

# The CNEW Skew

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## President's Message

### Which direction are you turning?

It still amazes me that at every meeting I attend, I find a few remarkably beautiful and well produced projects in front of me for Show and Tell. There seems to be no end to what will show up and often these items are made by folks who profess that they are brand new to turning. We have all seen an awesome piece on display, admiring it before we learn who created it, then when we find out it was made by "Joe Newbie" and he remarks "I really don't know how to do this, I was just messing around" we reel back and say "Hey – You have talent!"



**Well the truth is we all have talent.** Joe Newbie had some before he turned a thing. You had some before you started turning too, and the time you have spent at the lathe has further refined it to fit your particular style. A style which has either come easy for you or to which you have gravitated as a result of your or someone else's taste or preference.

**Your style is as individual as the woods we use.** Each of us has some innate talent, whether in woodworking or not. A few of us are great turners but can't paint a darn thing. Others may have a Green Thumb and could grow a vegetable garden in solid concrete. I know I have talent but also believe that I can refine it to serve me better in areas I like to work in. I know too, that stretching my mind and pushing my abilities can improve many of my skills. New things are interesting and keep boredom away.

**Recently, to stretch my mind,** I spent time at a couple of seminars with real famous turners who have different talents than mine, to learn more about their types of

## Editorial

More tool talk this month. At the last meeting, I had a remnant of a 6" high vase that had blown apart when I tried cutting eccentrically through walls that were too thin. The inside bottom of this vase was remarkably well finished. You might be surprised to learn that I used a scraper to achieve this. A normal scraper would be uncontrollable in that confined space, that far over the tool rest: using one would just produce catch after catch. The tool I used is a negative rake scraper, which is a totally different tool from a regular scraper.

I first saw a negative rake scraper at Totally Turning in Albany last year, where Stuart Batty demonstrated using the tool on the inside of a cocobolo bowl and to smooth the wings(!) of a rectangular bowl. The tool has a bevel on the top face as well as a bevel underneath. The one I have, designed by Stuart using Jerry Glaser's A11 steel, has a very long shallow top bevel and a very short bottom bevel. Robert Sorby make one (available from Craft Supplies) which appears to have a shorter top bevel, again at a shallow angle. Somehow, the altered geometry completely eliminates catches.

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### President's Message, ctd.

turning. Not necessarily things which I am already interested in, but rather topics with which I might become intrigued and which might help me cultivate new thoughts or concepts, ultimately leading me to contemplate whether I wish to develop skills or talent in those areas too. My direction after all should not be so fixed that I cannot consider changing it, right? As far as my talent, I will always pick up a couple of tidbits of information observing someone else's work. Oh, and I love it when some of that "famous talent" rubs off onto me! If I stand close enough, it always does.

**So now my direction has bent from** what it was a couple of months ago and I think that is good. This weekend a couple of my projects spun-off into destinations they may not have headed for a month ago. I added some color with dyes and markers, carved a little and used some texturing too. I even made a different shape and used different tool methods a few times. Maybe some of this will stick in my talent pool, maybe not. But I am enjoying myself and I am proud of how these items came out. They may not be perfect but they look different from what I produced last time I stood at the lathe.

**You could try this too. Change direction for a while.** Make a turning that you think is risky, not from a safety standpoint but rather a talent or experience perspective. Too often we stay in a rut and make the same choices over and over again. Joe Newbie hasn't got a rut yet so each new piece of wood is an opportunity to create something unique. Believe it or not you have the same opportunity. Look at your next piece of raw material as an opportunity to make something new, something different. Maybe try to copy a piece from last month's

### Editorial, ctd.

Before you rush off to re-grind all your scrapers, this is a finishing tool *only*. It will not hog off lots of wood. It also requires a burr to be effective: Stuart Batty says he uses A11steel because the burr on ordinary HSS will last only seconds on the dense tropical hardwoods he uses. I had to buy a 24-grit wheel because the 80-grit which had been my coarse wheel just wouldn't do the job and the tool still needs to be sharpened more frequently than a normal scraper.

In use, the tool is a dream. Keep it flat on the rest at centre height. No need to tilt it to a shear scraping angle. It is especially good on the inside of a bowl, in the transition between bottom and sides. You can work the tool back and forward and it will not catch as the amount of engaged edge changes. Near the rim, you will still get chatter if the walls are thin but now it's easier to control the tool with one hand and support the bowl with the other.

For more information, see Stuart's web site at [www.negativeverakescraping.com](http://www.negativeverakescraping.com).

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Show and Tell. Perhaps look for inspiration in a book or a video. The reward will be obvious. It will start as a smile across your face and wind up as a desire to bring the piece into Show and Tell for others to see.

I can restate the theme for this month in three simple terms as follows: Learn. Experiment. Be confident.

*We turners as a group enjoy sharing and learning. So I urge you to spin in a different direction this month and see what happens!*

Eccentrically yours,

*Dave Eaton*

## Minutes of September Meeting

Tim Elliott

No guests/new members were recognized. Mickey did not attend. Dave provided a summary of our treasury.

July beginning balance: \$1033

July ending balance: \$754

Aug beginning balance: \$754

Aug ending balance: \$681

The \$1000 we earmarked for seed money for the regional Yankee Symposium has already been paid.

**Project Goodwill** continues with another auction at the Woodworks show in January at the BigE. Please be sure to bring in any donations in time for this event.

Several members showed up for "open shop" at 5 p.m. prior to the start of our official meeting. We will have another open shop prior to the October meeting unless we fail to get permission from the craft center. If cancelled, an announcement will be made on the CNEW website.

The October meeting will include a **pen challenge**. Here's how it works: If you want to participate, make a pen and bring it to the meeting in a plain brown bag tied up with string. You will get to select a pen made by another member to bring home with you.

Dave asked how many have taken advantage of the mentors program. Only two members raised their hands. We would like to see more participate in this.

It is not too early to begin thinking about officer nominations for 2007. Reid pointed out that per the club bylaws, the current officers are the default nominating committee. Dave will bring a list of officers and their official duties to the next meeting. The following members have already volunteered to run for office:

Ray Boutotte	storekeeper, book librarian
Al Faul	video librarian
Norma Hogan	treasurer
Tim Elliott	secretary
Henry Fairlie	photographer
Graeme Young	newsletter editor

There was some interest in putting together a CNEW contribution to the Freedom Pen Project (hand-made pens sent to active duty US troops). Gene Spadi has a supply of corian that may be used for some pens. Interested members are invited to come turn pens in the open shop time before the October meeting.

Reid Gilmore summarized **upcoming events**:

Oct 13-15 - Totally Turning regional symposium in Albany, NY.

Oct 18 - CNEW hosts Malcolm Tibbetts. Tickets now on sale for \$15. Attendance will be limited to 50 people.

Oct 22 - Spirit of the Wood show at Middlesex Community College. We have room for 2 lathes and 2 tables this year, separate from the ART space.

Nov 24-26 - Worcester Center for Crafts craft fair.

Thanks to members who provided content for our last newsletter. Al Faul and Frank White have both volunteered to write up something for this month. The newsletter submission deadline is always the 15th of the month.

Thanks to Peter Chobot for providing a supply of large blanks for the September wood swap., and thanks to Craft Supplies for providing a \$15 gift certificate (placed in wood swap).

Ray Boutotte collected names of people interested in shirts with an embroidered CNEW logo. Ray also summarized transactions to date for the CNEW store: \$700 spent on inventory, \$525 taken in. Current inventory would yield a small profit if sold.

Ray would like to start a new "Piece Project" raffle in which one member per month will bring an item they made to the meeting to be raffled off.

Frank White plans that the rest of the year looks like:

Oct	Angelo Iafrate on alabaster
Nov	Al Czellecz on surface decoration
Dec	Annual gift swap & holiday party

Frank also reports that the steering committee for the Yankee Symposium (June 2007) has numerous subcommittee vacancies to fill. Please contact Frank if you would like to contribute.

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### AAW LATHE GIVEAWAY

As part of the Fall 2006 membership drive, the AAW ([www.woodturner.org](http://www.woodturner.org)) will be giving away a free Powermatic 3520B lathe to one lucky member who joined or renewed ONLINE. By joining on line, your correct address, phone, etc. will appear in the Directory and your Journal will be mailed to the correct address. The lathe will be given away in a drawing just after January 1, 2007.

## Eccentric Chucks

Reid Gilmore & Graeme Young

Eccentric chucks allow the woodturner to have more than one center or axis on a piece. These chucks allow the turner to create unusual objects that differ in one or more ways from a typical lathe-turned piece. The September CNEW demonstration featured two commercially available chucks that allow multi-axis turnings, the Axminster Eccentric Chuck and the Deluxe Escoulen Eccentric Chuck. A third chuck (Sorby Eccentric Chuck) was not shown, but has capabilities somewhere between the other two.

### The Axminster Chuck

The Axminster, which is the simpler and less versatile of the two chucks, is available from Craft Supplies for about \$120. The Axminster Chuck can be attached to any standard lathe chuck that has expanding 2.75" jaws, which corresponds to the #2 Jaw on a Stronghold Chuck. As such it is interchangeable between lathes, so you don't need to worry about spindle thread. It would be relatively simple to make home-made versions of the Axminster Chuck however, these might not be as easy to use.

The stainless steel ring on the Axminster chuck that fits over the expanding lathe jaws is attached to an offset ring that allows incremental  $\frac{1}{8}$ " offsets relative to the lathe center, up to a maximum offset of about 1". Surprisingly dramatic effects can be achieved by offsets of less than  $\frac{1}{4}$ ". The third part of the Axminster Eccentric chuck is an aluminum mounting block that attaches to the offset ring via a large set screw. This block has 12 index positions, to allow spiral rotations of offset pieces. The aluminum mounting block has three holes for woodscrews that can be used to attach the piece, a waste block, or a jam chuck to the Axminster Chuck. The waste block or jam chuck can be attached to the eccentric chuck with  $1\frac{1}{4}$ " wood screws. Pieces can also be attached to waste blocks with double side turning tape, hot melt glue or regular wood glue. I don't recommend trying to attach the work directly to the aluminum mounting block with double sided turning tape due to the difficulty of getting the piece back off the chuck. Piece specific mounting jigs (e.g. one to hold wine bottle stoppers) can be easily made.

The Axminster Eccentric chuck is not intended to make large items, but is instead used for smaller pieces such as offset boxes, wine bottle stoppers, candle holders, small (< 8" diameter) bowls, etc. As such, this would

be a reasonable attachment to use on a small lathe. Reid brought in a number of examples of items that could be made using an eccentric chuck.

### The Escoulen Chuck



The eccentric chuck designed by Jean-François Escoulen is a big, heavy chunk of solid steel. It costs about \$350 and as far as I know Craft Supplies is the only U.S. supplier to carry it. (There is also a smaller chuck with fewer capabilities). The front face of the chuck has a small faceplate set into it, off centre. The faceplate is held flush with the chuck faceplate by three setscrews; loosening these screws allows the faceplate to rotate. Work is held on the faceplate using either a  $\frac{3}{8}$ "x1" screw chuck or with three wood screws. Using the faceplate alone allows turning on multiple parallel axes. Work held on the screw chuck can be centred on the lathe/chuck axis and gradually moved off-centre. Because the work rotates as it moves away from centre, spiral-stemmed goblets and the like can be produced this way. Centering the work on the faceplate means it will always be off-centre. Rotating the faceplate brings different faces of the work closer to the edge of the chuck. There are twelve marks around the faceplate, allowing the work to be rotated in 30° increments to produce forms with multiple rounded facets.

The ability to turn off-centre on an axis parallel with the lathe axis is common to several eccentric chucks. What sets the Escoulen chucks apart is their ability to hold the work on an axis which is *not* parallel with the lathe axis. The part of the chuck that screws onto the lathe spindle is separate from the main body of the chuck. It is a ball with six indents spaced around its circumference. The chuck body fits over the ball and holds three pointed screws which fit into three of the indents. Another three flat screws are used to secure the

chuck body to the ball. With all six screws in place, the chuck is held straight and the faceplate/screw chuck provides off-center, parallel axis turning. Remove two of the pointed screws from the ball and the entire chuck body pivots about the remaining screw. Now the work is held on an axis which is not parallel with the lathe axis. Using the ball alone is not very useful for spindle work – unless you keep the angle very small, the outer end of the blank rapidly moves so far off center there is no way to turn it down to round. To turn on multiple non-parallel axes without having to use blanks that barely fit over the banjo, you can swing the blank off-center using the faceplate then pivot the entire chuck in the opposite direction. Now the axis of the blank crosses the lathe axis at some point and you can turn it at or near that point without having to remove vast amounts of wood.



### General Guidance

During off-center work, the tailstock should be used whenever possible to reduce the chance that the spinning item prematurely flies off the chuck. This may mean using a wider blank than usual and leaving a large piece of waste at the tailstock end. It is also important to rotate the piece by hand before turning on the lathe to make sure that the chuck and/or the wood don't smack into the toolrest. While this is a standard safety precaution on a lathe it is even more important when the chuck and the workpiece are mounted off-center relative to the spindle and tailstock. Slow speeds (~600-800 rpm) are highly recommended when the tool (spindle gouge or skew chisel) is making intermittent contact with the wood surface. The most difficult cut to make when using the offcenter chuck is the entry cut when the tool is only making contact with one surface of the piece. Slow rotation speeds and a non-aggressive cut will minimize tool vibration which leads to ragged cut surfaces. Once the tool is making contact on all surfaces, turning with an eccentric chuck is no more difficult than normal spindle turning.

When using any eccentric chuck, sanding is not a final step, but one instead that needs to be done before the offset is changed or the mounting clock is rotated. Once a section of the work is no longer “on-center” sanding is relatively ineffective. If you intend to use friction polish, that should also be applied at this point. Turning with the eccentric chuck is often a matter of trial and error, because it is sometimes difficult to visualize what you will get using a certain combination of center offset and object rotation. One book that has several plans for simple boxes using an eccentric chuck is “Turned boxes, 50 designs” by Chris Stott.

While an eccentric chuck is not an essential tool for the typical woodturner, it does allow you to try new things and produce objects that are a bit out of the ordinary.

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## Briar Wood Burl

### The Root of a Good Smoking Pipe

#### Frank White

Earlier this year I made a small bowl from a briar wood burl that I purchased several years ago. The wood has a handsome figure and turns and finishes very nicely. When I decided to embellish the outside surface with V-shaped flutes, I also discovered that it is very well suited to carving. Although it is a rather dense, tight-grained wood, it is not exceptionally hard, somewhat softer perhaps than cherry burl.

Knowing only that it has been used for well over a century for making Briar smoking pipes, I decided to see what I could find out about briar wood burl. When I was still gainfully employed, research often meant searching through primary sources such as early diaries, account books, and public records; consulting secondary sources such as published books and articles on a given topic; and examining three dimensional objects in the museum's collections for what clues they might have to offer. I did not use the internet for research purposes; in fact I had a certain disdain for it as a serious research tool.

Well, times have changed, and, I guess, so have I. My only readily available source for information about briar wood burls was the Internet. Yet, I still found that I had to scrutinize this information carefully for inconsistencies. For instance, one site says that the burl comes from a “small scraggly bush called White Heather (*Erica Arborea*).” Others say that briar wood burl is the “joint between the stem and roots of the

**Briar Burl**

White Heath.” Peterson’s *Field Guide to Trees and Shrubs* indicates that White Heath (botanical name *Erica*) and Heather (botanical name *Calluna*) are different species of the Rhododendron family. So it seems that White Heath is the likely source of these burls. Coincidentally, several years ago I turned a root burl from a Mountain Laurel bush, which is also of the Rhododendron family. Although it turned and finished easily, my impression is that it was a bit too spongy to carve easily.

The White Heath shrub is found on hillsides and mountainous areas of Mediterranean countries such as Greece, France, Italy, and Algeria. It can grow to a height of 10’ and develops an enormous root system. The fibrous growth that develops after several years between the visible stem and the roots of the plant is what is known as Briar wood burl. The harsh and very dry climate in these high regions produces virtually unique burls with the characteristics necessary for making a good pipe, i.e., density and toughness, porosity, imperviousness to heat. Not surprisingly, it is a slow-growing plant that may take 40-50 years to produce a burl of sufficient size for making pipes. Burls of 80-100 years old are preferred, and some of the finest briar pipes have been made from burls 2-3 feet in diameter and 200 or more years old. These large, ancient burls are now very scarce so burls of lesser age are commonly used. Immature burls are not sufficiently tight-grained to make quality smoking pipes.

Although the great concern in the recent past was that pipemakers would run out of briar burls, that has not been the case. The problem now is finding people who are willing “to do the hard work of roaming the Mediterranean mountains with a mule to [dig up] briar root.” Digging is backbreaking work aided only by hand tools, but it also requires a great deal of skill to remove the roots without harming them. There are few, if any, diggers under the age of 40, and it is feared they are becoming a vanishing breed. Sounds like a common present day problem where skilled manual labor is concerned!

“Once harvested, the burls are cut by skilled craftsmen using large circular saws to remove the soft and cracked portions, leaving only close-grained, extremely hard Briar wood.” Part of what is routinely removed is the stem of the Heath shrub, which runs through the burl.

(The piece that I used may have been this part of a Briar burl as it contained part of the pith of the plant.) The remaining burl is rough cut into small blanks, called “ebauchons,” of different sizes and shapes consistent with standard smoking pipe shapes.

As the burl at this stage still contains considerable moisture, some pipemakers age the ebauchons for a considerable time, up to 30 years. Others boil them from 12-24 hours in order to replace the sap and resin with free water, which evaporates more quickly than bound moisture. Even after the boiling process pipemakers have to air dry the ebauchons for as long as two years before they are suitable for making good smoking pipes.

One of the Briar wood sites recounted a visit to a large Briar sawmill in Italy in 1984. ([www.rdfield.com/Articles/My%20Visit.htm](http://www.rdfield.com/Articles/My%20Visit.htm).) At this mill burls were being stored everywhere inside sheds and outside in the open air; some were being wet down, some boiled, and some were bone dry. Most of these burls were very large and were still alive and growing with green shoots running out of them. In the cutting room where the noise was earsplitting, there were six sawyers, each seated in front of a large circular saw. Cutting the Briar burls takes considerable experience and skill as the sawyer has to examine the burl carefully before making his first cut. This cut is crucial to the efficient use of the burl and needs to result in two halves with straight grain. The halves are further cut up into large and small pieces with the aim of getting the largest number of pipe blanks out of the burl. These blanks, or ebauchons, are then boiled and are at that point made available to pipemakers who carefully sort through them choosing the type of grain and figure that is most suitable to the styles of pipes that they make. The pipemaker on this visit to the sawmill selected burls from different parts of Italy and from Sardinia and Corsica for the different pipes that he planned to make. Apparently, the highest grade pipes are made from the outer portion of the burls, called Plateau Briar, which has more pronounced grain. After the burls are sufficiently cured, they are shaped into pipe bowls by a variety of hand and machine operations. The bowls are fitted with stems of vulcanite or lucite and then hand finished, stained, polished, and waxed before they are made available for purchase by pipe smokers.



Yew Vase by Reid Gilmore



John McAtee  
Walnut, maple and redwood burl



Graeme Young  
Leopardwood, brown ebony and  
ebony



←Phil Bowman  
16" spalted maple  
bowl  
Will Hunt→  
Peruvian walnut and  
holly vase



## Show and Tell



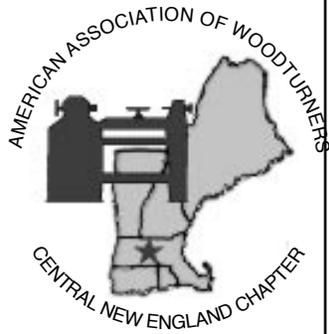
←Joe Harbey  
Tall spalted maple  
vase  
Martin Ring→  
Natural edge cherry  
burl



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Clockwise from top L: nested birch bowls by Dave Eaton; spalted maple squares by Bobbi Tornheim; spalted maple round by Joe Harbey; cherry burl bowl by Frank White.

