



Wood 'n' things



Mid Staffs Woodturning Association Newsletter

Issue – November 2013

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Future Events

MSWA Meetings

December 6th
Andrew Hall
Wooden Hats

January 10th 2014
Annual General Meeting

Other Events

November 16/17th
Christmas Fair
Staffordshire Wildlife Trust

Club Competitions

December

Novice
A natural edged bowl or platter

January
Challenge – A tea light or candle
holder

Premier Cup – An abstract
piece based on turning

Chairman's Notes

It is slowly dawning on people that the emphasis on all education at the tertiary level being University based has been over played, and that there is a lack of young people with the skills that the manufacturing industry require, a direct result of the replacement of the apprenticeships of yesteryear with what is now called vocational training. The following words from John Ruskin date from the turn of the previous century and yet have an interesting ring to them today.

“We are always in these days endeavouring to separate intellect and manual labour; we want one man to be always thinking, and another to be always working, and we call one a gentleman, and the other an operative; whereas the workman ought often to be thinking, and the thinker often to be working, and both should be gentlemen in the best sense. As it is, we make both ungentle, the one envying, the other despising, his brother; and the mass of society is made up of morbid thinkers and miserable workers.

—John Ruskin.”

I am not suggesting that a function of the MSWA is to provide such training but it would be satisfying if our demonstrations of craft could be the spark that inspires some young person to pursue a career in a traditional manufacturing industry.

Philip Watts

Chairman

A message from the Treasurer and Membership Secretary

AWGB/MSWA Membership renewals are now due for the year 2014. Individual membership to both is to stay the same at £30. Membership renewal forms were issued at the last meeting and will be available again at the next meeting-please bring a pen to complete your form. New 2014 stickers are also ready to issue on payment so bring your membership cards along too.



Editor's Scribblings

I recently listened to one of the Reith Lectures on the BBC. The speaker was Grayson Perry, the well known cross-dressing artist. He was defining the boundaries between art and craft. As somebody who both paints and makes pottery, he is well placed to appreciate the distinctions that people generally place on items. Pictures that he paints tend to be referred to as art, his pots are defined as craft. I think that he regards the distinction as an artificial one.

Looking back over recent demonstrations at the MSWA, we have had those that are quite clearly examples of craft such as that on chair making with the use of a pole lathe, but where would the work of Joey Richardson lie? To compound the question, or to muddy the waters perhaps, consider the following. Each of her turned and pierced works is unique. I am fairly sure that even Joey would wince at the challenge of turning put more than one piece of such complexity and make it identical. What is the situation, however, when one of pieces is the used as the basis of a replica produced in glass? There may be some differentiation between such items in the colour and the way the coloured glasses swirl in relation to each other but there is no limit, in theory, to the number of replicas that can be made.

So we return to an age old question. When does a craft become an art? Perhaps some other member could contribute their views.

Philip Watts

Deja vu

Searching for an image to complement my brief report on this month's demonstration by Melvyn Firmager, I came across a back reference to an older MSWA Newsletter, one edited and largely written by Paul Bellamy. The reference was to an article by Dawn Hopley on how she had spent a week at Melvyn Firmager's wood turning school near Bristol. The said newsletter is no longer immediately available through the Newsletter page on the MSWA website. Lack of space on the page meant that I cut back the links to the immediate past years. However, anybody who wants to read of her experiences can do so as the earlier newsletters are still archived on the site and can be accessed by typing the following into the address space on your browser:

www.mswa.co.uk/Newsletter/MSWA_June_07.pdf .

Note that the upper and lower case characters must be typed in correctly. (For the techies, servers running UNIX are more choosy than plain old Windows)

Paul also included this picture and captioned it "Dawn's lathe being delivered to Chads". I appreciated it because I once had something to do with these large trailers at one stage in my career. If you think that this one has a lot of wheels, you should have seen what I was responsible for designing!

Lengthy lorry leaves lots looking at its load

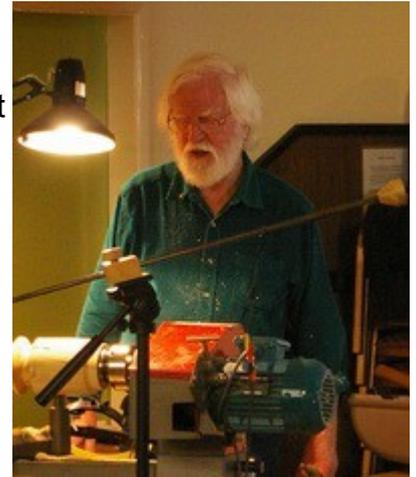




November demonstration – Melvyn Firmager

Melvyn Firmager is well known in the wood-turning field both in this country and, apparently, in the States. He combines his wood turning school with a Bed and Breakfast at an old farm south of Bristol. He was demonstrating at the recent Daventry Woodworks Show and has been a visiting speaker at many clubs around the U.K.

He chose as a project for this demonstration a hollow form in an end grain piece. His blank was about eight inches long and six inches in diameter. His preference is to hold the wood blank for such an item on the lathe by screwing it to a faceplate using socket head screws, as many as can be accommodated by the faceplate itself. This practice would permit him to turn extremely large items in his own workshop on a more powerful lathe than that possessed by the MSWA, up to two to three hundred pounds in weight.



The demonstration did not get off to a good start, as a vital piece of equipment had apparently been removed from his tool kit by a family member. Some improvisation overcame this problem and work got under-way. Over the years Melvyn has developed a number of his own style of tools, the first of which he described a “nib-gouge” because of its shape and resemblance to an item common before the advent of the ball point pen. Roughing down with this tool was achieved by plunging it into the wood, thus forming a series of v-shaped grooves along the blank. These were cleaned off by rotating the tool on its side and using the side of the bevel much in the manner of a skew chisel. Melvyn claims that this particular tool can be used to cover the work of the six most common tools in a wood-turners tool rack

Melvyn harked back to his early years of turning and the difficulty that he had found in sharpening his chisels in a consistent manner. The technique that he had ultimately adopted combined the use of an O'Donnell jig with the practice of marking up the bevel with a black marker pen before each phase of grinding. This allows a clear visual picture of the extent of the bevel being touched by the grindstone, allowing adjustments to be made to the angle of presentation.

The outside of the blank was then turned to the classical vase shape, with a narrow neck, flared mouth, and globular base section. The use of the nib-gouge was alternated with a gouge with an Irish or Celtic grind, the edges of the tool being ground back along the tool edge. Hollowing out through the narrow aperture in the neck followed with various gouges being used to first drill a central hole before opening it out, this being done in stages and working down into the turned piece.

An interesting demonstration but not one showing the full potential of Melvyn's work as demonstrated by this picture of one of his pieces.





Tools and their treatment

Melvyn Firmager had some disparaging words to say about tool suppliers and their ability to supply properly heat treated steels, a view not shared by all.

It reminded me of the time, when a student at UMIST, I was required as part of the metallurgy element of a Mechanical Engineering course to be able to reproduce from memory something known as the Iron/Carbon diagram. This was a feat that I found difficult then and one that would be impossible for me today. Basically, the diagram is in the form of a graph that demonstrates the changes in a steel as it is heated, and the potential changes to the material that would occur if a sudden cooling occurred at a particular phase. Correct selection of the carbon content of the steel, together with the incorporation of other elements such as cobalt and also the subsequent heat treatment, is essential if the material is to have the right properties for the intended purpose.

The high-speed steel (HSS or HS) used in the manufacture of wood turning tools is one of the tool steels, commonly used in drill bits and other cutting tools. It is superior to the older high-carbon steel used in earlier wood turning tools in that it can withstand higher temperatures without losing its temper (hardness). This property allows it to hold a cutting edge longer in wood turning and makes it easier to grind in that overheating is less likely to affect the material quality unlike with high-carbon steels.

Nevertheless, the message remain clear. Playing around with material qualities is not for the uninitiated. Heating a chisel to a high temperature and subjecting it to a sudden quenching can leave it dangerously brittle, likely to snap off in use. Similarly, the practice often quoted in older texts of turning old files into scraping tools is one to be avoided.

So when you come across what looks like a bargain set of wood chisels at auction or in a car boot sale, how do you tell what they are? The best advice that I could cull from that well known source, the Internet, suggested the following. "If there isn't an explicit statement stamped on the wood-turning tool, try to identify the tool's age. If it looks newer, there is a good chance it is HSS (though not guaranteed mind you). If the tool looks aged with a battered handle there is a good chance it is Carbon Steel, not HSS!

Check the spark pattern when sharpening if you are in doubt. This takes a bit of practice, but once you sharpen a couple of Carbon Steel tools and HSS tools side by side your eyes will see the difference. Carbon Steel tools will have a broader spray of warmer-yellow sparks than HSS. HSS will have a slightly tighter spark pattern with sparks that are a bit brighter. The best advice I can offer here is to get a tool you know is Carbon Steel and a tool that is HSS and put them on the grinder a couple of times side by side."

Philip Watts

Book Review

I have reviewed books before, many of them obtained from second-hand or remaindered stock. My latest purchase beats them all both for age and quantity. Sold on E-bay by the Chalfont Bookshop, it is a CD bearing a collection of some 94 books from the turn of the previous century, mainly if not all American, and scanned from books bearing the stamps of public libraries in places such as New York. There is inevitably a lot of repetition in the contents but there are books on woodworking, designs for furniture, and others such as Buhl work, inlay, and marquetry.

Wood turning is the sole subject of some of the books but is treated as a subject for only a chapter in others. The most intriguing aspect is that some of the chapters begin with instructions on how to build a treadle powered lathe, and regard the work as being totally within the capability of the average boy! The language and tone is of the time, such as when the young turner is exhorted to place some paper on the floor to collect the shavings as this would cause "the maid to think highly of the young gentleman".



November Competition

The November Competition in the Challenge Series was for a piece of involute turning. Two entries were received. Ted Gill took first place with an intriguing piece. My photograph does not do it full justice as the apertures in the turning gave an impression of two faces looking at each other. A simple but elegant candlestick from Hugh Field was in second place.



Results for this this year, so far.

NOVICE

CHALLENGE

Surname	Forename	NOVICE							CHALLENGE						
		February	April	June	August	October	December	Total	March	May	July	September	November	January '14	Total
Field	Hugh							0	4	2	2	3	3		14
Gill	Edward							0	1		4	4	4		13
Heath	Albert							0		1					1
Lupton	Vance							0		4					4
McElroy	John	4	4	4		3		15							0
Neale	David	4	3			4		11							0
Payne	Geoff							0	2	3	3				8
Powell	Philip	3			4			7	3		2				5
Smith	Brian							0	1	2					3
Watts	Philip							0	1	1		2			4

Newsletter

The Newsletter is for your and the club's benefit. If you have something to say then write it and send it to me for inclusion. I can accept text in almost any format, although simple text files are the best. Similarly, I can accept photographs in both hard and soft copy, in many formats.



Only so many Turning Days to Christmas

The club has supported the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust for the past few years by taking a stand at its annual Christmas Fayre, to be held this year at the Wolseley bridge centre on 16th/17th November. We have a lathe and demonstrate and also sell items made by club members, with varying success, the selling that is.

A popular item last year was miniature Christmas Trees. We offered them ready painted or unpainted so that they could be finished by the children in the family. On the Saturday, the painted items were the most popular. So Hugh Field spent Saturday night painting up a stock ready for the Sunday, when everybody demanded the unpainted versions.

My wife and I paid a visit to the medieval gardens at Castle Bromwich during their Apple Festival. We hadn't realised how many varieties of apples, and indeed other vegetables and fruits such as potatoes and tomatoes still existed. The West Midlands Wood-turners had a stand there and were busy trying to recreate one design of Christmas Tree in miniature. We discussed the origins of the design. I suggested that the idea originally came from the Black Forest in Germany. They thought that they had learnt it from Stuart Mortimer. I think that we have had it demonstrated at MSWA, possibly by Ken Allen. However, some research in my archives showed that Dave Regester, another well known turner, had written an article in the December 2001 edition of Woodturning on a visit to the Forest in which he described a number of techniques for making little fir trees.

I thought that an item on this would be an appropriate item to fill a blank page in this Newsletter, so here it is.

Three designs are shown in the picture below. Two are stylised trees turned in beech and finished with friction polish. One is a simple shape, the second is embellished with regularly spaced grooves turning in with the thinnest parting tool that I have to represent the branches. The third is the design referred to above. The simple conical shape is first turned in a material such as pine, although David Regester comments that the German turners favoured the use of Lime, or Linden as it is known in that country. Think of "Unten den Linden" in Berlin. It is the material also favoured by their wood carvers. David himself had good results with any wet wood and had success with elm, ash, lilac and magnolia,

A skew chisel is then used to "peel back" the layers to provide the impression of branches. This is relatively easy but does require care or the layer can well be turned off completely.

I completed this trio of trees by fitting a small screw eye to each one but many people would regard a length of mono-filament fishing line glued into a hole in the tip to be a neater and a cheaper approach. If you want to know more about this project, then come along to the Christmas Fayre, visit the stand and we will give you a teach-in.





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Club information

Your club committee for 2013 is:-

Chairman - Philip Watts

Email: chairman@mswa.co.uk

Tel. 0121 308 7838

Secretary – John McElroy

Email: secretary@mswa.co.uk

Treasurer – Vance Lupton

Email: treasurer@mswa.co.uk

Assistant Treasurer – Hugh Field

Events Secretary – Ted Gill

Email: events@mswa.co.uk

Abrasives -

Newsletter editor – Philip Watts

Email: editor@mswa.co.uk

Webmanager – Philip Watts

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Committee Members

Albert Heath
Dawn Hopley
Peter Worrall

Health and Safety Advisor

Hugh Field

Please only use phone numbers if absolutely necessary.

Merchandise



Clothing

The club has a selection of items for sale, all featuring the club name on a blue background.

Sweatshirts (dark blue)	£12.00
T-shirts (light blue)	£7.00
Baseball caps	£6.00

The sweatshirts are ideal for the workshop at this time of year; nice and warm, but they are also smart enough to wear down the high street, to woodturning shows, and to AWGB seminars.



Abrasives

If you need that finishing touch, the club has packs of Abranet, recommended by demonstrators and other club members, at £2.20 for a set of 7 sheets - 120 -600 grit.



Books and DVDs The club has the following DVDs amongst others for hire.

MSWA DVD List

- 1 AWGB Instant Gallery 1991-2003
- 2 Sharpening GMC
- 3 Turning Projects with Richard Raffan
- 4 Turning Wood with Alan Holtham – Table lamp
- 5 Colouring wood – Jan Sanders
- 6 3 Disc collection – Trent Bosch
- 7 Bowls for Beginners – Ray Jones
- 8 Course on Spindle Turning – Ray Jones
- 9 Making and Decorating Platters – Mick Hanbury
- 10 Making and Decorating Boxes – Mick Hanbury
- 11 Turn It On – Vol 1 – Jimmy Clewes
- 12 Turn It On – Vol 2 – Jimmy Clewes
- 13 Turn It On – Vol 3 – Jimmy Clewes
- 14 All Glued Up No1 – Sue Harker
- 15 Turned Out Nice Again – Sue Harker
- 16 Wood Turning with Steve Heeley – Steve Heeley
- 17 Woodcut Turning Tools
- 18 Robert Sorby Specialist Tools
- 19 Inlaid and Novelty Boxes – Chris Stott
- 20 Hope for us all – Simon Hope
- 21 Hope for us all – Vol2 – Simon Hope
- 22 Wet Turning With a Difference – Stuart Mortimer
- 23 AWGB Seminar 2011
- 24 Turning Green Wood – Michael O'Donnell
- 25 Woodturning, a craftsman's guide. - Mark Baker



Dawn Hopley has taken over the responsibility for these items and may be seen at Club Meetings



Turning tips

This section is for any tips or advice you would like to pass on to other members. It doesn't matter what it is, if you discovered something you found useful, that you think may benefit others, please pass it on.



Useful websites and suppliers

There is a lot of information available on the internet but some is better than others. If you come across any useful sites, please let me know and I will publish them here.

Questions and answers

This section is an opportunity for members to ask questions for other members to answer, primarily about wood-turning but I see no reason why this couldn't be extended further. There is a lot of knowledge in the club on many subjects and this should be an easy way to get answers.

Items for sale or wanted

If you have any items for sale, or if you are trying to find something, send me the details and I will put it in the next issue.

For Sale

1 Glue Pot Cast Interior and Exterior	£15.00
1 Draw Knife	£15.00
2 12" Record G Clamps	£30.00

Ring Albert Heath on 01785 661851

For Sale

Axminster Jet Bench Top Circular Saw JTS-10

Assembled and complete with stand

Little used and taking up room £150

Ring Philip Watts on 0121 308 7838

Custom Toolrests – David Fields

David's grandson is able to make tool-rests, similar to the Robert Sorby system, out of round steel bar. These can be tailored to suit your requirements i.e. tool-post stem and length of the actual tool-rest. At the moment he is only doing straight tool-rests but bowl rests may be feasible in the future.

And if you have a Record lathe and do small spindles, he has developed a cranked tool-post, allowing the tool-rest to get close to the work, without the banjo dropping off the front bed bar.

If you would like to see one, or want to discuss your requirements, please have a chat with David on 01283 229072

Carnauba wax polishes – Paul Bellamy

Following the favourable reaction to the polishing kits Paul started earlier this year, he has established a supply of carnauba wax flakes. These can be used to make your own 'sticks' or mixed with other components to make a range of polishes. He is selling these in 250g bags but could do larger quantities if you need it. He also has some ready-made wax blocks, comprising 60% beeswax/ 40% carnauba. These are softer than most 'wood-turning sticks' but he prefers this as it doesn't score your work.

He also has more of his 'Buffing kits', similar to Chestnut's system. For more details, e-mail him at

paul.bellamy@mswa.co.uk