



## Dean School Centenary

By Bart Venner

A slice of Forestry Commission history was made on 4th October 2003 with the commemoration of the start of forester training at Parkend in the Forest of Dean in January 1904.

On a wonderful early Autumn morning, there was a tour of the Dean Forester Training School. Nostalgia reigned supreme as some forty old boys re-entered the rooms which had previously been dormitories. Bed spaces were venerated and past members recalled. Then two coaches took the old students with their wives or partners to Nagshead to remember days spent in the Nursery, and to inspect the new RSPB Information Centre constructed entirely from Dean timber by sawmillers and builders in the Forest.

Then it was away to Beechenhurst recreation area previously, when many were at the School, an old Dean Coal Mine. It was levelled in 1963/64 and Bart Venner told of the hand grass seeding which he carried out with Jack Jennings and John Brain. Gerry Gissop, Dean Forest Recreation Officer, an ex-Dean student spoke about the proposed expansion of the site to cater for the ever increasing visitor numbers. A climb to the top of the New Fancy Colliery tip, part of which was removed to create the base foundations of Llanwern Steelworks, gave a wonderful panoramic view from the centre

of the forest. The final call of the morning was to the Rising Sun pub at Moseley Green, a watering hole for many students over the years.

The evening was the culmination of the day with a dinner for 128 ex-Dean students and their wives. In fact 74 were ex-students, ranging from Fred Beasley at almost 96 in school 1928-1930, to members who were in at the closure in 1971; some still at work for the Commission.

Photographers both professional and amateur were on hand to record the day. A report will follow in 'The Forester' newspaper in mid-October and photographs will be available through Bart Venner when produced.

Bart read letters of appreciation and sorrow for non-attendance from ex-students all over the world. Ham Gifford, who had travelled from Rotorua New Zealand for the occasion, spoke of all his known contacts in Australia and New Zealand.

As you can imagine, the chance for some to meet their classmates last seen 40 or 50 years ago, was a joy to behold. Talking went on all day and into Sunday morning, probably also in the pubs and guest houses where many of them stayed for the night or the weekend.

It was a memorable and unforgettable reunion of foresters who have had a major impact and influence on British forestry.

## Attention All Tool Hoarders!

**I KNOW YOU ARE OUT THERE!** Can I tell you about a very worthwhile organisation which you can support called Tools for Self Reliance (TFSR). Its main aim is to empower artisans working in developing countries so they can better participate in the development of themselves and their communities. People in wealthy countries can make a contribution to those efforts.

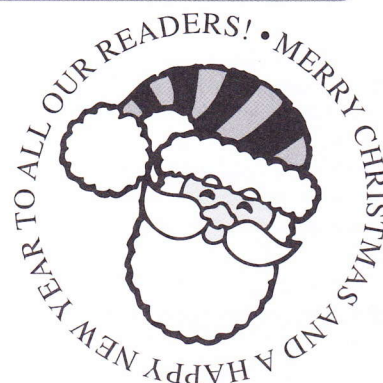
Carpenters, blacksmiths and other artisans have great difficulty in obtaining good quality hand tools. In the UK there are millions of unwanted hand tools lying around in lofts and sheds. If you deliver these surplus tools to a TFSR workshop they will be refurbished, made up into kits and shipped to countries in Africa and Central America.

There are 65 volunteer groups in the UK which have been collecting and refurbishing hand tools for up to 20 years. Last year 752

tool kits were shipped abroad. The volunteers who prepare the tool kits are mostly retired folk with much skill and enthusiasm. They are able to turn the most unappealing scrap into useful tools! The Edinburgh workshop also provide work experience and college qualifications for young people with learning disabilities. I am a tool collector in the Edinburgh area and the local FCA Group has provided many surplus items.

Most of the workshops are in the English Midlands and Home Counties, but there may be a centre near you. You could make a contribution now, or even become a collector yourself of old tools for your neighbourhood.

More details from TFSR, Ringwood Road, Netley Marsh, Southampton SO40 7GY, Tel 02380 869697 and [www.tfsr.org](http://www.tfsr.org)



## WELCOME TO RETIREMENT!

|                   |                 |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| Monica MacGregor  | Ely             |
| Hugh Price        | Merthyr Tydfil  |
| Richard Varney    | Bury St Edmunds |
| Bob Hands         | Dawlish         |
| Thelma Smalley    | Farnham         |
| Brian Lloyd Jones | Brecon          |
| Martin Fletcher   | Brockenhurst    |
| Griffith Davies   | Corris          |
| R C Currie        | Minnigaff       |
| John Cubby        | Wigton          |
| John Budd         | Alton           |
| Cyril Watt        | Ludlow          |
| George Francey    | Taynuilt        |
| Graham Robertson  | West Calder     |

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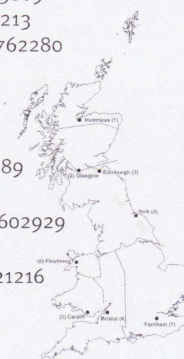
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Check with contacts for exact area covered.





## From the Editor

I knew when I opened the recent issue of *Slasher* that Jock Low would soon be in contact! He had seen things rediscovered by the FC which were the same as those he had been involved in way back.

First – timber shutes. He has already written about these in past issues of *FCA Today*. Readers will recall his stories of logs riding like javelins down aluminium shutes in Dyfi. He also tried clay and earth shutes, but sawmillers complained about dirt and stones in the logs. Second – log cabins. These were put up in Strathgryne in the mid 60s and a friend of his had one built at Loch Gail. Finally he could not resist a dig at the new post devolution FC structure. He said it looks remarkably like the long past Directorates of England, Wales and Scotland. So there is little new, just cycles of reinvention.

## Swedish Houses

By Russell Bruce

Too often when we think about architecture in our countryside the focus is on the great buildings and the turbulent times to which many were witness.

When it comes to more ordinary examples of rural domestic architecture which are still part of living communities, we are slow to value some excellent examples of both planning and building. The forestry workers homes built after the Second World War are an outstanding example of planned developments in the countryside. Some were built near existing settlements eg Strathgryne and Ardentinnay whilst others were situated within the new forests at natural settlement locations but alongside a few previously isolated dwellings such as Deer Park and Glenbranter in the Argyll Forest Park.

The post-War period saw a massive increase of house building in both urban and rural areas. In particular the FC saw a need to house an expanding labour force close to the developing forests. The Swedish timber houses contributed to this programme, along with conventional buildings. Most have survived and are valued as rural homes. They remain today as domestic dwellings which sit well with the Scottish landscape.

The history of the Swedish house and its import from Northern Europe is today a matter of interest to many of those who now live in one, but little is known about the story behind its development. It turns out that many known locally as Swedish houses are in fact Finnish.

The purpose of this article is to appeal to former forestry workers and managers who know some aspect of this untold story. If you know anything about the supply, construction and history of these homes or interesting anecdotes please contact Russell Bruce, The Bannachra, Blairmore, Argyll PA23 8TL or e-mail [bannachra@eidosnet.co.uk](mailto:bannachra@eidosnet.co.uk)

Russell Bruce is the elected member for the Argyll Forest Peninsula on The Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Board.

## Still More on Bothies!...

**This series has stirred memories. I have received many contributions. Here is Kerr Robertson's story. He was forester on Arran during his later years, and has retired there.**

Prior to leaving school on the Isle of Arran at 15 years old I made several enquiries about employment with the Forestry Commission. Eventually I was told about an apprenticeship scheme at Tulliallan in Fife and a place was available for me if I so desired. This was exactly what I wanted, so when my admission date arrived I set off for the mainland, and late in the evening stepped off the Glasgow to Dunfermline bus and was pointed in the direction of some huts. I was shown into one which was a dormitory with nine other apprentices. I was allocated a bed and though very nervous about the whole experience, I began to relax and feel that my determination to get into forestry was going okay.

Life in bothies was tough at times though there was also a great camaraderie between most of the occupants. One endearing quality was that everyone left their money lying around and yet I never remember any theft. At Tulliallan and Strathgryne bothies every new inmate had to undergo a degrading initiation ceremony. You were stripped, tarred and thrown outside in the dark along with all your possessions which included your bed.

There were many occasions of rivalry between dormitories and individuals, mostly good natured but often provoking anger from somebody. One such incident was when the dormitory with the older boys was reduced to just one – Gordon Watson (hi Gordon, hope you are enjoying retirement like myself) – and the dormitory with the youngsters, including myself, decided to play a prank on Gordon while he was out courting. We replaced all the springs that held his bed together with thread and then barricaded ourselves into our dormitory as we expected a reaction when Gordon discovered what we had done. We

were not disappointed. He certainly lost the rag as he carried out a one man assault on our dormitory. Thankfully our barricades held firm as I am sure he would have given us all a good hiding if he had managed to force his way in.

I moved to a bothy in Glendoll, 22 miles from Kirriemuir. A real bleak spot with only one bus a week and I was the only boy, now 16, in a crowd of hardy men with very diverse personalities. I was converted to Christianity by one but on being told that a fearsome individual in the bothy was putting it about that he was going to do me over, I moved rapidly back to Strathgryne. I only lasted a short time back at Strathgryne before moving to Cambusdhu bothy beside Loch Eck. A mixed crowd of young and old, though I was by far the youngest. We all got on fairly well and life was good except we had a gay cook who seemed to fancy me. Unknown to me he baked me a cake on my birthday. When he came through with the cake I reacted angrily, swore at him and threw the cake in his face.

Tom Robbie came to see me and advised that I should go to Corrow bothy in Lochgoilhead for more experience. I thought I was getting my fair share of experiences, but off I went to the last bothy before National Service. I was only there a fairly short time and my last memory is of a remarkable inmate called Jimmy McGuire. He was an absolute encyclopedia of information, who, when called up to settle an argument always had the answer. Every Saturday night he got drunk out of his mind and on returning to the bothy would gibber away, laughing and cackling continuously. His performance was unbearable so every Saturday night without fail Jimmy would be locked in the drying room from where he could be heard continuing his laughing gibberish. On Sunday morning he would be released and never showed any resentment for having been imprisoned.

National Service in the army was a piece of cake compared to some of the tough bothy life.

**A View from Afar...***We trained hard, but it seemed that every time we were beginning to form up into teams we would be reorganised.*

*I was to learn later in life that we tend to meet any new situation by reorganising and a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress, while producing confusion, inefficiency and demoralisation...Gaius Petronius Arbiter AD66 (more on Google).*

## Bangor Forestry Centenary Reunion, 18 – 20 June 2004

This reunion at Bangor is for alumni, staff, partners and friends to celebrate 100 years of teaching forestry at the University. The 2/3 day programme combines activities of social and professional interest including an informal welcome supper, reception and dinner-dance, forestry and non-forestry excursions, and technical presentations demonstrating the breadth of the current teaching programme of home and overseas forestry and related subjects. For further information contact Barry Teasdale, Tel 01721 721931, e-mail: [mbteasdale@btinternet.com](mailto:mbteasdale@btinternet.com)

## North Yorks Moors 2004

Next year our AGM and tour will be based at Scarborough on 11th and 12th May. Chris Griffin is the organiser and he has negotiated good rates at the Palm Court Hotel. The traditional Wednesday tour will take us to well known places in the NYM. First we shall go to Wykeham of nursery fame, then on to Dalby for lunch and a look at the refurbished cabins. Put it in your diary – it will be a great opportunity to meet friends and colleagues in an area of England steeped in forestry history. Why not make a holiday of it and stay on to explore York and more of the NYM, including the steam railway for the anoraks!



# Life After Retirement

By Jack Massey of Bristol

**R**etirement started for me at aged 63 when the FC moved the retirement age goal posts and I was out of work having been stung at the other end as well by wartime service not qualifying for pensionable time by some quirk of Estacode.

However, there was plenty to do. I had, for some years, and wherever we lived, been involved in matters 'churchy', and as I retired, so did the local vicar; and as one of the churchwardens, I was much involved in trying to maintain the status quo.

There followed six years of ecclesiastical and episcopal politics with two rogues of parsons - well one I suppose perhaps better described as pathetic; interspersed with three interregna, when the congregation was presented with a wide assortment of visiting clerics; and the buildings and property maintained to exacting standards.

Consultancy I discovered very early on, was not for me. Without my knowing it in advance, the regulations relating to licensing quotas was changed the day after I retired - so there followed an embarrassed telephone conversation and my UK forestry was henceforward confined to silvicultural meetings - and still is.

The other mainstay of retirement activity has been of course Tree Aid, which crept into my life quietly and insidiously courtesy of John Fletcher and Leslie Troup in 1985. It began gently, as many worthwhile things do, with four local (Bristol area) individuals with a tree bias in their lives considering the Ethiopian famine and the possible and potential effect that tree planting on a reasonable scale might have for the future in such situations. They took this forward until it got beyond them in both time and scope, involved John, who involved Leslie, who involved Brian Tipping and me. We three (John still being gainfully employed) thought in terms of one day a week for six months - that was in 1987 when the charity was registered. Brian and I are now down to one day per year or thereabouts, but John is still deeply involved as President.

John and I visited Sudan in 1994, to see for ourselves some of the early Tree Aid projects, and to assess their effectiveness. The trip began at Heathrow in January, arriving in Khartoum, via Paris and Air France at 1.30 am the following day in an airless temperature of 90 odd. Not only was the climatic atmosphere stifling, but the immigration, customs and passport controls all had the same feel about them, which made us feel not a little insecure. The inkpad in the visa office was so dry it was difficult to stamp the passport page with

the visa stamp, and equally difficult to keep a straight face - so essential if one was not to lose it. The customs lady, large and effusively inquisitive just added to the whole rather unreal but indescribably squalid arena which was Khartoum International Airport. Eventually by taxi to the Acropolis Hotel, to fill in yet another entry form, down an exquisite bottle of iced coke, to a bed with a straw mattress, sawdust pillow and a very clanky airconditioning unit outside the window. The next day was Friday - in a Muslim country - so a late breakfast didn't really matter, until a note from the Greek hotel management announced a formal visit from our hosts (SOS Sahel, Sudan office) and two formally dressed Sudanese gentlemen appeared, dressed of course, being Friday, in freshly laundered white jebellās. Fortunately we had met one previously in Cambridge, and the necessary future arrangements were duly made over a cup of black Nescafe.

We spent just short of three weeks in Sudan, taking three excursions to see projects in the west and north, and in the 'respites' in Khartoum inevitably became a little involved in formal discussions with Government ministers and like folk. Being also a Marxist country this was rather daunting until it transpired that almost all the relevant top brass we met were either Aberdeen or Edinburgh trained in the fifties!

The field excursions were, without exception, fascinating, challenging, instructive and tiring, but I found them, and I'm sure John did too, very worthwhile. I certainly went with some trepidation because of a total lack of experience in dryland tropical forestry, but this turned to be no serious barrier to constructive discussion.

A few particular incidents are worth recounting, like the isolated village we visited where Tree Aid had provided a donkey and water cart. These were brought out for display, the donkey being untethered while the cart was wheeled out from its specially built hut, and John looked on imperiously from the top of a camel.

During these excursions we were accommodated in the local SOS Sahel compounds or rest houses, where facilities varied considerably, a shortage of water being the most common. This meant dipping a can into the supply perhaps an oil barrel - for whatever purpose it was needed. Personally I was very thankful for a battery electric razor. And of course we ate whatever was provided, usually at a mess table, with all the other men, and using the best utensils the human has to offer - the digits of one's right hand.

Travelling north from Khartoum on the second of these visits we were driven for eight hours in the office based land rover across the desert. Tyre tracks proliferate here, but may literally be years old. School geography will remind you that the Nile

takes a U-shaped loop on its way to Egypt, so we felt we could hardly wander into Lybia, but John and I were sure we were clearly heading too far west for our destination, which was Ed Debba, only 200 or so miles north of Khartoum, and on the Nile. Arriving eventually at our proper destination, we spent three very interesting days, and then began our return journey with a local driver. How these chaps know their way in the desert is extraordinary. It is far from featureless, but changes all the time and all appeared very much the same to me. Our return journey took three and a half hours.

This three weeks had been exhausting, but at the same time, very rewarding personally. What is shattering is that the trip was nine years ago. Moral there somewhere about 'Life in Retirement'.

Tree Aid I'm glad to say progresses steadily, and I hope inexorably forward under Miranda's directorship and John's presidency, though I am, of necessity now much less involved.

Currently I should expect to take part in quiet village life - but not in this village, not a hope, merely a return to furniture restoration, gardening (well, mowing the lawn) and the social aspects of the village, avoiding drama and bridge.

## How Do You Do?

By Lena Birchall

At a recent meeting of the Alice Holt Group in February an earlier suggestion that members bring along results of their hobbies provided a most interesting idea and enabled an impressive display to be mounted.

Ron Brown, former entomologist, had a varied collection of coins while his wife Christine, an organist, displayed music. Ted Densham brought a most interesting portfolio of black and white photographs. Miniature animal collections were shown by Frankie Edwards (pigs), Joan Richardson (owls) while Wendy Lampard brought colourful thimbles.

Examples of calligraphy were shown by Betty Page and Deirdre Waddell who also brought a beautifully sculptured owl. Varied landscape paintings were shown by Monica Hopkin, Betty Page, Frankie Edwards, Lena Birchall and Eric Hale.

Frank Hales brought a wood carving and his wife Rhona had, by using typeface grouping of letters, created an unusual picture. Sylvia Nichols had been clicking needles and made knitwear while her husband, Nigel, crafted metal into a canon and paper knife. Tapestry was featured from Anne Yeomans, Deirdre Waddell and Doris Thorne and a patchwork waistcoat was shown from Lena Birchall. A delicious cake by Joan Richardson completed the display.



## OBITUARIES

### John Zehetmayr writes of IAN WATT MBE, whom he knew for over 50 years.

Ian was the epitome of a generation of British foresters, spending the whole of his professional career as a District Officer in the Forestry Commission. He never made senior rank but I am sure that with his other interests in natural history and conservation he had a most satisfying career as a hands-on manager in his native Scotland and then in Wales.

After graduating from Aberdeen he joined the FC in 1948. As a District Officer in Fife his enthusiasm attracted the attention of Director Scotland during an inspection and soon after he was brought into Edinburgh on acquisitions. He sealed the FC's biggest ever

acquisition of around 50,000 acres in Glen Affric, largely unplanted but containing native Caledonian pine stands for which it is now famous.

There followed a long spell in Perth, during which he became a founder member of the Scottish Wildlife Trust.

Then in 1970 came the sudden switch to Llandovery District in South Wales where he was to spend his last 13 years.

Soon after Ian revived the 'Llandovery Dance', a district social event that continued for years as a highlight for the FC in mid Wales. His broad figure, often kilted with sporran and bonnet, sporting what was once described as Jacobean legs, became a familiar sight in Llandovery and Llangadog where he and his wife Enid lived.

Ian had thrown himself into voluntary work with the West Wales Wildlife Trust and among his efforts raised £60,000 for Castle Woods, Llandeilo (a major factor in his MBE); this wonderful site included the remains of an important Welsh (as opposed to Edwardian) castle and a derelict chapel near the town which was converted to a nature centre. The move with Enid to Llandeilo, very close to Dynefwr Castle, enabled him to fulfil his role as Honorary warden for some twenty years up to his death.

Ian was made Vice-President of the West Wales Wildlife Trust in 1991 but sadly suffered a stroke in 1992, making a partial recovery over the years which, while restricting his activities, rarely precluded a walk in Castle Woods.

### Norman Brown tells of BOB IRVING.

I first met him briefly in Germany in 1946 when we were both employed by the North German Timber Control, but it was not until 1967 when I took charge of the then Border Forest District that I came to know him well. On my early visits to Newcastle Forest it quickly became quite clear that the organisation and management aspects were of a very high order. Indeed it was a pleasure to work with someone who was so efficient and well organised. But he was also an outstanding manager of men. He brooked no nonsense, was scrupulously fair so that the men know where they stood with him and respected him, and in this way he deservedly had a happy team. Bob was excellent company and had a great sense of fun. I recall him sharing his amusement with me over an incident connected with the joint experiment with The Game

Conservancy concerning the raising and shooting of pheasants in a spruce forest. The old keeper had admonished one of the gentlemen who was inclined to shoot at birds which were too close - "Man can ye no let them oot a wee thing further".

In the FC after the war there was a group of first class efficient and enthusiastic foresters, and there were a few who were quite outstanding in ability and personality. Bob was one of the Best of the Few.

### Barry Teasdale has gathered information on WARREN HENMAN from many of his friends.

After graduating in 1955 from Bangor, he became an Assistant Silviculturist (N) in Edinburgh. During the following 10 years his research included work on spacing, the isolation of selected stems in pole-stage crops and the natural regeneration of Scots pine. He continued John Zehetmayr's work exploring the response to increasingly intensive cultivation of hard upland heaths and, by contrast, set up the well-known parallel cultivation and drainage experiment on the raised bog at Flanders Moss. All this led to questions of tree stability and to some of the earliest studies in tree pulling. Roger Lines, a research colleague, observes that Warren spent much time in the "mucky" areas of research, and that his wife must have had quite a job getting him clean! It pleased him greatly when, in 1985, his daughter joined his old Department at Bangor as a post-graduate researcher funded by the FC.

Moving into management, he spent 7 years as District Officer at Oswestry in North Wales, with a District stimulatingly divided into Welsh and English speaking halves. Then there were 10 memorable years at Aberfoyle in the Trossachs where the onset of significant felling programmes was combined with expansion of the existing recreational facilities through forest cabins and a forest drive. He finished with 6 years at Carmarthen in South Wales, where he continued to live in 'retirement' at Manordeilo until his sudden and unexpected death in September 2002.

For almost 50 years he was dedicated to voluntary work with wildlife conservation movements and, after retirement, in various official capacities with the West Wales Wildlife Trust, along with deep involvement in church, rotary and community affairs including, for the last 10 years, Victim Support.

He will be remembered as an unassuming, congenial and helpful man of sound judgement - a good friend - with a devotion to detail. He is survived by his wife Beth, whom he met when she was a Botany Demonstrator at Bangor, daughter Sian and son Philip.

### George Stewart has memories of PETER LEGARD who died in March at Chester after a long illness; he was 86.

After Edinburgh University he joined the Commission and served in Galloway and then in Acquisitions in Edinburgh, including a spell in the North East in the aftermath of the 1953 windblow. He then went to Cardiff as Assistant Conservator and in 1966 to Chester.

Peter was the essence of an upright man both in bearing and character. He loved the outdoors in every way and walking in particular

and had an abiding interest in cricket.

In Chester he devoted 30 years of service to the church. He was a man of the greatest integrity based on his abiding Christian faith.

### John Stevens remembers JUNIOR PRIOR.

His interests and hobbies included big band music, golf and a mobile home in Cromer. He was a dedicated family man with a larger than life character and enjoyed being the life and soul of any gathering and was well known for his practical jokes and off-the-cuff comments.

He joined the FC at Santon Downham Repair Depot in 1983, firstly as a mechanic's mate and later as a lorry driver after successfully gaining a HGV licence. He continued driving and stand-in duties in other departments such as the stores until his retirement in September 1994.

### Stephen Ferrari and Ian Famelton recall the eventful life of former colleague VILNIS GRANT who was born in Riga, Latvia.

During his school days the country was subject to German occupation and following a persuasive talk by an officer he saw little alternative but join the German army. Deployed on the eastern front he experienced the advance into the heart of Russia and he might well have been present at the siege of Stalingrad. Eventually, after many months of hardship and deprivation, he retreated to Berlin where he surrendered to the Americans rather than the advancing Russians. Given the choice of allied countries in which to seek asylum, he chose Britain.

Upon naturalisation he took the name Grant. He qualified as a land surveyor spending time working for the local authority in Bradford, the Duke of Buccleuch and finally joining

the Forestry Commission in 1957. Initially he worked in Redesdale, Kidland, Harwood and

Thurton Forests before eventually covering both Kielder and Rothbury Forest Districts. Following a settled period in his life Vilnis was devastated by the loss of his only son in a car accident and separation from his first wife.

He was always a dapper dresser, the wearing of a cravat an everyday occurrence. He preferred VW cars and many times passed comment on the two things he didn't want again - a mother-in-law and a Ford. Salmon fishing played an ever more important role in his life with the water levels of the Esk and Nith of crucial importance on a Friday afternoon.

Vilnis will also be remembered by those of us who worked closely with him for the numerous sayings that lost nothing in the translation eg "Let my wind off" (let off steam), "Kick hell very much up" and "Examine with a toothbrush it". Vilnis is survived by his second wife Jan and family.

### Lena Birchall has told me about BETTY BURNABY 93 & PAT MARSH 75.

They were both ex-Alice Holt members. Pat left FTS in 1953 and went direct there, first in Ecology Branch and subsequently in Silviculture where he supervised the intensive nursery. They were both highly regarded by colleagues.

Obituaries for JOHN DAVIES, GORDON STRAUGHAN and BILL ELLIOT will appear in the next issue.