

## **The Extraordinary journey of a Plank of wood**

by Ian Elliott

I was lucky enough to be given a plank of Iroko *Chlorophora excelsa* last week. It was 3050mm long x 220mm x 80mm. The amazing thing is this plank was one of four that had been destined for the skip.

The planks journey from the skip to me started at a renovation within a local industrial unit. The planks had been beams that were removed during a renovation, then to be skipped, when they were spotted by someone who worked in the industrial unit who thought "I know a member of my family who could use them" Their relation had recently purchased a property in the Dales to renovate and wanted some beams to add more character. They asked and got permission to take the planks. The person renovating the property in the Dales happens to work with a relation of mine, who knows I am always on the lookout for good wood. Initially I was told that all four planks were going to be used, but there could be some off cuts from the ends if I could use them. I was delighted! I thought I might get four bowl blanks. It turned out that only three of the planks were used and one was spare and destined for me.

*When I started to write this piece, I looked up prices of Iroko up online. A piece of Iroko of equivalent size would cost around £200.00. So, £800.00 was going to be skipped, probably even more if was all cut up and sold to Woodturners. One person's rubbish is another's GOLD!*

The plank had a few big nail holes along one edge but as they were well spaced, they could easily be worked around. So, I marked the plank off allowing for cutting through the nail holes. I cut six at 220 x 220 x 80 for bowl blank and got six pieces about 150 x 75 x 75. The rest of the plank I passed on to another club member.



My hand-held circular saw only cuts to a depth of around 50mm so I had to cut from both sides.

I turned a bowl and a trinket box from the Iroko, which I gave to the person who gave the plank to me via my relative as a thank you.

**IROKO** *Chlorophora excelsa* is a Hardwood from East and West Africa it has a dry weight of around 40lb ft<sup>3</sup> (640kg m<sup>3</sup>) It is sometimes used as a substitute for Teak though it is not oily like Teak. It can have cross grain similar to Sapele but works well with sharp tools. It is mildly lustrous again similar to Sapele and can look different colours depending on the direction of the light. It works well but it is a very dusty wood, I personally use my **Powered Respirator** the entire time I am in my shed when using Iroko. I class it as a dirty wood to work with, but has rich colours ranging from brown to golden yellows.



I turned another bowl it is 215mm diameter x 70mm high and has a wall thickness of 6mm (see below). It has had 2 coats of Sanding Sealer and 2 coats of Danish Oil. I am happy with the finish, but not so happy with the shape. The bottom inside the bowl is too flat, it should just flow into the sides rather a distinctive transition. But if you don't turn you don't learn!

