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# The Full CIRCLE

The journal of The Association of Scottish Hardwood Sawmillers

Welcome to the 17th issue of the Full Circle for Winter 2023, back after a short hiatus. We are sorry to have missed the Spring edition, but after Kitty's tragic accident last winter ASHS needed time to recover before setting to the task of bringing together the next Full Circle. After some gentle prompting from Jim, Jo and I agreed to take on this winter edition. It's been a steep learning curve, but it's been nice to be able to go the process as a team, with much kind guidance from ASHS veterans Jim Birley, Nick Marshall, and Steve McLean (as well as our fantastic designer, Steph Christie).

A theme that has helped guide us for this issue is 20+ years of ASHS; an exploration of ASHS' history and beginnings, its ongoing development, and the various activities it runs now as it continues in its efforts to grow the local hardwoods industry. We have a selection of articles from ASHS members as well as contributions from Forestry & Land Scotland, and Scottish Forestry, giving a wide insight from across the sector.

The article that inspired the theme is a look back on what makes ASHS and its members special by our former Coordinator Nick Marshall, written from his perspective of two decades of experience. For those wanting something of a history/guide to ASHS beginnings and what it takes to replicate it we have the insight from Jim, as one of the members who has watched and helped ASHS grow. Not everyone has been with ASHS for years on years and we have articles from newer members to prove it! Johnny Chainsaw (it's how he introduces himself I swear) has a great perspective going through his journey of working out what ASHS actually does. We also have one of our newest members telling us about themselves, a new sawmill based out of a community woodland on the Ross of Mull. Those members who have been around long enough may recognise our centrespread – a throwback to the centrespread of ASHS' first Full Circle issue, then produced by Maggie Birley and revised now by Jo Birley. We hope you enjoy this edition of the Full Circle. Looking ahead we'll now be on the lookout for contributions for the next edition – if you're interested in contributing to the next Full Circle please get in touch! We would love to share what you have to say.

Johannes and Jo



COORDINATOR

Jo Birley



EDITOR

Johannes Schamp



DESIGNER

Stephanie Christie



You can view all 16 of our previous editions on our website [www.ashs.co.uk](http://www.ashs.co.uk)



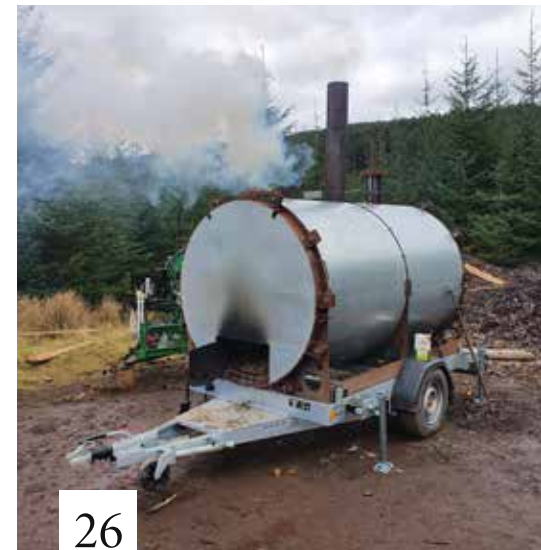
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## ASHS NEWS AND UPDATES

### ASHS AGM

The 2023 ASHS AGM this year was held on Wednesday November the 15th at Scottish Wood, Fife.

The AGM was well attended and generated positive discussion about the year in review, as well as proposals for the coming year's workplan.

Minutes were taken by Secretary, Jo Birley, and these have been distributed amongst the membership to enable those who were unable to attend can be kept up to date on proceedings. If you would like to request a further copy of the AGM documents, these can be supplied by Jo.

### New Member Notices:

***Eight new members have joined ASHS over the previous year...***

- Artisan Timber Supplies – run by David McLean, a sawmill and timber supplier based in Macmerry, Trenton.
- Ed Townley, Rising Canopy – Ed has an off-grid sawmill and workshop on the west coast where he is currently working on woodland creation
- Winton Estate – A family owned estate in East Lothian, recently taking on more management of their estate forestry
- Thompson Trees – Tree surgery business based outside of Edinburgh
- South West Mull and Iona Development (SWMID) – Community Group based on the Ross of Mull, they have a community owned woodland and sawmill
- Tuer Forest and Land – Kate Tuer is a forestry consultant and contract miller, officially joining ASHS this year after many years of close relations and working with us on the WWS course
- Tree Surgery & Sawmill Ltd – Tree surgery enterprise based in Killearn, recently developing into sawmilling
- Caitlin Erskine – Estate forester for Seafield and Strathsprey Estates in Moray

### Working Woods Scotland

***Since the last AGM, ASHS have run two Working Woods Scotland courses.***

In 2023 ASHS ran two Working Woods Scotland courses. Following the popularity and success of previous courses, ASHS was approached by the ICF (Institute of Chartered Foresters) and asked to deliver an altered version of the course tailored specifically for foresters. Working in partnership with ICF, the course – dubbed Working Woods for Foresters – was delivered in May over a beautifully sunny 2-day period. Day 1 was spent in the yard at Scottish Wood, with day 2 in the woodlands of Falkland Estate.

We also ran our usual 3-day Working Woods course at the end of September. It proved popular, with twice as many applicants as were spaces.

In 2024 we plan to run two of our usual three-day courses to cater for the rising interest. Dates for the first of these courses are confirmed for the 8-10th of May, the second course's dates are yet to be set, but can be expected to fall in September/October. Applications are open for Working Woods Scotland May 2024 – apply through application form found via 'Working Woods Scotland' at ashs.co.uk, or email [coordinator@ashs.co.uk](mailto:coordinator@ashs.co.uk).



The greatest benefit of the course is that it really got me thinking about growing productive hardwoods and has given me good information to enable me to evaluate it is an option in new woodland creation schemes. That is exactly what I was hoping to get out of it.

***-Stephen Tong, Working Woods for Foresters 2023***

For me the course provided a perfect introduction to the whole spectrum of opportunities provided by a tree right through to the final product. To meet so many inspirational people with such depth of knowledge and expertise was fascinating.

***- Rob Stuart, Working Woods Scotland 2023***







So, this is what we're doing! And we're also using this opportunity to bring our website in-house and under our own management. This will make future updates and access to the site quicker, cheaper and much simpler. Our new site is hosted on a user-friendly platform which means future co-coordinators should be able to easily learn the skills required for its management.

I'd like to say a big thank you to John, for his years of work alongside ASHS and for the role he's played in connecting us to the wider world (as well as the help he has offered me in our development of the new site). Our website has been a great promotional tool over the years – it's how many of our members originally discovered our organisation, and it also generates work for us through its connection to the public.

I'm looking forward to sharing the new ASHS website with you when it is ready, and thank members again for their patience as I finish setting it up. If you'd like to help, one thing I'm always on the look for is photos! If you have any pictures you'd be willing to contribute (of anything and everything), please send them my way!

### Planning to Succeed – business discussion group

The Planning to Succeed group formed after last year's AGM. They have met a number of times this year – at member's yards and workshops and on a visit to James Jones at Mosstodloch back in April.

Our most recent meeting was held at Scottish Wood after the 2023 AGM in November. No date has yet been set for the next meeting, but if you would like to be kept in the loop or for more information, please email [joanne.scottishwood@gmail.com](mailto:joanne.scottishwood@gmail.com).

You can read more about Planning to Succeed in the article written by Andy O'Neill on page 20.

### The new website is coming on well and should be ready to come online soon...

For those who don't know, the current ASHS website has been experiencing technical issues and we were advised that it was in fact on the brink of collapse!

It was designed and built by John Laing in 2015 and John has been managing the site for us ever since. It was John who advised us on the technological issues. As a non 'web-person', my best understanding is that the servers currently hosting the website are now out of date, and rather than engage in the tricky and time-consuming task of trying to bring them back up to speed, a better course of action would be to start afresh using a more current software.



Written by,

Jo Birley

ASHS Co-ordinator

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a Lantra trainer and trainee provided good insights and observations from an industry and personal perspective.

A three course format was discussed with various Lantra representatives and was in general well received. It was made clear at this point by them that ASHS as the professional body writing and presenting the course or courses are the leading authority here. We would state who the trainer would be and they would be checked, certified and insured by them. During the research for this paper however a few questions were raised surrounding the justification of using Lantra as the certifying body.

The ASHS business group is currently supported by more than a hundred member businesses across Scotland. Based on extrapolated figures from a past ASHS surveys they represent an estimated combined gross turnover of around £15 million! So if we are the leading authority on the subject then why do we need Lantra? Why not just certify it ourselves? This approach would simplify and speed up the progress towards a finished course and its intellectual property would remain with ASHS and its writers. It could also open up the option to potentially develop video courses alongside it.

The conversation on the road to developing a structured sawmill training course continues. If you think you could contribute in some way or have a thought that might help move this idea forward, please get in touch with the board and get involved.

## SAWMILLING TRAINING COURSE CONSULTATION

ASHS have talked about training for a long time now and over the years have provided it in the form of booklets, training videos and the Working Woods course. The consultation letter which was recently sent to all members for comment, is a realistic natural progression from these.

Research was carried out to establish what a structured sawmill training course might look like in broad terms at this initial stage. It looked at what was currently available on the market as well as course structures, timings and where and how it could be best delivered. It established contact with Lantra, the national training organisation for land based industries as the certifying body. A potentially large course content was outlined with the view to stimulate the conversation. It was considered that this would be narrowed down as members put forward their views of what a realistic training program might look like to them.

Five members responded with their thoughts, three were in full support of the idea as outlined with no other specific comments on the content. One was in general supporting but wasn't keen on sending his trainees on a business module. One comprehensive response was received from Johnny Stableford. His knowledge as



Written by,

*Steve McLean*

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## SCOTTISH FORESTRY & ASHS

Back in September I had the opportunity to sit down with Derek Nelson and chat about the early days of ASHS. Although I had met Derek briefly in 2019 as a woodland officer at a south Scotland Timber Transport meeting, it was good to get into the same room with the man whose electronic files and folders provide a multitude of answers and insights about the previous activities of the team. My particular favourite electronic folder is titled 'DEREK - ref docs just in case' and contains gems like chapter 10 of the Forestry Act 1967 - I haven't needed that one (yet) but if you do, give me a shout!

Many of you will be familiar with Derek, who retired from Scottish Forestry in March 2020 as he was the link between Forestry Commission Scotland (as it was then) and ASHS. He was also part of the Scottish Hardwood Timber Market Development Group (SHTMDG), which could be seen as a predecessor of ASHS. I would highly recommend readers to return to the spring 2020 edition of the Full Circle, where Derek's final article *The Longest Journey...* offers a retrospective of the sector over the previous 20+ years.

We discussed how SHTMDG's remit to raise the level of understanding of hardwoods, niche softwoods and encourage management of broadleaved woodlands through increased understanding of timber grades and values, was still as pertinent for ASHS today, as it was over 20 years ago. It is not a subject that dates. However what really stands out for me is how the established ASHS members provide support for newer members and share knowledge to benefit all.

I enjoyed hearing about how ASHS started out with a leaflet and mobile phone kept in the back pocket of various individuals. This phone was occasionally answered however the noisy nature of being a sawmiller didn't always merge well with the needs of query answering. The role of ASHS coordinator developed from here with funding from Scottish Forestry which continues to this day. Having the coordinator role has enabled ASHS to better respond to the market demand, develop ideas, acts as central connection point for the group and importantly allows the miller to mill. When probed about ASHS greatest achievement to date, Derek emphasised Gavin Munro's advice and education of agents and landowners about how to market and value each tree. Hardwoods





cannot be treated as softwoods with parcels felled and then sold. You need to have a better understanding of the end product before any material is cut. Gavin and Kate Tuer have been instrumental in this specialist marketing and getting the best buyer for the tree. I echoed the sentiment of harnessing the expertise of those in the hardwood sector and the value offered from the knowledge base short films available on the ASHS website – an activity Scottish Forestry continues to fund as a means to widening understanding of the sector and attracting new talent.



Our conversation ambled around how Scotland hits the sweet spot of being not too big or too small, enabling organisations such as ASHS and SFMA to know their audience and offer bespoke guidance that benefits both Scotland and the sector further afield. An example of this is regularly observed at the Working Woods Scotland course (along with the trial Working Woods for Foresters version in May 2023) drawing participants from across Scotland and the rest of the UK.



We felt the future was bright for the sector with ASHS welcoming and nurturing the next generation of sawmillers. I am particularly keen on our sector becoming more visible and highlighting the expertise that already exists. Scotland has ambitious tree planting targets which will offer a pipeline of material – a news release from Scottish Forestry in September stated that of the 11,200 hectares of new planting approved so far for 2023, over half were for native woodlands with species that will in time filter into the hardwood sector. And this is before we start calculating timber available from the other Forestry Grant Scheme options of ‘diverse conifer’ and ‘productive broadleaves’. Our changing climate will also see a change in species choice and diversity of planting for resilient forests.



The current and future ASHS programmes (as mentioned in Derek’s spring 2020 article) need to continue evidencing the progress and growth of the sector, stating the outcomes and highlighting the benefits to Scotland. When assessing the proposed ASHS yearly work programmes I measure the projects against the desired outcomes of Scotland’s Forestry Strategy which I have outlined below. Derek’s article concludes with him passing the ASHS baton to the next Scottish Forestry staff member. It is a baton that I am learning from and enjoying.

***Here are the activities that ASHS fulfils to meet the objectives and priorities set out in Scotland’s Forestry Strategy 2019 – 2029.***

***Objectives:***

1. Increase the contribution of forests and woodlands to Scotland’s sustainable and inclusive economic growth.
2. Improve the resilience of Scotland’s forests and woodlands, and increase their contribution to a healthy and high quality environment.
3. Increase the use of Scotland’s forest and woodland resource to enable more people to improve their health and life chances.

***Priorities and activities:***





**1. Improving efficiency and productivity, and developing markets by:**

- a. Supporting the ambitions of the Forest and Timber Technologies sector, as set out in their strategy *Roots for Further Growth*,
- b. Supporting businesses of differing types and scales to develop and grow markets for value-added wood products.
- c. Attracting new and more diverse talent to the forestry sector and improving the capacity, capabilities and safety of existing workforce.

**2. Enhancing the environmental benefits provided by forests and woodlands**

- a. Supporting activity to improve the ecological condition and habitat quality of native woodlands and forests, including PAWS.

**3. Engaging more people, communities and businesses in the creation, management and use of forests and woodlands**

- a. Improving people's understanding of the practice and value of forestry and the wider benefits it provides.
- b. Supporting the provision of appropriate education and skills training to encourage wider participation in forest and woodland related employment.

**Scottish Forestry update of work to date with interest to ASHS members:**

- On-going discussion about development of sawmilling training to be delivered by ASHS.
- SFMA Ash Rise project continues with 20 makers selected from the SFMA call (10) and open call (10), venue selection underway for the autumn 2024 exhibition tour, plus a collaboration with Outdoor & Woodland Learning Scotland (OWL Scotland) offering a special grant for educators and outdoor practitioners to work with young people with ash and learn about ash dieback.
- Women in Forestry practical training fund – next round of funding to be released autumn 2023 through Lantra, to support women in Scotland to undertake short

courses to develop career or improve employment opportunities. £500 per course available. More information available through Lantra or email me directly if you'd like to know more.

Email [ros.wardman@forestry.gov.scot](mailto:ros.wardman@forestry.gov.scot)

- Currently refreshing the Scottish Forest and Timber Technologies (SFTTG) Skills Action Plan 2024 – 2027 with priority themes: Talent Attraction, Workforce Support and Development, and Developing the Education Offer.



Written by,

*Ros Wardman*

Felling took place at Killearn, whilst the milling was Scottish Wood.  
Photography Tina Sorensen Photography







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## ASHS – WHERE IT CAME FROM

*"Why don't we have anything like ASHS in England or Wales?"*

*This question came up more than once during the Working Woods for Foresters course ASHS ran back in May.*

The Institute of Chartered Foresters (ICF) asked ASHS to run a course for them earlier this year. This we did - again with support from Scottish Forestry and the Scottish Forestry Trust, but what we hadn't anticipated was the number of professional foresters attending the course from England and Wales (although we probably should have as the ICF is a UK wide organisation). But this is where the comments came from, and I have to confess to a certain smugness here; not only is ASHS an open, friendly, and versatile organisation, but we are also unique!

But to be honest that's a little ironic, because part of what brought the ASHS concept together – back in the late 1990's – was when a bunch of enthused hardwood sawmillers from Scotland jumped in a minibus to go down to see what this new Coed Cymru initiative was in Wales!

But perhaps the main inspiration here wasn't what Coed Cymru was up to, it was just the fact that a bunch of us got together and went on a road trip! Many of the best ideas, projects and movements come together when a group of enthused individuals get together and start throwing ideas about. This is how it was for ASHS, and how it was also for the Scottish Furniture Makers Association (SFMA), when a few makers met up in a pub!

So, I would say to our southern colleagues; if you want to start up something similar yourselves... get together, hire a minibus, come and visit some ASHS members and we'll show you a good time! And our long and illustrious history might even give us the confidence to tell you some of the things we got wrong... or could have done better. Like, for example, our name!

As time has gone by ASHS has evolved and settled into being the obvious link between the growers of timber and the final users. But its name... "The Association of Scottish Hardwood Sawmillers" suggests that you have to be a hardwood sawmiller before you can be a part of the organisation. That's not the case. It is good and healthy for ASHS to include a wide range within its membership: from land owners, growers, and foresters; through to timber processors, designers, and final users. And that is what we have – although, sadly, feedback tells us that many have not joined in the past because of the name, due to uncertainty of whether or not they would qualify to meet the suggested criteria.







***So here we are... 23 years on from when six sawmillers met up and made us a thing.***

Our history has shown periods of vigorous activity, alongside periods of calm. Quite often the activity comes when there is a change of Chair... or a clutch of new members, and new ideas get thrown around and some get actioned. But – and here's another message to our Southern neighbours if you're thinking of forming a similar group – ASHS is a member led organisation with a part time coordinator to help keep on top of the day-to-day stuff. This means that nothing happens unless members give up their time and energy to help make the things happen that they care about. And this, sometimes, needs to be reminded to the wider membership when comments come in wondering why ASHS doesn't do this... or do that...!

***Nothing happens unless YOU help to make them happen!***

And we're a diverse bunch, and well spread throughout Scotland. I would say we are a pretty eclectic, practical and talented bunch. We work in an area that still has space for some pioneering and creative outlets - finding innovative ways of turning Scotland's varied tree resource (especially hardwoods) into useful, beautiful and desirable long-lasting products that lock up carbon over time. Generating profit might not be as high on our collective agendas as with some industries; perhaps it's more a way of life for us, along with a love for trees and timber and the fun of finding ways to overcome the challenges of making a living in this industry.

Communication and meet ups within the membership have been more of a thing in the past (pre covid), and we need to get better again at this in the future. It is these meet ups that lead to the sharing of knowledge and experiences and the formation of ideas for moving the industry forward. We also get to know each other better, which not only leads to good working relations and friendships, but also opens the doors for collaborative efforts (either as ASHS or in smaller local groups) in things like marketing and purchasing. They're also good fun!

And a key ingredient to the whole success of ASHS – right from the start - has been the support and interest from Scottish Forestry. This has helped us pay for the cost of a part time coordinator - essential in bringing together and helping to action the ideas of the group, along with keeping on top of the day-to-day admin of a growing organisation.

***So, we started with six members back in 1999. Now we have 55 full members, along with 57 Associate & Retired members. And the ideas keep flowing, and the numbers keep growing!***



Written by,

*Jim Birley*

Manager at Scottish Wood  
[www.scottishwood.co.uk](http://www.scottishwood.co.uk)





## WHAT I'VE LEARNED IN TWENTY YEARS WORKING FOR ASHS

I started working for ASHS in 2001, working part time alongside my role working for Reforesting Scotland. ASHS chose me, I think, partly because I'd set up one of the first mobile sawmills in Scotland, which became Lothian Trees and Timber, with Ulrich Loening in 1986. We used a Trekkasaw and had all sorts of problems but learnt a lot about sawmilling, seasoning, dealing with difficult people, working with difficult machines, and a lot more. It was hard work; we were essentially creating a new industry out of the ruins of the collapsed hardwood sawmilling sector, which had paid dearly for its single minded focus on the production of mining timber, heedless to the impacts of the Thatcher regime.

It's astonishing how far the industry has come from those early days when the mainstream timber industry talked about small sawmills being "hobby businesses" and "lifestyle choices" – well they'll be eating their words now!

Despite having run a sawmill, I've been an outsider working for ASHS – sitting at my desk while ASHS members have been cutting, sawing, lifting and transporting - doing the real work. But that's allowed me to see the industry in its wider context and I've gathered some impressions that I hope might help your individual businesses as the sector in general.

### ***1. ASHS exists in a parallel economy***

It's not really a separate economy, but you can't deny that ASHS members don't behave like other businesses. There's a tiny failure rate – about 10% compared to 90% for most small businesses. Booms and recessions go by in the wider economy and ASHS members just keep on keeping on, buying logs, sawing them and selling planks. It might be harder at times, but it's rare to see a member shut up shop for good. I think that this is partly because specialist niche markets are insulated from the mainstream economy, but also because you know that your work is always going to be hard and you have to keep up the effort and make the tough choices, in order to run businesses that give you job satisfaction.

I think ASHS itself bears some of the responsibility for the low failure rate. There's nothing worse than starting a new business with little to no knowledge of the industry, no customers or suppliers and no-one to turn to for advice or encouragement in tough times. Mutual support, through meetings and events, training and mentoring and collaborative working, has always been at



the heart of what ASHS does and I'm sure this has had a tremendous impact. I should single out Scottish Wood here, because of their commitment to mentoring very many ASHS members, as well as openly helping them over the years.

The supportive nature of this industry is aided in part because we're not competing against each other so much as against imports, giving small-scale timber a clear goal (and a common enemy) in which we can unite and work towards.

### **2. Sawmilling is not enough**

Apart from contract harvesting, sawmilling is the toughest job in the timber industry but unfortunately this isn't reflected in the profit margins (although COVID has seen an increase in sawmill turnover with the rise of woodwork hobbyists). Sooner or later, most sawyers take on other processes to add value to the products they sell. Many season planks, and often finishing or machining them too. Others make products like fencing, profiled cladding, or flooring. Some have gone into furniture making or building construction. When running a sawmill it might be a good idea to think about additional products/services you could provide to boost your turnover, whatever makes a profit, isn't too risky, and requires the skills that you have, can develop, or buy in - it might help increase the validity and longevity of your business.

### **3. Hardwoods aren't enough**

When we started Lothian Trees, we only cut hardwoods but it quickly became apparent that we needed to cut

some softwoods for stickers and building kilns and racks. Then people started asking for larch cladding. Most ASHS members describe hardwoods as their first love, but when starting in business many will turn to softwoods due to the high demand for premium softwood products and the fact that softwoods have a much faster turnaround than hardwoods – where it can take several years before you see a profit from your logs due to the air-drying requirements. As a result, the majority of ASHS members also work with softwoods, mainly Douglas fir and Larch, and dabbling in other softwoods depending on supply and demand, such as Western cedar for shingles, and even on occasion, good old Sitka Spruce. I've always thought that a business has to do what it must to make a profit, and in sawmilling that means the products you produce will depend on what logs are available and what planks customers want. While you mustn't forget your USP, which is high quality homegrown timber, you are all small businesses. You're never going to be part of the bulk timber industry.

### **4. You're part of the bigger timber industry**

But of course you are a tiny part of the Scottish timber industry. You use the same harvesting and haulage contractors. You're governed by the same regulations. You buy logs from big forests and sometimes sell to big businesses. And while you need these bigger businesses, your experiences with them have sometimes been awful. Some don't trust small sawmills or small businesses at all. Some require guarantees, endless forms, payment in advance. Most will only pay you after several months delay.







Although some are just badly managed, or don't care about small businesses, some have been burned in the past. It can hurt, but ultimately we need to get as many of these businesses as we can on side I think there is a job to be done in building confidence among bigger businesses in the stability and trustworthiness of ASHS members, which are demonstrable facts.

### ***5. There's always a place for mobile milling***

At LTT, we started out with a Land Rover and trailer and most of our work with the Trekkasaw was mobile milling. Part of Ulrich's vision was to make better use of the garden trees that tree surgeons logged and dumped, as well as hedgerow trees and ones from parks and gardens. It was a hard life and we soon discovered that a lot of the trees in question were low quality, or unmillable; some had problems with rot, uneven grain, or there were bits of metal grown into the logs. You can't really build a business on logs like these, but they are an important resource and despite

these common defects, there are still a lot of very valuable logs among them. More importantly, this work almost acted like a PR campaign for Scottish grown hardwoods; people would see you out there doing the work and it would encourage them to seek out Scottish hardwoods. Knowing the origin story of the tree that provided the wood for your table is a key selling point for many people, and there's no better illustration of this than seeing your neighbours lop-sided beech being put to the mill and producing beautiful planks. In recent years, many ASHS members have abandoned mobile milling, but I'm sure that there will always be a role for it.

### ***6. You are innovators***

Government staff often asked me what ASHS members had done by way of innovation. It's something of a mantra with Governments and I wonder if it isn't over-emphasised to the cost of people just getting on with delivering quality goods and services. But I've been astonished at the sheer amount of innovation ASHS members have come up with – in products, equipment, and business management. You are a practical lot – when faced with a problem, you do the research, look, and ask around, and if there's nothing out there that meets your needs, then you set to and create a solution. Kilns are the perfect example of this, ASHS members are always experimenting, trying out, building, adapting, and improving kilns - whether it be heat-vent, dehumidifier, vacuum or solar. The hours I've spent listening to discussions about the pros and cons of different fans, baffles, dehumidifier units, rails, bogeys, lorry-backs containers and all the kit that makes up a kiln. The ASHS solar kiln was just part of this story, and I'm sure the innovation will continue, for kilns and all the other kit you use.

### ***Two things have helped to enable the innovative nature of our members:***

- 1.** People getting training in key skills – whether it be sawmill maintenance in Poland, log-cabin building in Canada, or grading at a nearby sawmills, ASHS members spend a lot of time and money on learning skills to the collective benefit of the small-scale timber industry, and the Government should be more supportive in this effort.
- 2.** Useful contacts that aid in the development of technical skills and knowledge in the industry – Napier University staff have provided all sorts of technical advice, support, and research information over the years. Some Scottish Forestry staff are very well connected and, as well as their own knowledge, provide useful contacts in industry, academia, and Government. Independent consultants in the timber and forestry industries have helped make the case for small-scale sawmilling and had a significant role in the industries development.

### ***7. We are good value for money***

In the 20 years I worked for ASHS, we received about £250,000 from the Government, mainly through Scottish Forestry (and previously the Forestry Commission). In return, we've created an entirely new industry, using raw materials which mostly would have been dumped, left to rot, or more recently cut up into firewood. Now the small-scale hardwood industry employs hundreds of people and saves millions in imported timber and timber products. The revitalisation of this industry has helped develop a local craft furniture industry from nothing - creating an interest and pride in Scottish timber and its products among ordinary people.

That's worth its weight in gold (or, even better, quarter-sawn Scottish oak).

Postscript

I should take a moment to mention some names here, because ASHS and the small-scale homegrown hardwood sector might not have existed without the efforts of some visionaries who used their various means to push things forward. People like Derek Nelson, Roger Coppock of the Forestry Commission; Penny Edwards (Falkirk Wood); Frank Gamwell (FG Timber); Ulrich Loening (LTT); Jim and Maggie Birley (Scottish Wood); and many, many more.

***There's still so much to be learned from the story of ASHS, this industry, and it's hardworking, innovative members, and it deserves to be more widely known.***



Written by,  
Nick Marshall



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Frank Gamwell's kitchenware, sawmillers, the Forestry

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ASHS started off as 6 members  
112 Full, Associate a

THE JOURN

STRENGTHENING THE INDUSTRY



t-ups, chats and  
ions to see  
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HEY SO FAR



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STRENGTHENING THE INDUSTRY

hen table, a bunch of  
y Commison, and cake.  
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members. Now we have  
and Retired members.

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## ARE YOU PLANNING TO SUCCEED? WELL WE ARE!

Just before last year's AGM, ASHS members were invited to take part in a peer-to-peer business development group led by our chairman Malcolm Morrison. The day after the AGM there was an initial information meeting for ASHS members interested in joining the '*Planning to Succeed*' group which was very well attended with lots of questions and input.

Since then, there have been three meetings and a fourth in the diary, of what has become known as the 'Rough Cuts' - a name chosen over the plentiful, less P.C. versions that were suggested!

Already, meetings have taken place all over the country from just outside Penicuik in the South to Mosstodloch in the Highlands. Attending these meetings has often meant missing out on a day's work which isn't easy for a small business combined with considerable travel for most. However, even after only three meetings, something special is beginning to happen...

Malcolm, from the outset, confidently described how these groups evolve, based on his previous experience of running similar groups across other industries. Initially, there seemed to be some scepticism from participants about sharing amongst our peers, that travel and time constraints would be worth overcoming and we would all benefit from freely discussing what was working and what wasn't within each of our businesses. After all, as a group of sawdusty wood folk, often working in business isolation, the thought of sharing our goals, ambitions, successes and not to mention failures, doesn't necessarily come easily to many of us.

Fast forward to October and we now have a core group which has met at a Dovetail Scotland - custom furniture maker and sawmill, the opposite end of the spectrum at James Jones Mosstodloch sawmill - a huge commercial operation and most



recently at Tiny Temple - bespoke timber cladding manufacturer, learning about each of the businesses we were visiting as well as our own businesses. It seems that with every meeting, the group breaks new ground in sharing, networking and group development. What has been most surprising is the way in which each of the participants is so keen for the others to succeed and freely share tips, advice and experience. There is no feeling of competition which is credit to the ethos which underpins ASHS.

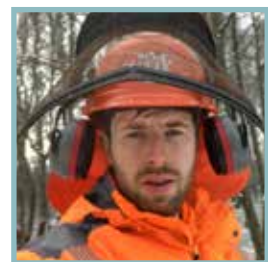
Some of my own learning has been that no matter of what size of business or whatever niche of the ASHS umbrella you work under, we in fact share many of the same struggles and that this only comes to light when we discuss these issues with our peers. When was the last time you asked another business in the industry what apps or technology they use to make life easier, how they get the best from their staff, who they bank with, or how they deal with other headaches? These are some of the many topics covered across our meetings now the ice has been well and truly broken between the Rough Cuts.

My feeling is that the group will continue to benefit the members involved to an even greater extent as we meet more, learn more about each other's businesses and discuss our own challenges as well as listen to how others have overcome similar struggles.

Personally, this has been a great opportunity to not only visit some really inspiring businesses, but also get to know the people behind them and the other Rough Cuts many of whom I now regard as more than just colleagues, but friends whose businesses I am keen to see succeed!

Thanks to Scottish Forestry for supporting this initiative as well as to the businesses who have hosted the Rough Cuts, setting the bar really high with their most amazing food and hospitality offerings which I'm convinced is an unwritten ASHS custom.

*I'm looking forward to our next meeting in the near future!*



Written by,  
*Andy O'Neill*





## WHERE DOES A TREE GO WHEN IT CROSSES TO THE OTHER SIDE? - TREES AT THE END OF THEIR LIVES, AN ARBORIST AND SAWMILLERS PERSPECTIVE

Following the sad news of the vandalism to the National Trust's Sycamore Gap tree, I feel it a prudent time to share some thoughts about the struggles our trees face, both in life and afterwards following human interaction (spoiler - they often lose!) from the perspective of an arborist and sawmillers.

Following the unacceptable vandalism of the Sycamore Gap tree and it rightfully gaining significant traction with the UK media, it raises some wider questions, particularly around why the felling of trees with significant environmental, historical and amenity value within our communities is not met with similar interest or concern? Perhaps if trees emitted Wi-fi instead of Oxygen we would all be more aware of how trees often come last in tree vs human conflict.

Trees of arguably greater historical and environmental significance than the non-native Sycamore Gap tree which are felled, often do not attract any scrutiny and worse still, once felled, typically assume the default designation as a waste product being unsuitable for the mainstream commercial timber industry and are destined to become firewood, biomass or left to rot – sometimes even in landfill, such is the relationship our society has with trees, beyond the scope of the commercial timber processing.

Making matters worse, aside from losing a mature tree of significant value to its local environment, when burnt or left to decompose, the CO<sub>2</sub> that the tree has sequestered over the course of many human lifetimes, is released back into the atmosphere rapidly, in relative terms. Depending on the species and its size, this can amount to literally tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per tree as trees sequester Carbon from the atmosphere that mixes with Oxygen when decaying or combust to form CO<sub>2</sub>; “1 kg of wood will generate 1.65 to 1.80 Kg of CO<sub>2</sub>.” (Kaltimber)

As an arborist, I acknowledge that there are times where the felling of mature and older trees is unavoidable. However, this is almost exclusively on the grounds of safety - where other management techniques are unable to mitigate the risk posed to its surroundings sufficiently. For example, following storm damage (possibly due to our changing climate); or severe fungal infection (oftentimes imported from other parts of our globalised world). Or it could simply be that the tree has come to the end of its natural life, as all living things do. These highlight just some of the mounting threats faced by trees, aside from humans. Following such circumstances, we should be looking to engage in a process of ensuring that either natural regeneration or the planting of a new trees is required to continue the tree life cycle as oftentimes, trees out with the scope of commercial forestry do not have such follow up actions mandated. Equally as important, we should seek to ensure that the people entrusted to perform



pruning and management works on all trees are in fact skilled and knowledgeable enough to perform such work so as not to inadvertently cause more harm than good in the course of their actions which can lead to the premature demise of a tree and is all too often the case across our tree scape judging by the low standards of tree work on display almost everywhere.

We, as a society, need to adjust how we 'value' all trees but particularly our mature, veteran and ancient trees, sometimes generations old, thinking of them not as a commodity standing in the way of our goals – all short term in tree years, but as a treasure for us to be custodians of for future generations. As the saying goes,

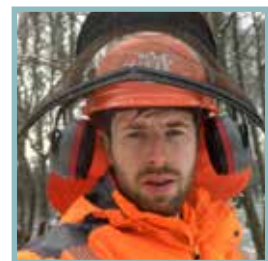
***'We don't inherit the Earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children.'***

We must better provide trees with protection of significant enough impact to ensure that anyone who chooses to fell ancient trees without the appropriate consent and justification faces consequences which cannot just be absorbed into the 'cost of doing business' as it has in the past.

As important, positive outcomes should be demanded for these ancient beings at the end of their lives, ensuring that they can live a second life which is a fitting tribute to the benefits they have brought to our daily lives. A good example of this would be as a unique piece of local wood following an interaction with an artisan woodworker to produce wood products with unique, traceable provenance – arguably more detailed than some tree stewardship schemes - with significant carbon storage, cultural and historic significance and most of all, elevated far beyond the designation of a waste product or consumable commodity.

Despite the logistical difficulties involved in such a process due to the size, weight and location of trees, this vision is being realised by a small number of forward-thinking chainsaw environmentalists producing nature's functional art, where people can see and touch these once living giants while gaining an appreciation of their brilliance evolved over millennia and the lives they have lived for hundreds of years. We hope to awaken the notion of trees around us in our day to day lives becoming a treasured wood product, perhaps in the form of furniture, art or environmentally sound construction material derived from our own shores without questionable environmental and labour practices and minus the huge carbon emissions in the transport of imported timber. When was the last time you shopped in a big box or furniture store and wondered, 'Where did the wood for this product come from?' and is it acceptable that oftentimes no one can tell you which county let alone which continent it came from?

Championing the cause for a number of years, under the banner of Tree Salvage, has often been a lonely and uphill path, but seeing the outpouring of emotion following the loss of the Sycamore Gap tree, has given me hope that significant trees are protected in life and equally afterwards. That the Gap tree and many others like it, can go on to live a worthy second life by passing through the hands of fellow wood stewards, sawmillers and artisan woodworkers, to be celebrated in a fitting tribute to the living tree that was while changing the tide on the perception of trees as commodities in the backdrop of our busy 21st century lives.



Written by,  
Andy O'Neill



## INVESTIGATING "ANCIENT WOODLAND" ON MAPS!

I really do understand the reasoning behind using General Roy's map of 1747-1755<sup>1</sup> as the basis for the Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI) in Scotland...I really do! And I really do try to think good things about it! Originally it was a quick fix to figure out roughly what woodland was around and acted as a base line for future reference. Something was needed at the time to draw attention to halt the rapidly diminishing older woodlands that were being ripped out or planted up with conifer in the more southerly parts of England. In the south the mapping resource is very different and so perhaps the mapping is more accurate or perhaps more appropriate. As a quick fix it has been excellent and has drawn attention to a big problem area in forestry. However, guys, let's get with it and get a bit more up to date with what is available?



Drumlanrig castle as depicted on General Roy's map of 1747-55. Its plantings date from around the 1680s when the new castle began to be built.<sup>2</sup>

General Roy's map is not really fit for purpose and more is read into it than is perhaps realistic. Nature Scot treat it "with caution" as well...<sup>3</sup> but fail to mention the multitude of other mapping that is available. One is almost invited not to look further than Roy or the first Ordnance Survey! The NLS has an excellent map site with a great range of maps and includes a guide for woodland research.<sup>4</sup> This is a go to page for researchers... after all simply designating something "Ancient" does not tell us anything about the history of a woodland. It is little more than a daft and often meaningless description of woodland that often conjures up meanings for the amateur that are entirely erroneous. Please do go and do a spot of your own research!

Of course, woodland history is not just about finding woods on maps: it is also about searching other records as well. Unlike a Scottish Forestry version of events (which tells us that forestry in Scotland started in 1919 with the arrival of the Forestry Commission) the first nursery, that we know of, was a monastic one in Cupar Angus in 1460 although we can rest assured that woodland planting was definitely encouraged by monastic institutions long before that. "Modern Scottish forestry" could be said to start around the 1660s with the return of exiles (both Parliamentarian and Monarchist) who had spent time travelling on the Continent during the Civil War. They brought back fresh ideas and even different tree species. The European Larch was said to first appear in Scotland at about that time and also the Silver Fir. By the end of the 17th century planting was definitely becoming a fashionable thing to do.

However, after the great famines of the 1690s there appears to have been a moral imperative to get the best out of one's estates. As Lord Belhaven remarked "The scarcities

of the last years, I must impute in part to our great neglect of husbandrie... so it ought to be an incitement to all those whom God has blessed with estates, to double their diligence in the improvement of their ground."<sup>5</sup>

This did not just mean concerning themselves with the growing of food but also the growing of timber and timber product.

There was as much interest in the growing of conifer species as there was in the growing of oak and other broadleaves. Not only this but we had a wide range of silvicultural ideas that took root over the ensuing 100 years or so. By 1750 we can clearly see planted woodland appearing on the estate maps.



A Plan of that Part of the Annexed Estate of Lovat lying in the Parish of Kilmorack and County of Inverness. 1757 by Peter May.<sup>6</sup>

There were "fir" plantations in both the North and the South. "Fir" in this instance refers to Scot's Pine and not to abies types. The Peter May map shows an area near Beaulieu and the woodland probably planted around 1750 or at least after the Jacobite revolt of 1745 on the Lovat Estates. In the south we had similar plantations created. This shows a "Fir Park" near St John's Town of Dalry near Castle Douglas. The map distinguishes between pine and broadleaves. Both lots of "fir" will have been planted for construction timbers and joinery woods and grown to compete with the Baltic imports of the time.



A Plan of the Enclosures of Earlstoun and Barskeoch belonging to James Newal Esq. 1769 by James Gregg<sup>7</sup>



They are often styled as “plantations”. This is to distinguish them from “natural woodland”. “Natural” is not as we would understand it as “natural regen”. Natural woods could be planted! There are books that describe “how to plant natural woods” ...this mainly involves heeling in a few acorns and broadcasting other seed! <sup>8</sup>

Of course, there are a few single trees of great significance that appear on these maps. The one shown here, the Earlston Oak shown on Barn Green is one that the Covenanters gathered underneath in the 17th century. Remnants of this once large tree still remain today. Every region has ancient trees that are meaningful in some way.



### The Earlston Oak

Broadleaves (especially oak) are of course the big earners in the 18th and 19th century ...but for their bark rather than for their timber. It appears that planting was encouraged for around 100 years through the use of import duties. So from around the 1750s import duties, particularly on bark and small section timbers (up to around 6”x6”), held prices artificially high. The woods that were planted in this era are numerous and they are often the ones that are regarded these days as “ancient” by the powers that be. They are of course often nothing more than industrial relics ...but are of great interest none-the-less ...and of course biodiverse.

One map that I constantly return to is of Elliock Estate in 1767 just to the south of Sanquhar. It looks so scenically splendid with various bits of woodlands interspersed with random fields and meadows. It is almost reminiscent of those Italianate landscape paintings that always have woodland in them with hills in the distance and probably a white cow! However, it turns out that this is one of the more ruthlessly exploited woodland in our region. Its woods were used in the mines up at Leadhills and Wanlockhead. The timber was hauled by pack pony on a regular basis and the woods were coppiced. All sorts of timber were used



including small branch wood for riddles and basket work etc. They get a mention by Robert Sibbald in 1684 when he complains that the woods have not been managed well as they have not been enclosed after they have been cut. However here they are some 80 years later looking in reasonable health. Much of the later planting was also designed for using in various local mines and they moved to conifers as a faster and more reliable alternative. Industrial relic indeed!



Plan of the Estate of Elliock in the Shire of Dumfries belonging to the honourable Ja. Veitch Esq. 1767 by Hamilton Leslie



The Parliamentary Free Trade lobby eventually got the better of the protectionists and the planting rate in the UK suffered accordingly. Take a look at virtually any random map from Scotland that is between 1800 and, say 1855, and compare it with something from the 1920s and you will see some sort of fall back in tree cover.



The map on the left is from the Dumfries Archival Mapping Project (DAMP) and National Library of Scotland (NLS) joint project called GREMLIN. The other is OS 1" from the 1920s.

The map on the left is from the Dumfries Archival Mapping Project (DAMP) and National Library of Scotland (NLS) joint project called GREMLIN. The other is OS 1" from the 1920s.

There is a school of thought that suggests that our lowest amount of tree cover was around the end of the First World War. It wasn't. It was probably around the middle of the 17th century. In the late 18th century, there are parishes in our region of Dumfries and Galloway with well below 1% in tree cover with some of the lowland parishes registering less than 0.5%. The maximum in any parish was as high as 5%. One cannot assume that this pattern would be the same for the rest of Scotland... or even for the rest of Scotland south of the highland line ...but it would be safe to assume something similar.

DAMP has been in collusion with Thomas Muller who assessed tree cover in Nithsdale and Annandale for his PhD.<sup>9</sup> He georeferenced some 400 plus pre-OS maps and also did botanical surveys on selected woodland. The conclusions have shown accuracy on the part of the maps and also on the part of historical writers of the time. Other aspects of this study show that the Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI) based on Roy is not an accurate way of doing things. It gets worse with the extras put into the AWI using the First OS maps being over 50% incorrect if a date of 1750 is used to assess ancientness!

The problem with the AWI is that it is trying to do two different things. One is to assess age and then jump to the assumption that if it is old then it will be biodiverse. Biodiversity is not necessarily a sign of age and age is not necessarily a sign of biodiversity. For instance, it is well understood that ground that has been ploughed and cropped will not respond well, in terms of ground flora, if planted with native tree species. This diversity will happen more quickly in unploughed land. There was a fashion for under-sowing woodland with grass seed as well in the 18th century which would also hold up the spread of a biodiverse herbage. Thus, it is difficult to say that "Age = Biodiversity". However, a part of Thomas' research did show that the flora did return to new woodland over time and thus the concept that these things are lost for ever once destroyed is certainly not the case.

There must be a better way to talk about these woodlands. A start would be to put a "first known date" on the woodland instead of simply calling it "ancient". The second would be to have some form of biodiversity check list which would give the place a score as to how biodiverse it was. Of course, the devil is in the detail!

To simply refer to woodlands as "ancient" is not just ignoring the history of the trees but it also ignores all people who have made use of the woodland and the various histories involved with utilisation. It ignores the early planting that was done, the fencing that was done to conserve woodland and the specific dynamics that lead to woodland failure. There are plenty more pre-OS estate maps out there. We know the whereabouts of perhaps around 8-9,000 of them. It has been estimated that there could be around 30,000 of them covering the whole of Scotland. Making the last sentence "We should be busy collecting copying and making them available to the broader public as well as for the professional to do quality research on the woods that they manage.

<sup>1</sup> <https://maps.nls.uk/geo/roy/#zoom=7.0&lat=56.88600&lon=-4.07090&layers=roy-highlands>

<sup>2</sup> <https://maps.nls.uk/geo/roy/#zoom=13.9&lat=55.27105&lon=-3.81201&layers=1>

<sup>3</sup> [https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/badb5ca513254860a1d7759f9170a179\)92](https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/badb5ca513254860a1d7759f9170a179)92)

<sup>4</sup> <https://maps.nls.uk/guides/woodland/>

<sup>5</sup> The Countryman's Rudiments etc. Introduction 1699 by Lord Belhaven

<sup>6</sup> <https://maps.nls.uk/view/188105992>

<sup>7</sup> <https://maps.nls.uk/view/223140637>

<sup>8</sup> Forester's Guide 2nd Edition 1824 by Robert Monteath

<sup>9</sup> Reconstructing Long-Term Woodland Cover Changes and their Environmental Legacy Using Scottish Estate Plans (c. 1740-1835) and GIS. Oct 2018 Thomas Muller <https://theses.gla.ac.uk/41074/1/2018mullerPhD.pdf>



Written by,  
Archie McConnell





## TIROKAN FOREST SAWMILL – FULFILLING A COMMUNITY AMBITION

Tiroran Forest, in the south west of the Isle of Mull, came into community ownership in November 2015, since when it has been owned and managed by South West Mull and Iona Development on behalf of local residents.

It is 789 hectares of former Forestry Commission commercial plantation - largely Sitka spruce, Japanese and Hybrid larch, and Lodgepole pine – planted from the 1960s. We do have small pockets of native broadleaves, primarily following the course of the river.

We took on a developing situation of SPHNs (Statutory Plant Health Notices) in the forest – our coupes of larch blighted by *Phytophthora ramorum*, with the requirement to fell the areas within a tight timescale and dispose of the logs according to strict biosecurity rules. This limited the market for the larch to a mainland biomass boiler – sold at a loss.

At this time, all of our felled timber was exported from the island and milled timber was purchased and transported back from the mainland. It didn't make sense and we knew there were many people who were keen to buy local timber, support local jobs, help build community resilience and reduce the carbon miles within the supply chain.

Before and after the community buy out, consultation with the local community had revealed a preference for the forest to retain a commercial purpose in the future, albeit restocked with a far greater diversity of species. Our extensive restocking plans reflect this view, with a replanting mix of diverse conifer species, areas of native broadleaf, and productive hardwoods. This includes broadleaves for selective felling on a continuous cover basis by future generations. There was also a call for other kinds of economic activity within the forest, with a sawmill being top of the agenda.

In July 2020, our main bridge was deemed unsafe to cross, stopping planned haulage. Delays to bridge repairs presented an opportunity and further incentive to get the sawmill up and running. We had several hundred tonnes of felled diseased larch remaining, plenty of potential customers asking for timber, and the possibility of adding considerable value to a currently low-value product, keeping the financial benefit in the local area. We carried out market research to quantify the demand with a survey circulated electronically through social media and email. The survey asked whether people would buy local larch and spruce, and what products they would prefer. We received 81 responses – the majority of which came from the communities of South West Mull and Iona (with a few from elsewhere on Mull) – a population of around 800. A resounding endorsement that we used to support grant applications for buying the sawmill! We successfully secured funding from the Princes Countryside Fund (now the Royal Countryside Fund) and Scottish Forestry (Harvesting and Processing Grant) and in July 2022 finally ordered a sawmill, and Kellfri timber trailer and grab.

On a very wet day in October 2022, our petrol-driven Logosol B1001 bandsaw was delivered by Doug at Farm and Forestry. This choice of sawmill was governed by budget, although we did make a lot of enquiries to ensure that it was a good quality machine and thus far it has proven to be an excellent choice.

Our funding included salary for a part-time sawmill operator – for a few months while we got set up and we were delighted to employ Matt, born and bred in Kintra, in South West Mull. His first job was to construct a shelter over the sawmill to protect it, himself and the milled timber from the elements. Much like all sheds – we could do with a bigger one!

Since we began taking orders in April of this year 2023, demand has been constant, enabling the sawmill to quickly cover its ongoing costs, although preventing us





from building up much stock. Our primary products have been larch cladding, posts, fence rails, sleepers for bridges and boardwalks, and a surprising number of octagonal strainers. We are constrained by the fact that all of our remaining roadside larch was cut to 3 metres for the biomass plant. If we have specific requests for longer lengths, we have to head off to a different part of the forest where a strip of affected larch trees were felled to waste. Here we can cut to length and extract with the winch: more work but worth the effort for the premium logs.

As an adjunct to the sawmill, to enable us to use every part of our larch in this circular economy project, we successfully applied to the Scottish Government's Rural and island Communities: Ideas into Action Fund for funding for a charcoal kiln – an Exeter Retort. Milled diseased larch – with the bark and cambion layer removed – can be transported anywhere. But, due to the SPHNs, the offcuts, which could potentially be sold for firewood could not, at the time, be moved outwith the forest. (We did find one customer within the forest boundary and several months after the purchase of our kiln, a transport exemption was put in place to try to tackle a firewood shortage on Mull and Iona!). Processing the larch offcuts in the kiln produces biochar (crushed charcoal) that can potentially be used in the forest soil, local gardens and further afield. Biochar is deemed to be carbon negative when produced in this way, locking up carbon in the soil, enhancing fertility and reducing the need for artificial fertilisers. The retort can produce up to 150kg of charcoal/biochar each burn, although the feedstock does need to have a low moisture content for efficient pyrolysis to take place. We found out the hard way how long it takes to remove any additional moisture during the burning process.

We also have a large stock of Sitka spruce available and have started to mill this to air dry and hopefully use in a year or so as strength graded construction timbers in our planned forest cabins.

To maximise the value we add to our timber, and in response to the requests that came through our market research, we have started to produce picnic benches for sale. We are currently contracting out the construction of the benches to local craftspeople, creating additional employment. We exhibited our first bench at the Bunessan Show this summer, where it proved very popular – especially amongst people looking for somewhere to eat their takeaways! We took our first orders here and expect many more next year. We are looking forward to expanding our range of island grown products, for example sheds, animal housing, and other garden furniture!





Looking ahead we have big plans for the community forest. We would love to move the sawmill – and possibly upgrade to a bigger, electric-powered one - to a more convenient location within the forest, with more space, the capacity to add secondary processing machinery, and with easier access for customers. We are also looking for funding to employ a modern apprentice, who would be able to learn and work in all aspects of work at the forest – from tree nursery to sawmill.



Naturally, a community forest needs to involve the community in its activities and we have held several events to spread the news of the sawmill. We've had a school visit with a demonstration – Matt enjoyed the round of applause he received for milling a log! We've given further demonstrations at our Forest Open Day, and with a small grant through Scottish Forestry's Community Fund, we facilitated two Forest Furniture Workshops where participants used hand tools to create basic outdoor furniture.



Written by,  
*Philip Yelder*





## BUYING LOGS FROM FLS

Forestry and Land Scotland continues to serve Scotland's specialist timber market through the sale of large diameter Douglas Fir, Larch and when available, hardwood sawlogs to small scale processors.



**Scottish  
Forestry**  
Coilltearachd  
na h-Alba

Unlike most Scottish Government Agencies, Forestry and Land Scotland functions as a near self-financing organisation with the majority of its income coming from timber sales which are sold primarily via our web-based Esales platform and Long Term Contracts.

Annually FLS sells 2.6 million tonnes of timber is primarily sold to medium and industrial scale customers across Scotland however we recognise the importance of smaller scale businesses and do our best to ensure purchase opportunities exist by using dedicated sale events and most recently advertising timber using the ASHS member's network to direct customers to our E-Sale platform.

Being a Government Agency, it is essential that an open and fair approach is taken with our sales which is why E-Sales is our preferred method of timber sales. At a regional level, local foresters are permitted to undertake a limited amount of negotiated sales but this approach has to be restricted in the spirit of providing open and fair sales to all potential customers who wish to purchase timber from us.

Through working with ASHS over a number of years, FLS has evolved its specialist timber sales with consideration to small scale processors by means of selling small volumes of logs, providing additional information such as pictures and not cross-cutting trees until a specification is received from the purchasing customer, in this way we avoid the situation of speculatively cutting which is often problematic for all concerned.

With these points in mind, our most recent sale of large Douglas Fir from East Region yielded no bids on our E-Sales platform which was disappointing given the quality of the timber and consequently we would be keen to secure feedback on how best we can engage with ASHS member for similar sales in the future.

Securing timber from FLS does require a degree of paperwork which reflects the nature of how we operate, however we remain committed to making timber available to Scotland's small scale sawmillers and will do our best in marketing specialist timber in a way that enables customers to purchase and use the quality timber that is grown in the National Forest Estate which is managed by Forestry and Land Scotland.

Yes... that's right enough Douglas... securing timber from FLS does require a certain degree of paperwork and online form filling, which (for me anyway) does incite a certain degree of dread!.

However, we should all know that when Douglas gets in touch with ASHS, to let us know there is timber soon to become available, and that this will be split into small parcels (ie down to the 25 tonne lorry load), then we should take note because its probably because he has come across a particularly stunning parcel of slow grown European Larch... or towering Douglas Firs, and he's keen to make these "Crown Jewels" available to a wider audience.





So yes, if you're used to buying most of your timber from forestry contractors or random land owners where paperwork may be next to nothing and prices agreed on a trust and reputation basis, then ploughing through the FLS paperwork might seem tiresome and onerous.

But I would argue that once you're there... once you've gone through the registration process and you're in, then the additional work involved in bidding and purchasing soon becomes straightforward. And then... timber from the entire publicly owned forest estate becomes available - even to the likes of wee guys like us!

So, we should be grateful that FLS - through Douglas - has a policy of helping to make timber from the forest estate more accessible for the small guys.

And when they do make that effort (and cost) of splitting up certain parcels, we need to be quick off the mark to snap up some of these excellent loads of premium softwoods (and sometimes hardwoods too).



Written by,  
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Written by,

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## Working Woods Scotland Course

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For more information see 'Working Woods Scotland' at [ashs.co.uk](http://ashs.co.uk) or email [coordinator@ashs.co.uk](mailto:coordinator@ashs.co.uk)



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**Contribute to the Full Circle!**

We're now looking for articles and contributions for our next issue.

Have something you'd like to write about? Email [coordinator@ashs.co.uk](mailto:coordinator@ashs.co.uk)





## WHAT EVEN IS ASHS?

Have you ever gotten involved with something without really knowing what it is? Well two and a half years ago when the then ASHS chairman, Keith Threadgall, asked if I'd join, that's exactly where I was. I've known Keith for quite some years as we both demonstrated our skills at the same events and became fairly well acquainted as a result. Keith explained to me he was trying to broaden the skill set within the association and thought my background in arboriculture and training could be an asset. I did find it a bit peculiar as I'm not a sawmiller, other than cutting planks with a chainsaw mill for making my bespoke carved benches. It's worth noting the entry requirements have now been adjusted somewhat to be as inclusive as possible. I've got to admit having joined ASHS I then completely forgot about it for over a year, probably due to change in circumstances of the committee staff at the time. It wasn't until the 2022 AGM held in Granton on Spey where I was then nominated to become a board member (I declined) that I thought "I still don't know what ASHS really does!" With another AGM approaching I'm not sure my position has changed and what else is interesting is I'm not the only one in that boat. So, without asking Google or digging up the ASHS charter for answers, what is it doing for me?

The first envelope I received through the door after joining contained a number of guides about grading and processing timber. They look very well made, professional and appear to be packed full of information. Remember I'm not a sawmiller so whilst this is great underpinning knowledge it's a little over my head. Things went a bit quiet again until Kitty took over the Secretaries position from Nick and after a request came out looking for contributions to the Full Circle magazine, general communications picked up and there was a steady flow of emails about everything from job



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opportunities, people looking to buy and sell equipment and timber, courses and events and a whole host more. It's quite an impressive networking facility when it gets going.

The 2022 AGM was combined with visits to Speyside Cooperage, Logie Timber ahead of their expansion project, and also to MAKAR. Two of these places would normally have restricted access to Joe Blogs so it was some what of a privilege to be welcomed in and formalities aside it was a good opportunity to meet some of the other members too.

As a result of the AGM I became aware of the Scottish Working Woods Label which I think is a fantastic hallmark and one I'm keen to pursue. Although the process has stalled a little, I think it's getting back on track.

A point of great discussion was a proposal for creating a sawmilling course and like a light bulb switching on, it almost felt like someone had set me up to get involved! I had no objection of course and offered my response to the feasibility review. For better or for worse it looks like I'm going to be heavily involved should it progress, and I think in the long run it will become a significant gain to the Association.

Another outcome of the 2022 AGM was the creation of a business development group. Now I was finding it hard enough to understand what ASHS did so when someone offers a subsidiary self-help group, I can't help but think everyone in the room took a proverbial step backwards. That said after signing up we've now been to evaluate several businesses, including some of our own, and I'm slowly starting to see how it's making a difference.

After the very tragic loss of Kitty, it's great to have Jo on board who appears to be taking great steps in modernising the ASHS membership and public persona. One of the things we've discussed was the use of social media and how our amazing internal network could be broadened to the wider public to promote our skills and services. I'm no spring chicken but I try my best to use socials as a tool for benefit. If you've got something worth sharing then tag the Association and we'll share it again.

I am soon to attend the next Scottish Working Woods course which despite the immediate financial impact, I'm really looking forward to and fully expect any information that doesn't drain from my tired brain will be a great benefit to my understanding of the bigger picture. On another offshoot I've joined a group of tree related people who are informally sharing information and creating opportunities for CPD. My involvement is as a result of connections through ASHS members.

Lastly and possibly most significant for me was the introduction to Andy O'Neill who is also a member and lives in Falkirk too. I've been working with him under his business O'Neill Trees and Timber Ltd and I've been giving him some practical guidance on arboriculture as we go. We're now trying to build relations with the local council to recover timber that would otherwise go to waste and turn it into either milled product or bespoke chainsaw carvings. With any luck other members might be able to use the model and duplicate the process in their area.

***In reflection, whilst I don't really know what ASHS does, it seems to be doing quite a lot for me and I suddenly appear to be quite involved. What's ASHS doing for you?***



Written by,  
Jonny Stableford





## SFMA ASH RISE PROJECT

SFMA Ash Rise project continues with 20 makers selected from the SFMA call (10) and open call (10) to create pieces of new work using ash which will showcase the best of Scottish talent as well as the beauty of the timber. Venue selection is underway for the autumn 2024 exhibition tour to regional locations, plus a collaboration with Outdoor & Woodland Learning Scotland (OWL Scotland) offering a special grant for educators and outdoor practitioners to work with young people with ash and learn about ash dieback. There will also be a feature length documentary film which form part of a lasting legacy of the project.

*It was fantastic to see the SFMA come to pick up their Ash at Scottish Wood recently!* The Ash Rise project has been a great opportunity for demonstrating the beauty and functionality of Scottish hardwoods (in this case, Ash).

It is doing a wonderful job of raising the profile of Scottish hardwoods across the board. ASHS have supported the project so far by processing and kilning the timber, which is now ready for the next stage of its journey - we're looking forward to seeing the final results! *More information about Ash Rise's journey will follow in next edition of the Full Circle.*



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## SFMA

*The beginnings..*

In this issue of the Full Circle where we're exploring some of ASHS past we thought it would be fitting to include this interview between Ross Samson and Mike Whittall on the beginnings of the Scottish Furniture Makers Association. (p35)

This interview was originally published in the Winter 2021 issue of the Full Circle (edition 14) as part of a celebration spread of the Scottish Furniture Makers 20th Anniversary.



# beginnings

Ross Samson talks about the founding of our Association  
*Interview by Mike Whittall*

**T**wo decades ago the concept of an association for furniture makers based in Scotland was born. We caught up with Ross Samson, one of the Scottish Furniture Makers Association's founding members, for a chat about how it all started and how it's developed over the last 20 years. And this is what he told us.

*M: I understand the SFMA was created by three makers enjoying a pint in a bar. Is that correct?*

R: Not quite. It actually started as an idea in my head while I was moving my business from furniture restorer to furniture maker. But it was a conversation with Tony Gill at a show in the SECC that was, I'd say, the moment when it all came into being. I was there with my little stand and had just sold a bookcase and we started chatting away... I told him about my idea and he straight away said "Yes, count me in". Following that, yes, I believe there was a chat in a bar and the idea developed further.

*Who was involved at the start?*

As well as Tony, there was Toby Vint and Ronnie Morland; and so we became an association of four. Then David Samuels, Angus Ross and Rob Elliot came on board and after a few years we'd grown to twelve members.

*What motivated you to set up the SFMA?*

Essentially it was because I really wanted to be able to help others and have others help me. To share experiences and costs with others, pass on work, buy and sell equipment among ourselves and to advertise together through holding exhibitions.

*What did you hope to achieve by forming the SFMA?*

I really hoped to increase the amount of cooperation between makers. Cabinetmakers can be quite solitary creatures – but I thought more could be achieved by people collaborating and helping each other towards the single goal. I think they call it the power of the collective!

*What do you see as the key benefits of belonging to the Association?*

For me it was all about collaborating – which I guess gave me greater confidence to proceed. Seeing these other guys making beautiful things made me think 'Yeah, I want to be doing that too'. And then there was also the camaraderie – which doesn't necessarily increase your sales – but I've always found really important.

*How did the Association impact your business?*

It's a little hard to say really, as I've only ever been a furniture maker while also being an SFMA member. But I would say it motivated me to achieve, to share and to pass on the legacy – which I've now done.

*What has been the most notable event of your time in the SFMA?*

It would have to be one of the exhibitions, I think. The one we held at the Dovecot in Edinburgh for the SFMA 10th anniversary particularly stands out. For one thing, it was a great venue, but also it was the first exhibition which the association held which I had very little involvement in organising. Which, to me, meant SFMA had grown beyond me – which I felt was a success!



*How has the Association changed over the last 20 years?*

Something I've noticed is it has become far more diverse; having such a large membership as it now does, which has drawn in a wider range of approaches; some very niche, others more mainstream. But the thing I've always liked about it, is that everyone in it makes lovely things.

*What would you hope the Association might achieve during the next 20 years?*

One thing I'd like to see would be a return to running some smaller exhibitions where we can get our work seen by local people – as in my experience, these result in more commissions. But overall, a continued evolution of that community and camaraderie, which have created such a buzz ■





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