

# FCRA News

The newsletter about retired Forestry Commission employees

Issue 8 April 2000

## SAVERNAKE ARBORETUM AGAIN

**In the last issue of FCRA NEWS we heard of the history and present state of Savernake Arboretum. In particular John Wildash mentioned the unusual Quercus robur 'Cristata'. The article has prompted others!**

A retired dendrologist (aka John White) writes:

"Quercus robur 'Cristata' is available from 2 nurseries in Devon, Dutford and Mallet Court. My specimen at the Westonbirt Herbarium, which may no longer exist, came from Abbey House, Pewsey (Angela Nettlefold), listed as ex Savernake 1917. The full 1993 Savernake inventory is on file with the current FC Dendrologist, Colin Morgan at Bedgebury."

Geoff Rouse also could not resist a response (unsurprisingly!). He says that he was invited to go with John White to mark a thinning in the species plots. The Larix polonika was of particular interest, with the best tree 81'24.7m. He was unable to find any record of this species in FC Technical Paper No 7 'Champion Trees of the British Isles'. He wonders why. Can anybody help? (It's not in my Hillier, or the Plant Finder - Ed.)

Also a retired silviculturist (aka Roger Lines) writes:

"My copy of Hillier does refer to Quercus robur 'Cristata', and describes it as a curious form in which the short, broad, deeply lobed leaves are folded and curled."

Finally Mike Whitlock's interest was aroused. He was at Savernake from 1956 to 1961 and thought the arboretum had been established after his time, on the former Cadley nursery, which does include specimen trees. He now appreciates it was planted before his arrival, and to his shame admits that either he did not know of its existence or forgot about it.

Who would have thought Savernake would have generated so much interest. Can a reader come up with another subject which can capture the imagination? I do hope all these Savernake devotees have a chance to meet this year - and write something for FCRA NEWS.

## A MILLENNIAL NEW START

**This has to be a unique millennium event, to join the many other unique millennium events. Elizabeth Porter, who has worked in HQ since 1985, retired on 31 December 1999.**

Her first day of retirement was 1 January 2000. She will be known to staff in FE England as she was part of the Personnel Services team which covered that area. Her retirement straddles the millennium (except that purists will disagree, as that event is not due for another year). Is this a record?

## ATTENTION ALL HOARDERS

John Grayson is enquiring whether any reader has an ELWELL catalogue of the early 1950s, when up to 70 regional patterns of billhooks were listed! He has a copy of the 1960 catalogue, but by then only 36 patterns were produced. John is a retired forester who was at North Wales,

Bedfordshire, Redlesham and Bardney. He will pay any costs involved. Now get searching you professional hoarders and justify the boxes of papers in your lofts! John can be contacted at 67 Lincoln Road, Branston, Lincoln LN4 1PD.

## HALE AND HEARTY

**Eric Hale, the FC's first full-time Welfare Officer, retired from HQ in 1977. He recalls the traumas of the HQ move from Basingstoke to Edinburgh in 1975.**

"I had the job of staying in the City collecting information, taking photographs, writing a booklet and then giving illustrated talks to staff of the benefits of Auld Reekie compared with Basingstoke. I wonder what, if any, difference it all made to staff staying or moving.

I remember some interesting times when I had to visit every area office (10 in those days) every year as well as dealing with welfare problems elsewhere. Malcolm Shapcott at HQ scrutinised my travel and subsistence diligently - a hard man! I kept in touch through the years with the late Maurice Nimmo and Joe Russell and I'm still in touch via Alice Holt Retirement Association with Ron Brown and Laurie Tee. I try to visit the Forest of Dean every other year to see Geoff Waygood and the Coleford office "girls" Nadine and Sheila, both now retired. For many years I often met the late Alan Mitchell - we were both Labour Party members and I wrote Nature Notes for a newspaper for seven years and Alan took over from me - he gave talks on trees and I gave talks on gardens and gardening. I have always supported the Tree Register of the British Isles (TROBI) and am delighted that Alan's thousands of card indexes of trees are now being computerised.

Since retiring I was, until two years ago, Clerk of Bentley Parish Council. Southerners will know that Bentley is the Hampshire village of Radio 4, BBC2 and Meridian TV programmes "The Village". It is a live soap with the people in it being villagers going about their daily lives, so no paid actors. However Bentley Parish Council has benefited from payments of over £15,000.

I had an interesting meeting last year. When driving through the New Forest I called at Denny Lodge and seeing Fred Courtier way down the garden I shouted "Fred, I bet you don't know me". He walked slowly up to the gate and said "I'd know you anywhere Eric, you silly bugger". It was nearly 30 years since we last met - I must be unforgettable.

# Life after retirement

Or as Charlie Greenlees says "Life after Life". Charlie left the FC twice. The first time was from Clashindarroch as Assistant Forester to enter Aberdeen University where he took a degree in Geography. He subsequently went to Helsinki University, then spent 15 years in Karelia, Finland, where he married a Finn. He returned to the FC in 1981 and was posted to Ratagan. He moved to Forest Surveys in 1987 and retired in Lochgilphead in 1992. He and his wife run a forest contracting and consultancy business.

Is there? Maybe you have fifty per cent still to go. Do you go - or do you fade? You have the luxury of deciding what to do with the rest of your life (unless necessity, as in illness or penury, dictate otherwise).

Pity so many are dying to retire; beware you are not retiring to die. Can you still fill your life? If you "never want to see another tree" you have a problem. Me, I like trees, I like forests, I liked being a Forest Surveyor, the best job in the world I called it. I liked working for the Forestry Commission! Sorry folks, I guess I'm just a born traitor. But look, on fine days I sauntered through forests new to me taking notes and measurements. The occasional occasion, maybe a deer across the ride, a met balloon hanging from a tree, a ruined dwelling screened by sitka. I know, little things amuse little minds. Fresh air and exercise and I got paid for it: not a lot, but enough. Always plenty of paper work for wet days. Now and then a visit from the boss two hundred miles away. At fifty plus no fear of promotion to a stressed office to spoil my idyllic life. So nearing sixty I applied to stay on in the job. "No exceptions" - although there already were some - said the Big Banana.

So forest contracting would keep me in forestry. Besides, on a quarter pension, I needed the money. I had taken twenty years out for education, sport, foreign forestry - the quality of life thing, you know - and in the old days you took your pension with you when you left. So The Wife ("My Wife" if you are not Scottish) being a Forest Biologist, joined me in the occasional deer survey, tariff, forest survey, woodland inspection - we are still available, by the way. So still in forestry but more time for other interests.

I was a serious runner until my fifties when I became a jogger. In my sixties a shuffler so I turned to cycling. Then the pile of large black and white photographs has grown rapidly which means more travel to less frequented foreign parts for more negatives to keep the pile growing and more letters to write to more foreigners for their kindness. It's a tough profession, being retired.

The old FC days won't come back so I wouldn't. Arriving at my second forest way back, the Head told me "you have a squad of twenty five men, I'll bring you their work plan - and I never want to see you in this office again". Changed days. Many a forester must long to see the forest for once - and never the office again. But promotion does not await you in the forest. Time was when a forester understood forestry and knew paperwork now they know forestry but understand accountancy.

Ah well, Happy New Century. I plan to see most of it, how about you?

**And now for news about Tom Johnstone.**

**I first met him at Wark Forest, where he was Chief Forester until he retired in 1984. His propensity to challenge any statement was well known. One was cautious even saying "Good morning" unless it was based on sound climatic evidence! He take up his story -**

After retirement I did forest survey work at Wark for 3 months. Forest measurement was my great interest. I left sample plots wherever I went. Archie Munro of Novar Estate once said "You are an expert like Alex McKenzie" but I laid no claim to that. After getting housed in Thornton Dale near Dalby, my friend Arthur Bowns offered me a job in the Visitor Centre at Dalby and I stayed there for 15 years including 5 years managing the Centre. I was retired a second time in 1998. I enjoyed working at the Centre. It coincided with the FC enlarging the forest shop network and increasing the income. It also kept me in touch

with forest staff with whom I had worked. I was amused at the way that office staff at Corstorphine became instant experts in shop management. It was interesting to visit other shops and learn from them. I even managed to pronounce some Welsh names. Well, almost. Visitors expected you to know all about birds, bees and flowers, but I had always been in production. To speak to schools and other groups was worthwhile, especially the children. It is a pity that the high cost of buses and curriculum changes have reduced the number of children coming into the Forest Centre. In the latter years visitors would recall their school visits with pleasure.

In 1984 I started forestry consultancy with Arthur Bowns. It was really more working than consultancy. We advised and then did the work. Arthur retired after a year and I took on more work for estates. My clients ranged from noble lords to people with a small wood. I planted, weeded, pruned, planted hedges, marked and measured for thinning and felling, sold Christmas trees, tried to keep sundry officials on the right track and enjoyed doing it. I met nice people for whom I tried to do a good job. Remembering the FC motto "A good job, well done and cheaply". In my early life I had a year at Kyloe, which together with forest visits with the RFS, helped me to understand the private estate. I was always amazed at the lack of knowledge shown by FC staff towards private estates and vice versa. I must pay tribute to the private woodlands foresters for their work and helpfulness.

I had a blackout last year and my wife Betty insisted that I pack in. I have continued at the local estate, giving Betty a drawing with an X marking the spot where the body lies. Happily, no further attacks. I have 0.7 ha to plant locally this season also maintenance of previous plantings and respacing of natural regeneration of ash, beech and sycamore. I did a great deal of contract work for the FC, marking of thinnings and Bupalus surveys. the latter was very boring. I have to confess to getting lost at Cropton Forest. I eventually came across a car which proved to be my own.

As well as the RFS I was a member of the RSFS and visited many estates in the UK. I also enjoyed foreign visits to Canada, USA, France, Germany, Austria, Holland, Belgium, Norway, Spain and Portugal. I would have loved to go to Argentina last year but decided that I would not stand the travelling. After settling in at Thornton Dale I became a volunteer steward at the Beck Isle Museum of Rural Life in Pickering doing desk duties and maintaining the farming implements. It took me 10 years to get round the yard. I also fixed up a forestry exhibit. Later I took over the publicity. I didn't enjoy this as it involved distributing leaflets by car. Thankfully, a publicity firm now does this chore. Last year I had to organise the rota for manning the desk. Unfortunately there was a lack of stewards and I ended up with 112 duties. Betty suggested that I take my bed to the museum! Like the Dalby Centre it is interesting to meet people and being in Yorkshire my Geordie accent often calls for comment. Two American visitors hold the record for the fastest time to go around the museum, about 5 minutes! I have a facility for picking out the Dutch "twang". I did a month's chainsaw course at Arnhem and also had forestry visits to Holland. I regret that visitor numbers are falling. There are too many other attractions nowadays.

As I have a daughter in Galicia, I have learnt Spanish, not fluently, but I get by. My Spanish granddaughter has started a forestry course at University. I was quite keen to join the International Brigade in 1937 and retained an interest in Spain. I used to joke with a Spanish friend that we could have been shooting at each other if I had gone to Spain. I am, of course, a keen viewer of the "Sharpe" series on TV.

My life in retirement may seem rather mundane compared with some of the previous articles but I enjoyed the last 15 years. My wife used to fear the day I retired because I had no interest other than forestry and later on complained bitterly that she could never get her hands on the car. I will finish by saying that I have now worked for 65 years and my wife keeps asking when I am going to pack in.

# OBITUARIES

George Dey recalls **GEORGE MURRAY** who died in December aged 74. During the War, he worked on Timber Control and as a Bevan Boy. In 1949 he entered Forester Training School at Glentress. He remained in East Scotland, being posted to Rannoch, Drummond Hill, Strathardle and finally to Drumtochty as Chief Forester, where he retired in 1985. He was a straightforward and decisive person and although he appeared abrasive to some, he strongly supported and protected his staff, the forest and the FC. He was greatly respected by all who knew and worked with him and was one of the many post-war foresters who never really won the acclaim due for the establishment of the successful new forests. He is survived by his wife Adelaide, 3 children and 4 grandchildren.

Donald Fraser has sent in an appreciation of **TAVISH MACMILLAN** who died at Aberfeldy last October aged 70, after a short illness. He was born in Drumnadrochit and spent the major part of his working life in the old East Scotland Conservancy. After leaving Faskally Forester Training School in 1957 where he gained a gold medal, he was posted to Drumtochty and later the Bin. He completed his career on Tayside at Kellour, Dunkeld, Drummond Hill, Rannoch and finally as Chief Forester at Dunkeld from where he retired in 1989. He was well kent not only in forestry circles but also as a talented fiddler, gaining distinctions at many competitions. Fishing was another of his passions. He spent most of his retirement in Aberfeldy where he will be particularly missed, bringing joy to many with his couthie manner and excellent music.

Although **LAURENCE 'LARRY' ROCHE**, who died in November, wasn't a member of the FC, he had a major influence on forestry through his professorship at the University of Wales, Bangor, from 1975-92. Under his stewardship the curriculum was widened to include agroforestry, environmental forestry and forest industries technology. This led to the establishment of the School of Agricultural and Forestry Sciences. He was also founding editor of the internationally successful "Journal of Forest Ecology and Management". Outwith the university he worked with FAO, UN Development Programme, the World Bank and other aid agencies. Students and friends will remember him for his clarity of vision, sound judgement and integrity, but above all for his sense of humour and fun. (Condensed from an obituary in the "Independent".)

Obituaries for Malcolm MacPherson and Sandy Morrison will appear in the next issue.

## ECOLOGY WINS IN RETIREMENT

**Alastair Rowan, whom readers will recall was very much a timber production man in Work Study and South Scotland, appears to have gone green in retirement.**

Everyone I know who's retired says the same: "where has the time gone?", and I'm no exception: ten years have gone like a summer's afternoon.

I had kept on my house in Dumfries, and took up residence again when I said goodbye to Corstorphine Road. Dumfries has the great advantage of being not too far from anywhere. After forty years of forestry, I wanted to do things not connected with trees, but it wasn't so easy. A spell on the committee of ICF Borders Region followed, and one day Graham Gill persuaded me to joint the assessor's team for the Scottish Woods and Forests awards. So over the next three summers, under the able guidance of the late Roger Larsen, I had the chance to see some of the best woods in Scotland.

In 1991 the Nature Conservancy Council (Scotland) was set up and I was invited to serve on the South West Regional board. Like most FC people, I had dealings with the NCC over many years, and it was something of a revelation to see it from the inside. The new Scottish body had to set up its own administration, particularly on finance. Preparing and managing budgets, second nature to FC staff, was a new experience to many NCC(S) people, particularly those who had been recruited as scientific officers, and whose financial duties had been limited. Twelve months later NCC(S) merged with the Countryside Commission for Scotland. The new body, Scottish Natural Heritage, put together experienced management teams who could cover the wide range of responsibilities of the new body.

South West Region of SNH found itself dealing with the proposed Marine Nature Reserve on Loch Sween, which local people regarded with some suspicion. Islay also had its problems, with Greenland

Whitefronted geese grazing on the cattle pastures. The same situation arose on the Solway, this time with Barnacle geese. We spent a lot of time on access matters, and the continuing commitments to long distance routes such as the West Highland Way; windfarms in Kintyre and Galloway; siting of fish farms; remnants of lowland peatlands; herb-rich meadows; how to manage oakwood in Argyll, and many other matters. Management of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs was a major concern; I was gradually persuaded of the advantages of National Park status, despite the variable performance of some English Park authorities.

I still act for SNH as its director on the board of Solway Heritage, a grant-dispensing body which channels European Union and landfill tax funds to worthwhile conservation projects in Dumfries and Galloway. These include footpaths and heritage trails, tree planting by schools, historic churches, and monuments, archaeological interpretation, 'facelift' projects for towns, kissing gates and barn owl boxes - an extensive list.

After an elderly cousin died, I had to trace relatives across the world, and this brought me into the realms of family history. As anyone who's into this will tell you, it combines the fascination of jigsaws and treasure hunts, and you can do it in the winter when the weather is bad. I got to know the General Register House and the Scottish Record Office well, and am particularly grateful to the Mormon Church for access to their records.

My son works in the Algarve, so I spend a fair bit of time there. I rediscovered the delights of bricklaying, and barrowing concrete is a great way to keep the waistline in shape. And there's sunshine (to much sometimes) and good affordable wines as well. If I'm not around Dumfries, you know where I'll be!

# FORESTER TRAINING SCHOOLS

There are many of you to whom the names Lynford, Parkend, Gwydyr, Faskally and Benmore have a special meaning. Way-off days when, as students, those who passed through entered the FC and private estates. Today's forests are a tribute to those people. They were great crusading and expansionist times. Current forestry industries are built on their activities. But the Forest Training Schools are slowly being forgotten. There are few records and references. Past students are fast retiring.

Henry Smith (ex Lynford and Dean) has suggested it would be possible to write a history of the schools while memories are still clear. He is unsure how to go about it, but is willing to act as a coordinator or facilitator. All who are interested in this project should contact Henry at - 35 The Pastures, Kingsworthy, Winchester SO23 7LX.

## ARE YOU THE TENANT OF AN EX-FC HOUSE?

In the 6th issue of FCRA NEWS. David Chadwick outlined the problems some were having as tenants of ex-FC houses.

Bart Venner has information of a "stay put" scheme, which is run by the Forest of Dean District Council in conjunction with the local Social Services. If someone living in his/her own accommodation, needs help with finance, these two bodies get together to discuss where funds may be available. They would prefer people to stay in their present accommodation and not be rehoused, so becoming a burden on the state or local authority.

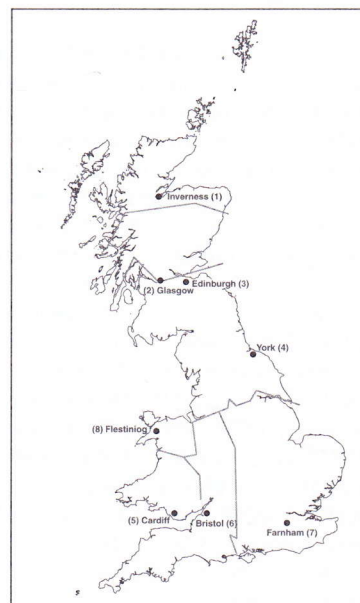
Each Local Authority may have its own similar scheme, and he suggests that people who need help should contact the Social Services or the Local Council.

## WARTIME MEMORIES

Geoff Rouse has an interesting idea and wonders if there would be support for it. He says that during the last war the FC staff was much reduced. Of those people few remain and the number is declining. He suggests that there are unusual, fascinating and entertaining stories to be told of the wartime period in the FC. He wonders whether those with a contribution would be prepared to write it up and send it in.

Initially I would collect these contributions. Depending on the interest and the quantity, I would consider the best way of publishing. Is there any potential in this idea? If so, please send your reminiscences to me-the Editor.

## Branch Boundaries and FCRA News Correspondants



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Farewell:

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Retired Age

|                   |                 |      |    |
|-------------------|-----------------|------|----|
| Peter Awbery      | Faversham       | 1984 | 74 |
| Doreen Baber      | Peasemars       | 1979 | 78 |
| George Ball       | Barr, Girvan    | 1986 | 78 |
| Joseph Bartlett   | Bridport        | 1970 | 93 |
| Peter Bowman      | Tiverton        | 1971 | 89 |
| Janet Brown       | Strathyre       | 1984 | 67 |
| Leslie Brummitt   | Raunds          | 1972 | 74 |
| William Buckle    | Bristol         | 1997 | 64 |
| Leslie Cran       | Culloden        | 1989 | 74 |
| Harold Cutler     | Lymington       | 1989 | 71 |
| David Davies      | Brynhir Llandre | 1985 | 79 |
| Jenkin Davies     | Tregaron        | 1984 | 80 |
| John Davies       | Carmarthen      | 1987 | 77 |
| William Doherty   | Exeter          | 1969 | 90 |
| George Doran      | Brandon         | 1984 | 77 |
| A C W Evans       | Newtown         | 1980 | 83 |
| Samuel Evans      | Devils Bridge   | 1978 | 85 |
| Margaret Ferguson | Glenmoriston    | 1992 | 66 |
| Arthur Fishlock   | Malmsbury       | 1986 | 66 |
| John Hamilton     | Glentroot       | 1986 | 61 |
| Richard Isted     | Petersfield     | 1988 | 76 |
| Griffith Jenkins  | Talybont, Dyfed | 1970 | 94 |
| Julia Jennings    | Hove            | 1970 | 88 |
| Elizabeth Johnson | Fleet           | 1979 | 80 |
| James Johnston    | Peebles         | 1981 | 79 |
| Ronald Keir       | Monmouth        | 1970 | 90 |
| Susan Lepper      | Bexhill         | 1976 | 71 |

|                   |                  |      |    |
|-------------------|------------------|------|----|
| Joseph Litt       | Keswick          | 1993 | 71 |
| Ronald Lyde       | Livingston       | 1983 | 79 |
| Kenneth Macdonald | Callanish        | 1979 | 62 |
| Alexander McEwan  | Dunoon           | 1994 | 70 |
| Lauchie MacGregor | Kyle of Lochalsh | 1976 | 83 |
| Elizabeth McGuire | Airdrie          | 1990 | 68 |
| John McIntyre     | Dunoon           | 1980 | 83 |
| James McTeir      | Lockerbie        | 1992 | 67 |
| S C Marsh         | Munford          | 1979 | 83 |
| Charles Marshall  | Cardiff          | 1979 | 79 |
| Anthony Messent   | Thetford         | 1982 | 77 |
| John Milne        | Brodick          | 1989 | 73 |
| Leonard Owen      | Pwllheli         | 1995 | 66 |
| Albert Parker     | Chepstow         | 1978 | 86 |
| Robert Payne      | Cambridge        | 1975 | 83 |
| William Powell    | Leominster       | 1988 | 76 |
| Godfrey Price     | Merthyr Tydfil   | 1987 | 70 |
| James Riddoch     | Peterhead        | 1973 | 90 |
| James Ross        | Inverness        | 1975 | 89 |
| William Stevens   | Carmarthen       | 1979 | 81 |
| William Stirk     | Stockton on Tees | 1974 | 62 |
| James Strachan    | Huntly           | 1977 | 76 |
| John Sprunt       | Tain             | 1982 | 81 |
| Jane Wightman     | Edinburgh        | 1975 | 85 |
| Kenneth Woods     | Ampleforth       | 1987 | 75 |
| Hamish Turner     | Minard           | 1992 | 70 |

## FRED REMEMBERS

Fred's recollection this time shows how a well laid plan bears fruit.

"There was a IUFRO Poplar conference at Oxford, and afterwards a party of 6 Russians were going to visit Alice Holt. By good luck, at that time there was a Ukrainian named Paramonov working there. I was determined to say my piece about Mensuration Section in Russian. Every morning before the visit I would rehearse a few sentences which he then translated, and I would learn parrot fashion. We didn't tell anyone, and I said my bit in Russian when the party arrived. As a result Henry Beresford Pearce, who by then had become Deputy DG said - Hummel, we'll take you along to Russia - I got my trip to Russia!"

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