

## Forest of Dean – May 2002

By Bart Venner

Returning to Whitemead Park for the Association's AGM in May was a shock for some but a memory for others. Since the Commission sold it to the Civil Service Motoring Association many changes have been made. In truth there is hardly anything of the old buildings which remain but there were many memories.

The meeting went well with Warwick Payne returned as Vice-Chairman. John Wallace, our Secretary, is trying to escape after five years. He had just convinced the late Calder Miller to take on the post but sadly he died on holiday in Japan in September. So we are still looking for successor and John goes on.

Group reports were well received, they showed that we were still alive and kicking, but there were areas where we should like better representation. We would also like more younger members. The Peninsula was represented by possibly our oldest active member in Fred Beasley, who at 94 drove to and from the meeting on his own from Okehampton in Devon.

Discussions on the motions showed a marked reluctance to keep the word 'retirement' in our heading, so from now on we shall be the Forestry Commission Association (FCA).

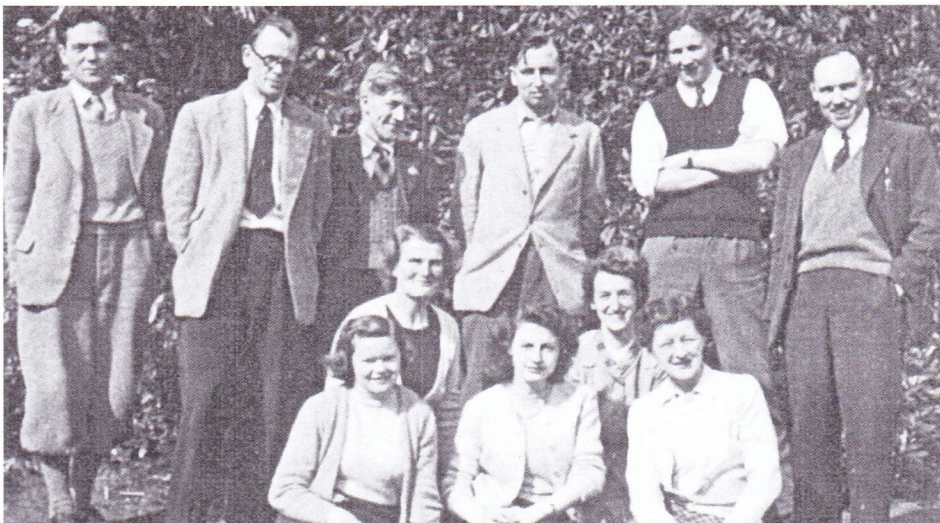
It's the chatting that makes annual dinners the success they are and ours followed that pattern. Jerry Gissop gave us an insight into the working life of the Dean today as an introduction for the next day's tour.

On Wednesday we toured enough of the Dean to whet our appetites without killing us by exercise. We walked through Nagshead Inclosure talking with the RSPB warden about the "bird box experiment" that still goes on!! (Old Dean students please note.) The bluebells were beautiful and plentiful this year. Because of the absence of sheep so far following last year's total cull, Oak regeneration was abundant. We met the Deputy Gaveller who talked of Coal Mining and Stone Quarrying. Then by coach to Symonds Yat to see the peregrine falcon protected site over-watched by RSPB wardens day and night in the nesting season. Lunch at Beechenhurst Lodge was followed by a short tour of felling and replanting sites in Sallow Vallets and the grove of the oldest conifers in Dean; Austrian Pine late 1780s.

Some intrepid wanderers stayed on for a holiday after the AGM to get their strength up for a journey to Inverness for the 2003 AGM.

### WELCOME TO RETIREMENT!

|                    |                |
|--------------------|----------------|
| A W Taylor         | Chepstow       |
| Andrew Cutler      | Hythe          |
| J C Davies         | Llandovery     |
| C A Laing          | Alness         |
| William Jones      | Blaenau        |
|                    | Ffestiniog     |
| Michael Hough      | Scarborough    |
| David Gregory      | Ulverston      |
| Adam Tait          | Moffat         |
| Alasdair Mackenzie | Lochcarron     |
| Brian Eadson       | Mansfield      |
| Peter Empson       | Lakenheath     |
| Ian Forrest        | Edinburgh      |
| William Little     | Newton Stewart |
| Lynda McIntyre     | Cambridge      |
| Leonard Marsh      | Thetford       |
| John Martin        | Inverness      |
| Aubrey Neale       | Coleford       |
| Ralph Nickerson    | Farnham        |
| Edward Parker      | Waterloooville |
| Mavis Peacock      | Aldershot      |
| James Pratt        | West Linton    |
| Eileen Stansfield  | Torlundy       |
| Sheila Stevens     | Innerleithen   |
| Jim Dewar          | Edinburgh      |
| Margaret Greenwood | Farnham        |
| Archibald Anderson | Dumfries       |
| John Ballantyne    | Newcastleton   |
| Leslie Cameron     | Invergarry     |
| Jim Christie       | Crook of Devon |
| Raymond Drew       | Cinderford     |
| David Evans        | Kidwelly       |
| David Giles        | Marlborough    |
| Rex Jones          | Llandovery     |
| Robert Lamin       | Bourne         |



### Who's Who?...

Now who could these folk be?  
 Betty Kirkland's (nee Saunders) photo of  
 Mensuration was taken at Alice Holt either  
 in the late 40s or early 50s. Do I see Fred  
 Hummel, John Christie,  
 Bob Waters and  
 Gilbert  
 Jackman?...  
 Who else?





## From the Editor

**F**irst some disappointing news. Because the FC is making cuts in expenditure, Slasher and its younger relative FCA Today will only appear three times a year – Christmas, Spring and Summer, I am pleased that I receive contributions regularly from retired FC staff, so keep them coming in. They will eventually appear – it will just take longer.

Now interesting news. The Government will be introducing legislation by 2006 to make illegal discrimination on the grounds of age. The FC currently applies different retirement ages to different groups of staff. To remove this inconsistency all staff may stay on until 65 years, subject to the normal requirements of efficiency and fitness for the job. This is an interim measure until the legislative requirements are known. However, when considering the unusual and exotic activities of retired staff, I guess many were quite happy to leave at 60.

Finally news of changes, first with the Association. At this year's AGM it was resolved to change its name to the Forestry Commission Association (FCA). There was no agreement on a new name for the newsletter, none of the submitted titles captured the imagination. We cannot use the title FCA News as there is already such a newsletter for the Forestry Contracting Association. So at short notice I had to think up a new title. It will now become FCA Today until something more appealing emerges. Any views on this or other names?

Secondly, changes at FCHQ. A recommendation of the Forestry Devolution Review Group was that there should be greater integration of forestry with other rural policy in England, Wales and Scotland. Changes include devolving FC's Forest Enterprise Agency into 3 bodies to manage separately the forests in the 3 countries. Also there will be greater integration between the FC's national offices and the rural affairs departments in 3 countries and stronger links with the 3 FE bodies. Hence it has been decided to cease referring to FCHQ. Central services essential to the running of the FC throughout GB will be retained in Edinburgh, and it has been renamed Silvan House. The FC will remain and operate across GB in the 3 countries, the head of each being an Executive Forestry Commissioner. The necessary changes will take place over 2003/04.

### AGM 2003

More details will appear in the next issue, but it will be based in Inverness, probably 13 May, but this is subject to confirmation. John Keenleyside is the local organiser and has an interesting visit planned to Glenmore. Put the date in your diary. It will be great to have a good turnout and, as usual, wonderful opportunities to catch up with friends and colleagues.

## Big Band Howe

**Les Howe has sent in a story of his other life as a keyboard kapellmeister. He started his FC career at Lynford Hall in 1950. He was then posted to Research Branch at Wareham Forest and later became Head Forester in charge. In 1976 he took over Shipbourne Forest from where he retired in 1983.**

I am into music and have been an active player over many years, usually with a small group, perhaps as a trio or quartet, playing for dancing or providing background music at a social function. I play piano or keyboard in the current idiom.

During my time at Wareham Forest (Research Branch) we played gigs regularly in the Wareham, Swanage and Poole areas. We also provided music for a local Summer Show and Pantomimes.

In 1970 a fresh and welcome change came into the music scene; I became a founder member of a "Big Band" playing the type of music earlier displayed by the great American bands led by Glen Miller, Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Benny Goodman and our own Ted Heath (not the sailor).

We have now completed 30 years "on the road" and five members of the original line-up are still playing. The strength of the band consists of 4 trumpets, 4 trombones, 5 saxes and a 4 piece rhythm section. Occasionally we are augmented by male and female vocalists.

Most members of the band are recruited from local semi-professional players, but we have been very fortunate over the years in obtaining the services of musicians from the complete professional field. This has been a great help in guiding us along the way to better performances.

We continue to practice every Wednesday evening as we have done over the whole 30 year period. Hopefully we will eventually get it right! Requests for our services continue to come in. We are known as The Purbeck Big Band and have recently produced our first CD. Not exactly Top of the Pops, but getting there!

When I was posted to Shipbourne Forest I continued to play with small groups in that area.

I retired in 1983 and in 1991 we moved back to Christchurch where I joined up with the Purbeck Band again, who, fortunately, were looking for a regular pianist. Just my luck to continue where I left off.

## The Story of the Forest

**A project to record the memories and stories of those involved in the creation of the forests of Wales**

Forest Enterprise (Wales), with support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, is at the start of an exciting new project to record the memories and tales of those who were intimately involved in the changing landscape of the Welsh countryside during the last century.

During the mid 20th century great changes occurred in the rural landscape of Wales. Economic and social change led to the closure of many quarries and mines, upland farming was less viable than previously and other areas saw the abandonment of wartime installations. Many of these areas were acquired by the Forestry Commission and planted with trees.

Recent work has shown that there are thousands of historical sites in the forests which were once the homes and workplaces of people still living in the local communities. We wish to get in contact with those who have a story to tell. With the help of staff from the National Library of Wales and the Museum of Welsh Life at St Fagans the project will create an archive of memories and old photographs. We hope that many people will come forward with stories of the old days and, in particular, stories about the many old sites and the first days of planting the forest.

If you have a story to tell please get in touch with Caroline Earwood at 01691 671808.

A regular newsletter is being published and can be obtained from Forest Enterprise, Aberystwyth, tel 01970 890500.

## WARRENERS TOGETHER

I received an interesting letter from Les Purver who retired in 1978 as Senior Ranger and who now lives with his wife at Newark. He recalled his early days of the FC which he joined in 1957 as a warrener. He covered Crowthorne and Ascot Woods using a tradesman's bicycle, but later qualified for a gent's cycle while covering part of Bramshill Forest. It was there he was joined by Les Knight and they were allowed to use his car after taking over Alice Holt Forest. They worked in many woods and travelled hundreds of miles together. It was a sad occasion when Les died in 1996 as he was never happier than when he was working. His wife May died soon after. Les said that although he bought his ex-FC house at Crowthorne he wanted to move to Newark to be near family.



# More on Bothies and Vacations...

**D**avid Paterson's account of bothy days has encouraged two further contributions. The first was from John Keenleyside who recalled the Dublin Bothy in Ardross Forest. This will appear in 3 or 4 parts, so readers will have to wait. Stan Forrester, now retired to Strathcarron, sent in the other contribution – here it is.

My bothy stories go back a little earlier than those described by David Paterson. I had better accommodation, but being in wartime conditions, there were difficulties caused by the rationing of food.

Strangely my early experiences of work with the Forestry Commission involved Inverliever, and the other forests of the Loch Awe District in Argyll, to which I was to be posted twenty years later as District Officer.

I cannot remember whether it was in 1941 or 1942 that the Boy Scout authorities in Edinburgh arranged that we would contribute to the war effort with a lumber camp. Based in Inverliever Lodge, the accommodation was partly under canvas, but after our first week we could apply to be housed in the Lodge itself. There must have been over a hundred of us in camp at any one time, each of us spending at least a fortnight in camp to justify the cost of our transport, and the initial day or two learning what was expected of us.

It was very much unskilled labouring. All I can remember was manhandling poles out of the plantation to the ridside, and into a chute which shot the logs down to the lochside. A horse dragged the poles out from the heap by the shore – these were made up into rafts for hauling across the loch to the sawmill, from which tons of pitprops were dispatched to the railhead at Dalmally.

One of the domestic arrangements comes to mind. Each patrol took turns as orderlies. A major job was peeling potatoes. On my first stint I wondered what would happen if we had not finished the job in time

for the evening dinner. There was no problem – we were peeling the potatoes for the next day.

Transport up the loch to the work site was by boat, the old Blackcock, which I was to know again. It was in 1945, five students from Edinburgh found ourselves working during the summer term on Eredine and Inverliever. Old hands will have heard at least two of the names – Bill Mutch and Myles Crooke were in academic posts in Scotland. Ian Wilson and Ian Bulmer went abroad – I have heard nothing of them since those days.

The bothy was a forest worker's house of 1930s vintage at Eredine. Our cook was a worker's wife from next door. A staple of our diet was porridge, for breakfast and for our evening dinner – oatmeal was not rationed, and there was an ample milk supply from a nearby farm.

At first we were condemned to weeding in Eredine nursery with all the insect horrors which Dave Paterson describes. Later we were released into the forest, brashing Sitka spruce planted by the Office of Woods before the FC took over.

Again it was the domestic, and particularly the social life, that sticks in mind. Thermos flasks were not easy to acquire. We brewed tea in tin cans over a fire in the nursery or out in the forest. We did not burn the forest down but I wonder how many cases of group dying we left behind round our fires.

We were not plagued by Irish navvies – a group of Timber corps girls in Inverliever Lodge were after us. There was a shortage of young men and when we had not turned up at a local dance the girls took us in hand. We were invited round for a Sunday afternoon tea. Their idea was to teach us some of the usual barn dances – Pride of Erin, Strip the Willow and so on.

We usually had a Saturday afternoon or evening run in the lorry into Lochgilphead to the shops and the cinema, or perhaps to a dance. However, the highlights of our spell

were linked to the end of the war. We celebrated VE day with a massive bonfire and a real barn dance in the nearby farm. That proved to be only the half of it.

Jock Maclaren, whose wife lived next door to our bothy, was captured when the 51st Highland Division was surrounded at St Valery in 1940. While we rejoiced at the end of the war, Mrs Maclaren was worried. There had been no news of Jock for some time. In fact his POW camp had been overrun by the Russians and the Red Cross lines of communication were broken. We heard the first news of Jock a week after VE day as we came down from the forest after work – he was in this country. We built a bonfire even bigger than that of the previous week. More news – Jock was actually on his way home.

We despatched couriers to Inverliever Lodge for the girls, to nearby hamlets for the musicians, piper, fiddler and accordionist. The women, meantime, got on with the baking – no one asked where they got supplies. More news – the mail train would make a special stop to let Jock off at Dalmally. The local hire car volunteered her services.

All was set. We watched for the headlights coming down the loch. Matches were applied to the petrol and diesel which we had splashed on the fire. The blaze reached its height as the car stopped at the bottom of the road and Jock was carried shoulder high on his last hundred yards home, led by the piper. Tea and sandwiches, and scones and cakes were consumed in quantity. What did it matter that it was three o'clock in the morning.

At seven o'clock the celebrations were concluded with an eightsome reel on what passed for the village green. We served the girls a breakfast of burnt porridge and boiled eggs. Off we went to work.

It was a sad day, twenty years later, to see Inverliever Lodge set on fire to get rid of the woodworm and dry rot, after which the army engineers used the ruins for demolition exercises.

## WANTED CYCLE RANGERS

I know many of you are keen cyclists. Sustrans is looking for volunteer rangers to look after sections of the National Cycle Network. Retirees do so many varied and unusual things that I am sure this will appeal to some. It is an opportunity to meet other interesting people.

Contact: Sustrans Volunteer Programme, FREEPOST SWB 1314, Bristol BS1 4ZZ ([www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk))

## The Man from Tiree...

James Anderson Bickley from West Argyll Forest District, at Lochgilphead, has written in to tell of Calum MacClounnan's grand retirement party in February at Dalavich Social Club. His career has been immortalised in verse!

*Down to Eredine came the man from Tiree  
Joining the ranks of the famous 'FC'  
I started off planting, tree by tree  
A happy young man, the man from Tiree.*

*Then to Dalavich, I thought it was braw  
They took me off planting and gave me a saw  
I oiled it and filed it lots every day  
I thought "This is brilliant, I'm on this to stay".*

*But alas, off the saw and on to the winch  
A job that came easy, to me just a synch  
With Jeff at my side, it was easy for me  
This happy wee man, the man from Tiree.*

*During my winch years with 'Jazz' in Aviemore  
The Star was our pub, we drunk drams galore  
But one night went wrong, we discovered with fright  
Our women at our digs, they'd been there half the night!*

*Then to Carradale with Richard, I had to do well  
Tree felling the aim, (a few drams as well)  
Perhaps I was destined not to stay away  
For back home I was bound and this time to stay.*

*Then things went haywire, nothing could last  
But 'Buntin' was the man, he moved in fast  
He got me back planting, where I was first of all  
But the damage was done, my career was to fall.*

*This day was coming, but let's not be sad  
Let's all be happy, let's all be glad  
We spent time together, through many a year  
It's time now to celebrate with fun, laughs and cheer.*

*So now I will ask you to join in with me  
And charge up your glasses with the auld 'barley brie'  
My friends the years in the famous 'FC'  
Let's all get blootered with the man from Tiree.*



## OBITUARIES

**FRED PEACHEY's** wife Rosalie recalls his eventful life. After the war, on demobilisation, he joined the FC where he remained until his retirement in 1975. He was awarded the BEM for services to forestry, which included active membership of the Forestry Section of the National Union of Allied Agricultural Workers. On retirement he took up active community work and was a long-serving councillor at Winchester. He served on many bodies and committees including the Forestry Training Council, the Hampshire County Council Countryside Panel, and chaired the National Forestry Advisory Committee. He became mayor of Winchester in 1983. Besides all these activities he was a keen gardener and travelled widely.

**BERTRAM REGINALD's** wife, who lives near Chepstow, told me that he died recently aged 90. They were happily married for 66 years. On retirement in 1977 he received a Long Service Certificate for 51 years and later the Queen's Silver Jubilee Medal.

Arnold Grayson has written a lengthy obituary for **DAVID JOHNSTON** for the International Forestry Review. Part is reproduced here.

He died at Midhurst on 15 July as a result of complications following Parkinson's disease. He dealt with his illness with characteristic bravery, observing to the writer once that he had become quite an expert in falling.

After release from the service in 1946, where he was a Fleet Air Arm pilot, he went up to Lincoln College, Oxford in 1949 and proceeded to get a First in Honour Moderations in one year, a year less than the normal time. Graduating in 1952 with a First in Forestry, he applied for a job as a District Officer in the Forestry Commission, serving in that position in South East England from 1953 to 1957. In that year Fred Hummel and Henry Beresford-Peirse, then, respectively, Mensuration Officer and Deputy Director General, decided that the management side of the

Commission should be built up and David Johnston was invited to take on the economist role. He declined that appointment, favouring instead the more practically orientated post of Working Plans Officer. Here, and through his subsequent time from 1961 to 1966 as Head of Planning and Economics Branch, his influence on Forestry Commission practice was to become massive. In this phase of his career he developed the more flexible system of working plans that became standard in the Commission, as well as the concepts of Yield Class and Production Class, their application to production forecasting, and the preparation of the necessary guides and drills for field use. He also built up a team of keen workers in Planning and Economics, set out clear goals, saw the work through to its conclusion, required written reports to be of the highest standard of English and at all times demonstrated a clear-minded determination to get the Branch to where he wanted it to be. It was altogether an exciting, rewarding period.

Obviously he was destined for greater things and in order to widen his experience he was posted to East England Conservancy as Assistant Conservator in charge of forest management. This was a time when the objects of British forest creation and management were clear-cut – or so it appeared – and with characteristic zeal he proceeded to ordain the removal on economic grounds of the broadleaved component of the many mixed stands in the Conservancy. Even at the time this determined action raised a few eyebrows. Promotion to Conservator followed with appointment as Deputy Head of Management Services, and two years later a further promotion led to David becoming Director of Management Services covering Working Plans and Surveys, Organisation and Methods, Work Study, and Economics.

In 1974 David succeeded George Holmes as Director of Research and Development, still based at Alice Holt and managing the traditional research fields, plus work study and working plans and surveys. This phase of his career was marked by a number of initiatives aimed at making the use of research resources more effective. These ranged from contracts undertaken and commissioned research, to leadership of a European Economic Community programme on wood as a raw material, and to the position of Deputy Coordinator of Division 4 of the International Union of Forest Research Organisations. At international meetings David could be relied upon to make pithy, incisive contributions. He said, politely but forcefully, what he meant and meant every word of what he said.

During all his time at Alice Holt he was an active sailor and increasingly a highly accomplished amateur cabinet maker. His work in this field has to be seen to be believed, it is wide in range as well as in number of pieces. To encourage others to undertake this expert work his enthusiasm led in due course to the publication of books on the craft of furniture-making, and a woodworker's guide to wood. All this effort typified his orderly approach to jobs as well as his determination to achieve perfect results.

David Johnston made a decisive contribution to British forestry at a time when the forest service was being pushed harder than ever before by Treasury to make its work more cost-effective and when major investments in new mills depended on the state sector providing soundly-based forecasts of wood production. He was a man of brilliance, allied with immense integrity and we mourn his loss.

Obituaries for Graham Semple, Bill Grant, Alan Freether and Calder Miller will appear in the next issue.

### FAREWELL

|                         |               | Retired | Aged |
|-------------------------|---------------|---------|------|
| Tony Tyres              | Devizes       | 1994    | 68   |
| George Clayton          | Middlesbrough | 1970    | 92   |
| William Craig           | Alloa         | 1976    | 90   |
| Dorothy Edmondson       | Bristol       | 1988    | 76   |
| John Evans              | Llanrumney    | 1961    | 74   |
| Bryan Gwilliam          | North Walsham | 1993    | 68   |
| Michael Harker          | Masham        | 1980    | 81   |
| Gwilym Harker           | Rhuthin       | 1980    | 81   |
| Maureen Mannings        | Cardiff       | 1977    | 64   |
| James Morrison          | Kinlochard    | 1990    | 64   |
| G Roberts               | Grimsby       | 1972    | 84   |
| Tecwyn Roberts          | Betwys-y-Coed | 1993    | 71   |
| Albert Robertson-Turner | Cruden Bay    | 1983    | 75   |
| Almond Skeard           | Huntley       | 1980    | 83   |
| Kenneth Snook           | Bovey Tracey  | 1976    | 86   |
| Frank Whatmore          | Shrewsbury    | 1972    | 94   |
| John Welsh              | Cramlington   | 1954    | 96   |
| Cecil Buck              | Kelvedon      | 1981    | 86   |
| John Chree              | Inverness     | 1985    | 76   |
| Alexander Crabtree      | Tayport       | 1982    | 82   |
| Arthur Crook            | Thetford      | 1969    | 98   |
| David Elliott           | Hexham        | 1991    | 72   |
| Lambert Harrison        | Airdrie       | 1984    | 63   |
| Joseph Hodgeson         | Ebberston     | 1978    | 88   |
| Lauchlan Low            | Peterhead     | 1997    | 70   |
| C J Millard             | East Calder   | 1973    | 74   |
| Richard Smith           | Liphook       | 1965    | 97   |
| Calder Miller           | Edinburgh     | 2001    | 61   |

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Check with contacts for exact area covered.

