

Roger Sear - Wheel Maker

by Dorothy Lumb

Around the late 1970s and early 1980s a retired civil engineer who had lost some use of his left arm following a heart attack was prompted by his wife to take up a new hobby, "to give him an interest in life". Roger Sear, of Shoreham-by-Sea, West Sussex, took up spinning, and knitting. From this developed a quest to produce the perfect spinning wheel. Off he went to Science Museum to make sketches and notes. He also came home with a list of books on the subject which he ordered through his local library. He collected driftwood from the nearby Kingston beach, and started to make spinning wheels. According to a partial newspaper clipping believed to be from The West Sussex Gazette – which is our only source of information about him – Roger Sear was already a skilled woodworker and had previously made spiral curved handrails for the British Museum and a flying spiral handrail for Midhurst hospital. He worked on an 1880 lathe that he found in a scrapyards, and had made seven wheels by the time the newspaper interviewed him in 1981. The first of these was a replica of a double-drive Saxony wheel from 1620, around the rim of which he carved signs from the zodiac. This was followed by a Shetland-type wheel with a brake on the bobbin.

The three wheels seen here have all suffered some damage over time, but no doubt survived because of their lovely carvings and ingenious touches such as the unusual tension system seen on the oak-leaf wheel, left for raising the mother of all.

Thanks to Dora and David Hancock, Angie Corbet and Judith Beckett for helping with photographs of their Roger Sear wheels.

PHOTOS: left, Judith's Ivy Leaf wheel, in full working order and regularly used. Top, close up of carved ivy leaves; left, sprung screw adjustment for both the front and back of the mother-of-all so the flyer and bobbin can be kept level as the drive band tension is adjusted; below, view of the whole wheel. Note the axle protruding from the front upright, it is possible that this was to carry a skein winder, as we know he made wheels with skein-winders. Right, Angie's Tudor Rose wheel. This saxony-type spinning wheel's 22" diameter drive wheel is carved with a tudor rose and leaf pattern.

It came with a broken wool winder, a replaced front maiden and a dark finish to the wood that we suspect is not original.



PHOTOS: above, centre right, and below right, Dora's wheel, described by the person she bought it from as "dismantled for storage", however it looks as though the glue used for the joints had failed. This wheel also appears to have had one of the maidens replaced. Striking features include marquetry inlay on the drive wheel and the flyer whorl (above) retained by a grub screw that needs to be undone everytime the bobbin is changed.

