



The

# Cleft Stick

News from NCFed and the UK Coppice Industry



## Coppice Seminar at Westonbirt

Graham Morgan of the Avon and South Cotswolds Coppice group summarises a recent landmark coppicing seminar which has kickstarted a positive future for coppice woodlands and coppicing. Driven by Westonbirt's (and NCFed's own) Brian Williamson, the seminar brought together various levels of staff from both Forestry England and the Forestry Commission to highlight all aspects of coppicing in England. Full story page 6

### NCFed Weekend Gathering and AGM 2022...

*October wouldn't be the same without it – a cornucopia of expertise, sharing, training, brilliant bites, beer and bonhomie – this year in deepest Dorset. Save the Date. Page 4*

### Richard Lofthouse - Press Officer

*A vital addition to the Federation's volunteer team, Richard explains his motivation for getting involved. Page 9*

### FC Grant Bid

*A bid to the Forestry Commission's Regional Woodland Restoration Innovation Fund was submitted on 9 May 2022, for and on behalf of NCFed, Page 8*

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## From the Chair

Whilst pondering this welcome recently, it occurred to me that 2023 will be NCFed's 10th birthday, which in turn made me reminisce about our journey thus far and more importantly our direction in the decade ahead.

Soon after NCFed's launch in 2013, we saw a boom in local coppice groups being created with a purpose of joining a growing network of groups under the unifying umbrella of NCFed.

NCFed itself is currently thriving. A growing team of enthusiastic and driven volunteers is drawn from across our affiliated groups. They carry out numerous specific roles for the good of the wider UK coppice sector. However, I am aware that many groups, large and small, are struggling to motivate their members or find a purpose; this exacerbated by the isolation and apathy born of the pandemic.

Long-standing groups, formed in part to improve networking on a local level, are now in competition with powerful social media platforms where queries and problems can easily be shared far and wide from the armchair. Indeed, the internet age has reduced the importance of local reputation and recommendation. But there certainly IS a very clear need for effective local and regional networks.

To this end, NCFed wants to initiate a discussion to see how it can help grow strong and versatile groups, for without them and the wonderful people in them, the Federation's next ten years could be a lonely place. Let's ALL strive to weave a strong and sustainable future - together.

**Dave Jackson**, Chair of the National Coppice Federation



# The National Coppice Federation

## Uniting regional coppice groups

The National Coppice Federation (NCFed) was formed in 2013 with the aim of uniting already existing regional coppice groups under one banner. Since then more local groups have formed and become affiliated to the NCFed, growing our membership and reach considerably.

**National  
Coppice  
Federation**



Supporting the Coppice Industry

### Aims

The NCFed has three key aims:

1. to promote coppicing as a form of woodland management that provides economic, ecological and culturally significant benefits;
2. to bring together regional coppice groups and provide a unified voice for the industry; and
3. to encourage and promote best practice

# Editorial



There's a bit of an air of optimism wafting around this edition of Cleft Stick. There are a lot of good things happening - Peer Awards, an Instagram campaign, a *young, female* coppice worker recently featured on the cover of another woodland-based magazine, a seminar pushing the positives of coppice

to Forestry England/Forestry Commission staff... perhaps it's just that it's spring but I don't think so. I really believe we have an opportunity to put coppice and woodland management and all the benefits that come along with them, in front of increasingly huge audiences in the near future.

Strength lies in co-operation, communication and sharing - qualities that historically we have perhaps been short of, but with a public ready for all our positive messages together with the amazing tools available through the internet, we could soon be riding on the crest of a wave. Renew your membership, organise meetings and events. Let's make it happen.

## Coppiced Tree Stakes?

I was asked recently, by someone from a local tree planting charity if I thought hazel stakes as supports for tree tubes could be workable. Initially I thought, brilliant, what a fantastic opportunity for the industry. After only a little consideration it's become far less clear. The three likely alternatives - bamboo, sawn hardwood and treated softwoods have their own problems but all would probably be better than hazel in that they last longer in the ground. And that's apart from hazel's weight and

bulk compared to bamboo.

There's an opportunity there for someone to market something sustainable. Just my one charity is predicting the need, in the next three years, for over 1.3 million stakes of various kinds to support the plants for which they have recently secured funding. And I've developed an interest in finding out how bamboo is produced and brought to market in so beautiful a manner.

Finally I would like to thank the Cleft Stick production team and particularly, Katja Huth who has very ably taken on the layout work for this edition.

**Guy Lambourne**, *Editor*



Image: Jane Lambourne

Does hazel have a future as tree stakes?

Cleft Stick Team:  
Editor - Guy Lambourne  
Editorial Assistants - Tim Roskell and Glenn Hadley  
Layout - Katja Huth

**Deadline for submissions for the next edition of Cleft Stick – 31 October for publication on 7 December.  
Please send all correspondence to [news@ncfed.org.uk](mailto:news@ncfed.org.uk)**

## Share your woody passions at the NCFed Weekend Gathering and AGM

**14-16 October 2022**

Whether you're a seasoned coppice worker, a new entrant into the industry, a green woodworker or just passionate about our great British woodlands, spending time with people from across the UK who share your passion for coppice crafts and sustainable woodland management can be a huge boost to morale. And where better to do that than at this year's annual Gathering of the National Coppice Federation from Friday 14th to Sunday 16th October, hosted by Dorset Coppice Group?

**"A thing of a coppice worker's dreams."**

There'll be plenty of time for socialising around a fire, catching up with old friends and making new ones. Pass on your skills or learn something new. We won't shy



away from the important issues either! From managing deer browsing to the new ELMs scheme; from changes to firewood regulations to charcoal and spar imports and more. There's bound to be someone with whom you can share your experience or get some advice.

**"An absolute triumph."**

**A packed programme includes:**

- Pre-event courses (a highly successful addition to the programme at last year's Gathering)
- Skill sharing
- Sales and demonstrations
- Talks and discussions
- Site tours
- Tool auction
- Coppice crafts competition
- (Oh, and the AGM happens too, never a long affair!)



Dorset Coppice Group has a fantastic base in the heart of Bonsley Wood near Blandford Forum, Dorset where members are restoring areas of hazel coppice in partnership with Forestry England. The site boasts excellent facilities including the "Living Classroom"- a great indoor space in which to teach, meet, eat, talk and learn. And talking of food, of course, local goodies will be on the menu and in the bar for all to enjoy.

***"We came away inspired."***

The weekend is open, via pre-booked tickets, to members of NCFed affiliated supporter and coppice groups as well as non-members. Full details will be available in due course.

The annual NCFed Gathering is a friendly, inspiring weekend where everyone is welcome.

***"Look forward to meeting up again next year."***

**How could you bear to miss it?**

Keep up with announcements about the programme, booking and pre-event courses, on the National Coppice Federation website <https://ncfed.org.uk> and Facebook pages <https://www.facebook.com/NationalCoppiceFederation>

Find out more about Dorset Coppice Group <http://dorsetcoppicegroup.co.uk> or FB pages <https://www.facebook.com/dorsetcoppicegroup>

**Dorset Coppice Group**



**Competitions**



**Site tours**



**Demonstrations**



**Training**



**Skill sharing**

# More productive Coppice into Management Seminar

Over two days in April, NCFed and the Forestry Commission/Forestry England ran a 'Productive Hazel Coppice' seminar at The National Arboretum, Westonbirt, Gloucestershire. Forty-one people attended over the two days from all over the country (and from the different functions within Forestry England and the Forestry Commission), including beat foresters, woodland officers, wildlife rangers and surveyors. NCFed was represented by Chair Dave Jackson, Directors Tom Coxhead and Pete Etheridge; and from the regional groups, Rosie Rendell, Suz Williams and Graham Morgan.

Although the focus was on hazel, the principles are applicable to other forms of coppice.

The main aims of the seminar were a) to inform Forestry Commission/Forestry England about the need for and benefits of productive hazel coppice, and b) to establish longer-term relationships through which new policy strategies and management action can be developed to get more coppice into favourable management.

The main emphasis was on the financial perspective; in particular, that productive coppice generates an income, but that longer-term contracts for coppice workers are needed to secure continuity of management and provide certainty for coppice workers. This is particularly important since coppice restoration is specialist work and can take more than twenty years over three or four cutting rotations before derelict coppice is restored to Grade 1 productive condition. The multiple ecosystem service benefits that follow from coppice under favourable management (including increased biodiversity, carbon sequestration, cultural heritage, employment, education, health, and wellbeing) was also emphasised and is a key consideration in the context of the climate emergency and cost of living crisis.

The morning session of the seminar began with an introduction about the importance of the Arboretum as a whole, followed by presentations from Forestry Commission/Forestry England on woodland biodiversity, protected species considerations, and matters relating to contracts on the public estate. Dave Jackson and Brian Williamson covered the basics of coppicing (what it is), an introduction to the history of coppicing, the status of coppicing today and what future demands and commercial opportunities may arise.

One of the main messages here is that growing consumer interest in coppice products (because of its sustainability credentials), means that demand now far exceeds the



Brian Williamson discusses coppice restoration with FE and FC staff at Westonbirt

availability of the high-quality (Grade 1) raw material needed.

The afternoon session of the seminar involved a walking tour of Silk Wood led by Brian Williamson. Silk Wood contains about 61 hectares (150 acres) of semi-natural ancient woodland which has a history of coppice management going back to the 17th Century. 18 hectares (45 acres) are identified for management by short rotation hazel coppice with standards on a 7-year cutting cycle; 8.5 hectares (21 acres) has had at least three cuts from derelict and, in some cases, four; 3.5 hectares (9 acres) had a first cut and a further 6 hectares (15 acres) are still derelict. The coppice restoration at Silk Wood has been led by Brian for around 20 years and is probably the largest such project in the country. It is certainly the most publicly accessible coppice presenting a great opportunity to engage the public about the value and importance of coppice. Brian covered the silviculture of hazel coppice, including: acceptable canopy cover; optimum stool density; woodland propagation of hazel (layering and stooling); cutting heights; hazel phenotypes; deer and bramble control. He also showed practical examples of good practice and mistakes. The time of year provided a great opportunity to see the amenity and wildlife value of a coppice in spring; there were carpets of woodland flowers (particularly wood anemone), over which fluttered various butterfly species.

Feedback from attendees about the seminar has been very positive, and already projects and networks are beginning to develop between NCFed and the Forestry Commission/Forestry England, including proposals to map the extent and condition of coppice on the public estate. This is great news for the future of coppice woodlands and NCFed hopes to provide future updates soon.

**Graham Morgan** BSc MSc CEnv MCIEEM is a Chartered Environmental Scientist and Associate Member of the Institute of Chartered Foresters. He is a coppice worker under contract to Forestry England at the National Arboretum, Westonbirt, Gloucestershire. He is Director of The SLIM Woodlands C.I.C. Graham is a member of the Avon and South Cotswolds Coppice group. [graham@slimwoodlands.co.uk](mailto:graham@slimwoodlands.co.uk)

# Coppice Peer Awards Launched for 2022

**NCFed has launched a new award scheme designed to celebrate the best within our coppice community.**

Each year categories will be selected by a committee and YOU will be able to nominate candidates via our online nomination form. Suggested categories thus far are:

- Best new entrant award
- Lifelong contribution to coppice crafts award
- Coppice restoration award
- Contribution to the coppice industry award
- Craftsperson of the year award

The winner of each category will be announced at the annual Weekend Gathering and AGM where they will receive the adulation of their peers along with a small (wooden) trophy. Winners will be further honoured with their names being listed on the website for perpetuity!

To get the ball, rolling the category for this year will be the 'Lifelong contribution to coppice crafts' award. Nominations will open on the website soon (where you will also find rules and T&Cs) so keep your eyes peeled!

**Dave Jackson**, Chair of NCFed  
[awards@ncfed.org.uk](mailto:awards@ncfed.org.uk)



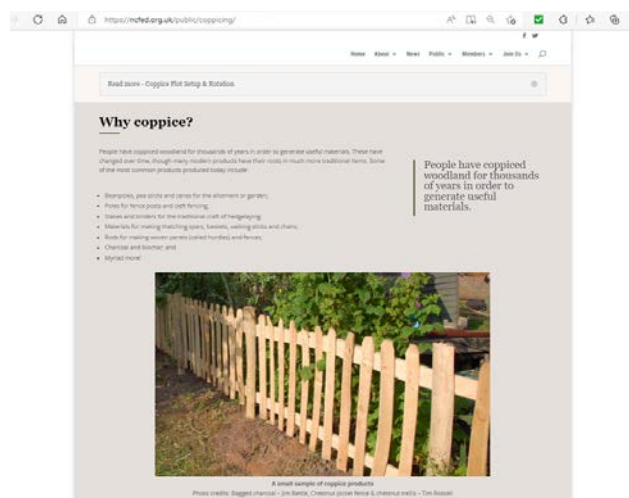
Image: Guy Lambourne

## Website News

### *Coppicing in a Nutshell*

For a long time now, there has been something missing from our website. It was something key, something pivotal, something important. It was like a laid hedge without stakes, a tool auction without a mysterious looking implement that could double as a medieval torture device, an NCFed Gathering without a bar. What was missing was any information about coppicing. Whoops! A visit to our website, whether by a wandering casual browser or a would-be woodsman, yielded little clue as to what coppice workers were up to in them thar woods or why.

We're pleased to announce that this is no longer the case with the unveiling of our new 'Coppicing in a Nutshell' webpage. This introduction to coppicing has been a long-term project for the Media and Marketing Sub-Committee (MAMSC) and is aimed at members of the public. For the newbies, it includes all the bare basics about what coppicing is and why we do it, and for those keen beans who want to know more there is additional information that introduces detailed or technical points such as coppice systems and woodland history.



Needless to say, that with coppicing having such a long and varied past, and being practiced in different ways by different people across the land, this one webpage is in no way a definitive guide. What we're aiming to provide is a useful introduction for those who have either found us by happy accident, or who have heard a little about coppicing and are intrigued to learn more. Packed with photos and diagrams, we hope it will be an enjoyable read and a useful resource to which we can all refer potential and existing customers, interested parties and woodland owners, spreading the word, building support, and shifting more sticks!

Take a look for yourself, visit <https://ncfed.org.uk/public/coppicing/>  
**Glenn Hadley**, Website Officer

# New Grant Bid: More Productive Coppice Into Active Management

**Graham Morgan summarises a grant application to the Forestry Commission which if successful could be transformational for coppice and coppicing.**

The collective anecdotal experience of coppice workers and landowners is that the existing inventory for coppice (as stated in Forest Research's 2018 National Forest Inventory) has significant inaccuracies at the local/district scale. There simply must be more coppice out there in England, albeit derelict or overstood, than the 3,400 hectares suggested. After all, there were some 225,000 hectares in the early 1900s; it can't all have disappeared!

An increasing policy emphasis on getting more woods into active management must include coppice because of the many ecosystem service benefits coppice provides. But there is no point setting objectives if the baseline of information is inaccurate. Coppice workers also struggle to meet the market demand for products due to a lack of availability of high-quality coppice.

In this context, a grant bid to the Forestry Commission's Regional Woodland Restoration Innovation Fund (the 'Fund') was submitted on 9 May 2022, for and on behalf of NCFed by The SLIM Woodlands CIC. The Fund is one of several different funding streams available under the over-arching Woods Into Management Innovation Fund (England).

The application submitted was for a pilot project in the South West region, covering the Cornwall, Dorset, Devon and Avon coppice groups. The South West was chosen for two reasons:

- the South West region has the lowest number of woods in active management – see Figure 1 below
- following the recent Productive Coppice Seminar at Westonbirt (information elsewhere in this edition), there is already a ground swell of ideas and networking in the South West that would readily give the project momentum.

The Project will focus, over three years, on privately-owned woodland and the key deliverables are:

- to map the true extent of coppice and its condition/restorability;
- to produce a web-based map of the data showing 'priority zones' where coppice that can be most readily restored occurs

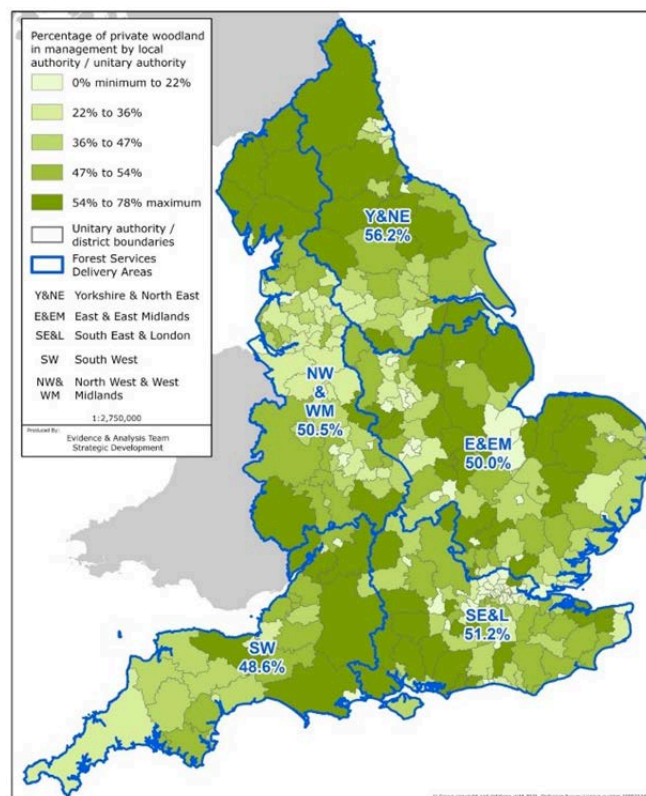
- to produce an information pack/resources for woodland owners and workers about the steps to get productive coppice into active management;
- to set-up a 'Productive Coppice Development Officer' role to co-ordinate action to get more existing coppice into active management.

The Project has a sizeable field-survey component and would include liaising with a range of project partners, their membership, and landowners to find out where coppice is located and what barriers they face.

An overview of the application was provided to NCFed Directors and Group Representatives during the General Meeting on 11 May 2022.

Even if the grant bid is unsuccessful, the feedback will help inform future grant applications (since the Fund seems to be open on an annual basis) and NCFed now has a framework to develop such a Project.

The grant bid has been formally acknowledged by the Forestry Commission, and we expect a decision by 10 June.



*Figure 1: Percentage of private woodland in active management by Forestry Commission region (Forestry Commission, 2021)*

The grant bid follows hot on the heels of the Productive Coppice Seminar recently held with the Forestry Commission/Forestry England; the keen eyed amongst you will notice that the seminar and the grant bid have similar titles, as do the two Cleft Stick articles! The recent tranche of initiatives is a real boost for coppice and coppicing. It really is an exciting time.

**Graham Morgan**



# Press Officer Appointed

Richard Lofthouse has offered to volunteer as a media consultant to NCFed.

By way of introduction: I'm a London based journalist with strong connections to West Sussex and Oxfordshire, via upbringing and current work respectively.

During the pandemic I moved back to Midhurst in the South Downs National Park and was constantly impressed by some of the great, surviving ancient coppice that is worked there still. I'm new to coppicing but edit the newsletter for the National Hedgelaying Society, and see the two activities as two sides of one coin, particularly given how precious good stakes and binders have become.



Probably Richard under a very flash helmet

Coppicing is a much under-valued activity. It swallows twice the carbon per acre of mature woodland owing to rapid growth, while supporting a phenomenal biodiversity because of rotation and light characteristics. It results in beautiful, sustainable products within a domestic supply chain, all of which might substitute plastics or metals. I'm struck by how little this is understood by society at large, but having recently laid two North London front garden hedges, right here in the East End, I'm also struck by how many passing comments we get to the effect, 'That's nice what is it?' – as if the sight of hazel binders has stirred a deep well of vestigial memory of what was quite recently a universal countryside activity.

So, I would like to support the great revival of a hugely valuable activity. The NCFed is the body to do this because it will increasingly have a voice to government as well as to the public at a time of great change in land management practices.

# Instagram - A Celebration of Your Work

In the last issue of Cleft Stick we reported how we wanted to celebrate the fantastic work carried out by members of the affiliated Supporter and Coppice Groups. Well, at last it's action stations, all systems go and ready for lift off!

<https://www.instagram.com/nationalcoppicefederation/>



We will be emailing all our Supporter and Coppice Groups a week or so after you have read this issue of Cleft Stick. There will be plenty of descriptive information in the email to remind you of what we will be looking for in terms of pictures and subject matter (all coppice related of course!) plus the extra information that you can provide to maximise this exciting publicity opportunity. This will help promote not only your own business and the National Coppice Federation, but also increase awareness of the benefits of coppicing.

Not in an affiliated Supporter or Coppice Group? Want to share your great work with all the "Followers" of the NCFed Instagram page? Then here's your chance to join a group! Follow this link to find out more.

<https://ncfed.org.uk/join/>

The Instagram Team  
*Nadia Clarke and Tim Roskell*

# Fed Facebook Charcoal



Image: Jim Bettie

For all you charcoal producers out there - keep an eye out for the launch of a new NCFed Facebook page highlighting the work going on to promote British charcoal and other charcoal related issues! Up and running in the next few days.

**Jim Bettie, NCFed Charcoal Representative**

# From Our Affiliated Groups

## Dorset Coppice Group Roundup

Where to start?! It feels like only yesterday that I sat down to write the previous 'News from Dorset' article!



We had an amazing members' meeting at the end of last year, where we extracted some ash and oak stems from the woodland which Toby Hoad (Dorset Horse Logging) milled for us on site. Some of the oak has already been used to effect some repairs to the Living Classroom, while the ash is quietly seasoning in our workshop. We plan to sell some of the ash planks to help bolster group funds, as well as putting some aside for replacement tool handles.

Over winter we cut another of the coppice coupes at Bonsley Wood and have undertaken a significant amount of layering to increase the future stool density. Some of the hazel that was cut is being used to make new in-situ Westmorland panels around the Living Classroom. This is a great opportunity for members to learn and/or practice the art of riving hazel.

By the time you read this, we will have held our annual Wood Fair which is making its return after a two-year break. There will be working horse demonstrations, coppice craft demonstrations, spar and hurdle making competitions (thanks to the National Society of Master Thatchers for their sponsorship), stalls and refreshments. It's always a great day with much support and interest from our local communities.



Image: Richard Budd

We are also partaking in Dorset Art Weeks in May, where members can display their craft items at the Living Classroom, which will be open to members of the public for an entire fortnight. Members will also use the opportunity to demonstrate coppice crafts and help raise awareness of the industry and the benefits of coppice management.

Finally, last but very much not least, Dorset Coppice Group has recently offered to host the NCFed's Weekend Gathering & AGM in October of this year. Planning meetings have already begun and we very much look forward to welcoming you to Bonsley in the autumn.

**Pete Etheridge,**  
*Dorset Coppice Group*

## Coppice Association North-West/Bill Hogarth Memorial Trust Get Together

We had a wonderful Saturday afternoon at Jack Holden's workshop at Halecat, South Cumbria, last November. It was the first time we had held the Annual General Meetings of The Bill Hogarth Memorial Apprenticeship Trust and the Coppice Association North West on the same day.

The BHMAT AGM was very well attended and a useful new Trustee was enrolled.

A few more people arrived for the CANW AGM, a useful, well attended meeting. Ed Mills gave a quick reminder of a number of very influential people from the last 25 years of CANW who are no longer with us. A little 25 years celebration then took place with cups of tea and other drinks complemented with superb cup-cakes baked by Matthew, Ed Mills' son.

We had arranged for Bill Lloyd to come and talk to us about his recent book, *One Horsepower*, a wonderful book about his work with a horse in the Lake District woodlands in the late 70s and early 80s.

As early environmental activists being concerned about the energy of the future, Bill and his wife Ali, decided that horses were a possible solution. He talked to us about the formation of The New Woodmanship Trust and the very first Weekend in the Woods event which he organised at Brantwood. He also told us about an apprenticeship scheme he had proposed through the Manpower Services Commission which was rejected



Image: Brian Crawley

## Features

# Woodland Management – for Women and Non-Binary People

Working Woodlands Cornwall has a course coming up in July in which readers may be interested - An Intro to Woodland Management – for Women and Non-Binary People.

The forestry industry can feel inaccessible and intimidating to people who don't identify as male, white, cis or heterosexual. At Working Woodlands Cornwall we are trying to change that by providing opportunities to work in the woods and gain the skills and confidence for a career with wood. Whether you are interested in working in the sector or not, you are welcome to come learn about woodland management and ask us questions.



by the Forestry Commission as 'there was no market for small woodland crafts' at that time. (It took another 17 years before the BHMAT apprenticeship model was accepted.) Another plan which he had initiated was Project Phoenix, the re-establishment of commercial charcoal burning in the Lake District with the agreement of the Lake District Special Planning Board. His father Walter, enthusiastically took on the project and established the very successful Lakeland Charcoal.

Many other woodland workers across the country have benefitted from this initiative, especially myself. One Horsepower is an amazing book with so many reflections of our own introduction to woodland work. I strongly recommend a read of it and a browse its fascinating photos.

### Brian Crawley

To purchase Bill Lloyd's book, One Horsepower, visit <https://billlloyd.co.uk/shop/one-horsepower-paperback/> Also available as an eBook.

Emma Eberhardt, *more information and to book -*

<https://workingwoodlandscornwall.com/events/>



National Coppice Federation



Supporting the Coppice Industry

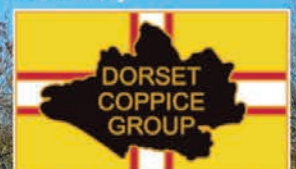
# Weekend Gathering & AGM

14-16 October 2022

- pre-event courses · skill sharing
- demonstrations
- talks and discussions
- site tours · tool auction
- coppice crafts competition
- oh, and the AGM happens too!

For more information including prices and booking [www.ncfed.org.uk](http://www.ncfed.org.uk)

Hosted by



Venue: Bonsley Wood  
Blandford Forum, Dorset

# A day in Shadow Woods

Sussex and Surrey Coppice group held a fungi day in Shadow Woods last autumn. We started by stepping into what had been a field during the First World War. By the Second World War it was scrub, brambles and gorse, which protected the trees that now dominate. These days however, this new woodland is in the midst of another change; ash dieback. What I find interesting about this area is the lack of fungi in comparison to the coppice, which makes sense, as the latter has never been ploughed or stomped upon by many hooves.

I had set up a table with examples I have taken to schools and shows over the past six months, to promote a better understanding of the importance of protecting our ancient woodland, and to talk about what is beneath our feet. I try to encourage people to learn more about biodiversity and take an interest in fungi and life in the soil.

The fungi I had on display were a mixture of brackets including a massive *Ganoderma*. Interestingly the mycelium of this species has been grown in balsa-wood and when compressed, produced a small charge of electricity. This is one example of the secrets that our woodlands have yet to reveal; it amplifies the need for education and protection.

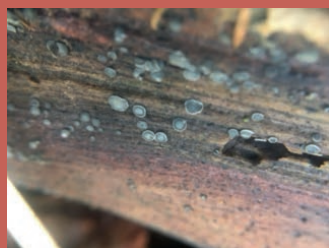
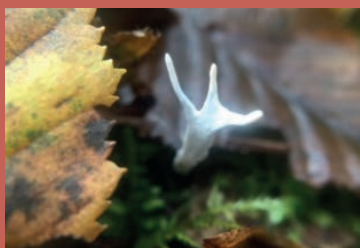
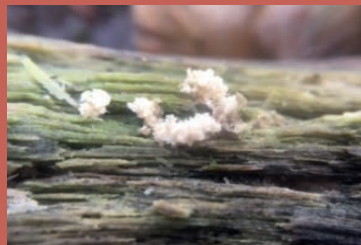
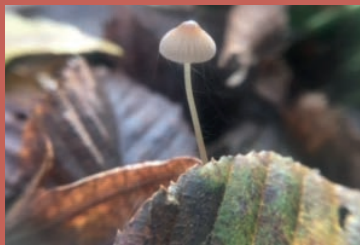


Image: Clive Cobie

powerful magnifying lens. I find it such a fascinating topic that I cannot help enthusing. So little is known about what mysterious goings on are constantly being acted out beneath our feet. This is especially true in ancient woodland where the mycorrhizal networks connect all trees and plants together, sharing information and exchanging nutrients in what is now generally known as the *wood wide web*. Its complexity has been likened to the relatively new internet or worldwide web. I would imagine it is far more intricate than that! It has been evolving for at least 420 million years when *Prototaxites* a giant fungus grew as tall as a two story building.

When I talk to people I always show the books that I have been reading. One of my favourites is *Mycelium Running* by Paul Stamets, in which he explains about the fungi that clean up pollutants from oil and also radiation. He lists many fungi that are beneficial in curing illnesses. Another favourite is *The Biochar Solution* by Albert Bates. We are in a prime position to help people understand nature by reconnecting them to the natural world; that should be at the top of our agenda.

As the group walked, we talked of the need to educate people about the importance of managing woodland for biodiversity and to encourage a better understanding of the importance of cutting the copse and promoting these skills to a wider audience. The woodland here appears not to have been cut in rotation since before the last war as most of the stems are the same age. I guess it was cleared for the war effort.

We are about to start cutting the first coupe. The Sussex and Surrey Coppice group has a number of members who are very keen on exploring the potential of biochar and its effects on regrowth. We plan to make various compost teas, use these to soak the charcoal and broadcast biochar around some stools.

Bob Hewitt and myself have approached both Sussex and Brighton Universities in the hope that they would have a student or two keen to carry out an ongoing survey. We were chatting about it to Professor Dave Goulson of Sussex University and he said to approach them in a year or two so that the students will have something to get their teeth into. On that note we will do the first two years and collect what data we can on the flora and fauna and measure the regrowth. It is a very interesting woodland, being on calcareous clay there are some interesting occupants. I have found yellow wort twice in the two decades that I've lived here and also another chalk lover, this past autumn, a beautiful yellow fungus that is on the red data list - *Cantharellus ferruginascens* - for those clever ones that understand Latin. It looks a bit like a chanterelle.

We wandered through the ancient hornbeam woodland finding many beautiful fungi, realising that the endless mycorrhizal network was aware of our movements. It was a great day; the weather was fantastic, we had some great food and a good catch up after the past years' pesky viral shenanigans.

Clive Cobie, Surrey and Sussex Coppice Group

There are many tiny fungi that are all connected in the wood wide web of mycelium, and roots, all are important for a balanced community"

Also on the table I had a selection of fungi, fruiting out of the wood it was degrading. These consisted of green elf cap, turkey tail, dead man's finger and a few more. We also looked at some oyster mushroom mycelium. I have grown this on coffee grounds, in clear plastic cups so that the mycelium could be seen. I also had some rotten wood on which the fine white threads could be seen under a

# Make Good – Rethinking Material Futures

Last December I received a call from Alicia, charming Lead Designer at London’s Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), who asked if we could supply wood, probably hazel and ash to be part of an exhibit. A request from this source was always going to receive a positive answer but it would take quite a while to grasp how our contribution would fit with this ten year project involving Italian artists, British furniture makers, scientists of many nations from the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and of course this most famous of museums.

and cleft, to make weavers for use in stylised wattle hurdles; seasoned hazel stakes (again peeled), from Andy Basham of Coppice Designs in Saffron Waldon, Essex, set in ash blocks, cut from our wood and milled by Darren Woodward of Bedfordshire Woodlands in Biggleswade, Bedfordshire. These were brought together with considerable aplomb, by Alex and are now installed in a temporary exhibit in the furniture gallery alongside (amongst others) some amazing screens by British furniture maker, Sebastian Cox and wax crayons created using colours derived from Japanese trees, by inspiring entrepreneurs, Daniel and Saki Coppen of Playfool. I remain confused by a stack of wooden chairs from the design studio Formafantasma, but that’s probably just me.

It was a pleasure to attend Make Good’s launch symposium at the V&A; an afternoon on a hard bench which passed easily because of fascinating content and inspiring speakers. I was particularly humbled by the amazing young people involved from various disciplines and all over the world. It is good to learn that there are so many talented people out there determined to make changes to the way materials are sourced and managed in future. There was far too much crammed in to report here. There is information here Make Good: Rethinking Material Futures symposium • V&A Blog ([vam.ac.uk](http://vam.ac.uk))

The experience was certainly a departure; from our perspective, it proved that NCFed membership is essential in collaborative work. The V&A and Alicia in particular deserve high praise for using British grown produce when a trip to a hardware store would have been so much simpler. One practical thing I took away was that as an industry we may be missing something on pricing - this from <https://www.sebastiancox.co.uk/> - check out this website. My involvement with Make Good and the V&A caused plentiful eyebrow-raising on the part of my partner, because of the time it consumed, but in the end, it has been a thrill.

If you are in South Kensington, (and why wouldn’t you be), the exhibit is worth a visit – third floor in the Dr Susan Weber Gallery, just past the sign ‘Beware of the Leopard’.

**Guy Lambourne**, Member of the East Anglian Coppice Network. [info@wassledine.co.uk](mailto:info@wassledine.co.uk)

Hazel and ash from Bedfordshire and Essex used as part of the construction of an exhibit at the V&A

Make Good – Rethinking Material Futures is a programme supported by well-known British furniture maker, John Makepeace OBE and launched at the V&A in February 2022. It invites practitioners from different disciplines to share research, knowledge and skills related to the use of natural, renewable materials in design and architecture. It features an annual display, and symposium and an acquisitions initiative. It was great to learn that such an institution was considering the use of local produce.

I knew nothing of this during initial conversations which focused on pinpointing exactly what we could supply from a British woodland that would satisfy this most particular museum designer. Certainly an interesting process – the meeting of minds between the amazing focus of a designer determined to realise her vision and me, damp, in a December woodland, moved from phone to WhatsApp to Zoom and back, through Christmas into January. The introduction of Alex, a very capable South London carpenter, helped to turn Alicia’s vision into reality. We shared some worries about the risks of green wood and its potential for introducing bugs into the museum to ravage priceless artifacts – “Tree bugs eat Elton’s Trousers!” But in the end we supplied fresh hazel, stripped



The Make Good exhibit in the Dr Susan Weber Gallery

# Coppicing Training

There is much debate on the value of ‘hobby’ coppicing. I read many years ago a statistic that confirmed my desire to try and stimulate the idea of wood culture – “80% of our timber is imported and 80% of our woodlands are unmanaged”. I am particularly drawn to coppice management for its human scale. Timber as in lumber requires much machinery and expense; power essentially, often including ownership. Coppicing in essence requires physical work, a blade and of course, access to a wood.

Teaching coppice is another thing that stimulates debate and opinion. Who is qualified to teach? What is worthwhile: commercial coppice, conservation coppice etc?

My opinion is, with all this unmanaged woodland and a human population hugely disconnected from their environment, that surely creating more awareness of coppice can only be a good thing. As long as basic principles are reinforced then the more people who learn about coppice the more chance that local woodlands will come under sustainable management and coppicing will have a chance of living on into the future. If people realise their local woods need more management, we will take the pressure off fragile and degraded habitats in countries where exploitation of both the natural resources and the labour market is rife. At the very least people who have attended any sort of coppice course are more likely to buy our products and understand how much work there is behind the price of products like hurdles.

Devon is very limited when it comes to coppice. There is debate as to whether we ever had a hazel coppice industry like the counties further east. Where they needed hurdles to manage sheep we tended to use stone walls. There was undoubtedly a harvest of timber for charcoal for early smelting and props for mining. You’d imagine hazel coppicing was required for thatching. This might well have been the case when thatch was far more prevalent. People I’ve met who have harvested hazel within living memory (usually “I used to cut sticks for pocket money for

my Grandfather who was a thatcher”) cut by ‘rogueing’ ie. poaching stools for what they needed. As we know, taking the good sticks and leaving the gnarly ones, very quickly results in mature stools which no longer produce quality stems. This process might well be why there is little visual evidence of in-cycle coppice management throughout Devon.

Recently Jordan Harris and I taught a weekend coppice course in a wood on Dartmoor. This was the first cut of a section of ten year old, specifically planted hazel maidens. Our course was based around harvesting a section (coupe would be too grand; this is Devon!), processing the sticks into different products: bean poles, pea sticks, Dahlia sticks and charcoal wood. Of course the main point to get across was to think about the stool. By cutting we are improving the stocking and quality of future sticks. Cut low, think about stock density and protect from browsing. For many it was the first time they had really had a go at swinging an axe or a billhook. Coppice theory was put over in a more incidental way through much discussion over break times and during work. We referred to renovation as much as possible as this is the most likely coppice situation in Devon. Jordan is very knowledgeable about edge tools and is skilled at making handles and sharpening, he provided a laceration of different hooks and axes and did a fascinating session on why hooks were shaped as they are and the differences in sharpening profiles and their function.

We had no idea how much interest there would be for our course. As it was, people were signing up as soon as we put the word out. We kept it to a maximum of eight, with two places offered at a bursary rate, high enough to make a commitment and yet low enough to be very affordable. This was aimed at anyone young and wanting to get into a forestry/woodland management career, or those wanting to broaden their forestry or woodland craft skillset. Oddly these places were harder to fill. The students came from all walks, each with their own angle which provided for a fascinating shared learning experience. For example, there was an archaeology student interested in matching modern tool design to those of our ancestors. We had someone who had taken on their father’s farm and wanted to make use of its patch of woodland. One, with a detailed knowledge of soil health (remedial composting and biochar), had changed from a medical career to become a gardener. Another student had done a fair amount of woodland volunteering and had experience of horse logging. Perhaps wisely he was studying law - probably so he could afford to be a hobby coppice worker in future.

I feel that the eight students we taught gained valuable knowledge and some experience of what is involved. In a modest way we have contributed to keeping coppice knowledge alive. Who knows, perhaps one of them might be inspired enough to come and work some of that gold coppice upcountry. We are definitely planning to hold more courses. It seems furthering coppice awareness is the leading principle behind why we put it on.

**James Dyson, Devon Coppice Group**



Trainees in action

# The case for the part-timer

## The last in a series in which George Darwall champions the part-time coppice worker

What's NCFed's vision for the future? As a federation it should reflect the views of member organisations. What's their vision? If we were brain surgeons we'd have a closed shop with hobbyists barred. Of course we need full time professionals, but I'm convinced that complementing them with part timers is the most plausible route to an expanded industry. If we can't expand we may as well give up. One can drive the length of an English county these days without seeing a single laid hedge.

I first laid hedges around my parents' home. For years, with a salaried job, I never thought of seeking paid work elsewhere. That surely was the prerogative of the retired cowman next door. I taught myself to make hurdles because a publisher offered me a commission for some in the '70s. I didn't plan to sell them but there were no local woodsmen and neighbours queued up! It was years before I "came out" as a part-time woodsman. Moving near Cranborne Chase, the centre of the old industry, I expected to revive a mediaeval outlet for stakes and faggots! I was surprised - and very relieved - to be welcomed.

For there's a case to answer. Could "a load of bloody amateurs" compete unfairly with real woodsmen, take their work and lower standards? I've now served over a decade on the Board of the Dorset Coppice Group representing part-time members. The last thing they want is to cause problems.

Socialising with real woodsmen ensures they don't. The two sectors exchange work prospects and surplus material, sometimes even collaborating on jobs. More hurdle makers in more villages help publicise the real threat: cheap and very nasty foreign imports easily mistaken by innocent purchasers for traditional products.

Back to hedges. It's no good whinging there aren't enough rich landowners and grants of taxpayers' money to reverse the cumulative decline of hedges since WWII; there never will be. How can we encourage more hedge laying: done competently but not necessarily to competition standards by professionals?

A village has expanded into farmland and two new houses are now separated by a chain of its hedge. Mrs Jones won't get a grant to lay it and doesn't need one: she's probably already paying her gardener more to butcher it. She doesn't keep a bull, nor her neighbour a heifer. The hedge will regenerate satisfactorily if staked with last year's beanpoles and ethered with its own brambles, keeping a fair price down. The nearest champion hedge layer some distance away won't want such work. He'll begrudge Land Rover mileage to come and quote. Jobs like that are the bread and butter of local part-timers. They don't have the capacity for major, grant-funded work.

NCFed needs a view of where the coppice industry should be going and how to get there. Could there be part-timers in nearly every village, outnumbering professionals 100:1 a la beekeeping? I'd be the first to advise cautious evolution, not precipitate revolution, but to me that's the right direction. If anybody disagrees, say why and suggest something better.

**George Darwall, Dorset Coppice Group**



George Darwall trims by-products as others re-lay the hedge, two cycles after its first cut

# Recovering the Rhythm - Devon Rural Skills Trust

The Devon Rural Skills Trust was established in 1980 to help safeguard the future of those traditional rural skills, that were traditionally passed down from one generation to the next. Since its inception, the Trust has trained thousands of men and women, enabling them to work professionally within the rural sector. It has also provided many others with the skills and knowledge to practice such skills in their leisure time. Running regular courses throughout the year (covering a variety of rural skills such as dry stone walling, hedge laying, turf hedging, coppicing, tool sharpening, green woodworking etc), the Trust also offers a very successful training/apprenticeship scheme covering a wide range of skills and crafts.

As Covid restrictions began to ease, Devon Rural Skills Trust, like so many of us, began returning to something like normal. This is an interesting, informative and often amusing, account of some of the courses that they were able to run in the last few months of 2021.

## September

Dry stone walling, near South Brent

Our first course after an 18-month hiatus because of you know what. A gorgeous place to be working, at that altitude where the enclosed lowland landscape begins to give way to the unfenced, tor-topped hills of Dartmoor. We had mist and mizzle at the start, bright sunshine later, and ended the day with ten yards of newly rebuilt wall. The farmer wanted to be able to put stock back into the field that evening so the job – dismantling the old section, renewing the foundations, and then the build – simply had to be finished. The course participants, some with a bit of experience, others with none, did a lovely job and their repaired section of wall was a beauty. It was a joy to be back running courses again.

## October

Hedge laying, near Ashburton

We had laid a section of this hedge a few weeks before the pandemic struck, which now had two-summer's regrowth and looked glorious in early autumn sunshine. We worked on the section next to it, a luscious mixture of blackthorn,

hawthorn, hazel, field maple, sycamore and wild rose, with a tiny bit of oak thrown in – the kind of tangled-up diversity that is so useful to wildlife. We laid the hedge in the Devon style, small trees and shrubs laid on top of a bank, the two combined forming the barrier. About two-thirds of Devon's hedges are medieval in origin, or older still; the county has more hedges than any other in the UK, a cultural survival worth preserving, as are the skills needed to lay and maintain them. Environment minister Victoria Prentis recently described hedges as “sexy and important” and we would be the last to disagree. Again, we had many novices on this course but they did a fabulous job, learned a bit of the craft, and laid a very sexy hedge.



Turf hedging

## October

Hedge laying, Ivybridge

An unusual site for us, beside the road leading to a busy municipal park operated by Ivybridge Town Council. We had allotments on one side, eeyoreing donkeys on the other, with the traffic hum of the A38 a constant companion in the background. There was a lot of coming and going in and out of the park all day and it was good to think so many people would see our urban fringe hedge. Unlike the previous one it was not on a bank and in truth was a bit of a hybrid, let us call it a conservation hedge after the Midland style. The UK government's Climate Change Committee has recommended a 40% increase in the extent of hedgerows to help mitigate the effects of the climate crisis, and our hedge is going to be another 50 yards-worth of carbon getting taken out of the atmosphere. An optimistic take-away on the opening weekend of the COP26 conference, in Glasgow.

## November

Turf hedging, near Paignton

One for the aficionados. The unsung skill of turf hedging – facing the side of a hedgebank with turf rather than stone, to prevent the bank eroding away – possibly represents why we exist in a way the more popular countryside crafts do not. Some backstory: in the 1970s national park managers on Dartmoor were struggling to find practitioners to maintain walls and hedges, and began an apprenticeship scheme to try to fill the skills gap. That led to Devon Rural Skills Trust being formed,



The wall and wallers



in 1980, in order to preserve these at-risk crafts in the wider county. A hedge is a tangible thing, the knowledge needed to maintain it, or in today's case re-face the bank with turf, more intangible. On days like this, practitioners pass on their know-how, whether it is how to build a wall, lay a hedge, or face a bank; society tends to forget the tangible things we can touch and see are underpinned by those intangible skills that need to be learned and practised. Curiously, the UK is one of the few countries that has not ratified UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Surely this is something those of us involved in countryside crafts should try to change?

#### *December*

Hedge laying, near Daddiscombsleigh

This had been our competition hedge in 2009 and was ready for its periodic rejuvenation. A good old Devon-style hedge in the gorgeous setting of the Teign Valley and it was good to be part of that age-old hedging rhythm of laying and re-laying. Good too that we had re-found our own rhythm after such a long period of enforced inactivity.

Information on Devon Rural Skills Trust courses can be found at: [www.drst.org.uk](http://www.drst.org.uk)

Words and pictures by Chris Baker, DRST

## Ash Dieback - Woodman Spare That Tree!

### Is felling really the best strategy to combat ash dieback?

It seems rather primitive that, at present, our main response to ash dieback is just to fell trees through a relatively arbitrary assessment regarding the degree of infection.

There may have been an argument for felling to reduce the spread of the disease at the start of the problem, but current data seems to suggest that felling has not had any effect on the spread, mainly because the spores are carried on the leaf litter and no-one has the resources (or will) to clear up leaf litter - certainly not in the woods!

The danger of felling as the only control for ash dieback is that the end result is the same: the loss of one of our most important native trees from our woodlands, countryside, streets and gardens. If we just fell everything as soon as there are signs of the disease, we leave no individuals or stands where resistance might develop.

There is growing evidence that mature ash can survive Chalara (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*). At a recent woodland seminar ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n0-WxVi\\_fzI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n0-WxVi_fzI)) Vikki Bengtsson, a researcher and recently appointed chair

of the Ancient Tree Forum found that very few mature trees actually die from the disease - mortality rates only increased from 1.4% to 2.5%. Her research suggests that avoidance of tree surgery on older trees and maybe pollarding in younger trees gives them a chance to recover and grow. If it is true that most mature trees can survive, surely we must change our advice - except, of course, where life and limb are under threat.

If we continue to fell at the current rate, we will do untold damage to unique ecosystems with unknown, and potentially far more dangerous, outcomes. The loss of ash from our environment will have enormous ecological impacts with knock-on effects for people, wildlife and landscapes. We must save as much as we can.

Even the Forestry Commission (<https://tinyurl.com/ash-dieback>) and the Ash Dieback Resilience Forum (Devon) (<https://tinyurl.com/4mpxsdhr>) recommend keeping as many as possible where there is no danger to life or property!



Typical ash dieback on a young coppice stool

Also, we are in a privileged position to be out in our native woodlands regularly. We can do something to help: PLEASE do join the Living Ash Project where you can report the condition of trees that you see regularly. In this way perhaps one of us can be the one to identify a resistant individual or stand which will lead to the conservation and restoration of one of our most iconic and important native trees.

<https://livingashproject.org.uk/reportatree/>

#### **Tean Mitchell**

*After one lifetime as a journalist, Tean started a second life as an ecologist and plant population genetics researcher, before being beguiled by a British-spar-hungry thatcher to start a coppice restoration and training project on Dartmoor. The Sustainable Coppice Partnership has taken over her (third) life. She is also secretary of the Dorset Coppice Group and the National Coppice Federation. [tean@sustainablecoppice.org](mailto:tean@sustainablecoppice.org)*

# How to replace an axe handle... properly!

Ian Swain describes the first part of the process. We hope he will return in a future edition to show you how to put it all back together again.

## Part 1 – removing the old handle.

Axes are often much abused, but older axe heads are generally of good quality and design, and worth re-handling, whether old friends or junk finds. There are lots of ways to do a job, but below is my approach, based on about 25 years' experience.

### Don't put it in a fire!

Broken handle removal is greatly helped by having a heavy, well mounted vice, as considerable force may be needed. In addition a good selection of punches and drifts make things easier. I have to hand 1/2" mild steel rod, old sections of hickory axe handle, square brass bar and engineer's parallel punches. My other basic tools for this job are a drill with 1/4" (6mm) bit, a sharp 3/8" (10mm) cold chisel and a 2lb hammer.

Mask the axe blade with tape and card – when clamped in the vice the edge is rather easy to walk into. Be aware of the risk of the tool dropping from the vice onto your feet. Steel toe caps, work gloves and safety specs are all appropriate. Cut off the remnants of the old handle close to the eye of the

axe, making the cut straight and square. Don't use your best saw. Clamp the axe head with the outside of the eye (where the wedges are) upwards and level. Use soft vice jaws for a firm grip and to avoid marking the axe head. If a steel wedge has been used in the axe eye, try to use a sharp cold chisel to pick at it from a low angle. With luck it will shift and you can tap and lever it out. Vice grip pliers can sometimes help to pull wedges out, once an edge is exposed. If your axe has staples, washers, cut nails and other miscellaneous scrap in the eye – bad luck.

Try to remove as much as you can and try to think kindly of the person who put the scrap there! If the "wedges" have been pounded in roughly, the edge of the eye may be turned over, reducing its size. Do what you can with a file to clean things up.

Turn the axe head over in the vice so the cut face of the handle is uppermost, i.e. the back of the eye, where the old handle emerged. Using a good quality 1/4" drill make a series of closely spaced holes along the middle of the eye, in line with the wedge. Try to make the drill holes really close together and once the row is complete drill diagonally so that the walls in between holes are broken. Cheap drills tend to snap when used in axe eyes, especially when hidden metal is hit, and the broken part left in the handle is then a real pain. This is partly the reason for trying to get metal wedges and debris out first. Use the drill gently and avoid damaging the side of the eye.

The eye of an axe narrows from the outer end (where it is wedged) towards the inner end (where the handle emerges towards the user), so that the wedges expand



1. Axe as found.



2. Punches and drifts.



3. Cold chisel to remove metal wedges, in this case a bit of joist



4. Drilling the other side of the eye.



5. Driving out the handle stub with a bit of smaller axe shaft as a drift.



6. Axe eye cleared out, ready to re-handle.

the end of the handle and make it impossible for the head to fly off. It is generally easiest to drive the old handle's stub out from the handle side, towards the outer end. The row of holes you've made allows the handle stub to compress and loosen.

Make sure the vice is really tight – swing on the handle a bit. Try to find a punch or drift that fills as much of the handle's cross section as possible. I use old bits of handle for this reason – they are the right shape already – if driven with a mallet they last quite well. Do be sure that the punch isn't likely to get stuck in the axe eye, you need some clearance and no burrs on the tip. Place the drift on the old handle and give it a tap to see if things will move. With luck, minimal force will drive the handle stub out.

Check that there is enough space below the axe eye so you don't end up pounding against the running part of the vice jaw! If the handle stub is really stubborn you can drill your holes out larger or use a chisel (not one you value too highly) to break the holes together to form a slot, so the two pieces can be collapsed in and removed – this is often the only method that will work if the edge of the eye is burred over. Also try using the cold chisel to lever the handle away from the sides of the eye, as rust can “glue” wood to metal. A heavy hammer (a 4lb sledge is a good candidate) might be needed in bad cases, or where metal debris are left in the eye. In that case a blacksmith's leg vice is also very handy to take the force.

Take note of the axe head's orientation on the handle. Generally (almost universally) the maker's name and weight are on the axe cheek facing you if the tool is laid down with its handle to your right, and with the blade edge facing towards you. This is important with symmetrical heads, as it is the only clue. If you get this incorrect the taper in the eye will be the wrong way around, and you'll never be able to make a new handle really secure.

**Ian Swain** is an ex-member of the SSCG, but now lives in Black Dog, north of Crediton, Devon, where he repairs and deals in hand tools.

He has three acres of secondary woodland near South Molton.

<https://www.theluddite.com/index.html>

## Research on Urban Coppicing

In 2020 I wrote an MSc thesis entitled: 'Evaluating the potential for increased urban coppice management in the UK'. Working in coppice restoration in West Yorkshire for the last eight years has sparked a passion for coppice restoration and the possibility to see an increase in the practice. I was honoured that my tutor, Dr Duncan Slater, thought the paper worth submitting for publication and that he helped edit it; the edited version was published in the *Arboricultural Journal* in March.

To briefly summarise the paper; two separate research

strands assessed the physical woodland resource and the human resource - both are essential for coppice management.

First, an evaluation of woodland resources was conducted across twenty-four sites in four urban regions: Bristol, Cambridge, Manchester and Milton Keynes. Second, five UK-based urban coppice businesses were surveyed. Their responses highlighted key challenges and opportunities urban coppice workers encounter. The research itself was a pleasure; visiting woodlands in different parts of the UK and chatting to likeminded individuals. The write up was more of a slog! The reason for focussing on urban coppice was frankly because the degree was in 'Arboriculture and Urban Forestry', but it helped to streamline a massive topic. I'm grateful for the assistance and contributions of all the contributing land owners and coppice workers.

I've included one of my favourite quotations from Mike Carswell (formerly of 'Urban Coppice' based in Manchester), below:

“Many urban dwelling people crave natural products, and the coppice worker gives these customers direct access to locally produced artisanal crafts. The customer can literally go and see the trees that have been used in their product and watch them grow, in better form and with increased biodiversity for the surrounding areas. No level of FSC-style certification can achieve the same result.”

Many of the barriers that make coppice restoration difficult (i.e. finances and the time investment required to improve things) will be obvious to readers of the *Cleft Stick* but perhaps less so to policymakers, landowners and the wider forestry community in general. And despite a few great resources and academic papers out there, the topic of coppice management is, in general, under-researched. I hope that my small contribution might be a useful reference and point of evidence to promote the case for coppice restoration both in urban and rural communities alike.

The link can be found here: <https://tinyurl.com/2ewtbvjp> If anyone would like to read the whole paper then do feel free to email me on [treasurer@ncfed.org.uk](mailto:treasurer@ncfed.org.uk)

**Tom Coxhead** is a member of the Leeds Coppice Co-operative



A volunteer day in Leeds

Image: Tom Coxhead

*Tried and tested*

## Eder 1800 Power Winch

**N**ot being generally prone to product mania, I wouldn't have expected to be writing this enthusiastic review, so it's a nice moment to make an exception to endorse something so heartily.

I will start with a quick rundown of what this winch features and then I'll delve into some of the practical applications that we've had enormous benefit from being able to utilise.

Put simply it's a petrol engine capstan winch. The 1800 gives a clue to its pulling power - a straight 1.8t. With a pulley, that force can be doubled...very considerable power for such a compact unit. The winch features a very strong aluminium alloy block to which all elements are attached. A spring loaded throttle returns the winch to a solid lock position when tension is let off the pull end of the winch rope. There are two gears which speed up lighter pulls; most useful for log extraction.

The Eder 1800 differs from other similar products on the market in two distinct and extremely useful ways: firstly it uses two stroke oil in the fuel system, the major benefit of which is that it can be operated without the need to set it dead flat on the ground. Engines that feature separate oiling will cut out if they detect that they are not in the upright position. The absence of a need for this in the Eder's case is useful when working on slopes. This is especially true for assisted felling where lines into trees are by necessity at the steepest angle one can achieve to exert leverage on the target.

The second distinguishing feature is that when not winching, the aforementioned throttle mechanism automatically locks off, which secures the winch rope, and therefore its load, in a rock solid manner. This saves tying locking off knots and prevents the item being winched running back to its original position. The consequences of this could be a leaning tree going the wrong way or a log rolling dangerously out of control. I can't emphasise enough how beneficial these features are to safe working.

There are two principal uses to which we've put our winch. The first is pulling large logs out of areas where we don't want vehicles to damage the ground. We use a log arch to lift the front of the log, and tow it to a pick up point. A skidding cone can also be used for this. Compared to using a forwarder, this is time consuming but sensitivity to habitat and biodiversity retention are important in our operation so we're prepared to put the hours in where needed.

The second is making safe assisted fells - taking trees away from lean. Although this is usually achievable with good forestry skills, it gives peace of mind when for example we're felling trackside or have something we really don't want to hit. Given that we're felling Douglas fir in excess of 30 metres and with a diameter at breast height approaching a metre the peace of mind is very welcome.

Recent storms have given us a few windblown situations to manage and again the power, portability and safe working features of this machine make it an invaluable piece of our kit. So much quicker to return a root plate back into the ground than using the trusty old Tirfor.

It's easy to tell from my words that I'm a fan of this item - it's strongly made, extremely robust, light therefore portable and has to date been totally reliable.

If you want to move material over delicate ground, maximise the safety aspects of felling awkward trees or secure windblown tangles I would pretty much guarantee that you'd find a place for this winch and never regret the spend.

### **Jake Newman**

*Jake runs Mimir Timber and is currently restoring an ancient woodland which is a Plantation on Ancient Woodland Site, located in Pembrokeshire, West Wales. They have invested in a sawmill and in future plan to produce a mixture of timber and coppice products through a continuous cover management plan. He admits that it will take longer than he has have left on earth!*

<https://www.facebook.com/MimirTimber>



The Eder 1800 Winch in action

# Polyco Granite 5 Beta Gloves

When I first started coppicing and hedge laying as paid work, I got myself all the basic kit and as I was just starting out, I aimed for the cheapest I could find. Firstly, I went with the commonly seen red gauntlets. I got on okay with them but they wore out quickly. It didn't take long for the material to get slippery in the wet and beating them into submission when they'd dried and gone hard was getting tiresome. I think the only thing I liked about them was how easy they were to put on and take off. In reality they didn't stop many thorns from getting through!



Image: Alex Lewis-Hand

I tried a couple of different gauntlets and wasn't satisfied, so bit the bullet and decided to invest in some pricier gloves. I tried some made by Cutter which were okay for coppice work but lacked wrist protection for hedge laying. I tried the Rostaing Ripeur 2 gloves which were the best at keeping out thorns, but that's not all I was looking for. Like the gauntlets they didn't keep my hands warm and I didn't get on well with their grip and flexibility. I really wanted something that was comfortable, grippy, kept my hands warm in winter and fended off most thorns.

I found my version of the perfect pair of gloves last season. I used them for months of hedging and ended up finishing them off late into spring. I'd only bought one pair and ended up forgetting the name of them. I scoured different safety kit websites, online glove shops multiple times and tried to find old receipts looking for their name. I asked every other hedger I met about these gloves and was given some hope when I bumped into a friend at the Cheshire Ploughing and Hedging match. He'd been telling me about a batch of gloves he'd worked his way through, having been the best gloves he'd ever used. When he showed me his last pair, I saw that these were the exact gloves I'd been searching for. He'd had a box of them but used them up. He also couldn't remember their name! So I went online and started asking questions. Asking around I could only describe them as "some kind of mythical glove" but after posting a video in which I'm wearing them, I was pointed towards the Polyco Granite 5 Beta gloves.

They're not marketed for anything to do with gardens or work with thorny plants. According to the manufacturer, they're meant for warehouse work, waste disposal,

emergency services and glazing manufacturers. They cost just under £30 although I remember them being a bit cheaper. They are made from high quality grain leather with a reinforced Kevlar liner and adhere to the highest level of cut resistance, but the trade-off is that they do let in the occasional thorn. These Polyco gloves are brilliant, they're grippy and flexible although they do take a little bit of wearing in. I've used them for everything I do. The first pair I had saw a decent amount of coppice work. I used them with the chainsaw, axe and billhook, and although it's not advised to use gloves with swinging tools, they worked great, almost like a second skin. When bundling hazel they were up to the job, flexible enough for tying knots and keeping my hands dry and warm throughout. When I've been hedging in the Polyco Granite 5 Betas, they've protected my hands from all but the most sinister thorns and have been grippy enough to pull even large stems out of the hedge in the wet. I also used them for gardening as they're not cumbersome when scything, cutting back bramble or using machinery. I think what finished off my first pair, after almost a whole season of coppicing and hedging, was scraping up leaves and weeds from paving flags and stone when I didn't have shovel or dustpan with me.

These gloves don't allow shoelace tying or nose scratching, but they protect you from the majority of thorns, keep your hands warm and allow you to carry on working through most weather. The only way they have let me down this season is when the stitching on one of the little fingers went fairly quickly, but I have used them non-stop. I'll be trying out the more heavy duty version soon, the Polyco Granite 5 Delta gloves, basically the same thing, but with added layers of leather for extra protection.

**Alex Lewis-Hand**, a hedge layer and coppicer based in South Cheshire, who moves on to garden maintenance and a bit of everything outdoors in the summer. [mercianwoodsman@outlook.com](mailto:mercianwoodsman@outlook.com), on Instagram and Facebook - @mercianwoodsman

## Kiln Wanted



Image: Jim Bettie

A member of the East Anglian Coppice Network is after a second-hand ring kiln. Preferably 6ft diameter. He is willing to pay a good price for something in good working condition. Will collect.

Please contact Olly Moses - [ollymoses@gmail.com](mailto:ollymoses@gmail.com)

# Whatever is This?

I know there's a pedunculate oak leaf, some oak spangle galls and at least one oak silk button gall, but what the large spherical one is I can't say, perhaps some kind of marble gall? If you know, do let us know.

That's not really why I attracted you over here! I expect the picture caught your eye which led you to read this. Cleft Stick uses plenty of images and we can always use more. If you take pictures of coppice-related things and they are in focus, thoughtfully composed and well lit, would you be willing to allow us to use them? We can't pay (of course) but we will always give you a credit. It's good to see your name in print even if it's only electronic.

Send likely pics to [news@ncfed.org.uk](mailto:news@ncfed.org.uk)



Image: Guy Lambourne

## Terry's Top Tips

Well, we were hoping to have published some more of Terry's Top Tips in this issue of Cleft Stick but despite having said he'd send some in, he's clearly forgotten and now he's gone AWOL. Rumour has it he's gone on holiday somewhere - clearly he needs one! Ed

PS: Terry is always happy to share your top tips from the woods or the workshop in future editions of the Cleft Stick. Please send them in to [news@ncfed.org.uk](mailto:news@ncfed.org.uk) and we'll pass them onto him.

## Billhook advice needed



Image: Guy Lambourne

My friend, Milton Keynes based contractor, spoon carver and furniture maker produced these old tools from his bag one day, whilst we were taking a break.

They belonged to his deceased great uncle who had apparently, amongst other things in his life, been a leather worker. Does any reader recognize what they might have been made for? Are they a leather worker's tools? Are the back-swept handles and fairly small size designed for a specific use?

They are lovely old things and for Tim, have great sentimental value because of their link to his family.

If you know, please do contact us at [news@ncfed.org.uk](mailto:news@ncfed.org.uk)

Guy Lambourne

## Suz on the Cover

Those of you who subscribe will already have seen this image of Suz Williams in action with billhook in hand, on the cover of the latest edition of Living Woods Magazine.

Suz, a coppice worker and past Small Woods Association and Bill Hogarth Memorial Trust Apprentice is also a member of the Chilterns and Thames Valley Coppice Group.

If you were at the NCFed Weekend Gathering and AGM last October you may remember that she was involved in its organisation and acted as clerk during the auction. Great to see coppicing and of course Suz on the cover of what is always an attractive and informative magazine.



# About the NCFed

*The National Coppice Federation (NCFed) was formed in 2013 with the aim of uniting already existing regional coppice groups under one banner. Since then more local groups have formed and become affiliated to the NCFed, growing our membership and reach considerably.*

## Aims

The NCFed has three key aims:

1. to promote coppicing as a form of woodland management that provides economic, ecological and culturally significant benefits;
2. to bring together regional coppice groups and provide a unified voice for the industry; and
3. to encourage and promote best practice.

## Regional Coppice Groups

Regional groups are the backbone of the NCFed. Some have been established for many years and are very active in their local areas, organising regular social meetings and training courses for members and running events for the public. Others are smaller scale and focus on encouraging networking, cooperation and support between coppice workers.

## Coppicing across the country

The National Coppice Federation is the umbrella organisation for local coppice groups from across the UK. These groups in turn have individual members. The groups vary in size, both in terms of membership and geographical area, and also in scope, with some groups being extremely active and others less so.

## Membership Benefits

- You'll be part of a national network that shares skills and ideas and better understands the bigger coppicing picture;
- You'll be part of a regional group that will connect you with local, likeminded individuals that you can co operate, collaborate and socialise with;
- You'll be part of a movement that aims to improve the coppicing industry and to find solutions to problems and issues;
- You'll be eligible for discounted insurance through our Insurance Scheme; and
- You'll be able to attend our fantastic annual gathering at a reduced rate.

## How to join

You will need to find and join your local coppice group; membership fees include a sum that is paid to the NCFed nationally. If there is no local group to join (coverage of the UK is not yet complete), why not consider setting up a new group?

**Receive Cleft Stick and other important information from NCFed by signing up for our mailing list at:**

<https://ncfed.org.uk/news/>



All images: Guy Lambourne

**National  
Coppice  
Federation**

