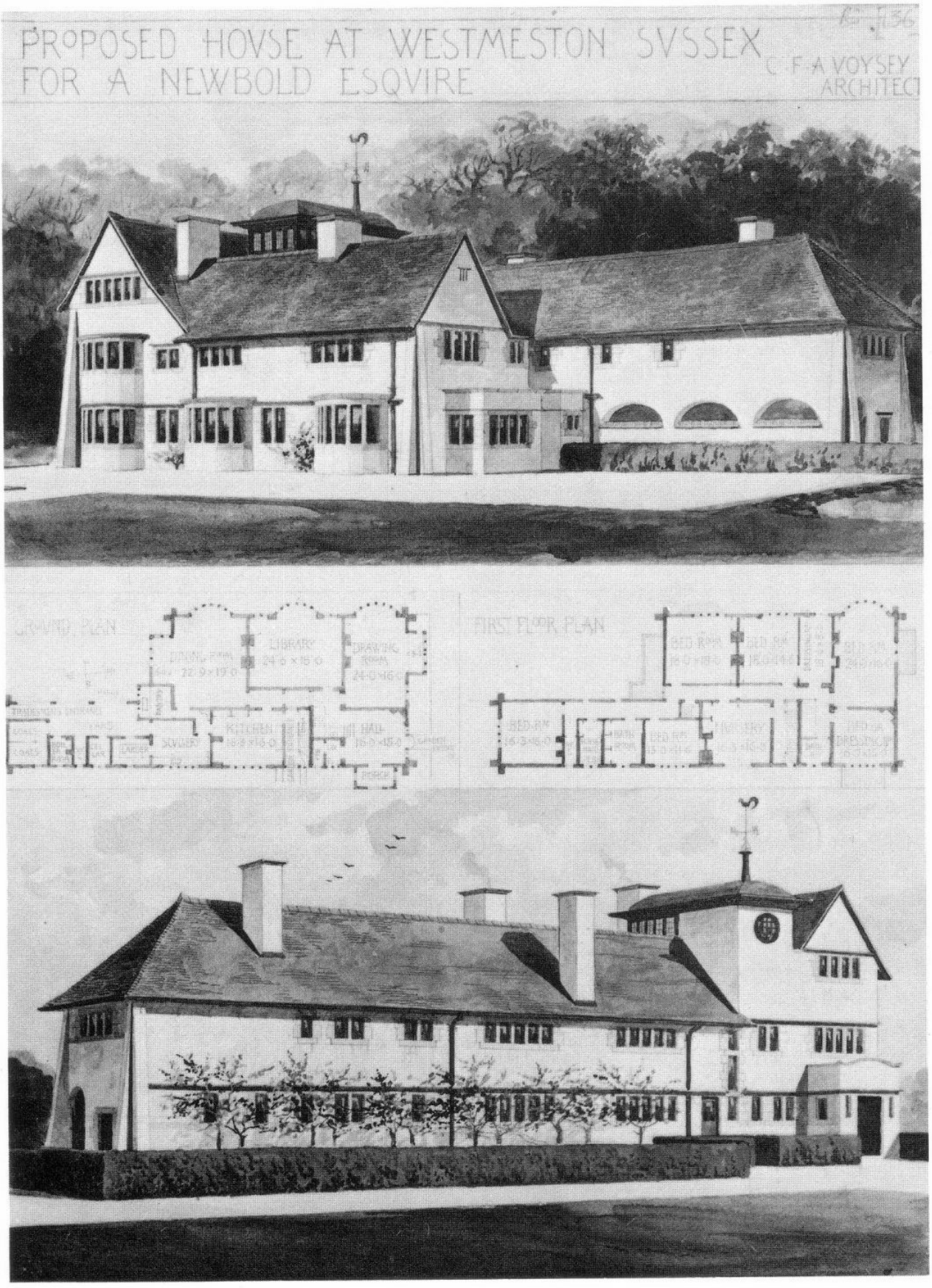
Chapter 4 The Years of Mature Practice, 1898–1910

After 1897 Voysey's practice entered its busiest period; even so, in terms of the career of a very well-known architect, the years of hectic business were relatively few. It is apparent that by 1904 the rush was easing off rapidly and the houses built between then and 1910, though including some important work, do not contain anything to the standard of Broadleys (1898), Moor Crag (1898), Spade House (1899), the Sandersons factory (1902), Vodin (1903) or the Whitwood Institute (1904). Then as the first decade of the century passed there was a distinct change as, in the houses of 1909 such as at Combe Down or Henley-in-Arden, a distinct element of Gothic detailing crept in, indicating what was to become a strong element in Voysey's later work. It is tempting to suggest a parallel with the architect whose principles and integrity Voysey appeared to admire most, A.W.N.Pugin; for though Pugin, the great Catholic Revival architect, died young at 40 in 1852 whereas Voysey lived to be 83, Pugin's major work was almost entirely done in the decade from 1840 to 1850, Voysey's from 1895 to 1905. Both lived in those ten years a life of hectic effort which, in both cases, adversely affected their general health. The drama and sheer pace of Pugin's brief career exceeds that of his later fellow but the comparisons are more than passing.

1898 began with a proposal for a client named Newbold for a house in Sussex, just north of Brighton in the small village of Westmeston. The house was not built, the failure being symbolic for it was in the mould of Norney and New Place which Voysey had now outlived: big, lavish, with a corner tower, three polygonal bays and an elaborated porch (28). Unusually, the roof was to have been of red tiles though otherwise, in roughcast with stone dressings, the finish was as expected. The design for this is dated March; by the middle of that year two of the best-known houses were on the drawing board. Both were sited, within a few hundred yards of each other, in one of the most picturesque areas in the country, on the edge of Lake Windermere in the Lake District. Because they are very different houses and because, as the drawings show, the designs were evolved within a few days of each other, the decision as to which to discuss first is arbitrary.

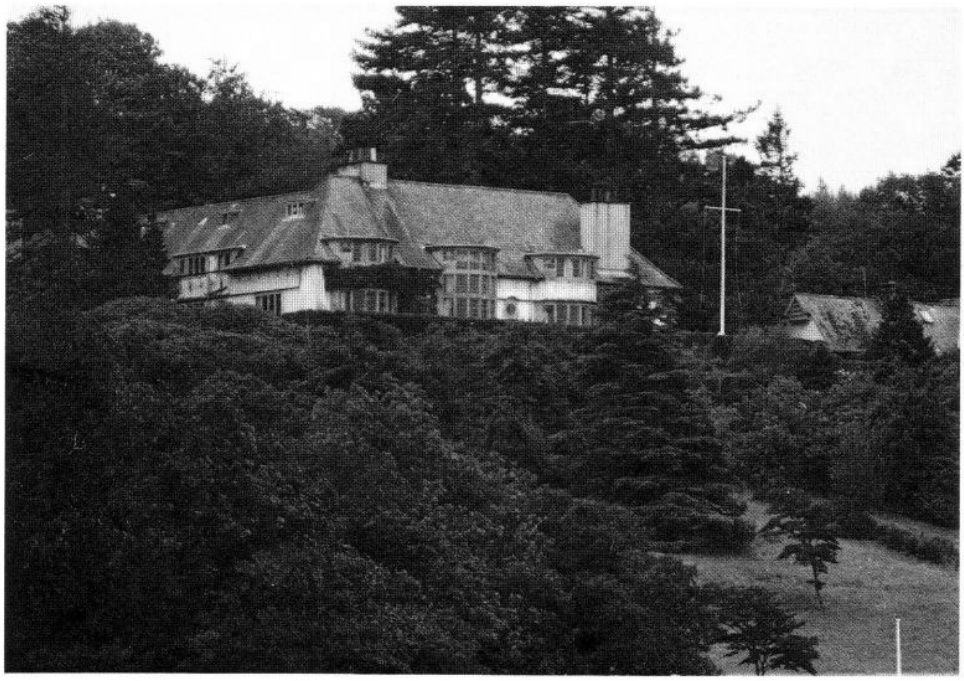
Broadleys

The house called Broadleys is spectacularly situated on a levelled site on the very edge of the lake; in front of the terrace on which the house stands the ground falls sharply away to the water's edge with a clear view across to the west side of the



28
Design for a house at Westmeston, Sussex, for A.Newbold, 1898; perspective drawings with watercolour of front and rear plus plans. Unexecuted.

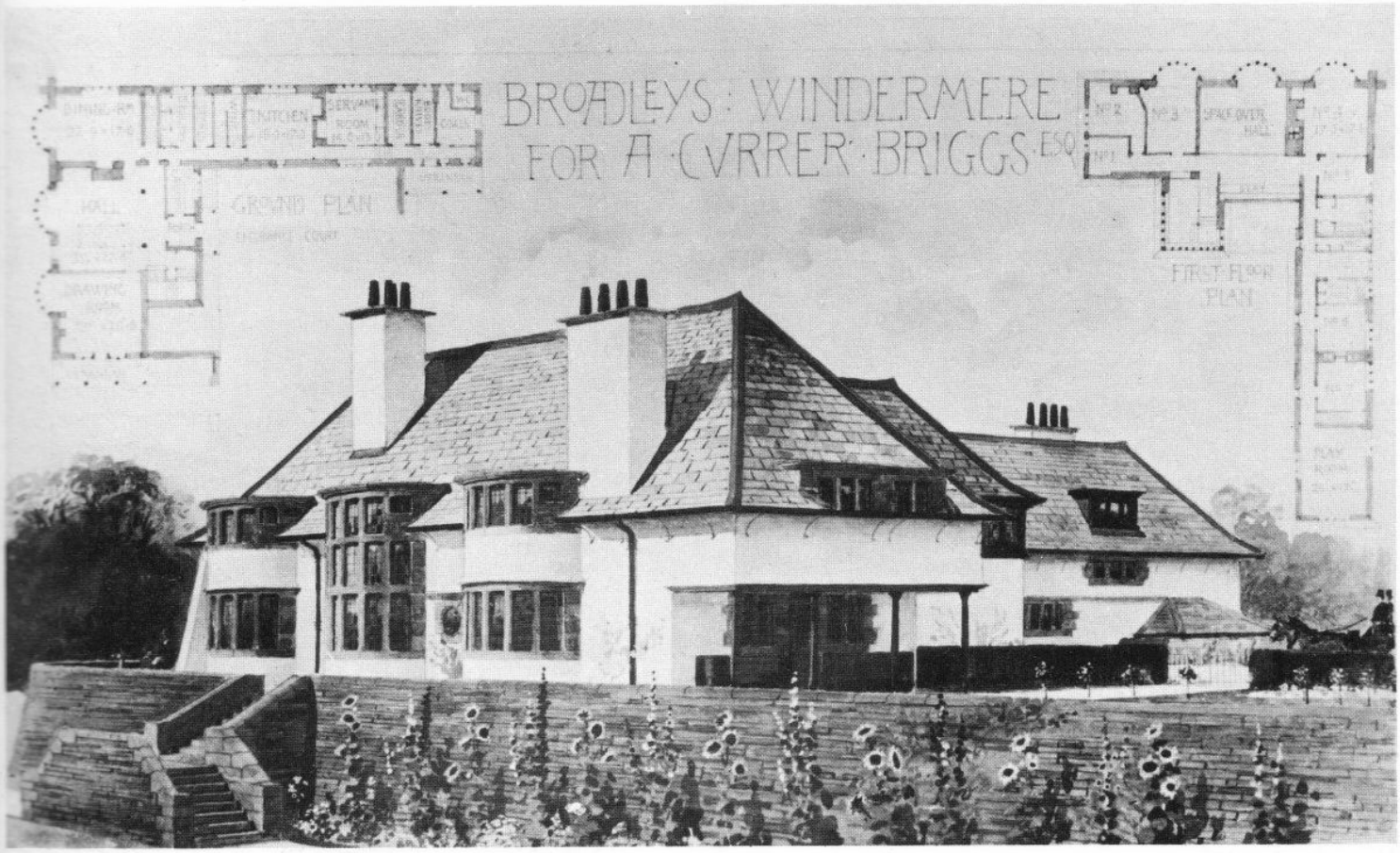
29a
Broadleys on Lake Windermere for A.Currer Briggs, 1898. This shows the house seen from the lake itself with the three bow windows and the service wing to the left.



lake. This situation has produced the most often published single elevation of all Voysey's work, the lake-front of the house with its three two-storey, deep, semi-circular bow windows (29a), which ironically can only be properly seen from the middle of the lake. As built the house is a simple L-shape, the ends terminated with hipped roofs; the hipped roof is repeated in the staircase extension of two storeys which sits in the angle of the L, behind the main lake-front elevation. Next to this, hard up against the angle (29b) is a gabled extension housing the porch and entrance lobby. The contrast of this gable, echoed in the small porch, with the hipped roof and horizontal band of windows tucked up under the eaves gives an interest to the entrance front which belies the very simple arrangement of the house. The longer arm of the L, slightly lower than the other and running back from the lake, is a service wing. The main wing houses at ground-floor level three rooms, in a row and interlinking, the dining-room, drawing-room and hall which, originally, housed a billiard table(29c). In the first scheme (29d), drawn up in June 1898, the buildings occupied three sides of a square, the fourth being closed by a hedge; this would have been a more substantial house with, for instance, a separate billiard-room. So the final scheme, drawn out in July, simplifies and reduces the layout. The house as seen today follows this July layout and remains externally as built except that the south end of the main wing has been filled in where originally a bedroom overhung the verandah.

Broadleys was built for a client called Currer Briggs; he was the son of the Henry Briggs who owned the colliery at Whitwood, near Normanton in Yorkshire where Voysey later carried out work. The company was clearly a

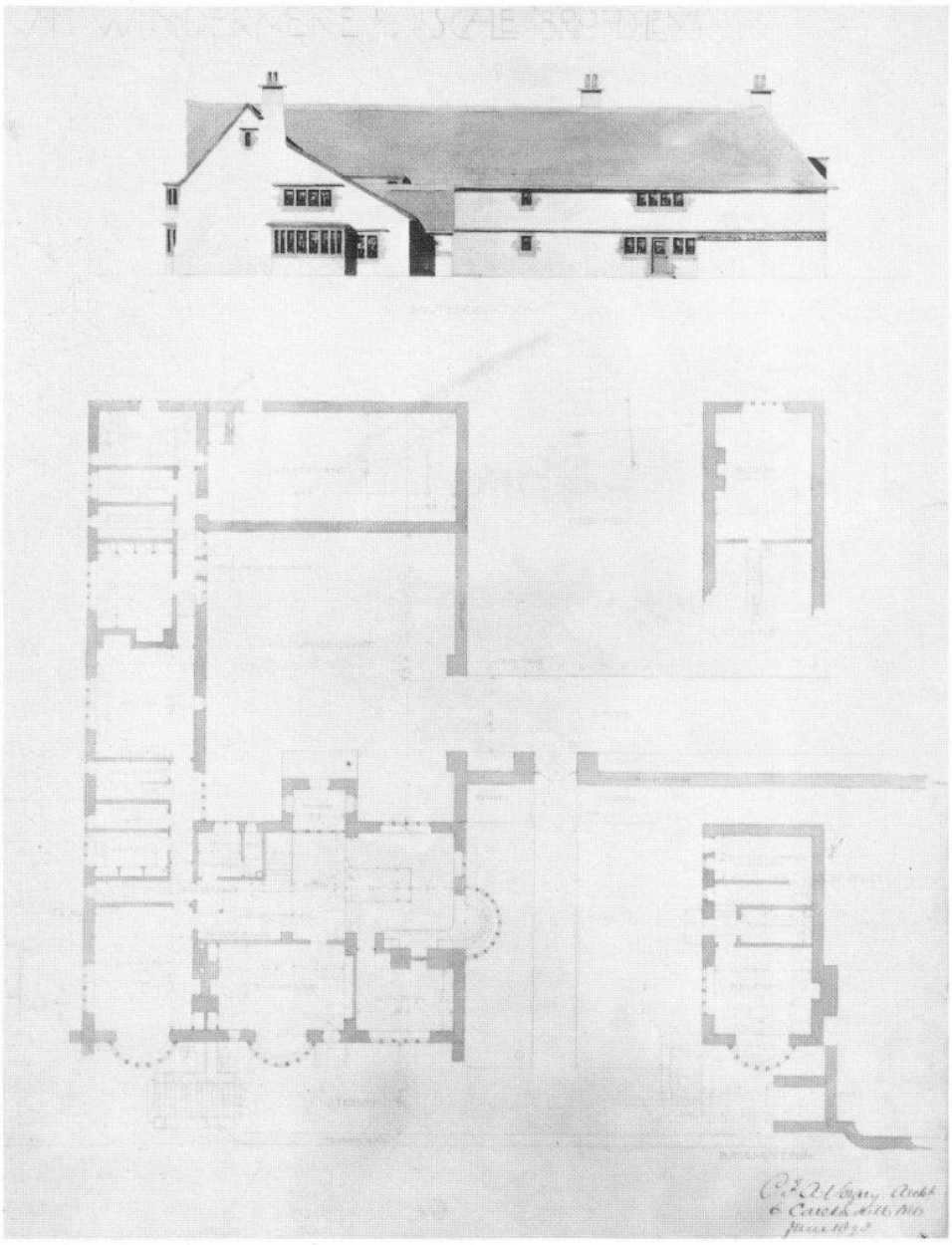
29b
Broadleys, the entrance porch and staircase extension. To the left, partly obscured by bushes, can be seen the infill where the verandah used to be.

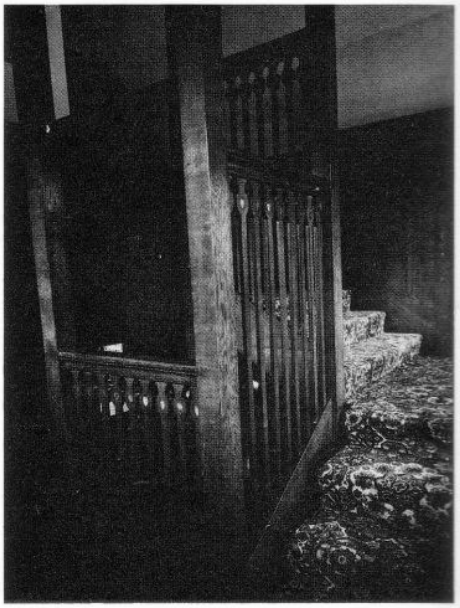


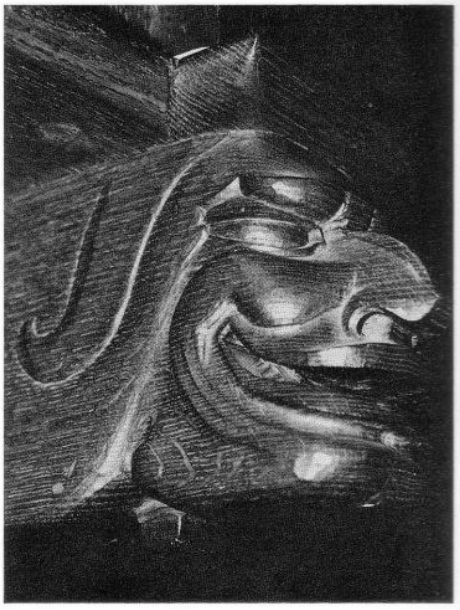
29c
Contemporary perspective watercolour, with inset plans, of Broadleys as executed.

progressive one for it employed Voysey to build housing and an Institute for its employees, begun in 1905. There is a certain oddity in this for whatever else he may have been Voysey was no progressive in his social views. In his mind no doubt there were feudal overtones to the scheme. However, at Broadleys Mr Currer Briggs was in his summer house and at leisure and the house reflects this. As we grow to expect of Voysey, and as indicated above, there are surprises in the comparison of the two main elevations, lake and entrance. The entrance front sets several elements side by side; as the visitor enters from the road he first sees the bedroom window projecting up into the hip, the gutter bracketted across in front of it; then, moving round, the contrasts of the entrance area as described above. Coming then to the lakeside, he sees the completely different mood of the large, dominant bows and their detailing (29e). Again, as we have seen in other buildings and will see again, Voysey creates variety by playing with levels. The bows push up through the wide projecting eaves into the roof pitch, which weaves around the capping cornice and spreads around the curve. The little round window with its curved drip course, set in emphatic stone dressings, picks up the strong motif of

29d
Design for the first scheme for Broadleys, dated June 1898; south elevation (the lake would lie to the west) with ground plan.



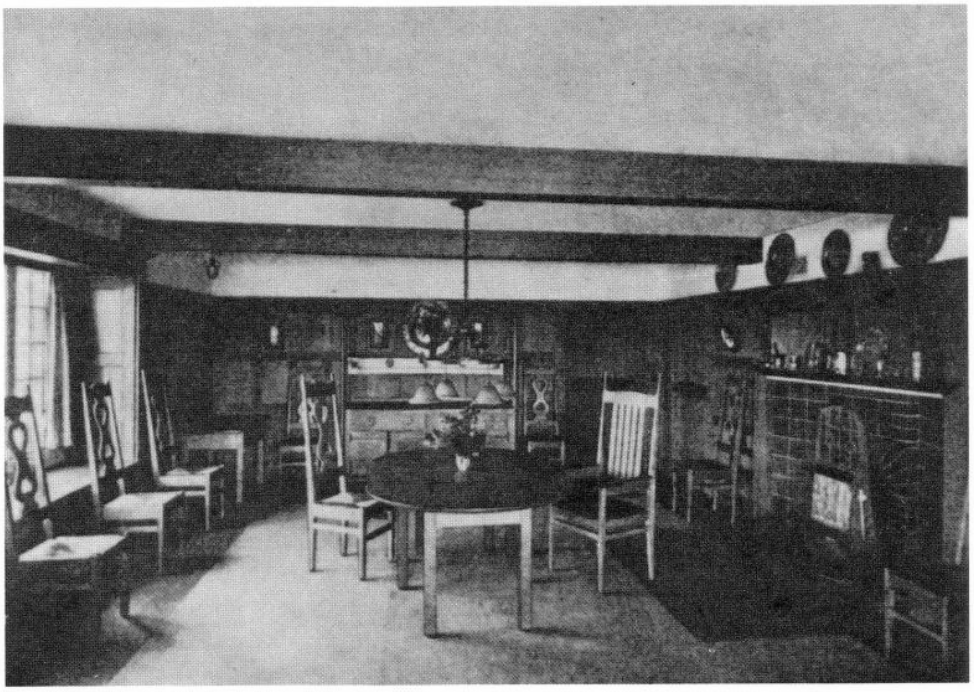




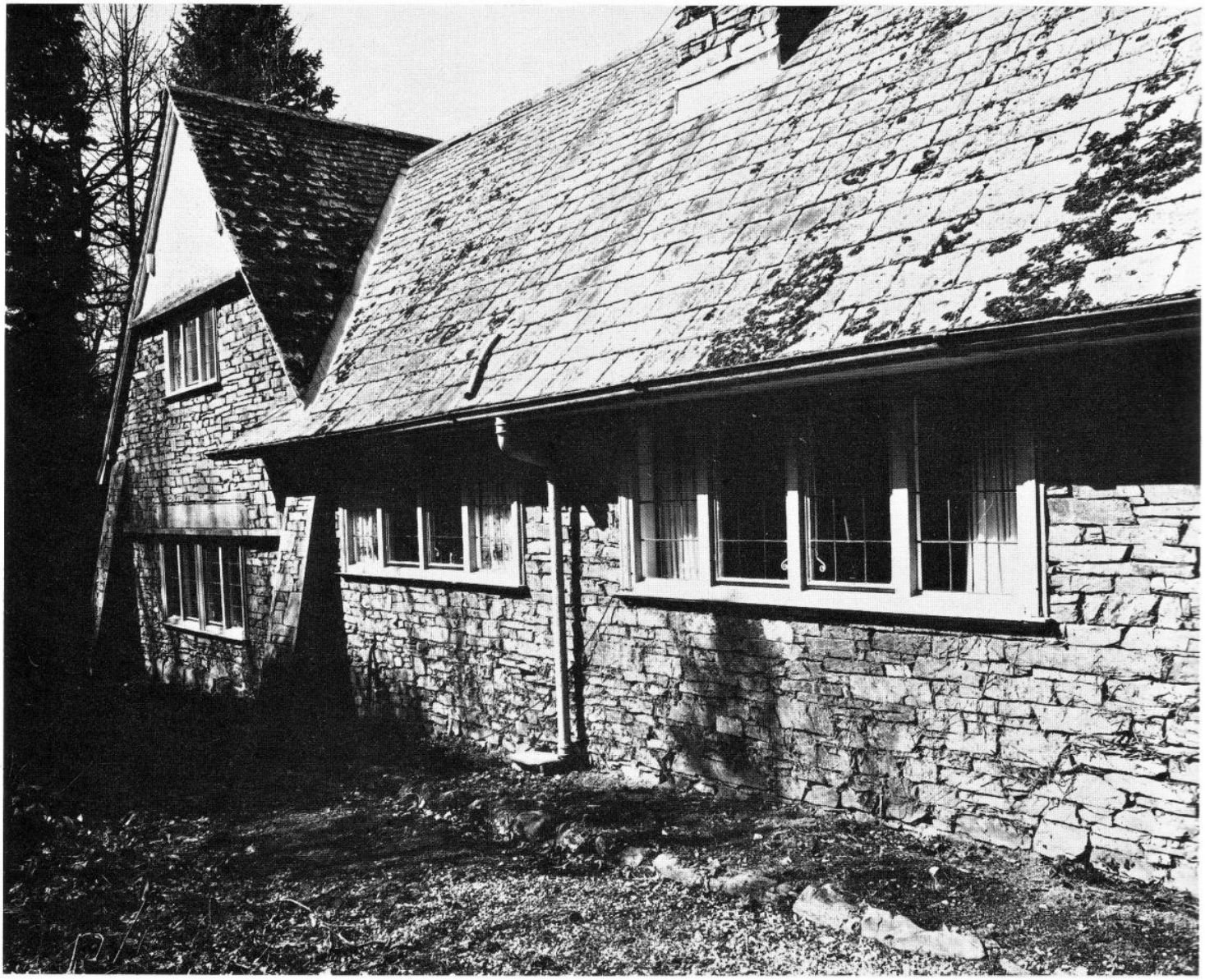
29e (right)
Detail of the lakeside (west) front of Broadleys.

29f (left)
Detail of the oak staircase of Broadleys, from the half-landing between ground and first floors.

29g (left, below)
Detail of the carved oak grotesque corbel from the hall at Broadleys; this is presumed to be a caricature of Currer Briggs, Voysey's client. The figure is less than life-size and carved in the coarse style that Voysey favoured for such work, the tool marks remaining in the wood.



29h
Contemporary photograph showing the dining-room at Broadleys shortly after the house was completed, with furniture largely to Voysey's own designs in situ.



291
The Lodge at Broadleys, a detail showing the stone construction without mortar and wooden casements.

curves which dominates this aspect of the house. The whole effect is, in its spectacular setting, unique in Voysey's work and very effective.

Moving inside the house the sense of solidity, comfort and successful design, offset by the odd surprise, continues. A lobby leads through into the hall, off which runs a staircase (29f). Here, as he recommends for entrance halls, Voysey has avoided any use of diagonals. The rails are inset with a green inlay, a unique decoration in Voysey's work; joinery here is all oak. The hall itself rises through the height of two storeys. It is panelled and gives a splendid view over the lake.

The only surprise comes on looking back from the window to the gallery containing the first-floor passage to the bedrooms; for on each heavy oak corbel is a carved grotesque (29g), the carving deliberately coarse, stylized and evocative, one assumes, of the appearance and character of Mr Currer Briggs himself. There was originally a good deal of Voysey's own designed furniture in the house; Hermann Muthesius, the German government representative who produced in the first decade of the present century a comprehensive and interesting account of the state of English contemporary domestic architecture,[1] devoted some space to Broadleys, a house which he admired. Indeed he admired Voysey's work in general. He includes among others a photograph of the dining-room in its original state which shows the furniture in situ (29h).

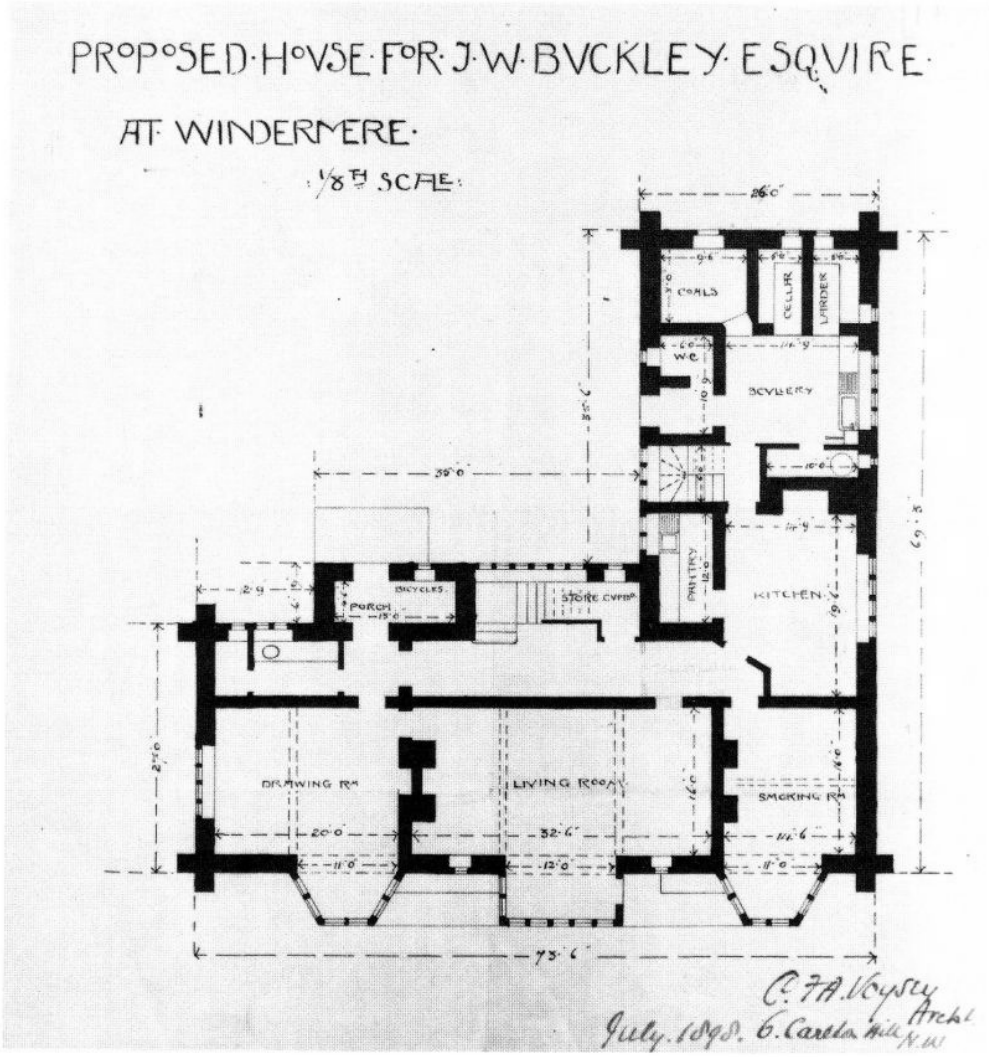
In addition to the main building Broadleys has an entrance lodge, also by Voysey (29i), which is built in the local vernacular tradition; in fact this blends extraordinarily well with Voysey's style of design and produces an extremely effective little building which avoids the temptation to which Voysey sometimes succumbed of producing contrived and whimsical effects.

Broadleys is an extremely effective and distinctive house in which the architect has responded enthusiastically to the excellent opportunity afforded by the location. He has produced a house of simple layout, just sufficiently offset by emphatic and varied detailing; internally it is of great comfort and quality, again offset by details which give it distinction and a sense of lightness. If we leave Broadleys and move just a few hundred yards south along the lakeside road we come to the drive into another house which deals with the problem of site in a completely different and, in some ways, more thoughtful and successful manner. Broadleys is a very well-contrived house put down on a levelled terrace overlooking the lake. Moor Crag is a house built into its site, set further back, higher up and on a slope.

Moor Crag

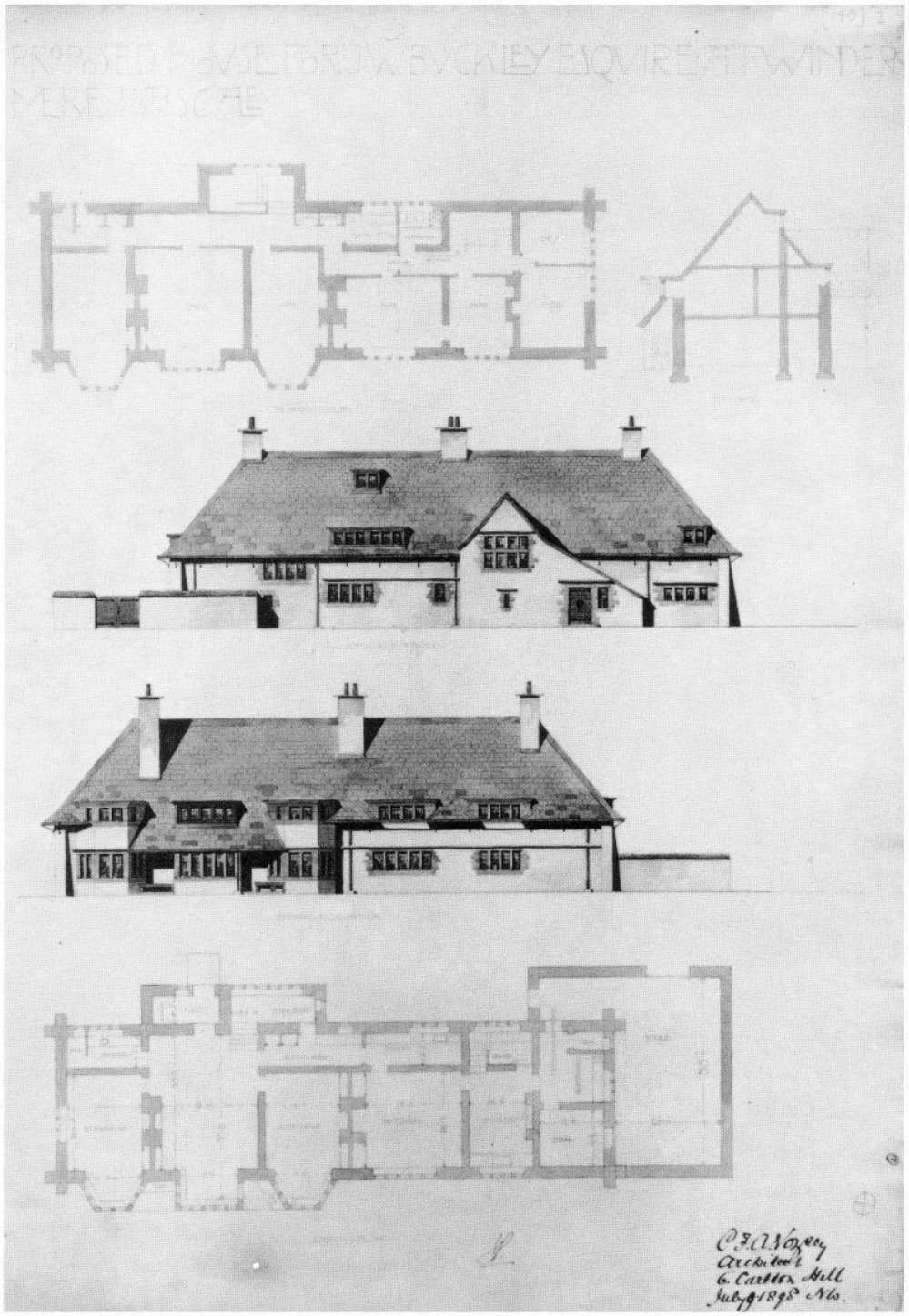
The house is not visible from the road; it is approached by a curving drive which runs through grounds landscaped at the time of the house's building by Mawson. The first design for the house (30a) shows that it was worked up on lines very similar to Broadleys; this is hardly surprising since this initial design, dated July 1898, must have been in Voysey's mind concurrently with Broadleys itself. So the first plan is for an L-shaped layout, a square bay and two angled bays on the garden front and a porch and a staircase extension built into the angle of the L. Internally the differences are more pronounced, particularly since a transverse division creates a passage at ground-floor level off which the main rooms lead. This suggests that Voysey did not wish to repeat the galleried, two-storey-high hall of Broadleys. This is confirmed by the second design (30b) which shows a basically similar layout for the ground-floor main rooms, though the porch now gives directly onto the hall, which has been reduced in width to alter the proportions of the front and so needs the extension in depth. The considerable change in this second plan is that the service wing has been turned through ninety degrees to produce a rectangular layout. Seen in elevation this permits some moves towards

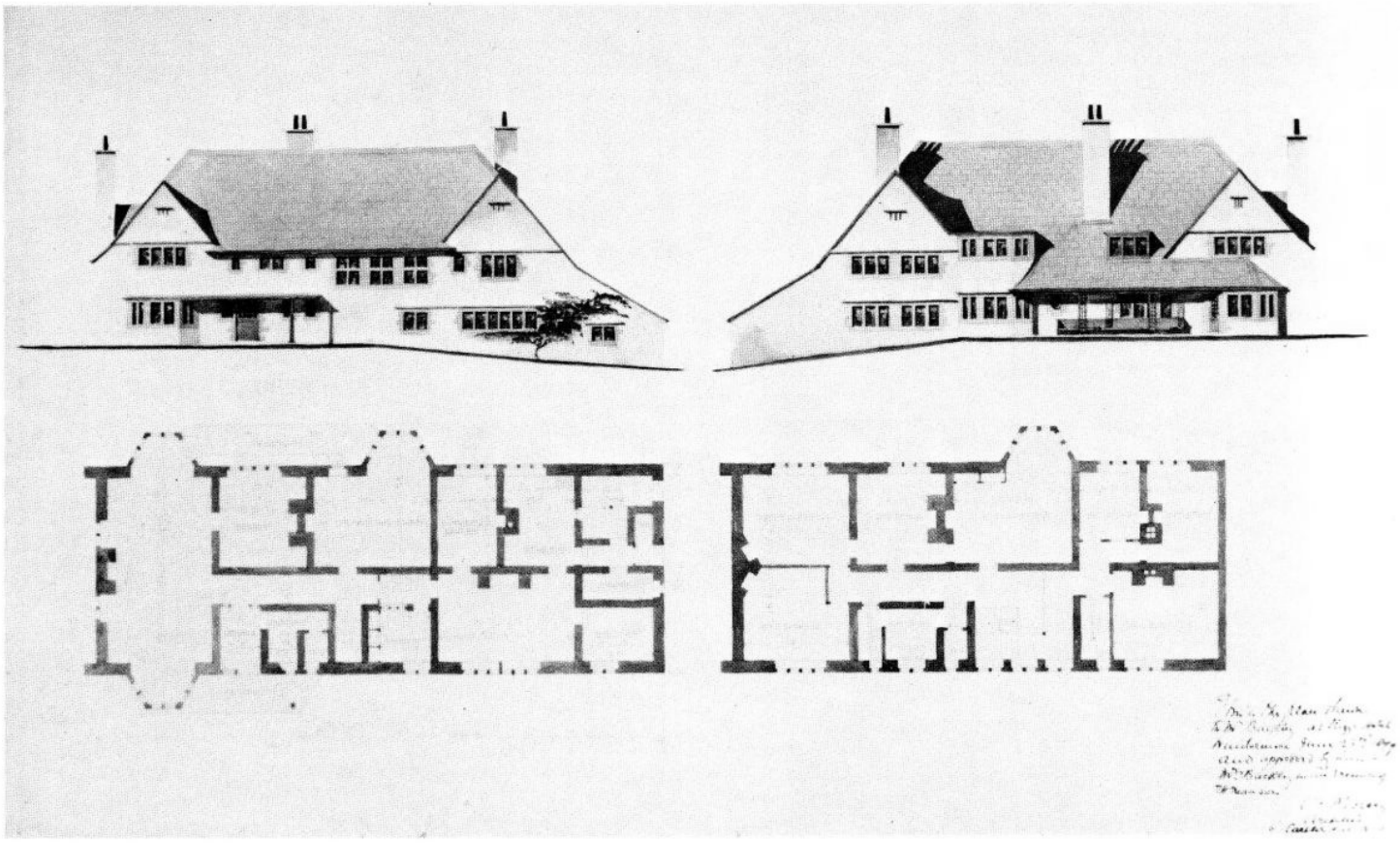
30a
Ground-floor plan for the first scheme for a house for J.W.Buckley at Windermere, dated 1898.



the final form of the house; the basic similarity of the elevation to the main rooms with that at Broadleys persists, with the two flanking bays breaking through the roofline and the pitch of the roof sweeping down below eaves level between them. The middle, square bay is now recessed at first-floor level so lies between being a bay and a dormer. The orientation of this drawing is not clear (and, indeed, there are one or two inconsistencies in the relationship between plan and elevation) but we can assume that it would more or less be that of the house as built, which is east-west at right angles to the lake. This means that the sweep down of the gable over the front door is echoing the slope of the surrounding land to that end of the house. This emphasizes the second, and most important, change in the conception of the house which is apparent in the third and final design (30c); this design, for the first time, acknowledges the slope of the site, which is shown to fall away at the service end of the house (the west). This is emphasized (30d) by the long sweep of the roof

30b
Design showing the second scheme for a house for J.W.Buckley at Windermere, 1898; front and rear elevations and plans.



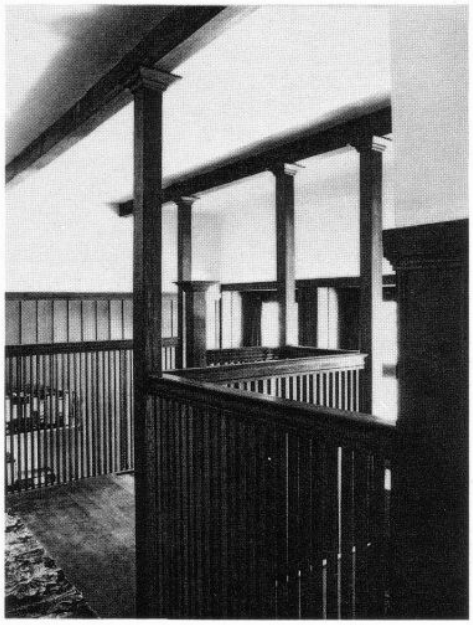


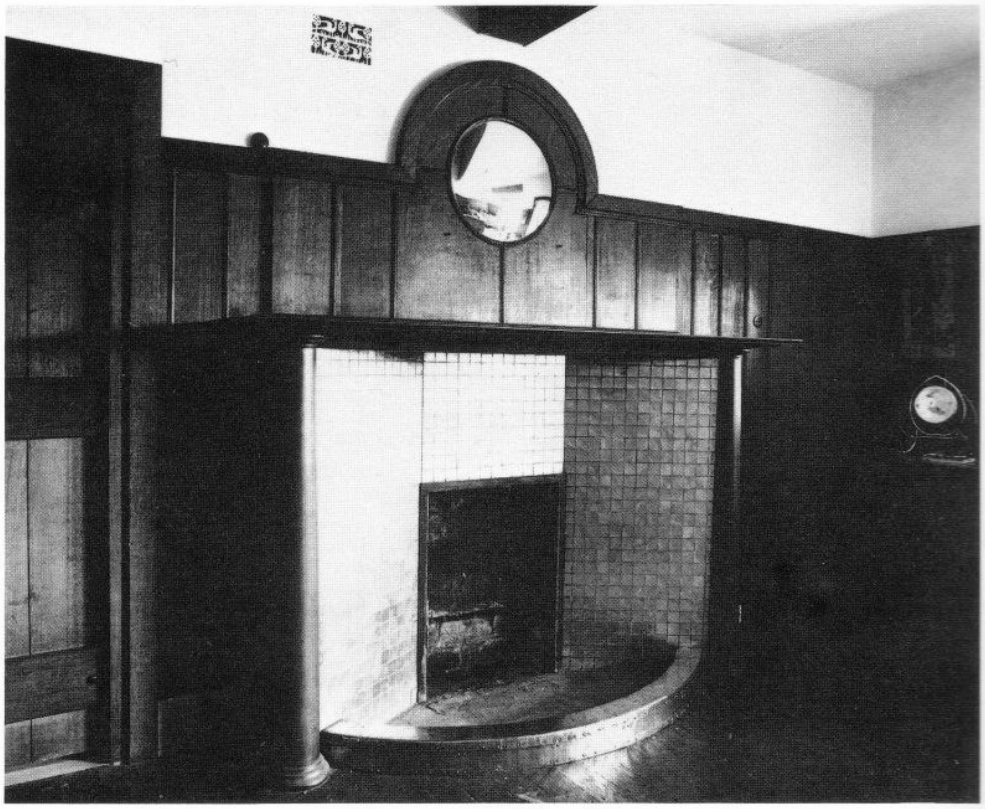
30c
Design as executed for Moor Crag at Windermere for J.W.Buckley, 1899; front and rear elevations and plans. It is noted in Voysey's hand on the drawing that this scheme was approved by the client in the presence of Mawson, who laid out the grounds, in June 1899. The name Moor Crag does not appear on the design.

right down to head height at this end of the building and further emphasized in the elevation by the fact that this end is gabled, standing out clearly against the slate roof which runs down to first-floor level over the verandah along the rest of this garden front. The regularity of the garden front, already broken, is further disrupted by the insertion of the two-storey bay, flat roofed and now, though not originally, with a tile-hung apron. On the entrance front one is also very aware of the downhill sweep of both house and site, and this is the impression one gets approaching up the drive. But seen from the front Voysey has chosen to emphasize the symmetry of the house which, on the other elevation, he had equally chosen to break.

In plan also this house has moved far away from the first two, Broadleys-based, designs. At the east end the long dining-room runs transversely the full width of the house, perhaps recognizing a need for at least one room which looked out in both directions, both at the natural setting and at the carefully landscaped gardens in the Picturesque tradition. Otherwise the emphasis is taken off the entrance front which consists of service rooms and staircase, a corridor set more or less centrally and running the length of the house providing access to rooms. The staircase,

30d
Moor Crag, the garden front.



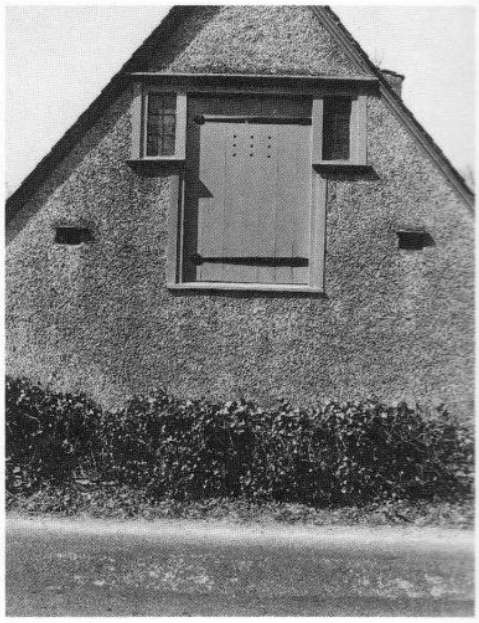


30e
Moor Crag, the staircase from the first-floor landing.

30f
Moor Crag, the chimney-piece in the drawing-room; the woodwork is all oak, the fender brass and the small tiles have a gold lustre glaze. The cast-iron ventilator grille above, with an incised design of birds and trees, is a recurring feature throughout this and many other houses.

30g
Moor Crag, a cast-iron bedroom chimney-piece typical of those which appear in many of Voysey's houses.

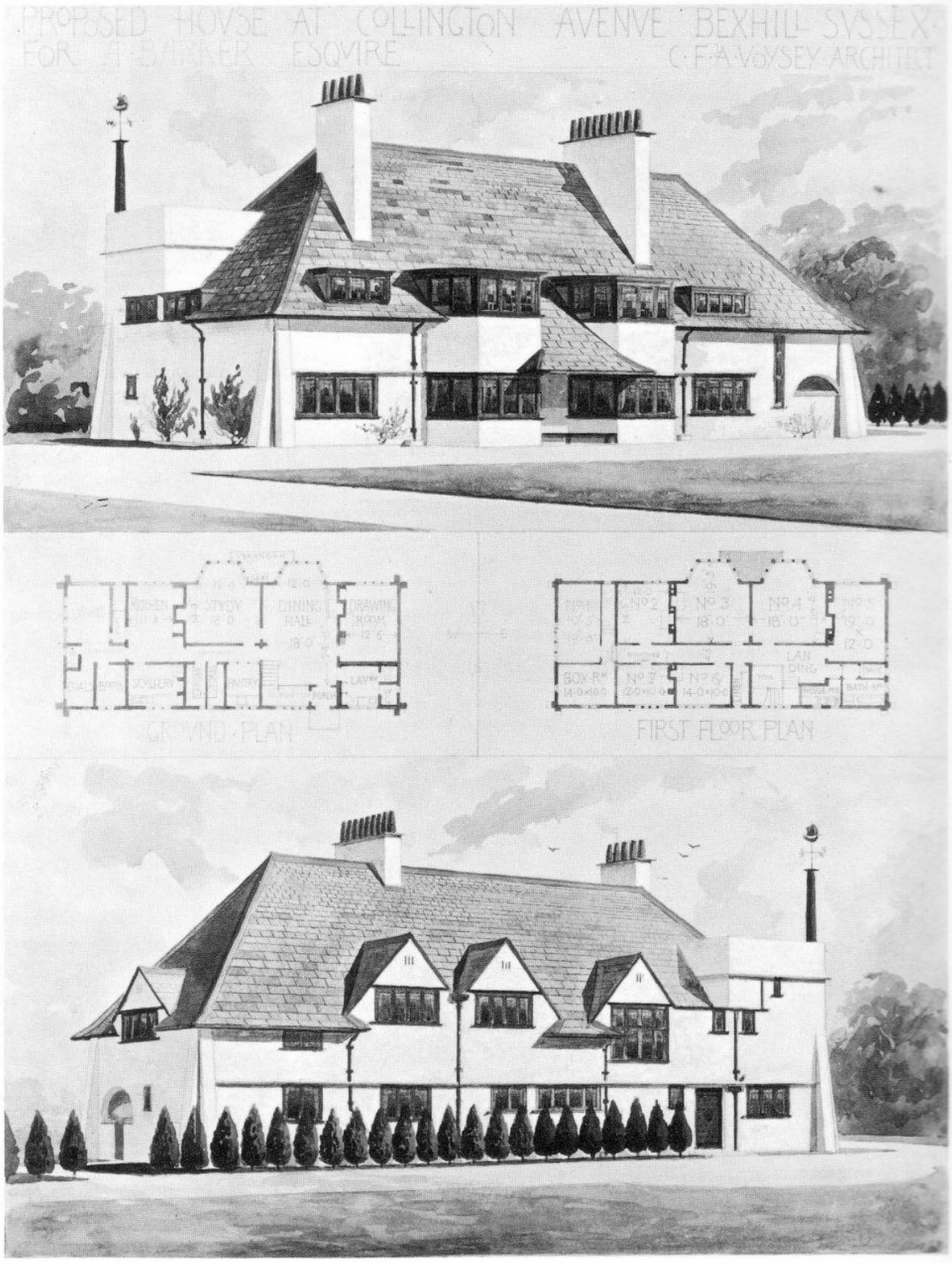
30h
The coach house and stables located opposite the drive entrance leading up to Moor Crag.



though less elaborate than that at Broadleys, is very much in Voysey's best and plainest style (30e). Great use is made throughout of oak panelling and the house contains some fine chimney-pieces (30f) and excellent examples of the plain, cast-iron bedroom fireplaces (30g). Opposite the entrance to the drive is a coach-house (30h).

It is highly instructive of Voysey's working style to watch the evolution of this house; the final design is dated with the comment, in Voysey's hand, 'This is the plan shown to Mr Buckley at Rigg's Hotel, Windermere, June 23rd 1899 and approved by him and Mrs Buckley in the presence of Mr Mawson'. Mr Buckley, the client, was clearly a man who knew what he wanted and was prepared to negotiate for almost a year to get it. It is interesting also to see that Thomas H.Mawson, the landscape gardener, was very much part of the process at this stage and that gardener and architect were working in close touch. It was undoubtedly the care and thought that went into Moor Crag, transmuting it from the earlier scheme to the final one, that made it the achievement it was. Although we know nothing of Buckley and the relationship he set up with Voysey, the development of this, the most successful and typical Voysey house, dispels the common assumption that Voysey was an inflexible man who sat at his drawing board, mapped out a finished design in a sitting of a few hours and then built it. There are several other, important instances where we see his development of a design through several stages but Moor Crag is the best and most effective. It has now an enormous air of appropriateness in its setting; it is a comfortable house and an attractive one; it has a basic discipline of layout treated with enough variety to create strong interest; it was also sufficiently financed to make all the fittings, though plain, of high quality. In its relationship to its setting, its detail of design, its quality of finish and its character it is the single most successful house that Voysey designed and built.

A third house was in the process of being drawn out at the same time as the two Windermere houses; this was a proposal for a house in Collington Avenue, Bexhill, Sussex, for a client named A.Barker and the first design is dated June 1898. A slightly modified second scheme (31) shows a house with certain similarities to Broadleys. The reason why this house was never built is lost; as the design stands it emphasizes a point that has been made particularly in connection with Moor Crag but which reappears in many of the major houses. This is the practice which Voysey developed to such an extent of differentiating the two major elevations by stylistic tricks, particularly related to roof layout. In the Bexhill house the south elevation was to have two double-height bays with a verandah inset between. In an exaggeration of the form used on the lake-front elevation of Broadleys, the roof pitch is brought down and round the bays to form a low roof over the verandah. The same thing happens on the garden front of Moor Crag though without the emphasis of the closely set bays. On the north side of the Bexhill house, by contrast, would have been gables and dormers and a corner tower. The effect is an abrupt contrast between elevations, one low and sweeping, the eye aware of the (in this case) green of the tiles; the other much higher, emphasized by the white of the roughcast on gable and corner tower. It is a distinctive and often repeated stylistic device, though here it shows more emphatically than usual.


PROPOSED HOUSE AT COLLINGTON AVENUE BEXHILL SUSSEX
FOR J.T. BARKER ESQUIRE
C.F.A. VOYSEY ARCHITECT
GROUND PLAN
FIRST FLOOR PLAN

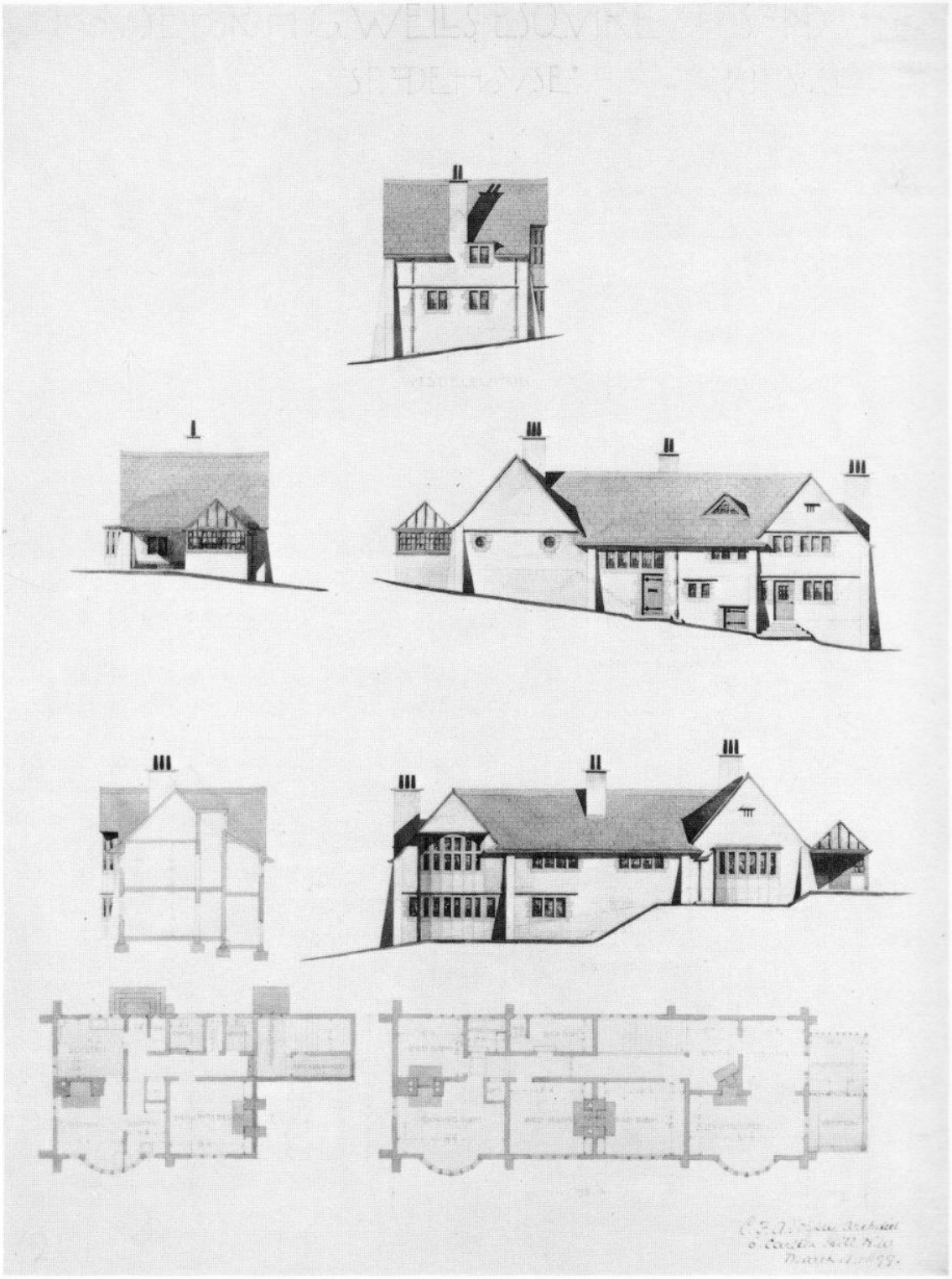
31
Design for a house in Collington Avenue, Bexhill, Sussex, for A.Barker, 1898. Perspectives of front and rear elevations, with watercolour, plus plans. Unexecuted.

32
Watercolour perspective executed by Voysey himself of a house, called Oakhurst, designed for Mrs E.F.Chester at Fernhurst, Sussex, 1900. The painting is dated 1901 and shows the house as executed; the foliage details are typical of Voysey's style.

Spade House

Into 1899, work on the houses at Windermere went on and another unusual and demanding project began; this was a house to be built at Sandgate, near Folkestone, for the author H.G.Wells.

In this house also there is an additional interest to tracing the evolution of the design through several schemes. The major distinction of the design is that it was a house planned to fit into the differing levels of the site. Voysey designed several such houses; New Place at Haslemere is an early instance, where the three-storey bay abuts the terrace at first-floor level. A more consistent example, probably based upon the work and experiment of the house for H.G.Wells, was the house for Mrs Chester, called Oakhurst, built at Fernhurst, Sussex and designed in August 1900. This house (32) is otherwise unimaginative but shows a south terrace only one storey in height, the main house being set back into the slope below this. A substantial part of the reasoning behind this stems from an extension of the comments made above on the liking Voysey had for playing with roof lines. Oakhurst has all the benefits of a two-storey house, including a two-storey hall; yet the aspect from the south is of an extremely low, snug, single-storey building. Another instance where the use of split level accentuates the lowness of the building while providing adequate accommodation is the cottage for Miss M.Foster Melliar at Ampthill, Bedfordshire. This house offered living space plus, for Miss Foster Melliar's work as a nurse or nanny, two bedrooms and a nursery; in the small building the basement room provided by the slope of the site gave valuable storage space for, among other things, prams.



33a
Second scheme for a house, called Spade House, at Sandgate, Folkestone, Kent, for H.G.Wells, 1899; elevations, cross-section and plans. Not executed in this form.

To return to the H.G.Wells house: this again shows the progression of a design through a series of evolving stages before client and architect were satisfied. The first design is dated March 5 1899 – that is, before the final Moor Crag scheme was approved; the main entrance is at the lower level which contains services and accommodation for a servant; a staircase leads up to the main floor with the family living space. On the single-storey elevation is a conservatory. The roof is a pitch roof with two cross gables. Only a week later – March 11 – the second scheme appeared (33a), different only in detail; the gable over the two-storey bay now projects forward over it, the bays are slightly wider and the kitchen size is changed.

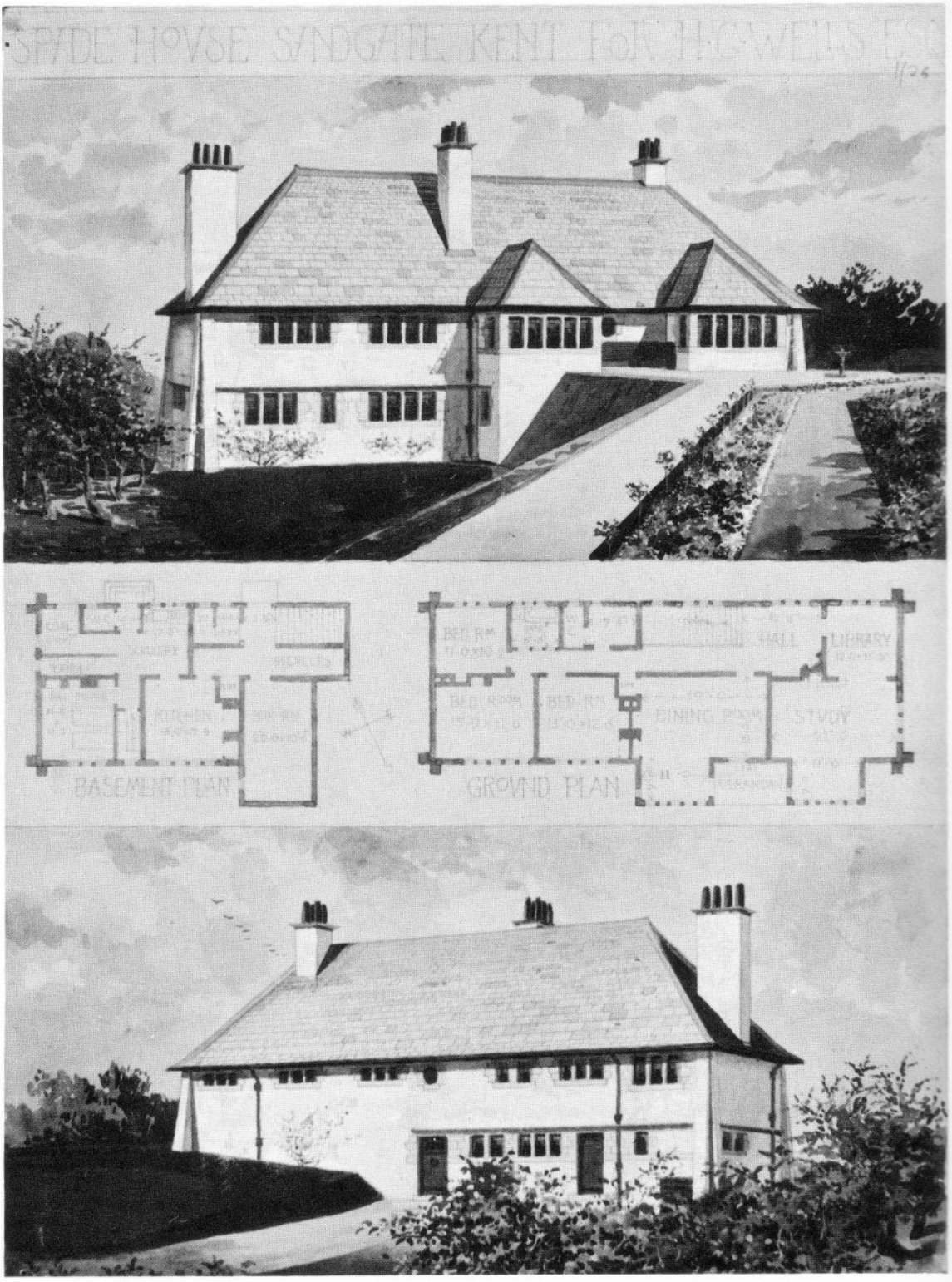
The house as built is shown in a third scheme of which a perspective drawing is illustrated (33b). There are considerable changes; the curved bays are gone, two square bays in different positions replacing them. This reflects changes in plan; the dining-room and living-room, formerly at opposite ends of the house with bedrooms between, are now brought together. The living-room is renamed 'the study'. Perhaps Voysey thought that famous authors needed to study, but not to live. This change of layout enables the introduction of a favoured Voysey device, the sheltered verandah between the two main rooms though in this case it is accessible only from the dining-room. In this final scheme the cross gables have gone, the bays have hipped slate roofs and the main roof is also hipped. So, although internally there has not been need for a great deal of change, the split-level form remaining, the effect on the appearance of the house is considerable. One surmises that the reasons behind much of the change were financial – the simplifying of the roof structure, the omission of the conservatory – and certainly the final version of the house has a lot less visual interest than the first. Spade House now stands in considerably altered form; Voysey himself added a further storey in 1903.

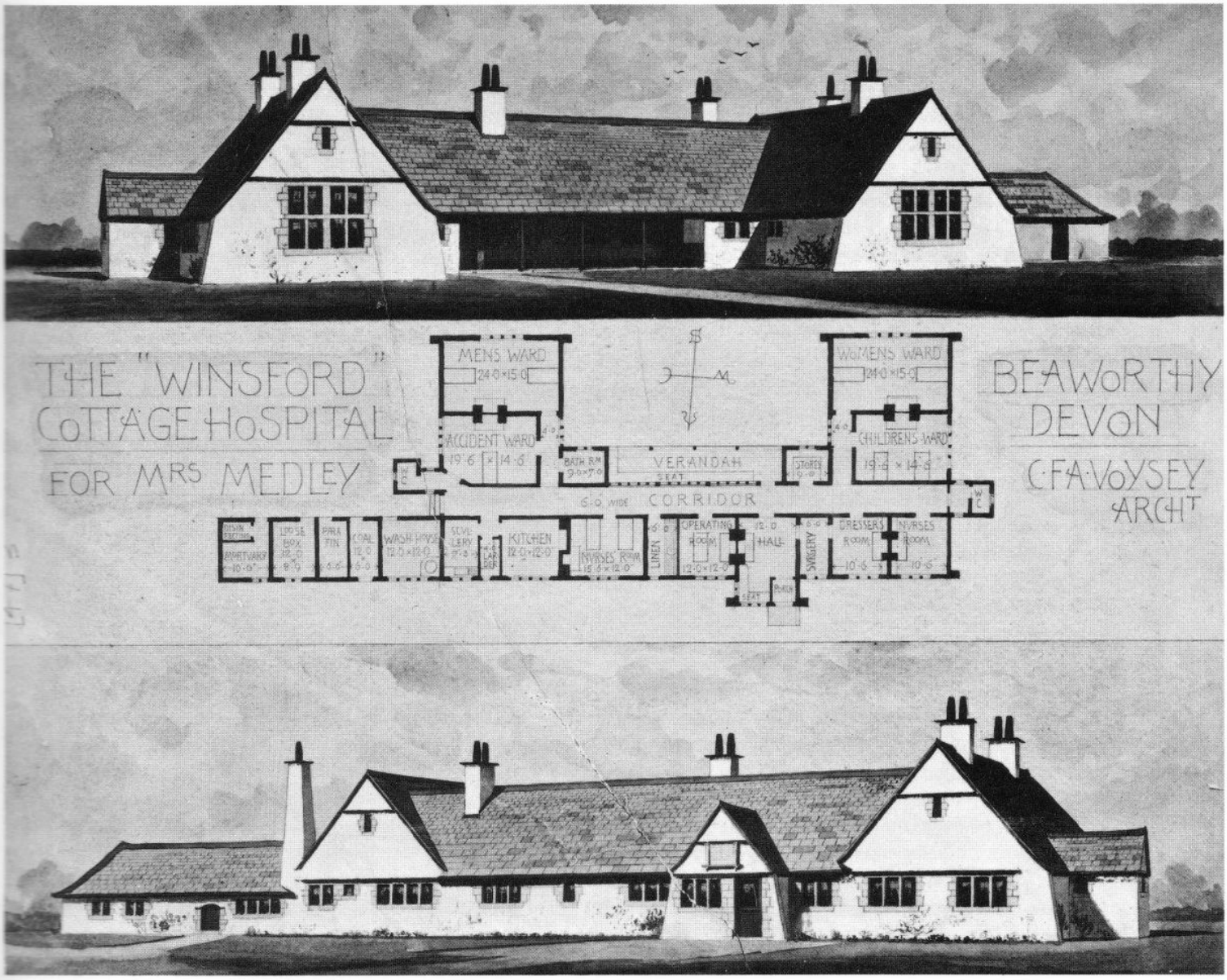
In April 1899 Voysey also produced plans and drawings for a project in Devon, the building of a cottage hospital; the building offers capacity for a few patients in the two main wards which form the forward-jutting wings of the building. It is a single-storey building, F-shaped in plan; there is a long, low centre block with a cross gable at each end, which projects to form wings on the south side; the various offices are in the tail of the F. The north (entrance) front has a long verandah, recessed under the eaves. The roof ridges of the cross wings are noticeably higher than that of the central span. The buttresses to the single-storey walls are more than usually emphatic in their reduced height. In plan the layout is simple, a single row of consulting, nurses' and doctor's rooms along the central block; wards in the wings; and all other services in the extension of the centre block (34).

Voysey's relationship with his clients

In a *Studio* article of April 1899 on some of Voysey's recently designed houses the writer mentions comments made by the architect in a previous interview:

> One of Mr Voysey's rare outbursts of temper was directed, while I talked to him recently, against those inconsiderate clients who endeavoured to insist upon his adding a foot or two to the height of a


HYDE HOUSE, SANDGATE, KENT. FOR H.G. WELLS ESQ.
1/24
BASEMENT PLAN
GROUND PLAN
HALL
LIBRARY
DINING ROOM
STUDY



33b
Third scheme for the H.G.Wells house, 1899, showing the house almost as executed. Perspectives of front and rear and plans.

34
Design for a Cottage Hospital at Halwill, near Beaworthy, Devon, for Mrs Medley, 1899. Perspectives of front and rear elevations with watercolour and plan, showing the hospital as executed; the building is still in use as a hospital.

second storey, regardless of the fact that by doing this the entire proportion, that is to say, the main beauty, of their house must be sacrificed. It led the designer to digress into an interesting consideration of the relations which ought to exist between client and architect. According to Mr Voysey – and there are few architects who will not agree with him – the client's wishes as regards accommodation, including general scheme of plan, and essentially as regards expense, should be a law to the architects, but the latter should be supreme touching artistic design and proportion.[2]

We do not know which of his houses or clients occasioned the outburst of temper that the *Studio* writer tells us about. It is, however, a useful coincidence that a series of letters survives from this date and gives us a good insight into a matter which would otherwise be a blind spot – the details of a relationship between Voysey and a client. The conclusions we draw from it coincide, more or less, with those the *Studio* has summarized for us but it is the process of its development, and the way in which it is handled, that gives the correspondence its interest.

The client is Cecil, later Sir Cecil, Fitch, a barrister; at the time of the building of his house, Gordondene in Wimbledon, London he was a young man of 29, in the first flush of success, highly intelligent and determined not to be done down, to get exactly what he wanted and not to pay over the odds for it. At the same time – as he tells us in the correspondence – he was not an unreasonable man. Voysey was then in his early forties, well established and busy. His first letter is dated August 21st 1899 and is addressed to 'Mr Fitch'; at Voysey's request the more friendly, 'My dear Fitch' and 'My dear Voysey' are adopted after this first letter, a sure sign that relations were on the whole satisfactory.[3] The stable block of the house is to be a block attached to a corner of the main building by a covered passage; on Oct. 10 1899 Voysey writes:

> I cannot spoil my proportions by cutting off the stable roof. We must manage by moving the stable building five feet to the East and the house five feet to the West and three or four feet to the South. You won't mind that, will you? . . . As to the light in the hall I hope you will forgive me for saying you know nothing about it at all. You will ruin the look of the hall from the outside and the in if you alter the staircase window, which is going to light the hall magnificently.[4]

The subject of light into rooms was one which had exercised Voysey when he was being interviewed for the *Studio* article quoted above so it was clearly one which was much on his mind – we might infer, one about which his clients, in view of the apparent smallness of the windows in his houses, gave him some trouble:

> I may say in passing that Mr Voysey characterizes himself as a 'stickler for light', though, by those who lend a mere surface consideration to his work, he is often found fault with for the smallness of his windows. He points out, however, that such critics do not take into consideration the size and height of the rooms these long low windows are intended to give light to. In proportion to a lofty room a low room, he avers, needs much less window space . . . In a low room the entire ceiling acts as a reflector and throws the light downwards into every corner of the interior.[5]

In the light of these comments, Mr Fitch's reply to Voysey is interesting; written on Oct. 11, it demonstrates that the client is taking a keen interest in what goes on:

> As regards the light in the hall you are no doubt correct in saying I know nothing about it and if you say there is sufficient I am more than satisfied.
>
> As regards the movement of the stables you will recollect your statement that to move the house further downhill would enormously increase the cost. It was because of this statement of yours that I altered

in the plan the position of the main body of the house in relation to the part containing the dining room and kitchen. I moved the latter portion downhill to give room for the passage to the yard and left the main portion where it was. You now seem to propose to move the whole house bodily downhill (i.e. five feet to the West and three or four feet to the South). If you assure me now that it will not increase the cost of the house I don't mind but if it will I mind very much when I see that two feet off the length of a gable will obviate the difficulty. Seriously, do you think the difference of that two feet will spoil the proportion of the stable roof? I tried it and did not think it would, but you know best and I don't desire to be in any way unreasonable. Perhaps some other way may be found so long as it adds nothing to the expense.[6]

The careful and legal mind of Fitch has put the architect very much on the spot and in his reply the architect has to fight for his dignity and to justify his points – indeed, he gives in over the hall windows, perhaps in order to carry his larger point over the siting of the buildings; his reply again is very quick, written on October 12, the day after Fitch's:

Many thanks for your most reasonable letter. You make me quite ashamed of my own impulsive and strong language. I wish to be emphatic but not rude. I will look to your light. Certainly bringing the building very much forward would increase the cost, but if we bring it only three feet to the South and five feet to the West I think the extra cost will be small because the ground does not drop so much in the West corner. Then we can compromise by cutting off a little from the stable roof and shifting the stabling perhaps a trifle. Room must be made somehow for turning a carriage, that is essential.[7]

The exact details of the dispute and nogotiation are not, for the present purpose, very important; what is, is to see the process of attack, clearly natural to him, in which Voysey engaged. In Fitch he seems to have met a strong opponent. It is apparent that a client who approached Voysey knew to some extent what he was going to get: a roughcast house with stone facings and iron casements, in a very modern idiom and built to a very high standard. He would also have to accept that the whole house and its fittings would be designed to the same exacting and austere standard. Fitch clearly rebelled here, his expressed excuse being the need for economy though one suspects that this was a sop to Voysey to disguise the need for a greater show of luxury than Voysey's spartan and excellently crafted fittings would afford. So, when the project for this house was a good deal further on and the plumbing and fittings were being installed, Voysey writes from the heart on 4 Feb. 1901:

I am distressed to see the appallingly ugly and gaudy lavatory and bath that have been sent down and to hear that there is to be no casing in so that the very 'ornamental' brackets will be a veritable cobweb to catch the dust and dirt. No human creature can ever keep them clean. I had provided beautiful clean oak casing that would have looked gentlemanly and dignified.[8]

35a
The Orchard, Voysey's own house at Chorleywood, Hertfordshire, 1899; the garden front.

The correspondence continues in this vein on Feb. 14:

> You have altered all the plumbing and I have no idea what the fittings will be like. I don't think any client deserves to save anything if he makes alterations. I really cannot pity you.[8]

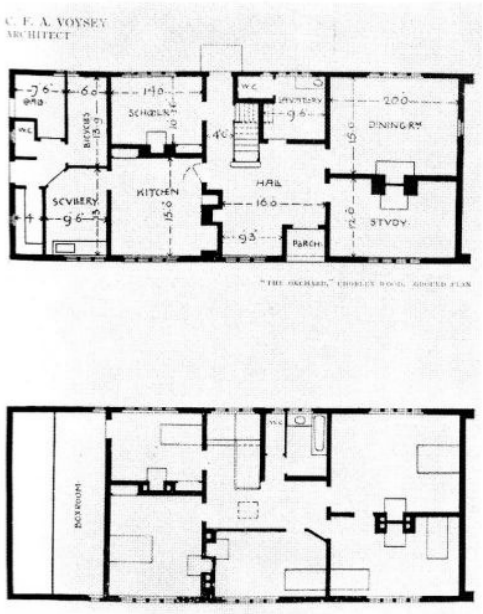
And by March 25 Voysey sounds a little strained and belligerent; he does retain, as he has throughout, a sense of humour which is expressed in the light irony of some of his comments so he is clearly not too angry with Fitch:

> . . . I think you ought to pay me some compensation in addition as it involves my doing what to any professional eye would be considered a gross blunder . . . the wilful planning of a huge dust trap. Surely it is very hard to be expected to do such a thing against all one's instincts of fitness and good manners . . . You must really wait until my work is finished before you criticize it. Then if you don't like it you can pull it down.[8]

In a last letter of 9 May, also 1901, Voysey writes:

> The greatest help will be for you to make up your mind that you cannot have first class material and workmanship without going to a first class builder and paying a first class price.[8]

Gordondene is now demolished. It is fitting that the only Voysey house to be pulled down, particularly a substantial one from the best years of his work, has left us at least this partial record of the process of its building. Voysey was not, as this



35b
The Orchard, ground- and first-floor plans.

correspondence tells us, the easiest man to work with and when questions of taste and the aesthetic of his work were concerned he stuck to his guns. On other matters – and remembering his own judgement, quoted at the beginning of this section, as to what belonged correctly to the architect to decide, and what to the client – he was open to argument and to persuasion and retained a sense of proportion and of humour in the process. If the above extracts show us no more than that about his methods of working, then they are worth the effort of study.

From 1900 to 1905:

The first five years of the present century continued as an extremely busy period for Voysey in which several fine houses were built: there was The Orchard, Voysey's own house, for which the design was begun in 1899 and carried through into 1900; The Pastures in 1901; Vodin in 1902; Higham in 1904; and the factory for Sandersons in 1902 and the Whitwood Institute in 1904. If for no other reason than its unexpectedness – though in fact it is a house of interest – one includes finally the house built at Aswan in Egypt in 1905. In addition to these there are various smaller and lesser houses, each of which has its own particular points of interest.

The Orchard

The Orchard, strictly speaking, should be spoken of as a house of 1899 since the dating given in this account is throughout the date of first design, not of completion. However, as the best example of the type of smaller house – for it is considerably smaller than most of the other houses referred to in this chapter – The Orchard fits more happily into the account at this point. The Orchard was built at Chorleywood, north-west of London and within easy commuting distance; it is appropriate that since the domestic architecture of the years around the turn of the century was above all the architecture of the new suburbs, of the comfortable, detached and medium-sized house, Voysey should have chosen to locate his house here. One suspects that it was a decision made to fulfil family needs rather than expressing personal preference to be outside the metropolis. The house itself (35a) adopts a form Voysey has shown already a liking for, a hipped roof with cross gables at each end over a rectangular form; here, though, the rectangle is unadorned by porches, verandahs, bays, dormers or any of the usual trimmings of a Voysey house. Only at the east end is a lean-to which allows the roof pitch over it – as at Moor Crag which has the same roof form – to run down to first-floor level. In plan (35b) the recessed porch is seen to give onto a corner of the hall; diagonally opposite, by the garden entrance, are the stairs. The width of the hall separates dining-room and study from the schoolroom, though one cannot imagine that Voysey children would have been encouraged to be noisy children. Services are also grouped at this end, away from the main living rooms. Upstairs a simple arrangement of bedrooms and bathrooms opening from a central landing offers maximum use of the space available. The distinction of the house lay in its interior finishings and furniture, where Voysey was free to exercise his wishes (see below,

36a
Contemporary photograph of The Pastures, North Luffenham, Rutland, for Miss G.Conant, 1901. The garden fronts.

36b
Contemporary photograph of The Pastures, the entrance courtyard and stable wing; just visible behind and to the left of the tree is the bell-tower.

chapter 5); downstairs the hall and service rooms are paved with grey slates; upstairs are green cork tiles. The woodwork was painted deal – it would be interesting to know whether it was budget or choice that decided him against his favourite oak, untreated. One suspects the former. The bright red curtains which appear in Voysey's coloured elevations of many of his houses were actually fitted here, as were one or two of the quieter of his own wallpapers. The furniture was almost entirely to his own designs.

Country Life published a short description of Voysey's own house while it was still under construction, commenting:

> This pleasant little house . . . is growing into shape, or by this time has grown into it, at Chorleywood, in the sylvan countryside of Herts . . . Its situation is as nearly ideal as may be . . . Its cost is to be between £1000 and £1500, and, speaking frankly, we do not see what more can be desired by any man of moderate means whose quiver is not very full indeed . . . Hot and cold water is laid on everywhere, for the pleasing air of rusticity in this house, studied as it is in reality goes hand in hand with a nice appreciation of creature comforts.[9]

The Pastures, Sandersons and Vodin

Many of Voysey's houses are clustered together in small areas; the Surrey houses, the Lake District houses, the Malvern houses. The Pastures at North Luffenham in what was, until recently, the small county of Rutland, stands on its own. The client was Miss G. Conant whose family was long established in a village nearby. The house is on the edge of the old village of North Luffenham, looking out across open fields. As can be seen from two contemporary photographs (36a and b) the house is built round a courtyard with one side open. The house and services occupy two sides, the third being a single-storey wing of stables. The south and west fronts opening onto the garden are distinguished by a series of gables; the two main gables have two-storey bay windows, the subsidiary ones are to dormers, the detailed treatment differing on the two fronts. A large semi-circular opening on the south front provides a sheltered verandah and leads to the garden entrance. The dominant feature of the courtyard elevations is a bell tower.

It is understood that Voysey wished The Pastures to be built in local stone – just as he had originally wished for Broadleys; it seems though that the family, both for reasons of cost and of appearance, preferred the roughcast finish. Overruled in this matter, Voysey had the consolation of laying out the gardens to the house himself.

1902 saw the design of Voysey's most distinctive building which, paradoxically, was one of very few not intended for domestic use and his only industrial building. The factory (37) provided additional space for Sandersons, the wallpaper manufacturer for whom Voysey produced many designs, next to their existing factory at Chiswick. The bridge shown on the perspective drawing, linking the two factories, was not built. The white finish was achieved with glazed brick, banded with dark blue brick and stone coping. The remarkable appearance of the building calls to mind the structure of a piece of Voysey's furniture – the

37
Perspective watercolour of the Sandersons factory at Chiswick, 1902.

capped supporting piers, the curvilinear coping – and suggests that Voysey's aim was to drop a 'box' for the production of wallpapers down into London's suburbs. It is very difficult to appreciate the building for it is hemmed in by others; it must be recognized, though, that this was also true when it was built and may help to explain the singular dominance of the roof-line.

As his style matured Voysey developed to a finer and finer art the skill of making a greater simplicity look more achieved; nowhere is this truer than in the house called Vodin, also designed in 1902. Approaching along the main drive, the house, situated at Pyrford Common just south of London, gives a strong

impression of substantiality; and yet its form is simply rectangular with a hipped roof. The only relief on the entrance front comes from the porch and the staircase tower, on the garden front from the arched door opening followed by the line of the drip course. There are none of the usual stylistic tricks played with the roof, no dormers, cross gables, low eaves. The elevations (38a and b) are an exercise in simplicity and much of the effect comes solely from the arrangement of fenestration and the sparse use of curve (38c). In the first scheme for the house, the drawing dated August 1902, the porch which is now such a dominant feature was pencilled in with the note, 'may be omitted' and the staircase tower did not appear in this scheme, so the house only narrowly escaped being very plain indeed. The house also has a cluster of service buildings, coach-house and cottage, single-storey, facing the front entrance (38d).

Already, with the completion of the Sandersons building and Vodin, there is a distinct feeling that the height of Voysey's career was past; some notable buildings were yet to come but the pace was slowing. Voysey always produced a number of unexecuted designs, as do most architects. There is no reason to think that his projects, when they failed to go ahead, were the victims of disagreement between architect and client. 1903, though, saw the failure of a commission from one of his best clients, W.Ward Higgs, who on this occasion commissioned a town house to be built at Bognor. He had moved his family here from the house Voysey had earlier fitted out for him in Queensborough Terrace in London. For this new design Voysey reverted to the 'Tower House' form for which he had shown favour in his very early years. The house, though, was not built. Nor was a design of 1904 for a house in Hampstead; also in 1904, there was an unsuccessful competition entry for a Library and Museum at Limerick. The houses that were built at this period were slight: the White Cottage, Wandsworth, for C.T. Coggin, begun in 1903; a small convalescent home for children at Bushey, Herts, begun in 1904, called Myholme; and, most effective of this group, a small house also for Miss E.Somers, the client of Myholme, situated quite close to her nursing home and begun in the same year (39). This small house, called Tilehurst, has a good example of the prominent, flat-roofed porch which Voysey seemed to favour for houses of this size (cf. Littleholme in Kendal for A.W.Simpson, see 45).

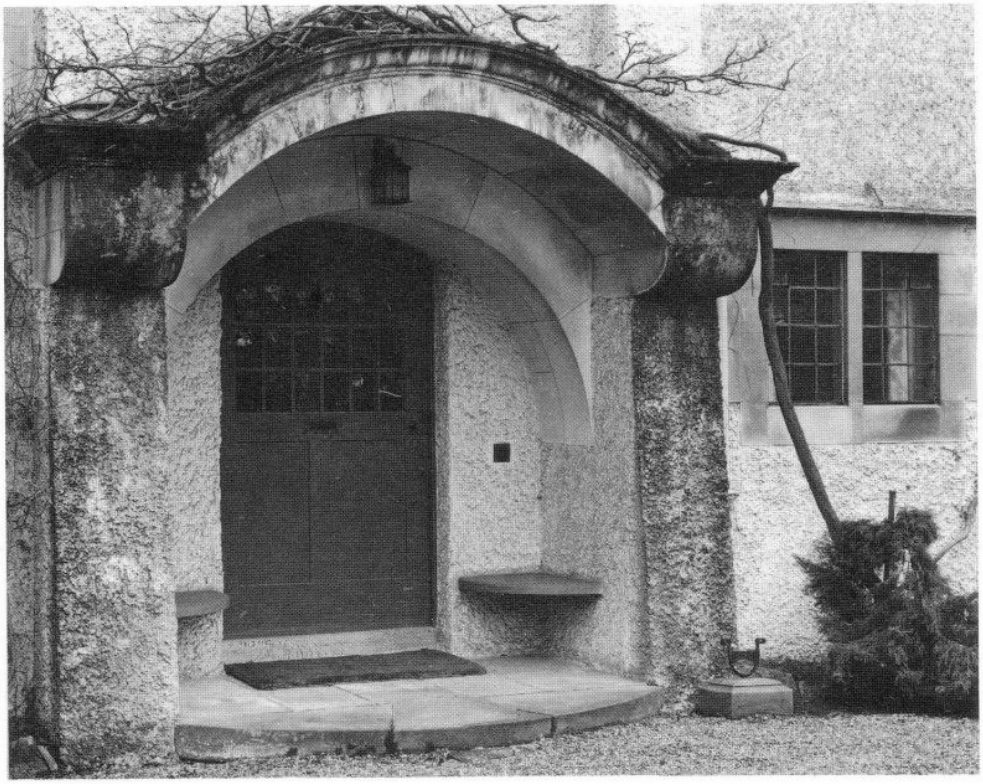
Higham and the Whitwood Institute

There was a paradox in Voysey's character and work. The man who was instrumental in reconciling thoroughgoing middle-class respectability with a modesty in domestic surrounding that would a few years before his work have been unthinkable, was also himself a quite fearful, though quite unmalicious, snob. The best practical instance of the workings of this paradox occurs in 1904 and alleviates the year's otherwise drabness in building and design. It concerns two projects, both of which will be illustrated here by the architect's drawings rather than by photographs of the finished buildings, even though both projects were completed. The particular reason for this is that neither was completed under the architect's own supervision. The first, a house at Higham, Woodford, Essex, for Lady Henry Somerset, came to construction by 1906 but did so without the

38a
Vodin at Pyrford Common near Woking for
F. Walters, 1903; the entrance front.

38b
Vodin, the garden front.

38c
Vodin, a detail of the entrance porch.



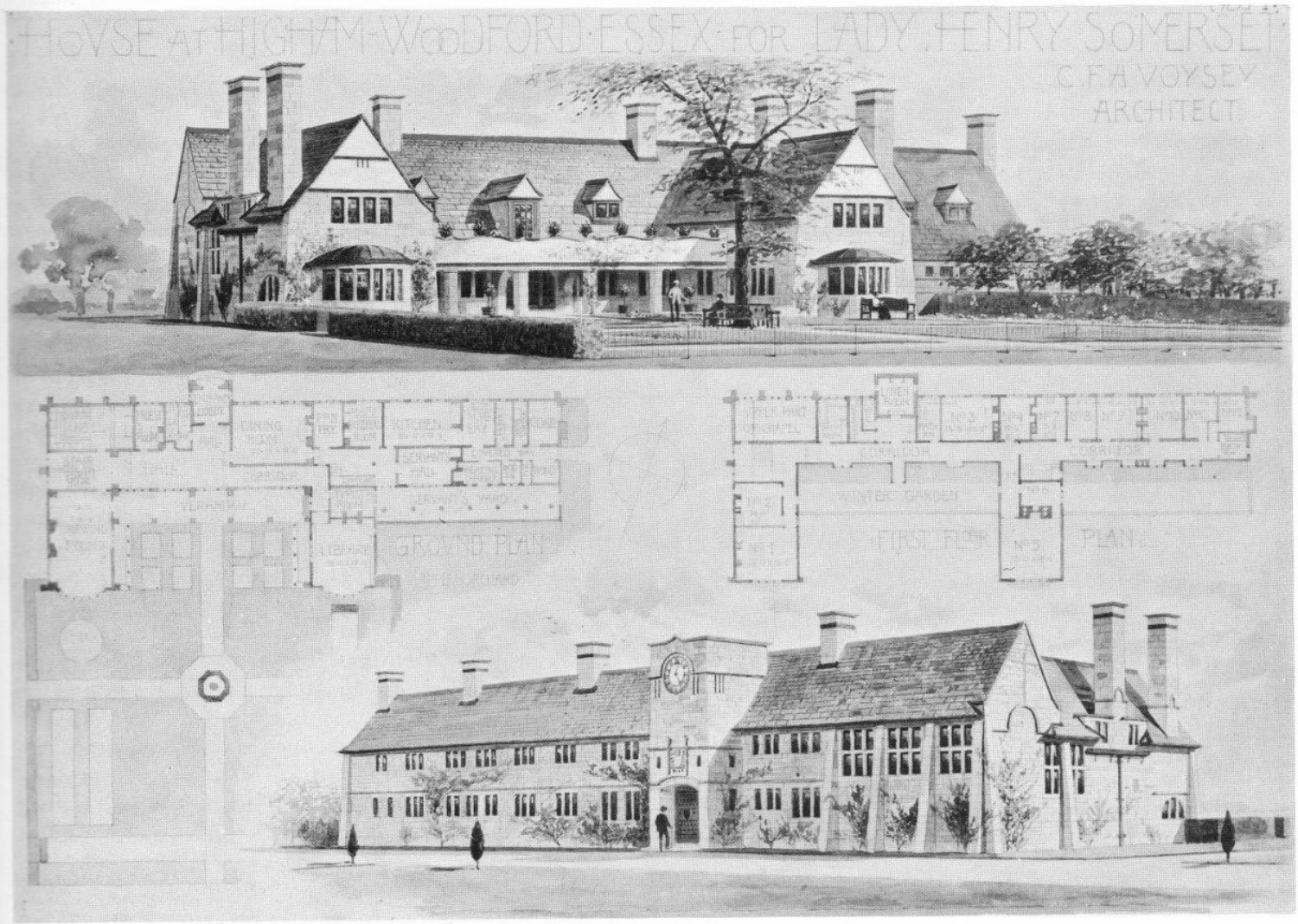
38d
Vodin, the lodge and outbuildings.

39
Tilehurst, Bushey, Hertfordshire, for Miss E.Somers, 1904; the front and side elevations.

40
Design for a house at Higham, Woodford, Essex, for Lady Henry Somerset, 1904; watercolour perspectives of front and rear elevations plus plans.

supervision which Voysey would, of course, have given to the job himself if he and his client had been on good terms. The only similar case is Dixcot, on Tooting Common, where following various disagreements the house was in fact finished by Walter Cave. The second was the project for an Institute and housing for miners at Whitwood, Yorkshire; this has already been mentioned above in the context of Broadleys for the Whitwood Institute was the brainchild of Currer Briggs, the client of that house. That project was finished without Voysey's superintendence because the Company's budget did not permit of it. It is of course possible, though we cannot know, that Voysey's aristocratic client dispensed with his supervision for the same reason.

The house that Voysey designed for Lady Henry Somerset (40) is impressive; the first scheme as shown is undated though other drawings are dated March 1904;



41
Watercolour perspective of the Colliery Institute and housing at Whitwood, near Normanton, Yorkshire, for Henry Briggs and Son and Co., 1904–5. Only one terrace of houses plus the Institute (the corner building) were completed, substantially as detailed here.

the second, which incorporates several changes, has the date April 15 1904. The house was to be of stone and arranged on an F-shaped plan, the main body of the house with two projecting wings, to which is added as the tail of the F the service wing. Many of the motifs in the design of the house are familiar and need no special explanation. Two features do, however, stand out: first the massive stone porch, two storeys in height with a lipped parapet slightly ramped in the centre. This feature is reminiscent, and quite deliberately so (note the narrow slit openings beside the clock) of a medieval castle. Second the curvilinear parapet to the front of the 'Winter Garden' roof terrace on the garden side. This evokes the form used on the roof-line of the Sandersons factory; it is rendered and it has a substantially 'Art Nouveau' feel about it though Voysey, who strongly deprecated that movement, would not have admitted to such an influence. It also appears from the perspective that Voysey intended, on the garden front, to render the top segment of the twin gables and the gables to the dormers, thus emphasizing the difference in style between entrance and garden elevations: the former is dignified, formal, massive; the latter domestic, informal, intimate. In plan the house shows the same love of clustering the main rooms round a central hall that we have come to recognize as a feature of Voysey's work. Notable is the inclusion of a chapel which we might regard as pointing further the appearance of a definite medieval influence in the design – the significance of this will be seen better in the chapter on Voysey's later work. The differences between the two schemes mentioned above are not great; in the second the entrance is moved to one end from being centred on the family part of the house; the projecting wings become round-ended, the chapel is moved and the number of bedrooms considerably reduced. Though a stone porch is retained, the rest of the entrance front is roughcast and so much of the medieval feel is lost. The dormers on the garden front disappear. So the second scheme, while clearly in part modified to cut costs, is also considerably de-natured and less

emphatic in style. As built, the house differed considerably from both the schemes considered here.

The Institute and terraced housing for Currer Briggs, for which the first scheme is dated September 14 1904, is an interesting contribution to the garden suburb idea and to the tradition of the benevolent employer. The notion of the garden city and its stablemate, the garden suburb, was in the air at the turn of the century and Bournville, Letchworth, Port Sunlight and Hampstead were talking points among those concerned with housing and design standards. A Garden City Association was formed including members as diverse as Earl Grey, Walter Crane and Bernard Shaw. The ideals involved could give rise to excesses of well-meaning enthusiasm:

> The scheme [i.e. Bournville] shows what is possible by well-conceived private enterprise, and we believe the lesson will not be lost upon a country which still produces the philosopher and the poet. For such a scheme is built with broad bases on the living rock, and shall be hereafter amongst those things which remain.[10]

Yet they were sound and humane, and above all practicable, in an age which had gone beyond the first phases of unthinking industrialization and required a more sophisticated social machinery to cope with the problems of accommodating its workforces. There is, in keeping with the mood of those years, a certain sense of

42
Contemporary photograph showing the White Horse Inn at Stetchworth, Cambridgeshire, for the Earl of Ellesmere, 1905.

43
Hollymount, Knotty Green, Buckinghamshire, for C.T.Burke, designed in 1905 and completed, as the tablet over the door records, in 1907; the elevation to the street.

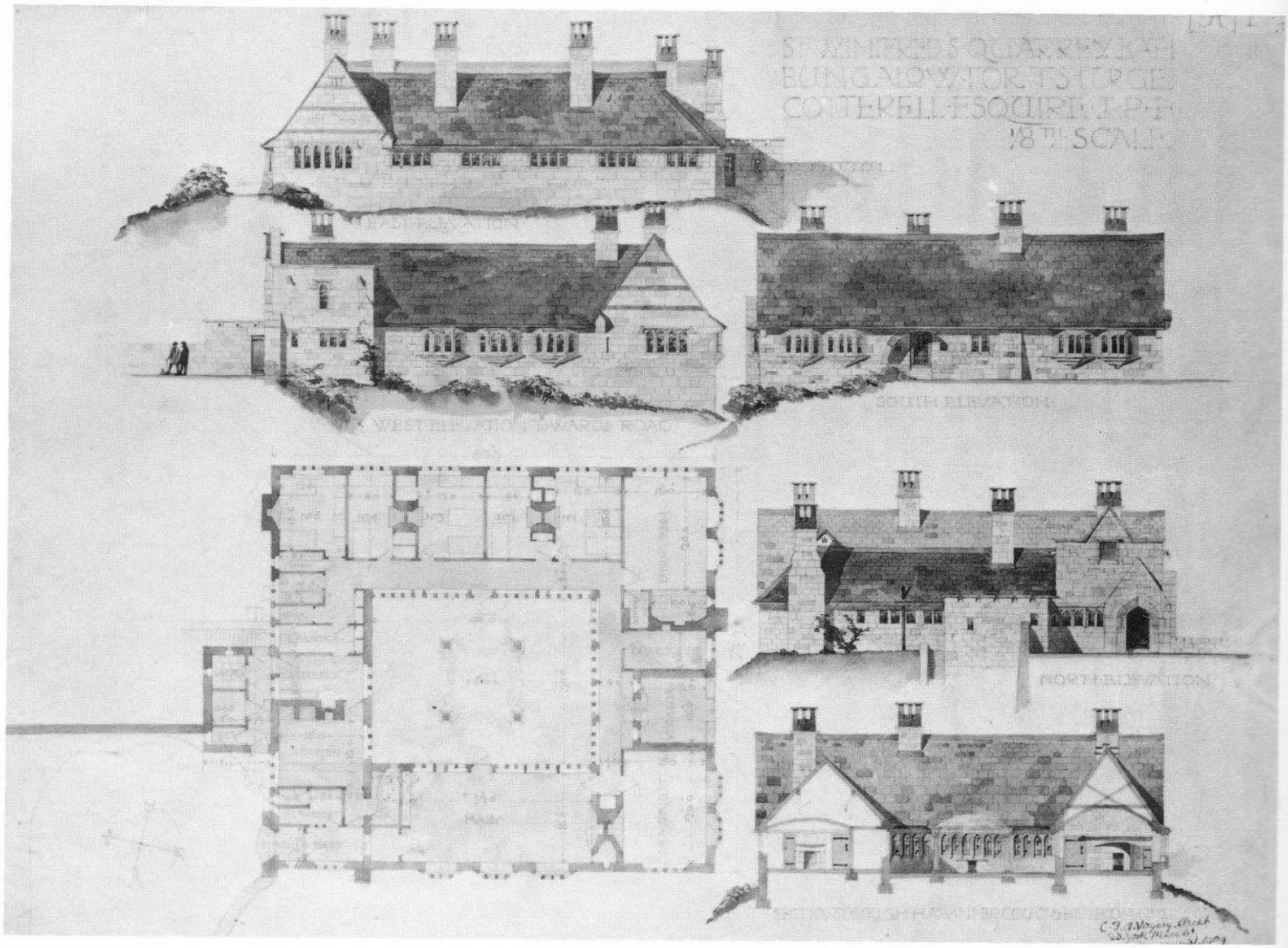
44
Contemporary photograph of The Homestead, Frinton-on-Sea, Essex, for S.C.Turner, 1905–6; the entrance front.

feudalism or benevolent despotism about the whole matter but since this reflected a reality, though one that was about to change, it was inevitable. Certainly this feel of medievalism may have been instrumental in exciting Voysey to contribute to the garden suburb movement, in quite a minor way, with his Institute and workmen's cottages for Currer Briggs. In fact only one terrace of houses were built with the Institute itself, Currer Briggs finding, as noted above, that philanthropy on this scale became expensive for a poor colliery owner.

The scheme is designed in roughcast with red tiles, the stone dressings of the design giving way to wooden window frames with no leading in the construction. The whole design (41) is harmonious with a pleasant regularity of gable and dormer along the terrace. The feature of the design, the square tower of the Institute with its vestigial crenellations and sparse fenestration, echoes quite surprisingly the porch of Lady Somerset's house in London and emphasizes the emergence in Voysey's work of a preoccupation with medieval form.

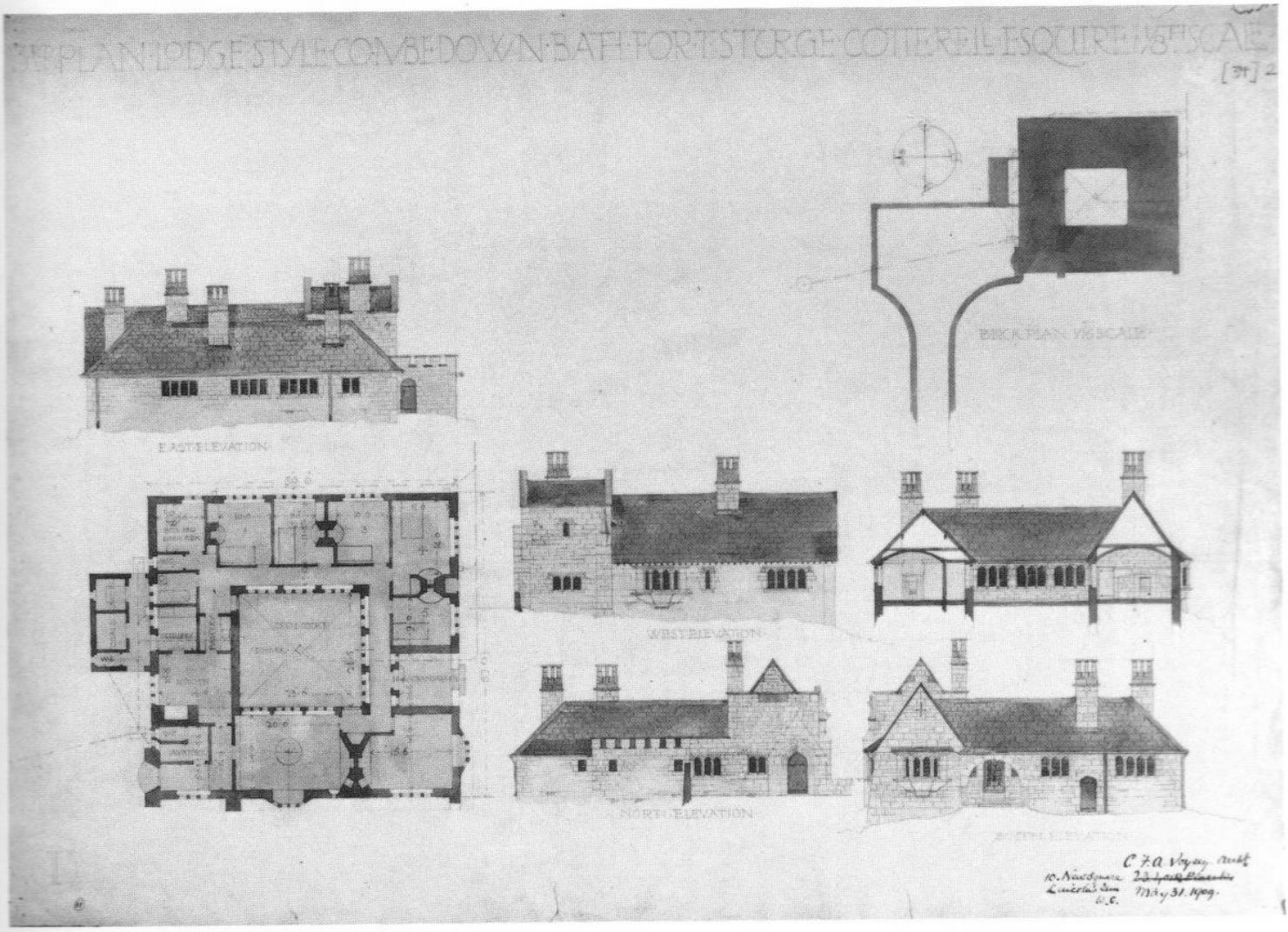
The close of the decade, 1905–9

These closing years of the busiest and best part of Voysey's career saw the continuance of the trend indicated above, away from the major commissions towards smaller houses and fewer. In 1905 the White Horse Inn at Stetchworth was designed for the Earl of Ellesmere and progressed through to a seventh revised



45a
Design for Lodge Style at Combe Down, near Bath, for T.Sturge Cotterell, 1909; the first scheme. Not executed in this form.

plan before the aristocratic client was satisfied with it (42). Also begun at the time were Hollymount at Knotty Green, near Beaconsfield (designed 1905–6) and The Homestead at Frinton-on-Sea (designed 1905–6), both of which were successful though quite small houses (43 and 44). Since each was also fitted out by Voysey with furnished interiors these will be dealt with in more detail in chapter 5 which concerns his interior design work. 1906–7 also produced the design and furnishing of the interior of Garden Corner in Chelsea for E.J.Horniman, one of Voysey's principal clients; this too will be dealt with in that later chapter. One of the most unusual commissions also came at this time, though regrettably the details are lost as to how. For Dr H.E.Leigh Canney Voysey designed a house to be built – and it was – at Aswan in Egypt. It also was in roughcast with dressings of local sandstone. The drawings, dated from Sept. to Oct. 1905, show quite a complex plan form



45b
Design for Lodge Style, the third scheme, showing the house as executed.

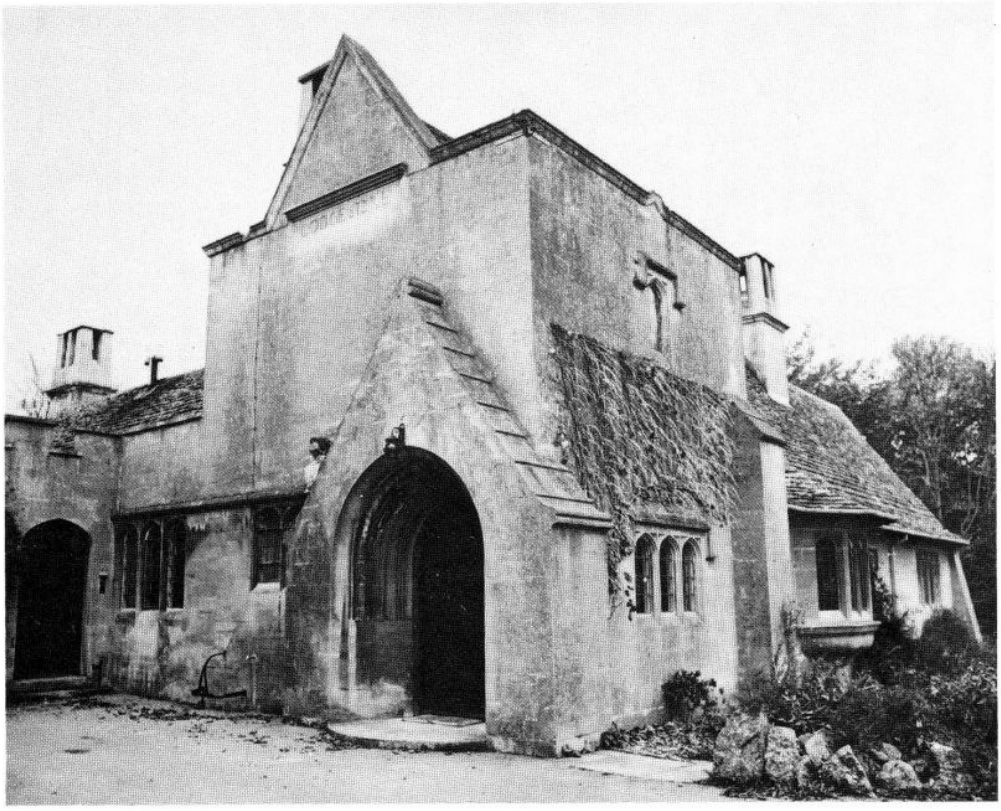
with a terrace built up on two sides and elaborate arrangement of levels with the single-storey hall and drawing-room on a mezzanine with bedrooms and services below and bedrooms and dining-room above. There is also a crenellated parapet. Voysey did not supervise the construction.

Then, at the end of the decade, came a spate of commissions for small houses each of a distinct interest; Lodge Style at Combe Down near Bath; Littleholme at Kendal; a house at Brooke End, Henley-in-Arden; and an unexecuted project for a house for the Hampstead Garden Suburb Development Company.

Lodge Style was built for T.S.Cotterell and was an eccentric commission which fell in very well with Voysey's inclinations at that time. The story goes that the client wanted a house reminiscent of Merton College, Oxford built in stone from his own quarry – he was a quarry owner. Voysey produced for him a scheme best

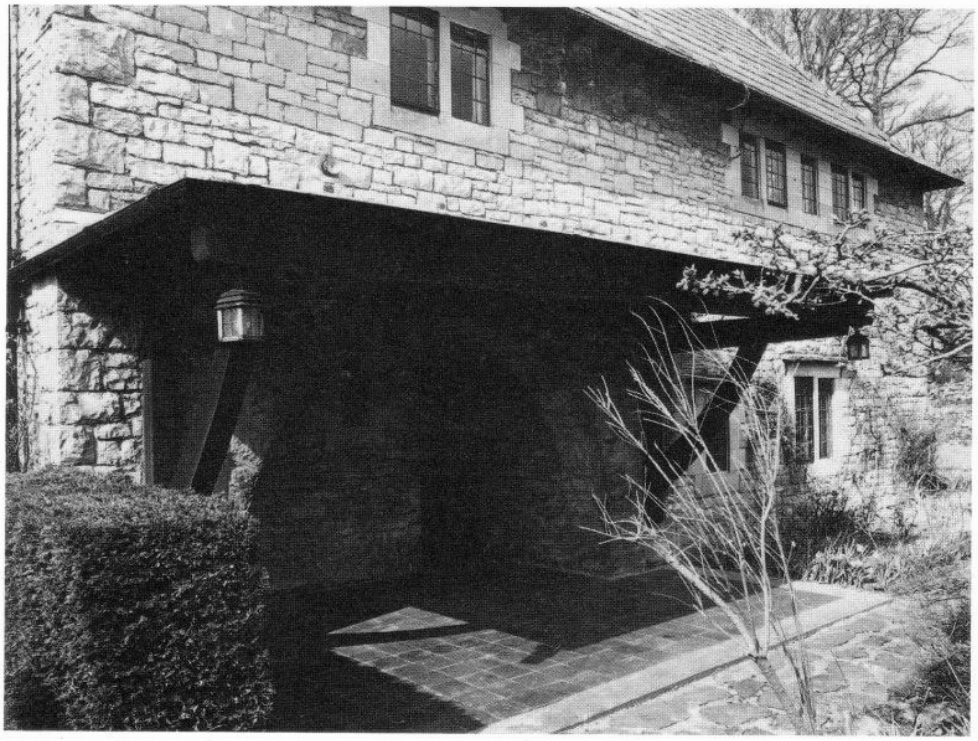
45c
Lodge Style, the west elevation.

45d
Lodge Style, the north (entrance) front.



described as Collegiate Bungalow style, to be built around a courtyard or, more properly in this case, quadrangle, forty feet by thirty feet. There was a pitched, gabled roof; the entrance and windows were thoroughly Gothic in detail, with oriels on the west and north elevations, pointed arch windows with narrow lights on the others and a crenellated extension on the entrance front (45a). The scheme, unhappily, was whittled down so that as built (45b and c) the quadrangle has become a cramped 23 feet by 21 feet (approximately), though pointed windows and entrance, crenellations and oriels do survive in a modified form. Inside are stone fireplaces and other detailing appropriate to the Gothic exterior. It is an intriguing, but not altogether attractive or successful, scheme.

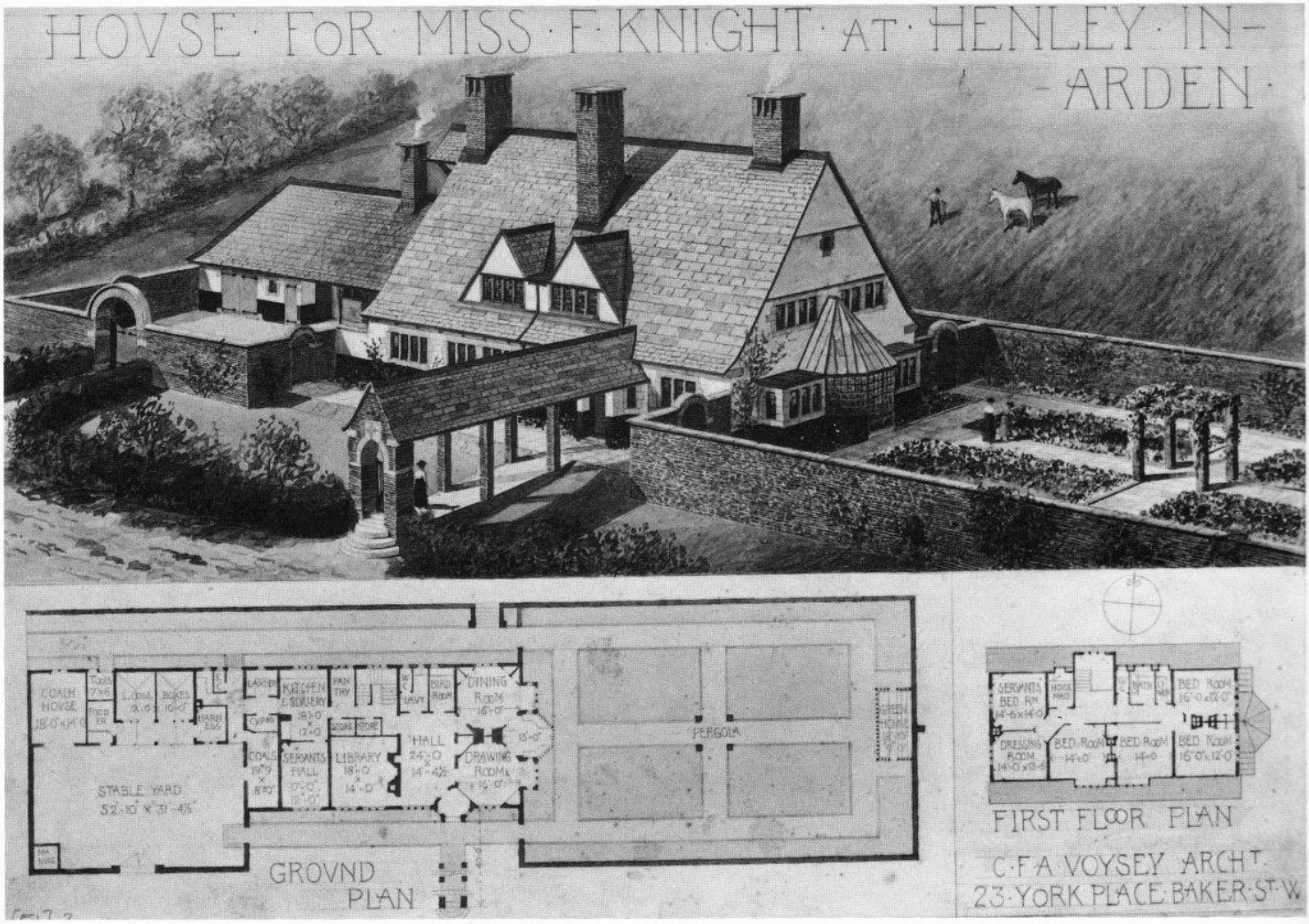
As different as can be is Littleholme, built at Kendal for Voysey's friend and colleague A.W.Simpson, furniture maker and designer. The only point of similarity is that both houses, unusually, are in stone. Littleholme has an enormous porch (46a), a simple, flat structure with massive wooden beam supports, which contrasts with the plain, forthright appearance of the house (46b). In plan the bulk of the ground-floor space is given over to a large, L-shaped sitting-room with a deep ingle-nook. In its original form the house was furnished largely with furniture, not to Voysey's designs but to Simpson's own. About 1923 Voysey designed a crenellated extension for the house but this was never built.



46a
Littleholme, Kendal, for A.W.Simpson, 1909; the entrance porch.

46b
Littleholme, the house from Sedbergh Road.

47a
Brooke End, Henley-in-Arden, Warwickshire, for Miss F.Knight, 1909; the entrance front showing the attenuated porch in brick with stone dressings.



47b
Design for Brooke End; perspective watercolour with plans showing the house as built except for the length of the porch.

If Lodge Style represents the way Voysey's mind, given only the slightest encouragement, was beginning to run towards a heavily mannered blend of his own style with neo-Gothic, and Littleholme the whittling down of his life-long ideals of plainness and good workmanship, then the house at Brooke End, Henley-in-Arden shows how, given a straightforward client, these two facets of his style and personality might resolve themselves. It is (47a) a conventional small Voysey house, though with some unconventional plan details, including octagonal rooms and a prominent conservatory(47b). The unusual feature is a long, projecting porch (though not, in the finished house, as long as the drawing would suggest) with pitched roof, a pointed arch opening and stone dressings. The flavour of this is undeniably Gothic and its contrast with the rest of the house emphasized by the use of exposed brickwork rather than a rendered finish. To round off this eccentric year, 1909, is a design which unfortunately was not

executed. This the drawing announces as, 'Proposed House for the Hampstead Garden Suburb Development Company, Hampstead. Plot no.338 in Bigwood Road for Miss Lang'. Like Littleholme it was to have a simple rectangular form, though here the more usual roughcast finish was to have been used. The house is set sideways to the road; there is a very steeply pitched roof with gables and into each roof slope a hipped dormer with wooden frames is fitted. The drawing is dated 6 Sept. 1909. It is unusual that Voysey, the champion and one of the few fully accomplished practitioners of the new vernacular style of domestic architecture, was not asked to take part in at least one of the mass housing projects which were becoming prevalent at this time. Perhaps his reputation for difficulty prevented such approaches; perhaps they were made and rejected; here, certainly, something intervened to prevent the house being built, so unfortunately Voysey remains one of the few distinguished domestic architects of his day not to be represented in the important work of the building of the Hampstead Garden Suburb.

In arriving at the end of this first decade of the present century we have followed through those years of hectic practice when Voysey produced the bulk of his best work; from the picturesque accomplishment of Moor Crag, the homely stateliness of Broadleys, through the consistently changing themes and moods, all to a basically similar plan, of Spade House, The Orchard, The Pastures, Vodin, to the diminution – in form though not in skill – of these four houses of 1909; en route, the graceful eccentricity of the Sandersons factory, the venture into social theory of the Whitwood Institute, the sheer oddity of the house at Aswan. The scene now must change, before we return to a consideration of the long but relatively empty years of the end of Voysey's life and work, to consideration of what went on inside some of the many houses where Voysey was allowed to influence the design and furnishing of his building. So first we look at the furniture which his mature years produced, then at some of the specific interiors he designed.