

From the Editor

This issue appears thanks to a great copy writing effort by my “old?” supporters, or should that be “Bold”? Lots of interesting stories about the past and present days. David West's article must surely encourage some of you to buy a woodland. I know some have already. What about following up his woodland tales with yours.

Please keep contributing. I have a little in hand but could do with more. If you are not that keen to write, send in photos of your activities. These, with only a little text, will always create interest. How about photos of your holidays in extreme places. You are not sit-at-homes, so you must have done something exciting, or even alarming. Now that could be a good yarn.

It makes my editing job easier if you send your copy or photos as attachments. So, the next issue depends on you.



Richard Toleman

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FCA Today

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Retirement in Devon

by David West

We'd bought our retirement home in Norfolk some two years before the due date, but fate dealt us a bitter blow only six months later when my mother-in-law suffered a severe stroke which left her speechless and bedridden. For eighteen months my wife travelled the miserable east - west - east journey to Devon and back every two or three weeks, with me joining her when work allowed. Just eight weeks before Muriel had her stroke, our best working bitch, Willow, had thrown a litter of ten puppies, so you can imagine life was a bit difficult for a while.

On retirement we'd decided we'd have to go back to our roots in Devon as my own mother, who also lived in Devon very close to the nursing home where Muriel was, had dementia. It was noticeably worsening and we were the only relations mother-in-law had to sort things out. However, every cloud has a silver lining and, although my dog training ability was very limited, I was keen to expand my knowledge and capability. We'd kept one bitch from the litter so, with Willow, her sister Rowan and the puppy, now eighteen months old, we had a three strong team.



I found to my amazement that we were in demand from day one! There are no end of shoots in our area, from the great big commercial shoots of Exmoor, such as Charget, Molland that go for really big bags of up to four hundred brace and need a dozen or so pickers up, to smallish syndicated days that are happy if they hit thirty or forty brace.

We've found - I say "we" because, lucky man that I am, my wife joins me and works her own dog whenever she can - that we don't much like the stiff formality of the bigger shoots and prefer to be with smaller groups of fellow pickers up. We'll be doing about forty days this season and our biggest will be around a hundred and twenty brace, usually working with four or five others.

Our dear old Willow died last year, Rowan is almost fourteen and fully retired, Jenna, Willow's daughter, works most days and we've Bridie, six, bought from a farm on Exmoor, Folly, three, bought as a nine week old from a girl I worked on a local farm shoot with, and Harry, our latest acquisition, who's also six. His owner died very suddenly in the Spring leaving four dogs to be re-homed and our local kennels rang and asked if we could help.

It had been a long time since I'd run a dog, as opposed to a bitch, so I was doubtful about taking him on. I needn't have worried as his owner had been a locally very well known trainer and was a mainstay of the North Devon Working Gundog group. He is a model dog, a perfect gentleman and has grown to love and protect his bevy of black beauties.

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Retirement in Devon *continued*

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So, dogs occupy my Winter time from October to the end of January. What do I do to fill my time for the rest of the year? Believe it or not, forestry. I'd always hankered after a small piece of woodland to "play" with, so when my brother, recently retired from being a GP, asked me to look for an area somewhere near my home so that I could manage it for him, I jumped at the challenge. I went on line and found a woodland some fifteen miles away, the only trouble being that it was about four or five times the area he'd been considering. I chanced it, took a walk through it and before I'd gone a hundred yards just knew he had to buy it.



It was an early June day, I was able to recognise half a dozen different warblers singing, dragonflies were everywhere and the Mussel Brook formed the north eastern boundary. Perfect bliss! I rang my brother straight away and asked him to come down from Rugby at the earliest opportunity. He drove down the next day, as did my sister from Plymouth. Three months later we were the proud owners of a twenty acre wood. Of the ten shares, I bought two, my sister one and my brother has the remaining seven. It's like a long, thin letter Y with the main stem planted with spruce in the wetter

ground and Douglas fir on the drier slopes. The north western arm is ancient oak, perhaps three hundred years old, and much younger groups of recently planted ash and hazel.



All the recent planting was carried out in 2000, so we've a little while before we think about first thinning.



We've had enormous fun over the five years that we've had the wood, my son Tom, in particular having a great deal of input. During the Winter that he and his partner lived in Devon, they built a cabin which has been a real boon on rainy days.

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Retirement in Devon *continued*

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Our biggest achievement was having a pond dug. For about six months or so after we'd bought the wood, I'd had the idea that a pond would add a certain something and luckily enough my brother and sister agreed.

There was a large area of about eighty yards by twenty that had been particularly boggy for many months, so we went ahead and had it dug out. It cost an enormous amount of money, but we were able to claim the last of the grant payments and I sold the spoil to a near neighbour who built a series of Devon banks round his smallholding.



Later, we bought a quad bike and trailer to haul out firewood which has been a real bonus as we have a woodburner in our home



as well as one in the woodland cabin. Any surplus, I've been able to sell locally and plough any profit back in to tools and equipment.



The wildlife has been wonderful. An otter, one summer day, floating lazily down Mussel Brook. A green sandpiper visited us for two or three days, presumably on migration, in

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Retirement in Devon *continued*

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both the Spring and Autumn of 2011, 2012 and 2013. A pair of Kingfishers flew around the lake which we watched for three hours one day on and off while clearing out weed. In the water, in our waders, we see countless dragonflies, darters, chasers and damselflies.

We have also seen a tiny roe deer fawn, I would guess no more than three days old one June day.

Swallows and house martins swoop down to drink and there is so much more.

Bird boxes have gone up, paths have been cut, bridges have been made and willow hedges planted.

It's very rewarding and I can recommend woodland ownership to anyone.

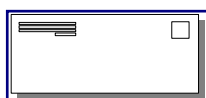


Do you have any articles for publication in this magazine?



Send your articles to the editor

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



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

Bringing the World of Books to You

by Arthur Miller

When I retired from the Forestry Commission at what now seems the ridiculously young age of 55, I looked forward to a life of slippers, gardening and holidays. What I did not know was that I was not yet ready to give up on an active occupation.

In addition, I was expected to go to the Job Centre each week to sign up to get my Insurance contributions made up, and to get Job Seekers allowance. That was a laugh, as I was not eligible! However, as a result of several weeks of standing in a queue waiting to be treated as an idiot by clerks who were younger than my own children, I decided that I must take matters into my own hands.



I saw an advertisement for a mobile library relief driver. What a chance, and a complete change from my previous activities. So, I applied and was given the job. On my first morning I climbed onto this 29ft monster, full of books, and sat alongside the regular driver who took me out on his round. What an experience, narrow lanes, tight car parks, reversing into the courtyards of old folks homes, relying on the two rear view mirrors and a camera fixed on the back. If that was not enough, I had to come to terms with the library cards in the books, the correct method of shelving the returns and of course, the customers. But I survived and the driver said that

I would need a couple more tries, and next time I could drive. So, after about a week's training I was called in because one of the drivers was on holiday, and I was to take the wagon out.

There were two mobiles, one to cover North Flintshire, and one for the south of the county. All I had to guide me was a book with the route indicated and the times of the stops. Off I went. It was a bit daunting at first until I got used to the vehicle, its size and its quirks, but I did not hit anything. One of the lessons that I had to learn was 'Where to stop?' If I did not stop in exactly the same place each time, some customers would not come on that day, because they could not see this huge white van from their armchair! If they could not see me, I was not there. I once met an Australian mobile driver who conducted a 54ft articulated library van around some of the wilder parts of that country. He was accused of being new because he had stopped 5ft away from his normal position, and that was in a small town in the middle of a desert!

The mobile library contained over 3000 items including fiction, non-fiction, large print, Welsh language fiction and non-fiction, audio tapes and a children's section. In fact the stock was greater than that of some of the smaller libraries.

We had to cater for all customers, so the steps up into the library could fold out and convert into a lift, which I controlled from outside with a remote switch box with up and down buttons. My elderly ladies used to grin when I stopped it half way up and told them I only

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Bringing the World of Books to You *continued*

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did the job because I liked looking at their legs! Sometimes it was the best thing that they had heard all day.

The service ran on a two weekly cycle, with the Monday of the first week being given over to maintenance, cleaning and re-stocking the van. Then there was a fixed route and timetable for each of the following nine days. We catered for village stops, old folks homes and children's nurseries

As time went on, I was used as a relief in branch libraries, as a delivery driver in a white van, and as caretaker at headquarters. That way I met most of the staff and worked in many of the branches. At that time I was the only male librarian to be seen in the branches. It caused a few eyebrows to be raised.

Finally, one of the drivers retired, I applied for his job and was given it. So at the age of 59 I was given a new job and a new state of the art mobile library wagon, with less than 500 miles on the clock. I was very pleased with my luck.

The job was very interesting. I met a full cross section of society, with all sorts of fascinating people. It came as a surprise to me that the world was full of folks who knew nothing at all about forestry, and whose knowledge was restricted to the tree in the garden or perhaps a vague memory of elm disease. However, the range of their experience was varied and vast. The longer I did the job, the more I learned about them.

A side effect of the job was that I saw customers regularly at fortnightly intervals. I became a friendly, but impersonal face, with whom they could chat freely and discuss all sorts of subjects, without having to continue relationships.

Sometimes conversations would resume on the next visit.

There was one old gentleman at the village of Caerwys, who quietly told me that he was an instrument maker during the second World War. He had made Astral compasses for use on the Russian convoys, because at those latitudes, ordinary magnetic compasses do not work properly. "As you know" he said "aluminium sweats in cold temperatures, the barrels of the compasses do not turn, one within the other, so we had to redesign the barrels in another material". Of course, that was the first I knew of Astral compasses and the problems of aluminium in Polar conditions! He then collected his usual batch of Mills and Boone romances, and set off home until next time round.



There were a lot of lady customers, many of whom enjoyed the romance and family stories. I acquired some favourites, who often asked me "Do you have any new ones for me?" Of course, I did.

But these stories were not limited to fiction. One lady told me about her mother, who had

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Bringing the World of Books to You *continued*

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lived as a girl with her family on a farm in darkest Shropshire. Sadly the girl's mother died. Her two brothers were worried about the girl's future, especially the abuse that she might receive at the hands of her newly widowed father. So, arrangements were made for her to leave the farm quietly at the dead of night, to make her way to the road, where she was collected by one of the brothers, put on a train to North Wales to be collected by a second brother, and to live with him. The story turned out well, she was educated, lived, married and raised a family happily and safely in North Wales. Talk about Catherine Cookson!

One of my favourite stops was at a children's day nursery at the local college. Children between the ages of 2 and 5 would come on, head for the back of the bus and choose from the junior selection. But, before they left, it was part of the ritual that I sat on the floor with them and read them a story. They had to join in, of course. It was great fun. My reward each year was some hand painted masterpieces produced especially for me, or perhaps a Christmas decoration to add to the garlands that festooned the interior of the wagon.



All in all the job was great fun. I learned how to drive the library van, discovered a lot of back streets and lanes within the county of Flintshire and met some fascinating people.

At night I could park up, do my paperwork and requests, and then head off home without having to take any work with me. Such bliss!

I had to retire from the job at the age of 65, having had eight years of fun. The strange thing is, whenever I tell people, especially men, about my career, I am often told "Those are the two jobs I would have liked. You are lucky". I was!



The best time to plant a tree is 25 years ago. The next best time is today.

(Chinese proverb)



Further Recollections of Pre Forestry School Work 1964 – 1966

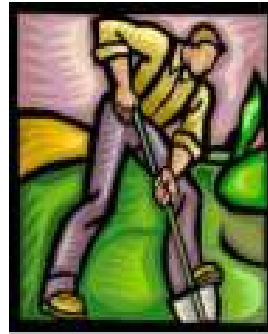
by Martin Fletcher

Simon Malone's article in the 2015 Spring Edition (No 54) of FCA-Today set me thinking back fifty years.

I cannot say I had the exhilaration of aerial CP cone collecting he describes, but I too had a few adventures during my Pre FTS practical work as well as doing many of the humdrum forestry operations.

The first 18 months of pre FTS training were spent doing just about every establishment operation at Bucklebury forest, which lay north and south of the A4 Bath road, between Reading and Newbury. The head forester was Ron Watkinson, who had come from Bramshill, soon after Bucklebury was started in 1953, and his assistant forester was Paul Cooper, who ran the beat south of the A4.

I was very indebted to my co-forest worker Wilf Lawes, who taught me so much. This forest has now nearly all been sold or returned to the freeholder. There were 20 – 25 blocks of woodland from 5 to 200 acres in size, 1730 acres in all, then just one of the 415 F.C. forests at that time.



The work to meet Government FC planting targets meant a heavy programme of prep ground, spraying, fencing, warrening, planting, weeding, cleaning and beating up.

From my notebook at the time, piecework rates were: -

£10-£25 /acre for prep ground,
£1- £1-5-0 /chain for rabbit fencing,
10/- per 100 for planting NS,
8/6 for CP & 15/- for planting on gravel,
£10 /acre for cleaning,
10/- to 18/6 per 100 for screefing/beating up,
£12 /acre for felling birch overhead cover, with cross cut saw and axe.

The dreaded summer weeding with a Fussell or No3 Gilpin hook was £4-10-0 to £6 /acre; second weed only £3-10-0 /acre, spraying 245-T with a metal Falcon sprayer at 4/- a fill, brashing larch £4 /acre.

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Further Recollections of Pre Forestry School Work 1964 – 1966

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MOT planting on the A4 trunk road and roundabouts in Newbury was a nice change at 3/- a tree.

I look fondly at the mature trees that I planted, when travelling through Newbury. There was some tariffing, using the S15 tariff form, in P28 SP in Pen Wood south of Newbury; mark girth and felling the volume sample trees, then doing all the calculations by hand, from the Tariff Tables (Forest Record No31) just as Simon described. It certainly taught one to keep the figures in a straight column to aid mental addition.

My nursery work experience was at Kennington Research Nursery, just south of Oxford. The land belonged to St. John's College, Oxford and reverted to them about 40 years ago. The nursery opened in 1926, on old agricultural land and was still being run by the same

redoubtable head forester Bill Gray, when I was there in 1966.

I started off in rather squalid digs, but after a fortnight, having been vetted by all the women nursery workers, I was deemed satisfactory to stay with Mr and Mrs Cox. I enjoyed helping with gardening work in the evenings. Incidentally, you can still identify her garden from the main Didcot to Oxford railway line, by the Douglas fir tree in the garden.

Every experiment and job was done by hand, throwing up seed beds, sowing, lining out, spraying etc. The highlight of the week was the trip to Morrels Brewery in Oxford, in the trailer, towed by the little grey Ferguson tractor, driven by Chris Caister the forester. This journey was to pick up a load of spent hops, for use as a weed free mulch or compost in the nursery. The reward for the journey was being

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Further Recollections of Pre Forestry School Work 1964 – 1966

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given a bottle of forest brown ale. I usually managed to find a small space in the corner of the trailer, amongst the often steaming hot hops, to consume the beer, as we travelled back to the nursery.

I was there from February to May and left before the tedium of hand weeding the seed beds and stocktaking. These operations were usually undertaken by the team of women, who worked at the nursery. Though we had separate wet weather sheds, the click of the knitting needles could be easily heard through the partition. With a little chatting up, one could get a good thick jersey knitted for the price of the wool. In the 1960s the F.C. had 70 nurseries in full production, to meet the supply of 130 million plants required annually.

For June and July, before doing the six week Newton Rigg course in August and starting at the Dean FTS in September, I managed to get a placement at Thetford Chase, to see how a large production forest operated.

Working for the head forester Mr Grant and forester Tony Butcher on the Santon beat, I was used as a kind of dogsbody to fill gaps for those on leave in the workforce. The first job was high pruning SP, as Simon described the technique, which was very tiring on the arms at the higher lifts of 18 and 24 feet. The piecework rate was 7½d /tree. This work was interspersed with peeling 13ft, 19½ft and 26ft poles at 1/3d, 2/3d and 3/3d each. This was to prevent infestation by Hylobius, as the forest output of poles had overtaken the ability of the giant peeler at the Brandon Central Depot to cope in the dangerous June and July breeding season.

Something Simon never had to endure was the unique experience of working as a creosoter, for a fortnight on the creosoting plant at Santon Downham. An extra 2d per hour was paid for this hazardous work, overseen by Lofty Marsh the foreman. There were five hot and cold creosote tanks with cranes and gantries,

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Further Recollections of Pre Forestry School Work 1964 – 1966

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all covered with a G.I. sheeting roof. The creosote was heated, by burning the SP trees that had died of Fomes on the 47,000 acres of 'The Chase'. With the hot and cold process, the daily output of 1,200 peeled and dried 5½ft stakes used 400 gallons of creosote a day, which meant each stake absorbed about a third of a gallon. Some of these densely creosoted stakes, perfectly sound after 50 years, are still in place today in East England. They can be easily identified by the helical marking left by the Coles Hurricane peeler. It was typical F.C. logic of the time. Rabbit fencing stakes needed only a 5 – 10 year life, yet all had the same treatment.

Another job was to prepare a picnic spot by the River Ouse, for the conservator George Backhouse. The Carex wood rush and grass bordering the river had to be cut with an old Oxford Allen autoscythe which had a dog clutch that was difficult to disengage. Tony Butcher ran to my aid when he



Oxford Allen scythe

could see me and the autoscythe were about to enter the River Ouse. He didn't want to fill in the accident report for the autoscythe, let alone the one for myself if I was injured or drowned. The conservator, who was a Thetford Chase man, often came back to the same spot for a family picnic.

Readers will be interested to know that the FC and the Environmental Agency (EA) have jointly set up a picnic site and mooring at the current head of navigation at Santon Downham bridge. The EA is exploring the possibility of reopening the navigation to Thetford. More on the Inland Waterways Association website, Great Ouse branch. Ed.

Work Study was very much in vogue in 1966. I had an interesting week with Geoff Bland-Flag and Bill Wittering measuring produce after cross cutting time studies on the Thetford beats at High Lodge, Mundford, Redneck and West Tofts.

Really useful experience was time spent with the Santon beat ganger on 'taking up' and log grading and measuring, all recorded in the U10 log book.

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After this introduction to manual forestry operations, I was ready for the two year course at the Dean FTS.

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Breckland Group Activities – 2015/16

by Simon Malone

Our Group had a busy year with our usual programme of events, but in addition we hosted the National AGM. This created extra work and we owe our secretary, Val Marsh, special thanks for doing most of the running around to secure the various bookings - a task with some frustrations at times! Thanks Val.

The year started with our AGM held in the village hall in Santon Downham and preceded by our traditional lunch. Although numbers were slightly down on last year, 36 members were present and the committee members were re-elected en-bloc.

In May, the Group hosted the National AGM and with fine weather we managed this event apparently successfully, (see report in FCA magazine - Summer 2015).

A week after the AGM and on a pleasant spring day, we enjoyed a visit to Hedingham Castle which is located on the edge of the pretty village of Castle Hedingham, Essex.



Many Essex village buildings are renowned for the decorated exterior plasterwork know as pargeting and this village has many examples. Our party of 19 was joined by members of the

Thetford and Great Hockham Garden Clubs, without whose presence the visit would not have been financially viable. After a couple of hours of free time to explore this attractive village, we all gathered at The Bell for a pre-arranged pub lunch. The Bell is a hostelry of some age and was a very atmospheric venue serving tasty meals.



A short drive out of the village took us to Hedingham Castle. This consists of a massive Norman Keep set in informally landscaped parkland with a large lake. Hedingham Castle is now the home of the Lindsay family. They live in the Georgian Mansion House next to the keep, which is all that remains of the Norman Castle built 875 years ago, in 1140, by their ancestor Aubrey de Vere II, the first Lord Great Chamberlain of England.



Hedingham Castle may occupy the site of an earlier castle believed to have been built in the late 11th or early 12th century by Aubrey de Vere I, a Norman baron. Hedingham was one of the largest manors among those acquired by Aubrey I. The Domesday Book

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Breckland Group Activities – 2015/16 *continued*

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records that he held the manor of Hedingham by 1086, and he ordered that vineyards be planted. The first Aubrey de Vere, Lord of Ver in Normandy, had come over with the Conqueror – his brother-in-law – and was granted fourteen lordships by William in England. Hedingham was the greatest.

A guide explained something of the history of this imposing structure and we were free to climb the usual spiral stairways to the upper floors.

For those exploring the grounds, there was a short interruption due to a heavy shower, but the sun came out and it was very warm thereafter.

In August our traditional summer BBQ was held in the Breckland Club, Santon Downham and was well attended with some 28 members and family enjoying succulent steaks and sausages.

The final excursion of the year was a boat trip on the River Lea (or Lee) Navigation near Broxbourne, Herts. Again we depended on a few non-FCA members to make the trip viable and this time we fielded 40 people who enjoyed a fish and chip lunch cruise of just over two and a half hours.



We were joined by Mike Whitlock, past chairman of the now defunct Alice Holt Group and he was able to make the acquaintance of some foresters who he had not seen for many years.



The Lady of the Lee can accommodate up to 60 passengers, so with our party of 40 there was room to move around the boat and soak up the passing countryside in bright and hot sunshine.

The Lea Valley Country Park is some 26 miles in length running down through Docklands to meet the Thames in London over an area of some 10,000 acres. The park was created by Act of Parliament to provide a green area to

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Breckland Group Activities – 2015/16 *continued*

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accommodate some of the recreational needs of the large population living within travelling distance of it. A wide range of recreational activities are on offer and part of the river was used to host the Olympic canoeing in 2012. It was here that Team GB won Silver and Gold in the canoe slalom. No white water for us that day!

Following the cruise, we walked the short distance to Broxbourne Old Mill where a local Country Park Ranger told us something of the history of the Lea Navigation and explained the significance of the ruins of the old water mill. Summer sun continued and ice creams were much in evidence before we walked back to the coach and an uneventful trip home.

In November, some 20 members and friends enjoyed a most interesting talk by Anne Mason, chair of the Breckland Society who gave an illustrated talk on the subject of "Flint in the Brecks" at the Mundford Bowls Club. Following on the success of a similar talk she had given the

previous autumn on the subject of 'Warrenning', we again had a good turnout.

We rounded the year off with our Christmas lunch which, incidentally we hold in the first week in January. We find this works well as venues are quieter after Christmas and prices are a little lower and it's always good to have something to look forward to in the flat period after Christmas. For the second consecutive year, the Christmas lunch was held at Lynford Hall with 52 members and friends enjoying a tasty 3-course dinner. The Hall had been a Forester Training School into the mid 1950s and our Group has several members who had been students there. The Christmas atmosphere had been retained, as a large Christmas tree was still set up and the tables were decorated with crackers and fun balloons.

Altogether, a very successful year and we are now well into the planning of the 2016/17 events.



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

Up a Tree Without a Harness

by Tony Butcher
New Zealand

I am standing on a ladder up a cabbage tree. The reason is to arrange some Christmas lights. The sun is quite hot at the moment. I can only be south of the equator and yes, in New Zealand. The birds are singing happily having got their first brood off the nest. The loudest is the European black bird, one of the better imports brought here by the first emigrants. They were valued for their song to make the early settlers feel 'at home'. They certainly have a very varied repertoire and I reckon they "speak" to me, but the language can be a little cheeky at times.

This cabbage tree, which is now higher than the house, was not here when we moved in 9 years ago. There was empty space between the house and the road, about 6 metres away, of which 50% belongs to the council as verge. As we had moved into a foreign land with beautiful vegetation, we were keen to keep to the local stuff rather than exotic oaks and ash. The planting included Pittosporum, Griselinia, southern beech and the cabbage trees. That was 7 years ago. They started as 2 year seedlings grown in pots and were no higher



My little bit of bush

than 45 cm. I look at our own little piece of bush and am amazed at the growth rate.

I mentioned the radiata pine in a previous article with a 30 year turnaround. The shrubs have been trimmed for the last 4 years to prevent the sun being blocked out! We also have a common European cotoneaster at one end, the berries of which attract the wax eyes or silver eyes as they are called. These come down from the mountains in winter, May-June time, for easier food, usually provided by humans. These busy little birds fly around in flocks of 20 to 25 like sparrows and about the same size, chattering away amongst themselves, so busy that they are often unaware of our cats.

The cabbage trees have flowered for the past 3 years around Christmas time, giving off a delightful heady scent which unfortunately brings on the hay fever. I got hay fever as soon as I arrived in New Zealand 15 years ago. These wonderful places do have their drawbacks.

We also have in our garden, planted by the previous owner, a large ash, an oak, a silver birch and an alder. The alder has recently been felled as it was too close to the roadside power lines. The tall trees tend to attract the native birds like the bell bird and the tui, both of which have a wonderful melodic song. These birds are now beginning to enter our garden because of the growing height of the trees.

While putting up the lights, there is a clatter and rattle as a truck and trailer go past and the northerly wind wafts the odour of sheep or cattle poo to me up the tree.

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Up a Tree Without a Harness *continued*

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Looking westwards from my viewpoint 15 feet up, I can see up the valley where all these sheep and cattle live on large farms.

The view goes right through to the first range of mountains 25 miles away and onwards to the often snow-capped range 45 miles distant and over 5000 feet high.

There are few trees to obscure the view because so many have been felled to make way for centre pivots. These are irrigation equipment up to a kilometre long that revolve around a point that has piped water from the Great Waitaki River 25 miles away. This river drains the glaciers up in the Southern Alps.

I am pleased to say that the English owners of a large station are replacing the exotic felled trees by planting natives around the edges.



The view up the valley

These same English owners presented me with about 40 tons of firewood earlier this year for a scheme to aid needy locals, so the felled exotics were not wasted. But that is another story.

FCA 2016 AGM

The Dean looks forward to arranging the AGM on 10th and 11th May and once again welcomes all members and friends. We are putting on an interesting visit looking mainly at the historical aspect of the old part of the forest centred around the meeting place, The Speech House Hotel.

Full details can be obtained from group secretaries and will be posted on the website.



Speech House Hotel

North Wales Group Activities 2015

by Arthur Miller

Once again we have been lucky enough to have another busy year with three field trips and a Christmas meal.



In April we paid a visit to the Electric Mountain at Llanberis. It is so called because there is a hydro-electric power station built inside the mountain. The water is held in a lake at the top of the mountain and released whenever instant power is needed by the National Grid. It descends through a mile of pipes to the turbine chamber, a cavern the size of Wembley stadium, containing five massive turbines. Having passed through the turbines, the water then flows into the top end of Llyn Perys to be held behind a dam. In the evening, when power is cheaper, the water is pumped back by the turbines up into the lake at the top to start the cycle all over again.

Our guided tour included a film presentation on the power station, a trip on a small bus into the mountain, which is an experience in itself, and the services of a guide throughout.

As part of the trip we all had to wear hard hats and hair nets to prevent cross contamination between customers. This did cause some amusement as we queued up to start the tour.



John Roe's new headgear

July saw us making the long trip south to Llandrindod Wells to visit the National Cycle Museum.

It was an interesting tour with plenty of old bicycles and other vintage memorabilia to spike our attention.



Bike Museum
Does this bring back memories?

There was a full range, from the earliest bone-shakers to the latest carbon fibre machines, including that used by Chris Boardman on one of his record breaking track events. There was a replica of an old cycle shop and a camp site showing the kit that would have been used in the 1950s. Suitably full of memories we retired to the café in the local park for a well deserved cup of tea.



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North Wales Group Activities 2015 *continued*

Continued from previous page

Our final trip was to Erddig Hall, a National Trust property near Wrexham. The estate woodsman gave a guided tour of some of the older trees and showed us the children's play area that had been formed from tree stumps, old trees and logs placed for balancing and swinging on.

It was good to see how children could use their imagination on such natural material. We were then treated to a tour of the gardens, including the history of the house and the story of their regeneration.

The house was owned by the Yorke family who threw nothing away, so it was full of interesting items not only in the house, but also in the chapel, the laundry and kitchen as well as in the saw mill. The restaurant and shop made for a pleasant end to the day.

A popular part of our calendar events is our Christmas lunch and AGM held at the Rhiw Goch Inn at Bronaber. We were served a carvery meal in a cosy dining room complete with a log fire.

We had the AGM first, so that was over quickly, as by then we were all hungry. Chris Griffiths, a former chairman of the group stood down from the committee, so we gave him a small presentation to recognise all his hard work and interest over a period of 20 years.

Our thanks go to the members of the committee who organised the events, and we look forward to the plans for 2016.

All photographs contributed by Les Starling.



A presentation to the Group's retiring chairman
Chris Griffiths



Lucky Raffle winner Phil Lloyd

Truck Driving at Gwydyr

by Don Amer

In the Winter edition of FCA Today, the photo of the Lynford 1951/52 forestry students pictured at the back of a lorry whilst on an exchange course at the Gwydyr FTS, instantly brought back memories of my time at Gwydyr in 1950/52. The reason being, was this the old Bedford truck which I was destined to drive fellow students to working locations and on forest visits?

Six months prior to being accepted for Gwydyr, I finished nineteen months of National Service in the RAF where I was trained to drive all manner of road transport from staff cars, liberty coaches and HGV, so I jumped at the chance of being asked to drive the school transport, which, I would guess, is the vehicle pictured. The trip which stands out most vividly than many of the visits which we made to different forests, was one we made to a forest in Mid Wales whose name escapes me at the moment. Well it was sixty years ago! When I was driving the truck, the instructors Ted Waddelove and Paddy Heavener were travelling separately by car. I got hopelessly lost on the Welsh country roads with the result that we were very late in arriving at our destination, much to the annoyance of our instructors but with the opposite effect of my fellow travellers. However we were forced to carry out the full itinerary as planned.

We finally set off for the return journey and because the weather was sunny and very hot, the students in the back of the lorry stripped back the canopy to keep cool. And so it was that on the return journey I had to cross a river bridge and I could see ahead that a number of people, including several pretty girls, were sitting on the bridge wall enjoying the sunshine. I stopped the truck deliberately on the bridge opposite the girls, who were very surprised to suddenly see about twenty young lads giving them wolf whistles and signs of appreciation. That



Students from Lynford FTS on exchange at Gwydyr 1951-2

brightened up the day for everyone until we arrived very late back at the school.

That one photograph has triggered many more recollections of my career in the Forestry Commission. I often think back to my time in the FC and all my colleagues and those whom I met and worked with, some of them great characters such as Willie Milne (Culbin), Tom Fox (Mounces Beat, Kielder), Bob Anderson (Speymouth), Joe Metcalfe (Plashets Beat, Kielder), Pat Garrow (Rannoch), Alex MacRae (Glentroot) and an old ganger at Mounces who used to walk to supervise his squads, and who used to say "it's not the "workin" it's the "walkin" that gets me", spoken in that great Northumbrian accent, to name just a few.

Looking back I have had many very happy and varied experiences from my initial posting

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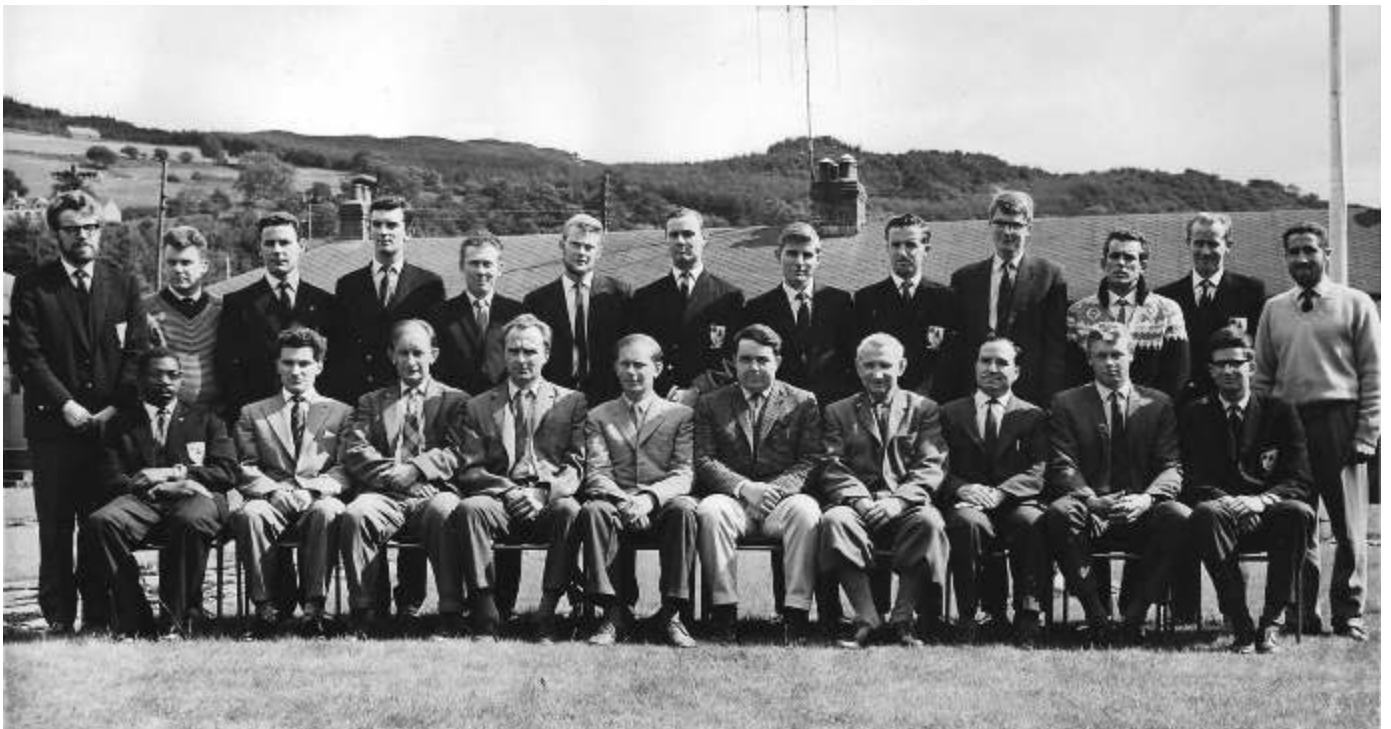
Truck Driving at Gwydyr *continued*

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with the Northern Sample Plot Party based in Edinburgh under the great Alex MacKenzie, to Culbin Forest then Kielder Forest, followed by about five years at Glentool and finally twenty years with the Radio and Electronics Branch

under Charles Connell, Conservator for SW England, before retiring in 1989. I am now 86 and living with my wife Nan in Blairgowrie and this year we shall be celebrating 62 years of happily married life. Have I any regrets in choosing a career in forestry? - NOT ONE!

Gwydyr Staff and Seniors July 1963



From Left to Right

Back Row: **Mostyn Pugh**, **Len Billington**, **Sandy Surman**, **John Roe**, **George Harrison**, **Roger Mitchell**, **Brian Pulford**, **Joe Kingsmill**, **Brian Lloyd Jones**, **Chris Caistor**, **Ash Brown**, **Sammy Wilson**, **Frank Stanbridge**.

Front Row: **Paul Rashidi**, **Geoff Rose**, **Alan Powell**, **Bob Kemp**, **David Perry**, **Gwyn Francis**, **Geoff Claydon**, Cypriot Instructor, **Arthur Miller**, **Dave Craze**.

Messrs Powell, Kemp, Perry and Claydon were all Instructors. Gwyn Francis was Education Officer.

Yorkshire Group Activities in 2015

Sadly the Yorkshire group have lost six members this year. They were Libby Capstick, Arthur Frankland, Brenda Jackson, Adrian Hartley, Rosaleen Barker, who in later years has not attended many meetings, and Muriel Goldsworthy.

The AGM in February 2016 was attended by 19 members and the group had a very active and enjoyable 2015 with seven visits.



Beverley Minster

We began with a trip to Beverley and a guided tour of the Minster in the morning followed by a visit to the nearby Yorkshire Wildlife Trust Reserve at North Cave. 47 members attended.

In May Chris Griffin and Dorothy Munn attended the National AGM at Mundford, Thetford with their spouses.

Also in May, a coach trip with 45 members went to Roundhay Park and Tropical World at Leeds.

The next visit took the group by cars to Wolds Way Lavender at Wintringham near Malton with 30 members present.



July saw 47 members take a coach to the Yorkshire Wildlife Park near Doncaster.

On a very wet day in August, 15 members braved the elements to visit the FC woods at Gilling and see the excavation of the 'lost' Yearsley water mill, one of only three known examples of its type in England.

49 members and friends went to the National Trust's Quarry Bank Cotton Mill at Wilmslow in September, and in October 31 members and friends gathered at Sledmere House on the Yorkshire Wolds for a guided tour of the house and a walk in the gardens.

The Christmas Lunch was held at the Forest & Vale Hotel Pickering in December and 35 members and friends enjoyed the company and the festive fare.



In 2016 the group is planning visits to: -

April	Harrogate Spring Flower Show
May	Ripley Castle, Ripon and Ripon Cathedral
June	Jackson's Wold, Sherburn (by car)
July	Carlisle to Settle Railway
September	Beamish Museum
October	The Deep, Hull

Non-Yorkshire Group members are welcome to join us on any trip. Please contact Dorothy Munn on 01751 472193.

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

Many vintage foresters will recall Lynford Hall, of blessed memory. Fifty members and their families of the East Anglian branch of the FCA sat down for an excellent New Year lunch on 7th January in what was once the Ballroom. Lynford was once a contender for being a Royal residence; Sandringham won! Having been through less exalted times, it is now well renovated and decorated, and for this occasion, still with its Christmas tree.

Everyone thoroughly enjoyed the meal and party atmosphere and getting together with old friends.

Best wishes,

Eric Rogers



Visit the FCA Today website at www.fca-today.com

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

I read with great interest about the Cashel Hydro Electric Scheme in the latest edition of FCA Today. I worked that area for many years, as you may recall, hence the interest.

It brought to mind a stone walled, corrugated roofed shed north of Rowardennan in FC land. It was locked, but I found keys for it and investigated. Based on the local knowledge of the forest worker with me, it turns out that the shed contained core samples of rock from the mouth of a blind glen above and to the north of Rowardennan (sorry, can't recall its name).

Local rumour had it that the Government of the day made a compulsory purchase of the glen and gave it to the FC to manage as a deer forest until their plans could be realised.

I seem to recall the plan was to block the open end of the glen with a concrete dam, hence the core samples to check that the rock formation was suitable for building on. Apparently, the

plans for this project took into account the likely impact on the environment and landscape and the resulting dam would have been set back out of sight, well back from the edge, out of general view.

There I have to stop as I have no further information, or at least I can't remember anything else. I have to stress this is hearsay and folklore combined. Perhaps other readers know more about this - perhaps you might know something about it from your days in West Scotland.

Regards,

Peter Ford

When the scheme was revealed there were howls of dismay, particularly about the resulting fluctuating water levels. Loch Lomond is so vast that the variation would only be about 20 cms. The natural variation is up to 2m. But never spoil a good campaign with facts! Ed

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

Ian Blake recalls a crisp sunny day in January 2016 when family, friends and former FC colleagues gathered together at Brecon Cathedral to celebrate the life of **DAVID MORGAN HUGHES**, the former Chief Conservator, FA (Wales). David had died suddenly, in his sleep, in December 2015, whilst visiting family in New Zealand.

Although a passionate Welshman, David was born in Bradford and raised in Woodhouse Eaves, near Loughborough. His father, himself a passionate Welshman, was headmaster of the Woodhouse Eaves primary school. At David's funeral Bill, his younger brother, gave the congregation a wonderful insight into their upbringing in an idyllic semi-rural setting, which included long walks into the surrounding countryside. Doubtless, these forays resulted in David's love of nature and ultimate choice of forestry as a career. David was also an avid cricketer and rugby follower all his life, these sports being added to by a love of playing golf in his later years. Welsh lessons took place at home regularly and David became bilingual, putting his Welsh to good use in later life.

After passing his 11+ David attended Loughborough Grammar School and then went on to study forestry at

Bangor University (1954-56). Following two years of National Service, David eventually joined the Forestry Commission as an assistant district officer at Oswestry in 1958.

David had by then met his future wife, Christine, at a tennis party held by one of his Woodhouse Eaves friends, and they married in August 1960, forming a lifelong partnership. Christine, a farmer's daughter from Cradock Drive, Quorn, moved with David to Llanrwst, North Wales, where he was assistant district officer, and Cradock was to prove significant in their retirement. More later.

David and Christine spent the next seven years in Llanrwst and Llanfairfechan during which time their three daughters Ceri, Bethan and Catrin were born. In 1967 the family moved to Dolgellau, on his promotion to FO1. Their next move was in 1973 to Neath in the South Wales Valleys where David was appointed district forest officer in charge of Coed Morgannwg, including the industrial Afan & Neath Valleys. Following this fiery challenge, David was transferred in 1979 to the Conservancy Office in Aberystwyth where he became HMO (Wales). This took place during a period of increased timber production from maturing forests, culminating

in more than 1,000,000 m3 harvested and marketed per annum from Welsh forests.

In 1992 FC (Wales) was split into Forest Authority (FA) and Forest Enterprise (FE). David was immediately appointed Chief Conservator, the lead regulatory position overseeing FE operations. He remained in this important post until his retirement in 1995, and that was closely followed by the award of an OBE for his services to forestry. David and his family enjoyed a memorable day at Buckingham Palace when presented with the award by Prince Charles.

Following retirement, with daughter Ceri living in south Wales and Bethan and Catrin in south east England, David and Christine decided to move to the Brecon area and purchased a house in Cradock, a picturesque village coincidentally sharing the name of Christine's childhood home in Quorn - hence the significance described earlier.

David and Christine settled into rural life with the golf course, long walks and family holidays playing important roles. David forged strong links with the Royal Forestry Society, acting in a judging capacity at times, and the FCA (South Wales) where he took on the role of Chairman for many years. Daughter Bethan, whose partner was a New

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LIFE IN BRIEF

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Zealand, had by now settled in Tauranga, so family holidays now meant travelling to the antipodes, enjoying their warmer Christmas and New Year periods.

Sadly Christine died in 2008, which devastated David, but supported by his loving family, he gradually overcame his grief and returned to a more active life. This included golf at the local club and more visits to New Zealand, organised by his daughters.

I last saw David at our Christmas lunch on December 2nd when he gave a lovely tribute to the late Gwyn Francis, so I had a real shock when I learnt of his sudden death in New Zealand on December 23rd. He is survived by his three daughters and five grandchildren.

David was a true gentleman who will be sorely missed by all who knew him, and the best description I heard about him was that he was "someone who always saw the good in people" - that sums him up perfectly.

David Foot recalls **GWYN FRANCIS** who died in Edinburgh in November 2015. This will have caused many of his forestry friends and acquaintances to stop and reflect on a man who brought so much to forestry in a career



Gwyn Francis

of outstanding energy and professionalism. Gwyn rose through the ranks of the Forestry Commission to become, in 1983, a Forestry Commissioner, and in 1986 its Director General and Deputy Chairman. He was at the forefront of the Commission in what turned out to be a uniquely challenging decade.

Born in Llanelli in Sept 1930, Gwyn Jones Francis went to the University College of North Wales, Bangor, getting an Honours degree in forestry in 1952, and thereafter serving for two years in the Royal Engineers. In 1954 he joined the FC as a district officer in Neath, with responsibility for the Commission's young forests in the Afan, Neath and Dulais valleys.

In 1960 he was appointed as the Principal of the FC's Gwydyr FTS, a residential college for the training of foresters near Betws y Coed. It was Gwyn's style to insist on

high standards, while modernising the course work and greatly enhancing the reputation of the school. The students were introduced to a world that they barely knew existed. Many of them were from industrial backgrounds and it was a learning experience that they would never forget.

One of the big training priorities of the 1960s was the introduction of mechanised working methods. Gwyn realised how much the industry could learn from harvesting practices in North America, and in 1964 he took a year out to study for an MSc in harvesting technology at Toronto University.

Thereafter it was only a matter of time before Gwyn became involved in management and the development of timber markets. The FC's wood production was growing rapidly as the forests matured. First in Cardiff, and then at the FC's headquarters in Edinburgh, he was responsible for harvesting and marketing, latterly across the FC's whole forest estate throughout Britain. For the home timber industry, it was a case of "cometh the hour, cometh the man".

Within a few years of his move to Edinburgh in 1976, the industry was plunged into a

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LIFE IN BRIEF

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major industrial crisis when its various markets for small roundwood closed down in the economic recession of that time. Building on some entrepreneurial work by the Economic Forestry Group, Gwyn negotiated the export of British-grown pulpwood to Sweden. In the 1980s, he embarked on a development programme that attracted to Britain the likes of the Sweden's United Paper Mills in North Wales, Norbord near Inverness, and later what was then the biggest ever inward investment in Scotland, the Finnish-owned Caledonian Paper Mills at Irvine, altogether over one billion pounds of inward investment.

Although organisational efficiency and hard economics were always his preoccupation, Gwyn was also alive to the softer side of forestry, and the benefits it could bring to people and wildlife. As the FC listened to its critics and adjusted to new ideas, his tenure as Director General brought with it some of the most profound changes in forest policy since the war.

With the introduction of a new tree-planting scheme in 1988 and much that followed from that, the social and environmental objectives of forestry were finally put on a par with its traditional timber-

based role that had existed from the FC's founding in 1919.

All these developments took place against the backdrop of political changes that threatened the very existence of the FC, and involved the top team in a hugely time-consuming saga that dragged on for more than a decade. 1981 saw the Thatcher government's first step towards privatisation of the FC's forests. Gwyn saw it as a damage limitation exercise and was at his intellectual best finding workable solutions to the demands of government ministers. Despite the threat of forest sales, one of his small triumphs before retirement was to get the government to agree to the FC's organisational *status quo* in response to a House of Commons Agriculture Committee report arguing for the separation of its two main parts, the Forest Enterprise and the Forest Authority. The government agreed in 1990 that "the present structure of the Forestry Commission provides an effective means of implementing forest policy". He saw clearly the risks of fragmentation, and being 'picked-off' by civil service bureaucracy, and by politics that had nothing to do with the effective management of the forest estate. Gwyn was determined that the FC's dismemberment would not

happen on his watch, although of course, in a changing world of funding squeezes and devolution, subsequent events reversed this.

Gwyn never wavered in his belief that the FC had a vital role to play in the creation of a successful forest industry in Britain. The FC was indeed fortunate to have had the benefit, over many years, of his vision, tough-mindedness and professionalism.

Throughout his career, Gwyn suffered from a bad back that took some of the fun out of his life. Though often uncomfortable, he never complained about it. In 1990 he was awarded a CB for his services to forestry, and in his retirement he pursued his interest in birds, becoming a council member of the RSPB and chairman of its Scottish committee.

Gwyn is survived by his wife Audrey, his daughter Kay and son David, and his two granddaughters, Anna and Maya, in whose company he took much pride and pleasure.

This obituary written by David Foot, with contributions from John Morgan, Graham Hamilton and Roger Busby, all former colleagues of Gwyn Francis, and past students from the FTS. Ed.

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LIFE IN BRIEF

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Boyd Glen knew **EDDIE ARTHURS** well. Eddie died aged 74 in December 2015 in Spain after a short illness.

Eddie started his Civil Service career with the National Assistance Board where he saw life in the raw in Moss Side, Manchester. He gravitated to IT where there were better career opportunities. Immediately before coming to FC he was Computer Officer with the Prescription Pricing Authority part of the DHSS based in Newcastle.

Eddie came to the FC in 1982 to head the Computer Branch. FC administrative computing was lagging behind other departments. An indicator of the state of the discipline was that, until then, it had been known as O&M ADP. At the time punched cards were still in use and the Scottish Office provided a computer bureau which the FC in Edinburgh used. An effort was made to import experienced staff and also recruit those with an aptitude from within the organisation. This was the start of a great expansion in the use of IT within FC. In a relatively short time a computer was installed in HQ and a network linking FC locations throughout GB. Commercial packages were introduced for standard business applications with bespoke software for special

systems. The days of sending paper documents to Edinburgh for punching were replaced by online input.

Staff working practices across FC changed through email and other tools on the desktop. The relentless march of the PC started. Many advances were overtaken by new technologies. The FC caught up with and passed many departments in the use of IT. The rate of advance was such that it is difficult to recall all that happened. These were heady times for those working for Eddie. Industry standard methods were introduced. Members of Eddie's staff were active in Government and industry groups. Eddie himself was part of the organising committee for COMCOM, the Government IT Directors' conference. Suffice to say CCTA sent a practitioner to Edinburgh to record how a small department had implemented things which large departments found difficult to resource. This was published as guidance for small departments.

Then change came for Eddie. In 1995, several things came together. The Commissioner Administration and Finance retired and it was decided that the post would not be filled.

The accounting function was in FE and market testing was looming. Eddie moved to head up Finance and Corporate

Planning. He was the Principal Finance Officer and had Parliamentary finance and many other responsibilities. This work was much less visible to FC staff but was of huge political importance. Devolution, accrual accounting, internal charging, transfer of the pension scheme and the threat of further disposals were just a few things which were involved. But what of Eddie, the man? He liked his food, always blaming Hitler and war time rationing for that. He knew where to eat. Visits to London generally meant a meal at Addie's Thai Café. He was good company and good fun.

As a manager he let his people get on with things only reining them in when necessary. He networked extensively within the organisation, promoting ideas, nipping problems in the bud, doing deals and gathering intelligence. He cared about his people and earned their respect and loyalty. That is reflected in the fact that his last group of staff met in Edinburgh in early January to remember Eddie with affection, to reminisce and to raise a glass in his memory.

Eddie is survived by Marjorie, his wife and by a son and a daughter, Ciaran and Claire. A first grandchild, Claire's daughter Elizabeth, was born in early January.

(Editor's note: Boyd Glen was a member of Eddie's staff during the whole time Eddie was with FC)

FCA Today on Facebook

by Ian Blake



I have set up a FCA Today Facebook page. Those with an account can search for FCA Today to become a member. If you don't have an account, I recommend you access the site shown below to set one up.

Simply follow the steps shown - they are quite straightforward. Once you're signed up, search for the FCA Today group to become a member, then you can disseminate information as and when you like.

Alternatively, there are a myriad of sites to assist in setting up Facebook, if you don't like this one, just type 'How to set up a Facebook account' into your browser.

<http://m.wikihow.com/Set-up-a-Facebook-Account>

Forestry Commission Association Organisers

FCA Liaison Officer: *Charles Dickens*

e-mail Group membership enquiries to: -

FCA Today editor: *Richard Toleman*

membership@fca-today.com

FCA Today Magazine

The next issue of the FCA Today magazine will be available on the www.fca-today.com website on **5th August 2016**.

Articles for inclusion in the next issue of the magazine should be sent to the editor before 1st July 2016.

The publication dates of the FCA Today magazine are: - **Spring edition: 5th April, Summer edition: 5th August and Winter edition: 5th December**

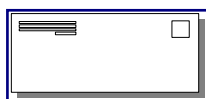
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