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The furniture designs of C F A Voysey, Part 2: 1898-1906

Tony Peart

William Ward-Higgs (1866–1936) and Haydee Nathalie Becker (1870–1951) were married in 1894 and would soon lease a large stuccoed, terraced townhouse at 23 Queensborough Terrace, Bayswater, just a short walk from Kensington Gardens. William was a successful City solicitor and his wife Haydee the mother of two very young daughters. It is likely the Ward-Higgs were introduced to Voysey by family friend William Harold Tingey¹ (1868–1917) who had trained as a barrister. They were evidently a couple of advanced, “artistic” tastes who were also confident to publicly express their individuality as, in early 1898, they commissioned Voysey to not only decorate and furnish certain rooms of their townhouse but also the exterior, street elevation. This was duly painted a vivid red to first-floor level and a large Voysey designed, heart-shaped letter box was installed to the white, enamelled front door. The Ward-Higgs commission finally offered Voysey the opportunity to design a wide range of standard, moveable furniture types such as: chairs; tables; cabinets and dressers to furnish his remodelled interiors which featured fitted furniture (fireplaces, bookcases, cupboards etc.) and, of course, Voysey designed wall coverings and textiles.

What we now think of as the quintessential Voysey chair types (single heart, double heart and lath back), all owe their genesis to two chairs² designed for Queensborough Terrace in April 1898. The chairs—one an armchair, the other a side chair—share many features including: legs that are square in section at the top but which are gradually chamfered to an octagonal section as they descend to the floor (a design feature previously only applied to Voysey’s cabinet furniture); massively extended back uprights tapering to a sharp point; a visually contrasting, gently curved top rail; straight bottom rail and in-line stretchers set close to the seat rails. Atypically, both designs also feature finely woven cane seats which, in use, seem to have been supplemented with thin, upholstered seat pads. The arm chair features a square, level seat and a back of five, grouped, wide, vertical laths. The side chair has a sloping, trapezoid seat and a single hourglass-shaped splat with two fret-cut hearts. Voysey’s long-term attachment to high-back chairs was partly due to the important role they played in providing a strong, contrasting, vertical element within the wide, low ceilinged rooms he favoured. However, he was also acutely aware of their historical, symbolic role within the home. In a lecture delivered in 1909 at Carpenter’s Hall³ he said: “You can tell me if the master and mistress have a sufficient sense of importance to give themselves high-back armchairs to dine in... ..This idea of the importance of the host and hostess is not to be despised; it is closely related to ceremonial of all kinds, and ceremony was always associated with kingship, and kingship with self-control.” At least one example of the arm chair and two of the side chair were

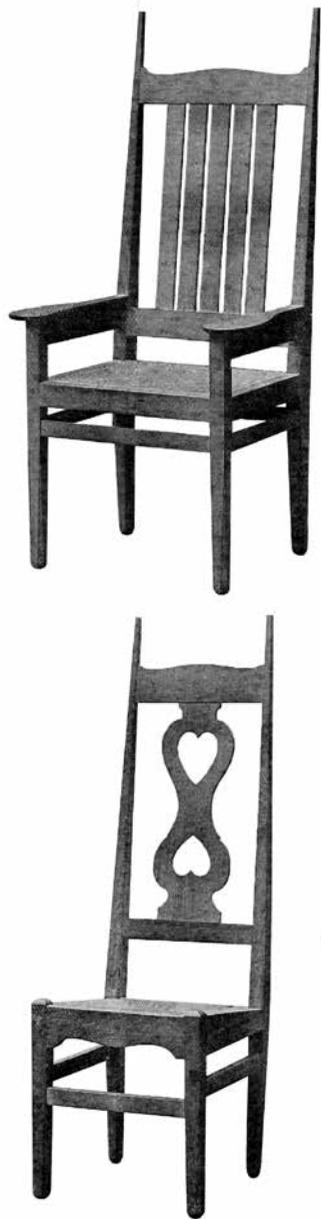


figure 1 –
The second iteration of the Ward-Higgs' chair, 1899

but they would soon be subject to further alteration and refinement, both as part of the on-going Ward-Higgs commission and also for other clients.

The second stage in these chairs' evolution can be clearly seen in the two examples (figure 1) exhibited in 1899 at the sixth exhibition of The Arts & Crafts Exhibition Society and illustrated in *The Studio* magazine.

⁴ Clearly intended to be used in combination as dining room carver and side chairs they can be seen used in this way in contemporary photographs of the dining room of Voysey's own house, The Orchard.

⁵ The side chair in particular has undergone considerable change, the extreme extension of the back uprights has now been moderated and the lower back rail has been elevated away from the seat creating a less bottom-heavy, cramped appearance. Likewise the bottom half of the chair has been visually lightened by employing a gently profiled front rail, the rear stretcher has been removed and the front stretcher considerably lowered. The arm chair underwent less obvious change but gained an elevated seat and shorter back uprights. By this date most "art" critics understood and generally lauded the stripped-down simplicity, emphasis on fine craftsmanship and reliance on refined proportion that characterised Voysey's furniture. However, members of the furniture trade proved to be harder to win over. R Davis Benn reviewing the exhibition for *The Cabinet Maker & Art Furnisher* said of Voysey's exhibits:

"...from the cabinet maker's point of view it is generally marked by refined simplicity, and so entitled to our admiration. It is, for the most part, perfectly proportioned, and charms purely by reason of its possession of that distinction. Of the numerous attempts made by this artist at the production of a successful chair the same cannot be said. The small chair in Fig. 6 (double heart) is poor, while the arms of its companion (lath back) are designed to press awkwardly into the ribs of the occupant, and are, moreover, too low for any comfort to be obtained from the support they tantalisingly offer."

The third and final iteration of the double heart dining chair. The third and final iteration of the double heart dining chair ⁶ was also designed for Queensborough Terrace and was probably manufactured as a batch of six around 1900. This chair had a more robust, drop-in rush seat which was now flat, rather than angled as it had been previously. Although a very well-known design today, this belies the fact that very few of Voysey's clients adopted this model, its only documented use being at Queensborough Terrace, The Orchard and finally at Broad Leys, Windermere. Here, at least six were used in the dining room (the only room fully furnished by Voysey), together with a lath back carver and a large, "en-suite" sideboard. This had been originally designed for A M Stedman in June 1899 ⁷ but was, in turn, a further refinement of an earlier sideboard designed in 1893 for Walter Richard Essex. ⁸ The new design shared a near identical lower section comprised of two drawers over two cupboards enclosed by four doors. Rising above was a superstructure of projecting, gently tapering, octagonal columns surmounted by turned, circular caps. The single rear shelf of the

earlier design was retained but the fully panelled back was removed to be replaced by a single, pierced-heart splat - as employed in the chair design - linking the base to the shelf and visually integrating the sideboard with the chairs. At some point early in its history, the superstructure of the Broad Leys sideboard (figure 2) was removed and replaced ⁹ by an unsympathetic, orthodox and undoubtedly more practical, Welsh Dresser type back.

Some pre-existing designs were also used to furnish Queensborough Terrace including the much earlier "Swan" chair of c1883-85 - discussed in Part 1 of this article - and the well-known writing cabinet with elaborate, pierced central strap hinge, now on public display at the V&A. This piece, originally designed in February 1895, was probably made for the Ward-Higgs' around 1902. In the intervening seven years Voysey had developed into such a consummate designer of cabinet pieces that one suspects due to its awkward, top-heavy appearance it must have looked somewhat incongruous when compared to the more recently designed and much more successful pieces already at the house. An elegant music cabinet (a design developed from Voysey's own writing cabinet ¹⁰ of 1896) had been designed for the drawing room in 1898 (figure 3). With a little further refinement, this design reappeared in early 1899 as arguably the most iconic and exquisitely proportioned of all Voysey's cabinet designs the Kelmscott "Chaucer" cabinet.¹¹ This is probably the first piece to feature what would later become a standard element of Voysey's cabinet furniture, the brass hardware manufactured and retailed by Thomas Elsley of The Portland Metal Works. Prior to this date, Voysey was in the occasional habit of having custom hardware - invariably elaborate hinges - manufactured as one-offs for a particular project. With Elsley he was able to achieve a range of quality, cast, brass cabinet hardware that could be specified in his drawings, readily costed and easily obtained by his cabinet makers. Although not cheap, a considerable saving would also be achieved when compared to one-off custom manufacture. In late 1899 at the Sixth Arts and Crafts Exhibition the Kelmscott "Chaucer" cabinet was exhibited and received much praise. Aymer Vallance writing for *The Studio* ¹² noted: "No better exemplification of the supreme value of an architect's



figure 2 –
Author's drawing of the Broad Leys sideboard as it first appeared (top) and after its later modification (bottom)



figure 3 –
The Drawing Room, 23 Queensborough Terrace photographed in 1899 showing the music cabinet and a double heart chair. The what-not, circular table, picture frame and cushions are also by Voysey

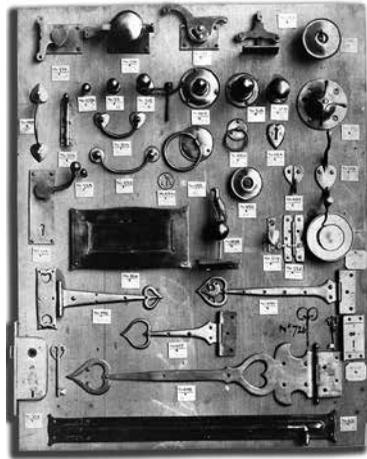


figure 4 –
Sample board of Voysey designed fittings and fixtures, Thomas Elsley & Co. Portland Metalworks c. 1903

training ‘could be desired than the art of Mr. C. F. A. Voysey, who is, beyond question, an artist of individual gifts very remarkable... ..In his designs for furniture, Mr. Voysey evidently aims at maintaining, in the leading structural lines, extreme simplicity of form, relieved, in the secondary parts only, by quaint ornamental detail.’ At the same exhibition two of his strap hinges manufactured by Elsley were also exhibited, no doubt to help publicise the new range. By the early 1900s Voysey’s designs for metalware had expanded beyond cabinet fittings and included a wide range of architectural hardware that would become a staple of his building projects (figure 4).

A second iconic piece supplied to Queensborough Terrace was a sideboard ¹³ with a dresser back, first designed in March 1899 for another of Voysey’s faithful patrons, The Earl of Lovelace. The most successful of all his sideboard designs, this piece is a master-class in restraint, proportion and contrast of plane and mass. The piece stands gracefully on square section uprights which visually integrate with the rectangular cabinet mass much more convincingly than the octagonal or round sectioned versions used previously. The front uprights are now shorter than those at the rear, visually anchoring the piece to any wall against which it rests. The understated Elsley hardware offers the only obvious decoration but, in its very simplicity, the viewer is forced to look closely and consider those key elements that mattered to Voysey: the fine craftsmanship; the figure of the wood; the subtle use of simple mouldings and chamfering; the interplay of line and volume and the contrast of curve and straight.

If the Kelmscott “Chaucer” cabinet and the Ward-Higgs’ sideboard are Voysey’s most successful cabinet designs they are also his most traditional in form. The early influence of Mackmurdo and The Century Guild on Voysey’s development as a designer of “radical” furniture was discussed in Part 1 of this article, however, in finding his mature voice Voysey also looked to the past. Speaking in 1894 ¹⁴ he talked of “old simple furniture; which furniture, I venture to say, was originally the direct outcome of human intelligence brought to bear on human needs, and not born of any spirit of revivalism” and later, in 1906 ¹⁵ he wrote of: “The plain, solid oak furniture of bygone times”. The furniture to which he was referring was undoubtedly the country made pieces manufactured in England and Wales during the late 18th century, a period we would now describe as “George III”. In 1931 ¹⁶ Voysey said of himself: “He was insular to the backbone, and could not admit that familiarity with foreign countries was necessary for true culture” something that is certainly true of his influences as a furniture designer.

The antecedent of the Kelmscott “Chaucer” cabinet can be seen in a common Georgian type, the “chest on stand”. There are strong similarities in proportion between the two pieces and in particular both share the use of generous, projecting mouldings to the top and base of the upper cabinet section. Turning to the ward Ward-Higgs’ sideboard, here we are looking at essentially a beautifully proportioned “Welsh dresser”, a form that achieved its zenith during the 18th century. The ogee chamfering seen along the lower rail should be read as a subtle nod from Voysey to “period” examples and the historical references in

his furniture would become more overt as time passed. Even many of the design elements of the seemingly more radical double heart chair can be traced back to simple, oak, country-made chairs (figure 5) of the Georgian period.



figure 5 –
George III furniture. From left to right: chest on stand, Welsh dresser, Welsh side chair

Voysey designed over twenty pieces of furniture for the Ward-Higgs between 1898 and 1903 and a few of the later pieces were displayed at the seventh exhibition of The Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society held at The New Gallery, Regent Street in 1903. This exhibition marked a radical shift in the Society’s approach to exhibition design following its rather staid showing at the First International Exhibition of Modern Decorative Art held in Turin the previous year. Moving away from a museum style approach with objects displayed in cases, this exhibition provided some members the opportunity to furnish small cubicles as room settings. Voysey’s exhibit - as documented in contemporary photographs ¹⁷ - looks to have been uncomfortably cramped. In a space approximately nine feet square he managed to display about forty works ranging from small items such as wall hung designs, tiles and metalware (including the well known aluminium mantel clock) to larger pieces of textile - including the “River Rug” - three chairs and two pieces of cabinet furniture. The exhibit was well received by the reviewer of *The Studio* ¹⁸ who said of Voysey:

“When we remember the outcry that was raised by some prejudiced people against his “eccentricity” in 1896, and observe the same strong individuality quietly persisting in his recent work, some of which, but by no means the most notable, is shown in this exhibition, we can only be thankful that simplicity of form does not appear so extraordinary as it did six years ago. Mr. Voysey has made sweeping rejections of all the conventional “finish” that goes beyond the real needs of a sound and beautiful structure, and the keynote of all his architecture and furniture is what would be called a Puritan severity but for that air of amplex and ease so rarely united with singleness of motive and economy of ornament...”

The one slightly anachronous piece was the writing table designed a few years earlier and now owned and exhibited by W H Tingey. This is a visually awkward piece (figure 6) with the legs extending as tall, capped columns well above the table surface and is a rare example in Voysey’s oeuvre of a design where style is favoured over function. It had been exhibited at Turin the previous year but here, on home soil,

Figure 6 – Oak writing desk, 1899

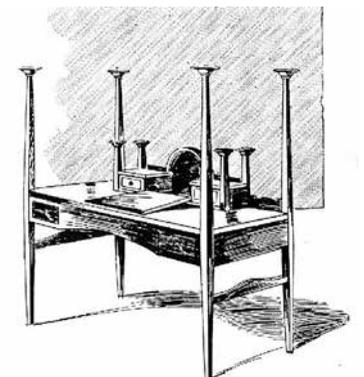




figure 7 – Voysey's cubicle at the 1903 Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society exhibition

came under the critical gaze of the reviewer of *The Cabinet Maker*¹⁹ who pronounced: “If Mr. Voysey... ..had set himself to produce an article that would furnish possibilities of the maximum knocks to one’s elbows... ..he could hardly have succeeded better.”

Voysey’s cubicle also contained a high backed side chair (figure 7, right), a slightly modified version of a child’s chair designed for the Ward-Higgs’ in early 1900. The child’s chair has a raised, solid seat and features a cut-out heart to the top rail. To Voysey the heart was symbolic of emotion and affection, but these sentiments are negated by its appearance: austere, humourless and emphatically “upright” it has much of the harshest Victorian “correction” chair about it. However, it should be stressed that this, like the majority of Voysey’s chair designs, is not uncomfortable to sit on. Voysey chairs are invariably ergonomically sound and provide excellent lumbar support producing a rather formal, upright posture. In this respect they can be seen as a true reflection of their designer. They make excellent dining chairs but are not entirely conducive to informal relaxation. This is clearly demonstrated in contemporary photographs of Voysey furnished interiors where a comfortable-looking upholstered chair (invariably not by Voysey) will usually be found lurking somewhere in the background. Even Voysey owned an upholstered, Georgian, wing chair which can be seen in photographs of the study at The Orchard although it is not clear if this was provided for his own comfort or that of his wife. An attempt to fill this gap was made in early 1900 when Voysey designed a partly

upholstered “easy” chair (figure 7, left) for William Ward-Higgs. This new design was specified to be made in Austrian Oak²⁰ and featured a fully upholstered and sprung seat along with well-padded back and arms. Fully upholstered furniture seems to have been something of an anathema to Voysey, no doubt because the structural wooden frame was hidden. Voysey, like Pugin before him, delighted in exploiting “revealed construction” i.e. making a design feature of construction techniques and structural elements. The hidden frames of most commercially upholstered furniture were usually synonymous with shoddy materials and poor workmanship. Voysey overcame these issues by making sure most of the key, wooden elements were clearly “revealed”. Although not based on a traditional chair type, this design is remarkably similar to an upholstered chair (figure 8) exhibited by Walter Cave at the 1899 Arts and Crafts Exhibition. Voysey’s easy chair was obviously designed with comfort in mind however the wooden elements create a strong jarring note and visually subvert this impression. It is hardly surprising that very few were adopted by contemporary clients and only a handful survive today.

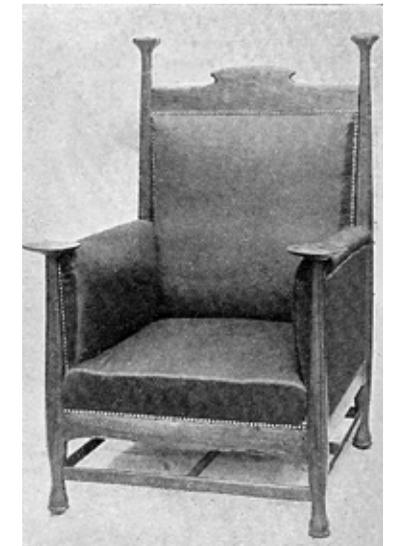
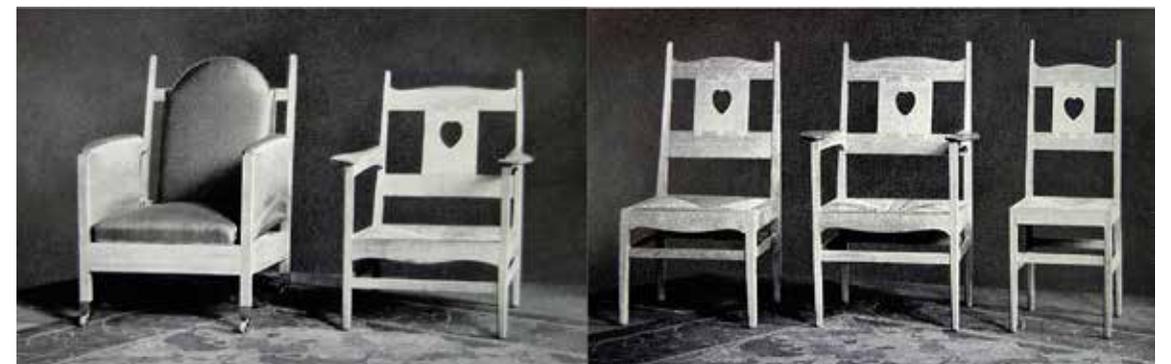


figure 8 – Walter Cave’s upholstered armchair of c.1898–99

Some elements of the easy chair can be clearly seen in what is arguably Voysey’s most famous chair design, the low-backed, single heart armchair designed in March 1902. Even though it (and its many variants) (figure 9) are the most ubiquitous of all Voysey’s chairs it was surprisingly late in arriving. Although no client is mentioned on the design drawing, various clues²¹ strongly point to the probability that it was first designed for Mrs. Florence Van Gruisen, a client new to Voysey. Florence, a 38 year old mother of three was married to a successful Liverpool fruit broker, Albert Henry Van Gruisen. The Van Grisens lived in a large but unremarkable Victorian House at 37 Bidston Road, Birkenhead. Although no profession is given for Florence on census returns she was a woman with strong artistic sensibilities having studied at the Liverpool School of Art²² during the 1890s in the well known “Art Sheds”. Studying alongside Florence was her exact contemporary and good friend, Miss Charlotte Dalziel McKay.²³ Miss McKay (commonly known as Dalziel), a spinster, lived a short walk away at 30 Shrewesbury Road with her bank manager brother and elderly, widowed mother. The family had been comfortably provided for by her late father who had been a successful ironmonger. It seems that Florence and Dalziel decided to simultaneously commission Voysey to decorate and furnish rooms in their respective homes. There is no documentary evidence to show how these commissions came about but it seems almost certain

Figure 9 – The single heart chair in all its various forms



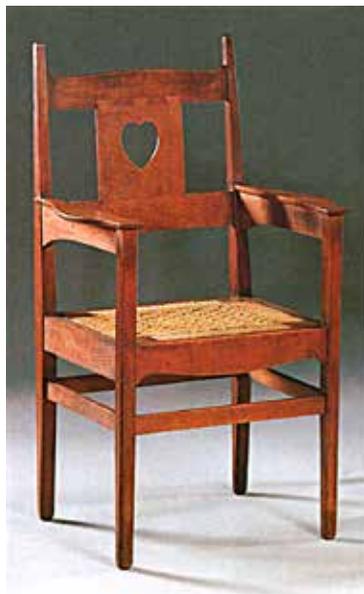


figure 10 – The first single heart armchair of 1902 above the second, “improved” version of c.1905

that Florence had already experienced Voysey’s work at first hand. Her elder sister Esther Stella also an artist, married Alfred Sutro in 1894 and three years later Voysey would design a studio house for the couple, Hill Close at Studland Bay, Swanage.²⁴ Also, as Florence and Dalziel were students at a progressive institution the two were bound to have seen Voysey’s work featured in contemporary publications, in particular *The Studio* and they had both studied under Voysey’s good friend Robert Anning Bell (1863–1933) who had taught at the Art Sheds from autumn 1894 until summer 1898. A coloured-plaster bas-relief²⁵ by Anning Bell would be prominently displayed on the wall behind the circular table, in the room Voysey would design for Florence and Henry Van Gruisen.

Voysey met his new clients on 5 February 1902 to discuss their respective requirements. For the Van Gruisens a radically remodelled and fully furnished dining room and for Miss McKay more minor alterations and furniture for a guest bedroom. By the end of March most of the design drawings were prepared including the single heart chair for Florence Van Gruisen. This drawing contains designs for two arm chairs that are almost identical apart from their respective backs. Sharing an identical top and lower rail, the single heart chair has a low back with the rails joined by a single, wide splat containing a cut out heart. The tall back variation replaces the splat with eight narrow, vertical laths. In both cases prominent dovetails are used to join the elements together, a radical departure for Voysey. Although common in cabinet construction (in particular drawers) the use of dovetails in chair manufacture is most unusual. Prior to this Voysey had used mortise and tenon joints to join his chair backs, the use of dovetails achieved completely flush/flat chair backs and also added an extra decorative detail. Contemporary photographs of Bidston Road show two of the tall back chairs and at least three (more probably four) of the single heart chairs in situ. As with most Voysey furniture there was still room for improvement and refinement. These earliest examples feature arm rests that gently curve from the rear but then transition into an awkward square shape immediately above the front legs (figure 10)—this would soon be altered to a version that terminates in a graceful, sweeping curve. Likewise, the vertical underside element of the arm gently curves along its whole length on the original but when refined it would run parallel to the seat for most of its length. In this first iteration the pierced heart occupies a much greater area of the back splat than it would do later and finally, the carved groove that visually “lightens” the upper edge of the back top rail has yet to be adopted. Although the changes seem minor they produced a massive improvement to the look of the later chairs.

The remodelling of the Van Gruisens’ dining room involved blocking of windows, stripping out fireplaces and the insertion of a spectacular demi-lune window containing a door to connect the room with an adjacent conservatory. The room itself was wainscoted in oak below a deep, white frieze and fully carpeted with a plain rug creating an ideal setting to showcase Voysey’s furniture. The drawing containing plans and elevation of the room show four items of moveable furniture and where they were to be placed within the scheme. These were a circular table, a carved, circular mirror (designed the previous December for the

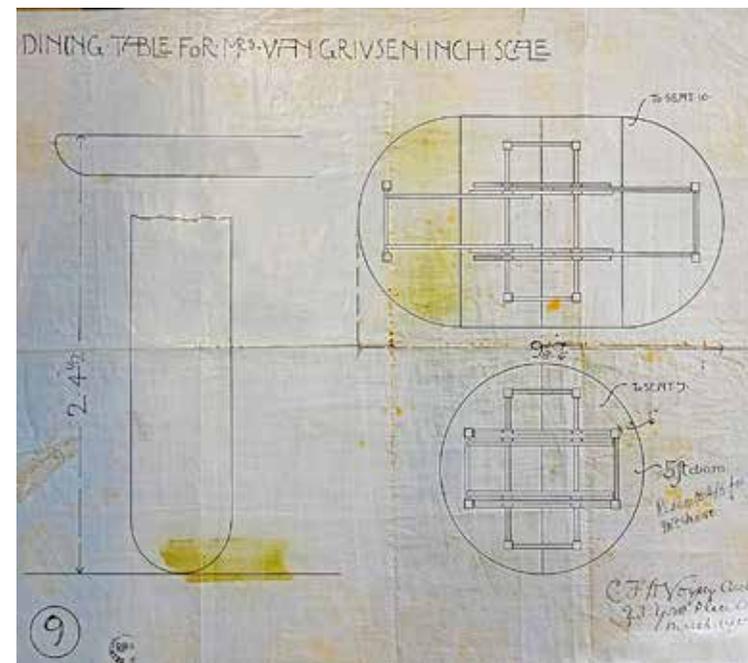


figure 11 – Drawing for the Van Gruisens’ extending dining table courtesy of RIBA Drawings Collection



figure 12 – Voysey’s pedestal table of c.1902–05

Ward Higgs), a tall sideboard/dresser (a variant of the one also owned by the Ward Higgs) and finally a specially designed, circular dumb-waiter on turned, ball feet. The table as originally specified was identical to one designed in 1901 for Voysey’s own use at The Orchard however, it appears this was not big enough for the Van Gruisens’ needs and a new, eight-legged, extending dining table was designed (figure 11). To visually tie the dresser into the surrounding scheme of fitted woodwork, the short legs of previous versions were omitted and the lower cabinet was given a deep plinth, identical to the skirting board against which it was placed. An interesting departure for Voysey was the three-tiered dumb-waiter²⁶ which stood in the corner of the room to the right of the sideboard. This comprised three graduated circular trays fixed to a central, octagonal column which rises from a heavily chamfered, cruciform base set on large, ball feet.²⁷ something which would become a common feature in future years although these, unlike the later examples, were probably made from turned wood not cast bronze. The base in particular must have pleased Voysey as he repeated it shortly afterwards for a small, oak, pedestal table (figure 12) that remained with him for the rest of his life.

The 1902 scheme for Dalziel McKay appears to have been much more modest. Although no drawings or photographs survive for the interior alterations there are four designs for furniture in the RIBA Drawings Collection. These are: a simple oak bench; a small bedside cabinet with acorn shaped finials and two extraordinarily radical chairs. The first of these is a fully upholstered, high-backed tub chair (figure 13) with legs and castors concealed by a fabric “skirt”. Its unusual form references the traditional Orkney chair and also appears to relate to the fully enclosed “bedroom” chair Voysey exhibited at the 1896 Arts and Crafts Exhibition. This was clearly an exercise in providing the user with both comfort and a freedom from draughts. It obviously also appealed to Florence Van Gruisen as in 1905, when Voysey was

figure 13 – Tub chair for Miss McKay 1902



figure 14 – Arm chair for Miss McKay 1902 (left) and a later, slightly modified version probably made by Peter Waals c.1920 (right), Private Collection courtesy of Paul Reeves London



once again commissioned, this time to remodel the master bedroom at Bidston Road, an identical model was supplied. The second chair (figure 14) remains Voysey's most radical and inventive design for this form of furniture. Although many elements of earlier chairs can be found in the detailing the basic form of this design departs completely from traditional chair construction. Here the rear legs and back uprights defy convention by not being fashioned from the same piece of wood, instead the back is a self contained unit slotting into a complex, lower frame section. The front legs rise to gracefully curved arms which are set much wider than on any other Voysey chair and may well have been specifically designed to accommodate the relatively voluminous skirts fashionable in Edwardian England. The original design shows the vertical back section made from two pieces of leather stitched together but a second drawing, also for Miss McKay, show it with its familiar four, vertical, dovetailed laths. The incredibly thin structural elements of this design left little room for all important mortise and tenon joints and thus compromised the chair's longevity. For many years it was thought that none survived but finally two did appear at auction in 2012.²⁸ It seems this pair were made in the early 1920s, probably by the craftsman and designer Peter Waals (1870–1937) and differ slightly in detailing and proportion from the drawn design. However, their survival was ensured by Waals, ever the consummate craftsman, employing far more structurally sound wedged, "through" tenons in their construction.

The following year of 1903 saw Voysey designing his most inventive and dynamic table.²⁹ Comprising four curving legs springing from the floor to a central spherical section with a further four supports emerging from this sphere and mirroring the lower section as they arch up to a circular top. The unusual form may well have been influenced by a table in a neo-gothic style, designed by Leonard Wyburd and featured in a Liberty's

catalogue of 1895.³⁰ Sometimes called the "crab" table it is not known for whom this was initially designed but its first recorded use was in a remarkably complete commission Voysey commenced in September 1905 for Charles Thomas Burke and his wife Nancy. This was to design and furnish a house, Holly Mount in Amersham Road, Beaconsfield - the first time Voysey was able to create a "*gesamtkunstwerk*" or total work of art. It was long thought that this must have been a second, or weekend home for Burke (a company secretary and engineer's agent) thereby explaining the comprehensive use of Voysey designed furniture and accessories throughout. However, census records indicate that this was not the case, this was a permanent home and this casts Burke in a new light as one of Voysey's most passionate and committed clients, a fact borne out by the longevity of their professional relationship which continued well into the 1920s. Apart from the table, all of the furniture used at Holly Mount had been designed previously but worthy of mention are a cast aluminium "Tingey" clock in the dining room and in the parlour a Collard & Collard oak piano (now manufactured commercially from an earlier 1902 design), an oil lamp (identical to one long owned by Voysey) and a large "Donnemara" Donegal carpet with decorative border and plain field.

Coincidentally, at the same time he was working on Holly Mount, Voysey also received a very similar commission to design and completely furnish a small weekend retreat in Frinton-on-Sea, Essex for Sydney Claridge Turner, the secretary of The Essex and Suffolk Equitable Building Society. The Homestead contained what is probably, as far as Voysey was concerned, his most satisfying interior scheme. This is evidenced by both his writing on what constitutes the "ideal" interior and also the large number of interior photographs commissioned by Voysey on completion and then widely reproduced in contemporary publications. Turner was a bachelor and appears to have been living a rather hectic and stressful life. He shared his main place of residence with various siblings (he married late in life) but, more importantly, he was also instigating radical changes within the insurance industry - including obtaining an Act of Parliament that would finally allow his and other companies to operate within the City of London. In this context The Homestead can be seen as a design brief that focused on creating an interior that was a haven of quiet calm. The almost proto-modern, strikingly "minimalist" interiors created for Turner were perfectly described and explained by Voysey when he said:

*"Try the effect of a well-proportioned room, with white walls, plain carpets and simple oak furniture, and nothing in it but the necessary articles of use, and one pure ornament in the form of a simple vase of flowers; not a cosmopolitan crowd of all sorts, but one or two sprays of one kind, and you will then find reflections begin to dance in your brain; each object will be received on the retina and understood, classified and dismissed from the mind, leaving you free as a bird to wander in the sunshine or storm of your own thoughts."*³¹

The Homestead was mostly furnished with pre-designed pieces and in contemporary photographs of the parlour and dining room³² we see at least two of the semi-upholstered easy chairs first designed for the



figure 15 – Writing table for S C Turner 1906

Ward Higgs' in 1900, four of the radical "McKay" armchairs are placed in the dining room along with the eight-legged, circular, extending dining table as designed for the Van Gruisens. A single heart armchair is tucked in the corner of the large, L-shaped parlour while in the foreground the compact, four-legged circular table Voysey designed for *The Orchard* can be seen. The room is dominated by a large, oak billiard table, first designed for the Revd Canon Leighton Grane in early 1900, but by this date commercially manufactured by Thurston and Company. The parlour also contained two original and very striking pieces of furniture: a wooden settee (or chesterfield as Voysey described it) supplied in early 1907 and a rather atypical writing desk designed in February 1906. The chesterfield is Voysey at his most rectilinear and rational with a simple oak frame containing numerous dovetailed laths used for both seat and back. A generous bracketed "tray" is attached for convenience to both arms and although no upholstery is specified in the design drawings, in use a large, loosely stuffed cushion was placed on the seat and small cushions served as back supports. The writing table (figure 15) is in complete contrast to the severity of the chesterfield and shows Voysey at his most organic and sensual. Despite his recently voiced opposition to continental Art Nouveau³³, this design unmistakably shows the influence of that movement and in particular the work of Henry van de Velde (1863–1957) the Belgian architect and designer who had been a long-time supporter of Voysey within the pages of continental art magazines. The desk could have signified a new turn of direction, rich with promise for the 48 year old designer but instead it stands alone, marking the end of an era not the beginning of a new one. Even so, Voysey must have regarded it highly as he had a studio photograph taken of it which, in January 1912, would be reproduced on the front cover of *The Illustrated Carpenter and Builder*.

As work on The Homestead was drawing to a close it must have been becoming apparent to Voysey that the numbers of clients seeking new houses were beginning to diminish alarmingly. Fortunately, as work in one area slowed, Voysey was about to embark upon the two most ambitious interior and furnishing commissions of his career. One was for an old client, Emslie John Horniman (1863–1932) for whom Voysey had designed the house Lowicks near Frensham, Surrey in 1894. Horniman was a business man, anthropologist, philanthropist and, by early 1906, a newly elected Liberal MP who urgently needed a residence within his London constituency. The other client was someone for whom Voysey was already working, Sydney Claridge Turner. Obviously pleased with the practical, ordered interior created for The Homestead, in August 1906 Turner asked Voysey to design, furnish and decorate The Essex and Suffolk's extensive suite of offices in a newly built office-block Capel House, New Broad Street in the City of London. These schemes along with his later furniture designs will be examined in the third and final article of this series.

- 1 In 1918 the Ward-Higgs' daughter, Nathalie married Tingey's son, William Harold.
- 2 Illustrated in: *The Orchard*, Number 5, 2016, front cover and p. 10.
- 3 Voysey, C. F. A. *Ideas in Things* in T. Raffles Davison (ed.), *The Arts Connected with Building*. London: Batsford, 1909, p. 131.
- 4 *The Studio*, vol. 18, October 1899, p. 43.
- 5 Illustrated in: Hitchmough, W. *C.F.A. Voysey*. London: Phaidon, 1995, p. 129.
- 6 The chairs were probably made at the workshop of The Lambeth Guild of Handicraft, a short-lived venture operated by the architect and designer C.H.B. Quennell (1872–1935). See: McKellar, E. *C.H.B. Quennell (1872–1935): Architecture, History and the Quest for the Modern. Architectural History*, vol. 50, 2007, pp. 211–246.
- 7 RIBA SBI 15VOY[337].
- 8 Illustrated in: *The Orchard*, Number 5, 2016, p. 13.
- 9 Sotheby's, *Applied Arts from 1880*, 23 October 1987, lot 374, pp. 100–101. The Broad Leys furnishings remained with the house when it was sold by the Currer Briggs in 1918. The new purchasers transferred the furniture to Brackenrigg (also in Windermere) in the early 1920s. It was probably at this time the upper superstructure was replaced and the new back added, most likely by Simpson's of Kendal the furniture workshop founded by Voysey's friend A.W. Simpson (1857–1922).
- 10 Illustrated in: *The Orchard*, Number 5, 2016, p. 13.
- 11 Illustrated in: Livingstone, K., Donnelly, M. and Parry, L. *C.F.A. Voysey Arts & Crafts Designer*. London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 2016, p. 183.
- 12 Vallance, A. *British decorative art in 1899 and the Arts and Crafts Exhibition*. Studio, vol. 18, 1899, pp. 38–49.

- 13 Illustrated in: Livingstone, K., Donnelly, M. and Parry, L. *C.F.A. Voysey Arts & Crafts Designer*. London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 2016, p. 182.
- 14 Voysey, C. F. A. *Domestic Furniture*. Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects, vol. 1, 1894, pp. 415–18.
- 15 Voysey, C. F. A. *Reason as a Basis of Art*. London: Elkin Mathews, 1906, p. 22.
- 16 Voysey, C. F. A. *The Value of Hidden Influences as Disclosed in the Life of One Ordinary Man*. Unpublished typescript, 1931, RIBA VOC/4/6
- 17 Illustrated in: Livingstone, K., Donnelly, M. and Parry, L. *C.F.A. Voysey Arts & Crafts Designer*. London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 2016, p. 232.
- 18 Anon. *The Arts and Crafts Exhibition at the New Gallery*, *The Studio* (vol. 28, 1903), pp. 35.
- 19 Anon. *The Arts and Crafts*, Cabinet Maker and Complete House Furnisher, vol. 23, 1903, p. 263.
- 20 English oak with its wilder "figure" is rarely found in Voysey furniture. He tended to favour the more consistent and evenly grained Austrian oak which was invariably quarter-sawn to display the attractive medullary rays which enliven the surface of most Voysey pieces.
- 21 All those drawings for the Van Gruisen commission which were copied to linen are carefully numbered in the bottom left-hand corner with a Voysey designed numeral within a circle. The drawing for the chair designs SBI 15VOY[215], dated March 1902 (the date of the commission) is identically numbered and fits within the chronology of the other drawings. Likewise, contemporary photographs of the dining room show only these two chairs being used.
- 22 See: Bennett, M. *The Art Sheds 1894–1905*. Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, 1981.
- 23 See: Carter, A. C. R. *The Year's Art 1899*. London: J S Virtue, 1899.

- 24 Information kindly provided by David Metcalfe.
- 25 See: *The Studio*, vol. 9, December 1893, p. 82. The dining room is illustrated in: Livingstone, K., Donnelly, M. and Parry, L. *C.F.A. Voysey Arts & Crafts Designer*. London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 2016, pp. 191, 193 & 195.
- 26 Ibid, p. 195.
- 27 C. R. Ashbee exhibited a writing cabinet (now in The Wilson, Cheltenham) with similar ball feet at the 1899 Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society exhibition and also at the Vienna Secession in 1900.
- 28 David Duggleby, Scarborough, 19 November 2012, lot 391.
- 29 Illustrated in: Livingstone, K., Donnelly, M. and Parry, L. *C.F.A. Voysey Arts & Crafts Designer*. London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 2016, p. 202.
- 30 See: Bennett, D. *Liberty's Furniture 1875–1915*, Antique Collectors Club, 2012, p. 131.
- 31 Anon. *C.F. Annesley Voysey : the man and his work Part III*, *The Architect & building news*, 11 February 1927, p. 274.
- 32 Illustrated in: Livingstone, K., Donnelly, M. and Parry, L. *C.F.A. Voysey Arts & Crafts Designer*. London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 2016, pp. 204–205.
- 33 In his contribution to *L'Art nouveau : what it is and what is thought of it : a symposium*, *Magazine of Art*, vol. 2, 1904, pp. 211–2 Voysey stated: "Surely *l'Art Nouveau* is not worthy to be called a style. Is it not merely the work of a lot of imitators with nothing but mad eccentricity as a guide..."