

NOTES ON COUNTRY AND SUBURBAN HOUSES DESIGNED BY C. F. A. VOYSEY

It is not so very many years since it was almost a truism among the architectural profession that the architect who wandered from the strait and narrow path and took to designing furniture, wall-papers, and so forth, had committed a species of professional suicide. Doubtless it was the late E. W. Godwin who more than any other dissipated this absurd theory, and the "new architect" nowadays designs the interior, including furniture, hangings, and so forth, of his house, quite as much as he does the exterior. No one in our day, perhaps, has been so completely successful in this respect as Mr. C. F. A. Voysey. To introduce Mr. Voysey to the readers of *THE STUDIO* were absurd, so familiar are they with what I may almost call, with-

out laying myself open to a charge of exaggeration, his epoch-making work in the decorative field. His furniture, with its broad simple effects, its reliance on proportion, its eschewal of useless ornament, and its strikingly original lines, has helped to form a school of its own, while his wall-papers and textiles strike an equally personal and individual note. Mr. Voysey is a designer who is guided, as one need not study him long to perceive, by very definite and certain principles, and, as the accompanying illustrations will serve to show, his architectural work is to just the same extent subservient to these same principles. Simplicity of thought and perfection of proportion distinguish it from the ordinary architecture of the day. Notable, too, is the deliberate avoidance of style; and here it is that only one or two of contemporary architects at the most are working to the same end as Mr. Voysey, and endeavouring, by an educated distrust of following too closely on the lines laid down by

the craftsmen of the past, to so impress what they do with their own individualities, as to present us with a nineteenth-century architecture. Whether they be right or wrong, it seems at least certain that by no slavish adherence to tradition has any living, breathing architectural style of bygone centuries come into existence, valuable and necessary as have been the lessons taught by the artists of previous generations.

But let us consider Mr. Voysey's work rather more in detail. One's first impression on glancing at the view of the house at North Tooting Common (page 162), is of the skill with which so many apparently uncorrelated features have been without effort harmonised and "pulled together," to use a slang phrase, giving an air of breadth and repose to what might so easily have been an uneasy arrangement of wall space, roof,



FROM A SKETCH IN WATER-COLOURS

BY ALFRED PARSONS, A.R.A.

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and window. The plan of this suburban house is also marked by simplicity and ingenuity, one of its leading features being the skill with which the stable has been designed so as to be under the same roof as the rest of the house, and yet be efficiently cut off from the living portion. The best view is to the north, yet Mr. Voysey has sensibly placed the chief rooms so as to look south, while the study which Mr. Essex chiefly uses during the forenoon catches the rays of the morning sun. The long stretch of reposeful roof is of green slates, the dressings to windows and doors are of Bath stone, while the walls are of rough-cast. Mr. Voysey's preference for this last-named form of finish—which is marked, by the way—is based, so he tells me, mainly on its economy. He considers a nine-inch brick wall faced with cement rough-cast is as warm and weather-tight as any much more expensive construction; but, at the same time, I imagine he is unconsciously attracted by the artistic value of these great spaces of cream-coloured surface, possessing a texture of their own, and peculiarly lending themselves to Mr. Voysey's stylistic sympathies.

Of a totally different character to Mr. Essex's house is Broadleys, Windermere, a house built for A. Currer Briggs, Esq. Here, as will be seen from the perspective view, we have a country house with a dignity all its own, yet based again

on the striking simplicity of conception. The hall, that essential feature of a country house, runs up into the roof, with a long glazed gallery at one end. The characteristic windows here were suggested to Mr. Voysey by the charming views which the surrounding country affords, while the great bay by which the drawing-room is lighted prevents the interior being in any way darkened by the verandah, which, as shown by the plan, runs along one end of it. From the terrace in front of the house the ground falls down to the lake, affording a delightful prospect of which full advantage is taken by the window arrangement.

Another north-country house is that for W. E. Rowley, Esq., at Glassonby, Kirkoswald, in the county of Cumberland (page 160). Here the architect has taken advantage of local material, and in a subtle way, I think, of local feeling. The result is a house which is a study in colour, with its purplish-red sandstone walls, and which also seems, to me, at least, to speak the "north countree" in its almost puritanical severity. It stands, I am told, on a most beautiful site, overlooking a river and a wild rocky country with which its sturdy uncompromising straightforwardness seems peculiarly to harmonise. Here, again, the bays were considered essential on account of the views. There is a fine entrance hall from which dining-room and drawing-room lead off, while another



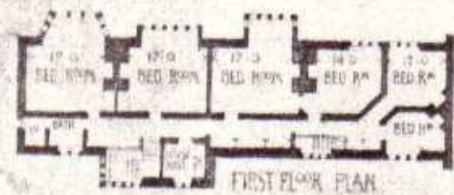
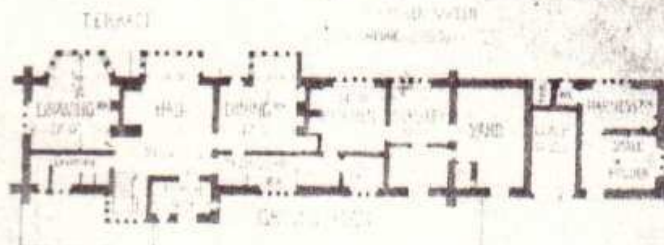
COUNTRY HOUSE

DESIGNED BY C. E. A. VOYSEY

PROPOSED HOUSE AT WINDERMERE, LANCASHIRE
FOR H. RICKARDS ESQUIRE C. F. A. VOYSEY ARCHITECT



S.E. VIEW



FIRST FLOOR PLAN



COUNTRY HOUSE DESIGNED
BY C. F. A. VOYSEY

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feature of the plan is the care with which children's and servants' quarters are cut off from the other part of the house.

In Mr. Rickard's house at Windermere (page 159) we have an ideal bachelor's country quarters, the plan so arranged that all the service of the house can be comfortably carried on, access gained to store cupboard, and so on, without infringing on the bachelor's private domain.

The site of this house, also, Mr. Voysey characterised as superb, and assures us his chief care was to endeavour to harmonise his house with its surroundings. A fine site, in his estimation, helps to create a beautiful house if the architect is careful not to come into competition with the country surrounding him, but endeavours to subject himself to nature's architecture. It is, I think, this constant subjection to nature as the chief source of inspiration which is one of Mr. Voysey's leading characteristics as a decorative designer; and one can see by studying these views of Mr. Rickard's house how admirably he has applied the same principle to his architecture. One can imagine how this design, with its mingling of reticence and modest assertion, would appear to be a part of its surroundings. It is this appearance of naturalness, of having grown by degrees rather than having been put there at a single stroke, which is the greatest charm a house in the country can possess, whether it be a simple Surrey cottage or a weather-stained grey stone hall with the traditions of centuries clinging around it. Reverting once more

to this Windermere house of Mr. Voysey's, it is finished in his favourite rough-cast, roofed with green slates, while the chimney-pots which crown the sturdy chimney-stacks are coloured black, no shade of red having by experiment been found to properly harmonise.

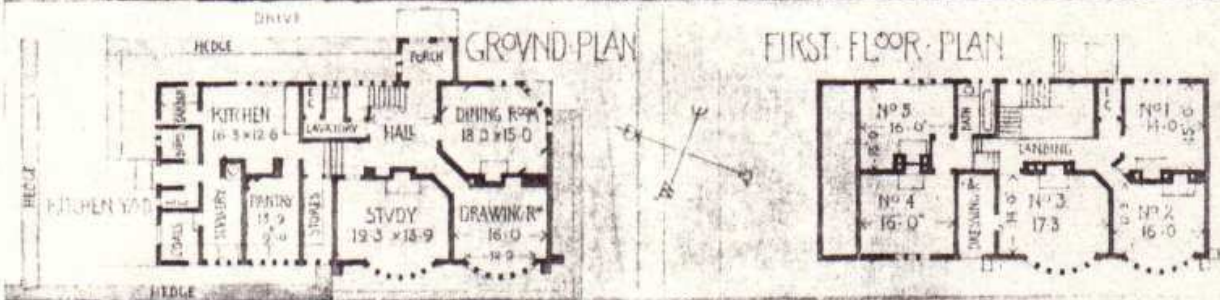
Travelling south to the pleasant lanes and well-wooded heights of Sussex and Surrey, we have first Mr. Newbold's house at Westmeston, the lower view of which, as given on the accompanying full-page illustration (page 163), shows us Mr. Voysey at his very best. There are few who could have treated the long stretch of unbroken and unrelieved wall space so efficiently, in the relations of wall and window openings, as here appears, while even what one might otherwise feel inclined to stigmatise as the baldness of the porch appears to fit naturally into the scheme. Effective, too, is the garden view of the same wing of the building, with its arched openings—utilitarian, yet strikingly decorative—which give light and air to the tradesmen's entrance corridor. Turning to the plan of this house, we find the staircase well lit by the lantern-light, which offers a picturesque external feature.

I may say in passing that Mr. Voysey characterises 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



HOUSE FOR W. E. R. WILEY ESQ. AT GLASSONBY, YORKSHIRE. C. F. A. VOYSEY ARCHT.

HOUSE FOR C.S. LOCH ESQ^{RE} AT OXSHOTT C.F. VOYSEY ARCHITECT



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lofty room a low room, he avers, needs much less window space. It is not the mere cubic contents which have to be taken into account; the real essential is the amount of reflecting surface in the room itself. In a low room the entire ceiling acts as a reflector, and throws the light downwards into every corner of the interior. This, again, is, as a rule, supplemented by Mr. Voysey through the employment of a deep whitewashed, or otherwise light-tinted, frieze as a feature in his decoration of the wall space. I may say in passing, as might be gathered from the above remarks, that Mr. Voysey is not only an advocate for light, but also for low rooms. They are pleasanter to live in, according to him, they are cheaper, they lend themselves more easily to the securing of pleasing proportion in design, and they are, contrary to general opinion, quite as easily ventilated as lofty ones. 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 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 architect, but the latter should be supreme touching artistic design and proportion.

Mr. Voysey's Surrey house is that at Oxshott, for C. S. Loch, Esq. (page 161). It lacks, perhaps, the charm of the long, low, rather straggling character of Mr. Newbold's, but it is a design of singular unity, with sufficient diversity to render it very interesting. Its principal interior feature is the ingeniously arranged octagonal dining-room, one of its angles being due to the necessity for gaining easy access to the drawing-room from the hall, the window forming another, while wine-cupboards and such-like utilitarian features form the two others. Though not giving one the idea of a large house, it is so planned as to be exceedingly commodious, two servants' and a child's room being arranged for in the attic.

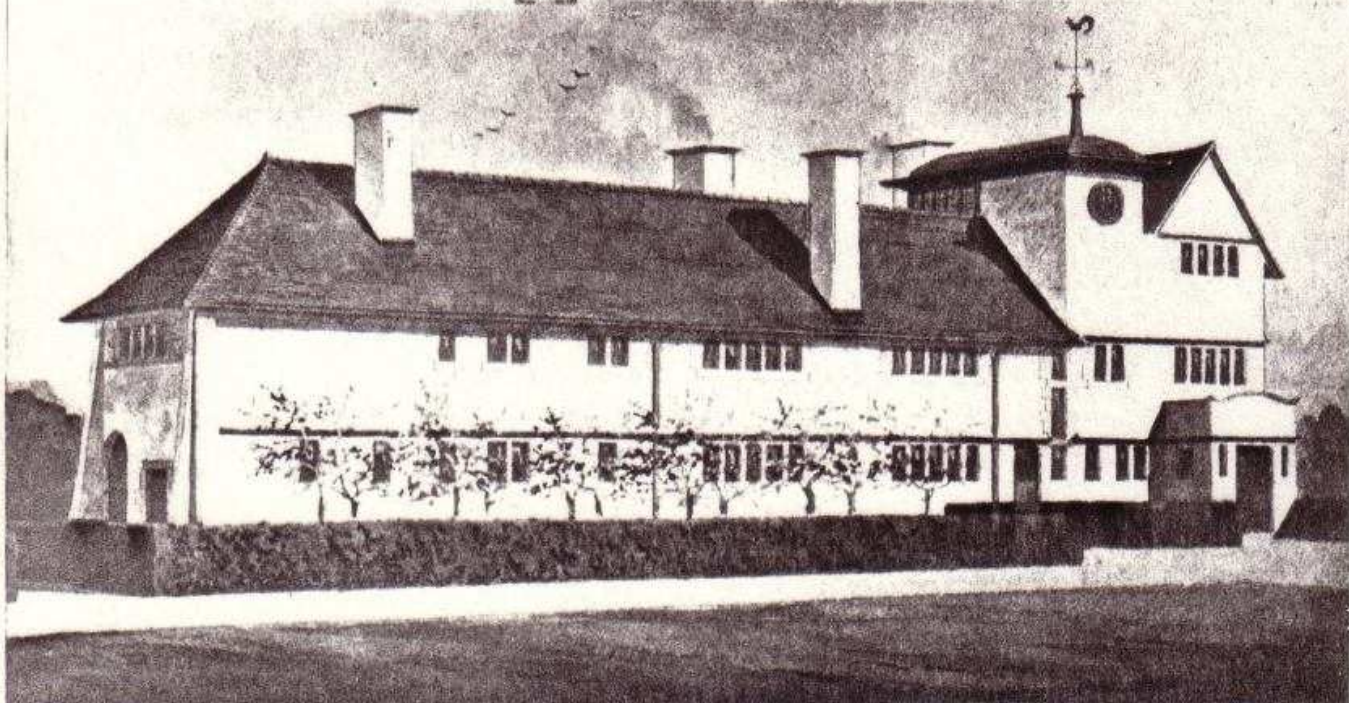
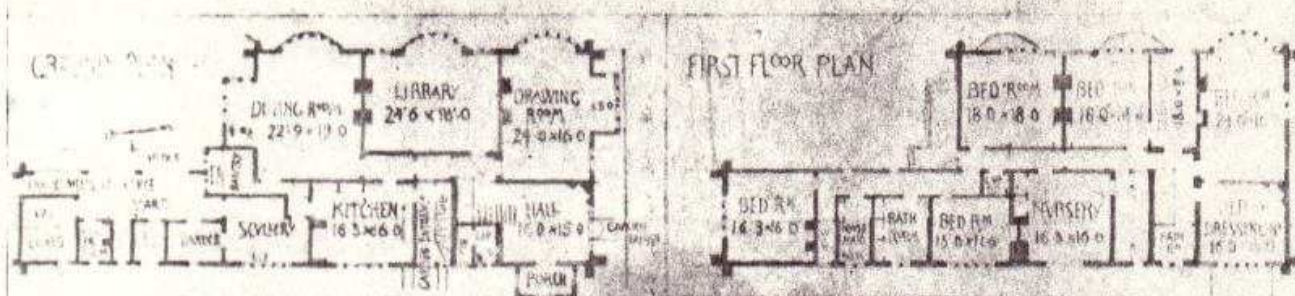
I have thus run through with somewhat casual comment the little group of houses which *THE STUDIO* is fortunate enough to be able to illustrate. They will at all events serve the purpose in themselves of reintroducing Mr. Voysey to *STUDIO* readers in the character of a designer of houses. It will be observed that these buildings all belong to the one class—the more or less simple and economical country house. It is, however, in this direction that Mr. Voysey's talents as an architect have down to the present been conspicuously displayed. It is, indeed, a very characteristic side of the general architecture of our own



PROPOSED HOUSE FOR R. W. ESSEX ESQ^{RE} AT NORTH TOOTING COMMON S.W.

PROPOSED HOUSE AT WESTMESTON SUSSEX FOR A NEWBOLD ESQUIRE

C. F. A. VOYSEY
ARCHITECT



COUNTRY HOUSE DESIGNED
BY C. F. A. VOYSEY

day; but it is none the less to be regretted that the principles Mr. Voysey and a few others have put into such excellent practice as regards the moderate-sized house should not yet, save in one or two instances, have been displayed in regard to buildings of a more monumental character. I do not fail to recognise that in one or two instances London street architecture has been enriched by works which speak directly to us in the nineteenth-century architectural language. But they are regrettably exceptional. If one can compose, in the architectural language of the nineteenth century, the dainty lyric overflowing with domestic sentiment, why not the stately ode surcharged with nobility of thought and idea? If, as these examples are, I hope, sufficient to demonstrate, there really is a nineteenth-century architectural style which is not a mere *pastiche* of bygone designers' details and fancies, is it not to be regretted that future ages will have to search for it, not in our public buildings, and in the principal streets of our cities, but in the unassuming house or cottage in more or less remote corners of the country-side?

HORACE TOWNSEND.