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PROFILE OF A TURNER

Jonathon Croft, member number 64 was born in 1922 in Mosman, NSW, and it seems that his earliest years were mainly involved with sheds. First there was Dad's tool shed, which was at the back of the yard, and because the yard had a slight slope, was always spoken of as "up the shed". That was where his dad had a lathe, the only machine tool Jon thinks he ever had and that was where he developed his love of tools. As the boys (there were three of them plus a sister) grew up and acquired bikes, his dad added a lean-to to the Tool shed and that became the bike shed. Then when he was about twelve a car appeared and so Dad added another lean-to on the other side and that became the Car Shed. Of course, there was the Chook Shed in the corner of the yard, but it didn't count, because it wasn't even high enough to stand up in, except for chooks. But it did count in a way, because there seemed to be a continuing dispute between Dad and the Council over his unauthorised sheds. Dad must have won, because when he left to live in WA in 1950 all, but the chook shed were still there!

Jon can't remember actually making anything on the lathe, but he can picture every inch of it. It was driven by a long wooden foot pedal connected to a big cast iron flywheel. While his dad was pedalling Jon enjoyed hopping on the board and getting pumped up and down, like a jack-in-the-box. Of course, all the kids grew heavier, Jon thinks that was why Dad's output of turned items gradually diminished. In those days there were no fancy expanding and contracting chucks for the hobby woodworker. So, most of the output from the Tool shed that Jon remembers were spindle turnings by Dad and billycarts by Jon (and Dad). According to Jon his Mum wasn't a shed person at all, and her ambitions for him were more in the direction of a doctor, bank manager or at least a public servant.

At fifteen, the latter was what he became when a position as Junior Clerk in the Family Endowment office became available. It was there he laboured until at seventeen the war rescued him, and he spent the next four plus years being a driver/ instructor on Bren-gun carriers and later armoured cars and later still, as an instrument repairer. The main thing he learnt in the Air Force is that instrument repairers don't repair instruments, they only remove or replace them so that the Instrument Makers can repair them. That was the sort of service logic that made him glad to return at the end of the war to public service. This time Jon was posted to the Local Government Dept.

He felt that fate had given him an opportunity to avenge Dad's battles with the Council because in a sense he was now in a position where he had power over local councils.

However, what really happened was to influence his life in another way, because the Department also administered the act relating to the sale of wildflowers, and he found himself in the position of having to verify that the people applying for a license were actually growing the flowers on their own property. This meant travelling by train or hired car to some interesting and isolated areas, but it also meant that he had to know the common names and the botanical names of the scheduled plants. This in turn led to an interest in trees and their family relationships which remains with him still and helped Jon where for a period he ran the "guess the wood" competition for WAWA.

During the war Jon married a young lady from a farming family in WA and in 1950 her brother offered to give him a start as a share farmer. This meant first of all learning the basics of farm life. Milking, separating, root picking, washing super-bags and mending them.

Jon made a writing desk which he entered in the Bruce Rock show and won first prize. There were not too many entries in the carpentry class in 1951, but he was very proud of it. Jon enjoyed farm work but the financial side of it was always a worry. After the regular income of a public servant and the wheat market began to look shaky in the mid 1950's he looked for something with better prospects for his growing family. A position as farm manager at the Methodist Boy's home at Werribee offered better schooling opportunities for the children but when changing social conditions meant that the Home catered for delinquent boys, not orphans. Jon's wife and he decided that another change of scene was required.

Jon went back to school, and this led to employment in 1960 as a Health Inspector, from there he got a position as Health Inspector/ Traffic Inspector at Beverley. Although initially disliking the traffic inspector's job, he found that it was possible to do a satisfying job of educating drivers without antagonising them, a feature of traffic control which he feels is sadly lacking today. On one occasion Jon stopped a car for some form of infringement, and without "booking" the driver he proceeded to deliver his usual lecture about road safety to all four occupants and sent them on their way. Sometime later the Shire Clerk showed Jon a letter. The occupants were all members of the Country Road Traffic Authority and they had commended him for his approach.

However, life was catching up again, the Police were taking over country traffic control, and Jon didn't want to be a full-time policeman.

Another stint back at school this time to add "Meat and other Foods" to his health ticket, which led in 1969 to a position with Perth City Council, where he remained until retirement in 1987.

In the meantime, Health Inspectors had become Health Surveyors and now when Perth City Council are kind enough to employ him for a week each year for the annual adult Immunization Programme, he finds himself as an Environmental Health Officer. Jon thinks that he must be the oldest in captivity.

At the Association meeting held at Stoneville in January 1987, Mike Kenny gave Jon a sawn slab of jarrah burl. It was very dry, and weather beaten but he took it home to see what he could do with it. Jon is still cutting bits from it to decorate various projects. Occasionally Jon thinks that he will retire properly (whatever that means) but he believes that there is always something to learn.

His children have tried to teach him about computers but with little success. On a recent trip to Hobart, he saw a Rocking Cow and Goat so now they are his projects. These, together with some Huon Pine, Blackwood and Sassafras timber brought back from Tasmania will keep him busy woodturning until the next change of scene.

Jon was elected to the WAWA Management committee in December 1991 and served as President from September 1992 to 1994. In October 1994 he became President and WA representative of the Australian Woodcraft Federation. Jon's pleasant and gentle manner has made him many friends and his contribution over many years in the Association are much appreciated; he is truly a devoted and fine example of a Homo Sapiens Woodensis.

VALE

JONATHAN CROFT

Jon passed away in August 2001 following some months of deteriorating health.

Jon joined WAWA on January 10th, 1986 as member 64 and quickly became involved in the Association activities and providing instruction to members of both WAW and his local Rockingham Woodturners Group in which he was also very active.

Jon was elected President of WAWA for 92/93 and 93/94.

Upon retiring from this position, he became National President of the Australian Woodcraft Federation for the two years that Western Australia became responsible for its administration.

Jon possessed a quiet personality but was progressive in his thinking and well respected by all who met and knew him. WAWA's Committee of Management and all members extend their deepest sympathy to Maisie and Jon's family in their sad loss.

Shortly after the passing of Jon CROFT, the following was found in his desk.....

I HOPE HEAVEN IS VERY MUCH LIKE THIS

I found myself returning one night to the workshop, to sit, to feel, to be surrounded by the sights and smells and feelings of a workshop, this was my time to take in the smells of paint and shavings, the glue and tools, which were always there, but remain unnoticed during the day.

There was a satisfaction of work completed and yet to be completed. It was an alone time, not a lonely time, for the obligations of the workshop had been fulfilled for the day. So, I sat alone, with only one small light I have at the back of the bench switched on and felt deeply of what is the workshop. Here I am completely at home, at rest, at peace The familiarity and understanding of every tool, every piece of wood, even the scraps below the saw and bench, is complete. I can turn and at my fingertips are things I need to fulfill my dreams.