# Show and Tell competition April 2021
# Pyrographed Platter

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The platter is 12 inches in diameter, about an inch and a half thick, and is turned from a sycamore blank with a pleasant light grain patterning. Sycamore is always my first choice for pieces involving detailed pyrography. It has a very close grain, which provides an even surface for burning, and the creamy white colouring gives a good contrast to the pyrography.

The central circle is 8 inches in diameter, and is turned slightly convex. I generally try to avoid flat surfaces on turning, but here I also think the convex surface helps to give a three-dimensional effect to the picture. I haven't made any attempt to hide the chucking point on the rear, though sometimes I remount platters using a vacuum chuck and turn away the chucking point to leave a slightly dished concave base.

I always turn the piece before preparing the picture. It is much easier to adjust picture sizes on paper or on a computer screen than it is to adjust the wood they are to adorn.

I had taken a photo of Robin Hood's Bay on a sunny afternoon in July. A popular tourist attraction on the near Whitby, Robin Hood's Bay is a small fishing village reached via a steep, winding, cobbled road. One of my favourite places to wander, and full of inspiration for photographs, drawings, paintings …. and pyrography!

I converted the colour photo to a number of black and white versions, using various filters available in Adobe Photoshop. The one that proved most useful was the Sketch/Stamp filter. Corel PaintShopPro is another graphics package with similar filter options, though I think Photoshop has the edge on what it offers. I reversed the picture using Microsoft Publisher (select the image, then "Rotate" and "Flip Horizontal"), then printed it out on an ordinary deskjet printer. Publisher also allowed me to scale the picture to fit the platter, to crop it to a circle, and to add the "Robin Hood's Bay" text.

Once printed out, I used masking tape to fix the reversed picture to my platter, the ink face down in contact with the wood, then gently rubbed over the back of the paper with a soft pencil. I dampen the surface of the wood lightly with water, which helps transfer a good impression in ink of the picture onto the wood. I use original printer ink, not generic versions, as this gives a more intense impression when transferring.

I then used a Peter Child pyrography machine. I use a home-made wire stylus, made from 22 SWG wire, flattened out with a hammer, bent to shape, then filed to a skew point. This allows very fine lines to be burnt using the point of the skew, but also shading of areas using the flat side. Compare the fine lines of the window frames and the boat wires in the picture with the shading technique used for the stonework and the cobbles. This was the only tip used for the whole project. The trick is to file the point sharp enough to burn well, but not too fine as to result in it snapping after a very short period. An alternative is to buy a spoon-tip nib, which can be used in the same way for fine lines and for shading. Peter Child machines have a temperature control ranging from 0 to 10: for artistic work like this picture, I never go above 3. A light touch and repeat applications where necessary avoid burn blobs and burn shadows.

Once the pyrography was complete, the platter was sealed with cellulose sanding sealer, then given three coats of wax using a 3-wheel Beall buffing system: Tripoli, white diamond, and finally

carnauba.  I find a wax finish preferable to oil: wax enhances the creamy white colouring of the sycamore, whereas oil darkens it, reducing the contrast for the pyrography.