

Lord Armstrong



Why did Lord Armstrong embrace electric lighting?

The Butler



Why do you think the butler was excited by electricity?

I am William Armstrong, and I live in Cragside, near Newcastle. I am a Victorian industrialist, and there were a few reasons why I embraced electricity. Firstly, I realised I could use water power to light my house. This is called 'hydroelectricity'. Hydroelectricity is important because it is a renewable energy source. I want to use renewable energy sources because I believe that using coal is very wasteful. I am worried that we will run out of it! That is why I use water to power the electricity at Cragside: because this is more sustainable.

As part of my business I entertain a lot of guests at Cragside, including royalty, and important politicians. This means it is an advantage to have an impressive house to show off to them, with all the latest technological advances. Having electricity is very impressive and modern, and this is good for business. Using electricity is also very practical: it allows me to have a fire alarm in my house. I also have electrical gongs to call people for dinner. Cragside is so big it is difficult to hear when dinner is ready otherwise!

I am the butler at Cragside. I am the head servant, which means I am responsible for making sure that the house runs smoothly. I am excited by electricity because, although only rich people can use it at the moment, I hope everyone will have it in the future. I know that it can be dangerous but I think it is safer than having lots of candles which can cause fires! Now that we have an electric fire alarm in Cragside, electricity can even help us to prevent fires.

It's also my job to make sure that we have enough electricity when we want to turn on a lot of lights in the house – for example for a dinner party with important guests. To do this I use a special telephone in my Pantry to ring the Power House. That's the separate building nearby where the electricity is generated. I tell the man in charge of the generator to supply more electricity to the house. Not many people get to use telephones at the moment, so that is exciting as well!

Princess Alexandra



Why was Lord Armstrong happy when she visited Cragside with her family?

The Maid



Why do you think the maid was afraid of electricity?

I am Alexandra, Princess of Wales. One day my husband Edward will be King of the United Kingdom. We once came with our family to visit Cragside soon after Lord Armstrong installed electric lights. He was happy because he could show off his beautiful home and all his modern electrical technologies, like the lights and the electric buttons which we could press to summon a servant. He was very proud that we came to stay with him because we are royalty, and very important, and this meant a lot for Lord Armstrong's social status. It was a good opportunity for him.

Lord Armstrong had several new rooms built just for our visit, and he had some lovely new lights. Electric lights can be very bright, and make me look very pale, but I do think they are very pretty. However, it was not all good: I got an electric shock from a light switch and I burnt my finger! This was not widely known, as it would not have been good for Lord Armstrong if everybody knew I had been hurt, even just a little bit, in his house!

I am one of the maids at Cragside, which means that I have to do what everyone else tells me! I clean the house, polish the silver, and help in the kitchen. I am afraid of electricity because I don't understand what it is. It is very strange and mysterious, and I can't see how it makes things work. There are lots of wires around the house now, and it makes me uncomfortable. I know that people have been hurt by electricity, and it is often servants like me who are at risk!

Electricity has also made my job easier though. Electric lights are cleaner than candles and lamps, which gave off soot and smoke. They made the wallpaper dirty, and turned the nice white ceilings black! So now there's less cleaning for me. But it also means that the boy who used to be in charge of changing the candles and cleaning the lamps has been fired, because there isn't enough for him to do anymore. With all this electricity around, I'm worried I might be out of a job soon as well!