



NEWS RELEASE

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Luthier wins Heritage Crafts Woodworker of the Year Award supported by Axminster Tools

Kent-based luthier Shem Mackey has won this year's Woodworker of the Year Award, supported by Axminster Tools, including a £2,000 prize and trophy awarded at a special presentation at Eltham Palace on Tuesday 26 November 2024.

Heritage Crafts was set up 14 years ago as a national charity to support and safeguard heritage crafts skills, and has become well known for its *Red List of Endangered Crafts*, the first research of its kind to rank traditional crafts in the UK by the likelihood they will survive the next generation.

The award, supported for the third year running by **Axminster Tools**, celebrates a heritage craftsman who has made an outstanding contribution to working with wood over the past year. It recognises a contribution that is far beyond the ordinary, based on a proven dedication to a particular woodworking skill.



Shem Mackey, from Kent, has become synonymous with the highest quality stringed-instruments in the world over the past 30 years, constantly striving to improve and bring new ideas into this historical craft. He recently produced one of the most iconic of instruments, a highly-decorated three manual Baryton with a total of 41 strings.

The *Woodworker of the Year* trophy presented to Shem was made by last year's winner, woodcarver **Tom Ball**. The carving shows intricate ivy leaves winding around a woodcarver's mallet, mounted on an oak base.

The judging panel for this year's award was made up of **Alan Styles** (Managing Director of Axminster Tools), **Robin Wood** (pole-lathe bowl turner and former Heritage Crafts Chair), **Helen Welch** (Founder and Head Instructor at the London Furniture School), and last year's winner **Tom Ball**.



The two other finalists for the award were **Peter Barnes**, who has been making harpsichords for 50 years, drawing on the expertise and experience of his father who was also an eminent builder of ancient keyboard instruments, and **Bob Johnston**, who uses traditional basket weaving techniques in a modern way; his willow Iron Throne for Game of Thrones has a prominent place at Belfast International Airport.

Heritage Crafts also ran a **Young Woodworker of the Year Award** for practitioners up to an including the age of 25, also supported by **Axminster Tools**, which was won by **Sean Evelegh**, who set up his own furniture making business straight out of university, making pieces for clients all around the world. In 2020 Sean won a TV show called 'The Chop', to be crowned Britain's top woodworker, competing as a teenager against experienced professionals.



Global suppliers of woodworking tools and machinery, **Axminster Tools** has spent 50 years building their family business into the renowned organisation it is today. Working together with makers and creators at all levels, from trade professionals through to craft enthusiasts, their commitment to supporting woodworking skills fits perfectly with the ethos of Heritage Crafts.

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Photo captions:

- **Shem Mackey**, winner of the 2024 *Woodworker of the Year Award*.
- 2024 *Woodworker of the Year Award* trophy, made by **Tom Ball**.
- **Shem Mackey**, winner of the 2024 *Woodworker of the Year Award*, and **Alan Styles**, Managing Director at Axminster Tools. Photo by Robert Wade.

About Heritage Crafts

Founded in 2009, the Heritage Crafts is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) registered as the 'Heritage Crafts Association', the advocacy body for traditional heritage crafts. Working in partnership with government and key agencies, it provides a focus for craftspeople, groups, societies and guilds, as well as individuals who care about the loss of traditional crafts skills, and works towards a healthy and sustainable framework for the future. Its aim is to support and promote heritage crafts as a fundamental part of our living heritage.

www.heritagecrafts.org.uk

About the *Red List of Endangered Crafts*

The Red List of Endangered Crafts, created by Heritage Crafts, was the first to rank traditional crafts in the UK by the likelihood they would survive the next generation. The 2023 edition of the Red List, funded by the Pilgrim Trust, assessed 259 crafts to identify those which are at greatest risk of disappearing, of which 62 have been classified as critically endangered, 84 as endangered and 112 as currently viable.

The Red List shows that the craft knowledge, skills and practices that form an important part of our shared cultural heritage are – for a number of reasons – at risk of being lost. Heritage Crafts believes that these cultural assets are as important as unique heritage buildings and ancient beautiful landscapes and could provide future generations with fantastic opportunities to enrich their lives and the lives of others.

<http://redlist.heritagecrafts.org.uk>