



# a craftsman



WINTER 2002/3 ISSUE 2 QUARTERLY RESEARCH REPORT FOR THE WORK OF THOMAS HAWSON DESIGNER/MAKER

## Craftsmen of the world unite.

### A note from Tom Hawson

Why have I undertaken the Iceland Project? I'll give you a potent example.

A few years ago a Korean hi-fi manufacturing company asked me and the group I worked with to provide some designs for hi-fi cases and a remote control box. At first we were surprised and amazed that someone from industry would want our opinion.

We submitted our designs and then didn't get paid. After some enquiries it turned out that the Korean company had approached lots of groups like our own, and that they had not been paid either.

And what were the Koreans playing at? They had worked out that the ideas we could provide represented very powerful information for a company wishing to enter the European market. And this was one of the incentives behind my starting this project.

The episode was a demonstration that market knowledge, linked to an understanding of how stuff is made, represents a very potent tool in the development of new products. This combination shouldn't be undervalued – craftspeople all over the world should be exploring the possibilities and then taking control of the creative potential.

Craftspeople have a commitment to culture and tradition and are in effect Culture in their own right. Their work should be encouraged to influence the designs of new products exported from their countries. This is happening very rarely, least of all in developing countries.

Thus I hope that the Iceland Project will demonstrate how craftspeople everywhere can assist in the development of manufacturing-based products within an open and fairer environment led by themselves.

I believe that a new Icelandic export product can be developed, led by craftspeople. I propose to be a facility, catalyst and enthusiast in helping to make this happen, using my project as a small demonstration of potential.

## New partner in Iceland Project.



Fjölur Björn Hlynsson in the Icelandic Forest.

Artist and craftsman Fjölur Björn Hlynsson from the east of Iceland is the first crafts practitioner to sign up for the Project. On arrival in Egilsstaðir Tom Hawson was warmly received as a guest

at Miðhús, Fjölur's parents' guesthouse and a traditional crafts centre.

Fjölur, a man of much learning and moral standing, gave Tom and his project a great deal of scrutiny for two days before he would commit himself to participating in the project.

The trip to Egilsstaðir was partly funded by Oðin Gunner Gunnerson of the East of Iceland Development Agency, whose support from the beginning of the project (in funding the return airfare to Egilsstaðir from Reykjavík) is much appreciated. The original purpose of the trip was to begin a working relationship with Miðhús, but it culminated in a presentation to other craftspeople in the area. In Egilsstaðir itself it developed further into a lecture to the students at Egilsstaðir high school and a meeting with the district forester Þór Þorfinnsson.

Tom started his relationship by sweeping up in the Miðhús workshop. Fjölur then agreed that there was potential in the project for demonstrating that Icelandic craftspeople could lead the way in developing new products for Icelandic Industry. He also agreed that participation in the project would help develop his skills



Tom Hawson sweeping up at the Miðhús workshop.

in tackling ever-changing commercial realities and the need to develop new products from the growing stockpile of Forest thinnings in his area.

## Geothermal energy

Geothermal energy is an abundant natural resource in Iceland. It is hard to believe that under the pavements of Reykjavik hot spring water is pumped through a network of pipes to stop them freezing in winter.



Under-pavement heating under construction.

The name Reykjavik roughly translated means smoky valley. This name was given to it by the Vikings and it describes the steam that rose from the ground due to the many geothermal springs in that area.

Geothermal springs provide a great deal of energy for Iceland's public swimming baths and most homes are heated by a direct supply of hot spring water.



Walking to the hot spring.



Cooking Chicken casserole in a hot spring.

On Tom's last trip to Iceland in November, Gísli Þorsteinsson – his partner in the Iceland Project – took him across a barren landscape of cooled lava and thick moss to an isolated valley of steam and boiling



Having a bath in hot stream in the hills.

springs. In this remote location in the hills Gísli demonstrated how to cook a chicken casserole and get a hot bath with compliments from mother nature.

## What to do with the Forestry thinnings in Iceland

The Icelandic joke asks, "How do you find your way in the forest if you get lost?" Answer: "Stand up." If you have always assumed that this is true, then you will be surprised to hear that there are Icelandic forests with quite large trees.

This Hallormsstaður forest was introduced to Tom while he was travelling in the east of Iceland as the guest of Fjölfnir Björn Hlynsson. Fjölfnir drove them through this 1,854 hectare forest along the east shore of lake Lagarfljót, where they also called in on the Icelandic forest services processing plant. As well as large trees there were also large stockpiles of larch piled up by the side of the road.

A few days later Tom met Þór Þorfinnsson, the head forester for the area, and (as Tom had feared) Þór said he couldn't make fence posts cheaper than the ones from Latvia that were being sold to local farmers. He had panic on his face as he said "I don't know what I'm going to do with the first 500 hectares of thinnings".

This situation is repeated across northern Europe. But it's in the hands of local artists and craftspeople like Fjorn to demonstrate their skills in finding new ways of making their local resource desirable in changing market economies. If local uses or new products can't be developed from these forest thinnings, who can afford to maintain a financially non profitable woodland? Will the re-establishment of a stripped and neglected ecosystem be sufficient reason to invest in the reforestation of Icelandic hills?



Pile of Forest thinnings, in Egilsstaðir area.

# The Three Ravens.

Ravens 1, 2, and 3 are caught and put in a cage. Raven 1 says in an objectionable squawky voice, "Where on earth are these men taking us on their ship, in this uncomfortable cage?"

The next day Raven 1 is brought out of the cage and set free. He flies as high as he can until he can see land, and in a gleeful squawk he tells the others, "I can see home, I'm off, see ya".

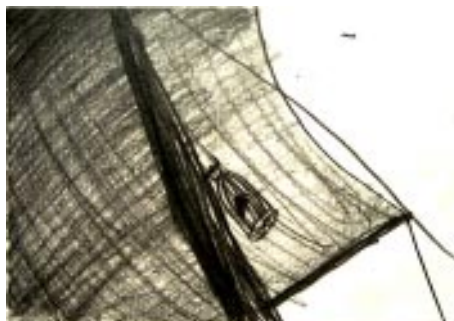
The ship, with the Raven's friends, carries on in the opposite direction. He looks back and wonders, 'Where on earth are those men going in that ship?'

The other two ravens sit in wonder in their cage. They discuss in their squawky voices (much to the annoyance of the men on the ship) how fortunate their friend was to be going home, where on earth the men on the ship were taking them, and whether or not they would be set free to fly home too.

The following day Raven 2 is bought out of the cage and set free. Squawking loudly she screams, "I'm free, I'm free, I'm free" and flies up as high as she can until she can see land. This time the land she can see is in almost the same direction as that of the ship, away from home. With some confusion in her mind, and realising that it can't be her old home she is flying to, she decides it must be her new home.

It is said that Raven 2 remembers the stories of a far-off land in this direction, told to her by a very wise old raven. This land was Iceland.

On the ship the remaining raven is feeling alone and sad that his two friends should leave him like this. Where on earth was his friend Raven 2 flying off to, in the opposite direction from home?



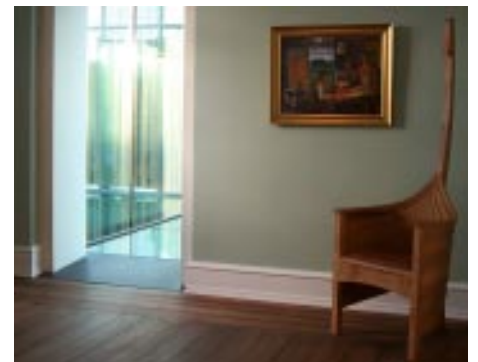
## History inspires craft

Settlement of Iceland began around 870 AD when Ingolf Arnarson sailed there in his Viking ship with his family members, friends and slaves. It took 3 days to sail from the Faroe Islands in the favourable winds. As an aid to navigation it is said that Ingolf took 3 ravens. The raven lives on land, so when released at sea from a boat with no sight of land, it flies as high as it can until it sees land. It then flies straight for it. So from a boat you can observe the direction in which the raven flies, and steer your course appropriately.

This story inspired the craft practitioner Margrét Guðnadóttir to make three ravens woven like baskets with music boxes inside them, for the animation of this story. This story and Margrét's woven ravens inspired the Three Ravens cartoon included in this newsletter.

The story of Ingolf Arnarson's voyage to Iceland in a Viking ship, and the resourceful nature of the first settlers in Iceland, inspired the design and making of the chair by Tom Hawson for the Icelandic Parliament as a gift from Scotland during the celebration of a thousand years of Christianity 2000. The chair is displayed in the Icelandic parliament.

The chair made for Iceland by Tom Hawson resides in the Icelandic parliament.



# A Monster in the east.



Original picture of lake Lagarfljót

While Tom was going through his photographs from his last research trip to Iceland he came across something quite unexpected. In a picture taken of the landscape in the east of Iceland, there appeared to be something in the water previously unidentified. With some enlargement and enhancement of the original photograph there appears to be a large creature in the water. Tom may have found more evidence to the growing theory that a relative of the Loch Ness monster may be alive and well in lake Lagarfljót.



Enlarged

## Space, the final frontier.

Since the last newsletter correspondence with design, art and cultural exhibition spaces has begun, asking for auxiliary space to exhibit the demonstration product from the Iceland Project. So far 'The Lighthouse' Design Museum in Glasgow has come forward with a commitment to exhibit the product between 30th October and 5th November 2003. In the final stage of this Project, the plan is to exhibit the demonstration product in Iceland, Faroe Islands, Scotland, Norway, Sweden and Denmark, retracing the migration routes of the first Icelandic settlers. Exhibition space is still being sought.

It is vital to the project that questionnaires are filled in and interviews carried out with members of the viewing public during the exhibitions, to assess viewers' opinion as to the success of the demonstration products.

## Dyslexia and crafts practitioners.

Is it any wonder that craftspeople find they have a small voice amongst all the world's office clerks, when many craftspeople were until recently regarded as retarded (now more correctly dyslexic)?

Fortunately there is a move towards equality, especially in communication through the pen. In the UK The 'Disability Discrimination Act 1995' is a start, stating that people with disabilities should be compensated to give them equal competitiveness in the market place. As a result the UK Government paid for Tom Hawson to acquire the laptop on which he writes this newsletter, and for training in how to speak to it and to use software enabling him to write 120 words a minute with his voice.

It may also be news to most people that the Government specifically assigns 1 dyslexic to each crisis-management strategy committee. This is because dyslexics can solve complex problems fast with little working out on paper, relying on the understanding of complex concepts and piecing them together in their heads.

Tom wrote this article to strengthen the argument that dyslexic crafts practitioners are great people to be developing new exports from Iceland, synthesising information and creating practical answers out of complex systems and infrastructures in a practical world.

Some tips on communicating more successfully with dyslexics can be found at [www.dyslexia-parent.com](http://www.dyslexia-parent.com) and other information can be found on the following web sites: [www.bda-dyslexia.org.uk](http://www.bda-dyslexia.org.uk), [www.dyslexia-inst.org.uk](http://www.dyslexia-inst.org.uk), [www.dyslexic.com](http://www.dyslexic.com), and [www.dyslexia.uk.com](http://www.dyslexia.uk.com).

## CONSIDERING WOOL.



Traditional Icelandic woollen fabric pattern.

Following the issue of the last Newsletter a questionnaire was circulated to all contacts with an interest in the Exports From Iceland Project, to help determine the design brief for the demonstration product.

A major finding was that Icelandic wool should be considered as a material. Hildur Hákonardóttir at Þingbor (the “Wool House”) in the south of Iceland wrote: “In Iceland the wool is falling off the backs of sheep because so few people are using it”. Icelandic wool certainly seems to be an underutilised resource, so the project will attempt to use wool in its design for a table and chair, probably as a chair seat cover. It is hoped that a partner in the Faroe Islands can be found to assist in the design of a

woollen seat or seat cover which will be produced in Iceland from Icelandic wool.

**“The wool is falling off the backs of sheep in Iceland because so few people are using it”.**

Hildur Hákonardóttir at Þingbor (the “Wool House”) in the south of Iceland

## Letters.

### Didgeridoos and Iceland

You may think that didgeridoos and Iceland have nothing in common, but having seen George Hollander’s didgeridoo-making in Iceland, Tom wrote to George and asked what relevance his instruments had to an exhibition of Icelandic craft. Was he trying to say these didgeridoos were Nordic?

Tom asked for references, because he makes and plays his own didgeridoos and has recently given public performances in Scotland. George replied as follows:

George Hollanders  
16 November 2002

Hi there Tom,  
The reference for the instrument would be an Icelandic magazine called “lífandi vísindi” or “living science”, loosely translated. In issue no. 7 1999 there is a small article about a Viking excavation in Herning (west Jutland in Denmark) where two wooden wind instruments were found from around 500A.D. They look like some kind of didgeridoo to me and are said to produce a similar sound. Roughly they are made by cleaving a piece of hazel wood, “boring” out and gluing together again, and are believed to be the Nordic original of their later copper

descendants. Somewhere else I read or heard (don’t remember where) that in the Irish folk music tradition people speak about a didge like instrument (a little shorter than its Australian relative) blown with the circular breathing technique as an accompanying drone. Also there is the Carnyx (I believe it’s called), an ancient war trumpet from Ireland which I feel relates to this phenomenon.

I hope this is of some use. Feel free to contact me if any more questions arise.

George

*Would any reader of this newsletter who wishes to write to ‘A Craftsman’ please not hesitate. All letters will be answered, and relevant material will also be published.*



Picture of George’s Furhorn didgeridoo.



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