

Crow Valley

WOODTURNERS



Autumn '25

Newsletter

Welcome back to a new season of the Crow Valley Woodturners' club. This quarter's issue of our club newsletter builds on the success of the revived June magazine which can still be found on the club's website. With our stated aim to make this magazine something which is built with articles by the members, for the members, it is great for your editorial team to have received several excellent contributions from members over the summer. That being said, we are always looking for new material and all contributions are gratefully received. Please don't be shy, we love reading them!

In this issue...

- Introduction from the Chair
- Spinning success: Steve Lester shares his adventure of 'Certificate of Woodturning'
- Hefin Rowlands describes the best of woodturning on YouTube
- David Alexander's woodturning journey... to date
- Turner's quiz crossword

Turning Competition

Showcase your craftsmanship and creativity at the 2025 Turning Competitions, as part of Wizardry in Wood, hosted by the Worshipful Company of Turners. Whether you are an experienced professional, an enthusiastic amateur, or a promising student, this is your opportunity to shine and gain recognition in the world of woodturning. Entry forms and conditions can be found at <https://turnersco.com/turning-competitions-2025/> Competitions and Judging Monday 28th October, Exhibition open to the public from Tuesday 29th to Friday 31st October 2025





Thoughts from the Chair

Hope you all had a good summer, but where has the summer gone?... seemed to be over in no time at all. Taking advantage of the excellent weather gave the opportunity to catch up on many outside maintenance jobs, but unfortunately it kept me out of the workshop! This I hope to put right over the coming months with the darker autumn evenings, perfect time for getting out in the workshop and spin some wood.

The summer break started for me with a trip the Windsor Castle with my family to receive the MBE at the investiture held by The Princess Royal. What an incredible day! Her Royal Highness Princess Anne was wonderful, though there were a large number of other recipients on the day, Her Royal Highness had specific knowledge of my work, congratulating me saying that I had achieved what the City and Guilds had not, referring to establishing a national woodturning qualification. The memory of the day at Windsor Castle will stay with me and my family for ever. I feel very honoured and privileged to have received the MBE on behalf of woodturning from Her Royal Highness Princess Anne.

There has been a great response over the summer from you the members for articles, some of which are included within this autumn edition. The article by Steve Lester is a great insight of Steve's experience of working toward the Certificate in Woodturning. This takes me back to time when our own Eadie Fleming and Julian Cleak were the very first to achieve the award and were presented with their certificates at the centre by the Master of the Worshipful Company of Turners back in 2013. Since then, the Certificate has been rolled out and delivered nationally at training centres around the country, including here at the centre.

The best of woodturning on YouTube by Hefin Rolands really does highlight the best of the best of woodturners on YouTube demonstrating good skills with safe practise.

The article by David Alexander was again a great insight and candid account of his woodturning journey, and I'm sure most of us can relate to David's story. The mention of some that gives inspiration; Douglas Fisher for example for which I'm a great admirer myself, and since seeing his work on Pinterest, I have always wanted to have a go at his technique's.

We have a Christmas theme demo/talk at the first club night in October, so finally, until I next write in the newsletter at the end of December... I wish you all a Merry Christmas!

Cheers,

Peter

Spinning Success!

My Adventure Earning a Certificate in Woodturning

& how I learned that life, and wood, is best experienced in the round. By Steve Lester

Confession time.... before I started my Certificate in Woodturning, I honestly thought that I could find my way around a lathe as I didn't see it as particularly complicated like some modern-day coffee machine. Little did I know, it would soon become my closest companion on days off and weekends. However, let's not get ahead of ourselves, being a qualified Joiner, I didn't realise how engaging spinning wood can be. This is the story of how I, a self-confessed short cut seeker and serial plant killer, became interested in the world's oldest spinning art.

What Exactly is the difference between joinery and Woodturning?

For the uninitiated, woodturning is the art (and let's be honest, sometimes the wild gamble) of spinning a lump of wood at high speeds and introducing sharp objects into the mix. The goal? To coax bowls, pens, candlesticks, and all manner of elegant objects out of what your neighbour might call "firewood." It's a little bit like pottery, but the clay is stubborn, splinters, and smells like a pine forest after a rainstorm.

Joinery is the manufacture of bespoke wooden fixtures and fitting such as doors, windows, stairs etc., and involves many traditional methods to join pieces of wood together. It should be noted that at times I did make newel posts and even some replacement spindles that were no longer being stocked as a standard product. Due to work commitments, (working Monday to Friday across the Southeast region of Wales), I was unable to commit to a regular evening woodturning class. I did feel that The Certificate in Woodturning, being held over several weekends, was possibly a better option for my personal circumstances and availability.

So, my application was sent to the Worshipful Company of Turners, they were prompt with their reply, and so the journey began.

I was asked to produce a sample piece of spindle turning, which included beads and coves and other profile shapes to a predetermined technical drawing, which I personally found to be a challenge, (the third attempt was the one I took with me). This was taken by me to our first session, and the feedback I received was supportive and very positive.

The first day of the course, I entered the workshop like a caffeinated squirrel! Nervous, wide-eyed, clutching my safety face mask and tools held in a nice new bag because they rarely leave the workshop. The training was at the Max Carey woodturning Centre in Portishead, (The Mill).





The Mill is extensively equipped, with 21 lathes of various types, all have electronic variable speed, and dust extraction. The range of ancillary equipment is very impressive, which includes an industrial bandsaw, drill press etc. and sets of wood turning tools. This is very much like the resources available to people at the Crow Valley Woodturners base at the community centre overseen very professionally by Nigel. There were two instructors leading the group of six people who were attending the course. Jay Herriot a seasoned and talented lady professional woodturner who hails from Mid Wales with hands as steady as mountain boulders, who greeted us

with a grin, her partner for the duration of the course was Stuart Bradfield, at that time the senior director at the Mill, a position now held by our own Peter Bradwick.

Woodturning for me tends to be a solo event, so to have others present and others seeing and feeding back on your technique, approach to design and the order that you intend to follow to achieve the desired outcome for me was something I wasn't expecting, but it enabled me to become more confident in my approach to woodturning. Producing detailed drawings of your intended work, prior to striking a blow, took me straight back to the joinery shop, good memories came flooding back even after so many years.

The Curriculum: More Than Meets the Grain

The Certificate in Woodturning isn't just a "how not to impale yourself" guide (though that is, admittedly, an important consideration). You are required to complete some "Homework", while it does take some concentration, there are clear benefits from it, completing health and safety audit of my home workshop was unexpected but made me question my approach to my safety and wellbeing in the workshop.

The course dives deep into the lore of timber: identifying species, understanding grain direction, mastering the ever-elusive art of sharpening tools (spoiler alert: dull chisels are the devil's playthings).

- **Tool Mastery:** Gouges, parting tools, scrapers—each with a purpose, and each with a personality. Did you know a spindle gouge can betray you faster than a reality TV twist?
- **Design Sense:** Learning the delicate balance between form and function, and how to hide your "oops" moments with creative flair. Vase too short? Call it a "modernist cup."
- **Finishing Techniques:** Oils, waxes, and more sandpaper than you ever dreamed possible. By the end of the course, you'll be buffing things that never needed buffing before.

Every lesson ended with a group debrief, where we'd admire each other's successes and collectively mourn the casualties (RIP, small bowl converted into a funnel!). It felt like we were more than a support group, really—except instead of tea, you share your splinters.

Somewhere between my third bowl and my third cup of workshop tea, it hit me: woodturning is a surprisingly philosophical pursuit. Sure, you're shaping wood, but along the way, the wood shapes you. Patience, focus, and a healthy respect for unpredictability quickly become your greatest tools.

- **Patience is a Virtue:** Rush the process and you'll have more kindling than keepsakes. Good things—and good bowls—take time.
- **Let Go of Perfection:** Every knot and feature or fault in the wood is a reminder that beauty can be a little off-centre. In fact, sometimes it's better that way.
- **Celebrate the Process:** The magic isn't just in the finished piece, but in the shavings on the floor, the hum of the lathe, and the thrill of seeing something emerge from nothing.

One of the greatest benefits that I continue to reap reward from is the great sense of camaraderie that I gained after completing the Certificate in Woodturning. Going back to my own club, I very quickly realised that all woodturners are a quirky, generous bunch who genuinely want to see you succeed (or at least not lose a finger). I continue to find myself, when hand chasing threads for example, (thank you Walter, you provided me with some great advice and inspiration), in conversations about spindle speed preferences and finishing oils with people I'd never otherwise meet—a retired policeman, ex jockey, a British Gas technician with a penchant for making wooden spoons, several high level engineers that produce the most exquisite piece with incredible finishes.

We continue to freely swap stories, share tips, and even invented a few inside jokes. The communal aspect of woodturning is as satisfying as the craft itself. There's a special bond that comes from collectively dodging airborne projectiles.

Why you should consider a Certificate in Woodturning. (Even if you're all thumbs

Let's face it: in a world of digital everything, working with your hands is a rare pleasure.

Woodturning offers the chance to unplug, create, and quite literally spin your problems away. Whether you dream of crafting heirlooms or just want to make a pencil that won't be mistaken for a stick, the Certificate in Woodturning is your invitation to join a merry band of makers. All applicants for the course are expected to have a basic level of skill and understanding of woodturning, before they apply. At Crow Valley we are very lucky to have Nigel, who is a seasoned and talented professional, who will be more than happy to start you off on your woodturning journey.

You'll gain practical skills, a new appreciation for trees, and probably an extensive collection of slightly odd bowls. Best of all, you'll discover that, like a good piece of timber, you're full of hidden potential—just waiting to take shape. So, if you've ever longed for the scent of sawdust and the thrill of creation, take the plunge. Your lathe—and your newfound woodturning friends—await.

Final Thoughts: The circle never ends.....

Looking back, I realise that my Certificate in Woodturning was about far more than making objects. It was a lesson in resilience, creativity, and the joy of learning by doing. Plus, my kitchen is now a shrine to misshapen bowls, and I wouldn't have it any other way. So next time someone asks what you've been up to, flash that certificate and say, "I turn wood into wonders." It's the kind of spin nobody can resist.

Steve Lester

The best of Wood Turning on YouTube



I find YouTube a valuable resource to help me develop my woodturning skills. There you will find an infinite number of videos to provide inspiration for your next project. This trend of on-line content peaked during lockdown when a huge number of live streams were available. I also recall our weekly club meetings including show and tell sessions the club hosted on zoom. Thankfully we are now back in the routine of physical meetings and workshop sessions.

Whilst you cannot beat a live workshop demo; on-line sessions have their place and enable us to watch a vast array of turners from across the world demonstrating their skills. I'm sure we all have our favourites and one of mine is Tomislav Tomasic. He was recently profiled in the Woodturning magazine and provides regular content on YouTube. One of the reasons why I find his approach appealing is that he explains in detail what he is doing; how to present and hold the tool; how to correct when things go wrong. Tomislav's demos are regularly aimed at the beginner but also provide a useful refresher and tips for the more experienced turner. He is part of the "4 ways collaboration series" with Richard Raffan, Mike Peace and Sam Angelo where every month they pick a topic or project and each one shows how they tackle the project in their own unique way. September 2025 was the 31st project which was how to turn a picture frame. The August 2025 project was to turn a salad bowl and in July 2025 the project was to turn a salt and pepper shaker set. There are plenty of ideas here for future club show and tell projects.

Other turners I enjoy watching are Ronald Kanne, Emma Cook, Mike Walddt, Martin Saban-Smith and Colwin Way. We will get the opportunity to see Martin and Emma demonstrate at the club in this session and Colwin has been a regular guest over the past few years.

YouTube provides a great resource to see a wide range of woodturners in action. In woodturning there are many ways to tackle a project and seeing different approaches helps us understand the challenges faced and to identify the best way to tackle a project that suits our individual needs. Be sure to look up the 4-way collaboration videos for inspiration for your next project.

Hefin Rolands



Ride the Bevel....????

I've got a job to ride the bus!

David Alexander gives us a quick insight into his wood turning journey and his general approach to the craft we all enjoy

"I guess I would describe myself as a bit of an 'activity butterfly'. I seem to flutter between hobbies and past times with frequent regularity, never really settling on one thing for too long". Looking around the garage, the tell-tale signs were there to be seen: A set of golf clubs gathering dust sat in the corner, the canoe paddles hanging from the roof trusses, the flat tyres on the mountain bike and fishing gear all over the place. "I could really do with having a good old sort out and dumping some of this stuff". "I've always been a bit of a hoarder, you never know when this stuff might come in handy".

When asked "Why woodturning?" David replied "it seemed a natural choice of crafts. I have always enjoyed working with wood albeit on a DIY basis. Working predominantly with steel, plastic and copper wire in my working life, wood gives you a warmth that you don't get from other materials whilst still maintaining the ability to be completely flexible in what you produce".

David's first lathe was an "eBay special". He had bought it as a restoration project for £30 and it needed a full nut and bolt repair. "It was a Draper WTL90 (this design of lathe is badged by many manufacturers and uses a mechanical speed control), it was in a pretty poor state with many of the bits missing. I was able to source certain components for the speed control from Charnwood but found myself making quite a few parts myself". By the time he had finished the lathe had been fitted with new bearings, new belts and was running sweetly with the mechanical speed control capable of turning a fair lump at 2200 rpm. "I did contemplate changing the motor and fitting an electronic speed control (circa £100), but it would have meant more down time of the lathe before I had even produced my first snowman".

With the lathe operational and with the purchase of a pretty basic set of chisels, David was ready for action. He recalls spending loads of hours watching random turning videos on you tube and thinking how easy it was. "How naive was I?". After stumbling across the Crow Valley website and reaching out to Jim via the contact link, he went along on a Thursday night, which was a demo night of Bowl Turning completed by Peter. "After receiving a warm welcome at the door from Jim, I settled into the workshop to watch Peter talk and demo the bowl turning process using a piece of sycamore which had been cut a few months previous".



Peter made it look easy. "There were streams of shavings coming off neatly and Peter quoted "make sure you ride the bevel" to get a good finish. Ride the Bevel? I've got a job to ride the bus!!!" he smirks. Since that first session, David has been a regular attender at the club and participant in

the show and tells including during the Covid years zoom calls. “The help and advice I had received from club members during the early sessions was far greater than I could have ever picked up from any YouTube video. Some of the senior guys (particularly Nigel, Walter and Graham) really helped me to approach things in a far more controlled and consistent fashion”.

He recalls Nigel’s advice about budgets and what you need to consider “If you have a budget for a lathe of £2000 when starting out, spend about £500 on the lathe as you will need the remaining for everything else, you’ll have to get (chucks, tools, materials and consumables)”.

Like many of us, as the years pass and the hobby takes hold, David has upgraded his kit within his workshop to include a large Axminster lathe (18” diameter over the bed with a 42” bed length), a full-size bandsaw, planer thicknesser and drill press. Even with the large lathe capability, David has chosen to make some “subtle enhancements” to it, “there’s always room for improvement” he points out “modifying the headstock to allow it to turn and rewiring the control box to fit an umbilical control box has made a massive difference to me. It allowed me to work more safely on larger items and hollow forms rather than turning from the end of the bed, especially given my limited space. The piece I entered into last year’s OZ award measured 22” in diameter and was turned off centre and off angle. I never would have achieved this without making these modifications”.



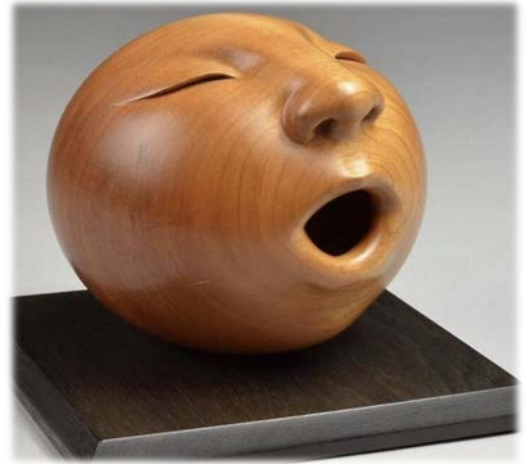
I asked him “What’s your general approach to turning?” he replies “I like to be inspired.... I generally don’t get too much time to turn so when I do get the opportunity, I like to work on something a little more unusual if possible. I’ve looked at so many images on Pinterest online of contemporary items which are not only well turned and finished but also includes an additional element, be it texturing or colours.

Pieces by Douglas Fisher, Vivien Gran-Douiller and the figures of Bjorn Kohler I find particularly appealing". "I'm hoping to build on my showing at last year's OZ award with another piece, hopefully a little more refined and delicate for this year".

"What does the future hold....", he interrupts before I can finish "Who am I? Mystic Meg?" he giggles. I try again "What does the future hold for you and Crow Valley?", with confidence he replies "I believe the club is in a really good place at the moment. The committee has been strengthened with new members who have come in with their new ideas. We are heading into the next rotation, and Nigel has been busy arranging with his contacts for future professional demos. If we can keep our turners inspired and interested, the gains for the individuals (me included) and the gains of the club will be self-evident. We have a wide talent pool within the membership who are consistently pulling out some really strong work. Whilst the standards remain high from some of the "old guard" within the club, the pieces coming through from the newer members at the show and tells nicely showcase the depth we have".

Finally, "and what about you?", he picks up a bowl gouge and says "I hope I can actually learn how to ride the bevel soon"

David Alexander

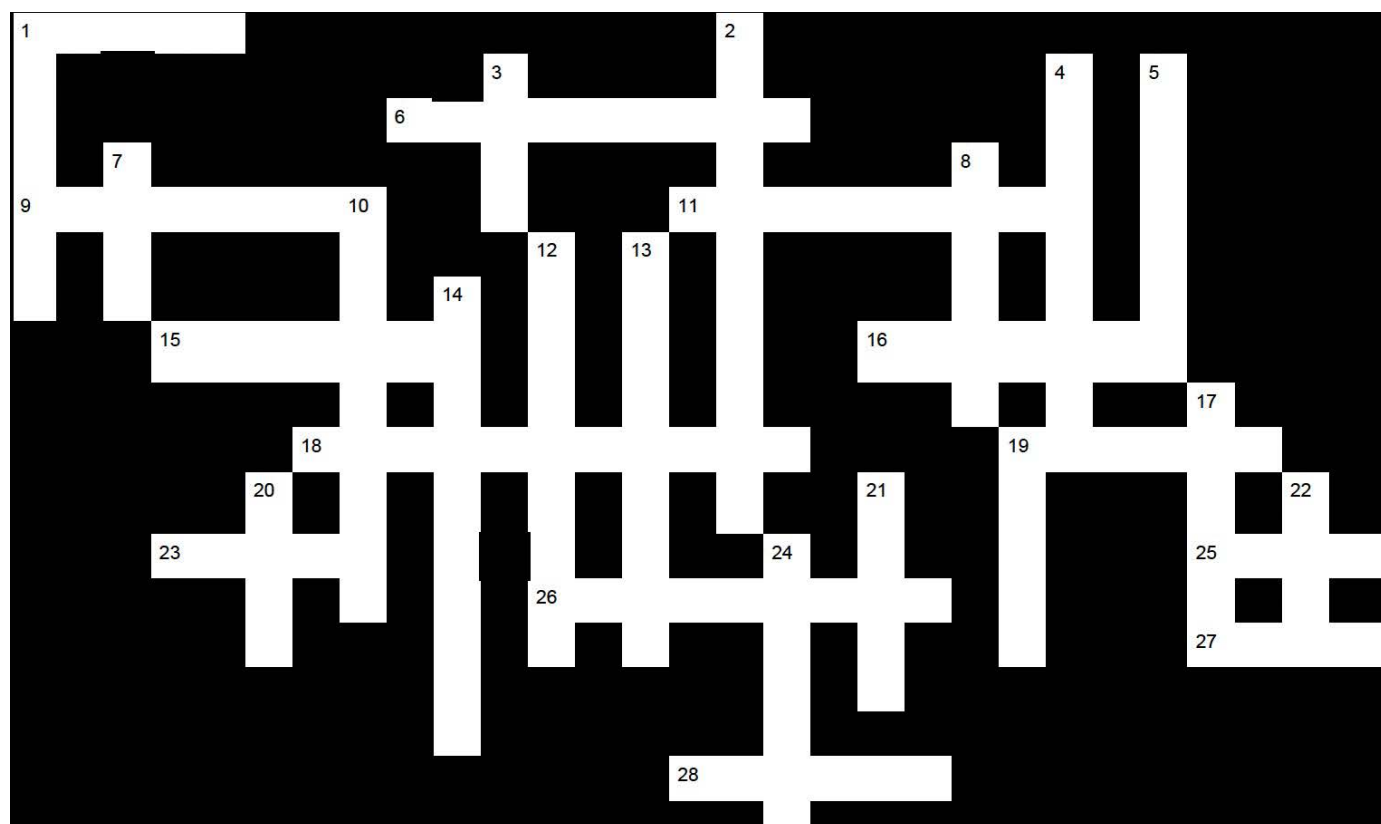


**MBE for Peter Bradwick.
Congratulations Peter!**

On Tuesday 22nd of July 2025 our very own Peter Bradwick MBE was invited to Windsor Castle for his investiture as a Member of the Order of the British Empire, 'for services to the craft of woodturning'. Peter was received by Her Royal Highness, The Princess Royal. Many congratulations to you and your family Peter!



Quiz *by Jeff Howells*



ACROSS

- 1 Music Maker (5)
- 6 Support (9)
- 9 Leftovers (8)
- 11 Sticky Stuff (9)
- 15 Very Smooth (7)
- 16 Hole Maker (7)
- 18 Threw his ladder away? (11)
- 19 Before you finish (6)
- 23 Type of Chisel (5)
- 25 Throw (5)
- 26 Measuring equipment (9)
- 27 Rotary Machine (5)
- 28 The last job (6)

DOWN

- 1 Circular cutter (7)
- 2 Expensive sucker (11)
- 3 Soft and strong (4)
- 4 Timber holder (9)
- 5 Pen maker (7)
- 7 Behind the lip (4)
- 8 Hard wood (6)
- 10 Gritty (9)
- 12 Chuck end (9)
- 13 Goggles (9)
- 17 Writing stick (6)
- 19 Cover all (5)
- 20 Numbers in line (4)
- 21 Starbucks are green (4)
- 22 Unwelcome residue (4)

Dates for your diary....

| Date 2025 | Meeting Topic |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| 2 nd October | Demo/Talk Christmas Theme |
| 9 th October | Open Workshop |
| 16 th October | Show and Tell Open Workshop |
| 18 th October Saturday | All day Demonstration Martin Saban-Smith |
| 23 rd October | Skills Workshop (Use of a skew) |
| 30 th October | Half Term – No Meeting |
| 6 th November | Demo/Talk TBA |
| 13 th November | Oz Award |
| 20 th November | Show and Tel (Oz Award) Open Workshop |
| 27 th November | Open Workshop |
| 4 th December | Demo/Talk TBA |
| 11 th December | Social Evening |

As a reminder, please pre-book a lathe for Open or Themed workshop nights if you intend to turn.

Health and safety rules can be found at www.crowvalleyturners.org.uk

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