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12, 2013

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# An architectural revelation

*Berrydown Court, Overton, Hampshire*

A recently restored house sheds an unexpected light on the early interests of Edwin Lutyens and his dalliance with Art Nouveau, as **Gavin Stamp** reveals

Photographs by Will Pryce

THE architect Edwin Lutyens and COUNTRY LIFE had an intense symbiotic relationship. Edward Hudson, the founder and editor of the magazine, admired Lutyens hugely, published his work and commissioned three homes from him and the architect's career greatly benefited from the coverage he was given. Some of Lutyens's early houses did not, however, appear in the pages of this magazine. These were the more experimental of his designs, ones that had a decided affinity with the work of C. R. Mackintosh in Glasgow and with the Art Nouveau of the 1890s. Such buildings were not to the taste of Hudson and his principal architectural writer, Laurence Weaver, who preferred the more conservative and insular interpretations of the English vernacular tradition in Surrey with which Lutyens began before he took up the Classical language.

These more quirky houses, all dating from the late 1890s, were usually further from London. One, Le Bois des Moutiers in

‘Berrydown may have been designed to give the impression of an old farmhouse’

Normandy, was fully published very late in COUNTRY LIFE (May 21 and 28, 1981, and March 25, 2009). Lutyens's biographer, Christopher Hussey, considered this house another example of a deviation of interest that ‘if pursued, might have transformed the course of English architecture in the Edwardian decade’. Similar unusual and intriguing details appeared in the addition to the Ferry Inn at Rosneath, Scotland, and the Pleasaunce at Overstand, Norfolk. Neither was noticed by COUNTRY LIFE or in Weaver's books about Lutyens.

Another of these early creations resolutely ignored by this magazine at the time

(although not by *The Studio* or *Architectural Review*) was Berrydown Court near Overton, Hampshire, built in 1897–98. Later, Hussey briefly mentioned it as an ‘undistinguished, medium-sized gabled stone house... seen from the road through a covered gateway in the line of stable buildings’.

But Hussey, whether through haste or prejudice, cannot have ventured beyond that gateway as the house is not built of stone. Rather, its walls are faced either in roughcast or tile-hung, materials typical of Lutyens's palette at the time.

A more sympathetic observer, Roderick Gradidge, observed that, although the entrance front is ‘perhaps a little bland... surprises come’ with the opposite, south-facing garden front. Lutyens ‘does seem here to have caught some of the Arts and Crafts frenzy that we see in the works of E. S. Prior’.

Berrydown is, in fact, at once exceptional and representative, for Lutyens here dis-



played his usual mastery in the use of materials, his ability to integrate house and gardens through axes and vistas and his delight in creating discrete formal exterior spaces contained by walls either of masonry or hedge, but all here combined with details that are, at times, puzzling in their apparent eccentricity.

The client at Berrydown was the politician, journalist and speculator Archibald Grove (1855–1920), founding editor of the *New Review* and sometime Liberal MP. 'Archie' Grove is an intriguing figure, who was close to Lutyens around the time of his marriage to Lady Emily Lytton in 1897. According to Hussey, he was 'a very small enthusiastic man, with a very tall wife and stepdaughter, whom it was diverting to see ➤

↑ **Fig 1:** The south front. The wing on the right is later; originally, this elevation was strangely asymmetrical.

→ **Fig 2:** The house seen from the fairytale castle-like gateway by the road





**Fig 3 left:** The restored hall looking onto the gardens. **Fig 4 centre:** A detail of the newly restored fireplace in the drawing room. **The**

him energetically chivvying around, and he had a passionate admiration for artists'.

Jane Ridley, Lutyens's great-granddaughter, notes that the eccentricity of Berrydown 'matched its owners. Mrs Grove... was large and bosomy, a free spirit and a friend of J. M. Barrie. She burned foul-smelling carbolic all over the house and ran outside in the evening wearing thin shoes and a tea-gown without stays which, thought Emily, made her look funny'.

The site purchased by Grove lay south of the Basingstoke to Andover road, along which Lutyens placed a line of stables and offices, making the house invisible to passing traffic. The gateway here is flanked by gently bulging tourelles capped with conical tiled roofs (**Fig 2**). As all surfaces are roughcast and the walls have a slight batter, this composition has a somewhat fantastic and castle-like air.

Hussey thought this range 'reminiscent of a Caldecott farm'—the young Lutyens had been greatly taken with the images of Randolph Caldecott, the children's books illustrator. But these roughcast, simplified forms are also reminiscent of the work of those architects from whose influence Lutyens later diverged, C. F. A. Voysey and M. H. Baillie Scott. This may well reflect the taste of Grove who, only six years earlier, had asked Voysey to design two

## ‘The eccentricity of Berrydown “matched its owners”, the Groves’

(brick) town houses in Hans Place, Knightsbridge (and, after he had fallen out with Voysey, a third house from that often very eccentric architect A. H. Mackmurdo).

From this gateway, an axial avenue leads directly to the entrance to the house. To the right, a wall topped with Lutyens's happy motif of a hipped tile roof separates this drive from large kitchen garden (**Fig 7**). Ahead, further walls separate the drive from the entrance courtyard, a rather theatrical device like a pair of stage flats flanking the drive, where the fairy-tale Caldecottian character is maintained by having strange, tiny lamps placed just below the tiled capping over the rounded ends of these walls.

As for the house itself, the front porch is in a projecting bay below a triangular gable in the centre of a plain roughcast symmetrical elevation. The fun and games start, however, with the side elevation over-

looking the formal garden to the west. Here, a repetitive range of leaded-light, timber-framed windows runs regardless below a valley between the discrete hipped roofs that cover each element in the plan before meeting a massive chimneybreast topped by typical Lutyens tall, brick chimneys.

It is the south elevation facing the lawn that is most extraordinary (**Fig 1**)—its main element is a double Tudor gable often used by Lutyens and his contemporaries. These are entirely tile-hung above a recessed ground floor. But this elevation was not originally symmetrical as there was a tile-hung wing containing the drawing room on the west side only. This element looks almost detached, all the more so as, although there is a hipped roof on the far side, the near end, with its blank elevation, looks almost sawn-off.

The reasoning behind this is hard to fathom, although, in an earlier scheme, this element was orientated differently and separated from the body of the house by a recession, suggesting that the Puginian principle of the exterior reflecting interior arrangements was taken to an extreme.

However, in several of his houses, Lutyens continued the Victorian practice of creating built-in history to give the impression that a new house has been enlarged



**bold and abstracted Mannerist design reflects Lutyens's mastery of the Classical idiom. Fig 5 above: A view of the main stair**

and altered over time. Berrydown, therefore, may have been designed to give the impression of an old, rambling farmhouse.

It is on this (originally) weirdly asymmetrical elevation that unusual details appear. The west wing has first-floor corner windows with sills at different heights, an arrangement reflecting the planned position of the bed in this bedroom allowing for both views and privacy. The central double-gabled bays are supported on rectangular roughcast piers that divide into two as they rise. These piers then support oak 'capitals', which have an attenuated ogee profile below the supporting oak beam of a decidedly 'New Art' character.

This south front, with its insistent horizontals balanced against massive vertical chimneys and its mixture of tile, roughcast, oak and brick, is proof, if proof is still needed, that Lutyens was a more interesting architect at the *fin de siècle* and closer in spirit to Mackintosh, Voysey and the international Art Nouveau than his later admirers were willing to admit.

Berrydown is less remarkable internally. In the centre, facing a comfortable sunken terrace (the house was built on gently rising ground) and the garden beyond, is a single-height large hall. From here, a surprisingly plain, unarticulated opening leads

to an oak staircase of traditional 17th-century design (Fig 5). This rises to a happily generous landing, overlooking the forecourt, from which the bedrooms can be reached.

But, as was so often the case, Lutyens's irrepressible invention, in both sculptural forms and in the use of materials, expressed itself in the chimneypieces. Most here were comparatively plain in red brick, but that in the drawing room is astonishing. It is one of many that reveal that, even in his early vernacular phase, Lutyens was able to play with the Classical language he would eventually make his own with wit and freedom.

This drawing room chimneypiece, which rises to the ceiling, can be described as Mannerist (Fig 4): a composition of niches, concavities, giant keystones and recessions all supported on stone brackets of that same attenuated ogee profile. This design is not unique, however, as an identical chimneypiece can be found in Overstand Hall, a contemporary (and somewhat strange) house in Norfolk—which suggests that even



**Fig 6 above right and right: Lutyens's sketches and ideas for wall decoration that were revealed beneath later paneling in the hall along with a sketch of his daughter, Barbara**

er tile a designer as Lutyens had a stock  
etails he would repeat.  
rove had sold Berrydown to Edward  
per, an underwriter, by 1905. Whether  
was because of dissatisfaction with the  
se or because of its location is not clear,  
he asked Lutyens to design another  
se for him at Chalfont St Giles, closer  
ondon. This was never completed, how-  
r, as he apparently ran into financial  
iculties and, according to the historian  
e Brown, the builder used parts of it in  
er houses. It is all rather mysterious, as  
ve did move to Chalfont St Giles and, in  
6, he was again elected to Parliament.  
1 1926, Berrydown was purchased  
Douglas Mathieson, who altered it sig-  
cantly. The original, simply detailed  
riors were 'Tudorised', oak panelling  
; put in the hall, additional mouldings  
died and the great drawing-room  
mneypiece was cut back in favour of  
ething more ordinary.  
t the same time, before the house was  
d again in 1932, an eastern kitchen wing  
s added to the garden elevation to

## ‘This remarkable house deserves a prominent position in the Lutyens canon’

achieve the balanced symmetry that Lutyens did not originally intend. The architect of this more conventional neo-Tudor tile-hung addition is not recorded.

In 2002, Berrydown became the home of the present owners, who asked the architect Inskip & Jenkins to restore it: a most happy choice as Peter Inskip has long been an admirer of Lutyens's architecture and has written perceptively about it. Berrydown has now been painstakingly brought back to its original state, although the later additions have, understandably, been retained.

The oak panelling and other later details are now expunged (*Fig 3*) and the original chimneypieces re-created—not least the magnificent one in the drawing room, which has been restored from its mutilated condition.

Removing the panelling in the hall also revealed ideas for wall decoration drawn on the underlying white plaster (*Fig 6*) as well as sketches of Lutyens's first child, his daughter Barbara. This unlikely family portrait is, in fact, documented—in October 1898, Emily Lutyens wrote to her husband that 'Mr Grove also came up to Mrs Grove in extasies [sic] over yr genius and the picture of Barbara' and that 'the conversation during the day turns on Nedi and his genius—and the Barbaras in the hall are considered quite divine'.

Now in superb condition, with every important element by Lutyens restored or re-created following careful research, COUNTRY LIFE's original decision not to publish Berrydown Court seems blinkered and prejudiced. Along with Le Bois des Moutiers, this remarkable, enchanting house deserves a prominent position in the Lutyens canon. 🐉

**Fig 7: The house, with its rough-cast walls and brick chimneys, from the north-west, seen from the walled kitchen garden**

