

Abbotts Living Wood Newsletter, January 2010

BBC 2 Mastercrafts

A new decade is starting and I have a strong feeling that it is going to be a very good time for green wood crafts. So far as I know at the moment, starting on February 12th, a new series entitled Mastercrafts (not Masterclass as I have been telling people) will be shown on BBC 2 at 9pm for the next 6 weeks.

Each week will feature a traditional craft: thatching, glass, weaving, stone-masonry, metal work and green woodwork. The series will be hosted by Monty Don with the aim of 'putting traditional crafts firmly back on the map in modern Britain'. This means that an hour of prime time TV will concentrate on the progress of three students at Guy Mallinson's woodland workshop in Dorset as they spend six weeks grappling with the skills of cleaving, shaving, pole-lathe turning and much more. Their final project was to design and make a greenwood chair and I was asked to join them for their last few days to judge who made the best job of it. It was great fun and I am looking forward to seeing how it comes across on the telly. Do look out for it.

Spreading The Word

Another very encouraging development has been the establishment of the Heritage Crafts Association (HCA), whose aim is very much in line with the Mastercrafts series. Much of the energy for this organization has come from pole-lathe bowl turner Robin Wood. Robin featured on the front page of Jan/Feb issue of Living Woods Magazine which has gone from strength to strength over the last year. If you have taken out a subscription (special offer of 3 issues for £5 instead of £3.75 for one, tel 01285 850481), you will already know about most of the contents of this newsletter through my regular column. I am now getting into the habit of looking at events with a journalist's eye and have also written a couple of articles for Permaculture magazine over the last year, with another to come this year.

Green Woodwork Comes Of Age

Later on this year at the end of September we shall be celebrating three anniversaries, marking the coming of age of green woodwork. The 20th anniversary of the Association of Pole Lathe Turners coincides with the 21st birthday of my first book, Green Woodwork. It also marks a quarter of a century since I established by business running green woodwork courses. These

anniversaries tie in sweetly with the 5th World Pole-lathe Championships to be held at the biennial Forest Machinery Exhibition, (also known as the APF Show) to be held again at Cannock Chase in Staffordshire from 23rd to 25th September. I am determined to have my new book ready to launch at the show. Do try and get along to join in the celebrations.

Courses

After a record year for course attendance in 2008, 2009 started slowly with some of the Introductory courses running half full. However by the summer, there had been a surge in bookings and we had to expand some of the Intro courses into 6-days but still ended up having to turn some people away. For 2010, we are keeping the price of the courses in May/June to the 2009 level, to encourage you to come along earlier in the year. This seems to be working, as the May courses are getting on for being full. Please have a look at the course programme to see the latest amendments since the Christmas break.

Website

You will also see a few changes to the [website](#) . We have finally got round to displaying details of how you can make a shaving horse in a couple of hours out of around £20 worth of easily sourced timber. The accommodation page shows the highly successful cedar cabin that we built last July as well as the spacious bell-tents. We have also added a website page giving the results of our analysis of course feedback forms, with around 95% of customers expressing top marks for enjoyment of their courses.

The Future

If you have been thinking about coming on a course but not got round to it, then now is the time. I can hardly believe that I have had 5 summers of courses at Brookhouse Wood. Jamie (who owns the farm) and I have recently agreed my tenancy for another 5 years, with the possibility of another couple of years to take me up to retirement. So you have a maximum of five to seven years to come on a course. We now feel we have all the required facilities running smoothly but will always be looking to keep up our standards. Technological developments move on and the Veritas tenon cutters are now firmly embedded into our chairmaking, while new techniques and materials for weaving the seats have been further progressed over the last year.

Personnel

To my amazement my old transit van cruised through its MOT and our old dog Badger keeps plodding on. Last year's main assistant Barnaby, is now settled into his caravan on the farm splitting his time between helping with Jamie's farm work, refining his expertise in making spoons and producing fire-by-friction kits. Josh is straining at the leash to start as the main assistant for this year with a promising bunch of budding green woodworkers lined up to work alongside him. Tamsin had her busiest year so far with her illustrated stained-glass and has

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some exciting projects and exhibitions lined up for the coming year. See www.tamsinsglass.co.uk or become a fan of her page on Facebook.

I recently spent a couple of days in the woods and was delighted to see that everything had survived the January snow. When spring finally arrives, I'm sure it will come with a bang, so get your course bookings in before they are all fully booked. Thanks to all of you who have helped in some way over the last year and I look forward to seeing you again when spring returns.