

2003

We begin!

2003 November 3, 3:17PM.

After many weeks of thinking, scheming and proposing I have at last settled upon this blog form, and so must begin. Have I anything to say? Not much, but this morning Yanagi (yet again) gave me something to think about, and I think it worth sharing.

Crafts are of and for the great mass of people and are made in great quantity for daily life. Expensive fine crafts for the few are not of the true character of craftsmanship, which, being for everyman, are appropriately decorated with the patterns of everyman. It is natural that craft objects should be associated with patterns that are also, in a sense, communal.

—p.117, *The Unknown Craftsman*, Soetsu Yanagi (1972), Japan.

If we didn't have injection-moulding machines to make inexpensive chairs, we would still need chairs, and those chairs would in fact still be inexpensive compared to the alternatives — they would just be vastly different in character. It is this folk-craft that I wish to develop in my work; to make useful things quickly and without over preoccupation with the 'fine'. A table will fulfill its purpose admirably whether its surface is smoothed a mirror polish or no — and if one wants to be putting tea cups on its surface it will probably be better that it is not smoothed excessively.

The nth Day Ends

2003 Novemberr 3, 4:01PM.

I won't fill you in on the background of anything; I have to start sometime, and it might as well be now.

The box is coming along well, better this afternoon once I gave up for the time being trying to make *A Thing* to cut trunnels. I turned instead to getting the

bottom finished: I am putting a low divider in towards the front of the box and cut the rebates and tenons on it this afternoon. The work went really smoothly and pleasurably; I love it when it happens like this. I would've kept going but I wanted to get in here (the library computer lab) before 7:00PM, and also home before dark.

I began today feeling pretty down and wanted only to sit in my room and read, so that's what I did. Didn't last long though, before I hauled myself out of there and down the hill to school—why on Earth should I feel guilty?! I was sorry I had come when I got here, but after retiring to the library to read *The Unknown Craftsman* for a couple of hours I started to remember what it was that I was so excited and happy about towards the end of last week: letting go and just flowing with the wood; being guided by what *it* wants to do.

The Speed of Response

2003 November 4, 4:50PM.

The speed at which one is required to respond in various forms of a) long-distance communication, and b) woodworking.

I have been thinking about the various forms of long-distance **communication** that are in common use, such as email, telephone, and snail mail, and in particular the length of time each gives one to respond to what the other person says. With traditional *postal correspondence* one has ample response time — months if so wished — and this I think gives letters a distinctly 'thought about' tone. The same is true, to a lesser extent, with *email*: although it is easy to quickly rap out a reply to someone and send it without really thinking, there is still the *opportunity* for leisurely consideration of what you want to say, over perhaps a couple of days. This is not true with the *telephone* — it is at the extreme end of this 'speed of response' continuum and necessitates a faster and less considered reply than even a face to face conversation. Silence just doesn't work on the 'phone, and can't play the important role of reflection and consideration that it does in all other forms of long-distance communication — including postal and electronic mail.

There is a parallel between this increasing response time in communication and the time that one has when working with **wood** to respond to the tools, materials and workshop environment. Take the saw as an example: a *portable circular saw* can give you very little time indeed to change your grip, stance or in some other way avoid being hurt — it's a bit like a 'phone; a *table saw* is more forgiving because the table, blade, fence(s) and work-piece are all (hopefully) fixed in their positions or trajectories and are therefore more predictable, but there is still the opportunity for rashness and accidents — similar to email one might say; the *handsaw* is the slowest of the saws and as such gives the user much more time to respond to the work-piece moving, or an unseen knot that puts the saw off a bit,

or any of a thousand other things that necessitate a response to the timber or tools — I would liken using a handsaw to sitting down and spending an hour or so writing a letter, knowing that far from being a ‘waste’ of time it is just *more* time spent being close to a dear friend.

I wheel my wheelbarrow

2003 November 4 9:17AM.

In which I bring my desk back to school to finish finishing it and then get it assessed.



Flickr: FARSKz

What a marvellous morning! I brought my desk back to school this morning to get it assessed next Monday; I walked here with it on my wheelbarrow. It's not a long walk — an hour or so — and on a day such as today it's quite a pleasure. Not often do I feel like smiling at motorists (in their stinking, noisy vehicles) but when possessed by the good vibes of happy woodworking their childish “get off the road!”s touch me but little. Walking this morning prompted me to reflect on just how important it is for every stage of making — including the transporting of the finished piece — to be of right ordering.

A Moment of Doubt

2003 November 5, 2:51PM.

“In which I wonder for a while if my work is crap, and then decide that it’s not.”

I have nailed six of the eight corners of the box: through the first tail and into the next pin, and I tried to offset the holes so the joint would be pulled tighter when the treenails were driven home. This failed to happen on most of the joints and has left gaps in some, and made me feel that the whole box was not of a very high standard. After some reflection though, I have rembered that the whole motivation for the box in the first place was to make something without glue or metal fasteners, and I am doing that. It is resulting in an aesthetic quite different from the norm, and that’s okay, that’s what I wanted to explore. Anyway, I couldn’t think how to progress; I couldn’t even decide on what I wanted the box to be, so I jumped on my bike and rode over to F&S to see what I could scrounge from their skip, and returned triumphant with an ash door jamb.



Door jamb.

Flickr: [VHSBbq](#)

I will now make a small box, possibly to go inside the large one, and I'll glue it.
I would like to research a bit more about PVA and its manufacturing process,

especially from an environmental point of view because it is this which concerns me. Nothing quite like an uninformed radical opinion, eh?

Clouds Above The Grass

2003, November 5, 8:43PM.

An afternoon of a book, a café, a friend, much good talking and only a little work done.



Docked door jamb

Flickr: EMhUUL

William Morris' lectures on *Art and Socialism* from the last quarter of the 19th century kept me company in a juice bar in town this afternoon, but only for a short while before the noise got to me. Morris really does give me a lot to think about, almost all of it good or exciting; I find him attempting to answer many of the same questions that have come to me in recent years, and in a manner wholly fascinating and indeed often congruent with my way of thinking.

To give people pleasure in the things they must perforce *use*, that is one great office of decoration; to give people pleasure in the things

they must perforce *make*, that is the other use of it.
Does not our subject look important enough now? I say that without these arts, our rest would be vacant and uninteresting, our labour mere endurance, mere wearing away of body and mind.

— William Morris, *The Lesser Arts*, 1877.

This ‘decoration’, could it not also include something that one could term ‘decoration of activity’? Those non-functional things that one does when working such as enjoying the sound of a sharp handsaw as it cuts, or being in an attractive workshop. Or am I just a bit too tired to be thinking more about this?

The jamb that I picked up earlier I docked in two and would’ve started planing but had tea instead.

Fine Woodworking on Treenails

2003 November 5.

What *Fine Woodworking* magazine (Jan/Feb 2001, p.65) has to say about making small treenails or pegs for pinning joints:

- **Squaring a drilled hole.** Begin by drilling through the leg and tenon with a bit just smaller than the width of the peg. Make sure you don’t drill through the other side of the leg. Use a 1/8" chisel to square up the first third of the hole.
- **Making peg stock.** [... cut. ...]
- **Whittling pegs.** With the pegs cut into 2" lengths, round over the first third with a small knife. Rounding the ends of the pegs prevents them from splitting the legs.
- **Driving it home.** After applying a small amount of glue to both the peg and the hole, tap the peg with a hammer. Keep the peg aligned and stop hammering when the peg bottoms out (you’ll hear a change in tone); otherwise, you risk splitting the leg. —

So perhaps I do not need to make a pencil sharpener after all! I have been trying to make *round* treenails, using some variant on the idea of a plane I saw in use on *Duyfken*; I’ll give this simpler idea a go.

Morning!

2003 November 5



Flickr: VHSB5U

It's okay (I Guess)

2003 November 6, 12:08PM.

I have begun dressing the ash, but am quite disheartened today; I don't want to be doing it. I feel like my work is not 'good enough', too rough, or ugly... why this society, myself included, is so hung up on the smooth, square, fair, straight, even, and 'perfect' I do not know! I like things to be neat, orderly, clean, structured, yes — but why does that mean I should feel *this* incompetent when I struggle to make things so? Aagh... As usual when I am in this state I have come to find solace in the internet (please note irony!), and at least the quiet of the library is nice... I have been reading about the Inaccessibility of Visually-Oriented Anti-Robot Tests. Fascinating.

I love the physicality of woodworking, the way that it engages my whole body and soul — but not, alas, my mind. What I mean is that I don't turn to wood to be challenged in a cerebral way; rather, I find with wood a calming and a satisfaction that is on a wholly other level, more in my hands than my head. The problem solving inherent in woodworking *is* entertaining, but it's nowhere near the level I find in programming. Thus is the eternal division in my life... sigh...

The Afternoon

2003 November 6, 7:26PM.

I get back from the library and cheer up, but have a bit of bother with my plane iron.

I got some lunch on the way back to the workshop, and sat in my corner feeling a bit sad about not wanting to work. It took only a bit of food in my stomach for this mood to pass and I got back to it: more dressing of the ash door jamb for this little box. I made a lot of shavings doing that, and then some dust when I cut and shot each part to length (4 @ 377 mm, 2 @ 77 mm, and a little bit left over that I will use tomorrow to patch up the holes in the wood).

All that dulled my iron a bit so I went downstairs to sharpen it — little did I know what I was in for! For nearly an hour and a half I toiled over those stones trying various ways of holding the blade, standing, focusing on my big toe — all to no avail until (with a little help from my friends) I hit upon what seems a pretty good way. Locking my elbows and wrists in tight, with a hand on either side of the blade and rocking from my front ankle with my back leg providing the movement. This and a little 30° plastic triangle from Rodney gave me a sharp blade at last! I *have* been sharpening it to razor sharpness all year, but a couple of weeks ago I noticed that I was unable to rectify the tendency I have to apply more pressure to one side than the other. So I re-ground it square and since then I just have not been able to get it quite as sharp as usual (until today). I filmed myself as I was sharpening so that I could see how well I kept to the angle.



Flickr: FhC43J

All of this fiddling around with my plane blade got me right back in the vibe of doing good work, for which I was thankful. So I went back to my bench and worked for the rest of the afternoon. I planed grooves in the box sides to take the bottom and (sliding) top using my No.50 plow plane. It was lovely to be back enjoying wood, and what a marvelous tool that is!



Flickr: FErAbb

All in all a far better afternoon than the morning; seems to happen that way...

This is fun!

date: 2003-11-07T15:00:00+00:00 author: Sam Wilson layout: post guid: /?p=11
permalink: /2003/11/07/this-is-fun/ aktt_tweeted: - "1" views: - "739" categories: - Woodworking tags: - box - inlaying - planing - woodwork — *In which I put little inlays over nail holes.*

Thus far today I have been installing little squares of inlay to cover the nail holes in the box sides. It's fun work, quite exacting but calm and easy. I'm enjoying myself. I finished the inlaying just after lunch and moved on to planing grooves in the two short sides — why I didn't think to do all the grooving before I docked pieces to length I do not know, and I will have more work to do because of it. It annoyed me a bit that I was that silly, hence my being in this computer lab. On the other hand, I am really satisfied with the inlays, so that's nice isn't it?

Closer, ever closer to where the wood really is

date: 2003-11-09T16:47:57+00:00 author: Sam Wilson layout: post guid: /?p=13
permalink: /2003/11/09/closer-closer-ever-closer-to-where-the-wood-really-is/
aktt_tweeted: - "1" views: - "353" categories: - Woodworking tags: - closeness
- emotion - physicality - wood - woodwork — To be in touch — in contact —
with the wood is a wonderful thing; the dust, shavings and sweat blackening my
hands; reveling in intimacy with the tree, giving part of myself in exchange for
what I am making. Running my hand over the wood, sweeping the shavings off
the bench with my skin, it's this closeness and rawness that cries out to me as
real; to get closer, ever closer, to what the wood actually is. Lying curled up,
warm and safe, almost consuming the wood (or being consumed by it — it's
hard to tell), at the heart of a tree; or cold, barely holding on high in the crown
as the rain whips down, but yet there is care present where the smallest branches
meet, and it uplifts. The emotion of the tree is, like the picture in a hologram,
present in every part removed from the whole and is ever further released every
time we work or use that wood. So personal, so universal; so real.

Assesment

date: 2003-11-10T13:18:17+00:00 author: Sam Wilson layout: post guid: /?p=14
permalink: /2003/11/10/assesment/ aktt_tweeted: - "1" views: - "413" cate-
gories: - Woodworking tags: - art school - assessment - dovetails - future plans
- manifesto - woodwork technique - Woodworking — This morning was my final
assessment for the Diploma. I was getting pretty nervous beforehand, didn't
sleep much last night (for a host of other reasons, not just the assessment) and
had had little to eat. As I moved my work downstairs ready to bump it in I
thought how poor it looked next to the fabulous work of Michael and John who
were being assessed just before me. The usual pre-performance insecurities I
suppose...

But the assessment went fine; better than fine: I enjoyed it, or rather found it
helpful and even inspiring! I *do* believe in the direction that I'm going in, and
the body of work that I presented this morning shows this direction — it is not
of course where I'm aiming at but if it were why would I be here?! I think I was
able to express something of my philosophy of woodworking and explain how
the pieces (table, stool, chair and press) fit into it. Rodney was a great help,
talking about my progress etc; so was John Reid, especially with reminding and
encouraging me about the wider university context of my work (mentioning, for
example, the Talloires Declaration). In talking about my work I was not very
clear, nor at all concise; there was much that I would like to have added — but
all in all assessment has left me keener than ever to get in and do what makes
my heart sing! I thinking of drafting some sort of brief outline of those aspects
of woodworking that are important to me, that I might refer to when I get stuck

in the quagmire of doubt(!) Something about the workshop, my dress, drawing of what I'm to make, the recycled and made materials, the hand tools, finishing, etc. A checklist, manifesto, or somesuch thing.

Do I now want to get back into the workshop and keep working though? Not a bit of it! Time for cake and tea with friends in town I think. Part of my reluctance is the mistake I made with the dovetails yesterday: I was trying a technique that I have read about often in textbooks whereby one marks the *pins* by placing the *tails* over them and marking with the *saw* (and not a marking knife as I have usually done). I did not think very thoroughly about how this would work because I have heard a number of people talk about it as well as seeing it in books. But work is what it did not do: it leaves a gap the size of the saw kerf on every pin! I've probably just missed something very simple, but rather than trying to perfect that technique now I think I'll go back to what I know and can do — marking off the cut tails with a sharp pencil.

On the technical side of things today: on my main page I would like to put an RSS feed from this blog, a calendar or other visual summary of my work and the same for my reading; I guess this summer will see me on the computer a bit! It's exciting though, this playing at the point of intersection of old ways of working wood and new ways of coding sites!

A slow day

date: 2003-11-11T13:06:20+00:00 author: Sam Wilson layout: post guid: /?p=15
permalink: /2003/11/11/a-slow-day/ aktt_tweeted: - "1" views: - "612" categories: - Woodworking tags: - bookplate - boring posts - prototyping — This morning I began a boxboard mock-up of a set of pidgeonholes for stationery; more on that later. I'm also thinking about the possibility of a bathroom cabinet. I am working again on my bookplate, this time with a view to printing in full colour (I am discovering just how little I know about Illustrator). The weather is so lovely at the moment and I really want to go to the beach... And ooh err: it's remembrance day; how much that means to me!

Just Plane/Flat

date: 2003-11-12T12:06:46+00:00 author: Sam Wilson layout: post guid: /?p=16
permalink: /2003/11/12/just-plane-flat/ aktt_tweeted: - "1" views: - "606" categories: - Woodworking tags: - flattening - Joseph Whitworth - planing - woodwork — This morning I came into the workshop really wanting to work on *something*, but I couldn't really think what. I pulled out a rough sawn piece of blackwood that was left over from my table, sharpened up my plane, and set to

work making shavings. I didn't have an aim of making anything at all, I wanted only to hear and feel the plane working smoothly.

I have been looking around for information about producing flat surfaces, not because I need to know how it's done – I already know that – but just to get a bit of background on how this method was developed. New Scientist – The Last Word: Tell me straight has some interesting accounts of making lapping plates etc. and Joseph Witworth is mentioned all over the web in relation to this subject.

unfinished

date: 2003-11-15T12:58:49+00:00 author: Sam Wilson layout: post guid: /?p=17
permalink: /2003/11/15/unfinished/ aktt_tweeted: - "1" views: - "173" categories: - Reading - Woodworking tags: - art school - pidgeonholes - Reading — I haven't posted for a few days because I have not been doing much worthy of note. A bit more playing with boxboard pidgeonholes, a bit of reading (Morris mainly, this morning the first book of *The Prelude*, as well as sundry other texts relating to the... [gotta go...])

Just WALK!

2003 November 17 11:02AM.

Satish Kumar, from *Resurgence*, issue 197:

In industrialized countries we live as if we have no legs. Yet, we always want to go somewhere and fast. Often we don't live near where we work and we don't work where we live. ... Transport consumes large quantities of oil; it is a major source of air and noise pollution; it creates unbearable congestion — particularly in urban areas; it puts people's health at risk; it causes global warming and it causes the death of both humans and animals. Yet, we are totally addicted to and dependent on the transportation of goods and people. It is hard to see a practical way out of this quagmire. However, if we could resort to our wisdom and rationality, there are solutions. To begin with, we can start walking."

Keepin' it local

2003 November 17, 10:49AM.

I can't wait to get to work! I'll avoid transport; I'll dig the skips; I'll code to my heart's content (and no farther)!

I'm so excited. Last night I couldn't sleep for the thrill of what I'm planning on doing. I'm feeling excited about facing the utter enormity of global manufacture from a standpoint of low-tech and beautiful dumpster diving! Take that door jamb from the week before last (let's just forget about last week, eh? Apart from Monday I was singularly unproductive), a rough length of ash replete with nail holes and weathering — and what potential! A box made from such a waste item, even with a lot of attention, will never be quite the same as a box made with new material — *and that's the point!* It is the thought, the love, and the time that goes into a thing that makes it speak, more than it's raw material. I believe that this works both in terms of a) gaining spirit by putting more hands-on time into a piece (ripping boards by hand for example) and b) also losing spirit through increased alienation and disconnection *of* the material (shipping things half-way around the world [see The Fable Of The Cop Car]). Hmm... I'll think about this a bit more...

I have been working on the encyclopaedia code for the last few days (because I didn't go to the Major's Creek Folk Festival) and it is now nearing test data entry stage. I still have a lot of work to do with the stylesheet of course — I'm no graphic artist!

This strange, apparently discordant, confluence of the high-tech web world and slow, intuitive woodworking that I am embarking on is a thing which is going to require great concentration on my behalf. It's a matter of balance, and I know how easy it is going to be to lean more to one side than another. To spend so much time coding that I throw my hands up in disgust and want to never look at another computer. Or to force myself to continue with cutting a joint past when I can see why I'm doing it, and inevitably stuff it up.

A Catalogue, I Think?

2003 November 28 6:31PM. In which I work on the catalogue for the workshop exhibition and do no woodworking but lots of thinking.

I have not posted for ages, and I didn't really think I would be again until next year. But here I am, and very inspired about woodwork, uni and all that is going on: hooray (and what a relief)! I have much to report from the last couple of weeks but I may never get around to telling you because I want to meet G. and L. at the street theater soon.

Firstly (or lastly if one is to be chronological), I am working on the catalogue for the workshop exhibition. I am learning heaps about InDesign (especially its faults!) which is rather exciting. It does not do signature imposition of pages by itself, so this afternoon has seen me scrabbling around the web looking for

a script that will. I found one (at ScriptBuilders.net) and so I think tomorrow will be fun.

It is strange that I am focusing more on the web/technological side of my proposal at the moment, given that it is a minor part of what I will be doing next year. I feel like I want to get it sorted though: get the encyclopaedia working and also a couple of other things that I have been considering recently. I will be making a reading log to keep track of what I read, a project management script with which to track all of my ideas about things to make and write etc. I also have been doing some work with the style (CSS) of my site. I am constantly thinking about what I want to do next year and how I will go about it, working on a “manifesto” or “modi operandi” thingy... hmm... more thought needed...

I was on 2XXFM yesterday (Thursday) talking about the *Walking With Water* project that I did earlier this year. I'll put the MP3 of it up soon.

— *I really am rather excited about all this!!!*

Update 2007-06-12: After nearly four years, here's the MP3.]