

KEEPING up with DEMAND

The growing popularity of wood-fuel-based heating systems - boosted by soaring gas and electricity prices - means 'big business for those who are prepared to offer high-quality, seasoned split logs', writes forestry equipment supplier **John Wilson** of Dalbeattie in recounting the story of a progressive NW England joint arb and log-production company.

Holly House Landscapes (HHL)* and associated company **Grange Wood Fuels (GWF)** are located on the A580 Liverpool-Manchester link road, one mile off J23 of the M6 which makes them easily accessible to major north-west cities and towns. The joint enterprise was started by Andrew Burman, with HHL, 16 years ago straight after he left school.

Putting in hard work and long hours, he built up the business into one of the most reputable ground-maintenance companies in the region. Responsible for tending the grounds of many large housing associations, councils and hospitals, Andrew found more and more need for high-quality tree surgery work and so formed Holly House Landscapes - Tree Surgeons. Being from a farming background, he was penny-conscious and never sent any of the waste the company produced to landfill. Grass cuttings, shrub prunings and leaves were rotted down to become compost and supplied to local farmers and allotment associations. Wood-chips were used on clients' beds as weed suppressant and logs turned into fuel for local consumers.

As most of those involved in the wood-fuel business are aware, many people are turning back to traditional ways of heating their homes or adding extra warmth by installing wood-burning stoves. Most of the logs and kindling that Andrew produces are from his tree surgery business. However, he has found the need to buy in wood from sustainable sources to keep up with the demand. Luckily, on his 20-acre site, he has plenty of room to season his timber.

Wood from tree surgery operations is very hard to break down, its irregular size and shape resulting in log production which is labour-intensive. Grange Wood Fuels, started out with a chainsaw and screw splitter, found that it was never meeting the demand. An inspiring visit to an APF show had Andrew 'biting at the bit as he visualised the way forward for his firewood-production business'.

He firstly wanted a timber-lifting crane fitting to his Marshall 10-tonne Monocoque trailer that he had always taken on site to remove timber. He at one time cut all his timber pieces into rings, hand-balling them onto the trailer and unloading them by tipping them up in the yard before stacking.

Jas P. Wilson** of Dalbeattie, Dumfries and Galloway, took his idea and turned it into a reality by fitting a 560TL Botex crane to his trailer. 'This has been ideal', Andrew told 'essARB'.

Now that he has a multi-tool handler, he finds that the trailer easily handles big logs and, when he arrives back in the yard, he unloads them with the Botex, stacking them in place. Because no tipping is involved, the trailer is not damaged by the heavy pieces of timber. Delicate lifting work can also be achieved as the controls are so positive.

As the large pieces of timber now needed breaking down, Andrew bought a Posch 30t horizontal log-splitter. A powerful machine, it



is capable of tackling massive pieces of timber which could be stacked and air-dried in billets and then crosscut on a sawbench.

GWF bought a Splitta from **Fuelwood***** which allowed them to split logs from cut rings of timber and net them up neatly in their bagging system: a high-output machine which is capable of producing up to 100 nets of logs and kindling an hour. The only problem was keeping up with the demand for precision-cut rings and the bulk trade.

GWF looked at various machines and had models on demonstration, some designed for

straight/light timber. 'Many of the machines we viewed', Andrew said, 'did not have more than a 5-7t force and rings would jam in the splitting knife, wasting valuable time in unjamming the machine and making production intermittent.'

'We needed a powerful splitting force and, in the demo of the Posch 301, saw just that. A circular saw and 12t splitting force meant that we were able to keep the Splitta fed with clean-cut rings and were able to keep on top of bulk logs.'

'We found production much faster',

ABOVE: Holly House Landscapes/Grange Wood Fuels' Marshall 10t Monocoque trailer with its 560TL Botex crane.
TOP RIGHT: Tipping a load from the Marshall trailer.
RIGHT: Loading a heavy log.

Andrew continued, 'when we incorporated the log deck and cross-feed system, as it is now possible continually to cut and process logs of up to 13in diameter. I would say that 40% of the time in processing was in manually putting timber onto the 301; the log



deck can now be loaded with the Botex crane and production has now become continuous.

'After crosscutting, the table tilts to dump the log into the splitting channel. Some machines rely on the log rolling off itself in the

round, falling on a tilt which means that time is taken up with straightening the log. Knife-changing only takes minutes and is lifted hydraulically. The powerful 12t splitting ram copes well with knotty rings and we can also drop rings in manually for splitting'.