

# THE WORSHIPFUL COMPANY OF TURNERS OF LONDON



Newsletter Winter 1997 Issue 9

Dear Fellow Turners

*I am already over half-way through my term as Master, and the time certainly flies. Both my wife and I have enjoyed our first six months and we particularly remember the visit to Buckingham Palace last July with an enjoyable conversation with the Duke of Edinburgh. Fortunately, we missed the day of rain and lightning.*

*We have been present at a number of Charity functions, including one at the American ambassador's residence in Regents Park. A vivid memory was the visit to Lord Mayor Treloar College, founded in 1906. It has expanded and flourished, supported by the City Livery Companies, for example the Turners' gift of a lathe in 1994. With this the teachers and pupils have produced among other things a land yacht. Number two is now coming up to enable the pupils to arrange races.*

*The visit in October to H.M.S. Sultan was illuminating. The Turners' engineering awards have made the Company part of the background of this naval training school. Due to retraction in the British Navy, they now have to look around in a private enterprise manner to find recruits from neighbouring allied countries.*

*Apart from these official visits, we enjoyed visits to the Inns of Court - the Middle Temple Hall with drinks and supper in the Judge's chambers overlooking the Temple Gardens stretching down to the river; and to the Apothecaries' Hall, with a guided tour by the Clerk, Colonel Stringer, and his predecessor, Major O'Leary. Many facts were unearthed, such as the original ownership of the site by the Blackfriars Monks, whose novices cleaned down the panelling with beer and honey many years ago.*



*A magnificent mazer, one of the treasures of the Middle Temple*

*I could of course go on and on reciting the other various happenings and dinners and official functions such as the Lord Mayor's Show day, the Beating of the Retreat by the Royal Marines at the Guildhall last October, the Company's Livery Dinner with the Lord Mayor and Sheriffs graced by a R.E.M.E. military guard and set off by flaming Christmas puddings and carols sung by the St Bride's choir.*

*The Patronal Service on the 25th of November in St Bride's was much appreciated by the 90 or so present who listened with tremendous enjoyment to the sermon and hymns which owe much to the enthusiasm of Canon Oates.*

*On now to 1997 and the second half of the Master's year, which I hope you will all enjoy.*

*Yours sincerely*

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## COMING EVENTS

**Awards Court (Prize-giving)** - Tuesday 11th February 1997

**Gardner Williams Banquet** - Monday 24th February 1997

**Court meeting (morning) & Court Luncheon** - Thursday 13th March 1997

**United Guilds Service** - Friday 14th March 1997

**Craft Meeting (Register of Professional Turners)** - Monday 24th March 1997

**Ladies Dinner** - Wednesday 16th April 1997

**Election Court & Dinner** Thursday 8th May 1997

**Election of Sheriffs in Guildhall** - Tuesday 24th June 1997

**Court Meeting (afternoon)** - Thursday 10th July 1997

**Swan Upping** - Tuesday 15th July 1997

**Turning Competitions Apothecaries' Hall** - Thursday 24th July 1997

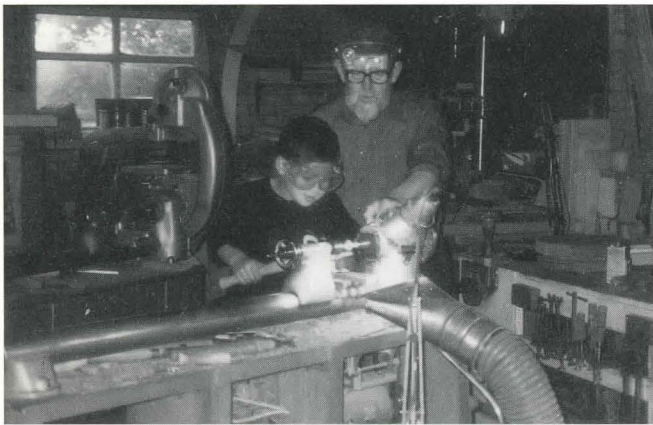
# The Turner

## TWO WELCOME INTRUDERS

*Malcolm Cobb tells of two intruders who were unusually welcome in his workshop*

A workshop with a lathe is a very special place, where arm-chair ponderings can be brought to some sort of reality. It is a sanctum that must be protected from intruders, benign or otherwise, who may wish to "tidy it up a bit" or to "reorganise your wood pile". Although there is an understandable pride in this special place, intruders are liable to cause the wastage of precious time with well-worn questions, e.g. "Where do you get your wood, then?"

But this year I had a very welcome interloper: our grandson, Gregory, from Enfield (unfortunately, Enfield Connecticut). At eight years, he showed a natural ability, a keenness and a quite uncharacteristic patience at the lathe. We made together a candle holder, that simplest of all combinations of faceplate and spindle turning. He took it back to Connecticut with great pride!

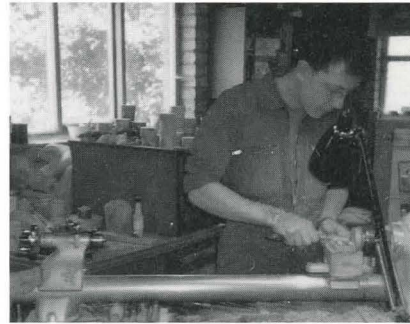


*Malcolm with Gregory and his candle holder, upside down in a vice with its first coat of varnish*

The second visitor was a young Frenchman, Rémy Dumesnil, whom we had met in the Jura at the time of the European Turnery Conference in October 1995. His father, another professional turner, was keen that Rémy, after attaining his diploma in wood turning, should gain as much experience in other workshops as possible, before settling down at the family 'atelier'. Arrangements were made for Rémy to stay with us: working out the details involved rather a lot of calvados.

The originally planned three months were cut down to one by the requirements of French military service. However, he buckled down quickly, and with great competence worked his way through some routine work for one of my regular customers. This was his first revenue job. The last two weeks were occupied with spiral work, which clearly fascinated him. He had made spirals by machine in France, but had no experience in setting out and hand carving. We made visits to other workshops, timber yards and the odd stately home with good furniture.

Finally we met his parents near Birmingham at the National Woodworking and Turning exhibition at N.E.C., and handed over our apprentice. The whole family were very impressed by the show, where Rémy had the opportunity to demonstrate on two of the stands!



*Rémy Dumesnil Improved both his turning and his English*

## THE COMPANY'S COMPETITIONS

*Gordon Sloan reports*

Since 1969 we have run the annual Design Awards Competition, to encourage the art, science and practice of design in mechanical and production engineering-innovation, quality and practicality being of prime importance. Last year the number and quality of entries reached a low, and our independent judges advised us that award of our medals and cash prizes was not warranted. So despite the efforts of the Smallpeice Trust, which for years has managed the Competition for us and is very experienced, the Howe Committee had no option but to cancel the 1996 competition.

The position is under urgent review. The Committee is considering our own Competition and those of other bodies, notably the engineering institutions, to look at their present-day role and success - or otherwise - in stimulating engineering education and industry. We are also considering alternative promotional arrangements for the Competitions. Watch this space!

Every two years the Howe Committee organizes our Turning Competitions, to be held this year on July 24th in Apothecaries' Hall. There is a competition open to all members of the Company, and competitions for the Society of Ornamental Turners, the Association of Wood Turners of Great Britain, the Northern Federation of Woodturning Groups and the Association of South Western Wood Turners; and an open competition for all the above plus members of our Register of Professional Turners.

No matter if you are a novice, experienced amateur or professional, entries from our members will be particularly welcome. Copies of the rules and entry forms will shortly be available from our Clerk. Whether you enter or not, do come along to the Hall between 2.00 and 4.00 pm on the day and enjoy the work on display.

# The Turner

## IN SEARCH OF PAUL OPPITZ

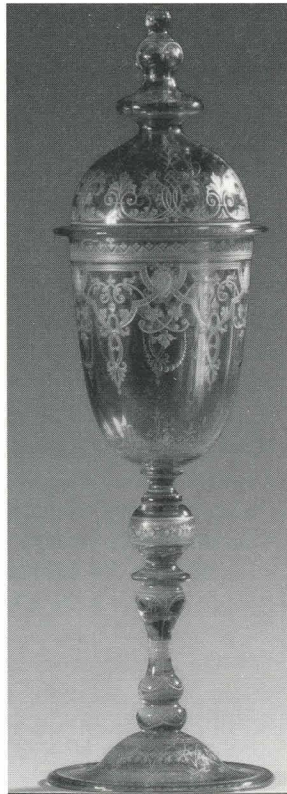
*Past Master Brian Burnett tells of a flash-back to the Company's national prize competitions a century ago*

The great-granddaughter of a glass engraver from Bohemia wonders how comprehensive are our records, and can we help her? Indeed we can. She writes:

*I had always known that my great-grandfather, Paul Oppitz (1827-1894), was a glass engraver who came over to England at the age of 18 from Haida (now Novy Bor), a centre of the long-famous Bohemian glass industry, and we had some of his engraved glass and some photographs.*

*Paul's elder brother Ferdinand had emigrated from Haida to the London area prior to 1843, and when Paul followed him they were in business together. They both married and raised their families over here, Paul living in Vardens Road, Clapham Junction, where he had his studio. I believe he was employed by W.T. Copeland & Sons of 160 New Bond Street, but also did freelance work. A vase engraved by him (now in the Victoria & Albert Museum) is said to have been exhibited by Copelands at the Vienna Exhibition of 1873.*

*Last year I learned that Mallett & Son, New Bond Street, had exhibited at the Grosvenor House Art & Antiques Fair a claret jug and 2 goblets thought to be Paul's gold prize-winning entry at the 1876 Alexandra Palace Exhibition organized by the Glass Sellers' Company.*



*An amber vase engraved by Paul Oppitz*

*In July I wrote to the Clerk of the Turners' Company, as I knew that Paul had entered their Competitions in Glass at the Mansion House and had won prizes. Mr Brian Burnett kindly sent me relevant extracts from the Court Minute Book, which show that Paul Oppitz indeed won a Silver Medal and 10 guineas for his exhibits in 1887, and 5th prize of 1½ guineas in 1889. How thrilled I would be if I could trace these prize-winning pieces.*

*Brian Burnett adds:*

In 1887, for the Company's 18th Annual Prize Competition and Exhibition, glass blowing, cutting and engraving were included as an innovation. The Court minutes show Paul Oppitz placed first in the 'amateur' glass engraving class. "Conspicuous," said the judges' report, "is the exhibit of Love Conquers All, a jug and 2 goblets most delicately engraved with the City Arms introduced with good taste, various borders and garlands, and a 2-handled vase with a figure subject as its most prominent feature, the

accessories tastefully carried out, and considerable ingenuity and cleverness being displayed by the engraver in carrying his wheel within the handles, thus overcoming a great risk and difficulty. To this exhibit by Paul Oppitz is awarded a Silver Medal and Ten Guineas."

The jug and goblets were considered by the City Press "without doubt the choicest gem of the whole exhibition", and were bought personally by the Lord Mayor, while an unnamed paper reported: "Mr Harry Powell, one of the judges in glass, expressed great admiration for the engraved work that had been shown by Mr Paul Oppitz, who had displayed a remarkable amount of spirit, energy and conscientiousness in his performances. He was pleased to find that exhibitors had avoided the shoddy form of glass making - such ornaments as straggling strawberries or creeping lizards, which he was sorry to say the public appreciated so much - and had gone in for real art."

## SUCH A WONDERFUL OCCASION!

*"Thank you so much for inviting me on Monday, and for asking me to take part in such a wonderful occasion," wrote a guest who came to the Company's Patronal Service and lunch in November last year. "It was a magnificent day for me - lovely music and sentiment in church followed by a very jolly lunch. I met such interesting and hospitable people, was given food for thought and for the body, lived briefly and blessedly in another world. Please invite me again!"*

Both guests and Turners benefit from wonderful occasions in magnificent settings such as Apothecaries' Hall and H.Q.S. Wellington. There is always the warmest of welcomes, excellent food, new and varied people to meet, a strength of tradition (even if "I drink to thee" is sometimes confused with "I drink to me". . .) So come to the Gardner Williams (free) Banquet, bring your guests to other events, and generally RISE TO THE OCCASION!



*Members of the Court of Assistants spotted by Turner cartoonist Alan Gillett enjoying themselves at the Gardner Williams Banquet last year: Tony Meredith, Michael Simmonds, Christopher Tyler and Peter Venn*

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