



fig.1 J.A. Radford, Design for an Overmantel, Montreal.
(Photo: *Canadian Architect and Builder*, February 1889: 22)

THE DISSEMINATION OF THE ARTS AND CRAFTS STYLE IN DOMESTIC ARCHITECTURE

The Case of Kingston, Ontario

During the Victorian period architectural journals became increasingly important vehicles for the dissemination of ideas and styles.¹ In this article I shall demonstrate the way in which Canadian trade journals, in particular *Canadian Architect and Builder* (CAB),² helped to spread the influence of the Arts and Crafts movement and its offshoot, the "Queen Anne" style. The effect on small towns and cities in Canada was particularly interesting because it was here that architects tended to rely most heavily on periodicals for their understanding of new styles and techniques. I shall discuss three late-Victorian examples of Arts-and-Crafts-influenced houses in Kingston. Although it was a prosperous city in the late-nineteenth century, Kingston no longer had the political importance it enjoyed at mid-century, and does not have the grand and comparatively *avant-garde* houses found in Toronto and Montréal. Most or all of the local architects at this time had begun as builders or masons and lacked professional training or the experience of extensive travel. This tended to lead to interpretations of new styles that are often quite different from those in larger cities.

Although the influence of the Arts and Crafts movement on smaller centres has often been noted, the variations in its interpretation have not been carefully examined. The modifications made to the style in larger, more affluent Canadian cities were perhaps more in tune with the current fashions in Britain. In smaller towns architects tended to adapt new styles to their own purposes and to the tastes of their clients, and new interpretations thus appeared. For example one often sees typical Victorian row houses adorned with decorative elements such as terracotta panels or sunburst gable designs. In this way, an ordinary local house facade could take on an innovative "Queen Anne" or Arts and Crafts appearance simply through a new type of surface decoration.³ This corresponded much more closely to the Arts and Crafts ideal of working with local materials and basing designs on local examples than did slavishly copying a fashionable new style. Similarly, plans might be adjusted for practical reasons such as money or space. For example, the Arts and Crafts living hall, which often appears in much-altered form in late-Victorian houses, may contain the tiled fireplace, built-in seat and wood paneling

that one would expect to find in a much larger house, but all crowded into an area not much bigger than an ordinary stairwell. At worst, the modifications made by architects or builders in smaller cities and towns sometimes resulted in a debased style not worthy of its antecedents. I contend, however, that this process also led to new styles of architecture that were interesting in their own right, as fusions of the old and the new. While it is true that such changes eventually led to the style becoming so diluted as to be unrecognizable, we should see this as a process of development and change rather than as debasement and disappearance.

A step in the process of change to "provincial" forms of mainstream architectural styles may be seen in a drawing for an overmantel published in *CAB* in 1889 (fig.1) to illustrate an article entitled "How to Decorate and Furnish a Home." The decorative overmantel took many forms and was commonly used in houses of the period; it often had a central mirror surrounded by shelves and brackets for displaying the blue and white china and other aesthetic objects beloved of English "Queen Anne" proponents. But the "Suggestive Sketch" in question has taken the overmantel to extremes that would have made it quite unrecognizable to architect Richard Norman Shaw (1831-1912), who is identified with the inception of the "Queen Anne" style in England.⁴ It towers over the fireplace, mixing motifs and materials with abandon. This design could have illustrated an 1896 article in *Studio* magazine, where the author stated of Shaw's design: "Of course his imitators burlesqued his work, they crowded detail upon detail, and lost the breadth of treatment which was Mr. Norman Shaw's final excellence."⁵

The "Queen Anne" style added elements of eighteenth-century vernacular classicism to the Medieval influence at the root of Arts and Crafts architecture, and was, as Mark Girouard tells us, particularly attractive to the Aesthetic crowd's rebellion against the heavy mid-Victorian darkness of their parents and their search for some "Sweetness and Light" in their lives.⁶ For a number of reasons the "Queen Anne" style was more readily adopted in Canada (and, in various incarnations, in the United States) than was the purer Arts and Crafts style. "Queen Anne" was far more accessible, having been more commonly used for urban dwellings as well as for non-domestic structures from law courts and schools to shops and public houses. It also lacked the political baggage of the Arts and Crafts movement; it was not directly connected with the socialist ideals of William Morris (1834-1896), Philip Webb (1831-1915) and their compatriots. In part because its existence relied less on these political and social ideas, it was more visually definable, and therefore a more easily copied style.

Several British periodicals were instrumental in spreading the influence of the Arts and Crafts and the "Queen Anne" styles. *Studio*, published in London beginning in 1893, was a particular champion of the Arts and Crafts movement and regularly published articles and illustrations about architects, artists and

designers. Such articles often discussed the philosophical background of the movement as well as its formal aspects. The editors of Canadian journals such as *CAB* and *Construction*⁷ probably became familiar with the Arts and Crafts movement through these articles. Canadian publications tended to concentrate less on the ideological aspects of the movement and focus on formal concerns such as the use of local materials and local motifs. This lack of emphasis on the philosophy behind the movement meant that small-town architects wishing to build in an Arts and Crafts style were not involved in the theory of this practice and indeed were not necessarily aware of it. Nor did the Canadian periodicals stress the Medieval craft ideal. As a result, although many small-town architects used decorative elements that might not have looked out of place in an English Arts and Crafts house, these were often mass-produced and ordered in, which would have made them an anathema to Morris and his circle.

The Arts and Crafts movement received a considerable amount of ink in *Canadian Architect and Builder* and *Construction* around the turn of the century. Although readers could not have gained a real understanding of the true principles of the movement from these sources, they would certainly have seen sufficient discussion and illustrations to know that it was a fashionable style. For example, in the article "A Century's Review" in *CAB* of 1901, the author states that, although the Gothic Revival was "a stupid chapter" in the history of architecture, it had had some positive offshoots. Among these he mentions Richard Norman Shaw who, "between the pressure of classic tradition on one hand and Gothic revival on the other...took what might be called a resultant line, uniting qualities of both and ending in work which is both pre-eminently modern and pre-eminently English."⁸ The article goes on to commend William Morris, from whom were descended "the arts and crafts designers with whom are affiliated architects of undoubted originality." Until its demise in 1908, *CAB* published a wide range of articles related to the Arts and Crafts movement. They included a brief passage by John Ruskin on the superiority of the pointed arch, an article by the English designer and illustrator Walter Crane entitled "On Some of the Arts Allied to Architecture," a reprint of a paper by English Garden City architects Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin, and many illustrations and descriptions of houses influenced by the movement.⁹ Illustrations of Arts-and-Crafts-influenced designs by Canadian architects were also common; examples included an 1888 design for the Church of St. Simon, Rosedale by the Toronto firm Strickland and Symons (but signed by English emigrant Eden Smith, and perhaps designed by him¹⁰), and a church by Langley and Burke, from 1889. Both are quite domestic in scale and appearance, and the architects' use of half-timbering in this context is quite unusual in Canada. These characteristics, together with the asymmetrical massing and elaborate moulded brick chimneys of both buildings and the small leaded-glass windows of the Eden Smith drawing, make the designs highly evocative of



fig.2 Joseph Power, Hendry House, 1888, King Street East, Kingston. (Photo: *Canadian Architect and Builder*, March 1888: 3)

the Arts and Crafts tradition. The description of the Langley and Burke design points out that the church is to be built in an area where stone fences abound and that the building itself will be surrounded by a stone wall and built of stone up to the window sills. The debt the architects owed to the Arts and Crafts movement is further emphasized by this concern for use of local materials.

Sometimes readers were more specifically exhorted to follow Arts and Crafts principles with a Canadian theme. Montréal architect and educator Percy Erskine Nobbs (1875-1964), who had been trained among Arts and Crafts architects in Scotland and England, wrote in 1905: "The beautiful words of William Morris in appreciating the vernacular art of England are as appropriate to the work we find here around us, and I feel sure if he were familiar with the charm and quaintness of the old Québec farms and seigneuries he would have written something very similar about it."¹¹

The Arts and Crafts style even permeated advertising in *Canadian Architect and Builder* and *Construction*. An advertisement for Black Diamond Tarred Felt

insulating material, which first appeared in *Construction* magazine in 1909, is such an example. It pictures a house which had appeared only the month before in an article on the American architect and designer Gustav Stickley's Craftsman homes. This is a clear indication that even manufacturers of completely utilitarian, mass-produced products were aware of the importance and popularity of Arts and Crafts and its offshoots. Sometimes advertisements went further and actually incorporated Arts and Crafts ideology into their copy. An advertisement for the Cooksville Shale Brick Company that appeared in the late 1920's in the *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada* illustrates a great brick chimney breast, no doubt enclosing an inglenook. The caption reads: "Success in handling building materials has ever depended upon an intimate knowledge of its capabilities and its limitations. Masterpieces of brick work owe their success to the art of the designer and its skillful interpretation by the Craftsman."¹²

Trade journals often published illustrations of houses built by architects who had probably gained much of their knowledge of the style from journals. In March 1888, *Canadian Architect and Builder* published an illustration of a house (which still stands) built by the architect Joseph Power (fig.2). Power was born in Kingston and lived there all his life. The house was built in 1886 for two prosperous grocers, brothers by the name of Hendry. It is Kingston's most flamboyant essay in "Queen Anne." Power's introduction to the style probably came largely from trade journals and his design, derived from sources several stages removed from original British "Queen Anne," became an example for others to follow when it was published in *CAB*. Power made eclectic use of materials, including moulded brick panels, some with the sunflower motifs beloved of the Arts and Crafts and Aesthetic movements, carved stone lintels, pebble-dashed cove on the tower, multi-coloured slate roof, and turned and fret-sawn wood in the porch and balcony. These elements are all characteristic of the "Queen Anne" style, as are the use of several brick-laying patterns, the prominent chimneys with inset panels, and the stained-glass transoms and staircase-landing window. The "Queen Anne" detailing does not carry through to the back of the house which is quite plain and utilitarian. The end result is very different from British "Queen Anne" as Power has piled detail upon detail, much as the designer of the overmantel had done (fig.1). More importantly, without its superficial encrustations of decoration, this building is little different from many more conventional Kingston houses. It is fundamentally symmetrical, although the tower on one side and bay on the other, combined with varied fenestration, give the appearance of asymmetry. In essence, the architect has created a "Queen Anne" house using a typical local design. In addition, because it incorporates existing local materials and styles, the house reflects the philosophy of the Arts and Crafts movement more directly than would a building which strictly follows its structural and decorative vocabulary.

There are many houses in Kingston with elements of Arts and Crafts or



fig. 3 Architect unknown, **George Wilson House**, 1897-98, Stuart Street, Kingston. (Photo: author)

"Queen Anne" but one house in particular, built in 1897-98 for mason and contractor George Wilson, more thoroughly embraces an Arts and Crafts appearance (fig. 3). With its three windows marching diagonally up the side of the house to mark the stairwell, its inset porch, its oriel window breaking through the roof line to form a dormer, and its externally-expressed chimneys, it is unlike any other house in the city. However, with the exception of some interesting brick chimneypieces, the interior of the Wilson house is rather conventional and the Arts and Crafts appearance does not carry through. Rather, it adopts classical motifs eschewed by the exterior, in the form of ionic pilasters flanking the doors, and other interior woodwork of classical design. This is common in such domestic structures; classical motifs had long been in use in the interior of houses of almost any style and were perhaps too deeply ingrained to be changed. Clearly however, the architect of the Wilson house looked much further afield than the local streets for his inspiration for the exterior. Once again, established design ideas appear in



fig.4 Strickland and Symons, House for Dr. Nattress, Carlton Street, Toronto. (Photo: *Canadian Architect and Builder*, August 1889: np)

combination with *avant-garde* motifs. Perhaps this architect was well-traveled, but it is more likely that trade journals provided the inspiration. The house may even have been designed and built by its first owner, which might explain the architect's evident interest in masonry work. A design such as the house for Dr. Nattress by Strickland and Symons, which appeared in *Canadian Architect and Builder* in 1889, may well have caught the attention of such an architect or builder (fig.4). Its inset porch, heavy stone lintels and externally-expressed, stone-detailed chimney could have been applied to turn an ordinary brick house in Kingston into an interesting new design, while the interior maintained the familiarity of classical motifs.

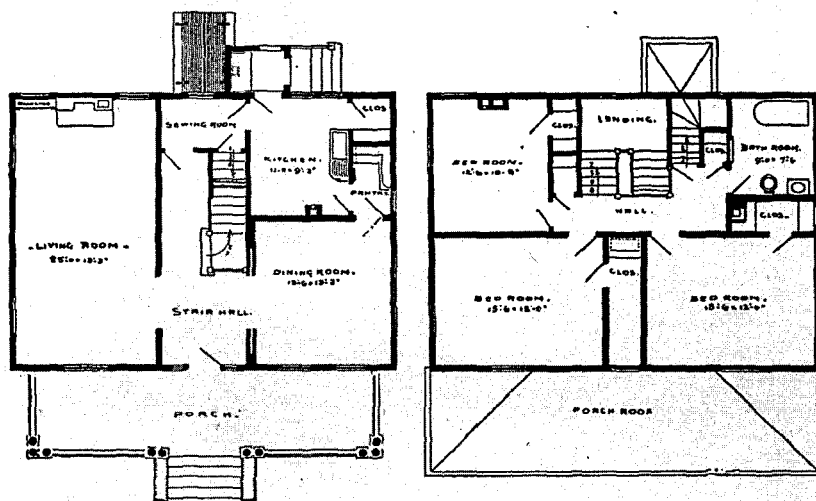
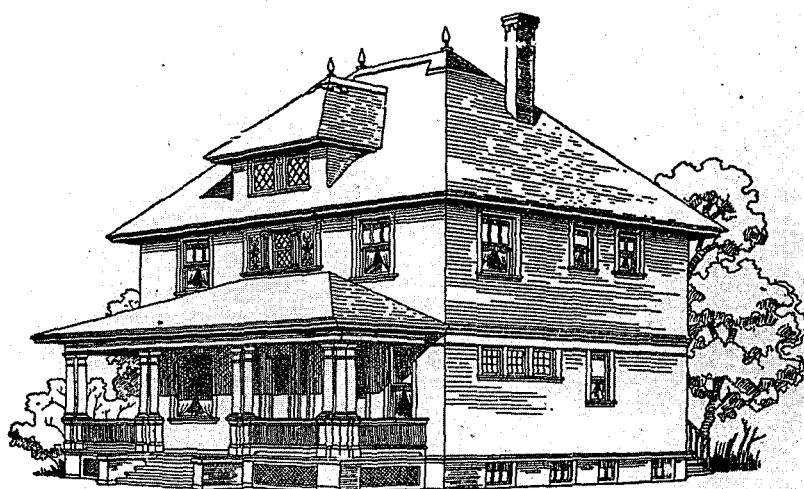
Architects gleaning ideas from journals could also mix and match styles as they chose. A Kingston house built in 1908 by architect Arthur Ellis combines elements of the English "Queen Anne" and its American offshoot, the Shingle



fig.5 Arthur
Ellis, Ellis
House, c.1908,
University Street,
Kingston. (Photo:
Pierre du Prey)

Style (fig.5). The Ellis house is red brick, the favorite "Queen Anne" material, and has several Serliana windows, also common to "Queen Anne." But its rather unusual wide dormer is shingled, and its inset front porch is entered through a large Syrian arch, a particularly American motif not commonly seen in British domestic architecture. The scale and fenestration of the house have much in common with those of local houses and unite the building visually with its neighbours. As well, it is built of local red brick with Kingston limestone foundations and window sills. Here is an example of a house whose architect did not adopt a specific style, but was able to create a pastiche of motifs that he had seen elsewhere in combination with elements of the local architecture to create a design which, far from representing the debasement of a style, is innovative and interesting in its own right.

According to an 1896 article in *Studio*, "The jerry-builder especially did his best to ruin the new fashion ["Queen Anne"], and with hideous perversion tried,



DESIGN FOR A MODERATE COST HOUSE.

fig.6 Architect unknown, A Moderate Cost House. (Photo: *Canadian Architect and Builder*, January 1907: 6)

but in vain, to make the style unbearable."¹³ Less careful individuals adapted "Queen Anne" and Arts and Crafts ideas from sources increasingly distant from the original, with ever-decreasing understanding of their underlying tenets. The sources became more and more diluted until, in some hands, they were essentially unrecognizable. Richard Norman Shaw's biographer Andrew Saint notes that a similar dilution of styles occurred in England:

Architectural publicity was both good and bad. If your buildings were original and pretty, any surveyor or 'spec.' builder who had the architectural press upon his Sunday morning breakfast table could and did filch from your inventions. This happened slowly. There was a ten-year lag, during which other architects, of gradually declining inventiveness, would try your ideas out, alter or amend them.¹⁴

At the final stages of this less inventive process were houses with almost no attention to decorative detail, but which contain a few last remnants of Arts and Crafts motifs. An example is a 1907 *Canadian Architect and Builder* design for a moderate-cost house. It is a brick four-square with a hipped roof and quite plain but with a few leaded-glass windows and a roof detail reminiscent of the thatch pattern found on many English cottages (fig.6). These elements, drawn from the Arts and Crafts tradition, decorate a house whose designer has not exercised the same innovative process of adaptation that we saw in the earlier examples. Here the decorative details are less creatively integrated with the building they adorn, but this type of building in no way represents the end of Arts and Crafts or "Queen Anne" influence. Elements of these styles, or of their later incarnations practised by such English architects as C.F.A. Voysey and M.H. Baillie-Scott, continued to be popular and attractive. Architects who were successfully able to combine elements from the new ideas with the local architectural styles and the needs of their clients were perhaps closer to the roots of the Arts and Crafts movement. They created, almost certainly unintentionally, their own version of the style.

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Notes

- 1 I should like to thank Lynda Jessup for reading an earlier version of this article, and Pierre du Prey for his guidance on my Master's thesis from which it arose.
- 2 *Canadian Architect and Builder*, published in Toronto by C.H. Mortimer, 1888-1908. All illustrations from CAB are courtesy of University of Toronto libraries.
- 3 This process of rendering a building in a new style by the use of surface decoration was certainly not new. English Picturesque pattern books often give two or more stylistic variants using the same plan and elevation. In Canada, Jeffry Wyatt's 1811-12 unexecuted designs for a parliament building for Québec included a Greek and a Gothic Revival option. See Harold KALMAN, *A History of Canadian Architecture* 1 (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1994), 258. Kalman also discusses the domestic Gothic Revival example of the 1841-43 Elizabeth Cottage in Kingston, in which Gothic trim is applied to a traditional 1 1/2-storey Ontario cottage. (KALMAN, *A History of Canadian Architecture*, 278.)
- 4 Andrew SAINT, *Richard Norman Shaw* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976).
- 5 "G," "The Revival of English Domestic Architecture. I. The Work of Mr. Norman Shaw, R.A.," *Studio* 7 (February 1896): 29.
- 6 Mark GIROUARD, *Sweetness and Light: The "Queen Anne" Movement 1860-1900* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).
- 7 *Construction* was published in Toronto by Gagnier *et al.*, 1907-1934: monthly 1907-32; bi-monthly 1933-34.
- 8 "A Century's Review," *Canadian Architect and Builder* 14 (January 1901): 1, 2.
- 9 John RUSKIN, "The Lintel," *Canadian Architect and Builder* 1 (April 1888): 2. *Canadian Architect and Builder* 6 (August 1893): 89. Barry PARKER and Raymond UNWIN, "The Art of Designing Small Houses and Cottages," *Canadian Architect and Builder* 14 (April 1901): 75-9.
- 10 This is noted in Carolyn NEAL, *Eden Smith: Architect 1858-1949* (Toronto: Architectural Conservancy of Ontario, 1976), 18. The drawing for St. Simon, Rosedale appears in *Canadian Architect and Builder* 1 (May 1888): np. The Langley and Burke design may be found in the *Canadian Architect and Builder* 2 (January 1889): 1.
- 11 Percy NOBBS, "On the Value of the Study of Old Work," *Canadian Architect and Builder* 18 (May 1905): 75. For a discussion of Nobbs, see Susan WAGG, *Percy Erskine Nobbs: Architects, Craftsman* (Kingston: McGill Queen's University Press, 1982).
- 12 *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada* 5 (March 1928): xxxiv.
- 13 "G," "The Revival of English Domestic Architecture. I. The Work of Mr. Norman Shaw, R.A.," *Studio* 7 (February 1896): 29.
- 14 Andrew SAINT, *Richard Norman Shaw* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 142.