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Dean FTS

See the appeal and the important note about the DEAN FTS Reunion Dinner on Page 2.

FROM THE EDITOR

After my last appeal for copy in our newsletter and also a "last ditch " appeal at our AGM, I have enough for this issue. But readers can't help but notice that they are almost all "Blasts from the past".

Stories of our past make great reading and in many cases it seems almost impossible for the same things to be happening in the FC today. They are the stuff of myth and legend. But for those of you who were able to see the BBC Scotland TV series on Galloway Forest Park, myth and legend live on.

So here I go again. What about all those things you are doing NOW. Retirement has given you time to do those things that work interfered with. Don Amer has rediscovered the joy of model railways. He can't be the only rivet counter out there.

I've rediscovered Hornby Dublo 3-rail.

The stuff is nearly as old as me. Great fun to make it run again.



I have a garden railway for good weather too. I am also a volunteer canal boat driver and give novice drivers training. I know there are boaters and sailors out there.

A few issues ago, Roddie Burgess told us about his voyage through the Caledonian canal to the West Coast. There have to be other adventurous mariners. Where are your stories?

We shall always enjoy the stories of past times, but tell us about NOW and do it NOW.

Richard Toleman

Dean FTS Reunion Dinner

There will not be a Dean FTS Reunion Dinner this October, since both Gerry Gissop and Martin Fletcher are unavailable at that time.

Though there has been a very disappointing response to both of us for contact details (Gerry has only had three and I have had none), we still very much hope to organise a Dean FTS Reunion Dinner at the Speech House in late September or early October 2019.

Meantime since we have no addresses, phone numbers or contacts left by Bart Venner, we are very much relying on you readers to supply this information.

Gerry Gissop

gissop@hotmail.co.uk

Martin Fletcher

martinfletcher42@gmail.com

*Now there's an appeal you cannot ignore.
Ex-Dean members were always so active.*



Surely you haven't lost your spirit! Get in touch with Gerry and Martin NOW. The Dean produced outstanding foresters.

Don't let them drift into oblivion. Ed

Forest Fires in the South Wales Valleys

by Dave Price



I was a forester at Cymer forest in the south Wales coalfield from 1971 to 1981. In 1974 I organised the FC stand at the Bridgend Agriculture show. We had an assortment of machinery, information boards, country quiz etc. but the main theme was on forest fires. I had looked back over the previous five years FC records for the whole of Britain and found that 80% of the recordable forest fires, i.e. fires over quarter ha, were within a 30 mile radius of Bridgend. When you take a circle of that radius and see 40% of it is the Bristol Channel, it just emphasises the enormity of our problem, which we highlighted on the information boards. To make the forest fire theme more realistic we stuck 20 assorted 1.5m to 2.5m conifers in a group with molinia grass between (incidentally notifying the fire service who had a station only ¼ mile away), and setting fire to our mini plantation so the public could see the devastation and smell the after effects. It must have looked authentic because numerous people said how sad they were that someone had vandalized our plantation, until we explained the reason why it was done.

I think it's fair to say Cymer forest had the biggest problem, although forest fires were a major issue throughout the South Wales valleys. We went through a series of 4 yearly intervals '76, '80 and '84 when there were particularly bad fire seasons. Helicopters were on standby and used for overseeing firefighting and water bombing, while we were 12 hours on and 12 hours off fire duty, with the army and others there to assist us. Because of the gravity of the

situation we faced annually, we were usually the first conservancy to have any new forest firefighting equipment that was available.

The fire service were excellent and did all they could to help us, but with the difficult and unfamiliar terrain (especially at night when we seemed to get most fires), left most of the supervision to us. I remember one occasion when more help was requested and they said there were already nine appliances out at forest fires in the district and they needed to retain the rest for accidents, house fires etc. I know that over the ten years I was in the district, they had two fire engines burnt out and an assortment of mobile pumps and hoses. Thank goodness, as far as I'm aware, no FC or fire service personnel were injured, apart from smoke inhalation.

In the late 70s, the use of foam for firefighting was introduced. It had the advantage of making the water used go much further, while it wouldn't evaporate off the trees and vegetation for a significant length of time. This led to our trying a few early designs of foam tender which could be towed behind a landrover. So in early 1980, we had a smart prototype foam tender from one of the fire engine makers (Dennis) to try out in the coming fire season. This was to be towed behind my landrover as it was the newest. We practised (or played) with the equipment so we were familiar with where and when to use the wide or tapered nozzles, light small fires and laid a broad strip of foam on the ground or covering trees to contain it.

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Forest Fires in the South Wales Valleys *Continued*

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Brian Page laying foam along the roadside

One particular Sunday in early May 1980 we, like all the other forests in the district, had fuelled up, with beaters on roof racks, blue lights and two tone horns in working order, knapsacks full and radios on ready for the first call of the day. Just after midday a call came through from our district office which was the fire control centre, of a fire reported in the forest above Abercregan. John Wall and five of the men went ahead and Gwyn Colman and I followed with the foam tender. It was in a familiar area, so while the others dealt with the immediate fire, Gwyn and I drove on up the track, which we had used on other occasions towing a 250 gallon water bowser, to lay foam on the trees and ground ahead of the fire.

When you tow anything heavy with a landrover, especially in off road conditions, you use low ratio and four wheel drive. We were roughly half way to where we wanted to be when we lost traction. Although the base was solid, the loose stone on the track surface prevented the wheels gripping, but as we were sufficiently ahead of the fire we decided to start laying foam. We thought

this would reduce the volume and weight of water so that we could proceed to the top. Gwyn started the pump on the tender and commenced to lay the foam (see picture 2).



2 : Offloading excess water

To have sufficient pressure to project the foam over the trees the pump had to be working at full speed, but the vibration from this caused the additional handbrake on the tender to jump off. Thank goodness Gwyn had already moved away down the track because this resulted in the tender and landrover going off the track and into the trees with the landrover ending up on its side (see picture 3).



3 : Landrover and tender off track

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Forest Fires in the South Wales Valleys *Continued*

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When you have a situation like that you can't just wring your hands and say that's it then.

As the tender was still functional, we decided to lay foam around the site so that when the fire reached it, the machines would be safe. In the meantime I radioed John to come up with his landrover and chain to pull my landrover upright again and disconnect the tender. Having done that, I checked the engine started and because there wasn't a very high lip onto the track, we hitched the two vehicles up to tow and drive mine out of danger.

But unknown to us, because of the thickness of the vegetation, the fire which had reached our barrier, had started to creep underneath. We had the chain attached to the two machines and as happens on these occasions, things didn't go quite to plan. We both started to move but the engine stalled on John's machine and the starter jammed! By this time the fire was starting to lick the back of my landrover. So I unclipped the briefcase sized radio pack radio from the back between the front seats, picked up my camera and hot footed it up the track.

Having done all we could, I seized the moment and took some dramatic pictures of the unfolding scene. Our chief forester, Gordon Morris, radioed our control centre to say we were about to lose two landrovers and a foam tender.

In picture 4, you can just make out my landrover front wing and mirror under the smoke and flames.



4: Landrover in the fire

It's hard to believe it when you look at the pictures, but we did save the landrovers. Mine was scorched all along the sides and tyres and the blue light on the roof was partially melted, as was the driver's side sun visor. There was some scorching to the tender and some lengths of hose burnt.

As the fire had been intense but brief, I managed to drive my landrover back to our office later that day (see picture 5).



5 : After the fire

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Forest Fires in the South Wales Valleys *Continued*

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It took a while to get the fire under control. We left some of the additional men and fire service to dampen down, while we went with the remaining equipment to deal with the next of the five fires we had that day.

In picture 6, Gwyn Bynon and Emlyn Howells are keeping watch and damping down whilst we went to the next fire.



6 : Monitoring the fire

I had to write the accident report and an additional report on the use and function of the foam tender. The conclusions were;

1. We had previously towed 250 gallon bowzers and Hathaway pumps up

that track in the past, but those bowzers had a two wheel axle and were close coupled. This put extra weight on the towing vehicle's rear axle which aided grip. The foam tender, though well designed, was low slung, set further back and had two axles (four wheels). Consequentially, there was no extra downward pressure on the rear driving axle to aid traction.

2. The independent ratchet handbrake on the tender needed a locking pin to prevent it jumping off when in use.
3. In cases of fires in very thick undergrowth, there was a possibility of the fire creeping under the foam, so someone with a fire beater would be required to patrol the edge.

This was just one of the many interesting experiences I had firefighting in the South Wales valleys. I am sure there are many more retired foresters with similar experiences who have related tales to tell. Get them recorded because from what I gather, fires are not dealt with in that way any more.

Happy memories!

Send any articles for publication in this magazine to the editor



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

by post to: Richard Toleman,
Manuel Stables,
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The Road to Gwydyr

by Richard Ayre

In the early fifties on a tandem holiday with my dad, I was fascinated as we rode and walked through parts of Dalby Forest. A couple of years later on a motoring holiday in North Wales with my parents, I was in awe of the forests around Betws y Coed. Whatever the spur, the road started in earnest in late August 1961. Fresh from Doncaster Grammar School and with a handful of "O" levels, I biked uphill by Moscow Farm in the rain from my new found lodgings in Gilsland in north east Cumberland, to start as a juvenile forest worker for the FC at Spadeadam Forest, NW(E) Conservancy.

In 1961 Spadeadam was about 10 years old, 9,000 acres within a fence. Between 700 and 1100 feet asl and shown on the OS map as Spadeadam Waste, the area occupied some of the first high ground east of the Solway Firth and was thus quite exposed. Not long after afforestation had started, the government took over three parts of the area as a testing ground for the ill-fated Blue Streak Rocket.

Alongside the river Irthing lay Redsike Farm. This comprised 1600 acres of land acquired for planting and on which the FC employed a shepherd to keep the sheep against the time when it could be planted.

Frank Pemberton completed the induction paperwork and then took me across the road to the "Ministry's" security gate to get the necessary pass to enter the area. In addition to the forester i/c, who did all the admin work and wages, there was a ganger, two tractor drivers, two forest workers and including me, seven forestry school aspirants.

The rocket site with its better wages took most of the local labour, and it seemed "that bloody wild hole" (reportedly the Conservator NW(E)'s words for Spadeadam) was a good place to send aspirants to see if they could stick the outdoor life. There was a Bedford van and two tracked tractors, a long wide County and a D7, plus a heavyweight wooden sledge with a steel bottom to carry stores and equipment about. The shepherd lived in Middle Shields. Work was all related to establishment, hand draining with rutter and hack to tidy up the ploughing, hand application after planting of ground mineral phosphate on the peat areas, planting and beating up, and weeding and fencing, with the occasional help for the shepherd.

For the next few weeks I worked with the tractor driver first gathering up polythene bags that had enclosed paper sacks of GMP, then re-filling the bags with full 1cwt paper sacks of the same, which were then led out to the compartments earmarked for fertilization. An introduction to the rutter soon followed and after weeks on day work, there was the chance of piecework spreading GMP by hand. Dry sweaty dusty work!

Kershope forest lay a few miles to the north close to the Scottish border. This was a well established forest and beginning to suffer from windblow. There were many men from both sides of the border including mechanical and civil engineers. We brashed spruce to start with, then we were shown how to thin, using for the first time, axes and bushman saws and were then let

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The Road to Gwydyr *Continued*

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loose among the windblow. On wet days we sat in a canvas tilt. In snowy times, whole gangs were gathered to burn lop and top from the windblow areas.

One day we were told that the Deputy Director General, George Ryle, was coming the following day and the two assistant foresters took gangs of us round the route of his visit to tidy produce heaps and clear away piles of sawdust, points and peelings. It rained on the great day. After lunch we were walking back along the forest road to the shelter, having loaded a couple of wagons, when land rovers were heard. We were ordered into the adjoining trees so as not to be seen.

Kershope had a head forester, at least two foresters, two assistant foresters and a foreman in the nursery and about seventy men. Those of us under eighteen were sent to Carlisle Technical College on day release each Monday. We had English lessons in the morning and horticulture in the afternoons and early evenings. Our horticultural instructors came from Newton Rigg Farm School, which was just then beginning forestry courses, and they did their best to accommodate our forestry interests. On the day our course went to Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh, one of the Newton Rigg staff took the forestry folk round all the trees.

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Gwydyr FTS photograph supplied by Simon Malone

The Road to Gwydyr *Continued*

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In late February 1962 and with 300 acres to plant, we were sent back to Spadeadam in the back of a lorry load of LP from the Kershope nursery. The original seven aspirants now down to three. One had left, one stayed at Kershope and the others transferred to the Midlands. Planting was halted after a week and suspended through March because frosty weather set in. We drained on day rate, sometimes finding it hard to cut through the frozen peat crust. Conditions eased as Easter approached and then it was all out to get the planting done, sometimes seven days a week and with help from Kershope staff.

After lambing we helped gather sheep on Redsike Farm for dosing and to castrate the tups. One day at lunch in late May the shepherd declared it was too hot for sheep to be moved and for us and the dogs to work, so I was taught to tickle trout in the Irthing. Two of us helped dip the sheep. We had no protective clothing so at the end of the day I sat fully clothed in the river to clean up. Neighbouring shepherds came together with staff from Kershope to help with shearing, all done by hand. We aspirants were kept busy catching for the shearers, rolling fleeces and re-marking with a vertical red daub down the left fourth rib.

Heavy rain storms in August washed out the boundary fence water gates on the Butterburn, the Cauld Beck and the King Water. Molinia had filled the gates, forming a dam which caused the break. They were found 400yds down stream. I was

sent to effect repairs, walking an hour each way, laden with tools from the nearest point on the road.



Acting as banksman for the ploughing, I saw the Cuthbertson plough sink into the peat behind the County. We managed to uncouple the plough, but failed to winch it out. We called a tractor from Kielder to assist. It travelled many miles over the hills, cutting fences on the way that we subsequently had to repair. More fertilizing and some fencing followed until late September when my requested free transfer came through.

I moved to Wigsley Forest in October 1962. It was a scatter of acquired woods either side of the A46 between Newark and Lincoln. It was mostly lowland heath and in the rehabilitation phase after war time fellings. There was a forester, an assistant forester, one ganger and a dozen forest workers including a warrener. Several men were housed in wooden semis newly built from kits imported from Sweden, with a newly built brick house for the forester.

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The Road to Gwydyr *Continued*

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There was a Land Rover, a motorcycle combination, a light lorry that carried the water tank and pump for firefighting, a little grey Fergie and a rotavator for the nursery work. There were two heathland nurseries. Rhododendron and birch clearance occupied much of the winter, with sickle weeding most of the summer and with nursery work, planting, brashing and cleaning in between.



Rabbits were a major problem and the fences needed to be well maintained. From time to time I helped a semi-retired man from the local Rabbit Clearance Society who came with his gas gun.

I was set to work burning broadleaved brash cut from a large land drain and then clearing growth from a smaller drain. The southern nursery was closed and I felled the birch shelterbelts and burnt the resultant brash. In the run up to Christmas I helped lift and heel in the last plants, amidst snow showers. January 1963 heralded the start of two months of freezing snowy weather. I spent the first month clearing blackthorn and in February I went on larch thinning. With dead larch brash and a touch of creosote from the stump treatment, we always had a good lunch break fire. We also had to make birch fire beaters, a cold job when it's freezing. With the sudden thaw at the end of February, came nursery work and lifting for local

planting. There was also lining out and plenty of transplant beds to weed.

Drains maintenance followed and then cleaning and a couple of weeks birch scrub clearance. As the days grew warmer I sought and was given another free transfer.

In late May 1963, I moved to Doncaster Forest which consisted of acquired woods around the town and mostly in the rehabilitation phase. There were a dozen men, mostly ex-miners and a forester who did everything from a converted chicken hut next to his house. I spent the summer first cleaning then weeding, both in the woods and on the Doncaster by pass. Early autumn saw the felling of birch top cover over underplanted sycamore. The forester took me on one side in August, swearing me to secrecy, and said that redundancies were being planned. As an accepted school candidate it would not be politic to axe men and keep me, so would I look for another forest to work in.

I rang the forester at Wigsley and explained the problem and he said he would speak to the new DO, John Leafe. Success. A clerk was wanted, so I was taken back as a forest worker who, when required, had to work in the office. No problem, even wider pre-school experience!

The Winter of '63/'64 was spent catching rabbits, making up the pay and totalling the quarterly individual pay sheets and helping Reg Mee to cut a road line. I also worked with Reg felling birch scrub so that a car park could be made. Spring '64

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The Road to Gwydyr *Continued*

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brought weeks of solitary planting and nursery work and some more scrub clearance.

John Leafe decided in late Spring that Ken Searson from the neighbouring Bourne Forest and I, both due to go to forestry school in September '65, should gain experience elsewhere. Early one Sunday evening in June, we met in The Crown at Mundford, where we would spend the next two months in lodgings whilst working together, mostly on Mundford Beat of Thetford Forest. The forest was in full production with a busy pitwood depot and a fencing wood treatment depot. I worked on weeding, high pruning, thinning and clearing poor oak for pine replanting. The last fortnight was spent with a research forester in the restock sites, digging up newly planted CP to see why the take was so poor. The recent felling had created frost hollows and much new lop and top, so a combination of frost and weevil attack took the blame.



Photograph supplied by Simon Malone

September saw me back at Wigsley and by November, I was relieved of office work so that I could earn some money on piece work before entry to forestry school. I worked on clearing and burning rhododendron and birch until late February '65 before going to Newton Rigg for six weeks on a pre forestry school course. I returned to Wigsley until mid September when I said goodbye and thank you to the folks who'd helped and tolerated me.

I went home to Doncaster for a few days then took the train north to Pitlochry and Faskally FTS.

Five weeks later, having settled at Faskally, I was hitching a lift south on the A1 near Ferrybridge, when I suffered a broken right arm after being knocked down by a lorry at 4am. There followed months of frustration. The arm, snapped above the elbow, was slow to heal. The FC were very good about it, but after consultation with the surgeon at Doncaster Royal Infirmary, the decision was to suspend my training to the following September (1966). Once fit, I should seek a forest workers job.

In March 1966, the splints were removed and I contacted John Leefe, who arranged a job on Ropsley Forest to start in late May.

On a Sunday morning at the end of June, I was a passenger in a motorcycle combination. We were going fishing and failed to make a sharp left hand corner. The far side ditch stopped us short and the rapid deceleration jolted my right arm against the edge of the sidecar, sufficient to displace the recently mended fracture.

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The Road to Gwydyr *Continued*

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I was taken to Grantham Hospital where the arm was hung in plaster, and a few days later, I was able to attend the pre-planned check up with my old doctor in Doncaster Royal Hospital. I am still not sure which of us was the most embarrassed!

Towards the end of August, I got my arm back and set about making it work again. At the same time I was in correspondence with E&T in the old Saville Road address in London. It was agreed that rather than follow a year behind my mates at Faskally, I could restart at Gwydyr in late October, three weeks into Course 21. Allan Powell, the senior Head Forester instructor met me at Betws-y-coed station and helped lift my case into the Land Rover. So through the village, and just after the Ugly House Bridge, there was the green painted sign "Ysgol Fforestwyr Cymru". The "School of Welsh Foresters" better known as "Gwydyr Forester Training School". "ni wyr nid ymarfer" an old Welsh proverb – "he who does not know will not practise".



A long road, not made without much patient help from many sources.

The Gwydyr badge was supplied by Doug Allan from the Isle of Man. The photographs of Gwydyr were supplied by Simon Malone. Thanks to both.

Send any articles for publication in this magazine to the editor



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

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



Passing the Buck

by Charles Critchley



In 1969 before going to agricultural college, I was employed on a farming estate with vague notions of one day working with wild-life. When asked com-

pletely out of the blue to transport a captive deer that was becoming too much of a handful for its keeper, not surprisingly I jumped at the opportunity. It seemed the deer was a hand-reared roebuck that couldn't be released into the wild because of its increasingly unpredictable and dangerous behaviour, especially as antler growth approached maturity and when in hard horn.

The move definitely had to be done whilst the buck was in velvet. So I arrived at an address in the back of beyond, sometime in the winter of 1969/70 to be met at the door by an elderly, rather distinguished but frail looking man who led me down a long, stone passageway, past a pair of wooden skis hanging on the wall that looked like they could have accompanied an Antarctic expedition, and into the kitchen.

Over a cup of tea, he told how he had tended the animal from being a kid, and carefully collected each set of antlers cast over the years; I seem to recollect six or seven pairs but can't remember exactly. Looking back I fear he must have been horrified by my ignorance of deer, and more particularly by the apparently inadequate preparations for containment and carriage of his beloved pet. But if it were not for lack of experience, youthful enthusiasm and, at this stage of the proceed-

ings, a likely indifference to the sensitivities of both the animal and the man, the job would not have got done.

That morning, in advance of my arrival, the trusting roebuck had been enticed into a stable adjoining its enclosure. I was equipped with a number of large hessian sacks of a size and strength ideal in those less caring times for transporting week-old calves back home in the boot of the car, when the house cow was giving surplus milk. As soon as we entered the stable, it was clear that my elderly companion's efforts to soothe and hold the buck were to no avail. It went berserk. At last it dawned on me that the undertaking might not be such a good idea.

Thinking about it now, it's obvious that those involved in seeking a way to help their old friend out of his predicament would have been fully aware of the perils.

Things got worse, grappling with the animal on the floor, when it began to screech and scream. The noise was truly dreadful. Eventually, having worked the mouth of a sack above its shoulders and whilst attempting to tie off the loose sacking around its neck with baler twine, the buck gave an almighty kick and both its back feet sliced through the length of hessian as though with a knife. Fortunately it didn't galloch me. By now the sound of the buck had reached new heights and was being accompanied by occasional, loud, despairing sobs from my companion.

Once the back feet were hobbled with extra sacking and loose corners of hessian

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Passing the Buck *Continued*

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had been gathered in, I was able to stand up and the awful screaming ceased. The buck lay in a natural attitude with head up, pristine pair of velvet antlers between its ears, looking completely calm and unaffected by its ordeal. Not so we perpetrators, partners in crime, carefully avoiding each other's eyes.

The buck was lifted quickly into the back of the car, a Hillman Imp, where the 'boot' was not an option and for the next two or three hours, his quiet and sedate bearing continued throughout the journey, on the back seat, alert with head erect, facing the rear view mirror into which I kept an eye with fingers crossed.

Finally on arrival and release into his new enclosure, he bounded away, stood and looked back for a few moments from some rising ground, then disappeared into the trees.

Years later I acquired a copy of Forestry Commission Forest Record 99, 'The Roe Deer', published in 1974 which stated in the acknowledgements that three of the illustrations it contained had been drawn by F S Shrigley-Fiegl. It turned out that this was the very same Mr Shrigley-Fiegl

who had met me at the house in the back of beyond. First produced as Leaflet No. 45 in 1960, a revised version of 'The Roe Deer' was published in 1970 which replaced three of the original illustrations by H A Fooks with drawings by F S Shrigley-Fiegl. Unfortunately I never saw Mr Shrigley-Fiegl again, nor the roebuck, but looking at Figures 3, 4 and 6 in Forest Record 99 or in the 1970 edition of Leaflet No. 45 (with front cover reproduced from a water colour by H Frank Wallace), it seems to me that both Mr Shrigley-Fiegl and his life model roebuck live on. I wonder what became of the cast antler collection.

The same illustrations appear as Figures 3, 4 and 6 in both

'The Roe Deer' Forestry Commission Leaflet No. 45 HMSO 1970

Forestry Commission Forest Record 99 'The Roe Deer' JSR Chard HMSO 1974

(According to acknowledgements in both publications, the text of both the 1970 and 1974 publications, first published as Leaflet No. 45 in 1960, was revised by Mr J S R Chard B.Sc., Conservator of Forests for North West England).

Illustrations on following pages ➡



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

Passing the Buck *Continued*

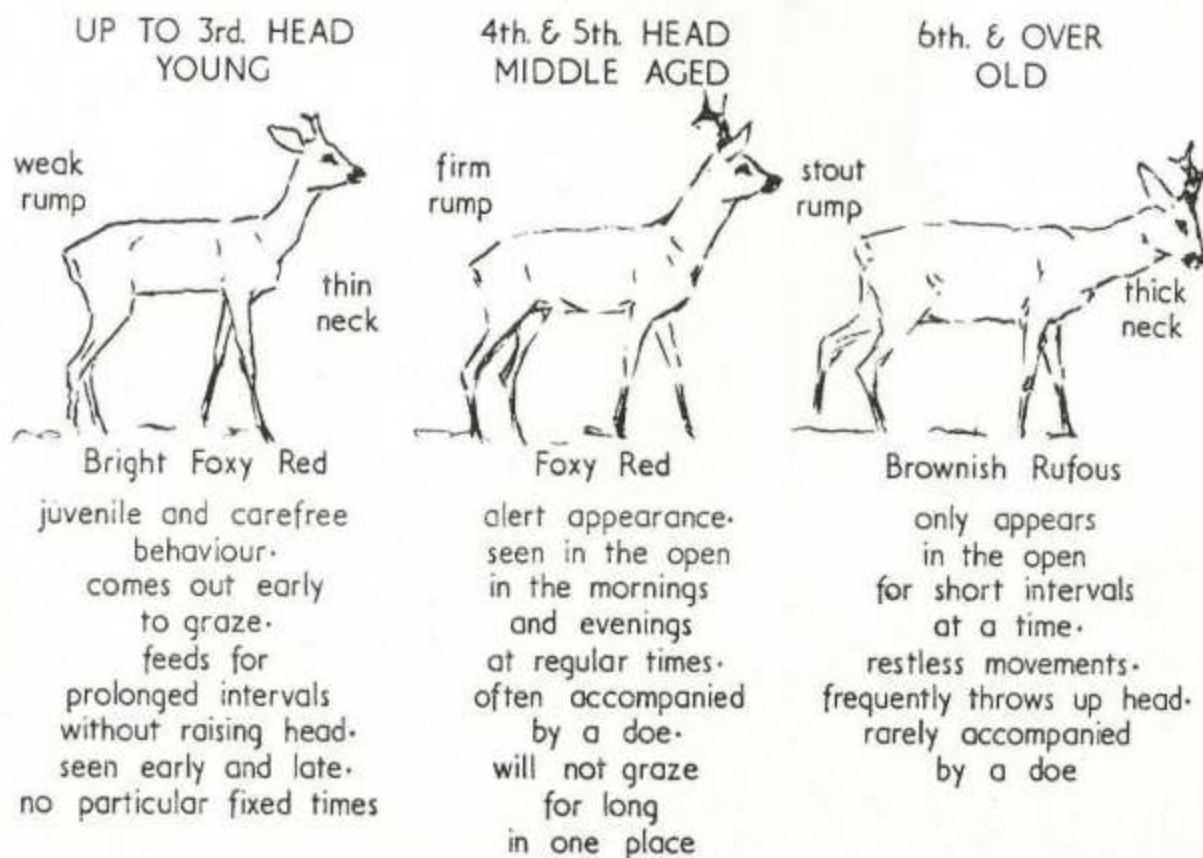


Figure 3. The age of a roebuck may be judged by his appearance.

Charles Critchley joined the FC North West England Conservancy as trainee ranger in January 1974 on the Shobdon beat of Mortimer Forest under head forester Bert Brooks and forester Joe Kingsmill.

In the autumn of 1974, he moved to Cannock Forest under chief forester Ian Campbell.

The majority of time nominally at Cannock was spent working with head ranger Gerald Springthorpe across a number of forests, in addition to Cannock including Sherwood, Launde, Bagots and Goyt with occasional visits to Mortimer and Grizedale.

In February 1978, he was transferred to Pickering Forest District, North East England Conservancy as head ranger with a remit to include recreation as well as wildlife management and conservation. The district officer on his arrival was Fred Weston, then succeeded by Sandy Calder, John Mackenzie, David Jardine and Andrew Smith.

His 10 years from 2001 until retirement in 2011 were spent as wildlife management officer for Forest Enterprise England working to Brian Mahony, Head of Sustainable Forestry and Land Management.

More illustrations overleaf ➡

Passing the Buck *Continued*

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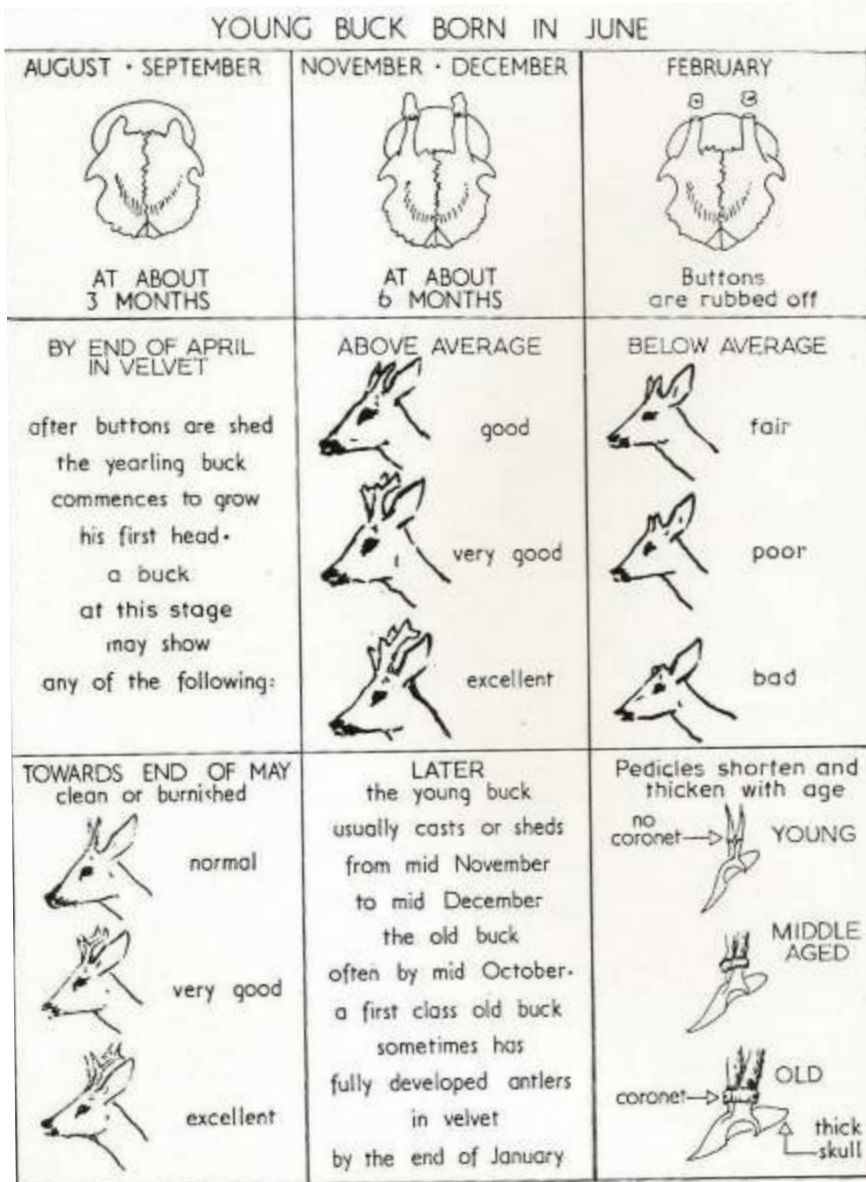


Figure 4. Development of antlers in a young roebuck.

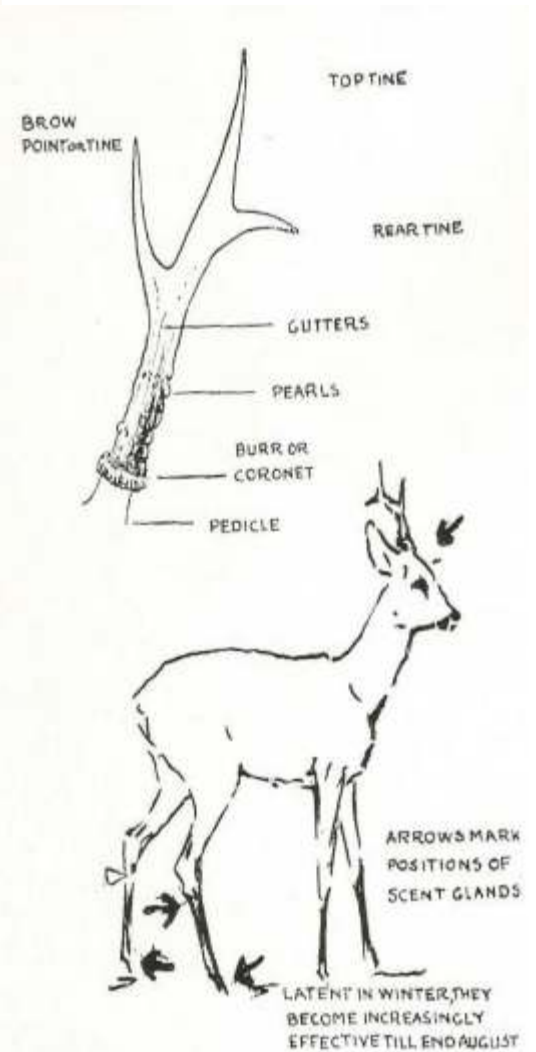


Figure 6. Above: Details of an antler. Below: Situation of scent glands.

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.



In the Days Before

by Brian Walker

I joined the FC 'family' in 1976. It is the best thing I ever did and I met some amazing people. Some were eccentric, some superbly talented, some behind the times and some ahead of them, but none were boring (well hardly ever). Many of the things that happened would now be regarded as issues calling for 'serious disciplinary action' but then were just passed off.

When the weather was somewhat inclement, I used to work in the stores with the handyman Jack Taylor who was nearing retirement. He would help me paint and repair signs and I would help with tool maintenance. On this occasion it was pouring down and Jack and I were in the stores when the squad, about six of them came in. They had been up the wood but had been beaten by the weather. As we had the pot-bellied stove going, they came in the stores instead of going to the wet weather shed and lighting the stove in there.

I could see Jack was not amused. The stores were his domain and he didn't take kindly to interlopers, even if he had worked with most of them for nearly 40 years.

I could see him getting more and more agitated, chewing on his pipe full of 'Kendal Twist' baccy. After a few minutes, he got up and told me to bring the steps outside into the rain. As soon as we were outside he said "Hold the steps lad and divn't gan back inside". He climbed up the steps and on to the roof to the stove pipe. I couldn't believe what happened next. He produced



a large aerosol paint can from the pocket of his old coat and dropped it down the chimney into the stove. It exploded almost immediately with a loud bang. From where I was standing, I saw the stove door fly off while the lid went up in the air as well. A huge gout of flame about six feet long shot across the storeroom, narrowly missing some of the occupants. Needless to say the squad were not impressed and amidst a lot of swearing, vacated the stores in a hurry, much to Jack's delight.

On another occasion, Jack's 'resistance to authority' was demonstrated when we were putting up a large sign at the bottom of the Camp Bank near the Hamsterley Office. The holes for the sign were really hard digging and it never ceased to amaze me how Jack seemed to get stones out of holes that were bigger than the holes themselves. He had an immense pinch bar with half a garden spade welded on one end. It was his trademark. It took about two hours to dig two holes. We dropped the sign in and the head forester, Frank Stephenson, came out to check the position. He drove his car up and down the bank about four times, while we held the sign and moved it about until he was happy. Of course, now the sign didn't drop in the holes, it was about six inches off, so he told us to dig more holes in what he saw as the right place. As soon as Frank had gone back to the office, Jack gave me his toothless grin and told me to pick up the spit (a narrow spade for digging post holes) and he picked up his pinch bar.

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In the Days Before *Continued*

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I prepared to dig the new holes, but Jack said "No, just scratch about on top".

So for about thirty minutes we moved a few rocks about, shovelled a bit of soil from side to side and eventually put the signs in the original holes. Jack sent me to get Frank, who once again got in his car and drove up and down the bank, while we held the sign. Frank hailed it as great improvement and in just the right place, but we hadn't moved it at all.



Jack Taylor, a great handyman, gardener and leek grower. What more can you say? Here he is sitting by the fractured millstone in Whisky gill, Hamsterley Forest, Co. Durham.

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Look after Number One - Life before the Forestry Commission

by Willie Sheridan

Over the years, FCA Today has supplied us with many interesting tales of life in the FC and also life afterwards in retirement. I can't match these stories for excitement. So I thought I would have a wee go at telling a story from before the FC.

My 22 year stint in the Forestry Commission was my second career. I joined in 1974 as one of the 13 HEOs recruited to replace staff who didn't want to move to Edinburgh. My first boss was Brian Tipping.

I transferred to the FC after 15 years in the Diplomatic Service, serving in the Foreign Office in London and in three British Embassies overseas.

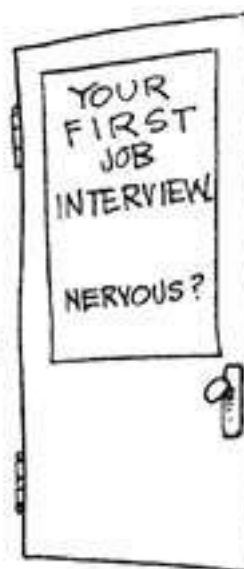
I had entered the Foreign Office straight from school at the age of 17. Contrary to what you would read in the tabloids about "Who You Know", in those days everything was done by competitive written exams. The top passers were invited for interview and the final people selected from that.

There came an opportunity for promotion when I was 21, taking another competitive exam where each of the 5 papers was marked out of 100 and the subsequent interview was also out of 100.

The trouble was that, having reached 21, I had just been notified of my first overseas posting which would last two and a half years before home leave. But it was made clear that there was no question of flying me home for interview if I got through the written exam. The only way was for me to take the interview in UK before I went overseas; I would then take the written

exam at my overseas post some time later. I said "Yes".

You'll recall that Civil Service exams gave every candidate a serial number. In the unusual circumstances, I was made Candidate Number One and was told to report to somewhere near London's Burlington Arcade for interview on a certain day before I left for a faraway place.



The day came. I arrived early at the building and was ushered into a waiting room. I was nervous, my first interview since I had been recruited into the Foreign Office some years earlier. Should I read the old magazines that lay around? Should I try to memorise some answers to questions that might come up?

A few other candidates shuffled nervously into the waiting room. We all avoided catching each other's eyes, but as far as I could see, I didn't know any of them. Perhaps they were from one of the outhoused buildings, while I was from Downing Street.

Anyway, I was Candidate Number One, so I would be going into the lions' den first.

After a long silent wait, a messenger appeared in the doorway. "Candidate Number One", he boomed, turned smartly

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Look after Number 1 - Life before the F.C. *Continued*

Continued from previous page

on his heel and marched off down the corridor. War wound or not, he could still march! I was up out of my chair like a rocket and following him, with "Candidate Number One" still ringing in my ears.

I was ushered into a room where three people sat at a table. The chairman waved me towards a seat. I sat down, breathless and nervous. I had probably forgotten to breathe as I made my way along the corridor.

The chairman smiled and asked me a question. I didn't understand it; I was nervous, after all. I smiled back in silence. The chairman spoke again. I still didn't understand. Is this nervousness the price one pays for being Candidate Number One? The chairman looked puzzled. The other board members looked puzzled.



The chairman spoke again. What a relief. This time I did understand the words. He said "You HAVE come for the Russian interpretership exam, haven't you?"

I was ushered back sheepishly into the waiting room and the other "Candidate

Number One" was taken to have his Russian tested.

I got my own interview a little later, with an apology that one of my board members had missed a train. The board didn't know about my earlier encounter in another interview room. I was not as nervous this time, and understood every word.

It was many months before I knew the outcome, after I had taken the written exam and other candidates had been interviewed. I'd passed and was promoted. As a result, I was eligible to apply for a hard language course, which I did. I chose Arabic, NOT Russian!

My languages served me well, even later in the Forestry Commission where I ended up being in charge of international affairs.

What I hadn't realised was that I would be exposed to yet another language, unique to the FC. You'll all remember FC33s, NDR, FY, QCI etc! And then there were normal words that had a different meaning - dedication, overheads, consultation, white finger, origin, provenance, plus the unusual - Hoppus foot, hydrostatic. I could speak it quite fluently after twenty years, having absorbed the later additions of FDM, IT etc.

Fortunately, I had retired by the time HR came into vogue. I had always enjoyed being treated as a valuable person in the FC. To now be categorised as a "resource" would have saddened me. But maybe I'm just old-fashioned.

Breckland Group Spring Outing

by Eric Rogers

Something new: a visit to a Shopping Centre at Spalding in Lincolnshire. We had a good turnout, especially from the ladies! Springfield is on the River Welland in the south west corner of the Wash.

One of the interesting parts of the journey was crossing the Fens, one of the greatest food producing areas of Britain. Flowers too, but we were too late to see the daffodils and tulips. The weather was hot and sunny, very much appreciated following weeks of miserable cold.



I am sure that many of the male sex wondered why on earth we wanted to go to a shopping centre, but they were catered for by a river trip down to Spalding and back and also a series of gardens designed by some well known designers and some less well known. Or they could just sit out in the sun for the first time this year.



Something different, but it turned out to be a most enjoyable day.



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The Therapy of Model Railways

by Don Amer

Question: How do you fill the void left when your companion, friend and wife of sixty three years of marriage dies?

Answer: You can't!

Of course there are many, many memories. Memories of happy family holidays in England, Wales, Scotland and all those holidays, just the two of us, in foreign climes, Spain, Norway, France, Corfu, Russia and even a cruise. Memories are forever, but they don't fill the hours of suddenly having to adopt a solitary lifestyle. Since retiring in 1989, me, from the Forestry Commission, and my wife in 1987 from the Countryside Commission, we had lived a fairly active lifestyle, engaging in such activities as picture framing, wood turning, and serving on local craft associations and Town Hall committees.

Now on my own but with family members living nearby, who help out with household tasks and shopping, what do I do to keep myself occupied in a meaningful way?



I have always had a fascination for jigsaw puzzles, they are a great way of passing a few hours, and they help in keeping the brain cells ticking over. Four one-thousand piece jigsaw puzzles later, much later, I had had enough. The trouble was that I couldn't pace myself, and once one was started, I had to keep at it until it was completed. They certainly helped initially with my loss, especially during the early days of winter, but it wasn't what I was looking for in the long term.

It wasn't a "eureka" moment, but I began thinking about model railways. I had had a Hornby trainset in my youth, just a small oval track and a clockwork loco and wagons, but it gave me a lot of pleasure, as I recall. And since retiring I had salvaged some old electrically operated model railway equipment and managed to get it operational and subsequently sold it on to a serious railway modeller. Was this what I had been looking for, and I decided that it was exactly that. Where did I begin?

Model railways have moved on from analogue operation, whereby locos, were controlled in direction and speed by varying the DC voltage applied to the track. These train sets are still available but now there is a new kid on the block, called DCC - Digital Command Control - using computer technology. The railway layout is effectively a computer system that uses miniature circuit boards, called decoders, installed in each loco. These decoders respond to data transmitted to them from a "Command station". This data can control the speed and direction of the loco, and can also be used to control signals, change points and operate signals electronically. Having had an extensive grounding in the analogue operation, I knew that I had to move on to something new, so I plumped for the DCC system.

Where do I start and who do I buy from were the questions. Hornby was the obvious choice for its worldwide reputation, although as I was soon to find out, all of its products are made in China, but then difficulties began. Locos are advertised as

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The Therapy of Model Railways *Continued*

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"DCC Ready" and "DCC Fitted". DCC ready means that a separate "Decoder" has to be purchased separately and then installed in the loco, whereas DCC Fitted means that the loco is ready to run on the layout. To keep things simple, or so I thought, I opted for an all-in train set, which came with a simple oval of track, a diesel loco and a steam loco, and a fairly simple to

understand Digital Controller. The next question was where to put the layout. It so happened that I had a small bedroom which was no longer needed as a bedroom, so out with furniture and in with a model railway layout, but not before I had constructed a 6ft x 4ft wooden table on which to lay out the track.

To be continued.





Letter to the Editor

Dear FCA Today readers,

My name is Luke Hemmings, and I'm currently serving as Woodland Officer for Tyne & Wear, County Durham & Teeside in the North East of England. I have worked in the FC now for a total of just over 4 years, including my mid-year placement from Newton Rigg in Thetford Forest.

I'm originally a city boy, growing up in the centre of Newcastle upon Tyne, then latterly Hexham. I only discovered that forestry existed as a career after a trip to New Zealand to work on farms when I finished school. I still find it amazing that it took a trip to the other side of the world for me to discover what I wanted to do with my life, after later realising I had grown up just down the road from one of the largest man-made forests in Europe!

This partly ties in to why I am writing to you today. Working in the FC and elsewhere has taken me to many different parts of the country, and brought me into contact with the most wild and wonderful people you could ever imagine. I've planted eucalyptus and pines in the dusty sand of the Brecks, sawn huge oak logs in a sawmill in the Welsh borders, watched wild boar and marked enormous Douglas fir for thinning in the Forest of Dean and farmed Sitka spruce on the wet and expansive moorlands of Dartmoor. Now that I have returned to my home turf and had time to think about all that I have seen, it strikes me more than ever that I am terribly lucky to have found this course in my life. A large part of what has made it so special has been the variety and the characters I have met along the way.



Forest workers circa 1900 Forest of Dean

As you will be aware, in 2019 the Forestry Commission celebrates its centenary, 100 years since its establishment in 1919.

As an evolution of, and hopefully and addition to, the 'official' celebrations, I am hoping to conduct some interviews and create a short film focusing on the people who helped to build the public forest estate we all know and love. There is also an opportunity to collect archive resources from around different districts in England, together with oral and visual interviews with as many former FC employees and retirees as possible.

Along the course of my search, I have been directed to the Forestry Memories website; <http://forestry-memories.org.uk/> which has achieved something similar on the Scottish side of the border. I am not aware of anything like this that has ever been done in England. I don't think we are generally proud enough of our forest heritage, preferring to move away from

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Letter to the Editor *Continued*

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The Universal Belt Elevator working in Bramshill Forest

what has come before at the expense of honouring the people and hard work that went into creating these amazing places and natural resources. There is also a fantastic book that was produced off the back of the Scottish project. Readers may be interested in "Voices of the Forest" by Mairi Stewart, available here: www.treesource.co.uk (no affiliation).

I noted a comment in the most recent FCA Today, "the pioneering spirit and individualism is no longer there within the FC". I would like to think of myself as a young(ish) member of the FC who has witnessed this enterprising spirit and does not want it to be lost in today's organisation and the challenges we face. This is the spirit that I want to capture and convey through the book and interviews that I hope to create. By running it as a forester, I hope to capture some aspects that may be missed were a more generic approach to be taken. I am not looking to gloss over the less glamorous aspects and realities of forestry that had to be undertaken, and would love to capture some of the silliness and fun stories that clearly some of your members have to share.

Another aspect that has really interested me, which came up in the article by Don Amer, is the reality of the lives of wives and partners of those who worked in forestry, the isolation, the long hard working days and the potentially dangerous work. I would like to talk about the communities that grew up, especially in the forestry villages, and how each of them grew to have their own character and sense of place, despite being "cut from the same cloth". My days of pulling pints behind the bar of the Breckland club showed me how important the community is in these sometimes remote, rural locations.

All of these are not insignificant challenges and stories that deserve to be told. I am going to be initially focusing on stories from the North East, as this is where I am from and easy for me to get to, but I would be keen to hear from any reader who would be happy to talk to me.

If you would like to get in touch, please feel free to contact me using the details below, or have a look at my current website;

www.thebeardedforester.wordpress.com

Many thanks,

Luke Hemmings

07791 983 315

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Life in Brief

PETER WOOD's daughter, Elizabeth, has told me of her father's death last month.

Peter was very independent up to that last month, living on his own in a thatched cottage near Dartmoor, where he had retired with his wife of 60 years. She had died a few years previously. He retired 30 years ago and the last position he held was as chief forester of Devon and Cornwall.

A Sussex man by birth, he was evacuated at 11 to Bedford with the whole of Rye Grammar School. He then entered the army and was stationed in Germany, Libya and Palestine in the aftermath of WW2. Having reached the rank of sergeant, he decided that forestry was the life for him. His wife Audrey, who had been evacuated with him, kept the family as a primary school teacher, whilst Peter attended Lynford Hall FTS. His first job was as a ganger in Kent, living in a tiny caravan with his wife and baby daughter, Elizabeth. He fondly remembered his training in Norfolk and moved back to work in Thetford Chase, initially living in the same caravan in the garden of a fellow teacher. They then moved

to a flat at Stabley Yard, Didlington Hall where, in 1960, Richard was born.

In 1961 he became assistant forester in St Helena, Dunwich, Suffolk. There he spoke of the recently established Minsmere RSPB reserve to his children, along with tales of Dunwich's destruction by sea erosion.

The next move was to Gardener's Cottage, Marks Hall in Essex, although not before Audrey insisted on electricity being installed, for by then Andrew's birth was imminent. Later, Peter moved back to Thetford Chase where he worked as a forester, while the family lived Santon Downham with both boys and his wife going to Brandon school. After 18 months, the family home became Didlington again, which was always Peter's favourite place. The two lakes at Didlington teamed with wild life and waterfowl and had been planted with exotic plants by the Amhurst family. Indeed I remember complaining that I'd been kept awake as a 16 year old by some bird singing all night in the oak tree behind the garden wall. Dad informed me that it was a nightingale and one day I'd

feel honoured to have heard it. I now am!

There was a newly built cricket club at nearby Mundford where he played. He also became part of the social club and helped by rolling and cutting the wicket and serving in its bar. He then joined Work Study Branch working amongst other places at the Brandon Depot.

He finally moved to Forty Acres, Halwill at Cookworthy Moor. Until Audrey's death, he was treasurer in the local 'old foresters club' and they both went to the social functions, especially enjoying the Xmas dinners at Tom Cobley Inn, Spreyton. After retiring he became a National Trust guide and volunteer worker at the working water wheels at Finch's Foundry, Sticklepath and was also a keen wood carver.

Peter is survived by his sister Joyce (100 this year), three children, seven grandchildren and ten great grandchildren and will be much missed. He loved his chosen profession, the local countryside and his family dearly.

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Life in Brief Continued

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Piers Voysey, **JOHN VOYSEY'S** son has told me of his father's death in July aged 89. He had been an ICF member for 64 years and also was a member of the Royal Forestry Society's Shropshire branch.

John was a down to earth practical Forester with particular skills and interest in the silviculture, wildlife conservation and public recreational aspects in the forest. He had no wish to move up the promotion ladder to become one who would spend most of his time in meetings and travel. He was a hands on forest manager with a largely holistic and pragmatic approach to life and work.

He graduated with a BSc Forestry in 1952 then gained a Diploma in Forestry at Oxford University a year later before joining the FC in 1953. It was the start of a career that would span 36 years until he retired in

May 1989. He then went on as a part time consultant for some years.

John started as a district forester in the Welsh Marches before becoming district forest manager in the South Lakes at Kendal.

He joined the ICF in 1954 and was promoted to Fellow in 1975. He served on the Institute's Council from 1987 to 1992, as Chair of its Meetings Committee from 1989-1992, and on the Wales and the Marches Regional Committee.

Commenting last year in *Chartered Forester*, he said: "It's all too easy to have a parochial view of forestry in Britain. The best advice to young foresters is to attend the Institute's Study Tours and gain a wider understanding of British Silviculture."

John's interest in forestry never waned and his mind remained sharp. Indeed, in March this year he wrote to

the Institute on the topical issue of the use of plastics in the industry and queried the Institute's policy.

His friend Mark Yorke recalls that John still liked to review the current work of the three separate FC's in England, Scotland and Wales, reckoning that the FC had been seriously weakened as a result of devolution. Mark added that he got to know John during his retirement when he regularly called as his home to check the management of "his" roadside oak tree!

Piers said that John cared about the people he worked with. He enjoyed involvement with the broadening of the FC's role in Grizedale to encompass art installations and gain more engagement with the public. He remained a champion for European silver fir, so when I find them in the Wigmore Rolls (Herefordshire) with the wildlife ponds he made, I shall remember him there.

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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 Magazine

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

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

The publication dates of the FCA Today magazine are: - **Spring edition: 5th April, Summer edition: 5th August and Winter edition: December. Visit the FCA Today website on these dates to download the latest edition of the magazine.**

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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