



Men at the Mill

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Woodend Men's Shed

June 2025

Newsletter



President's Message

Vale Jan Couche

Our Secretary, Bill Couche's wife Jan passed away earlier this month after a long illness. Like all partners, Jan contributed to the Shed in many ways - particularly assisting with our catering and BBQs. I express my condolences to Bill and his family on behalf of all members.

The Shed continues to be very active, and we have welcomed a number of new members since the last issue of the newsletter. We have been fortunate in receiving several grants, which will be used to improve our dust extraction capacity within the facility.

Our kindling wood project is progressing at a great rate of knots, with a considerable number of bags already packed for this winter season. We are grateful for the opportunity to raise funds that this activity affords us.

Finally, I compliment our membership on making us a very active Shed, while still catering for those at a stage in life where they may not be as physically capable as they once were.

"Keep on Shedding" - Bob McDonald, President

House on Fire Project

As everyone knows, a house fire is anything but a game. However, when the local Fire Brigade approaches you to construct one, you get on with the job!

Designed to spark interest and raise awareness of the brigade among children at markets and open days, the game features a house-like façade with flames shooting from the windows and chimney. Children use water pistols to "knock down" the flames and win the game.

The Shed was pleased to assist with this creative project, which was officially donated to the Brigade at their March meeting.

Woodend Fire Brigade Captain Steve Ritchie accepts the "House on Fire" from Shed member Kevin Davis



Woodend Men's Shed

Please call and see us at 988 Black Forest Drive on a Monday or Wednesday morning or email us at info@woodendmensshed.org

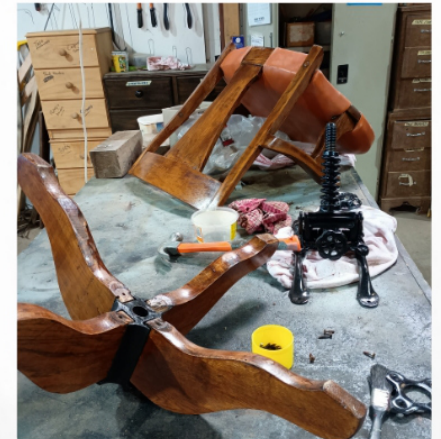
Happenings around the Workshop

Jobs for the Community

Almost every week – and sometimes more often – the Shed is asked to assist a community member or organisation. Generally, the assistance involves a repair or construction project that we undertake in our workshop.

Recent examples of support to local organisations include the Fire Brigade (see separate story), the Woodend Cemetery Trust (trailer repair), Woodend Rotary (Bereavement Boxes), and the Neighbourhood House (construction of a potting bench).

For individual members of the community, we have restored antique chairs, rebuilt various pieces of garden furniture, and even brought an antique wooden ice cream maker back to life. We're currently working on a project that has called on our star turner, Barry, to reproduce the leg of a low stool (as seen in the photo)—a complex task indeed!



Wherever possible, we endeavour to keep costs to organisations as low as we can – generally only recouping the cost of materials. Community members are charged a fee usually based on the time and skill required, but it's always a very reasonable sum for the result achieved. These contributions help cover the costs needed to keep the doors of our Shed open.

Metal Working at the Shed



As our membership continues to grow, so too does the need to expand the variety and types of projects we undertake. Currently, our activities include woodturning, antique restoration, toymaking, nesting boxes, and garden furniture restoration.

We felt it was time to introduce metalwork projects, beginning with outdoor tables and pot plant holders, and eventually expanding to items like rose arbours.

Thanks to the support of grants, we've been able to purchase a new multipurpose welder and accessories. We've also acquired new bending and cutting machines, which have allowed us to produce the items shown in the photos.

My Adventures - Bruce Giddings

Born in Melbourne to Australian parents and grandparents. Emigrated to the UK in the early 1950s and grew up in England. Joined the Merchant Navy at 18 and served a marine engineering apprenticeship. Sailed as cadet, junior, and then third officer (engines). I was at sea with Esso on tankers ranging from 26,000 to 249,000 tons, all fitted with steam turbine engines—the largest producing 32,000 horsepower.



I sailed the American coast, the Caribbean, Venezuela, the Mediterranean, Europe, Saudi Arabia, and Japan. I married in 1972, and my wife sometimes joined me. Our honeymoon, courtesy of Esso, was two weeks ashore in Lisbon during drydock, followed by a cruise across the Atlantic and four months in the Caribbean.

After settling ashore, I studied engineering at night school and joined a light aircraft company as a design draughtsman. I invented fictitious experience in motor vehicle design and blagged a contract role with Porsche, working at their research and development centre in the Black Forest, southern Germany. When I was called to pay income tax, I did a runner and ended up at Simca in Paris as a chassis design engineer—mostly living in a tent on the banks of the Seine.

I returned to the Isle of Wight and was employed as a design engineer for an oil pollution control company. Later, I worked as a hydraulics supervisor on the build of a North Sea car ferry.

My father and I fitted out a 32' GRP yacht hull, and I crewed the delivery voyage from the Isle of Wight to Gibraltar.

Next, I started my own company designing and manufacturing microlight aircraft. I designed, built, and flew a two-seat microlight, chaired the Technical Committee, and negotiated with the Civil Aviation Authority on microlight design standards. Unfortunately, my company went bust.

I was then recruited by Richard Noble—world land speed record holder at 1,019 kph in a jet-powered car—to help start a new light aircraft company. We designed and built an all-aluminium two-seat light aircraft. I was initially Chief Designer, then Sales Director, flying around England to demonstrate the aircraft at flying clubs. I flew into Prince Charles' backyard for an engineering award and sold two aircraft to Jack Brabham. That company also went bust.

After that, I worked as a roofer for two years—slates, tiles, and felt roofing. A great outdoor job, though a bit cold in winter.

I joined Trinity House Lighthouse Corporation as a mechanic, servicing lighthouse equipment all around England and Wales. I was helicoptered to several offshore rock lighthouses, where I lived for up to a month at a time. I was later promoted to R&D engineer, travelling around England and Scotland to measure lighthouse flash characteristics in preparation for solar conversion.

Then I transferred to the Meteorological Research Flight—the airborne research arm of the British Meteorological Service (the Australian equivalent is the BOM). The RAF operated a Hercules C-130 military transport aircraft, fitted out as a flying weather research lab. I was the installation engineer, designing and managing the fitting of scientific instruments on board, and I flew as part of the instrument operating crew. We conducted atmospheric observations and measurements including cloud physics, radiation, atmospheric chemistry, and drop-sonde data collection. There was even some occasional storm chasing in cumulonimbus clouds.

We flew campaigns based in Ireland, Denmark, Germany, Austria, Portugal, and Namibia. Island-based campaigns included the Azores, Canary Islands, Cape Verde Islands (off West Africa), and Ascension Island.

When the Met Office relocated from Farnborough Airport to Devon, we bought a 10-acre hobby farm. We raised beef cattle, sheep, rare breed pigs, and chickens.

I took early retirement at 56. We sold the farm and all our worldly possessions and imported a 30' motorhome from America, complete with a 6.8-litre V10 engine, queen-size bedroom, toilet, bathroom, huge lounge slide-out, built-in generator, and all mod cons. We towed a Mercedes Smart car behind it and lived on the road for four and a half years, touring France, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and even making a quick trip to Tangiers, Morocco.

After selling the motorhome, we backpacked through Thailand and Indonesia, then flew to New Zealand and toured both islands in a tiny rental campervan.

We arrived in Australia and bought a Ford Transit campervan in Sydney. We toured up to Far North Queensland, through the Daintree rainforest and Great Barrier Reef, then down the east coast, across to Tasmania, and up the Great Ocean Road.

We eventually bought a bush block in Mudgee, NSW, and kept sheep and chickens. I did the slaughtering and butchering, while my wife spun and knitted the wool to sell at markets. I also volunteered with the Rural Fire Service as a Communications Officer—working as a radio operator, liaising between firefighters on the ground and the logistics control centre during major fires.

Recreation

A lifelong motorcyclist, I got my licence in 1966 and rode until 2018, including a couple of track days in France and the UK—along with a few broken bones.

I sailed dinghies and yachts for 20 years and owned and raced Olympic-class boats including the Flying Dutchman, Five-O-Five, and Laser. I co-owned a Formula One racing yacht, and we placed 7th in the world championships. I also owned a 4-ton sloop and designed and built two training dinghies for the Sea Scouts.

I skied in Germany, Austria, France, and Switzerland. My favourite kind of skiing was what I called “whole mountain skiing”—starting above the clouds on steep slopes, skiing down twisting pistes, through the clouds and forests, and finishing at a ski lodge for a cold beer. I never had a single lesson—foolish, undoubtedly—but it was a hell of a lot of fun.

In 1974, I taught myself hang gliding by jumping off the 500-foot cliff at Beachy Head. I later imported a microlight kit from the US, built it, and taught myself to fly it. I re-engined it and fitted it with a self-designed reduction drive and propeller. I sold 130 propellers into the microlight market, which led to the creation of my own aircraft design and build company. I also flew paragliders and sailplanes and earned my UK private pilot's licence in 1984.

While living in Mudgee, I built a MiniMax— a single-seat, shoulder-wing taildragger made from wood and canvas with a 65hp engine. I flew it for two years before relocating to Victoria in 2018 to be close to my son and his young family. Now I live in a little house in Woodend, and all my adventures are over – except for the Men's Shed!

The Workshop Clock

You probably pass it several times a day—but have you ever wondered about the history of our workshop clock?

It was donated about four years ago by Joy Daymon, who just turned 100! Joy and her husband Reg were both aircraft mechanics during WWII. Reg later worked for Ansett Airlines, and when their Essendon workshop moved to Tullamarine, he rescued the clock from a skip and kept it in his shed for decades.



Joy moved to Woodend in 1995 and brought the clock with her. In 2021, she offered “a few bits and bobs” to the Men's Shed—including the clock. After a clean, oil, and a new cord, it found a new home with us. Still ticking—and hopefully as resilient as Joy, who just celebrated her 100th birthday in Fiji!