

A HAPPY CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR TO ALL OUR READERS

THE SLASHER

Forestry Commission News

No. 60

December, 1952

AN EFFORT TO BE TOPICAL

(OR A SOLILOQUY ON SNOW)

"SNOW HAD FALLEN,
SNOW WAS FALLING,
SNOW ON SNOW!"

SO RUNS the old carol, but what does the Forester think when that which makes the weather seasonable and the Christmas cards so pretty comes falling down relentlessly over his broad acres of trees?

If there is any depth of snow on the ground, planting and nursery work come to an abrupt halt, and as at this time of the year most of our Foresters are pre-occupied with anxious calculations as to whether they can complete their planting and lining out programmes, their first reaction is to chafe at the enforced delay. But at many forests the men can be switched on to other tasks such as thinning, which may go on in the shelter of the woods in almost anything short of a blizzard; there is nothing like a brisk spell with axe or cross-cut saw to drive out the sharpest cold, and set the skin tingling with a healthy, rosy glow! The harder you work, the better you like it!

Snow upsets personal living arrangements, too. Some of our men have been known to be cut off from supplies for quite long periods by blocked roads. We believe that up at Glen More, in the Cairngorms, the Forester has frequently had to use a sledge to bring out food from the nearest shop - five miles from his house. Our staff in those districts that get snow regularly every year - mainly in Scotland - take it in their stride, so to speak. Of course, they have to dress like Arctic explorers - in Duffel coats and several layers of Harris tweed, fit heaters to their cars where they haven't one of the modern vehicles, and carry chains for icy roads and spades for digging themselves out of snowdrifts. But they laugh it all off!

Who gets the most snow? Correct us if you like, but we believe it is the east side of the country, not the north. One of our London staff assures us that for the past eight winters there has always been enough snow on the North Downs of Surrey to provide at least a couple of days' sledging. On the other hand, there are parts of Galloway and Argyll where, if snow does fall, it never lingers. To be sure of snow, we ourselves would go to the "cold-shoulder" of north-east Scotland, up and around Tomintoul, where the height of land, and the distance from the sea, encourage it to fall and remain for weeks on end.

We would like to hear from any Forester who thinks his unit holds the record for snow holdups - whether of work or transport - judged by such factors as (a) the length of hold-up in any winter when snow prevented planting or nursery work, or (b) the number of days during which the Forester's house was cut off from normal transport.

We should also like to know if anyone can throw some light on the much-vexed question of "perpetual snow" in Scotland. Do you know of any snowfield, high in the hills, which never disappears completely in a normal summer?

Scotland, by the way, boasts two Arctic animals, and one bird, that camouflage themselves in winter by turning white to match the snow. These are the mountain hare and the stoat, and the ptarmigan of the hilltops. When the stoat goes white - all but the black tail - its fur becomes ermine, and is therefore presumably in great demand just now for trimming robes for the Coronation. But in England, we get no ermine. Because why? Our stoats are always vermin!

* * OPENING OF TWO VILLAGE HALLS

CEREMONIES IN WALES AND SCOTLAND

THE SOCIAL AMENITIES of two of our forest villages have recently been extended by the opening of village halls.

A tree-planting ceremony preceded the opening by Alderman HUV T. EDWARDS, Chairman of the Council for Wales, of the new hall at Bsgairgeiliog, on the Montgomery-Merioneth border, four miles from Machynlleth. The hall is a large hut converted by the Commission and leased to the local Recreation Association at a nominal rent. It has a large stage and plenty of room for dancing, and a well equipped kitchen.

Among those supporting Alderman Edwards were Mr. LLOYD OWEN, who is Chairman of our National Committee for Wales, and Mr. A. P. LONG, Director of Forestry for Wales. District Officer R. BUTTER provided Alderman Edwards with a slasher with which to cut the rope which lay across the entrance to the hall, and others of our staff who were present included Forester GEORGE McMILLAN. For the latter it was an especially happy day; as secretary of the Esgairgeiliog Recreation Association he has played a leading part in bringing the hall into being.

Commander D. HERRIES MAXWELL, Chairman of the Dumfries and Galloway Region of the Royal Scottish Forestry Society, officially opened the new hall in the Village of Ae. He was introduced by the Conservator for South Scotland, Mr. J. A. B. MACDONALD, who subsequently asked Mrs. BURTON, chairman of the Community Association, to take charge of the proceedings. The hall will be the centre for all social life in the Ae Valley and will unquestionably prove a great boon.

** THE FAMOUS SALCEY OAKS

VETERAN ONCE STABLED A HORSE

SOME OF THE FAMOUS old oaks in Salcey Forest, Northamptonshire, are reputed to be about 900 years old. The "Salcey Oak", the most noted of these trees, is now in the last stages of decay. Once upon a time a horse was stabled inside its hollow stem and at another period in the history of this giant tree two horses and a wagon could pass through it. Now it is surrounded by a fence, inside which can be seen a 20-foot high oak grown from one of the veteran's acorns.

Another of the Salcey oaks is "Church Path Oak", under which the Sixth Duke of Grafton was wont to rest while on his way to and from Piddington Church. The "Two Sisters Oak" is notable because two trunks rise from one root, and the "Milking Oak" because cows were once milked in the shelter of its great branches.

** THE FRIENDLY PIGS

THIS LITTLE STORY proves that pigs have unsuspected qualities. It comes from Mr. E.R. HUGGARD, Planning Officer, Aberystwyth.

"With a colleague", he writes, "I recently had occasion to walk and climb over some miles of the roughest and most beautiful country in Wales, namely the Towy hills and valleys. We heard grunts, but ignored them, each thinking the other was ill pleased with life for some reason or other. But there were more grunts, and then two "teen-age" pigs emerged from the molinia and stayed at our heels for five long miles, crossing with us the deep ravines as well as the easier country. Then we stopped, they stopped; they ate grass and part of our lunch, but never for a moment did they take their eyes off us.

Our eventual parting was due to the intervention of a farm worker who had spotted us on the skyline, all four of us in single column. Not long afterwards the owner of a farm asked us in for a cup of tea and offered us some home cured bacon, adding she was well off for this as she had two pigs fattening outside! We hadn't the heart to accept.

** MAINLY ABOUT BIRDS AND FOXES

PINE MARTEN SEEN AT GWYDYR

SOME INTERESTING NOTES come from District Officer P. J. LANGLEY. The first is ornithological in content. "The flocking of some of our rarer birds has had some prominence in The Slasher", he writes, "and it may well be that this flocking is the result of increasing numbers after protection. In the Border Districts the short-eared owl has increased considerably, and last December, in Redesdale Forest, I noticed ten birds in the air at once. Blackcock are common and the largest flock I have seen in winter numbered 35. It will be interesting to see whether the raven, which is increasing in numbers in Northumberland, will begin to pack this winter."

Forester J. TAIT, of Kielder, North East England, tells us that a Redstart nestling which was rung in his unit in June was recently found near Visell, Portugal. The ringing of quite a large number of nestlings of various kinds of birds was carried out by members of the Natural History Society of Northumberland and Durham. "Incidentally", says Forester Tait, "the Redstart is among the first nestlings from a State forest to be found after ringing by the Society. It would be interesting to hear details of bird ringing in any other of our forests, and of the results."

Back to District Officer Langley. Commenting on the destruction of foxes, he says that Trapper MALCOLM KERR'S achievements at Blairadam (reported in The Slasher in August) were of special interest to Mr. T. MILLS

and his son, keepers at Redesdale Forest. In that forest, in F.Y.51, no fewer than 121 foxes were destroyed (54 adults and 67 cubs); towards the end of F.Y.52 the "bag" stood at 109, despite the fact that Mr. Mills, senior, was absent for some months. The figures do not include a number of foxes killed outside the forest boundary.

STUDENT D. MASH, of Gwydyr Forester Training School, has gained some distinction. He recently saw a pine marten in Maesnewyddoin Wood, Gwydyr; it was chasing a squirrel. This was the first time a pine marten had been seen at Gwydyr for a very long while, although it has occasionally been reported in neighbouring areas.

** "BEAT", "BLEET", or "BETE"?

IT BEATS US

WHENEVER WE TALK of replacing failures in the first and subsequent years after planting (writes District Officer B. W. HOLTHAM, North Wales) we use the expression "Beating up". I remember that when first I heard this jargon, used by Forester WILDASH, of Saverlake Forest, I was surprised to hear a good natured man use such an aggressive expression!

I have been unable to trace the origin of the term "To beat up". The Third Edition of the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary does not mention the verb in the sense of replacing failures. I find, however, that "Beet" (with an alternative spelling "Bete") when used as a transitive verb, means "To mend, make good", so that one might "Beet" a plantation. But I do not think that one would "Beet up" a plantation; to "Beet" it would suffice.

"Beet" is derived from the old English "boetan". I would be interested to hear other readers' views on these expressions.

** TROPHIES FOR CHRYSANTHEMUMS
AND HONEY

AT THE ANNUAL autumn show of the Castle Douglas and District Horticultural Society, Mr. GEORGE M. MORLEY, Executive Officer in the South Conservancy, Scotland, gained first and second prizes in the chrysanthemum class. He also won the silver bowl for the best vase of chysanthemums in the show.

At a recent show at Newton Stewart, Forester HUGH MacMILLEN, Kirroughtree Forest, South Scotland, won the silver cup for the second year in succession by gaining the highest number of points in the honey section. Forester F. J. CANNON, of the same forest, also won a number of prizes for honey.

** TRANSFERS

THE FOLLOWING TRANSFERS have been notified to Headquarters: District Officers R. R. DONALD from Palnure, S(S), to Dumfries, S(S); J. D. MacNAB from Auchencastle, S(S), to Palnure. Forester J. E. METCALFE from Thornthwaite, NW(E), to Redesdale, NE(E). Foreman R. WALTON from Thetford Chase, E(E), to Wareham, SW(E); J. C. WATSON from Fiunary, N(S), to Smart, N(S). Assistant Engineer H. G. BEATTIE from Glentrool, S(S), to Dumfries. Clerk of Works W. E. GRIFFITHS from Hafren, N(W), to Dovey, N(W). Clerical Officer W. G. KIRKWOOD from Aberystwyth to Chester.

Newcomers are: District Officer J. R. AARON to D.(R. & E.). Clerical Officers A. C. BENTON to E(S); A. R. BURGESS to D(W). Clerical Officers L. H. J. WITTS and R. C. STERN have returned from H.M. Forces to S(W) and D(W), respectively.

** FORESTRY AS THE POETS SEE IT

HAVE YOU A FAVOURITE QUOTATION?

CAN ANYONE tell us (no prizes offered) what wellknown poet wrote the following lines, and in which poem - also a famous one - they are to be found? We'll give you a clue - he was himself, when not writing poetry, a forester and did a great deal of planting on his own estate.

1. "'Tis merry, 'tis merry, in good greenwood,
So blithe Lady Alice is singing;
On the beech's pride, and oak's brown side,
Lord Richard's axe is ringing."

2. "For O my sweet William was
Forester true,
He stole poor Blanche's heart away!
His coat it was all of the green-
wood hue,
and so blithely he trilled the
Lowland lay!"

If any of our readers has a favourite quotation on forestry, from the works of any poet - ancient or modern - we shall be glad to see it and, space permitting, to reproduce it in The Slasher. Only do please tell us the source, as we are not so good at answering puzzles as we are at setting them.

And please don't send us "Trees", by Joyce Kilmer; we know that one already. The only point we feel we should record about "Trees" is that we believe the author was an American man and not a woman, as the name would suggest.

** THE MEDALLION IN THE TREE

A POSSIBLE EXPLANATION

IN EARLIER ISSUES we made reference to a medallion having been found "in the heart" of an old beech tree felled at Barcaldine, West Scotland. We are afraid the first report of the finding was incorrect; the coin was actually discovered in a cleft about 10 feet from the ground and did not look as though it had been there for many years. It was not sufficiently fixed to stand the impact when the old beech fell, and readily sprang out.

How the coin got into the tree remains a mystery, but a correspondent remembers talking, some years ago, to the late Sir Charles Stewart, of Barcaldine House, and recalls he was told that Sir Charles had a very fine collection of old Irish coins. It is suggested that somehow the coin found its way out of the house and was thrown into the tree.

** HALLOWE'EN PARTY

THE RECENTLY FORMED Social Club of the South Scotland Conservancy Office observed Hallowe'en in traditional fashion. Individual indeed was the performance of Mr. NED FELL, with his "one-man" band. BOB ROBERTS excelled with his melodium, and Piper PETER GRIEVE impressed with his vigorous reels and strathspeys. The excellent catering arrangements were carried out by the Misses HALLIDAY, LOW and MARCHBANK, and Mr. ALEX REID was an efficient M.C.

** THE BRAZEN BROWN OWL

EVERY SATURDAY morning (says our South Wales Correspondent) a brown owl has been seen perched on the branch of a lime tree outside the Conservancy office. It gazes stolidly through the window into the Estate Section.

Mr. E. D. BLUNDELL, the Executive Officer in charge of the Section, writes: "As I sit at my desk with the owl gazing more or less over my shoulder, I am tempted to offer this little plea:

1. "Oh Owl, each Saturday morn you sit
Upon the lime tree limb,
And gaze with never faltering eyes
Through the windows din."
2. "If you are wise, as I am told,
And I believe it's true,
Tell me then the answer, please,
To this poser from H.Q."

** DEATH OF MISS C. A. EVANS

IT IS WITH DEEP REGRET that we have to record the death of Miss CATHERINE A. EVANS, an Executive Officer in the Finance Branch at Headquarters. Miss Evans was held in high regard by her colleagues and had been with the Department since 1947. She was a Civil Servant for some 39 years, having been employed in the General Post Office, the Public Trustee Office and, from 1940 to 1947, the War Office. The funeral was attended by a number of officers from the Finance Branch, including Mr. W. M. CORMACK, Controller of Finance, and Mr. M. P. SHAPCOTT, in whose Section Miss Evans worked.

** PERSONAL

MISS J. B. MOSS, Clerical Officer at Headquarters for the past six years, has resigned to join the Metropolitan Police. During her service with the Department Miss Moss did yeoman work on behalf of the Headquarters Social Club. On leaving, she was presented by Mr. A. D. PALMER, on behalf of colleagues, with a travelling clock and a leather hold-all.

PROUD VISITOR to Marden (Kent) Fruit Show was ex-Head Forester F. J. NELMES, formerly of Bedgebury, S.E. England. He went to the show in company of Mr. G. J. L. BATTERS in order to receive from LORD CORNWALLIS, Lord Lieutenant of Kent, the B.E.M. awarded him for his services to the Commission over many years.

Congratulations to Leading Surveyor PAT BLIGHT and ex-School Ganger PAT MOORE, both of the Research Branch, who have wed. Also to Miss M. E. HUTT, Clerical Officer at Cambridge, who has married Mr. J. FOLEY; Conservancy Office staff were well represented at the wedding, Miss R. MORRIS (Supervisor of Typists), being bridesmaid. The bride was presented with an oak coffee table by Mr. G. CLARK, on behalf of the office staff.

Best wishes to District Officer S. MURRAY, Research, and Mrs. MURRAY, on the birth of a son.