

Shides

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An article in the Wyre Forest Study Group's REVIEW 2010, Number 11, p71, 'Coppicing in the Manor of Bewdley, 1741-1771', revealed that among the products of coppicing were many thousands of SHIDES, the cutting, handling and carting of which would have involved a great deal of labour.

The term SHIDE or SHIDEWOOD was unknown and not understood locally, nor indeed in response to wider enquiries and searches. A reference, now to hand which was not available last year, is helpful. Oliver Rackham's book of 1980, 'Ancient Woodland; its history, vegetation and uses in England', (Edward Arnold), does mention shides and gives some explanation. The Review article cites examples of early uses of the word shide from 725 AD, 1470, 1512 from the OED. However, Rackham, in a discussion of 'underwood products' (page 142), describes shides among various forms of fuelwood, and the term included in a Statute of 1542.

FAGGOTS: Tied bundles of brushwood or spray, made faggots, with names for several sorts. These gave a short hot blaze for baking, or burning heretics; or for land drains or muddy trackways and dams. The term faggots has been used continuously since the 1250s.

LOGS: Terms for various kinds of logs were shide, billet, talwood=coppice wood, (wood for fuel cut to a prescribed size) and astell (split wood,1472).

Quoting from Rackham's text, page 143;
"From the fifteenth century, attempts were made to

standardize the sizes of firewood. A statute of 1542, (Statutes of the Realm 34-5 Hen VIII c. 3), prescribed that faggots for sale had to be 3 foot long and $\frac{3}{4}$ yard in girth (0.9 x 0.7 m). There were five permitted sizes for shides, all the same length, but of different girth.

Every shyde of talwood to conteyne in lenghte foure fote.... at the least beside the carfe, (or kerf, the oblique face produced by cross cutting with an axe), and every tall shyde of oone to be in greatnes in the myddes twentie inches....at the leaste...And every tall shyde named of five, to conteyne in greatnes.... 44 ynches....

Billets were 3½ feet long and either 9 or 12 inches girth. Billets were the commonest kind of log, and andirons (ends of fire-baskets) of the period are designed to take them. Shides could be much larger in diameter. These evidently came from the branches of timber trees... or trunks...unsuitable for timber. Later, the billet sizes were elaborated so that billets could be sold cleft into two or four with corresponding adjustments in the permitted girths. (Statutes of the Realm, 7 Ed. VI c. 7)"

Some confusion persists as to the relation of cordwood to shidewood. Cords of four foot long mentioned by David Poyner refer really to cords of stone or coal, whereas 8 feet is usual for wood. So it would seem that shides were logs for fires and furnaces cut to four foot lengths, (?44 inches), but of various girths from 20 inches or $20/\pi = 6.36$ inches diameter, or a span from finger tip to finger tip.



Bark peelers in the Wyre Forest including Freddie Booton and his parents. (Photograph supplied by William Elliot)