

My Other Interests - Jock Watson

As well being in the HTPA, I have been a member of the International Wood Collector's Society in America for 13 years. My membership no. is 1778 and the latest members number is 4692. There are currently about 1400 members, of which USA has 93% and the other 7% is thinly scattered throughout the rest of the world. Australia has the next most members to USA with 34, nine of which are in Victoria. As the members are so scattered we only have a get-together on the occasion of a visit from an American member.

The purpose of the Society is:-

To encourage others in developing a proficient wood collection.

To disseminate information pertinent and instructive to those interested in working with wood.

To encourage the exchange of wood samples (Standard size 6"x3"x 1/2") by members from all parts of the world.

To encourage quality and creative craftsmanship with the innovative uses of wood.

To assist in accurate identification and classification of wood specimens.

Most members are involved in at least one or two of the following:- wood turning, carving, furniture, cabinets, boxes, marquetry, toys, puzzles and novelties, and collecting wood samples.

In USA they have Regional Meetings in different States nearly every month. We had an Australian Regional meeting in the Meat Market last September, the first ever outside the USA. Attending were members from the USA and NZ as well as local and interstate. At every Regional meeting in USA and here, a wood auction is held of pieces of wood, all sizes and varieties donated by members, the proceeds going to the Society.

I keep in touch with two of the most active local members, who although they are in the engineering business, make wood working their hobby, and are both expert wood turners. They also do a deal of sample swapping with USA members. Another member is an expert carver and has exhibited his carvings in the City on numerous occasions.

I collect different wood for samples, also larger pieces of the more colourful grained timbers for wood turning generally, and for the replacement of handles of the many different tools in my collection.

Some of the USA members have picked out a certain object like bowls, goblets, plates, gavels, birds, and animals etc. and turn or carve them in as many different woods as they can acquire.

In the monthly magazine of the Society, from time to time, are photos of the work of the more expert wood turners and carvers. I have photo copied some of these photos, but in black and white they don't show up as well as in colour.

Stone Tools from 31,000 years ago

The Age (23.3.89) held a fascinating front page article together with this accompanying photograph. Carbon - dating of stone tools and animal bones from three rock shelters in south-central Tasmania surprised archaeologists by dating to 31,000 years ago rather than the expected 12,000 - 14,000 years. At this stage Tasmania was joined to the mainland. The unexpected dating result means that current theories about the colonisation of Tasmania are having to be revised. The previous belief was that the first aborigines colonised the coastal areas and then moved inland along the rivers. But it seems that this was not the pattern. The Tasmanian aborigines do not seem to have been isolated there but rather can be seen to have adapted superbly. Already up to 50,000 stone tools have been found including a superior purpose-made stone tool previously only found in Western Australia.

Caves reveal stone tools from 31,000 years ago



New light on theories
of first Tasmanians

Man and his Tools - A force for change - Watson Cutter

"Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it?" (Isaiah 10.15)

Man differs from the animals by his ability to change his environment with ingenuity, by designing and fashioning tools. Man always has had an inbuilt set of tools; his arms, legs, fingers, finger nails, eyes and teeth. He is no different to the animals in this regard, except in the degree and efficiency with which he uses or has to use them. Increasingly over the millennia he gained brain power, then he began to visualize the scope for increasing his efficiency and producing tools to enable the potential mechanical advantages of his body to be fully realised. He had a great incentive, the tools he fashioned saved wear and tear on his natural parts.

Change in all things is now occurring very rapidly, but it was not always so. So it was with tools. Doubtless changes now occurring are the result of man's ability to quickly design new tools; for example, the computer. But is the computer really a tool or merely a contrivance? Were his arms and legs really tools?

By definition, as we shall see more clearly later, a tool is an "extension of man" it cannot perform work by itself and man cannot work and reach his limits without it. The combination of man and tool is a powerful force indeed for environmental change; be it for good or evil. The reader will have to decide which.

With some rough analogy and reference to Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs", tools have played a part in establishing the environment, and throughout time they have been employed in satisfying man's needs. This is even more pertinent in modern times, although in some developed countries like Australia, the first four levels of needs (See Fig.1.) (see next page) are taken as a matter of course (if not for granted) and more and more emphasis and time is given to the accumulation of knowledge and the subsequent application of this to create, with his tools, wonderfully crafted works of art and all manner of things. This aside, some of the worlds most beautiful works took place when tools were very rudimentary. At this stage we should be determining what a tool is, for it has been stated rightly or wrongly that arms and legs and computers may be tools. You are referred to the opinion of A. Rigg MA, as expressed in the Cantor Lectures delivered before the "Society of Arts" in England at the end of last century.

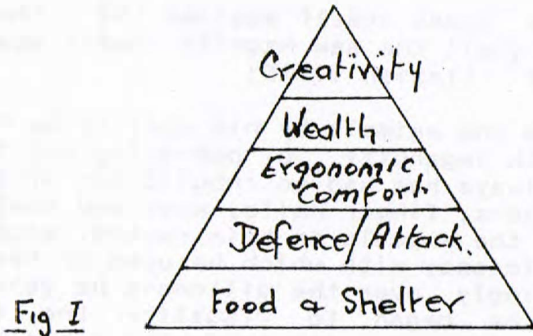


Fig I

[A tool may be considered to be "any implement used for performing or facilitating mechanical operation" or "for enabling man to change the form of material"; but perhaps the second definition is too restrictive and if it is adopted certain so called tools will be found to be mere contrivances. According to it, a chisel or a hammer is a tool but the boxing of a chisel or a plane and the handle of a hammer are contrivances, for by them the mode of application and the power of the tools are extended and varied; and according to the second definition a vice, a soldering bit, a nail, a square, are not tools but contrivances only]

This makes us think about our subject more deeply but only to possibly draw distinctions, and we don't want to be left, for the purposes of this work, not knowing what it is we are talking about.

The "Hamlyn Encyclopaedia World Dictionary" helps us by taking the esoteric nature of Rigg's argument away and defining a tool as follows:-

[An instrument, especially one held in the hand for performing or facilitating mechanical operations, such as a hammer, a saw, a file etc.]

Tools can be classified in a number of ways and indeed Mercer (c 1929) classified them thus:-

1. Felling, splitting and log sawing.
2. Moving and measuring.
3. Holding and gripping.
4. Surfacing, chipping and paring.
5. Shaping and fitting.
6. Fastening and unfastening.
7. Sharpening.

Perhaps the only other "action" we can add is "boring and drilling", inserted logically between categories 5 and 6. There are no doubt other ways. If a tool is an extension of man, then pushing, pulling, sliding, turning, twisting, gripping, sighting, and hitting, or any of mans normal physiological actions may suggest worthwhile categorization. The order is not particularly important except when one is exploring the history of tools and attempting to determine the first or predominant action leading to development.

It is of vital importance when looking back, well into the early Stone Age, to recognize and contemplate the progressive and logical development of tools and the use of the same principles and dynamics used in modern tools. It is as though some far-seeing guiding force had given the earliest man a complete insight into all the mechanics that were necessary to design and fashion tools. However if man had been shaped differently would his tools be as they are now?

When researching tool evolution it is not easy to get back to just on 300,000 years when it is considered that the use of (recognizable) tools had just begun. Much of the available information is based on archaeological conjecture, folk lore and perhaps imagination. There were no books, perhaps no language and certainly not the likes of W.W. Goodman to chronicle the events. One reference or find may have some significance, but it does not make a fact on the time scale. However a number of similar finds over a widespread area covering a number of years, tends to build up information which ultimately can be used as reasonable evidence that a particular class or form of tool, was in use or available to early craftsmen. Was he so early a craftsman?

So important has been the development of tools that each of the great divisions of the history of mankind has been named after the material that was used for shaping tools.

The ages of mankind are:-

- * Stone Age - Unground tools - Old Stone Age
Ground tools - New Stone Age
- * Bronze (or Copper) Age
- * Iron Age - leading into the Steel Age

Then depending upon your definition of a tool the Modern Ages could well become the -

- * Machine Age
- * Cybernetic (Robotic) Age