

1934

# WOODLAND CRAFTS IN BRITAIN

H.L. EDLIN



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*An Account of the Traditional Uses of Trees  
and Timbers in the British Countryside*

by

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B. T. BATSFORD LTD.

LONDON . NEW YORK . TORONTO . SYDNEY

## PREFACE

IN these pages I have aimed to describe the whole range of woodland crafts that use timber or tree products, as practised in Britain at the present day or within recent times. Wood is an exceptionally versatile material, but craftsmen have such marked preferences for particular timbers that it is possible to classify most of their trades according to the kind of tree employed. Therefore, after three opening chapters dealing with the techniques common to many crafts, each of the main tree species is considered in turn, in alphabetical order, whilst the closing chapters deal with branches of craftwork in which it is necessary to employ more than one timber or forest product. There are, of course, many processes wherein it is possible to substitute an allied timber for the kind usually chosen, and where this is done the other timbers that can be used are mentioned.

These crafts are intimately linked up with the history of forestry in Britain, for a large proportion of our remaining woodland has been tended in the past to meet the needs of charcoal burners, hurdle makers, and the builders of wooden houses and ships. But forestry to-day is seldom concerned with the requirements of the hand tool worker, and the techniques of most modern timber-using trades call for trees grown by other methods to different standards of value. Yet although the interest of a forester or of a timber worker in these old crafts—which can reveal so much of the character of a tree and its substance—now seldom arises from their commercial importance, it should not be thought that every old craft is doomed or dying. Many, such as basket making and chestnut cleaving, have a bright future, and still attract young recruits.

A knowledge of the fashioning of wood is needed by those who interpret the life of the past from the relics of its arts and economy. Here an understanding of surviving handicrafts can be of great help, for certain of them have been traced back into prehistoric times, and they throw light on the purposes of the stone and metal tools that mark the progress of early civilization. The wood itself seldom survives, for unlike a broken potsherd a broken wooden bowl can always be burnt as fuel; and unless it comes to lie below water, well below ground level, or in peat, the soundest timber will eventually decay in our moist climate.

With such ancient crafts, serving so many ends, it is but natural that a diversity of tools and methods has arisen. The individual craftsman, having few opportunities for travel or discussion with the fellows of his trade, may often honestly assert that only certain tools or timbers will serve his purpose, or that certain processes can only be carried out at particular seasons of the year. Yet in the next county one may find the same results achieved with quite different tools in another kind of wood, at what one has been led to believe is an impossible season. For the same

## CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENT	viii
I WOODLANDERS	i
II TREE FELLING AND TIMBER HAULING	5
III THE CRAFTWORK OF TIMBER CONVERSION	12
IV ALDER COPPICE AND CLOG SOLES	22
V THE ASH CRAFTS	26
VI BEECHWOODS AND CHAIR BODGING	33
VII BIRCHWOODS AND BESOMS	40
VIII CHESTNUT CUTTING	47
IX ELM IN TRADITIONAL TIMBERWORK	52
X HAWTHORNS AND HEDGECRAFT	59
XI THE HAZEL CUTTERS	63
XII HAZEL HURDLES, HOOPS, AND CRATES	70
XIII SYCAMORE AND MAPLE WOODS	76
XIV OAKWOODS AND TAN BARK	82
XV THE CLEAVING OF OAK	90
XVI WILLOWS IN CRAFTWORK	100
XVII WILLOW WEAVING AND BASKETRY	106
XVIII SHRUBS, SMALL TREES AND SCARCE TIMBERS	115
XIX CRAFTWORK IN CONIFERS	123
XX WOODLAND CARPENTRY	132
XXI MILLWRIGHT AND WHEELWRIGHT	139
XXII WOODLAND SHIPWRIGHTS	142

	PAGE
XXIII WOOD IN THE HOMESTEAD	147
XXIV WOOD FUEL	155
XXV CHARCOAL BURNING	160
XXVI HERBS, DYES, RESINS AND FOLIAGE	166
XXVII FOOD FROM THE FOREST	173
REFERENCE KEY	178
INDEX	179