

Appendix 2: Summary History of the principle greenwood products c. 1850 - 1950

Barrel Hoops , used for binding ‘slack’ barrels for the transport of dry goods, were a leading product in most major coppice districts of the south and midlands, supplying the ports and cities. Upwards of 100 million hoops varying from 2¹/₂ to 18 feet in length were made annually, and about 25,000 hectares of woodland was reserved for the purpose. The substitution of metal for wooden bands, and of wooden and cardboard cartons and boxes for barrels from the late 19th century, took its toll. Hoop-making had largely ceased by the late 1920’s, and after a modest recovery in World War II, died out completely in the early 1950’s.

Besom Brooms were important in birch and heather producing districts, with production heavily concentrated in Ashdown Forest, the West Surrey Heaths, North Hampshire, New Forest, Cranbourne Chase, Sherwood Forest, Cannock Chase, North Yorkshire Moors, around Sheffield (where in 1905 one master is said to have had nearly 50,000 in stock). Huge numbers of handle- less brooms were used in steel works for sweeping the ‘flake’ or ‘shale’ off the plates as they emerged from the furnace. Besoms could not compete with cheap mass-produced bristle brooms, or automated methods of quality control in steel manufacture. Though still flourishing in the 1950’s, the next decade saw a major shake out, and by the 1980’s probably fewer than 10 specialist makers were still in business.

Turned wares used principally of Chiltern beech wood. Around 1880, several hundred ‘bodgers’ were working in the woods around High Wycombe and Stokenchurch, turning

chair-legs on primitive pole-lathes for the local furniture factories. Although stronger and cheaper than cross-sawn legs made in factories, hand-made legs lost ground favour after 1900. Bodging declined in the face of factory competition, the demand for standardized components, changing fashions in chair design away from the traditional 'Windsor', and the reluctance of young persons to go into the woods. Numbers fell to little more than a hundred in the early 20's, to nine at the start of the Second World War; by the mid-60's bodging was dead.

Turnery was among the very few coppice crafts to mechanize on a factory scale. By the 1880's, the broom and mop-stick makers and their pole lathes, once a feature in the heathland economies of southern England had mostly given up. However, a few could still be found on the Lancashire-Cheshire borders in the 1920's. The demand for bobbins, reels and pirns grew exponentially after 1800 *pari passu* with the rapid rise of the textile industries, and by 1850 at least 60 water-powered bobbin mills were operating in Cumbria. Steam-power dominated the industry in the later 19th century, supplying many hundreds of millions of bobbins. Rural mills declined from the 1870's due to Scandinavian competition and the re-location of bobbin-making closer to the textile towns. The last commercial bobbin mill in the Lake District ceased production in 1970.

The turnery trades proved the most resilient of the coppice manufacturing industries.

Tool handles used large quantities of ash, and soft turnery larger quantities again of 12-25 year old birch and willow, but by the 1920s even rural firms had come increasingly to depend on imported materials. Of the present membership of the British Brush Manufacturer's Association, virtually none now use home-grown wood.

Brush-back and bowl turnery were old established beechwood trades in the Buckinghamshire Chilterns around Chesham and Burnham. 7 firms of brush-makers, 14 basket and sieve makers and 15 general wooden-ware manufacturers were listed there in 1900. Millions of **wooden spoons and toys** and large quantities of **kitchen and sports wares** were produced between the wars, Stokenchurch and Chesham were important centres of the brush trade until the closure of the last of the factories in the 1970's. **Tent pegs**, another important beechwood product, declined with the run-down of the military following the end of National Service in the early 1960s.

Among other failures was **white coopering**, a once important craft making wooden tubs and washers, which, by 1900, had almost died out as a rural industry. The cutting of **clog sole** blocks from 25-30 year alder and birch by itinerant gangs, and their fashioning into footwear for the northern textile towns, was important up to the 1920's. Demand slipped as wood was replaced by more fashionable leather, and by the 1950's the industry was depressed. Clog-sole cutting had almost gone, and the 'cone-shaped mounds of golden clog-blocks built honey-comb fashion', once a feature of English alder woods, were now a memory.

Charcoal ceased to be of major importance following the demise of the charcoal iron industry in the early 19th century. On the eve of World War I charcoal making on a significant scale was restricted to Kent, Surrey and the Lake District. Pit-burning was still the usual method. Cut off from the normal sources of imported supplies, it revived temporarily in the Second World War to meet the demand for high grade industrial

charcoal for a variety of purposes, as distillates and chemical re-agents for use in gasmasks, and manufacture of artificial silk. Renewed decline set in soon after 1950, by which stage pits had mostly given way to kilns and retorts. The **pit prop** trade had long been supplied by imports, but continued to be a profitable outlet for older oak, ash and chestnut coppice until the final running down of British coal mining in the 1980s. Foreign competition together with washing machines, clothes driers and moulded plastics led to the collapse of the market first for turned, then for cleft clothes pegs.

The switch to more durable roofing materials and, between 1880 and 1939, a shift from corn to dairying and livestock, meant shrinking demand for **thatching materials**. At the same time, modern wheat varieties and the use of combines reduced the supply and quality of home-grown thatching straw. A recent study of the industry contrasts the position in 1790 when thatch was abundant in almost every part of the country and on almost every class of building, with that in 1940 when the numbers of thatched buildings and practicing thatchers had fallen to the point 'at which the craft teetered on the brink of extinction', and thatch was an unfashionable and technically inferior material. From over 5,000 recorded in the 1851 census, numbers of thatchers declined to 3,000 in 1891 and about 500 in 1937-8. The market for thatching **spars** once a staple of the hazel coppices of south-central and south-west England, diminished accordingly.

Changes in farming techniques had serious repercussions for the coppice industry. The decline of the arable flock as a mainplank of mixed farming, and of the practice of close folding on roots and brassica, led to the abandonment of wattle and gate hurdles by sheep farmers in southern and England. In their heyday, a large mixed farm might

employ as many as 200 **hurdles**, renewed every 5-6 years, and up to 50 lambing pens. Between 1870 and 1939, the area under fodder roots in England fell from 250,000 to 130,000 hectares, and by 1980 to just 40,000. In central-southern England the majority of hazel coppice on and around the Downs was reserved for **wattle hurdles**, as to a degree were ash, chestnut and willow in other parts of England for **'open' or gate hurdles**. Demand collapsed in the 1960s; today fewer than one thousand wattle hurdles are in use, mainly for lambing.

The mechanization of the hay harvest and, from the 1950's, the baling of hay direct from the field, made the **hay rake** obsolete. The making of rakes and associated wares, e.g. **scythe snaiths, tool handles, and sheep cribs**, was already in decline before the First World War, but was still widespread in the 1920's with many local variations in styles. From perhaps one hundred firms in 1920-2, the industry had shrunk to barely a dozen by 1960, when the use of the scythe and hand rake were confined to small holdings or uneven terrain where the scythe and hand rake were more appropriate. The closure of the Wrelnetham Works in Suffolk in 1990 (for many years the sole survivor of the eight turnery firms listed for the county in 1900), leaves just two small specialist manufacturers, in Cumbria and east Kent. From the 1870s, preference for barbed-wire and other forms of fencing lessened the demand for **hedging stakes and binders**, as in the post-war period, and on a far larger scale, has the grubbing-up of several hundred thousand miles of hedgerow in lowland England. The 70 per cent fall in the area under orchard trees between the early 1950s and the mid-1980s, and the increasing use of treated soft wood supports, has led to a sharply lower demand for **fruit stakes** made from local coppice wood in the fruit growing districts.

Hop poles were historically the most important coppice product in the hop-growing districts. In the late 1870's, an estimated 80-200 million poles were needed annually for setting out new grounds and replacements. As many as 30,000 hectares of chestnut, ash and oak, cut at 12-16 years, were reserved for what was reckoned the most profitable use of coppice woodland. The pole trade declined with the contraction of the domestic hop industry, from 28,000 hectares in 1876-80 to 7,000 hectares in 1931-35 and fewer than 5000 hectares in the 1980's, with serious production now limited to just one or two areas. This, together with changes in the method of growing hops and supporting the bines, from hills and poles to row cultivation with permanent supports, and the use of larch and creosoted chestnut for the straining posts, was a major blow to wood owners in the west midlands and south-east where, in the nineteenth century, large areas of oak and hazel were replanted with chestnut, and many new chestnut plantations established to service the hop yards. The hop industry is currently only a minor user. The use of locally-made charcoal for drying hops ceased between the wars.