

Benmore goes to North Wales

By John White

While the FTS operated, it was FC policy to shift all the students round for a six-week period half way through the course to widen their experience. In August 1961, nine of us from Benmore arrived at Gwydyr to join some of the students from Dean and Faskally. After the pseudo-baronial setting of Benmore, Gwydyr school was something of an architectural disappointment. The corrugated iron huts in a secure looking compound were reminiscent of a 1930s displaced persons camp. Were they expecting an escape attempt?

However experiences outside 'the wire' were pretty good in both an educational and social sense. The sun seemed to shine the whole time which was rare in North Wales we were told, and amused those of us from persistently moist Argyll. Much of the manual work was easy, hand weeding either in the local Ugly House nursery on Saturday mornings or at the vast Delamere nurseries which involved hours of travelling in an old coach, quite a step up for students used to being crammed into a three ton lorry. Our loud and memorable 'community' singing on the bus through places like Chester was memorable but probably offensive to residents – who knows.

Noteworthy among excursions was a visit to Bowaters paper mill at Ellesmere Port in the days before any health and safety clampdown. Then it was possible to get dangerously close to the gigantic fast moving rolls of newsprint and the hiss of scalding steam. Almost a 'hands on' approach to learning about where all the Sitka spruce was going. Less frenetic was a trip to Frank Best's private estate at Vivod



Back top: HF Griffiths, Gwyn Francis. Back row: Ian Embury, John White, Ken Russell. Centre: Jock Campbell, John Livingstone, Norman MacIlmoyle, Stan Maconachy. Front: Arthur Barlow, Brian Monaghan, Bob Alpe, Jim Findley.

near Llangollen. The large forest garden there was established from 1943 as part of a ministerial decision to prepare for post-war diversity in forestry. Later it was to become an important part of my own work as FC Research Dendrologist, significantly more after the decline of the associated Bedgebury plots in the 1987 storm. For easy-going tours, sand dune afforestation at Newborough Warren on Anglesey would be hard to beat. After the beach and sea the first impressions were of numerous dead trees stuck up side down in the sand, interspersed with forlorn little pine transplants under constant threat of inundation.

The lunchtime picture shows the relaxed mood of the day. Who can recognize themselves nearly 50 years ago? Incidentally the tiny pines did grow and 30 years later Neville Danby and I were able to effortlessly collect Maritime pine seed by walking up the dunes to the treetops. Those from Benmore I recall, I am not so good on Faskally and Dean, the readers should have a go.

Goodbye Victoria

By Shaun Mather

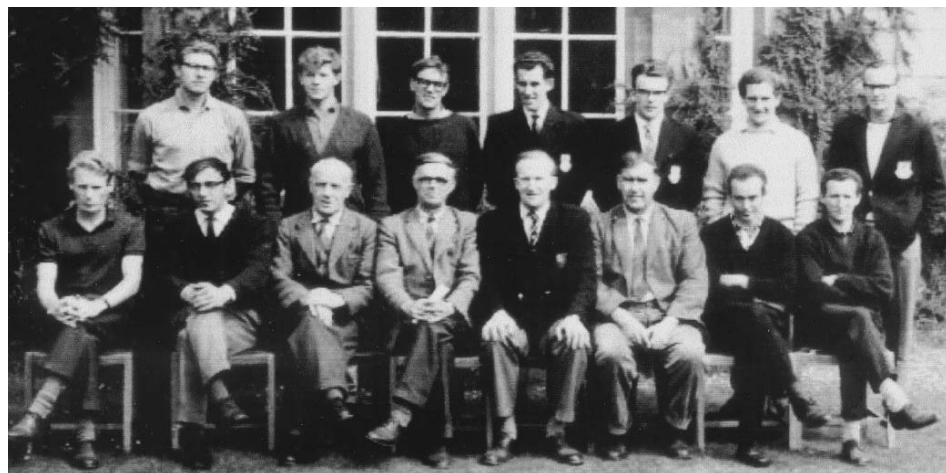
After many decades based in Victoria House on the Aberystwyth seafront, the FC Wales National Office is moving. From October 2009 FC Wales will be based in the new Welsh Assembly Government building in the heart of the town. To celebrate the time spent in Victoria House, staff are planning a dinner dance.

Invitations have yet to be sent but if you worked there or had strong links with the office and are interested in attending, please email Lewis Edwards at: lewis.edwards1@btinternet.com or phone 0845 604 0845. We are looking for any photos during our occupancy, office parties, retirements or merely just working there.

Come and join us at the Marine Hotel on Saturday 12th. September 2009. Make it a night to remember. Meet old friends and colleagues, catch up on the news and just have a good time. Victoria should go out with a bang!

Faskally – a balanced view

By Gordon Rae



As a former student at Faskally I read the articles in the last two editions of FCA Today by John McNeil, Ralph Nickerson and Ted Radford with some interest. From “rose tinted perceptions” through to “incarceration” and “tears of nostalgia” the views of the contributors are varied, if not extreme. I agree with many of the assertions but some basic facts should be established.

From the late fifties to the early sixties, the FC was expanding rapidly and needed foresters to manage and supervise the afforestation programme. Subsequently, all students at Faskally and the other FTS were there for one purpose and that was to emerge as FC foresters. The training at the school reflected this, and while the methodology applied in all four FTS varied, the production of foresters was the prime objective.

The discipline at Faskally was severe and many unfortunately fell by the wayside, particularly during the first few months. In some cases it cannot be argued that the dismissal procedure was other than iniquitous. I personally do not believe the system was Draconian and would assert that the Darwinian theory of survival of the fittest would be a more accurate description of the system.

I can recall my first experience of Faskally discipline with absolute clarity. Because I lived fairly close to Pitlochry I arrived early in the day full of enthusiasm and anticipation. Within an hour of my arrival I was summoned to the Head Training Officer's office and there subjected to a grilling which would have made Torquemada proud. It ran along the lines of “Should not be here at all, possibly be out within the first term and the likelihood of qualifying most improbable”. After recovering from the initial shock I determined that no amount of browbeating or brainwashing would deter me from completing the course. In essence I received

Back row (l-r): Ralph Nickerson, Mike Hanafin, Dick Ogilvie, Dave Chappell, Dave Cotton, Dave Douglas, Gordon Rae. Back row (l-r): Clark Anderson, Don Lindsey, Bill Stoddard, Norman Tulloch, Sandy Cram, Ian Garrioch, Mike Smith, Ian Robertson, (not included Gordon Heddon).

my de-selection, verbal warning and a pre-training PA of zero before even starting!

A word here regarding the PA system, which was applied to all students, not only at Faskally but also in the other FTS. The FC's reporting system at that time also applied an element of personal assessment which was never revealed to the reportee, but contributed significantly to the success or otherwise of the individual's career, determined by the subjective opinion of the Reporting Officer.

Unquestionably the first year students at Faskally were used as cost-free labour in local forests, but some who arrived there had only a limited knowledge of the basic work of forestry – planting, draining, weeding, brashing, etc. The only way to attain those essential skills was to physically and manually experience the work. Also Faskally at that time was a fully stocked forest so some elements of work experience could only be found in neighbouring forests. One thing was certain, at the end of a student's first year, he knew all there was to know about the basic manual skills required to supervise industrial staff in the future.

The second year at Faskally was significantly different and there was more emphasis on acquiring knowledge of supervision. While the manual labour was still there it was much reduced from the first year. Some of the subjects studied included geology and soils, surveying, botany, mensuration, thinning control, mechanics, genetics, fire protection and fighting, nursery work, safety and kinetics. Furthermore, for those who did not hold a

driving license, a qualified instructor provided tuition and training which was also enhanced by way of the Faskally Morris Minor - all free, gratis and for nothing.

There was one aspect of training which was sadly lacking. Significantly more harvesting operational expertise should have been provided. The exchange visit to Gwyder between 1st and 2nd year did offer a closer look at basic harvesting methods, while visits to places in and around Wales made the exchange very interesting. More importantly the food was very good although I cannot remember any case of salmonella at Faskally.

As I recall, during the 2nd year we were given the opportunity to expand our knowledge further by visits to other forests throughout north Scotland with overnight accommodation thrown in!

If my memory serves me right the demise of all the FTS came about as a result of a steady decline of the FC's planting reserve, consequently fewer foresters were required and the closure of the FTS was inevitable.

In essence the training, the visits and board and lodgings came free together with a weekly allowance of £2-10-0 all paid by the FC. A degree of restriction was inevitable, but what must be emphasised was that many students from Faskally and the other FTS went on, within and outwith the FC, to attain great success in their chosen careers. Despite some shortcomings, Faskally produced some very fine and accomplished foresters and I feel proud to have studied there and qualified successfully despite the obstacles. The photo shows those who graduated in 1964 which proves this point.

We still need recollections from Dean, Gwydyr, Lynford Hall and Benmore. Do the inmates still have their marbles? Ed

Faskally Reunion 2009

by Hamish McIntyre

I am organising a Faskally reunion later this year for the final year students of 1958, 1959 and 1960. I have already found many of you but a number have “gone missing”.

Please contact me if you would like to meet up: Email: jas.mac@virgin.net 5 Armadale Crescent, Balbeggie, Perth PH2 6EP. Tel: 01821 640 223

Alternatively contact – Joe Meechan at: Email: JMMeechan@aol.com Kyle, Dryfesdale, Lockerbie Tel: 01576 203 626

Where are the following?...

1958 David Lewis and Tony Tunks; 1959 Alex Robson; 1960 Bill Thompson, Michael Graham Pat Priestley and Douglas Watters.

If you have already been in touch, make sure you confirm you are coming. If you can entertain us, bring your props!

Touchwood Branches Out – and would like your help

A 3 year forestry history project, A Social History of Forestry in Scotland in the Twentieth Century, will create an historic record of forestry throughout Scotland. Following the success of the Touchwood History Projects in Mid-Argyll, the Great Glen and Glenmore during the past three years, a team from the soon to be University of the Highlands and Islands, Centre for History, is starting on a project throughout Scotland. It will culminate with a major written and spoken history in 2012. The planned book will become a standard reference of forestry, and the oral archive will be a resource of living history for Scotland's future generations.

Interviewees for the project will be sought in as many areas as possible. The history team are particularly keen to hear from people who were involved in both private and state forestry in the 1930 and 1940s.

The Touchwood Project has already resulted in an oral archive of well over a hundred hours. Two successful booklets, *Smell of the Rosin, Noise of the Saw*, now into its second edition, and *The Forest is a Beautiful Place to Be*, have been written by project coordinator Mairi Stewart.

The research team is led by Professor James Hunter, Director of the Centre for History. The project is supported financially by the FC Scotland and has also received European funding. It is the biggest history project ever carried out on forestry in the UK.

If you think you can help the team, please contact:

Email: Mairi.Stewart@thurso.uhi.ac.uk
The Centre for History,
The Coach House, Murray Road,
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Tel: 01786 821 374

Dughall Mor's taken down a peg or two!

Avid readers of this journal will recall a headline piece in the December 2006 issue which said that the tallest tree in Britain was a Douglas fir in Reelig Glen named Dughall Mor. It came in at 64.0m. I also claimed that the denizens of Inverness F.D. had a special relationship with this statuesque specimen, maintaining its vigour through all sorts of mystical fertility rites. How they have failed!

Recent height measurements by the Woodland Trust have revealed that it has slipped into third place. An unknown has come from behind. The Stronardron Douglas fir, part of an avenue in Glendaruel, has made 63.79m. It was planted by Archibald Fletcher of Dunans in 1848. Meanwhile a

Grand fir in Diana's Grove in Blair Castle has also taken a spurt to 62.70m., now taking second place. Dughall has fallen back to third at a revised measurement of 62.02m., while the Hermitage Douglas fir is just behind at 61.31m.

It seems that Inverness F.D. thought itself invincible, but the fairies and staff were working away behind the toadstools in Aberfoyle & Cowal F.D. and have come up with a result. Even the inmates of Tay F.D. have pulled a fast one on their neighbours with two out of four in the height stakes.

So the title of Master Tree 2009 moves to Cowal. Now that's a challenge which has to be taken up by all the mystics of the Big Tree world!

Are you a Scot?

You know you are Scottish if...

You can spot the odd one out in:-

- Auchtermuchty, Auchterarder, Aufurfsake and Auchenshuggle.
- Ye measure distance in minutes.
- Ye can make hael sentences jist wae sweer words.
- Ye plan yer wedding date aroond the fitba schedule.
- During the wedding, the fitba scores are announced at the church.
- Ye know Irn-Bru is a hangover cure.
- Ye urny surprised tae find curries, pizzas, kebabs, fish-n-chips, Irn-Bru, fags and nappies all in the wan shop.

Finally you understand the following...

A wee Glasga wumman goes intae a butcher shop. The butcher has jist came oot the freezer and is standing haunds ahint his back, with his erse aimed at the electric fire. The wumman checks oot the display case then asks, "Is that yer Ayrshire bacon?" "Naw" he replies, "It's jist ma haunds ah'a heatin". **and...** She then goes next door itae the baker's, looks o'er the display and asks, "Is that a doughnut or a meringue?" "Yer reet", the baker replies, "It's a doughnut".



THE FC JOURNAL

Recently Gwyn Francis contacted me saying that a complete bound set of FC Journals had come into his possession. He said that he enjoyed many moments glancing through each volume.

They cover subjects as varied as *Aesthetic Afforestation*, *Note on a Visit to Scotland*, *An English View of Scottish Forests*, *A View of Savile Row* and *D. Micans – a Threat?*

He has deposited the set in the library at the NRS Bush, as the Alice Holt library already has a copy.

AGM 2009

By Bart Venner

This year's AGM went well. Oak Lodge at Thetford was an admirable setting if only the USAF had not been flying over so often. There were 8 Group Delegates with another 10 members, not including the Chairman and the Treasurer. We changed the communications system and set up an e-mail contact in each Group. This would allow us to keep in touch and distribute information more easily. The Treasurer and Chairman were the same, David Parnall and Bart Venner. Plans were going ahead to hold the AGM for 2010 in the Dean and for 2011 in North Wales.

On the tour on Wednesday, the first stop was a stand of semi mature DF, with Silver fir and native broadleaved natural regeneration. We debated how we would manage it if it were ours. A good discussion, which included the proposals of the District Forester, kept us going for half an hour. We then visited an area of conifer stand removed, allowing a return to heath land for wildlife conservation. Close by we were told about Red Band needle blight which affected CP in the 15-30 year class. Thetford, being mostly planted with CP, had some 3000 hectares of the problem. We suggested that a return to early and frequent thinning would change the microclimate within the plantations so reducing the risk of infection.

At an area of recent gravel removal, we were told that if more were needed for road building, there would be pressure on the FC to sell or lease the pits. As they filled with water so readily, they could become attractive business propositions for leisure companies. Lastly we were taken round the arboretum next to Lyndford Hall. This gave some a chance to remember their days at FTS. The tour finished, the sun came through and we said our farewells to meet next year in the Dean.

OBITUARIES

Cliff Featherstone remembers two friends.

KEN CAPSTICK died aged 81 in January. He grew up on a farm in Wensleydale and as a young man moved to Ryedale as a farm worker in 1951. There he met and married Libby, to whom he was happily married for 52 years. In 1958 he started in the FC at Helmsley where he enjoyed using his skills in all aspects of forestry, and demonstrated his special ability in dry stone walling brought with him from Wensleydale.

Ken spent 34 happy years helping develop the forests in Ryedale and colleagues sum him up as a true countryman who cared for and appreciated the observation of the fields and forests and wild life which surrounded him. He was a country gentleman respected by all who knew him.

THOMAS JOHNSTONE died aged 89 in February.

Following wartime service as a Sergeant in the Royal Artillery in South Africa he pursued a forestry career beginning at the Klyloe Estate in Northumberland. He attended Glentress FTS from 1946-8 where he met his future wife, Betty. His first posting was to Rothbury, then subsequently he worked in other forests in N. Yorkshire where he received promotion to Head Forester.

Later he returned to Dalby from 1965 to 1971 where he was in charge of developing harvesting in North Yorkshire and played a big part in the 50th Anniversary celebrations. On promotion to Chief Forester in 1971 he moved to Wark Forest where he saw the last of the larger scale afforestation programmes, and oversaw the expanding Christmas tree and timber harvesting operations, his especial interest.

On retirement in 1984 he moved to Thornton Dale and was involved in setting up the Dalby Forest Visitor Centre and in voluntary work with the Beck Isle Museum in Pickering. He also worked as a forestry consultant intermittently over the next few years.

Tom was very involved with the Forestry Society, he and Betty visiting many countries on holiday with the Society. He also gave much to the CSU Foresters Section, serving for many years in both Yorkshire and Northumberland Branches at various times as secretary or chairman and with spells on the section executive committee.

Forestry was his life, he loved his work and was dedicated in anything he undertook for the FC. He was very active until his early 80s and after his wife died in 2004 he stayed in Thornton Dale, his last two years being spent very happily in the local Hall Residential Home. Tom was well respected by all who knew him and he will be sadly missed.

Norman Davidson and Bill Taylor have many memories of **JACK CHRISTIE** who died in January aged 84. He left school at 15 and starting work in the nearby Stoneywood Papermill which, during the wartime, was making parts for munitions. This 'Reserved Occupation' kept Jack out of the army until 1944 when he joined the Black Watch, where, after initial training, the battalion was sent overseas to India. Whilst in India he trained as a paratrooper to counter the Japanese invasion but fortunately the war ended before he had to use his new skills and he was finally demobbed in 1948.

Following demob he worked on Dunect Estate and enjoying the outdoor life, Jack joined the Forestry Commission as a worker in Kirkhill Forest in 1949. He then went on to Forester Training School at Glentress 1950 – 1952 where he was the Gold Medallist for his year. His first posting was Clashindarroch Forest where he was stationed at Gartly but he was able to continue with his passion of playing for his home team Dyce Cricket Club. At this time he also joined the Kennethmont Football Club. In 1954 Jack was posted over the hill to Glenlivet Forest and there met his future wife Jean Roy who at that time was a clerical worker in the forest office. In 1959 he moved to Speymouth Forest to help with a newly acquired area of 3000 acres which in time to become known as Aultmore Forest. Jack and Jean were married in 1960 and their first home was a very eco-friendly rented cottage in the Drybridge area with no electricity and hand pumped water from a nearby well. The FC eventually built a new forester's house with all the mod cons for them at Enzie in 1964 and shortly afterwards in 1965 Jack was promoted to Head Forester.

In a memorable blizzard on the 1 April 1970 he and family moved to a new home, Lynwood, and new work location of Forest of Deer where he managed the widely distributed forest area of about 7000 acres until his retirement in 1985. He enjoyed the out door environment so much that after retiring as Head Forester, he continued to work at Forest of Deer part time for a further 5 years.

Foresters and forest workers alike always spoke of him as a man of great honesty and fairness who worked hard and enjoyed many socials occasions with the staff. Jack's very lively sense of fun, humour and ability for practical jokes was legendary and former colleagues still remember with great affection some of his exploits on them or their friends. Finding a large sea fish that had spilled off a fish lorry is one such tale and Jack, taking it with him as he went away up the hill to see

the men draining, was unseen, able to leave it in the drain to be discovered later. The tales of this remarkable 'find' echoed through the community for months without his letting on.

Jack maintained a firm hand on work quality but was never afraid to step back and let junior staff take on responsibility and be justly recognised for their own achievements. He was dedicated to the FC and particularly proud of being instrumental in opening up many areas of the Forest of Deer to the public by creating car parks and walks back in the 1970s.

Jack enjoyed good health for a great many years in retirement and had a wide range of interests and is survived by his wife Jean, 6 children and 5 grandchildren.

Lena Birchall said that **FRANKIE (FRANCES) EDWARDS** died in April. She joined the Alice Holt Research Station in 1971 as typist, until retirement in 1979. She enjoyed life and people and had a great interest in gardening. For many years she was a volunteer helper in the local Leonard Cheshire home and organised its annual fete. In recent years she was Social Secretary of the Alice Holt FCA group.

Friends remember **SID FARQUAR** who died last October aged 89. He was brought up in Stuartfield, Aberdeenshire and growing up in the Buchan countryside he developed a lifelong passion for nature and wildlife. At the outbreak of WW2 he was working for the FC in the Forest of Deer. During the war he served in North Africa, the Middle East and the Mediterranean.

In 1947, he rejoined the FC at the Forest of Deer as a Wildlife Ranger, rising to Senior Ranger, First Class, where he remained until he retired in 1983. Sid loved his work and considered himself lucky to be paid to do a job that was also his passion. Throughout his working life he had the reputation of being very hard working. He set himself the highest standards and could be relied upon to get the job done. He had a wry sense of humour and was notorious for being a very early riser – a necessity for observing wildlife. Bill Taylor recalled Sid as being an excellent shot and frequently repeated his stock phrase 'always aim for the left eye'.

He was a man of many interests and talents and was well read, taking a keen interest in current affairs, geography, history, nature and the environment. He was a passionate gardener and his vegetable garden was his pride and joy. He was a talented musician who, at the end of a hard day, liked to unwind with a tune or two on the piano and mouth organ. He loved sports, particularly shooting and fishing, and enjoyed his invitations to local game shoots. These activities kept him busy in retirement and he enjoyed good health until just before his death. Above all, he is remembered affectionately by his family.

Mervyn Davies remembers **MIKE REANEY** who died recently.

On returning from his duties abroad he joined the FC as an Area Civil Engineer. In South Wales his abilities as a sound engineer were soon recognised and appreciated on a wide front both within and without the FC.

His outside interests were many and varied with an appreciation of music, a love of the great outdoors, travelling widely and enjoying sport. Mike was a very active member of the Gower Society, which is a renowned group of ordinary people who passionately regard the Gower Peninsula as a very special place. Mike's contribution to the society's activities was much appreciated. In the later years of his retirement, when his health was beginning to decline, he said that he had considered most drawbacks that the ageing years would bring, but that reduced mobility and hence the ability to walk the peninsula, and indeed the wider world, was one that had hit him most. Mike was a lover of many sports and an accomplished player of both tennis and rugby, the latter of which he played until he was in his late 40's.

His first post was as Area Engineer at Neath and later he became Conservancy Engineer at Cardiff. Through both periods, he put his prowess as an experienced civil engineer to the greatest effect. He had a rare ability to assemble facts, weigh the problems, assess the difficulties and risks and then come up with an effective, low tech, low cost, pragmatic solution which inevitably worked when put into practice. When the Welsh conservancies were amalgamated he took on the mantle of Land Reclamation Engineer, Wales. He always had an avid interest in the reclamation of despoiled land, a task he had embraced as Area Engineer in the south Wales coalfield. He recognised early on that one of the greatest inhibitors of tree growth on reclaimed land was compaction and so developed a piece of equipment, the "Neath plough". This had a robust soil bursting capability suitable for cultivating opencast and colliery spoil tips.

As Land Reclamation Engineer he was required to advise the Mineral Planning Authorities on the best practices to be adopted for effective restoration and aftercare of sites destined for woodland after-use following the extraction of minerals. Many well restored sites bear testimony to his intuitive approach to the needs of trees, and some of these are

still cited as classic examples of how difficult sites can be returned to beneficial woodland.

Mike, in recognition of his contribution to forestry, was awarded an OBE, a real tribute to his engineering abilities and in typical, self effacing manner is known to have commented "I wonder if it was given for the little work I did on restoration". He had a great sense of fun and this was very evident in a video he made showing the work of the civil engineering road construction teams. Not best practice, oh no! It was a whimsical look on how it should not be done. On the rare occasions when he would show it to visiting colleagues, the laughter it induced could be heard throughout the office.

Mike was a mentor to many, a kindly inspirational boss and commanded the respect of all who worked with him. He was a good man to know.

ARTHUR TAYLOR'S daughter Susan writes to tell us of his death in February aged 97. Arthur, originally from Manchester, joined the FC in 1946 aged 33. After being demobbed from the Army in Yorkshire, he saw an FC recruitment leaflet promising applicants "perpetual youth in the forest". He applied and started his training at Lewisburn Camp at Kielder in 1946. He married Mary, from Hull, the same year and they moved into an FC cottage in Plashetts. There was no electricity and no road to the hamlet initially and all the furniture arrived by train and had to be lifted over the fence at the bottom of the garden. Their children Susan and James were born at Plashetts but once the FC houses were built in Kielder, the family moved up to the village.

Arthur started in forestry when using a rutter to cut drains and a two hour cycle or walk to work were not unusual. Fire-watching from towers and fire beating were all part of the job. Arthur often recalled the fires that got away especially the one where all that was left of a waistcoat were the brass buttons at the foot of a fence post! Meanwhile for 15 years Mary ran Kielder post office from their sitting room. Arthur's last few years of service were spent as Storeman at Hawkhirst.

He retired in 1976 and took up photography. He photographed village events and recorded the changing nature of the valley as Kielder Water built and Plashetts and Hawkhirst went under the water. When Mary fell ill he looked after her for many years until she died in 1997. He was active and full of life until his final year, enjoying holidays in the Lake District and on Skye with his daughter. He retained his interest in forestry and often compared the life of forest workers today with his experiences 60 years ago long before the days of mechanisation and midge hoods.

Obituaries for Dick Richards, Bob Stewart and John Zehetmayr will appear in the next issue.

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