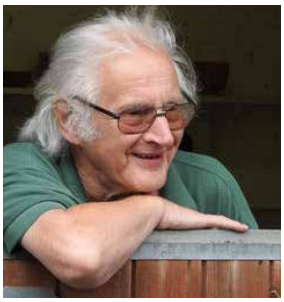
October 2026 - Issue 211
Middlesex Woodturners Association - Monthly Newsletter

TURNING TALK

Middlesex Woodturners Association

STUART KING
THE CHAIR BODGERS OF BUCKINGHAMSHIRE



PLEASE CAN YOU HELP THE CLUB?

TREASURER AND ASSISTANTS
Our AGM takes place on Tuesday 17 November to review the year and elect a new Committee, followed by a speaker. We need a new Treasurer and assistants to share the workload with Howard and Mike Bonnici. Assistants would collect membership fees, pay AWGB fees and account for exhibition sales, with John's support initially. We are very grateful to John, who is retiring as Treasurer at the AGM due to health issues.

NEWSLETTER HELP
Could you help Josh produce the Newsletter, contribute articles or meeting reports, or occasionally set up and operate the AV system?

SAW OPEN DAY – SUNDAY 25 OCTOBER
Please bring one or two pieces made in the past year to the October meeting for me to take for the MWA Competition Display Table. This enjoyable day includes Paul Hannaby's demonstrations, trade stands, members' competitions and club displays.

CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS FOR HORATIO'S GARDEN
Could you donate wooden Christmas tree decorations for Horatio's Garden to sell at its Christmas fairs? This worthwhile cause introduces woodturning to wheelchair patients. Please bring contributions to the October or November meetings.

THIS MONTH'S MEETING
Nathanael Griffiths will demonstrate a variation of a platter. We hope to welcome several visitors and know you will give them our usual warm welcome.

Thank you to Peter for September's thread-chasing demonstration, which inspired several members to try it at home; to Mike W for his gunpowder barrels and help with Stuart and Phil's skew-chisel demonstration; and to Phil for his sharpening clinic. Thanks also to everyone helping clear up after meetings—your support is much appreciated.

We would love to see more members at our monthly meetings. What would you like to see, and what prevents you from attending? Please let the Committee know.

Gordon Cookson

SAFETY ADVICE
including YOU TUBES

Gordon Cookson

This series of suggestions are because there are so many You Tubes that have dangerous ideas or techniques, omissions, mistakes and americanisms in them.

The club also has two professional turners, Phil Jones and Ben Dick(when his health improves), who give lessons. The club library has many DVDs and books.

However you learn, please consider your safety as outlined in the Members section of the club's website under Safe Working Practice and Risk Assessment and the article in the August Newsletter about the dangers of dust.
Complete beginners wanting to turn bowls should probably start with spindle turning and tool sharpening, because some people find bowl turning has a steeper learning curve.

Our first suggestion is Richard Findley, who has a series of very good instructional videos on YouTube. Often the projects are broken down into more than one part.

For wide ranging interest items, do see our President, Stuart King's videos.

Some woodworking demonstrations on YouTube show table saws being used without blade guards. Seeing an experienced demonstrator do this does not make it safe.

Table saws can cause life-changing injuries in a split second, through contact with the blade or kickback. Always use the correct, properly adjusted guard and riving knife, follow the manufacturer's instructions and use suitable push sticks to keep your hands away from the blade. If a technique requires removing safety equipment, stop and seek a safer method.

Enjoy the inspiration online—but never copy unsafe shortcuts.

YouTube

CHILTERN OPEN AIR MUSEUM
HARVEST FESTIVAL EVENT

September 26th & 27th

Many thanks to Stuart, Peter, Phil and our new excellent demonstrator Callum for showing many visitors how we make turned items. The experiment of timed slots for the demos worked well and many thanks to the COAM volunteers for all their help with publicising our demo slots, chairs, and the loan of A boards for John and Josh's great posters. To show our appreciation we have sent COAM a donation of £100.

Five members sold pieces totalling £1,219 and Charity sales from Daventry entries were £120 . So do think about entering a few pieces for sale in next year's exhibitions. Also remember that if you exhibit six or fewer pieces there is no 10% sales commission on your first time exhibiting.

We were disappointed that no non-exhibiting members came forward to steward for half a day to spread the work load in return for free access on the day.

CHRIS FISHER
THE BLIND WOODTURNER

Gordon Cookson

Chris was the demonstrator at Dalmann's Open Day on Sunday August 22, with quiet assistance by his wife Nicola away from the demo table . At first it was not at all obvious that he was blind. He just picked up the appropriate tool etc without any difficulty. Nicola explained to me that he always carefully laid out everything he was going to need in the same places for every demo when he sets up. This meant that setting up took longer but it was so worthwhile. A good lesson for tidying up my workshop!

The demos were a coloured candlestick out of Sycamore and a bowl out of Umbilo, an African timber that Dalmann's stock.

The texturing on the candlestick was done with a small engraving tool. A black water based dye was applied with kitchen towel and followed by gold cream applied with bare fingers . Using your finger means that the cream is not wasted.

It was interesting to watch him turn using his very sensitive fingers to guide him along with the sound produced as the chisel changed direction or the texture of the wood.

His background as a metal machinist engineer with the Military and afterwards meant that he had some understanding of the principles of turning. However when he lost his sight and the mental health issues that followed, what was he going to do. After listening to 600 hours of You tube by well known turners including Nick Agar and Richard Raffan and realising there were so many bad or dangerous ones around, his lathe arrived. Starting out took a long time and many failures but he persevered. A truly inspirational display of overcoming a disability.

He wanted to make a vampire stake as his first project without explaining why! After eight attempts with the wood coming off the lathe, he succeeded.

The learning curve involved not only how the lathe needed to be set up but all the things a beginner turner needs to know. For bowls this meant finding the centre of the wood, fixing the faceplate centrally, sizes for the chuck jaws to fit properly, where to start turning the inside of the bowl, angle of the gouge and the depth of the bowl inside to possibly not joining the funnel club like all of us!

Finding the centre of a bowl blank was done using a centre finder and scribing rather than a pencil. Then mark the central point with an indent. A wooden column/jig, the same diameter as the lathe mandrel, with a sharp metal point in the centre is put on the centre mark of the blank. Then the faceplate is dropped over the jig and the screws are attached to the blank. Chris made it look so easy and you forgot his blindness yet again.

The diameter for the chuck jaws was done with a centre plate with the useful holes marked with a paper sticker. Again a scribe was used rather than a pencil.

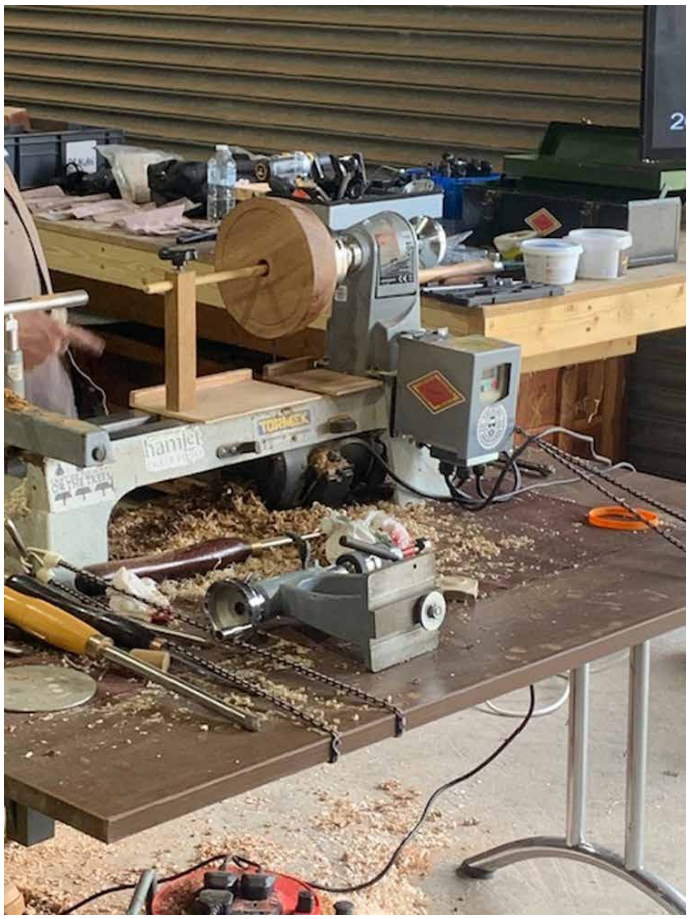
The outside shape of the bowl was based on the catenary curve principle, which is the natural shaped curve formed by holding a chain or thick rope between two points. Moving the two hanging points in, gives a steeper curve. I am not sure how this relates to the natural shapes of the Golden Ratio and Fibonacci curve. Maybe Martin Saban-Smith's new book in the library will help!

After flattening the top surface of the bowl, he made a slight groove with a parting tool to mark the bowl wall thickness. The depth of the inside was an inch from the bottom of the recess in the base using an inch forstner bit. The depth was marked on the bit's hank. Then he made a series of grooves across the top of the bowl with a parting chisel. This helps him know where to start taking out the centre of the bowl and indeed for beginners also.

To get the bowl gouge angle to the wood right, Chris suggested a red line in the middle of the gouge flute. Then turn the gouge over until you can't see the line and then the gouge would be at the recommended 10 o'clock or 2 o'clock.

Starting with the central groove he started hollowing out the bowl. His depth jig was then used to check how thick the bottom of the bowl was.

The small separate wood piece registers the distance from the headstock upright to the front of the chuck jaws being used. The rod had been set to give a base thickness of 1inch.



As the bowl depth is turned away, the distance between the base of the jig and the piece against the headstock will decrease.

When the depth of the bowl was getting nearly there, Chris asked for a volunteer to be blind folded with assurance that no turning would be involved, having moved the on/off variable speed control out of the way. As nobody volunteered and he had been very helpful answering my questions and letting me take pictures, I volunteered! Chris adjusted the blindfold so I couldn't see a little at the very bottom of the blindfold, I made my way to the lathe. Not knowing what he was going to ask me to do, I found the bowl and moved the tool rest a bit and started feeling the bowl. After some comments about the shape, wall thickness, end grain and pimple in the base, Chris said I was doing a bit of a critique and had jumped a lot of lessons! After my apology that I had forgotten I was supposed to be blind and having turned off and on since I was 15, I did know my way around a lathe!

What he actually wanted me to do was set the tool rest at centre height for him to complete the bowl inside. This I did a bit slower but somewhat what quicker than a blind person, who hadnâ€™t come across a lathe before. After thanking me for being a good sport, he was OK with the tool rest height and went on turning. I think I actually set the rest height at slightly below centre, which is where I would put it.

He finished the bowl and used a new oil finish called Loxkin Food safe Hemp Oil. Nicola had got a free sample at the Shed Fest recently!

Interestingly the beautiful curves on the outside and inside of the bowl were quite different. I mentioned this to Chris after the demo but he didn't comment as I think he was tired from the mental effort of the day. Whilst I liked both curves I am not sure I liked the difference in them on the one bowl. I hope the picture shows the contrast. Cutting the bowl in half didn't seem a likely possibility!

It was a very good day and an inspiring display of overcoming a disability. It made me think more about what might be involved in trying for the AWGB Tutor Badge. This should help with the sessions at the Orthopaedic Hospital. I am hoping that I can join the session that Dave Washer at Herts&Beds might be able to organise next year.

The next demo day is with Chris Parker (The Bald Turner) on 17th October, who will be demonstrating the turning techniques of sphere making, the use of a doughnut chuck and a vase form.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES 2026

Oct 25th	SAW Open Day
Oct 25th	East Herts with Darren Breeze
November 13th - 15th	North of England Woodworking Show, Harrogate

THE WINDSOR CHAIR
FROM WOODLAND TO WORKSHOP

Following Stuart King's presentation to the Middlesex Woodturners Association

A Windsor chair is such a familiar piece of furniture that it is easy to overlook the craftsmanship it contains. Look closely, however, and its 'green' turned legs, slender spindles, shaped seat and carefully fitted joints reveal a story of woodland workers, specialist trades and an important industry in and around High Wycombe.

Our recent presentation by fellow member Stuart King provided an opportunity to explore that history with someone whose knowledge extends beyond books and museum displays. Stuart knew some of the surviving craftsmen associated with the trade and has spent decades recording their work and preserving their stories.

Stuart King with a Windsor chair he made at Holmer Green in the mid-1980s.

What makes a chair a Windsor?

The name describes its construction. The turned legs enter a solid wooden seat from below, while the back elements and arm supports enter it from above. The seat is therefore the central structural element connecting the two parts. Chairs constructed using this principle, and there are many different designs can all be referred to as Windsors. The defining feature is how the components fit together.

An uncertain beginning

There is no established inventor of the Windsor chair but it is likely the term relates to the royal town and river Thames being used as a trade route for makers in the general locality. The chairs basic form can be traced to at least the seventeenth century, often its early use was as painted garden seating for the gentry. During the eighteenth century it became more widely used, with regional variations to be found in most corners of Great Britain. The Thames Valley and Southern Chilterns with its vast Beech woodlands and proximity to London and Oxford developed into the major area of manufacture for over 200 years.

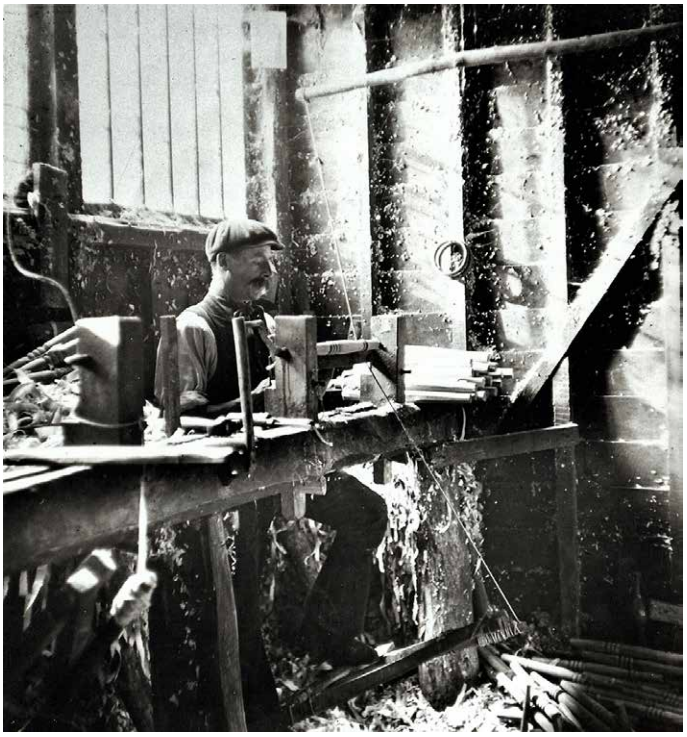
One surviving link with the early trade is High Wycombe museum's chair made by John Pitt in the 1740s, in what is now part of Slough. It is a reminder that the Windsor's history reaches well beyond the Victorian factories with which it is often associated.

Different woods for different jobs

A traditional Windsor combined several timbers, each selected for its unique properties. In the Wycombe trade, beech was widely used for turned components, elm for seats and ash for steam-bent bows and arms. Cherry and Yew were also used for better class chairs. The Chiltern beech woods supplied material well suited to turning, while the chair's construction allowed different specialists to contribute their parts before final assembly. A finished chair represented a combination of skills rather than simply the output of one lathe.

The men behind the turnings

Woodturners called chair bodgers created most of the turned components. These skilled craftsmen supplied turned components to the furniture workshops and factories around High Wycombe, often working on foot-powered pole lathes within the woodlands close to the raw material. By the middle of the nineteenth century, their work formed part of Britain's leading chairmaking industries. Their lives are sometimes romanticised as those of wandering woodland workers, but these men were not itinerant, they lived in nearby villages.



Chair bodger Bobby Wingrove at work in Winchmore Hill, Buckinghamshire, c.1908. Stuart King Collection.

Stuart describes the chair bodgers marked wooden tool rests used as patterns for different turnings—a practical means of maintaining consistency across repeated components. The last three chair bodgers all retired in 1959, one of these men, Sam Rockall (died in 1962) is well documented, Stuart has Sam Rackall's complete collection of tools, lathes and documents representing a very important period of a lost industry and craft. trade and was described in contemporary local reports as the last of the bodgers.

From village workshops to London

The photographs supplied by Stuart bring the scale and human character of the trade into focus. The Dancer and Hearn workers at Holmer Green, photographed around 1905, put faces to the industry. The image of workers loading a wagon at Gibbons' factory on a Friday afternoon illustrates the desire to deliver the weeks work quickly so that the carter can return early with the payment and hence the men's wages. Chair bodger Bobby Wingrove at work in Winchmore Hill, Buckinghamshire, c.1908. Stuart King Collection. offer a more grounded picture. The men he knew

Workers at the Dancer and Hearn chair factory, Holmer Green, c.1905. Stuart King Collection.

had homes, families and gardens; some worked in woodland shelters, while others preferred workshops beside their cottages. Stuart recorded the experiences of Reg Tilbury, who began work as a boy and later replaced his pole lathe with an engine-driven machine. His account captures both the demanding nature of the work and the gradual changes taking place within an established

"A week's work": workers at Gibbons' chair factory loading a wagon for the journey to London. Image supplied by Stuart King

craft. By 1877, the Chilterns chair industry was producing an estimated 4,700 chairs each day across approximately 150 workshops. Those figures describe the wider chair trade, rather than Windsor chairs alone, but they demonstrate how far production had developed from its woodland beginnings.

Keeping the history alive

Stuart's interest has been sustained over many decades. The exhibition clipping supplied with these photographs records that his collection of Windsor chairs and tools began in 1968. It also describes his miniature replicas and his efforts to introduce visitors, including schoolchildren, to the tools and history of chairmaking. The photograph of Stuart with a Windsor chair he made at Holmer Green in the mid-1980s provides a fitting companion to that record. His involvement encompasses making, collecting and documenting—helping preserve both the objects and the knowledge surrounding them. Our thanks to Stuart for his presentation and for sharing these images. For club members, the next encounter with an old Windsor chair may prompt a closer look: at the turnings, the joints and the work of the people whose skills still support anyone who sits in it

Windsor chair exhibition

THE exhibition "A bodger's eye view" — one of the items in the recent High Wycombe Arts Festival — was held in conjunction with Mr. C. E. Stuart King's talk on the history of the Windsor chair (May, Bucks and Berks Countryside).

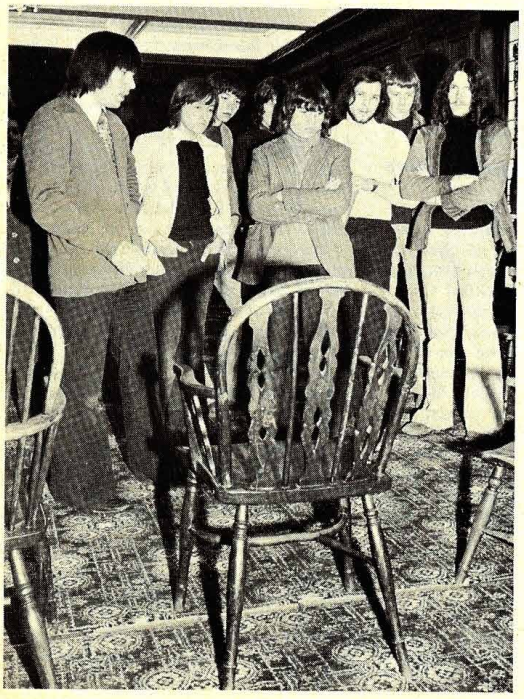
Mr. Stuart King's collection of Windsor chairs and working tools was started in 1968 and has grown steadily since then. His study of the history of the Windsor chair has led him to the production of miniature replicas which he sells to collectors. The exhibition proved fascinating to both young and old, and Mr. Stuart King's wealth of knowledge added to the interest as he explained the purpose of the tools or related local customs and folklore.

Above: Mr. Stuart King with one of his miniature Windsor chairs made in yew, cherry, ash and other traditional woods to quarter scale.

Below left: Mr. Stuart King shows students part of his collection.

Below right: A party of children gaze at the tools displayed.

Mr. Stuart King hoped that by holding the exhibition some interest in Wycombe's history would be aroused. "Wycombe's growth," he explained, "in the 19th century was almost entirely due to the expansion of the chair industry." He hoped that a touch of nostalgia would be felt by the older residents and that the younger visitors would leave with more knowledge than when they arrived. Photographs by courtesy of Robert Mead.



Stuart King's chairmaking history exhibition at High Wycombe Town Hall, 1974. The accompanying report describes his collection and quarter-scale Windsor chairs.

HORATIO'S GARDEN

September Update

Adam Blackie

This month's visit, attended by Mark Aizikowitz and Peter from Middlesex and me was highly successful. Four candidates made three bud vases and one pen. The glorious weather showcased the garden at its best, and the visit coincided with that of Horatio's Garden chief executive Katie Tate. I had a productive conversation with her about the activities we sponsor and the possibility of extending the programme to other gardens through local woodturning clubs, potentially in partnership with the AWGB.

We also discussed the baby's rattle Harvey made for a member of the garden staff, which was gratefully received and caused much excitement among the attendees. Katie mentioned that a cherry tree in her garden is due to be felled. I suggested that she bring a piece of the wood on her next visit so we could create an item for auction at the charity's next fundraiser; she welcomed the idea enthusiastically. In due course, I will need a volunteer to make something special for Katie that could raise additional funds for Horatio's Garden and highlight the work we have been doing there.

Following last month's newsletter, several people offered to volunteer occasionally at Horatio's Garden but explained that weekday sessions are difficult because they are working during the week. In response, I have discussed holding sessions on Saturdays or Sundays to make volunteering more accessible. The Horatio's Garden team is considering how it might accommodate this request.

Here is a photograph from this month's session, featuring Mark, a patient and a member of the hospital staff. The concentration shared by all three reflects one of the most meaningful aspects of woodturning: it offers people a welcome opportunity to focus on something creative and absorbing, away from the concerns of everyday life. It is deeply rewarding to see someone adjusting to an unexpected change in circumstances become fully engaged in the activity and enjoy a positive, restorative hour. Moments like these capture the real value of what we do at Horatio's Garden.

Adam Blackie
Chairman@hertsandbedswoodturners.co.uk

CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS FOR HORATIO'S GARDEN

With Christmas approaching, we're inviting members to donate wooden Christmas tree decorations for Horatio's Garden to sell at its Christmas fairs.

This worthwhile cause introduces woodturning to wheelchair patients, and donating a handmade decoration is a lovely way to lend your support. Whether you enjoy making miniature trees, snowmen, baubles or your own festive designs, every contribution would be welcome. Please bring your decorations to the October or November club meetings. Thank you to everyone who can help.

CLUB COMPETITIONS
SHOW & TELL TABLE

We would love to see more members bringing along their work each month and to help build a strong sense of friendship and shared learning within the club. Remember, every turner started somewhere, and sharing your work can inspire others as much as it helps you.

To encourage this, our monthly competition has now become a Show and Tell Table, with two sections:

Beginners
More Experienced Turners
This is not just about displaying finished pieces—it's an opportunity to share your experiences. You may wish to discuss challenges you faced, explain how your piece was made, or ask for advice. Members often find these conversations some of the most valuable and enjoyable parts of the evening.

Turner of the Year Award
The Turner of the Year competition continues as a year-long award. Any piece you bring during the year can be included.

Points are awarded across your best ten monthly entries, and the winner receives the Alan Spargo Shield, named in honour of one of our club's founders. The aim is simple: to encourage everyone to take part and share their turning throughout the year.

Other Club Awards and Events
The Graddage Trophy is awarded at the Annual Seminar Day for a piece made in the previous year.

We will also continue to take part in the Team Inter-Club Competition at Daventry Woodworks in May and the SAW Open Day in October. Your participation and support are always appreciated.

Please Bring Something Along

Whatever your skill level, and whatever you have made—large or small, simple or complex—please bring it along to share. Your work helps inspire others and strengthens the spirit of our club.

SHOW & TELL TABLE 2026	
January 20th	An Item of food as box
February 17th	Apple/pear
March 17th	Easter based turning
April 21st	Natural edged bowl any size
May 19th	Candlestick
June 28th (Sunday)	Seminar/ Graddage Competition
July 21st	Bird/animal any size
August 18th	Pendant/earrings
September 15th	Platter any size
October 20th	November 5th, related
November 17th	Something music related
December 15th	Christmas tree ornament

LIBRARY

Please also use our extensive Library of Books and DVDs, which we believe is the largest club library in the country and listed in the Members area of the website. The books are free with DVDs a £1 for a month.

The latest addition is Conversations with Wood , The Waterbury Collection. There are so many ideas and styles to inspire you.

DONATION TO HARROW GATEWAY

Our annual donation to the Gateway this year was £455.66 made up of the quarter of the 10% sales commission, charity sales, 10% of sales of donated tools, the sale of Mike Wood's prize winning stool at Daventry and other donations. Sue Heels reply was:

"To all members of the Middlesex Woodturners

I'd like to thank you for your very generous donation to Harrow Gateway; it's much appreciated. As you know we run social activities for local learning disabled adults and, apart from attending our clubs, members enjoy trips bowling, sailing and to shows at Harrow Arts Centre.

Thank you again for your generosity from all the trustees/committee members, our supporters and club members.

Kind regards
Sue (trustee/administrator)"

WHAT WOULD HELP YOU TO ATTEND MORE MEETINGS?

We know that some members have difficulty driving to meetings especially at night or because of ULEZ. So, if you would like help, please let me or another committee member know and we will see if someone could give you a lift. If you can offer a lift, please let us know.

If you have a BLUE BADGE and your car doesn't comply with the ULEZ regulations getting to the Gateway, there are relevant deals at https://tfl.gov.uk/modes/driving/ultra-low-emission-zone/discounts-and-exemptions#on-this-page-0. Thanks to John Thei for finding this out.

CLUB T-SHIRTS

We have contacted the supplier for the club T-Shirts, if you are interested in getting one for yourself or a gift for a loved one, please contact Mike - secretary@middxturners.com who will act as the collection point for orders and the only condition is that we need an order of a minimum of £50.00.

Prices are: Sweatshirt - £23.88, Polo - £20.34, Hoodie - £39.24 & Smock Badges Price TBC (minimum order 10)

All prices include VAT and there is a minor reduction for club logo only and no name.

Middlesex Woodturners Mike Bonnici

Logo Size: Left Chest Logo 86mm wide

The Middlesex Woodturners Association now has a WhatsApp group! It's a place for members to:

- Share your latest woodturning projects
- Ask for advice or tips
- Exchange ideas and inspiration
- Stay informed about upcoming events

Scan the QR code or follow this link and start chatting with your fellow woodturners! - https://chat.whatsapp.com/ITrAXquwzLv1bBytAeJV8E

PROGRAMME 2026	
January 20th	Jason Breach (IRD)
February 17th	Workshop
March 17th	James Burton
April 21st	Workshop
May 19th	Martin Saban-Smith
June 28th (Sunday)	Andy James
July 21st	Workshop
August 18th	Stuart King
September 15th	Workshop
October 20th	Nathanael Griffiths
November 17th	AGM & Speaker TBA
December 15th	Christmas Party

RECORD POWER
ESTABLISHED 1909
Woodworking Machinery & Accessories

Middlesex Woodturners Association

Association of Woodturners of Great Britain

Middlesex Woodturners Association
President: Stuart King
Chairman: Gordon Cookson
Secretary: Mike Bonnici
Treasurer: John Thei
Membership Secretary: Mike Bonnici
Programme and events Organiser: Peter Leach

Committee Members:
Phil Jones
Callum Heatlie-Ball
Kieron Desmond
Peter Leach
Mike Wood
David Wilks
Josh Pinto