

## West Suffolk Woodturning Club meeting – January 21<sup>st</sup> 2020

### Demonstrator - John French - Spinning Tops



John started by showing some quotes:-

- Men don't quit playing because they grow old; they grow old because they stop playing - Oliver Wendell Holmes
- Growing old is compulsory; growing up is optional
  - You never really understand something until you can explain it clearly to your grandmother - Albert Einstein

Then pictures of a couple of notices, one from Great Yarmouth and one from Ipswich -

- Borough of Gt Yarmouth – CAUTION, Notice is hereby given that all Boys and others, obstructing the public thoroughfares of the town, by spinning tops or playing marbles or other games upon pavements or footpaths, will be summoned before the magistrates and fined. By order Wm Brogden, Chief Constable, February 1<sup>st</sup> 1889
- Edict from the Chief Constable of Ipswich 1891 – “The pegtop season having apparently set in with its usual severity, constables are to capture and bring to the police station all the tops they can lay their hands upon, also, as the opportunity offers, to explain to the children the penalty (four days imprisonment) they are liable to for thus acting”. - extract from “Constables of Suffolk” by Leslie Jacobs 1992

John then showed examples of two types of tops – a finger spinner, and a palm spinner. The palm spinner had a longer 'handle' and was spun by positioning it between the palms of both hands (held together as if in prayer mode), then the hands moved in opposite directions – one forwards, one backwards.

A bit of theory – a smaller diameter top spins faster than a larger diameter top.

John prefers using 'Hard Maple' (or Rock Maple – from America) to make his tops, but that has become difficult to obtain, but Sycamore or any other hard, close grained light colour timber is also OK. A light colour wood will take colour better.

John then placed a sycamore blank in the chuck and started turning the base of a top.



Then more theory – Points: Friction slows down tops – air on the surface of the top and friction on the point. John has used upholstery tacks for points on some of his tops. If he is just shaping the wood to form a 'point' he gives them a small radius. The wood fibres in a sharp point will soon bend and cause friction.

With the base shaped, John then applied colour using quality paint pens. John would then normally apply acrylic lacquer and carnauba wax. This was then parted off. In his own workshop, John would then buff this with a polishing mop. John then spoke about legislation when selling 'toys' for children. The finish must be safe, and he suggested that any tops for children should be two inches or larger in diameter.

Then John spoke about other types of top. One that had been a challenge to him was a 'Humming' top. Referring to Gary Rance, Gary says that a humming top should have a square hole with a bevelled undercut. This involves the theory of whistles.

John then set about making a 'Tippe Top'. This has a hollowed parabola shaped body, the handle needs to have a flat end. The Tippe Top inverts itself when spun.



Then John made what he called a three-way top. This has a stand to spin on, and it hangs on the edge of the stand when it stops spinning.

He then made a Finger top. The point of this is recessed in a 'skirt'. It will spin on the end of a finger, or it will spin on a small stand. The skirt lowers the centre of gravity below the pivot point, so when it stops spinning on the stand it does not fall off.



And finally he made a Drop Top. This was suspended on a loop of string, the string was then twisted. As the string untwisted, the top would spin and drop off the loop.

A very interesting demonstration with a fun element.

