

industry of Kent and Sussex.

The history of coppicing in south east England in the modern period with special reference to the chestnut industry of Kent and Sussex

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on coppice woodland management in South East England, the region with the greatest concentration of woodland in the UK, with Kent the county with the highest proportion of ancient semi-natural broadleaved woodland. The woodland management practice of coppicing has declined, particularly since the Second World War, generally attributed to loss of markets for products fashioned from small diameter roundwood.

This thesis begins by asking questions about the decline in the coppice industry particularly the extent of the decline and the significance this has for ecology and landscape, as well for the livelihoods of both woodland owners and the workforce. This is set in context by a review of the historical background, focusing on the modern period, the previous research into the industry, and the changes in policy that have taken place over the last fifty years. The evidence for the decline and the attempts that have been made to address it are evaluated.

A series of investigations have been undertaken, including interviews, questionnaires and focus groups. These provide evidence that coppicing is still taking place over a wide area, and that there is a strong demand for products, both here and abroad, particularly for chestnut fencing. Claims by earlier researchers that the workforce is diminishing, with the majority nearing retirement, are refuted. Profiling the workforce has revealed the existence of separate groups, with distinct characteristics. These do not operate in the same way, indicating that considering the industry as a single entity is no longer valid. The importance of the chestnut workers, with a craft tradition handed down through the generations should be acknowledged.

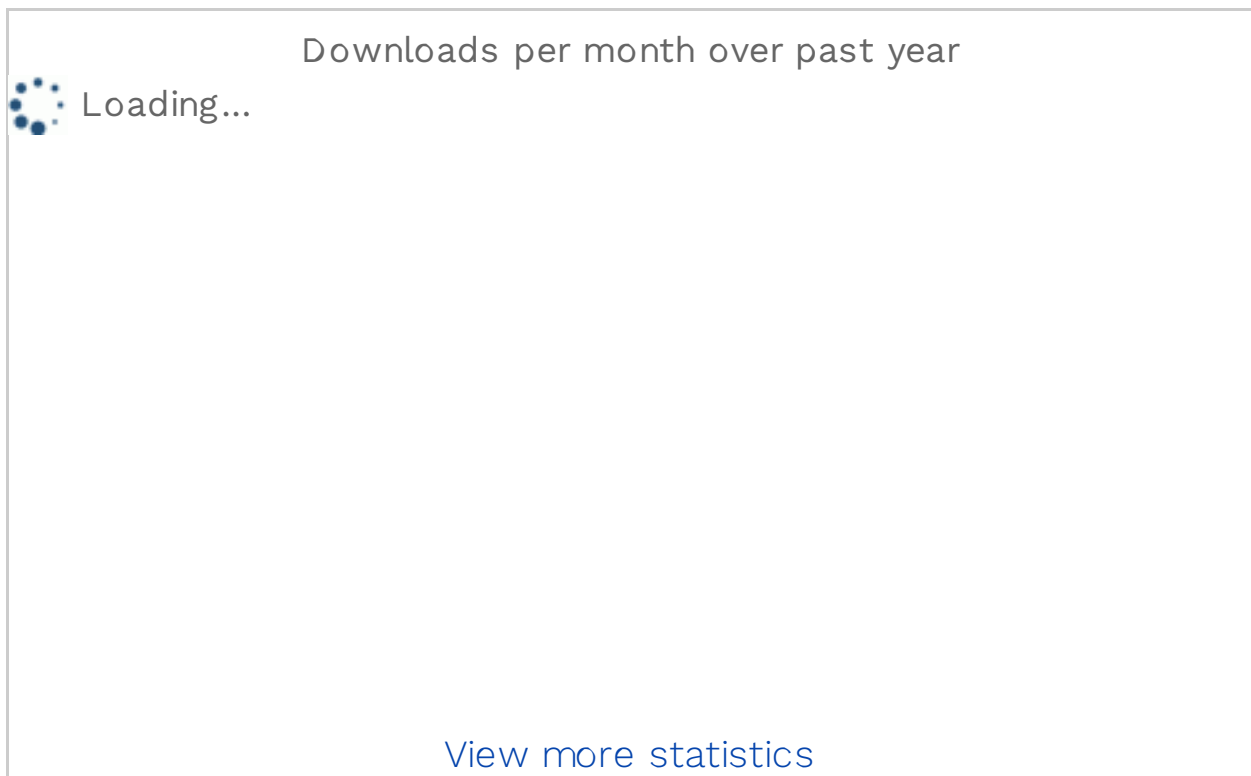
The current political context highlights the importance of involving all stakeholders in decision making. Recommendations are made for further research to incorporate this and so enable more successful development of the coppice industry in the future, whether this is for environmental, economic or social reasons.

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