



WOODBITS NEWSLETTER

Issue 244
September 2026

Shavings from the Chairman

Welcome to another excellent newsletter, featuring plenty of contributions from members.

Last month's lively club night featured plenty of activity and three demonstrations by club members, for which we are very grateful.

Our next meeting, on 13 October, will feature a demonstration by Steven Kearvell. As one of the UK's leading demonstrators, Steven promises an excellent evening not to be missed, so please arrive early.

Elsewhere, the club remains active at Letchworth Men's Shed, where weekly woodturning sessions are now well established every Thursday. Members are welcome to visit or take part. No booking is required—simply come along to see what we do. The success and growing profile of these sessions have led to both organisations being jointly nominated for an award recognising their collaboration and its positive impact.

We continue to visit Horatio's Garden monthly, with an update included in this newsletter. We are also exploring a second monthly session at the weekend, following requests from several members.

The AWGB Collaborative Competition takes place on 10 and 11 October. This newsletter presents our splendid final piece, which I am confident will fare well in what the organisers expect to be a highly competitive event. As this project concludes, we are preparing to launch the Houses of Parliament Mulberry Pen Project. Many of you have already volunteered, and the project will run for approximately six months. More details about this exciting opportunity are included in the newsletter.

That's all for now. I look forward to seeing you in October. Please bring along entries for our competitions; contributions are always welcome from turners of every level, from beginners to advanced.

Happy Turning

Adam Blackie

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A note from the (not so new) Editor

At breakfast whilst visiting the Chestnut Products Woodturning Weekender my wife asked me if there was a collective noun for woodturners. I am not aware of one, so I told her I would canvass opinions from a few people over the course of the weekend.

Favourite suggestions were:

- a curl of woodturners

- a gouge of woodturners

- a bevel of woodturners

and my personal favourite, a catch of woodturners

Please feel free to write in to hertsandbedsnews@gmail.com If you think of a better one!

Peter Clark

Club News

Meetings Calendar

2026		
October	13	Steven Kearvell
November	10	Richard Peers
December	14	Club Night
2027		
January '27	11	Gary Rance
February	9	Andy James
March	9	Steven Gordon
April	12	AGM+
May	11	Ian Ethel
June	8	Club Night
July	13	Frans Brown

Competition Subjects

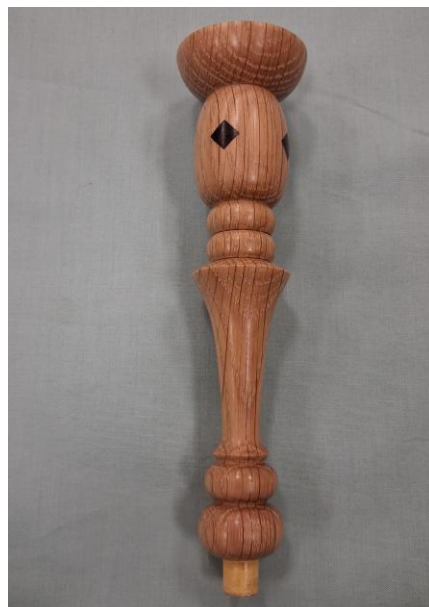
2026		
	Beginners	Advanced
October	Platter	Bowl on Feet
November	Xmas Decoration	Wall Plaque
December	20 to 30cm Long Spurtle	Textured Platter
2027		
January	Paper Weight	Offset Goblet
February	Ring Finger	Wool Bowl
March	12 to 15cm Dia. Bowl	Natural Edged Vase

September Competition

Beginners



1st Derek Stevens



2nd Gary Atkins



3rd Alison Bigsby

N.B Derek Stevens also received the accolade of Chairman's Choice

Advanced



1st Tony Taylor



2nd Pete Pocock



3rd Keith Austin

Open



1st Grahame Tomkins



2nd Stuart King



3rd Harvey Alison

**Professionals Choice
Mike Fitz**



Logo, leaflets, and business cards



Since the start of this year, we've been using our new logo and we also have leaflets and business cards designed by Graham Lester and Bob Marshall respectively.

The leaflets and business cards are available at Adeyfield for everyone to take and to distribute at craft fairs and other suitable events. If you are involved with any events, we encourage you to take some leaflets and cards with you to distribute liberally.

Patrick Stileman

Houses of Parliament mulberry pen project

As previously reported, we have been given the green light by the Parliamentary Estate to make 150 pens for the Speaker of the House (Sir Lindsay Hoyle). The wood comes from a mulberry tree in a highly prominent location on Speaker's Green, between the River Thames and the Elizabeth Tower (Big Ben), next to Westminster Bridge.

This is a fantastic project for the club to be involved with, and it is open to anyone in the club who would like to take part. To date, we have 29 members who have volunteered, and more people are very welcome to join in. The club will provide the wood, pen kits, and all the materials needed. We are planning a small information sheet with each pen to include the name of the pen-maker.

In excess of 200 pen blanks have been cut so far, and we would like to give these a few more weeks of drying time.

We shall provide more information about this at the October club night, and hope that by the November club night we will be able to distribute the blanks and materials to members who have signed up.

The names of volunteer pen makers to date are as follows:

Patrick Stileman, Adam Blackie, James Blackie, Peter Hoare, Dave Washer, Paul Ruck, Richard Burton, Mike Pearson, Jamie Cheung, Geoff Ashfield, Steve Hart, Phil Walters, Graham Bridge, Bob Marshall, Chris Squires, Keith Lucas, Philip Bright, Graham Hill, Colin Newman, Pete Pocock, Brian Stanton, Peter Clark, Steve Hall, Mark Aizicowitz, Graham Lester, Colin Gibson, Andy Mason, Keith Goddard, Matthew Cawthorne

If you think you have signed up but your name isn't on the list, or you would like to take part, please send me an email and let me know.

Patrick Stileman. secretary@hertsandbedswoodturners.co.uk

Turning Pens – By Allen Kaye

1. Materials needed

1. Lathe – can be tiny
2. Pen Kit and blank
3. Also bushings appropriate to the pen kit and tube size required
4. Sharp drill – default is a 7mm wood drill with spur
5. Pen Mandrel. The normal mandrel is designed for 7mm pens however you can buy additional bushings to accommodate different diameter tubes.
6. Barrel Trimmer or bench sander
7. Finishing materials

2. Overview of whole process

- Choose pen kit. There is a whole industry producing pen kits and similar. Most people use 7mm pen kits such as the Streamline or Slimline which can cost up to £3.00. You can buy pen kits in bulk from China which are a lot cheaper but take time to deliver and occasionally have quality issues. Other pen kits are available but you may need to also buy extra bushings to suit the diameter of brass tube and also a different wood drill.
- Choose material for blank and consider design.
- Drill pen blank(s)
- Insert and glue brass tubes
- Trim ends. Typically the blanks are cut slightly longer than the tubes to avoid breakout at the end. Once glued, the excess material is then trimmed back to the ends of the brass tube. It is important to trim the blank perpendicular to the tube to ensure correct final assembly of the pen.
- Turn to shape – to your design but the ends must match the diameters of the bushings.
- Apply finish
- Construct finished pen

3. Materials for blanks

Most pens are turned with wood however you can also use a range of other materials such as Corian, acrylic or resin. If wood is chosen typically people will choose a piece that has an interesting colour or grain pattern.

4. Preparation and turning the pen

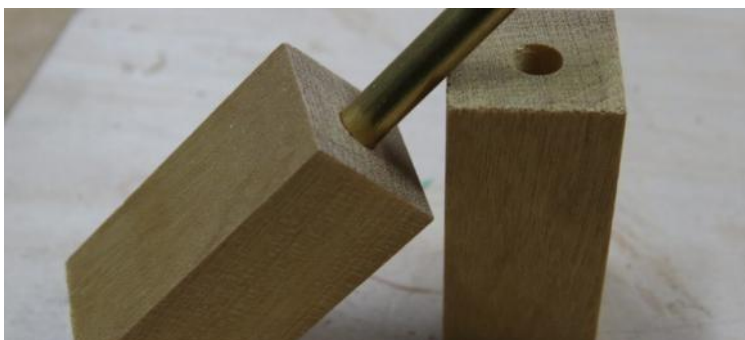
Blanks – cut slightly longer than the brass tube



Drilling blank on lathe



Alternative way to drill holes



Inserting brass tube

Roughen surface of tube to ensure good adhesion. Blank normally a little longer than tube and will need later trimming. Superglue or epoxy.

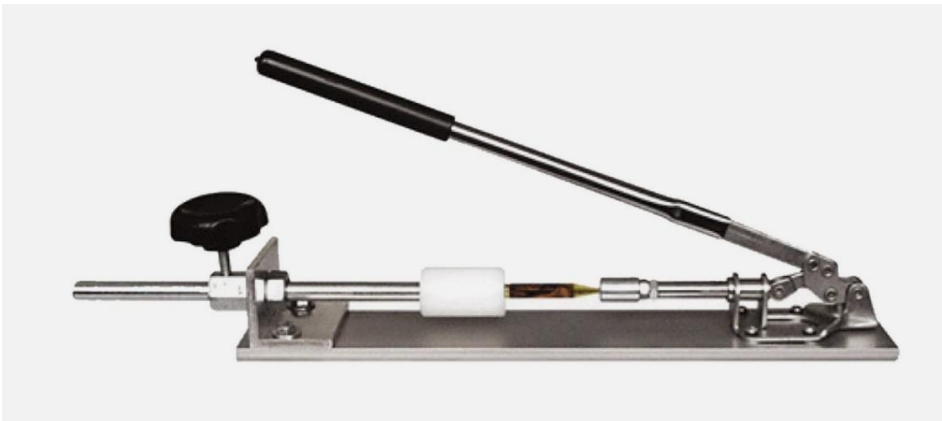


Mount

on mandrel and turn down ends to diameter of spacers

5. Finish

- Sand – through the grits – if wood then 180 to 400 at least
- Lots of choices – most people find their own technique and stick with it. Sanding sealer often a good base for further finishes
- My preferred finish is CA glue. Medium viscosity multiple coats sanding up to 1200 grit and maybe 12,000 grit with micromesh. Finally T-cut or similar. A slow process but will never dull. Some people don't like this finish as you lose the nature of the wood.



6. Assembling pen

Special pen assembly mechanisms are available - all components push fit. Lots of models available. I use a bench vice with softwood jaws.



7. Adding more value

- Engrave
- Use presentation boxes or pouches

Allen Kaye

Editors note:

<https://penkitsmall.com/> and <https://www.strongink.cn/> are a couple of Chinese based manufacturers of pen kits and related tools and accessories. Both of them have websites in English and quote prices in US Dollars, though StrongInk can display in British Pounds. I have used both sites successfully.

Report from the Arlesey Summer Fête

(including a field test of the “Craft Fair Kit” available from the Club Tool Library)

One of my interests outside of woodturning, is assisting at the Arlesey village Repair Café, which is run by the Town Council. A short while ago I noticed that the Arlesey Summer Fête had been scheduled for the same day as the next proposed Repair Café. So I popped into the Council office to see whether they were aware of the clash of dates. Apparently, they had a vague idea that we could run a Repair Café session during the Fête. I pointed out that I found a conflict of interests here because I would have wanted a Craft Fair table at the Fête, which would be impossible if I were also expected for the Repair Café. I then showed the Local Engagement Officer, Lucy, to whom I was speaking, one of the pens I had made. Lucy then had a chat with the Town Clerk, Janet, which resulted in fixing the Fête for Saturday, 5th September, and setting an October date for the Café. Somehow they then asked if I could bring my lathe and demonstrate some turning.

I therefore arranged to borrow one of the Clubs small lathes for the demonstrations, mine being too big and heavy to move, and headed for the workshop to start producing some more stock to sell. Christmas is coming, I thought. Lets do some snowmen (and a few more pens). I prepared some pen blanks ready for the day, and some suitable bits of tree branch (with the bark still on) for turning into snowmen. Chairman Adam suggested I could borrow the clubs Craft Fair Kit (detailed in the Tool Library addendum to last months newsletter). So, after the August Club meeting I was able to collect the small Axminster lathe, (still best part of 30kg), a box of tools, drives, centres and a chuck, along with a folding gazebo and two of the folding tables, and a bag of club banners, table cloths, pegs, leg weights for the gazebo etc.

This immediately began to cause me some alarm. The gazebo is pretty big and although the frame is collapsible, would only fit on my car diagonally with the rear seats folded flat. The tables aren't



small either, and the canvas bag is also pretty capacious! I began to wonder how I would have any room to take any of my usual craft fair boxes of wooden stuff to sell! I know that Honda are proud of their “magic seats” in a Honda Jazz, but it doesn’t have expanding rubber walls! Fortunately, Adam offered to help with transport on the day.

The morning of the 5th arrived with some lovely sunshine. This always helps for a successful day and Adam arrived at my home for a quick breakfast of cereal, bacon sarnies and coffee before loading his car with most of the big and heavy stuff, and I had packed the Jazz with a lot of other stuff.

Setup of the gazebo on site was pretty straightforward, though it isn’t a job for one person. Adam, myself and my wonderful wife, Susan, worked well as a team to get it erected and secured to the ground. It probably took us at least 45 minutes. Steve Hart had also arrived to help with setup. Then we were able to start setting out the stock on the two tables. The kit does have three tables, and the gazebo at three metres square, is perfectly capable of the space. My car was the limiting factor. Once we were ready, about the opening time of 11.00am, Adam started turning a dibber. A couple with their young daughter stood and watched, and it was great to see Adam engaging with the girl in conversation about what he was making and explaining what it was used for. He carefully made the handle so it would fit her hand, asking her to help him by telling him when she thought it looked finished, before removing it from the lathe, tidying up the point with a knife and then presenting it to her. Her dad then had a brief turning lesson from Adam.

A couple of my friends arrived. Nick, John and I often meet with a few other guys for breakfast on the first Saturday of each month at the local Weatherspoons, and I had messaged the group to apologise for not being there that day and inviting any of them that were free to come along to support me.

It wasn’t long before Nick said that he’d like to see me make a pen, so after selecting one of my prepared blanks, I took over the lathe. I had brought my own pen mandrel and mandrel saver to use. Turning the blank just using a roughing gouge is my usual practise, then sanding to 600 grit, applying some sanding sealer, an acrylic lacquer and finally a bit of Carnauba wax, buffed with a bit of kitchen roll, and the pen barrel was quickly finished. I then demonstrated assembling the pen using my pen press, whilst explaining that this task could also be achieved using an ordinary bench vice. Nick was very pleased with his custom made pen, which he plans to use to show the school students he teaches.

Many positive conversations took place during the day, including one with a lady who works with Central Bedfordshire Youth Support services. She is interested in whether we could demonstrate to and give the young people she works with the opportunity to learn to turn for themselves. Watch this space!

Lessons learnt from the day.

The Craft Fair kit is a useful asset to be able to borrow from the Tool Library, but only if you have a large car, preferably an estate model, or a suitable van.

A demonstration of live turning needs to be carefully planned. At a public site, have the organisers agreed that a power supply can be made available? If not, are they happy for you to use a generator? Perhaps one of the new PowerBank batteries supplying mains voltage would work, but again, would take up valuable space in the car. This is something to consider adding to the Tool Library. Have you a risk assessment for your demonstration? This may be requested by the organisers.

Also, have you got Public Liability Insurance, which is frequently required? Some venues are happy that they already have suitable cover, but most would rather move the liability to the individual stall holder in the event of a claim.

Plan, as far as possible, everything you need for the day. Prepare for wind and rain – the absence of both is a bonus! Try to keep the turning to simple items. Whilst a nice bowl with textured decoration or pierced features may look wonderful on the sales table it really doesn't have a place on your demonstration lathe because of the time it requires to make.

Make sure that blanks you take are suitable, you don't have ready access to your band saw or other equipment you have at home in your workshop. I had prepared nine pairs of blanks for pens in different timbers, but had only barrel trimmed one of them. Though I had brought my barrel trimmer, I forgot my pen blank jaws, which in any case, might not have fitted the chuck in the tool kit that came with the lathe. So I should have brought my own chuck, but that wouldn't fit the lathe without an adapter I don't have. Fortunately, I had trimmed one pair so I was able to make a pen for Nick. Be prepared for a tiring day! At closing time you still have to dismantle and re pack everything. It never ceases to amaze me how a box that arrived on site well organised and packed, but the contents almost never go back in the same way afterwards! Susan and I got home, unloaded the car, sat down with a cold beer and dozed for quite a while. My feet were very tired! We finally settled on a curry for supper and ordered a takeaway from Arlesey's excellent Raj Villa curry house. It was delivered by the owner, who knows us well as customers and expressed surprise that we had chosen to eat at home rather than in his restaurant as we normally do, but I explained that we simply didn't have the energy to walk the six minutes from our door to his!

Finally, huge thanks to Adam, Steve and Susan for all their help on the day, chatting with visitors and trying to turn them into potential club members, or at least customers, and Adam and Steve taking turns on the lathe with me.

Peter Clark

Report from Woodturning Weekender

On the last Friday of August my wife and I set off to Doncaster in South Yorkshire for the 7th iteration of the Woodturning Weekender. For anyone that is unfamiliar with this annual event it is sponsored by Chestnut Products. It doesn't have a fixed venue, but moves around the country from one year to the next. Next year it will be in Bedford, so much more local to us as a club.

The weekend starts informally on the Friday evening around 6.00pm in a pub (in this weekend, it was within the Dome at Doncaster, which was the venue for the entire weekend. A good opportunity to meet up with other turners for a drink and a chat. The Weekender itself consists of four main hall headline demonstrators, and about a dozen other, mostly local, club demonstrators in another hall adjacent to the main hall. There is also a Trade hall where one can buy woodturning supplies.

On the Saturday morning the event starts at 9.00am with an introduction by Terry Smart (CEO of Chestnut Products) introducing the first turning session. This was presented by Nathanael Griffiths, former winner of Channel 4 Woodworker of the Year. Nathanael demonstrated a very unusual box. After about 90 minutes we had a half hour break to visit the other demonstrations and to check out the Trade hall and decide what to buy. Nathanael then resumed until the lunch interval.



For the Saturday afternoon session we had a demonstration by Les Thorne, making what he had now renamed as the "The Second Most Over Complicated Box" which is made from six separate pieces and employed several jam chucks to create.

At 3.30pm there was a further interval before Les finished for the day at 5.00pm. Les was a very amusing demonstrator, with an endless stream of banter as he worked, sometimes making useful comments on what he was doing, and also a lot of off the cuff humour, some of which was directed at our very own Gary Rance, who apparently, mentored him for some years. (If you have seen Gary demonstrating you will know that he gives back as good as he gets!)

When deciding to attend the Weekender there is one important decision to make. Are you attending for just one of the two days, or are you doing both? If the latter, there is a further decision to make. Do you want to book in for the evening meal and the entertainment that follows? You will remember that the start of this article mentioned my wife. She is not a woodturner (yet), but accompanied me to Doncaster for the opportunity to visit an aunt near Leeds on the Saturday, but I

was able to buy her a ticket just for Saturday evening. So, at 6.00pm we made our way to the on site restaurant for a meal. This was accompanied by a magician, who wandered around the hall presenting various magic tricks to the diners at each table. When we had finished our meal we all returned to the main hall for a concert by a band named The Bohemians. (You can guess what they played – the Weekender title was “It’s A Kind of Magic”). An hour and a half of so many hits by Queen, and the lead vocalist, Rob Comber, playing Freddie Mercury seemed to not even break a sweat, despite the colossal energy of his performance.

On the Sunday morning we had a demonstration from Mario Nagel. I was unfamiliar with this name, but Mario is employed as production manager for Neureiter, the German company that build the Stratos lathes, marketed in the UK by Simon Hope Woodturning. Mario commented that he makes his money from woodturning, but not at the lathe. He is, however, a holder of the German Master Woodturner title, for which he was paid to study by his employer. The training takes three days, with a practical examination at the end. Mario passed the examination at the end of day one!



He also mentioned that, as the only member of staff who actually uses a lathe, he has been able to have some influence on the design of the current range. Actually, the lathe on the stage for the Weekender was a £4600 Stratos XL on loan from Simon Hope.

Mario demonstrated making an undercut bowl for his first session at the lathe.



For his second demonstration he chose to make another bowl, but this time the rim was blowtorched and brushed. The surface then was coloured, using spirit stain applied in random patches using



some cotton cloth. Referencing the Weekender title, “A Kind of Magic, nothing could be seen of the colour on the surface until he applied some dabbed patches of white stain onto the still wet green and yellow he had applied. This caused to hitherto invisible colours to be revealed, hence the magic! Finally, he added a coat of melamine lacquer, sprayed, not brushed to finish. Following this, a quick remount on the lathe to tidy up the inside, removing the charring from the blowtorch from inside the bowl, along with any stray stain that might have found its way in.

The finished bowl

The Sunday afternoon slot was taken by Margaret Garrard.

Margaret's first demonstration was creating a bowl with routed inserts. Having turned the outside of the bowl to her desired profile she used a jig holding a router with a 90 degree profile which was mounted horizontally. This enabled her to cut slots to a chosen depth, all spaced by an indexing system, so as to enable the gluing in of five or seven square section pieces of contrasting timber. Think of sticking the corner edge of a pen blank into a machined 90 degree groove in the outside of the bowl, then rotate the bowl and do it another four or five times and you may get the picture. The outside of the bowl is then re-turned until the surface is smooth, leaving a nicely shaped insert on the outside.



The pictures above show the router jigs and cutter, the slots, the glued inserts and the finished shape. The bowl is then mounted via the tenon and the inside turned, which eventually begins to reveal the inserts from the inside.



I haven't space, time, or the energy to write about all the excellent demonstrations also taking place in the adjacent hall. Same goes for the Trade Hall.

The whole weekend was filmed. I paid for access to the video recordings. This is valid for one year, though I employed the Video Download Helper extension for the Firefox web browser to download a local copy. Sixteen hours of video comprising all the main hall demonstration sessions, a lot of the other demonstrations, interviews with the main demonstrators. I haven't had time to watch the entire program, so there may be other gems lurking in it for me to discover.

Was it expensive? The cheapest access was the Livestream only, giving viewing of all the video for one year for a cost of £30. A ticket for one single day was £37.50, a two day pass (including the livestream access) was £75, though you could buy both days without the video for £60. The ticket for the meal, the magician and The Bohemians was £27.50. Obviously, you have the cost of travel and the hotel for a couple of nights on top of that.

Was it worth it? Definitely, a great weekend and a lovely, friendly, almost family feel to it. I hope to see many of you there next August.

Peter Clark

Please see below for the links to access the livestream for this year or to book your ticket for Bedford next year.

<https://chestnutproducts.co.uk/product/woodturning-weekender-2026-livestream-ticket/>

<https://chestnutproducts.co.uk/woodturning-weekender/>

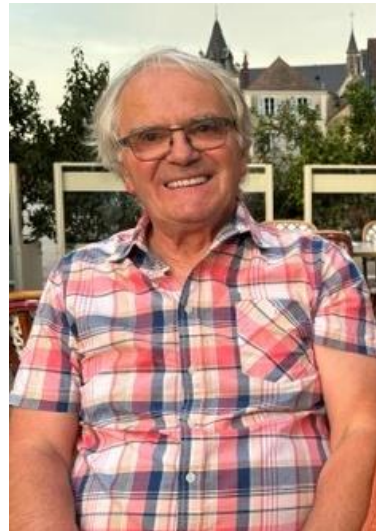


<https://chestnutproducts.co.uk/product/woodturning-weekender-2026-livestream-ticket/>

<https://chestnutproducts.co.uk/woodturning-weekender/>

Making Boules de Canton (Chinese balls) – Harvey Alison

Boules de Canton are a woodturning ‘tour de force’, a specialised turning with a long history of being created by master turners for prestigious patrons. Today, the specialist knowledge required to make them is a tradition preserved by a few. These notes aim to capture my learning about the tools and techniques, acquired during a training weekend with artist and artisan Jean Claude Charpignon at his atelier in Rambouillet in September 2026.



Materials

For a ‘standard’ boule de Canton, most hardwoods can be used. To attempt more complex and detailed varieties, incorporating stars, platonic solids, and carving, a fine-grained timber such as boxwood should be used. The timber should be stable i.e. seasoned and in equilibrium with the environment.

Making a ‘perfect’ sphere

Because of the precise nature of the turning, a sphere that is accurate to within 0.1mm is ideally required. This is almost impossible to achieve when hand turning by eye. Fortunately, there are two relatively simple methods to help the turner achieve this precision.

The Plumier method. Described in 1701 by Charles Plumier in his foundational text ‘The Art of the Turner’, and probably known long before, this technique requires no specialised tools. You first prepare a cylinder of timber between centers that is exactly the required diameter as the finished sphere, and very slightly longer. Mark the exact center of this cylinder using a sharp pencil while the lathe is running. Then make a jam chuck that can hold the cylinder turned sideways. We used a branch of green pear wood, but anything a little softer than the timber for the sphere will do. The jam chuck should allow the cylinder to sit so that just over half of it protrudes from the chuck. The first hemisphere is turned in the same way you would turn a simple half bead, using light cuts. As the pencil line is approached, take finer cuts until the pencil line is reached “perfectly”, for example using a skew as a scraper - going over the pencil line is fatal! Once the first hemisphere is cut, reverse the piece into another jam chuck, which should be a good, tapered fit for the hemisphere, and have a hole drilled in the bottom to allow the sphere to be subsequently removed with a knockout bar. Follow the same procedure used for turning the first hemisphere. Once the sphere is complete, check the dimensions in a few different directions using callipers.

Cylinder



Jig #1



Cylinder in Jig #1



1st hemisphere turned



1st hemisphere



Jig #2



Sphere fully turned



Check!



With a Sphere jig. As the Plumier method requires a certain amount of hand turning skill, it may be preferred to use a sphere cutting jig, which can achieve even greater accuracy. This should be a very solid and stable device, mounted on the bed of the lathe. A rough sphere shape is turned by eye, which is then refined using successive cuts with the jig. The first cuts are taken by pressing the tip of the cutter into the centre of the sphere while the lathe is stationary and then cutting quite quickly. The sphere is refined using slower, lighter cuts for a better finish. As a final shape is approached, even lighter cuts are taken starting slightly off centre. Once you get to a point where multiple calliper measurements show that some parts of the sphere are “perfect”, the remaining few hundredths of a mm can be taken off using gentle finger pressure to lift the sphere jig slightly without adjusting the jig.

Rough jig cuts



Fine jig cuts



Measuring



Ultra fine jig cuts



More measuring!



Regardless of how the sphere is created, it is important that it does not subsequently change shape before marking out and turning. Jean Claude recommends storing spheres in an airtight bag, which prevents changes in humidity, the main cause of warping.

Marking out

For the finish turning to be performed without removing the sphere from the lathe, it must be fully marked out with the 12 circles through which the cutting will be done. These must be perfectly equidistant. Start by marking a single point, which should be the place where the sphere was parted off when it was created, likely to be the least accurate part of the sphere. Using this as the starting point ensures it will be removed during turning.

The next step is to draw a series of precise circles starting from this point with sharp baluster callipers, which are more accurate for marking a curved surface. Intersections of the arcs mark successive points. The exact diameter of the circles to draw is provided by calculation, based on the diameter of the sphere. See [Platonic solid - Wikipedia](#) for Euclid's original proofs, although Jean Claude has kindly given me a spreadsheet that takes away all the hard work! For marking a dodecahedron on a 65mm sphere, the scribing circles are 34.17mm. Drawing circles this precise with pencil callipers may be optimistic, even sharpening the pencil lead with sandpaper, but if all the arcs intersect, that is good enough. Once the vertices are marked, use a punch to establish them permanently. Each vertex in turn then forms the center of a circle which you can scribe to whatever diameter you wish for excavation. Smaller circles will be harder to hollow through, and there will be a limit after which the tools will not work to fully detach the inner spheres. We used 25mm circles on a 65mm sphere but could have gone a little smaller.

Vertices



Punching



Tools, sphere jig and cutters

Although boules de Canton are made on a regular woodturning lathe, specialised tools and jigs are needed. These can be made yourself, but in my case the tools were made for me kindly in advance by Jean Claude, who has refined the design over many years.

- Cutters and holder. These are bespoke to the size of the sphere. The holder is designed to sit flush to the outside of the sphere, to allow the cutters to be presented at the correct depth. The cutters are curved to match the outside of the sphere at the depth they cut. In addition to the curved cutter, there is a boring cutter for excavating the holes, and a point cutter for cutting to the center if desired. All the cutters are sharpened using a 1000 grit diamond stone by hand, as using a grinding wheel would remove too much material. The tools are presented on-center using a platform tool rest and are sharpened to between 30 and 45 degrees – this produces clean cut shavings not scraping dust.
- Sphere jig. This is constructed in three parts
 - The base of the chuck Jean Claude made for me is threaded directly with M33 to match my lathe, although it could be fitted to a faceplate if desired. The side of the base is threaded to receive the outer ring.
 - The sphere retaining ring is keyed to the base using a small pin, so that it doesn't rotate when adjusting the sphere, a frequent operation.
 - The outer ring is threaded to fit the base and provides holding compression to fix the sphere in place. The band of sandpaper adds helpful grip for your hand when loosening and tightening the chuck.

Cutters



Sharpening



Cutter holder



Sphere chuck face



Sphere chuck side



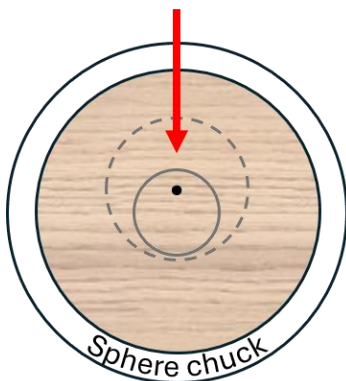
Sphere chuck parts



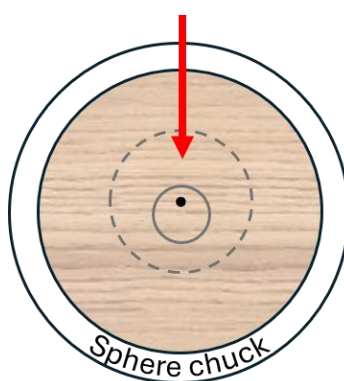
Centering, excavating and cutting

Once the sphere is fully marked out, it is mounted in the sphere chuck on the lathe for turning. Turning takes place through each of the twelve scribed circles, which need to be accurately centered on the lathe. This is achieved by first roughly positioning the sphere, and then by nudging the sphere using a flat ended punch, as shown in the sketch. Successively smaller pencil lines drawn while the lathe is spinning really help identify how much nudging is still required. Once perfectly centered, the sphere chuck is tightened.

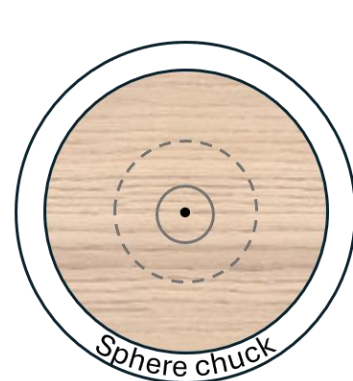
Big nudge



Small nudge



'Perfect'



Circle scribed by marking out



Pencil line drawn while lathe spinning



Center of scribed circle (punched)

Excavating is very simple. The hole boring cutter is put in the holder on a flat platform tool rest, and pushed into the sphere, cutting on center. A flat sided hole is gradually excavated using small cuts. When the boring cutter has bottomed out, the point tool can then be used to cut the last part. Cutting then proceeds starting at the smallest inside sphere and working outwards. The cutter is pushed in carefully on the right-hand side of the hole, until the tool holder is flush with the outside of the sphere. The cutter is then moved in a gentle clockwise direction until the side of the cutter contacts the left-hand side of the hole. You should be able to feel when the cutter is working well, and see nice shavings being produced. After each cut is made, it is important when changing to the next cutter to ensure that shavings are cleared, and the next cutter is seated correctly in the holder. I made a mess of my first sphere by not checking this!

Once all the cuts are made through the first hole, an outside bead detail can be cut if desired. The sphere is moved to the next center, and the process repeated for each of the 11 remaining holes. This sounds intimidating, but in practice the cutting took only an hour or so to complete, and I got faster with practice.

When you get to the last six holes, the structure of the sphere will start to be weakened by the removal of material. To stabilise the sphere, cut out small pieces of reasonably stiff foam, roughly shaped with a Stanley knife, and pushed neatly into the sphere holes. As the final few holes are excavated and cut, add more pieces of foam.

Centering



Centered



Excavating



Cutting inside



Mostly cut



Only 11 more to go!



Fettling and Finishing

Almost there! Before removing the pieces of foam, now is a good time to re-mount the sphere in the jam chuck and do any sanding of the outside of the sphere. The sphere can also be buffed on a buffing wheel or finished as you want. Finally, the pieces of foam are removed using a corkscrew (of course, this is France!) and if all has gone well the inner spheres will now freely rotate.

Sanding and finishing the inside spheres is hard, but the outermost ones can be sanded by threading a strip of sandpaper through two of the holes and then blowing the inside spheres round using an air compressor. Of course, this may be considered 'gilding the lily', and you can go as far as you like. A finish on the inside is hard, but a little low build finishing oil could be attempted if desired.

A finished boule de Canton in Walnut



Beyond the basics – adding a star

On the second day of my training with Jean Claude, we moved on to a more advanced project, creating a boule de Canton with a twelve-pointed star inside. I will not describe the process in detail, but here are some pictures to get the idea. Essentially, the procedure is similar, but the cutting tools are smaller, and even greater care is needed to ensure that the star points are not damaged when turning. We had to repair a couple when making my first one!

Because the tools are smaller, the first few inside spheres will not fully be disconnected by cutting through the star holes, so the additional holes drilled in between the larger ones are not just for decoration.

Centering



Excavating leaving a star point



'Special' tube, 8mm OD, 6mm ID



Measuring the star point length



Excavation complete



A finished boule de Canton with stars
in boxwood



Future possibilities

The boules de Canton we made are all 65mm diameter, which allows for seven inner spheres to be created. As an aspiration, I would like to make larger spheres for artistic projects, which will require different tools – I think metal working and tool making skills are going to be something I need to develop in the future! As an example, here is a set of thirteen tools that Jean Claude made for turning spheres of 100mm. Of course, finding pieces of high quality fine-grained timber in larger sizes may be a challenge – boxwood trees don't often grow that large!

Tools for a 100mm sphere...



Finally, I want to acknowledge Jean Claude, not only as an artist-turner of great skill and experience, but also as a great teacher. I have written nine pages of notes covering only two days of workshop time, during which his constant friendly support was fantastic. I have made a new friend and look forward to continuing my adventure in 'tour de force' turning. – Harvey Alison

AWGB Collaborative Competition. 10/11 October 2026

After several months of considerable effort from club members—especially Harvey Allison, Geoff Selly and James Blackie—we are ready to finalise the club's entry for the AWGB competition at the festival in Stratford this October. Several members, including Harvey and Patrick, will attend, and many others plan to visit for at least one day. It would be great to see you there, so please come and find us and say hello if you visit.

Here is a picture of our entry being assembled in Harvey's workshop, he will be delivering it on Saturday morning the 10th of October and we are hopeful or being placed well in the competition, although personally I think we should win it with this what do you think?



Our competition entry takes inspiration from Shakespeare's Macbeth. Act 5 scene 5. We have just learned that Lady Macbeth died at Dunsinane Castle. Macbeth is now about to give battle to Malcolm at Burnham Wood, potentially concluding his own life. He begins to muse upon his situation:

"Out, out brief candle!

Life's but a walking shadow,

a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage,

and then is heard no more."

It includes contributions from 52 members of our club. All at different stages; beginners intermediate and advanced. Each one improving their skills as they burn through their own "brief candle".

The message is a simple one.

Life is short. Spend more time in your workshop.

Thank you to the following members for their contributions: Mark Aizicowitz, Harvey Alison, Gary Atkins, Keith Austin, Alison Bigsby, Adam Blackie, James Blackie, Paul Boyes, Graham Bridge, Graham Burford, Richard Burton, Tony Buttle, Tony Champion, Peter Clark, Gordon Cookson, Mike Fitz, Philip Francis, Colin Gibson, Keith Goddard, Steve Hart, Richard Hartshorne, Peter Hoare, Melvyn Hogg, Andrew Holwerda, David Ireson, Allen Kaye, Peter Kemp, Stuart King, Graham Lester, Keith Lucas, Andrew Mackness, Bob Marshall, Andy Mason, Colin Newman, Tim Pettigrew, Pete Pocock, Stepan Ptacek, Gary Rance (ye clubbe professional), Geoff Selley, Paul Simmons, Brian Stanton, Derek Stephens, Patrick Stileman, Keith Sutton, Tony Taylor, Grahame Tomkins, Phil Walters, Dave Washer, Myra Woolmington. Plus 3 unidentified clubmates!

Adam Blackie

Horatio's Garden September Update

This month's visit, attended by Mark Aizikowitz and Peter from Middlesex and me was highly successful. Four candidates made three bud vases and one pen. The glorious weather showcased the garden at its best, and the visit coincided with that of Horatio's Garden chief executive Katie Tate. I had a productive conversation with her about the activities we sponsor and the possibility of extending the programme to other gardens through local woodturning clubs, potentially in partnership with the AWGB.

We also discussed the baby's rattle Harvey made for a member of the garden staff, which was gratefully received and caused much excitement among the attendees. Katie mentioned that a cherry tree in her garden is due to be felled. I suggested that she bring a piece of the wood on her next visit so we could create an item for auction at the charity's next fundraiser; she welcomed the idea enthusiastically. In due course, I will need a volunteer to make something special for Katie that could raise additional funds for Horatio's Garden and highlight the work we have been doing there. Following last month's newsletter, several people offered to volunteer occasionally at Horatio's Garden but explained that weekday sessions are difficult because they are working during the week. In response, I have discussed holding sessions on Saturdays or Sundays to make volunteering more accessible. The Horatio's Garden team is considering how it might accommodate this request.



Here is a photograph from this month's session, featuring Mark, a patient and a member of the hospital staff. The concentration shared by all three reflects one of the most meaningful aspects of woodturning: it offers people a welcome opportunity to focus on something creative and absorbing, away from the concerns of everyday life. It is deeply rewarding to see someone adjusting to an unexpected change in circumstances become fully engaged in the activity and enjoy a positive, restorative hour. Moments like these capture the real value of what we do at Horatio's Garden.

Adam Blackie

Chairman@hertsandbedswoodturners.co.uk

The following link will take you to **the 2026 Horatio's Garden Survey**. The item is included to demonstrate the amazing impact the Garden has for those who can use it. The document itself is too long to include directly in the Newsletter but is well worth the read.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1e--51I9bSsqJPUPsf6UTyQw2hqt4KS7U/view?usp=drive_link

Caption Competition

Last month's caption competition featured Dave Washer, who spent an afternoon whittling a bowl in the Letchworth men's sheds workshop. Judged at our September club night, the competition offered the winning entry a small prize. Although there were joint winners, one team, in keeping with our members' customary generosity, deferred to the other. The prize therefore went to Colin's table for the following caption.



After another 6 hours work, Dave's 12' 3" log should give him the toothpick he always wanted to make.

This month's caption competition features Stuart King, an esteemed woodturner and member of our club and others across the region. At the September competition, he judged the entries while holding a piece made by Mike Fitz, another established professional woodturner and long-standing club member. In the background, Harvey, Chris and Geoff appear to be enjoying a quiet remark from Chris. What could he be saying?



Please send your entries to our club letter newsletter editor, Peter Clark on the following e-mail address hertsandbedsnews@gmail.com

Encouraging the next generation of turners

Here's a photograph taken by a very proud grandfather and father, showing his son and granddaughter in the workshop. At nearly two years old, my granddaughter already knows that Grandad spends time there and is beginning to discover why. I hope these early, positive memories stay with her for life; young minds absorb everything they see.



Taken during the early stages of refurbishing my workshop, with welcome help from several club members—thank you to everyone involved.

On this occasion, we were fitting the doors to the cabinets beneath the workbench. The bifold doors will fold fully back, providing generous, easy access to storage for all those things you know you need but may never use.

I can't express how much joy this photograph brings me, and I hope you enjoy it too.

If you have hosted a young person in your workshop or are currently encouraging a young person to take up wood turning, please do share a photograph by sending it to me at the following address:
chairman@hertsandbedswoodturners.co.uk

Adam Blackie

Poetry Corner

THE BAYEUX TAPESTRY STITCHUP

Seventy magical metres of embroidered silken thread
Telling the story of the all conquering Royal Head
French owned but could be English stitched
No matter, for by this, both nations are enriched

Not Richard of York, but Harold giving battle in vain
On Senlac's Hill, next Pevensey, should be the new refrain
1000 year old needlework, such historic art
Named Bayeux for all to see from the very start

Depicting demonic deeds in gentle silk, those irrefutable acts
But needle working sisters were at hand recording these deadly facts
Gone for good to invading hoards
England's green and pleasant broads
Changing culture, language and laws
Even our behaviour with all the ingrained flaws

But now at last under homespun gaze
To more appreciate our modern ways
Perhaps too brief, but what relief
L'Entente Cordiale marches on with continuing full belief

Martin Sexton 14th September 2026