



# ORBIT



The Newsletter of the **Register of Professional Turners**  
Supported by the Worshipful Company of Turners of London

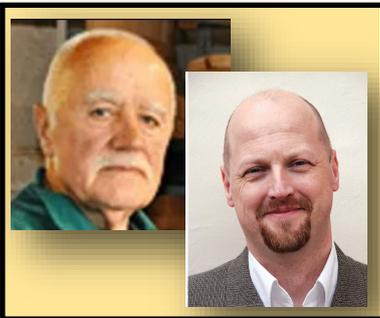
Welcome to the December 2020 issue of your newsletter!



Well, what a year that was!

As we approach Christmas and the year-end, let's keep our fingers crossed for a more settled year to come in 2021. I guess that little will change for the remainder of this winter, nor perhaps for the spring, but we are told that by the summer, we should be returning to normal; though should I dare say, "...to the new normal", whatever that may turn out to be.

I must admit that as the deadline for preparing this edition grew ever closer, I was a little concerned that there just wouldn't be enough news to fill it, but the members and our friends have come to my aid and once again, we have a news-packed issue for you.



Sadly, the world of woodturning lost two people who meant a lot to many of the members. Don White and Mark Baker were well known to many of us and will be sorely missed.

From Eleanor Lakelin, we have news in this issue of a most unusual commission and exhibition, whilst from Andy Fortune on the Isle of Wight, we learn of his use of a solar kiln to season timber.



Back in my neck of the woods, we catch up with news of Miriam Jones, who you may recall we featured a few issues ago as one of the Worshipful Company of Turner's bursary award winners.

I keep in touch with Miriam and it is fascinating to see the progress that she is making. We'll also hear from Andy Pickard, who has some interesting thoughts on the future of the RPT.



Les Symonds RPT...Newsletter Editor



## A Christmas Message

Just in case you have not noticed things will be a bit different this Christmas. As I sit writing this the numbers of infections are rising and people are being asked to take more care with their social distancing.

Traditionally at this time of the year many of us should be attending craft events or Christmas fayres, this year due to the virus hanging about many of those will be cancelled. I happen to be the chairman of my local woodturning club and five minutes ago I finished a zoom meeting where we planned how our festive meeting would take place, online obviously but we will still hold a competition and a raffle. In effect we are trying to make our meeting as normal as possible even though we cannot be in the same building together.

This is probably the best way forward for members of the RPT too. I may not be able to attend a craft event as normal but I am jolly well going to make the stock I normally make at this time of the year and find a market for it somewhere, be it online or wherever. This is my coping mechanism, yours may be different, but my attitude is life is too precious to waste waiting for Corona virus to go away, so I will do what I can to normalise the situation while always keeping socially distanced and remaining as safe as I possibly can.

2020 has been a funny year for me, full of incredible highs such as becoming a grandfather again to a gorgeous little girl and extreme lows when I could only see my grandson via zoom, not being able to give him a hug has been the hardest part, and just when we thought it was getting safer.....

So my message to you this year is stay safe, better to miss one Christmas with a loved one than never to spend one with them ever again. I hope those of you that have struggled to keep your businesses going can hold on a bit longer and manage to come out the other side with the means to carry on the craft that we all love so much and that we all become stronger and more resilient than we were before.

I would like to wish each and every one of you a very Merry Christmas and as far as possible a happy and prosperous New Year

Best wishes to all,

John



From the Worshipful  
Company of Turners

# A word from the Master!



**The Worshipful Company of Turners**

Supporting the Craft, City and Charity for over four hundred years

What a pleasure it was to present your Chairman, John Boyne-Aitken, with Freedom of the Company on November 18.

For background, the ancient Livery Companies were established as the trade associations of their day. They were about community, fellowship, networking, looking after one another (so relevant in these current times especially), but crucially about ensuring quality standards were maintained across their craft.

In mediaeval times, to be allowed to practice the '*art or misterie*' as it was then called, of a particular craft, the young apprentice had to be 'Free of the City', in other words to have the right to enter and leave the City as a trusted member of that society. The young craftsman, already apprenticed to a turner of standing, first had to be approved by those of his peers (at that time this was only open to men) and who could vouch for him. He would be put forward by the turner for whom he worked, and come before the Master and Wardens of the Turners Company (just as John did at the virtual Ceremony on 18 November in the presence of the Court) and make the declaration, promising to be a good and upright member of the Company, to uphold its laws and constitutions, and support the Master and Wardens.

Assuming this passed satisfactorily, he would be admitted to the Freedom of the Company which in turn would allow the Company to support the applicant to obtain his Freedom of the City so that he could ply his trade and one day become a Master craftsman. Today, the principal difference was that rather than receiving Freedom by apprenticeship, John received the rare Freedom by Presentation – as a reflection of the thanks of the Company for his tremendous contribution to the craft, especially through the Register of Professional Turners.

The Turners Company can only imagine the impact on Professional Turners to 'ply their trade' during Covid-19 and we've been delighted with the support from RPT members in responding to our *Turning for Good* initiative. Already, members and friends have ordered over 100 pieces for Christmas and we know that our ability to sell your work will generate thousands of pounds for our charities. In my installation speech as Master in May, I referred to the interesting development in Craft – and the need for people to re-engage with making and creating. The many comments we have received regarding your beautiful work reflects our need and appreciation of the Turners Craft. Thank you.

Whilst Wizardry in Wood was postponed this October, I look forward to meeting many of you next year at future Craft events and send warmest greetings to you and your families for the festive season. Stay well and keep turning!

**MELISSA SCOTT**

MASTER THE WORSHIPFUL COMPANY OF **TURNERS** OF LONDON





# Oh Beautiful World!

Eleanor Lakelin reports on a "Beautiful" commission.

## 'Oh Beautiful World' Commission

In June this year, I was honoured to receive a major commission from Reading Museum to memorialise Reading Gaol's most famous inmate, Oscar Wilde. This commission is supported by the Contemporary Art Society's Rapid Response Fund, in partnership with Frieze London, which awards funding to artists and museums during the Covid-19 pandemic. The sculpture will be



permanently installed in the museum space in December 2020.



The connection to the past is profound in this commission. The piece is made from material that grew around, under and over Reading Gaol when Oscar Wilde was incarcerated there. I have only been able to make this work because of the tragic loss of the mighty Horse Chestnut trees that stood alongside the Gaol for centuries; this seems a particularly poignant illustration of '...the meaning of Sorrow, and its beauty' (Oscar Wilde). The piece is made from

three separate parts of the tree utilising the best areas of burr. Each piece was turned on the lathe and then hollowed. The bark was then carefully removed and then the pieces sandblasted and sanded. The tree sections were then dowel-jointed and sculpted together. The piece is bleached and finished with white oil.

My aim has been to create a work that captures a calm, silent and watchful spirituality, much like the trees from which it is made. Through its form, the piece evokes the refinement and balance of classical cultural objects – their strength and confidence. At the same time, by using the burred sections of the wood in particular orientations, that confident line and form have been disrupted thereby suggesting the fragile nature of our existence – the short distance between fame and humiliation, health and sickness, beauty and sorrow.



I am now working towards my solo exhibition 'UnEarthed' at Sarah Myerscough Gallery from March 22<sup>nd</sup> 2020 to 1st May 2020.



Miriam Jones

## Bursary Award Update

You may recall me writing previously about a young lady by the name of Miriam Jones, from my neck of the woods. Miriam was one of the recipients of the Worshipful Company's bursary award last year and has been putting that award to good use. What has been very reassuring to note is that she has retained some of those signature-piece ideas that I first noticed when she came to me for tuition a couple of years ago, and I'm referring to her use of colour through the application of

coloured twine (whipping twine, I believe) as

embellishments of her work. During her second tuition day with me, she made a huge bowl with a groove around it, ready to accept whatever colour of twine she decided upon when she got back home,

and now I see that this concept crops up in many of the pieces that she makes, from stool legs to the rainbow tea-light holders that she has been producing prolifically during lock-down. Indeed, it was during the main period of lock-down earlier this year that Miriam featured in a short video produced by the Worshipful Company of Turners.

With all this exposure, Miriam came to the attention of the Welsh TV 4th channel, S4C, and was invited to take part in a programme in which three Welsh makers tackle a commission the same client, which turned out to be the Snowdonia National Park. The programme took the format of a competition to see which maker's piece would be chosen by the authority, and Miriam has been making star-gazing bench for them. Filming finished recently and I look forward to seeing it on TV in early December.



AGM  
Calling  
Notice

The Annual General Meeting of the Register of Professional Turners will take place on Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> March 2021. The meeting will be held via Zoom the video conferencing service.

Members that wish to apply for a committee post should apply in writing to the Turners Company Clerk, Alex Robertson or the Chairman RPT John Boyne-Aitken at least 30 days before the AGM is due to take place.

Further details including the agenda will be sent out after the festive season.



## Andy Fortune reports on his construction of a solar kiln for timber seasoning.

To buy a bandsaw mill and build a solar kiln has been high on my to do list over the last few years since I started my woodturning business. I've bought several books and researched solar kilns online and have subsequently drawn up several possible designs. Various ideas have been rattling around my brain for a while and I've toyed with building from scratch, using a lorry back or a metal container or just polythene sheeting over a frame.

The basic idea of a solar kiln is to use a greenhouse arrangement on top of a sealed box to generate heat which is then circulated around the timber via 12v, car battery powered fans which speeds up the seasoning process and reduces the time needed down to a few weeks instead of a year or more. The benefits of this is that it costs virtually nothing to run.



In December I finally had the funds available to order a bandsaw mill which I decided to import from China because of the cost saving but due to the difficulties of the pandemic in China the delivery was delayed until April which actually worked out well for me as I had shut the workshop due to the lockdown. As the initial restrictions were eased I was able to get the mill assembled and started cutting up what timber I had in stock to make boards. I was also able to access a grant

from Natural Enterprise through the Solent Local Enterprise Partnership which allowed me a match funded grant to build a kiln, buy a large flat bed trailer and a new chainsaw.

The final design for the kiln was a 4.8m L x 3m W x 2.4m H box with a 60 degree pent roof for a solar collector. The latitude for the Isle of Wight is 50.69 degrees so you add 10 degrees for the correct roof pitch to catch the most sunlight throughout the year, and obviously south facing.

The box was made from 4x4" corner posts with 3x2" stud work, clad inside with Stirling board ply over Cellotex insulation in the walls. The exterior has then been clad with shiplap boarding over a polythene vapour barrier. The interior of the roof has been painted with a matt black barn paint along with the exterior shiplap and the interior of the kiln is painted with a waterproof grey roofing paint. The pent roof solar collector has then been covered with a polythene polytunnel film.



A slight adaptation of my own was to add some controls for the fans. The fans are run from a 12 volt car battery and PV solar panel and I've added some speed controllers for the fans as well as high/low thermostats to switch them off overnight and also if the temperature gets too high in the roof during the day. The total cost of building the kiln has been around £2000 but I will now have a ready supply of seasoned boards which I can use for making my products or sell through my shop.

If you are looking for information on solar kilns I can recommend 'Solar Lumber Kilns' by Jim Birkemeier or online [www.timbergreenforestry.com](http://www.timbergreenforestry.com) or [www.greenandgrowing.org/solar-kiln](http://www.greenandgrowing.org/solar-kiln)



Looking to the  
future!

## Some thoughts from Andy Pickard

Over the last few weeks I have been having a look at a series of films the AWGB have put out on Youtube as 'shop tours'. Everyone likes to see what other people's set-ups are like and they were quite interesting, but two things immediately came to mind and that is firstly the level of financial investment that has been made (some of these workshops are absolutely beautiful), but secondly, and more importantly, the standard of the work produced—which can be absolutely first class, with lovely examples of design, technique and of finishing. Indeed, this can be work that any professional turner would be happy with.

Maybe without the financial constraints we constantly juggle with, a more relaxed time schedule to produce these turnings helps. It is a debatable point that for entry into the Register, a proportion of your income is from turning, but what percentage is that? Do pensions from a previous well paid job count, etc? I'm sure that we have all heard these arguments before!

At the moment we are deep into the COVID crisis, RPT members are really struggling despite the best efforts of the Worshipful Company of Turners, and of the Chairman and the Committee, especially through such initiatives as 'Turning for Good' and the Wednesday night zoom chats.

According to Alex Robertson, the RPT membership is just 169 this includes the retired members.

We know that ten members have left the Register already this year, but how many more might we lose? We might find that COVID and all the financial implications that entails will just tip some people over the edge. Are we going to be the membership that sees the register disappear?

I would like to see it discussed openly about bringing some of the aforementioned nucleus of top quality amateur turners onto the Register. In my recent discussions with Martin Saban Smith, he suggested a new category title of Associate or Affiliate Members. This could give us a well needed injection of enthusiasm and also of membership numbers.

Andy Pickard



This could be a very interesting topic for discussion and once the newsletter is issued, I'll open a discussion on our Facebook page. We look forward to hearing the views of all members - I'm sure that those views will be very varied and that some will be strongly felt.

Les.



Feedback

## I am grateful to Register member George Shapland for feedback to an earlier article about how our members have adapted to the change in Open Studio events this year.

I am prompted to write as you asked for feedback from those who had taken part in Open Studios events. I participated in the Hampshire Open Studios this year (despite living in Wiltshire, more of that later) and thought my experience and thoughts might be of passing interest to those bored enough to read beyond the open paragraph.

Firstly, why the HOS. I do quite a lot of networking in the Salisbury Area, both in the small business community and the artistic world. One of my contacts at a small business start up event put me in contact with a water colour artist who has previously taken part in the HOS despite living just over the border in Redlynch (I believe she lives opposite one of the HOS Committee members) and I arranged to meet her and show her some of my work with a view to joining several artists in her house for the event. We got on really well and she liked my work (no accounting for taste) and



agreed to me joining her along

with a photographer and a ceramicist as a foursome.

Covid obviously threw a spanner in the works and the event was almost cancelled but common sense prevailed and it was left up to the individual exhibitors as to whether they went ahead, with the HOS organisation doing most of the promotion and advertising. We went for it and instead of using the house as in previous years, our host thought the garden would be a better option so we used her studio, very smart greenhouse and two gazebos set up like market stands. It worked really well and having four different disciplines in one place made our

location worth a visit.

We are already looking forward to next year and would like to add a jeweller and possibly a metal worker of some kind to make it even more attractive in future. We were open from 10am to 4pm and will probably delay opening to 11am next year as no one came before 11. There was a sign-in book to record each visitor as well as capture email addresses (optional but most agreed to do it) and we had all the usual precautions covered such as masks and hand sanitiser that have become the norm. We also gave every one a slip of paper to record their favourite item from each artist which made them look a little harder at each stand and gave us some great feedback at the end.

I made three firm new friends over the 10 days of the event and we are looking at doing other events as a group and even holding our own Christmas Event (if we are allowed to!). I found the event much more relaxed than the usual art markets, most people had more time and wanted to have a chat and I found having my iPad handy was really useful to show photos of how a piece is made. I might look at having a laptop and video running at future events. I also gave out my business card to anyone who would take one which has already resulted in two firm commissions and a maybe.

George Shapland.

It occurs to me that George's experience typifies the measures that many of us have found necessary during the pandemic. By scaling things down a bit and concentrating his event on a few key points, his group kept things local and assured themselves of the quality of produce that they were offering. Thankyou, George.

**HAMPSHIRE**  
open studios  
22-31 August 2020

**LUCINDA NICHOLAS**  
Watercolour & Pen Artist

**GEORGE SHAPLAND**  
Wood Turner

**DAWN HAINES**  
Ceramic Artist

**SALLY EDWARDS**  
Photographer

**OPEN HOUSE & GARDEN**  
Hackmore House, Grove Lane, Redlynch SP5 2NR  
lucyhackmore@talktalk | 07876 551 622  
Gravel Drive. No wheelchair access. One way viewing system. Masks essential.

With 125 artist studios listed for exhibitions, online galleries & more  
See our website to see how you can support local artists & visit safely  
[www.hampshireopenstudios.org.uk](http://www.hampshireopenstudios.org.uk)



On a sadder note!

## Since our last issue, we have sadly noted the passing of RPT member, Don White.

### A Tribute to Don White



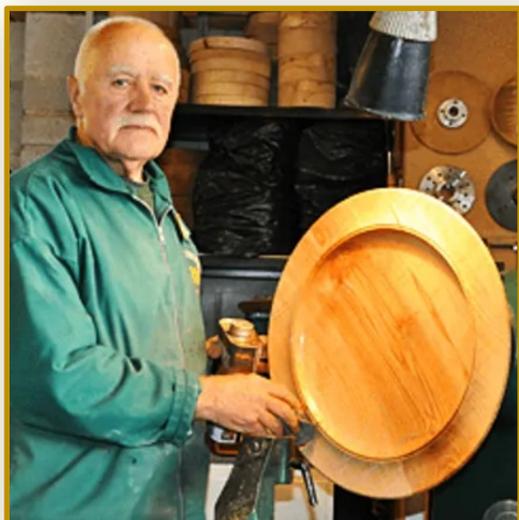
I first met Don in the late seventies, at Brecon crafts fair. At that time the craft fairs were just getting going, I went to Brecon to see an old friend who was a cabinet maker. I was dealing in timber in them days, selling board and logs. For myself back then Wood turning was a hobby. Something to do when the weather was too bad to get out in the woods. Don was there at Brecon with his work displayed for sale. It was a real eye opener for me, to see work of such a high standard. I talked with Don for a while, he was a quiet man, a good listener. We got on well. I had some beautiful Acacia logs down at Abergavenny on The Llanover estate, so we arranged a time and day for us to meet up and saw



David and Don working on a huge, burry elm log in the late 1980s

these logs into boards. I had one of the first chainsaw mills, it was hard work with two Stihl 090s either end of the cutting bar. A long day and some great boards to go home with, Don was happy. That was the start of a great friendship. Later I would deliver timber to Don's workshop over in Bristol. On, one occasion I arrived very early in the morning,

Don invited me to stay and that was my first real lesson in turning wood. Don was old school. Every thing had to be done right. It was a day that has always stayed with me. That was when I thought I could turn for a living, It was Don's encouragement. We met on several occasions over the years and I have great memories. At the very first AWGB seminar, Don was working away in the back ground, making sure all the



demonstrators had every thing to hand. Getting wood and any aids they may have required. Always busy, Don was a worker not a talker, He never got into the demo scene. His work was turning.

He once told me that to be a woodturner meant being able to tackle any job, from face plate to spindles. This he could do, and the quality of his work really stood out. Several years later when the AWGB was a bit more established I approached Ray Key and invited the AWGB to exhibit at "From the Wood" the gallery I had set up in Hay-on-Wye. He accepted the invite, I asked if the selectors would be Himself, Don White and Bert Marsh. Don gave up his time for turners and was always very approachable and easy to talk with. I could go on all day. But Don is a man who will be missed by all those who met him and got to know him, I thank him for such great memories. RIP.

David Woodward.



On a Sadder Note  
(Cont'd)

# Mark Baker

## 1966 - 2020



There can be few people in the world of woodturning who had not heard of Mark Baker, a man who was held in high regard and who was very widely respected. Those of us on the Register who knew him well, through our associations with Woodturning Magazine, through personal friendship or through his role as a Freeman of the Worshipful Company of Turners, would have been aware of the health issues that he strove to deal with throughout the latter months of his life, yet the news of his passing was none the easier to bear.

I first met Mark in my capacity as Treasurer at Mid Wales Woodturners



when he was our demonstrator one month. We chatted very briefly

(there were several people waiting to chat to him after his demo), I settled his bill for the day and wished him well. A few months later I was delivering stock of my work to an exhibition at a north Wales arts centre, when my mobile phone rang and Mark introduced himself, asking if I was one and the same "Les Symonds" that he had met at the demo. It seems that he had been watching my progress, reading articles that I had written and viewing images of my work on the Woodworkers Institute forum, and on the strength of all this, he was inviting me to write for Woodturning Magazine.

I was not particularly confident about the prospects of writing professionally, especially as, at the time I had been turning for only a little over 6 years, but Mark was insistent and very reassuring. A similar set of circumstances occurred more recently when Mark asked me to write a six-month series of articles on the use of the six major types of woodturning tools, a series that I was very reluctant to write, given the lack of breadth of my woodturning experiences, but once again, Mark won! He firmly believed that we all have something to give to the craft, that we each may have a personal style or quirky technique and that such traits needed to be shared.

Mark's interest in me didn't stop at what I could do for the magazine. He was genuinely interested in the fact that my wife and I had our own little shop and gallery on the High Street in our home town in Snowdonia. He would phone me, most weeks, just to see how the shop was going, to chat about customers' attitudes to turned wooden items and about what else we sold to support

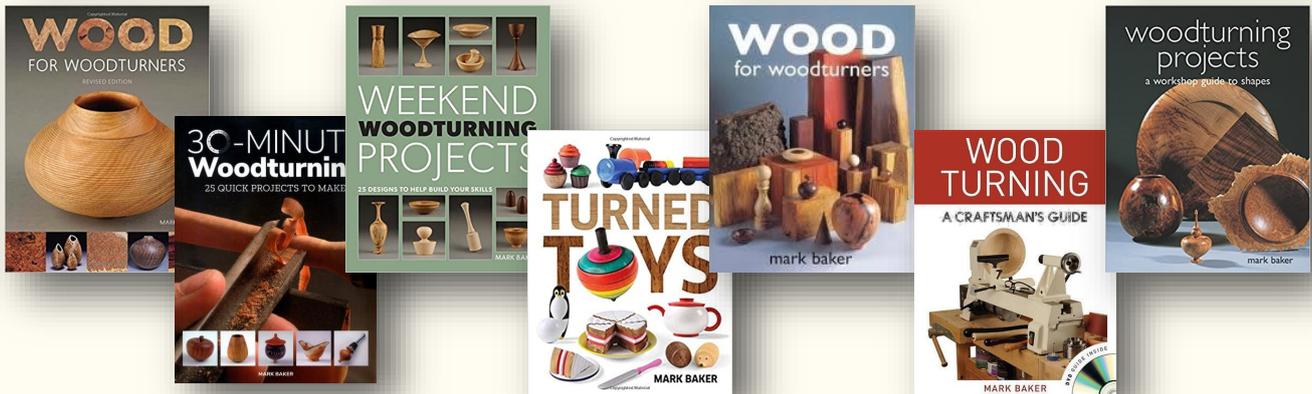
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## Mark Baker..... (continued from previous page)

....and to compliment the work that I produced. Indeed, when, in 2019 we took the decision to vacate the shop and increase the business emphasis on tuition, he appeared genuinely sad that our town would lose a shop window full of wood, but at the same time, he understood that the demands of such a business, on my time and on family life, were becoming too much.

I had been providing woodturning demonstrations at a number of clubs around Wales and the Midlands, and Mark was the first to admit that whilst such demonstrations formed an important resource for all woodturners, the demands on the time of the demonstrator made them a loss making aspect of work for many of us. Indeed, he had taken the decision to stop travelling and to concentrate more of his time at home with his family.



A Selection of Woodturning Books by Mark

As the years progressed, I became aware that Mark was phoning me more and more frequently. Initially, I would open my part of the conversation with an apology for being a few days late with an article, or for having not found the photograph that he had requested, but then he would stop me in my tracks if this was to be an informal chat rather than work orientated, and phone calls such as this became increasingly frequent.

I recall one phone call in which Mark stated that he had seen an image of a Christmas tree that I was producing, about 80cm tall and with a set of LEDs set into them. Mark wanted an article on it for Woodturning, but was disappointed to find that my method of producing them involved the use of both a chain-saw and an angle-grinder with a carving disk attached. Thus I was set the challenge of re-designing the project such that it could be made by a method that more of his readers could safely adopt. Similarly, talk (by me) of a hollow cubic box with six turned surfaces, initially filled him with dread and it took me some considerable time to set up that project in such a way that he felt happy to publish it. By the time that each of these projects came to fruition, Mark was no longer active in his role as editor, but I take some comfort from knowing that he had seen the images that I had submitted and that he was pleased to see the finished articles.



The smile that so many of us knew!

I have mentioned the many phone calls from Mark, well, what linked all of these, whether for business or just for a chat, was Mark's closing words each time; he would end with the phrase, "Goodbye, my friend", and that is how I will remember him, thus my thoughts to him will surely be, "Mark, goodbye my friend!"

Les Symonds, newsletter editor.



## New Members

# News from the Committee of two new members.

Just as I was about to send this issue of to our Chairman for his approval before asking Becca to circulate it, news came in of two new members who have made it onto the Register.

There isn't going to be time to send out the questionnaire that I usually send to new members, but here's a little information to be getting on with....



Ben Dick, Uxbridge, Middlesex.

<http://www.wonderofwood.co.uk>



Ben had a long career in building work, especially in carpentry and joinery, then transferred into wood turning ten years ago.

Joe Creed-Kaile, Batcombe, Dorset

Joe is the youngest member of the register and has recently spent some time being mentored by Stuart Mortimer.



## The Midlands Woodworking Show



We have recently had news, from our secretary, Dave Willcocks, that due to the uncertainty of what lies before us, the Midlands Woodworking Show at Newark, Notts, which was planned for March 2021, has had to be cancelled. It is hoped that the show will be able to go ahead in March 2022, probably on 11th and 12th.



Stop Press!

## The Woodturning Shop and Learning Centre



Back in August, Les Thorne and Martin Saban-Smith joined forces and started a new turning oriented business called The Woodturning Shop and Learning Centre. Over the bank holiday weekend, Les moved his workshop kit up to where

Martin has been for a number of years and

took over the building that was largely unused by the garden centre where they are now based together. The last few months have been a frantically busy with Les



continuing his production turning and Martin pushing on with his own businesses whilst jointly managing the building and stocking of the retail space and learning centre.



The new business features a retail shop, Les' production workshop, a purpose built multi media turning-studio where Martin spends most of his time, and a fully equipped teaching space where up to 7 students can be taught on a variety of full size lathes.

The Woodturning Shop opened it's virtual doors in the middle of August with an ecommerce website for online orders and on 3rd December, the retail shop quietly opened to the public.

.....and so, as another year draws to a close, all that remains is for me to wish you my very best compliments of the season. I trust that you manage to have some relaxing family-time.

**Happy Christmas!**

