

Early Craft Education and the Endeavour of C.R. Ashbee

The Society of Arts and the School of Art Wood-Carving

It could be argued that 1884 was the most significant year in the development of the Arts and Crafts movement, for in that year both the Art-Workers' Guild and the Home Arts and Industries Association were founded; but institutions encouraging higher education in crafts already existed. By 1884 the Royal School of Art Needlework was established on Exhibition Road, and the School of Art Wood-Carving in rooms at the Albert Hall; both the Society of Arts and the City and Guilds of London Institute were already awarding grants and prizes for students of artistic crafts.

The Society of Arts had as far back as 1758, within four years of its foundation, offered prizes for designs for weaving, calico-printing, cabinet-making, coachwork, iron and brasswork, china, earthenware or 'any other Mechanic Trade that requires Taste.' The public response was disappointing 'with the result that, by 1778, nearly all the technical subjects had dropped out,' and the competitions were restricted to subjects normally performed by fine artists, such as drawing, painting, engraving, modelling, and carving.¹ The Society of Arts' awards were quite generous, and this early failure to interest the public in artistic craftwork presaged the difficulties that were to beset the Arts and Crafts movement.

The Society's next attempt to encourage designers in the crafts was due to the enthusiasm of Prince Albert who advised: 'To wed mechanical skill with high art is a task worthy of the Society of Arts.' A competition for designers was organized in 1846, and entries from this, and a similar competition in the following year formed the nucleus of the Society's first 'exhibition of select specimens of British manufactures and decorative art' held during March, 1847. A series of exhibitions organized by Henry Cole ensued, leading up to the Great Exhibition of 1851. Other large exhibitions, notably that of 1862, followed, but little was done to assist or to educate the artist craftsman or designer. The Schools of Design (1837–1857) and the Schools of Art were, it was generally agreed, a complete failure in this respect.²

The Society of Arts continued to sponsor minor exhibitions with the intention of encouraging designers and craftsmen, for example in 1861 it

collaborated with the Company of Paper Stainers in an exhibition of the decorative arts, and in 1863 with the Society of Woodcarvers in an exhibition of wood-carving. From the time of this second show until 1870 the Society of Arts awarded annual art-workmanship prizes for chased, repoussé, and hammered metalwork, carving, enamel and porcelain painting etc., but again the response was small, leading to the cessation of the awards. The Society's annual report of 1871 declared:

These competitions have now been carried on for several years but the Council regret to observe that, in spite of the large amount of prizes offered, there is still wanting anything like an adequate response on the part of manufacturers, designers, or workmen. The result is, that although no doubt the articles rewarded are of a very satisfactory character, showing great skill and taste, yet the competition is small, and the amount of money awarded is far less than that which was offered, and which it was hoped would be claimed.

To the Society was, nevertheless, due the foundation of the first public institution for training male and female craft workers, namely the School of Art Wood-Carving. With the aid of some funds provided for technical education by the Drapers' Company, the Society established the school in 1878 at Portman Square under the supervision of Signor Bulletti, noted for his carvings at Alnwick Castle. In the following year the school was provided with rooms in the Albert Hall by the Royal Commissioners for the Great Exhibition of 1851, and found successive homes in the City and Guilds College, in the Royal School of Art Needlework, and lastly in its own premises in Thurloe Place where it eventually succumbed.³

The development of the School should have served as a warning to Crane, Lethaby, Ashbee, and other members of the Art-Workers' Guild who later held out the hope to students of a decent place in society for the educated hand-craftsmen. The provision of such a school was an anachronistic attempt to revive a dying craft which had little place in a modern economy, a venture kept afloat by the same temporary enthusiasm of the upper classes for things aesthetic and traditional as later sustained the Arts and Crafts movement.

Sir John Donnelly was chairman of the School from its foundation until his death in 1902, which may seem strange to the reader, taking into account his strong disapproval of craftwork in the Schools of Art, but Donnelly's viewpoint was clear. Art was art: craft was craft. Government Schools of Art should provide art, and craft schools supported by master tradesmen, manufacturers, and the Guilds of London should provide crafts.

At first under Bulletti the number of students at the School was small and had only risen to 42 by 1881, his last year as manager. It thrived better

under his successor Miss Eleanor Rowe as the Arts and Crafts movement gathered momentum and during 1892 there were 375 on the roll. The aims of the School were outlined in the *Art-Workers' Quarterly* as follows:

In the first place it undertakes to train a certain number of young students of both sexes (who have shown artistic aptitude) entirely free of charge as wood carvers and teachers. . . . Among the teachers employed by the various County Councils throughout the country are many women who were free students at the School. . . .

The second aim of the School is to help those who are already professional wood carvers and teachers and the small grants given by the London County Council Technical Education Board and the Worshipful Company of Drapers are chiefly devoted to this end. . . .

The third part of the School work lies among amateurs, who, having joined the classes for a short period, return again and again. . . .

The classes are open every working day from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and the fee paid entitles the student to stay all day . . . and from time to time orders given by artists and others are executed by the students as part of their training.⁴

It is significant that the first paragraph of these aims refers to the teachers employed by the County Councils as 'many women.' *The Studio* magazine also stressed the School's suitability for females. It reported that:

For women, the opening as teachers of carving is a very good one. The remuneration varies from £1 to £5 a week according to the energy and ability of the teacher. For young men, in addition to the opening as teachers there is the workshop, where they will do far better in their early years, than going about the country teaching elementary wood-carving.⁵

It is also significant that the third paragraph of the aims mentions the amateurs who 'return again and again.' Both the free students, whose fees were paid for by the City and Guilds of London Institute, and the amateurs, were mostly female; also the manager who followed Bulletti and her successor were both female. The School had become what the Female School of Design and the Female School of Art (Bloomsbury) had become in the 1840s and 1850s, namely an establishment catering mainly for 'reduced gentlewomen' seeking a pittance, and enthusiastic lady amateurs eager to present some of their work to a distinguished relation or friend or to show it at a Home Crafts and Industries exhibition; lady amateurs described by C.R. Ashbee, a member of the A-W. G., as 'dear Emilys.'

Fine wood carving or 'the art of wood carving as a branch of the

Fine Arts,' as an advertisement for the School put it, was a time-consuming craft, and could only obtain ample reward for a male or independent female if sold to the rich. It was significant that the staff and students of the School carried out work for H.R.H. Princess Louise, the Earls of Wharnccliffe and Shrewsbury, Lord Brassey, the Rajah of Koosh-Behar, and various members of the British and German aristocracy.

The Royal School of Art Needlework

The Royal School of Art Needlework, South Kensington is not as significant for this history of the Arts and Crafts movement in education as the above school, since some form of education in needlework has been with us from at least Anglo-Saxon days, and such a functional subject will no doubt be taught indefinitely, but it deserves mention between it was the first public institution established in London specifically for an artistic craft; moreover this School and the School of Art-Woodcarving were the only two such public institutions at the time that the Art-Workers' Guild was founded, and were strongly supported by the Guild, especially through the pages of the *Art Workers' Quarterly*.

The Royal School of Art Needlework was founded in Sloane Street in 1872 by H.R.H. Princess Christian of Schleswig-Holstein with the help of Lady Marion Alford, Lady Welby, and others 'with the twofold objects of reviving decorative needlework and finding profitable employment to needy educated women.' In 1875 it moved into buildings in Exhibition Road remaining from the Exhibition of 1862, and finally into its own building at the corner of Imperial Institute Road and Exhibition Road in 1903.

Needlework was of course unlike any of the other crafts for which the Art Workers' Guild supported. In an age of opulent dress and drapery the School thrived, and the students had no difficulty in obtaining employment in industry or teaching. A large amount of ceremonial robes for church and state was produced and the *Art Workers' Quarterly* reported:

A considerable stock of embroidery is also maintained, the sale of which has generally proved satisfactory; the School therefore has been self-supporting, and has carried on its work without any public grant or subsidy.⁶

Schools of the City and Guilds

Thus it can be seen that there were in London at the time of the foundation of the Art-Workers Guild two educational institutions exclusively for artistic craftwork, one for art wood-carving, surviving by virtue of grants from the City and Guilds, from the Drapers' Company, and from wealthy patrons; and the other for needlework, thriving on contracts from the Court, Church and Government. The only other educational institutions in London which

were providing practical experience of artistic craftwork were the City and Guilds South London Technical Art School, Kennington Park Road, Lambeth and the Finsbury Technical College.

The members of the City and Guilds Institute had from its foundation by the London City Livery Companies in 1880 taken an interest in artistic crafts, which were regarded before the crusade by the A-W.G. as 'technical subjects,' and the Institute were later to provide an important incentive to artisans through its examinations. The artistic crafts were not however much practised at the Finsbury College which the City and Guilds established in 1883. There was an art department taken by a designer Arthur F. Brophy, who later joined the A-W.G., in which the students studied drawing, painting, modelling, and design, but the only craft which might have been considered artistic in this 'model trade school', as it was termed, was cabinet-making which was carried out on a large scale along with joinery in the evening trade classes.

The City and Guilds South London Technical Art School was more inclined to the artistic crafts. The School had been established by the Guilds in connection with Lambeth School of Art at the suggestion of J.C.L. Sparkes, headmaster of the National Art Training School from 1876–1897, formerly head at Lambeth, in order to provide classes in modelling, china painting, and enamelling for the purpose of Doulton's, the famous potters, and for Farmer and Brindley's great marble works. In 1884, design lectures were given at the School by Hugh Stannus, design lecturer at the National Art Training School and teacher of Architectural Ornament and Modelling at the R.A. Schools, who on 5 May of that year became the first member of the A-W.G. to be elected by its committee.

In addition to the above artistic crafts and drawing and painting, the Technical Art School had daily classes in wood engraving under C. Roberts. The Royal Commissioners on Technical Instruction witnessed a lecture there in 1883 on the design of ceramic tiles by Stannus, and visited the day class for wood engraving, and reported:

The students, 11 in number, at the time of our visit, were engaged in practical work at circular tables specially fitted for the purpose.⁷

Only 15 students attended the design lecture, a contrast to the attendance at life drawing from the nude. The Commissioners reported of the latter:

The room was almost inconveniently crowded. Some of the students there seemed to have scarcely sufficient power of drawing to be working from the nude.⁸

This situation was typical. Fine art classes in drawing and painting were widespread and well attended owing to the great art boom of the 1880s.

Classes in the artistic crafts of in 'the lower branches of ornament' were nothing like as popular. As we now move from these early technical schools to the central institution of art education it will be seen that it was even worse in this respect until Walter Crane of the A-W.G. intervened.

Design and Crafts at South Kensington

In 1884 the metropolitan or central school of art of the Department of Science and Art was the National Art Training School located in the precincts of the South Kensington Museum (now the Victoria and Albert Museum). The type of art education pursued in the Training School was determined by Major-General Donnelly, Assistant Secretary of the Education Department, and Chief Executive at South Kensington, and Thomas Armstrong, Director for Art of the Department of Science and Art. As has been mentioned Donnelly was opposed to the introduction of craftwork, and the regulations for examinations of the Department discouraged any employment on craft materials.

The first attempt to introduce practical craftwork into the central art institution had been made as early as December, 1838, when a Monsieur Trenel had been appointed to visit the Normal School of Design twice a week to give lessons in weaving and the application of patterns to ruled paper. These lessons had been discontinued within a year owing to poor attendance and lack of sound organization by the Superintendent Professor, William Dyce.⁹

A more successful endeavour had taken place from 1852 when Henry Cole established Special Technical Classes at Marlborough House for advanced students to cast in plaster, enamel, engrave and print, but these classes had been abandoned after the departure of their chief instructor, Professor Gottfried Semper for Zurich, and on the School moving to South Kensington in 1857.¹⁰ A further venture into the field of advanced practical work had been made in 1858, when Cole set up the South Kensington Workshops for the staff and students to design and decorate the new buildings there, but these ateliers had been closed in 1877 during the directorship of Edward J. Poynter on the grounds of economy.¹¹

Edmund Potter, President of the Manchester School of Art, had complained after the departure of Professor Semper that 'The School was virtually converted into a normal training institute for teachers,' and his complaint was even more applicable in 1884, since in Thomas Armstrong's first year as director (1881–1882), the Department had reduced the number of day students from 621 to 426 by allowing only intending teachers to enrol.¹² The Training School's courses were all planned for intending Government teachers of drawing, not for teachers of practical design or craftwork, nor for intending designers or craftsmen, although these last



*Stage 8c of the National Course of Instruction –
shaded drawing from the nude model, 1897*

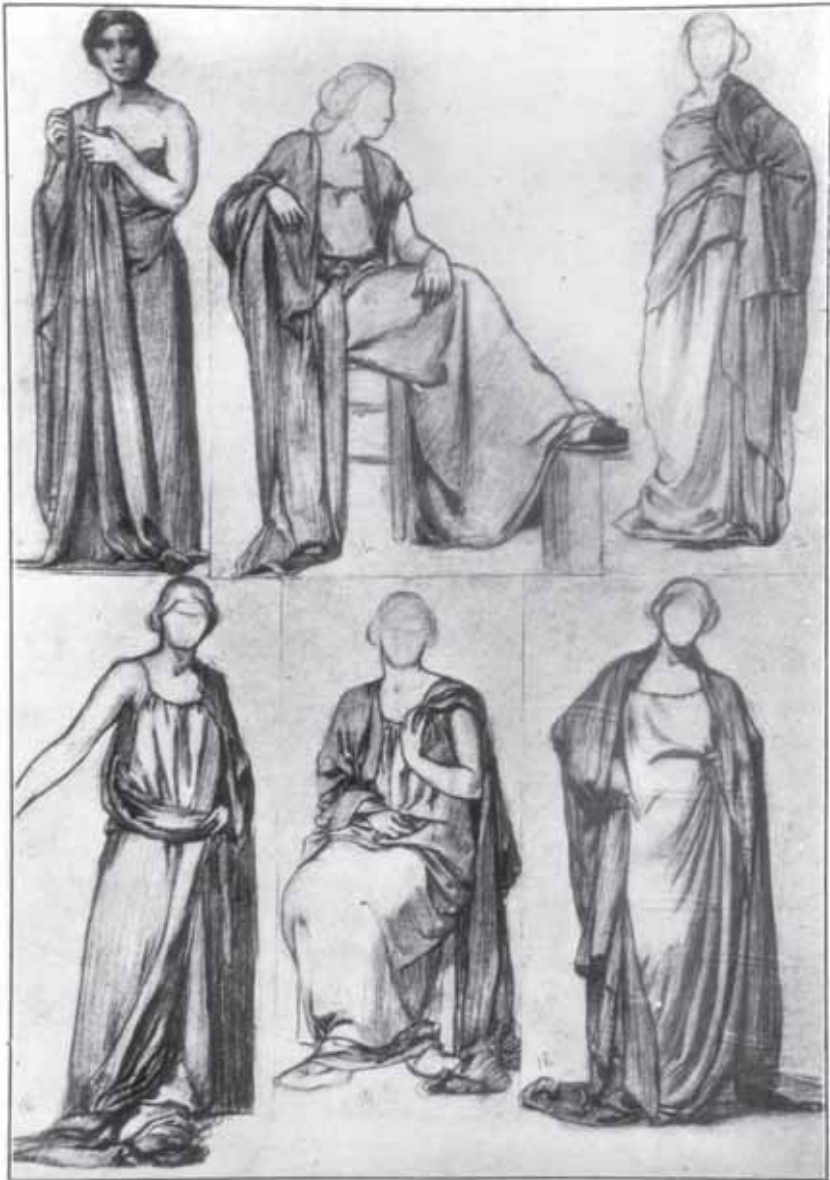
two categories of teachers and practitioners were those for which the Government art education had been originally founded.

The National Art Training School's preoccupation in 1884 with drawing and fine art, to the exclusion of design and industrial crafts, is clearly shown in the list of the School's day classes for teacher training and night classes for artisans given by John C.L. Sparkes, headmaster of the School in that year. The list given in his paper on 'The Schools of Art' is freehand, architectural, and mechanical drawing; practical geometry and perspective; painting in oil, tempera, and water colours; modelling, moulding and casting; antique, life and anatomy.¹³

Donnelly could not see that designing in a craft material or any form of practical craftwork was relevant for a government art teacher. A few sporadic and unsuccessful attempts were made to introduce craft classes at South Kensington, but these were separate from the official third-grade course and examinations for art teachers, and regarded by Donnelly as a provision for students who sought another outlet for their activities, such as a career as a craftsman, or as an instructor of craftsmen. This attitude is clear from his evidence to the Royal Commission on Technical Instruction.¹⁴ Donnelly further stated that it was better if a 'non-government Body' like the City and Guilds of London did the technological studies or 'purely technical applications'. An article in the *Art Journal* of 1884 under the nom-de-plume of 'Textile', reiterated this.¹⁵

The furthest a student at South Kensington approached to designing for materials was when preparing his outline drawings for Stages 22 and 23 of the national Course of Instruction, Elementary and Applied Design respectively. Only a very small proportion of the students worked towards the Applied Design Stage, which did not require applying design to actual material. The students had merely to draw, paint, or model a design, which could be applied to material and was judged by their teachers and examiners – results that proved unacceptable to most manufacturers and designers.

The staff and examiners were incompetent to judge Applied Design. The headmaster of the Nottingham School of Art in his report for 1883–4 referred to a design for a hand-made flounce, to which a silver medal was awarded, which the examiners at South Kensington called 'a machine-made lace curtain.' He complained: 'If the examiners have, on the same principle, been judging the designs for machine-made lace curtains sent from Nottingham as hand-made laces, the reason we no longer receive gold medals for them is readily found.'¹⁶ The headmaster of Halifax School of Art had a similar complaint about the impracticability of the carpet designs which received high awards.



Studies of Drapery on the living model by a Manchester student, 1910

The correspondent to the *Art Journal* mentioned above wrote that no Art master in the country . . . would be worth £1 a week as a designer in the business with which I am connected; and I suspect it would be much the same in others . . . because his designs would be artistically worthless for want of knowledge and practice.

The only students who were constantly taught designing were the twelve or so National Scholars at South Kensington. National Scholarships were the highest art awards of the Department of Science and Art, open only to those who had won medals in the National Competition for the Design Stages of the Course of Instruction. These students were instructed in architectural decoration in the Renaissance style by F.W. Moody of the South Kensington Museum staff.

The rest of the students could attend occasional lectures on ornament by Moody or H.H. Stannus, but these lectures were confined to architectural decoration and historic ornament, and were poorly attended.

The visit of the Commissioners on Technical Instruction to the National Art Training Schools in 1882 was reported as follows.

The Commissioners, accompanied by the principle, Mr Sparkes, inspected the various class-rooms, and examined the work in progress. The more advanced students draw and model from the antique and from life. We were present at a lecture by Mr Stannus on decorative art, and on a subsequent visit, when we were accompanied by the Director of Art, Mr T. Armstrong, we were shown the designs for industrial purposes made by the students of the training class, among which were specimens of designs for metal work, wood carving, goldsmith's work, and the interior decoration of buildings. These designs are worked out in the competition (the National Competition) among the students.¹⁷

These designs were not part of the planned course of the students in the training class for art masters, who were mostly working to obtain the first or second art master's certificate of the Department; they were designs done for the previous annual National Competition, and the students could obtain no experience in the Training School of the materials they were designing for. The Commissioners were not so naive as to be impressed by these designs and the Conclusions of their 2nd Report emphasised the necessity for the students to gain experience of craft materials:

On the subject of the teaching of industrial design, we are of the opinion that the Science and Art Department may with advantage depart from their principle as at first laid down, of granting

encouragement to design only – so far as to award grants for specimens of applied art-workmanship in the materials themselves, as a test of the applicability of the design and as a reward for success in overcoming the technical difficulties of the manufacture. It seems scarcely fair that well executed art-work by a student, say a richly chased piece of silver plate should obtain only the same recompense as the design for the same object on paper.¹⁸

In their Recommendations the Commissioners urged:

That in the awards for industrial design more attention be paid by the Department, than is the case at present, to the applicability of the design to the material in which it is to be executed, and that special grants be made for the actual execution of designs under proper safeguards. . . .

There has been a great departure in this respect from the intention with which the 'Schools of Design' were originally founded, viz. the practical application of a knowledge of ornamental Art to the improvement of manufactures.¹⁹

The publication and circulation of the Report of the Commission in 1884 strengthened the hand of Thomas Armstrong, Director for Art against his chief Major-General Donnelly, and in the following year he approached Walter Crane, at that time on the committee of the A-WG, to assist in the National Art Training Schools. Crane related:

At this period, at the suggestion of Mr Thomas Armstrong, who had succeeded Sir E.J. Poynter as Art Director at South Kensington, I undertook a series of lectures and demonstrations in various crafts allied to decorative design in which I had had personal experience, such as gesso and plaster relief-work, sgraffito, tempera painting, stencilling, designing for embroidery, repoussé metal work. I gave a short introduction, and having the tools and materials at hand proceeded to give practical demonstrations of the methods of working. These lectures were mostly given in the Lecture Theatre, but the one on modelling in plaster was given in the lecture-room in the school. Osmund Weeks was my assistant with the materials, mixing the gesso, etc. I believe they were the first lectures of the kind at South Kensington – forerunners of the time when craft classes became part of the ordinary college course in design. . . . To Mr Armstrong's initiation, also, was due the first classes in enamelling, at the school, as he secured the services of M. Dalpeyrat to give a series of demonstrations in the art to selected students, one of whom was Mr Alexander Fisher, who revived enamelling so successfully.²⁰

Indeed that same South Kensington student, later a member of the A-W.G., was destined to become a great educator in his craft. Eighteen years later the *Art Workers' Quarterly* commented:

Nearly all the enamellers in this country at the present day were pupils in Mr Fisher's enamel classes, either at Finsbury College or Regent Street Central School of Arts and Crafts, or received private tuition from him.²¹

Returning to 1885, however, there was no further development at the National Art Training School towards design or craft education until Crane returned as Principal in 1898, shortly after the School had been reconstituted as the Royal College of Art. The next step forward in London was made at a private institution established by Charles Robert Ashbee.

Ashbee's Endeavour Towards the Teaching of John Ruskin and William Morris

The almost farcical failures of the St George's Guild, which had, on Ruskin's own admission, contributed to his brain disorder, might have dissuaded others from attempting to form a self-supporting guild of artisans; but precisely such an endeavour produced the first important progress in arts and crafts education following the formation of the A-W.G in early 1884.

In that year Toynbee Hall was opened to commemorate the University Extension lectures that Arnold Toynbee had given to the workmen of Whitechapel. Among the most enthusiastic educationists working in the settlement was a young architect, Charles Robert Ashbee (1863–1942). The architect's mother, Mrs E.J.J. Ashbee (1841–1919) held open house at Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, for progressive artists and educators. Ashbee related:

Young men at Toynbee Hall not only believed they could redeem England by waving the cultured wand of Oxford and Cambridge over the East End – Charles Booth, Samuel Barnett, Arnold Toynbee, E. Carpenter, Octavia Hill, were proofs of accomplishment – but that they need only show the Arts to the poor and of their own glory they would prevail. . . . Whitechapel and the East End became a rallying point. Morris, Watts, W.B. Richmond, Herkomer, Alma Tadema, Walter Crane, Holman Hunt, Leighton, William de Morgan and many others, the masters of that age, they all came down into this underworld and made its battle theirs. Your 'Grannie' (Mrs E.J.J. Ashbee) was constantly among them.²²

Several of the above were frequent guests at Mrs Ashbee's, as were also the members of the New English Art Club, and John Singer Sargent, Roger Fry, and Christopher Whall of the A-W.G.

Ashbee gave readings of Ruskin during 1886 and 1887 to a small class initiated by Sir Philip Magnus and the Rev. Samuel Barnett for the training of manual teachers²³ in Ashbee's own words:

The reading of Ruskin led to an experiment of a more practical nature and out of *Fors Clavigera* and the *Crown of Wild Olive*, sprang a small class for the study of design. The class grew to thirty, some men, some boys; and then it was felt that design needed application to give the teaching fulfilment.

Ashbee then related how a piece of practical work was set for the class, and added that 'the outcome of their united work as dilettanti was the desire that permanence might be given to it by making it work for life and bread. From this sprang the idea of the present Guild and School.'²⁴

The Guild and School of Handicraft

The Guild and School of Handicraft were inaugurated on 23 June, 1888, and rented the top floor of a warehouse in Commercial Street, Whitechapel for two years 'to serve as a workshop and school-room combined.' Thence they moved into Essex House 'an old 18th century hall with panelled rooms and spacious workshops and garden, in Mile End'.²⁵

Ashbee's scheme was audacious: the Guild (productive), the School (educational), and a club (social); the whole activity of adults' work and children's education combined in an institution independent of the state system and as close to a mediaeval guild as possible. Financial independence was to be achieved by the Guild producing saleable craftwork of high quality, or 'Standard' as Ashbee called it, in the workshops. Some members of the School were expected to graduate to positions in the Guild as it waxed prosperous: others would go forth and 'guide in the formation of schools similar to the mother institution.'²⁶ Thus a network of guilds, as advocated by Ruskin and Morris, would spring up throughout the land and transform society.

The senior committee of the institution, the Committee of the Guild, was permanent and consisted of Ashbee (chairman) and leading craftsmen of the Guild. The Education Committee was elected annually by those whom Ashbee had persuaded to give financial support to the School and also consisted of craftsmen; thus Ashbee was virtually director of all the institution's activities.

The logical way to have started the scheme on a sound financial footing, or rather to have attempted to do so, would have been to first establish a 'shop' producing work of the high standard Ashbee desired, to see if the Guilds could make sufficient profit to keep its members and to form a

school. Instead, from the outset, the Guild and School accepted funds from philanthropists and public bodies, and fees from amateurs. The Guild itself was run as a company and shares were purchased by craft-loving philanthropists, by the Guild's craftsmen, and by a few businessmen misguided enough to expect a sizable profit.

The craftsmen of the Guild spent up to half their working week instructing in the School, their pupils consisting of lady and gentlemen amateurs, art, technical, and elementary teachers, and young craftsmen. By 1892 there were 80 teachers on the roll, due to the inauguration of Science and Art Department grants in 1890 of six shillings per elementary school pupil receiving manual instruction, and to the introduction of 1892 of certificates for Manual Training teachers by the City and Guilds. These teachers, studying at the School of Handicraft, were employed by the Technical Instruction Committees of councils, thus serving the state system, which Ashbee condemned. By training them he had departed from his Guild principle, as indeed he also did by instructing amateurs. Neither the teachers nor the craftsmen trained at the School went forth to set up Guilds as Ashbee had intended; not even the Guild members who left did so. They even abandoned their crafts. Ashbee wrote of these

three or four hold prominent posts at, or are the heads of Technical Institutes, several are the trusted instructors under County Councils in different parts of England . . . circumstances in one way or another compelled them to leave, and leaving has meant in almost every case abandoning the craft.²⁷

Crafts carried out by the Guild and School included cabinet making, woodcarving, joinery, metalwork, bookbinding and printing, and the institution at Essex House filled a gap in educational provision up to the School's closure in 1895, for, as we have seen, the Schools of Art avoided training a designer or a craftsman in the use of materials. Ashbee argued:

In the training of handicraft we hold that it cannot be taught – in the manner of the ordinary art school – by making drawings, by making designs, by 'stippling from the antique', and so forth; . . . A designer cannot be taught on paper; he must be taught in wood, in clay, in leather, in metal, in wax, in the actual substance in which he is to design. This is the workshop principle applied to education and, in so far as we enter our protest against the paper designer, we would do so indirectly also against the artist of the art school. We say, let him become a handicraftsman – he will do

better so; let him leave the landscape painting and the portraiture, and study design in its relation to something more immediately productive.²⁸

The public service the School provided can be judged from a circular sent out by Ashbee in September, 1891, entitled 'County Councils and Technical Education.' The circular advertised that the Guild would be willing to organize manual training in areas, to send elementary craft instructors, and to send inspectors. The Guild would also advise on any school building, equip workshops, advise on exhibits to be purchased, and provide practical 'bench lectures.'²⁹

This service was accepted by eight counties including London, but as far as the Technical Instruction Committees were concerned this was a temporary expedient while they organized their own manual training centres and craft classes in the technical schools, art schools, and polytechnics. There was no point in paying fees to the School of Handicraft which could be used to support their own public institutions. After the closure of the School in 1895, Ashbee gave as the cause 'the failure of the Technical Education Board of the L.C.C. to keep its word with the School Committee and the impossibility of carrying on costly educational work in the teeth of state aided competition.'³⁰ The closure of the School was timely, for in the following year the London County Council established its Central School of Arts and Crafts in Regent Street under the supervision of W.R. Lethaby, a companion of Ashbee in the A-W.G.

The Guild of Handicraft did not cease with the closure of the School, in fact the membership increased and the workshops showed a small profit. But Ashbee longed to place his Guildsmen in rural England, and in 1902 has found the ideal location at Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire. As will be seen though, his peaceful new environment did not cause him to cease his attacks on the Schools of Art.

In the 1890s, while Ashbee was urging art students to become handicraftsmen and proclaiming, 'A designer cannot be taught on paper,' Walter Crane, a senior member of the A-W.G., was up at Manchester Municipal School of Art showing the students how to design on blackboard and paper.

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