



The Woodturners Association of Western Australia (Inc)

Life Membership

Keith Johnson – 98

Keith Johnson, the Woodturners Association of Western Australia honours and confers upon you Life Membership, in recognition of your outstanding contribution to the Association.

Keith's skill and expertise in working with wood goes back much further than his interest in woodturning, which commenced in 1981. Prior to that he had many years in the cabinet making and furniture industry, and it was here that he developed, so keenly, his finishing and polishing skills.

When he retired from an active working life to go fishing and pursue the normal activities of a retiree Keith was introduced to the lathe and he became 'hooked'. With his skills, his life was turned over, the lathe and other equipment was given pride of place in the garage, the car was relegated to the carport, and the rods are still gathering dust in the wall racks.

Keith joined the Association in its formative years, and his experience, together with his natural teaching skills, developed as a trade's instructor for psychiatric patients, combined with his generosity in imparting knowledge was, and still is of great benefit to members.

Keith has a great talent in demonstrating and simultaneously describing, in detail, what he is doing and why. He has been a most sought-after demonstrator, and he always has an interesting anecdote. He could well be described as a "racon turner".

Keith's excellent woodturning is well known, having been displayed at various exhibitions and the Royal Show with great success, but he is forever trying new products and procedures, and, by way of Newsletter items and demonstrations, has kept members informed - not only on finishing but on turning procedures, tools and products. A number of clubs in the eastern states have reproduced articles written about his work.

Keith's talents have been applied to the management of the organisation and he served on the Committee from April 1987 to September 1990, a time of rapid growth in the Association, and as Membership Secretary, he developed a system which still serves our needs.

Keith was a foundation member of the Melville Group, and served as a Convenor among other offices, and has been a stalwart of the Melville City Council Community Development Programme at Palmyra. He has always been willing to support the establishment of other groups, and Albany and Esperance woodturners have benefited from his counsel.

Keith Johnson, a well-rounded 'racon turner', Life Member of the Woodturners Association of Western Australia, WE HONOUR YOU. Presented 1996

PROFILE OF A TURNER

(extract from newsletter number 71 October/November 1997)

Keith Johnson has long been a stalwart of WAWA and is widely regarded as one of the best exponents of finishing wood. Although not an original member, he joined very early in the life of the Association and was an early committee member. For many years he was membership secretary and encouraged many to join and advance the craft of woodturning.

Keith was born in Kyabram in Victoria. Keith's father come from a farming family but, as the farm could only support one son, his father worked in the town. After leaving primary school he went to Melbourne to work for a panel beater as an improver (similar to an apprentice, except they did not have to sign papers), learning to be a spray painter. His pay at first was 12 shillings a week which advanced to 15 shillings after the first year.

In, 1939 the war intervened and Keith joined the militia and later transferred to the AIF. He served at the Canungra jungle training school as an instructor in artillery, anti-aircraft guns and machine guns.

Following his discharge from the army, he returned to spray painting for 1 ½ years but decided that he would fancy something not so dirty. The opportunity to train under rehab was taken and Keith spent 6 months at technical school doing cabinet making. After the 6 months they were regarded as 40% efficient and then obtained a job of which they were assessed every 6 months and their efficiency increased in 10% increments. Keith was employed making TV cabinets and radiograms. From there he transferred to another factory which had 165000 sq feet of space devoted entirely to wood.

One day, quite out of the blue, he decided he would like to move to WA. In 1963 he drove to the West over 1000 miles of largely unmade road. At first, he worked for Joyce Bros and then for Catt Furniture.

From there Keith was employed in the Occupational Therapy Dept of RPH where he was a trade instructor in the Psychiatric Unit. Being a cabinet maker, the workshop therapy was mainly woodwork. It was suggested that a small wood lathe would be of benefit to some patients. A small hobby lathe was obtained but, being too noisy, the Engineering Dept at the hospital made up a portable lathe and Keith obtained some wood turning chisels. As Keith didn't know anything about woodturning, he took himself off to night school at Leederville Tech and did one term of wood turning. This exposure got him well and truly hooked. On mentioning to a friend that he might buy a lathe, his friend said, "Look no further, I have one going rusty in my garage". It was a Tough lathe, complete with 10 chisels all for \$350. It has been in constant use ever since making bowls, lidded boxes which are beautifully enhanced by Jan's lovely tapestry inlays, goblets and trophy boxes. Keith used to be a keen fisherman but his fishing gear now has 10mm of dust all over it.

Keith, together with the late Cyril Jones and Ernie Margetts started the Melville group. In the first days of WAWA, weekend workshops were held only every second month - once in the city and once in the country in order to provide instruction and fellowship among turners. From this has developed all the various groups which have contributed so much to the advancement of the craft of turning. Keith, together with Ernie Margetts were the first instructors for the Melville City Council, giving instruction every Monday for something like 5 years. Many people owe their interest and competence in wood turning to these lessons.

The Association owes a debt of gratitude to such as Keith who have given endless demonstrations at workshops, shopping centres and other places. Keith is particularly known for his demonstrations on finishing. He constantly strives to improve his techniques.

One member complained he had no sooner mastered the latest idea to find Keilh had already progressed to another method. Keith believes you never stop learning and this is a valuable lesson for all of us.

VALE

KEITH JOHNSON 1921 – 2008

In July 1967 I arrived in WA from Victoria and at Mt Pleasant Melodist Church I met a local Bombers supporter Keith Johnson and although a Tiger man myself began a friendship that lasted over 40 years.

He was a master craftsman in cabinet making and the furniture industry.

Later in life he took up occupational therapy at RPH where he could help people get back on their feet.

Very typical of Keith and that is where he met Jan.

He became a WAWA member in 1981 and became passionate about turning. As a very active member of the Melville group, he and Ern Margetts decided that the Association should be brought to the public's attention and they held the first Shopping Centre Display at the Melville Plaza on the 1st to 6th September 1986. These displays are still current today and still serve the purpose of attracting new members to WAWA and raising funds for the Association.

Keith had a great talent in demonstrating and simultaneously describing, in detail, what he was doing and why. He often threw in an interesting anecdote. He could also be relied upon to stir us up and take the "mickey" out of an unsuspecting member.

He served on the Committee in various roles and at a time of rapid growth took on the Membership Secretary work.

He travelled to Esperance to help the members there to learn more about the art of wood turning. Always more than willing to show other members how he achieved his excellent results particularly in spraying and polishing his work.

In 1996 WAWA honoured Keith with Life Membership in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the Association

A truly Christian gentleman who will be sorely missed by all who had the privilege of knowing him and benefiting from his help.

Written by Len Nicholls