

Conservation Documentary



Piece: Limited Edition 1849 Howard Staunton Club-Size Chess Set Hand Crafted by Jaques of London, #9 of 300 sets with mahogany case.

Overall Condition: Fair, 16 damaged pieces

Finish Condition: Good



Almost anything in existence can be collected, and chess sets are no exception. The popularity of this ancient game is known to have thrived for at least fifteen hundred years. The origins of the game are still debated to be predating Christ in China or conception within India around the sixth century. Discrepancies between pieces and rules between Chinese chess and modern Western chess are contemplated. In any case, evolving through antiquity and continues to pit modern strategists against each other in an arena where plans, moves, counters, offense, and defense require concentration and mental dexterity.

Chess set designs have varied with the personalities of players and designers throughout the game's history, including the set featured in this article. Sets included turned pieces, sculptured fantasy, medieval, architectural bases, and carvings. The random nature of the pieces created frustration amongst players, especially as tournaments gained momentum. In 1849, Jaques of London introduced the first tournament standard set designed by Nathaniel Cooke. This revolutionary concept design quickly gained attention in the circles of masters, impressing famous English School of Chess exponent Howard Staunton enough to authenticate every set with his signature.

The set featured in this conservation documentary is the ninth of 300 first edition signature Staunton sets. Notably, this is the oldest known existing original Staunton set still in existence. This project is the first chess set Artisans restored, and it will make a unique addition to our portfolio. Jaques has been producing fine chess sets since 1795, with the "Rolls Royce" of their product line being the Staunton sets. Our research into materials and finishes quickly lead us back to the company, still producing chess sets that define the tournament standard today, for advice. Jaques, as an interesting fact, has the longest documented lineage for a business passed without interruption through the generations.

Our client's desire was to restore the set as accurately as possible, and ensure the historic value of the pieces was maintained through the process. All thirty-two hand made pieces were present, but sixteen sustained damage including missing pips, crosses, and chunks. All possibly common damage, sustained from years of being shuffled around against each other in a single compartment box. We also pondered the possibility of a child breaking off the delicate tips.

Overall, the set was in stable condition, and the restoration project was definitely feasible. All efforts would have to be done by hand, filing or carving the new material to meet the contours of the piece. Originally turned, the pieces were rounded and high polished while spinning.

Wood never ages in the round; it always tends to oblong with time. It is impossible to repeat the turning process without risk of shattering the aged wood, eliminating the oblong aging, and destroying the existing finishes. Fortunately, the sets are originally hand made, making slight discrepancies and distinctions between pieces acceptable.



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It should also be mentioned that the original mahogany box is intact with the set, including the hand signature of Howard Staunton. This box was waxed, and no other work was required.

Artisans located heartwood Gaboon Ebony and English Boxwood for the project from a local instrument shop, the materials originally destined for violins. Wood selected for musical instruments tends to be high quality stable heartwood. This is the exact requirement for restoration of this set, we only wish we could have located antique wood. Each missing chunk was hand cut and fit to the profile of the break, removing as little original material as possible to ensure a tight joint.

The fitted ruff pieces were then hand filed using diamond files to shape, round, and blend the pieces into the original profile. This filing process was necessary due to the hard nature of ebony, which resists carving tools and tends to chip easily. Filing is the fastest method to obtain a smooth surface.

Spot patching a French polish can be an arduous task, but the advent of premixed solutions of crystal clear polish allowed Artisans to match the shine with a five or six carefully applied and rubbed coats. A final waxed shine over the whole piece blended the repairs resulting in a barely noticeable result.

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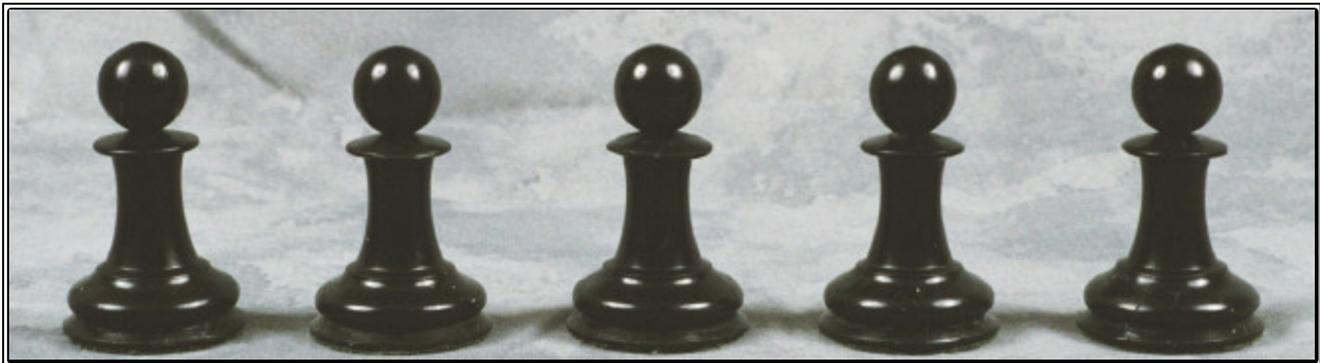
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Artisans always does their best to ensure our work enhances the value of a piece. This chess set is no exception. We believe that the restoration will restore this first edition set to a value at least 80% of a pristine set. Our client provided an example from the same series, and documented a history of value between the sets. Our restoration brought back the glory to the bruised royalty of the set, and restored a tattered clan of battered pawns to their original splendor. Having a model set in excellent condition ensured the accuracy of our restoration.

The restoration process entailed approximately thirty hours of physical work and perhaps another four or five of research. The result is undetectable while in position to play a game with this set. The repairs can be detected only upon close inspection of individual pieces were large missing sections were replaced. Our third party inspections have determined they cannot discern the new crosses and pips. The finish polish has been matched, and the warm glow of the pieces restored. Restoration included blending the new sections into the old by waxing the entire surface of each piece using a high quality clear and black Briwax as appropriate.



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