

PROFILE OF A TURNER

Keith Johnson has long been a stalwart of WAWA and is widely regarded as one of the best exponents of finishing wood. Although not an original member, he joined very early in the life of the Association and was an early committee member. For many years he was membership secretary and encouraged many to join and advance the craft of woodturning.

Keith was born in Kyabram in Victoria. Keith's father come from a farming family but, as the farm could only support one son, his father worked in the town. After leaving primary school he went to Melbourne to work for a panel beater as an improver (similar to an apprentice, except they did not have to sign papers), learning to be a spray painter. His pay at first was 12 shillings a week which advanced to 15 shillings after the first year.

In 1939 the war intervened, and Keith joined the militia and later transferred to the AIF. He served at the Canungra jungle training school as an instructor in artillery, anti-aircraft guns and machine guns.

Following his discharge from the army, he returned to spray painting for 1 ½ years but decided that he would fancy something not so dirty. The opportunity to train under rehab was taken and Keith spent 6 months at technical school doing cabinet making. After the 6 months they were regarded as 40% efficient and then obtained a job of which they were assessed every 6 months and their efficiency increased in 10% increments. Keith was employed making TV cabinets and radiograms. From there he transferred to another factory which had 165000 sq feet of space devoted entirely to wood.

One day, quite out of the blue, he decided he would like to move to WA. In 1963 he drove to the West over 1000 miles of largely unmade road. At first, he worked for Joyce Bros and then for Catt Furniture.

From there Keith was employed in the Occupational Therapy Dept of RPH where he was a trade instructor in the Psychiatric Unit. Being a cabinet maker, the workshop therapy was mainly woodwork. It was suggested that a small wood lathe would be of benefit to some patients. A small hobby lathe was obtained but being too noisy, the Engineering Dept at the hospital made up a portable lathe and Keith obtained some wood turning chisels. As Keith didn't know anything about woodturning, he took himself off to night school at Leederville Tech and did one term of wood turning. This exposure got him well and truly hooked. On mentioning to a friend that he might buy a lathe, his friend said, "Look no further, I have one going rusty in my garage". It was a Tough lathe, complete with 10 chisels all for \$350. It has been in constant use ever since making bowls, lidded boxes which are beautifully enhanced by Jan's lovely tapestry inlays, goblets and trophy boxes. Keith used to be a keen fisherman, but his fishing gear now has 10mm of dust all over it.

Keith, together with the late Cyril Jones and Ernie Margetts started the Melville group. In the first days of WAWA, weekend workshops were held only every second month - once in the city and once in the country in order to provide instruction and fellowship among turners. From this has developed all the various groups which have contributed so much to the advancement of the craft of turning. Keith, together with Ernie Margetts were the first

instructors for the Melville City Council, giving instruction every Monday for something like 5 years. Many people owe their interest and competence in wood turning to these lessons.

The Association owes a debt of gratitude to such as Keith who have given endless demonstrations at workshops, shopping centres and other places. Keith is particularly known for his demonstrations on finishing. He constantly strives to improve his techniques. One member complained he had no sooner mastered the latest idea to find Keith had already progressed to another method. Keith believes you never stop learning and this is a valuable lesson for all of us.

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VALE

KEITH JOHNSON Member 98 1921 – 2008

In July 1967 I arrived in WA from Victoria and at the Mt Pleasant Methodist Church I met a vocal Bombers supporter Keith Johnson and although a Tiger man myself began a friendship that lasted over 40 years.

Keith was a master craftsman in cabinet making and the furniture industry.

Later in life he took up occupational therapy at Royal Perth Hospital where he could help people to get back on their feet. Very typical of Keith and that is where he met Jan.

He became a member of WAWA in 1981 and became very passionate about turning. As a very active member of the Melville Group, he and Ern Margetts decided that the Association should be brought to the public's attention, and they held the first Shopping Centre Display at the Melville Plaza on the 1st to the 6th of September 1986. These displays are still current today and still serve the purpose of attracting new members to WAWA and raising funds for the Association.

Keith had a great talent in demonstrating and simultaneously describing, in detail, what he was doing and why and often threw in an interesting anecdote. He could also be relied upon to stir us up and take the "mickey" out of an unsuspecting member.

He served on the Committee in various roles and at a time of rapid growth took on the Membership Secretary work. He also travelled to Esperance to help the members there to learn more about the art of wood turning. Always more than willing to show other members how he achieved his excellent results, particularly in spraying and polishing his work. In 1996 WAWA honoured Keith with Life Membership in recognition of his outstanding contributions to the Association.

A truly Christian gentleman who will be sorely missed by all who had the privilege of knowing him and benefiting from his help.