

We meet at:

St John's United Reformed Church Hall
Lynwood Grove Orpington BR6 0BG

We meet on:

The first Saturday of each month
9am-1pm. New members welcome

The Woodentops is the SE London and W Kent Branch of the BWA



Twitter: #carverofwood



Factory Visit

It was on a bright spring morning that a group of 12 gallant 'Woodentops' travelled from the South East to (what was to us) the wilds of Lincolnshire.

It was an early start. We were to set off at 6:15am - well, that was the plan anyway, but one of our party (who shall be nameless) found there was an early morning bus to get him to the departure point and finding him set us back just a tad.

Though we were delayed by no more than five or ten minutes, the chorus of 'There's always one' echoed through the minibus as we set off. But this was very good-humoured banter. Driver Graham, Ann's other half, and who isn't even a carver, had very kindly volunteered to take us to the Ashley Iles factory. He got us there in about the three hours that we had allocated, plus time for a short break on the way. We were nearly at our destination when another of our party (who shall also be nameless) was caught short and another comfort break was urgently required, so our van took a quick detour down a narrow farm track to provide the relief that was needed. Another chorus of 'There's always one' naturally ensued.

Personally I had been expecting the Ashley Iles factory to be based in some sort of small industrial complex on the outskirts of a country town. So it was a big surprise when we drove to literally the centre of a large flat field in the middle of nowhere to be confronted with some converted farm buildings (Figures 1, 2) which form the centre of the Ashley Iles empire.

Our merry band got out of our comfortable but somewhat cramped minivan. We consisted of Ann, Graham, David, Terry, Derek, Cathy, Norman, Tom, Laurie, Peter and Clive. We were joined at the works by Stuart, who does not live near Orpington - he drove up separately as it was easier for him to go directly.

Right next to our van was an open shipping container which was chock-full of chisels and gouges ready to be sold to an eager carving public (Figure 3). We whittling enthusiasts could now sense the carving heaven that awaited.

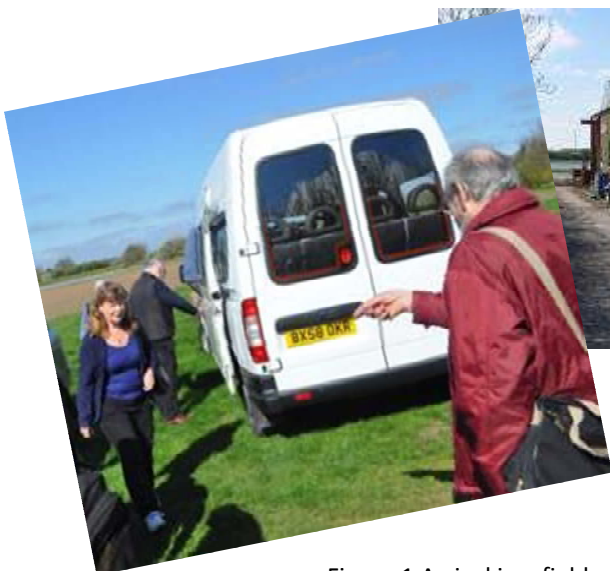


Figure 1 Arrival in a field



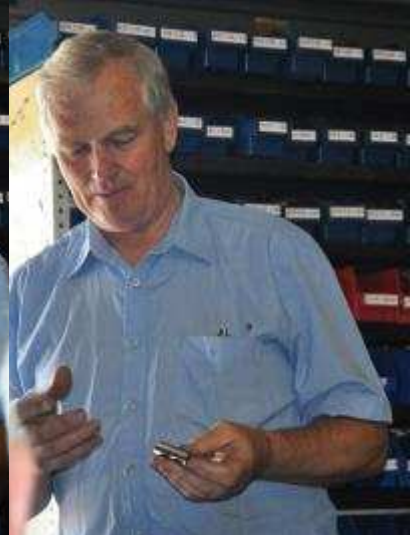
Figure 2 The Factory



Figure 3 The Tool Shed –
a gold mine for carvers!

Ashley Iles Factory Visit (cont.)

On entering the building, employee Maureen welcomed us with tea and coffee. We later learned that Maureen had worked for the company for 40 years and had retired but then came back as she loved the place so much. We were then ushered upstairs to a lecture room-come-store, where owner Tony Iles explain to us how his products were made, and how the firm ended up being in Lincolnshire.



He told us that his father, Ashley Iles, had started out in the 1950s taking bars of chisel-steel from one specialist tool works to another, the first cutting the bars into usable lengths, the second forging a tang, the third shaping and tempering and so on until the products were finished. This was in the days when Sheffield was awash with small manufactories willing and able to undertake such tasks. As the company grew, it moved into purpose-built accommodation where it seemed that Tony and his brother Barry gradually took over from their dad. Another brother, Ray was also in the business but in a different works elsewhere.

By the 1980s, the business had expanded and the firm needed to move. However, in that decade manufacturing was rather out of favour. Our political masters had decided, nationally, that Great Britain would be far better off doing tourism, retail and merchant banking. Manufacturing went to the dogs across the nation and was very unfashionable, as those of us who lived through that era bitterly remember.

Incredible as it may seem, given Sheffield's proud history in iron and steel, Tony told us that because making chisels and gouges required hammering of the metal to forge it, any premises they had in Sheffield needed to have a special hammering licence or permit!. Try as they might, they could not find an appropriate property that had or would be granted such a thing. Coupled with this, and the fact that it would seem that the Council at that time was hell-bent on converting small productive business premises into retail parks, the writing seemed to be on the wall, so Tony and his brother looked further afield and eventually set on Lincolnshire for their new base. They found a Victorian farmhouse and outbuildings which they could, and did, convert into the premises they needed. Here, they looked at new ways to improve production processes and increase efficiency. From over 20 staff, today Tony now has eight people based in two core teams, one forging and tempering the products and the other grinding and sharpening. Finishing and packing are carried out in the third area.

Tony was proud to say that his products are entirely made in the factory, though the steel is sourced from Germany and Austria, and the handles is still come from Sheffield. He also told us that the company was performing healthily, with boosts from increased internet sales and new areas, such as country crafts, where 'bodging' and similar skills need special gouges and Ashley Iles seems to have cornered the market here.

We then went round the works and saw exactly how the products were made. **This will form the second of these articles about our trip to Ashley Iles in the next edition of this newsletter.** After three hours cooped up in a van, followed by our fascinating tour, of course we had to adjourn to a local hostelry for some refreshment. The group shot shows us outside the pub where we had lunch. The homeward trip was another three hours but we came back with a much clearer picture about how those specialised tools are made - and with such care to ensure they are fit for purpose.



Tony and his team made us so welcome. I suspect it will make most of us think very hard before we buy anything *but* Ashley Iles tools in future.

Mandela Sculpture

Fifty rods of steel, symbolizing prison bars, so people will never forget the years Mandela was imprisoned. The remarkable thing about this artwork is that it is only when you stand at a certain distance (which is marked) that you see him. How about using this idea to inspire your next carving?



Churches Out of Use

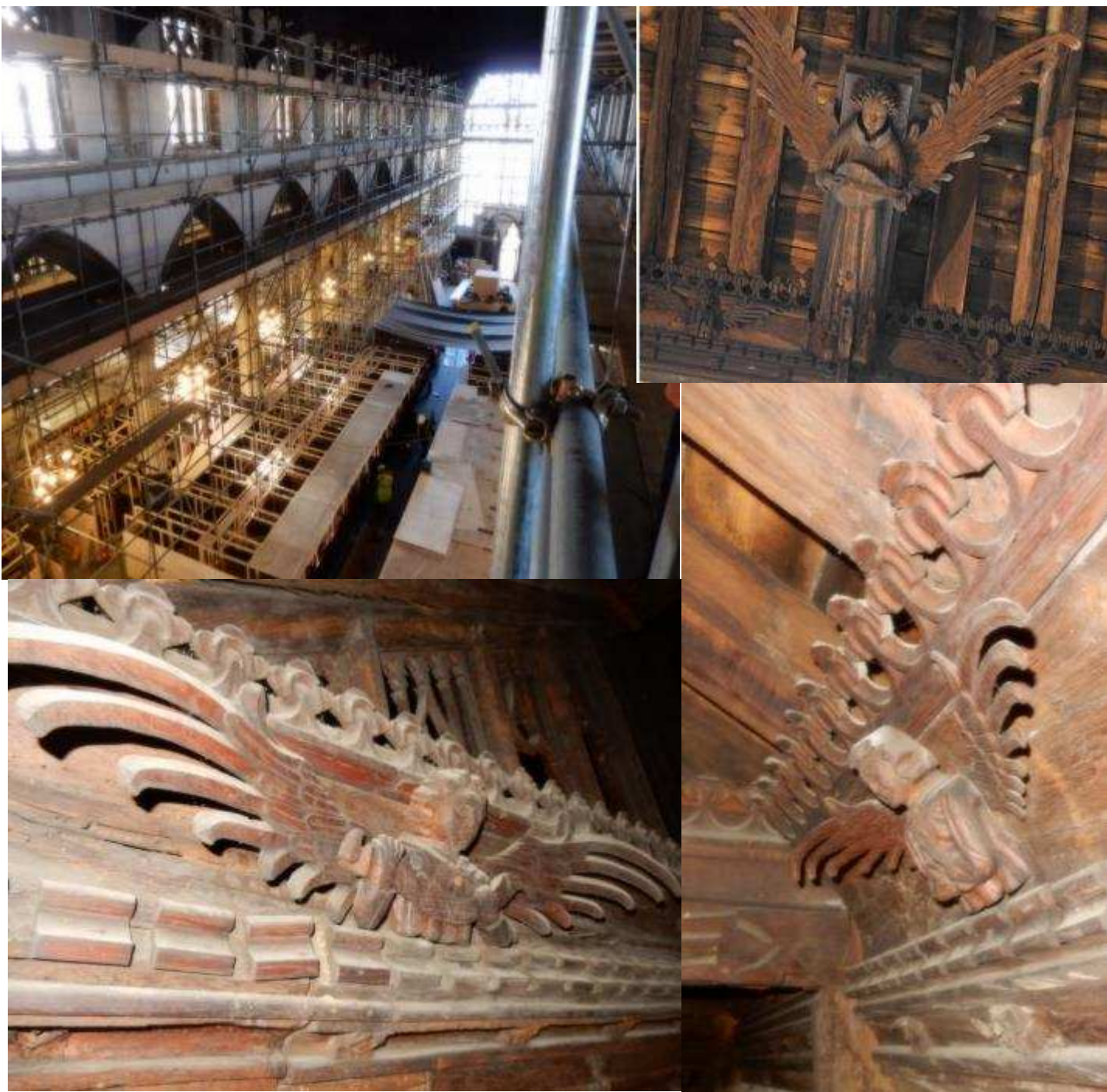
In my view, it's very sad when churches fall out of use, and even sadder if they have a glorious carving heritage. One such church is St Nicholas' Chapel, King's Lynn where for over 600 years the wonderful carved roof angels have inspired locals and visitors alike.

A friend of mine, working on a volunteer basis for The Churches Conservation Trust had the glorious opportunity of going up the scaffolding at St.Nicholas'. He took these shots (except the second one, which is from the Chapel website). The great news is that the church is being restored, at a cost of £2.7 million.

The Chapel is still a consecrated Church in which services and some local funerals are still held. It is also in regular use by Community organisations for concerts, exhibitions and workshops. The modernisation work will provide better space and facilities for these events which you can view in the Venue section.

Fund raising continues and the chapel had more than 13,000 visitors last year. It's worth pausing for thought that if every visitor gave just £15 it would enable The Churches Conservation Trust to keep this beautiful building open for the community.

More information is at: <http://www.stnicholaskingslynn.org.uk/>



AGM

Notice is hereby given of the AGM of the Woodentops, to be held on Saturday 2 May 2015 straight after the usual 11am chat (and which follows coffee). At this point, non-members can leave if they wish to do so but are welcome to stay and observe.

The Agenda is below. Notes of last year's AGM and the Club Constitution are available from Clive.

Nominations are invited for Committee Membership. Posts are:

GROUP LEADER

SECRETARY

TREASURER

NEWSLETTER EDITOR

COMMITTEE MEMBER (with particular responsibility for catering)

COMMITTEE MEMBER

COMMITTEE MEMBER

Current post holder: Ann High

Current post holder: Clive Nash

Current post holder: Mary Paddick

Current post holder: Clive Nash

Current post holder: Cathy Thomas

Current post holder: Tom Young

Current post holder: Terry Vincent

(Norman Wilkins is our Webmaster but under the Constitution this is not a Committee post)

It should be noted that all present Committee members, with the exception of the Treasurer, have indicated their willingness to re-stand for the positions they currently hold.

Nominations for this post would therefore be particularly welcome.

Nominations can be made at the meeting, or you can advise me prior to the meeting by email if you so wish.

The Newsletter Editor and Secretary roles are currently combined (the post I hold) but this does not have to be the case for the future if, for example, someone would like to take on just the Secretarial role.

Clive Nash

Secretary

Agenda for Annual General Meeting of 'The Woodentops'; May 2nd 2015

(The meeting will be held after the usual 11am gathering at which items of common interest are generally discussed. At this point, non-members can leave if they wish to do so.)

1. Chairman's Report
2. Treasurer's Report
3. Secretary/Newsletter Editor's Report
4. Webmaster's Report
5. Committee Changes
6. AOB

Perhaps you can try to find something of interest to all of us over the summer – maybe an interesting carving you see on your travels (take a picture), an exhibition, or a show. Let me know and it will go in the Newsletter. Send items to: clive@the.woodentops.co.uk

Remember: this is Your magazine

Jottings

Some liked the recipe of the toffee rice cakes at last months meeting. At the risk of straying TOO far from the noble craft of carving, here is the recipe: →

SHOWS:

From 2 June 2015 at the Tate Gallery:
Barbara Hepworth Sculpture Exhibition

Saturday 12th & Sunday 13th September 2015:

The European Woodworking Show, Cressing
Temple Barns, Witham Road, Braintree, CM77 8PD

Web site: europeanwoodworkingshow.eu

Remember: at its last competition, Woodentop
member Peter Paces won First prize here

RICE KRISPIE SLAB

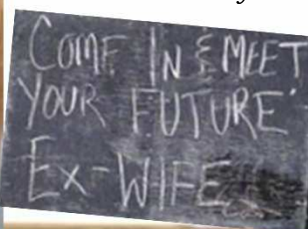
Cuts into about 15 pieces: 4 oz.
margarine, 4 oz. slab toffee, 4 oz.
marshmallows, 1 packet (5 oz.)
Rice Krispies

Oil an oblong tin about 7 in. by
11 in. Place margarine, slab toffee
and marshmallows in a pan and
melt over a gentle heat. Remove
from heat and stir well till blended.
Add Rice Krispies and stir till well
coated with the mixture. Turn
into prepared tin and press down
firmly. Cut into pieces when cold.

With sadness we note the passing of previous member **Val Drumm**. Val was a professional photographer in his working life. He was a member of the Club for a few years after he retired. Always cheerful, he was a talented member of the group.



Spotted in local bars – who knows, one might be the venue for our next Christmas meal as we agreed to eat out to celebrate this year



2015 Meetings: all 9am to 1pm, Saturdays

2 May	6 Jun	4 Jul	1 Aug	5 Sep	3 Oct	7 Nov	5 Dec
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Ann



Next meeting and AGM: 2 May