

W. R. Harvey & Co (Antiques) Ltd.

The Care of Antiques

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E-mail: antiques@wrharvey.co.uk Web site: www.wrharvey.co.uk

The Care of Antiques

At W.R. Harvey & Co (Antiques) Ltd we are often asked for advice on caring for antiques. Here are some basic recommendations that we hope you will find useful.

Furniture

Dust frequently with a soft cloth, and rub up your furniture often to encourage a hard skin to form, and build up a good patina. Once or twice a year polish thoroughly using a good beeswax based polish, polish sparingly, and preferably leave overnight, before rubbing well. Do not use spray polishes, as although they give a good initial effect, they contain silicone which builds up a sticky surface and a large proportion of spirit which evaporates quickly, taking with it some of the natural oils in the timber.

Antique furniture needs to be protected from fluctuations in temperature and relative humidity which can cause a great deal of damage which is costly to repair. Many fine pieces of furniture which have survived for centuries in unheated conditions can suffer major harm in just one or two winters of modern central heating. The reason for this is that antique furniture is constructed from air-dried timber and has a far higher water content than modern furniture, which is usually made of kiln-dried wood containing far less moisture. When subjected to low levels of relative humidity, it gradually gives up moisture to the dry surrounding atmosphere and starts to shrink and split along the grain. This is aggravated when underlying pieces of wood used in the construction are laid at right angles to each other and then veneered on top. The carcass wood moves and the veneer consequently tears and lifts and pieces may become detached. It is vital that these be kept carefully. Other typical dry air problems include cracking, loosening joints (where animal glues dry out), drawers sticking, and doors warping and no longer closing properly.

Prevention is always better than cure and it is possible to safeguard antique furniture from dry air damage by investing in a good humidifier which will help maintain a constant level of relative humidity in the air during the winter heating season. For a normal comfortable, indoor temperature you should aim to maintain 50-55% relative humidity. A cheaper alternative, but much less efficient, is a hang-on radiator humidifier, or even a bowl of water nearby, with a simple hygrometer to monitor the humidity in the room.

Another aspect of prevention is monitoring the amount of sunlight that reaches furniture. A degree of light over a long period can mellow the colour attractively, but too much will dry it out, perish the surface polish and can lead to uneven fading. Where possible, turn pieces of furniture around occasionally to even the fading process and keep curtains drawn on sunny days when rooms are not in use.

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It is wise to make periodical inspections of furniture for lifting mouldings or veneer (which will sound hollow if lightly tapped), loose joints, water damage or fresh furniture beetle (woodworm) holes (particularly around May/June). If repair is required do call us and we will be happy to advise. Don't forget Harvey's has a well deserved and high reputation for our restoration and restoration department.

Clocks

Antique clocks fall into two categories basically - spring driven and weight driven. You will find that with either type of clock they will perform better if they are kept running, so regular winding is essential, being sure to use only the correct size of key. Care should be taken when winding. With spring driven bracket and mantle clocks be sure to hold the clock steady. With weight driven long case clocks, open the trunk door to enable you to see that the weights do not foul the case or pendulum. When correcting the time, on all clocks, only turn the hands clockwise. This is particularly important with striking clocks. Antique clocks, in good condition, require very little maintenance. Any servicing or restoration work should only be entrusted to a qualified horologist who specialises in antique clocks. If repair is required do call us and we will be happy to advise. Don't forget Harvey's has a well deserved and high reputation for our renovation and restoration department.

Porcelain and Pottery

Common sense will take you a long way towards the care of antique porcelain.

In some cases decorative pieces may be extremely fragile. Always remember to hold an item by the main part of the body, never by the extremities such as the handle. If necessary immerse it very gently in warm water to which has been added a dash of washing up liquid. On no account use abrasive cleaners. If it is very dirty use a soft sponge to very gently wipe clean. Pottery, being more porous, should be cleaned with a soft damp cloth. If it is necessary to put it in water, the water should be much cooler than for porcelain, and the item should not be left to soak. Adhesive tape such as Sellotape should never be used to hold on lids, as on peeling it off the enamelling or gilding may be removed. A better way to attach loose pieces is to use Blu-tack. Never display your precious antique plates on wire plate hangers. These will warp and crack the plate and damage the glaze and finish. Please ask our advice about hanging and display. It is always preferable to keep antique porcelain and pottery behind glass.

If any pottery or porcelain is damaged or broken - save all the pieces and do call us, we will be happy to advise. Don't forget Harvey's has a well deserved and high reputation for our renovation and restoration department.

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Prints

Whenever possible antiquarian maps and prints should be backed and mounted with acid-free card. It is advisable to avoid direct sunlight with all prints and maps but especially those with original colour. Damp conditions should be avoided at all costs and any signs of damp should be dealt with by a paper conservator immediately.

It is recommended that unframed maps and prints should be stored in archival wallets.

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Silver

Ideally silver should simply be washed in hot soapy water, rinsed in hot water and thoroughly dried, before buffing with a soft cloth. This will not however remove tarnish, for which there are various commercial products available, You can choose from impregnated cloths, creams, foam paste and liquid polishes. Perhaps the best solution is to use a long-term silver polish which leaves a protective layer on the surface. Silver polishes are abrasive, so use them as little as possible. Use an old soft toothbrush to gently rub engraved areas.

To preserve the polish on domestic silver wrap it in dry, acid-free tissue paper and put it in a polythene bag to seal out the air.

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Watercolour Paintings

Hanging is an important consideration with watercolour paintings as they are susceptible to fading and problems caused by damp. If possible, they should be placed away from direct sunlight as this will cause bleaching, and they should not be stored or hung in damp areas as brown discolouration known as foxing, may occur. There is no remedy for fading in watercolours, but (except in extremely advanced cases) foxing can usually be eradicated by a professional conservator. It is also advisable to have watercolours mounted on acid-free board.

With regard to oil paintings, dry paint surface, cracking, discolouration of varnish are all indications that a picture needs attention. If repair is required do call us and we will be happy to advise. Don't forget Harvey's has a well deserved and high reputation for our restoration and restoration department.

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English Furniture Periods

Bold type indicates the period covered by W.R. Harvey & Co

Elizabethan	c1558 - 1603
Jacobean	c1603 - 1625
Carolean	c1625 - 1649
Cromwellian	c1649 - 1660
Restoration	c1660 - 1689
William and Mary	c1689 - 1702
Queen Anne	c1702 - 1714
Georgian	c1714 - 1820
Thomas Chippendale	c1760 (1718 - 1779)
Hepplewhite	c1775 (died 1786)
Adam	c1775 (1728 - 1792)
Thomas Chippendale, Younger	c1780 (1749 - 1822)
Sheraton	c1790 (1751 - 1806)
Regency	c1800 - 1830
William IV	c1830 - 1837
Victorian	c1837 - 1901
Edwardian	c1901 - 1910
Twentieth Century	c1901 –

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Sovereigns of England

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Elizabeth I	1558 - 1603
James I	1603 - 1625
Charles I	1625 - 1649
Commonwealth	1649 - 1660
Charles II	1660 - 1685
James II	1685 - 1689
William III and Mary II	1689 - 1694
William III	1694 - 1702
Anne	1702 - 1714
George I	1714 - 1727
George II	1727 - 1760
George III	1760 - 1820
George IV	1820 - 1830
William IV	1830 - 1837
Victoria	1837 - 1901
Edward VII	1901 - 1910
George V	1910 - 1936

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About W.R. Harvey & Co

W.R. Harvey & Co (Antiques) Ltd specialise in the finest English furniture, clocks, pictures, and other works of art from the period 1680-1830. Our firm was founded some fifty years ago by Walter Harvey who is still the active Chairman of the company whilst his son, David, is the Managing Director.

We were initially based in Chalk Farm, London and these premises have been retained for our restoration and conservation departments. We then expanded to gallery premises in Old Bond Street in order to provide an unparalleled service to our constantly expanding international clientele.

In 1996 we moved from London's Mayfair to our charming and spacious Georgian property in Witney, Oxfordshire, where we are now able to display our outstanding stock of period pieces in delightful room settings.

The stock displayed on our Web site is changed often, so, if you are a collector of fine English antique furniture, please be sure to bookmark your browser with our address at www.wrharvey.co.uk as this will make it easy for you to return to our pages.

Harvey's also frequently participate in the major antique exhibitions. The 'News' page on our Web site will give you further details of venues and dates. Also, as we naturally hope you will want to pay a personal visit to our showrooms, the 'Visit Witney' page will show you exactly where we are located.

Finally, please do E-mail us if you have a special requirement, or if you would like to be added to our mailing list for news of our forthcoming events.

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