

Artisan Course at the Mill

By Robin Goodman

The **Apprenticeship** woodturning course at the Mill has been running for a long time and many beginners have benefited from this excellent grounding in basic woodturning skills. It was not until the beginning of 2010 that a follow-on **Journeyman** course was set up to develop turning skills further. Unlike the Apprenticeship course, where individuals work through at their own pace with tuition, it was run as a group with most people making the same items at the same time. This approach proved very successful and facilitated plenty of interaction and learning from each other.

Following completion of the first of the Journeyman course, I was asked to put together a more advanced course. This could have been approached in several ways, but it was decided to look first at the various skills and different types of materials which I thought should be included. The list included techniques such as hollowing through the base, thin wall turning, lattice work, involuted and multi-axis turning, spirals, thread chasing, segmental introduction, carving, wood bending, piercing, texturing, colouring and pyrography. Acrylic sheet and polyester resin were included as alternative materials to turn.

Following completion of the first Journeyman Course, it was agreed to call this new one '**Artisan**'.

As with the Journeyman course, instructions for making each item were to be provided. A search was therefore carried out for suitable items that would cover all the skills and materials planned. The 'Woodturning Magazine' was the best source of items with descriptions, but other publications checked out included the AAW 'American Woodturner' and the English 'Woodworker & Woodturner' magazines, together with plenty of books and a few DVD's, not to mention the internet.

Only one of the items was taken from a DVD: Mick Hanbury's 'Making and decorating Goblets', which combined both texturing with coloured filler and a spiral stem formed with a spiralling tool - *see photo*. Written instructions were therefore prepared from watching the DVD.



Decorated, spiral-stem goblet



Thin-walled pyrographed bowl

At the time, a good article on carving a spiral on the lathe was not located. Whilst Stuart Mortimer's book 'Techniques of Spiral Work' is an admirable comprehensive work on the subject, a more concise description of how to carve a spiral stem was required. I therefore wrote my own description and took photos while making the item. The stem was made relatively thick in order that the stronger larger microplane could be used; this tool makes removal of material from between the bines so much easier and quicker. The proportions of base and cup to the stem as first made were not the best - *see photo above* - so there was scope for participants to make improvements. A suitable article was not found to cover the last two remaining skills on my list - thin wall turning and pyrography - so I wrote a brief description of a thin-walled pyrographed bowl and made an example - *see photo above*.

Because we needed to reproduce the published articles describing the making of each item, permission was required from the authors and publishers. Editor Mark Baker was of great help in obtaining permission from authors of articles that had been picked from the Woodturner. I contacted the other authors directly. All the authors and publications kindly gave the appropriate permissions.

A summary spreadsheet was prepared listing all the skills and techniques in columns and the 24 items in rows. Adding a tick in the appropriate columns for each item, provided a clearer picture of the distribution and frequency of particular skills and materials.

Descriptions of all 24 items, including photos and how to make them, were copied onto CD's. The descriptions amounted to about 100 A4 pages that participants could print out as and when required. In future, all the information will be available on the web to those who join the course.

After some delays and with Stuart Bradfield's help, the first group of 9 commenced the course in November 2011. At the first meeting we decided which 16 from the possible 24 items would be included in the course. We tried to ensure that the chosen 16 would cover all the techniques and materials listed for the course.

I made all the relevant pieces in advance, in order to be able to give advice and pass on additional tips about making each item; it also made it easier to ensure the correct blanks and materials were obtained in advance.

Participants were encouraged not to copy the items exactly, but to make them individual by varying shapes or decoration, or perhaps amending the method whilst still using the techniques specified.

An example of varying the method is the pierced egg item – *see photo*. The AAW article written by Spero and Lacko had suggested gluing the very thin half joint for the hollowed out halves after painting inside and before piercing. Filing off all the whiskers from the inside edge of all the pierced holes is very difficult to achieve, it can also damage some of the internal colouring. It proved easier to complete all the piercing before gluing. All whiskers could easily be removed with good access to the inside faces, prior to internal colouring and gluing the two halves together. The egg halves could still be supported together without glue by the tailstock, while piercing.

Not everybody completed the course, but it is hoped they all gained some useful additional skills and experience at the same time as enjoying their woodturning in a group. Many of the items were coloured, textured or carved; a direction that has plenty of scope for innovation and individuality.

There may be a second course starting within the next few months. It is a natural follow-on from the Journeyman course, but if there is anybody else who has been turning for a while who feels they would like to try the course, then they should contact Stuart Bradfield at the Mill or via the Trust's website.

Photos of some Artisan items are shown alongside, others can be viewed on the Trust's website :

www.maxcareywoodturningtrust.org.uk/artisan.



Pierced egg



Above - a selection of the beautifully-crafted work produced by Robin for the Artisan course