

TIMBER FINISHES

French polished furniture should be cleaned with a soft damp cloth and dried with a lint-free cloth. Treat the surface each year with an approved burnishing agent: Wattyl burnisher, crystal veneer or similar product.

Retain the original finish wherever possible. Where a French polished finish is beyond preservation, it should be removed with an approved preparation. Avoid preparations containing sodium hydroxide, as this may cause permanent damage.



Large items should be retained in their intended form
The loss of both base and doors has greatly reduced the value of this bookcase

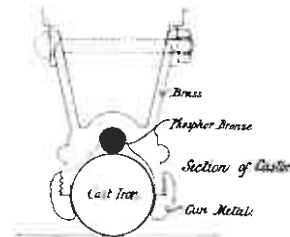
Be extremely careful when removing old finishes. Definition can be lost through scraping, sanding, or filling in the grain, so use softer tools such as stiff-bristled nail brushes, toothbrushes, wire wool and toothpicks. Scrapers should be made of wood rather than metal. This minimises the danger of knocking off corners or denting curves in carved timber.

Note: Orbital sanders, belt sanders and sanding discs should never be used in the fine sanding of furniture. These instruments leave scratches that are invisible until the finish has been applied.

Once the old finish has been removed, the item should be either French polished, waxed or oiled. Spirit varnishes and polyurethane should not be used. Polyurethane finishes need frequent replacement and cannot be successfully removed from intricate mouldings.

FITTINGS

Castors will wear out or break after extended use. Fortunately, such fittings are easily replaced. Many significant chairs have been severely damaged by failure to carry out proper repairs. When the front castors failed, they were removed, and the back legs cut down to level the chair. These chairs are now too short to be used at most desks and tables.



Drawing: Castor Section

ADAPTATION

Remember that each piece of historic furniture is an individual item. Never separate components or 'mix and match'. Large items such as bookcases and cabinets should be retained in their intended form – do not separate top from base, remove doors or cappings, or make any other modifications.

If extensions or additions are made to fixed furniture, (e.g. judge's benches), ensure that the *addition*, rather than the original item, is compromised. Detail the addition to accommodate moulds and skirtings rather than remove chunks of bolection moulding or achitrave.

FOR INFORMATION

The Historic Buildings Branch offers a complete advisory service for repair, restoration and maintenance problems.

Artisans from the Construction Group provide the restoration expertise to complement these architectural services.



An artisan from the Ministry's restoration team at work

For further assistance, please phone (03) 651 1571 or write to

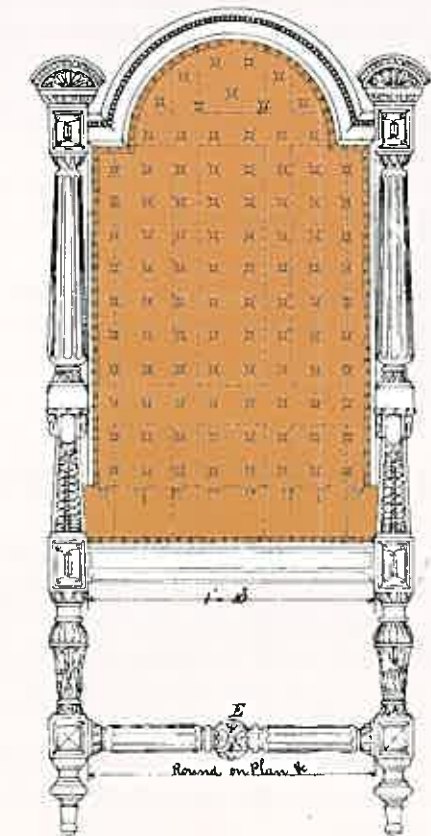
The Historic Buildings Branch Manager
Ministry of Housing and Construction
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CARING

FOR

HISTORIC

FURNITURE



IN PUBLIC BUILDINGS

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VICT



Many of Victoria's older public buildings retain their original furniture. These items are often still functional, despite a century of use. Timely repairs, regular maintenance and appropriate restoration will keep them in service for many years to come; complementing our historic buildings and conserving Victoria's heritage.



Glass-fronted Cedar Bookcase

'Historic' furniture refers to both nineteenth and twentieth century items, and may include arm-chairs, desks, tables, chairs, shelves and fitted joinery, chaises longue and bookcases. Also notable are the complete sets of furniture, especially courthouses. This furniture cannot be replaced through antique shops or other commercial sources.

This pamphlet is a guide to general maintenance and does not deal with complex repair and restoration problems.

GENERAL MAINTENANCE

Protect furniture from heat. Use blinds or curtains on windows, and be careful not to place furniture too close to heaters.

Moisture will also damage historic furniture. Polished surfaces bloom and flake; leather cracks and weakens. Keep furniture away from damp areas and wipe off moisture with a damp cloth as soon as it is detected.

UPHOLSTERY

Leather upholstery can be cleaned with a diluted solution of liquid wool washing detergent in warm water. Treat with a leather preservative at least once a year.

Webbing should be checked regularly to ensure that it is secure. This will prevent accidents and reduce stress on timber members and related joints.

Reupholstering is necessary when the existing fabric deteriorates and becomes unserviceable. This is a specialist craft and should only be carried out by trained upholsterers. The historic significance and value of an item can be greatly reduced if new work fails to match the original in fabric quality and workmanship.



Magistrates' Chair, Victorian Period

Try to match new fabric as closely as possible to the original. Check for evidence of original colour by closely inspecting stripped furniture. Marks left by earlier fixings should provide some clues. Match studs and braiding to the original fabric.

Authentic materials should be used as extensively as possible. For example, furniture should be re-stuffed with horsehair, available from specialist outlets. Upholstery tacks should be used instead of staples. This may not be practical where the timber is already heavily perforated by previous tack holes. If this is the case, tacks should be used in attaching the fabric and staples used for webbing, hessian and calico.



Horseshoe Back Smokers' Chair



Gentleman's Tub Chair



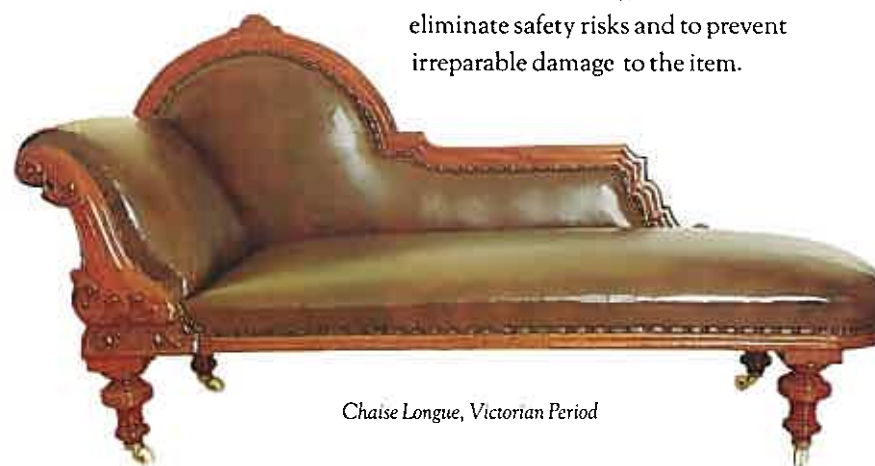
Edwardian Dining Chair



Balloon Back Chair

LOOSE AND BROKEN JOINTS

Regular inspection will identify loose or broken joints. Withdraw such furniture from use immediately, in order to eliminate safety risks and to prevent irreparable damage to the item.



Chaise Longue, Victorian Period



Inappropriate repairs may cause permanent damage

Re-glueing is best done by a specialist artisan. If you intend to carry out this work yourself, be sure to observe these points:

- use an animal-based or other approved glue
- remove all the old glue first
- square up all members and provide protective pads between clamps and timber surfaces
- clean off excess glue before it dries, or timber finishes will not adhere to the glued area

Support blocks in the base of chairs and beneath tables should be checked for stability. It may be necessary to provide support blocks by discreetly attaching triangular or rectangular blocks with glue and screws behind joints that are submitted to pressure (e.g. chair legs). Make sure that screws do not come through the front of the timber surface.

Avoid using nails wherever possible.

INSECT DAMAGE

Furniture should be regularly inspected for signs of insect attack. Termites, commonly known as white ants, are capable of causing serious damage to timber. Close inspection is necessary, as termites tend to eat timber from the inside, giving little outward sign of their presence. Arrange immediate treatment if signs of termite attack are observed.