

# The Birdman of Hurst



**Conjure up an image of a woodcarver, quiet, retiring even, perhaps spending his days whittling away in an ancient garden shed while life catapults by outside.**

The tops are carved from mahogany, elm burr, oak or ash – he instinctively senses which wood will suit a particular carving.

He used a piece of 20-year-old elm to carve Ted's likeness and a block of beautiful umber coloured yew to form a greyhound's face. An elephant's head has tusks of honeysuckle, which gives them just enough spring to prevent breakage.

It is this attention to detail, combined with the unique characteristics of each piece of wood which give the sticks their individuality. Mickey loves what he does and his enthusiasm leaps out of his creations.

Now I ask him about the bird charming.

Five years ago, Mickey began feeding a wild wood pigeon that visited his garden. Over a six month period he gained its trust enough to persuade it to land on his hand and, at a barbeque in his garden, he called the bird down

in front of 40 disbelieving guests.

If you think you recognise Mickey, all may not be as it appears for he has an identical twin brother called John. With wild bird taming and an identical other, Mickey seems something of a magician and in a sense he is, for he breathes new life into overlooked and discarded materials. Few people, myself included, leave without bartering for one of his creations, which are treasured and appreciated by those lucky enough to own one. ■

**N**ow forget the stereotype and meet Mickey Bundy: craftsman, traveller and collector of all that is old and interesting. I'm told that he even charms birds down from the trees.

Stepping into his eclectic home, I immediately spot a vast collection of Mickey's hand carved walking sticks, bursting from their container as though they intend jumping into your hand to take you walking. One stick is topped by a detailed terrier's head, complete with intricately carved fur and beguiling eyes. On cue, its canine model appears and is introduced as Ted, a rescue dog who quickly steals my heart by playing dead for a biscuit.

Mickey only began carving four years ago after completing a single course of evening classes at Haywards Heath. The sticks he hasn't bartered, exchanged or given away live here and form a burgeoning menagerie of creatures.

He imagines sticks into being, turning wood into art like an alchemist, seeing birds, beasts and fish appear from simple blocks and knarled branches.

He uses hazel, ash, blackthorn and holly to make the shaft of the stick, utilising wood seasoned from 18 months to three years before beginning work.

**“He imagines sticks into being, turning wood into art like an alchemist, seeing birds, beasts and fish appear from simple blocks and knarled branches.”**



by  
Ruth Lawrence