During last year’s enforced lockdown people started making things again. The rise in sales of crafting materials rose dramatically, with Hobbycraft, John Lewis, as well as independent stores citing dramatic increases in demand.

With a 200% increase in sales, and craft classes being attended by more than 15 million customers, Hobbycraft has played a huge role in keeping creative spirit high. Among other retailers looking to find their way through the new circumstances, was John Lewis with a jump in haberdashery sales and hosting knitting tutorials on Zoom keeping them spinning.

The upsurge of interest was in sewing, knitting, cooking, and gardening, and businesses got creative about teaching people ‘how’.

Mike Whittall, a local furniture maker, also played his part in supporting people keen to learn new skills. He said: “as a teacher as well as a maker, it has been extremely interesting to see how people have got creative in response to their circumstances. I think the lockdown has allowed people to rediscover old skills and learn new ones where they have never had the opportunity to do so before.

“Woodworkers in my community posted a lot of videos on Instagram and Facebook to inspire people in ‘how to’ in order to help people in their creative journey.” Mike has also seen a marked rise in interest and bookings for his face-to-face woodworking courses which resumed – in a Covid safe way – in May of this year.

He adds “It is great to see how, now people have the opportunity to enhance their skills with experienced tutors, the interest in learning new skills hasn’t diminished.”

At Mike’s workshop near Turriff he runs three levels of courses, the beginners, the intermediate, and the progressive. With each student getting their own bench, tools, and materials, the skills learnt spread from basic joints as a beginner, to advanced skills and using workshop equipment.

Mike shared, “I had a lovely lady who came on all three levels of the course, she had never done any woodworking before and did not even know how to hold and work a saw properly. Having had cancer, she was keen to learn and try knew things and now, having completed all the courses, she has set up her own bench in her garage so that she can continue to make.”

The courses are running in October (intermediate level), November 2021 and January 2022 (progressive level), with more dates to follow. It is complete with a homemade lunch and cakes and the option to book an Air B’n’B nearby that is also run by Mike and Jane.