



Branch Office

Tree Planting at Tillydaff - Midmar

If you've ever wished that you had a bit of land to plant some trees, you're not alone. After visits to Sissinghurst and Edinburgh Botanic Gardens 10 years ago, Wendy and I arrived home to our compact garden with that very same thought.

They say you should be careful what you wish for, and it's true ... two and a half years later after a long search, we became the proud owners of an almost derelict old farmhouse, complete with a 2.75 acre field, 0.75 acres of paddock, and a garden full of vigorous perennial weeds. North Tillydaff lies just to the west of Barmekin hill, where Lewis Grassic Gibbon reputedly wrote the first part of his trilogy, "Sunset Song". The views to the North and North-West are spectacular, just as he described.



The "Tillydaff Scots pine"

In the year 2000, we planted 230 or so mostly native trees in the "Big Field" - mostly downy birch and rowans grown from seed, with a few bird cherry, elder, Scots pine, a few ash, oak, hawthorn, blackthorn, Viburnum, willow, and crab apples. We planted another 25 or so trees in what is now the 'orchard' ... 10 or so apple varieties, a couple of cherries, plums, a crab apple, and the remainder are assorted decorative trees, including Amelanchier, Korean fir, the handkerchief tree, Eddie's white wonder, paper bark maple, assorted white- and peach-



Wendy Seel checking for deer damage

stemmed birches, rowans and a snake-bark maple. We also planted a few hundred daffodils as our first step towards recreating the Sissinghurst experience in rural Aberdeenshire!

Five years later, we bought another 126 acres of adjoining land, and through SFGS planted 50 acres of native deciduous trees plus some Scots pine in spring 2004.

Sandy Main did a wonderful job of designing the new wood, avoiding the use of straight lines, varying the density of the planting, and planting small shrubby trees such as hazel, hawthorn and dog rose, around the edges, with the taller species in the centre to mimic a natural wood. Built in to the design is a south-facing glade just beyond one of the three ponds on the farm, which should attract butterflies in the future. Open flight paths have been included to make sure that swans, geese and ducks which regularly visit the ponds will continue to do so. And a boggy area which is home to snipe has been left clear to make sure their territory remains attractive to them.

There were a few trees already on the farm - a windbreak of mature ash to protect the house and orchard, and a small number of incredibly hardy ash trees had survived a much earlier attempt to plant a new wood, in spite of having

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Welcome to Branch Office, the quarterly newsletter of Aberdeen Community Trees (ACT) and the Aberdeen Tree Warden Scheme.

Geoff Banks
Project Co-ordinator

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no protection from any of the voracious local wildlife. But the most striking tree on the farm by far is a beautiful old Scots pine which stands on the southern edge of the new wood. The most recent addition is a Deodar cedar which we've planted to the west of the "Tillydaff pine", in the hope of providing another stately arboreal landmark at the southern edge of the new wood in 30 or 40 years time.

So if this sounds like your idea of heaven, go ahead and make your dreams a reality - you won't regret it!

Anne Taylor
www.vitalveg.co.uk

Rob Watt - Forester



**Rob Watt with
Josh Banks**

Tell me Rob about your father and the farms he used to work?

My father he came up here in 1946, but before that he worked on various farms - Carse of Gowrie, Perthshire...it was mostly through Perthshire he worked on different farms - he workit horse for a start and then he moved on to the dairy. He got more money working the dairy but longer hours like, thirty bob a week! Then he moved to Arbroath and worked on a farm there and then he came up to Bogarn just up the road here in 1946. He was there till he died in 1957 and my mother was left a widow right on till 1973, then she passed on like. I got the ground after that so I just worked it in with the farm here which I had since 1953.

So how did that work out in terms of the two separate farms?

Ach, it was quite good for a while. When you grew grain and worked the rotation everything was great... but well the big conglomerates growing massive barley and had battery hens (we used to keep hens ye see and well they had battery hens) and then this big piggeries come in... so I mean at one time you had a couple of fat pigs away and that paid the rent - you put in a couple of fat pigs in May and November and 'at paid your rent. And your hens you see they kept the house at one time.

When your father died, did that force you to go into the farming or had you different ideas?

Nae really, oh no, in fact he'd been more of a farmer than ever I was. I was pretty young and of course I went an worked in the woods and that's when I started the forestry.

So you started forestry from a young age then?

Oh yes. Aye. So I mean a farm of this size it was just a sideline. More so now. At one time if you hed about a hundred acre you could hed yourself, you would o' hed three horse and you would o' hed a young lad working and that did fine. And now you would need two, three hundred acre to survive.

How quickly did you realise at that time that trees would be more than a sideline?

Well eence I got into the forestry work it wis nearly full time because you hed the plantin - well you hed that if there wis an "r" in the month (fae October right through to April) but I mean you usually waited till they harden

off in the nursery before you started.

And obviously at that time, trees were giving you a reasonable return?

Especially once the hens and the pigs an everything went... well a young family... you had to go out and make some money. Basically I was just a sort o' sub-contractor plantin... I employed a few men at the busy time like. I got a lot of work from the Scottish Woodlands but before I got fae the Scottish Woodlands I would hae just worked on estates plantin trees, fencing or whit ever.

So you've done that all this time then?

Yes. But initially when we started plantin trees (plantin up in Blackhall Forest) you'd to screiff the ground wi yer

spade, screiff it bare - a' the grass hed to come aff if it wis grassy. If it wis bracken ye'd to clear the bit, if it wis heather, ye'd tae cut the heather wi a spade (yer spade wid hae t' be sharp) and then ye cleared the bit for yer tree but ye'd get a big rock below and y'd t' start again!

Oh aye it wis murder! Ye hed blisters on yer hands and then ach... they said 'Nae bother stoppit that,' and then of course the ploughing cam in. But we did hill ditchin' an a' and

the sods that cam oot the ditch (y' ca'd it 'soddin') ye dragged them a roun' the side spaced them a' oot and then y' planted the Norway spruce on the sod and then out o' the hollows y' planted Scots pine; if y' got a really hard bit y' would have planted the larch. But nowadays (I suppose it's went full circle) after that it was just block plantin', Sitka spruce a' the time an' then they discovered oh! no wildlife... we'll start amenity bits and planted the broad-leaves.

Back in the 40's and 50's, wildlife was not considered important as it is today?

No. Y' see they would hiv cut doon the birch, they wid hiv cut everthing doon, y' jist went into this block plantation. At that time if you planted Douglas fir, y' see they're liable to frost, and we wid hiv underplanted them in the birch until they were established an the birch sheltered them y' see. You didna cut the birch down (that wid hiv smashed the young tree) y' ringed the birch an' the birch died off and disintegrated.

Did you have many problems with windthrow?

No not too bad although my brother was down in Fife (an 'at wis after the '53 gale when there wis the tremendous wind and a' thing blowin doon) and they'd ploughed a'



Scots pine plantation at Bogendreip

this ground in Fife y' see an' they could hardly believe it the wind had come and the young plantation (about 15 years old) and the forest cowed back... it took trees a lot! An' when y' looked at it y' didn't realise that the trees were a' doon it wis flattened...acres an acres wi this big gale that come right through the central belt o Scotland and wheeched the forest back!

You mentioned the '53 gales...

The devastation was terrible. The roads were a' blocked. Well at that time there wis nae power saws, so they set up in the Glen o Dye here an the whole o' Deeside, they jist set up saw mills o'er a` the place. Of course everything wis done by hand ye studded them oot. Some of the trees were away up about 40 feet in the air and y wheeched off the point wi the axe an cut it off at the root and the caterpillary dragged them all tae a bankin. Then they were cut to appropriate lengths and jist loaded it on tae the lorries b' hand.

So were you involved with the big trees as well?

We had massive trees... the Douglas some of them were about 300 cube... massive things... three bits on the lorries (not the big artics in those days, jist the wee lorries).

Have the broad-leaf trees around here really recovered since the '53 gales?

Nae really, no. They have planted some of course, but a lot of these trees have never been replaced. It's coming in now with these tuley tubes but I don't know if they're jist a great success up here, we're too far north I think. What happens often is the tree comes up out o' the tuley tube, it's grown fast, and then the groun's as hard doon below the roots are nae able to bear the weight o' the top an'... blown over.

Tell me about "Plant a Tree in '73"...

This was the great carry on! I started in '72. It was a good back end. And then it wis "plant a tree in '73" and I must of planted about a quarter o' a million spruce (along wi some helpers o course!) We planted right through t' August and we finished up on Balmoral estate... `at wis the frozen trees of course (I think that wis the start o freezing them). They come oot o the freezer they were took up t' the hill an y'd to lowse a' the bundles an put them in ditches (an o' course they flush like fury) y' plant them as quick as y' could (which took a while) well if y' didn't get rain after that it wis curtains. It wis too much for the tree t' put down roots an keep it's foliage goin' at the same time. There's nae sae much o' the frozen trees now, if y' want anything late now it's more intae the containers.

Have you been back to these planting sites?

I hinna been back (that wis Glen Muick) but I mean jist doon the road here near Strachan, I planted that wee plantation on the left.. o jist everywhere... Finzean... planted up there, they've hid the first thinning out o' there'll be the second, third thinnins noo. Y' ken that wall

bit jist before y' go intae Stonehaven at Urie estate? I planted a great lot in the back o' the wall and I said those trees'll never get up over the wall... an they're away up! Away doon at Forfar, Tannadice estate... I'm nae goin tae run back tae a' they places! But it's good if y do pass an y' say, oh I planted that wood, that's a forest now an' there thinning it etc... Blackhall Forest... some of that I planted well there wis a big squad there. The lorry came right up through Strachan up t Finzean, another lorry load frae Durris ... two lorryloads of humanity plantin' in Blackhall. Masses of it... it's been cut and replanted since like.



Peacock butterfly caterpillars in one of Rob's fields

Looking back, what would you say about all the planting that was done in '73.

There wis a dedication scheme on and a lot o' that wis dedicated an the lairds took it on through the commission. This acreage hed a' to be planted up an' every'ing's planted up noo there's nae massive schemes nowadays jist little wee corners an wee bits farm schemes an replantin whit's clean cut and then of course they planted a lot o the flow country that wis investment for Terry Wogan an a lot o his pals an' then there's the draggin them out how were they ever going to get them oot onyhow?

You had people coming from all over the world to Bogendreip last year - tell me more!

This orienteering thing came on the 6th and 7th of August of last year. There were tracks a' through the forest an' different tests for the old an' for the young an' for athletes. It was an international thing - thousands came, even a bus came from Moscow. They'd been before but jist in the first wee field here. But this was a massive thing - doon here they haed the paramedics, even a place for a helicopter landing. It put Bogendreip on the map... world famous!

Quite something! If you had not done all your planting this kind of event couldn't have taken place!

No! Me and a lot like us, there wouldna' be forests!

Do you think there's a place now for planting broad-leaved woodlands up here?

Nae really up here. This is good Scots pine and larch country. Well I think they should plant mair Scots pine an' get back the way o' life. Y canna hae capercaillies without the Scots pine. The foresters didna like them for they pick oot the leadin bud, but it's still good that the capers are there.

But what about rowans etc?

O' aye, amenities stuff, feed the birdies!

Thank you for talking to me Rob

Nae bother!

Interview by Geoff Banks and transcript by Grace Banks

Aberdeen Community Trees

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Promoting, Protecting & Planting Trees in & Around Aberdeen



Aberdeen Community Trees is jointly funded by Aberdeen Countryside Project, Aberdeen City Council and Fresh Futures.

ACT is a member of the national Tree Warden initiative co-ordinated by the Tree Council, operating in many local authority areas across the UK.

Check out these sites below:

Aberdeen Community Trees:
www.beehive.thisisnorthscotland.co.uk

Aberdeen Countryside Project:
www.aberdeencountrysideproject.org

Aberdeen City Council:
www.aberdeencity.gov.uk

Fresh Futures: www.fresh-futures.org.uk

Tree Council: www.treecouncil.org.uk

The Tree Warden Scheme

Tree Wardens do not need to be tree experts, only enthusiasts. Training courses are run by Aberdeen Community Trees (ACT) in conjunction with Aberdeen Countryside Project (ACP). These courses cover topics such as surveying woodland and non-woodland trees, summer and winter tree identification, tree planting and aftercare, woodland ecology and management, seed collection and tree law.

The Role of the Tree Warden

Tree Wardens work closely within their local community and with local landowners. Among the tasks they can become involved in are:

Gathering information and carrying out surveys of local trees to develop ideas for projects, discover where practical help and advice is needed and become aware of threats to trees which may need to be reported to the city tree officer.

Local community liaison - a key element in the Tree Warden's role. Tree Wardens may be asked questions on what species to plant, how to deal with a damaged tree, and how to obtain grant aid for planting. Wardens will not

necessarily have all the answers, but they will soon learn where to look to find them!

Protecting Trees - trees and woods need protection, and local people can often see what needs to be done before council officials. Tree Wardens have a vital role to play here, by informing the local tree officer of threats to trees, and so helping to ensure compliance with tree preservation orders (TPO's) and planning consents. They can also keep their eyes open for vandalism to newly planted trees, and look out for trees showing signs of disease or danger due to decay.

Organising or encouraging others to organise practical

projects such as tree planting or urban woodland management. Local community involvement is one of the main aims of the National Grid Tree Warden Scheme. Wardens can work with schools to create conservation areas, organise guided tree walks, give talks to local groups, encourage local environmental improvement projects, plan tree planting projects for National Tree Week and so on. Involving children and youth groups also helps to control vandalism and create respect for the natural environment.

If you would like to know how you can become a Tree Warden please contact ACT now.