

## CLIVE CARVES NEW HOBBY

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Intricate: One of Clive's carvings



At work: Woodcarver Clive Firth, from Skinburness, works on one of his carvings  
PAULA PAISLEY

By Julie Armstrong

A DISABLED artist who has mastered the craft of woodcarving against all odds is celebrating the anniversary of a group he set up one year ago.

Clive Firth, 52, of Skinburness, was born with renal disease and, while his peers were being taught woodwork at school, he was in hospital for months at a time.

He did not let that stand in his way, and after leaving school he picked up a chisel and taught himself to carve.

His kidneys failed in 1987 and he had to use a dialysis machine for five years.

After 38 operations and regularly inserting a needle for dialysis, his arms were left weak and at one point it got so bad he was unable to carve. He said: "After my transplant in 1992 the anti-rejection drugs affected my muscles and for a while I couldn't grip, sketch or carve. I felt very trapped. But then they changed the kind of drug I was on and it got a lot better."

When he and his wife Carol-Ann moved to Skinburness from Birmingham two years ago, Clive looked for like-minded people.

Showing his artwork at Silloth Carnival stirred up interest. Word spread and, last October, Solway Coast Woodcarvers & Wood Sculpture Group was set up with £500 from the Solway Coast Neighbourhood Forum towards chisels, and the promise of free use of Silloth community hall.

It started out with six members and, one year on, has 18 members aged 10 to 75, from Silloth, Abbeytown and around west Cumbria.

Carol-Ann, 48, said: "In the group you've got a doctor, an engineer, a gardener, children and retired people.

"It's lovely how you get all walks of life coming together with a common interest."

Clive added: "The British Woodcarving Association were really happy with me because they had tried for 20 years to start a group in Cumbria but failed."

He is now being trained to teach by Prism Arts, a group which helps excluded groups to realise their potential.

He said: "My dream is to start a studio so that people in built-up areas like Birmingham and London can come and carve in beautiful surroundings in Cumbria."

The group meets on Mondays and Wednesdays, 7pm to 9.30pm. Sessions cost £3.

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