

ELTHAM & DISTRICT WOODWORKERS INC.

NEWSLETTER

JULY 2025

The next newsletter will be produced at the end of August. Please forward any items to richardasmith1955@gmail.com by the 20th of August.

General Meeting 6th August at 7.30pm

Club Rooms Ironbark Road

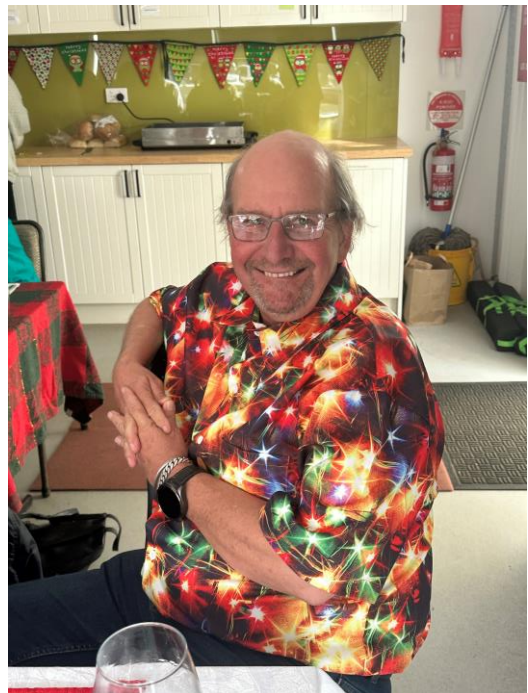
Christmas in July is done and dusted for another year. It was a great success, plenty of food, good company and wine, even the sun shone down on us. Thanks to all who attended and especially to those who dressed up in Christmas clobber! Hank's wife D.D. stole the show with her very festive creation. Tom's shirt gave the appearance of lights actually glowing in the photos. This year stickers were put under a few chairs for some prizes to be handed out for a bit of fun. Many thanks to those who helped out in the preparation of the day and especially to those who helped with the clean up. Never the fun part of the day.



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The exhibition planning is chugging along, you will have noticed the pull up banner in the kitchen. Well done to Maike and her design contact for the graphics and getting this done. I think it looks fabulous. The raffle tickets are printed and the process will begin to get them out to you. The prizes are fantastic once again.

The Wattle Festival is looming on the horizon, Sunday 31st of August. Wes will be taking charge of the pack up of things needed for our stall and will be ably assisted by Colin, any volunteers would be most welcome! This will take place on the Saturday, 30th of August at about 10.00am, but that will be confirmed closer to the day.

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And on the subject of the Exhibition, I hope you are busily making items to be displayed and making items to sell at the sales table. Now that Christmas in July has come and gone, and, I have been able to tidy up my garage/workspace I am hoping to have some items completed myself! I have seen some wonderful work being done during the year, very much looking forward to seeing the completed pieces. I don't know about you, but I am always very inspired by what you, the members are doing.

We are getting closer to starting the shed build, Raman is doing an excellent job in moving this along.

Hamish's session on drill bits and drills was very informative. So many drill bits, and so many functions! No wonder I was confused and not getting the results I was expecting. Hamish would welcome suggestions for topics, so if you have anything that you would like to be discussed or shown please let him know. Don't forget these sessions are held on the second Monday of the month, 1.00pm.

Eltham Sea Scouts have asked if we would do another workshop for some of their young scouts. Anyone interested in volunteering please let me know. A date hasn't been set as yet, but it's not a big time commitment, only a couple of hours.

And finally, please be careful with the machinery. Don't force something if there is resistance. We've had machinery put out of commission a few times by some overzealous attention, and especially, don't walk off and leave it, please write it up at the bottom of the sign in sheet for the day, and let the key-holder know.

Until next time,
Jane Hammett

Mentoring on a Monday

Our Mondays continue to be filled with bustle and loads of wonderful variety, with Charlie and myself offering contrasting advice and suggestions to anyone who dares to listen.

Skills and Techniques Session Second Monday of the Month

At the last session we had a great turnout of members wanting more information on drills and their bits. I hope they received some useful information and will find some of these simple processes easier, we also touched a bit on selection of screws and I recommend for anyone interested that the Robertson square drive screws are as good as it gets and you can get all varieties and generally good quality from 'Screw it Screws', I don't think much of their new business name but the products work for me.

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NEXT SESSION

Monday the 11th of August at 1-00pm

Back to Basics, Measuring, marking and cutting clean joints.

I feel it is timely to return to this topic as I notice so many relying on blunt pencils and dodgy squares to mark up their timber. We will discuss marking out your project accurately and the use of marking knives, squares, sliding bevels and marking/cutting gauges. Also we will have a look at cutting and processing once your project is marked up.

As mentioned previously I am keen to hear what topics you might like to see covered, so please let me know. It would also be great if those members with expertise or ideas on the chosen topics came along and contributed.

Hamish

Mallet & Gouge carving

The loud carvers (the noise we make not us ourselves) gather on the 2nd, 4th and 5th Fridays of the month. A small and dedicated group come together to make some noise. We have met on several occasions since we started before Easter. Unfortunately, I didn't write down what we did and it has gone into the mists of my memory which is patchy at the best of times. I did remember to write down what we did at the end of May and last week.

30.05.2025

Hank Tyler has been cleaning out his workshop by using up small pieces he has collected. Today he worked on an owl in Osage Orange he brought with him from Kansas. Alwyn Wainwright worked on a sitting figure in Jelutong and on a pecan pod in Jelutong using a very unusual gouge he bought at the Bacchus marsh Carve-In in early May. Melissa Foong dropped in, taking time out of her work to make some small handheld objects to put together in a sculpture. She's undecided about how they might go together. She's getting used to the tools and used a riffler today under Hank's guidance. Wes Weight continued to work away on his possum. This is so detailed. He takes small pieces of different coloured wood, stands them on end and glues them in place to reproduce a photograph of a possum on a branch. I'm really looking forward to seeing it finished. I think Wes is too! Chris Boylan brought a bottle of vinegar and steel wool to explore ebonising on various woods. He also turned a branch of Manna Gum for Barb Knell into a mallet.

13.06.2025

A small group of us came to make a bit of noise. Hank Tyler brought several large pieces of Osage Orange. He worked on a large abstract that revealed the stunning grain of the wood. He also prepared walnut bases for these large sculptures. Melissa Foong worked some more on the handheld objects. Chris Boylan carved his green man, deepening the relief around leaves surrounding the green man in a log. I worked on a bowl in a Merbau off-cut from a stair tread. Its hard wood and punishing on tools but has a lovely sheen from a gouge finish.

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If you would like to come along, we meet on the 2nd, 4th, and 5th Friday's from 9am to 3pm. If you want to carve quietly you are welcome too. Just wear hearing protection! We don't talk loudly. We just work loudly.

Bernie McCarthy 0408 145 819

Bacchus Marsh Carve-in 2025

Four members of EDWI travelled to the annual Carve-in at Bacchus Marsh in early May for a weekend of carving. Alwyn Wainwright, Maike Pritchard, Hank Tyler and me joined 40 other carvers mostly from the Woodcraft Manningham club. It is a live-in weekend and has been held for 28 years at the YMCA Lady Northcote camp.

Alwyn carved a low-relief dog which he enhanced after the weekend with colour. Maike carved her own dog as part of that same group and added colour, Hank sanded his handheld sculptures and I reproduced a 17th century panel design. Unfortunately, I don't have a photo of Hank at work. Check out his Facebook page to see his wonderful sculptures.

We could join a group and learn from an experienced carver, or we could do our own thing. On the first night we had 'show and tell' with our work for the past year and Timbecon provided voucher prizes for the most popular. If you think mallet and gouge carving is loud you should get up close and personal with the powercarvers who used electrical handheld tools to achieve rather beautiful platters. They were given a house to carve in a good distance from rest of us who value our hearing.

The food was good. We met carvers from all over and swapped stories about what we do and how we carve. I personally enjoyed meeting people who share my interest in 17th century carving styles. We carved in-the-round, deep and shallow relief. Some chip-carved.

The bagpipes on Sunday morning were a bit of a wake-up call. I came away with a sense of a community of carvers who have many different ways of doing things, and a range of interests, and all have a common love of carving.



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All in all it was a great weekend and I will go again. It was a privilege to have such an extended period to immerse myself in a project and get a lot done in a brief time, all in friendly company.

Thanks to Woodcraft Manningham and John Paine who organised the weekend.
Bernie McCarthy

Carving Group Friday 4/7/2025

Kerrie, Kevin and Alwyn apologies this month, but still wound up with twelve present through the day.

Had three listed as here for the Kumiko Group. Lorraine, Graham and Sensei Peter leading the charge. All determined to get this project completed by the deadline.

Wes was working on a green wood spoon, eager to see what all the fuss is about in regards to Greenwood carving.

Rod had his head down labouring away at his kneeling shepherd, and Bernie spent some time working on the raffle prize box he is making. Then Bernie relaxed a little working the decorative pattern on his large white walnut bowl. (I wrote that bit "tongue in cheek", because he didn't look like he was relaxed at all!)

Chris Boylen was working on an elongated White Pine sushi container. Trying very hard to get parallel grooves in the bottom, and finding the grain wasn't being very helpful. (Who said Carving was fun?)

Hank spent his time between working on his large Osage Orange sculpture piece, his small

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hand held objects, and showing Ethan (a prospective member) how to read and carve with the grain.

David Green was toying with his drawer for inclusion in a new bookcase at home. (I say 'toying' because it didn't look like he was being serious about it.) Then he took the easy route, and spent some time carving the back of a wooden spoon to finish his day.

And a new face, Marianne Doczi, was flitting about cleaning and prepping some wood for various projects.

As for me, I was hard at work carving a high relief Billy in Radiata Pine as part of a four part commission destined for overseas. Has to be delivered within two weeks, or I won't get paid. Looks like I'll be burning the midnight oil at home.....

Steve Mitchener.

Scrollsaw Group Sunday 13/7/2025

Kerrie, Val, Chris Hand and Kim Webster all apologies today, which only left four of us on deck.

Jess popped in and drilled 3 holes. That's all I wrote down.

Rowena was using my templates to mark out animals on 19mm Radiata Pine boards for cutting at the November Exhibition.

Kevin popped in for a while and cut some of a Koala and Baby fretwork piece.

I was doing some carving because I was pushing to get my commission finished in time for it's scheduled delivery. But the highlight of the day was a visit from Tony Orb and Steve Hood who popped in to catch up. Both doing well and enjoyed a good old chin wag and catch up. All the talking wore us out and we closed up early today. Was great to see the guys!

Steve Mitchener.

Carving Group

Friday 18/7/2025

What a strange and interesting day. Had one apology, the Kumiko Group working again, and six visitors for various reasons.

Wes was back working on his stick parquetry.

Alwyn waxed up his finished sitting figure, which is quite an interesting piece. Then he

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started a relief carving of a Tulip in Huon Pine.

Chris Boylen worked on his Greenman in his chunk of Bay Wood. This is shaping up well, though it seems the wood is getting harder as it is exposed to the air now. Chris spent some time working on a small spoon latter in the day.

Bernie spent considerable time progressing on the box for the raffle prize. Trimming, sanding, shaping and prepping.

Maike put a coat of paint on the raffle prize rocking horse, then quietly worked on a spoon. Making the bowl deeper and smoothing it out.

Rod was getting into his kneeling shepherd with some sandpaper. A sure sign this sucker is nearly finished.

David Green spent some time cutting the outline of a hanging bat on the Scrollsaw, then took it out to the bandsaw to make the deep shaping cuts from the other aspect. This project is in King Billy Pine. (You cut the block from two sides to remove most of the "waste". Then you round off what's left to make your carving. So simple.)

Hank was working on his small hand held sculptures, then went onto his bigger Osage Orange with his rifflers to refine the shape some more.

Barbara Knell brought along a visitor, and I spent most of the day talking to him. But more of that in a minute. I have no idea what Barbara did while I was busy with the visitor. And the other five 'quick' visitors were Shane, fixing the table saw, Charles Camera, Jane, Geoff and Rado. They all came and went and didn't interact with me much at all.

And the Kumiko Group under Peter's supervision were Lorraine, Rowena, Graham and Will. They worked in the kitchen, and that left me with Barbara's "guest".

The gentleman's name was Graeme Dean, and I found my conversation with him to be very fruitful and revealing. It seems that back in the day Graeme was a hobbyist Woodturner (involved with another small turning group,) and worked for the Eltham council in some capacity. As a consequence he used to come across people asking about woodworking groups in the area. One of which was Dennis Connor, who we all have heard about in relation to founding the Club as we know it.

Graeme arranged a meeting at his place in June 1987 at which six people turned up, Dennis Connor was an apology on the night. Four of those attending I recognised as original founders of this Club, the other two were unnamed. Graeme passed the contact details to Dennis, and stressed their interest in a 'local Club'. Graeme also suggested as the people were from 'the district' rather than just local residents, the name "Eltham & District Woodworkers" would be appropriate. Dennis was keen, and said he would follow it up.

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Dennis ran an ad in the local rag (the exact date unknown) to arrange a meeting at his place for August 1987. At this meeting 19 people turned up, four from Graeme's earlier meeting, and the Eltham & District Woodworkers were inaugurated as a result.

Unfortunately Graeme couldn't join this group at the time, and later in 1990 got Blackwood poisoning from his turning activities, and had to give up wood working as a result. So while Graeme was not a true "founder" of EDW, his input in the early stages was the incentive for Dennis to create the Club. I believe Graeme was astounded that his early input has grown into a such a strong thriving Club as it is today. He was truly amazed at our membership numbers, diversity of equipment, and the range of the various woodworking activities undertaken at our establishment.

While this information doesn't change the known history of the Club, it is certainly a useful bit of EDW pre-history. Thank you Graeme Dean. We owe you.

Needless to say, while gathering all this information and showing Graeme around, I got bugger-all done today. But I think that was a fair price to pay.

Steve Mitchener.

New Purchase

The club has purchased a Tormek Leather Honing Wheel, this may be useful for members involved in carving or turning.



Blackheart Sassafras and friends.

"Blackheart Sassafras was a bloodthirsty pirate who sailed the Spanish Main" is a great opening line to a bedtime story for the grandkids. Alas, you will have to settle for a story about a distinctive Australian timber instead. No pirates, but a bit about root beer, fungi and trans-Atlantic trade will have to suffice.

When the first Europeans came to Australia they would have known all about **sassafras**. A native of eastern North America, *Sassafras albidum* was 'discovered' by the Spanish in the 1500s and became one of the first major exports from North America back to Europe. The native Americans utilised all parts of the tree in treating various ailments and so in Europe it became a wonder drug with the reputation for curing almost any illness – even retarding old age. The roots of the plant have a distinctive sweet, spicy scent

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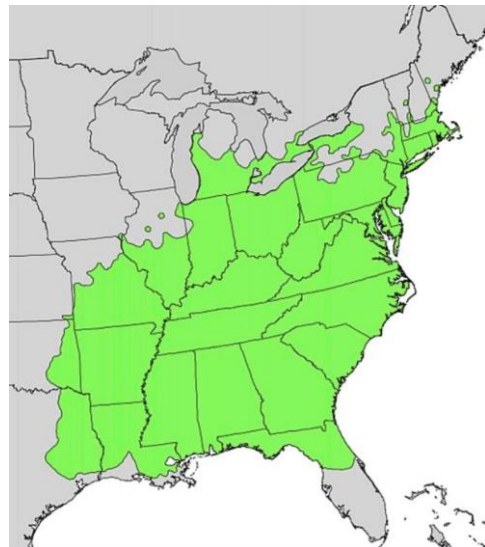
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and root tea was the most common way of partaking the healthful qualities of sassafras. The root was also used to flavour a beer – hence ‘root beer’. Supernatural powers were attributed to the species, for example the belief spread that

incorporating sassafras wood into a ship’s hull would prevent it from sinking.



The economic significance of sassafras declined quickly. No matter how high demand rose in Europe, a seemingly unlimited supply of sassafras was available. The expansion of white settlement in North America and the conversion of forests into farmland encouraged the proliferation of the tree since it thrives along the forest edge. The market became flooded with sassafras products, prices dropped and by the time of the American Revolution (1775-1783) the commercial glory of sassafras had faded.



But memories of the tree remained. It was (and still is) a fine and durable woodworking timber that is easy to work and has good dimensional stability when dry. It is a light timber, 495 kg/m³ and very soft, 2.8 kN on the Janka rating. Common uses included the making of small boats, kitchen cabinets and furniture. Its aromatic qualities repel insects and so made it a good choice for chests and beds. When Europeans came to Australia and ‘discovered’ a tree with similar characteristics, **sassafras** was an obvious choice for its name.

The ‘true’ *Sassafras* of the northern hemisphere is one of those plants whose genus name is also its common name, like *Dahlia*, *Magnolia* and *Aloe*. There are three species in the genus, the aforementioned *S. albidum* in North America, one in China and one in Taiwan. They are deciduous plants and the genus is classified in **Lauraceae**, a plant family also including cinnamon, bay laurel and avocado.

The southern hemisphere sassafras, **Atherospermataceae**, is a family of broadleaf evergreen trees and shrubs that are Gondwana remnants and totally

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unrelated to their northern hemisphere namesakes. There are fourteen species in seven genera: one or two found in each of southern Chile, New Zealand, New Guinea and New Caledonia with ten found in Australia. Here they are a rainforest species, found in the understory from far north Queensland to Tasmania. The two species of most interest to woodworkers are the **golden sassafras**, *Doryphora sassafras*, and the tree that started this yarn, **southern** or **blackheart sassafras**, *Atherosperma moschatum*.



Golden sassafras grows from southern Queensland down into NSW as far as Merimbula. In tree form it can grow to 36 m, all parts of the tree have a spicy smell and freshly cut wood has a distinctive odour. The grain is usually straight with no figure and the texture very even. In colour it is yellowish grey or brown to dark brown. It is firm but easy to work and glues well. It is used for veneer, small tool handles, cabinet drawer sides, brush-ware and turnery. There is limited availability in NSW.



You may have heard of a timber called socket (or socet) wood. Some of the other Australian Atherospermataceae species have this as part of their common name because the way that their branches connect to the trunk somewhat resemble a ball and socket joint. The **Illawarra socketwood**, *Daphnandra johnsoni*, is one example.

Blackheart sassafras is a shrub to conical tree that typically grows to a height of 2 to 30 m and 1 m in diameter and lives for up to 200 years. It grows in cool temperate rainforest in eastern Victoria and eastern Tasmania. There is a sub-species that grows at Barrington Tops and the Blue Mountains in NSW. Its botanical name, *A. moschatum*, links it to sassafras for *moschatum* is the Latin adjective meaning “musk-scented, due to the cinnamon smell of its bark and the sarsaparilla-like fragrance of its leaves. The sapwood is white or greyish, the heartwood can be similarly creamy grey to white or stained black by a fungi, hence “blackheart”. The grain is straight and the texture fine and even, usually with no pronounced figure. It is of moderate weight, 630 kg/m³ and is very soft with a Janka rating of 3.4 kN. It is easy to work, glues well but all nail-holes should be pre-drilled. It is an excellent steam-bending timber. In the past it was

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used for handles, textile bobbins, shoe heels, bungs for casks and was the best Australian species for clothes pegs because of its very low tannin content. It is a good timber for turnery and carving.

Nowadays it is a highly regarded furniture timber. When the tree is infected with a staining fungus distinctive brown, black and even green streaks run through the wood. It is highly prized for decorative work and bowl-turning as no two pieces are ever the same. Somewhat confusingly, when the timber is not stained it is called



Zone line spalting

golden sassafras, the same common name as its northern brethren. Blackheart sassafras is often cut so that it can be “bookmatched”, meaning that adjoining wood surfaces mirror each other giving a pleasing symmetry.



The streaks through the heart of the blackheart sassafras occur when a living tree suffers some sort of stress, such as storm damage, that allows fungi to enter the wood and produce pigmentation. The pigmenting fungi decays the wood but at a slow rate. Pigmentation is one form of **spalting**, ie. any form of wood colouration caused by fungi. The other types of spalting are **white rot** and **zone lines**. Pale hardwoods have the best ability to spalt and northern hemisphere trees in this category include **maple** (*Acer* spp.), **birch** (*Betula* spp.) and **beech** (*Fagus* spp.). Tasmanian ‘tiger myrtle’ (*Nothofagus cunninghamii*) is spectacular, with pigmentation causing dark brown or black stripes on the pink-red wood.

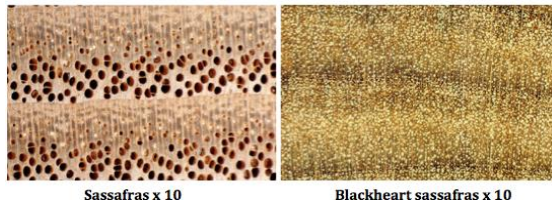
The availability of blackheart sassafras is limited. There are no plantations because its specific temperature and moisture requirements are difficult to replicate outside natural rainforests. Over 80% of Tasmanian sassafras grows inside protected reserves. It is mostly sourced

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from eucalypt forests that are certified to the Australian Forest Certification Scheme, meaning that they practise sustainable harvesting. It is not listed in the CITES appendices or on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.



The difference in the **end grain** photos of the North American sassafras and blackheart sassafras is striking. The North American species is typical of a tree

growing in temperate regions with a distinct annual growing season. The earlywood pores are large, three to six rows wide and the latewood pores are much smaller, commonly arranged in radial multiples and clusters. The rays are narrow with normal spacing.

The Australian tree is shows a diffuse porous pattern, typical of regions with no distinct growing season. There are numerous small pores in no specific arrangement between the growth rings. The rays are narrow with spacing normal.

Peter Goddard

Sources:

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Committee Members for Eltham and District Woodworks Club Inc.

President	Jane Hammett	0408 195 965
Vice President	Raman Rao	0433 741 753
Secretary	Catherine Watson	0449 294 814
Treasurer	Peter Gannon	0419 136 235

Committee

Shane Watson	0410 850 074
Rado Starec	0409 997 948

DATES FOR THE CALENDAR:

General Meeting	6th August at 7.30pm
Wattle Festival	31st August

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WORKSHOP SCHEDULE:

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
<p>Second Sunday Scrollsaw 9.00 – 4.00pm Steve Mitchener 0409 003 487</p> <p>Fourth Sunday Pyrography 9.00am – 4.00pm Steve Mitchener 0409 003 487</p>	<p>Every Monday Mentoring 9.00am-12.30pm Charlie Camera 0413481699 Hamish Hill 0428 577 878</p> <p>Second Monday Skills Techniques and Safety Session 1.00pm – 2.00pm Hamish Hill 0428 577 878</p>	<p>Every Tuesday Open Workshop 9.00 am-12.30pm Geoff Oliver 0417 375 782</p> <p>Every Tuesday Instrument Group 1.00pm – 4.00pm Frank Camera 0427 964 245</p> <p>s</p>	<p>Every Wednesday Wes' Exhibition Toy Making 9.30am – 12.00pm Wes Weight 0478 021 269</p> <p>First Wednesday General Meeting 7.30pm @ the club rooms</p> <p>Third Wednesday Committee Meeting 7.30pm @ the club rooms</p>	<p>Every Thursday Open Workshop 9.00am-12.30pm Paul Rushton 0417 017 347</p> <p>Every Thursday Wood Turning 1.00pm – 4.00pm Rod Gorfine 0418 108 551</p>	<p>First & Third Friday Wood Carving 9.00am-3.00pm Steve Mitchener 0409 003 487</p> <p>Second & Fourth Friday Mallet & Gouge Carving 9.00am-3.00pm Bernie McCarthy 0408 145 819</p>	<p>First & Third Saturday Open Workshop 9.00am-12.30pm Jane Hammett 0408 195 965</p> <p>Second & Fourth Saturday Open Workshop 9.00am – 12.30pm Toby Grant 0488 994 741</p> <p>Fifth Saturday Open Workshop 9.00am – 12.30pm TBA</p>