

Crow Valley

WOODTURNERS

Newsletter

Winter '26

“By the Members, for the Members”

Welcome back to a new year at Crow Valley Woodturners' club. This January marks the start of our 20th anniversary year as a club. Stay tuned for details on how we plan to celebrate this milestone in the coming months! Thank you to the members who have once again contributed a range of excellent articles; we hope that you enjoy reading them. As always we are looking for new material for the next edition, and all contributions are gratefully received. Please don't be shy, we love reading them!

Welcome to our 20th Year

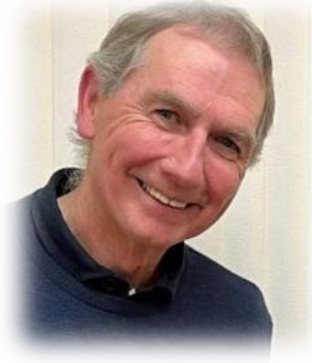
Watch out for this celebration logo which will be showing up on various items and at various events through the year. There are exciting times to come!



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Thoughts from the Chair

Welcome to 2026, this being a very special milestone for Crow Valley Woodturners as this is the year the club turns twenty! Watch this space for special events through the year to celebrate our 20th anniversary.

Back in October, a number of club members travelled to London to visit the Worshipful Company of Turners Wizardry in Wood at the magnificent Plaisterers' Hall. See the article by Paul Thomas giving an insight of the day.

In November we held our annual 'Oz Awards' competition. As always, the work presented was of an inspirational quality and the winning piece from Sean was stunning.

David Alexander writes a very interesting article on finishing, highlighting where to get inspiration, giving a candid view of some of the pitfalls, and listing some points to consider when finishing your work... thoroughly enjoyable read!

Following on from the excellent demonstration delivered by Hefin Rowlands back in November, see the article 'My Barley Twist Journey' by Hefin Rowlands, giving a very interesting account of his twist and turns journey... Stuart Mortimer would be well impressed.

The year ended with the very sad news that our friend and mentor Walter Wigmore had lost his battle with illness and passed away... we include some lovely memories in tribute to our friend who will be greatly missed.

We look forward to this coming year with events being planned at both the centre and externally in celebration of the 20th anniversary of the club being formed. In addition the committee are also working on some new and exciting initiatives to roll out through the year. Once again, the club is also hosting a Youth Training Day in April; so, let me know if you have young people who would be interested in attending. See the March edition for more information on the above.

I wish you all a healthy and wonderful 2026.

Cheers,

Peter

Wizardry in Wood 2025

ART | BEAUTY | SKILL | MYSTERY



So, there are 7 Welshmen on a bus stop.....

By Paul Thomas

Cast your mind back to October 29th, 2025; Where were you at 6:30am? Well 7 of your clubmates were stood in a very dull, drab and dismal Newport city centre, waiting for the “Flix Bus” bound for the bright lights of London and in particular the stunning Plaisterers’ Hall, venue for Wizardry in Wood 2025. This four-yearly woodturning equivalent to Harry Potter’s Quidditch World Cup brought together the work of hundreds of turners from across the country and beyond and showcased works from 21 of the finest woodturners in the UK invited by the Worshipful Company of Turners to produce pieces exclusively for the event. So, 7 of us enjoyed a beautifully uneventful journey to Hammersmith where we jumped on the tube across to the City of London right next to St. Paul’s Cathedral. After a breakfast stop a ‘Pret’ in Paternoster Square we walked the short distance to London Wall (it’s a street with a piece of the ancient city wall in it) and into the venue.



Once downstairs into the exhibition area we all spent some time ‘critiquing’ the invitational pieces, before concluding that pretty much all of them were amazing. My personal favourite (and I’m writing the article ☺) was a piece by Carlyn Lindsay called ‘Fifteen Millimetres’ shown to the left here, made from sycamore, veneers, black paint, 24 carat gold leaf and acrylic lacquer. It was only 15cm high and 16 cm in diameter, but the work was exquisite. The title of the piece relates to the tiny but constant movements of tectonic plates on the earth’s surface represented by the offset in the curvature of the walls of the work.

Moving into the great hall we were greeted by a series of maker's stands where work was both displayed and for sale. It was great to spend time talking with the makers who were very accessible and happy to talk in detail about the techniques that they use and design concepts behind their work. Speaking with Darren Breeze RPT about his extremely large wall hanging works (up to 6 feet across) it became clear that bravery was a huge part of his process, standing next to a rotating piece of wood the size of a front door isn't my personal idea of fun, but the outcome is very imposing!



In this seller's space the work of Sally Burnett from Dorset stood out for me, with beautifully proportioned classical vase shapes using pyrography to define leaf forms with beautifully painted outer surfaces. Sally was also very generous with her time and explanation of her process which I hope to try to emulate sometime in the future.

Several of us met and had a chat with Emma Cook (the 'Tiny Turner') who we will be welcoming to Croesyceiliog to demonstrate for us on Saturday July 18th, 2026. As you can see from this photograph next to our own diminutive David Alexander, she really is tiny!

One large section of the room was dedicated to the Turning Turns 40 exhibition by the Irish Woodturners Guild. A collection of Irish Ash pieces all made from six-inch cubes of stock by different members of the Irish guild. The guild President Emmet Kane walked me through the pieces explaining that the brief was for turners to imagine and produce diverse forms from their single standard block of ash. The diversity of pieces was remarkable. To celebrate their 40th anniversary, the guild produced a book of all these pieces with explanations from the tuner about their craft and process. Emmet was kind enough to furnish me with a copy of the book which I have placed in the club library should anyone wish to have a look. Here are a few of my favourite pieces.



There was also a working demonstration by the Society of Ornamental Turners of a working 'rose engine' lathe. Speaking personally this technique was completely new to me but the output

is spectacular. For anyone wishing to build one of these complex machines, the society has plans available at www.rougueturner.com/mdf-rose-engine.html or a second version at www.colvintools.com/MDF-RE%202.0.html

Most of the rest of the main hall was dedicated to pieces from AWGB members and other competitors including our own David Alexander. The standard of work across the hundreds of pieces in this area was stunning. Here are just a few examples.

After a good look around the exhibition, we adjourned to the suitably Welsh “Lord Raglan” pub around the corner for some well-earned ‘refreshments’ prior to the tube to Victoria bus station and the incredibly slow bus journey home. This event happens only once every four years but was certainly worth the trip. We had a great day!

Paul



*It's not how you start,
its how you finish!!!*

by David Alexander

How many times have you turned a pretty good-looking piece to then slap some finish on with the care and attention of nursery kid painting a self-portrait? Worse still, once it's started to look pants, in an attempt to improve things chased the finish by laying down more coats or layers believing “it'll turn out alright.....”. I know I have.

Having recently visited the “Wizardry in Wood” exhibition with a few of the members from the club, the one big take away for me was just how much enhancements and additional finishes to many of the items seemed to be the current style. There were some fantastic pieces on show which had been subtly finished with paint and stains and also incorporated additional/non-conventional materials. I would urge you to search for Sally Burnett if you have 5 mins and look at some of her works. Even within our own club competition in November, the two top pieces had been coloured and finished to enhance the wood turning skills on show before



being “made shiny” with some neatly applied lacquer. The visit of Martin Saban Smith at the end of October demonstrated how even the plainest piece of wood could be made into “a work of art” with the right approach and the right combination of finishes.



Since becoming a member of Crow Valley a few years back, I have come to realise that its not all about the wood and the chisels. I have seen members turn up at the show and tell sessions with items which have been properly enhanced with the use of colour without losing site of the original medium. It’s probably fair to say that I (and others) have presented a few pieces where the approach to the finishing could have benefitted from “a little more thought” 😊. We are lucky in the club that we have some members

who are consistently maintaining a leading standard when it comes to finishing and I for one am eagerly anticipating seeing how this further develops. Talking with guys, they are amenable to demonstrating their approach and we will look to set up a few sessions during 2026.

Whilst I am far from the best placed to provide any advice when it comes to the application of finishes, the points below will hopefully give you something to think about.

1. Start off right!

Putting the correct time and effort into your piece is key. You should be aiming for the best-off tool finish you can achieve in preparation for sanding before applying any finish. If it’s not tooled or sanded correctly, the marks may show up even more when the finish is applied. If your finish materials say, “sand to 400”, then sand to 400!

2. Have a plan

Before starting to apply anything, have a plan/jot down your stages before committing anything to the wood. With the clear steps in mind it may help prevent any off-piste meanders which don’t always work. Remember the 5 “P”s!!!

3. Have a practice

If you are using materials or finishes which you are unfamiliar with, don’t be afraid to spend an hour or so playing with them before going straight at the final piece. Knowing how the materials react and work will help you learn how best to apply them for real when it comes to the showpiece.

4. Be patient

Take a deep breath and slow down. There is a reason why the instructions tell you to wait 4 hours between coats!!! Rome wasn't built in a day and if you want to give it the best chance of coming out right, give it time to dry properly and mature.

5. Less is sometimes more

The common practice for many woodturners seems to be "one more cut or one more coat". Knowing when to stop is a skill in itself. Take time to look at the piece in different lights and from different angles before committing to the final application of topcoat. If it looks good then stop, if you think it needs a bit more, then go careful!!

6. Select your products

There are loads of finishing products on the market. All of them claim to be the best. I know for a fact that none of them are cheap!!! Getting the right choice of products is important. Martin Saban Smith suggested to avoid mixing manufacturers materials. Sean shared that he had a reaction with two types of Halfords lacquer, so please be careful.

7. Don't be afraid to STOP

If something is not working out, then stop before going too far. Take a breath and start again. If you need to re-sand/prepare because the finish choice isn't working for you, it's a small price to pay for the chance of recovering your works.

8. Do your research.

Have a look through the books, on the web and online resources of other people using the materials. Look, listen and learn and identify the good things which work and the bad things to avoid.

In slight contradiction to the quote by Mahatma Gandhi, when it comes to finishing– It **IS** the fruit of the action that's important!!!

David

Remembering our friend



Walter Wigmore



Walter started his woodturning journey by enrolling on a course at the centre delivered by the late Gordon Rich as tutor. After the first term, he was hooked and enrolled for a second term and went on to join the club.

Walter was soon producing some fine work with the encouragement and help from club members, going on to produce very interesting and challenging projects such as segmented, pierced, and basket weave illusion work.

He pushed the boundaries by challenging himself with some very intricate work, with some members joking with comments such as... 'Walter you got too much time on your hands'. However, he really enjoyed the challenge and the process... just having fun with wood, and in doing so inspiring others.



Walter had first prize at the 2019 Oz Awards annual competition with his amazing basket weave illusion platter.

A few years later he achieved the Oz Award for a second time in 2022 with his fine segmented and pierced globe.



For many years Walter volunteered on the committee arranging events for club nights, setting tasks to challenge members, delivering demonstrations and sharing his knowledge and skills with members willingly.

Crow Valley Woodturners is very much richer for having Walter as a member, with his contribution and support, he will be sadly missed by us all.



Peter

My Barley twist journey

Hefin Rowlands



I'm not sure what got me interested in barley twists, probably the symmetry of the spirals interweaving up a stem and thinking, how do they do that? I thought that you probably needed an expensive machine or jig, but on exploring you-tube, I saw a some being made with a Dremel or similar tool and one or two by hand. Without exception all mentioned Stuart Mortimer as the guru of this art. I had to get his book which is a great reference source providing detailed drawings and layout of constructing various types of twists (Techniques of Spiral Work, Stuart Mortimer, Stobart Davies, Hertford, 1995). This was just what I wanted to get me started.

I started with the basic single twist, all cut by with hand files and rasps. I learnt very quickly that the less expensive files readily available from diy stores didn't do a great job and I needed to get the right tools for the job. I invested in a set of Japanese files which cut rather than tear the wood, leaving a much cleaner finish resulting in less sanding needed. After mastering the basics in terms of layout and cutting the twists, I tried an open twist which was achieved by drilling a hole through the spindle blank before proceeding with cutting the twists (Fig 1).



Fig 1: Example of a 2 start open twist in progress.



Fig 2: Spirals cut on a hollow form vase.

By now I had the bug and experimented with 3 and 4 start twists before moving on to more ambitious pieces to cut twist and spines on a hollow form vase. The basic layout remains the same but a lot more care was needed to cut the spines to ensure equal spacing and even thickness. After a few broken pieces I achieved a spiral turned hollow form vase (Fig 2).



I now felt confident enough to do a demo session at the club on what I have learned. During this session in December 2025, I went through the basic layout techniques, cut and shaped a small section of a twist to demonstrate the process and discussed various tool that I used.

I had many of my pieces as well as tools available for club members to see. I thoroughly enjoyed the experience of sharing what I have learnt with club members, and from the positive comments received it was an enjoyable evening for all.

I look forward to seeing what members come up with at the end of January 2026 in the barley twist show and tell.

Hefin



In October we welcomed the well known professional woodturner and YouTuber, Martin Saban-Smith and his wife Natalja. Martin demonstrated several of his hollow form pieces and showcased colouring techniques and finishing using his own brand wood stains and finishing products. The Saturday event was very well attended and a great time was had by all.

'Oz' Awards Gallery 2025

2025 Oz Award Winner

Sean



2nd

Graham



3rd

Rob



Highly commended

David



Gordon Trophy

Paul



Looking ahead into 2026

Date 2026	Meeting Topic	Workshop Supervisor
8th January	Welcome Back Ideas Session/Talk	
15th January	Open Workshop	Kevin James
22nd January	Turners Task Barley Twist	Paul Thomas
29th January	Open Workshop	Steve Lester
5th February	Demo/Talk Box Making Techniques	
12th February	Open Workshop	Kevin James
19th February	Half Term – No Meeting	
26th February	Turners Task Russian Dolls	TBC
5th March	Demo/Talk Bowl Turning Techniques	
12th March	Open Workshop	Steve Lester
19th March	AGM	
26th March	Turners Task TBA	Kevin James
2nd April	Easter Break	
9th April	Easter Break	
16th April	Open Workshop	Paul Thomas
23rd April	Turners Task TBA	Steve Lester