

Peart, Tony (2018) Was there a fourth painted clock? The Orchard, 7 . pp. 31-38.

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Was there a fourth painted clock?

Voysey scholars have long been aware of a colour reproduction of a watercolour painting (figure 1) titled “reception room in Miss Conant’s house” (depicting an interior scene at The Pastures, North Luffenham) published by the German architectural magazine *Modern Bauformen*. The room depicted is furnished with various Voysey designed pieces of furniture and significantly, features one of his iconic painted clocks, prominently displayed on the mantel shelf above the fireplace. This has led to much speculation and the tantalizing possibility that at least four painted clocks were produced. As hand-painted Voysey clocks are incredibly rare, with only three known, a fourth to add to their number is an exciting prospect.[1] The discovery of a group of photographs of The Pastures, taken on two different occasions, within the manuscripts collection of the late John Brandon-Jones, together with other circumstantial evidence, provides the opportunity to finally answer the long-standing question: was there a fourth painted clock?[2]

The client was Miss Gertrude Catherine Conant (1846–1930), then living with her 80-year-old father, Edward Nathaniel Conant of Lyndon Hall, Oakham: Justice of the Peace and Deputy Lieutenant. The Pastures was commissioned upon the death of the client’s father, the family seat transferring to a male relative. Voysey commenced work on the project in late November 1901 and the house appears to have been finished by early 1904. In March the same year a lengthy description of The Pastures formed part of a well-illustrated article on Voysey’s recent architectural work in *The Studio* but no photographs of this specific project were included.[3] The interior of the house was described as follows:

“In the interior all the fireplace tiles are of special design, different in every room; the tiles themselves executed by Mr. C. Dressler at Marlow. The parlour walls are lined to the height of six feet with pink silk, the woodwork being enamelled in white. The floors are carpeted with self-coloured Austrian pile carpets.”

The reader would be forgiven for naturally assuming the house was fully furnished at this time, but was it? The collection of photographs in the Brandon-Jones archive contain various external views of the house (figure 2) taken shortly after completion, some of which were reproduced in *Modern Bauformen* alongside the watercolour interior depicting the clock. However, it should be noted that this article was not published in 1911 as has been previously and erroneously stated but was actually featured in the September 1905 issue.[4] These photographs of the house and surrounding landscape are not dated but do offer clues as to when they were taken. Close scrutiny reveals a handful of trees to be in early leaf whereas the majority are bare. This, together with the absence of fallen leaves, the fact that the garden has yet to be planted and daffodils appear to be flowering

would indicate they were taken in early to mid-spring, shortly after the house was completed i.e. approximately April 1904, a few weeks too late for them to be included in *The Studio* article.

The 1905 *Modern Bauformen* piece is extensively illustrated including: photographs of the exterior of Voysey's home, The Orchard together with the well-known interior view of the hall featuring his own painted clock; the ground plan and three of the exterior photographs of The Pastures as previously mentioned; elevations and plans for a proposed library in Limerick; elevations and plans of a proposed tower house in Bognor Regis for William and Haydee Ward Higgs and six recent textile designs. As was customary for *Modern Bauformen* many lavish colour plates were included with two being devoted to Voysey: the interior view of The Pastures together with an exterior perspective of the Sanderson & Sons Factory in Chiswick.[5] The article was written by Henry F W Ganz who was also the artist responsible for the watercolour interior of The Pastures.

Henry Francis William Ganz (1863–1947) was born in London to a German father, Wilhelm a professor of music and trained as an artist under Alphonse Legros at the Slade School of Fine Art, University College London. He subsequently worked as a painter, engraver and occasional writer in London where, between the late 1880s and early 1920s, he exhibited at: the Royal Academy; the Royal Institute of Oil Painters; the London Salon and the New English Art Club. Ganz may have been a member of the Reverend Charles Voysey's Theistic Church and through this had come to know his son.[6] The pair were certainly on good terms around this time for as well as Ganz writing and illustrating the article on Voysey for *Modern Bauformen*, Voysey also designed two typographic book covers for Ganz (in 1905 and 1908) and both participated in a joint exhibition at The Rowley Gallery in January 1908.[7]

Among the images of The Pastures in the Brandon-Jones archive is one that is of significant interest (figure 3), a photograph of the parlour seen from an almost identical viewpoint as Ganz's watercolour but devoid of any furniture or decoration which, as with the exterior views, must have been taken shortly after the building's completion. Ganz is unlikely to have ever visited The Pastures, in fact much of his descriptive text (including the passage on The Pastures) is simply a translation into German of *The Studio* article written by Aymer Vallance the previous year. To create this watercolour, he would probably have been supplied with either drawings or, as was more common by this time, reference photographs. Is this the reference photograph that Ganz used to create his watercolour and if so, what are its implications?

The fact that this *is* the reference photograph seems to be borne out by simply overlaying the two images in Photoshop (figure 4) and finding that they correspond in all major respects. This then begs one further question: if the room was empty, where did the furnishings depicted by Ganz come

from? To answer this one does not have to look very far. As previously stated, the well-known photograph of the hall of Voysey's home, The Orchard (figure 5) was also included in the same article and it is instructive to carefully study the two side-by-side and note the many strong similarities. The most obvious of these, reading from left to right in both images are chair, table and clock. The chair in the painting features turned caps to its front legs and although at a different angle, is similarly closely cropped at the extreme left of the image. The chair Ganz depicts appears to be of his own devising, featuring the visible elements of the hall chair shown in the photograph with the addition of a "Voyseyesque" lath back of his own invention and it will come as no surprise that no chair of this design is known to exist. To its right is a Voysey designed circular, centre table virtually identical to that shown at The Orchard and in a similar relative position. Finally, we have the painted clock placed, as it was at The Orchard, high on the mantel shelf above the fire. If we continue to focus on this shelf we see that it contains other objects with a "twin" at The Orchard: the brass candle sticks (identically positioned in both images) and a vase displaying some peacock feathers, moved left from above a mirror at The Orchard to alongside the clock at The Pastures. The scene is completed with the addition of four additional Voysey designed items. A ridiculously small Voysey style high back chair to the left of the fireplace which, if compared in height to the six-inch tiles decorating the fireplace, stands at only 40 inches and, sitting on the hearth itself, a set of fire irons, fire screen and kettle on stand suspiciously similar to a photograph (figure 6) of identical items exhibited at the 1903 Arts and Crafts exhibition and published in *The Studio* the same year.[8]

The inevitable conclusion must be that considerable "artistic licence" was employed by Henry Ganz, in producing this painting. No doubt at the request of the architect, he took a photograph of an empty room and "virtually" populated it with typical examples of his furniture, supplemented with a few choice ornaments, creating the simple, understated interior desired by Voysey: "You will arrange my rooms with their furniture so that each piece has the place most suited for its use, with light helping to make it more useful, so that we feel that no single bit of furniture is quarrelling with or harassing another, and everything shall have its useful purpose. Thus proportion and grace and the intention to serve a useful purpose will provide the very best elements of beauty, and ornaments will be little required." [9]

It would be unsatisfactory to leave the argument here as there is still the possibility that even though Ganz's painting may well be a fantasy created from various photographic sources (including an empty parlour) that still does not mean that when Miss Conant eventually furnished the house, it did not look like the interior depicted in the painting. To counter this argument, one can offer the fact that no drawings exist for any moveable furniture commissioned by the client nor is any mention made of such items in any of Voysey's papers or record books. However, as pictures speak

louder than words, we shall consider one further piece of photographic evidence. As mentioned in the opening paragraph, a second set of photographs (including many of the furnished interiors) are also in the Brandon-Jones archive. These must date to October 1909, evidenced by a reference in Voysey's expense book, the more established appearance of the garden and the fact that the surrounding trees are beginning to shed their leaves.[10] This set contains an image of the now fully furnished parlour (figure 7), instantly recognised by the unique, tiled fireplace although it is now surrounded by a plethora of reproduction furniture, chintz-covered upholstery and decorative "knick-knacks" (covering most available surfaces). It is apparent that in the case of furnishings, Miss Conant had the bourgeois, conservative taste so stereotypical of the Edwardian landed gentry and so despised by her architect! Voysey was firmly of the opinion that "lavish ornament is like a drug, the dose requires increasing as it loses its effect" and it is quite obvious that his client was an "addict"![11]

On a more positive note, the clarity of these photographs also reveals one final, important piece of evidence: judging by the objects displayed upon it, the mantel shelf on which the clock supposedly stood was, in reality, far too narrow to ever house it.[12] With great regret, it is the author's considered opinion that Miss Conant's painted clock never existed.

Footnotes

[1] The three known clocks are: 1) a version c.1896 with an enamelled dial (Private Collection); 2) Voysey's own clock c.1898 (V&A); 3) a version owned by the Countess Lovelace c.1909 (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts). For more information see: Hamerton, I. *Voysey's Architectural Clocks*, in *The Orchard*, vol. 3, 2014, pp. 25-36.

[2] BrJo/box 06/01A.

[3] *The Studio*, vol. 31, issue 132, 1904, pp. 127-133.

[4] *Modern Bauformen: Monatshefte für Architektur*, Jahrg IV, Heft 9, September 1905, pp. 95-106.

[5] Illustrated in: Hitchmough, W. *C F A Voysey*. London: Phaidon, 1995, pp. 178-80.

[6] See the expenses book, RIBA VoC/2/1: May 18, 1908, "Ganz re. TTC" (The Theistic Church).

[7] *The Studio*, vol. 43, issue 180, 1908, p. 141.

[8] *The Studio*, vol. 38, issue 119, 1903, p. 28.

[9] Voysey, C.F.A. *Ideas in Things*, in T. Raffles Davidson (ed.), *The Arts Connected with Building*, Batsford 1909, p. 130.

[10] See the expenses book, RIBA VoC/2/1: Oct 21, 1909, "Extra copies of photos of The Pasture House".

[11] Voysey, C.F.A. *Ideas in Things*, in T. Raffles Davidson (ed.), *The Arts Connected with Building*, Batsford 1909, p. 114.

[12] Although similar to that at The Pastures, the mantel shelf at The Orchard was in fact deeper as it also incorporated the picture rail, throwing it further into the room. However, even this didn't create sufficient width to accommodate the clock as close inspection of the photograph of the hall at The Orchard reveals a small area of moulding added to the section on which the clock stood, providing the necessary additional width. This modification was not made at The Pastures.

Picture Captions

Figure 1 – "Empfangszimmer Aus Miss Conant's House" by Henry Ganz, from Modern Bauformen, September 1905

Figure 2 – The Pastures, North Luffenham photographed c. April 1904 Courtesy RIBA Collections

Figure 3 – The Parlour photographed c. April 1904 Courtesy RIBA Collections

Figure 4 – Collage of alternating sections of Ganz's painting and the photograph of the parlour

Figure 5 – The entrance hall at The Orchard c. 1900 Courtesy RIBA Collections

Figure 6 – Metalwork, the majority manufactured by Thomas Elsley & Co. 1903 Courtesy RIBA Collections

Figure 7 – The Parlour photographed c. October 1909 Courtesy RIBA Collections