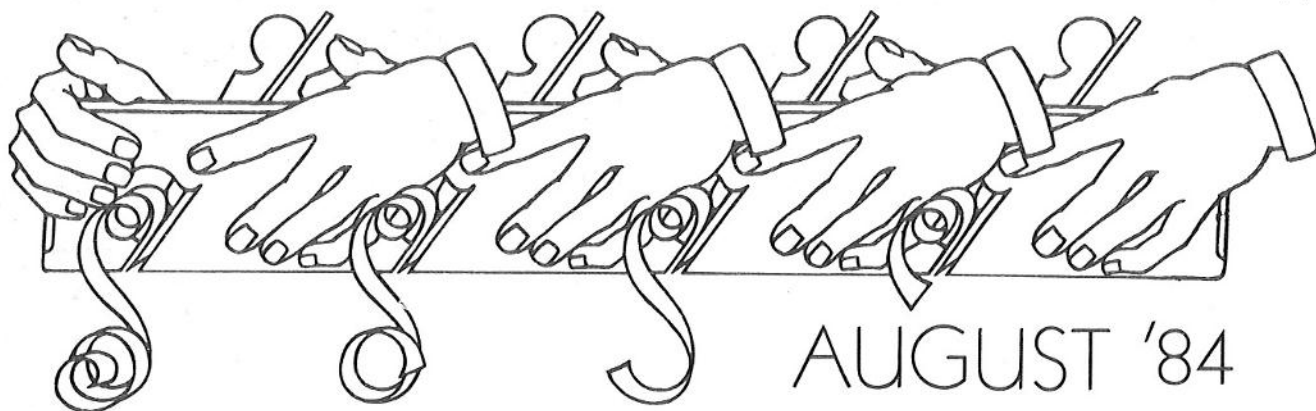


# WOODWORKERS' GROUP OF N.S.W.



AUGUST '84

## WOODWORKERS' GROUP OF NSW

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Secretary – Les Miller, 6 Balmoral St, Waitara 2077, 48 2682  
Editor – Michael Gill, 1 Bank St, Pyrmont 2009, 660 7357  
Group Fees: Member – \$40pa; Associate – \$30pa.

## FROM THE CHAIR

First up, thank you to all of those who made the effort to come to my place at Beecroft for the barbecue and slide show by Henry. Sorry if I failed to have a chat to everybody, especially the newcomers, but as you no doubt noticed, I was rather busy burning my mistakes and turning the onions. A sincere thank you also to those who phoned me with their apologies — good to know you were with us in spirit (smoke?).

## Thank You Henry

You will all, I am sure, join with me in thanking Henry Black for his slide show and talk which provoked a lot of comment. I do feel there is a lot to be gained from outside stimulation. The point I would like to make is that although I do not necessarily like everything I see, at least it shatters my lethargy and stimulates the old grey matter and, for me, that has proven beneficial.

Over the years I have seen some very unusual images flash up on a screen; work ranging from that of Chris Rose to Michael Cooper, from Alan Peters to John Brooks. (I shall never forget Michael Cooper remarking that the only chisel he possessed was a blunt one for removing glue!)

## Outside Stimulation

Whilst on this topic, I thought you would be interested to know that our newsletter does not just go to paid-up members. Your executive has decided that copies should be sent to other woodworkers' groups and interested organisations, such as the Forestry Commission, the Crafts Council, the Crafts Board of the Australian Council, etc. If you can think of any more, please contact the editor. Do you have any appropriate overseas connections or suggestions? In doing this, we are trying to establish some communication with like-minded people and spread the news of our existence.

Of course, another way that we are making ourselves known is through Les Miller's Video of our last exhibition "WOODCRAFT '83". I took one of these down to South Australia on a recent trip (to see Mother, Brother, Family and all that sort of thing) and showed it at the June meeting of the SA Woodgroup. I can tell you in all honesty, they were very impressed with our efforts.

One point in conversation that surprised me was the fact that two of their members had found it necessary to travel interstate to Victoria and to Queensland to obtain timber supplies. It brought home the fact that, on the east coast, we are particularly well-blessed with a variety of woods — but I wonder if we really appreciate it.

Come to think about it, do we always do it justice or just take it for granted? I hope not the latter. Anyhow, let's keep trying, ever improving the use of our resources.

Keep the shavings flying!

Alan

## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATIONS

Your executive committee has tightened up its procedures in respect of submission of Associates' work for consideration for Group

Membership. The system has been settled upon as follows:

- Submissions must be examples of the applicant's **best current work**. Please, **no** old pieces or unfinished work.
  - Assessments will be done in private at meetings of the exec. committee where a minimum of four of the same must come to a unanimous decision. At least one of the four should have experience or expertise in the branch of woodcraft reviewed.
  - All applicants must be paid-up Associates.
  - Applicants may submit any accompanying or explanatory notes with their work, if desired.
  - Deliveries of work for review may be made at any convenient time (by arrangement) before committee meetings (next one is set for Sept 12th chez Sadubin). You may also leave your work at any general meeting of the Group.
  - All applicants will receive notification of the panel's decision and comments in writing.
  - All successful applicants will be introduced and welcomed in the following newsletter with comments on the work reviewed.
- Assessments will be made along the following guidelines:
- innovation and originality will be encouraged.
  - appropriate and well-executed joinery, technically sound.
  - sympathetic and appropriate choice of material(s).
  - suitability of design and finish.

## OUR LAST MEETING

Many thanks to Alan for throwing open his workshop to us and for providing us with the wherewithal to enjoy a great barbecue lunch. Thanks again to Henry Black for taking us on his tour of the US and cheers to those who were present — almost 50 in total.

## BROOKS AT CITY ROAD



John Brooks' illustrated talk on June 17 provoked much thought and a lot of animated discussion since. His studies in painting, sculpture and architecture have resulted in strong influences from such as Gandi, Henry Moore and Brancusi, and his chain-sawn furniture is highly sculptural. Hewn from stumps and stems, John's "thrones" and chairs complement his glass-topped tables and outdoor environmental sculptures, his themes and motifs inspired by natural and organic forms — landscape, the elements, etc.

John's home in New Hampshire, a structure of modelled concrete and arching shingle roofs was a sensation and, though opinions of his work varied enormously, he certainly got the blood running in our veins. (His Tasmanian exhibition was a sell-out!). John Brooks studied under Wendell Castle in New York at age 19 and now works from home on commissions and also for exhibitions, when not lecturing in Australia or New Zealand. Thanks, John, for expanding our understanding of the title, "Woodworker".

## LINE-UP

We don't see one another half as often as most of us would like and so "Line-up" has been proposed as a way in which we can get to know one another a little better. Every issue of your newsletter will introduce one or more of your fellow members in his own words and give us a closer look at what is behind the faces that may be more or less familiar at our meetings.

You have all been shy in submitting yourselves and latest exciting projects for publication (maybe it's a bit too much like blowing your own trumpet or strumming your own guitar) and so we thought we could get the ball rolling by featuring your executive committee members first, hoping it might warm you to your task.

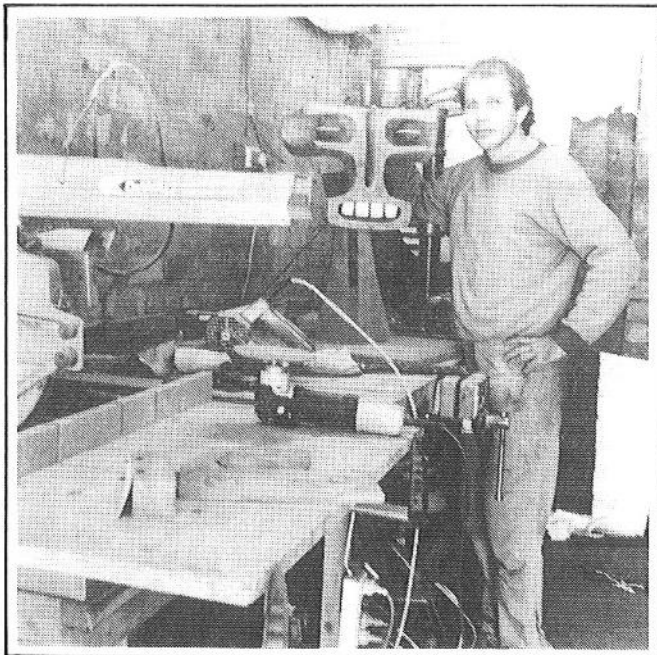


### PAUL FREELAND

#### Member, executive committee, subscriptions

After a degree in Metallurgy in 1974, I finally knew what I did **not** want to do for a living and began to dabble in things at the other end of the spectrum — music and woodwork.

My first attempt at woodwork was a coffee table that looked more like a Roman war machine . . . at least it was **different**. With encouragement from friends, I made more one-offs, trying to improve (in design and workmanship) on the previous one.



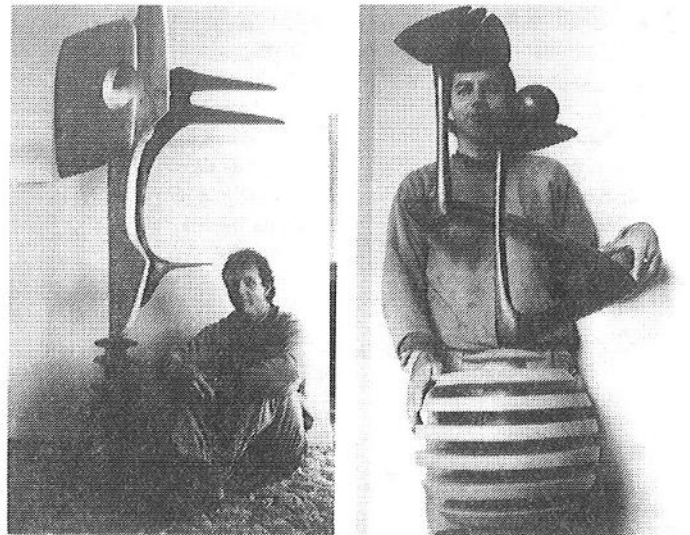
### Ships colliding in the night

An article which featured me in "Belle" magazine in 1977 led to an invitation to the first woodworkers' meeting — just what I needed to expand my sadly lacking knowledge of the craft and of timber itself. (This was evidenced by some monumental disasters.)

I plugged along until 1980 when I decided that a capital input was necessary — one can do just so much with a pocket knife, a bush saw and a tube of Tarzan's Grip!. To this end, I reverted to being a musician in the evenings.

One thing led to another and I found myself in a very successful

rock band that demanded all my attention for the next two years. Not to be deterred, however, I returned to woodwork in 1982, set up a workshop with royalty money and turned my hand to sculpture.



### Forestry Commission Flips

Now, I realised that sculpting was not the easiest way to make a living, but with encouragement from my first showing at Woodcraft '83 (both from fellow-members and by picking up the Henry Kendal 19P Acquisitive Prize) I decided to give it a burl. So I arranged for my first solo exhibition of sculpture at the Holdsworth Galleries scheduled for May '85.

As distinct from many other wood sculptors, whose work is hewn from a solid chunk, my work is a pre-conceived arrangement of individual segments, shaped from blanks built up from 2" thick laminates. This often requires traditional joinery techniques although I have found steel dowels with epoxy glue to be the strongest and easiest fastening in many situations.

### Modern Tools for Modern Forms

Shaping is done with a chainsaw, electric plane, angle-grinder and tungsten carbide gritted discs, then smoothed with an orbital disc sander and finally hand-sanded from 100-400 grit. I use whatever means is easiest to attain the desired shape — I have no romantic or scholastic attachments to traditional tools and techniques — I don't own a gouge, hand plane or hand saw — it's the end result that counts.

I work from a sketch or set of sketches viewing from several angles — I find it difficult to design, in two dimensions on paper, something you wish to look good from all angles in 3D. Experience will gradually help in this regard. I am only new to the field, but already I'm hooked and can see myself whittling away for some time to come — surviving is the hard part.

### JIMMY POSSUM

Alan's June chair was made by Jimmy Possum and you knew it all the time didn't you? This particular chair is in the collection of the Australian National Gallery in Canberra, the gift of Diana Cameron in 1981 and it stands 109 high by 62.5 by 47cm.

The Gallery lists it as made of blackwood, other sources suggesting it contains some "hardwood" as well. The Gallery also dates it at c.1925 whereas it is labelled c.1900 by Peter Cuffley and Kevin Carney in their tome "A Catalogue and History of Cottage Chairs in Australia", Pioneer.

Everyone, however, seems agreed that the roots of this beautiful chair (and indeed, it is no Victorian object) lie deep in the English Windsor tradition of country chair making — its basic structure casts it undeniably in this mould — the slab seat at the structural heart of a chair whose members are mostly round, socketed into bored mortises. But to take the analogy any further, we really have to push it hard.

### The Little Aussie Bodger

Mister Possum was, indeed, our own answer to the Bodger of the Buckinghamshire Beechwoods. He apparently lived and worked in the bush in the Deloraine district of northern Tasmania (suggested as possible haunts are: the Scott Family property, Entally, Hadspen, Chudleigh and Mole Creek).

He made his home in a hollow tree with, perhaps, a skillion shack attached and fashioned his chairs from the materials closest to hand. But, unlike his frozen English comrades (literally pumping out their legs, spindles and stretchers in the winter woods around High Wycombe) Jimmy Possum had no pole lathe. There is not a single turned member in his chair — he shaped his stock no more than necessary, often using sticks and stripped poles for legs and spindles.

This chair turns yet further away from the Windsor model in its total



absence of stretchers — the fine, simple design, drawing the legs right up through the seat to anchor in the arms obviates the necessity for any bracing below seat level.

And where are the curves that are the very heart of the Windsor chair tradition? Is there such a thing as a Windsor without its steamed yew or ash back-bow or even in the most severe of comb-back chairs, at least a gentle sweep in the back-rail and slats?

The wheelwright, it is said, played an influential part in the birth of the Windsor chair — its spokes and splats and spindles, its bows and bends are an intrinsic feature of its spirit.

### The Little Aussie Backside

But Jimmy won't even saddle the seat for us — it is a flat, hard slab, split from a billet, that once kept the cockies of Deloraine off the floor. Not for the bourgeois bottom is the unyielding seat of a Possum chair — not even this small comfort will he concede to the curve! (You're not going to wrinkle out that touch of rounding on the seat corners and hold it aloft as anything more than the softening of a lethal edge, are you?)

For a chair that is so much like a stick-insect on crutches, it is beautifully proportioned and elegant. There is more air than chair.

### Primitive but Virile?

Most "country" chairs cop this label sooner or later and some even have to bear "rustic" (a word which has never quite been the same since the Victorians last took it to their hearts) but I see no primitiveness in our J.P. piece. As for virility, I don't think I've ever seen a chair with so many hormones circulating through it. I have an advantage in that I have a marvellous colour postcard of it before me, which, for reasons of copyright, alas, you don't!

The joints are pegged and wedged with wood and the whole was usually painted grey or green. Here is another great rift between Pom and Possum — English Windsors were usually varnished or sold "in the white" and, where coloured at all, were stained a deep red (a "mahogany finish"). This is a good comparison with American chairs of similar ancestry — they too were often painted green, white, yellow or mahogany red, sometimes including decorative bandings. But the curves are always there.

Our chair is so very confidence in its austerity, so powerful in its gaunt simplicity that it would be difficult to imagine that its form was the result of anything but a conscious and deliberate statement of function.

We have, in this chair, one of the most honest and articulate expressions of the Australian idiom — a quiet, considered drawl with a strong Australian accent. Even the refined, sophisticated severity of American shaker chairs is mellowed by their gentle curves and simple finials — but, then again, they didn't live in hollow trees. Had Jimmy Possum inhabited a comfortable workshop in Hobart or Launceston, would his unselfconscious constructions have lost their spontaneity and taken on a slicker, more fashionable style? Just how much is this unique chair a product of the bush life? The two shillings and sixpence he reputedly charged for his chairs would not have gone far in Hobart.

Jimmy Possum achieved something which is very rare — something which becomes ever rarer as time passes and as more awareness, study and analysis draw us away from the basic sincerity of what we know as "Folk Art".

He has banged a few sticks together and created an almost timeless expression of himself and his country — a pure, indigenous form which yet breathes at us the quiet air of centuries of strong tradition. How often do we see this power and grace today?

Some suggest that his tools were so primitive that he lacked even a brace and bit or auger and that his mortises were gouged out with a simple burning iron. Are we really to conclude that his chairs were angular because he lacked the means to shape, bend, steam and smooth curved components? Must we believe he just hadn't the tools or skill to saddle those slab seats? Or was it that these "refinements" were simple not demanded or perhaps uneconomical when his clients and their hard, leathery bums were happy with what he was providing? Could the market not stand the three shilling de-luxe model?

### Dragged, Screaming into the '80s

Imagine what Jimmy Possum would be turning out in 1984 in a workshop humming with routers, stroke-sanders, thicknessers and automatic lathes. Perhaps such an idea is as ludicrous and contrived as if we were all to trudge off with swag and notched penknife to doss down in the hollow stem of our chosen bluegums, a new wave of Alan Wombats, Henry Blacksnakes, Leon Lizards and Michael Goannas.

But here is an almost mythical old bushie with a long, white beard speaking to his fellow-craftsmen across the decades. His simple message is carved into our history and our culture — be true to your times, your timber, your tools.

### What the Postman Brought

Thanks to David Muston for the information he sent me from "Australian Decorative Arts" by John McPhee and many thanks also to Hans Westermann for his very astute criticism of my drawing — "The sketch shows the bottom of the legs tapered, imparting to the chair a certain daintiness which reminds one of English rustic chairs, but which

is foreign to the Jimmy Possum chair, whose legs are straight, giving it a sturdy look and grounding it well in the Australian soil." Quite right, too. Touché! The legs are, in fact, broader at the bottom than at any other point. Sorry.

Ian Percival also sent me some interesting comments: "Within the book, 'The Home in Britain' by James Ayres, there can be seen photographs of interiors of country cottages and these include chairs almost identical in construction to the Jimmy Possum chair. These cottages are located in Wales and Ulster. It is hinted that this type of chair came from the simple 3-legged stool like the milking stool or Irish 'creepie'. The same design and use of materials can be invented in isolation in different places at different times."

This may be time, but I think this represents a good case in arguing for a Gaelic ancestry — a line which has always been strong in Australia's white history. It is not unlikely that James was a Walsh, Irish or Scottish immigrant. Then again, perhaps he was born here of old Celtic stock and retained a strong "folk memory". On either account, it does lead one to ponder the ambiguities and complexities that surround the concept of "Australianism".

### OUR NEXT MEETING

David Lockwood has very kindly agreed to host our September 2nd general meeting at his almost legendary workshop premises located at 16/26 TUPIA ST, BOTANY 2019. Eat beforehand or bring some sandwiches with you.

It will be chainsaw day with plans for demonstrating log-mill, ripping, crosscutting and general chainsaw twirling.

If you have some work you're pleased with, something innovative, unusual or just well-made, bring it along and share it with us. David's enormous workshop is very professionally equipped with some really magnificent machinery — so come along and turn green with envy. See you there.

### WOODCRAFT '85

Just another friendly little nudge in the ribs. It will be our very best yet and standards are going to be very high. Let's get down to it and stage a showing of the finest woodwork that Australia has yet seen. It's up to each of us to indulge himself and produce some really superlative work. About eight months, we've got.



# WOOD TURNING TOOLS

A full range of these world famous tools is now available for immediate delivery throughout Australia. Standard, long and strong, scraper tools, sets, draw knives and the 6 in 1 Universal chuck. Warehouse open for personal sales Monday to Friday 9 am to 4.30 pm. Mail orders are dealt with efficiently for those unable to call.

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### COMING EXHIBITIONS

Harry Arnall is staging a one-man showing of his superlative wood-turning at the ANZ Bank, Martin Place. Open to the public 22nd to 30th November, 1984.

## EXPO and AFTER

### Richard Crosland's thoughts on CRAFT EXPO '84 in retrospect.

Craft Expo is an annual exhibition organised by the Crafts Council of Australia, whose participants, drawn from all over Australia, present one-off works and also studio-production lines. The crafts represented include woodwork, ceramics, gold and silver-smithing, leatherwork, blown and stained glasswork, textiles, basketry, ironworking, screen and fabric printing, etc.

I decided to apply for acceptance into Craft Expo '84 despite my somewhat disastrous participation in Craft Expo '83 at which I exhibited mostly sculptural, mechanical, kinetic and static pieces and smaller boxes, sets of cutlery, etc, hoping to sell to private collectors or to galleries. I sold \$54.50 worth of goods over the five days! This year, I thought, I'll go commercial.

### The Cost — in Cash and Preparation

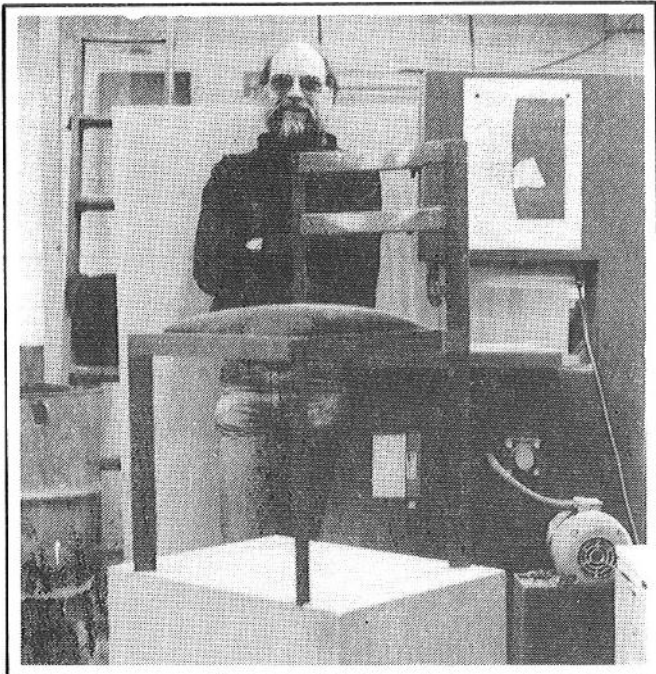
One is invited by the Crafts Council to apply for consideration as an exhibitor. (\$10 fee plus four representative slides) if selected, you pay your exhibition fee of \$400 (1984). Notified in February of my acceptance, I set to and designed and built a dining table and chairs, wooden brief cases, stationery boxes, jewellery boxes and card boxes. My Woodcraft '83 Ball Bearing Race was displayed as a recent piece. Three months, many late nights and the usual last minute panic later, I set up my stand ready for the opening on Thursday 31st May.

The Hyatt Kingsgate Hotel at Kings Cross is far from an ideal venue but, as one of the organisers put it, "It's free, and unless you're prepared to pay a \$1000 exhibition fee, don't knock it!" The air conditioning can't cope with the volume of visitors and it's not ideal for access or parking, but this year's layout was more spacious with an easier circulation of people. Thank goodness, I was placed next to a window!

### A Big Ego Trip

Everybody making admiring noises about your work isn't hard to take. "How's it done?" and "is it really . . . ?" But Expo is also a great opportunity to meet some terrific people, co-exhibitors and visitors alike. It's tiring, too. This year, I felt five days was quite long enough! The result? In the short term, under a hundred dollars in sales but a three-month waiting list of students for my woodwork classes.

In the longer term, I made contacts which will, hopefully, bear fruit. Indirectly, an outlet for my furniture with access to the sort of market I'm aiming at, ie, through interior designers, architects and directly into board rooms. Whether or not my furniture sells into that rarified "up market" atmosphere remains to be seen, but the people marketing it appear to be very enthusiastic about it.



### In Conclusion

On a pure balance of finance, I don't believe Craft Expo '84 was worth it for me. As one of the exhibitors described it: "It's an up-market flea-market." The craft that sells best is the craft that the public is prepared to buy on the spur of the moment — printed T-shirts, jewellery, leather goods, small ceramics, pottery and other compact portables.

However, as a public relations exercise it worked — I got rid of huge volumes of pamphlets, and business cards and I talked and talked and talked . . .

Will I apply for Craft Expo again? I can't answer that yet, not until I see what comes out of 1984. I think it should be staged in another state next time

and that would be an entirely different consideration. R.C.

Richard's only colleagues with splinters in their fingers were Robert Dunlop from Stafford, Queensland, carver/furniture-maker, and John Linek, woodturner of Stapylton in the same state.

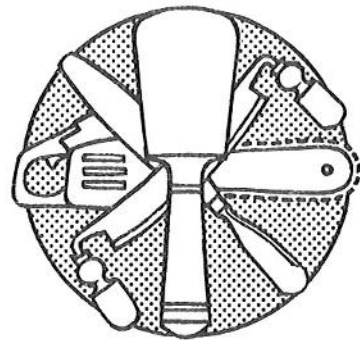
### WOODTURNING WORKSHOP, ACT

Vic Wood, Melbourne woody (can you think of a better name for a bloke in this line of work and in that geographical position?) gave a demonstration and slide lecture on wood turning at Don Lee's Fyshwick Workshop on Saturday, July 14th. Vic demonstrated a set-up for making small containers, both turning and finishing. His slide collection featured shots of his own and other turners' work and also some interesting lathe types.

Don finished the night off with a flourish, turning a green bowl of Desert Ash using a high-speed, super-flute gouge. With a barbecue included, at \$12 it was very good value.

— Henry Black

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### CLASSIFIED ADZE

- Jointer, Woodfast, for sale. Cast iron, 10" wide, 3hp. Current new price — \$ 2,488. Will sell for \$950. Definitely a bargain. **84 1183**
- Turning squares, offcuts. Mainly blackwood. Suit amateur **84 1183**
- WANTED: Chainsaw mill. **84 1183**
- WANTED: Workshop space. Several members of the Group are looking for workshop space. A co-operative has been suggested, possibly in the inner city. The idea would be to share the building and possibly machinery. If you are interested, please contact Henry Black at the next general meeting or write to 1 Nichols St, Downer, ACT 2602
- Older style lathe for sale, includes Jacobs chuck, line tail-stock and some turning tools. Reconditioned, 1/2hp motor, 4-speed pulleys. Tool rest but no bed or stand. Needs a little cleaning up. \$100. **709 4427** (also with face-plate)
- Is a bride joint something smoked at a wedding?

### TOLL-FREE PHONE

The Australia Council's toll-free phone is now in operation allowing interstate calls to be made to the Council for the price of a local call. The number is (008) 22 6912. You may use it to enquire about grants, crafts residencies or any other business.

**Stop Press: wood turning workshop in Nowra on Sat. 20th October, Richard Raffan taking the floor. \$20 includes light lunch. contact G. Noble to register or for more information c/o Kangaroo Valley P.O. 2577 or phone....**  
044 651356  
044 465071 a.n.