

## Disposing of a Workshop

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**It's a sad fact that sooner or later we will all have to leave our workshops behind or sell them on. Roger Backhouse's 2014 MEW article on disposing of a workshop offers some sage advice that may make the process easier for us or our families and friends.**

It happens to all model engineers one day. Their workshops, perhaps built up over many years, have to go. This may be because of house moves, change of personal circumstances, acquiring new interests and worst, through illness or death.

There are several options for workshop disposal. That chosen may depend on personal priorities. Is it to obtain the maximum value for workshop contents? Is it to secure fast and easy removal? To obtain quick payment? Or to ensure that contents go to good homes, perhaps where other model engineers will appreciate and use the equipment? These objectives are not incompatible.

This article is really about planned disposal, but if you are in the unfortunate position of having to dispose of a workshop at short notice, here's some 'potted advice':

- Plan ahead if possible. Itemise principal items and give realistic values. Friends or family members would appreciate an idea of values, which are also useful for insurance purposes - your workshop may be worth more than you thought.
- If selling, take plenty of good photographs - they will help dealers or other potential buyers.
- Make a will but consult with potential executors and beneficiaries - the last thing they might want to deal with is a workshop!
- Consider your model engineering club or society as a good home for equipment - members might like your tools and metals.
- Remember other people's time in disposing of your assets, they might be pleased to do it but may not want the responsibility.
- Use dealers who advertise in ME/MEW if you want a quick no hassle sale.

### Planning ahead

Ideally, though rarely possible, workshop disposal should be planned in advance. Those with disposal responsibilities would probably appreciate a note of workshop contents and guide prices to ask. This is particularly important when selling models, though this article concentrates on selling tools and equipment. Family or friends unused to model engineering may have little idea of values.

It is always advisable to leave a will and appoint executors, though unfortunately many people don't. Having a simple will made is not expensive. You can name an individual or an organisation to have your workshop should you wish.

A *Lasting Power of Attorney* drawn up in advance can also be considered. This allows a named person (or persons) to manage some or all affairs of someone who becomes incapable of managing their own financial or other business.

### Family and friends

Family members may share interests and be ready to take workshop contents. Model engineers could have like-minded friends who can help. However, many of our friends are

likely to be of similar age, perhaps with similar ailments and not always able to cope with the considerable demands of sorting out a workshop.

### **Advertisements**

Model Engineer and Model Engineer's Workshop offer free adverts and many workshops have been sold through these magazines. Sensible pricing helps, and looking through to find the going rate for machinery will help fix a price that can attract buyers without pricing too cheaply. Both magazines are good sales outlets if you can plan ahead and have adequate time to make a workshop sale.

Adverts in local papers may produce sales but results are hit and miss. One engineer I knew bought a milling machine cheaply thanks to an advert in the local Yellow Advertiser. However, local papers do not usually reach a specialist market like model engineers.

### **Society sales**

Model engineering clubs often help sell member's workshops. Many societies have notice boards where members advertise unwanted goods, or less usually ask for something they need. Others take adverts in club magazines.

Sometimes society members show their appreciation of the help and companionship found in a society and make bequests to help clubs. They may also want to see their workshop contents going to people they know will appreciate them. For example, Dennis Major, a founder member of Dockland and East London Model Engineering Society, bequeathed his workshop to the Society when he died in 2013 (**photo 1**). Fortunately Dennis had made a will and appointed executors.

Workshop contents included a milling machine, drill and Myford ML7B lathe in very good condition, plus stationary engine castings and other tooling. It was quite a task for a small society to handle the sale but by contacting other societies locally the drill, milling machine, castings and tooling and some metals were sold, going to appreciative model engineers. They also organised a sale by their track in Belhus Country Park, near Thurrock, with surplus goods on a trailer and invitees from other local societies.

With the house on the market it was pressing to remove remaining equipment. MEW advertisers Home and Workshop Machinery stepped in to make a fair offer for the Myford lathe (to include accessories), removed it within three days and paid promptly.

### **SMEE Sales Service**

The Society of Model and Experimental Engineers (SMEE) offers a service, holding regular rummage sales for members selling unwanted tools and metals (**photo 2**). If there is a workshop for sale they change this to a much larger disposal sale to sell workshop contents. They have a tightly organised workshop clearance system but it is considerable work for their volunteers (**photo 3**).

Using SMEE's services my neighbour Bob Buckle sold many tools and metals from his father's workshop, untouched for nearly 30 years after his death. Going through an untouched workshop is always sad. It is also dirty with oil film and dust. The SMEE team of Martin Cook and David Taylor rapidly sorted cupboards, drawers and boxes. They

dismantled the drill and moved the massive vice downstairs, taking most contents in a morning's work. Martin Cook says it is worth spending time sorting through goods before a sale to remove scrap and rubbish. This helps boost buyer interest and takings.

Besides removing goods for the auction Maurice Fagg, a SMEE member and clockmaker, took a synchronome clock for sale at one of the specialist clock fairs held three times a year at Brunel University, making £150 for Bob, much more than he expected.

However, they wouldn't take patterns for castings as these wouldn't sell. Nor would they take the 1920's made IXL lathe, bench and grinder as these wouldn't sell either. A brazing hearth remained as the piping was unsafe.

An SMEE auction at Marshall House was enjoyable. About 30 members attended with the auctioneer, Peter Wardropper, rattling through the goods on offer. Speed is a secret of a good auction. Humour helps too. One bundle of polished metal was described as 'could be platinum' and when a clock kit came up for sale the society humourist had to ask 'Is it digital'? As a sale novice I enjoyed the afternoon, but in a fit of auction fever bid a whole £1 for a box of miscellaneous nuts and bolts, few of which mate! Better, the unwanted bits and pieces I took in made a satisfactory £23.

As with any auction there is no knowing how much lots will make - there are good days and bad. SMEE charge 10% commission on sales for members. This one raised £400 for my neighbour, less commission and a charge for petrol used to transport the goods. Bob was well satisfied, and SMEE members enjoyed themselves. If a smaller society plans to hold an auction I suggest inviting members of other societies to boost the market.

Society auction sales seem a good way to sell metals and tools, though perhaps not larger machinery (**photo 4**). There are always club members looking to pick up metals, though one SMEE theory is that the same bits of unworkable metal are sold each time, to be returned to the next auction by an unhappy buyer!

Peter Wardropper thinks that interest in society sales is less than formerly and lathes in particular are more difficult to sell. Model engineers are now generally better equipped though Peter suggests rummage and disposal sales remain a good outlet for many tools and surplus metals.

## **Local Auctioneers**

In 2013 the firm of Harry Ray and Co of Welshpool, Powys, advertised a complete workshop, sold as one lot at auction. This firm is a general auctioneer holding specialist machinery and farm sales when required. Some auction firms specialise in machinery auctions but these may take time to arrange. They are a possible outlet for machines and other equipment if you want to test the market, but may not attract specialist buyers.

## **Second hand machinery dealers**

Tools and machinery dealers advertising in Model Engineer's Workshop and Model Engineer offer quick removal of workshop contents which can be vital where there is pressure to remove goods quickly. They also offer quick settlement, again this can be helpful.

Long established dealers advertising in ME and MEW include Home and Workshop Machinery of Sidcup, G and M Tools of Ashington, West Sussex, and West Point Machine

Tools, of Hyde, Cheshire. These firms aim for fast turnover so are constantly in need of new stock.

Steve Holder of Home and Workshop Machinery says he can usually offer a price based on good photographs of the machinery and tooling offered. He quoted quickly after seeing pictures of Dennis Major's lathe and associated tooling, and cleared all within three days. They are highly experienced in clearing workshops, offering a professional service.

Tim Muddle of G and M Tools reckons to deliver a similarly quick service. His firm can travel to most parts of the UK if the tools offered are good enough. Like Steve he can make an offer based on photographs. Sadly he sometimes buys back workshops sold previously to model engineers who can no longer continue with their hobby.

West Point Machine Tools originally dealt in factory machinery but finds increasing business among model engineers. They prefer to value and sell whole workshops rather than individual machines. Like other dealers they pay promptly.

All these firms offer second hand smaller tools, though these are generally less important to them than machine sales.

Sometimes dealers are criticised for offering prices considered too low. This is not really fair. Look at the costs of running a second hand machinery business - there are rents and rates to pay, wages and insurance, transport costs (hiring a large truck can be £1000 a day), cleaning machinery for sale, advertising and of course the need to make a living. All these costs mount up so dealers need reasonable mark-ups just to cover costs, never mind make a profit. And some goods probably won't sell quickly but still add to storage costs.

Selling goods yourself or through a society may make more money but if costing time involved for family, friends or society volunteers then a dealer is a good option. Norman Dean of West Point Tools says that contrary to expectations a dealer can often offer more than a private buyer. They have turnover and financial organisation to offer ready money.

One risk is that a dealer may already be well stocked though ME/MEW advertisers are always ready for more stock. A local second hand dealer (who doesn't advertise in ME/MEW) had lots of measuring equipment for sale so when a retired toolmaker came in to sell Imperial micrometers he was politely refused. Luckily I could make an offer.

## **EBay**

This has rapidly become the means of choice for many people wanting to sell unwanted items. Bob Buckle could not sell his father's 1920's IXL lathe though offered to south-eastern model engineering societies (**photo 5**). Despite being well built, carefully maintained, and used to produce models winning prizes at Model Engineer exhibitions, there is no demand for older non indexed lathes. Bob's son put it on EBay and received an offer of £127 which was gratefully accepted. Fortunately the buyer could collect promptly, obtaining a robust lathe with a good centre height.

## **Freecycle**

Almost all areas have a Freecycle website where members can offer items free or request free goods. Obviously it is no good if you want paying but potentially useful if you want something moved quickly. People like something for nothing.

It is surprising what people take. I put three plastic air bricks on Redbridge Freecycle which were collected the same day. I tried my neighbour's old bench on Freecycle; there was interest but unfortunately potential takers were unable to remove it.

## **Conclusion**

There are many options for workshop disposal. We all hope it doesn't happen, but the time will come. Planning ahead, consulting with family, friends and our societies, will all help make eventual disposal easier and help ensure that our valued tools and equipment go to those who will use and value them.