

My Life in Wood Turning

Jim Cameron

We returned to WA at the beginning of 2005 after 30 years away, mainly in eastern and northern Australia but also with a fair amount of time overseas. I'd been in Fiji for the last 2½ years running an Australian government aid project at Lautoka Teachers College and decided to take early retirement to finish off a couple of books I'd been working on and to learn woodturning.

The books never did get finished, while woodturning – well that's another story. I set up the beginnings of a workshop with a lathe and tools bought from Carbatec and took the evening classes that Carbatec offered beginners but still had no clear idea of what I was doing and so attended one of the weekend workshops then being run at Dwellingup with Gordon Ward as the tutor – spindle turning on Saturday and a bowl on Sunday. Before it could be hollowed out, Gordon managed to spin the bowl across the room, so it is no surprise that I concentrated for a long time on various dimensions of spindle turning. I learned later that that was probably one of Gordon's party tricks.

It took me more than three years to discover WAWA. I then joined Wandi and became a regular at its Thursday demonstrations even though my presence in the group went unrecognised for a long time. After some months I felt sufficiently confident to submit something for show-and-tell. I had been experimenting with the design of candlesticks using an abstract human shape and, as always when working on prototypes, used pine as my timber of choice. Using the three examples I prepared, I explained the problems I was having with balance between head, shoulder and body and with finding a pleasing shape. The assessor made no reference to the design issues I was grappling with but, instead, focused on the tearout evident at the base and did so in such a way there was another eight years before I tried another show and tell.

I was beginning to settle down at Wandi when I was given an opportunity to work with principals of secondary schools in Sri Lanka strengthening their management capacities. The civil war there was coming to an end and the country was desperate to rebuild its education system with assistance from the Australian Government. As I was finishing up, I was approached by a Japanese company working in Vietnam for the Asian Development Bank to assist the redevelopment of the secondary education curriculum to equip students with practical skills. And, as that project was nearing completion, I moved across to a World Bank project dealing with a major shift in the orientation of Vietnam's primary education. Thus, between 2009 and 2016, I spent a fair proportion of the year overseas, living in lathe-less hotel rooms in Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Kiribati, and elsewhere.

My wood turning skills developed very slowly. They were given a major boost however when Wandi established a Tuesday morning hands-on group under the leadership of Graham Lewis who was later joined by Bob Malacari. Graham was an impeccable trainer, always well prepared and attuned to the needs of individual turners.

Indeed, I used him as a case study with my Vietnamese students, showing them that he exhibited all that I knew as the best practice in adult training. From Graham I finally learned to ride the bevel, along with the importance of sharp (and shiny) tools, and how to design on paper before ever picking up a chisel. Graham could also see scratches in finished work invisible to the naked eye and insisted that they be removed. Only the best was good enough.

Even though my attendance was regularly interrupted, I made real progress and moved from spindles to bowls and platters and then to boxes. That is where I now reside, comfortable with

each form, although still with plenty more to learn. I joined the committee at Wandi representing the Tuesday (now Monday) group becoming, in time, its convener, sharing the duties at first with Rod Cocks because I was still spending a fair amount of time away.

When fellow Wandi member Andy Phillips moved to New Zealand, I stepped in to take his place on the Committee of Management and wasn't quick enough to avoid being nominated as president. The rest of the story you now know, except you will never know how indebted I am to the many demonstrations at club and Association level that I have witnessed over the years as well as a marvellous range of competition and show and tell items. My time as president is coming to an end. I never did write the books I had in mind when I started out more than 15 years ago, but I do have one close to being finished and have begun work on another, and somehow had a hand in five others along the way. My turning is never better than ordinary but has become an essential part of what I do and what I am.

Extract from WAWA Newsletter issue 219 November/December 2021

Jack DeVos Award

Jim Cameron, member number 2227, has been a member of the Wandi Wood turning group since his return to live in WA. Since joining the group in 2007 he has taken on a number of responsibilities.

Jim became Wandi group convener in 2016 and held the job for two years. That same year he joined the WAWA committee and became WAWA President in 2017, spending nearly 4 years in the job, until 2020.

On leaving the Presidential post in 2020, he re-joined the committee at Wandi in July 2020 and accepted a number of other jobs in our organisation. He is a prolific and talented demonstrator who enjoys using the group's fortnightly Fellowship meetings to help and encourage other members prepare for WAWA competitions.



He has taken on the role of trainer for the Monday morning group, helping and encouraging the members of that session to advance in the craft. He was a driving force behind the recommencement of the Wednesday evening hands-on group, and he readily accepted the role of group coordinator to ensure that session's continuation.

Jim is a friend and mentor to new and old members alike and is happy to attend other sessions to listen and share the latest information about the group's activities. Jim Cameron is a credit to the group and is a fitting recipient of the Wandi Woodturners Jack DeVos award for 2021.

Urn for Former Member Arthur Smith.

In April, Kylhan Townsing contacted the group with a view to getting one of our members to turn a funeral urn for his partner's grandfather, Arthur Smith. Before he passed away, Arthur was a keen turner and a member of the Wednesday group, and he often spoke fondly to his family about his time at Wandi. After asking around, **Jim Cameron** agreed to turn the urn for Arthur. Jim's first attempt went awry when the olive blank he was hollowing developed a large crack. Jim went back to the drawing board and on his second attempt turned a beautiful urn in mulberry with a cape lilac lid. Jim used an innovative method of fixing the lid to the base by securing a 50mm plumbers threaded joint on the neck of the urn and its corresponding piece in the lid. This very secure joint ensured that in the event of any unforeseen accidents Arthur's remains would remain safely inside the urn.



On Wednesday evening, 2nd May 2021, Kylhan came to the Wandi Workshop and Jim presented him with the urn. Kylhan was delighted with this excellent example of the woodturner's craft and looked forward to presenting it to Arthur's widow and family.

The attached photograph shows Jim presenting the urn to Kylhan.

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Merit Award Citation to Jim Cameron – 2227

Jim joined the Woodturners Association in April 2007 with the Wandi group.

He has been a very active member of that Group, including on their committee and taking on the role of Convenor for two years. He is passionate about training and mentoring of new members.

In 2016 Jim joined the Association Committee of Management and was elected as President in 2017. He held this position for an extended period of 3 years before retiring in 2020.



During his time as President, he was a strong advocate for good government and devoted a great deal of effort in travelling to the groups to make the COM more visible and accessible.

Jim oversaw several key developments for the Association. These include the review and upgrading of most of the Association's documentation including the Handbook and Safety Manual. He was responsible for the development of a Strategic Plan, giving direction and timelines for the future of the Association.

He has also been active in the Training Sub-committee to develop a Training Resource Manual and initiate what has now become the STEP program. Jim's passion and dedication to the Association and the Wandj Group are an example for us all and make him a worthy recipient of the Association's Merit award.