum of attention.

Voysey's concentration on the straightforward structural scheme certainly limited the variety of room shapes and restricted the possibility of experiments in contrasting spaces that was a feature of many Norman Shaw interiors. Voysey always designed the ground- and first-floor plans together, and, if possible, took the partition walls up through both floors and made them carry the roof timbers, whereas Shaw was comparatively reckless as a constructor. In Wilson Forster's house at Bedford Park, for example, Voysey placed the studio on the top floor and carried it up into the roof. His construction was therefore very cheap compared with that of Shaw's house in Netherhall Gardens (Fig 2.) in which the ceiling of the great first-floor studio had to be laced with steel joists to carry the weight of chimney-stacks and bedroom partitions on the floor above. Shaw produced a magnificent result, but his client must have paid a very long price.

Nearly all the houses designed by Voysey between 1889 and 1897 were given hipped roofs with wide eaves and elegant wrought-iron gutter brackets. The earlier houses followed the detail of Forster's house and had roofs of very low pitch, but at Perrycroft, in 1893, and most of the later houses the pitch was raised to forty-five degrees. In the smaller houses there was very little moulding, picture-rails and skirtings were reduced to battens with rounded edges, but sometimes in porches and fireplaces Voysey allowed himself a little more freedom and used cornices and columns of the attenuated Classic profile introduced by Mackmurdo, whose influence can also be seen in Voysey's earliest designs for furniture and metal-work. In the late 'nineties Voysey's work became more elaborate in detail. Norney, at Shackleford, and New Place, at Haslemere, were both designed during 1897 and are typical of the comparatively expensive houses he built just before the end of the century. The details are still distinctly Classical in spirit and the drawn-out cyma is used both in wood and in stone. There are semicircular hoods over windows and doors and decorative panels are applied to gables and chimney-stacks; other mannerisms,

tried out but soon abandoned, were domical and double ogee lead roofs over bays or chimney-ingles.

In 1898 designs were made for three houses at Windermere and one at Glassonby. Their severity is perhaps a response to the harder conditions and wilder landscape in which they were set. Glassonby was to have been built of red sandstone, one of the few exceptions to Voysey's use of whitened rough-cast. The roof of 'M' section, was given top-lighting in the valley over the central corridor, and the ends of the roof were carried out to form gables. Broadleys, at Windermere, came a couple of months later – the earliest drawings, now at the R.I.B.A., are dated June, 1898 – and in this design there is a reversion to the hipped ends of earlier years (Plate XCVI). Broome Cottage would also have had a hipped roof, but the third house, Moor Crag (Fig. 11), had its

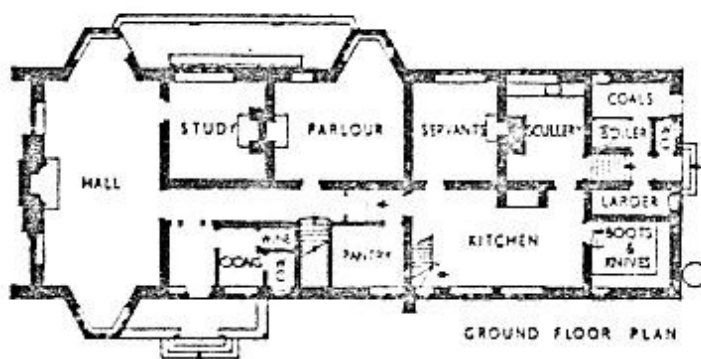
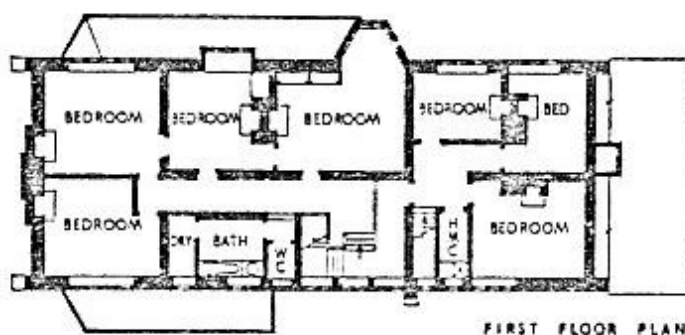


FIG. 11. *Moor Crag, Gill Head, Windermere*

roof stopped at either end by means of cross-gables. A short ridge ran from back to front, stopping the main longitudinal ridge and showing a gable facing each way. The roof was that of an 'H' plan, but the arms did not in fact project. This device had been used a couple of years earlier over the library end of Sturgis's house on the Hog's Back.

It was from Moor Crag that the typical Voysey house of the 1900s was developed. His own house at Chorley Wood (1899), Pasture House, at North Luffenham (1901), Mr Walter's house at Pyrford Common (1902), and The Homestead, at Frinton (1905), are examples of Voysey's work at its best. In these buildings there is little trace of Mackmurdo's influence, and the elaborate detailing of Norney has been abandoned. Voysey, in his forties, was standing on his own feet, he no longer felt the urge to produce 'something different' that had at times been a weakness in his early work; he did what he liked and he could afford to turn down clients who were unwilling to give him *carte blanche*. His work was controlled by his love for simplicity and by his respect for materials and for the customs of the English craftsman.

While Voysey had been working out his own salvation, a new fashion had sprung up among the architects of country houses. The Gothic Revival was almost dead; but instead of attempting the approach from first principles that Voysey had advocated, the younger architects turned to look for another set of crutches and found the neo-Georgian style.

Voysey saw in this renaissance of the Renaissance the antithesis of everything that he had been striving for; he spoke against it and wrote against it and it was perhaps partly as a gesture of defiance that he flouted the coming fashion by once more introducing recognizably Gothic elements in his work. Pointed arches made a tentative appearance in his drawings during 1907, only to be eliminated when the time came for building, and in 1909 he had the chance to let himself go on the fascinating house he built for T. S. Cotterell at Coombe Down, near Bath. The client asked for a design reminiscent of Merton College and Voysey gave him a single-storey house built round a miniature quadrangle, elaborately detailed and decorated with sculpture and carving.

It was also in 1909 that Voysey designed Littleholme, near Kendal, one of his best small houses and one of the few to be built without a rough-cast coat. Local stone was used and it was laid according to the local tradition. Littleholme has a compact rectangular plan with a slate roof, hipped and pitched at fifty degrees.

A third design, dating from the same year, was the holiday cottage at Slindon for A. A. Voysey. The plans show one large room, twenty-four feet by twelve, on each floor. The stair rises directly from the living-room to the bed-

room and at one end is an open sleeping porch above a bathroom and a diminutive kitchen. It is an attractive scheme and it must have pleased its author for it was one of the seven designs he chose to deposit at the Victoria and Albert Museum as representative of his work. It is interesting to note that the other six designs are Broadleys, Windermere (1898), Moor Crag, Windermere (1899), Dr Bowie's house at Colnebrook (1899), a house at Highams Park for Lady Henry Somerset (1904), one of the three houses designed for a site at Frinton (1908), and the design for Atkinson's shop in Old Bond Street (1911).

From 1910 onwards Voysey had a series of disappointments. Several more houses were built, all of modest scale, but during the next four years not one of Voysey's more ambitious schemes came to fruition. An interesting design was made for twin office blocks in the City for Spicer Brothers – straight cliffs of brick with unadorned openings regularly spaced. Then there was an unsuccessful competition scheme for Government buildings at Ottawa, of which only one elevation survives, and finally in 1914 drawings were made for two large houses, but building was prevented by the outbreak of war and for five years Voysey's notebook recorded nothing but minor alterations and designs for furniture, for memorial panels and the like.

Although he had no more important building work, Voysey remained alert and active to the end of his long life. He was always interested in current problems and prepared to argue for unpopular ideas and take his share in any artistic or architectural controversy. In the Academy of 1923 he was represented by a design for the elevation of an office block in which he demonstrated the possibility of introducing colour and moulded detail of Gothic type in a façade with nearly fifty per cent glass area. Later in the same year he put in a plea for the development of the Devonshire House site as a unit:

On this site there is room for three towers of the size and majesty of Pugin's Victoria Tower at Westminster. Surely no one will deny the great beauty and design of that tower? Three such towers could be erected on the Devonshire House site, each tower would be a hundred feet away from any other building all round and would rise from a belt of trees fifty feet wide. Nobody's light and air need be interfered with in the least degree.

Voysey went on to discuss various points of detail and illustrated his idea with sketches – but once more he was out of step with the times. The practical men of the day built the buildings that we can now see and the progressives merely laughed at Voysey's design because he was perverse, or consistent, enough to clothe it from top to bottom with Gothic detail!

In this account of Voysey's architectural work the emphasis has been upon

the development of his skill as a designer of country houses, for as luck would have it, the majority of executed designs were domestic buildings in rural settings. Many people must have wondered how he would have dealt with the limitations of a town site or the more complicated conditions of a large public or commercial building, and he himself regretted that he never had the opportunity to do work on a large scale.

Some indication of the work he might have done can be obtained from the drawings surviving from his unsuccessful competition schemes for the Ottawa Government Buildings, the Masonic Peace Memorial and the Croydon Town Hall. In all these buildings he came out firmly on the Gothic side and without a doubt his master was Pugin. Two earlier schemes of intermediate scale are also of distinctly Gothic cast, though the detailing is comparatively free; these are the designs for Lincoln Grammar School and for the Carnegie Library at Limerick. Very much plainer and more personal in detail is the design for offices in the City of London for Spicer Brothers. Another interesting design is the factory for Sandersons, built at Chiswick in 1902 (Plate XCV). The three lower floors have a maximum glass area between white, glazed brick piers, but the top floor is lighted through the roof, with the solid wall panels carried through to the parapet coping.

The only other examples of urban work that were actually built were the two excellent houses in Hans Road, Kensington, designed for Archibald Grove. Three houses were provided for in the original scheme of 1891, but the third was taken over by Mackmurdo. Voysey's first design provided for a rough-cast facing, but he evidently realized that such a finish would be out of place and unsatisfactory in town and the work was carried out in red brick with Ketton stone dressings – the revised elevation is dated 1892. The section of these houses is worth careful study, the ingenious use of broken floor levels and the planning of the mezzanines is sufficient proof that Voysey would have held his own if other opportunities had come his way. It is quite amazing, considering the success of these Kensington houses, that the only comparable job that came to Voysey in later years was the conversion of Garden Corner on Chelsea Embankment for E. J. Horniman. This too, was a brilliant piece of work. The interior of the house was completely gutted; the staircases, fire-places, plasterwork and panelling were all replaced; and the furniture designed by Voysey was as good as he could make it. Unfortunately the moveable furnishings have been dispersed, but the panelling and fire-places, and the unique green slate dado in the drawing-room, remain as examples of Voysey's work at its best.

Although Voysey was one of the most insular of English architects his designs made an immediate impression on his Continental contemporaries.

When illustrations of his work began to appear in the architectural papers and in *The Studio*, they were eagerly awaited and collected by architects and students all over Europe. Special articles on his work were published in *Dekorative Kunst* and other Continental periodicals and his influence, especially in Austria, in Germany and in Scandinavia, was considerable. A few years later, when a taste for 'Voysey-like' forms and details had become established, an appetite for the work of the younger architects Baillie Scott and Mackintosh followed. In the case of the two last there was to some extent an exchange of ideas with Continental designers, but Voysey retained his insularity to the end. If a foreigner chose to admire and emulate his work that was very nice for the foreigner, and in a quiet way Voysey enjoyed his flattery, but he never thought of returning the compliment, and he said that the importation of exotic architecture, though often lauded as evidence of catholicity of taste, was really the fruit of want of taste, want of sensibility to the fitness of things and a direct outcome of feeble imagination.

It has sometimes been suggested that Voysey was never appreciated in England as he was abroad. This is hardly supported by the facts. In his prime he certainly had as much on hand as he could tackle, and the work he did was described and illustrated in almost every technical journal of importance, and, of course, *The Studio* published not only architectural designs but furniture, fabrics and textiles as well as interviews and articles.

Voysey was frequently asked to address societies of architects, artists and craftsmen and his lectures were fully reported and duly discussed. In 1912 he was invited to deposit a selection of his designs at the Victoria and Albert Museum and further examples of his work were added between 1926 and 1930. In 1924 he was elected Master of the Art Workers Guild. He was one of the first to be given the distinction of Designer for Industry by the Royal Society of Arts, and in 1940 the Royal Institute of British Architects nominated him as the Royal Gold Medallist.

The basis of the legend of neglected genius is the fact that his output was small in bulk compared to that of those of his contemporaries who allowed themselves to become the general managers of design factories. Voysey did not believe that architecture could be produced by factory methods. He insisted upon being personally responsible for every detail and he would not delegate work to assistants. It is true in his later years he lived alone, working in his own flat, or spending his time quietly at the Arts Club; but his retirement from the bustle of ordinary practice was of his own choosing.

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