

## Donegal brothers turning the wood

Two young County Donegal brothers are making a name for themselves in the art of woodturning after developing an interest in it while on a weekend away last August. Ronan McGarvey, 13, and his young brother Conor, 10, of Loughanure, West Donegal spend most of their evenings after school in the work shed turning wooden pens and other small items that are already proving to be a big hit.

The boys took an interest in the craft of woodturning after getting the opportunity to make their own wooden pens on a lathe at a craft fair in Antrim last year. Well known County Down wood turner Geoff Tulip was part of the craft



Ronan

event at the Junction One shopping centre in Antrim and was happy to give the boys a try at turning their own pens. From there the interest developed.

The pens and small bowls are turned on a wood lathe using a variety of timbers that they source locally or from recognised suppliers. These include Raitts of Stranorlar, Co. Donegal that stocks a huge variety of woodturning supplies. They have also visited the Woodshed in Templepatrick, Co Antrim and local carpenters and log suppliers also give them timber.

“When we get the pens turned down so far on the lathe dad acts as the quality control man and looks them over to be sure everything is looking OK. Now and again we will have a slip up but if we make a mistake then we’ll know next time not to,” said Ronan.

Finishing off the pen in the highlight of the project for the boys. “When we get this far it’s nice to see the finished pen coming together. The first one we made was exciting as we really didn’t have a clue what we were at but it worked out ok,” said Conor.

They use velvet or leatherette finished boxes for presentation and a small information card is included indicating the type of wood used and the process involved. The boys use a variety of woods including oak, yew, ash, elm, beech, wenge, spalted beech and bog oak and like to point out that every pen is unique and receives personal attention.

“Most of the wood is easy enough to get but the bog oak is not that easy and is usually a good bit more expensive. There are some people around the country using it for making different things and we were lucky to get some pieces from them. Yew is very popular as our hometown Loughanure

(Loch an lui) is named after the Yew tree but it is hard enough to get. Our friend Geoff in County Down got us a few big logs recently but they have to dry out a good bit before we can use them,” said Ronan.

After attending a few craft fairs over Christmas word soon got around about the pens and the boys were delighted that people were so interested in their hobby. To date the pens are on sale at Glenveagh National Park, Ionad Cois Locha, Dunlewey, the Craft Centre at An Chuiirt Hotel, Gweedore, Kim Sharkey’s Craft Shop in Kincasslagh, the Gift Shop, Donegal Town, Kilmacrennan Cottage Craft shop and Donegal Airport.

The boys have also revealed that one of their pens now graces the desk of the Bishop of Ferns in Wexford following a request from the Bishop’s secretary Fr. John Carroll. The special order included pens made for the Bishop from Olive wood that was imported from Jerusalem and the pen clip was in the design of a cross.

Ronan and Conor are among the youngest members of the Irish Woodturners Guild (IWG) and attend monthly meetings and demonstrations hosted in Stranorlar by the North West chapter of the guild.

“Some of the men there are really good turning bowls and things and they are very helpful too. Last month at the meeting there were some very nice pieces and it would be nice to be as good as them some day. We have to do a certain item for each meeting and this month it was a candlestick. It was harder to make than a pen but I managed,” added Conor.



The boys saved their birthday money to buy the lathes and most of the tools. Ronan uses a Record Power DML36SH while Conor went for the smaller Charnwood W815. Most of the tools are also Record Power but they also have recently taken a shine to the Robert Sorby range.

They keep an eye out for trees that have fallen or are being cut down. Although they are still learning the different types of wood by looking at them, they are getting the grasp of what's good and what's not.

"Yew is our favourite to work with as we find it turns very easily. Olive is nice too but we have to get that from abroad. People have been very good telling us about fallen trees. Recently a big ash tree was cut down near to us and that would give us a long term supply for pens and small things," added Conor.

Safety is the workshop is also very important and the boys are quick to point out the supply of masks, the safety glasses and shields. "With sharp tools and machinery you need to be careful, and the dust can also be bad when sanding so we always use the protection masks," said Rónán.

So far the safety record is quite good apart from one or two minor incidents. "I sort of fell out with a sharp chisel one night and ended up in casualty to get a cut above my nose glued together but I was back in action the next night again. I gave the keyring I had just finished to the nurse in casualty who fixed me up," remarked Conor.

Anyone interested in the boy's pens can contact the retail outlets listed above, phone them at (074) 9548516 or check out their website at [www.donegalpens.com](http://www.donegalpens.com)

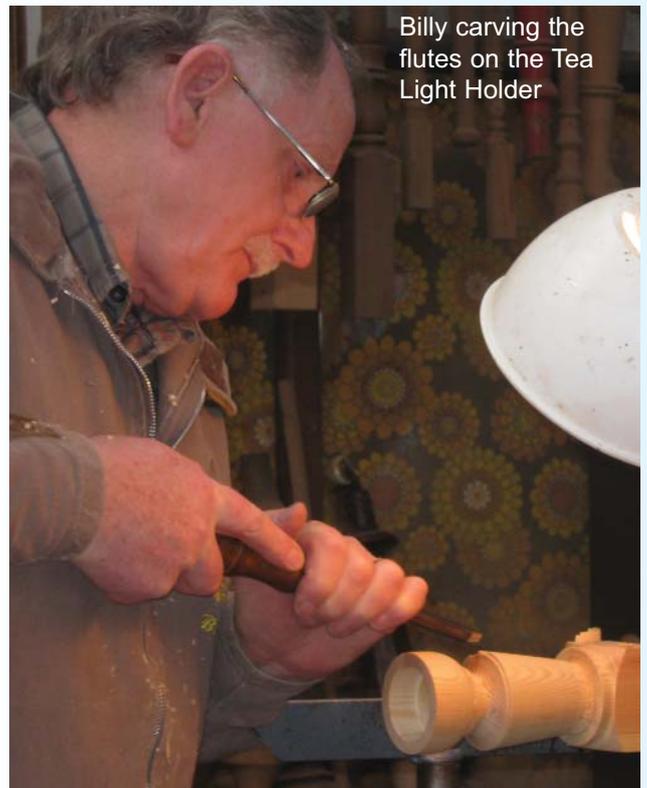
## Sligo Chapter

## Sligo Chapter

On the 20th of March we had a demonstration day by professional wood turner Billy Henry. Billy's first project was a "T" light holder. This was a nice exercise in spindle work. Billy went on to decorate the holder by creating some fluted carving on holder. The second exercise was to produce a salt shaker that was a complete sphere. And Billy's final exercise was a lidded bowl. These were three very interesting projects and were performed by a true craftsman. Thanks Billy for your demonstration.



Billy's Demo Pieces



Billy carving the flutes on the Tea Light Holder

The April Chapter meeting was hosted in my own Workshop, we had a good turn out on the night and all just fitted into my small workshop. Tommy McFadden got the meeting off to a start by announcing that we were re-launching the Sligo Chapters website and handed over the proceedings to myself. I gave a general run through of the site and contents. I hope the Sligo Chapter members and the entire I.W.G. members find the website to their liking.

I also demonstrated on the night and kept my demo simple by turning an apple from a piece of spalted beech. I started off by turning a spigot on one end then holding the spigot firmly in the chuck and turning and finishing the top of the apple. I drilled a hole into the top in order to hold the apple in a home made fruit chuck. I removed the partially turned apple and then held it in the fruit chuck with aid of an 80 mm screw and turned and finished the end of the apple. I drilled the end and inserted a clove. On the top I fitted into the screw hole a fake leaf. The second part of the exercise was to turn a worm and make it look like as if it had eaten its way through the apple. This was done by turning a 60 mm diameter ring then cutting up the ring into pieces. Then drilling and inserting a panel pin into the ends (to strengthen the joint) and gluing two pieces back together to form an "S" shape. I sanded a head on one and a tail on the other then put some markings onto the worm. I drilled two holes into the apple and glued in the head and tail in.

Our competition piece for April was mushrooms. We had some beautiful and interesting pieces entered. The pieces showed off the imaginations of the turners with some fantastic ideas, wood choice's and uses for the mushrooms. The May competition piece is an apple, apples or piece of fruit.