

Carlo Bugatti “Marriage” corner chair



Conservation report and photographs

April to June 2012

fraus.co.uk





The chair that was collected from a private customer in Edinburgh, Scotland in April 2012, was a corner chair by Carlo Bugatti, dating from around 1905. The photograph on the

preceding page was taken before any work started. The following pages document the process of conservation.

The chair was made from a number of different materials, walnut, copper, pewter, brass, bone, calfskin vellum, cord and pine. The overall condition, considering its age, is very good. An examination revealed the joints to be sound and no signs of any woodworm damage were found. Some parts of the chair were in need of attention and these were noted and will appear later in the report. The most obvious of these were the cord attaching one of the medallions, and the seat which had previously been re-covered with vinyl, which was to be replaced with calfskin vellum.

The original estimate consisted of the initial assessments :

*Original estimate for the conservation of a Carlo Bugatti
"Marriage" corner chair.*

Breakdown of estimate :

Research the chair and maker.

Photograph the chair and make notes on condition, test joints for soundness.

Carefully clean chair using water only, more aggressive cleaning fluids only if necessary.

Photograph the chair again.

Remove the old vinyl from the drop in seat and discard.

Photograph the old upholstery.

Strip the old upholstery, keeping all original materials but replacing materials which are overly worn and of no use.

Upholster the seat using traditional techniques.

Attach the new vellum to the seat and adjust colour if necessary, add a mould resistant additive to it.

Carefully consolidate the broken strands of rope and re-attach them.

Wax the whole chair frame using a traditional beeswax polish.

Take final photographs of the chair.

Make final notes on condition, work carried out, materials used, etc.

Write a report and include it with all the photographs and any old original parts of the upholstery which were removed.

Once the chair had reached our workshop, a more detailed examination was undertaken, the details of which appear on the pages to follow.

Some information on the maker, Carlo Bugatti (from the Bugatti.com website) :

“Carlo Bugatti was born in Milan on 16 February 1856, son of the architect and sculptor Giovanni Luigi Bugatti.

Young Carlo trained at the Brera Academy in Milan and the Académie des Beaux Arts in Paris. In 1880 he began his professional career as an architect in Milan and married Teresa Lorioli. Their eldest son Ettore was born 1881, followed by daughter Deanice in 1883 and another son, Rembrandt, a year later. The Bugatti’s circle of friends consisted of numerous sculptors and artists, including the composer Giacomo Puccini and the painter Giovanni Segantini, who had married Carlo Bugatti’s sister in 1880.

Carlo Bugatti worked with ceramics, musical instruments, silverware, and textiles, but he is best known for his furniture designs. The first show of Bugatti furniture was at the 1888 Fine Arts Fair in Milan. Influenced by “New Art”, Bugatti used inlays of exotic wood, copper and parchment in his designs as well as mother of pearl. In the summer of 1888 his work was displayed at the Italian Exhibition in London - his first international show. In London, Bugatti’s furniture was awarded an honorary prize and his characteristic furniture style began to find avid devotees around the world - in New York, the Waldorf Astoria’s Turkish Salon was furnished with Bugatti pieces. Further shows followed in Amsterdam and Antwerp, and international newspaper reports and reviews contributed to his growing fame. In 1900 his furniture was awarded the silver medal at the Paris World Fair.

At 48 years of age Carlo Bugatti sold his studio in Milan and moved with his family to Paris, where he worked for the big department stores Maison Dufayel and Au Bon Marché. During this time, he also created numerous silverware and bronzeware pieces. In 1910, after six years in Paris, he moved to Pierrefond near Compiègne to once again work in his own studio; during the war years 1914 to 1918 he even served as the town's mayor. In 1935, at the venerable age of 79, he moved once again, joining his son Ettore in Molsheim. He lived there in one of the coach houses of the Chateau Saint Jean until his death in April 1940.”



The following photographs taken during the examination and the conservation work and show the various stages the chair went through, along with notes taken while the work was carried out.

Report written by Mark Kinghorn June 2012

fraus : Furniture Restoration & Upholstery Services

Edinburgh and the surrounding areas

fraus.co.uk



On this page and the next pages are the photographs taken when the chair first came into the workshop. This photograph shows the inlaid pewter and bone, the beaten copper leg surrounds and beaten and pierced copper medallions.

Condition of the chair was assessed during this stage and notes taken. No significant damage was evident during this assessment. The vinyl seat covering was the primary concern, as it was neither original nor in keeping with the piece.



Here, as on the previous page, there is evidence of some dentils missing from the sides, under the seat rail. Darker patches revealed themselves to be from animal (hide) glue, used to attach the dentils individually.



The chair side shown on this page and the two previous pages have no dentils still attached. On the next page, the side which still has some dentils attached to it can be seen.



On this side you can see the dentils which would have originally gone all the way round the chair, this is the only side with any of the dentils remaining, two were found to be loose after they were all checked. There are eighteen in total.



This picture shows the vinyl seat covering. Despite being in a reasonable condition, it was decided that replacing it with vellum would be more appropriate. Various samples were obtained and it was decided to use natural calfskin vellum from William Cowley Ltd. Using vellum to re-cover the seat was thought to be the best option to return the seat covering to something more in keeping with the original design of the chair.



In this photograph you can see the cord which has become detached from the central upright, it had also become frayed and is in need of some attention. The rest of the cord seems in good condition, although some parts are a little dusty.

The following two pages show the round panels, or medallions, attached with cord to the three uprights of the chair and to the crest rail and seat rails. The first of the two photographs shows the detached cord at the right hand side.







After examining the chair it was clear that it was in need of a thorough cleaning, this would have to be undertaken with caution, starting with a gentle dusting then moving on to a damp cloth then possibly cleaning fluids. The seat covering would be replaced with vellum and the cord which had become detached, re-attached. The removable drop seat frame was removed at this point so the interior of the chair could be examined. The photographs on the following pages display this examination in progress.





Detail (from the above photograph), of the four marks cut into the inner chair rail :





On the following two pages, detail on the pierced and beaten brass medallions forming the chair back can be seen. One in particular shows a fair bit of vertigris, though both show a fair amount of patination. Given that conservation rather than restoration of the chair was required, it was decided to leave this patination in place.

The frayed cord can be seen in the first of the photographs, the inlay round the edge of the crest rail and chair rails and also the beaten copper surrounds round the legs and uprights. The second photograph shows a piece of cord which had come loose and is starting to fray.







Here the crest rail can be seen, a number of pieces of missing inlay are visible here. A small split near the centre of the crest rail had started to develop and it was decided that this was another area which required attention. Again traditional animal glue was to be used. At this stage though, no work had been started, only notes and photographs were taken.





A total of ten pieces of inlay were missing from the top of the crest rail. Seven pieces of inlay were missing from the sides of the crest rail. The remaining pieces of inlay seemed to be firmly attached and stable.



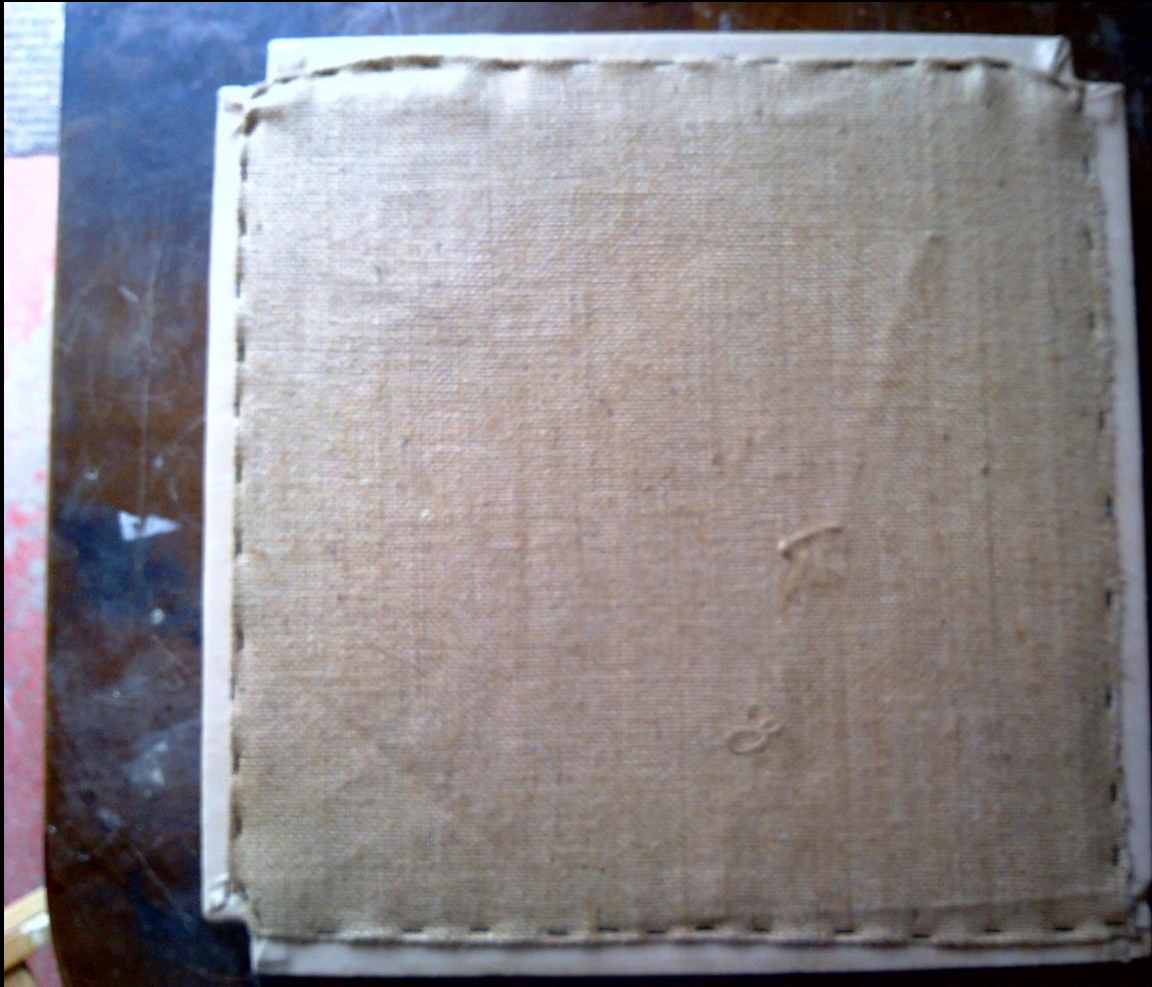
Here the vellum panels in the back rests can be seen. These were used as a basis to find the most suitable vellum to cover the seat. These vellum panels were in good condition but were slightly dirty. Great care would have to be taken with these if they were to be cleaned.



Here the underside of the chair frame can be seen, the feet pads look to be original and were firmly attached. The joints were again tested and all were found to be sound.



Above the removable drop seat frame with vinyl covering can be seen, although a reasonable colour match to the vellum it is not in keeping with the chair and so will be replaced. Again, great care will need to be taken when removing the old upholstery, so as not to damage the chair frame in any way, and to preserve any original parts which may be underneath this, obviously recovered seat frame.



The underside of the seat frame was covered with this hessian, it had been stapled on and was not original.



After the hessian was removed, this was revealed. This appeared to be original webbing, along with the striped fabric and the staples used to attach the vinyl.

The drop seat frame (which looked to be made from some sort of pine) seen here seemed to be original and was well made and in good condition.



A signature of some description, written in pencil, was found on the underside of the drop seat and can be seen in this photograph. It was not possible to read these markings.



The staples attaching the vinyl now removed, original tack holes and some presumably original vellum can be seen. It was at this stage that it was decided to keep the old fragments of vellum on the chair, and to use staples to attach any new upholstery. These decisions were made to conserve the original materials, and to prevent too much damage to the drop seat frame respectively.



Here the original vellum and tacks are shown in more detail.



The vinyl removed, polyester wadding is exposed, obviously not original to the seat upholstery and so discarded.



Cotton felt was underneath the polyester wadding, again deemed not to be original and so discarded.



What appeared to be some sort of straw fibre was used as the stuffing on this seat, best English herringbone webbing was attached but not properly, explaining why the seat had sunk somewhat. The striped fabric was an unusual choice and is, along with the way the webbing was attached, an indication that this chair had been upholstered last by an amateur.



The webbing are striped fabric removed we are left with some remnants of the tacks, the original hessian scrim and jute webbing. It was decided that leaving these remnants of the original upholstery on would be the correct thing to do, they were the only remaining pieces of original upholstery and keeping them attached would not affect the subsequent re-upholstery.



At this stage the examination was complete and a plan was written up. The following work was to be carried out and will be documented on the following pages :

Source a suitable piece of vellum for the seat and re-upholster using traditional techniques.

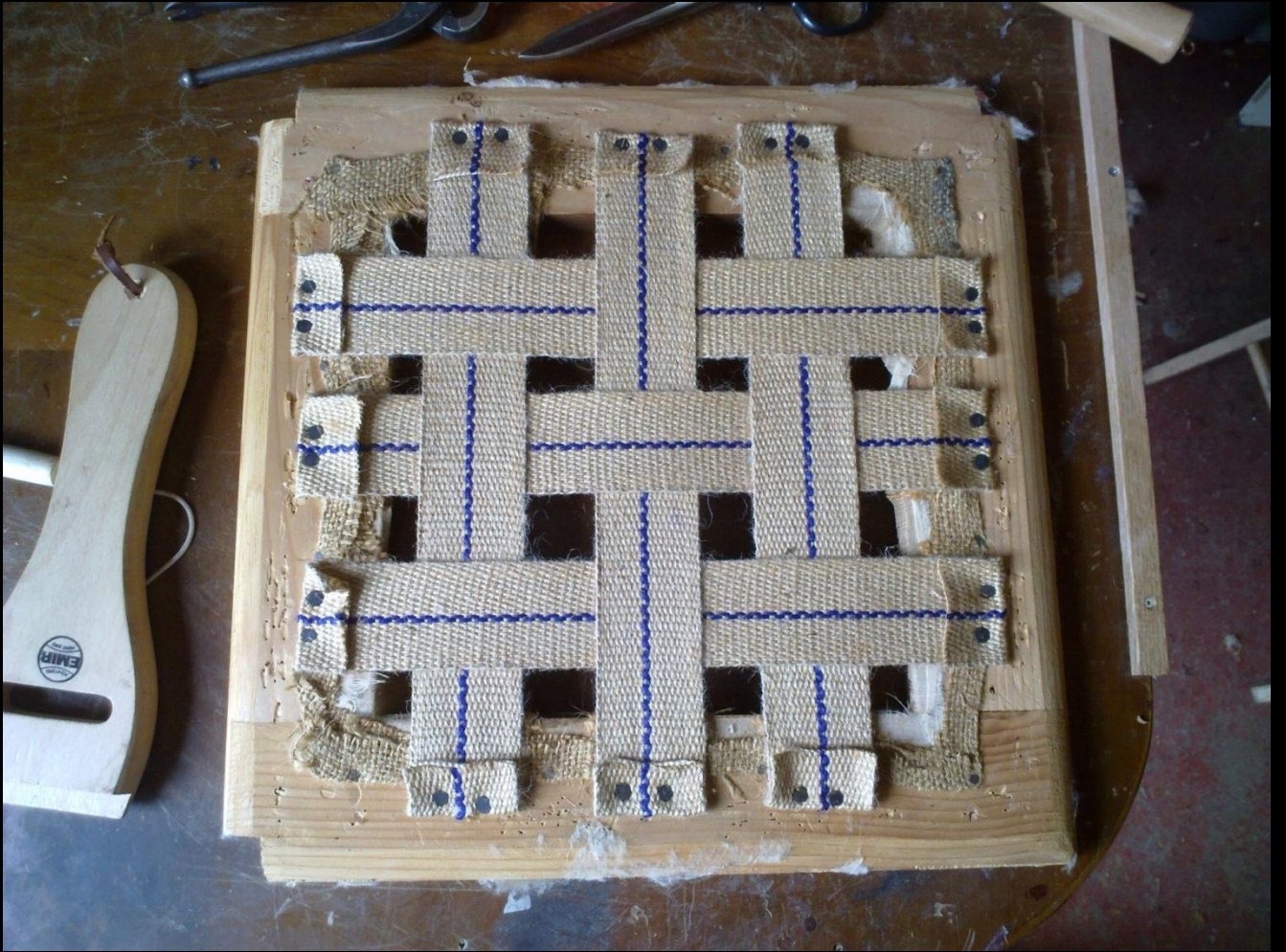
Re-glue and carefully clamp any loose pieces such as the loose dentils and the split near the centre of the crest rail.

Carefully but thoroughly clean the whole chair frame, waxing the timber sections and leaving the patina on the metal parts.

Consolidate and re-attach the frayed and detached piece of cord.



12lb jute webbing was tacked to the frame using 13mm improved tacks.





The frame of the chair outside for some final pre-conservation photographs.

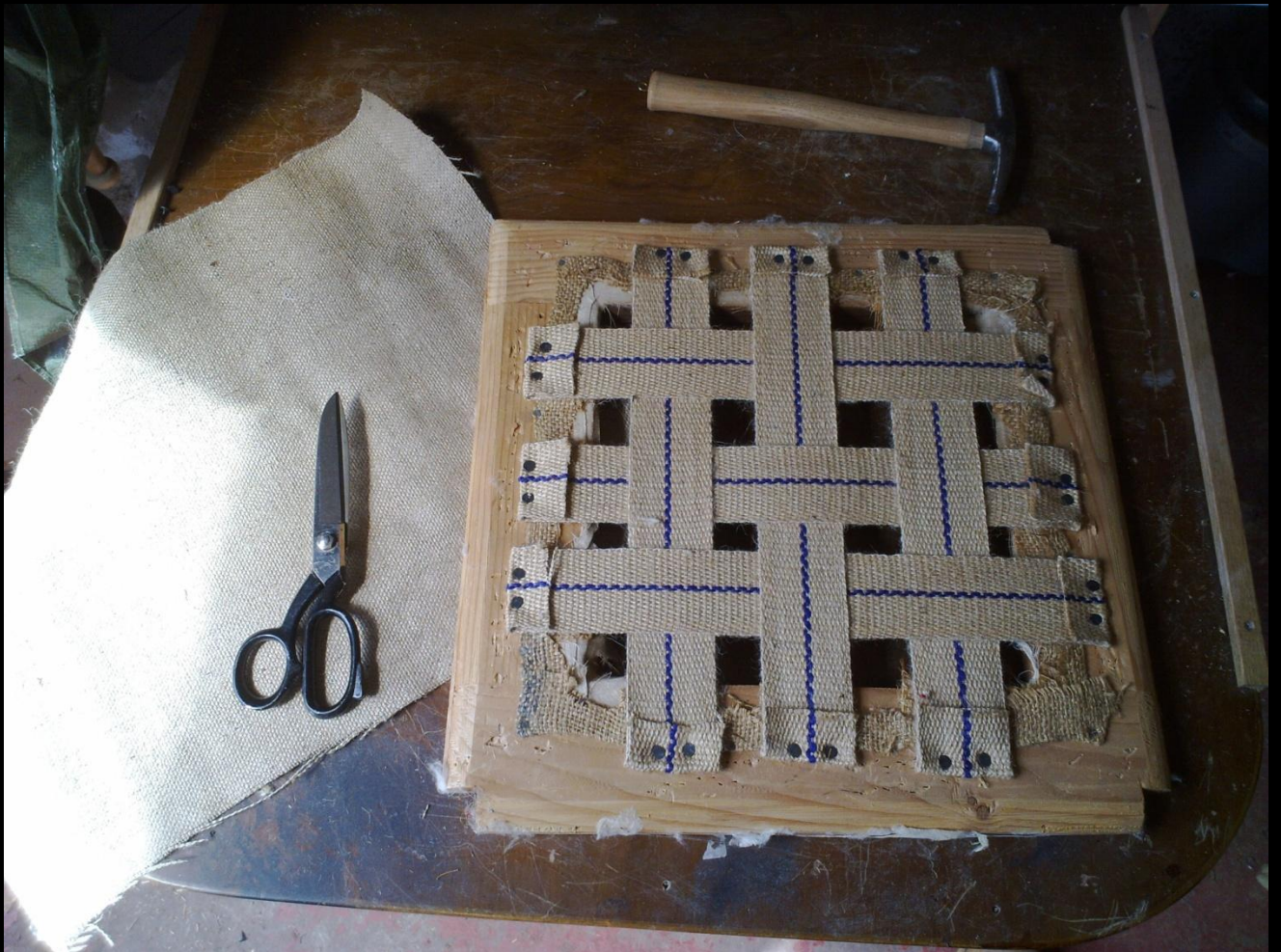












15oz spring canvas (hessian) was cut to size and then attached using 8mm staples. It was decided to use staples to attach the rest of the upholstery to reduce the damage caused to the drop in seat frame.



Linen mattress twine used to create stuffing. Horsehair then used to stuff the stuffing ties, teased out to ensure an even covering.



The fire retardant calico interliner is now attached, again using 8mm staples.



A double layer of skin wadding (made from wool and cotton) is cut to size and added to the top of the calico.



An attempt is made at fixing the natural vellum sheet to the drop seat frame, which proved to be quite a challenge due to the vellum being stiff and having no stretch to it at all. A call was made to the manufacturers William Cowley and after discussing the fitting of the vellum and hearing of the massive pressures it could exert as it dried, it was decided it would be a job better suited to their expertise.



The drop seat frame and vellum were carefully packaged and posted using special next day delivery, to William Cowley down in Newport Pagnall. We had discussed what was to be done with the chair and I felt comfortable with their assurances.



The chair has a number of small areas with silver glitter attached to it, these were removed with the use of a small brush and some toothpicks.



Here a small brush is being used to clear the dust from around the top of the vellum medallions. The whole chair was carefully brushed down to remove the loose dust before cleaning commenced. After the brushing, each section of the chair was cleaned, first with plain water, then water with a tiny amount of washing liquid. The washed parts of the chair were quickly dried with clean towels.



Here the piece of cord which has become detached is consolidated and pushed back into the hole it was originally attached in.



This photograph shows the cord now back in its original hole. The photograph on the next page shows the frayed piece of cord which had detached from the central upright, now re-attached.









The vellum covered drop seat arrives back from William Cowley and is examined. It is well attached to the inside of the drop seat frame, using staples and the “grip” of the vellum itself.



It was found that the corners were a tight fit when fitting the drop seat frame into the chair and so clamps were used to flatten the vellum on the three corners which were stopping it drop in.



The small crack near in the centre of the crest rail can be seen in the photograph above, running from the edge of the crest rail in, towards the middle of the central circle. This was not a serious split and so was glued with a traditional hide glue and clamped.



Above is shown the small crack near in the centre of the crest rail, now glued, the frame was cleaned once again and then waxed using a traditional beeswax furniture polish.



Almost finished now, the black cotton (FR) platform cloth is attached. The drop seat frame was now fitted into the chair frame and some final photographs and notes were taken.



Materials used :

Linen mattress twine, 12lb Jute webbing, 15oz spring canvas (hessian), horse hair stuffing, fire retardant cotton calico interliner, skin wadding (wool and cotton) (2 layers), 13mm improved tacks, 10mm improved tacks, 8mm staples, natural calfskin vellum, black fire retardant platform cloth, traditional hide (animal glue), Ecover washing up liquid, Liberon Wax and Polish remover, Fiddes Supreme wax polish (light).



This report is available for download at :

fraus.co.uk/Documents/Bugatti_Chair_Conservation_Report.pdf

A USB memory stick has been loaded with a copy of this report along with all original photographs. This memory stick, receipts for the work carried out by fraus, plus receipts for the work carried out by William Cowley will, it is hoped stay with the chair to add to its provenance.

The other points to mention regarding provenance are the Antiques Roadshow appearance this chair made (both on television and in print) and the chair's history within the family which commissioned the conservation work. I will leave these two points to the accompanying notes.

Mark Kinghorn fraus.co.uk



Carlo Bugatti “Marriage” corner chair
Conservation report written June 2012



Download a PDF version of this report at :

fraus.co.uk/Documents/Bugatti_Chair_Conservation_Report.pdf