

**DD1000 Historical Contextual Studies: Discuss how the Bauhaus led the British Arts & Crafts movement into German Industrialisation.**

By Ronald Burgess

The First World War: a time of massive advancement for humanity, from the immense lifesaving capabilities of the X-ray machine, to the development of destructive technologies such as the armoured tank. At its beginning in 1914 Germany had established itself as an immense superpower, not only within Europe but around the globe, inferior only to the United States. It led the War in both technological prowess as well as tactical advantage, however after four devastating years of conflict Germany's economy was in collapse. With trade and industry crippled the country faced hyperinflation. This contextual study shall explore how the British Arts & Crafts movement inspired the formation of the Bauhaus, arguable one of the most prestigious art schools in history, and how this institute pioneered the way for German Industrialisation.

The British Arts-&-Crafts movement finds its origins long before the formation of the Bauhaus, dating back to medieval England. "The Gothic style, displayed in vast and complex works of architecture, in monumental structures, richly illuminated scripts" (*style and civilization: gothic G.Henderson*) Stretching from as early as the 14<sup>th</sup> century till 1547 Gothic art and architecture stood as a testament to pious craftsmen, constructing grand towering cathedrals and embellished buildings of power. The style focused heavily on the implementation of high pointed spires, large sloping roofs and towering steeples, adorned with gargoyles and holy symbolism. The Gothic style also heavily drew from Islamic architecture: the Quatrefoil a four sided, leaf shaped pattern or the pointed arch. Also referred to as an 'Ogive' (Fig,1) this style of arched structure support allowed for an increase of structural integrity but was also subliminally viewed as disrespectful towards the church due to it incorporating aspects from a rival religion. This architectural form faded with the introduction of the renaissance style who valued symmetry and a distinctly neo-classical style of art and building over the traditional gothic forms.

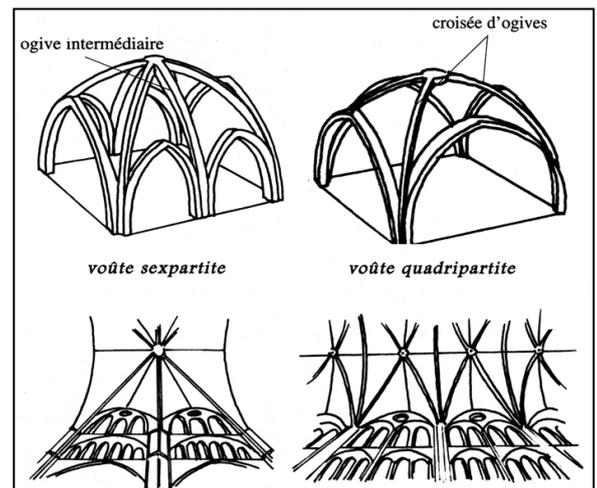


Figure.1 – Ogive, Gothic Architecture.

Beginning in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century the Gothic-Revival Movement consisted of a collection of individuals who condemned the Neo-classical approach, seeking to reunite Britain with its gothic roots. At this point in history the Church of England was gaining massive influence throughout the country causing a desperate need for more sanctified sites. Attempting to replicate the past within their work, architects began to style their work towards medieval styles, but without a steadfast instruction on what constituted



Figure.2 – Strawberry Hill House

gothic. The aristocracy began to buy into Gothic-revival, it dominating almost every aspect of their life via design, from the chairs they sat in to the tables they dined at, all adorned with spires, crosses and gargoyle effigies. Even the literature of the time was affected, with narratives such as Bram Stoker's Dracula (1897), and Mary Shelly's Frankenstein (1818) rising out of the sudden obsession with the macabre. Horace Wapole renowned for his home 'Strawberry Hill' (Fig.2) summarises the effects of the revitalised gothic movement as 'How these antique towers

and vacant courts chill the suspended soul!” (P38 -Radcliffe A. 1792) This factual approach to Gothic architecture began to perpetuate that, through viewing this art form, the past can be replicated.

In 1836 an architect named Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin published a volume named ‘Contrasts’ This piece of literature laid down the fundamentals of pure Gothic, as opposed to the more modern counterpart which was purely decorative. He despised the hollow representations of architecture, with the arrival of the industrial revolution more began to doubt whether sacrificing craftsmanship was worth the technological advancements that steam power idolised. Pugin, through this manual went on to design many churches around the country, his work coming to a crescendo with the interior of The Palace of Westminster.

The Eighteen hundreds brought with it the full power of steam production, the assembly line was in full realization and England was at the forefront of the world. Using the power of industry the country began exporting and trading all over the world, dealing products that would have taken the skill of a master craftsman a life time to perfect but within the space of a few hours. The country enjoyed the admiration of the world, with Prince Albert, conceiving the idea of a massive exhibit demonstrating the prowess of British Industrialism. This manifested in ‘The Great Exhibition of 1851’ contained within the gargantuan ‘Crystal Palace’, The structure itself measuring 564 metres by 138 metres, and visited by over six million people between May and October in 1851. With ticket prices being at three guineas for a season ticket, the event generated four and a half million shillings (£21,495,090) generating the funding for the Natural-History, National-Science and the Victoria and Albert museums. The exhibit displayed the wonders of the industrial age as well as the wealth of the British empire, with over 100,000 objects on display, even the ‘Koh-i-Noor Diamond’ the largest diamond in the world and centre-piece for the British Crown Jewels.



Figure.3 – The Great Exhibition of 1851

Despite the success that the industrial revolution brought the country, the upcoming revolution reached its boiling point. William Morris(1834-1896),inspired by the social reformer John Ruskin (1819-1900) who idealised social, environmental and artistic preservation; eventually inspiring the formation of ‘The National Trust’ at the hands of Octavia Hill and Hardwick Rawnsley. Where the previously masters of design had taken a passive approach to the industrial rise, their unease manifested itself in a revolution against the production line, attempting to fully reincarnate the medieval period, as Pugin has pioneered. Advocates claimed that the power of industrialisation was hindering the skills of the coming generation as well as destroying the pride of craftsmen. In order to counter this, practitioners began to form guilds that encapsulate the ideals of their medieval counterparts: promoting the use of indigenous materials coupled with strong, durable design. Examples of these guilds would be ‘The Birmingham Guild of Handicraft(1880)’ and ‘The Guild of Saint George ( 1819- 1900)’

Founding ‘Morris&Co(1861)’(Fig.4) Morris embodied the ideals of his newly forming art movement ‘British Arts&Crafts’ providing hand crafted objects for the common people of Victorian Britain, producing everything from wallpaper, to furniture, carpeting and even stained glass. The success of Moirris&Co acted as a platform for the creation of Morris’ subsequent business venture ‘Kelmscott Press (1891-1898)’. Located in Hammersmith the company produced over 83 books, the peak of Morris’ life as a craftsman, these tomes accumulated all of the designers principles; proving that the quality of product could be

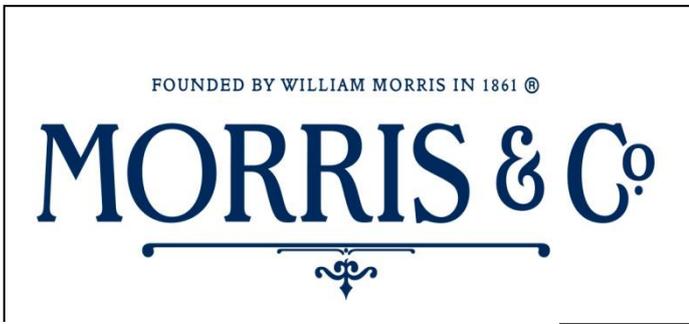


Figure.4 – Morris & Co Logo (1861)

retained and improved upon by the implementation of modern technology sensibly in conjunction with classical skills. The Arts&Crafts movement could be felt worldwide as the participants rebelled against industrialisation in favour of the common people, arguably the most famous example The Glasgow Four.

The Four: Charles Rennie Mackintosh(1868-1928)(Fig.5), James Herbert McNair(1868-1955), Margaret Macdonald(1864-1933) and finally Frances Macdonald(1873-1921) All four belonged to the Glasgow School of Art. The four each specialised and explored different areas of art, often to a controversial theme, ranging from architecture to painting and textiles. The Scottish Arts&Crafts movement encapsulated elements of its inspirer, namely the hand crafted aesthetic and fondness for native materials, however Glasgow style also drew heavily from Scottish culture, incorporating Celtic intertextual references linking to folk tales and lore. In terms of controversy the four as well as the style was often regarded as ‘The Spook School’ because of the fondness for ghoulish motifs.



Figure.5 – Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868-1928)

The Socialist and preservative nature of Arts-&Crafts, would eventually prove to be the movement’s downfall. As the power of industry continued to improve, production quality rose, creating equilibrium of cost and quality not seen by Pugin or his predecessors. The Arts&crafts movement, was a crusade of reflection, looking to the past for inspiration, but no amount of nostalgia could contest with the raising price of craftsmanship. This resulted in only the rich being able to partake in personally crafted objects, the poor purchasing the production line and the key aspect of the Arts & Crafts movement defeated by the very institution they attempted to remove.

Though on decline the Arts-&Crafts movement stayed a beacon of productivity to the world, drawing the attention of an economically troubled post-war Germany, Hermann Muthesius(1861-1927) would be the instigator of Germany’s financial recovery. Muthesius, a skilled architect, as well as an influential diplomat travelled to London in 1896 as an envoy to the German Embassy there, offered a position in which he studied industrial England to aid a failing Germany. The subsequent six years of cultural research flourished in the publication of his three-volume report – ‘*Das englische Haus.*(1904)’ The manuscript focused on residential architecture, the day-to-day lives of the British as well as the subtle nuances of the working home and design. Muthesius also shared an avid interest in Scottish Arts-&Crafts, admiring the work of Mackintosh, and combining the virtues of both English and Glasgow style to create an alternative to Germany’s very ostentatious and ornamental architecture, obtaining the concept for economic growth due to the low cost of production line pieces.

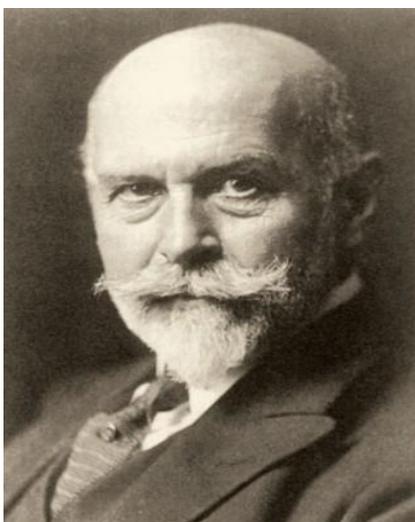


Fig.6 – Hermann Muthesius,1861-1927

Returning to Germany in 1904, Methesius separated his time between the private practice of architecture and advising the government of Prussia. Despite being acknowledged as an architect of brilliant renown Methesius was brought before the “Association for the Economic Interests of the Arts and Crafts” accused of split loyalties between Germany and Britain. Through this controversy several of the Avant-garde of design resigned from the organisation, creating ‘Deutscher Werkbund’ the early ancestor of the Bauhaus.

A survivor of World War 1, Walter Gropius was awarded various honours for his services in battle for Germany, becoming an architect after his draft ended. During this time, Gropius gradually rose through the ranks at his practice, eventually forming his own company in 1910 with his colleague Adolf Mayer. His career began rapidly improving when he became the Master of the “Grand-Ducal Saxon School of Arts and Crafts” due to a recommendation by the previous principle Henry van de Velde. This school would eventually be transformed into the Bauhaus as we know it today. With the reduction of the German monarchy as well as the abolition of censorship the school embodied the burning desire for extensive artistic experimentation without the threat of the previous regime, chiefly inspired by the Russian Revolution, primarily Constructivism.

Taking Methesius’ combination of skilful craftsmanship and design when fused with the power of the production line Gropius managed to create a school which valued the development and advancement design and technology, attempting to create objects of practical and aesthetic beauty for the average German home; Simple, every day and unadorned. Each student was taught the value of the production line, as well as the technology involved, renowned tutors such as the surrealist painter Paul Klee (1879-1940) or the Swiss expressionist painter and designer Johannes Itten (1888-1967) worked with students to create products of Art-&-Design, straddling a delicate equilibrium between minimalistic beauty and basic



Fig.7 – Bauhaus School of design.

practicality. This philosophy borrows not only from the Arts&Crafts movement but as far back as the medieval, balancing the timeless skills of master craftsmen with the ingenious renovations brought on by the industrial revolution. A prime example of the Bauhaus’ effect on the modern world comes from the designer Marcel Breuer, who is responsible for the Cantilever chair, a feat of efficiency and design that since its conception within the school has changed little in over 80 years.

The Bauhaus itself sought to aid recovering Germany, striving to create minimalist homes and furniture, constantly spreading its doctrine of skilful craftsmanship and the beauty of the production line. The school’s success spread its influence over the country, lead by three different directors Walter Gropius from 1919-1928, Hannes Mayer from 1928 to 1930 and finally Ludwig Mies van der Rohe from 1930 to 1933, each teacher attempting to continue these values despite difference of opinion on social and political views. However the school faced distress in 1933 with the rise of the Nazi party. Viewed as a hub of communist and liberals via the spread of degrading propaganda the school faced closure multiple times from the government; eventually forcefully closed by the Gestapo. Mies attempted to defend the studio convincing the leader of the German gestapo to prevent the closer of the school, only for the faculty to consensually close the school weeks later. With its closure the leaders instead spreading the word of German industrialism around the world via new institutes such as the ‘New Bauhaus’ in Chicago, perpetuating the belief of ‘Form follows Function’

In conclusion the Arts and Crafts movement from England and Scotland can be easily viewed as one of, if not the primary influence of German Industrialism, drawing from the socialist ideals of designing for the masses but succeeding where previous movements failed. Rather than focusing to the past for inspiration as the Crafts movement applied to medieval and Gothic revival, Industrialism looked to the future, generating designs that required a delicate amalgamation of current technologies as well as the perfection of function and form.

## References

### Books

Barbauld, A. (1810). *The British novelists*. London: F.C. and J. Rivington.

Crawford, A. (1984). *By hammer and hand*. Birmingham, England: The Publications Unit, Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery.

Franciscono, M. (1971). *Walter Gropius and the creation of the Bauhaus in Weimar*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Henderson, G. (1967). *Gothic*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin.

Marks, R. and Williamson, P. (2003). *Gothic*. London: V & A.

Pugin, A. (1969). *Contrasts*. Leicester: Leicester U.P.

Pugin, A., Aldrich, M. and Atterbury, P. (1995). *A.W.N. Pugin*. New Haven: Published for the Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, New York by Yale University Press.

### Websites

Artsandcrafts.org.uk, (2015). *Acknowledgements. | The Arts & Crafts Movement in Great Britain 1850-1915*. [online] Available at: <http://artsandcrafts.org.uk/about/acknow.html> [Accessed 1 May 2015].

Artyfactory.com, (2015). *William Morris - The Arts and Crafts Movement*. [online] Available at: [http://www.artfactory.com/art\\_appreciation/graphic\\_designers/william\\_morris.html](http://www.artfactory.com/art_appreciation/graphic_designers/william_morris.html) [Accessed 1 May 2015].

BBC Schools, (2014). *Weapons and technology*. [online] Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/0/ww1/25401269> [Accessed 1 May 2015].

Crmsociety.com, (2015). *The Four - Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Frances Macdonald, James Herbert McNair and Margaret Macdonald*. [online] Available at: <http://www.crmsociety.com/aboutthefour.aspx> [Accessed 1 May 2015].

Mental Floss, (2015). *12 Technological Advancements of World War I*. [online] Available at: <http://mentalfloss.com/article/31882/12-technological-advancements-world-war-i> [Accessed 1 May 2015].

Primaryfacts.com, (2013). *Facts About the Great Exhibition of 1851 / Primary Facts*. [online] Available at: <http://primaryfacts.com/675/facts-about-the-great-exhibition-of-1851/> [Accessed 1 May 2015].

Www2.open.ac.uk, (2015). *OU Design*. [online] Available at: [http://www2.open.ac.uk/openlearn/design\\_nutshell/index.php#](http://www2.open.ac.uk/openlearn/design_nutshell/index.php#) [Accessed 1 May 2015].

## Figures

**FIG.1** - Histoiredesarts.com, (2015). *Histoire des arts » Vocabulaire architectural*. [online] Available at: <http://histoiredesarts.com/hda/ressources/outils/vocabulaire-architectural/> [Accessed 4 May 2015].

**FIG.2** - Visitrichmond.co.uk, (2015). *Strawberry Hill House / Historic House / Twickenham/London*. [online] Available at: <http://www.visitrichmond.co.uk/thedms.aspx?dms=3&venue=3502290> [Accessed 4 May 2015].

**FIG. 3** - Lotten.se, (2015). *Crystal Palace och The Great Exhibition of 1851 — Lotten*. [online] Available at: <http://lotten.se/2014/10/crystal-palace-och-the-great-exhibition-of-1851.html> [Accessed 4 May 2015].

**FIG.4** - Ledecorazioni.com, (2015). *Le Decorazioni - Pitture Inglesi e Francesi a Roma - Carte da Parati*. [online] Available at: <http://www.ledecorazioni.com/carte-da-parati.html> [Accessed 4 May 2015].

**FIG.5** - Justmackintosh.com, (2015). *Just Mackintosh*. [online] Available at: [http://www.justmackintosh.com/acatalog/Photo\\_Gallery.html](http://www.justmackintosh.com/acatalog/Photo_Gallery.html) [Accessed 4 May 2015].

**FIG. 5** - Gwz-berlin.de, (2015). *Geisteswissenschaftliche Zentren Berlin /// Über die GWZ /// Arbeitsorte*. [online] Available at: <http://www.gwz-berlin.de/ueber-die-gwz/arbeitsorte/> [Accessed 4 May 2015].

**FIG.6** - GreatBuildings, (2015). *Bauhaus by Walter Gropius at GreatBuildings*. [online] Available at: <http://www.greatbuildings.com/buildings/Bauhaus.html> [Accessed 4 May 2015].