

Dining Halls



Luke Hughes

Furniture in Architecture

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'Buildings have little function until there is a chair to sit on and a table to sit at. Yet a great architectural interior can be severely diminished with inappropriate furniture. So, our aim is for the furniture to appear as a seamless extension of the architecture, looking logical and appropriate ... as though it has always been there'.

Introduction

For more than 40 years, Luke Hughes has focussed on working with clients who occupy great buildings, for whom architecture is used to project something of the values of their particular institution.

This has involved furnishing dozens of dining halls in colleges, schools, livery companies, Inns of Court etc., not just in the UK but also USA and Asia. Many of them are of great architectural importance. The projects have either been in new buildings (such as Yale's Franklin College or Homerton College, Cambridge) or in venerable settings (such as New College, Oxford, originally built in 1385). Sometimes, the existing furniture can be adapted and recycled.

Today, the need to generate revenue from external events entails **maximising the capacity** and **allowing for flexible layouts** which permit both formal and informal meals, concerts, lectures, weddings or even being cleared away altogether for buffet functions. It also means furniture that can be **easily reconfigured and stored without damaging the building or those who use it**. Additional design challenges lie in enhancing the visual character of an institution's interior, whilst also making it easier and safer for the catering team to re-arrange and store it.

Sometimes, it is possible to re-work the original furniture; sometimes it is just not economic to do so. However, through judicious space-planning, it is usually possible to ensure no one has to sit with their knees either side of a table leg and in almost all cases, we have been able to **increase the capacity of halls by between 20-50%**. This has significant beneficial impact on any annual catering budget.

Solutions lie in selecting chairs which stack and designing tables which can be demounted or folded – and stored. Indeed, in our experience, the **storage and handling solutions are just as important as the actual look and feel of the chairs and tables**. However, there is no dining hall that is quite the same as any other, which is why every project has to be viewed individually, especially when it comes to storage. We have evolved proven engineered techniques for ensuring adaptability of the furniture – these allow for multiple uses and enhanced commercial prospects.

‘God lives in the details’

Mies van der Rohe





Trinity Hall, Cambridge

This renovation of the dining hall was the first in more than a century and now allows for many alternative uses.

Most of the oak from the original tables was perfectly seasoned and of high quality, quite suitable for re-use. The original benches were replaced with new stacking oak 'Folio' chairs which are also in use in other rooms around the college.









The original tables were knocked apart, the table bases redesigned, and the legs repositioned. The tops were cut down to a size that would allow every sitter to get their knees beneath the top without having to straddle a table leg.

All the original legs were found to be reusable. The two high tables were also remade to reduce the width and increase the numbers.

The linking beams between the legs were refashioned to incorporate our unique, stainless-steel, quick release, linking wedge system. This permits the bases to be quickly taken down and stored – in this case, in a former cleaning cupboard under the stairs. The tops can now be slid into discreet racks in a nearby corridor.

Seating capacity was increased from 96 to 140 (46%) in the hall and a further 16 in the gallery.



Before



After







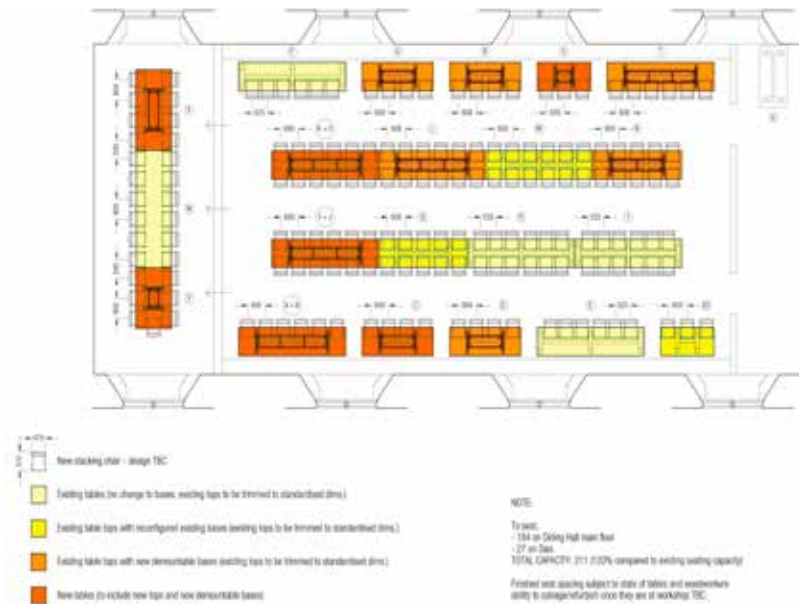
New College, Oxford

A similar approach was adopted for the dining hall at New College, Oxford, albeit in a very different interior with its 14th century walls and 16th century linen-fold panelling.

The knockdown table's assembly and disassembly process requires only a rubber mallet.

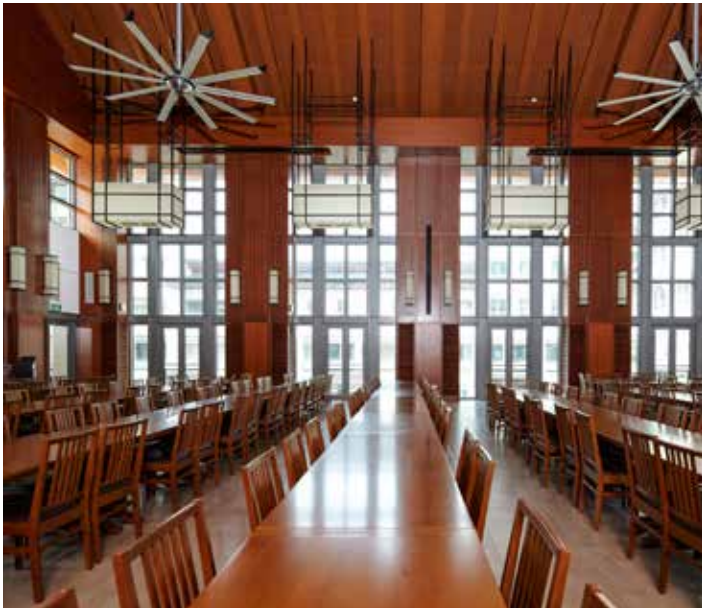
Such design solutions enable huge efficiencies, not only of space but also of time. The capacity was increased from 182 to 209 (15%), a boon to the catering budget. The hall can be cleared in twenty-five minutes.

The chairs selected were the 'Wykeham', originally designed for the college and named after its founder, William of Wykeham. The brass lights were also designed especially for the college and the colour of the shades was chosen to pick up the mount surrounding the founder's portrait behind the high table.



SEATING CAPACITY INCREASE
209
182





Yale-NUS College, Singapore

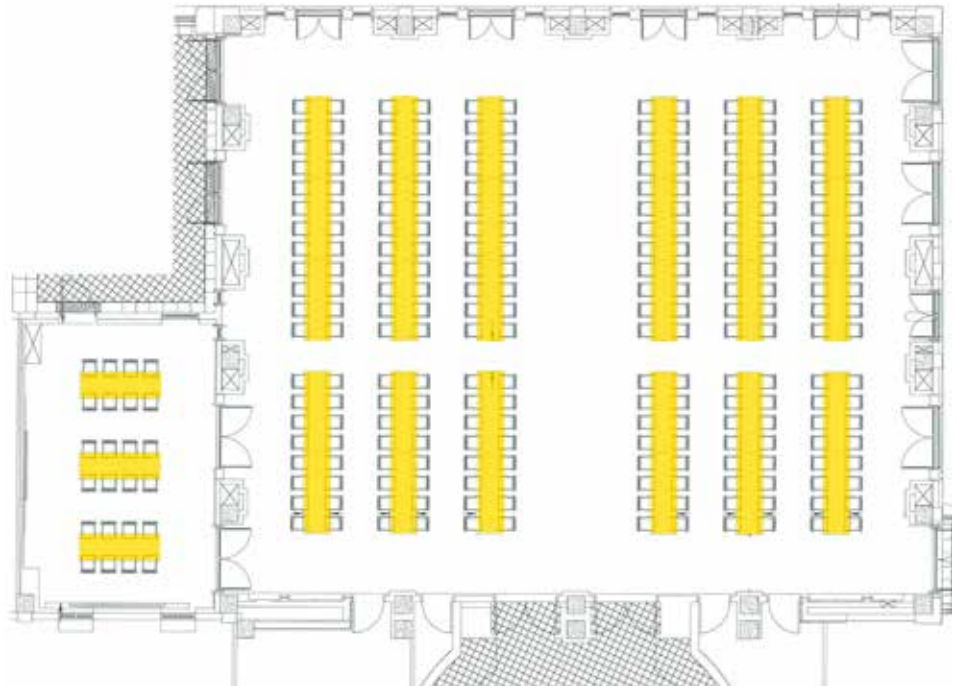
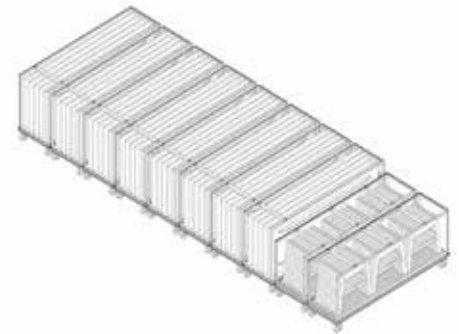
Saga College is one of the three college dining halls on the campus of Yale/National University of Singapore, all furnished by Luke Hughes.

All the chairs used in the individual dining halls are adaptations of the 'Newnham' chairs, with the back design altered to suit each specific interior.

The space planning was once again where Luke Hughes was able to make a significant difference.

"When the early layout drawings were sent through, we thought we could improve on the layouts and both make more sense of the furniture within the architectural interior and increase the capacity.

We also engineered the tables down by a millimetre or two and, by doing so, increased the seating capacity by nearly 20%.





Newnham College, Cambridge

Newnham's Clough Hall, designed by Basil Champneys in 1876, reflects many of the ideals of the Arts and Crafts Movement, which particularly celebrated the connection between furniture and architecture.

The 'Newnham' chair was first designed for this project more than 30 years ago. The 'Trojan' folding tables in solid oak permit easy storage and reconfiguration for concerts, meetings and wedding receptions.



'You will be pleased to know that the Newnham chairs and tables are standing up superbly to the rigours of college life and, 25 years on, still look like new. They are a great testament to the skills and workmanship of your team'

Dame Patricia Hodgson, Principal







Oriel College, Oxford

The refurbishment of Oriel College's dining hall was the first phase of the redevelopment of all the College's catering and dining facilities.

The building dates from the 1620's. The richly carved joinery frieze, dates from 1911. This has now been re-painted to a new conservation plan, improving the legibility of its heraldic devices.

Most of the oak of the original tables, both tops and bases, was recycled. The whole suite of furniture can now be flat-packed and cleared away. The benches were also rebuilt incorporating a folding leg mechanism.



'Your designs were widely acknowledged as being both imaginative and sympathetic to the building and the high standard of construction and the commendable service you provided have been greatly praised...'

Bursar, Oriel College, Oxford





'Our new dining hall is a beautiful beacon which from the outside speaks to our ambition and values, and on the inside provides space for our students, Fellows, staff and guests to have conversations, debates, music, theatre and of course, fine dining... it celebrates the integrity and inherent beauty of its materials, from its design through to its incredible craftsmanship...'

Lord Simon Woolley, Principal of Homerton College.



Homerton College, Cambridge

The new dining hall at Homerton College, designed by Feilden Fowles, features one of the finest modern examples of a college dining hall – a soaring, majestic space, complementing the surrounding 19th century Arts & Crafts architecture.

The Luke Hughes team designed a complete set of dining hall furniture, chairs which stack and tables which fold. In this case, the choice was for the 'LH 42' stacking oak chairs and 'Athena' folding tables.



'But furniture also has to work, and to last 50 years or so'.





Reuben College, Oxford

Reuben College – dining hall

Reuben College is the newest (and 39th) college of Oxford University, located in the Radcliffe Science Library site. The college was established with £80M donation from the Reuben Foundation and admitted its first students in 2021. The dining hall was opened in 2023, after a refurbishment led by the architect Christine Kwong of FJM Studio.

The college buildings include the Jackson Wing (designed by Sir Thomas Jackson and opened in 1901) of the Inorganic Chemistry Laboratory and the 'Abbot's Kitchen', a dramatic octagonal building based on the 14th century building of the same name at Glastonbury Abbey. A number of scientists who worked in this building went on to win the Nobel Prize, including Ernest Rutherford for his work on radio-activity and Dorothy Hodgkin for her work on crystallography.

The dining hall furniture includes 'LH 42' stacking oak chairs and 'Athena' folding tables.







Gray's Inn

The dining hall at Gray's Inn is one of the four belonging to the Inns of Court, all now used for multiple type of functions, some of them commercial.

Previously, the annual costs for clearing the furniture were well into six figures. Storage was limited to leaving the tables under a tarpaulin, in the carpark outside, where the humidity was causing long-term damage.

The tables can now be stored in cabinets in discreet locations around the ground floor of the building – all internal and conveniently accessible. The 'Folio' oak stacking chairs are transported and stored on dollys in adjoining rooms and cupboards.

The total cost of the project came to much the same as the annual cost normally paid to outside contractors to move the furniture. Furthermore, this new solution should be still functioning well for the next 30-50 years.







Keystone Academy Primary School, Beijing

Keystone Academy is a Chinese private school based in Beijing which has been in operation since 2014. This school is founded on three 'keystones: bilingual immersion in Chinese and English; building character and community throughout our residential setting; and promoting Chinese culture and identity in a world context'.

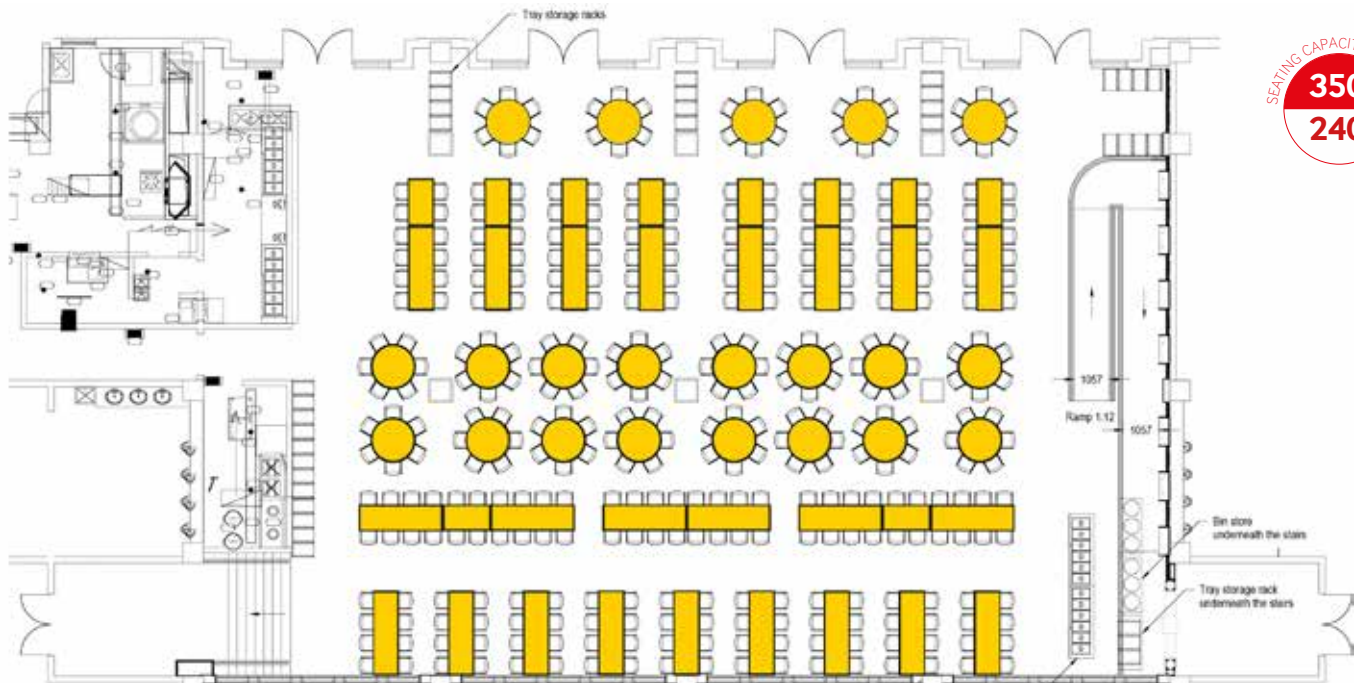
The designs for the Primary school dining hall were required to reflect this cultural context.

Our commission included the overall concept for the interior, which (being a Primary School) included playful representations of clouds and planets as part of concealing the essential acoustic treatment as well as the lighting.





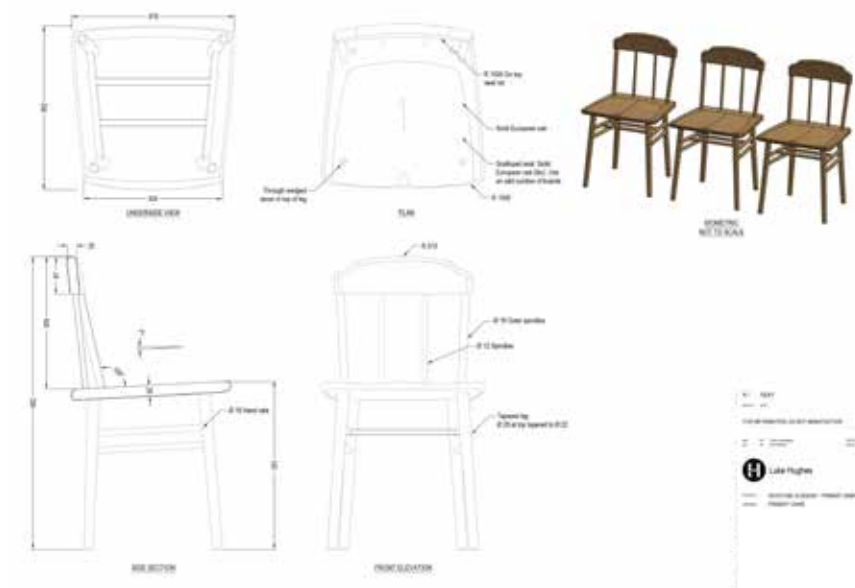
The detailed space planning was critical to the success of the project and resulted in an increase of capacity from 240 to 350 (46%). It also allowed for layouts in long lines for banquets, as well as for the traditional Asian preference for smaller groups around round tables.

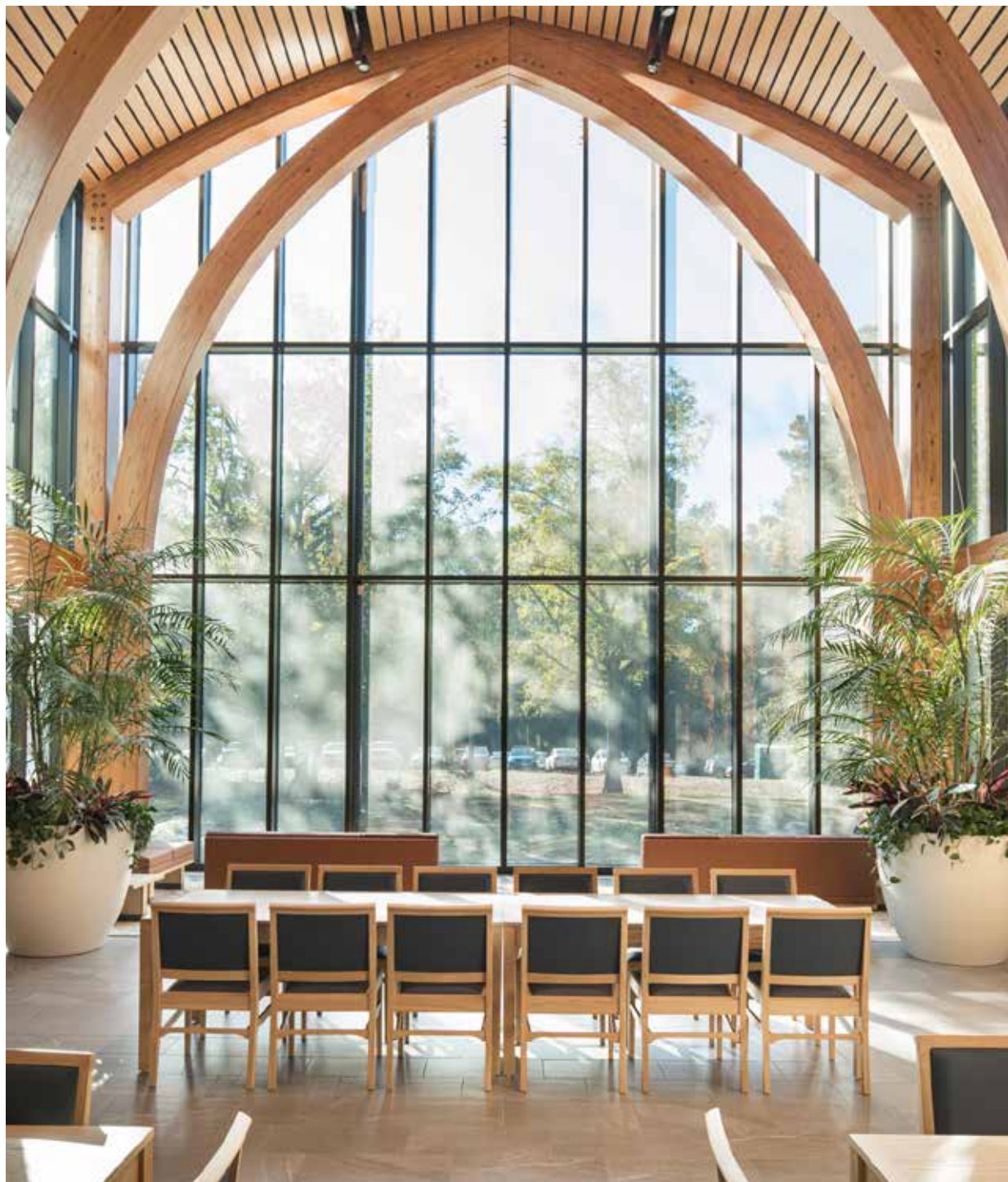


SEATING CAPACITY INCREASE
350
240



The design of the new chairs shows a nod to traditional Chinese hutong café-style chairs, albeit adjusted to the sizes of younger school children. The tables are made using light-weight tops and a honeycomb structure, with splayed legs that make them extremely stable and allow them to be easily re-arranged and stored'.







Karsh Alumni Center, Duke University NC

The Karsh Alumni & Visitors Center, designed by Centerbrook Architects, is based around an oak-gabled cloister that relates to much of the other architecture of the Duke University campus.

It was conceived as a multi-function facility capable of supporting dinners, meetings, fund-raising and other social events.

The Luke Hughes team designed and supplied a series of versatile and flexible furniture (folding 'Athena' tables, stacking 'Folio' chairs and sliding sofas) for the main event rooms, boardroom and meeting lobby.

Space planning, storage and handling for the folding timber tables and stacking timber chairs were key considerations, as was compatibility with Centerbrook Architect's design aesthetic.







Middle Temple

The Hall was completed in the early 1570s and is probably the most magnificent of its kind in the UK. Queen Elizabeth I made an impromptu visit in 1578, and the first recorded performance of Shakespeare's Twelfth Night was held here in 1602.

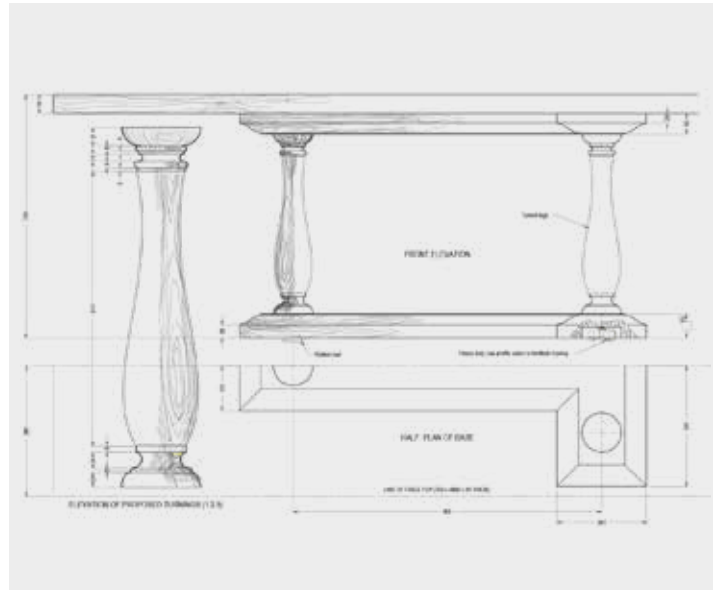
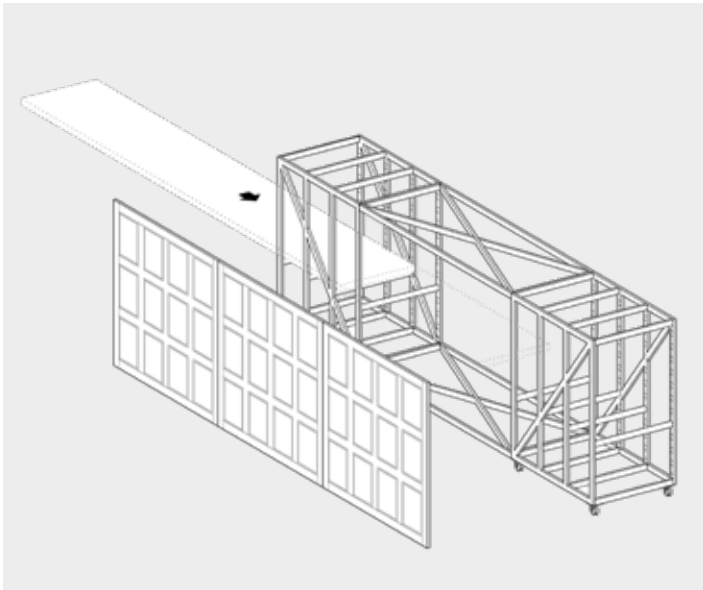
Today, its role combines traditional dining with both collegiate and educational use; receptions, lectures, debates, moots and musical performances. Middle Temple Hall is another popular venue for banqueting, weddings, receptions and parties.

The project was completed in 1998 and, since then, most people have never even noticed that the tables are stored in the hall. As at Gray's Inn, they used to be stored under tarpaulins in the outside courtyard.

The tops of the original tables (6m long!) can now be lifted clear and rolled into a steel cage behind the high table, which is clad with oak panelling that matches the existing wainscot.

The table bases were re-made and can now be swiftly re-arranged, gliding on concealed castors. Long oak benches were replaced with 'Folio' oak stacking chairs.

The ability to reconfigure the furniture is a major factor in the success of the events and catering operation and it has been in continuous use for more than 25 years.



Benjamin Franklin College, Yale University

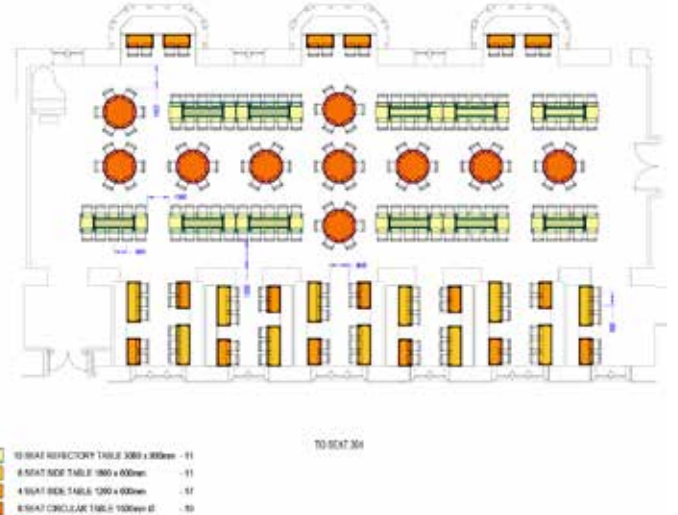
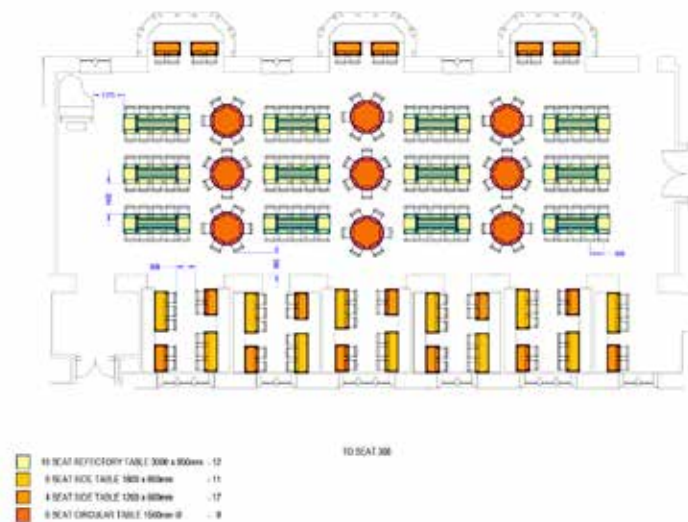
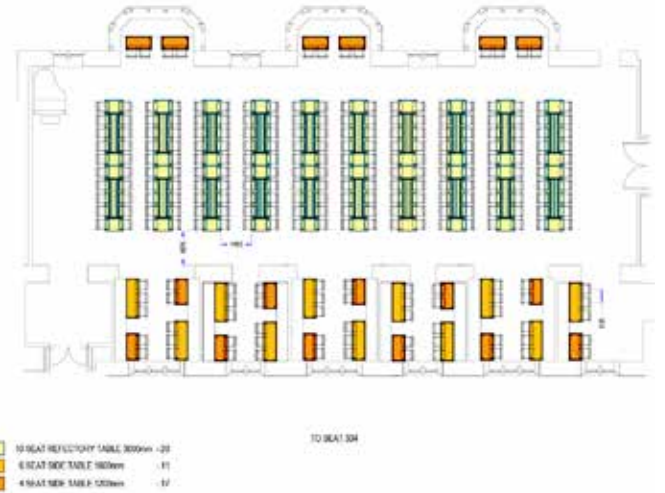
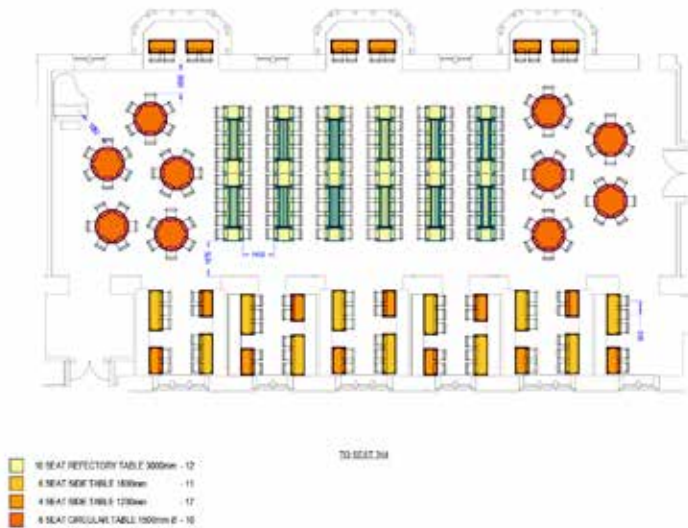
This new Yale college, designed by Robert A M Stern and opened in 2017, has a curious mix of a neo-Gothic exterior with a classical interior.

The new dining commons is furnished with 'Wykeham' stacking oak chairs and an array of demountable tables.

Alignment of the furniture elements with the architectural features renders the whole space both manageable and visually coherent.







'A dining hall is part of the identity of a college. People come, mix, eat and talk. Serving that social paradigm is what a dining hall does. The principle of gathering everybody together over a meal is fundamental to the anthropology of the institution.'

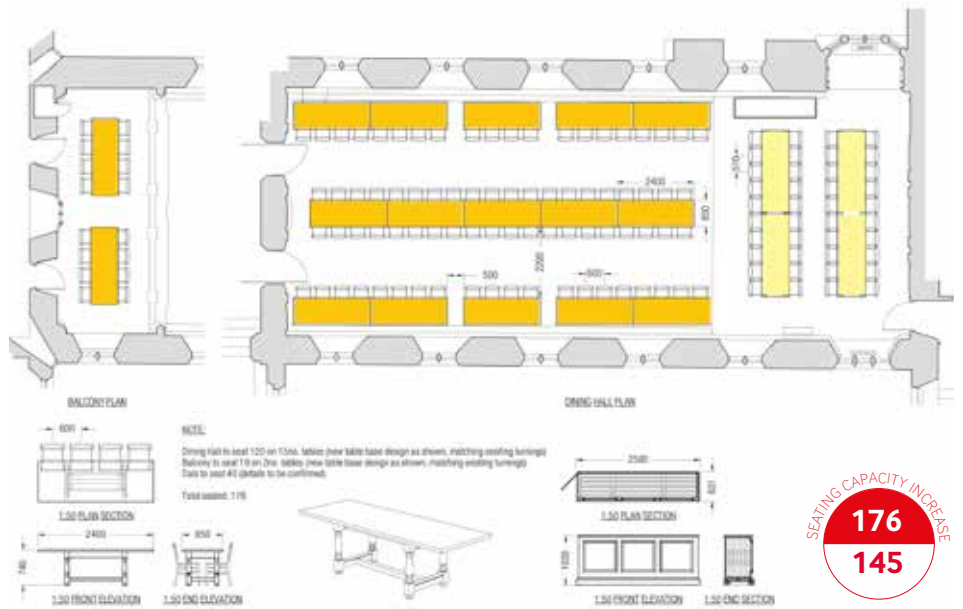
The four alternative configurations illustrated here show how the different sized tops, all based on the same number of underframes, allow for a variety of plays, concerts, balls and dinners.





Jesus College, Cambridge

The solution for the dining hall (and Upper Hall) followed the same principles as at other colleges - repositioning the table legs, adjusting the dimensions and increasing the overall capacity from 145 to 176 (21%).



The chosen chair was the 'Lincoln' oak stacking chair, with its comfortable open, rather than upholstered, back.
 The bench seating along the panelling was provided with leather cushions and vents for the heat radiation.





Butchers' Hall

The rebuilding of this livery hall in 2019 also prompted a review of the catering facilities requiring flexible layouts for functions, lectures, weddings, dining and receptions. For this, a new variant of the 'Trojan' folding table was developed for use with 'Lincoln' oak stacking chairs, the livery crest being etched into the backs of the chairs.



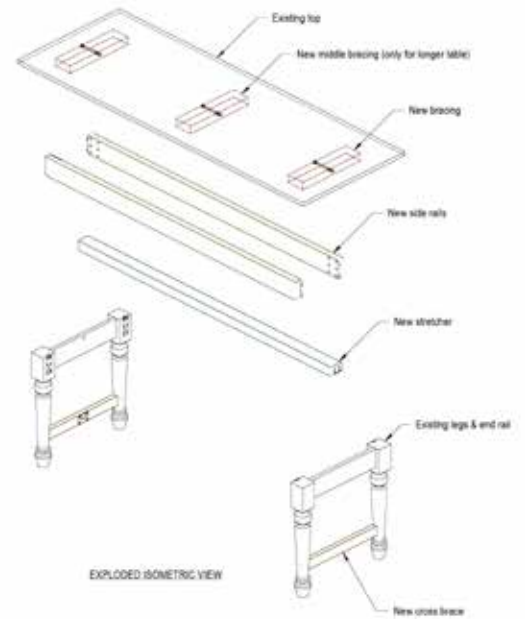
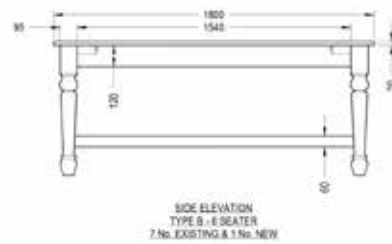
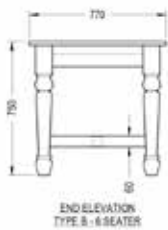
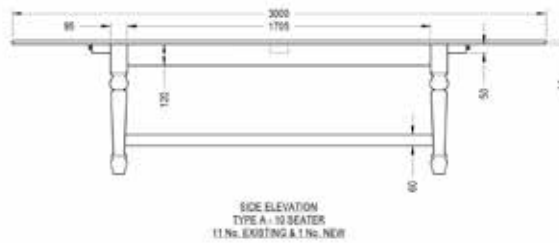


Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge

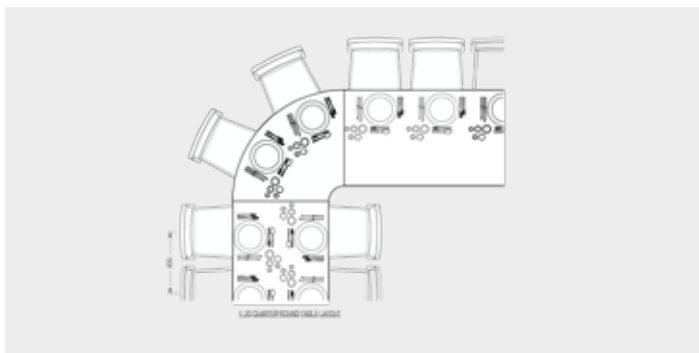
Although the first college buildings date from 1353, the dining hall was designed by Anthony Salvin in 1854 and the dining tables date from then. Salvin's original design intent is retained and, in this vein, we applied the same techniques to retain the legs and re-arrange their position.

Capacity was increased by 24% from 154 to 192.







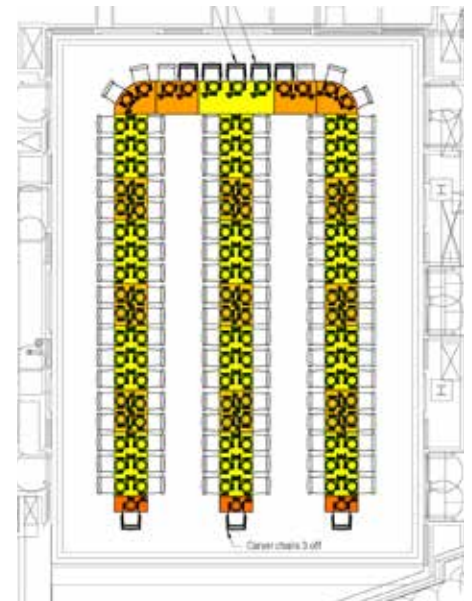


Leathersellers' Hall

This new livery hall was designed by Eric Parry Architects and opened in 2016. Much of the furniture from the previous hall was still in reasonable repair, albeit not capable of easy handling and storage.

Accordingly, designs were put forward to retain the look and feel of the original furniture and it now incorporates quick-release aluminium knock-box-section beams and a new folding mechanism.

A set of quadrants and gunners' leaves were also made to give enhanced flexibility to formal dinners. Additional chairs were made to match the originals.







Inner Temple

Inner Temple, one of the four Inns of Court, can trace its origins back to the 12th century. The latest hall was built after the Blitz to original designs by Hubert Worthington which were completed under the supervision of Sir Edward Maufe in 1955.

Like the other colleges, Inns of Court and Livery Halls, the provision of high quality catering, storage and flexible layouts in such memorable interiors is a key component in their continued popularity as venues.



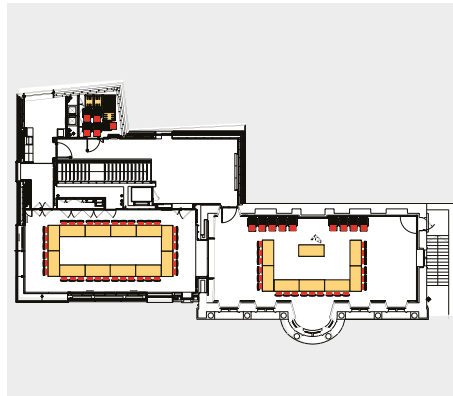
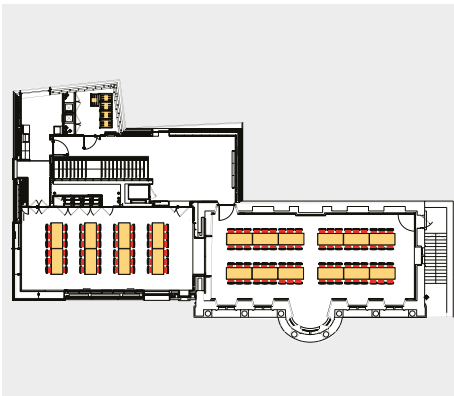
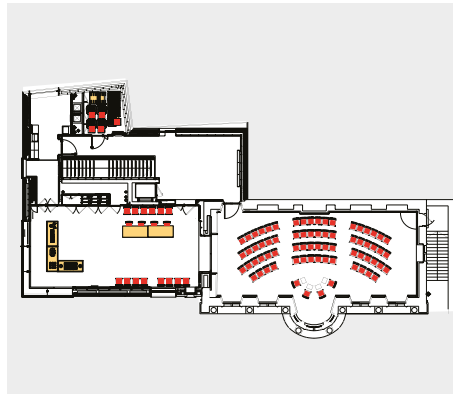
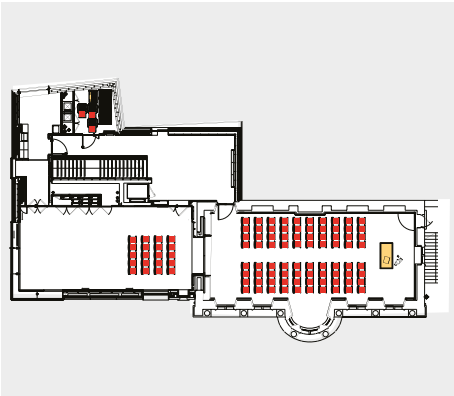


Lincoln College, Oxford

The architects at Stanton Williams were commissioned to design an extension to a 19th century building to enable the college to link various spaces spread out on the site for lectures, seminars, meetings, teaching break-out and dining.

As with all 'flexible solutions', the rationalisation of the storage and handling are key – and there lies much of our expertise.

It was for this project that the 'Lincoln' chair was developed.



'You've achieved an all too rare contemporary synthesis between architectural space and furniture'

Paul Williams, architect of the Berrow Building,
Lincoln College, Oxford





Churchill College, Cambridge

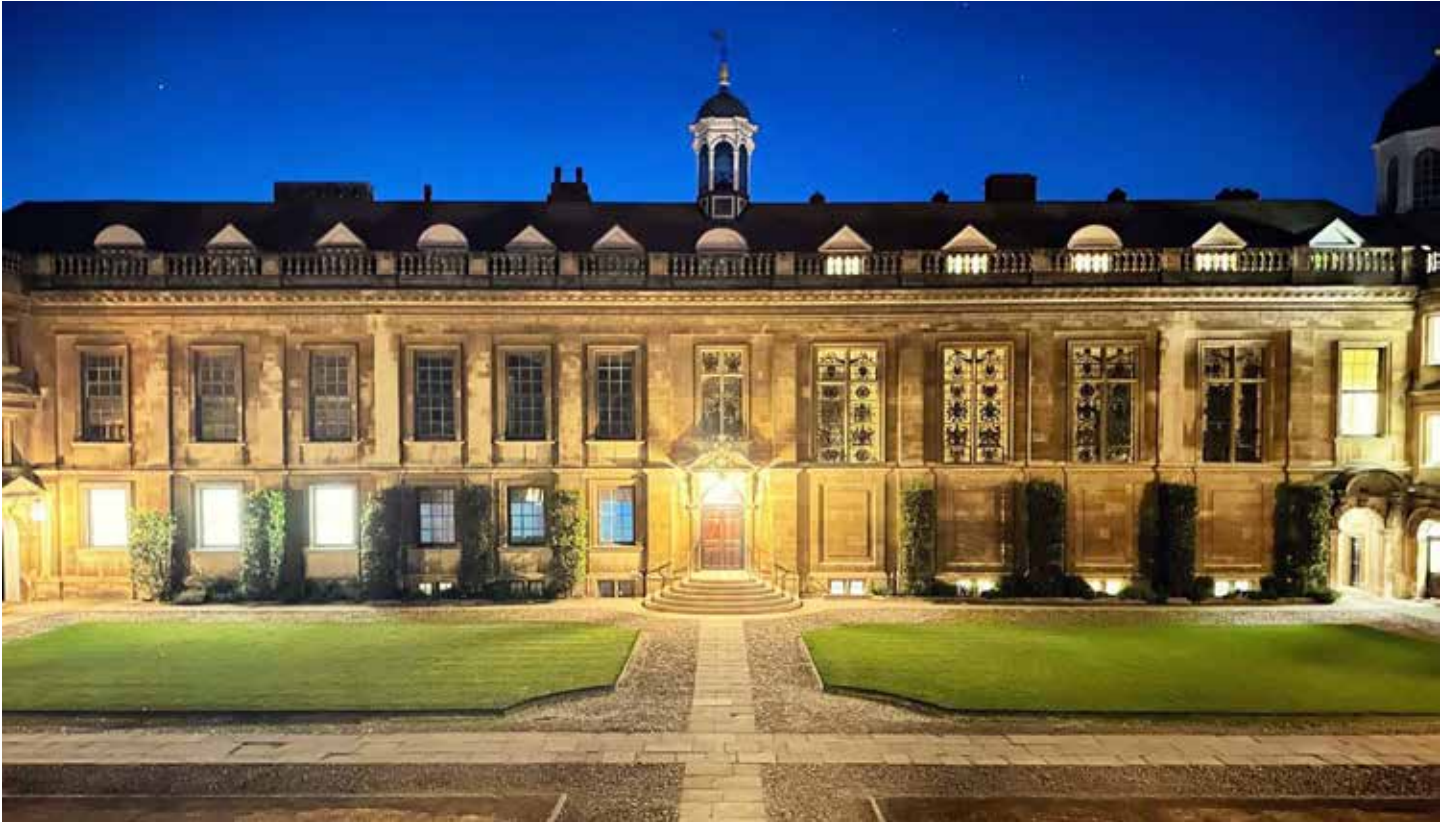
These college buildings were designed in 1958 by Richard Sheppard. The hall was completed in 1963 using furniture which was seen to be an integral part of the architectural interior.

Although, after fifty years of student use, the chairs were beyond economic repair, the college were keen to maintain the integrity of Sheppard's design. They commissioned a new design, more comfortable and longer lasting, but still sympathetic. This offered an opportunity to rethink the way the catering staff were likely to move and store the furniture.

The introduction of dollies (rather than sack-trucks) for moving the chairs, leaving the chairs on the dollies, massively reduces the wear and tear both on the chairs and on the staff that move them. The system avoids double-handling and halves the time needed for clearing the hall.

The dollies need somewhere to be stored and for this reason, storage trolleys are now part of the handling routine. All the stacks of chairs can now go in the nearby goods lift or be stored into corners of corridors and the life expectancy of the chairs is greatly extended.





Clare College, Cambridge

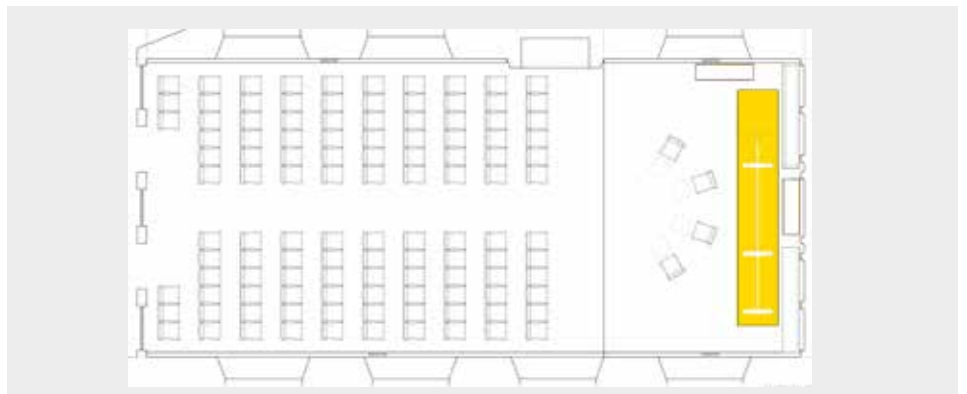




The dining hall at Clare College dates back to 1680s and was substantially redecorated in 1870s by Matthew Digby Wyatt.

Some elements of the oak tables, in particular the attractive barley-twist legs, probably date back to the 17th century Hall. Understandably, there was a determination to retain as much as possible of their original character.

One particular table, which is more than 7.2m long, was too long to remove and thus required re-working and refurbishing in the Hall; it is now positioned as the principal High Table, albeit mounted on concealed castors.



SEATING CAPACITY INCREASE
150
121







Refurbished table to new dimensions and re-using most of the original material.



Westminster Abbey



Wolfson College, Oxford



Balliol College, Oxford



St. John's College, Cambridge



Homerton College, Cambridge



Brasenose College, Oxford



Trinity College, Oxford



Sydney Sussex College, Cambridge



New College, Oxford



Folio



LH 42



Downing



Lincoln



Wykeham



Newnham



Assembly



Churchill

'How very pleased we are with our new Hall chairs. Individually they look elegant; together and filling the hall they are magnificent.. they have exceeded all our expectations by a wide margin'

Bursar, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge



Before



After



Before



After



Education and Research clients

All Souls College, Oxford
Atlantic College
Balliol College, Cambridge
Bancroft School
Bedford School
Benenden School
Brasenose College, Oxford
Broadstone Academy
Brookfield School
Broomwood Hall School
Bryanston School
Cambridge Union Society
Cambridge University Boat Club
Cambridge University Engineering Department
Cambridge University Institute of Criminology
Cambridge University Library
Cambridge University Old Schools
Cambridge University Press
Cambridge University Sainsbury Laboratory
Campion Hall, Oxford
Charterhouse School
Christ Church, Oxford
Christ's College, Cambridge
Churchill College, Cambridge
City of London School
Clare College, Cambridge
College of Law
Corpus Christi College, Cambridge
Corpus Christi College, Oxford
Cranleigh School
Darwin College, Cambridge
Downing College, Cambridge
Duke University, NC
Emmanuel College, Cambridge
Epsom College
Eton College
Exeter College, Oxford
Giggleswick School
Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge
Green College, Oxford
Haberdashers' Aske's Boys School
Haileybury School
Harrow School
Harvard University
Hertford College, Oxford
Highgate School
Hughes Hall, Cambridge
Hurstpierpoint College
Jesus College, Cambridge

Jesus College, Oxford
Kebble College, Oxford
Keystone Academy, Beijing
King's College, London
Liverpool Hope University
London School of Economics
Marlborough College
Merton College, Oxford
Middlesex School, Concord, MA
Middlesex University
New College, Oxford
New Hall, Cambridge
Newnham College, Cambridge
Nuffield College, Oxford
Open University
Oriel College, Oxford
Oundle School
Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies
Pembroke College, Cambridge
Pembroke College, Oxford
Peterhouse, Cambridge
Queen's College, Oxford
Reuben College, Oxford
Rhodes House, Oxford
Robinson College, Cambridge
Roedean School
Royal Academy of Music
Royal Grammar School, Guildford
Selwyn College, Cambridge
Sherborne School
Shrewsbury School
Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge
St Anne's College, Oxford
St Antony's College, Oxford
St Benet's Hall
St Catharine's, Cambridge
St Cross College, Oxford
St Edmund Hall, Oxford
St Edmund's College, Cambridge
St Edward's School, Oxford
St Hugh's College, Oxford
St John's College, Cambridge
St John's College, Oxford
St John's School, Leatherhead
St Paul's Girls' School
St Paul's School
St Peter's College, Oxford
Stowe School
The Hill School, Pottstown, PA
The King's School, Canterbury

Trinity College, Cambridge
Trinity College, Oxford
Trinity Hall, Cambridge
UCL Sainsbury Wellcome Centre
University College London
University College, Oxford
University of Birmingham
University of Chester
University of Dundee
University of Edinburgh
University of Liverpool
University of London, Royal Holloway College
University of Nottingham Trent
University of Roehampton
University of Warwick
University of Winchester
Uppingham School
Valparaiso University, IA
Villanova University, PA
Wolfson College, Cambridge
Wolfson College, Oxford
Yale National University of Singapore
Yale University

Civic and Cultural clients

Anglo-Omani Society
Apex Theatre, Bury St Edmunds
Art Workers Guild
Athenaeum Club
Beefsteak Club
British Academy
British Council
British Heart Foundation
British Library
British Museum
Buckingham Palace
Cambridge Arts Theatre
Department for Culture, Media & Sport
Edinburgh University Law Library
English Heritage
Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge
Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington DC
Foreign & Commonwealth Office
Garrick Club
General Medical Council
Geological Society
Guildhall, London
Hampton Court Palace
Hertfordshire County Council
Historic Royal Palaces

Holyrood Palace
House of Commons
Institute for Government
Institute of Chartered Accountants
Institute of Electrical Engineers
International Institute for Strategic Studies
Kew Gardens Herbarium
Kew Palace
Leighton House Museum
London Library
London Transport
Manchester Town Hall
Ministry of Defence
National Gallery of Scotland
National Gallery, London
National Maritime Museum
Oxford and Cambridge Club
Paul Mellon Centre, London
Philip Mould Gallery
Prince of Wales Theatre, London
Rotherham City Hall
Royal Albert Hall
Royal Astronomical Society
Royal Collection Trust
Royal College of Paediatrics
Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons
Royal Geographical Society
Royal Institute of British Architects
Royal Opera House
RPSA (Milton Resnick & Pat Paslof Foundation), NYC
Scottish Supreme Court
Society of Antiquaries
Sondeim Theatre, London
South Bank, London
Temple Bar
The Honourable Society of Gray's Inn, London
The Honourable Society of Inner Temple
The Honourable Society of Lincoln's Inn
The Honourable Society of Middle Temple
The Worshipful Company of Butchers
The Worshipful Company of Carpenters
The Worshipful Company of Dyers
The Worshipful Company of Leathersellers
The Worshipful Company of Mercers
The Worshipful Company of Salters
Theatre Royal, Bury St Edmunds
Trinity Real Estate, Manhattan
UK Supreme Court of England & Wales
United Grand Lodge of England
Victoria & Albert Museum



'Knowledge and experience gained over the years has informed a unique relationship between creative craftwork and high precision, industrial production.

Although designs are always respectful of context – striving to be accomplished, discreet and restrained – they are also rugged, robust, and built to last'.

Accordingly, if our advice is followed, we are pleased to offer a ten-year warranty. In fact, we have already supported many of our clients for more than forty years and consider we have a vested interest in ensuring our furniture gives decades of service.

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