

**The Arts Society Sussex
Summer Term Report, 2019 – Samuel Matthews**

Student Report

I feel that I have been extremely lucky to have been awarded the Scholarship from the Arts Society Sussex. With the generous funding I was given, it has allowed me to attend my first year at West Dean College and expand my knowledge for the furniture making and restoration career that I have chosen to pursue.

At the beginning of the year, I started off by creating tools to use on later projects such as the Veneer Hammer and Shooting Board. With the Veneer hammer I wanted to have a tool that was practical and aesthetically pleasing, so I carved my initials into the head of the tool and used ebony to cap on the end of the handle of the tool.

We have been on many trips out with the class to places of interest for style purposes and woodworking interest. We also visited Vienna in March for a week, where we visited many different museums and galleries and were also allowed access to workshops across Vienna. It was extremely inspiring to have such an in depth and action-packed visit to a country that I had never been to before and to be allowed to see furniture that I would never have been able to see otherwise.



The first main project I started at West Dean College was a Mahogany Travel Artist Easel that was inspired by a cheaply made, shop brought easel. My task was to develop the design and improve the quality of the overall product. I did this by redesigning the method that it was supported and how it closed, handmaking the components needed to create a quality finish. I worked with some of the students from the Antique Clock Restoration department, learning how to work brass to the dimensions and shapes I needed. One completed I applied a shellac finish and waxed the whole piece.

While at West Dean College I have attended many different short courses, some related to woodwork and some not so much. I have enjoyed all the short courses and learned huge amounts of

information, I have attended Woodcarving, Woodturning, Computer Aided Design (CAD), Advanced Furniture Making, Technical Drawing, Observational Sketching, Metal Finishing and Gilding short courses.



While on the Advanced Furniture Making short course with Bernard Allen, I made a Jewellery box with a hidden draw. It was made from Cherry and Black walnut and included a clock spring mechanism to work the hidden draw ejector. I had never made a hidden drawer in a piece of furniture before, so it was very interesting for me to work out the mechanism and the metalwork involved.

On the Blacksmithing short course with Andrew Smith I made two cranked wood chisel blades. I had never done Blacksmithing before and I found I really enjoyed it, this led to me joining the blacksmithing society which I shall be running from the beginning of next year. It was very interesting learning about how to work hot metal with only hand tools, and I found that even though the work I did that week was not directly related to wood work or conservation I could use the information in similar areas.



Probably the most complex and challenging short courses I have attended was the Gilding short course with Judy Wetherall. Throughout the week I learnt how to do Water and Oil Gilding and learnt about the different techniques used. It put into perspective how long and how much practice it would take to master them. We also learnt the basics of Gold leaf designs on a Japanned surface, the design I did for this was a Koi Carp which I found turned out very impressive and we also learned about how to pigment the gold leaf itself.



The next main project I made was a large chess table for oversized one-off chess pieces. I carved two dragons into the sides of the top that is made from cherry, it was very nice to carve giving a crisp edge and a wonderful grain structure. The chess board itself is made from black walnut and pippy maple veneer and the legs are sapele. The drawer is still in the making but it will be able to hold all of the unique chess pieces without them being damaged. I made a moulding that



is situated at the bottom of the side rails using a tool called a 'Flamstock', which I found very interesting to learn how to use as I had never used one before.

The final project I have been working on this year is a Mahogany Regency Trafalgar Chair that needed extreme restoration. When I received the chair all that was left were the back legs, top, middle and bottom rails, the front legs and side rails were all missing. After discussing it with my tutor we decided that I should restore the Mahogany to its original colour (due to it being sun bleached) and remake the side rails out of new Beech and the front legs out of Maple. This would allow easy recognition between the original parts of the chair in comparison to the new parts. I also remade the scratch mouldings around the base of the chair to follow the pattern.

If it wasn't for the generosity of the Arts Society Sussex I would never been able to attend my first year at West Dean College. When reflecting on this year I can see how much my confidence and skill in my work has increased, and how every day I've learnt a new important lesson or technique that would have been impossible to learn if I hadn't had the opportunity to study here. Thank you for investing in my future as a Furniture Maker/Restorer and allowing me to gain the knowledge to achieve my aims and dreams.

