

Pole lathe

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A **pole lathe** is a wood-turning lathe that uses a long pole as a return spring for a treadle. Pressing the treadle with your foot pulls on a cord that is wrapped around the piece of wood or billet being turned. The other end of the cord reaches up to the end of a long springy pole. As the action is reciprocating, the work rotates in one direction and then back the other way. Cutting is only carried out on the down stroke of the treadle, the spring of the pole only being sufficient to return the treadle to the raised position ready for the next down stroke. Modern pole lathes often replace the springy pole with an elastic bungee cord.^[1]



A pole lathe in a museum in Seiffen, Germany.

While the action of the pole lathe and the skills required are similar to those employed on a modern power lathe, a requirement is that the timber used on a pole lathe is freshly felled and unseasoned, *i.e.*, green. The angle that the tools are ground is closer to that of a carpenter's chisel than that of a power lathe tool. Using power lathe tools on a pole lathe is safe, but hard work. Using a pole lathe chisel on a power lathe risks serious injury, since the forces are such that the blade is likely to break.

The pole lathe's origin is lost in antiquity; we know that Vikings used them from the archaeological finds at Jórdvík, the Viking settlement discovered beneath the modern city of York in England. The use of pole lathes died out in England after World War II. It has seen a return through the increased interest in green woodworking,^[1] although the majority of practitioners are at the hobby rather than professional level. Around Britain there are regular courses for learning the art of pole lathe turning and associated skills, culminating in making chairs or simpler items.

See also

- Bodging
- Philip Clissett
- Green woodworking

References

1. "Keeping an ancient craft alive in the Lake District" (video). BBC Radio Cumbria. 4 June 2010. "A pole turner, Sue Swatridge, fells trees for the National Trust"

External links

- The Bodger's Home (<http://www.bodgers.org.uk>)
- Medieval and Renaissance lathes

(<http://www.bloodandsawdust.com/sca/lathes.html>)

- The development of the lathe (<http://www.stuartking.co.uk/index.php/history-of-the-lathe-part-one-reciprocal-motion/>)
- Spring pole lathe (<http://www.historicgames.com/lathes/springpole.html>)



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