

PROFILE OF A TURNER

Bob Nichols was born in Broken Hill NSW in 1924. Broken Hill was a pretty rugged place in those days with swirling dust storms and difficult living conditions. Broken Hill is a major mining town where Silver, Lead and Zinc have been mined from the largest deposit of these metals the world has seen.

Mining has continued since 1883 until today. The wealth from this ore body has financed BHP and many of Australia's major industries. Bob knew little of this as his family moved to Adelaide when Bob was about three years old. He was educated in Adelaide and was privileged to have been taught by the Dominican Nuns and then by the Marist Brothers. Bob has very positive memories of school but looking back now he wishes there had been the opportunity to do wood and metal working.

Bob's last year at school in 1950 was spent as a boarder at Sacred Heart College as the family returned to Broken Hill. Bob also returned after his last year, commenced work as night boy on the telephone exchange. In 1951 Bob started as a cadet Mining Engineer at the Zinc Corporation initially as an underground surveyor's assistant then working through most technical aspects of mine management (as well as working three years as a miner). At the same time, he studied at Broken Hill Technical College for a diploma in Metalliferous Mining Engineering. He also worked in Broken Hill Consolidated LTD which with Zinc Corporation formed part of what is now Rio Tinto. In 1960 he transferred to North Broken Hill LTD and worked there until 1968 as Senior Mine Planning engineer. During this important part of Bob's life, he met and married Margaret and together they brought seven new little Nichols into the world. In 1968 they moved to Perth where Bob had accepted a position with Western Mining Corporation when a new Corporate Mining Engineering group was set up.

This work involved travelling to individual mining operations, including representing WMC and Windarra while Poseidon was constructing a plant and beginning mining operations in joint venture with WMC. He had an almost ideal mining job – working each week in the bush (which he loved) and flying back to Perth each weekend. Evaluation of new prospects and other opportunities provided much interest and stimulation.

In 1979 Bob commenced a new career and changed from mining to become a student nurse at the WA School of Nursing, a change in order to derive his living from being more directly useful to people. He nursed in most wards at Royal Perth Hospital and RP Hospital (Rehabilitation) as well as spending time at Northam Regional Hospital while training. Bob completed a Post – Basic Diploma in Mental Health Nursing in 1985 and has worked in Mental Health at Royal Perth Hospital since then.

He spent his last six years on night duty until retiring in September 1999. Bob has also studied palliative care nursing and grief counselling with the objective of working in the terminal care but for various reasons this was not to be, so he remained in his second love of mental health nursing. He has consistently resisted promotion to administration positions remaining firmly "hands on".

Bob is hopeful that retirement will allow him to spend much more time working his beloved wood as well as allowing more frequent family contact. His love of wood is lifelong. He was guided away from carpentry while young, so this love remained dormant for years. As a boy,

Bob spent much of his spare time outside his school and sporting commitments, breeding and racing pigeons and making model warships from wood. When first married some of Bob and Margaret's furniture was made by Bob from wooden cases in which explosives were delivered to the mines. His other attempts at making furniture were pretty forgettable.

However, when the family moved to Perth, Bob made more acceptable furniture and became convinced of the beauty of Jarrah. The beautiful turned work of Tom Armstrong displayed by the Kalamunda Arts & Craft Groups intrigued Bob as did the items turned from the desert timbers, he saw displayed in Kalgoorlie over the years convinced him that he would eventually turn wood himself. In 1989 Bob undertook a term at TAFE to learn the basics of woodturning. While at TAFE he was made aware of WAWA, and he became number 744 in November that year.

From his first contact with WAWA, Bob has been amazed how friendly, helpful and supportive the members have been. He is particularly grateful to those very talented turners from whom he has gained so much knowledge. He remains in grateful awe of his heroes – John Shinnick, Ron Goodson, Keith Johnson, the late Keith Stout, John Lathwell, Gordon Ward, Viv Paust, Gerald Young, Alan France and Joe Hegney. Bob often harks back to the excellent advice he received from Bill Botman who was competition coordinator at the time. Entering the competition was the best way to become a better turner.

Bob has enjoyed submitting entries to as many competitions as possible since July 1991 and has achieved much success. Bob turns on a Tough Lathe. He is particularly fond of Jarrah but takes great satisfaction from finding that beautiful thing hidden within many ordinary looking logs of wood.

Bob's turning has been as varied as the many different tasks set to fulfill the competition requirements rather than specialising in any particular direction. He has no special techniques, nor does he produce items at a rapid rate. He achieves results by spending as much care and attention to detail that the task demands. Sometimes this takes a great deal of time. Bob likes to make items of practical utility to a high stand in preference to "arty" creations. He is tending to make more turned items of use in furniture making.

Bob takes particular satisfaction from the complete process from design, through selection of wood, turning finishing to the completed item. This is even more satisfying when the process is undertaken with the objective of being given to a particular person for a particular reason so that person/purpose permeated each step of the way. Items to satisfy competition requirements also stimulate special satisfaction.

To date most of Bob's work has been given to family members for various special occasions and as a consequence much of his work has been exported overseas, as until recently, he had three of his children and five of his fourteen grandchildren living overseas. Bob has regularly attended meetings of the Midvale Group, has demonstrated there a number of times, has been a committee member from 1995/98 and has reorganised the competition and acted as competition coordinator for this period.

While never feeling comfortable when demonstrating, Bob has done so on several occasions at weekend workshops and will probably do so again in the future, as he feels keen to put something back into the organisation which has given him so much.

Extract from WAWA Newsletter issue 144 dated October/November 2009

Observations Swan WEWS 2009

Bob Nichols took the stage to demonstrate a Square Bowl with three axes.

Bob passed around two samples of his work and explained how he had modified an idea from an American Symposium. Bob turned a piece to a cylinder and proceeded to turn the bowl, unfortunately it did not reach Bob's standards and he started again and after cutting the cylinder in two mounted in a jig with double sided tape then using a faceplate, he completed the bowl.

Bob said that the lack of a bandsaw had caused problems however the samples and his explanations conveyed a clear message to his audience of the methodology needed to make these unique bowls.

Extract from WAWA Newsletter issue 212 dated September 2020

VALE

Robert (Bob) Augustine Nichols 744 Bob joined WAWA in 1989 as part of the then Lesmurdie Group, which became Midvale and is now Swan.

Bob was an extremely talented and passionate woodturner who contributed much to the development of the Swan Group.

He spent many years on the Swan Committee, was a frequent demonstrator at group and weekend workshops and was involved in conducting weekend workshops for training demonstrators.

Bob was always interested in new techniques and ideas and consequently attended a woodturning symposium in the U.S. and the Bunbury Collaboration.

He was also very competitive and won many competitions at group and WAWA level.