



Wyre Forest Study Group

Coppicing in the Manor of Bewdley 1741 – 1771

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Introduction

An insight into the production from parts of Wyre Forest is included within 'A Survey of the Manor of Bewdley' for the Lord of the Manor, Edward Winnington, by his Steward, John Ingram, in 1749. There are records of coppicing, over a thirty year period, in addition to the list of tenants, property and rental income, discussed elsewhere, (WFSG Review 2009 pp50-53). An original copy of the Survey is owned by Mr. Charles Purcell of the Bewdley Historical Research Group. We thank him for allowing use of these unique documents.

The records, professionally hand written in the 'copper plate' style of the time, using quill pen, probably by trained clerks, from a draft, cover 13 pages, now for

convenience copied on to A4 sheets. At least two sets of handwriting are used and records of some later fellings are squashed into the limited space between earlier records, as the cycle of coppicing progressed. The pages are numbered, but the entries are not in date order, nor presented consistently, but rather as continuous text, without punctuation and including abbreviations, various spellings (e.g. Baggotts and Bagots), and of course, using units of measure for the trade, in the second half of the 18th century. Photocopies of sample entries (Fig 1) give some idea of the original. To render the data easier to use, a simplified summary of each entry is presented, (Table 1 and Table 2). A graph (Fig 2) permits comparisons of commodity prices from 1750.

TABLE 1 The Sequence of Coppicing from 1741 to 1771.

1741, 1756, 1771; Baggotts Bank. The 1845 Tithe Map shows three adjacent enclosures each named Baggotts Bank, now the SE corner of Whartons Park golf course between Blackmans Stitch to Whartons Park farm and extending down from the by-pass island to the old footpath. NGR SO767744. These no longer exist. **Cold Harbour Coppice (Subject to Tyth)** lies north of the A456, between Beaucastle and St. Johns Lane extending northwards to Uncllys Farm and is included with Baggotts Bank to form a 53 acre unit. There are details of three cuts at 15 year intervals.

1742-58, 43-59, 44-60; Lord's Yard (Subject to Tyth) lies to the west of Uncllys Farm. NGR SO756753. This is a "Coppice in the Forrest, for which the Rector of Ribbesford has Tyth". (*Hence the name, one supposes.*) The cuts of 1742 and 1758 were from the same area of 69 acres, cuts of 1743 and again in 1759 were from a different area of 67 acres, while further falls in 1744 and 1760 were from yet another area of 50 acres, totalling 186 acres over a three year cropping. All these cuts follow a 16 year rotation.

1745, 61; Shelfield (Subject to Tyth) (*Presumably the Shelf Held Coppice of current maps*). This large area surrounds the west and north side of Ruskin Land. (*Ruskin, 1819-1900.*), NGR SO755759. An area of 65 acres was harvested in 1745 and 16 years later in 1761.

1746, 1763; Suttons Burgage. The 1845 Tythe Map shows three enclosures and an unenclosed area to the east of Park Farm on the south side of Snuffmill Dingle, below Heightington Lane; NGR SO780744. An area of 22 acres was felled in 1746 and 17 years later in 1763.

1747; The lower parks, or Rotten Brook Coppice. About 27 acres. Presumably below the Snuff Mill, still known as Lower Park.

1748, 1764; The upper Parks. 32 acres 0 roods 9 perch, part of an extensive tract of land between Horsehill Farm and Park End Farm. A 16 year interval between cropping. NGR SO773737.

1749, 1766; Town Coppice, (Subject to Tyth) Area not given. Part of a large coppice of triangular shape between Ruskin Land and Dowles Brook. NGR SO763760. Town Coppice was subject to Tyth for the Rector of Ribbesford. This area felled again, after 17 years, in 1766.

1750; Town Coppice, "The other part of Town Coppice to be fell in 1750". This suggests that roughly half was cut in 1749 and that all was cut by the following year. There is no record of a further cut. NGR SO763760.

1751 to 1755, 57, 67; No records of coppicing in this document, for these years.

1756 to 1771; This period covers the second and third cuts as cited above, but including several additional fellings.

1758; Hitterell extending from Uncllys Farm to Forest Lodge and bounded by water courses to east and west. Area not stated. NGR SO767758. See Lord's Yard also cut in 1758.

1762; Brand Lodge Coppice. NGR SO737751. North east of Far Forest about 2/3 mile along Plough Lane. Area is not stated, but it reads as if the whole coppice was cut at this time.

1765; Park End Bind. The 1845 Tythe Map shows "Park End Coppice" bordering the south of what is now Whartons Park golf course, and on the modern map named as Rock Coppice. No area is given. "Bind" suggests a dense woodland and presumably lies near this coppice. NGR SO767739.

1768; Simon's Stool. Symonds Stool appears on the 1845 Tythe Map in the triangle of forest between Uncllys and Bowcastle Farm. NGR SO763750. No area given.

1769; Hawk's Bind. No area given.

1770; Doghanging. Between Callow Hill and Far Forest, and north of the Fingerpost junction of A456 and A4117. NGR SO736745.

Units of Measure

Explanation of units for measuring coppice products.

Monetary Values

Pounds (£) shillings (S) and pence (d) are used throughout; (12 pence, d, =1 shilling, s; 240 pence = 20 shillings = one pound, £1). Estimates have been calculated and shown in square brackets where there were gaps in the data and where totals only are entered. A few minor errors in the arithmetic emerge, but these are as likely to be the author's as the Steward's!

The purchasing power of the Pound remained remarkably constant from 1750 to about 1790, that is, over the period of this study. By 1800, with the French Revolution and Napoleonic wars there was some inflation and the value dropped perhaps by a third. The value recovered by the 1820s and remained steady, with minor fluctuations, until the First World War. Thus for 160 years almost a direct comparison could be made between 18th century prices and those up to 1910. After WW1 inflation increased, dropped back in the 1930s, by 1940 began to rise substantially and, from 1970, very rapidly, to the present day. A graph used by historians compiled as a Composite Commodity Price Index from 1750 to 1996 comparing the costs of the same basic commodities over the years, shows these trends clearly (Fig 2). One hundred pounds in 1750 would purchase more or less the same basic commodities in 1800 and 1900 but by 1996 you would need £ 9,222.48p for the same goods. There are numerous commodity price indices, no doubt controversial, but with these figures one can gauge roughly the worth of the coppice yields. For example Baggotts Bank yielding £210 in 1741 would be 2.1 x £ 9,222 or close to £20,000.

There is no mention of costs or wages or transport, or whether the totals are net profit. However, page 49 of the Manor Survey, forma part of Mr. Winnington's Land Tax return and Poor Levy, (no date) and incidentally offers some indication of costs.

"The Charges attending Bewdley Woods (Exclusive of Taxes making the fences, and Woodward's Salary) are as under

"For falling Shidewood	£0~08~4 per thousand
"For Carriage of it to Severn	£0~13~4
"For piling it, weighing it etc	£0~1~8
Total	£1~3s~4d per thousand
For Weighing the Bark	3d per Tun
Making the Hedges	3d per perch [5½ yards]"

A feature in the Kinlet Parish Newsletter, 2010 edited by Francis Engleheart uses documents from the Kinlet Hall archive, with a commentary by David Poyner. An estate record for 1810, just 200 years ago, refers to the work

and payment of woodmen, during December that year, particularly in Alton and Earnwood coppices.

"Paid the Woodcutters for cutting 161cord 1ft of winter fallen wood in Alton Coppice at 3s per cord, £24~3s~4½d"

"Paid Woodcutters for cutting peel'd wood 58-1 ... at 3/6, £10~4~7½"

"Paid Ditto for falling 13,028 shides of oak poles at 10d per hundred shide, £5~8~6½"

"Paid Tho' Perkins to pay Jos Davies for butting and topping 49 Oak Trees fallen in the Bell Ground at 6d per Tree, £1~4~6"

"Paid [John Horton] for piling 71,000 shides of Poles at Bar Gate at 1/3 per thousand, £4~8~9"

"Paid Ditto what he paid for mending the bark Roads in Earnwd Coppice, £1~4~0"

"Paid exps apprehending & taking Wood Stealers to Justice, £1~4~0"

Costs of cordwood, bark and shides fluctuate over the years and between first and second fellings, remaining generally steady within a range, but it is difficult to attribute causes to any fluctuations in prices.

Cordwood

CORD as explained in the OED comes from the Greek, then to Latin 'chorda', to the Old French 'corde' and Middle English 'cord'; 'a string or small rope of strands twisted together'; 'A measure of wood, stone or rock, measured with a cord'; 'Pile of wood 8 feet by 4 feet, and 4 feet high' (and thus equivalent to 128 cubic feet), first use cited 1616. Cordwood was wood stacked in cords, wood for fuel cut in lengths (usually) of 4 feet. As a verb 'to stack (wood) in cords' the word is cited 1762. (When Brand Lodge coppice was being felled 250 years ago – see above!).

The Kinlet Estate owned about half of Wyre with compartments of roughly 100 acres, cutting over an 18 or 20 year cycle, (compare the Bewdley data of 15, 16 or 17 year cycles giving smaller timber), to produce large numbers of poles for pit-props, fences and charcoal. When felled the wood was cut in to 4 foot lengths and stacked into cords, piles of wood 3 foot x 3 foot x 4 foot (D.P.), (and equivalent to only 36 cubic feet). So there may be some question as to the quantities of cord wood produced in the Bewdley Manor record; large cords or small cords? There is no information. In the forest, a cord would be measured with two stakes three foot apart and the round logs stacked between. Reference to Town Coppice, and others, shows fractions of cord, as for example in 1749, as 137 cords 2ft 9ins. This would be linear not cubic measure and one wonders why such was included, given the scale of the operations. Measures were not standardised.



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Correspondence with Mr. Bede Howell considers the 1742 felling of 69 acres in Lord's Yard, yielding 234 cords, or 3.4 cords per acre. Modern cord measure is reckoned to be 23 cwt or 1.15 ton, and allows for air spaces with 55% wood or 60% if the wood is straight. A small cord of 3x3x4 would seem likely in 18th century manual conditions. Thus the 234 small cords would yield $234 \times 36/128 \times 1.15 = 75.34$ ton, or just over one ton per acre. This might not be a substantial yield. Hardwoods like oak give better quality timber when grown rapidly, the slow growth, more typical of Wyre, yields poorer quality. Part of Bell Coppice, mentioned above, now part of NNR, is a registered seed stand, contributing live material to the British and Irish Hardwood Improvement Programme. The converse applies to softwoods where slow growth gives better quality. The most-dense heart-wood, in the centre, would not be formed in the few years of coppice growth, which would be mostly sapwood. Green Oak has a moisture content of 80-90% for newly cut wood, which would further reduce the initial yield. The British Oaks, *Quercus petraea* (Mat) Liebl. and *Q. Robur* L. are distinct species but the timbers are indistinguishable. Oak is our heaviest timber, with weights per cubic foot of 52-53 lbs air-dry. The longer cutting cycle at Kinlet, giving a higher proportion of heartwood, would give stronger timber for pit props, while thinner shides would be more suitable for splitting.

Shidewood

This unfamiliar term is no longer in use except perhaps in dialect. Extensive enquiries among experienced forest workers and academics alike, evoked the same negative response, none of whom had heard the word. At the time of writing no one seems to have a clear idea of the form taken or the uses for shidewood, and not surprisingly, no photographs have come to light.

The OED devotes 5½ column-inches to Shide with several spellings and examples of early usage. The word appears in Old English as *scid*, Old Frisian as *skid*, through Old and Middle High German to the modern German *scheit*; Old Norse and Old Teutonic all with the same root meaning to divide. Of the examples of usage going back to 725 AD, the most useful are listed below giving clues as to use and dimensions. 1470, "Paid for carying a shide"; 1512, "The shedes to be maid of the said Hardwode to be in leinth a Yerde and in thikenes a Spanne", (9 inches, tip of thumb or forefinger to tip of little finger); 1657, "If the fire-man throw great shides of wood in the mouths of the Furnaces"; 1677, "Cutting every shid of tall wood four foot long beside the kerf, and the billet three foot four inches"; 1703, the same as shingles"; 1793, "A Quantity of Pollard Trees sufficient

to make 1,200 Shides of Cleft Wood containing Half a Foot each". The current definition does not give a clear image of the form of a shide or shid. "A piece of wood split off from timber, a block, billet; a board, plank, beam. As a quantity; Half a cubic foot of timber." (864cu inches=1in x 12in x 72in). Interestingly the term Shidewood drops out of the Bewdley record in 1768 but persists at Kinlet to 1810 at least. One is reminded of the term shard, a fragment of broken earthenware, another word of north European origin, but with a different root meaning fragment.

So what is a shide or shidewood? A shide seems to be a piece of newly cut coppice wood about half a cubic foot in size; locally at least, a pole, small diameter round from coppice felling after fifteen to 20 years of growth. With or without bark is not clear, probably either. A standing branch or cut branch possibly up to six or nine inches diameter would be cross-cut into lengths of three or four feet suitable for furnaces, splitting for hurdles, laths for plastering and roof battens, coracles, wiskets and trugs. How individual pieces differ from cordwood is not clear. The word 'shide' actually means split wood. Could shides be like cordwood, but destined to be split lengthways? More research may give a clearer understanding of what must have been a substantial trade, handling and transporting thousands.

Stakes and Etherings, Besom Staves

Stakes also called Lugs, were sold for the upright or angled supports in hedging, placed regularly every few feet, through which the branches were woven. *Etherings* were the long thin, flexible wands used to bind the top of a newly laid hedge, twisted between the stakes to strengthen the edge where stock would chafe. There is still a trade for these but nowadays called *Heatherings*. A steady supply of broom handles, Besom Staves, would be required as the birch twigs of the broom would soon wear out.

Conclusion

One must be impressed with the sheer toil which went into harvesting the woodlands, mostly in winter. Bark peeling was easier when the sap was rising in early spring, but work would have to be over long periods to deal with the quantities involved. Men and women would walk to and from work in all weathers. Hidden behind these figures the labour of loading and carting to the river, goes unrecorded. This is an insight into the supply of the raw materials for domestic trade and local industry before the Industrial Revolution. Most of the wood, of whatever sizes, would go to firewood and charcoal burning. Abraham Darby (1677-1717) developed the use of coke instead of the more

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expensive charcoal, for smelting iron ore, in 1709, but wood remained cheaper than coal for the many furnaces of the industrialising Midlands. Charcoal was needed for blacksmith's hearths. The late Mr. Potter, one of the last Bewdley charcoal burners, who lived

in a cottage, now demolished, at the top of Wyre Hill, Bewdley, told me about 1969, that he could get 6 hundredweight of charcoal from a ton of wood. So the hundreds of years of coppicing continued until recent times, before passing from living memory.



Fig 1 Copy of page 47 of the original data for Lord's Yard (50 acres, 1744, 1760), and Sheffield coppice (65 acres, 1745, 1761).

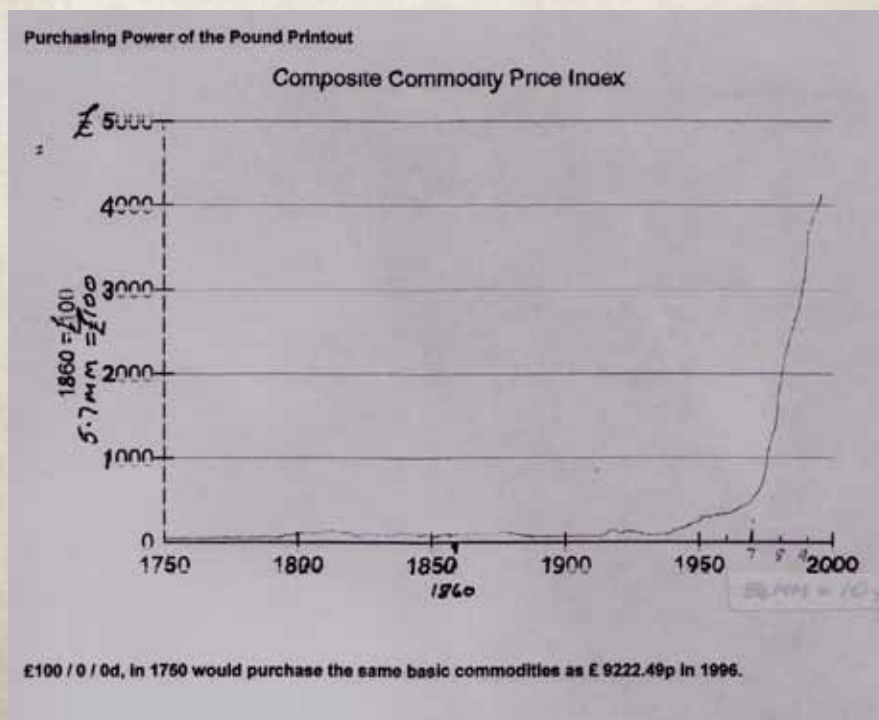


FIG 2 Purchasing power of the pound from 1750 to 1996.

TABLE 2 The Products of Coppicing; a summary of each annual crop

Baggotts Bank (Tyth) and Cold Harbour

1741	Cords of wood	205 cord	@ 9 sh per cord	£92-8s-0d
	Bark	34 Tun	@ 35 s per Tun	52-12-0
	Shidewood	25,000	@ 52s 6d per thous	66-0-0 Tot = £ 210
1756	Cordwood	167 cords 2ft 0 ins	@ 14 s per cord	117-01-6
	Bark	18 Tun 11 hd	@ 37s 6d per Tun	34-15-7½
	Poles	23 Thous 0 hd 72 Shids	@ £3-10-0 per thous	80-15-0 Tot = £232-12s-1½d
1771	Cordwood	168 cords 4 ft 6 ins	@ 14 s per cord	118-01-0
	Bark	24 Tun 6 hd 56 pounds	@ 54 s per Tun	66-06-6
	Poles	138 Tun	@ 11 s 6d per Tun	78-04-0
	Besom Staves + other wood			15-00-1 Tot = £277-11s-7d

Lord's Yard (Tyth) (69 acres)

1742	Cordwood	234 cords	@ 9 s per cord	[105-06-8]
	Bark	42 Tun 7 hd	@ 30 s per Tun	[63-10-6] [Tot = £247 12s 2d]
	Shidewood	30,000	@ £2 .. 12 s .. 6d per thous.	[78-15-0] Tot ? = £250-5s-3d
1758	Cordwood	? 366 cords 4ft "Yard Wood" = 274cd: 7ft:	@ 14 s per cord	192-08-3
	Bark	19 Tun 5 hd	@ 38 s per Tun	37-10-0
	Shidewood	23Th 3 hd 25 shides	@ 70 s per thous	82-12-6
	Stakes and Etherings			1-18-6 Tot = £314-9s-3d

Lord's Yard (67 acres)

1743	Cordwood	335 cords	@ 9 s per cord	[150-15-0]
	Bark	52 Tun	@ 30 s per Tun	[78-0-0] [Tot =£286-5-0]
	Shidewood	23,000	@ 50 s per thous	[57-10-0] Tot = £288-17-0
1759	Cordwood	377 cord 3 ft 6 ins	@ 14 s per cord	264-04-01
	Bark	25 Tun 7 hd 3 qter	@ 33 s per Tun	41-15-0
	Shidewood	26 Thous 4 hun 15 Shides	@ £3 : 10s : 0 per thous	94-06-6
	Stakes and Etherings			2-00-0

Lord's Yard (50 acres)

1744	Cordwood	173 cords	@ 7 s per cord	[60-11-0]
	Bark	29 Tun	@ 29 s per Tun	[42-01-0] [Tot = £145-2s-0]
	Shidewood	17,000	£2:10:0 per thous	[42-10-0] Tot = £145-3s-0
1760	Cordwood	201 cords 1 ft 9 ins	@ 14 s per cord	140-17-0
	Bark	18 Tun 12 hd	@ 35 s per Tun	£32-11s-0d
	Shidewood	20 thous 6 hd	@ £3-10-0 per thous	£72-09-6 [£72-2s-0d]
	Besom staves, Lugs and Etherings etc.			7-03-0 Tot = £253-0s-6d ?

Shelfeld Tyth (65 acres)

1745	Cordwood	266 cords	@ 8 s per cord	[106-8-0]
	Bark	41 Tun	@ 25 s per Tun	[51-5-0] [Tot = £247-13-0]
	Shidewood	36,000	@ 50 s per Thous	[90-0-0] Tot = £248-19s 6d ?
1761	Cordwood	322cord 1ft 9 ins	@ 14 s per cord	225-11-0
	Bark	23 Tun 5 hd	@ 33 s per Tun	38-7-0
	Shidewood	24 thous 4 hd 71 Shids	@ £3-10-0 per thous	87-9-0
	Besom Staves	5cord 2ft	@ 20 s per cord	5-5-0
	Lugs, Etherings etc			12 Tot = £357-4s-0

Suttons Burgage (22 acres)

1746	Cordwood	71 cords	[@ 8 s per cord]	£28-8s-6
	Bark	20Tun 14 hd	@ 28 s per Tun	[£28-19-6] [Tot £128-18-6]
	Shidewood	28 thous 600 hd 2qter	@ 50 s per thous	[71-10-6] Tot=£126-11s-0?
1763	Cordwood	93 cord 5 ft 3 ins	@ 10 s per cord	46-16-6
	Bark	28 Tun 7 hd 28 lbs	@ 35 s per Tun	49-12-0
	Shidewood	45 thous 5 hd 3 shides	@ 50 s per thous	114-01-0
	Besom staves etc.			2-08-4 Tot = £212-17s-10d

The Lower Parks or Rotten Brook Coppice (27 acres)

1747	Cordwood	80 cord	@ 8 s 6d per cord	31-11s-0
	? Bark	(No quantities given, except money)	?	34-00-6
	Shidewood	26 thous	@ 56 s per thous	69-17-0



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The Upper Parks (82 acres 0 rood 9 poles)				
1748	Cordwood	254 cords	@ 9 s per cord	114-06-6
	Bark	42 Tun	@ 31 s per Tun	65-09-6
	Shidewood	38 thous	@ 55 s per thous	106-14-0 Tot = £286-10-0d
1764	Cordwood	389 cords 5ft	@ 12 s per cord	233-15-6
	Bark	42½ Tun	@ 35 s per Tun	74-07-6
	Poles (? Shides)	49 thous 4 hd 2qter	@ £2-12-6 per thous	142-03-4½
	Stakes and Etherings etc.			7-11-1 Tot = £457-17-5½
Town Coppice (Yields Tyth) "Part"				
1749	Cordwood	137 cord 2ft 9 ins	@ 12 s per cord	£61-16-0
	Bark	23 Tun 3 hd	@ 35 s per Tun	40-08-6
	Shidewood	130 thous 5 hd 3qter	@ £3 per thous	100-14-6 Tot = £202-19s-0d
1766	Cordwood	229 cord 6 ft	@ 12 s per cord	137-17-0
	Bark	22 Tun 7 hd	@ 32 s 6d per Tun	35-15-0
	Shidewood	130 Tun =26 thous	@ 55 s per thous	71-10-0
	Besom staves etc.			7-07-0 Tot = £252-09s-0d
Town Coppice "The other part"				
1750	Cordwood	121 cord 4 ft 9 ins	@ 9 s per cord	54-14-4
	Bark	18 Tun 11 hd	@ 38 s per Tun	32-09-9
	Shidewood	28 thous 5 hd 1qter	@ £3 per thous	85-11-6 Tot = £172-15-7d
1751 to 1755 inclusive, no records of coppicing in these documents				
Hitterell (Note also the Lord's Yard 69 acre second cut this year, following the 1742 cut, cited above.)				
1758	Cordwood	317 cord 7 ft 9 ins	@ 9 s per cord	222-10-0
	Bark	28 Tun 6 hd	@ 40 s per Tun	56-12-0
	Shidewood	31,000 7 hd	@ £3-10 s per thous	110-19-0 Tot = £390-10s-0d
Brand Lodge Coppice				
1762	Cordwood	460 cord 1ft 9 ins	@ 12 s per cord	276-02-0
	Bark	32 Tun 4 hd	[@ 35 s per Tun, estimate]	56-11-0
	Shidewood	47 thous 600 [shides]	@ £3-2-6 per thous	148-15-0
	Besom staves and other wood			17- 08-10 Tot = £498-16s-10d
Park End Bind				
1765	Cordwood	394 cord 7 ft 9 ins	@ 12 s per cord	236-19-6
	Bark	9 Tun 8hd	@ 32 s-6d per Tun	15-5-6
	Shidewood	11 thous	@ 55 s per thous	30-5-0
	Besom staves			7-1-0 Tot = £289-11s-0d
Simon's Stool				
1768	Cordwood	567 cord 4 ft 6 ins	[@ 12 s per cord, estimate]	350-00-0
	Bark	27 Tun 4 hd	[@ 32 s-6d per Tun, estimate]	44-04-0
	Poles	156 Tun 5 hd	[@ 11 s-6d per Tun, estimate]	89-16-0
	Etherings			10-04-2 Tot = £494-4s-2d
Hawk's Bind				
1769	Cordwood	228 cord 1 ft 6 ins	@ 12 s -6d per cord	£142-12-3
	Bark	12 Tun 7 hd	@ £1-12-6 per Tun	20-01-4½
	Poles	70 Tun 5 hd	@ 11 s-6d per Tun	40-07-10
	Besom staves Etherings etc			8-13-6 Tot = £211-14s-11½
Doghanging				
1770	Cordwood	193 cord 7 ft	@ 13 s-6d per cord	130-17-0
	Bark	11 Tun 9 hd 2 qter	@ 44 s per Tun	25-04-0
	Poles	60 Tun 15 hd	@ 11 s-6d per Tun	34-18-0
	Besom staves etc.			7-11-6 Tot = £198-10s-6d