

## Friends of Park Wood Newsletter Winter and Spring 2022

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### Work Parties



Held usually on the last Sunday of the month and the first Wednesday of the month. They start at 10 am and go on until lunchtime. Anyone is welcome, you don't need any particular skills or specialist knowledge. Tools and refreshments are provided.

*Gary Smith hard at work in the coppice glade*

Diary dates for work parties are:

- **Sunday 30th January**
- **Wednesday 2nd February**
- **Sunday 27th February**
- **Wednesday 2nd March**
- **Sunday 27th March**
- **Wednesday 6th April**
- **Sunday 24th April**

Over the next few months, we will be extending our coppice glade, clearing around trees that the group has planted in the past and maintaining the drainage ditches.

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### Bench Replacement

In November we replaced the dilapidated memorial bench with dedication plaques to Reg and Edna Mott (nee Watson) and Emily Watson.

Our Wednesday group dismantled the old bench and prepared the ground for the replacement which Pete and Gary installed the following day complete with the salvaged and restored dedication plaques.

Pete recently received the following e-mail from Phil at the Woodland Trust:



*The new bench (all made from recycled timber)*

Hi Pete

After I informed our Dedications team that you had replaced the Mott family bench, they received the lovely compliment below from the family which I said I would pass on to you and the Friends:

*Thank you very much for your email and for keeping us updated.*

*Please would you be kind enough to pass on our sincere thanks to The Friends of Park Wood for their kindness and hard work.*

*The bench looks wonderful on the photo and we are looking forward to visiting it in the next week or so.*

*Thank you very much for all your help, it truly means more than words can convey.*

Well done Pete – it doesn't get much better than that.

Phil

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## Coppice Woods



*Fresh coppice stool in winter*

Until very recently virtually all ancient woodland that survives in the UK has become semi-derelict. During the last century traditional forest industries all but died out as using native broadleaves trees were replaced by fast-growing non-native conifers grown in large commercial plantations and mass manufacturing using new artificial materials replaced small scale cottage industries using local hardwoods.

As towns expanded, and green field sites were developed for housing, any woodland left was intended to provide green space for the new residents to enjoy. However often the incoming population were moving from the inner cities and had no connections to the

countryside nor understanding of woodland traditions or values. Issues like fly-tipping, garden encroachment, erosion, uncontrolled felling, and poor tree management became commonplace.

Often the new residents view of woods was that they were dark threatening places, so few people objected to woodland being cleared or lost to new urban development if they felt it was a wasteland or an eyesore.



*The same stool the following spring*

Thankfully, in the last fifty years things have changed to the point where today more and more people are taking an active interest in our ancient woods. Like the Friends of Park Wood all over the country local community groups have sprung up to help care for their local woodland.

Old greenwood crafts and traditional woodland management skills are being revived by a new generation. New markets for traditional products are being developed so there is hope for the future of our ancient woods. One form of traditional woodland management important for these revived crafts is coppicing.

Coppicing is a traditional and sustainable way of managing our woods for small timber and for wildlife. If left too long, a derelict coppice tree will collapse, the stump rots and eventually the tree will die.

Cutting broadleaf trees back to their stump (stool) encourages the growth of new shoots the next spring, after a few years these shoots will have grown into a multiple stemmed tree which can then be coppiced again providing useful timber every few years.

Coppicing was traditionally managed in coupes, an area where all the understory would be cut leaving only the larger hardwood trees. These standard trees provided big timber for beams or planks. Standards would be over 100 years old before felling and as a rule of thumb in coppice woods there would be about 13 standards per acre known as a Kings Acre as it was supposedly decreed by Henry VIII to ensure there would be a supply of large construction timber for the Kings Navy and other strategic purposes.



*Chris Matthews bodging at one of our woodland festivals*

Hazel and other coppice trees would provide our ancestors with plenty of timber to use. Thicker stems made stakes, or if cleaved they could be turned on a pole lath into bowls and chair legs or carved into spoons or other domestic items.

Long thin Hazel rods made bean sticks and hedging binders or as well being split and woven into hurdles, the hazel tops made pea sticks and

the logs used for charcoal or firewood. Nothing was wasted. Trees would be coppiced anytime between 3 and 20 years depending on how fast they grew and the use for their timber. In the south of England, the main types of commercial coppice were either Hazel for the hurdles and wattle or Sweet Chestnut which was used for fence poles and rails as well as paling fencing and charcoal which in the medieval period powered the iron industry of the Weald.

In Hampshire the ancient woodland is predominately Hazel coppice with Oak standards whereas the counties of Kent, West and East Sussex are important areas for growing Sweet Chestnut.

Elsewhere in Britain other tree species were coppiced for local industries. For example, Willow on the Somerset levels for the weaving of baskets and nowadays caskets. In South Yorkshire coppiced Silver Birch provided faggots to the steel industry for burning off impurities during the steel forging process.

In Park Wood we coppice for nature conservation. Each year, we will be coppicing a small area in Park Wood to encourage a broad diversity of plants and wildlife. The timber will be left in habitat piles or used for dead hedging, providing dead wood for insects and fungi. Newly cut coppice opens up the canopy allowing light to get to the ground, bringing dormant seeds into life. Coppicing creates a dynamic habitat of plants and shrubs, providing new opportunities for wildlife. Stump regeneration means that a coppice stool can be incredibly old, much older than if the tree had been left uncut. The results of last year's coppicing can be seen now, the leaves of Fox Gloves



*A working ancient woodland*

are appearing, and the hazel stools have had good vigorous regrowth. Coppicing is a labour-intensive task and is only possible in most woods because volunteers have revived it, so join one of our work parties and help revive this old woodland skill.

There are several good publications on countryside crafts using coppice material but for a general introduction to the crafts and coppicing seek out *Woodland Craft* by Ben Law who some of you might remember being on *Grand Designs* building his house in a Sussex wood.

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## Membership



Just a reminder that membership of the Friends of Park Wood runs from the 1st of April to 31st March each year.

Please contact our membership secretary Maureen Nye at:  
6 Deanswood Drive, Waterlooville, PO7 7RB  
or  
[maureenye@ntlworld.com](mailto:maureenye@ntlworld.com)

to renew from 1st April 2022. You can download a membership form from our website, we would ask for a membership donation of £5 to help meet the annual costs of running the group (about the equivalent of a cup of coffee and a bun at my local cafe!).

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Pete Hodges  
Chair of the Friends of Park Wood