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CFA VOYSEY, 1857-1941

'I make no claim to anything new,' Voysey wrote to the editor of *Architects' Journal* in March 1935, '. . . like many others, I followed some old traditions and avoided some others . . . steel construction and reinforced concrete are the real culprits responsible for the ultra-modern architecture of today.' Despite this seemingly reactionary statement, Voysey's great achievement was to bring about a vital symbiosis between innovation and tradition.

The fact is, Voysey was a Victorian. And he was nurtured in the richest of Victorian environments – the intellectual home.

He might have something to teach us: his architecture is 'green', his buildings are made from simple materials. Now, we could build in the way he did. It might seem expensive; but the sheer pleasure well-made things bring would more than compensate.

Building in a labour-intensive way could be rewarding, too. William Morris once said in a lecture – *Of the Origins of Ornamental Art*, given in 1883 – 'Machines should never be used for doing work in which men can take pleasure'. While we may never arrive at the Morrisian millennium, we need, as automation proceeds, to find worthwhile things for people to do. Building well, for posterity, could be one of them.

His utterances are always at their most profound in his architecture. He did theorise more than most of his architectural contemporaries. What Voysey has to say is worth reading and on occasions it can be psychologically revealing. But he is not, it should be said, the intellectual peer of Lethaby, the leading architect-theoretician of the Arts and Crafts, still less of Morris or Ruskin.

He was the first domestic architect to gain an international reputation. Of course, long before Voysey, there had been Palladio, on a grander scale, but at the turn of the century when Voysey came to the fore, Palladio's reputation – as it always had done – rested with a small, architecturally literate elite. One did not need to be a scholar to appreciate Voysey's work.

Voysey could be described as the first popular architect. Any amateur could look through widely circulated art magazines – like *The Studio*, founded in 1893, or the Munich magazine *Dekorative Kunst*, founded in 1897 – where one could find all one needed to know about Voysey's houses, his furniture or his decoration.

The Voysey House was picturesque, with gentle references to unspecified vernacular traditions. Unlike some of his Arts and Crafts colleagues, Voysey did not resort to a stilted borrowing of arcane traditional details. The Voysey House was convenient, informal, economical to build and maintain. It seemed refreshingly new. There is a Protean *fin-de-siècle* vitality about a Voysey House.

Occasionally, Voysey's work has a quality which prompts one to think of the work of some of the well-known children's illustrators of the 1880s, 1890s such as Walter Crane, Randolph Caldecott, Kate Greenaway and Beatrix Potter. Any comparison between Voysey's work and that of once-fashionable illustrators might be thought to be an unflattering one but there is in his work a certain artificiality – an indefinable quaintness. This is characteristic of much British art and design of the 1880s and 1890s.

It is not the intention here to trivialise Voysey. There is nothing in the least trivial in his work; it has stood the test of time in practical and aesthetic terms. But no great architect before had possessed such delicacy and lightness of touch.

Charles Francis Annesley Voysey was born on May 28th, 1857. Pugin had been dead for almost five years, but Scott, Street and Butterfield who were all great church architects were in their prime. Religion and architecture were the two great Victorian obsessions. Voysey was himself the eldest son of a clergyman, the Reverend Charles Voysey (1828-1912). His mother, Mary Edlin, was the daughter of a banker.

Voysey's childhood was disrupted by an event which it is difficult to fully comprehend some 120 years later. The stark fact is Charles Voysey was dismissed from the Anglican church by being 'deprived of his living' for teaching unapproved doctrine. In the latter part of the 20th century, when a lukewarm doctrinal liberalism prevails, this may not appear to be a very significant matter.

Such was not the case in the 19th century. As a result of the social and psychological upheavals brought about by industrialisation, by the vast, destabilising migrations of ordinary people, and above all by the advance of scientific materialism, religion had become a field for intensive speculation. John Henry Newman's writings, in particular his spiritual autobiography *Apologia pro Vita Sua*, reflect the often high intellectual quality of such speculation.

Every scandal concerning the Church was of profound interest. Of these, the greatest, of course, was Newman's defection to the Church of Rome on October 8, 1845 – a trauma for Oxford and an unmitigated disaster for the Anglican Church. In comparison the heresy of Charles Voysey, the vicar of the obscure parish of Healaugh, near York, may have only been of minor importance but enough to have caused regional concern.

Charles Voysey had simply published controversial sermons, one of which was 'Is every statement in the Bible about our Heavenly Father true?' Nevertheless, the Healaugh affair profoundly influenced the lives of all the Voysey family. Rev Voysey was given the opportunity to retract his ideas, but he chose instead the lonely path of the heretic and the martyr. He was a man with inflexible opinions – a characteristic that he passed on to his son.

Voysey was 12 when the final judgement against his father was delivered in the House of Lords on February 11, 1871. By this time the family had moved to London and Charles Voysey had begun to preach on his own account, soon drawing a sizeable congregation.

He founded the Theistic Church, which was to be situated in a small street off Piccadilly. One may deduce from such a prosperous location that Theism appealed to the educated middle class who seem to have been prepared to invest in what Charles Voysey described as a new religion in its own right. He was sympathetic towards science and Theism could readily accommodate the idea of evolution. Charles Voysey considered Theism itself to be part of an evolutionary process operating within religion; the God of the Theists was not the wrathful God of the Old Testament.

Charles Voysey, a fine preacher, and a prolific publisher of sermons, nevertheless bequeathed no enduring theological legacy. With his death in 1912, Theism evaporated into the ether, though Voysey's brother became a Unitarian minister; Theism was in fact in some ways quite close to Unitarianism.

At first educated at home by his father, Voysey, at 13, was sent to Dulwich College as a day boy. Like many similar schools, it was to undergo a considerable expansion during the Victorian era. The

new buildings of the 1860s, in a North Italian early Renaissance style, were by the younger Charles Barry (1823-1900), the son of Sir Charles Barry, the designer – with the aid of Pugin – of the Houses of Parliament. Might these vigorous, if rather brash, buildings have turned the young Voysey's thoughts towards architecture? Surely Soane's sombre Dulwich Picture Gallery, which was not far away, would not have inspired him in the least. Soane's reputation, which had been undermined by Pugin's attack in *Contrasts* of 1836, was still at a low ebb in the 1870s.

The redoubtable JCL Sparkes was art master at Dulwich. He had a remarkable gift for recognising ability in the young. Two important late Victorian painters, Stanhope Forbes, (1857-1947) and Henry La Thangue (1859-1929) were both at Dulwich with Voysey and were taught by Sparkes. (In the early 1900s Voysey designed a house in Bedford Park for a La Thangue which was never built.) One may surmise that because he had only a modest gift for drawing from the human figure, that were most likely plaster casts of approved classical figures, Voysey's talents as an artist did not impress Sparkes.

Voysey did not thrive academically at Dulwich though he was able enough intellectually. He may have suffered from what is now described as 'learning difficulties'. Apparently he was an erratic speller. Perhaps family tensions, induced by the scandal of Healaugh, may have been damaging to a boy on the verge of adolescence.

After 18 months at Dulwich, Voysey was withdrawn and educated at home until the eve of his 17th birthday. It could have been that architecture was selected for him as a career while he was at Dulwich. Sparkes could have suggested the idea – a straw of comfort to a father despairing of his son's prospects. However, his paternal grandfather Annesley Voysey, 1794-1834, had been a successful architect. This is the most likely reason for Voysey's entry into architecture – a profession which did not have the status it was to acquire in the present century.

Voysey was articled to John Pollard Seddon (1827-1906) on 11 May, 1874. Here begins the better documented part of his life, although it should be pointed out that, as with so many architects, there is all too often a dearth of hard biographical information. Seddon was at the height of his powers. He was a sound Gothic Revivalist with a good, primarily ecclesiastical, practice. Seddon's architecture was restrained and practical, but he lacked, perhaps, the brilliance of Butterfield or Street, or still more, William Burges. Seddon, nevertheless, was an ideal mentor. Voysey learned restraint and rationality during his five years with Seddon.

After leaving Seddon, Voysey assisted Henry Saxon Snell (1830-1904) for a short time. Snell successfully specialised in the design of hospitals and charitable institutions he was the author of *Charitable and Parochial Buildings*, 1881, and, with Dr FJ Mouat, of *Hospital Construction and Management*, 1883. Among his London buildings were: Emmanuel School, Wandsworth, part of the recently demolished hospital in Fulham Palace Road, and the hospital in Archway Road.

Although Voysey did not relish the work in the Snell office, which he found dull, he evidently acquired enough specialised technical knowledge there to design a sanatorium for Teignmouth between 1882 and 1884. Although this ultimately came to nothing, it seems to have been his first major project. It is worth pointing out that in 1899 Voysey was to design a cottage hospital at Halwill, near Beaworthy, Devon, which is still standing. He probably learned little concerning the art of architecture during his time in the Snell office, although it would have reinforced his belief that buildings should be, above all, practical, and it fostered an interest in ventilation which continued throughout his career.

Of supreme importance in Voysey's development was the period he spent with George Devey (1820-1886), the country house architect. Devey was a member of Charles Voysey's Theistic Church and a generous subscriber to its funds, and Voysey would have met him through this connection. He worked for Devey for nearly two years as an 'improver', that is a young architect who, having completed his articles, sought to gain professional experience. Generally, improvers were not paid.

Without question, Devey was an architect of the first rank. Less of a extrovert than Richard Norman Shaw, he has, until comparatively recently, been treated as a somewhat shadowy, even minor, figure. He may yet be the last major Victorian architect to be rediscovered. (Jill Allibone's recent study reveals his stature and Mark Girouard in *The Victorian Country House*, first published in 1971, also acknowledged his qualities.)

Devey's clients were mainly members of the landed gentry and, not surprisingly, Devey took a keen interest in vernacular building. He would, of course, have seen much of it during his visits to country estates. The RIBA possesses several volumes of his sketches of cottages in their settings. An abortive scheme, for a middle-class housing development in Northampton of around 1876 shows that Devey was capable of devising delightful and varied houses – as Shaw had done at Bedford Park at about the same time. Two of Devey's smaller house types for Northampton resemble the kind of houses which Parker and Unwin were to design for Letchworth Garden City 25 years later. Some of Devey's projected Northampton houses suggest a vernacular influence.

Voysey is said to have designed some cottages for Devey in Northamptonshire, where he had some land though it has not been possible to trace these. One can safely assume that they would have had the Devey imprint. There is a distinctly Devey-like quality in several of Voysey's earliest schemes that is most apparent in the work that he did before he attained full autonomy as an architect.

Voysey, then, had three able teachers – Seddon, Snell and Devey – before he started practice on his own. Like so many of his contemporaries, he had also come under the influence, through their writings, of two towering figures: Ruskin and Pugin. Throughout his life, his writings and his attitudes were to reveal his commitment to their ideals. Voysey cannot be called the last Ruskinian as there are too many candidates for that honour but he could well be called the last Puginian.

And what of Morris? Voysey certainly admired Morris' decorative designs. After all, what designer maturing in the 1880s did not? But he abhorred Morris' Socialism, which he equated with what he called collectivism. Voysey stood for 'individuality'. He proclaimed his faith in it in his short book *Individuality* written in 1915, when, under the influence of universal war madness, individuality was trampled upon.

Voysey set up his own practice in late 1881, or early 1882, in Queen Anne's Gate. He moved very shortly. He declared on his curious, one supposes jesting, change-of-address card:

> Unto alle and sondrie. Know ye hereby yt ye Architect Master CFA Voysey heretofore of Queen Anne's Gate hath now removed unto ye more commodious premises situate at ye Broadway Chambers, Westminster. Here from henceforth all ye craft of ye master architect will be exercised.

Very early in his career, Voysey entered a competition for the Admiralty offices in Whitehall, but the design was unplaced. No record seems to exist of it – it would have been instructive to see how he would have handled a monumental design at this stage. Monumentality was never his forte.

However, a very early design by Voysey does survive in published form. This was for the sanatorium at Teignmouth in Devon (1882-84). It is only known through a reproduction of a drawing in 'CFA Voysey', *Dekorative Kunst 1*; Voysey's first major appearance in a Continental periodical. This was a copiously illustrated and extensive article which could possibly have been by Hermann Muthesius who was later to publish *Das Englische Haus* and was in London at this time. Voysey was obviously responsible for the selection of illustrations in the article. He, at least,

considered the sanatorium project important.

All that is shown of the sanatorium, built for the Teignmouth Sanatorium Company, is what is probably an elevation facing towards the sea. It is quite evidently an institutional building, but one that is made more congenial by the addition of a certain amount of picturesque and medievalising detail. Voysey also makes use of the diaper-patterned brickwork favoured by Devey, which he was to use in another early project – the house with an octagonal hall. There is a certain clumsiness in the sanatorium design, which is not altogether unpleasing, but the elevation is confident. It does not immediately strike one as the work of a very young man.

Of course, Voysey, like all young architects, did not find commissions easy to come by. A friend – AH Mackmurdo (1852-1942) – the pivotal member of The Century Guild – a Morrisian co-operative of designers which sought 'to render all branches of art the sphere no longer of the tradesman but the artist' – encouraged Voysey to take up designing textiles and wallpapers in order to supplement his small income from architecture and he was to become extremely successful at this. His status as a decorative designer equals that of Walter Crane, or Lewis F Day.

Since the Modern Movement, which anathematised decoration, it has often been assumed that the spatial and organisational skills of the architect are very different from those of the designer of decoration. This is not the case. It is very easy, in fact, to cite architects who have excelled at decorative design: Robert Adam, Pugin, Butterfield, Burges, Philip Webb, Viollet-le-Duc, Otto Wagner, Frank Furness, Sullivan, Guimard, Van de Velde, Mackintosh and Hoffmann for example. MH Baillie Scott (1865-1945), in many ways Voysey's principal rival as a designer of small-scale country houses, was also an accomplished designer of decoration. The ability to generate pattern is closely allied to the ability to manipulate geometric forms so essential to architects.

Among Voysey's early and unexecuted projects is a design for his own cottage. This is probably the most important among the early projects in tracing the evolution of the Voysey House. The half-timbered cottage probably dates from 1885, the year in which he married Mary Maria Evans. It was illustrated for the first time in *The British Architect XXX*, 1888. The cottage was also illustrated in the October 1894 issue of *The Studio*. *The Studio* was to illustrate much of Voysey's early work and such publicity must have brought him clients. The almost excessive half-timbering was 'solid and tarred' – Voysey's drawing seems to emphasise this – and filled in with 'breeze concrete'. One would have expected a more traditional material – if he had been an obsessive medievalist.

The cottage was roofed with green slate and its external woodwork was a bright, cheerful, green which, it was said, would harmonise with the surrounding countryside. (Interestingly enough, Christopher Dresser (1834-1904) a prominent commercial designer who had strong ideas on colour, commented on just how much he disliked seeing natural and artificial greens in juxtaposition.) The cottage was buttressed at ground floor level in order to reduce costs by lessening the thicknesses of the walls.

The plan of the cottage is somewhat unusual as the largest room is described as a 'living and work room'. It is the only resemblance that the cottage actually bears to a country labourer's dwelling. Here is the space, dominating the whole house where Voysey intended to work. The cottage has something of the air of a bachelor's residence, certainly its plan does not suggest the home of a *paterfamilias*. Leading off the living and work room is a narrow picture-gallery where Voysey intended to display his own work. This is the first example of the Voysey House. It is also the earliest of his architectural drawings of Voysey's to have survived.

Another early design was for a medium-sized house which was first illustrated in *The British Architect, XXXI*, 1889. It is possible that this actually antedates the cottage. This house, which has an octagonal hall, resembles one of the larger house types which Devey had designed for the abortive housing scheme in Northampton. One may also detect the influence of Richard Norman Shaw.

With its half-timbering, its prominent belvedere, its dressed stone contrasted with patterned brickwork, and its unmistakably Victorian bay window, the house can properly be described as picturesquely eclectic. The circulation of the house depends upon the octagonal hall from which all the principal rooms open; above it is a gallery linking the main upstairs rooms. The plan, despite a degree of ingenuity, is not entirely convincing for Voysey, though a perfectly reasonable creator of plans, was not a virtuoso planner like Shaw or Baillie Scott.

Although the house with the octagonal hall, unlike the cottage, is not instantly recognisable as a Voysey House, there is a refinement in its proportions that does suggest his hand. Voysey made use of unusual proportions and generally favoured an exaggerated horizontality which contrasts with Pugin's over-stressed verticality. There would appear, however, to be no formal mathematical basis to his system of proportions – if system one designates it. Like Ruskin, Voysey despised those things which he considered mathematically commensurable and hence crudely mechanistic. Voysey's proportions, like many aspects of his design, depend upon a sound empiricism tempered by a highly individual sensibility.

The design for the house with the octagonal hall does not seem to have brought Voysey any clients – possibly because it suggested that he had rather fanciful ideas. Besides, who would trust a young and unknown architect with such an apparently costly project? However, the drawings of his own more modest cottage which had appeared in *The British Architect* did bring him a client. In 1888, the same year in which the cottage drawings were published, Voysey was commissioned to design a small house for M H Lakin at Bishop's Itchington, in Warwickshire. This was to be a modified version of the cottage. The half-timbering was omitted – very likely to reduce costs – and the entire wall-surfaces of the house were covered with rough-cast. This was the first Voysey House to have been built. It was called 'The Cottage' which is a name that Voysey seems to have suggested himself on later occasions.

Although it is all too easy to recognise that The Cottage had antecedents in the smaller domestic work of Gothic Revivalists – Seddon, of course, or Butterfield, Philip Webb, or Devey, with his paraphrases of vernacular buildings – the Bishop's Itchington house has much that is positively new about it. Voysey succeeded here in blending vernacular, medieval, and purely innovative elements in a refreshingly unselfconscious way.

Voysey recognised that a scholarly, not to say pedantic, borrowing from the past would lead only to an architecture which was remote from contemporary reality. 'Revivalism must involve the sacrifice of fitness,' he was to say in 'Ideas in Things' – two articles in *The Arts Connected with Building*, a collection of essays by a number of arts and crafts designers, edited by T Raffles Davison and published in 1909.

In the same year as the design for Lakin, 1888, Voysey produced a preliminary design for a house for Mrs Forster in South Parade, Bedford Park, Chiswick. The earliest garden suburb, Bedford Park had been founded in 1875 and was effectively the test-bed for the garden city, in terms of house types at least. Norman Shaw was its principal architect though protégés of his were also involved. The projected Forster House differs quite markedly from the neighbouring Shaw Houses which, although representing a new approach to middle-class housing, make reference to the Early Renaissance in English architecture. They are frequently rich in moulded brick detail, inspired by nearby red-brick Kew Palace which was originally built as a London merchant's house in 1631.

The Forster house is plainer than the Shaw Houses, only on the ground floor is the brickwork revealed. The porch has a low Tudor, or late-medieval, arch surrounded with moulded bricks. The wide and stoutly constructed front door has the wrought-iron hinges of

which Voysey was so fond. The deep eaves are supported by slender wrought-iron brackets. The bay windows, with leaded glazing on the ground and first floor, are reminiscent of those to be found in speculative suburban houses of the 1920s and 1930s. In many ways, the projected Forster house would fit comfortably into almost any prosperous pre-war London suburbs. Had it been widely publicised, one might have been able to suggest that it was the very prototype of the London suburban house. Voysey's proportions, however, give the house a look of solidity combined with elegance and such qualities were not often seen in suburban architecture.

In 1889 *The British Architect, XXXI*, illustrated a 'tower house' by Voysey. It would not have been cheap to build. Possibly Voysey simply used the design to publicise his ideas. The 'tower house' had four floors and, like the unbuilt cottage for himself of 1885, it was capped with heavy half-timbering. It was conspicuously buttressed to the second floor and clad with rough-cast. It has an assertiveness which only the most accomplished architectural personalities can achieve without descending to vulgarity. In 1903, Voysey was to revive the 'tower house' idea in an unrealised project at Bognor, Sussex, for W Ward Higgs. This was a five-floor house without buttresses, and a band of windows on the top floor to enable the owner to enjoy the panorama.

The Forster House, Bedford Park, as it was finally to be built in 1891, was to represent a compromise between the first project and the 'tower house'. Like the first design, it was conspicuously different from the adjoining Shaw houses. It was plain, entirely covered with rough-cast, with stone mullions and leaded lights. There were still the wide eaves and the wrought-iron brackets. In the 1890s Bedford Park was still fashionable among artists, or at least the artistically inclined and the Forster house – easily seen from the District Line – would have served as an excellent London showcase for Voysey. Almost every Londoner interested in developments in the arts would have seen it. The Forster House effectively launched Voysey's career.

Another early Voysey House was Walnut Tree Farm, Castlemorton, near Malvern, which was designed for RH Cazalet in 1890. This also appeared in *The British Architect, XXXIV*, 1890. Because of its comparatively remote location, Walnut Tree Farm made a lesser impact than the Bedford Park house. It has a number of features which were to be found in the 1885 cottage, including buttressing at ground floor level, deep eaves and a rough-cast finish. The house has four dormer windows, one of which is distinctly larger than the others, varied window sizes, a corner bay which is five sides of an octagon to trap the sun, and prominent chimneys, the sides of which slope dramatically. These serve to give this comparatively small building an air of complexity, or even fussiness.

W Alexander Harvey, the architect of the Cadbury family's ideal industrial town of Bourneville, designed a private house for JH Barlow which suggests the inspiration of Walnut Tree Farm. This is illustrated in H Whitehouse: 'Bourneville. A study in housing reform', *The Studio, XXIV*, 1903. A number of Bourneville designs by Harvey have Voysey-like features including buttresses. While it is common knowledge that Voysey had a very considerable influence in his day, it is not easy to cite such textbook disciples.

In 1891-92, Voysey was commissioned by Archibald Grove to design a pair of houses for Hans Road in Knightsbridge. The fact that he was asked to design houses for what was obviously an expensive site indicates that, though still in his 30s, Voysey's practice was beginning to flourish. Originally there were to have been three houses – one for Grove himself and the others for letting. But Voysey's friend AH Mackmurdo was subsequently commissioned to design the third house. This is said by John Brandon-Jones to have led to a rift in a once warm friendship. Reasonably close at hand are to be found a number of imaginative town houses by such major contemporary architects as Shaw, EW Godwin and JJ Stevenson – nearly all are in a style that can be loosely described as Queen Anne. These houses were located conveniently close to the South Kensington Museum – later to be re-named The Victoria and Albert Museum – and for two decades the area had been associated with a well-healed aestheticism.

Voysey's Hans Road Houses reflect, to a degree, the influence of Shaw, though they are simpler. Stone mullions give them a somewhat medieval appearance; rooms are panelled and a grand room at the rear of each house is achieved by the introduction of a mezzanine floor – a device that Voysey undoubtedly borrowed from Shaw, whose complex multi-level sections were marvels of ingenuity. Shaw's sections and plans seem to echo the complex mechanisms of late 19th-century society. How complex these seem when compared with the sections of 18th-century town houses.

The contrast between Mackmurdo's Hans Road House and Voysey's pair is extreme: Voysey appears assured but inclined towards idiosyncrasy, though not eccentricity. Mackmurdo, on the other hand, teeters towards an unscholarly classicism. (This can be confirmed by studying his curious house at 25 Cadogan Gardens, not far from Sloane Square.) The writer, Julian Russell Sturgis, for whom, in 1896, Voysey was to design one of his finest houses – Greyfriars, on the Hog's Back, near Guildford – lived in one of the Hans Road Houses. This is how he would have come to know Voysey's work and thus come to admire his practical sensibility.

Perrycroft, the first of Voysey's eight or so larger houses, was designed for JW Wilson, MP, between 1893 and 1894. The site chosen was a fine one: at Colwall, near Malvern, which has views over the Malvern hills. The house cost a little under 5000 pounds, or approximately one million pounds of today's money, excluding the cost of the site. Perrycroft has the roughcast and buttresses of Voysey's earlier houses and the ceilings were similarly low. There is a small tower, obviously intended primarily for effect; but monumentality and display are otherwise eschewed in true Arts and Crafts style. Perrycroft was widely publicised, being illustrated in *The British Architect, XLII*, 1894, as well as in the important article in *Dekorative Kunst* of 1897.

Perrycroft was followed, in 1894, by Lowicks at Frensham, in Surrey, for EJ Horniman, of the well-known tea importing family. The Hornimans were interested in avant-garde architecture. FJ Horniman, MP, commissioned CH Townsend in 1900 to design the Horniman Museum, Forest Hill. (*The Studio* called this 'frank and fearless'.) Lowicks, which was more modest in size than Perrycroft, heralds the houses of Voysey's mature period. Although a timbered dormer reminds one of Walnut Tree Farm, it is far plainer – and plainer even than Perrycroft.

Then came a large project, unfortunately to be an abortive one, on which Voysey worked in 1894-95. This was for a house for the Earl of Lovelace, which was to be built on a site in the garden of Ockham Park – a house built by Hawksmoor in 1725, near the village of Ockham, in the countryside near Ripley in Surrey. The very existence of such an ambitious project indicates that Voysey had learned how to deal with aristocratic clients during the time he had spent with George Devey. The house was low; buttressed and with the typical slate roof, but it was much larger than any of Voysey's built houses. The Ockham Park house has the same sort of awkward quality which Norney Grange of 1897, another big Surrey house, was to have. Voysey was not at his best with large, grandiloquent houses. He did, in fact, build a modest cottage – Pevsner calls it 'primitive' – for one of the Earl's Ockham estate workers. He also built a group of thatched cottages, at Elmesthorpe, Hinckley, Leicestershire, between 1895 and 1896, for the Earl.

In 1895, Voysey designed a house for his father. George Devey, on his death in 1886, had left Charles Voysey a personal legacy of some 2000 pounds which was a considerable sum at the time. It is very possible that this money went towards the house. The house was called Annesley Lodge, after Charles Voysey's architect father. Situated in Hampstead, it was illustrated in both *The British*

Architect and *The Studio*. The house is L-shaped and represents the Voysey House in its final and complete form.

Greyfriars, one of Voysey's finest houses, was designed in 1896 and if he had designed nothing else Voysey's reputation would still have been one to reckon with. The house was originally known as Merlshanger, then as Wancote. It is situated on the Hog's Back, not far from Guildford. The client, an interesting one, was Julian Russell Sturgis, 1848-1904, a widely travelled and successful novelist. Sturgis also wrote verse, including the lyrics for Sir Arthur Sullivan's *Ivanhoe* and Sir Charles Villiers Stanford's version of *Much Ado about Nothing*. Voysey's perspective of the house shows Sturgis standing in front of it with his head in a book. The house is narrow, so that as many rooms as possible can face the view, which is among the finest in the Home Counties. ('Hang the cost man,' said Bossinney, the young architect, in Galsworthy's *Forsyte Saga*, 'look at the view.') The house, as well as being narrow, is also low but it is not in the least self-effacing. It could, in fact, be described as the boldest of all Voysey's houses.

Although it is impossible to measure with the precise historical significance of Greyfriars, it is reasonable to claim, that after Philip Webb's Red House for William Morris of 1859, it was the most remarkable British house of the 19th century. Its principal impact, however, was made in the early 20th century. Indeed, at first glance, the house seems to hint at the coming century. In actuality, Greyfriars can be set readily within the Gothic canon or more precisely the Puginian canon.

Greyfriars was the most widely illustrated of all Voysey's houses. It was to appear in innumerable British and European publications. The most important of these was Hermann Muthesius' enormously influential *Das Englische Haus*, Berlin, 1904-05. In the 1890s, this conception could only have come from Voysey. Unfortunately, Greyfriars was altered in 1913 and the startling clarity of its conception, like an elegant equation, has been all but obscured. The situation is worsened by the addition of unsympathetic outbuildings. It is conceivable, however, that Greyfriars could be reinstated without great difficulty, as one of the most original buildings of the 19th century.

In 1897, Voysey designed another Surrey house – Norney Grange, near Eashing, West of Godalming. This was for the Reverend W Leighton Crane who, like many Victorian clergymen, must have been moneyed. Norney, which is quite large, is an awkward building. Ian Nairn and Pevsner writing in *The Buildings of England* are not kind about Norney:

> Voysey is here almost making clichés out of his own style, particularly in the entrance front with the ugly doorway and the asymmetrically battered gabled wings. The house also has Voysey's disconcerting quality of appearing more solid the longer the viewer looks at it.

The front elevation of Norney has an odd feel to it. It seems almost as if Voysey was trying to make points. One is reminded, a little, of the excessively didactic quality of some of Philip Webb's houses – Clouds, or Standen, for example. The garden elevation, which is unaffected and simple, is entirely successful.

In the same year in which he designed Norney, Voysey was to design New Place, a house at Haslemere, Surrey, for the publisher AM Stedman, later Sir Algernon Methuen. Voysey was now 40 and his reputation was growing. With its general air of complexity, New Place does not possess the serene resolution of Greyfriars. Nevertheless, it demonstrated that Voysey could orchestrate a range of architectural elements – bays of different types, chimneys, gables, dormers – with great skill. All things considered, New Place is among Voysey's better houses; certainly, it does not exhibit the infelicities of Norney.

Broadleys, overlooking Lake Windermere, was designed in 1898, for A Currer Briggs, the son of a Yorkshire colliery owner. Later in 1904-05, Voysey was to design housing and a miners' institute for the employees of Briggs and Son. This implies that Currer Briggs had progressive social ideas for his time. Broadleys, with Greyfriars, is deservedly the best known of Voysey's houses. Like Greyfriars, Muthesius was to make much of it.

Broadleys was intended for the summer months, but it as a sober house it has none of the frivolity often associated with late-Victorian holiday homes. Like Greyfriars, the principal elevation is the one which faces towards the finest view. In both cases this is not the domain of the householder. In the 18th century the builder of the fine house possessed the view himself. This serves to remind us of two things. Firstly, Voysey's clients were, for the most part, bourgeois intellectuals with a taste for the arts – a new class of consumers which had multiplied since the 1850s. Secondly, Ruskin had popularised the idea that the contemplation of landscape, as the handiwork of God – however defined – was morally uplifting. This thinking, conveyed in such writings as *Modern Painters*, quickly passed into the national unconscious. Ruskin himself had a house in the Lake District, built on a site not very different from Broadleys, at Brantwood, on Coniston Water, which he had bought – unseen – in September 1871, after merely hearing its description.

Broadleys can best be seen from a boat in the lake. On the lake elevation, it has three stone-mullioned bays, almost like the bow windows of Regency houses. The central bay, like the bay in Greyfriars, is used to light a double height hall. The partial symmetry of the house is disrupted by a massive chimney and a small, round, porthole-like window placed to the right of the central bay. The composition of the lake elevation is of great subtlety. How easy it would have been for Voysey to have reduced it to total symmetry. Broadleys appears in the film based on John Fowles' book *The French Lieutenant's Woman* where it was used to affirm the spiritual escape of the heroine – played by Meryl Streep – from the fetters of a stifling Victorian morality. Although Fowles' book is set rather earlier than the time when Broadleys was built, the anachronism can be condoned for Broadleys, like Greyfriars, does seem to stand for a kind of enlightenment.

Nairn and Pevsner remarked in their guide to the buildings of Surrey that Voysey had 'much greater artistic integrity than Lutyens, but less talent . . . Voysey houses are the same everywhere – this can be a serious failing – and his style did not alter much throughout his life.' These remarks can certainly not be dismissed lightly. Integrity? Well, Lutyens, desperate for worldly success, always seized the main chance. Less talent? That is a difficult question to address.

The fact is, Voysey invented a style, whereas Lutyens – with virtuosity and, on occasions, bravura – adapted styles; initially, the vernacular South of England style and latterly, the English Palladian style. That some of Lutyens' houses are of a very high aesthetic quality is impossible to deny – but, using Greyfriars and Broadleys, Voysey's two finest houses, as examplars, it is reasonable to claim that Voysey was indeed a greater innovator than Lutyens.

Were Voysey's houses the same wherever they were built? There is a degree of truth in the assertion that they were, although all Voysey's lakeland houses – after Broadleys came Moorcrag, Windermere, 1898-99, and Littleholme, Kendal, 1909 – have an appropriate northern sternness. So, too, did an unexecuted house, the stone construction untypically left exposed – at Glassonby, Kirkoswald, Cumberland, of 1898.

And the final point to be considered in these diversionary paragraphs – did Voysey's style remain static? No, not exactly, But, after a remarkable and swift evolution – an evolution towards a particular kind of perfection – beginning with the Teignmouth sanatorium project of the early 1880s and culminating in Broadleys of 1898 – Voysey's powers do seem to have begun to diminish. This is also reflected in his decorative design.

One can only speculate on the reasons for his decline. John Brandon-Jones has hinted that Voysey suffered from a gastric

ulcer. This, in the early years of the century, would have been less susceptible to treatment than it is today. Pain, rather than arrogance, may have made Voysey a difficult man with whom to work. A reputation as such would surely not have endeared him to the kind of client he needed to cultivate in order to display his abilities to the full. This is not to dismiss Voysey's later work, but, undeniably, it lacks the *élan* of that of the 1890s.

Moorcrag, Gillhead, near Cartmel Fell, Windermere, of 1898-99, which followed shortly after Broadleys, was built for JW Buckley. The contract drawings for the house were witnessed by Thomas H Mawson, who was to design the garden for Moorcrag. Mawson is an interesting figure in his own right. He was to become the first lecturer in landscape design in Britain, at Liverpool University; his *Art and Craft of Garden Making*, London, 1900, is an excellent work which has been rather overlooked by garden historians, mesmerised by Gertrude Jeckyll. A house by Mawson, which is illustrated in his book, suggests the influence of Voysey.

Moorcrag, unlike Greyfriars and Broadleys, is a rather informal, even modest, house – the entrance has a space for bicycles. Despite its intimacy, Moorcrag is compositionally satisfying and must be numbered among Voysey's most successful houses.

In 1899 Voysey was commissioned to design a house by HG Wells (1866-1946). Wells was not at all enthusiastic about the typical Voysey heart on the front door. Voysey simply added a stalk and the heart became a spade – hence Spade House. Both men would have enjoyed the joke and the symbolism of the spade which traditionally has the same meaning as the hoe – the implement with which Adam tilled the Garden of Eden. It is a symbol of Spring.

At 33, Wells had already established a fairly considerable reputation with *The Time Machine* (1895), *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), *The Invisible Man* (1897) and *The War of the Worlds* (1898). If the epithet 'avant-garde' is not quite applicable to him, 'progressive' certainly is. Spade House, near Folkestone in Kent, was built on a sloping site – rather like that of New Place – a house for another literary figure, AMM Stedman, the publisher. Wells was to write *Kipps* (1905), *The War in the Air* (1908), *Tono Bungay* (1909) and *The History of Mr Polly* (1910) at Spade House.

The close contact which Wells had with Voysey during its design evidently inspired an interest in architecture. In *Kipps*, Book Three, The Housing Question, Wells describes the design of Kipps' house. Although Kipps' architect, with his cynical attitude over the matter of style, does not remotely resemble Voysey, Wells' description of how he made careful notes on his client's exact requirements does suggest Voysey. So too does his account of 'a small, alert individual', who sat 'with his hat and his bag exactly equidistant right and left'. The well-known photograph of Voysey in his study at The Orchard, Chorley Wood, with his papers neatly arranged in front of him, suggests that he was similarly meticulous to the point of obsessiveness.

Kipps' architect wanted to see a site plan in order that he could decide where to put the 'ugly side' of the house. Many Victorian houses had an ugly side or more often three. There was never an ugly side to a Voysey House.

Life in Spade House is described by MM Meyer, the Swiss governess of the Wells family, in *HG Wells and his Family*, London, 1955. Miss Meyer spoke of the beautiful garden and the 'homelike and unpretentious atmosphere' of Spade House. It is indeed an unpretentious house and typically Voysey. But it does not induce quite the same *frisson* of delight which Greyfriars or Broadleys do. An extra floor was added to the house in 1903, by Voysey, which has not had the devastating effect of the barbarous alterations to Greyfriars.

In the same year as he worked on Spade House, Voysey began work on the design of a house for his own family – The Orchard, Chorley Wood, Hertfordshire. He had just moved his office to Baker Street, conveniently situated near Marylebone Station, the London terminus of the Metropolitan Line which led to Chorley Wood. He became, in fact, a commuter. The Orchard represented, in material terms, a fairly considerable degree of success.

Voysey's own house, The Orchard, should be worthy of discussion. It is a typical Voysey House though less remarkable than Moorcrag which was not very much larger. The largest room, the dining room, is 15 foot by 20 foot. There is no sitting room, merely the often illustrated hall, with its small fireplace. There is no room which Mrs Voysey could have really considered her own.

While the Voysey marriage never completely foundered, husband and wife drew further apart as time went on. Increasingly, Voysey was to live on his own. At 60, when most men have come to depend upon the comforts associated with married life, he moved into a flat in St James' Street. He lived and worked there until a few months before his death, in Winchester – on February 12, 1941.

During the first five years of the 20th century Voysey was to design a number of houses. None had quite the authority of his best houses of the 1890s – the Forster house, Perrycroft, Greyfriars, Broadleys or Moorcrag.

Among the houses of this period are: Prior's Garth, near Puttenham, Surrey, 1900; The Pastures, North Luffenham, Leicestershire, 1901; Vodin, Pyrford, Surrey, 1902; Ty Bronna, Fairwater, near Cardiff, 1903; White Cottage, Wimbledon, 1903; Tilehurst, Bushey, Hertfordshire, 1903; Hollybank, Chorley Wood, 1903 – which was very near to The Orchard; Myholme, Bushey, Hertfordshire, 1904; Hollymount, Knotty Green, Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire, 1905; and The Homestead, Frinton-on-Sea, Essex, 1905.

The Pastures and The Homestead are the most memorable of these turn-of-the-century houses. The former has something of the look of the 19th-century model farm about it. There is half-timbering above the doors of the carriage-house which is reminiscent of Voysey's earlier houses such as the unbuilt cottage of 1885 and Walnut Tree Farm of 1890. Voysey always proceeded by small steps and never by quantum leaps. He intended the house to be built of stone from the locality but it is said that he was over-ruled by his client. Cost, no doubt, was the deciding factor.

The Homestead, Frinton-on-Sea is an entirely typical Voysey House. There are no major features about it which are not found in earlier houses. Nevertheless, it affirms the validity of the Voysey method. Contemporary photographs of the interiors show an austere house but Voysey seems closer to the Puritan ideal than he does to proto-modernity.

In 1902, Voysey designed what was to be his only industrial building, a factory for A Sanderson & Sons, the wallpaper manufacturers, in Chiswick, a West London suburb. It has been much illustrated and frequently discussed. Pevsner called it 'a clean and charming design'. It is clad externally with white glazed tiles – an idea which Voysey probably borrowed from Halsey Ricardo, another, though rather unorthodox, Arts and Crafts architect. Ricardo believed passionately that the external surfaces of buildings should be easily washable.

Compositionally the factory is very strong and it compares favourably in this respect with some of Voysey's best houses of the 1890s. Bands of low arched windows, like those found in early 19th-century South of England water-mills, are located within a simple grid defined by prominent buttresses. At first sight, these buttresses appear to be a medievalising feature but they in fact ingeniously conceal ventilating ducts. They terminate with the rather exaggerated, flattened caps which Voysey occasionally used on his furniture – like those on the bedposts on the double bed in The Orchard, or a dresser of 1898 which was shown in the exhibition *CFA Voysey: Architect and Designer 1857-1941*, Brighton Pavilion, 1978. These caps appear to derive from those which were to be found on the upright members of the small timber Century Guild exhibition stand which his friend AH Mackmurdo designed for an exhibition of 1886. The deep parapet, which links

the buttresses, curves elegantly – like the foot of The Orchard bed and the dresser and, indeed, the top of the Century Guild stand. Nevertheless, one does not for a moment think of the factory as merely a scaled-up piece of furniture.

Built on a claustrophobic site, the Sanderson factory, although it cannot be seen as a totality, as in Voysey's perspective, makes a dramatic impact. With very considerable skill, Voysey designed a building which possesses precisely those architectonic qualities that can be enjoyed from the restricted viewpoint of the very narrow access road.

A wallpaper factory does not call for great chimneys, or tall assembly sheds – for wallpaper making was, in the early years of the century, a craft. Voysey would have had been in particular sympathy with the Sandersons who were long-standing purchasers of his wallpaper designs. What would Voysey have made of designing factories for heavy industrial processes, as Hans Poelzig was to do very shortly after the Sanderson exercise?

Voysey was 49 in 1906. At the time it seemed that if all went well, he could have looked forward to at least another twenty or so years of work, like his father, who, at 78, was still preaching the optimistic, if not anodyne, message of Theism.

A mere 20 more years of designing would have taken Voysey right up to the time of what is so often said to have been the first real manifestation of the International Style – the *Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau* at the *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs* in Paris in 1925, by Le Corbusier.

There were to be only eight years left of practice. Voysey's career as a fully-fledged architect, someone, that is, sustained primarily by an architectural practice, was not a very lengthy one at just a little over a quarter of a century. Nothing like as long as the careers of William Butterfield, or Richard Norman Shaw, or Lutyens. To say nothing of Van de Velde, or Josef Hoffmann.

The outbreak of the Great War, in August 1914, effectively brought Voysey's career as an architect to an end. He continued until the 1930s, with at best only modest financial success, to design fabrics, carpets and wallpapers. But, however accomplished he was at these activities, they did not bring him the intellectual elation which architecture did.

Voysey's architectural career can be divided conveniently into four stages: the first, 1888-91, the stage during which he devised a highly individual architectural vocabulary; the second, 1892-95, when he was perfecting this vocabulary; the third, 1896-1905, the mature and most brilliant phase – when he designed Greyfriars and Broadleys; and the fourth, 1906-14, which should have been one been of consolidation. It is this stage which concerns us now. What did Voysey achieve between 1906 and 1914?

These years are, frankly, disappointing for anyone who admires Voysey. There is a certain lack of rigour in his work. His inventiveness seems to have been in eclipse – Pevsner and Nairn, remember, had written of how Voysey could make 'clichés out of his style'. He was possibly less fortunate with his clients than he had been in the late 1890s. This is not to say that Voysey lacked clients during these years. Far from it: in many ways his practice flourished. But sophisticated and sympathetic clients – like Julian Russell Sturgis of Greyfriars, or Currer Briggs of Broadleys – were harder to find.

A look at any of the many Edwardian books on the middle class house will show that new talents were emerging such as WH Bidlake, Walter H Brierley, E Guy Dawber, RS Lorimer, Mervyn Macartney, Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin, Robert Weir Schultz, Charles Spooner and Leonard Stokes. Then there were such men as Baillie Scott, who published an excellent and influential manual *Houses and Gardens*, in 1906.

Waiting in the wings was Lutyens, who seems to have been making the running in popular house books. (Five shillings or seven and sixpence a copy and illustrated with plans and excellent photographs.) By 1906 Voysey must have seemed no more than a talented architect among many.

Besides the fierce competition which Voysey faced as a result of the sheer numbers of more than competent designers of middle-class houses – an *embarras de richesse* if ever there was one – there was also the matter of style. A glance through any of the mid-Edwardian house books will reveal that Voysey, in terms of style, was somewhat isolated.

Baillie Scott, for all the underlying logicality of his architecture, favoured a more seductively picturesque approach than Voysey. Lutyens understood exactly how paraphrases of vernacular details could be surreptitiously employed to display wealth. (Only on one occasion, in 1897, with the unfortunate front elevation of Norney Grange, can Voysey ever have been said to have resorted to display for its own sake.) Furthermore, Lutyens was increasingly turning towards Palladianism. Other contemporaries, too, like Stokes, or Brierley, were also drawn to forms of classicism, if more eclectic and less forcefully expressed.

The Voysey style had probably been over-exposed. For ten years or so, Voysey had figured very prominently in *The Studio* and in its European equivalents. Voysey, who once reaped the benefits of fashionable taste, was now himself falling victim to its vagaries.

A list of Voysey's completed projects between 1906 and 1914 does not suggest, for a moment, that he was running out of clients. But none of these clients wanted from Voysey what he was demonstrably best at – the middle-sized country house built on a fine site such as Perrycroft, Greyfriars, Broadleys and Moorcrag.

Among the more important of the projects from 1906 until the outbreak of the Great War were : the remodelling of offices for the Essex and Suffolk Equitable Insurance Company, New Broad Street, London EC1, 1906-10; Littleholme, Guildford, for G Muntzer, 1906-07; another Littleholme, this time at Kendal, for AW Simpson, 1909; Lodge Style, Combe Down, for T Sturge Cotterell, 1909; a house in Belfast, Northern Ireland, for Robert Hetherington, 1911; and the Pleasure Ground, Kensal Green, London W10, for EJ Horniman, 1913. Muntzer and EJ Horniman had been long-standing clients. Voysey designed fabrics for Muntzer and had designed Lowicks, near Frensham, for Horniman, in 1894.

Of these projects, Littleholme, Kendal, for AM Simpson is the most noteworthy. Simpson was a discerning craftsman, designer and furniture maker. The name must have been suggested by Voysey. It is surely too much of a coincidence that two clients, Muntzer and Simpson, quite independently of each other decided to call their houses such a mawkish name.

Littleholme is small, with 24-inch thick walls of local stone. The stone is left, unlike neighbouring Broadleys or Moorcrag, exposed. Windows are small and the house has an austere air about it.

At a fleeting glance, Littleholme might be seen, because of its studied simplicity, as an early manifestation of modernism. This would be quite wrong. It is an Arts and Crafts house. Idiosyncratic, with its overscale but beautifully detailed porch, Littleholme must be regarded as one of Voysey's most successful houses.

An oddity, but also worthy of discussion, is Lodge Style also of 1909. The house is built of dressed stone as the client T Sturge Cotterell owned a quarry in the locality and wanted to supply his own stone. It is said that the eccentric Cotterell wanted a single-storey house – one hesitates to call it a bungalow – which resembled, as far as was possible on a miniature scale, Merton College, Oxford. Lodge Style was built around a college courtyard. With the exception of the arched porch, which was exactly like that at The Pastures, of 1901, Lodge Style would almost pass as a Gothic Revival parish school of the 1840s.

In 1914 Voysey returned again to the Gothic Revival language that he had learned in the office of Seddon in the 1870s. His competition entry for the City of Ottawa Government Buildings was in a late-medieval or Tudor style. Its mullioned windows bear

a resemblance to those of such buildings as the Charterhouse at Finsbury, which largely dates from the late 16th century. Voysey, it might be remembered, had much earlier demonstrated a fondness for Tudor details with his design for The Cottage of around 1885. The same might be said for the Teignmouth Sanatorium of 1884.

The Ottawa Government Buildings possess an unhappy mechanical quality which can be seen all too often in very late Gothic Revival architecture. It can be observed in Gilbert Scott's Liverpool Cathedral, as well as Charles Rennie Mackintosh's rejected designs for the same cathedral of 1903 which, for all their brilliant massing, are lifeless and unconvincing. Medieval architecture was extemporised and organic, as few but Ruskin truly understood. Voysey merely fails where his peers failed. This is not, however, to say the Arts and Crafts solution had failed.

At the outbreak of war in 1914, Voysey had three schemes for houses in hand. These were: a house at Wilmslow, Cheshire, for his brother, the Reverend EA Voysey; a largish and a rather fussy house at Ashmansworth, Berkshire; and a house at Thatcham Coldash, Berkshire. None of the projects was revived after the war.

All that Voysey actually built after the war were war memorials. One was constructed at Malvern Wells, Hereford in 1919, and the other at Potter's Bar, Hertfordshire, in 1920. There were also alterations to a house owned by AH Van Gruisen in Hambledon, Surrey, of 1919, and the re-modelling of a room in 29 Harley Street, London W1, for Leslie Paton, also in 1919.

Three post-war projects fell through. None, in truth, would have enhanced Voysey's reputation. These were a flat-roofed house with battlements, at Laughton, near Market Harborough, of 1920; a house at St Nicholas-at-Wade, Kent; and a large house, designed with dull symmetrical elevations for Carl Löw in 1922, to be built in Czechoslovakia. Voysey's only other overseas project seems to have been a house for a Dr Leigh Canney at Aswan, Egypt, of 1905, which photographs confirm was actually built.

In 1923 Voysey proposed a scheme for three identical residential tower blocks, with communal restaurants, for a site in Piccadilly which had become vacant because of the demolition of Devonshire House. The idea arose out of a competition organised to find an appropriate use for the site. The tower blocks are of 30 storeys and have light wells in their centres which would have been ineffective in dispersing light at the lower levels. At the corner of each of the blocks is an emergency staircase which is treated as a keep in a Norman castle. The blocks were taller than anything London knew at the time and show the unexpected influence of the North American skyscraper, These must have furnished Voysey with the idea of the tall building with medieval details. Voysey must surely have known of the work of such skyscraper architects as Warren and Wetmore through periodicals.

With the decline of his practice, Voysey went through a very lean time financially. This continued for many years, up to the end of his life. On April 17, 1918, he wrote to his friend Alexander Morton, the Carlisle textile manufacturer and a long-standing patron, of his 'terrible plight – could you give me anything to do?'

On April 26, 1929, he wrote to Morton again : 'I am in terribly low water and distracted by financial worry – I have not so much as sixty pounds left. No one will commission an architect of seventy-two'. In a postscript to a letter to Morton of June 11, he remarked : 'The Council of the RIBA have elected me a full Fellow, a compliment which will not prevent me from starving.'

Another letter to Morton, written a few days later, on June 19, 1929, reveals Voysey's pathetic situation:

> I must tell you that the manager of the Wallpaper Manufacturers Ltd told me yesterday that the retaining fee of £200 *per annum* must cease at the end of August next. But he added if I could induce the Weavers and Cotton Printers to contribute toward the retainer his company might consider contributing too. It is very painful to me to go begging on my own behalf. . . PS Without that £200 I should have to leave my flat, sell all my furniture and bury myself in a slum.

With no fees from architecture and barely a pittance to be earned from designing wallpapers and textiles – and that by no means secure – Voysey had fallen on hard times. There was no private money, as far as one knows. He appears to have retained little or nothing from his days of successful practice. The war years had probably eaten up what capital he had.

In the early 20s, when a flaccid neo-Georgianism prevailed, Voysey's architecture must have seemed as *passé* as *The Yellow Book* – that symbol of the 90s. Yet, unexpectedly, Voysey's reputation was to be revived in the 1930s.

The rehabilitation of Voysey appears to have first begun with a series of five anonymous articles in *The Architect* and *Building News* in 1927. The restoration of Voysey's reputation continued with a retrospective exhibition, at the Batsford Gallery in 1931. It was not until 1934 that William Morris was accorded a similar honour.

The Voysey exhibition evidently created something of a stir. It inspired the young John Betjeman to write about him in 'Charles Francis Annesley Voysey. The Architect of Individualism', *The Architectural Review*, LXX, 1931, pp 93-96.

Betjeman observed in his short article:

> Only in England is Voysey not taken at his true value, for he is dismissed as art nouveau or even 'arty' . . . The sincerity of Voysey's architecture refutes all slurs that it is deliberately unusual . . . To him aesthetic and moral values are inseparable . . . since he is an individualist, he considers the training of character to be of far greater importance than any knowledge of styles and books . . . Although we see many of his decorative details reproduced *ad nauseam* in the tea shop, waiting room and monster furnishing store, the simplicity to which he – as much if not more than William Morris – leads us back from the complex and futile revivalism, in which many architects still remain, has made itself felt at least on the continent.

Thus Betjeman – uncharacteristically perhaps – connects Voysey with the Modern Movement. It is not entirely easy to dismiss the connection, if one subscribes to that familiar but mythologising view of history which, in its naively Darwinian way, saw the history of architecture culminating, triumphing, in the Modern Movement. And try as we might to cast it aside, parts of this history still linger in our collective unconscious.

This same connection between Voysey and the Modern Movement is also assumed by Raymond McGrath in *Twentieth Century Houses* (London 1934), a readable Modern Movement primer evidently aimed at a wide audience.[1] Because of its historical interest, it deserves to be better known.

Besides Voysey, McGrath elevates other architects to the status of pioneer proto-Moderns. These include: Charles Ashbee, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, George Walton, Baillie Scott and his later partner Edward Beresford, as well as, Adams Holden and Pearson, and, most unexpectedly of all, Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, who is represented by a commonplace neo-Georgian house.[2]

'We rightly put Ashbee, Voysey, Mackintosh and Walton first in order among the architects of the last thirty years,' wrote McGrath, 'not because of the value of the buildings produced by them, but because they did much of our hard work for us.' This is the archetypical Moderno-centric view which began to be questioned more than a couple of decades ago.

Nikolaus Pevsner, in his *Pioneers of Modern Design*, which first appeared in 1936 with a title which indicated its leitmotif. *Pioneers of the Modern Movement* made more references to Voysey than he did to any other 'pioneer'. Pevsner says of Voysey, when writing of Broadleys, the Windermere house of 1898:

> Here . . . was a mind equally averse to the picturesque tricks of the Shaw school and the preciousness of Art Nouveau.

> From [its] centre bay with its completely unmoulded mullions and transoms, from these windows cut clean and sheer into the wall, access to the architectural style of today could have been direct . . .

The case of Voysey was a particularly infuriating one for historians of the Modern Movement. If only Voysey had been able to make that leap – such a small leap – to Modernity.

Reyner Banham, in *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*, published first in 1960, has things to say about Voysey too:

> . . . it is common knowledge that Voysey's own intention was only to improve and continue the native cottage vernacular of Southern England. He had no conception of the importance of what he was doing (he seems to have had the almost pathological modesty of some English provincial intellectuals) and angrily deprecated any attempt to link his name with the Modern Movement. Under the circumstances it should not surprise us that his practices and aims should be at variance with one another. His work excels by the sharp definition of one smooth plain surface from another, the fine precision of his arises and the bold geometry of his forms, and yet he was quoted in 1906 as saying that he preferred: 'The soft effect of the outline of an old building where the angles were put up by eye, compared with the mechanical effect of the modern drafted style.'

Banham, like McGrath, or Pevsner, had all dutifully followed the Modernist line. But who in 1960, apart from John Brandon-Jones, who is part of the Arts and Crafts apostolic succession, would have dared to say otherwise?

It is not the wrongness of McGrath's, Pevsner's, or Banham's views which strikes one – for being wrong on some counts at least is the just prerogative of the best historians – but the fact that Voysey's *oeuvre* is valued principally as representing an interim stage between the Arts and Crafts Movement and the Modern Movement. Voysey was the representative of an inventive and autonomous architectural culture. He must be judged as such.

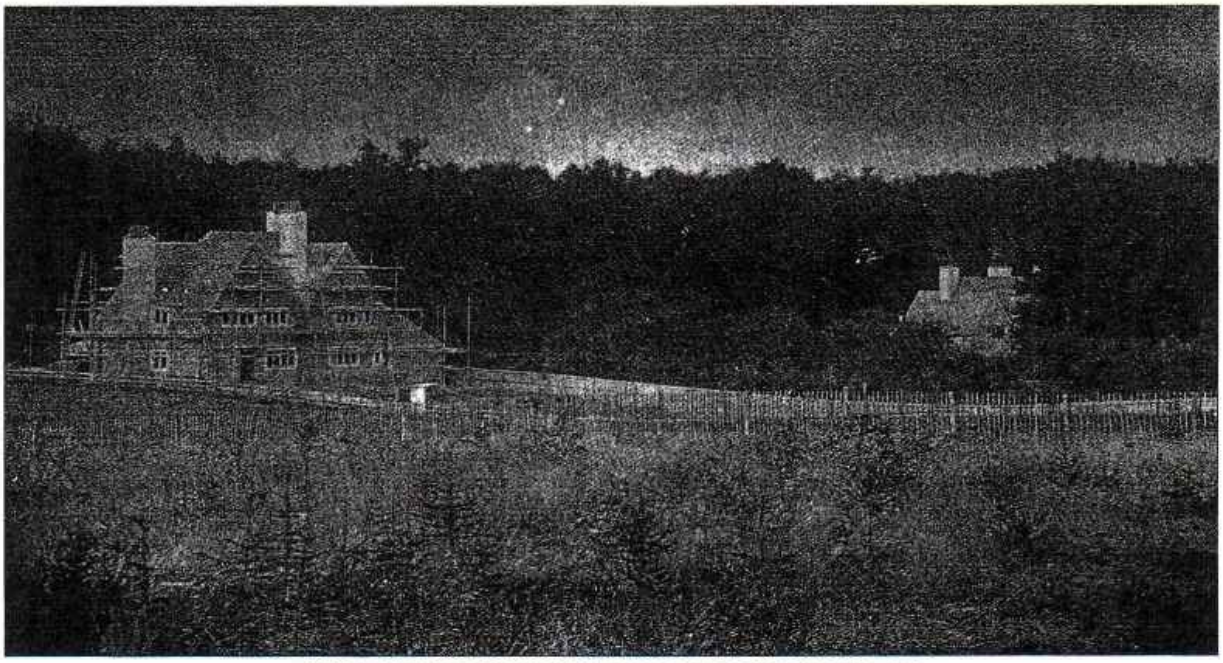
Towards the end of Voysey's career the honours came. In 1924, at the age of 67, he was made Master of the Art Workers' Guild, which to the present day has staunchly defended the values of the Arts and Crafts. In 1936 he was one of the earliest designers to be honoured with the title 'Designer for Industry' by the Royal Society of Arts. In 1940, probably too late for him to savour fully, he was awarded his greatest honour – the gold Medal of the Royal Institute of British Architects. At the beginning of a vile war Voysey's innocence and his unfailing belief in art seemed impossibly remote from the realities of the 20th century. For Voysey, who had grown to maturity during the 1880s, when bourgeois Aestheticism erupted, believed in art as passionately as Walter Pater, but without Pater's hedonism. Art was an entirely benign and therapeutic power for Voysey – as it had been for William Morris.

Might it still be just a little too early to evaluate Voysey's achievements? For if a 'green' school develops, his architecture will be studied with the utmost seriousness. One can say with conviction that he has become a myth not unlike Roland Barthes' Eiffel Tower. Who else, among British architects, has attained mythic status? Possibly Inigo Jones, Wren, Hawksmoor, Adam, Soane, Pugin, Butterfield, Shaw, and Lutyens. But Voysey is more ordinary and less remote than all of these. He is the most approachable of great architects. This is his achievement.

Notes

1 Raymond McGrath, 1903-77, an Australian, did some interesting work in the 1930s; he was co-ordinator of the successful interior schemes for the BBC's Broadcasting House and the designer of an adventurous, part-circular, house of 1937 at Chertsey in Surrey.

2 Incidentally, FRS Yorke in *The Modern House in England*, London, 1937, ilustrates houses by the following precursors of the Modern Movement: Philip Webb's The Red House, 1859; Voysey's The Orchard, 1900; and Mackintosh's Hill House, Helensburgh, 1902-03. Yorke's real Moderns are: Peter Behrens, Thomas S Tait, Amyas Connell, George Checkley and Colin Lucas.



HOLLYBANK UNDER CONSTRUCTION WITH THE ORCHARD IN BACKGROUND, 1903