

GRANGE WOOD FUELS

Andrew and Melanie Burman combine tree surgery with firewood production, have an online ordering system, and even bring in Santa Claus if necessary.

Grange Wood Fuels are located on the A580 Liverpool to Manchester link road. Being one mile off J23 of the M6 places them in the position of being accessible to all of the major northwest cities and towns.

Andrew started Holly House Landscapes 16 years ago, straight from leaving school. Hard work and long hours have built the reputation of the business in the ground maintenance sector in the northwest. Maintaining the grounds of many large housing associations, councils and hospitals, Andrew found more and more need for high quality tree surgery work and so Holly House Landscapes – Tree Surgeons was formed.

Andrew, being from a farming background, was very penny conscious and never sent any of the waste his company produced to landfill. All the grass cuttings, shrub prunings and leaves were rotted down and turned into compost and supplied to local farmers and allotment associations. All litter was sieved out and sent for recycling. Woodchip was put back on clients beds as weed suppressant, and logs were turned into a valuable fuel for the local people.

The Burmans are known locally for their unique approach to marketing. For example, last Christmas 2000 high quality Christmas trees

were staked in one of Andrew's fields beside the A580. Christmas lights were erected and a Santa was hired to give presents to all the children. This obviously worked as all the trees were sold at a premium price.

They sell much of their firewood through their website. This has a highly organised on-line purchasing system which allows customers to calculate the cost of delivered loads according to their distance from Burmans' base at Lowton. As they place their order they pay by credit card and will receive their delivery at a time of their choosing.

Most who are now in the wood fuel business will be aware that with the frightening rises in the cost of gas and electricity, many people are turning back to traditional ways of heating their homes or adding extra warmth by installing wood burning stoves. This means big business for those who are prepared to offer high quality, seasoned split logs. Most of the logs and kindling Andrew produces are from his tree surgery business, but he has found the need to buy in wood to keep up with demand. Luckily on his 20 acre site he has plenty of room to season his timber.

Tree surgery wood is very hard to break down, and its irregular size and shape means log production is



Andrew and Melanie Burman with their new Posch K-4000. The controls are offset allowing the operator to view the cutting process through a perspex screen which protects him from sawdust and flying debris.

very labour intensive. Grange Wood Fuels started out with a chainsaw and screw splitter and found they could not keep up with demand. An inspiring visit to the APF show had Andrew chomping at the bit as he visualised the way forward for his firewood production business.

Firstly, he wanted a timber lifting crane fitting to the Marshall 10 tonne Monocoque trailer which he always took on site to take timber away. He used to cut all timber pieces into rings and hand ball them onto the trailer, and then unload them by tipping them up in the yard and then stack them. Jas P Wilson took his idea and turned it into a reality by fitting a 560TL Botex crane to

his trailer. Now Andrew has a multi tool handling tool: the trailer easily handles big logs and when Andrew arrives back in the yard he stacks them in place with the Botex. Not tipping the load means the trailer is not damaged by the heavy pieces of timber. The controls are so positive that delicate lifting work can also be achieved.

The large pieces of timber now needed breaking down, so Andrew purchased a Posch 30 tonne horizontal log splitter, a powerful machine capable of breaking down massive pieces of timber which now could be stacked and air dried in billets and then cross cut on a saw bench.



(Left) Chainsaw crosscut fitted with hardened harvester chain, capable of cutting 18 inch material. (Right) Melanie Burman is just visible as she fills the Marshall trailer.