



From the Editor

In this issue you will find Don Amer's story of his family life while working with the FC. He was encouraged to write this after his wife's death late last year. As he says in his article, writing about all the exciting and happy family times he enjoyed has helped him to come to terms with his wife's death.

I know all about this. My wife died two years ago and you never get over it. There is no such thing as "Getting over it". Well meaning people ask this as a form of offering comfort but until one has a family death, one can never appreciate the endless bleakness that follows.

Also well meaning people often ask how are you feeling. This is just as bad. The true answer is "Shite". The vernacular expresses it succinctly. My response has been to mumble something about how I am managing well enough. Better is the question "How are you feeling today?". But again, until you have experienced a death, this distinction is not apparent.

For the very many who have experienced a close family death I can only say that life is about what can be done with what is left and what still happens to be there. Those that you loved become ghosts within you and that's how they stay alive. There are so many memory keepers. For me it can be music or special places that have great significance or certain activities that we both enjoyed. I cry on many of these occasions and don't care who sees.

I went to a bereavement group and told them this about my wife. It helped me and may help you.

My wife's time has come and she has done well. She, and we, are all made of fragments. Her fragments have dispersed and they must go back. They have finished with her but her energy and fragments will reappear in the scale of a fish, a leaf of a tree, a feather of a bird and the leg of a beetle. Her fragments will swarm and reform and may become the hand of a child far away. Our fragments have always existed and will exist for ever. I helped to spread her fragments.

If, like Don, you would like to write a piece about someone close to you who has died, I shall publish it. I hope it will help you and readers. One thing is certain, we shall all experience a close family death. As we are born, so we must die.

Richard Toleman



FCA Today

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Brecklands Group Christmas Lunch

by Eric Rogers



40 members and friends enjoyed their annual Christmas lunch at the Mundford Bowls Club. My! Don't they look bright and perky! Must be the East Anglian air.

Website Message Board

If you have any news, announcements or any 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

Lynford Hall

By Eric Rogers

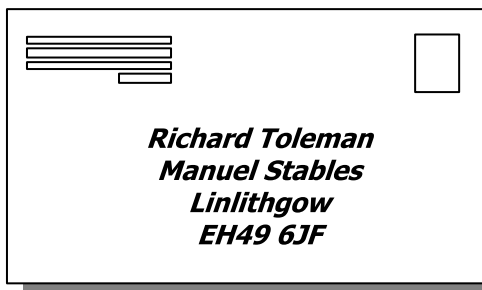


More senior retired members may like to see this photo of the hall in its better days in 1905 and before the wing on the left was destroyed by fire. Some of the students were accommodated in the cellars which remained after it. The main part is now an hotel and the interior rather grander than in our days, and the food is better too! The garden has been renovated and is also rather grand.

Send your articles or letters to the editor for publication in FCA Today



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



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Letters to the Editor

I read the poem about spruce with much interest and would agree that this could well have been written by Hugh McKay. He wrote a similar poem for the retirement of Jimmy Munro (a long serving low loader driver in N(S)), but sadly I have lost my copy.

During his time at Farigaig, Hugh had a relaxed approach to minutes from Conservancy Office. They were read, shown to other staff as necessary, and then screwed up and thrown into a tea chest in a corner of the office. He took the view that if the content of the minute was important another copy would be sent out. Not surprisingly his successor (possibly Frank Sutherland) took a different view and spent a number of weekends ironing the minutes to create the semblance of a filing system. Hugh was an excellent forester and was not one to simply follow an instruction when he felt it was wrong.

In 1979 when I came to N(S) my first contact with Hugh was at his FC house in Ratagan, just down from the Kyle of Lochalsh, an area as you would expect with high rainfall. He was a keen gardener and when I admired the stone lined drains running through the garden and suggested they must have been a lot of work, he just smiled and said "drains maintenance".

After a move to Shin Forest as chief forester, Hugh had a good humoured battle to have the new forest district office at Shin following the 1984/85 restructuring. He would have temporary district office signs put up when senior staff were due to visit. Sadly, he lost the battle and Dornoch

nursery became the new office for the district.

One story that amused me following the 1987 storm, was about a phone call from a private land owner for advice on how to deal with the fallen trees on his land. He contacted the Harvesting and Marketing Officer in HQ (John Oakley?) who asked a number of pertinent questions about tree species, road access problems, power lines etc. The H&MO had a dry sense of humour and suggested that he took two weeks holiday. The land owner was not amused until he was told that there was no urgency to do anything. He had plenty of time to plan the removal of the trees in a way that would minimise costs and maximise income.



During my time as mechanical engineer in Cambridge in 1992/94, Alan Drake, the civil engineer who had been involved in setting up the Thetford Log Store, expressed an interest in getting an aerial photograph of the log store, now that it was nearly empty. As I had a pilot's licence at the time, I said

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Letters to the Editor

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Alan Drake

that I would take him there in a small Cessna, as long as he did the navigation. All my flying up to that time had been out of Inverness, where navigation was much easier with the abundance of hills, lochs etc. to navigate by. Alan said he would take on that responsibility and I handed him the chart of the area, so that he could tell me which course to fly.



My confidence in his knowledge of the area took a dip shortly after taking off from Little Gransden, a small grass airfield, when Alan said he was unsure of our position relative to the map. He cheered up when we



Barry Rands (left) and Richard Saunders (right) were the civil engineering road construction and maintenance team covering Thetford, Suffolk and Chilterns forest districts and they operated a motor grader and a loading shovel plus vibratory roller respectively for 5 days each week. Every weekend they were at the log store extending the sprinkler lines as the timber was brought in, maintaining the lines by removing eels etc from the sprinkler heads or dismantling the lines as the timber was removed.

accidentally flew over his house and he was able to get his bearings. The log store was duly photographed and the return trip was not a problem as there is a 2000 ft mast near the airfield which makes a very good landmark to aim for.

Regards
John Martin

John's stories are the stuff of myth and legend in the annals of the FC. I know they will appeal to many. My feeling when I meet FC staff in today's organisation is that, although they are enthusiastic for their jobs, the pioneering spirit and individualism is no longer there. There seems to be a corporate uniformity. Ed.

Personal Memories

by Don Amer

Throughout the years of reading FCA Today and before that "The Slasher", there are no stories about how the womenfolk in our lives coped, often having been plucked from the comforts of living in towns and cities. Sometimes they went to very remote places where amenities were somewhat limited.

The death of my wife Nan in October 2017, after a year-long illness of hospitalisation, pain and suffering, started me thinking what would life have been like if I had not married. I will never know that, but having been married for sixty-three years, I can look back with pride and happiness to fond memories those sixty three years brought me.

Of the forty two years working for the FC, my wife shared forty of them and it was because of my posting to Edinburgh in 1952, to join The Northern Sample Plot Party that I met her.



St Andrews House in Edinburgh

Here was a girl living in Edinburgh and working in St Andrews House with HM Stationery Office, getting married to a lad

from industrial Merseyside who decided that he wanted to work for the Forestry Commission. She would be suddenly whisked away from all the comforts and convenience of living in Edinburgh to live in a wooden British Timber House. It was more like an upmarket garden shed, but it was our first home together. This was to be a lifelong adventure for both of us, but whereas I was aware what my chosen life style might be like, my wife was not.

Having been posted to Culbin Forest, we settled in to make a home together in the small village of Kintessack which had very few inhabitants, all older than ourselves and with no social activities.

At work I was the youngster, an assistant forester, among the forestry workers, the gangers and Willie Milne, the chief forester.

With no transport of our own, we were dependent on a bus service into Forres on Tuesdays and Saturdays for essential shopping.

Despite the change in lifestyle from Edinburgh, where she enjoyed the company of her many friends and a job which she enjoyed, my wife never ever complained. Money was tight and we could only afford to buy cheap non fitting Belgian cotton carpets.

I remember being told that Prince Phillip was due to visit and it was planned that he should come to our house. Panic set in! We had to go into Forres to buy Congoleum, like a cheap linoleum, to cover the bare

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Personal Memories *continued*

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floorboards which weren't carpeted. In the event, Prince Phillip's visit was cancelled!

Slowly life went on and in 1956 our twins, a boy and girl, were born and domestic life became more frenzied with the daily wash of dozens of nappies and preparing bottles for two babies day and night. But soon it became a routine chore.

Our social life improved when we discovered that there was a badminton club in the neighbouring village of Dyke. My wife was a devotee of badminton, having been a member of an Edinburgh club, so I was introduced to the game. By employing a baby sitter to look after the twins, we able to have an improved social life and we made many friends as a result.

Our only means of transport at that time was a bicycle, so I began to look around for a cheap car. Our luck was in and we bought an old Ford for the princely sum of £25 that had several months on the tax disc. The annual tax at that time was

£12.50. But there was a problem! The engine lacked power and needed a re-bore. I set to and stripped out the engine, took it into Forres, had the cylinders re-bored and fitted with oversize pistons, then replaced it.

Having our own transport, we were able to visit my wife's mother in Edinburgh and my parents in Birkenhead to show off their grandchildren. The car had wooden floorboards which became very useful while waiting for the ferry at Queensferry, because we able to empty the children's potty by lifting a board or two. It ran until 1959 and I was able to sell it for £25 before being posted to the great Kielder Forest.

Suddenly the old saying, "out of the frying pan and into the fire", springs to mind when leaving peaceful Morayshire with its dry climate for the wetter one of the North Tyne valley. The four years which we spent at Kielder, couldn't have been more different, both socially and in lifestyle, than the five years at Culbin, but that's a story for another time, perhaps.

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,
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Linlithgow, EH49 6JF.

100 Years of Forestry

by Rupert Barry

As the Forestry Commission prepares to mark its centenary in 2019, we are keen that staff, both past and present, are directly involved in the celebrations.

'Staff Stories' is an online project that will celebrate the role of forestry in the work and personal lives of Forestry Commission staff and alumni. From the submissions we receive, we will present a series of edited articles, short videos or audio interviews for internal and external audiences to enjoy.

To help us capture a rich and diverse range of stories, we'd like to hear your memories and reflections from your time working for the Forestry Commission and see any photos you might have of tools, uniform or time at work.

The following offer some references as story starting points but don't feel limited to these.

- An extraordinary day or proudest moment in your forestry career
- How forests have inspired your time outside of work
- Personal or lifelong connections to the Forestry Commission or a certain forest
- The role forests play in today's society
- A short plotted history of your career highlights
- What made you want to work in forestry

Please be aware that we may choose to use your entry to be published in future internal communications at the Forestry Commission to inspire others. For those whom we shortlist, we shall be back in touch before they are published externally.

Remember to include your contact details on each submission, and limit entries to 1000 words.

Please submit by May 30th 2018 via email to centenary@forestry.gsi.gov.uk or send them to Rupert Barry, Forestry Commission, 620 Bristol Business Park, Bristol, BS16 1EJ.



1950s uniform

Early Days at Kielder

by Ted Baldwin

In the late 1940s when I arrived at Lewie camp to start as a forest worker, the wage was £4pw. As £2 went on basic accommodation, I was no better off than I had been during my forest worker training at Birch Hall. However Kielder was to broaden my forestry experience.

My first job was brashing SS on Smales beat under Charlie Simpson. This was mundane but straightforward, but under the dense canopy there was little air circulation and the midges were intolerable.

Thankfully my time at Smales was brief and I was glad to be posted to Plashetts which was within cycling distance of Lewie camp. It consisted of the station master's house, a small row of former miners' cottages occupied by forest workers and one or two pre-war FC houses. The forest office and store were near the station and George Parker was the forester in charge.



Like most Kielder forest beats, the emphasis was on achieving the annual planting programme and fire protection from the North Tyne railway.

The steam locomotives blasted out glowing sparks that ignited the vegetation next to the track. To minimise the fire risk, fire breaks and rides alongside the track were regularly mown to encourage new growth which was less flammable.



Plashetts Station

One of my first jobs at Plashetts was with the squad cutting and raking the grass off rides on Law Hill with an old temperamental Autoscythe. While doing this work I became aware of an active coal mine above Plashetts. Coal was brought down through the forest on a steep rough track by an extremely ancient lorry and loaded on to railway trucks at the station.



Plashetts Colliery incline is on the right

I also discovered in the hills above Plashetts the derelict remains of two rows of former

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Early Days at Kielder *continued*

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miners' cottages. Life for them and their families must have been harsh indeed.

Autumn saw the arrival of the Conservancy ploughing circus to prepare the season's planting programme.

Rides had already been pegged out and the ploughing tractors drove up and down, leaving behind widely spaced furrows and long glistening peat ridges. Then it was all hands to the rutters and hacks to cut and spread the planting turfs before the winter's snow and frost make it impossible.



This was my first acquaintance with a rutter and because of its size and weight, I doubted that I would ever carry it to the planting site, let alone produce

acceptable planting turfs. However after a few back breaking days slithering about on peat ridges, I managed to achieve some sort of working rhythm and was able to produce turfs at the required 5' x 5' spacing.

I had to accept that I could never match the output of the best Poles and Ukrainians who made it look effortless and easy. I tended to work those awkward corners where the ploughs couldn't operate and needed to be drained and turfed by hand.

As soon as the frost was out of the ground, the planting began. At Kielder it was traditional to use the semi circular spade to

twist out a peat plug from the centre of the turf. The plant could then be placed with the roots at the correct depth when the plug was replaced. This was a two man operation with the men taking turns about with the spade or firming the plant.

Under favourable conditions, some prodigious outputs were achieved by the eastern European teams. This caused some resentment among the locals, as high outputs tended to depress the piece work rates set by some foresters.



Kielder Forest Railway Station

The dry early Spring weather saw the start of the fire danger season, with the railway posing the greatest risk. When the hazard was high, the railway had to be constantly patrolled and any fires started by trains had to be extinguished promptly. During this time I was seconded to assist Ted Turnbull who was the Kielder Fire Warden and had an office at Kielder Castle.

Our first job was to coordinate the fire control system for the North Tyne forests. We prepared fire plans and made daily assessments of the fire hazard based on

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Early Days at Kielder *continued*

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data from weather stations and foresters' reports.

Without radios and mobile phones, our communications were primitive and relied on a network of old ex-army field telephones. They were connected by miles of cables throughout the forests that were vulnerable to all sorts of damage and mishaps. To maintain this system we had a linesman equipped with motorbike and sidecar whose thankless task was to keep the cables intact and the phones working.



During the fire season I was permanently on call either at Kielder Castle or in my cabin in the camp where I had a field telephone. For a number of weeks my free time was very restricted. I was involved in many call-outs for road and rail side fires, but none was serious during my time as a fire warden.

On my return to forest duties at Plashetts, I took over the supervision of felling and conversion at Wainhope wood. This was one of a number of old shelter plantations and was mainly NS/SP.

Felling was done with cross-cut saws and axes, and conversion to timber lengths and pit props with cross-cut and Bushman saws.

There was a rough access track for timber lorries and a hard standing in the centre for conversion and stacking. A crude set of shear legs with block and tackle was used to load the timber lengths. An old crawler tractor was sometimes available for extraction but otherwise timber had to be manhandled.

The non timber material was peeled and cut to a wide range of pit prop specifications from the largest at 12' x 12in. td down to 2' x 2in. td. All pit props had strict length and top diameter tolerance limits that made checking quite a task. Coupled with setting piece work rates for peeling and cutting, this made the whole operation a mensuration and costing nightmare! No calculators in those days.

The squad I was overseeing was of mixed origin and some had only a rudimentary command of English and knowledge of our measurement units. However each had a shrewd idea of how much he had earned, and heaven help me if my calculations did not tally, come pay day!

With Wainhope felled, my next task was the felling of a similar wood on Whickhope beat. As I had predicted on my arrival at Kielder, my forestry experience was greatly broadened. When I returned to Kielder many years later, much of what had been familiar had disappeared under the mighty Kielder Water.

Tree Pests

by Peter Crow

Concerned about the rise of tree pests and diseases in the UK? Would you like to be part of a Tree Health Early Warning System designed to help protect the UK's trees?

Established through funding from the EU's Life+ Programme (2013-2017), Observatree is a partnership project. Led by Forest Research, partners are APHA, Defra, Fera Science Ltd, Forestry Commission England, Forestry Commission Scotland, Natural Resources Wales, the National Trust and the Woodland Trust.

Whilst the LIFE+ funding ended in September, because of the success of the multi-award winning project, partners are funding its continuation. Observatree aims to protect the UK's trees, woods and forests from new pests and diseases – either arriving or spreading across the country. The earlier these are spotted, the higher the chances that outbreaks can be eliminated or controlled.

Observatree plays two roles in protecting the UK's trees. One is to raise awareness of tree pests and diseases and provide tools to help anybody identify and report particular pests or diseases. This is achieved by making our online educational resources freely available.

The project also recruits a network of 200 volunteers dedicated to monitoring and reporting on tree health.

Extensive training in recognizing tree pests and diseases is provided, allowing our specialist volunteers to: -

- Carry out early surveys for tree pests and diseases and report findings
- Ensure [Tree Alert](#) reports are complete and of high quality, enabling scientists at Forest Research Fera to carry out a correct diagnosis
- Provide further accurate data allowing scientists to identify trends in the spread and appearance of pests and diseases

Observatree volunteers carry out surveys of their local woods and trees for the presence **and absence** of specific pests and diseases on common tree species.

Surveyors may also be asked to carry out targeted surveys for specific pests and diseases during new outbreaks and also have the option to set up their own sentinel tree plots to monitor the health of individual trees.

When necessary, surveyors may be asked to follow up Tree Alert reports, carrying out site surveys to gather additional information required for correct diagnosis. This provides essential support to tree health professionals, allowing scientists and tree health officers to focus on the most significant reports submitted.

Observatree volunteers are trained annually by tree health professionals and scientists from within the partnership. Training enables them to correctly identify signs and symptoms of Observatree's 21

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Tree Pests *continued*

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priority pests and diseases as well as carry out effective site surveys.

Volunteers are also trained to collect samples; record accurate grid references; and follow good biosecurity.

Interested in helping? We have some limited spaces available within our volunteer network.

Because we wish to have a good geographic spread of volunteers, we are particularly interested in recruiting volunteers from south and southwest England, Wales, northern England and Scotland.

Whilst training on tree pests and diseases and tree identification is provided, some prior tree identification skills would be advantageous.

We do not actively recruit throughout the year, but will open the opportunity again in early April.

If you live outside of these areas, but would still be interested in helping, you can either join our volunteer waiting list, subscribe to receive our e-newsletter or look out for and report tree health issues via the FC's Tree Alert tool:

www.forestry.gov.uk/treealert

Peter Crow

Observatree Project Manager,
Forest Research.



If you would like to find out more about becoming an Observatree volunteer, please visit:

<http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/get-involved/volunteer-with-us/opportunities/tree-health-surveyor/>

or get in touch via our website: www.observatree.org.uk/contact-us/

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

Memorable Weather Events in Scotland

by Norman Davidson

Simon Malone's eloquent description of the 1987 gale and its aftermath did bring back memories of climatic events that stick in my own memory. Of course, those of us living north in Scotland hardly felt that particular gale as it was centred so far south.

I also escaped the 1968 gale that devastated the forests on the west of Scotland and the thousands of roofs and chimney stacks in Glasgow, even though I was living in the Fort William area at the time. The centre of that storm passed well south of Oban and although there was windblow in Leanachan Forest, where I was stationed, it was comparatively minor.

However we soon felt the consequences of the flattened forests of Argyllshire, as all our harvesting operations were stopped to allow the areas of blown timber to be worked and marketed quickly.



Windblow Inverliever Forest

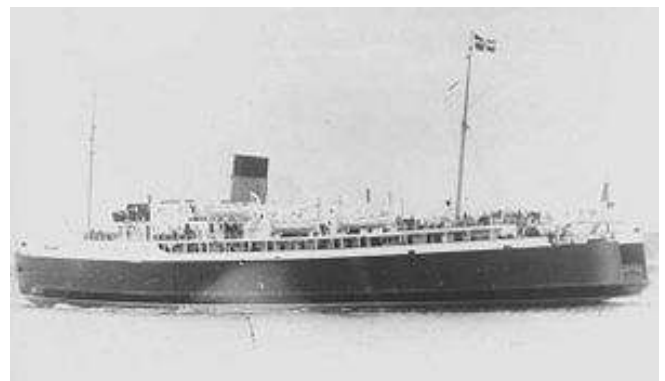
Our harvesting teams of manual cutters and cable crane operators were sent down to the Loch Awe area to help out there and it was the best part of three years before the very last of them returned.

Well before my forestry days, I do vividly remember the January 1952 hurricane and its follow up of the life devastating gale of January 1953.



1953 gale damage in Kirkwall

We lived in Orkney at the time and although we were battered, we missed the strongest winds in 1953. This was the one that pushed the enormous storm surge down the North Sea at high tide overtopping the sea walls in the Wash and Holland and consequently resulted in very heavy loss of life. Being familiar with sea ferries we listened in horror to the radio as the ferry Princess Victoria was reported to be in danger on her route from Stranraer to Larne and was then lost.



MV Princess Victoria

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Memorable Weather Events in Scotland *continued*

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In north and north east Scotland, it flattened and broke hundreds of thousands of trees in the forests.

The 1952 gale however is one that still lives on strongly in my memory. We awoke in the middle of the night to the roar of the wind and the stone built house shuddering and shaking under the strongest blasts. We all retreated to the central core of the house, but then our parents were forced into action when a gable end window blew in. A single mattress was placed over the whole window and a bed frame upended and jammed against it, followed by some heavy chairs.



Hurricane damage in Orkney 1952

The next morning there was an eerie calm as we emerged to survey the windswept scene. Windswept it was. Everything loose was gone as were the stacks of straw, the wooden hen houses, slates off roofs, ex army huts used as houses and even the fences were flat where the blown straw had filled the wire mesh.

It was said the only instrument in the isles to record the wind speed had a limit of 120mph. The maximum was reached and probably well exceeded.

The other climatic event that is a fixture in my memory, involved not wind but cold, the very cold frost and a long period of snow that lasted from December 1962 to the end of March 1963. We were young and quite hardy in those days, but the pain of the low temperatures is a recall that still sends shivers down the back.

The clothing that we had, mainly ex forces second hand jackets and trousers, was no match for the low temperatures, but the worst effects were on the feet and hands where protection was more basic.

As young forestry workers living in a hostel, financial resources to buy extra clothing were a bit limited. We did envy one of our colleagues who had an RAF aircrew sheepskin jacket with collar that came up over the ears – part of his motorcycling outfit.



We doubled up on everything we could, trousers, jerseys, socks but soon discovered that boot size limited the amount of layers that could be added to the feet before blood supply was restricted. Gloves were mainly in the form of woollen mitts, but I did have a pair of long cuffed rubber type material gloves that I used in timber dragging operations. However they turned hard and felt as warm and comfortable as a pair made of iron.

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Memorable Weather Events in Scotland *continued*

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Wellington boots were really very cold and when you took them off, they were always lined with a layer of ice from the condensation. We did have leather boots and we should have acquired ex army puttees or gaiters to keep out the deep snow, but somehow we did not.

At the time, I was part of a team of six young men all under eighteen, who worked in the Calvine section of the Atholl Estates forestry enterprise. Calvine House, a large former sheep farm manager's house, was used as the accommodation for Bill Brand, the forestry foreman for the section, and his family. The north end of the house comprising three bedrooms, a living/dining room, wash room, basic bathroom and a separate toilet served as the accommodation for the young forestry workers.



Calvine House

Bill Brand's wife, Aileen or Eileen but always Mrs Brand to us, provided us with cooked food and also filled our piece boxes. From memory we paid about £2/12 or perhaps, as we got the age increase in wages, £3

per week. Consequently she had a very meagre budget for the weekly provision of food for six ravenous teenagers. Nothing was ever left and we certainly never put on much extra weight!

At New Year, we always had two day holidays having worked Christmas day, and as it fell just after a weekend, I was invited by my friend and work colleague Tom Bell to take New Year in at his home in Kilmarnock. We caught the train at nearby Struan Station on Friday afternoon and set off for Glasgow via Perth but as we progressed down the line, snow started falling, accompanied by a strong wind. The train heading for Glasgow got slower and slower, snow was battering like dust against the windows and at times we stopped, but eventually pulled into Glasgow very late after 11pm. Of course, we missed the connection to Kilmarnock and there was nothing going that way until the next morning. Still determined to get to Kilmarnock that night we 'brave' lads headed out to the Kilmarnock road to try and get a lift, but after walking a mile or two in falling snow and freezing cold with hardly a vehicle moving we gave up. We turned back, but in a heavy snow shower, we had to take temporary shelter in a telephone box. Bad move!

Somehow I fell asleep sitting on my case only to be wakened some time later by



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Memorable Weather Events in Scotland *continued*

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rough voices and questions. Looking back I was most likely in the early stages of hypothermia, had great difficulty in gathering my thoughts and was shivering uncontrollably. Fortunately Tom was in better shape than I and was able to give some intelligible answers to the two policemen from the patrol car. They took us in the car to a room in the police station and there we slept the night on benches, or it may have been the empty cell bunks – memory is a bit vague there. Next morning we said thanks (probably saved our lives) and headed for the train and Kilmarnock.

Back at work after New Year, older and wiser, we continued with a bit of timber harvesting in Baluain Wood off the A9, just up behind the present big shopping stop of House of Bruar. This as usual for me, involved walking the big Clydesdale horse, Jock, about 2 miles down the A9 from Calvine and then dragging the felled trees out of the wood down to the forest roadside for conversion on an old saw bench.



There was no salt used on the roads those days, just sand resulting in the surface of the road building up with hard packed snow and ice on which the horse slipped frequently, nearly taking me and it into the path of a vehicle. 'Take the horse down to the blacksmith and get cogs fitted' was the next instruction from Bill Brand. This involved a very careful five mile walk all the

way down the A9 to Blair Athol, stopping every time vehicles approached, which was often. The blacksmith took the old shoes off and fitted a new set with a series of half inch square holes, about six or possibly eight in total, punched into the metal spaced along the whole shoe. Once all four feet were done he then showed me how to insert the tapered shanks of the cogs into the holes and hammer them in a bit to create a firm fit. The cogs were shaped a bit like a three quarter inch wide cold chisel point with a height of about the same before the start of the tapered shank. We walked back, Jock the horse quite happy and steady on his set of spikes with absolutely no slipping and sliding. Getting back before darkness was the main problem.

Some of you will have had the experience of a horse testing your foot height with its hoof, which is memorable enough, but I can assure you the added stimulation of a set of sharp edged cogs through a thin wellie boot, even with two pairs of socks, brought tears to the eyes, a one footed dance and an archaic language flow which could only be described as colourful. A horse does not walk that fast and one had to be well wrapped for the journey to work.



As the cold air hurt nose and lungs, I took to wearing a scarf around my face, but this soon froze up and the moist breath then forced upwards, froze on my eyebrows and the front hair hanging out from under my

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Memorable Weather Events in Scotland *continued*

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beret. Jock was one of those horses that had a sizable moustache and as the journey progressed this grew longer and longer as two icicles up to a foot long formed from his breath. Passing vehicle drivers really must have wondered what type of throwbacks worked in that part of Perthshire!

Dragging timber in the wood was not easy as the tree stems were half or completely buried under cold frost hard snow. Passing a chain around underneath always ensured some snow ended up under the coat sleeve.

When holes wore in the gloves you had to be so careful that the skin did not freeze to the chains causing a very painful experience on the fingers when trying to detach them from the metal. After a week or two of this work, the snow depth increased even more and it was decided to give up on this work – cannot say I was unhappy about that.

Bill, the foreman, must have really struggled to think of meaningful work for the three month period. As it was, we set about chopping lots of wood to fuel all the fires in the house. We had to keep the washroom wood fired water heater going 24 hours a day to prevent a major freeze up of the water pipes.

During the coldest periods, we lit the small open fires in the bedrooms as well as the main fire in the sitting room. Even then, the milk froze inside at the back door and we were very lucky that the main water supply did not freeze as happened to half the village of Blair Atholl.



Perthshire snow at an unknown location but it certainly gives an impression of how it was.

Once the snow fall settled down, we did actually go and inspect some of the forest deer fences and where they were half buried, dug large trenches in the snow to try and stop deer and hares nipping over the fence and eating the tops of the young trees showing temptingly through the snow cover. It was really a bit of a fruitless task as the wind filled in the channels more quickly than we could dig them.

At some points, the main Perth Inverness rail line was blocked and even with large snow ploughs fitted to a couple of heavy engines coming down hill from Drumochter, they had no success and had to resort to large squads of men digging out the deepest cuttings. I seem to remember that they were looking for volunteers or personnel from other companies to help,



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Memorable Weather Events in Scotland *continued*

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but we were not sent up and never saw the operation.

The main road, the A9, from Inverness also blocked from time to time, but the road teams worked at it continuously and did a remarkable job to get traffic going. Lorries used to park up at Calvine when word came through that the road was closed and the drivers would go asking around for a bed for the night. They were usually accommodated somewhere, but it did create a bit of local discussion when a single lady put up five drivers in her two bedroomed cottage.

As all work continued to dwindle, we were detailed to go and make fire brooms down at the Kindrochit house, which was rented out by the Estate for guests in the summer and shooting months.

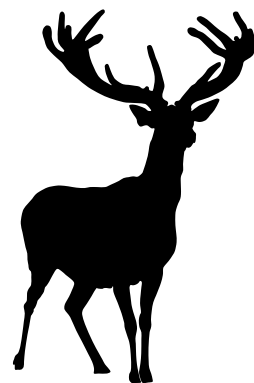


Norman Davidson sitting in the sunshine when taking a break from making fire brooms at Kindrochit House

There was a ready supply of birch there and we spent many weeks working on harvesting the small birch trees and making

the brooms in an old shed, which we warmed up with a brazier. The whip of the thin branches of birch, which lashed out as you pulled them down were a great danger to ice cold ears and exceedingly painful if contact was made. Brilliant sunshine was the greatest spirit lifter, and it was real joy to stand or sit in its rays and feel a bit of heat in the atmosphere. There was hope the enduring cold would end!

The other event at this time that is still painfully embedded into the memory, was seeing and hearing the red deer suffering.



As the three month period wore on, spectacular numbers of deer, stags and hinds, drifted southwards from the Cairngorms desperate to find a morsel of food buried under deep snow.

I remember travelling from Calvine all the way up to Dalnamine, a distance of five miles, and counted about five large herds but in fact they were almost one continuous herd. We thought that there must have been somewhere between 3 – 5 thousand animals, all starving and pawing away at the deep snow trying to uncover any kind of vegetation but they only uncovered a few bites after a great deal of effort. All the time there was a continuous low, deep bawling or crying coming from within the herds which was very noticeable at night even in the village of Calvine. That summer

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Memorable Weather Events in Scotland *continued*

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when walking in those same hills we encountered carcass after carcass of the many hundreds that had succumbed to starvation and cold.

Looking back, as far as the memory will recall, it seemed that a lot of snow fell over a two month period, probably four to five feet. It packed down and was manageable, then it would take a turn for the worse and another big fall would come along with strong winds and every hollow and cutting just filled up causing chaos, and again the road and rail teams would heroically tackle the blockages. I am not sure how they managed it, but they always seemed to get routes clear, perhaps after a few days.

The frost levels rose and fell a bit, it always felt cold, but I do recollect zero Fahrenheit

being reached at Calvine, which is about minus 18°C in today's money.

There was a bit of excitement when a Weasel tracked machine was brought into Calvine to travel out the 7 miles across the hills into Bruar Lodge, where a keeper and his family were marooned for many weeks and had started running out of provisions.

I believe Forest Lodge was also re-provisioned at the same time. In April, spring eventually arrived but the water pipes in Blair Atholl stayed frozen for weeks after and may have been dug up to get things going or repair the bursts. We just got on with the normal forest work programme again and looked forward to a warm summer. However I was already looking further afield as I had been allocated a place in the Benmore Forester Training School from that August!

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

Mike Roe, **BILL ROE'S**, son has told me of his recent death. Bill began his career with the FC immediately after the war and did his initial training first at Gwydyr then Parkend forestry schools.

On leaving there he was posted to West Sussex to complete his practical training. On completion of this training he moved to the New Forest as an assistant forester on the, then, Linwood beat under head forester Aubrey James. Strangely the FC house allocated to Bill was called Roe Cottage.

In the mid fifties he was promoted and became the head forester for Rhinefield beat. During the latter part of his stay at Rhinefield he was responsible for laying out and planting the Blackwater Arboretum. He was also made the forester in charge of the ancient and ornamental woodlands throughout the New Forest.

On leaving the New Forest in the early 70s he found himself at Craven Arms where he was to be the Private Woodlands Officer for the Shropshire area until his retirement in the mid 80s.

I have received a note from **DOROTHY MacIVER'S** daughter that she passed away in October. She was the widow

of Ian MacIver who was well known to Scottish foresters.

John Roe has told me of the death of **HARRY JAMES HINDLE** aged 91 of Forden, Welshpool. He, along with the chairman of the North Wales Division of the RFS, attended his funeral on 13th July 2017. There was a large gathering, including long standing FC colleagues, friends, neighbours, and supporting his widow Bridget were his son and daughter along with the grandchildren and their partners.

Harry, a trained engineer when demobbed from the RAF, decided to retrain to become a forester, and in 1947 entered Gwydyr Forestry Training School. His FC career was within mid Wales which included Radnor, Hafren and Mathrafal forests. He left the FC in 1984 and took up the post of head forester, Leighton Estate, where he remained until long after the usual retirement age.

He will be remembered by many younger Gwydyr FTS students from their visits to Hafren forest in the early 1960s to see upland ploughing afforestation programmes, where he was in charge of the ploughing teams on the slopes of Pumlumon. Many woodlands are a memorial to his life.

Mike Whitlock has told me of the death of **JANE SMYTH** in December aged 69. She was born with achondroplasia (shortness of stature), the only one like this in her family.



Her parents decided that she should lead as normal a life as possible.

Her father adapted various devices for her use including a car. This was when adaptations of vehicles for disabled people were not commonly available, not that Jane regarded herself as "disabled".

Jane learnt to drive a car at an early age and passed the Institute of Advanced Motorists test.

She engaged in various physical activities including attempting to ski using skis adapted for her use.



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Life in Brief

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Jane graduated with a B.Sc degree from Hatfield College of Technology and eventually joined Forest Research at Alice Holt as a computer programmer.

She became head of the computing section of Statistics and Computing Branch and, was responsible for data processing and computer operations. In those days such work was more labour intensive so she had a largish staff to manage. She eventually became head of the whole branch.

On retirement, Jane became involved in various groups in Alton where she lived. These were mainly focused on 'welfare' and included being an adviser to the Citizens' Advice Bureau. She joined the Alice Holt group of the FCA and

soon became a member of the committee. This was at a time when no other members of the group wanted to run it. Also the group was running down in the number of active members. Being Jane, she made her contribution to our planning and discussions.

In a talk which she gave to members of the FCA group, she gave a very frank account of her life, her unfulfilled hopes but also the successes.

She spoke of the practical difficulties she faced, such as reaching car parking machines, cash points and items high up on supermarket shelves.

Anyone who knew or worked with Jane knew that she had



a strong and assertive personality. This may well have developed for the sense she had that, as other people had to look down on her physically, they might also look down on her as an intelligent and capable person. None of us who knew her well ever thought like this. She had to have determination to overcome such obstacles in order to lead a full life as any other intelligent person.

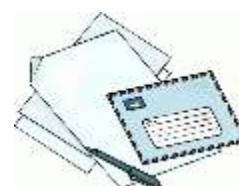
Sadly, during the past few years, Jane suffered a number of strokes, each one leaving her more incapacitated than previously. This involved long stays in hospital and full care when at home. This must have been very frustrating for someone who had been so active. She did acquire a tablet (one of the earliest) to enable her to read books whilst lying in bed.

Send your articles for publication in this magazine to the editor

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by post to: Richard Toleman,
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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://www.wikihow.com/Set-up-a-Facebook-Account>

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FCA Today editor: *Richard Toleman*

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FCA Today Magazine

The next issue of the FCA Today magazine will be available on the www.fca-today.com website in **August 2018**.

Articles for inclusion in the next issue of the magazine should be sent to the editor before 1st July 2018.

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

Visit the FCA Today website to download the latest edition of the magazine

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