

ROYAL FORESTRY SOCIETY

Promoting wise management of trees and woods



About the:

RFS Excellence in Forestry Silviculture Award winners 2010:

Category Sponsor: Fencing & Landscaping News

1st place: Wilderness Wood, Uckfield, East Sussex.

The wood lies on a crest of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and demonstrates how poor coppice can be converted to produce high-quality timber and other benefits. When the current owners bought the wood in 1970, 87% of the 25ha was recently cut coppice and the remainder young plantations. Their policy has been to restructure the growing stock by converting one third of the coppice by 'storing' to high forest; converting even-age plantations to continuous cover, and extending the continuous cover area into adjoining coppicing by group planting so that simple coppicing now constitutes less than 60% of the area. Their philosophy is to add value and waste nothing.

What the judges said:

Forestry judges Roderick Leslie and Simon Hewitt said: "Twenty-eight years ago Chris and Anne Yarrow set out to demonstrate multipurpose land use. As they hand over to their daughter Joanna it is fair to say they have succeeded – brilliantly.

"We were amazed that they not only make a profit from just 25 hectares, but employ six people in the process; even more amazed when Chris explained just how poor the site is for tree growing, limited largely to Sweet Chestnut and conifers by impoverished Upper Tunbridge Wells Sands.

"Silviculturally, the wood is split into three managements: Chestnut coppice, Chestnut coppice stored to high forest; and conifers managed under a Bradford system continuous cover approach, of which Chris was an early UK supporter.

"The secret to Wilderness Wood, however, is the people, with well over 30,000 visitors per annum. They come to the traditional oak frame barn housing the shop and café, and to a wood with the intimacy of a Winnie the Pooh story, to the Ant Wood and the Owl Wood, to build shelters and have a barbeque. The Yarrow's real belief in sustainable living and forestry, comes across – there is nothing contrived or artificial, those woods are named because there are Ants and Owls!

“And, of course, it is to the visitors to whom the bulk of the wood’s produce is sold, from simple Chestnut poles to rose arbours and garden seats. Young, straight conifers don’t go as fencing, they sell as tepee poles. Poorer quality material moves fast as firewood, and the dig-your-own Christmas tree plot is both a key financial performer and a great Christmas family event. “

Chris’s daughter Joanna Yarrow took over Wilderness Wood this spring with her partner Jonathan Smales. She said: “Growing up in Wilderness Wood was a very special experience, and gave me a passion for nature which has guided most of my adult life – both personal and professional.

“It’s a huge honour to take over Wilderness Wood and continue the fantastic project my parents began. I’m delighted that their vision and tireless work has been recognised with this award. I hope we can match their enthusiasm and dedication in our plans to engage a growing range of visitors in hands-on sustainability at the wood, giving them a taste of that magic through activities from corporate seminars to permaculture workshops, green living weekends to locally sourced candlelit dinners. We’ll undoubtedly be calling on my parents’ expertise over the coming years!”

You can find out more about wilderness wood on www.wildernesswood.co.uk



Pictured: Judge Simon Hewitt, left, with Wilderness Wood owner Chris Yarrow (Credit Rod Leslie)

2nd place: Leconfield Estate, Petworth, West Sussex

This West Sussex Estate has been in the same family ownership for seven centuries.

The estate's woodlands are primarily broadleaf. Some are planted and some have evolved by natural regeneration from the old coppice woodlands (copses). A programme of thinning and selective felling has taken place in the broadleaf woodlands in the past 14 years, and this will continue alongside small clearfells. A considerable proportion of the conifers were planted between 1960 and 1990, but nearly all planting since 1990 has been broadleaf. Many mature conifers were windblown in the 1987 and 1990 storms and the next generation is coming up to maturity.

What the judges said:

Forestry judges Roderick Leslie and Simon Hewitt said: "We knew we were in for a treat as soon as we stepped out of Head Forester Neil Humphris's Landrover into one of the finest stands of stunning straight Oak we've ever seen.

"Regenerated by seeding with acorns in 1908, it is a fine representative of Leconfield Estates' extraordinary resource of old hardwoods. With 865 hectares of hardwood and only 187 ha of conifer, Leconfield runs a profitable forestry business based on the management of high quality – and high value – hardwoods, mainly Oak but also Sweet Chestnut and Ash. The next two hours were more like a master class than a judging visit – we both learnt a huge amount about managing quality broadleaves.

Neil Humphris said: "Foresters are a rare breed these days, leading a fairly solitary existence in a habitat somewhere between timber growing and conservation, so it is always enjoyable to show interested parties around the Leconfield woods and to get their feedback – there is always something new to learn."



Pictured: Neil Humphris at Leconfield estate



Pictured: Frith wood at Leconfield estate

Certificate of Merit: Torry Hill Estate, Sittingbourne, Kent.

Torry Hill Chestnut Woods is one of the few big blocks of woodland to be actively managed as coppice on the North Downs. It has two main objectives:

- production of high quality Chestnut poles for conversion to cleft chestnut fencing or all sorts
- to maintain and strengthen the virtuous cycle, starting with the maintenance of a 14-year coppice cycle throughout the woodlands.

Around 20–30 acres of coppicing are cut every year and there is a programme allowing a number of standard trees to grow on, particularly on the ride edges to provide species and habitat diversity. The woodlands have open public access for walkers, cyclists and horse riders, and there are regular wildlife monitoring surveys. Nearly all the timber production goes to the Torry Hill Estate's own processing operation, Torry Hill Chestnut Fencing, which exports 30 per cent of production, primarily to Belgium and Holland.

What the judges said:

Forestry judges Roderick Leslie, and Simon Hewitt said: "Its success – and its profitable – owes much to owner John Leigh Pemberton's enterprise and imagination.

"A real champion for rural employment, he has beaten the general decline in Chestnut working and two years ago took on a failing Chestnut operation which is now growing fast, supplying picket fencing to the Holland and Belgium and an increasing range of fencing, panels and garden furniture across southern England. It has already doubled from three to six employees, and 25–30 people are involved in working the estate's Chestnut. Some standards are being introduced into the pure coppice for diversity. The estate has installed a

new 150kW KWB woodfuel boiler to heat a holiday cottage complex accommodating 55 people.

“It was bluebell time when we visited and there can't be any better demonstration of the benefit of traditional active management in our ancient woodlands. Something for everyone, thanks to Torry Hill's generous open access policy.”

Owner John Leigh Pemberton said: "I am delighted to have received this award, which recognises the contribution that the Torry Hill Chestnut woods make to the local economy and to the environment. Coppicing Chestnut as a management system has so much to recommend it. It is completely sustainable, has significant benefits for wildlife of all sorts, and provides a high quality raw material for fencing products which are increasingly popular for their durability and attractive natural appearance, and, of course, the woods look wonderful when the bluebells are out."



Pictured: Torry Hill owner John Leigh Pemberton, praised for enterprise and imagination (Credit Rod Leslie)