

Summary

The demand for individually designed bespoke furniture continues at a high level. Enquiries and commissions undertaken for large scale and multiple items seems to be the theme running at the moment, with construction taking several months to complete for those orders placed.

The previous twelve months then have been extremely busy, fruitful and diverse. In addition to designing and making the furniture for private clients and the church, a wide range of events and exhibitions has required attendance, the delivering of talks to groups and societies, and also offering consultancy and presentations to churches has meant much travelling. During the course of the year, I have been appointed to the Liturgy and Furnishings Advisory Group at the Cathedral Fabric Commission for England (CFCE).

Enquiries for a rich and diverse range of items ranging from doors, screens, drinks and storage cabinets, sideboards, tables of various sizes, lecterns and church chairs have all been accommodated by site or home visits, design work and costings.

Perhaps the most unusual item to have been constructed in the workshop this year has been a windlass roller with bearing blocks for a water well in France. Of considerable diameter and length, it presented a number of technical challenges, one being that it was constructed without the use of a lathe. One aspect of the business I particularly like is the challenge of the unusual, then seeking a solution. It means the comfort zone is kept at bay and adds to a great store of experience and expertise.

Of some note this year, simply because it is unusual, has been the number and value of sales from both workshop and exhibition stand. There were sales recorded at every show during the year, leaving display stock at a low level. As a consequence, visitors to my stand this year can expect to see new work and designs.



Lincoln Cathedral

Designs and scale models for the furniture for St Hugh's Chapel at Lincoln Cathedral have now been prepared and were presented to the reordering committee earlier this

year. The proposals which included the altar, lectern, president's chair, seating for the congregation, a credence table and book shelving will be put before the Dean and Chapter of the Cathedral as the next stage in the approvals process.

Located directly beneath the huge East Window, St Hugh's Chapel is the largest, most complex and ornate space I have worked with to date. Whilst the furniture must take account of and respond to the building and its history, it must nevertheless serve the liturgical purposes of the Cathedral and be of human scale.

The concept behind the design of the altar and integral to its very construction is Christian symbolism which is then abstracted to such a degree that only the effort of close inspection will reveal the whole. The physical presence of the furniture is very simple, readily recognised and there is a comfort in that, but within it lies a complexity.

The deconstruction of trees into boards into components and subsequent reconstruction into furniture giving the tree new life is a physical aspect of my daily life and representative of the ebb and flow of life for all of us. Here it is visually apparent within each of the designs and delineated by the use of contrasting timbers, then containing also the notion that the collective is a stronger entity.

So far as the designs are concerned, a conscious effort is made to incorporate elements of the building and its contents along with the symbolism of St Hugh. The abstract elements of sound and time are integral, with sound being transient, time and its passage being a constant acts as a reminder of our own presence.



Leicester Museums Service

A few years ago, New Walk Museum in Leicester held an exhibition curated by Mary Greensted of the work of Ernest Gimson and other associated Arts and Crafts makers. Current makers working in the tradition were also represented, a blanket chest was commissioned from me



to be exhibited and form part of the important Arts and Crafts collection held at Leicester. Ongoing work by the museums service is to build an archive of film footage of traditional ways of making in a number of disciplines for display in its galleries and form part of the website content. Earlier in the year the cameras turned up to capture me in action and despite being filmed dry assembling a blanket chest, a piece very familiar to me, I think it is fair to say that it is unlikely that an Oscar will be awarded!

Speakers list

You may be aware that for some time now I have been delivering illustrated talks to groups and societies around the country. The two topics currently being delivered are:

1. *George Widdows*, first county architect of Derbyshire County Council, whose pioneering work with schools design was contrary to regulations and brought him into conflict with the Board of Education at national level.
2. *Designing Church Furniture*, based upon my current practice. More about my role in previous projects, with reference to the buildings and people concerned.

Both presentations are illustrated with a variety of media and can be tailored to suit the audience. They usually end with a lively Q and A session.

For bookings, enquiries and further details, please contact me by e-mail – nicholashobbsfurniture@yahoo.co.uk

Forthcoming commissions

Currently on the bench is a suite of eight dining chairs, a settle and a desk. Of course, with only one pair of hands, not all can be built simultaneously, and I constantly have to address issues of space, movement and cramping logistics. The dining chairs are constructed of no less than eighty separate curved components, so some time is spent each day on the laminating process and, rather than watch glue drying, I then revert to making up the desk and settle. These two items are for one customer and will be placed within the same room. The design themes common to both are further enhanced by using timber from the same stock of boards, which effectively provides continuity of grain and colour.



Further down the line includes a small nested table in ash, a display cabinet, sanctuary furniture including an altar for a church in Nottingham and an adjustable lectern. I have also been commissioned by a hospice in Derbyshire to produce a floor standing candlestick and table for their chapel.

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| 21 - 23 June 2013 | Craft and Design Experience Henley Showground Henley on Thames, Oxfordshire www.craftexperience.co.uk |
| 17 August 2013 | Ashbourne Show Polo Ground Osmaston, Derbyshire www.ashbourneshow.co.uk |
| 14 - 15 September 2013 | Melbourne Festival Art Trail Melbourne Derbyshire www.melbournefestival.co.uk |
| 21 - 22 September 2013 | Royal Berkshire Show Newbury Showground Newbury Berkshire www.berkshireshow.co.uk |
| 25 - 27 October 2013 | Craft in Focus Wellington College, Crowthorne, Berkshire www.craftinfocus.com |
| 29 - 30 January 2014 | Christian Resources East Peterborough Arena East of England Showground Peterborough www.creonline.co.uk |