

Forest SET AND KEEP

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The last great oaks of the historical Ettrick Forest - once a favourite hunting ground of the Scottish kings - are being felled at Galashiels to make way for a new school.

The trees covered an area on the Gala Estate until Mr. Christopher Scott, Laird of Gala, sold land to Selkirk County Council. Now the county council is clearing the land a site for a new building for Galashiels Academy, which celebrates its centenary this year.

Even the oldest survivor, which Mr. Scott reckons to be about 700 ⁶ years old, will not be spared. It now stands alone in the middle of the cleared site.

Mr. J.B.Hall, the county council's planning consultant, said: "Much as we would like to leave the old tree, it just isn't practicable. Building land is very scarce and the site is the only one left in the town for a school."

The oaks in Gala Estate were the last survivors of a forest that once covered about 600 square miles of Selkirkshire and Peeblesshire. Ettrick Forest was a remnant of the ancient Caledonian Forest, and it is recorded that 10,000 buck scoured the woodlands in 1528, in the reign of Edward I.

Mary Queen of Scots was the last Scottish sovereign to hunt in Ettrick Forest. Most of the trees were destroyed when James V converted the entire forest into a sheep pasture.

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