

Corwen Forestry

– a logical progression

The Lloyd family has a long history within the forestry industry. Over 60+ years they have gained a wealth of experience that has enabled them to develop Corwen Forestry into a multifaceted business. Anne Berry paid them a visit and discovered just how long and diverse this history is.

Three other businesses operate under the umbrella of Corwen Forestry.

They are CF Machinery – retail goods and machinery sales; CF Timber Products – sawmills and timber extraction; and CF Racing – off-road bikes and equipment.

The businesses are run by brothers

Harry, Brian and Gareth Lloyd. Very much a working partnership, each has his own particular skills that he brings to the business and, as a result, they have all found their own niche area of responsibility.

Gareth takes care of the machinery, sales and retail shop, Harry the sawmills and Brian oversees timber

harvesting operations. But just how did three local lads from a small town in Denbighshire come to build a business that now contributes greatly to the local community and economy by employing over 80 people?

I met Gareth at their premises to hear how it all started. As with a lot of stories from the forest, it all began with dad.

Dad was cutting timber, working on contracts for the likes of Tilhill and for other contractors, and also buying his own standing timber. Most of the timber felled would go for pit props, cut by hand, with horses

used to fetch the timber out. No forwarders and harvesters then – just good old-fashioned hard work. As little as fifteen years ago there would have been 100 guys with chainsaws in the local forest – now there are only a handful.

The writing was on the wall for the chainsaw gangs with the arrival of the harvester that could do the work of 15–20 of these guys.

Dad later progressed to owning a 4WD Zetor tractor with a 10-tonne Cargo winch on the back. Used for winching out, they still have this tractor today.

Harry was the first to go into the woods working alongside dad. Brian and Gareth both went in quite a different direction and qualified as mechanics. Later dad and Harry packed the job in, and Harry went to work for Ifor Williams trailers in Corwen.



From left to right: Gareth, Brian and Harry Lloyd.



Eight-foot logs going through the Jocar twin saw at Llandrillo.

It was in 1984 that the Lloyd brothers decided to get back into the timber. I asked Gareth why they would give up good jobs to go and work in the woods. He told me, "I wasn't paid much as a mechanic and we were fed up of being broke. Thinking about it, we were even more broke when we first got started!"

Before they packed their jobs in, Harry managed to secure a local contract with Kronospan through Stuart Wyn-Evans and Robin Turner. Many thanks must go to these two as this is where it all started, felling by hand, winching out with dad's old Zetor, and

getting paid by the tonne over the weighbridge.

Then came the big gales of 1987. All the local contractors cleared off down south to make their fortunes. The brothers did think about going, but decided to stay put – a decision that paid off.

As time went on they bought more kit, took on more guys and, with nobody else left in the area to do the work, there were good contracts to be had. Gareth said, "We were lucky really – we very nearly went ourselves. Staying behind was a good move as loads of work came our way, and we knew the

work down south would come to an end in time."

After they had finished their contract with Kronospan they started buying in their own timber. By this time they had five County tractors and a Farmi forwarding trailer.

From there, in 1988, they moved into retail, selling Partner and Husqvarna chainsaws. This seemed a logical move as they had a lot of guys working for them whom they could supply, and they could also sell to other local contractors. In the late 80s they acquired the Farmi dealership, which they still have today.

I asked Gareth how they made the transition from working in the woods to having a retail outlet.

It wasn't just the lads who were working in the business though – it had become a real family affair with their three wives employed. Gareth and Brian's wives, Julie and Anwen, were doing all the admin side and keeping the paperwork in order. Harry's late wife Rhian, who sadly passed away two years ago, was in charge of all sales in the shop. Rhian was a real asset to the business and knew everything regarding the stock and small machinery side better than most men.

Eventually the business outgrew the original premises and in 1993 moved to the present one-acre site where the shop, stores, workshop and yard were built.



Cross-cutting with the Holtec saw.



Slabwood stacked, ready to go through the shaver.

"It seemed a natural move. We started at Harry's yard in a 30-foot caravan. We had some guys working for us and Dad was doing the maintenance and repairs. Trade just grew by word of mouth."

They then progressed to a portacabin and, as business grew, built a unit which is only about five minutes from their present site. The portacabin is still there but the caravan is long gone. Once the unit had been built it was logical to expand the range and they took on safety clothing and all types of garden machinery.

Gareth believes the expansion was again just natural progression, but it involved a steep learning curve and an element of luck. "In those first few years we seemed to always be buying stock. We didn't make a lot of money as we had to keep ploughing it back into the business."

Not resting on their laurels, the next part of the progress was the purchase of their first sawmill in Llandrillo, bought eight years ago. Harry told me, "It had changed hands a few times and then went into receivership, so we took it over. We were then in a position to process our own wood, which made sense. Opening the mill up again was good for the local community."

This was another change in direction for the lads. I asked Brian which one of them had the sawmill experience to pick it up and run with it. "None of us, but we managed to get a lot of the original staff back, which helped at the start. We had a lot of clearing up and revamping to do before we could open it up, and it turned out that Harry enjoyed the sawmill side, so he took it on."

Brian feels they are fortunate in that they don't just produce one or

two products, like some sawmills. They can produce mixed-quantity orders to suit, on demand, and deliver in bulk.

The purchase of their second sawmill in Gwyddelwern soon followed. Again it had been in the hands of the receivers. I asked Harry, why two sawmills? "They were set up to work in different ways. The first one was geared up for big timber, sawlogs etc, and the second for smaller timber and bars. It also had a wood shaving plant for producing horse bedding; on average, three to four artic loads are now going out every week."

The two sawmills are six miles apart, with the Llandrillo mill having a treatment plant. Gareth took me to see it in operation. He said, "The mill had been in a hell of a mess and needed a lot of new machinery to change it to the way we wanted it to work. We also had to concrete the yard. Getting both mills back up and running has been hard work."

This is no small operation and the saws are going full pelt. The wood is brought in from roadside and a 360° wheeled excavator (rubber duck) with grapple loads it onto the ramps. It then goes through the peeler and various saws and comes out a finished product.

The excavator has, at some point in its life, been modified, and the cab heightened. Once

processed into blocks the wood can be sawn into a variety of products – for example 12 cuts to make feather boards.

The mills can cut any size of log from 5 to 16 feet, and have the capability of processing 1000 tonnes of timber a week. All slabwood goes to the shaving plant and is then pumped into bins for sale loose, or made into bales at the mill. The sawdust from the mill is used as the heat source for the drying plant.

Corwen extract around 50,000 tonnes of timber a year for their own use, plus what they sell on. They have a Valmet 840.4 forwarder, Ponsse Ergo harvester and a John Deere 1070 harvester with a 754 head. When they have extra work, they use local contractors.

At one time Corwen had its own fleet of lorries bringing timber to the mills. Now they use two contract hauliers with upwards of five lorries working full time to haul timber out of the forests, to move timber that needs treating between the sawmills, and to deliver to larger customers. They also treat timber for other companies.

Having seen the growth that the brothers have engendered over the years, and the success they have achieved, I asked Brian if they now had all they needed for the business – or had they got anything



New driver, Dai Jones, operating the new Ponsse harvester.

else I didn't know about, like the odd power plant or two hidden away? Laughing, he said, "We're thinking about it."

I asked Gareth if there was anything he missed from the early days. "No, not really. It was good to go contracting, but as you get older it's hard work and the time of the chainsaw has gone now. Typically we process 5,000 tonnes

with the harvester and send one guy in with a saw for a couple of days just to tidy up."

The Lloyds are keeping it all in the family as Eirian, Harry's daughter, has followed in her mother's footsteps in small machinery sales. Julie now works in admin for the timber side, assisted by daughter Emma.

Brian's wife Anwen deals with invoicing and VAT, with their eldest daughter Margaret in accounts.

Harry's son Hywel was driving a forwarder but is now a top Formula Three International Series racing driver.

Gareth's daughter Kate now takes care of the off-road bikes and parts sales of CF Racing. This element of the business came about as a result of the brothers' interest in competing in motocross. They are in a good area for competitions and races, and are main dealers for Kawasaki off-road bikes.

I know that Gareth and Brian are still actively competing and that they have done well, but they wouldn't be drawn on the subject except to say it is god fun.

Having met the three brothers and seen a little of their operation, I am impressed with their achievements. I can't help thinking though that they are not finished yet. I am sure that they still have plans they want to put in place and I am equally certain that the next generation will have a few ideas of their own.

Corwen Forestry 01490 412146



The wheeled excavator loading eight-foot logs onto the log ramp in the old station yard at Landrillo.