

PROFILE OF A TURNER

Neil Turner

Neil writes:

I was born February 3rd 1958 in Narrogin, the eldest of three children. Most of my schooling took place at the Corrigin District High school; in years eleven and twelve I attended Christ Church Grammar school.

During my schooling I only made one article on the wood lathe (a very shabby paperweight). On leaving school in 1975 I returned to the farm to work the land. While tilling the soil we would unearth long round roots and round stumps, which we thought may have been Banksia and Wandoo, so I decided to make a wood lathe and use this material. After three attempts I arrived at what I considered the perfect lathe. Two inches by two inches, half inch thick by three feet angle iron for the bed, twelve-inch swing, electric motor with a step pulley driving through a three-speed gear box, with a belt driving the headstock. This ungainly set-up provided the speed options I needed to turn these odd, shaped pieces. When I look back it is a wonder I did not "wear" some of these pieces of wood. After breaking the tangs of two chisels and trying to lever myself through the roof several times, I decided it would be a good idea to buy myself some books and do some reading. The addition of a half-inch bowl turning gauge to the kit made things easier. As with all things my skills improved but I lacked direction.

I married my wife Suellen in 1981; we had met while she was attending Methodist Ladies College. While this time in our lives was busy with sport and raising five children, I still found time to do some turning in a poorly lit shed full of old farm rubbish, near the house.

Suellen has often been my source of inspiration and my greatest critic. She suggested I join WAWA and through this organization I attended a workshop with Stephen Hughes in Bunbury. This provided the direction I was looking for and it really opened my eyes to the many ideas that could be used on a lathe. It set my mind racing. It amazed me on that first workshop, that when we retired to John Shinnick's after all day turning, they (Gordon Ward, John Shinnick, Keith Stout, and Stephen Houghes) talked wood turning until late into the night. I could but sit and listen.

They seemed consumed, absorbed with wood and the lathe, and talked with passion about the subject.

I attended two more workshops in Bunbury in the ensuing years with Vic Wood and Stephen Houghes. These workshops enabled me to achieve two things; broaden my thoughts and horizons and meet many people from different backgrounds with a common thread, woodturning.

I have found in all my time in the Woodturners Association that I have always been made very welcome. People have always shared their skills and ideas freely. I attended my first WAWA weekend at Brookton some years later, conducting my first demo there, turning a mallee stump (a real buzz). Subsequently, I have given other demonstrations turning Mallee; two at Mandurah and one in Busselton, all of which I enjoyed. From the many questions and the close attention of the members, I got the impression that they were pleased and surprised that Mallee could be turned into such beautiful objects.

I have entered the Australian Woodturning Exhibition on three occasions, winning the natural edge bowl section in the novice division a few years ago and last year, third in the open class in the same section. I really enjoy the challenge turning it, I believe that you must access each piece and feel comfortable that the shape you have in mind will fit within the piece of wood.

I try to put a little bit of myself in all my pieces, through shape and form. Mallee is not the only wood I turn, although it fascinates me particularly. I also like turning Sheoak and of course Sandalwood when I can get it. The addition of a small studio next to the house has made it more enjoyable to do some turning in the evenings. I must confess that I find it very easy to lose track of time when I make it into the workshop. I still have my old gearbox lathe (mark two), it now has a gap bed enabling me to swing bigger pieces. Most of my work is produced on a Vic Mark 200, which I am finding has its limitations. I am always trying to do new and different things; it is the only way to improve, to get out of my comfort zone and strive for the perfect piece.



Neil Turner inspiring the Busselton crew 2015



Extract from Newsletter issue 153 dated March 2011

Observations Gosnells WEWS February 2011

Neil Turner was next with a demo titled Something Special and it certainly was just that. First the 3 cornered bowl that Chris Sioulas had made was passed around showing the wings had been embellished and the impact that had achieved. Neil explained that he is the strongest critic of his own work constantly challenging himself to improve his techniques, try a different way, a different shape or various combinations of embellishment in search of constant improvement. Neil then turned a bowl his way explaining the importance of how the outside shape can provide the visual impact and gave examples of embellishment that made the piece an individual type of artwork. He then hollowed out the bowl and explained how he could use pyrography to subtly follow growth lines. Neil then showed how he holds his work

on his knees and cuts various drilled dot patterns. He showed examples of bowls with cut patterns plus pyrography and dot pattern work all blending together to produce his unique style, the work was passed around as well as tools and cutters. Neil stressed the importance of good photography for a turner that wishes to sell his work and showed his album to prove his point, this was also passed around. Neil then explained the 3D affect that can be obtained with flowing lines as obtained in examples of burl turning. Neil then showed examples and photographs of his FIRE series and his SEA series and demonstrated how he draws fire flashes and cuts the fire tails, he also showed how he uses different size dots to enhance growth lines. Neil provided a continuous flow of information during the demonstration as well as showing photographs and examples of his work, you really needed to be there to appreciate the imagination and technical expertise that Neil exhibited to the members fortunate to be present.

Extract from Newsletter issue 155 dated July 2011

Observations Mandurah WEWS May 2011

Neil Turner then showed how he makes small boxes from left over wood. Neil explained how he finds inspiration for his work from many sources even using the Taj Mahal to model small boxes. His boxes are usually made in a ratio of 1 top and 2 bottom. He rounded the wood and made a spigot for both ends, making the bottom first including a rebate for the lid. Neil then made the top and after fitting the bottom he then completed the outside, with the bottom in the chuck and the top jam chucked to it he would shape a finial if required. Sanding and finishing are next.

Extract from Newsletter issue 158 dated January 2012

Observations Bunbury WEWS November 2011

Final demonstration for the day was **Neil Turner** with embellished lidded container. Neil first showed a number of bowl shapes using coral forms, and a York gum natural edged bowl. He then mounted a York gum burl on the lathe and shaped the outside of the form. Neil emphasized the importance of safety and how to make use of sapwood in the choice of shape, as well as using it to stand out as a feature. He, then removed the burl from the lathe, and after speaking about types of finishes, remounted in a four-jaw chuck. Neil then cut out the centre, explaining that he leaves the tailstock in place as long as possible. After removal of the tailstock Neil completed the form to the shape and thickness he required. He would then sand and finish as desired. A lively question and answer session followed, as members took the opportunity to gain information on a wide range of subjects.

Extract from WAWA Newsletter issue 171 dated March/April 2014

Observations Wandl WEWS February 2014

Master of Ceremonies David Rechter introduced **Neil Turner** as the first demonstrator, giving a short history of Neil's achievements mainly from 2010 when he gave up farming to become a professional turner. Neil passed round a book of his work and described his passion for embellishment and sculpture of natural edged bowls.

He also passed round a sea urchin ring box plus a collection of other small boxes. Today he would demonstrate the making of a sea urchin ring box starting by turning down two pieces with spigots, the lid being smaller than the bottom. Neil stated that no amount of embellishment will save a crap shape - a drawing is what is needed to achieve a pleasant shape. Whilst giving a continuous commentary on tool selection and handling, Neil shaped the lid outside first then inside, using a Vermec scraper to finish the inside before drilling the hole for the spire with a 5mm bit. Neil then starts on the bottom turning the spire on the inside of the bottom. After fitting the bottom to the top with the spire protruding through the top, he refines this fit until he is satisfied. Using a scraper for the final finish before sanding, Neil then tapes the top to the bottom and finishes the point of the spire that protrudes from the top. Neil



separates the box and finishes the bottom using a T.C. Cutter and after removing the bottom from the chuck, Neil makes a jam chuck to hold the piece whilst he shapes the outside of the bottom. Neil then assembled the box and passed it round. Embellishment. Using a four-jaw chuck Neil spaced for six lines. He then explained the types of drilling machines and reasons for his choice, passing round the three burrs he will use. Following the lines Neil cut grooves using the 6mm burr then cutting spikes with a 4mm knife cutter. He explained the patterns in coral and the use of smaller burrs to achieve the desired result. then drilled out a pattern using a 1mm burr. Neil invited questions on any subject and a lively Q & A session followed. We are indeed privileged to witness a professional international turner and demonstrator of the calibre of Neil Turner making available his valuable time to be with us.

Extract from WAWA Newsletter issue 172 dated May/June 2014

Observations Collie WEWS 2014

After lunch followed a demonstration by Neil Turner of Coral embellishment. Neil spoke of the inspiration that drives him to incorporate different ideas, showing a platter drilled with a flywire effect, a fan shaped with extremely thin wood and an imitation sponge also from wood. Neil showed the drilling equipment and burrs he uses then, after showing a platter with great grain, Neil showed how embellishment can complement the grain and shape. Start with a poor shape and no amount of embellishment can make it look good.

To illustrate good design Neil mounted a piece of carob on the lathe, shaped the bottom and cut a spigot smoothing with a skew chisel while at the same time explaining what he is trying to achieve. Reversing the wood in the lathe Neil then hollowed the inside concentrating on the desired wall thickness. Neil spoke of his work that was exhibited in international galleries and the need to inspire yourself to achieve continual improvement.



Extract from Newsletter issue 207 dated March/April 2020

Observation Melville WEWS Feb 2020

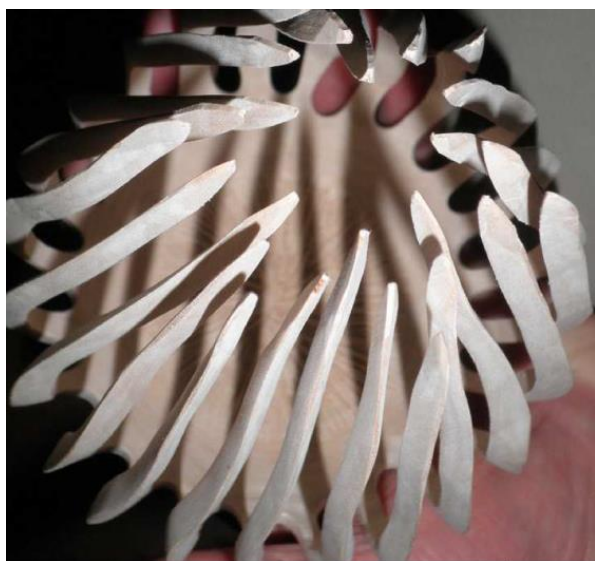
Neil Turner conducted an all-day demonstration to 63 turners including a visitor from Toronto Canada. Neil's flair for turning, explaining what why and how he was doing, and patiently answering questions all peppered with little anecdotes kept all informed and entertained during the 7 hours. Starting with a curved bowl form with a small, elevated base which was carved on the outside, Neil explained timber selection, wall thickness, form and function, inspiration for the piece, finish and the importance of chisel sharpening grind angles.

The influence of other turners was illustrated by actual pieces from Liam Flynn and David Elseworth which were entrusted to the audience for close inspection. Then a second topic was the informative discussion on tools and various myths along with effective finishing methods. The design of the carved pattern was explained (it can take several hours to sketch it up in pencil on object) and the use of a variety of shaping tools, burrs, machines and hand tools was shown on the freshly turned bowl. Next was the demonstration of a cake stand purely turned covering elements of design, use of template explaining the process and the actual turning of the three components making it up. This was whipped up in no time at all but with detailed explanation of methods used and tool use along the way. Finishing and enhancing the grain is important in the final appearance. Those interested in doing a cake stand are referred to an article by Neil in the English Woodturning magazine Issue No. 302. The pace then picked up with turning a grain spoon, where Neil showed the turning process, chucking method, use of speed control to negate vibration, design consideration to bear in mind. e.g., left-handed or right-handed spoons. Finally turning a chop stick using a different method of tensioning the wood. This was interesting as it required a captive live centre to tension a spindle turned thin section. Although it's not a production method of producing chop sticks it certainly showed the potential to do some unusual innovative turning using the skew and spindle gouge.

All in all, a great day of demonstrations from one of our own master commercial turners.

NEIL TURNER HANDS-ON MELVILLE February 2020

A full on and interesting day overseen by Neil who was generous with his time and equipment. Those attending had various levels of skill and experience and all received encouragement and advice from Neil throughout the day. We started with a discussion on what Neil would like us to achieve by the end of the day and shown some of the basic concepts for firstly getting a good shape for our small vase and achieving a thin wall for those intending to try piercing the item. Neil provided each of us with a piercing Dremel bit. After the shaping came the carving and/or piercing. Some participants were quite ambitious with their patterns, others kept it simple, but everyone went home full of inspiration and new ideas. Neil finished the day by showing us some techniques for sharpening tools with the swept back grind that is becoming popular. Thank you, Neil, for an excellent day and thank you to Melville Woodturners for hosting and organizing both events on the weekend.



Top and side view of Neil Turner's steamed vase form



Extract from WAWA Newsletter issue 196 dated May/June 2018

Observations Swan WEWS April 2018

Neil Turner, one of WA's most accomplished wood turners kept the audience entranced - he started with a session on bowl turning basics, using jacaranda from the Goldfields. He stressed the need for a well-shaped dovetailed spigot, with a flat edge against which the chuck jaws rest. Design options were covered, and attention was drawn to the need to use the bowl gouge in varying presentations from bevel cutting mode to shear scraping. Also covered was the ease of which a right-angle drill may be used to power sand. The next session covered aspects of turning a platter and his experimentation with ground rock of different colours and natural pigments such as ochre, to colour the platter's edge. A comment from the audience suggested the use of ground marri gum as an additional pigment to be used, mixed with resin or epoxy glue.

Then followed a discussion of design elements using a series of objects turned by several of the world's top wood turners as examples. Included were 2 items turned from spalted maple, a vase turned from green oak that dried to an oval shape, an example of Jack de Vos's seed pod incorporating a section of a branch, Bin Pho's pierced work and items incorporating colouring, pyrography and embellishment. He showed a form he turned from worm wood which was immersed in liquid beeswax prior to turning. The wax was then removed with a heated hair drier! The thrust of the discussion was the need for members to push their boundaries, whilst being their own worst critics. The final session covered another of Neil's works in progress, using aluminium rods of varying, small diameters drilled into a vase shaped blank, using coloured epoxy glue. He discussed various options for deep hollowing - a good tool being one similar those made by Jim Clarke, with a cutter projecting a mm or two and with a flexible rod from the outrigger bar to allow for an even wall thickness. Also of importance was the need to drill a central hole to allow access for the cutter. Truly this was a day to remember and on which to reflect!

Extract from WAWA Newsletter issue 206 dated January/February 2020

Observations Bunbury WEWS November 2019

Neil Turner was first cab off the rank with a very simple but elegant demonstration of using a bowl gouge to create a thin section hollow form, completing the work with delicate draw and shear cuts, which almost negated the need for sanding. This was followed using materials literally taken from the off cuts and reject material from previous works to create ring holders. Again, with elegance and grace in design and proportion and delicate tool work.

Extract from WAWA Newsletter issue 222 dated May/June 2022

Swan Weekend Workshop Report

The Swan Weekend Workshop was held on 9th April 2022 and we were fortunate to have **Neil Turner** demonstrating, as our MC said "he needs no introduction".

The first session was of a natural edged bowl in York gum burl. Neil discussed the importance of orientating the blank (with the burl edge facing the headstock) so that the final edge would be roughly parallel to the base. He used a bowl gouge with a swept back profile allowing him to undertake pull, push & shear scrape cuts, the latter with the flute almost "closed". The importance of the final profile was stressed by leaving extra wood at the spigot end to allow for an eventual, smaller foot. He discussed the advantages of using a vacuum chuck to rechunk the bowl, showing the system he uses with a Vicmarc cup which accurately centres the bowl. Also demonstrated was a small amount of embellishment on the bowls outer surface.



The second session was the turning of a Cape Lilac platter, wood that he had not turned before. A neat way of securing the blank was using an aluminium disc with a dovetail spigot, fixed to the top surface of the blank. Also, to save wood he glued a small piece of plywood to the bottom surface. The outside of the blank was quickly turned using a pull cut. After reverse chucking the blank he discussed the options for the surface of platter's rim, suggesting that it should be slightly curved rather than flat. Embellishment options using various cutters were shown, using a compressed air type of "Dremel" tool.



Finally, he demonstrated turning a hollow form using a jarrah blank with random black spots. The blank was one of several that the late Jack de Vos had earmarked for Neil.

He stressed the importance of a good-sized spigot ~70 mm in diameter to avoid loss of centricity if a catch occurs. Getting the form right, again was stressed. Having bored a hole in the blank the deep hollowing tool options were discussed, using tools with an outrigger and a simple flexible projecting length of curtain wire to accurately assess wall thickness.



The meeting was a great success with ~80 attendees. A great lunch was served with thanks to Bonnie Rasmussen and her team. 23 competition entries were tabled – showing many variations on the theme of a "bowl in a bowl". As always, the members appreciated the trade displays – Alan Williams, Deb & Rod Cocks and Sam & Bruce Jackson.

Roving Reporter Ted Stewart-Wynne