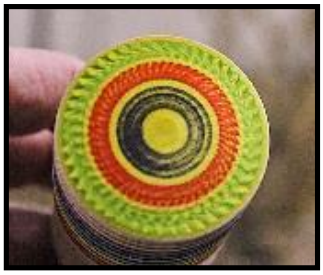
February 2014 Meeting – John French

At the start of John's demonstration he asked the question of the audience about how they set about a new piece of turning. He followed this by talking about developing on the initial idea and he then said that he would use making spinning tops to illustrate some of the discussion points.

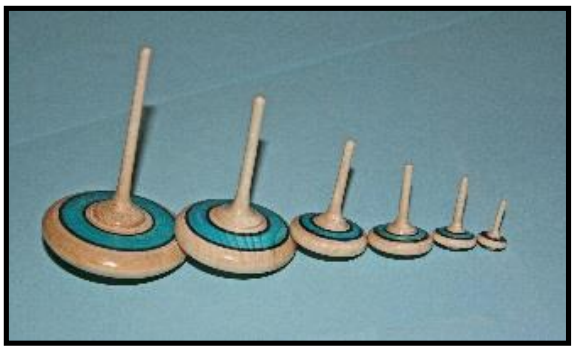
He immediately talked about how he decorates and finishes a top. With a piece of sycamore mounted in a chuck he showed that a skew chisel cuts the end grain fibres cleanly and need not require any sanding. However, he showed the procedure he uses by abrading through the grits and using Webrax to get a really fine finish.



On the endgrain he showed two ways of using colour and chattertool work. The first was to use the chattertool first then apply colour from a brush pen and the second was to apply a base colour, perform the chatterwork and then highlight with other colours.

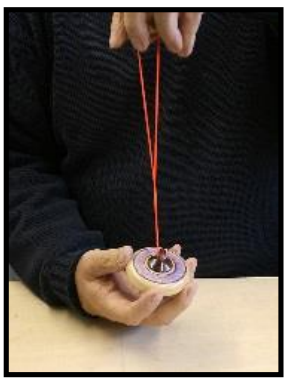
A point tool was used to cut some lines in the side gain of the sycamore and then a piece of nichrome wire was used to friction burn dark lines into the surface. Brush pens were used to add colour between the lines. John explained that the next steps for finishing were to spray with an acrylic lacquer, then the surface is buffed and finished with carnauba wax and polished. He explained that he had found that fibre tip pens while cheap were a false economy as they hardened when applied to rotating wood whereas the brush pens while more expensive last much longer and are easier to use. John uses two types of pen: Kuretake Zig Clean Colour Real Brush Pens (Japanese) obtainable from www.artifolk.co.uk (12 pen set ~£25) and Tombow Dual Brush pen (German) obtainable from www.amazon.co.uk (18 pen set ~ £42)

Some discussion about what makes the best finger spin top ensued and John made a simple design and showed how it could be decorated in various ways using designs based on the circumference being divided by eight. Some designs can be seen in the photo.



The next item turned was a "long handled" top, again a piece of sycamore was used mounted in the chuck and not supported by the tailstock. The spinning point was turned first, then the body of the top was formed and the handle started. At this point the boy of the top was sanded and colour applied, using a black pen to outline the colour. A piece of stiff polystyrene foam was then held over the spinning point and the tailstock brought up to support it. This provides sufficient stability when turning the thin handle. John explained that if one is short of wood that this style of top can be made quite small and still be spun. He presented a series of tops of decreasing size (see photo).

The last top that was made was a "hanging top" and it was the sequence of making that was important. A piece of sycamore was used and an 8mm hole was drilled down the centre using a router drill in a Jacobs chuck in the tailstock. The upper face of the body of the top was turned, abraded and decorated, the underside was partially turned and the whole parted off. A separate contrasting coloured piece was mounted in the chuck and an 8mm diameter spigot formed so that it would be a good fit in the hole in the body of the top. A sufficient length to allow for formation of the spinning point was parted off. A second 8mm diameter spigot was then turned on the piece remaining in the chuck. The body of the top was then "super glued" onto this spigot with upper face of the body facing the headstock. Once the glue was set the base of the body was turned flat and the parted off piece was then glued into the hole. The underside of the top was then finish turned and the spinning point formed.



With a parting tool the stem of the handle was formed and a domed shape formed with a spindle gouge before parting off. A Dremel tool fitted with a saw blade was used to cut off the sides of the dome shape and then a small sanding drum in the Dremel was used to finish the shaping of the handle. (see photo for final shape). John demonstrated how this top was spun by suspending it from a length of cord, giving the top a twist and then building up the momentum of the top by gently moving the hands apart and bringing them back together, allowing the top to twist the string tighter. Finally the top is placed on a hard surface and the loop of string allowed to fall away, leaving the top spinning.