

# Hovingham Estate

*"A forest that is neglected is worth nothing in monetary terms."*

The Worsley family has owned the 1225-hectare Hovingham Estate in North Yorkshire since 1593. Current steward, William Worsley, was one of the first landowners to speak publicly on the importance of a proper standard for tree safety inspections that reflected the low risk that trees pose to the public on roads that surround, and the public rights of way that cross, privately owned land. Over the years he has championed the cause of landowners earning enough income to ensure that the rural economy survives. As current President of the Country Land and Business Association, he will lead by example, thanks in no small part to his head forester, David Brown.

David is the fourth consecutive member of his family to have managed Hovingham's forest resource. Under three ownerships, four principal blocks of woods (High Wood, South Wood, Mill Wood and Bank Wood) make up the 360 hectares of woodlands David manages at Hovingham. Most plantations are on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) and are managed as mixed-use forestry (80% conifer plantations and 20% mixed broadleaf plantations including ancient woodland sites and special non-intervention areas) and fall within the boundaries of the Howardian Hills AONB.

David joined the forestry department at Hovingham Estate in 1983, completing a Level 4 C&G in Forestry in 1989 at Newton Rigg. One of a team of four, he worked on establishment and maintenance, driving

the forwarder. He became head forester and park manager in 1994. He says, "My role was to develop the works programme, overseeing a team of three and organising contractors for the 1000 cubic metres of thinnings and 2000 cubic metres of clearfell we were doing per annum. As far back as 1998, roles in forestry started changing. There were indications that timber income would fall with changing price structures. Rather than 'shutting the forest gate', William Worsley preferred to keep the skills of the forestry department on the estate. I needed to find ways to offset my overheads."

In 2000 David enrolled on a BSc (Hons) Forest Management (Distance Learning) degree course at Newton Rigg. What he learned paved the way for a fledgling contracting business when, through the Forestry Commission at Ae, he undertook an ecological site survey course and studied the background information to roadside tree surveys.

"My interest developed because of the introduction of the EWGS and concerns of landowners. High profile court cases questioned the ability of an estate's head forester to identify the risks posed by roadside trees and what exactly constitutes an estate's 'duty of care', their responsibilities and liabilities to the general public. Managing roadside trees efficiently addresses the issue effectively. By completing my training to a professional level (Lantra Level 2) I could manage tree surveys at Hovingham and outsource this



*In the 'Three Sisters' compartment the trees are 51 years old. The hut was once a small sawmill with a McConnell saw bench and an old belt peeler.*

skill set to other estates."

Graduating in 2002, David has undertaken ten roadside tree surveys for other estates, some leading to woodland management contracts. "In 2006, I was asked to carry out a survey at the Brodsworth Estate in Doncaster and to manage all stages of the works, from performing the initial survey to addressing health and safety issues brought up by the survey's recommendations and managing the contractors throughout the works programme."

Brodsworth (a shooting estate leased to a syndicate) then asked David to survey their 120 hectares of woodland. Some areas crossed by public footpaths were unmanaged for 20 years. He completed the Public Rights of Way survey, sought quotes and applied for felling licences last year. Reports and site instruction sheets were given to the contractors and David is now overseeing the returned risk assessment and method statements needed for the works to proceed. All works should be completed by March 2010.

"Having identified the client's needs, in terms of landscape and amenity, the next step is to bring their long, narrow strips of woodland back into management through continuous cover forestry. An application for a Woodland Planning Grant has been filed with the Forestry Commission, which will fund the writing of a Woodland Plan to cover the next ten years and beyond."

Today, Hovingham produces 3000 tonnes of UKWAS-certified timber a year. Clearfells are sold standing to a local contractor BM&R Stephenson (Timber) Ltd, for products from fencing through to quality sawlogs and a small amount of chipwood. Hovingham's hardwood fuels a small-scale (130 tonne) firewood business and part-time foreman Tony Harrison, having cut and split lengths on the estate's Transaw logging bench, is now taking them to the store pile, ready to sell to the local firewood market. Tony (and the estate's machinery) are shared between the farm and forestry departments. He works five months of the year with the forestry department. In June, he assists with the chemical weed programme. During the winter months, he helps David with the establishment programme of restocking and beating up, the maintenance programme of pruning, fencing, 'roading' and drainage, and felling areas that the contractor's machines cannot access.

With PAWS and AONB designations, David manages Hovingham's landscape for amenity value, multi-purpose forestry use including shooting, conservation, biodiversity and wildlife, and long-term non-intervention areas. The Woodland Design Plan, which he drew up in 1999 under the Woodland Grant Scheme (WGS), is now being updated. "Coming out of the WGS, registering with the Rural Payments



*(Left) David Brown next to the Transaw logging bench/splitter. (Right) The department's 6-tonne Igländ winch.*



*This block was planted in 1994 when David Brown first took over the estate. It was thinned this year with the intention of removing 30% of the crop with racks at one in six rows.*

Agency, gives us the opportunity to readdress our management before we apply for the English Woodland Grant Scheme (EWGS). In 1983, we planted European larch and a small amount of productive conifers with the intention of growing at Yield Class 12. In 1989, the decision was made to plant Douglas fir, Sitka spruce and Corsican pine, hopefully giving a return of Yield Class 16. This gives an extra 4 cubic metres per hectare/annum and reduces the rotation from 65 to 38 years. I am trying to put the estate onto an even-age woodland structure, 7 hectares/annum allocated for clear-fell. With red band needle blight in the Corsican, we are now planting European larch as the tertiary species to be removed during first and second thinnings for the staking market."

Hovingham's forestry and shooting departments are of equal importance to the estate and are managed as such. "In consultation with the head gamekeeper and the owner, we have felled ride-edge

conifers and widened the woodland edge, planting oak with field maple and cherry to add colour and to create an airy feel for the pheasants. Where edges border open fields, we are creating a scalloped edge, planting a mix of native species; ash and oak including native woody shrubs. A proportion of self-seeded birch is accepted throughout the crop, which fits with the EWGS structure at this current time. Ecological site surveys in the parkland revealed a number of rare species (Chickweed Wintergreen, Herb Paris and Baneberry). By identifying these areas and recording them in the management plan, we can adapt our forestry techniques of establishment and maintenance. To accommodate the longevity of these habitats we plant native species to mimic appropriate National Vegetation Classifications and operate a more sensitive thinning regime."

David's woodland management won the estate two RFS awards in 2009. The Duke of Cornwall Award

for Forestry and Conservation (amenity use, forestry conservation and biodiversity) was awarded to High Wood and the Farm Woods (20 hectares planted under the Farm Woodland Premium Scheme in 1996). "The Silvicultural Award was given for silviculture and all the benefits our management encompasses. Factors taken into account were good establishment, good thinning technique, development of the girth and canopy, species choice, how well the species is performing and what benefits such as ground flora, fauna and fritillaries are provided."

While David is managing to offset his costs, Hovingham's forestry department still runs at a loss and is not helped by the UKWAS requirement of section 6.2.2, concerning deadwood habitats. "One of the silvicultural objectives of thinning is to remove the diseased, dying and dead trees. I do not mind leaving deadwood in remote areas away from the general public, but we are required to leave it on each hectare, throughout the whole estate. This raises health and safety management considerations and it is 20 cubic metres of timber per hectare that we cannot sell."

David may be able to claw back some of the £300 per hectare lost through UKWAS via his connection with Tilhill, and their contracts to supply woody biomass to UPM Shotton and Sembcorp at Wilton. "We used to rake up lop-and-top with a brash rake on a 360 and burn it. It was a costly operation. Last year, we trialled bringing 160 tonnes of brash to rideside. John Vicary chipped it, using a Jenz on an articulated trailer, and transported it directly to Shotton. Chipping mitigates the cost of burning, leaves

a site ready for restocking and addresses the issue of deadwood more appropriately. As far as I know this was a first for the area, and even though it made a marginal loss, from the lessons we learned, future operations should break even or return a small profit."

If, in future, chipping operations can be demonstrated to fellow members of the local Woodfuel Supply Group as a financial success, David will approach local estates, many of whom have ceased management of their woods, to reconsider and utilise his outside management contracting services.

Including Hovingham, David manages a total of 650 hectares of woodlands for four clients (including 100 hectares of clearfell and thinning programmes) and the occasional one-off contract, like the clearance of woodland adjacent to the local airfield to extend the airstrip at Sutton Bank. Last week a local farmer contacted him via the FC's local Woodland Officer. He is now marking the site, filing for the necessary felling licence and sourcing quotes in readiness for the works to commence, once approvals have been received and accepted.

David concludes, "I would like ultimately to expand the outside consultancy and contracting business to where there are enough estates for a network of contractors to move between as work dictates. A forest that is neglected is worth nothing in monetary terms. By opening the proverbial forest gate, even to thinning, a landowner is opening up the woodland to flora and fauna, enhancing and adding value to a resource that they already own."

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*(Left) The Jenz Hem 561 chipping some of the 160 tonnes of brash brought to rideside. (Right) All estate machinery is shared between the farm and forestry departments. This Manitou MLT 634 LSU Turbo is used to load logs and lift the heavier pieces of timber and brash.*