



a craftsman



SUMMER 2002 ISSUE 1 QUARTERLY RESEARCH REPORT FOR THE WORK OF THOMAS HAWSON DESIGNER/MAKER

THE ICELAND PROJECT

NEW EXPORTS FROM ICELAND

The Iceland Project is born

In 1999 Tom Hawson studied the craft of Viking shipbuilding in the west of Scotland and, commissioned by the British Government, went on to develop a chair based on these principles. In July 2000 at a parliamentary speakers' conference in Reykjavík, Lord Steel (speaker of the Scottish Parliament) handed over the chair to the President of the Icelandic Parliament, a gift from the youngest parliament in the world to the oldest. And so was the project born.



View of Reykjavík from the tower of Hallgrímskirkja

“Potentially one of the most important international collaborations for Icelandic craftsmanship in recent times”

Gísli Þorsteinsson, University of Iceland

He returned to Iceland in April 2002 to gain evidence that Icelanders believed there could be a positive outcome to the project. Needless to say, the evidence was there in ample quantities.

Tom explains that there are two main objectives to the project. “I want to provide an opportunity for the skills and knowledge of Icelandic and other Nordic craftspeople to be exposed to an international audience, and in turn preserve this very important area of Icelandic culture.” The spin-off, he says, will be a demonstration to the authorities and the public of the potential in craftspeople for the development of new exports from Iceland.

The project is still in its infancy. Nonetheless, in the short time since it started great progress has been made in identifying Icelandic and other Nordic craftspeople who demonstrate that their craft originates in an ancient Norse tradition.

These craftspeople have been found with the the help of Icelanders Sunneva Hafsteinsdóttir and Harpa Björg Guðfinnsdóttir at Handwerk og Hönnun (Handwork and Design) and Gísli Þorsteinsson at the University of Iceland. Tom hopes that he will be able to use their list of contacts to assist the project, by sending out a questionnaire to all of them.

The Iceland Project in a nutshell

- o **Expose Nordic crafts people to an international audience**
- o **Help conserve Icelandic culture**
- o **Demonstrate the potential for new crafts-based exports from Iceland**



Tom in the Althingi in the chair which he designed and made according to Viking principles

“Tom Hawson has an unusual ability to project his head, his heart and his hands simultaneously on to a creative landscape as broad as that of Leonardo or Beethoven”

Tom Burnham, Editor

Tom visited Iceland for the first time in January 2001 as part of a British Trade Mission. During his visit Tom met many people who said they would help and would like to participate in the project, including Óðinn Gunnar Óðinsson of the East of Iceland Development Agency, and many artists, craftsmen and small businesses. This visit crystallised his ideas, and in January of this year he was awarded a bursary from Brunel University to complete the project over the next 3 years as a PhD.

SPACE

Tom needs exhibition space!

Between September and December 2003 Tom is looking for exhibition sites across Scotland and the Nordic countries. He needs venues for exhibiting product prototypes designed and made by the participants in the *New Exports from Iceland* project.

The Project and its participants will be portrayed alongside their products in interactive digital multi-media. Individual participants may also be able to display their existing product ranges.

So that Tom can evaluate the project on which his PhD depends, it is essential that product prototypes receive the widest audience possible.



"Rocket Ship" Oak. Tom Hawson

If you can provide appropriate space between September and December 2003, and are interested in the ground-breaking potential of this project, please contact Tom Hawson at:

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Hundalee Mill Farmhouse and outbuildings

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On 15 June 2001 Tom & Jenny took over a beautiful rundown farmhouse with mill and woodland at Hundalee near Jedburgh in the Scottish Borders. The farmhouse had been derelict for over three years and had not been modernised since 1940.

After a year of very hard work (for which Tom had to be relieved of his professional commitments) the house has been extensively and sympathetically improved. On 15 June 2002, exactly a year after entering the house, Tom and Jenny were married in the garden.

100 guests celebrated with them, and were fed from a pig-roast just as Egil's guests were 1,200 years ago.



A re-run of Egil's Saga at Tom & Jenny's wedding feast

Tom Hawson: the creative engineer

Born in 1973, Tom set his sights on becoming a civil engineer. However, after studying to degree level he discovered that the professional reality would not satisfy his creativity. Deciding that the only way to put his creative skills to best use was to combine his engineering knowledge with mastered hand skills, he chose to practise using wood.

"The modern environment demands a combination of engineering knowledge and hands-on experience with wood"

Why wood? "I chose wood because it's the single raw material which is always demanding to work with owing to its organic and inconsistent nature," says Tom. "Only the combination of

engineering theory and hands-on experience with wood qualifies me to create things for the modern environment."

Tom left Brunel University in June 1997 with a degree in furniture design and craftsmanship. Since then he has already made a major impact on the Scottish

crafts scene, as a self-employed designer/maker in the Scottish Borders. Here he has helped to set up a collective workshop and has

been the team leader in designing and prototyping a collective product range for Woodschool Ltd. Part of this assignment has been the devotion of his skills to the demanding brief of developing high value-added products from low-grade hardwood which would otherwise have been burned as scrap.



Chair in Althingi, and its smaller partner

In 1999 his furniture was shown at the National Museum of Scotland as part of the *20th Century Design Collection*. In 2000 he produced the prestigious commission for the Icelandic Parliament (see above), and received the Morgan Fraser Award at the Royal Scottish Academy at their *Visual Arts Scotland* show.

In spring 2001 Tom completed design work and produced prototypes for a Northern Periphery Programme project, developing new products for manufacture in remote sawmills in Northern Europe.

As a member of the Offcentre Partnership Tom provided the final drawings and prototypes of Crossing furniture for St Mary's Cathedral, Glasgow. This furniture comprised the altar, altar platform, kneeling rails, credence table, conductor's stand, choir stalls and masts. The 5.5m masts were co-produced with TP Davidson of Jedburgh, and the whole work was finally fitted in February 2002.

What next? With an old mill as studio space at Hundalee, Tom will be concentrating on demonstrating the lessons learned from his PhD project on Nordic craftsmanship.



Furniture for St Mary's Cathedral, Glasgow

"In a brief five years Tom Hawson has already made a major impact on the Scottish crafts scene"

SCULPTURE IN THE MILL

In the mill at Hundalee Tom is now making sculptures in response to his experiences of Nordic culture, the basis for his PhD project. Going back to basics with the minimal tools of his Norse exemplars, Tom is experimenting and re-learning in a way that is stimulating – and being stimulated by – his Icelandic research project.

So far a heron, fish and large spoon have been made from wood using just an axe and knives. The next piece will be a massive spoon (helped, Tom admits, by some roughing out with a chainsaw).



The heron stands on the bank of Jedwater as it runs through Hundalee Mill (cedar and steel)



Mill studio



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