

Tools of the glade

A remarkable array of traditional farm and woodland tools is being given a new lease of life at a Cumbria bobbin mill

For the past year, in a barn on the southern tip of Windermere, a team of dedicated volunteers has been working hard to restore and catalogue a collection of hand tools for the creation of a public tool library.

The tools belong to ninety year old Walter Lloyd, a retired farmer, emergency planning officer for Manchester and charcoal burner, who lives in a bow top wagon built with his own hands. Over the past twenty seven years he has amassed a large collection of hand tools relating to a variety of traditional woodland trades such as coppicing, green wood working, coopering, tanning, blacksmithing, basket making, and scything. Some of the tools date back to the nineteenth century. They were occasionally used by Walter and his colleagues, but it was felt that a much broader range of people could benefit from their existence. His knowledge about their uses remains as detailed and functional as ever. Last year he kindly passed the tools into the guardianship of The Woodmanship Trust, a local charity, and on successful acquisition of funding through the Heritage Lottery Fund's Sharing Heritage scheme, the project Walter's Tools was born.

The unique aspect of the project, recognised early on by the Museum of English Rural Life (MERL) in Reading, was that it did not seek to conserve the tools as vestiges of a forgotten past, for the public to look at. Rather it sought to restore them to functionality, and to document Walter's and other experts'



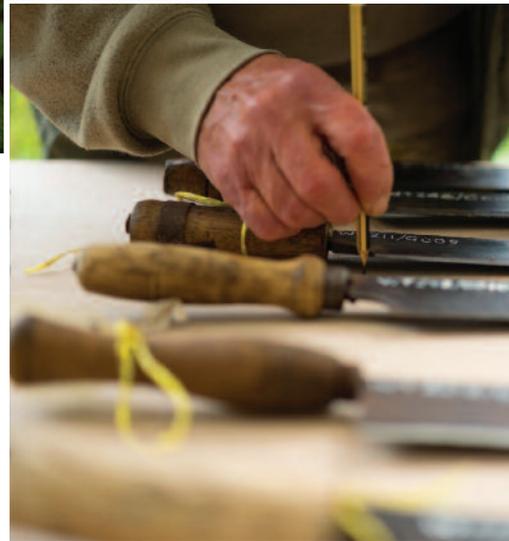


Retired farmer Walter Lloyd, left, and above scything his own meadow using traditional methods and with hand tools which have been restored as the focus of a Lottery Heritage Fund-backed project led by The Woodmanship Trust. All the images in this feature are by Cumbrian photographer Davye Ward (www.photographybyward.co.uk), who has made a visual record of project

knowledge as to their uses, before it is lost. Furthermore it sought to pass on that knowledge through free public workshops held by expert craftspeople, so that current and future generations may work towards a low-carbon future rooted in the landscape in which they live. MERL curator Greta Bertram, who has spent much time looking at tools in glass cases, was so enthused by that aspect of the project that she volunteered many hours of her time, coming up from Reading on two occasions to assist with the restoration, and working on the catalogue remotely in the interim.

The project was locally rooted, the South Lakes being an active coppicing region, but its reach was much broader. While most volunteers and workshop participants were based in Cumbria, some also came from Edinburgh, Yorkshire, County Durham and Buckinghamshire. Through its blog and twitter feed, the project gained national recognition through MERL and the Tools and Trades History Society (TATHS), and even internationally with interested parties emailing with their expertise, which was especially helpful in the identification process.

The tools were in various states of disrepair, and needed a variety of polishing, sharpening, re-handling, fettling and complete repair. Blacksmiths Shaun Bainbridge and Tim Swettenham and tool handle maker Sam Robinson were brought in for the more specialist work. As the spirit of the project was to pass on knowledge to future generations,





Above: members of The Woodmanship Trust repair and preserve some of the traditional hand tools collected by Walter Lloyd before (left) recording and cataloguing them and making them available to be put back to practical use in the field

Traditional willow baskets were produced during a workshop using tools passed on by Walter Lloyd, under the tutelage of Helen Elvin (below). Opposite page: some of the Woodmanship Trust volunteers involved in the project

summer saw a series of free weekend workshops held in the trades to which the tools related, making use of the tools where possible. A kiln charcoal burn took place at Stott Park Bobbin Mill with coppice worker Sam Ansell, Walter's meadow was scythed under the tutelage of Steve Tomlin, six happy participants went home with beautiful willow baskets following the patient instruction of Helen Elvin, and Sam Robinson got volunteers and participants well on the way to re-handling many of the tools. Participants went away not only with the things they had made, but with skills and a renewed interest in woodland trades that they could pass on in their own communities, and apply to their lines of work.

The project is now nearing completion. The library will be housed at Stott Park Bobbin Mill in Finsthwaite on the west shore of Lake Windermere, from Spring 2015, and administered through The Woodmanship Trust. The library will launch on April 12 at 3–5pm at Stott Park Bobbin Mill. The launch will be free for invitees but normal admission prices will apply for tours around the mill.

For more information visit www.walterstools.wordpress.com, or follow twitter: @walterstools.

