

Stuart Mortimer Workshop - April 2013

by Robin Goodman

This AWGB sponsored 2 day workshop was titled ‘Artistic Turning’, so it very much appealed to me. Our joining instructions were to bring some ideas and some timber! On arrival at Stuart’s workshop in Hampshire, I was joined by 4 other turners I had never met before: Adrian Cobb, John Fell, John White and Brian Hollett. We were all asked what we wanted to do.

Stuart is the woodturning king of the spiral - he published a book in 1995 about spiral work and a large proportion of all his turned pieces over the last 30 years include spirals, particularly as hollow forms, for which he has his own special method for hollowing. In view of this, hollowing and spirals were agreed to be the order of the day, so Stuart proceeded to demonstrate his methods. An example of his spiral work is shown in **photo 1 (right)**.

After rough shaping, Stuart showed us how to mark out the spirals or ‘bines’, which are the solid spirals of wood left behind



Photo 2



Photo 1

after removal of most of the wood and can

vary in number from only 2 to 20 or more, depending partly on the final diameter of the piece. Stuart has an array of different small angle grinders and disc cutters that can be used to cut the spirals. He is so experienced that the cutting process is made to look easy: slowly rotating the lathe with one hand whilst manipulating the cutting disc in the other hand – see **photo 2 (left)** - but the process is not that easy to master without cutting away at least some wood in the wrong place! He usually cuts every 3rd or 4th slot deeper to act as a thickness guide for the subsequent hollowing.

Hollowing was then demonstrated using his special internal hollowing gouges, which have a very stiff shaft and short flute. They are made by Hamlet and are available to buy. Stuart normally works with lathe speeds as high as safely possible. His gouges can continue to be used to finish the internal shaping, even after breaking through the spiral cut slots – the use of most other types of hollowing tools, such as shielded cutters, at this stage would almost certainly break the bines.

If no spirals are to be formed on the hollow form, Stuart uses his special tools to hollow out using a sequence that is different from that recommended by most woodturners. A

light inserted into the form is his preferred method for helping to produce a thin but consistent wall thickness.

We then all tried our hand at the process with varying degrees of success. The rough cut spirals need a lot of work to finish off the bins to a reasonable consistent shape. Stuart had numerous different electric rotary tools and burrs to help us – see **photo 3** (right) with a flexible shaft and burr in use - before using hand tools such as palm plane, microplanes and files. The slow process of sanding then begins and is best carried out using long ribbons of cloth-backed abrasive threaded around each bine in turn to try to achieve the required circular section as well as producing a smooth finish. Most of us chose a 12 bine form and it is very difficult to get all the bines the same size and shape, not to mention the required circular section.

On the second day a week later, most of us tried our hand at finials and fishtails. Stuart normally does not even need to pencil in the design, before attacking the wood with a disc cutter, whilst rotating the lathe by hand. However he had worked out a marking out system for the fishtails that we mortals could use. A cut but not sanded fishtail is shown in photo 4.

I tried making a hollow finial with only 4 bines, as well as a tapered screw. The results of my three unfinished pieces are shown in photo 5.

Spirals still feature in most of Stuart's recent work, but he is now adding features such as gold and silver plating to some of his pieces, especially small, almost Faberge-like eggs.

It was wonderful to experience such an inspiring



Photo 3

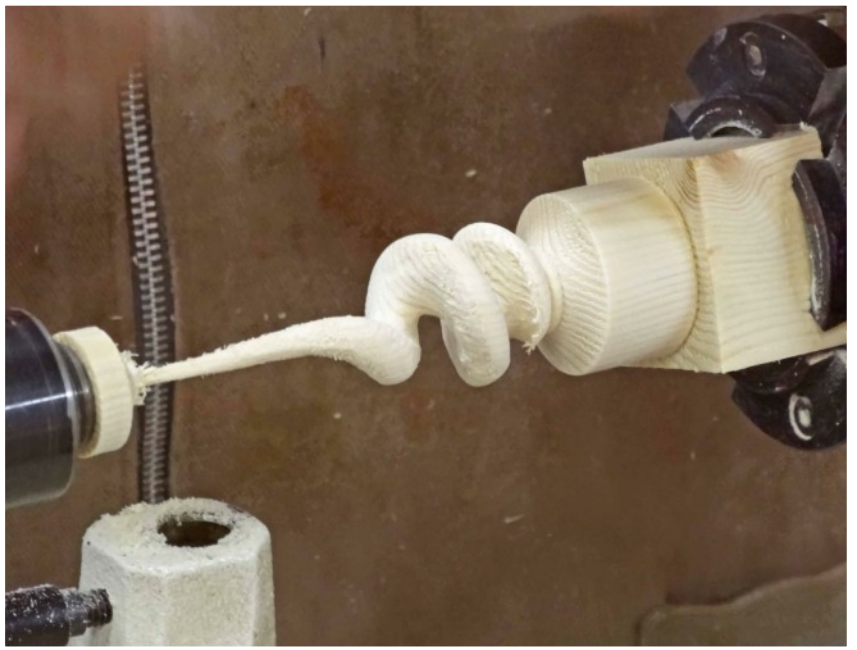


Photo 4



Photo 5

and enthusiastic turner, who has lost none of his enthusiasm even after several decades. He kindly agreed not to cancel the course, in spite of being in the middle of packing up everything up for an expected move. As well as thanking him for an excellent course, we also thanked Linda, his wife, for keeping us well topped up with large mugs of tea and coffee.