

Introduction to Woodturning—November 2013

I recently had the pleasure of attending a woodturning course for beginners at the ACT Woodcraft Guild. I have been a box maker for a number of years under the tutelage of Fred Buckley. I had never been interested in the art of turning. In fact I have viewed the “turner” with suspicion and resentment. They are everywhere, and their output pops up here, there, and everywhere. The Byrd’s song “turn turn turn” always came to mind as I saw yet another bowl produced in what I considered with indecent haste (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W4ga_M5Zdn4 link to the Byrds). My resentment really could be sourced to the ability of the turner to produce something within a day by comparison to box that could take me months.

It was not until late 2012 that my interest in turning was aroused. I was a participant in a Windsor chair making course and I really needed to turn those spindles. I couldn’t turn so I had to shape them by hand. I had a “turn” on a lathe for the legs but required more experienced assistance when it came finishing the legs. It was then that I realised that I needed to know more about these gouging tools and fast spinning machines. So when I had the opportunity to attend a two day course run by the turners at the Guild in November 2013 I decided to confront my suspicion and resentment of the “turner”.

The course was well structured with a

combination of observation and practical components. The course is aimed at the beginner with an initial exposure to the turner’s tools and the use of the lathe. A demonstration was followed by a “hands on” application of the demonstration with a student to teacher ratio of 2:1. The course conveners knew what they wished to impart and set about it methodically. Importantly from my perspective there was not an over emphasis on producing something but rather on exposure to the tools, simple methods and safety. It is for these reasons that I thought it was one of the best short courses I have ever attended.



Robin demonstrates spindle turning

Day 1 introduced the roughing gouge, spindle gouge and parting tools with three demonstrations and three practical sessions. Even the name “gouge” conjured up all manner of dastardly deeds! But I just had to overcome the insensitive language of the “turner” and proceeded how to “spindle turn” for the day. The demonstrations were clearly visible with use of a camera and TV. Participants

were not looking from back of the room to the front of the demonstrator because camera allowed you to observe the demonstrator at the lathe. The practical component allowed participants to use the roughing gouge, spindle gouge and parting tools to rough a square piece of timber, to shape the piece into beads and grooves. This aspect was most useful as you were not making anything in particular but creating shapes using the tools. In other words you were having a bit of a play. The final session was applying all of the skills into making a small vase.



Mary Jean

There was a short demonstration of sharpening the tools by both schools of thought, that is those that sharpen free hand and those who use jigs. However at one stage I was a little frightened as the discussions be-



Dan showing Ray

Day 2 introduced participants to bowl turning, the tools and finishing. The tools used were a bowl gouge, spindle gouge and scrapers. The demonstrations focused on fitting a blank to the lathe and turning the outside profile of a bowl and secondly hollowing out the bowl and finishing the inside. The participants then proceeded to make bowls or dishes depending on how many mistakes were made.



Mike
concentrating



I enjoyed it and I have softened my attitude to turning, I even attending a woodturning SIG at the Guild post the course. I would highly recommend this course to anyone that is curious about this dark art!

Ray Halpin



tween those that do and those that don't had gouges in their hands.

This course will not teach you to be an expert turner. It introduces you to the basics in a coherent organised and well tutored fashion.



Happy students display their finished bowls with the course tutors