

*The following article was prepared for and printed in the last issue of the Newsletter of the Friends of the Waite Arboretum.*

## “Turning nuts in my old age”

This provocative but hopefully amusing statement refers to my wood turning, not my mental state. I have always professed to be interested in the whole shrub or tree. The form of the plant, the varied colours and textures of the bark, the diverse shape of the leaves and the beauty of the flowers and fruit all go to make plants one of nature's precious entities. However there is another dimension to their beauty. The wood - warm, tactile and infinitely variable. Woodturning, above all other wood crafts provides the chance to find pieces of branch wood and quickly use a wood lathe to reveal the beauty of the wood. One of the joys of woodturning is to suddenly discover the hidden beauty of wood from something which might seem mundane. A good example is the colour and texture seen within a parasitic Mistletoe. Some trees and shrubs have hard woody seed capsules – often called cones or nuts. I have had fun recently trying to turn many of these into common woodturning forms, some of which I will detail below.

### **Banksia**

The largest of the nuts (or cones) is from the Bull Banksia (*Banksia grandis*), native to SW Western Australia. These are commonly used in Woodturning and are sought by turners from all corners of the world. Many *Banksia*'s contain little hard woody material and simply fall apart, but *B grandis* is very hard and woody and lends itself to many craft articles. I purchased some in Western Australia last year, some of which



are 250 mm long by 90 mm diameter. The beauty of the individual seed casings is revealed when turned, each of them outlined in darker wood, looking much like eyes. The photograph shows a vase, apple and pear turned from it. Common to South Australia is the silver Banksia (*Banksia marginata*). Although quite small – it was difficult to find one big enough to turn an egg, it is harder and darker and quite attractive. I am sure that other species would create interesting forms.

## Sheoak

One of the nuts or cones which I have had fun with is that of the Drooping Sheoak (*Allocasuarina verticiliata*) native to south eastern Australia, including South Australia. These nuts or cones are hard to turn, but always create interesting textures. Although impossible to make smooth, the small diamond shapes formed from the valves are very interesting and invariably cause comment and questions. Many of the Sheoaks are interesting but *A. verticiliata* is the largest – up to 40 mm long.



## Hakea

Many of the Hakea's have hard woody fruits which usually open into two halves each containing a winged seed. Pincushion Hakea (*H. laurina*) has fruits which are almost spherical. They turn well producing an interesting spotted feature.

Although other species of the genus *Hakea* have elongated shapes, I think they would also turn well.



## Grevillea

Grevillea's generally produce thin walled follicles as seed cases, however Clothes Peg

Grevillea (rightmost in photo), also called Bushmen's Clothes-peg (*Grevillea glauca*) produces Hakea style fruit. They grow to 50mm in diameter, are almost spherical and split down the centre to show two winged seeds. They were reputedly used as clothes pegs by early settlers and are native to northern Queensland, where I collected a number some years ago. They turn very well and the form lends itself into turning small bowls.

## Queensland Nut

Also known as Popple Nut (*Macadamia integrifolia*) and famous across the world for its nuts. For all of those who have tried to break the hard shell to reach the rich nuts an



appreciation of the hardness is admired. I am always impressed when I see the teeth marks of the rats which break through this extremely hard shell under the trees in the Adelaide Botanic Gardens. The shell does turn to produce a very smooth finish as in these miniature bowls.

### **Eucalypts**

I have turned a number of gum nuts, and although they sometimes show interesting textures they are somewhat fibrous and not woody. They also have hollows in each of the valves which always remain.

### **Tagua Nuts**

The king of all of the nuts is that from the palm tree *Phytelephas aequatorialis*, commonly known as Ecuadorean Ivory Palm from the tropical rainforests of Ecuador.

It is often known as vegetable Ivory. The mature seeds are harder than wood and are encased in a bonelike shell which is so hard that it can be polished and carved like ivory.

It is widely advertised on the internet and although quite expensive is in high demand for netsuke carving.



Ron Allen