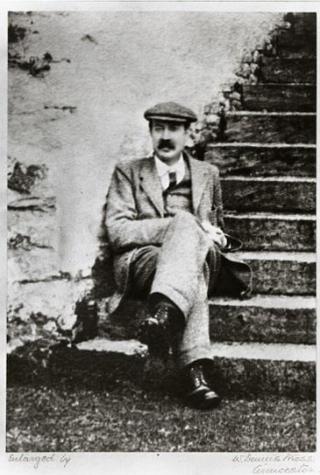


ARTS AND CRAFTS MOVEMENT: ERNEST GIMSON



Ernest Gimson was born in Leicester in 1864, the son of an engineer. He grew up playing in the countryside near Leicester, sketching plants and animals. His sister records that he used to buy owls and jackdaws sold as pets and setting them free. He was articled to a Leicester architect, Isaac Barradale, in 1881, aged 17, and also attended classes at the Leicester School of Art.

In 1884 he had the opportunity to meet a hero of his: William Morris. Morris was giving a lecture on 'Art and Socialism' at the Leicester Secular Society, of which Gimson and most of his family were members, and he was to stay in the Gimson household. Morris stayed up talking to the young men until two in the

morning, and was obviously impressed with Ernest as he later provided him with three letters of introduction to London architects, including JD Sedding.

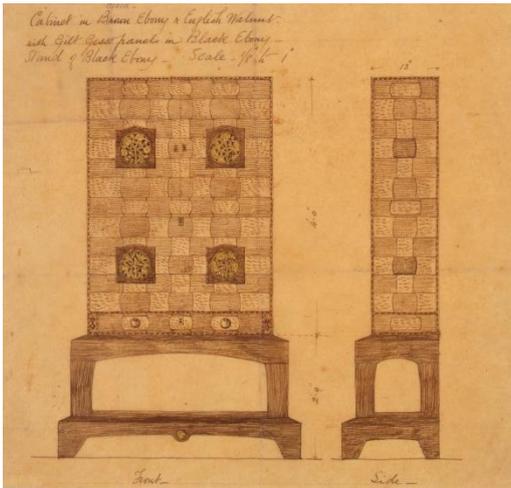
Life in London

Gimson moved to London to work at Sedding's practice in 1886. Gimson was soon involved in the growing Arts and Crafts scene. His friends were the young architects from those offices, particularly Ernest and Sidney Barnsley, Alfred Powell, Robert Weir Schultz, WR Lethaby and Detmar Blow. He started designing embroidery, and trained with professionals in chair bodging and decorative plaster making. In 1890, he and some of these friends founded Kenton & Co. to design furniture of the best design and workmanship. The designs that Gimson and Sidney Barnsley made were to form the styles that they would use for the rest of their lives. It was a short-lived business, but provided the impetus for Gimson and Sidney Barnsley to start looking for a place in the country where they could not only design but make furniture and other crafts.



Kenton and Co. chair designed by Gimson and made by Bowen, London, 1890–1892.

Gimson in the Cotswolds



In 1893 Ernest Gimson, Sidney Barnsley and Ernest Barnsley moved to the Cotswolds. They first rented houses at Ewen, near Cirencester, but in 1894 they were able to move to Pinbury Park, owned by Lord Bathurst, a major landowner in the Cirencester area. Lord Bathurst was sympathetic to their aims, and they paid a repairing rent, doing up the house and outbuildings for their use. At first, they shared a workshop, with Gimson making chairs and decorative plaster.

In 1900, Gimson and Ernest Barnsley went into partnership setting up a second workshop and employing experienced cabinet makers including Peter Waals and Harry Davoll to make up their furniture designs. Gimson took sole control of the business from about 1903, and would continue designing furniture for the rest of his life. The three men and their families moved to the village of Sapperton the same year, in houses they had designed and built themselves. After the move to Sapperton he opened showrooms at Daneway House and a workshop in the outbuildings. He also set up a smithy in Sapperton and with Edward Gardiner a chair making business at Daneway. Gimson continued as an architect throughout his life, although he didn't build many buildings, he is recognised as one of the foremost architects of the Arts and Crafts period.

Gimson's life in Gloucestershire

Gimson threw himself into country life, so much so that by the end of his life he hated having to go to a city. He took part in amateur dramatics and helped revive the folk songs and dances of the village. He hoped to develop the craft community, but his plans were cut short by the First World War and his subsequent final illness. However, artists and craftspeople continued to move to area after his death in 1919, and it is still a lively area for artists and makers to this day.



To find out more about the Arts and Crafts collection and archives held by the museum contact: The Wilson, Cheltenham's art gallery and museum, Clarence Street, Cheltenham GL50 3JT.

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