

Extract from Newsletter issue 87 dated April/May 2000

Re printed in Newsletter issue 208 dated April 2020

PROFILE OF A TURNER

Keith McQueen was born in Goomalling in 1929. His father and uncle farmed 800 acres three miles northeast of Goomalling, but this farm was too small for two families, so in 1929 Keith's family moved to 3300 acres of uncleared land at Yorkrakine. Keith's father travelled to the farm on the EB steel wheeled tractor (not many about in those days). His mother, with a three-year-old son and three-month-old Keith as her passengers, drove the Model T Ford car following in the tractor wheel marks for sixty miles to their new home. Clearing the farm was started just in time for the Great Depression.

From early childhood Keith helped his mother and brother run the farm while their father tried to earn enough to sustain the family. One task which the young boys helped with in the early 1940's was the clearing and gravelling of the Cemetery Road, shovelling gravel onto a 1928 Chev 4 truck, then shovelling it off again and levelling it with a rake.



In 1943 Keith's father broke his elbow and was in the Cunderdin Hospital. Keith aged fourteen at the time drove to take his mother to visit his father.

Of necessity Keith learned to do the mechanical repairs to farm machinery and tractors. He did a CIG Gas course in welding and went on to teach his neighbouring farmer. When the McQueen's bought a tractor-pack electric welder, the neighbour returned the favour and taught Keith basic electric welding. Keith designed and built many machines for the farm over the years.

He attended a one room school at Yorkrakine, was a foundation member of the Kellerberrin TQ Car Club and of course built his own TQ.

Keith met (his wife) Pam where she worked at the local Machinery Agency, and also at Square Dancing. They married and had three sons. In 1963, they moved to a mostly uncleared property at Dandaragan. Then, in 1966, with their three sons to educate, moved to Scarborough. He started a clover harvesting business in the summer and in winter worked at an engineering shop as a welder making wrought iron balustrade and gates. Keith had always wanted a steel lathe



but could not justify the expense. The next Christmas the decision was a Tough Lathe! Dad and sons were soon at a local firewood yard. After searching, some Jarrah was selected for their first project, one piece turned out to be Karri and the resulting stack-nibble dishes has a Karri bowl in the centre that warps with the damp weather even now.

In 1976 the family was back on the land, this time just North of Eneabba and of course the Tough went with them.

They built a Caravan Park near the Brand Highway and at this time the Geraldton Tourist Promotions asked Keith to demonstrate woodturning at various shopping centres in Metro area. During this time many people asked Keith why he did not cut, instead of "scraping". Although Keith always asked for a demonstration it was obvious that many had not heard about the use of the skew chisel. None could use it until Paul Thompson of the ABC in Geraldton asked the question and being offered the chisel, he proceeded to demonstrate the skew chisel and so started a whole new side of woodturning. Keith was immediately won over and after a little practice proceeded to teach the skew chisel to every turner he met. Keith could see the need for a Woodturners' club where he would share his knowledge for the betterment of turning.

It was at one of these Tourism Promotions that Ivor Bridges (who was a leading hand at Toughs) noticed Keith's Tough Lathe looked a bit battered and arranged the lathe to be left at the Tough Factory. It came home looking brand new. It was about this time that Keith spoke with Ivor Bridges and John Shinnick about his desire to start a club.

After compiling a list of interested people they met in the Caravan Park. He sent out eighty invitations for a woodturning workshop to form a club. On Saturday 21 September 1985, eighteen people turned up.

The Woodturners Association of Western Australia (Inc) started with Keith as President. It was mentioned how great it would be to have fifty members, not realising how quickly it would grow. A WAWA weekend workshop was held on 16th and 17th of November 1985 and Pam wondered what to do for the ladies while the seventeen woodturners buried themselves in the woodshed. She decided to demonstrate the spinning of wool, conduct a wildflower walk and generally encouraged the ladies to do their own craft and of course feed the men. So set the pattern of the Association. Membership was by then fifty.

At a meeting held at John and Kath Shinnick's home in February the following year forty-four turners turned up. All had a great time. Keith was determined that the Association would be statewide, sharing knowledge. He carried his Tough Lathe to every meeting from Kalbarri to Albany. When a woodturner suggested that there was something else in the world besides wood, Keith replied, "Is there?" After serving as President for three years Keith decided to let others guide the Association as membership was now over 200.

Keith proudly received a Life Membership of the Woodturners Association of Western Australia at the Annual General Meeting in September 1992. Keith put woodturning aside and worked on building a mud brick house in Mundaring. Keith and Pam remained involved with the Association over the years since this profile was written but, sadly, ill health gradually reduced that involvement. Keith was very proud (and rightly so) of how the Association started and the way so many people have helped to make it the success it is today.

