



The

# Cleft Stick

News from the National Coppice Federation and the UK Coppice Industry



Image Jim Bettie

## More Coppice into Management

*An update on the Federation's Forestry Commission funded project that's mapping coppice in South-west England.*  
Page 8

## Focus on Spars

*News on the recent addition of spar making to the HCA's Endangered list, and more on training and sales*  
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## Food from coppice

*Could the woods you cut yield more than just sticks?*  
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## 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.

#### **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

**National  
Coppice  
Federation**



Supporting the Coppice Industry

Welcome to another edition of Cleft Stick. It covers as wide a range of subjects as ever, but I make no apology for this issue being a little spar-heavy. I seem to remember mentioning the subject in this column before, but it seems more pressing than ever – we have an opportunity to win back business from overseas competitors right now, but to do that we need to get our skills honed and start producing in quantity. The National Society of Master Thatchers have put a conservative estimate of around 25-30 million spars a year needed to maintain a sustainable supply (Heritage Crafts Association). That's a lot of spars! Producing them should contribute to getting more of our hazel coppice woodlands back into good shape. As long as our prices are high enough.



From my perspective, time is gathering momentum; alarmingly, each year feels noticeably shorter than the last. Spring with its break

from chainsaws, a return to thing-making and picking flies out of cups of tea, sees NCFed's collective thoughts shifting inevitably to the Annual Gathering and AGM. Actually planning has been on-going since the last one ended and it's already looking to be an event that anyone associated with coppicing cannot afford to miss. This October we will be in North Lancashire, hosted by Coppice Association North-West. It's right and proper that the Gathering is returning north of the Trent and there's no doubt the location will add a certain something. The Gathering sold out in 2022, so don't delay booking your tickets. Everything you need to know, including prices, visits, discussion groups, training sessions, accommodation and a whole lot more will be on the Federation's website by mid-late June. But there's a preview in this edition.

NCFed's Forestry Commission funded 'More Coppice into Productive Management' project has had an extremely successful first phase. It is operating across the whole of the South-West of England. The Team are seeking to record further coppice woods in the region, so if you know of any that may not have already been spotted, do let them know. I understand there are ambitions to expand the Project into the rest of the country in the future. Full details on page 8.

### Write for Cleft Stick

We are always on the look out for more stories of coppice, woodlands, safety, products, wildlife, business matters, equipment, people... if you find something interesting, it's a sure bet others will too. So, if you have a mind to, please bash out some words and send something to us at [news@ncfed.org.uk](mailto:news@ncfed.org.uk) Or maybe just give me a call - 07794 013876.

And a very big thank you to everyone who has contributed to this edition and that of course includes Tim and Glenn

I look forward to seeing many of you at the Gathering and AGM in October.

*Guy Lambourne, Editor*

# News

## A coppicing calendar for 2024

I know it's a bit early and we haven't even mentioned Christmas yet. At least I haven't. But there is a bit of an interest developing in producing a calendar to showcase our lovely offices. We all have folders on phones, laptops and PCs stuffed with images amongst which there will be a few that are in focus, well composed, well-lit and showing something (or someone) interesting or beautiful and related to coppicing.

If you have some images that you would like to submit for inclusion in a calendar used to promote coppicing in the UK, could you let us know? As yet we haven't got detail pinned down, so we just need to gauge interest.

In return you could bask in the glory of your work being displayed in houses throughout the country for up to 31 days. We will include your name, a contact and a caption that describes what the picture shows.

We will need a good cross-section of subjects and seasons, from beautiful woodland and trees, through to activities and processing to perfect products. So hunt out that Hasselblad or rummage in the hard drive and get in touch.

[mamsc@ncfed.org.uk](mailto:mamsc@ncfed.org.uk)



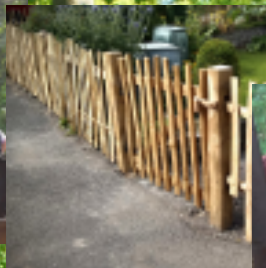
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Editorial Assistants - Glenn Hadley and Tim Roskell

Deadline for next edition 30 September 2023

Please send all words, ideas, stories and images to [news@ncfed.org.uk](mailto:news@ncfed.org.uk)

13-15 October 2023



SilverHelme Scout Camp,  
near Calnforth, Lancs

- 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  
[www.ncfed.org.uk](http://www.ncfed.org.uk)



Hosted by:

This year's Weekend Gathering and AGM is being held in North Lancashire, on the shores of Morecambe Bay, in an area known for its extensive ash, yew and hazel woodlands and rich biodiversity associated with limestone pavements. There is a long history of woodland management for the production of bobbins, oak swill baskets and charcoal.

The Gathering and pre-event courses, will be hosted this year by Coppice Association North West (CANW), at the SilverHelme Scout Camp in Silverdale, near Carnforth. Set in 18 acres of woodland with a bunkhouse for 30, campsite for over 100 tents and room for campervans, there will be plenty of space to spread out and enjoy a weekend-long celebration of all that Lancashire and the South Lakes can offer to coppice workers and coppice fans.

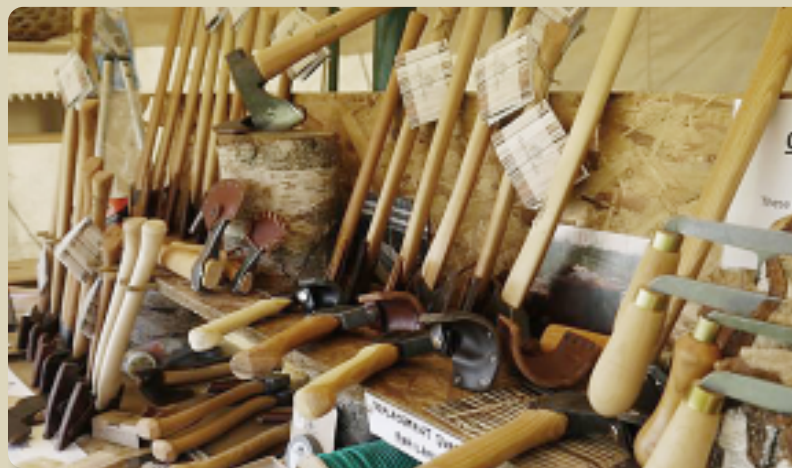
#### Demos, visits...

The popular Friday, pre-gathering courses/workshops will again be on offer to include riving and weaving (oak swill baskets), leather tool sheaths, tool sharpening and more. There will be have-a-go sessions and demonstrations of many of these activities, and others, on the Saturday. **The Woodsmith Store** will also be with us over the weekend so you'll be able to top up your tool bag with some new kit! Don't forget to bring some of your favourite tools for sharpening!

#### ..and much more

There will be discussion groups such as working as a co-

operative and coppice apprenticeships. Another reason to bring tools – to sell them in the tool auction! There will be a craft competition (rules to follow) and a Saturday evening speaker. Please bring musical instruments for a Saturday evening music jam around the campfire! As always, we will have great local food, a Friday night BBQ (bring your own food) and fire pit, *the Froe Up and Split Bar* alongside lots of chat and catching up with old friends and new.



Worth a visit just for the Woodsmith Store?

#### Come by train

Do consider coming by train as Silverdale Station is just a short walk away and there will be plenty of shared transport to any off-site visits.

#### Booking

The weekend will be open, via pre-booked tickets, to members of NCFed affiliated supporter and coppice groups as well as non-members. Full details will be available mid to late June when ticket booking will go live.

Keep up to date through the National Coppice Federation's website [ncfed.org.uk/](http://ncfed.org.uk/) and Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/NationalCoppiceFederation/> We look forward to holding the AGM back in the North after a gap of 8 years!

Coppice Association North West

#### This year's event includes:

- Pre-Gathering courses/workshops
- Skill sharing
- Sales and demonstrations
- Talks and discussions
- Site tours
- Tool auction
- Coppice crafts competition
- Live music
- Froe Up and Split bar

## Cleft Stick Bulletins

As you know, Cleft Stick is currently produced twice a year. We are usually well supplied with material for each edition (keep those articles rolling in though), but we know that every so often you will have news stories, relevant to the UK coppicing world, that can't wait for the next edition. If that's the case, we can help.

We can send individual stories to a growing mailing list of interested people and organisations across the UK and probably the world. This could be for training and other events run by your group or others, requests for people to take part in surveys, news published in other places that might be of interest nationally, in short, burning issues that just won't wait. We will try to get these out within a week of you getting in touch.

We need a clear bit of writing, probably what marketing types describe as a 'call to action' (what you want people to do as a result of reading your message), maybe a link to a website or other media post and a lovely picture that tells the story. Brevity is key here – less is definitely more – say it in 150 words or fewer. This paragraph is now 72 words.

That's it.

Oh and if your email address isn't already on our mailing list, add it here [ncfed.org.uk/news](mailto:ncfed.org.uk/news)

Send stories to me at [news@ncfed.org.uk](mailto:news@ncfed.org.uk) adding 'CS bulletin' in the subject line and we will get them out.

*Guy Lambourne, Editor*

## Wye Coppice to offer traineeships

Specialist broadleaf woodland contractor, Wye Coppice CIC, is looking to hire four paid trainees to start work in September 2023. The year-long, part-time positions include chainsaw and first aid tickets, provision of a Stihl chainsaw, PPE and other equipment – thanks to the support of the Wye Valley AONB Sustainable Development Fund.

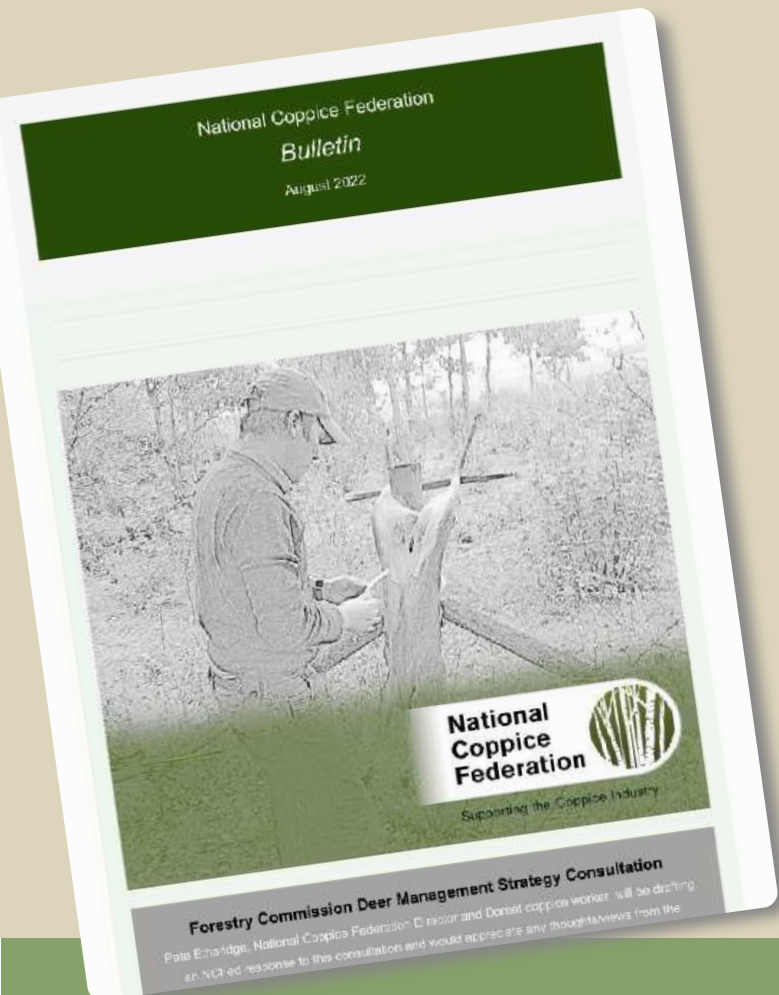
The CIC (community interest company), which works chiefly in the Wye Valley and surrounding counties, is concerned not only with restoring and managing coppice and other woodland for conservation, but wants to overcome barriers to people entering a career in forestry, and spread the word about sustainable management. The training positions will offer both a grounding in practical work, and environmental outreach, as trainees will be expected to help deliver a programme of courses to the public.

For more information about Wye Coppice, see [www.wyecoppice.co.uk](http://www.wyecoppice.co.uk). Full details on the traineeships will be announced soon. Applications are welcomed from anyone interested in following a career in woodland management.

This project has been supported by Welsh Government's Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) in the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

### Contacts

Joe Weaver, Director, Wye Coppice: [info@wyecoppice.co.uk](mailto:info@wyecoppice.co.uk)  
Ruth Waycott, Wye Valley AONB Information Officer:  
01600 710846, 0790 4436719  
[information@wyevalleyaonb.org.uk](mailto:information@wyevalleyaonb.org.uk)



## Media and Marketing Sub-committee (MAMSC)

I'm not sure how I came to be Chair of MAMSC. It probably happened during an unguarded moment in the company of Dave Jackson. Actually it's not too onerous. It's certainly rewarding and gets you into the national organisation. A certain amount of commitment of time and attention is required. It can be frustrating - we have no shortage of enthusiasm, expertise and knowledge amongst the membership, but we are all short of time. So as Chair I regularly find myself saying: "Great idea, we should do that, but not until we have someone to take it on". So I thought I would tell you what MAMSC does and hopes to do in the future, and tempt you to get involved.

### What's it for and what does it do?

MAMSC considers issues relating to all media and marketing of NCFed and the UK coppice industry. That's a wide remit! Currently we are dealing with:

- Printed and digital media
- NCFed Website
- Coppice-products website
- Cleft Stick Newsletter
- Banners and leaflets for events
- Graphics, display material, stationery templates and merchandise
- Social media
- Advertising and sponsorship
- Cloud storage
- Event support, including National Beanpole Campaign,
- Annual Gathering and AGM, seminars
- Marketing of the NCFed organisation
- Press releases

### Who is on the Committee now?

Jim Bettle, charcoal issues; Glenn Hadley, website; Dave Jackson, Chair of NCFed; Guy Lambourne, Chair and Cleft Stick editor; Richard Lofthouse, press releases; Rosie Rendell, social media and Beanpole Campaign; Tim Roskell, Secretary and social media; Helen Waterfield

### What of the Future?

There is no shortage of ideas. Here are some that have been discussed...

**A patron for NCFed** – a celebrity who would push our aims and influencing others on our behalf

**National Coppice Week** – a national campaign to promote products, sales and all aspects of coppicing

**A coppice podcast** – a fantastic digital opportunity to get the word out to anyone with internet and an interest

**Coppicing signage** – an update of generic signage that could be displayed next to areas of coppice

..and many more

### Could you help?

The Federation can only ever be as strong and effective as the members of its affiliated groups. If you have an interest in anything mentioned above along with some expertise and a bit of time, please let us know.

Contact me at [news@ncfed.org.uk](mailto:news@ncfed.org.uk) or if you'd like a chat, call me on 07794 013876.

*Guy Lambourne, Chair*

## Voluntary Officer opportunities - we need you!

Over the last few months several people, who are members of affiliated coppice groups, have put their names forward as potential officers in their chosen area of expertise, knowledge and passion. NCFed Directors are currently drawing up some job descriptions to help guide these good folks as to how their skills can best be utilised for the benefit of both NCFed and the coppice industry as a whole.

An excellent example is NCFed's Charcoal Representative, Jim Bettle, who has been beavering away dealing with charcoal related issues for some time, including highlighting the issue of cheap, unsustainably produced imported charcoal.

The following voluntary roles are, subject to Directors' agreement, on their way to being filled.

- Coppice Creation Officer- (Planting New Coppice)
- Hedge-laying Officer
- Biodiversity Officer
- Spars Officer
- Sponsorship Officer
- Forest Gardening Officer

### Can you help?

There are numerous areas within our industry where there is scope for a voluntary officer to take a lead. Please take a few minutes to think about how and where you could help. It may well be, for example, that one of the Directors, a Group Rep or someone from your own or another coppice group, may also have a specific interest or bank of knowledge in one of these areas; more than one person could fill one role.

There are two specific posts we are keen to fill as soon as possible:

**Beanpole Officer** - to lead the on-going campaign to promote UK-produced coppice products to gardeners

**Cleft Stick Designer** - to take on the layout of this prestigious periodical

Please contact Tim Roskell (who is acting as "Officer Liaison") via [mamsc@ncfed.org.uk](mailto:mamsc@ncfed.org.uk) if you'd like to know more or have queries about a potential role for which you feel you could offer your services.

*Tim Roskell, Officer Liaison*



Could you be NCFed's Bean Pole Officer?

# Charcoal News

## NCFed's Charcoal Producers' Directory

As you are probably now aware, the National Coppice Federation's Charcoal Producers' Directory has had a revamp. The main purpose of the Directory is to provide contact details for UK charcoal producers – one list that allows anyone to find local, high quality, UK produced charcoal easily. However, there is a great deal of additional information, aimed at the producer, much of which will also be of great interest to prospective buyers, particularly about the product itself, its production and packaging.

If you produce charcoal and are a member of an affiliated group, you should seriously consider adding your name and contact details to the directory.

An added benefit of being included in the Directory is that you automatically become part of a National Coppice Federation group email. We have already shared enquiries from purchasers from around the UK. It will continue to be used to send producers information.

In conjunction with the Directory relaunch in April this year, we issued an NCFed press release promoting UK produced charcoal (see below). If you haven't seen it, check with your Group Rep or on Facebook. The release is there to be used by members locally. (We have reproduced it here just in case you didn't see it at the time).

I hope you will agree that we went to great lengths (or should I say heights) to get the "Carbon Cycle Image!"

Thank you to all who have already re-registered. If you haven't yet, it is never too late to do so.

Find the Directory at [ncfed.org.uk/public/products/charcoal/suppliers/](http://ncfed.org.uk/public/products/charcoal/suppliers/)  
For producer members of local groups wishing to be added to the Directory, email [charcoal@ncfed.org.uk](mailto:charcoal@ncfed.org.uk)

*Jim Bettie, Charcoal Rep for NCFed. Also the Dorset Charcoal Company*

Image Guy Lambourne



Image: Jim Bettie

## UK Charcoal Press Release, May 2023

~ Ahead of that BBQ for the [add name of a national event] spare a thought for the UK-producers of environmentally sustainable charcoal  
~ Typically UK consumers are totally unaware where their BBQ charcoal comes from

~ The *Earthworm Foundation* estimates that charcoal is among Europe's top five products that contribute towards global deforestation, along with beef, palm oil and soy  
~ The UK government does not regulate imported charcoal  
~ Much charcoal is the result of illegal deforestation in tropical rainforests, compounded by high air miles for the imports  
~ The UK's Coppice Federation offers a simple-to-search database of local producers whose products can be found and bought  
~ Anyone can search for a producer here: <https://ncfed.org.uk/public/products/charcoal/>

IMAGE credit: National Coppice Federation/Jim Bettie  
IMAGE caption: An array of empty bags all from distinctively packed, environmentally responsible English charcoal producers, not to be confused with most other brands

Generally UK producers package their sustainable charcoal in brown bags with black or green print.

If there is no mention on the bag of where the charcoal is produced it is more than likely from unsustainable forestry.

Further communication to:  
[Your name and contact number  
Name of your coppice group]



*The heights to which people will go to capture the right picture!*

## More Coppice Into Productive Management: Project Update

On behalf of the Management Committee, Project Manager Graham Morgan reflects upon the past year of this innovative and ground-breaking project and what has been achieved to date since the last update in the winter 2022/2023 edition of *Cleft Stick*.

At the time of writing, it is just over one year ago that a 2-day seminar on restoring and managing productive coppice was held by the National Coppice Federation (see *Cleft Stick* Spring 2022). Enthusiastic discussions held then, inspired us to apply for funding through the Forestry Commission's Woods Into Management Forestry Innovation Fund.

The past year has been something of a blur of activity, such is the nature of working on an innovative project, though we have some fantastic results to share with you. The end of 2022 and the start of 2023 were spent embedding the newly appointed Management Committee into the Project and in all honesty it is great to be working with such a responsive and resilient bunch.

February and March 2023 were particularly busy months for the Project; in addition to ensuring we increased the number of coppice woodland locations being identified, we designed and launched a webpage for the Project hosted on NCFed's website.

See: <https://ncfed.org.uk/mapping-project/>

We also produced a bespoke coppice survey methodology and designed an associated survey app to be used on handheld tablets.



Screenshots of the bespoke survey app.

work and discuss its future.

At the end of March 2023, we submitted our first formal, end of financial year progress report to the Forestry Commission. This has been accepted; a massive milestone and a great achievement for the Project team and for NCFed.

All of this endeavour and close partnership working means that at the end of financial year 1 (end of March 2023), we have already significantly increased the number of coppice woodlands and the area of coppice woodland known to exist in Southwest England, compared to data that existed before the Project began (the National Forest Inventory 2020 dataset).

To the end of March 2023, the project has identified 103 coppice woodlands (compared to 31) and 542ha of coppice (compared to 95ha). See Table 1. These numbers are only provisional and subject to ongoing verification work to confirm the actual extent and condition of coppice believed to be present.

This is a great achievement of which the Project team and NCFed are proud. We believe it clearly demonstrates and validates the viability and purpose of the Project, including future iterations of it. Whilst this data is yet to be 'ground truthed' by surveyors, we continue to receive new site information so remain hopeful that the final total will be higher.

Of course, none of this would be possible without the participation of individual landowners, to whom we are immensely grateful. NCFed and the Project team place great importance on establishing good relationships with landowners and respecting their wishes; we understand for example, that not every landowner will want to have their woodland location shown on a map. It is fair to say that the complexities around intellectual property, conflict of interest and data privacy are challenging aspects for projects such as this. But addressing such challenges is necessary and part of the journey towards improving the current situation for the coppicing sector.



Handheld tablet with the bespoke survey app.

Following a formal recruitment process, four lead surveyors were also appointed in February 2023, supported by an additional surveyor from within the existing team. The spread of surveyor locations will ensure good coverage across the Project area in Southwest England. In February, the surveyors also undertook practical training at Silk Wood (the National Arboretum, Westonbirt) on how to use the bespoke coppice survey methodology and the associated app.

In March 2023 the Project's Management Committee held its first face-to-face meeting at Silk Wood, which was a great opportunity to review the past eight months of project



## More Coppice Into Productive Management: Project Update (continued)



Image: © Graham Morgan, 2023

Surveyor training day at Silk Wood using handheld tablets

We have recently submitted additional applications to the latest round of the Forestry Commission's Woods Into Management Forest Innovation Fund, which if successful, will allow us to roll out the Project to other areas of England.

Further updates about the Project and our latest fund applications will appear periodically on the NCFed webpage and in Cleft Stick.

If you know of coppice woodland in Southwest England (new, old, managed or unmanaged), please email Graham Morgan at: [morecoppiceSW@ncfed.org.uk](mailto:morecoppiceSW@ncfed.org.uk). Or see here for more information about how to contribute information to the Project online: <https://ncfed.org.uk/mapping-project>

This is why we have been working really hard to ensure that the required protocols and procedures to protect rights and interests and comply with legislation are in place. Importantly, landowners who want to participate in the Project can be assured that we have opted for a high standard of data privacy and they are given complete control of how their data is used in the Project and beyond.

A range of Project partners and woodland and environmental organisations continue to be hugely positive and engaged despite their own workload and pressures. We are grateful to them for this. Special mention has to go to the National Trust, the Woodland Trust, Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, Dorset Wildlife Trust and Cornwall Wildlife Trust who have been generous in identifying a significant number of sites to add to the list. This meant a great leap forward in the tally of sites since the end of 2022.

In financial year 2 (till end of March 2024) we will continue to be busy identifying the locations of more coppice woodland and getting our surveyors on the ground surveying.

***If you know of coppiced woodland in the Southwest, let the team know***



Photo © Cheryl Duerden 2023

The Project's Management Committee meets for the first time (trying not to look like the headline act at a Folk Festival).

**Table 1: Coppice woodland in Southwest England**

	MCIPM 2022/2023	NFI 2020
Number of coppice woodlands	103.00	31.00
Total extent of coppice woodland (Ha)	542.15	95.36
Largest coppice extent in a land holding (Ha)	154.00	11.70
Smallest coppice extent in a land holding (Ha)	0.05	0.51

Table Notes: MCIPM 2022/2023 - the More Coppice Into Productive Management project dataset to end of March 2023; NFI 2020 - National Forest Inventory 2020 dataset.

# From our Affiliated Groups

## The Devon Coppice and Small Woods Group quarterly gathering – spar making

Huge thanks to Frank and Lynne Wells for hosting our first event, in March, at their site on Dartmoor at Clearbrook, near Yelverton. Frank and Lynne took on the site seven or so years ago. It was a well stocked but derelict hazel coppice and winter 2022/23 saw the first cut undertaken since the initial work.

When all had arrived, from all over Devon, Cornwall, Hampshire and Dorset, we walked up to the recently cut coupe. Predominantly hazel with self seeded birch, the coppice had already been cut by Frank and was lying in drifts ready to be processed.

At this stage there were bean poles, pea sticks and stakes to be had, with plenty of birch tops and tails for the production of besoms. Our group was instructed on the harvesting specifications for the end products and we worked steadily for a couple of hours through the drifts. This was for many, the first time we had met and was the perfect way to get to know each other and generally bond as a new group. It was especially heartening for the committee, as after almost a year of meetings to establish the group, this was our first real life, practical gathering.

Devon has a rich woodland history and it felt like this space was for many the first time issues unique to Devon could be discussed and shared. This engaging discussion could well have gone on and on but it was



Image: Pete Jameson

Nigel Turton using Devon spars

time to meet Chris Cowell and watch his spar making demonstration. Chris is a full-time spar maker based in Hampshire. A master of the craft, he is unable to satisfy all requests for spars. The supply of cheap imported spars has slowed down due to the war in Ukraine, resulting in a high demand for British spars. Spar making forms part of the holistic approach necessary for a coppice worker's income. Chris explained that the coupes he cuts in Hampshire need to provide a multitude of products to be financially viable. He took the group through how he selects gads (the stick blanks that are split further to become spars) and how to make best use of available hazel rods. Then he went on to cleaving the gad and pointing the splits with a sharp bill hook, to make perfect spars.

The group were invited to have a go themselves. This led to much hilarity and healthy discussion. Huge thanks to Chris for his good humoured, kind approach. As a follow up to this initial taster, the DCSG and Chris, have organised a more in depth two day course at his base in Hampshire. This is likely to be an informative, fun and sociable event. Dates to be confirmed.

Luckily, for those of us parched after all the excitement, the Skylark Inn was very close to hand. Further plans and future schemes for Devon's new wood group were excitedly discussed and all concept of time rapidly lost...

All in all a great day for the very first proper DCSG gathering. It really did exceed all expectations. We have a few shows to attend this summer along with our mini Char Fest AGM. Can't wait to get together again!

The spars made at the Devon Gathering were passed to Nigel Turton (president of the National Society of Master Thatchers). The photo shows him pushing a Devon spar into the levelling up of base layer with more Devon spars on the roof waiting between hand and ladder.



Image: John Williamson

Working through those Devon drifts

## Sussex & Surrey Coppice Group - Charfest

Those of you who were involved with, or have been keeping an eye on the progress of the earth burn last year will remember it was disappointing that the burn was postponed. This was due to the unseasonably hot weather and the total lack of understanding from the insurance companies... "so you want to make charcoal by pushing a load of logs into a heap and setting light to it, without burning half of Sussex, *and* you want us to insure you for this when the outside temperature is 42 degrees?!". I am glad I wasn't present when the news was put to Alan Waters!



Image: Surrey & Sussex Coppice Group

*The Surrey & Sussex earth burn - under wraps until 2023*

The earth burn construction was covered with tarps and put to bed for the winter. We are still trying to access the insurance. We have faith and hopefully it will be sorted in the next few weeks. Our illustrious chairman Chris, has produced the mother of all risk assessments - enough to try the patience of a saint. Maybe the reader of said risk assessment will get half way through the document, lose interest and rubber stamp the project, just to get it out of the way.

We have pencilled in the first week in June for the burn, giving the group time to organise a bunch of work parties to get the place ready. It will also sit well with the farm next door as they have kindly allowed us to use their field adjacent to the woods for parking when the silage has been cut.

We have been fortunate to secure single event sponsorship from DM Chainsaws at Walberton Place, Nursing Home Farm, Yapton Ln, Walberton, Arundel BN18 0AS. This will help with vital supplies and sundries like dust masks, high-viz vests and other important stuff. So please give their website a hit and like their Facebook page - [www.dmchainsaws.com](http://www.dmchainsaws.com)  
Watch out for a full report in the next edition of Cleft Stick.

As with many other groups around the country, we have a busy show season ahead. At some shows we are able to charge for our attendance in return for providing demonstrations and some are offering free pitches. This extra income is vital to the group to pay for show advertising and corporate presence like flags, banners and a posh new gala tent.

We have also been able to develop our group base site by kind permission of our landlord. With a vermin proof flat pack lock up container, a covered training area, and two posh composting loos ready for the earth burn.

Bob Hewitt

## Wye Dean Coppice Group

This new group has been formed in the Forest of Dean and Wye Valley. It held its inaugural meeting in April. Attendees at the meeting, which took place on May Hill, included greenwood workers, coppice workers, landowners and representatives from Forestry England and Grown in Britain.

The aim of the group is to promote the sustainable management of the area's woodlands, and to support the local economy by creating a market for coppice products such as charcoal, hazel hurdles and greenwood furniture. The group also aims to provide a forum for knowledge-sharing and training in traditional woodland crafts.

Broadly the new group's area covers from Ross on Wye to Newent in the north, the River Severn to the east, down to Chepstow and incorporating the Wye Valley AONB up the Western boundary back to Ross.

The group welcomes anyone with an interest in woodland management, from seasoned coppice workers to those who are new to the field. If you're interested in joining the Wye Dean Coppice Group, please contact Simon Jones on 07496 975465 or [theearthcaregardener@gmail.com](mailto:theearthcaregardener@gmail.com).

Joe Weaver



Image: Joe Weaver

*A damp venue for the Wye Dean Coppice Group's first meeting*

## East Anglian Coppice Network

The Network is coming out of Covid hibernation having met in person during November and run a hurdle making day in April. There's a strong chance we have a new treasurer and there are plans for another meeting at a woodland near Ipswich later in the summer. So all's looking more positive.

Andy Basham of Coppice Designs organised and hosted a hurdle day at Hales Wood, near Saffron Walden, Essex, the ancient woodland and SSSI that he works on behalf of Natural England. Andy brought in ace local hurdle maker, Mick Thwaites to do the teaching and a great job he did for us. We were short of takers from the group so four places were snaffled by members of Nene Coppice and Craft in Peterborough – four new recruits for EACN!

Rachel Kellett describes the day...

The hurdle maker uses ancient techniques and tools to produce a robust and portable panel, traditionally used to fold sheep. There is still a strong market for well-made panels but they are more likely to end up in a garden as fencing or screening than in a field of sheep.

Andy provided all the hazel rods of various sizes from coppice cut last winter. We had plenty to practice on. Working in pairs we made a 3 foot wattle hurdle. I worked with Molly, who as it happened was used to making willow hurdles - much easier to manipulate and weave, but not of course, so long lasting.

We started off on a railway sleeper, drilled with nine holes in a slight curve, inserting the vertical rods called zales - two strong pointed rods for each end, and seven split rods for the rest. We began the weaving with the *bra straps* (yes, I was enjoying the language) with sturdy rods at the base, 3-4 rows, but not straight forward, they wove vertically as well as horizontally, so ensuring the base strength. Then began the classic twisting of the hazel around the two end zales. Both Molly and I struggled with this and, although by the end Molly definitively got a good twist in, we certainly needed Mick's help to start us off.

It was tough. Twisting breaks the hazel fibres into more pliable strands, so it bends rather than breaks as you turn it around the end zale. Splitting or cleaving the hazel using a billhook was enjoyable once I got the hang of it. We were well taught by Mick, who was a joy to watch as he accomplished with such ease and grace, so much that we struggled with.

A bonus was taking the hurdle home. Molly generously relinquished her half, so I packed ours in to my van (full of dogs) and emptied it into the wood for us to use in forest school.



Molly (left) and Rachel with their finished hurdle

Image: Glenn Hadley

*"Splitting or cleaving the hazel using a billhook was enjoyable once I got the hang of it."*

Rachel Kellett, Secretary, East Anglian Coppice Network



# Focus on spars

## Spar making

### Latest addition to endangered list

The Heritage Craft Association has just added spar and ligger making to their list of endangered crafts. The list was published in May 2023, on their website - <http://heritagecrafts.org.uk>. The listing suggests there are only 1-5 full-time and 21-50 part-time spar makers in the UK (based on a survey carried out by the National Society of Master Thatchers in March 2023).

A couple of paragraphs taken from the listing highlight what many in the coppice world know already.

“In the 1990s the remaining spar makers were almost all older and retired or semi-retired and making spars at a low price as a supplementary income. As a result of this thatchers did not expect to pay more, or weren't prepared to pay more, and younger makers were consequently not interested in taking up the craft. As spar makers retired, supply became less reliable and the gap was filled by more reliable imports that at the time were approximately the same price. Many thatchers started relying on these pre-twisted spars and some who have started thatching since may not have used or even twisted fresh English spars.

During the Covid pandemic in 2019-20, supply of spars from Poland dramatically declined and thatchers are now looking to UK coppiced hazel for spars again. This has led to an increase in the price of spars and demand is outstripping supply” (Heritage Crafts Association, 2023).

### Crisis - what crisis?

Interestingly, the boss of a firm of thatchers I spoke to recently didn't recognise this as the current situation. Most of his spars, he told me, were pre-twisted and sourced from Polish producers who are apparently now in full production. He had little interest in British-produced material which is anyway in short supply, now that he can buy Polish for £210 a thousand.

There is an opportunity here for British coppice workers and spar makers who have access to good quality hazel. But can we compete? Probably not on price, but are there other factors at play here that we can exploit?

Guy Lambourne

### Thatching Spars – National coverage

Readers of the Guardian newspaper may be aware of Tom Allan's writing under their heading 'Country Diary'. Tom, a writer and thatcher, covers subjects such as trees, thatching, countryside, birds, reed and now spars. His short piece, published in February this year, mentions the recent shortage of imported spars experienced by British thatchers. It's another prompt, if we needed one, that British coppice workers have an opportunity, right now, to win back the market from overseas competitors. From evidence in these pages, it seems we are moving in the right direction.

To read Tom's article visit Country diary: *English thatchers are having to take to the woods*

### Thatch Advice Centre

The Thatch Advice Centre's Newsletter No. 28 of March this year, included a brief story reflecting the spar shortage and a need for thatchers to be trained in spar making. It contained a lovely shot of spar maker, Chris Cowell, the trainer brought in by the Devon Coppice and Small Woods Group. Here's a taste...

“..The price of spars, along with other thatching materials, has gone up and so making them in the UK (rather than so many, currently essential, imported ones) must be a good way forward...

..Sadly, it's impossible to find out how many thatchers nowadays can make spars!! It is, obviously, more profitable for thatchers to thatch than make spars but, in times of shortage, it is a very useful skill to be able to make your own. More coppice craftsmen making spars will be a huge benefit, if they can get the managed woodland! But that's perhaps another story...”

The Thatch Advice Centre - Free Thatching Help and Information



Image: Guy Lambourne

Can the UK coppice industry meet demand for spars?

## National Society of Master Thatchers Apprentice Spar Making

Early last year, Hampshire Coppice Group (HCG) was asked by the National Society of Master Thatchers (NSMT) if it would be possible to run a spar making session for their southeast England apprentices. Seeing this as an opportunity for joint working too good to miss, Kester Westcott of Three Copse Woodland Products arranged an event at East Hyden Copse.

Dave Lister provided the spar making teaching and Peter Jameson helped Kester deal with the coppice and gad cutting side of things.

Eight apprentices took part, supported by the President, Chairman and Treasurer of NSMT. The apprentices were divided into two groups and on the Friday morning; half stayed with Dave and learnt or improved their spar making techniques, while the rest walked over to the coppice coupe to cut rods with hand saws, supervised by Peter and Kester. Groups swapped later. As well as cutting, the apprentices learnt how to layer to increase stool density. The coupe had been cut previously from quite seriously overstood hazel and this was its first cut since then. It was a couple of years overstood, but not bad quality, and certainly as good as or better than something most non-coppice workers would be allowed to use.

Some gads were provided, but a lot had to be cut from the rods. These were variable - some produced several gads and some only one, so quite a lot of waste was generated. This will go into a small kiln to be converted into charcoal; there is no such thing as waste wood.

On Saturday morning the group returned and concentrated on cutting gads, to take back with them for practise and use.

It is part of a thatcher's 3-4 year apprenticeship, to learn to make their own spars. Without this module, they cannot complete their apprenticeship. Most of them had at least some idea and had already been partly shown by the master thatcher they worked for. Although quite slow they all managed to produce some spars. As a roof might need 10-20,000, their making just a few, or cutting ones suitable for special places, like around chimneys,

is not going to seriously affect the livelihood of professional spar makers. These days, with the advent of weather-proof coverings, thatching can go on all year round, so the older tradition that thatchers made spars during the winter or when the weather was bad is no longer so relevant.



*Hampshire spar making trainees*

During the course, we were visited by Ken Galton and Darren Hammerton, who were brought in by a local thatcher who lives just down the lane from the wood. Ken told us about making rick spars which were a yard long and used in the days, before mechanical balers, when haystacks were thatched. Modern, large hay and straw bales are held together with large quantities of polypropylene string or wrapped in plastic film. Perhaps, in future, we will need to get back to thatched ricks if single use plastic is phased out. We are very grateful to Dave Lister and Peter Jameson for the success of the course, and to John Westcott who fired a charcoal kiln during the proceedings - an added bit of interest to the thatchers, who didn't know very much about that side of coppice work.

*Chris Westcott  
Editor The Teller, Hampshire Coppice Group*



*Image: Guy Lambourne*

# Features

## Forest School and the TikTok Generation

Gary Marlow founded Woods for Learning as a Community Interest Company (CIC) in 2014 to meet a growing need for children to experience life outdoors. Originally using local authority owned and managed woodland sites, he now has an arrangement with Horsham Rugby Club in West Sussex, to use an eight-acre area of woodland next to their clubhouse. He discovered it was owned by the club via a search at the Land Registry and arranged a meeting with the Club's Chairman at which he presented a proposal to use it as a base for Woods for Learning. The club was delighted that the woods would be used to help educate young people.

Gary's unique selling point is the experience he has of working with young people, particularly those with physical, sensory or learning difficulties. Being close to nature – listening for birds, touching plants and trees, identifying fungi, learning survival skills – inspires most children. But for those who miss electronic gizmos, Gary has incorporated computer games and social media into courses. He said: "A few years ago, many primary

**"Children know we are destroying the planet and that we need to do more for our natural environment..."**

pupils were hooked on Minecraft. I adapted elements of the game for the outdoor world, developing a points system for finding certain materials and precious metals or for learning survival skills. The current trend is TikTok and we're looking at fun ways to use that too. You can't get away from the fact that children have phones and use them a lot, so we embrace that in a way that increases their engagement and participation. "As well as having vast experience of working with young people myself, I have brought in others who communicate well with children. One young person with autism first started coming to courses when he was seven. He is now a teenager and loves helping run the courses, passing on his enthusiasm to others.

## Saving the Planet

Children know we are destroying the planet and that we need to do more for our natural environment – anyone who works with children or who is a parent themselves knows this. "If you educate the next generation from a young age, you might set someone on the road to making a big difference in the future" said Gary. "Maybe these children will be the ones who finally start reversing current trends".

For details of future courses and camps, visit [www.woodsforlearning.com](http://www.woodsforlearning.com)

*Original article written by Ben Morris and published in AAH Magazine on 1st April 2023 - AAH - All About Horsham ([aahorsham.co.uk](http://aahorsham.co.uk))*



Image: Alan Wright Photography

## The Leaning Oak Tree

**B**olton le Sands Parish Council has a ten-year management plan for the Thwaite Brow Woods with the Forestry Commission and Natural England. This was organised by Rebecca Oaks and is being managed by the Thwaite Brow Woods Conservation Project, which I coordinate.

In the wood there was a large oak tree which was developing a significant lean and ground heave by the roots. For safety reasons the tree needed to be felled and as it was covered by a Tree Preservation Order, formal approval was required. This was gained after a visit by Lancaster City Council's Tree Officer and a detailed application. We peeled most of the bark from the trunk and much of the branch wood. The small branch wood was used to make a dead hedge around the cut stump to deter deer from browsing fresh growth which will appear and grow into new stems.

A few weeks earlier we had cut a large oak branch which was growing into a neighbouring field and was not wanted. We peeled the bark from most of this branch too, some of which we made into a rustic bench which we donated to the Abbeyfield nursing home in Bolton le Sands. Robert Swain wrote an article about it, for the Lancaster Guardian. All the oak bark which had been peeled was collected and later taken to Baker's Tannery in Devon - the last tannery in the country using oak bark in the production of leather. A cheque for £284.64 was received from the tannery and passed on to the Parish Council at their December meeting, along with £100 cash received for the trunk.

The tree had a long straight trunk which was mostly taken to Jack Holden by Adam Kirk on his timber forwarder. We later heard that the trunk had been passed on to Charlie Whinney who has a workshop in Grange over Sands. We were also told that he used the timber for a project at the Chelsea Flower Show - the 'Garden of Hope' produced for the Royal Horticultural Society and the BBC One Show. After the show, the Garden will be relocated to the Rosewood Mother and Baby Unit in Dartford which is a specialist mental health centre for new mothers and babies. Details and photos of the 'Garden of Hope' can be seen by searching the web with RHS Garden of Hope. The Parish Council and conservation volunteers are delighted with the outcome of felling this 'unsafe' tree.

Brian Crawley



Image: Brian Crawley

The rustic bench donated to the Abbeyfield nursing home

## Just Say No!

*Let's stop giving away our skills and expertise for free*

Here's a story that shows why we need a National Coppice Federation working to enhance the profile of coppicing as a professional occupation. How many of us have had a conversation like that below, extracted from a real exchange of emails (words in brackets are my unspoken thoughts)?

**Landowner** (probably pretty wealthy): "Please can you come and look at our wood? We need advice on how to manage it/look after the coppice/set up a plan."

**My response:** "Of course, I'd be delighted (to use my professional knowledge and experience that took years to acquire) I charge £xxx per day for a site visit and short report."

**LO** (still rolling in dough): "Oh, I am not looking to pay anyone but if there is someone who might like to explore possibilities, that could be interesting." (Interesting to whom?)

**Me:** "I note your comments about paying for woodland management advice/work but I'm afraid I only do *pro bono* work for charities or not-for-profit organisations. Even then, I usually expect to have my expenses covered. I'm sure you'll understand that I - like any other professional - can't work for free" (and why the hell should I?).

**LO** (bet she doesn't expect free advice from her solicitor, private doctor or gardener): "Yes, I fully understand. (No you don't) I was thinking more of any greenwood enthusiasts." (ie, a random person who's going to give you unqualified advice that may be absolute rubbish, but it will at least be free!)

**Me:** (Absolutely FUMING but remaining polite) "I and my professional colleagues working in coppice and woodland restoration definitely class ourselves as 'greenwood enthusiasts'. "Many of us work in this industry exactly because we care about the environment, and the preservation and promotion of heritage greenwood arts and crafts. It's certainly not a well-paid field, like so much in the environmental sector. We take it up for the love of it - but we still have to pay our bills. "We make our living from managing, harvesting, working and making products from green wood. Most of us have trained for years to gain the qualifications and practical skills needed to both manage the woodland professionally or to learn how to make beautiful products from green and seasoned timbers. "Do have a look at the Dorset Coppice Group or the National Coppice Federation's website and you will see the exceptional work that we do. You will see that we run courses too - ensuring the next generation of heritage artisans have the knowledge to keep managing our historic woodlands for their important ecosystems and to preserve the associated arts and crafts. Beware amateur greenwood "enthusiasts" - indiscriminate felling in your wood could cause serious damage!

"Best regards (Not really!) Tean Mitchell"

Unsurprisingly, no more was heard from this landowner. I used to do a free site visit and short report for free on the understanding that I would get the management work... but it seldom, if ever, turned into a fee. So, I stopped. I'd like to encourage you all to do the same. As the advert says: "You're Worth It!"

Tean Mitchell



## Creating new coppice

*A summary of a discussion held at the 2022 Gathering*

Guy Lambourne (MAMSC chair and East Anglia Coppice Network) suggested this discussion because he had been asked to advise a Forestry England officer on the creation of around ten hectares of hazel coppice within a very much larger, proposed plantation in Buckinghamshire. After talking to several members of NCFed groups, he compiled some guidance notes which had, according to FE, proved helpful. He has since been asked to take part in the official public consultation on the woodland creation project. One immediate outcome of his attempts to find out what's known

is that we don't know much!

Given the short time available at the Gathering, the discussion focused on the general areas that need to be looked at without going into detail about any individually. Guy provided a suggested list of headings (drawn from his previous notes), that were discussed in turn. This focused on hazel because that's where most participants' experience lay.

### Site location

Generally there's not much choice of a new plantations' location  
Within a wood, future coppice coupes should



Image: Jane Lambourne

*Catch them young...*

be located to maximise production (see below) and on the best soils possible. The Bucks example (over 40 hectares of proposed mixed woodland planting on county farms land) placed coupes under electricity cables making best use of otherwise difficult ground.

### Area

As large as possible  
Minimum area to provide worthwhile productivity might be 4 acres (1.6ha) but better at 7 acres (2.8ha) or multiples thereof. Possibly 20 acres (8ha) if growing other species for firewood.

### Species and stock

Discussion focused on hazel  
Other species mentioned for firewood/charcoal – sweet chestnut, hornbeam, alder, birch, *Robinia pseudoacacia*

### Source of stock

We will need very large quantities of plants and their quality (for cleaving rather than nut production) needs to be good. Hazel doesn't take from cuttings successfully and layering is slow and not suitable for mass propagation. Nut collection is probably impractical because of squirrels (although complete squirrel control is possible) and vulnerability to predation when germinating. Nut collection doesn't

guarantee production of good offspring so micro-propagation could be the best solution but funding for this could be a challenge.

### Spacing of plants

For hazel – somewhere between 1 and 2m, perhaps 1.8m

### Planting design

Should create:

Equal sized coupes

Same species mix and spacing across coupes

Good access - to each coupe without the need to pass through other coupes. Best on surfaced tracks to coupe side, but grass rides will do

### Time to first cut

Hazel – opinion varies – 3-7 years. There is also debate about timing for a first cut to encourage multi-stemming. A second cut to promote more stem production could be beneficial after another short period. Thenceforward, 5-8 year rotation depending on needs of worker and the product/s they intend to sell. First productive cut is unlikely before ten or more likely twenty years.

Other species – no experience was available within the group

### Standards (in hazel)

Various opinions but majority didn't want standards in hazel

### Protection against predators

Agreed this is essential

Fencing possibly best option but difficult to maintain and expensive to build  
Discussion re. control of deer and squirrels, the latter is essential for some tree species

### Information/consultation

Agreed that this is desirable to explain the process of coppicing especially in plantations that are open to the public  
This is an opportunity to get the coppicing message across to public

Guy suggests this discussion might form the basis of the production of some best practice guidelines to encourage anyone considering creating new woodland to include coppice in the design.



Image: Guy Lambourne

*...same plantation, 21 years later*

**If you have experience of planting trees for coppice, including long-term economics (not touched on here) and might be able to get involved, please contact Guy - [info@wassledine.co.uk](mailto:info@wassledine.co.uk)**

*Tean Mitchell*

## Forestry England Contract for Coppice

In July 2022, we were approached by Forestry England (FE) who asked us to view some sites that might be suitable for coppicing. This started the ball rolling for what in the long term, could be various coppice sites available for DCSG members to work. We are very much in the initial stages of building a working relationship with FE. The larger sites require a more complicated contract set up but we were offered a 'Service contract' to cut a small site (just shy of an acre or 0.4 hectares). The site had been cut eight years previously and fenced.



Image: Devon Coppice and Small Woods Group

James and the crew

I'm very pleased to say that despite what turned out to be very short notice to get the final organisation done, we managed to get a crew together and cut the plot. Some seven people were paid at a reasonable rate for cutting the plot over two days. We now have lots of lying timber for which we are negotiating a separate 'Sale Contract'. We have a fair bit of processing still to do with various species and timber sizes. There are plenty of birch tops, potentially for besoms, excitingly some sweet chestnut, some of which has been earmarked for cleft gates, plenty of charcoal fuel and there are plans to make faggots from the brash.

All of this is a logistical learning hill, for example trying to find a market for faggots or fascines for waterways restoration (there have been positive sounds through Forestry England's network). We are also hoping, when we're a bit more organised, that we will be able to invite members for some workshops or similar but this is pending negotiations with FE. In the meantime if you have an interest in materials for specific projects then do get in touch. We need to cover the sales contract and any excess could go towards boosting DCSG funds.

We have much to learn with regards how to manage these contracts and subsequent management of the processing although as we grow and build teams and networks for products and raw materials this will get easier. We are lucky that our contact at FE is very open to building this relationship. It is very much a learning experience for them too, being more used to dealing with bigger harvesting operations. There are no FE procedures for some things

that are essential for coppice workers, long term leasing being one important example. This 'service contract, then sale contract' is a great bridge for us. To be paid to cut negates the usual situation of cutting at a loss in the hope of securing the longer term increased value of that cutting.

The interest from Forestry England came about after attending an in-house coppice conference at Westonbirt where Brian Williamson, who has been renovating hazel coppice there, delivered sessions on the benefits and potential for coppicing. It's good to see that Brian's work and that of NCFed have linked through with us delivering work opportunities here in Devon. As far as I know we are the first region to make a partnership with FE on the back of this conference; fantastic for such a young group. We look forward to being able to share the format with other regional coppice groups.

In all, this is a great opportunity for us and ticks many of our aims. The committee are excited to continue to progress these opportunities and build a crew of skilled coppice workers who otherwise would have difficulty accessing land.

If you are interested to be on the Coppice Crew list please contact Jo at:  
[devoncoppiceandsmallwoodsgroup@gmail.com](mailto:devoncoppiceandsmallwoodsgroup@gmail.com)

James Dyson, DCSG Chairman

***"I really appreciated this opportunity to work with more experienced cutters... Particularly as a woman, getting into forestry can sometimes feel intimidating. The team were very understanding, encouraging and welcoming."***  
**Rachel**



Image: Devon Coppice and Small Woods Group

## Food production in coppice

The current demand for food produced using environmentally friendly methods provides coppice workers with an opportunity to increase profitability. Regenerative agriculture, forest gardening and permaculture are all terms which cover different scales and elements of the same practice - environmentally friendly land management. All use observations of natural patterns and copy the most productive of these to produce crops. These skills are at the heart of coppicing and can be expanded to incorporate food production.

At its most simple, hazel coppice can provide hazelnuts alongside wood and whilst most aren't bred for nut production they can produce a viable nut crop. Hazelnuts can be used whole or used in a wide variety of products such as pesto and confectionary, or even pressed to produce an oil which is as healthy as olive oil. The waste products from processing - husks, shells and discarded nuts can be used as a biomass fuel.

But why stop at harvesting the nuts? Many coppices contain standards so why shouldn't these be fruit trees? The most productive parts of the coppice are on the edges and shortly after cutting. Using this edge effect, or sudden introduction of light following a cut, is the basic principle of forest gardening and a key principle in permaculture. So, as coppice workers are already establishing forest gardens and using the basic principles of permaculture it requires a relatively small step to produce edible crops.

Many will find bramble thickets in coppiced woodland. These could produce a crop but if they were replaced with commercial thornless varieties, they would provide a more pleasant experience during harvest. These could be trained along fence lines to make cropping easier and are relatively low maintenance.

Wild garlic is a valuable crop that can easily be spread throughout a coppice to provide an income during spring. Wild garlic worth several hundred pounds can be harvested in an hour, whilst maintaining a healthy plant population for future years. Excess can easily be preserved (maybe wild garlic pesto using hazelnuts and hazelnut oil) to provide a sustainable income.



Shiitake mushroom growing on a log



An adder of value to a coppice business? An elm oyster mushroom

During coppicing many will have wood that is only suitable for firewood but how about inoculating these logs with gourmet fungi such as *lions mane*, *chicken of the woods*, *shiitake* or *oyster mushrooms*? These logs can provide a valuable crop that can be sold fresh or dried, each log converting up to ten percent of its weight into fungi each year for many years to come. This is ideal for shorter coppice cycles as the logs could be replaced every 7 to 10 years as the coppice is cut.

It is possible to introduce livestock into coppice, creating a *silvo-pastoral* system. Sparsely populated coppices could be grazed by sheep or cattle to provide fertiliser whilst benefiting from the shade and additional feed. Damage to trees would be managed by regular rotation. More traditionally, pigs are used in woodlands and will gladly remove any nuts or fruit. Pigs are diggers so it is not advisable to keep them in one place too long if growing crops such as wild garlic.

A more manageable livestock option is to use poultry. Chickens and turkeys are naturally forest fowl. They will happily browse between the trees, eating insects which could damage trees and nuts, and will provide eggs, meat and nitrogen rich fertiliser.

All of these options are of course dependent on the coppice type, and the amount of effort required varies, but every coppice should be able to produce a food crop. The Victorians even coppiced their fruit trees so they had fruit and wood production. I am actively experimenting with different combinations in our coppices of hazel, sweet chestnut and oak as they become established here in West Yorkshire, so would value any observations from those of you with more established woodlands. I am happy to share our findings if anyone wants to start food production in their coppice.

Darren Roberts  
Regenerative Innovations  
darren@regeninnov.co.uk

Instagram @warland\_ecogrowing).

Based in Todmorden, West Yorkshire, I am working with farmers, landowners and individuals to increase biodiversity, resilience and profitability of their land through permaculture principles.

## Beyond the bean pole

### New markets for coppice products

Tradition can serve us well, with time-worn customs, rites and practices unifying us or showing us good ways of doing something. Coppicing is by nature a traditional heritage craft, with traditional products like bean poles, hurdles, and hedge laying stakes and binders. But sometimes we need to see beyond tradition to help keep a craft alive.

Joe Weaver of Wye Coppice CIC specialises in sustainable woodland management for conservation and biodiversity, working around the Wye Valley, Gloucestershire, Somerset and Bristol. He has been selling coppice and coppice restoration products since 2010. His main product, currently, is charcoal, prior to which he had a thriving firewood business centred around Bristol.

“We do also make hedging stakes and binders – which are great because hedge layers generally want a few hundred at a time – as opposed to gardeners who want a handful of beanpoles and pea sticks,” he explains. “In the woods I’ve worked in this area, I’ve never had the quality of hazel for good hurdles. We do a lot of coppice restoration, so the poles can be quite large diameter.” He admits that bean poles are a good advert – reaching out to gardeners and spreading the word about coppicing. Barbecue charcoal may reach even further with its message about sustainable, home-grown wood. “We’re very happy to provide all these products, but with

a team of woodland workers who need to make an income, we’re always on the lookout for novel markets for the wood we cut.” He continues. “We’ve built up a thriving charcoal business and had a few good orders lately for faggots, but last year also turned up a couple of useful new buyers.”



*A curved length of wood for a travois – a sort of horse-pulled trailer*

company. They were filming an adaptation of *The Winter King*, a novel by Bernard Cornwell. Cornwell is synonymous with medieval drama – his *Saxon Stories* was serialised as *The Last Kingdom* on the BBC and Netflix. *The Winter King* is in a similar vein, inspired by Arthurian myth, Druidic lore and Dark Age legend. The sets required a suitably medieval ambience. Enter our local woodsman and coppice restoration protagonists, Joe Weaver and Wye Coppice. *Bad Wolf* asked Joe for large volumes of charcoal and pole wood, as well as

rough planks (sourced from a local mill with links to Wye Coppice) – and even brambles!

“They got my number from the British Charcoal Makers Directory. And then they were on the phone every other day! They’d call up asking for 20 of this, 50 of that, dumpy bags of charcoal... It could be challenging because they wanted things quickly, maybe the next day, and sometimes the specifications were a bit unclear – but they were generally happy with what they got. And we charged a bit of danger money for the eight dumpy bags of brambles!” Pleased with Joe’s ability to come up with the goods in a timely fashion, the production company returned to him for more and more wood.

“I did have to say no to some requests. Toward the end the cutting season they asked for 20ft (7m) poles that we couldn’t supply, for instance. They also asked for some very specific curved lengths for a travois – a sort of horse-pulled trailer – which we did find after hunting around. (They’d asked for something like a 30 degree curve on a 4m pole.)” Coppice products for film sets is not the only novel market



*The Prickly Pear guys collecting long poles for tents*

that turned up last year. Joe was also approached by a stretch tent firm who were looking for a home-grown alternative to bamboo poles. “The tents use long poles from about two to five metres,” explains Joe. “The firm wanted to reduce their carbon footprint and give some unique character to their tents, which are hired for everything from weddings to festivals. “They were really keen to support local businesses rather than importing bamboo and made a sizeable order to see them through the summer. They’re also looking to offer our poles with tents that they lease and sell – so the relationship is likely to be ongoing rather than just a one-off.”

Wye Coppice isn’t going to ditch traditional products, but it’s great to know that there are other uses for the wood cut by this sustainable small business, to bolster income from contracts and support its team of woodland workers. The springing up of new markets for home-grown, sustainably produced pole wood and other products is great news for woodland workers and the environment.

*Joe Weaver, Lead Consultant Forester, Comprehensive Woodland Management & Wye Coppice CIC*

Tel: 07931 695104 [www.josephweaver.co.uk](http://www.josephweaver.co.uk) [www.wyecoppice.co.uk](http://www.wyecoppice.co.uk)

# A View from the Loft:

Richard Lofthouse



It's been a funny year down in the woods, for me. Russia's invasion of Ukraine last February, has got mixed up with my coppicing activities in the UK, while on my visits to Ukraine I found myself discovering a different, and compelling forest craft.



Richard's Ranger - destined for Ukraine

It all started with me discovering car4ukraine.com. This brilliant group of young Ukrainian professionals, all volunteers, were appealing for pick-up trucks from the UK farming community. So I bought an ex-arborist (i.e. dented) Ford Ranger in January and drove it 2000kms to a volunteer-manned workshop in the western Ukrainian city of Lviv in early February. You hand over your V5 at the border and from there on you're uninsured and the truck belongs to the army. A nice little adventure, you could say. In the workshop, the trucks get painted army green and armoured with 10mm steel plate, about 300 kgs in total, inserted into the doors and around the engine bay. They then go straight to the frontline where the average service life is about 3 weeks.

Thing is, I loved that Ranger and filled it with tree limbs and logs myself, in the month I owned it before I gave it away. So I was sad to hand it over and even sadder that war is such an abominable waste.

Back in the UK, I felt compelled to do it all over again, so next up was a Nissan D22, single cab long-bed, 53-plate, with a nothing-much 174k miles on the clock and a load liner so fractured that it bore six sycamore seedlings growing out of compacted soil. This one was the hedge layer's dream and I knew I had a job to complete before setting off east again. So it was duly laden with stakes and binders from Simon Watson near his wood in Hampshire, and thence to an overstood blackthorn hedge in Thame, Oxfordshire.

Come April, it was the Nissan's turn to be driven to its death, and again I was sad.

This time I drove the extra 9.5 hours from Lviv to Kyiv, and it's around western Kyiv that you encounter extensive arboreal forest dominated by silver birch and oak. There by

the highway at polite intervals were many forest workers with makeshift stalls selling forest products I had never seen before.

My Ukrainian interpreter, a woman called Ljudmila, told me that they were selling:

1. Bunches of oak leaves for aromatherapy in a sauna. It is well known that the tannins in oak prevents a high blood pressure in a hot sauna.
2. Birch juice tapped straight from the tree, well known to contain minerals and antioxidants, such as manganese and magnesium
3. Home-made mustard
4. Preserved jars of pickled mushrooms harvested from the forest.

In and around these same forests there remain huge numbers of Ukrainian soldiers dug deeply into trenches, which you can see from the same highway.

I can honestly say that it was utterly surreal to observe these two activities, one peaceable, the other about brute survival, carrying on simultaneously, while the actual frontline is now hundreds of kilometres to the east and south.

The trauma that is so freshly in mind – and I was taken to see a detritus of tanks and mass graves later – is all around this same approach to Kyiv. It seems like a miracle that the Russians didn't conquer the city.

You're expecting me to sign off with some sort of closing quip but I have none to offer. I was genuinely delighted by my unexpected encounter with a different forest tradition. I was also full of troubled dreams having been taken to a freshly dug cemetery, another sort of forest comprising hundreds of flags and other insignia, flapping disconsolately in a cold wind while huddles of widows and other relatives stood, respecting their husbands, sons and brothers, killed by Russians fighting a barbaric and illegal war against a sovereign state.

If you know of anyone with a roadworthy pick-up truck that could be donated or sold for low money, drop a line to [ivan.oleksii@car4ukraine.com](mailto:ivan.oleksii@car4ukraine.com).

Richard Lofthouse, NCFed's Press Officer



The detritus of tanks all around Kyiv

Contact Richard at [newsletter@hedgelayering.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@hedgelayering.org.uk) for hedgelayer advertising, and for NCFed business to [press@ncfed.org.uk](mailto:press@ncfed.org.uk)

# Tried & Tested

## Wood chisel for rotary hammer drill

Ok, I know the idea of using a rotary hammer drill with a wood chisel will go against the grain (sorry, no pun actually intended here!) for many traditional green woodworking craftsmen, but in this day and age there is a place for every type of kit if it saves time, money and muscle power.

For me, the latter reason was what prompted me to look for and eventually buy this chisel. I was working on a project for the garden at home that involved a lot of housings being chiselled out of some sweet chestnut poles that were to be used as floor joists. A historical wrist injury decided to rear its ugly head not long after I had started, with a wide hand chisel and mallet. Next day, my wrist was telling me to lay off those particular hand tools for a few days. So I did. Cue an internet search!

I recalled seeing ages ago that you could get a wood chisel for a rotary hammer drill. There didn't seem to be a lot of choice out there when I looked (mmm... what does that tell you!) but I eventually tracked down a bevel edged chisel manufactured by Makita. The product description reads "... ideal for fast, rough stock removal when used with rotary hammer drills..." There was a choice of 20mm or 30mm wide blades. Depending on where you purchase from, the current price seems to be about £18.00 and £26.00 respectively. As always, you can get them half the price from that supplier named after a Brazilian river BUT they're not Makita. Just a cheap alternative brand - don't go there.

I opted for the 30mm wide blade. It has an overall length of 170mm and a working length of 110mm. It will fit all rotary drills that take standard SDS shanks. It arrived with a plastic protective sheath cap on the end, which is always handy, but it did need a bit of tickling up in the sharpening department as there were some burrs still left on the edge. No big deal though to sort that out. I have to say that using this chisel in a rotary drill, does what it says on the box. It does quickly remove stock and is ideal for that purpose. Using the drill on a hammer setting, you do have to keep your eyes on the ball otherwise it can quickly dig into the wood and you'll soon find yourself cutting into and beyond where you want to chisel out.

I've used this chisel many times now for roughing out housings in sweet chestnut, finished off with a conventional chisel and mallet. It's still sharp as a whistle. For the relatively small investment, it has easily paid for itself in terms of my time and my wrist!

Ps: as with any internet search you'll get a lot of unsuitable results cropping up. Expect to see SDS chisel bits for concrete (!) along with lots of bevel edge wood chisels... traditional hand ones!

Tim Roskell  
The Creative Chestnut Company



*"For the relatively small investment, it has easily paid for itself..."*



IMAGES: The images show the lower section of chestnut pole where an angle section has been cut out using the Makita chisel. (if anyone is wondering- the rest of the pole has had a quadrant slice removed, using a circular saw)  
All photos: Tim Roskell

# Book Review

## The Woodchip Handbook by Ben Raskin

If woodchip is not currently on your list of products, a new book by Ben Raskin "The Woodchip Handbook" might persuade you it's worth a look. The author is a horticultural professional who obviously cares deeply about how we look after our woodlands. His enthusiasm shines throughout the book, backed by serious research and knowledge - and an extensive reference list. He aims to show how there are all sorts of economic, practical and ecological benefits to both producers and users of woodchip as a much-neglected by-product of tree, hedge and woodland management.

For coppicers, in-cycle coppice may not produce enough brash to make chipping a worthwhile process, especially if you already use it to make fascines or faggots or dead-hedging. But, if you are involved in a restoration project where there's a huge amount of brash, plus small-bore material to be processed, chipping might be worth thinking about. For those without a chipper, the investment may not be worthwhile so hiring could be an option. Chipping might

reduce your brash handling time significantly if it's a waste product for you.

**"And, of course, coppice brash is exactly this sort of material."**

(The Woodchip Handbook)

The book covers just about every possible source and use you can think of - and therefore a huge range of possible markets. Ben Raskin wants us all to join the Woodchip Supporters' Club... so you might come across a new idea that has you jumping up and down with joy - which is what he wants us all to do!

He describes a multiplicity of different types of woodchip depending on such criteria as branch diameter, species, bark only, chip size. There is an infinite variety and an almost complete lack of agreed standards.

Ben sings the praises of ramial chipped wood (RCW) which appears to be one form that does have a specification and a higher value than other types. This is small chip made from branches less than 7cm diameter. It has a softer structure and higher nitrogen content than chip made from larger, leafless older stems. You might be surprised to hear about its all-round usefulness in gardening, farming, forestry, food growing... the list is apparently endless. And, of course, coppice brash is exactly this sort of material.

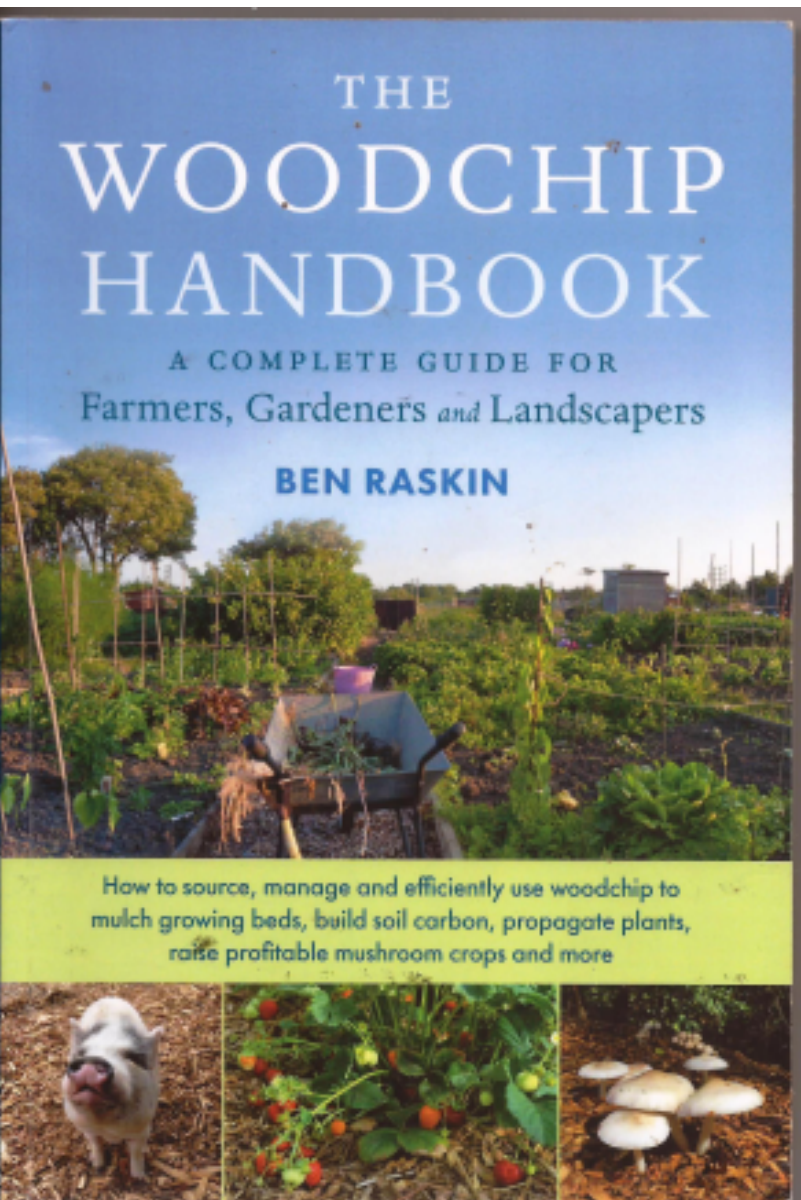
He cites research that dispels some of the myths about woodchip, such as its reputation for preferential nitrogen uptake in competition with plants. This is shown, in most cases, to be unfounded. He uses case-studies to demonstrate where woodchip is delivering significant benefits to users. He provides lots of numbers too. These may be of particular interest to estate managers and farmers, encouraging them to see woodland and trees as a woody asset, rather than just a management cost.

Ben is humble about his own expertise and happy to acknowledge gaps in his knowledge but he has obviously done his research. One slightly odd inclusion is the first photo. Its caption says "hazel coppice" but it looks like a line of short-rotation willow. If it is hazel, I have to assume that the weird half-pollard cutting height and form is because it's being grown for "fuel", rather than any normal coppice products and that they don't want the stools to increase in size - which may be fair enough, given the book is about woodchip and not rods!

Having discovered the wonder of woodchip myself some years ago, I can highly recommend reading The Woodchip Handbook to see if you, too, might find a way to add woodchip to your products list, or just take some home and put it on the flower beds or the veg plot... that's what I do and it's brilliant.

The Woodchip Handbook by Ben Raskin. Pub. Chelsea Green Publishing. £20.00

*Tea Mitchell, Sustainable Coppice Partnership*



# Obituaries

## Ernest William Steel

25th Nov 1936 - 19th Jan 2023



Ern at 17 or 18

Well, what can I say. "The passing of a legend" was uttered by several people on the news of Ern the Hurdle's passing, and I think that's a very good summary. He did not like fuss or excess, so part of me thinks - leave it at that. A greater part of me however thinks "No!". I am sure reference will be made to his name for many years in hazel cleaving circles. For those coppice workers to come who did not have the chance to meet him, I need to pen a few words for posterity. Considering the name Ernest (he was always known as Ern or Ernie, or, as he referred to himself "Poor old Ern"), either his mother had vast foresight or he grew into his name -

that was just how he was.

His whole life was in Farnham on the Pitt-Rivers Estate, much of it spent within a one-mile radius. A very "Thomas Hardy" image. Ern was a Dorset Man through and through. A good summary of his life can be found in James Crowden's book "Dorset Man" ([jamescrowden.co.uk/product/dorset-man/](http://jamescrowden.co.uk/product/dorset-man/)), with Ern's words extracted and recorded by James in 2005.

Pete Etheridge's tribute on the Dorset Coppice Group Facebook page is an excellent read and the article by Keith Hatch - published in the Agricultural Workers Union magazine (Ernie the fastest hurdle maker in the west) is a parody of Benny Hill's No.1 hit "Ernie the Fastest Milkman in the West". For those not of an age to remember the song, it's also a good read! Ern must have approved as it hung on his front room wall. At the funeral, it was in a proper frame on top of the box.

Ern's Funeral was held at Salisbury crematorium on Friday 3rd March 2023. Over 100 people were in attendance including Ian Steel and family and many coppice workers and woodsmen. There was much talk of Ern and his achievements. Ern's family were taken aback by the number of people he knew and the esteem in which he was held, and especially that Mandy Staple had travelled all the way from Suffolk to be there.

On Sunday 12th March 2023, a celebration of Ern's life was held at the Living Classroom, Bonsley Wood. Jackie Broomfield gave a heartfelt "He will be missed speech". Pete Snelson commented on what Ern's mentoring had meant to him in his early days in the coppice industry.

Glasses and mugs of dandelion and burdock were raised to an absent friend.

I reflected on various stories. For one how, when Dorset Coppice Group was newly formed 20 years ago, Ern was interested but decided it "wasn't for the likes of him to splash out on membership". He was, however, more regularly at most meetings than some members! The then chair, Dave Partridge, took the view that he would prefer to have Ern's knowledge and input at a meeting than to scare him off for the sake of a tenner! The current Chair, David Ewers, formalised this arrangement by bestowing honorary life membership on Ern. The fruits of this decision were seen in the inspiration he provided to many in his speed - even in advancing years - at the hurdle and spar making competitions. If you knew a bit, or could do a bit, he would show you more - a true mentor.

My last memory of Ern will be at the Tollard Royal Cranborne Chase AONB spar making project. Ern kept asking when it was going to happen so that he could "check up on the nippers" (not many call me nipper today) and was interested that it would be the first hazel cut at Tollard Royal for a long time. The following day I received a phone call to say that Ern was in Odstock Hospital having fallen at home sometime after locking up for the night. Ern voted with his feet on the Thursday. He had always said that he would go when he could no longer support himself. He was a man of his word - his last working day, five days before, had been amongst the click of cleaving hazel, mentoring and inspiring the young.



Ern at NCFed's 2018 Gathering

Rest in peace 'Ern the Hurdle'.

Peter Jameson

A longer version of Pete's obituary of Ern Steel is available at <https://ncfed.org.uk/news/>

## Jilly Snelson

It is with sadness that we announce the passing of long-standing Dorset Coppice Group member, Jilly Snelson, on Saturday 14th January 2023.

Jilly, and her husband Pete, have been long-term members of the Group and, for many of us, one or either of them was our first point of contact with the Group.

Jilly was a lifelong advocate for heritage crafts and traditional skills - particularly drystone walling and hedge laying. While standing on the DCG Board, she brought wisdom and experience, not being scared to put us in our place when needed! Many of us will miss her clarity of thought and passion for the Group.

Alongside Pete, she was a regular on the show circuit; be that Stock Gaylard, 'Skills of the Hills' hedge laying competition and many others. There is no doubt that DCG would not be in the position it is in now without Jill's passionate input.

Pete Etheridge



## 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, co-operation 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, like-minded 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? Alternatively, there is now an option to join a holding group designed for anyone not in an existing group's area. Full details on the website.

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

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

