Living Woods MAGAZINE

No.56 SUMMER 2020

NATURAL TRACTION

HORSES IN FORESTRY

+

PLANTING TREES woodland creation in action

MEET THE MAKER Jane Mickelborough

CONTENTS

Having written about the International Year of Plant Health in our last issue, it turns out that 2020 is likely be remembered as the year of human health. The restrictions on our lives have been alleviated slightly by a beautiful spring and we are grateful to all our contributors for a host of features in this issue, which range from horse logging to stag beetles, via woodland baking,

At the end of March, speakers at a Woodland Creation Conference in London spoke eloquently about what is needed to encourage more tree planting. John Lockhart summarises the opportunities for large-scale planting, while Jo Haywood writes about what her family has achieved in their one-acre plot south of Bristol.

Those who have recently found more time to devote to their hobbies will be inspired by the beautiful spoons carved by Jane Mickelborough, the subject of Meet the Maker. Dan Watson has provided basic guidance for absolute beginners.

We hope that all our readers will be able to enjoy woods and forests safely over the summer.

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COVER PHOTO
Horse logging, Weald Woodscapes

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@Woodland News

APF 2020 POSTPONED

The directors of APF 2020 hoped that Covid-19 restrictions would be lifted in time to hold the popular APF show in September, but given the continuing uncertainty, the organisers have postponed it until 23-25 September 2021.

APF is not alone – woodfairs due to take place throughout the summer have been cancelled or postponed until 2021. APF is undoubtedly the largest: it is the leading exhibition for the forestry, woodland, arboriculture, wood fuel and utility sectors in the UK, and attracts some 22,000 visitors over the three days of the show.

Exhibition Secretary Ian Millward said, 'It is with a very heavy heart that we made this decision, but it became obvious that there was only one sensible option and that was to postpone until September 2021.

'The show is the industry flagship event and everyone in the organising team is passionate about the show and want to make it the best we possibly can. We simply cannot stage the event this year to the size and quality our exhibitors, sponsors, visitors and ourselves want. We sincerely hope that in 12 months time the world will have returned to something much closer to normal and we can run the event as we all want.'

Visitors who have already purchased tickets can either carry forward their tickets to APF 2021 or request a refund. ***apfexhibition.co.uk***

RANDOM ACTS OF WILDNESS

Join in with the Wildlife Trusts' June campaign **30 Days Wild.**

Do one wild thing a day throughout the whole month – that's 30 simple, fun and exciting Random Acts of Wildness.

There are a variety of free resources to download, with separate packs targeted at care homes, children, schools and businesses. Packs include a photography guide, games and wallcharts.

action.wildlifetrusts.org

BRITISH WOODLAND SURVEY JUNE 2020

Sylva Foundation wants to hear from people about how they manage their woodlands, as well as their hopes and fears for the future of their wood.

Environmental change is already altering the ecology of our woodlands, affecting timber prices and productivity, impacting financial sustainability and more. Do you think some of these impacts may be positive as well as negative? Do you think you need better financial support or advice? Would you like to be better connected with others, and could information technology support you better?

This is your chance to have your say: visit **www.sylva.org** to take the **2020 British Woodlands Survey.**

Volunteers isolate to save thousands of young trees

A team of six people from Trees for Life have been voluntarily isolating at the charity's flagship Dundreggan rewilding estate in Glenmoriston, near Loch Ness in the Highlands since 23 March – to save more than 100,000 native young trees from being lost due to the coronavirus crisis lockdown.

'We were all set for another busy season of preparing thousands of young native trees for planting on the hills by our volunteers, when the coronavirus crisis forced the postponement of this spring's tree planting – meaning tens of thousands of young trees have not left our nursery as planned,' said Doug Gilbert, Trees for Life's Dundreggan Manager.' But nature isn't in lockdown. All these precious trees have been coming into leaf, and we need to take care of them – especially in the dry weather we've been having. Without regular watering, they would all die. We also needed to start sowing new seed now, to ensure a supply of trees for future planting seasons.'

So Doug – with colleagues Abbey Goff, Emma Beckinsale, Patrick Fenner, and trainees Catriona Bullivant and Louise Cameron – opted to voluntarily isolate themselves at Dundreggan rather than at their homes when the national lockdown was announced.

As well as being an internationally important forest restoration site, Dundreggan is a biodiversity hotspot that is home to over 4,000 plant and animal species. Discoveries include several species never recorded in the UK before, or previously feared extinct.

Trees for Life is dedicated to rewilding the Scottish Highlands. So far its volunteers have established nearly two million native trees at dozens of sites, encouraging wildlife to flourish and helping communities to thrive.

DISTINGUISHED FORESTERS WIN PETER SAVILL AWARD

The **Peter Savill Award** for a significant contribution to British forestry was inaugurated in 2007. It has been shared this year by two distinguished foresters (and contributors to *Living Woods Magazine*) Professor Julian Evans OBE and Dr Gabriel Hemery.

'The Trustees of Woodland Heritage always find it incredibly challenging to select the winner of the Peter Savill Award, when there is such a broad and talented range of people to consider,' said Lewis Scott, co-founder and acting Chairman. 'This year was the hardest so far, coming so soon after Peter's tragic death. In the end we wanted to recognise not just the amazing contributions that both Julian and Gabriel have made and continue to make to British forestry, but how they were also important people in Peter's life.'

Professor Evans said: 'Working with Peter on Plantation Silviculture in Temperate Regions – with special reference to the British Isles and then Plantation Silviculture in Europe, as well as our continuing professional association has been one of life's privileges for me. To receive this award is honour indeed.'

Professor Julian Evans (left) and Dr Gabriel Hemery (right).

Dr Hemery added: 'Peter Savill has left an incredible legacy to forestry. I am humbled and hugely honoured by the award … As my academic supervisor during my DPhil research at Oxford University he supported me through three of the most exhilarating, expansive, and challenging years of my life. Ever since, it was a great privilege working closely alongside him as my career developed and we worked together on projects, research, and establishing Sylva Foundation.'

We extend our congratulations to them both.

‘A ROBUST LOT’: SWA SURVEYS WOODLAND OWNERS

The Small Woods Association (SWA) has surveyed both SWA members and the wider small woodland community in recent weeks to find out how small woodlanders have been surviving the Covid-19 crisis.

Chief Executive Ian Baker writes, ‘It looks like we see ourselves as a robust lot. Whilst there is a widespread perception that there has been a negative impact from the crisis, with many unable to work in their woods, just when they needed to do so after such a wet and damaging winter. And whilst around half of SWA members and two-thirds of the wider poll see Covid-19’s impact as negative; the overwhelming majority of members see it as a temporary setback and only a quarter of the businesses surveyed felt it was worth their while applying for the government support. A mixture of resistance to bureaucracy and not feeling it was relevant leading to the lack of applications.

‘Given the high level of awareness of the support schemes and the depth of impact, it is striking that so few felt it was worth their while to apply. We will now use the feedback to help inform an approach to government regarding appropriate responses to Covid recovery for woodland management businesses.

‘We also took the opportunity to ask for feedback on Small Woods Association services. We are glad to say that the response were really positive and we also had loads of very helpful comments regarding what the members wanted to see more of. With a growing supporter base, it is always important to understand how the interests of members change and we now have plenty of ideas to help us shape future activities.’

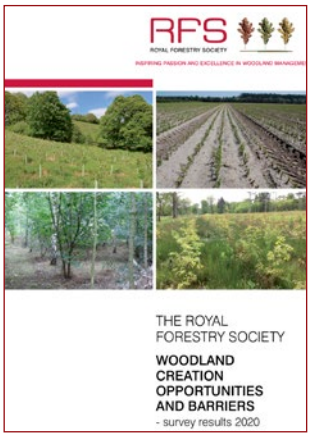
SWA is also engaged in one of a number of test and trials of the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) run by Defra. Proposals will be trialled among local landowners and woodland managers to see what will work best, before a national report is submitted to Defra next year. John Morris was appointed as national Project Manager in June. John will be keen to hear from woodland managers and owners who may have ideas about how support might be developed.

SWA’s regional coordinators will host local steering groups to carry out the research in seven areas; Cumbria, SW Peak, Suffolk Claylands, the Surrey Hills and the Weald, the Cotswolds, north Devon and the Marches.

South-east regional coordinator David Cracknell, said, ‘This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for people to have their say in how woodlands are funded in the future. I encourage everyone to come forward and submit ideas to us as to what they would like to see.’

Contact **johnmorris@smallwoods.org.uk** or visit **smallwoods.org.uk** for further information.

Making woodland creation viable



A new report from the Royal Forestry Society reveals that too much red tape and the potential loss of land value deters landowners from planting trees. Chief Executive of the RFS, Simon Lloyd, says ‘There is widespread interest in woodland creation among land managers, but a prerequisite for most is a financial case that recognises the risk and uncertainty in taking an irreversible decision.

‘The survey records widespread concerns about the complexity, cost and timing of grant processes. The government risks putting off private land owners from potential woodland creation unless administrative processes are greatly simplified and grant timescales aligned with forestry timescales to recognise not just the costs of planting but the long-term nature of management.’

The full report is available to download from the **RFS website.**

‘Give back all the trees’
‘Woodlands for Sale’ wins Tower Poetry competition

Launched in 2000, the Tower Poetry competition is organised by Christ Church College, Oxford, thanks to a bequest by the late Christopher Tower to stimulate an enjoyment and critical appreciation of poetry among young people.

This year’s competition was on the theme of ‘Trees’. Entrants took very different approaches to the subject, but we were delighted to see that the winner, Nadia Lines, was inspired by the possibilities of woodland ownership, having seen a **Woodlands.co.uk** sale sign beside a road. Her poem muses playfully on the endless possibilities of woodland ownership, covering both whimsical and more serious environmental topics.

The winners read their poems and talk about their inspiration on the **Tower Poetry website,** where their work can also be read and downloaded.

VIEW THROUGH THE TREES

Does this mean we'll miss the bluebells? Like many woodland owners, **JULIA GOODFELLOW-SMITH** was unable to visit her woodland for several weeks.

We didn't know about the bluebells when we bought Garland Wood. We didn't expect the subtle scent wafting across the woodland or the shimmer of colour extending as far as the eye can see, the flowers making the most of the light before the canopy closes. Now we look forward to them every year, marking the progression of the seasons from spring into summer.

When lockdown was announced, we counted down the weeks, first to the start of the bluebell season and then to the end. Would we have a chance to see them this year?

During lockdown, we had plenty to keep us busy. Since owning the woodland, our house and garden have become somewhat neglected, so we took the opportunity to catch up at home.

For the duration, I was totally unconcerned about not being able to get to the woodland. I enjoyed the simplicity of having my horizons temporarily shortened and having nowhere to go. Oddly, I think that it's spending time in the woodland that has created this change for me.

Time has taken on a different flavour for me since buying Garland Wood. I have started to think longer-term and become aware of how little is actually urgent. After all, the trees will happily live for hundreds of years. What difference will it make if we don't visit for a few weeks?

I knew that everything would simply continue as normal in the woodland, even as the world around me rapidly changed beyond recognition.

Mike, on the other hand, missed the woodland viscerally. Owning Garland Wood gives us the freedom to do whatever we want, within reason, while we're there. We can have a fire without inconveniencing or upsetting our neighbours. We can determine and execute what we deem to be a sensible management plan (subject to legalities, of course). We can camp out whenever we want.

When the government removed our freedom to travel, they also removed these other freedoms. It was hard for him to stay away, but stay away we did.

We returned on the first day that lockdown rules were relaxed. As I walked down the narrow path into the deep shade of the beech trees, I felt a small thrill. Butterflies danced in my stomach. I was back. Last time I felt like this was three years ago, when I first walked into the woodland as its owner. Back then, I laid down under the trees, gazed up at tiny patches of sky between the leaves, and breathed.

On this first visit after lockdown I did the same, only I was lying in the sun and the patch of sky was larger where we felled a tree last winter. I felt a strong sense of belonging. We are now part of these woods, and they are part of us.

Sadly, we did miss the bluebell display this year, but they'll be back next year – and hopefully lockdown will be over so we can enjoy them to their fullest.

Bluebells in oak woodland (Photo: JHM)

ACCELERATING WOODLAND CREATION

At the Accelerating Woodland Creation conference in March, JOHN LOCKHART, Chairman of Lockhart Garratt, spoke about the business of woodland creation, and the opportunities and challenges for rural business. Summarised below, much of what he said will resonate with small woodland owners.

Woodland as a percentage of land area in England increased in the 20th century partly because the demands of two world wars made it clear that a sustainable timber resource was vital. Despite the establishment of the Forestry Commission and an upward trajectory, tree planting in England is still woefully short of what's needed.

One clear barrier for businesses investing in woodland is the fact that it is a long-term commitment and generally considered to be a permanent land use change. Returns from timber sales are far into the future and. with high capital costs associated with the establishment of woodland, returns are poor and highly unpredictable.

Current grants, whilst significant, have not been sufficient to overcome these barriers at any real scale, and funding that is simpler to access. and can be supported by private investment through a range of blended finance models. will be critical if we are to see real change.

Woodlands' long-term nature and their ability to deliver against a vast range of natural capital benefits such as carbon sequestration, water quality, flooding, landscape, biodiversity, health and wellbeing and air quality, mean that the long-term advantages of planting are significant.

Where to plant?

A key consideration is finding the right land to plant on. Land suitable for woodland creation is often in competition with better-understood alternatives, some of which offer the prosepct of shorter-term gain, such as energy crops, development, food production, biodiversity offsetting and rewilding. We do not want to use our best and most versatile agricultural land for planting. Equally, we do not want to impact areas of high biodiversity or environmental value. However, this still leaves many possible options including

- low-grade arable and temporary grassland
- marginal upland farmland
- ex-mineral restored sites
- historic landfill sites (which amazingly account for some 0.85% of land area in England and Wales).

Like every investment, there are costs, financial and otherwise, involved in embarking on woodland creation with a view to future financial gain. Many opportunities can emerge from collaboration by engaging the public, using the Woodland Creation Planning Grant and working with third sector partners such as the National Forest or Community Forests.

The benefits

Timber With the 2050 zero carbon target in mind, steel and concrete may become less viable materials for construction, while timber construction techniques are improving and evolving. Many construction companies may see the increased use of home-grown timber as a key goal.

Carbon As the first sector with established carbon accounting, under the Woodland Carbon Code, woodland creation now has a clear pathway to revenue. The Woodland Carbon Guarantee offers the prospect of realistic returns for sequestered carbon, with potential returns yielding some £6,000/ha over the first 30 years.

Water quality and flooding As well as providing natural flood management, the planting of trees can help reduce soil erosion and nitrate pollution.

Biodiversity The Environment Bill 2019–20 was created to 'address the hidden costs of development', and proposed that development will be required to provide a 10% gain in biodiversity from the baseline figure. As a long-term land use, new woodland can deliver real biodiversity benefits more securely than other habitat creation models that may only be secured for 30 years.

Landscape, health and wellbeing Woodland creation offers a unique opportunity to create and restore beauty to our landscape. In turn, this enhances the recovery of the landscape, benefits air quality and improves physical and mental health with public access to green spaces.

LOCKHART GARRATT John Lockhart is Chairman of **Lockhart Garratt 01536 408840**

WOODLAND CREATION IN ACTION

Woodland creation is going on all around us, often on a small scale. A lifelong tree planter, **JO HAYWOOD** describes how she and her family have created a diverse small woodland outside Bristol.

This spring our favourite ewe produced two perfect lambs, one black, one white. They were born at 6am under an ancient apple tree in the orchard. These will be the last lambs born here as we have our eyes on the orchard for new trees, and browsing herbivores and young trees are not a good mix.

We've always been crazy about trees – for both their aesthetic beauty and environmental benefits. I met my husband, Simon, while studying ecology at Royal Holloway College in the 1980s, and when we got the opportunity to relocate from London to Bristol we were looking for somewhere with plenty of land where we could grow our own food and plant a wood.

When we found this property on the southern edge of Bristol in 1996, it was in an area known as 'the prairie'. There was an old orchard and a one-acre field with a three-bedroom house in one corner. The previous owners had been more interested in livestock than plants, and the wind whistled across from the farmyard next door, bringing with it all the accompanying aromas.

Faced with all this empty grassland, where to plant the trees was obvious – nothing was going to grow here until we had reduced the incessant wind. So, we set about planting shelter belts of trees on the edges of our plot, each on a different theme.

The orchard shelter belt

At the bottom of the orchard we planted native woodland whips of silver birch, hawthorn, field maple and wayfaring tree, then splashed out on five black poplars. Twenty-three years later, the poplars are a staggering 20 metres high and, alongside the other trees, have created a dense woodland, which is where the more timid of our ewes prefer to bury themselves on lambing day.

1997: Oscar's Wood

Between the field and the farmyard we wanted a mix of conifer and deciduous trees to give us some cover in the winter. As we're on the top of a hill we went with a mountain theme of Scots pine, rowan, silver birch, holly, dogwood. All of these trees went in as whips or small saplings while I was pregnant with our first son, hence the name.

2003: Anthony's Wood

A few years later, number two son, Anthony, had arrived and in his honour we planted a second shelter belt at the top of the field. Located east of the house, it's backlit in the morning and in full sun in the evenings, so we planted for autumn colour; June berry, hawthorn, ash (*Fraxinus oxycarpa* 'Raywood', which, inevitably, is now showing signs of dieback) and golden dogwood. Then, as we started to be given trees, we added a more random selection of oak, a giant redwood, aspen, and a tulip tree.

These shelter belts have transformed the garden. It's now filled with the buzzing of bees, where butterflies flit, swallows dart and ravens caw. A place where the air is still and filled with the scent of wildflowers and grasses. The effect spreads way beyond our patch: we now have a pair of hares living in the garden, flocks of long-tailed tits and goldfinch, several species of bats and owls and regular visits from sparrowhawks. Not only that, but our trees will be cleaning the air and increasing oxygen levels locally.

The difference two decades makes – the wide open space of spring 2003 has been transformed into a beautiful young woodland with much improved biodversity.

If I'm asked to offer advice on planting trees for shelter, it would always be to choose deciduous trees. In the winter they break up the wind and slow it down, rather than creating a wall that the wind whips around, and in the summer when you want to be outside, they create a richer diversity, pleasing colours and pleasant dappled shade. I don't think anyone wants to sit out in the midgy wasteland next to a line of conifers.

The forest garden

When I'm not enjoying our trees, I run Skylark Media, a video production company. In 2019 I combined my work and tree planting by introducing an initiative to plant a

Oscar watering the new woodland corridor, with the black poplars in the background.

A small section of the forest garden planted early in 2020. A broad mix of species helps to mitigate against the potential effects of disease and climate change.

tree for each client. But not just any tree, each one would be for a forest garden – food-producing trees that nourish each other, use different nutrients from the soil and make the best use of the space.

Forest gardens have been used for millennia in tropical regions and it seems right that we should be taking a leaf out of their book and making better use of our vertical space, improving soil conditions, adding to the diversity of wildlife and growing new crops all at the same time. It's important to plant the right tree in the right place and we have used the Agroforestry website to inform our choices. Bringing my environmental goals into the business has also had the benefit of meeting many like-minded business owners. Bristol has a well-deserved reputation as an environmentally conscious city, where professional organisations such as the Future Economy Network and Bristol Green Capital Partnership help promote the city's green goals. We're also part of Chew Valley Plants Trees, whose mission is to double the tree cover in Chew Valley by 2030, drawing together national initiatives, funding, and the local community.

The woodland corridor

Back to the orchard where the lambs are now gamboling among the daisies and buttercups. Every year, as the sheep graze from the inside and the cars get wider and faster outside, our roadside hedgerow gets narrower and narrower. But in the hedgerow are the last survivors of our ancient woodlands: bluebells, dog's mercury, primrose and wood anemone. Imagine what wonders we'd create if we gave these the space to thrive. So we've fenced off a strip that's 70m x 7m and planted Woodland Trust 'targeting disease' packs to restore existing woodland.

Thanks to our new acquisition, an auger, we planted, staked and guarded 72 trees in a day and I'm pleased to report that Oscar now plays a part on watering duty.

I am so excited that the UK has woken up to the requirement to plant trees and I'm overjoyed to see so many initiatives springing up. To be honest, tree planting has been quite a lonely pursuit over the last 23 years, but now it seems everyone can get involved with what is arguably one of the best methods of carbon off-setting that we have.

Favourite plantings

Sea Buckthorn *(Hippophae rhamnoides)* Used in cosmetics, its berries prevent infection and slow the ageing process. You can also use the berries for jam. It's drought-tolerant and nitrogen-fixing, so improves the soil.

Bladdernut *(Staphylea pinnata)* I planted this one partly because it's got a great name! I can't wait to taste the first of its edible seeds that apparently taste like pistachio nuts.

Quince *(Cydonia oblonga 'Krymsk')* An ancient fruit tree that was growing in the garden of the house where I was born. With delicate blossom in spring, and golden fragrant fruit, quince holds happy memories of my Mother's much prized quince honey.

skylark media

Skylark Media has produced videos for Westonbirt Arboretum and the Forestry Commission. View them on the Skylark Media website.

Subsidised tree packs and advice are available from the Woodland Trust.

Forestry England provides grants for tree planting, subject to various conditions. Read an overview here.

Boxing hares by Cathy Ryan, Woodland Photography winner 2019

WOODLANDS AWARDS **2020**

The Woodlands Awards are going ahead to schedule, despite COVID-19 and the lockdown, and there are plenty of ways you can enter while remaining strictly within government guidelines.

Once again they aim to spotlight and celebrate the hard work, artistry, knowledge and enterprise invested in British woodlands.

Awards categories

There are 14 categories altogether, divided into two groups: awards for individuals (woodland owners and users) and awards for enterprises (woodland organisations, businesses, educational programmes and so on). See the list in the box, right.

How to enter

Each of the categories has its own criteria for entry. Some (such as the Woodland Photography Award, or the new Woodland Huts Award) depend on individuals submitting their own entries. Some (such as the Woodland Courses Award) depend on personal recommendations. Others still (such as the Woodland Blogs Award and the new Woodland Instagram Award) depend on a mixture of these.

The main idea is that they are all easy to enter. Full details are available on **woodlands.co.uk/woodlands-awards**.

Deadline for submissions: 31 July 2020

Any questions?

Please email **antony@woodlands.co.uk**

Winners

A panel of judges will draw up shortlists of the best entries, and then award the prizes. There may be a number of winners in each category (last year there were 48 winners altogether): all entries judged to be of equally high merit will be awarded a First Prize (i.e. no Second, Third etc).

The 2020 award winners will be announced in September 2020.

A note to past winners: the competition rules say that winners cannot win an award in the same category for a second time, but there is nothing to stop them entering (or being entered) in another category.

Prizes

The prizes (depending on the category) will be a mixture of award certificates, selected woodland books and woodland equipment and/or tools – and recognition!

THE WOODLANDS AWARDS SPONSORED BY WOODLANDS.CO.UK

Prizes will be awarded in each of the following categories:

Awards for individuals

Woodland Blogs
Small Woodland Websites
Woodland Photography
Woodland Instagrams
Woodland Tool Recommendations
Whole Wood Owners' Coordinators
Woodland Huts

Awards for enterprises

Woodland Contractors
Woodland Tree-Planting Projects
Forest Schools
Woodland Courses
Community Woods
Woodland Books of the Year
Regional and National Woodland Organisations

Horses in forestry

Before mechanisation, horses pulled their weight alongside humans for centuries, helping us to manage woodlands sustainably. **FRANKIE WOODGATE** reflects on this rich heritage and explains why horse logging is enjoying a woodland renaissance.

It is early May as I write this. The woods are bursting at their green seams with an abundance of life: songbirds in coppice plots, the raucous chatter of jays and the lofty mew of buzzards adding to the soundtrack. Bustling discreetly beneath the cover of bramble, wood mice, shrews and all manner of small mammals hurtle hither and thither, and decaying wood provides habitat for the trundling of pill bugs, centipedes and wood lice. The bluebells and wood anemones are finally leaving the stage, making way for foxgloves, yellow archangel and figwort.

All life is here, and from soil to canopy, it's a riotous, inspiring and uplifting time to be wood-bound. But then woodlands surrender a new perspective every day throughout the year, ever changing and in a constant state of flux.

Historical hoofprints

When you consider the ecological diversity of a wood, it is also worth pondering its history. How often have you considered the lives that touched the wood ahead of your custodianship? Our woodlands, especially ancient woods or PAWS (Plantations on Ancient Woodland Site) have thrived as places of industry throughout the centuries and may well exhibit features of past woodsmanship. Think about the human endeavour behind features such as a sawpit, a wood bank, a deeply dug ironstone pond or marl pit, a series of hammer ponds, the site of a charcoal burners' encampment and burn site or other archaeological features indicative of woodland industry. The extent of human input and labour was remarkable and the legacy is evident in the features you see: the 'top

dog and the underdog' that worked the crosscut saw; the team of men that laboured to build and maintain the wood banks; the skills and labour force required to excavate and mine the ironstone or marl and to construct hammer ponds; the families of charcoal burners that established camps and tended their kilns.

Yet none of it would have been possible without the host of animals that walked alongside or in front of their human counterparts – each one pulling their weight (and more). Every one of those historical features was made possible by virtue of animal draft. The extraction of the timber, the movement of mined material and coppice products, the transport of people to and from the woodlands were all achieved in alliance with Messrs Horse, Pony, Ox & Co. Our political, environmental and industrial heritage owes a great deal to the strength and endeavours of draft animals. From battlefields to land cultivation, from coal mines beneath to forests and woodlands above, and the constant movement of people and goods – draft animals are intrinsically woven into the fabric of this land. If you ever find a large rusty horseshoe or a smaller cloven-shaped shoe buried in your wood, it's probably the PPE of a horse or ox, lost years ago while working that woodland or field.

Above: **A 19th-century sawpit, showing the top dog and the underdog in the sawpit itself. (Source: Wikicommons)**
Below: **Yser, an Ardennes gelding extacting Douglas fir on an ecologically sensitive site with restricted access to mechanised forwarders.**

Low-impact forestry in a nutshell

Truth be told, the working horse has never really left the woodlands of the UK. Mechanisation led to a post-war decline in their use, partly due to an increasing demand for home-grown timber and rising labour costs. However, horses continued to play a particularly important role in the hill country of the north and west. In 1960 50% of the national timber production was still extracted by horses, and at that time 400 horses were employed in Forestry Commission woodlands alone.

When I started out some 23 years ago, there were still teams of horse loggers working in the uplands of Scotland and Cumbria. These teams were second and third generation loggers, working on sites that their parents had worked before them, deftly bringing pole-length timber down steep inclines (inaccessible to mechanised extraction) with dexterous Dales ponies, or using horses as the primary extraction method to skylines in Scotland. In 1997 my forestry research took me to Sweden where I worked with foresters and horse loggers that worked commercially with horses – not out of an idealistic or romantic adherence to the old ways, but because it was both economically and silviculturally viable to do so. In Sweden, the horse in the forest has retained its place in the cultural and silvicultural landscapes; Sweden continues to develop most cutting-edge horse-drawn

LINKS

Woodland archaeology blogs
woodlands.co.uk

British Horse Loggers
britishhorseloggers.org

Weald Woodscapes is a company dedicated to the goal of sustainable, low impact woodland management and the wise use of timber as a renewable resource.

Contact Frankie:
wealdwoodscapes.co.uk

forestry equipment and has forestry colleges, dedicated to the training of 'forest horse entrepreneurs'.

Horse logging renaissance

Today, concerns with forest biodiversity and sustainability have prompted a reassessment of the role that horse-drawn extraction systems can play in our own woodlands. Over the past 20 years we have witnessed a slow but sure renaissance in the use of the horse as a low impact extraction method. Woodland management objectives are changing in response to a whole host of factors: there is a shift in focus towards Low Impact Silvicultural Systems (LISS) of management, those that favour transformation thinning, natural regeneration and greater structural diversity in order to create a more resilient woodland structure; management that serves to enhance and maintain the stability of woodland habitats and secures the protection and sound management of woodland soils and watercourses. All these elements are vital to the health and vitality of a woodland and to the varied ecosystems dependent on it. Woodlands also contribute to the increasingly recognised need to de-materialise our economy, producing and consuming sustainably sourced products and services that help to reduce the nation's carbon footprint. Alongside this is the change in ownership, with the diversification of some woodlands into smaller plots, which create their own unique collection of management constraints and potential.

The benefits of horse-drawn timber extraction today

So where does the horse fit into this new woodscape? The question should be where does it not fit? When it comes to low impact, low carbon hoof print and high productivity – the horse, in my opinion is king!

We are utilising our woodlands as a resource for timber, wildlife and as green space to be enjoyed. Areas of neglected and undermanaged woodland are being reclaimed and managed, and the horse's versatility of operation allows it to fit into the diverse range of woodland types and management objectives.

The horse is unparalleled in terms of manoeuvrability. The ability to step sideways, turn on its own axis, and make its way flexibly between trees and other features in a woodland is a key factor. This is especially important where access to timber is limited or if timber is scattered throughout a felling coupe in selective felling systems or thinning operations, for instance. Where the retention of emergent young broadleaves is an important factor, the use of horse-drawn extraction systems minimises the risk of damage to the standing crop and naturally regenerated or planted stock.

A horse does NOT get stuck, it has perfect natural traction and permanent four-hoof drive. It is possible to utilise a range of different extraction routes and seldom is there any need to remove additional trees to access the timber – using the simple system of skidding timber with a draft bar, the minimum access requirement is 1 metre.

Over the past 20 years we have witnessed a revival in the use of horse-drawn timber extraction systems. An environmentally sensitive management technique, the use of horses offers a viable, low impact and efficient extraction method. Modern horse logging equipment has been developed that reflects and complements the diversity of woodland sites and timber product types. As a sustainable management technique the use of horses combines the most vital elements of its history with the advantages of modern technology.

Next time you're in your wood, be sure to remember the ghosts of woodlanders and horses past.

DEADWOOD & STAG BEETLES

Magnificent stag beetles are an uncommon sight in woodlands, but they play an important part in enriching the soil. **LAURA BOWER**, conservation officer at the People's Trust for Endangered Species, explains how woodland owners can provide habitat for them.

Stag beetles (*Lucanus cervus*) are the UK's largest land beetle, and despite their large size and popularity with the public, they're either rare or endangered across their range. Stag beetles prefer a warm microclimate, so in the UK they are largely confined to southern England and are rarely seen further north. They rely on deadwood for a large part of their life cycle, and along with fungi and bacteria, stag beetles play a crucial part in recycling the nutrients from decaying wood back into the soil.

Life cycle

Stag beetles spend most of their lives underground as a larva. A female beetle digs down into the ground and lays her eggs in or near deadwood. Once hatched, the larvae feed on this deadwood for three to seven years before building a large cocoon, inside which they transform into a pupa and then into an adult beetle. The adults spend the winter underground, then dig themselves back up to the surface and begin to search for a mate.

They emerge in spring: the males tend to appear first from late May and are usually seen flying to find a mate or wrestling other males with their huge antler-like jaws in order to win the right to mate with a female beetle. Females emerge slightly later and are more likely to be seen walking on the ground. The females lay their eggs in late June/July and by August, most mature adult stag beetles have died.

Above: **Adult stag beetles do not feed once they emerge from the earth, relying on fat reserves built up at the larval stage. (Photo: Danny Jenkins)**

Below: **Stag beetle larvae wth their characteristic orange heads. (Photo: Carolin Gohler)**

Habitat

Woodland edges with plenty of fallen and standing deadwood are ideal for stag beetles. They need partial or dappled shade so that the wood stays moist, alongside warm open areas, such as rides, glades and edges in order to fly.

Stag beetles are usually found in broadleaved woodlands, although they can also inhabit mixed woodlands. They inhabit a wide range of other sites, from open parkland and orchards, to cemeteries. Coppice and coppice with standards are good habitat because of the combination of open areas and the availability of deadwood.

Studies in mainland Europe have shown that stag beetles are strongly associated with oak trees.

Loss of habitat is one of the main threats to stag beetles. Woodland owners can encourage stag beetles by ensuring a plentiful supply of deadwood in their woods.

How to recognise a stag beetle

Stag beetles have a black head, black thorax (middle section) and chestnut brown wing cases. The males vary in size from about 5cm to 8cm long and the females are a little smaller, usually around 3–5cm.

What do the larvae look like?

If you're digging in woodland, maybe while planting trees or erecting some fencing, you may come across the larvae. They are large creamy white larvae with an orange head and orange legs and come to rest in a C-shape if placed on the ground or in your hand.

Lesser stag beetles

The stag beetle's smaller cousin, the lesser stag beetle (*Dorcus parallelipipedus*), also relies on deadwood for its larvae to feed on, but this species lives in rotting tree trunks above ground. They are smaller (around 2cm long) and are a dull matt black rather than shiny, with a 'square' appearance. Male and female lesser stag beetles differ from each other, but there's less to distinguish between the sexes as the male lacks the enlarged jaws.

Records

Each year PTES receives thousands of stag beetle records, the majority from gardens and urban parks. Only very rarely do people report seeing a stag beetle in woodland – and we'd like to know about their presence in woodlands.

If you have seen a stag beetle in your own woodland or a woodland near you, please let us know at ptes.org/gsh

How you can help stag beetles

Retain some deadwood in your woodlands and gardens. Stumps dug into a pit ensure that dead wood rots into the ground and are preferable to cut logs piled horizontally on top of each other.

You can also build a log pyramid from broadleaf stumps, which ensures that the wood is rotting underground where stag beetles need it.

Above: **Smaller than males, female stage beetles are about 3–5cm long and lack the huge antlers of the males. (Photo: Andrew Neal)**

Below: **This log pile is made up of hardwood logs, which are buried about 50cm in the ground to encourage rotting. (Photo: PTES)**

MORE INFORMATION

People's Trust for Endangered Species
ptes.org/stagbeetles
Royal Holloway stag beetle project
Stagbeetle.info
Woodlands TV **Stag Beetles in the Woods**
Instructions on building a log pile

people's trust for endangered species

MEET *the* MAKER

JANE MICKELBOROUGH is the doyenne of spoon makers – a maker whose work is revered by her peers. Specialising in intricately decorated traditional Breton spoons, with a sideline in hinged folding spoons, she tells us about the craft and her inspiration.

How and when did you realise you wanted to be a spoon maker?

I have been carving all my life. My mother gave me a block of soap and a small knife when I was about eight, and I carved a family of rabbits. I've carved dry wood, mainly bass-relief panels, for many years. I only started carving wooden spoons from green wood about eight years ago. I found the Facebook page of an old friend (our own dear Martin Hazell) who is a spoon carver and was totally blown away by his spoons. I tried to carve a wooden spoon and quickly realised how very complicated they are!

How did your style develop?

My particular style took a while to develop, and I really don't much like some of the spoons I made a few years ago! I found that both my style and technique improved in incremental steps after each Spoonfest for quite a few years.

I was inspired by a wood and silver spoon in the Louvre gallery in Paris to try a technique of undercutting the bowl at the neck of the spoon, only to discover that Barn the Spoon had been doing this for years! When I finally discovered the old Breton spoons, I had already started to regularly carve my spoons with a rat's-tail keel, and was delighted to see that almost all of the Breton spoons are the same. There really is nothing new in the world of spoon carving!

Spoons are really such complicated shapes, and the variations are endless. The search for form and beauty married to function is totally absorbing and always ongoing.

Spoons carved from box wood and decorated with coloured wax inlay.

Where do you look for your inspiration?

Fritiof Runhall and Fred Livesey were probably the most important early inspiration, which continues to this day. There are a couple of Fred's spoons that I occasionally try to reproduce, but I haven't managed a decent version yet.

Of course, the bold shapes and phenomenal decoration on the old Breton spoons remains an endless source of learning, techniques and ideas. There are some 250 of these in museum collections that I have found so far, so I've only just started to tap the possibilities…

Where do you source your wood?

For everyday spoons I get wood from the countryside around us here in central Brittany, and occasionally from trees on our own land.

Getting hold of the box wood for making Breton-style decorated spoons is much more complicated. Box doesn't often grow very big here, so I have had to rely on supplies from a kind friend who lives further south in France, who sends an occasional log by post!

Recently, I was given the most amazing windfall (excuse the pun) by a friend who is a gardener in the UK. She obtained a car-full of huge box logs from the Blenheim Estate, and I got the big ones. This bounty has prompted me to buy a bandsaw to process the wood and a dedicated wood freezer, which is now stocked to overflowing.

BRETON CUILLÈRES D'APPARAT

The tradition of carving highly decorated (and often folding) spoons emerged in the west of the Breton peninsula (around Finistère and Morbihan) between the early 18th century and the First World War. While everyone had their own everyday wooden spoon, these decorated spoons, that were nearly all made of box wood, were reserved for high days and holidays. They were, in effect, party spoons and chief among these occasions were weddings, which were usually three- or four-day affairs with hundreds of guests. Because it was not possible to supply everyone with cutlery, guests were expected to bring their own spoon for meals. This seems to have led to the development of specially decorated spoons, which would not have been affordable for everyone. Most of these spoons were made by professional woodworkers, and it is possible to recognise sets of spoons that have obviously been made by a single craftsman, or at least in a single workshop. There were two very distinct styles of spoons from areas separated both linguistically and geographically. To the far west, the spoons were highly coloured, with inlays of sealing wax and sometimes pewter. Further to the south-east, the spoons' shapes were distinctly different and there was no use of wax inlay at all.

How do you start a piece and how long does it take to complete a spoon?

No matter what spoon, I invariably start with drawing a centre line, even if the spoon is going to be asymmetric. Then a perfect circle, extended to an egg shape for the bowl.

I like to have a free day ahead of me before I will consider starting a complicated folding spoon. Once I start, I hate stopping before it's finished enough to be left to dry, and sometimes a day is what it takes.

How did you come to focus on Breton spoons?

Whilst selling spoons at fairs and markets here in Brittany, people would occasionally ask me if I had seen the old Breton 'wedding' spoons. I must admit that I didn't take much notice of these suggestions for quite a while, as I assumed that they would be like the rather mad Welsh love spoons, that are strictly non-functional.

However, when I finally managed to find a website that showed some of the old Breton 'party spoons' (*cuillères d'apparat*) I was completely astonished and totally hooked.

I have visited museums across the whole of Brittany to see the Breton spoons in their collections. The national collection is held in **Mucem** (the Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisations) in Marseille; I'm sure you can imagine the terrible hardship it was to go there, but I made the effort – for the spoons, you understand.

Tell us about your workspace and the tools you use

I work in the south-facing front porch of our house, which gives me loads of light, even in winter, although it can get a bit too hot in summer. I share it with our three cats and the plant propagators, and I have a nice neat little Sjöbergs work bench which just fits the space and has proved a perfect work surface, when the cats let me have access. I far prefer natural daylight, and almost never use artificial light for carving. People who solemnly tell me the old story – that Breton lads would sit round the fireside in winter, carving spoons for their beloved – have obviously never tried it!

I use my *paroir* more and more for the early cutting of the spoon blanks. It is an old French clogmaker's stock knife, which is mounted on a low bench, using a swivelling and sprung ring. I find that this tool's enormous power, combined with surprisingly fine control, makes it a real joy to use. This steady force, without impact, is particularly important when using box wood which I have found can be quite brittle. The sheer force needed to axe out a

> *I am fascinated by wooden spoons – they appear to be simple, everyday objects but are, in fact, very subtle three-dimensional shapes.*

Using a *paroir,* an old French clogmaker's stock knife, to cut a blank.

spoon blank has a tendency to produce micro-cracks in the wood which usually only show up on a finished (or nearly-finished) spoon.

I have succumbed to a bandsaw for similar reasons – box wood is almost impossible to rive or split successfully and items made from split wood always seem to crack. I had a whole series of failed spoons around a year ago, and became very disheartened with carving box. Since using the bandsaw I have not had a crack failure with box wood (my fingers are firmly crossed!)

I have quite a collection of carving knives, but always seem to go back to Mora 106s for most of the donkey work. For hollowing work I return consistently to my Nic Westermann/ Lee Stoffer scorps. I do, however, have some curved knives made by Sean Hellman and Gary Hackett which I use more and more often.

What does the craft mean to you?

For me, making is not just a lifestyle choice. Making something, anything, creative is an imperative. Ever since I was a small child I have been impelled to make things – using leather, fabric, wood, even soap! Finding spoon carving in my late fifties felt like coming home. At last I had found my true métier. Carving spoons is absolute therapy: utterly absorbing, endlessly fascinating and (almost) always calming.

I am fascinated by wooden spoons. They appear to be simple, everyday objects but are, in fact, very subtle three-dimensional shapes. The variability of the wood itself means that making a beautiful, functional wooden spoon is a real challenge that is never the same twice.

As well as teaching a monthly spoon club, my husband Peter and I organise an annual green wood working festival (**fineslames-petitescuilleres.com**). I teach and demonstrate regularly at festivals like Spoonfest, Greenwood Fest and Täljfest, plus occasional short courses. I also teach occasional one-to-one days here at home in Brittany.

What's your proudest achievement?

In 2017 I was honoured to be awarded a Sundqvist-Coperthwaite Slöjd Fellowship. This allowed me to travel to travel to Greenwood Fest and the Spoon Gathering in Milan in 2018, as well as to continue my research into the traditional spoons that used to be made in Brittany.

FOLLOW JANE'S WORK
instagram.com/janespoons/
chatquilit.com
facebook.com/JaneSpoons
Video: Jane and Barn the Spoon talk

The colourful decorative handles are filled with an inlay of sealing wax. The handles are hand-carved and the cavities then filled with melted wax, one colour at a time.

BASIC SPOON CARVING

Wood carver Dan Watson explains the basic principles behind roughing out a spoon blank. In the next issue, he'll focus on knife work and how to finish the spoon off.

One of the joys of spoon carving is that you only need simple tools to get started. To make a spoon all that is required is a small, sharp hand axe, a saw, a straight knife, a hook knife and a pencil. Second-hand axes can be purchased and sharpened, basic carving tools can also bought from a number of online suppliers.

Basic tools are pictured below: a car boot-bought 1.5 lb axe, Mora hook knife, Mora 106 straight knife and Bahco folding saw.

For a beginner, carving freshly cut wood (known as green wood) is easier, and many different species of timber can be used. Woods such as birch, willow and alder are softer and easier to carve. Small-diameter poles are relatively easy to come by: I'd suggest 6-7cm diameter. Larger-diameter sections may also be carved but require a bit more processing to split out a billet of wood for a spoon blank.

1. Choose a pole about 6-7cm in diameter – this is birch. Use a club to split the pole in half.

2. Use the hand axe to flatten the split surface.

3. Next, sketch the spoon outline. You can also trace around the edge of another spoon to provide a good shape.

4. Saw 'stop' cuts to make waste-removal easier.

5 Remove the sides of the handle, working down to the sawn stop cuts. Be careful not to cut into the edge of the bowl.

6. Carefully axe up to the outline. At all times, think about safety: only work to two-thirds of the way up the billet, keeping your fingers well clear and holding on to the opposite side of the billet to where you are working.

7. Chop away waste wood from the back of the blank.

8. Shape around the front edge of the bowl.

9. Chamfer off the back edges. The blank is finished and ready for knife work.

WEBSITES

Wood-tools.co.uk
Woodsmithexperience.co.uk
Woodlandcraftsupplies.co.uk
barnthespoon.com

BOOKS

Spon, Barn the Spoon.
Spoon Carving, E J Osborne.

Going Dutch in the woods

Back in the days when flour was freely available, **DAVID ALTY** carried out some baking in the Cumbria woodlands. This is a great activity to try out in the summer – with a bit of luck the weather will be warm enough for the dough to prove outside.

The Dutch oven has to be one of my favourite campfire cooking essentials. Supremely versatile, it can be used to create a wide variety of dishes using several different cooking methods.

So, what is a Dutch oven? Essentially, it is a heavy cast-iron pot with a bail arm handle, which enables it to be suspended over the fire from a tripod chain. Thanks to its high cast-iron mass, the Dutch oven regulates uneven heat and thus enables uniform cooking. A key feature distinguishes it from an ordinary cast pot: the lid has a raised rim to enable hot embers to be heaped on it to provide all round heat. A decent pair of welding gloves is ideal for handling the oven once hot.

On a bright sunny day early in spring, I decided to brush off the dust, get out into the woods and make some proper bread. The first task of the day is to get a decent fire going with a good heart of embers. This takes time to build up and is facilitated if hardwood is available. I was lucky to find some dead sycamore and oak branches readily to hand. Second on the to-do list is getting the storm kettle fired up. Any task is much eased by the inclusion of a brew-up and some warm water will be needed shortly anyhow.

BASIC WHOLEMEAL BREAD RECIPE

- 250g strong wholemeal bread flour
- 250g strong white bread flour
- 1 sachet or 7g easy bake yeast
- 1½ tsp salt
- Oil or butter
- 1½ tsp sugar
- 300ml warm water

1 While the fire is warming up you can mix the ingredients. I normally measure and mix the dry ingredients before a camping trip and store them in loaf-sized portions. Having done this, only the addition of liquids is required out in the woods. The dry ingredients are placed in a large wooden bowl; a good slosh of oil is added and rubbed in, hand-hot water is carefully added and everything given a good mix. The mixture should come together into a ball and be slightly sticky. The resulting dough is then kneaded for around ten minutes until it becomes elastic. Using a decent size bowl enables kneading to be undertaken one-handed inside it, and this means there is less kit to carry into the woods!

2 Whilst all this has been going on, I have been preparing not one, but two Dutch ovens for cooking. I know it's a bit of a luxury, but in coldish weather it is good to have one oven warming next to the fire for proving the dough, while another is over the flames building up some heat. Not all ovens come with an internal trivet – my tivets are cheap pan stands with the rubber feet removed.

3 Once the dough has been shaped into a ball, place it on a metal tray on a good thick layer of flour in the warming oven and leave it for about 20 minutes to prove.

4 When the dough ball has doubled in size, transfer it quickly to the hot oven, put the lid in place and pile up hot embers on the top. Time now for more tea, or maybe prepare a second loaf while you wait.

5 After about 40 minutes it's time to check on your loaf. With care, the lid can be removed without disturbing the embers or worse still, tipping them all over the loaf.

6 The loaf is done when it sounds hollow when tapped on the base. If it is well browned on the top but still a bit soft underneath, I often invert the loaf and give it a few more minutes over the heat. Stand the finished loaf on the trivet to allow cooling before attempting to slice it. This is a tough challenge as you WILL want to try it immediately. The end result is simply delicious: you will never want shop-bought bread again!

LINKS

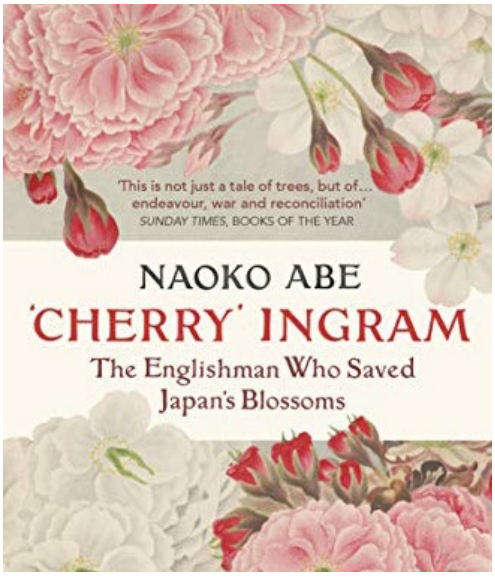
For more information about the versatility of a Dutch oven, as well as a few well-chosen recipes, visit Woodlands TV **woodlands.co.uk/the-dutch-oven**

BOOK REVIEW

ANTONY MASON, co-ordinator of the Woodlands Awards, explains why he was particularly struck by one of last year's winners.

'CHERRY' INGRAM - THE ENGLISHMAN WHO SAVED JAPAN'S BLOSSOMS

Naoko Abe
Chatto & Windus
400 pages 150 x 220mm
Hardback £18.99
Paperback £10.99



The subject of this book touches us all. Who hasn't stood in enchanted wonder before an ornamental cherry tree, in a street, in a park or garden, even sometimes in woodlands? Flowering cherries are now common enough in the UK, but have only been so for the last century or so – and that is largely down to the work of one avid enthusiast and collector, Collingwood 'Cherry' Ingram (1880–1981).

Not only this but, as the book's subtitle proposes, he was 'The Englishman Who Saved Japan's Blossoms'. Having collected every variety he could lay his hands on, and grown some 120 of them on his estate in Benenden, in Kent, he possessed a unique archive of flowering cherries. This became particularly precious to Japan.

Once the unique source of *sakura* ornamental flowering cherry species, Japan had a historic reverence for cherry blossom, as witnessed in the annual spring passion for *hanami* (cherry-blossom viewing). Flowering cherry varieties were avidly collected, and protected by the venerable *sakuramori* (cherry guardians). But from around 1900 Japan pursued virtually a cherry monoculture when the blossom became the object of imperialist symbolism, favouring the pink, fast-growing *Somei-yoshino* hybrid above all others, and neglecting – even uprooting and replacing – the rest.

The symbolism turned sinister when falling cherry blossom petals were poetically associated with *kamikaze* pilots. This is a beautifully illustrated book, with drawings of various flowering cherries, and evocative photographs of 'Cherry' Ingram at home and on his travels in Japan – but none perhaps is more poignant than the photograph of Japanese girls lined up on an airstrip to bid farewell to *kamikaze* pilots by waving fronds of cherry blossom at their departing planes.

After the Second World War, 'Cherry' Ingram (who died in 1981, at the age of 100) was able to help restore to a recovering Japan many of the varieties that had been lost during the preceding decades. Some of these, but for him, might well have become extinct.

Naoko Abe, a Japanese journalist and non-fiction writer living in London since 2001, is superbly well placed to tell this story. She fully understands the British side of it: how a somewhat eccentric, independently wealthy young man (Ingram's publisher-grandfather founded the *Illustrated London News*) falls to an all-consuming passion, and how that is seen in his own social milieu. More, she is able to give an account of 20th-century history from a Japanese perspective, with all the explanation needed to be accessible to English-language readers. This makes for some brutally uncomfortable reading, as in the story behind that unsettling *kamikaze* photograph.

Naoko Abe's book is thus a rich blend: the enthusiasm for trees, botanical research, family history, two contrasting cultures, and world war – with a satisfying sense of redemption achieved by the innocent passions of good people. Read this book, and next spring you will gaze upon a flowering cherry tree through a new lens – and with an even greater sense of wonder.

Stolen forests, bionic trees, and silvan adventures

GABRIEL HEMERY has published a collection of short stories, *Tall Trees Short Stories.*

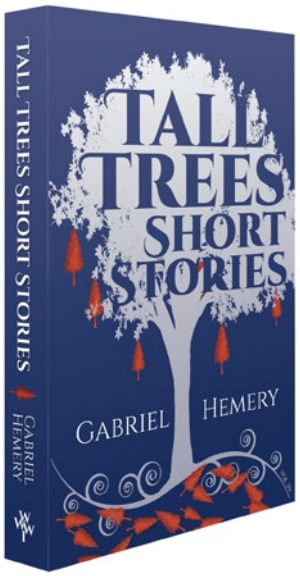
Tall Trees Short Stories is a collection of more than 25 tales exploring the natural world and our relationship with it, written by environmentalist and silviculturalist Gabriel Hemery.

Gabriel has enjoyed writing this multi-genre collection of tree stories. As he says, 'Look out for love and loss, brace for dystopia and utopia, and jump forwards and backwards in time, but beware as you follow the path through the dark forest – nature can have a sting in its tale'.

Equally important is the message behind the tales, that of the need to care for the environment around us, especially our trees. Gabriel uses all the advantages of fiction to push this message home, using an amusing and often quirky angle to examine more serious issues.

Chief Executive of Sylva Foundation, Gabriel is already a published author of fiction and has been writing short stories for his blog for some time. He has relished the challenge of self-publishing, reporting that while it gives an author much greater control over the publishing process, it also requires an element of upfront funding. To address this, Gabriel invited selected companies to sponsor a couple of stories. *The Great Forest Heist* has been sponsored by Woodlands.co.uk and Forest Holidays sponsored a traditional tale, *The Woodcutter's Axe*.

Readers of Living Woods Magazine are invited to download *The Great Forest Heist* free and can take advantage of a discount on the full collection which is published this month.



Extract from* THE GREAT FOREST HEIST. *Trees and forests suddenly disappear, to the consternation of the human population. Who or what is responsible?

"*But there are no stumps! The whole tree—all the trees—have just gone?'*

'Like I told you, the whole wood. And now, it looks like someone dumped 300 tonnes of leaves on my empty field.'

The policewoman stooped down to pick up an oak twig. It was the kind only found in the deepest litter in an old forest; dry, soft and crumbly. Underneath it a mouldering shadow of the twig remained in the leaves, were it had lain undisturbed for countless years. She cleared some strands of blond hair from her eyes, and stared at the lichen-encrusted evidence in her hands. 'And there is no sawdust, no digger tracks, nothing . . ?'

'It was heavin' with trees yesterday, and now … well, you can see yourself. No trees, and no signs of anyone 'aving been 'ere.'

'I don't know what to say. They'll think I'm mad when I radio this in' . . .

. . ."How can we be sure that these resources are not required by the species on this planet?' asks the dominant one.

'We have taken 100 of their green of different sizes, and none of them have complained,' replied the ambassador of the mission.

'Yet perhaps they have not the technology to reach us by any means, for we still have poor understanding of their communications.'

'We have seen their behaviour. They have no wish to survive. It is our opinion, among those of who came on the first mission—observing them while they orbited one hundred times round their star—that the dominant species is afflicted with a death determination. It appears that they understand the role of the green in maintaining their future, for they have been observed creating more, yet still they destroy more than they create. The blue has become the container for their waste, which they manufacture in a way which clogs the sytem. I could describe more of their strangeness.' "

EXCLUSIVE OFFER

Download a free version of *The Great Forest Heist* via this link: **gabhem.com/gfh**

The author is offering 50% discount on the e-book of *Tall Trees Short Stories* to readers of Living Woods Magazine. Visit **gabhem.com/shop** using the password swog50

To buy a hard copy, visit **gabrielhemery.com**

JOHNNY MORRIS casts a graphic designer's eye over the contents and cartography of the *Great Trees of London Map.*

THE GREAT TREES OF LONDON MAP

written and photographed by
Paul Wood
Unfolded: A2 (420 x 594mm)
Folded: A5 (148 × 210mm)
Published by Blue Crow Media £8

This new guide comes in the form of an A2 map that can be folded down to a size that doesn't quite fit into your trouser pocket. The publication is based upon the fine idea of highlighting 50 of London's special trees that help make up 'the uniquely diverse urban forest'. An inspiring concept indeed, but one that the author and photographer Paul Wood doesn't quite pull off.

Let's start with the positive points about the map. Identifying 'hero' trees across London from Kew Gardens to Tottenham helps us to focus on the wide range and great numbers of woody wonders we have in our capital city. After reading about Hampstead Heath's iconic beech and the stunning Yoshino cherries of SE24, I found myself spotting potential specimens of special trees in my own neck of the London woods.

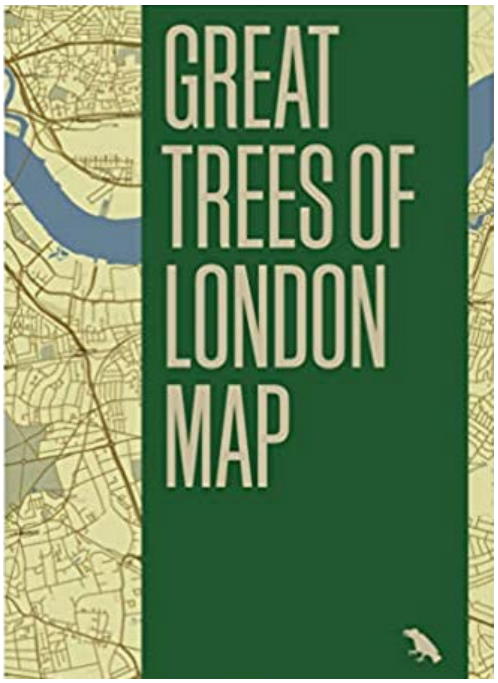
Appreciation heightened, I would willingly go out of my way to see one of the map's selections. The Giant Redwood in New Cross certainly sounds worthy of a south London outing. But besides drawing my attention to the grand Redwood, what else does the guide offer? Answer: a postcode, a Latin name, a few lines of chat and a very average photograph (only half the trees are pictured and while we are counting, why only 46 entries in a celebration to 50 great trees?)

Any guide worth returning to should be packed full of well-researched details and interesting gems. The appropriately named Mr Wood gives us a few cracking facts, but his offerings are uneven. For example we are introduced to 'Barney', London's oldest plane tree, which dates from 1680 and is so huge it is held together with chains. All good stuff, but then he tells us that 'Barney' is hidden in woodland and is a tricky tree to find.' A few more clues than just a postcode and a dot on a giant map might be useful in a map guide.

The clunky design of the publication doesn't help either. The publisher, Blue Crow Media, has had success with a series of maps highlighting remarkable concrete and Brutalist architecture in cities around the world. Their bold, utilitarian typography and layout perfectly suits the subject of blocky, mid-century architecture. Employing a similar style for a guide to the lyrical and organic world of trees simply jars.

Landmark trees can be beautiful and poetic things but here they are portrayed with a crude colour palette, intrusive typography and cluttered design. And the paper the guide is printed on may be recycled and carbon neutral, but the quality doesn't live up to the £8 price mark.

This is the first edition of the map so hopefully later versions will evolve with improvements. (How about partnering with a phone app or illustrating the map for starters?) *Great Trees of London* is such a good idea and it would be a shame to see the concept killed off by mediocre execution and editing.



SYMBOLS IN TREES

Elder trees spring up unwanted and often unloved. **CLARE GIBSON** explains why we should accord them more respect.

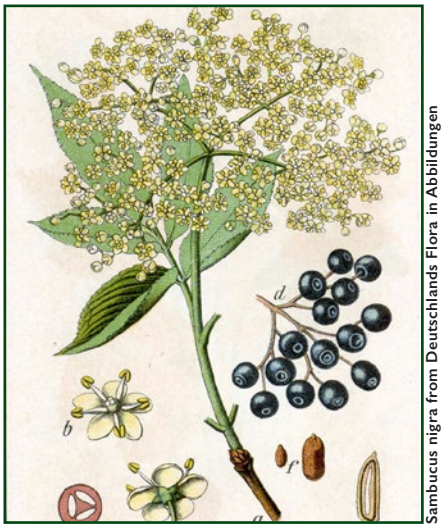
It may not be the most imposing-looking, but few trees have so much to offer us as the elder, which has a wealth of curative properties, culinary uses and, some say, apotropeic powers.

Not only that, but the genus's common name, *Sambucus*, which is derived from *sambuca,* Latin for 'harp', provides a clue to another of its traditional uses, for its wood was fashioned into musical instruments. 'Harp' is somewhat misleading, though, for elder is more closely associated with pipes or whistles, which can be created after the central pith has been removed from young branches; blowpipes and peashooters can be made like this, too. Its hollowed-out twigs are also thought to have given *Sambucus* its common name, 'elder', which may have been derived from *aeld*, the Anglo-Saxon word for fire, this being created when such twigs were used to blow life into a struggling flame. Its dark berries supply the second part of the elder's botanical name, *Sambucus niger* (*niger* being Latin for 'black'), and these can be used in the kitchen and to make elderberry wine.

Cordials and fritters

Today, we probably value the elder the most for its flowers, which foraging cooks happily harvest in order to make elderflower cordials, fritters and other dishes. In times past, however, the elder was regarded with such profound respect – indeed, even trepidation – that cutting off any part of it was considered a dangerous venture. Many northern European folk traditions tell of the 'elder mother' (also known as the 'old gal' in parts of Britain) who inhabits elders, whose permission should be asked before an elder tree's wood is cut or its flowers or fruits are gathered. If this courtesy is not observed, it was said, the transgressor would be punished with all manner of misfortune, and perhaps even death. If the proper procedure is followed, however, the reward is access to what has been described as nature's 'medicine chest'. Just a few popular, elder-based remedies include making an infusion from its blossoms to soothe inflamed sinuses and sore throats; rubbing warts with young elder twigs to encourage their disappearance; and boiling elder root for a tea to ease rheumatism.

That the elder rapidly regenerates itself when cut down or damaged, and elder cuttings readily root, was once deemed further proof of the tree's life-giving properties, and this, coupled with its identification with the 'elder mother', caused protective properties to be ascribed to the tree. It was said to be especially effective in warding off attacks by malevolent witches, and in many parts of Europe people carried elder twigs or pinned them to their clothes on Walpurgis Night (30 April to 1 May), when witches were thought to be active. Similarly, planting elders near houses and nailing elder wood around windows and doors was believed to keep evil at bay and the household safe from harm, including from lightning strikes.



Sambucus nigra from Deutschlands Flora in Abbildungen

Alternative folklore ascribes conflicting, more sinister properties to the elder, however, stating, that it should never be brought into the home because this would attract the Devil and other evil entities. It was also said that witches could transform themselves into elders, so one should give the trees a wide berth.

Super powers

Why was the elder credited with such dangerous powers? Well, some believed that the cross on which Christ was crucified was made of elder wood (this, despite the tree's relatively small stature). What's more, after his betrayal of Christ, Judas Iscariot is said to have hanged himself from an elder tree (which also explains why the ear-shaped fungus that often grows on elders is called *Auricularia auricula-judae*, which, translated from the Latin, means 'Judas's ear', or 'Jew's ear'). Supposed proof of these negative associations is the unpleasant smell of the elder's leaves when bruised; these nevertheless have the benefit of keeping flies and rodents away when strewn around stables and grain stores, as was once traditional practice. (An old southern German explanation for the leaves' smell, which resembles cat's urine, is that the Virgin Mary used to hang the infant Jesus's used nappies on an elder tree to dry.)

It may look insignificant, but the elder is a powerful and ambivalent symbol of white magic and dark witchcraft, of healing and harm, and of life and death. Lore and tradition tell us that it is a tree to be reckoned with, but also one to be thankful for.

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