

Anne's Pocket Guide to the Art and Crafts in the Cotwolds

Chipping Campden: Ashbee's Guild of Handicrafts

Considering their up-market status today, it's hard to believe that at the close of the 19th century the Cotswolds were 'depressed'. The agricultural recession of the 1880s, leading to falling land rents, resulted in a rural decline. When Charles Robert Ashbee (1863-1942) was seeking the perfect place to relocate his London based Guild of Handicraft and establish a rural utopia, Chipping Campden appeared ideal. In addition to sixteen cottages apparently standing empty, there were industrial buildings that could be adapted to his needs. Renamed Essex House, the old silk mill would come to house the printing presses on the ground floor with the metalwork and furniture workshops above.



The arcaded Market Hall built by Sir Baptist Hicks in 1627 is the focal point on the High Street.



**Almshouses, Church Street, built by Sir Baptist Hicks in 1612.
Opposite the wheel wash for cleaning and keeping cartwheels wet.**



The Old Silk Mill on Sheep Street

"I am glad to think that the men themselves have decided on the whole it is better to leave Babylon and go home to the land."

C R Ashbee c. 1902.

The Song of the Builders of the City of the Sun

Chorus of the Builders

*Comrades, our city of the sun!
A quest unfound, a joy unwon;
Ay, here in England shall it rise
Beneath her grey and solemn skies.
Far in her golden past, or far
Ahead where her Utopias are,
For hearts that feel and souls that find
Their inner life within the mind,
The inner life yet scarce begun,
Here stands our city of the sun!*

C.R. Ashbee, Essex House Press, 1905.

The Cotswolds: An Arts and Crafts Haven

Ashbee was not the first to discover the delights of the area. William Morris and Dante Gabriel Rossetti leased Kelmscott Manor in 1871. After Rossetti withdrew from the tenancy in 1874, Kelmscott became Morris's beloved rural retreat. It is said his famous *Strawberry Thief* was inspired while he was waiting to use the outdoor privy. Evidently, he watched the thrushes 'stealing' his strawberries.



Kelmscott Manor, Lechlade, Morris's summer retreat

Having trained as architects in London, Ernest Gimson and the Barnsley brothers took Pinbury Park, near Sapperton, on a 'repairing lease' in 1893. Following Morris' lead, they wished to 'live near to nature'. Gimson and Ernest Barnsley formed a partnership designing and making furniture, with workshops at the Fleece in Cirencester. When these premises proved inadequate, the Daneway, a beautiful house on the Bathurst estate was leased. This also offered an ideal period setting for the display of the furniture. When the Gimson/ Barnsley partnership was dissolved in 1903, Gimson ran the workshops on his own, soon establishing his reputation as a leading furniture designer.



Ernest Gimson, Sideboard with plate stand, 1915, made by Ernest Smith and Percy Burchett. Cost £47.8.0. The Wilson, Cheltenham

Situated to the north, Broadway had been 'discovered' in the 1870s. Crom Price, one of Morris's Oxford gang, rented Broadway Tower, an iconic landmark on the edge of the Cotswold escarpment, as a holiday retreat. 'I am up at Crom Price's Tower among the winds and the clouds,' wrote Morris to a friend in the summer of 1876. With the coming of the railway to Evesham in 1852, the village of Broadway became a sleepy backwater. Artists, writers, and musicians were drawn to its unspoiled beauty and tranquility: composers Edward Elgar and Vaughan Williams; American artists John Singer Sargent, Edwin Austin Abbey; writer J.M. Barrie and actress Mary Anderson. While some just came for the summer, others like Mary Anderson took up permanent residence. The arrival of the motorcar at the turn of the 20th century, transformed Broadway into a popular tourist destination. Realising Broadway's potential S.B. Russell acquired the Lygon Arms, an old coaching inn, in 1904. Transformed into an up-market hotel, particularly catering to American tourists, S B Russell appropriately filled his hotel with antique furniture. Gaining experience in the hotel's workshops, his son Gordon Russell would become the world-renowned furniture designer and educationalist. Gordon's destiny was undoubtedly shaped by his upbringing. Attending the Grammar School at Chipping Campden, Gordon witnessed at first hand the Guild of Handicraft's commitment to craftsmanship.



Lygon Arms, Broadway, acquired by S B Russell in 1904

Charles Robert Ashbee and the Guild of Handicraft

Educated at Cambridge and embarking on a career as an architect, the young Charles Robert Ashbee (1863-1942) was influenced by poet-philosopher Edward Carpenter who extolled the virtues of 'the simple life'. Equally committed to improving the working and living conditions of the working class, Ashbee volunteered at Toynbee Hall, the famous university settlement in London's East End founded by Canon Barnett in 1884. Having established a Ruskin reading class in 1886, Ashbee was moved to put his words into action. This evolved into the Guild of Handicraft, which was inaugurated in 1888 as a cooperative group of craftsmen. From four members the Guild grew rapidly moving to new premises, Essex House on the Mile End Road in Bow, in 1890. The Guild produced woodwork, leatherwork, and metalwork, notably beaten copperwork and jewellery.



John Williams, founder member of the Guild, copper 1896. The Wilson.

John Williams resigned his position in 1892 and went on to teach at Hammersmith School of Arts. He was also involved with the Home Arts and Industries Association, being associated with the Fivemiletown Art Metalwork classes in County Tyrone.

Founder member of the Guild, John Pearson (flourished 1885-1910) may have gained experience decorating tiles and pots at William De Morgan's workshop. A De Morgan 'Antelope' charger bears the initials 'JP'. As his beaten repousse copper chargers illustrate, he was certainly influenced by De Morgan's style, favouring galleons and fishes.



Pearson charger with a galleon (the Craft of the Ship motif) and fishes, c. 1890, Standen, East Grinstead

Resigning from the Guild in 1892, Pearson became an instructor at the newly founded Newlyn Industrial Class. Pearson also sold his work independently, supplying the 'competition', Liberty of Regent Street. Although keen to offer his clients Arts and Crafts commodities, Arthur Lazenby Liberty, who founded his famous store in 1875, lacked Ashbee's commitment to the crafts. Launching his own ranges, Cymric silverwares and Tudric pewter, in 1900 and 1902 respectively, Liberty happily relied on commercial manufacturers.



Archibald Knox for Liberty *Cymric* silver, c. 1900. V&A

Purchasing Morris's Kelmscott Press Albion printing presses, upon his death in 1896, Ashbee founded the Essex House Press. He also employed one of the Kelmscott Press compositors Thomas Binning. With its cover of oak boards fitted with hammered iron and leather clasps made by the Guild, Ashbee's masterpiece was the Prayer Book. This celebrated Edward VII coming to the throne in 1901. Moving to Chipping Campden alongside the Guild of Handicraft, the Essex House Press produced 84 titles.

Running into financial trouble in 1907, the Guild was formally liquidated in 1908. Craftsmanship and competitive industry were inevitably at odds. It did not help that Liberty's Arts and Crafts style jewellery and metalwork, being commercially produced, could be bought more cheaply.

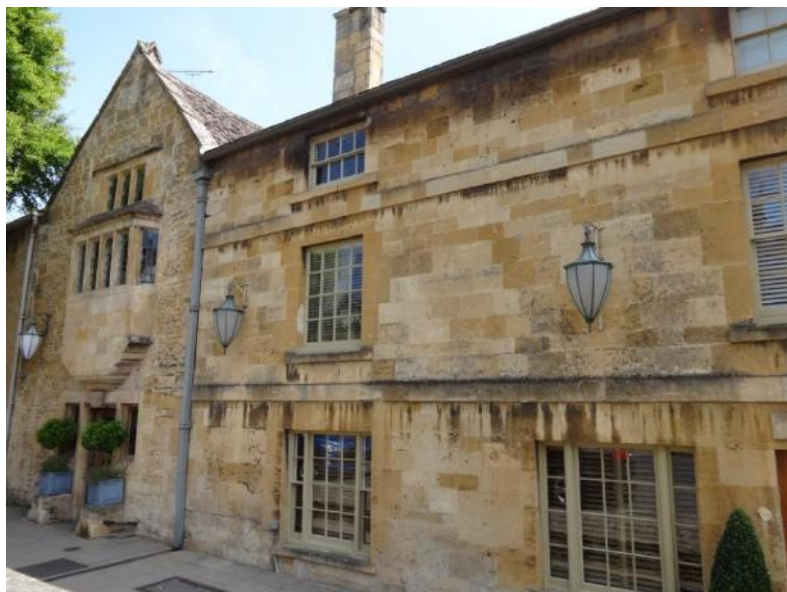
Cockneys in Arcadia: The Guild moves to Chipping Campden.

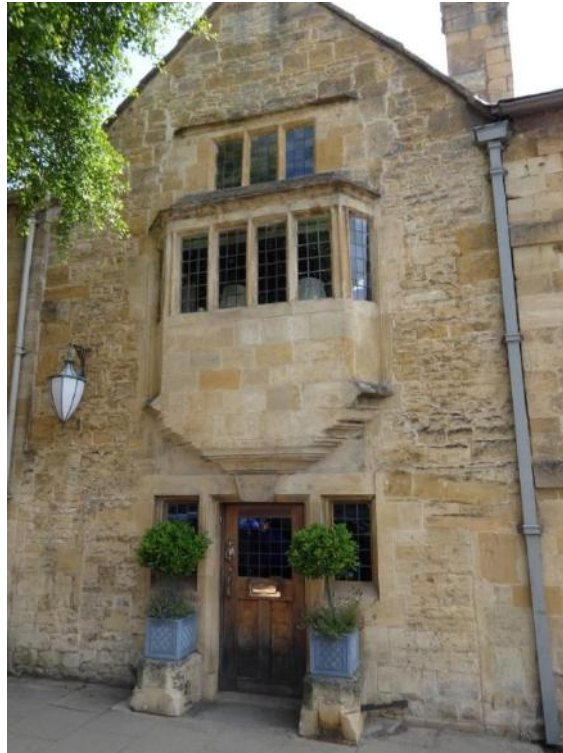
With the lease for Essex House up for renewal, the time had come to take the bold leap of moving the Guild to a rural location. In May 1902, after voting on the motion to leave London, the Guildsmen started to arrive in Chipping Campden. It must have been a shock to the system of both the incoming Londoners and the local townsfolk. Divisions were inevitable, with two camps quickly forming, 'Campden' and 'Guild'.



Guildsmen in 1903: John Cameron, William Mark, Arthur Penny and Arthur Cameron

Ashbee and his wife Janet set up home in the Woolstaplers' Hall on the High Street. A few improvements were made to the building, which in part dated back to the 14th century. A new front door was easily installed by replacing a window. Windows were unblocked and partitions and false ceilings removed, creating a fine upper room dubbed the 'library'. Used for reading and writing, this was also an ideal place for Guild singsongs.





Ashbee's residence, Woolstaplers' Hall on the High Street

When the Guild was at its height, **Island House, part of Middle Row**, was also used as a club, with a billiard room, bar, and a brand-new gramophone.



Island House, part of Middle Row

Rosary Cottage, Middle Row, housed the book binding workshop (1902-05) under the direction of Annie Power, the first woman to be employed by the Guild. Her presence caused some strife, as jeweller Fred Partridge was captivated by her charms. Apparently engaged to May Hart, Ashbee demanded he give up Annie *and* leave the Guild. He opted to leave, and the Guild lost one of its best jewellers because, as Janet Ashbee observed, 'of the way of a man with maid'.



Island House and Rosary Cottage, part of Middle Row

The Guild leased a row of six recently built cottages in Sheep Street. However, these did not prove popular with the Guildsmen's families. They had no gardens, and the lavatories were outside. Some of the families allocated this accommodation went back to London as soon as they could. Nevertheless, by the end of 1902, the Guild was employing up to seventy men.

The bachelors were accommodated at **Braithwaite House** on the High Street. In 1904 Frederick Landseer Griggs (1876-1938) lodged with the Guildsmen. Although trained as an architect, Griggs made his living as an illustrator. He came to Campden to work on illustrations for a book, *Highways and Byways in Oxford and the Cotswolds*.



Braithwaite House, on the left, High Street.

Westcote House, opposite the Lygon Arms was repaired by Norman Jewson (son-in-law of Ernest Barnsley) and Griggs in 1926. At that time the Kingsley Weavers, run by Leo and Eileen Baker, were in residence. Eileen Baker had been taught to weave by Ethel Mairat, a pioneer of modern hand-loom weaving, in Ditchling, Sussex, an Arts and Crafts utopia guided by Eric Gill and Hilary Peplar. **The actual looms were in the Long House on Calf Lane, a converted barn on the other side of the High Street, behind Dovers House.**



From 1924, **Trinder House** was home to Fred Hart, brother of the silversmith George Hart and Will Hart, the carver and guildler known to his mates as 'The Skipper'. Fred Hart was an enthusiastic, magpie-like collector. He and Charles Wade, of Snowhill Manor, hunted together and traded finds. Through nearly all weathers, Hart kept the top half of the stable door of Trinder House open. Passer-by would see him surrounded by his eclectic treasures. When he died in 1971, it took four days to sell his collection.



Trinder House, on the right, with the shallow bay window, was the home of Fred Hart.

Newcomers

Falling in love with the village, Griggs settled permanently in Campden taking Dovers House, a beautiful Georgian house on the High Street. He lived here from 1906 to 1930, when he embarked on designing and building a new home, New Dovers House.



Griggs also repaired and altered several houses in Campden. Fronting Leysbourne, **Miles House** lies opposite the cast iron pump which has supplied water to the village since 1832. Two 17th century cottages conjoined to create one house, Miles House was further altered and refaced by Griggs in 1917. The front, with added stone mullioned canted bays, is a perfect example of Art and Crafts sensitivity to neighbouring properties.



Miles House, Leysbourne





Village Pump, 1832

Griggs' War Memorial was more than a cross; he created a complete scheme comprising a wall, a grassy plot linking the Market Hall and the Town Hall, and steps from the lower street level to the level of the cross.





Griggs' War Memorial

Griggs converted to the Roman Catholic faith in 1912. He contributed to the enrichment of St Catharine's Roman Catholic church, which lies on the corner of Lower High Street and Hoo Lane. Dating to 1891, the church was built in a late Gothic style admirably suiting its location. Griggs designed the crucifix in the chancel arch, organ case and pulpit. The crucifix was carved by another convert Alec Miller, who was offered a job on the eve of the Guild's move to Campden.

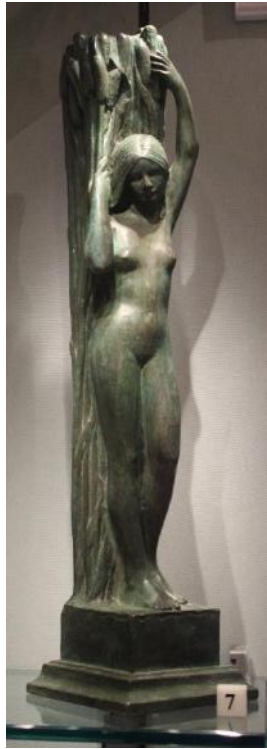
Coming from smoky Glasgow, Alec Miller (1879-1961) was overcome by Campden's splendid 'stone-built houses, so rich, so substantial and of such beautiful stone.'



Grevel House on the High Street, said to be the oldest house in Campden, was built around 1380

Combining the practical culture of the workshop with intellectual prowess, Miller was Ashbee's ideal craftsman. Able to converse on Greek philosophy, Miller understood the larger ideas behind the Guild. After the failure of the Guild in 1908, Miller continued to work as a wood carver and sculptor. After working in the United States during the 1920s and 1930s, Miller emigrated to California in 1939.





**Alec Miller, *The Sphinx*, 1927 and
Naiad, c. 1918**

From a Roman Catholic family Paul Woodroffe (1875-1954) contributed a fine three light window, commemorating Charles, Earl of Gainsborough and his first wife Ida, by Paul Woodroffe. In the centre the Virgin and Child, on the left St Charles Borromeo in Cardinal's robes and on the right St Ida.



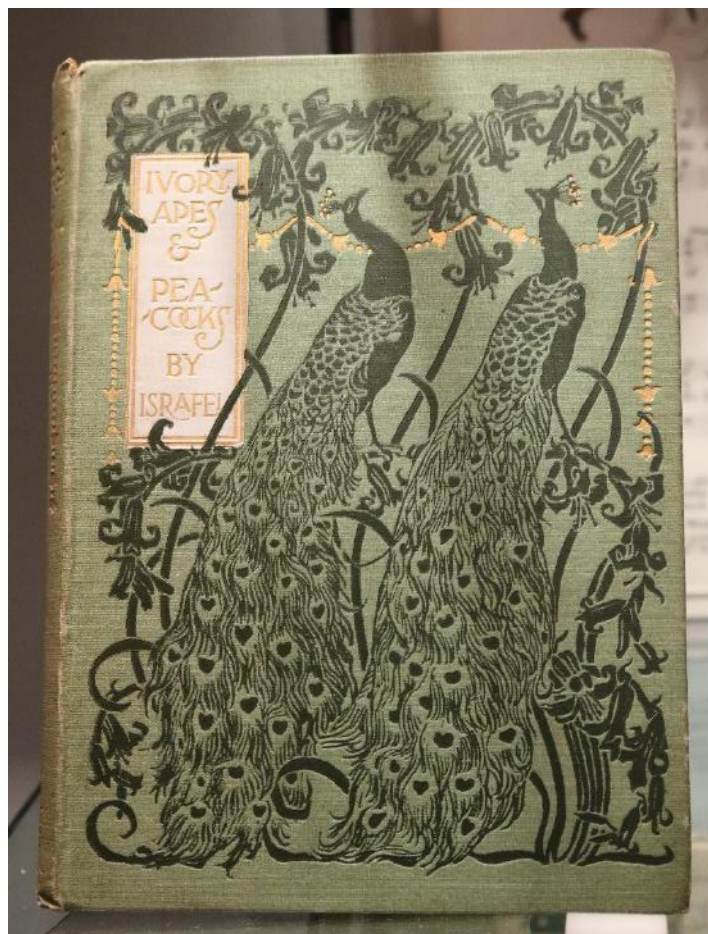


Window, commemorating Charles, Earl of Gainsborough and his first wife Ida, by Paul Woodroffe.



St Thomas More, at the west end of the south isle, is also by Woodroffe.

Educated at the Slade School of Art, Woodroffe played a significant role in the flowering of book illustration in the 1890s. He specialised in song books for children, the words and music illuminated with his illustrations. In the 1890s he took up stained glass work, being trained by the leading master of the Arts and Crafts movement, Christopher Whall. From then on, he split his time between books and windows.



Cover of *Ivory Apes and Peacocks* by Woodroffe, 1899

Woodroffe settled in Westington, an outlier of Campden, in 1904, in a thatched cottage repaired and enlarged by Ashbee. He ran his workshop, in an outbuilding, with a staff of some eight apprentices and assistants. His most notable commission came in 1909, fifteen windows for the Lady Chapel at St Patrick's Roman Catholic Cathedral in New York.

The Harts: The Guild of Handicraft lives on

Located on the second floor of the old silk mill, the silver and jewellery workshop has hardly changed since the days of the Guild. The pieces made today also draw heavily on drawings going back decades. The mark on Hart silver 'GofH', registered by the Guild of Handicraft in 1908, is still in use. This continuity is remarkable.





Catalogues going back decades at the old silk mill



Ashbee, 'Posset', Guild of Handicraft, at The Wilson, Cheltenham



Ashbee, Decanter, 1903, Court Barn

George Hart (1882-1973) joined the Guild in 1901. He took over the running of the workshop when the Guild closed in 1908. He was joined by his son Henry in 1930. The Harts' workshop continues to this day, being run successively by George Harts' grandson David Hart, his son William Hart, nephew Julian Hart and Derek Elliott, who joined in 1982.

Perhaps attracted by Ashbee's utopian dream and the Harts tradition, silversmith Robert Welch (1929-2000) spent his working life at the old silk mill. Trained at the Royal College of Art, Welch was inspired by post-war Scandinavian design. Attempting to be both a silversmith and an industrial designer, he made his name with his stainless-steel cutlery. His showrooms on the corner of the High Street and Sheep Street opened in 1972. They are now managed by his children, Rupert and Alice Welch. Thus, the tradition of good design and fine craftsmanship lives on in Campden.

See

Travel Editions offers Arts and Crafts guided tours with Anne and Scott Anderson.

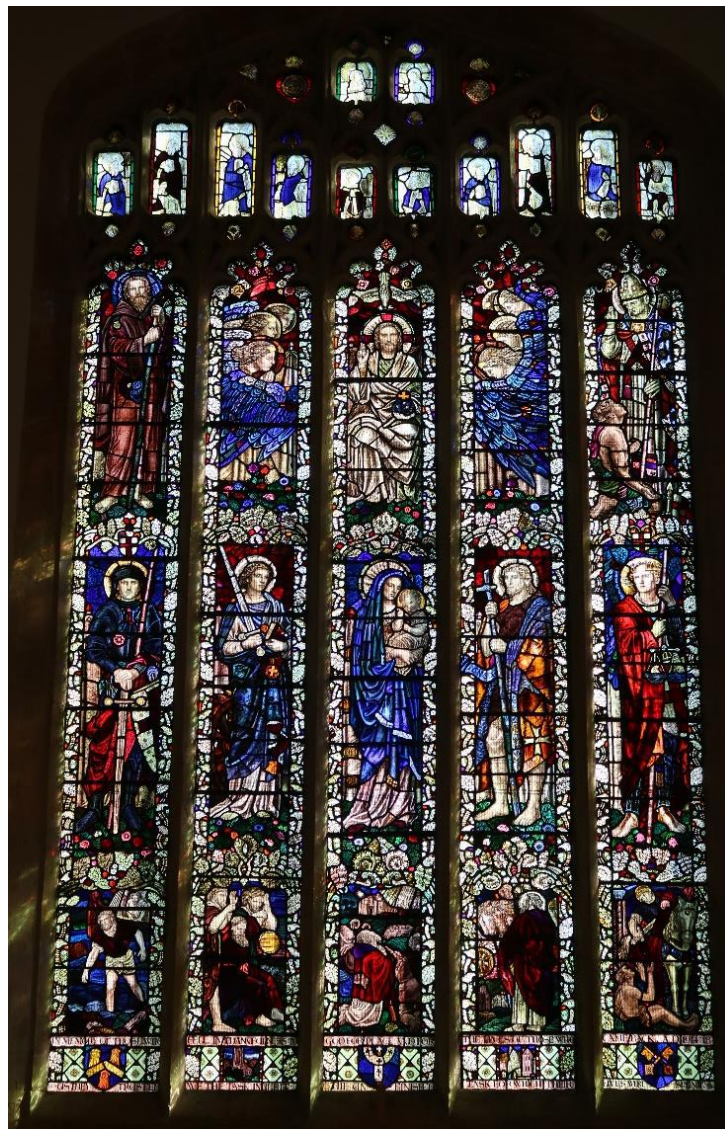
Be prepared to do lots of walking around Chipping Campden. Properties linked to the Guild can be found along the High Street, Lower High Street, and Sheep Street which leads you into Westington.

If you are feeling energetic, you could even walk to Broad Campden to see the Norman Chapel, restored, and enlarged by Ashbee for Ananda and Ethel Coomaraswamy, who was the sister of Guildsman Fred Partridge. They furnished their home with the Guild's work alongside Morris & Co. and Indian textiles. When the Coomaraswamy's moved out

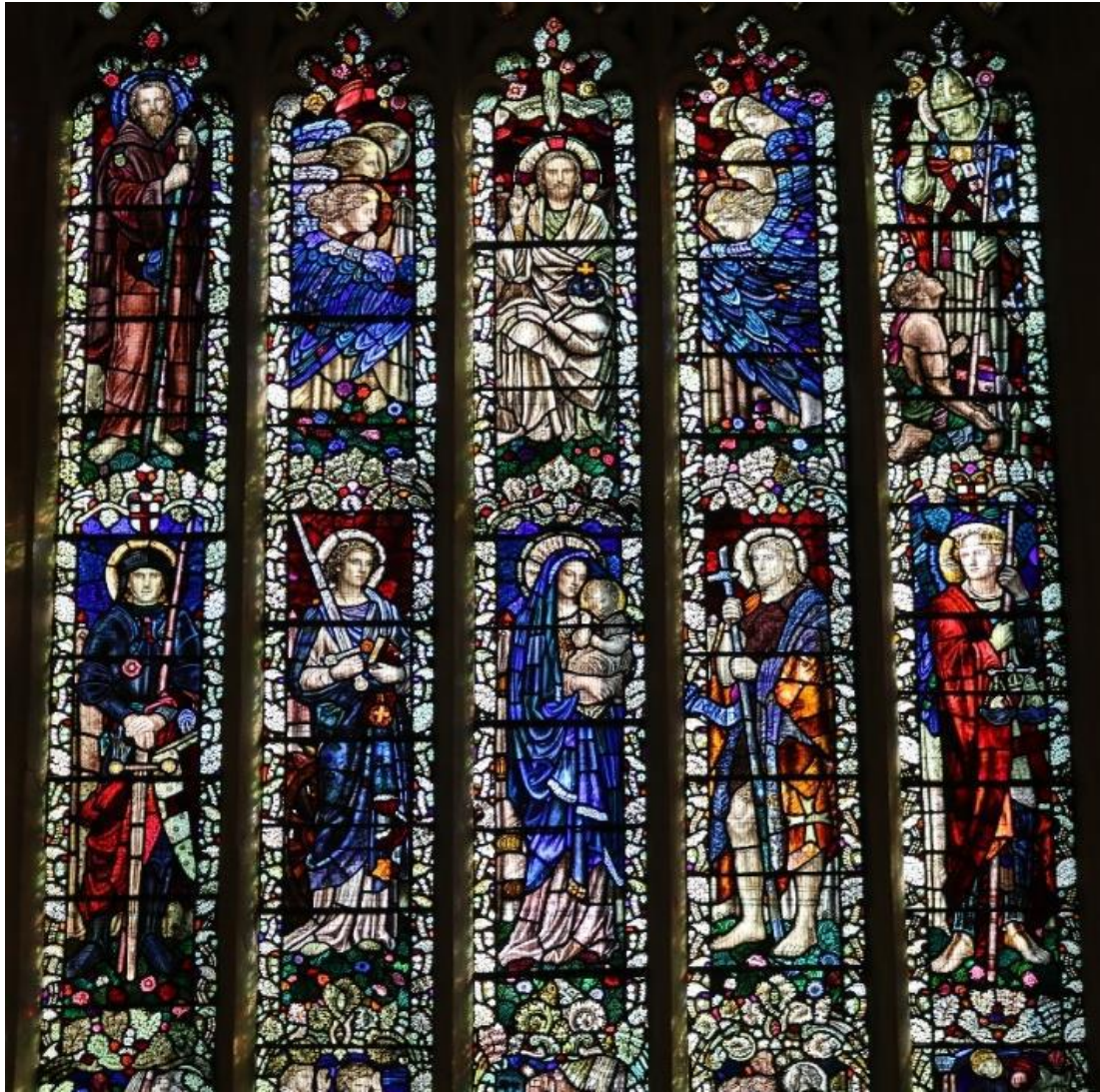
in 1911, the Ashbee's were able to rent the Norman Chapel. Three of their four daughters were born there.

Court Barn, near St James, on Church Street, offers an introduction to Ashbee and the Guildsmen.

The largest collection of material relating to the Arts and Crafts in the Cotswolds can be found at The Wilson, Cheltenham.



Parish church of St James, east window, memorial commemorating the First World War, by Henry Payne



The Parish church of St James, east window, memorial commemorating the First World War, by Henry Payne of the Birmingham School of Arts and Crafts. Dedicated in 1925. St Martin is represented twice; at the base of the window as a Roman soldier dividing his cloak to help a beggar and at the top as a cardinal blessing a beggar. As much of the fighting took place in France, St Martin was particularly relevant as he became Bishop of Tours. Moreover, his day is the 11th November, Armistice day.



St Martin dividing his cloak for a beggar, Parish church of St James, east window, memorial commemorating the First World War, by Henry Payne



Boer War plaque, Guild of Handicraft, St James.

Reading

Felicity Ashbee, *Janet Ashbee, Love, Marriage and the Arts and Crafts Movement*, Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002.

Annett Carruthers and Mary Greensted, *Good Citizen's Furniture: The Arts and Crafts Collections at Cheltenham*, Cheltenham: Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museums/Lund Humphries, 1994.

Alan Crawford, *C.R. Ashbee: Architect, Designer and Romantic Socialist*, New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1985.

Alan Crawford, *Arts and Crafts Walks in Broadway and Chipping Campden*, Chipping Campden, Glos: The Guild of Handicraft Trust, 2020.

Mary Greensted, *The Arts and Crafts Movement in the Cotswolds*, Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1993.

Mary Greensted, *The Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain (Shire History)*, Oxford: Shire, 2010.

Jan Marsh, *Back to the Land: The Pastoral Impulse in Victorian England from 1880 to 1914*, London: Quartet Books, 1982.

Fiona McCarthy, *The Simple Life: C.R. Ashbee in the Cotswolds*, (London: Lund Humphries, 1981.

Jerrold Northrop Moore, *F.L. Griggs (1876-1938): The architect of dreams*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999.

Gillian Naylor, *The Arts and Crafts Movement: A study of its sources, ideals and influence on design theory*, London: Trefoil, 1990.