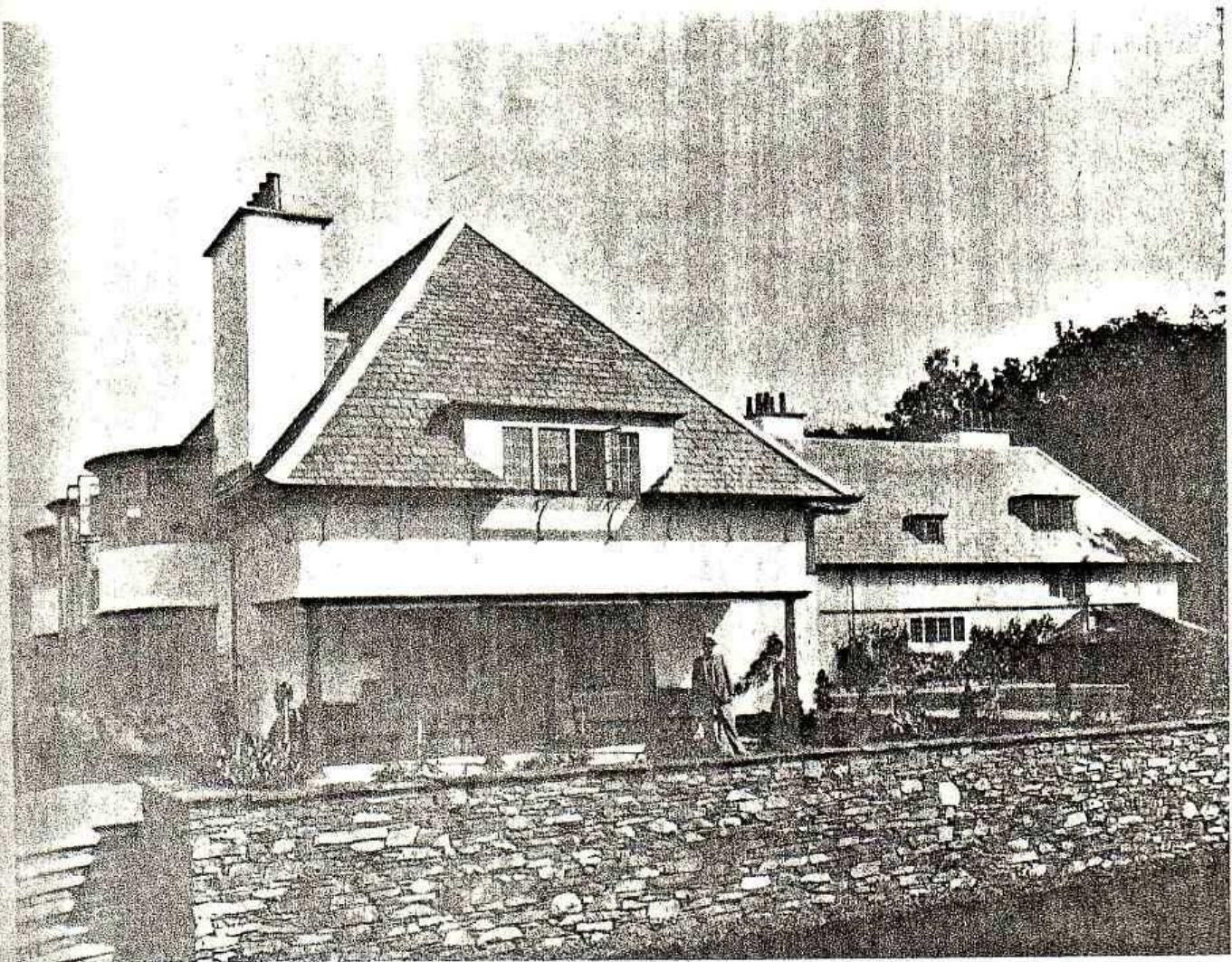


**SOME RECENT WORK BY MR. C. F. A. VOYSEY. BY AYMER VALLANCE.**

It sometimes befalls an artist's work that the aspect of it with which his name becomes associated in common estimate is not that which is habitual to him, but rather what is exceptional, especially if the latter be marked by striking peculiarities. And it is natural enough that this should be so, for what is pronounced necessarily arrests attention and is remembered, while the more normal, on that very account, escapes observation or is forgotten. Something of this sort appears to have happened in the case of Mr. Voysey, who, his name having once become connected with a certain type of building, is scarcely credited with the versatility of powers that belongs to him.

It is true there are many architects who, on principle, would employ only such building materials as are produced in the particular locality; but Mr. Voysey is no purist, nor has he any prejudice against importing from wherever he may. At the

same time, when a perfectly suitable material is ready to hand, he would naturally prefer to take advantage of it. And it is a matter for regret to the artist should a client insist on having what he or she deems a thoroughly characteristic house instead of one more properly native to the soil. Thus the house designed by Mr. Voysey for Miss G. C. Conant at North Luffenham, near Stamford, Rutland, notwithstanding the district yields excellent building stone, was required to have brick walls covered with cement rough cast. Happily it was roofed, after the manner of an Oxford college, with slabs of local stone. Another feature of the exterior is a large gable, with a clock, surmounted by an old fourteenth-century bell, weighing upwards of three hundredweight. It is fitted with a hammer, plugged with wood to deaden its harsh, metallic clang, for striking the hours. In the interior all the fireplace tiles are of special design, different in every room; the tiles themselves executed by Mr. C. Dressler at Marlow. The parlour walls are lined to the height of six feet with pink silk, the woodwork being enamelled in white. The floors



"BROADLEYS," WINDERMERE

C. F. A. VOYSEY, ARCHITECT



are carpeted with self-coloured Austrian pile carpets. Out of doors the gardens, in the middle of which stands a fine old walnut-tree, were laid out, according to Mr. Voysey's plans, with terraces and flagged garden walks. An entrance gate, executed by Mr. Bainbridge Reynolds from Mr. Voysey's drawings, and a dovecote designed by the same hand complete the quaint effect of the whole.

It may be wondered why, with his dominant love of the picturesque, Mr. Voysey does not build in half-timber. The answer is that, unfortunately, prevalent opinion, endorsed in official quarters, would appear to be hostile to the erection of timber-framed houses for modern use. Nay, bureaucratic bye-laws, wherever in force, actually require all buildings in which half-timber work is employed to be lined within with a substantial wall of brick. Thus in effect timber construction is rendered a mere superficial sham, and, as such, beyond the pale of reasonable architecture. The alleged pretext is, of course, the danger of fire. But the inflammability of timber houses is as much overrated as the belief in their instability is unwarranted. The wood itself, in course of time, acquires a seasoned solidity and hardness almost equivalent to the fire-resisting properties of a mineral substance; while the very system of its

bracing and jointing affords it, as it were, an elasticity and a power of resistance against strain of subsidence and the shock of concussion not possessed by any other building material. Of all the houses that formerly surrounded the Cathedral of Strassburg none survived the devastating ordeal of fire and shell during the siege of 1870, except one only, which is of half-timber, dating from the sixteenth century. It still stands at the north-west corner of the cathedral square, a conspicuous proof of the enduring quality of wood construction.

A thing against which the charge of inflammability is less undeserved is thatching; and yet its æsthetic properties are so great that I am happy to think that it has not been wholly abolished. No official interference, then, was in motion to hinder Mr. Voysey from building, besides an inn for the Earl of Lovelace, at Elmesthorpe, near Leicester, six cottages picturesquely thatched with straw on the same estate.

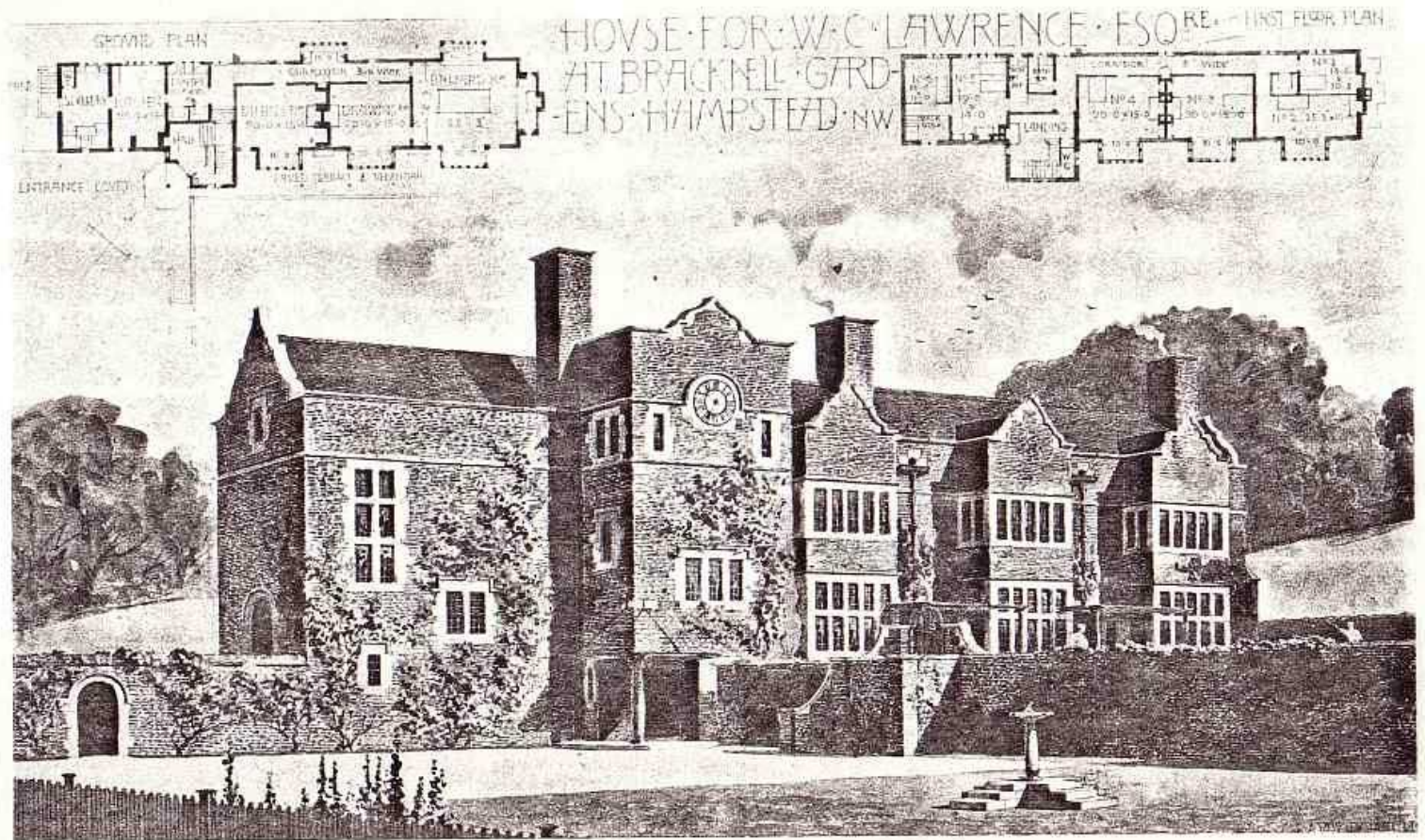
The importance of roofs as factors in a landscape is such, indeed, that the late William Morris devoted an interesting pamphlet to the consideration of this subject alone. We may be sure that if any of the materials which nature supplies do not look well, the fault lies with ourselves for misapplying them. Thus, though a slate roof hardly ever harmonises



"MOOR CRAG," WINDERMERE

C. F. A. VOYSEY, ARCHITECT





A HOUSE AT HAMPSTEAD  
C. F. A. VOYSEY, ARCHITECT



with brick walls, it is not on that account to be taken for granted that slate roofs cannot be employed with æsthetic effect in any situation whatsoever. Even so unpromising a material as polished slate, which one might well imagine too unsympathetic to look well in any circumstances, is superb in its place, as all who have seen the glossy black roofs of Angers can testify. Nor can anybody deny the beauty of the conical roofs of the old Archiepiscopal Palace Gatehouse at Beauvais, whose convex surfaces gleam with the pearly sheen of grey satin.

Mr. Voysey, objecting personally to a hard surface which could not be expected to acquire the mellow tones of moss-grown age, never uses any save unpolished slate; but this he does introduce effectively in judicious combination with such materials as his experience has proved combine suitably with the slate. Thus "Broadleys," Windermere, a house designed for Mr. Curror Briggs, was built of local yellowish stone and roofed with Westmoreland slates. The latter, since they are quarried and sold in different sizes, admit of being used as roof slates should be, namely, in graduated stages, which have a much more attractive appearance

than the mechanical monotony of uniform slabs. A feature of "Broadleys" is the deep verandah, but, that the interior should not be overshadowed unduly, ample provision for lighting is furnished in the shape of an immense bow-window. The long verandah is conspicuous also in another Windermere residence, "Moor Crag," designed for Mr. J. W. Buckley. It is built of local greenstone, the two-foot thick walls being rough cast on the outside.

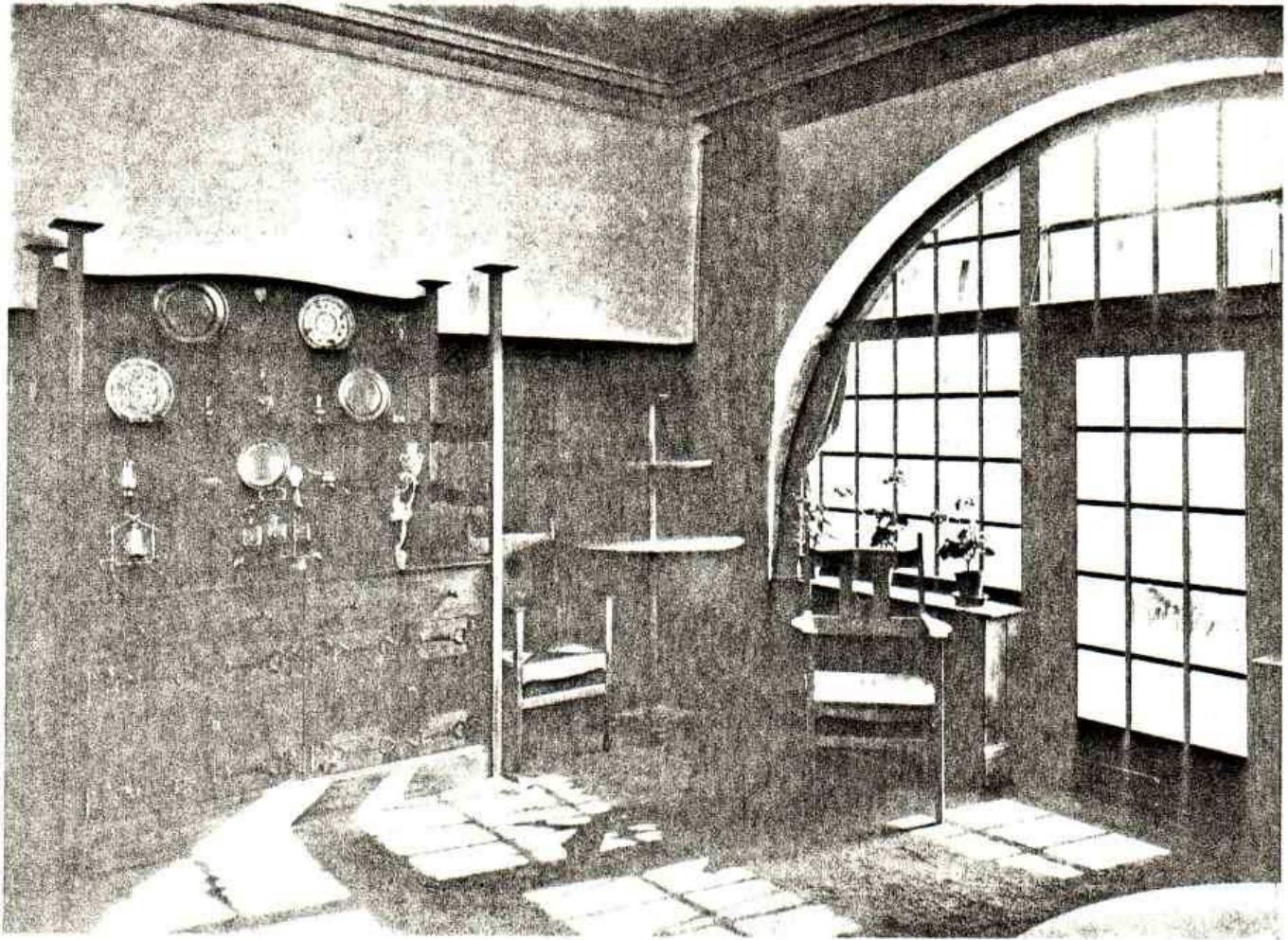
Next should be noticed two projects which were not destined to be realised. The first was a competitive design for the Carnegie Library and Museum at Limerick, the judges accepting in the end the work of a local architect. Mr. Voysey's design shows a handsome building of native chalkstone, the wall-surface relieved with a checker pattern in dark grey and lighter stone, the roof being of Irish blue-black slate. The second scheme—which came to nought because of a disagreement as to the situation of the building within the allotted space, Mr. Voysey not seeing his way to carry out a work in a manner required of him against his convictions—was a house intended for Mr. W. C. Lawrence, at Hampstead. The design



ROOM IN A HOUSE AT BIRKENHEAD

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shows a tile-roofed building of red brick, with white stone string-courses and dressings. The characteristic feature is the brickwork, which Mr. Voysey proposed to carry out in bricks of narrow calibre, giving six courses to the foot, instead of the modern standard size bricks of four courses.

Mr. Voysey contends, and rightly of course, that if one wants a building to have the character of old work, one must, as nearly as may be, build it in the same manner and with the same standard of proportions as those adopted by the old builders. It is because we do not attend to these and such-like elementary matters that we go astray; or, if we do chance to remark them in ancient work, in the blindness that we flatter ourselves is knowledge, we misunderstand them and attribute to them some preposterously far-fetched symbolic or mystical signification, of which the single-hearted masons of old were as innocent and as unconscious as we ourselves have hitherto been of the existence of radium. A vivid apprehension of scale, and of the right relation of parts; a commonsense use of material; a practical though, belike, unformulated observance or acoustic and dynamic laws—these

were the factors which primarily contributed to make the buildings our fathers built what they are. And it is because we violate these first principles in our productions of the present day, that we have made ourselves unfit to replace a single stone of their venerable handiwork. If ever (which God forbid!) Westminster Abbey were to disappear by any such accident as that which destroyed the neighbouring Houses of Parliament, not all the boasted wealth of the British Empire, nor the united wealth and skill of the whole world, could avail to rebuild it again as it was before.

An antique-looking design on paper may give a highly satisfactory impression, and architects have a trick of manipulating and colouring their drawings so as not to fail in conveying the desired impression; but when the actual building comes to be finished, with modern appliances and mathematically uniform blocks and courses—even if free from the contemptible artifice of sham joints or sham construction—the result has a mechanical, cast-iron effect that the cultivated sense abhors. The monstrous Tower Bridge, with its iron framework belied by a superficial mask of stone, is a



case in point. Architecture conducted on such lines is as hopelessly unconvincing as an attempt to reproduce tempera pictures in oil paint. The copy is no more like the real thing than a volume of Chaucer printed in modern newspaper type, set in the middle of the page of machine-made composition paper, is like an old printed book.

But to return to Mr. Voysey and his work. In a house recently built and decorated throughout for Mr. F. Walters at Pyrford Common, near Woking, the dining-room is lined with oak, the wood being left, as Mr. Voysey prefers it, in the natural state, without staining, oiling, fuming, polishing or doctoring of any kind. The large window of the dining-room contains a specially designed heraldic panel with the owner's arms in painted glass. Less satisfactory work to the artist, though equally desirable, is the remodelling of interiors in already existing, commonplace houses. Such an undertaking Mr. Voysey has lately carried out for Mrs. Van Gruisen at Birkenhead, where he fitted a room in oak, with a deep white frieze, and a large open hearth to give character to the whole.

And now to treat of less ambitious works. The texture of tapestry of silk and wool combined—a process developed, if not actually initiated by William Morris—is one that lends itself peculiarly

well to artistic effects; because, although the weaving is mechanical, the uneven stretching of the soft silk fabric in contact with the firmer body of the woollen web produces charming variations of surface. Mr. Voysey has designed many beautiful specimens of this particular sort of textile. A recent instance, executed by Messrs. Alexander Morton & Co., is founded on a *motif* of birds and roses, treated in the artist's most characteristic manner.

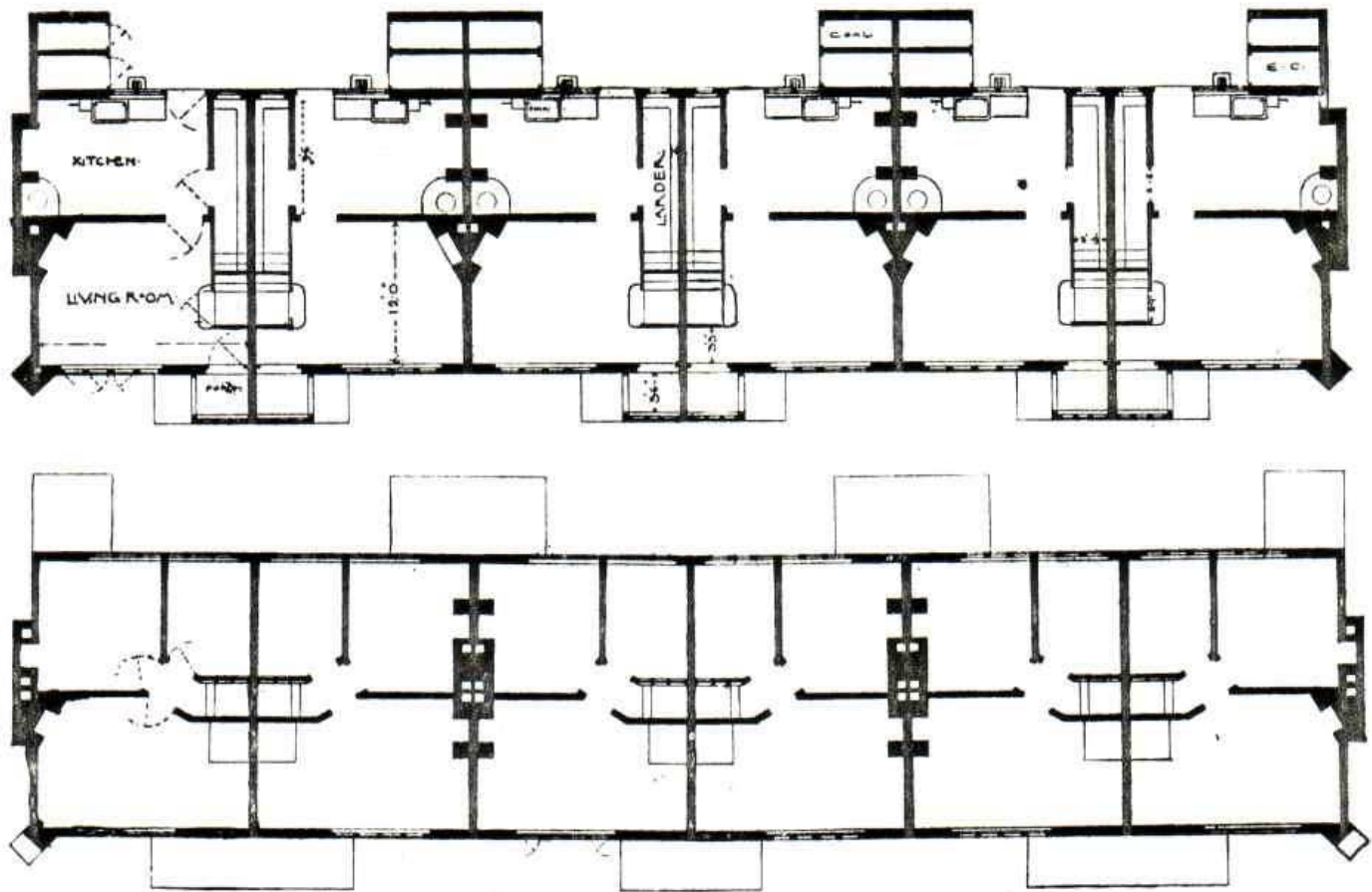
Further proofs of Mr. Voysey's resourceful invention may be found in a collection of door furniture from his designs, which include, among fittings for various uses, some quaint gate-latches in wrought-iron and a swing-door handle in brass or gun-metal, with birds picturesquely introduced into the design. No minutest accessory or detail of its ornament but is the object of Mr. Voysey's scrupulous care and attention. As instancing his conscientiousness I cannot refrain from mentioning how often, against his own interests as a designer of wall-paper patterns, should he judge the decorative scheme improved thereby, he elects to use self-coloured papers. Those known as Eltonbury silk fibres, whose beautiful texture represents the happy medium between a dead flatness and a glassy surface, are a favourite material employed by the artist for this purpose.



"VIOLEN," PYRFORD COMMON, WOKING

C. F. A. VOYSEY, ARCHITECT





PLANS OF COTTAGES AT ELMESTHORPE

C. F. A. VOYSEY, ARCHITECT



COTTAGES AT ELMESTHORPE, NEAR LINCOLN

C. F. A. VOYSEY ARCHITECT