

Hippocampus and Moai !

Shropshire woodcarvers have often invited carvers to visit to help develop our skill set. This time we approached Michelle Boulton at the Countryfile Show 2016 and with promises of Shropshire Ale and tea on demand she agreed to a visit. This perhaps highlights the value of wood carvers and other 'woodies' having the opportunity to meet others from around the country. To make her journey north of Watford worthwhile and to enable us to get stuck into a project, a whole weekend in October was allocated for this activity.

Despite a Stiperstones Stroll and a Shropshire serenade provided by local bricklayers, soothed perhaps by the afore mentioned Shropshire ale, Michelle emerged the next day with enthusiasm and plans for carving either a moai; an Easter Island figure with a background story - see Michelle's facebook page, or a seahorse.

Despite a hesitant start by the group, the caffeine and confidence started to kick in as we realised we were getting nothing but top tips and positive support. The focus was as much about the use of tools and techniques as it was the actual projects as Michelle went around giving individual tuition. The exercise was also a great leveller so even those who had only been carving a short time (2 weeks in one case) found that they could more than keep up. A shared buffet of food helped keep the concentration going throughout the day until a 5 pm finish.

The weekend format also provided a good excuse for a social event at the local curry house. Luckily Michelle did not walk out on finding that only lager was available and a relaxed evening was enjoyed, though the stories told are best not repeated here.

Sunday was set for a 10.00 am start but gouges were in action well before then. The herd of seahorses were galloping forward on a wave of enthusiasm. Meanwhile the moai were taking shape, although there was some debate about who in the room was being used as a model for the rather rotund form or the ample facial features. Later a question and answer session further enhanced the proceedings, after even more food. We now know more about flowing curves and using our hips when carving, which will also be useful when we are called up for 'Strictly'. As intended the day finished with all the carvings needing many more hours of work but which will be tackled with enhanced skills.

Many thanks to Michelle for an excellent 2 days, thoroughly enjoyed by all present.

Dave Taplin on behalf of Shropshire Woodcarvers.