



## From the Editor

Readers will be aware that Arthur Miller, Charles Dickens and I discussed the AGM and concluded that it should be postponed. The situation changes so rapidly that we cannot forecast when we may hold it. Provisionally, if conditions improve, we may go for early Autumn at the same location. If not, we may have to cancel it and meet in 2021.

We'll keep you informed both on the website and through local secretaries. So all of you now have a great opportunity, as your travels are restricted, to WRITE SOMETHING for the Summer issue. You're not ones to drift around aimlessly, so tell us where you've been, what you're doing, where you're going and have a good old reminisce. I hope to be inundated with copy!



And now for something completely different. Not the FCA Today but - The Slasher!

Well remembered and much enjoyed by all our readers. For our centenary, James Ogilvie published a potted history of the FC which I reproduced in FCA Today. Now he has had a go at a reproduction of Slasher.

It is a whole edition, so it will come out separately. On page 3 is a preview of one of the special Slasher edition pages. We aim to have it on our website during the coming months. I'll let you know when it's there. You can now live on in expectancy. I can guarantee you'll enjoy it. It will bring back memories and maybe you'll feel like responding.

Richard



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## FCA Today

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by James Ogilvie



**Slasher factoid:** The FC was - albeit briefly - a UK body, with responsibility for Ireland. That reign lasted only four years. When the Irish Free State was formed, the FC's brief changed from The

### All bets are off...

Lord Lovat had a reputation as something of a gambling man (he once won £3,500 in an evening at Monte Carlo - equivalent to 100 times that sum today!). History does not relate whether betting money changed hands between Lords Lovat and Clinton at the time, but on 7th December 1919 in a race against time they travelled by overnight train to plant the Commission's first trees. When he arrived at Elgin station Lord Lovat was handed a telegram announcing that Lord Clinton had pipped him to the post. Tactfully, the official records did not take sides between England and Scotland. *[Given that there are now flights from London to Inverness, the result might be quite different for a Scottish Lord today. Ed]*



Guest Editor James Ogilvie  
- complete with slasher!



Commemorative plaque at Eggesford Forest.

Note the reference to the UK. © BBC

### Slasher factoid:

Flashdown Wood, Eggesford Forest, in Devon, is home to the very first trees planted in 1919 by the newly created Forestry

### The task ahead

The Acland Committee recommended that the State establish 1.7 million acres (715,000 hectares) by the end of the century and that the private sector maintain 1.2 million hectares as insurance against future wars. Private owners were to be paid £2 per acre.

Decision-making in the newly formed FC consisted of eight Commissioners, with executive staff comprising Assistant Commissioners, Forest Officers, Foresters and Foremen. There were 10 Divisions, 29 Divisional & District Officers, 110 foresters and 59 Admin/finance staff (the latter based in London and Edinburgh).

## Reminiscences of the Forester Training School at Parkend During The Early 1960s

*by Pete Ralph*

Pete Ralph worked for the Forestry Commission for almost forty years. He started in 1957 by spending 3 years 'in the wood' in Surrey. He then spent two formative years at the Forester Training School at Parkend, between 1960 and 1962.

After subsequent postings away, Pete returned to the Forest of Dean in 1975 continuing to work for the Forestry Commission locally until his retirement in 1996. Building on Geoff Waygood's previous article on 'The Dean Forester Training School' (New Regard Volume 17), Pete provides his personal reminiscences of the ups and downs of life at the Forester Training School during his time there as a student.

The School was started in 1904 at the Crown Offices at Coleford. The first instructor was C.O. Hanson, late of the Indian Forestry Department, and author of 'Forestry for Woodmen' (my first 'bible' of forestry).

In 1905 the School moved to a mouse-infested wooden hut near where the Parkend cricket pavilion now stands.

In 1910 the School was moved to the converted engine house of the Parkend Iron Works. At that time the School occupied only the third and fourth floors of the building. Parkend Institute had the first and second floors; with a snooker room and reading room accommodated on the second floor, and a miniature rifle range on the first floor.

By 1913 the School had taken over the whole building. In 1915 the School closed because of the First World War, but reopened in 1917, and continued until 1940, when the Women's Timber Corps took over the building. In 1941 the School reopened for 18 months, until, in 1943, it became the US Army Headquarters for the area. In 1946 the School resumed and continued undisturbed until it closed in 1971.

Thus ends the potted history, to be followed by my reminiscences of my time at the Forester Training School between 1960 and 1962.

September 21<sup>st</sup> 1960 was the day I left home for the first time and started my journey to the Forest of Dean, though I have to admit I was not sure of its location. Changing trains at Reading, I encountered another would-be forestry student, complete with bike, as was I. To Gloucester and then a change of trains to Lydney. We were impressed by the River Severn, even more so by the Severn Railway Bridge, little knowing that in just over a month the centre span would be gone.

On arrival at Lydney we were met by the School lorry, an ex-War-Department Bedford with a tilt and wooden benches. My first impression of the Forest of Dean was the number of bends between Lydney and Whitecroft. The lorry decanted us by the 'Giraffe House' (more of this later), and we were met by the Orderly Officer of the week who welcomed us to the School (a

*Continued on next page* »—————>

## Reminiscences of the FTS at Parkend During The Early 1960s *continued*

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quite awe inspiring building, tastefully decorated with virginia creeper). We were allocated our dormitory in which we were lucky in having a four-bed room rather than a 'stall' (reminiscent of a stable and known as a 'pit'). Having settled in, the whole course, 13 in all, 10 white, 3 black (Nigeria, Tanganyika, Kenya), repaired to the Fountain Inn to cement the bond. Here we were introduced to landlord Ron Meek and

his wife Hildy, also to rough cider (10d a pint and powerful stuff!).

I also had an introduction to 'Forrest'. On asking directions to Newland, I was told "Goo'n'exe auld Tom, im'll tell tha". Only two words were understandable, 'Tom' and 'tell', otherwise I was completely flummoxed. Luckily Tom was pointed out and he could give directions to our lorry driver, who translated for me. From then

*Continued on next page* »—————▶

## DEAN SCHOOL OF FORESTRY 1950-51



S. Heaven, F. Courtier, A. Cooper, K. Baker, H. Yess, E. Sutton, J. Harth, C. Mainert, D. Huchins, J. Pasch, E. Green, P. Moore, A. Jodin, G. Beckwith, R. Kemp, C. McLean, P. Curiale, B. Wren, E. Longman, A. Wilson, R. Marchant, R. Grenfell, H. Hine, A. Catchpole, P. Lewis, W. Evans, H. Stickland, H. Fayle, E. Jemmett, J. Jullien, F. Chambers, G. Taylor, E. Booth, E. Aspinall, G. Hamble, E. Roberts, G. Bullock, G. Thomas, J. Walsh, G. Spiller, G. Ayres, A. Wilkinson, I. Dawson, T. Mercer, J. Gardiner, R. Scammell, E. Treweek, H. Jones, S. Gale, J. Q. Williamson, M. T. E. Edvardson, J. F. Goodwin, I. J. Bessmeron, J. Rowe, D. Gray

## Reminiscences of the FTS at Parkend During The Early 1960s *continued*

*Continued from previous page*

on, four days a week in the wood, one day of lectures, and Saturday mornings with Mr Pitt (maths), and Harold Jones (botany). Both of these gentlemen were on loan from Lydney Grammar School.

One notable incident in our first term was a Hallowe'en Dance at Parkend Memorial Hall, on 29 October 1960, where I met my wife-to-be. This liaison was cemented by visits to Whitemead on Friday evenings for Scottish dancing. By Christmas our course had shrunk to 11, one left as the life was not for him, the second due to a broken leg in a motorbike accident.

Our weekly wage of 56 shillings did not stretch to eating out, so it was just as well we had bed and full board. Breakfast was filling, and as we had to make our own sandwiches for lunch break, getting up early was essential or else the bread was nearly all gone. Sandwich fillings varied very little (a choice of jam, cheese & marmite). In later years I have fought shy of marmite. Supper was almost always good, the only mistake the cooks made was to offer tripe and onions, at which point the whole course left for the Half Acre (a transport café on the A48 – now 'The Willows').

Interspersed with work and lectures were tours to places of forestry interest. Two that stay in my memory are TairOnen (a one hundred acre forest nursery in South Wales), and Garnons (an estate in Herefordshire which grew very good oaks and we collected acorns there). Transport to these places was by the School lorry, not

the most comfortable of rides. The lorry was parked in the 'Giraffe House', which got its name from the shape of the building – tall and narrow. Legend has it that when it was built the plans were laid sideways, so instead of a low wide building, we got the 'Giraffe House'! The building survives.

Mention of the forest nurseries brings back memories of the nursery at Viney Hill which was run by the School. Known to all students as 'Viney Hell', not because of the excess heat, but the cold. I have vivid memories of plunging frozen hands into warm water and the agony thereafter, unforgettable!

There were exams at the end of each term, therefore much tension before the relief of holidays. Before the beginning of the second year was the Exchange course. This entailed students being sent to one of the other Forester Training Schools in the UK: Benmore in West Scotland, Faskally in East Scotland, and Gwydyr in North Wales. I, with three other students, was sent to Gwydyr and enjoyed five weeks in Snowdonia. Very different to the Dean, 99% spruce and pine, and peat bogs to be drained.

Despite the Welsh reputation for rain, we had 5 weeks of sunshine and much of our spare time was spent in the River Conway. On returning to the Dean, we discovered an addition to our course, a student who had spent his first year at Benmore. He was extremely interested in fungi and spent the rest of his career in research identifying them.

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## Reminiscences of the FTS at Parkend During The Early 1960s *continued*

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Our second year was much like the first, except that our junior course was considerably larger at 25, including 8 Africans, one of whom, as on our course, was a white Rhodesian. This put us at a considerable disadvantage, especially when it came to water fights, which occurred at intervals using the fire hoses. Instructors turned a blind eye providing the mess was cleared up by morning.

More tours ensued, a memorably one to Newport Docks to see how telegraph poles were treated. Ironically during the last five years of my career with the Forestry Commission, part of my job was timber inspections at South Wales docks, so at Newport I knew my way around.

Year two carried on inexorably to the final exams in July. Much sweating was done until the results were announced. We all passed! So, I left the Dean on a posting to Kent, but returned frequently as the in-laws were still at Whitecroft.

It was some 14 years later before we returned permanently, after further postings to the New Forest and North Wales. I had no intention of going anywhere else! Nor did I.

*Acknowledgements:*

*Photographs and newspaper cuttings: Dean Heritage Centre.*

*The Dean Forester Training School by Henry Smith & Geoff Waygood. 2002. New Regard No. 17.*

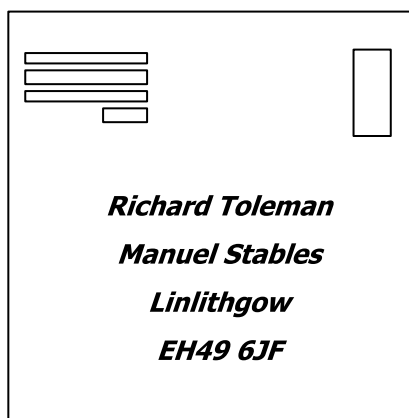
*This article first appeared in The New Regard 2019.*

*Published with kind permission of the Forest of Dean Local History Society.*

*Pete Ralph died in March 2019 and his widow Beryl wished to see this article published in the FCA Today magazine.*

*Dean Photo of 1961-1962 on next page* ➡

## Send your articles to the editor for publication in FCA Today



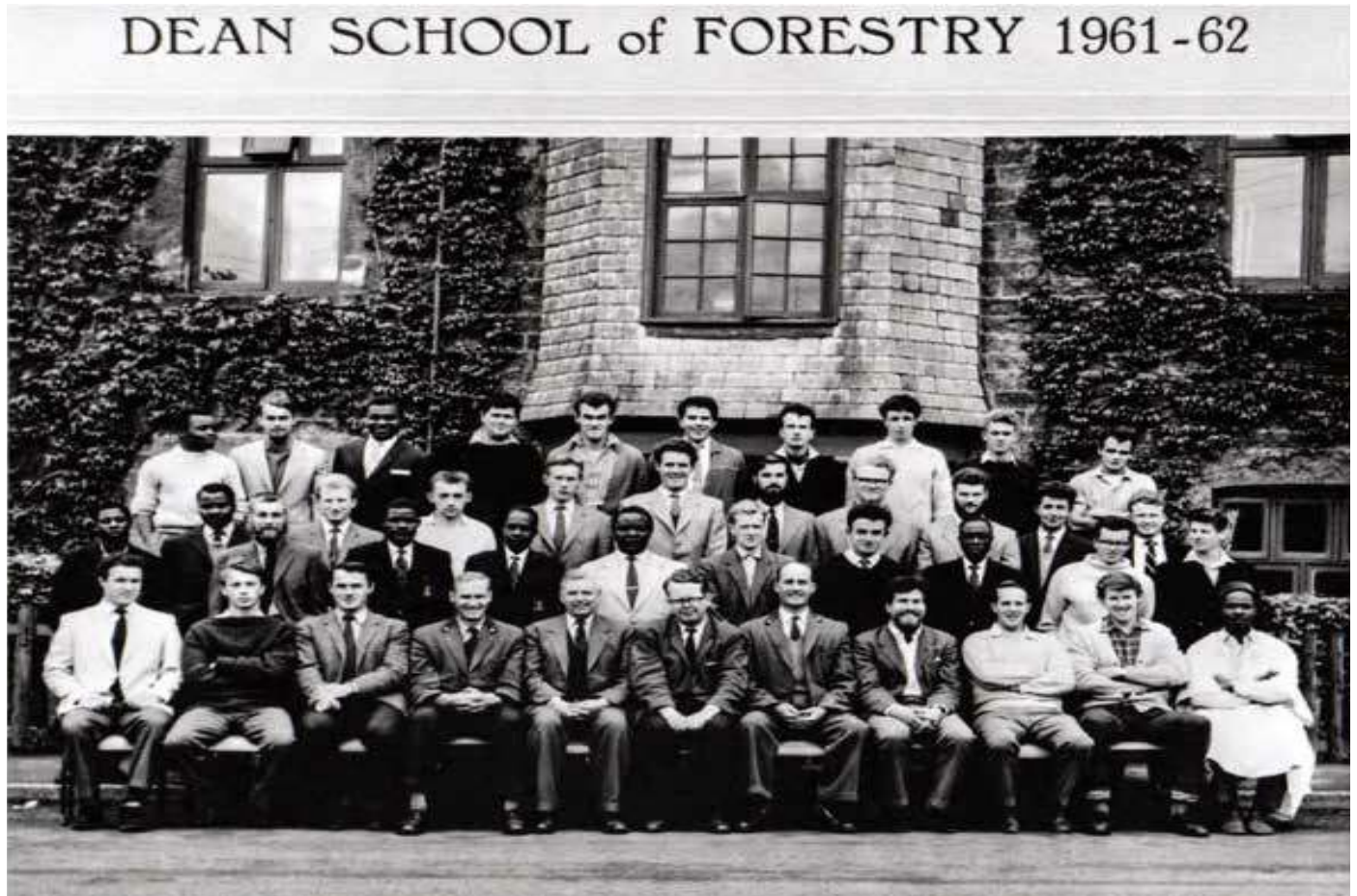
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## Reminiscences of the FTS at Parkend During The Early 1960s *continued*

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**Back Row (left to right):** E.R.Kamundi; J.Dickinson; E.Temu; M.J.Sayer; J.Stemp;  
P.W.Ralph; G.Kearns; I.Parrott; R.Rogers; M.Pratt

**3<sup>rd</sup> Row:** D.Mwela; F.Mwale; C.Phillipson; D.Williams; J.Richards; R.V.Wills; R.G.Strouts;  
M.Rodgers; A.C.Swinburn; G.Barfield; P.J.Mobbs

**2<sup>nd</sup> Row:** M.Baker; N.Salim; J.Bakamunaga; J.Zabasajja; R.Taylor; C.Hudson; G.Nsubuga;  
A.Hansford; D.Pitt

**Seated:** W.Williams; R.Liversidge; D.Lyons; Mr G.E.Waygood; Mr M.E.S. Dickenson; Mr  
J.F.Goodwin; Mr J.T.Webster; A.R.Barlow; M.A.Nicol; F.S.Smith; J.I.M.Ihidero

## Dean Oak and HMS Victory

*by Rob Guest*

Most schoolchildren only know two dates – 1066 – the Norman invasion of England and 1805 – the battle of Trafalgar. Trafalgar Day is the commemoration of the victory won by the Royal Navy, commanded by Vice-Admiral Horatio Nelson, over the combined French and Spanish fleets at the Battle of Trafalgar on 21 October 1805.



In 2005, there were to be special celebrations of the bicentenary, and in preparation for this the Royal Navy took steps to repair Nelson's flagship, HMS Victory, which despite its age (launched in 1765) is still officially a naval ship and is moored in Portsmouth Harbour.

The Victory is associated with the Forest of Dean. For centuries, Dean oak was regarded as the prime shipbuilding timber in Britain – some sources claim that the Spanish Armada had specific instructions to burn down the Dean, such was the importance of its timber for the naval strength of Britain.

It is not known whether Victory was actually built of Dean oak, but the Dean was the biggest supplier of oak to the naval shipyards at the time, including Chatham, where the Victory was built.



*Forest of Dean*

Given this history, it is not surprising that Rob Guest, Deputy Surveyor of the Forest of Dean at the time, was horrified to hear that the Royal Navy was proposing to repair the Victory using French oak and he contacted the powers that be and

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## Dean Oak and HMS Victory *Continued*

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suggested Dean oak should be used instead. The Navy (with red faces!) saw the logic in this, particularly as they needed timber from sustainable sources, and the Dean was certified under the Forestry Stewardship Scheme, so they agreed to use Dean oak if timber of sufficient size and quality could be supplied for their purposes.

The Forest of Dean had another association with Trafalgar. Lord Nelson visited the area in 1802, and was concerned when he was told that deforestation of the Forest to supply charcoal for iron smelting might jeopardise future supplies of oak for naval ships. He left and wrote a report which was presented to Parliament in 1803 expressing his worries and urging action to address the issue - this report is now held in the museum in Monmouth and begins: -



*The Forest of Dean contains about 23,000 acres of the finest land in the kingdom, which I am informed if in a high state of cultivation of oak, would produce about 9,200 loads of timber fit for building ships of the line every year; that is, the Forest would grow in full vigour 920,000 oak trees. The state of the Forest at this moment is deplorable, for if my information is true, there is not 3,500 loads of timber in the whole Forest fit for building, and none coming forward. It is useless, I admit, to state the causes of such a want of timber where so much could be produced, except that by knowing the faults we may be better able to amend ourselves. First, the generality of trees for these last*

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## Dean Oak and HMS Victory *Continued*

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He never lived to see his concerns addressed, but in 1808, the Government passed an act (the Dean Forest (Timber) Act 1808) to reverse the state of the Dean and this resulted in a planting boom for a couple of decades. Trees from this era are now perversely referred to as Napoleonic Oaks (not Nelsonian Oaks!!)

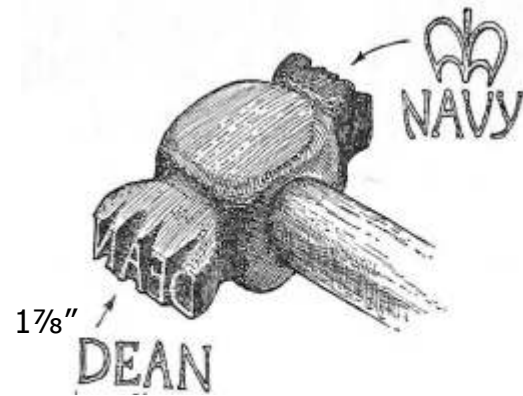


and the irony is that by the time the trees became large enough to use, warships were no longer built out of wood.

Jim Sauter, Forestry Operations Manager in the Dean, started searching for trees planted shortly after the Act of Parliament that had resulted from Nelson's initiative, and he located some suitable ones at the top of Russells Inclosure, near Boys Grave, SW of The Speech House.

In 2004, one of these trees was felled by local experienced contractor Terry Wilce and extracted to the roadside. The timber from this one tree, shown below with FC public relations officer Val Long for scale, totalled 4.74 cubic metres.

Once this had been done, the Captain of HMS Victory visited the Dean to inspect the logs, and he and Rob Guest marked them with the traditional navy stamp.



*Hammer used in Dean during the 18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> centuries for marking timber for the Navy*

The Forestry Commission still owned the original marking hammer which was on loan to the Dean Heritage Museum, and this was used in the marking process. The hammer can be seen in the Museum.



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## Dean Oak and HMS Victory *Continued*

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The logs then went off to W.L. West & Son sawmill in Sussex which was able to saw such large timber and which was also certified to process FSC certified timber.



In due course the Victory was repaired in advance of the bicentenary on 21<sup>st</sup> October 2005 and Forestry Commission staff from the Dean visited the Victory in Portsmouth to view the timber in situ.



Exactly two hundred years after the battle, Trafalgar Day was celebrated in the Forest of Dean on October 21<sup>st</sup> 2005.

Val Long co-ordinated an event where 200 oaks (derived from one of the areas planted following the 1808 Act) were planted in an avenue, to be known as Trafalgar Avenue.



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## Dean Oak and HMS Victory *Continued*

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Excess seedlings were planted nearby, in what became known as the Nelson Grove. The 200 oaks were planted by a range of people associated with the Forest of Dean – eg the Verderers, the High Sheriff of Gloucestershire, Robert Turner (the Queen's Remembrancer), local Councillors and other local dignitaries, forestry staff et



al. The occasion included a wonderful display of local schoolchildren dancing hornpipes to live music (trained by Steve Rowley) and was enhanced by Don Burgess, the local brewer from the Freeminer Brewery who made a special brew for the occasion, which he called Trafalgar Ale.



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## Dean Oak and HMS Victory *Continued*

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### In celebration of the 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar,

the visit to the area of Admiral Lord Nelson in 1802, his recommendation to Parliament that the Dean should be replanted in order to provide naval timber for the future and the subsequent Dean Forest (Timber) Act of 1808 which was followed by major planting of oaks,

### Trafalgar Avenue

was planted on

**21 October 2005**

Representatives from local communities and the many organisations that are closely connected with the 21<sup>st</sup> century Forest of Dean planted 200 young oak trees to form the commemorative avenue. The saplings were grown from acorns collected under the old oaks that were planted in the 1800s and which form the core of the modern Forest.

The Trafalgar Avenue will be there for future generations to see and will help to maintain the Dean's long history of links with Britain's naval history.

Earlier in 2005, the Nelson Grove was established near by.



This souvenir sheet commemorates your contribution to the planting of the Trafalgar Avenue.

*R. Guzet.*

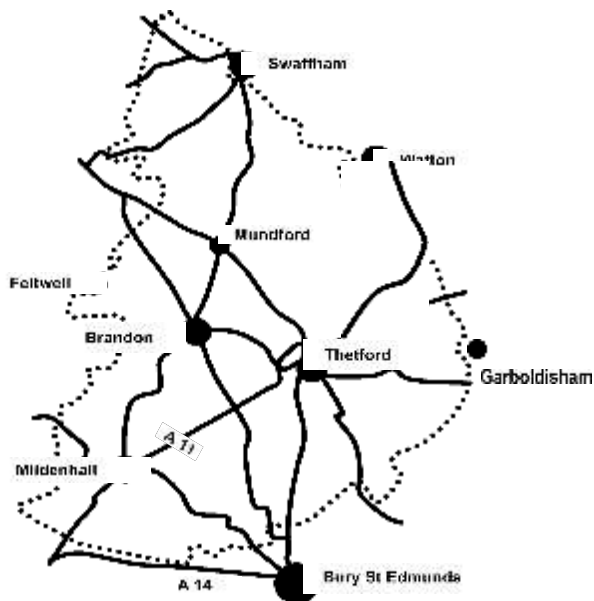
Deputy Surveyor

Thank you for taking part in this historic day.



## Breckland and the Pine Hedgerows

by Simon Malone



First, a little about Breckland to set the scene. Breckland is an extensive region of some 370 square miles straddling the Norfolk-Suffolk border, characterised by light sandy soil and with a field pattern hedged by aged Scots pine trees, the like of which are rarely found elsewhere in England. More about the pine hedges in due course.

There is no precisely defined physical boundary to this region, but most authorities regard it as stretching more or less from Bury St Edmunds and Mildenhall in the south towards Swaffham and across to Watton in the north, bounded by the Fens in the west and across towards East Harling and Garboldisham in the east. It is roughly within this area that the light, free draining soils, characteristic of The Brecks are at their most widespread, though even within this area there are some parts where heavier soils with ponds and meres exist.



*(The picture shows one of the two fur processing factories which were located in Brandon. The picture was taken in 1994 and today the site is a Tesco store!)*

In recent centuries these light sandy soils, situated in the driest part of the entire UK, had relatively little agricultural value. Indeed, their main use was to graze sheep and in the Middle Ages there were also extensive rabbit warrens, for rabbits were farmed for their meat and their fur.

The result of this type of land use was a landscape almost devoid of trees with extensive areas virtually stripped of significant vegetation. Limited cultivation took place and what did was quite transient as farmers used up any natural fertility in the soil and moved on to "Break" new ground. Hence "Break" became "Breck" and the famous local historian and naturalist W G Clarke coined the name Breckland in 1894.

Nowadays, modern agriculture has tamed the inhospitable soil and, thanks largely to irrigation and the use of modern fertilisers, very valuable arable crops are grown including carrots, parsnips, onions, lettuce, potatoes and sugar beet as well as cereal crops.

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## Breckland and the Pine Hedgerows *Continued*

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At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century things had come to a head and agriculture was in serious depression. The few large estates in the area were struggling to balance their books. At the same time, the country had endured the Great War of 1914-18 and the government of the day was counting the cost to British woodlands. These had been stripped to provide timber for the war effort which had required vast quantities of timber for the coal mines at home and for the trench fortifications in France and because German blockades had hindered vital timber imports from reaching us.

Accordingly, the Ackland Committee was set up to advise the government and its decision was to establish a Forestry Commission, a state forest industry, to create a reserve of timber against any future wars or catastrophes. And so, the Forestry Commission came into being in 1919.

The first requirement was to buy or lease land suitable for afforestation and in the early 1920's plans were put together to buy up many of the impoverished estates in Breckland. From these acquisitions, largely between 1922 and the early 1940's, Thetford Forest was created. It was to become the largest man made lowland pine forest in Great Britain and eventually reached its current size of around 20,000 hectares (50,000 acres) with an annual production of over 160,000 tonnes of timber.

It was quickly found that Scots and Corsican pines thrived in the dry, sandy

soils and they were the main species to be planted. Broadleaf belts, slow growing and difficult to establish, were planted along roadsides to serve as firebreaks rather than for their amenity value. The forest thrived and by the Second World War was producing pit props for the war effort from early thinning of the young plantations.



As I have previously mentioned, the most obvious landscape feature of the area is the lines of pines which border many fields. Approaching the area from the south just beyond Newmarket, you enter the Breckland region and visually the pine trees catch your eye, so unlike field hedges elsewhere in the country. The main constituent of the hedges, historically referred to as Deal Rows, is Scots pine but occasionally Norway spruce was used, the latter rarely encountered now and never having thrived due to the low rainfall. Breckland is notorious as an area where late spring frosts are common, and the use of pine as opposed to the more traditional hawthorn may well be attributed to this factor, pines being somewhat easier to establish from this point of view.

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## Breckland and the Pine Hedgerows *Continued*

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The lines of Scots pine were planted in the 1800's, it is thought mainly between 1810 to 1830, to act as windbreaks and help to stabilise the light sandy soil. Even today during periods when there are strong gales, particularly in the spring, the sand can be whipped up and blown quite high into the air for short periods of time. Anecdotally, a Norfolk farmer asked where his farm was replied by saying "Sometimes it be in Norfolk and sometimes it be in Suffolk!"

Of course, what we see today are tall pine trees with strangely contorted trunks and which have little value as windbreaks. However, as young plantings they would have been close planted, as single or twin rows, and managed by pruning and trimming to keep them as dense hedgerows of a manageable height - typically around 2 to 2.5 metres in height.



It is a fact that most conifers respond to trimming and shearing if this is done at the correct time of year. It is essential to only prune during that period in the spring growing season when the new extension growth is active and soft. By doing so, adventitious buds in the new growth will be stimulated to flush and thus create a thick, bushy type of growth appropriate to a hedge. Also, such soft growth can be cleanly sliced through with simple tools when trimming. After growth has ceased and the new growth has hardened off, such buds will not break out in the same way and indeed the recent growth may well die back.

Today the practice of shearing pines, spruces and firs is largely reserved to the Christmas tree market to encourage shapely and tightly furnished branching to the trees.

So, for a over a hundred years, the pine hedges were trimmed each year to keep them dense and wind tight and to act as effective wind breaks. The limiting height was around a couple of metres, which was all it was possible to reach by normal means. The practice continued into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, until labour became either too expensive or became unavailable due to the impact of the First World War. The hedges fell into neglect but continued to want to develop into trees. From the tops of the hedges normal tree growth continued leaving us with the typical gnarled and distorted tree lines we see today.

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## Breckland and the Pine Hedgerows *Continued*

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Unfortunately, these hedge lines are slowly disappearing as age and continued neglect catch up with them. Each year more are lost due to changes in agriculture, or even urban development in and around the local towns, as well as by the forces of nature - storm, fire and drought. There have been limited attempts to plant new hedge lines but of course these are not managed by the much-needed annual shearing, so it is unlikely they will develop the crooked and distorted characteristics of their predecessors. Indeed, so far most of such plantings look simply like a row of close planted, straight stemmed trees. Locally, planners like to include pines in their

landscape plantings and even the Highways Agency has used Scots and Corsican pines extensively in its plantings along recent new sections of the A11.

In Thetford and nearby Brandon, towns which were expanded and developed as London overspill towns in the 1960's, field hedges were subsumed into the developments and still exist today in very much urban surroundings.

It seems likely that in the next few decades, little will remain of these historic plantings and with their loss, Breckland will have lost one of its most important visual characteristics.



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



## Forestry Commission 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Tree Planting in East Anglia

*by Simon Malone*



In May last year, as part of the planning for the outdoor field trip associated with the National AGM, I had a lot of contact with local Forest District staff. Taking advantage of this I floated the idea of the Retirement Association seeking permission to plant a commemorative tree in Lynford Arboretum.

The arboretum has strong connections with some of our members, as much of the early planting in the 1950's was carried out by students at the then Lynford Forester Training School.

The idea grew and a plan for a joint planting, shared with current local staff and members of the Friends of Thetford Forest evolved. Within the Friends there is a smaller group who carry out regular management work in the Arboretum as well.

This year the Friends are also celebrating their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Originally the planting was planned for late autumn 2019 but the unforeseen promotion and departure of the Forest Management Director caused staffing and work-load difficulties within the local forest office and as a result the planting was rescheduled for mid-February.

My earliest acquaintance with the Arboretum dates from around 1984, soon after I was posted to Thetford with Silv(S) Research.

I recall fighting my way through the bramble, bracken and scrub then occupying the vista shown behind the anniversary planted trees in the photographs. Around this time, Norman 'Mac' McCreath took over responsibility for the Arboretum and set about totally overhauling it. Scrub was cleared, the lakes were dredged and new paths installed, together with a census of the planted stock, with cataloguing and labelling of all trees and shrubs. Its popularity soon spread, and it is today



*Continued on next page* ➡➡➡

## FC 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Tree Planting in East Anglia *Continued*

*Continued from previous page*

accepted as an important tree collection in England. It is also very much a venue for ornithologists due to the high numbers of unusual bird species often present. I am told over 20 hawfinches have been seen recently.



Dave Goodrum starts the planting

The Friends of Thetford Forest today help with its management, carrying out a multitude of tasks which would otherwise be considered unaffordable to carry out.



Has Charles Ashley met his match?

So, on a somewhat chilly but sunny morning, a gathering of Group members, local staff and members of the Friends group numbering around thirty people ceremonially planted two species sweet gums and a Liquidamber styraciflua. Following the devastating storms Ciara and Dennis of the previous two weeks, we were blessed with a calm, dry, sunny morning and perfect planting conditions.

*Continued on next page* ➡➡➡

## FC 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Tree Planting in East Anglia *Continued*

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After an introduction from John Bruce, acting Forest Management Director, Forestry England, the trees were planted in turn by Dave Goodrum, (Friends of Thetford Forest), Eric Rogers, (the most senior member of the Breckland FCA Group present and a former student at Lynford FTS) and Charles Ashley, (present Land Agent for the East of England Region).



Eric last planted trees here in the 1950s

Unfortunately, 'Mac' was not able to join us for the planting ceremony which was a disappointment for us all. It would have been great for him to have shared this occasion with us in 'his' arboretum.

However, the value of the work he had done in the restoration of the Arboretum was recognised and applauded.



A plaque commemorating the event has been mounted on a large boulder.



*Continued on next page* ➡➡➡

## FC 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Tree Planting in East Anglia *Continued*

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Following the planting ceremony around twenty people adjourned to the nearby Lynford Hall for coffee, biscuits, a chat and a nice warm up.

**I would like to thank Imogen Radford for supplying some of the photographs.**



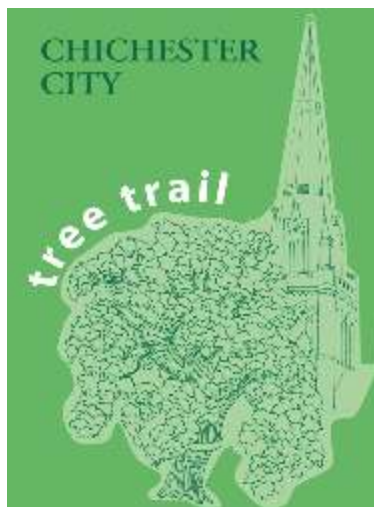
## Wollemi Pine

*by Mike Whitlock*

Having suffered from a hip fracture, I have not been able to do my usual long country walks. Instead, I have had days out in cities and towns. A place I have visited quite often is Chichester in West Sussex. It has a number of interesting buildings, parks and gardens as well as the cathedral, long sections of the Roman wall, museums etc. On one of my visits last year, I discovered in the museum a free booklet "Chichester City Tree Trail". This was produced by the local council and included a plan and suggested route to see the trees described in the booklet. In addition to the numbered plan, there was a description of each of the trees. Some were

common and others uncommon or rare. An uncommon one was the Foxglove Tree (*Paulownia tomentosa*).

The rarest tree is the Wollemi pine (*Wollemi nobilis*). This was discovered in the Wollemi National



Park, New South Wales in 1994, although it was probably known previously. It is not a pine, but to many people most evergreen conifers are "pines". It is related to the Monkey Puzzle tree. Its leaves are more like Silver firs (*Abies* spp). It has a bark like bubbly chocolate, although this is not apparent in the photos, probably because it is still young. The printed notes say that it coppices naturally.



Wollemi Pine

It is named after the national park where it was found and its finder, David Noble. Less than 100 trees were discovered so, as with other rare plants confined to specific locations, it was decided to propagate and plant it at other sites to ensure its survival. Since 2006, rooted cuttings have been available in the UK. The one at Chichester was planted in 2008. It is situated in the Bishop's Palace Gardens which is a public open space in a parkland setting with lawns, flower beds, shrubs and various interesting trees. It is surrounded on two sides by the Roman Wall, which includes a walkway along the top.

With the recent bush fires in Australia, I wondered on the fate of the original trees. I heard a short news item that they had been saved, although some had suffered bark scorching.

One of the authors of the guide was Rod Stern, whom many readers will have known when he worked for the F.C. He retired to Chichester and died recently.

## The Problem in 2010

*by Jim Christie*

In 2010 essential Forest equipment was costing in the region of £250,000 and in an industry where profit margins were extremely fragile, it was therefore essential that prudent capital purchase choices were made.

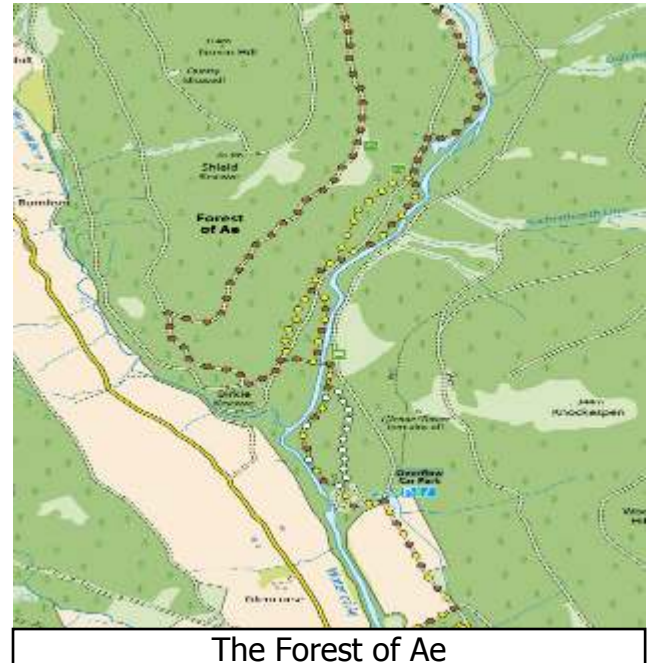
This was particularly true in the Timber Harvesting Industry where buying the wrong harvesting equipment could be a serious waste of a business's capital. For this reason, identifying the best harvester or forwarder was (and still is) probably the most critical decision that a Harvesting Contractor has to make, so a realistic demonstration of the comparative machines' capabilities was rightly regarded an essential part of the purchasing process.

But how can the Machine agent realistically demonstrate machines with virtually the correct technical specifications and features that interests the prospective customer?

This is a question that I frequently asked myself - and I kept coming to the same conclusion - If agents could demonstrate their machines for a realistic period of time on a large timber production site alongside competitive models from other manufacturers, potential customers would be able to compare, not only the individual machines, but also the various features, components and attachments?

### The Solution?

Although it is widely recognised that the APF and Elmia Shows generate extremely useful publicity for the whole of the forestry machine industry, the suitability of these events on traditional show grounds do not



allow for continuous comparative working facilities to be included.

This will be no surprise to those within the industry who are aware of the considerable area of forest that modern machines can clear in a two day period.

Could it be possible for Demo sites to be 'shared' by the vendors so reducing costs and the number of sites required while at same time, offering prospective buyers a wider opportunity to compare a range of possible purchases?

As a Forest Machine Consultant, I had had some experience of working with most of the popular harvesting machine companies and this often included my having acted as "Safety man" at their demonstrations of their equipment. But could this highly competitive group of machine vendors be persuaded to share a working demo site and all that has to go with it?

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## The Problem in 2010 *Continued*

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Various attempts by Colleges etc. to organise this type of event on a local scale had not been successful due to a plethora of reasons including costs, safety and a well established and embedded competitiveness between the participating companies and, would this approach really increase sales?

Subsequently, I floated this idea past various machine suppliers' Sales Managers and with Douglas Clark of 'Clark of Parkgate' who has a wide knowledge of the Forest Machine Industry.

As a result I did sense a 'well it might work' reaction and so I subsequently approached those with whom I had shared my thoughts, including Douglas and they all admitted to being interested in the idea and that the consensus of opinion appeared to be that it could be possible if a suitable 'mutual' person could be persuaded to take responsibility for the organising of a combined working demonstration.

This was followed with the question "Would you be prepared to take on the job?" and so I did agree to initially consider the possibility, but depending on the outcome of any preliminary meetings, I made it clear that I might change my mind.

A meeting of interested parties was subsequently held at Clark of Parkgate's premises to test further the enthusiasm for the event and it was immediately obvious that the proposal should at least be taken to the next level, so a second meeting was arranged and constructive discussions began in earnest.

It was agreed that we should progress the idea and that the first step should be to identify a timber grower who could offer a suitable site with reasonable crop conditions with and good public road access and, that that person, or a company representative, should be co-opted onto the committee.



Forwarder

At our next meeting progress was again made. The Forestry Commission had been contacted and South Scotland Conservancy had offered us a site 5 miles from their office at Ae, and a local forester who knew the area, had committed to help us as required, and so our next meeting produced a draft of the necessary requirements of all the various tasks and the persons to be responsible, 'Best guess' time scales, and the setting up of a 'Working capital.' Individual cash contributions were agreed. It was also agreed that once this initial fund had been set up, no other Timber Harvesting Machine companies could be added to our list of working demonstrators. (This was to avoid late-comers from 'jumping on to the bandwagon' once our arrangements were clearly

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## The Problem in 2010 *Continued*

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going to come to fruition, and so avoiding some of the expense that would have to be shared by companies that had been supportive of the idea since its inception).

We also applied to various timber connected bodies for additional funding - but all in vain because we had limited the number of participating companies from the start of implementing our plans, our event was therefore deemed "not open to all".

We had previously agreed that once a suitable parcel of forest had been located and divided into sites that offered equal capacities and similar conditions, a draft proposal of the site plan would be drawn up and submitted to the woodland owner.

The Commission agreed, but asked for assurance that the site should be left in a condition that would not hamper subsequent operations' and that their forester who had previously agreed to help with our project be seconded onto our committee.

All was going well.

However, a major problem arose which halted the preparations for the event. One of the Machine Manufacturers announced that a new range of their machines was due to be made available soon after the date proposed for the demo.

This meant that prospective buyers of new machines would stop buying all current models, until the new models were made available. Since this would obviously affect all models from the competition as well, the response from the group was to immediately agree that our target date for the

Demo should be put back by one year.

As it happened, this was no bad thing as not all the essential issues had been properly sorted out and the delay would give us more time to tailor the site to allow the public to have safe vantage points and for us to allocate areas to companies to have static stands to show their range of harvesting related accoutrements and arrange their 'on-site' hospitality stands.



TigerCat Harvester

These stands would also generate additional income, they would give a useful boost to reduce the overall cost of the event, but since these sites would require some work by heavy Civil Engineering Plant, the committee members agreed that this work should be undertaken by only one shared Civil Engineering company to prevent congestion of the site, and that it should be supervised by our "Commission man." This suited all concerned.

And so the first Joint Forestry Harvesting Machine Demo was arranged for 2011, over a two day period at the Forest of Ae. It was not to be a Show – it was to be a Joint Demo, so although nobody would be turned away, the event would be primarily

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## The Problem in 2010 *Continued*

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intended for industry professionals and anyone else who had a real interest in timber harvesting.

### Two Welcome Gestures

Tigercat, who was a member of the organizing committee bought the timber on the demo site as a standing sale, and agreed to pay each of the participating demonstrating companies the going rate for the timber they extracted during the event. Yet another useful contribution!

Since Ae had the advantage of being in the location of Douglas Clark's fully equipped Workshop and Yard, complete with Lifting Tackle and plenty of 'Setting Down Space', Douglas made the yard open to the group members to use for tasks related to the event.

Things were 'looking good.'

However the location of the car park at Ae proved to lead to the biggest "Last Minute Crisis" of the event.

### The Humpy Road to the Demo Site

The road between the car park and the demo site was single track for most of its length and included some fairly sharp bends and steep "humps."

It was impossible to anticipate the intensity of the demand for buses, but we decided that two different sizes of bus would give flexibility to cope with waiting times.

I identified two local companies who could match our demands in terms of the size of the buses available on the day of the demo.

I visited both company's premises and offered to take a driver from them both to reconnoitre the route that they were going to have to drive.

The Company with the smaller coaches accepted and I took him over the required route. This proved not to be a problem, but the manager of the company with the larger buses immediately claimed that he used to do a school run on this road and was very familiar with it and so no 'dummy run' was required.



I took him at his word, but 36 hours before the event, he telephoned me to say he had been mistaken about which road I had been meaning and that his buses did not have sufficient ground clearance!

After a frantic 24 hours constantly on the telephone, I realised that buses with the required specification were not going to be available at any cost from any company on the day that I required them!

I reckoned that by this time, attendees would already be on their way to the event and so, that evening in the dark, I again drove the road and was fortunate to locate a turning area two thirds of the distance between the car park and the demo site

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## The Problem in 2010 *Continued*

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and from that point to the demo site no serious "humps" were evident.

This would allow the larger buses to run from the car park to the turning area, where they could transfer the passengers to the smaller buses that could run on to the demo site.

To minimize complications, we were able to equip all those involved in this 'Trans humus' with radios but even so, this part of the arrangements was, without a doubt, the most stressful part of the whole event.

The demo itself went smoothly even when a HSE Inspector arrived on site and pointed out that we were deploying the machines too closely together and were therefore in breach of the regulations, but he did recognize that the working machines were clearly fenced off from the spectators.

I made the point to him that we had been aware of this apparent breach in terms of 'working proximities', but to compensate for that we had also arranged for each machine to have a 'Banksman' who was in radio contact with all the operators and our Site Central Control point which had been set up on a vantage point along with a team of three St Andrews first aiders, complete with ambulance.

Since all the site activities could be monitored from the Control Point this gave a level of surveillance that surpassed that of normal site working. It was also pointed out that all the operators were selected for their experience and that all the machines

were effectively brand new, so the likelihood of accidents were minimal but, should an accident happen, the ambulance team on site were well equipped to handle the consequences.

The demo went ahead as planned and was universally regarded as a success.

After the event was over, I left the site under the watchful eye of the Overnight Security man and headed for home.

When I was about 20 miles south of the site, the phone rang. It was the Security man.

He reported that a Compressor had been stolen from the site. A lorry driver had been sent to uplift it, and he had searched all the machines still onsite and could not find it.

Since I was still 50 miles from home I decided to return to the site rather than return the following morning, so I about turned back to the Demo site.

On arrival, I immediately spotted the Compressor. The simple explanation was that neither the driver nor the Security man knew what a Compressor looked like.

I about turned and again headed for home.

Job Done!

*Afterthought: I would like to thank each of the representatives from the Machine Suppliers who formed the Working Group responsible for these 'Ground Breaking' events in spite of their existing commitments to their full time employers.*



## Book Reviews



***The Ancient Yew: A History of Taxus Baccata (Third Edition) by Robert Bevan-Jones.***

Publisher: *Windgather Press, Oxford.*

Date of publication: 2017 (190pp).

ISBN: 978-1-78570-078-1.

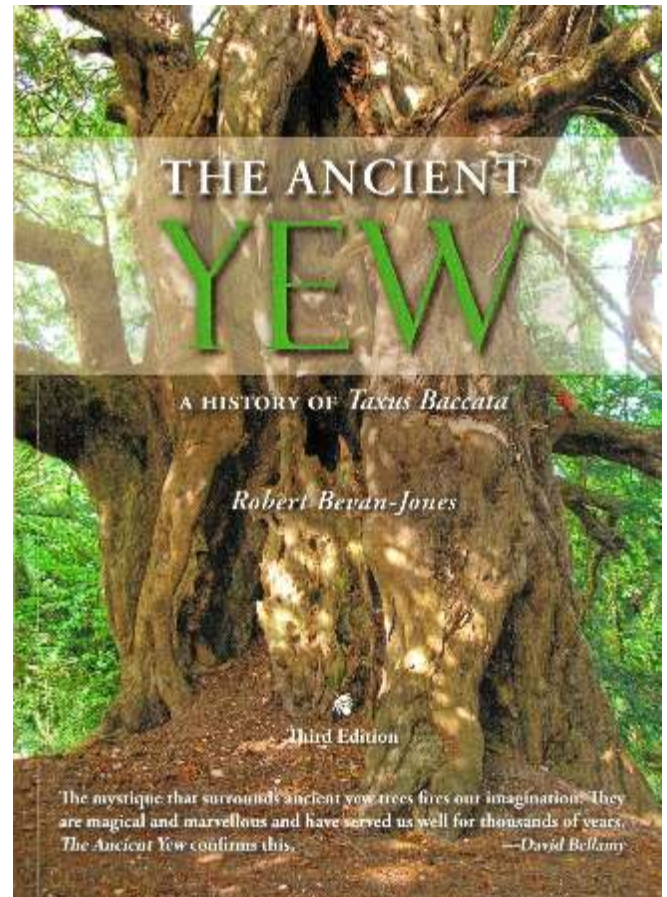
Price: £29.95 (pbk) available from Oxbow Books [[www.oxbowbooks.com](http://www.oxbowbooks.com)]

***Review by Dr Scott McG Wilson***

This is the enhanced third edition under the same title, first published in 2002. The book contributes to our understanding of the historical and cultural status of yew in Britain, Ireland and Europe.

After a brief initial chapter on botanical features, the second chapter addresses challenges of ageing ancient yews, very often hollow. Succeeding chapters deal with cultural contexts – ancient yews in churchyards, in abbey grounds, near wells and springs, in woodlands, hedges and gardens and in the wider countryside. A major chapter then deals with the yew in folklore, primarily of England, Ireland and Wales, with some Continental coverage. A shorter final chapter places yew in the archaeological record.

There is an extensive bibliography that will be valuable to readers with in-depth interest, and a useful gazetteer (with map references) of ancient yews referred to in the text. As many lie within churchyards and parks with some degree of public access, there may be opportunities for those interested to visit key examples.



The author has collated copious information from secondary (and some primary) literature relevant to his subject. Coverage is strongest on “home territories” of late Iron Age (druidic) and Dark Age (early Christian) symbolism and cultivation of yew in Wales, Western England and Ireland – here the book makes a very valuable contribution. The central impression is of a tree of spiritual and ritual significance to Iron Age Celts, later adopted for conversion by Dark Age Christian saints of Wales, Ireland and Cornwall. Previous exposure to Welsh and Irish history and folklore may assist readers in appreciating some more esoteric references.

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## Book Reviews



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Apparent scarcity of ancient yews in Eastern England may reflect geographical patterns of Saxon settlement and religion between AD 300 and 600.

Coverage of other topics, including archaeology and Germanic/Scandinavian folklores is briefer.

Many inferences made are unavoidably speculative, and although this was acknowledged, I felt the need for a more explicit critical analysis of sources, particularly mediaeval literature "referred back" into pre-literate late Iron Age and Dark Age circumstances – a notoriously problematic approach. The arrangement of evidence can make the reader's experience demanding – diligent cataloguing of excerpts and citations tended to overshadow emergent conclusions in places.

This book does not detail the biology and ecology of yew, and I recommend that it is

read alongside the excellent entry in the *Journal of Ecology/ Biological Flora of the British Isles* by Thomas and Polwart (2003).

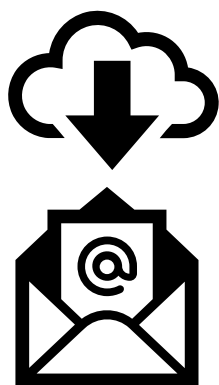
Surprisingly, the book is light in its coverage of yew in Scotland, essentially restricting its treatment to the Fortingall yew in Glen Lyon.

Despite doubts on the native status of yew in Scotland, discussed by Professor Jim Dickson (botanist at Glasgow University) in *Scottish Forestry* [v48(4), 1994], the Native Woodland Survey of Scotland (2014) recorded it as a widespread, if minor, component of broadleaved woodland, particularly in lowland areas such as the Clyde Valley and Lothian.

The map on page 7 of this book, with accompanying gazetteer, might well under-record presence of ancient yews within those particular districts.

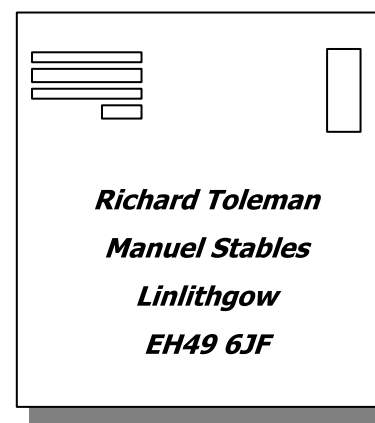
*Another book review on next page* »————→

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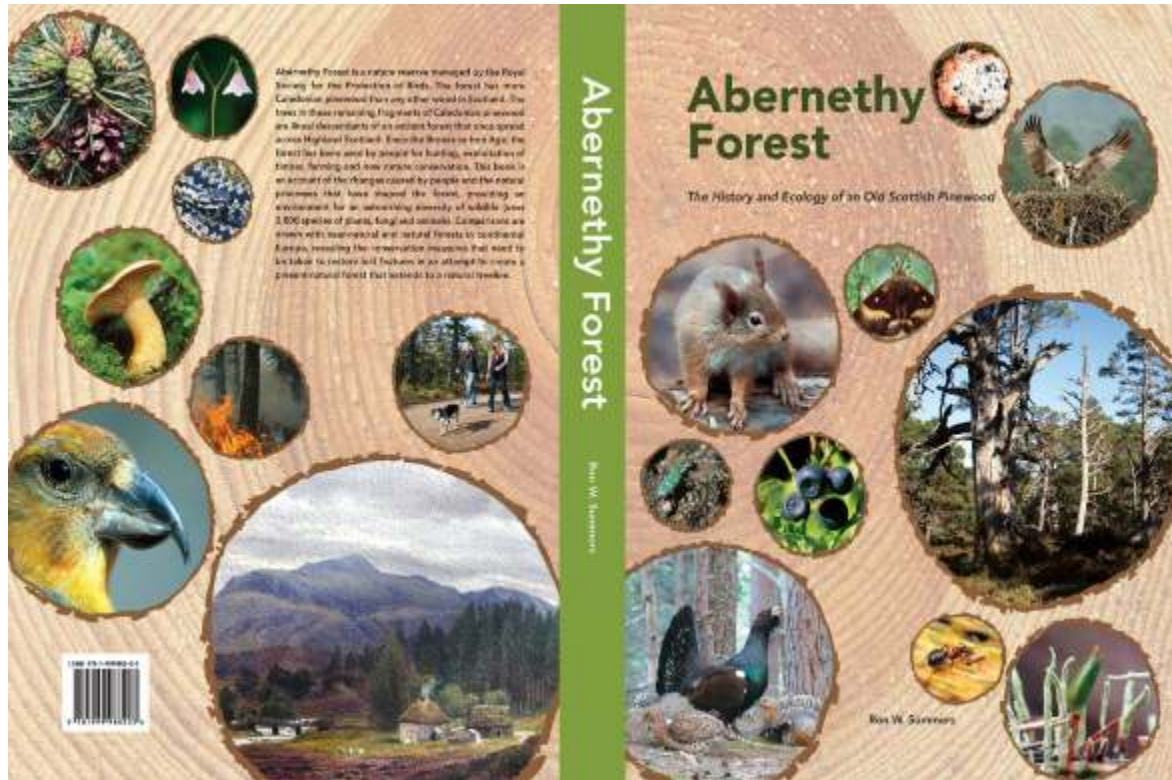
*by e-mail to: [editor@fca-today.com](mailto:editor@fca-today.com)*

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





## Book Reviews



### ***Abernethy Forest – the history and ecology of an old Scottish pinewood*** by Ron W Summers.

RSPB. 2018.

ISBN 978-1-9999882-0-3.

Hardback, 360pp, £29.99.

#### ***Review by Ro Scott***

Abernethy Forest will be well-known to NWDG members as the second-largest RSPB Reserve (after Forsinard Flows) and the largest remaining example of Caledonian pine forest. It is a fascinating place, and this is a fascinating book that will be of interest to anyone who cares about native woodland.

The book begins with a chapter on the nature of boreal forests and Abernethy's

place within this biome. There then follows a history of Abernethy Forest from the retreat of the ice, through colonisation by vegetation, changing ownerships and land uses over the intervening centuries, from woodland exploitation via settlement for farming, through the Victorian sporting era, right up to the present day emphasis on nature conservation. A chapter on fire explains its importance as a driver of boreal forest processes.

Next, Ron Summers guides the reader through the incredible inventory of species recorded at Abernethy, with chapters on each of the major taxonomic groups: plants higher and lower, fungi, lichens, invertebrates and vertebrates. These chapters cover all of the expected

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## Book Reviews



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specialities and rarities of the Caledonian pine forest without neglecting the matrix of commoner species within which they are embedded. But this is much more than a treatise on species and habitats.

The final third of the book sets Abernethy in its context as a pinewood reserve and explores the evolving approach to conservation management since it came into the RSPB's ownership in 1988.

The book contains a fabulous array of illustrations, from the author's own (and others') photographs to old maps, paintings and documents, which serve to bring alive the wonder of this magical place. Particularly intriguing are several pairs of photos of the same view at different times. These clearly illustrate the changes that have taken place in vegetation cover, tree regeneration and recovery from erosion.

In addition to the wildlife, due acknowledgement is given to the many human characters who have been involved with the exploration, exploitation and management of Abernethy Forest over the years.

Appendices give lists of common and scientific names of the species mentioned,

place names with their meanings and grid references, human census information, loch chemistry, some meteorological data, locations of archaeological sites and methods of ecological study. There is a separate glossary of technical terms.

The book has been produced to a high standard: it is beautifully bound, the smooth high-quality paper means that there are no fuzzy photos, and there is a remarkable lack of typos. All facts are meticulously referenced – the list of references extends to nearly 800 publications. Scientific information is presented in a way that would be comprehensible to any non-scientist, with many clear graphs and diagrams. My only quibble would be that, as a large-format hardback, it is a bit unwieldy for bedtime reading!

With its multiple designations, Abernethy Forest is one of the most special places in the UK. The author's love for it shines through. This book is a worthy introduction to Abernethy for anyone still in ignorance, and a treasure trove of information for even the best-informed native pinewood aficionado. It is remarkable value for its price of £29.99. We have the RSPB to thank for funding its publication and, of course, the author for writing it.

*Visit the FCA website at [www.fca-today.com](http://www.fca-today.com)*

## *Life in Brief*

I've heard from Ian Blake that **GEORGE BRUCE** died recently. I've haven't been able to find anybody to write up memories of his FC career, but he was a regular supporter of the FCA. We'll miss his cheerful contributions to our meetings.

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Graham Hamilton has told me of the death in January at 94 of **BOB CATHIE**, formerly conservator North Scotland. He was born in Balerno and spent much of his childhood around Leith.

He graduated with a forestry degree from Edinburgh University in 1950 after service in the Gordon Highlanders. His military career took him

to South Africa, India and Burma followed by a period in Germany with his regiment.

He joined the Forestry Commission in 1951 and started his career at Fochabers, initially as an assistant district officer. He subsequently took over the Moray district and remained there until 1966 when he moved to HQ at Drumsheugh Gardens on acquisitions. He returned to East Scotland as assistant conservator (H&M) in 1968.

He then moved to South Wales in a similar capacity for a few years before his last appointment, conservator North Scotland in 1977, from where he retired in 1985.

For those of us who worked with him, he was an excellent boss. Very much a round peg in a round hole in North Scotland, his wide experience and sound judgement were very valuable to the organisation. He was highly respected by his staff and his regular visits to the districts were always enjoyable and his mischievous sense of humour made him very good company.

He lost both his wife, Hildegard, and his eldest daughter Anne before his own death in a Nairn Nursing home. He is survived by daughters Barbara and Irene to whom we extend our sympathies.

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### **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](http://www.fca-today.com)

## 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>

## Forestry Commission Association Organisers

FCA Liaison Officer: *Charles Dickens*

e-mail Group membership enquiries to: -

FCA Today editor: *Richard Toleman*

[membership@fca-today.com](mailto:membership@fca-today.com)

## FCA Today Magazine

If there are enough articles, the Summer issue of the FCA Today magazine will be available on the [www.fca-today.com](http://www.fca-today.com) website in **August 2020**.

Articles for inclusion in the Summer issue of the magazine should be sent to the editor before 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020.

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.***

## Do you have any articles for publication in this magazine?



### Send your articles to the editor

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