

Woodland Creation case study

Swain's Wood

A woodland that benefits business, biodiversity, and the local community, leaving a lasting legacy for the family



Swain's Wood in full leaf.

Key facts

- **Site:** Swain's Wood, Riddings Farm, Staffordshire
- **Size:** 32 hectare farm with 6 hectares of woodland
- **Type and species mix:** Native broadleaf including oak, ash, small-leaved lime, European white birch, wild cherry, holly, maple, hazel, crab apple, and guelder rose
- **Date planted:** December 2006
- **Grant:** English Woodland Grant Scheme

Key objectives

To create amenity woodland in memory of the owners' parents that would improve biodiversity, encourage wildlife, and support health and well-being by providing public access.



Riddings Farm is a traditional farm that has been in the Swain family for over 100 years. In 2006 the owners, Terry and Jean Harvey, created an amenity woodland which they named Swain's Wood, in memory of Jean's parents George and Bet Swain. They wanted to improve biodiversity and offer a place for wildlife to thrive, as well as provide public access to allow their local community to further benefit from the woodland.

Establishing Swain's Wood

The family received approximately £10,000 from the English Woodland Grant Scheme (which closed to new applicants in 2014) to cover the cost of purchasing the trees for their new woodland. Working with an agent on their woodland design and with help from family, friends, and contractors, the Harveys were able to plant the woodland alongside an established copse and existing ash trees.

The planting activity saw over 10,000 native trees put into the ground including 3,100 oak, 2,000 ash, 1,050 small-leaved lime, 1,000 European white birch, 1,000 wild cherry, 950 holly, 575 maple, 300 hazel, 300 crab apple, and 200 guelder rose. In addition to these species, Terry and Jean planted two giant redwoods in memory of their late fathers.

The project received around £1,500 per year for 15 years from the English Woodland Grant Scheme to encourage tree establishment and to maintain healthy growth. The grant was used to pay for formative pruning, weed management, and replacing any dead trees for the first five to seven years. The Harveys discovered that trees in their early years need more regular maintenance to thrive – speaking to forestry experts and attending agricultural shows helped them to learn how to care for new trees, and later manage their woodland.

In year five, the family noticed some boughs dropping off the established trees. Unfortunately, ash dieback had spread to a large proportion of the ash trees in the woodland and around 95% of the newly planted ash trees later died. They gradually removed the diseased trees which resulted in a natural thinning or 're-spacing' of the woodland. Other trees have since started to grow where the ash trees once stood – demonstrating the resilience found within species-diverse woodlands. If trees need replacing at any time in the future, the Harveys will look to consider species that are more resilient to warmer weather to improve the overall health and resilience of their woodland to climate change.



Giant redwood planted in memory of late father.



The Swain family statue carved from reclaimed ash trees situated in Swain's Wood.

Creating a woodland for the local community

Terry and Jean take pleasure in knowing that the local community enjoy walking along the public footpaths around their woodland. Local residents were especially grateful for the restorative benefit trees had on their health and well-being during the Covid pandemic.

A neighbour who is a chainsaw carver, was able to use the removed ash trees to create a series of wooden statues featured throughout the woodland. One of the statues is of the Swains family and shows George and Bet with their five daughters heading into the woods. These statues are frequently enjoyed by locals and the woodland is very much embedded in their community.

"We get such a lot of pleasure out of the woodland. It's therapeutic and a lovely place to walk. It improves mental health, it's very peaceful and it's great to watch the trees grow and see the results of what we've done." Terry Harvey, Owner, Swain's Wood

The Harveys are conscious about what they're leaving behind and what their grandchildren and future generations will inherit. Swain's Wood is their contribution towards minimising the impact of climate change alongside the other environmental interventions, such as the installation of solar panels.

"It's nice to think we're leaving a legacy for society. Our sons will keep and manage the woodland." Terry Harvey, Owner, Swain's Wood



A carved wooden statue of a troll situated by a bridge.



'Tranquillitas' statue carved out of an ash tree removed due to ash dieback.



Swain's Wood in its 15th year of planting.

Benefitting business and biodiversity

As well as supporting the mental health and well-being of the local community, Terry and Jean have observed a number of further benefits:

- **Offering shade and shelter for livestock.** Sheep graze adjacent to the woodland and during hot weather sheep are let into the woodland to seek shade from the trees.
- **Creating a sustainable fuel source.** By-products from maintaining and pruning the woodland have been used for woodfuel. When the family comes to thin the woodland in years to come, they intend to use some wood for fuel, as well as selling any surplus to the local community.
- **Improving drainage.** The woodland is planted alongside a brook that can get very wet and boggy: since planting trees, the drainage has improved.
- **Directly benefitting biodiversity.** Since the establishment of their woodland, the Harveys have started to notice butterflies, moths, and wood anemones in their woods. In one area they've planted a few thousand snowdrops (and are continuing to plant more each year) and have collected bluebell seeds to scatter in new areas.

Top Tips

1. Don't underestimate the work needed in the first 10 years. After that, the trees will need less maintenance until around 25 years when the woodland will need to be thinned.
2. Consider planting a range of different species when establishing a woodland as it makes it more resistant to pests and diseases.

Find out more about how the Forestry Commission can help you create woodland. Visit: www.gov.uk/forestry/tree-planting-overview

