



Editorial

Rather a depressing issue this time I am afraid, as we have a few Obituaries. On the other hand, we have news of a younger member of our Group, who is just starting out on being a coppice worker.

The weather hasn't been too bad for working this winter; neither too wet not too cold, but the hazel hasn't really had a long dormant period, and we found ash trees had more sap in them than in previous winters.

With the upheaval that Brexit will cause, we have no idea what effect it will have coppicing and forestry. There has been a report issued by the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee (EFRA) pressing the government to ensure that forestry is properly funded, particularly pest and diseases research, and that the grant system should be made far less complex. HCCG and the National Coppice Federation submitted our views to EFRA several months ago, so we hope that whatever happens, it is to the benefit of our industry.

Keep a look out for pests and diseases as sweet chesnut blight and gall wasp have been reported, and Chelara is now quite prevalent in this area. The Forestry Commission have some details of what to look out for on their website, and as we are the people who are most in the woods, we are in the best position to catch anything early.

You will be sent details of the AGM which will be in East Hampshire again this year. We have some interesting things going on, including hopefully a representative from Grown in Britain willing to give us a talk, firing the Hookway retort kiln, and the chance to have a chat with other coppice workers.

Hope to see as many of you as possible at the AGM.

Chris Westcott

Editor

Hampshire Coppice Craftsmen's Group AGM

The AGM will be held at Bluebell Wood, Clanfield on 22nd April. You will have received further details from Toni Brannon about how to get there, and what we are hoping to offer you. You will also be sent the minutes of last year's AGM and the Agenda for this one.

Please bring a cup, whatever you will need to cook and eat your lunch (if applicable) and something to sit on. Some logs will be available, but if you want a more comfortable seat, please bring your own.

Hope to see you there.

Members Meeting at Hilliers Gardens, Ampfield

In late January we had a members meeting of a guided walk round Hilliers Gardens at Ampfield led by the Head of Horticulture, Fran.

We were fortunate with the weather as it was cold and dry, if somewhat misty. We started by looking at some hedgelaying which is being carried out in 50m lengths, one each year. The first section had been layed when Les and Toni Brannon showed the horticulture section how to hedge lay, and this had come back very well. The hedge was only one row thick rather than the usual two, and composed of a number of native shrubs, luckily with a fair amount of hazel and hawthorn. The second length had been done by the staff, and there was another length to do next winter.

We then went into a valley with a drainage pond surrounded by a willow hedge. They had cut the willow every year, but had bent some of the rods over to form loops at the top. It looked very nice; eventually I think they might have to cut the willow to ground level and start again, but that is for the future.

The next section we visited was the winter garden. There were various flowers such as hellebores, cyclamen and some heather, but most of the interest was from the rods of willow and dogwood. There were also some trees with interesting bark; prunus and birch being some of them.

They showed us an interesting use for some multistemmed conifers which had become overhigh and unstable. They had been cut to about 15 feet high, and were being used to support some Japanese clematis. Should look good when the clematis has grown.

Just behind the entrance complex they are developing a valley with autumn colour. It was predominantly oak, and the mature trees are still there, but not that interesting most of the time, so they have cut beds going down the shallow valley for shrubs with autumn colour backed by a mixture of the existing oaks and some trees such as maples and liquidamber that will give strong colours. The oaks remain green quite late, so that should give an amazing contrast. They expect there to be some colour this autumn, but in a few years time it will be better and improving all the while. As a point of interest, their collection contains over 12,000 different specimens of plant, mainly trees and shrubs with a smaller number of herbaceous plants.

Going down a slope we then saw the pond which is part Japanese style and partly less managed. They have kingfishers, herons and water voles visit, which is encouraging in a semi-formal garden, but knowing its wild life potential, they manage some parts of it to be overgrown to help the animals.

Passing the pond, we climbed another hill into the woodland area. This had been planted by the Forestry Commission in about 1960 with mainly Douglas fir and western hemlock with some hardwoods. The first part has been very heavily thinned with some parts opened up, and this has an activity area for schools. They have visits from children from nursery school to senior school age, so there are a range of things for them to do. Some of the older students get involved with the horticulture department doing things like tree planting and other useful work. This is encouraging, as often these are the students that do less well in the classroom, and especially those that are inclined to cause trouble, it gives them a useful direction. Fran said that if they have helped to plant trees, they are less likely to vandalise them elsewhere as they know the work involved, and have actually got a 'stake' in a real tree. There was an edible hedge that some students had planted; not yet very well grown, but showing some promise.



The main part of the woodland has two rides running through it. One carries the power line to the Gardens, and the other has a gas pipeline under it. Both have to be kept clear of trees and particularly the gas pipeline, have to be treated very carefully. The aim is to divide the woodland, about 20 acres including rides and open spaces, into three parts. One part will have British and European trees, the second American, and the third Japanese, Chinese and far eastern trees. This work will take years, and at present they are more at the preparation stage. The conifers have been thinned, and although it still looked pretty thick, they were very close together with nothing growing under them. Now there is more light, plants are growing, but brambles are becoming a problem, so they are introducing pigs to do the bramble clearance. Using only small numbers, they find none of the existing trees or shrubs are damaged, and where there are new plantings, they fence those off first. The pigs are kept in by an electric fence with a rope fence outside that to stop people seeing if the fence is live!

There are a few hazel stools here, some of which had been recently cut, not too well, by students, but at least they tried. They are currently protected only by brushwood cages, but we had a discussion about alternatives, and I think Fran may be trying other methods. She is also keen to include some sweet chestnut coppice.

Going back towards the main garden we passed a slope planted with far eastern shrubs and small plants, but not a lot to see at this season.

We finished the afternoon with a cream tea at Jermyn's House tearooms, and very nice it was. Thanks to Toni for arranging the meeting, and to Fran for giving us such an interesting visit.

Hazel Basketry Course, Granary Arts Centre 11th and 12th February 2017



In the Autumn of 2016 I was approached by the Granary Arts Centre to run a course in Hazel frame basketry. I had learnt this skill in North Wales the previous Winter on a course run by Ruth Pybus and David Brown who had revived their local style of Hazel basket in the Denbighshire area. Split Hazel baskets have traditionally been made all over Europe and in Britain the tradition held out the longest in Wales and one area of Sussex. Since then I have made quite a few of these baskets and I now almost always have one on the go.

I'd wanted to run this course for a while because there was a lot of interest in my baskets at various shows in the summer and it is absolutely ideal for people to do at home given that it doesn't require much raw material and the only tool needed is a small knife.

The Granary Arts Centre in Bramdean seemed like the perfect place to run the course. It is an independent arts venue run by artist and teacher Kezia Hoffman. It's ethos is to simply to give people a space to be creative and the variety of courses there is fantastic, everything from spray painting to stone carving. It's a wonderful old building too, typical Hampshire-timber frame with red brick infill stood up on staddle stones.

It was the first course I had run myself, which was quite daunting as I wasn't quite sure how people would progress and whether there was enough time over the two days. The preparation of material for the basketry is quite labour intensive and hard on the hands (I call it stick wrestling!) so I decided to concentrate on that for the first day.

As it happened I was very lucky to have such diligent students for the first course, they all worked really hard to learn the knife skills and made plenty of the weaving strips. We then learnt the knack of peeling two from one growth ring of Hazel and tying the St Brigid's Cross knot to connect the handle and hoop of the basket. Coppice group members Richard and Sue Loader even brought some of their own Hazel rods, which were lovely to work with having grown fast and straight on a rich clay soil. The Hazel I cut is markedly different in character, growing quite wiggly and knotty on very flinty ground.

On the second day we focused on putting the frame of the basket together and filling the weave. I really wanted everyone to finish a basket after all the hard work the previous day and everyone progressed very quickly with the weaving. By four o'clock everyone had near enough finished their basket and were just tidying up the frayed ends.



All in all it was a fantastic couple of days and really good to teach such friendly and interested students. I'm very grateful to everyone for coming along, it's taught me a lot and I hope the students will continue making this style of basket. I'm certain there is a lot more that can be done creatively with Hazel as a weaving material so I'd love to see what people come up with in the future. As you all know, here in Hampshire we are lucky to have some of the best coppiced Hazel in the country and we owe it to our woodlands to keep on making!

If anyone is interested in the next Hazel basketry courses at the Granary Arts Centre the dates will be as follows:

Weekend course- 22nd and 23rd April 10.00am to 5.00pm

Evening course- consecutive Tuesdays, 25th April to March 29th 6.30pm to 9pm

Michael Bennett

I was on the course and found that Michael is a good teacher. The Granary Arts Centre is very interesting to those interested in timber framing and Kesia looked after us very well. A good time was had by all, and I even finished off my basket at home by inserting a couple more weavers once it had dried and shrunk a bit. Thanks for a good course Michael, and I can thoroughly recommend it to anyone interested in hazel basket making.

Chris Westcott

OBITUARIES

Peter Patrick Joseph Thorne 13th February 1957 - 8th January 2017

As members of HCCG will be aware from an announcement on 22nd January 2017 our member Peter Thorne lost his long fought battle with pancreatic cancer.

A Potted History Of Peter's Life.

At a young age Peter and his brother Michael moved to Woodgreen Hampshire with their mother. Peter attended Breamore Junior School followed by Burgate Secondary School. Upon leaving school he completed an apprenticeship as a motor mechanic with Nicklins Garage Fordingbridge. As a journeyman he moved to Headlands Garage Downton, following the retirement of the owner he took over the business.

From a woodland point of view Peter started attending I.C.H.F Craft Fairs with the father of his grandchildren Peter Lane in about 1987. Peter's motivation was two fold, to learn about the craft of hurdle making and keep it going, and secondly he enjoyed the camaraderie around the camp fire of an evening with fellow craft exhibitors after the public had gone home.

About 10 years ago Peter was faced with the decision on the garage business of either investing in a lot of computerised diagnostic equipment for the new generation of cars or resigning himself to only being able to change wheels and weld panels, or to take up hurdle making and coppice work full time. Peter chose the third option.



Initially his new business supported and guided by his mentor Peter Lane was hurdles, pea sticks, bean rods and fire wood, with a preference for firewood customers of licenced premises. In due course following visits to Charfest and the Forest of Dean Earthburn to enjoy the camaraderie of the camp fire Peter developed an interest in charcoal, using a small scale retort custom built by his life long friend 'Blacksmith Dago'. When during illness the hurdle wood got a bit heavy he made thatching spars and finally gypsy style clothes pegs, refining the process and developing a jig to improve production. Taking pegs to a level further than that of he who taught him, and then returning the lesson to his original tutor. Like many of us who exhibit at craft shows we are naturally shy but can talk to the public providing we are doing something with our hands at the same time, so Peter kept working hazel, albeit in shorter lengths almost until the end.

Peter's last show was appropriately Burley Cider Weekend, but equally memorable was the previous week end at the Weald and Downland Autumn Harvest Home where he entered the hurdle competition and came joint 1st. The sheer determination on his face as he completed the hurdle was an inspiration to watch.

He had done the foreign cruise with the family, but making something or repairing something was when Peter was most at ease.

Peter's funeral was held on Friday 27th January 2017 at Fordingbridge Parish Church, St. Marys. The gathering was a church full (undertakers estimate 300 people). The coppice community attendees were Peter Lane in the family pew, a pew at the south back Heather Dixon, Robert Dixon, Jackie Broomfield, Peter Jameson, Dave Partridge and Simon Watson. In the middle of the church John Sweeney and former Hants Coppice member Mel Wallis. From further afield Owen Jones, Neil Taylor, Charles Bucan and also Jason White from Cranborne. I apologise if I have missed any other HCCG members but the attendance was significantly bigger than the audience I usually view from a rostrum.

Peter undertook his final journey from home to the church on a horse drawn timber carriage. He was carried in to the song of Maggie May by Rod Stewart. After prayers The Lord Is My Shepherd was sung, with other hymns being Morning Has Broken and All Things Bright And Beautiful.

His brother Micheal's memories made reference to his woodcraft and charcoal, his love of smallholding type animals including at one time a goat but latterly mainly geese, his dislike of wasting anything, his sense of fun and generous spirit to all which lead me to think are coppice workers pre-ordained to the craft to use these traits?



The poem written and read by family friend Tom Roach and a reading written by his daughter Sinead Blake and read by Amy Thorne were both very moving.

Peter was carried out by family to the music A Fairy Tale Of New York by The Pogues.

A procession of cars and walkers heading to the cemetery at Stuckton Road brought the High Street and Bridge Street to a standstill. At the internment it was typical funeral weather, the light drizzle turning to light rain.

A wake was held at Hyde Ex Servicemens Club with the bar heaving. A party he would have liked to be at in body as well as spirit.

From a personal point of view I will miss Peter. He mainly worked the next farm woodlands down the valley from my kiln site. When the wind was in the right direction we could hear each others chain saws. We have both towed each other out of the mud when we got a vehicle stuck, one tow each so a good job we were even in this world. I will miss a fellow burner who could tell which way the wind was blowing and how strong, how it affected the burn even when using a retort. On a particular day it was Peter who persuaded me to do a kiln full of Douglas Fir before moving the ring kilns out of a chestnut/douglas fir wood. That made our eyes water but it was an interesting learning experience that we both enjoyed 'the once' for the 'crack of giving it a try'.

Peter it was a pleasure to see your hurdle making come on, the joy of shovelling fresh charcoal, your smile as it tinkles like the sound of money and you took clothes pegs to a new level. Rest in peace Pete but I reckon you will be watching if I cut a bit of hazel for Mr Lane in your Cornpits Wood. So the three Petes cutting in the Damerham Valley will live on. One cutting, one threading out and one supervising from above.

Yours Pete.

NOTE FOR INTEREST

The hurdles were fixed to a plain wooden rectangular box. Pete Lane wove the ends and top and the cross (a hard job for him to do in the circumstances and I admire him for it). The sides were cut down from a pair of hurdles that Peter Thorne had briefly used as 'greedy boards' for his truck so his commitment to avoid waste was carried through to the end.

Peter Jameson



Bob Bennett MBE 11th December 1932-28th February 2017

Although Bob was not a member of HCCG, he is featured here as a supporter of the Coppice Group.

He commissioned work with various Group members; split chestnut laths, wattle rods, hurdles, straw bale build pins, and hedge-laying both for his business, The Lime Centre Winchester, and his wife's extensive garden.

For many years he allowed us to use the Lime Centre lecture room as a committee room and nice central location. As part of Phil Allan's research into coppice auctions in the Stockbridge area for archiving history project, Phil happened across an auction catalogue which included the sale of agricultural barn Longbarn at Morstead. Phil bought this on e-bay, gambling Bob might reimburse the cost after Phil had finished his research. Somebody was looking down on both of them at the time. Bob was trying to change a short number of deeds to a registered conveyance. This historical document was of great interest and Bob made the Coppice Group a substantial donation, but assured us it was no more than it would save him in solicitors fees.

For me, Bob's greatest contribution to the Coppice Group was his inspiration and guidance to persevere. We both saw parallels with what he had achieved as one of the originators of the lime revival and what we hoped we will achieve with the coppice revival.

In both cases we had received a lot of scorn. Leave it as a museum piece and the polite version would be 'you are barking up the wrong tree'. Well look at us now. The breathability for buildings of using lime with joints that wear not shatter stone is once again appreciated and underwood management with associated wildlife benefits, light touch extraction on rides and culverts and lessening of runoff and flood risk is once again appreciated.

A Service of Thanksgiving for the life of Bob Bennett was held at Wessex Vale Crematorium on Friday 17th March. A Crematorium full plus 36 standing. Bob was carried in by family members in a cardboard coffin to the music 'The Trout Quintet' by Franz Schubert. The hymn 'All things bright and beautiful' was sung. Family reminiscences read by his son in law Craig touched both on his professional life and also his conjuring tricks and some of the fun and enjoyment of his grandchildren.

The service was conducted by the Reverend Michael Jackson who had known Bob and Katie for many years. He read the poem 'May your road rise with you' in full.

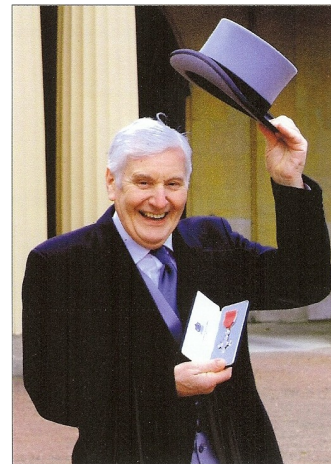
Bob's working life started as a medical photographer and National Service in air traffic control, repping for Huntley and Palmers and Birds Eye food. Claim to fame, Bob was there at the launch of the frozen sprout! Bob's next career move was to Wright Rain irrigation engineers at Ringwood, which then led him to set up as a hydro building cleaning operator which metamorphosed into stone repair and consultancy using lime products which were difficult to get hold of, so in Bob's usual approach to practical problems, set up a supply facility; The Lime Centre.

The longer half of the address concentrated on family and flying etc. One line I enjoyed was Bob had requested he was conveyed in a cardboard box and a wheelbarrow; he had the box but the undertaker did not have a wheelbarrow (sign of the times I say).

Bob exited to the 633 Squadron Theme by Ron Goodwin. Back at Longbarn, Katies hospitality was as generous as ever.

Donations were to the Alzheimer Society and the RNLI.

Peter Jameson



Keith Wheal

Some of you who studied forestry at Sparsholt College will have known Keith, and he has also been a member of HCCG. Sadly, he lost his fight with cancer last month.

He was a good lecturer and ensured his students understood the practicalities of making a living, rather than just fulfilling the academic requirements of the course. A sad loss to his family, friends, and forestry. RIP Keith.

Chris Westcott

Past Chairman's Closing Remarks

May I write less obituaries (preferably none) for the next Teller. It has been a hard winter, turbulent political times with knock on economic consequences. Some good people have voted with their feet (feet first) and as well as published, I know members of the entire Coppice Group have lost dear ones, but one thing I am sure; those who have gone would like us to enjoy spring with the lush green of new leaves and the white blossom of the hawthorn coming back into the woods complete with some strength in the sun.

They would like us to just get on with the job and work another year harvest into product. They would like us to be survivors for a long time. Partly because they have gone, we step up one more rung of the ladder and the young need some real models who are a bit different for the norm, and who are not a society of keyboard pressers, to preserve a rounded society. One of our educated readers may be able to write in and advise who the quote; 'Nobody on their death bed said I wish I spent more time in the office' is attributed to. So lets spend some time in the woods and in good company.

Yours in Greenwoodwork

P. S. Jameson.

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