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Modern Symbolism: The Graphic Design of CFA Voysey

Over the course of a long career CFA Voysey created a large body of commercial art or, as we would call it today, graphic design. It encompasses everything from book jackets, to posters, to hand lettering, to badges (logos) and most famously bookplates. As space is limited, I have avoided any detailed exploration of his activities as a typographer and bookplate designer and would refer the curious to two further sources of information. The first is my own *Voysey's Lettering Designs*, The Orchard No. 4 (Autumn 2015) which can be viewed as an adjunct to this paper. The second is the profusely illustrated *The Bookplates and Badges of CFA Voysey* by Karen Livingstone (Woodbridge 2011).

Voysey's earliest recorded foray into commercial artwork is both obscure and bizarre; a copyright application made in November 1873 by Thomas Bowden Green, a tea merchant of Mincing Lane in the City of London in respect of a drawing entitled '*Tichbourne as a Boy (a buoy with a human face)*'.^[1] The artist of what, one assumes, is a caricature drawing is the sixteen-year-old Voysey, then living with his parents at Camden House, Dulwich. The image is now lost as is much of its context although the date is shortly after Voysey left Dulwich College, ending an unhappy period in his life later recalled in the third person as follows:

"When School was over, eagerly he rushed home to be with his parents... ..he made a few friends among the Students of the Upper School sixth form boys and those in the painting Studios... ..When the Art Master (the sculptor John LC Sparkes RA) was asked by the father as to the fitness of his son to any of the artistic professions, he said that the boy was no good at all, and quite unfit for an Artist's Career."^[2]

As life drawing played no part in the training of an architect, it must be from his brief time at Dulwich, mixing with the likes of Henry Herbert La Thangue (1859-1929) and Stanhope Forbes (1857-1947), that the young Voysey gained the confidence and knowledge to draw the human form, a skill he would call on for the rest of his life and something that would set him apart from the architects of his generation, including the remarkably versatile Philip Webb (1831-1917).

John Pollard Seddon (1827-1906), to whom Voysey was articled for five years from 1874, certainly recognised his ability as a talented graphic artist allowing him to carry out a decorative scheme at a church in an "*important provincial town*" where he painted "*life sized angels.*" During this period Voysey also produced an elaborately illustrated rent roll book (now lost) for an extensive Irish Estate featuring watercolours of "*street after street, with pigs and peasants going in and out of the doors.*"^[3]

Portrait drawings are the earliest of his dated works to survive and seem to have been something of a passion for the aspirant architect.^[4] During the 1870s and early 1880s Voysey was yet to find his own graphic 'voice' and these works are executed in a highly realistic, relatively anonymous style, the one exception being a printed change of address card dated 1882 featuring a confidently rendered young man (most likely an idealised self-portrait) attired in Tudor garb (*figure 1*). This figure is drawn with a firm outline with simple, contoured hatching giving a strong sense of directional light and shows the twenty-five-year-old architect to be well aware of contemporary illustration techniques and, in particular, the work of Sir John Tenniel (1820-1914).

It is well known that Voysey's independent architectural career took many years to establish, and it proved necessary for the young architect to explore alternative sources of income. An early attempt was recalled later in life with the elderly Voysey explaining that a friendship with a young "*painter and etcher*" resulted in them sharing a studio, he explains:

“Together they worked and sometimes sat up all night etching copper plates. There was a certain religious sect with which the painter’s father was connected and so the painter conceived the notion of etching portraits of their notable preachers. Some of the Ministers objected to having their portraits taken and sold to the members of their flock. So the painter and architect attended the service of these good people and during the sermon made careful sketches, slipping out stealthily unobserved, and in their Studio prepared plates from which many prints were made and sold to the brethren.”[5]

Voysey places this enterprise during his years of pupillage, however this immediately proves him to be an unreliable witness as the small group of etched portraits that survive all date to late 1883 and early 1884 when he had been in independent practice for two years. A drawing from this period, probably by Henry Ganz (the most likely candidate for Voysey’s painter/etcher friend), survives and shows the young architect engrossed in sketching (*figure 2*). It also seems likely that the “*certain religious sect*” referred to was not that of the painter’s father but his own father’s Theistic Church in Swallow Street, Piccadilly with Voysey mis-representing the facts to maintain his lifelong assertion that he never exploited any of his father’s extensive social connexions to further his own career.[6]

The most profound and long-lasting influence on Voysey’s graphic and decorative art was undoubtedly the publication, commencing in April 1884 of *The Century Guild Hobby Horse* the radical and exquisitely produced art journal established by the architect Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo (1851-1942) along with the poet, architect, designer and art historian Herbert Horne (1864-1916) and the artist, designer, writer and poet Selwyn Image (1849-1930). The importance of Mackmurdo’s help, advice and encouragement in establishing Voysey’s career as a pattern designer is well documented but that influence also extended to the work he would go on to produce for advertisements, posters and book jackets. Voysey would later recall:

“It was by Mackmurdo that the journal entitled ‘The Hobby-horse’ was started, in collaboration with Professor Selwyn Image and P. Horn. For those days it was beautifully got up and printed on good paper, before Morris came on the scene. The ordinary Press were not accustomed to notice artists’ work, so ‘The Hobby-horse’ was only ridden by its sympathetic professional brethren, and consequently short-lived as a publication. But the extent of its influence was impossible to measure.”[7]

Many assume *The Hobby Horse* was an extensively illustrated publication whereas, in reality, it contained very few illustrations making its visual influence on the generation of artists that were to follow all the more remarkable. Voysey, along with many of the illustrators who would go on to find fame in the ‘nineties’, must have pawed for hours over the striking cover design and the few scattered illustrations contained in each issue.[8] All three of the journal’s founders provided illustrations but it is undeniably those created by Selwyn Image that had the greatest influence on Voysey. Here he found not only the simplified, ‘flat’ stylistic treatment with an emphasis on outline that he would follow for the rest of his life but also many of the motifs that are now considered to be quintessentially ‘Voysey’. The journal’s cover is a case in point (*figure 3*) as here can be seen the genesis of the ‘Voysey bird’, the parallel ‘whiplash’ curves that characterise much of his early textile and wallpaper designs, not to mention his design of 1885 for the Thomas Carlyle memorial plaque (sculpted by Benjamin Creswick an associate of The Century Guild) (*figure 4*). Perhaps a memory of the cover, featuring as it does a setting sun and silhouetted mountains, would also later serve as the inspiration for the famous painted clock!

The first, 1884 issue of *The Hobby Horse* proved to be a one-off until the publication was successfully relaunched in April 1886 as a quarterly. A series of decorative vignettes drawn by Selwyn Image for

this new edition, all featuring highly stylized birds, can also be seen to have had a huge influence upon Voysey. A comparison of these with Voysey's iconic bird air vent, probably designed in the early 1890s, graphically demonstrates this point (*figure 5*).

The first reference to graphic design in Voysey's *'Black Book'* is an entry for 1888 that records him providing designs for 'chimney pieces' and 'grates' together with 'advertisements' for the firm of Lewis & Co. however, as dates prior to 1890 were added from memory, it is likely Voysey is mistaken in his recollection.[9] No such company is listed in his address book nor has an advert come to light. An early advertisement for a manufacturer of fireplaces and fire accessories does exist for the West Midlands firm of Ben Parkes & Son, and this is probably to what he was referring (*figure 6*). The crisply delineated line drawing not only gives a tantalising view of what are likely to be Voysey's first forays into metalwork design (the fender is pierced with galleon motifs) but also show his detailed knowledge of Tudor Gothic design motifs. At this early date the association of Voysey's name with the product was not considered to have a marketing value. However, the architect has ensured his name, as the designer of the advertisement, has been recorded for all to see. From the beginning we see Voysey's drive to not only produce pattern and metalwork design to commission but also his desire to actively participate in the marketing of these products and when possible, promote his own name. This would soon reach an early highpoint with the long-running series of advertisements, commencing in 1889, he would design for the wallpaper manufacturers Essex & Co.

Voysey's first contact with the firm was a small commission to design bespoke furniture for the recently established company's showrooms.[10] This quickly expanded to not only include the design of wallpapers but also the creation of a long-running series of playful press adverts and promotional material. In a world before marketing departments, Voysey seems to have been given remarkable freedom to design as he saw fit, allowing him to develop a series of highly personal, instantly recognisable, and quirky advertisements rich with symbolism. In representing the public face of the manufacturer for approximately two decades it can be argued that, in hindsight, Voysey created a proto-corporate identity for the company.[11]

Although difficult to date accurately, both the style of the execution and that of the associated hand lettering allows for a likely sequence for this body of work to be postulated. The earliest pieces were probably executed around 1890 and include an address label featuring a galleon motif that Voysey seems to have quickly developed as a company badge or logo and a pair of large, full-page adverts featuring complicated, swirling, asymmetric designs. These can be seen to directly parallel the elaborate dynamics of his pattern designs at this time and feature in one case a highly wrought abstracted angels wing (*figure 7*) and in the other an almost 'Blakeian' vision of a guardian angel providing a guiding light.[12] As with his designs for pattern, as time progresses the graphic work becomes more simplified with less emphasis on complicated, 'busy' outlines as evidenced by another full-page advert featuring a more realistic angel dating to 1896 (*figure 8*) and a likely contemporary design depicting a punning 'SX' (Essex) device. The relationship with Essex & Co. continued into the new century with a series of less bombastic, more charming, quarter-page adverts featuring Voysey's characteristic motifs of birds, hearts, wildflowers, angels and bucolic characters (*figure 9*). The advertisements Voysey created for Essex & Co. exposed his graphic work to a mass audience resulting in further commissions which grew steadily as the decade progressed.

The most influential journal of the day *The Studio*, founded by Charles Holme in 1893, was an active supporter of Voysey and featured examples of his work in its very first issue. This was followed in September 1893, by a lengthy illustrated interview with the architect focusing primarily on his work as a designer of pattern. Following these features, Holme went on to commission Voysey to create an illustrative cloth binding to house the six individual monthly issues that would comprise volume

one of the journal. However, the resulting complex, highly symbolic image of two slightly androgynous figures kissing in a garden was soon dropped by the publisher in favour of a much simpler, purely decorative design that would appear from volume three onwards. One wonders how many readers of *The Studio* were able to decipher the image's idiosyncratic symbolism, in particular the use of the 'governor' of a steam engine (held by the male figure) which, in Voysey's mind, typified "useful control"?[13] In retrospect, most of what typifies Voysey's relatively narrow design vocabulary of birds, figures, flowers and foliage is present in this image. As with most areas of his creative practice, once he found an approach that worked, he tended to stick with it.

In the early 1890s Voysey became involved with Octavia and Miranda Hill's Kyrle Society, a philanthropic organisation formed to bring 'beauty to the homes of the people' and supplied various decorative schemes for their London meeting rooms. Around 1893 this involvement extended into the field of publishing when he provided the Society with a striking and highly appropriate cover design for a series of architectural guidebooks, although the only example known to exist is that to St. Paul's Cathedral.[14] The style of execution is very similar to that of *The Studio* cover but here a greater use is made of solid black to pick out the negative space and thus highlight the positive elements, a stylistic approach learned from Selwyn Image. The characters depicted, 'Love and the Pilgrim', feature in Chaucer's *The Romaunt of the Rose* and will appear again later in Voysey's graphic oeuvre. A similar graphic approach was taken for the design of the cover of a parish magazine for St. Mary's Church, Chatham in 1895 a commission that came about after Voysey had repaired and decorated the church rectory for the incumbent, the Rev. J T Rowe (figure 10).

This commission was not unusual. Over the course of his career, Voysey received the majority of his graphic commissions as extensions to other, unrelated design work he had provided to the customer. In the early days this was primarily in the field of pattern design but as his architectural practice developed these contacts too often resulted in commissions for graphic work. However, one suspects that the majority of these designs including many of the later bookplates, were simply produced as favours to the client, not through any drive for financial remuneration. Things were a little different in the early days of his architectural practice and there are a handful of designs from the 1890s that can only have arisen because Voysey was actively pursuing paid graphic work. These pieces include a 'masthead' design for *The Girls Own Paper* executed in March 1894, a press advertisement that appeared in German publications during 1895 for Blank & Co. a German braids and trimmings manufacturer and two heraldic pieces: a letterhead for the London branch of piano manufacturer C Bechstein and somewhat surprisingly, a coloured label design for bottles of 'Holder's Pale Ale' (figure 11)!

By 1897 Voysey's graphic work was well enough known for one of his Essex & Co. adverts to be reproduced as an illustration to accompany 'Art in Advertising' a survey of recent developments in commercial art written by the well-known designer Lewis F Day for *The Art Journal*. This was followed a year later with the special winter number of *The Studio* devoted to 'Modern Book-Plates and Their Designers'. This lengthy survey, written by Gleeson White, saw Voysey being represented by a badge recently designed for his children's school, The King Alfred School, Hampstead, and a bookplate for Charles Stewart King. This public exposure of his recent graphic work coincides with the commencement of Voysey's busiest, most productive spell as both as an architect and a designer of pattern. It is remarkable that during the time he was engaged with the design and building of houses such as: Greyfriars; Dixcot; Norney Grange; New Place; Broad Leys and Moorcrag and was also under contract to various wallpaper and textile manufactures, his output of graphic design continues unabated. Voysey found the time to design further adverts for Essex & Co., book jackets for the Glasgow publishers Blackie and Son and an elaborate certificate for The Home Arts and

Industries Association.[15] Sadly, the designs for *Modern House Construction* (figure 12) provided to Blackie were rejected and the edition appeared with a cover designed by the company's in-house art director, Talwin Morris (1865-1911). Motifs from the HAIA certificate would later reappear on tiles designed for Pilkington's but it is interesting to note that Voysey's original inspiration seems to have come from a line engraving of a twelfth century French pavement tomb (figure 13). This print is one of many graphic images he preserved for future reference in an envelope he entitled "*Miscellaneous photos and prints by various authors.*" This collection of 'inspirational items' now with the RIBA contains many photographic details of various plants (for use in his pattern design) but also many graphic images removed from various books and magazines, some of which clearly informed this aspect of his work. Early woodcuts and illuminated manuscripts from the fourteenth century predominate but works from the Renaissance also feature including a delicate engraving of '*Tobias and the Angel*' by an unknown artist (in the manner of Raphael), which likely served as the initial inspiration for Voysey's 'Love and the Pilgrim' pair. More recent images include a collection of Thomas Bewick wood engravings of birds and an Edward Burne-Jones woodcut illustration for the Kelmscott Press.

It is only as the new century dawns that one sees a slowing of Voysey's graphic output, but it did not cease. Book jacket designs were commissioned (and rejected) by George Newnes publisher of *The Strand Magazine* in 1902. One regrets that Voysey's playful and punning response to *The Works of Francis Bacon*, a design featuring pigs rooting for acorns (figure 14), was not used! Further forays into publishing followed as in the same year he was commissioned to design a range of simple, pocket-sized, gilt-stamped book covers for Methuen's *Little Library* series. He also designed a small, hand lettered title for the series, which appeared as a frontispiece in each volume.[16] A hand lettered cover for his father's *Religion for All Mankind* was designed in 1905 along with another hand lettered design for his friend Henry Ganz's *Practical Hints on Painting, Composition, Landscape, and Etching*. The Ganz volume also contains a Voysey designed circular monogram for the author along with a typical Voysey advertisement featuring birds for The Rowley Gallery in Kensington Church Street. Finally, in 1906 Voysey designed the cover for his own *Reason as a Basis of Art* rejecting a treatment featuring pictorial elements (figure 15) in favour of an entirely hand lettered approach. This proved to be one of the last outings of his 'free form' lettering before he adopted, in 1907, a more regular and austere 'Gothic' script.[17]

The early 1900s also saw Voysey designing widely circulated press advertisements for the wallpaper manufacturer Arthur Sanderson and Son, a company he had occasionally provided with wallpaper designs since the late 1880s. These adverts often appear in magazines alongside the superficially similar designs Voysey had provided the previous decade to Essex and Co. which were successful enough to run well into the new century. This undoubtedly caused much confusion for the reader, featuring, as they do, virtually identical lettering alongside similar decorative motifs. Voysey was aware of this and sought to create a different identity by ensuring his Sanderson adverts always featured a lone, elongated male figure dressed in eighteenth century garb. However, the highly individual, and immediately recognisable nature of his graphic style somewhat negates this. Although deceptively simple, these designs were also full of symbolism as he later explained in reference to a design featuring the lone figure bending to inspect a rose bush (figure 16) saying it was: "*intended to attract artists with a reverence for nature. The humble lover with delicate touch, is humble because conscious of Nature's Divine origin.*" In designing a coloured Christmas card for Arthur Sanderson's brother Harold, Voysey overtly proclaims his design philosophy showing a pair of angels displaying a scroll bearing the statement '*Symbols May Express More than Words Can Utter*' (figure 17).

The year 1907 proved to be a watershed; as many of his fellow architects embraced neo-classicism, Voysey reacted histrionically by embracing the Tudor Gothic. As the secular, modern world dawned, he responded by adopting design motifs from an idealised, religious, medieval past. His father, the Rev. Charles Voysey (1828-1912), had relished his prolonged conflict with the established church, using every opportunity to disseminate his views through the press or by self-publishing. Mirroring the approach of the father, the son viewed the arena of graphic design as the most effective way to widely disseminate his beliefs and values to the public no matter how obscure or arcane! This was surely the motivating factor that saw Voysey producing graphic designs regularly throughout his career. Frustratingly for the designer, his clients tended to respond to his graphic work in terms of style and aesthetics but there was always a subtext to Voysey's work and for him the intention was to encourage his audience to: *"love that which is symbolised and never sink into a materialistic contentment with the symbol only."* [18]

As the new century wore on and his frustrations grew, Voysey felt a growing need to publicly lobby for a return to the widespread use of symbolism. Contradictorily, in also seeking opportunities to explain the symbols he makes a tacit admission that much of his symbolism's meaning was lost on a contemporary audience. A case in point can be seen when *The Builder* reproduced Voysey's circular badge design for The Design Club (*figure 18*) stating (probably at the insistence of Voysey) that the 'mystical symbol' is: *"intended to express the essentials of design – head, heart and hand, the head crowned with the band of restraint."* [19] Rather cuttingly, the anonymous author goes on to say: *"The meaning of the symbol is better than its decorative effect, which is not very attractive."* However, this was not an issue to Voysey whose claimed sole intention was to encourage the viewer to: *"see beneath the surface of things"* as it *"enriches our lives and develops character"* and further cautioned: *"our materialistic temper has caused us to count only sensuous qualities in things material..."* [20]

As Voysey's architectural work slowed towards the end of the decade, graphic and pattern design would once again become his primary source of income although designs were frequently provided to friends and family for little or no remuneration. As Voysey had more time available to spend on his graphic work the complexity of his designs often increases, culminating in the years preceding The Great War with a small group of designs commissioned by his brother and close friend, the Rev. Ellison Annesley Voysey (1867-1942). The earliest dates to 1911 and features a reworking of 'Love and the Pilgrim' a design created eighteen years previously for The Kyrle Society. The symbolism used in this group is relatively straightforward; all feature angels (*figure 19*) but in one example, a prize certificate for the Alderley Edge Music Festival (*figure 20*), Voysey did not blanch from including a written description of how the image is to be 'read' as part and parcel of the image!

The March 1915 issue of *The Studio* featured a double page spread illustrating six of Voysey's badges and bookplates and an editorial celebrating his *"decorative genius"* and noting it was not surprising that: *"he should have bestowed his attention upon a class of design which, if lying outside the broad ambit of his practice as an architect, is yet one calling for the play of the decorative faculty which he possesses in such a marked degree."* [21] This article was probably seen by Campbell Dodgson (1867-1948), Keeper of Prints and Drawings at The British Museum, who requested examples of Voysey's graphic work to add to the museum's collection. Flattered, Voysey donated a selection of his bookplates, badges and advertisements in a series of bequests, the last occurring only four years before his death. The *Studio* article certainly had a positive impact on this aspect of Voysey's design practice with bookplates and badges comprising the bulk of his output across the remainder of his career.

Around July 1915 Voysey became involved with The Civic Survey of Greater London, a body originally founded in 1894 by CR Ashbee as the Committee for the Survey of the Memorials of Greater London. A loose association of like-minded architects and conservationists including Voysey's good friend, the architect George Walton (1867-1933), their task was to complete a register, parish by parish, of any important buildings under threat and alert Londoners of the situation by reporting to the London County Council. Shortly before Voysey joined the 54-year-old architect Harry Redfern (1861-1950), a fellow member of The Art Workers' Guild, was appointed Assistant Director. Voysey's involvement lasted only a few months but saw him designing a circular badge to act as an identity for the Survey. This striking design appropriately features: *"two good spirits, one casting light while the other is recording. That is to say, the collecting of facts and the making of diagrammatic records of the same."* [22] In January 1916 he also designed and drew for the Survey a large scale, full-colour map for use by servicemen on leave in London. The *Soldiers & Sailors Map of London* (figure 21) indicates the location of accommodation, food, baths, swimming pools, YMCAs and various military clubs. This would be his last work for the Civic Survey's as their activities were suspended due to the outbreak of war.

During the early months of the conflict, widespread concerns about the negative effects upon munitions production of excessive drinking amongst the workforce, prompted David Lloyd George, the Minister of Munitions, to set up the Central Control Board (Liquor Traffic) on 30 June 1915 under Regulation 1 of the Defence of the Realm (Liquor Control) Regulations, 1915. Those men not eligible for the armed forces through reasons of age or health currently employed on The Survey of London by The London County Council (under whose remit its operation fell), were transferred to the Ministry of Munitions and a group including Voysey, Redfern and Walton were allocated to the Central Control Board. Thus, during August 1916, on the eve of his seventh decade, Voysey became an employee of HM Government.

The solution to excessive drinking in the areas surrounding the larger munitions factories was solved by taking local pubs into state management and employing a disinterested management system that removed the incentive to sell liquor and promoted the provision of entertainment, food and non-alcoholic beverages. Three areas were involved in the scheme: Carlisle, Enfield and Cromarty Firth with the main focus being on Carlisle, close to the massive armament factory at Gretna. In what became commonly known as the 'Carlisle Experiment', many sub-standard establishments were closed or radically re-modelled and many new 'model' pubs were designed and built. Harry Redfern was appointed chief architect to the Central Control Board with George Walton, his junior by six years, acting as his assistant. Walton's remit was to assist Redfern with site surveys and supply the interior decoration and furnishing of the premises. Voysey, who certainly was a much better-known architect than either Redfern or Walton, was simply tasked with designing the Board's badge, a few hand lettered notices, a year calendar and a series of posters for use as decorations in the scheme's public houses and canteens (figure 22). The select group of large-scale images that Voysey created to be framed as posters are his most colourful body of graphic design work and comprise illustrations of well-known nursery rhymes and aphorisms with the occasional oblique statement thrown in for good measure! It would appear he was given complete freedom in relation to subject matter and made little attempt to design images that specifically relate to either place, time or context. Many also feature images and motifs that had been employed previously. [23] They have the appearance of charming, anachronistic images seemingly ripped at random from the pages of a children's book of fairy tales. Their means of reproduction was somewhat tortuous with Voysey drawing each full-size on brown wrapping paper (probably because of paper shortages) and then carefully inking in the design. From this a black and white line image was transferred to linen following which the drawing on wrapping paper was coloured using relatively opaque watercolours.

The black and white image on linen was then sent to Charles Thurnham Printers of Carlisle who produced multiples using the 'sun process' which were then shipped back to Voysey in London for hand-colouring in watercolour.[24] Finally, these signed, hand-coloured prints were returned to Thurnham's in Carlisle for framing and distribution. One suspects that the supportive Redfern had devised a cunning way to help Voysey prolong his involvement with the scheme and so maximise the modest income he would receive from his somewhat tangential involvement with the war effort!

As previously stated, from the war until the end of his life in 1941, Voysey's graphic design activity accounted for much of his modest income. This preoccupation probably led to him selecting it as the subject of an illustrated lecture entitled *Modern Symbolism* given at Carpenters' Hall on February 6, 1918 and printed in *The Builder* the following month.[25] As with so much of Voysey's writing he demonstrates an uncanny knack of simultaneously praising and antagonising his audience. We have already seen his frustration at the general public's unwillingness to engage with and decipher his graphic symbolism and he must have seen this as an opportunity to finally set the record straight. More religious tract than advice on design, Voysey's lecture cautions against those pursuing 'art for art's sake' believing that: "*all we enjoy through our senses is on a lower plane than that which stimulates our intelligence and our love.*" He is adamant that the time is quickly coming when: "*qualities of thought and feeling will be looked for*" and extolls his audience to: "*wake up and express in our design all the beauty of thought and feeling with which every child of man is endowed.*" The extract printed in *The Builder* included five illustrations of Voysey's badges and bookplates necessitating the editor to add a postscript, likely to have been supplied by Voysey), explaining how the symbolism of each design should be deciphered and understood.

This evangelical mission to re-orientate and re-educate the public continued unabated and over a decade later in April 1929, *The Builder* once again provided a platform for Voysey to call for the widespread adoption of symbolic design when an edited and expanded version of '*Modern Symbolism*' reappeared illustrated with five different examples of Voysey's bookplate designs.[26] On this occasion Voysey provided detailed explanations for each image and reference is made to "*the oak of sturdy growth*" (figure 23), compasses "*symbolising logic*" and the crown signifying "*self-control*" and indicating that "*the mind must control the emotions.*" However, the definitive, self-penned guide to Voysey's canon of symbolic design is a scrapbook compiled between 1930-32 containing seventy-five annotated examples of his graphic work. Voysey paid to have each of his explanatory commentaries typed by a professional indicating that the work may have been intended for commercial publication. Unsure of the final title, Voysey pondered a list of alternatives including: *Symbolism in Design (or a Little Moral Philosophy)*; *Ideas for Bookplates and Badges*; *Some Hidden Meanings in Form* and finally, *Badges, Bookplates, Symbolism and Philosophy*. [27] The lengthy introduction is once again based upon his Carpenters' Hall lecture of 1918, and the images selected are a comprehensive and representative selection of his 'greatest hits' from forty years' worth of graphic work (figure 24). The majority are bookplates, but the volume also contains the 1893 cover design for *The Studio* and the Sanderson adverts discussed previously. Designs for commerce are represented by circular badges for The Deptford Chamber of Commerce, The Brockley Permanent Building Society and The Central Control Board (Liquor Traffic).[28] Also documented is an unsuccessful 1911 competition design for an Australian stamp (featuring a Kangaroo) and a more recent piece, a 'Tudor Gothic' head piece for an article on his hero, Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin published in the *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*. [29] As ever with Voysey, a seemingly simple design could well have a highly complex meaning in the mind of its creator, as in the case of a design for the reverse of a pack of playing cards (figure 25). This warrants an explanation that runs to no less than thirty-six lines of dense text although it starts simply enough with a description of the Knave, King and Queen. By its conclusion Voysey has attacked society's

“materialistic contentment” and criticised those who *“appropriate the opinions of others”* without making the effort to think for themselves, explaining that people are prone to be lazy and love the *“wrong things.”* He ends pessimistically with a cry from the heart:

“Love money and matter most, and then the value of our book plates and symbols will depend on material dexterity and authorship, more than on the beauty of thought and feeling contained in them; and the names of the author will be an important addition. But in all time there have been some who believe that the love of God leads to the love of goodness, truth and beauty and ultimately to the love of man and the joy of symbolising these qualities in all designs.”

Voysey continued to create graphic designs, especially bookplates, until shortly before his death in 1941. This later work lacks the focus of his earlier designs and ranges from circular badges featuring plants, flowers and animals (supplied to the Embroiders’ Guild) to hand-painted public house signs executed for long-standing patrons such as Lady Lovelace.^[30] As Voysey’s financial difficulties became dire, he turned to selling multiples of his work in an attempt to generate income. Once again, he exploited the ‘sun print’ method having drawings of his large format annual calendars and grids of smaller greetings card designs reproduced as black and white line art. The elderly Voysey would then sit alone in his small, St. James’s bed-sit flat, cutting out and hand colouring the images as and when required (figure 26). Some of these were sold but one suspects the majority were given away as gifts to friends and clients. An entry in the *‘Black Book’* records: *“Designed and coloured 936 cupids, 448 given away. Profit £11.4.0.”*^[31]

Voysey’s final graphic design commission was never completed. It was to have been a bookplate for John Betjeman (1906-1984) who he first met around 1936; the pair quickly becoming good friends. They corresponded regularly and, in a letter, dated July 7, 1939 Voysey provides an insight into his philosophy regarding bookplate design by revealing:

“I cannot design any ornament that does not suggest some thought and feeling other than pure sensuous feeling. It should suggest the owner’s character, affections or occupation. Any suggestion of the designer would be in my opinion quite out of place and in bad taste. As Ruskin said, “tell me what you love, and I will tell you what you are”. If I design you a book plate, it must speak of you alone.”^[32]

After a meeting to discuss the project, Voysey tells Betjeman that he will not accept payment for the design and that following their discussions he has decided that the most appropriate symbol to represent an author and journalist is the eagle which he sees as: *“the highest flyer and furthest seer of any living creature.”* His devotion to symbolic meaning and his belief in its ability to prompt ‘higher thoughts’ never wavered but sadly the war and his failing health intervened. We shall leave the final words to Voysey who, in one of his first letters to Betjeman, tragically encapsulates the physical and financial plight that dogged his later years:

“It is rather an amusing race I am watching between life and Bank Balance. I do not yet know which is going to win. My hope is that the Bank will.”

Notes

- [1] The National Archives Kew, Copyright Office and Stationers' Company, Ref: COPY 1/23/655.
- [2] Voysey, CFA. *The Value of Hidden Influences, as Disclosed in the Life of an Ordinary Man*, 1931, Ref: RIBA VoC/4/6.
- [3] Ibid.
- [4] See: RIBA SC 172/VOY [626-635]
- [5] Voysey, CFA. 'The Value of Hidden Influences, as Disclosed in the Life of an Ordinary Man', 1931, Ref: RIBA VoC/4/6.
- [6] For three examples see: *The Orchard*, no. 7, p. 43.
- [7]. Voysey, CFA. '1874 and After', *Architectural Review*, vol.70, 1931, pp.91-92.
- [8] *The Hobby Horse* was a huge influence on Aubrey Beardsley, Sidney Sime and the members of the Birmingham Group.
- [9] *Black Book*, RIBA VoC/1/1.
- [10] Ibid.
- [11] The German architect and designer Peter Behrens is widely considered 'the father of corporate identity' based on the work he produced for AEG from 1906 onwards.
- [12] Illustrated: *The Orchard*, no. 4, p. 38.
- [13] Voysey, CFA. 'Symbolism in Design', 1930-32, p. 11. RIBA SKB458/2.
- [14] Illustrated: *The Orchard*, no. 4, p. 38.
- [15] Illustrated: *The Orchard*, no. 8, p. 88.
- [16] Illustrated: *The Orchard*, no. 4, p. 41.
- [17] See: Peart, T. 'Voysey's Lettering Designs', *The Orchard*, no. 4, pp. 37-45.
- [18] Anonymous. 'Carpenters' Hall Lectures: Modern Symbolism', *The Builder*, March 8, 1918, pp. 156-7.
- [19] Anonymous. *The Builder*, Feb 27, 1909, p. 236.
- [20] *The Builder*, March 8, 1918, pp. 156-7.
- [21] *The Studio*, vol. 64, March 1915, pp. 50-51.
- [22] Voysey, CFA. 'Symbolism in Design', 1930-32, p. 11. RIBA SKB458/2.
- [23] "What makes your admiration?" is a reworking of a Sanderson advert (figure 16), "Love and the pilgrim" first appeared on the Kyrle Society guide to St. Paul's and was later used as a Sunday School certificate (figure 19), "T's love that makes the world go round" first appeared as an Essex & Co, wallpaper and was also used as an advert for the same company finally, "Use & Beauty" is the same design that decorated the first two volumes of *The Studio* in 1893.

[24] The 'sun process' was a development of cyanotype printing using sunlight or UV light to transfer a black line image to paper.

[25] *The Builder*, March 8, 1918, pp. 156-7.

[26] Voysey, CFA. 'Modern Symbolism', *The Builder*, April 5, 1929, p. 634.

[27] Voysey, CFA. 'Symbolism in Design', 1930-32, p. 11. RIBA SKB458/2.

[28] Illustrated: Livingstone, K. *The Bookplates and Badges of CFA Voysey*. Woodbridge: Antique Collectors' Club, 2011.

[29] See: RIBA SC 172/VOY [576].

[30] A sign was also designed for the Horse & Jockey Inn for Col. Raymond, 1927. RIBA SA69VoY[13].

[31] *Black Book*, RIBA VoC/1/1.

[32] See: RIBA BrJo/Box1/16.

Illustrations

- 1 *Change of address card (detail), 1882 (RIBA Collections)*
- 2 *Voysey sketching. Probably drawn by Henry Ganz c.1883 (RIBA Collections)*
- 3 *Cover design for The Century Guild Hobby Horse by Selwyn Image, 1884*
- 4 *Thomas Carlyle memorial plaque; background designed by CFA Voysey, executed by Benjamin Creswick, 1885*
- 5 *Vignettes drawn by Selwyn Image for The Hobby Horse, 1886 together with Voysey's air vent grille designed c.1893*
- 6 *Advertisement for Ben Parkes & Son, 1888. The metalwork depicted was most likely designed by Voysey (RIBA Collections)*
- 7 *Full page advert for Essex & Co., c.1890*
- 8 *Full page advert for Essex & Co., 1896*
- 9 *Quarter page adverts for Essex & Co., late 1890s*
- 10 *Cover design for St. Mary's Parish Magazine, Chatham, 1895 (RIBA Collections)*
- 11 *Label design for Holder's Pale Ale, mid-1890s (RIBA Collections)*
- 12 *Rejected design for cover and title page of Modern House Construction, c.1897 (RIBA Collections)*
- 13 *An engraving of a French, 12th century, monumental paving slab providing inspiration for Voysey's design for a certificate for the HAIA, c.1898 (RIBA Collections)*
- 14 *Rejected cover design for The Works of Francis Bacon, 1902 (RIBA Collections)*
- 15 *Alternative cover design for Voysey's own Reason as a Basis of Art, c.1906 (RIBA Collections)*
- 16 *Original pen & ink design for Arthur Sanderson advert, c.1903 (© Victoria and Albert Museum, London)*

- 17** *Christmas Card for Harold Sanderson, 1901 (RIBA Collections)*
- 18** *Badge for The Design Club, 1909*
- 19** *Certificates commissioned by Voysey's brother, the Rev. Ellison Annesley Voysey, c.1911 (RIBA Collections)*
- 20** *Detail of certificate for the Alderley Edge Musical Festival, c.1913 (RIBA Collections)*
- 21** *Soldiers & Sailors Map of London, 1916*
- 22** *Hand coloured posters for the Central Control Board (Liquor Traffic), 1916-18 (RIBA Collections)*
- 23** *Bookplate for Arthur À Beckett Terrell, 1917 (RIBA Collections)*
- 24** *Symbolism in Design: Voysey's carefully compiled and annotated scrapbook of bookplates, badges and advertisements, 1930-32 (RIBA Collections)*
- 25** *Design for the reverse of a pack of playing cards, c.1912 (RIBA Collections)*
- 26** *Hand-coloured multiples of Cupid, 1932 (RIBA Collections)*