

Dot Bird

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HDot Bird is one of the most sought after bear restorers in the teddy bear industry. It was when she bought her first 'vintage' bear at an antique shop in Leeds almost twenty years ago that her love of bears turned from a hobby into a full-time job. Not only is her skill recognised internationally, she has become well-known in teddy bear circles for her historical bear knowledge in general and of Chad Valley bears in particular. A poor old soul sympathetically restored by Dot has a whole new lease of life.

Hello, my name is Dot Bird and I specialize in sympathetic resto-



ration of antique and vintage teddy bears, from the early 1900's to the 1960's. I have been restoring bears for nearly 20 years and have met some wonderful bears and people during this time, with many stories to tell. I write Bear Hospital for an American teddy bear magazine and have the restoration stand at three popular teddy bear fairs, two of which are held twice a year which are the Hugglets teddy fair in London and the Pudsey bear and doll fair, then the Gateshead Bear and Doll fair which is currently held once a year. Here is a look at a typical working day in my life as a

restorer, although I have to say - no two days are the same!

My day usually starts at 7am. I rise from my bed and already I am thinking about the bear I was working on the night before. Our 3 cats are already forming a hungry queue in the kitchen for their breakfast so they get fed first before the kettle boils! Still pondering over the bear I was thinking about earlier, I get breakfast out of the way then I get down to the task in hand and put out the tools and fabrics on my workbench that I need for the current repair.

The bear in question needed his felt paw pads repairing and the foot pads replacing. He also required some ear surgery and his growler looked at. I had started to repair the ears the night before and left the pads until I could match the felt in daylight. The ears still required some minor work so



I finished that off before starting on the pads. None of the felt I had matched the colour I needed, despite having every colour that is made in my stock! This often happens, the colours change so much over the years with wear and fading with sunlight, I very frequently find myself at the kitchen sink



dyeing fabric and today was no exception. On with the rubber gloves and out with the dyes, it can be a very time consuming task, especially as you never quite know how it will turn out until the fabric is

dry. I have been known to spend the entire day just trying to match a piece of mohair to a bear and not succeeding. Luckily that wasn't the case today, the felt took the dye quite well and it turned out to be a good match after the first attempt, which is a rarity! I don't always dye felt, it can make it very thick which isn't great for restoring old bears, it depends on the size of the bear and the customer requirements!

Back to the workbench to cut out the pieces I needed for the footpads and repair the paw pads. Once the pieces were cut out I pinned them into place and sewed them on. By this time it is half way through the morning and time to check for emails. A few queries regarding repairs had come in so I answered those and gave some approximate prices for restoring a variety of different bears. I always say prices are approximate because until I have the bear in front of me it is difficult to assess the work required on a description; a photograph or image sent via email is always useful, however, and can go a long way into providing me with the information I need to give a correct quote. Sat once again at my bench the 'phone rings, it's another restoration enquiry, this time from a lady who wanted her childhood bear restored so she could pass him down to her grandchildren. We had a lovely chat about her bear and she decided to send him at the end of the week so he could take his place in the hospital queue. Bears don't usually mind the queue, they have a good chat about the old days and enjoy meeting one another! I find that the owners are sometimes a little apprehensive about their bears being away from them until they realise that the bears are in good company and that they will be looked after well. I usually say to keep the bear at home until I am ready to work on him/her and then they are away for the least possible time. I took a note of her name and address and a few other details for the booking sheet then got back to the repairs in hand.

Shortly after there came a knock at the door and it's the postman with 2 parcels for me. One box is from a dealer that regularly sends

his bears to me for repair and the other box is from a collector who I spoke to the previous week, she had recently bought a lovely 1930's Chiltern and needed him restoring so she had sent him to me to have a look at and to give her a quote for the work. Once any bears are delivered I like to contact the owners to let them know that the bears have safely arrived, it puts peoples mind at rest and gives me an opportunity to discuss the repairs in detail.

Back at the workbench I finished off the repairs to the bear and gave him a little brush through to remove any dust from his mohair. I rang the owner to tell her to tell her that her bear was ready to come home and that he would be posted back to her that day, she had already paid me for the repair so I was able to send him straight away.

With lunchtime fast approaching I had a break and a quick snack then it was time to package up the bear and into town to post him plus other correspondence and try and think what to have for the evening meal. Inspiration struck me, which is rare, and I was back home again to unpack the shopping and pick up any messages on the answer phone and any other emails. By this time it was 2.30pm and time was slipping away fast!

The next teddy for repair needed cleaning first, he was very fragile and sometimes it is better to clean first then you can see how the fabric stands up to it and also if there are any other weak areas they can be noted and repaired later on. So, it was out with the cleaning stuff and I set to work. This bear was a beautiful Chad Valley from the 1930's. He was quite worn but cleaned well, with no further damage to the fabric, then he was set to one side on a towel to air off and dry. A gentle surface clean can take quite some time to complete, you have to be very careful and work slowly to ensure that the fabric has the least amount of trauma possible. By this time it was time to start preparing the evening meal and have a run round with the vacuum cleaner. It never ceases to amaze me the amount of dust and

debris I make when I repair the bears!

Once we'd eaten I had an hour or so on the computer putting together the next Bear Hospital article, I usually feature 2 bears with before and after images plus a written piece to tell the readers about the work I have carried out plus any interesting stories about the bears and their owners. By this time it is 9pm and time to stop work and put my feet up, although I am already thinking about the repairs that are need on the Chad Valley teddy I cleaned earlier...

Tomorrow is another day!

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