

Extract from WAWA Newsletter issue 25 dated December 1989

Reflections on a visit by a Master Woodturner and Instructor

GEORGE HATFIELD was to be the guest turner to members of WAWA for two days at Midvale Woodturning Centre, a lecturer and demonstrator in the craft.

George was in Western Australia as Craftsman in Residence at the Nedlands College of Advanced Education.

To those who have not met him, they could have been expected to be awed by his presence.

From his first words to his final actions, he showed his feelings for the craft, wood and people.

We were led through the age-old mysteries of spindle turning with beads, coves and finials to their incorporation in design, with turning of goblets held in compression chucks and through the various intricacies of bowl-turning. All of these were enjoyed by the classes of experienced turners to the rank amateur. No matter how trivial the question or the more expert request, George handled it with delicacy, by expert advice and demonstration.

While being led through this maze of workmanship, one recurring theme was always dominant - the preparation and maintenance of the working tools - skew chisel, gouge (roughing and detail) and scraping, for all techniques were used at his workshop.

George's portable sharpening centre was always on hand for the final honing of his cutting edges. Apart from electric grindstones this always travels with him. A lidded lunch box with a good smear of oil and kerosene mixture on the bottom, covered by a 25cm thick pad of soft foam with a flat Arkansas and slipstone on top - gentle pressure brings the oil- through to either stone to be used - the former for skew and the latter for gouges. The magic of it all is that the oil mixture sinks through the foam when not being used, so the stones never become oversaturated.

This leads onto the shaping of his detail gouges which hollow shapes on spindles and the insides of goblets and eggcups etc. This shape is the well-known semi-elliptical or fingernail gouge. A shape extremely hard to obtain and maintain by beginners and others. It is obtained by grinding the top of the gouge on the 8-inch grindstone preferably and then reversing the gouge and grinding the correct bevel angle up to the distinct fingernail edge - the final- edge being done with the slipstone. The rests on the grindstone were used only by the hands and not the tools.

We had arguments for and against new sharpening methods; -

- a) Each new demonstrator requires us to alter our sharpening techniques. (Not true, they are only variations of what we do now)
- b) They work on soft woods mostly in the Eastern states and ours are hard, their edges last longer. (No worry - alter the sharpening angle only)
- c) After each new demonstrator we alter the profiles on our tools to the benefit of the retailer. Not so - as an alteration is usually only minor if it is as simple as George's. We are never compelled to change.

In summation, I feel that the sharpening techniques would have been of utmost benefit to all who attended whether they were used in their entirety or partially.

The fellowship with George was a bonus to us all.