



Rural tranquility: the cottage designed by Ernest Gimson and still lived in by his great nephew, Don Gimson.



White gloves.



A Loughborough College student bedroom. ●

The arts and crafts movement in the East Midlands

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Following visits to Rodmarton Manor (Ernest Barnsley) and Chipping Camden (C.R.Ashbee), on a crisp sunny late February day some 20 RFS members were treated to an unforgettable experience of some of the finest work of Ernest Gimson and his fellow Cotswold craftsmen and partners Ernest and Sydney Barnsley. The three partners all came from well-off families and met while training as architects in London, but rather than going off to the south of France (or the 1895 equivalent) they decided to go to Pinbury in Gloucestershire to make furniture. So why visit the East Midlands? This emerged as the visit proceeded.

The first part of the visit was to the New Walk Museum in Leicester. Ernest Gimson's family engineering business was based in Leicester, and the Leicester Museum Service has built up an important collection of his work and that

of the other Cotswold craftsmen. After many years in store this collection was the focus of a major exhibition curated by Mary Greensted, and we were fortunate to have her personal insight and knowledge on our tour of the exhibition. She is a world authority on the Cotswold craftsmen, having written several standard texts on the subject. As RFS members we felt the need to feel and touch and, after sending out for the white gloves, Mary was allowed to extract a chair by Gardener (Gimson's first assistant chair maker) from behind the exhibition barrier while eager onlookers helped find the stamped name - on the inside of the rocker, just for the record!

Although mainly concentrating on interior decoration and the design of furniture, wrought iron, plasterwork and so on, Gimson also used his architectural training to design a country retreat just outside Leicester for one of his brothers. This cottage, Stoneywell, is still lived in by Ernest Gimson's great nephew Don Gimson and, apart from the thatch lost in a fire and replaced by slates, it remains essentially unaltered. But before arriving in the rural tranquillity of Charnwood Forest we were treated to a private tour by Ernie Miller of the Hazlerigg Halls of residence at Loughborough University.

After Ernest Gimson's untimely death in 1919 his foreman Peter Waals and his partner's son Edward Barnsley carried on the furniture-making tradition in their own workshops, but also for a period as woodworking design tutors at Loughborough College. This was a centre for the training of handicraft teachers for the whole of the UK and in the 1930s first Waals and then Barnsley were hired as advisers for the teaching of design and cabinet making. They supervised students making a wide range of furniture to Waals' and Barnsley's designs, including tables and chairs for the college dining hall and wardrobes and desks for the students' bedrooms. The latter were occupied until very recently by students, as we found to our amusement from the graffiti inside the desk drawers when we examined the construction. It seems that both students and the college authorities were ignorant of the significance of these craftsman-designed fittings until they were brought to their attention through the recent efforts of Ernie Miller: he is passionate about recording and preserving the footprint of the Cotswolds craftsmen at Loughborough College and we were delighted to have his guidance on our visit.

To return to Charnwood Forest, perhaps the highlight of the day was the privilege of being invited inside Stoneywell cottage by Don Gimson. He gave a talk about its history and origins, followed by a personal tour. The whole atmosphere of the cottage interior with its original furniture and fittings, its delightful rural setting on an outcrop of rock and, above all, the charisma of Ernest Gimson's great nephew, gave us a visit to remember.

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