

IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

Taverham, March 21

This book has to be shared with wood lovers

It was Chris Blenkiron who told me about *The Wood Book*, published by Taschen. He guessed I would be thrilled to see his recently acquired copy. After his enthusiastic description I just had to phone one of my regular suppliers to order a copy for myself!

The original, *The American Woods*, was published in parts between 1888 and 1913 with a final section in 1928. Each part was a labour of love, compiled by Romeyn Beck Hough as a contribution towards the greater understanding and appreciation of the North American forests. Over-exploitation during a relatively short period of time had made forward-looking individuals realise national self-restraint was essential. The conservation movement and the idea of national parks were born.

There was no particular order in *The American Woods*. Hough must have collected for each part as and where he could. Each tree entry consisted of a brief description of the species, its habitat, the derived timber and its uses at that time in North America. Now the exciting element. Each tree was represented by three 2in by 5in extremely thin sections of actual wood from across the trunk, down the trunk and of tangential veneer.

No wonder the project took so long. Doing it all again was obviously out of the question. Indeed it was a highly commendable gesture on the part of Taschen to reproduce the woods in photographic form for their modern edition. They used the original editions in the library at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

None who appreciate wood could fail to take pleasure in browsing through the pages. The notes on the trees and their uses add interest for the social historians. When my copy came I had to share my excitement with a hands-on lover of timbers so off I went to Taverham Craft Centre to share my pleasure with Simon Robinson, whose display room is full of quality woods worked to perfection.

Some of the woods included are in use here today: black walnut, for instance, as are some of the pines and relatives of our ash. Oaks are scattered through the pages and worth seeking out to compare the diversity of the patterns, all linked to a basic theme as it were. Some we use for ornament only, such as the pin oak which can be seen along Castle Meadow, Norwich.

The tulip tree, familiar in parks and large gardens, grows to a substantial size. Yet I have never thought of it as anything more than decorative. The grain is attractive though the wood was never used for more than mundane, practical purposes.