

West Riding Woodcarvers' Association



November 2011
Newsletter Issue 202

Patron
Dr Ingrid M Roscoe
Lord Lieutenant of
West Yorkshire

Life members
Anne Hobson
Albert Hobson

Meeting at Shepley Saturday 12th November: Well, for a new venture at our monthly Saturday meetings, I think we should put that down as a great big success. I've got to admit, with a few negative comments flowing back before the meeting, hence the 'Reminder' notice put out to everybody, a few of us were getting worried that the day could finish up as a financial, as well as a turn out, disaster. How pleasing to see 25 workmates distributed across the room, a good number of non-carving colleagues in support and we very nearly broke even on the costs.

I think, also, that a practical meeting of this nature addresses a comment often heard at club meetings where members feel that there isn't enough time to converse with others. But on Saturday there was plenty of chat, cursing, cut fingers, laughter and friendly banter flowing across the room. And without doubt records show that with just a 'free and easy' meeting attendance drops right down. Food for thought!

Our grateful thanks to Peter Berry who did a sterling job keeping everybody's 'Fred' on track, it's just a pity we all managed to only get about 60% of the

way finished. But all is not lost and 'Fred' can get finished and into a few Christmas stockings, as Peter has kindly offered to pop along to the Brooksbank class on the 28th November and now, also, to Mike's Wakefield class on the 5th December. Anybody interested in finishing their carving is invited to come along to these venues to follow Peter as he leads us through putting a face and a few clothes on 'Fred'. If possible could the members near to Wakefield please go to that class and the ones nearest to Elland to the Brooksbank class, just to try and even out the numbers or we shall be flowing out the door. Along with this newsletter, I will include photos of a finished 'Fred' in actual size and photos of where we got up to on Saturday. I have four blanks if anybody would like one to try and catch up and then follow Peter through to completion. I will also include directions to Queen Elizabeth Grammar School and Brooksbank School. Incidentally, Dr Roscoe was invited to call round anytime to the classes in Wakefield or Elland on any Monday evening but she says, "I don't usually make a habit of hanging around strange town centres on a Monday evening". Obviously a lady of good breeding!

It was suggested, and taken up, that all the 'Freds' should go on display at the Christmas Luncheon. They can't all be called Fred so the carver's name and a name for the carving should be displayed.

Our grateful thanks also go to David who spent the whole day working the camera for our benefit and as such couldn't get down and dirty actually carving. I understand he stole a blank and is going to catch up ready for Peter's visit to Brooksbank. And yet again a great big thanks to all the ladies, and a few men, who worked tirelessly in the kitchen all day providing, yet again, coffee and a splendid lunch. Not forgetting Arthur the pie collector, Margaret the pea maker and all those who provided sweets. Also to Peter for keeping check on the door money, David for organising the raffle, although a bit more practice is required, and latterly to myself who supplied all the sheets to cover the floor and my wife who has spent hours clearing up as I foolishly put them back up the loft without giving them a further shake and the house, from kitchen door to loft door, was covered in wood chips.



Fred



Peter Berry



Christmas Luncheon December 10th at Brighouse Sports and Social Club: It was decided at the meeting that the annual carving competition would be scrapped and just a display of carvings would be the order of the day. So please all bring two, three or more carvings for the table display. It was considered too complicated sticking red spots on the carvings of the last five years' winners!!!!!! We kick off at 10:00am with coffee, then the speaker and onto lunch. Dress, as usual, smart casual.

Jane is waiting for your 'Corny Jokes' and I'm told that her prize is a two week all inclusive holiday in the Caribbean in the company of one of the 'Celebrities' cast out of the ITV series Get Me out of The Jungle, or whatever it's called. So please email, or post to Jane, your favourite joke, slightly rude ones are encouraged, but not too rude we do have distinguished guests this year.

If you still haven't got booked in, Adrian is sitting by the phone awaiting your call on 01484-861452.

According to Adrian a bargain at £18.50.

Forget-me-Not Trust: On Friday 4th February, quite a number of our members took up the kind invitation of the Trust to tour the new hospice building and what a delight, and humbling experience that turned out to be. The building is a credit to all the people involved and we were all reminded that the hospice is for the support of children, whilst they are battling their life limiting conditions and not for just the end of their short life. The most moving part of the tour undoubtedly was the special 'end-of-life suite' where a child's body can be kept for up to two weeks before burial, thus allowing the parents and siblings to come to terms with their loss through quiet reflection, while staying in self contained adjacent accommodation.



On November 11th, while observing the two minute silence, I was reminded of what a proud and wonderful day it was for the club twelve months ago at the presentation of the two panels to the Royal Armouries Museum. I'm sure that I'm not alone in the club by wanting to eclipse the Royal Armouries project when we start planning the new project for the children's hospice. And as worthy a cause the Armouries panels was, with our good relationship and direct link with the hospice and the children that will benefit from our labours, I think our club members will derive immense pleasure and satisfaction by doing our bit to help bring some cheer into the lives of these unfortunate children.

The Round Hill pub has been booked for the evening of Tuesday 22nd November from 7:30pm for a meeting to establish a 'steering group' for the new panel that we have promised to start in September 2012. Anybody interested in driving the project forward, please attend this meeting. This is your chance to put your views forward at the beginning of the project. So let's get together and get started as undoubtedly, from past experience, we will endeavour to produce a completed project that will be uplifting to be involved with, a joy for the children at the hospice and a credit to the skill of our members.



The Huddersfield Film Makers Club: Our Huddersfield members will probably be conversant with the annual show that this organisation puts on at the Town Hall. This year is of interest to our club as, you may recall, two gentlemen from the film club followed through the Armouries panels project and took film footage when Dr Roscoe presented us with the Queen's Award at Shepley, also at the various carving classes and latterly at the Armouries last November.

One of the main features of their show is the film that they have made from the material collected during these visits. We are trying to obtain a copy of the film to show at the Christmas Luncheon. The film is only 7 minutes long but the content and editing is very good and portrays the story of the Queen's Award and the Armouries panels in great detail. Quite a number of our members describe their carving.

Overgate Hospice: John Dean has made, yet another, carving of his 'dry stone wall'. This was presented to (I think) the Duke of Gloucester at the recent opening of the new wing.

Brighouse Central Brighouse Methodist Church display: You may remember that in June this year we were invited to join the church in its annual Flower Festival by presenting a display of carvings. We have received a thank you letter advising us that the total amount donated to charity was: £3400 - McMillan Nurses, £3400 - Overgate Hospice and £3400 to Hollybank Trust for children with special needs.

A remarkable achievement that, through Margaret and Jeff, we were only too pleased to be involved in.

Raffle: Takings £45.52 Spend £19.00 Profit £26.52

Royal Armouries: Nothing new to report at the moment. We are just waiting for them to offer for approval new information boards for round the panels.

Directions to QEGS, Wakefield and Brooksbank, Elland:

Wakefield: Up Northgate and right though the main gates, past the security barrier and between the two buildings. Following the road round to the rear of the building on your right into the large car park. As you look at the rear of the building the woodcarving classroom is in the top left hand corner.

Queen Elizabeth Grammar School (Senior School), 154 Northgate, Wakefield. Post code: WF1 3QX.

Brooksbank: Up Victoria Road turning left on Linden Road, just before the school. Along Linden Road for about 50 yards then turn first right into the school grounds. There is an orange light shining at you as you turn right. Follow the road round to the Sports Hall car park but don't park there, go across the car park and follow the road down the side of the Sports Hall. The road runs between the Hall and the playing field to the left. Park in the car park at the rear of the Sports Hall and the light shining out of the classroom window is the carving classroom.

Brooksbank School and Sports College, Victoria Road, Elland, HX5 OGG.

Jane has sent a message to the club members following the death of her mother and our gift of flowers. It reads: To all my friends at WRWA. Thank you for your support over the last difficult months. The flowers are just beautiful shades of pink. They are on my coffee table as I write this. Thank you for the cards, phone calls and emails, they are all most appreciated. I hope to be back with you all for the Christmas 'do' - don't forget those corny jokes - we can't let Murph' win again. Love Jane xxx.

Alan Raynor: Most of you will be aware that Alan is now a member of the club and also a member of Mike Chambers class on Monday evening in Wakefield. You may also be aware that Alan is quite unique in carving circles as he is totally blind. Mike and I asked Alan if he would mind putting into words how he manages to carve. His words are as follows and make fascinating reading:

Alan informs me that he has been totally blind for 25 years, he writes: It is impossible to pinpoint a specific time that it faded away altogether. The best way to describe how I can judge approximately when it went, is that I can remember what Maggie Thatcher looked like, (for my sins) but I cannot put a face to John Major, and I have never seen my grandchildren. Maggie's demise I reckon was around the mid '80s, and my grand daughter was 21 this year, so we are talking around 25 years that I have been completely without sight including light and dark perception. When people ask my age, I always say 37, because that is roughly the last time I would have been able to see myself in a mirror I guess, and since then all mental images have stood still. If you do a quick calculation, that makes my official age 62. (the queen has two birthdays, - so why can't I?)



Alan (in red shirt) at the Wakefield class.

THE SMOKE AND MIRRORS APPROACH TO WOOD CARVING

By Alan Michael Rayner

November 2011

Blind folk like myself are used to people asking questions like... "How do you manage to... ?". I am pleased that they are interested, prepare a lengthy and somewhat tangential reply usually prefixed by the flippant comment, "Well it's all done by smoke and mirrors", followed by a more graphic and detailed description. I do however, enjoy being given the opportunity to demonstrate there is usually a 'Work-around' to most everyday practical problems with the employment of a little lateral thinking, _ wood carving being no exception. So I am thankful to Mike (John) Chambers, John Murphy and the kindred spirits at West Riding Woodcarvers for allowing me to indulge myself in divulging my 'modi operandi' in the newsletter.

Firstly some background about my involvement with wood carving. I heard about some courses being run by Yorkshire Sculpture Park at West Bretton, and enrolled for three. They included 'XYZ' Sculpture, stone carving and wood carving. The first was a tad diverse and was all about creating sculptures incorporating geometric principles using plastic nodes and straws pieced together as modules in geometric polyhedra (Don't worry, - that's the last of the technical pedantics). We made small models culminating in giant ones in the grounds. It was fascinating how these structures had the strength to be self-supporting by just using geometric theories and three metre lengths of plastic piping. Geometry was one of my favourite subjects at school and in later life as an apprentice engineer, and I find it very good groundwork for use in art and design, especially in 3_d applications like sculpture and carving, - I never did find out the difference between sculpture and wood or stone carving. The only tools I encountered on this course was a pipe cutter which is pretty straightforward, but I sensed the initial trepidation by the artist facilitating. I soon put his mind to rest when I zipped off a few lengths of plastic off-cuts. The next two courses required the use of sharp tools together with lump hammers or mallets which in theory requires good hand-eye coordination. This is certainly the case for sighted participants, but what about this blind chap? - I could feel the mental cogs working out the health and safety consequences in the minds of the sceptics! I soon put their minds at rest when they saw me in action.

The first thing I was taught in the woodwork class at school was to keep your fingers behind the cutting edge of a chisel. This advice is still uppermost in my mind when I use a wood or stone chisel. The only difference being that I have to slightly modify my hold on the blade to accommodate forward and sideways wavering, and to assess the impact of a cut as the tool is engaged by hammer or mallet. This involves a kind of pen-holder grip with first or second finger touching the upward facing edge of the business end of the chisel exactly at the point where it bites the material. As far as the hammer action is concerned, muscle memory takes over. Any golfer will know exactly what I mean by this. When doing repetitive actions, the brain can direct limbs to correct accordingly a poor swing of a golf club or skewed blow from a hammer without having to see it. I tend to keep hammer or mallet work to a minimum, usually for roughing out, and with gentler, sparing taps when necessary. I much prefer using paring actions where I have more control. Control being the operative word for me, and I quite often find using rasps and rifflers more effective and less intimidating than chisels. Yes, it often takes longer this way, but I can feel the shape evolving without my fingers straying too far from the material. Each of those finger pads is like a pair of eyes, and has the advantage of searching out the slightest deviation, plus of course, it allows me to see around corners or in hidden crevices and recesses without re-fastening a piece of work.

The best tools I have in my toolbox are an endless supply of patience together with a handy packet of sticking plasters. Oh yes, I get the odd nick despite being hyper careful with sharp tools, who was it that said that you always leave a bit of yourself in your work? Measurements are achieved by rule of thumb as they were often used in ancient times. The knuckles of hands, span of fingers, width of hand and elbow to longest finger tip can all be employed for basic calculation. Did you know that if you outstretch your arms sideways that the distance between fingertips of both hands is roughly the same as your height? I have employed this fact in measuring sizes of rooms etc. Another useful measuring instrument when you cannot see a tape or ruler is a length of

knotted string. Paving slabs usually come in sizes of 2' X 2' or 2' X 3', so by knotting your string at either end you can measure 2' or 3' with your knots, then by folding your string in multiples, you can arrive at 1' and 6" measures etc, which is very useful if you are not working to fine tolerances. After all, the speed of ships was once measured by a length of knotted rope trailing behind, - hence the nautical term - 'A rate of Knots'. Surveyors also got in the act by using a length of chain as a measurement, and indeed, the first ordnance surveys were painstakingly carried out this way, and have been verified as accurate to a couple of metres over the whole of the UK using modern techniques.

So, where do I get my ideas and inspiration for a piece of work? The answer is that I can draw upon my sighted memory for shapes, colours structures and materials. Being unable to work from a drawing or plan, I think about the basic geometric shapes stuck together for the overall concept since everything can be broken down initially to cubes, pyramids, cylinders, spheres and semi-spheres. If you think about the knuckles of your hand for example, they are basically cylindrical, and your head is roughly egg-shaped. Building up a mental image like this allows me to make a 'Marquette' of wire and plaster to work from. Whenever I encounter unfamiliar furniture, furnishings, or practically anything that my hands come into contact with, I cannot resist working out the shape and structure of it. When I am in restaurants or anywhere really, I cannot resist feeling my way around objects. Beware this however if you are of a nervous disposition, since there are occasions where some people will leave nasty sticky deposits of things like chewing gum under table lips or chair seats!

I hope that this article has given you some insight into how it all hangs together in the psyche of the sight-impooverished. I am so pleased that I found out about the West Riding Woodcarvers, and I am so grateful for the hints and tips, nay, also for the practical help and donation of tools that I have received from some members.

Our grateful thanks to Alan for this fascinating article. I have asked Alan if he minds us contacting the Woodcarving Magazine as I think his article, which he will pad out a bit more and I'm sure Graham will add to with some decent photos, would be of interest to a wider audience.

The next question that everybody is going to ask is 'how does he get thoughts into text and into my computer and onwards into the newsletter'. Well don't ask me, but I'm sure the explanation will save me a job of wondering what to put in the next newsletter.

Many thanks Alan.



If anybody is trying to catch up this is where we got to. Incredible to think that we started at 10:30am and finished at 3:00pm and this is how far we got!!!! And Fred looks more like a zombie and anything like his mate to the left. But I'm sure we shall all get there - one year.