

## BUYING YOUR OWN TURNING TOOLS

The first thing I usually say to beginners about buying woodturning tools is: **DON'T**. Enthusiastic new turners have a tendency to either rush out and buy some *el cheapo* set they have seen on eBay, or they go to the other extreme and spend a fortune on very expensive sets from catalogs or websites. Either way, they often end up with sets of tools, many of which they will never use, or are worse than useless (except perhaps for sharpening practice!). The cheap sets are invariably Chinese-made, and are either not true High Speed Steel, or are poor-quality HSS, and they tend to be copies of old-fashioned sets from English makers containing unsuitable (if not useless) tools, such as narrow, round-nosed scrapers, or oval skew chisels (an abomination in the eyes of the turning gods!).

My best advice to you is to **delay any tool purchases until you have become familiar with the toolkit used at the Guild**, as described below. At the Guild, we have built up ten sets of essential tools for beginners to use, which we sharpen to a standard profile, so that everyone starts on the same footing. These tools are always available for any member to use at the Shed, so you can practise with them, and get used to them before buying any of your own. Also, talk to experienced turners, and ask what they use.

When you do decide to buy, there is no question that you should **invest in the best quality woodturning tools you can reasonably afford** - sharpened properly and treated well, they will last you for years. The most reputable brand names are **Robert Sorby, Hamlet, and Henry Taylor** (all English); and some very good American makers, like **Thompson Tools**. The Australian lathe manufacturer, **Vicmarc**, also makes a limited range of high-quality tools, but they are quite expensive, as are tools from the New Zealand company, **Woodcut**. The important thing is to buy **good quality HSS, M2 grade** (molybdenum alloy), or better. Naturally, this will not be cheap - a typical gouge could cost from \$60 ~ \$80, or more, depending on size and complexity, and whether you buy them handled, or unhandled (good learning experience, making your own handles!).

*[It is worth noting here that you will see many Guild turners using an Australian brand of tools which are of very high quality – P&N, made by Sutton Tools. Unfortunately, in 2018 Sutton's bean-counters decided that turning tools were no longer profitable, and they suddenly discontinued production, to everyone's dismay. Remaining stocks have largely been snapped up, but if you have an opportunity to buy any P&N tools second-hand, go for it – this is reflected in my recommendations below.]*

Here are my recommendations, which I believe accord with the sort of advice Richard Raffan gives in his books, and certainly match the sets of teaching tools we use in the Guild (my personal preference of maker is shown in brackets):

**Essential** (the tools you really can't turn without) [*NB – see note at end about sizing of gouges*]:

**25mm Skew Chisel**, preferably with rounded shoulders on the tool shaft (P&N, Hamlet)

**13mm Spindle Gouge**, preferably factory-shaped with a "fingernail" profile (Sorby)

**16mm Bowl Gouge** (P&N, Sorby, or Hamlet) for roughing down bowl blanks, and hollowing larger bowls\*

**12mm Bowl Gouge** (P&N, Sorby, or Hamlet) for hollowing small bowls and boxes\*

**25mm Curved Scraper**, curved to left side (but **not round-nosed, or “domed”**). Alternatively, a basic 25mm Square-ended Scraper can be re-profiled with a left-sloping radius (we can help you do that). (P&N, Sorby, or Hamlet) \*

**6mm Parting Tool** (Sorby)

**Desirable**:

**25mm Spindle Roughing Gouge**, deep-fluted (P&N, Sorby) \*

*[\* NB: If you want to concentrate on spindle turning initially, and progress to bowls later on, then the Bowl Gouges and Scraper fall under the "Desirable" category, and the Spindle Roughing Gouge becomes an "Essential".]*

Unfortunately, in terms of local availability, there is no shop in Canberra which sells quality woodturning (or even woodworking) tools - certainly NOT Bunnings!

Many Guild members buy online from Jim Carroll of Grovedale, near Geelong (Carroll's Woodcraft Supplies - <http://www.cwsonline.com.au>) who stocks Sorby tools, and **offers a discount to Guild members** (make sure to ring with your order, and advise them of your Guild membership). CarbaTec of Brisbane stock Hamlet (<http://www.carbatec.com.au>) - but no discount); TimberBits of Sydney (<http://www.timberbits.com>) specialize in pen kits, but also stock Sorby and other brands (no discount). Other brands can be bought online, but beware of shipping costs, especially from overseas.

**A word of warning:** a number of Guild members have bought second-hand brand-name tools, like Robert Sorby, from sites such as eBay or Gumtree, but have discovered on delivery that they are older versions of the tools which were made of Carbon Steel. While such English (Sheffield) tool steels are still of very good quality, they are difficult to sharpen without affecting the temper of the metal, and will not hold an edge as long as HSS tools. This is not critical with scrapers or parting tools, but is very important with bowl and spindle gouges, and skew chisels.

If you have any questions about tools, please feel free to contact me by email, or ring me on **0408 278 460**.

### ***Rod Tier***

Coordinator

Monday Evening Turning SIG

**NB: Sizing of Gouges** - as if things weren't already confusing enough, there is a problem with sizing of gouges, which are made from round bar stock. **In Australia**, and the USA, woodturning **gouges are sized by the diameter of the bar stock**, but of course we measure in metric and the Americans in imperial. **In England, gouges are sized by the width between the edges of the flute** – in both metric and imperial!

But wait – it gets even more confusing!

**Bowl Gouges** have a **deep flute**, so the edges will be narrower and located towards the top arc of the bar stock. Therefore, in Australia a 16mm diameter bowl gouge will measure 13mm between flute edges (the Americans will call this a 5/8" gouge). Correspondingly, a 12mm diameter gouge (1/2" American) will be 10mm between flute edges. The English, however, describe a 16mm diameter bowl gouge as 1/2" / 13mm (ie, across the flute).

**Spindle Gouges**, on the other hand, have **shallow flutes**, so that the width between the flute edges is not much less than the diameter of the bar stock. So in Australia, what we call a 13mm spindle gouge (1/2" American), the English **also** describe as 1/2" / 13mm.

Are we clear on that? Just be careful if ordering online from a catalog – it's always best to ring the dealer and clarify the size you want.

**PS: A Note on Sharpening of Turning Tools.** At the Guild, we maintain our turning tools using a jig system developed by the Swedish company **Tormek**. This excellent Tormek system is based on a wet-stone, slow-speed grinder (we have two on the Sharpening Bench in the Bench Room), and uses a support arm to attach various jigs which give a high level of accuracy and repeatability in sharpening tools of all kinds. Tormek realized, however, that many turners prefer to use a dry grinder for quick sharpening of their tools, so they brought out an adapter which enables fitting of the Tormek Support Arm to a normal bench grinder. They also supply a set of specialized jigs for turning tools.

We have combined this Tormek jig system with a bench grinder fitted with a CBN (Cubic Boron Nitride) wheel, the latest technology for sharpening HSS steel. This set-up is available for all Guild turners to use, but we ask that you **please do not attempt to sharpen Guild tools, because we want to maintain a standard profile**. You are welcome to sharpen your own tools on this system, however, and I am happy to teach you how – just ask.