

**STARTING WITH PIGS**

**PIGS**

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**Poultry**

**POULTRY ON THE MOVE**

**INCUBATION STAR**

**FREE**

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**Worth £189**

December 2010  
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# Country Smallholding

**FREE PLANNING ADVICE**

Grow your own firewood

Day at a sheep sale

WORKING WITH WOOD

**SMALLHOLDER OF THE YEAR**  
more finalists



**Food to share**

Community



**Homes guide**

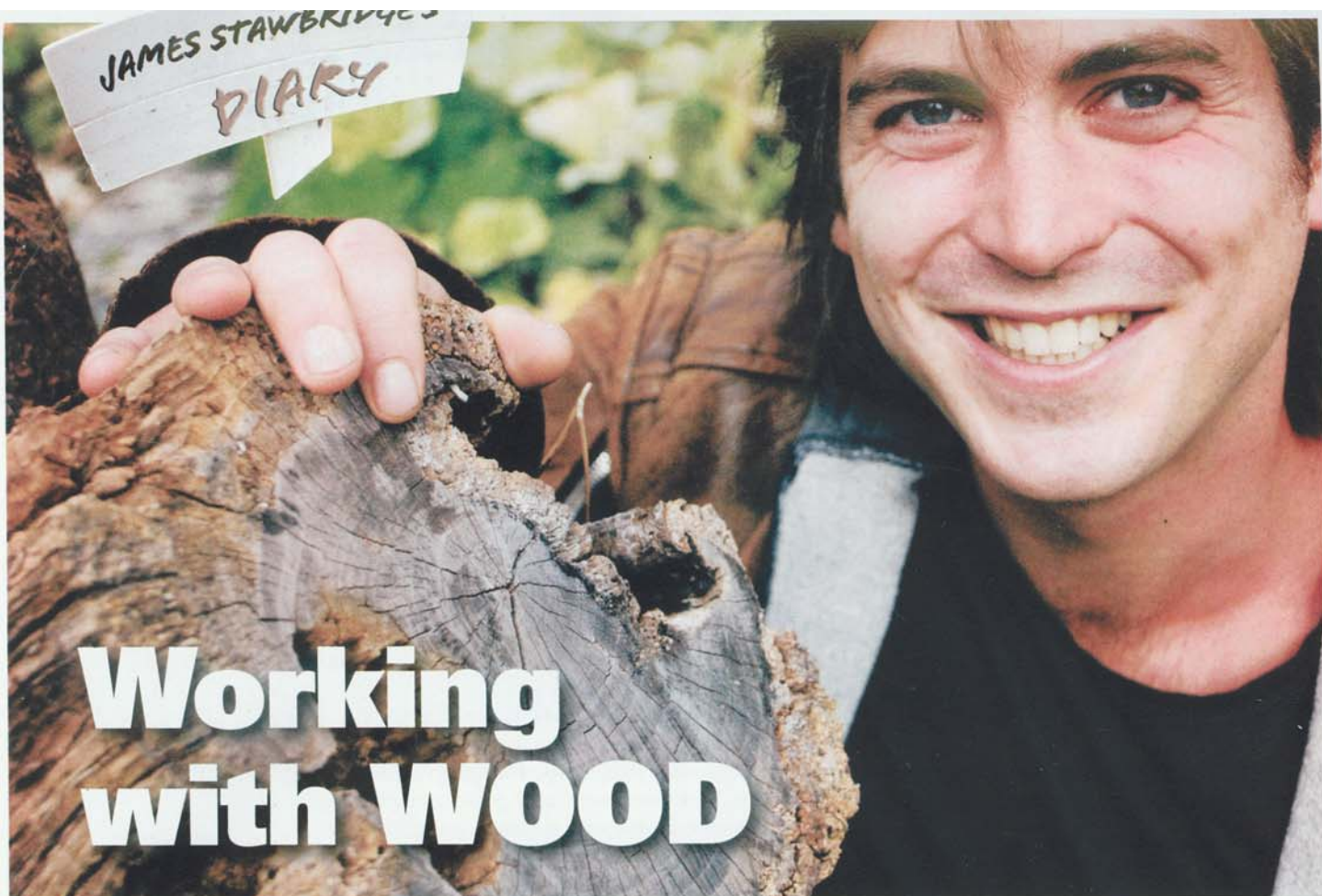
The best good



**A cool idea**

Make money





# Working with WOOD

find that life on a smallholding always takes on a more exciting feel in the build up to Christmas. December is an excellent time to celebrate another hard year's work and enjoy some time off - if you're lucky!

Christmas has also become a time of giving and receiving gifts. On a smallholding, 'useful' is normally the only sort of purchase we make. This is to save money and because practical presents seem to go hand-in-hand with the lifestyle. Here at Newhouse Farm, we slaughter our own turkeys each year and give them to close friends and family as presents. We also try to buy each other a gift that is well made and will last a long time, something like a nice pair of secateurs for winter pruning is a classic. The other sort of gifts that we have fallen in love with are practical learning courses. Learning new skills that can then be brought home to the smallholding for further development and practice is, in my opinion, the best sort of present. Give a man a fish and he will feed his family for a day; send him on a course to learn how to fish, and he will come back smiling and with skills that could mean fish every Friday. Over the years, we have used the winter months as extra curricula time for further development; we make the most of the dormant season by attending workshops and broadening our skills.

This year, there has been an awakening interest in the popular media for traditional crafts. This has meant that more and more courses are springing up around the country to teach a range of the old skills to a new generation. I have been tempted to try everything from straw bale construction to stone

## OTHER JOBS INCLUDE COLLECTING MANURE

In addition to galavanting in the Dorset woodland, I have also been busy storing all our squash and pumpkins for winter soups, clamping the root vegetables and clearing out the greenhouse ready to sow some more fresh herbs.

Other jobs this month include renovating the poultry houses, pruning the fruit trees and conditioning all of the empty beds in the garden with loads of horse manure.

If you don't have horses - and we don't - then it really is worth finding your local stables and asking if you can collect some of their manure. More often than not they don't mind, as you are essentially supplying free labour to tidy up the stables.

masonry, basket weaving to thatching. This month, I was lucky enough to be given a special wedding present by my mum which involved Holly and I going to spend a couple of days with Guy Mallinson in Dorset (*see [www.mallinson.co.uk](http://www.mallinson.co.uk)*). It was such a tremendous trip that I thought it was worth sharing with *Country Smallholding* as a gift idea for any budding wood craftsmen out there...

Guy Mallinson has been making things out of



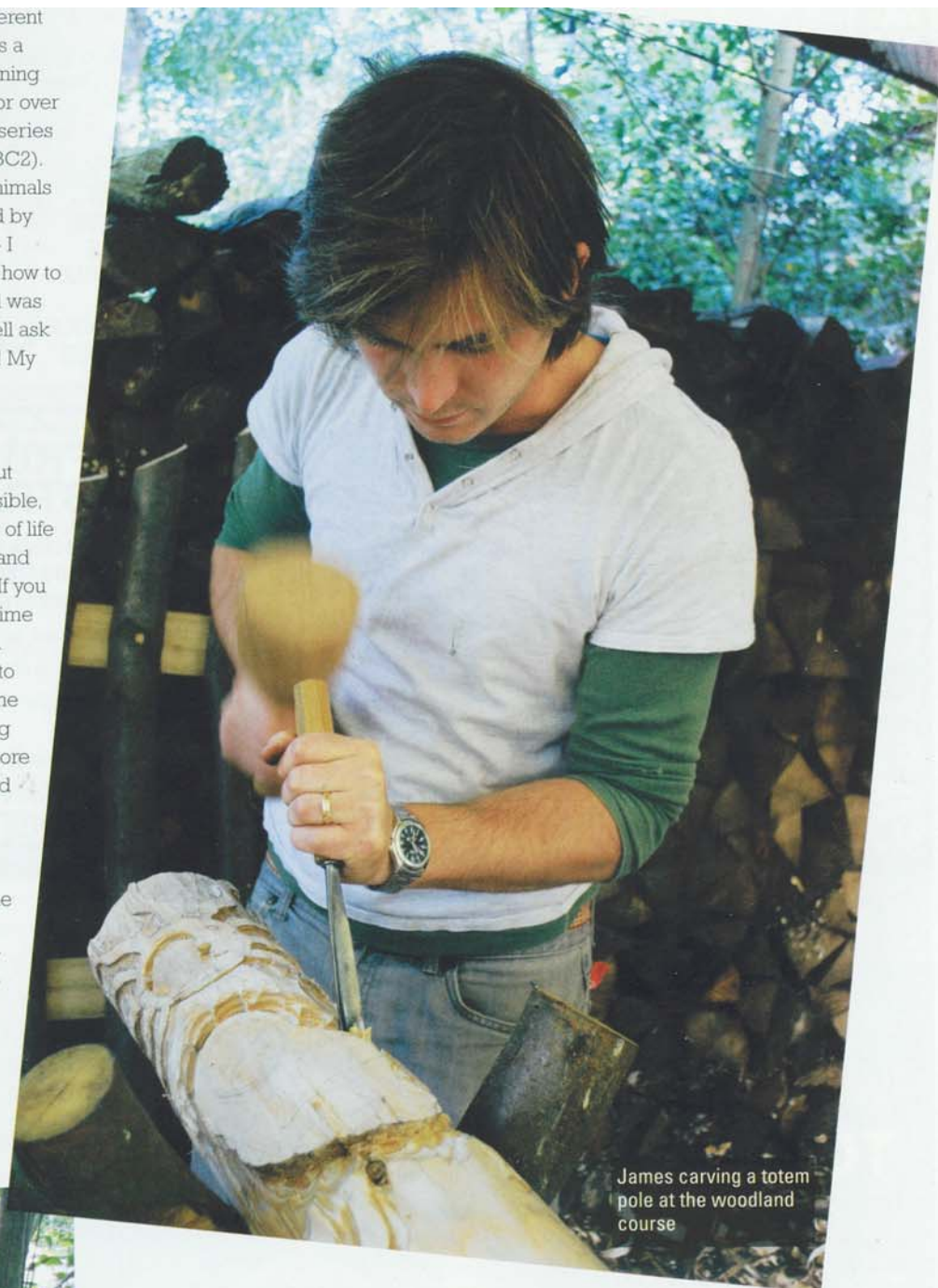
Carvings by James and his wife Holly

wood for years, and discovered a slightly different passion for green woodworking after years as a conventional cabinetmaker. He has been running courses on a wide range of woodcraft skills for over five years, and appeared in Monty Don's TV series on traditional crafts this year (*Mastercrafts*, BBC2). Holly and I drove to Dorset after letting the animals out and arrived in a sleepy wood surrounded by fantastic looking chestnut fencing and gates - I already know I want to do another course on how to make them! The two day course we attended was called 'Totem Pole Carving', and you may well ask what this has to with a *Country Smallholding*? My answer is: everything...

### Shaping your skills

Living and working on a smallholding is about using your resources as productively as possible, but it is also about choosing a certain quality of life - enjoying using your hands to make things, and surrounding yourself with happy memories. If you have your own woodland, then winter is the time of year to coppice and fell trees for firewood. Equally, if you have a workshop that you like to tinker in, then passing the winter months in the dry often involves repairing things or shaping your belongings with skills and becoming more self-sufficient with household materials. Wood carving is a great way to make your own decorations and to start creating your own furniture with its own character at less cost than going to a shop. So, carving a totem pole was a learning experience that has filled me with enthusiasm for woodworking, and I now feel that I have more skills to try out on other projects around our smallholding.

Karen Hansen was the lady who led the course, alongside Guy, and taught us how to use a huge range of tools, specific techniques for carving, and appreciating how to shape wood by working with the



James carving a totem pole at the woodland course



The location for the woodland course in Dorset

## COURSE DISCOUNTS

Currently, I run courses here at Newhouse Farm in Cornwall on a range of sustainability issues that aim to help people achieve greater self sufficiency (see [www.practicalselfsufficiency.co.uk](http://www.practicalselfsufficiency.co.uk)) and, as it's Christmas, I would love to offer a concessionary price to any *Country Smallholding* readers who want to get a Christmas present for their friends and family. Simply mention *CS* magazine, and I'll arrange a good discount!

grain instead of against it. We started with a log of sweet chestnut that was still green (that is, freshly cut and easy to work with). We drew our images onto the wood and then carved it with different sorts of tools which were similar to chisels, but with more curvature. All of the tools we used are available to buy at [www.mallison.co.uk](http://www.mallison.co.uk). The process itself took patience and hard work, but the end results were great. Other woodworking courses that I think are useful around a smallholding include making a chair from a tree, spoon carving and making gates.

The general idea of using the darker months for accumulating more skills is something which I strongly believe in. It often happens that, just down the road from you, will be someone who has been practising a craft for years and is keen to teach it to others. Sometimes it just takes some exploring and a quick look on Google!

■ **Did you enter the competition for James' book on self-sufficiency? See last month's issue.**