

FURNITURE RESTORATION – ETHICS AND PRACTICES

In a recent Newsletter (No. 20 Spring 1994), Victor Chinnery, in his obituary to the late R. W. P. Luff, recalled the interesting lecture on restoration that Mr. Luff gave to RFS members at the Trouthouse, and hoped that 'his exposition of the subject might yet provoke wider discussion'. Luff's lecture, illustrated with slides of various items restored in the Wolsey workshop, was based on four principles, which I noted at the time, as follows:

1. If a piece is of real historic value, exhibiting the styles and skills of its time, and is preserved for public view, *no restoration is permissible* other than work necessary to conserve it.

2. If a piece is rare but not historic, *restoration is permissible*, but do not invent new parts etc. (the Victorians were notorious for doing this).

3. Unless previous restoration is clearly unacceptable, do not try to improve on it.

4. Let restoration blend in, but do not create distressed wood. Allow time to do this as part of the history of the piece.

In general, Luff argued, no one expects us not to repair, conserve and restore historic buildings, so why not the furniture, which we use as we use houses? *Honest wear and tear and necessary repairs are acceptable, but faking is not.*

These principles can hardly stir much dissent among our curator/conservator members, but many restorers are under commercial pressures, especially perhaps where items 3. and 4. are concerned. There is a need to examine current philosophies in these matters, and it is surely appropriate that our Society should take a lead in debating them and giving its own guidelines in this very important and diverse field.

In order to start this off, may I suggest that **every RFS member who is a practising restorer** should consider them and send in opinions, however brief, on each of the numbered items, as soon as possible, to our editor? The collated opinions could then appear in our next newsletter. They would give a valuable insight into current practices and feelings, and give valuable guidance to the Society in formulating future events concerned with them.