

West Suffolk Woodturning Club Meeting – 20th December 2021

Hello to one and all again in these very uncertain times. The December club meeting was held with all the Covid requirements to prevent Omicron spread and to meet the current guidelines. Unfortunately, and probably due to this, the meeting was only very lightly attended with five members of the committee and two members but it was great that a meeting went ahead and all those who attended had an enjoyable evening.



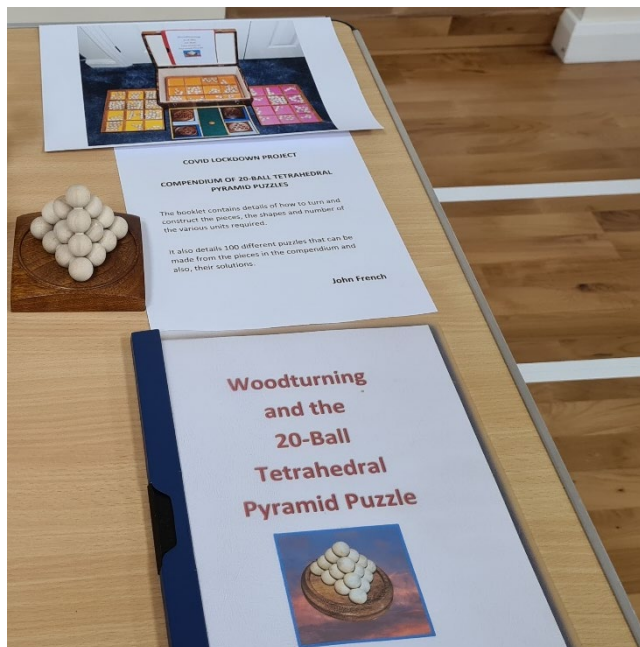
As it was Christmas John Woods kindly donated Mince Pies and Ian Cameron some sausage rolls and some home made warming Sloe Gin (hic!).

The talk for this meeting was given by John Woods in his capacity as owner, reseller and manufacturer of Woodart Products. There follows his report notes and some photographs.



Only a few things on the display table this month. Tic showed a beautiful Pyrography design of a Flying Unicorn on what appeared to be a burr panel, the detail is superb. John French showed some of his colourful and beautifully made spinning tops, John is somewhat of an expert in wooden toys such as these and has previously given talks on the subjects. John also recently took on a tricky lock down project in the form of the 20 ball Tetrahedral Pyramid. He brought a set along to the meeting and has produced an excellent article which we shall be publishing very shortly.





John French – 20 ball Tetrahedral Pyramid Puzzle, John's article will be available on the website shortly



So that's it for this month, wishing all members a very Happy Christmas and Happy and Healthy New Year, let us hope for a better one for all.

Neil

Talk by John Woods of Woodart Products

I offer a range of products to enable woodturners and carvers to embellish their work. I try to offer something different to other traders.

On one business course I attended, the presenter made a statement about being a successful business:

'be daring, be bold, be different, be first'.

There are many traders offering tooling from mainstream manufacturers and the Chestnut range of products – why try to compete with them?

Most of my promotion has been at the various woodworking/woodturning shows normal held throughout the year.

I have a website, but that needs a major update to include many newer products.

Background

On leaving school I worked for a local electrical retailer as a trainee electrician and Radio & TV engineer. After this, and working for a couple of other companies as a TV engineer, I retrained as a computer engineer. In those days a small mainframe computer system required the space of this village hall. It needed a clinically clean, air-conditioned environment and a stable power source, so that also needed a large external space for the air-con equipment and back-up power source (usually a large UPS system and generator).

I then moved on to become a Project Manager involving computer systems and financial telephone systems.

Alongside those roles, I also helped Rex Garrod. Primarily, Rex made models and special effects for the film, TV and advertising industries, but was also known for the robots he made and competed with in Robot Wars. These activities involved all sorts of engineering disciplines – mechanical, electrical, electronics, physics, chemicals, explosives – in fact, most things that are dangerous.

On my early working life, I was given some sound advice by a work acquaintance who was due to retire. He had been on a pre-retirement course (*in those days, some companies looked after their employees*). When he came back from the course he said that apart from managing your financial portfolio, they advised:

‘when you retire you need to get yourself at least one hobby, preferably two – an indoor hobby and an outdoor hobby. Ideally get these maybe 5 to 10 years before you retire – while you still have an income so that you can try them and if you don’t enjoy them you can afford to try something else’.

In later life, I got involved with woodturning. I was interested in the technical aspects of it as well as the actual turning. I had some lessons from a Cornish cousin who taught woodturning. I also went along to some shows and demonstrations.

Around that time, Simon Hope had started up a business called ‘Aussie Outback’, and he was holding regular demonstrations at his premises in Elmstead Market. He sold wood blanks – Aussie and UK, tools and lathes.

Simon had also designed his ‘Sanding Ball’. These he made on the premises. When I saw them I made a couple of suggestions to improve it further. A few years later, Simon sold that business and the rights to make the sanding ball.

A year or so later, Simon started a new business making tool handles and inertia sanders.

After I had been made redundant in 2009, Simon asked if I would help him. This I did on a part time basis.

Helping Simon, and watching various demos, I noticed that many turners were using ‘Angle-poise’ style lamps to see what they were turning. However, when they went to look inside a bowl or hollow form they were blocking out the light. I came up with the idea of putting the light where you want to see, and subsequently designed a small LED light with a magnetic base to stick onto the face of the toolrest - my ‘Handy Light’. I marketed this independently from Simon.



With my background in electrics/electronics, I decided that I could make an improved pyrography unit. I had previously made a pyrography unit from salvaged parts. Deliberately, I had not looked at commercial units as I didn’t want to be influenced by them. I had some resistance wire (from a high power industrial fan heater), so built a unit to suit that. When I subsequently compared this with a commercial unit I found that the commercial units use much thinner wire. The problem I found with my pyrography unit was that the pen got hot – this is because it was running at a much higher power than commercial units. How to overcome that problem? After trying several different handle designs I tried forcing air through the handle to keep it cool – it worked!! So my next unit incorporated an air pump and the forced-air handle. This became my high power ‘Dragon’ pyrography unit. This high power version opened up possibilities for woodturners. Previously they could put pyrography work on their turnings, but using the Peter Childs unit that would take a while. If they used a Burnmaster they could do more, but the pen handles get hot quite quickly.

The case I had used for the Dragon unit was an economical ‘industrial’ style case. It had a similar appearance to the Peter Childs unit. People were confusing the two units, so after a few years I decided to make a smarter, more compact and cheaper pyrography unit, but with my identity – I failed!!

I wasn’t going to compromise on the build quality. I tried several different designs for pyrography pens and found a design that worked at high power without getting excessively hot. I then made an even higher power pen and main unit, which has been popular with woodturners. But I was not able to sell these much cheaper than the Dragon units.

For a more economical pyrography unit I took on Razertip units and accessories. Their pyrography units perform better than the Peter Childs units, and they offer a far bigger range of tips than any other manufacturer. Their tips will also work with my pyrography units.

Tic has been helping me by testing and demonstrating these pyrography units.

Around 2010-2011, I found a version of micro-drill which was suitable for embellishing wood turned items using appropriate piercing cutters and burrs. So these were also added to my products range.

Dremel type units were being used by many woodturners, but I thought these to be a bit cumbersome for fine work. They are fitted with a mini 3-jaw chuck and plain bearings – these are not renowned for longevity or precision (plain bearings can wear, and a 3-jaw chuck is not as precise as a collet chuck).

With the dominance of the American market, a lot of tooling has imperial shank sizes, and for the smaller scale tools for wood related crafts this tends to be 1/8" (Jewellery related tooling is 3/32" and Dental tooling is 1/16").

The Micro-drills I get are fitted with a 1/8" collet chuck, and I can supply a reduction sleeve to take this down to 3/32" or a different sleeve to reduce down to 1/16"

To complement the micro-drills, I added carbide piercing cutters and the Saburrtooth range of carbide burrs. Specifically choosing carbide tooling where possible for its longevity.

Following a sale of a pyrography unit, a customer stated that they had used colour to enhance their pyrography work, so we added water-soluble coloured pencils to the portfolio. Which led to other colour products – acrylic inks and airbrushes. Tic uses these for her work, so based on her experience we have added Daler Rowney Acrylic Inks and a decent affordable airbrush - similar to an Iwata but costing much less.

I am continually looking for other ideas or products to add to the range.

Among the shows I attend are the British Decoy and wildfowl Carvers Association show, and the British Stickmakers Guild show – both held at Bakewell. Those activities incorporate different techniques and require different materials to woodturners. From this I started selling Milliput Epoxy Putty.

In 2018 I went on the Norwegian Woodturning Cruise. There I met Arthur Averling – founder of the 'King Arthur' tooling and his sales manager, Jerry Hammock. After negotiating with them I added the King Arthur tools to my range.
