



Profile of a Turner – Malcolm Munro 1187

Malcolm was born in Rabaul, a township in the East New Britain province of Papua New Guinea in 1936. Malcolms father was in the Australian Police Force working in New Guinea. His had an older brother and later back in Australia two sisters were born.

On return to Australia Malcolm's father had a dairy farm in Northam. Malcolm attended school until Year Nine in Northam and when his father was injured Malcolm took over the reins (literally) of the milk delivery by horse and cart.



In 1959 Malcom came to Perth and got a job as Linesman Assistant, while training to become a Foreman Line Construction Worker for Western Power, which in those days was known as State Electricity Commission of Western Australia (SECWA). Later in his career with SECWA Malcolm worked transferring paper maps onto a computer. This involved measuring distances and marking where each power pole was located.

Vegetable gardening, with a specialty of rhubarb plants, has been an interest of Malcolm's. Making lead lighting panels for windows and doors (displayed in his home) has also been a great achievement.

A keen interest in woodworking making cupboards and furniture expanded into an interest in woodturning. Sometime in 1960-1961, while travelling in Balcatta, he saw a shop with an advertisement "Woodturning Lathes Cheap". Malcolm found they had purchased a shipping container of woodturning lathes - no lathe stand or motor however a three feet long cast iron lathe. He purchased a lathe, followed by a motor and stand. He also purchased unhandled tools. Wood was collected at the local rubbish dump or he used old SECWA crossarms.

Malcolm enrolled in night woodturning classes which did not prove very successful but with perseverance, self-education, learning from others class members as well as being befriended by an elderly man who gave him many tips as to what to do and what NOT TO DO, he became a woodturner.

Malcolm joined WAWA in September 1993. He and his wife Shirley attended many weekend workshops which they both enjoyed as there was a lady's program offered in conjunction with the woodturning program. Shirley's arm got twisted and she finally accepted the position of Secretary to the organisation. Shirley was The Western Australian Woodturners Secretary for 7 years during which time Malcolm was also on the committee of management - what a team.

Malcolm has held many positions within WAWA over a long time. Demonstrator, Competition Judge and demonstrator at weekend workshops.

Recorded in the Association's Newsletter, Malcolm entered the WAWA monthly competitions and got place settings. He also published drawings and methods on the Technical Desk including being how to make some of your own tools like faceplates and scrapers.

At Group level he was Convenor at the Stirling Group which later became North of the River Group where he then was Treasurer.

During these years and later at the Swan Group, many of Malcolm's demonstrations revolved around tools that he had made to support his keen interest in woodturning. He produced tools to help turn and complete his items of interest. A white board and coloured pens were often used to explain his ideas and the maths involved.

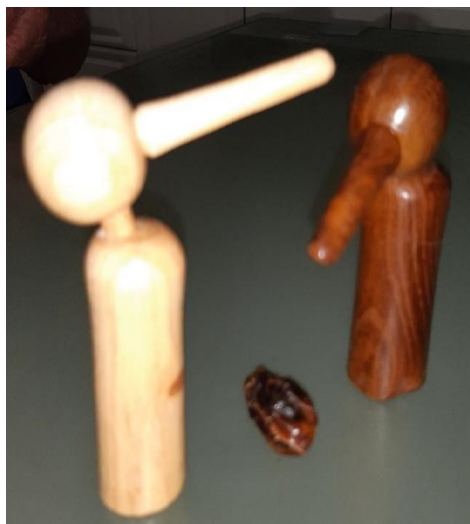
"A Top Turner" - Malcolm has made over 2000 spinning tops. Mostly for Christmas Church Appeals but also for children in fire evacuation centres and just to hand out to adults for their bored children.

"Moody Birds" have also been made by Malcolm and given to sick friends and family. There is a boxful made to be given out at Malcolm's funeral. Have you heard the story of the Moody Birds?

Once upon a time, long, long ago, a man had a very sick child in hospital. Every day after work he would visit his child. Sometimes the child was bright and active, bubbling over with excitement and sometimes the sick child only wanted to lie in bed knowing someone who loved them was nearby. The man did not know whether to expect a good day or a bad day.

One evening on his way home he saw a small, stylised bird almost hidden amongst the clutter in a shop window. Something about this bird attracted his attention. The next day he returned to buy the bird. The shop keeper said, "No. Of all the things in the shop I am unable to sell the bird to you at any price as I believe it would lose its power if sold". However he stated that as the man's circumstances in life were far more demanding than his own he would give it to him on condition that should the time come when he no longer needed the bird for his child he would not sell it but pass it on to someone who was in need and thus the mystery and magic of the bird could continue.

The next day the man took the bird to work so he could give it to his child so the child could turn the bird's head to show whether he was having a good day or a bad day. A fellow worker, a wise and wonderful woodworking wizard, wondered what wonders it held and so he carefully copied the creature's curves creating another bird but when he had finished it the bird held no magic – only small pieces of wood, not even a toy – so he gave it away. When he did, it released the little bird's spirit, and it was able to work its wonderful magic that only a little moody bird can do.



Malcolm has been a very passionate woodturner with a big heart and loves to impart his knowledge to others. Sometimes with great enthusiasm.

You can hear Malcolm say at weekend workshops "Hold it where you turn" so it can be seen on the TVs.

Written by Mary Byers 2025