

# THE WORSHIPFUL COMPANY OF TURNERS OF LONDON

Newsletter Winter 2001 Issue 17



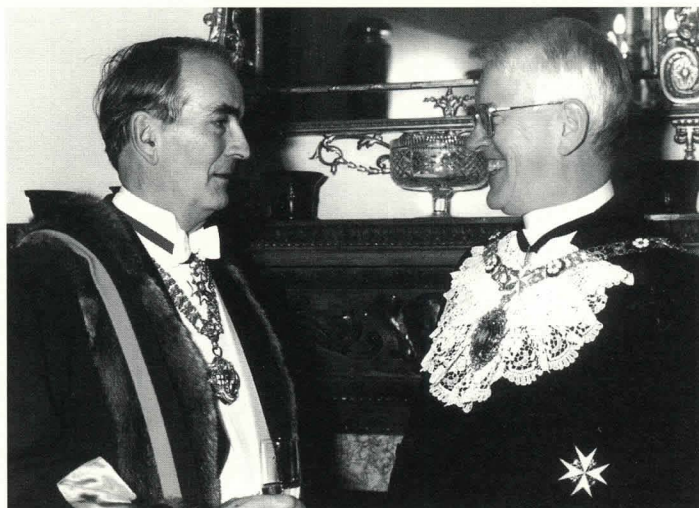
*Dear Fellow Turners*

**I** was delighted to inherit the Mastership from a predecessor who had faced and resolved many tasks, especially the new arrangements for the Clerk and his offices. John Slater's thoroughness in all he does has enabled me to enjoy a smoother ride than he had, and I am most grateful.

Shortly after becoming Master, I remember being asked by a Liveryman what my policy was for the coming year. I was embarrassed to find that I had not got one, so I had to think quickly! I came to the conclusion that, if I had to have a policy, it was to continue to build gently on top of the last 397 years and to encourage the Livery to enjoy itself. At about my half-way point, I hope the policy is working!

I am writing these notes in the warmth of the thanks our Company received from our guests at the Livery Dinner. I would like to give my special thanks to the Clerk and to the Master's Steward, Andrew Mayer, for their organisation of the hosting arrangements. The information sheets with mini-CVs were greatly appreciated by all and having each official guest individually met and looked after by a member of the Livery got everyone off to an excellent start.

I am sure that the jollity of the rest of the evening was set in motion by this well-run and genuine welcome, and this is reflected



*The Master with the Lord Mayor, David Howard, at the Company's very bonhomonious Livery Dinner*

through the many thank-you letters that I received. Another point which pleased the guests was the brevity of the three speakers!

I would like to use this Newsletter for another thank-you. The response to my recent letter, asking for support for the Charity Fund so that we can do more in our Guild role, has been most encouraging. Many of you have given immediate support and others have pledged to help in later years. I would just like to add one comment that I should have included in my letter, namely that the Court does understand and sympathise with the demands and pressures upon us all.

*Christopher Tyler*

## COMING EVENTS

\* **Court Meeting & Court Luncheon**  
Wednesday 7th March 2001

\* **United Guilds Service**  
Friday 30th March 2001

\* **Craft Meeting - Register of Professional Turners**  
Wednesday 11th April 2001

\* **Ladies' Dinner**  
Thursday 26th April 2001

\* **Election Court & Dinner (5.00 p.m.)**  
Thursday 24th May 2001

\* **Election of Sheriffs in Guildhall**  
Monday 25th June 2001

\* **Court Meeting (4.00 p.m.)**  
Wednesday 4th July 2001

The Turner



# The Turner

## THE MASTER'S YEAR

*Christopher Tyler reports on an interesting and enjoyable half year*

In the year 2000, Easter and hence Ascension happened to be later than ever before. (This fact came up in a "Who wants to be a millionaire?" question but, unfortunately, I was not in that chair when I heard it!) This put the Election Court onto June 1st, which in turn led to my first event as Master on June 2nd. The first weekend in June is traditionally when all Masters and their wives are invited to Ironbridge, to stay at an hotel near the Gorge and visit some of the many museums recording aspects of the Industrial Revolution. As well as being a fascinating two days, it is an excellent opportunity to meet most of the other 101 Masters.

From the many delightful events of the year so far, I would highlight just a few of particular interest. The Fan Makers had a Luncheon which was preceded by an exhibition of fans of all types, ranging from antique elegant fans for ladies to the latest technology in turbo fans. Another memorable occasion was a Barbecue given by the Blacksmiths, at which some of their forges were being used as grills while at others the art of ornamental wrought ironwork was being demonstrated.

The Elections of the Sheriffs and Lord Mayor are important City events, and the Court feels that we could make more out of them. The Apothecaries organised a Luncheon for the three Liveries in the Hall for the latter of the two days, and this will probably become a regular event. After this year's Sheriffs' Election Day, we are organising a Livery Pub Lunch near Guildhall, and I encourage you to attend both the Election and the lunch.

The most spectacular event of the year was the Banquet given by the World Traders' Company to celebrate the granting of their Livery. The evening started with a river trip from Westminster Pier to Greenwich for a Medieval Banquet held at the Queen's House. Congratulations and welcome to Livery Company number 101.

I made two most valuable visits to see our expert professional turners in action. The Register of Professional Turners, the Society of Ornamental Turners and the Woodworkers of Great Britain all demonstrate their skills to the world at the National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham (this year, October 5-8th) and the Shepton Mallet Show (October 25-28th). I found both exhibitions absolutely fascinating and commend you most strongly to visit them. Please put the dates in your diaries now.

Looking back at our own events, I would like to highlight the Patronal Service, the last to be held by our Honorary

Chaplain, Canon John Oates. John has already handed over as Vicar of St Bride's and he has asked to retire as our Chaplain at the Election Court this year. We appreciate enormously what he has done to further the happy association between his church and our Company throughout his Chaplaincy and we shall miss him.

Finally, after the very enjoyable Livery Dinner just before Christmas, I look forward to seeing as many of you as can make it at the Ladies' Dinner.

## SEVEN AND FORTY TURNERS LOCKED IN THE TOWER

*On a dark November evening, Liveryman Michael Steinbeck-Reeves and forty-six more Turners and guests formed up outside the Tower of London. Michael reports*

Our guide, Yeoman Warder Mr East, met us at the West Gate. The conditions were perfect: a piercing wind blowing in off the Thames with occasional drizzle concealed much of the background noise of modern-day London. We all felt the atmosphere unique to this place, so deeply steeped in history.

Through the West Gate, past Traitors' Gate, the Bloody Tower, on up to the chapel, we went back in time, listening to Mr East's often lurid descriptions of the history we were passing: momentous events which shaped this country, and fascinating snippets giving an insight into life in the Tower's heyday. In the chapel Mr East regaled us with grisly details of imprisonments and executions. Then on to the Yeomen Warders' club and the 21st century for an excellent buffet supper.

After our first course Mr East led us to the ravens' night-time accommodation, told us some intimate details of the sleeping birds, and led us to the gate near the Bloody Tower, our Master Major General Tyler pointing out his former home when he was Governor of the Tower. The Ceremony of the Keys was executed by the guard and t

escort as it has been for hundreds of years:

*"Who comes there?"*

*"The keys."*

*"Whose keys?"*

*"Queen Elizabeth's keys."*

*"Pass Queen Elizabeth's keys, and all's well."*

The escort formed up, the Last Post was sounded as the clock struck 10 o'clock, Major General Tyler gave the commander of the guard permission to dismiss his men. With the weight of history on our shoulders we returned to the Yeomen Warders' Club for pudding.

Despite being locked in the Tower, a successful bid for freedom was made, and so ended a fascinating and most enjoyable look at one of our longest-standing traditions.



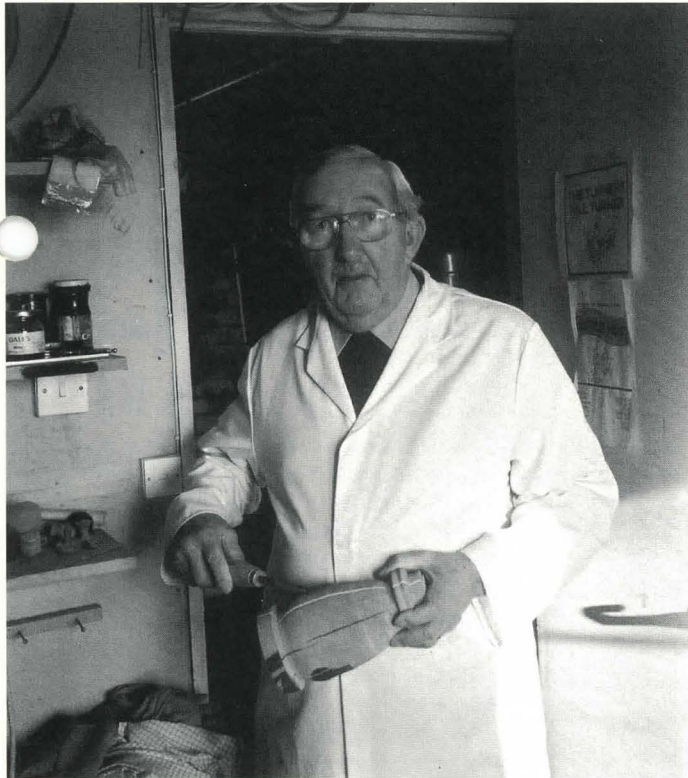
*Food, drink and smiling faces at Company events*



# The Turner

## THE TURNING FIELDS

*Edward Field sent Penrose Halson comprehensive directions for finding his house, including his telephone number in case of getting lost. She didn't need to use it, but highly recommends that any Turner wanting a most vivid and entertaining introduction to the art of turning should contact him. She talked to Edward in the workshop he built onto his house - his "playroom"!*



*Edward in his playroom - an immaculately organised and tidy workshop with windows looking over the Sussex countryside. It's a big house, and his wife Joan judges where he is from the noise: muttering and cursing means he's shut up with his computer; silence means he's in his playroom, blissfully absorbed in turning*

*Are you the first Field to become a Turner?*

Yes. My great-great-grandfather was apprenticed to a turner and hat-block maker, I've still got his indentures. The things he wasn't allowed to do! He couldn't play cards or consort with women - no wonder he gave it up and became an undertaker. He started the family firm, in 1760, I think it was. Much later, when I was serving on our local council, the engineer and surveyor was a Turner, and so too was a leading member of the council, so they proposed me for the Company. I became a Freeman the same day as the famous Fred Howe, one of the greatest turners ever. I'd never heard of him before. I didn't know much about turning either, I'd just done a bit at school. But I just fell into it, and I'm thankful I did.

*Why?*

Well, running a firm means spending the day with difficult people (mostly!) and trying to control them, so to come

home and beat hell's bells out of a piece of wood that can't argue - that was absolutely marvellous!

*You became Master of the Company, didn't you?*

Yes. Mind you, it was all very different then. Not nearly so friendly. We didn't talk much to each other then. It's much better now, we have social events - though I think we need more that interest the younger members.

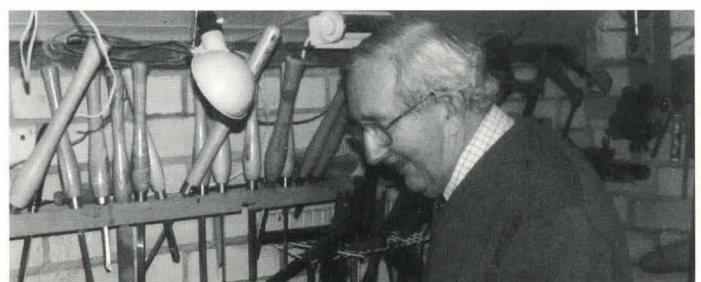
*And you learned more about turning, especially when you retired from your firm?*

Yes. I visited turners and picked up lots of hints and tips - they're a very helpful lot of people, they show you how not to hold the cutting tool by the sharp end! I learned to turn small, plainish bowls and boxes and dishes, and then my devoted wife gave me a Holtzappfel lathe as a birthday present! Felix Levy put me in touch with the owner. It's the most wonderful thing, it has attachments so that I can do highly intricate ornamental turning. Ornamental work is incredible, but we need to remember that you've got to plain turn your basic object first, and then you transfer to the ornamental lathe to do all the decorating. I'll never use most of the attachments to my Holtzappfel; but I've got a seven-year-old grandson who's a super little turner, and my grand-daughter Emily, who's an apprentice to the Company, is very good too (though her father, Colin, is a bit of a mutton at it!)

*Do you teach your grand-children?*

Well, I keep an eye on them when they're here in the workshop, make sure they don't do anything silly like poke their eyes out. There are only a few things the youngsters can't do, it's a matter of patience. Gradually they find they can make amazing things, and they love it. I wish more Turners knew more about the craft - if any of them would like to come down here and have a look, I'll show them a thing or two!

Penrose adds: If you take up Edward's generous offer you will find it a revelation. He will show you turned objects made by himself and by top turners including Fred Howe (after whom the Howe Committee is named), Bill Jones (featured in Newsletter 8) and Theo Fabergé (with his Holtzappfel lathe in Newsletter 5). Seeing him working at his lathes, breathing in the scent of sawdust, will bring home to you, as no third-party explanation ever can, how turning works. If you are lucky you may even come away with a wooden door wedge with an ornamental pattern - including one or two slightly erratic gouge marks made by your own faltering hand!





# The Turner

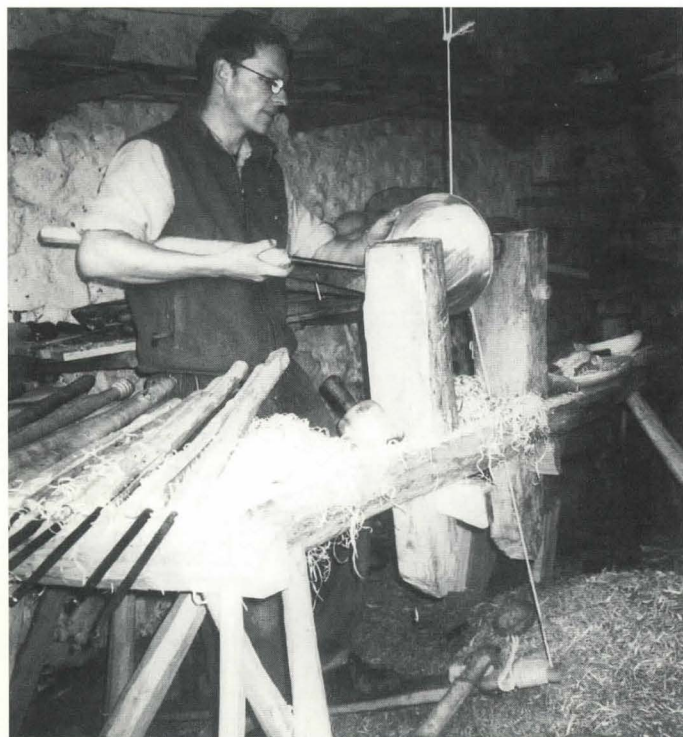
## TURNING THE MEDIEVAL WAY

*Liveryman Mark Hatt-Cook went to the Hope Valley in the Derbyshire Dales to visit the leading exponent of the art of turning using power supplied by a sapling coupled to a foot treadle: Robin Wood. Mark was bowled over*

The hills were covered with a heavy dusting of snow and the air had a crisp clarity that made it feel good to be alive. The last sign of human habitation as you travel up the footpath from Upper Booth is a collection of stone buildings nestling into the side of the hill: home and workshop for Robin and his family. The cottage's hand-made furniture shows the skill and ingenuity with which native timber can be used (and the wood-burning stove is fuelled from the by-products). In the barn is all Robin's equipment, including a collection of turning tools that he forged himself from high carbon steel. All around and in the byre are pieces of timber, ranging from whole trees to prepared blanks ready for use.

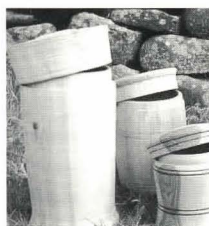
The first bowl turned by Robin that I saw was almost identical to one I had bought from the great George Lailey, the "last bowl turner", of Bucklebury in Berkshire. As a schoolboy in 1956 I had watched Lailey work, fascinated by his skill in creating bowls from unpromising chunks of timber. When he died in 1958 his lathe and tools were preserved in the Museum of English Rural Life at Reading - and they inspired Robin.

Robin trained as a forester and his research into markets for timber and the old woodland crafts led to his interest in traditional turnery. Visiting museums in Britain and Europe, and examining hundreds of medieval bowls, he learned much about how they were made. He has advised



*Robin Wood operating his pole lathe - no concessions to the twenty-first century*

*Above: Replicas of containers used by the Mary Rose's barber-surgeon*



extensively on the history of the wooden artefacts retrieved from the Mary Rose, and now creates beautiful replicas of the plates, dishes and bowls. He is currently researching the turned containers found with the equipment used by the ship's barber-surgeon.

Visit Robin's workshop and his Aladdin's cave stockroom to find every variant of the bowl turner's art worked in a miscellany of timbers, particularly beech, alder and elm. Also beautiful mazers made of pear wood, a replica Tudor pepper-mill, and water flasks and turned and carved bowls replicating 15th-century originals. See Robin's work at the Oxford Art Fair "Art in Action" at Waterperry House near Wheatley, July 20th-23rd; or on the internet: [www.robin-wood.co.uk](http://www.robin-wood.co.uk). To visit, telephone him on 01433 670321

## DINNER LEADS TO ELECTION

*In 1999 Past Master Barrie Johnston went to a dinner. . .*

I sat next to Major General Peter Besgrove, then Director General of REME, and talked about service charities, particularly the REME Museum. He wanted to know why I knew about the subjects, so I told him I had been on the Fund Raising Committee of the Imperial War Museum, and had been a trustee of the Royal Marines Museum and Treasurer of the Royal Marines Association. His Corps and my own work very closely together, as for example we did in the Falklands where REME maintains much of the Army's complex electronic and other machinery, particularly in the Commando Logistic Regiment.

REME's museum is a must for a visit (as is the Royal Marines Museum!) and here again there is friendly co-operation, with exchange of visits and information.

To my utter astonishment I have been elected an Honorary Member of the REME Institution - a rare privilege (there are only about 15 members). I now have another tie to wear! It is a good one and I do wear it.

## ODDS & ENDS

\* The **City Livery Yacht Club**, founded in 1956 by enthusiastic yachting Liverymen, has annually a fitting-out dinner, a power & sail race weekend, a Thames rally and a laying-up dinner. Contact the Hon. Secretary, Mrs M L McMorrough Kavanagh, The City Livery Yacht Club, 52 Queen Anne Street, London W1M 9LA.

\* The Company wants to set up a **photographic archive**. Can you give/lend interesting Turner-related photographs? Please contact the Clerk - also if you would take informal photographs at Company events.

\* **A Woodwork Mistery**: Ruritania (for economy) prints postage stamps of only four different values. Further economy decrees that never more than four stamps may be placed on a letter or parcel. What four stamp values can provide every postage value from one to forty-four?

Answer: 1, 3, 11 & 18

\* Would you like to **advertise** in the Newsletter? Please contact Penrose Halson, 18 Thayer Street, London W1U 3JY; Tel: 020 7935 6408; E-mail: [Penrose@halson.com](mailto:Penrose@halson.com)