

A Terrible Tool

by Bob Heltman, CMW, AAW © 3-2012

About 25 years ago, when I had a coal fired forge in my back yard, I fashioned a number of woodturning tools...and other objects.

An old railroad spike was used to make a ring cutting tool. The head was cut off first, a slight bend made, and then about 4 inches from the other end I heated and hammered an area 1/4" thick. This I ground flatter and smoother, and then, with further grinding, formed a very sharp and narrow tip. See Figure 1.



Figure 2 is a close-up of the metal end. Here you can see the split handle held together with nylon cord soaked in glue. I was in a hurry back then, a condition little abated with time. FOGwood was



used for the handle (FOG = Found On Ground).

Thus ugly and embarrassing "terrible" tool has had only one virtue; it WORKS GREAT! Some day, probably not soon, I ought to make a proper handle. And, next time I have my side grinder handy, and the weather allows, I will probably grind a better tip, as shown in Figure 3. The red area would be removed.



Figure 4 shows a "store bought" ring making tool, compared to my Terrible Tool. Frankly, my tool makes tinier rings with less loss of undercut wood.



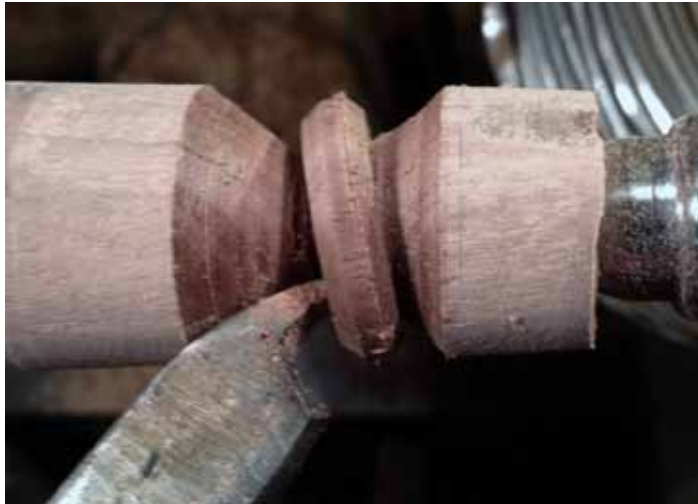
A 1/4" spindle gouge was used to cut the side slopes to allow clearance for the ring tool, which can be seen in Figure 5 as cutting in from the right hand side.



Another option would be to heat the tip of the tool and bent the point to a more inward angle. In such a case the initial cutting would require the tool's handle to start much farther left, and as the tool cut inward the handle would slowly swing to the right.

As in the commercial ring tool in Figure 4, the cutout in the tool could be round so the inner part, during initial cutting inward, would form the ring, with the tool's handle then swung to the right to begin under cutting.

Figure 6 shows the Terrible Tool having cut in from the left and slicing the ring free. For the purpose of this demonstration I did not take extra time to



shape and sand the outer curvature of the ring; this photo simply shows that Terrible Tool really does work. Sharpening is done with straight and round diamond hones...and not often needed.

And, this tool was ideal for making a series of discreet centering rings on a locust wood base made to hold statuary. The sharp point was lightly touched to the wood, while the base was reverse chucked, making a series of ever larger circles about 1/4" apart. See Figure 7. When not used as a base, and flipped over, this becomes a wide bottomed snack bowl - 2 uses for the price of one!

On a whim I inset a 1" mirror in the center, around which I marked in my name, wood type, and date. Most any art object displayed on this stand would cover the center items.

Making tools can become a significant part of woodturning. I had a lot of fun with my anvil, hammers, tongs, and coal fired forge. Especially on a hot summer's day one could really appreciate our forefathers working around their forges, shoeing horses, making beam hooks, forming many other



tools and artifacts, and building a strong America.

These days, on a smaller scale, I can use my bench vise, MappGas+Oxygen torch, various hammers and pliers, and at least form or adjust tool tips.

You can too! Have fun. 😊😊