

2. Specimen Bottles

Without Frank Procter these bottles would never have been made. They stand on average 140mm high and I turned them using a restored 1950's Myford 8 lathe. They each contain a 10mm glass test tube and are therefore fully functional as specimen vases albeit only for the tiniest of specimens.

Together they represent the beginning of my excursion into wood turning being my 1st (on the left), 2nd and 3rd attempt respectively at turning something half decent on the newly restored lathe. This lathe had some history. I can reveal nothing much about it's original owner except that he must have lived in Leyton, London, E10. Uncle Dennis Wicks had a sweet shop/tobacconists called Mundy's right opposite Leyton town hall. He acquired this lathe and several gouges/accessories while there and for a while kept it set up but, as far as I know, unused in the huge cellar beneath the shop which doubled as his workshop. When Dennis moved to Waltham Abbey he brought the lathe to Swindon and gave it to my father who did at least have a try at producing something but soon lost interest. It languished in his rat-infested shed until it passed to my son, Sam, who rebuilt it and after a few attempts at using it the lathe was yet again abandoned to the elements becoming rusty and grubby with sawdust and other workmanlike debris that flies around in typical man-caves.



With the only other option being to scrap it, the lathe passed to me for restoration. I built a new table for it, spent £700 or so on a four jaw chuck, a basic set of new gouges, bench grinder, glass papers and a variety of wood finishes. After youtubing for several hours I had, out of nowhere, acquired a new hobby within the space of about 4 weeks and had become a trainee wood turner. It is now 3 years at least since those heady, frenetic days of enthusiasm. So far these three specimen vases brought to primitive and unrefined fruition are all there is to show for the effort and have cost me, apart from the effort involved, around £233 each!

I am still enthusiastic though. All is not lost, the lathe not yet re-abandoned and, as can be seen here, a start has been made on a simple oak bowl. In the foreground are the raw materials used to produce the bottles.



The connection with Frank Procter is now revealed. 6 or 7 flooring tiles working as far as was possible, light, dark, light etc., were glued and clamped then, when set, turned to shape. The third was turned off centre to obtain a different effect.

Here are three examples of some of my Dad's brave efforts.



Frank and Nancy also became friends with Dennis and Rose accompanying them, for example, on outings when the latter came to visit or stay with Mum and Dad in Swindon. These specimen vases, intimately linked with the history of an old lathe, also connect Frank and Nancy Procter with Dennis Wicks and Mundy's sweetshop in Leyton and that is where the next story commences.