

Charles F. A. Voysey's Forgotten Designs for Southern Moravia

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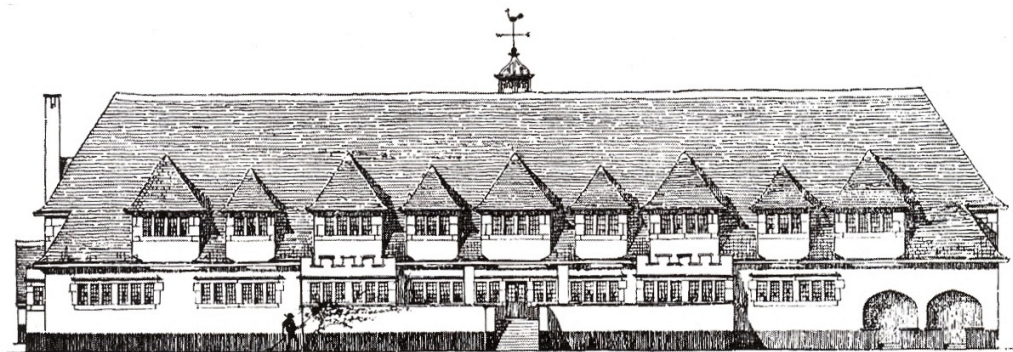
ZAPOMENUTÉ PROJEKTY CHARLESE F. A. VOYSEYHO PRO JIŽNÍ MORAVU. Jihlavský podnikatel Karl Löw (1849–1930) byl na přelomu 19. a 20. století vlastníkem největších textilních továren na západní Moravě. V mládí strávil dva roky v Anglii a po návratu zahájil ve svém podniku výrobu anglického soukenného zboží. Po celý život byl obdivovatelem britské kultury a životního stylu. Jeden z hlavních tvůrců architektury Arts & Crafts Charles Francis Annesley Voysey (1857–1941) pro něj v roce 1912 navrhl rodinnou hrobku a v roce 1922 příměstské sídlo. Tyto návrhy nebyly u nás známé a angličtí badatelé je považovali za nerealizované. Venkovský dům Karla Löwa byl však zčásti uskutečněn, a to v Henčově u Jihlavy. Zbudována byla pouze hospodářská křídla, při čemž provádějící stavitelé poněkud změnili původní projekt. Dílo si přesto zachovalo hlavní rysy architektury Arts & Crafts i Voyseyho osobního stylu. Poměrně nízká stavba, citlivě umístěná do přírodního prostředí, je završena strmou a široce přečnávající střechou s vikýři a štíty. Zdi z neomítnutého kamene jsou vyvedeny bez soklu, okenní otvory prolomeny nepravidelně a sdruženy do horizontálních pásů. Příznačný je dojem ochrany a klidu, dosažený nízkými liniemi a měkkými tvary, jenž byl pro Voyseyho hlavním atributem obytného domu, jeho podstatnou spirituální kvalitou. Také velmi osobité pojetí Löwovy hrobky s Ukřížovaným od německého sochaře Felixe Pfeiffera, dokončené na jihlavském hřbitově roku 1915, dovoluje připsání díla Voyseymu. Z jeho oblíbených motivů se zde uplatňuje horizontálně roztažený lomený oblouk, jakož i dekorativní vzory – archaicky stylizované rostliny, vinné hrozny a ptáci. Nelze vyloučit, že se britský architekt nějakým způsobem podílel rovněž na návrhu obytného domu a Elsiny brány do henčovské obory, nebo dokonce na křídle s rytířskou síní, přistavěném k továrně Löwů v Heleníně. Toto dílo se značně liší od Voyseyho známých realizací. Je však možné, že stárnoucí a opomíjený tvůrce, který v Anglii již deset let neobdržel významnější zakázku, byl ochotný k nebyvalým ústupkům zákazníkovi.

Dedicated to Marie Schenková

IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 19th CENTURY, the Arts & Crafts movement was a powerful generator of ideas that had a fundamental impact on modern Western architecture and design. Roughly from the time of the world exhibition in London in 1862, England was at the centre of the reform of these branches in Europe and even in North America. Applied arts in the Habsburg monarchy and Germany borrowed from the British movement the idea of the revival of the traditional unity of arts and crafts, as well as the rational relationship between modern industrial materials and artistic form. In these countries, criticism of stylistic chaos and the need for reliable models of contemporary architecture led to enthusiasm for the English house. The British type of accommodation was also appealing in that it prioritised practical concerns and a connection with nature over ostentation; and in that it gave shape to the prescribed functions and the customs of the inhabitants using simple artistic means. Interest in the lifestyle and architecture of the British Isles reached a peak at the beginning of the 20th century thanks to the writings of the German architect Hermann Muthesius.¹ Inspired by his work,

modern artists in the Danubian monarchy began to design family homes along the lines of the British 'cottages'. Not only the architecture of these buildings, but also all the furnishings were based on these intellectual and formal principles. The advocates of the new approach were mostly students of Otto Wagner – in Austria, Josef Hoffmann, in Bohemia, Jan Kotěra, in Moravia, Leopold Bauer. The British influence gained prominence through a number of journals, first and foremost the London publication *The Studio*. It spread further through direct exposure to the work of Charles R. Mackintosh, who, in 1900, participated in the eighth exhibition of the Viennese Secession. Also influential was the Darmstadt competition for the 'house for the art-lover' in the following year, at which, in addition to the renowned Scottish architect, the equally famous Mackay Hugh Baillie Scott also attracted attention.²

Surprisingly little is known about the personal connections between Czech and British artists in this transitional period – as if the appeal of French modernism precluded the possibility of such connections. It seemed highly unlikely that English architects would have worked for Bohemian or Moravian customers. Yet



SOUTH-ELEVATION-REVISED-PLAN-Nº1-

HOUSE AT IGLAU-CZECHOSLOVAKIA-C.F.A. VOYSEY, ARCHT. 73. ST. JAMES S. S. W.



NORTH-ELEVATION-REVISED-PLAN-Nº1-



EAST-ELEVATION-REVISED-PLAN-Nº1- X This window should be the same as west end of corridor

1-3/ Charles F. A. Voysey, design of the country seat of Karl Löw in Helenín, southern façade, northern façade, eastern façade

1922

Reproduction: The Builder, 1923

persistent research has yielded surprising discoveries: one of the main creators of Arts & Crafts architecture, Charles Francis Annesley Voysey, designed the family tomb and suburban seat of the Jihlava entrepreneur Karl Löw. The first design is only noted in the inventory of the architect's work; the second, however, is documented by eight drawings in his papers at the London Royal Institute of British Architects. Three of them present a preliminary design for a country home and the others his reworked version.³ Voysey made the design in 1922 and published it the following year in the journal *The Builder*.⁴ Czech scholars did not notice the design and their English colleagues considered it unlikely that any of Voysey's ideas would have been implemented in such distant parts.

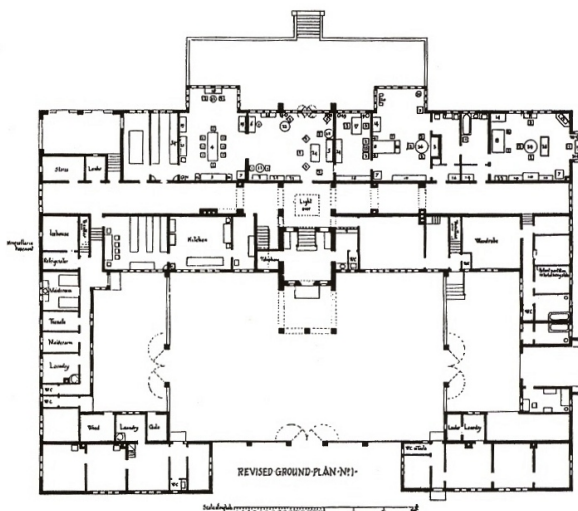
Karl Löw

The industrialist who commissioned the design for the country house from the famous London architect was, at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the owner of the largest textile factories in western Moravia. The business, which he ran for more than half a century, was founded in 1846 by his father Adolf (13 February 1824, Uherský Ostroh – 23 February 1883, Brno).⁵ The origins of the family firm were very humble, going back literally to a single home loom. After seven thin years, however, Adolf Löw and his brother-in-law Friedrich Schmal allegedly owned almost a hundred such devices; in 1858, they started up the first steam machine in a new factory in the Brno Cejl. Two years later, they founded a manufacturing company in Helenín near Jihlava and in 1870 acquired another factory in nearby Malý Beranov.⁶ Karl Löw was born in Brno on 28 May 1849 and started to work for the family business when he was eighteen. On his own initiative, he first set out for England, where he was employed for two years as a worker in wool factories. Upon his return, he gradually took over the management of the firm. He further strengthened his position by marrying the daughter of Friedrich Schmal. He acquired new machines for the business and initiated production of the so-called English cloth goods. Later, he also focused on printed fabric, employing French workers and masters to make it in his factories. Löw's production strategy was based on the thorough specialisation of the various sectors, turning them 'into completely separate branches, equipped with all the necessary technological equipment and with all the separate processes run independently'.⁷ He also manufactured fashionable goods and women's ready-made clothes, but his business success came mainly from large army orders. It is said that in peace-time, Löw's company covered 32 percent of all military requirements for cloth and blankets in Austria-Hungary.⁸ In addition to the domestic market, the firm exported its products mainly to the Balkans and the Orient, as well as to Australia and South America. Successful sales funded the major expansion of the company. In 1882, Karl Löw, at the request of the Austrian ministry of trade, founded a factory with two hundred weaving looms in Dačice. Shortly thereafter, he became a partner in a new company in Łódź in Poland. In 1890 he set up a factory in Žilina; and in 1912 he purchased

others in Krahulčí near Telč. The distant subsidiaries, however, were not very profitable and Löw gradually got rid of them.⁹

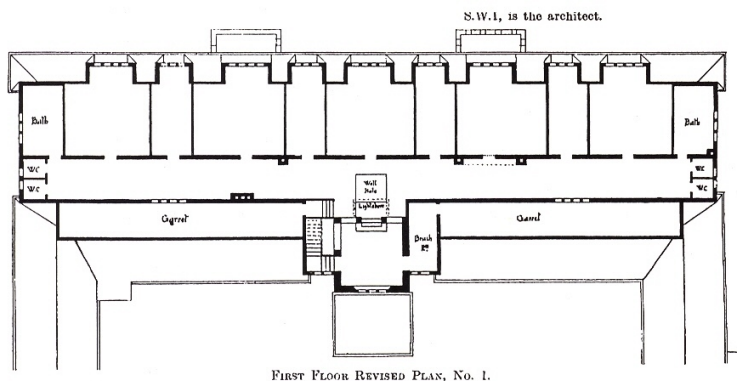
The enterprises in Brno, Helenín and Malý Beranov made up the core of the textile empire. According to the official data for 1898, there were about 3,000 workers, sixty masters and one hundred clerks. The overall turnover of the firm was about 4,000,000 guilder annually. Later statistics mentioned as many as 4,000 workers and manufactured goods worth more than 5,000,000.¹⁰ In 1900, Karl Löw transferred his seat from Brno to Helenín, sold the oldest family factory to the firm Himmelreich & Zwicker and built what was allegedly the largest factory of its kind in Europe near Jihlava. There, he employed about 2,000 workers, thirty-two masters and an equal number of clerks.¹¹ The originally small factory colony in Helenín grew to a village with 448 inhabitants and eighty buildings, of which twenty-one belonged to the factory.¹² In 1875, Löw founded a gas works in the village, and in 1879 a railway siding. In 1884, he ran a horse-team line between the manufacturing buildings in Helenín and Malý Beranov. In 1918, he introduced electricity to the entire enterprise. His steam power plant also supplied current to part of Jihlava. In 1919, he built his own road from the village to the main train station in Jihlava. At his own expense, he also opened a school there, as well as a chapel, a post and telegraph office.¹³

Karl Löw allegedly ended his two-year stay in England in 1869.¹⁴ In the same year, the so-called supplementary convention to the English trade agreement was



4/ Charles F. A. Voysey, design of the country seat of Karl Löw in Helenín, ground plan of ground floor 1922

Reproduction: *The Builder*, 1923



FIRST FLOOR REVISED PLAN, No. 1.

5/ Charles F. A. Voysey, design of the country seat of Karl Löw in Helenín, ground plan of attic 1922

Reproduction: *The Builder*, 1923

concluded, opening up Austrian markets to the cheap products of the British textile industry.¹⁵ At that time, the English wool trade ceased to be merely a model for Central European enterprises and became their fierce competitor. In the situation that ensued, the benefits of Löw's industrial espionage soon became clear; in England, 'after overcoming great difficulties, he managed to find work as an ordinary worker in factories and to gain experience of the production process and the necessary machine equipment'.¹⁶ This adventure was the only way to save his business and make it prosper. The young factory owner made his business competitive internationally. Thanks to him, Austrian production of women's ready-made clothes at least ceased to be dependent on imports. In addition, his stay in England remained a permanent source of inspiration for Löw. Thanks to the perspective that he gained there, for the rest of his life he transcended the stereotype of the ordinary enterprising businessman; that is, of a skilful, but rather boorish amasser of riches. The annals that documented his successes extolled Löw's 'brilliant organisational talent, energy and productiveness, tireless creativity, daring entrepreneurial instinct and keen understanding of economics'.¹⁷ In the obligatory eulogies, however, one can detect qualities of another sort. His ambition clearly was not satisfied by success in business. The Jihlava factory owner apparently 'promoted community and state interests, strove, with rare unselfishness, to improve the position of his workers and clerks, and made contributions to humanitarian projects'.¹⁸ As an enlightened entrepreneur, Karl Löw set up colonies with little houses for workers and clerks at his factories. He built a model community in Helenín, with eight houses for clerks and thirty for workers, as well as fifteen buildings for single workers. 'These apartments are comfortable, cosily furnished, healthy and cheap,' official bulletins proclaimed.¹⁹ Near his factories he also founded public parks. He had trees planted around his factory colonies and they thus had a reputation for being the healthiest and best communities in the region. He also set up sickness and accident insurance for his employees. He supported a wide variety of associations and foundations.²⁰ British social reformers, who argued that care for the well-being of the proletariat should be linked to the prosperity of businesses, clearly found in him a diligent student.

The commemorative article published after the industrialist's death on 19 April 1930 emphasised yet another dimension of his personality: 'Karl Löw was an eminent cultural pioneer, an aesthete of profound enjoyment of life'.²¹ The Jihlava factory owner grew up as a self-made man who had only a 'technical education'. He raised his descendants in the same way. He was, however, well-read and well-travelled. He took part in international exhibitions, at which his firm collected medals. As a government expert, he was sent to England in 1880 and Moscow in 1882.²² German, English and French were commonly spoken in his home. Contemporaries described his luxuriously furnished house as full of books and art collections. 'The select library testified to the broad outlook of its owner and the truly magnificent artworks adorning his residential and reception rooms indicated a sophisticated taste'.²³ The inventory of possessions compiled for the inheritance proceedings documented an unusual number of antiques – in addition to small objects, also dozens of paintings, sculptures, carpets and tapestries, as well as Gothic altarpieces and carvings. In the financial assessment of the estate, which was deliberately undervalued, the value of the antiques was estimated at the considerable sum of 272,000 crowns. The art-loving factory owner liked to attend auctions in Vienna; in his will, he described this collection as his life-long serious interest.²⁴ The villa in Helenín was also an important social and cultural centre. His frequent guests included the magnificent tenor from the court opera Leo Slezak; a number of accounts of his visits and performances at the Löw's home have survived.²⁵ The Jihlava patron often stayed in Vienna, where he had a rented hotel suite permanently at his disposal. In terms of cultural preference, he was, however, an anglophile. According to his great-grandson, Vítězslav Horn, who is still alive, Löw subscribed to numerous British journals, in particular architectural journals. In his old age, he added a knight's hall with a hearth in the late Victorian style to his seat. Shortly thereafter, he decided to build 'an English seat' in the woods beyond Helenín.²⁶ Just as the beginnings of the Arts & Crafts movement on the British Isles were closely linked with the development of the textile industry, in Moravia the representative of this branch of production became the most important recipient of English reform ideas.²⁷

Charles Francis Annesley Voysey

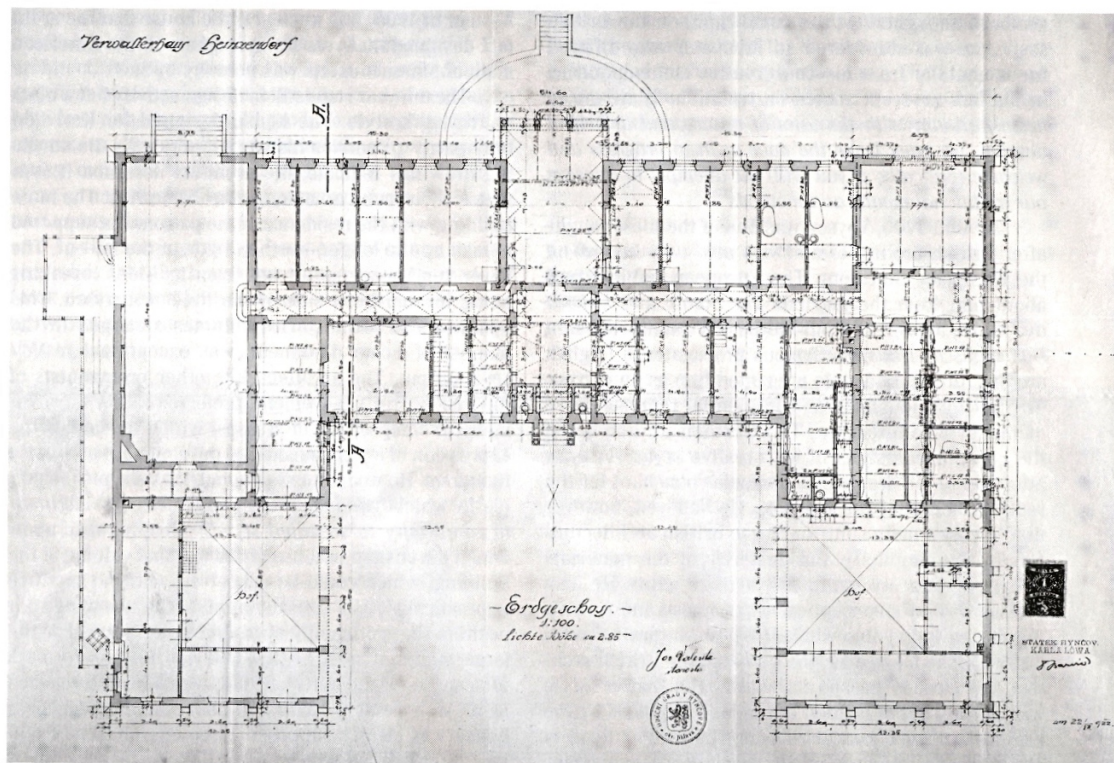
The British architect was eight years to the day younger than his Moravian client. He was born into the family of an Anglican priest in Yorkshire on 28 May 1857. Like Löw, he did not have a thorough formal education, but trained under the architects John P. Sheddon and George Devey. He worked on his own from the end of 1881 on. He designed buildings, but also wallpaper, carpets and textile patterns. To begin with, his design was influenced by the work of Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo; the similarity can be seen in the bright colourful compositions using natural motifs. As an architect, he focused almost exclusively on residential homes. The country seats that he designed for members of the middle class were rather low buildings, topped by steep and broadly overhanging roofs with dormer windows and gables. In these, Voysey revived and adapted the timeless qualities of the British 'cottage' to the new demands. The ideals that he adhered to were humble, but solid: a cosy space with pleasant proportions and white-washed walls, simple oak furniture, furnishings with no ornament or any other extravagance, but instead flowers in vases or a rose trellis. The impression of peace and refuge was very important, as was the connection between the building and the natural surroundings. The distinctive features of this architecture were established early on. They included: coarse plaster, an overhanging storey supported by piers, windows joined in horizontal strips, distinctive details such as deep eaves supported by slender metal corbels. From this deliberately limited repertoire, the architect created an almost unlimited number of vari-

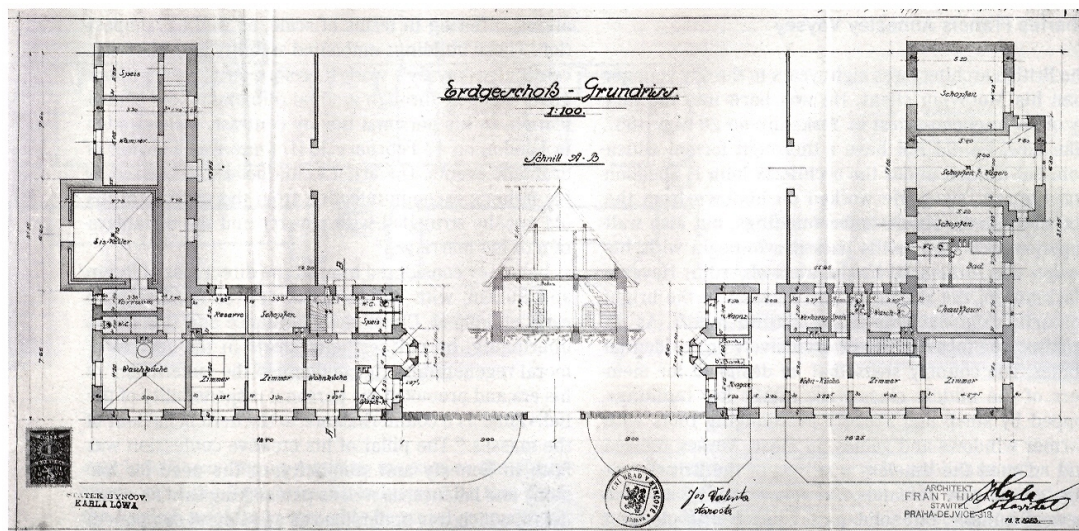
ations, differing in terms of scale, as well as composition. These buildings embodied stability and historical continuity. Voysey's work therefore developed without great changes, through gradual refinement and consolidation. In his personal life, by contrast, which ended in London on 12 February 1941, there was a surfeit of dramatic events. The artist's childhood was scarred by his father's excommunication from the church; in his old age, he struggled with poverty and the disintegration of his marriage.²⁸

Voysey considered himself the direct heir of Pugin and Ruskin, with whose works he was familiar from early childhood. Under their influence and that of his upbringing, he put aesthetic ideals in the service of moral regeneration. He condemned the materialism of his era and promoted the personal responsibility of the individual as a counterbalance to the herd behaviour of the masses.²⁹ The pillar of his creative confession was faith in honesty and simplicity, in the need for harmony and balance, as well as painstaking care for every detail, which was understood as an integral component of his overall creative aim. It was thanks to his sober and comprehensible texts, as well as his buildings, that the complex critical thought of his predecessors and founders of the Arts & Crafts movement entered the general consciousness in England at the turn of

6/ Design of building for the manager in Henčov, ground plan of ground floor 1922

Photo: Moravian Land Archive in Brno





7/ Design of building for the manager in Henčov, ground plan of ground floor 1923

Photo: Moravian Land Archive in Brno

the century. Voysey also contributed to the reconciliation between the crafts and industrial production, and hence to resolving the difficult dilemma of Victorian aesthetic thought.³⁰ At the same time, on the British scene, he was considered an innovator who differed fundamentally from his conservative contemporaries in his less reverent stance on tradition: 'If we are to be in harmony with the laws of nature and to help it develop, we must leave the door open to progress and welcome (critically, if you will) all attempts to improve our traditional means and methods'.³¹

Around 1900, Voysey was one of the most sought-after British architects and was also well known on the European continent. The European public knew about him from the journals *The Studio* and *Dekorative Kunst*, as well as from Muthesius' publications. In *Das englische Haus*, the famous propagator of English architecture and lifestyle presented him as an extraordinarily individualistic and influential representative of modern architecture. The German author noted the conspicuous signs of his creative style. He drew attention to the architect's particular penchant for the reduced height of the interiors. He believed, however, that Voysey's main contribution to British architecture was in the simplicity and austerity of the materials used, yielding economic and artistic gains. He also praised Voysey's conception of the house and furnishings as an indivisible whole.³² When Muthesius' work was published, however, the career of the British architect had already passed its zenith. His 'native' style was already out of fashion in England, replaced by the Edwardian Neo-classical revival. The former flood of commissions dried up; of the seventeen commissions

that Voysey received from 1907–1910, twelve never yielded any tangible results. The last house designed by him was built in 1911. The architect encountered serious financial difficulties and had to sell his seat and move into a two-room apartment.³³ He therefore must have welcomed the offer from the Jihlava entrepreneur as a gift from heaven. After all, he never had many commissions abroad. He claimed to have built a total of 117 private homes in Britain, America, Austria and Egypt. The execution of only one design abroad, however, has been confirmed – the residence of Dr. Leigh Canney in Assuan in 1905. It is unclear if the house that the architect designed that year for Tyringham in the American state of Massachusetts was actually built.³⁴

The ten-year standstill in design activity left a mark on Voysey's style. The house designed for Karl Löw only partly resembles his earlier works. As the surviving drawings indicate, the architect designed it symmetrically around an oblong cour d'honneur. The main building with the residence of the patron was supposed to take up the longer, southern side of the lay-out. The lower service wings jut out from its sides, breaking along the northern side of the inner courtyard. This symmetrical outline, with volumes arranged in the manner of a cour d'honneur, was exceptional in Voysey's output. The architect, like other protagonists of the Arts & Crafts movement, preferred rather an asymmetrical composition of masses, which he saw as the expression of a well considered development of diverse functions. He understood symmetry as a typical example in which 'candour, truth and fitness are sacrificed to conformity to so-called style'.³⁵ He probably abandoned his custom because of the unusual volume of the building, which could be conceived, with no sacrifice to practicality, as a concatenation of the two-wing composition that commonly appeared in his work. For the large manorial seat, he also did not hesitate to mark off a space for the entrance hall, which he had rejected as an unnecessary luxury in bourgeois homes. Löw's house was clearly supposed to be one of those exclusive buildings in which, according to Voysey's strict

standards, 'qualities like grandeur, splendour, pomp, majesty and exuberance were appropriate'.³⁶ It is highly likely that the patron wanted the 'Baroque' layout and grand spatial arrangement. Fortunately, given their declared respect for different local traditions, the British reformers found ample justification for such divergences.

The architect designed the central building, like the back wings, as a single-storey; he topped it, however, with a high hip roof with dormer windows. In the southern façade of the roof, he set a row of nine dormer windows, with wider and narrower openings alternating rhythmically. In the façade turned towards the courtyard, they were matched by six small roof windows, above which were two broad dormer windows that lit the attic. The raised central section, from which a shallow bay protruded, topped by a triangular gable and bell-tower, was supposed to dominate this front. In addition, Voysey emphasised the centre of this façade with a portico on two Tudor arches. He divided the southern façade with two rectangular ground-floor bays, topped by crenellation; he marked the centre of the façade with a wide terrace. In the south-eastern corner, he inserted a covered service entrance, which was the only serious divergence from the axial symmetry of the design. The regular, almost monotonous, sequence of repeating elements likewise was not typical of Voysey's compositions. In the repertoire of forms used, however, one sees a number of the architect's distinctive themes, such as the strips of low windows, the dormer windows, the gable with a clock or bell-tower. This set also included features of Gothic lineage, of which the British reformers were particularly fond. Even according to Voysey, 'Gothic architecture grew out of the careful consideration of requirements and conditions, and obedience to the natural qualities of materials'.³⁷ The architect, however, placed the spirit of individualism and firm moral principles over any kind of revival. In his view, only these would produce an architecture of any worth. 'But if we cast behind us all preconceived styles, our work will still possess a style, but it will be a living natural and true expression of modern needs and ideals'.³⁸

In the accompanying commentary on the design, one reads that the house was supposed to be made of brick and covered with a course cement plaster, painted white, with no half-timbering.³⁹ The roof was sup-

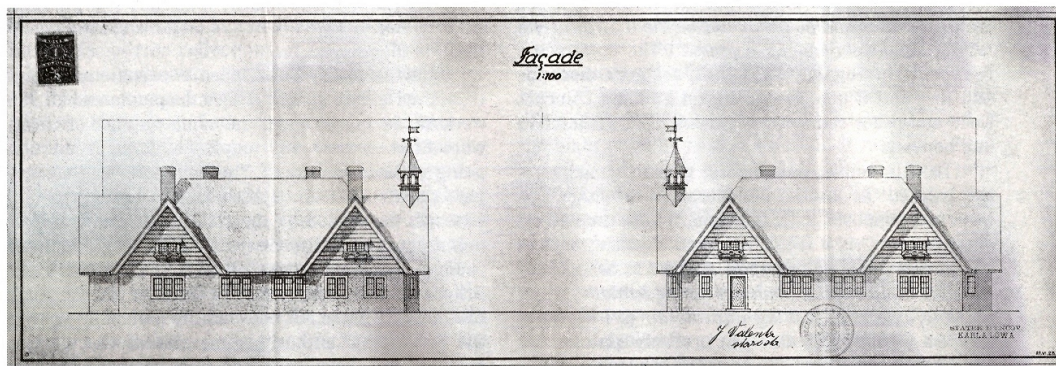
posed to be made of oak shingles. Voysey also imagined that oak wood, with no paint or polish, would be used for the furniture, the woodwork and the wainscoting of the staircase and landings. He asked that the double windows, opening out, be made of gunmetal. Grey stone panels were supposed to be used to pave the hall, corridors, porch and terrace; the windows were to be set in local grey granite. The residential rooms would have floors panelled in concrete and entirely covered by thick, hand-woven carpets in simple colours with no patterns. Voysey evidently was willing to use modern materials in his buildings. According to him, 'concrete construction considered as a servant and as a means to an end can be made a ministering angel'.⁴⁰ His ethical principles were reflected in the architecture in that the new constructions were not supposed to be masked, the natural qualities of the traditional materials were highlighted and ornament was tolerated only occasionally and for practical reasons. Therefore, any coating of the wood was strictly forbidden at Helenín, as were blind windows and the half-timbering commonly attached to brick masonry in England. The uncompromising moral judge could not fail to see it as the embodiment of 'dishonesty' in construction. Voysey declared, 'we want real richness, not the effect of it. ... The effect of real richness is only obtainable by having precious materials, elaboration concentrated and harmoniously arranged, and eloquent with thought and feeling'.⁴¹

The manorial wing was designed with three sections and a central corridor. The design gives only a general idea of the purpose of the individual rooms. Two sitting rooms were supposed to take up the middle of the southern section; on the sides, they were connected with a dining room and bedroom, projecting into the bays. A closet and bathroom separated Löw's bedroom from a separate suite in the south-western corner, clearly intended for his second wife Alma. The kitchen was located in the northern section of the manorial house, near the dining room. The architect reserved the first

8/ Design of building for the manager in Henčov, northern façade

1923

Photo: Moravian Land Archive in Brno



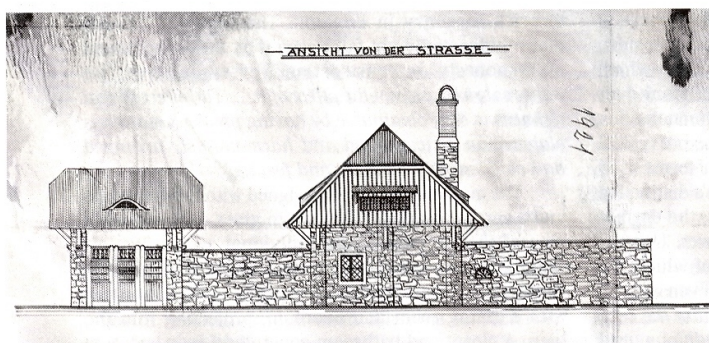
floor for guestrooms, whereas the service wings were meant to provide accommodation for the staff, as well as storage space. In the ground plan, one can see that an effort was made to ensure that the rooms had proper proportions, were rationally connected and sufficiently lighted. It is surprising that the main feature of the 'English house' is missing: the residential rooms were not designed with open hearths, but rather with corner stoves. It is therefore also difficult to explain the reference to central heating in the commentary on the design.

As one might expect, Voysey designed the height of the rooms in accordance with his distinctive principles. The reception rooms of the manorial home were supposed to be nine feet (2.75 m) high, which the architect considered to be the upper limit.⁴² He specified that the height of the rooms upstairs was to be seven feet (2.44 m). As Hermann Muthesius noted, the architect favoured these frugal dimensions for their low construction costs, as well as for their aesthetic impact: 'Low ceilings

his turbulent life in a cosy wooded refuge, in a modest and comfortable house designed by one of the best British architects.

Helenín and Henčov after 1918

The war years brought unusual prosperity to the firms of Karl Löw. According to his own accounts, the firm had at that time 18 percent of all army orders for textile products.⁴⁷ Even after the war, there was continued interest in the products of the firm, so that in 1922, the Helenín factory employed 775 workers and 89 clerks.⁴⁸ Encouraged by the favourable development, Löw purchased an estate in Rantířov in 1917 and over the next two years he made major investments in his Jihlava enterprises, as discussed above. The extension with the reception rooms in the complex of the Helenín factory also bears the date 1919. In addition to a knight's hall, it also included a library, a gallery, a cinema and



9/ Design of residential building with Elsa gate in Henčov, façade 1921

Photo: Moravian Land Archive in Brno

create a cosy impression and make the room seem closed, unified.⁴³ In addition, however, Voysey achieved another quality with his low-ceilinged rooms, which the German architect failed to appreciate fully. This quality, horizontalism, was key to his buildings. The architect attributed a symbolic importance to it: 'At sunset we see the horizontal lines as if all nature were reclining and preparing for rest, dim light drawing a veil over disturbing detail. Horizontalism thus suggests repose.'⁴⁴ The impression of peace, achieved through low lines and soft shapes, was, for Voysey, the main attribute of the residential home, its essential spiritual quality. He declared: 'Our homes must arouse the emotions of peace and goodwill ... the home should be the most peaceful, restful, simple servant we possess.'⁴⁵ The idea recurs repeatedly in Voysey's texts. In it, aesthetic demands and the ethical qualities of a good building coincide. Good and peace come only from humility, moderation and honesty.

In this sense, nature, the greatest teacher of art, pointed the architect in the right direction. His work was supposed to be in harmony with the natural environment: 'As a sympathetic accompanist, both in colour and form, we can show a desire to be subdued and quiet and restful, modestly hiding behind trees, if possible, and not towering into the air to look down on them with scorn.'⁴⁶ One can probably assume that a similar idea led Karl Löw to spend the remainder of

a bowling alley. Under these relatively stable conditions, the head of the firm began to think of retirement. In May 1922, he transformed the firm into a joint-stock company with basic assets of 10,000,000 crowns.⁴⁹ At that time, he also gave his rather incompetent sons their share of the inheritance, to the amount of 500,000 crowns.⁵⁰ Sometime in this period, he commissioned a design of a country seat from Voysey.

The boom came to an end with the deflationary policies of Rašín's ministry and the concomitant shortage of raw materials. In a letter to his son Adolf, in May 1921, Karl Löw expressed his fear of future events: 'A terrible crisis has fallen upon us, which will probably get even worse, so really we are only living from day to day.'⁵¹

But the reality outstripped expectations. In May 1924, the Helenín factory ceased to operate and all 390 workers, 20 masters and the same number of clerks were fired. A mere 100 employees kept production going at Malý Beranov.⁵² The political situation also gave rise to uncertainty. According to family tradition, Löw was devastated by the collapse of the Habsburg monarchy and did not expect much good from the young Czechoslovak state.⁵³ Events in the vicinity confirmed his fears. In the mostly German Jihlava, a full-blown battle broke out between the nationalities, with the government authorities energetically deciding in favour of the Czech minority. In November 1923, the

provincial political administration dissolved the local authority for a second time and put a government commissar in charge of the municipal administration. In the 1925 elections, the German parties lost the majority.⁵⁴ In addition to high unemployment, the city was also afflicted by a severe accommodation shortage, so the Löw family had reason to fear social upheavals.⁵⁵ The circumstances were not propitious for the construction of an ostentatious country seat.

The British historian Joanna Symonds, in a catalogue of Voysey's graphic work, claimed that the architect's plans for Helenín remained only on paper.

a closer connection between the design and the building. Is the building in the Henčov park a fragment of Löw's planned English seat? And if so, to what extent did Voysey's plan serve as a model?

The Henčov manor was nearby Löw's factory in Helenín. At the time of the land reform, it was more than 407 hectares, almost half of which was cultivated for trees.⁵⁹ Löw's great-grandson recalls that the enterprise on it did not make a profit; the park, however, remained fixed in his memories as a site of picnics, walks and horseback rides.⁶⁰ At the beginning of the 1920s, the forest park was at the centre of Löw's atten-

10/ Manager's building in Henčov

about 1924

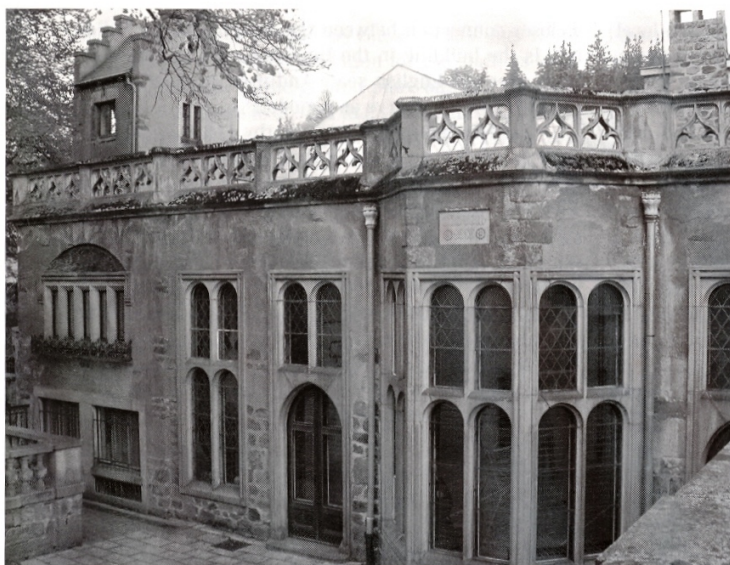
view from east

Photo: Ivan Šikýř



According to her, the design did not correspond to any building constructed for Karl Löw. She mentioned the estate in Henčov only as a planned building site.⁵⁶ The historical accounts from the factory owner's milieu, however, present a more ambiguous picture and allow for a more optimistic conclusion as to whether or not Voysey's plans were implemented. In accounts from the period, it is noted that after the war, Löw *'began to build a large seat in the woods of the Henčov estate'*.⁵⁷ The great-grandson of the builder, who is not an eyewitness, states that the building began before the war, but he does speak explicitly of an English seat.⁵⁸ In Henčov, one actually does find a building that resembles Voysey's design. It is a unit of two double-wing buildings, mirror reflections of one another, breaking along a main cour d'honneur. They are single-storey masses, covered with a sloping roof. The central pavilion, from which both arms extend, resembles, on account of its dominant position, the manor building designed by the architect. It is, however, obviously a later work and of little artistic interest. The building differs from Voysey's design mainly in the construction material used and the reverse orientation towards the cardinal points, as the cour d'honneur opens to the south. It is impossible, however, to overlook the close connection between the shapes of the building and the Arts & Crafts principles. One has to determine whether this is a mere similarity, or whether there is

tion. In August 1921, Professor Emanuel Gross, an orchard specialist from Děčín-Libverda, visited Henčov to design the expansion of the fruit orchards there. According to his instructions, in March of the following year, the manor administration ordered several dozen fruit trees.⁶¹ Building in the park began with the construction of the small residential house with the Elsa entrance gate, which was also designed in August 1921.⁶² In August 1922, the manor administration requested that the local authority approve the construction of the house for the manager. The surviving ground plans from this period offer the first solid evidence needed to answer our questions. The main features of the design were in accordance with Voysey's design. Two wings, framing the cour d'honneur, extend out perpendicular to the triple-sectioned manor house.⁶³ The wings, however, are shorter than in the plans of the British architect and the interior layout of the main building is also different. It may have been a preliminary study made before or at the same time as the London design. It is not clear, finally, what role these ground plans played in the authorisation process or what importance the powerful factory owner attributed to this procedure. The building that stands in the park, however, was not raised on the basis of these plans. In July 1923, the manor administration asked the municipality for permission to change the building plans and a year later the mayor of Henčov approved



11/ *Extension with knight's hall in Karl Löw's factory in Helenín*
1919

Photo: Jindřich Vybíral

further divergences from the original design.⁶⁴ The reworked building documentation finally offers a key to the mystery. The documentation indicates that Löw decided to build only the service wings of the manor house at Henčov, on a reduced dimension. During construction, he changed his mind somewhat and had both buildings built to the previously planned size. From the design one can also see that the original grand intention was not entirely abandoned, but only temporarily postponed: the outline of the planned main building is marked in the design of the façades. The further unfolding of circumstances put a definitive end to the construction of the manor house. In the post-war era, the original idea of the building was negated and distorted by the connecting of both wings on the spot where, in Voysey's plan, there was supposed to be an entrance to the main cour d'honneur.

A detailed comparison with the London drawings indicates that the earlier design continued to serve as the starting point for the execution; in its size and proportions, the finished building resembles the design. Voysey's two-section plan is respected in the design of the eastern wing. The rooms, however, were not supposed to serve the needs of the manor residence, but rather agricultural purposes. A new feature was the addition of a bay with cold storage. The residential rooms disappeared from the western wing and the two-section lay-out was also suppressed. Only the northern section of both wings was reserved for accommodation. In place of the cut corners, however, that were supposed to frame the entrance to the main cour d'honneur, the designer modelled façades, standing opposite one another, with three-sided bays and turrets set on top of them. The shape of the rooms designed by Voysey was only roughly respected in the new building. One sees even greater changes in the exterior of the building. The façades were given triangular gables; the Gothic features and strips of windows were suppressed. The materials used also changed. Instead of brick, the house was built of unplastered stone, set in regular

rows. The windows were set in frames of light granite. None of these deviations, however, clashed with Voysey's principles. Even the most striking change, the abandoning of brick masonry with a coarse plaster in favour of good stone, would certainly have been approved by the British architect. His middle-class customers as a rule could not afford a building like that. When he had the opportunity, however, as in Brodleys in 1898 or in Littleholme in 1909, Voysey liked to use natural stone from local quarries and contrast it with the other materials. He saw it as a way to express the personality of the patron and the uniqueness of the local conditions. On the contrary, he was very disappointed that Lady Henry Somerset did not permit him to pursue this goal in the construction of her house at Higham.⁶⁵ Voysey's participation in the construction of the building is also suggested by the unusual treatment of the walls without a socle, the irregular layout of the individual and compound window openings and mainly by the rejection of half-timbering, which was designed for the gable surfaces in the working plans from 1923. The costly material and the careful execution of the Henčov building confirm the impression that the house of the manager was only supposed to be the first stage in the construction of a grand seat. This is also suggested by the clearly provisional ending of both wings on the southern side, where the short façades were made from cheap material and plastered.

The design of the house in the park is also unusual in that its various, almost identical, versions are signed by various people. On the ground plan from May 1923, there is the name of the Jihlava builder J. Dufka; in July 1923, the builder František Hůla from Prague-Dejvice signed the same plan; a year later, the Jihlava engineer Konrad Weigner signed the version with the extended wings. The façade from 21 June 1923 has only the symbol of the Henčov manor.⁶⁶ None of these builders, in all likelihood, actually designed the working documentation. Voysey's design was probably reworked in the technological division of Löw's firm.

One cannot rule out the possibility that the new plans were made under the personal supervision of the British architect, or at least after consultation with him. It is known that in September 1922, Voysey acquired a passport and a visa for a trip to Czechoslovakia, at the expense of the Jihlava entrepreneur.⁶⁷ One can only speculate as to whether or not he actually arrived in Moravia. Considering his longstanding financial and creative crisis, however, one can assume that he overcame his well-known reluctance to travel in the hope of the long awaited commission. The fact that almost a year after his visit to Löw, Voysey published the unrevised plans in an English journal would tend to undermine the theory that the architect made a major contribution to the execution of the design.

This analysis of Voysey's commission from Karl Löw could end with the sober conclusion that his design for Henčov was executed only in part, and in changed form. But this does not rule out further speculation. First and foremost, the question arises as to whether or not Voysey contributed to the design of the Elsa gate to the Henčov park and the neighbouring house. These structures were built from unplastered stone, which contrasted with the wooden gables; their walls were reinforced with supporting piers and wooden corbels supported the overhanging roof. Even after the later renovations, they are so 'English' and similar to the house of the manager that one cannot exclude the participation of the London architect. Another question is who designed the 1919 extension in Helenín, for which no plans have survived. The wing with the knight's hall is very different from Voysey's well-known executions. Historical reminiscences like the corner tower or the Gothic details made from artificial stone are as foreign to the spirit of his famous buildings as the flat roof. But if one compares the building with his later designs, in which these very bizarre motifs and approaches to composition appear, one cannot simply reject the idea of a contribution from Voysey. In addition, the architect, who had not had a major commission for ten years, must have been willing to make far-reaching concessions to the customer. The design may have been drawn up in Löw's enterprise on the basis of study of British books and journals. But in the 20th century, the do-it-yourself approach did not suit the social status of a rich and enlightened industrialist. Löw's friends Rudolf Rohrer and Willy Ginzkey commonly entrusted such tasks to Viennese architects. For that matter, even the native from nearby Brtnice, Josef Hoffmann, accepted commissions of that sort in Moravia.⁶⁸

The idea that Voysey contributed to these designs can also be supported with reference to the above-mentioned earlier commission, which the architect received from the Jihlava entrepreneur. In 1912, he designed a tomb for Löw, noted in the 'black book' in the London papers. English scholars assumed, as in the case of the country seat at Helenín, that this design was not executed.⁶⁹ The tomb was built, however, and in May 1915, it housed the remains of Löw's first wife Fanny.⁷⁰ The tomb in the main Jihlava cemetery is conceived as an enclosure made of stone ashlars; its raised back wall is topped by a gable in the shape of a pointed arch. At the centre of the composition is a cross with a relief figure of the crucified Christ, signed by the Leipzig sculp-

tor Felix Pfeiffer (1871–1945).⁷¹ On the sides, there are two oblong window openings with decorative grating; a carved ornament, inspired by the pre-Romanesque 'insular' style, decorates the surfaces in the spandrels.⁷¹ Tombstones with the names Karl and Fanny Löw lie below the gable; on the opposite side, an enormous stone bench is set in the enclosure. The work can be understood as a symbolic representation of a funeral chapel, with the heavenly dome as the vault. The back 'picture wall', in which the body of the Saviour constitutes the central column of an imaginary passage-way, marks the boundary between this world and the next – the gate of eternity.⁷²

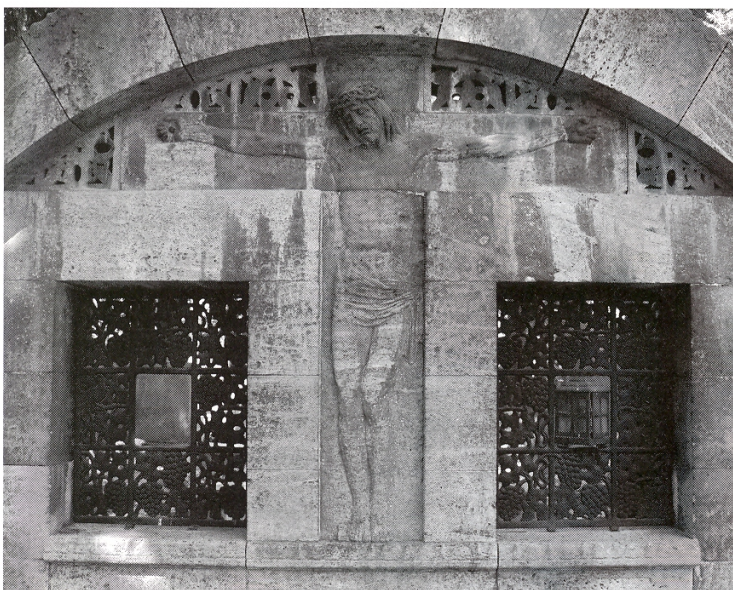
Löw's order has been documented, but there is no drawing that would establish Voysey as the designer of this highly original work. Thus, the only signpost is once again the style of the work. The decorative patterns, in particular, suggest that it may be attributed to the London architect. Stylised plants and birds appear in the ornament cut into the stone panels. One sees a similar motif, birds among bunches of grapes, in the grating of the window openings. These motifs, which here undoubtedly symbolise the blessed in paradise, are very characteristic of Voysey's conception of spiritual art; one can find a number of analogies in his flat patterns. The pointed arch, which rises over the remains of the Löw couple, is another of the architect's typical symbols. Voysey considered it an expression of the fruitful clash of forces, which was characteristic of a 'struggling and aspiring age' and was lacking in eras focused only on consumption and pleasure.⁷³ Also important for the attribution of the work is the horizontal spread of the arch, in contrast with the conventional treatment of this theme and, rather, corresponding to the formal sensibility of C. F. A. Voysey.

Whether we like it or not, the history of art is not only made up of facts and documented claims. If it is to tell a meaningful story and link up proven facts, it must also include conjectures and more or less daring hypotheses. Whether or not the theory of Voysey's



12/ Charles F. A. Voysey (?) – Felix Pfeiffer, family tomb of Karl Löw in Jihlava 1912–1915

Photo: Ivan Šikýř



13/ Charles F. A. Voysey (?) –
Felix Pfeiffer, family tomb of Karl Löw
in Jihlava
1912–1915
decorative detail
Photo: Ivan Štikýř

contribution to the design of Löw's houses and his family crypt is confirmed, the very discovery of intensive contacts between the London architect and the Jihlava entrepreneur can considerably change the way that scholars look at the history of art in Moravia around 1900. Did this region have to turn to Vienna for inspiration? Even if it was only an isolated occurrence and, from the perspective of the inter-war avant-garde, an anachronism, the choice of the famous British archi-

tect indicates a powerful ambition to make up for the shortcomings of the local art scene by way of energetic international contacts. In this connection, it may be necessary to look at the Moravian work of the Viennese architects in a different way than simply as a manifestation of the utter subordination of the northern provinces to the sole centre of the Danubian monarchy.

Translated by Kathleen Hayes

Notes

1. Stefan Muthesius, *Das englische Vorbild. Eine Studie zu den deutschen Reformbewegungen in Architektur, Wohnbau und Kunstgewerbe im späteren 19. Jahrhundert*, München 1974. – Mitchell Schwarzer, *German Architectural Theory and the Search for Modern Identity*, Cambridge 1995. – Cf Jindřich Vybíral, *The Reception of the Arts and Crafts Movement in Bohemia around 1900*, *Centropa* IV, 2004, pp. 218–230.

2. Jindřich Vybíral, *Mladí mistři* (Young Masters), Praha 2002, pp. 61–66. – Pavel Zatloukal, *Příběhy z dlouhého století. Architektura let 1750–1918 na Moravě a ve Slezsku* (Stories from a Long Century. Architecture in Moravia and Silesia 1750–1918), Olomouc 2002, pp. 491–505.

3. Joanna Symonds (ed.), *Catalogue of the Drawings Collections of the Royal Institute of British Architects. C. F. A. Voysey*, London 1976, p. 28.

4. *The Builder* CXXV, 1923, pp. 288–289.

5. State Regional Archive in Jihlava, *Pamětní kniha obce Handlových Dvůrů* (Visitors' Book for the Handlové dvory village), p. 13. – Adolf Anton Löw was the son of Salomon Löw – a hereditary tenant of menorial land from Uherský Ostrov. In 1848 he married Franziska Schön from Brno-Obřany. He died in Brno, in a building in Cejl No. 76. Moravian Land Archive in Brno. *Fund Adolf Löw a syn* (A. L. and son). Sign. 99 I/20, cart. 83.

6. Ein Bahnbrecher der Textilindustrie. Grossindustrieller Carl Löw, *Mährischer Grenzboten* 26. 5. 1929, weekend supplement, pp. 1–2.

7. *Adolf Löw a syn* (see note 5). Velkopřemyslník p. Karel Löw v Heleníně (The Great Industrialist Karel Löw in Helenín), *Jihlavské listy* (Jihlava News) 25. 5. 1929, p. 5. – Karl Anton Löw was born in Brno-Obřany in building No. 54. His first wife was Franziska, daughter of Friedrich Schmal and his wife Marie, née Schön (25. 7. 1854–22. 1. 1911).

8. Západomoravské továrny na sukno a přikrývky (West Moravian factories for cloth and blankets), joint-stock company in Helenín and Malý Beranov, in: B. Bradáč – Josef Mašek – Vladimír Urbánek (eds.), *Jihlava, město a okolí* (Jihlava, the Town and Vicinity), Jihlava 1933, pp. 84–85.

9. Adolf Löw u. Sohn. Schafwollwaaren-Fabriken Brünn – Helenenthal – Klein-Beranau, in: *Gross-Industrie Österreichs* IV, Wien 1898, pp. 115–116. – *Pamětní kniha* (see note 5). – *Mährischer Grenzboten* (see note 6).

10. *Gross-Industrie Österreichs* (see note 9). – *Jihlavské listy* (see note 7).

11. *Mährischer Grenzboten* (see note 6).

12. *Ibidem*. – *Jihlavské listy* (see note 7).

13. *Pamětní kniha obce Handlových Dvůrů* (see note 5).

14. *Gross-Industrie Österreichs* (see note 9).

15. Stefan Licht, Die österreichische Schafwollwaaren-Industrie, in: *Gross-Industrie Österreichs* (see note 9), pp. 49–65, here p. 62.

16. *Gross-Industrie Österreichs* (see note 9).

17. *Mährischer Grenzboten* (see note 6).

18. Ibidem.
19. *Gross-Industrie Österreichs* (see note 9).
20. *Jihlavské listy* (see note 7).
21. Grossindustrieller Carl Löw, *Mährischer Grenzbote*, 24. 4. 1930, p. 2.
22. *Mährischer Grenzbote* (see note 6).
23. *Mährischer Grenzbote* (see note 21).
24. *Adolf Löw a syn* (see note 5), cart. 82.
25. Leo Slezak in Iglau, *Mährischer Grenzbote*, 22. 5. 1923.
26. Vítězslav Horn, *Jak jsem přežil. Život českého lékaře* (How I Survived. The Life of a Czech Doctor), Brno 2002, pp. 21–22.
27. Cf Die britische Textilindustrie zur Zeit der Arts and Crafts-Bewegung, in: Gerda Breuer (ed.), *Arts and Crafts. Von Morris bis Mackintosh. Reformbewegung zwischen Kunstgewerbe und Sozialutopie*, Darmstadt 1994, pp. 33–46.
28. Wendy Hitchmough, *C. F. A. Voysey*, Oxford 1995. – Peter Davey, *Arts and Crafts Architecture*, London 1995.
29. Breuer (see note 27), p. 288.
30. Hitchmough (see note 28), pp. 7, 54.
31. Cited by Davey (see note 28), p. 95.
32. Hermann Muthesius, *Das englische Haus. Entwicklung, Bedingungen, Anlage, Aufbau, Einrichtung und Innenraum I*, Berlin 1908, pp. 161–167.
33. Hitchmough (see note 28), pp. 201, 207–208.
34. Ibidem, pp. 217–218.
35. Charles F. A. Voysey, *Individuality*, London 1915. Cited in Stuart Durant, *CFA Voysey*, London 1992, pp. 127–133, here p. 129.
36. Cited in Hitchmough (see note 28), p. 184. Cf Charles F. A. Voysey, *Ideas in Things*. Cited in Durant (see note 35), pp. 113–125, here p. 119.
37. Voysey, *Individuality* (see note 35), here p. 131.
38. Ibidem.
39. *The Builder* (see note 4).
40. Charles F. A. Voysey, *On Concrete*. Cited in Durant (see note 36), p. 135.
41. Voysey (see note 36), p. 123.
42. Cf Muthesius (see note 32), p. 163.
43. Ibidem, p. 164. 'Niedrige Räume erscheinen stets gemütlich und geben dem Zimmer eine geschlossene, einheitliche Wirkung.'
44. Voysey (see note 36), p. 117.
45. Ibidem, pp. 114, 119.
46. Ibidem, p. 119.
47. *Mährischer Grenzbote* (see note 6).
48. *Pamětní kniha obce Handlových Dvorů* (see note 5), p. 30.
49. *Mährischer Grenzbote* (see note 6).
50. *Adolf Löw a syn* (see note 5), sign. 109 I/30, cart. 84.
51. Ibidem. 'Auserdem ist eine furchtbare Krisis über uns hereingebrochen, die sich wahrscheinlich noch verschärft wird, so dass man eigentlich nur von heute auf morgen existiert.'
52. *Pamětní kniha obce Handlových Dvorů* (see note 5), p. 31.
53. Horn (see note 26), p. 21.
54. Bradáč – Mašek – Urbánek (see note 8), pp. 12–13.
55. Příspěvek k jihlavským bytovým poměrům (Reflection on Housing Conditions in Jihlava), *Jihlavské listy*, 1. 4. 1922, p. 2.
56. Symonds, (see note 3).
57. *Pamětní kniha obce Handlových Dvorů* (see note 5).
58. Horn (see note 25), p. 22.
59. Moravian Land Archive, *Velkostatek Henčov* (The Great Henčov Estate), 1908–1948. Inventory (prepared by Ivan Štarha), Brno 1961.
60. Horn (see note 25), p. 22.
61. *Adolf Löw a syn* (see note 5), sign. 210 V/15, cart. 116. – Ibidem, sign. 222 V/12, cart. 117. The unsigned design of a fruit orchard is dated 25. 8. 1921.
62. Ibidem. The design marked Oekonomie Heinzendorf, dat. Helenental 5. 8. 1921. – State Regional Archive in Jihlava, fund *Obecní úřad Henčov* (Henčov Municipal Authority), Inv. No. 9.
63. *Adolf Löw a syn* (see note 5), sign. 222 V/12, cart. 117. Unsigned design of foundations dated 2. 6. 1922, the ground plan of the ground floor is dated 22. 7. 1922. Building permit granted 2. 10. 1922. – *Obecní úřad Henčov* (see note 60), the request for a building permit is dated 23. 8. 1922.
64. Ibidem, the first request is dated 20. 7. 1923, the second 29. 7. 1924. – *Adolf Löw a syn* (see note 5), sign. 222 V/12, cart. 117. The earlier request was processed immediately, on the day it was submitted, the later one on 3. 8. 1924.
65. Hitchmough (see note 28), pp. 184–185.
66. *Adolf Löw a syn* (see note 5), sign. 222 V/12, cart. 117. – *Obecní úřad Henčov* (see note 60).
67. Hitchmough (see note 27), pp. 218–219.
68. *Adolf Löw a syn* (see note 5), sign. 98 I/20, cart. 82. There is a mention of wreaths from W. Ginzkey and R. Rohrer in the instructions for Löw's funeral. – On J. Hoffmann's designs for Moravian-Silesian entrepreneurs, see Jindřich Vybíral (see note 2), pp. 190–198.
69. Symonds (see note 3). – Hitchmough (see note 28), pp. 218–219.
70. Franziska Löw was the daughter of Friedrich Schmal and thus the cousin of the Jihlava factory owner. She was born in Helenín on 26. 7. 1854 and died on 22. 1. 1907. The information is provided on the tomb in the main Jihlava cemetery. I am grateful to Petr Dvořák from the State Regional Archive in Jihlava for the date of the tomb.
71. Hans Vollmer, *Allgemeines Lexikon der bildenden Künstler des 20. Jahrhunderts III*, Leipzig 1956, p. 581.
72. Adolf Reinle, *Zeichensprache der Architektur. Symbol. Darstellung und Brauch in der Baukunst des Mittelalters und der Neuzeit*, Zürich – München 1984, pp. 248–282.
73. Hitchmough (see note 28), p. 143.

Redakční poznámka: české znění článku najdete na internetové adrese Umění.