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Editorial

Last year's editorial highlighted the Landmark Trust's campaign to save Winsford Cottage Hospital in Devon, and the Voysey Society is delighted that fundraising has proved successful. We are confident that Landmark will carry out a careful and sympathetic restoration of this unique survivor and will support their efforts in any way we can.

The covers of this year's journal commemorate the 1918 centenary, with images of a Voysey designed calendar and war memorials at Potters Bar, Malvern Wells and in York Minster. The memorials contain much imagery, combining traditional badges and emblems with typical Voysey symbolism. The war years were very tough on Voysey and by 1918 he was "within measurable distance of the workhouse", and later worried about having to "bury myself in a slum" (letters to James Morton), so this new though modest income source must have been very welcome.

We are fortunate that so many of Voysey's designs have survived, but there is little first-hand personal detail from the man himself. A rare autobiographical survivor in the RIBA collections is 'The value of hidden influences, as disclosed in the life of one ordinary man', written in 1931 and here transcribed by Peter King, who has added helpful footnotes and illustrations for context. The reader of today will find much of Voysey's narrative style rather bizarre, including the following reference to his wife Mary: "The lady was very reserved and not at all addicted to sentiment. Love letters were conspicuous by their absence, the man regarded the woman as a help to his professional stamina. That is to say, a steadying power to his character and a stimulus to work". Not a sentiment to share with your wife!

Tony Peart and Richard Havelock have continued their compelling series on Voysey furniture and houses respectively, including much by Richard on the extension added to the little known house Wilverley in Sussex. Both writers demonstrate great skill in keeping the reader hooked, whilst in a second article Tony uses a forensic approach to assess whether a fourth copy of Voysey's famous painted clock was produced.

This edition is completed by Christopher Jordan's look at the few examples of Voysey designs in Australian public collections and by David Coles' tantalising introduction to a comparative study of Voysey and Lutyens, with much more to come next year.

Sincere thanks are due to members of the editorial board for helping to produce *The Orchard*, in particular to Charles Lawrence, who has used his talents to typeset text and images. After two years as editor I am handing over to Charles, who will continue to produce our quality annual journal.

David Metcalfe

Furniture designs of CFA Voysey, part 3: 1906-1934

Tony Peart

Garden Corner is an imposing six-storey, red brick townhouse on Chelsea Embankment, situated at the western corner of Chelsea Physic Garden. It was designed in 1879 in a broadly "Queen Anne" style by Edward I'Anson (1812–1888) but in 1906, with the house not yet thirty years old, Voysey was given "carte blanche" to completely strip it back to an empty shell and radically redesign and fully furnish the interior. The work was from an old client, Emslie John Horniman (1863–1932) who had become a friend, providing commissions to Voysey across a period of forty years.¹ Horniman had, since 1898, sat as a Progressive Party member on the London County Council, and had been newly elected Liberal MP for Chelsea at the 1906 general election, necessitating a permanent constituency base. The commission also coincided with the death of the client's father, Frederick Horniman, with his son inheriting the family's hugely profitable tea blending business. It is apparent that money was no object and this, combined with Horniman's progressive sensibilities, provided Voysey the artistic freedom to produce arguably his most ambitious and satisfying domestic interior. (figure 1)

¹ Hand-coloured black and white photograph of the oak drawing-room, Garden Corner, as reproduced in *The Studio Yearbook 1913*



With the approval of Horniman, the decorative scheme was widely publicised in contemporary design and architecture journals, with *The Studio* devoting six pages to photographs of the interior.² It was described as follows:

The house is semi-detached, and was built about twenty years ago. It was arranged with one principal staircase to the first floor only, the subsidiary stairs from top to bottom of the seven floors being in a narrow dark slit by the side of the grand stairs. The walls were lined with oak veneer, stained a nut brown; the rooms were so high that no reflected light was secured from the ceilings, and the windows had two scales, the upper halves being in panes of smallish size, the lower glazed with huge sheets of plate-glass. Darkness and gloom prevailed when Mr. Horniman came into possession of the house.

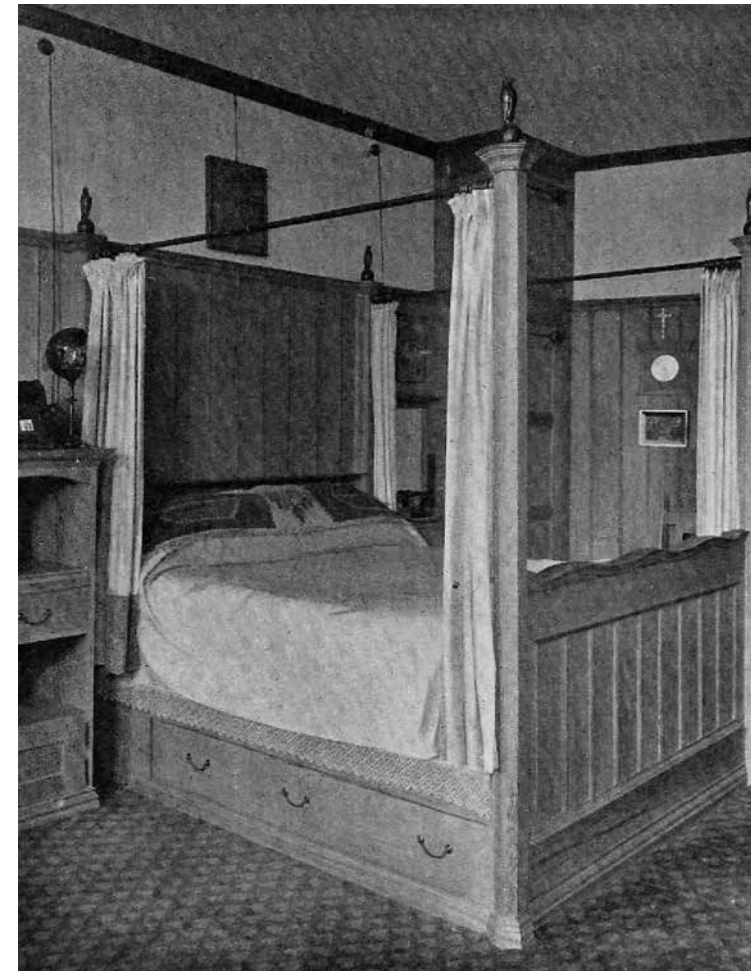
In the process of transformation, the grand staircase was taken out, the veneer torn off the walls, and most of the doors and windows were removed. The basement has been rearranged and lined throughout with van Straaten's white Dutch tiles and light captured wherever possible.³ An electric lift by Messrs. Waygood and Co. serves all floors, and is fitted with a specially designed plain oak cage to match the new joinery, which on the ground and first floors is entirely in oak, left quite clean from the plane, without stain, varnish, or polish.

The library (which was the billiard room) has a new stone window, overlooking the Chelsea "Physick" Garden, fitted with gun metal casements, and its ceiling has been lowered to increase the restful proportions of the room. The massive oak beams are blackleaded, and the plaster is all distempered white down to the oak bookcases ... Each floor is provided with bathroom and housemaid's closet, and all the painted wood is white enamel, and deep white friezes contribute to the light by their reflection. The drawing-room is L-shaped, one arm being treated with oak 6 ft. 6 ins. high, with plaster barrel ceiling above, and the other section is lined with Westmoreland green slate unpolished ...

Voysey employed a rich vocabulary of demi-lune arches and circular windows within the interior, extending and developing themes he had established in the dining room designed in 1902 for Florence van Gruisen.⁴ The chairs too recall this earlier scheme, with the "single heart" version in its various iterations (with and without arms, lath back and upholstered) used extensively throughout. These were supplemented with an austere oak chesterfield, identical to the one recently supplied to SC Turner at Frinton-on-Sea, and at least one of the "crab" tables supplied in 1903 to CT Burke. The few pieces of bespoke furniture are of interest and show Voysey to be still at the height of his creative powers. The folding circular (or gate leg) table was obviously designed to complement the "crab" table, as it is identical in height and diameter. It has a similar graceful and dynamic presence when open (somewhat reminiscent of EW Godwin's multi-legged centre tables of

2

Folding table and "crab" table as used at Garden Corner (courtesy RIBA Collections)



3

The Hornimans' four poster bed, Garden Corner 1907

the 1880s), but has the advantage of being able to be stored flat against a wall when not in use (figure 2). Strangely, for such a large property, the Hornimans seem to have been particularly focused on maximising all available space. *The Studio* article continues:

Mrs. Horniman's bed-room on the second floor is fitted and lined with oak. The bedstead, jewel safe, writing-table, wardrobe, and all the usual bedroom equipment are fixed and fitted in to utilise every inch of space, and at the side of the bed the cabinets are fitted with sliding shelves, to bring the morning tea-tray over the bed. Mr. Horniman's dressing-room is fitted in the same manner with oak furniture.

The scheme did involve a remarkable amount of fitted oak furniture, all decorated with Voysey-designed strap hinges and handles supplied by Thomas Elsley's Portland Metal Works. Much remains in situ, especially in the principal bedroom mentioned above, but sadly the four-poster bed (figure 3) has gone. This was a massive, fitted, rectilinear piece with an octagonal column towering upwards at all four corners, each capped with a cast bronze figure of a kestrel originally modelled by Voysey in wax. These have the feel of ancient Egyptian sculptures and were intended to be "read" symbolically.

Writing about his use of symbols, Voysey says:

*Symbolism is the oldest of the arts, and must for ever be man's expression of his dependence on man. We are so variously constituted, being on different planes of spiritual and intellectual development, that we are forced to exchange ideas, and so our dependence on one another becomes the foundation of our love, therefore we seek many means by which to transmit ideas, and charm each other into harmonious thought.*⁵

Birds, to Voysey, were perfect symbols of aspiration and spiritual activity. Like people they walk on two legs but they are not wedded to the ground, having the ability to soar towards the heavens and see far and wide. Voysey would later describe an even more specific justification for their use: *"You shall perch four eagles on my bedposts to drive away bad spirits, as the Byzantines believed ..."*⁶

The octagonal, heavily moulded, capitals on which the birds stand (also mirrored at the base of each column) introduce a distinctly Gothic flavour which, in retrospect, can be seen as an early indicator of Voysey turning away from the stripped-down simplicity and proportional refinement of his "peak" years of 1896–1905.

Cast bronze birds, in this case eagles, also featured on a large umbrella stand (*figure 4*) designed for the entrance lobby of Garden Corner, and a further distinctly Gothic piece was prominently displayed close by. This was the built-in master longcase clock that carried a heavily moulded, stepped, ogee pediment - in effect "pointed Gothic" - a decorative device also introduced to the glazing bars of the fitted bookcases in the upstairs library.⁷

4
Umbrella stand for 28 umbrellas
designed for Garden Corner 1907
(courtesy RIBA Collections)



Pointed Gothic is also very much in evidence in the choice of ceiling lights for the large, L-shaped drawing room, which were also designed by Voysey.⁸ In Garden Corner, Voysey created the most ambitious domestic interior of his career, an achievement even more remarkable when one considers the work he was concurrently engaged upon, a project that was to be his most ambitious commercial interior scheme.

As mentioned in Part 2 of this article, Sydney Claridge Turner, the secretary and general manager of the Essex and Suffolk Equitable Insurance Company, had recently successfully lobbied Parliament for reforms to the insurance industry, along with the right for regional insurance companies to operate within the City of London.⁹ This allowed the Essex and Suffolk – whose headquarters were in Colchester – to take a large, prestigious office space in the City. Voysey had recently designed and fully furnished Turner's weekend home, The Homestead at Frinton-on-Sea. The client, fully preoccupied with running his large and rapidly expanding business, was obviously delighted with his new home and was happy to delegate to Voysey the responsibility of designing and fully furnishing the Society's new City office at Capel House, 60 New Broad Street. This was within a new, purpose-built office block designed by Paul Hoffmann and in August 1906, when Voysey started work on the commission, the ground floor and basement levels – those taken by the Essex and Suffolk – had not yet been fitted out. This gave Voysey the freedom to negotiate some structural changes to the interior spaces, allowing him to produce a strikingly "modern", well-lit and rationally organised open-plan design at a time when progressive office design was still in its infancy.

Although the use of the rooms – board room, manager's office, general office (an area open to the public), clerks' office – display a clear hierarchy, they were furnished throughout to a consistently high standard, with bespoke free-standing and fitted oak furniture and off-the-peg lighting, cabinet furniture and metalwork including fireplaces, fire irons, inkwells and pen trays. The striking overall effect – one of relative austerity contrasted with a selective use of luxury materials – can be judged from an article published in *The Modern Building Record* (1911):

This building was nothing but a carcass when handed over to the architect, without floors, doors, ceilings or windows. Every single detail of these, as well as those of the chimney-pieces and furniture, was designed by him. Above the oak dado, five feet high, which is a feature of all the rooms and passages, the walls are treated with hand-floated plaster, distempered white. The columns and chimney-pieces are of black unpolished marble, and on several of the latter are carved or emblazoned in colour the arms of various Essex and Suffolk towns, and the seal of the Company. The windows are glazed with 1¼ inch wide wrought iron glazing bars and Chance's Norman slabs, and in each is a panel of stained glass representing one of the towns in which the Society does business.

*The counters are of gilded oak, covered with plate glass, bound round the edges with copper. The clocks' dials and hands are made to Mr. Voysey's design. Unpolished black marble forms the floor, and all the oak woodwork is left quite clean and free from stain, polish or varnish: the practical result of this combination of material is that it obviates any annual expenditure except that necessitated by fresh white distemper on the ceilings and walls, the nature of the glazing doing away with any need of blinds or curtains.*¹⁰

As mentioned above, clocks featured prominently in most of the interior spaces, the largest being displayed in the main office above the fireplace mantel. These were made by MF Dent & Co, and, like most of the clocks designed for the Essex and Suffolk, the form is closely based upon historical precedent, in this case "Tavern", or "Act of Parliament", clocks of the early to mid-18th century. Bespoke high-back chairs are the most striking feature of the scheme, all variants of the "single heart" chair first designed for Mrs Van Gruisen in 1902.

The board room and manager's office feature the most impressive and extreme of these, armchairs with vertically extended backs containing a wide single splat upholstered in tooled leather displaying the Voysey-designed company monogram.¹¹ These came in two versions: one

5
The typewriting office, Capel House
(courtesy RIBA Collections)



with a leather upholstered seat and typical "Voysey" tapering, octagonal legs, the other, identical in size, featuring a woven cane seat and square section legs terminating with brass castors. These were supplemented with a smaller high-back side chair (figure 5), which also came in two versions: one with a single monogrammed leather covered splat and leather seat, the other with five vertical oak laths and a drop-in rush seat.¹² The Voysey-designed free-standing furniture was made by FC Neilsen and Arthur Simpson, while other furniture (not designed by Voysey), such as the swivel office chairs, came from specialist office suppliers Partridge & Cooper. All the oak fittings were undertaken by S. Elliott & Sons Ltd and the Voysey-designed heraldic stained glass, featuring the coat of arms of the various towns in which the company did business, was supplied by James Powell.¹³

As with the interior of Garden Corner, Voysey exploited a range of demi-lune arches and windows to provide both a rhythm and a visual contrast to the dominant vertical emphasis of the interior spaces. However, here there is a much more dominant use of "pointed Gothic" in the stepped "Tudor" pediment to many of the black marble fire surrounds, also reinforced by the use (in the accounts department) of a recently designed cast iron Gothic fire surround (figure 6) manufactured by the Standard Range & Foundry Co of Watford, with a similar, pointed pediment.

The completed scheme was lavishly photographed (at Voysey's expense) and featured, over the next few years, in several contemporary publications, but unfortunately resulted in no new commissions for office design. However, Voysey continued to decorate and furnish some of the Essex & Suffolk's regional offices between 1907 and 1910.¹⁴ These were much less lavishly appointed than Capel House and contained a mixture of commercially available office furniture together with Voysey-designed lighting, desk accessories, tables, cabinets and a large number of rush-seated "single heart" arm and side chairs, mostly made by Arthur Simpson of Kendal. Simpson had made occasional pieces of furniture for Voysey since the mid-1890s and they had become very good friends with Voysey designing a house for him, Littleholme in Kendal, in 1909. They corresponded regularly and the Voysey-Simpson letters are worthy of separate study, documenting as they do their innermost thoughts, religious beliefs, financial positions (for Voysey, often perilous), philosophical outlook and general health (Voysey frequently refers to various physical ailments and bouts of depression). The letters also reveal that by 1910 Simpson was beginning to eclipse FC Nielsen as Voysey's preferred cabinetmaker. Referring to Voysey's client CT Burke in a letter dated 17th October he states, "I forget if you have done anything for him. Now that Nielsen is no longer to be depended upon it is more likely that you will." Frustratingly, there is no reference to the exact nature of Nielsen's "unreliability", but the working relationship did survive.¹⁵ The letters show Voysey to have been open to suggestions of technical improvements to his furniture from the master craftsman Simpson, and, revealingly, document Voysey's growing self-perception

6
Cast-iron "Tudor" fireplace
manufactured by The Standard
Range & Foundry Co of Watford
c.1906-7



as a “prophet without honour”, as a few extracts (all written by Voysey) demonstrate:

June 8th 1909: *You are right to say keep it simple – but if it is simple it must be pure and beautiful and of good report. The most lavishly ornamented is generally the cheapest from a £.s.d. point of view because the ornament hides bad work and bad material and machine finish and the stock patterns which are got cheap are much cheaper than anything you or I can design. But that sort of cheapness we all know is terribly costly to the soul.*

July 19th 1909: *The chairs I have had made have stood remarkably well but I quite agree with you that it is sailing too close to the wind. This would be better and because more obedient to the nature of the material I think more beautiful. When drawing with a pencil it is very difficult to think and feel as if you were drawing with a chisel on the fibres of the oak, hence the blunder.*

September 27th 1909: *Your chairs at Capel House are excellent. I am quite convinced now that blocking is the right thing. And am very glad you did it.*

February 16th 1910: *It is very good of you to wish to do me more furniture but I do not want anything & I am already very much in your debt. I wish I could order something for clients but there is no furnishing in hand at present all my work is architectural now.*

June 29th 1910: *I send you the only two “Reason as a basis of Art” that are left ... they are wanted by nobody. I am getting more kicks than halfpence for daring to fly in the face of popular beliefs. My architectural brethren are depriving me of assistants. I have the utmost difficulty in getting the help of a really competent draughtsman. I am to be boycotted I suppose, but it will not hinder me in the course that seems for the ultimate good of my profession. When I am dead and gone so will be the present educational system. If we are only scavengers making way for healthier growth – The Lord be praised.¹⁶*

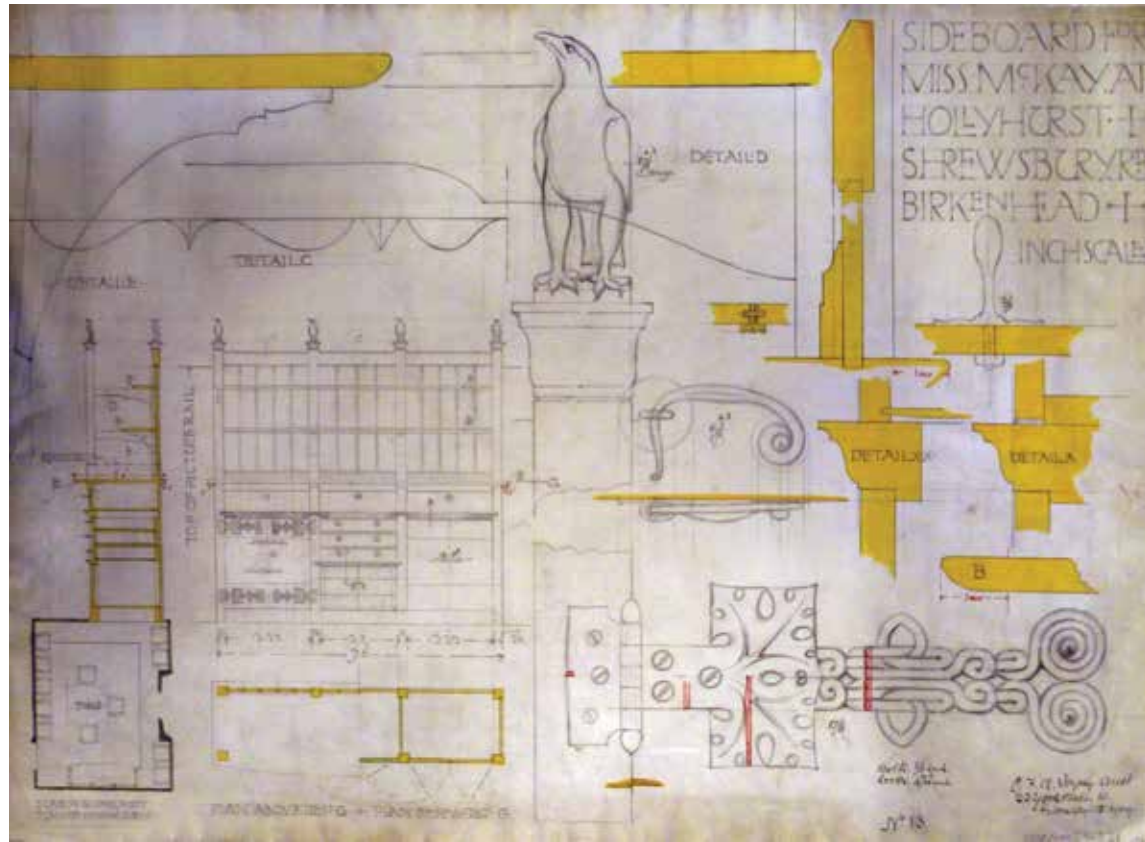
The “present educational system” that so offended Voysey was a widespread return within schools of architecture to teaching Classicism, resulting in Neoclassicism rapidly becoming the dominant contemporary style. Voysey published numerous articles which criticised the younger generation’s rejection of both religion and Gothic principles of design, principles which can be summarised as a truth to materials, climate and location, honest construction and, when applied to architecture, a focus on rational room layout based solely on need and use, resulting in asymmetrical exteriors. When writing autobiographical notes Voysey summed himself up as follows:

He never studied the classic orders, for Gothic Architects in those days regarded Tudor Architecture as the purest and best English building, never found anywhere else. And pure because the honest outcome

of national character, requirements and conditions, both climatic, geographical and geological. He was insular to the backbone, and could not admit that familiarity with foreign countries was necessary for true culture. The avoidance of fashionable practices was congenial to his rabid individualism. Obviously this type of mind was regarded by many as a form of egotistical self isolation. And a form of eccentricity only understandable to those of similar temperament and mental outlook.¹⁷

Throughout his career Voysey had devoutly followed Gothic principles of design as laid down by Pugin and Ruskin. However, in earlier years he had felt no need to obviously demonstrate this by decorating his buildings or furniture with overtly Gothic motifs. As the first decade of the 20th century wore on and he increasingly identified himself as the “last disciple of Pugin”, that position changed and Gothic decoration would frequently come to the fore in much of his architecture and furniture. This is readily apparent in the furniture designed from 1909 onwards although, as is common with Voysey, many pieces were also supplied either repeating, or featuring variants based upon, earlier designs.

The rapid decline in Voysey’s architectural and furniture commissions from this date is well documented, but, although not as productive as he would have wished, he did continue to design furniture worthy of note, albeit for a dwindling number of patrons mostly comprised of faithful former clients. One such was Miss Dalziel McKay of Birkenhead, for whom Voysey had designed furniture and a guest bedroom in 1902. Following the death of her widowed mother, Miss McKay returned to Voysey in 1909 to commission a suite of dining room furniture including twelve “single heart” armchairs and an extending dining table. The centrepiece was to be Voysey’s most elaborate and unusual sideboard design.¹⁸ The piece is similar in form to his earlier sideboard and dresser designs, but the overall appearance is vastly different, so much so that at first sight one would be hard pressed to attribute it to Voysey. On closer inspection, the six cast bronze eagles capping each extended upright – different in design to those used on the bed at Garden Corner – betray Voysey as the designer. His characteristic use of the cabinet hardware formerly manufactured by Thomas Elsley is absent, replaced by custom-made, highly elaborate, Celtic entrelac strap hinges (*figure 7*) and hardware supplied by William Bainbridge Reynolds.¹⁹ As Voysey never betrayed any interest in Celtic art, one would assume these were designed at the request of his artistic client who had studied at the Liverpool School of Art. Questionable construction techniques are also evident as all cupboard doors are constructed from full-width panels with only a top and bottom rail to provide stability – the side stiles having been abandoned – and an overtly “Tudor” styling is introduced with the use of heavily chamfered ogee curves running along the upper edge of the back rail, creating a “castellated” appearance to the design.



7
Original drawing of the sideboard for Miss McKay 1909 (courtesy RIBA Collections)

Family connections also provided the occasional commission, as with the impressive “curio cabinet” (figure 8) designed and supplied to his sister-in-law in 1910. A successful design comprising a recessed, glazed upper section over two sets of drawers, this, as with all Voysey’s best furniture, exhibits a combination of excellent craftsmanship and harmonious proportions. Typical of much of his later cabinet designs, elaborately profiled and visually “heavy” mouldings are applied to the top and base, showing the continued influence of early Georgian furniture. The elegant, integrated octagonal corner columns are a feature that can be traced back to designs of the early 1890s, but they now terminate in “false” caps that are carved out of the moulded top and base. Voysey’s continued use of bronze ball feet is also typical of his later pieces, these being supplied by William Bainbridge Reynolds, as were the recently designed “Tudor” style hinges. In the same year Voysey also supplied two pieces of furniture to FC Gwyn of Hampstead, both exemplifying his habit of utilising previous designs. One is a music cabinet (figure 9), a slight variation of the Kelmscott “Chaucer” cabinet of 1899, and the other, a china cabinet, is a new design but is styled to complement the music cabinet.²⁰ Unusually, these were made of mahogany, a material that must have been demanded by the client given Voysey’s abhorrence of non-native timbers.



8
Curio cabinet for Mrs HA Voysey 1910 (private collection, courtesy Paul Reeves London)



9
Mahogany music cabinet for JW Gwyn 1910 (courtesy Hill House Antiques & Decorative Arts Ltd, www.hillhouse-antiques.co.uk)



10
Atkinson's ground floor showroom
(courtesy RIBA Collections)

In May 1911, commissioned by the New Bond Street perfumers J & E Atkinson & Co, Voysey commenced work on what would be his final commercial interior. This was part of a larger scheme to radically remodel the exterior of the premises, with the street-level elevation being heavily "Gothicised" by Voysey. The recessed front door was crested with a sculpted royal coat of arms and given portcullis-like iron gates, whereas both side doors were topped with windows infilled with curvilinear Gothic tracery. Photographs of the fortress-like exterior show it to have had the appearance of a bank, not a high-class perfume retailer, and it is no surprise to learn that the premises were completely rebuilt in 1925.²¹

The showroom that Voysey designed and furnished (figure 10) appears to have been much more fit for purpose, and in its use of a barrel vault, semi-circular windows, Gothic ceiling lights and glazed counter tops is very reminiscent of the interiors of both Garden Corner and Capel House. The free-standing and fitted furniture is subservient to the products it was designed to display, with Voysey creating a run of glazed-top counters, plain to the front but stacked with drawers to the shop assistants' side, even including a toe recess at ground level for the comfort of the serving staff. Tiered display stands, both floor-standing and counter-top, a range of central showcases, and fitted, canted-side display cabinets provided ample scope for the effective display of the

companies' various products. Seating was provided by employing several "single heart", rush-seated side chairs, with the manufacture of the furniture being divided between Arthur Simpson and FC Nielsen.

In 1912 Voysey produced his final piano design, executed by the Aeolian Company of Bond Street, an American firm who specialised in "pianolas" or player (that is, automatic) pianos. This is a "boxy", inelegant piece of furniture that even manages to incorporate elements of architectural carpentry within its massive under-structure. It was later photographed (figure 11) alongside a music stool designed for EJ Horniman, indicating that it too was likely manufactured as a one-off for the same client. This is confirmed by an article in *The Furnishing Trades Organiser* illustrating items of furniture owned by Horniman, including a remarkably austere cheval glass and stool (figure 12) that must have been designed at around the same time.²² The same year also saw more designs for old clients: furniture for CT Coggin - for whom he had designed The White Cottage, Wandsworth in 1903 - and for Dalziel McKay, a dressing table with en suite washstand.

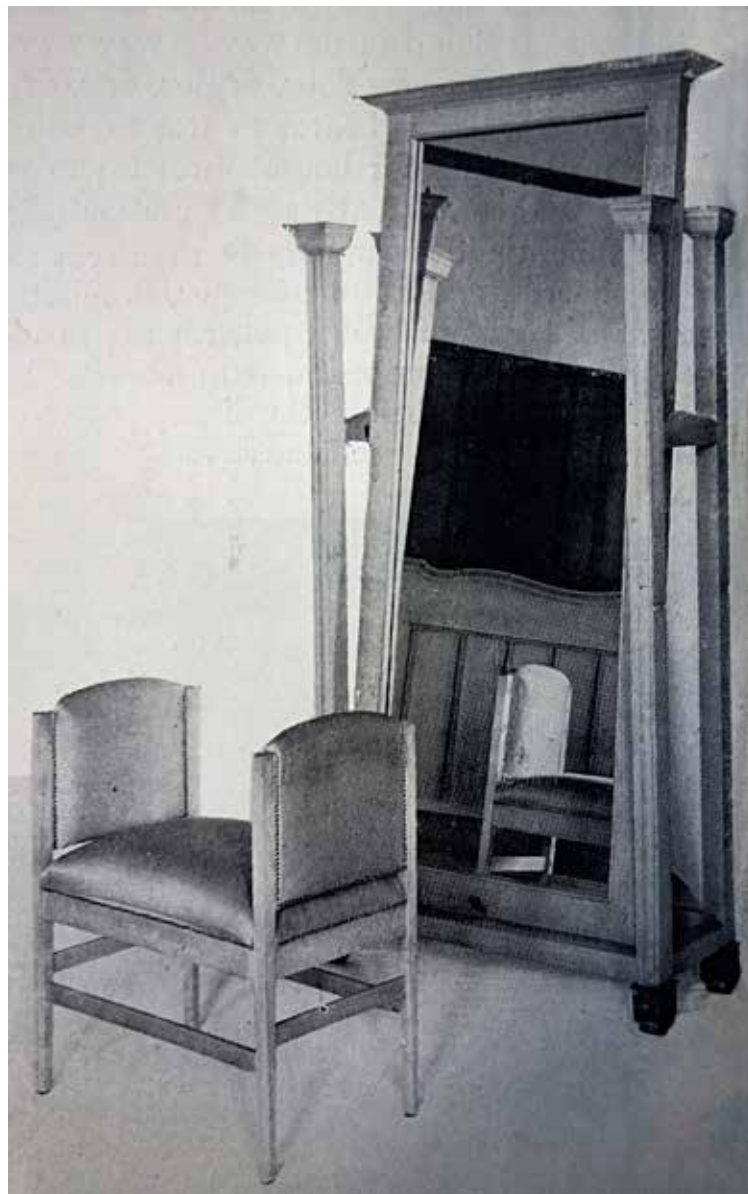


11
Pianola or player piano for
EJ Horniman (courtesy RIBA
Collections)

In early 1912 the front page of *The Illustrated Carpenter and Builder* was devoted to photographs of Voysey furniture.²³ This included many earlier pieces but also one of his recent, overtly "medieval" designs, featuring carved angels. This is a relatively plain, three-drawer carving table with an open structure and bronze ball feet,²⁴ its most striking feature being the four carved angels – appropriately "singing grace" – perched atop the extended corner posts. The cabinet work was supplied by FC Nielsen, with the specialist architectural sculptors William Aumonier & Son providing the angels. It is not recorded for whom the table was made, but an identical one was reproduced over a decade later. The following year *The British Architect* illustrated construction drawings for an oak wardrobe once more, a deceptively simple design (figure 13) and once again decorated with angels.²⁵ In

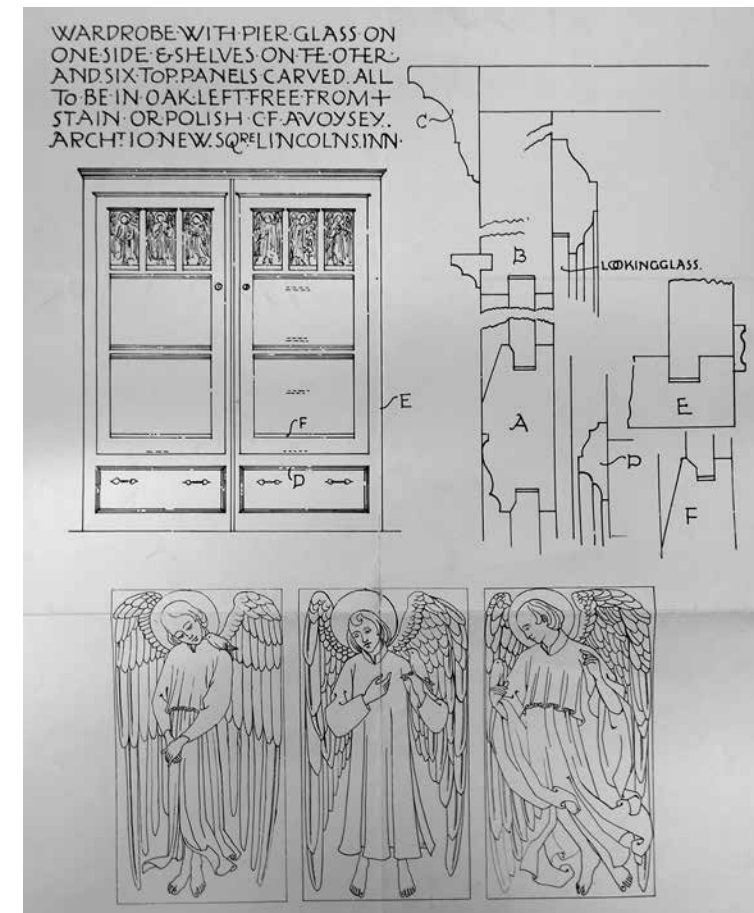
this case a sequence of six, carved in low relief, arranged in-line across the wardrobe's two doors. Voysey provided his own, typically provocative, caption demonstrating his belief that his furniture had the power to spiritually "improve" its owner:

In these days of materialistic realism, it is well to remember that figures have been used in the past, as symbols to express thoughts, not entirely animal or selfish. Anything spiritual, anything Gothic, anything aspiring and uncorporeal is taboo. Indeed, it gives offence to some to mention the word spiritual. Their habit of thought is so materialistic that it is shocked by any pure spiritual idea. But here is the idea that angels (messengers of the Most High) teach the birds



12
Cheval mirror and stool for
EJ Horniman

their song, and plumage; so the lady when she goes to dress might remember the fashions of Heaven as well as Paris.



13
Drawing for a wardrobe with six carved angels and pier glass 1913

Unsurprisingly, very little furniture was designed during the war, but the desire to "Gothicise" continued into his declining years. The chairs of this period show no new creativity, being simply earlier designs overdrawn with added chamfers and ogee pointed back rails. Two, both from 1919, will serve as examples. The first, for CA Hunt, is a variation of the Essex and Suffolk boardroom chair. However, the back has been further extended and pointed Gothic decoration added to the top rail, lending it the unfortunate appearance of a pantomime throne (figure 14). The chair was made by FC Nielsen and, uniquely for Voysey, is upholstered with laced leather straps, a technique frequently used by Arthur Simpson. The second chair was for another old client, Albert H Van Gruisen (husband of Florence), who had retired from his Liverpool fruit business to Hambleton Hurst in Surrey and had commissioned Voysey to design new gardens and a major extension to the house in the same year. Using the drawing of the elegant "single heart" chair as a starting point – first designed for his wife, seventeen years earlier – Voysey created a bizarre "Tudor" commode with similar Gothic points

14
Easy chair for CA Hunt 1919
(courtesy RIBA Collections)

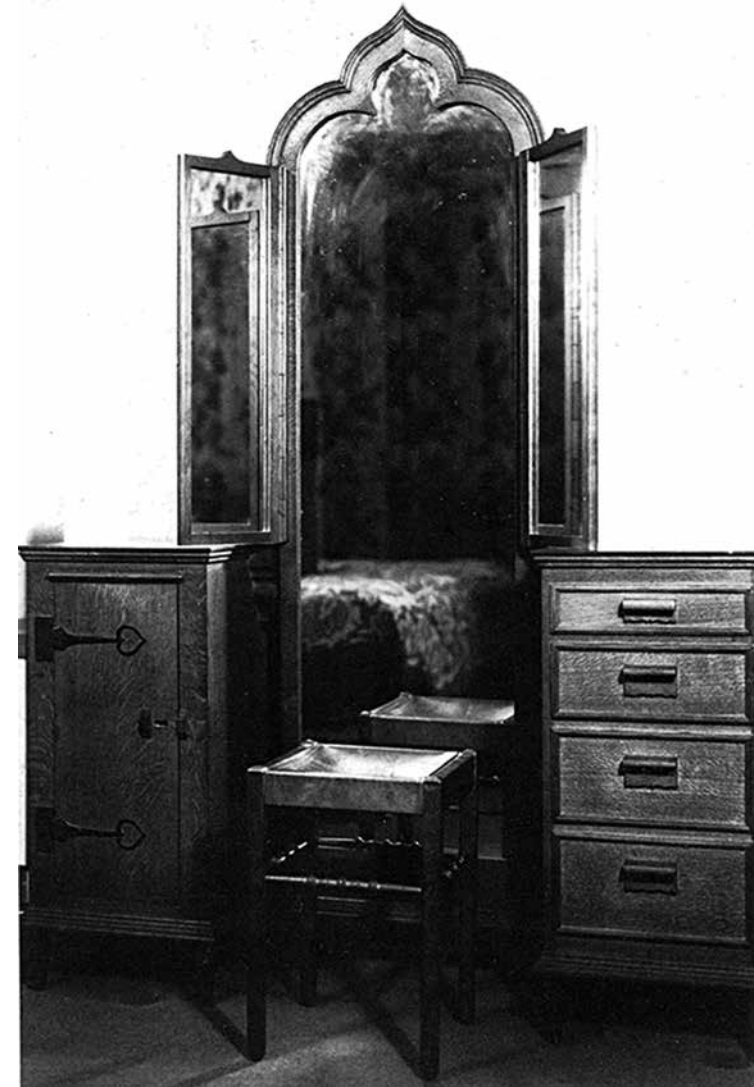


added to the top rail as the Hunt armchair and the gracefully curving arms of the original replaced with narrow, straight lengths of wood.

Sporadic and mostly minor furniture commissions continued into the mid-1920s, including clocks and toilet table (*figure 15*) for CT Burke (1921), chairs and clock case for CE Welstead (1921), “various articles of furniture” for CT Burke (1923), “many pieces of furniture, sent to Vodin” for T Eastwood (1923), “several pieces of furniture” for CE Welstead (1923), and finally furniture for PA Barendt (1927).²⁶ Voysey’s final furniture designs – a dining room table, dressing table and bedside fitment – were made in 1934 for his favourite niece Ella, recently married to the actor Robert Donat. Then aged seventy-seven, Voysey had lived on into the age of Modernism. In an increasingly secular world of cutting-edge materials and radically abstract design, where furniture could be made from tubular steel, glass or bent ply, an oak “Tudor” dressing table (*figure 16*) must have appeared wilfully anachronistic. Not so to Voysey, who remained faithful to the deeply held beliefs inherited from his father and the writings of Pugin and Ruskin until the close of his career. Writing as late as 1936 he said, “I am trying to show that modern art reveals the effect of the poisonous dictum ‘an artist must express himself.’ An artist must be sincere; but surely he should try to express the fundamental qualities of the highest universal moral and spiritual thoughts and feelings of human and Divine Nature – not his own miserable prejudices.”²⁷ To Voysey religion and design had always been one and the same.



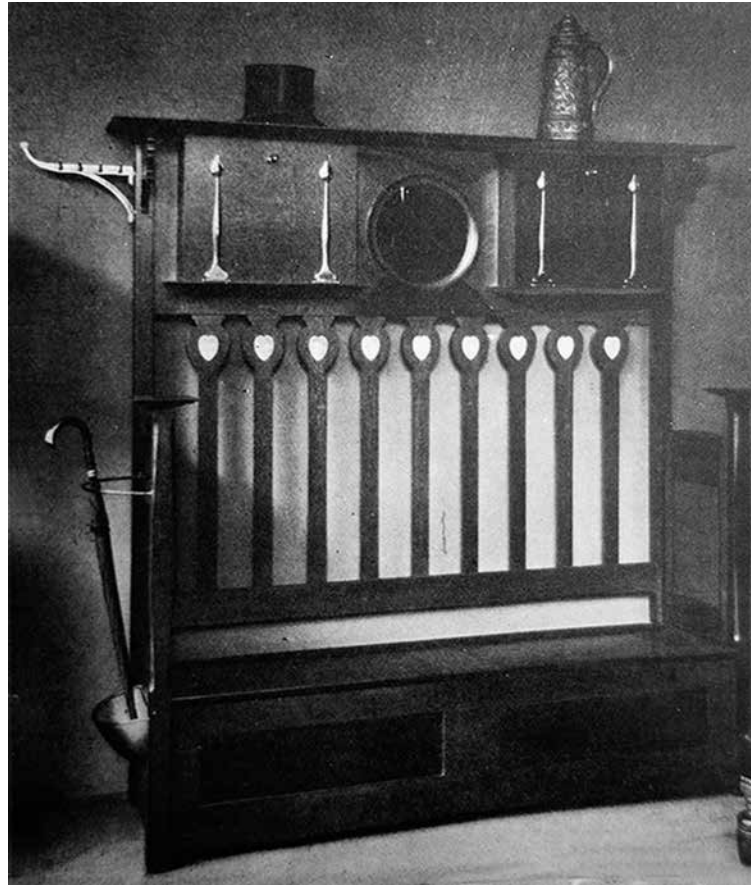
15
Toilet table for CT Burke 1921
(courtesy Hill House Antiques &
Decorative Arts Ltd, www.hillhouse-antiques.co.uk)



16
Dressing table for Mr and Mrs
Robert Donat 1934

A note on commercial furniture and contemporary copies

The furniture discussed in these articles was never mass produced or commercially retailed and, once a bespoke design had been created, was only available to subsequent clients by ordering through Voysey. However, for a short period between c.1899 and c.1902 he did supply designs to a small number of commercial manufacturers. Even so, judging by the scarcity of surviving examples, the numbers produced were very small. The most well-documented relationship, although brief, is with the manufacturer and wholesaler of “Artistic Furniture” JS Henry of Old Street, Shoreditch. An oak hall settle (*figure 17*) illustrated in *The Furnisher* was warmly praised by the writer and fully attributed to Voysey.²⁸ The relative simplicity of this oak piece is unusual for JS Henry, who specialised in elaborate “novelties” featuring much elaborate inlay work, invariably manufactured in mahogany. Interestingly, none of the highly prominent cabinet fittings were supplied by Thomas Elsley and one must question to what extent Voysey’s design was “improved”



17
Hall settle manufactured by JS
Henry c.1900

or “added to” by the company during manufacture. Comparison with a similar settle designed for AMM Stedman only a year later is telling.²⁹ Almost identical in form – both featuring grotesque silhouettes and under-seat storage – the later version is more typically austere, dispensing with all metal fittings and the circular mirror and replacing the pewter inlaid splats with a solid panelled back. There is only one other design that can be confidently attributed to Voysey and Henry, an inlaid games table with characteristic octagonal legs, examples surviving in both oak and mahogany.³⁰

Examples of commercial Voysey designs that appear to have been manufactured without alteration include the well-known “Tempus Fugit” clock in oak, retailed by Heal’s c.1902, the upright piano manufactured in rosewood, oak or mahogany by Collard & Collard c.1902, and a billiard table (figure 18) first designed c.1900 for Revd Canon Grane and then commercially produced by the specialist firm of Thurston & Co, who were manufacturing it well into the 1920s.³¹

For many years it has been repeatedly stated that Voysey provided furniture designs for Liberty & Co, invariably in relation to several different “Voyseyesque” chairs that have periodically appeared on the market. However, there is no evidence in either the Liberty records or in Voysey’s own extensive archive that there was a relationship with the Liberty furniture studio.³² What is certain is that Liberty



18
Billiard table manufactured by
Thurston & Co

advertised an arm and side chair very loosely based on the “single heart” chair in their *Inexpensive Furniture* catalogue of 1907 which, apart from a similar basic form, differs markedly from the “original”.³³ Ever conscious of fashionable taste, Liberty’s design department had a habit of actively taking inspiration from the work of contemporary designers and appropriating elements into their own work. Of the other “Voyseyesque” chairs – none of which can be attributed to Liberty – one, a cut-down version of the “double heart” chair, is remarkably close to Voysey’s original, although the design is totally compromised by the clumsy height reduction. Other chairs (figure 19) exhibit differences to a greater or lesser extent, but they share one thing in common: in all cases the “originals” upon which they are based were reproduced in popular contemporary journals, in particular *The Studio*, giving amateur woodworkers and unscrupulous manufacturers across Europe and the USA more than enough information to create their own version of the Voysey chair. **Caveat emptor.**

19
“Voyseyesque” chairs. From left:
cut-down version of the “double
heart” chair; armchair probably
made by an American amateur
from a photograph in *The Studio*;
crudely executed chairs, probably of
continental origin

