



From the Editor

You'll see from the article in this issue on the way ahead that Charles and I propose two important changes to the running of the FCA. For my part, I intend putting FCA Today into hibernation. That means it will still exist behind the scenes, but that I want to give Forest Forum a try. Like our present newsletter, it will still be the place where we keep in touch with our forestry colleagues and friends. Exactly the same types of articles will be published in it. I shall still be encouraging members to contribute. The difference will be that there will be no fixed publication date. So I'll not have the last minute pressure to dig out copy, neither will members be pushed to produce it.

Send me your articles at any time and they will be opened in Forest Forum. I'll keep adding articles so they'll accumulate during the year. From time to time, I'll remind members to check the website for updates. At the end of the year, I'll archive the Forest Forum and start a new one. As this is a new venture we'll have to see how it works out. It may have to be modified as we go. The important point is that it will still be our main way of keeping in touch. It will still depend on your contributions.

I shall be working on the Forest Forum in the new year and will let you know when it is ready for your contributions.

Well, that's it. Let's give it a go. At the end of 2021 we shall look how we've done and what changes, if any, are needed. Of one thing I'm certain, members will continue to be supportive. Keep copy rolling in. A Happy (Covid) Christmas and a new look for the FCA in 2021.

Richard



Look out for the Forest Forum in 2021 on the website

www.fca-today.com

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Concessions to FCA members

Forestry England has agreed to honour the concessions members had under the previous FC regime. So in England we can enjoy the free use of car parks, forest drives and entry to Westonbirt and Bedgebury arboreta.

Forestry England has sent special car windscreen stickers to Charles with instructions on their use. He will be sending them to all local secretaries for distribution to members, while retaining a small stock for future use. They are valid to 31st March 2022.

Forestry and Land Scotland and Natural Resources Wales will not be introducing a similar scheme so this will only apply to members using the facilities in England.

Forestry Commission Association - What Lies Ahead

by Charles Dickens and Richard Toleman

We two have been mulling over the future of our association. The facts are:

1. The Forestry Commission as we knew it has gone, to be replaced with three separate forestry authorities, each with its own agenda. Affinity to the FC will fade away.
2. Our membership is shrinking, mainly because new retirees are not joining us. A trickle of people still do contact us, but I fear the trickle becomes a drip of those who actually join up. This is in spite of asking the Human Resources in each agency to give new retirees our invitation to join.
3. Consequently, the membership is getting older and nature is reducing our number.
4. Of the three agencies, only Forestry England has shown an active interest in the FCA (e.g. the issue of windscreen stickers for members wishing to avail themselves of the car parking, etc. concessions). Forestry and Land Scotland has acknowledged our presence but has withdrawn our concessions and I regret that Natural Resources Wales has shown little, if any, interest in us.

But all is not lost provided we work with the new order. In our discussions with Forestry England, they have made known their intent to foster interest in forestry through the establishment of "Friends of the Forest" type groups. Indeed it is understood these may already be in operation - members having licensed use of car parks and the facilities. FCA members could be readily drawn into these groups.

We think that because we no longer have a forestry agency covering Great Britain as a whole, it might be more appropriate that the link between the new agencies and the FCA become more direct. This would involve, for example, Forestry England in Bristol having contact details for each of the English groups, so if a new retiree wishes to join us they can be given details of the group nearest to them. Perhaps a more local approach could prompt Groups to more actively promote the FCA to potential members. Charles Dickens would however retain his current role as a backstop Liaison Officer for Great Britain as a whole.

The future of the website

The current dearth of copy for the FCA Today magazine has prompted us to consider its future. Rather than Richard Toleman struggling to obtain copy for the magazine for its thrice yearly publication, the website becomes an open forum for groups to promote their own activities. This would not preclude articles and general notices appearing from time to time. Richard would retain overall editorial control and be the channel for feeding copy from groups to our website publisher.

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Forestry Commission Association - What Lies Ahead *Continued*

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Next steps

Richard plans to go ahead with this winter issue of FCA Today, but the appearance and content of future issues will depend on your response to the above. Please let us have your thoughts on the above, and particularly the idea of a more direct liaison between groups and their own national forestry agency, and using the website to submit articles and promote group activities.

Forestry Commission Association - The Way Ahead

The foregoing article has been circulated to each of the Groups and most have replied.

1. There is general agreement among the Groups on our analysis of the current situation on membership and recruitment, and a more direct link between the Groups and the three forestry agencies and through such as "Friends of the Forest" type initiatives would have a positive outcome. There were some misgivings that people with different backgrounds in "Friends of the Forest" groups could dilute the ethos of the Forestry Commission Association.
2. Comments on discontinuing the newsletter FCA Today to be replaced with the Forest Forum were more mixed. Perhaps reducing publication from three to two issues per year might help, but we feel that we would not solve the editor's increasingly difficult task of obtaining enough articles to make publication worthwhile. On balance we feel that we should give the Forest Forum a try.

Therefore we will do the following:

1. Charles will advise each of the three national agencies of the contacts in each of the Groups and ask that they direct new retirees direct to their nearest Group rather than to Charles in the first instance. Charles will devise an open invitation letter, to be lodged early in the New Year with each agency to be handed to each employee leaving either on retirement or to other employment.
Charles will still retain the role of Liaison Officer for the FCA.
2. We shall retain the website, but the magazine section FCA Today will be replaced with the Forest Forum with, we hope, a steady flow of contributions from the membership to be posted at any time during the year. Richard will work on a new look website with Diane Birkett (who does all the technical IT stuff). It is intended that the Forest Forum is opened for each calendar year and then archived at the year end.
Richard would retain overall editorial responsibility for the website.

FCA Today Facebook Group

by Ian Blake

Some years ago I set up a facebook group page, FCA Today, initially aimed at encouraging former retired colleagues to stay in touch with the Forestry Commission Association (FCA), albeit digitally. This included former FC Staff now employed by Natural Resources Wales and latterly those who have since joined Scottish Forestry. A decision was approved by Group members earlier this year to also invite family members of FC retirees who had sadly passed away.

FCA Today is a private group, with me currently acting as administrator, simply acting as a means for our 'forestry family' to keep in touch. Presently there are 128 members and it would be great to increase these numbers significantly, but in order to join, YOU will need a Facebook (FB) account. I'm aware there are concerns about social media and IT generally, but given the current circumstances, with Coronavirus restrictions and the advent of Zoom get-togethers, perhaps now is the time to 'take the plunge'. You can set the parameters for privacy etc. on your FB page and there's no need for us to be individual FB friends as you can send a request to me via my FB account, or indeed FB's Messenger system. If anyone lacks confidence in setting up an account just follow the links at the end of this piece, or get one of your grandchildren to help you out, I know my two aged 10 and 8 are already well ahead of me in this tech age.



Visit us on
Facebook

If you have a facebook account, 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.

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

Do you have any articles for publication on the FCA Today website?



Send your articles to the editor

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

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



Bats at Windy Pits

by Nick Gibbons

A planned bat visit to the 'Windy pits' to see bats swarming at their hibernation sites near Helmsley did not come off as we were not allowed access to the sites by the landowners. However, Brian Walker mentioned there were some pits in Dalby forest that may be worth investigating and supplied me with the locations.



I managed to find these and installed bat loggers at the two I could find and returned with Brian three days later to see what bat usage there was. The 'Old Fat and Past It' pit showed a count of over 3800 files during the previous three nights and was clearly being very well used. The Newclose Rigg site had only a few files on the recorder and was also fairly overgrown including quite a few brambles.

We managed to clear these with extended tools and left the bat detector in place to see if there was any difference over the next few days.



Old Fat and Past It pit

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Bats at Windy Pits *Continued*

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Newclose Rigg before and after clearance



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Bats at Windy Pits *Continued*

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A small group attended the Old Fat and Past It pit three nights later to see if there was any swarming. Sadly, the temperature dropped and only a couple of bats emerged fully, the others flying around in the pit entrance. Luckily, with an infra red monocular, everyone had a chance to watch the bats whizzing around in the confined space. A further 3000 files were recorded on the detector in the previous three nights and it is somewhere where we will be able to organise some 'swarming visits' in 2021.



The other good news is that this site has not been identified as a bat hibernation site previously and was purely a place for potholers.

If you want to see what the pit looks like underground there are some good photos on:-

<https://www.yucpc.org.uk/gallery/album.php?id=754>



Forest Forum

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

FC 100th Anniversary Commemorative Planting – An Update

by Simon Malone



In the Spring 2020 edition of FCA Today, I reported on a planting ceremony in Lynford Arboretum to commemorate the FC's 100th birthday. On the 19th February, two species Sweet Gums and a Liquidamber styraciflua were planted by representatives of past and present Forestry Commission staff and the Friends of Thetford Forest. Little did we all realise that little more than a month or so later the nation would go into lock-down and life as we had known it would be utterly changed.

As a result of the lock-down much of the routine work in the forest was put on hold and the Friends, who are responsible for a lot of the minor work and general tidying of the arboretum, were unable to carry out their normal maintenance work for some months.

The spring and summer of 2020 were also quite challenging for newly planted trees and they were left very much to fend for themselves. Fortunately, staking, guarding and fitting of large mulch mats had been carried out prior to lock-down.

Eric Rogers looking pleased with his work!



In the East of England, always the lowest rainfall area in the UK, the overall rainfall was close to or a little below the long-term average for the area and there were two very hot spells where temperatures were in the upper thirties for a few days. However, the site is close to lake level and the soil quite moisture retentive, so drought stress was minimal.

Happily, despite the enforced neglect, all of the trees have so far not just survived, but actually appear to be thriving. The recent photograph shows them just as they are beginning to show the autumn colour for which these trees are remarkable.

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FC 100th Anniversary Commemorative Planting – *Continued*

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The site is a challenging one in some ways, being at the bottom of a long slope and in an area liable to late spring frosts. The next couple of seasons will be important as to the long-term potential of this planting, but so far so good!



Coming soon

The Forest Forum on the FCA Today website

With your articles, letters and news

www.fca-today.com

Trees (in a Nut-Shell)

By Don Grant



Trees have been growing on our planet for 370 million years, and, not only are they the oldest living organisms, with many being 1,000 years old, and some considerably older, they are also the largest, with some exceeding 100 metres in height, and weighing 1,500 tonnes. An old saying would have us believe that 'an oak tree spends 300 years growing, 300 years resting and 300 years dying.' There are a number of contenders for the oldest tree, with a bristlecone pine 3,000 metres up in the White Mountains in Eastern California reputedly 4,700 years-old, although Scotland's Fortingall yew in a churchyard in Perthshire, could be 5,000 years-old, and a spruce in Fulfjallet, Sweden, is reputed to be 9,550 years-old.

In 2011 The Woodland Trust published a book called *Why Willows Weep*, which comprised a selection of short 'tales from the woods', with such authors as Tracy Chevalier, Joanne Harris, Philip Hensher, Kate Mosse, Maggie O'Farrell, Ali Smith and Terence Blacker, in all, nineteen authors writing about nineteen of the UK's native trees. A native British tree is defined as a genus that colonised the land when the glaciers melted after the last Ice Age, 10,000 years ago, and before the UK was disconnected from mainland Europe. By far the most common of British native trees is the Oak. In the 2,500 acres of Richmond Park, founded by King Edward I in the thirteenth century as a hunting ground, seven species make up 90% of the

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Trees (in a Nut-Shell) *Continued*

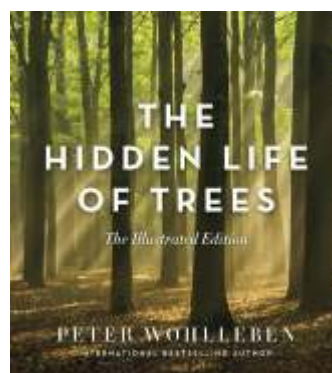
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130,000 trees, with Oak being the predominate at 45%, Beech amounting to 20%, with a further 20% across five species, including Hawthorn, Blackthorn, Birch, Hornbeam and Chestnut, and the remaining 10% comprising Willow, Alder, Cedar and Sugar Maple. There are 1,400 'veteran' trees, known as the Crown Jewels, including one venerable old gentleman known as the Royal Oak, which is at least 800 years-old.

An exhibition in the Southbank Centre entitled *Among the Trees*, examines how artists have used trees as inspiration for their work, and highlight our relationship with trees and forests. There is a projection of a 30 metre-high Spruce, but displayed horizontally, by Eija-Liisa Ahtila, and a vast forest constructed entirely from cardboard by Eva Jospin. There is a cast from a 2,000 year-old olive tree by Ugo Rondione, which reaches to the ceiling of the gallery. Alongside sculptures and installations, drawings, paintings and photographs, there are artworks that celebrate the soaring scale of trees. At a time when the destruction of the world's forests is accelerating at a record pace, *Among the Trees* vividly highlights the indispensable role that trees play in our lives and imaginations.

A German forester, and now author, Peter Wohlleben, wrote a book in 2015 called *The Hidden Life of Trees*, proposing that most individual trees of the same species are connected to each other through their root systems, and that, exchanging nutrients and helping neighbours in times of

need, leads him to the conclusion that forest are superorganisms with interconnections much like ant colonies. A revolution has been taking place in the scientific understanding of trees, and Wohlleben is the first writer to convey its amazements to a general audience. The latest scientific studies, conducted at well-respected universities in Germany and around the world, confirm what he has long suspected from close observa-



tion in the forest: trees are far more alert, social, sophisticated, and even intelligent, than we thought. Suzanne Simard is best known for her extensive research into mycorrhizal networks, and she identified hyperlinked 'hub trees,' as she calls them in scientific papers, or 'mother trees.' Peter Wohlleben has referred extensively to her research in his book, and notes that forest networks feed rain systems, each tree releasing tens of thousands of gallons of water into the air annually. There are many scientific dissenters about these latest findings both in the UK and in the US, notably statements like, 'the older the tree, the more quickly it grows.'

The eminent British scientist Richard Fortey expressed serious and well-argued criticisms about these new-found, hippie 'tree-hugging' philosophies. Now semi-retired, he was a paleontologist at the Natural History Museum in London, and visiting

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Trees (in a Nut-Shell) *Continued*

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professor of paleobiology at Oxford. He recently published *The Wood for the Trees*, a book about four acres of woodland that he owns in the Chiltern Hills. It is an authoritative work, and rigorously trimmed of all sentiment and emotion. 'The mother tree protecting its little ones?' he says with gentle scorn. 'It's so anthropomorphized that it's really not helpful. The case is overstated and suffused with vitalism. Trees do not have will or intention. They solve problems, but it's all under hormonal control, and it all evolved through natural selection.' The past few years have seen the release of a rich and varied list of books concerned with woods, including Oliver Rackham's irreverent *Woodlands*, Richard Mabey's whimsically-titled *Beech-combings*, and Sara Maitland's *Gossip from the Forest*.

The UK has about 13% of woodland in its total land cover, whereas in the EU member states, the average is 38%. Government targets up until March 2019 were planting 5,000 hectares, but only 1,420 hectares were covered. In the 26 years up to 2016, a million square kilometres were wiped off the face of the earth. By 2015 humans had felled 40% of the trees grown on the planet. It has been suggested that we need to plant 1.7 billion hectares on treeless land across the world, amounting to one trillion native tree saplings, which experts say would offset two thirds of all carbon emissions from human activities. Professor Rackham contradicts these predictions, saying that 'exhorting people to plant trees to sequester carbon dioxide is like telling them to drink more water to

hold down rising sea levels.' In 2004, Wangari Maathai, a Kenyan professor of Biological Sciences and founder of the Green Belt Movement, won The Nobel Peace Prize for 'sustainable development, democracy and peace,' after having initiated the planting of 30 million trees across Kenya. In Ethiopia in July 2019, 350 million trees were planted IN ONE DAY!

Richard Powers won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 2019 for his absorbing, arboreal novel *Overstory*, in which eight completely different characters' stories are played out over many decades, and initially, so diverse, there seems to be no rhyme or reason, except that they all involve trees. Sometimes, the sheer weight of description threatens to fell the interwoven themes, but the quality of the writing wins in the end, broken down, as it is, into four headings: Roots, Trunk, Crown and Seeds. *Roots* begins with the Hoel family, Norwegians who emigrated to America in the mid-19th century, before setting out for Iowa to start a farm. They brought with them chestnut seeds which they planted at the edge of a cornfield. One of the trees made it to maturity, far enough from any other chestnuts to survive the great blight



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Trees (in a Nut-Shell) *Continued*

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that swept through the US in the early 1900s. It becomes a landmark in the surrounding area, and the old man photographed the tree on the same day in March every year, a tradition he passed on to his son, and then grandson, and then great-grandson. Another one of the characters is a botanist, Patricia Westerford, who controversially proposes that trees are communal, and that they communicate with each other, an idea that costs her an academic job, before her research is taken seriously by other, younger academics and it makes her famous. Her work, on the 'wisdom' and utility of trees, underpins much of the novel, and her beliefs are not incompatible with Dr Simard. In this work of fiction, there are many underlying truths and theories, and an astonishing array of rich, dendroidal descriptions, which fill the air with poetical joy. 'In summer, water rises through the xylem and disperses out of the million tiny mouths on the undersides of leaves, a hundred gallons a day evaporating from the tree's airy crown into the humid Iowa air.'

One piece of research that was carried out in the 1970s in East Africa reads like fiction, as David Attenborough explained in his 1995 book *The Private Life of Plants*. Giraffes love acacia leaves, and they are able to eat from the very top of the trees, much to the annoyance of the acacia tree in question. 'The African acacias, well-protected though they may be by their thorns, use distasteful chemicals in their leaves as a second line of defence. Furthermore, and most remarkably, they warn one another that they are doing so. At the same time as

they fill their leaves with poison, they release ethylene gas which drifts out of the pores of their leaves. Other acacias within fifty yards are able to detect this and as soon as they do so, they themselves begin to manufacture poison and distribute it to their leaves.' However, the giraffes got wise to this game, and they moved, usually upwind, further away to a part of the Savannah where they could find trees that were oblivious to what was going on.

It is curious that so little has been made of Year of the Tree, and even less of the International Day of the Forest, which is a UN-inspired initiative, focusing on Forests and Biodiversity, held annually on 21st March 'to raise awareness of the importance of forests to people and their vital role in poverty eradication, environmental sustainability and food security. Sustainable management of all types of forests are at the heart of unlocking challenges of conflict-affected, developing and developed countries, for the benefit of current and future generations.' In the European Tree of the Year contest, the Czech Republic's 350-year-old Guardian of the Flooded Village pine was this year's winner of the prestigious award, with Croatia's 242-year-



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Trees (in a Nut-Shell) *Continued*

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old Ginkgo from Daruvar securing the second and Russia's Lonely Poplar the third place, a youngster at only a century old.

John Healey, professor of Forest Sciences at Bangor University, has scoffed at the government's ambitious plans for hitting climate goals by planting indigenous species such as oak and beech. He says we have no choice but to engage with the commercial sector in large-scale planting of imported conifers, despite fears of the impact on habitats and wildlife. He says that indigenous species grow too slowly to be an efficient option for rapid carbon fixation, and that 'unharvested woodland eventually stops sequestering carbon, when it reaches maturity.' On an even more pessimistic note, he says that, although it would be nice to have 'native species of woodland broadleaved trees and lots of diversity, it's just not economically

possible.' Oh dear. There we have the dilemma in a nut-shell.

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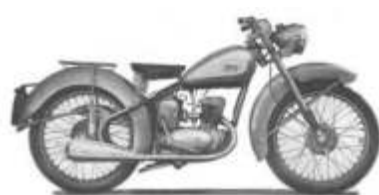
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Get on Yer Bike!

by Ted Baldwin

In August 1951, whilst working as a ganger at Kielder, I received instructions to report to the FTS at Lynford Hall on the 1st October. Enclosed was the appropriate train warrant and a reminder that I should bring with me my ration book, towels, sports kit and bicycle (that must be maintained in good working order).



On my arrival at Lynford Hall, I saw that an assortment of suitable bikes was being off loaded by my fellow students. However what later became apparent was that in addition to the mandatory bikes, some students possessed a more lively means of transport. Most memorable of these were motorbikes which ranged from an old BSA Bantam, that could probably just manage 30mph with a favourable following wind, to a Vincent 1000cc that could certainly reach the magical "ton".

There were also a couple of cars. The first was an ancient pre-war Austin 7 which, rather ominously, carried a spare engine along with the spare tyre. But the "Piece de resistance" for student transport was the shiny new red and cream MG sports car. Vroom, vroom!



Now there have to be stories behind Ted's memories. What happened after their arrival at Lynford Hall? Did the Austin 7 need the spare engine? Did the MG go vroom vroom? Did the Vincent make the "ton"? There have to be members around who recall their heady student days and their much loved means of transport, either at Lynford Hall or elsewhere. As a student, I had a small green Ford Anglia/Thames van. Being a commercial vehicle, it was limited to 40mph. Ha ha! I was stopped once by the North Wales police who said that they knew I used to exceed the speed limit and that one day they would get me. They never did! Ed.

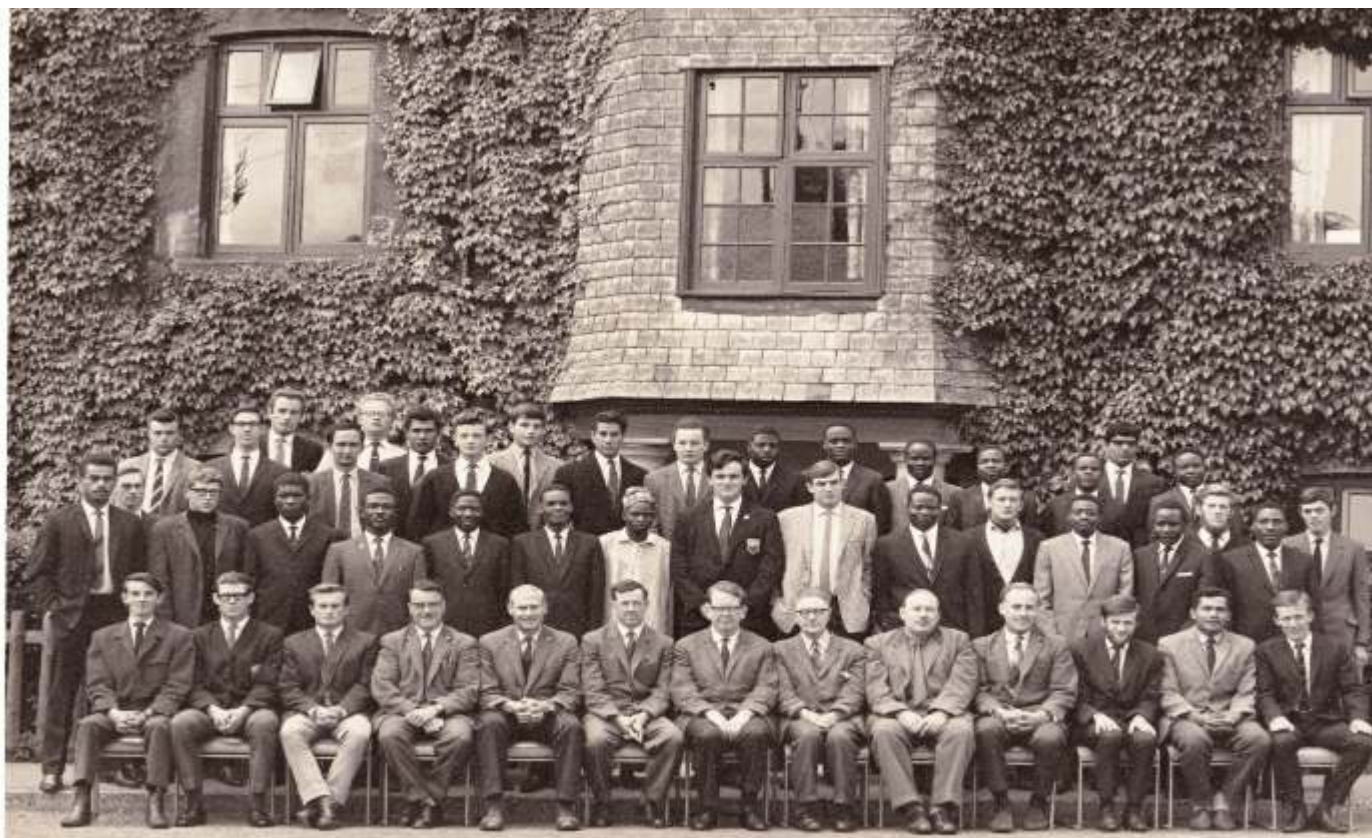
Visit the FCA website at www.fca-today.com

Some Happy Memories of Dean FTS 1965-67

by Simon Malone

Back in 2015, in the second of the articles I wrote about my career with the Forestry Commission, I covered the period spent at the Dean FTS. I thought perhaps I could now add to this with a few reminiscences about the happy days spent there.

I was at the Dean FTS during the period 1965-67. Our senior course was small in terms of numbers, (9), and my own course comprised 10 students from the UK and 7 students from a number of Commonwealth countries; Malaysia, Mauritius, Seychelles and Fiji, with all of us there for the full two years. During this period, running concurrent with our own course each year, there was a separate 6-month course for students from a number of African countries, notably Nigeria, Malawi and Tanzania. I have put names to all the students in the photograph of my year taken with our senior course. Regretfully, I cannot name any of the African students for which I apologise.



Front seated Left to Right: J. d'Arch Smith; S. Malone; T. Coxwell; D. Davies; G. Waygood; T. Joslin; J. Goodwin; H. Jones; R. Twallin; J. Niles; I. Ledgard; K. Vunisasari; M. Steward.

Middle Left to Right: S. Turuva; D. White (hidden); D. Whitaker; xx; xx; xx; xx; xx; M. Stone; B. Gregory; xx; M. Blud; xx; xx; M. Taylor; xx; D. Case.

Back Left to Right: R. McKinley; M. Mason; R. Newborough; K. Pestana; H. Milner; M. Mungloo; J. Latter; I. Cox; S. Rousetti; D. Gregory; xx; xx; xx; xx; xx; R. Venkatasamy; xx.

Missing - P. Jefferson due to family bereavement.

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Some Happy Memories of Dean FTS 1965-67 *Continued*

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Hidden away in the school library were some faded and battered copies of a school magazine called "Taproots". This appeared to have been produced sporadically over the years, very much dependent on the enthusiasm of a particular year group.



Our 1965 year resolved to resurrect this publication and so "Taproots" came to life, a 30 page epic contributed to by many of our year. A simple production, stapled and tape bound, it was to be sold in aid of student funds on a sliding scale of charges. Our editor and main mover and shaker, John Latter devised a set of price/seniority charges which meant students paid a low price and the school principal a rather hefty charge! These charges were set out in the form of curves very similar to those for Yield Classes!



Another happy event each winter was the annual school dinner dance. Tradition had it that it was held in the Anchor Hotel in Tintern. Wives and girlfriends were encouraged to come and I remember one year in particular which

was bitterly cold. The majority of the girl friends were offered overnight accommodation in the home of Tony Joslin, the vice principal. Tony being a bachelor at that time seemed to lead a fairly frugal life and heating his home was not high on his priority list. The girls spent a cold and miserable night while we students were snug as bugs in our nice warm pits in the school! Note the extravagant price increase over a year!!



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Some Happy Memories of Dean FTS 1965-67 *Continued*

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There were few sad times, thankfully, but the loss of two of our Fijian students in a car accident while returning to the school from the 1965 Christmas break dampened spirits considerably. Kit and Seru were hugely popular being outgoing and extrovert in all they did. Their funerals, held in the local Parkend church were very moving with a choir of Fijian countrymen, then based in army barracks in Aldershot, attending and singing a very beautiful Fijian hymn. They are laid to rest in the cemetery in Parkend.



The school principal, John Goodwin, fondly known as "Drag" on account of his slow drawn out manner of speech, lived just outside Parkend and occasionally in the summer months would host a "garden party" for staff and students. His large garden accommodated a mobile bowling alley and this would be set up, the beer would flow and we would all have a great evening.

An annual cricket match took place on the Parkend cricket green. For the life of me, I can't remember if it was the school against the locals or seniors v juniors! Perhaps someone will remind me.

I often went off on my bike exploring the area and once found myself under the then uncompleted Severn Bridge.

A spectacular site and on another occasion, I cycled across it, experiencing the fairly severe shaking as heavy traffic thundered by.



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Some Happy Memories of Dean FTS 1965-67 *Continued*

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During this period the last NCB coal mine closed and this in turn was to lead to the ending of rail traffic into Parkend as coal exports had been the major traffic from the area.



Northern United coal mine in 1966

The final act so to speak was sitting final exams followed in due course by prizegiving. During the short period between exams and while waiting for our results, Derek Davies, one of our instructors, arranged for us to spend a working holiday in two Outward Bound cabins in Dovey Forest, his old stamping ground. Here we put the newly invented line thinning ideas into practice setting out a series of plots with various configurations of thinning in an unbrushed Sitka crop – 1 in 3, 1 in 4, 2 in 5 etc. etc.

FORESTER'S CERTIFICATE			
D. Case	K.J. Festana		
R.A.G. Coxwell	S.Y. Roussety	FIRST YEAR PRIZEWINNERS	
W.H. Gregory	J.F. d'Arch Smith		
J.S. Latter	M.J. Steward	1st	2nd
J.W. McKinley	M.A. Stone		
S.E. Malone	R.K. Venkatasamy	G. Carmuthers	R.O. Hendrie
R.M. Mason	D.G. White		

PRIZEWINNERS			
Medallist	R.A.G. Coxwell		
2nd Prize	J.S. Latter		

SENIOR VERDENER'S PRACTICAL FORESTRY PRIZE			
R.A.G. Coxwell			

PROJECT PRIZES			
1st	2nd		
J.W. McKinley	R.A.G. Coxwell		

OVERSEAS FORESTERS			
J.O. Akinduro	M.L.B. Liabunya		
S.O. Amoko	W. Lombe		
E.O. Bangbala	P.C. Mafikiri		
P.J. Kadondo	A.M. Mbandawire		
J.L. Kangala	O. Oniyale		
G.A. Kiogwe	G.L. Ng'Ambi		
A. Kwebiha	E.D. Sisya		

DAVID NYANZA PRIZEMAN			
J.O. Akinduro			
	2nd		
	S.O. Amoko		

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Some Happy Memories of Dean FTS 1965-67 *Continued*

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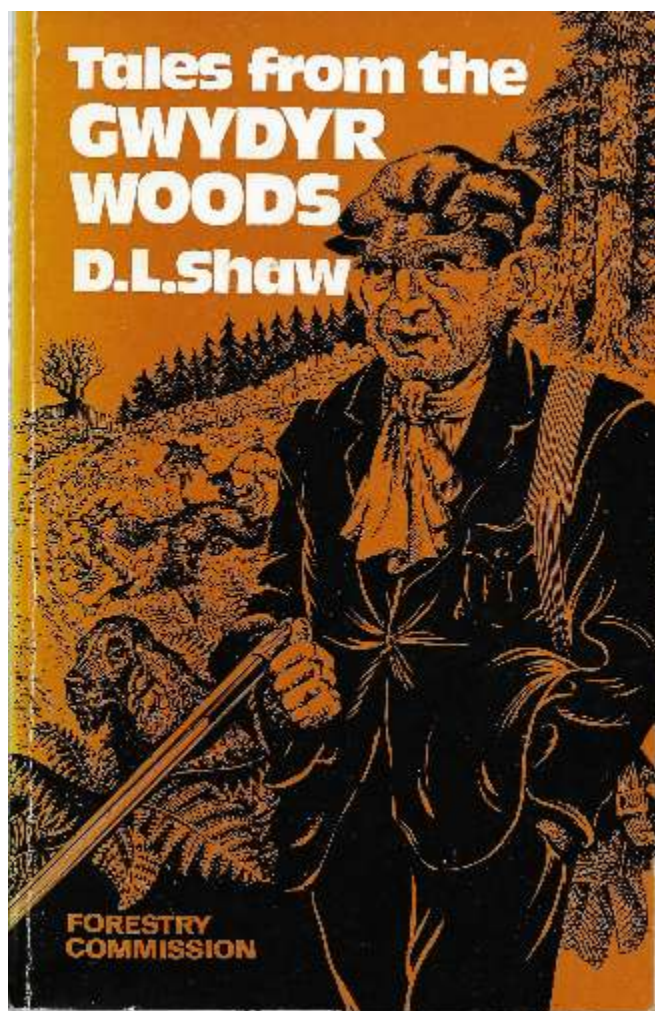
All in all I can honestly say that my two years in Forestry School were amongst the happiest of my life. It is easy to understand why past generations of Forestry Commission foresters who shared this experience in one of the many Training Schools became such a tight knit group of people.

Students at work and play!!



Tales from the Gwydyr Woods

by Arthur Miller



Like many of us the Covid 19 lockdown has prevented me from making new memories, so I have gone back to my bookshelf and started to read again some of my favourites. One of them is a smallish volume entitled '*Tales from the Gwydyr Woods*'. It was published by the Forestry Commission in 1977 and cost the princely sum of £1.

When we all joined the Forestry Commission, no matter our age, grade or rank, it was a fully functioning organisation, with departments to cover all contingencies, from practical forestry to research, workshops, land agents, surveyors and a multitude of other disciplines, supported by all the paperwork and clerical staff needed to keep the organisation running.

Now, in your mind's eye, go back to the early days of a brand new Forestry Commission, of open hill, unskilled staff, remote postings and only a motor bike and sidecar as transport for the head forester. A time when the First World War was in the very recent past, the country had no money, men were desperate to find work, and the whole population was looking for a return to normality. Such are the times described in the chapters of the book.

The Forestry Commission began its activities at Gwydyr in 1921, when there was no tradition of forestry, no workers, and no skills other than those gained through farming, smallholding and quarrying. The rest had to be created, and over time the skills base was built up, traditions formed, a code of conduct and practice was developed, normal forestry estate systems were established, trees were planted and grown. After 100 years we now have the benefit of the lessons that those men learned and the hard work that they did, often in inclement weather and under difficult circumstances. We also have the whole magnificence of Gwydyr forest, from the deep river valley to the lofty open moors.

The book was written by D.L. Shaw, the son of James Lynburn Shaw, who took charge of Gwydyr Forest as head forester in 1925. He was promoted to district officer in 1939 and maintained his association with Gwydyr until 1946. It is based on his father's notes and stories, and tells of times long past.

James Shaw had a private estate background and in those early years had responsibility for forest management – nurseries, ground preparation, plantation work and protection – but also for estate work, the renovation of run-down smallholdings and farms.

He would have had a lot of responsibility, but also a great deal of authority.

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Tales from the Gwydyr Woods *Continued*

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There are many stories in the book including tales of forest fires, the trapper, (forest ranger), dirty deeds in the old mines and the adventures of the Home Guard platoon.

However, the one that puts it all in context for me is the first story of the four untrained men who became the estate staff, refurbishing cottages and smallholdings from a standing start.

When the Forestry Commission took over lease of the land, they also took over the smallholdings. The policy was to restore the holdings, make them habitable and then to rent them out to forest workers. Each holding would comprise about ten to twenty acres of reasonable agricultural land in addition to some rough grazing. It was envisaged that about seventy holdings would be occupied and that they would absorb some of the workforce shed by other local industries. A thousand acres of afforested land could support ten men and their families, instead of only

three or four families struggling to make ends meet.

It was a sound policy that ensured a supply of labour in difficult times. There was also a spread of workers throughout the forest who would be close to their point of work and also available for rapid response in case of fire.

However, there was a snag – a total lack of trained staff to do the work. Supplies and equipment could be delivered to site by horse and cart hired from local farmers or hauliers and was the only way of transporting material to remote spots along rough roads. Builders could not be found and clerks of works were unheard of. So a request was circulated for volunteers to form the basis of an estates squad. In the event, our new men were only partly skilled and had no experience of tackling major refurbishment projects.

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Tales from the Gwydyr Woods *Continued*

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There is a tradition in Wales of giving nicknames to individuals, based on some facet of their life, to distinguish them from others of the same surname. So, let us meet our four volunteers.

The charge hand was William Jones, known as 'Blydi Will', because of his use of that word, not as a curse, but just part of the rhythm of his speech. He was, apparently, temperate, likeable and hard working. The second man was also a William Jones, who had the epithet of 'Will hanner peint', or 'Half Pint', from his habit of drinking no more than half a pint of ale at the pub! The other Will said 'He is just Blydi moderate and knows when a drop's enough for him.

Parry Thomas was the third member, a relaxed, easy going man, who never became riled or annoyed. He was called Parry 'plaster' because he did all the plastering jobs at the smallholdings. Finally we come to the fourth member – Aled Roberts, called Aled 'Black Horse', from the fact that it was the only pub in Llanrwst that he would frequent. He was full of fun and nothing got him down.

Despite their different characters they blended into a reliable team, and their work endured for many years. The pattern was that Blydi Will would meet the head forester and visit the properties to be refurbished, measurements were taken and a schedule of work agreed. Any materials required would be agreed and delivered to site ready for the work to start. They would then meet up at a convenient place, walking into the job, sometimes over quite a long distance, ready for a 7.30am start.

At Pentre Isaf, for example, the work included, a 'Blydi lot of roofing', new down spouts, a new chimney, strengthening of the inside walls, two new doors and a new oven. The boss wanted the work done in a fortnight, they completed it in nine days. Whilst there, they found an old bag containing a brass coffin plate, some coins and a collection of horse brasses. The coffin plate went to the local chapel, the coins to a museum and the brasses were shared among them.

They worked together as a team, had a tight budget and a tight timetable.. The programme was arranged at least a week in advance.

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Tales from the Gwydyr Woods *Continued*

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They grew in experience and their own shortcomings imposed but few restrictions on their progress.

Blydi Will helped everywhere, Will Half Pint undertook the carpentry, Parry Richards plastered away carefully and Aled 'Black Horse' laboured for all of them.

Sadly, the years of 1928 and 1929, were very hard, in the middle of the Depression. Both money and work were in short supply. Tasks could not be undertaken, and the men became frustrated at the lack of money and the inactivity. Slowly things improved and by the end of 1929 our four heroes were back in action.

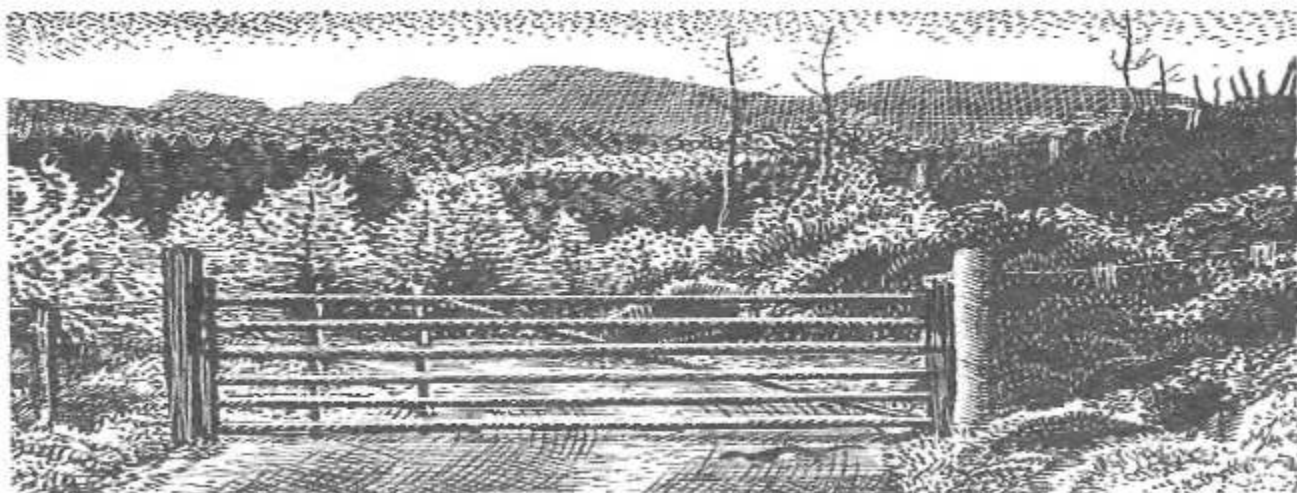
The smallholding at Hafod-yr-Ywen gave them problems with water supply. How to lead the water from a mountain stream 200 yards away, passing a rocky outcrop and into the building which nestled into the hill. Do they go up, or down, to get around the rocks and still maintain the fall for the correct water flow? Eventually the problem was solved by the head forester, who brought in one of the other men on his forest squad who had experience with dynamite. The route was blasted through

the rocks, the correct fall achieved and the water supply fitted.

Sanitation was as important as the water supply, most facilities were primitive, a couple of round poles over a sunken bucket! Outside sanitation was provided and a standard issue of toilet and outhouse was designed and constructed from timber and corrugated iron. Great care was taken in locating the outhouse, not too near or too far from the house, not uphill or down, but preferably on the level, given all the difficulties of any particular site. The comfort of the occupants was also considered. One batch of seats, made from rough and splintery timber, was returned to the manufacturer as unfit for purpose.

Between 1925 and 1932 more than fifty smallholdings and outbuildings were refurbished and made habitable. Many of them can still be seen in the forest, as homes or holiday lets. A credit to the hard work, persistence and adaptability of Will, Will, Parry and Aled.

Finally, my thanks to D.L.Shaw and to the Forestry Commission for giving me such an entertaining volume. It is well written, with many stories in a true conversational tone. It describes how many of the things that we now take for granted, were put into place.



The Road to Llyn Geirionydd

Retirement

by Eric Rogers



I am told that some folk dread retirement. Maybe working for Forestry England / Wales / Scotland will be better, but after nearly 30 years retirement myself I know which I would choose. Retirement releases you to do all the things you didn't have time for or, in the early days, the money either. Usually by age 60, the house is paid for and the children are established in their own careers – if not already having children of their own!

It is time to do all the things you wanted to do, providing it's legal, like robbing a bank, of course!

Before I retired, I had organized the FC's section at the Royal Norfolk Show. I was asked by the secretary if I would organize a woodland craft section in future years. As I was already into pole lathe turning and chair



making, I accepted. For many years I brought together craftsmen and women in woodcraft, basketry, straw work, metal work etc. in a woodland in the showground. I even got Prince Harry to have a go on the pole lathe guided by one of my lady turners. I took my turn on the lathe and chair making as well. I joined the Association of Pole Lathe Turners in its very early days and went on courses with some of the best. This also resulted in my going over to the USA to the re-creation of the early town of Williamsburg.



I also went to Novgorod in Russia where excavations of early timber log houses were carried out each summer, producing fine articles; spoons, bowls etc. in excellent condition.

A highlight in my retirement life was going to Sweden for a week, living with Willie Sundquist in the far north, learning woodcraft. I was amazed by how good his vegetables were until I realized the link with the "long drop" toilets! Willie was the premier teacher of woodcraft in Sweden. A lovely man gone, I'm afraid, a few years ago.

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Retirement *Continued*

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I didn't neglect the British countryside. A small group, mostly retired FC folk, had great days out in the winter. We went birdwatching on the north Norfolk coast seeing spoon-bill, snow bunting, waders of all sorts, gulls etc.

I also recorded our Norfolk butterflies and, for a good few years, spent many days out with a group of botanists, recording all over the county for the New Flora of Norfolk.



Sessile Oak

Another tree I had noticed occasionally was the black poplar, usually old, huge and decaying.

The County Council took notice and I collected cuttings which they grew on and distributed them saving this wonderful tree for the future.

While I worked in north Norfolk I came across a number of sessile oak which at that time was considered a doubtful native here. So when I retired I made a point of recording any I saw, mostly old pollards.

The highpoint of the day was visiting a private wood with the Norfolk Forestry Club one evening which was exclusively old sessile pollards. Sessile are now well established as a Norfolk native species.



Black Poplar

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Retirement *Continued*

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Our daughter now lives in the Smokey Mountains in the USA and gets raccoons and even bears in the garden. We have had a couple of trips to stay.

The second trip was to see the total eclipse of the sun. Once in a lifetime! The Smokey Mountains have a wonderful selection of animals and birds.

The birds especially are brightly coloured. Hummingbirds are easily tempted to sugar solution feeders.

All the ash were dead from Ash Die-back – good winter fuel! From a high point in the mountains, you can see the forest for 50 miles around. It is nearly all second growth, but – wow!

The Smokies are mostly a National Park where the Park Authorities do not allow felling. Museums include the life of the settlers and the native Indians, shabbily treated by European settlers, their civilization not far behind ours.

We have managed two or three trips to Crete, mainly botanising, the last with the family, and more recently a coach holiday as far as Switzerland as well as coach trips to Lancaster and Barnstaple. It's good to let someone else do the organising and the driving these days.

With Covid, and being 90 next year, life will perhaps not be so interesting, but there will be the garden and maybe – just maybe – I may try to get to grips with the computer and some of the other gismos which are becoming necessary to lead a full life these days – we shall see!



The Gwydyr Forest

by Arthur Miller



Arthur Miller

I have been a member of the Cyclists' Touring Club (now entitled British Cycling) for many years, and have been associated with my local group, the Chester and North Wales, for some 40 years.

The group was founded in 1939, a few weeks before the start of World War II, by the Chester section part of the Merseyside District Association.

From its earliest days, the section and then the group had a newsletter, or magazine, which was issued periodically, depending upon the availability of editors, paper and copy. A bit like FCA Today!

Another part of the tradition in those days, just before and after the conflict, was an annual competition for the Davis Cup. The competition was based on several categories, including regularity of attendance on rides, map reading, photography and articles or essays submitted to the judging panel, and often included in the magazine.

Cycling is not just a matter of sweating up hills and swooping down the other side with a 'Wheee!' There are many miles of gently undulating or flat lanes when two can ride together and have a conversation. Plus of course, pub and picnic lunches!



A group of Riders in a Woodland Trust woodland near a memorial to a former president

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The Gwydyr Forest *Continued*

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Start of Veterans' 100 mile ride. Riders must be over 50 and complete the ride in 12 Hours



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The Gwydyr Forest *Continued*

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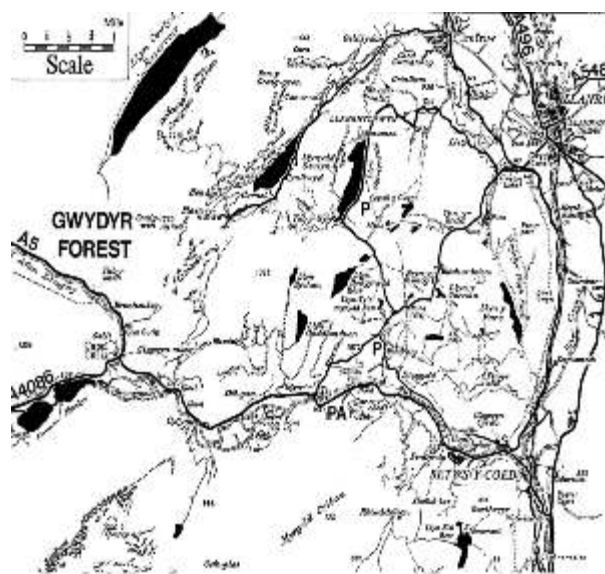
One of my fellow cyclists was Dick Bellingham, a quiet, gentle man, an artist and musician who loved nature. He once told me that he had been to Gwydyr Forester Training School, my Alma Mater Sylvestris, just after the war. Then opportunities were being made available for returning servicemen and there was a need for skilled men in many disciplines.

Sadly, Dick found that the duties, responsibilities and financial constraints of being a forester were too great and he left the industry.

He produced this article for the November 1952 issue of Awheel, the group magazine. It is remarkable for the clarity of writing, for the way it demonstrated the wide variety of articles that appeared in our local cycling magazine, and for the fact that he was looking to a future, that is now our past. The Forestry Commission is no more, having been combined into Natural Resources Wales, but, thankfully, Gwydyr is still there and will celebrate its centenary in 2021.

Dick's Article

When the Gwydyr Forest was acquired by the Forestry Commission in 1921 it covered only about 100 acres. Today it is a vastly more ambitious affair of over 20,000 acres, stretching from Dolgarrog south to Llyn Conway, and from the Conway Valley west to Capel Curig. Included in this area are the valleys of the Llugwy, the Lledr, and the Machno, three rivers which in their more turbulent stretches add a vigour to the district which contrasts pleasantly with the more pastoral air of the Conway Valley.



The rivers are well fed too, for there is an average annual rainfall of 48" in the valleys and 100" on the hilltops. Don't imagine from that however that the area is one huge squelchy morass. On the contrary, there are cultivated farmlands covering 1,280 acres, while 620 acres are given over to Forest Workers Holdings. 9,500 acres have been planted with trees so far with a further 3,300 acres still to be planted.

Nurseries take up about 5 acres whilst bog and rock answer for the remaining unplatable 4,600 acres, which are nevertheless suitable for sheep grazing.

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The Gwydyr Forest *Continued*

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Unless hard weather delays matters, the young trees, average 4 to 5 years old, are planted out at the end and beginning of the year, 4'6" to 5' apart according to species. Planting closely protects the trees from extreme weather conditions, also causing them to grow straighter and to put more wood on the stems.

This gives rise to the regimental look which so many of us deplore. It is unfortunate, but we are paying for years of forestry neglect.

As the trees mature and the plantations are thinned by removing the poor specimens, they will look more like the forests of our fancy. Some idea of future promise is given by the fine stand of trees around Gwydyr Uchaf Y.H.A. which was planted long before 1921.

Conifers predominate in the plantations because they are best suited to the poor soil and wet climate. They also give the quickest returns.

The more colourful hardwoods – Oak, Beech, Sycamore, Poplar, Ash and Cherry – have been planted here and there principally to fringe the roads and to help maintain the amenities of the well known beauty spots.

The major stands of conifers that you will find, in order of abundance are, Sitka and Norway Spruce, Douglas Fir, Japanese Larch, Scots Pine, European Larch Lodgepole and Corsican Pine.

There are, in lesser groups such exotics as Thuya, Tsuga, Grand and Noble Fir, Lawson Cypress and Sequoia, the Giant Redwood.

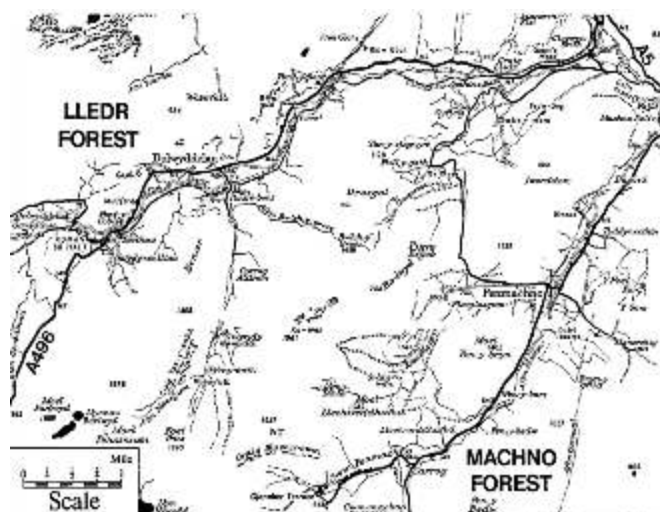
Sitka is recognised by its horrible spikiness and lovely aromatic smell, suggestive of tangerines when cut or bruised.

Norway is the typical Christmas card tree, its needles are shorter and softer than Sitka. Douglas Fir may be recognised by little bubbles in the bark which, when punctured, emit a resinous syrup, pleasantly odorous and fairly palatable.

The most distinctive feature of the Larch is that it sheds its leaves in winter, unusual for a conifer. Larch provides a good firebreak as it kills the undergrowth quickly, which is the real danger of all forest fires.

Scots Pine is distinguished by its red cast flaky bark and grey-green tufted needles in pairs. It will be found invariably at the highest levels of planting.

This is a brief account of the forest. The best way to learn more is to go and walk along the forest sides in public places and to see for yourself.



Ten New England Sawmill Units in Scotland 1917-1918

by Norman Davidson

On the 28th of July 1917 at 3.20pm, G. Howard (Happy) Reed of Acton, Massachusetts pushed the levers and started the saw running, allowing Burpee Steele of Broxboro to cut the very first board by an American sawmill manned by American men from New England working in the north eastern part of Ross-shire (Strathcarron) close to Ardgay village. This sawmill and the felling teams, ten in all, were each manned by just over thirty men, all working to provide desperately required timber for the war effort against Germany.

The cutting of the board was the culmination of many months of frenetic planning, the gathering together of funds, masses of equipment, horses and then the men to do all the work followed by the onward dispatch by ship and rail to northern Scotland. Unusually, each of the American men was on a personal contract to the British Board of Trade for one year from mid June 1917 to mid June 1918. The six New England States of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont each funded one sawmill, including all the equipment, plus a further four mills were funded by private subscription and local companies. Part of their story is told below in extracts from the Acton Historical Society blog and other American reports and newspaper articles. On the Forestry Memories website, a series of photographs and accompanying texts record in some detail the activities in the Bonar Bridge / Ardgay area. It has been established that at least six, possibly seven, sawmill units worked in Strathcarron on Charles Ross's Balnagowan Estate and the remaining three on Andrew Carnegie's Skibo Estate. (Record No 4779 – 4789 or look under 'Groups' and select 'American Sawmill Units').

From the Acton Historical Society blog: -

<https://www.actonhistoricalsociety.org/ww1-sawmill-unit.html>

"One of the almost-forgotten aspects of warfare in World War I was the dependence of the military on wood supplies. The Allies' war effort required a tremendous amount of lumber for their operations. It was used for shoring up trenches and mines, lining roads to make them passable after destruction by shelling and overuse, building structures such as hospitals, ordnance depots and bridges, supporting barbed wire barriers, and manufacturing smaller but necessary items such as boxes for shells.

There were still forests in Britain, many on private lands, but the manpower needs of the war had created a shortage of labor to cut them down. In April 1917, a colonel attached to the British War Office sent a cable to an American colonel in Boston mentioning this critical need. Lumbering was something at which Americans had experience to offer. Government and industry leaders in New England decided to recruit and equip ten units of skilled men and send them to the Allies' aid. Getting approval from both sides of the Atlantic took a month, so the practical work started in mid-May.

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Ten New England Sawmill Units in Scotland *Continued*

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Part of the committee that got the process going was Arthur F. Blanchard of West Acton. Each New England state pledged to equip a sawmill unit at an estimated cost of \$12,000-\$14,000 each, including the cost of food, lodging, medical care, and the issue of "hat, shoes, mackinaw and oilskins" (*Boston Daily Globe*, May 23, 1917, page 10). Private lumbering companies, including Blanchard's, pledged money to pay for four additional companies. The British government would provide transportation to and from England and would pay the men's salaries from the time of sailing, for a term of up to a year's service.

According to the *Boston Daily Globe* (June 12, 1917, page 4), some people predicted that the venture would fail because of scarce labor in lumbering in the United States. This concern was unfounded. The committee advertised and within two days had enough men for three units. Many applications were reviewed and eventually whittled down to about 35 men per unit plus support staff. One of the units was composed mostly of men from Acton and surrounding towns under the leadership of Arthur Blanchard's son Webster. Locally, it was thought of as the Blanchard & Gould company, but its official title was New England Sawmill Unit No. 3.



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Ten New England Sawmill Units in Scotland *Continued*

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The logistics were daunting. Each unit was to have a portable sawmill and everything it needed to function independently for a year, including an engine and boiler, wagons, axes, saws, blacksmiths' and carpenters' tools, harnesses, lamps, cooking utensils, bedding and other camp equipment. Over two thousand different items were procured, carefully accounted for so that each would go to the proper unit, and delivered to Boston. One-hundred and twenty work-ready horses were bought and kept in Watertown until it was time to ship out. On the personnel side, men had to be found who were experienced, "of good character," and willing to sail on two days' notice. Each man needed to be approved for a passport and to sign an individual contract with the British government. Not only were men needed to deal with cutting, transporting and milling the lumber, (in roles such as the interestingly named "head chopper" and "swamper"), but there was also need of cooks, bookkeepers, blacksmiths and veterinary support. In an amazing feat of cooperation and organization, the ten units were created, equipped, and ready to go in a month. America's military was just gearing up at the time, and New Englanders were proud of getting help to their allies so quickly. A self-congratulatory note appeared in an industry publication: "There was not an amateur or an epaulette connected with the affair. It was worked out practically – hence its success." (*Lumber World Review*, Nov. 10, 1917, p. 54)



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Ten New England Sawmill Units in Scotland *Continued*

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When organized, the lumbermen convened in Boston where they stayed at the South Armory. The committee had organized a welcome for them, arranging for them to see a baseball game and be eligible for free motion picture and vaudeville performances. At least some of the men also participated in the Elks' Flag Day parade, accompanied by their mascot, a black bear cub. The Saw Mill Unit's send-off seems surprisingly generous, but they were in the vanguard. There may also have been a less generous motivation; the organizers seem to have been nervous about lumberjacks running amok. "The Ten Mill Units are a civilian, not a military organization, so it was impossible to impose military discipline on the men, many of them loose in a large city for the first time in their lives. However, it must be said, that the men behaved a lot better than anticipated." (*Lumber World Review*, November 10, 1917 p. 54) On the evening of June 14, they were feted at a banquet at the Boston City Club. The *Christian Science Monitor* noted the next day the unusual nature of the dinner as members of the club and the Public Safety Committee in dress suits mingled with lumberjacks, "some in overalls, moccasins, flannel shirts and bared arms, the type of men who fought in the American Revolution." (June 15, 1917, p. 7). Despite concerns over attire, it was reported to have been a successful event.

For the organizers, there was some stress as departure-time approached, because some of the expected men did not show up. According to the *Lumber World Review* article, as late as the morning of the day of departure, they were missing three cooks and a couple of blacksmiths. Somehow they were able to fill the slots, "although the last cook got over the gang plank just as it was being raised." (p. 54).

The Sawmill Unit sailed to New York, arriving on June 16th. On the 18th, they sailed on the troopship *Justicia* to Halifax, staying in port until June 25th, when they were joined by 4,000-5,000 Canadian troops and headed across the Atlantic. A letter written at sea by Whitney Bent described the trip. (*Concord Enterprise*, July 25, 1917, p. 7). Two ships accompanied them at a distance of about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile, one with the horses and wheat and one that carried nitroglycerine. The *Justicia* apparently also carried wheat and lumber. The letter did not mention where all the equipment was, perhaps with the horses. It was, fortunately, a relatively smooth sail. The men were required to wear life preservers at all times. They slept in tightly-arranged hammocks, alternating in direction of head and feet. For most of the journey, there was not much to see except the other ships and occasional whales, although the men kept busy with "church, boxing, cards and reading" and received news and baseball scores by wireless. A dog fight between different groups' pets interrupted the monotony. On July 3, Bent added to his letter that they had been joined by "submarine chasers" and there were possible submarine sightings that day and the night before. The *Boston Daily Globe*, (Aug. 19, 1917, p. 36), printed a letter from Hugh Connors of Maynard who also described the trip. "We arrived, as you probably know, July 5, [in

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Ten New England Sawmill Units in Scotland *Continued*

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Scotland], after a long tiresome trip. The last two days we were in the war zone. We had been on the boat so long that some of the boys didn't care whether we were torpedoed or not." According to Mr. Connors, at the end of the trip, the boat was fired upon by two German submarines. Two torpedoes were fired, but missed by 12 feet or less. A contrasting letter, written to the head of the organizing committee back in Massachusetts by Downing P. Brown, general manager of the ten mill units, said that "For a time there was considerable conjecture about the possibility of submarines, etc., but as soon as the fleet of destroyers arrived, the tension relaxed and everyone felt safe." (*Lumber World Review*, Nov. 10, 1917, p. 56). The different tone may have been because of censors. The *Boston Sunday Globe* (Aug. 26, 1917, a.m. edition, p. 10) quoted a letter from Hap Reed to his parents that the Atlantic crossing was "a most bitter experience – more than I can write about" and that British censors were keeping the men from revealing details of the trip. Whatever actually happened, it was a dangerous time to cross the Atlantic.

After landing in Liverpool, the "lumberjack unit" took a train to northern Scotland where they were to work in forests on private estates, including that of Andrew Carnegie. Unit No. 3 worked at Ardgay. They had to wait for their equipment to arrive by boat. The *Concord Enterprise* (Aug. 22, 1917, p. 3) reported that the "Blanchard & Gould mill



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Ten New England Sawmill Units in Scotland *Continued*

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known officially as Unit No. 3. had the distinction of cutting and sawing the first lumber on foreign soil for the cause of the Allies, by an organized body of men and complete equipment from the United States." The first work was done by Burpee Steele of Boxboro and G. Howard Reed of Acton. Three officers from the general staff were present and inscribed a piece of wood with "First Lumber Sawed by American Lumbermen in this Country, July 28, 1917 at 3:20 p m." A portion was inscribed by Reed and Steele and given as a gift to Arthur Blanchard for Christmas, 1917".

On the Forestry Memories website: -

<https://www.forestry-memories.org.uk/picture/number4778>

the image of the board shows that the actual wording appears to read:

"A piece of the first board sawed by Unit 3 in Scotland thereby winning the first honour of the ten units. Sawed July 28th 1917 - 3.20pm. Presented to Arthur F Blanchard by G Howard Reed of Acton, Mass. and Burpee C Steel of Broxboro, Mass. Dec 25 1917 AD".

Note that in the text above, 'Chopper' refers to a member of the tree felling team and 'Swamper' to the ones that delimbed the felled trees and also cleared the brash from routes to allow extracting by horse and sledge. A complete woods team consisted of 8-10 fellers, 4-5 delimiters and 4-5 'teamsters' horse men.

The mills all appeared to be single roller bench with large inset tooth circular saw blade. The inventory includes an edger saw unit but there are no indications in the photographs that they were used but could have been fitted in some mills. The reports indicate that each mill unit produced, on average, almost two million Board Feet Measure (American measuring convention) of sawn timber products for the war effort. This equates to just over 46,000 cu m of sawn timber and if calculated backwards this could represent around 73,000 cu m of standing trees or about 45-50 acres. Included in the figure is mining timber and from the photographs birch wood was also harvested probably for pirl manufacture. A large quantity of the material was sawn through and through and the three quarter inch waney edged material shipped out to munitions factories etc. for re-sawing to their specific dimensions. Using the above calculations there was more than enough timber in the locations (much of it planted after the Napoleonic wars) to accommodate the 10 sawmill units. Most likely the Canadian Timber Corps worked on some of the residue after the New England units had disbanded. For those interested, a mill, similar to that used by the New England teams, can be seen in the following link but perhaps if of a nervous disposition be warned that guarding and safeguards are very limited! One unfortunate sawmill worker did lose his hand in Strathcarron.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zmkgBuKxbek>

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Ten New England Sawmill Units in Scotland *Continued*

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Below, in part of another report prepared for the Lumber World Review - November Edition of 1917

Part of Committee Report on New England Sawmill Units

"The New England Sawmill Unit was the best sporting event that has come to my attention during the war." So spoke Lord Lovat, Brigadier-General in charge of lumber interests for the British government.

Shortly after the arrival at Argday, Mr. D. P. Brown of the Berlin Mills Company, who had accompanied the expedition as its general manager, resigned that he might return to the United States and enlist in our army. Mr. Edgar C. Hirst, State Forester of New Hampshire, was then put in charge, having on his staff as assistant managers and chief engineers, Mr. H. M. Hackett of Athol, Mass., Mr. G. M. Shea of the Connecticut Valley Lumber Company, and Mr. C. A. Pratt. Mr. Hirst practically remained in control from the time the cutting operations began until the new military unit was fully organized, the commissioned officers of which were in general chosen from the foremen of the New England Sawmill Units.

After Mr. Hirst returned to America he received the following letter from the Assistant Controller of Timber Supplies for Scotland, which expressed the appreciation of that department for the splendid assistance given by the units: —

DEAR MR HIRST: — I desire to convey to you formally the thanks of this department for the valuable assistance it has received from you during the year you have been in charge of the New England Sawmill Units.

Even in this time of great events, the action of the New England States in sending this expedition to Great Britain stands out as a notable episode. Thanks to the energy, zeal and hard work of yourself and your assistants, your mill foremen and men, the gift so generously designed by the Committee has most happily achieved its object. It has provided us in time of need with timber we could not otherwise have produced. It has bequeathed to us valuable plant and horses. On our side it leaves a feeling of profound gratitude and friendship towards the States that sent you over, and of warm personal regard to yourself. . . . Yours very sincerely,

JOHN STIRLING MAXWELL, *Assistant Controller of Timber Supplies, Scotland.*

The formal presentation of the units from New England to Old England was made by Mr. George S. Lewis of Holyoke, Mass., to Right Hon. Arthur James Balfour, Minister of Foreign Affairs for the British government, at the office of the Ministry in London. Mr. Lewis carried with him a letter of gift from the Governor of each New England State. The gratitude of the British government for the help given them by New England in sending this

Continued on next page »————→

Ten New England Sawmill Units in Scotland *Continued*

Continued from previous page

assistance may be gathered from the following letter written to Mr. Lewis just previous to his embarking for America: —

DEAR MR. LEWIS: — I cannot allow you to leave England without again expressing my heartfelt thanks for the splendid help you have given to this country in general and to my department in particular.

Words fail me to give adequate expression to my gratitude, both for the magnificent gift from New England and for the infinite pains which you have taken to insure that Old England should receive the fullest benefits from that gift.

You have given your Lumber Units a splendid start, and I am very sorry that you cannot stay to see the great results which we are all confident they will achieve. You will be sorry, too, but you will have the supreme satisfaction of knowing that your generous sacrifice of time and thought in our interests has rendered us a most signal service.

When you return to England, as I sincerely hope you will, a warm welcome awaits you from the many friends you have made during your brief stay among us; from none will it be warmer and more sincere than,

Yours most sincerely,

J. B. BALL, *Controller of Timber Supplies of the British Board of Trade.*

"The climate of Scotland seemed to agree with the men in more ways than one. They were both well and happy, and most cordially and hospitably welcomed by the people of the neighborhood, who expressed great admiration for the manner in which they conducted themselves and turned out their work. Indeed, so naturally did they succumb to the charms of their Scotch environment that the home passage was enlivened by the presence of a large bevy of *bona fide* Highland lassies as brides.

In the matter of rations, each man was allowed by the British government the following: —

Meat and fish, 18 ounces per day.

Bread, 16 ounces per day.

Sugar, ½ pound per week.

Tea, ½ ounce per day.

All non-rationed articles, such as potatoes, beans, fresh vegetables, coffee and cocoa were obtained in practically unlimited amounts."

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Ten New England Sawmill Units in Scotland *Continued*

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"That the enterprise was not one of merely momentary interest, but was held in appreciative memory after its conclusion, is shown in a letter to Mr. Lewis from the Controller of Timber Supplies of the British Board of Trade: —

SEPTEMBER, 1918.

DEAR MR. LEWIS: — Now that the work of the Lumber Units raised by the Massachusetts Committee on Public Safety has come to a conclusion, consequent upon the enrollment of the men in the United States Forces for service in France, I should like to convey to you my personal appreciation of the work achieved by the officers and the men of these units. I trust that the sojourn of the men in Scotland was not altogether unenjoyable, and I need hardly say how valuable a contribution to the solidarity of the Allied cause is afforded by such work as that performed by the units.

My sincere thanks are also due to you personally for the very considerable share you took in the work of organization.

Yours very truly,
J. B. BALL.

Surely when Lord Lovat, so prominent a representative of that virile England long recognized as the pristine center of sporting life, forgetting any insular prejudices, allowed in his enthusiasm that the New England Sawmill Unit was the sportiest event of the war, he not only repaid the Massachusetts Committee on Public Safety and its supporters in full, but touched that little human chord that makes the whole world kin."

End of quote.

There is an inventory of material tools and equipment that was sent over with the teams. The names of the items, tools, equipment, harness parts will be partially familiar to some readers perhaps those of certain age but none the less the items particularly those to do with steam engines must resonate with those enthusiasts. Each time the list is read an item is picked up on and to take one example note the weights of the axes!

The full inventory can be viewed on Forestry Memories website: -

<https://www.forestry-memories.org.uk/picture/number4795>



Letter to the Editor

Dear Richard,

Will you please ask your readers for images of Scottish forestry signs or signs used in Scottish forests as contributions to the Forestry Memories pages.

Older images are very much a scarce item these days.

I've added two examples to aid the memory.

All the best,

Norman Davidson.

Dunvegan,

Settrington Street,

Huntly,

Aberdeenshire. AB54 8AY.

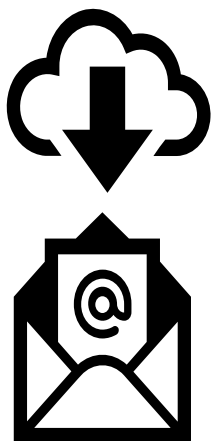
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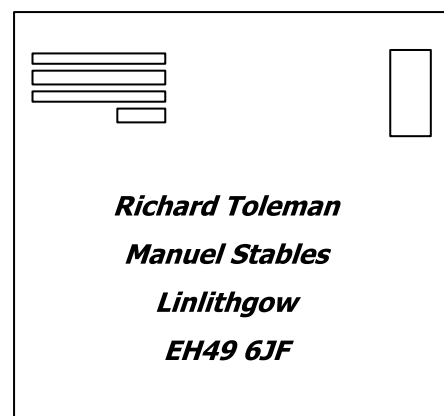


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*by post to: Richard Toleman
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Life in Brief

John Roe has written that **DAVID LEGGE** died at home on 23rd of July after many months of hospitalisation earlier this year.

His career with the Forestry Commission started in late 1947 after demob from the army.

After practical experience and forester training, he was posted to Corris forest North Wales, where he met and married Phyllis. His next posting was to Clocaenog forest, residing in Derwen. After several years he was posted to Ystwyth forest, residing in the newly built Gwel Ystwyth houses. There he was promoted to forester where he retired in 1987. Colleagues and staff always respected him for his fairness and honesty.

By 1970, David had bought a house in Llanbadarn, Aberystwyth and he lived 'in town' for the rest of his life.

For many years he was a church warden and treasurer at St Padarn's Church.

Several years into retirement, Phyllis died and later David married Liz and they moved to a smaller house and garden in the same locality. David was a car enthusiast and favoured BMWs which always shone, being polished weekly. As dementia started, David surrendered his driving licence quoting 'I have a clean record for over 70 years, and want it to remain like that'.

Liz managed to care and look after David at home until this Spring when other medical problems took him into hospital. Because of Covid 19 Liz could not visit him, so as he deteriorated, she brought him home and with help, nursed him to a peaceful end. His funeral was according to his wishes a private family affair at Aberystwyth Crematorium in August.

He leaves a wife, daughter, three grandchildren, step children and step grandchildren.

Our condolences and our sympathy to all of them.

Rob Guest has been advised that **NEIL COOPER** has died, aged 93 in Rangiora, New Zealand.

Neil trained at the Dean FTS and then worked in the Forest of Dean as a junior forester, living in Edge Hills Lodge.

He was a fanatical sportsman, a good cricketer and he also played rugby for Lydney.

He moved to New Zealand and there he had an illustrious career. His most lasting legacy being Whakarewarewa Forest Park where he introduced recreational use at a time when such places were solely focussed on producing timber. Later in his career, he became the country's rural fire guru. He retained his interest in forestry throughout his retirement.

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

Life in Brief

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Douglas (Doug) Pringle
09.05.1931 – 06.11.2020



Douglas (Doug) Pringle's daughter has told me of his recent death.

Douglas was born in Edinburgh on the 9th May 1931, and went to Roseburn primary school and then, when he was older, gained a scholarship to Boroughmuir where the focus was primarily on academic study, but he did enjoy playing rugby at the school's playing fields at Meggetland.

He did well in his studies and planned to be a history teacher until someone came to the school to talk about the Civil Service, and the

Forestry Commission in particular, and his path was set.

He was to spend his entire career in the Forestry Commission, although not spending as much time in forests as he would have liked!

Before embarking on his forestry career, he undertook National Service with the Royal Air Force in Belfast where he excelled at Shinty, as well as other sports including rugby.

Soon after starting work with the Forestry Commission, he was posted to the Inverness office, where he worked as an Executive Officer and, in his spare time, was a Toastmaster.

It was while he was in Inverness, in 1954, that he met a young nurse called Adah Falconer, and they were soon engaged and married on August 10th 1955. They were to go on to have four children, two granddaughters, a great-grandson and over 64 happy years together.

After Inverness, Douglas worked in Edinburgh, Glasgow and then back in Edinburgh before heading to Basingstoke in 1971 to

manage the installation of a new computer system.

In 1974, the Forestry Commission's HQ moved to Edinburgh, and so Douglas moved back to Scotland.

In 1977, Douglas had an opportunity for a promotion and this meant moving down to the Chester office. Douglas and Adah eventually moved back to Edinburgh in 1984 and settled into a double upper flat in Lynedoch Place, overlooking the back of the Drumsheugh Gardens offices where Douglas had previously worked! They were to be very happy there for over 30 years!

Throughout his time at the Forestry Commission, Douglas and Adah always enjoyed taking part in the various activities and outings that were organised by the local offices, and especially enjoyed the regular dances, with the rest of the family often joining them.

Douglas undertook a variety of different roles during his time at the Forestry Commission, including working in Personnel and setting up

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Life in Brief

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computer systems as mentioned previously. His last role before he retired was a senior position in the Commission's Secretariat Division which included liaison between Commissioners and Forestry Ministers and many other bodies.

He was often called to Westminster and Brussels. But his favourite thing was the G&T on the plane back to Edinburgh!

Douglas retired from the Forestry Commission in June 1991, and he was invested



At Buckingham Palace in 1991

with an OBE by the Queen at Buckingham Palace in recognition for his services

to forestry. Following this, Douglas was asked to write a book which was subsequently published "*The Forestry Commission – The first 75 years*". Douglas continued to keep up with the many good friends he had made in the Forestry Commission over the years and he also liked to keep up with what was going on through reading the "Slasher" magazine.

Douglas sadly died in the early hours of November 6th this year, aged 89, with all his family by his side. (Adah had sadly died in November 2019)

The family are sponsoring a bench in the Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh in memory of Douglas and Adah as they loved the gardens so much, particularly the trees!

I and many others who worked at Silvan House knew him well and we always found him both diligent and, more importantly, very entertaining. Ed



Doug & Adah's Golden Wedding Anniversary in 2005

FCA Today on Facebook

by Ian Blake



Visit us on
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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.

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

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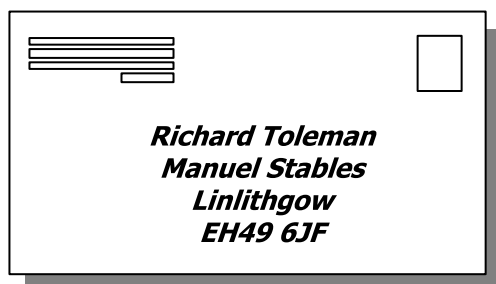
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