

WSWC club meeting – Monday 20th June 2023

Demonstration by Tic Challis

Club News

Last meeting

Our chairman Tic Challis gave us a fantastic demonstration about her pyrography, her talk covered the history and basics of pyrography, equipment, techniques, hand posture and the use of colour over, under and within pyrographed items for different effects. The full meeting writeup is in this newsletter.

Next meeting 17th July 2023

This will be a multi demonstration with various talks around the subject of texturing brought to you by several club members. This promises to be a varied and interesting demonstration and if you are interested in decorating your turned items then its one meeting not to miss. The meeting starts at 7:30 pm.

That's all for now, take care and keep making things!

Neil (Newsletter and website)

Members Table

Two items this meeting from new to be member David Stockwell. He has used a laburnum root to create a lovely bowl, it is approximately 20cm or 8 inches. David held this on a faceplate, a very wise thing to do given the condition of the timber with its splits and cracks. The end result of this careful turning of a difficult root piece is something very special.

David's other piece is a yew wood tall vase made from a section of hollowed branch wood. This allows the contrast from the woods sapwood and heartwood to be shown to good effect, especially when the timber has good grain detail, a nice touch is the rolled top collar, its approximately 25.5cm or 10 inches. Yew rarely fails to please but does requires sharp tools and tool presentation and correct sanding speed to avoid checking.



Demonstration by Tic Challis

Tic studied Art formally and is now well known for her fantasy art, turning and pyrography as well as creating wonderful stylised figures and animals using mixed media. Tic has demonstrated widely and is well known in the world of Pyrography. You can see her work on our website in her member gallery and more of her wonderful creations and artistic skill can be seen at <https://www.deviantart.com/tic-challis>



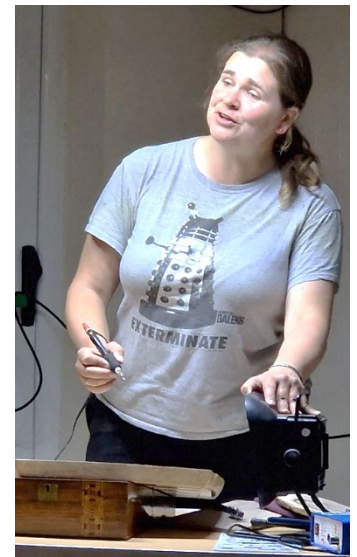
Tic started by looking at what pyrography is and a little about its history. People have been charring wood for centuries to make marks but it became popular in the Victorian times, she stated that she thinks pyrography is an awful word for the craft and a definition for pyrography in itself can be described as 'mark making over actual drawing'.

It is possible to apply the craft to various materials, wood, leather (smells like burnt flesh), bamboo, gourds, bone (another smelly one), antler and horn (smells like burning hair), cork and velvet. Velvet was popular in Victorian times but beware that newer material may contain plastics. It is important that you carefully consider what you are marking as it all produces smoke / fumes which you do not want to breath. It is always good to have adequate ventilation however open windows and draughts may affect the temperature of the nibs and hence the quality of your marks. Tics rule of thumb is 'if it smells bad then be careful or don't do it'.

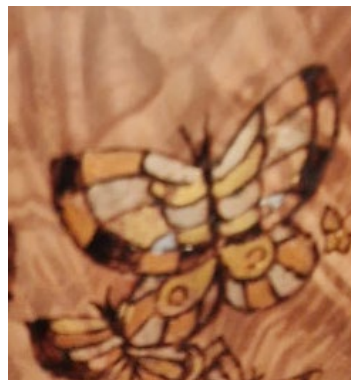
Pyrography marks are not purely black but monochrome. Burning wood creates a mark ranging from dark brown to grey depending on the species and grain. Tighter grain woods are usually better for pyrography, examples of good woods would be sycamore, box, walnut and cherry. Exotics and yew wood may be used but its important to avoid the fumes, more open grain woods such as ash and oak can be used but the nibs tend to fall within the grain and its not easy to get a quality line. Larger tips and often curved tips will need to be used. The marks will also show up more on the higher and harder grain and the overall finish may be poor.

Applying heat to the wood causes carbonisation and the amount of heat may be varied to apply shading, burn in detail as well as draw lines.

Whatever you use it is important to carefully prepare your surface and sand it to remove any scratches as they will be even more visible once pyrography is applied.



Tic demonstrates the use of a portable fan filter, these use a pre-coated carbon filter, and cost around 25 pounds plus



Left: Pyrography on a quilted ash hollow form by Tic Challis. The grain is still open and Tic says that it affects the quality of the artwork. (Hollow form made by Shaun Clifford).

Equipment

Tic has used a variety of pyrography machines and now has some firm favourites. There are two main types: those that use stamp and soldering iron type nibs and those that use a pen with a wire nib.



The Star Tec unit is a typical soldering iron type.
<http://www.startecproducts.de/>



With practice units like the Star Tec can produce good pyrography, various thicknesses of 'soldering iron' type nibs may be used as well as the brass stamps. When using the stamps, it is important that you heat them enough to perform a good burn and that the heat will quickly be drawn from the nib each time you use it. To use them effectively apply the stamp squarely and rock the stamp to make a good impression.

Disadvantage of these systems is the long heat up and cool down of the nibs when changing patterns or use.

Right/below: 'Mr Toad' created using a Star Tec unit.



Another system is the wire nib pens. The most well known one is the Peter Child unit developed several years ago and still available. This uses a pen that holds a thin wire nibs made of Nichrome wire. As a current is applied the resistance of the wire cause it to heat.

A vast selection of ready-made nibs is available; however, nibs can be homemade by cutting a length of wire and forming it with your fingers or pliers and attaching the ends to the screw terminals on the pen. Tic prefers to use 20-gauge wire. When the tips are first heated, they will lightly burn off a coating that may smell a little.

Tic says it is important to clean the nib from time to time using a wire or fibre glass brush, she doesn't advise sanding as it will change the nib profile.

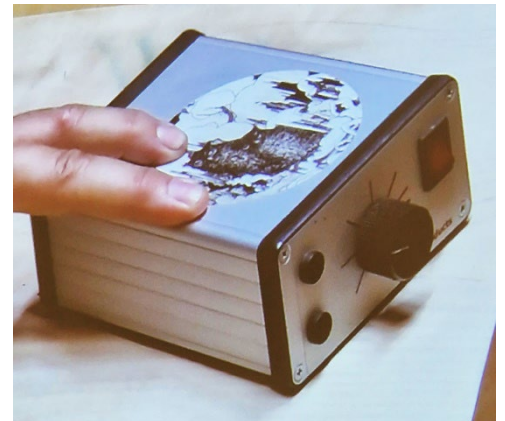


Other machines like the Razor tip models all work on the same principle but may offer enhancements such as easy to change pens where the lead plugs in each pen therefore retaining your tips in a pen to allow a quick change without needing to wait for the pens to cool down and change the nib, albeit at a cost. Razor tip have a vast catalogue of pre-made tips available



Typical nibs

<https://razertip.com/>



Tic's 'go to' machine is a small custom version of Woodart products pyrography machine (shown right) which uses pens and nichrome nibs. It heats quickly and has the power she needs to perform all of her pyrography needs. Woodart products machines and pens are all handmade in England, see <http://www.woodart-products.co.uk/>

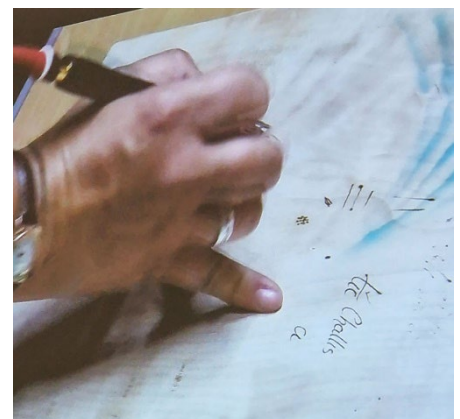
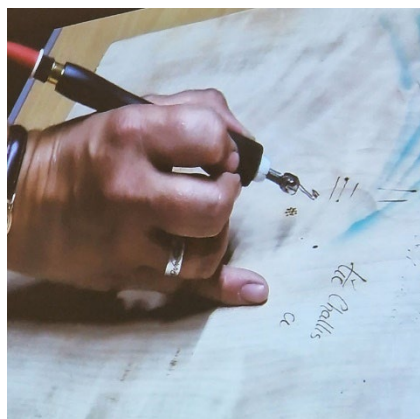
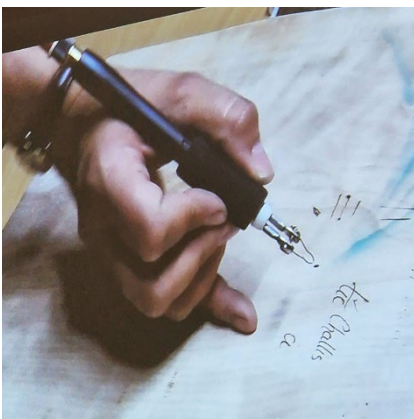
Creating lines and marks

Tic then demonstrated the use of a wire nib machine. Setting the nib temperature is very important, it doesn't want to glow orange hot, but just before it gets to that heat. Set the machine to a low setting and gradually increase it whilst looking at the nib. Some woods may need more heat than others.

There are several ways to make a mark by creating a line, applying dots or shading. A shading technique involves lots of close placed random dots that Tic calls 'squibbeling'. To make a more natural and even looking pattern when doing this on a large area Tic advises to start in one corner, move to the next, then move again and gradually work towards the centre.

Tic explained that a line needs to be created by moving the pen before it is applied to the wood to avoid a dot at the start. It is important to lay on and lift off and not stop at the end of the line to avoid the same. Tic said that artists have a saying 'taking a line for a walk', this means extending a line by feathering the line by passing over the previous mark. When doing this the pen must be moving. A light touch is required and allow the nib time to burn the line. Since the tip loses heat as it burns feathering is an important technique to master.

Tic explained that the correct hand posture is required: It's important to put your elbows out and support your drawing hand with the other. Tic explained that it's important to work freely, not huddled and tight



Above, correct hand position. Using the little finger as a pivot allows the wrist a fluid motion resulting in fluid lines. In the sequence above Tic demonstrates rotating the pen counter clockwise, moving the body in what she describes as a 'pyrography dance'.

Projects and resources

A good project is a chess board. Different marks and patterns can be applied and you will end up with something useful. Tic says she recommends keeping a log of nib shapes and types and patterns created by it for later reference.

Tic creates her pattern sticks: cylinders of pine wood that she applies different ideas, again she carefully notes the settings, speed and technique.



Above. Tic demonstrates laying precise even parallel lines



Above: two of Tic's pattern sticks



Above: Practice pieces helps create better results

Tic is a natural artist who has a fantastic gift for drawing hence she is able to sketch out a design and then apply the pyrography. She showed several books that have royalty free and copyright exempt designs that you may apply to your work. She said it is important that you don't just assume a design or illustration on the internet or in other books can be used. The published designs belong to the creator and you could fall foul of them should they see their work used, especially for commercial sale unless they are released into the public domain.

A new type designs for beginners is available and called 'Burn Through'. This uses an image on thin paper where you stick it to your piece and literally burn through the pattern. These are royalty free and work but they require high heat settings and its difficult to see what you are doing.



When drawing any design onto wood Tic advises using a pencil that is neither too soft nor too hard. A soft pen will deposit graphite into the grain and is difficult to remove after you have applied your pyrography. Hard pencils will tend to scratch the wood surface and is undesirable. A good compromise is a simple HB pencil. Marks may be removed using a rubber over your pyrography or by gently sanding.

Tic advises removing pencil marks as soon as possible

(It is worth searching the internet as several free guides are available. Take a look at <https://lirish.com/> Free tutorials are available here published by Lora Irish) - Ed.



Left: Tic has been asked to not sell her decorated owls by the owl designer.

However, she has now created her own cat versions complete with whiskers and homemade acrylic eyes that she can freely sell.

Seen right is a partially created piece, the artwork is original to Tic and it can be seen that the foot is drawn on the wood.

Pyrography is not for those in a rush. This piece has 15 hours so far and the estimate to completion will require another 30.

For this reason and to achieve quality it is important that you make yourself comfortable.



Pyro Engraving and adding detail

This technique is used to 'carve' detail into a piece. It may require hotter temperatures but it is important that like making pyrography marks you don't press hard on the tip if it starts to run out of heat. Tic said this is a typical and natural reaction to making a dark mark when the heat drains from the nib. The result is you damage your nib and bend it and it is better to wait for the nib to re-heat. Tic says that you know a good heat for engraving when the nib 'squeaks' as it is applied to the piece.

Quite deep engraving may be achieved depending on the wood species and the detail can be overpainted or stained.

Tic also advocates re-working old or new pieces to add engraving and detail.

Right: Pyro engraving on an eagle's head. These wooden items were for sale at a recent show. The finish is a wood stain and the overall effect is very impressive.

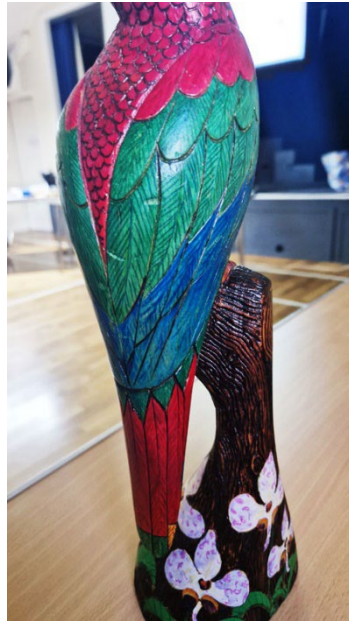




Shown left are two test pieces showing pyro engraving and two colour spirit staining.



Right: this is an example of pyro engraving, staining and then micro drill engraving and chip carving to produce a sgraffito test piece.



A balsa wood parrot purchased second hand has Tics' magic applied. Pyro engraving and good paint techniques have transformed this piece into something very special

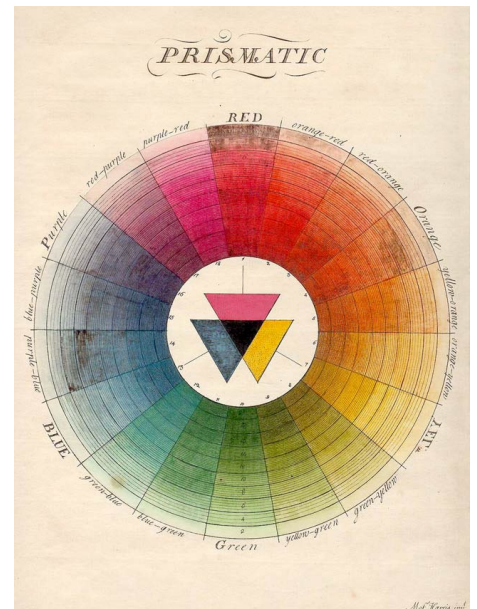
Painting, staining and applying colour

Tic suggests that only Artist's quality products are used to ensure your pieces last this is also important as pyrography can fade over time and disappear as wood naturally darkens over a period of many years. Light will fade and totally remove pyrography, the use of a high quality Ultra Violet filter varnishes and matt finishes may slow this process.

When decorating Tic suggests that a study of colour is taken to identify adjacent and complimentary colours. A simple colour wheel will help you.

The illustration on the right is a wonderful old wheel drawn by Moses Harris, from his publication 'The Natural System of Colours' published in Vienna in 1772.

Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=57409696>

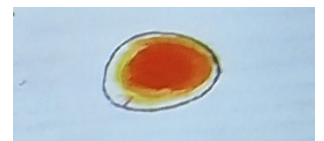


Complementary colours are a pair of colours located directly across from each other on a colour wheel. Such colours may be blue and orange, yellow and purple and work well together in a piece. These colours enhance your scheme by showing the most contrast from each other.

Tic explained that adjacent colours on a wheel are known as Analogous. This allows you to create a scheme where your base colour is the main or primary, whilst the secondary colours adjacent to it may be used for highlights and accents. Doing this within a limited palette is clear and very effective.

Stains, colouring and effects

Tic demonstrated colouring in a small pyrographed circle explaining that the line helped to contain the applied colourant. In the is demonstration she used Derwent Inktense water colour pencils. Derwent describe these as: *“Highly pigmented, intensely vibrant, watercolour pencils that offer exceptional layering without moving previously dried layers of colour. Unlike traditional watercolour, Derwent Inktense have been uniquely formulated in vivid ink-like colours. Activate the advanced performance formulation with water and see your artwork transform.”* (<https://www.derwentart.com/en-gb/c/professional-products/watersoluble/inktense-pencils>)



These are water soluble and can be used on many porous materials including wood, they can be purchased individually or in sets up to one hundred. There are also solid block sets available. They can be used to create a wash, layered effects or to create blended colours. Tic says the best thing is they cure to become permanent and water proof.

Other colour techniques include spirit stains, acrylic and oil-based inks and paints. Typical products are Chestnut spirit stains and Jo Sonias paints and mediums.

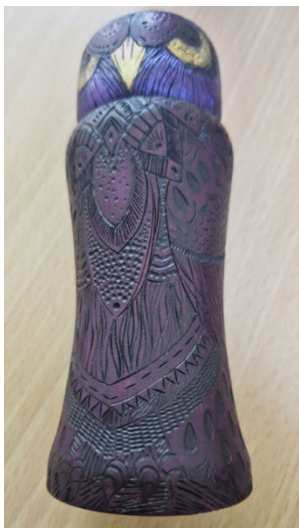
It is possible to use several different products as long as you understand how they work with each other, for example water-based products will not necessarily work over oil based products.



Far Left: Inktense colouring

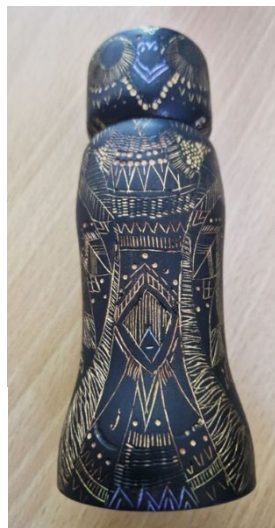
Middle: stains and inks

Near left: Acrylic inks



Left: Wooden owl box.

Finished with several blended stains over pyrography



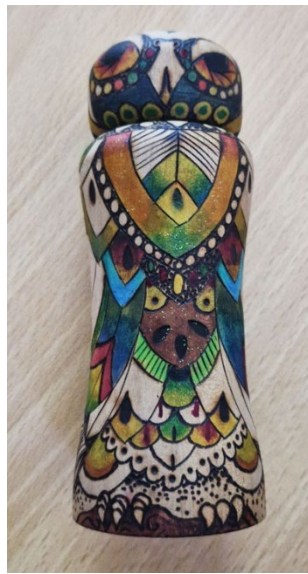
Right: Matt acrylic base colour applied over pyrography with later applied gilt wax filled



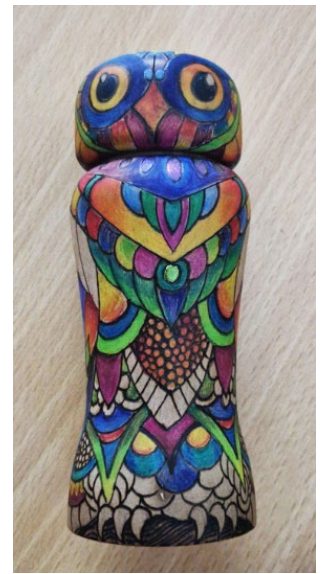
Right: Two tone acrylic paint effect over pyrography



Above: Wooden owl box, detailed and shaded with pyrography and accentuated with colour.



Above: blended acrylic paints



Above: Ink and permanent watercolour

Shou Sugi Bann

Finally, Tic showed us a wooden plank that had been subjected to an interesting technique called Japanese burning known as Shou Sugi Bann. This is an ancient Japanese technique used to preserve wood by controlled burning.

This is usually used on open grain woods such as cedar and pine. The wood is charred using a hot flame which colours and raises the grain. It is then textured as desired using a wire brush and then burnishing the piece with fine sandpaper. By repeating this process, a fine interesting finish can be achieved with differing levels of texture. The colour tones may range from dark blacks to greys.

Spirit stains can be applied for extra effect on the finished piece and the whole sealed, a good sealant would be a natural oils like Tung oil.

This was a well thought out presentation that walked us through all aspects of the pyrography art form.

Tic demonstrated that it isn't just about applying lines and shading to create beautiful monotone art works. She showed how to incorporate other techniques and colour in tandem with pyrography to dramatically enhance pieces.

Being an artist, Tic, makes it look easy to create beautiful base artworks through her ability to draw as well as having an artist's eye how to get the best out of materials, patterns and detail.

What has to be appreciated is that she has built up a massive amount of experience and techniques through constant development and vast practice of her ideas.

Thank you, Tic, for a very informative evening.

