



From the Editor

As you can see from reading our Spring newsletter, we continue to survive with enough copy to keep up the interest. Many thanks to those few of you who did contribute. I have retained some copy for the Summer edition to prevent sleepless nights, but I still need more.

Readers can look forward to an account of Roddie Burgess's exciting voyage from the Forth to the West Coast. Also Brian Greig tells of bark stripping as a student



at the Dean and H&S in 1959, and Ted Baldwin has more on the early days at Kielder. They have all made an effort to provide copy, why don't you?

Elsewhere in this newsletter you will read about the threats to the existence of the FCA. Whatever happens to it, I want and hope this newsletter will continue to be published. It's up to you!

Richard Toleman

Contents

FCA Today

	Page
From the Editor	1
The Demise of the Alice Holt Group	2
AGM and Discussion Paper on the future of the FCA	3
How I Avoided the Couch Potato Syndrome	5
Early Days as a DP at Kielder	10
Gwydyr Forester Training School	14
Sweet Chestnut Coppice Silviculture in Kent	15
Letters to the Editor	20
Life in Brief	21
Contact Details	26

The Demise of the Alice Holt Group

by Mike Whitlock

The group was launched on 24th April 1989 soon after the Association became official on 17th March. Ron Brown was the first chairman and I am pleased to say that he is still active and was present at the last event. Lena Birchall was on the Group Steering Committee and was still a committee member when the group closed down on 31st December 2013.

From the start, the group was very active with a mixture of coach outings, interspersed with indoor meetings with speakers on various subjects. The coach outings consisted of visits to stately homes, gardens and also boat trips. The events were well supported; the outings being especially attractive with visits to places as far away as Bristol, Westonbirt, Kent and Hertfordshire.

However, support declined with the increasing age and the death of active members, so recent events have mainly consisted of pub lunches and occasional social gatherings at the Research Station. Attendances dropped to single figures with one occasion when only 3 members were present.

The "paper" membership as at 31st December stood at 54 which includes spouses. We have always considered spouses as members and when their husband/wife has died we have "promoted" them to "full membership". This figure suggests a healthy number but can be broken down as follows:

1. Age, ill health, disability.
2. Living at a distance from the venue for meetings.
3. Lack of transport.
4. Lack of interest.

We have been able to recruit a few new, younger members but they were probably not interested in our rather limited events. There is also an age/physical ability gap.

We had been sending out programmes etc. to about 40 addresses but in view of the numbers of people attending events we decided that this was a waste of resources so a letter was sent out to all members asking them to complete a tear off slip to indicate that they wished to continue to receive communications. Alternatively, they could have replied via telephone or e-mail. Only 5 responses were received! This convinced me and the rest of the committee that most of the members did not see any future for the group so it was decided to close down at the end of 2013. Our last event was the Christmas lunch which was attended by 18 members plus two visitors. This marked a further decline in attendance at this event compared with previous occasions.

In addition, the four members of the committee had served for a long time and despite appeals no other members wished to join it let alone take over specific responsibilities. Three of the four members have had health problems but they continued to serve until the group closed. As already mentioned one has served ever since the group started.

Nevertheless, I am pleased to hear that other groups are still very active and have enough members to run coach outings, which we found attracts new members but had to drop.

View or download earlier issues of FCA Today

from the FCA website at: -

www.fca-today.com

AGM 2014 and the Future of the FCA

The 2014 AGM will be held in Neath on 13th May and is organised by Ian Blake of the South Wales group. An important item on the agenda is the future of the FCA as a national body. Already FC Wales has ceased to exist and Scotland will vote on independence in September. Will FC England remain as the rump of the old FC or will it disappear? At the same time, the FCA has great difficulties finding local and national organisers to keep it going. In this issue you will see an account by Mike Whitlock on the demise of the Alice Holt group. The Edinburgh & South Scotland group suffers from lack of support and

may wind up at its local AGM in April. However there are very active and viable local groups that will want to continue.

Because of these threats to the FCA, Charles Dickens and I have produced a discussion document that will be presented as an agenda item to our AGM. It has already been circulated to group secretaries for discussion at local AGMs. If you do not participate in a local group but have a strong view, please send comments to me or Charles via e-mail addresses on our website www.fca-today.com

The discussion document is given in full below.

FORESTRY COMMISSION ASSOCIATION

Discussion Paper – The Future of the FCA

CURRENT SITUATION

The death of Peter Charlesworth means that we have no chairman or secretary and when David Parnall stepped down from his post at the 2013 AGM, we also have no treasurer although Charles Dickens offered to step into this role on a caretaker basis.

Richard Toleman continues to run the website *FCA – Today* and has indicated he is happy to continue to do so as long as he gets copy to publish although he is finding it increasingly difficult to do so.

Therefore at the present time just Richard and Charles are representing the FCA Management Committee.

In the early days of the Association the job of the Management Committee was to create Branches based initially on the old Conservancies who in turn would create Groups. In the absence of a Branch being set up, Groups could be set up directly by the Management Committee. The FC gave the Management Committee funding to assist the setting up of Branches and Groups. In addition the committee directly organized the AGM although lately this task has been handed to the Groups, the Committee maintaining an overview and assistance.

Today, in practice the term "Branch" has become defunct in preference to "Group".

Currently there are nine active Groups; North Scotland, West Argyll (formerly Mid Argyll) Edinburgh & South Scotland, Yorkshire, Forest of Dean, Breckland, Peninsula, North Wales and South Wales. Some Groups are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit members. Membership is generally getting older and people are very reluctant to help in managing these groups. Indeed in recent years Groups in Cowal, North West England, Chilterns and Alice Holt have folded and the future of the Edinburgh and South Scotland Groups is in doubt.

However, some groups are still flourishing but there is no certainty as to the exact state of the membership because it is some time since a general survey of membership numbers was carried out. It is recommended that a survey be carried out before the 2014 AGM.

LIAISON WITH THE FORESTRY COMMISSION

Funding. The FC offers a grant each year to the FCA to assist in the running of the association. Each April the Treasurer presents the accounts to the FC for examination that is instrumental for a grant being paid. Currently the amount is £1,500 per annum. We have been offered £1,500 for 2014/15 but there is no

FORESTRY COMMISSION ASSOCIATION

Discussion Paper – The Future of the FCA *continued*

guarantee the grant will continue.

Prospective FC retirees are advised by FC Human Resources of the existence of the FCA and are given Charles Dickens' contact details should they wish to know more about the association. As the FCA's Liaison Officer, Charles is also the first contact between the FCA and the FC (and *vice versa*) on other matters of common interest.

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The form of the AGM, is an afternoon meeting followed by a dinner and the next day, a forest outing. It has been regularly attended by about 20 people some of whom are prepared to travel from one end of Great Britain to the other to attend. The Management Committee largely defrays the cost of travel and accommodation for one delegate per Group but it has become increasingly expensive to do so. The FC's annual grant is almost all used up paying delegates' expenses. It is likely delegates' expenses may not be fully reimbursed for the 2014 AGM.

NORTH AND SOUTH WALES GROUPS

Since FC Wales was subsumed into Natural Resources Wales, the two Welsh Groups continue to exist as members of the FCA but in accordance with the terms of the FCA Constitution only ex FC employees may become members. This raises the question whether or not forestry employees, formerly FC staff but now employed by NRW could become members of the FCA. And what about forestry staff recruited by NRW?

It had been hoped to enter a dialogue with NRW so that this and other matters related to retired FC staff could be resolved but to date there has been no response to our approaches.

Meanwhile the views of the two Welsh Groups should be sought on this matter and, however it is resolved, the

Constitution amended to reflect the wishes of the membership.

THE FUTURE

The options facing the FCA are:

1. Do nothing. It might be that at the May 2014 AGM people come forward to fill the posts on the Management Committee in which case the FCA carries on as before. However, with Groups folding, difficulty in recruiting and retaining new members and the lack of people offering themselves to take on the running of the association, the reality may be that this will not happen and the association withers away.
2. Abandon the AGM. Should new people not come forward to run the Management Committee, we carry on as now with Richard and Charles performing their roles as long as they wish to do so.
3. Wind up the Management Committee. Bearing in mind that most of the membership may see the committee as a channel for co-ordinating the AGM it could be left for the Groups themselves to pass on the organization of the AGM to another. However there would be no central focus for the association to approach the FC for funding (provided it is still available) or on any other matter of mutual interest.
4. Formally wind up the association. The FCA ceases to exist as a formal entity and its assets handed back to the FC in accordance with the terms of the Constitution. This would not mean that individual groups who wish to continue as gatherings of ex FC employees cannot do so but they adopt their own rules.

**Richard Toleman
Charles Dickens
February 2014**

How I Avoided the 'Couch Potato' Syndrome

by Jim Christie

After many years of enjoying all things outdoors and still a keen hill-walker, I retired from the Commission in 2002 determined not to become a 'Couch Potato'. I felt that working with one of the environmental charities might give me the opportunity to combine what I liked doing with what I believed needed doing.

As chance would have it, my retiring from the position of Plant Engineer coincided with the very early stages of the Woodland Trust's Glendevon project aimed at turning the clock back by 600 years and re-creating the natural woodland that had existed before the Ochils had been cleared of woods and used for the grazing of sheep. Since Glendevon is virtually on my doorstep I signed up as a Voluntary Warden.

The long-term vision for Glendevon was to establish a large, more or less continuous area of new native broadleaved woodland by planting 1.5 million trees with a completion date of May 2008. The site would cover 1233 ha with 70% of the land under birch and oak but with considerable site variation with areas of alder, ash and juniper on the upper slopes.

Initially my input was that of a hill-walker.

To comply with the 'Right to Roam' legislation, it was my job to advise where the mounding plan should be adapted to incorporate footpaths. Also, I was asked to suggest where gates and styles should be located in the boundary fence and temporary compartment fences that were being erected. All of this work was well within my 'comfort zone' but that was soon to change.

I next became involved in an interesting aspect of the project as a result of the good folks of Muckart requesting that part of the Glendevon area should become their "Community Nature Park." This request aligns perfectly with the Trust's objectives and so joint Trust / Community discussions were set up.

The outcome was that an area known locally as "Geordie's Wood" near the village would be designated as a Community Nature Park.

However, there was one aspect of the Community's input that was a bit of a surprise, namely their request. "Can we have wild-flowers as well as trees?"

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How I Avoided the 'Couch Potato' Syndrome *continued*

Trees and Flowers – How?

If a flower carpeted woodland is to be created on what was previously agricultural pasture land that has lain un-ploughed for more than one hundred years, then establishing trees is not a problem in that a mounding preparation followed by hand planting is a well tried and tested method. However, the addition of wildflower seeds into the package makes the approach a bit more complicated.

The Trust's Woodland Manager for the project explained the two obvious options; mound and plant the site, prior to cultivating strips between the mounds with pedestrian controlled cultivators, then broadcast the strips with the wildflower seed or, blanket-cultivate the site, broadcast the wild-flower seed then plant the trees once the flowers are sufficiently well established. He further explained that accepted wisdom was that both these options will result in the trees growing well but due to the fertility of the soil the common agricultural weeds such as willow herb, thistles, creeping

buttercup and dockens will also thrive and smother any wildflowers that have been subsequently introduced.

Specialist Advice

After a search of the information on the subject, the decision was taken to adopt an approach that has already been successfully evaluated by an organisation known as Landlife, a registered environment charity specialising in the preservation of wildflowers.

The original Landlife project introduced the concept of soil inversion as a means of preparing land for tree planting and wildflower establishment. This was done with a minimum of herbicide usage by deep ploughing to expose weed free sub-soils. Historically, deep ploughing had been used in Denmark and Lithuania as a forestry technique to reduce weed competition. The technique, however, was not widely adopted since some sites were at risk from soil erosion.

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How I Avoided the 'Couch Potato' Syndrome *continued*

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For the Woodland Trust to apply this technique in Geordie's Wood we were going to have to bury the topsoil under a layer of sub-soil then, broadcast flower seeds selected on the basis of sub-soil analysis, before planting the trees.

Next Problem - How Could Complete Inversion of the Soil be Achieved?

Conventional ploughs invert the furrow by 135 degrees and therefore, even if set to plough deeper than normal, do not completely bury the topsoil with a layer of sub-soil. However we were able to locate a plough manufacturer in Denmark who had made a prototype plough that does exactly what was required and the Trust was able to arrange for it to be made at the right time to carry out the necessary cultivation.

When the plough arrived on site, a local contractor was engaged to carry out the necessary work. Fortunately for the Woodland Trust, the contractor was also able to supply extremely patient and competent tractor drivers who were able to keep the plough operating in the stony conditions that were frequently outside its rather fragile design envelope.

How Does the Plough Work?

It can be seen from the photograph that the leading body is the subsoil plough and the second body is the topsoil plough. Since it is in effect only a two-furrow plough it was well within the capability of a 190 hp tractor in spite of the extremely stony conditions encountered below the depth of previous ploughing.

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How I Avoided the 'Couch Potato' Syndrome *continued*

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When the tractor approaches the previous furrow, the offside wheels are aligned to run on top of the inverted topsoil furrow from the previous pass of the topsoil plough. (T4 in the diagram below.) This ensures that the topsoil

is firmly buried. This alignment ensures that the subsoil plough body lifts and inverts the subsoil slice (S4 in the diagram) onto the top of the topsoil slice T4. Thus the topsoil is effectively buried. On the same pass, the topsoil body engages topsoil slice T3 and flips it into the trench left by S4.



The cultivation process was completed by heavy-duty disc harrows to establish the final seed-bed tilth ready to sow the selection of seeds refined

to suit the particular growing conditions by the supplier Scotia Seeds, who are well known for their specialist knowledge in this area.



Seed bed preparation

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How I Avoided the 'Couch Potato' Syndrome *continued*

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Since the Trust takes every opportunity to involve communities and give them the sense of 'ownership,' flower seed sowing events were organised and the local residents were put to work using the traditional farmer's method of 'hand broadcasting.' I had had occasion to do this on my uncle's farm but on this occasion I learned an interesting variation on 'hand broadcasting.'

When hand sowing oats or barley to a relatively high sowing density, it is easy to obtain an even scatter, but to achieve the lower density required for flower seeds, coupled with the much smaller seed size, achieving an even scatter of the seeds is particularly difficult. Fortunately, a local farmer gave us a useful tip.



Flora sowing by the community

Thoroughly mixing the seed with sawdust prior to sowing gives the broadcaster a more easily regulated handful to scatter, the sawdust then biodegrades, the seeds grow and the distribution is nicely even – job done.

And so in the spring of 2007 a wonderful display appeared. Since then the trees have been planted and in subsequent springs the flowers have altered their blooming cycle so that instead of the initial mix of glorious colours, a

succession of colours has evolved. More recently, due to the zero-grazing regime adopted to protect the trees, weeds, such as willow herb and thistles, have become dominant and are taking the light from the flowers. However, the flower experts assure us that once the trees dominate the weeds, the flowers will again make a showing and the good folks of the local community will have what they asked for.



Options for Woodland Trust Scotland Volunteers are listed online. We are currently looking for people with experience in forestry to help the Trust achieve its ambition of doubling the amount of woodland across the UK by acting as Woodland Creation Champions.

Early Days as a "DP" at Kielder

by Ted Baldwin

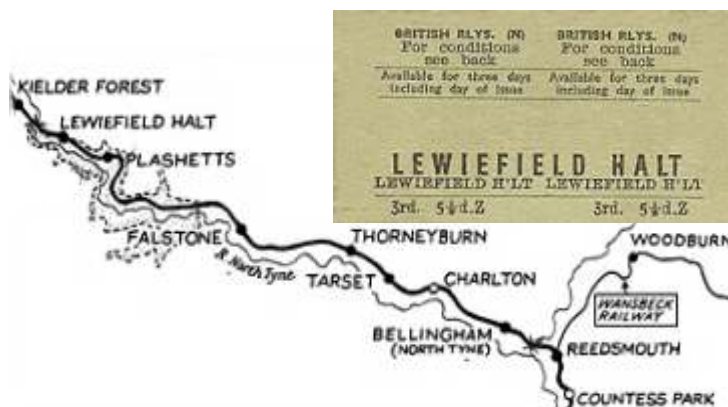
In the late 1940s, on completion of a year's forest worker training at Birch Hall in north Yorkshire, I was presented with my Certificate of Competence and a single ticket to Lewiefield halt, Kielder. In those days, the North Tyne valley was served by a vital rail link to the outer world. For me, it was a journey into the unknown vastness of Kielder forest. As the train steamed its way from Bellingham, there were brief stops at Tarnet, Thorneyburn, Falstone and Plashetts.



Eventually I arrived at Lewiefield and I alighted with my kit and trusty push bike. My accommodation was

in the nearby Lewie Camp which turned out to be a more depressing version of the pre-war labour camp that I had recently left at Birch Hall. Here were the same grim looking huts within a forbidding perimeter fence. During the War it had served as a Naval Detention Camp and the hut at the camp entrance had all the features of a former Guard Room.

The majority of the camp residents were displaced persons or "DPs", or refugees from war torn Europe. Many were from eastern European countries occupied by Russia and included Latvians, Estonians, Lithuanians, Poles and Ukrainians. Also at various times there would be an influx of Geordies sent to the camp for forestry work from the Newcastle Labour Exchange. More often than not, their stay was short lived and most soon returned to Geordieland. While they were at the camp, their unruly behaviour and heavy drinking could be very intimidating. I recall one night when one ran amok in the hut wielding a knife or bayonet.



After this incident, I managed to arrange a transfer to a small individual cabin in another hut, part of which was being used as Mounces forest office. As well as having more privacy and security, it benefited from some of the adjacent office's residual warmth before I could light my own stove each night. My stove was a great comfort and was essential for heating meat pies, tins of beans and spaghetti bought from the visiting mobile shop. They supplemented the basic camp food that had a distinctly continental flavour. This was so much so that for years after, anything with a hint of garlic was an anathema to me!

Having a bath at the camp was quite an event. One of the huts had a couple of baths that were



only available at certain times and had to be booked well in advance. Without a radio or daily paper, life in the camp could be quite frustrating, especially over winter. However one bright spot was the weekly arrival of the mobile cinema. A makeshift screen was set up in one of the empty huts and the operator attempted to show the film reels in the correct sequence on his often temperamental projector.

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Early Days as a "DP" at Kielder *continued*

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At weekends there was an opportunity to leave the camp by train, the favourite destination being Hawick. Even though



Lewiefield Halt

we worked S a t u r d a y mornings, we caught the north bound midday train, r e a c h i n g Hawick with a

change at Riccarton junction. It was possible to see Hibs or Hearts play in the afternoon, have a meal, see a film and catch the last train back to Lewiefield. This was the High Life!

On the whole, the DPs were very good workers. Some settled into life at Kielder and applied for British citizenship. Others saw forestry work as a way of making money before moving on or emigrating. A few of the Latvians and Lithuanians were experienced foresters or surveyors, one Latvian being the remarkable Valdemars Blankenburgs. For a while, I worked with him surveying and mapping Kielder Forest District. He was a keen and competent photographer and produced a valuable archive of photos of the forest and the North Tyne Valley. He was one of the refugees who remained and settled in Northumberland.

(This remarkable archive is stored in Northumberland County Records Office at Woodhorn. Although it is not catalogued it is kept safely and is available for inspection and study. See www.experiencewoodhorn.com/archives A small selection from the Blankenburgs archive can be seen at:

http://communities.northumberland.gov.uk/Kielder_C4.htm

I have used some of his photos to illustrate this article. There is a better selection at:

www.randpsystems.co.uk/blankenburgs/pastpics2.htm#dad Ed.)

Some years after I left Lewie camp, a round of budget cuts resulted in the laying off of many DPs and its closure. It eventually became the District Mechanical Workshop, subsequently disappearing under the rising waters of Kielder Water. I recall that for quite a while I was the only Brit residing in the camp which made me feel more like a DP than the rest of the resident refugees.



Kielder, Sitka Spruce (c.1949)

In those early years at Kielder there were eleven beats, each with its own forester in charge and a local squad of forest workers. These were, in sequence from the Scottish border, N. & S. Kielder, Mounces, Plashetts, Falstone, Smales, Whickhope, Chirdon, Tarset, Pundershaw and Wark. At this time there were a few forestry houses at Bewshaugh and at Kielder station and further down the valley there were scattered houses at Plashetts, Falstone and Wark.

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Early Days as a "DP" at Kielder *continued*

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While I was at Lewie there were ambitious plans drawn up by Dr. T. Sharp for five new forestry villages at Kielder, Mounces, Plashetts, Comb and Chirdon.

The largest of these was to have been Kielder on the Butteryhaugh nursery site.



Kielder, Butteryhaugh Nursey (1949)

There it was proposed to build 250 houses with shops, pubs, a hall, a school, a church and a cinema. It was intended to house up to 1000 forestry employees.

An artists impression of Kielder village shows a gaitered horseman standing with his steed on the village green and against a backdrop of a row of shops and houses and an elevated church.

The other proposed villages were planned to have 120 houses each, also with community facilities, but like Kielder, they failed to materialise.

Subsequently the sites at Mounces and Plashetts disappeared under Kielder Water. After I left, a number of houses were built at Kielder but the vibrant village community envisaged by Dr. Sharp was never realised.



Kielder Village (1952)

The best laid schemes o' mice an' men gang aft a-gley, an' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain, for promised joy.



Kielder, Forest Railway Station (c.1949)



Kielder Viaduct and School (1950)

More photographs from the Blankenburgs archive are on the next page ➡➡➡

Early Days as a "DP" at Kielder *continued*

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Photographs from the Blankenburgs archive



Kielder, Castle Drive House Building (1950)



Kielder Castle (1948)



Maija, Dzintra and Gunars



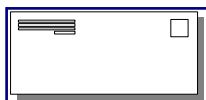
Maija, Valdemars, Elfrida, Gunars and Dzintra

Do you have any articles for publication in this magazine?



Send your articles to the editor

by e-mail to: editor@fca-today.com



by post to: Richard Toleman,
Manuel Stables,
Linlithgow,

Gwydyr Forester Training School Course 21 Prize Giving 17th July 1968

by Dick Ayre

Looking through my photographic archives, I came across this classic picture of students who were about to become a force for change in the forestry world. My word we do look smart! Are we still feeling bright and perky? Why not? I'd welcome any contacts. What are you up to now?

Back row Left to Right :-

Mike Casserley, Keith Henderson,
Meirion Morris, Bob Sanders,
John Proudfoot, Doug Allan.

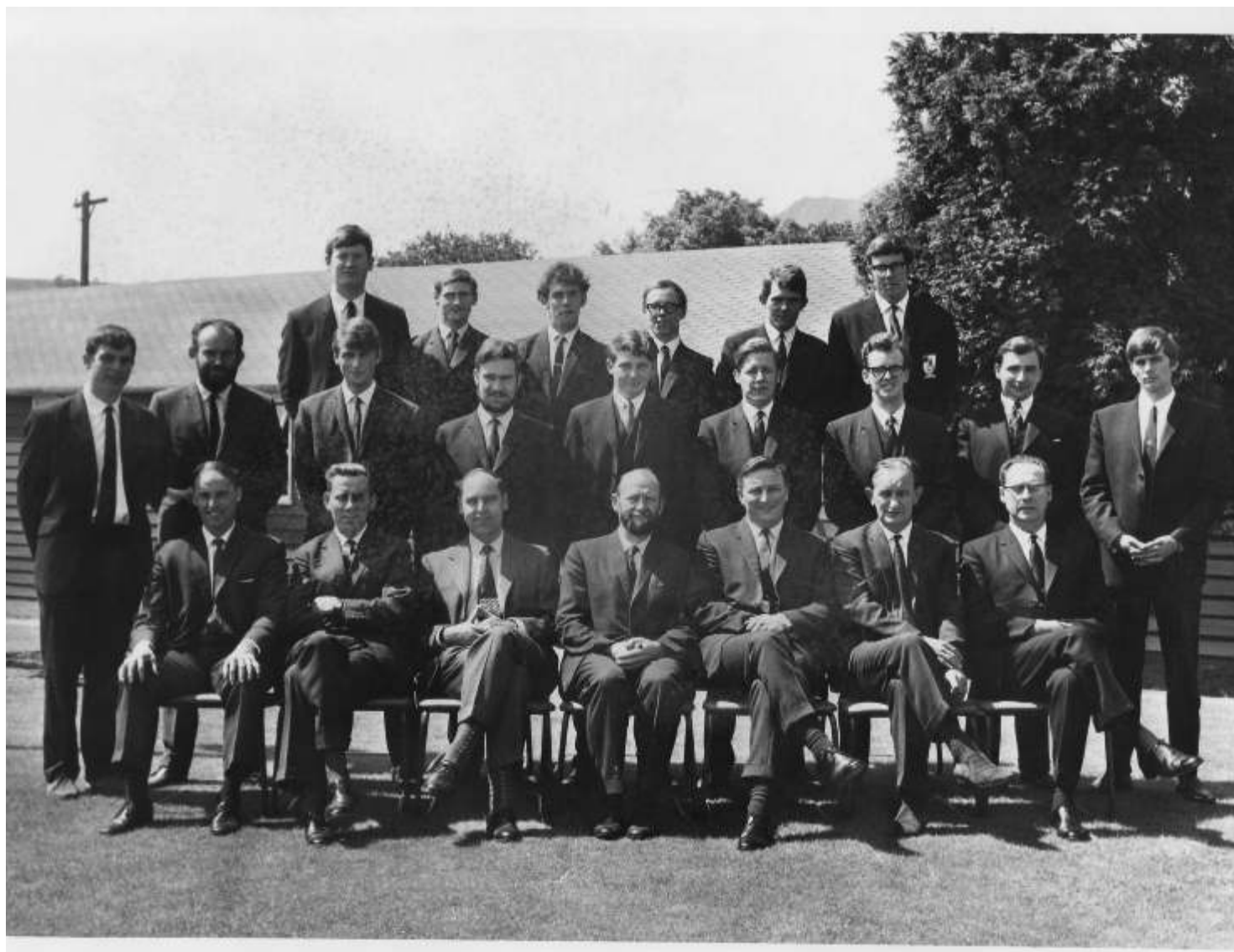
Middle row Left to Right :-

Chris Robinson, Hamish Jeffrey,
John Clarke, Chris Booth, Ian Tierney,
Paul Marsh, John Davies, Dick Ayre,
Brian Barrett.

Front row Left to Right :-

Mr J. Robertson (F), Mr R. Wheeler (HF),
Mr E. Harris, Mr G. Savage (DO1),
Mr A. Jones (DO2), Mr A. Powell (HF),
Mr B. Thompson (F).

Mr Harris was our original Education Officer but left in our second year to become Forestry Training Advisor to the Agriculture, Horticulture and Forestry Industry Training Board. By acclaim he returned to present our prizes and certificates.



Sweet Chestnut Coppice Silviculture in Kent

by Simon Malone

As a Trainee Forester fresh from Forester School in 1967 my first posting was to Challock Forest, Kent in the old SE(E) conservancy. I was quickly drawn into the management of commercial sweet chestnut coppice, something which the Dean FTS had not prepared me for! At that time Challock, (pronounced Chollock), carried an area of over a thousand acres of sweet chestnut coppice, though at one time the area under such coppice would have been much greater. Over the years the poorer areas had been taken out of coppice and

stocked with Corsican pine, Norway spruce or Douglas fir. Indeed this process was ongoing as poor quality areas were identified and taken out of production.

As British forestry goes, this crop had a sense of history about it and the language of "cants", "washes" and "tellers" was soon part and parcel of my life, as was the practice of measuring the areas for sale in acres, roods and perches. This was at a time when forest measurement was conducted in acres, chains, Hoppus feet and tons.



An area of sweet chestnut coppice, or underwood as it was also known, might be around 20-30 acres or so and normally be ready for harvesting at between 16 to 20 years of age. The area would not necessarily be a regular shape and the trick was to carve it into areas, known as cants, of about an acre each. When sold

by auction, adjoining cants would not necessarily be purchased by the same buyer and so it was essential that each cant had individual roadside frontage in order to ensure access to the timber to be removed. Using a simple cross stick

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Sweet Chestnut Coppice Silviculture in Kent *continued*

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mounted on a pole with a couple of nails to sight along, straight lines were sighted through the area to demarcate the boundaries of the cants. The minimum amount of cutting back was done to produce a visible sight line through the crop.

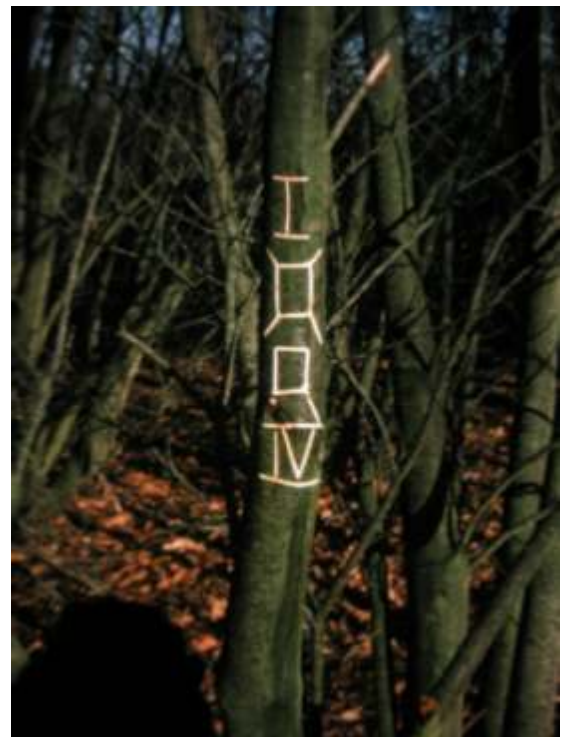
In the old days standing chestnut poles on each side of this line were marked with whitewash to make them clearer as these were the boundaries of the cants offered for sale. Hence they were referred to as "washes". To make measuring the cant areas both easy and accurate, the washes were put through the crop parallel to each other using the crossed sighting stick to set off right angles as well as to produce long straight lines. The area of the cant in square yards could also then be easily calculated. However for sale purposes the area was described in acres, roods and perches. (There are 4 roods to the acre and 40 perches to the rood). Easy so far! The cant number and its area in acres, roods and perches would be marked conspicuously with a timber scribe on a pole at each corner of a cant.

This would enable prospective purchasers to know the area of the cant before an auction catalogue became available. The photograph shows cant number 1 with an area of 1 acre, 1 rood (which is a quarter of an acre), and 4 perch.

The old woodsmen who bid for the standing coppice would furtively inspect the cants, often many times, in the run-up to the sale and I remember Dick Vines, one of the older foresters, saying we were walking in the footsteps of the faithful when we conducted the valuation

inspection exercise with the auctioneer shortly before the sales. Indeed, some inkling of the interest in a particular cant could be gauged by evidence of foot traffic along the wash lines prior to the sale as potential buyers inspected the areas!

A few days before the sale the auctioneer, his assistant, the Head Forester, (Peter Awbery), the District Officer, (John Harrison), myself and our Leading Ganger Gil Clark would inspect all the cants to agree a valuation and set reserves.



Occasionally, on such inspections, our party might run into one of the potential buyers also making a final, furtive check of his own. Such meetings would result in very coy conversations on the part of each party with the sellers upbeat about quality and value and the buyer telling us he had never seen such a load of old rubbish as was on offer!

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Sweet Chestnut Coppice Silviculture in Kent *continued*

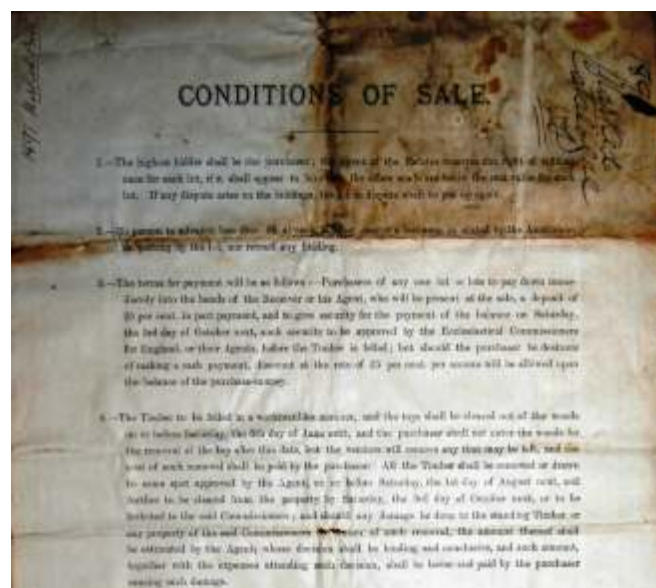
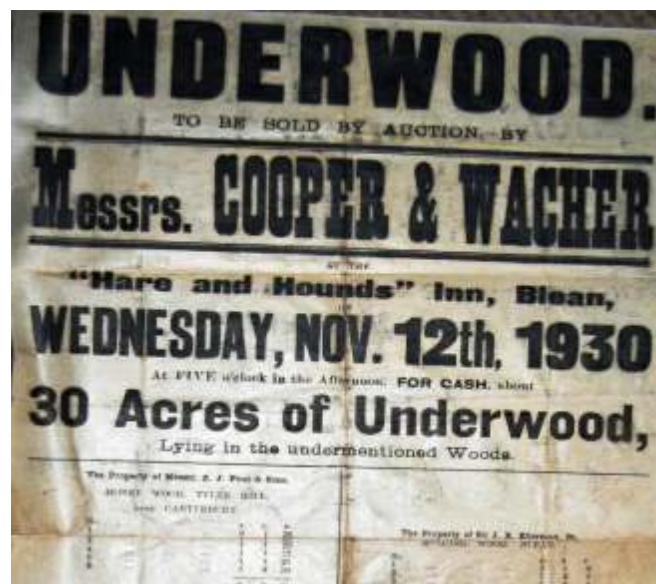
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The cants were sold by auction in local pubs each November. Here the auctioneer would buy everyone a pint and preside across a smoke filled room over a group of scruffy looking characters who barely acknowledged each other as the sale went on. Poor quality crops, where the chestnut poles were either crooked or thin on the ground, might sell for as little as £40-50 per acre, if they sold at all! Indeed, if it wasn't for the proximity of the then Bowater factory at Sittingbourne there would have been almost no market for the lower quality chestnut.

The top quality cants, where quality was ideal for cleaving the poles into stakes or spiles (pales for cleft chestnut fencing) or which could produce posts and hop poles would fetch £400-600 per acre (1970's prices) and were fiercely bid for. Strangely, once the sale was concluded and normal pub business resumed these old timers would be best of friends with each other once the competition of the sale was over, buying each other drinks and no doubt congratulating each other on how well they had done!

The chestnut auctions were in early November each year and areas for sale were marked out and measured during the preceding spring, (prior to leaf growth which would make surveying difficult), ready to go into the auction catalogue. To protect the coppice and its long term future, all felling had to be complete by the 25th March after the sale and all lop-and-top burnt and produce removed by the 1st June in order that damage to the new coppice shoots, which started to grow in the spring after felling, was minimised.

Examples of sale poster (1930) and catalogue conditions (1891)



The felling quality of the poles on individual stools was very important in ensuring the highest quality possible of the successor crop. Poles needed to be cut as close to the coppice stool as possible and with the sloping cuts made in such a way as to shed water away from the centre of the stools. Cutting poles low would ensure straight re-growth whereas if cut high there was a

Continued on next page ➡

Sweet Chestnut Coppice Silviculture in Kent *continued*

Continued from previous page

tendency for the new growth or "springs" to grow away from the stool forming a "hockey stick" bend in the new stems. Some areas of coppice must have been of considerable age as the stools could have spread outwards across a diameter of 5 or 6 feet suggesting as many as 10 or more rotational cuts with an implied age for the stool of some 180-200 years.



During the period in question most buyers carted the felled produce back to their yards to complete the process of peeling, cleaving, pointing etc. but some would still set up a "bivvy" using old tarpaulins and sheets of corrugated iron and carry out this work on the cant itself. Those who transported the produce off site used tractors with trailers or transporter boxes, loaded by hand, to cart the produce off the cants and sometimes the same vehicle took everything back to their yards as well.

After the crops had been felled, the brushwood burnt by the buyer, and the produce removed, the cants would be absolutely clear of rubbish and weeds. Poorly stocked cants were "gapped up" in the spring a year after felling using transplants. Another method was to use long slender chestnut poles which had been marked strategically throughout the crop and excluded from the sale. These were part severed, bent over and pegged down to create a "layer" which would root along the length of the pole and help to infill the gaps.

In the old days all other species which regenerated in the areas would be "cleaned" out of the crop by hand cutting in the second or third year's re-growth. However as economics changed this added cost was saved and birch and sallow allowed to grow. Both of these species were acceptable at Bowaters and birch was in demand by the Kent Woodware turnery factory in Hawkhurst. Birch tops would be bundled up and sold to the racing industry for horse jumps. Another benefit of allowing infilling by other species was the tendency to force the chestnut poles to grow up straight in the face of the competition provided.

Damage to the new chestnut growth, or "springs" as they were known, caused by browsing deer started to become a problem in the mid 1970's. Fallow deer in the area, escapees from the nearby Chilham Park, became more numerous and would browse on the tips of the first year re-growth in the early spring. The loss of the leading bud would result in a "crook" in the stem at about waist height and this would have serious impact on the straightness and therefore value of the crop in later years.

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Sweet Chestnut Coppice Silviculture in Kent *continued*

Continued from previous page

Measures were taken to reduce the size of the population but at this time the deer were spreading rapidly across east Kent. Other measures included restricting the burning of lop and top and requiring purchasers to break the brushwood down and leave it spread across the cant between the coppice stools in an attempt to hamper easy access across the area by the deer. This had partial success but made working the cants more difficult when it came to the extraction of the produce.

Some Sweet Chestnut crops contained a scatter of mature oak trees which were part of the old coppice-with-standards system. These varied in age from mature oak, ready to harvest, to younger trees or "tellers" which still needed many years to grow to maturity. Whether mature oaks or tellers, they were not part of the coppice crop offered for sale at the auctions and the best of them may be sold separately immediately after the coppice crop had been cleared.

In 1947 Charles Begley, later to become Conservator SE(E), published Forest Record 30, "Growth and Yield of Sweet Chestnut Coppice". His estimates of production of 20 – 30 tons per acre were generally recognised as something of an underestimate, probably because his assessments were based on outturn of high quality traditional products only and didn't take account of low value pulpwood and non-chestnut species product outturn. Also the coppice workers recovered material below the then 3 inch top diameter recognised for timber volume measurement.

In 1987 the data was revised in the form of Bulletin 64, the author of which was Tim Rollinson, later to become Director General. Tim entered into the world of forestry as District Officer 2 in the 1970's based at Ashford, Kent working with Bob Waters, the other DO in that office.

When forest measurement went metric in 1970 FC policy was that all crops, including Sweet Chestnut coppice, must be sold by the metric unit, (tonnes in this case). We got round this by continuing to measure in the old way and converting the units to hectares afterwards. (Don't forget – no electronic calculators at this time!) The area would then be sold by the hectare and this area multiplied by the theoretical weight per acre/hectare to give the accepted tonnage sold and which was used for FC records purposes. The auction catalogue would also show the old imperial units alongside the metric versions as the old timers who worked these crops were very resistant to change and certainly wouldn't know what a hectare looked like! I have the dubious privilege of being one of the few Commission foresters to convert these ancient sale units to hectares when the FC adopted the use of metric conventions in 1970 and may well have been among the last Commission foresters to even work in such ancient units.

The custom of selling chestnut coppice at traditional Underwood Sales in Kent died out in the early 1990's and I look back on this phase of my forestry career with affection and nostalgia.

Footnote. Much of the chestnut coppice I worked with was grown in King's Wood, Challock and the link below will take you to a web site describing the interesting history of this old woodland.

<http://www.jennyuglow.com/?page=Akings>

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

I am trying to find out the name of the driver of the D7 featured in the attached photo. The driver is talking to Geoff Bartlett (chief forester, Research) on the left at Ardross Forest in 1975 where the mounted tine new type heavy pivot plough mounting was being tried out. Can any reader help?

I am currently working on a series of Research cultivation photos showing ploughing and related operations from the 1930s to the 1980s.

There are over 700 images and they will be loaded onto the Forest Memories website in early 2014. The site, very much Scotland based, has over 2000 images and there are more photos and text on attached PDFs.

Best wishes

Norman Davidson

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Do you know this Research D7 driver?

Send your letters to the editor for publication in FCA Today



by e-mail to: editor@fca-today.com

by post to: Richard Toleman,
Manuel Stables, Linlithgow, EH49 6JF.

LIFE IN BRIEF

In Memory of Peter Charlesworth

1st June 1934 - 10th December 2013

by Ian Blake

Peter Charlesworth, FCA Chairman for the past two years, passed away suddenly on Tuesday 10th December 2013. He was 79 years of age. Here are some thoughts on a larger than life character who brightened up so many peoples lives.

Peter was born and raised in Hyde, Cheshire, but spent most of his adult life in Wales working for the FC in a number of locations, engaged in every aspect of forest management.

His love of trees and woodlands grew from formative years spent in the cubs and scouts. As a scoutmaster he took boys camping and taught groups bush craft, and how to survive on short rations in the post-war era. Peter was involved with scouting throughout most of his life and was made a King's Scout for his dedication to the movement. It was a due mark of respect that scout representatives and the organisation's flag were present at his funeral service.

After leaving school Peter tried to get employment with the Forestry Commission, but initially ended up working in forestry for the water board based at Derwent, Lake District. He was due to be called up for National Service at 18, but decided to join the Army as a regular. He served three years in the Royal Electrical & Mechanical Engineers, where he learned the skills to service trucks and lorries, including a posting abroad in the Gulf of Suez.

On leaving the Army Peter was determined to pursue a career in

forestry and was accepted at Gwydyr FTS, due to his previous experience with the water board and time in the Army. Whilst at forestry school, like several before and after him, Peter met his future wife Eirlys at a local dance. They were happily married for 56 years and have two children, four grandchildren and latterly two great grand-daughters whom Peter doted on. He was at Gwydyr FTS between 1955-57 and subsequently joined the FC when offered a posting as Assistant Forester at Coed Taf Fechan, Merthyr Tydfil, in the South Wales Valleys.

After his promotion to forester, Peter remained at Coed Taf Fechan until his transfer to Crychan forest in the early 1960s, where he became a harvesting forester. Some eight years later, another transfer took Peter and his family to Talybont, then on to Ebbw Forest where he stayed until his promotion to Chief Surveys Officer for Wales & N. England.

Following retirement in 1984 Peter undertook the role of Plant Health officer for South Wales on contract to the FC. He was known to be a stickler for ensuring standards were maintained and on one occasion had a boatload of timber burnt at dockside because it hadn't been debarked as regulations required.

In later years Peter was as energetic in retirement as in his working life. Some of the many ways he carried on working for others was as Chair of UK Pension

Association, Chair of Risca (University of the 3rd Age) U3A Social Committee, and latterly as FCA Chairman where he undertook responsibilities in his usual enthusiastic manner.

Peter was a consummate optimist. He loved to create and once retired was able to develop his interest in painting. He had dabbled with the paint brush through life, but in retirement he entered into the real spirit of painting on canvas. He was commended on his method and the detail of trees and leaves, the changing colours, the countryside and symmetry. Peter's art shows the vision of a man who could see nature from within and feel it living and breathing.

For all who knew Peter, there will be something about him that will last long in the memory. My own recollection is when he suddenly left the dinner table at the 2012 AGM, held at York, re-appeared ten minutes later, dressed in full Scottish regalia, and proceeded to entertain us with a welter of jokes in a quasi-Glaswegian accent! Peter was a genuinely nice guy, with a quirky sense of humour, who is a great loss not only to his family but the forestry fraternity at large.

Following a funeral service at St Basil's Church, Bassaleg, Nr Newport on Wednesday 18th December 2013, Peter was interred at Usk Woodland Burial Site, a fitting resting place for a man who lived and breathed forestry.

LIFE IN BRIEF

Mike Whitlock recounts the interesting career of **David Mobbs** who died in December. David was born on 31st May 1935 at Orpington, Kent to parents who were on leave from missionary service in China. They returned to China, taking David and his older sister with them. His early life was spent in China where he learnt Mandarin although he claimed in later life to have forgotten most of it.

When the Japanese invaded China the family were forced to leave. After a long and difficult journey they reached the Himalayas. They were penniless and so David's father resorted to helping grind peanuts in a Chinese household in order to pay the air fare over the mountains to India. The voyage back to Britain was also hazardous as the convoy, under naval escort, had to dodge Japanese submarines. When, at the end of the war, his parents returned to China, David continued his education in South London.

After national service with the RAF, David joined the F.C. and went to the Lynford Hall Forester Training School. His service as a forester was spent entirely in N.E. England where he worked at Kielder and North York Moors forests. An attraction to statistics lead to his taking examinations for professional qualifications in the subject. As a result, he moved to Alice Holt and was regraded as a scientist. His main task at this point was advising Work Study Branch on statistical methods and in this connection he was the joint author of

technical papers. He also made some overseas trips including a visit to China! In addition he spent a period of secondment with the Pay Research Unit which meant a daily commute to London.

Eventually David succeeded Rex Howell as head of Statistics and Computing Branch. The staff remember him as dealing with them in a kindly and considerate manner. He was highly regarded.

Retirement did not mean idleness. Amongst his many activities he became a statistical adviser to a contact lens company, treasurer for various groups and still found time to carry out arboricultural work for friends and neighbours. He bought a wood in Devon which he managed himself, that included thinning with his own chain saw.

David joined the FCA but did not attend many events organised by the Alice Holt group, but as auditor of the accounts, he usually attended the AGM. When I tried to persuade him to take on a more active role he always said that he was "too busy". This was almost certainly true. We had to convince him each year that auditing our accounts was not a vast job and that he should continue to perform this function.

Unfortunately, a few years ago whilst carrying out one of his arboricultural jobs he fell from a ladder severely injuring the upper part of his spine. This necessitated a long spell in the National Orthopaedic Hospital. He made a partial recovery but never fully recovered the full use

of his arms and hands. More recently, he managed to drive again and also worked in a charity shop helping with their finances. Another serious illness meant a stay in a local hospital. This illness proved fatal but he died at home.

At the memorial service held in almost a full church, tributes were paid by various people. Mention was made of his strong Christian faith and especially the help he gave to other people even when tasks in his own home and garden were neglected as a result.

Our condolences are extended to his wife Anne, his son and the rest of the family.

Dick Ayre has many memories of **Frank Harvey**, aka Mr. Wharncliffe. He was a retired ganger in the woods of South Yorkshire and passed away on the 21st of October 2013.

Frank was born in 1930 at Wharncliffe Side in the upper Don Valley a few miles north west of Sheffield and opposite Wharncliffe Wood, which was to play such a large part in his life. He left school at 13 to work on a nearby farm, delivering milk locally and was proud of his ability to plough a straight furrow behind a team of horses.

In 1958 he joined the Forestry Commission and for the next 32 years played a part in the rehabilitation of existing woods and the afforestation of new woods in the South Pennines from Sheffield to Holmfirth and the experimental plots near

Continued on next page ➡

LIFE IN BRIEF

Continued from previous page

Hebden Bridge. As forests were merged he was also busy near Barnsley and at Bawtry with the Christmas Tree Sales Point. A railway line runs north from Sheffield alongside the River Don and along the bottom edge of Wharnccliffe Wood. Whilst it was in use, steam trains making the long incline were a constant threat and so Frank, living opposite in the valley, was always alert to the risk of fire. He had the gift of dowsing. In his spare time he retained his farming interests and kept pedigree pigs.

Frank opted for retirement at age 60. Thus I lay claim to be the last of a long line of foresters to have had the privilege, and pleasure of working with him. In latter times the office for York Forest District, which covered South Yorkshire, was in Wheldrake Wood near York and there was comfort in knowing that there was someone of Frank's calibre 50 miles away to rely on.

In retirement Frank kept busy as a skilled stonewaller, contracting to the FC and local landowners in the south Pennines. He also helped in building restoration projects until a fall at the age of 78 left him unable to continue heavy physical jobs. At home he helped with the local resident's association as well as amassing a knowledge of local history and a catalogue of old photos. He was regularly seen cycling through Wharnccliffe Woods and keenly followed his interest in "The Owls" i.e. Sheffield Wednesday.

David Seal and George Holmes remember **Norman Brown**, who died in hospital in Melrose on 17th December 2013 aged 94.

Born in Edinburgh in July 1919, Norman was educated at Morningside Primary School and George Heriot's School. Even as a very young boy, he was keenly interested in the countryside and when the family were living in Morningside, he spent much of his spare time in the Pentlands and the Tweed Valley.

On the outbreak of war in 1939, Norman volunteered for the Royal Air Force. He was called up on 1st September, qualified as a Spitfire pilot and fought throughout the Battle of Britain in 1940 and 1941. His war service has been well recorded in obituaries in the major daily newspapers.

After his war service, Norman returned to Scotland and resumed his interest in rural affairs, particularly forestry. He worked at Hawick for the Ministry of Supply as an operations foreman in timber supply and qualified for a Royal Scottish Forestry Society certificate in 1945. He volunteered for "Operation Woodpecker" which involved his spending time in Germany directing timber harvesting for war reparations and the restoration of German domestic supplies.

In 1947 Norman started the forestry course under Professor Stebbing at Edinburgh University, graduating as a B.Sc. in 1950 when Professor Mark Anderson became head of the Forestry Department. Although Norman

was not a student of Professor Anderson's, he was very interested in the Professor's views on the selection of species for afforestation, many of which he came to share.

After graduating, Norman was appointed as a District Officer in South Scotland Conservancy under J.A.B. MacDonald, Conservator, and after an initial training period was posted to the large district centred in the Tweeddale area of the Tweed Valley between Selkirk and Peebles. With many private woodlands requiring grant inspections and advice, and numerous Commission forests to be supervised, the District was a very demanding one.

The Commission's forests included Glentress, Cardrona, Dreva, Elbank, Stenton, Yair Hill, Selmuir, Duns and Edgarhope and Norman's supervision of these was unusual. Andy Neustein, who was a trainee / assistant to Norman in 1954/56, recalls his approach to silviculture, especially the choice of tree species, was almost unique. While the general emphasis elsewhere was how to cultivate and fertilise a site to enable Sitka spruce to flourish, his relatively unusual approach was to use a wider range of species, each appropriate to the site as reflected by its existing vegetation. His approach was also unusual in the personal care he took over plant allocations in visiting every type of site and deciding the species to be used. The diversity of tree species in

Continued on next page ➡

LIFE IN BRIEF

Continued from previous page

many of the forests in this part of the Tweed Valley adds greatly to their scenic and recreational value and is a tribute to Norman's period of management.

In addition to supervising the District, Norman was required to take newly appointed district officers as assistants for training. Andy Neustein and Jack Aaron were both trained in this way. He also assisted FC Research Branch and Edinburgh University Forestry Department with some of their projects, including a long term species trial in Glen-tress Forest by the University. Dr. Bill Mutch remembers that Norman was highly regarded by all the University staff with whom he collaborated.

In the mid-1970's Norman was promoted to Assistant Conservator FM to Sandy Morrison, Conservator, West Scotland, with the Conservancy office in Glasgow. Norman greatly enjoyed working in this part of Scotland but had many interests in the Tweed Valley and so continued living there, commuting to Glasgow and the west until he retired in 1979.

Norman had many hobbies which he pursued keenly in retirement. He was a dedicated angler for both salmon and trout, and a very good one. He was a Tweed Commissioner for some years. He was a keen bird shot and organiser of shoots. He enjoyed golf and was a member of Torwoodlee Golf Club in Galashiels. He was a strong supporter of the Peebles Branch of the Royal British Legion Scotland

which he served successively as a Convener, Chairman and President. He enjoyed painting in oils and had some attractive pictures to his credit.

He was given the Royal Humane Society's Resuscitation Award in 1960 for saving a boy from drowning in the River Tweed near Peebles. He strongly supported a number of charities, and throughout his life Norman consistently showed consideration for others and personal courage.

After almost sixty years of marriage Norman's wife Sheila died in 2003. He is survived by their three children, six grandchildren and ten great grandchildren.

I have been informed by his family of the death of **Edmund Waddelove** aged 94. He would have been known to a generation of foresters having spent the decade of the 1950s at Gwydyr FTS as an instructor.

He was born during the summer of 1919, along with the FC itself, in Leigh, Lancashire and educated at Thornleigh Salesian College in Bolton. He was 20 when World War II was declared and his service with the Royal Artillery included the defence of RAF Hawkinge in Kent during the Battle of Britain. He was commissioned in 1943, and as a young officer was part of the build-up for D-Day. He was en route for embarkation to Normandy days after the landings when he was recalled as the Allied losses were not as great as had been feared. He went on to work on the use of radar in counter-mortar

batteries. His last posting was to India in 1945 for a brief period.

After de-mob he applied to join the FC and arrived in Clocaenog for work experience at the same time as the infamous weather in January 1947. He would later wryly say that it was some introduction to forestry – weeks spent just shovelling snow! He began at Lyndhurst in the New Forest and was one of the advance party sent to open the Gwydyr FTS where he completed his training.

His first posting in 1948 took him back to Clocaenog and, in the autumn of 1949, he returned to Gwydyr FTS to begin his 11 years on the staff there. He moved to Coed-y-Brenin as a beat forester in 1960 and in 1963 became head forester at Delamere.

During his time there, he rationalised the paperwork involved in local sales when the surge in demand for Christmas trees threatened to overwhelm him and his team. Each year he had to arrange for extensive resupplies by colleagues near and far to meet the rising demand. The wish to have a tree from Delamere became so popular in the North West that he was asked to supply some for a Coronation Street storyline! He was also responsible for the planting along 40 miles of the M6 through Cheshire after being invited to the opening ceremony as one of his early official engagements.

The main focus, however, was on production, and the experience he gained was useful

Continued on next page ➡

LIFE IN BRIEF

Continued from previous page

when, in 1969, he took over as chief forester at Clocaenog where the emphasis had changed from planting to production a few years earlier. It completed the circle for Edmund, returning to replace Fred Davies, who had been an early mentor when he started there.

After retirement in 1981, he enjoyed for over 20 years, what was almost a second career as an amateur archaeologist, publishing 15 research papers, including one on sea-level changes in the national Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies annual journal. In addition, he wrote two booklets on the Romans in the Vale of Clwyd, and his 1999 book "The Roman Roads of North Wales:

Recent Discoveries" described over 200 miles of previously unknown routes.

Edmund was a lifelong committed and active Roman Catholic. In Betws-y-Coed, together with Catholic students from Gwydyr FTS and friend and FC colleague Frank Farrelly, he dug by hand the foundations for the "Our Lady of The Woods" church and worked as labourer during its construction.

Then in retirement he played a leading role for nearly 20 years in the Latin Mass Society (LMS) which was formed to keep alive the centuries-old liturgy. He received a Prince of Wales Certificate for his involvement in a project on Clocaenog in 1981 and a Papal Blessing from Pope John Paul II in 1996 in recognition

of his LMS work.

In his youth he was a keen cyclist, covering most of Cheshire and Lancashire on his travels – with no gears on his bike and no gear (Lycra!) for riders in those days. His other interests included carpentry and bee-keeping, and he followed Lancashire cricket for much of his life. He studied and sang Gregorian Chant and was also an accomplished ballroom dancer. He married Bernadette in 1943; his very supportive and long-suffering FC wife died in 1997. They lost their eldest daughter before her first birthday and nursed their youngest through illness and handicap for 12 years until her death in 1974. He is survived by four sons and a daughter, 14 grand-children and 15 great grand-children.



Website Message Board

If you have any news, announcements or forthcoming events, post or e-mail the details to the editor. Contact details are on the back page of this magazine.

www.fca-today.com

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FCA Today Magazine

The next issue of the FCA Today magazine will be available (depending on whether we receive any articles from you) on the www.fca-today.com website on **5th August 2014**.

Articles for inclusion in the next issue of the magazine should be sent to the editor before 1st July 2014.

The new fixed publication dates of the FCA Today magazine are: -

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Summer edition: 5th August

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