

PROFILE OF A TURNER

Bruce Johnson

My first exposure to a lathe was around the age of eight when my father brought home a treadle operated metal lathe. My expertise was developed in riding up and down on the treadle. I did, however, in later years manage a few simple turning exercises.

On leaving school I joined Rugby Cement as a trainee and there gained serious experience with the metal lathe. I remember one lesson learned when turning a brass split bearing for a support roller shaft of some 300 mm diameter, I had cast the two half bearings, machined the longitudinal faces and soldered the pair together ready for machining to size. I was merrily turning a rough cut for the internal diameter and allowed about 6 mm on the diameter dimension before getting down to the finishing cuts. Alas I had added the extra 6 mm to the diameter instead of subtracting and the bore was a bit slack!

Ah well back to the foundry for melting down and start all over again. Measure twice and cut once was coined with me in mind.

I studied mechanical engineering at Coventry Technical College on a part time basis whilst working and when this was completed, I was invited to perform my National Service in the Royal Engineers in Malaya and Singapore.

On returning to my job, after two years in the army, I refreshed my mind by taking another engineering subject at the local college. At this point I decided to learn something a little more interesting and more immediately useful. I enrolled in a class for Cabinet Making at the Medway College of Technology.

I had been brought up in a home where my father went shopping, measured up what he needed and then went home and built it. I quickly persuaded the lecturer that I could measure, mark and cut and got down to the real stuff and over the past forty years I have produced many items around our home and the homes of my children such as cots, tables, desks, video/audio cabinets and lounge chairs, upholstered by my wife Diane.

Diane and I have brought up three children and now have five grandchildren. I built two sailing dinghies when the children were young. I started sailing whilst serving in the army in Singapore and have continued with this sport to the present time.

The whole of my working life was in the cement industry with the Rugby Cement of the UK. The early years were in England at various cement plants and on projects such as constructing a fifty-six-mile pipeline to pump chalk slurry. I was appointed as works manager of Trinidad Cement in the West Indies where we spent seven years and I arrived in WA in 1971 to take up the position of works manager at Cockburn Cement.

Whilst buying a band saw one day early in 1990 I spotted one of the cheap Sontax lathes. As I was planning to retire in about a year and a half, I thought this would be a good toy. Having attacked bits of wood with semi sharp tools for a month or two I did not seem to be making much progress until traveling back from the North with our caravan one day we pulled into Regan's Ford for morning tea and discovered a woodturning demonstration. There was a turner, complete with caravan, Honda generator and lathe. After exchanging greetings and discussing wood turning, he pronounced "You cannot teach yourself" and promptly offered me an application form to join WAWA.

I joined the Association in mid-1990 and have been forever grateful to that traveling turner. I have gained so much knowledge and skills from the members both individually and at the weekend workshops. Since that early time, I have upgraded my lathe, gained many friends and travelled in the caravan to workshops in places I might not otherwise have visited.