March 2023 - Chris Foweraker

George's brother Chris was demonstrating the processes and techniques involved in the turning of pens. This is something that I had not tried or seen before so I was looking forward to learning a lot and, as ever with Chris's demonstrations, we were not disappointed!

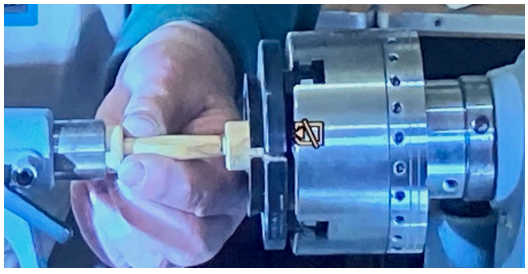
The tips started at the outset with the revelation that he would be turning pens in olive wood, a difficult wood to source, but Chris had solved the problem by purchasing an olive chopping board whilst on holiday in Italy and then cutting it up to make sufficient blanks for a number of pens!

Chris demonstrated using both the Euro and Slimline pen making kits, emphasising that there are slight size differences between the tube lengths and therefore it is important to mark blanks according to the kit being used and also to keep the tubes and fittings for each kit type in separate containers.

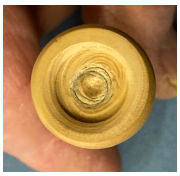
The first challenge when turning pens is to accurately centre the hole through the blanks as there is a tendency for the drill to wander off centre. Having marked the centre point of each blank with a bradawl, the trick is to start with a 7mm spur drill (also known as a brad point bit or dowelling bit) and drill SLOWLY about 3/16" into each end. This prevents the subsequent complete drilling with a twist drill starting off centre. Also, make sure to remove clogging from time to time, especially when using oily woods such as olive. Finally check the tubes fit, roughen slightly and then glue into the blanks. When set, using a reamer in the headstock, carefully trim up the ends of each of the blanks, making sure not to alter the tube lengths.

Assemble the blanks and bushes etc in the correct order on the mandrel and turn down the shape required on both blanks using a 1/4" bowl gouge in the manner of a skew before sanding and sealing.

The final stage is then the assembly of the various components. Rather than purchase an expensive press to do this, Chris had ingeniously made his own simple press which he and other members said in their view did a more satisfactory job. The two parts of the press need to be made out of a very hard wood, box wood is ideal.



The shape of the tailstock and headstock parts of the press are as shown in the photos below, noting that the tailstock part is tapered but not to a tight fit as it is held in place against the shoulder …

Thanks to Chris for a very interesting and informative demonstration - much appreciated by all members.

David Langan