

Benson, William Arthur Smith (W.A.S.) 1854 - 1924



Benson, William Arthur Smith [often known as W.A.S. Benson] was born in London, England on 17 October 1854. He studied classics and philosophy at New College, Oxford University (1874-77), following which he was articled to the London architect Basil Champneys (1877-80). Nevertheless, he decided not to make a career in architecture, although he did later work on the occasional architectural project for family and friends.

In 1877 he became acquainted with Edward Burne-Jones, through whom he met William Morris, who encouraged Benson to become a craftsman. Early in 1880 he left Champneys and opened a small workshop in North End Road, Fulham, London. Initially the workshop made furniture but following the hiring of John Lovegrove, a skilled brass and copper-worker in 1881, Benson diversified into metalwork. Within two years, such was the success of the workshop that they moved into larger premises at Eyot Gardens in nearby Chiswick. About the same time, Benson also opened a studio and showroom at his house in Kensington.

In 1884 Benson was a founder member of the Art Workers Guild and was instrumental in establishing the Home Arts and Industries Association. Four years later, in 1888, he helped to establish the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, which provided an opportunity for craftsmen like himself to both exhibit and promote their designs. Later, in 1915, Benson was also one of the founder members of the Design and Industries Association.

In 1887 Benson moved his showroom from Kensington to premises at 82 Bond Street, London, and in 1889-90 expanded his workshop in Chiswick which was renamed the Eyot Metal Works.

By the 1890s Benson had acquired an international reputation for his metalwork which by then had extended to light fittings and a wide range of appliances and fittings for the home, all in the characteristic Arts and Crafts style, including fire screens and fenders, tableware, kettles, urns, etc.

A catalogue produced by the Benson in 1899-1900 listed over 800 items available from his firm. They also worked on commissions for individual clients such as the solicitor J.S. Beal, whose house, 'Standen' in East Grinstead, designed by Philip Webb, they equipped with electric lighting in the 1890s, making it one of the first houses to be fully electrified in Britain.

In 1899-1900 Benson installed the lighting in St Paul's Cathedral, London. During the 1890s Benson began designing furniture which was made by Morris & Co. and the London cabinetmaker J.S. Henry & Co.

In 1896, following the death of William Morris, Benson took over the directorship of Morris & Co. On 22 December 1900 the W.A.S. Benson Company was registered as a limited company.

During World War One, Benson utilised his company for the production of shells for the Ministry of Munitions and equipment for the launching of torpedoes for the Admiralty.

Benson sold off his company in 1920 and retired to Castle Corner, a house in Manorbier, Wales, which he and his wife had purchased in 1909 and where he died on 5 July 1924.

Worked in
UK
Works

Architectural works by W. A. S. Benson:

Alterations to the interior of Aubrey House (later North End House), The Green, Rottingdan, West Sussex, for Mr. Saunders (1880); Crick pavilion, Winchester College, Winchester, Hampshire (1887); Alteration and additions, together with remodelling of interior, 82-83 New Bond Street, London for W. A. S. Benson & Co. (1887); The Hill House, Grand Hill, Chalfont St. Giles, Buckinghamshire, for

George Heywood Maoinoir Sumner and Mrs Agnes Mary Sumner (1888); The Eyot Metal Works, Eyot Gardens, Hugbendon Road, Hammersmith, London for W. A. S. Benson & Co. (1889); Stables for Maltman's Green, Maltman's Lane, Gerrard's Cross, Buckinghamshire, for Captain Algernon Heaneage Drummond and Mrs Margaret Elizabeth Drummond, née Benson (1889); Alterations to the interior of W. A. S. Benson's own house, 39 Montagu Square, London (1894); Alterations and addition of stables, The Woodlands, Fairmile Common, Coblam, Surrey, for Theresa Earle (1896); Alterations to 88 Portland Place, London for Sir George and Lady Lewis (1897); Alterations to interior of 2 Aubrey Road, London for Mr. and Mrs Manuel (1897); Additions and alterations to his own house, Castle Corner, Manorbier, Pembrokeshire, Wales (1889); Additions and alterations to The Dene, Rottingdeane, East Sussex, for Sir Edward Aurelian Ridsdale (1899); Alterations to 2 Marlborough Gate, Hyde Park, London, for Mr. and Mrs Manuel (1900); Addition of terrace garden to 2 Wilton Place, London (1900); Pavilion to display products made by W. A. S. Benson & Co., at the Glasgow Exhibition of 1901 (1901); Alterations to 15 Berkeley Square, London (1903); Wilden House, Wilden, Worcestershire (1903); Alterations to 115 Eaton Square, London, for Mr. and Mrs Robert Hunter (1904); Bedburn Hall and cottage and outbuildings on estate, Hamsterley, Wolsingham, Co. Durham, for John Walton Fogg-Elliott (1904); Alterations and additions, Lydstep House, Lydstep, Pembrokeshire, Wales (1905); Windlesham, with cottages and outbuildings, Whithyham, East Sussex, for himself (1906); The White Cottage, German Street, Winchelsea, East Sussex, for Miss Beatrice and Miss Maud Bennington (1906); Parish Hall, Manorbier, Pembrokeshire, Wales (1906); Minterne House, Minterne Magna, Dorchester, Dorset, for Lord Edward Henry Trafalgar Digby (1907); Ballader's Plat, German Street, Winchelsea, East Sussex, for Miss Maud Beddington (1907); Extension to Swallowcliffe Manor, Swallowcliffe, near Tisbury, Wiltshire, for Henry Frederick Compton Cavendish (1907); additions and alterations to cottage, Evens, Rectory Lane, Winchelsea, East Sussex (1910); Alterations to Morney Cross, Fownhope, Herefordshire, for Alfred P. and Anne C. Maudsley (1910); Cottages for Astley Hall, near Stowport-on-Severn, Worcestershire, for Stanley Baldwin (1911); Addition of arches to 93 Eaton Square, London for Stanley Baldwin (1911); Additions to Batemans, and the addition of an estate cottage, Burwash, East Sussex, and an estate cottage, for Rudyard Kipling (1913); and Additions to The Clochfaen, Llangurig, Powys, Wales, for Harry Lloyd Verney (1913).

For further information about these commissions see: W.A.S. Benson: Arts and Crafts Luminary and Pioneer of Modern Design. Edited by Ian Hamerton. Woodbridge, England: Antique collectors' Club, 2005 pp. 260-282

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Links

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- Mapping the Practice & Profession of Sculpture in Britain & Ireland 1851-1951 https://sculpture.gla.ac.uk/mapping/public/view/person.php?id=msib2_1214229691&search
- Victoria & Albert Museum, London <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/search/?q=Benson%2C%20William%20Arthur%20Smith>
- Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Arthur_Smith_Benson
- The British Museum <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/search?keyword=Benson>

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