

£6

Edition 16 / Winter 2022

*The Full*

# CIRCLE

The journal of The Association of Scottish Hardwood Sawmillers

## **WOMEN OF THE WOODS**

*Articles from the women working in the Scottish timber and forestry industry*



Scottish  
Forestry

Coilltearachd  
na h-Alba





**THE FULL CIRCLE EDITION 16 IS DEDICATED TO**

*Kitty Birley*

*Many of you will already know the desperately sad news of Kitty's recent death in a kayaking accident on the river Nevis. On a reunion weekend with her ex Aberdeen University Canoe Club friends, Kitty was tragically trapped and pinned underwater for several minutes.*

*Her partner, Joe, and other friends were able to pull Kitty out of the water and administer CPR until the emergency services arrived. Kitty was taken to Queen Elizabeth University Hospital and continued living with assisted life support for three days but died on Wednesday afternoon November 30th, as this was gradually withdrawn.*

*Our family will be eternally grateful to all of those involved in Kitty's care, and for the incredible actions of her friends on the river who enabled us to surround Kitty with so much love throughout her final days with us.*

*Kitty was incredibly excited about completing the editing and collation of this edition of Full Circle – her first, and getting it packed off to Stephanie for design and production.*

*I know she would want this edition to go out on time and as it is, and happily there has been time, and space, for us to include these pictures.*

*Jo Birley  
(Kitty's sister)*

On behalf of all of the ASHS members and extended community we would like to send our heartfelt condolences to Jim Birley and his family at this unimaginably difficult time. We're sure that you will agree that Kitty has produced a wonderful edition of The Full Circle which will remain as just a small part of her legacy...

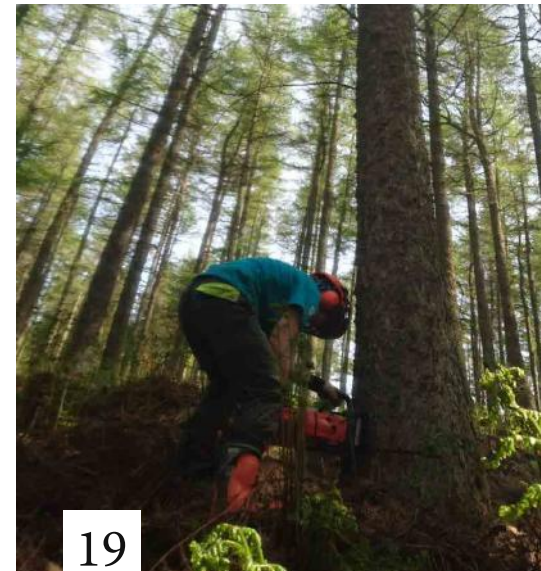


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# The Full CIRCLE

The journal of The Association of Scottish Hardwood Sawmillers

*The Full Circle has been going strong for over 7 years now, under the careful curation of Steve Mclean and Nick Marshall.* This Winter the journal is looking at the women working in the Scottish timber sector, so Steve felt like it was only right that this edition should be overseen by the Full Circle's first female editor. Having taken over from Nick as ASHS coordinator a year ago, I was excited to take on the challenge of putting together this edition of the Full Circle. With a range of excellent and interesting editorials from women across this industry, I believe that we have created a great addition to the Full Circle's catalogue, that investigates an area which has historically received little attention but has been gaining in awareness over recent years.

This journal delves into the experiences of women from across the timber industry; with an article from Helen Mackay, Chief Forester for Scotland, talking about how times have changed since she started working in the industry – when there weren't enough women around to bother having a lady's toilet at forestry events; to an article from Lizzy Taylor, discussing her personal struggles in her woodworking career. While most contributors acknowledge that there are times when their gender has impacted their work life, the severity and extent of this varies considerably from person to person, and between industries.

However, despite the differences in experience, there was one recurring theme, which was the issue of representation; for a long time, the realm of forests and timber have been seen as a 'man's world', which can act as a deterrent to women entering the industry. Nevertheless, women have been working in the woodlands for a long time – going back as far as World War 1 where the 'Land Girls' were seen taking up saws and axes to fulfil gaps in the forestry sector when the men were drafted into the army. While we may be in the minority, we're definitely there. Ros, the Forest Industries advisor at Scottish Forestry, states in her article, that 'if you can't see it, you can't do it'. Therefore, to get more women applying to work in the timber sector, we need to show them that there is a place for them in this industry.

*Which is exactly what this journal aims to do. By shedding a light on the wonderful and talented women already working in this industry, we hope to show that the woods are for women too.*

All the best,  
Kitty  
The Full Circle Editor

**DEADLINE DATE FOR EDITION 17**  
Friday 31st March

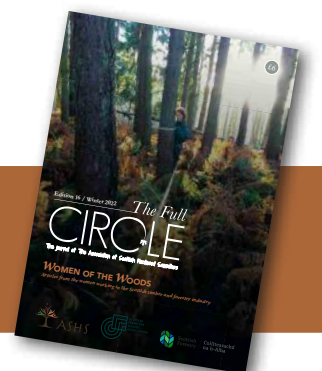
You can view all of our previous editions on our website  
[www.ashs.co.uk](http://www.ashs.co.uk)



**PRODUCTION EDITOR**  
Kitty Birley



**DESIGNER**  
Stephanie Christie



Scottish Forestry / Coilltearachd na h-Alba





## ASHS NEWS AND UPDATES

### Current industry conditions: the impact of the cost-of-living crisis

As we see the current economic climate in Britain go from bad to worse, with the cost-of-living crisis well underway and a recession on the horizon, it's hard to say how this might affect ASHS and our members.

The main softwood industry is clearly going through a less busy time than over the previous couple of years, and some mills are working well beneath capacity.



a reduction in Russian larch imports - our main competitor. But countering this is potential concern for the supply of Larch timber into the future as Phytophthora marches steadily northward, and many landowners are felling and selling their Larch now, before it catches up with them. Some say that hardwoods are more likely to be hit by the cost-of-living crisis than the softwoods that we do. Hardwoods are often seen as a luxury product, and therefore more likely to get stricken off the shopping list as people begin to tighten their belts in a recession than the necessities.

***But the general chat and feedback at the AGM was buoyant. Wood is where it's at! Wood and timber products are becoming increasingly tied into our futures in the wake of the climate crisis. And ASHS members - if anything - are great innovators, where there are ways to add value to our timber, we'll find them!***



But it seems the majority of ASHS members, as usual, carry on; head down, busying away, mostly unaffected by the ups and downs of the industry at large.

Part of our resilience will be down to the variety of work that we do; not only between the different businesses, but also within most member businesses – if one outlet is down, we can focus on another.

Many of us work with Larch as a naturally durable external grade timber, and this has lately undergone some good times. This is partly driven by cultural trends towards increased use of timber in building construction (especially cladding), the increased demand that was sparked by the COVID lockdowns (for garden decks and offices etc), and, more recently,



Written by,

*Jim Birley*

ASHS Treasurer | Scottish Wood

## CALLING ALL MEMBERS!

...We need your suggestions for ASHS 2023/24 work program!

*“Birch, Scotland’s most numerous hardwood tree and yet greatest hardwood import. What could we do to improve and use our own stock rather than buying it all in from abroad?”*

*“Premium hardwood and softwood logs cut into roundels for firewood, because extracting them from a garden or wood is impractical. Is there a lightweight saw that could be carried to the log for processing rather than taking the log to the saw?”*

*“The Scandinavians use Spruce for external cladding... why don’t we?”*

These were some of the chats at the recent ASHS AGM in Granton on Spey (among many others), so it's time to gather these thoughts and ideas and put them forward for the 23 24 ASHS work program (April 2023 to March 2024). Most of us have pet projects, ideas, or rants, which frequently don't get beyond being expressed over a coffee or pint. Yet it is these ideas that have helped form ASHS work programmes in the past. So don't hold back, because if the membership or Scottish Forestry think you're on to something then here's your chance to look more deeply into your own personal project and paid for the privilege! What better?

We're open to all ideas relating to the timber industry, don't be put off if your project doesn't seem related to hardwoods or forestry or sawmilling. ASHS has become increasingly diverse over the years from starting out as a community of hardwood and softwood sawmillers it has now become a home for woodworkers, foresters, tree surgeons, contractors, landowners and more.

*If you have an idea that you would like to put forward as an ASHS project, please send your proposal to Kitty at [coordinator@ashs.co.uk](mailto:coordinator@ashs.co.uk) who will put your idea to the ASHS board for consideration. Don't hesitate to send it through, we want to hear them all!*





### AGM

The AGM was held on the 4-5th of November at the Garth Hotel in Grantown on Spey. Over 30 attended, and the event included site visits to Speyside Cooperage (who have an ongoing commission with ASHS for the provision of quarter sawn Oak planks for whiskey casks), Logie Timber, and MAKAR. The AGM was enjoyed by all participants and gave members a chance to get together and talk about what type of mill is truly the best and other problems facing the industry!

The AGM saw Keith Step down from his position as chair, and Malcolm Morrison (GMG Energy) was nominated to fill this role. Both Ninian Stuart of Falkland estate, and Malcolm Mack have stepped down as board members. Keith continues to support ASHS work as a director, and there were further additions to the ASHS Board, and so we would like to welcome our new directors; Marc Council (Logie Timber), Ben Moore (Moore Timber), and Andy O'Neil (O'Neil Trees and Timber).

### Work Programme 2022-23

ASHS has had an active start to the year, with an AGM and a Working Woods Scotland course already under our belts.

***But that is not all, oh no that is not all!***

### Sawmilling training School:

It has been pointed out that there is a gap in the market when it comes to official training opportunities for sawmilling. This has been a long-standing issue and one that we are working on. Steve Mclean (ASHS director) has started plans for the development of a training course (or courses) for sawmilling, and this is being done with support from both Scottish Forestry and Lantra.

Steve hopes to provide a range of sawmill specific courses, and the consultation and planning stage for this starts soon. Steve will then be circulating emails to members asking for opinions and recommendations on course content – so, keep your eye out for these and please respond.







### Sycamore video:

ASHS have also published an informational video on the processing, storing and marketability of Sycamore timber. A species that is becoming increasingly dominant in broadleaf woodlands. The video can be found in the ASHS video knowledge base on the ASHS website ([ashs.co.uk](http://ashs.co.uk)), as well as on YouTube.

### Plan to Succeed:

'Plan to succeed' is a business discussion group run by ASHS and facilitated by Malcolm Morrison. Malcolm has extensive experience of running business groups of this nature, and its aim is to bring 8 to 12 ASHS members together to learn from each other and to learn from outside business models, to help streamline and improve their own business practices.

Having held an interest meeting on the morning after the AGM, the group has already received significant interest from members with the first official meeting of the group will be held on the 7th of December this year.

### ASHS Booklets:

In addition, ASHS are working on publishing 2 informational booklets; a guide to timber pricing; and comparison sheet, that will provide Scottish timber alternatives against common imports.

These will be published later this year. In the meantime, we will be asking for member contribution to these documents – the more the merrier!

If you would like to put forward your pricing methods for the ASHS guide, or have an idea of what species you would like to be included in the comparison sheets, please email [coordinator@ashs.co.uk](mailto:coordinator@ashs.co.uk)

### SWW update

The Scottish Working Wood label is still going strong, with two new members joining in the last financial year.



Written by,  
*Kitty Birley*  
ASHS Coordinator



## WORKING WOODS SCOTLAND 2022

In September this year ASHS had its second ever run of the Working Woods Scotland course. The first run (October 2021) was a great success with attendees, trainers, and (most importantly perhaps) funders! A second course was clearly very much on the cards. Applications started coming in before the dust had even settled on the first course.

Furthermore, off the back of the success of the first course, we are now in the process of creating an alternative 2-day version of the course, in collaboration with ICF, that is specifically designed for foresters.

*Here is a review of this year's course, from one of our participants.*

### *Working Woods Scotland: it's THE place to go*

If you are interested in learning more about the management of broadleaves for hardwood production, the processing of timber, or if you are looking into setting up your own sawmill - or just want to improve your current set up - the Working Woods course is THE place to go. With a melting pot of professionals and like-minded enthusiastic people, you learn so much, and come out on the other side, not only with a greater understanding of the industry, but also the confidence required to take yourself in whatever direction you want to go within the Scottish hardwood sector.

Having talked to previous attendees I was excited to start the course (at last!) on the Tuesday morning - although I must admit I was slightly fearful of the infamous hoppus foot! After our initial meet and greet in one of the lean-tos at the Scottish Wood yard - where we were supplied with bountiful cups of tea and biscuits - we sat down and got straight to business.

Of course, the first subject we covered had to be the Hoppus Foot!

Out came Gavin Munro's quarter girth tape, as he started telling us all about how to measure the volume of a log. To my great relief, it actually seemed quite simple; perhaps my leg was being pulled; or perhaps it was just Gavin's excellent tutelage!

With a lifetime of experience under his belt, there was no question that Gavin couldn't answer. I'm sure he, his dry sense of humour, and his loathing of softwood (or weeds as he prefers to call them) will be greatly missed in all future courses, as this one was his last. Having said that, his successor Kate Tuer was equally knowledgeable despite being almost 50 years his junior!

On the second day we were lucky enough to go to Dalmeny Estate and learn about silviculture with Andy MacQueen, Rick Worrell, and Kate. This is a subject which I personally knew very little about, and therefore learned an awful lot! Moving between stands of trees of different ages enabled me to visualise the whole process, and the amount of attention and effort required to take a plantation from seed to final crop.

It's a lot to process, especially for a newcomer to the topic, but Rick, Andy, and Kate's enthusiastic and hands on approach really helped the information sink in.

The last day saw a return to Scottish Wood where the logs that we had measured and priced up on the Tuesday had been milled; some 'through and through' and some into beams. We then went over each board and beam noting their flaws and pricing them accordingly, with the help and expertise of Jim Birley, the founder of Scottish Wood. This exercise really highlighted how much value can be added to a log through the milling and drying process.





However, in my opinion, the most valuable thing from the course is not necessarily all the new information you learn, but the people you meet. It was great meeting so many like-minded people and everyone is willing to help you, no matter what; everyone wants each other to succeed, and competition is encouraged rather than stamped out (something rarely seen in other industries).

*This is where ASHS and its members must be applauded. The way it supports small businesses to grow is exemplary, and both ASHS and the WWS course are a credit to the industry.*



Written by,

James Birley

Tree surgeon and sawmiller,  
Guernsey







**ASHS**  
ASSOCIATION OF SCOTTISH HARDWOOD SAWMILLERS

## Working Woods Scotland

Learn about the silviculture, grading, processing, and marketing of Scottish hardwoods.

**Applications are open for 2023 Course (27th-29th Sept)**

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)

## THE ASHS 'BUY AND SELL' NETWORK



Knowing who have the logs and knowing who wants the logs has always been a challenge in this industry.

We are talking about those small parcels of timber, or handful of logs, or even individual quality trees - both hardwood and softwood, that can often be hard to sell at their best value or even find a good home for.

This network aims to connect those that sometimes sell logs with those who want to buy logs.

### Becoming an ASHS 'Supplier'

Registering as an ASHS Supplier is open to anyone who might come into possession of logs: forestry contractors, landowners, tree surgeons, arboriculturists, forestry agents, farmers etc.

Signing up as a Supplier is free and it will give you access to the ASHS Buy and Sell Google group alongside the 120+ ASHS membership. You can use this group to advertise any round logs/ timber you come into possession of; it could be from one tree up to several lorry loads.

If you are interested in signing up as a Supplier, or would like more information, please email [coordinator@ashs.co.uk](mailto:coordinator@ashs.co.uk).



## ASHS AGM 2022

*The sawmillers descended on Granton-on-Spey en-mass this November for the first in person AGM since the onset of the COVID pandemic in early 2020.* Members appeared to revel in the opportunity to fully geek out with fellow industry members, there wasn't a conversation that took place where I didn't have to pretend to understand some technical processing lingo, or act like I knew exactly what type of sawmill was being discussed.

The AGM itself was a success. There was a lot of interest in cornering the training market. Sawmilling has no official certification or training to its name and there was significant discussion around the development of training courses to address this. This is currently being explored by Steve McLean, with the support of ASHS and Scottish Forestry. The AGM saw a flurry of new board members nominated and the appointment of Malcolm Morrison as chair. In addition to the AGM, a second meeting was held on the Saturday morning before we departed to MAKAR. This meeting was run by new chair, Malcolm Morrison, to provide more detail on the Business Discussion Group 'Planning to Succeed', which is being run by ASHS this year.

*True to form, this year's AGM boasted several site visits to nearby ASHS yards and businesses. This year's visits were to Speyside Cooperage, Logie Timber, and MAKAR.*



### Speyside Cooperage

The first of the site visits was to Speyside Cooperage. For the past 3 years ASHS members have been supplying Speyside Cooperage with air dried quarter sawn Scottish Oak to use as barrel staves for the creation of Scottish Oak whiskey barrels. This is a new(ish) program driven by Speyside Cooperage and Whyte & Mackay to

*"...develop new Scottish Whiskies born from Scottish Oak"*  
*Gregg Glass, Whyte and Mackay*



At the Cooperage we were treated to a short film on the production of whiskey barrels – from acorn to cask - and were introduced to our competition – the American Oak of the Kentucky forests, from which the cooperage received most of its wood for new staves.



However, new casks appeared to be a minority product of the cooperage, and most of the cooper's work seemed to go into refurbishing old barrels; going to great lengths to get the most out of each cask that made its way back to the cooperage. Whether that be sanding off the old char, replacing a few broken slats, and re-charring the barrel, or if the barrel is worse for wear, they might completely disassemble it, reusing the still usable parts to augment other casks. When a cask finally reaches the end of its life it would find new purpose as an attractive piece of garden furniture or a flowerpot.

Waste reduction was the name of the game, and this was enabled by the evident skill of the coopers, who – we were told – had an average pace of 4 casks an hour! All done using predominantly traditional methods and tools (with the occasional assistance from some new purpose-built machinery, such as timed charring units). It was impressive to behold the efficiency of the work as we watched the coopers assemble their casks from the comfort of the viewing platform. The hard manual labour, dedication to the craft, and satisfaction in the final product is something I think that most ASHS members can relate to, and it's great to see how much we have in common with other industries in Scotland.



### Logie Timber

For the second visit, we were back on more familiar soil at the Logie Timber sawmill. It's an impressive site, completely walled off from the car park by the walled side of a massive open-fronted shed, which on entry revealed a neat and organised machinery shed. Supported by massive, peeled logs – which deserved plenty of appreciation as it seems like they were no picnic to make!





We were welcomed onto the site with a delicious looking tea and cake spread, all beautifully presented on stunning boards of spalted beech; a nice introduction to the high product standard of the mill, with the added bonus that it helped sate the groups hunger until dinner – which wasn't due for a good few hours yet!

After a talk by Mark on the set up of the business, the group were set loose on the yard which was cock-a-block full of interesting machinery and beautiful boards – enough to keep any wood enthusiast entertained for hours! It was a very impressive set up, despite the relatively young age of the business, this is partly due to the partnership with Logie estate through one of the companies 2 directors, Alec Laing. Through this partnership Logie Timber was able to secure both land and financial support through loans for their machinery. This set them on a slightly different path to most ASHS sawmills by enabling them to streamline the development process and yard set up – forgoing the traditional develop-as-you-grow method that is heavily reliant on temporary lean-tos and shipping containers favoured by many ASHS members at the start of their career.

They have also managed to side-step some of the problems that older sawmills are now encountering, such as what to do with waste product – in particular, sawdust! Waste reduction was a consideration of the business from the get-go, and when it comes to sawdust, they have an elegant solution. Thanks to the initial capital investment Logie Timber have been able to set up a good sawdust extraction system from the start, and so all the sawdust is siphoned off and deposited in a large trailer which is taken away by a local farmer to use for bedding. Because they were able to sort this arrangement from the start, they have not built-up on-site piles of wet contaminated sawdust that are the plague of many older sawmills today.

They are also interested in giving back and have plans to use some of their profit to set up a planting scheme to off-set their non-reducible energy consumption.

Although, as you can imagine no sawmill is ever truly finished, and Logie Timber is no exception, having made plans with MAKAR to erect a massive 60x15 meter open sided shed to sit adjacent to the existing machinery shed.

### MAKAR

Saturday saw the group setting off for a site visit to MAKAR, where Neil Sutherland offered a fascinating talk on the working and product practices employed by the company.

MAKAR is a highly innovative company that combines architecture with construction to create sustainable, modular buildings, most of which are constructed to Passivhaus standard. The talk was engaging, even when delving into the details behind the material choices, design parameters and business development.





As we listened to Neil, we were guided through their production process, where he talked about how they avoided production line approaches to their construction of the building panels

Standing beside a nearly completed roof panel we could see clearly the different layers of material and engineering that went into each section and all the aspects that need to be considered in the design of a building; we learnt the importance of preventing damp from entering the construction of the building, and how MAKAR design their outer walls and ceilings to make space for air flow in the structure, therefore, ensuring that any moisture is drawn out of the materials, preventing the build-up of damp. And no use of plastic membranes. We also discovered that MAKAR change their designs to best suit the situation of each building; for example, MAKAR favour overhanging roofs in east-coast buildings as they help with temperature control in the summer, assist rain run-off – reducing water contact with the outer walls – and make for a more attractive building. However, these overhangs are significantly reduced when building on the West-coast or Islands due to the increased exposure to the elements those buildings are likely to face – mainly wind. Neil described how these overhangs can create loud howling in exposed locations, and therefore it is often better to not have them.

All the considerations, the level of design, construction and engineering that goes into the development of the MAKAR buildings – which are expected to last upwards of 150 years – feels in stark contrast to the current standard of new builds that we see erected in housing developments all over Scotland today. Buildings that are often damp, poorly constructed, and only designed to last 50 years – the lifespan of just 2 mortgage cycles!

### *On reflection*

The AGM was a great reminder of how unique our industry and organisation is. With members that care about creating a collaborative and supportive atmosphere within the sector, that encourages new starts and revels in the success of our fellow industry members. It also evidenced the innovative nature of our members and provides examples of businesses that care about improving conditions both within the small-scale timber sector and Scotland as a whole, as we work towards creating more sustainable and environmentally conscious business models and methods, to the benefit of everyone.



Written by,

*Kitty Birley*

ASHS Coordinator and  
Environmental Project Manager at  
Scottish Wood  
Catriona.scottishwood@gamil.com





## CALCULATING CARBON AT SCOTTISH WOOD

*This was something I was not keen to do...*

I really didn't want to find out how awful our carbon footprint was going to be and liked even less the idea of having to do something about it. And the cost! But daughter, Kitty, was relentless, and went to work at it with tiresome diligence... scrutinizing her way through our purchases, fuel use, vehicles, systems, machines, deliveries, waste and more.

And now, two years on and I can feel mildly smug at some of the improvements we've made. But only mildly, because some things still defeat me. What do other members do with that nasty great pile of ancient sawdust at the back of the yard that has sat there for years and is contaminated with sticks, bark, bits of soil and the odd six-inch nail!

Perhaps they have approached it with a wisdom similar to that seen at Logie Timber during the recent AGM. They planned it in right at the start and created a system that effortlessly turns waste into valuable co-products, while at the same time incorporating an almost lunar display of bright shiny pipes running in ever increasing diameters the full length of their impressive building. **A great example of how to do it properly!**

Back on earth, and Kitty informs me that our great pile acts as a methane factory which goes to represent a third of our total CO<sub>2</sub>e (Carbon dioxide equivalent) emissions.

*Something has to be done...*

Set fire to it? Nope, **not acceptable**. Dry it, sieve it and burn it in the biomass system? Good in theory, **incredibly expensive in practice**. Give it for free to AW Jenkinson Forestry Co Products. **YES!** They rock up with a huge wagon which we load to the brim. They cart it off to England for processing, but down there they reject it and send it back to Scotland where it eventually gets dumped... for compost! When I ask them when they'll be back for the next load, they politely decline!

**So, there it remains.**



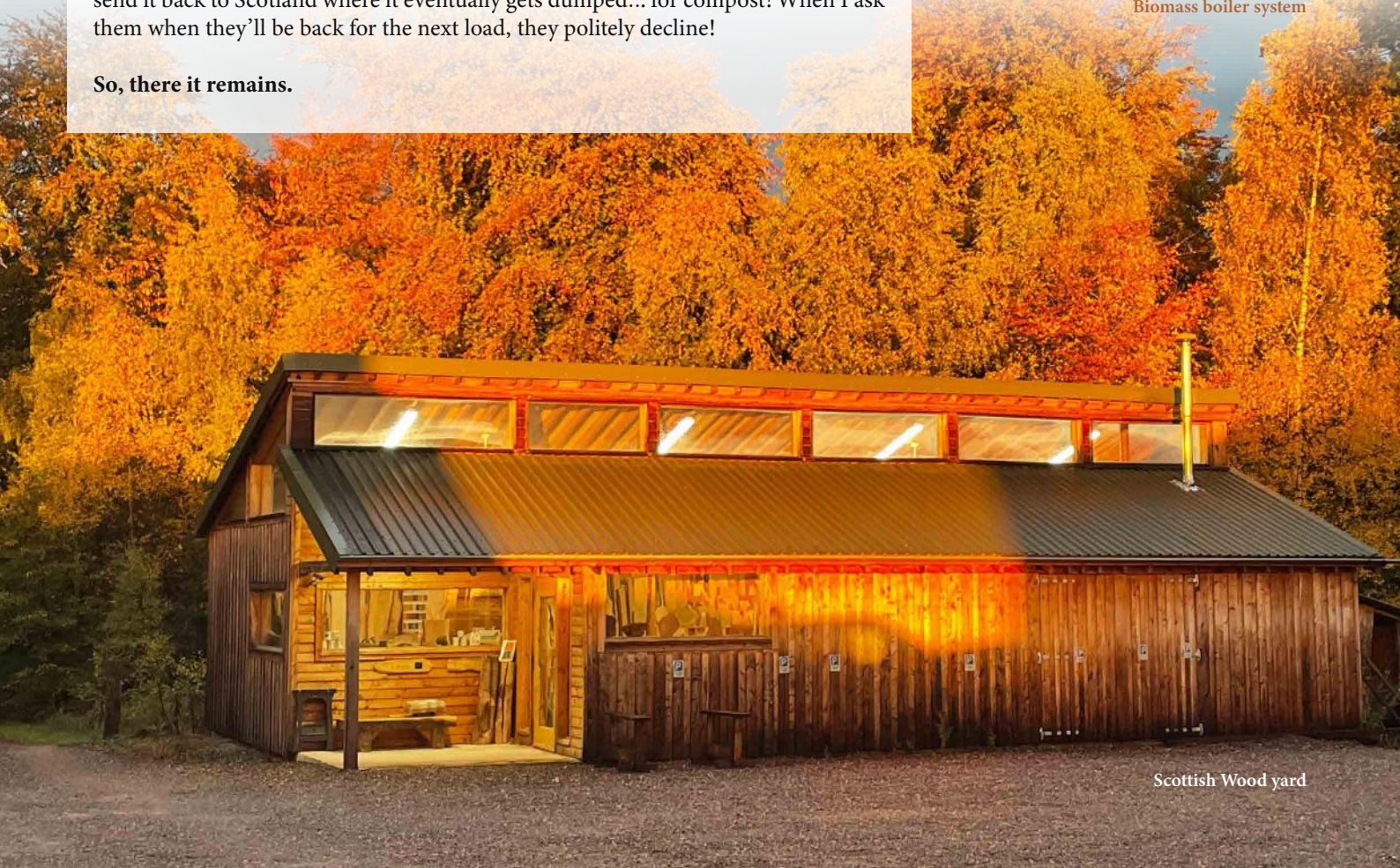
Extracting and storing clean sawdust



Biomass boiler system outside



Biomass boiler system



Scottish Wood yard





Scottish Wood yard



Kiln dried offcuts

Earlier this year I had a brainwave; if they can use it for compost, then so can I! So, I get hold of a digger and spread it out into a giant raised veg patch and plant potatoes. Methane production requires the warmth and pressure of DEEP piles of sawdust, but by spreading it out and increasing its surface area, it becomes just that... compost! Incredibly the tatties grow, despite zero soil, and drought conditions, but get no bigger than golf balls (very clean golf balls... and slug free!).

So, on reflection, and despite my initial reluctance, our efforts to calculate our carbon footprint has led us to make some not only good carbon reducing decisions, but also good commercial ones...

- ***Get our act together regarding waste management***
- ***Replace an ageing works van with an electric van.***
- ***Engage in a replanting programme on the ex-opencast mining site next to the yard***
- ***Switch to an all-renewable electricity provider***
- ***Use electric chainsaws where practical***
- ***And other smaller initiatives to do with efficiency, recycling and using less etc.***

And by harnessing our waste, we can now finally join the Smug Club that refers to waste as “co-products”.

- ***Our clean sawdust gets soaked off and sold.***
- ***The big hardwood slabwood goes for firewood.***
- ***The smaller slabwood goes through an awesome chopper that turns it into a cheap “kiln dried sawmill off-cuts” firewood (very much in demand).***
- ***And the shavings, more sawdust and some chip go to feed our giant Nordist 350 kilowatt biomass burner second hand from an MDF factory in Hull (which heats three kilns, the office and a house... and could do a lot more!)***

And nothing goes to enlarge the tattie patch (well, not much!).

ASHS members are very much an aware and conscientious bunch when it comes to the environment and sustainable business models – you only need to look at our (multiple) ASHS guides on things like solar kilns to know that!

While we use trees in our operations, and while some of these trees might be turned into firewood and burned, a vast amount of the wood used by ASHS members goes to create long lasting timber products, which locks up the carbon sequestered by the tree. And, of course, we all specialise in making best use of our local and home-grown timber thereby replacing imports from potentially less sustainable sources, which reduces fuel miles and adds to our local economies.

When I started Scottish Wood with my wife Maggie, she made sure that Scottish Wood was established as an environmentally and socially responsible business; something that is getting both easier and harder! While there is more, and better, technology being made available, the emissions sources that remain are tricky and, consequently, more expensive to tackle. So, we need to balance the reduction impact



Kiln runs off wood waste

against the costs of these changes while remaining profitable.

**But one of the great strengths of the ASHS community is its openness to the sharing of knowledge and ideas.** We are an enterprising and diverse group in an industry that doesn't have set patterns and models, and therefore has huge potential for innovation - looking for new ways to take on the challenges that face us all. And timber has a big part to play in the solution to the current climatic conditions.

***The future looks good. The future is WOOD!***



Written by,  
*Jim Birley*  
 Manager at Scottish Wood  
[www.scottishwood.co.uk](http://www.scottishwood.co.uk)



## SUCCESS IS WHEN WOMEN HAVE TO QUEUE FOR THE TOILETS!



*Dr Helen McKay was appointed as the New Chief Forester for Scotland in 2020. A strong voice within the forestry sector - her previous work having earned her an OBE for services to forest science - Helen continues to progress the field while also using her position to promote diversity in the industry by advocating for support systems that enable more people to enter the forestry sector.*

This is a strange experience. I have spent my professional life doing my job to the best of my ability, not wanting, or expecting to be treated differently to my male colleagues. So, writing an article about the female perspective in a male dominated industry is unusual and challenging – I need a second cup of coffee already!

### My path into forestry

**My career path was most definitely not planned. I've been very lucky, firstly in my upbringing, and then having the support of my husband and family every time I have tackled a new challenge.**

I was immersed in the natural world from an early age; taken out in all weathers to explore Kintyre's shores, or Cairngorm's forests. I have a very vivid memory, from when I was about eight, of easing the bud scales off a spruce shoot and seeing the incredibly symmetrical bright green spiral of the new needles. On my mother's side we were growers, cultivating everything from tomatoes and cauliflowers to rockery plants. From my father I learned technical things - clocks, cars, radios - so I am comfortable using gadgets and wielding power tools. These skills have helped me in my jobs, enabling me to acquire practical knowledge, for example, in remote sensing and CLT.



We were not well off growing up, so we fixed things, and we made things. This has given me a real appreciation of wood. One of the things I'd grab if the house went on fire is a wooden music box that my father made me. Now I have a collection of wooden boxes from around the world, from bento boxes to little boxes with secret compartments (which were used by prospectors to secretly store specks of gold), from one disguised as a book, to purely decorative ones. The range of woods used in these creations is fascinating, not just in the variation of colour and grain, but also the different densities and the techniques used to craft each of the boxes. I have also had 2 boxes of woven pine needles, which were made using a technique from the Tarahumara Indians of Mexico. This is just a small example of how much more trees have to offer than just their wood!



When it came to selecting my career path, I originally had a place at university to do Chemistry, however, at the open day I chanced upon a talk by Professor Black about a new course Ecological Sciences. The examples he gave of the interconnections between plants, animals and their environment made such complete sense that I knew definitively that I wanted to change my course. I hadn't studied biology at school, so there were a few stressful years getting to grips with this aspect of the course content. Fortunately, much of the course was linked to forestry and I was able to specialise in silviculture and soils which seemed to come easily to me.

From then on forest science became my path. Although I had no clear goals, and limited confidence, sometimes an opportunity would come along that sounded so interesting that I put myself forward without really thinking through how challenging it might be. As I progressed (and became older), I became more confident that I could make a difference in areas that I felt were important. Even after all this time, I still have no set career plan! I think such planning can risk missing all sorts of fantastic and unexpected opportunities, that might be slightly off to one side but are ultimately beneficial to your life and learning!

### Forestry, is it a man's world?

**Once I was asked – what are your measures of success for women in forestry.**

**My answer:**

*“When women have to queue for the toilets at a forestry event”.*

When I started out in forestry, it never occurred to me that it would be male dominated world. From childhood all the children around my age in my cul-de-sac were boys so I was used to it, and it was rarely an issue. Occasionally I feel that I have to be more insistent than I'd naturally be in my job. In these situations, I find myself repeating my main points, almost as though I sense I'm





not being listened to! It's important not to assume that this is because I'm female. For example, it has sometimes been because I'm in applied science and there can be a tendency to think that people working in pure science are smarter. I also inherited the 'early white hair' gene from my mother, so my hair has been grey since about 40 so some people initially assume that I'm slow and out-of-date.

On the rare occasions when I do sense that I'm not being given the respect I deserve, I just keep going and do my job; being objective, logical, and well prepared. At the same time, there's little point in pretending that I know something when I don't - this applies especially to IT.

When it comes to the gender pay gap, fortunately, it's not been something I've experienced during my career; I've always been able to move up grades either through the fluid grading system in Forest Research, or by applying for higher posts. I've been lucky to be situated in the Edinburgh area which has made these moves possible, however, I appreciate that moving to promoted posts may not always be possible because of family responsibilities.

Now as Chief Forester, I take the opportunity to encourage school pupils and university students into forestry careers; instead of focussing purely on encouraging gender diversity I prefer to emphasise that forestry offers careers for a wide range of people who come from different backgrounds and have different strengths. **In schools, I give examples of rowan flowers to boys and make sure the girls have a chance to try on my hardhat and safety gloves.** However, I also try to give a little more time to the young women I see starting out in the sector.

I love it when I see women tree climbers, lorry drivers, sawmill mechanics, GIS experts and mathematical modellers. **Are there any jobs that women can't do?** At the same time, we should welcome men who cook the dinners, put out the washings, bake cakes, and help caring for parents. I have been so lucky in the help and support I've had from the men in my family as well as the men at work.

Not everyone has that support system, and I'm working hard to increase the training places available on the traditional college and university courses as well as widening the formats at these courses so that they are easier for people who are already working, have caring responsibilities, or cannot relocate to do a full-time course in Inverness, Aberdeen, Dumfries, or Edinburgh. It is important that a full range of forestry apprenticeships is offered in Scotland, to expand the sector and increase its diversity. I have submitted an application to offer a graduate forestry apprenticeship,

and we are now working towards developing a pre-apprenticeship and a technical apprenticeship to complement the Foundation and Modern Apprenticeship courses already available.

*When I began in forestry there were so few women at events that there was never a queue at the toilets, in fact there were often no toilets! Now, not only are there toilets but, at the last ICF meeting, I also had to queue.... progress!*



Written by,

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## SAWING, NOT SEWING!

*Abbey Timber is a well-known institution in the ASHS world; here Ellinor talks about her experience working as a female sawyer and forester - jobs that are often still perceived as 'men's work'.*

### How I got into the timber industry

I grew up surrounded by trees and sawdust. My family own and manage 270 ha of mixed woodlands, most of which is heading towards a transformation to continuous cover forestry (what's left after storm Arwen anyway). The timber from successive thinning's supplies our sawmill, where we have a variety of saws, a kiln, and planer-moulders, which we use to make a wide range of bespoke and standard products, including cladding, decking, flooring, fencing, and timber for construction, joinery, boats, and lobster pots.

From a young age, I knew I wanted this to be my life, which it now is. Having done a forestry degree a few years ago, I split my time between operating machines in the sawmill, general practical forestry jobs, and management/admin tasks. I absolutely love it: the beauty of the forests and timber, the variety of the work, the scope to exercise my body and brain, and the wonderful people I work with. There's never a dull moment: I might be sawing spalted beech in the morning and tree felling in the afternoon; or be making restocking maps one moment, only to have to rush out and fix a leak on the biomass district heating system.

### My womanhood in the workplace

It's hard to frame how being female has influenced my life in the forestry and sawmilling world. It is very nuanced, and it's easy to under or overplay it. On the one hand, I haven't encountered any barriers or extreme sexism, and can wax lyrical about how welcoming and friendly the industry is. On the other hand, there are many insidious reminders that we are still a somewhat rare species Such as being the only woman in the first year of my forestry course; the frustration of trying



A pram offers the perfect vantage point to learn the finer points of sawing



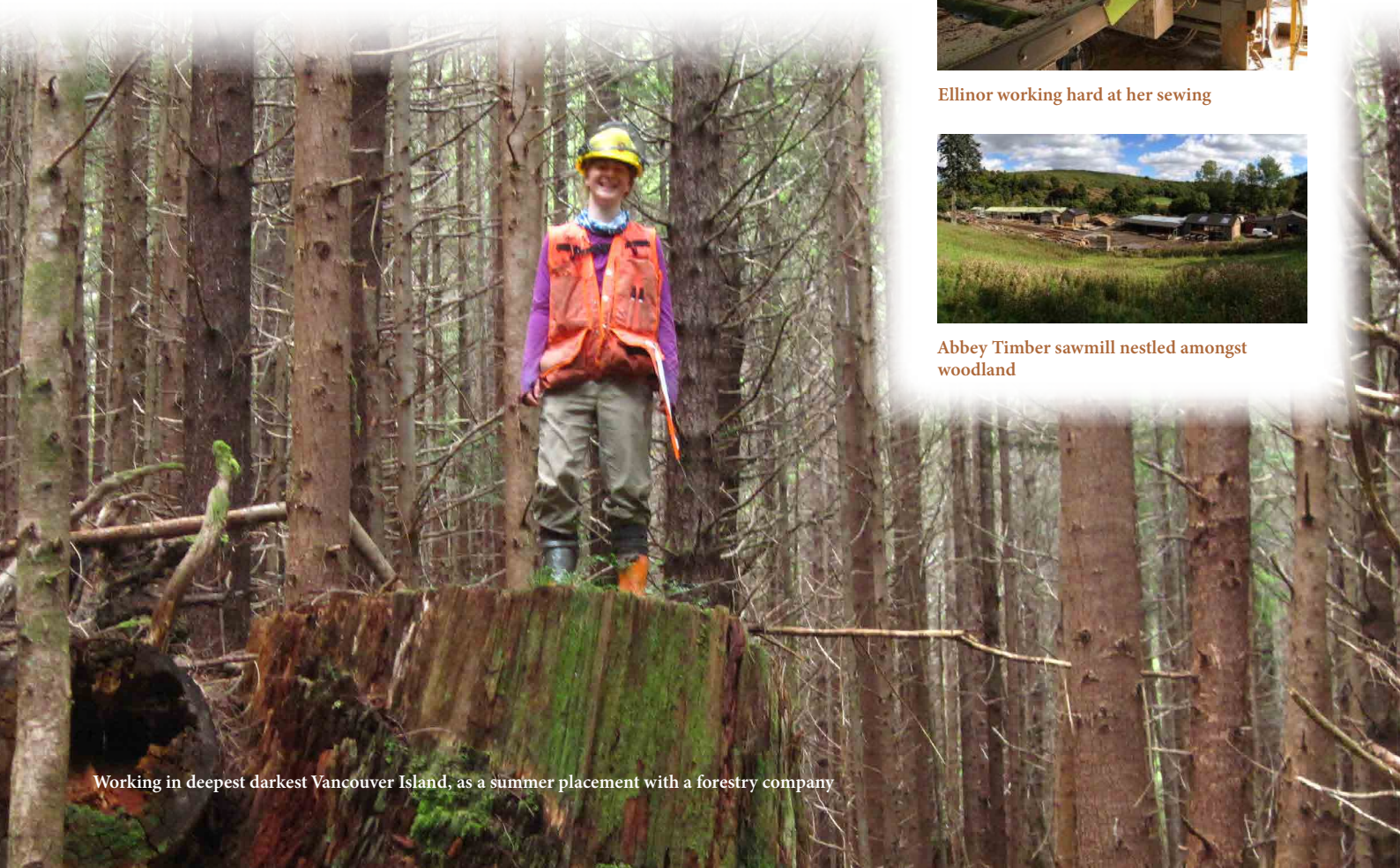
The Dobie women planting tree seedlings for their forest



Ellinor working hard at her sewing



Abbey Timber sawmill nestled amongst woodland







Thinning larch to free up better trees and make space for the next generation - and harvest some nice sawlogs to boot



Loading up the lorry ready for a forestry show



Showing the RSFS round the sawmill and woodland



Written by,  
Ellinor Dobie,  
Sawmiller and Forester at Abbey  
Timber  
[www.abbeytimber.co.uk](http://www.abbeytimber.co.uk)

to find decent affordable workwear that fits; watching sawmill customers make a beeline for my male colleagues, and looking doubtful when they're redirected to me; being automatically allocated admin work while the men get off scot-free; having my knowledge and physical strength be met with surprise or assumed to be zero; people thinking I've spent the day "sewing" when I say I've been "sawing"; and a gentle barrage of mild sexist banter.

These things are just irritations, but taken together they can undermine confidence, and create a pressure to prove myself and be a good ambassador for women in the industry and undo the assumptions and biases people may have.

Most of the time, I think that this bias comes from unfamiliarity with women in the industry rather than hostility, and the persistent link between noisy machines and masochism. Though it's important to note that attitudes are changing. I have far fewer horror stories than older women who started in the industry a few decades ago, and rarely encounter sexism from my peers. Society still has some catching up to do though. I feel the main reason there aren't more women in the industry isn't because of barriers/sexism within it, but because they never get here in the first place. Society is so unaware of forestry/sawmilling in general, and even less aware of the women in it, that the chances of a girl being encouraged to pursue this career is extremely low. I'm very lucky that my family are foresters, otherwise who knows what dull desk-based job I would be stuck in - just admiring trees from a window.

One of the reasons that attitudes may be slow to change is the manual element of some jobs, which people might assume would be unsuitable for women. Though there is a difference in average muscle-mass between men and women, I have yet to find it a problem. Either things are light enough that a man or woman of whatever size can handle them, or they're heavy, in which case it's more efficient and safer to use levers/forklift/rollers regardless of your gender. Laziness may be the mother of invention, but, I'd argue, so is being small; that extra motivation to plan work ergonomically certainly beats giving in to a one-on-one wrestling match with an obstinate log and getting a hernia.

Besides, many jobs that are integral to the industry involve little/no manual work, and overall physical build is largely irrelevant. Character, skills, and interests have a far bigger impact on what jobs people will excel at.

*I'm so happy to be in this industry, and find it fits me and my womanhood perfectly. I work with awesome people, and we bring together a wide range of backgrounds, experience, strengths, and weaknesses, and make a great team.*



Choosing a specific tree for a massive beam with dad



Mensuration (and meditation)



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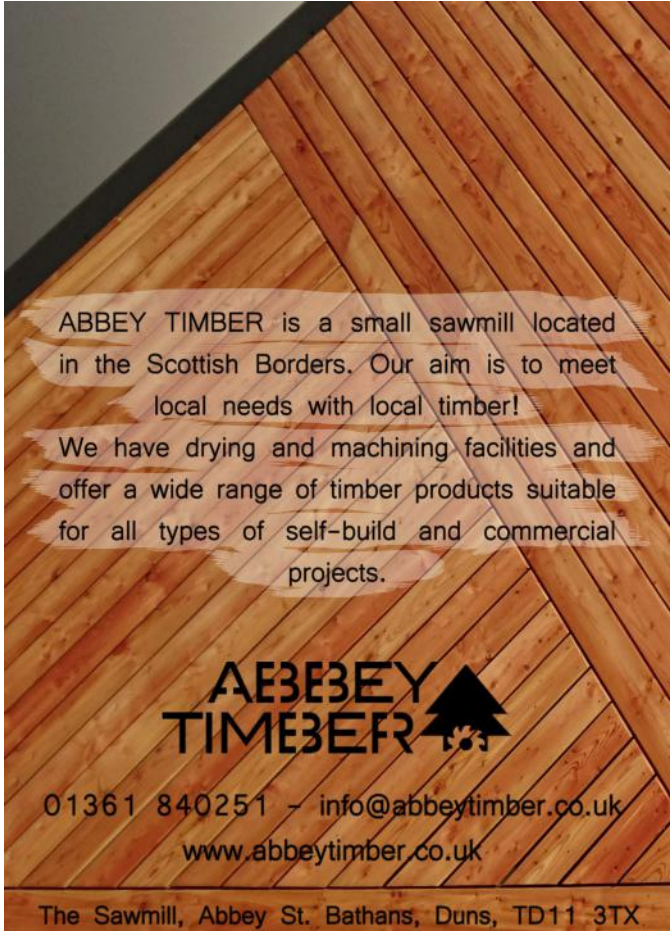
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## IF YOU CAN'T SEE IT, YOU CAN'T BE IT...



*Ros is a Forest Industries Advisor for Scottish Forestry; in this article she talks about her experience moving into the forestry sector and how we need to increase the visibility of women working in the sector so that more women begin to see forestry as a potential career.*

Last year I gave an introduction in the Full Circle to my work with Scottish Forestry which mentioned my career change from stage management to forestry. Theatre was a fantastic career providing significant life skills and the opportunity to work with a range of artistic individuals. However, during my time within the black box, I realised that I was missing the rotating seasons and in particular the colour change of autumnal trees. I sought out open space and woodlands which led on to thinking about a career with trees. Numerous family holidays in north Wales, the Lake District and west coast Scotland had created an awareness of commercial forestry and the recreation possibilities within woodlands.

I returned to education and undertook an A-level in Environmental Science via distance learning that turned out to be a great way to pass the time whilst on tour and on show call – only going into work for matinees and evening performances. The two stand out modules during the A-level were woodland management and wastewater treatment. The phrase ‘where there’s muck, there’s brass’ came to mind however I stuck to my earlier woodland interest and pursued that option.

Studying at Newton Rigg is one of my favourite forestry memories. Learning about sustainable woodland management with like-minded people and being paid to complete a mid-year placement with Forest Enterprise in the Scottish Borders Forest District as it was then, was exciting and eye-opening. I was the only female in my year group of 35 with only one other woman in the year above. There have been female foresters throughout my career at a variety of management levels but just not in equal numbers to men. This is possibly why I have had numerous occasions when contractors expected Ross and not Ros to turn up for a pre-commencement meeting! I was recently told a fact that more young women are attending university than young men so if we want women to consider this sector, we women need to be more visible – **if you can't see it, you can't be it.**

Most of the sector have been welcoming, however, during my early career there were some questions about how someone from an urban background could work within a rural setting? Did I know what an oak tree looked like? Did my father work in forestry? However, these questions were totally irrelevant to whether I was male or female.

Returning to work after maternity leave and reducing my working pattern to three days a week was tricky. Having gained considerable experience there were opportunities for promotion but the three-day week was a sticking point. When I did get promotion to the role of woodland officer, it was as a job share. This opportunity came through a newer, different style of public sector recruitment that included a banner stating ‘happy to talk flexible working.’ Up to this point in my career the presumption had been that all job vacancies were full time and you, the interested party had to argue the case for why it should be considered for anything less – believe me I tried -. And didn't get anywhere! Now all vacancies have a preference whether full time/part time but all working patterns are considered equally against the person specification. I performed far better during interviews where I felt I was getting a fair chance, than the ones where I felt I was on the defensive to ask for something out of the ordinary.

The woodland officer job share position was greeted with a refreshing view of gaining two brains worth of experience. The beat area for the position was split in two to fit the workload into three days. This was a game changer for me and renewed my passion for working in the sector.







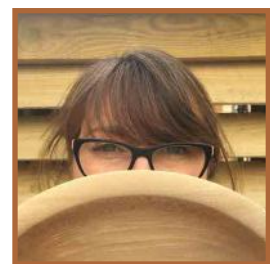
Ros and Helen Leading Scottish Junior Forester award

This industry is great and can feel like a family at times. There are opportunities to develop experience across a variety of roles and employment types, but this isn't well known. I would like to foster greater links between industry and young people. Improving the connection to our natural resources and the available rewarding careers will help build a resilient workforce for future management of Scotland's increasing woodland cover.

*What we are doing to increase young people's engagement with forestry...*

We are currently working to increase the visibility of forestry careers is by engaging with young people through schools and youth groups. To this end we have developed the Scottish Junior Forester Award, a program spearheaded by Helen McKay, our Chief Forester, that aims to give young an insight into what a career in Forestry might involve; equipping them with knowledge and practical skills that they can use to help manage their local woodlands. The award was created by Scottish Forestry in conjunction with the John Muir Trust and is open to anyone between the ages of 4-14 and can be provided through youth groups, schools, or other community settings.

The Scottish Junior Forester award is part of Outdoor Woodland Learning Scotland (OWLS). OWLS is one of the ways that we are using to get young people to interact more with the outdoors; supporting forest school practitioners and teachers to engage young people in outdoor learning and connect that learning with the world around them. The OWLS groups form a network across Scotland and some of you may already have been involved with them. Could we link a local group with its nearest small sawmill, furniture maker, woodland manager to exchange knowledge and bring young people into an environment that many will have little idea about? If you are already doing this or would like to be involved, please get in touch as I would like to discuss this further.



Written by,

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Find out more about the Scottish Junior Forester award here: [Scottish Forestry - New Award will grow foresters of the future](#)  
And the OWL program here: [OWLS - Outdoor and Woodland Learning Scotland](#) ([owlsotland.org](#))



## STARTING AGAIN AT 51

*My life in furniture design started late, after I lost my job during a departmental review process, following a 20year career in the library sector.*

Finishing up at the library was traumatic, leaving all the lovely friends I'd made, and the service I'd helped to shape and build, my confidence and self-belief took a bashing.

*How was I supposed to start again at the age of 51?*

But then, for the first time in a long time, there was only me to worry about, I could put all my energy into learning something brand new. It was exhilarating, the world was my oyster again!

One of my favourite roles at the library was when I was given the opportunity to put my artistic and craft skills to work, using them to run events and classes, and create displays. So, when I had to re-evaluate my career path, I chose one that was based on my need to make things; I wanted to create things that would be useful while also allowing for some self-expression, so I chose furniture making - I think, partly, because I knew it would be a challenge. My grandfather had been a carpenter and I inherited his toolbox, plus, **when I was at school, girls weren't allowed to do woodwork, and who doesn't like doing something they were told they couldn't?**

I went to study at Fife College, starting at the very beginning with an NC and working my way up to HND before starting a BA honours Creative Enterprise. College was a revelation, there were no boundaries set on what could be achieved; I won student of the year for HNC 2018/19 and Highest Graded Unit 2019/20. I have passed my degree with distinction and hope to do equally well in the Honours year.

Even in the early stages of my career I have found groups like the Scottish Furniture Makers Association have been very supportive, encouraging, and generous with their time; hosting college visits, doing interviews and offering insights. Most makers that I have come across are always interested in your work and ready to answer your questions - stupid or otherwise!



The Shaker Clock (made of cherry, is a reproduction made in the style of Isaac Newton Youngs 1793-1865)



Cheeky Chair (ash and sapele frame, upholstered with rubber inner tubes and crystal buttoning)

**Despite the support within the industry, I still find the odd gender related stumbling block across my path.**

For example, I have found buying materials and equipment can be difficult, particularly if I have my husband with me. Suppliers will automatically direct their questions to him, even though he tells them - in no uncertain terms - that he knows nothing about what I'm looking for and that they should talk to me. I find (ridiculous, I know) that this does sometimes undermine my confidence. So, I always do my homework before looking for assistance, which can negate the need to talk to someone, this is a shame because talking to people is how you build a network. **The prime example was when I was looking at purchasing a van instead of a car, but 'wee wuman' syndrome struck again, and my husband was the one given all the information!**





Anger and Frustration Chair (ash frame with hand painted upholstery and Shibari knotting in bungee cord)



Queensferry Chair (salted beech, maple, sapele, ash and walnut with bungee cord wires)

*I want to work for myself once I have graduated from my course, and the dissertation for my degree is the creation of a business plan. This will hopefully be of help to me when it comes to applying for finance, however, it will be interesting to see if being a 'wee wuman' of a certain age will have any adverse effects on this process. I certainly hope not!*

You can find out more about me and my work through my website: <https://archibaldrachel.wixsite.com/website>



Written by,

*Rachel Archibald,*  
Furniture Designer, Midlothian



## 10 YEARS IN FORESTRY

*Leigh Mcivor talks about her long term love of conservation and the opportunities she has received since moving into the forestry sector.*

This month marks my 10-year anniversary of working in forestry. I initially set out to work in conservation, but graduating in the financial crash of 2009, I found my options limited. After travelling in South America, I came home with a renewed passion for conservation work. Sadly, I ended up in a call centre. One fateful day, while sitting miserably on my laptop looking for job opportunities that didn't exist, I saw an advertisement for an 'Apprentice Forest Craftsperson'. This jogged my memory of a Permaculture course I completed a few years previously, where we had a lecture on 'non-timber forestry products, delivered by a lovely chap from Forest Enterprise (now Forestry and Land Scotland).

As I read through the job description, I thought it sounded like a fantastic way to get an overall view of what forestry is all about, and finally, a job with career opportunities in conservation and ecology!

**But would they want a 28-year-old woman with a very non-forestry related background?**

Obviously, the answer was yes, as, 10 years later, I'm still here, although I now work for Scottish Forestry in the National Office team as a 'Woodland Creation Technical Officer'.

**So, what has 10 years in forestry looked like for me?**

I've helped blast quarries, planted broadleaved woodlands, yielded a chainsaw, and had my own 'Airwolf' moment, leaning out of helicopter windows with a camera to take pictures of diseased trees. Now, my work involves supporting colleagues with complex woodland creation cases, creating guidance, and a range of National Office tasks. Given the ongoing opportunities within Scottish Forestry, I'm sure this role will not be my last within the organisation.



Leigh hard at work planting new woodlands

I'm not saying it's all been plain sailing, there have been missed job opportunities and disappointments, but I have always felt supported by my team and by my managers. I've never felt my gender has limited me in any way, and I have actively been encouraged to go for jobs by my male line managers. It can be challenging working with strong willed characters in the private sector (who, statistically, are generally men), but I don't see that as a gender issue!

My only regret about starting a career in forestry is that I didn't do it sooner. There are so many career opportunities, from ecologists to archaeologists, it's not all about trees, and I've found it, on the whole, to be an industry that is building on its inclusivity, and actively encouraging and supporting women with their careers.



Written by,

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New planting



## WE'LL TAKE OVER THE WOODLANDS YET!

### *Where am I, and how did I get here?*

Like most people that join the timber industry, sawmilling is not where I saw my life going. However, unlike most people, this is not from a lack of exposure to the industry. Growing up on the Scottish Wood sawmill, the buzz of wood misers, planers and chainsaws were such a constant feature of our lives that I barely noticed their presence; apart from when they acted as an unwelcome early morning alarm call during the school holidays.

Indifference is an apt description of my approach to my parents' business growing up; a typical teenager, I took little interest in what my parents did for a living, beyond how it benefitted me (e.g., free access to wood and tools, and a nice easy way to make some money through firewood production or thinning the young growth in the woods). Little did I expect to return to the business 10 years later as a full-time employee, let alone run the coordination of a sawmilling based cooperative. Yet here I am, the most unqualified ASHS coordinator ever – which sounds worse than it is as there have been only two coordinators before me, and I would need roughly 20 years of work experience to beat out the last one!

There were a couple of missteps before I landed in my current career; for the first 17 years of my life my focus was art and art school. I was a good but very slow artist, and as a result most art projects outlasted my attention span! Ambitions of art school were abandoned in favour of going to university to study Anthropology and Geography which combined my passions for people and nature. Upon graduating, I chose the 'people path'; working as a support worker during the day and helping to run youth groups in the evening. However, I started feeling trapped by the concrete, living and working in the city (albeit the relatively small city of Aberdeen), and I came to realise that I missed working with nature.

I have always been passionate about the environment – a side-effect of growing up in a woodland. I finally found my calling studying an MSc Environmental Management and Conservation, only to graduate while the world was in the early throes of COVID and employment opportunities were thin on the ground. Fortunately for me, Dad, and Scottish Wood, came to my rescue. At the time, Scottish Wood was in the process of taking over some of the surrounding woodland on a long-term lease from the Woodland Trust, which, along with our own section of woods, was sorely in need of management. In addition, some of our community engagement and environmental commitments needed attention, having fallen by the wayside since my Mum, Maggie, passed away in 2018. There was a gap that needed filling, and I was more than happy to fill it!



Newly planted section at Scottish Wood

Almost even split of men and women on WWS course with Kate Tuer leading







Team work makes the dreamwork - building a BDA in Scottish Wood



WWS course group photo - almost even gender split



Building a damn with volunteers



Consequently, I have found myself back where I started, working roughly 20 metres from my childhood bedroom, realising that all I really want to do is 'play in the woods' and provide others with the opportunity to get out and engage with their local woodlands and wild places.

Now I spend half my days ripping through rhododendron with a chainsaw, or gathering volunteers to build a dam across the outflow of the local pond – I mean, who doesn't love building dams! It's great, and I feel like the work I do helps make the world a better place, even if the difference I make is a small one. Also, through this position, I have identified high emissions sources in the yard (much to Dad's displeasure); helped come up with creative solutions to reduce our carbon footprint; planted trees where there was once invasive elder shrub; and been part of a West Fife wide initiative to increase community engagement in local wild places.

### Women and representation in the timber industry...

It was through my position at Scottish Wood that I fell into my new role as the Coordinator of ASHS. Here is where I feel I have come full circle, from distancing myself from my parents' industry as a young person, to spending much of my work life working to improve conditions for small-scale hardwood sawmillers. And the community has been nothing but welcoming to me, any doubts I might have had about being misjudged due to my age, gender, or experience have gone completely unfounded. However, I have noticed in my interactions with the timber industry, and with sawmilling in particular, that women are still a significant minority; only 1 out of the 50+ ASHS Full members is a woman.

It's hard to quantify the impact that this lack of representation has had both on my own experience and the industry in general; would sawmilling, or forestry have seemed like a more desirable career from the start if I had been exposed to more women in the industry growing up? Who else might have been put off by the perception of timber and forestry as a 'man's world'?

As an insecure teen, who was tall, strong, and too often told that she looked 'just like her dad!' I was often conscious of things that would seem unfeminine, all the while, deep down, craving activities that were perceived as just that. A study published in 2017 that investigated the different factors that impacted the motivations of entrepreneurs in European economies, found that:

*The professional expectations of women and the roles they are expected to fulfil are influenced by parents, peers, school, the media, and the environment, among others. Often, these factors give rise to stereotypes about the types of roles that men and women must assume and how they should act in society.*

(Santos et al 2017)



Completed damn





High numbers of women WWS 2021



Clearing the woods of invasive elder



Scottish Wood tree seedlings

**Representation is important; we are less likely to choose a career that is depicted as ‘not for us’.** While this might not ring true for every woman’s experience, I believe it certainly reflects my own. Therefore, by increasing the visibility of the women currently working in the sector, and encouraging more woman to enter the industry, it will hopefully result in a self-perpetuating pattern where more and more women begin to consider the timber industry as a viable career path.

*The work being done...*

While there still might be a long way to go, I believe that the industry is in the process of making very positive steps to addressing the gender discrepancy in sawmilling and the timber sector. One example of this was the Scottish Governments ‘Women in Rural Economy Training Fund’ which targets women in rural industries, providing funding for women to get qualified in ‘Aquaculture, Conservation, Fisheries, Forestry, Horticulture, Land-based engineering and Wildlife management, amongst others’ (Lantra Scotland 2022)<sup>1</sup>. To help address the gender imbalance within these sectors.

Furthermore, both runs of ASHS Working Woods Scotland Course had an almost even split in genders, and one of our primary trainers is Kate Tuer – a woodland powerhouse with expertise in both sawmilling and woodland management. As this is the only course in Scotland that focuses on hardwoods and sawmilling, it means that one of the key voices in this industry is a woman. We’ll take over the woodlands yet!



Over seeing the newly planted site at Scottish Wood

*In conclusion...*

I don’t know if my road to forestry and sawmilling would have been shorter if I had more access to female role models, but I can tell you that I am constantly inspired by the women that I know and come across in my work, and I gain a lot out of the interactions I have with them. I love my job now, and I love working in the woodlands and with the sawmillers of ASHS, and I want more women to have that experience. Wood and woodlands are for women, and I’m excited by the prospect of seeing increasing numbers of women branching into our industry, and hopefully helping (in what small ways I can) to progress this movement, as diversity benefits everyone.

<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, this fund has recently been closed for new applicants, however, we have been told that there are efforts to secure funding for similar schemes, so keep your eyes peeled!



Written by,

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## THE AGE OF THE FEMALE ARCHITECT

*Gail Halvorsen set up Halvorsen Architects in 1994, which specializes in sustainable architecture. Here Gail talks about her personal journey to where she is now, and what she sees as the rising role of the female architect.*

*'Girls don't study physics at school because they "don't like it".'*

Speaking in April, the Conservative government's social mobility tsar Katharine Birbalsingh added:

*"There's a lot of hard maths in there that I think they would rather not do."*

This preposterous statement certainly did not apply to me. I took maths, further maths, and physics at A-level. My all-girls boarding school with an all-female staff (except for the chemistry teacher, with his hand knitted ties, and the gnomish art teacher) treated the arts and sciences equitably. The only deterrent I was aware of was that science was not seen as "cool" -- and this still puts off a lot of girls.

When it came to selecting a career, the multiple-choice questionnaire directed me to a job in history of art – architecture not being on their list of suitable careers for women, although I had been toying with the idea. So, I went to the University of East Anglia, with the purpose of studying History of Art. It was a short-lived career, and, following a chance encounter with an enthusiastic Richard Rodgers employee, I left, with only one term under my belt. Serendipity took me to where I am now.

I went on to study at the Architectural Association School of Architecture in London's Bedford Square, where there was a good proportion of female staff and pupils. It was not 50-50 but we were treated equally.

Then came my entry into the real world. I joined Michael Hopkins & Partners, now called Hopkins Architects, where there was an equal number of men and women staff and where we were treated pretty much equally except for the working conditions. As with other "iconic" architectural practices, the working hours, and terms of employment for junior staff were hellish, and it was notable that it was the women who left in search of more acceptable working hours, normally ahead of starting a family and, tellingly, the only female directors in the practice were its sole interior designer, and Michael Hopkins' wife, Patty.

My final year at MHP was spent living on-site, based in a Portakabin on Parliament Square, as the site architect for the Westminster London Underground station – part of the Jubilee line extension. I would regularly attend meetings with up to 10 people where I was often the only woman; I was surrounded by male structural engineers, male electrical engineers, male quantity surveyors, and an all-male construction team. I was lucky in that I never encountered any obvious sexism during that year. However, I did learn to never wear a skirt on site after my first journey up a ladder with several members of the construction team below.

### *Managing motherhood and a career*

I continued working while pregnant with my first child, even after being prematurely admitted to St Thomas' Hospital with a complication. My bed overlooked Parliament Square. I could almost supervise the site from my hospital bed, and I only stopped holding meetings in the hospital cafeteria when forced to by the ante-natal staff. Giving birth was game changer. If I wanted to balance a career with motherhood, I would not be able to continue with MHP. So, I set up Halvorsen Architects in London. Again, I can say that I was not exposed to any sexism, although I had colleagues who were. Maybe it's partly an attitude thing – I have been told that by female friends. It sounds implausible but to a certain extent I think there is some truth in it – that if you approach a situation or a group of men without the expectation of sexism, they subconsciously pick this up. I don't know.



Kids enjoying the fantastic features of stunning new nurseries for Happy Days in Midlothian designed by Halvorsen Architects.



Gail on site at the construction of Wooploft, Wooplaw Community would, Lauder, the Scottish Borders: one year project with P6, Tynewater Primary school, Midlothian.





Buildings designed by Halvorsen architects



Gail measuring trees for a build

I carried on, carrying my baby daughter around in a sling on-site, up ladders and over scaffolding, much to the horror of the builders. All three of my children have a good head for heights! However, I learnt the hard way that holding meetings with a baby under the table being rocked periodically with one's foot is not a good idea, and finally arranged for childcare three days a week.

**The thing that affected my career most was not being a woman, but rather being a mother. I had to make the difficult decision between dedicating myself to my children or developing my practice. I chose a compromise which, in my case, worked for the family (I think!), but not my practice.**

### *My experience of sexism and gender in the world of architecture*

Over the course of my career, the only time I have encountered overt sexism was in my dealings with Midlothian Council. I was a board member of Gorebridge Community Development Trust in charge of the £2.5 million design and construction of a new community center, and there was one senior council official who, even once I became chair of the trust, would always address his comments to my junior male office manager rather than me.

Fearing that my experience might not be representative I consulted a couple of female colleagues and, possibly surprisingly, they have had similarly little sexism while practicing architecture.

In fact, what I have found during my career as a sole practitioner is that, particularly for domestic jobs (and, in my case, nursery school buildings) clients often prefer a female architect, especially if the client is a woman. I think women are often better attuned to residential design. I think we are more practical – we allow for storage and have a better understanding of family dynamics – and are aware of how to cater for the elderly and the young.

***As architecture adapts to the demands of combating climate change, I believe there will be fewer signature buildings and fewer "starchitects". Design will become more sensitive, more ecological, and as a result more modest. I think that will be the true harbinger of the age of the female architect.***



Written by,

*Gail Halvorsen*

Halvorsen Architects

[www.halvorsen-architects.co.uk](http://www.halvorsen-architects.co.uk)





## BATTLING FOR MY PLACE

*Woodcarver and furniture maker, Lizzy Taylor, talks about the internal and external struggles she has faced during her journey in the wood industry.*

### The first taste

I was interested in woodwork from a young age. It was a film called *Treasures of the Snow* - where an old wood carver teaches a young boy his craft - which got me hooked. I was only 4/5 when I first watched the film but ever since I have had a fascination with woodwork, always noticing any wooden crafts I came across. As a kid I would carefully study my parents' collection of small carved wooden animals and try and make my own sculptures and objects from twigs and sticks in the garden - not getting very far! At school, one of my favourite classes was Design and Technology and, luckily, I had parents and teachers that recognised and encouraged my interest. Before starting my A levels, I chose to spend my work experience at a cabinet maker. This was my first taste of the professional woodworking industry, and it was intimidating: **I was a 14-year-old girl going into a completely male dominated workshop; loud music, lots of noise from machinery, and mess!**

I remember being very nervous, but, keen to learn, I pushed through my fears, and it turned out to be a fun and educational experience.

### An education in woodwork... and gender diversity

On leaving school I completed an art foundation diploma, specialising in sculpture. I was most interested in woodcarving, however, even though my tutor was a woodcarver himself, my requests to take up the medium were consistently denied - I'm still at a loss as to why! So, I moved into furniture making, since that was the closest I could get to working with wood.

I started a furniture design and craft course at Bucks New University, High Wycombe. There were around 30 students on my course, of which only 4 were women. All the tutors and technicians for my course were male. I was conscious of the discrepancy, but it just became commonplace, and, at the time, I wasn't aware of it affecting me. **It was a gentle introduction to the male dominated environment that I would be constantly faced with in my career.**

In my second year of University, I was given the opportunity to learn woodcarving through an Erasmus exchange to Finland. Finally, I had the chance to practise what had drawn me to woodwork in the first place! I was the only girl out of 16 people on the carving course, although I'm not sure I even noticed it at the time - it was just expected by then!

On returning to the UK to complete my degree I struggled to integrate back onto the course, so I reached out for help from the leader of the MA Furniture course at the University. **She was the first woman in the industry that I had come across in all my time studying furniture design. I benefitted a lot from having a female tutor and appreciated her approach to my situation, her support helped get me through to graduation.**

### Entering the industry

Despite her support and encouragement, I left university without much confidence in my ability. I was nervous to use machinery, but still wanted to work with wood, so walking away wasn't even a consideration. I went for an interview at a high-end workshop in London after I was encouraged to apply by the managing director whom I met at my university degree show. However, I was intimidated by the size of the furniture projects and worried about my ability to lift and keep up with the men there. So, I



Unable to pursue carving Lizzy went on to study furniture design and craft, developing skills that would be integral to her career. This is a piece Lizzy designed and made for the White Stuff headquarters in London.



successfully talked myself out of a job by voicing these concerns to the workshop manager during my interview, which ended up with him agreeing with me - rather than offering solutions or encouragement to counter my lack of confidence. Looking back, of course the men in that workshop weren't working on their own, yet I had been comparing myself to imagined that they had.

**This was the first time that I noticed feeling disadvantaged because of my gender;** why did I feel like I was less capable than men? Had I built that up in my own mind or had it built up subconsciously, over years of exposure to smaller experiences and attitudes I'd encountered in the industry due to my gender? It's hard to know.

Despite this setback, within a year of graduating, I managed to get my first job at a company specialising in furniture making and design for the super yacht industry. They were looking for experienced makers but came back to me because they were interested in my woodcarving skills. This was great news to me as woodcarving is where I felt most comfortable, and I was excited about the opportunity to develop my skills further in this field. I was the only woman in the workshop but another 2 joined whilst I was there. I loved the carving work, and I developed skills in laser and straw marquetry, as well as other aspects of cabinet making, although I still struggled with my confidence.

### Taking a step back

I began struggling with my mental health towards the end of my 4th year at the yacht company. So, I took a year out of the industry, moving to a community in the Yorkshire Dales where I had the time and space to recover and re-evaluate my career. **My time in the community helped me get back what I loved about woodwork and helped me gain back some of my confidence.**

On leaving Yorkshire I felt ready to dive back into the furniture industry, and I got a job as a veneering manager at bespoke cabinet makers who manufacture and install luxury interiors. Once again, I started out as the only female in the workshop, although 3 other women have since joined. Within the last year I have had to move to working part time for health reasons, but this has opened new and exciting opportunities for me, for example it has given me time to take up teaching weekend wood carving courses at Williams and Cleal Furniture School, which I am thoroughly enjoying!



Lizzy hard at work; carving is what first ignited Lizzy's interest in woodwork and remains her primary passion and interest.



Passementerie



Layers of Time



Lizzy was able to rediscover her love of sculptures and carving whilst living in a community in Yorkshire. This owl sits at Scargill estate and was inspired by the many owls you can hear in the area.





These pieces show Lizzy's design and make process, the clock represents Lizzy's interpretation of the Rococco style, one of the most challenging techniques for a woodcarver. Her piece includes an oceanic twist on the traditional style.

### On reflection...

**When I look back at my journey into the industry, getting to where I am, has been a constant battle for me.**

I have spent most of my career grappling with feelings of inadequacy. Perhaps it is partly a personal struggle, but when I think about what I have had to withstand throughout my career, and the barriers that I have faced as a woman however big or small, these emotions begin to feel justified.

**Throughout my career I have constantly compared myself to men, often feeling the need to prove myself, rather than being content in myself and my ability.** The small experiences - such as having to deal with staff in tool shops turning to my dad or my husband to ask if they can help them rather than me, and the struggle to find women's work clothing and steel toe cap boots that fit - have all affected me.

Recently, I noticed that I change the way I communicate and hold myself when I am in a male dominated work environment, often overcompensating for the fact that I am a woman by being more assertive in meetings than I would normally be in order to be listened to. This has been commented on by some of my male colleagues, and I sometimes wonder if it would have been noticed if I were a man.

The industry is still not accustomed to women working in it, and although companies may think they don't treat women differently, my experience has shown me that the differences are still there subconsciously. That is not to say I haven't been encouraged and supported in the industry by men. It is also men that have influenced me from a young age and encouraged me to get to where I am today, seeing my strengths and potential and encouraging me to develop and utilise them.

**By continuing to work alongside men in the industry, I hope that those subconscious differences will reduce in time for future generations.**

***I also hope that I can influence and encourage women and girls, who see me working and teaching in these environments, that it is possible to pursue a successful career in the furniture industry.***



Written by,

*Lizzy Taylor,*

Wood carving artist and craftswoman  
[cargocollective.com/solizzy](http://cargocollective.com/solizzy)





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## MY JOURNEY INTO THE FURNITURE INDUSTRY

*I am a furniture maker and designer. I've been running my own furniture company since 2010 in Scotland.*

I've always been creative and interested in art and design from a young age, and I've spent many family trips visiting art and design galleries both in the UK and Europe. Taking inspiration from sculptures, architecture, and product design. A particular favourite of mine was the art nouveau furniture collection I saw on a visit to the Musée d'Orsay in Paris.

My path into furniture making started young, I made my first piece, a rocking chair, as my final year A-level project at school. My teacher brought in his own wood lathe for us to have a go on. This was my first introduction to woodwork and wood turning, and I was hooked.

It was at Art College, where I was first able to bring together my two passions of sculpture and design. These skills were further developed during my time at Northumbria University, where I studied 3D design in a designer/maker course that focused on furniture, fine products, and jewellery. The degree was very diverse, and I worked with metal, glass, and plastics, as well as my first love, wood. It also gave me experience in designing and creating batch production products, as well as one-off bespoke pieces.

I didn't just drop into the furniture industry after university, I had to spend time working as a freelance furniture designer to get experience on my CV. I always liked being a designer and a maker, however, I found that at the start of my career I had to pick between the two. After looking into a variety of apprenticeships, I chose design, and started working in my first drawing office when I was 22 years old.



Scottish oak dining table with a glass centre. This was Annas first delivery out of the workshop after the covid winter lockdown



My first design job was working in office refurbishment, I then moved into a role as a design engineer in the architectural steelwork industry. During my time in this position, I also concentrated on increasing my knowledge and training by getting a HNC in Engineering whilst working.

My love of furniture making was ever present throughout this period, and I continued making and designing furniture in my own time. The skills that I developed in engineering, photography, and graphic design helped hone my craft by improving my understanding of structural design and aesthetics.

In my dad's garage, I focused on making Shaker inspired pieces of furniture. I always liked the simplicity of design style and beautiful shapes. I started to learn and develop my furniture making skills with hand tools.

At the start I was only making furniture for my family, but it was always with a passion to one day be able to make furniture for a living. However, I came to understand that the only way I was going to be able to follow my dreams of combining both design and make, was to start out on my own.

I persevered in my ambitions but hit a snag in the form of the 2008 recession, which had large negative effects on the construction industry. Yet, luck hit in 2009, and I was provided with a valuable opportunity to develop my fine furniture skills, when a spot on a course in Oxford became available last minute. Upon finishing the course,

I moved to Scottish borders and took on a position at Real Wood Studios in 2010; where I took on a role as a cabinet maker while also working as part of a collective in assisting with the day to day running of the sawmill. Which gave me a more wholistic view of the process involved in timber production.

I'm now living my ambition in Edinburgh, renting a workshop space in Leith at the Edinburgh Open Workshop where I design and make furniture to commission.

*As you can see it has been a long journey, but I am happy with where I am and really enjoy my chosen work. I am sure that any other career would, equally, have its challenges and ups and downs.*

*Check out my work either via my website [www.alnfurniture.co.uk](http://www.alnfurniture.co.uk) or on Instagram @annawoodshop @alnfurniture and Facebook @alnfurniture*



Written by,  
*Anna Nichols*  
aln furniture, Edinburgh



An outdoor modern bench which incorporates steam bending and laminating; skills Anna learnt at 17 with her dad when making a rocking chair at school. The bench was designed by Anna in 2021 for clients in West Linton; a wedding gift to themselves.



Turning is what first drew Anna to woodwork; this bowl made from Scottish elm in 2020



Anna learnt a lot about cabinet building from her time on Jonathon Markovitz fine furniture course in Oxford, this is a cabinet she designed and built out of American black walnut in 2019.



## WOMEN WARRIORS OF THE ABRIACHAN FOREST TRUST

*Abriachan Forest Trust is a social enterprise that manage 540 hectares of community land, with an aim to improve the environmental conditions of the land, provide local employment opportunities and to increase public engagement with the forest. The women of AFT have been essential to the delivery of these goals.*

When it was suggested we write an article for the ASHS winter edition, specifically relating to women in forestry, we certainly did not see ourselves as hardwood forester material. However, despite being found in a predominantly softwood woodland, we are good at working hard! And we have learned a lot about forestry in the past twenty-five years. So, what follows will be about some of the skills and opportunities some of the women involved with Abriachan Forest Trust (AFT) have learned and delivered over the years.

### *About AFT and the women who helped build it.*

Woman led action is not a new phenomenon to AFT, within our community you can find strong female leaders as far back as the early 1900's where Katharine Stewart, local author, and resident, galvanised the community into taking on more active in the management of the woodlands surrounding the crofts. Margaret Davidson followed in her footsteps and, was responsible for steering a campaign of community activism that resulted in the community buyout of 540 Hectares of land from Forest Enterprise in 1998.

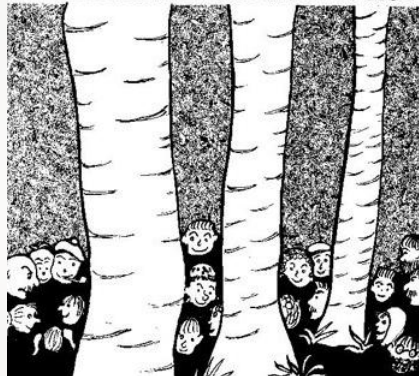
The actions undertaken by the community, spearheaded by Margaret, and (in a more distanced sense) motivated by Katherine, were ahead of the trend in terms of community led action, as all this occurred before the Scottish Outdoor Access legislation and the Scottish Land Fund came into being.

Since then, the original Abriachan Forest Trust aims have been achieved and surpassed!

These aims included:

- **ensuring responsible access for all**
- **improving biodiversity through sensitive land management**
- **providing local employment**
- **supporting outdoor learning and recreation with health and wellbeing benefits**

### abriachan forest trust



Abriachan forest trails



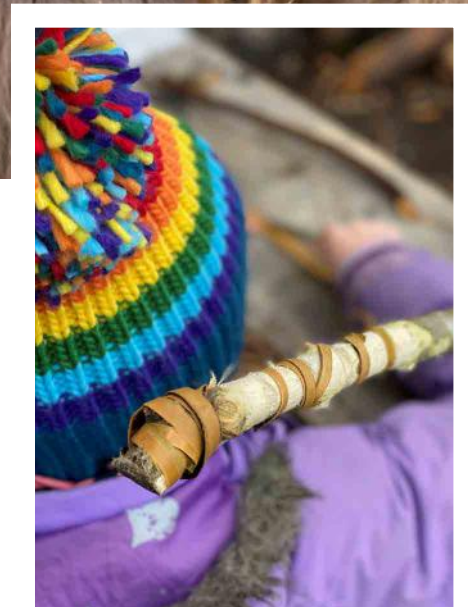
Dovetailing the safe and successful delivery of these different aspects of the forest management has been an important feature and relies on effective communication and collaboration between parties. Therefore, the multi-tasking, smoothers of ruffled feathers, local women - who can sometimes feel like a thorn in the flesh of contractors and forestry consultants - are a key player in this chess game!

(Afterall, it takes a woman to try and explain to Joe Public why the mountain bike trails are closed due to harvesting operations and then, later in the same year, explain to the contractors why the mountain bike trail builders have allegedly spoiled the newly graded forest road!)





Measuring tree girth



## The Women of AFT

### **Christine**

Christine is a part of the Forest Schools practitioner team, who help deliver our outdoor learning opportunities. Christine is also a Millennium Forest Fellow, our Company Secretary, archivist and go-to natural and cultural history expert. The little she doesn't know she will research until she finds out, and then shares with the group.

Christine pays weekly visits to the nursery, where she will pull out interesting artefacts from her bag of surprises and sing Gaelic songs with the children. Over the past few months Christine's wonderful bag has revealed squirrel and badger skulls, fossilised mammoth teeth, and dandelions – much to the children's delight!

*“An t-ionnsachadh òg an t-ionnsachadh bòidheachd”*

*Learn young... Learn well*

Christine trained as a botanist/zoologist as well as a librarian, so she is also responsible for organising our biodiversity recording sessions, collecting tree and wild flower seeds for propagation, inputting new observations into the phenology calendar, and ensuring the minutes of the Trustees' monthly meetings always contain a list of the flora and fauna spotted around Abriachan in the previous weeks.

### **Suzann**

In it from the beginning, I was part of the steering group and one of the founding members of the trust. I am also a science teacher and, like Christine, one of my passions is using my scientific background to encourage others to take an interest in and look after the local and global environment has been one of the ongoing drivers for the forest trust. A lot of my work is done in conjunction with Roni (below), and together we work to help put older students through outdoor learning awards (find more details below).



Christine collecting ash keys





Roni leading training

### Roni

Roni is the Forest School Manager for the Early Years' provision. She trained as a nursery nurse and, with her diverse skills as a community education youth worker, has played a major role in the delivery of outdoor play and learning in the woodland. Under Roni's reign our outdoor nursery has become so popular there are names on the waiting list beyond 2025. The fact that the community owns and manages the forest, gives us the freedom to use all parts of the land for our activities; one week the children might be guddling and pond dipping in the burn, and gardening the next, or den building up amongst the tallest spruces. Lots of variety and lots of choice, means lots of learning through play.

As well as supporting the Early Years' curriculum, Roni and I help older pupils achieve learning outcomes through the delivery of Scottish Junior Forester, John Muir, Rural Skills, and Forest and Outdoor Learning Awards. Delivering these accredited awards in a working forest gives us lots of opportunities to discover, explore, conserve, and share experiences.

The learners we work with are often people who find mainstream school a difficult environment to be in and are less anxious in an outdoor woodland setting and, therefore, more willing to participate in experiential learning activities. This experience helps them gain confidence, as well as develop coping strategies and a capacity to socialise. Often the young people that have been put through these awards find that they feel able to return to school or go on to pursue further education opportunities.

Over the past year our pupils have taken part in bushcraft, made bat and bird boxes, and foraged for wild fruits. They have even undertaken a project in creating Leopold benches, where they take part in all aspects of the bench creation; starting with standing Scots pine that they process this into planks, which they use to construct a very desirable finished article....so much so that we are not keeping up with orders! One of the greatest delights for us is when a former pupil drops in to visit, often as an adult with their own children, and reminisces about what they learned, and how they have used their Abriachan skills in life. There have been a few who have even decided to pursue a career in forestry after their experience with AFT!

It's not just young people that AFT strives to help, earlier in her career with us Roni coordinated Branching Out, a programme for adults who have been referred due to mental ill health. Abriachan staff help deliver training and blocks of practical Branching Out sessions alongside NHS staff and greenspace workers. Roni has also worked with criminal justice social workers and service users, through Job Centre+, often developing bespoke programmes integrating Outsider Decider skills into the sessions.

### Our work and the influence of the AFT

In addition to the aforementioned programs, AFT also hold regular volunteering Fridays; these are often attended by some of the individuals who have been introduced to AFT through our other groups. The volunteers contribute to conservation and estate maintenance tasks and have even produced items for the AFT shop. We also work with the local youth group to nurture leadership qualities in young people through various events/roles in the forest; they have been seasonal countryside rangers, created interpretation around the forest paths, and taken part in Opal citizen science surveys.

During school holidays, and on some weekends, AFT organises family days for Women's Aid, Home Start, and separated sibling contact days. These are coordinated through children and families' social workers and provide brothers and sisters with the opportunity to play together, having potentially not seen each other for months. We are also in the process of introducing a new and innovative project in partnership with Moniak Mhor, which will focus on providing creative opportunities in the woodland for young people who have lived experience with care!

Newt catchers







Story telling stools



Tree planters



Car park shop



Restocking Scots Pine



The den life

Partnership and collaborations have always been important; Abriachan forest has been an active member of the Forest Education Initiative in the past and is now part of the South Highland Outdoor Woodland Learning group. Through this network we deliver a wide range of training opportunities for other OWL members and local authority staff. The fact that we have both indoor and outdoor facilities means the venue is appreciated by most who attend – examples of recent training are numeracy and literacy workshops, natural dyeing, Gaelic in the woods, green woodworking, Outsider Decider, campfire cooking, safe fire, and tool use - to name but a few.

Over the past 25 years we have worked with thousands of different individuals and groups, most of whom have gained a real sense of belonging to, and ownership of, the forest because of what they have brought to it and vice versa. We have provided an inspiring woodland experience with shelters, footpaths, and bike trails for tens of thousands of visitors (of all ages) each year and, in doing so, demonstrate what effective community land ownership can deliver.

### Abriachan's Full Circle

The effort that the community and AFT has gone to has made a huge difference to local life, helping to revitalise the local area. In the last 40 years it feels like Abriachan has really come Full Circle; going from only 1 child in the whole village in the 1970's, people have been gravitating back to the area and now the grandchildren of the first owners are attending our nursery on a daily basis. Our current chair is the grandson of Katharine Stewart, and we confidently predict his firstborn daughter will be the chairperson of Abriachan Forest Trust in the future.

Written by,

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Abriachan tiny houses



## MY LIFE IN HEAVY MACHINERY

*Having worked at Global recycling solutions, Louise took over the marketing of Norwood Sawmills in 2019, giving her the opportunity to get more closely involved in the timber industry, and see how the industry has changed over time.*

I have a very hands-on approach with the marketing of the sawmills. I find it magical seeing the creations that are brought alive by the mills, so, whenever there is a chance to visit some of our sawmill customers, I jump at it!

**There is no better marketing than visiting a customer, seeing how that sawmill has changed their business and what they're achieving with it.**

An example of this can be found from my recent 16-hour, 800-mile round trip to Fort William, in March this year. Where I paid a visit to Donald Donnelly, to deliver a static mill for his son's building company, DMD Construction Ltd, and met Norman Clark – who was a great example of how a mill can change your life! Having only been introduced to milling was 6 years ago, when he took on his first pod project – building pods for his friend's sister's campsite – Norman now runs his own pod company which works at a 20-pod build level. Having seen them first hand and sat inside some, it just amazes me the way milling can create such complex and incredible projects that will be enjoyed for decades to come.



Donald Donnelly with static mill

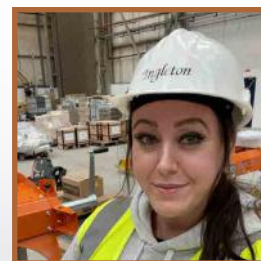
Another way in which my hands-on approach comes to the fore, is through my interest in the construction of our machinery. Most of our mills are sold in kit form for the customer to self-build, and I wanted to share in this experience; from the anticipation of opening the first packets of bolts to the absolute joy of finally running the carriage down the assembled track, knowing that we had put all of that together. So, in April, I co-built 5 different sawmill models at our Mildenhall depot.

These mills went on to be exhibited at shows throughout the rest of this year and the response I got from stand visitors when discussing the mills was quite different to what I had expected. Although no industry should be presumed male or female, I think it's safe to say that, generally, the land of heavy machinery has been male dominated. Therefore, I expected some surprise when I told customers that I had built up the mills, however, much to my own surprise, I received very little! **I think this is evidence of a wider trend of an industry where women have become a lot more commonplace.**

Having a tree and a mill is almost like having a chalk and a blank slate, the possibilities of you can produce is as wide as the imagination, and I think this is partly why women have been increasingly drawn to the industry. Not only are mills more accessible and affordable than ever but it also allows for another creative outlet; historically our creative outlets have been limited, with the sewing machine representing one of the few acceptable tools for women. Now, the sky's the limit! **Taking on sawmilling and the realm of heavy machinery is just the tip of the iceberg.**

The industry is moving and evolving with the times and although it can't be said women were not milling before, it is more at the forefront of social consciousness through increased exposure on social media and in publications.

***This is hopefully just the start of a self-fulfilling prophecy, which will encourage more women to take on the timber industry, by letting them know that they can!***



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Mill on the way to Fort William





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