

West Riding Woodcarvers' Association



March 2013
Newsletter Issue 216

Patron
Dr Ingrid M Roscoe
Lord Lieutenant of
West Yorkshire

Life members
Anne Hobson
Albert Hobson

Tony Powell - Grinling Gibbons - 9th March 2013

A Colossus in Carving

It was interesting, not to say a little strange, that a man who had never carved anything in his life should be in awe of Grinling Gibbons.

But to Tony Powell, Gibbons is the greatest English woodcarver of all time, and a carver whose work is mind-blowing or jaw-droppingly stunning.

Tony, who was the guest speaker at the Shepley monthly meeting, brought to life the times of Gibbons, an artist in wood, who was born in the mid-17th century. He gave us an insight into this talented man who left no drawings, no invoices – it is just his work that speaks to us over more than 300 years.

Casting around for a subject for a dissertation, Tony, who works for English Heritage, came across Grinling Gibbons. Of course Gibbons' work adorns many stately homes – particularly Petworth House in Sussex and Hampton Court Palace – and Tony's interest soon grew beyond his degree. He was lucky enough to go to the V and A exhibition of Gibbons' work in 1998/9 and to study the Gibbons' carvings a little closer to home at Lyme Park and Dunham Massey in Cheshire, Chatsworth in Derbyshire and Belton House in Lincolnshire.

It was curious to realise that the genius of Gibbons may never have developed if he had been born at another time. But as luck would have it, his remarkable skills and distinct style were ideally suited to the time when, after the end of Puritan England, Charles II embraced the 'over-the-top' Baroque style.

Up until then, carvers had used typical English oak, but Gibbons' work in creamy white lime was like a breath of fresh air and his lush style with cascades and swags of fruit, birds, foliage and flowers soon brought him many admirers.

Tony's quest to know more about Gibbons gave him the chance to peer behind the great works of art – to discover that, although the front was exquisitely carved, the back resembled bits of plain wood, nailed here and there for support. Tony also pointed out how realistic much of Gibbons' carving was – the feather that almost appears to move, and the musical score that can actually be played.

And of course Tony explained that where great sculptors and artists are exalted to the peerage, artists in wood are not, as it is classed as a trade rather than an art.

Much of Gibbons' work exists today but there is some, like that at Petworth House, that has succumbed to woodworm, temperature, atmosphere etc., and is in danger of disappearing before our eyes. Perhaps it's a signal that the West Riding Woodcarvers ought to be visiting Belton, Dunham Massey, Lyme Park and Chatsworth sooner rather than later. And acknowledging that there's little hope that any of us will get a knighthood for services to wood.

If the sound of an AGM sounds a little stuffy, here's something to tempt you. David Kent will be showing us slides of carvings from Bali – pictures he took while on holiday there earlier in the year. David visited a woodcarving workshop and saw for himself the magnificent work of carvers there. Working in teak, with chisels that do not even have handles, it's a skill that is handed down from generation to generation.

Janet Smith/Asst Sec

Annual General Meeting: 13th April 2013:

Please make sure you keep the morning of this day free as your views and input are important to the smooth running of your club.

Should anybody wish to join the Management Committee please let me know before Friday 12th April 2013.



Forget-Me-Not Children's Hospice Panel.

I understand that there was a very good turn out once again for the progress meeting at the Lindley Bowling Club on the 7th March. Most of the 40 carvings would now appear to be in their final stages with just a few lagging behind, but not causing a great deal of problems at the moment.

Graham has been working hard mechanising some of the mobile carvings and, having recently seen a few of them, I can report that they are looking splendid and should certainly amuse the children. I don't think we all appreciate how much time Graham is putting into the mechanism of these carvings or indeed how much time and thought David Hey has put into the control boards and electrics which are now very nearly completed and tested.

Derek and Trevor have now sourced the timber for the frame and are working on the machining and construction.



Adrian has advised me that meetings regarding the booklet have been on-going with the hospice and printers and now final quotations and talks regarding funding are well underway. A small team from the panel sub-committee are working on the design of the booklet.

We still don't know when the final hand over of the panel is planned as the hospices is still working on a 'Royal' to officially open the new building. Our Patron, Dr Roscoe, has visited the hospice and has asked to be involved when our panel is eventually handed over.

One bit of good news regarding the Brooksbank class, and the children's hospice: At the beginning of the September carving class term the Brooksbank School headmaster asked our class if we would undertake the carving of a couple of trophies for the school. It wasn't long before Colin Pratley and Peter Keene 'volunteered' and were willing, well maybe not quite willingly, chipping away.

Regretfully the one that Peter beautifully carved didn't quite fit the bill and is presently undergoing remedial work, but the old fashioned microphone that Colin carved, and David Kent turned the base for, came out very well and was handed over to the 'Class of 51' that has close ties to the school.

The result is that a cheque is being sent to us from the 'Class of 51' for **£561.00**. This has eventually to find its way to the Forget-Me-Not children's hospice. Well done Colin, Peter and David and on behalf of the club a big thank you.

National Memorial Arboretum:

Our last contact with the Arboretum was on the 31st January 2013 when we were advised that they were in the middle of appointing contractors for the new building and hadn't yet got round to looking very closely at the internal content.



They have, however, previously passed to their architects the information pack that I supplied in September 2012.

Dr Roscoe has informed me that she, along with a group of West Yorkshire Deputy Lieutenants, will be meeting management representatives from the Arboretum during April and, if appropriate, has kindly offered to raise the question of our two World War panels forming part of their new Centre for Remembrance.



If anybody has recently looked at the attendance figures for the Royal Armouries they will have noticed that their figures have been going down while the attendance figures for the National Memorial Arboretum have been rising and have now passed the 300,000 per year mark. Bearing in mind that our panels at the Armouries are not ideally sited, without doubt the panels would have greater viewing figures at the Arboretum. We shall just have to be patient and hope that our offer to re-site the panels is accepted.

Brooksbank School carving class Monday evening 7:00pm to 9:00pm.

We have added six extra Monday evenings to the class at Brooksbank. These are the 8th, 15th and 22nd and the 29th April 2013.

Monday 6th May is a Bank Holiday and the school is closed.

Then we are open on the 13th and 20th May. Then off to the pub!

These classes are open to anybody in the club, but especially those members who are trying to complete their carving for the children's hospice panel. The cost per person is £10.