

# Coppice as a Business



## Introduction

Local craft skills are now in great demand, and although there is no opportunity to get rich, there is independence, a slower pace of life, and the room to develop skills over time.

This case study follows the example of one man, Larry Jones, from Telford, who chose to make coppicing and woodlands his way of life, and has found this way of life satisfying and rewarding.

Larry first started within the woodland sector as a volunteer for the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) programme undertaking various conservation projects. His volunteer work then continued on various projects involving the National Trust Volunteers.

## Coppicing

From the earliest times most woodland (estimates vary from 70 – 90%) was managed as coppice with standards, as this was the most effective use of woodland to provide the range of products that were needed.

Coppicing is a 'cut and come again' technique which involves cutting native broadleaved hardwoods down to ground level and then harvesting the multiple straight stems regenerating from the stump or stool. It is a rotational system of cultivation, in which woodcutters fell each small area of woodland (known as a coupe or cant) every few years.

Coppicing is once again being recognised as an invaluable tool in the modern management of woodlands, a process which brings with it huge benefits in terms of the biodiversity of flora and fauna. Products from the coppice are once again in great demand, as larger organisations and individuals seek more local supplies of sustainable products.

## A revitalised industry

The establishment of the Green Wood Trust by a small group of enthusiasts marked a revitalisation of the coppice industry. The first Trustees were a group of far sighted enthusiasts who saw the woodlands of Telford (then being created as a Forest City) offering as many employment opportunities as the industry being brought into the town. They created a training centre in Coalbrookdale that would train people in making chairs, charcoal, and garden hurdles to supply the needs of the fast growing population of Telford. In fact they created a national resource for the preservation of traditional skills in woodland crafts.

## Project name

The name of the business is Larry Jones, who has been working as a professional woodsman for 14 years. Larry operates from a yard space at the Green Wood Centre (GWC) in Coalbrookdale.

## Business Objectives

- ◆ To make a viable profit
- ◆ Demonstrate sustainable woodland management within the local area.



- ◆ Promote local diversity by only using trees of local provenance
- ◆ Manage land in an ecological and traditional way

## Description

Larry is a self employed woodsman who generally works around Telford and the surrounding area. He is an experienced coppice worker and craftsman and has been a tutor at the Green Wood Centre for many years now; he offers a high level of teaching ability along with skills and knowledge gained throughout many years of practical experience.

Each year his work sites vary, but as coppice is managed on rotation many woods are visited each year. The average size of coupe is around half to one hectare.

## Project design

The land on which Larry works is primarily owned by Wrekin District Council although many contracts are undertaken for private landowners and organisations.

New prospective woodlands are often found by accident or by word of mouth. Many are also through individual relationships with people within various organisations. Often there are no formal contracts signed, most agreements are just on a verbal basis.

A wide variety of coppice products are produced throughout the business including charcoal, firewood and wattle hurdles. There is a focus on hedging stakes and eatherings (binders) as a large proportion of work undertaken is hedge laying. The present demand for hedge laying has boomed over recent years

particularly with the current grant aid offered by the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) under their Countryside Stewardship Scheme.

The marketing of products vary, supplying only people with items that have been previously ordered and mainly focusing on local sales. Charcoal production however has declined, with Larry only currently producing 10 burns per season compared to 1993 – 96 when he was undertaking 2 burns per week!

During the summer months, when work within the woodland is generally out of season and not so frequent, Larry attends many country shows and events. Items are also produced for the Green Wood Centre and BTCV. *“I make a fair living, but my kind of work is not a profit making business”*



there is sufficient demand to keep the local network busy; however diversification throughout the coppice industry is essential to prevent seasonal fluctuations on income.

## Implementation

- ◆ Larry has been associated with the Green Wood Centre since he became involved in coppice work. He tutors a variety of courses at the Centre related to his craft and more recently has become an accredited instructor for the Open College Network courses recently introduced there.
- ◆ Shropshire Charcoalliers, Craftsman and Underwoodsmen (SCUM) is a group of local contractors from the surrounding counties, including craft workers and woodsmen. The core aim is to offer assistance and networking within their working woodland sector.
- ◆ Niche markets for coppice products often result from trends associated with fashionable media, e.g. gardening programmes and press articles this can affect both sales and the demand for many desired items. Larry produces coracle laths for courses at the GWC as these are produced nowhere else.
- ◆ Competition for work particularly within this sector is generally not a concern;

## Achievements/ outputs

Sustainable woodland management  
*Total area of coppice cut per year = 4 - 5 acres*

Product	Approximate quantity
Hedging stakes	4000 – 5000
Hedging bundles/ rods	400 – 500
Willow bundles for private sales & river side work	400 – 500
Cord wood	200 cubic metres (c. 80 –100 tons)
Wattle hurdles	100 varying sizes
Cleft Oak and Chestnut stakes	2000 – 5 ft 1000 – 4 ft 1000 – 1m
Charcoal	10 burns per season
Oak fencing rails	500

## Future management and sustainability

- ◆ Create a better network between landowners, coppice craftsmen and recognize future possible markets
- ◆ Localised marketing should be promoted and encouraged

- ◆ Extend and increase the area of quality coppice in rotation, including the Identification of markets for low grade hazel coppice

*“Coppice, there is nothing better for a woodland, human beings have a positive effect on the state of woodlands if managed correctly. With this form of management wildlife and woodland health aspects benefit along with production”*

## Wider application

- ◆ Traditional coppice management helps increase and enhance British flora and fauna by increasing a diverse habitat and also by the re-establishment of neglected woodlands.
- ◆ Traditional coppice management is a valuable crop for wood fuel in the form of logs and woodchip, and for making wood products for a local market. When managed as coppice, woodlands provide a renewable resource which can reduce our reliance on fossil fuels and plastic in the house and garden.

### This project delivers against the following themes of the West Midlands Regional Forestry Framework:

Woodland Cover	✓
The Woodland & Forestry industry	✓
Wood Energy	✓
Recycling	
Recreation & Tourism	
Health & Wellbeing	
Education, Learning & Skills	✓
Fostering Social Inclusion	
Enhancing Biodiversity	✓
Natural & Cultural Environmental benefits	✓
Supporting the Regeneration of the West Midlands	✓

## Contact addresses

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**Small Woods Association**  
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Tel: 01743 792644  
[www.smallwoods.org.uk](http://www.smallwoods.org.uk)



**Forestry Commission**  
England

## Further reading

- Traditional Woodland Crafts:** Raymond Tabor – Sterling Publishing
- The Woodland Way:** A Permaculture Approach to Sustainable Woodland Management – Ben Law – *Permanent Publications*
- Green Wood working:** Mike Abbott – *Guild of Master Craftsman Publications*
- Crafts in the English Countryside:** Towards a future – Ed. Professor EJT Collins