

## Bert Chapman joins in the 'tacks or staples?' controversy

To many people the use of staples in antique furniture is unthinkable. But one upholsterer and restorer who advocates their use at every stage is Bert Chapman, MBE. Writing in The British Antique Furniture Restorers' Association (BAFRA) Newsletter on the 'tacks or staples?' controversy, he explains why he is in favour of staples and is not of the school of thought that would only use tacks. Provided he can gain the acquiescence of the client, he advocates the use of staples at every stage of the re-upholstery process.

Firstly, he says, staples cause much less damage to the frame which is the most important part of a chair. He gives three reasons:

1. Two tiny pinholes
2. One hit and they are home
3. Because the staple gun is placed in position before firing, there can be no damage to the gilded or polished show wood.

Secondly, staples can be easily removed and he cites two examples:

1. By hand using a staple remover and pliers - no jarring of the frame by the use of mallet and chisel.
2. Placing well-spaced staples at an angle, the staple remover can be inserted without damaging the show wood.

The 'least damage to the frame' is one of the five principals which make up the criteria an upholsterer should adopt according to Bert Chapman who was awarded the MBE in 1986 for his services to the trade. The other principals are the wishes of the client, a pictorial record of the treatment, the reinstatement of the piece with any original stuffing preserved and ensuring the profiles of the upholstery accord with the style of the piece.

"Having recorded instructions from the client, and before commencement of any work, it is of the utmost importance that the chair is photographed from all angles for future reference and as part of the 'before and after' record", he says. The removal of each layer of cover should be photographed and the sequence of the covers carefully recorded and retained. Each layer of upholstery must also be photographed with particular attention to the manner of the stitching. The type of webbing and colour can also be significant and must be photographed, says Bert who is a former president of the Association of Master Upholsters.

"At this stage, it is easy to discern whether or not the upholstery is the original by the number of tack holes in the frame. More often than not, the tacking section of the rails are full of tack holes and are dry and brittle, but nevertheless, there may still be parts of the stuffing that are original and worth preserving in the restored piece. The frame is the most important part of the chair and the tacking sections of the rails are generally in poor condition and need treatment before re-upholstery can commence. Whether the tacking section of the rail is replaced or built up with sawdust and glue is a decision that needs to be taken in consultation with, or undertaken by a competent furniture restorer."

The British Antique Furniture Restorers Association, BAFRA, founded in 1979, has become widely acknowledged as the authority on furniture conservation and restoration. Members are chosen for their artistic skills as well as their competence as craftsmen, conservators, furniture historians and professional people, like upholsterers.

For further details on the 'tacks or staples?' controversy, contact Bert Chapman on 01707 652932.



*A single blow of the stapler and the fine pins of the staples are driven home with less damage to the frame.*



*Staples sparingly used placed at an angle for ease of removal.*



*Use of staple remover to enable staples to be taken out without damage to the frame. Particularly important for gilded chairs.*