

## The Dr Cyril Hart Memorial Award

In February 2011 I was asked by Bob Stubbs of the Scottish Forestry Trust to come up with an idea for an award to be given to post graduate students in remembrance of Cyril Hart. Over the last year my original idea developed into what is now a pod shaped lidded vessel, filled with an array of found and crafted objects.

The vessel itself is an extension of what I make daily as a professional artist and woodturner. It draws heavily upon early memories of black three-legged cast iron cooking pots and cauldrons found while growing up in the Highlands of Scotland.

The objects I have chosen to place in the vessel are personal to me and should not be regarded as a definitive collection. They are merely a starting point, a catalyst that will spark interest, enabling my original ideas to flow in new directions.

### An explanation

When I first read the email from Bob Stubbs I was transported back to childhood memories of times that awards were both given and being received. Smoke filled rooms in the Highlands crammed with damp noisy drinkers after a rainy day at the "shoot" or some such activity: the calling to attention, the hush, the announcements, the giving of cups and shields and also the cheers and congratulations filling the room.

At these occasions I was genuinely filled with wonder at the objects presented. What were they for? Was bigger better? Where did they come from? What happened to them? What was it like to be the winner? What did people do with the awards when they took them home? I remember asking about the small metal plaques around the outside of the large wooden shields and wondering what they were for too. Being told they were for names of past winners made me wonder even more. Who were these people and did they know each other? Were they special in some way? What happened to the shield or cup when there was no more room for people's names? I was told rightly or wrongly that the person who got the last space would get to keep the trophy. How lucky they were, as wouldn't it be great to be the last person and keep it forever?

Since my childhood, I too have been lucky enough to be a winner. I've had my name on cups and shields, kept them for a year, then handed them back. I've wondered about past winners. I've also had time to ponder the significance of these objects given as prizes. In the past being presented with the shield or drinking cup of a dead or departed comrade after a particularly daring or courageous deed would indeed have been a great honour.

My initial thoughts on designing an award, (in the context of what I make today), were how inadequate any object like the aforementioned would be. Just a 'thing' you stick names on and hand on to the next person. Would the recipient wonder about the names and who were they and what they had done to win? How had the award changed them and what are they doing now? Could there be any information about Cyril Hart and the past winners included on or into the object?

I soon came up with the idea of a lidded vessel with an enclosed USB memory stick within which information about the award and the recipients could be stored and added to over the years. This left room inside both the vessel and memory stick for more ideas...

I thought I'd acquire small pieces of wood from every 'native' tree in the British Isles and craft them in ways appropriate to that tree. After some enquires about sourcing the wood, I found it would be incredibly difficult to collect all the species. In my normal working practice I do not go out of my way to acquire wood in this way. I don't buy exotic woods, I use what is available to me locally and a lot of my materials come to me in interesting ways. If I had succeeded in collecting all the species the vessel would not only be complete and static, but the collection of wood inside could be considered quite valuable, with the bits prone to being lost and difficult to replace. Should it then be locked up forever and would I need to keep replacing the lost bits? An alternative was to make the collection more personal and grant complete control of the contents of the pod to the recipient of the award. They could chose to look after the contents, add or discard any objects as they saw fit and the memory stick could be used to record past winners, their work and their thoughts on the award or anything else they wanted. No rules.

## My thoughts...

I am not the winner of the award so it is not for me to say what should or should not be placed in the 'Pod' at any given time.

As the work has neared completion I have gathered together a collection of objects from my local area and recent travels. Some are just interesting things that caught my eye, others might inspire or influence my work and with others, I have a deeper connection. I have included photographs and some information about the objects and their collecting on a separate file. There are bits of stone, plastic, metal, glass, wood, leaves, seeds and twigs. There is wood from the 'Ancient Yew Tree' at Fortingall, the 'Birnam Oak', the 'Mother Larch' at Dunkeld, along with cone and bark from the Douglas Fir at Scone Palace. Some have been crafted and changed, others left as found and some are so fragile they will be destroyed or altered with the first opening of the 'Pod'.

This habit of collecting objects to bring home and put in that special place is something most of us do. They are often placed on windowsills and mantelpieces or in a bowl where they will be seen when entering a room. When I visit friends I often ask about such collections and there is always a story, a memory attached. They will remember who was there what the weather was like, so these small objects can be very powerful, acting like a memory tool.

Since starting this project and making the decision about how the work would progress, I have had a chance encounter with an old piece of work I made many years ago. This is very rare. As an artist working in wood I labour over objects that have a personal connection to me, then pass on the finished work to new owners, who take on the responsibility for its upkeep. The work is almost never seen by me again. However, on this occasion the work in question, (a large bowl with a burnt rim), was in the front room of a bed and breakfast on the Isle of Skye where I happened to be meeting up with some American photographers. It was originally made in exchange for a large amount of wood and had come to be in the possession of the owners of the B&B by a circuitous route. The bowl had changed, it had been used, handled and bashed about a bit. Furniture polish (or something) had been applied and left some residue and over time the bowl had developed its own patina. It was also filled with found objects brought in by numerous guests from their travels around the Islands. These trinkets would have had a significance to those who

had brought them back, a memory attached to them, they had chosen to leave them in the bowl for the next guest to find.

For me what was most interesting about this chance encounter was how much I had changed in the fourteen years since I had made the bowl. Looking at this rather rough and dated piece of work (relative to what I make today) gave me a rare chance to see myself and a progression in my work which was inspirational.

### Finally

For this project to work I think there should be an aspect of discovery about it. The opening of the 'Pod', the objects inside, the finding of the memory stick. I believe that when the winners are presented with the vessel they should not be told of its history and its contents or that they "must do something with it" as the choice should be theirs. If they do not find the memory stick or if they choose to do nothing when they do, then that is as interesting as deciding to change the entire contents of the vessel.

I hope they are given the freedom to make the 'Pod' their own for the time it is in their keeping: to add to the store of personal objects, memories and thoughts inside in their own way, giving the next owner the pleasure of discovery.

I am certain that in the future awardees may wish to go back and revisit information they have left there and check out who has won since they did and perhaps at the same time learn something more about themselves. Public access via the internet of the updated information on the memory stick will be vital for this aspect of the award to work and as I have a personal interest in this project I would also hope to be checking in on its progress from time to time.

Angus Clyne