

SOUTH OF ENGLAND HEDGE LAYING SOCIETY



Reg Charity No.1046124

*Promoting the craft of hedge laying, training, competitions,
and countryside management*

August 2021



FROM THE EDITOR

The new season is approaching: 'For Your Diary' has details of dates and venues. Iain White has produced a timely article on axe sharpening, and Frank Wright has some suggestions on how to tackle large trees. I think that the 2021/22 season will be a good one.

As ever, please do send in your articles and comments. The deadline for the December 2021 Newsletter is noted in 'For Your Diary'.

Mark Schofield

Front cover: Photo taken at the 2019 National Championship

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

I hope our 2021/2 season is not troubled by any further Covid regulations. As I write this in early July, the Prime Minister is still to give the final word. The season will get going with the Laughton Ploughing Match: all who can, please support the ploughing matches. It has been a rough time for all concerned - why not enter the points trophy sweep? The South of England Hedge Laying Society has a full and varied programme of training days, and some coppice days. I wish you all a happy and successful season. Meanwhile get the tools sharp and oiled.

Mike Parrott

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Dear members, welcome to the August newsletter. The committee has been busy putting together a new program of events for the forthcoming season: thank you to Frank Wright for finding, visiting, and setting up each venue. Thank you to Tim Hughes for helping re-establish the coppicing days in the forthcoming season. We are planning to attend the Weald Wood Fair in September - if anyone would like to help-out with the stand or laying some of the hedge, please get in contact. It will be good to get to see everyone again. There is still space to lay at the NHLS charity hedge laying day on 25th September at the Rotherfield Park Estate in Hampshire GU34 3SE: contact Clive Bethel 07976 895643 for entry details. It promises to be a good day. At present all 3 local Ploughing match hedge laying competitions are running, with the Laughton competition first out of the blocks. I look forward to seeing you there, or at any of our planned events this season. Best wishes,

Phil Hart.

LAYING LARGE TREES

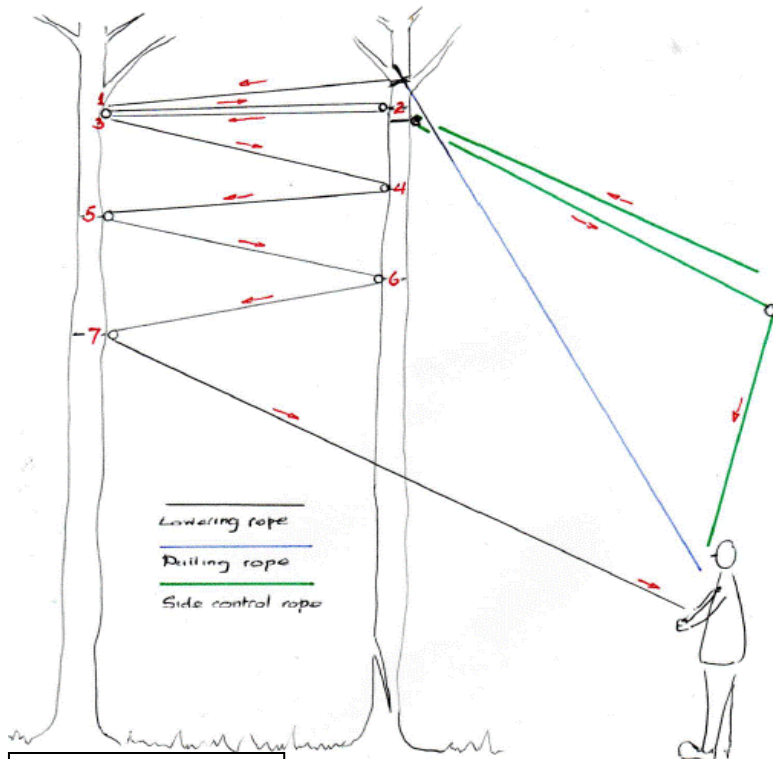
BY FRANK WRIGHT

Over the winter one of my tasks has resulted in me laying over 300 metres of very large holly (with another 300 or more to go). I haven't counted but I must have laid in excess of 500 trees up to 50 feet tall and/or up to 14 inches diameter. As far as I'm aware there is nothing written about laying anything that large, so I have developed some techniques over the last few months. I found they work for me, but I am not intending to be prescriptive.

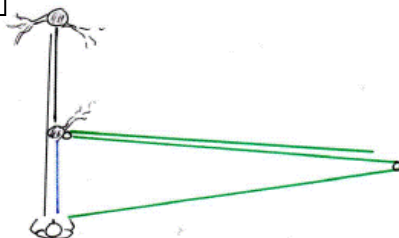
Firstly, it was very evident from the start that most of the trees would be far too heavy to manage without developing some kind of mechanical advantage. They could not be allowed to just fall as they would be uncontrolled and could easily snap off or fall on others and cause them to do so. I had a double block and a single block pulley from a previous project so started out with that as a three-pulley system. It quickly became apparent that this was inadequate, so another two pulleys were added and then another two. This has proven to work quite well. It takes quite a time to set up for each tree so if a tree farther back can be used to lower several trees this is much quicker. You need an extendable ladder to try and attach the top pulleys as high as possible to help give the maximum mechanical advantage. Also attached at this topmost point are your pulling rope and another rope to control sideways movement, both also being placed high up for mechanical advantage. The other pulleys are spaced out below; if they are reasonably well spaced this

helps control the tree's descent. Depending on the size of the tree and how much you think it might try to swing sideways you may also need to run the side-control rope through a couple of pulleys.

If you use swing-cheek pulleys they are easy to include or leave out of the rope runs as required. Carabiners of the simple barrel-lock kind are easiest as they can be



Rope layout



manipulated one-handed whereas some of the others are more complicated to use. Bear in mind that you may be a long way up a ladder trying to use these things. A straight ladder rung against a round tree is not the most secure of placings so expansive, Italianate gestures when at the top of the ladder are best avoided. Securing the ladder to the tree with a rope helps. It is important to check your rope runs before you remove your ladder to make sure that none of the ropes are caught around themselves and that they are not dragging against or snagging trees and branches ... and that you have not accidentally tied the ladder in.



You do need a lot of rope for this because as the tree comes down the distance between it and the anchor tree becomes greater and multiplied several times by the pulley system. I have been using relatively cheap 10mm twisted rope rather than the more expensive stuff that arborists and climbers use as my life is not dependent upon it.

Regarding the pleaching I have found it better to err on the side of too thick rather than thin as the pleach can have a pretty tough time of it as several hundred kilos of tree weigh on it and it may well be trying to twist off or need manoeuvring in some way. If the pleach is too thin it tends to just rip out as it bears the weight of the tree – particularly irritating as you will have spent a long time preparing this. There is a greater risk of split back with this method, but I have been accepting that as the lesser of two evils – you can tidy it up afterwards. Of course, sometimes it works out fine. I have taken to starting the pleach in the normal manner but promoting the last part of the pleach down using wedges driven into the saw cut. My theory is that this should retain the fibres intact and therefore stronger – I don't know if this is valid or not, but it seems to work alright. It also gives you an indication that the tree is on its way down when the wedges fall out as, by this time, you are several yards away in front of the tree handling three ropes.

The actual lowering process is different every time, sometimes straightforward, sometimes a real struggle and sometimes an abject failure. A powered pole saw is extremely useful as you need to remove heavy branches that unbalance the tree and possibly branches from other,

uninvolved but interfering trees before you even think of commencing the pleach but even so you may well not have been able to reach them all. You may have to take the top of the tree off as any significant out-of-balance load will lead to a violent twisting force.





A swing-cheek pulley

It may be that you find that you need to pause the process part way through in order to deal with a hung-up branch or some other problem; this is easily achieved by just temporarily tying off the control ropes. You can often use the target tree for this as it is then pulling against itself. If all goes reasonably well you can ultimately place your tree very accurately into your hedge. If it doesn't you may be

able to manoeuvre the tree into place using levers and skidding it along stakes laid on the ground.

With all this rope around you need to exercise some care dealing with all the excess. Flake it onto a clear area with the rope coming off the top towards the anchor tree; if it comes off the bottom there is a greater risk of it becoming entangled. Also try and make sure there are no twiggy bits lying around that can become entangled in the rope as it only takes some silly little bit of twig to complicate life. Try not to get your own feet entangled as this could have serious consequences if you lose control of the lowering procedure.

Each tree is its own unique challenge and, as with normal hedgelaying (but more so), you need to have a plan regarding what you want to do with it and where it is going to go. Your plan may or may not work out. Similarly, some trees are either unusable or excess to requirements so need to be removed. I have made most of the mistakes that there are to make so I have evolved these techniques to try and resolve them.

The holly trees were obviously planted as part of a plan, seemingly with the original intention of them forming a hedge. One of the local residents has been there 45 years and he said that they had always been “like that” so they are at least 50+ years old. An alternative approach could have been to cut the lot down and lay the regrowth but this was not what the client was really looking for. The result has met with local approval so far as it is letting a lot more light through and opening up the view, so I hope that the trees all hang on in there and regrowth occurs otherwise it

is going to be one massive dead hedge. It is not laid to any recognised style, the nearest might be a Devon hedge on steroids.





I have **not** conducted any tests on the suitability of any of this equipment for the purposes for which I have used it. This is **not** an instruction manual. If anyone elects to attempt any of the techniques I have mentioned, you do so at your own risk. Your first priority is your own safety.



NATURE NOTES

BY REG LANAWAY

It is becoming apparent, that many of our summer visiting birds have not returned to this part of the country in the numbers they normally do. The cold windy weather at the time they migrate will have made a difference, but it must be more than that. Locally, little seems to have changed in the habitats over recent years but the decline in the numbers of these birds is real. Surprisingly, where my son lives in Shrewsbury, in Shropshire which has the lowest human population density of any county, there seems to be good numbers of Swallows and Swifts.

Only ten years ago, I regularly checked many of the local stable yards. They all had thriving colonies of Swallows, the ones with the dark red throats and tail streamers, but now the yards are reduced to a single pair if any at all. There seems no explanation here as the horses attract the same number of flies, their food source, and the mud nests still remain from years ago. Originally Swallows would have nested in caves and under dark cover before there was human habitation.

House Martins, are the stubby black and white birds that breed beneath the eaves of houses, replacing the cliff nesting sites they used before there were buildings for them to colonise. In recent years, the college has held one of the strongest colonies in Sussex. We had to miss counting the occupied nests last

summer due to lockdown restrictions, a regular record of over fifty nests was usual before that. This year, only about a dozen were flying around the buildings in early June so a check next month will give more information.

Swifts are really mysterious. These are the dark arc-shaped birds that during their flight displays, scream and dash at great speed around the buildings in which they breed. Few arrive before May and after the brief breeding of just one brood of two or three, depart in early August. They nest in the rooves of buildings and more recently in nest boxes and especially hollow blocks set into new municipal buildings. There was a loss of nest sites when their traditional sites in old buildings such as churches were renovated, and the apertures sealed up. There is a Swift Study Group in Lewes that reported over eighty nests last year, a marked increase. In Plumpton they are less common. Not many years ago they bred in both St. Michael's and All Saints Churches. I once found a nest of a House martin on the college that had an enlarged hole, with most of the back end of an incubating Swift poking out of the hole. When reading up on the subject, I found it is not an unusual nest site for them.

They never alight on the ground. Their legs are so short and wings so long, that they cannot rise. They do not breed until about four years old so when they drop out of the nest for the first time, are continually on the wing for that time. They feed, collect nest material and even mate on the wing, only alighting into the nest cavity or clinging to a nearby wall. They are long-lived, many exceeding twenty years of age. Difficult to catch and ring, I have handled only three in over fifty years of ringing, and none was caught in a mist net. The first had been beaten to the ground after heavy rain so could not take off. The farm manager brought it down from the top of the downs and it later flew off. The second found its way into one of the lecture rooms via a partly opened window.

The last one somehow got into St. Michael's when the Flower Club were preparing for the festival. It buzzed the ladies just above head height. I fetched a landing net and caught it as it flew above the pews, ringed, weight and measured the bird and released it through the door. I wonder if any of the ladies who were there at the time remember the incident. The huge pink gape for catching flying insects was amazing to see. One can never anticipate the opportunities Nature can provide!

Editor: useful information forwarded by Phill Piddell

Silky **Sharpening**

How to sharpen your Silky saw
 Below you will find the silky saws that are sharpenable and their angles. We recommend professional users to start filing with the teeth at surface ①, then finish with the top surface ②. Please file along the angle a few times for optimal result. For common users it's sufficient to only sharpen the top surface ②.

Product	Angle A	Angle B	Angle C
Hayasuchi	21°	50°	50°
Hayate	33°	45°	40°
Ibuki	21°	60°	50°
Sugoi	33°	45°	40°
Misuzu	30°	40°	40°
Zorin	30°	40°	40°
Sugowaza	33°	45°	50°
Yamabico	31°	50°	50°
Oenki Temagari 600	27°	50°	50°
Natanoko 60 300	27°	50°	55°
Natanoko 60 330	27°	50°	55°
Katanaboy 500	27°	50°	50°
Katanaboy 650	27°	60°	50°

Silky file: art. nr. KZSI200000

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LIVING ON THE HEDGE – THE FIELD MAPLE (*ACER CAMPESTRE*)

BY MARK SCHOFIELD

Family & Scientific Name

The Field Maple belongs to a family of plants that includes the Horse Chestnut and is native to much of continental Europe, southwest Asia (from Turkey to the Caucasus) and north Africa in the Atlas Mountains. It is the UK's only native Maple and its scientific name '*Acer campestre*' is derived from the Latin *acer* for 'maple tree' and *campestre* for 'of a plain'.

Vernacular & Folklore

Vernacular names include 'Oak Apple', 'Cat-oak' in Yorkshire, 'Dog-oak' in Nottinghamshire, 'Maplin-tree' in Gloucestershire and 'Zigzag' in Bristol.

Medieval superstition said that if one passed a Maple branch over a child, it would remove all traces of witchcraft. In parts of Europe, it was thought that Maple branches, hung around a doorway, stopped bats entering.

History

A Maple harp has been excavated from a Saxon barrow at Taplow in Berkshire and another Maple harp, wrapped in a sealskin bag, was among the treasure unearthed at Sutton Hoo in Suffolk. Maple was used for medieval drinking bowls called 'mazers' and the seventeenth century herbalist Nicholas Culpepper recommended maple leaves and bark to strengthen the liver.

Restoration Day was, until 1859, an English public holiday observed annually on 29 May to commemorate the restoration of the English monarchy in 1660. Commonly known as Oak Apple Day or Royal Oak Day, it was observed by the wearing

sprigs of Oak or Maple leaves ('oak apples'). In Sussex, anyone failing to wear a sprig was liable to be pinched and this gave rise to the unofficial name 'Pinch-bum Day'.

In the Language of Flowers ('floriography'), popular in the nineteenth century as a means of sending coded messages expressing feelings that could not be spoken aloud in Victorian society, Maple represented the sender's reservations.

Plant Description

The Field Maple is deciduous and grows in woods, scrubland, hedgerows, and on chalk lowland. It is also widely planted in gardens and parks due to its compact habit, tolerance of pollution and rich autumn colours. It is not among the first trees to colonise a freshly disturbed area, but instead the seeds grow under any existing vegetation. It is very shade-tolerant during the early stages of its life but needs more light during its seed-bearing years. It grows rapidly at first but is eventually outstripped and replaced by other trees.

A Field Maple can grow to between 49 and 82 feet (15–25m) tall with a trunk up to 3ft 3 in (1m) in diameter. It can live for up to 350 years. The bark is light brown, finely fissured and often somewhat corky with age. The twigs are long, slender, and brown and have dark brown winter buds. The small dark-green and shiny leaves are in opposite pairs and have five blunt, rounded lobes with a smooth edge. They fade to a rich, golden yellow before falling in autumn. The leaves are an easy way to distinguish the Field Maple: they are much more rounded than those of the Sycamore and Norway Maple.

Flowers are produced in spring at the same time as the leaves open. They are hermaphrodite (each containing both male and female reproductive parts) and are small, yellow-green, cup-shaped and hang in clusters. After pollination by insects, the flower develops into a large, winged fruit (samara) which is wind dispersed. The new fruit are tinged with pink with wings set in a straight line.

The fruit are eaten by small mammals. The Field Maple is also attractive to aphids and their predators which include many species of ladybird, hoverfly and bird. It is a foodplant for a range of moth species including the Mocha (*Cyclophora annularia*) and Gypsy Moth (*Lymantria dispar*). The flowers are a nectar and pollen source for bees.

Plant Uses

Field maple produces the hardest timber of all European maples. The wood is a warm, creamy-brown colour with a silky shine. Traditional uses include woodturning and carving. It is also used for furniture and flooring. As with all maple trees, the sap of the Field Maple can be used to make maple syrup.

HEDGES IN THE NEWS

BY MARK SCHOFIELD

Spindly rows of plastic-wrapped trees:

[The ersatz hedge: how we're debasing England's rural landscape | Richard Mabey | The Guardian](#)

Editor: not strictly about hedges, but of interest:

[How cattle are helping rare butterflies to thrive at Mabie Forest - BBC News](#)

HOW TO SHARPEN AN AXE

BY IAIN WHITE

Following the previous article on sharpening billhooks I will now examine how to sharpen an axe. The three basic principles that we used for billhooks also apply to axes, namely: surface finish, edge geometry, and metallurgy, but there is a particular focus on edge geometry with axes due to the various different types of axe available.

Metallurgy is included again as a warning, as it is possible to ruin an axe head with inappropriate grinding with a high-speed bench or handheld grinder. If these grinders are used to re-shape an axe head, extreme caution should be used to avoid over-heating and discolouring the metal. Light grinding and regular quenching in water is the key, or better still use a belt grinder or hand file, as these will not over-heat the relatively thin blade edge.

The key to getting the edge geometry of an axe head correct is to understand what duty the axe is designed for. For example, a felling axe is designed for slicing wood, and so in spite of its large size and weight it has a very fine edge. The overall included angle from face to face can be as low as 15-20 degrees, which is similar to a billhook. Whereas at the other end of the scale a splitting axe that is designed to create a wedge-action through a log will have an included angle of approximately 40 degrees. A splitting maul will have an edge angle that is set as high as 90 degrees.

The trick is to use the right tool for the job, and to set the edge up appropriately. If a felling axe is used for splitting, it is likely to get stuck in the log, as the angle is too fine to have enough wedge action. But a felling axe is easily damaged if it strikes dead wood or worse still a stone lodged in a trunk in the bottom of a hedge. The angle that is put on the blade of an axe is a trade off between strength and cutting ability. An axe has a long

handle which enables a significant amount of both striking power and leverage to be applied to the axe head. This can cause damage if the blade is not strong enough to withstand these forces, and the angle and shape of the blade edge is what determines the strength of an axe head.

Another consideration when setting the angle on the axe head is whether each cheek or side of the blade is ground equally. A felling axe or hand axe will have an equal grind, whereas a traditional side axe or carpenter's axe will have one flat face and one bevelled face. These were originally designed for cutting the timbers used in timber frame houses, so had the ability to create a square face on the wood. This type of axe is quite useful in hedge laying as it helps cut the pleach straight, and is handed to suit the user i.e., when laying the hedge to the left, a right-handed cutter would use a right handed axe. This axe has a flat left cheek, with the bevel ground only on the right cheek. It is critical with this type of axe that one side is truly flat, and the bevel is all ground on one face.

To give the blade edge some strength it is typical to create a slightly convex shape onto the cheek of the blade, in addition to having a convex curve from top to bottom of the blade. There are no hard and fast rules for this, it is more about what suits the user and the task. A modern Granfors Bruks axe Small Forest Axe comes with a relatively flat grind on fairly flat cheeks, whereas a Robin Wood carving axe has a distinctly convex grind.

The following list gives some examples of the approximate included angle from one face to another of different axe types in degrees:

Felling axe for green wood 15-20

Felling axe for drier wood 20-25

Forest axe for limbing	25
Hand axe and side axe	30
Splitting axe	40
Splitting maul	90

If in doubt when re-conditioning an old axe for hedge laying I would suggest setting the angle to about 30 degrees, then use the tool and see how it feels, it can always be adjusted later. If the surface is covered in rust pits then these should always be filed out to get back to clean steel. The Vallorbe files mentioned in the previous article for bill hooks will work well on an axe head. As there may be a lot of material to remove on an old axe head to get to the desired angle, remember to clean the file regularly with a wire brush, to keep it cutting effectively. One trick to improve the finish prior to polishing is to rub some chalk on your finest file and use it sideways, rather than lengthways. This is the quickest way to get the best finish with a file.

Once the desired angle has been created, then the surface finish can be polished to create a truly sharp edge. This is can be done with hand held stones, and typically oil stones are used for this, although water stones, diamond stones or wet and dry paper will all work effectively. My preference is to use wet and dry paper glued to strips of MDF in the workshop, this way you can easily move progressively through the grades up to 1200 to get a fine finish and a sharp edge. A sharp axe should easily cut a piece of paper in your hand. I also carry a small oilstone when hedging, to touch up the edge, or repair any damage during the day.

The final job when sharpening is to immediately put some oil on the blade, this is to avoid oxidation, which eventually shows as rust. Always do this immediately after polishing, as oxidation will start straight away, invisibly blunting your beautiful new surface, and rust never sleeps. Any oil from the garage will do, e.g. 3in1

or engine oil, but don't use cooking oil from the kitchen, as these are all hygroscopic and attract water, which defeats the object. It is also well worth making a cover for your axe blade from leather or thin plywood, this protects the blade from damage, and you from your now dangerously sharp blade.

Happy sharpening.

OLD PLEACHERS NEVER DIE

BY DAVE DROSCHE



I took this photo of an old pleacher near where I live. It is being used as part of a stile into some woodland. It is on the edge of what is believed to be the old Brighton Road at North Chailey. I would be interested to know if anyone has seen an old pleacher like this one. It is a hornbeam tree and shows that old pleachers never die.

FOR YOUR DIARY

Laughton Hedge Laying Competition	4 th Sept. 2021	Shauna Fenner 07737 668077 Plashetts Park Fm BN8 5SJ
Bentley Wood Fair	17 th – 19 th Sept 2021	Lewes BN8 5AF
West Grinstead Hedge Laying Competition	18 th Sept 2021	Rowan Allen 01903 879488 Priors Byne Fm RH13 8EF
Air Ambulance Charity Event	25 th Sept. 2021	Rotherfield Estate, Hants
Hurstpierpoint Ploughing Match	2 nd Oc.t 2021	Gary Moore 07767 894961 Old Erringham Fm BN43 5FT
Training Day 1	9 th Oct. 2021	Long Furlong Fm. Nr Clapham, W. Sussex.
Pre-National Event	16 th Oct. 2021	Hope Fm. Wittersham, Kent
National Championship	23 rd Oct. 2021	Rotherfield Estate, Hants
Training Day 2	6 th Nov. 2021	Colemore, Petersfield, Hants.
Dec 2021 Newsletter	15 th Nov. 2021	Selous1961@gmail.com
Coppicing Day 1	20 th Nov. 2021	Turners Hill
Training Day 3	4 th Dec. 2021	Goudhurst, E. Sussex
Coppicing Day 2	30 th Dec 2021	Blunts Wood
Improvers Day	8 th Jan. 2022	Norfolk Estate, Arundel, West Sussex
Charity / Fun Day	22 nd Jan. 2022	RSPB Pullborough, W. Sussex
SEHLS Competition	20 Feb. 2022	Norton Fm. Alton, Hants.
President v Chairman	12 th Mar. 2022	Nodes Fm. Magham Down, E. Sussex
Midland Day	26 th Mar. 2022	Norfolk Estate, Arundel, W. Sussex

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The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the policy of the South of England Hedgelaying Society. The Editor reserves the right to edit or exclude any item sent.