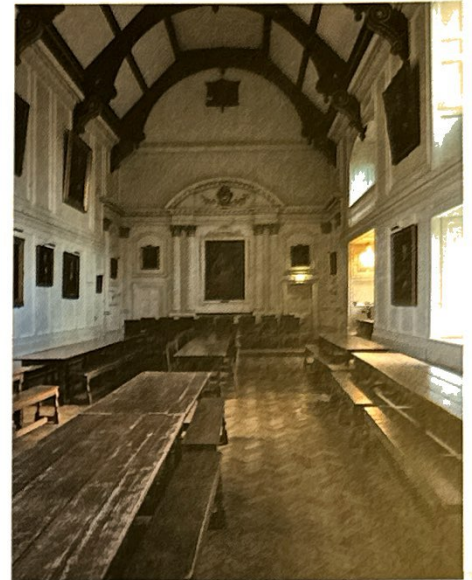




Luke Hughes

## THE TABLE TRANSFORMATION



Luke Hughes® was commissioned by the College to redesign Trinity Hall's dining furniture as part of the general refurbishment of the Dining Hall.

Amongst the challenges of the refurbishment was to retain the intimate feel of the space whilst making it much easier for the catering team to move the furniture around, set it out for formal and informal dining, music performances and lectures or, indeed, clear it away altogether for buffet functions. The greatest challenge was to increase seating capacity from 96 to 140 (46%) in the Dining Hall and a further 16 in the gallery, without cluttering the space.

This was the first major renovation of the Dining Hall in a century and has been designed to see the College through for another century or more. The College's forebears had built it to last. One of the great advantages of having selected high quality materials is that they can almost always be restored and revived. The dining tables, with good turned oak legs, had endured a century of abuse from students, staff, and the maintenance team. Well-meaning steel straps screwed to the underside of the tops had prevented the normal rhythm of expansion and contraction between winter and summer, leading to bad cracks. Nevertheless, most of the oak was of high quality and was perfectly seasoned. The table bases were therefore redesigned, the legs repositioned

and the tops cut down to a size that could allow every sitter to get their knees beneath the top without straddling a table leg. All the legs were found to be reusable as well as about 70% of the tops. The linking beams between the legs were refashioned to incorporate a quick-release linking wedge system that allows the bases to be quickly taken down and stored in a former cleaning cupboard under the stairs. The tops can now be slid into special racks, tucked into the corridor by the Senior Combination Room (SCR). The two high tables were also remade to reduce the width and increase capacity.

It was clear that the old benches had had their day. Although viewed with affection by some, they were felt to be no longer suitable for modern expectations of dining in comfort (especially for the important conference trade outside College term). These were auctioned to alumni which raised over £10,000. The money raised was then invested back into the refurbishment of the Dining Hall. It was agreed to replace the benches with the same solid oak-frame and leather-upholstered stacking chairs, that have been used in the Graham Storey Room and the Senior Combination Room for the last fifteen years or so.

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People often ask me "what do you do for a living?" I used to say blandly, "I'm a furniture designer." Now I say that my company specialises in "furniture in architecture" and for me it is immaterial whether this is furniture for a busy college dining hall, a romanesque cathedral like Ely or the Sainsbury Botanic Institute (designed by Stanton Williams and winner of the Stirling Prize in 2012). It is less the style of the furniture that matters and more the impact it has on those who work in and inhabit these impressive public spaces, and what one can do to improve that. It has been a great pleasure to apply some of our experience to one of the most welcoming and now beautifully restored college halls in both Oxford and Cambridge.



Opposite page: The tables in need of restoration. Top left: the storage system outside the SCR. Top right: in the workshop. Bottom left: the newly restored tables meet the new chairs. Bottom right: a stack of new chairs in the Dining Hall

### Brief background to Luke Hughes®

Luke Hughes, is one of the UK's leading furniture designers, who studied History of Architecture at Cambridge University. He and his Covent Garden based team have concentrated on designing furniture for architecture over the last 30 years. 80% of his clients are academic institutions, including Oxbridge colleges, as well as Yale and Harvard. He designed the furniture for both the UK Supreme Court and Westminster Abbey (used in the Royal Wedding in 2011).

In 2010, he was a winner of a Walpole Award for British Design Talent for 'outstanding achievement in design, craftsmanship, business and culture'. In 2012, the Botanic Institute in Cambridge, for which he designed all the furniture, was awarded 14 architectural prizes including the UK's most prestigious award, the Stirling Prize.

For more information, see: [www.lukehughes.co.uk](http://www.lukehughes.co.uk)

