

# Reminiscences of working with Edward Barnsley

Edward Storey became a student of Edward Barnsley at Loughborough Teacher Training College 65 years ago and remained a life-long admirer of his work and methods. Later, as a tutor at Goldsmiths College for 25 years, he ensured that his students appreciated Barnsley's work and were aware of his place in the arts & crafts movement. The following notes were to have been read at our Cheltenham conference.

There are two distinct strands to Edward Barnsley's work. The first was when he was a pupil with Geoffrey Lupton in the Froxfield workshops and then when he took over the workshops and was joined by Bert Upton, a youngster of 14. Over the next 15 years the firm was producing fine furniture. The second phase of Edward's work was when he took over from Peter Waals as adviser in design and construction at Loughborough Teacher Training College. He was able, over the years, to influence many future handicraft teachers, ensuring his own reputation as a designer.

I was one of Edward's Loughborough students and worked with him for three years, but the final diploma year was taken post-war, when our small group of eight received very personal attention. Edward's technique for teaching design seemed to be to allow each of us to sketch an idea and then to sit alongside each of us in turn and, with his pencil, 'doctor' our ideas by adjusting proportion, adding an ovolo and chamfer here and there to rails and stretchers, to offer alternative panel features and even to include stringing until,

lo and behold, each of us had a 'Barnsley' piece of which we were proud!

I was hopeless with freehand drawing, but as we sat in the refectory one day Edward gave me a task to practise my lack of pencil skills. On the reverse of the menu he sketched the outline of an 18th century candle-holder he had recently admired. He took a pencil in each hand and sketched from top to base in a single stroke, using both hands - both sides beautifully matching. Why didn't I hang onto that menu?

One thing that always intrigued me was how Edward managed to get those interesting grain patterns on many of the panels in his work. Again, over a cup of tea I got the inside story. His account remained in my notebook until many years later I was able to find just the timber he suggested. 'First look for a tree with a branch that forks from the main stem. You merely take that section and slice vertically. Select and cut your panel but reverse bottom to top when you eventually use it.' Several years ago I found about 10 of these forks in an old timber yard in Norfolk. I bought a couple and did as I had been instructed probably 40 years previously!

Barnsley's design teaching techniques included scale drawings and working details. He was scrupulous in

determining material thickness and his technique was to produce an eighth scale orthographic drawing which, he maintained, gave the correct proportion as if looking at an object from 12 feet away. In consequence we always used a rule held vertically at

arm's length to check sizes. For example,  $\frac{1}{16}$  in. on the rule equals  $\frac{1}{2}$  in., or  $\frac{3}{8}$  in. on the model 12 feet away. Try it out - it works! Only when we had drawn our one-eighth scale



Fig 1. Inside view of Edward Storey's cabinet.



Fig 2. A small cabinet in walnut, made by Edward Storey following Edward Barnsley's principles.

with instruments were we free to produce our full-size detailed drawings.

At this stage Cecil Gough would be brought in for guidance. Cecil had come to help in this work after making several prototype designs for Gordon Russell in Broadway. Cecil was a remarkable craftsman and his influence at Loughborough and his work with Barnsley should not be forgotten. I owe a special debt to Cecil, who tutored me through all the City & Guilds cabinet-making exams over the following few years.

At Loughborough, Barnsley continued Waals's work, advising on design for furniture for the college offices as well as for students' study bedrooms. These items were made up in the college's cabinet workshops which were quite distinct from the teacher training workshops. What is probably not widely known is that all handicraft students spent a considerable amount of time in the special cabinet workshops as an essential part of their training. A normal working day was from 8.30am to 5pm, with a break of one hour for lunch. We all made such things as chests of drawers, study tables with drawers, chairs and bed ends, under the supervision of professional cabinet makers. All materials were provided by the college and prepared to size by the apprentices who also helped with assembly, gluing up and so on.

In our final diploma year one day per week was spent on special college items, many of which were then donated by the college to visiting VIPs. Many of these pieces were designed by Edward, who took great interest

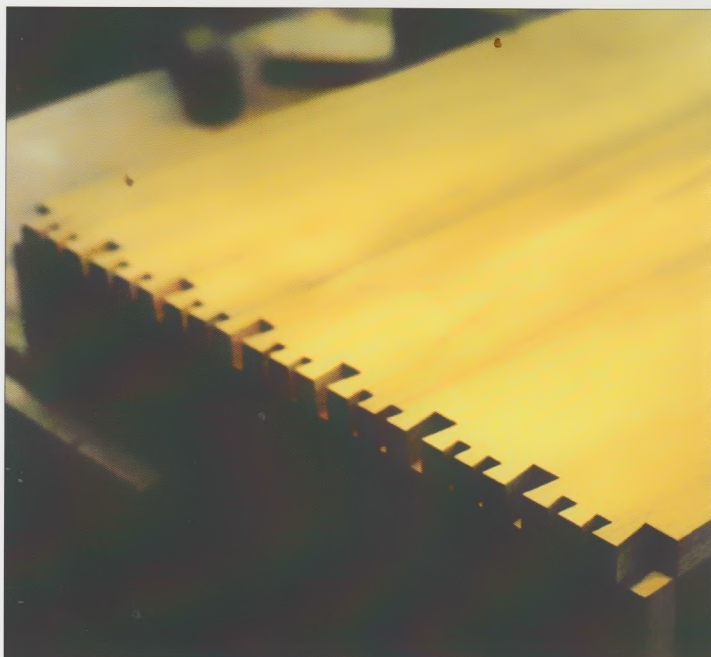


Fig 3. Edward Barnsley's favoured decorative dovetailing.

in different ideas that we were trying out for him. Using students for this kind of work was eventually stopped, but those of us who had experienced the practice were happy to work with fine timber and with expert tuition at no cost to ourselves.

The handicraft workshops at Loughborough, as opposed to the cabinet workshops, were quite separate, and under the supervision of qualified tutoring staff with the help of advisers such as Barnsley for design and Cecil Gough for construction. All materials for our personal projects here were billed to us individually. One of Edward's main concerns was to ensure skilled workmanship and to this end we were always encouraged to show jointing techniques. These became a benchmark of honesty in construction as far as he was concerned. But of course, it ensured that we were kept up to the mark!

At his own workshop he saw the greatest skill from Herbert Upton and others so he knew what was wanted. Later in life his work did conceal construction, but 'if you stop your tenons you really should ensure they are foxed.' At one of our tea breaks he suggested to me that the ultimate honesty combined with embellishment showed well in a decorative dovetail which he sketched on another menu. Somehow English walnut seemed to be the ideal timber and for no other reason than to satisfy my interest years later, I chose a two-drawer cabinet to try it out. It was a really satisfying project, but photos do not do justice to the work involved.

*Edward Storey*