

R. W. P. LUFF – A BRIEF OBITUARY

Members of the Society were saddened to hear of the death last September of Richard Luff, whom many will remember from his visit to Trouthouse in October 1992, when he delivered a fascinating illustrated talk on the philosophy of furniture restoration, as practised by his erstwhile collaborator Sam Wolsey, the renowned antique dealer and oak furniture specialist.

The firm of S.W. Wolsey had stood almost alone as early furniture specialists in their premises in Buckingham Gate from the Thirties until the mid-Sixties. In the years after the Second World War they continued to promote pre-18th century furniture and works of art in the face of a crashing lack of interest from the majority of collectors and museums. Through most of these years, Wolsey had given much assistance to the furniture historian Robert Wemyss Symonds, who made copious use of Wolsey's photographs to illustrate his pioneering magazine articles. In many ways, Dick Luff succeeded to this position following Symonds' death in 1958.

Luff's obituary in *'The Times'* of November 1st 1993 made it clear that, almost unknown to the furniture history world, his career took place primarily in corporate property management. He was a founder member in 1977, and Master in 1985 of the Worshipful Company of Chartered Surveyors; and acted at different times on behalf of Middlesex County Council, the GLC, the City of London, British Telecom, the Commission for New Towns, the London Housing Standards Company and other bodies. He was a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.

Despite his broad range of articles in the Antique press, most of us will know best his book *'The Age of the Joiner'* (pub. Arthur Baker), which appeared in 1968 and played its part in re-kindling an interest in early furniture amongst a new generation of young dealers, collectors and curators, myself included. Wolsey is credited with co-authorship of the book, and it is clear that his firm supplied the photographs and a proportion of the research for the book.

At Trouthouse we were shown a range of slides taken before, during and after the repair of a variety of pieces in the Wolsey workshops, especially upholstered seat furniture. I personally found Dick's lecture extremely interesting, and hope his exposition of the subject might yet provoke a wider discussion. As yet there seems to have been too little informed public debate in this country on the philosophical problems of furniture restoration and conservation. The subject has certainly been raised amongst our American colleagues (where museums and collectors take some very positive lines), and specific views are adopted by English Heritage and SPAB in the sphere of historic buildings; but the furniture lobby has been remarkably silent. Wolsey's legacy of photographs are vital to that debate, and it is our loss that Dick Luff is no longer here to guide us around them. His collection has now found its way to Temple Newsam, from where it is hoped that their easy availability will serve to inform our discussion.

Victor Chinnery