

THE SLASHER

Forestry Commission News

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HOW GREEN WAS OUR CHRISTMAS

A SEASONAL NOTE

X WHEN WE REMARKED the other day to one of our Foresters that his Christmas trees were looking remarkably spruce, the pained look on his face set us thinking. What did people use for decorations before Albert, Queen Victoria's Prince Consort, brought over the first Christmas trees from Germany to grace a royal children's party? The Norway spruce had been grown in England for two hundred years or more before that event, but people thought of it only as a garden tree or timber producer.

Apparently the urge to use evergreens for decoration in the dull short days of mid-winter, when most common hardwood trees are leafless, goes back to prehistoric times. The ancient druids used mistletoe at their Yule-tide ceremonies -- and these good old Welsh customs die very hard! Mistletoe grows on a great variety of trees, but is nowhere very common. Most of our present-day supplies come from the apple orchards and poplar plantations of Normandy, where the growers encourage it as a profitable side-line. In fact, they are said to "plant" it artificially by cutting an opening in the bark of a suitable bough and rubbing in a sticky white mistletoe berry, which eventually takes root in the tissue of its host tree. Mistletoe, of course, is a parasite, but only a "partial" one; that is to say, it provides its own leaves, and only draws on the tree for water and mineral salts.

In mediaeval times, the custom of constructing evergreen-covered spheres was well established in English homes. The foliage used was often ivy or yew, woven into a framework of branches, and decorated with berries or trinkets. The whole was hung from the ceiling or over a doorway, and might be lit with candles set inside, and beneath it the maid would wait hopefully for a salutation from her swain.

Butchers broom, too, sometimes figures in Christmas decorations, and only a week or two ago certain enterprising gentlemen, who had travelled all the way from London, were prosecuted at Lymington for removing some of this rare and interesting shrub from the New Forest. It looks rather like holly, and bears scarlet berries, but grows only a few feet high. But it is the true holly that has, perhaps, the most widespread traditional use as a Christmas decoration. In pre-Reformation days the church used it as a symbol of Christ's "passion", taking the prickly foliage to stand for a crown of thorns, while the scarlet berries represented blood. The famous old carol, "The Holly and the Ivy", perpetuates this tradition.

But today the sprig of holly on the good old Christmas pudding is more usually associated with feasting and merry-making, and we therefore take our last lines from Shakespeare:

"Sing heigh-ho, the holly!
"This life is most jolly!"

**PRESENTATION TO CONSERVATOR

AU REVOIR TO MR. J.R. THOM

A PLEASING CEREMONY was held in the Dumfries office, South Scotland, recently, and marked the transfer of the Conservator, Mr. J.R. THOM, to Edinburgh, headquarters of the Scottish Directorate. Before a large gathering of field and office staff Mr. Thom, who was accompanied by Mrs. Thom, was presented with a canteen of cutlery, and heard tributes paid to his work in South Scotland by Mr. R.E. FOSSEY (State Forests Officer) and Mr. T.H. McGEORGE (Chief Clerk), and expressions of regret that he was concluding a personal association with the Conservancy which had extended over nine years.

Mr. J.A.B. MACDONALD, late of the Research Branch, and Mr. Thom's successor as Conservator, South Scotland, was present and was given a warm welcome.

A further move is that of Conservator Mr. A. WATT, who has been transferred from Edinburgh to Headquarters for special duties.

****PASSING OF DISTRICT OFFICER SPRAGGAN**

"A MAN OF FRIENDLY NATURE"

mentioned in our previous issue, joined the Forestry Commission in 1920 as a Foreman at Glentress, in South Scotland. He was promoted Forester the following year and in 1925 was transferred to Ardgartan, West Scotland. He became a District Officer in 1931 with base at Stromeferry, North Scotland, later undertaking duties at Inverness for nearly three years from 1940. He was subsequently stationed at Fort Augustus and then, in July, 1949, he was transferred to the South Conservancy and placed in charge of a group of Border forests, making his home at Walkerburn, Peebleshire.

District Officer Spraggan, in the words of one who knew and worked with him, was "a man of friendly nature" who earned the liking and respect of all with whom he came into contact. Despite ill-health, he worked until a fortnight before his death. The funeral at Peebles was attended by a large gathering of local people and Forestry Commission colleagues, some of whom came from far beyond the boundaries of the Conservancy in order to pay their last tribute.

District Officer Spraggan is survived by his wife and daughter, to whom we extend our deepest sympathy.

****RETIREMENT OF MR. W.H. HAMILTON**

A CIVIL SERVANT FOR NEARLY 44 YEARS

Mr. Hamilton has been a Civil Servant for nearly 44 years. He entered the Service in 1908 as a Boy Clerk (or Copyist, as such lads were known) in the Post Office Savings Bank. In 1911 he was transferred as an Assistant Clerk to Inland Revenue at Somerset House.

SO IT IS FAREWELL TO W.H. ("BILL") HAMILTON, SEO at Headquarters, who is to retire at the end of the month. A brother of Mr. F.W. Hamilton, the former Secretary of the Commission,

Mr. Hamilton joined the Forestry Commission a few weeks after it came into being in 1919 and was the first established officer to be assigned to the Department, for although others were with the Commission at the time they were, in fact, on loan from other Departments. Until 1939 he served almost wholly with the Finance Branch. Of recent years he has been responsible for the purchase and distribution of seed. With his retirement a family link with the Civil Service is broken, for his service and that of his brother, father and uncle has covered more than 180 years.

Mr. Hamilton plans eventually to join a son who is dairy-farming in the West Country. Meanwhile he intends to devote more time to his hobby of pigeon "fancying", being a breeder of these birds, an exhibitor and also a judge at the classic shows. We wish him well.

****FOREST WORKER AND MANNEQUIN**

MEET JOAN, THE MODEL

attractive brunette, has worked in the nursery and woods of Cannock Chase since she was 15, but fashion modelling is her hobby, and on occasions in Birmingham she displays all kinds of clothes from beach wear to glamorous evening dress. She considers that her forestry work helps her to keep her figure -- she is six feet tall -- in trim. She has turned down an offer of employment as a professional mannequin at a tempting salary, and makes no secret of the fact that forestry is work she loves.

ITS A FAR CRY from the forest to the mannequin parade, but to 21-years old JOAN TANNER, of Cannock Chase (North West England Conservancy) the journey presents no obstacles. Joan, an

****THE FEATHERED FORESTER**

"SURPASSES THE HUMAN"

to our readers:

THE FOLLOWING reference to the jay, made in the correspondence columns of a Sunday newspaper and believed to be quoted from Professor Bier's book "Die Seele", may be of interest

"The jay carries away the acorns, one in his beak, the rest in his crop, and sticks them into the soil, or especially into pine needle carpets. He reforests evenly over the whole area at correct planting distances -- sometimes in rows. He is the founder of our deciduous forests or, where they do not exist, he could be, if man would let him alone. Of course, the jay sows the oak in order to consume its fruits -- here showing a reciprocal action between plant and animal. In going about the building up of woods according to plan, no creature outside mankind approaches the jay. He even surpasses the human forester."

****BULL-FIGHTING AS ONE READER SAW IT**
HORSES WERE "POOR BROKEN BEASTS"

A READER describes a Spanish bull-fight which he saw some years ago. In reading this account it should be borne in mind that today a measure of protection is given

to the horses - whether for humane reasons or as a concession to the feelings of foreign visitors we are not prepared to say.

We walked around before taking our places in the stadium (writes our correspondent). We came to a dark, stable-like building and saw therein not the magnificent horses that would lead the parade, but poor broken beasts, wounded, sick and ill, and waiting patiently for death. We looked closely at one horse. It was strapped round its middle by a carpet-like wrapping. This animal was gored by a bull on the previous Sunday and had stood in a dark hell for a week. It was doubtful whether it had been fed, and because of the nature of its injuries it is certain it had been given no water.

They were very quiet, these horses, and even when gored they did not scream. There was a reason for this. Their vocal cords had been cut.

As we took our places there were fanfares and a grand opening procession. Those taking part in the "fight" took up their positions, and to the roars of the waiting crowd the bull ran from his dark pen to the blinding sunshine and burning sand. The drama began in earnest. The bull rushed and the men scuttled behind their safety barriers or even jumped over the fence. Goads adorned with coloured ribbons were stuck, two at a time, into the shoulders of the bull. It tired, but the fight went on, and the crowd continued to roar in delighted anticipation.

Soon the horses of two Picadores lay dead. A third animal was gored and fell. It was kicked to its feet, and we saw it was gravely injured; straw and the carpet-like wrapping were used to plug the wound, and the poor brute seemingly meekly left the ring, to be patched up when out of sight. (This particular horse was brought in for the next bull, and died after a further goring).

The bull was soon fighting its fourth horse, and to the accompaniment of a devilish pandemonium of noise contributed by standing, shrieking men and women, the horse was lifted from the ground, impaled on the fearsome horns. It rose after being thrown; the rider remounted, and the horse was turned side-on to meet the horns of the bull. It fell dead. The crowd howled.

A Picador stuck his lance into the shoulder of the bull and, after several thrusts, it was noticeable that it never raised its head again. It would seem the intention was to cut the nerves and paralyse the neck muscles. The "hero" -- the Matador -- received his sword and played the weakened, bloody and tortured bull. At long last he plunged his sword into the bull to the hilt, but he was not too skilful; another fighter had to lean over the animal and finish the job. The hurdle arrived, drawn by four horses, and on it the carcass was dragged round the arena, and out.

In all, concludes our correspondent, eight bulls died that day in like manner. We never heard how many horses perished. Needless to say, we left long before the end of the programme.

****TRANSFERS**

THE FOLLOWING TRANSFERS have been notified to Headquarters:

District Officer H. SEARLE from Princes Risborough to Santon Downham, E(E).
Foresters J.M. BRUCE from Brandon, E(E), to Gwydyr, N(W); R.B. GILSON from Hope, NE(E) to Winttringham, NE(E); C.H. HEAVENER from Gwydyr School to Princes Risborough;
T.E. DAGLISH from Kielder, NE(E), to Hamsterley, NE(E); G.S. DUDLEY from Neroche, SW(E), to Honiton, SW(E); W.H. MORRILL from Allerston, NE(E) (Research), to Hope; W.E. DYE from Duror, W(S), to Fearnock, S(W); C.F. FEATHERSTONE from Allerston to Ampleforth, NE(E); P.H. AINSWORTH from Kielder to Knaresborough, NE(E); J.A. HENDRIE from Watlington, E(E), to Kesteven, E(E); T. BEWICK from Hamsterley to Slaley, NE(E); R.E. YOUNG from Rosedale, NE(E), to Kielder; J.P. McRORIE from Ardgartan, W(S), to Glenrickard, W(S); A.J. TACKNEY from Bodmin, SW(E), to Halwill, SW(E).

Foremen E.H. STORER from Beddgelert, N(W), to Gwydyr; R. SCHOTFIELD from Fineshade, E(E), to Watlington.

Asst. Engineer J.H. WATTIS from Aberystwyth to Cardiff. Clerks of Works T. CUTHBERT from Smalles, NE(E), to Rothbury, NE(E); R.C. MEECH from Coed-y-Brenin, N(W), to Halwill.

It is regretted that in announcing transfers last month we inadvertently placed the names of District Officers BURTON, ROBERTSON and KLEN among those of Foresters.

Newcomers are District Officers J.D. LEEFE to Education; R.G. CATHIE to E(S); D.H. WALLACE, P.A.W. OVERELL and J.A. SPENCER to Director, Wales; F.W. LINDSAY and A.J. SPENCER to SE(E); J.F. MCGARVA to W(S); T.C. MITCHELL to NE(E); J. KELLIE to SW(E); F.M. MACRAE to N(S); C.W. YEATMAN to Research. Asst. Engineer E.M. BLACK to Director, Scotland. Executive Officer J.W. MOGFORD to NW(E). Clerical Officers K.A. NETHERWOOD to E(E); E.B. KIMBERLEY to SW(E); T.M. MANSER to N(W); J.G. BARNES to New Forest.

**YOU ARE OLD, ROBERT WILLIAM

THESE VERSES by Forester C.D. HOLLINGTON, of Cynwyd, North Wales, should amuse some readers.

(WITH APPROPRIATE APOLOGIES)

YOU ARE OLD, ROBERT WILLIAM

"YOU ARE OLD, Robert William," the trainee said,
"And your pension is almost in sight --
And yet you're obsessed by a consummate dread;
Do you think, at your age, it is right?"
"In my youth, when at school," the forester said,
"Without leave I stayed out late at night,
And I failed to return certain tools to the shed-
I'm not sure they've forgotten it - quite."

"You are old", said the youth, "one would hardly suppose
That your legs were as sturdy as ever;
Yet you kicked our new foreman right out of the door -
What made you so awfully clever?"
"In my youth, "said Bob William, "I used a great spade,
Heart shaped, with one edge like a knife,
And the muscular strength it gave to my legs
Has lasted the rest of my life".

"You are old, "said the youth, "As I mentioned before.
You are steadily losing your sight;
Yet you stand on your head to look under the door,
Do you think, at your age, it is right?"
"Forest Workers should be up the hill in the trees",
Replied Bob, "To commence work at eight,
So they crawl past my door on their hands and their knees,
And I peep out - to see who is late".

"You are old, Robert William", the trainee said,
"And your hair has become very white.
And yet you incessantly jump out of bed
Shouting Fire! in the dead of the night."
"In my youth", said Bob William, "A great forest fire
Gave rise to a dreadful commotion;
I started that fire, was first on the spot,
And that's how I got my promotion."

**NEWS FLASHES

CONGRATULATIONS to Head Forester A.I. DAVIES, of Clocaenog, North Wales, and Mrs. Davies, on the birth of a daughter; to District Officer C.E. PEATY, North Wales, and Mrs. Peaty, on the birth of a son; and to Executive Officer P.C.B. LATHAM, of Aberystwyth, and Mrs. Latham on the birth of a daughter. Finally, best wishes for a speedy recovery to HEO JOHN HARPER, of Headquarters, who at the time of writing is in hospital.

THERE IS A SLASHER CORRESPONDENT IN EACH DIRECTORATE AND CONSERVANCY OFFICE.
PLEASE KEEP HIM WELL SUPPLIED WITH CONTRIBUTIONS. DON'T LET YOUR TERRITORY BE OUT OF
THE NEWS