



No. 8

Tree Scribe

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Pulp in perspective

THREE PULPMILL closures in the space of a few months have shown that the British forest products industry is not immune from the current recession, with its daily toll in other sectors of the economy of factory closures and redundancies.

While the pulpmill workers at Fort William, Ellesmere Port and Bristol join the ranks of the nation's unemployed is the effect on British forestry equally acute?

Coming hard on the heels of the announcement that Wiggins Teape and Canadian group Consolidated-Bathurst were not to proceed with a projected £100 million mechanical newsprint mill at Fort William which sealed the fate of the existing chemical pulping operation there, Bowaters' decision to close their mechanical newsprint mill at Ellesmere Port has been greeted in the Press with general alarm and dismay.

Bowaters' published reasons for the closure have referred to a trading loss of £5M and blamed the relative strength of sterling against the US dollar, together with the costs of energy and wood in the UK. The currency factor is telling because pulp is traded internationally priced in US dollars. Both energy and wood costs in North America are considerably less than in the UK.

All these reasons are valid ones for Bowaters' having invested heavily in North America and having kept capital inputs for re-equipping at Ellesmere Port to an irreducible minimum. Estimates for the cost of modernising the Ellesmere Port pulpmill now have been put at £36M.

Growers have enjoyed the pricing policies employed at Ellesmere Port. With no long-term guarantees of supply from the Forestry

Commission Bowaters have made certain of their wood supply by being generous with prices. Prices have exceeded those paid by Bowaters at their Sittingbourne pulpmill by some £4 per tonne.

This alone added £1M per annum to Ellesmere Port's costs. There appears to have been no pricing liaison with Sittingbourne, where, significantly perhaps, their pulping operation continues in production.

Outside of North America the other main centre of pulping activity is Scandinavia, whose products also compete in the world market priced in US dollars. Here also energy costs are lower than in the UK: electricity costs for example are one-third of those in the UK. The price of wood however in Scandinavia stands comparison with the UK.

It does appear in the case of both

Fort William and Ellesmere Port that energy costs were a significant factor. Tree Scribe understands that in the package of incentives offered by Government as assistance towards the Wiggins Teape/Consolidated-Bathurst project there were no special terms for energy. This seems particularly shortsighted, bearing in mind that the North of Scotland Hydro Electric Board has powers to vary its tariffs to attract new industry and did so for British Aluminium's new smelter at Invergordon.

For high-volume constant-load processes such as pulping there must be considerable attraction to the energy supply industries in discounted terms to attract the custom.

The closure news at Fort William preceded that at Ellesmere Port and has allowed time for the forestry industry in Scotland to work out its own temporary salvation. This has involved close co-operation and co-ordination between the state and private sectors, resulting in a series of invitations to tender for pulpwood supplies for export to Norway and Sweden in which Tilhill has participated.

The contracts are being finalised for shipment from East Coast ports and will involve some 200,000 tonnes in total per annum.

This opportunity has come about because of an excess of pulping capacity in Scandinavia and a shortage of pulpwood supplies there. While it is regrettable that British-grown wood will be exported in the raw and the finished goods re-imported to this country, the price being paid for the wood is economic and will allow thinning programmes to proceed and provide continuity of employment for harvesting labour and hauliers.

It is foreseen that the export opportunity will last for at least three years, which will allow time to attract new wood-processing industry to this country.

It is anticipated that the same solution will prove practicable to remove the otherwise surplus Ellesmere Port pulpwood from the UK market. Bowaters themselves are investigating the possibilities of

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Tilhill is participating in the export of pulp from east Scotland to Scandinavia.
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Profile:

Drobinski

Stanley Drobinski's father came to Britain during World War II, married a Scots lass and settled in East Lothian where he started a land clearance business. Stanley, inheriting the family traits of independence and an appetite for hard work, struck out on his own as a timber harvesting contractor. Since 1971 he has spent the bulk of his time contracting to Tilhill.

But Stanley's natural talents as an engineer provide highlights to what might have been a conventional story of a successful timber contractor. Although he has had no formal specialist training, he either designs and builds his own equipment, or radically modifies units originally intended for some other purpose.

THE FORWARDING trailer was built from scratch by Stanley — seen here with Tilhill Harvesting and Marketing director Steve Macpherson — using steel specially bought for the job. It has a capacity of 10-tonnes and has fully automatic hydraulic stabilisers. One refinement still to be carried out is the coupling-up of the trailer wheels to give the unit 6-wheel drive.

Its Atlas crane has a maximum lift of 3300 kg and with its double extension can reach out 24 ft.

Already Stanley is confident that he has an all-weather unit. In fact it was built because over the past two winters Stanley reckoned 'There was a lot of timber coming out through mucky holes and tail dragging made the sticks far too muddy.'

(Further view top right)



MORE DEMANDING technically, and rewarding financially, was the addition of his own design of bulldozer blade to a County tractor. The blade is centrally mounted on a single hydraulic ram and the touch of a lever changes angle and pitch. Stanley admits to having had to strengthen the front end of the County and to add supplementary struts to absorb additional stress, but the design has been so successful that he had sold two tractors fitted with the 'Drobinski blade.'

With its rear mounted winch, operated by Drobinski-designed hand controls, the County tractor is now a most versatile timber extraction tool. It is ideal for ground skidding, and the blade is especially useful on clear-fell sites where brush has to be piled for burning.





FLAGSHIP of the Drobinski fleet is Stanley's own design of forwarder powered by a Massey-Ferguson 1200 with a Perkins diesel engine. Articulated steering makes it extremely manoeuvrable, and the operator has excellent vision high up in his air-conditioned safety cab.



BACK at his depot and workshop his JCB 1000 still has its original bucket attachments which can be used for drain clearance at the end of a timber operation. It also has Stanley's own grab attachment designed to handle large diameter hardwood logs. The jaws open to 4 ft 9 in, it has a 5-tonne lift and can drop a log over 12 ft lorry stanchions.

Here we see it showing its paces with a 4-tonne beech log.



ON THIS typical clear-fell site Stanley is seen operating a Mack — originally a tank transporter, now an independent timber loader.

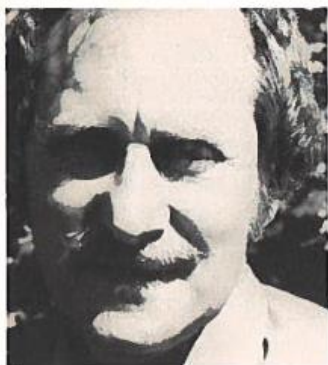
Built in 1943 the Mack came to Europe as part of the JS war effort, and after the end of hostilities was bought by Midlothian County Council, who added blade and salt/grit box to convert it to a snowplough.

Stanley bought it in 1973. He cut off the plough blade and dismantled the grit box, revealing a centre mounted powerful winch originally meant to handle tanks. The petrol engine was removed and replaced by a diesel unit. A 3-tonne Atlas crane was then mounted on the rear end and the unit was ready to go to work in the forest — in all weathers and tough ground conditions.

The winch is equipped with a 25-tonne breaking strain wire rope, and because of the overall stability of the unit can give maximum pull even at a 90 degree angle. During such manoeuvres the crane is extended on the far side of the unit to give additional counterbalance. 'It just cannae come' says Stanley, disclosing he has broken one or two ropes.

The automatic brake means that the winch is ideal for controlling dangerous trees — 'hangers' and 'leaners' — and the whole unit can, if necessary, winch itself out of trouble.

FOOTNOTE: Steve Macpherson adds — 'Timber harvesting is a difficult and sometimes dangerous operation demanding a high degree of skill which can only be learned fully in the forest itself. Much of the specialised equipment needed to cope with forest conditions in the UK and Europe is still at the development stage. Stanley has both the forest and engineering skills which go to make a successful timber contractor, and I personally hope he and Tilhill will continue to work profitably together for many years.'



Pension-fund g

Pension trust funds are very much in the news these days and their relatively recent presence in the countryside is dramatically reflected in developments in Southern division's Southwest branch. Bill Dorrington — one of Tilhill's longest-serving managers — discloses that nearly thirty per cent of his managed woodland estates are pension trust fund owned. And it has happened within the past two years.

BY THE END of 1980 Bill Dorrington will have been with Tilhill for twenty years, originally having worked in Ledbury with what was then Tilhill Forestry (Hereford). In 1963 the branch office was opened in Frome as more estates were added to the portfolio, following active buying on behalf of clients by chairman Archie Aitkins.

The office in the centre of Frome is in the Court House which is Tudor with a Queen Anne facade and now a Grade I listed building, rating a mention in 'Plessey's England.' It is thought that 'Hanging Judge' Jefferies presided here at times. A small walk-in cupboard now used as a store originally served as the judges' powder room. When it ceased serving as a courtroom, the then purchaser extended the property by constructing the adjoining 'Iron Gates,' a rendered stone annexe to house his twenty or so children.

Bill's support team comprises two assistant branch managers based at Frome — Chris Radford and New Zealander Neil Austin — and senior forester Martin Giles whose responsibilities lie on the eastern side of the branch area and who is based at the Porchester estate at Kingsclere. The field team is completed by foremen Nick Rose at Frome and Bert Griffiths at Dunster. Bert has been working for Tilhill since 1959.

The important office anchor is Mrs Jenny O'Dell from Falmouth in Cornwall, now two years with the



company. Jenny says her colleagues are without exception helpful and considerate and obviously enjoys her working environment. She put in nine years in Falmouth Public Library before getting married and now teaches typing in Frome in her spare time.

Dunster estate at Minehead provided the focal point for Tree Scribe's visit to the southwest. This well-stocked woodland estate of 800 acres on the hills behind the town is largely coniferous and must rank amongst the most attractive in the

country. Originally part of property owned by the local Lutterell family, the present woodland estate was purchased in the late fifties by a Scottish family trust.

The continuity of ownership and management by Bill Dorrington since then and local supervision by Bert Griffiths has facilitated the development of the forest to its present highly productive state. Favourable local conditions contribute greatly to the estate's profitability. For example, road-making could hardly be less of a

problem; the rich deep red sandstone soil has a high stone content and compacts with ease after bulldozing to support today's 32 tonne loaded timber lorries. Bill wryly recalls that in the early sixties his first ten miles of roading cost all of £300 in total.

Again, the woods are largely free of both deer and rabbits, so the need for fencing is eliminated and Bill so arranges the size and siting of felling coupes that natural regeneration is usually prolific and the need for restocking by planting is avoided.

The lower slopes at Dunster grow magnificent Douglas fir. Tree Scribe was shown a grove of Douglas in the Alcombe section planted in 1909 which is now 150 feet tall with clean stems of large dimensions. 'Ideal for ships' masts,' said Bill, adding that some of this timber was exported to the USA for use as dock timbers in the port of Baltimore.

Twenty years ago Dunster's upper hills were unstocked and a wilderness of gorse, bracken and heather. A careful plan retained some areas unplanted to protect views and provide scenic amenity, while the bulk of this otherwise unproductive land was cleared, rotovated and planted with a variety of species, mainly Sitka spruce but with an admixture of larch, tuga, Douglas fir and beech.

The unfenced woods and all the pleasant forest roads and tracks are freely open to the public on foot or horseback. The estate road network connects with two much older thoroughfares, one being the Oway Trail, an old packhorse track used to transport wool from Exmoor to the



growth in south-west



quay at Minehead, and the other with a more sombre purpose, a coffin track along the crest of the ridge from Porlock Weir to Dunster village.

Fire is a seasonal hazard, at times acute, when patrols are maintained. Liaison with the local fire brigade is excellent and protective burning and swiping of the gorse in the open hill-top areas is carried out to reduce the risk.

Elsewhere Bill's territory encompasses a great variety of geology, from the difficult limestones on the edge of the Cotswolds to the rich red sandstones of Herefordshire, from the chalks and greensands of Salisbury Plain to the heaths of Dorset. Not surprisingly Bill has a great regard for Douglas fir on the right sites and where possible has introduced the species on parts of the Dorset heaths in preference to Scots pine, and reports excellent growth.

Recent landscape work has reflected the need for restoration following the widespread loss of elms and his staff have been busy establishing a full range of hardwoods on country road-sides for Somerset County Council. A current project is at Bovington Army camp where seeding, turfing and shrub and tree planting have been undertaken and maintenance is continuing.

Bill Dorrington welcomes the advent of pension fund investment in

forestry. 'They require the same service as our other managed estates — comprehensive management with accurate forecasting and adherence to budgets. While of course the prime concern is the protection and enhancement of their investment, a common misconception is that their interest is solely financial,' says Bill. 'As with individual owners the pension funds are equally concerned with good husbandry and the beneficial role of forestry in the environment.'

Tree Scribe enjoyed its day out with Bill Dorrington, a man for whom his Tilhill career has clearly moulded a happy blend of business forester and knowledgeable countryman — or, as Bill might claim as the superior variant — Westcountryman.

Top left, facing page: Bill Dorrington, and just below he provides scale on the Oway Trail landscape. Bottom left: 'natural generation is usually prolific.'

Top: Douglas fir looking good at Dunster estate. Above right: Frome anchorperson Jenny O'Dell and right — the weather-beaten face of Bert Griffiths.



Frost protection

Tilhill Nurseries are the first commercial nursery to use the new 'Tensar' plastic mesh by Netlon of Blackburn for seedling and transplant protection.

At Greenhills some five acres of the mesh provides protection against late spring and early autumn frosts, replacing traditional chestnut laths and supplementing the water protection systems used at Tilford.

Frost is a potential danger from April to early June, and again in September and October. The light soils have the advantage of heating up quickly to give early growth, but the earth cools equally rapidly on cold clear nights.

'Tensar has been introduced at exactly the right moment for us as this is just about the last season for our old chestnut palings,' says John White. 'Tensar will also help us economise on labour and the large number of stakes and wires which were necessary.'

The new material can be tensioned enough to be self-supporting over large areas, and it needs fewer supporting stakes to keep it at the average 2ft 6in height. It is much easier to erect or dismantle for summer weeding, and in the long term it will be very economical.

Tilhill extended the normal manufactured length from 36m to 50m, one metre wide.



'... easier to erect or dismantle ...'



New five million gallon capacity reservoir at the Tilhill nursery will increase available frost protection by 13 acres to 35 acres in total. It will also, says Nurseries division director John White, give greater flexibility for irrigation, including the new 37 acres recently de-stumped, cultivated and partially planted up earlier this year.

Workshop foreman Tony Trotman and building maintenance foreman John Simmonds worked with ground-work specialists J and E Ely to get the excavation and formation right, and oversaw the levels. Vulcanisers of Butyl Products are shown painstakingly welding seams. A three-ft strip takes one minute at 190 degs C and 80lbs psi.

Nine strips totalling 7900m³ form the waterproof bed of the reservoir which is in parallelogram format to match the pattern dictated by the beds and road system.

Scottish division

BORDERS branch clients will be pleased to learn that Bryson Middleton no longer has to be both a branch manager and an area manager, one or other in his spare time (Tree Scribe 7). A new Borders branch manager has been appointed, enabling Bryson to concentrate full-time as southeast area manager as from October 1.

The new Borders branch manager is Roger J Smith, BSc (For). Roger Smith graduated from Aberdeen University in 1971. He then worked for two years in the south of England, firstly with Kent



Branch manager Roger Smith

County, and then with William Mallinson, Denny Mott & Dickson. He then felt the call of the deeper south, and spent the next several years in plantation forest management in Swaziland, working for Usutu Pulp Co.

Following his return to the UK, he worked for a year with Hicksons Timber Impregnation in Yorkshire, but was keen to get back in to 'mainstream' forestry. He has worked for a period at Tilhill's Cowal & Bute branch, becoming reacquainted with British plantation forestry, and by the time Tree Scribe goes to press will be in Jedburgh familiarising himself with the areas under his management, before taking full charge on October 1.

The Jedburgh office is now split, with area manager Bryson Middleton and Harvesting and Marketing director Steve Macpherson on the first floor. Janet Hedley, office manageress, assisted by typist/clerkess Anne Wood, provides the office back-up for this H and M HQ and Scottish division area office.



Nigel Baylis

The top two floors are occupied by Scottish division Borders branch, plus H and M regional manager John Jackson. The office

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staff team is Eleanor Thomson, promoted to Borders branch secretary, with newly appointed Lynn Notman as clerkess/typist. June Plenderleith, junior typist, works in both offices as required, and acts as 'postperson' and must be very fit from stairclimbing at 12 Market Place.

Nigel Baylis MSc joined Borders branch on September 1, after completing graduate work at Aberdeen. He replaced Ian Wallace as an assistant branch manager. Ian left on April 30 after 16 years with Tilhill to take over a boat hire business in Oban, — Borroboats. We wish Ian every success in his new venture.

New staff

Continuing expansion has led to many other staff additions.

Rupert Pearson and Tom Dunlop, graduates of Edinburgh and Aberdeen respectively, joined Central branch this spring after



Tom Dunlop



Ian Dale

four years each in forestry in southern Africa.

Oliver Barnsley joined Cowal and Bute branch in August after graduating from Bangor. Ian Dale, a recent Bangor graduate joined Central branch, and Tim Liddon, an Aberdeen graduate with



Tim Liddon

previous landscaping experience, joined Central Landscape branch.

John Macdonald OND joined Central branch as forester in July from Newton Rigg College, and

People and places

Southern division

MARTIN Wilkinson, branch manager, has been promoted to area manager, Northern area, replacing Andrew Mackay who resigned on July 30.

After graduating from Aberdeen in 1973 Martin joined the Scottish division serving in the Northern and Borders branches before transferring to Southern division in 1973 to become branch manager at the newly formed Marches branch. In 1975 he transferred to the Anglia branch.

Steele Haughton, assistant branch manager at Anglia

Bob Stainton joined Central Landscape branch as supervisor, with an OND in horticulture from Askham Bryan College in York.



John Macdonald



Bob Stainton

Sheena McDowall, Central Landscape branch secretary, has left to go to Edinburgh after six years with Tilhill. We wish her all the best 'in the smoke' of 'Auld Reekie'. She handed over to Helen Cully from Old Sauchie head office, who in turn has been replaced as secretary-clerkess by Alison Nimmo. There is also a new junior and 'postperson' at Old Sauchie, Margaret Henderson, who joined in August when Marie Winters went back to 'school' at Clackmannan College.

Solway branch has a new clerkess-typist, Mrs Kay Young, who joined in June as an addition to the branch back-up team.

branch is promoted to branch manager, taking over the Marches branch from Phil Hymers on July 17.

Phil Hymers, branch manager, was transferred in July to take over the Anglia branch from Martin Wilkinson.

Stephen Lavery joined Anglia branch in August as assistant



Stephen Lavery

branch manager having graduated from Aberdeen University in June.

Mark Hudson joined South-East branch in August as forester after



Mark Hudson

gaining his OND at Newton Rigg in June.

Bob Lucas returned to duty on May 12, having made a good recovery after his accident last January.

Congratulations to Keith Jeddere-Fisher and Hazel Cuthbertson who were married at St. James' Church, Stanstead, Suffolk on August 17. Watch this space!

To commemorate the Guildford Cathedral landscaping campaign, Tilhill Southern division donated a sorbus (*Joseph Rock*) which was planted by Lord Hamilton of Dalzell at a ceremony on July 25, 1980. Central branch had undertaken the planting of 2000 broadleaved trees at Guildford Cathedral earlier in the year.

Contracts

East Yorkshire branch — awarded £12,000 grass seeding contract by A Monk and Co on Teesside.

Northern branch — awarded £11,000 landscaping contract at Westhill, Skene, Aberdeenshire, by Cunningham Glass Partnership.

Central Landscape branch — awarded a £5,000 landscape maintenance contract at Kilmalid by Hiram Walker Co.

Central branch — awarded £14,760 fencing contract at Henley on Thames by Culford Fencing Ltd.

Landscaping Section — awarded seeding contracts for £12,400 and £4,800 by Bovis and Costain respectively, both on new Savacentre site near Reading.

Awarded seeding, turfing and planting contract for £7,100 at new Eastleigh Health Centre by Wessex Regional Health Authority.

South West branch — awarded fencing contract for £6,960 at farming estate near Andover.

STOP PRESS

BALI success

The British Association of Landscape Industries in their annual nationwide competition have made a single Award of Merit in their Category A Industrial / Municipal section to Tilhill's Borders branch for their outstanding work on the Jedburgh Riverside Walk scheme. Full story in the next Tree Scribe.

Pulp in perspective

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continuing to receive normal supplies and exporting the wood: this may argue that Bowaters envisage setting up new processing plant here at a more opportune time.

In the meanwhile other new processing capacity is coming on-stream, as previously reported in Tree Scribe. Caberboard are about to commission their new medium density fibreboard line at Stirling and Thames Board Mills are on schedule with the installations for the tripling of their pulping capacity at Workington.

From a wider viewpoint it has to be remembered that the British forest products industry has been built up since the end of the last war from a base that was largely composed of mining timber and lowish quality saw-timber to its present substantial scale embracing modern sawmilling, pulping, particleboard manufacture and (still) mining timber. Growth has been rapid in response to increasing British timber production, and such development is never without the occasional casualty.

Given the vast market for timber products in the UK and increasing timber yields it can reasonably be expected, especially as the country moves out of recession, that new investment in processing plant will follow.

Landscaping for recreation



The preparation and seeding of 3.65 ha was part of a land improvement scheme at Brora in Sutherland, funded by the SDA. The area constituted the slopes of the large arena and surrounding a proposed games pitch; built on the site of the old Brora brickworks and coal mine.

The difficulties of negotiating the gradients were overcome by employing a balloon-tyred, 4-wheel-drive tractor. Thus the various stages of the operation were carried out with the minimum of disturbance to the ground surface. The individual spreadings of lime, fertiliser, slag, and grass-seed were successfully effected using a mechanical spreader fitted to the same tractor — seen here.

Southern dinner-dance



The annual dinner and dance held at the Hogs Back hotel, Farnham, on June 27 was attended by 118 members of staff and their guests. This was a record attendance which more than justified the spacious accommodation provided by the new venue.

The guests were welcomed by Bob Gray, director, Southern division. George Holmes, director-general of the Forestry Commission responded on behalf of the guests.

After dinner the band played for the enjoyment of a large number of enthusiastic dancers whose energy remained unabated until the small hours drew the party to a close.