



Staffordshire & South Cheshire Woodturners Association

Newsletter – June 2012

Holidays! Well mine anyway. I have just spent the last two weeks in Cornwall. Had some good weather and some not so good. During my stay there I was able to get the opportunity to see some pieces of turned wood for sale. To say that there were variations in both price and quality would be a gross understatement. My first encounter was in a gallery in the main high street in Penzance. A small gallery specializing in locally produced crafts and art, I found several pieces of nicely turned bowls and platters along with some very mundane pens produced from wood with a local interest. Prices, I thought, were very fair, reflecting the cost of production and a healthy profit (presumably for both the gallery and the turner) and ranged from £20.00 for a small bowl to £65.00 for a large (15" diameter) spalted beech bowl. There were some good examples of spalted woods and woods with 'features' being used to create interesting pieces. All had a natural finish, mainly of beeswax I think.

Next, I came across a small craft fair, as you would see in any part of the country. Here I found a turner selling his pieces at ridiculously low prices. I would guess that, unless he acquired the wood for free, that his prices little more than covered his costs – wood, finish, electric etc. The quality of the turning was not bad, but the shapes of the items – mainly bowls – were very much on the heavy side and somewhat crude. In addition to this lack of finesse, his finishing was very poor. Bowls ranged from as little as £4.50 (!!!!) to £15.00 for a large salad bowl in what appeared to be cherry.

The most astonishing examples of turning I came across were at the Lost Gardens of Heligan, close to Mevagissey. Similar to Biddulph Grange in a lot of ways, I have visited the gardens regularly since they opened several years ago. As the gardens were cleared, surplus wood was often sold through their shop and I have bought many a piece of wood from there (much of the bass guitar I am building originated from there). The gardens were rediscovered by the same person who went on to establish the Eden Project, and, unlike Biddulph Grange, are privately run. Three or four years ago, in conjunction with Cornwall College, they started taking on an apprentice for yearlong secondments in various aspects of carpentry and design. The first year the apprentice was doing a course in furniture making, and could be seen working at this in the workshop in the grounds. I can only guess that this year they have taken on a turner, as there were several large bowls and platters for sale in the shop (and NO wood!). Again, there were some beautiful woods being used and the sizes of the items were quite impressive. BUT..... the standard of turning was really quite appalling. I don't recall a single piece coming up to the standard of work being produced at SSCWA – and I include everyone, from beginner to advanced! The designs were poor, all on the very heavy side. Finishes, if they existed, were minimal and poor. And, at least one piece did not sit flat on the table and wobbled (and this was definitely not deliberate). However, the final straw was the pricing which ranged from around the £100.00 mark to £195.00. What a rip off. I was moved to voice my opinions to the staff who seemed bemused and ignorant of this travesty. A waste of good wood is how I would sum it up.

Lastly, I found a few very nice pieces for sale in a gallery in St. Ives. Now, St. Ives is noted for its artistic leanings, most notable being the sculptress Barbara Hepworth and the presence of the Tate Gallery, and Prices for original art can be quite high. However, I was pleasantly surprised to find that the turned work in this little gallery was not only well designed and proportioned, as well as being well made and finished, but was fairly priced. By that, I mean, that I felt that the items were value for money, but not cheap. A large walnut bowl (14" diameter) was on sale at £65.00 and smaller bowls ranged from £35.00 upwards. My only criticism (and being turners yourselves, I bet you can guess what is coming) was that chucking recesses and spigots were left untouched. To be honest, this did not detract from their appeal, and the gallery owner was not aware of this 'fault'.

I found all this quite enlightening. It seems to me, that the people selling turned items at prices that valued the work that had been put in, were the galleries. Whereas the turner selling his own work (good or bad) undervalues his or her work, seeing only the cost of the raw materials, and not the added value that they have put in. I was also proud of the work that we produce at the club, and I can honestly say that **any of it** would stand up to comparison with the work I saw on sale.

I would be interested to hear YOUR comments and thoughts on this matter, and I would be pleased to air them through this newsletter.

Spotlight on club members

No profile this month (guess everybody was on holiday as well!!)

REMEMBER

I hope, in future issues, to spotlight other members of the club, not just the committee, in this newsletter and will value any contributions that you can make. This is the opportunity for YOU to explain to the rest of the members how you do things. Short or long, it doesn't matter, this newsletter is for you to use and enjoy.

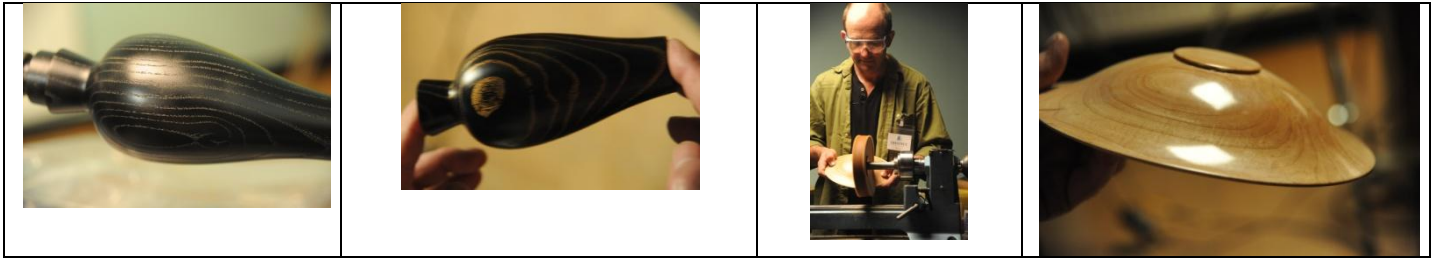
Meeting June 14th 2012

The guest demonstrator at the last meeting was Terry Smart of Chestnut Finishes. Terry, by his own admission, is not a woodturner, and used pre-turned pieces to demonstrate a selection of finishes and techniques using his company's products. During his demo's he imparted many useful tips to enable the best to be got from these products. Techniques demonstrated included the correct use of sanding sealer, ebonising spray and gilding creams and using the 3 buffing wheel system of finishing. Members were also able to buy most of the products at a discount.

Additionally, we trialled a new system of lighting for the first time this month. Reaction from those present was really positive and we will be taking this forward. Benefits included a much clearer video image on the screen with less 'white-outs', and better viewing for more of the room.

Terry Smart





Members' Display Table

Month four of our new venture, brought back from the US by Tom, to replace the monthly competitions. Members are asked to bring along a piece that they have finished in the last month to be put on display. We will be asking the visiting demonstrators to give a critique on the pieces to help forward our woodturning skills. Members themselves, time permitting, may also comment on pieces displayed.

Terry was pleased to give some critique and advice on the items displayed. If any members wish to comment via the newsletter, either on other member's items or on their own, maybe giving some details of the techniques used, I am sure it would be welcomed by everyone.

I have tried to do justice to the quality of the work displayed in the attached photos, but time and facilities make this difficult.





Next Meeting

The next meeting will be on 12th July 2012 when the guest demonstrator will be Mick Hanbury and the topic will be a decorative platter with Arbotec diffusers.

Mick is a skilful and artistic woodturner who has been turning for over 20 years. He is listed on the Register of Professional Turners as well as being a member of Association of Woodturners of Great Britain. Over the years Mick has developed a unique style of decorative finishes to his pieces and is well known for his beautiful finial boxes, elegant spiral stem goblets, and delicately patterned platters.



With over 25 years in the surface coatings industry – including time spent in manufacturing, research and development laboratories, quality control, technical assistance as well as sales and marketing - Terry Smart is more than qualified to demonstrate and talk about finishes, and has done so around the UK and Europe at trade fairs, public exhibitions, shops and club demos.

Audiences at previous demos have remarked on Terry's in-depth knowledge and ability to answer questions on finishing and finishes. Terry sees demos as more of an informal chat about finishing rather than a rehearsed lecture and tries to avoid clichés and 'buzz-phrases' as much as possible. Whilst the demo is structured to include sealers, lacquer, waxes, oils, stains etc. there is no rigid script and questions from the audience often take the demo in a totally different direction to the one planned.

(Taken from Chestnut Products web site

<http://www.chestnutproducts.co.uk>)

If anyone has any wood that they would like to donate to the club for the next wood auction (July 12th) it will be gratefully received. The wood auction is one of the many ways in which we fund the club, thereby keeping the annual subs as low as possible.

This month's caption

Tom certainly looks mystified by something – any suggestions?



Any for sale or wanted? Just drop me an e-mail and I'll include it in the next newsletter. You can include pictures as well.

Last month's caption competition

Nigel Rickards suggested: "Linda was one of Specsavers first customers to try out their new 'Combi' 1 for 2 glasses and false teeth offer!"

Or from Tom: 'I was sure i had booked a coach for Harrogate, but who the hell with.'



Bye for now,

Barry