

## The Arts and Crafts Movement and Its Influence on English Education at the Beginning of the Industrial Revolution

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### Abstract

The Arts and Crafts Movement began in Britain around 1880, having been established in response to the Industrial Revolution, and quickly spread to Europe, America and Japan. At the outset of the Industrial Revolution, education for work was implemented in many countries, as new methods of production and manufacturing at the beginning of industrialisation demanded new skills from workers (Kantola et al., 1999). In Britain, the negative influences of industrial manufacturing and poor quality products were acknowledged from around 1840, but it was not until the 1860s and the 1870s that designers, artists and architects began to identify new approaches to design and decorative arts: these in turn led to the establishment of the Arts and Crafts Movement. The leading figures of the movement were John Ruskin, a theorist and educator, and William Morris, a writer, designer and activist; both encouraged the resurrection of redundant handicrafts, a simpler lifestyle and a focus on the designing and fashioning of objects for daily life. Ruskin studied the association between society, art and labour, while Morris put Ruskin's ideas into practice by emphasising the value of handicraft, the enjoyment of craftsmanship and the natural outlook of materials. Both Ruskin and Morris criticised contemporary education for failing to adapt to the environment of students and the lack of opportunities for self-fulfilment. By the 1880s, Morris had become an internationally renowned and commercially successful designer and manufacturer. New guilds, societies and schools began to adopt his ideas in order to bring the ideals of Arts and Crafts to a wider audience and improve British industry. Several schools were established in England at this time under the influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement and the movement also reached other countries at a later date. The aim of the movement was to teach students to utilise handicraft in order to create genuine artefacts, with aesthetic value, for use in everyday life, as opposed to mass-produced items. Nature was the reference for beauty, both in decoration and in art. Organic shapes were promoted as inspiring and the value of well-crafted art was assumed as the outcome of the coordination of the eye and the heart.

**Keywords:** Art and Craft, Schools, Handicraft, Industrial Revolution, Education.

### Introduction

The Arts and Crafts Movement (ACM) was introduced by Pugin, Ruskin and Morris (Petts, 2008) in response to a fall in design standards caused by the use of machinery and factory manufacturing. It was also a reaction to items presented in the Great Exhibition of 1851 that were decorative copies of well-known artefacts, but did not consider the quality of materials used (Cumming & Kaplan, 1991; Gillian, 1971). The

concerns of the initiators of the Arts and Crafts Movement were based on a desire to change the outlook of a newly industrialised society and build a society based on social liberalism. Nature was seen as the true basis of learning and individual growth.

The educational ideas associated with the Arts and Crafts Movement were based on an interest in aesthetic education that could be achieved by focusing on quality handicraft (Petts, 2008). The originators of the movement criticised contemporary education for failing to consider students' backgrounds and a failure to provide opportunities for self-fulfilment. The aim was to educate students in the utilisation of handicraft in order to create everyday objects with aesthetic value. From this was borne a romanticised faith in handicraft, in stark contrast to the automation and mass manufacturing of industrialisation. Nature was seen as the inspiration within arts and crafts. Organic shapes were inspiring and well-crafted art was deemed more valuable than mass produced objects, the outcome of coordination of the eye and the heart.

This article outlines the Arts and Crafts Movement within the context of the Industrial Revolution and its impact on the role of art, craft and design in society. It highlights the educational ideas of the initiators of the Arts and Crafts Movement and discusses schools that were founded on the ideology of the movement. Finally, the authors discuss the value of these educational ideas and present their conclusions.

### **The Industrial Revolution and the Arts and Crafts Movement**

With the development of the steam engine in the 1780s, energy production increased and factories were established. Cities became bigger and political power moved from aristocracy to industrial manufacturers (Hudson, 1992). Power-driven mass manufacture became possible and thus people earned more money and things became less expensive (Szostak, 1991; Uglow, 2002; Usher, 1920). The populations in cities rose and basic living standards included long working days, pollution and job uncertainty, giving rise to widespread misery. Political movements were established in order to protest against the ill-treatment of factory workers and to improve their living conditions. However, as a result of industrialisation, literacy was improved and product design was influenced by automatic processes, which gave rise to a new request for advertisement (Hudson, 1992). Thus, handicraft processes were outdated and the fashioning of handmade objects was fragmented. At the outset of mass manufacturing, companies attempted to reproduce the visual beauty of handcrafted artefacts and, later, designers began to consider manufacturing methods designed to make production more efficient (Blakesley, 2005; Gillian, 1971).

The Arts and Crafts Movement was established in protest against factory production and out of an interest in quality craftsmanship. It grew from the teachings of Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) and John Ruskin (1819-1900) and was initiated by William Morris,

a leading member of the movement who believed that contemporary art and design was inferior and worthless. The movement were opposed to mechanical duplication, insincerity in art and the use of cheap decoration. Indeed, art was not superimposed; it was in an object itself, in its proportions and structure. Beauty was not only found in complexity, but, more often, in simplicity. To be considered really beautiful, an object had to be genuine, or appear to be genuine. Ruskin believed that art was the product of man's joy in his labour. Thus, art in its best form came from the unified, creative effort of a single individual. The designer was the craftsman and the craftsman the designer (Blakesley, 2005; Gillian, 1971).

### **The Man and the Machine**

Ruskin and Morris protested against the factory system, in which machines succeeded handicraft. Both argued that workers lacked control over their work and that machines had their limitations in that they could not replicate the quality of crafted products. Unlike factory workers, a craftsman knew the history of his product and thus could share this story with the eventual owner (Gish and Hansen, 2013). Knowing their products were lovingly fashioned posed real value for craftsmen, as there was an emotional connection that a machine simply cannot produce. These personalised, human factors were noted by William Morris, one of the initiators of the Arts and Crafts movement (Ashbee, 1908; Kinna, 2013) and are the reason why craftsmanship has survived since the inception of mass production.

The founders of the Arts and Crafts Movement were both strongly opposed to the use of machines. Ruskin believed that life in a factory was a poorer option than a feudalistic society, due to the fact that workers were not given the opportunity to personalise products (Crawford, 1997; Ruskin, 2004). Morris was also against industrialisation as he believed that machines could not substitute true craftsmanship, in that they were unable to create art (Morris, 1882). However, he did acknowledge that machines relieved men of hard, boring or repetitive work (Ruskin, 1884). Morris further argued that workers in factories could not produce worthy decorative art, as they did not find happiness or satisfaction in their mundane work (Morris, 1882). Morris, in common with other Marxists, considered factory workers isolated as the division of labour separated them from their work and thus did not allow them to express themselves through their work.

### **The Craftsman**

The term 'craftsman', according to Hanks (2013), refers to one who designs bespoke products, fashioning them lovingly by hand. Indeed, it is defined as 'the skill that is needed to make something by hand' (The Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2011).

. Craftsmanship refers to a specific skill and an interest in the design process of a product and the bestowing of emotion and quality upon a design, rendering it all the

more valuable (Sennett, 2008). Craftsmanship refers to handmade products fashioned by a craftsman who has spent years practicing his techniques, in repeating, developing and perfecting his handicraft (Ashbee, 1908). Craftsmen love what they do and see their product as a functional piece of art, rather than simply an object. The craftsman's practice is not just a job, it is a way of life and the workshop is the craftsman's home (Sennett, 2008). The workshop is also an important aspect of education for the next generation, as the children of craftsmen learn the skills and inherit knowledge of craft through assisting their parents. Years of practice means that their inherited skills are well developed and they became masters in their handicraft, eventually becoming traditional craftsmen (Sennett, 2008). An artisan refers to one who does not design what he makes but is a master in his specific field, no matter what that field may be, with a focus on the beauty of skilled work (Hanks, 2013). This term does not define the type of work and could thus refer to different artefacts (Schaefer, 1958).

There is a distinct difference between a craftsman and an artisan, as the first is a maker of products (Sennett, 2008). Consumers are always interested in the design process of the product as this adds an element of emotion and quality into the design, thus rendering it more valuable. The term 'artisan' infers that craftsmanship is relevant to anyone who is particularly skilled at what they do, no matter what design field he or she practices in.

### **The Value of Good Craftsmanship**

Ruskin believed that products should last for a lifetime. Thus, they should be made by experienced craftsmen, in order to ensure quality, longevity and detail. It was through handcrafted products, lovingly crafted from quality materials, that a real emotional connection was fostered and the value of the product recognised (Ruskin, 1897). With the onset of the Industrial Revolution and mass production, the value and emotional durability of products disappeared in a new, disposable society. Ruskin believed that longevity was evident in the 1800s, when buildings were made to last so that future generations could enjoy them. Craftsmen would also design and produce everyday products of good quality; indeed, such products would last the user a lifetime. They were also functional in accordance with people's needs, rather than just focusing on a traditional outlook.

The manufacturing industry made it increasingly difficult for craftsmen to continue trading successfully and they found it difficult to make a profit. Mass produced products were sold at a much lower price, but with a higher profit margin. Industry was in competition with the craftsmen and made their living conditions difficult, thus forcing them to find alternative work (Ashbee, 1908). Consumers were able to choose between expensive crafted products and mass-produced, inexpensive items, which proved popular within society.

Throughout history, craftsmen have always made compromises. The machine replaced production by hand, in terms of efficiency, and some craftsmen made the decision to work alongside the machines. They may not have had the satisfaction of seeing a product created from start to finish, but they were able to practice their skill and had more security, in that they were in the more comfortable position of being able to provide for their family (Schaefer, 1958; Patch, 2012). Craftsmen sharing their skills and knowledge made a big contribution to industrialisation, in ensuring that mass-produced items were of the highest possible quality, retaining the attention-to-detail the craftsmen were known for (Schaefer, 1958). Sennett argues that this is where true craftsmanship became disjointed and the craftsman became devalued. The real craftsmen were the ones that remained in their practise in an attempt to keep their handicraft alive, with a focus on creativity and originality (Sennett, 2008). They created products from start to finish, sourcing materials and transforming them into beautifully crafted, functional and quality products.

### **Pedagogical Ideas Founded by the Initiators of the Arts and Crafts Movement**

Pugin, Morris and Ruskin articulated ideas regarding education within art, design and craft. Morris considered the art and design of his own time both worthless and inferior; furthermore, he blamed the Industrial Revolution for the poor quality of mass-produced goods, believing that aesthetic education was important in enhancing the quality of craft and maintaining originality (Triggs, 1979). The factory system was not only shaped by new, innovative technology, it was an instrument through which factory owners controlled society: machines were tools used to discipline workers and control the manufacturing process. Thus, education had to provide individuals with freedom from repression and the opportunity for personal development.

In his book, *News from Nowhere* (2009), Morris outlined his vision of a libertarian, socialist society. He desired a return to nature, where machines were only used to ease the burden of men. In this future society, he argued, education would be offered to everyone, with the objective of developing good values in students. Morris's idea of education was focused on increasing students' knowledge of art and craft skills in order to foster the self-confidence required to live in a classless community in brotherhood and balance. Educational activities took place amongst nature, in the form of outdoor education rather than within schools, as children learn from nature. Morris and Ruskin championed gender equality and the division of labour, but it was still women who did the housework. They reasoned that Labour should be based on workmanship and workshops; otherwise, people would not be happy at work.

Ruskin also underlined the importance of education for workers so they could develop a sense of self-fulfilment (Cole, 1954). He considered preparation for active, intellectual participation in ordinary matters to be of a greater value than the study of subjects that might never be used in real life. Moreover, he thought that schools

should teach subjects adapted to the circumstances of the children they were teaching (Ruskin, 1888). Aesthetic appreciation and faithfulness was a significant aspect of Morris's thinking. He saw aesthetic appreciation as built upon ideas of collaboration and community, which, in turn, are founded on an aesthetic education achieved through authentic work (Petts, 2008:27).

### **William Morris Enterprises: Influences on Education**

William Morris was a leading member of the Arts and Crafts Movement. He believed that the art and design of his own time was inferior and unworthy and felt that this was the result of the poor quality of life during the Industrial Revolution. Morris encouraged artists and designers to look back to medieval art for their inspiration, as this was a time when artists and craftsmen worked together, with equal status (Bennett, 1926).

Morris believed that nature was the perfect example of God's design and that all design should be based on nature, which he saw as the spiritual remedy to the inferior standards of art and design during the Industrial Revolution. He had stated: 'Have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful' (Bennett, 1926).

In 1857, when Morris rented an unfurnished apartment in Red Lion Square, London, he was confronted with the practical problem of furnishing it. As highlighted by Mackail, 'the arts of cabinetmaking and upholstery had at this time reached the lowest point to which they have ever sunk. Ugliness and vulgarity reigned in them unchecked. While he (Morris) lived in furnished rooms, it was easy to accept things as they were, but now, when furniture had actually to be bought, it became at once clear that nothing could be had that was beautiful or, indeed, that was not actually hideous. Nor was it possible even to get so simple a thing as a table or chair, still less any more elaborate piece of furniture, made at the furnishing shops from a better design' (1901: 112-113).

The designing and making of furniture were the initial furnishing problems addressed by Morris and his associates. Another was the well-known 'Red House' on Bexley Heath, near the village of Upton, into which Morris moved in 1860, soon after his wedding. The building and much of its furnishings were designed by Phillip Webb and the house and furniture, unusual in design and a protest against the practices of the time, were redesigned in order to satisfy the owner's sense of what was fine-looking and architecturally good (Bennett, 1926). Mackail advised: 'Only in a few isolated cases, such as Persian carpets and blue china or delft for vessels of household use, was there anything then to be bought ready-made that Morris could be content with in his own house. Not a chair, or table, or bed; not a cloth or paper hanging for

the walls; nor tiles to line fireplaces or passages; nor a curtain or a candlestick; nor a jug to hold wine or a glass to drink it out of, but had to be reinvented, one might almost say, to escape the flat ugliness of the current article' (1901: 143).

The craftsmen and artists who assisted Morris with the work were described as 'fine art workmen in painting, carving, furniture and metals' (Pamela Todd, 2012: 37). Much of the initial work of these craftsmen lay within church ornamentation. Morris later established a shop for weaving and dyeing in Hammersmith, London, and, in 1881, the work of the company had progressed, with weaving, dyeing and cotton printing offered. More space and improved working conditions were soon needed and so the business was transferred to 'picturesque and prettily weathered workshops' near the site of Merton Abbey (Bennett, 1926). Many artefacts were designed and produced by the company, which was described as a firm of art-craftsmen. They offered '(1) painted glass windows, (2) arras tapestry woven in the high-warp loom, (3) carpets, (4) embroidery, (5) tiles, (6) furniture, (7) general house decorations, (8) printed cotton goods, (9) paper hangings, (10) figured woven stuffs, (11) furniture, velvets, and cloths and (12) upholstery.' (Mackail, 1901: 37).

Thus, the company was made up of extremely skilled artists and craftsmen working in various fields, most of whom acknowledged William Morris as their master. In this context, it is important to note that, in the early days of the business, Morris had adopted two principles: 'the first, that nothing should be done in his workshops which he did not know how to do himself, and the second, that every form of decorative art could be subsumed under the single head of architecture and had only a real life and intelligible meaning in its relation to the mistress-art, and through the mistress-art to all the other subordinate arts (Mackail, 1901: 197, 198)

This ideal of architecture brought together many art-crafts, giving rise to a community of interests that demanded some visible expression. Thus, in 1884, the Art Workers' Guild was established in London. One of the aims of the Guild was to hold monthly seminars and periodical public exhibitions in relation to which teaching and training of acknowledged masters would be employed in the theory and practice of numerous handicrafts.

Two years later, several fellows of the Guild, working with representatives of other organisations, established a provisional committee of twenty-five, in order to form a new organisation capable of supporting a comprehensive annual exhibition of the work of art-craftsmen (Bennett, 1926). This organisation was named *The Crafts Exhibition Society*. Walter Crane, a well-known designer, became president and successfully ran the organisation for many years. From the naming of this organisation, which originated in 1888, the term 'Arts and Crafts' was most commonly used in reference to the movement in both Britain and America and the purpose of the organisation was

putting the teachings of William Morris and his associates into practice, in reference to art and common objects in everyday life (Bennett, 1926).

### **Central School of Arts and Crafts**

The Arts and Crafts Movement and the teachings of Morris and his enterprises had a big influence on authorities understanding the importance of education within arts and crafts. The Central School of Arts and Crafts was established by the County Council of London in 1896, in order to encourage the industrial use of decorative art. Attractive arts and crafts exhibitions increased the demand for better quality art products and for improved education within art and craft. In 1896, London County Council made provision for design instruction and for several handicrafts studios in Regent Street.

In 1908, the school, named the Central School of Arts and Crafts, moved to its own new building in Southampton Row (see fig. 100). Lethaby, the author of *Form in Civilisation* and many papers on the art-crafts in relation to modern life, was headmaster of the school. He was in charge from 1900 to 1912 and established a new curriculum that placed emphasis on an understanding of materials and workshop - based practices at the hands of professional designers (Woodham, 2004).

An important aspect of this school is that it was initially intended to supplement rather than replace education. The school was primarily for students who were involved in some aspect of the art industry, rather than for those who wanted to get into such an industry. Design was taught and handicraft provided in branches of the craft that were not generally available in the normal routine of manufacturing workshops.

Many of the initial teachers were members of the Art Workers' Guild and their practice - centred methods of instruction were a distinct break from the generally predominant drawing - based teaching offered in other establishments. In 1912, Fred Burridge became principal and, by this time, the school had expanded to five major departments (Woodham, 2004).

Because many of the students were involved in workshop activities, a large majority of them were in the evening classes. However, two technical day schools for boys were added to the school (Kimmins, 1909). According to the school prospectus of 1914-1915, the school was made up as follows:

1. School of Architecture and Building Crafts
2. School of Cabinet Work and Furniture



3. School of Silversmith's Work and Allied Crafts
4. School of Book Production
5. School of Drawing, Design, and Modelling
6. School of Decorative Needlework
7. School of Stained Glass, Mosaic, and Decorative Painting
8. Special Lectures and Demonstrations
9. Day Technical School for Boys in Book Production
10. Day Technical School for Boys in Silversmiths' and Jewellers' work.



*Figure 1:* Central School of Arts and Crafts, London

In 1912, the school had expanded and consisted of five major departments, including furniture, printing and silver and goldsmithing. In the 1930s, the Central School of Arts and Crafts adopted a greater commitment to industrial design education, with the establishing of a course in Design for Light Industry in 1938. This direction was developed further post 1945, when a systematic industrial design curriculum was established. This emphasis on design contributed to a shift in the title of the institution in 1966, away from its initial 'arts and crafts' to the designated 'Central School of Art and Design' (Woodham, 2004).

### **Camberwell School of Arts & Crafts**

The Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts, another school of the same type as the Central School of Arts and Crafts, was established by London County Council's Technical Education Board on 10 January 1898. The school was financially supported by John Passmore Edwards, following advocacy by Edward Burne-Jones, Lord Leighton, Walter Crane and G.F. Watts. When the school opened, it offered day and evening instruction in a wide range of subjects such as Architecture,

Furniture Design, Life Drawing, Stained Glass Work, Dressmaking, Pottery and  
Typography.

In 1909, the school offered quality instruction in masonry and stone carving (Bennett, 1926). William Johnstone (1897-1981) was made principal in 1938 and the reputation of the school soon increased as a fundamental influence on art development throughout the country. The school largely focused on technical subjects until a Fine Arts department was established amid the wars. In January 1986, the school became part of the London Institute, adopting the name 'Camberwell College of Arts' in 1989 (Tancell, 2002).

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Up until the end of the 19th century, the term 'handicraft' was used to describe the craft of this era (Dormer, 1997). Handicraft, shortened to craft, would have at one time referred to products made entirely by hand, or by machines powered by the operator, such as a potter's wheel (Campbell, 2005). Craft is a process of products being designed and made via the hands of the same individual (Campbell, 2005; Crafts Council, 2011) and the process has been defined as highly valued, skilled labour (Frayling, 2011). Additionally, being familiar with a material through the senses deems the definition of craft as more than just 'made by hand'; to understanding on a deeper level (Nimkulrat, 2012).

Prior to the Industrial Revolution, crafted products were traditionally perceived by consumers as humanised products, due to the labour involved. Mass-manufacture automated previously valued manual processes that required human skill, which in turn dehumanised products (Campbell, 2005). Bonanni *et al.* (2008) supports this, stating that mass-manufactured products are generic, due to designers often being so distanced from the production process.

Craft can create a sense of humanity within consumers, in interacting with crafted products. People relate to imperfections or differences between every design as a natural human trait, thus providing them with a sense of validation as a human being (Needleman, 1993). The Arts and Crafts Movement supported this, suggesting that crafted products provide consumers with a sense of identity lacking in the saturated market of commercialised and mass-produced products.

The term 'craft' symbolises the ideology that it is important to teach via art and craft education. People perceive objects mass-created in industry differently to objects skilfully created by hand. Indeed, with the former, there are feelings of detachment and a loss of the human touch. True craft will always be distinguished from industry, as care and time go into production, something that is unachievable with mass manufacture. A

product made by one person for another holds emotional significance with consumers (Crafts Council, 2011). Emotional significance is also fostered through a crafted product meeting the ideals of the consumer, either through aesthetics, values or the human connection associated with the product. This ‘human-product relationship’ allows the consumer to attach emotions to crafted products with ease, thus making the object personal to them (Kalviainen, 2000).

The initiators of the Arts and Crafts movement produced innovative, intriguing ideas for art and craft education, based on the above ideology. However, this was not developed as a holistic system or officially used in schools. The Arts and Crafts movement promoted handicraft as a response to the tasteless mass production of the Industrial Revolution and the educational ideas of the movement were not defined by a particular system, but rather as a response to the social, moral and artistic confusion of the Industrial Revolution. Nevertheless, the initiators of The Arts and Crafts movement attempted to formulate radical educational principles in order to develop a socialist society through education; for example, by using craft to teach students inclusive and collaborative decision-making. Such education was established in the Central School of Arts and Crafts, the Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts. The school promoted the revival of craftsmanship, honesty in construction and truth in the use of materials. Ultimately, it would offer a good quality of life.

The main aim of the Arts and Crafts movement was to transform society, in making it more humanistic. The movement was based on socialistic ideas and, rather than their schools being similar to a factory environment, they promoted the idealistic natural educational surroundings outlined by Morris, in which nature was a source of inspiration (Morris, 2009).

The ACM was an idealistic movement and its educational ideals demonstrate its attempts to improve society through education. The movement aimed to underpin students’ positive experiences and foster contentment through craft. Many of the movement’s educational ideas are still valid today and are often useful in contemporary education, such as the elements of creativity, originality and autonomy. It was thus important to develop future citizens’ ability to become independent, creative and able to understand art through craft. The Arts and Crafts movement aimed to develop a student’s artistic taste and ability. Ruskin and Morris highlighted how art should enhance industry and how that beauty was available to everyone (Brown & Krozenik, 1993).

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