



**WOODBITS  
NEWSLETTER  
Issue 238  
March 2026**

## **Shavings from the Chairman**

Welcome to the March 2026 newsletter.

The year is off to a fantastic start. Our March meeting was a real highlight, with a record turnout of 78 members keen to see Stuart King's demonstration. It was wonderful to see so many friendly faces – thank you all for making it such a memorable event.

Looking ahead, our next get-together will be the annual AGM. We'll keep the business section brief, sharing last year's results and a sneak peek at our plans for 2026. Afterwards, several club members will treat us to short demonstrations and presentations, all centred around woodturning and its many skills. There's plenty to look forward to, and I'm sure you'll enjoy it!

On a practical note, there's been a little hiccup with the upgrade to our audiovisual equipment – it's running about a month behind schedule. Not to worry, though! I fully expect we'll be putting the new kit to good use from May onwards.

We've had some successes, too: in February and March, we refreshed the lending library, with a special focus on small lathes for new members to borrow. If you haven't yet explored what's available, do check our website for the lending library link – there might be something perfect for you!

Lastly, I'd like to shine a spotlight on the AWGB youth training initiative, which you'll find featured in this newsletter. Are we, as a club, doing all we can to encourage young people to take up woodturning? I believe this will become one of our main themes for 2026, and I look forward to hearing your thoughts.

I'm really looking forward to our next meeting and hope you are too. See you all on 14<sup>th</sup> April.

Adam Blackie  
Chairman

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# Club News

## February Competition

### BEGINNERS

Chairman's choice:



1<sup>st</sup> Gary Atkins

2<sup>nd</sup> Alison Bigsby



Only two beginner entries this month, hoping for more for the April meeting.

3<sup>rd</sup>

ADVANCED



1<sup>st</sup> Tony Taylor



2<sup>nd</sup> Phil Walters



3<sup>rd</sup> James Blackie

OPEN



1<sup>st</sup> Peter Kemp



2<sup>nd</sup> Tony Taylor

3<sup>rd</sup> Chris Bentley



## Meetings Calendar

2026		
April	14 <sup>th</sup>	AGM+
May	12 <sup>th</sup>	Nathaniel Griffiths
June	9 <sup>th</sup>	Club Night
July	14 <sup>th</sup>	Liz Pearson
August	11 <sup>th</sup>	Geoff Harris (Pole Lathe)
September	8 <sup>th</sup>	Club Night
October	13 <sup>th</sup>	Steven Kearvell
November	10 <sup>th</sup>	Richard Peers
December	14 <sup>th</sup>	Club Night

## Competition Subjects

2026		
	Beginners	Advanced
April	Pair of Napkin Rings	Two or More Woods
May	Needle Case	Pagoda Box
June	Hedgehog or other Creature	Bangle
July	Honey Drizzler	Natural Edged Bowl
August	Ball and Cup	Hollow Form
September	Apple and Pear	Something Decorated
October	Platter	Bowl on Feet
November	Xmas Decoration	Wall Plaque
December	20 to 30cm Long Spurtle	Textured Platter
January	Paper Weight	Offset Goblet
February	Ring Finger	Wool Bowl
March	12 to 15cm Dia. Bowl	Natural Edged Vase

## Training Update - Dave Washer

The Introduction to **Multi-Axis Turning** is now set for 16th May however the course is now fully subscribed. It may be the case this is something you would like to try, if so please give me a shout and with a few more interested members I'll be happy to set up another course.

I am still arranging dates for the **Bowl Hollowing/Hollow form course**, this is also to be held at Queens Park Centre, probably June/July 2026. Places are filling up for this course, and we have limited space at the training centre so if this is something you would like to try please do get in touch either by email [training@herts&bedswoodturners.co.uk](mailto:training@herts&bedswoodturners.co.uk) or my Mobile 07546 612450,

You may also be interested in the excellent training opportunity to the well-attended '**A day in my workshop**' where members can visit one of our members workshops and have a day of one-to-one training, honing your skills and techniques, a small fee is required for the day to cover club insurance and add to the club funds. It's a good way to get to know other club members too!

The club can also offer a **discount on all group training** delivered by a registered professional turner. This is limited to 50% of the total group cost or a maximum of £70 per person. I can provide further details if you are interested in this option.

Please do get in touch if you have any Training or Specialist Technique's you would like to try as I'm sure we can find a member willing to teach or support.

## AWGB Young Turners Scheme

At our March meeting, I shared some exciting news: the AWGB is using 2026 as the year to introduce the craft to as many youngsters as possible.

As caring parents and grandparents, I know you're probably doing your bit with your own children and grandchildren. If you are, we'd love to hear about it! Please do send us some photos of you passing on your skills—it's great to see woodturning being shared across the generations.

And we'd really enjoy seeing some younger faces at our Adeyfield meetings. Have you thought about inviting your teenagers along? If not, please do—everyone's welcome! We're more than happy to arrange an introductory session at Adeyfield or Aylesbury, thanks to our training manager, Dave Washer.

On a wider scale the AWGB is hosting several sessions throughout the year for those who want to make a start.

You can find more details about their Young Turner Training Days here:

<https://awgb.co.uk/training/youth-training/> Although there aren't any sessions nearby at the moment, both the AWGB and The Worshipful Company of Turners Livery are kindly offering to cover costs.

Date	Topic	Organiser	Venue
<b>2026</b>			
8 April 2026	Varied (6 places)	Peter Bradwick	Cwmbran, South Wales
10 April 2026	Varied (4 places)	Liz Pearson	west Berkshire
23 May 2026	Varied (6 places)	Les Thorne	Hampshire
30 May 2026	Varied (6 places)	Paul Hannaby	Gloucester
28 August 2026	Varied (4 places)	Liz Pearson	West Berkshire
24 October 2026	Varied (6 places)	Les Thorne	Hampshire

## Horatio's Garden - Update February 2026

Here's a little update about our session on 18<sup>th</sup> February at the Spinal Injuries Rehabilitation Unit at Stanmore Hospital, better known as Horatio's Garden. <https://www.horatiosgarden.org.uk/the-gardens/horatio-garden-london-south-east/>

Alongside Mark Aizikowitz and Peter Leach (from Middlesex Turners Association), I had the pleasure of hosting another session. This time we welcomed four brilliant participants—three women and one gentleman—each facing their own unique challenges.

Everyone managed to craft their very first turned object, picking up the technique remarkably quickly. We all left with huge smiles on our faces, having shared a rewarding and joyful experience together.

As they say, a picture paints a thousand words— here are a few to give you a flavour of the day.



We're delighted to say these sessions will now be held every month throughout 2026. If you'd like to get involved or simply find out more, please do drop me a line at

[chairman@hertsandbedswoodturners.co.uk](mailto:chairman@hertsandbedswoodturners.co.uk)

Adam Blackie

## March Demonstration - Stuart King

The club was privileged to host Stuart King as our demonstrator in March. Stuart is a legend in the woodturning world, and he delivered a wonderfully entertaining and inspiring evening. Stuart demonstrated how much fun woodturning can be, and over the course of the demonstration made as many as six different items. He began with a miniature goblet in boxwood, complete with an intricate captive ring, all made using a huge skew chisel that looked impossibly large for such delicate work.

Wooden goblet with captive ring, and the chisel used to make it



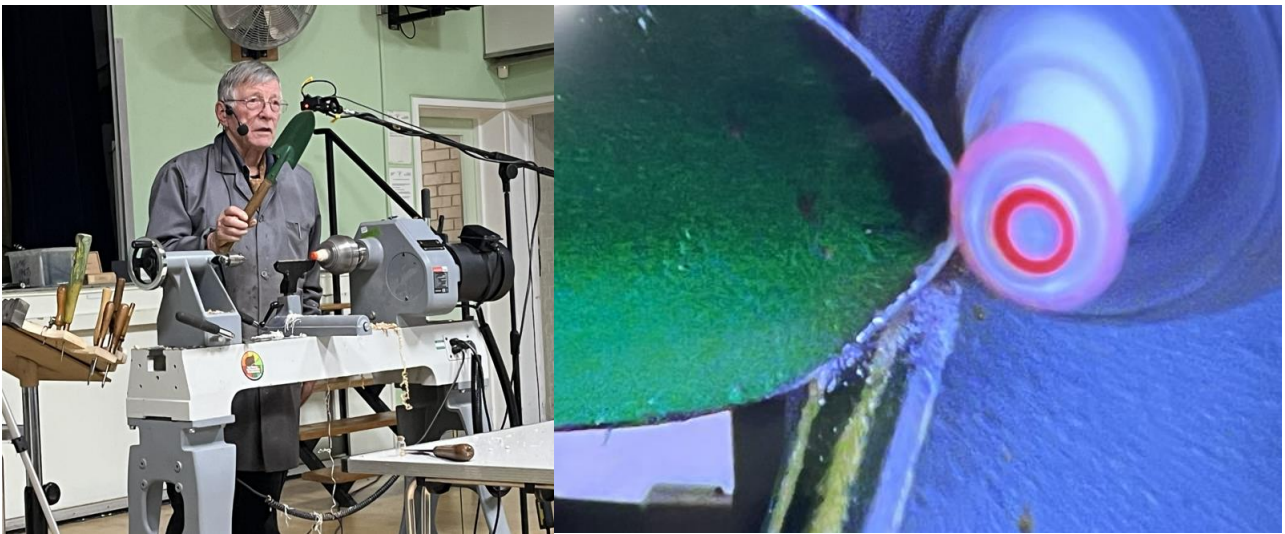
Next came a touch of theatre. Starting with what he called “a rough old piece of ash,” he turned a wand using a combination of skew chisel, roughing gouge and a spindle gouge. The real surprise followed: like a magician, he removed an end piece and invited volunteers to pull out a ribbon with a tiny goblet attached, to catch glitter that he poured out, and finally produced a message on a string from the cap.



Stuart then moved on to a piece of green holly which he told us is one of his favourite woods to turn because of the satisfying ribbons it produces. From this he created an incredibly thin-walled miniature cup. After hollowing it, the hall lights were switched off and he used an LED lamp shining inside the cup to reveal the translucence of the thin wall, allowing him to refine the outside until the thickness was perfectly even.



Still before the tea break, he turned to making flowers from more green holly, adding spirit stain for colour. After asking whether there were any gardeners in the room, he produced a sharpened trowel with a flourish and used it to complete turning the flowers!



After the break, Stuart made a satellite bowl from green sycamore, with a captive free-spinning disc around its centre. He rounded off the evening by turning a superb chess piece, complete with a captive ring, in impressively quick time using a skew chisel. The whole demonstration was a masterclass in skill and creativity. Stuart combined decades of experience with an easy style, showing what can be possible, at times using surprising tools. It was delivered with great fun and showman panache.

Patrick Stileman

## A Musical Collaboration with some Woodturning.

David Ireson and I have been close friends for many years. He often pops into my workshop, usually on a Friday afternoon, giving my work routine a welcome break with some enjoyable time spent using the tools together. Without his visits, I'm sure I'd be far too busy and things would get a bit lonely for my liking. Sharing half a day in the workshop with a good mate is always a brilliant way to round off the week.

Before he retired, David was a teacher at St Albans boys' school, and music was one of the many subjects he introduced to young minds. Over the years, he's led and organised several choirs and orchestras, and even now, in retirement, he occasionally conducts at musical events in Saint Albans. Around six months ago, David mentioned he'd be giving a talk in spring 2026 (which seemed ages away then), and he had an idea for making a musical instrument to show how the traditional western music scale is actually a mathematical sequence — all about the fractions of a string's length. He thought a traditional Japanese Ichigenkin would be just the ticket, and reckoned it would be fairly straightforward to make. Well, the idea came back at the start of February, with his lecture now only six weeks away, so we decided it was time to start!

At first glance, you might think there's not much woodturning involved, but there are three parts that need to be made with care on the lathe to fit perfectly into the board supporting the instrument's single string. Choosing the right wood is important, so we went with oak — it's tough and provides just the right amount of friction for the tuning peg, which has to be precisely shaped to fit into a tapered hole, much like a Morse taper, somewhere between MT1 and MT2 in size. At the other end, there's a peg acting like a bridge on a guitar or violin; it needs to be robust and fixed securely to avoid any unwanted vibrations. Lastly, the plectrum and slide must be comfortable for the player — not too tight, so as not to cut off circulation, and not too loose, so they don't slip off mid-performance. So, getting the turning just right is essential.

We decided to make the Ichigenkin from oak simply because I happened to have a piece that was just the right size.

Traditionally, these would be made from kiri (*Paulownia tomentosa*) wood, with the slide and plectrum crafted from ivory and the string woven from raw silk. Ours uses a cello string — possibly a G string, but I'll let David confirm that!

It's incredibly satisfying to play — it feels natural once the string is properly tightened and you get the hang of moving the slide with your fingers. I brought the prototype along to the February meeting, and it sparked lots of questions (not all of which I could answer!). Now that the instrument is complete, David has kindly agreed to join us for our April club night to give a short talk and a quick demonstration. Hopefully, it'll inspire some of you to try your hand at making musical instruments in your own workshops!

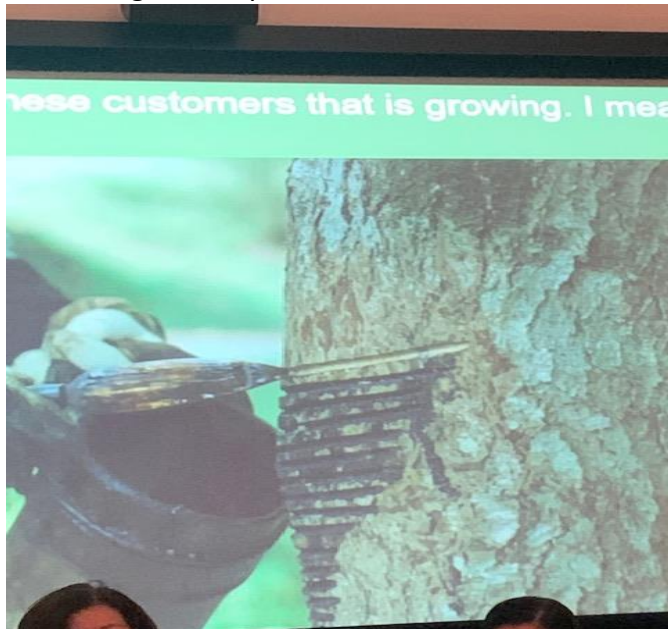
Adam Blackie



## 2026 at Somerset House

This is an Exhibition by Galleries from around the world. Deep pockets are needed to buy items but there were some wonderful pieces on show. I started by going to an interesting Talk about Contemporary Lacquer: Reinventing an Ancient Medium. This lacquer is gathered from trees in Japan but mainly now from China and therefore differing from Indian lacquer which comes from insects.

Harvesting the lacquer.



An example made of a linen base, thread decoration and layers of lacquer on wood.



Here are some of my favourites, which might inspire some of my future efforts. I hope they might inspire you or at least you will find them interesting.

Denim layers - I wonder if it might be possible using wet wood.



I think these are turned with wet wood and part of the rim folded over by Alan Meredith from Ireland  
Ceramic inner layers by Matthew Chambers from UK and silver bowls.



I yearned after the nearest pair of exquisite bowls!

### Lacewood Table for Goldsmith's Fair Exhibits



Two silversmiths weren't too sure whether it was Elm or London Plane as their ring boxes and the table are made by the same company. They have the contract for clearing all London Plane trees that have to come down in the London area. I explained how the wood had been quarter sawn to produce Lacewood!

### Carved Cherry bowls by Pontus Takashi from Sweden



The carving of green Cherry is initially done by using specialised axes and finished with rotary sanders. I thought they had been turned until I spoke to Pontus. He was interested in the various types of lathes without motors.

### Oval Mirrors by Anna Bera from Poland

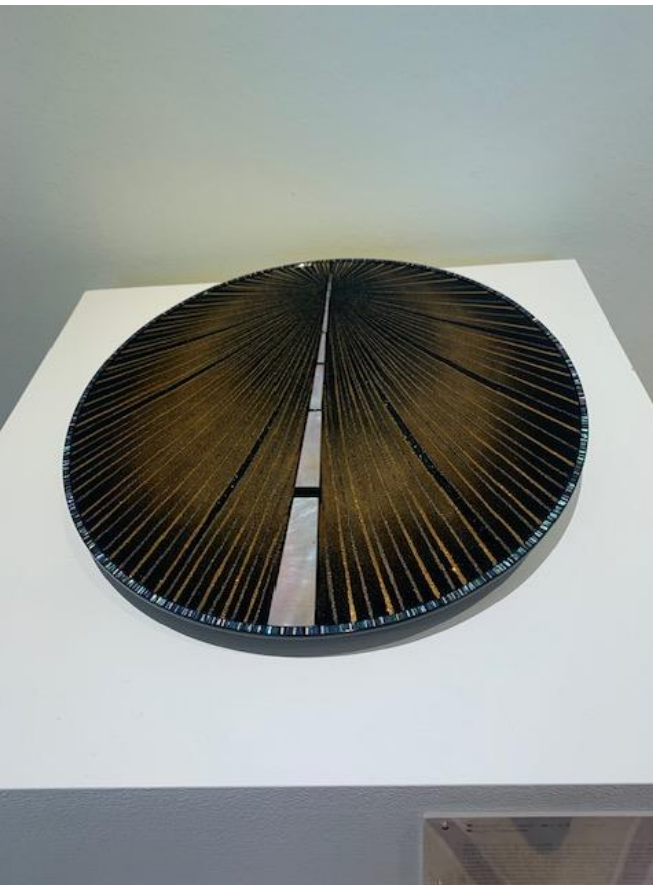


Made of various woods, with the oval shapes bought in and then carved. The mirrors are stainless steel. There is a 3D printed hexagonal fixing so that the pieces can be wall mounted in different positions.

Nest of glass bowls - London Glassblowing Studio



Lacquered Disc

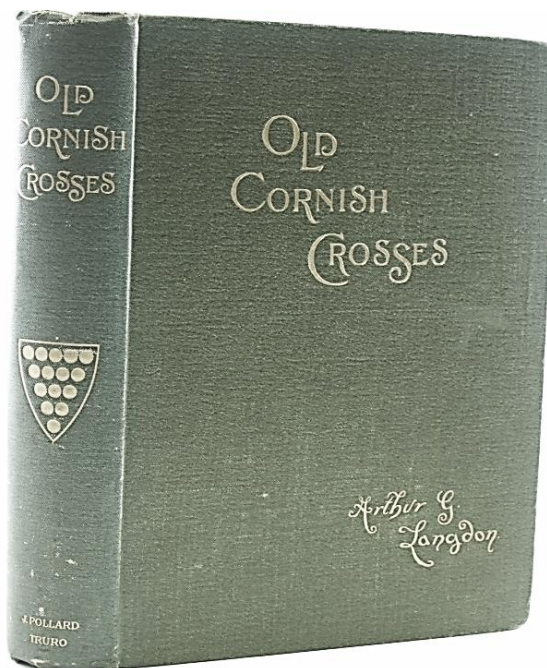


Calling it a disc is a great understatement!  
Sandblasted Oak by Darrell DesRoches from  
Canada

This reminded me that a kind member of the Herts  
& Beds Club offered me access to a sandblaster,  
but who was it! I hope that Darrell and I might  
exchange newsletters in future

Gordon Cookson

## Making a Celtic Cross



### Background

You might be wondering, why on earth would Adam decide to make a Celtic cross? Well, it all started during a trip to Cornwall—a place famous for its ancient standing stones and beautiful Celtic crosses. While I was there in late 2025, I stumbled across a charming old book in a second-hand shop. It was written way back in the 1860s by a Cornish vicar who, by the sounds of it, had plenty of spare time! He spent his days travelling around Cornwall, documenting and sketching more than 350 Celtic crosses. The book is a real treasure trove, packed with fascinating stories and quirky snippets about the farmers whose fields these crosses stand in, including tales of their neglect and the vicar's good-natured efforts to encourage them to take better care of these historic stones.

If you're interested, the book has been reprinted and is available—and here's a picture of it!

After dipping into that wonderful old book, I realised that quite a few of the Celtic crosses were only a short drive from where we were staying. So, off I went on a little adventure to see them for myself! There are three and a half crosses (one's been a bit mangled by the local farmers, bless them) in the churchyard at St Creden (Sancreed) church <https://maps.app.goo.gl/v34RTmSNF6VgutmF9>, and one of them even pops up on page 189. Seeing these historic stones gave me the perfect excuse to finally make use of a huge piece of Yew wood that had been gathering dust in my workshop for ages.

### Sourcing some wood

The wood itself has a bit of a story, too—it came from the Harrison Timber Company, tucked away near Luton airport and Someries Castle. The place is run by a resourceful chap who clears farmers' fields of fallen trees and turns them into slabs, perfect for making beautiful tables or, in my case, a Celtic cross. David Ireson and I paid him a visit back in 2024 and left with a car packed full of wood, all for the bargain price of £30. If you fancy a day out or need to stock up on English native timber, I'd highly recommend popping in. <https://maps.app.goo.gl/ZNyn6gaL8Ng6BSkL8>

So, where to begin? Luckily, Peter Hoare is a dab hand at wood carving and has brought some nice pieces to the club's display table over the years, so he was my first port of call. Once I'd roughed out my slab into a blank ready for carving, I needed a bit of guidance on using a Dremel—something I'd never tried before and part of the learning curve in making this cross. On my way home, I popped in to see Keith Goddard, who kindly lent me a box full of hand carving tools, as I didn't have any myself. That meant I had options: I could carve by hand or let a bit of electricity do the work. After a few experiments, I decided to go electric. Yew is a tough old wood, and the piece I picked had grain running in every direction, with some spots and even a few bark inclusions. It does make you wonder whether you might have been better off picking a different bit of timber—but where's the adventure in that?

## Design notes

The next bit is the fun part—sketching out some designs, inspired by the crosses I spotted around Cornwall. I lost count of how many times I tweaked and redrew them, but after a few iterations, I finally landed on a set of simple, effective designs that looked possible for this beginner. Here’s a photo showing my finished design. The cross at the top right was the first one I tackled, even before adding the other designs—but I already had those in mind as I worked.



I discovered that these crosses might have been placed between 500 and 1,000 years ago as handy markers to show people the way to the various “ChurchTowns”.


Back then, there were no towns, villages or roads like we have today, and no maps. (Speaking of which, when did maps come along?) In Cornwall,

parishes often had their church sitting in a church town—a little cluster of buildings from which the parish itself took its name, and which could stretch over thousands of acres, covering other scattered villages and hamlets. Some church towns eventually turned into the modern villages or market towns we can see now, but sometimes the main settlement popped up a fair distance away, leaving the church in its own quiet little corner.

These crosses aren’t just old stones—they’re full of meaning. They mark the shift from old pagan beliefs to Christianity in Cornwall. Many mix familiar traditional designs with Christian symbols, almost as if they were gently nudging people to change their ways. In my own designs, I tried to capture that message. The three knots leading up to the figure of Christ, with three symbols above his head, are meant to represent the Holy Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. On the back, the more detailed pattern leading to the cross shows the soul’s journey through purgatory to heaven—a tricky path with twists and turns, but, in the end, there’s the hope of reaching the heavenly realm.

## New kit

With all that in mind, it was finally time to get stuck into the carving! I must admit, I saw this as the perfect excuse to treat myself to a brand-new Dremel—couldn't resist. There are plenty of other options out there, but this one did the job brilliantly for what I needed. To make sure I was well equipped, I picked up four different shapes of Carbide Die Grinder Bits (£20) and a pack of forty 25mm Abrasive Buffing Wheels (£10). I was now ready to roll up my sleeves and dive into the work.



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## Transferring the designs


I spent some time trying out different ways to get my designs onto the wood and found that the simplest trick was to just cut out the shapes and trace around them with a pencil. There's no need to be too precise with this kind of carving, as the wood itself has a mind of its own and will guide your lines in its own way. And I wasn't working with an easy-going piece of lime wood or anything especially forgiving—this timber was determined to put up a bit of a fight and keep me on my toes!

## Starting to Carve

A couple of the die grinder bits had tapered points on the end, perfect for marking out my pencil lines. These made things easier, as the chunkier bits could then follow the path I'd already laid out. One thing I quickly learnt: the Dremel spins in just one direction—and it's speedy! Establish a good grip on the tool before you touch the wood, or else it'll skip across the surface and leave a trail you'll have to fix later. I also made a little mistake with the complex knot on the back of the cross. I wanted it to look like a rope, weaving in and out, with each part going under and over in turn. But when I took a step back, I realised one section was going over twice before going under. Thankfully, I'd only made light cuts to outline the shape, so it was easy enough to correct. If you look closely, you might spot that one of the ropes is slightly thinner than the others—but so far, nobody's noticed, so I reckon I got away with it!

## Dust, dust, dust


Naturally, I kicked things off with a dust mask. I'm quite fond of this one—it fits snugly over my sizeable nose, the generous filters let me breathe easily, and the rubber mask sits comfortably without any fuss. It's a breeze to clean, built to last, and at this price, I don't feel too precious about it if it ever needs replacing. All in all, it's a cracking bit of kit that makes the whole process much more pleasant!



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Peering around my workshop at the end of the very first day, you'd have thought a sawdust bomb had gone off—there was dust everywhere! While I was safely tucked behind my mask, the rest of my equipment was having none of it. So, I spent a good hour tinkering with the flexible pipes of my dust extractor, fashioning a homemade clamp and fixing the hose right to the workbench, just behind where I was wielding the Dremel. The difference was instant—suddenly, the dust disappeared and the whole place felt much less like a snowstorm in a timber yard.

## Going in deep.

The Dremel's brilliant for gently whittling away at the wood and giving your carving those finishing touches. If you're hoping to clear out bigger chunks, though, it's best to call in reinforcements! That's where a handheld router comes in. Normally, I use it to give tables or shelves a rounded edge, but armed with an 8-millimetre plunge bit, it made light work of scooping out most of the bulk, leaving crisp square edges all-round the designs. Once this was done, I switched back to the Dremel to soften the corners and finesse the shapes.

## Finishing touches.

It was finally time to whip out those abrasive buffing wheels I picked up with the Dremel. There are four grits to choose from—ranging from 80 right up to 240—and they're brilliant at smoothing away tool marks and covering up those moments where the Dremel took an unplanned dive into the wrong spot. I'll be honest, this bit's not exactly my favourite (it's a bit of a slog, if you ask me), mostly because by now you're itching to see the finished piece and just want to get it done. However, the more you look, the more you spot little things to tweak—and you must make your mind up when enough is enough. I recall David Ireson dropping by the workshop as I was nearing the end; his reaction convinced me it was time to finish up the carving and sanding and start thinking about a protective coat and what sort of base would do it justice. In the end, I kept things simple—not just out of laziness, but because a traditional finish felt right for this project. So, I grabbed a tin of Danish oil and brushed

on three coats. Between each coat, I popped the piece inside, to our kitchen where the AGA works its magic. Now, an AGA can do all sorts—revive newborn lambs in the warming oven, dry out soggy jumpers after a wash, and, as it turns out, it's brilliant for overnight curing of Danish oil. It's lucky my wife's so understanding about these odd jobs in our kitchen!

For the base, I settled on a simple round pedestal made from Yew—though not from the same batch as the main piece. It felt like a good fit, but truth be told, I still feel it deserves something a bit more substantial. Maybe one day I'll swap it for a sturdier platform. For now, it's held firmly in place with a single long coach screw, so it'll be an easy fix if inspiration strikes later.

### What next?

When I brought the finished Cross along to the club at the end of 2025, a few of the members were keen to know all about it—why I made it, how long it took, how I went about it—so that's really where this article comes from. I hope you've enjoyed reading it as much as I enjoyed making it.



Would I tackle another one? Perhaps, but I don't think I'll be rushing into it. It took roughly ten afternoons from start to finish—a lovely way to while away those early winter evenings and weekends, but I can't see this becoming my go-to project. I tend to prefer jobs that offer a bit more instant gratification, which is probably why most of what I make ends up being round and brown!

Where will it find its home? I haven't quite decided. But I

might just leave it in a Cornish church next time I head down to West Penwith—it feels like the perfect spot.

Adam Blackie

# Poetry Corner

## The Hen Pheasant Muster Cluster

ESPECIALLY WHEN IT'S 5 degrees UNDER  
sooo cold

BRETHEREN, and ladies, we are gathered here  
Next the dung heap warmth to bring us good cheer  
Its internal combustion is just the thing  
To protect in the cold and get us back on the wing  
Plumped up feathers are the way ahead  
Thus saving us 'til this frost has fled  
Surely this icy blast should not last  
Making food finding fickle, enforcing our fast  
The risk of being Christmas and New Year's soup is now past  
But there is still the swish of lead and the bang  
Ever present from the huntsman's gang

In the air or on the ground, danger persists  
In these January cold and freezing mists  
Pray keep us til February, end of season  
When we can fly about with very good reason  
Then grain feed will appear like magic from the keeper's hand  
As we strive for existence in this green pleasant land  
All we ask is the pleasure of peace, at least  
Humans could do without their game tasting feast

Martin Sexton Jan 2026

