

## **Stoneywell and the Gimson**

This was one of the best attended meetings the Woodhouse & Woodhouse Eaves Local History Group have ever had. Mark's subject was not only truly local, but was also current because Stoneywell Cottage in Ulverscroft has only recently been opened to the public.

Central to his theme was the fact that Ernest Gimson and various members of his family played a significant role in the Arts and Crafts Movement, which in turn had a profound impact upon virtually every aspect of design in the later 19th and early 20th centuries. Thus we learned how Ernest Gimson was strongly influenced by William Morris, but then went on to develop his own ideas. We saw numerous examples of his work in furniture design, metalwork, interior decoration and architecture.

Central to the philosophy of the Arts and Crafts Movement was the idea that those who designed should also be able to make. Here Stoneywell has a great deal to offer, as Mark Temple showed, because it still contains much of the original furniture designed by Ernest Gimson and his colleagues.

Mark not only gave us the story of Ernest, his career and his family, but also the story of Stoneywell. This was accompanied by a remarkable series of photographs, showing the site before building began, continuing through architecture drawings, construction, how the house was lived in, how it was almost lost in a fire, how it was entrusted to the National Trust, and how it has been made into the visitor attraction it is today.

Nor did we only get Stoneywell Cottage: Mark also put this house – or summer residence as it should more accurately be called – into its surroundings. He gave us the story of neighbouring houses which date from the same period, even mentioning how the construction of Stoneywell inadvertently extended several feet over the property boundary, necessitating the purchase of some of "next door's garden". In fact one of the most interesting aspects of Mark's talk concerned the occasionally amusing mistakes made by the designers, builders and craftsmen who were responsible for Stoneywell.

This was no uncritical song of praise to the Arts and Crafts Movement. Its foibles and failures ranged from exceptionally draughty doors to insoluble problems of rising damp and smokey fireplaces, to access between floors only by means of ladders. Ernest Gimson and his colleagues in the Arts and Crafts Movement were true pioneers who did not always get things right, but who nevertheless had a profound impact upon aesthetic ideas in this country. They even played a part in the early years of design teaching in what is now Loughborough University.

David Nicolle