

PRODUCTS FROM THE WOOD

A key personal objective was to demonstrate that woodland such as Sandhurst Copse & Sheepwalk could generate enough revenue to support itself, on a sustainable basis, in perpetuity, whilst maintaining the character of the woodland.

When I first acquired the wood, I did not have the knowledge and skills to fell and use the c.20 year old sweet chestnut coppice growth, which was the primary productive raw material. There was some urgency in starting such a programme. Fortunately, after asking around, I made contact with Mick Johnson. A red bearded, salt of the earth, genial giant, who worked sweet chestnut for post and rail fencing and was also a game keeper for a shoot, and required fence posts, strainers and other items for the same. Initially Mick and his mate Pete worked the chestnut each year. Pete then had to leave to work for a sole employer for tax reasons and I started to work with Mick, I learned a lot, some very useful and good, the odd bit not so, such as burning all unwanted material and thereby destroying forever the nutrients that they had taken from the soil, and starting the fire on a wet day with engine oil!

Mick's products were traditional including round fence posts and strainers and 10 ft split rails (on the right - waiting for the ends to be finished).



Latterly we worked split fence rails for my own use in the wood, for which I paid Mick.

A game changer was the purchase of an LT15 Woodmizer sawmill in 2004, the main driving force for this was concern about the ability to process timber when there was a glut, eg. after a big storm. At this point I also took over the annual felling from Mick so that I controlled the raw material.

Successful sawn products included 1.5m x 100mm square, waymark posts for footpaths and bridlepaths (left photo) and boardwalk material (right photo) for Surrey County Council. I was fortunate in that a volunteer who worked in the wood on Saturdays worked for SCC and alerted me to the opportunity to quote for these. SCC became my largest customer.



Other sawn products, produced and sold included hardwood fence panels, picket fencing;



Garden gate (painted), mounting block, posts to order;



Pub picnic table, oak beams for a pergola and replacement timber for a cast iron bench.



Products were not advertised; but sold by personal contact. I was demonstrating possible products, I was fortunate to have my pension and did not need to carry out larger scale marketing; but to my satisfaction over 10 years demonstrated that the site could provide at least £50-80,000 revenue per annum within the terms of the original objective.

By my own activities on site, I was also demonstrating the use of sweet chestnut for construction, and as potential product, including the cladding of the original sawmill barn and the construction of a barn for seasoning.



Firewood logs were an obvious product, albeit a lot of work for little reward compared to products constructed from sawn timber. I served two local pubs and about 20 private customers. The product was one foot, 2 year seasoned under cover, specified species, logs. Sold by the size of the stack measured on the customer site.

In addition there were items produced and used on site, which were potentially marketable products. These included morticed fence posts, chunky benches and other seats.



The original objective “to demonstrate that woodland such as Sandhurst Copse & Sheepwalk could generate revenue on a sustainable basis, in perpetuity, whilst maintaining the character of the woodland” was predicated on nature allowing me to grow timber trees. After about 10 years, in 2014 I realised that this was not pre-ordained and diverted my attention to management of nutrients, changes in weather patterns and other sivicultural issues. I therefore terminated for the time being my product initiatives and sales. However was satisfied that the objective had been met regarding demonstration of products and revenue generation.