

The Cleft Stick

Issue 3. June 2014



an intermittent e-mailing from NCFed

The Cleft Stick is intended to disseminate news and information within NCFed. It goes to: the Directors; relevant Local and Regional Group Committee members; Local Reps; individuals not affiliated to groups and to others. It will also go to appropriate organisations and individuals without NCFed. It will go out only by email to save on time and cost. It will go out as often as there is sufficient copy of interest or importance.

News of new Groups.

Cornwall held a gathering of potential Group members during National Beanpole Week and have now got enough interest to have got a new Group up and running. Well done to them and welcome to the club!

If you'd like to find out what's going on down there, get in touch with Tom Kemp at: woodforthetrees@gmail.com .

Tim Little, based in *Hertfordshire*, is also interested in getting a Group going in his area. He can be contacted on tim@hard-graft.co.uk . He sent in this article, conveying his enthusiasm for his work.

“A Step Back In Time With A Full Leap Forwards”
(Semi-Ancient Woodland Regeneration – Watton at Stone, Hertfordshire)

Set back from the homely Hertfordshire village of Watton-at-Stone, lies a set of semi ancient woodland compartments flanked by arable land and the nearby Wood hall Estate. Immediately upon entering the first diamond shaped woodland section; one can feel a definite calmness along with the sense of past activities and a wealth of history.

The remnants of Oak standards are dotted around this coupe which, at a guess, dates back to the time of the last cutting. The rotting stumps remaining give a rough guide as to their size. The Hornbeam here is overstood; it was about 35 years ago that they last experienced the hustle and bustle of a busy

winter's coppice. These silvery, winding characters project a strong energy into their surroundings and exhibit such joy to my eyes. Perhaps a biased opinion being one of my favourite tree species however an opinion I'm sure many share. Around 4 or 5 younger Oak standards can be seen commanding the canopy along with 5 or 6 older Ash. The remainder of this compartment boasts younger Ash along with some Field Maple which was incorporated into the last coppice cut along with the stools of *Carpinus betulus*.

After a visual survey, discussions with the woodland owner regarding his intentions and our advice, we set about making our first cuts systematically and respectfully harvesting timber with the intentions of breathing fresh life and vigor back into this area.

8 months later, some wet and cold days and more recently beautifully warm ones in between we are now at a point where we are ready to bring in our traditional charcoal kiln to commence our first burn here. This is the first full length coppice project I have been involved with and cannot get over the feeling you have when you can sit or stand back in Spring and now Summer and do the following: Listen to the growing symphony of birdsong, watch the succession of ground flora from Bluebell to Primrose then Early Purple Orchid to Cow Parsley and so on, feel the freshness of the air which the wind can now bring in and finally to absorb the new feel to this once crowded and dark corner.

I now look forward to what is to come with the greatest amount of excitement. Some anxiety exists when I see fresh Fallow and Muntjac slots along the routes in, however I feel confident that the correct deterrents are in place. I also understand that they too have a place, and that, so long as I am the alpha mammal here, we can both go about our duties in harmony.

(Tim Little)

Rockingham Forest Group (Northants) update:

The inaugural meeting of the Rockingham Forest Coppice Group was held in December last year, when we brought together a steering group made up of a cross-section of interested groups and individuals including: Forestry Commission, Natural England, Estate Managers and Agents, Wildlife Trust, Coppice and Greenwood Workers, Social Forestry organisations, Volunteers and Colleges. We were wanting to gain an overview of coppicing in the area from a number of various perspectives.

It was felt that the aims and objectives of the group should be:-

Raise the standards of the coppice resource in the area and promote positive coppice management.

Encourage skill sharing and networking, training and apprenticeships.

Promotion of good quality coppice products and creation of a supply chain for producers and users in the area.

Since the last meeting things have been moving on apace, Moulton College Students studying Countryside and Wildlife management, have teamed up with Smallwoods Ass and the Rockingham Forest Coppice Group to design an online public survey which will help to identify the current and future demand for woodland products in our region. James Littlemore from the college will be available to discuss the results of the survey at the next meeting. Anyone wanting to contribute to the survey from our region, the on line link is – <https://www.surveymonkey.com/5/HQFR3JB>.



Foxy's Woodland Shop is now open in East Carlton Country Park. It's hoped that this could become a shop window for quality coppice products produced from timber harvested from Corby's woodlands and other woodlands in the Rockingham Forest Area. At the moment the shop is selling firewood, kindling, charcoal, bird boxes and beanpoles, so if anyone out there has products that they might wish to sell through the shop, please contact Rebecca Bishop on 01536 464019 or at Rebecca.bishop@corby.gov.uk.

The shop is run by volunteers from the Corby Woodland project and is a not for profit organisation, any surplus income will go towards conserving local woodlands for the future.

The local group gives an opportunity for people to get together and share skills, support and learn from one another and is open to anyone who has an interest in seeing our local coppice woodlands being positively and productively managed once again. Do do come along and have a look at 'Foxy's Woodland Shop' and find out the results of the Woodland Products Questionnaire.

If you would like more information on the Rockingham Forest Coppice Group, please contact Hugh Ross or Carolyn Church on tel:- 07785536613.

A better insurance deal for coppice workers!

(Toni Brannon has been beavering away on our behalf. Here is her update).

Following the usual annual hike in our insurance premium and problems with our County Council putting the public liability requirement up to ten million, I rang Gary Alexander of Beech Tree Insurance. Gary was recommended to me by other coppice/woodland workers already insured with him. We had a chat about all the activities we needed to be covered and why, with some details being confirmed by e-mail.

The outcome was a policy that suited us and what we do at about a third less premium than our previous provider. It also gave us increased employers and public liability. Gary had impressed me (and believe me, I am not easily impressed!!) with his professional, informative and flexible manner.

I then told him that, as a Director of the National Coppice Federation I was also looking for decent insurance cover for members. At the same time, I approached two other providers but, for differing reasons, nothing came from these. Gary and I arranged to meet and we had a long chat covering many aspects of coppice/woodland work and also insurance. It would be fair to say we both came away having learnt something.

During phone conferences with the other Federation Directors we discussed drafting a document that might have different insurance bands for varying activity levels and requirements. This proved to be too ambitious, so I ended up with one list of basic activities that still covered a great deal. This was sanity checked for me by other members of the Hampshire Coppice Craftsmen's Group (whom I represent and am Membership Secretary for) at one of our meetings.

Gary has given us a price for this cover of £280 per year which gives a Federation member a discount of about £80. There are also two other bands with the same activities but increased levels of annual

turnover. A list of all the activities, other prices and Beech Tree Insurance contact details will be found on the Federation website <http://www.ncfed.org.uk/> (due to go online very soon!).

This merely represents a starting point, as every individual will need to contact Gary to discuss their own requirements. To obtain the discount you will need to prove that you are a member of one of the Groups affiliated to NCFed. You should be able to obtain a form from your Membership Secretary confirming this. People in more informal groups and networks will need to obtain confirmation of membership from the Federation Membership Secretary Richard Thomason (groundsforconservation@hotmail.com).

I see this as the start of a beneficial collaboration where a provider has gone out of their way to understand our varied needs and be flexible enough to attempt to cover them. Coppice workers will be able, through membership of Affiliated Groups, get a really good price for their insurance cover and NCFed will receive a donation from Beech Tree for each member insuring through them.

Toni Brannon.

(Note: because of Beech Tree's background in Event insurance, you will need to attend at least one show or event annually. Ed.).

What's in a name.

(I had several responses to the original article in the last issue, and here they are. Thanks for them guys, and please keep them coming).

From John Sinclair of the Sussex and Surrey Group:

'I read with considerable interest the article on Faggots, Fascines, Bavins and Pimps in the previous issue.

Some years ago I also wondered about the origins of these terms and discovered that our counting system hasn't always been one, two, three, etc to ten. Once upon a time it was Yan, tan, tetherer, petherer, PIMP, hetherer, setherer, hoverer, coverer, dic. Please don't ask me how this was worked out originally but if you check on Wikipedia, you will find variations for almost all areas of the British Isles. While there are many differences there are also a lot of commonalities; whether ancient British 'pimpe', old Welsh 'pimp', Cornish 'pymp', or Breton 'pemp' all used for the number 5.

The traditional product for fire-lighting, a small bundle consisting of a couple of pieces of split wood, wrapped up with a load of twigs has always been, so I believe, sold in multiples of 5 and known singularly or in multiples of 5 as a pimp. The actual material used would, in the South East have been the leftovers from hurdles, besoms or other mainline products from the Coppice world. I guess there's no such thing as waste wood!

I don't know exactly what would be used in other parts of the country, but I'm pretty sure that the term derives from the old-style counting system, and the counting system (with local variations) was nationwide.



Alan Waters who, as far as I know, is the only person currently making pimps seriously, bundles his 'pimpets' up into 25's (each pair of cleft sticks in the picture is part of an individual 'pimpet').

Since 25 is five fives, maybe John's idea still works here?

John Honeyman, formerly of Hants, now in Lincs, adds this. He was told by an old Lincolnshire fellow that 3' long bundles were much used in those parts in the past for riverbank work. These were known as 'kids'.

Which jogs a memory of a tale in the old Coppice Association newsletter.

A novice coppice worker is asked to make up some faggots – except in those parts they were known as 'kidds'.

So he goes round to his local Agricultural Merchant to buy some baler twine. The chap behind the counter, slightly curious as to why he only wants a single pack, asks him what he's doing.

'Oh', comes the reply, 'I'm tying up lots of brushwood into bundles'.

'You're kidding', says the chap behind the counter.

'No, honestly, I'm tying up bundles of brushwood.....'

I'm not positive about the spelling, but dd is what my memory tells me. Ed.

George Darwell (Hants) adds even more information.

Bailey's Dictionary of 1761 gives:

Fascine	a fagot or bavin
Fascinés	[in fortification] are small branches of trees, or bavins bound up in bundles, which, mixed with earth, serve to fill up ditches, make breast-works, etc.
Bavins	brush faggots
Fagot	a bundle of sticks or wood for fuel

When, in the early '60s, my family harvested modest sized hedgerow elms for firewood, I would collect all the lightest trimmings, to the very last twig, into bundles about 30inches long and 12ins diameter, bound round with a flexible branch. We called these faggots. The dimensions were not decreed by some EU Directive: the length corresponded to that of the logs we burnt between fire-dogs in our open fireplace, so we could stack them in the same woodpile; and the diameter was compatible with the flexibility of the binding. We would cut the binding and use part of the faggot each morning to re-kindle the fire from the embers buried the night before.

Years later I was helping to trim branches from an oak in a suburban garden. Having at that time a small open-grate fireplace, I instinctively bound up the twigs into "mini-faggots" about 8ins long and 4in diameter, which my Sussex mother-in-law promptly called "pimps"; the first time I had heard the word with that meaning!

I've only met the word "bavin" in books, but have understood it to be a faggot you use to fire a bread oven.

In modern parlance I suggest there'd be merit in reserving "fascine" for bundles of small diameter rods used for civil engineering – and often meeting quite tight specifications. Faggots (or bavins if there are people out there who still use the word) are bundles of small sticks or twigs to be burnt, with a specification depending on the hearth or oven using them; and pimps appear to be a Sussex term for miniature faggots.

There was formerly another important use for faggots, as a damp-proof course underneath the hay- and corn- ricks. This foundation was known as "staddle"; hence staddle-stones designed to support an entire rick and make it inaccessible to vermin. In *Wattle Hurdles and Leather Gaiters* John Randall describes such faggots as being about 4ft long, and salvaged for burning after the ricks had been thrashed. His logs being the same length, he clearly had a decent-sized fireplace. There's no point in wasting energy sawing firewood shorter than necessary!

By sticking my head above the breastwork of fascines I shall doubtless incur the wrath of others more knowledgeable, and revive a Mediaeval outlet for coppice in the form of stakes and faggots!

Sussex & Surrey Coppice Group Hands on Day, July 5th.

Venue: Fernhurst Furnace, Surrey. Just south of Haslemere.

This is a regular, and growing, event. You can come and try your hand at a wide range of activities, from bark weaving to wood carving by way of chestnut pales, hazel bonds and steam bending.

Demonstrations are ten-a-penny at shows - this time you can get your hands dirty!

Camping is available on the Friday and Saturday nights and there are barbecues, barter and banter!

Everyone is welcome, from Cumbria to Cornwall and beyond.

For more info go to www.coppicgroup.wordpress.com .

(I went a couple of years ago and would thoroughly recommend it. And It's bigger than ever this year! Ed.)



From the press release, JUNE 2014.

Media contacts: Wendy Necar, RFS Communications Officer, 01926 421679/07973 523168, email communications@rfs.org.uk Twitter: @royal_forestry

England's top small woodlands

A wood near Tamworth on the Warwickshire/Staffordshire borders has been named England's best Small Woodland, with a Northamptonshire wood taking silver in the Royal Forestry Society (RFS)'s Excellence in Forestry Awards - the most prestigious forestry competition in England.

The competition was open to woodlands up to 20ha in size which had previously won regional RFS Excellence in Forestry Awards. The category was sponsored by Wood-Mizer.

The winner, **Alvecote Wood**, near Tamworth on the Warwickshire /Staffordshire border, is owned by Sarah Walters & Stephen Briggs who won the North West Regional Excellence in Forestry Awards for small woodlands in 2013. Taking silver was **Rawhaw Wood**, Northamptonshire, owned by Carolyn Church and Hugh Ross who won the Eastern England in 2011.

RFS Excellence in Forestry Awards Co-ordinator Trefor Thompson said: " The quality of the field was evidence of the strength of woodland knowledge and management throughout England.

"All those who entered had already proved themselves as excellent winners in their regions in previous years, and they were all therefore competing against the very toughest of competition."

Owners of Rawhaw Wood near Pipewell, Northamptonshire Carolyn Church and Hugh Ross are founder members of the National Coppice Federation. It was their own coppicing that impressed judges who said: "The restoration of this neglected hazel coppice has been achieved with dedication, hard work and a belief that such woodlands can pay their way - and the resulting ground flora is remarkable."

Carolyn and Hugh said: " We are absolutely thrilled with the award! Sadly our neglected Ancient Coppice woodlands have become the normal expectation of the general public. When we bought Rawhaw Wood we knew we were embarking on something of a restoration project. Our aim was that the wood should become a truly productive and sustainable venture. With good positive management we have recreated the biodiverse, vibrant and very beautiful habitat that is a working coppice woodland."

The Awards will be presented at a special event in Oxfordshire on July 9th.

(Well done to Carolyn and Hugh, who have also helped set up the Rockingham Forest Group).

Old Coppice Association charcoal bag revamp



The old Coppice Association charcoal bags have been with us for years. They were probably first printed before some current charcoal burners were born! So probably time for an update then?

We've made an initial approach to Selway Packaging (who print them) and they're happy to be involved in a revamp. The question is, to what extent? We'd like some feedback from you, the users, about this before going ahead, so, what do you think?

All options are up for grabs at the moment.

The old bag could be discarded entirely and replaced by a new, updated version. There could be a modified version, looking much the same but with updated information (1992 is a long time ago!) and with the NCFed logo replacing the CA one. Or perhaps the old bag remains in print and a new, NCFed bag is available alongside it?

Should we upgrade to a bag with colour?

Do you think that the big bag should be exactly double the volume of the small one?

If you've any opinions on this, please email them to me (brian.hurdles@virgin.net) and I'll pass them all on to whoever takes on the co-ordinating job.

Remember, charcoal bags are both a marketing tool and a brand identifier (and it's your brand), so it's important that we get it right.

Health and Safety at work!

Toby Allen sent in this picture of (part of) a mate of his, off work for several weeks:



Taken several days after the event, it has been '.....folded back in and tidied up, but pre skin graft'.

As Toby says 'Be sure always to wear your chainsaw pants.'