

## **AWGB Certificate in Woodturning**

**By Bill Yeats**

I'd been a member of the AWGB for a couple of years, read the magazines but not paid too much attention to the courses advertised until the address of the Certificate course caught my eye. This one was being delivered by Andrew Hall, the famous hat and blues bowl turner, in Crook; just 20 miles away from my home on Tyneside. So, no awkward journeys to another part of the country and no overnight accommodation needed, plus it was being delivered by one of my favourite demonstrators – what was not to like.

When I applied however the course for the following spring was fully booked. I was promised by the AWGB that I was first on the list for the course in 2020 and so it turned out.

I am mainly self-taught and have been turning for quite a few years. I have turned lots of different items in this time and have received the usual praise from family and friends. But you can't kid yourself, can you? I knew deep down that I had picked up lots of faulty technique along the way and this may be a good opportunity to straighten them out whilst, at the same time, challenging myself by leaving my comfort zone by working in a new environment with people that I'd never met before. It was definitely a challenge, but I soon discovered that I didn't need to be concerned as the course was delivered in such a way that I and my fellow turners always felt fully supported, encouraged and looked after.

Andrew delivers the course from his workshop next to his home with Janet, his wife, and Alan, their friend who is also a qualified AWGB tutor and terrific spindle turner. They really are a great partnership. The workshop is self-contained and wonderfully equipped with 4 lathes each with their own comprehensive set of tools, extraction and safety equipment. Hence 4 turners can be accommodated and with me on this course were Steve and Kevin, both members of our club, and Philip, a lad from the Birstall club near Huddersfield who sadly had to leave after the third day to return home for a domestic issue.

The hands-on part of the course is delivered over 7 tiring, but very enjoyable days split between 2 sessions: one of 4 days and the other of 3. We all agreed that we would never have been able to devote this much time to turning at home; too many distractions and other things to do. We also had some homework to complete between these sessions consisting of 4 pieces of

turned work and a written portfolio of evidence. Again, this was challenging but the 3 of us completed the tasks set by Andrew.

The syllabus for the course was wide ranging and dealt with many aspects of turning through a collection of modules. Andrew started with the most important but probably least observed rules of woodturning (at least by me); health and safety. Personal protective equipment was available for each of us together with a terrific extraction system. We progressed through the various sections of the course smoothly guided by Andrew and Alan, turning items that showed our prowess (or otherwise) in the disciplines of spindle turning, faceplate turning, finishing and sanding with expert tuition in each. It was a real pleasure to see Andrew handling the tools with tremendous expertise at close quarters and listen to him describe the secrets of using them to achieve the optimum finish.

We each turned our own versions of functional and decorative objects. Some we needed to copy from previously turned examples, others from our own drawings or, in the case of the final assessment project, from a detailed drawing given to us.

As we all know, turning isn't just about working on the (lathe presenting tools to wood. The underpinning knowledge that turners have is vital to achieving good results. From a personal perspective, I gained a vast amount of knowledge from the wood technology module of the course. This was the part that I devoted most research effort to when I was preparing my portfolio of evidence because prior to the course I hadn't really given this aspect of turning that much thought.

Each element of the course was followed by a written assessment at the end of each day. This took the form of 12 multi-choice questions that, I am pleased to say, we all passed. On the last day we were asked to complete a 3 piece 'tazza' from a detailed drawing to a tolerance of 2 millimetres and finish it to a decorative standard. No pressure there then!

So – Did I find it useful? Did I learn anything? Did I enjoy it? Did it live up to my expectations? Did I have fun? A resounding YES to all these questions. I would recommend this course to anyone, even if an experienced turner you will get a great deal of benefit from the course, meet some good people and have some fun.

