



Martock and District Woodturners Newsletter

February 2024

News

Thank you to everyone who attended the AGM last month. For those who were not there your committee remains pretty much unchanged and consists of:

Dave H (*Chairman*)
Andy R (*Treasurer*)
Caroline M-G (*Minutes Secretary*)
Ray F (*Communications Secretary*)
Colin C (*Hands-On Co-ordinator*)
John G (*Committee member*)
Steve A (*Committee member*)
Graham W (*Committee member*)

Thanks go to Dave P who is organising the programme for the year, but does not want to sit on the committee.

Diary Dates

February 23 rd	Yandles woodturning demonstration – 4-6pm – Paul Hannaby
February 27 th	Club night – 7pm, Ash Pavilion – Colwin Way (a change from the published programme)
March 9 th	Hands-on – 10am, Yandles Training Room
March 22 nd	Yandles woodturning demonstration – 4-6pm – Jason Breach
March 26 th	Club night – 7pm, Ash Pavilion – Jason Breach (a change from the published programme)
April 13 th	Hands-on – 10am, Yandles Training Room
April 20 th	Yandles Spring Craft Fair

Beginner's Techniques – The Skew Chisel

The skew chisel is one of the most basic turning tools and has probably been around the longest. In its simplest form it is a steel bar that has been ground obliquely at one end to form a cutting edge. These days there is a bewildering array of different designs of skew chisel with different cross sections (rectangular, oval, round ...) and different shapes and sizes, some with handles and others without. Most of these are endorsed by some famous turner or other who will tell you that their design is the one you should use, but to begin with it is best to start with the one that came in the set of turning tools you own. If you are buying a new one then I would recommend one with rounded edges rather than sharp corners as it will ride more smoothly over the tool rest.



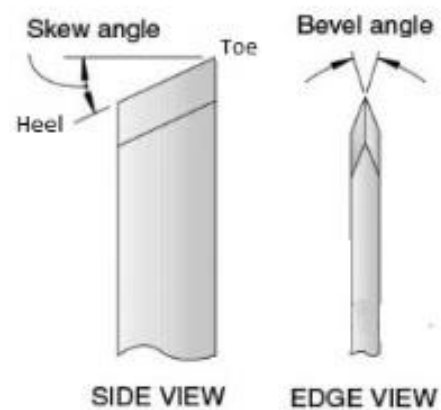
Angles, Angles

When sharpening a skew chisel there are two things to consider:

- The bevel angle
- The skew angle

Of course, if you ask half a dozen turners what these should be you will receive at least a dozen answers, but it is generally considered best if the skew angle is between 20° and 30° and the bevel angle between 25° and 45°.

Both sides of the skew should be ground equally so that the bevel length is the same along each edge.



Using a Skew Chisel

Skew chisels are mostly used for spindle work (i.e. along the grain of the timber), although there are a few cases where it can be used in faceplate work as will be seen later.

Planing Cuts

Using a skew to “plane” the surface of a spindle can produce a superb finish that will require little sanding. Planing cuts are made with lower part of the middle of the cutting edge $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ way from the heel. Cutting too close to the heel risks digging it into the work piece. Cutting too close to the toe risks the tool twisting under the rotational force and catching the point in the wood. Clearly, a wide skew gives greater leeway than a narrow one.

To practice a planing cut, start with cylindrical blank made using a spindle roughing gouge. Position the tool rest slightly above centre and about 2cm away from and parallel to the workpiece and start the lathe. Holding the tool handle below the tool rest, place the side of the skew on the tool rest, and the back of the bevel against the wood without engaging the cutting edge (Photo A). Orient the cutting edge 45° to the workpiece axis - the cutting edge should always forms a 45° angle with the axis of the workpiece regardless of the skew angle. Raise the tool handle slightly while pulling back on the tool until the cutting edge also touches the wood just below the centre of the cutting edge. Keeping the tool on the tool rest, and the back of the bevel and cutting edge contacting the wood, slowly push the tool along the length of the workpiece, planing off shavings (Photo B). If the cut veers toward the heel, slightly tip the tool on the tool rest toward the toe edge. If the cut veers toward the toe, slightly tip the tool toward the heel edge. Practice planing in one direction, turn the tool over, and practice in the other direction.

You may get the odd catch (it happens to us all!), but just keep up the practice!



Photo A



Photo B

V-Cuts

V- cuts can be used as decorative elements or as the starting point for other features. To make a V-cut, position the tool rest on or slightly below centre height and about 2cm away from and parallel to the workpiece. Position the tool vertically with the long edge on the tool rest, and at right-angles to the workpiece. Place the toe of the skew about half way to the top of the piece and slowly raise the tool handle, pivoting the tool on the rest so the toe cuts into the workpiece and makes a shallow cut. Don't push the tool into the workpiece, just raise the handle and move the tool backwards (Photo C).

Subsequent cuts are made in the same way but with the tool swung to the left and the right and angled slightly to cut down the side of the "V" just made.



It is important that only the tip of the tool does the cutting and the rest of the cutting edge is kept away from the workpiece (Photo D)

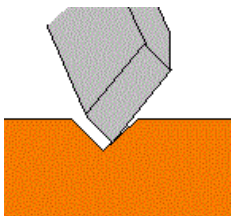


Photo C



Photo D

Beads

Turning beads with a skew should only be attempted once the V-cut has been mastered, since the starting point for a bead is two V-cuts, one each side of the bead! Draw a pencil line to mark the extents of the bead and also its centre. You can use either the toe or the heel of the skew to turn a bead and there are plenty of advocates for either. I prefer to use the toe as this give better visibility of the cut as it progresses.

To form the left half of the bead, lay the skew flat on the tool rest with the cutting edge along the workpiece with the toe pointing left. Rest the back of the bevel against the wood, with toe close to the right edge of the V-groove (fig 4). Engage the tool by slowly raising the tool handle and gently pulling it back. As the skew begins to cut, continue to raise the handle, and roll the tool onto the edge, cutting a small radius. Make a series of successive cuts until the left half of the bead is complete and a smooth curve extends from the centerline to the bottom of the left-hand V-cut (Photo E).



Fig 4

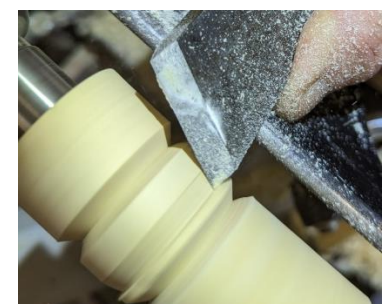
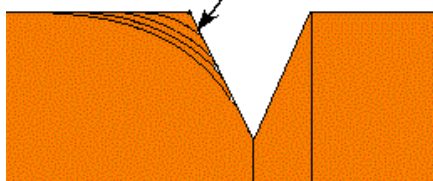


Photo E



Photo F

Successive cuts



Always start your cuts with the tool flat on the tool rest, and finish with the tool standing vertically on edge (Photo F). Turn the tool over on its other side and form the right half of the bead, cutting from left to right.

Scraping

Placed flat on the tool rest, a skew chisel makes an efficient “negative rake” scraper for flattening the bottoms of bowls, etc. The shape of the skew makes it ideal to use in this way to form a dovetail for subsequent mounting in a scroll chuck.



Conclusion

As with any operations like these they are far easier to demonstrate than to describe in writing. There are plenty of examples on YouTube for you to learn from, but better still come along to one of the hands-on sessions where you can get plenty of help, advice and tuition.

It's still not too late...



A number of club members have already booked up to attend the [Chestnut Woodturning Weekender](#) next year. The cost is only £45 pounds (plus travel and accommodation – the intention is to travel by train from Yeovil Pen Mill). This is a fun, relaxing weekend features four full-length demonstrations (the demonstrators will be Chris Parker, Andrew Hall, Mary Ashton and Gary Rance), as well as a Saturday evening two-course barbecue with bar & surprise entertainment, clinics & smaller demonstrations and trade stands. It is also an ideal opportunity to get to know some of your fellow club members better. If you think you might be interested in joining them, have word with Dave P to find out more.

Timber of the Month - Leadwood



Leadwood (*Combretum imberbe*) sometimes known as mhoba-hoba, motswiri or mondzo, is a bushwillow species growing in south tropical Africa from South Africa north to Tanzania. It is a medium to large tree with a sparse, semi-deciduous canopy of grey-green leaves. The twigs and leaves are hairless (*imberbe* means “beardless”). It has dark brown, close-grained heartwood which is very hard and heavy and darkens with age. The sapwood is clearly demarcated and is a pale yellow.

Leadwood typically grows to a height of 7 to 15m (23 - 49 ft) tall, but may reach 20m (66 ft) and up to 1.5m (4.9 ft) in diameter. The bark is pale to dark grey, deeply fissured along its length. It mainly grows in mixed woodland and along dry watercourses. A

leadwood tree can live over 1000 years and will remain standing for many years after it has died.

As implied by its name, the wood is dense and very hard, difficult to plane, but drills, sands and turns well. It is termite resistant and was once used for railway sleepers but is now prized for turning and carving, and also for furniture. Although it is not listed as a threatened species it is not often offered for sale, but can sometimes be found as turning blanks or small sections.

Leadwood burns very slowly and give off a lot of heat so can be used in barbecues to provide a long-lasting flame. On safari it is often used for a fire that will keep going all night in order to keep wild animals at bay. The ashes are used as whitewash for painting walls of kraal huts and can also be mixed into a paste with water and used as toothpaste.

For several tribes in Namibia the tree is the great ancestor of all animals and people, and must be passed with respect.

If you have anything you would like to share through this newsletter, or have any ideas of what you would like to see included, please let me know by emailing me at <mailto:newsletter@madturners.co.uk>.

Thanks, Dave H