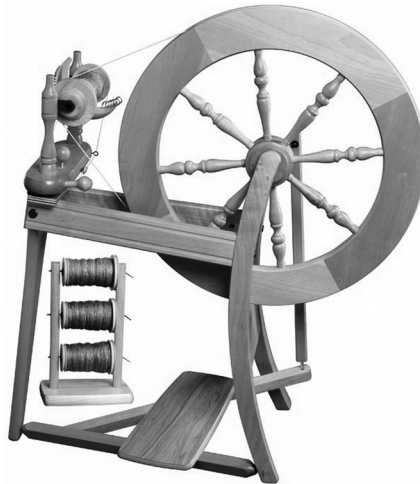


Part 5 Spinning wheels - Video 10

Some people have always wanted a spinning wheel. If that is the case, you might as well learn on a wheel from the start unless cost is a major consideration. Spindle spinning can help to some extent, but the techniques are different and spindling is not a prerequisite for wheel spinning.



Ashford Traditional spinning wheel with a lazy kate.

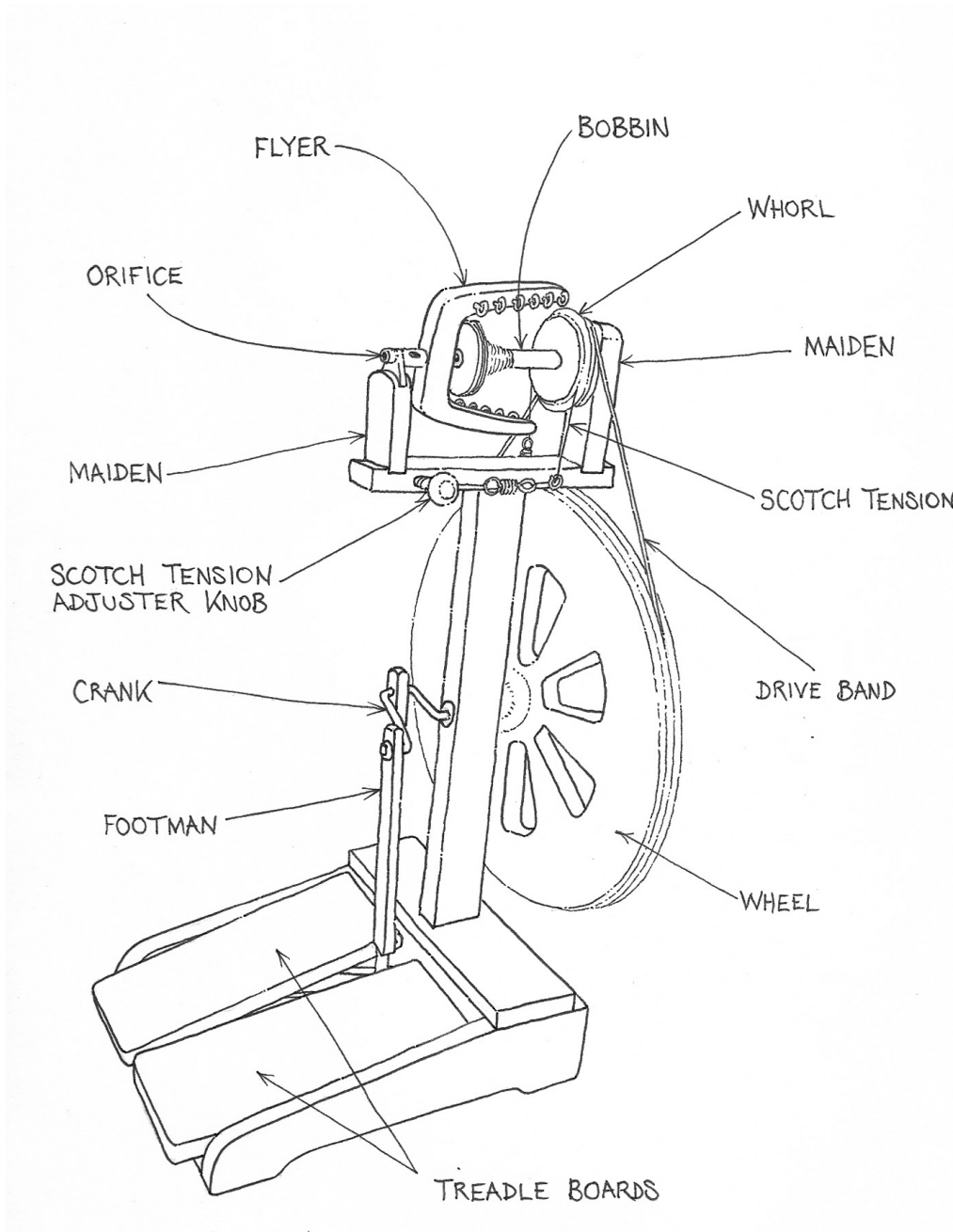
How a spinning wheel works

It is not necessary to know all about spinning wheels in order to be able to spin. So if it seems bewildering right now, just miss this bit out. Once you can spin it will be obvious anyway. These details are included here because it may be useful information to have when you are buying a wheel.

A spinning wheel does essentially the same thing as a hand spindle in that it twists the fibre which turns it into yarn. The spinner still drafts (or pulls out) the fibre, but the wheel does the twisting and winds the yarn onto the bobbin instead of it being wound on by hand as it is on a spindle.

When the spinner moves their hand forwards (towards the flyer), it releases the tension on the yarn. The bobbin then slows down but the flyer keeps moving at the same speed. The flyer then rotates around the bobbin and this is what winds the yarn on. If you try rotating the flyer on a spinning wheel by hand whilst holding the bobbin still, you will see this happening and it will all make sense.

Most wheels are powered by treading with your feet – some use one foot (single treadle) and some use two feet on separate treadles (double treadle). There are a few such as charkhas - the small spinning wheels made famous in India by Ghandi – and great wheels that are rotated by hand. For the purposes of this course I will talk mainly about treadle spinning wheels.



The parts of a spinning wheel.

Although spinning wheels can look different to each other, their essential parts are similar.

There is an actual wheel which can vary in size. There is a treadle board which the spinner treads in order to turn the wheel. This is joined to the wheel by a piece of wood called the footman, at the top of which is a bent bit of metal called the crank. This crank goes through the centre of the wheel so that the wheel turns when you treadle.

Adjacent to the wheel is the flyer assembly. This consists of uprights called maidens which have bearings on them to hold the flyer itself. The flyer is normally U-shaped and has hooks or a sliding metal loop to guide the newly spun yarn onto a bobbin. The bobbin sits on a spindle in the middle of the flyer. The whole bobbin, flyer and maidens assembly is called the mother of all. Wonderful names, huh?

A drive band joins the wheel and the flyer assembly in a loop, a bit like the chain on a bicycle. This band is often just a piece of string but can be stretchy plastic. There are three ways for the drive band and tension to work – Scotch tension, double drive and bobbin lead. These are explored later.

Orifice size

The standard orifice on most wheels works for most yarn, so this is not something you need to worry about if buying a recognised brand. This is one reason to avoid antique wheels which often have a small orifice. That will really stop you learning and reduce the range of what you can spin on the wheel.

An Ashford spinning wheel is a good first choice with a decent orifice size as they are well made and parts are always available even many years later. Good ones in working order can often be bought second hand via a Guild or spinning group.

The S10/S15 series of Louet wheels have an even larger orifice size which is useful (but not essential) when learning or spinning thick or fancy yarns. Some Louet wheels have a removable centre to the orifice which provides different sizes.

Other wheels have a hook or metal loop instead of an orifice and these will also cope easily with thicker yarns. The best thing is to contact a spinning Guild or group and see the different wheels that members use. Many groups have a wheel available to borrow as well.

Accessories

There are a few necessary accessories to go with a spinning wheel.

Lazy kate



A lazy kate holds the bobbins full of spun singles yarn when you are plying (see Part 8). A lazy kate is essential for this and usually comes with the spinning wheel if you buy it new.

Some lazy kates are free standing and some are actually on the spinning wheel. There are various kinds of lazy kate; the type shown here holds three bobbins in line. You can make your own from a shoe box and three knitting needles.

A lazy kate with three bobbins.

Niddy noddy



A niddy noddy enables you to wind the yarn off the bobbin into a skein, ready for washing or dyeing.

It does not usually come with the wheel but they are inexpensive. The yarn can be wound around a large book or a picture frame if you do not have one. Life is so much easier if you do have one that they are worth buying.

A niddy noddy.

The Ashford ones work particularly well because the sloped arms make it easy to get the yarn off again. Beware of any that have straight arms as the yarn gets tighter as you wind and it can be hard to remove it.

Spare bobbins

At least three bobbins are necessary so that you can spin two bobbins of singles yarn and then ply them onto a third one. New wheels come with three bobbins but if you buy one second-hand there might only be one. Extra bobbins can be bought from spinning suppliers.

If the end of any second-hand bobbins is broken, this can be fixed with glue. (The kind that comes in two tubes and sets very hard is best.) Then sand off any rough edges on the bobbins but do not sand the grooves at the ends of the bobbins or the central core. Just smooth any bits that yarn could catch on.



Bobbins vary from wheel to wheel; pictured from left to right are Timbertops, Majacraft standard bobbin, Majacraft jumbo bobbin and Ashford standard bobbin.