



FACTS AND FIGURES

Debbie Bartlett and David Rossney

Definitions

Coppice in the UK really just means any tree that is cut at - or near - ground level, so that it regrows with multiple stems. These trees would then be described as 'coppiced'. Coppice woodland is woodland where this management technique has occurred and this may be carried out repeatedly, and so called rotational (or in rotation) coppice. We would refer to such woodland as managed by coppicing or in coppice management.

Debbie Barlett

Woodland comprising broadleaved trees, areas of which are clear felled, often regularly, and which then re-sprout (sometimes including suckering species). These sprouting root stocks will grow another crop of trees in the absence of grazing and browsing.

David Rossney

Legal Framework

There is no legal framework. In fact we have some problems defining woodland. Short Rotation Coppice is usually *Salix* spp., although chestnut can be managed on a wide range of rotations depending on end use, for example 3 years for walking sticks.

Debbie Barlett

There is no special legal framework for coppice, but it is mostly covered by general UK Forestry legislation and tree felling controls.

Coppice often grows in ancient semi-natural woodland which is itself subject to legal protection from damage. This does not mean that felling coppice cannot take place, but that the woodland must be allowed to re-grow again. This in effect means not cleared for building or agriculture and protected from grazing farm animals and wild browsing animals like deer.

David Rossney

Statistics

In 1999, total forest cover in the UK was over 2.6 m ha. Coppice and coppice with standards amounted to 0.9% of this total (24,000 ha). Historically this was higher and estimated at 1.5% in 1980 and 5.3% in 1947.

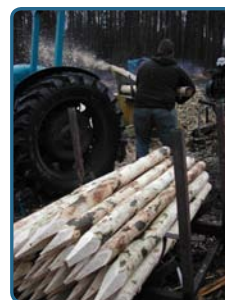
Source: Forestry Commission Research Report 2010

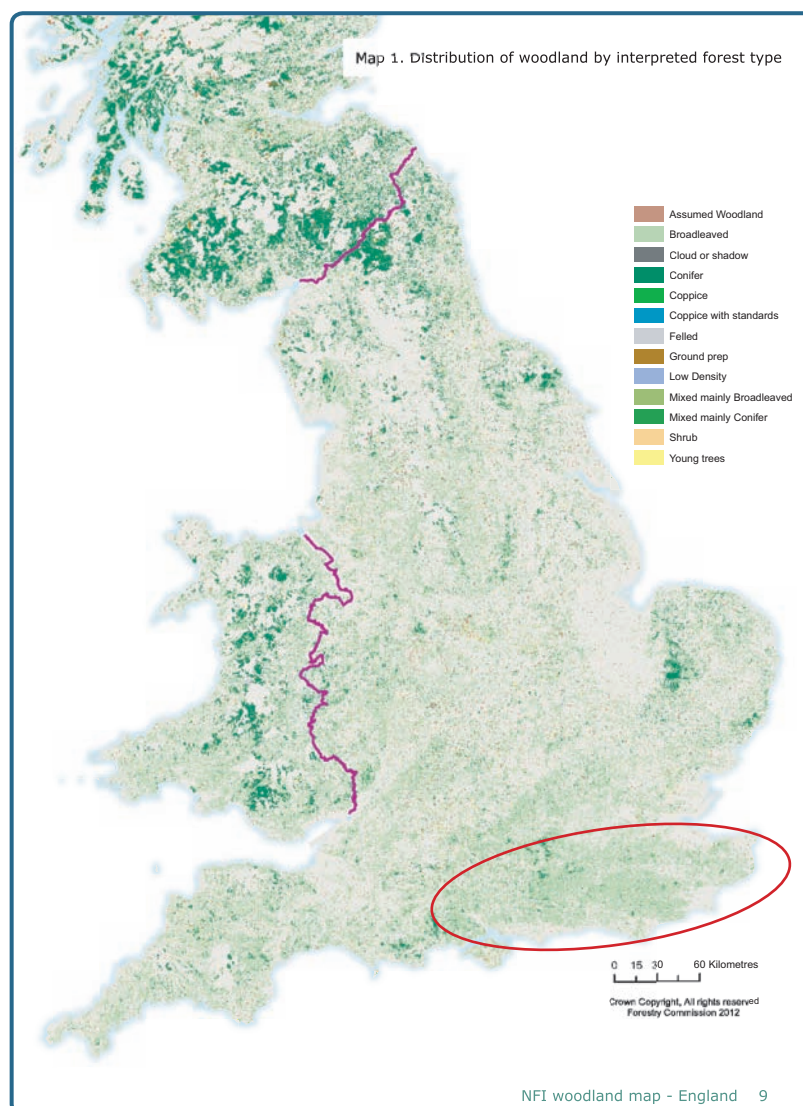
Much of the broadleaved woodland was, in the past, managed as coppice even if this practice has not been continued.

Typology

Simple coppice	Traditional natural forest regeneration method still practised, particularly in Southeast England, mainly sweet chestnut, hazel or mixed species and may include standards.
Coppice with standards	UK - Very common, usually with oak as the standard. This was, in times past, important for timber, particularly ship building. The recruitment of standards is no longer the norm, but is encouraged for biodiversity. England - standards often of oak.
Pollarding	UK - Practised in historic wood pastures and also within coppice areas as one way of marking boundaries between felling areas and changes in ownership, parish boundaries etc. England - historically - now regarded as archaeological features of cultural/biological significance.
Short rotation coppice	UK - Practised as an agricultural alternative to normal farmed crops. Not really part of the UK's woodland management heritage, unless counting hazel coppice cut on 7-9 year rotation. England - limited and considered as agriculture rather than forestry.
Other types	Self-seeded stands and newly planted coppice. A little new planting is still undertaken with the intention of creating new coppice woodland, particularly for sweet chestnut. Seed regeneration, especially of species such as silver birch, is often mistaken for or mixed in with coppice and is effectively managed in much the same way. After cutting, some stools will coppice, but with birch, most new trees come from self-seeding.

Images





Map of the distribution of woodland in England by interpreted forest type, from the National Forest Inventory (NFI) 2011 (Contains Forestry Commission information licensed under the Open Government License v3.0). Coppice is currently a significant component of the landscape character in the south-east of England (circled in red).

DESCRIPTION

Debbie Bartlett

Coppice management has been practiced since the earliest times with archaeological evidence including the remains of trackways laid across boggy ground showing the marks of felling axes. The composition of the woods has varied over time as particular tree species were preferentially encouraged to meet the demands of

markets. Similarly, rotational cycles were developed to provide roundwood of the required dimensions.

Forestry as a whole has undergone dramatic changes in recent centuries. The demands of oak for ship building, particularly in the 17th and 18th centuries, led to the development of

the coppice with standards system. In this, oaks were grown over coppice, encouraging branching and the development of the 'crooks' or angled branches required by the master shipwrights.

In the immediate aftermath of the First World War the Forestry Commission was set up in response to the shortages of timber and this Government organisation, which still exists today, set about increasing self-sufficiency in timber. This was done by buying woodland, planting conifers and providing financial incentives for private woodland owners to do the same. In many cases this led to previously coppiced native broadleaved woods being cleared and over-planted with fast growing conifers.

After the Second World War, which again had a major impact on woodlands, particularly coppice, there was a period of agricultural intensification, driven by the food shortages. This led to a reduction in the woodland area as land was cleared for agriculture. The rise of the environmental movement and increasing awareness of the effect on native flora and fauna led to a change in forestry policy with a move from coniferisation to encouraging native broadleaves in the mid-1980s.

So how has this affected coppice woodland management? The area managed as coppice has risen and fallen with changes in market demand, policy and overall woodland area. By the turn of the century it had virtually died out in most parts of the UK as an economic activity and was practised, primarily by nature conservation organisations, to maintain specific habitats. The exception to this trend was the chestnut industry, concentrated in the south eastern counties, and producing fencing materials. This has remained largely 'hidden' as there is no legislation affecting it (i.e. no permissions

are required for harvesting roundwood of small diameter). There has been continuity with coppice workers often working in family groups and with skills and knowledge passed from father to sons.

There has been a revival in hazel coppice crafts apparent in the last decades of the 20th century with some choosing to take up this livelihood, often after becoming disillusioned by working in more high powered careers. These tend to sell products directly to their customers, as opposed to feeding produce into 'coppice merchants' as is the case for the chestnut industry, and supplement this by demonstrating at craft fairs and country shows.

In addition to these two sectors, based on specific tree species, woods are coppiced for firewood.



Figure 1. An example of coppice with standards in the United Kingdom

FORESTRY REGULATIONS

Jenny Mills and Peter Buckley

England, Scotland and Wales

There are 3.16 million hectares of woodland in the UK according to national forestry statistics published in 2016. This represents 13% of the total land area in the UK, 10% in England, 15% in Wales, 18% in Scotland and 8% in Northern Ireland. 1.35 million hectares of woodland in the UK is independently certified as sustainably managed. Conifers, mainly Sitka spruce and Scots pine, cover around 51% of the UK woodland area, although varying from 26% in England to 74% in Scotland. The main broadleaf species are oak, beech, sycamore, ash, birch, alder, sweet chestnut and hazel.

UK forestry statistics define woodland as land under stands of trees with a canopy cover of at least 20% (or having the potential to achieve this), including integral open space, and including felled areas that are awaiting restocking. There is no minimum size for a woodland or minimum height for trees to form a woodland at maturity; the definition therefore includes woodland scrub but not areas with only shrub species. During the 20th century, the area under working coppice in the UK greatly decreased; the last official estimate in 2011 was only just over 2,000 ha. This is distributed mainly in south-east England, where it represents approximately 1% of the forest cover (Forestry Commission, 2015).

The **Forestry Act 1967** and subsequent amendments regulate forestry in England, Scotland and Wales. Responsibility for administration and enforcement is vested in the Forestry Commission, Forestry Commission Scotland and Natural Resources Wales.

Under the Forestry Act, it is illegal to fell trees in the UK without prior approval, apart from the

exemptions listed below. **Felling licences** are usually granted subject to restocking and maintenance for a period not exceeding 10 years. The Forestry Commission will discuss any proposed restocking condition with the applicant before a licence is issued. However, licences without the requirement to restock are issued for silvicultural thinning operations. They may also be issued if there are overriding environmental considerations, e.g. to restore important habitats, and such applications are assessed under the **Environmental Impact Assessment (Forestry) Regulations 1999**. It is recommended that a felling licence application is made at least 3 months before felling is planned to take place.

In England, Scotland and Wales, a felling licence is not required if the owner wishes:

- to fell less than 5 cubic metres in a calendar quarter, but only 2 cubic metres of this can be sold per quarter (i.e. can fell 20 cubic metres a year, but sell only 8)
- for trees that have the following diameters when measured 1.3 metres from the ground: 8 cm or less; 10 cm or less for thinnings; 15cm or less for cutting coppice

A licence is not needed if the owner has a current permission under an approved **Dedication Scheme** plan or planning permission granted under the Town & Country Planning Act.

A licence is not needed to fell dangerous or nuisance trees, diseased trees in accordance with a notice served by a Plant Health Officer, to comply with an Act of Parliament or to undertake duties as a statutory service provider (gas, water, electricity).

No licence is required for lopping, topping, pruning or pollarding unless the tree is covered

by a **Tree Preservation Order** or by **Hedgerow Regulations**, in which case permission must be sought from the Local Planning Authority and they also have to be consulted if a tree is to be felled in a historical **Conservation Area**.

Application for a felling licence can be made on its own or as part of a management plan submitted to the Forestry Commission, Forestry Commission Scotland or Natural Resources Wales. An application to fell trees can be made as part of a grant scheme application. A separate felling licence application is not required as a felling licence will be issued with the grant scheme contract.

An offence under the **Wildlife & Countryside Act** (1981) may be committed if felling, and in particular, clear felling, is carried out during the breeding season of protected species, including all wild birds. A **European Protected Species** (EPS) licence may be required from Natural England under the **Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations** (2010) if felling operations could adversely affect any EPS.

Natura 2000 sites in the UK are also designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). Consent for forestry operations, which include afforestation, planting, clear and selective felling, thinning, coppicing, modification of the stand or underwood, changes in species

composition and the cessation of management, on these designated sites is required from Natural England, Scottish Natural Heritage or Natural Resources Wales as well as the Forestry Commission, unless statutory permission has been received from another public body such as the Environment Agency who have already consulted the national environmental body.

Within SSSIs, and so by association in all SACs (Special Areas of Conservation), lists of damaging operations notified by the above conservation organisations include the cessation of tree or woodland management, which in the case of coppice, could mean keeping the coppice within rotation. However, Natural England is not aware of any action being taken for sites where coppice is being neglected, even if it was being actively coppiced when listed.

Northern Ireland

The **Forestry Act (Northern Ireland)** passed in 2010 applies in this part of the UK. Owners of private woodlands of 0.2 hectares or more need a licence to fell trees from the Forestry Service of the Northern Ireland Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. They are required to re-establish the woodland under an approved felling management plan. The exemptions from the requirement for a felling licence are similar to the rest of the UK.

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