

T H E S L A S H E R

Forestry Commission News

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SOME SENIOR STAFF CHANGES

MR. A. WATT TO BE DIRECTOR,
SCOTLAND

MR. A. H. H. ROSS, Director, Scotland, since July, 1953, is to retire in March next; he will be succeeded by Mr. ANDREW WATT, who is at present serving at Headquarters.

Mr. Ross obtained a diploma and degree in forestry at Oxford in 1920 and was for some years in the Indian Forest Service. He joined the Forestry Commission early in 1925 as a District Officer, serving successively in different areas under the then Assistant Commissioner for England and Wales. During the last war he was engaged on timber supply duties and was with the North German Timber Control. Following his return to the Commission, Mr. Ross was promoted to Conservator, North West England, and remained in that post until his appointment as Director for Scotland. In the latter office Mr. Ross has played an important part in the more recent development of forestry north of the Border and is at present in charge of nearly half a million acres of Commission woodlands. In 1953 Mr. Ross received the O.B.E. for meritorious services to forestry.

Mr. Watt obtained his degree in forestry at Oxford in 1931. He was appointed a District Officer at Aberdeen in 1934 and subsequently served in South, North and West Scotland and became Conservator, West Scotland, in 1946. He was transferred to the office of Director, Scotland, in 1948, and came to London three years later.

Divisional Officer M. J. FENISTAN, who recently returned to this country after a year's tour on a Nuffield Foundation Scholarship, has transferred from East Scotland to South West England, where he has commenced duties in succession to Mr. D. F. STILEMAN, who has retired after 27 years with the Commission.

Mr. R. J. G. HORNE has taken up Divisional Officer duties at Aberdeen on promotion from District Officer and transfer from Fochabers, East Scotland. Brigadier S. A. H. BATTEN, late Directorate Engineer, England, has retired and is succeeded by Colonel R. H. PACKWOOD, hitherto Directorate Engineer for Scotland, who will continue to act as Deputy Chief Engineer; an announcement about the appointment of a successor to Colonel Packwood in Scotland is yet to be made. Mr. R. COOTE, late of the Office of Director, England, has been appointed Chief Clerk at Bristol, on temporary promotion to Senior Executive Officer and in succession to the late WALTER MATTHEWS, whose tragic death was reported recently.

CHRISTMAS IN WESSEX

SOME ANCIENT LEGENDS

THIS CHRISTMAS we turn to the West Country for four interesting traditions, or superstitions, associated with the festive season.

The first concerns Stonehenge. Most of our readers will have heard the usual explanation of the purpose of that magnificent monument, built by Stone Age men. It is apparently designed to celebrate the rising of the sun on Midsummer's Day. Anyone who stands within the central horseshoe of stones, and looks towards the North East, will see the sun's first rays shine over the curious Hele Stone outside the circle; in fact, a curious band of modern pagans or sun worshippers goes there each year to observe this. Now it seems that the old idea may be quite wrong. Those with keen mathematical brains will realise that the direction of the sunrise on Midsummer's Day is directly opposite the direction of the sunset on Midwinter's Day. So an observer who stands at the Hele Stone at ten minutes to four in the afternoon on Friday, 21st December next will (if there is no cloud) see the sun set over the Altar Stone, at the very heart of the mysterious horseshoe that comprises the inner sanctum of Stonehenge.

Stonehenge, in short, may well have been built up around ceremonies concerning the decline of the sun when the shortest day of the year was reached and not its rising on the longest day. The sun had to be charmed back again by some magic ritual, such as the cutting of the evergreen mistletoe from the bough of the leafless oak. As such, it is linked with the Roman festival of Saturnalia, and the

Scandinavian feast of Yule, now merged in our modern Christmas.

The next quaint custom, also connected with pagan fertility rites, is the wassailing of the fruit trees, still carried out in some Somerset orchards on Twelfth Night, the 6th of January. A crowd of people go out with lanterns and toast the health of the trees in mugs of cider, throwing the dregs on the ground, and singing such choruses as:

"Wassail the trees, that they may bear
You many a plum and many a pear
For more or less fruit they do bring
As you do give them wassailing!"

Our third legend is a Christian one, the story that Joseph of Arimathea fled to Britain early in the first century, A.D., and reached Glastonbury, then an island amid the surrounding fens. There he founded a monastery, but first he stuck his pilgrim's staff, brought from the Holy Land, into the ground. Miraculously the dry stick put forth green leaves, and grew into the famous Glastonbury Thorn, which for centuries thereafter came into leaf at Christmas. Eventually the original tree was destroyed by stern-minded Puritans with no fondness for miracles, but cuttings from it preserved the remarkable strain, and some thorns still survive with this strange habit of starting growth in mid-winter.

Away in New Forest, in Hampshire, there is the remarkable Cadnam Oak, which shows a similar peculiarity, often producing fresh leaves at the coldest season of the year.

Finally, we would mention the old Dorset belief, recorded by Thomas Hardy, that at midnight on Christmas Eve the oxen in their byres kneel down to pray, as they did around Christ's birthplace in distant Bethlehem, centuries before.

MM

SEEING DOMINION FORESTS

DIVISIONAL OFFICER PENISTAN'S TOUR

WE ARE indebted to Divisional Officer M. J. PENISTAN for the following notes on his Nuffield Foundation Scholarship tour, during which he studied the management of exotic coniferous plantations in New Zealand, Australia and South Africa.

Although the species are different from ours, he writes, large areas of forest trees have been planted in the Dominions in the Southern Hemisphere since the first world war, and the rate of growth is at least twice that of our trees; thus the foresters are tackling problems which will not arise here for another ten to twenty years.

After a sea voyage out, through the Suez Canal which the last British troops were preparing to leave, we approached New Zealand. There was a promise of fertility in the sight of thousands of sea birds and great shoals of fish inshore, and this was well fulfilled as one came ashore and drove all day in the rich dairylands of North Island, the landscape of which is amazingly European. Only the ubiquitous radiata pine and macrocarpa cypress, and the fairly common harriers, which are not common birds in Britain, tend to destroy the illusion that one is still at home.

We stayed most of the time in Rotorua, among geysers and sulphur fumes. There was an active volcano in the distance, and occasionally there were slight earthquakes.

I worked in the Forest Service Conservancy Office with the State Forest Officer, who was managing some 277,000 acres of plantations, which represented about 60 per cent of the total woodlands in the Dominion. The annual planting programme is now only 2,000 acres and only 1,000 acres had till then been thinned each year. A very big change was taking place, however, for a pulpmill and sawmill were starting up to take 20 million hoppus feet a year from the gigantic forest of Kaingaroa, which made up nine-tenths of the Conservancy's forest area. Imagine looking for workers in a compartment one mile by half a mile - it wasn't easy to find them! I lived in camps in the forest (but had a comfortable flat in the tourist town of Rotorua to return to at weekends). The Maoris are cheerful characters and the camps were happy places; these people provide much of the forest and mill labour, for they are natural woodmen and take quickly to machinery. So far there are no Maori foresters, but their turn will come.

Radiata pine is the principal tree, just as "branchy" as those we have in Cornwall, but it produces magnificent timber, light and strong. There is often 6 feet and sometimes 12 feet between whorls of branches, so that clean timber can easily be obtained in short lengths without need for pruning.

In our last three weeks we travelled the length of the two islands and saw many of the smaller and sometimes better plantations. I also had a precious two days in the natural forests, which are still too heavily exploited; the splendid timber compares well with that from the plantations. The colour scheme is dark, glossy green, the air is moist, and huge stems tower above the underbush of tree ferns and evergreens, and here and there are shafts of sunlight. Here New Zealand birds still survive and some of their songs are quite wonderful. Similarly the Notofagus forests resound with birdsong.

By contrast, Australia is an open blue country of long low hills. Each State has its pine plantations. Sawmills are going up, private ones in the socialist States; State-owned ones in liberal South Australia, where the Minister of Forests approves piecework rates. In Queensland, which is very hot and wet, I saw a forest of Araucarias, a bizarre sight to British eyes, and the result of much successful research as well as the source of one of the world's best plywood timbers. The banana eaters (Queenslanders) were the finest foresters I met and are ahead of us in Britain in many ways, though their area of pine plantations is very small.

Most of the other States grow radiata pine, generally more slowly than New Zealand, and with straighter and finer stems. The timber is beginning now to compete with that from Scandinavia and America, and as the supplies of native conifers dwindle and the eucalypts are cut out it will become more and more important as a raw material. It saws, planes and finishes beautifully, its knots are soft, and I rate it above our Sitka spruce.

I saw plantations and made friends in many parts of the country. I got to know the townships with dusty streets, such as Beerwah, Tumut, Timbarumba, Kalangadoo and Manjamup. I was awakened by the kookaburra and saw parrots of brilliant hue flash between the eucalypts. I got very interested in this amazing genus of more than 350 species (some people put it at over 600), for we lived in a wooden hut in Penola reserve in South Australia among 80,000 acres of radiata pine on pure sand. I saw one snake and many kangaroos.

The native gum forests of Victoria and West Australia are almost unbelievable. Trees in the 250 feet class look far too dense at 50 to the acre - I climbed a fire tower set 210 feet up in a karri tree. There is a good chance that a eucalypt in Tasmania will be found to exceed the tallest Douglas fir in America - one felled recently was 338 feet high.

Ericas, scores of species of them, were blooming in the Cape when we arrived in South Africa. Apart from Cape Province, where radiata pine is again the choice, the pines are much the same as in Queensland, the southern pines of the U.S.A. There were extraordinary mixtures of traditional and modern peeling machines from Sweden; and mules, oxen, and the latest road-making machinery. Forestry has been done by numbers for many years now and Craib's prescriptions have produced nice-looking stands of straight pines of (to me) disappointing quality. The average plantation is better tended than in New Zealand and Australia but the best of those countries exceeds the African. As in the other countries I visited, I encountered new sawmills, new pulpmills and ready sales for produce.

Our one day off in Africa was spent in the Kruger National Park among thousands of wild animals. We saw no lions, but spotted six giraffes at one time. On another day we shared a forest with some elephants.

Our journey also took in forests in the Vosges, Ardennes, Hesse, Harz Mountains, Luneburg and Jutland. As in the Commonwealth, my reception by fellow foresters was magnificent.

MY

THEIR HOTEL IN FLAMES

SOME ADVICE ON INSURANCE

TWO of our District Officers, Messrs. D. GRAHAM-CAMPBELL and J. G. CHRYSTALL, recently had an alarming experience when the hotel in which they were staying was destroyed by fire.

We were at the Bridge of Orchy Hotel in Argyllshire, writes Mr. Graham-Campbell, and were just finishing dinner when the alarm was raised. We tried to get upstairs to see where the fire had started and whether we could do anything to help put it out. We found, however, that it had developed so quickly that we were unable to reach even the top of the stairs; the heat and smoke forced us outside the building. As the cars were parked nearby and were, in fact, over the underground petrol storage tank, we quickly removed them to a place of safety. (This was made more difficult because one of our cars was locked and the keys left in a bedroom, and so lost).

Soon the whole top floor of the hotel was ablaze and firefighting had to be abandoned as hopeless. We then witnessed a wonderful display of fireworks as the roof collapsed and the floors and ceilings fell in; sheets of flame lit up the dark night, and nearby cottages were showered with sparks. The Oban Fire Brigade, after travelling 33 miles and when only seven miles from the fire, crashed and several of the crew were injured. By the time the Killin brigade arrived, the hotel was a smouldering ruin. The speed at which this fire developed was astounding.

Fires have occurred in several highland hotels, goes on Mr. Graham-Campbell, and some such places are very isolated. Having been involved myself, I strongly advise any of your readers who regularly visit hotels of this kind on business or pleasure to make certain that their possessions are fully insured. It appears that Innkeepers do not have to insure their guests' belongings and although under the Act of 1836 the Innkeeper is normally responsible for the absolute safety of his guests while in the inn, there are exceptions to the rule; one of these is that where the damage or loss is due to an act of God, the Innkeeper avoids liability. As far as the law in Scotland relates, fire is considered to be an act of God, or inevitable accident, for which the Innkeeper is not responsible, unless it can be proved that it was due to his negligence. This is obviously difficult and uncertain and the only wise course, therefore, seems to be to insure one's personal effects before the "inevitable accident" takes place.

OAKS FOR MELBOURNE

READERS may like to know that the Forestry Commission contributed to the arrangement of the Olympic Games; in small measure, it is true, but in an interesting way.

The British team took with them some 30 young oak trees to plant in a commemorative avenue in Melbourne, and these came from one of our forests - Micheldever, in the South East England Conservancy.

TRANSFERS

THE FOLLOWING TRANSFERS have been notified to Headquarters: Divisional Officers M. J. Penistan from Aberdeen to Bristol; R. J. G. HORNE from Fochabers, E(S), to Aberdeen. District Officers R. M. G. SEMPLE from Devizes, SW(E), to Education, Lynford; D. C. MALCOLM from Mansfield, NW(E), to Shifnal, NW(E); D. W. HENMAN from Research, Edinburgh, to Fochabers.

Head Forester L. WYATT from Kesteven, E(E), to Hazelborough, E(E). Foresters R. A. JAMIESON from Greskine, S(S), to Newcastleton, S(S); T. L. JENKINS from Education, Lynford, to Delamere, NW(E); D. J. McNAUGHT from Dalnacallan, S(S), to Arecleoch, S(S); A. S. COCHRANE from Clauchrie, S(S), to Dalnacallan; J. M. GALLACHER from Fleet, S(S), to Clauchrie; C. J. MACPHEE from Benmore, W(S), to Fearnoch, W(S); W. J. RODERICK from Brechfa, S(W), to Glasfynydd, S(W); C. R. DICK from Castle O'er, S(S), to Education, Lynford; J. R. HARKNESS from Craik, S(S), to Twiglees and Castle O'er; J. F. SCOTT from Leithope, S(S), to Craik; R. P. C. WOOLARD from Santon, E(E), to Bawtry, E(E).

Assistant Foresters J. K. SHAW from Walsham, E(E), to Roudham, E(E); D. E. ELLIS from Swanton, E(E), to Hevingham, E(E); B. COOPER from Bareagle, S(S), to Ae, S(S); A. E. HARWOOD from Tentsmuir, E(S), to Blairadam, E(S); A. W. WATSON from Kirroughtree, S(S), to Bareagle; P. MARSH from Crowsley Park, E(E), to Marlow, E(E); B. S. GORDON from Santon to Swaffham, E(E); C. A. EDWARDS from Machen, S(W), to Glasfynydd; D. R. HUTCHINS from Dunwich, E(E), to Honeywood, E(E); J. E. JONES from Dyfnant, N(W), to Gwydyr, N(W); E. V. ROGERS from Kesteven to Huntingdon, E(E); D. D. G. DAVIES from Mathrafal, N(W), to Dyfnant; C. T. W. BEVERIDGE from Elwy, N(W), to Brynmawr, N(W); P. A. GREGORY from Research, Alice Holt Lodge, to Research, Bettys-y-Coed; K. J. DAWSON from Research, Edinburgh, to Rosedale, NE(E); D. WINDLE from Research, Bettys-y-Coed, to Dalton, NW(E); J. HOWSON from Brecon, S(W), to Brechfa; W. BARTHOLOMEW from Sherwood, NW(E), to Grizedale, NW(E); A. A. GREEN from Research, Alice Holt Lodge, to Research, Mable.

Foremen J. S. NICHOLS from RHEOLA, S(W), to Cwmogwr, S(W); A. M. GRANT from Teindland, E(E), to Elchies, E(S); W. J. TAYLOR from Caio, S(W), to Brecon. Clerk of Works A. M. MACLENNAN from Glenhurich, N(S), to Inchnacardoch, N(S). Assistant Engineer D. R. MARTIN from Launceston, SW(E), to Chester, NW(E). Clerical Officers S. P. CRONIN from Parkend, Dean, to Edinburgh; R. G. ROPER from Edinburgh to York.