



Austin Friar

The Newsletter of The Furniture Makers' Company
No. 14 - Autumn 2014



Restoring a valued heritage – Windsor Chair story page 20



The Furniture Makers' Company
the furnishing industry's charity

Restoring a valued heritage

Experts restore original tables and chairs to their full glory

Golden Lane Estate

In the early 1960s, Sir Ralph Perring had recently become Lord Mayor of London and was involved in the early development of the Barbican area of the City of London, which includes the Golden Lane Estate. He was instrumental in establishing a community centre, known as the Ralph Perring Centre, within the Estate, to enable residents to meet and interact.

Golden Lane is very much the sister complex to the Barbican, with a shared history and similar architectural approach. Pre-dating the construction of The Barbican by 10-20 years, this 1950s housing estate was architects Chamberlin, Powell and Bon's initial project to renew this area of the City which had been almost obliterated by the Blitz during World War II.

Chairs and tables donated

At the time Sir Ralph was great friends with Lucian Ercolani, founder of Ercol Furniture, and when talking to him one day about the formation of the Centre, Lucian offered to provide tables and chairs from Ercol's Windsor Collection as a gift.



The Sir Ralph Perring Centre today

Today, 50 years later, the Sir Ralph Perring Centre is alive and well, fulfilling the same purpose of providing a warm, clean and flexible meeting space for all manner of groups and activities for residents on the Estate.

However earlier this year, after so many years of constant use, the furniture had reached the stage where it needed attention. While it could so easily have all been replaced with new pieces, in truth the furniture was still robust, the wood still beautiful and the mid-century design still highly relevant.

Restoration over replacement

Sir Ralph's son, Sir John Perring suggested having the pieces restored to bring them into the 21st century and offered to sponsor it. "The beauty of solid wood

furniture fully justifies restoration over replacement," said Sir John. "After 50 years hard use this furniture looks as good as the day it was first installed and fit for another 50 years."



Structure of meeting tables

Expert conservation

Restoration expert Ludovic Potts, who has worked with Ercol for many years as well as on many major conservation and restoration projects, took on the task, part funded by Sir John and part from his own



Edward Tadros of Ercol with Sir John Perring and an original Windsor chair

company. "The project involved removal of all the original finish down to the bare frame, full structural repairs throughout, and applying splices using reclaimed matching timber (beech wood and elm) to retain all the original chairs and tables.



Two of the restored chairs

Restoration team

"The furniture was re-finished in the traditional style, followed by hand waxing. A team of five restorers carried out the work, with our latest trainee Thomas Holmes, the youngest member of the team, fully involved."

The end result is stunning – original English elm, now gone forever from our woodlands, restored to its full glory across a range of chairs and tables.



An original English elm table



Stuart Shearman of Ercol Furniture, Ludovic Potts, Sir John Perring, and Edward Tadros of Ercol Furniture

Fine fabrics

Edward Tadros, grandson of Lucian Ercolani and Chairman of Ercol Furniture Limited, provided new cushions in a fine fabric from their current range for the chairs.



New upholstery for all chairs

He said, "Ercol is really delighted to be involved in this project to restore our furniture after more than 50 years of regular use in the Ralph Perring Club. I am sure that it will now provide many more happy years of use."

The lucky residents of the Golden Lane Estate now have a gleaming set of Ercol furniture for many events and activities to come. You can't ask for better value than that!