

Building friendships and things

If you think that Men in Sheds (MiS) is all about blokes getting busy with nails and bits of wood, you'd be a little bit right, but also very wrong. There's more to it than that, as *Pulse's* Sammy Jones discovered.

Nationwide, there are around 13,000 MiS members, or Shedders, to give them their collective name. It's a healthy number and, impressively, the Milton Keynes branch is one of the most successful collectives in the country, with more than 100 members signed up.

Nigel Pigott is one of them. He made contact after retiring from the Open University back in 2013, and has been 'an active member' ever since. Today he is hands-on in more than one guise; he also serves as secretary for the branch.

"I have always been keen on woodworking and metalwork and the Shed offered facilities and expertise that I could never have found at home, as well as good company," he says of the initial attraction to MiS.

And that's the point – the Shed is a bit of a creative bubble, but it also offers social interaction and a welcoming environment. It's a place of positivity that is about more than just toolboxes.

"We have many members who live alone and some suffer from mental health issues such as depression or anxiety," says Nigel, "They find attendance at the Shed provides a ready made social environment and many relish the opportunity to fill their time with creative activities; others are happy simply to spend time in the company of others."

So, while the Shedders are traditionally a 'can do' bunch, they don't have to be super productive.

"We also have members who, for their own reasons, prefer simply to come to the Shed

and enjoy the company, without necessarily doing anything."

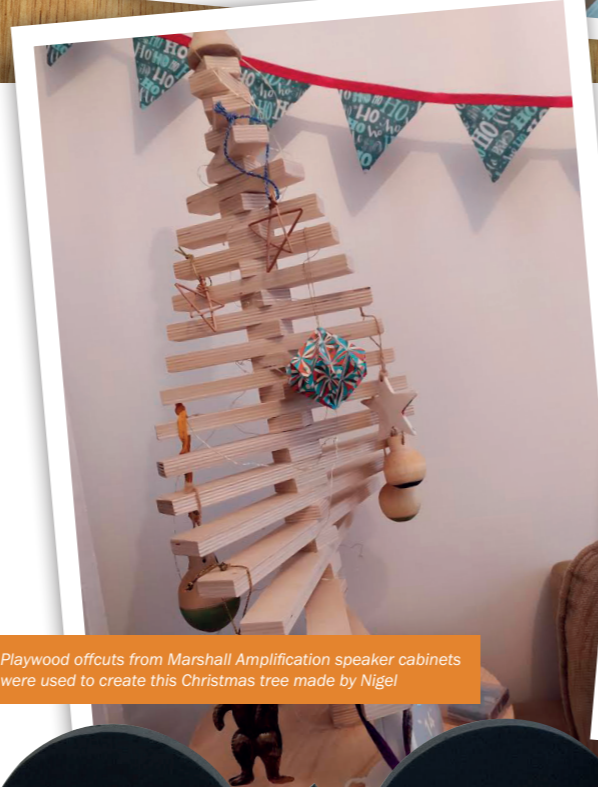
When it comes to the practical side, Men in Sheds is an opportunity for people to get busy with a wide range of activities; from the aforementioned woodworking and metalworking, and plenty more besides. It enhances hobbies, utilises skills and members get to support community projects too, which is encouraged.

You might not realise it, but work by those Shedders pops up all over the new city.

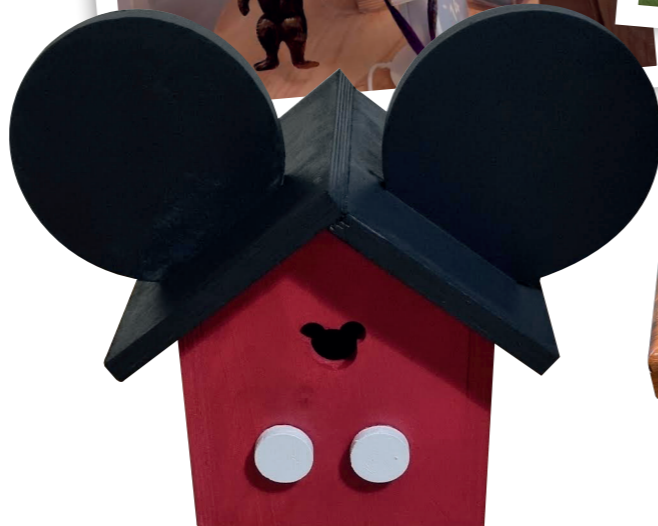
They have been commissioned to make unique benches for Wolverton's Secret



Tree-mendous - another clever creation



Playwood offcuts from Marshall Amplification speaker cabinets were used to create this Christmas tree made by Nigel



Nigel Pigott (above) Men in Sheds member and Milton Keynes branch secretary

From the left: Replica music stand for local band The Rhythm Aces, 'Ears' a Mickey Mouse bird box made by MiS and an engraved ornamental box



Garden, made a treasure chest for an Easter challenge in Stony Stratford, and their replica music stand for The Rhythm Aces – a band active in the area from the 1940s – took pride of place at the 2021 Wired For Sound exhibition.

They have carried out work in support of the MK Food Bank, completed theatrical props and also created a fabulous tree for a touring theatre group. That job saw them employing help from a specialist company to assist with the machining – because if they can't do it, they might know someone who can!

Their DIY skills keep them busy, but also colours up the area.

“Anyone who is looking to spend their time productively and perhaps to contribute to our community projects is welcome to join...”



An outdoor library for Russell First School in Stony Stratford

You need to be at least eighteen years old to join, and those currently signed up here in Milton Keynes include members in full and part-time work, those out of work, carers who need to take some 'me' time and people who have long-term medical conditions.

By far the largest group are people who have retired from the day job, but still have plenty to offer, and want the warmth of a 'working' community.

Collectively, the various Shedders bring a variety of skills to the table that can be shared and learned from.

It's the members who decide what happens in the Shed, which in MK is located in a large industrial unit in Kiln Farm. The space also incorporates the Men in Sheds sub group Milton Keynes Maker Space, which provides facilities for technical projects including electronics, computing and 3D printing.

And at odds with the name, these days Men in Sheds also welcomes ladies to the fold.

"Until fairly recently we resisted approaches from prospective female members – given our name and the focus on men's health," Nigel explained, "However, we began to receive requests from a small number of women who were keen to learn woodworking and for whom no other facilities existed in Milton Keynes, so we let them join, and the outcome has been very positive."

It's safe to say that things are going from strength to strength: "Not only have they become, in a short time, some of the most skilled woodworkers we have, but the effect of having women in the Shed, from my perspective anyway, has been beneficial."

"They generally have better listening and other 'soft' skills and they are very tolerant of the occasional laddish behaviour from the men. We now also run evening groups in more traditional 'female' activities such as crochet and machine sewing."

If you've been away from work or social circles for any period of time, the thought of attending anywhere new might be daunting. But do take the plunge and reach out – you'll be glad you did.

"Anyone who is looking to spend their time productively and perhaps to contribute to our



A large planter made for Home Instead at Crownhill

community projects is welcome to join, as is anyone who is looking for a friendly social group with diverse backgrounds," Nigel encouraged.

Join Men in Sheds and two things are guaranteed – you'll make acquaintances, and be called upon to operate the kettle every once in a while. After all, brews make happy Shedders!

Men in Sheds – what you need to know

- > Annual membership costs £11, but members are encouraged to donate regularly to help with running costs; £15 a month is the suggested amount, but members unable to make regular payments won't be turned away.
- > The Shed is open every Monday, Wednesday and Friday during the day, and on Sunday afternoons. It also meets on Monday and Wednesday evenings when the MK Maker Space meets.

> Want to donate? To make a one-off or regular payment, visit localgiving.org/charity/mismk

> Make contact: Email info@meninshedsmk.org.uk Call them on **01908 267126** Visit the website: meninshedsmk.org.uk