

The Arts & Crafts Movement

The craft revival was started in the 1850's by a group of Oxford University students, known as **The Birmingham Set**, led by **William Morris** and **Edward Burne-Jones**. Although originally apolitical, the group rapidly became politicised against the "barbarity of contemporary culture" and pursued literary and artistic activities to "wage Holy warfare against the age". They were heavily influenced by the romantic works of **Tennyson, Keats** and **Shelley**; later, by the writings of **Ruskin** and the mediaevalist writings of **Mallory's *Morte d'Arthur***.

Members of the group took up careers as painters, writers, designers, architects and, later, as craftsmen in wood and other materials. In 1861 **Morris** and some friends founded a company, **Morris Marshall Faulkner & Co** (later **Morris & Co**), which designed and made decorative objects for homes, including wallpaper, textiles, furniture and stained glass. In 1891 Morris established the **Kelmscott Press**, for which he designed a typeface based on 15th-century letterforms. The press printed fine and de-luxe editions of contemporary and historical English literature.

Morris's ideas spread during the late 19th and early 20th centuries resulting in the establishment of many associations and craft communities, although Morris was not involved because of his preoccupation with promoting socialism. A hundred and thirty Arts and Crafts organisations were formed in Britain between 1895 and 1905. **The Arts and Crafts Movement** started in the 1880s, and the **Art Workers Guild** was formed in 1884. In 1885, the **Birmingham School of Art**, the first **Municipal School of Art**, became a leading centre for the Arts and Crafts movement. In 1887 the **Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society** was formed and, in November 1888, held its first exhibition in London. Morris & Co. was well represented in the exhibition with furniture, fabrics, carpets and embroideries. Edward Burne-Jones observed, "here for the first time one can measure a bit the change that has happened in the last twenty years". The society still exists as the **Society of Designer Craftsmen**.

In 1888, **Charles Ashbee**, an important craftsman working in silver, founded a **Guild and School of Handicraft** in the East End of London. The guild was a craft co-operative modelled on the medieval guilds; skilled craftsmen, working on the principles of Ruskin and Morris, produced handcrafted goods and managed a school for apprentices. The idea was greeted with enthusiasm by almost everyone except Morris. From 1888 to 1902 the guild prospered, employing about 50 men. In 1902 Ashbee relocated the guild out of London to begin an experimental community in **Chipping Campden** in the Cotswolds. The guild's work is characterized by plain surfaces of hammered silver, flowing wirework and coloured stones in simple settings. Although the guild at Chipping Campden attracted many craftsmen, including the print maker **F L Griggs**, it did not prosper financially and was liquidated in 1908. However, some craftsmen stayed and contributed to the tradition of modern craftsmanship in that area.

Charles Francis Annesley Voysey (1857–1941) was an Arts and Crafts architect who also designed fabrics, tiles, ceramics, furniture and metalwork. His style combined simplicity with sophistication. His wallpapers and textiles, featuring stylized bird and plant forms in bold outlines with flat colors, were used widely. Morris's ideas were adopted by the New Education philosophy in the late 1880s, which incorporated handicraft teaching in schools and led to the formation of the **Crafts Council** in 1971. Morris & Co traded until 1940 and some of its designs are still in production.

The Central School of Arts and Crafts, founded in 1896 by the London County Council, with **William Lethaby** and **George Frampton** as its first principals, was influenced by the Arts and Crafts philosophy, as was the **Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts**. **Walter Crane** became head of the **Royal College of Art** in 1898 and tried to reform it and to introduce practical crafts, but resigned after a year. However, **Augustus Spencer** reformed its curriculum and brought in **Lethaby** to head its school of design.

Interest spread rapidly into Ireland and, especially, into Scotland where Charles Rennie Mackintosh was the leading architect-designer at the Glasgow School of Art that popularized Celtic designs. The concepts spread and were implemented in different ways across Europe, the USA and the British colonies, especially in Canada.

Arts & Crafts in the Cotswolds

The Cotswolds became an important centre for the Arts and Crafts Movement in the late 19th and early 20th century. Craftsmen and women followed in the footsteps of **William Morris**, whose country home was at **Kelmscott Manor**, and settled in villages throughout the Cotswolds and Gloucestershire and especially in the **Cotswold villages**, **Rodmarton Manor** and **Owlpen Manor**.

Leading Arts and Crafts practitioners were drawn to the Cotswolds by its rich craft tradition, its accessibility to London and Oxford and by the cultivated charm of the landscape. The existing architecture served as an inspiration for the numerous large and small buildings constructed by Arts and Crafts architects. From 1871 –1896 William Morris spent his summers at Kelmscott Manor; in 1894 three young architect designers, **Ernest Gimson** and the brothers **Ernest** and **Sidney Barnsley**, settled at Pinbury Park near **Cirencester**. In 1902, they moved to **Sapperton** and opened the **Daneway Workshops**.



The migration of craftsmen continued in 1902 when **C R Ashbee** and some 100 followers settled in **Chipping Campden**, bringing with them the ethos of the **Guild of Handicraft** originally set up by Ashbee at Toynbee Hall in 1888. Throughout the Cotswolds, there are many villages and churches where the work of Arts and Crafts Movement designers can be seen, although many houses are still in private ownership and not open to the public. Of course, the exteriors are still free to view!



At **Chipping Campden** there is a rich legacy of work by **Ashbee** and the members of the **Guild of Handicraft**, which had a worldwide influence as profound as that of the **Morris Co**. It provided a model of communal living, profit sharing and joyous labour. Among the many surviving buildings is **Elm Tree House**, which Ashbee converted into **Campden School of Arts and Crafts** in

1904. **Ashbee** lived in **Woolstapler's Hall** from 1902-11, which has Arts and Crafts interior features. In nearby **Broadway** another craftsman, **Gordon Russell**, established a workshop and showrooms in The **Lygon Arms**, the former manor house dating back to 1620 that was taken over by Gordon's father, SB Russell, in 1904. The architect **CE Bateman** added the Great Hall as a new dining room with plasterwork by the **Birmingham Guild**.

Painswick to the south of **Cheltenham** has a number of Arts and Crafts buildings: the **Congregational Church** in Gloucester St has a window by Morris & Co; the **Gyde Almshouses** in Gloucester Road were designed by Sidney Barnsley in 1913, as were the public baths in St Mary's Street. **The Gloucestershire Guild of Craftsmen** still holds its own exhibition every August that shows the variety and excellence of their workmanship. Other places of interest outside **Painswick** are **Holcombe House**, **Olivers**, **Paradise**, and **Painswick Lodge**, the latter altered and restored by Sidney Barnsley in 1925/6.

At **Sapperton** several buildings were designed by Arts and Crafts architects for their own occupation. **Norman Jewson** made interior alterations at **Batchelor's Court**, an 18th century Farmhouse; **Sidney Barnsley** built **Beechanger**; **The Leasowes** was designed and built by **Ernest Gimson**; and **Ernest Barnsley** built **Upper Dorvel House**. He also built the village hall in 1913 with assistance from Norman Jewson. Near **Cirencester**, is **Rodmarton Manor**, one of the last country houses built and furnished using local stone and timber by Ernest Barnsley and the **Cotswold Group** of craftsmen. The house took 20 years to complete and was not finished until 1929.



Rodmarton Manor