



## The Good Life Presented by Chris Yarrow.

Fri 10<sup>th</sup> March 2017

Most of us in the village hall are of an age where we can remember the exploits of Tom and Barbara Good as they attempted to live off the land in their suburban environment. Therefore, it was interesting to hear Chris relate his tale of how he did it for real, not in the environs of Surbiton but in a 63 acre plot near Hadlow Down with the charming name of Wilderness Wood. A forester by background with native experience supplemented by several years spent living and studying the topic in the US State of Montana, Chris had often wondered about the possibility of creating a sustainable life from a wood. He despaired at the large proportion of British woodland that was either poorly managed or simply neglected and considered the Forestry Commission's focus on the sole pursuit of growing timber as too narrow. A better approach that met the needs of timber production, conservation and recreation seemed possible.

After some false starts, the opportunity to purchase Wilderness Wood arose at auction in the early 80s. From that moment, when the hammer came down on their final bid in the auction room, Chris and his wife Anne were on a mission to prove a point. The technical and practical side of forestry was just one component of the process of creating a sustainable living from the land; much depended upon communicating and developing good a relationship with the local community. This is where the correct portrayal of a slightly eccentric character, along with sound business and environmental sense can reap rewards in terms of being able to gain planning permission to put a dwelling on the site.

Success was a slow and hard won battle with many hiccups along the way. The storm of October 1987 was a particular case in point, where numerous trees were either blown over or had their trunks snapped by the force of the wind. Once the effort of clearing up the debris had finished, an opportunity to remodel the site with new planting arose. The goal here was to develop the practice of continuous cover forestry, which avoids the harvesting of large sections of woodland in a short period of time and provides the shade to prevent young trees from growing too quickly. Cash crops such as Christmas trees provided a periodic source of income whilst other parts of the site grew towards maturity.

After 30 years of full-on activity, Chris and Anne decided to retire and let someone else continue the project. Having developed the business and raised their children there, they can look back with satisfaction at having brought back one part of an East Sussex woodland from obscurity and made it into a feature.

Chris' book "Thirty Years in Wilderness Wood" is available in hardback, ISBN 9781784624934.