51. C.F.A. Voysey. A single part of a design for a carpet for Tomkinsons Carpets Ltd., Kidderminster, 1895-99, signed on the back 'C.F.A. Voysey, Architect, 6, Carlton Hill, NW'. Several such watercolours would be needed to complete the design – no other working drawings of this carpet appear to survive. The design – in watercolour – is on 'point paper' – a grid of 9×7 graph paper specially made to show how the punched cards controlling Jacquard loom should be set out. Each small square represents a tuft of the carpet. There are 10,080 tufts in this fragment of the design and a sequence of 90 punched cards would be needed to complete the design. Besides the making of the punched cards, the setting-up of a Jacquard loom itself was highly skilled and time consuming. Voysey was working on Greyfriars, Broad Leys and Moorcrag at the time he was designing carpets like his. The flowers in the carpet are: Daisy, Tulip and Bluebell. © Michael Whiteway.

Voysey's success as a decorative designer

Voysey's decorative designs – carpets, cast-iron, fabrics, ornamental metal-work and wallpapers – were created while his architectural career was at its *apogée*. When the hedonistic Aesthetic 1880s were merging with the principled Arts and Crafts, Voysey was among the most successful decorative designers. Remarkably, his success coincided with the building of his finest houses.

Voysey's clients were invariably exacting and prosperous members of the new *cadre* of intellectuals that had appeared in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Among among them was the wealthy Anglo-American Julian Russell Sturgis (1848-1904), novelist, poet, sportsman and the librettist of Arthur Sullivan's only grand opera *Ivanhoe* (1891). Sturgis commissioned one of Voysey's most

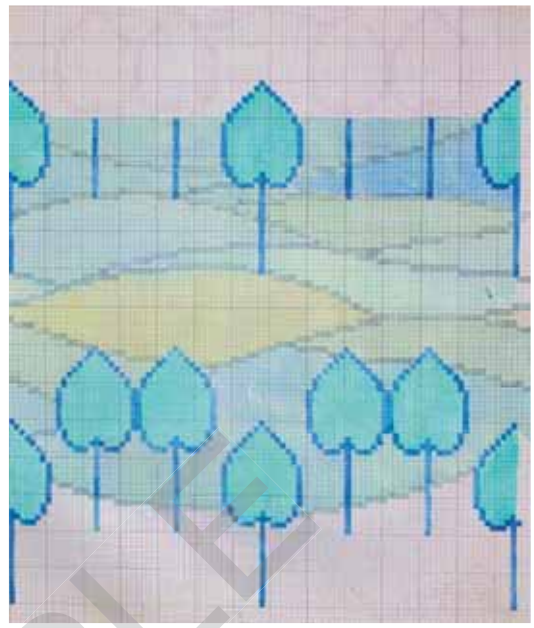
famous houses – Greyfriars on the Hog's Back, near Guildford (see figure XX). It was completed in 1896. Next, in 1897, came A.M. Stedman (1856-1924; later Sir Algernon Methuen Marshall) for whom Voysey designed New Place, Haslemere. Stedman was the publisher of Hilaire Belloc, Rudyard Kipling, Robert Louis Stevenson and Oscar Wilde (see figures XX, XX).

Broad Leys, is the most renowned of Voysey's houses, overlooking Lake Windermere, was completed in 1898. It was for Arthur Currer Briggs (1855-1906) – colliery owner and Lord Mayor of Leeds – a Unitarian; Unitarianism was quite close to the Rev. Voysey's Theism. Currer Briggs had a social conscience and set up a profit-sharing scheme for his miners.

In 1899, Voysey designed Spade House, Sandgate, near Folkestone, for H.G. Wells – *enfant terrible*, then in *vogue* – speculated upon what might be happening to civilization; he anticipated a future dominated by science.

How could Voysey have achieved such great success in two diverse fields – architecture and decorative design? While the skills required to practise both these arts are far from dissimilar, the skills to promote these activities are not often combined. Voysey did not run a design factory, staffed with talented assistants, like many Victorian commercial designers. We know that Voysey's decorative designs are by his own hand. The answer to the question, 'how could Voysey have achieved the wide-ranging successes that he did?', can only be 'with phenomenal application'. What evidence that has so far surfaced suggests that his success was at the cost of the enjoyment of a conventional family life.

Flat pattern was a *forte* of Voysey. His designs for carpets, fabrics and wallpapers are virtually interchangeable. Voysey supplied many designs to Tomkinsons of Kidderminster, a leading manufacturer of mass-produced carpets (see figures XX, XXX, XXX). Tomkinsons was a client mainly between 1895 and 1907; he appears, however, to have sold his last design to Tomkinsons as late as 1932. Evidently Voysey's Tomkinson carpets were popular. Tomkinsons used the latest steam-powered American patented Jacquard weaving machines. The preparing of the Jacquard 'cards' was an expensive process and manufacturers had to be confident when introducing a new carpet design that it would sell. Voysey's working drawings are in his own hand, in precise colour on special squared paper – 'point paper' – which resembles graph paper. Each minute square represents a single tuft of a carpet. Such drawings, which are transferred to the sequence of the punched Jacquard 'cards' that govern the mechanised

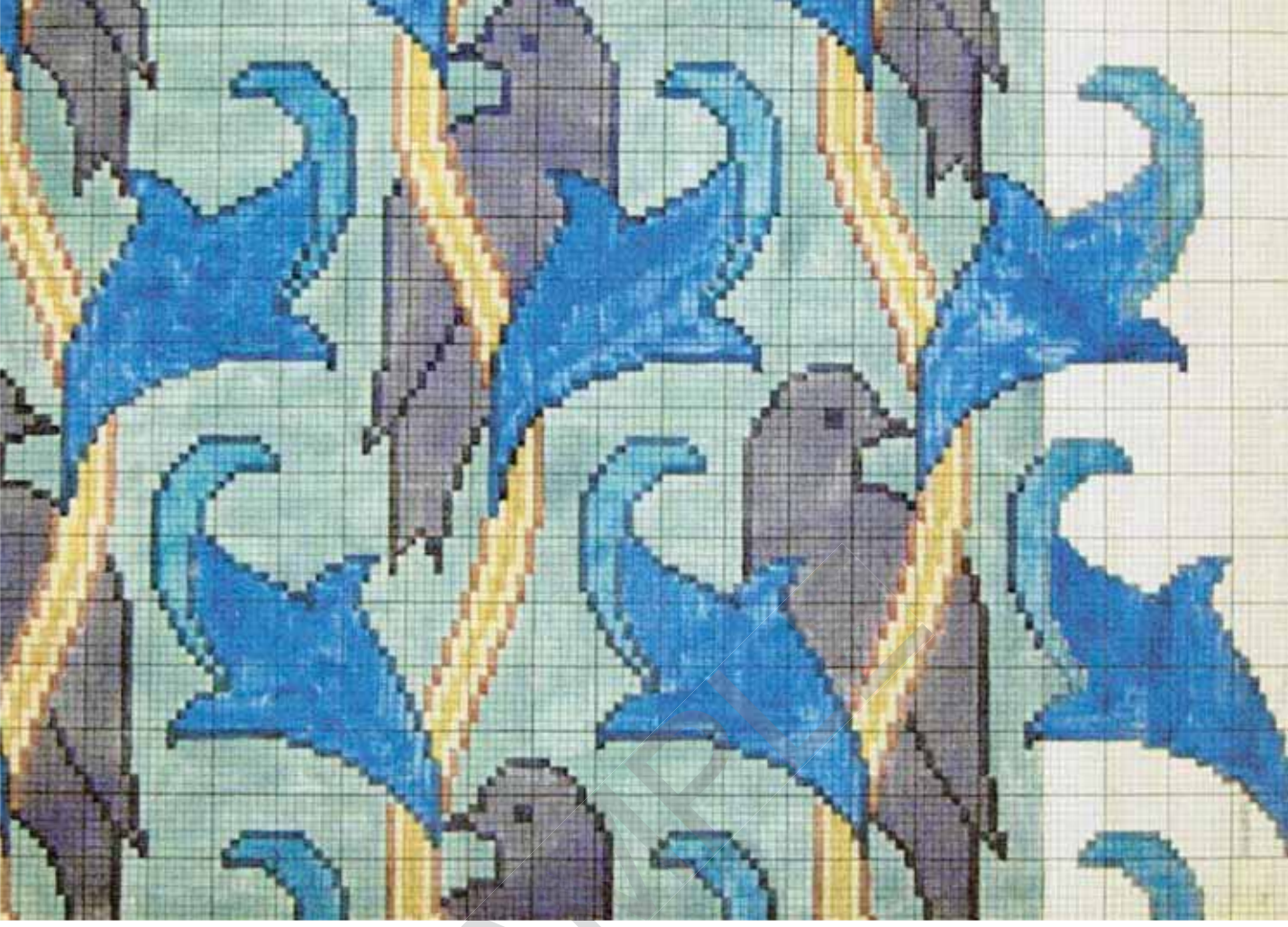


45. A working drawing by Voysey from the Tomkinson archive – probably from the early 1900s. The exceptional simplicity of this design – though obviously a fragment from a larger design of which we have no record – is remarkable. It corresponds with the visual economy of his houses.

52. C.F.A. Voysey. A carpet design for Tomkinsons Carpets Ltd., Kidderminster, 1895-99, signed on back 'C.F.A. Voysey, Architect, 6, Carlton Hill, NW'. Water colour on 'point paper' on two joined sheets used to set-up a Jacquard weaving machine. Instructions for individual tufts in each square are shown. These would have been transferred on to a sequence of punched cards by a technician. 14 strands of different coloured wool would be required to produce the design shown. The flowers are: Blue Delphinium, Celandine, Clematis, Cyclamen, Hosta, Tulip (closed) and Violet – all were familiar in ordinary gardens. © Michael Whiteway.

weaving process, are not usually supplied by designers. They are normally made by specialist technicians, employed by manufacturers who interpret the designer's original art-work. It is in the nature of mass-produced carpets that few examples of carpets actually survive.

Besides his Tomkinsons designs, Voysey designed many 'Donegal' rugs. These were hand-woven in Donegal in the north-west of Ireland, where labour was cheap. The Donegal Company had been founded by Alastair Morton – later of Morton Sundour – in 1898. Voysey was to have a long connection with the Mortons. Donegal rugs could comfortably undercut the prices of Morris and Co. rugs, but even so they could still only be afforded by affluent members of the middle classes. Voysey's Donegal designs contrast with the



53. C.F.A. Voysey. A carpet design for Tomkinsons Carpets Ltd., Kidderminster, signed on back 'C.F.A. Voysey, 23, York Place, W', stamped on back 'Tomkinsons Carpets Ltd.', dated 'Aug 23rd 1900'. The design, in watercolour – is on 'point paper' with a 7×7 grid – possibly because a different weaving machine was used from that of the designs shown in figs. 49 and 50. Formalised birds are found in many of Voysey's decorative designs – 'I do not see why the forms of birds may not be used, provided they are reduced to mere symbols . . .' (Voysey in interview in *The Studio*, I, 1893.) © Michael Whiteway.

54. (*right*) C.F.A. Voysey. A carpet design for Tomkinsons Carpets Ltd., Kidderminster, a watercolour dated 12 July, 1906. Besides the semi-naturalism of the carpets shown in figs. 49 and 50, Voysey had a complete command of the stylised decorative vocabulary that was associated with Art Nouveau.

intricacy of the Morris designs.

Many of the designs reproduced in this book are for wallpapers, demonstrate simplicity as well as the ease with which Voysey handles natural subjects. Some of his designs are still in production. Voysey produced wallpaper designs for Essex and Co. for many years – certainly from 1890 until around 1906. The company was, for a time, the most adventurous among wallpaper manufacturers. Indicative of the company's faith in Voysey, he designed the company's trademark as well as some of their advertisements (see figure X). Founded in 1887 by R.W. Essex, during the era of 'Art Furniture', the enthusiasm for beautifying the middle-class home was at its height. This was when the

market for fashionable goods was recovering after a long recession. In 1899, Essex and Co. fell under the control of the conglomerate Wallpaper Manufacturers Limited. When R.W. Essex was elected to Parliament, the Voysey connection must have ended. Essex had, from the company's very beginning, commissioned wallpapers from prominent artists like George Charles Haité (1855-1924), who was the son of the renowned mid-Victorian textile designer – George Haité (1825-71) – famous for his Paisley designs. G.C. Haité is now better remembered as an excellent illustrator and topographical artist. His *Plant Studies for Designers and Student*s, 1887 – a splendid folio-sized work – could well have drawn his work to the attention of Essex and Co. Another Essex *protégé*, Lindsay Butterfield, had been a prize-winning student at the South Kensington School (later the Royal College of Art), also became well-known. John Illingworth Kay (1870-1950) – better known for his association with the Silver Studio from 1892 to 1900 – was another early Essex designer.

Voysey was also close to Sanderson and Sons, which had been founded in 1860 by Arthur Sanderson (1829-82). In 1895, Sandersons opened impressive showrooms in Berners Street in smart central London. Like Essex and Co., Sanderson's was ambitious and employed fashionable designers. Voysey began selling designs to Sanderson's in the early 1890s. The company provided Voysey with the opportunity to display his versatility as he was commissioned to design the Sanderson factory at Chiswick. It was completed in 1903. Voysey shows a foretaste of the enlightened approach to factory design shown by Walter Gropius (1883-1969) and Adolf Meyer (1881-1929) in their daylight-filled Fagus Factory in Alfeld, Germany, of 1911.

Voysey also designed wallpapers for Lightbown Aspinall, a wallpaper manufacturing company that had been founded in 1854 in Manchester; several designs by Voysey were sold to the company in 1924. A Lightbown Aspinall frieze, of around 1930, was very likely intended for a nursery – a shepherd plays a pipe, there is a woodman and animals appear behind foliage. The pastoral enthusiasm of Voysey's early years had not left him.

Voysey's most important textile patron was Alexander Morton of Carlisle (1844-1923). The close association with the Morton family – and latterly with his son James Morton (1867-1943) – continued until at least 1929. Voysey designed the bookplate of Alexander and Beatrice Morton. Alexander Morton had set up a small hand-loom business in 1860, gradually introducing lace-making machines in his family cottage in Ayrshire. By the 1890s, when the business had been moved to Carlisle, he was employing hundreds of workers. In the early 1880s, Morton started commissioning well-known designers like Lewis F. Day, Christopher Dresser, who could supply designs for all levels of the market, and Bruce Talbert (1831-81), a versatile and fashionable architect-designer. Towards the end of the 1880s, the ideas of William Morris were gaining currency. These were reinforced by Ruskin's assertions that people needed to have delight in creating worthwhile and enduring things. His words awakened a generation.

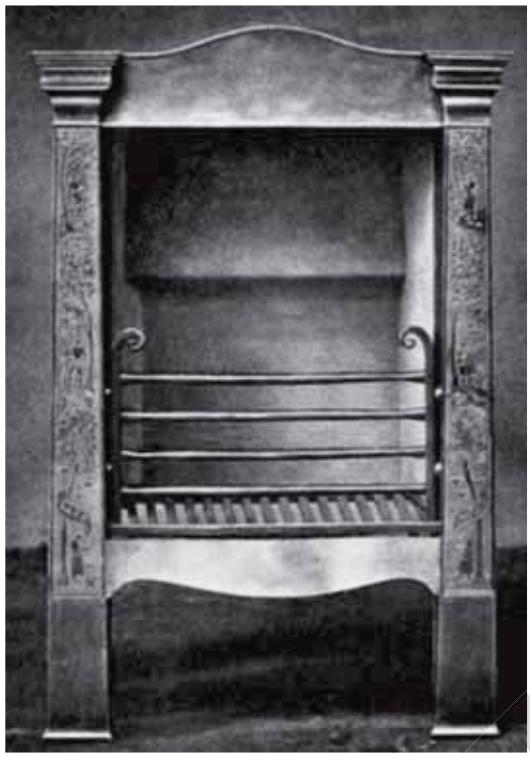
The seminal text of Arts and Crafts philosophy is Ruskin's 'On the nature of Gothic', the famous chapter from the second volume of *The Stones of Venice*, 1852-53. The chapter is one of the most extraordinary in the history of architectural writing. It embodies a vision of society that transcends mere architectural prescription.

'On the nature of Gothic' was reprinted by William Morris at his Kelmscott Press in 1892. Morris considered it 'one of the very few necessary and inevitable utterances of the century'.

Ruskin inveighed against the industrial

40. Voysey, wallpaper design for an unrecorded manufacturer, published in the special Voysey number of *Dekorative Kunst*, March 1898. This design suggests the influence of Walter Crane, while the bridge has a Far Eastern, willow-pattern air about it. It appears the design would have been machine-printed in monochrome

system that made barren the lives of people and changed them into near machines. He compared them with the innocent and untutored mediaeval artisans who built cathedrals. The salient passage is: that from 'the labour of inferior minds' and 'out of fragments full of imperfection . . . ' could rise up 'a stately and unaccusable whole'. This



47. Voysey, cast-iron fireplace, manufactured by Thomas Elsley of the Portland Metalworks, Great Tichfield Street, London, c.1895. Although illustrated in the Elsley catalogue of about 1905, no surviving example of this fireplace has been found. The fireplace is Classical – rather in the eighteenth-century manner. Voysey's iconography is pastoral – on the left column Work is symbolised by three male figures in rural costume: Sowing, Harvesting and Winnowing; on the right Play is symbolised by Fishing, Shooting and what appears to be Drawing. In the 1870s and 1880s, Elsley was associated with leading figures in the Aesthetic Movement and produced fireplaces that incorporated William de Morgan tiles.

was the great Gothic building. The cathedral was the achievement of a whole society, in which ordinary people could take pride. Industrial society offered no such fulfilment. To propagate the Ruskin-Morris philosophy, the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society was inaugurated in 1887. Walter Crane was the founding president – Morris was to succeed him in 1891. The society aimed to abolish the distinction 'between the Fine and the Decorative Arts'. Alexander Morton, like many contemporaries, became enamoured with Arts and Crafts design – though without the accompanying anti-machine rhetoric of many of its champions. He employed designers associated with the new movement. Among them was Heywood Sumner (1853-1940), a designer and historian and a co-founder of the beauty-fixated Century Guild – a link to the burgeoning Arts and Crafts and the Aesthetic Movement. There was also George Walton (1867-1933), a designer, who in his earlier years was associated with the Glasgow School of Art. (The Glasgow alumni included Charles Rennie Mackintosh and his fellow artist and wife Margaret Macdonald (1864-1933).) There was also Lindsay Butterfield (1869-1948), known for his accomplished floral designs. Voysey was by far the best known of the earlier Morton designers however; between 1900 and 1902 he supplied Morton with forty fabric designs. Voysey's imagery, or iconography, was very much the same as that found in his wallpaper designs: swirling botanical forms, animals, birds and occasionally imagined figures from the countryside.

Voysey also designed textiles for other leading manufacturers. The most influential among them was William Foxton (1861-1945), who founded his company in 1903. He was sympathetic towards modern design and among the founders of the Design in Industries Association in 1915. (A pale imitation of the Deutscher Werkbund – it was the earliest attempt to integrate design with industry. It was founded in 1907, with Hermann Muthesius as prime mover.) Foxton employed an impressive assembly of pre-Modern Movement designers. His fabrics created a very favourable impression at the Paris

Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs, 1925. Among Foxton's best-known designers were: Phyllis Barron (1890-1964), F. Gregory Brown (1887-1941), Claude Lovat Fraser (1890-1921), Dorothy Larcher (1884-1952), Minnie McLeish (1867-1957) and Charles Rennie Macintosh. Voysey also supplied designs to G.P. and J. Baker, Donald Brothers, A.H. Lee, Liberty and Co., Stead McAlpin, Muntzer and Co., Newman, Smith and Newman, St Edmundsbury Weavers, Wardle and Co. Another company to be mentioned is Wylie and Lochhead – the leading manufacturers of artistic furniture and commissioners of fabrics in Scotland, the company survives as a funeral directors.

Although Voysey is best known for his carpets, wallpapers and textiles, his decorative metal-work – wrought and cast-iron – should not be neglected. Among his designs were escutcheon plates, finger plates, lock cases, latches, and fittings for casement windows. Although functional, these still possess decorative qualities. One latch features a caricature of himself – Voysey enjoyed caricaturing himself, he also enjoyed being photographed; he must have been the most photographed of contemporary architects. He was not without vanity.

Voysey's domestic hardware was prin-cipally manufactured by Thomas Elsley of the Portland Metalworks, Ironmongers and Metalworkers of Great Tichfield Street, London. Elsley had at one time made tiled fireplaces for the dealer Murray Marks (1840-1918) – whose gallery was not far from the Morris and Co. Oxford Street showrooms. Marks was a close friend of Rossetti and an important figure in the 1870s and 1880s. Elsley was in the vanguard of taste, as the central London address suggests. It is hardly surprising that Elsley commissioned Voysey to design fireplaces and hardware. Voysey also designed cast-iron fireplaces for George Wright, the leading manufacturer of billiard tables – these had cast-iron bases for the baize covered playing surfaces. Voysey even designed a billiard table for Wright (no.23 in their catalogue). A similar billiard table can be seen in a photograph of the interior of Voysey's The Homestead, Frinton-on-Sea, 1905.

Voysey learned how to design pattern – ornament as it was called – which was thought could transform a workaday building into architecture. Aspiring Victorian architects pain-stakingly measured ornament from antiquity and Gothic cathedrals. John Pollard Seddon – Voysey's mentor – had actually published a treatise on Gothic ornament in his youth (see figure X). It was illustrated with eloquent lithographs inspired by Ruskin's powerful and romantic drawings. As a lucrative side-line, Seddon designed ecclesiastical tiles in the manner of Pugin – for there was eager building of churches in his era. Voysey would have learned every aspect of ornament and pattern design in the Seddon office: the different varieties of repeat, the transformation of realistic re-presentations of plants into the stylised forms that could be carved, used for tiles, stained glass, textiles or woven in tapestries. Voysey would also have learned about the harmonious disposition of elements in a design and the impression these would make upon viewers when seen at a distance, although, in the Seddon era, there was merely empirical, no theoretical, knowledge of perception. There is no doubt that Pugin and Jones – the two great Victorian authorities on ornament – understood how, by observation and practice, designs are perceived and what the eye requires and is pleased by. (We classify this study under 'Gestalt perception'.) There is no doubt that Pugin and Jones – the two great Victorian authorities on Ornament – understood how, by observation and practice, how designs are perceived. Voysey's grasp of the mechanics of ornamental design equalled that of the best of his contemporaries.

The revival of rural life

Like so many people of his time, Voysey looked forward to the revitalisation of rural life and society. His design for the 'River Rug' (see figures xx, xx, xx), which was shown in the Arts and Crafts Exhibition of 1903, epitomises this desire for a ruralised future with a village of Voysey buildings, the farmer with his ox-drawn plough and sailing ships on the river. The importance of reviving the life of the countryside – as an antidote to the depredations and alienation wrought by industrialisation – is explicit in the writings of Ruskin and Morris. These views can also be related to the long-standing pastoral tradition in British literature – exemplified by Romantics like Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), or William Wordsworth (1770-1850), and later by the novels and poetry of an architect-turned-writer, Thomas Hardy (1840-1928). This tradition is also manifested in the paintings of such artists as Richard Wilson (1714-82), John Constable (1776-1837) and Samuel Palmer (1805-81). Godfrey Blount (1859-1937) – a religiously inclined artist, actually tried to revive traditional Surrey life, when Surrey was already becoming commuter territory, by founding The Peasant Arts Society and Haslemere Peasant Industries. There were many other similar 'back to the countryside' experiments. Not least among them was C.R. Ashbee's removal of his East End Guild of Handicraft to Chipping Campden in 1902 in the Cotswolds. The Guild was liquidated in 1907.

Voysey's decorative design fits into the category labelled 'Arts and Crafts', which had, from its inception, a rural agenda. To say so is in no way to underestimate Voysey's uniqueness or his achievements – for he was as accomplished a designer as any of his contemporaries.

Voysey's decoration answered Morris' call that decoration should be 'something that will not drive us into unrest or into callowness; something which reminds us of life beyond itself. . . . ' Morris meant the life of the fields and the hedgerows – Nature – it was believed could become a healing agent. Morris' era and Voysey's era were preoccupied with the problem of the lack of social unity and the perceived disintegration of society. Decorative design had a health-giving psychological role to play.

An aspect of Voysey's decoration that will strike anyone who compares it with the generality of late nineteenth-century design is that there is an intentional lack of mechanical precision – a naturalness or even ordinariness – that one does not find in the very precise decoration of William Morris, Lewis F. Day or Walter Crane.

Voysey's decoration adheres to the pastoral agenda. It has a naturalness or even ordinariness. It recalls the time when the skill of the crafts-man, rather than the machine operative, prevailed. Voysey's decorative design is never in-timidatingly perfect in a mechanical way. And it has the quality that William Morris described in a lecture at the London Working Men's College on 10 December 1881: 'something which can be done by a great many people without too much difficulty and with great pleasure'. (Morris, *Some hints on pattern-designing* . . . , 1889) Of course Voysey's art, to remember an axiom from antiquity, is to conceal its artistry.

Summing up

In the 1930s, Modernists were inclined to claim Voysey as 'one of their own'. But he is not the proto-modern, born before his time. Modernists affirmed the ascendancy of industrialised, collectivised humanity. Voysey

dreamed of a pastoral and less mechanised world. He also complained of the banality of box-like, flat-roofed, contemporary architecture. His dream was shattered by the unspeakable events of the Great War. And he was to witness the bombing of London before he died.

We can feel with empathy for the age which gave birth to Voysey. 'Let every bit of ornament speak to us of bright and healthy thought', he wrote in 'Ideas in Things', 1909. Such a view echoes Plato – Voysey had Plato's *Republic* in his modest collection of books. His designs tell us of the things we admire from his era. People talked then of the Utopia that seemed to be within sight. There was the prevailing belief that society could be transformed – if education and good living conditions could be offered to everyone.

Healthy living and the rural life were praised by the Voysey generation. Childhood was extolled and an enticing world was portrayed for them by artists like Walter Crane and Kate Greenaway. Art became a national enthusiasm in the 1880s and 1890s.

Voysey was among the leading participants in a brilliant surge of cultural energy. We can connect with Voysey more easily than we can with few artists from the past. Voysey was entirely of his time, but we need feel no pang of guilt in longing for the cloudless world Voysey offered us.