

PO Box 1016 Bondi Junction NSW 1355

ABN 51 544 262 364

July August 2012 newsletter

Woodworkers Association of NSW



# Working with Timber and Wood show

Friday 27 to Sunday 29 July 2012

Sydney Showground, Sydney Olympic Park, Homebush

10am to 5pm daily. Adult \$16, Concession \$14.

Children (under 14) free when accompanied by an adult on Saturday and Sunday.

Multi-Day pass discount available.

A premier event for every woodworker! From the home DIYer to the most passionate of enthusiasts. See the best in the industry share their expertise and try out new techniques and tools. Relax and recharge in our complimentary visitor lounge and, at the end of the day take advantage of the free parcel pickup service after stocking up on tools and specialty timbers.



## 2011 show winner

*Inter se* - American Rock Maple, rattan cane, fibre-glass sheet, by Rhys Jones.

*Inter se* is Latin meaning between or amongst themselves. Full story in July/August 2011 edition, available on the website.

## ----- Next meeting ----- @ 7 for 7.30pm, Monday 6 August 2012

Putney Tennyson Bowling & Community Club, Frances Road, Putney, NSW

**Speaker:** Mark Viner, Head of Sturt, will present to the meeting about what's happening at Sturt and explore the possibilities of holding an exhibition at Sturt for association members



# *Spinning wheel . . . . . . boom and bust*

Tom Palley's winning wheel - Royal Easter Show, Sydney 2012

*This little project had its genesis during one of my periods of contemplation in the workshop. My attention became diverted to re-reading through some of my collection of old woodwork magazines. I alighted on an article from 1985, about a guy making spinning wheels.*

I started reading in the full knowledge that such articles, while reading inspirationally well, always seem to lack important details, which always seem to be vague, missed out, or edited out to make a better story . . .

## ***Reclaiming the past***

But I decided, why not? A simple machine, historically a co-operation between the village carpenter and blacksmith (and not a TAFE certificate in sight). How hard could it be? I have better equipment and knowledge of processes, I thought. So, I set out to reclaim that past knowledge, which in reality became a journey of discovery of the past.

The very little knowledge I had of the practicalities involved very quickly became evident as each of the individual parts were worked out and made to integrate into the whole.

## ***Improvement 'headaches'***

The overall concept of the machine is simplicity itself. However, integrating the bits together, making each play their part was a series of headaches, made probably more difficult by me making 'improvements' (incorporating ball races in place of greased feather bearings). If it's so simple, how come it's so hard (superior 21st Century thinking)!!

It must be admitted that using a few photos as drawings was a bit ambitious, to embark on what was basically a 'vernacular proto-

. . . more next page

# Spinning wheel boom and bust cont . . .

type', and not real smart. There is, of course, real mathematical underpinnings to throttle throw, flywheel diameter/balance, bobbin drive, orifice diameter . . . and so on, and so on. So, is this really important? Well, yes and no.

## Duds and dandies

Such machines were developed all over Europe on substantially similar lines, but with wide variation in size and effectiveness. Many must have been duds that looked the part, but didn't perform to expectations.

The more pristine/elaborate/decorative ones probably being the duds and the working ones more likely the patched up and worn out ones, having served their owners well past their prime.

This type of 'domestic' machine was the means by which country people could gain some measure of independence from principally working as agricultural labour on an estate for little reward, one step up from serfdom.

## Spinning value

Spinning fibre, jute, flax, hemp and wool was a major local industry in areas where it was grown, adding considerable value to the basic commodity. In the case of wool, it took approximately four spinners to supply the needs of one handloom worker. This ratio made a 'family enterprise' and

the degree of independence it afforded a real possibility. In reality, spinning was done by women. Weaving – operating a handloom – usually by men (hence "spinner" and the surname "Weaver").

The heyday of hand spinning and weaving was during the Napoleonic Wars, when demand for cloth and fibre of all kinds far-outstripped demand. (This also heralded the application of power, principally water, then steam . . . but that's another story.)

## Enterprises of war

With Europe's attention on successive wars involving most of Europe being on one side or another, England was able to prosper despite waging a war against Napoleon's forces and his allies on a continuing basis.

This required enormous quantities of rope, cordage, sail cloth and uniforms (quite apart from men, ships, arms and cannon food). Napoleon required much the same. He established his Continental System (a sort of common market) to supply his armies (and incidentally introduced a common method of measurement: the metric system).

Meanwhile, England organised the Continental Blockade and both sides set out to starve the other into submission. The general result was a lift in prices to those who could supply what

was needed. Both Napoleon's Continental System and England's blockade were full of holes, which attracted enterprising individuals. Spinners and weavers were primary beneficiaries of these circumstances.

But towards the end of hostilities, unemployment grew as men and ships were no longer required. In the case of spinners and weavers, this was made worse by the invention of machines.

So, what happened to all those spinners and weavers? They gradually found other means of employment and the wheels and looms fell into disrepair and eventually became firewood. Such occupations retreated into the far corners of the country, where self sufficiency was still a viable way of life (2012).

## History repeating?

Perhaps it is fitting that the 'technically challenged' should make an industrial heirloom such as a spinning wheel. Interestingly enough, mine sold on the second day of the exhibition at the Royal Easter Show.

The big question is, is there a new market for green energy friendly spinning wheels in an era of rising power prices? History! It's the flow of society – how we came to be and why.

Tom Paley

## Inside this issue

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The old firm - Ricketts  
and Thorp, Part 2  
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**TWELVE WEEK  
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with  
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# Silas Kopf update



*Three Mile Island desk*



*Telephone 2*

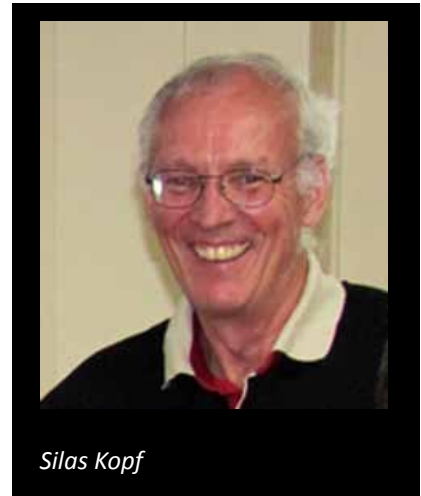


*Checkmate*

Some members were fortunate enough to attend the two day marquetry workshop Silas Kopf conducted in Sydney in March.

Participants found the workshop a challenge, but worth the 'stretch' for the insights gained into marquetry techniques and how to incorporate them into their own work. "Silas is a gifted teacher with the highest expertise, a fine sense of conveying appropriate information, and a deeply charitable sense of humour. He was tolerant of incomplete success, and generous with sharing skills and expertise", reported one participant.

We congratulate Silas Kopf on recently having works accepted into the prestigious collections of The Museum of Fine Arts Boston (*Three Mile Island desk* and *Telephone 2*) and the Mint Museum in Charlotte, North Carolina (*Who's Chicken Now*). Additionally, he has shown at the Milwaukee Art



*Silas Kopf*

Museum and has a piece in their collection.

Kopf will also be the focus of an exhibition at Gallery Henoch in October this year. *Traditional Homes Magazine* has already featured his newly completed cabinet, *Checkmate*. This trompe l'oeil cabinet features a hidden door as well as several compartments. The marquetry will be included in his exhibition.

Andrew Liss, Gallery Henoch, New York - [andrew@galleryhenoch.com](mailto:andrew@galleryhenoch.com)



*Who's chicken now*

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### Short Courses:

Tuning & sharpening with Daryl Ingate  
10<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup> March



Intro to wood with David Upfill-Brown 22<sup>nd</sup> March

Joints for woodworking with David Upfill-Brown 26<sup>th</sup> & 27<sup>th</sup> May

4week cabinetmaking with Roy Schack 20<sup>th</sup> Aug-14<sup>th</sup> Sept

Shaker boxes with Phoebe Everill 18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> August

Woodwork for women with Phoebe Everill 15<sup>th</sup> & 16<sup>th</sup> September

Intro to woodwork for kids with Phoebe Everill 30<sup>th</sup> September

Hand finishes with Tim Foster 27<sup>th</sup> & 28<sup>th</sup> October

### 10 Week courses:

30<sup>th</sup> January - 5<sup>th</sup> April 2012 with David Upfill-Brown

23<sup>rd</sup> April - 29<sup>th</sup> June 2012 with James Carr

### Winter School: 2<sup>nd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> July 2012

Marquetry with Katalin Sallai

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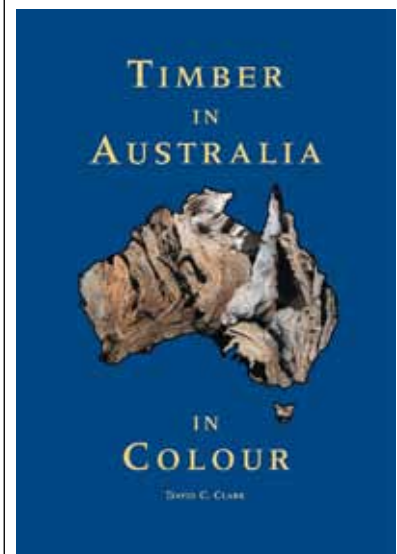


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# *The old firm*

## *Ricketts & Thorp Part 2*

*By Alan Perry*

***Ricketts & Thorp had always been proud of the high standards of its employees, the apprentices it trained, and the rapport between management and staff. Along with Beard Watsons, Ricketts & Thorp was considered the ultimate place to be trained. Without the skill and dedication of these men and women, the firm's success would not have been possible.***

Ex-employees are to be found in successful, diverse occupations in many parts of Australia, some in management positions; others in their own businesses. Some of these include Bowman & Rodgers, Duncan & Whelan, Ron Locke Pty Ltd., Nelson & Johnston, Franklin & Smith and many more.

In 1936, about 300 employees worked in the factory. But by the 1950s there were only 180 employees, falling to around 80 in 1977. In its 66 years, hundreds of employees gave 20 years or more of faithful service.

Seven employees gave over 50 years or more of service. One employee, on being given notice said "after 53 years service, a week's

notice! If I'd known the job wasn't going to be permanent I wouldn't have started".

They were always rewarded with good conditions, generous payment of unused sick pay, a Christmas hamper, and consideration in the pay packet in times of absence due to family illness or bereavement. The Ricketts & Thorp families owned six houses in and around Banksia and these were let to employees at generous rent.

It was always popularly accepted that Ricketts & Thorp was a major training ground for furniture tradesmen. To work at the "old firm" also bought memories of a vibrant social life, attending



theatre parties and musicals at the Tivoli, Saturday cricket teams and golf club, with annual picnics and harbour cruises to Neilsen Park and many harbour beaches, Children's Christmas parties, annual cabarets at Rockdale Town Hall and many employees played competition tennis and cycling and other sports together at weekends.

Lunchtime cricket in Rockdale Street (you were out if the ball landed on Princes Highway or on the timber stacks) was legendary as were the intense lunchtime card games (of 500) on a piece of plywood on rubbish tins.

### ***The employees***

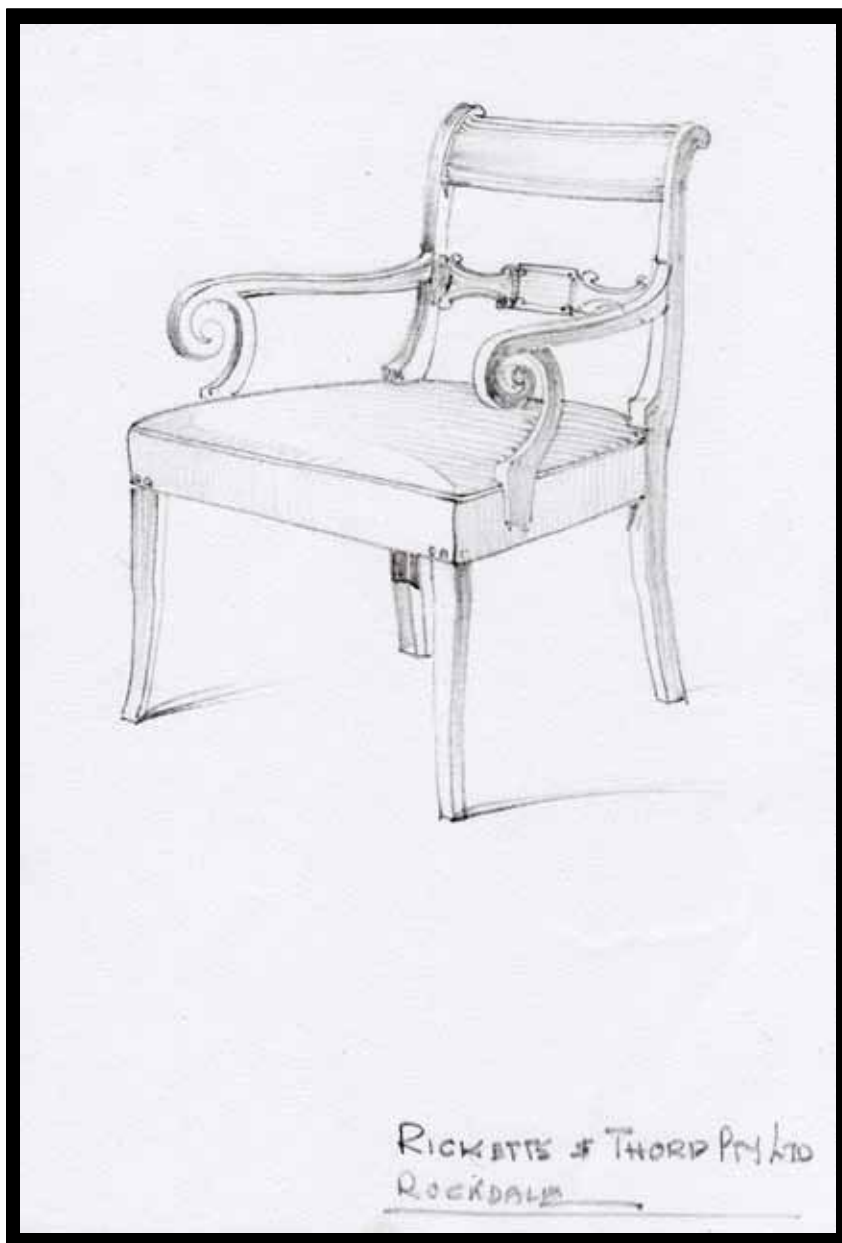
The factory at Rockdale provided employment for St George and Sutherland Shire residents and in the 1940s returning service personal took part in the Government Retraining Scheme. The company was involved in the migrant training program, employing many production employees from Europe, in particular the large Ital-

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#### **Alan Perry, Committee member, Furniture History Society**

Started at Ricketts & Thorp in 1954, at 15 and a half, as a floor boy on three months probation. He swept the floor, cleaned the animal glue pots and was a gofer and assistant to the tradesmen. He subsequently became an apprenticed cabinetmaker, one of 180 employees in the factory at Rockdale, earning £1.10.6 a week. Alan worked in the sewing machine cabinet section until graduating to the cabinet section. He then became a draughtsman and eventually became Furniture Designer, Estimator and Site Supervisor until he joined TAFE in 1973 as a teacher in cabinetmaking to all ages of apprentices and tradesman in colleges in Sydney. He also spent a year at the London College of Furniture. He became Head Teacher of Cabinetmaking at Lidcombe TAFE, retiring in 1998.

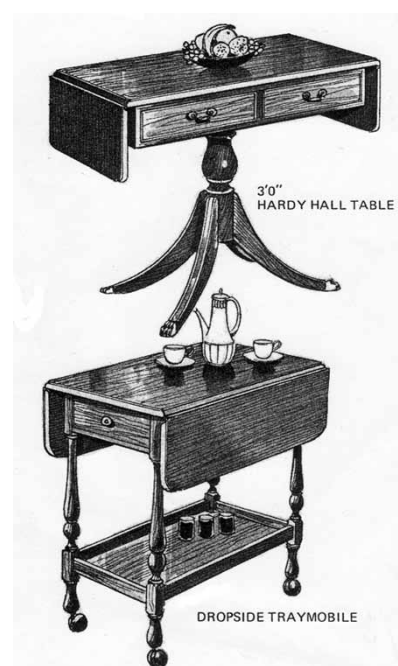




at a showroom in North Sydney. A lot of work was contracted out with two wood-turners and two carvers producing components. Other companies provided metal components for office desks and special custom-built pieces, lounge chair frames and upholstery sewers.

### **Products**

Over the years, Ricketts and Thorp became well known for producing every kind of household, office, church and school furniture.



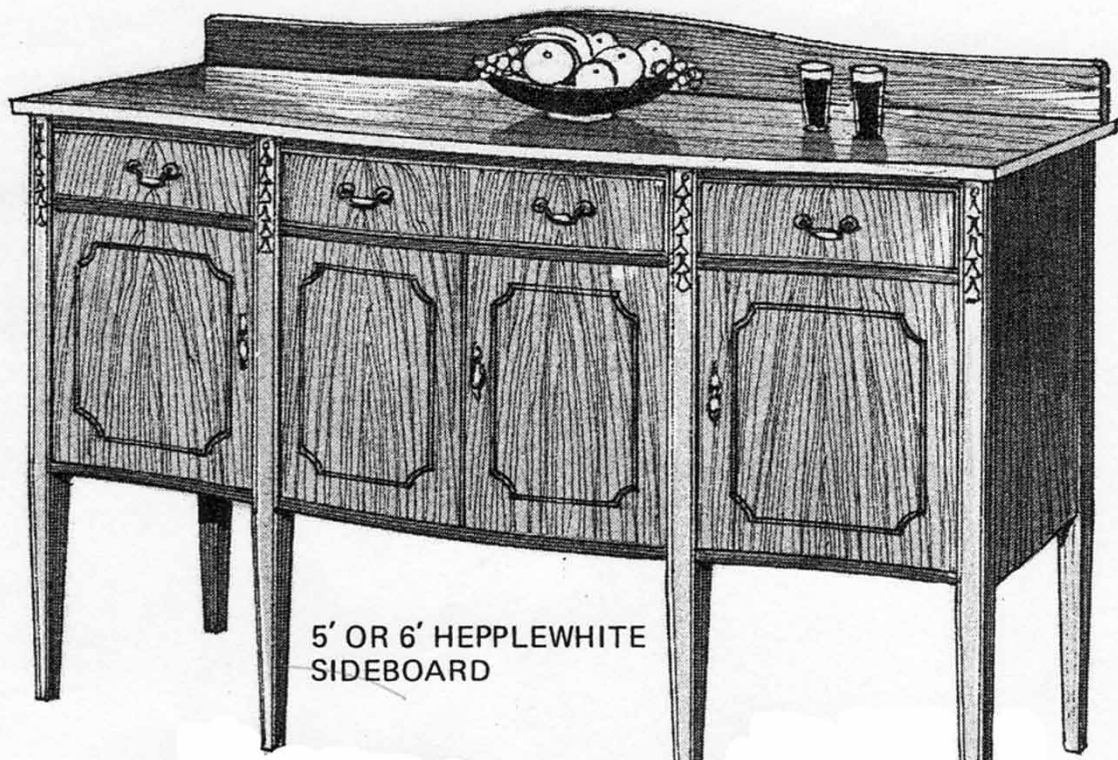
ian and Greek community around Rockdale. Many tradesmen came to the company following the completion of the Snowy River Scheme.

With their commitment to training R & T would always take their full quota of apprentices, most would stay for several years after completing their time to become valued tradesmen, some becoming specialists in particular techniques and furniture components. A few of these specialties were in extension table construction, Hepplewhite sideboard and chair production, French polish-

ing, lacquer work, solid colour finishing, production machining, belt sanding, veneer matching, veneer laying, shaped component veneering, specialist pattern and jig making, timber preparation, circular saw and spindle operation and many more. The factory also had a full time machine maintenance engineer, saw and tool sharpener (saw doctor), boiler attendant, cleaners, first aid nurse, delivery staff and yardmen.

The office had approximately 12 staff with accounts, despatch and drawing office staff, estimators and sales staff at the factory and

... more next page



From the 1920s, they kept a full production line employing up to 50 workers. It also allowed sections of the factory that were short of work to move tradesmen in and out of the production lines.

The first of these were poultry incubators made for industry under licence to Buckeye, an American company, and Bluebird ice chests, with fittings imported from the US - until EFCO Manufacturing, in Arncliffe started producing suitable hardware.

In the 1930s, Ricketts & Thorp were a leading supplier of radio cabinets to the manufacturers of radio receiving sets.

The development of this section of their business was largely due to what was known as the Scullin Tariffs of 1931, which placed prohibitive duty on imported complete radio sets that, at that time, were coming to Australia, mostly from America.

The effect of these tariffs was to encourage a very important secondary industry, providing work for many Australians.

During WWII, its output was devoted almost entirely to defence production, including a major contribution to the construction of the Mosquito bomber. The factory had two shifts of workers producing parts for Hawker De Havilland, who produced the aircraft at Bankstown, and in Sale, in Victoria.

Together with many other furniture factories in Sydney, Ricketts & Thorp produced spares and 300 varied parts for aircraft, using laminated timbers and plywood glued together with urea formaldehyde.

They were the first to use this synthetic adhesive with various thicknesses of Canadian Spruce and plywoods, and other hard materials such as diatex and di-

alac made of highly pressed cloth and resin.

Other defence products were Owen gun butts, out of Queensland maple, jungle knife handles out of jarrah, ammunition boxes, jettison belly tanks for aircraft and trestle tables for the Army.

During the war a threshold (dedman) was placed on furniture costs that made the selling price uneconomical.

The only other item produced outside of defence supply was shaped plywood mouldings, usually veneered crossgrain, and sold to Leopold Barnetts for re-sale to radio cabinet dining room suite manufacturers.

The 1950s saw the company producing many types of radio-grams/hi-fi cabinets for HMV, AWA and Stromberg Carlson.

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These cabinets were fine pieces of furniture made out of matched veneers of European and American walnut and butt maple with lift-up lids and pull-out record player decks.

Sewing machine cabinets were produced for Bebarfalds Ltd and Pinnocks. The cabinet and table models were made out of Queensland Maple in the Swedish style, with tapered rectangular

legs and a lift-up top. The sewing machine hinged down inside and the cabinet model was fitted for fabrics and cottons. Probably the most popular model was the portable with a rounded top of plywood and a solid timber machine base.

***Next edition - Part 3: Advent of TV creates lots more work***

## CANCELLATION NOTICE

I regret to inform that the Parliament House display in September will not proceed. Although we booked the space over two years ago, the current President of the Legislative Council has decided that the display is not suitable for the Fountain Court. An alternative space has been offered, but it is completely inadequate. We have asked for the decision to be reversed and have pleaded our case by correspondence and in person without success. The committee is investigating alternatives or a future members' display. Any member who knows of a suitable venue is invited to contact the committee.

***Phil Greenwood,  
WWA of NSW Chairperson***



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## Professional members' exhibition August 2012

### Members exhibiting at the WWA Chifley Exhibition in August

Richard CROSLAND, John GALLAGHER, Jon GASPARINI, Geoffrey HANNAH, Peter HAYES, Hugh JONES, Piers JONES, Tony KENWAY, David Mac LAREN, James McGARRY, Michael McGRATH, Takashi NISHIURA, Craig SARGEANT, Artie SZABO, and Nikolaus TEPLY.

There is a wonderful selection and diversity of works. Some new and some old favourites. Traditional and unusual designs. An eclectic and fascinating collection.

Please note the exhibition in your diary for August and tell everyone who loves fine woodwork to do the same.

# Woodworkers Association and member ads

- **AngleMag saw guide**

\$75 for members

\$100 for non-members

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or Kim Larymore  
(see last page for  
contact details)



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## Association member ads cont . . .

### • Tormek 1002 SuperGrind tool sharpening system

Early model Tormek without internal motor (a drill drives the wheel).

In as-new condition with tool attachment. Wheel is 250mm x 50mm SuperGrind stone (RRP around \$300 on its own). Suits all current Tormek accessories and comes with drill as shown for \$250 (or best offer). Contact Michael McGrath

**02 9949 6683, or [accent@swiftdsl.com.au](mailto:accent@swiftdsl.com.au)**



## Association Committee contact information

### Committee members

**Chair:** Phil Greenwood • 02 9235 2874 • [phgreenwood@optusnet.com.au](mailto:phgreenwood@optusnet.com.au)

**Vice Chair:** Kim Larymore • 02 9858 1578 • [klarymore@optusnet.com.au](mailto:klarymore@optusnet.com.au)

**Secretary/Public Officer:** Merv Walter • 02 9634 2066 • [secretary@woodworkersnsw.org.au](mailto:secretary@woodworkersnsw.org.au)

**Treasurer:** Miko Nakamura • 02 9805 1775 • [treasurer@woodworkersnsw.org.au](mailto:treasurer@woodworkersnsw.org.au)

### General committee members

Frank Duff • 02 9896 4017 • [fwduff@optusnet.com.au](mailto:fwduff@optusnet.com.au) || Peter Dunn • 02 02 4344 7806 • [bentneck@bigpond.com](mailto:bentneck@bigpond.com)

|| Matthew Dwight • 02 9945 0300 • [dwrightmatt@hotmail.com](mailto:dwrightmatt@hotmail.com) || Phil Harley • 02 9404 1852 • [philipharley@gmail.com](mailto:philipharley@gmail.com)

|| Peter Harris • 02 9879 3329 • [peterh47@ihug.com.au](mailto:peterh47@ihug.com.au)

### Currently assisting the committee

**Membership Secretary:** Peter Hunt • 0418 867 870 • [p\\_j\\_hunt@msn.com.au](mailto:p_j_hunt@msn.com.au)

**Newsletter Assistant:** Peter Dunn • 02 02 4344 7806 • [bentneck@bigpond.com](mailto:bentneck@bigpond.com)

**Newsletter/Website:** Jo Healy-North • 0417 667 367 • [jhn@bigpond.com](mailto:jhn@bigpond.com)

### Life members

Richard Crosland, Phil Lake, Kim Larymore, Leon Sadubin, Richard Vaughan, Alan Wale

### New members update

(Details are added as they become available)

**If you'd like to join the committee or be more involved in the association, call Merv Walter**

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*If undelivered please return to PO Box 1016 Bondi Junction NSW 1355*

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