

Features

RFS Whole Society Meeting Cumbria 16-19 May 2017

Simon Lloyd and Ted Wilson report on this year's event.

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Naworth Estate

First up was a visit to Naworth Estate, which has been in the family of Philip Howard, the host for the morning, for over 650 years. Today the estate consists of 900ha including 260ha of woodland. Naworth has outstanding heritage landscape value with Naworth Castle, Lanercost Priory and Hadrian's Wall all visible from vantage points on the estate. Since taking charge in 1992 Philip has increased the woodland holding through purchase and planting 62ha of marginal agricultural land.

The first discussion centred on a 20ha wood of well thinned, good quality, mature oak where over 12ha of rhododendron have been removed, opening up the stream and allowing natural regeneration to take place. It was noted that it can take 7-10 years for the soil to recover after rhododendron clearance before conditions for regeneration

are at their best. Roe deer represent a serious threat to a strategy of natural regeneration and a culling operation has removed 60-70 deer in the last year.

An extensive area of new planting at East Wood has been planned with access for timber extraction as a key consideration. The estate has invested extensively in a high quality forest road network. Woodland creation and infrastructure investments have been funded by grants. The new planting of will greatly enhance the landscape, provide a valuable sanctuary for birds and a valuable timber crop.

Views were sought on whether a stand of sycamore, which is not the best quality, should be felled or continue to be gradually thinned. The stand has suffered from lack of pruning but site conditions and provenance may have also contributed. Views were also sought on management prescriptions to prevent rapid and extensive erosion of agricultural land caused by the river Irthing. Rules preventing dredging of the river bed are thought to contribute to the problem. Various suggestions were made including cricket bat willow and a willow hedge.

The morning ended at Lanercost Priory with lunch in the adjacent Dacre Hall and the opportunity to visit the priory or walk a short distance to Hadrian's Wall.

Miltonrigg Wood

The afternoon was spent at Miltonrigg Wood, a 64ha wood near Brampton purchased in 1987 by the Woodland Trust. Heather Swift (Site Manager) led the visit supported by Nick Hall (Safety Manager) and Mark Feather (Woodland Operations Manager). This is predominantly a PAWS site with extensive areas planted with larch, Scots pine and Norway spruce. Woodland Trust management objectives are to restore the wood to predominantly native broadleaves and provide a high quality woodland experience for the public.

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Naworth Castle and new native woodland plantation.



Group visiting the Woodland Trust's Miltonrigg Wood to discuss native woodland restoration.

cleared from most of the wood. Larch has been more heavily thinned to mitigate the potential impact of *P. ramorum*, which is not yet present on the site. A good understorey of birch, beech, ash and sycamore has become established. The Woodland Trust is keen to diversify the range of species to ensure greater resilience against the impact of pest and diseases. The group considered that the wood would benefit from further thinning but overall the wood has benefited from an active and considered management regime.

The wood is bounded by the busy A69 and bisected by the Carlisle-Newcastle rail line, raising significant safety challenges. Nick Hall talked through the Woodland Trust's practical approach to safety and illustrated this with the process used to clear trees alongside the rail line, a highly complex and costly operation that took two years to plan.

Miltonrigg Wood is a very popular and well used wood and public access facilities are more extensive than most Woodland Trust sites including a surfaced level track, seats, picnic bench, a pond viewing platform, interpretation boards

and way markers. Heather reported that thinning operations do not raise major issues with the public provided the rationale is explained in advance via poster campaigns, and that the wood experiences only very minor anti-social behaviour.

Lowther Estate

Ian Jack (Forestry and Land Use Manager) hosted the second day at Lowther Estate. The visit started with a fascinating presentation by Ian on the history of the estate from the 13th century, when Lowther was already a substantial settlement, to the present day. This provided invaluable historical context for the visit to the Lowther gardens that formed the focus for the day. In the 18th and 19th centuries Lowther was considered one of the finest estates in the country. The gardens form an impressive backdrop and frame for this historic site and have been shaped at various times by renowned landscapers including Richardson, Mawson, Brown and Webb. Sadly the castle and gardens were abandoned in 1935.

The garden's trees and woods are a small part of an estate woodland holding of approximately 2,000ha that generates a positive financial contribution from about 10,000m³ a year of wood products including top grade sawlogs, furniture quality timbers, fencing, firewood and biomass. Ian also outlined plans to plant a further 180ha of productive woods on agricultural land that has been demonstrated to offer lower returns than forestry, and reinstate a former lake to enhance flood management, which are expected to receive final consent this year.

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WSM group photo at Lowther Castle.

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spotting grey squirrels on site. With these tools, David reports a 97% success rate for his control programme, safeguarding a thriving population of red squirrels.

A.W. Jenkinson Forest Products

A.W. Jenkinson Forest Products is owned by Allan Jenkinson, who started the business in the 1960s by collecting unwanted sawdust and wood shavings from sawmills and selling them to farmers. Today the business handles over 3 million tonnes of roundwood, sawdust, chip, bark, brash, green waste and other timber co-products collected from woodlands, sawmills and other wood processing industries across the UK. Where there is a wood co-product that would otherwise go to waste, A.W. Jenkinson has created a market for it. Approximately half a million tonnes are processed at the A.W. Jenkinson's Clifton HQ near Penrith to produce a range of products including livestock and pet bedding, chipped landscaping bark and peat composts for the retail garden market. The group was interested to see maritime pine bark chips imported from Portugal for the garden market. The business operates over 750 trucks including 300 contractors.

Richard Palmer (Commercial Director) and Simon Bullock (Senior Wood Fibre Manager), both foresters by background, led the tour of the Clifton site. They explained that due to a two week outage at Iggesund Paperboard there was a much larger volume of product in storage on the site than usual. Operations are based on turning product around as quickly as possible and recycling all waste back into the manufacturing process, including, for example any granite rocks that arrive with loads of bark or brash which are crushed and recycled for farm and forest roads. The group



Natural regeneration of broadleaves in a pine plantation at Warren and Labuss.

was shown the equestrian wood shavings plant, from 2.5m spruce logs to wood shavings with 12% moisture content after flash drying in the nearby A.W. Jenkinson Penrith depot. The garden compost bagging plant was mesmerising, with batch production of four different products manufactured to specification for leading garden brands being blended and bagged up on pallets for transport to garden retailers, including red (stained) bark and garden manure. The whole operation is highly automated and very impressive.

Conclusions

Overall, this was a very successful and enjoyable WSM which finished with a magnificent buffet lunch at Ivegill village hall. The Society thanks the North Western Division organising committee (John Harris, Jackie Dunne, Ian Jack, Andrew Leslie, Eddie Cruikshank, Jim O'Neill and Ron and Judith Shapland), Dawn Dewhurst and Zoe Knight and our hosts for an excellent visit to Cumbria.

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support of a £9M grant. The result is a remarkable transformation as testified by the 130,000 visitors who now visit Lowther each year since it opened to the public in 2011. The garden's trees and woods are an integral component of the visitor experience.

Ian invited the group to provide suggestions for the management of a wide range of challenges for the trees and woods in the gardens. These included:

- Whether roundels of Scots pine planted in 1912 as a landscape feature have outlived their purpose and should be gradually thinned and replaced.
- The management of a 200 year old beech tree that is showing signs of decay adjacent to a footpath.
- The restoration Jack Croft Pond to recreate the reflection of adjacent trees on the water.
- The treatment of a stand of sycamore close to the castle that has not yet responded to a heavy thinning.
- Whether a cathedral stand of old Norway spruce, which has been thinned in recent years, is achieving its purpose and what the next intervention should be.
- The phased restoration of a medieval wilderness garden of veteran yew and lime, originally pollarded but currently suffering from neglect.
- The replacement and augmentation of the Victorian pinetum with new species.

Each of these topics stimulated a lively discussion, of much interest and learning. Of equal enjoyment were the magnificent views of the lakeland fells from various vantage points in the gardens and the discussion on how these landscapes are being managed. At the end of the afternoon there was time to admire the restoration of the castle



Hardwood stand at Lowther – well thinned, profuse natural regen, ash rich.

courtyard including the impact of recently planted hornbeam.

The Society AGM was held at lunchtime in the village hall. This was preceded by Sara Brown, RFS Teaching Trees Education Officer in Cumbria, giving an overview of her work to teach primary school children about the value of woodland management.

Whinlatter Forest

Day three was hosted by Nathan Fox and Gareth Browning (Forestry Commission). The visit included walking tours through Whinlatter Forest (am) and Dodd Wood (pm) in the Lake District National Park.

Whinlatter Forest (1226ha, 140-500m asl) is located 5km from Keswick in an area characterised steep-sided valleys and mountain peaks. One of the original Forestry Commission sites for afforestation (P1919), the forest now comes under several designations, including the Bassenthwaite Lake Special Area of Conservation (SAC), three Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and is England's only mountain Forest Park (established 1993). Plantations of Sitka spruce are dominant, but there is a diverse mix of other conifers on better soils, including larch, western hemlock and Douglas fir, and areas of native woodland.

Recreation is a feature of Whinlatter Forest and has expanded steadily in recent years. There are over 200,000 day visitors per year. Facilities include a visitor centre, café, bike shop and hire centre, an extensive network of walking and mountain bike trails, a GoApe high wire course, a Segway trail and a play area. Seasonal events have proved a draw for locals and visitors. Mountain biking has helped Whinlatter gain a reputation as an all-season adventure destination. The impact is felt throughout the wider area and contributes to the local economy.

With the backdrop of high visitor numbers, forest management at Whinlatter Forest is integrated and innovative. A steady output of 10,000m³ of timber is produced each year but careful consideration is given to landscape, environment and amenity values. Large areas of the forest are managed on continuous cover forestry (CCF) principles. CCF has proved beneficial in responding to *Phytophthora ramorum*, where an understorey of naturally-regenerated resilient species (spruce, western hemlock, Douglas fir, broadleaves) has helped reduce the impact of removing diseased stands of larch. However, clear-felling continues elsewhere in the forest, especially on higher ground where stability is a concern.

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