

Slasher Commemorative Centenary Edition



James Ogilvie BA, MA, MSc, FICFor, CEnv, started working for the FC as a student in 1978 before joining as an Assistant District Officer in 1980 and finally retiring in 2018. Formerly President of ICF, he has raised over £50k for Tree Aid through his climbing the 7 Summits. Now a Non-executive Director of the Woodland Trust and Corrou, he is also the hands-on owner of an award-winning woodland in Northumberland.



Guest Editor James Ogilvie - complete with slasher!



Editor's Introduction

The Forestry Commission started life as a response to wartime shortages. For several decades it was single-minded in its drive for afforestation, timber production and economic return. It arrested and reversed the wholesale decline of Britain's woodland, transforming forestry into a vibrant, modern and forward-looking sector. As time advanced and with external pressures, its aims broadened into today's mantra of sustainable forest management, encompassing the whole range of economic, social and environmental priorities. As well as becoming the largest land manager in Britain, the Commission became the preeminent forestry research body, the largest provider of outdoor recreation and the largest provider of outdoor art. Although it almost 'hit the political buffers' several times and narrowly avoided privatisation on more than one occasion, the Commission survived, improbably, for a hundred years. Not many other Government organisations can boast such longevity. Against a shifting social and political background, it showed itself to be a flexible and adaptable delivery organisation. The woodlands it plants and manages today will be its legacy well into the 21st century – and indeed beyond.

Side-by-side with the Commission's extraordinary delivery has been its partnership with the private sector, encouraging good practice and facilitating an equally extraordinary expansion of forests through grant aid. The year 2011 was particularly significant in this relationship, marking the crossover point when softwood production from the private sector overtook that of the combined FC in England and Scotland, plus Natural Resources Wales.

The Commission's 100-year history has been - in the main - a golden journey, but it has not been without its political and financial perils. In today's post-devolved world, the greatest risks to the nation's forests are not so much political as existential: climate change and in particular the associated threats from introduced pests and diseases. The sector has taken a huge - and so far, successful - timber bet on Sitka spruce, and to date it has avoided the depredations that have affected other countries' forests. But there is a lot of 'skin in the game' when it comes to Sitka and we have seen what devastation can be caused by destructive agencies imported to these shores (Dutch Elm disease; Phytophthora disease of Larch; and Chalara dieback of Ash are but three examples).

FC forests have also been an extraordinary investment of taxpayers' money. A 2010 study by the Economics for the Environment Consultancy concluded that the value of England's Public Forest Estate was in the following order: people; carbon; timber; biodiversity. North of the Border, a 2015 report showed that Scottish forestry in general contributed nearly £1 billion GVA to Scotland's economy every year, with £771 million from forestry and timber processing and £183 million from forest recreation and tourism. More than 70 per cent of all British adults have visited a forest and more than 350 million daytrips are made to forests every year. We all love our forests and the FC undoubtedly became a National Treasure during its century-long journey. Whichever way you look at it, the connection with people and the benefits to people remain central to State Forestry's continued existence.

Here's to the next 100 years!

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BC – Before the Commission

Ever stopped to think what life would have been like BC (before the Commission)? Hundreds of years of exploitation and deforestation had left only a pitiful 5% forest cover by the start of the 20th century. When World War I broke out in 1914, Britain was vulnerable to blockades by German U boats. Timber security was so important that Prime Minister Lloyd George famously remarked that *Britain came closer to losing the war through lack of timber than want of food*. With no forestry policy, forest service or forestry authority, the time was ripe for change...



In the beginning... the Acland Committee

The Acland Committee was formed in 1916 to *consider and report upon the best means of conserving and developing the woodland and forestry resources of the United Kingdom, having regard to experience gained during the war*. Its Secretary was the influential ‘father of British forestry’ Mr. (later Lord) R L Robinson of His Majesty’s Office of Woods. He would come to make a significant and unique contribution championing forestry in Britain. Other members were the estate owners Lord Clinton (from Devon) and Lord Lovat (from Inverness-shire).

1919 Timeline

August - Royal Assent given by King George V to a Forestry Act

September – the Forestry Act 1919 comes into force and the Forestry Commission is born!

December - the first trees planted

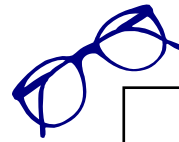
All bets are off...

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]*



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 United Kingdom to Great Britain.

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Slasher factoid:

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

Commemorative plaque at Eggesford Forest.

Note the reference to the UK. © BBC

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).

Early FC corporate culture was formal - almost militaristic: office-based staff were obliged to wear black or pinstripe suits for example. A Divisional Officer was allowed to use his *[always a 'his' then! -Ed]* car for shorter work journeys, but for more distant visits the practice was to take a train to the nearest station and then hire a bicycle.

The District Officer

The District Officer is in a privileged position, somewhat similar to that of a Company Commander in the Army, in this respect that his is the senior grade that comes into anything like direct contact with the men who are carrying out the actual operations. To use a mixed metaphor, he is the buffer state between the instructions issuing from High Policy on the one hand and urging for improved conditions on the other.

In addition to his responsibility for the smooth working of the staff the District Officer has very heavy technical responsibilities. In fact, it is not too much to say that he is responsible to a greater or less degree for every plant that is raised, and the method of its raising, every acre that is planted, and the method of its planting, every drain that is dug, and every fence that is erected. The great majority of the records that are kept are his, or under his supervision. It is his duty to delimit areas and prepare the necessary maps, make plans for the future, record the past and keep the present ever active.

In a few years' time - if not already - the running of a district will prove to be a highly intensive business. It is an interesting speculation for the future as to how the business will be developed. A policy of de-centralization may perhaps be evolved with a central bureau for guidance, information and control. The department responsible for forestry, whatever be its nature in the future, will be inevitably a large trading department. If it is to escape the losses which are always associated with government trading, it will be due in good part to a modified monopoly, but also to the business training which it will be incumbent on the District Officer of the future to possess.

From **The Work of an Officer in Charge of a District** by L. A. Newton in the Journal of the Forestry Commission April 1926

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'Bye-bye!' or 'Buy-buy'?

No sooner was it born than the Forestry Commission was nearly consigned to the history books. Only two years after its formation it narrowly escaped being sacrificed on the altar of financial austerity [*déjà vu anyone? -Ed*] as the country slid into an economic crisis. A Committee on National Expenditure - the Geddes Committee - recommended scrapping State afforestation and in 1921 - under the infamous 'Geddes axe' - Treasury withdrew the Commission's authority to acquire land. Forestry Schools were cut and staff dismissed. But just when it seemed that 'the game was a bogey' another Government policy came to the rescue - this time the need to reduce rural unemployment. The moratorium on land acquisition was lifted and suddenly it was full steam ahead again.

Land was cheap in the 1920s. By 1929, some 192,000 acres (78,000 ha) had been planted: 56kha by the Commission and 22kha by the private sector. From the start the FC's mission was all about afforestation and future timber supply. Its environmental and social agendas would have to wait for some considerable time. In their early guiding principles, the Commissioners required '*...the elimination of all activities, however attractive, which do not conduce directly or in the long run to an increase of timber-production*'.



Photo courtesy of Jake Willis,
Sunart Oakwoods Initiative.
Forestry Memories website

During the early years, public access was viewed as an intrusion. In 1927 the revolution in social forestry was still a long way off, but that year a Forestry Act introduced regulations to enable public access to forests. The following year saw the first systematic census of British Woodlands, a stock take that has - with increasing sophistication and accuracy - continued ever since.

1923 Commission Statement...

Resolution No. 1 of the Forestry Conference reaffirms what may be called the fundamental creed of foresters. It is a matter of elementary prudence for every country which is developing on the lines of Western civilisation to ensure that materials of first-rate importance to industry shall be readily available at all times. The aim of Forest Policy is to ensure continuity of supplies on a scale sufficient to meet prospective demands. The Commissioners believe that the future well-being of the whole Empire and its individual parts depends in no small measure on the effective incorporation of this creed into accepted political economy.

Such briefly are the grounds on which the Forestry Conference was led to pass the Resolution No. 2 that it was incumbent on every part of the Empire to conserve and augment its own resources of growing coniferous timber.

...at the British Empire Forestry Conference, Canada, 1923.

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A 1926 Government White Paper on Land Policy is an indication of the increased stability of British Forest Policy...

"Large areas of Land in many parts of Great Britain are more suited to the production of timber than food. An adequate supply of growing timber is also highly desirable on grounds of national defence. The development of Forest Policy is largely dependent on State action continuously applied over a period of years. The Forestry Commission was established to carry out such a policy and is actively engaged on a definite programme, including the afforestation of 150,000 acres in the 10-year period 1919-1929, the encouragement of private forestry by a system of grants, and the systematic establishment of forest workers' holdings at the rate of five holdings per 1,000 acres of afforestable land. It is anticipated that these holdings, the occupiers of which are guaranteed 150 days' work per annum in the State forests, will make a useful permanent addition to the rural population, especially in poor grazing districts. The Crown Woods and Forests, including about 60,000 acres of woodland, have also been transferred to the Commissioners.

The Government has agreed that this policy shall be carried on without interruption."

It's good, but is it good enough?

Recent debates in Parliament show that while there is very general satisfaction with the work of the Commission, there is also the feeling in certain quarters that operations should be on a much larger scale.

Journal of the Forestry Commission 1927.

Memories of 1927 (Jack Jennings, Chief Forester, Slasher 1971)

"Forest Workers had a rough time. For a start, when you turned up in the morning you were never certain you would be permitted to work. If it was raining you were told to stand by until 11am. If it was still raining at lunchtime that was that and home you went, without pay. There was no dole or unemployment pay for agricultural workers. The working week of fifty-something hours was six days. Saturday counted as a full day.

Young lads like myself always had hopes of getting into Forestry School though the number of openings was far fewer than the number of candidates. To make the grade you had to work very hard, keep your mouth shut and make sure you were in the Foresters' good books. Senior Foresters were idols. A Grade 1 Forester on a salary of £150 a year was to me in the Cabinet Minister class!"



*Felling team working on larch circa 1922.
Photograph courtesy of Jean Cranna.
Forestry Memories website.*

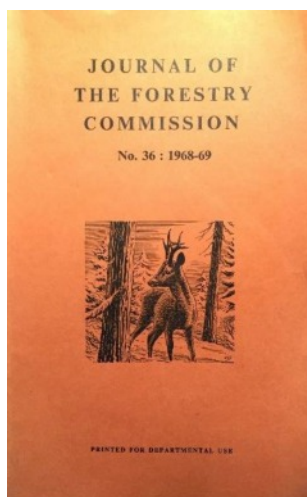


*Ploughing on Lon Mor, Fort Augustus 1927.
© Forest Research photographs*



*Glentress forest workers c1928.
Forestry Memories website.*

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Do you have an old copy of the **Journal of the Forestry Commission**? Introduced in 1922 the first edition stated: “*The Journal affords an opportunity of discussing the many knotty problems [sic! -Ed] which arise in daily forestry practice.*” In all, it ran to 36 Editions, the last one being in 1968-69. Each edition listed the names of staff at Headquarters (London, Basingstoke and Edinburgh), Alice Holt/Research, Wales and the Conservancies. Intended to be a means of exchanging the opinions and experiences of all members of staff, the Journal ceased in 1969. The main (monthly) topical news source for news, events and staff moves then became **The Slasher**.

Vol 1 of the Journal of the Forestry Commission (February 1922) had some interesting comments about training and ‘labour’

D.W.Y writing on Foresters’ Schools. *Trained men, of course, are just as likely to be as careless as untrained men, but slackness of that sort can be dealt with. Where carelessness springs from ignorance it is a more difficult matter.*

In North Scotland... *there was a shortage of labour on the three schemes in the Glen Mhor District when planting was commenced in October 1920. No men could be obtained locally, and it was necessary to import them from other parts. These included eleven fishermen from Barra, who were employed during the winter and spring. None of the imported men had any previous experience of planting and most of them were indifferent planters, but they did useful work clearing scrub and draining.*

In Northeast Scotland... *the total planting squad here averaged 25 to 30 men, only one or two of whom had planted before. Most of them, however, had handled spades and forestry tools, and with close supervision for several days new men usually became quite adept fairly quickly. We had absolutely no “labour troubles” and as far as I could learn there was very little discontent in the squad all winter, and, indeed, for the coming planting season I expect to have most of the same men available, though many of them come distances of not less than five miles.*



Slasher factoids: *The tallest Forestry Commission employee was the seven feet tall Forest Worker ‘The Inverliever Giant’ B.T. Crowe. The oldest employee was Forest Worker Archie Menzies of Loch Ard Forest, who started with the FC in 1929 aged 62 and was still doing a full day’s work aged 84!*

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The emergence of Forest Research...

An advisory committee on Forest Research was formed in 1929 but the first Forest Research Station wasn't established until 1946 at Alice Holt Lodge in Surrey. Northern Research Station at Bush Estate opened in 1970.



Alice Holt Lodge in the early days

Forest Research in Scotland has a rich history influenced by names like Steven & Carlisle (Native Pinewoods of Scotland) and Mark Anderson (head of Forestry at Edinburgh University). The 1940s saw the Commission's research work start to expand and eventually grow out of all recognition.



Slasher Factoid: A fancy new extension to Alice Holt was built in 1959 with plate glass windows whereupon almost immediately a Forester walked through one by mistake!

A Uniform Approach

From the purely official point of view the system of having woodmen in uniform is of value in protecting plantations from damage by trespassers. Normally, the forester would wear out his old clothes while pursuing his daily occupation, but clothes chosen for social use are by no means the best for rough work in the open. It may therefore be concluded that a specially made suit or uniform is desirable. In 1925, official sanction was obtained to an arrangement by which foresters might obtain a uniform, the ordering and payment for which should be carried out through the Department, who would contribute 30s. towards the cost. The scheme has given much satisfaction, and 28 uniforms have already been supplied.

From Uniforms for Foresters in Scotland, F. C. Handford - Journal of the Forestry Commission 1927

Unofficial Notes on an Official Visit

Being a mere office wallah, it was a pleasant and instructive privilege to visit Tintern and the Dean in the company of foresters. I use the word foresters in the wide sense, as the party included Forestry Commissioners and Forest Officers. Foresters appear to be able and willing to explain those things which a layman wants to know, and when asked questions they do not take refuge in scientific jargon. Foresters have, however, some idiosyncrasies. For example, they are never satisfied with the result of their labours, but are always aiming at a forest Utopia; and while they may become ecstatic over some self-regenerated oak which the ordinary mortal would not have eyes to see, they will refer to a cathedral of 150 feet larch of overwhelming beauty as "nice sticks."

A non-technical Officer...Journal of the Forestry Commission 1928

From an Office Window at 1, Whitehall

Every man's outlook is limited; some see farther than others. There are seven men working behind this window, and for many hours each day their outlook is on paper. It may be a forester's report, a District Officer's, or a Divisional Officer's report, but it is on paper... Now you foresters and others actually see things, and I do think you might give us poor report readers a better idea in your reports of what you see and what you want us to do... above all, write what you think and not what you think you ought to write. Simple language, stating the plain facts, is a good deal better than a lot of surplus irrelevance.

When you are out in the rain you envy us; when you are in the sunshine we envy you, so there is not a great deal between us. If we can realise the other's outlook the better for both.

B.R. Davies Journal of the Forestry Commission 1928

A Very Good report card

We have had almost ten years' experience of administration under the Forestry Acts and the new term of a like period will soon commence. I think the general impression throughout the country among those who know and the many who are interested but who do not know about our subject, is that the Commission has been successful and has not failed in diligence or in the effort to carry out the programme allotted in 1919. The past years, however, have been strenuous for all participants, and possibly a little of the enthusiasm originally existing in the members of the staff has somewhat abated, but, nevertheless, there exists throughout the whole Service a deep interest and a well-rooted sense of responsibility and of the desire to carry on the work with success. Everyone engaged in this great national enterprise could no doubt write a chapter on the last ten years, chapters of criticism or of satisfaction and of sage advice, but we must feel a thrill of gratification in the fact that we have all taken our share in the successful launching of a new and permanent industry in the old Homeland.

John D. Sutherland Journal of the Forestry Commission 1929

The depressing thirties



The Great Depression. © BBC

The Commission started the decade in fine form, planting up many new forests. But very soon the Government brakes were applied. In 1931 - the year that the FC's HQ in London moved from Grosvenor Gardens to Saville Row - Britain became gripped in a financial depression so severe that a state of national emergency was declared.

Private forestry entered the doldrums, many traditional estates were parcelled up for sale and it was up to the Commission to continue the afforestation effort. But money was tight, so land purchase had to be put on hold.

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A few tips to young Foresters and Foremen

- Don't work in big gangs, as you will find that every watch in the gang is 15 or 20 minutes in front of yours in the afternoon.
- Don't reprimand a man in front of his mates, as this tends to make him a hero in their eyes.
- When finishing measuring up piecework, don't put too much faith in the stake you may drive in the ground. You must have a secret landmark, as the wind has been known to blow these stakes 2 or 3 chains further back.
- Avoid the farmers as you would the plague and put farmhouses out of bounds during working hours.
- Don't envy other foresters down south, who can play tennis and catch butterflies, as you can have enough exercise here to keep you fit, viz., running after your hat, jumping over swollen brooks, and, last but not least, running after mountain-sheep that have strayed or been thrown into your plantations. There is some satisfaction in this last sport, because, if these sheep have gained 2 lbs. or more through grazing in the plantations, they lose more before they are turned out, as you have to run them to a standstill.
- All these amusements will make you fit. The pure mountain air will give you a tremendous appetite, and you will soon apply to your Divisional Office for an increase of salary.

By G. H. Brown *Journal of the Forestry Commission 1930*

The first FC Chairman Lord Lovat [*remember the one who lost his bet with Lord Clinton? -Ed*] held a 'long cherished dream' of repopulating the uplands. Along with other Highland landowners like the Commissioner Sir John Stirling-Maxwell of Corrour he set up a smallholder scheme. Ten-acre holdings were created on better land in the newly planted forests. The tenants paid a rent and in return were guaranteed forestry work. Forest workers



Image courtesy of Ian Bremner.
Forestry Memories website.

were attracted to remote areas. In 1924 there were 624 smallholdings in Britain but the number reduced after the Great Depression. Later on, the FC tackled rural employment by building bespoke forestry villages. Pictured here are Tom, Elsie and Ian Bremner at Bin Forest Holding No. 3 in 1954.



Image courtesy of Ian Bremner.
Forestry Memories website.

Two giant figures in the FC's history...

The intimation that Sir John Stirling-Maxwell is about to retire from the Commission will have been received with genuine regret by every member of the staff. His term of office as Chairman has been of short duration, but he has been a member of the Commission since it was formed. His knowledge of forestry and his unflagging interest in the work and in the welfare of everyone concerned have been a source of inspiration and of confidence. Sir John Stirling-Maxwell will be succeeded in the Chair by Sir Roy L. Robinson, who as Technical Commissioner and Vice Chairman has already had heavy responsibilities. His selection is a tribute to his consistent application to those matters which beset the men in the field. As the first Rhodes Scholar in Forestry and as one who has never been induced to veer from the subject since he became a graduate, his promotion and the honour conferred upon him by the King are both subjects for congratulation.

Journal of the Forestry Commission 1932

A walk in the park?

Question: *What came first – National Parks or Forest Parks?*

Maybe not as well recognised as their formal cousins the National Parks, in fact the Forest Park concept came first.

Answer:
Forest Parks

Scotland's Six Forest Parks - a timeline

1936 Argyll - wildest of the Forest Parks, with steep slopes and deep glens formed due to its Highland Boundary Fault Line location.

1947 Galloway - largest of the Forest Parks, with three visitor centres, at Kirroughtree, Glentrool and Clatteringshaws.

1948 Glenmore - nestled in the heart of the Cairngorms National Park, with popular watersports at Loch Morlich.

The first National Parks to be established in Great Britain were the Peak District, Lake District, Snowdonia, and Dartmoor in 1951.

1953 Queen Elizabeth - home to Lochs Lomond and Katrine, both areas of outstanding natural beauty.

1991 Tay - a patchwork of forests and woodlands, perhaps the most varied in its terrain.

2004 Tweed Valley - a perennial favourite, most accessible to the Central Belt.

By 1935 the Commission had slowly woken up to the public view that 'unbridled afforestation' was not always welcome. The Lake District had become something of a battleground between the FC and CPRE (now called the Campaign to Protect Rural England). But timber production was still the overall name of the game and it would be four decades before the landscape agenda was fully recognised by the Commission [see Sylvia Crowe later on -Ed].

Even although the early years of the FC were all about timber production, there were a few enlightened employees who saw the bigger picture. In the 1931 Edition of the **Journal of the Forestry Commission**, B F. Oliver wrote **Concerning the Aesthetic Aspect of Afforestation...**

A man who is born in a glen where a young plantation exists grows up with the trees, and to him they are as much a part of the landscape as the hillside on which they stand. The State forester may or may not have a poetic strain in his make-up; but his work, by which is primarily meant re-afforestation, must of necessity be carried out on strictly utilitarian lines. Poetry is not a plant that flourishes in the bitter blast of progress reports and monthly accounts.

... the great British Public, typified by the man in the street... knows that there is a Forestry Commission, that its function is to plant trees, and he has a more or less distorted idea, according to the particular newspaper which he reads, of how it is discharging its duties. But the "man in the street" is now a traveller. When summer comes, he enters his car or motor 'bus and "sees the country," along with hosts of his fellows, and he then forms his own opinion of what the Forestry Commission is doing. But the forester is a servant of the State. He is engaged in forming forests for the ultimate benefit of the nation and of the aforesaid "man in the street." The latter, as represented by the holiday maker or tourist, cares very little for the economic side of forestry, but cares a great deal for what appeals to his sense of beauty, however inarticulate. There is no reason to suppose that the annual holiday invasion of country districts will lessen. On the contrary, it is likely to increase and to lengthen its season every year.

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Tie-rants

In 1935 a probationer District Officer's salary was £250 a year. Many had to save up to afford the new FC tie.

Do you remember (or perhaps own) one of the Commission's old brown and green ties?



In 1948 King George VI approved the FC brown and green colours - which were to last for over 40 years.

The leaf tie [aka 'jungle' tie -Ed] was introduced in the 1990s



Jaw-jaw or war-war?

As the decade progressed it looked as if Britain might be heading towards another war. The FC and the Board of Trade drew up plans for supplying home-grown timber. In 1939 the Home Grown Timber Advisory Committee was established: it was to play a major role during and after the war. The Commission was split into the Forest Management Department (maintaining normal duties) and the Timber Supply Department (charged with producing timber for the war effort - mainly pit props). As the Commission's early commercial plantings were under 20 years old - clearly too young to produce a meaningful timber supply - much of its timber came from the New Forest and the Forest of Dean.



Slasher factoid: 90% of the timber used in the war effort came from private estates, authorised by the recently introduced system of FC felling licenses.



Old style FC colours and crest - flag at Glenmore Visitor Centre. Photograph courtesy of Brian Duff.

Roddy Murray, Brian Duff, Alan MacDougall, Matt Poulton and Kev Robertson.

Forestry Memories website

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Britain at war

By the outbreak of World War II, the Commission was the largest landowner in Britain. Lots of forest workers were needed to keep the war effort going: the number more than trebled - from 14,000 to 44,300. These workers included the Newfoundland Forestry Detachment (the 'Newfies') and Canadian Forestry Corps; military foresters from Britain, Australia and New Zealand, and of course the Women's Timber Corps or 'Lumberjills' as they became fondly known (see below). The war did not stop afforestation efforts either: over 40,000 hectares were planted and the Commission bought many felled and undermanaged woodlands.

Home thoughts from abroad... the Canadian Forestry Corps Company in Deeside



*CFC co. no 25, Mar Lodge camp logging pond.
Ponding removed mud and stones from logs, reduced saw damage and allowed logs to be sorted.
Forestry Memories website.
[Some of those logs look fairly dodgy quality! -Ed]*



*Mar Lodge logging camp and sawmill were constructed by around 200 men from CFC Companies 2, 3, 4, 13 and 16 (the trailer is placed to receive slabs and off cuts).
Forestry Memories website.
[Those bicycles lying in the front look very new. -Ed]*



*This timber bridge over the River Dee has all the hallmarks of the Canadian Forestry Corps. Timber products were taken for onward transport by light rail.
Forestry Memories website.
[Beautifully constructed! -Ed]*

Lumberjills – the unsung War heroines

Women had played a key role in the Great War through the Women's Forestry Service formed in 1917. But forestry's traditional male dominance changed fundamentally when the Women's Timber Corps formed in 1942. The year before, Ernest Bevin, Minister for Labour and National Service, declared that, *"One million wives were wanted for war work; inconvenience would have to be suffered and younger women would have to go where their services were required. It would be better to suffer temporarily than to be in perpetual slavery to the Nazis."* From only 200 women in forestry the figure rose to 6000 Lumberjills who provided vital war work all over Scotland: felling, snedding, loading transport and sawmilling timber. Girls were recruited from the age of 17 but some were as young as 14. They came from all kinds of backgrounds and all walks of life.

Lumberjill Christina's story...



Christina Forrester, née Edgar, from Glasgow, was just 19 when she volunteered into the Corps back in 1942. After a month's training in a billeted camp near Brechin, Christina and the other lumberjills learned how to fell trees with axes and saws.

"When I went into the Women's Timber Corps, I really didn't know what was ahead of me. People didn't travel much in those days and moving from the Glasgow area to Perthshire seemed far away from family and friends. But everyone felt the same as they came from far and wide too. We all supported each other



when someone was homesick or unwell. You had to get used to being told what to do and when to do it although it wasn't too regimented. Leisure time was a Sunday and there was dancing on Friday and Saturday night. The girls all walked four miles to and from the dances except when Jimmy Shand was playing and we were allowed a lift, in all our finery, on the back of a lorry!"



Slasher factoid: Another famous Scots entertainer - Kenneth McKellar - worked for the FC for 2 years. [Not a lot of people know that - Ed]



Lumberjill Christina photographed in 2007 along with some of FC Scotland's female staff

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Raising the stakes

By 1943 home-grown timber production had risen from 4% to 65%. But this came at a very heavy cost. It beggars belief today, but **by the end of the War almost all conifer plantations between 20 and 30 years of age had been felled and utilised: approximately one third of the country's available timber resource.**

The 1945 Forestry Act brought FC under the control of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and the Secretary of State for Scotland - emphasising the increasing political importance of forestry. Ambitious targets were given for planting/replanting (117,359ha State: 30,351ha Private). But a census led by Jack Chard showed that only three quarters of private woods were 'of interest' [*i.e. producing a timber crop! -Ed*] with overall average Yield Class of only 2.

Following the Act, new FC posts were created, including Directors of Forestry, a Director of Research, Education & Publications, and a Director General. The first DG to be appointed was Sir Roy Robinson of Kielder Forest and Adelaide [*Remember him? -Ed*]. He wrote to Corrour Estate, where Sir John Stirling Maxwell (Chairman of the Forestry Commission from 1929–1932) had done early species trials: *"I regard your pioneer work there as the most valuable ever done in Britain and an inspiration to the subsequent developments which we have brought about."*

At this time the Commission's Engineering Branch was founded virtually from scratch with the twin functions of building forest roads and maintaining machinery.

The War Effort...

Sponsors who raised money for 'donor Spitfires' were able to have their name displayed on the engine cowling. This Spitfire - AB188 from 609 Squadron - was enabled through donations by FC staff. Tragically its Belgian pilot, Flight Lieutenant Jean Offenburg was killed aged 26 in a training flight over Lincolnshire in 1942. He was commemorated in a poem written by Frank Ziegler who was the Intelligence Officer for 609 Squadron...



Photograph courtesy
Aircrewremembered.com

*Here in a corner of an English Shire,
Far from the Homeland he fought to save
A Belgian pilot sleeps, who dying gave
His all, for all of England to admire.
Here was a warrior of the lonely sky,
Modest and brave, outstanding for his race,
Who winged the outer air with swallow's grace.*

*Do not grieve if you should pass this way in the next years-
His was a life that shone too bright for tears.*

From **A Corner of an English Shire** by Frank Ziegler. [*Abridged -Ed*]



Slasher factoid:

During the War, Jack Chard employed out-of-work elephants to help move logs!



Photograph courtesy of
aboutzoos.info.

"The older elephant Molly had done timber work in India and could pull a two-ton log with ease. The pair worked hard but they couldn't be hurried, and time-keeping just didn't interest them."

Jack Chard



Photograph courtesy Britmodeller.

Slasher Commemorative Centenary Edition

In a 1950 lecture delivered to the British Council course on Forestry in Scotland, **James Macdonald**, Director of Research and Education stated, *“The twentieth century showed an increasing feeling for the more recent exotic conifers, but the most important changes were the first large scale attempts to afforest the peat lands of the Borders and of the west of Scotland, in which Sitka spruce was extensively used, and the discovery of the Hybrid larch at Dunkeld. The first, for which the Duke of Buccleuch’s Moorburnhead plantation in Dumfries-shire, Sir John Stirling Maxwell’s forest at Corrour in Inverness-shire and the Crown Wood of Inverliever in Argyll are celebrated, paved the way for all the subsequent developments in the afforestation of peat, while the second gave us an entirely new tree with distinct possibilities.”*

Sic Transit Gloria Sitchensis or A Plea for the Late Developer (from the Gaelic of the Brahan Seer) by **A. M. Mackenzie** Air: Tha a chuan gu eilean a cheo (Over the sea to Skye)

The forester despised his Japanese Larch,
But lauded his Sitka Spruce
And vowed they would be the replacement tree,
As he planned his future land-use.
Yet, while time has flown, so the Larches have grown
To majestic bole and crown.
And how have the Sitka throve the while?
Oh! the winds have blown them down.

Journal of the Forestry Commission No 35

Transformation for the Nation

In three decades, the Commission had transformed itself from a small band of enthusiasts into a sophisticated Government Department managing an estate of more than 600,000 hectares. Research knowledge was increasing; forest management was vibrant; engineering expertise was growing; and forest expansion was impressive: 43,000 hectares planted in just three years for example (1947-1949). Now the stage was set for a massive expansion of upland forestry using Sitka Spruce as the key species. Boom times awaited the Commission ... *[oh, and most importantly of all - the first edition of Slasher was launched, in 1948 to be precise -Ed].*

What's in a name?

Once famously mocked in the BBC show Have I Got News for You, **The Slasher** is a memorable moniker. The very first edition explained it like this: *“The choice was made because it was necessary to decide on something symbolic of those concerned with forestry, and the slasher has for long been regarded as an insignia of office among those who serve the Commission... It is invariably carried by all our woodsmen when in the plantations.”*

Originally, Foremen, Foresters and Forest Workers had to share copies of **The Slasher** due to post-war paper shortages.

Jean Philip - a Clerical Officer in the Accounts Section of the FC's Aberdeen Office - became the FC's first female Junior Forester in 1948 after achieving 83% in her Royal Scottish Forestry Society exams... which included felling a 14ft Scots Pine!

The expanding fifties

By 1950 the Commission employed 13,220 people. Annual removal reached 325,000 cubic metres *[less than the annual output of Kielder today, but significant for its time -Ed]*. A 1951 Forestry Act gave the Forestry Commissioners some powers that have stood the test of time (e.g. felling licence replanting conditions); and some that haven't (a requirement to consult with the Home Grown Timber Advisory Committee and the establishment of Regional Advisory Committees). During the '50s, planting averaged 10,000 hectares per year.

The 'father of British forestry' Lord Robinson - so instrumental in establishing Kielder and other large-scale upland spruce forests - died in 1952.

Lord Robinson of Kielder and Adelaide

Seven decades ago, a year before his death Lord Robinson wrote of Kielder Forest - a favourite haunt -

"New silvicultural problems will also arise; windblow is inevitable to a lesser or greater degree however skilful the management may be and the problem of economically extracting blown timber and restocking the blows have to be solved in good time. I do not think the spruces will regenerate themselves to any extent [The only prediction he got wrong! - Ed] and the opportunity will arise for changing the species composition of the forest – if that is found to be desirable – and also of breaking up the great masses of even-aged plantations.

I am only re-echoing the wishes of other keen foresters when I say that I would like to see Kielder Forest as it will be 50 or 100 years hence."



Photograph courtesy of Michael Lawson-Smith, great grandson of Lord Robinson

In 1953, a devastating storm caused significant fatalities, as well as the windthrow of over 1.2 million cubic metres in forests in the north-east of Scotland, mainly conifers. There was a lot of clearing up to do...

Slasher Commemorative Centenary Edition

Clearing 1953 windthrow in Deeside



Precariously balanced on a blown Scots pine these men are wielding 6lb wedge axes to cut off the branches from the stems. The man on the right has tied the bottoms of his trousers to reduce snagging on branches. *[No 'elf and safety executive back then! -Ed].*

Photograph courtesy of Sandy Tough.
Forestry Memories website.



A human forwarder! *[Among the branches and fallen trees behind him you can just see a horse and horseman gathering a load -Ed]*

Photograph courtesy of Sandy Tough.
Forestry Memories website.



A lorry weaves its way between the wood wagons whilst GPO staff are busy re-erecting the telephone wires torn down by the fallen trees. *[The aptly named A. Wood was Alexander Wood of Lumphanan -Ed]*

Photograph courtesy of Sandy Tough.
Forestry Memories website.



A Bounty bar

In 1953 the Commission introduced a payment of one shilling per tail for all squirrel bounty hunters. *[Imagine that today! -Ed]*

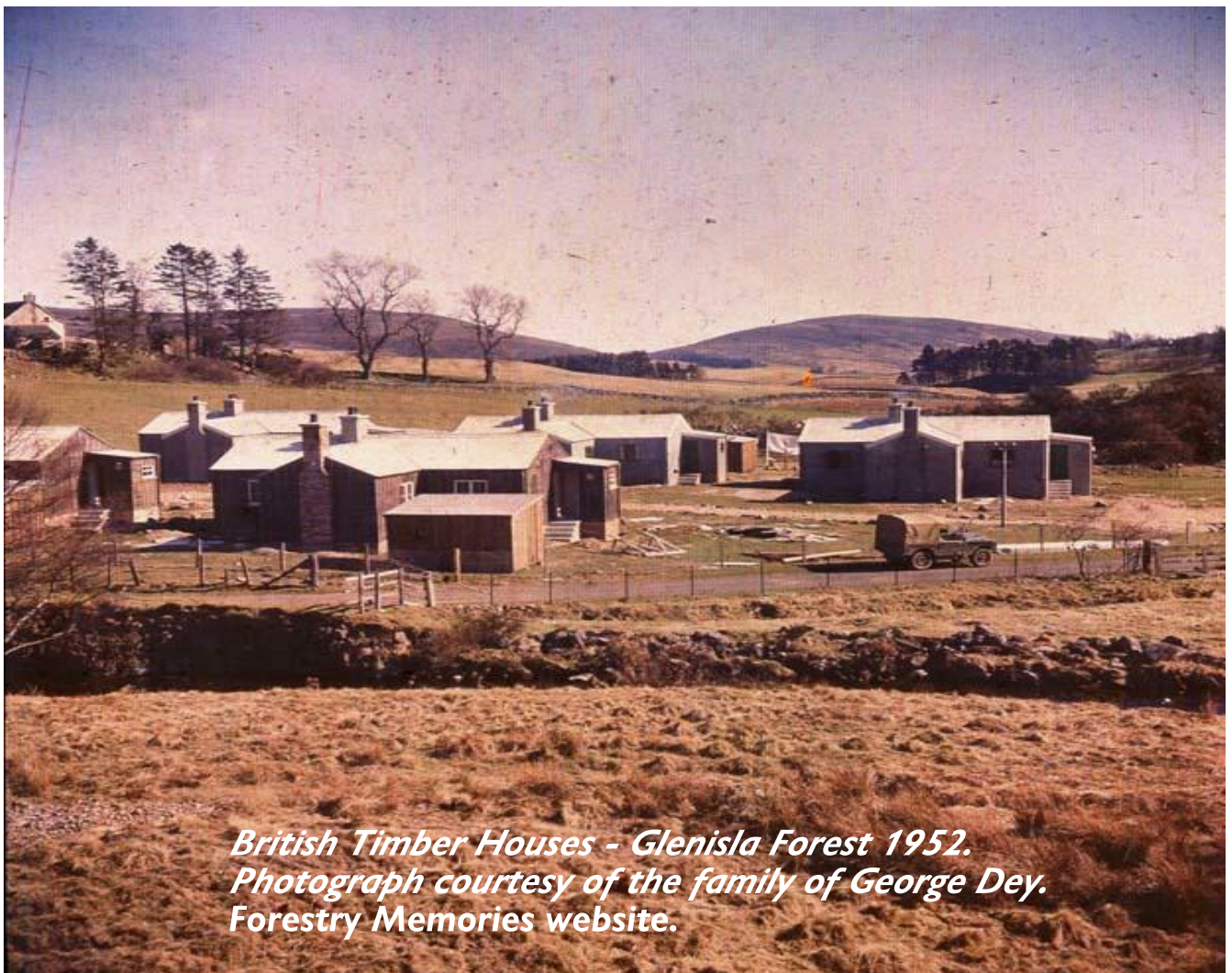
Chips of the old block

Already, one third of the Government's postwar afforestation target had been achieved. New markets for thinnings such as chipwood and pulp opened up, supplementing the traditional pit props market, such that by the end of the 1950s, FC timber income had quadrupled. But the world was changing. The Commission's priorities were moving away from a timber reserve, towards economic and social benefits. The Government recognised that in a nuclear war a strategic timber reserve was no longer a priority, and accepted a 1957 Zuckerman Report recommending a better balance between agriculture and forestry in the uplands. Expanding programmes of establishment and harvesting meant that new houses had to be built. In 1958 - the peak year for all tenancies - the FC owned a total of 4627 properties.

"What is seen today is the reversal of the trend for people to leave the land – the bringing back of people into the rural areas in ever-increasing numbers, the provision of houses in lovely surroundings, and an assurance of employment for so long as a man is able to work"

Sir Henry Beresford-Peirse

FC Director Scotland, writing in Slasher 1949



*British Timber Houses - Glenisla Forest 1952.
Photograph courtesy of the family of George Dey.
Forestry Memories website.*

Slasher Commemorative Centenary Edition

Mechanisation

The '50s saw the start of a revolution in mechanisation, with powered ropeways, aerial spraying and even helicopter extraction of timber. Not surprisingly the latter never caught on...

"It is certain that while helicopters are convenient, they will not be an economic proposition until their operating costs are reduced far below the present figure."

Col R G Shaw, Machinery Research Officer, describing a trial in 1956 at Glenduror near Fort William.



Helicopter trialling timber extraction 1956.

Image provided by Jim Christie.

Forestry Memories website.

Aerial fertilising at Forest of Deer near Cuminestown watched by Emslie, Edith and Audrey Wilson, along with other children.

[And a dog: no doubt all in the safe zone! -Ed]

Photograph courtesy of Jean Christie.

Forestry Memories website.



Prolonged drought in 1955 resulted in 2,832 fires – an unprecedented number. But it says a lot about FC staff that only 111ha of planted trees was destroyed, amounting to £19,000.

Slasher Commemorative Centenary Edition

Tractor Driver G Rodkin of Leithhope Forest claimed a ploughing record – 148 acres in 21 days using a D2 tractor and a single furrow Begg-type plough, working both ways, with five feet spacing.



*Solotrac Plough in Speymouth Forest.
Photograph courtesy of Glenn Brearley.
Forestry Memories website.*

The boomtime sixties

The '60s continued where the '50s left off, with continued expansion by both the FC and the private sector (by 1969 private forests accounted for 40% of the total planting with the Dedication Scheme and Approved Woodlands Scheme totalling almost one million hectares). Timber production nearly doubled - from 726,000 cubic metres in 1960 to 1,318,000 cubic metres by the end of the decade.

What's in a name?

Question: When did the terms Forest Enterprise and Forestry Authority first appear?

After the Commission's 1919 enabling regulation, The Forestry Act 1967 remained the most important legislation, consolidating all previous Acts and providing the chief regulating instrument up until devolution.

Answer: in 1966

Stable progress

Axes and crosscut saws were disappearing, to be replaced by chainsaws. Stables became workshops as the use of horses declined. Coal mining now accounted for only a third of the Commission's timber output. Hand in hand with this unprecedented supply of timber came a boom in the establishment of timber-processing facilities. Softwood pulp mills were built at Fort William, Ellesmere Port and Workington; hardwood pulp mills were built at Sudbrook and Sittingbourne; and chipboard mills were constructed at Inverness, Annan, Wallsend, Hexham, Thetford, Monmouth, Coleford and Irvine, creating thousands of jobs. Other significant industry investments were made in wood wool (used in packaging and building panels) and sawmills. These key investments were only made possible by the Forestry Commission providing guarantees of supply.

Road sage

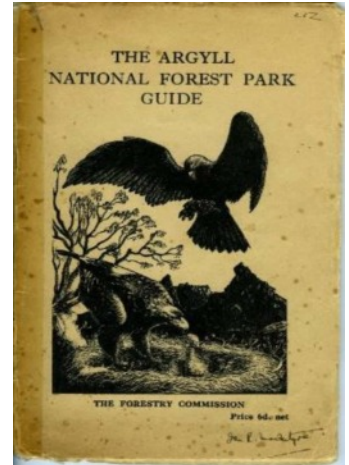
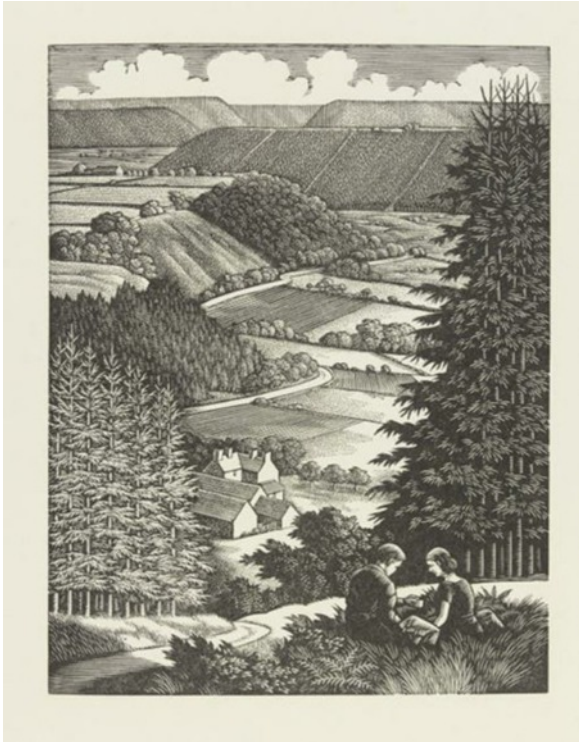
The FC became agents for the Ministry of Transport, greening up the emerging network of motorways and trunk roads. *Many trees seem as yet little more than twigs poking out of embankments and verges, usually with a drab supporting stake alongside. Eventually, however, they will grow strong enough to break the straps binding them to the stakes. "The whole object is basically to have reasons for the tree grouping", explained Mr. Len Simpson, the tall Scot, who as Forestry Commission district officer, generally supervises the Staffordshire contract. "Some groups are essential screens for private properties near the roads and others replace ancient trees. But many are to 'beautify' - to give a dash of forest vista to a motorway or soften the angular contours of bridges and embankments."*

From the Wolverhampton Express and Star

Slasher Commemorative Centenary Edition

Timber trailers to timber trails

Until the sixties, the Commission's main purpose had been an economic one – a strategic reserve of timber and rural employment. However, things started to change following the 1968 Countryside Act, which gave the general public the right to use much of the forest estate for recreation. New Visitor Centres, campsites, trails and picnic areas were added to the Commission's recreational portfolio, eventually enabling the FC to claim its place as the largest provider of outdoor recreation in Britain.

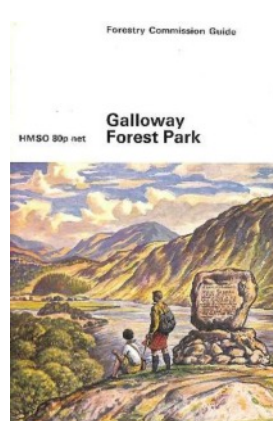
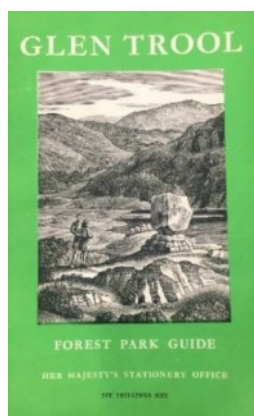


Photograph courtesy of Glenbranter Forest office staff & Ian Adams. Forestry Memories website.

1960-1961 Wood-engraving by George Edward Mackley, commissioned by the FC. Reproduced by kind permission of the V&A George Mackley Bequest.

Scenery, however, is largely a matter of taste and habit of thought. The same person may admire the Black Forest in Germany but not Kielder Forest in Northumberland. Why? Perhaps the simplest explanation is that the former is thought to 'belong' whilst the latter is new and strange. Foresters in Britain are proud of their achievement, and hope that as the new forests become more familiar, they will be felt to 'belong' to our countryside also.

Forestry in the British Scene 1968 FC Booklet No 14



The changing face of FC recreational presentation - Galloway Forest Park.

Slasher Commemorative Centenary Edition

Training heroes to training zero



*Benmore Forester Training School 1964.
Photograph courtesy of Jim Pratt.
Forestry Memories website.*

One of the Commission's famous landmarks in Scotland - Benmore Forester Training School - closed in 1965. Forester training facilities were rationalised over the next few years with the closure of Faskally, Parkend and Northerwood House. But new Management Training Centres opened in the Forest of Dean and Ae Forest, and new entrant Training Schemes were launched at Newton Rigg and Inverness. In 1966 new forester grades were introduced: Chief Forester, Head Forester, Forester and Trainee Forester.



*Ae Management Training Centre 1975. Photograph courtesy of the family of George Dey.
Forestry Memories website.*

[Ae Machine Training Centre was a little further along beside the garages and machine bays, where operators honed their skills on different machines -Ed]

Jubilee jubilations

Fifty years after its creation, the Commission celebrated its Golden Jubilee in 1969. In that year, the Journal of the Forestry Commission recorded... *Since publication began, the Commission has grown from a struggling new Department with inexperienced staff, few in numbers, to a major concern responsible - taking its own forests and the private estates together - for three million acres of woodlands. Today it is well equipped with the latest technological aids, and staffed with experienced men, skilled in many professional fields. We take this opportunity of thanking all our contributors, over the years, for the part they have played in aiding this remarkable growth.*



Princess Alexandra during a 1969 FC Jubilee event at Bush Estate Midlothian.

*Image courtesy of Sheila Matheson.
Forestry Memories website.*

Back to the Future...

The Jubilee Year ended with a celebratory tree planting ceremony at the same place and on the same date as the first Commission planting – at Eggesford Forest, Devon on 8th December.

Slasher Commemorative Centenary Edition

Lines to honour a fifty-year achievement by the Forestry Commission by D. L. Shaw, Forester, North Wales (1968-69 Journal of the Forestry Commission)

HAIL!

~~~~~

Achievement, with a purpose born of need—  
To restore this Nation's gravely drained resource;  
A haunt of kings, a fount of British might  
Depleted by the need to counter force.  
A fifty-year creation restocks our ancient land  
Fulfilling, in broad splendour, much of Britain's wide demand.

**HAIL!**

~~~~~

Five decade's growth invests the ancient hills
Uplifts serrated form o'er lonely moor.
Clothes rugged slopes and shelves of fissured rock
Spreads, sighing, to the vacant farmhouse door.
And cradling, in tender, close embrace
The lowland hamlet, quaint with pristine grace.

HAIL!

~~~~~

Take pride in these our forests, secure them well;  
Their creation spans the flow of fifty years.  
Endeavour, trial and study stamp their course  
From seedling growth to ripening forest tiers.  
Take pride! Within these confines is narration—  
Of man's dedicated service to his nation!

**HAIL!**

~~~~~

Two hundred seasons can chronicle this feat!
And fifty springs have come and gone, awakening the bud,
Renewing Nature's cycle with never failing pulse.
Long summer days have fled on sunshine's lustrous flood.
The guise of autumn tints revives a splendour all too brief
And winters frost-clad pageant recalls woodlands veiled in grief.

HAIL!

~~~~~

Prospects of visual charm enhance the dwindling rural scene  
From Dunnet in Caithness, to Land's End's blustery shore  
From Preseli's lonely fastness to Aldewood in the east  
Our forests straddle landscapes alleged as infecund before.  
A heritage for ageless youth! - and those as yet unborn,  
Ah! amber-littered forest aisles - your crown is proudly worn!

**HAIL!**

~~~~~

Let us respect, and not neglect, those men who laid foundations.
Long pioneer days of trial endured with patient skill
Out of the seed the forest grew - replete with tales and legends
Of men of courage, patience too, who practised on the hill.
Many praise, are with us yet - and for those who are departed
What greater tribute - these our woods - which they so zealously started?

HAIL!

~~~~~

Then let us celebrate these fifty years of function;  
Distinguish proud achievement in this year of Jubilee.  
And observe we are united, for in honour and esteem—  
A Prince of Wales will be proclaimed with Royal Pageantry!  
Grow on then noble trees, grow on—your spell has never fled  
Lead on proud forest service—the century lies ahead!

## The role-changing seventies

### Treasury tumult

The Treasury dropped a bombshell on the Forestry Commission in 1972. Their cost/benefit analysis concluded that State forests were uneconomic compared with other public sector investments. They called for a reduction in new planting and a financial target rate of return of 3% (the analysis did however recognise the value of new planting in providing jobs and stemming depopulation in socially fragile parts of Britain). Experts challenged whether using discount rates was the right way to evaluate afforestation, but to no avail. One consequence was to concentrate afforestation in Scotland: another was increased disposal of Commission properties deemed to be 'surplus'.

By 1979 a gradual sale of houses became a flood, fuelled by discount incentives to tenants under the Thatcher administration. Fifty years on, the Commission's objective of rural employment had long since diminished in importance - but the legacy is still there scattered throughout rural Britain: distinctive FC houses (often pebbledashed or cedar shingles) in communities and villages.



*Strathgryre Forestry Village c1975.  
Photograph courtesy of Sandy Robertson.  
Forestry Memories website.*



**Slasher factoid:** *Despite the Treasury bombshell, overall afforestation continued apace, with 217,000 hectares planted between 1969 and 1979.*

The Treasury recognised that private forestry had a key role to play in the national economy and that grant aid should be conditional upon providing employment or delivering environmental benefits. Entry to the existing schemes (Dedication, Approved Woodlands and Small Woodlands) closed overnight, but the new grant scheme took a long time to develop. In consequence, private sector planting dropped from 24,000 hectares in 1972, to only 9,000 hectares in 1977.



FC Morris Minor. Photograph courtesy of Alex MacLennan.

# Slasher Commemorative Centenary Edition

## Recreation revolution

By 1970, sales of timber totalled more than £5.5million for 1.5 million cubic metres. But while timber was still paramount, the decade saw recreation, conservation and amenity objectives gaining importance.



Dame Sylvia Crowe. © ITV

Some 15 million day-visits and 1 million camper nights were recorded in 1970. A Forest Cabins Branch was established. The Commission could now boast seven Forest Parks, nine managed camping/caravanning sites and a plethora of trails, picnic sites and carparks. The Forest Recreation Handbook, published in 1973, proved to be a popular and enduring read. Forests were identified as important wildlife reserves, and conservation became a special responsibility of Commission staff. Dame Sylvia Crowe was appointed to take forward the forest design agenda.

*[What used to be called 'landscaping' back then. And while we're at it, the cartographic office, used to be called 'drawing office'. Nostalgia isn't what it used to be, sigh! -Ed].*



Caravan site Glenmore - Queen's Forest 1972.  
Photograph courtesy of Inverness, Ross and Skye Forest District and staff. Forestry Memories website.



Loch Faskally picnic site Tummel Forest 1972.  
Photograph is courtesy of George Dey.  
Forestry Memories website.

In a visionary statement in 1974 the Commissioners stated:

*"No one sector of the community nor single generation has a monopoly interest in the forest and its management. As a trustee for the community at large and for future generations the foresters' duty is to pass on our own inheritance from the past, avoiding change for its own sake – which is rightly resented – and shaping the inevitable cycle of growth, maturity, and replacement in a manner which blends the best of tradition, currently accepted standards and options for the future."*

# Slasher Commemorative Centenary Edition

## More mechanisation

Following technical advances in the 1950s, the next stage was the development of hydraulics: cranes and grapples. Timber haulage benefitted first as working practices no longer involved hand loading ('handballing' accounted for 70% in 1960 but had all but disappeared by the mid- 1970s). The FC operated its own fleet of lorries until the 1980s when it moved to contracted haulage. But the big mechanical innovations of the decade were the forwarder and the processor introduced from Scandinavia and working shortwood systems. Trials in the 1970s led to widespread adoption thereafter.



*Highland Bear Forwarder.  
Photograph courtesy of John Ireland.  
Forestry Memories website.*



*Forest Forwarder, Ratagan.  
Photograph courtesy of the family of George Dey.  
Forestry Memories website.*



*Kockums 84-35 forwarder, Tentsmuir Forest.  
Photograph courtesy of Will Anderson.  
Forestry Memories website.*



*6 wheel Volvo BM with OSA 350 crane.  
Forestry Memories website.*

In 1975, the Commission's three offices (London, Basingstoke and Edinburgh) were amalgamated into a new building in Edinburgh. Originally saluted as 'Headquarters', the name became less formal in time, changing to 'Head Office', finally becoming 'Silvan House' in the 1990s following a staff poll.

*[Somehow other suggestions such as 'The Treehouse' 'The Nuthouse' and 'FCUK' failed to gain approval! -Ed]*

*Gordon Ferguson, Ross Moffat and David Veitch helping(?) Jim Hewitson (Clambunk Captain) leave his 'sinking ship' in Glentress*

# Slasher Commemorative Centenary Edition

Apart from the 1976 drought, which caused the worst fire losses since the war, the big disaster of the decade - with echoes continuing to this day - was the introduction of a virulent strain of Dutch Elm Disease, believed to have arrived on Rock Elm logs from Canada. Despite movement restriction orders, by 1975 a third of the elm trees in central and southern England had been affected. Strenuous research efforts failed to find a cure and the disease was left to run its course northwards.



**Slasher factoid:** In 1976 Fiona Fenton becomes the FC's first female Forester.  
[Cynic alert: well I suppose it only took about 70 years! -Ed]

The '50s, '60s and '70s saw dramatic surges in output and income. The Forest Estate doubled to nearly 1.6 million hectares and afforestation surged onto upland marginal land, enabled by research and technical development. Sixty years after its formation the Commission had come a very long way - as had the private sector. And yet Britain still had almost the lowest proportion of woodland cover in Europe as well as an import bill, in 1979, of £2.8 billion. The case for continuing to expand the country's forest estate was as strong as ever...

## The changing eighties

Change and challenge, economy and efficiency were the 1980s watchwords for the Commission - and the forest sector as a whole. A Government statement said: *"A continued expansion of forestry is in the national interest, both to reduce our dependence upon imported wood in the long-term and to provide continued employment in forestry and associated industries."* ... *We see a greater place for participation by the private sector in new planting, but the Forestry Commission will also continue to have a programme...*". A Reading University Paper *'Strategy for the UK Forest Industry'* proposed a big increase in afforestation (0.6 million to 2.0 million hectares) by 2030. But pressure groups - especially the Ramblers - were strongly against more conifers.

Before Thatcherism very few sales of FC land and forests took place but in 1981 a change in the Forestry Act allowed the FC to sell its woodlands. Between 1981 and 1997 over 70,000 hectares of land and forests were sold in Scotland alone; by 1989, property sales had totalled more than £123 million.

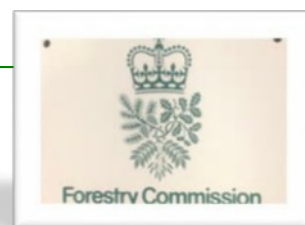
*Already, the first decade of sale of Commission forests, 1981 - 1991, was marked by a dramatic loss of public access, even in forests near to centres of population which had used them for recreational purposes. There are now public access guidelines attached to such sales, but access remains a problem and may have been a factor in preventing privatisation of the Commission in 1994.*

**House of Commons Library Research Paper on Forestry Policy, 27 July 1995**

## From Crown Imperial to As You Like It



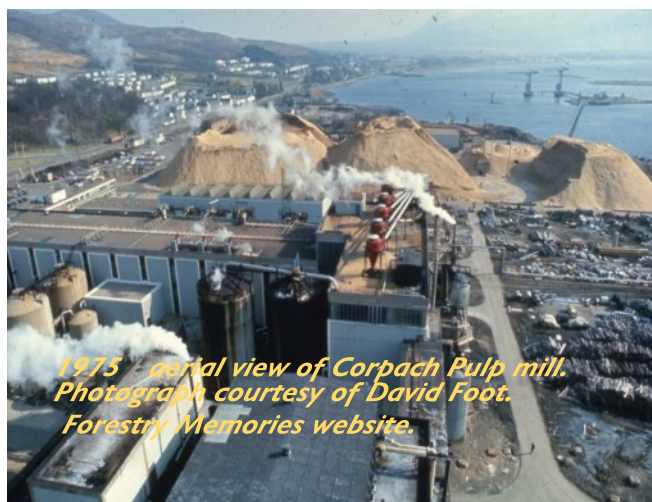
# Forestry Commission



Designed in 1980 by Bob Jones (Head of Design & Interpretative Services Unit) the Commission's friendly tree logo broke the traditional FC mould of crown and heraldic crests. *[The welcoming two trees, distinctive green colour and font must surely be the best recognised rural brand in Britain. For any private sector company today such brand awareness would be of incalculable value. -Ed]*

# Slasher Commemorative Centenary Edition

## Pulp Fiction to Pulp Fact



1975 aerial view of Corpach Pulp mill.  
Photograph courtesy of David Foot.  
Forestry Memories website.

Economic times were hard during the early '80s. The recession closed the mills at Fort William, Ellesmere Port and Bristol. Government cuts led to a downturn in buying land and recreation investment. British markets for timber waned, so the Commission began to export pulpwood and soon half a million tonnes of timber a year were being shipped - much of it to Scandinavia. *[Coals to Newcastle anyone? -Ed]*

A search for new investment began. Within five years there were new particleboard and pulpwood investments at Irvine, Dalcross and Irvine, much of it underpinned by FC timber contracts.

*"And everything went fine, everything was boom, until this damned pulp mill collapsed... so the whole place just died."* Tommy Stewart, Haulier.

## A Knapdale first

In 1985 Knapdale Forest became the first in the UK to be equipped with a mechanised harvester. Malcolm Wield, the forester in charge recalls, *"The machines are tireless. They were to be aspired to and brought back a lot of motivation... Machine operation became the best job for forest workers, and still is."*

## Tax Flow

Much of the 1980s forest expansion was by the private sector, driven by tax incentives. Over the decade, private planting totalled 182,000 hectares, but it wasn't always the 'right tree in the right place'.

The Flow Country of Caithness and Sutherland, *[christened Scotland's Serengeti -Ed]* - one of the largest surviving areas of blanket bog in Europe - emerged as a pivotal campaigning battle ground.

Private forestry tax breaks for celebrity investors were roundly condemned by the public and the media. The climax of this campaign came in 1988 when forestry was removed from the scope of Income Tax and Corporation Tax by Chancellor Lawson. Tax-led forestry investment ended overnight, new planting reduced dramatically, the nursery trade suffered and there was a loss of confidence amongst private investors.

Planting eventually picked up again when the Woodland Grant Scheme was introduced.



Double Mould Board ploughing Rumster Forest 1979.  
Photograph courtesy of the family of George Dey.  
Forestry Memories website.



Ploughing tractors bogged at Lochans near Lairg 1987.  
Photograph courtesy of Frank Thom.  
Forestry Memories website.

# Slasher Commemorative Centenary Edition

The 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act stimulated environmental awareness, but FC policies and lack of awareness were seen as being out of step with the times. The Nature Conservancy Council 1985 report *'Nature Conservation in Great Britain'* showed that nearly half of Ancient Semi-Natural woodland had been lost over the last 50 years in 23 counties.

But forestry attitudes were at last catching up: an FC/ICF Symposium *'Broadleaves in Britain'* led to an FC review of broadleaved policy in 1985 and new incentives were brought in to protect and enhance Britain's broadleaves. European Union legislation also helped the conservation agenda, with the EIA, Birds, and Habitat Directives.

The Forestry Act 1967 was amended by the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1985 to include a duty on the Commission to balance *"the development of afforestation, the management of forests and the production and supply of timber"* with *"the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty and the conservation of flora, fauna and geological or physio-graphical features of special interest."*

## Audit, audit

In 1986 a National Audit Office Report *'Forestry in Great Britain'* strongly criticised the FC's economic performance [*like its predecessor 1972 Treasury cost/benefit analysis -Ed*]. The future looked bleak but - in the event - help came from an unexpected quarter. The Forest Industry vigorously defended the FC, rounding on the Report as *'ill-informed criticism'*. The threat passed and 'the show did go on'.

In 1987 a Countryside Commission report *'Forestry in the Countryside'* supported multi-purpose forestry and proposed County forestry strategies, new urban fringe Community Woodlands and a National Forest in the Midlands, as well as planning permission for major new planting proposals. For the Commission it looked like others were picking up the forestry agenda and taking it forward. The FC eventually saw sense and backed all the proposals except for afforestation coming under planning control.



**Slasher factoid:** *Forest expansion still remains outwith the planning system although planning authorities exert a strong influence over future woodland expansion, the control of woodland removal and the development of the forestry industry in their areas.*



173,000m<sup>3</sup> of timber was stored at Thetford Forest

But 1987 was mainly remembered for the devastating autumn gale that flooded two million cubic metres of timber onto the market in the south of England. Fifty million trees blew down, with more timber destroyed than in any other single storm in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thanks to FC planning and innovative water storage techniques the vast majority of windblown timber was salvaged and marketed successfully.

*"Earlier on today apparently a woman rang the BBC and said she had heard a hurricane was on the way. Well I can assure people watching, don't worry, there isn't".*

BBC weather forecaster  
Michael Fish,  
16<sup>th</sup> October 1987

# Slasher Commemorative Centenary Edition

## The multi-purpose nineties

By now the Commission was firmly committed to multi-purpose/multi-benefit forestry. Gone was the single-minded drive for a strategic timber reserve. Now it was all about sustainable forest management: the three-legged stool of economic, environmental and social benefits.



## Restructuring...

A 1991 House of Commons Agriculture Committee Enquiry Report on Land Use and Forestry set out the FC's main aim as: '*sustainable management of our existing woods and forests; and steady expansion of tree cover to increase the many, diverse benefits that forests provide*'. It also recommended separating the FC's Authority and Enterprise functions into distinct bodies.



Following international commitments at Rio in 1992 and Helsinki in 1993, the UK published **Sustainable Forestry - The UK Programme** in 1994, which drew upon **Biodiversity: The UK Action Plan**. This set out practical measures for safeguarding and enhancing the environment. *[Forestry has a vital role to play in biodiversity and it features prominently in many Species and Habitat Action Plans and local Biodiversity Action Plans – Ed]*



The decade ushered in Local Authority Indicative Forestry Strategies in Scotland, which identified areas for new planting as either 'preferred', 'potential' or 'sensitive'.

*Circular 13/1990 introduced Indicative Forestry Strategies at a time of controversy over the large-scale planting of commercial forests. IFSS were designed to reduce conflict by steering further planting to less sensitive areas. Circumstances have changed radically since then and IFSS can be adapted to play a positive role in guiding and influencing future planting and felling.*

## Scottish Government Circular 9/1999 - Indicative Forestry Strategies



The Commission realised the importance of Britain's native and broadleaved woods, leading to the British & Irish Hardwoods Investment Programme and the Scottish Hardwood Timber Market Development Group as well as FC Advisory Guides for native woodland types. In 1998 the FC Guidelines that had been developed over the previous decade were incorporated into the UK Forestry Standard. This provided a reference standard for sustainable forest management and a basis for regulation and monitoring. Retailer demand for timber



certification led to the UK Woodland Assurance Standard in 1991. The Public Forest Estate (all FC Forests) was subsequently granted Forest Stewardship Council certification and became the largest supplier of certificated timber in the UK.

Social forestry was on the rise too - especially for people living in urban environments –with initiatives like the Central Scotland Forest and the National Forest and twelve Community Forests in England.

## ...and more Restructuring

Production from FC forests rose from four million cubic metres in 1993 to over five million by the end of the decade. This allowed first rotation plantations to be restructured *[Turning the carpet of Sitka into a patchwork quilt of different ages, species and open ground - Ed]*.

# Slasher Commemorative Centenary Edition

## Three quarters of the way towards its Century



*From left to right :*

*Robin Cutler - DG*

*Anne Stohner*

*Roger Bradley - Commissioner*

*Ros Bull*

*David Grundy - Commissioner*

*Moira Hart*

*Stella Simpson*

*Tim Rollinson - Secretary to the Commissioners*

*Lesley Hanson*

*Diane*

*David Foot - Commissioner*



*In 1993/4 [and not for the last time!*

*- Ed]* the government considered privatising the Commission. There was a lot of push back from conservation groups like CPRE, CPRW and RSPB, and also from timber processors concerned about continuity of timber supplies. In the end FC forests remained in the public sector and Forest Enterprise and Forest Research became government Agencies.

75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Forestry Commission celebration given by Parliamentary Under Secretary of State Sir Hector Munro, at the Scottish Office, Edinburgh Castle, Great Hall 10 Nov 1994. Photograph courtesy of Douglas Green. FC attendees included Eddie Arthurs, Arthur Barlow, Alan Betts, Bill Brack, Richard Britton, Roger Bradley, Roger Busby, Peter Clarke, Hugh Clayden, Gordon Cowie, Robin Cutler, Norman Davidson, Huw Davies, Jim Dewar, Bob Dunsmore, David Evans, John Everard, Gwyn Francis, David Foot, Mike Garforth, John Gell, Keith Glidden, David Grundy, Alan Low, Graham Hamilton, David Henderson-Howat, Roger Herbert, George Holmes, Syd House, David Hughes, Raymond Johnston, Rod Leslie, Fraser Lindsay, Bob MacIntosh, Bill Mason, Frank McCulloch, Arthur Miller, Dallas Mithen, Sir David Montgomery, John Morgan, Kenny Murray, Andy Neustein, John Pollock, Willie Prest, James Ogilvie, Steve Quigley, Peter Ranken, Tim Rollinson, Derek Rutherford, Richard Smith, John Spittal, George Stewart, Christina Tracey, Malcolm Wield,

# Slasher Commemorative Centenary Edition

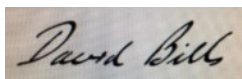
Some lamented the reorganisations that occurred over the previous two decades, changes driven by economies and efficiencies. The influential expansionist Conservator for South Scotland John Davies felt that the changes were for the worse...

*I look back over the last 20 years with deep sorrow. The old idealism... has gone and we now have an organisation which tries to be all things to everyone. No stable employment. No permanent local foresters. Neglected forests run on very basic cost-cutting lines. Very sad.*

But the then Director General was more sanguine...

## 1999/2000 FC Annual Report

*The sector therefore has a bright future and there is much worthwhile work to be done... Fortunately, the Forestry Commission is full of very able and committed people with proven ability... It may be clichéd to say that they are our greatest asset, but it is nevertheless true. We continue to give a high priority to people issues. Some of the ways we have done this include improving diversity, in line with Modernising Government, and unifying all FC staff in a single work group. Some of these steps will not hit the headlines, but they are essential if we are to create together a modern Commission able to meet the very modern challenges that we shall undoubtedly face in the years ahead.*



Thanks to the 20<sup>th</sup> century planting programmes by the FC and the private sector, by the start of the new millennium, Britain's forest cover had more than doubled, to 12% (9% England, 16% Scotland and 12% Wales). *[A high-tech FC National Forest Inventory showed that by 2011 there were 2,982,000 hectares of woodland across England, Scotland and Wales, representing 13% of Britain's land area - a massive increase on the 5% tree cover that existed when the Commission started life nine decades earlier. -Ed]*



**Slasher factoid:** In 2016, the FC National Forest Inventory calculated that there were 742,000 hectares of tree cover outside woodland in Britain: 565,000 hectares in England; 84,000 hectares in Scotland and 93,000 hectares in Wales.

## Treemendous tree cover



*[Here you can clearly see that the heyday for FC afforestation was the '50s, '60s and '70s. Private sector new planting became the new norm after that. Ed]*

## The boom and bust noughties

### Wood for good

At the start of the noughties, Britain's forests were producing more than eight million tonnes of wood per year: by the end of the decade this rose to nearly ten million tonnes, mainly softwood. The timber industry's £2 billion investment between 1985 and 2000 ensured that Britain had world-class processing facilities, with forestry accounting for around 35,000 jobs. Demand for wood products continued to grow at the same time however, with imports still accounting for more than 80% of domestic demand.



But the social agenda was gaining momentum too. In Southern Scotland the '7 Stanes' was launched: seven world-class mountain biking centres attracting riders from all over the UK and beyond.

By now the English Community Forests were flourishing, whilst in Scotland the influential WIAT multi-million-pound programme (Woods In and Around Towns) was launched in 2005 to improve quality of life in Scotland's urban areas. Ten years later WIAT had brought 11,000 hectares of neglected woodland back into active management, created 1,400 hectares of new urban woodland and created or upgraded over 300 miles of footpaths.

# Slasher Commemorative Centenary Edition

*“We conclude that environmental interventions in deprived urban locations can positively impact on use patterns, perceptions of environment and, potentially, activity levels and quality of life”. (Conclusion from a four-year study funded by the National Institute for Health examining the impact of WIAT on the psychological wellbeing and stress levels of people living in deprived communities in Scotland’s ‘central belt’.)*



*“Woodlands close to our communities are often undervalued assets. WIAT, and the research by OPENspace measuring its effect, allows us to understand the importance of these assets and teaches us how to make them work for health and wellbeing.”*

- George Morris, Consultant in Environmental Health & Former Science Policy Adviser in Scottish Government

## Artistic perspective

Since Grizedale forest in the 1960s, the FC had *[mostly covertly -Ed]* provided arts offerings, mainly static art (sculpture). As the social agenda increased in the 1990s and beyond, arts of all kinds were encouraged to flourish across the Commission’s forests. One of many examples is The Enchanted Forest - Perthshire’s multi-award-winning sound and light show - set up by James McDougall in 2002 to encourage more people to connect with woodlands. Started with just under £26,000 funding from FCS, Scottish Enterprise and Perth and Kinross Council, the event attracted just over 2,000 visitors in its first year. In 2010, the event was passed to a community led organisation. By 2015, The Enchanted Forest was attracting over 60,000 people, contributing nearly £3million to the local tourism economy.



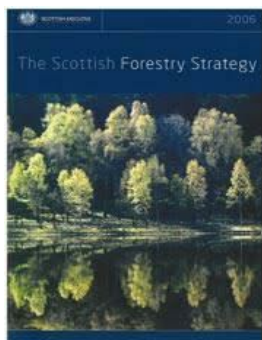
**Slasher factoid:** The FC is the largest provider of outdoor art in Britain.

# Slasher Commemorative Centenary Edition

The Forestry Commission has never promoted a specific policy on art, nor has it had any real overall strategic orientation on the subject at GB level.

It seems clear that the FC's arts activities add in unique ways to people's awareness, understanding and valuing of trees, forests and woodland. They can be effective in addressing intangible values such as 'sense of place', cultural history and identity; and they help with reassessing the relationship between nature and society, and in rebuilding some of the lost connections. Art projects that give people greater respect for forest values have helped in reducing problems of litter, fire and vandalism; and they probably also support a wider social sense of care for the natural environment. Finally, of course, there is the intrinsic creative merit of the art itself. This study has confirmed that the artistic achievements of the FC's involvements - the meanings, effects, and quality of the content of the work - add up to a hugely significant contribution to the contemporary cultural life of the nation.

Dave Pritchard Artistic Licence - A review of the FC's involvements in the arts.



The concept of community ownership was gaining momentum in Scotland. FCS established the National Forest Land Scheme which gave local communities the opportunity to buy areas of FC land (by now referred to as the National Forest Estate). The Scottish Government later used experience from this Scheme to develop its broader Community Asset Transfer Scheme.

As devolution continued apace, the three countries - England, Scotland and Wales - developed different Forestry Strategies, with differing emphases of policy.

Despite buoyant timber production, recreation usage and revenue, in the wake of the 2008 Financial Crash and government austerity, the various parts of FC suffered considerable budget cuts and staff salaries were effectively frozen for several years.

## The devolutionary finale....

In 2010, the Government introduced a Public Bodies Bill with powers to privatise public forests in England. Opposition by interest groups and the public was intense and an online protest petition received more than half a million signatories. Eventually the privatisation plans were abandoned, and an Independent Panel was established to advise on future direction of forestry and woodland policy in England. It recommended that England's forests should

*Our forests and woods are nature's playground for the adventurous, museum for the curious, hospital for the stressed, cathedral for the spiritual, and a livelihood for the entrepreneur. They are a microcosm of the cycle of life in which each and every part is dependent on the other; forests and woods are the benefactor of all, purifying the air that we breathe and distilling the water of life. In short, trees are for life.*

The Right Reverend Bishop James Jones, the Bishop of Liverpool, Chair of the Independent Panel - July 2012

increase from 9% to 15% by 2060 and that the FC Public Forest Estate should be defined in law as land held in trust for the nation as a national asset. *[Whilst this had obvious advantages, it meant that FC England could not rationalise its properties. By contrast Scotland's Ministers agreed that FCS could undertake 'repositioning': selling areas with low public benefits to invest in programmes (e.g. land/woodland acquisition) to help deliver the Scottish Forestry Strategy. -Ed]*

# Slasher Commemorative Centenary Edition

***"If there is one clear message from this experience, it is that people cherish their forests and woodlands and the benefits they bring. My first priority throughout this period of debate has been securing a sustainable future for our woodlands and forests."***

Environment secretary Caroline Spelman apologises to MPs as she confirms the government has abandoned plans to sell off England's forests amid widespread criticism.

Devolution was the main organisational driver for the Commission in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In 2003, forestry policy, grants and the ownership of the state forests were devolved to each of the three Administrations. Now the FC reported to the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly as well as Westminster. Forestry Commission England, FC Scotland (Coimisiun na Coilltearachd) and FC Wales (Comisiwn Coedwigeath Cymru) became in effect sub-departments of the GB Forestry Commission, each with their different Forestry Strategies. In Wales this process was completed ten years later by the merger of FC Wales with Environment Agency Wales and the Countryside Council for Wales - as Natural Resources Wales: a single body delivering the environmental priorities of the Welsh Government. This move was controversial among forestry stakeholders who worried *[with some justification as it turned out -Ed]* that the industry's voice would not be adequately heard in the new organisation.



In Scotland, the devolutionary journey took a little longer, and with some bumps along the road. In 2018, proposals for merger into the Scottish Government were defeated by MSPs on the grounds that this would lead to a loss of professional focus.



Instead, in April 2019 - a century after the Commission was established - Forest Enterprise Scotland became Forestry & Land Scotland, an Agency of Scottish Government, whilst FC



Scotland became a separate Scottish Government Agency entitled Scottish Forestry *[well RSFS, they do say that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery! -Ed]*. One hundred years after its ignition, the FC torch is kept alight only in England...

***"It is 2050, and England's trees, woods and forests are helping us to cope with the continuing challenge of climate change and are also valued because many more people now enjoy using them. Trees are not just an important part of England's history, but an essential feature of a modern, sustainable society, which has significantly reduced carbon emissions".***

***2007 England Forestry Strategy***

## OUR 50-YEAR VISION FOR FORESTRY IN SCOTLAND

» In 2070, Scotland will have more forests and woodlands, sustainably managed and better integrated with other land uses. These will provide a more resilient, adaptable resource, with greater natural capital value, that supports a strong economy, a thriving environment, and healthy and flourishing communities.

Scottish Forestry Strategy

### Back to the Future...again

The Forestry Commission's 2019 centenary year ended with celebratory planting ceremonies in the same places as the first tree plantings by Lords Clinton and Lovat, at Eggesford Forest in Devon and Monaughtie Forest in Moray. Guest of honour at the latter was 100 year old George Stewart, former Commissioner, Forest and Estate Management.

### 1984 or 2084 - Orwell that Ends Well?

An article by A. D. Hopkinson entitled **Sixty Years' Hence** was published in the April 1925 Journal of the Forestry Commission. It is still as relevant today as it was back then...

*Let us cast aside for a moment the affairs of to-day and glance at our forests sixty years hence. Let us imagine the forester of a future generation regarding the maturity of our labours. How will he criticise the results? Will he dig out old and musty files? No! Will he wade through voluminous reports? No! Will he make intricate calculations with masses of figures? No! He will look at the growing trees and by them shall we be judged, even as we now judge the foresters of the past. Gone will be the forester, the figures, the files. Alone will remain the trees, the only vital link left, tall, majestic trees - a monument to our skill or a stunted growth, symbolic of the reverse. Our politics, our pay, our promotion, our very names, all happily lost in oblivion, but the forest standing there.*

*Then again, our 1984 forester may enquire into results of our efforts as viewed from the social point of view. To do this he will have a perfect right, as our labours will have been all in vain if the people of the country have not benefited thereby. Upon the system we have built up we will be judged.*

*But our forester will again turn to the trees, for if the trees fail all else will fail with them. They alone will stand in silent but eloquent testimony of our worth.*

***[And finally... grateful thanks to the tireless efforts of Norman Davidson and the Forestry Memories website images <https://www.forestry-memories.org.uk/> and especially to all those who contributed images used in this special centenary edition of Slasher. Ed]***