

PROFILE OF A TURNER

Alan Roberts – member number 1798

I was born in Salford, England, in 1935.

At the beginning of World War II, we moved out of the city but, despite this move, we still spent most of 1942 (I think) sleeping in the shelter in the back garden. We knew about the war but, as children, we thought it was quite exciting – up in the morning and collecting shrapnel from exploded shells. The downside of course was losing friends. Dad was an engineer and as such was drafted back into the factories as a superintendent with the Ford Motor Company making Rolls-Royce Merlin engines for aircraft.

I grew up with three sisters, played a lot of sport – rugby league, cricket and athletics – made Queens Scout, the badge being presented by Prince Philip, and eventually got married in 1957.

My late wife and I, with our two children – a boy and a girl – landed in Australia in 1968. Upon arrival, I got a job as an apprentice training instructor with Australian Iron and Steel at Kwinana. I thought of this as a fill-in job until I could find something better as it was a time of great opportunity but, within two years, I was a master of apprentices and technical training officer for Kwinana and several of the company's mines. The axe fell in 1982 and the plant closed.

I took up teaching with TAFE and, when I retired from there in 1998, My wife and I took off around Australia for eight months.

Upon returning I decided to fulfil a long dormant ambition start wood turning. I was lucky that my next-door neighbour was a member of Wandi and took me to my first meeting. At that meeting I met three men I knew already, and they helped me during the early days. I started attending the hands-on session on Wednesdays and an old member John Punch took me under his wing and stuck with me until I learned skew work and beads and coves – the groundwork for all future turning.

I started like most members in the belief that I was going to make a fortune from my turning and did quite well for several years until in the shed one night, about 10 o'clock, when trying to fulfil an order, I reminded myself that I had retired to get away from the humdrum of work. I never canvassed work after that.

Since then, I have concentrated on one offs that require new skills, and which give me new challenges. I still continue to learn from other members of the Wednesday group and try to pass on what skills I have to newer members coming in. They are the future of our Association.

My wife died in 2004 and I threw myself in to the Wandi group's activities, taking on the positions of secretary and convener and general dogsbody. When I was convener, Wandi was short of both money and lathes, as were all groups at the time. This led to what I believe was my major achievement for Wandi. I cut a deal with the Committee of Management and, in return for my spending two years running one-day courses (initially twice a month and then once a month and using three of our finest professional turners) the Committee gave Wandi four new lathes and four older lathes complete with chucks, as well as a large bandsaw. Boy! Did Wandi make sawdust after that. The



courses led me to starting the ladies' group at Wandi. At this time, I also met and ultimately married my second wife, a very fine turner in her own right.

During this time, I also became a member of the Committee of Management, then registrar, vice president and, ultimately, president. I didn't finish my two years in that final position because I took time out due to accumulated stress. However, during that time I did achieve what I consider was a major change to group funding. I took great pride in writing up and presenting to the Association what is now the group member rebate scheme and then overseeing its implementation. It was designed jointly by Derek Martin, Jim Stiffal and me, with the support and approval of the Committee.

I continue to be grateful for the advice and support received from Derek and Jim in the formatting of the scheme and throughout my time on the committee. I now sit back, at the ripe old age of 87 years, with my wife, two children, five grandchildren, and three great grandchildren to reflect on my time at Wandi. Now, in my 23rd year, I still enjoy my turning and hopefully will be able to do so for a few more years yet.

Alan 2022