



THE COPPICE ASSOCIATION North West

NEWSLETTER No 44 Winter 2010

The end of an era- Alan Shepley dies at 71



A typical pose for Alan in Estonia as he catalogues another photo.

Alan Shepley who was secretary of CANW for 13 years has died at the age of 71. Alan was widely known in coppicing and Conservation circles. Alan put a huge amount of his time into running the Association and although he had stood down as Secretary his drive, organisational ability, attention to detail and rye humour will be greatly missed. Brian Crawley has kindly produced a more in depth obituary on page 3.

AGM 7pm January 25th
Gilpin Bridge Hotel

Its the annual get together to officially re-elect the committee so if you want to join the committee this is your chance to join an increasingly vibrant committee and make a difference.

Its not all committee business however, there is one of Ed Mill's quiz or slide show and you are asked to bring along interesting woody objects and prizes for the highlight of the night 'the raffle'. Who knows it could be you, and usually is as there are quite a few prizes.

Weekend in the Woods
14th-15th May

The Weekend in the Woods event has been moved this year to May after being the third weekend in August for most of its existence. Last years event was a great success with full courses but the change in date means that we need everyone to push this event and get another full set of courses. Details page 5

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AGM

There will be an Annual General Meeting of the Association on Wednesday the 26th January 2011 at 7.00pm at the Gilpin Bridge Hotel, Lyth Valley, Cumbria.

AGENDA

1. Apologies

2. Minutes

- a. Minutes of the meeting held on 27th January 2010.
- b. Matters Arising from the minutes.
- c. Agenda review at Chair's discretion.

3. Report from the committee for 2010

- a. Chairs Report.
- b. Income and Expenditure Account.

4. Elections

- a. President.
- b. Committee.

5. Status of the Association

6. National Coppice Organisation

- a. Report from meetings and discussion so far.

7. Moss and Heights Spring Wood

8. Events 2011

- a. Damson Day – mid April, date tbc.
- b. Brown Robin 7/8 May with Cumbria Wildlife Trust.
- c. Weekend in the Woods 14/15 May.

9. Online presence

- a. Website.
- b. Facebook page.

9. A.O.B.

After the official bit there will be an Ed Mills Quiz, please bring woody items and memorabilia for dissection by the massed membership and prizes for the raffle (all proceeds to CANW funds). Bar meals are available at the erm... bar.

Obituary - Alan Shepley



Alan Victor Shepley MBE, BSc(For), MSc, DASE, MIBiol, MCIFor, FRGS departed from this world in the early hours of Sunday 3rd October 2010 aged 71. He died peacefully in his bed at home in Kendal after being sent home from hospital a few days earlier. An untreatable cancer, diagnosed just 5 weeks earlier, was understood to be the cause. He was cremated at Lancaster crematorium in a woven willow coffin.

Alan was born and brought-up in the Burnage area of Manchester and initially qualified as a forester at Bangor University. He lived and worked in various locations in the north of England, forging a successful career in education whilst largely pursuing his passion for the environment as a volunteer, a writer and an enabler. In 1989 he made the decision to give up his job in Southport and move to Kendal where he spent the last 21 years focussed on all things environmental. Overall he spent close on 5 decades involved in soil science, field ecology, forestry, conservation and countryside management, mainly in the Lake District. Throughout this time he was also teaching adult education courses, in recent years at Lancaster University. His personal interest focused on human impact on the natural environment, especially in respect of trees and woodland.

His first contact with the local coppice group was in October 1995 when he went, with his relatively-new-found-friend

Colin Simpson, to a meeting of the North West Region of the original national Coppice Association to talk to them about the Wood Education Programme Trust of which he was a Trustee and chief activist. Just over a year later he was to become the first secretary and a prime mover of the newly formed Coppice Association North West after the death of Mike Napton and the sudden demise of the national Coppice Association. His input to the new association was immense, resulting in a vibrant programme of events and useful interchange of information. Alan produced the much needed and valued publication 'Bill Hogarth MBE Coppice Merchant' from his hand-written manuscript after Bill's untimely death. The success of the CANW display at the Stott Park Bobbin Mill over many years owes much to the enthusiasm and determination of both Alan and Colin.

Major achievements were the continuance of Weekend in the Woods, previously run by Hay Bridge, and two extremely successful national coppice conferences run in the North West. These conferences were hugely helpful in networking between like-minded people from all parts of the country. The loss of his sparring partner Colin Simpson a few years ago was a great loss to him and he planted a memorial oak tree to him at his woodland plantation near Crook. Alan retired from secretary of CANW at the end of 2009 after thirteen years in the post but was unstintingly helpful to Sam Ansell who fortunately took on the onerous duties.

In addition to his work for the coppice industry Alan produced many texts on ecology and soils, wrote numerous guidebooks and articles and was editor of Cumbrian Wildlife. He was a vice-president of the Association of Countryside Voluntary Wardens and was awarded his MBE for services to the countryside. He will be sadly missed and our heartfelt sympathies go to his wife, Marian.

Brian Crawley

P.s. We are hoping to plant an oak sapling at Todd's Lot in honour of Alan on 4th March 2011 at 4pm .

Cumbria Wood & Forestry Festival

The festival year has gone past in a whirlwind of fun events, which was an absolute joy to put together - time truly flies when you're enjoying yourself! Edward Mills and Alan Shepley provided me with a couple of good examples to take my lead from: the festival opening at the Westmorland Show and the Coppice conference also at the show ground. In the process of putting the four later ones together I reacquainted myself with loads of people working with trees and got to know many more new ones, what a treasure to come away with!

My first event as the organizer, Time Honoured Trees at Trotters Animal Farm, did get off to a good start even though I only had about a month to prepare and the bridge to the site was still out of action because of flooding! Both teams from Grampus Heritage & Training and Trotters World of Animals did pull out all the stops to both literally put trees in the spotlights and figuratively got their importance across to people during the Solstice and Christmas period. All the facilitators/demonstrators made it easy for up to 500 members of the public to enjoy a fun day out. However, little did I know that I should have included smoke inhalation in the overall fire risk assessment, as I still claim that that was the trigger for me turning poorly – feeling shivery as I was getting up in the morning had clearly nothing to do with it – (hmm, hmm)! Henk, my husband, was kind enough to stand in for me in the afternoon, but even he couldn't stop the weather turning poorly as well and both rain and sleet put a damper on the tree lantern procession, the supposed highlight of the day!

Even so, people did take the opportunity to learn about past and present importance of trees, while enjoying themselves. As the snow set in that night the guided walks for the Sunday had to be cancelled, Christmas had truly come early!

I had stacks of time in comparison to get the Talkin Treemendous event on the go, not only giving me the opportunity to approach the day in a much calmer frame of

mind, but also develop the theme of 'Trees and health' in ways I've never done before.



So this time I engaged a nutritionist, forest cook, photographer, spiritual healer, musician and a health walk specialist to give the public the opportunity to engage with trees in ways they might not have done before (or might not have realized that they did). By mixing the 'health' providers in with other tree workers I trust that the 'health' message wasn't 'overcooked' and that all benefited from the opportunity to sell their 'wares'.

Organising the Trading with Trees event for the Westmorland Show was very different again. On a practical note we were naturally restricted in space, but on the plus side Christine Knipe and her team took care of all the promotion. Edward and Alan this time wanted to emphasize the commercial aspects of forestry and I had in mind to focus on the Green Man. Even though both ideas do not necessarily sit well together, we did manage to combine them by asking the two fellows from Storytree to link both aspects together; as it turned out I couldn't have asked for anyone better to pull this off.



This time I set myself the challenge to also put up a stall for Woodland Inspirations, but

as it was my first time, I knew full well that I needed support and therefore asked Jackie Dunne (Dunne Woodlands) whether she would want to share the space with me. Together we had a good time preparing for it, which included persuading people to let us borrow gazebos, etc., but on the day Jackie still had to take on the lion's share of manning our stall, so without her it would have failed dramatically! Like last year we had wonderful weather and the Show was very busy again - our section perhaps even more so, with about 6,000 people coming through! Only now do I realize how little chance people have to look around any of the other stalls, however close by!

Hot on the heels of Trading with Trees came the Green Wood Fair with a focus on 'Woodfuel' at Leighton Hall. Its grounds provided us with a gorgeous setting and the trees did themselves proud by showing their best autumn colours. I think there are enough Cumbrian firewood suppliers to fill the whole space all by themselves, but by incorporating as many other aspects of woodfuel that I could think off I hoped to ensure enough variety for the 1,000 or so young and old visitors to be entertained by trees and what we do with them. By paying homage to the Green Man again through the living statues I managed to book for the Fair, we must have pleased him, as the weather was actually very pleasant during the hours of the day, whereas both before and after, it rained!

All in all it is safe to say that I enjoyed the Festival year tremendously (I've seen this spelling so many times, that I can't spell it any different now!); any funding and admin hassle that we may have had is long forgotten, and any report writing left to do is no hard task as it will bring to mind time well spent with so many wonderful people all dedicated to trees and their specific trade, but as you can well imagine, it will always remind me of Alan, his enthusiastic chats about his desire for all people to 'get' trees, coppicing, woodland management and all that it entails; Wilf's seems pretty empty at the moment!

Iris Glimmerveen

National organisation progress

There have been some major steps forward in recent months towards setting up a National Coppice Organisation. It has not always been easy for the various different elements of the coppice sector to even discuss the issues, let alone come to agreement, and in this light I will venture to say that the recent meeting at the Greenwood Centre was a fine example of unity and harmony! Ok, so perhaps that is an exaggeration, but it was nonetheless very productive and positive.

There were 23 people around the table, with good representation from different parts of the country, and apologies from regions that were unable to be present. Two of the major stumbling blocks to the formation of an organisation have been concern over regional differences, and fear that certain parties will have disproportionate influence - and it is clear that folk are trying hard to overcome these issues. The meeting started with a summary of the recent coppice conference in the South East, which had invited delegates to describe some of the key issues affecting them. From this list of key issues it was suggested that a national organisation could be potentially effective in the following areas:

- exerting pressure to bring woods into management
- grant availability to support restoration and management
- support for new starters (and apprentices)
- establishing the need for restoration
- insurance, VAT, contracts, tax.

Also identified as important was the need to support local groups rather than undermine them, the need for good communication, and for data collection and mapping at a national scale. Around about this point, with the feeling being that plenty of talk had gone on but not enough action, it was proposed that we establish a national group to support the coppice industry. This was agreed unanimously. Excellent. Or maybe that was the easy bit?

To these ends, the meeting then set about forming a steering group (chaired by John Sinclair from Sussex and Surrey) to figure out the realities of it all. The steering group will be working to:

- Agree a name for the group
- Agree aims and objectives
- Agree and allocate initial actions
- Develop a constitution
- Arrange an AGM during August 2011 if possible to initiate the association.

So there you have it! Party in the woods in August! If, in the meantime, anybody has any comments or ideas relating to the national association, there will be a chance to discuss it at our AGM, or you can get in touch with Rebecca who will be representing CANW on the steering group.

Sam Ansell

Weekend in the Woods 2011

Chapel House woods ,

Staveley in Cartmel, Newby Bridge

Courtesy of the Sir John Fisher Foundation

Every year ,CANW presents traditional craft workshops aimed at both beginners and improvers. Each workshop is run by an experienced professional tutor and operates from 10am to 4pm each day. Some workshops carry a small extra charge for materials. This year the following workshops are offered:

Hazel hurdles with Rebecca Oakes

Traditional hurdle making is a fascinating skill and one that deserves to be preserved by future generations. Rebecca has been making hurdles for 16 years and can help you coax and twist the hazel into a beautiful and functional panel. There will be a £10 extra cost for materials on this workshop.



Trug Making with Bill Sanders

During the course you will make a "No 5 Garden Trug" using traditional hand tools and techniques. This will involve cleaving the sweet chestnut and dressing it out using a shave horse and drawknife to make the handles and rims of the basket. There will be a £10 extra cost for materials on this workshop.

Pole Lathe with Paula Keary

Experienced tutor and bodger Paula Keary will teach you how to turn wood using a variety of chisels to produce small but challenging items. There will be a £5 extra cost for materials on this workshop.

Stick Chairs with James Mitchell

Learn the techniques for creating a beautiful and functional stick chair with Kendal based coppicer James Mitchell. There will be an extra materials cost of £10-£20 (depending on amount and type of wood used) on this workshop.

Make a Shave horse with Twiggy

Experienced coppicer and crafts person Twiggy will guide you through the processes needed to make your own shave horse - an indispensable tool for many greenwood projects. There will be an extra £15 cost for

materials on this workshop.

Willow Weaving with Helen Elvin

Cumbrian coppice worker and crafts person Helen Elvin will show you how to make an oval shaped willow basket using a variety of coloured willows and hedgerow materials. There will be a £7 extra cost for materials on this workshop.

Longbows with Tony Saunders

Spend the weekend learning the techniques used for making a traditional English longbow with longbow historian and expert Tony Saunders. There will be no extra cost for materials on this workshop.

Cleft Gate Hurdles with Mike Carswell

Learn how to cleave ash and sweet chestnut into the component parts for making your own traditional gate hurdle. You can choose a traditional 6x4' pattern, make a few mini-hurdles or if you would like to fill a particular gap in your garden then bring along the dimensions. There will be a £5 charge for materials on this workshop.

Camping: Pitches on site, B+B's nearby.

Food: Vegetarian lunches will be provided. The cost of lunch and refreshments during the workshops is included in your fee. However, we ask you to provide your own breakfast on Sunday morning.

Saturday evening: There will be a barbeque on Saturday evening (bring something to cook) and a campfire - bring any instruments if you fancy a jam later on around the fire!

Tools: Tools and essential protective clothing will be provided. Wear work clothes and stout footwear and be prepared for a weekend in the woods in all weathers.

A booking form can be downloaded in PDF form from the CANW website www.canw.woodlandrecollections.org

Demonstrators sought for a coppice event

At Brown Robin nature Reserve Grange over Sands , 7/8th May

For more information contact Tony Saunders

On 07961 054114

Continued on page 7

Charcoal notes continued from back page

I feel quite confident that as long as the charcoal content of the soil does not outweigh the actual soil content, then there is an extremely low chance of having any negative impact. The charcoal is after all only pure carbon, and so cannot in itself cause any harm. If all else fails I will as least have my own personal carbon sink, helping to offset all those chainsaw emissions.

There is, however, a dark side to biochar. Bruges repeatedly warns of the dangers of biochar becoming an industrialised commodity, with vast areas of land used to grow mono-crops for the production of biomass for biochar. He also warns of the dangers of large companies using biochar to offset their own emissions, thus providing an excuse to create more emissions. Another worry is the carbon trading scheme suggested by the Kyoto protocol, this could encourage those with power to see biochar as a profit making substance, rather than helping the small farmers and producers to offset their own emissions.

A recent report published in *Nature* magazine entitled "Sustainable biochar to mitigate global climate change" has explored the potential for biochar to reduce the atmospheric concentration of CO₂. The researchers have been able to calculate the positive impact that biochar could have if all of the available land, currently deemed *unproductive*, be used to grow crops specifically for biochar production. This has raised a few eyebrows in the worlds of environmental campaigners, such as the African Biodiversity Network, Biofuelwatch and the Gaia Foundation, who together have produced a report of their own in response; "Biochar Land Grabbing: the impacts on Africa". These groups are concerned that articles, such as the one published by *Nature*, will encourage companies, driven by profit, to buy-up large areas of land in developing countries to grow vast mono-crops for biochar production. They believe that "Africa is a particular target for biochar, largely due to the commonly held perception that there is abundant land available waiting for development". The exploitation of developing countries for financial gain is nothing new, and fears that the rush to secure large carbon off-setting will probably become a reality as land becomes scarcer and the impacts of climate change become more widespread. Biofuels are already responsible for massive land-grabbing exercises in Africa, and the creation of vast mono-crops has a well-documented effect on biodiversity.

Bruges would like to encourage all of us to use biochar both at home and in the production of food, not to encourage large companies to make profit. He sees organic farming, together with soil improvement with biochar, the best way to mitigate climate change. The reality of peak oil, and also peak phosphorus,

means that large-scale mechanised agriculture is quickly becoming a dinosaur on the brink of extinction. The way to live sustainably is to live locally, and to practise small-scale industry, making local things for local people. It might be too late to stop climate change, but small-scale organic farming using biochar as a carbon-capturing method is one way of improving the situation.

One of the good things that may come out of this new interest in biochar is that it is quickly becoming a recognised product. Large companies, such as Carbon Gold (www.carbongold.com), are developing new biochar products for home use. But often their sourcing and need for unrealistic financial gain is built on ethically dubious grounds. So hopefully biochar will be heavily invested in by large companies in the hope that they might make lots of money from it, only to have their plans undermined by climate change and peak oil, thus leaving the small producers to fill in the gap they leave. I just hope that not too much damage is caused to the environment in the meantime.

Every charcoal burner in the UK is potentially producing charcoal fines and few of them are doing much with it. If you are interested in buying biochar for your garden just ask your nearest charcoal producer and they should be able to help. So I leave you with this message; improve your soils, support your local charcoal producer and offset your own carbon emissions all in one fell swoop – use biochar!

The Biochar Debate by James Bruges, Schumacher Briefing No. 16, published by Green Books

Sustainable biochar to mitigate global climate change by Dominic Woolf, James E. Amonette, F. Alayne Street-Perrott, Johannes Lehmann & Stephen Joseph, published by Nature Communications 10th August 2010.

Biochar Land Grabbing: the impacts on Africa. A briefing by The African Biodiversity Network, Biofuelwatch and the Gaia Foundation, November 2009

Mike Carswell

Charcoal Bags

Selway Packaging still have quite a few of the brown paper , green print charcoal bags (small and large size). They are threatening to charge the Association for the remaining bags they have in stock, so if you need charcoal bags for the new season please order them sooner rather than later. Selway can be contacted on:-

01189 462333

Charcoal Notes

Anyone who has been lucky enough to experience the joys of grading charcoal will undoubtedly be aware of the main tangible by-product in this process; charcoal fines. Charcoal fines are becoming increasingly fashionable in the "green scene" with quite a few new reports published discussing the merits of charcoal fines as a carbon-capturing tool as well as improving soil.

In 2009 *The Biochar Debate*, written by James Bruges, was published as one of the Schumacher Briefings. This book outlines the basics of charcoal use in the context of soil improvement and its potential for carbon capture. Bruges provides one example of a fourth-generation farmer, Pattu Murugesan, in southern India who alternately grows one year of rice paddy, followed by two years of bananas. The evidence is somewhat anecdotal, but Murugesan is convinced of the benefits of biochar after beginning to add it to his crops four years ago. When taking his rice to the mill he found piles of rice-husk charcoal, a by-product, and began digging it into his fields. He uses three to five tonnes per hectare during each banana season, and says that the char is still identifiable the following year. The result has been a reduction of 25% in fertilizer use, as well as a drop in the labour costs needed to spread the fertilizer. The bananas previously needed to be watered for two hours everyday, now only one hour is needed. The actual crop of bananas has risen from 9kg per plant to 13kg, an increase of 44%. The fruit also takes longer to ripen after picking, enabling transport to more distant markets where they achieve a higher price. Just to top it all off, Murugesan claims the bananas taste better too! The evidence has not been rigorously tested by scientists, but a happy farmer with lowered labour costs and higher profit margins speaks volumes. At least ten of Murugesan's neighbouring farmers are adopting his practice after seeing the evidence for themselves.

Bruges points out that the well-documented *Terra Preta* in the Amazon Basin is a fine example of the longevity of biochar in soil (with some people actually digging up this soil and selling it to gardeners in recent years). In that instance, the biochar was made from low-temperature wood charcoal along with bone and manure, therefore increasing the phosphorus,

nitrogen and calcium content. The ash content of the charcoal also helped to increase the magnesium and potassium. Adding pure carbon to soil alone merely acts as a medium for the absorption and slow-release of nutrients, it does not provide and nutrients itself. The recent experiments in Italy, for which Ian Taylor provided the charcoal fines, showed a yield increase of 25% on an organic wheat crop.

Bruges suggests that "charging" biochar before adding it to soils could speed up its effects and slow the potential detrimental effects, such as any nutrient deficiency caused in the time it takes for the biochar to absorb the nutrients in the first place. By adding biochar to an active composting system, nutrients can be absorbed into the charcoal before adding directly to soil. I have developed my own "charging" system at home; I keep a bucket with a tight-fitting lid in the garden, fill it up with charcoal fines, then urinate into it. When full of urine I empty the bucket into my compost heap, gradually turning the compost as per normal. When the compost is ready it will have about a quarter of its volume made up of "charged" charcoal fines – the high nitrogen content of urine also helps to break the compost down. I haven't been using this system for long enough to comment on its success, but adding urine to compost is nothing new and the last thing it will be doing is causing harm (apart from the odd smell).

My own experience has shown that the potential side effects of adding raw charcoal to soil are not apparent. Since the summer of 2008, I have been slowly adding charcoal fines to the heavy clay soil on my allotment. In the first season there was a noticeable improvement in the soil texture, helping to break up the large clumps of sticky clay. The crops, mainly legumes and cucurbits, did grow and yield well, but there was also a lot of good compost added. In the following two seasons I have continued to add charcoal fines as well as more compost and have noticed only improvements in yields and soil texture – no negative side effects.

Deadline for next edition

30th March

Any articles gratefully received, can be about anything vaguely wood related