The following pages are extracts of an unknown publication found amongst unsorted papers; so the writer and publisher are unknown. The information within really helps give an understanding of Arthur Liberty's success and influences, as well as that of Art Nouveau.

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ART NOUVEAU
JEWELLERY, SILVER, AND PEWTER

In the same year that Arthur Liberty left Farmer & Rogers to open his first half-shop, an art dealer of Hamburg named Samuel Bing visited the Far East and returned to Europe to open a gallery for Oriental Art in Paris, with a branch in New York. Twenty years later, in 1895, Bing opened a shop for modern art in the rue de Provence and called it L'ART NOUVEAU. It was this shop that gave a name to the new decorative style in France and England. The German term was *Jugendstil*, and in Italy it became known as *Stile Liberty*.

Four rooms in Bing's shop were designed by Henry van de Velde. Van de Velde became the best known of early Art Nouveau designers, but he was not the first. An earlier exponent was the American architect Louis Sullivan, who in 1880 designed the interior and furniture of the Auditorium Building in Chicago in what he himself called 'Quaint Style' – tangles of tendrils, scalloped leaves, and tortuous marine growths. In 1892 Victor Horta of Brussels began work on Professor Tassel's house at 6 rue Paul-Emile Janson, the interior decoration of which was inspired by the book illustrations of Aubrey Beardsley and Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo, founder of the Century Guild. Van de Velde began as a painter, but turned later to designing furniture, textiles, and metalwork, then eventually to architecture. He also acknowledged inspiration from Mackmurdo, and from English designers of the Arts and Crafts movement, in particular William Morris and Walter Crane – whose work he described as having '*les lignes de très spéciale souplesse*'. Furthermore, he paid tribute to Liberty silks, which he first saw in 1891 and described as bringing '*une sorte de printemps*' new to the Continental scene.

Indeed, it would be difficult to over-estimate the influence of British design on other countries towards the end of the century. English wallpapers were shown at *L'Exposition Universelle* of 1889 in Paris, and were afterwards imported into Belgium together with Liberty textiles and other 'artistic'

Art Nouveau side-board by Liberty & Co.

household furnishings from England, including pottery. Again, Liberty & Co. had a whole section in the Paris Exhibition of 1900. In René Schwaeblé's *Les Détraquées de Paris*, published at about this time, he writes of an apartment '*meublé luxueusement à l'anglaise*: modern style *chaises et fauteuils tortillés, tentures et tapis Liberty* etc.'.

In America, Louis Comfort Tiffany's work developed under the influence of the various English art and craft movements of the 1870s until he too arrived at Art Nouveau. Tiffany met Samuel Bing when he visited Paris for *L'Exposition Universelle* of 1889, and it was later at Bing's 'L'Art Nouveau' shop that the first pieces of iridescent Favrile glass designed by Tiffany were sold in Paris. Although his intention was to provide household objects whose beauty would enrich the lives of average American citizens, his glass was too elegant, exquisite, precious and impractical for everyday use. He and Morris had the same ideals and the same blind spots about the lives of 'average citizens' and what they could afford.

The world at large first became aware of the term Art Nouveau when van de Velde designed an Art Nouveau rest-room at the Dresden Art Exhibition of 1897. This rest-room, the decoration of which was as unrestful as a nightmare, so astonished and astounded that it became news beyond professional

design circles. Three years later, the Paris Exhibition of 1900, at which Arthur Liberty was a juror, again brought the limelight on to what many people regarded as the Art Nouveau atrocities. In Vienna that same year, the work of 'The Glasgow Four' exhibited at the 8th Wiener Secessionist Exhibition made an international impact, and the same group received maximum attention when they exhibited again at the Turin Exhibition of 1902. The Glasgow School was led by Charles Rennie Mackintosh, architect of the controversial building for the Glasgow School of Art, his wife Margaret MacDonald, and Herbert and Frances McNair.

In wallpapers and furnishing textiles there was a great deal of distinguished designing. John Llewellyn was appointed to the Liberty Board in 1898, and it was under his inspired direction that Liberty's Art Nouveau furnishing fabrics were commissioned from many artists. It was Liberty's policy not to name their designers, but the Victoria & Albert Museum has confirmed that they included Lindsay P. Butterfield, C. F. A. Voysey, Frank Miles, Sidney Mawson, Arthur Willshaw, Edgar L. Pattison, J. M. Doran, Jessie M. King, and Arthur Wilcock. Wilcock in particular was much used by Liberty's in the 1890s; and his 'Daffodils and Crocus' chintz for them was bought by Walter Crane for his own diningroom. Liberty also had many designs from the Silver Studio, established by the designer craftsman Arthur Silver, who was chiefly inspired by Japanese examples. Hornsey College of Art now possesses the Silver Studio's Day Book for 1891–8, in which clients include Liberty, Morton, Richard Stanway and Lightbrown Aspinall; also sample books of designs, principally for wallpapers and cretonnes, but including designs for carpets and stencils for interior decoration. At Arthur Silver's early death in 1896, he left the Studio to be managed for his widow by Harry Napper, whose designs were also bought by Liberty. Subsequently Arthur's eldest son Rex directed the practice and, as will be told later, became an important designer of Liberty textiles, silver and pewter. His brother Harry Silver also designed textiles for Liberty's.

John Llewellyn was interviewed by *The Citizen* (December 10, 1898), on his appointment to the Board and he showed the journalist some new silk furnishing tapestry at 8s 9d a yard, 50 inches wide, saying that it could not have been bought ten years previously under 10 guineas a yard. It had only been perfected after many trials lasting over two years . . . 'These and other similar and characteristic patterns are now all the rage, not only in England but on the Continent, and indeed throughout the world. Just in the same way as there was a Louis XVI period, so we flatter ourselves that we have created a new "English" period. Years ago nothing but French designs would suit, now the English school is leading.' There would inevitably be

imitators, not only at home but on the Continent – 'but this makes it necessary for us to have continual changes of patterns and fabrics in order to keep in front'.

Indeed there were imitators. In 1901 Liberty's were considerably gratified to be able to quote in translation a circular sent out by a firm of French silk manufacturers (not named) to their retail trade customers, upbraiding them for selling and advertising silks as being made in the *Style Liberty*:

'Gentlemen,

'We beg to draw your attention to the fact that by naming and describing our materials, manufactured in the new style, by the name of "Liberty" you gratuitously advertise – and without giving any credit to the French taste – a name which stands for nothing in regard to these creations, which are specialities due to inspiration purely French, and interpreted by French artists. The new style advances day by day, by reason of its undoubted merits; but this is due to the unremitting toil of French artists and manufacturers, and it is they who have the right to give the style a name. Their long years of effort, their self-sacrifice and perseverance, should attain other results than the glorification of the foreigner – or Liberty. Honour to whom honour is due; to the new style give the credit of its French good taste and originality; to the English give the credit of . . . such taste as they possess.'

The French successfully stamped out the use of the term *Style Liberty*, but in Italy *Stile Liberty* was applied to all Art Nouveau, not only in textiles, but in furniture, metalwork, glasswork, ceramics, and even architecture. And in Holland, the leading shop for modern furniture and furnishings, Metz & Co. of Amsterdam and The Hague began an association with Liberty & Co. which soon resulted in the name Liberty appearing in their advertising and, in the words of a Chairman of the firm, 'the second name of Metz rapidly became Liberty'. Seventy years later, Metz did in fact become Liberty, as will be told in the final chapter.

In furniture design, the Art Nouveau style gathered momentum until the exhibitions of 1900 in Paris and Vienna, and the Turin Exhibition of 1902. And as it gathered momentum, it also gathered excrescences. Although in the early years of the new century it was reasonably restrained in England, France and Belgium, in Germany and more particularly Austria perversions were rife. Furniture was produced with strange contortions and in asymmetrical shapes that affronted the senses. Surfaces were busily broken by panels of hammered copper, sometimes beaten with improving mottoes.

Pewter tea-set designed by Archibald Knox

British designers from whose work Continental Art Nouveau was originally derived, amongst them Walter Crane and C. R. Ashbee, reacted disgustedly against the distortions of the style. Lewis F. Day wrote in the *Art Journal* of October, 1900, that Art Nouveau 'shows symptoms . . . of pronounced disease'. And one of the most explosive outbursts was that of Arthur Liberty, after visiting an exhibition of Art Nouveau drawings and paintings in Budapest in 1909: 'It was painfully evident,' he wrote, 'that the very name *L'Art Nouveau* has been brought into contempt by gross exaggeration of its principles and aims. The majority of the exhibits were not only crude but meaningless. Nearly all the few clever ones were either obtrusively revolting in subject . . . or else erotic imaginings of morbid brains depicted with a mastery of technique only too wickedly perfect.' Arthur Liberty had been among the first to take an interest in Art Nouveau and experiment with the style when it promised to develop into a distinguished design movement. His reaction at its later manifestations was therefore all the more severe. There is a brief account of Liberty's introduction, development, and subsequent dismissal of Art Nouveau furniture and decoration written in the *Liberty Lamp* of July, 1927, by P. Campbell who worked in the Liberty cabinet factory from 1888:

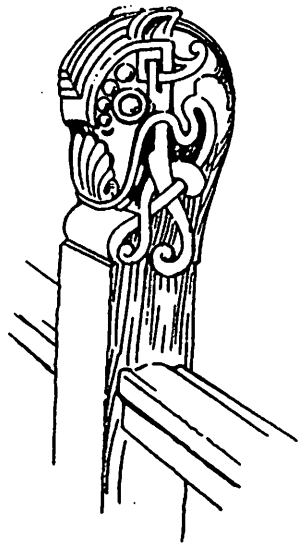
'It was at this time that Mr Robinson and Mr Leonard Wyburd originated forms of modern design in interior work and furniture, which became known as "Art Nouveau", and I believe that the late Sir Arthur Liberty had hopes of founding a new School of Furniture of this type which would carry his name to posterity. For some years Art Nouveau was extremely popular, and we exhibited at the Arts and Crafts Exhibitions under the Presidency of Mr

Walter Crane and other well-known artists and designers. Gradually, however, the call for this decreased owing to the enormities carried out in its name on the Continent and especially Austria, and with the general public becoming more educated by such publications as *The Studio*, etc., a revulsion of feeling took place, and the demand came for period work such as Tudor, William and Mary, and the Brothers Adam.'

Another account of Liberty's changing styles in furniture was written by Guy Bentley: 'By the beginning of the 1890s, the characteristics of Liberty & Co. were slowly changing from the Eastern styles of furnishing; and for the past forty years [*he is writing in 1931*] the tendency has been to foster and develop our own natural styles of decoration, especially avoiding the French influence; in fact, French work has always been absent from our showrooms with the exception of one room in the style of Louis XVI, which was only a passing phase, acceding to the wish of one of the assistants who had a strong *penchant* for that period.

'During the last decade of the nineteenth century, the craving for something new at any cost produced the so-called Art Nouveau. This was never taken very seriously by the Furniture Department, and what little was done in it was carried out with considerable modifications. As we all know, it died a natural death and was unregretted, for in the form in which it developed on the Continent, especially, it passed all bounds of reason. A good deal of work was done in an attempted revival of ancient Celtic, and I have always regretted that it failed to find more lasting favour, being one of the most brilliant phases of art that ever existed. Moreover, it was indigenous and British, with little or no debt to foreign influence. The "Book of Kells" showed it at its highest development, fully justifying the saying that it is "the wonder and despair" of copyists; but when simplified it does not lose its individuality. The finials of the staircase at Chesham House were a highly successful modern adaptation.'

The Celtic revival began with the finding of the Tara brooch in 1850 which inspired silversmiths and book illustrators. Copies of antique Irish ornaments were shown by James West & Sons of Dublin at the 1851 Exhibition and also by Waterhouse of Dublin. Both firms showed



Celtic finial, Chesham House

more jewellery of Celtic Irish inspiration at the Exhibition of Art Industry in Dublin in 1853. Morris, Faulkner & Co. made a cabinet in 1861 of inlay work with Celtic-inspired initials on the lid, and Celtic designs with the interlac motif began to appear in magazines and pattern books. Christopher Dresser wrote of Celtic ornaments in his *Modern Ornamentation* published in 1886; and the Glasgow School expressed the indigenous Celtic principles with coils and linear rhythms, interlac, and the dragon or serpent motifs kept on one plane raised above the background. In 1899 Liberty & Co. launched their Cymric silver. Stephan Tschudi Madsen, in his *Sources of Art Nouveau*, writes of 'the ever-vigilant Arthur Liberty's' Cymric silver and Tudric pewter being 'the last important result of the neo-Celtic tendency, an expression of the formal fusion of the stylistic elements of Art Nouveau and the Celtic'. Madsen went on to say that the influence of the Celtic revival on Art Nouveau was confined to Scandinavia, Scotland and Ireland, with a few special fields in England, mainly silverwork and book illustration . . . 'Only in Norway and Sweden was the influence of any importance to furniture making, interior design, or architecture.' We can but regret with Guy Bentley that Liberty's were unable to gain for it more lasting favour in those fields.

However, their beautiful Cymric silver and Tudric pewter of Celtic inspiration were among the most distinguished contributions to this felicitous development of Art Nouveau. It was sold in the Jewellery Department, which was first started in 1883 and originally concentrated on Eastern silverware and bijouterie, Cairene and Indian work in gold and precious stones. Later, notable specialities were jade and amber. Besides rare and costly antique jewellery, the department carried quite inexpensive pieces, described in one contemporary editorial as 'unique and dainty ornaments in gold and silver, quaint conceits and devices from China and Japan' . . . forerunners of 'costume jewellery', although of course the gold and silver were real. They concentrated on Eastern work because it was in keeping with the traditions of the firm, and also because at that time European jewellery and silverware design was contemptible. The long Napoleonic wars which halted the interchange of craftsmanship in Europe began the decline; and then the rapid development of machine industry brought about virtual stagnation in design. Bentley wrote of the jewellery and silverware illustrated in the catalogue of the Great Exhibition of 1851 that 'there was scarcely a specimen which could be called even creditable in design, and many of them are veritable nightmares'. He went on: 'This Exhibition opened the eyes of people of good natural taste; and the schools of design which were established soon after, together with the interest already aroused by the Gothic revival, began to stir the dry bones, and by slow degrees an improvement

became general. William Morris and the Hardmans of Birmingham contributed to this improvement during the 60s and 70s.'

To supplement their Eastern imports, Liberty began to import Dutch and Greek silver jewellery; and then they founded their own workshops, at first making reproductions of Flemish and Renaissance pieces, and then developing their own Liberty tradition alongside the Eastern imports. In 1899 came the great impetus given by 'Liberty Cymric'. Bernard Cuzner, Jessie M. King and Rex Silver designed the first Cymric jewellery which, enriched with blue and green enamels, was instantly successful. In 1901 a new company, Liberty & Co. (Cymric) Ltd was registered in conjunction with the old Birmingham firm of W. H. Haseler. Guy Bentley emphasises that 'from the first the silver plate was kept sternly to restrained and refined elegance, natural forms of flowers and foliage being always excluded as well as the Rococo and shell ornament of the previous fashions. Then a new decorative artist, Archibald Knox, brought out a series of designs for the Cymric Silver Company based more or less on ancient Celtic art – cups, vases, inkstands, and other silver articles, sometimes combining old and precious stones. It was soon realised that the Celtic forms were equally suited for pewter, and the manufacture of Tudric pewter began in 1903'. There is reason to ~~believe that~~ some designs ~~were in~~ production as early as 1901.

The pewter trade had been virtually extinct in England since the mid-nineteenth century . . . killed by the introduction of Britannia metal and electro-plating, the general deterioration of taste, and the cheap production of domestic earthenware, pottery, and porcelain. A revival began towards the end of the nineteenth century in Germany, the exponents of Art Nouveau seeing in pewter a medium after their own hearts. German *Jugendstil* in pewter developed in a more controlled manner than in other fields. In a paper on pewter read in 1904 before the Applied Art Section of the Society of Arts, Arthur Liberty observed, 'Alongside the foolish and undesirable, it must in justice be admitted that the Germans have recently produced many original and pleasing designs in pewter.'

The German firm of J. P. Kayser Sohn of Krefeld, founded in 1885, exhibited their Kayserzinn pewter at the Paris *Exposition Universelle* of 1900; and from that time until 1914 it was stocked by Liberty. The first Liberty catalogue introducing '*Novelties in Pewter Ware*' (1900) included a claret jug by Walter Scherf & Co. of Nuremburg – a tall jug whose design was typical of the Art Nouveau manner, with grapes and leaves clustered at the top, the stems trailing diagonally downwards to the base. This jug was stocked by Liberty for many years. The majority of the illustrations accompanying Arthur Liberty's paper on pewter when it was printed in the

Journal of the Society of Arts, June 10, 1904, were of Liberty Tudric. It was priced, he said, to bring it within the reach of people of moderate means, and was not identical in its constituents to the old material. It comprised some ingredients to make it more brilliant in appearance and harder in texture. And it was of uniform quality, whereas antique pewter varies greatly.

The two most important designers for Liberty & Co. (Cymric) Ltd were Rex Silver and the Manx artist Archibald Knox, who began to supply designs to Liberty in the 1890s. As with so many English designers (including those from whom Continental designers had originally drawn their inspiration for Art Nouveau) Knox was hostile to the swirling excesses of the style as it developed on the Continent. His own work, although it had a feeling of growth and freedom, derived rather from the disciplined interlacing of Celtic ornamentation found on Manx and Cornish crosses and in illuminated manuscripts. He therefore fell in very happily with Arthur Liberty's own suggestion that the new pewter ware should be decorated with modifications of ancient Celtic forms supplemented by floral and plant motifs used in a controlled and stylised manner. Liberty's policy that their designers should be anonymous makes definite identification seldom possible. But Knox's style was so distinctive that V. & A. experts can attribute his work with some degree of certainty. According to Guy Bentley, Knox did over four hundred designs for Liberty's, the majority being for their Cymric silver and jewellery. A whole series was based on ancient Celtic art and the same designs were produced in a range of Tudric pewter which, Guy Bentley recorded, 'produced something of a furore'.

Celtic forms were also used in the decoration of a splendid range of Liberty garden pottery made by Mrs G. F. Watts, widow of the painter, who had her own pottery at Compton. Her work for Liberty won Gold and Silver Medal awards from the Royal Botanic Society and Royal Horticultural Society. The pottery was in 'frost proof earthenware, red or grey, that with exposure assumes an interesting old-world and weather stained appearance'. It included shrub pots, flower pots, bird baths, window boxes, garden seats and benches, pedestals, sundials, fountains and terrace balustrades. Mrs Watts also designed carpets and rugs made in Donegal for Liberty's. It was a unique concession that Liberty's should have credited the designer's name. Mrs Watts was evidently a woman who got her own way. Archibald Knox also designed Donegal rugs and carpets for Liberty's – but anonymously.

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THE BELLE EPOQUE – IN LONDON AND AT THE LEE

For fashionable Society in London and Paris, the Edwardian period was the Belle Epoque. It was a period of unparalleled expenditure on extravagant pleasures and elaborate fashions, a golden age for those who had the gold. In commerce, everything was basking in what seemed to be perpetual prosperity. And the great department stores of London were at their zenith.

It was high noon also for the English country-house way of life. And Arthur Liberty had the best of both worlds, the golden commerce and the golden countryside. After he had been ten years a tenant of Lee Manor, the Plaistowes sold the property to Arthur Vernon, an auctioneer of High Wycombe related to the Libertys; and in 1902 he sold it to Arthur Liberty. From then on he gradually added to the manor house, and acquired more land until he owned 3,000 acres, also farms, cottages, houses, and the Lee Gate Inn. He gave the village a green, planted woods and avenues of trees, and had a new road made across his fields to Great Missenden station because he considered the existing road too hilly for his horses. There was a locked gate at each end of the new road, to which only the Liberty family had keys. He had a studio and office at the Manor, but still went up by train to London most weekdays. At Marylebone station he had a marble seat built for himself alone to repose upon if he arrived early for his homeward train. Every summer there was a day on which the whole staff of Liberty & Co., with their families, were transported to The Lee Manor, where there was luncheon and tea in a great marquee on the lawn.

He was gradually giving more of his time and energy to being a country squire, less to being a retailer of Regent Street. He became chairman of many county associations, among them the Bucks Architectural and Archaeological Society, and the Bucks Association for the Loan of Pictures to Schools. He became High Sheriff of the County, a Justice of Peace, Chairman of the Great Missenden Petty Sessions, a County Councillor, Deputy Lieutenant of the County. He initiated the building of two new transepts to