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The Woodlands

Part of the woodland to the south of the Museum is open to the public. Within the woodland there is an area of hazel coppice, reflecting the importance of coppice wood in the traditional rural economy.

A few years ago the hillside above the Museum was covered with mature beech trees. These have recently been felled for timber, but regeneration of a wide variety of species is taking place. In due course the hillside will again be covered with trees, but this time ash, beech, hornbeam and sycamore will form a mixed woodland.

A small section of the woodland consists of hazel coppice. In a coppice, poles are cut every few years, leaving a 'stool' from which a fresh crop of poles will grow. Many species of tree have been coppiced, but today only hazel and chestnut are cut commercially. Coppiced woodlands were once of considerable importance in the rural economy, the young wood providing the raw material for many products. Coppiced hazel was used to make hurdles for sheep enclosures, feeding cages, wattle panels in timber framed buildings, the hoops of barrels used to hold dry products, and many other purposes. Today only hurdles are made in significant numbers.

The Museum has brought the coppice back into rotation and it provides hazel for thatching spars and wattle fencing. In addition, the Museum manages hazel coppice on a local estate owned by the National Trust. We also work closely with local coppice workers to develop outlets for many products, both traditional and new.



Cutting the buttresses of an oak tree in preparation for felling.



Felling is complete.



A chestnut pole is held in a shaving horse, while the bark is peeled off with a shave

Taking off the oak bark, using a barking iron. The bark would be sold for tanning.

The woodman's shelter. A simple shelter was often built to give cover to the woodman. Many products were made in the woods rather than transporting the material to another site. Nowadays canvas shelters can still be seen, especially in areas where chestnut coppice is cut.

Click on any picture to enlarge it.

Loading bundles of hazel rods.

A froe is used to cleave a pole into two parts



Products and processes of traditional forestry

The photographs reproduced here were all taken during the 1930s in Plashetts Wood near Lewes, East Sussex. They have been made available to the Museum by Mrs M. Ridley, whose father took the photographs. They illustrate some of the products and processes of traditional forestry, a forest economy that left little unused material. Plashetts Wood was a mixed coppice of hazel and chestnut with oak standards allowed to develop into large timber trees.