

LOCAL LIFE *By Adele Gourlay*

THE WOMEN OF THE FORESTRY COMMISSION

We are very lucky to live in an area of such natural beauty however, the Scottish Borders landscape looked very different post World War II. With much of the woodland felled for timber for the armed forces it fell to a different type of army to restore our beautiful countryside, the women of the forestry commission. One of these ladies was Mary Turnbull, nee Tinlin, born in February of 1932, this month she turns 91 and is one of the last of her group remaining of the forestry women who helped restore our woodlands and forests. Mary lived with her grandparents at the Blacklea at Bonchester after losing her mother to TB when she was 3 years old. She attended Hopkirk school until she was 14 but with money tight, she left to find work which didn't prove to be easy. With the war having ended the year before and many of the men returning home to their old jobs work was not so easy to find however, she persevered and was given a job at the nursery at Wauchope for the forestry commission. Britain was needing re-built and trees had been felled for timber to do this, therefore hundreds of thousands of trees needed to be re-planted. Being a slight built, blond haired lassie the foreman at the time didn't think she stood much hope of being able to manage the work and would struggle with the cold winters but always up for a challenge she took the job.

Mary tells us that working for the forestry was some of the best times of her life and she thoroughly enjoyed the work. She was involved in all aspects of growing the trees starting with climbing trees to gather the cones to get the seeds for planting. In the spring the seeds were then planted into seed beds 25ft by 3ft where they would stay for 2 years, just 1000s of tiny little pin heads popping through the earth. After 2 years they would be lifted and planted into lines for a further 3 years and then lifted again and taken to where they would spend the rest of their growing lives in new forests and woodlands. Mary would count the trees, put them into bundles in hessian sacks and load them onto lorries many to remain in Britain but some to be shipped all over the world.

When Mary first started in 1946 there were 26 girls and women at Wauchope all of whom had to do any of the jobs the men would do from weeding to cutting down trees and digging ditches although, she says her favourite part was being out on the hills climbing the trees for their cones. Her working days were long, 7.40 am to 5 pm Monday to Friday and 7.45 am to 11.30 am on a Saturday, for 25 shillings a week but Mary proved her foreman wrong and stayed with the service for 7 years leaving at 21 she left to get married to her first husband Norman Gourlay SR who she had met while working there. She tells us that it was a great atmosphere everyone got on with everyone and she enjoyed every minute out in the open air. She was able to walk to work and come home for her lunch and has fond memories dancing on a Friday and Saturday night at Bonchester hall. We owe much of our beautiful landscape to these fantastic women of the Forestry Commission. And the process has now come full circle as her grandson Ian, who fells trees for a living, now cutting down some of the very trees Mary planted.



(Above L to R) May Bell, Esme Blake, Mary Tinlin (17 years old)



(Above) Mary Tinlin

(Below) Jeanie Amos & Esme Blake



(From top left clockwise)

(1) Nan Scott, Unknown, Agnes Neil

(2) Foreman Bert Edwards - not the foreman who thought Mary wouldn't last!

(3) Mary Tinlin Today

(4) Agnes Neil

