

AGM 2007

This year's AGM was held at Dunster in Somerset. Unfortunately, due to a range of circumstances, far fewer than usual attended. Bart had to give the sad news that our Vice Chairman, Warwick Payne, had died only weeks before.

There were reports from the Groups with most enjoying a wide range of activities. Some of the highlights were:

- South Wales Group's tour of the Cwm Carn Drive.
- North Scotland's visit to a wind farm which, contrary to common belief, had not disturbed wild life and did not generate unacceptable noise.
- Yorkshire's trip to the Hull Experience.
- South Scotland's ever successful barbecue overlooking the Forth and the hotly contested quiz night.
- Peninsula's lunch meets in very agreeable inns.
- Alice Holt's regular indoor meets with a stimulating variety of subjects.
- The Dean's winter monthly pub meets which included well fought games of skittles and the regular summer outing which last year was to the Cardiff Bay complex.

Bart Venner and David Parnell were re-elected as Chairman and Treasurer respectively while Lawrie Tee volunteered as Vice Chairman. **We still need a Secretary – please volunteer – it's not arduous!**

Excursion to Quantock Forest

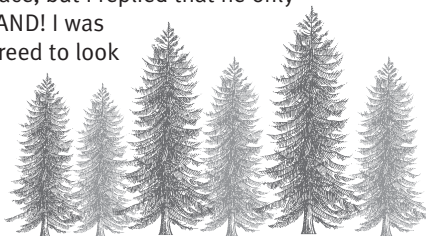
Reflections by David Chadwick

I started my Forestry Commission career as an Assistant District Officer in the Somerset District of South West England Conservancy in September 1959. Quantock Forest was one of the District forests and I remember being greatly impressed by the magnificent Douglas fir, then around thirty five years old. Happily some still stood and were truly remarkable trees. We all thought what a good forest Quantock was, and we were fascinated to hear how it was being managed. Many of us started our careers when the Forestry Commission was primarily a creator of a timber reserve by plantations. We lived through the era of maximum net discounted revenue and wall to wall Sitka spruce. How encouraging it was to see good ecological management and the diverse forest this was producing.

Mixed Measures...3 x 3

Ken Broad, who has retired to Somerset in 1999, sent me a number of whimsical memories of his 50 years. in forestry and woodland management. This is his last.

The phone in the office rang. It was the agent for Mendip Limestone Quarries. He said that he had planted the area following the WGS instructions, but something was not quite right. I asked what and he replied that I had calculated the number of trees required but he had run out. My calculations were wrong! I said that it was always difficult to get the exact number on an awkwardly shaped area and guardedly asked how short. He replied lots. I checked this again with him and I said that having planted 10ha @ 3 x 3 and used 11,000 trees, how could he need more. So I asked how many and he replied about 80 or 90. So I said that's nothing and the resulting open space would be good for wildlife conservation. He stuck with it and said that it was not a small space, but I replied that he only required 80 or 90. He said no, it's 80 or 90 THOUSAND! I was convinced the agent was utterly confused and I agreed to look in at the site later. I did, and found he had made a first class job of the planting – carefully done and all in tree shelters. Only one thing was wrong, and very wrong. They had been planted @ 3ft x 3ft rather than 3m x 3m 11,000 trees were very well planted on one hectare!



Henry Smith's Memories

Henry has retired to Winchester where he is Group contact for the New Forest.

In 1949 there was a Select Committee visit to Kershope Forest. I was bottoming out a drain. As a single file of MPs walked along my drain, someone wanted to know how deep the peat was. Two men were instructed to dig a pit and by the end of the day it was 13 feet deep. When they came to resume digging the next day they found that the hole had filled to within an inch of the top with water. We never knew the full peat depth!

As the local PW head forester in 1976, I was told to attend an estate in Hampshire where another Select Committee of MPs with the FC Chairman was meeting the owner. It was at the time when private woodlands were under attack from the Labour Government. The Chairman said to the owner "You should do a quinquennial valuation of your woodland as the FC does". The owner said, "Why?". The Chairman thought for a minute but was unable to give an explanation. I was standing with the MPs and started giggling. The MP alongside me chastised me and suggested that my reaction was inappropriate!

On another occasion an ex Chairman had written to the Conservator asking for advice about replanting after the elm disease. This was at the height of the its occurrence, we were overrun by requests for advice so we couldn't follow each case. However an exception was made and I called at his house in Warsash. In fact all the elms in the district had been killed and as ex Chairman of the FC, the local council had asked him for advice on the replanting. As he was only an expert on the import of plywood he was rather flummoxed. He invited me in to have a glass of beer and chatted, saying how were Charles and Joe. I suddenly realised he was talking about the top men in the FC. I told him I didn't move in those circles!

I had another amusing event when I was in charge of Shipbourne Forest in Kent. I had given a talk to a small school adjoining one of our woods and subsequently discussed its management with the headmaster. Later he rang the Conservancy Office and mentioned that he had been talking to Mr Smith. At the time our Conservator was called Smith and he couldn't recall talking to this man. All were puzzled until one of his assistants said I was the Smith in question. When Mr Smith retired, he toured round all the forests. After he arrived at Shipbourne I said, "I'm sorry you are retiring, I won't be mistaken for the Conservator again". He replied "You'll have to change your name to Barrington, my successor!"

The Oak Tree in Folklore

By Karen Bell

Oak was one of the most revered trees of the Celtic people. It was featured in many stories about gods, goddesses and mythological or legendary characters, although in Scotland the rowan and hazel were thought to be even more powerful than the mighty oak.

The oak has always had a link to the mysterious plant of the Druids – mistletoe. Mistletoe would grow on the top of oak trees and it was believed that the seed was placed there by a bolt of lightning sent by the thunder god Woden, probably because lightning was attracted to tall oaks.

Sacred fires of oak wood were, and still are, burnt on Beltane (May 1st) and at the mid summer and mid winter solstices. As the holly was sacred to the waning year so the oak was sacred to the waxing year. In pagan cultures the Oak King was worshipped at the summer solstice.

Oak groves were the traditional places of worship for the ancient Celts. When the early Christians arrived in Britain they generally took over these sites of ancient worship and many of the early Christian churches and

monasteries were built using the timber from these ancient groves.

St. Columba was said to love and respect oak and avoided felling them whenever possible, although he did build an oak chapel on Iona using wood from the great oak woods on Mull.

On a Thursday (Columba's Day) people from the highlands of Scotland used to bake special cakes using oak wood as fuel.

Oak has been used throughout the ages for many purposes from building boats, homes and places of worship, to being used in tanning leather and being burnt to produce charcoal. Many woods in Argyll and the surrounding areas were coppiced for charcoal making for the iron smelting industry. These woods were carefully managed and are still there for all to see today.

Oak bark and acorns have been used to produce black and brown dye, whilst its galls or oak apples were used to produce ink. It is said to have a host of healing qualities and its tannin is supposed to be highly antiseptic. The bark can be made into a tonic and other oak drinks include acorn coffee, leaf tea and leaf wine.

Ancient Trees

The Woodland Trust has teamed up with the Ancient Tree Forum to celebrate ancient trees. It is asking people to record ancient trees so that a national data base can be produced. Anybody can record a tree. All you do is to go on the website and for each tree, put in as many details as you are able. There is an interactive map, so the tree can be located very accurately. More than 6000 have been recorded to date and there are many more waiting to be discovered. If it is a really great tree, take a photo. It can be added to the record. You don't have to be an expert on computers to record – just follow the site instructions. If you go wrong, delete the tree and start again. The WT is also looking for Verifiers (I am one). Their role is to verify the recordings of submitted trees, amending or adding information. If you can tear yourselves away from digging up family history, this is a great way to go out, be active and contribute to an interesting project. Go to www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk or Woodland Trust, Grantham NG31 6LL for more information. Happy recording!

The Forestry Commission's Dublin Bothy in the 1950's

By John Keenleyside

Part 3: Recreation

Recreation was very limited in those far off days. There was a dart board on the back of the door in the main room. Fortunately no one ever entered when a dart was in full flight. No darts were provided. Inmates had their own sets which they carefully secreted away when not playing. Some sets had feather flights which were carefully groomed before play, others had paper flights, hand made, carefully folded to ensure accuracy of flight.

The main social occasion was on a Friday night when the Forestry Commission Thames Trader lorry with wooden frame on back covered with a tarpaulin was authorised to take the inmates, the local workers and a few unauthorised hangers-on to the pictures in Invergordon. This was the start of the C & D era for entertainment; cinema, darts, dominoes and drinks. I do not claim that the 3Ds are listed in the correct order of priority. Some would reckon that drinks came first, with darts or dominoes an optional extra. The departure was around 7 pm and the return around 10.30 pm. Some of the worthies preferred to call at a hostelry and spend the evening there. Others preferred the back row in the cinema and were unable to relate many details of the films viewed on return. When they did return, the whole lorry load staggered into the bothy to have their own ceilidh, darts

match or consume the remnants of any drinks they had on board. Some evenings when visibility was poor due to wet wood on the stove or poor mantles on the Tilley, darts contestants were allowed to stand a foot nearer the board so that they could see the bull's eye. Gradually the locals would trickle away around midnight and the inmates would make tracks for bed.

Life was slower to start on a Saturday, and breakfast was a moveable feast. The porridge looked as if it had been poured from a cement mixer, and handmade toast curled up at the edges with a charcoal centre, was impossible to butter, if there was any left. This style of toast was not the latest addition to Watties cuisine but the necessity of thinly slicing the week old loaf to enable everyone to have a morsel of the burnt offering.

The other highlight of a Saturday morning was the issue of clean sheets for beds to those that reported with their dirty ones by 9 am. These had been professionally laundered and were clean, white, cool in summer, very cold in winter. Lunch on a Saturday consisted of the weekly remains and the delight of tomato ketchup sandwiches. It was then that Wattie made a pronouncement on his budgetary skills over the past week. He reckoned that the only thing which should be left on the pantry shelves should be the salt and pepper pots. He then pronounced that the salt was half empty and the pepper was half full. The subtle difference being that salt was cheap and he

could afford another packet, while pepper was expensive and if half full, would have to last another week. He failed to realise that usage of condiments was beyond his control and depended on the dexterity of the inmates. Why stick around for Saturday lunch? In those days there were several weeks when we were blocked in by snow, followed by spring with the mandatory participation in the fire duty roster. In the event of a fire the inmates were a ready made squad for immediate despatch to the scene of the fire. They did not complain as it meant extra in the next weekly pay packet.

When not involved on duty or blocked in by snow, people disappeared on a Saturday to various destinations on foot, by bike or with a lift. Some of the more adventurous made it to see Ross County football team play in Dingwall, others took the opportunity to have a haircut, while a few went somewhere to view television as it was then a great novelty. They arrived back any time from teatime on Saturday to starting time on Monday morning.

Meanwhile Wattie had stocked up with provisions from the butcher's van. The soup had started its career on the ex-army stove and Monday was the start of a new working week. Thus life in the hostel had evolved and revolved on a weekly cycle.

Then came the rumour that the bothy was to be wired for electricity. The electricians duly arrived and completed their task. The supply lines were still marching up the glen when the next rumour came that the hostel was to be closed. This was confirmed officially a few days after the wiring was completed and before a unit of electricity had passed through the cables. The closure procedure took some time, but this is for the last part.

Some more on Genealogy

By Ken Davidson

Genealogy can uncover the family's highs and lows, its tragedies, and its skeletons. Today in the IT age it is becoming easier than ever. If you, like me, have Scottish roots then you will find there is a wealth of information readily available. The Scottish church records from 1560 to 1855 are available on line. Also available are most government records of births, deaths and marriages from 1855, and census returns for 1861, 71, 81, 91, and 1901, with 1841 and 51 due any day now. Local family history societies, public libraries, and the Mormon Church (the LDS to aficionados) family history centres can all be very helpful. The LDS can obtain for you, for a modest loan fee, films and fiches of original documents. The War Grave Commission web site will turn up interesting if sombre facts. 19th century passenger shipping lists can let you know when and by what ship your ancestor emigrated.

Visits to graveyards with known ancestor connections can be another important source of information. Photographing sites where your forebears lived adds interest and depth to your research. However many buildings will have been demolished, some will have been redeveloped and some will be in ruins. Glasgow redevelopment has obliterated whole districts and with it lots of my own ancestors' records. On the plus side it was a good feeling to discover a ruined farm house with ancestral connections in the middle of a Tilhill forestry plantation in South Lanarkshire.

My wife Lilian with a maiden name of Smith initially had a few uphill struggles. She can now trace her roots back to 17th century Sweden, to the old Kinnaird lairds of Culbin, and to a Welsh line with the name of Williams, which has given her more problems than the Smiths ever did! My own roots have been traced back to the 16th century and were nearly all from lowland Scotland, with a minor line leading to near Inverness and with a forestry connection. My maternal side was steeped in the west of Scotland cotton spinning industry and my paternal side in lead mining and agriculture on the Lanark/Dumfriesshire border. And I've come across the skeletons, about which no one talked!

If you haven't yet dipped your toe in the water of this fascinating subject why not give it a go. You will find it very rewarding.

Genealogy will just not go away! I have two more quite lengthy pieces waiting in the wings. There isn't the space in FCA Today for a number of longer articles, so they will have to await their turn. All you retirees must spend hours guddling in graveyards! Ed.

Whitelee Forest Oral History Project: Update

By Ruth Tittensor

At the invitation of the FC a group of about 30 people met last August at Whitelee. They were some of the contributors to the Whitelee Forest Oral History Project, and they knew the plateau when it was still moorland. They were farmers who sold, or did not sell, land to the FC, local residents and naturalists who wandered the muir studying its flora and fauna. Several retired FC staff who knew Whitelee Forest in its early days were there.

These people came to see the changes since their time on the muir, to find out about plans for the future and to give the current FC staff the benefit of their knowledge and memories.

I first wrote about the project in *FCA Today* March 2005 issue. Two years later there have been over 70 contributors from the FC and local communities. Between them they have known the plateau since 1922. We have recorded about 40 contributors and their recordings were saved on CDs as both sound recordings and transcripts. Other contributors wished to have their memories written down as they spoke, or wrote their memories themselves. The writings have been prepared as attractive, bound booklets.

We have details of the arduous way the plateau was farmed prior to 1960. Residents made considerable use of it for its diverse resources and for recreation. We have recorded the interesting ecosystems and flora and fauna that formed the muir. We have been told of the magnificent views to Ben Lomond, Arran, the Pentlands and Tinto Hill. There was a great emotional attachment to the plateau.

From previous FC staff we know how the peaty land was ploughed and drained. People have described how it was planted, then fertilised by hand or by helicopter and what hard work it was to be in the squad and running Forest Workers' Holdings. We know about the increase in roe deer and their management. People were sad when planting came to an end as the squad was made redundant. The last resident forester retired and the forest was left to grow. Local people felt impotent when there were no longer any resident FC employees with whom to communicate and when they saw no visible further management.

Contributors have seen big changes in land-use. In the early part of the 20th century it was farmed. It was then afforested and recently harvesting has begun. Forestry workers have been replaced by machinery carrying out new methods of draining, preparing the ground and planting trees.

In our August visit, we were told about another phase in land-use. From 2005 it was being managed as a large wind-farm! Silviculture would need to take into account 140 wind turbines! Clear-felling would be required, opening up some of the forest before its original intended harvesting time and giving considerable ecological benefits.

Contributors to the project are certainly living through a surprising period of change!

I am currently writing an illustrated book in which the Whitelee story is told through the words of all the contributors. I will also produce a shorter, popular book and a research leaflet assessing the oral history methods.

Please look out for the books next year.

What is a "Forester"

By Les Howe

I am puzzled, but have I got it wrong? Is the word "Forester" running out of steam, being kicked into touch, being given the elbow? In the current edition of *The Slasher* the word Forester occurs only twice. Firstly there is Head Forester Peter Noot (congratulations on your award) and secondly there is mention of a Recreation Forester. Is the latter a "Proper" forester or does he coach the local football team? There is also mention of a "Forest Management Works Supervisor" (Never use one word when four will do). How does he, or she, fit the forestry scene?

I live on the edge on the New Forest and regularly see yellow and green FC vans carrying the logo "Forest Ranger". What does he, or she, do? Is that person a "proper" forester, trained and experienced in forest management and able to plan and supervise a wide range of jobs in the forest? I am sure forest rangers do a good job, but is it forestry? When I pass one of these vehicles I can see in my imagination Andy Divine as the driver and John Wayne riding shotgun! We are losing the proper word for the job of forester, or have I got it



OBITUARIES

DAVID ROY BOWEN died in February after 28 years service in west Wales.

Roy was the typical figure of the traditional wildlife ranger for the FC.

He joined the FC in 1975 having previously worked on a farm, down the mines and in the Royal Engineers.

Starting in Brechfa Forest, Roy soon claimed this area as his own patch, and progressed from forest craftsman to tractor driver and then to wildlife ranger. This was a job which Roy enjoyed and to which he was fully committed.

Roy was always keen to show a newly arrived forester what was important in Brechfa Forest. You knew you'd passed the test if he took you tickling a few Sewin in one of the many small forest streams.

He was a well-known character amongst the farming community, and was often their first point of contact when fences were down, or when there were problems with foxes in spring. Many issues were resolved without the forest district office ever knowing of them.

He encouraged youngsters and often took them on work experience from the schools. We were never sure if the bat boxes and the other holts built were ever finished, but the students certainly found their days memorable. Roy proudly represented the FC in the 1996 Eisteddfod in South Wales.

Typical of his generosity, he invited his friends and family to his retirement "Do", and treated everyone to an enjoyable evening of good company, food and drink.

DEREK HOUSE attended the Dean Forestry School and on completion of training, became a member of a Research Branch team involved in the establishment and maintenance of sample plots and census of woodlands. During this period he and Derek Earl gained some recognition through the act of climbing some of the tallest trees in the UK, not through any sporting encounter but in the interest of gathering accurate tree heights.

He continued to work in Research Branch, taking a leading role in the update and survey of many forests, including those in the Lake District and the New Forest. At the conclusion of this tour he was promoted to Chief Forester and posted in charge of Bedgebury until his retirement in 1985. Subsequently he was employed by Sussex CC to supervise a control programme of Dutch elm disease.

During retirement he became Chairman of the FCA in Kent and Sussex and worked hard to keep things going. Derek was a keen follower of most sports. In particular he had a life long association with Portsmouth FC and the cricket of Sussex and Hampshire. One of his fondest memories was of Wembley in 1953 when Stanley Matthews won his Cup Final medal. How did he get a ticket for such an occasion? You may well ask. He had "persuaded" his sister to marry a professional footballer. The marriage was a great success and Derek received a steady flow of tickets to many top class games! His sense of humour was such that it gave the impression that he had planned the whole affair.

John Keenleyside tells of two North Scotland members who died recently.

JIMMY MAXTONE from Fochabers served his whole career in East Scotland. He spent a long time at Kemnay and ended up on Private Woodlands work in Fochabers. After retiring from FC he continued to work privately in forestry.

JIMMY PATERSON was from Nairn. He was not a trained forester but he was one of the greatest tree hunters of our time. He inspired and led the hunt for Britain's tallest tree. The one he first identified as potential champion in 1993 was finally confirmed and televised in 2006 for the BBC production *Trees that made Britain*. He built up a comprehensive catalogue with measurements, locations and a wonderful

collection of colour slides. He was awarded the MBE for his work with trees and latterly showed visitors around trees at Cawdor Castle.

Ken Trodd recalls **WARWICK PAYNE** who died in April. He did his pre Forester School training at Bramhill. During this period, information was being gathered for a publication on the service requirements and work commitment for a trainee. Subsequently a book titled *Tim of Tamberley Forest* was written and appeared in the early 1950s. Warwick figured largely in the book as the character Tim. I was given a signed copy of the book by the author, who was writing under the assumed name of a lady. However I cannot recall the name and through an unfortunate circumstance, the book went missing. (Now here is a mystery. Can anyone help? There has to be a good story behind this enigma. Who will come up with it? Ed.)

After graduating from the Dean FTS he had a range of postings which included Tool Instructor in E & T Branch, H/F Amptill, where he met and married Hilda, and H/F Chilterns. In 1986 he was promoted to C/F and took over Stamford Forest until his retirement.

He had a keen interest in the FCA and was instigator of the Chilterns Group of which he was Chairman until his death.

Gill Potts has many happy memories of her husband **HAROLD "H" POTTS** who died last August after 58 years service with the FC. He joined in 1948 and worked on a wide range of jobs including planting, road building and cone collecting. He had great stories of lodgings in the Lake District. Until his death, he was still employed by the FC doing mowing on contract. Forestry was his way of life and he enjoyed every moment. When we went on holiday we always met someone who knew him. I would be pleased to hear from anyone who has stories to tell of "H". (Please call: 01588 673772)

William Shaw of Carradale has written an appreciation of his colleague, forester **ANDY SIMPSON**, who died in January aged 83.

Andy was born at Tulliallan, Fife and on leaving school went to work in the nearby forest nursery managed by his father. He entered Benmore Forestry School but his studies were interrupted by call up for World War 2. After seeing active service in Burma, he returned and completed the course. He then worked in a number of forests in Perthshire, Strathyre and Lochearnhead before ending up in Kintyre where he was some years at Saddell and finally Carradale in 1956.

There Andy met and married local girl April Paterson. He was always keen on music with Gilbert and Sullivan being his favourite. He was a distinguished organist who played regularly in Carradale and Campbeltown, only relinquishing this in 2006.

Frank, **HUGH THOM'S** brother recalls his life. Frank's father worked for the FC and in 1947 became forester in charge of Inchriach. By then Frank had left school and he also joined the FC where he assisted the trapper reduce the rabbit population at Inchriach.

After national service in Malaya he returned and enrolled at Faskally Training School. Following his graduation in 1954 he was posted to Inchnacardoch Forest and soon married Jean whom he had met at Faskally. In 1960 he was transferred to Culloden Forest where he was involved in all aspects of forestry work including the forest sawmill. He joined the Education Branch in 1964 where he trained chainsaw and cable crane winches operators. He continued doing this work for seventeen years during which time he spent short periods doing similar work elsewhere in Britain, France, Newfoundland and Cyprus. He so enjoyed Cyprus he eventually bought a holiday home where he spent two vacations a year.

On leaving Education Branch in 1981 Hugh was seconded to the United Nations to instruct on timber harvesting techniques in Bhutan, remaining there for nearly four years. On his return he was posted to York for seven years with the Forest Authority, being employed for the first time with private forestry.

He retired in 1992 and returned to Balloch near Inverness. There he occupied himself with his garden and being a prime mover in establishing a bowling green for the village, sadly never completed. But he kept his hand in by being an enthusiastic indoor bowler.

Mike Whitock of Alice Holt has sent thoughts of some of his past colleagues.

BETTY PAGE who died in March was in charge of "Office Services" under its various titles. This involved responsibility for buildings and supplies. One's first impression was of a rather severe person possessing the authority and manner of a traditional civil servant. However, when one got to know her one discovered that beneath a somewhat forbidding exterior there was a person who was kind and helpful, as well as being efficient. During the early days of the Alice Holt group of FCA she was our very efficient outings secretary.

DENNIS CHANDLER, who died in November, had a background in agriculture and at one time had a chicken farm. With the decline in agriculture, he sought a more regular form of employment. As a result, he joined the research staff as a messenger, handling the post and delivering and collecting papers. He became well known amongst all members of staff and was respected for his quiet demeanour and efficiency.

BILL POWELL also died in March. He worked in various sections including Photography, Work Study and the workshops. He was an accomplished photographer and at one time led a dance band about which he wrote an article for *FCA Today*. He used to play the piano for social functions in the retirement home where he spent the last years of his life.

FCA Today Correspondents

1. Bryce Reynard: 01463 225887
2. Charlie Greenlees: 01546 602929
3. Coll Gardner: 0131 336 3223
4. Elizabeth Capstick: 01439 771249
5. Mike Reaney: 01792 202449
6. John Thomas: 01179 863869
7. Lena Birchall: 01420 23213
8. David Williams: 01766 762280

GROUP CONTACTS

N & NE Scotland

Eric Urquhart: 01463 221989

Mid Argyll

Charlie Greenlees: 01546 602929

HQ & South Scotland

David Chadwick: 01383 821216

Yorkshire

Geoff Barry: 01751 472575

Brecklands

Margaret Mayes: 01842 81920

New Forest Henry Smith: 01962 882017

Alice Holt Sylvia Nicholls: 01252 516016

Forest of Dean Hilda Jones: 01594 836006

West Country Peter Webb: 01837 52926

North Wales Eifion Jones: 01745 814857

South Wales Peter Walker: 01291 424291

Check with contacts for exact area covered.

