

Hampshire Antique Restoration

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CONDITION REPORT AND TREATMENT PROPOSAL

OBJECT: Mid 17th Century Italian Walnut Armchair

OBJECT NUMBER: 2343-08-F

OWNER:

DATE RECEIVED: 16/01/2007

CONSERVATOR: David Burton

DATE EXAMINED: 16/01/2007

DIMENSIONS

H:

W:

D:

DESCRIPTION:

A mid 17th century Italian / Spanish walnut open armchair.

The chair has a square section walnut frame turned arm supports of cheeked construction beneath the flat wide arms. The front legs are joined by a pair of symmetrical spiral twist turned stretchers. The front and rear legs are connected by stretchers serving as feet. These "foot stretchers" are shaped on the underside to form scroll feet at the front.



The seat rails and planked seat base are constructed from populus pp – by eye – with the seat boards held in place by clout nails contemporary with a 17th century manufacture. The chair is joined by mortice and tenon joints – with some riven walnut pegging securing the joints as one would expect at this date.

There is evidence of earlier silk upholstery, in places supported by cardboard beneath the present red velvet stuffed with straw and flock seat stuffing.

The chair is surmounted by a pair of cartouche carved finials at the top of the rear stiles, secured with loose dovetail cleats.

CONDITION:

The red velvet upholstery is a relatively recent replacement and is edged with a modern red fringing. The chair has had some significant structural repairs in the past.

The PR rear stile has had a scarfed splice let in where the PR seat rail joins the stile, and a section of the PR arm around 11cm long has been spliced in to the PR arm where it meets the stile. The PR turned arm support

has had a previous – probably dowelled – repair, which is loose and unstable.

There is evidence of extensive common furniture beetle damage to the item, especially the front legs and both feet rails, which are extensively weakened eroded and pitted with flight holes. All of this previous infestation appears to be dormant. Stopping wax has been used to previously fill the flight holes – a large amount of which is now missing.

The gilded finials at the top of both rear stiles show evidence of extensive alteration. At some point they were removed from the chair with a saw – probably after some damage had occurred to them. They were then reconstructed with approximately 20% of the original retained and new walnut applied around it. At the same time a small ogee moulding was added as a lower collar to the finial – probably to allow the re-upholstery to continue up to the top of the rear stiles. The new timber was then carved, gessoed, boled, gilded and toned to the finish we see now. Finally the finials were re-attached to the chair with loose dovetailed tenons let into the rear of the stiles, more recently secured with screws.

The upholstery is neither original nor in keeping with the piece, and will be replaced with close nailed leather upholstery.

The whole chair exhibits movement at all of the joints and is extremely unstable at present.

PROPOSED TREATMENT:

After careful dismantling the original joints will be cleaned of degraded old glue. The sections of frame weakened by common furniture beetle damage will be consolidated for strength and appearance and the whole chair re-assembled with walnut veneer packing used to eliminate the play in the mortice and tenon joints. The replacement upholstery will be applied with a conservation upholstery approach minimising further damage to the frame.

ESTIMATED COST:

ACCEPTED BY:
(SIGNATURE)

DATE:

Hampshire Antique Restoration

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TREATMENT REPORT

OBJECT: Mid 17th Century Italian Walnut Armchair

OBJECT NUMBER: 2343-08-F

OWNER:

DATE COMPLETED:

DESCRIPTION OF TREATMENT:

1. De-upholstery



The velvet covering was carefully removed, revealing the previously extant upholstery, fragments of which were found under the joint between arm and rear stile. Every nail was labelled and its corresponding hole marked. Finally all remaining tacks and degraded material fragments were collected and placed into a snap top bag for future retrieval.

2. Disassembly



The chair was disassembled using carefully applied force, and any small splits were repaired using hide glue.

3. Consolidation



After research it was decided to use Butvar 98 as a consolidant (see report). Damaged areas were treated with a 5% W/V solution (dissolved in IMS) at first then increasing to a 10% W/V solution. After drying Japanese tissue was glued into place with 10% Butvar 98 to act as physical barrier before casting in Bencon epoxy putty to replace existing losses.

4. Epoxy Casting



Epoxy putty was cast into place using acetate film to form the approximate shape; detailing was performed with carving chisels. The final colouring was done using shellac and earth pigments to minimise visual impairment.



Several areas of epoxy putty were cast into place where similar losses needed consolidation, the Butvar 98 proved very effective in strengthening timber reduced to frass by the woodworm damage.

6. Replace lower rear cross-member



The unsuitable birch cross-member was replaced using a section of walnut, screwed into place using the existing hole, and the final colouring was done using water stains, shellac and earth pigments (the old cross member can be seen on the left side photo, and on the seat in the RHS picture above).

7 Fit walnut foot



A walnut foot pad was fitted to level the chair, and evenly spread the load of the sitter; this was glued into place with hide glue. The final colouring was done using shellac and earth pigments to minimise visual impairment upon reinstallation.

8 Consolidate upper cross-member



An acetate strip was used to transfer existing upholstery tack hole locations to a prepared section of sycamore. This was back drilled and screwed into place to provide both a strengthener and a base for the replacement upholstery.