

Extract from WAWA Newsletter issue 67 dated February/March 1997

PROFILE OF A TURNER

John Lathwell is a genuine sandgroper having been born and educated in WA. After leaving school soon after the end of World War 11 he obtained a job making musical instruments. The business was started by two ex-prisoners of war who employed John. Using mainly Queensland Maple or Butternut when maple was scarce, they produced ukuleles and full-size guitars. The finger boards were made from WA Peppermint which was very hard and resisted wear.

At one stage John thought he might like to go farming and for about 18 months worked on farms at Bodallin and Wagin. He decided that he could only become a farmer under one of three conditions - be born with a silver spoon, marry a rich farmer's daughter or win the lottery. As none of these appeared likely he decided to leave farming.

John enrolled at Perth Technical College and studied art for 2 1/2 years. He became a ticket writer and this occupation served him well in travels around Australia. He was almost always able to get employment and while working in Sydney he met Marie who was to become his wife. While working for David Jones he was transferred back to Perth.

John became involved in full time commercial art in design, water colour, oils and acrylics. This involved designing such things as letterheads, logos, book jackets and record covers as well as advertisements for the press. John in fact designed the WAWA logo. John finally became art director at several art studios.

His interest in wood turning started after a visit to a cousin in Manjimup who had been turning for 20 years. When John expressed an interest in learning his cousin gave him a day during which he turned an 8" bowl under his direction.

John purchased a cheap lathe in 1981 but soon graduated to a Tough lathe. In 1982 he collected green jarrah planks from a timber mill in the Hills and sealed and seasoned these so that he had a good supply for many years. He turns standard lamps, table lamps and a range of perfume atomisers and pens both ball point and fountain. At one time he turned legs for 16 birdcage tables for a client. The tabletops were marble 900mm x 1200mm, and the 64 legs of Honduran Mahogany and Asian Teak were 5'6" diameter.

John joined WAWA at their second meeting, so he is one of the early members. He was a member of the Committee for 8 years and for 6 years was the Weekend Workshop Coordinator and a great worker for the Association. His sterling efforts have been rewarded with Life Membership of the Association. After a spell from the job of Coordinator he now finds himself back in his old position. All the members of WAWA have greatly appreciated his dedicated service.