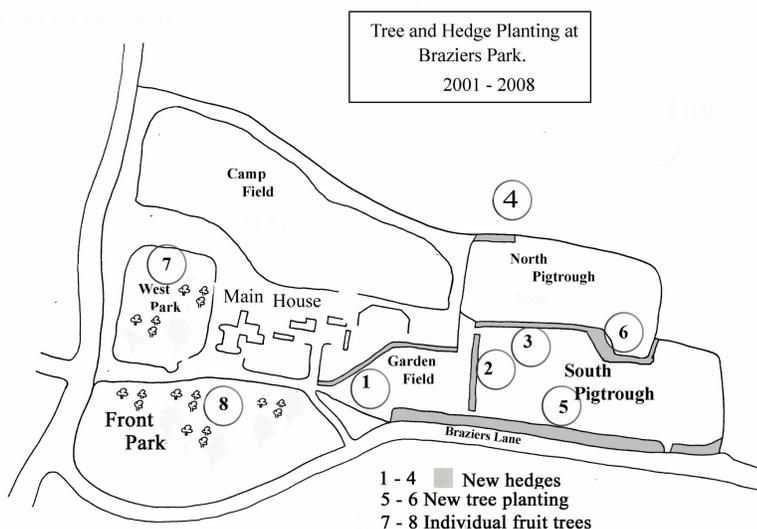


Tree Planting at Braziers

[Anna Kendall HND. is a professional horticulturalist with many years experience of practical work in private gardens and design. She became a Landscape officer for the local authorities of Leeds and Harrogate and for the North Yorkshire Moors National Park, where she was more concerned with trees.]



Braziers Park has many lovely old trees of beech, yew, oak and cedar. A number of trees have been lost recently through old age and there needed to be some kind of planting program to replace them before the attractive woodland edges were lost. In the year 2000 a scheme was drawn up.

The aims were to;

- increase the area of tree cover at Braziers Park
- provide shelter and forage for the sheep
- provide firewood
- plant fruiting and nut species to harvest
- provide a frost barrier for the existing orchard
- restore the overgrown hedges

The Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS)

Consequently, we entered a 10 year programme with DEFRA called The Countryside Stewardship Scheme. The annual grant and the commitment required gave us the focus to carry out the work each year. Under the scheme it was possible to plant new hedges and restore the old, to plant single specimen trees in the fields and to establish a belt of trees along Braziers Lane. The CSS also included an annual payment for maintaining the "unimproved" flower meadows, namely, meadows untouched by artificial fertilizer.

We decided to leave the camping field out of the scheme, which would give us free rein to plant non-native species in a less traditional way, using permaculture principles. This work has not yet been started but lots of ideas have been put forward by permaculture students.

New Hedges

The most difficult decision was whether to plant new hedges along the fenced field boundaries. Would they enhance the views and create additional pleasant spaces? Would the animals benefit from the shade and shelter they provided? A new hedge along Garden Field was to shelter the garden and protect the orchard area from early frosts. We considered putting a hedge along the by the Front Park, but people preferred the present openness along the front of the house. On the other hand, we decided to hedge South Pig trough and replace the open sweep of the valley with a ribbon of green leading down from the clump of very old horse-chestnut trees which will not survive much longer.

Tree Belt and Choice of species

The idea to plant a belt of trees alongside the Braziers Lane hedgerow, near Wichelo, came from the existing Woodland Walk on the far side of the camp field. In the future we could extend this walk around the whole perimeter of the estate. An extra depth of trees here, by the lane, also fulfilled the plans for shelter and firewood. In addition, it would provide a green “wildlife corridor” from the woodlands to the heart of the estate.

The decision to embark on the CSS was not particularly welcomed at first by the permaculturalists among us, because it committed us to more of the traditional practices and use of native plants. However, we were allowed to choose many fruiting varieties. So the first hedge, running from the Drive, through Garden Field and on to the orchard, although predominantly Hawthorne, did contain wild pear, wild plum and crab-apple. The second hedge was an unconventional mix of wild plum, field maple and goat willow, with five wild cherries, all to grow up as trees. This hedge forms a boundary between the South Pig trough and Garden Field.

The tree belt along Braziers Lane was planted with hazel, ash, lime, alder, field maple and horse-chestnut, all species that respond to being coppiced, or cut down to ground level for re-growing. Some oaks were planted amongst them to grow as standard trees.

In addition to the dozen or so apples, pears and plums in the orchard, we already had walnuts, cherries, sweet chestnuts, elderberries and hazelnuts growing elsewhere on the estate. Under the scheme we have increased the number of these species with improved varieties and also added mulberry and nectarine to the collection.

Restoring the old hedgerow from above the Art Studio and up along the lane to the end of the estate.

This work was done in two phases during the winters of 2002/3 and 2004/5. The hedgerow consisted mostly of overgrown thorn trees that were drawn out, spindly, and smothered in ivy. Two thirds of these were cut down to the base, to

re-sprout. There was a lot of dead wood. We used hand saw mainly, but chain-saw for the thicker trunks. All the work was done by our volunteers, with supervision. There were many large hazels in the upper section of the hedge, all of which coppiced beautifully and, in the first year, sent out shoots of 8' or more. Whilst we were cutting, we found about 80 thin, flexible hazel shoots to bend down and dig under the soil to produce fresh roots. These "layers", as they are called, took well and could be separated from the mother tree in their second winter.

The burning problem. The first time round we decided to try to use all cut wood and avoid bonfires. We dealt with the brash (cut wood) as follows:

- Dead and decaying wood was stacked in wildlife habitat piles on site.
- Wood over 3" diameter went to the house firewood store.
- Poles and straight trunks were for use in the garden, or for benders (shelters in the camping field).
- Brash was returned to the hedge and placed round the newly planted trees to keep off rabbits and deer.
- The sheep chose to eat some of the ivy.

This was a good ecological exercise in re-cycling, but we did not repeat it in the second year. Instead, we had a lovely big bonfire.

Our reasons were:

- Dispersal took 2 or 3 times longer than burning on site.
- The presence of the brash round the trees encouraged tall weed growth round their bases, which swamped them, so it was difficult to keep the roots clear.
- The brash also created a good habitat for voles, which attacked the bark on the young trees. At that time, these were without plastic spiral guards.

Planting and Mulching

The CSS specified the use of plants from 45 – 60 cm. as best suited for hedge restoration. The taller plants come with large roots and require pit planting, namely digging a hole for each one. Next time, we shall choose the smaller size to speed up the planting, because Braziers' soil is very hard and stony.

All the trees were mulched round after planting with layers of newspaper and a thick layer of woodchips to retain moisture and stop weed competition whilst they established. Even in the dry periods the area under the mulch remained moist which reduced the need for watering in the summer.

Achievements

Under the scheme we have undertaken to complete the following work by 2008:

- 562m. of new hedge planting
- 338m. of hedge restoration
- 533 more trees planted in the woodland belt and small copse
- 12 more specimen trees in the West and Front Parks
- New fencing along field boundaries, of which 5 have already been done.

75% of this work has already been completed.

Educational Aspects

By increasing our wooded areas, a wider variety of wildlife will be attracted to the estate, including insects, birds and butterflies. A richer and more diverse environment could lead to more field study and related courses such as the bush - craft skills presently taught by David Goodworth.

The tree-planting and fencing activities have been very popular, being run as work weekends which gave many the opportunity to learn new skills and work as a team. Similarly, when the trees and hedges have grown, an opportunity opens up for workshops in coppicing, hedge-laying and crafts such as greenwood-work and hurdle-making.

There is plenty of scope for more planting at Braziers, especially on the camp field and on the south bank below the camp field, which consists, at present of elder and diseased elm. Now that we have got used to clearing and nurturing young trees every spring, it would be good to continue our commitment to such care for the estate beyond the current requirements of the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. The number of volunteers is growing too; they show a lively interest in the work.