



From Pulp to Parliament

transforming coppice timber

The decline of traditional markets for coppiced sweet chestnut over the twentieth century has brought this once thriving sustainable industry to a relative standstill. The loss of biodiversity, productivity, traditional skills and rural lifestyles has been well documented in recent years. Numerous projects throughout the region have sought to support our sweet chestnut heritage, now in the hands of a very few dedicated cutters and traditional crafts people managing to preserve skills and eke out a living.

New markets need to be found to provide economic stimuli for maintaining coppice woodlands. In the face of extremely cheap timber imports this can at times seem like an impossible dream. Nevertheless some dedicated local timber experts have been quietly developing a new approach to adding value to 'low-grade' small diameter coppice hardwoods. Production of finger-jointed lengths of local sweet chestnut and oak is underway, resulting in a versatile product that can be used for any internal and external joinery and in laminated beam form as a stable structural timber.



Finger jointing technology and timber



Lengths as short as 125mm can be fingerjointed into 6 metre lengths

Inwood Developments Ltd, based at Whitesmith, East Sussex, have pioneered the use of finger-jointing technology to process short lengths (as little as 125mm) of 15-30 year old coppiced hard-woods into high-grade, stable timber products. Working in conjunction with EC Forest Products (also at Whitesmith), Inwood Developments Ltd can offer full machining and finishing of finger-jointed timbers. The possibilities for this new product are limitless, offering manufacturers a versatile timber from a local sustainable source.

The transformation of low-grade coppice timber into high-grade joinery and construction timber is already making an impressive contribution to the British construction industry. The roof structure of the new Debating Chamber in the Scottish Houses of Parliament is made from finger-jointed lengths of laminated oak supplied by InWood Developments – 27 kilometres in all! WoodLots readers are already familiar with the Woodland Enterprise Centre near Flimwell, with the main gridshell structure and all exterior cladding and external joinery built from finger jointed sweet chestnut. Furthermore, finger-jointed coppice timber has superb environmental credentials, providing an economic stimulus for coppicing (a sustainable management system supporting scarce and diverse ecosystems), maximising the use of wood otherwise destined for pulp mills, and minimising transport costs when compared to imports.

However, the economic sustainability of this supply chain is yet to be fully tested as Inwood Developments requires sawn timber lengths cut to 100mm x 30mm. Generally timber processing in the Southeast is aimed at breaking down large logs. Production of small planks from small diameter timber on a typical mill is a far more labour intensive process. As such, the viable production of sawn coppice suitable for finger jointing will depend on the adaptation of current technology, enabling the cost effective planking of small diameter coppice possibly in the woods. This is an exciting challenge offering opportunities to coppice workers, farmers, landowners and contractors to diversify and transform the productivity of our currently neglected coppice woodlands.

Inwood Developments Ltd immediately require accurately sawn timber (100mm x 30mm), green or dried, from 15-30 year sweet chestnut coppice in lengths of 1metre to 3 metres. High grade is not important as knots can be removed through skilled selection during the finger jointing process. For further information contact: Nigel Braden Tel: 01825 872150

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