

NEW  
series

# Peter Gill on... The view from the other side of turning

As Managing Director of Robert Sorby, there are many people who envy me. They think I have the best job in the world. They assume I have access to all the latest tools and equipment, that I get to play with all sorts of new developments, I travel the world in style visiting customers and attending woodworking shows, and that as a consequence, I must be worth a fortune. However, nothing could be further from the truth.

First of all, let me dispel any myth that I fill my days playing with tools on a lathe. I am not a woodturner – never have been, never will be. I simply have neither the patience nor the skill, although I do admire those who possess these attributes.

So how is it that I run a very focused business like Robert Sorby when I am not a turner? Well, the answer has something to do with dogs and barking. All my colleagues at Robert Sorby are enthusiastic, amateur woodturners. This means they mirror the typical woodturner and as such, have an appreciation of their skills and aspirations. And this in turn makes them ideal for developing new tools.

The problem is that when they start brainstorming, there is a tendency for their enthusiasm to run away with them. They design the most efficient, most versatile and most comfortable tools, but often without consideration for the commercial implications. They produce a tool that everyone wants at a price no one can afford. That is where my role begins as I aim to introduce a bit of hard-headed reality. Only a non-turner can do that.

As for woodworking shows, I have probably attended more than most – my last two were in Sydney, Australia and Richmond, Virginia, USA – in consecutive weekends I might add!

For those visiting a show, much of the hard work, such as the preliminary



PHOTOGRAPH BY CLIVE BROOKS

planning and the erection of displays, goes very much unseen. That is to say nothing of the aching feet. Just ask any experienced exhibitor.

Interestingly, woodturners are the

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same the world over. When the doors to a show open there is a frantic dash – either in the direction of the toilet or the exhibitor selling bargain basement products. No matter which continent

you are on, woodturners not only fall into the same age group, but they dress alike and they ask the same questions in the never ending search for more information.

Each is a wonderful character, full of a wealth of experience. That is why the evidence of theft at such shows – and I have been a recent victim – is so disheartening. You are part of a magnificent community made up of honest and genuine people, of different levels of skill and experience, and you are all willing to share your experiences. Please do not let the standards slip. ●

**NEXT MONTH...**  
Peter Hemsley from The Tool Post will be airing his views on woodturning