



Souter's Shop

THE TRUST HAS BECOME the owner of an historic souter's (or shoe-maker's) shop since the last newsletter. The story of this "time capsule shop" was featured in many national newspaper and on TV and radio during January.

The shop was built in 1896 by the shoe-maker James Merchant, when he took over the lease of a croft in Ballogie, and has survived largely untouched since his death in the 1940s, with boxes of shoes on the shelves in the front shop and the shoe-maker's tools and materials still in place in the back workshop. Detailed ledgers of the souter's business and a range of other fascinating items are also still there.

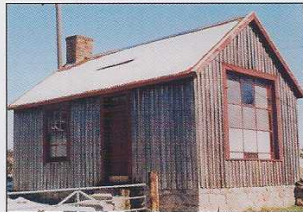
The shop is a remarkable piece of cultural heritage of regional and possibly national significance. To ensure its conservation, the Trust has embarked on a programme of work with four main elements:-

- repairing the building to make it wind and water tight and ensuring that it is both safe and secure.
- cataloguing the shop contents to museum standards and researching the history and significance of the shop and the souter's craft as practised there.
- ensuring appropriate conservation treatment of the contents and re-positioning them to restore the shop to its 1930s character.
- developing interpretive and educational materials about the shop and opening it by appointment to schools and other interested groups.

The Trust has been consulting closely with Ballogie Community Association over the Souter's Shop and the work is being tackled by a Project Team of Anke Addy, Pam Baxter and Julie Nicol.

School Wood

FINZEAN PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS planted more trees in the spring at the School Wood site that BCT has leased and enclosed for use by the School. While the final planting at that site is due this autumn, the overall project continues to be developed by the School and BCT to include a widening range of educational and practical involvements. As part of that, in future years, pupils will be able to plant the native trees they have grown themselves from local seed at other BCT sites.



The Souter's Shop

Photo by A. Addy



Part of the Souter's workshop – a glimpse back into the 1940s.

Photo by A. Addy

The Commonty

Agreements

BCT HAS ANCIENT SHARED LAND USE RIGHTS over the whole Forest of Birse Commonty, covering over 3,500 ha (9,000 acres). Two other parties also have rights over the Commonty: the owner of the solum (Hon. Charles Pearson) and the owners of the sporting rights (Hon. Charles Pearson & Nicol Brothers).

In 1999, as part of the historic settlement over the Commonty described in Updates 1 & 2, BCT and the other parties signed the North Hill Agreement to enable BCT to use its ancient rights to manage the native pinewoods covering over 500 ha (1,250 acres) of the Commonty.

At that stage, the Agreement did not include a small area (7.5 ha) of trees near the Forest of Birse Kirk, because some of the trees were planted and not all self-sown as elsewhere on the Commonty. However, in February this year, the parties signed the Kirk Woods Agreement to add this area to the North Hill, subject to special provisions to allow the Hon. Charles Pearson to fell some of the trees there.

Finlets Oaks

WITHIN THE COMMONTY PINEWOODS, on the lower slopes of the Finlets, there is one of the very few surviving examples in Scotland where native oak are naturally regenerating with native pine and other native tree species amongst heather and granite scree.

A detailed survey by BCT has shown that there are nearly 200 oaks, ranging from gnarled and ancient trees down to young seedlings below heather height. BCT has protected some of the smallest seedlings from browsing and has also felled some young birch and pine, where these were suppressing the growth of young oaks.

The oldest Finlets oaks are estimated by experts to be at least as old as the Court of Session arbitration in 1755 that was so important in ensuring the survival of the ancient rights BCT now holds over the Commonty. The Trust collects acorns from these trees and has planted Finlets oaks at most of its project sites, making them something of an emblem for the Trust.



Native Oak and Pine at the Finlets

Historic Landscape

ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD SURVEYS of the Forest of Birse commissioned by BCT have located nearly 100 features or groups of features of prehistoric or historic interest. This wealth of sites, coupled with the area's distinctive history over the last 1000 years, mean that the Forest of Birse is an historic landscape of national significance. The report on the surveys makes several recommendations for further investigations which the Trust hopes to follow up. Of particular interest, is the surviving pattern of medieval sheiling sites on the Commonty.