

PASSING OF CONSERVATOR

AND A RESEARCH ASSOCIATE

IT IS SAD to have to open this month's issue by recording the passing of two good friends - one a Conservator with many years service with the Commission and the other an esteemed associate in the field of forest nursery research. We refer, of course, to the late Mr. W. D. RUSSELL, Conservator, South Wales, and to the late Dr. E. M. CROWTHER, of Rothamsted.

Mr. Russell will be greatly missed by the many colleagues with whom he had contact during his 28 years as a forest officer. He joined the Forestry Commission as long ago as 1926 as a District Officer in South West England, after several years in the Queensland forest service. In 1934 he took charge of the Commission's School of Forestry in the Dean and in this connection, too, his loss is the more marked, for few could have had greater cause for interest in the forthcoming Jubilee celebrations at what is now the Dean Forester Training School. In 1939 Mr. Russell was seconded to H.T.P.D. as Divisional Officer in charge of the Gloucester and Wiltshire Division; he was transferred some four years later to Shrewsbury, in control of the Midland and South Wales area, and in 1946 he went to Bristol for the purpose of closing down the activities of H.T.P.D. He returned to the Forestry Commission in 1947 and was promoted Conservator, South Wales, in 1949.

A comparatively young man, Mr. Russell died at the age of 53 in Cardiff Royal Infirmary. He leaves a widow, to whom we extend our deepest sympathy.

Dr. CROWTHER was invited to conduct experiments in our nurseries when the Research Advisory Committee set up its Sub-committee on Nursery Nutrition in 1944, under the chairmanship of the late Professor F. T. Brooks. There followed a programme of investigation which has scarcely been equalled for accuracy and thoroughness in any country on any crop, and it is tragic that Dr. Crowther could not publish his findings. His work, however, was so systematic that the task of publication will be minimised for whomsoever undertakes it. A few brief notes on Dr. Crowther's work will not be out of place.

At the inception of the experiments we knew, largely from the late Dr. Rayner's investigations, one highly successful (though expensive) method of manuring nurseries. This, though, only gave the answer for wasteland or new arable nurseries. It was not known whether organic nutrition was necessary for conifer seedlings, or whether they would respond to soluble fertilisers, like most other crops. The conditions in the older "conifer sick" nursery were not at all understood and production in our nurseries was generally at an unsatisfactory level.

Dr. Crowther showed firstly that conifer seedlings responded satisfactorily to commercial soluble fertilisers. He worked out methods and rates of application and showed that the "inorganic" plants performed equally in the forest with "compost" plants. He investigated the troubles of the sick nursery and demonstrated the large part played in this story by high lime content. He showed that acidification and soil sterilisation could improve the conditions, and experiments in this field provided opportunities for micro-biologists at various centres to advance greatly our knowledge of the functions of the soil flora and fauna.

Many people have combined to produce the advances in nursery productivity that have been made in the last decade. Dr. Crowther (quite typically) described a recent summary of his results as "negative". Others, less hypercritical, will rate his work as one of the outstanding contributions to our knowledge. "Nothing mattered to Dr. Crowther," writes a correspondent, "except the results of his experiments and he advocated nothing that he could not demonstrate experimentally we who were privileged to work with him and his excellent Rothamsted team looked up to him as a model 'experimenter', and his unassuming, friendly nature made working for him a pleasure, difficult as it sometimes was to keep up with a man of his mental calibre and energy."

XMA CORRESPONDENT WANTED

STYLING HIMSELF without frills as a foreigner, whereas we, with our native friendliness, would doubtless call him an American cousin, WILLIAM S. BRENNEMAN writes from Muskegon Heights, Michigan. Here is his letter:

"Do you know of anyone who would be interested in corresponding with me, an American forestry graduate? I am presently employed by a private electric utility company. My age is 35. Am married with two children. Politics, Conservative. Interests, photography, nature, hunting and fishing. As I was stationed in Wiltshire during the war I would prefer a correspondent from that area, or up in Scotland. However, the location isn't important if you know of anyone in any other part of the realm who desires to correspond with a foreigner."

Mr. Brenneman's full address is:

5237, Maffett Street, Muskegon Heights, Michigan, U.S.A. The rest is up to any reader who feels like furthering the "hands across the sea" movement.

WORK WITH THE BREW

WE UNDERTOOK, last month, to give further guidance on brewing beer. Adopting the same general technique as previously outlined, the following should be used to make a heavy beer -

3½ lbs. of malt, 1 lb. of sugar, 2½ ozs. of hops, and three teaspoons of gravy browning. For a light bitter beer, use 2 lbs. of malt, ¾ lb. of sugar, 3¼ ozs. of hops, and 1½ teaspoons of gravy browning. These quantities are all for 25-pint brews and should be proportionately reduced where a smaller brew is required.

Of beer-brewing generally, District Officer ROWAN makes the following additional observations: "Golden syrup may be used instead of ordinary sugar and personally I find it better. Extract of malt (not cod liver oil and malt) may be bought of any chemist and it is cheaper to buy a 7 lb. jar at a time. Yeast may be ordinary baker's variety and the hops can normally be obtained from a chemist or herbalist. Heinz gravy browning has been recommended because it is stronger than other makes - it must not be confused with gravy salt.

"The quantities of ingredients given this month and last are not hard and fast; the principle is that the sugar gives strength, the malt 'body' and the hops the bitter flavour, and these can be varied according to taste. I was first introduced to the mysteries of brewing at a memorable Northwood course (held for an entirely different purpose, I would add!) and by now there must be a number of Forestry Commission brewers up and down the country."

Mr. Rowan is probably right. There are at least four people in the North Scotland Conservancy who have tried brewing their own beer, using a recipe almost identical with that given by Mr. Rowan. "The beer," writes our Conservancy correspondent, "has proved of good quality. The only problem appears to be the sediment in the bottles; but one person here overcomes this difficulty by pouring off the beer into new bottles after a fortnight, 'reactivating' the liquid by means of half a teaspoon of sugar per bottle."

TWO HOUSES DESTROYED BY FIRE

TWO OF OUR HOUSES at Glenacnulich, in West Scotland, were recently destroyed by fire. The outbreak was first discovered by one of the tenants, who was awakened by the smell of smoke. He opened the bedroom door to find that the fire had a strong hold on the first floor of the building, but he and his wife were able to get downstairs and escape with their two small sons, who were in a bedroom on the ground floor. The tenant of the house next door and his wife and their small son and year-old baby were also able safely to leave their home.

Tenants and their families from the remaining few houses at Glenacnulich, together with the occupants of nearby Forest Workers Holdings, were quickly on the scene to help salvage belongings. Unfortunately, however, the family occupying the house in which the blaze is thought to have originated lost almost all their possessions. It was not until fire brigades from Kinlochleven and Fort William had arrived that it was possible finally to subdue the fire.

CUCKOO!!

LARRY LAST MONTH it was reported in the Local Press and in a London evening newspaper - and also mentioned on the B.B.C. - that a woman had been "hoaxed" by a forester at Alice Holt, South East England, into reporting the arrival of the first cuckoo. Readers might like to hear a little more of the story. The "forester" is ex-School Ganger FRED COURTIER, sometimes known as "the squirrels man". He was doing a round of his traps with an office colleague and decided to give a demonstration of his ability to imitate the cuckoo. Maybe it was quite by chance that he had just previously seen, in the distance, a certain lady known as a keen naturalist; anyway, it seems that a 'phone call was made by someone to the Press.

Something similar happened when Fred Courtier only 13. He was on Dartmoor when he tried out his call in earshot of two elderly ladies; the result was a letter in The Times! But he not only misleads humans. His skill is such that he can call cuckoos to him and can also summon owls and pigeons.

The moral of all this, of course, is that one should both hear and see the first cuckoo of the year before rushing to claim the distinction of being first in the field.

*CORNISH PLACE NAMES

AND SOME STRANGELY-NAMED INNS

THE FOLLOWING contribution is from Mobile Mechanist F. S. JARVIS, South West England, and introduces a wide variety of unusual Cornish place names. We shall be pleased to hear from other readers who can make similar contributions covering other parts of the country.

A LONDON APPRENTICE sought his fortune in the PROMISED LAND and set out for JERICHO. In a ROUGH STREET he met some CAMELS ridden by INDIAN QUEENS and saw a KNAVE-GO-BY on crutches, enquiring if FEATHER BEDS were HARD-TO-COME-BY. The boy was a LITTLE beside himself but said CRIPPLES EASE may be attained by bathing in PIPERS POOL or FROG POOL on FIDDLERS GREEN. The knave thanked him and hoped he would COME-TO-GOOD fortune on his ADVENTURES. Later he met ROSE and BESSIE BENEATH an OLD TREE watching a LIZARD trying to jump from a FOXHOLE into a MOUSEHOLE. He enquired his way and they told him he could travel via MOUNT MISERY or MOUNT JOY. Whereupon he being a READY-MONEY-COVE began to TURN-A-PENNY to decide the route by which he found his fortune in PARADISE beyond LANDS END.

Incidentally, a correspondent has suggested that we record in The Slasher the oddest names of public houses. Here are a few to be going on with: THE FLEA and EARACHE (understood to be near Wrotham, Kent); TUMBLE DOWN DICK, Farnborough, Hampshire; THE STARTLED SLINT, near Watlington, Kent. The sign in the latter case shows a pious, haloed head around which is circling a Spitfire; the public house itself is situated quite close to Walling Aerodrome.

*TOBACCO GROWING IN SCOTLAND

READER "ENJOYS EVERY PUFF"

WHEN IN 1951 I contemplated growing tobacco, writes Research Forester D. C. COUTTS, Inchnacardoch, the idea was ridiculed. However, I got in touch with the Scottish Amateur Tobacco Growers Association (39, Milton Road, Kirkcaldy, Fife) who assured me that tobacco could be successfully grown in Fort Augustus. Eventually harvest time arrived, together with early frosts, and in my anxiety I completely lifted the plants. Getting the leaves to the right colour was no easy task; smoking quality was poor, and there many remarks about the smell. However, I lived it all down and tried again the following year, benefitting by my mistakes; the crop was more successful, but it was clear I still had much to learn.

By 1953 the growing of tobacco had become something of an obsession, so I planted nine dozen plants and got 12½ lbs. of dried leaf and a report from the curing station that quality and condition were excellent.

Many people think that a profound horticultural knowledge is essential to the cultivation of tobacco. This is not so. A soil of light loamy or sandy nature is to be preferred, with a sheltered southerly aspect. Very little organic nitrogen should be incorporated in the soil, for this encourages soft growth when least required. A dressing of 2-4 ozs. of superphosphates and 2 ozs. sulphate of potash per square yard is beneficial and encourages strong root growth and early maturity.

I buy my plants direct from the Association and receive them in the first week in June. I plant them out in rows two feet apart, remembering that ground previously cropped with potatoes should not be stocked, and ground that earlier carried a cabbage crop is ideal for tobacco. In the first two weeks after planting the plants should be watered daily and in August an operation known as 'topping' is carried out - in other words the flower head, small top leaves, side shoots and suckers are removed. This promotes growth in the lower 10-12 leaves that are left to reach maturity. Generally speaking, the first picking should be taken when the leaves change to a lighter shade or become a mottled yellow. Two or three of the lower leaves should be taken for a start, a slight twist taking them off easily, provided they are ripe. The leaves are then piled in a heap 12 to 18 inches high and prefermented, or "sweated". Each day the heap must be turned and the yellow leaves taken to the top and eventually dried. (I dry my leaves with the aid of an Alladin

stove, which substantially reduces the time normally taken for the operation.) When dry they are exposed to the outside air to absorb moisture, until such time that they have the feel of a crisp pound note; they are then made into "hands" and sent to the curing station. On their return, I proceed to make the tobacco fit to smoke by an operation known as 'casing', involving spraying with a mixture of either of the following to ten parts of water - treacle, Demarara sugar, syrup or honey, to which is added one per cent glycerine and one per cent saltpetre. The tobacco is then made into plugs ready for shredding (and a good shredder is a worthwhile 'buy'). Then follows 'panning', during which the tobacco is placed in a roasting tin on a hot plate and turned until almost dry, thus bringing out the aroma. Next it is put into jars and left for some weeks to mature. Flavourings can be added, if desired.

So there you are, beautiful tobacco for the growing - and believe me, I enjoy every puff!

~~THE~~ TRANSFERS

THE FOLLOWING TRANSFERS have been notified to Headquarters:

District Officers T. I. W. BELL from Cardiff, S(W), to Narbeth, S(W); G. G. M. TAYLOR from Inverness, N(S), to Fort William, N(S); A. J. GRAYSON from York, NE(E), to Bellingham, NE(E); J. E. LESLIE from Dean to Chester, NW(E). Foresters O. D. HOLLINGTON from Cynwyd, N(W), to Coed-y-Brenin, N(W); J. HAMILTON from Glenbranter, W(S), to Benmore, W(S); N. ROBERTSON from Benmore to Tighnabruaich, W(S); W. E. COATES from Research, Edinburgh, to Thornthwaite NW(E). Foremen A. T. LIDDELL from Glentool, S(S), to Glentress, S(S); R. L. SCAMMELL from Haldon, SW(E), to Honiton, SW(E).

Higher Executive Officers T. D. H. MORRIS from Headquarters to Cardiff; J. S. V. OVERY from Headquarters to Woking. Clerical Officers J. C. O'HARA from Edinburgh to Glasgow.

Newcomers are: Clerical Officers T. A. SCOTT to D(S); J. GIBSON to NW(E); Miss P. HARRIS to SE(E); Miss C. M. MacIVER to N(S); V. C. MANFORD to N(W); Miss D. M. KIMBERLEY to E(E); R. C. TROKE to New.

~~THE~~ FORESTRY IN THE FUTURE

LEMBLESS, KNOTLESS TREES?

GLANCING through a newspaper the other day the headline "Limbless, Knotless Trees are Possible" caught our eye. This, we thought as we read on, is where someone puts forward once more the theory that it should not be beyond the forester's ingenuity to grow square trees, with obvious advantages. It was not quite as "high-falutin'" as that, however, but the said newspaper recorded some startling forecasts credited to Mr. Leslie J. Carry, President of the Forest Products Research Society of the United States. For example: Genetics in forestry are now progressing to the point where fine timber trees will be grown from seedling to forest giant in a third of the time now taken. Every tree, if so desired, will be tall, straight and limbless. Other developments in the next 50 years will include processes by which timber, while still standing in the forest, will be stained to decorators' colours; foresters will carry hypodermic needles instead of axes, helping trees to grow; powerful beams of atomic radiation, instead of saws, will be used to fell the trees. Future logging methods will involve the use of giant machines which lift entire trees - roots, stem, limbs - from forest site to sawmill, where complete utilisation will take place.

Well, is all this so very improbable? What has the Commission's Geneticist to say on the subject, and what do our utilisation people think?

~~THE~~ PITY THE POOR INCOME TAX COLLECTOR!

THE INCOME TAX year ending on 5th April, we were intrigued to receive by the end of March news of no fewer than six births - four of them in the South Scotland Conservancy. Our congratulations, therefore, to the following colleagues and their wives in Scotland: District Officer W. S. FERGUSON and Mrs. Ferguson on the birth of a son; District Officer K. W. WILSON and Mrs. Wilson (a son); Forester H. O. ARMSTRONG, Glentool, and Mrs. Armstrong (a daughter); Forester A. THOMSON, Glengap, and Mrs. Thomson (daughter). There is also news of the birth of a daughter to Mrs. L. VARRIE, formerly a Clerical Officer in the Dumfries Office. In South Wales, proud parents are District Officer O. N. BLATCHFORD and Mrs. Blatchford (a son).

IF YOU DO SOMETHING, SEE SOMETHING, OR HEAR SOMETHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY, TELL YOUR SLASHER CORRESPONDENT. THERE IS A CORRESPONDENT IN EACH DIRECTORATE AND CONSERVANCY OFFICE