



# Behind the scenes – North Devon Woodturners

Originally a small club, they are still going strong celebrating their 25th anniversary

North Devon Woodturners was formed in 1991, initially with around 12 enthusiastic members. The key instigators were Fred Ward and Jack Dean, who attended a demonstration at Parkins Steel, Barnstaple and decided to form a woodturners club, the other instigators being Jack Chapel, Roy Turner and Keith Mountcastle. The first meeting was held at Pilton School, Barnstaple, but following a few clean-up issues it soon moved to village halls nearby, first in Muddiford for a couple of years, then to Marwood for 20 years. From small beginnings, membership quickly rose to 30, peaked at 70, and is now between 50 and 60 members. For the past three years our meetings have been held in Fremington village hall, which is more central for the area, with easier access for the majority of our members and where we use our two Axminster lathes, grinder, tools

and our up-to-date audio-visual equipment. The club is an associate member of the Association of Woodturners of Great Britain (AWGB), and many of the more experienced members belong, as individuals, to AWGB.

## Meetings and members

The club's meetings are held on the third Friday of each month and are a mix of demonstrations by visiting expert turners, club members and occasional 'hands-on' nights. Two of our original members recall that the first professional demonstrator was Dave Register in 1991, who graphically illustrated the principles of 'keeping the bevel rubbing' with the benefit of a 120mm axe, a sharpened garden trowel and a 100mm masonry nail. Dave actually turned a complete goblet using the sharpened nail. He has since visited us, most recently at our June meeting this year, when he turned his famous Trunnion Box



Martin Coates demonstrating at a recent event

including rings inside and outside the box, all within an hour and a quarter – altogether different from producing a goblet using a nail!

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF NORTH DEVON WOODTURNERS

## Club nights

A typical club night starts at around 7pm with a brief address by the chairman with club notices, discussion on any issues, followed by the introduction of the evening's demonstrator. Their session lasts around two and a half hours with a break for refreshments, giving members an opportunity to network and chat with the demonstrator. Questions are always welcome during a demonstration, but as with many clubs, members aren't always as forthcoming in an open forum. So that as many members as possible can get a good view, we use an HD video camera which projects a full high-definition image of the demonstration, live, on a two metre screen. It means we can alter the viewing angle and get close-up to the action when appropriate. Furthermore, we have recently purchased a UHF wireless headset which improves the demonstrators' commentary for any members with hearing difficulties.

At every meeting, we have a project table for which members are encouraged to exhibit their work in line with the published theme for the month, or any other pieces they've produced. It's a great opportunity for makers and observers alike to benefit from helpful critique by the club's experienced turners as well as by our visiting experts, and also to help solve problems (the use of tools or finishing, for example). The more pieces a member exhibits throughout the year, the more chances they get to win one of several cash prizes presented at the annual Christmas lunch – it's been a good way to encourage participation by members of all skill levels. Our meetings end with the monthly raffle of useful bits and pieces of turning kit – providing a good source of income for the club to augment the annual subscription, which is currently £30 – that funds the cost of all meetings and demonstrators.

## Feedback

To help the committee discover and provide what our members want, each meeting is followed up with an email feedback questionnaire. Of course, it needs to be simple to complete, so it is limited to returning a score of 1–5 from 'had nothing to offer anyone' – please don't ask this person again' to 'excellent demonstration – hope to see them again very soon', with an opportunity for comment as well. We get a fairly good response rate, usually around two thirds of the members, producing an average score between 3.6 and 4.7. This allows us to create a 'popularity' database, which alongside details of demonstrators' fees and expenses is very useful to the committee in deciding on the future programmes.

## Club events

Occasional meetings include a 'bring and



Just a small number of projects created in the club

buy' sale where members are encouraged to bring any spare tools or wood for sale. In addition, we organise an annual trip to the Yandles Show, usually in April. The coach trip is well supported providing woodturners with a good day out, and about three hours of gossip, mostly about turning, and no doubt other less than mind-improving topics during the journey. The Christmas lunch provides another opportunity for networking and a turning display – a chance for members to show off their best work to their wives, husbands, partners and friends.

Our anniversary celebrations in August included a social evening for all members, present and past, invited to come and share their memories and revive old friendships. With an enthusiastic membership, North Devon Woodturners aims to build on its success over the next 25 years.

## Details and promotion

The club has a good mix of skills from its novices to some expert turners (also members of the Worshipful Company of Turners) who freely share their knowledge and experience. We have a website [www.northdevonwoodturners.org.uk](http://www.northdevonwoodturners.org.uk), we're on Facebook, and always keen to encourage new members, especially younger ones. To promote the club and attract new turners, for some years we have run a Craft Fair annually in Barnstaple with sales, demonstrations, a turning competition and other craftspeople selling their wares. This year, for our 25th anniversary, we held a special event featuring only woodturning, which was kindly sponsored by, and held at, St John's Garden Centre in Barnstaple on 6 August. There were three lathes running all day with nine club demonstrators, a members' sales display, a tombola with



A tombola sales display with over 50 prizes

over 50 prizes of members' turnings, and our annual competition with four well-represented classes – 'novice' to 'master' – which was judged by the St Johns managing director Nick Oliver and professional turner John Montgomery (AWGB). ●



25th anniversary competition table

## QUICK INFO

- Date formed: 1991
- Meetings held: monthly at Fremington village hall, EX31 3BG
- 50–60 members currently
- Chairman: Cyril Johns
- [www.northdevonwoodturners.org.uk](http://www.northdevonwoodturners.org.uk)
- Facebook: North Devon Woodturners