

# F R Shadbolt & Sons Ltd

## Veneer of The Week



For many years, for those who travelled from the Waterworks Roundabout along the North Circular Road toward Tottenham, the Shadbolt factory was a landmark. This was because, each week, the company chose a sample veneer from their huge range and stock of veneers and displayed a sample panel outside the factory.

In 2008, the Walthamstow factory closed and production was moved to Braintree. This was to a new factory where it continues to manufacture high quality products with state of the art machinery.

## The Product

The company is known for its stock of high quality veneers and various products made using these. Veneers are extremely thin sheets of wood that show the beauty of the timber. They are generally pressure bonded to other much thicker sheet materials to form decorative panels that then can be made into other items. In the middle ages, veneers were produced by hand sawing as thin a sheet of the timber as could be produced. This process produced veneers that are much thicker than today's extremely thin sheets that are produced by machine cutting.

## How It All Began

According to the company profile [www.shadbolt.co.uk/default.asp?id=202](http://www.shadbolt.co.uk/default.asp?id=202)

*' Frederick Robert Shadbolt founded the family firm of F R Shadbolt & Sons Ltd in London in 1884, producing decorative inlays for the furniture trade. In 1900 our first veneering service was offered to cabinet makers following the installation of a hand press. This innovative investment in machinery was to become the foundation of the company's future expansion. In 1947 we moved to London's North Circular Road at Chingford, and the third generation of the family took over the running of the business.'*

**(The picture on the right is of Frederick Robert Shadbolt)**



## The Family History

However, having looked at the family genealogy I have a major problem with the official account. In the 1881 Census John & Elizabeth Shadbolt are living with their four children and a domestic servant at Old Ford Road in Hackney. John (Aged 53) and his two eldest sons (Arthur & James, aged 18 & 16 respectively) are described as Cabinet Makers. They also have a 14 year old daughter named Mary and a 9 year old son named Frederick.

Ten years later, in the 1891 Census, (Seven years after the supposed founding date of the company) nineteen year old Frederick Shadbolt is shown living with his widowed mother at Bonner Street in Bethnel Green and is working as a Firewood Cutter. There can be no doubt at all that this is the same Elizabeth and Frederick who are shown in the 1881 Census. Frederick's father - John Shadbolt died in 1884 and his siblings have left home.

This means that If the company was started by Frederick in 1884, he would have only been 13 years old and it also doesn't explain how he had any knowledge at all of veneers and decorative inlays for the furniture trade.

## The Problem Solved

I'm pretty sure that the solution to this problem is to be found in the marriage of twenty year old Frederick Shadbolt to twenty one year old Louisa Farmer at St James Church in Bethnel Green on July 20<sup>th</sup> 1891.

In the 1891 Census, Louisa is one of five children of Russell and Susannah Farmer of Brookdale Road in Walthamstow. Her father was a Carver and Gilder and all five of his children (Three boys and two girls, including Louisa ) are decribed as Marquetry Cutters.

## Marquetry

According to **Wikipedia**, 'Marquetry' (also spelled as 'marqueterie') is the art and **craft** of applying pieces of veneer to a structure to form decorative patterns, designs or pictures. Marquetry differs from the more ancient craft of *inlay*, in which a solid body of one material is cut out to receive sections of another to form the surface pattern. The word derives from a Middle French word meaning "inlaid work".

<http://www.craftsmanspace.com/free-books/veneering-and-inlaying.html>

*'The marquetry cutter must be a person of great skill and artistic ability in order to work out the pictures true to life in such unresponsive materials. The work is done by tracing the design on the veneer which is to form the background. The other veneers to form the design are glued onto the back of the former, with paper between. They are then cut with a marquetry cutter's saw - a machine resembling a foot-power scroll saw, adjusted with a tilting table or a tilting saw. This is to take care of the space left by the saw cutting its way thru the materials. As very fine saw blades are used, it does not take much of a tilt to close kerf when design slips into place.*

*After being sawed the design is removed and shaded. This is done by dipping the piece in hot sand and scorching until the desired depth is obtained. Afterward the background and all pieces forming the design are assembled and glued onto a soft piece of cardboard and the marquetry is now ready for the market.'*

It seems very obvious that Frederick's knowledge of marquetry and inlay veneer work must have come from his wife and her family. It must also be a strong possibility that it was her family who started the business originally and that Frederick carried the business forward.

I believe that the original business was situated in Hackney and we know that it moved to Walthamstow in 1947.

## The Diamond Jubilee

It is perhaps appropriate that I am writing the article at this time, as the Shadbolt company were involved in a piece of work that drew on their specialised skills at the time of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. The Redbridge Marquetry Group decided to make a large marquetry mural to mark the occasion. The design included pictures of Concord, the Hovercraft, the liner QE 11, Bobby Moore



with the World Cup, Calder Hall (Atomic Reactor), a North Sea Gas rig, the Post Office Tower and the Joderell Bank radio telescope, the climbing of Everest, Coventry Cathedral, a picture of Sir Winston Churchill, three castles - Balmoral, Windsor and Caernarvon and Buckingham Palace. (It is an interesting commentary on this selection to note that Concord and the Hovercraft channel service are no more and the Calder Hall nuclear reactor has been decommissioned)

The mural was put made and put together by members of the Redbridge Group and taken to F R Shadbolt where the mural was pressure bonded to a purpose made base then cut and sanded the finished mural. It was then send to another contractor to be polished. When completed it was presented to the Queen on 22<sup>nd</sup>. December 1977. Later, it as displayed at the Coach House Museum at Windsor. The following site gives more information: [http://www.redbridgemarquetrygroup.org/london\\_murals.htm](http://www.redbridgemarquetrygroup.org/london_murals.htm)

## Post Script

As I write this, the site is presently being redeveloped as what appears to be a huge Car showroom.

The company is still run by family members. If you want to know what the company is doing now, go to: <http://www.shadbolt.co.uk/>

Bill Bayliss

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