

# Introducing... The Solent Guild of Woodcarvers and Sculptors

Club secretary John Vardon tells us about this club, which dates back to the 1970s

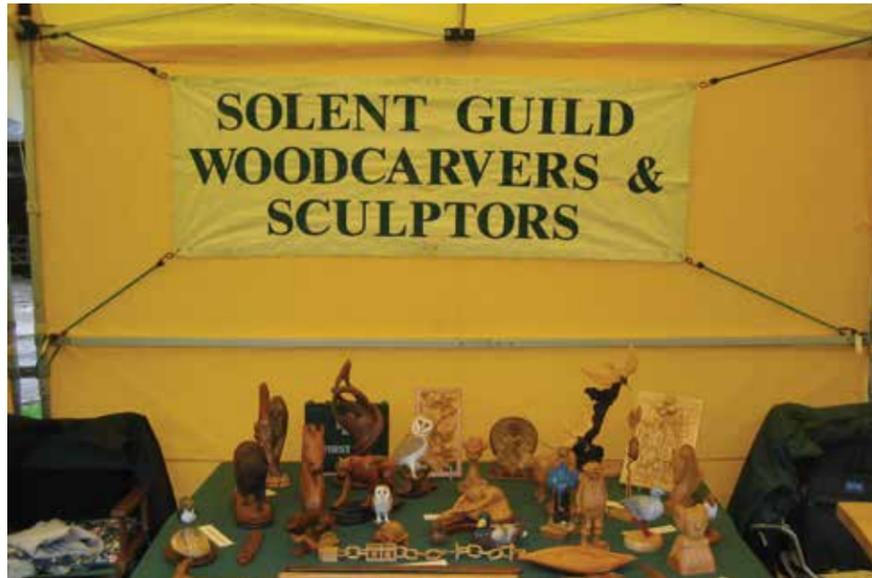
The Solent Guild of Woodcarvers & Sculptors inaugurated in 1978 was the result of an idea inspired by James Bell and encouraged by Vic Flower, Bill Judge and Stan Callan who felt that woodcarving should be better promoted and encouragement given to the craft especially in the Solent region.

The initial meeting was attended by 20 people and membership steadily grew to over one hundred but now comprises 58 members of both sexes. The objectives of the Guild are to further the interests of woodcarvers and sculptors and to encourage newcomers to the craft. Regular talks, exhibitions, outings and practical meetings take place to further these objectives.

Recently a granddaughter of founder Member Bill Judge came across a photograph of some members taken in the mid-1980s. Regrettably, many of these Members are now deceased but several are still alive and have remained active Members of the Guild to the present day.

## Guild members

Members, whose ages range from 16 to 90 years, are mainly from the Solent area but some come from as far as Petersfield and Selsey. The whole range of carvings is covered with some members specialising



Display of carvings at a demonstration

in relief, some in 'human form', and others in birds, fish, etc. Although the Guild does not provide formal tuition, the more experienced members help and encourage others. Like other woodcarving clubs, we find it difficult to encourage

young blood and convince the younger ones that carving is for all ages and both sexes.

## A lively group

The Guild is very active throughout the year. During the autumn and winter the Guild holds full day group carving sessions once or twice a month on Saturdays at Portsmouth Grammar School. These carving sessions are interspersed by monthly social evenings where a talk, not always related to woodcarving, is given, a quiz, skittles or other social event is held. In the spring and summer months, the Guild attend about 11 external events, e.g. arts trails, country park shows, wood-related shows and local outdoor museums. At these events, under our distinctive yellow tents which were purchased by the members, we demonstrate woodcarving and display carvings completed and hopefully encourage members of the public to become interested in woodcarving and possibly join the Guild. There are times when we are encouraged to attend as we are considered a valuable attraction at the event. The Guild publishes a newsletter several times a year and a yearly programme.



More examples of the club's fine work



Grumpy old men!



Trafalgar carving

## Members' work

One of our member's offers private tuition for those who require it. Two members are providing tuition at a one-day and a two-day course at the Weald and Downland Open Air Museum, near Chichester, for participants to learn the basics of woodcarving. Some of our members also use their carving knowledge to carve in stone or other non-wood material. Other members give talks on woodcarving related topics to other organisations.

Several of our members have attended carving courses run by Mike Painter at his own studio or at Westhope Craft College in Shropshire to enhance their skills and to pass on knowledge gained to other members. Some members have joined up with other carvers in the area and demonstrate once a month at the

Weald & Downland Open Air Museum near Chichester.

## Competitions

Once a year we hold a competition where we invite the public to judge members' carvings completed in the last two years. Five trophies are competed for, including one for non-wood sculptures. This competition is held at one of the early demonstrations and for the last couple of years has been held at the Amberley Museum & Heritage Centre, near Arundel in West Sussex. In addition, a further competition is held at the Guild's Annual General Meeting where Members only judge the entries. Awards for these competitions are made at a summer social event. At this event there is a further competition for novices, i.e. those who have not won a competition before.

## Carving projects

Occasionally, members of the Guild carry out a major project for a particular local organisation. In 2002 the Guild completed a carving for Havant Borough Council. In 2005, we were asked by The Friends of the Royal Naval Museum and HMS Victory to design and carve a carving to celebrate the Bicentenary of Trafalgar. The carving, designed by myself, was based on the midship section of HMS Victory and comprised six individual carvings by Jess Jay, Ray White, Bert Cox, John Tappy, Alan Crockford and Andrew Huebler. One half of the carving depicts the Navy in the days of Admiral Lord Nelson and the other half depicts the navy of today. The resulting carving is on display at The Royal Naval Museum.

In addition, members are often asked to carry out projects for local schools and some carry out commissions. One example is a totem pole carved by Jess Jay for Rowner Junior School in Gosport. The Pole is carved in a birch (*Fagus sylvatica*) log, which was supplied by the head ranger at Holly Hill Country Park.

## Membership

Membership is open to anyone interested in woodcarving and details may be obtained by seeing details below. ▶

## Details

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Woodcarvers in the Gridshell at the Weald & Downland Open Air Museum