



THE COPPICE ASSOCIATION North West

www.coppicenorthwest.org.uk

Happy Felling Season!!

NEWSLETTER No 55 Winter 2017

Stott Park Earthburn 2016

The time between CANW earthburns seems to get faster and faster every year; it hardly feels like a month since we were wheelbarrowing a very similar looking pile of expired bobbin wood up the hill from The Mill to our usual recess between the ash trees above the beck.

I say "We", although I myself was suffering badly from a prolapsed disc and so resigned myself to pointing at logs with my not-quite-finished walking stick, occasionally saying "that one there" in order to make myself feel somehow useful. Fortunately, Anna & Stuart had come to help out with their 3 children Caleb, Naomi & Judah. They worked like ants carrying armfuls of logs up the hill, trip after trip. They also studied our burn intently, then went home to do several earth-clamps by themselves! Hywel, Flora and John assisted with the barrows & we had all the material we needed in place in no time. Dave arrived after a special turf buying mission in the morning. Then Mick brought up a tray of toasted teacakes & cups of tea, so we took a break to catch our breath and make a formal plan of the day.

The building procedure is as follows:

1. Stack the wood around the burn site, arranged according to size, so that it is accessible.
2. Build a chimney from evenly sized logs where the centre of the stack will be. We make it triangular shaped, and arranged so that the end of each log is on top of the next log so that it is entirely interlocked. This provides stability to the stack during the burn when it is constantly changing shape.
3. Mark on the ground the shape of the outside of the stack so that it ends up even on all sides.
4. Lean logs up almost vertically against the chimney ensuring even pressure on all sides as it grows. Then add a second tier to the stack at a slightly more reclined angle, which helps keep the turfs on.
5. Cover the logs in fresh bracken or ferns.
6. Cover the bracken in turf, leaving a hole in the chimney for lighting, and a flap of turf to cover the hole.

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Friday 10th February 2017**Moss and Heights Spring Wood Workday 10am till 4pm**

Clear scrub in the field, take out small beeches and lend a hand in Jack's coupe. Bring lunch and warm kit. Some tools will be available. If you've not been to MAHS before, directions to the site are on www.coppicenorthwest.org.uk/mahs.php

Also Friday 10th February 2017**CANW AGM****Jacob's join 5pm, meeting starts 6pm**

After the MAHS workday join come us at CANW's own AGM. Edward and Romola have very kindly agreed to host us again at Sprint Mill. Swot up on moths and bring your reading glasses for counting year rings in the natural history quiz. Time to make sure you're up to date with your subs.

Bring your own drinks if you want something stronger than tea. Bring a prize for the raffle extravaganza. Bring cash for raffle tickets. Arrive from 5pm (bring a dish to share). The meeting will kick off 6ish.

**Saturday and Sunday 6-7th of May****Weekend In The Woods 2017****Staveley-in-Cartmel**

Please note the change of week. WITW 2017 will be held the first weekend in May. For the first time EVER we will completely avoid clashing with the Bodger's Ball OR the Cuerden Valley Park wood fair, giving members a chance to turn May into one wild woodsy month. Updates on courses and bookings to follow.

RUSLAND HORIZONS WANTED: Conservation Volunteers

Rusland Horizons are setting up a practical conservation volunteer work party to bring new life to neglected woodland in the Rusland area every 2nd Wednesday of the month starting starting December the 14th. Expect coppicing, thinning, fencing, enrichment planting and more. Would you like to muck in or do you know someone else who would? Get all the details on: www.ruslandhorizons.org/getInvolved.html

BHMAT Promotion Film

You may have spotted Chris Maudsley filming at Woodland Pioneers 2016. He has been putting together a beautiful film about the Bill Hogarth Memorial Apprenticeship Trust. Have a peek here: <https://vimeo.com/chrismaudsley>

BOBBIN WOOD NEWS

For everybody wanting to supply bobbin wood: Stott Park Bobbin Mill are taking less wood this year, and request that it is of a higher standard.

Anyone with potential deliveries of newly cut coppiced wood should contact Tracy Shaw (Nutmeg) tracy.shaw@english-heritage.org.uk before any sale can be agreed.

As a reminder on the spec, Tracey says: "The mill needs freshly cut hazel, ash, birch and maybe a very small amount of alder. It needs to be as straight as possible and with as few as possible knots in the wood. Our lathes don't like knots! The diameter of the wood can be anywhere between 2 inches and 4 inches. Length is not too important as when the wood is delivered I will saw it into 3 foot lengths before it makes its way into the mill."

Biochar Burn at Bolton Cinder Ovens Bridge, Lancaster Canal

As a result of learning more about former cinder ovens by Bolton Cinder Ovens Bridge on the Lancaster Canal, the Friends of Carnforth Coke Ovens decided to start work to see if any traces of the former cinder ovens remain. First, permission had to be obtained from the land owner and, once that was done, the Friends Committee went to examine the site. It was decided that it was worth further examination. A lot of scrub first needed to be cut back and cleared. After it had been cut away, the scrub needed to be disposed of. Brian Crawley, the secretary of the group, is an experienced charcoal burner and made all the arrangements for holding a biochar burn on site.

Biochar is used in a number of ways in horticulture. It aids the drainage of clays, but also helps retain moisture as it is able to absorb its own weight in water. It can be used instead of peat and as a substitute for perlite, vermiculite or grit. Biochar can deter slugs when placed around various plants.

On Thursday 10 March a number of volunteers from the group turned up on the site and removed the large amounts of scrub down to where some old oil drums had been set up for the burn. Pieces were cut to a size to fit in the drums and fires were started in them. Once a fire had got well going in it, the drum was tipped over to lie on its side.

The thin strips of woody material, including holly, elder, bramble, ash and sycamore were then steadily fed into the fires in the drums where they gradually burned down to form biochar rather than burning away. Brian supervised the burn which lasted from 10.00 am until 4.00 pm.

The hot drums were then rolled over on the ground so that the fire and biochar was on the ground, but covered by the drum. The drums were then sealed to keep out oxygen and the fires left to extinguish and cool down. Next day, Brian returned to roll back the drums and collect the piles of biochar left behind.

Robert Swain 2016

Originally published in "The Messenger"



Brian adds more scrub to the fire.

Stott Park Burn 2016 continued

Then Dave poured embers down the chimney and we were off! The turfs were lifted back from around the bottom of the stack to allow air to draw in from outside & ignite the centre of the stack.

A sense of anticipation and apprehension always follows at this point. Will it catch? Did we build it well enough? It's too late now, so we'll just have to wait & see. Sure enough, smoke & heat haze starts to bellow out of the top of the chimney, which is then closed up with a layer of logs, bracken and turf.

The stack starts to breathe, taking on characteristics of a living being. Smoke seeps out from the bottom of the stack & spills along the ground in long white trailing dreads, only to suddenly turn and suck back in again as the fire draws in more air. After an hour or so the turfs at the bottom are closed up so that most of the air is excluded. A thick haze begins to form under the tree canopy and slowly spreads across the site, filtering the sunlight into eerie silver tones.



The hecticness of the build calms down, and life slowly begins to align itself with the pace of the meandering smoke that wisps out from under the turfs. Suddenly it feels as though last year's burn and this one are part of a continuum, through which we've never been home or done anything else in between. Time to catch up and make a rota.

Finding someone to cover the slot from 2am – 6am is surprisingly easy, in fact the hard part is actually going to bed at a time that ensures you've had enough sleep to do the daytime duty, such is the allure of the smoking pile and the company of friends. I find that I never want to risk missing anything and would stay up 24-7 if I were capable of it!



The conversation was quite charcoal focused to begin with featuring speculations on the practicalities of what we understand as 'trad' methods and how they would have been adapted to suit differing soils, terrain & woodland types. Brian had brought along inspiring films of earlier burns. We wanted to do more earthburns, gather more data, get more experienced and share this with more folks.

We've since had a geeky, open to all, CANW charcoal get-together at the Gilpin Bridge near Levens already, and the new date for the one in January will be in the email updates from your secretary.

A Dutch family who were staying nearby arrived to see where all the smoke was coming from. They were amazed to find that one of this weekend's colliers came from a village within 2km of their home in Noord Holland! Flora enjoyed a little *Nederlands spreken* & chatting about the European Charcoal Making Association and the work of colliers Heidi Moy and Doris Wicki and apprentice Noemi Auer in Switzerland. Our Dutch tourists returned for updates every day.

Our first night passed without major incident, though the stack had certainly changed shape by morning. Some patches had been needed in the night but since Dave had procured plenty of turf it was a simple case of laying on another slab to blindfold those menacing red eyes that stare out at you through the smoke filled darkness. Saturday also was surprisingly uneventful - we all remarked how 'well behaved' this particular burn was.

Now our smouldering heap was being so well behaved that at some point during Saturday afternoon we began to worry that perhaps it wasn't really doing very much. Sam opened up some turfs around the base to allow a little more air in & hopefully instigate some action. By evening a red glow could be seen through the open 'ports' on one side of the stack, so we closed these up & left the other side a little longer to draw the heat that way.

Mick provided a fantastic BBQ for us & we ate sausages until we could hardly move! Thanks again Mick! Later as the light faded I popped back to the tent for my guitar and found a car stopped on the road with the driver and passenger staring wide eyed at me, the passenger dialling a number into her phone. They expressed surprise at seeing a person emerge from the haze and asked me what was going on. I explained we were making charcoal and invited them up to see. "Oh", they said, "we thought the Bobbin Mill was on fire! We were just calling the fire brigade!" I explained that we'd already called them on Friday to let them know what we were doing & they drove away perplexed & bewildered.

Close to midnight a fierce red glow of embers appeared on the far side of stack. We downed our musical instruments and set about dropping the turfs back again round the bottom of the stack in the knowledge that the heat had reached the outer layer of the stack. And then back to guitars & banjos, singing our hearts out to the accompaniment of tawny owls and the occasional hiss or crack from the converting timber.

Sunday was a foggy day. Not so much due to weather or smoke as to a severe lack of sleep. I had stayed up with Jack & Sam until daybreak. We'd all forgotten who's shift it was supposed to be, but it really didn't matter since none of us wanted to be anywhere else. By the time Flo and Brian arrived to relieve us we were pretty much spent & crawled away to our respective sleeping bags.

By the time I crawled out again Rusland Horizons Launch Day was in full swing. Tony had set up his leather working stall, Lorna was making oak swill baskets, Gareth had a portable forge going, and Jack was hewing a beam (making impressively accurate cuts for someone who couldn't possibly have had more than a couple of hours of sleep). The event was well attended by visitors & we had lots of interest at the CANW burn.

It was also a steam weekend at The Mill, where the massive old boiler is fired up and the belt-driven lathes are powered in the traditional manner. This is a real treat and not to be missed – the old technology is seriously beautiful, and gives an awe-inspiring sense of power.

At around 11am we were ready to begin shutting down the burn. Brian has worked out it takes 40 gallons of water, injected into the stack by means of a length of pipe with a poker through the middle. Once raked open the residual heat evaporates off the water leaving bone-dry yet largely extinguished charcoal. So dry that the pieces 'chink' together with a sharp crisp sound like little bells.



John raking open the charcoal. Glowbusters Flora and Wilson extinguish burning coals.

Any smouldering coals are finely sprayed with a little extra water so they can be bagged safely. Initially, net bags are used which allow the final evaporation of water and any hot bits can be spotted before they grow into a BBQ-in-a-bag that would likely take your shed down with it! Later all will be transferred to paper charcoal sacks for sale at Stott Mill.

And what a haul it was! Thanks to everybody, grown-ups and kids who came out to help bagging up. We had a record year last year but we topped it this year – hardly any brown ends (not fully converted logs) at all, and an impressive pile of charcoal.

After quick clear up of the site & packing up of gear we said our goodbyes to Mick & Nutmeg & set off for home, driving very slowly & carefully. It always feels weird to re-enter society after several of charcoaling in the woods & I find I'm looking forward to next year before I've even arrived home...

Duncan Goulder
December 2016

“Double, double toil and trouble; Fire burn, and cauldron bubble”

Weekend in the Woods 2016 provided the opportunity to learn how to make oak swill material i.e. the process of converting lumps of oak into strips of weaving quality. Lorna Singleton, a graduate of the BHMAT apprentice scheme and prize winning maker of beautiful woven wooden products, was our tutor for the weekend. Lorna's Recipe for perfect riven oak is as follows:

Ingredients:

- Freshly felled oak
10-15cm Ø
- Water

Tools required

- Axe and wedges
- Wooden maul and knockers (various sizes)
- Steel tank about 150cm long
- Froe
- Firewood
- Old towels
- Riving knives (various sizes)
- Heat resistant gloves
- Knife
- Cleaving brake
- First aid kit



1. Ensure the log is from the bottom 3 meters of the tree and free of significant knots or epicormic growth.
2. Cut log into suitable lengths of between 100cm and 150cm dependent on final product and size of tank.
3. Set the steel tank on some low supports and fill with water leaving space for the wood billets. Do not light until tank is loaded with wood.
4. Cleave the log in half through the centre with the axe and wedges, it should split easily, if not it may not be worth continuing as you may encounter further problems later in the process.
5. Using the froe, split each half into 3 or 4 billets using the cleaving brake to give pieces of equal thickness. Cleave the heartwood from the sapwood and retain the sapwood, discard the heartwood, this can be used for furniture making if required.
6. Immerse the sapwood billets in the tank, light the fire and bring to the boil for several hours, allow to stand overnight. In the morning relight the fire and boil again for several hours. The water and surfaces of the oak will turn a dark inky black.



Wilson and Mike riving using terry loop PPE.

7. Health & Safety Warning: Tie some 'heat resistant' towels around each knee to allow you to grip the hot billet between the knees for riving.

8. Carefully lift a 'cooked' billet from the tank and, holding it firmly between the knees, using a large riving knife and knocker start to split the wood lengthways. The split may be made radially (“lat ways”) or tangentially (“back ways”) depending on how the wood behaves.

9. Carefully continue to split each piece in half and half again carefully adjusting the rive, using the thumbs to pressure the thicker part to ensure the split does not run out, until you have oak strips that are an even width, flexible and suitable for weaving.

10. Final dressing can be undertaken with a knife held stationary on the knee moving the oak strip until it is flexible and an even thickness throughout, with practice you should be able to feel any minor variations in thickness and stiffness which can be trimmed to give uniform flexibility throughout the length.

11. The material is now ready for weaving and can be left to dry. Resoak when you are ready to weave.

Of course the secret to any recipe is how to use the ingredients and tools with skill to give the perfect outcome. This is where Lorna's years of experience and feel for how the material is riving shines through. Lorna guided us through the process and reviewed our initial attempts to rive thin swills, *'it will split again.'*

With practice it was possible to feel and control the rive pressuring the thicker section to prevent the split running out. Eventually, a pile of riven material to a standard suitable for weaving started to accumulate.

Could we repeat the process? Yes, I think so provided we could source the right material and find a big enough tank.



Dennis using clothespins to secure the weave.

There was also time to weave some simple baskets, (not the large oak swill which was a speciality of the Furness area) to get the feel for how supple and workable the riven material is.

If you get a chance to try it out, have a go. Look out for future courses at lornasingleton.co.uk (or email contact@lornasingleton.co.uk). It's amazing to see how a solid rigid tree trunk can be transformed into a supple thin strip suitable for weaving into swill baskets.

Thanks to Michelle, Simon, Mike, Dan and Dennis and of course Lorna for their advice and support throughout the weekend.

Wilson Irving, June 2016



Training & Courses



Saturday 14th January 2017

Bench and Stool Making with Woodmatters

Make a rustic greenwood bench or simple stool using hand tools only. After a day's work your bench or stool will be ready to take home and will look fantastic indoors or out. Ro and Gareth hold their workshops near Kendal or Windermere. Fee is £60 + £25 for materials. Kettle always on the boil and unlimited biscuits! Bring your own lunch. For more information and to book please visit

www.woodmatters.org.uk/course

Sunday 26th February

Bowl Carving with Woodmatters

Hand carve your own bowl or kneading trough from local greenwood. Learn traditional axe carving techniques. A busy day will be rewarded when your creation takes pride of place in your kitchen. Course location either near Kendal or Windermere will be confirmed at booking. Fee £60. To book or view other dates for this course please visit www.woodmatters.org.uk/course

Saturday 11th March

Practical Coppicing with Sam Ansell

Seen people out coppicing and want to know how to do this yourself? Learn the basics of coppicing in a woodland setting near Silverdale. Covering all aspects including: access, product selection, felling, dressing out, bundling & adding value. Fee £50. To book please email info@coppicecoop.co.uk or ring 07766 629533

Saturday 8th- Sunday 9th April

Hazel Hurdle Making with Sam Ansell

Traditional hurdle making is a fascinating skill. Learn how to coax and twist the hazel into a beautiful, strong, functional panel on this two day course near Silverdale. Fee £110. To book please contact info@coppicecoop.co.uk or 07766 629533

A Fireside Book Recommendation ***The Worm Forgives the Plough***

A book which first comes to my mind when I think about inspiring 'nature writing' is *The Worm Forgives the Plough* by John Stewart Collis, which combines *While Following the Plough* (1946) and *Down to Earth* (1947).

The book is Collis' account of the workings of nature and the agricultural industry during World War 2. Though there's a current resurgence in the genre we call 'nature writing', I think its mega-valuable to look back at some texts from the last 100 years to draw on things that have perhaps been lost, and how some sentiments of the past can help us live with a greater respect and appreciation of the wonderful green around us.

The text encapsulates his curiosity and wonder when exploring a broad variety of subjects including ploughing, hedging, forestry, drilling, harrowing and also the creatures of the British landscape. The book is an accumulation of memoirs and meditative reflections on rural life. In the introduction Collis writes, "This book was written just before the corn-rick and the hay-rick were deemed unnecessary by modern methods. The change of scene followed rather swiftly. Thus this is the last book of its kind which can be written about England." In hindsight this change of scene was already happening while Collis was working. The chapters 'Tractor vs. Horse', 'The Machine-milker' and 'The Combine Harvester: The Leisure State' offer us Collis' insightful and often comical first hand experiences of the changes which were happening across Britain because of the wartime demand for produce.

In reading this book, we learn about how Collis came to learn and love a local landscape, and how through this he achieved a larger spiritual dimension in his life. I think its quite inspiring to consider the 'extraordinary in the ordinary' as Collis did: "There is no point gazing raptly into the future for paradise is at our feet." This text from over sixty years ago can perhaps help to revive our great tradition of living, working and respecting nature as we once did, to live in a greater harmony with the land. Give it a read.

Jack Holden
November 2016

Woodland Delicacies No. 5. **Deer Liver Pâté**

Deer liver doesn't keep in our house. The hunger-inducing job of butchering is always rewarded with liver, cut on the bias, flash fried. It's the sort of food that disappears by just looking at it. Here is a luxurious recipe for the lucky folk who end up with livers in their fridge or freezer.

Always rapidly chill fresh liver for the best taste. Educate yourself about parasites and other zoonoses. Discard any livers with spots, discolorations, calcifications or cysts inside. Liver should look a smooth glossy dark red-brown.

You can make this pâté as fine, or coarse, creamy, shroomy, nutty or spicy as you would like your ideal pâté to be. Chop up about 500gr of venison liver. Bone out and grind 400gr organic pork shoulder and 100gr organic pork belly. In a large bowl mix these all together with an egg, a finely chopped and sauteed shallot, a splash of port and a torn up slice of bread soaked in cream. Add a good pinch of salt, crushed garlic cloves and cracked black pepper.

Now fry a spoonful of the mix in a hot skillet and try a bite. What would you like with it? A pinch each of fresh ground mace and allspice? A handful of chopped parsley and a sprinkle of thyme leaves? More salt? More cream? Nuts? 2016 was a great year for beech mast as far North as Warton Rectory. Whole hazelnuts? Dried porcini powder? As with anything served cold, go heavy handed on the seasoning.

Line a bread tin with super thin slices of organic pork fatback. It's easiest to slice frozen. Spoon in the mixture bit by bit and smear out evenly into all the corners to avoid air bubbles. Cover with sliced fatback. Cover with baking paper and tinfoil. Find something creative to use as an oven-safe lid and something equally oven-safe to weigh the lid down. Place the tin in a dish and fill with hot water reaching 2/3rds up the side. Bake 90 mins in a medium oven or until core temperature reaches 65-70 °Celsius. Rest one day in the fridge with weights on. Take out of the fridge at least an hour before flipping onto a board and serving with zippy cornichons and hot crusty bread.

Flora Abbes
December 2016

NEXT ISSUE: Please send any articles, pictures or drawings by April 15th to florisabbes@gmail.com
Thank you for sending your article's pictures separately.