Sometime during 1894, Prior, then living in Melina Place, St. John's Wood, acquired a new next door neighbour who was just as fiercely independent and incapable of taking the via media.

Charles Francis Annesley Voysey (1857–1941) was one of the few major Arts and Crafts architects born in the '50s who did not belong to the apostolic succession of Street and his pupils: Morris, Webb and Shaw and through Shaw to his pupils, Lethaby, Prior, Newton and Macartney. But, the same age as Lethaby, Voysey was an early member of the Art Workers' Guild (elected in December 1884, the Guild's first year), and he must have known Prior for several years before they became neighbours.

Though similar in their fierce independence and strength of character, and in their reverence for Pugin and Ruskin, Prior and Voysey were unalike in almost every other way. Prior had been through the mill of conventional English upper middle class education; Voysey was almost completely privately educated. Prior, as far as his political opinions can be discerned, seems to have been a Whig; Voysey was definitely a high Tory—but of libertarian temperament. Prior was a conventional Anglican; Voysey was fervently religious. Prior always attempted great fidelity to local materials and building traditions; Voysey evolved a style which, though susceptible of local variation, was applicable everywhere.

Voysey was born at Hessle in the East Riding of Yorkshire where his father, the Rev. Charles Voysey, was running a school. When Voysey was fourteen, his father was dismissed from the Church of England in one of the great ecclesiastical scandals of the nineteenth century; his heresy was that he did not believe in the doctrine of eternal damnation or, as his son put it, "he believed in a good God rather than an angry one".

The influence of the Rev. Charles was always strong. Voysey was educated by him at home in the Yorkshire years and his father's kindly puritanism permeated his life. "If he had to punish any of his children", Voysey wrote, "he would creep up to the bedside before the culprit was asleep, and gently stroking the head, with tears in his eyes, would soften the little heart with a few kind words and leave it in peace. His suffering in causing pain in order to do good could not be doubted and is the experience of all noble parents, surgeons, doctors, dentists and others. And surely of the Creator likewise?"

Voysey's early years must have been very happy, if strictly regulated, and, perhaps as a result, there is an element of what some have condemned as childishness in all his work: a delight in simple jokes such as designing an iron bracket to the profile of a client's face and a love of obvious symbolic imagery: hearts, bull's eye windows and big green water butts. Perhaps it is only in retrospect that his buildings themselves seem to have a childlike quality, but with their big roofs, wide doorways and low walls, they are models of what many children, particularly country bred ones, first draw when they make a picture of a house.

In 1871, the year of his trial in the Lords, Charles Voysey moved to Dulwich to set up his own Theistic church, and C.F.A. was sent to Dulwich College, where he stayed for only eighteen months. The tough régime of a public school did not suit him, and he was withdrawn to study under a private tutor.

Though his art master at Dulwich had dubbed him incompetent for any artistic profession, he was articed for five years to the Victorian Gothic architect J. P. Seddon in 1873. The relationship was a success, and Seddon introduced him to the writings of Pugin, who was to be one of Voysey's guiding stars. Of Ruskin he probably already knew something for Ruskin taught drawing at a school which Voysey's sisters
attended. In 1879 he worked briefly for Saxon Snell, an innovator in sanitation techniques, before being asked to join the office of George Devey, a member of his father’s church.

In 1880, Devey’s practice was wide and flourishing. Voysey learned much from him about designing houses in the country—which, on a different scale, were to be Voysey’s main contribution to architecture. And he learned a style—or rather two styles.

Voysey set up his own practice in about 1882, and supported himself on surveys, alterations and designs for furniture, fabrics and wallpapers. As a designer he was both influenced and helped by Mackmurdo, whose flat, sinuous designs of birds and leaves, and furniture with tall, tapering verticals topped by thin square capitals were to re-echo through much of Voysey’s work. But the architectural influence was Devey. In a design for a house, published in the *British Architect* in 1889 but probably designed some years before, Voysey seems to be trying to cram as many Deveyan idioms into as small a space as possible. The walls have a stone base course with brick on top. They are pierced by rows of stone mullioned windows, patterned in all kinds of diapers and chequers, and bulge out into square, polygonal and semi-circular bays. On top is an exuberant roof which heaves up and down, with hips, gables both Dutch (in masonry) and English (in half-timbering), and a series of little dormers. It was never built—perhaps because it would have been extremely expensive for

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71 Charles Francis Annesley Voysey. House design (published 1889)

72 George Devey. St. Albans Court, estate cottages (1870s–1880s)
the amount of space it would have provided.

Devey had a quiet approach for cottages which was to be the foundation of Voysey's mature style. On the St. Alban's Court estate, where work was proceeding during Voysey's time in Devey's office, are several groups of cottages; they are the architectural forefathers of Voysey's small country houses. The floors are clearly delineated, usually by projecting the upper one; windows are in mullioned bands crammed up against the projection of the upper floor, the eaves or the projecting gables. Doors are simple, low and wide and the effect would be strongly horizontal but for the massive chimney stacks. The materials are quite different to the ones Voysey commonly used—Devey's cottages are covered in hung tiles, half-timbering and patterned brickwork. But imagine the effect of moving the mighty chimney stack round to the end of the cottage shown on p. 83, strip off the Old English clothing and replace it by roughcast and you have something very like a mature Voysey house.

Voysey's mature style began to emerge in 1888 when he published a design for a cottage in the British Architect. He had made the drawings in 1885 in the hope that he could build a house for himself and his new wife. The cottage was completely asymmetrical, long and low with its horizontality emphasized by recessing the ground floor. Its leaded windows were in long mullioned bands, the upper ones hard up against the wide eaves (themselves supported on delicate curved iron brackets) and the lower windows anchored visually between buttresses. The wide door (green in the original drawing) was recessed behind a Tudor arch and balanced by a green water butt at the other end of the elevation. The whole composition is pinned down by a little tower over the stairs. The plan is economical; though long and thin, it is compact, with the major circulation space on the ground floor doubling as a "picture gallery and lounge". It is the Arts and Crafts one-room-and-a-corridor plan in one of its most compressed forms.

All these themes were to be the basis of Voysey's later work*. His buildings were never symmetrical, for he was a firm believer in Russianian changefulness and praised Gothic architecture because "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." The horizontality of most of his work derived from a belief in the symbolic importance of long low straight lines: "When the sun sets horizonality prevails, when we are weary we recline, and the darkness covers up the differences and hides all detail under one harmonious veil, while we, too, close our eyes for rest. What, then, is obviously necessary for the effect of repose in our houses, [is] to avoid angularity and complexity in colour, form or texture, and make our dominating lines horizontal rather than vertical."6

The buttresses of the lower floor were, so he claimed, the result of economy. In 1897, an article in the Studio, presumably published with his approval, explained that "Mr Voysey employs these buttresses to save the cost of thicker walls for the lower storey of his buildings. That they chance to afford pleasant-looking shelters for a garden seat and break up the wall-surface happily, giving the facade a certain architectural pattern of shadows he realizes, and is, beyond doubt delighted by the picturesque qualities . . . [But] Mr Voysey would no more dream of adding a superfluous buttress than he would add an unnecessary panel of cheap ornament."7 The roughcast, too, was an economy. Horace Townsend explained in another Studio article (Voysey was a favourite of the magazine from its foundation) that "Mr Voysey's preference for [roughcast] . . . which is marked by the way—is based, so he tells me, mainly on its economy. He considers a nine inch brick wall faced with cement rough-cast is as warm and weather-tight as any much more expensive construction."8

The wide door had particular symbolic importance for Voysey who believed that doors should be "wide in proportion to height, to suggest welcome—not stand-offishly dignified, like the coffin lid, high and narrow for the entrance of one body only."9

And the long, thin Arts and Crafts plan was adopted partly because of his belief that servants should not be kept in dungeons as was common in many Victorian houses. "In offices for servants' use, let them be cheerful, and not shabby and dark, as if it did not matter how you treated your servants because you were paying for their services. Some day men will be ashamed to do ugly things and cheap and nasty treatment of servants will be regarded as dishonouring to the master."10

In 1888, the immediate result of publication of the design was Voysey's first important commission—for a similar cottage at Bishop's Itchington, Warwickshire which, when built, was quite like the original,
73 Voysey. Cottage design (1885)

74 Voysey. Cottage, Bishop's Itchington, Warwickshire (1888)
though the half-timbering was omitted, a projecting porch added and the eaves line was broken by hipped dormer windows over the principal upstairs rooms.

Voysey was off, and, during the next twenty years, he built a multitude of houses, most of which used the themes he had brought together at Bishop’s Itchington. There were, of course, exceptions: a charming little tower house for a narrow site in Bedford Park (1891), some flats in Hans Road (see page 120), and there was a curious flirtation with classical detailing in the late '90s in houses like New Place, Haslemere (1897). But all these buildings bear a Voysey stamp.

The basic vocabulary was gradually added to and refined. Voysey’s next commission after Bishop’s Itchington was Walnut Tree Farm (now Bannut Tree Farm) at Castlemorton near Malvern (designed 1890), where the roof pitch is increased to 45° and the eaves are pulled down to the bottom of the first floor
windows, which are expressed as a series of gables. This gives a much greater expanse of roof and reduces the apparent height—a device used in many of Voysey’s later buildings, in which steep sweeping roofs united quite complicated plans and sections, for instance in the beautiful Sturgis House (1896) on the Hogs Back near Guildford (ruined by Herbert Baker’s 1913 additions). Tucked under the first floor at the east end of Walnut Tree Farm is the half octagonal bay of the morning room, the first of a series of octagonal, polygonal and semi-circular bays, often capped by the projecting horizontal of a first floor but sometimes allowed to crash up through the eaves to end up as a kind of dormer (for instance at Broadleys, Windermere, 1896). Walnut Tree Farm shows Voysey’s last extensive use of half-timbering which he abandoned because “bureaucratic byelaws” necessitated half-timbering to be executed as boarding on rendered brickwork which Voysey
refused to use because it was a sham.  

Perrycroft at Colwall in the Malvern Hills (designed 1893–1894) was Voysey’s first large commission and shows his mature style to perfection with buttresses rising the full height of the walls to the wide eaves which cover the shallow bays in front of the principal bedrooms. The hipped roof is of green Westmorland slates (a favourite Voysey material), penetrated by big, tapering rectangular chimneys (the chimney pots are modern).

The entrance side has an open porch shielding double doors with long strap hinges. Lighting the first floor corridor is a long band of small paned windows just under the eaves. The composition is pinned down by a little tower, capped by a lead covered ogee-shaped roof with a weathervane on a high slender spike.

The siting is very carefully considered with bays and seats built between the buttresses to take advantage of the magnificent views over the green hills to the south-west and north-west. Voysey was always very considerate of his sites. “The character of the site”, he wrote, “will suggest many limitations and conditions as to aspect and prospect. The contour of the ground obviously controls the arrangement, and the colour, shape and texture of hills and trees suggest the colour, form and texture of our building. That is, provided we have no preconceived notions of classical façades, or a deep rooted preference for a particular style of architecture.”

The remarks about the locality determining the colour and texture of the building may seem odd in a man who was prepared to bring Westmorland slates to Herefordshire, but Voysey, always a symbolist, was making a visual analogue with the smooth green shapes of the hills themselves. At least he avoided the paradox of Prior’s Home Place—a building created out of materials from the very site itself but which manages to look extraordinarily foreign.

Yet after a while, Voysey became trapped by his own style. The Studio reported in 1904 that “it is a matter of regret to the artist should a client insist on having what he or she deems a thoroughly characteristic house instead of one more properly native to the soil.” He was certainly prepared to exploit local materials—for instance where he could get really good brick as in the Wentworth Arms, Elmesthorpe, Leicestershire (1895), he left it exposed. He made designs for houses in local stone (mostly unbuilt) and, at Hill Close near Studland, Dorset (1896), he used
80  Perrycroft, north (entrance) front

81  Voysey. House at Glassonby, Cumberland (1898), unexecuted—Voysey would have liked to use local materials where they were suitable and the client could afford them.
rough-hewn Portland stone round the windows and large local stone flags on the roof.

Hill Close was designed for the Edwardian animal painter, Alfred Suto, and had a large studio with a great window (sadly now replaced by modern patent glazing) looking out over the magnificent view over Studland Bay and Poole Harbour. The studio itself was a high room with a little library gallery over the door.* Most Voysey rooms were much lower, like the Hill Close dining room, which is not much more than eight feet high and which looks lower because of its deep plaster frieze of stylized trees. Voysey believed that "an eight foot room may be better ventilated and more comfortable to live in than a room twelve or fifteen feet and high and is certainly more easy to light and warm"—because the lower ceiling reflected more light to the back of the room and so obviated the need for large areas of glass. The cold from large windows could lead to unsightly horrors, "hot water pipes and various demonical contrivances for heating . . . like tombs to the memory of cremated air".15 (Voysey usually relied on open fires for heating with special connections to the outside air to provide drafts for the chimneys and to avoid them in the rooms.)

Voysey's objections to central heating were largely aesthetic. He believed that most contemporary commercial artefacts were hideously ugly, and, given a chance, he would, like Webb, design everything for a house from the forks to the door hinges. His ideal was "a well proportioned room, with whitewashed 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."16

This image of a white box containing a few exquisite objects seems strange from the man who was one of the most successful wallpaper designers of the turn of the century. He explained that "a wallpaper is of course only a background, and were your furniture good in form and colour a very simple or quite undecorated treatment of the walls would be preferable; but as most modern furniture is vulgar or bad in every way, elaborate papers of many colours help to disguise its ugliness."17 Voysey was rather less extreme in practice and, for instance, used his wallpaper in the house he designed for his wife at Chorleywood (1899), where, presumably, he did like the furniture.

To achieve the simple effects he wanted, Voysey had to go to some trouble, particularly at first. In the Bedford Park tower house, "it was found necessary, in order to prevent the builder from displaying the usual 'ovolo moldings', 'stop chamfers', fillets, and the like, to prepare eighteen sheets of contract drawings to show where his beloved ornamentation was to be omitted . . . Great pains have to be taken to prevent the workmen from unconscious 'decoration' as is their wonted habit".18

Voysey had firmly resolved the Puginian paradox in favour of the designer rather than the craftsman and he was also prepared to accept the machine—but tentatively, rather as Pugin himself had accepted it. "The human quality in familiar objects has in many cases been driven out by the machine. Nevertheless, the machine has come to liberate men's minds for more intellectual work than was provided for them by the sawpit."19 But he was insistent that "we are far too keen on mechanical perfection. That love of smooth, polished surfaces is very materialistic [a quality that Voysey abhorred]; it can be produced without brains and in most cases can only be produced by the elimination of all human thought and feeling."20

From the earliest years, Voysey enlivened the austerity of his houses with occasional jokey details: the brackets bent to form his clients' profiles, and little grotesque finials, caricatures of the architect or his client. They were the echoes of Ruskinian savagery in the work of a man who designed every detail.

As he grew older, he became increasingly hostile to machine production. John Betjeman, who as a young editor of the Architectural Review rediscovered Voysey in virtual retirement in the early '30s, recalled that "he disliked machinery as 'unnatural' and would always advocate the use of craftsmen—from the craftsman who made his pipes to those who built his houses."21

But Voysey rarely had an opportunity to use craftsmanship lavishly. He was, after all, building houses that "compare favourably in cost with the miserable shams of the jobbing builder,"22 and, as a Tory, he believed that there were certain qualities that were "essential to all classes of homes, but there are certain other qualities like grandeur, splendour, pomp, majesty and exuberance which are suitable only to comparatively few. In the category of general need, we should put repose, cheerfulness, simplicity, breadth, warmth, quietness in storm, economy of up-keep, evidence of protection, harmony with surroundings, absence of dark passages or places, even-

* Alexander Hamilton Fletcher has pointed out to me that the original gallery has been replaced with woodwork taken from Austin Reed's shop in Exeter.
82 Voysey. Hill Close, Studland, Dorset (1896)

83 Hill Close, dining room. The frieze is original; the furnishings (including the light fitting) are modern
Voysey. Charles Voysey's House, Platt's Lane, Hampstead, London (1895)

Voysey. Spade House, Sandgate, Folkestone, Kent (1899), for H. G. Wells. The nearest bay is a 1903 addition by Voysey.
cess of temperature." But where he did have what he believed to be an appropriate client, Voysey was prepared to indulge in some splendour and exuberance—for instance in his design for a house for the Earl of Lovelace (1894–5), where the white walls are relieved by a bay with carved ornament. It was not built, nor did he ever build a big house for a grandee.

His clients were generally comfortably off members of the middle class like his own father, for whom he built a house in Platt's Lane, Hampstead (1895), and H. G. Wells, then a rising young left wing novelist, who, in 1899, chose Voysey as the “pioneer in the escape from the small snobbish villa residence to the bright and comfortable pseudo cottage.” In Wells, incidentally, Voysey for once had a client as strong minded as he was about some aspects of design. "Voysey wanted to put a large heart shaped letter plate on my front door [by then virtually a Voysey trademark], but I protested at wearing my heart so conspicuously outside and we compromised on a spade" (i.e., by turning the heart upside down). Despite disagreements, the two must have remained on good terms, as Voysey was asked to add an extra bay in 1903.

Voysey's way of building could cope with almost any problem. The Platts Lane house shows how his style could be accommodated to a small suburban plot (by running an L-shaped plan along the north and east sides of the site and by putting the entrance facing south-west in the angle so that all the rooms had a sunny orientation). Wells's Spade House, on the cliff top at Sandgate in Kent, reveals how Voysey could run his buildings up a quite steeply sloping site.

He could even, without too much difficulty, adapt his style to a factory for Sandersons, the wallpaper

86 Voysey. Factory for Sanderson & Sons, Chiswick, London (1902)
manufacturers, at Chiswick (1902), with white glazed brick piers taking the place of buttresses and big small-paned windows with white spandrels between them. (The tops of the piers, which also act as ventilation shafts, are reminiscent of Voysey's furniture, complete with little Mackmurdoish capitals.)

And the technique could be adapted to quite large housing schemes—for example the row of cottages at Whitwood, Yorkshire (1904–1905) in which pairs of cottages with low walls and hipped dormers in the roof are set in a terrace between seven cottages with big gables facing the road. The planning is extremely economical in circulation space and yet commodious in living area; the cottages must have been extremely desirable miners' residences (the complex was built for Briggs & Sons colliery). The terrace is dominated by the tower of the miners' institute, which is topped by simple crenellations.

This was one of the first instances of overt Gothic detailing which developed after 1905 in Voysey's work, perhaps as a counter-blast to the growing popu-
larity of the classical styles that were becoming popular. By 1909 he was designing a stone courtyard house for Coombe Down near Bath in which almost every detail was taken from Tudor precedents. But there, the client, T. S. Cotterell, had particularly requested something to remind him of his old college, Merton, and Voysey’s white houses continued in a thin trickle until they ceased with High Gault, St. Margaret’s-at-Cliffe, Kent in 1914. Voysey, though he lived to 1941, built nothing after the First War apart from a couple of alterations and some war memorials. Yet he continued to design, in Gothic and Tudor; and even produced an unbuilt Tudor tower block scheme in 1923.

Increasingly, he thought of himself as one of the last disciples of Pugin and Ruskin. He echoed Pugin (p. 12) in calling for a real English architecture. “Why...should England turn her back on her own country and pretend that she is such a born mongrel she can have no truly national architecture? Has she no national climate? Are her geological and geographical conditions the same as all other countries? Is there no difference between English and Italian men...? No one denies strong national character to the British people. Why, then, do we so persistently try to ape the manners of foreigners?” But, at the same time, he was a total individualist who despised excessive reverence for tradition, believing that “if we are to try and harmonize with the laws of nature and help her to progress we must leave the door perpetually open to progress and welcome (critically if you like) all attempts to improve our traditional modes and methods, whatever they may be.”

His was such a strong character that he was accused of not allowing his clients’ personalities to influence their houses. There is some truth in the allegation. Voysey wrote to his client, Cecil Fitch, “all artistic questions you must trust me to decide. No two minds ever produced an artistic result.” But he was loved; in reply to a wounding article about his relationships with his clients published after a retrospective exhibition of his work organized by Betjeman in 1931, Voysey wrote to the RIBA librarian, “out of two hundred and forty-six clients I have worked for, fifty-three have returned with fresh commissions, and I have built a hundred and eight private houses, only one of which I should care to live in, and that is the house I built for my wife.” It was an unusually good record.

His last years were fraught with money worries. (As early as the First War he had to approach James Morton, who printed many of his fabrics, for financial assistance. But he ended life as a Civil List pensioner and a pensioner of the Royal Academy and of the RIBA, which, with fees and royalties for his designs, helped him keep afloat.

Gordon Russell remembered him in the early ’20s. Voysey had only one job: “It’s a house for a lunatic”, he said, “such a nice man, and his doctor thought he might take an interest in the building of it. But I find it difficult. None of my friends can tell me how to deal with a client who, when the contract should be signed, gets under the table and refuses to come out.” Not surprisingly, the commission came to nothing.

His spirit was unimpaired. Betjeman gave a beautiful obituary picture of a man who changed little once he reached maturity. “He was a little below middle height and with an ascetic, clean shaven countenance... His dress was of his own design. He wore dark suits with no lapels to the coat, blue shirts and collars and a tie through a gold ring. He was always scrupulously neat and clean and his appearance never altered for all the time I knew him. He took snuff and smoked clay pipes that were made at a curious old pipe hospital in Soho.” Robert Donat, who married Voysey’s niece, recalled, “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.”

Kindly, austere, witty, argumentative, childlike, Voysey believed to his dying day in his father’s good God and that “simplicity, sincerity, repose, directness and frankness are moral qualities as essential to good architecture as to good men.”

2 Quoted by Brandon-Jones, J. in Architectural Association Journal, op. cit., p. 247
3 British Architect, Vol. XXXI, 1889, p. 248
7 Studio, Vol. XI, 1897, p. 20
8 Townsend, Horace “Notes on country and suburban houses designed by C. F. A. Voysey” in Studio, Vol. XVI, 1899, p. 158
9 Voysey, C. F. A. "The English Home", *op. cit.*, p. 70
10 Ibid.
11 Studio, Vol. XXXI, 1904, p. 128
15 Ibid., p. 244
16 Voysey, C. F. A. "The English Home", *op. cit.*, p. 69
18 Studio, Vol. XI, 1897, p. 25
20 Ibid.
22 Studio, Vol. XI, 1897, p. 16

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89 Voysey. High Gault, St. Margaret's-at-Cliffe, Kent (1914)

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23 Voysey, C. F. A. "The English Home", *op. cit.*, p. 69
25 Ibid.
26 Voysey, C. F. A. "The English Home", *op. cit.*, p. 60
27 Voysey, C. F. A. "Tradition and individuality in art" 1928, unpublished paper in RIBA Library
29 Voysey to Edward Carter, October 21st 1931. Manuscript in the RIBA library
31 *The Times*, 13 February, 1941
35 Voysey, C.F.A. "The English Home", *op. cit.*, p. 69