

Who was Charles Spooner?

Charles Sydney Spooner (1862-1938) was an architect, furniture-maker and teacher; a life-long adherent to the political and aesthetic ideas of William Morris: 'The Arts & Crafts'.

Spooner was a member of the influential **Spooner family** – academics and clergymen. One of his cousins was Warden Spooner, of New College, Oxford, after whom "**Spoonerisms**" are named – for example, he is supposed to have said, "You have tasted a whole worm" instead of "You have wasted a whole term." An aunt married an Archbishop of Canterbury; and her daughter another.

Spooner was the second of the five children of Charles Spooner (Land Agent) and Sarah Frances (nee Trinder) of 1 Girdlers Road, Brook Green, Hammersmith. At 19 he was articled to the church architect Arthur Blomfield (1829-1899). He was Blomfield's assistant from 1885. In 1886 he went to work for John Dixon Butler (1828-1900), Architect to the Metropolitan Police.

In 1887 he joined the **Art Workers Guild**, a group of young, rebellious architects who were tired of mechanical, elaborate Victorian design and materialism, and fell under the spell of the socialist ideas of William Morris. (Others who joined the Guild that year were Emery Walker and Selwyn Image.) Morris revered the hand-made, and "truth to materials". In 1888 the **Arts & Crafts Exhibition Society** was founded, and Spooner was an early member. In 1890 he won the RA Travelling Studentship, and set up in practice at 50 Queen Anne's Gate.

In July 1900 he married Minnie Dibdin Davison, a painter, sculptor and designer. They lived in a house opposite Chiswick Eyot, where friends and relations came to watch the Boat Race. Charles and Minnie worked together on many projects as co-designers. Their close friends included C F A Voysey, Christopher Whall and Louis Davis; Spooner had professional connections with F W Troup, W D Caroe, Walter Tapper, Henry Wilson, Fred Rowntree and Arthur Penty.

Spooner built 8 churches: at Hadleigh (Suffolk); Ipswich; Little Ilford (demolished 1990); Haslemere (in my view, his best); Maldon (RC); Letchworth (RC); Wanstead; East Ham (his favourite). He added the chancel at Rye Harbour, and doubled the size of Upton Park (demolished 1968). He did repairs at many other churches, including Cheddington (Herts), St Mary, Hadleigh, and St George's, Queen Square. He decorated and furnished other churches: notably at Exton (Hants); the rood screen, reredos and baptistery screen at Hatch End; the south aisle altar piece at St Leonard's, Bridgnorth; a screen and font cover at Pinner; a screen at Holy Innocents, Hammersmith. He designed war memorials at Hadleigh (Suffolk) and Ranby (Notts.) He did work on cottages, houses and the church in the village of Westmill, Herts off and on for 40 years.

He built large houses at Bury (Sussex) (destroyed by fire); Aldershot (the vicarage); Rushmere, Ipswich (demolished); Hindhead; and country cottages at Holford (Somerset), Lulworth Cove, Burwash, Tilford (Surrey), Leighton Buzzard. He built estate cottages at Bawdsey (Suffolk); a suburban 'ideal home' at Gidea Park; and a farm at Steeple Claydon (Bucks) for Henry Arthur Jones, a playwright now totally forgotten, thanks to sneers by Oscar Wilde.

Spooner taught furniture design at the LCC Central School of Arts and Crafts c1898-1930: his furniture was featured in many exhibitions. He was a member of the Consulting Architects panel of the Incorporated Church Building Society 1909-38, and advised on plans for hundreds of new churches. In 1911 *Recent English and Ecclesiastical Architecture* was published, under the names of Spooner and another, and more successful church architect, Sir Charles Nicholson (1867-1949).

©Alec Hamilton 2 August 2009