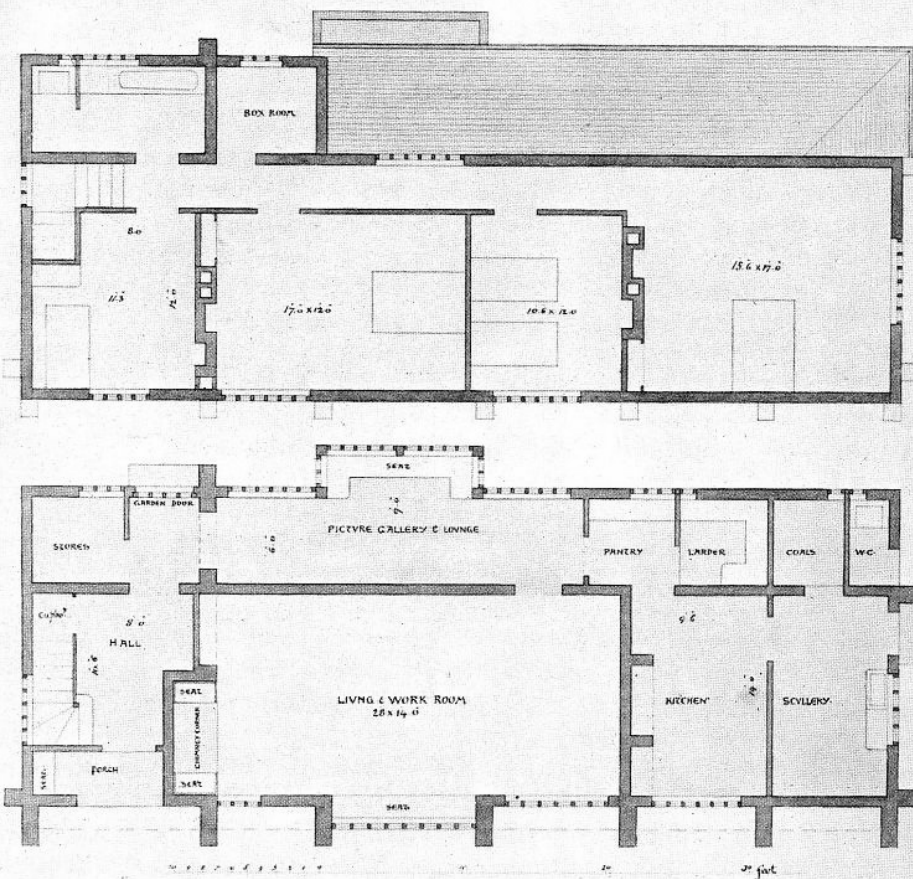
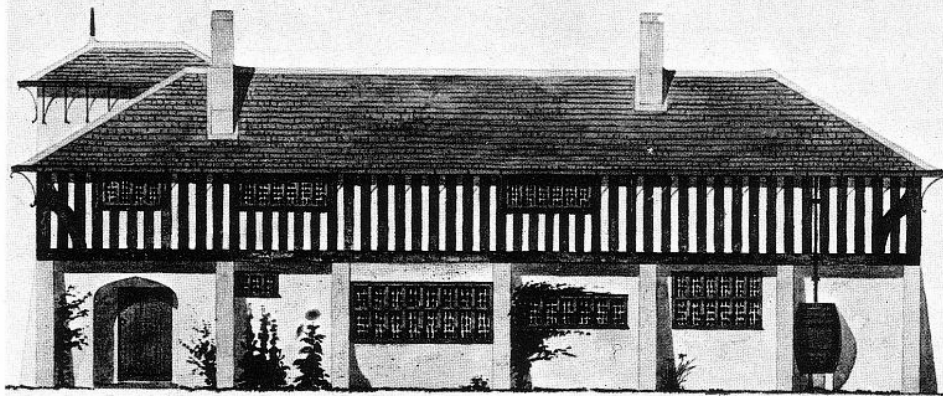


Chapter 2 Establishing a Practice – The Years up to 1895

The establishment of a substantial architectural practice was a laborious business for Voysey; he did not make it easier for himself since, as John Brandon-Jones tells us in his *Memoir*, he refused the help of his father in encouraging friends to patronize the young architect. Until 1890 business was very slow but from then, with Walnut Tree Farm, near Malvern (1890) and the Bedford Park house (1891), more substantial commissions began to come in. The *Studio* of September 1893 carried a substantial interview with 'Mr Charles F. Annesley Voysey, Architect and Designer'¹ and, while it was a considerable achievement to have won this recognition, the emphasis is heavily on pattern design work. When, towards the end of the piece, the subject of architectural designs is introduced it is done in a way which lacks conviction: 'It is not fair to regard Mr Voysey as a designer alone ...' – though this is manifestly what the piece has done. By June 1897, however, it is a different matter: a whole article is devoted to the work of Voysey as a component of 'The Revival of English Domestic Architecture' and this article deals in some detail with most of the works of the early years of his practice.²

In 1888 the *Architect* published a design for a cottage by Voysey the address on which – 7 Blandford Road, Bedford Park – dates it to the very few months after his marriage in 1885 which he spent at this address. This design is in no way surprising viewed as the work of a young architect in the mid 1880s; yet it was taken up, republished in the *Studio* in a slightly reworked form in 1894 as an 'Artist's Cottage', and is invariably cited in discussions of Voysey's work (1). It has a few of the Voysey trademarks – horizontal strips of leaded windows, those at first-floor level tucked up under the eaves; the eaves themselves having a deep overhang, the gutter supported on smoothly curved metal brackets; the walls having shallow buttresses and, apparently, a roughcast render. Less typically it is fashionably half-timbered, a practice which Voysey speedily dropped; and the layout is idiosyncratic, a spacious 28ft × 14ft 6in. 'living and work room' absorbing so much space that the 'picture gallery and lounge' behind is over 20ft long but only 6ft deep. On the rear elevation, except for a squat corner tower, the roof sweeps down close to ground-floor level, truncating the available bedroom space to good visual effect but to no real purpose. Possibly as a result of the publication of this design Voysey was commissioned by M.H.Lakin to design a cottage to be built at Bishop's Itchington; this he did and the house was built (2). The half-timbering was dropped though initially Lakin had considered it as a possibility; the buttressing and partially jettied first floor, which can be seen again

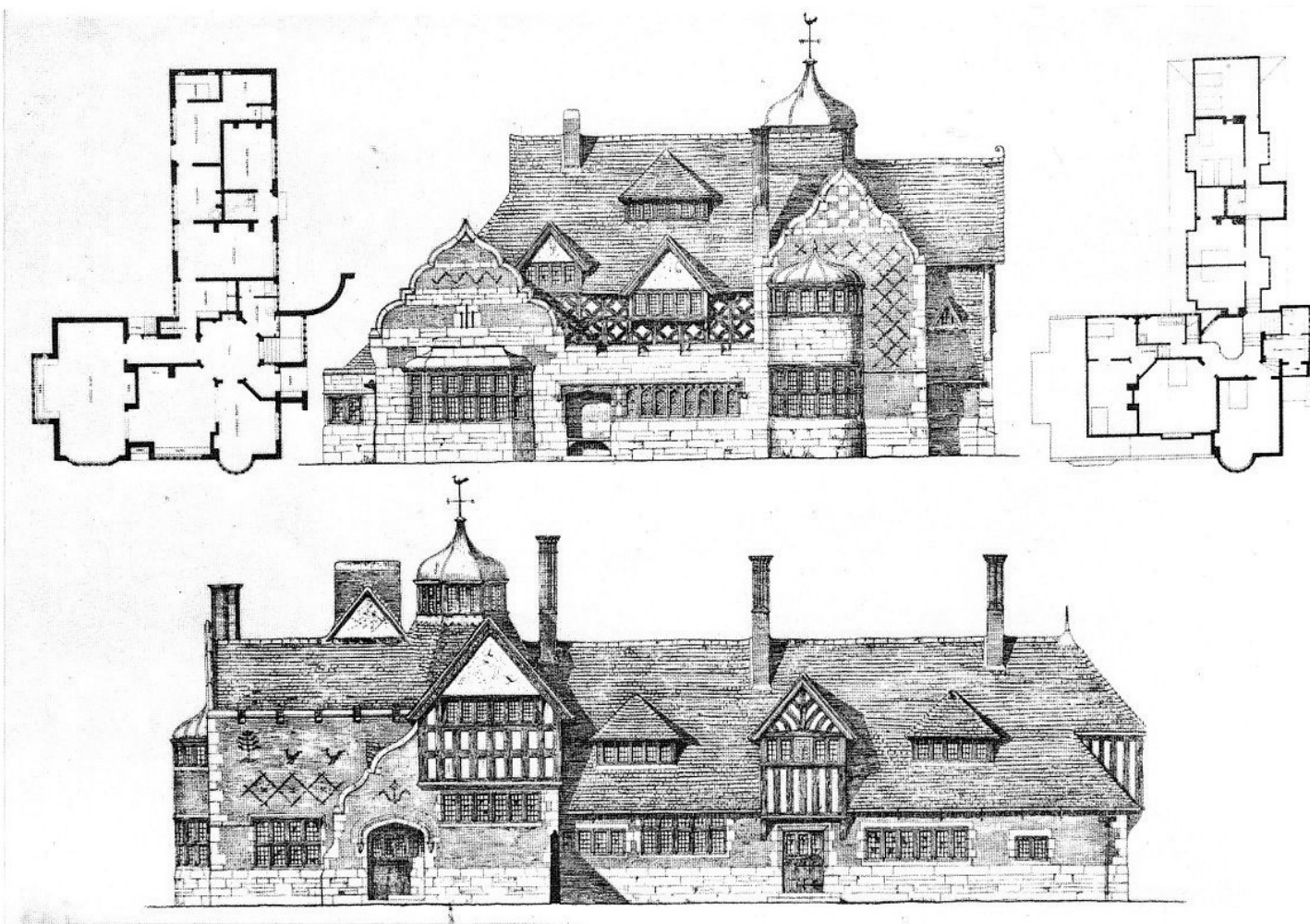
DESIGN FOR A COTTAGE 1/4 SCALE C. F. A. VOYSEY ARCHITECT 45 ZIERNEY R^d STREATHAM HILLS SW.



1
Design for a cottage, probably designed in a form similar to this in 1885; published as here 1888. Unexecuted. Elevation and plans.

2
The Cottage at Bishop's Itchington, near Warwick, for M.H. Lakin, 1888.



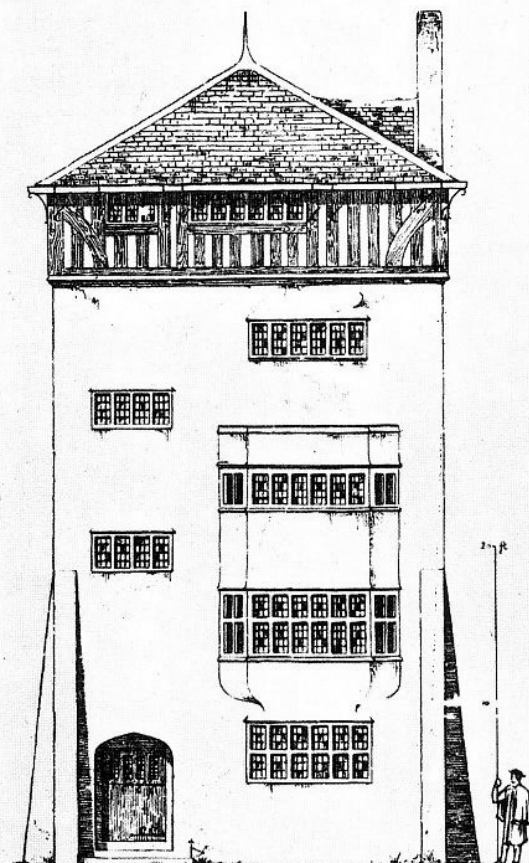


³ Design for a house having an octagonal hall, published in the *British Architect*, 1889. Unexecuted. Elevations and plans.

at Perrycroft (see 14), are retained from the published design. There is a pleasing porch and lean-to with strip windows each having a hipped, tiled roof. Less pleasing is the slight raising into the eaves of several of the upper windows, covered with barely projecting hipped dormers which produce a hesitant series of breaks in the sweep of the roof. These two projects, the design and the cottage, are an uneasy balance of emphatic features and detailing set against self-conscious mannerisms.

Three other designs, all for unexecuted projects, also survive from this pre-1890 period and throw light on Voysey's activities then. Two were published in the *British Architect* in 1889,³ though probably dating from two or three years earlier. The design for a house with an octagonal hall (3) is probably the earlier, owing as it does a great deal to the influence of Voysey's masters and the generally used stylistic devices of the period. It is an eclectic and very cheerful design, having

4
Design for a house, published in the *British Architect*, 1889 and known, from its attenuated form, as a tower house. Unexecuted. Front elevation and plans.

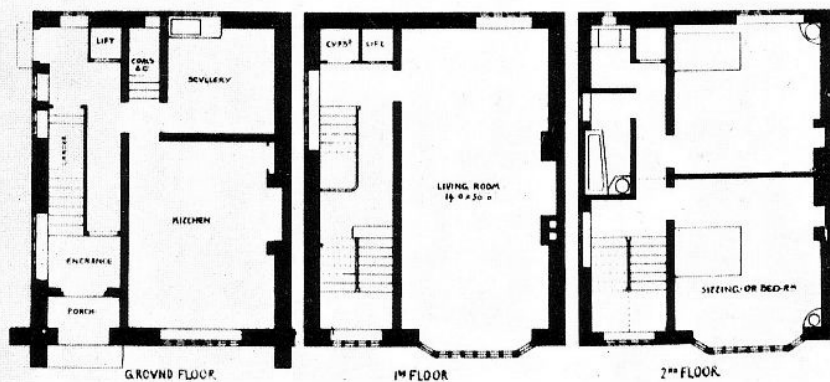
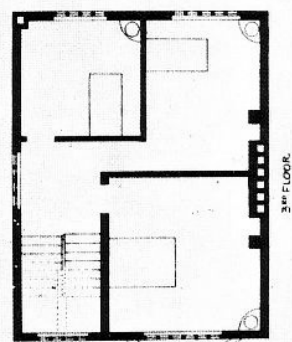
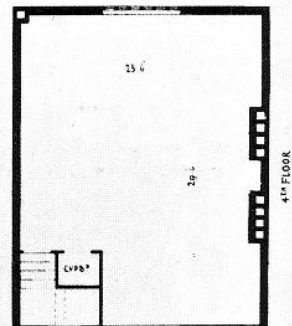


A TOWER HOUSE.

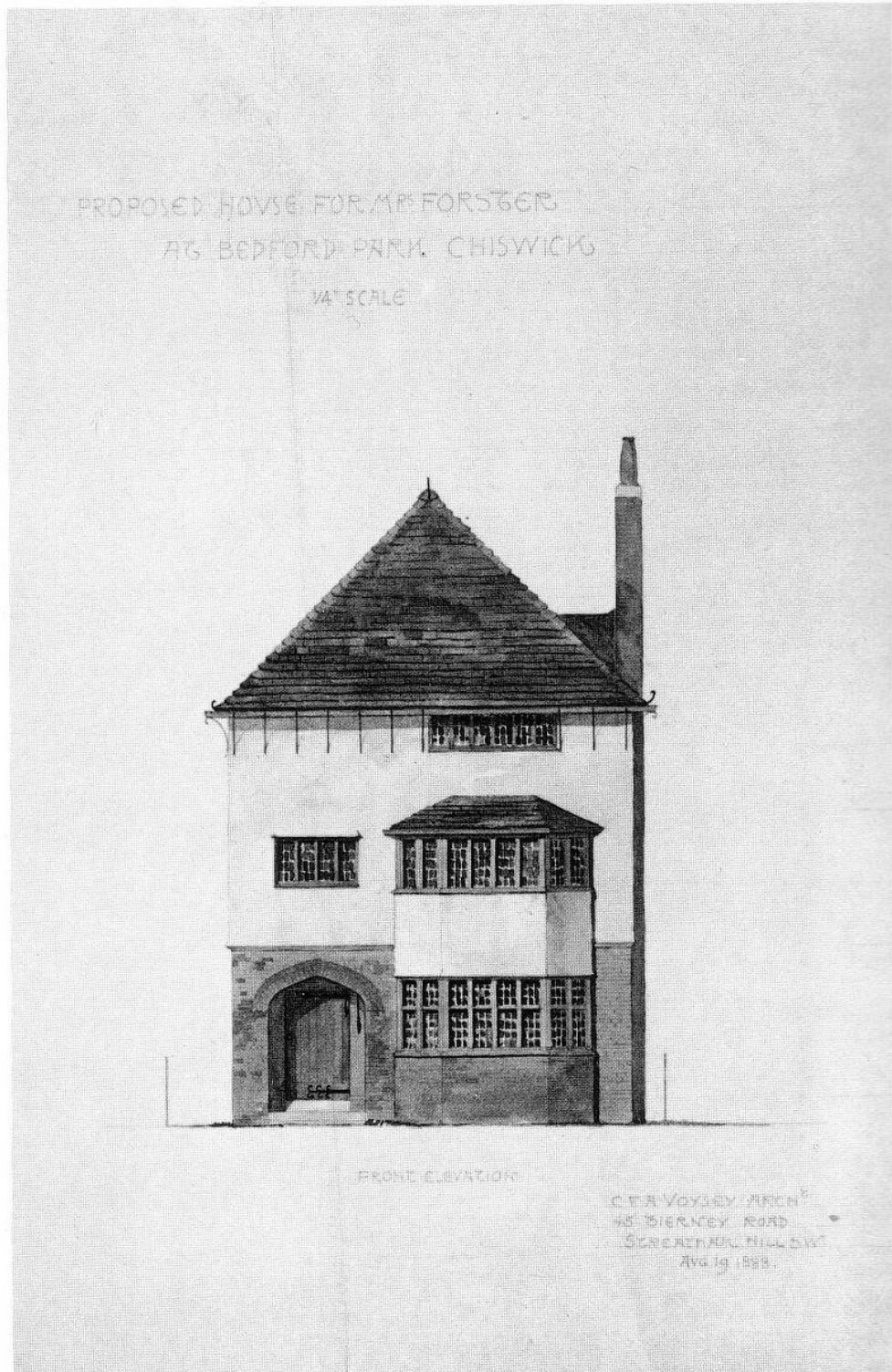
38ft. by 40ft.

C. F. A. VOYSEY, ARCHITECT.

45, TIERNEY ROAD, STREATHAM HILL.



5
First design for a house at Bedford Park in
Chiswick for Mrs Forster, 1888. Not executed
in this form. Front elevation.



decorative brickwork, figures and devices freely used alongside stone walls, crenellations, timber-frame and Dutch gables, decorative half-timbering, gabled and hipped dormers, bow windows, stone mullioned and transomed window frames and the ogee curve of the roof lantern and the roofing over the bows. Perhaps young Voysey was trying to get all the decorative complexity which this building incorporates out of his system in one go. The resultant heterogeneity is very well handled, markedly lacking the unease which, as suggested above, then crept into the designs of the next few years. The 'Tower House' of the mid- or late-1880s is a complete contrast (4); its severe form and fenestration – emphasized by the two small between-floors staircase windows – is relieved only by the angle-buttresses, the oriel window, the quite bizarre fourth-floor half-timbering and the arched opening to the porch. Its main eccentricity is excused, presumably, since it is the result of a brief to produce a lot of living space on a narrow site. The Tower House here shown has the charm of an ungainly, gangling puppy, but might not be much fun to live either in or next to. If the open fourth floor were intended to be a studio or workroom then, with its restricted window openings, tucked up below the overhanging eaves, it would not be a joy to work in either. The third of these early, unexecuted projects is different in that it was the result of a brief from a client, a Mrs Forster who wanted a house built at Bedford Park. The problem was to fit a new building into the completed ranges of homes in Bedford Park which represented an avant-garde development of the previous decade; Voysey's initial answer to it, designed in 1888 (5) makes some concession to the setting and also shows a debt to his training. Only the upper part is rendered and the bay window of conventional form; the window layout shows clear signs of Voysey's developing distinctiveness, the gutter brackets are beginning to look familiar and we even see what looks to be a prototype of the long cast-iron strap hinge terminating in a heart shape at the top of the entrance door. These hinges are endemic in Voysey's later work. This design certainly does not have the distinctiveness of either of the other two designs noted above; possibly the nearness of an actual client unnerved Voysey; presumably the design he produced unnerved the client as well for when the Bedford Park house was finally built three years later the final design (see 5) was much closer in spirit to the idiosyncratic Tower House than to this first draft.

It will be apparent by now that there is not a tremendous amount of evidence on which to judge these early years; yet there is no reason to think that Voysey worked on more projects than have survived. There is no executed building before the very end of the 1880s; there is no reason to think that the few projects which are known are the survivors from a culling in later years by their author. If he had weeded out his early designs on some retrospective basis in his mature years there is no rationale obvious now which could tell us why he preserved these particular designs. So we can conclude that we have the substantial part of the architectural work of the early years at our disposal. It is a very fair selection; original, inventive, but too concerned with manner and with stylistic trickery.

After these various projects and the one house at Bishop's Itchington work suddenly began in earnest. In the first two years of the 1890s there were four projects all being built: the Bedford Park house was taken up again and

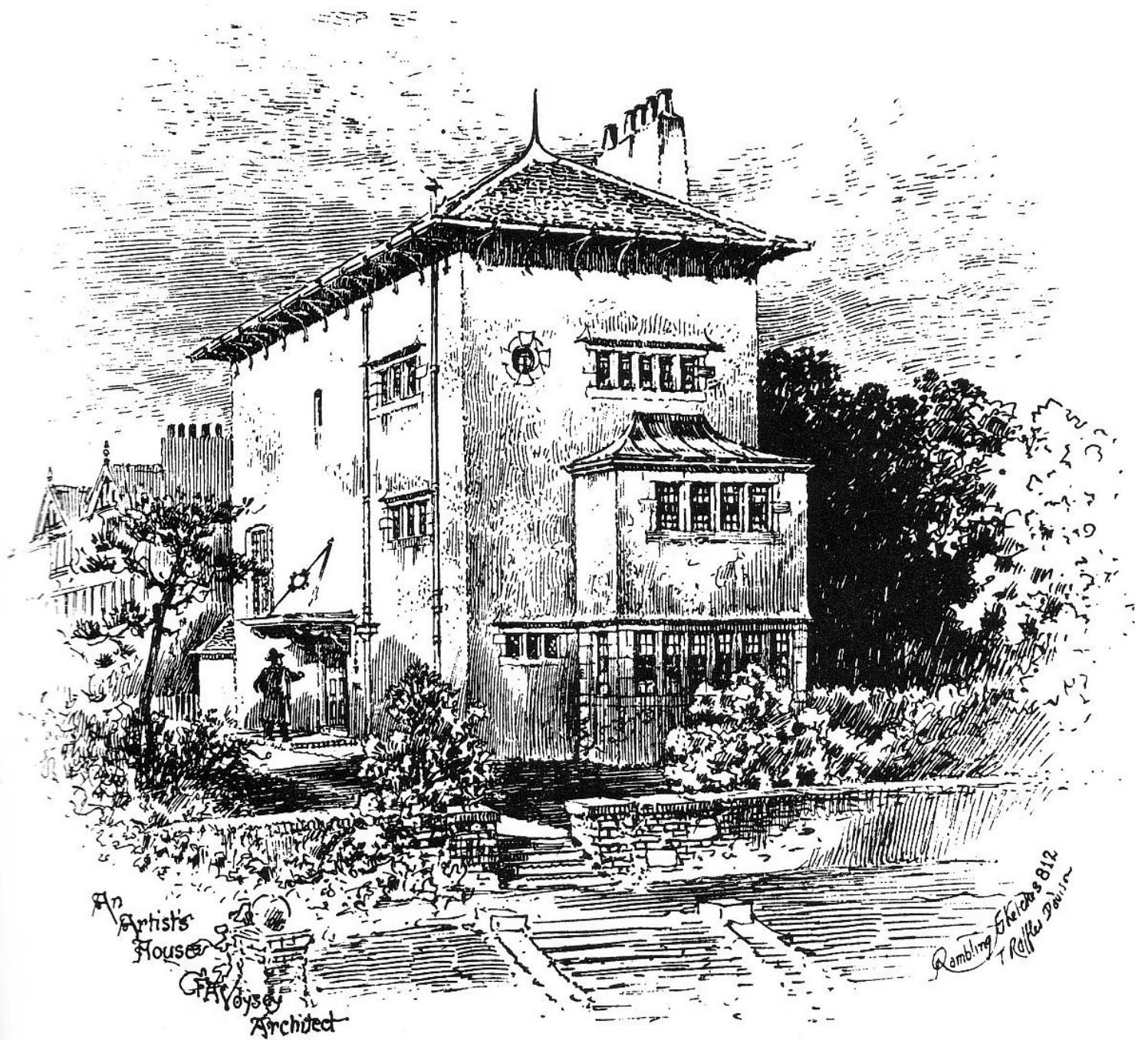
redesigned; there was a studio in West Kensington; two town houses in a terrace in Knightsbridge; a substantial farm house near Malvern. It is difficult to sort out the exact chronology of these projects and since they were so close together in date it seems permissible to deal with them in the most convenient way from a critical point of view. The house at 14 South Parade, Bedford Park, for the Forsters, is a very workable compromise between two previous projects, the first design for the site of 1888 and the Tower House, both described above. The front elevation, idiosyncratically tall and slender and with a low pitched roof, resembles the Tower House with its ground-floor storey cut away (6). It has a deeper, square bay, terminating in a canopy with concave curves which has Georgian overtones. This deep bay and the new entrance position, now moved round to the side, minimize the drawbacks of the narrow frontage. Nevertheless accommodation space is cramped since the whole second floor is given over to a studio room lit principally by a rear-facing window, almost of full width, which carries up into the roofline. The significance of this design as executed is that it loses the obvious drawbacks of the two parent designs: the uneasy domestic character of Voysey's first design for the house, which represented a hangover from the days of his training, is gone; so also is the ungainly half-timbering which marred the severity of the Tower House design. The deficiencies in living space in this house were soon acknowledged by the addition in 1894 of a side extension on two floors. The disruption this has caused to the original effect is apparent at first glance and does reflect on the impracticality of Voysey's first efforts here. Even so the house is a striking one, effective even now and impressive as the first substantial contribution of its designer to the architecture of his day; doubly impressive when the 'newness' of its appearance is remembered. When the house was built the inhabitants of Bedford Park thought it ill-conceived and unsuitable – but for the reason that it was 'old-fashioned' in appearance and not at all the thing for that progressive suburb. This apparent contradiction should be remembered in later discussions of Voysey's place in the progression of the vernacular style of his day. This building shows the first use of the window detailing which became a trademark of the Voysey house, employing leaded panes set in an iron frame, with iron fittings, within stone dressings. It also provides the setting for the story, the original source of which is lost but which was recorded in the *Studio*:

It is amusing to read that it was found necessary, in order to prevent the builder from displaying the usual 'ovolo mouldings', 'stop chamfers', fillets, and the like, to prepare eighteen sheets of contract drawings to show where his beloved ornamentation *was to be omitted*. This topsyturvy proceeding is delightfully suggestive of the entirely mechanical adornment in general use which is so thoroughly a part of the routine that great pains have to be taken to prevent the workmen from unconscious 'decoration', according to their wonted habit.⁴

The same writer also notes that the contract price of £494.10s was extremely low, 'a price that takes one's breath away'.

In strong contrast, though again intended as studio and living accommodation for an artist, is the building for W.E.F. Britten at 17 St Dunstan's Road in West

6
 Perspective sketch by T. Raffles Davison of a
 house at 14 South Parade, Bedford Park,
 Chiswick, for Mrs Forster as executed from a
 design of 1891.





7a
Street elevation of a house at 17 St Dunstan's Road, Hammersmith, for W.E.F. Britten, 1891. This elevation is substantially as executed though the rear and interior of the house are much altered.



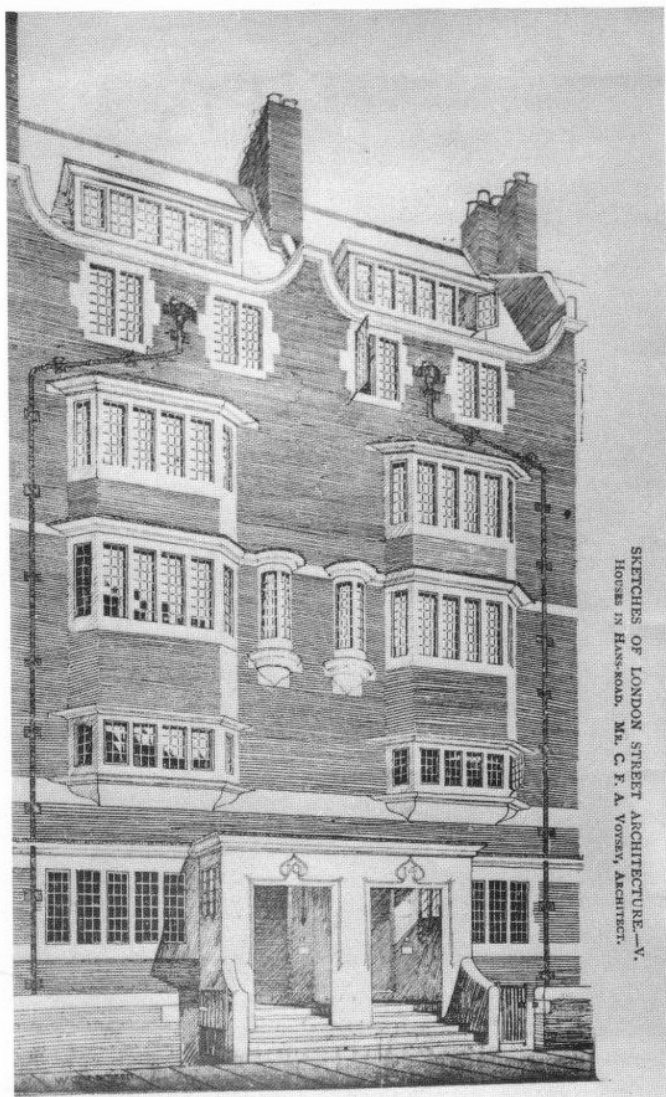
7b
Detail of the porch of the house at St Dunstan's Road, showing the grotesque profiles carved in the supporting beams.

Kensington (7). This is a squat, two-storey house, its lowness emphasized by the low-pitched hipped roof with a deep eaves overhang. The eaves at the front project out past the dormer window in a manner that we will see often in later houses. Other devices added to the Voysey vocabulary with this house include the tapered chimney-stack, roughcast like the walls; the deeply projecting porch cantilevered out on wooden supports (in this case further supported by a wrought-iron stay); the use of a grotesque profile, probably caricaturing the client, in this case carved into the porch supports. These devices all recur regularly in his later work. No other house, unfortunately, has the plain but elegant wrought- and cast-iron railings which ornament the front of the St Dunstan's Road house.

The last of the trio of London buildings dating from the first years of the 1890s is the pair of terraced houses, numbers 14 and 16 Hans Road in Knightsbridge, facing the west elevation of Harrods. It is strange that the writer of the *Studio* article quoted states that these two houses lack the originality of other early Voysey designs; his words are that they 'do not amaze you by sheer novelty as Mr Britten's studio surprises'. We must bow down to this contemporary assessment

of the impact of these designs yet it is hard to understand. There is much of interest in these two houses, the only ones in Voysey's work where he suffered the constraints of infilling into an existing terrace. The most marked feature (after the use of brickwork rather than roughcast, which we can accept was imposed upon a reluctant Voysey by the demands of client and of setting) is the blending of line and curve in the façade. Curves are seen in the low walls flanking the entrance stairs, the upswept quadrant curve on the parapet at the party walls, the pair of small semicircular oriel windows and the moulding of the corbelling to support these and the main oriel windows. Contrasting with this are the squareness of the flat-roofed porch and the drip-mouldings over the lower windows which are carried through into decorative stone courses running the width of the houses. The severe symmetry of this pair of houses is emphasized by the angular descent of the downpipes. The only slight flourish is the appearance of the heart shape – later so typical of Voysey – framing the house numbers on the porch. What the line drawing (8a) cannot convey, which the photograph (8b) does, is the strong sense of horizontality which Voysey's houses have compared with their neighbours in the street.

The three buildings described above show the emergence of many of the main features of Voysey's mature style, particularly when contrasted with the earlier unexecuted designs. All three, however, show Voysey dealing with a town site, an oddity for an architect whose reputation rests on the evolution of a successful style of medium-size vernacular country house. The designing of Walnut Tree Farm in open country at Castlemorton, in clear view of the Malvern Hills, has therefore a double importance as an early design for a house of substantial size and as the first significant commission for a country house (9a). Designed in 1890 it is L-shaped with the services situated in the subsidiary wing of the L; a line of stables and outbuildings close a third side and form a sort of entrance courtyard. The setting is flat country eastwards and in the lee of the Malvern Hills though the orientation of the house has the main elevation, the garden front, facing away from the hills. It is crucial to remember that the house was built to replace the old, timber-frame farmhouse which stands just north of it; contemporary photographs show this in reasonable condition such that it could be mistaken, at a distance, for part of Voysey's work; now this old house stands in a shamefully ruinous condition. The presence of a fine timber-frame building on site was almost certainly what swayed Voysey into using half-timbered detailing – which was in no way structural – and therefore we should not read Walnut Tree Farm as a serious attempt to instate timber-frame work, sham or genuine, as a component of Voysey's style. Like Bishop's Itchington this house has a jettied first floor on the garden front though this is disguised by the chimney breast, porch, polygonal window bay, and series of buttresses to read as a series of recessed bays. Above, the dormers have been given the conviction they lacked at Bishop's Itchington by the addition of gables with half-timbered detailing; the guttering is carried in front of the bedroom windows supported only by the now familiar curved brackets. The principal feature of the entrance elevation, by contrast, is the sweeping down of the pitched roof to eaves at ground-floor window level, less than head height. This considerable expanse of roof is broken only by a dormer and the projecting



8a
Perspective sketch of two houses, Nos. 14 and 16 Hans Road, Knightsbridge, for Archibald Grove, 1891-2, showing the houses as executed.



8b
Nos. 14 and 16 Hans Road shown in the terrace of which they form a part. No. 12, to the right, is by Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo.

pitched roof over the porch. The most remarkable feature of this exaggerated detailing of the roof is the dramatic end elevation it produced (9b). A fine coloured perspective sketch of the garden front (9c) demonstrates that Voysey introduced here for the first time his favourite colouring scheme – a white roughcast render, woodwork of a strong mid-green and curtains uniformly throughout the house of a bright red. The plan layout shows the simplicity characteristic of Voysey's early designs as indeed of many later ones: a staircase beside the main door, a corridor running the length of the entrance front at ground- and first-floor level, a strip of rooms opening off this corridor. The only complication is the staggering of the upper floor, made necessary by the narrowing caused by the low sweep of the roof



9a
Walnut Tree Farm, Castlemorton, near
Malvern, for R.H.Cazalet, 1890. The garden
front as it is today.



on the entrance front; this is compensated for, and turned to stylistic advantage, by the jettying on the garden front already referred to.

Early furniture designs and other work

After this group of houses were built up to 1891, there comes a brief gap before the progression to houses at Colwall and Frensham which bring the account up to 1895. This is therefore a good point at which to consider the other ways in which Voysey's career had been expanding in these early years. The *Black Book's* records designs for furniture in 1889 for an A.I. Collis or Collin and for the Essex and Co. showrooms; also furniture for A.A. Voysey for a house at Higham, Kent, in 1892. None of this survives or is identifiable. For the 1880s there are two instances of furniture designs which do survive. The first is a design for a chair, known as the Swan chair because of the low-relief carved swans' heads which terminate the rear supports. A chair to this pattern was certainly made about 1896 for W. Ward Higgs and exhibited in the Arts and Crafts Exhibition of that year. The design

9b
Walnut Tree Farm, end elevation.

9c
Walnut Tree Farm, perspective watercolour from the garden with plans inset.



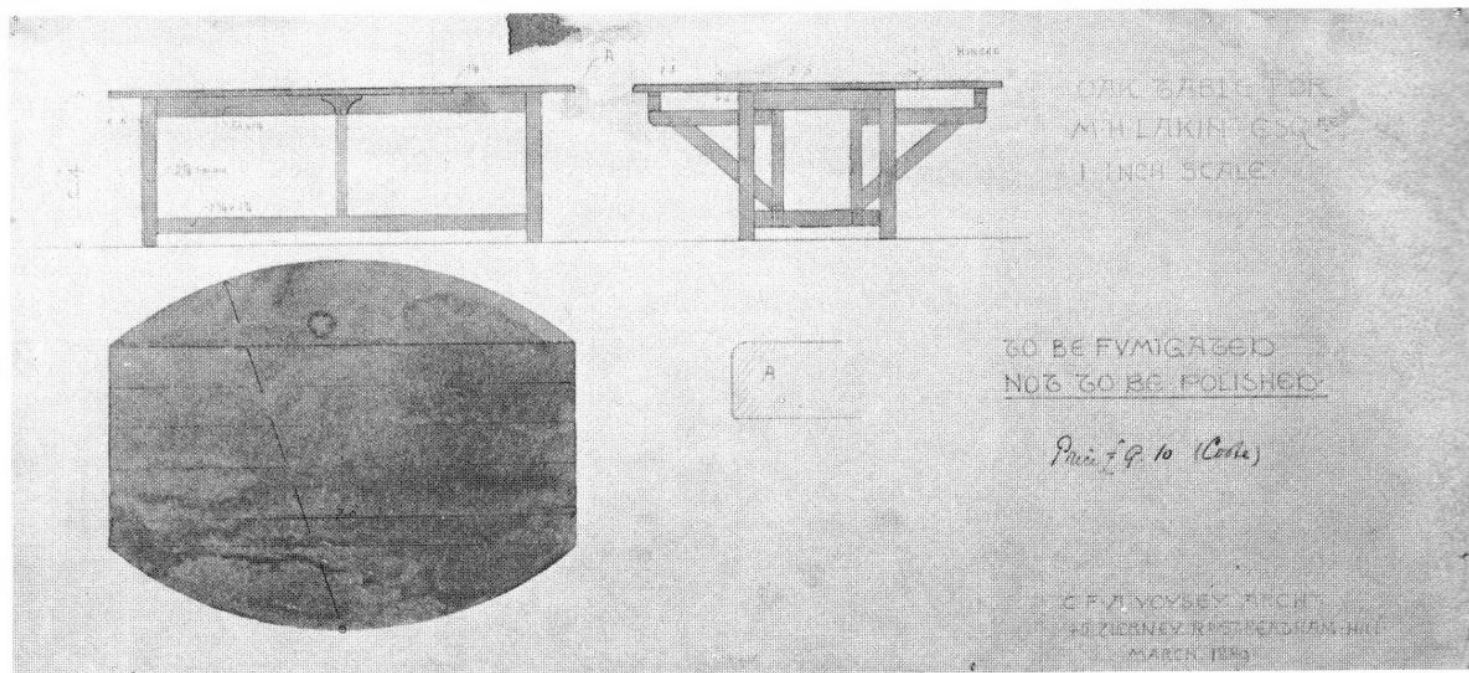


10
The Swan chair, designed c.1883–5. The seat padding is not original.

11
Design for an oak table for M.H.Lakin, 1889.

which survives, however, can be dated by watermark and by the address 'Broadway Chambers' which Voysey has inscribed on it to between 1883 and 1885. As can be seen (10) the chair has a form unlike anything else designed by Voysey. Structurally it is simple – flat section oak, the side members interlocked in an X-shape, the joints all pegged or doweled. But the flat side members are cut to free curves and the ends carved to bird's head form. The chair has strong links with the English vernacular which relate both to the influences of Voysey's training and to his inclination to think in terms of the past. Perhaps in the Swan chair there is an influence from Pugin, who was one of Voysey's heroes; certainly there is about it a feeling of the early seventeenth century. Very similar in its roots, though as different as can be in the nature of its outward appearance, is the design for a table of 1888 (11). It also is oak, the native British timber which Voysey used almost without exception for his furniture. It has – again a precedent for most of his later furniture – a plain finish, in this case 'to be fumigated, not to be polished'. The timber is heavy, square sectioned, unrelieved by any decoration; only the segmental drop leaves relieve with their curve the simple solidity. More sophisticated but falling into a laboured, cottage style is the cabinet of 1893 designed for Lady Wentworth (12). Here the style of Voysey's later furniture can be seen developing, the plain oak surfaces, deeply projecting but simple mouldings, carefully considered proportions and a craftsmanlike finish contrasting with austerity of appearance.

There is no record in these early years of an interior completely designed and fitted by Voysey; there is, for that matter, no assured knowledge of the growth of his interest in combining the design of interior fittings and detail with the design of



12
Cabinet for Lady Wentworth, 1893. In a slightly modified form to that shown here, the cabinet is illustrated in the *Studio* of May 1896, possibly suggesting that more than one example was made.



his buildings. There is, however, a very strong clue to the direction his thoughts were taking in a design of 1890 which survives. This Voysey entitled 'Suggestion for Treatment of a Domestic Window' and it is an interesting treatment. It is ornate and loosely tudoresque; the chief features (13) are the heavy, moulded stone mullions; the leaded glass with oval stained-glass panels set in iron casement frames; the green stained panelled wood surrounds. It foreshadows his later work in that all details, notably the window fittings, are distinctively to his own design. Yet it is essentially an ornate treatment, perhaps suited to the interior of the 'House with an Octagonal Hall', certainly not to the Bedford Park house. It is elegant but lacks Voysey's later restraint. He had joined, in 1884, the Art Workers' Guild, and was to become in 1924 its Master; it is clear that his interests lay for the large part of his professional life in the design of the house and fittings entire. This interest stemmed presumably from the early influences of Mackmurdo and others and was, among the practitioners of the Arts and Crafts movement, a widely held one. W.R.Lethaby wrote in 1892:

So it matters much that such things as are about you be each of their kind good; carefully wrought and thoughtfully shaped – beautiful.⁶

In 1894 Voysey put forward some views on domestic furniture to the General Meeting of the Royal Institute of British Architects, a lecture that was later published:

Mankind is still very much in the monkey stage. We mock and mimic old and new work, good and bad . . . From one extreme to another we rock, without any sign of regaining an equilibrium.⁷

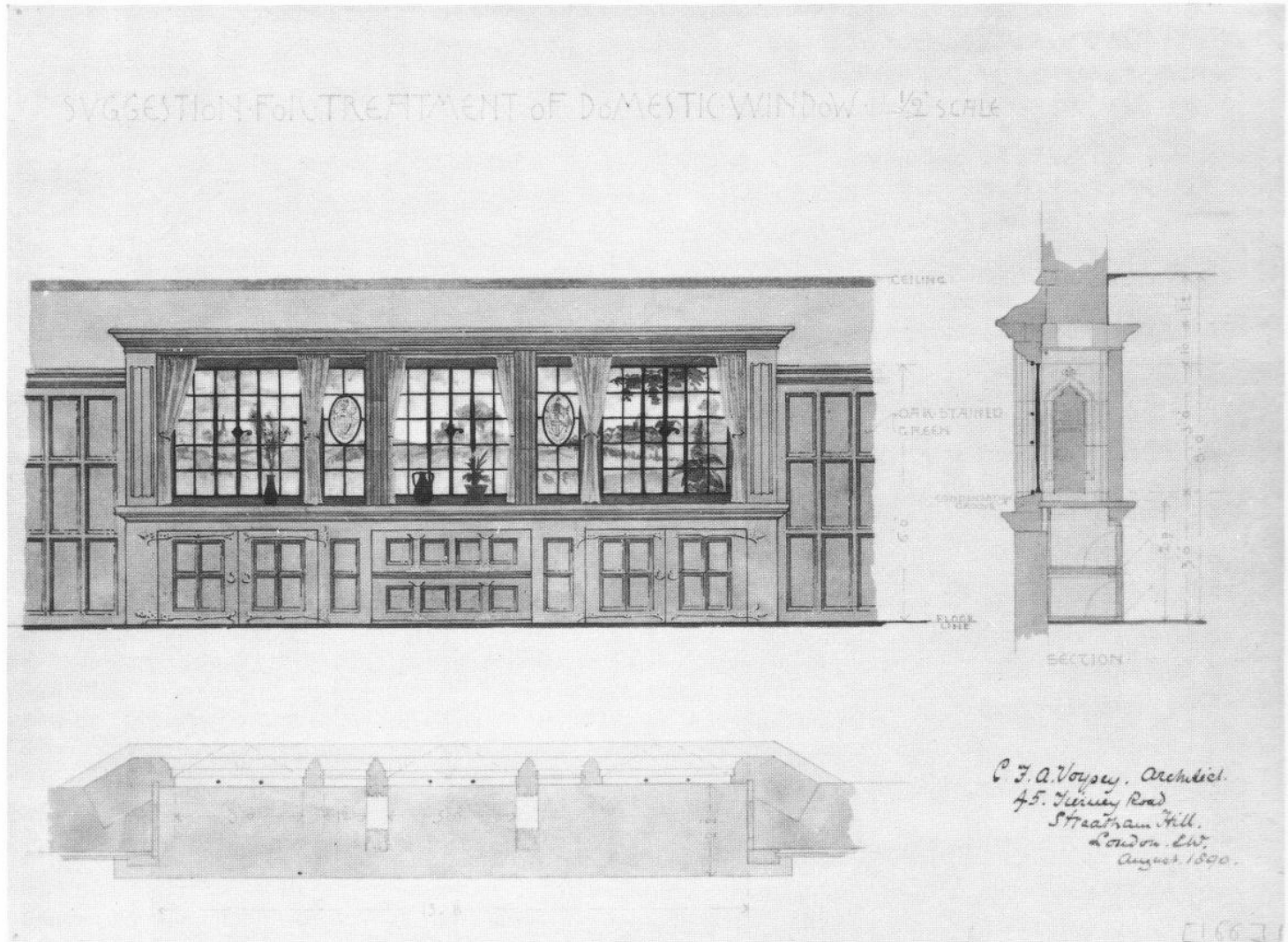
This was his first sally at revivalism and the imitation of past styles, a subject that caused him, along with so many of his colleagues and predecessors in the nineteenth century, a great deal of confused thought and indeterminate conclusion. He went on to say, on a narrower tack:

It is clear then that we must have a logical basis for our design in furniture; as in all else, laws must be discovered and obeyed.⁷

But without defining these laws for which he searched he had to go on:

I fear I am expected to say something much more practical about the

¹³
Design entitled, 'Suggestion for Treatment of a Domestic Window', 1890. No client is named so the design is assumed to be an unexecuted project.

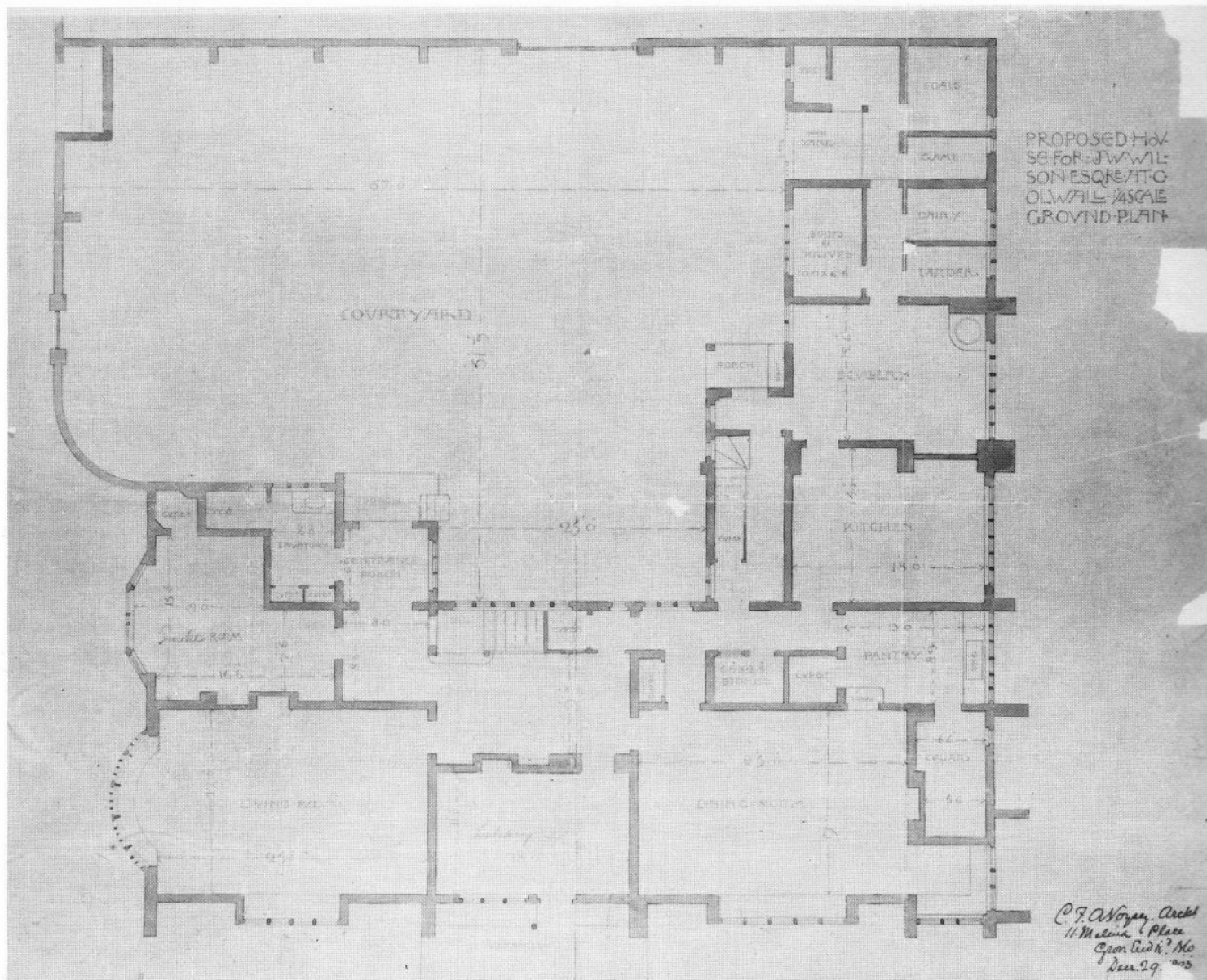


design of furniture. I wish I could say something helpful but I am myself groping in the dark, struggling to find out the true laws which govern fitness and beauty.⁷

In the evidence that survives from these early years we do see a little of the struggle to which Voysey refers; we do not see enough to be clear about it. From his later years it is comforting to deduce a strong feeling of what is 'right' in architecture and its allied skills; from these early comments it is congenial for us to assume that the struggle for laws to 'discover and obey' did leave him 'groping in the dark'. What we actually see from the evidence available is a disciplining process, initially a paring away of excess detail. The interesting thing about this detail, at this stage, is that it is the detail of history or tradition, the stylistic influences of English vernacular. This is the backcloth one would have expected Voysey to begin with, working as he did from his background and training. The remarkable thing was how quickly and completely he shed the appearance of it in his work, while retaining its mood. The spirit of a vernacular style and the sense of designing buildings for a country which had a long history and in a style appropriate to that history remained with him. If that seems a nebulous or meaningless distinction one can only say that it is necessary to try to understand it for there seems no other way to reconcile the two aspects of Voysey's work: first his apparent, increasing absorption with the British native past; second the interest which the sparseness and economy of his work created among the next generation of architects, who were to do things quite foreign to his own inclinations and interests, just as most of his were foreign to theirs.

Perrycroft and Lowicks

When Voysey made the above comments to the RIBA his biggest architectural venture to date and first building to attract substantial notice was completed. This was Perrycroft which like Walnut Tree Farm was sited near Malvern. Perrycroft had from the start advantages which the earlier house lacked; it was situated outstandingly on the steep west slope of the Malvern Hills and it commanded, as well as this more than generous site, an ample budget of almost £5000 against the £1120 of Walnut Tree Farm. Did Voysey take full advantage of this chance? Initially, no. The house does not extract the full value from the site as did some of his later houses, notably Moor Crag; it stands square on an excavated terrace, commanding the best of the views. The plan is L-shaped, the service wing in the tail of the L (14a), and the two main elevations are quite different in mood, a common feature in Voysey's work. The drive comes down steeply and round into the angle of the L, the way the site is cut back into the hillside preventing a clear long-distance view of the entrance façade. The L in fact carries back a little way into a third side, creating a narrow west wing which looks out direct over the ground west of the Malvern Hills. The atmosphere of this entrance court (14b) retains something of Voysey's first projects, something of the 'House with an Octagonal Hall', in the tower and porch with their leaded roofs of complex double curves. Notable also is an unbroken run of windows at first-floor level. On the garden side – looking steeply down but not directly out to the plain to the west



14a
Ground plan for Perrycroft at Colwall, near
Malvern, for J. W. Wilson, 1893-4.

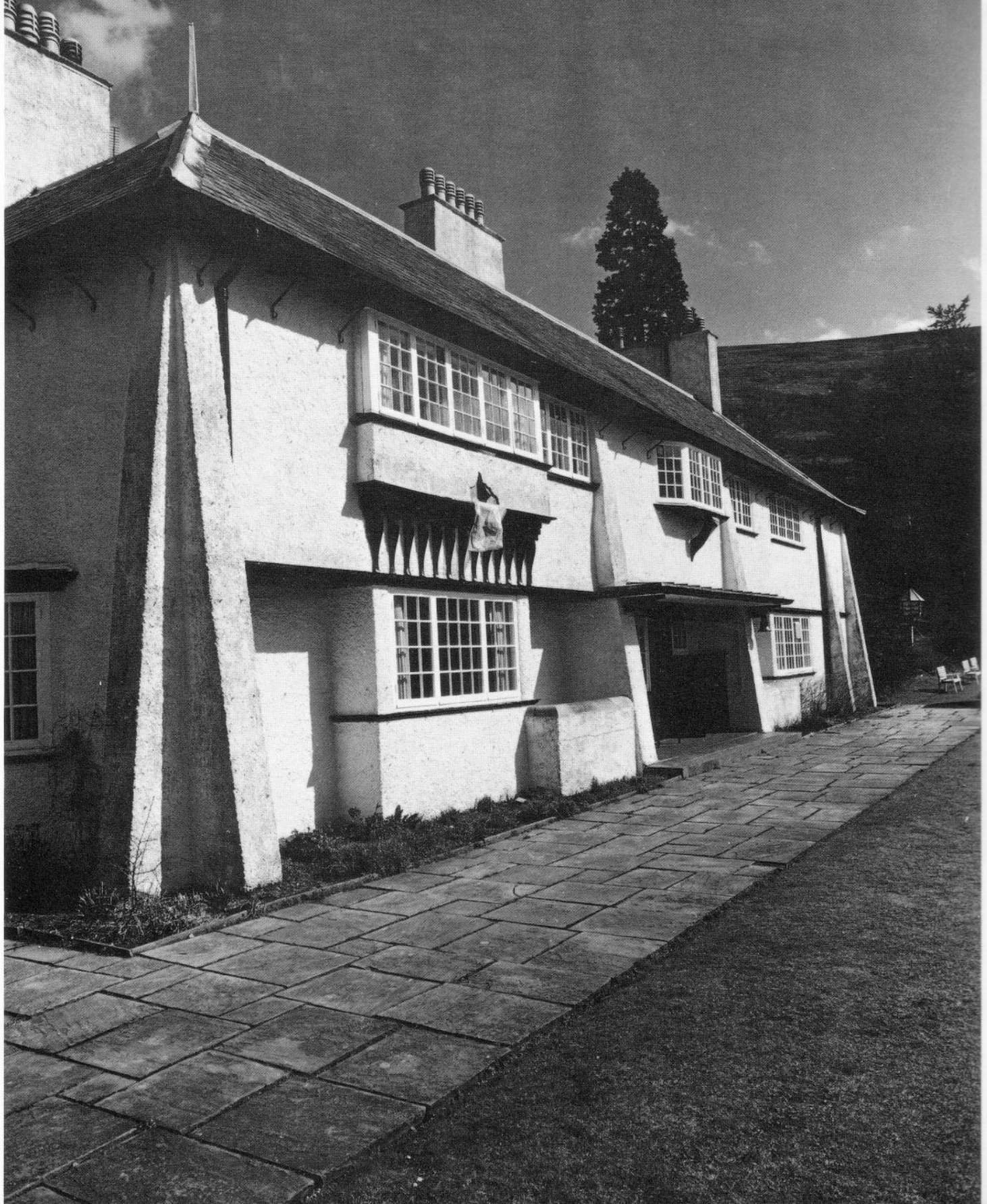
— is a long sweep of hipped roof; on the entrance side the tower, a dormer, the chimney-stacks all break the roofline but here it is clean. There is a slight jetty, the timber corbels to the upstairs bays are rustic in character, the window frames are timber not stone (14c). This and the half-timbering to the top of the tower are concessions to the setting and the area; not much else is. The designs for Perrycroft are dated from Dec 1893 to Jan 1894 so over three years separate it from Walnut Tree Farm; yet although the houses are quite different in scale, Perrycroft being bigger and more lavish, their strengths and weaknesses are much the same. Both



14b
Perrycroft, the entrance courtyard.

strive to incorporate vernacular or traditional detail with the clean, plain style which is becoming typical of Voysey. Both adopt simple layouts providing unfussy living conditions. Each house is quite well adapted for use by its inhabitants. Neither, on the other hand, – and this is the principal weakness – is particularly well reconciled to its setting, which indicates the unease which Voysey still felt in this aspect of his work.

Quite how Voysey established his link with the area around Malvern is unknown; following the building of these two substantial projects he designed an





unexecuted house there for himself in 1897 so it was obviously a part of the country which appealed to him. However the pull was not strong enough to get him away from London. In the meantime he designed and built a house, starting in 1895, for his father in Platt's Lane, Hampstead; it was a plain L-shaped house of low budget, reinforcing the development of the medium-sized house which was the backbone of his practice. More excitingly a commission came in 1894 from a client whose work was to play an important part for Voysey – his first commission, in fact, from a substantial and established client who would be in a position to contribute to his career. The client was E.J.Horniman of the tea family and that he liked the work Voysey produced for him is evidenced since he came back with more commissions which we shall consider in later chapters. This first project was to build a house near Frensham in Surrey, the first of Voysey's several important commissions in this part of the Home Counties. As the final item in this opening chapter Lowicks, as the house was named, is satisfying; it helps to sum up what has been happening and it looks forward. All the earlier houses and projects have been idiosyncratic, which is not a bad thing, but have also been self-conscious, which is. That is why, for instance, Perrycroft produces a slight feeling of unease. There it sits, a substantial house in a spectacular setting which we can rationalize as a contribution in vernacular vein to the progress of contemporary domestic architecture and can applaud as such; yet it is awkward. Lowicks comes right out with its stylistic awkwardness in a much more honest way, more mature. Thus it makes a virtue of it (15). The house is compact with a single-storey service wing; the main block, rectangular with a hipped roof, has to accommodate three

storeys, the top one being an attic room. The roof therefore sports windows recessed into the heavily overhanging eaves, a plain flat-roofed dormer and an elaborate half-timbered one with hipped, tiled roof. The house at Frensham, though not one of Voysey's finest, is the clearest and most enjoyable sign that he has grown up as an architect, has developed the confidence to do what he wants, to assert himself and to be at ease in doing so.

It is particularly appropriate therefore that it should be on Lowicks that we have a rare account, and the earliest, of what it was like to be inside a Voysey house:

Lowicks was equally [the writer has just been discussing another home not by Voysey] beguiling and even more idiosyncratic, partly because everything was very high or very low. The roof, for instance, came down steeply almost to the ground; the casement windows were wide and low and the window seats very low; but the latches on the doors were very high and to open them one had to make a gesture like that of proposing a toast; straight and very high were the backs of the chairs which . . . were pierced with heart-shaped openings; on high shelves near the ceiling stood vases of crafty green pottery filled with peacocks' feathers; and the hot water cans, coal-scuttles, electroliers and so on were made of beaten or hammered brass or copper. It was still, this house, the last word, or at any rate the last but one, in modern taste and comfort.⁸

What is interesting is what, at the time of visiting, fascinated the writer. The low sweep of the roof and lowness in general came first; loftiness, after all, had always been associated with grandeur or prestige so its lack would be striking. The high-backed chairs pierced with hearts – as we shall see, a typical Voysey design – strengthened the impression of lowness in the rooms. The small items of furniture, and the ornaments, all conformed to and helped to consolidate the mood of the house; overall the impression was that this was fashionable, modern and also comfortable. One cannot judge the success of Voysey as a designer solely in the context of contemporary opinion; yet it is important to be reminded constantly of the extent to which his work was considered innovatory and extraordinary.

As the last five years of the nineteenth century began Voysey found himself with a practice fast becoming established; he had good press notice including considerable mention in Europe where the Germans in particular thought well of his work. Though Voysey never cared to travel his scrap book shows that he kept a close eye on all publication of his work, in England and overseas. He had acquired a sense of confidence and accomplishment in carrying out the type of design which, he had persuaded himself and a body of clients, was practical and worthwhile. He was also about to produce a spate of furniture designs and other detail work. He was poised to become one of the leading figures in British architecture and design depending on his performance over the next few years.