



Peter Sloan



I started to serve my apprenticeship as a carpenter in 1993 and since then I have gained many experiences and knowledge along the way. In 2006 I found myself co director of a successful joinery company with three employees and two apprentices.

Like most other tradesmen the “Big Crash” of 2008 brought the building trade and many businesses to a virtual standstill.

Newly married with my first child on the way my working future was uncertain at best. It was only when I was no longer working every day that I realised how much I loved my job and the true passion I had of the craft of wood.

Working with wood is a passion of mine. Wood is a product of nature, it has a purpose and whether you are putting on a roof with rough cut timber, making gothic arched windows, carving something from a solid piece of timber, or turning a piece on a lathe there is a sense of fulfilment and pride as you are leaving your mark on the world. A lot has happened in the seven years since 2008 and I had to reinvent myself whilst staying true to my one passion.

I worked as Head of Maintenance at a nursing home for two years and trained and worked as a tree surgeon for three years.....time had flown and the family at home had followed suit! My wife and I are proud parents of three children, Erin 7, Jude 5 & Rory 4.

The UK economy it seemed wasn't to be my only challenge as our two wonderful boys were both diagnosed with ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder). This was another learning challenge within our home and one my wife and I took on with vigour.

In 2012 I took a difficult but necessary decision to be at home with the children to help support their needs until they were at school age. It was a tough transition but a natural one and one I'm very proud to say I chose. With the children settled into school it was time to look for a new challenge and opportunity.

When I saw an advertisement in the paper looking for experienced joiners to train in a programme gaining an NVQ Level 3 Qualification in Heritage Skills in Wood Occupations it seemed a perfect opportunity. An opportunity for me to get back into work all whilst doing a job I was passionate about.

Northern Ireland has over 8000 listed buildings all worth conserving for future generations to see, and I saw this as a very exciting opportunity to be a part of that.

I applied and was fortunate to be accepted into the programme as a bursary trainee funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

My training consisted of a placement with the NIEA with four weeks off the job training at CITB NI at Nutts Corner Training Centre.

Part of that four weeks training was working alongside eleven other bursary trainee on the programme to construct the Oak Framed Building that sits at the Ulster Folk & Transport Museum today.

The second part was theory based looking at Architectural styles and time periods, natural building materials and an in depth study of roofing harking back to my school days using Trigonometry. I think I paid more attention second time around, seeing maths in practice gives it much more meaning!

Our tuition has been second to none and our first bite at true Heritage Carpentry was amazing. For the first project we constructed a magnificent oak framed building which is now on display at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum in Cultra. We used traditional techniques and locally sourced green oak timber. Using our knowledge of plumb bobs, ink lines and callipers, roofing squares and levels with great precision we started to make the building take shape. All of this precision was of paramount importance to ensure a solid and true base from which the building would rise.

Joints were all cut by hand with the use of dovetails, mortise and tenons and various housing joints. No nails, screws or glue were used only wooden dowels were driven in to hold the building together. The hipped roof was all hand cut using Red Cedar, Jack rafters were hand cut and fixed and three intersecting Lancet Arch windows were handmade by the group using geometry with traditional methods of construction.

None of us can predict the future but as one the eleven bursary trainees we are the first in Northern Ireland to have a NVQ Level 3 Qualification in Heritage Skills (Construction) Wood Occupations.

It is a proud moment coming to Cultra to see something that my hand has had a part of building, something I helped to craft which is there now for all the public to enjoy, something that might just become a little piece of history itself. Knowing I was part of that is something very special indeed.