Middlesex Woodturners Association

NEWSLETTER

No. 67 September 2003

Editor's Comments

More about the MWA Seminar. In my report I said that there was too much information from Tobias Kaye for me to record. In the event, one of those present, namely Gordon Cookson, somehow did manage to keep a record of much of Tobias' presentation. At first I thought that I might, after minimal editing, send it all to be reproduced in 'Revolutions'. After further thought, I have now decided to use Gordon's notes in extract form in our own Newsletter over the coming months. In that way our own members will get maximum benefit, and I shall have some useful items available to fill in the inevitable spaces as I put the newsletter together. Two for the price of one, so to speak! I hope that Gordon will approve.

There have been no takers for the the job of running the Shop. The Committee is reluctant simply to discontinue it, and sell off the stock to a trader at a low price, so for the next few meetings, we shall be offering, at half price to members, items which are slow moving, and which, if the shop is to continue, will not be stocked in future. If this tactic reduces the amount of stock to be looked after, perhaps then somebody will be prepared to take the Shop on. Let's see what happens. We believe that members will not want to lose the Shop altogether.

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(Two committee vacanies remain)

A.G.M. 2003

Time flies! The A.G.M. is due in November, the Committee is now discussing matters to do with it, and I am having early thoughts about the Chairman's Report. Our greatest preoccupation is that it seems inevitable that by then we shall have lost yet another committee member, bringing the number down to five. The amount of work which goes on unseen is considerable, and those of us who are left are having to pack in essential work which should have been shared out between eight people. There is a limit to just how much each of us can do, so you will not be surprised to know that some committee members are talking about needing a rest. Please do not just assume that the existing committee members will stand again. Willing horses cannot be flogged forever.

The Association has had a successful year, thanks to the sterling work done behind the scenes, but it is abundantly clear that the committee will need topping up with new talent if it is to continue to deliver.

My purpose in writing this short piece is to ask if, when it comes to nominating a new committee at the A.G.M., a few members would consider becoming part of the organisation of the Association, by coming forward as candidates. Do think it over, and remember, if we cannot form a committee, MWA may be unable to continue.

Its as simple as that!. *Alan*

Outback Timbers

For the June meeting, Simon Hope brought along a wide selection of 'Outback' timbers. These timbers are nominally 'green', or at best partly air dried, but as he pointed out, they come from very arid parts of Australia and there is not a great deal of moisture in them. They also grow slowly, and hence are closely grained, and hard. This applies to the burrs too. Such materials require a different approach by the turner, compared with that for more familiar woods.

Simon was very anxious that purchasers of 'outback' timber could get the best out of it, and he spent most of his presentation demonstrating the best ways in which to turn them. The hard and often abrasive nature of outback timbers leads to rapid blunting of all but the very best tools. Ordinary HSS will need frequent regrinding, and honing is simply a waste of time. Simon prefers to use tools made from the new generation steels. They are much more expensive, but do last between 3 and 4.5 times as long between regrinds. In general, rather lighter cuts seemed to be the order of the day, while scraping was often necessary to reduce torn grain. Some heavy power sanding was needed on the Coolibah wood which Simon used. This produced large amounts of fine dust, which gave the Committee cause to worry on Health & Safety grounds. It has been resolved that all future demonstrators will be asked to avoid the use of power sanding. Outback timbers usually finish well, and conventional methods all give very good results.

All the timber which Simon had brought with him was for sale at bargain prices, and during the tea break and at the end of the evening, sales were brisk. Some items made from burrs bought during the evening were on show at the recent Cow Byre Exhibition. They demonstrated the exceptionally good finish attainable with these timbers.

CCTV was in use to keep us close to the action, thanks yet again to our faithful provider and operator of the camera. What would we do without him!

Expert Spindle Turning

Spindle turning is an often neglected method of working. Most of us seem to be fixated on bowls and hollow objects. To remedy this Gary Rance was asked to demonstrate the ins and outs of the art. Gary is a professional turner who uses spindle turning in a major part of his day to day, 'bread and butter work'. Nobody does it better!

Gary had put together a special presentation in which he demonstrated every component of spindle turning. Individually they appear to be surprisingly simple, and with enough practice, so they are. The trouble is that many of us simply do not do enough practice! It is the bringing together of all these components in a single piece which makes the perfect piece of spindle turning. The importance of sharp tools and bevel contact were emphasised, and the dangers of pressing heavily on the bevel of the tool were also noted. The tools used were confined to spindle gouges, the skew chisel and of course the parting tool. Scrapers were simply not needed.

Gary demonstrated on softwood, which beginners often find difficult to deal with because they have not grasped the principles of cutting, not scraping, the wood. Needless to say, in Gary's hands, the tools left an almost perfect surface, with crisp detail and needing little or no sanding. Spindle turning is not confined to work between centres. Gary demonstrated how spindle turning methods work on the faces of some shapes, e.g. the foot of a candlestick. This was a surprise to some, but he pointed out that this work was not hollow like a bowl, when quite different methods and tools would have to be used.

Gary's presentation was very carefully thought out, and in a very neat way showed all that would ever be needed to carry out any form of spindle turning. In this he was ably supported by a double act with his cheeky son Luke. Nothing was left out. Of course, long practice has enabled Gary to make it look so easy, but occasional turners would be well advised to include a warm up spindle turning exercise on scrap softwood prior to embarking on something important, including that nice bowl.

This was an excellent presentation, and Gary well deserved the applause when he had finished. As usual, the provider and operator of the CCTV made sure we saw it all. Thanks again!.

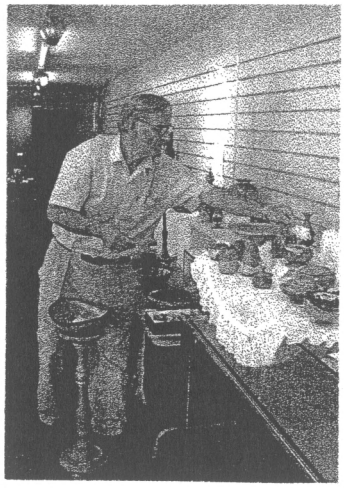
More Spindle Turning Wisdom

Don't turn the taper on that leg from the small diameter end. You would not sharpen a pencil that way! Frank Pain "Turning wood as it likes to be turned".

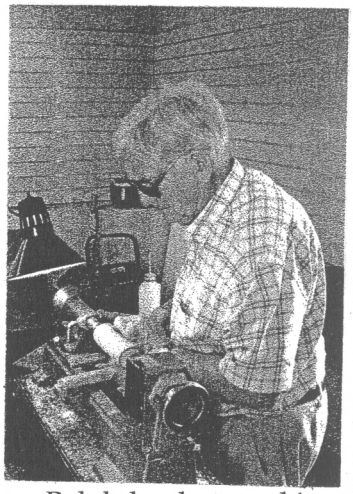
Exhibition at the Cow Byre

It was disappointing that the exhibition was not as well supported by the members as had been hoped for. Just nine members out of a membership of over eighty produced work for display and sale. In the past this show would have attracted more than twice that number, and would have been a more representative display of what Association members could do. Also very few members took the trouble to come along to look at the display, which was another disappointment. However, it was a very successful event, with plenty of interest from the public, and some notable purchases were made. When the accounts were done, it turned out that this show was the best ever in terms of sales, and the Association was able to show a profit after the rental and commission on sales (plus VAT!) were paid to the Local Authority. In the past, the Association usually had to absorb losses. In passing, items made for demonstration purposes were given to the Chairman's favourite Charity. We are asked by the Iver Nature Study Centre to pass on its thanks for the £45 raised by sales of these and other donated items.

Just a part of the impressive display.



Harry getting it just right!



Ralph hard at work!

I would like to extend many thanks to the stalwarts who provided, mounted, and dismantled the exhibition, and helped with the stewarding and demonstrating. This includes several members who had not been able to put work on display. It would have been much harder work without them. A special thank you too to Pat Spargo and June Brown who looked after the sales and the money. Pat also made up the accounts at the end of the show. We were lucky not to have experienced any serious pilfering, although we believe that one or two small items disappeared during the week. The small value of these was absorbed by the Association, so that no exhibitor suffered a loss.

Photographs by Tony Brown

For your Diary

October 9th. All being well, we are planning demonstrations of miniature turning and bobbin making.

17th October to 31st October.
The Exhibition in the Atrium of Uxbridge Central Library. More details at the October meeting, meanwhile, start preparing. We need a good display, as this venue is a Gallery.

13th November.
Annual General Meeting, followed by a Video Show..

11th December. Nikos Siragas, well known for his Genie Vases and other unusual turnings.**There will also be a Bring & Buy, Mince pies,** and perhaps some time for a good old nag.

'Hands On' in August

Hands On evenings are always well received. This one was no exception, despite the fact that it did not go quite as we had planned. First of all we could not have as many lathes as we usually have, because some normally available members were on holiday or otherwise prevented from attending. Nevertheless we had favourites such as freehand twist drill grinding and bandsaw folding by Ken Johnson, and tool grinding, using a jig and an adjustable tool rest with Ralph Pooley. In addition, Brian Wooldridge spent time discussing the choice of turning tools, and what tools to use for which purposes, The Club Lathe was set up so that members could if they wished try out their newly sharpened tools. Advice on turning topics was also available. Members only had to ask, and somebody had the answer! One visitor said afterwards that "some very interesting things were going on here".

A new event was Stuart King demonstrating pyrography, with special emphasis on it uses in decorating turned objects. He had some excellent examples of his own work with him, as well as an inexhaustible supply of carved wooden spoons, bought in bulk, we believe, in Bulgaria! Also new was Chris Stevens with one of his very good ideas for gadgets which make some turning operations more easy. We had already seen his very neat device for making finger nail grinds on gouges during Gary Rance's recent presentation, and for this evening he brought his toolpost for supporting the tool during deep excavations in hollow forms. This was well tried out during the evening, and generally attracted much interest. Chris will make one for you at a very reasonable price if you ask him nicely!

As usual there was a Bring & Buy session. Some interesting things were available, and there were some well priced bowl blanks on sale. Several members were seen departing, well satisfied with their purchases. Bring & Buy is a feature of all our 'Hands On' events, so save up your unwanted items for the next one in December. One man's junk is often another man's treasure. The seller makes some money, and the buyer gets a bargain. It can't be better than that!

Lastly, many thanks to all who helped with the considerable task of setting up and putting away all the gear for the evening, and particularly to those who stayed on until all the shavings and dust were finally cleared away.

Elisabeth and Malcolm.

Both Elisabeth and Malcolm have had to spend time in Hospital since we last saw them. You will be pleased to know that Elisabeth has had a Pacemaker fitted, which will improve her enjoyment of life considerably, and Malcolm has had some work done on his 'wonky' leg which should relieve him of much of the pain he has born with fortitude in recent times. You will all, I know, wish to join with me in wishing them both a speedy return to normality. *Alan*

Some Notes from the MWA Seminar. By Gordon Cookson.

Tobias started the session with "Don't be afraid to do it. Try it! Develop artistic and design skills by looking for the finished shape as real potential inside the wood blank. Make the bowl or whatever and then hold it up, and compare it with the original idea. How are they different? Why are they different? This is not self criticism, but a chance to compare the idea with reality. Notice how features of the wood changed the plan. Note the slow and erratic increase in your tool and design skills".

During the day,Tobias expounded his ideas on excellence versus perfection in traditional wood turning as follows. Strive for excellence, but imperfection is part of the human condition. Perfection can be boring. Setting standards on perfection will not produce a thing of joy. It is also tiring to try to achieve. Accuracy is the death of beauty. Making things identical is the death of the soul because there is a lack of interest in the development of ideas. A set of baluster spindles which subtly develop one to the next (a difficult task) would be more appealing to the eye than a set of perfect copies (an even more difficult task!). Similarity between the components of a set should be like the leaves on a tree, but given that we do not want too much disparity, remember to copy the first item every time. (This seems to be one of the best arguments to use ever when you are criticised because your candlesticks are not an exact pair! Ed)