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RETIREMENT OF MR. G. B. RYLE

AFTER 41 years' service Mr. GEORGE B. RYLE, C.B.E., who until the reconstitution of the Commission was our Deputy Director General, retires on the 13th of next month. Because he is taking leave before his actual retiring date, he said farewell to Savile Row and many of his colleagues and friends in mid-September.

Mr Ryle has supplied us with a few notes about his long and varied career in forestry. He writes: I reported for duty on 13th October, 1924 at the Bedford Divisional Office, the staff of which comprised Mr. A. P. LONG as Divisional Officer, assisted by the late George Childs, and one shorthand typist. The Division included Allerston, Selby, Hazelborough, Salcey, Apethorpe, Fineshades, Swaffham and Ampthill, and the forests of Clipstone and Loughton came in in 1925. This was a large and rambling district and, of course, the correct mode of transport in those days was either a push bicycle or Shanks' pony. Even the Divisional Officer, when he visited Selby or Allerston, was expected to travel up by train to the nearest railway station and then look for a secondhand bicycle shop where a bicycle could be hired by the hour, day or week and use that for getting to and from the forests.

In 1925 I was transferred as Working Plans Officer, working directly under the then Mr. ROBINSON at the Headquarters office, 22, Grosvenor Gardens. In those days there was a delightful practice whereby the Chairman's secretary, Miss INGRAM, held a small tea party in her room every day at 4 p.m. sharp. The Chairman, LORD LOVAT, and Messrs. ROBINSON, HERBERT (Secretary), GUILLEBAUD (Research Officer), FRASER STOREY (Publications Officer) and myself attended for a 10-minute gossip about current Commission affairs.

In 1928, on getting married, I asked for a transfer and took charge of the Thetford district and was again transferred, at short notice, to take charge of the South Wales district with headquarters at Tintern. The district covered Tintern Forest, Chepstow Park, Sedbury (Gloucestershire), Llantrisant, Margam, Rheola, Hensol, Pembrey, Brecon, Glasfynydd and Glangwili (now the Forest of Brechfa). In 1930 it was decided that Tintern, Chepstow Park and Sedbury should be handed back to the Deputy Surveyor of the Forest of Dean and I was therefore transferred once more to form a new district headquarters at Bridgend.

About 1932 I became District Officer I. In 1936 came the dreadful period of industrial depression over South Wales and it was decided that there should be large expansions of forestry work in and around the South Wales coalfield. I was then promoted to Divisional Officer and spent the next year or so doing land acquisitions in this district. In 1938 South Wales was made into a new division entirely and I took charge with a divisional officer in Cardiff, and a staff comprising TED BRADFORD as Chief Clerk, T. D. H. MORRIS as boy clerk, together with one girl clerk and one shorthand typist. There were three out-stationed District Officers.

On the outbreak of war in 1939 there was a split of the Forestry Commission into two branches, the F.M.D., or Forest Management Department, and the T.P.D., or the Timber Production Department. I was put in charge of the latter and became Divisional Officer for South Wales of the T.P.D., on secondment. Throughout the whole of the war my division and that of my neighbour in South West England vied to the see which could win in a weekly match on the number of trucks of pitwood despatched to South Wales coalfield. We were also doing a large business in round timber, which we acquired, felled and delivered to the South Wales private trade sawmillers. We also had eleven departmental sawmills scattered up and down the valleys in South Wales.

At end of the war in Europe I was seconded to the Control Commission for Germany, North German Timber Control, and stationed at Hamburg in the post of Controller of Pitwood Supplies. This, of course, involved supplies of pitwood to the German mines as fast as they were able to be reconstructed after the colossal bombing damage they sustained. I had to attend a fortnightly meeting of the German Pitwood Merchants' Association which took place in Essen, and for my personal accommodation I was allocated one of the bedrooms in Krupps' house. Eventually the German pitwood merchants dealt with the German Coal Board, and the need for British personnel rapidly came to an end. I was then transferred to take charge of the Luneburg district as Chief Control Officer with the dual function of trying to put the German timber trade back on its feet and of increasing direct operations whereby the North German Timber Control felled timber of various categories and got it exported to Britain. We got a high proportion of able-bodied men then living in the former concentration camps to work on direct timber production operations, but as they were only allowed the minimum civilian ration of food (which at that time was really extraordinarily low) and as they had practically no means of using their weekly wage which we paid them, the rate of output was also pretty low. Most of Germany at that time seemed to be living on the black market, but these poor displaced persons had no means of entering into the racket. We therefore decided to pay them a bonus, not in money but in cigarettes. I am not going to tell you how we got hold of these but after a few weeks it became so obvious that production was going up and up because of this incentive that I persuaded our Director General, Mr. Lenanton, that the situation be legalised. Before the next pay day we had a large room in our office completely full from floor to ceiling with cigarette packets of all shapes, sizes and makes, some German, some English.

After about a year in Germany I was recalled to the Commission to take charge of the new South Wales Conservancy, because ANGUS MUIR had become very ill. I stayed there for about two years and was transferred as Conservator for private forestry and land acquisitions in the office of the Director of Forestry for England.

After a five-year stint in London I was again promoted and went to Wales as Director, on the retirement of the late Mr. A. P. LONG. I arrived in Wales at a somewhat difficult period, when the famous Towy compulsory acquisition scheme had caused an uproar amongst the farming community. However, by hard work and tremendous enthusiasm from all the staff, both in the Directorate office and the two Conservancies, the picture steadily changed and has continued to improve ever since.

After another five years stay in Wales I went back to London, this time as Director for England, on the retirement of Mr. O. J. SANGAR.

This was a third five-year stint and my subsequent and final move was to the Headquarters of the Forestry Commission as Deputy Director General

"Last stage of all which ends this strange eventful history"

Before a large gathering at Headquarters MR. RYLE was presented by our Director General, SIR HENRY BERESFORD-PEIRSE, with a cheque, on behalf of many colleagues and well-wishers. Of this, more in a later issue.

****CORECTION**

WE much regret that in the last issue of The Slasher we stated that MR. J.R. HAMPSON was being transferred, on promotion, from North Wales to a post as Assistant Conservator in South West England. Not so; MR. HAMPSON goes to South Wales and, of course, in his case the matter of promotion did not arise.

****34 YEARS AT SAME FOREST**

FORESTER J. HIRD, known to his many friends as "Joe", has retired after 34 years' service. His stay at Stang, Yorkshire, may be unique. He commenced there as a forest worker in the early 1930's, he helped to plant the first trees and rose to the rank of Forester, and when he retired the thinning programme had risen to about 100 acres per annum. Joe Hird was a native of Arkengarthdale in the adjoining dale, to which he has now retired. His father was a Dales lead miner, but Joe, as a young man, went to the coalmines until about 1931, and when the Stang was bought for afforestation, he returned to his native district to become one of the original squad.

To quote Joe, "Those were hard days; most of the winter we had to walk over the hill as the road was impassable and many a day we walked for 'nowt'. We were just sent home again having walked for two hours and no pay".

It was as "seller" that Joe excelled. Christmas tree sales at Stang have been of the order of 100,000, and posts, rails, rustic poles and so on disposed of locally in fairly large quantities. On Bank day at Barnard Castle, which was also market day, he could be found selling his wares.

Joe was presented with a pair of binoculars by the oldest serving employee, Mr. STAN WALLER, on behalf of colleagues. At a later date the Conservator (MR. G.J.L. BATTERS), Divisional Officer (MR. T. V. DENT) and the District Officer (MR. I.A.D. MACDONALD) entertained Joe to dinner in the local hotel and with a drink at the Tan Hill Inn nearby - the highest public house in England, 1732 ft. above sea level.

More recently, when a guest on a Foresters' visit to Thetford, Joe was presented with a cheque towards a watch of his own choice.

We all wish him well in his retirement.

****DEATH OF FORMER FORESTER**

WE regret to have to record the death recently of MR. H.M. JENKINS, former Forester who retired in 1961. A native of the Dovey Valley, he served for many years in Crychan Forest in South Wales, later returning to Dovey Forest, where he remained until his retirement. He continued to live at Dovey until his death and was locally held in high regard. Our sympathy goes to his son, Head Forester TREVOR JENKINS, of Ebbw Forest in South Wales.

****NEWS FROM WOKING**

IT is with considerable regret, writes our Woking Correspondent, that we have to record the death of MR. J.A. WHEELER, our Messenger, on the day he returned home from a fortnight's holiday.

He leaves a widow and a married son and daughter, to whom we extend our sympathy.

Mr. WHEELER joined the Forestry Commission in June 1958, MR. H.W. GULLIVER, Administration and Finance Officer, writes: "The loss of our friend BERT WHEELER has been keenly felt in the Woking Office. He was a bus driver before joining the staff of the Commission but with his family grown up, he decided to take a job with regular hours. He was a modest man who carried out his duties cheerfully and without fuss and was blessed with a good measure of dry humour."

The Woking Office has had to say an official farewell to "Peter Pan" REG CHEESEMAN (Telephonist & o/c Registry) who has retired at the age of 74! This retirement only became a necessity due to the failing health of his wife. Reg is a remarkable man. When he left he did not look (or act) any older than when he joined the Commission as a temporary Clerical Officer 15 years ago, after retiring from the Post Office. His many friends throughout the Conservancy subscribed to the presentation, made by the Conservator, MR. R.H. SMITH, of a very fine garden chair and penknife.

****AN ODE TO HENRY:
A DOG AMONG DOGS**

THE *Slasher* cannot normally include obituaries about pets because our many animal-loving foresters could often relate sad stories of bereavement (writes MR. J.Q. WILLIAMSON, hitherto Director, Wales). My only excuse for asking that Henry, my boxer, should have this honour is that he was not just a family pet - he was a well-known forestry character who knew intimately as many trees in the forests of Britain as his distinguished namesake and was welcomed just as cordially when he carried out his visits of inspection.

Henry literally jumped into fame at a conference of Conservators when he was a puppy by springing from the top storey of Northwood House, and his howl of anguish as he hurtled past the window of the meeting room will be remembered while the old guard of Conservators live to tell the tale. He considered a broken leg well worth the publicity he gained. Determined to remain in the public eye his next escapade was at a demonstration to timber merchants at Micheldever when, in an excess of zeal, he whipped the legs from under the Divisional Officer at the height of his peroration on "Dappled Shade" treatment.

He identified landrovers with joyful forest excursions and whenever he saw one, no matter to whom it belonged or where it stood - even in a London street - he was up in a flash, impatiently demanding action.

In his middle age Henry took up golf and was eagerly sought after as a caddy by many members of the Aberystwyth club - finding the ball was his speciality and he knew he should never disturb one except, of course, occasionally to nose it gently into a better lie or nuzzle his opponent's into a deeper bit of rough. He never considered the strict "No Dogs" rule applied to him because by this time he did not really look upon himself as belonging to that species of animal but rather as a "rara avis". His only disappointment was in his master's play and in many a confidential chat he told me that he was ashamed at being seen playing with such a rabbit.

Although he took liberties with Commission time and trees, he amply made up for this by furthering the cause of forestry in Wales - many of our Welsh "unfriends" became less hostile when Henry had shown what he thought of the Sassenachs by lying disdainfully on his back and then leaping joyfully in the air when asked what he thought of Wales.

He ingratiated himself quickly with the Aberystwyth staff and set a new record by persuading animal-lover MR. TAYLOR, the messenger here, to bring him his tea every morning on a silver salver - more than his master ever got.

Probably he reached the height of his career when he baffled the Commissioners on a tour in North Wales with his card trick dexterity this I am sure was not done for self glorification but to impress them at second hand that his master was still capable of occasional flashes of brilliance.

In his final two years he suffered from kidney trouble which, to check, meant imbibing vast quantities of water with the inevitable nocturnal result. Whenever we stayed away from home we both enjoyed reconnoitring the premises to find an exit which could be used without disturbing other guests. The most ludicrous occasion was at a Henley hotel where the only feasible exit was down a steep iron fire escape, and a pyjama-clad Director olampering down this with five stones of dog in his arms at 2 a.m. found some difficulty in explaining the reason to a policeman who pounced on him.

But there, we can all tell endless tales of our favourite dogs and I am sure that Henry would be the first to complain if I prolong this sentimental eulogy - so farewell Henry Plantagenet, old and faithful friend.