



PHOTOGRAPHS BY STEVE FEARNLEY

In the workshop with... Steve Fearnley

We go in the workshop with Yorkshire-based woodturner **Steve Fearnley**

Steve Fearnley has been woodturning for some years now, since 2009. Steve produces a variety of items ranging from household goods and ornaments to clocks and trophies and runs his own website; www.oldfern.co.uk.

How, when and why did you start turning?

I had been making trophies for a couple of years for the school I worked at and thought I could do a better job with a lathe. My dad used to turn and I have made things out of wood most of my life. I bought a small lathe for Christmas and spent the Christmas holiday getting nowhere, until I went to a beginners' night in January, after which I was up and running.

What and who are the greatest influences in your work?

I owe virtually all my progress to Snainton Woodworking Supplies, near Scarborough. I was invited to beginners' nights every

Wednesday – free because I bought a lathe from them – and never looked back. Graham and Sue Harker guided me through the key techniques and there isn't much that Rob Thompson doesn't know about timber and turning. Snainton Woodturning Club then enhanced everything with their monthly club nights with top class demonstrators.

If you were to offer one sage piece of advice to someone what would it be?

The best advice I could give any 'would-be' woodturner is get some tuition and advice, and join a club. You cannot have too much advice – you don't have to act on it all and it will be conflicting at times from different people. You just have to make up your mind which to take.

What music and which book are you currently into?

I enjoy live music. My wife and I have been to

the Perthshire Amber festival for the last few years. Dougie Maclean and Eddie Reader are firm favourites. Closer to home we enjoy Kate Rusby's concerts, especially the Christmas specials. We also fulfilled a lifetime ambition when we saw Leonard Cohen perform live at Leeds Arena a couple of years ago. I haven't read much recently. I like biographies – the last book I read was a biography of Leeds Rugby League great John Holmes.

What is your silliest mistake?

I started stripping down my Nova lathe, because it suddenly lost power and was close to taking off the headstock, to return it to my supplier. But then common-sense prevailed – it always pays to start with the most obvious problem, such as the 3-pin plug working loose in the extension socket.

What has been your greatest challenge?

The most challenging, but also most

interesting piece I have turned was a full chess set and board, based on a 125mm-high king and 50mm-wide chessboard squares. As with most of my work, it was a commission. I experimented with different wood before settling on rosewood (*Dalbergia latifolia*) and box (*Cornus florida*) and particularly enjoyed the challenge of carving four knights on top of their turned bases, not having done much carving before. Making 16 identical pawns, four rooks and bishops, and two kings and queens required some thinking about design and technique. I settled on using a beading tool to create two measured beads on each piece, one at the bottom and one near the top. All that was needed then was to shape the space between them and turn the top.

Name one thing on your turning 'to do' list?

As a maths teacher I came across a mathematical solid known as a Klein bottle. This is a solid 'bottle', but it only has one side; its inside is also its outside and it has no boundaries. I am sure I can turn one, probably involving segmented turning techniques... one day.

Tell us about the piece you are currently working on?

I usually work on a handful of pieces at a time. One currently on the go is a 610mm diameter sycamore memorial plaque. The disc is turned, it now needs pyrographing with the names of those students and staff from where I used to teach – Malton School – who gave their lives in both World Wars.

What is the one piece of equipment or tool you would not be without and why?

Apart from the obvious lathe, gouges and chisels, I would not be without my Peter Child pyrography kit. When I first started turning trophies, getting lettering on them involved either fixing metal plates, or using computer generated vinyl transfer lettering. Both of these required work by another person, so the piece was not entirely my creation. Nowadays I transfer computer generated mirror image designs from an ordinary inkjet printout rubbed on to the wood, then pyrograph over this outline.

If you could change one thing what would it be and why?

I am not sure about changing one thing. I like to think that things happen as they happen, and they are as they are. It doesn't pay to be thinking what might have been, if only something else had happened.

What is your favourite type of turning?

I am happy doing all types of turning, whatever is required by a particular request. Left to my own devices with no requirement to sell a piece or fulfil a commission I would



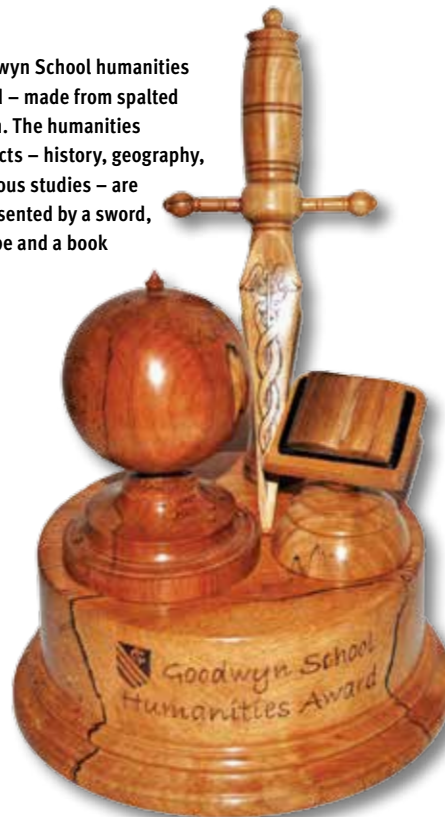
Large oak burr bowl – pitted and cracked, but full of character

English trophy – a memorial trophy made to commemorate a former Head of English at Malton School



Cricket trophy – ash base and wickets, with a ball made from padauk for its reddish colour. Army badge pyrographed and painted. Made for the Army Training Centre in Pirbright

Goodwyn School humanities award – made from spalted beech. The humanities subjects – history, geography, religious studies – are represented by a sword, a globe and a book



If you could have one piece of equipment, what would it be and why?

I think I might like a vacuum chuck, but never having used one I don't know if one would be a good investment. Finding ways of holding pieces while turning is all part of the fun, but a vacuum chuck might allow designs that would otherwise not be possible ●

probably mainly turn bowls – I love the endless variety of such a basic shape and the subtle effects that very minor changes in shape can have.

If you had one wish, what would you wish for?

Wishes are for magical things, aren't they? I wish woodturning and sanding didn't produce dust.

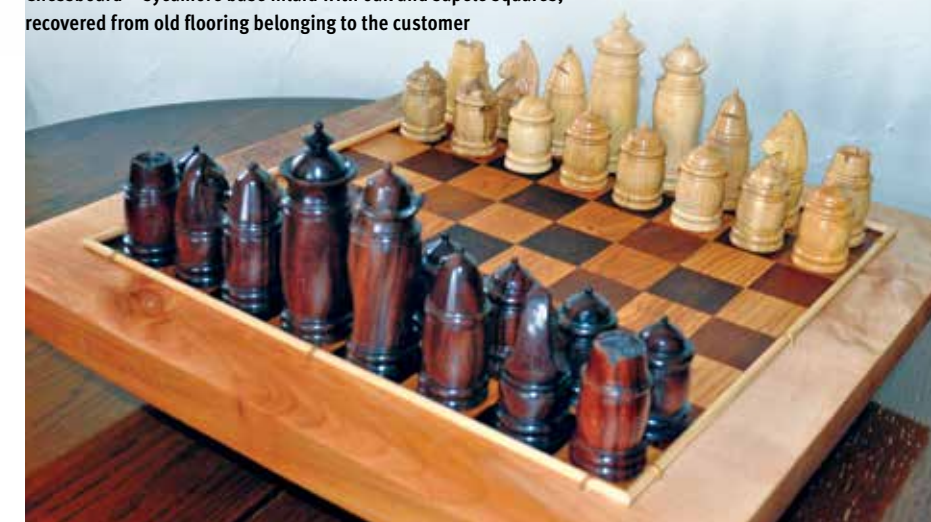


Steve's workshop is just 3.5 metres long by 2.5 metres wide. An exercise in compact working and storage

Chess – chess pieces in box and rosewood



Chessboard – sycamore base inlaid with oak and sapele squares, recovered from old flooring belonging to the customer



LIKES

- Burrs, especially oak
- Demonstrators who talk about what they are doing, give lots of basic detail – such as lathe speed, gouge make and size, type of timber – and don't take anything for granted in terms of what they should or should not tell their audience
- Looking at other people's woodturning
- Working with a customer on a unique design to suit their needs
- Recovering from an error on a piece, sometimes improving on the original intention

DISLIKES

- Gluing pieces together. Clamping awkward shapes and dealing with glue that might seep out are not in my fun to do list
- People who email to request a piece, or ideas for a piece, but then never follow up. Even a 'sorry, but I have sourced the work elsewhere' would be better than nothing
- Manufacturers who sell items in kits or 'packages', but not as individual components. Half a dozen chucks are useful, but not half a dozen chuck keys, or half a dozen 50mm jaws
- Coming up with a price for work
- The noise that dust extractors and filters make
- Throwing anything away. I use any pieces of wood that are viable, if not they are put on the wood burner as kindling or fuel. Shavings and sawdust are all put on the compost heap and mixed with grass clippings. The downside is finding places to keep everything until a use occurs!

HANDY HINTS

- Photograph every piece you make. Once it is sold or given away, you cannot show it to someone, but a photo allows at least an idea of what you make to be shown to someone else
- Inkjet printing will transfer from paper on to wood with light rubbing on the reverse of the paper. As desktop publisher packages or word processors usually have WordArt options to fit lettering to shapes and rotate and flip options to create mirror images, this allows lettering to be designed on a computer before transferring to wood for pyrography
- It pays to keep your workshop tidy; a place for everything and everything in its place. If only I could follow this advice!

Contact: Steve Fearnley
Email: oldfern@btinternet.com
Web: www.oldfern.co.uk