

Growing Broadleaves for Quality Timber

Using Hardwood Timber

This Guidance Note is one of a series summarising information presented at a seminar on “Growing Broadleaves for Quality Timber”, held in February 2010 as part of FC Scotland’s Timber Development Programme. These notes provide information on all the main aspects of growing quality broadleaved timber, from choice of planting stock through to timber marketing, together with relevant references and links to more detailed information.

This presentation, which was delivered by Maggie Birley of Scottish Wood, is available for download through the [seminar web page](#).

Association of Small Hardwood Sawmills (ASHS)

The small hardwood sawmill sector is thriving, with membership of ASHS expanding (Figure 1) and turnover of businesses such as Scottish Wood increasing (Figure 2). For details of ASHS see <http://www.ashs.co.uk/>.

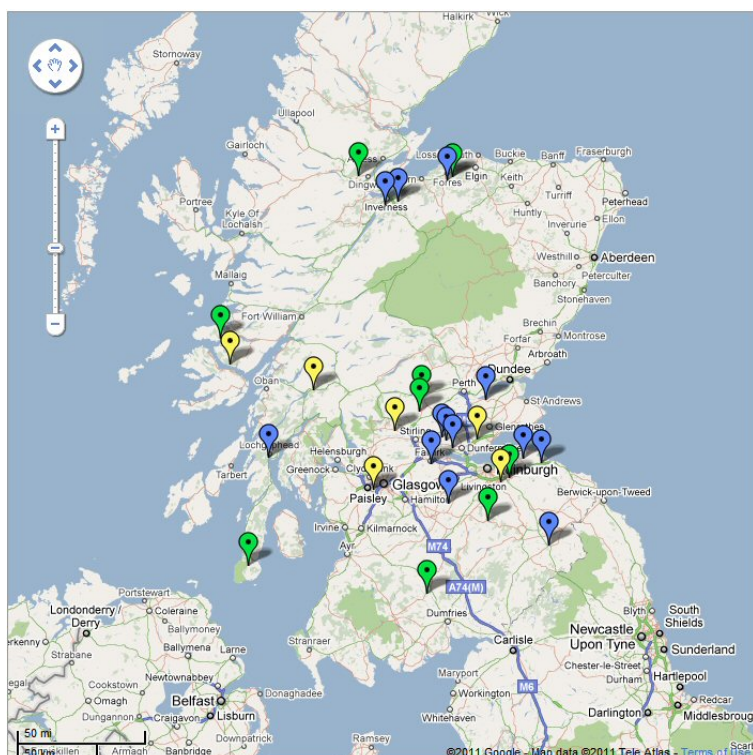


Figure 1: Location of ASHS members (green flags = original members, yellow flags = most recently joined members, blue flags = rest of membership)

The small sawmilling sector is now able to supply many of the timber needs of local wood-using craft and furniture markets from locally grown timber. There is reason to be optimistic about future demand for hardwood timber and the capacity of the small-scale hardwood sector to supply it.

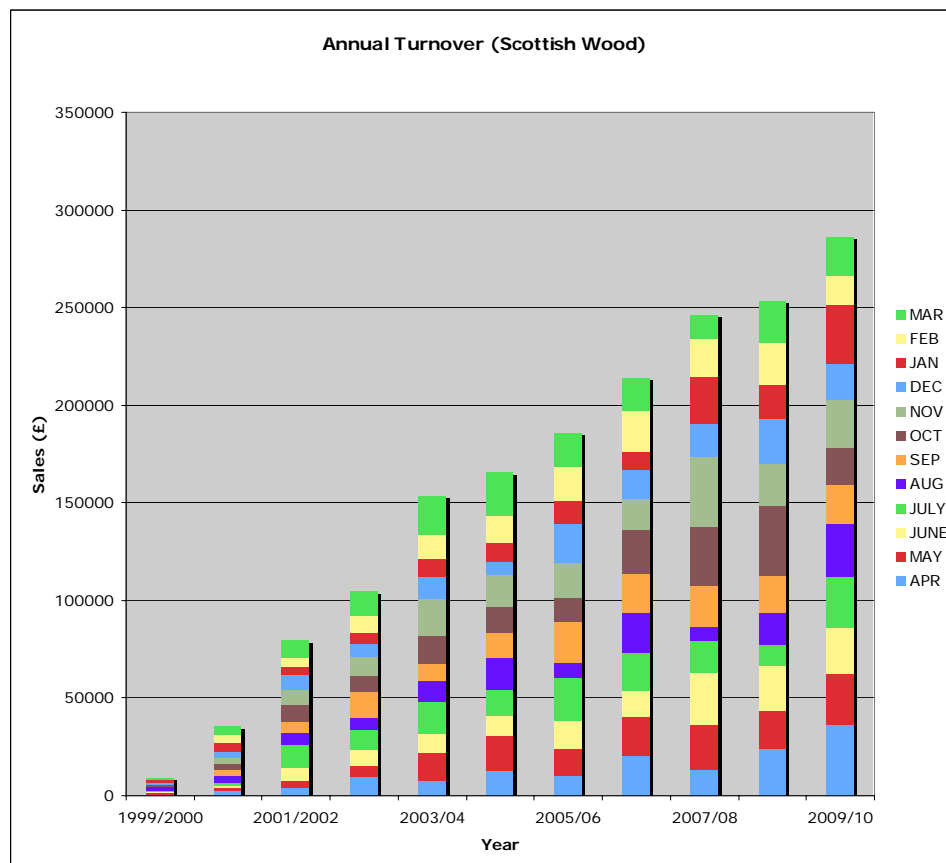


Figure 2: Increasing annual turnover of Scottish Wood Ltd.

“Hardwood Conversations”

ASHS, supported by Forestry Commission Scotland, has been involved in a series of workshops called the “Hardwood Conversations” that have brought together all the players in the sector, with the aim of analysing progress. The main issues to emerge were:

- Lack of knowledge between sectors: growers, sawmillers and end-users who were not always aware of each other’s requirements.
- Difficulty harvesting small timber parcels: It is difficult for growers to harvest and make available the small parcels of one type of timber that are typically requested by small sawmillers. However, for bigger jobs it was becoming possible for some ASHS members to buy in full loads of mixed hardwoods, which made supplying timber easier for growers.

- Poor availability of particular species: a historic lack of planting meant that some species were particularly scarce.
- The specification “whirlpool”: sawmillers, architects and end users struggled with a very unclear situation regarding timber specification for different uses, especially in construction.
- Adding more value locally: the importance of adding value locally so as to strengthen the local economy.
- Maximising the sustainable use of timber: it is preferable to use *local* timber where possible in order to minimise the distance travelled and associated “timber miles”.

Small sawmillers have typically supplied small, niche-market builders, but now the scale of operation is increasing and it is possible for some ASHS members to supply more mainstream builders. Flooring is potentially a good larger scale market that the sector can supply. Supplying local furniture-makers is core to many businesses and this can utilise poorer quality “knarly” timber in variable lengths, as well as higher grade timber. One crucial aspect is that individual craftspeople can talk to their local yards to get timber cut to an exact specification, which is not possible with other larger suppliers.

Timber marketing

The main problem for ASHS members remains timber availability. It is hard for individual sawmilling businesses to get information on local timber resources and build relationships with local growers. As a result, buying is largely reactive rather than proactive. These problems are starting to be addressed by some suppliers, for example:

1. Forest Enterprise has developed a successful niche programme in Argyll that now needs to be rolled out to the rest of the country.
2. Edinburgh and Lothian Council have systems in place to make small parcels of timber available.
3. Altyre Estate has an initiative to improve marketing of small scale timber parcels.

Electronic marketing systems exist, but are not widely used by ASHS members and it is not clear whether these are likely to prove successful.

Timber certification

Timber is generally sold by ASHS members as “FSC controlled” i.e. not fully certified. In addition, members use the “Scottish Working Woods Label” developed by ASHS, though this is only partly successful as a labelling scheme.