

Bob French RPT - Lidded Apple Boxes - July 17th 2002

Reviewed by Malcolm Martin (photos Gregory Moreton)

Bob French entertained us at our July meeting with his demonstration of turning an Apple which was different to the normal wooden apple in that he makes them hollow and with an almost invisible The evening was amply rewarding in that Bob gave us all some very interesting tips and his views on turning matters some of which were contrary to what we had been told by other pundits of the art.

Bob came from a boat building family and went into engineering as a career which lasted until he was badly injured in a motoring accident during recovery he was introduced to woodturning. Following his recovery he had to leave engineering and in 1982 took up woodturning seriously and was making items and selling at Craft Fairs. After working in the furniture trade for a time he became a professional wood turner in 1985 when he got a large order for making decorative kitchen cabinet spindles.

Bob had a block of Plum to make this apple which he was sure was well and truly dry about 2 1/2ins square and about 3 1/2ins - 4ins long. Having had numerous production orders for large batches of items to make over the years he was able to give us many useful tips as he progressed.

- Having marked the centre each end he mounted the block between centres using a Stem Centre which he finds most useful for production jobs.
- He roughed the block to a round using a 1/3in roughing gouge and obtained a good finish using the side of the gouge as a skew chisel.
- He squared up each end and formed a 1 1/2in Diameter spigot on each end. The same depth as the width of his parting tool
- After measuring off the length he was going to make the lid 1 1/2 tool widths- he undercut the length with a parting tool, just under the 1/2ins Diameter he required for the lid. He then turned the sides of the lid parallel to 1/2ins diameter i.e. about the same as the spigot.
- He was then in a position to shape the remainder of the block into a rough Apple shape
To finalise the work between centres he cut a Witness mark in the end of the apple nearest the lid section to indicate the diameter of the lid on the body of the Apple.
- He removed the work and stem drive centre and mounted a 4 jaw engineering chuck on the lathe spindle. He had the O'Donnell jaws fitted in the chuck with the additional inserts for taking the 1 1/2 ins diameter spigot He was careful to see that the piece was centred up properly before finally tightening the chuck.



- Next the lid is parted off. (If he was making a number of these he would remove the roughed out apple and tie the parted lid to the apple for finishing later and he would then do a number of apples to this stage and possibly leave them to settle for some months depending on the wood used.)
- With the lid in the chuck, cleans up the end and then turns the sides of the lid so that they are perfectly parallel. He checks this by using the jaws of an engineering vernier gauge. Finishing with 400 grit paper. He marks the depth of the lid on its outer end and polishes the inside end of the lid. Not the sides. He parts off the now finished plug lid. So that he can remove the tight lid from the Apple he screws a sheet Metal type screw in the hole formed for the stalk.
- He now bored the Apple with a 3/8in Gouge to the depth to be hollowed out. Being careful not to go through the bottom the apple when finished. Bob has a novel way of hollowing out! He uses a bowl gouge to do any drilling. He explained that the gouge to use is one where the bottom of the flute is on the centre of the gouge diameter not all gouges are. Also you need to grind the left hand side edge slightly in advance of the right hand side edge. He also has a purpose made scraper for under cutting the hollowed out entrance to the box. He has a theory of grinding scrapers which is different to some turners ideas. He grinds on a rough grey wheel and does not bother with creating a burr or an ultra sharp honed edge. - It works for him.
- He forms a recess for the lid in the top with a side and end scraper made from a piece of HSS and leaves an 1/8 in flanged shoulder for the bottom of the lid to close onto when finished. The lid recess is not finished to size at this stage as the diameter will be carefully turned to the size of the lid to provide - a perfect fit! We hope!
- Next he carefully turns the bore for the lid so that there is a perfect firm fit for the lid. Too much off and all is lost!
- A final clean up on the inside of the hollow apple with the purpose made scraper, a sanding through the grit grades, being careful to use small pieces on the end of his finger to avoid entrapment risk. Seal and polish the inside of the Apple but not the lid recess.
- He now bored a 1/8in Diameter hole from the lid end and through the lid using a 1/8 in Diameter gouge by turning a bowl gouge upside down to enter in at an angle from the front so cutting on the inside away from you. The advantage is that the waste material shoots out of the hole down the flute of the bowl gouge and saves a lot of time not having to clear the muck out of the hollow. Who has the guts to try it? Bob showed us doing this without the use of a tool rest. The tool shank was rubbing on the entry to the hole which was in effect acting as a tool rest. This was for the stalk of the apple to be fitted later.
- He now fits the tight fitting lid plug to the Apple and finish turns the whole Apple externally to provide the best apple shape including the lid in with the overall shape using a small bowl gouge. He finally shapes with a wide scraper without a handle. He then sands through the grit grades, gives a good coat of thinned sanding sealer, wipes off the surplus, allows to dry, then wire wool to provide a nice sheen finish. He then applies friction polish, using a rag to provide the friction and a glistening polish.
- He undercuts the bottom of the apple with the top edge of his parting tool and parts off
- Finally he glues in a pre-prepared stalk into the lid plug, replacing the screw. This is made, using a contrasting wood, by turning a small banana shaped piece and cutting in 2 diagonally.



Result: A perfect Hollow Apple Box with an invisible lid. Bob has made hundreds and he told some amusing follow up stories about some of them. A most enjoyable evening with something for everyone.