

FCRA *News*

The newsletter about retired Forestry Commission employees

Issue 14 September 2001

Alice Holt – 50 Years Ago



When Betty Kirkland (nee Saunders) saw the photo of Alice Holt staff in a recent issue of *Slasher*, she knew she could go one better. Digging around in her dusty drawers she came across this photo of Alice Holt staff in 1950 or 51. It was taken at a social evening in the conference room. Many will spot some well kent faces which

have matured with time!

Some to identify are – Back row: Dermot Bevan, Mike Locke, Olive Harmen. Middle row: George Holmes, Fred Hummel, Tom Peace, John Joblin. Front row: Molly McKay, Bill Wittering, John Jeffers, Thelma Wood.

Others to spot: Molly Harris, Marion Mansell,

Monica Hopkins, Ann Moyle, Frank Deste, Charles & Doris Thorne

Betty has retired near Ulverston, but recalls times in Alice Holt with much pleasure. How about your memory recall? They were pioneering days in forest research.

One Tree

I recently read a review of the One Tree project in the *Woodland Heritage Journal*.

Woodland Heritage was established by furniture makers to encourage good management of woodlands so ensuring a sustainable resource of timber. It has the support of landowners, nurserymen, foresters, sawmillers, timber merchants and hundreds of individuals with a love of trees and woodlands.

The Journal can be obtained free of charge from PO Box 168, Haslemere GU27 1XQ, tel: 01428 652159.

Individual Woodland Heritage membership rate is £15 per annum.

Now the story of One Tree. It was established in 1998 by furniture makers Garry Olson and Peter Toaig. It explores the creative uses to which a single tree can be put. The tree used was an oak felled at Tatton Park, Cheshire as part of the National Trust's woodland management plan. It involved artists, designers and

crafts people, each of whom were given a part of the tree and asked to make something.

The possibilities are endless and One Tree has explored many creative avenues, drawing attention to the beauty and versatility of wood. The timber was milled and seasoned free of charge by Whitmore's Timber of Leicester, who have a commitment to native hardwoods. Leading practitioners include furniture makers Richard Bateman, John Makepeace and Alan Peters; wood turners Anthony Bryant; sculptor, late Tim Stead; basketmaker Lois Walpole; designer Jane Dillan; artists Lee Brewster and Malca Schottan; photographer Robert Walker and writer Joan Poulson.

During 2000 parts of the tree were distributed across workshops in Britain and the finished work was returned to Cheshire. Merrell Publishers are working on a book which will describe the course of the project and aims, as well as cataloguing the works produced. A national exhibition tour has been planned and the project is illustrated on a website www.onetree.org.uk The tour dates are: 11 August – 23 September 2001 Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh; 3 November – 23

December 2001 Harley Gallery, Welbeck, Notts; 19 January – 1 March 2002 Tatton Park, Cheshire; 27 April – 9 June 2002 Bristol City Art Gallery; 25 June – 1 September 2002 Geffrye Museum, Hackney, London.

The Royal Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh has launched the tour during the Edinburgh Festival this summer. The venue has been recently remodelled and renovated to give open spaces with views of the gardens and glasshouses. The project coordinators and the Royal Botanic Gardens were brought together by the late Tim Stead, who previously had a very successful exhibition "The Botanic Ash". His workshop is continuing to produce and a piece to his specification is being shown in the exhibition.

If you wish to find out more about this project, in addition to information on the website Garry Olsen and Peter Toaig can be contacted at 17 Stoney Lane, Wilmslow, SK9 6LG, tel: 01625 533701, e-mail ptoaig@aol.com

Do try to visit one of the exhibition venues, I have already – It's magical!

BENMORE AND THE YOUNGER FAMILY (Part 1)

Readers will recall John Jackson, ex forester at Glenbranter, who gave us an amusing wartime story of salmon poaching. He has remained in touch and was able to obtain a very interesting history of Benmore by David Younger, the present Laird of Eckford, near Dunoon. Stories of Benmore Forester Training School will be still clear to many. We hope to see more in Henry Smith's history of the FTS. The story of Benmore and the Younger family will add to it. Due to its length, it will appear in 2 parts.

Up to the end of the 18th Century, Benmore and the surrounding hills were little more than a vast deer forest, a favourite hunting ground for the Dukes of Argyll. Early in the 19th Century, Thomas Harkness began to pioneer sheep farming in Cowal on an ambitious scale, buying a number of local farms including Benmore; the remains of this early farm building could be seen as late as 1950 to the west of the Duck Pond. It was Harkness who pioneered the practice of allowing sheep to graze at large on the hills instead of shutting them up each night in sheepcotes – amassing a fortune before others began to copy his methods.

Ross Wilson bought the estate from Harkness in 1831 for £8,000, and built a small slated family house near the Golden Gates. He planted the Scots pines, still standing above the Golden Gates drive, and a mixture of conifers and hardwoods on the lower slopes of the Cruach, the hill which dominates the garden. In 1894 John Lamont bought the estate and built the front part of the mansion house. He died the following year, and the estate passed through a number of owners until it was bought in 1861 by an American, Piers Patrick. He enlarged the house, adding the tower which carries the date 1862. Patrick built the bulk of the estate buildings, including the stables block and the lodge at the Black Gates entrance. As a boy, I was told by an old man that he could remember a quay being constructed on the tidal waters of the Eachaig and that building materials were unloaded from boats on to ox carts which were driven up to Benmore across the ford at Uig. Patrick also purchased the neighbouring estates of Bernice and Kilmun, so Benmore's grounds stretched from the head of Loch Eck across to Gairlether on Loch Long and down to Strone Point, over 11,000 acres.

Patrick's most significant legacy to Benmore was his planting in 1863 of the Wellingtonia avenue. A total of fifty-one trees (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*) were planted along the main drive, of which only one has been lost despite the battering they've received in the gales which have caused chaos elsewhere in the garden. An early photograph shows them about twelve feet high, whereas today they have reached over 150 feet.

This photograph also shows the slopes of the surrounding hills, now conifer covered, virtually bare. Earlier, at the time of the Monmouth Rebellion, the Argylls had hidden their Estate Deeds in the Paper Caves above Loch Eck in order to prevent their enemies gaining control of the Argyll properties. The hillside above Coiranteer was then so thickly covered in oak, birch and alder that the forces of the Crown searching for the entrance to the caves were unable to find it. After the introduction of intensive sheep farming, the sheep prevented the growth of saplings, and a plenitude of cheap labour kept the bracken under control.

Patrick came a financial cropper at the end of the American Civil War, and the estate passed to a sugar broker from Greenock, James Duncan. He altered the whole appearance of Benmore. The house was enlarged, and a huge picture gallery added. Recent research suggests that had his collection been preserved intact, it might today be recognised as comparable to the Courtauld collection in London. Glasshouses were erected round three sides of the Formal Garden, and an experimental sugar factory was built next to the stable block. The chime of the clock he installed in the tower of the stables block no longer resounds across the garden, and an electric motor how winds up the clock's mechanism – but it still displays the time with meticulous accuracy. Duncan's initials were wrought in the ironwork of the Golden Gates which he imported from France where they had won a prize in a Paris exhibition. In past days one could easily imagine that the gates were indeed golden. The ruined fernery in Glen Massan dates from his time; would that a benefactor could be found to restore it.

Between 1871 and 1883 Duncan planted 6,400 trees, almost entirely conifers, across wide tracts of the estate, transforming the look of the Eachaig valley. Strips of trees ran from the road on the east side of the valley, across to the River Eachaig. Their original purpose was to provide shelter for cattle and sheep, but later the strips provided ideal

pheasant coverts. Duncan's enterprises also included iron smelting near Puck's Glen and silver mining at Blairmore. Unfortunately, after the introduction of a German sugar bounty, he became bankrupt and everything had to be sold.

In November 1889 Henry Younger (HJY) paid £110,237 to buy the estate of Benmore. He undoubtedly bought it as a sporting estate, though subsequently he found that little of the structure for such an enterprise had been put in place. Depressed by what he found, he wrote in the game book 'This was my first season at Benmore, and there was not a head of game on the place. C, the keeper, had not even thought of killing a single head of vermin. I had 300 pheasant eggs hatched every week and burned the heather carefully to encourage the few grouse that were there to grow in number'. To no one's surprise, C was dismissed before the end of the season.

Pheasant shoots were the main focus of activity with at least 1,000 birds being reared each year. To allow the pheasants to flourish, war was declared on 'vermin'. In 1893, 37 cats, 16 foxes and 3 hedgehogs were recorded in the game book, along with ravens, jackdaws, jays, magpies, hawks, weasels and squirrels. Only 178 pheasants were shot in 1891, but by 1911 the annual bag had increased to 880.

Whereas today there are no pheasants left at Benmore, a few grouse still survive on the hills. Commenting on the 1896 season, HJY noted, 'I put up three sets of butts. Our first grouse shoot on August 26th was a great success (20 brace), but the weather turned so dreadful that we had no opportunity to shoot from the butts till October 13th (22 brace). After this, the weather continued so dreadful that we were unable to shoot from the butts for the rest of the season'. Woodcock, blackcock and capercaillie formed part of the season's bag, though modern eyebrows might twitch at the practice of putting caged ducks in wicker baskets, hauling them uphill and releasing the birds to fly over the guns lurking below. And I'm not quite sure how to respond to the fact that in October and November 1902 16 Canadian turkeys were shot – obviously not destined for a Christmas luncheon.

Rabbits were by far the most numerous item in the game book. They must have been managed as one of the Eachaig's best pools is named the Rabbit Warren. The game book shows that in 1893, '18 live rabbits were sent to Mr Black at Glenfinnart who wished new blood there'. The biggest bag of all was in 1895 when 5,490 rabbits were shot. No wonder HJY grumbled that year, 'The rabbits did great damage to my trees'. It would be interesting to know if the staff at Benmore got fed up with rabbit, rabbit, rabbit on the menu.

HJY was not all that interested in fishing, though he was irked if there were not enough fish in the larder to satisfy the constant round of visitors. At the end of the 1890 season he wrote, 'I found that no trouble whatever had been taken with the fishing in former years. No roots or trees had been removed from the river, and even the best pools had branches right across them. Anybody who asked was allowed to fish, so the river has been fished to death – I refused all leave to outsiders to fish the Eachaig'. Nevertheless, 75 salmon and grilse were caught on the rod during 1890, and 50 in the net. Their average weight was seven and a half pounds, a figure that has remained relatively constant over the years.

Grumbling at the weather is no modern phenomenon. HJY wrote in 1892, 'A most unsatisfactory season. Practically no rain in February, March and April, and an utter want of good rains and floods all the season, leading to an unprecedented want of fish in the river'. Things got worse. In 1893, 'Floods came very late and hardly any fish ran from the sea. There were so few fish in Loch Eck that we gave up the nets altogether'. The season of 1894 proved even more disastrous, and HJY's gloom can only have been partially lightened by the conviction of a notorious Sandbank poacher. With the arrival of a new head ghillie in 1894, poaching became less prevalent, though those familiar with Para Handy will remember that he and Dougie used to go out at night with a splash net to see if some of the Duke's or Mr Younger's fish had 'lost their way to Billingsgate' (How to Buy a Boat).

HJY's commercial sagacity was not displayed at its best when he decided in 1897 to allow a local fishmonger to rent the netting in the Eachaig's tidal water for three years in return for a payment of £200/year and a promise to keep poachers at bay. Alas, the fishmonger set to work with a will and in just one season caught 8,500 sea trout. His contract was not renewed since it was clear he was scooping virtually all the fish out of the river.

In these days of minimal manual work, it is salutary to remember that Loch Eck was regularly netted by rowing the heavy boat all seven miles up to the top of the loch and drawing five or six suitable places on the return journey. Rowing the laden boat down to the boathouse in the face of a strong southerly wind must have been back-breaking work. A motor boat was purchased round about 1902. To start its engine which had hot bulb ignition, cotton waste below the engine was soaked with petrol, then set alight. The same boat was used until the mid-70s. Technology moved on and the new Kelvin engine (1910) was wound into action after opening a cock on the top of each cylinder and squirting petrol into it. There was one famous draw near the top of the loch when a record 85 salmon and grilse were caught in the net. A bystander remembered Mr Younger going round and excitedly telling everybody to return the fish to the loch, whilst the rest of the group took out their priests and knocked as many salmon as they could firmly on the head.

It was HJY who started the collection of rhododendrons at Benmore. He was known to be a stickler for tidiness. Woe betide the gardening staff if he came across a sticky willie. Photographs of Benmore taken in his day suggest a clinical neatness that nowadays might be thought more suited to a municipal park. Livestock in the grounds included peacocks strutting down the Golden Gates drive, ducks and swans on the Duck Pond (the giant golden orfe, peering out from below the waterlilies, came later), and Japanese deer whose ability to jump the deer fence at the edge of the front lawn led to their eventual demise.

Despite pleas from his son, Harry Younger (HGY), that the picture gallery be converted into a racquets court, HJY pulled it down and added the library and billiard room wing, giving the house a more balanced appearance. However, even HJY's deep purse eventually found the cost of running the estate worryingly high. To save money, he demolished the Winter Garden at the east end of the Formal Garden, leaving the 'girlie' fountain to the mercies of the weather.

An efficient administrative system is required to ensure that an estate is run properly. The factor, sitting with his clerk in the office at Benmore House, presided over a self-contained community which was able to meet virtually all the demands made on it. The largest section of the workforce was the gardening staff, numbering about forty. Much of their effort was focused on the Formal Garden with its vegetable garden and elaborate bedding schemes, and on the glasshouses which surrounded it on three sides. In the absence of strimmers and flymows, scythes and sickles had to be used to keep the garden hillside tidy, a laborious but effective technique. There were ghillies to provide sport for the house guests, foresters to look after the woods, and painters, plumbers, joiners and a blacksmith to deal with maintenance work on the estate. The smithy was in action up to the end of the 1939 war, and I can remember making my first horse shoe there. In 1891 the domestic staff consisted of a butler, a cook, a groom, a footman and four servants. Later on, as entertaining increased, a coachman was added, together with another three servants and a boot boy.

Thanks to Lloyd George's fiscal reforms, heavy death duties had to be paid on Benmore when HGY inherited in 1913. Most of the house was shut up, the indoor staff was reduced to a skeleton and the outdoor staff pruned. A year later, however, the old regime was restored and life went on as before.

SCOTTISH PLANT COLLECTORS GARDEN

In a recent issue of FCRA NEWS I gave information about Scotland's newest garden at Pitlochry. To complement this, there is a programme of escorted coach tours around Perthshire's Big Tree country. There are one day and half day events which run during the summer until early October and cost between £12-£19.50. Among the famous trees are Forthingall Yew, Birks of Aberfeldy, Birnam oak, Hermitage conifers, Diana's Grove at Blair Castle, Meikleour beech hedge and conifers at Scone.

More information from Pitlochry TIC 01796 472215, e-mail pitlochrytic@ptb.ossian.net Details of Perthshire's Big Trees can be seen on www.perthshirebigtreecountry.co.uk and www.perthshire.co.uk

• LIFE IN RETIREMENT •

Since the inception of FCRA NEWS, it has been difficult to obtain material from retirees in Wales. At our FCRA Christmas lunch, it was suggested by popular acclaim that I approach John Zehetmayr. This is the result!

John graduated in forestry in 1947 after service in the RNVR. He was Assistant Silviculturist North from 1948 to 1956, writing two Bulletins on the afforestation experiments on peat and heathland. He was founder Work Study Officer from 1956 to 1964 and then after two years as Conservator West Scotland spent his last 15 years as Conservator South Wales and Senior Officer Wales from 1966 to 1981. Readers will be unsurprised to note that John has written about retirement in a meticulous way befitting an ex-researcher!

As I move into my 20th year of retirement I was most surprised to be rung up from Edinburgh after their Retirement Association dinner to be asked to write an account of my retirement activities. After some days of putting thoughts in order, it became clear I must outline the background in three phases. First the ten years when I was working with half a dozen organisations and Betty was doing WRVS and other voluntary work. From about 1991 Betty was slowly developing Alzheimers and I pulled out of most activities to concentrate on those we could do together and finally the last two years when she has been in care, physically not too bad, eating and sleeping well, able to walk about half a mile but not really knowing anyone except occasionally in five second flashes.

So to start with the organisations:

I sat on the Brecon Beacons National Park Committee for 9 years. It was an area I had known well when Conservator and now as the planning authority we tried to cope with the development pressures. I hope my main achievement was to help modify the strong anti-forestry view expressed in the first NP plan, and indeed it has mellowed with successive revisions and changes of personnel.

The Prince of Wales Committee resulted from Conservation Year 1970 and I had been involved since 1968, retiring in 1981. But I was twice asked to rejoin to chair groups of which I had experience – The Award Group and later the SE Wales Project Group. Both were involved with a fascinating range of environmental and conservation projects undertaken by individuals, voluntary organisations, industry, local authorities and other statutory bodies in Wales.

For Glamorgan Wildlife Trust I had been warden of a reserve since 1976; in the '80s I chaired the local group and then was vice-chair of the Trust, standing down when it was clear I could not undertake the work of Chairman as Betty became more dependent.

In retirement I continued to Chair the Gwent Small Woods Project (1979-84) and wrote up the report in an FC Booklet.

A phone call from Forestry Commissioner Roger Bradley in 1984 came out of the blue asking me to take the chair of the Forestry Safety Council (FSC), of which I knew nothing except the Safety Leaflets. For five years, six days a year I did what was necessary, but in the next 18 months a reply was needed to parliamentary criticism of the safety record in forestry. This time 'our officer', Barry Teasdale,

was about to retire and guess who wrote the report! This, I like to think, led to the setting up of the well-respected FASTCo (Forestry and Arboricultural Safety and Training Council) by combining the FSC, the Forestry Training Council and the Arboricultural Safety and Training Council. It was the above efforts which brought me an 'O' in the New Year 1991 for services to Forestry and Conservation.

My next 'job' was a small consultancy, but as South Wales has few private woodland estates, I mainly got involved with trees and development. I closed down when writing the Safety Report, which was clearly going to be a major task. The only exception was marking a P53 oak plantation at Doldowld for free growth, selecting and girdling trees for pruning. Mr Gibson Watt (now Lord GW) had been the Forestry minister and then Forestry Commissioner for Wales. While B and I marked and measured, he and his forester thinned and pruned to 6m. I have now known that wood longer than any other. We are almost at final stocking, we are on course for veneer at 100 years and the records are on deposit at Alice Holt.

So these activities helped to fill the first decade, but in addition there was family, house and garden. The garden of 0.4 acres has been open 6 or 7 times for the Wildlife Trust, the church and latterly for the Children's Society. Last year 10 gardens and allotments made £2,500 for the last named Society on an August Saturday, attracting 700 visitors overall. Plants and foliage sales have raised £2,000 for the Wildlife Trust over the years.

I owe my career in forestry to schoolboy natural history pursuits in the 1930s, notably on butterflies. I have now been counting butterflies for 19 years at Lavernock Point Nature Reserve on the coast a mile from home, using a standard transect method. The greatest number of one species was 325 Gatekeepers in August 1991, while I have seen 28 species, but missed the Monarch in 1999, a native of N America. The garden has been one of 50 recorded weekly for the last six years. For the Millennium Survey 1995-99 I have been recording the local Country Park, and an ex-FC, now Woodland Trust, area where I first recorded in 1970s and realised how rich were the mixed FC woods in South Wales. This survey is about to be published to cover every 10km square in the UK.

The number of grandchildren increased to six with a great-granddaughter in August 2000 adding to the sixth generation of Z's in UK. We have helped with gardens, with demolition and decorating, babysitting, house and pet sitting, sharing holidays at home and abroad, notably in the Alps.

Betty and I travelled quite a bit to family in UK but also collecting islands, Jersey, Majorca, Minorca, Crete, Lanzarote and even Thorn Island in Milford Haven. Also Virginia and Florida to meet Peter's family, then in the West Indies, the Holy Land and Oberammergau with the church, the former perhaps the most memorable week of all. When the Falklands were invaded we were in Belgium with a family whose mother came as a 6 week old refugee to Britain in 1914. I have written up the de Sagher-Zehetmayr Saga 1914-1990 for both families, as a record of their 75 year friendship.

More recently I have made two expeditions to Norway and two to Greece, all with my sister. In Norway it was mainly wildlife, and I was for the first time north of the Arctic

Circle – my previous attempt in 1943 having ended when the ship hit a large wave! In Greece it was antiquities, here I had reached the Parthenon, but nothing else, in 1944. Lastly a butterfly trip to the Pyrenees in July 2000 yielded over 100 species to the experts but I certainly couldn't guarantee to identify half that number again.

And so I come to skiing, holding back to last ... A few facts: I have spent some 9 months in the Alps since retiring, stayed in over 20 resorts in 5 countries and at a wild estimate covered some 3,500 miles 'on my planks'. When Fairwater plastic slope in Cardiff was passed from the City to the Ski Council of Wales in 1984 I became a volunteer 'Trainee Instructor' and remained such for 12 years.

In 1996 I qualified as a 'Club Instructor' and did up to 30 sessions of instruction a year, mainly for children's ski school. It is most satisfying to start them on something that has given me so much enjoyment. To celebrate my 70th birthday we had 11 of the family skiing in Austria, aged 4-72 (Betty). For my 80th hopefully a chalet and free pass in the Trois Vallées; I've had two at Val d'Isère where you qualify at 75. I almost omitted that two years ago, after 35 years at it I had an accident, 2,000 feet downhill head first on the 'bloodwagon' was followed by 6 weeks on crutches. Now I ski with an 18" brace on my left knee; otherwise I am thankful for good health.

So what else is there – hobbies and clubs. I have written up the Lloyd-Zehetmayr Stamp Collections 1865-1995. I have the seven collections involved and am still adding to my collection for a limited number of countries. There is reading and books, largely naval and WWII as I remain Lieut Cdr VRD RNR (rtd) and once the only British Z in the Navy List. To excursions with Wildlife Trust, Royal Forestry Society, FCRA have more recently been added some with Friends of National Museum of Wales and Royal British Legion. With Betty in care I can now attend meetings again including church Men's Society, Penarth Society and Probus. Thirty members of South Wales FCRA recently saw my forestry films 1971-82 and I still occasionally get asked to talk on butterflies and show my films. Sadly 8mm film went out in 1993 and no more can be added.

My sister wrote family histories for Lloyds and Zehetmayrs 15 years ago. In Italy in 1951 she saw the retrospective of a well-known Italian painter Llewelyn Lloyd (sic!). Now a retired Professor of Italian has written a 100pp book on LI LI in Welsh! We know we are related but exactly how? We're working on it with the Prof; we've always known some of our fathers are buried in Mold and we are now back to mid-1700s.

So to the future in 2001; two ski holidays booked, also Italy which will include the Neapolitan Riviera, notably the Greek temple at Paestum, last seen through the ship's range finder during the Salerno landings in 1943. I now have a flat and have given up the garden. I have recently completed my naval memoirs; perhaps next some FC ones? And there are those 80 ship models in the attic from 1937-45, untouched since and needing repair and display; and all the photos to arrange; films to go on video, books unread ... can I report back in 5 or 10 years?

Although many regret the passing of 8mm film, a whole new world of digital cameras and CDs has opened up, old film can be transferred, and ... and ... and ...! A new project for JZ? Ed.

NEED A BUS DRIVER?

Recently Charlie Greenless, our Mid Argyll FCRA NEWS correspondent called on John Rees, now retired to Lochgilphead. An interesting story emerged from the meeting.

John was a forest worker at Alice Holt, then went to Faskally Forester Training School from 1965 to 1967 from where he was posted to Achray (Aberfoyle) for a year as a trainee and then on to Arrocher (Ardgarden). As a forester he was posted to Lochgoilhead and had just built his house there when he moved, in 1982, to Dalavich (Inverliever) as Head Forester. A move to Kintyre FD as Chief Forester was followed in 1990 by his being made up to FDM for Loch Awe. However, he had not been long in the post before he found that the level of paper work and bureaucracy was making the job too depressing to be worthwhile and so he took early retirement at the age of 52.

In 1986 he had bought a large old house very much in need of repairs which he undertook himself over the next decade. Improvements to the house and grounds continue still. He has three adult daughters and is a grandfather. He and his wife are keen on long walks among which has been, starting in France, the trans Pyrenees and Spain walk to Santiago de Compostela.

He decided not to try forest consultancy after retirement as it seemed overcrowded, instead he turned to occasional bus driving; you meet people, it's relaxing, there is no bureaucracy and you get paid. To fill in any spare time he does video editing, mainly of his walks and travels. He seems rather pleased with himself. Pop in, you might get a cup of tea and detailed instructions on how to make a Spanish garden, or help with driving your bus!

Savernake Triggers Memories

Roger Lines saw John Aldhous' note of the P46 European larch experiment at Savernake which brought back memories. He recalls

"In the late 60s I took Stephan Buczacki to Drummond Hill to see the Scottish experiment in the series. In the end his main field work was at Glen Isla and Durris, which resulted in his PhD from Oxford University in 1971. Whenever I hear him on a gardening programme it reminds me of these visits, and as he worked in my experiments I think of him as "my" student!"

Stephan will be familiar to Radio 4 listeners from Gardener's Question Time. He contributes regularly to garden magazines and is the author of many best-selling garden books. One such is "Garden Warfare", or how to reach a truce with nature in your garden. He explains how you can use your own guerrilla tactics and defences, so enjoying your garden in peace.

Spotlight on the Dean

Readers will recall from a recent issue of FCRA NEWS that I was hoping for contributions from the Dean. Bart Venner, our present Vice-Chairman describes his life in retirement.

I had always been interested in Local Government as my grandfather, father and mother had all been members of the Council in Cowes, Isle of Wight in their lives. So I thought I should carry on with the family tradition when I retired. I was selected to stand in the town of Coleford in 1995 and duly won one of the three seats on the District Council.

What I hadn't bargained for was the list of Committees which were available but it was the representation of one particular one that changed my outlook. I had been involved in the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in my work in the county on Private Woodlands. I live on the edge of the Wye Valley AONB, in fact, if my house was on the other side of the road I would live in it. I was surprised, therefore, to be put as a Dean representative on the Wye Valley Joint Advisory Committee (JAC), even more surprised at our first meeting to be made Chairman.

AONBs are peculiar to England and Wales, being put in place by statute in 1948 with the advent of National Parks

and AONBs; there is a possibility that the Scottish Parliament may create them soon. A JAC is involved in reviewing all that happens within the AONB boundary: the Wye Valley is unique as it is in two countries, England and Wales and in three counties; Monmouthshire, Herefordshire and Gloucestershire. The JAC has no planning role apart from recommendations or observations to the relevant planning authorities. It is made up to elected members; statutory authorities (eg Forestry Commission, English Nature, Countryside Agency and their Welsh equivalents), NFU, CLA, RSPB and many other wildlife and environment groups. In all the Committee has more than 40 members.

After three years there was a movement to create a co-ordinating body of all the AONBs, 37 in England and 4 in Wales because there had been no meetings of all of the bodies at the same time and there was a perceived need for such a conference to discuss the future.

This was mirrored by the Government changing the status of the Countryside Commission by amalgamation and creating the Countryside Agency; this body would be directly responsible to the Environment Minister; it also is able to fund in some way AONBs. Normal funding is through the elected authorities for the staff salaries etc.

The first conference was in Blackburn in February 1998, where it was decided to produce a shadow Executive Committee to formulate a constitution and have a proper conference held in the Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester in September 1999. At the Executive meeting on 3 September I was elected as the Chair of the National body. At conference we were invited by the Minister to become involved in the Countryside and Rights of Way Bill to be put before Parliament later in 1999. It actually appeared in early 2000 and we were pitched into attempting to amend the Bill to enable AONBs to be properly funded by the Government for the first time in their 50 year history. After a lot of hard work, meetings with a wide variety of influential groups of Peers, MPs and other interested bodies the AONB amendment was passed and is now enshrined in law.

Now the Bill has completed its passage through Parliament I am endeavouring to meet the Minister of the Welsh Assembly who is directly involved with the Welsh AONBs. This meeting should ensure that the 4 areas in Wales have the same future as the English areas.

My spell as Chair included our second conference in Exeter University last September and we went to the University of East Anglia in July for conference 2001. However, our constitution allows for the Chair to rule for a 3 year period so I am pleased that I was in at the beginning of the National AONB and look forward to handing the reins on to a colleague soon.

OBITUARIES

John Keenleyside has news of two deaths in North Scotland. EVARARD MARTIN died in a road accident on the A9. He came to Britain as a young POW in World War II and worked on the land nearby. At the end of the War he did not return to his native country but stayed on to work in a part that he had grown to love. He was taken care of by the Grant Family from Boat of Garten area, he never married.

With increasing mechanisation on farms he moved on to work for the Forestry Commission and ended up in Inverness Forest District on the forest management side of the operations.

He was a hard and reliable worker. His great skill and joy was selling Christmas trees in the sawmill yard at Smithton. Families came year after year to select and purchase their tree from him; he always had a kind word for the children.

He was well-known over a wide area, a community worker, famous for his kindness to children and a loyal supporter of the Northern FCRA. He was a character, a great worker, a well-respected person in the community and a great asset to his adopted country.

The death occurred in May of WINNIE WATSON from Rothes. Winnie started with the Forestry Commission at Teindland in Moray when it was a small individual unit, famous for its pioneering of the heathland nursery techniques and the site of many of the early research projects. She finished up with Research Division at Newton Nursery, Elgin.

Winnie was in control of the office. Before the days of word processing she was very competent on her Imperial typewriter in getting the most complicated sets of data summarised into tables.

She never forgot to make a cup of tea for visiting officials and excelled at retirement functions with baskets of home baking. In her private life she played the church organ at Rothes and enjoyed music. Winnie will be remembered for her driving skills! She had a little red Mini and came round the corner to the Research office on two wheels, ending up inches from the office building at two minutes to eight every morning!

Winnie was good at her work and pleasant to all the people she dealt with, whether on the phone by correspondence or calling at the office.

One of the loyal types who helped to build up the profile of the Forestry Commission in the early days, she will be sadly missed for her contribution to the church and the community in which she lived.

Eifion Jones from Denbigh heard of the death of REG WILLIAMS last February. Reg graduated from the Dean FTS in 1932 and took up a post in Dyfi Forest. During the war he served in the Timber Supply sector. In 1948 he became forester in charge at Dyfnant where he met his wife Megan with whom he spent 50 years of married life. After promotion to Head Forester, he eventually took charge of

the enlarged Dyfi Forest as Chief Forester.

Reg was held in high esteem by all his staff and senior officers for his sensitive feeling for his fellow men and for the countryside. He also had a sense of community spirit, taking a keen interest and involvement in local activities. In retirement Reg and Megan lived in Welshpool, where Reg became Chairman of the local Horticultural Society and also Chairman of the Regional Civil Service Retirement Association. His hobbies included a wide variety of countryside pursuits in particular fishing, shooting and motor sport. He is sadly missed by his family and friends.

BILL RAVEN, Land Agent at Chester, is remembered by many of his friends - John Gwynn, Ron White and Ted Portlock, who have put together their reminiscences. During the last war he served in the Merchant Navy and joined the FC in 1948. At first he was at Carlisle, but for the rest of his career he was at Chester, where he lived for 52 years.

Bill had a great depth of knowledge on all aspects of land agency and took pride in running a very efficient Estate Section in NW England Conservancy. Having presided over Estates during that particularly busy period when acquisition led to rapid growth in land holdings, his knowledge of the area and local personalities was exceptional. He was a quiet man, greatly respected, with strongly held views. One example being the Grizedale Valley which he regarded as a fine example of the integration of farming with forestry and where he firmly and successfully resisted pressure from HQ to sell off the Grizedale farms.

After retirement Bill led an active life, continuing to play golf, tennis and cricket, while caring for his wife Joan during her illness until her death in 1996.

Following the demise of the old NW England Conservancy and closure of the Chester office, he regularly attended the twice yearly reunion meetings, at which he will be sadly missed.

Ron White remembers him as one of the "old breed" of Land Agents, working at a time when budgets were tight and Civil Service rules strictly applied. Bill insisted in keeping expenditure on repairs and maintenance to the minimum. He was conscious that it was taxpayers money being spent, and it was hard to argue with him.

It was unfortunate that this austere policy made some people see Bill as a 'penny pinching' person. On many occasions Bill in his own quiet professional manner had the ability to calm down angry, complaining tenants and staff, something I found hard to do.

We both called on a tenant and his wife who wanted improvements carried out to their bathroom. On inspecting the bath, Bill rolled his sleeves up and asked for a cloth and some Vim and proceeded to scrub away for several minutes. He then came to the conclusion that elbow grease was all it required to further its use for a

few more years. After a heated argument and once outside, I asked Bill what I should do to which he replied "go ahead and replace the string pull cord on the wc cistern with a new chain".

Jock Low saw ARTHUR CADMAN's obituary in the last issue which brought back memories. He recalled that both Arthur and Frank Best were fine shots on the grouse moor. Jock remembered planning to drain a pond for ploughing and was told to keep away. The pond was needed for fighting ducks and geese. Red kites used to nest in the Rheidol valley. Nothing was allowed to disturb them. No tractors, no chain saws, no vehicles. Nothing to upset the kites until the young had fledged. That's enthusiasm for both forestry and conservation!

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Check with contacts for exact area covered.

FAREWELL

		Retired	Aged
James Allison	Kyle of Lochalsh		73
Andrew Birrell	Inverness	1978	84
John Douglas	Lochaline	1992	84
Arthur Evans	Dolgellau	1993	67
William Keiller	Stirling	1971	88
Wallace Stapleton	Chawleigh Chumleigh	1991	70
Dorothy Williams	Swansea	-	79

WELCOME TO RETIREMENT

Colin Lawes	Llanrwst	Hazel Pearson	York
Christopher Liversidge	Hawkhurst	Maureen Kerr	Inverness
John Mones	Llanwrda	Margaret Milwen Lewis	Aberaeron
Ted Radford	Peebles	Bertram Gailor	Lyndhurst
Walker Scott	Edinburgh	Barry Holiday	Newton
Patricia Smith	Donnington		Stewart
	N Yorks	David McGowan	Lockerbie
Brian Easton	Cambridge	Graham Thompson	Cambridge
Rob Donaldson	Llandeilo	Peter Foulsham	Swaffham