

## PROFILE OF A TURNER

**GORDON WILKINS** "Been there done that". Nothing would express better the story of Gordon's life. If ever anyone has had such an eclectic experience it is Gordon.

Best known for his large turnings and especially his large museum pieces hollowed out through a very small opening, Gordon has been and done many other things. Born in Melbourne but moving to WA with his parents at a very young age he grew up on a farm at Kondinin. His father, with no previous farming experience, took up a largely uncleared block with no improvements on it and proceeded to develop it. Gordon was educated at Kondinin school but, because of the Great Depression, had to leave school at 14 to work on the farm. In 1936 he came to Perth and worked for a builder and during this time went to night school at Perth Tech to study the theory of diesel and aero engineering. This experience led to him join the RAAF where he became an engine fitter.

After leaving the air force at the end of the war, he took up land back in Kondinin which, while largely cleared, had been under lease for many years and so all the fixed improvements had been badly neglected. In 1956, he gave up farming and moved with the family to Perth.

At first, he worked as an industrial lighting specialist and then for a marine engineering group in Fremantle. Ever looking for new challenges, he then trained as a manual arts teacher and spent 8 years in that profession before retiring in 1978.

It was then that he took up woodturning. With his enquiring mind and engineering skills, he built his own lathe. He has in fact built two, but the large lathe is extraordinary. Taking pieces up to 4 feet in diameter and up to 200 kg in weight and using homemade tools with extension handles, Gordon can produce those quality articles for which he has become so well known.

He has had two exhibitions of his work at Fremantle and has built up a demand for his quality. His great talent is his ability to use the raw wood in such a way that shows the grain and colour of the wood to its best advantage. While turning is Gordon's prime interest, his talent is in no way restricted to turning. In his home is a beautiful dining room table and chairs made by him from a cape lilac tree grown by him. The grain and the colour are exquisite and of course the workmanship immaculate.

Always happy and willing to share he consistently demonstrates at workshops and passes on his considerable knowledge to any who care to listen and learn. A great stalwart of WAWA and an all-round good fellow.

## Gordon Wilkins Lathe for Large Logs

On considering a large section of log, the idea of building a suitable lathe arises. This need not be too daunting a project as it is really a very simple machine - I have been there and done that.

My big lathe uses a car rear axle assembly to provide the reduction gearing and the strength to support the heavy unbalanced work piece. The left axle is removed, its housing cut off from the differential housing and a plate welded over the hole to keep dirt out and oil in the diff. I shortened the right axle and housing which involved quite a lot of work and is not really necessary.

The differential pinions are welded to their axle drive gears so that no differential action may occur. The crown wheel and pinion are retained and in my unit speeds of 10 RPM through to 580 RPM are obtained by having a 4 sheeve 2" to 4" pulley on the 1440 RPM one horsepower motor driving to 2" and 5" pulleys attached to the universal joint flange on the diff pinion shaft. Holden axles usually have a reduction of about 3 to 1 so may need larger pulleys on the diff. I seldom use the lowest or highest speeds so if they were different to mine it would not be a problem.

The drive belt is tensioned by the weight of the motor which can be slid on its hinge shaft allowing the belt to line up with the chosen pulleys.

The face plate fits on the axle flange in place of the wheel and is held by bolts through the flange and threaded into the face plate.

The axle assembly sits on an A frame with the pulleys and belt on the opposite side to the operator, and the motor is below.

The cross bar of the A frame is set at the height required to attach the lathe bed which may be made from 2 rectangular hollow sections with a slot between to accommodate bolts securing the tail stock and tool rest. Care must be taken to ensure that the shaft centre line and bed are parallel. This also applies to the tail stock shaft.

Just a warning, big logs are heavy and muscle power alone may not be sufficient for loading on to trailers etc, so think of lifting gear in the workshop, a large chain saw, large chisels and lots of space in your workshop. Gordon Wilkins.

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## VALE

It is with regret that I report the death of a former member **Gordon Wilkins** who will be remembered by older members for the wonderful larger bowls he turned from native timber in a closed form through a very small central hole.

Condolences to his family