

Home Grown Oak Utilisation

Felling, Extraction, On-site Milling and Grading for a Barn Conversion

East Lydeard Farm, Bishops Lydeard, Taunton

The long awaited Indian summer, excellent access to farm woodland (ripe for thinning) and the supply and grading of structural Oak for a barn refurbishment project combined to make an interesting and rewarding few days of work in the Somerset countryside for Jim White of White Wood Management and his associate Mark Snellgrove. Notwithstanding the favourable conditions the task was not without its challenges however....



1. Working around quality grade one organic dairy pasture for the farmer, our client Mr Tom Morris, meant that we had to minimise any potential damage to his key grassland.
2. Extraction from a small 90 year old plantation with no access track into the woodland, suffering from — as Mr Morris put it — ‘benign neglect’ and riddled with a wide and sprawling active badger sett meant that we had to find and clear a route in and out of the woodland to allow felling and extraction that would not disrupt or damage the sett and other wildlife.
3. Negotiating some of the longer cut lengths of timber through narrow access points down to the milling site demanded some very careful and steady tractor handling!
4. The cutting list required larger section material suitable for structural use and ‘pushed the envelope’ as far as acceptable limitations on wane (the amount of curved outer edge of the tree) could be permitted in the pieces. We wanted to avoid cutting more trees than were really necessary to resource the building and so a high recovery rate from the roundwood timber was imperative.

The Barn

Awaiting conversion and refurbishment and the destination for the Oak timber coming from the farm's woodland.



The Felling

The five trees came down safely in the direction as planned with minimal disruption to canopy, sub-canopy, ground flora and fauna.



The Extraction

The use of Mr Tom Morris' tractor was invaluable. Three point linkage at the rear was used, with chains wrapped around the trees, to lift the butts off the ground and then drag them out to the woodland edge.

The Milling

With the logs lined up ready for milling, Mark prepared the first one on the mobile saw bench by removing bark along the line of the first cut to protect the blade from grit and stone, thus helping it to stay sharp and cut cleanly....





From Round to Square

As the log is turned on the saw bed after each cut a square baulk or cant is formed from which specific section dimensions can then be cut.

Stress Grading and Stacking

The finished sections are set to one side ready for stress grading and stacking. Recovery of extra material (over and above material required in the cutting list) was also achieved. But note the amount of slab wood to the rear of the picture. Given more time, a modest amount more of material could be recovered (for example one inch boards with wane edges etc.) from this pile.

The work generated some thoughts on the present limitations on specifying and using UK grown hardwood (and softwood) timbers. It is possible that much of the material for the build was over specified – a common but understandable issue given the perceived risks and possible litigation if things went wrong.

Given that we are dealing with a limited, slow growing resource there is a concern that architects, structural engineers, building control officers and the like are specifying larger dimensions than are necessary when in fact smaller ones will do and we could actually get more structural material out of each tree and make it go further. Consequently some good quality pieces failed purely because they had too much wane, the larger dimensions forcing the miller to cut closer to the outer portions of the tree, and taking in more of the curvature/bark. Specifying slightly smaller section timber would have allowed more to pass for having less or possibly no wane at all.

Nevertheless, with over three cubic metres of sawn material (2.8m³ of it structural quality) already gained from 7.9 m³ of actual usable roundwood volume an excellent recovery rate was achieved.



The slabwood.

Thanks must go in this respect to the quality of the Oak material planted over 90 years ago by the occupants of East Lydeard Farm and to their descendant Mr Tom Morris for the continuing vision to see East Lydeard's home grown Oak put to good use and in perpetuity for future generations. 🌲



The finished barn conversion.

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